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April 6, 2001

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SUBJECT: ATTENDANCE WAIVERS EVALUATION REPORT

The Office of Research and Evaluation has completed the Attendance Waivers Evaluation Report. This research examined the perspectives of school principals, teachers, and students on attendance policies. The research also examined the effect of attendance waivers on the student performance as measured by attendance, assessments, and course grades. The data did not indicate enhancement of student performance at attendance waiver schools relative to schools that follow the standard district policy. Therefore, schools seeking a waiver to the district's policy will research attendance models that have been implemented in other schools and school districts before submitting their applications. The schools must demonstrate that the model they wish to implement produces a favorable enhancement to student performance.

The complete evaluation report is attached. Inquiries concerning this evaluation should be directed to **Dr. Katherine Blasik, Executive Director, Office of Research and Evaluation, 760-7342.**

KAB/COS/RWC:tbn
Attachment

cc: Senior Management
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Dr. Frank Till
Superintendent of Schools

Attendance Waivers Evaluation Report

The School Board of Broward County, Florida



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Attendance Waivers Evaluation Report

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Attendance Waivers Evaluation Report

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Absenteeism presents problems on three levels: that of the student, the school, and the community. On the student level, absenteeism contributes to poor academic performance. Moreover, truants are at greater risk for dropping out than are their peers. On the school level, absenteeism costs schools billions of dollars due to lost instructional time. Absenteeism also reduces the amount of state and federal funding that a school receives. Society is impacted through crime associated with students skipping school and individuals who failed to acquire the skills necessary to be productive citizens.

Several Broward County Public Schools have attempted to decrease student absenteeism by applying for waivers from the standard district policy. In the 1999-2000 school year, three high schools had applied for and implemented attendance waiver policies: Northeast High School, Dillard High School, and South Plantation High School. These school-based policies vary from school to school and are described in detail in the report.

To determine the effectiveness of the attendance waiver policy, two sets of analyses were conducted. Qualitative analyses queried the opinions of administrators, teachers, and students at the attendance waiver schools. The findings from the qualitative analyses include:

- Administrators reported an increased focus on attendance at their schools and a resultant increase in student attendance.
- Teachers in the waived schools reflected, across all survey questions, more positive attitudes towards the attendance policy of their school and of the school's administration of that policy.
- Teachers reported that, for most students, an increase in attendance resulted in an increase in learning.
- Students reported that academic performance was related more to a student's attitude about school and learning than to his or her attendance pattern.
 - Those students who viewed school as their job during these years of their life where they are working to gain knowledge and experience in preparation for another occupation regarded attendance as a responsibility, similar to showing up for work every day.

Quantitative analyses provided an objective examination of student performance as related to the attendance policy. Attendance, norm-referenced test (NRT) scores, Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test - Sunshine State Standards (FCAT-SSS) scores, and grade point averages (GPAs) were the measures of student performance. Demographically similar students, selected through statistical weighting procedures were the objective standard against which the attendance waiver students were compared. Analyses based on these parameters led to the following conclusions:

- There was no consistent pattern across the attendance waiver schools related to the absentee rate.
 - Northeast High School students had fewer mean absences than did similar students at other comparison schools.

- Dillard High School students were more likely to be absent than similar students at comparison schools. However, year-to-year increases in absences were greater among comparison students than among the Dillard High School students.
 - South Plantation High School students maintained consistent levels of absences from 1999 to 2000, while the comparison students showed increased absences.
- The NRT data showed little evidence that performance was enhanced due to attendance waivers. Common across schools, the 10th grade scores were lower than the 9th grade scores. Northeast High School and South Plantation High School students showed differences in performance between grades 9 and 10 that were similar to those displayed by their peers at comparison schools. However, the difference between the 9th and 10th grade scores was smaller for students at Dillard High School relative to the comparison students.
- The distribution of FCAT-SSS achievement levels was similar between students at the attendance waiver schools and their respective comparison students in mathematics, reading, and writing.
- Examination of course grades as indexed by GPAs did not offer evidence that attendance waiver policies improve classroom performance.
 - Northeast High School had GPAs that were similar to those of similar students at other block-scheduled schools.
 - Only the grade 12 cohort at Dillard High School showed a favorable result with greater increases in GPAs than did similar comparison students.
 - South Plantation High School students showed mixed results with GPAs decreasing from 1999 to 2000 for the grade 10 cohort, but increases among the grade 12 cohort during the same time period. However, the increases found among the grade 12 cohort were similar to those seen among similar comparison students.

Recommendation

The data does not indicate academic advantages supporting achievement for students enrolled in schools operating under attendance waivers. Therefore, before further attendance waivers are granted, schools applying for the waivers should research the various attendance models that have been implemented in other schools and school districts to identify models that best promote student achievement. How application of a proposed model will impact student achievement in the school should be clearly delineated and supported with empirical evidence.

ATTENDANCE WAIVERS EVALUATION REPORT

This report presents findings concerning the implementation of attendance-related policy waivers in three high schools through the year 1999-2000 in Broward County, Florida. These waivers eliminated the distinction between excused and unexcused absences. Qualitative findings include the opinion of administrators, teachers, and students that attendance improved in these schools. Teachers in waived schools felt more positive about the attendance policy and its administration in their school. Students differed in their view of attendance policies depending on whether they saw school as a job and as a place to acquire knowledge and skills. Quantitative analyses of norm-referenced test scores, Florida Comprehensive Assessment Tests-Sunshine State Standards, and grade point averages show no enhancement of student performance related to attendance waiver policies.

Introduction

Absenteeism can become a problem on three levels: that of the student, the school, and the community. On the student level, absenteeism contributes to poor academic performance. Studies have shown that truant students receive lower grades and show less than expected learning gains than students who attend school on a more regular basis (Deschamps, 1992; Rohrman, 1993). In addition, truant students are at greater risk for dropping out. Chronic absenteeism has been found to be one of the strongest predictors of leaving school early (Deschamps, 1992).

On the school level, absenteeism costs schools billions of dollars due to lost instructional time. Teachers and administrators devote significant time and resources to accounting for absent students and providing make-up work (Ratigan & Kube, 1991). Absenteeism also reduces the amount of state and federal funding that a school receives.

The impacts to society are both short and long term. According to Birman and Natriello (1978) the short-term problems are the “delinquency and crime, which occur when large numbers of adolescents are out of school and unemployed,” and the long-term problems are created by former students and dropouts who have “failed to acquire basic competencies necessary for a productive adult life” (p. 31).

Ken Duckworth, in his article “Coping with Student Absenteeism” (1988), discusses both academic and administrative penalties used to deter students from both whole day truancy and selective class cutting. He concluded that “In general, academic penalties are effective only with students who are concerned about their academic records” and that “A basic problem with all penalties is that they use aversion to force students to participate in school. They do not build positive motivation. The coerced attendee becomes the classroom teacher’s discipline problem” (p. 3).

In her review of the literature, Kovas (1986) found that “Reports from administrators who have implemented this type of policy (grade penalties) suggest that they are effective in increasing average daily attendance (ADA) at many high schools.” In 1984-85, the Texas legislature set a state standard that a student could miss no more than five classes per semester and receive class credit and that principals could “excuse” absences at their discretion. Ligon and Jackson (1990) in their evaluation of

the policy's effect on the Austin School District concluded that "The five-absence rule initially worked to maintain high attendance in district high schools: however, in the past few years, the number of absences that are being excused has risen - circumventing the five-absence rule and making it ineffective" (p. 3).

In Broward County, Northeast High School applied for and received a School Improvement Waiver for the 1996-1997 school year to implement an attendance policy based on the elimination of the distinction between excused and unexcused absences (see below). Northeast High applied for and received a similar waiver for each subsequent academic year through 1999-2000. Three other high schools (South Plantation, Dillard and Coral Springs) applied for a School Improvement Waiver for the 1999-2000 school year to implement similar attendance policies. Coral Springs, however, chose not to implement the attendance waiver policy. Northeast and South Plantation high schools requested a renewal waiver for the 2000-2001 school year, but were denied by the School Board.

Waiver Policy

Schools may submit requests to waive School Board Policy provided that it is "(a) approved by two-thirds of all faculty members [if the waiver does not affect the entire school, by a two-thirds majority of the affected department or grade level teachers]; (b) reviewed and endorsed by the community at an advertised open meeting; and (c) budget neutral."

Attendance Policies for Broward County in 1999-2000

Excused Absences

Students must be in school unless the absence has been excused for one of the reasons listed below. **For reasons 1-5, parents must report the absence the day before, the day of, or within two school days following the absence, or the absence will be considered unexcused.** Some situations will require written documentation from a private physician or public health unit. Excused absences include:

1. Illness of student. Any student who expects to miss at least 15 consecutive school days due to illness, medical condition, or social emotional reasons, or who would miss excessive days intermittently throughout the school year for the same reasons, and could benefit from instruction, should obtain a copy of the Homebound referral packet from the Homebound contact person at his/her school.
2. Illness of an immediate family member.
3. Death in the family.
4. Religious holidays of the student's own specific faith.
5. Required court appearance or subpoena by a law enforcement agency.
6. Special events IF the student gets permission from the school at least five days ahead of time. Such trips refer to exceptional cases of family need, college visitations, or trips of an academic nature.
7. Doctor or dental appointment IF the parent notifies the school of the date and appointment time.
8. Internal or external suspension from classes.

9. Students are allowed a maximum 5 days excused absence for head lice infestation.

High School Absence Reports

School Board policy says that high school staff members may NOT accept notes as reports of excused absences. Parent MUST report these absences by telephone within two days following the absences, although school principals MAY make exceptions in cases of need. In the case of shared-time students, absences must be reported to both schools. School staff members have a legal right to ask for a written medical excuse.

Make-up Work Grades 6-12

-- All students are expected to make up classwork missed during an absence. The student has two days to make up the work for each day absent, **not including the day of return**. However, previously assigned work is due the day of return.

-- Students who are assigned to internal suspension are expected to be in school. These students must keep up with all assignments and turn in work daily.

-- Allow students who are externally suspended and who attend alternatives to suspension programs to make up work. (Alternatives to suspension may include school internal suspension, Saturday School, off-campus alternative to suspension programs, and community partnership alternative to suspension programs.) Students who elect not to participate in alternative to suspension programs will not be allowed to make up work.

-- When classwork is not complete for a marking period due to excused absences, a grade of "I" may be given. Student must complete the work during the next marking period prior to the 40th day and may earn a grade to replace the "I." In extenuating circumstances, the principal has the authority to extend the deadline. But, in most cases when these deadlines are not met, the "I" changes to an "F" and may cause a semester course failure. If and when the class is repeated and the student earns a grade, the "I" or the "F" will not be counted in computing grade point averages.

Semester Exams Grades 9-12

When a semester exam is not completed, a grade of "I" is given. If a student is absent excused or suspended from school on an exam day, the exam must be made up in order for credit to be given. These deadlines may be extended by the principal for extenuating circumstances. (School Board of Broward County, 1999)

Policy Waivers

Dillard High School. “This waiver eliminates the distinction between excused and unexcused absences. Students absent more than seven days during the nine weeks excluding field trips would receive an “F” unless they make up the time and work missed in Saturday school. Students with an extended illness requiring absences in excess of eight days would be granted absences with official documentation. Eligible students will be awarded extra percentage points each marking period for

maintaining outstanding attendance. The following would apply: 3% for zero absences; 2.5% for one absence; 2.0% for two absences.”

Northeast High School. “This waiver eliminates the distinction between excused and unexcused absences. Students absent more than five days per nine weeks (Block Schedule) excluding field trips would receive an "F" unless they make up the time and work missed. Students with an extended illness requiring absences in excess of six days will be granted additional absences with a doctor's note. An appeals board will hear and rule on hardship cases. Students with four or fewer absences per term who receive a grade of “C” or better each term may exempt the final exam for that class. Exemptions are limited to two exams per term with parent permission.”

South Plantation High School. “Students who accrue more than seven excused or unexcused absences in any class during a nine weeks will receive an "F" unless they make up the time and the work missed. Students on field trips, suspended, or who have extend illnesses with a doctor's letter are excluded from the "F" rule. An appeals board will hear and rule on hardship cases from students who present documentation for the hearing. Students who need to make up time will do so either in an extended after school period like the current Detention Period or in a Saturday school program. The makeup time is to be used for doing assigned schoolwork and also may be used to work on standardized test skills. Either of these makeup times can be implemented. A committee of interested teachers and staff is ready to meet to finalize the makeup time and work requirements for students. Students and parents have been asked to serve on this committee. Members of this committee may serve on the appeals board which will rotate at the end of each semester.”

Cost Impact

There were no overall cost impacts to the district. Any additional costs of the implementation of policy waivers were borne by the individual school budgets.

Evaluation Methodology

Qualitative Analyses

An external research consultant developed, in conjunction with the Office of Research and Evaluation, a series of data collection instruments, which were administered by the Office of Research and Evaluation and forwarded to the consultant for analyses. These instruments consisted of Principal and Teacher Surveys.

Principal Survey Results. The results of the implementation surveys for the principals are shown in Tables 1 through 5 below. Additional practices beyond School Board Policy that are documented in school policy publications are identified by school in Table 1. Responses to the other questions are not identified by school and the order of presentation has been changed to comply with the promise of confidentiality made in the survey instrument. Principals from all regular high schools responded to the survey ($N=23$).

The survey requested that the principals describe attendance practices that extended beyond those described by the School Board or those delineated in the Code of Student Conduct handbook and were documented in school policies. The results of this request are summarized in Table 1.

Five schools had Board-approved Policy Waivers. Four of those eliminated the distinction between excused and non-excused absences and were the focus of this study. One of those schools decided not to implement the policy waiver. The remaining policy waiver provided rewards for students who had good attendance. Eight high schools (including one with a policy waiver) had additional documented attendance-related practices as reported by their principals. Four schools rewarded perfect attendance with additional percentage points. Two schools notified parents of absences and one of these referred students to a social worker for excessive absences. Three schools allowed students to be exempt from taking exams if they had good grades and few or no absences. Ten high schools reported they had no additional documented practices.

The survey also requested that the principals list up to three other attendance-related practices that their school used and that were not documented. The results of this request are summarized in Table 2. The principals were assured that their responses would not be associated with their school.

The reported undocumented practices fall into two categories, parental contacts and disciplinary consequences. Three schools contacted parents through telerobot calling. One school hired an outside company to contact parents. Two schools required their teachers to contact parents of truant students. Three schools had the administrative staff contact parents of truant students. Three schools sent letters to parents regarding truant students. One school relied on the interim reports with attendance documented to notify parents. Two schools used the Community Liaisons to contact parents of truant students and one school referred truancy cases to social workers. Six schools used internal suspension, detentions, and/or Saturday school to punish tardy students. Three schools utilized administrative referrals and other disciplinary consequences to deal with truant students.

Table 1

Additional Documented Practices

SCHOOL	ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTED PRACTICES BEYOND POLICY
Coral Springs	Approved Policy Waiver -- School decided not to implement Policy Waiver.
Dillard	Approved Policy Waiver plus Eligible students will be awarded extra percentage points each marking period for maintaining outstanding attendance.
Northeast	Approved Policy Waiver.
South Plantation	Approved Policy Waiver.
Blanche Ely	None.
Boyd Anderson	Parent letter at 10 unexcused absences Exam exemption for "C" or better and three or fewer absences
Charles Flanagan	Students awarded two additional percentage point for perfect attendance.
Coconut Creek	Students may waiver exam with a grade of A or B in a class and two or less absences.
Cooper City	None
Deerfield Beach	None.
Fort Lauderdale	Parent letter excessive absences, telephone parents, social worker referrals.
Hallandale	None.
Hollywood Hills	None.
J.P. Taravella	None.
Marjory Stoneman Douglas	None.
McArthur	Student with two or fewer absences & no report card grade lower than a "C" may exempt the exam. Students with perfect attendance in a class have 2.2% added to their nine-week grade average. (Board Approved Policy)
Miramar	None.
Nova	All absences will be designated as unexcused, unexcused/unwaived or excused/waived. The student shall receive a grade of "F" for all classes except second period in which he/she has accumulated four or more unwaived absences in any nine-week quarter.
Piper	None.
Plantation	None.
South Broward	Students will receive 2% points to the nine-weeks average for perfect attendance.
Stranahan	None
Western	None.

Table 2

Undocumented Practices

SCHOOL	ADDITIONAL UNDOCUMENTED PRACTICES BEYOND POLICY
School A	Tardy Policy : 8 minutes allowed for passing from class to class. Students who are not in class on time are sent to internal suspension for the period. Telerobot calls homes daily of students with unexcused absences. Administrators conduct hall sweeps of students tardy to classes. Administrators review requests on a case-by-case basis of parents wanting to excuse an absence after 48 hours.
School B	Students who are tardy excessively are assigned Saturday school: two hours reading & writing.
School C	We have hired a company to make parent contact. All students receive interims with attendance documented.
School D	Use of discipline consequences for incidents of documented cutting class. Behavior contracts to habitually truant and/or tardy students.
School E	Letters to parents re: excessive absences. Telephone parents re: excessive absences. Social worker referrals.
School F	Community Liaisons visit homes to inform parents of pupil truancy. Use of computer network to track tardiness to first period classes. If a student is tardy four unexcused times it warrant one day of Conduct Adjustment Intervention placement; while five unexcused times tardy warrant one day assigned to Saturday School. The cycle repeats after five.
School G	A letter is mailed to parents after the second unexcused absence from school requesting a conference with the assistant principal. Parent notification is required by the teacher on the second class cut and referral to administration on the third and each subsequent cut.
School H	Our attendance policy works. There is no need to practice any other attendance-related practices. Daily and/or weekly progress reports are used with students having attendance problems.
School I	Internal suspension. Saturday school. Family counseling.
School J	Collect cuts daily from every student. A cut is a class missed by a student not on the absentee bulletin. Community liaisons are sent to home to inquire why students are not attending.
School K	Robot calls to the home. Letters sent to the home. Administrative calls to the home.
School L	Teachers must refer any student to administration upon unexcused absences. Teachers are expected to also call parent for any unexcused absentee concern. Students are required to make-up all time missed due to unexcused absences - after school/Saturday.
School M	Detentions for tardies. Robot telephone calls for unexcused absences.
School N	Five or more absences results in one Saturday school; administrative placement. Daily or weekly attendance checks for specific students.
School O	Administrative staff contact home and students to notify them when they have exceeded seven absences.

The survey also asked principals whether all of their teachers adhered to the school’s attendance practices. If they did not, they were requested to list the top one to three ways in which teachers “modified” these practices. The results of this request are summarized in Table 3. The principals were assured that their responses would not be associated with their school.

Table 3
Principals’ Observations Regarding Teachers Adherence To Attendance Practices

SCHOOL	PRINCIPALS’ OBSERVATIONS
School A	No, not all teachers adhere to school’s documented attendance practices. Teachers exempt students from semester exams who should not be based on their attendance records and/or grades. Teachers refuse to exempt students even if they should be exempt.
School B	Teachers are required to adhere to School Board Policy and School procedures.
School C	Teachers fail to notify administrators of excessive unexcused absences from class. Teachers do not call parents enough about excessive unexcused absences. Some teachers do not take accurate attendance.
School D	All teachers adhere to our schools/ documented attendance practices.
School E	Some teachers offer additional credit for good attendance.
School F	Teachers report excess absences (as defined in the student code of conduct book) to the community liaisons.
School G	Some teachers allow students make-up work for some unexcused absences or give extra credit work.
School H	Teachers individually ignore or excuse student absences and tardies. Teachers are inconsistently reporting the 6 th absence, which results in warning letters sent to parents. Teachers permit students to make-up absences and tardies with them instead of required method of Saturday or Tuesday school.
School I	All teachers keep accurate records in their rollbooks.
School J	We advise all teachers to follow only the accepted attendance practices set forth by the district. When an error is found to be made by a teacher, we then, on an individual basis, help correct the deviation of the accepted policy by the teacher.
School K	Our teachers are very committed to documenting attendance - it has been stressed as a primary responsibility of all teachers to insure student success. Our attendance statistics continue to be among the best in the district.
School L	Not all teachers take attendance every period. Not all teachers record tardies. Not all teachers follow the policy for no makeup work but allow students to make up work when absences are unexcused.
School M	Attendance policy is followed by all teachers.

The principals’ reports regarding their teachers’ adherence to attendance practices varied significantly. Seven of the principals reported that teachers strictly adhered to the attendance policies and/or took accurate attendance. Three principals reported that some of their teachers did not take accurate attendance. One principal reported that some teachers did not allow approved exemptions and others granted their own exemptions. Two principals reported that teachers allowed make-up work for unexcused absences. Principals also reported that teachers gave additional grade credit for attendance and failed to contact administrators when the student’s attendance pattern warranted referral.

The survey asked principals to reflect on what additional strategies they would recommend for their school and for the district as a whole. The principals' recommendations for their school are summarized in Table 4 and Table 5 summarizes their recommendations for the district. The principals were assured that their responses would not be associated with their school.

Table 4
Principals' Recommended School Strategies

SCHOOL	PRINCIPALS' RECOMMENDED SCHOOL STRATEGIES
School A	Implement an attendance incentive waiver.
School B	No excused or unexcused absences, only just absent suspensions from school count 2.2% off final grade for four or more unexcused tardies student is externally suspended from school three days.
School C	Allow five absences per semester; if more, student needs to take mastery test to receive grade.
School D	Students receive an "F" in each class after five absences each nine weeks unless they have doctor's note. Mandatory withdrawal of a student after 30 unexcused absences per semester.
School E	Target truants to connect them with paid teacher mentors.
School F	Require parents to escort their truant child to school for counseling. six unexcused absences during any nine-week grading period warrants a grade of "F". An appeal is allowed when valid concerns arise.
School G	Enforce the mandatory attendance law. Parents must be accountable for students' attendance.
School H	Pass an exam-exempt waiver policy.
School I	Waiver requiring parent involvement in child's attendance. District funding for Saturday school.
School J	Perfect attendance bonus of 2.2 not awarded if student is in Internal Suspension.
School K	Develop a true competency based attendance program. Create policies to promote better attendance; incentive based program for good attendance or an enforceable policy with grade reduction for poor attendance.
School L	Will resubmit the waiver for exempting final exams used previously.
School M	Rewards for perfect attendance. Exam exemptions for grades and attendance.
School N	Waiving each subject only once in a year.

Three principals recommended school strategies to require parental involvement. Five principals suggested policies to provide incentives for good attendance (exam waivers and additional credit) and five principals recommended grade penalties for poor attendance. Principals also recommended district funding for Saturday school and developing a competency based attendance program.

Table 5
Principals' Recommended District Strategies

SCHOOL	PRINCIPALS' RECOMMENDED DISTRICT STRATEGIES
School A	Students who exceed five unexcused absences should not receive course credit in high school for the quarter. Students who miss in excess of 20 days should not be promoted without attending summer school.
School B	Students should not be able to pass classes if they have been absent more than 6 days per quarter, except in cases of documented serious illnesses.
School C	Ten or more absences per semester student would fail class, unless student passes final with a "B" average. Much tougher policy on number of day's student can miss from school if student is 16 years old before withdrawn.
School D	Mandatory attendance requirement. Limit amount of absences to five; otherwise student cannot get credit for class.
School E	Enforce the mandatory attendance law. Support schools' court referrals for truancy.
School F	Eliminate excused/unexcused labels. Limit the number of days a student can be absent and pass.
School G	More frequent and timely absentee reports from ETS. Mandate a minimum number of days in attendance to pass marking period.
School H	Change calendar so school term ends before winter break and new term begins after. District funding for Saturday school.
School I	Enforce state law, which limits number of absences before credit is lost.
School J	Students with more than a set number of absences go to school Saturday to make up time or fail.
School K	Increase accountability for parents who are not responsible with supporting their child's attendance in school.
School L	Review current policy as per unexcused absences. Modify exam policy.
School M	Modify ETS to automatically default all 9-week grades to an "F" when students exceed an agreed upon number of absences.

Eight principals recommended district strategies to mandate no credit if attendance is less than a certain number of days or absences exceed a certain number of days. Principals also suggested the funding of Saturday school, ETS support to automatically enforce grading policies, support for court referrals for truancy, and stricter enforcement of state law regarding truancy.

Teacher Survey Results. The results of the teacher survey are shown in Table 6 below. The responses are presented in decreasing order of the differences between waived and non-waived schools. One-hundred-sixty teachers at the waived schools (Dillard, Northeast, and South Plantation) were randomly selected and sent surveys. Eighty-two of these teachers returned the surveys, resulting in a response rate of 51%. Because Coral Springs High School was approved for an attendance waiver but decided not to implement it, their teacher survey results were not included. Two-hundred-and-forty teachers were randomly selected from the non-waived schools and were sent surveys. One-hundred-and-eighty-four of these teachers returned the surveys, resulting in a response rate of 77%.

Table 6
Teacher Survey Results

Question	Waiver	Responses							Avg	Diff
		N	SA	A	N	D	SD			
The school attendance policy promotes student attendance.	Yes	82	46%	34%	13%	5%	1%	4.20	1.09	
	No	184	15%	30%	21%	19%	15%	3.11		
Overall, the attendance policy at my school is good for the school.	Yes	82	48%	35%	13%	1%	2%	4.24	0.96	
	No	184	16%	36%	17%	20%	10%	3.28		
I consistently apply the attendance policy at my school in the assignment of grades.	Yes	82	70%	27%	4%	0%	0%	4.66	0.64	
	No	184	34%	46%	10%	6%	3%	4.02		
The school attendance policy promotes improvement in students' academic performance.	Yes	82	26%	39%	26%	6%	4%	3.77	0.63	
	No	184	14%	31%	23%	21%	12%	3.14		
My students understand the attendance policy and its ramifications.	Yes	82	38%	52%	5%	4%	1%	4.22	0.58	
	No	183	27%	36%	17%	15%	5%	3.64		
It is important to distinguish between excused and unexcused absences.	Yes	82	30%	20%	17%	20%	13%	3.34		
	No	183	47%	29%	6%	9%	9%	3.95	0.61	
As a teacher, I understand the attendance policy and its ramifications.	Yes	82	72%	24%	1%	1%	1%	4.65	0.22	
	No	181	60%	31%	4%	2%	3%	4.43		

Note. SA=Strongly Agree, A=Agree, N=Neutral, D=Disagree, SD=Strongly Disagree. Average represents a weighted average with the following weights: SA=5, A=4, N=3, D=2, SD=1.

All of the differences between waived and non-waived school averages were statistically significant (the probability of observing a difference of that magnitude through random sampling events was 5% or less). The largest differences (an average of one point on a five point scale) between the responses of the teachers in the waived and non-waived schools was in the area of whether the school policies promoted attendance and were good for the school, with teachers in the waived schools expressing stronger positive opinions. The teachers in the waived schools also agreed more strongly (an average difference of over half a point) that they consistently applied the policy, their students understood the policy and that it promotes improvement in students' academic performance. There was a difference (an average difference of 0.61) between teachers in waived and non-waived schools in their feelings on the importance of distinguishing between excused and unexcused absences (waived schools less) and their understanding of the policy (waived schools average difference of 0.22 more). It was of interest to note that half of the teachers in the schools with waivers, and more than half of the teachers in

the non-waivered schools, felt that it was important to distinguish between excused and unexcused absences.

Focus Group Interview Results – Administrators. Focus groups of three to five administrators were held at the three waived schools. Because Coral Springs High School was approved for an attendance waiver but decided not to implement it, their administrators were not interviewed. The administrators all reflected that they had observed an increase in the importance of attendance in the culture of their school. This was ascribed to the increased focus on attendance necessitated by the new attendance policy. Administrators felt that there had been a trend that as attendance improved, student academic work and performance also improved. Administrators observed that students were much more concerned about their attendance record. Administrators also felt that the appeals procedures and appeals committee had been important in the transition such that special circumstances could be addressed. Administrators expressed that the new approach streamlined their operations and put them much more in line with the corporate world. Administrators observed an increase in administrative workload surrounding the appeals process, but felt that this was offset by reductions elsewhere. Administrators felt that the Saturday school program was important and had had some trouble identifying funds to support it.

The administrators expressed some concern regarding the uneven implementation among the faculty. There were instances of some students exceeding the limit receiving some F's and some A's. The portion of the variation between teachers due to faculty record keeping appeared to reduce itself over time. Some variation persisted due to faculty differences over grading philosophy. A suggestion was made to have the grade defaulted to F automatically if the maximum number of absences was exceeded.

The appeals committee at Northeast High identified the following issues of concern when designing and implementing such a policy. Many of these issues were also reflected in interviews with other administrators and stakeholder groups:

1. Doctor vs. economics of family
2. Teachers being consistent with absences
3. Teachers/Administrators did not bypass the system (unofficial make-up time)
4. Teachers were consistent on reporting failing grades, checking make-up list, making grade changes after time was made-up
5. 10 day rule (state law)
6. Banking time
7. Suspension system
8. College visitations, Teen mothers
9. Procrastination - large turnout for Saturday school at end of marking period
10. Early attendance bonus plan

All of the administrators interviewed felt that it was important to keep the new policy.

Focus Group Interview Results – Teachers. Focus groups of six to ten teachers were held at the three waived schools. At one of the schools the faculty did not approve the attendance waiver request. The faculty present in the interview took care to point out that that defeat did not relate to dissatisfaction with the attendance policy, but to the fact that not enough teachers attended the faculty meeting to gain the appropriate percentage of the entire faculty.

The teachers in all of the schools reported that they had observed better attendance among the students and felt that it resulted in a greater degree of learning overall. Teachers felt that if students were present, they would work and learn something. Teachers found that having students in class increased the overall enthusiasm of both teachers and students.

Teachers did point out, however, that among those students who did not care or who had “mentally withdrawn,” attendance bore no relationship to learning. Teachers felt that those students were simply not being served well by a traditional high school and that other alternatives should be found (e.g., adult or vocational centers).

The teachers’ comments reflected the administrators’ observation that a major issue was the focus placed on attendance at their schools. Students were more aware of the need to attend and would force themselves to come to school, sometimes even when they were sick. Teachers found that students were more aware of their attendance record and were more conscientious about attending. The peer attitude or culture among students had become more oriented towards attending school. Students sometimes attend Saturday school to “bank” time for anticipated absences later in the school year.

The teachers reported that the new policy was no more time consuming than the previous policy. Teachers had to be more careful regarding student attendance, but found that grading was easier with less makeup, or uncertainties regarding the status of an absence. They found that they had to do less repeating for students who were absent and had less make-ups on state testing. They did find, however, that more students present meant more papers to grade.

They all reported that the first term had some adjustment problems with difficulties in understanding and consistent enforcement. They all felt that, by this time, all of the stakeholders in the school were well aware of the policy and its implications.

The teachers all felt that consistency in implementation was important and that there was some inconsistency regarding implementation among the faculty. They reported that students with too many absences would have a variety of grades, rather than all F’s.

The teachers reported a few drawbacks of the new policies. They reported that some students came to class when they should not have, primarily due to illness. They found that students who exceeded the maximum number of classes tended to give up with the “I’ve already failed so why should I try?” attitude. These students tended to become disruptive or to skip classes randomly, their one reason to attend being the state driver’s license law.

All of the teachers interviewed felt that it was important to keep the new policy.

Focus Group Interview Results – Student Leaders. Focus groups of 12 to 15 students that were in a student leadership group were held at the three waived schools. The student leaders had also noticed that class attendance increased, but with mixed impact. Student leaders observed grades and learning were more related to students’ attitudes than to days of attendance. Student leaders observed that students tended to treat the number of absences as a “right” and tended to give up when they exceeded

that number. Student leaders expressed the feeling that some students could always get waivers and that the process was so difficult that many students, particularly low-income students without access to doctor's notes, did not even try. Student leaders observed that students, in general, disliked the policy.

The attitudes of the student leaders regarding the appropriateness or value of the policy to the student body was clearly split according to their personal views regarding school. Those student leaders that equated school to a job in preparation for their future viewed the policy favorably and compared it to sick and vacation leave policies in the job market. Student leaders felt that it taught students responsibility and dependability. Some of them had concerns regarding implementation issues (perceived fairness and appeal difficulties) and which absences should receive waivers (such as college visits), but supported the idea of the policy.

Other students among the leaders group viewed school as principally an educational institution where the primary goal was to acquire important knowledge and skills. These students viewed grades as a reflection of how well they had obtained the appropriate knowledge and skills. Student leaders took the position that failing a class that they (mostly hypothetically) had earned an A in was an unfair reflection of their academic performance. One student put it bluntly by asking "Why do I have to sit through these boring movies and hear the book read to me if I can meet the requirements without coming to class?" The question revealed a curricular problem as well as a philosophical divide. This divide was reflected in the question, should grades reflect academic achievement alone or a complex function of behaviors reflecting educational job performance?

Focus Group Interview Results – Students with greater than five absences. Focus groups of six to ten students that had more than five absences were held at the three waived schools. The same philosophical divide observed among the student leaders was also evident among students who had five absences or more. Those students who felt that grades should reflect their academic achievement felt that it was unfair to fail a class due to absences for which they had earned a passing grade. Those students who adopted the "job metaphor" accepted the idea of the policy but had serious concerns regarding implementation issues.

Students reported that attendance appeared to have increased and found that there was less reviewing for students who missed something in class. Students also observed that students who had exceeded the limit tended to give up and stop working or caring.

The students suggested that a lot more kids were failing as a result of the policy. Students expressed concern with the difficulty in making appeals, the difficulty in obtaining a doctor's note, and the length of time an appeal takes. Students reported many students just gave up when faced with the process. Students stated that Saturday school was frequently a case of just "sitting there" because they observed that "most teachers don't give students the work that they missed." Students felt Saturday school placed an unfair burden on the students who needed to work on Saturdays.

Qualitative Analyses Summary and Conclusions

The opinions of the administrators, teachers and students support the conclusion that attendance at the schools with policy waivers has increased. Administrators reported an increased focus on attendance at their schools and a resultant increase in student attendance. Teachers in the waived schools reflected, across all survey questions, more positive attitudes towards the attendance policy of their school and of the school's administration of that policy.

The impact on the students themselves, however, appears to have been mixed. Teachers reported that, for most students, an increase in attendance resulted in an increase in learning. However, they also reported that for students that did not care, attendance bore no relationship to learning.

Students reported that academic performance was related more to a student's attitude about school and learning than to his or her attendance pattern. In the context of the interviews, the students were referring to an overall positive or negative attitude toward school, while another aspect of a student's thinking about school was revealed as indicative of their attitudes regarding attendance and attendance policies. It became apparent that the student's paradigm regarding school affected their feelings regarding attendance.

Those students who viewed school as primarily an educational institution where the goal is to gain knowledge and skills saw attendance as important only as it related to the accomplishment of that goal. When school, or a particular class, was viewed as boring or irrelevant, attendance became unnecessary and a waste of valuable time. Attendance policies were sometimes viewed as an intrusion on a student's ability to make decisions regarding the best method for accomplishing the goal of gaining knowledge and skills.

Those students who viewed school as their job during these years of their life where they were working to gain knowledge and experience in preparation for another occupation regard attendance as a responsibility, similar to showing up for work every day. Attendance policies were considered appropriate rules in the workplace and were judged according to their perceived degree of fairness to all students and their ability to accommodate special circumstances.

Quantitative Analyses

To determine the impact of attendance waivers on student performance, four sets of analyses were conducted. First, the average number of absences at the attendance waiver schools was compared with the average number of absences at comparison schools. Second, student performance on the norm-referenced tests (NRTs) at the attendance waiver schools was compared with student performance at comparison schools. Third, student performance on the FCAT-SSS at the attendance waiver schools was compared with the performance of similar comparison students. Fourth, student coursework was examined through analyses of earned grades expressed as grade point averages (GPAs). Analyses were conducted across two school years (1999 and 2000), separately for each of the three attendance waiver schools.

Absences Per Student. The median and average numbers of absences per student at the attendance waiver and comparisons schools are displayed in Table 7 for the block schools and Table 8 for the non-block schools. The data summarized in the tables were derived from totaling full day excused and

unexcused absences. Examination of the data revealed that the average number of absences tended to increase overall from 1999 to 2000.¹ Students at Northeast High School tended to have fewer absences than their comparison peers (Table 7). Students at Dillard High School and South Plantation High School tended to have more absences in 1999 than the comparison students, but about the same as the comparison students in 2000 (Table 8).

Table 7.
Overall Absences at Northeast High School and Comparison Block Schools by Grade Cohort, 1998-1999 and 1999-2000.

Grade Cohort	1999				2000				
	<i>Mdn</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mdn</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	
Northeast High									
9	6	9.2	9.9	440	7	12.1	15.3	570	
10	7	9.9	12.4	346	7	10.9	13.4	422	
11	7	8.9	9.9	299	8	12.4	14.3	327	
12	9	11.8	9.8	239	9	12.1	10.9	308	
Total	7	9.8	10.6	1324	8	11.8	13.8	1627	
Comparison Group									
9	8	10.7	11.1	5261	9	13.1	14.6	7086	
10	8	12.1	12.3	4986	9	12.7	13.1	5083	
11	10	13.8	13.4	5017	11	15.3	14.8	4945	
12	13	18.0	16.5	4942	13	17.3	14.8	5148	
Total	9	13.6	13.7	20206	10	14.5	14.5	22262	
Total									
9	7	10.6	11.0	5701	9	13.0	14.6	7656	
10	8	11.9	12.3	5332	9	12.6	13.1	5505	
11	10	13.5	13.2	5316	11	15.1	14.8	5272	
12	13	17.7	16.3	5181	13	17.0	14.7	5456	
Total	9	13.3	13.6	21530	10	14.3	14.5	23889	

¹ School years are denoted by the year in which the school year ends. For example, the 1998-1999 school year is denoted by 1999.

Table 8.

Overall Absences at Dillard High School, South Plantation High School, and Comparison Non-Block Schools by Grade Cohort, 1999 and 2000.

Grade Cohort	1999				2000				
	<i>Mdn</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mdn</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	
Dillard High									
9	10	15.2	14.9	475	10	17.7	21.8	646	
10	12	15.4	14.2	403	9	16.2	19.4	470	
11	11	16.0	15.4	413	10	15.6	18.3	402	
12	20	25.6	21.0	399	12	17.2	17.3	415	
Total	13	17.9	17.1	1690	10	16.8	19.6	1933	
South Plantation High									
9	9	12.5	12.4	483	9	11.9	11.1	744	
10	9	12.0	13.0	425	8	10.5	8.7	407	
11	13	16.0	14.2	434	9	10.9	8.3	427	
12	16	19.7	15.1	416	13	15.1	10.2	441	
Total	11	14.9	14.0	1758	10	12.1	10.1	2019	
Comparison Group									
9	7	10.1	10.7	2504	9	13.6	14.9	3432	
10	7	10.4	10.8	2256	8	11.7	11.9	2370	
11	8	11.7	11.2	2050	10	13.6	12.8	2213	
12	12	15.6	13.8	2327	14	17.2	14.6	2103	
Total	8	11.9	11.9	9137	10	13.9	13.9	10118	
Total									
9	8	11.1	11.7	3462	9	13.9	15.6	4822	
10	8	11.3	11.8	3084	8	12.2	13.0	3247	
11	9	12.9	12.5	2897	10	13.5	13.2	3042	
12	13	17.5	15.5	3142	13	16.9	14.5	2959	
Total	9	13.2	13.2	12585	10	14.0	14.4	14070	

Statistical Weighting. For each of the analyses described, students attending attendance waiver schools were compared with demographically similar students from non-waiver schools. The comparison students were identified through statistical weighting procedures, with a six-weight solution controlling for student classifications with regard to ethnicity, gender, Exceptional Student Education (ESE), Free or Reduced Lunch (FRL), Limited English Proficiency (LEP), and grade level. Weights were computed separately for each attendance waiver school and its comparison schools. The same sets of weights were used for all analyses, even though missing data will slightly alter the sample size across analyses. However, the discrepancies in sample sizes and resulting variations in demographic variables were not substantial enough to warrant computation of separate weighted samples for each analysis. This methodology allows comparisons that most clearly illuminate the effect of attendance waivers on student performance.

Re-examination of Absences Per Student. The numbers of absences per student were re-examined using the weighted comparison groups; the data are summarized in Tables 9 through 11. The data are displayed disaggregated by grade cohort. For each cohort, two years of data are presented (1999 and

2000) and the same students are represented in both years. This grouping of students allows year-to-year comparisons across the same students. The grade cohorts are labeled according to the grade level during the 2000 school year. In Table 9, students in the grade 10 cohort at Northeast High School had an average of 8.0 absences in the 1999 school year (when they were in grade 9) and an average of 10.2 absences when they were in the 2000 school year (when they were in grade 10).

Examination of the medians and the means for each cohort shows that the median number of days absent was less than the mean number of days absent suggesting that the distributions of days absent were positively skewed. Analysis of skewness supported that observation with most distributions exhibiting skewnesses greater than 2.0. To reduce skewness and normalize the distributions, the data were subjected to square root transformations. This procedure allows analyses on the number of absences to be conducted using standard parametric techniques. For ease of interpretation, data are presented in the untransformed format. The absence data were entered into 2(School: Attendance Waiver School vs. Comparison Schools) X 3(Grade Cohort) X 2(School Year) mixed-model analyses of variance (ANOVAs) with repeated measures on the last factor. These analyses were conducted separately for each attendance waiver school.

Table 9.
Absences at Northeast High School and Comparison Block Schools by Cohort and School Year.

Grade Cohort	Absence Year	Northeast High School				Comparison				Total			
		<i>Mdn</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mdn</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mdn</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>
10	1999	6	8.0	7.6	405	8	10.4	10.6	405	7	9.2	9.3	810
	2000	7	10.2	12.5	405	9	13.0	13.2	405	8	11.6	12.9	810
11	1999	6	8.4	9.1	309	8	12.0	11.8	309	7	10.2	10.7	618
	2000	8	11.4	12.2	309	11	15.6	15.1	309	9	13.5	13.9	618
12	1999	6	8.2	8.2	288	10	13.8	13.8	288	7	11.0	11.7	576
	2000	9	12.1	11.1	288	14	17.3	15.3	288	11	14.7	13.6	576
Total	1999	6	8.2	8.3	1002	8	11.9	12.0	1002	7	10.0	10.5	2004
	2000	8	11.1	12.0	1002	11	15.0	14.5	1002	9	13.1	13.5	2004

Table 9 shows the absence data of students from Northeast High School and the students identified from the comparison block-scheduled high schools.² Aggregating across School Year, Northeast High School students were absent on fewer days ($M=9.7$) than were the comparison students ($M=13.5$), $F(1, 1998)=70.6, p<.001$. This difference between schools was not modified by interactions with any of the other variables. However, across School, the number of absences increased with Grade Cohort, $F(2, 1998)=10.6, p<.001$. Also across School, the absences increased from year to year for each Grade Cohort, $F(1, 1998)=215.3, p<.001$. These latter two main effects were modified by the interaction ($F(2, 1998)=6.1, p=.002$) such that the increase in absences from 1999 to 2000 was larger among the grade 11 cohort ($Diff=3.3$) than among the grade 10 cohort ($Diff=2.4$), $F(1, 1426)=3.9, p<.05$. The increased absences found among the grade 12 cohort ($Diff=3.7$) did not differ from the grade 11 cohort, $F(1, 1192)=2.1, ns$.

² Only block-scheduling schools on the 4X4 pattern were included in the comparison pool.

The preceding analysis tracked defined cohorts from year to year and increases in the number of days absent were found for each cohort. This increase was seen at the comparison schools as well as at Northeast High School. Increases were also seen from grade level to grade level. Therefore, it is likely that the increased absences were a function of the grade level of the students as opposed to the attendance waiver policy at Northeast High School. To test this possibility, mean absences were examined across cohorts, within grade level. The grade 10 cohort's absences in 2000 (10th grade) were compared with the grade 11 cohort's absences in 1999 (also 10th grade). Overall, absences increased from 1999 ($M=10.2$) to 2000 ($M=11.6$) for grade 10 students, $F(1, 1424)=3.6, p=.06$. Similarly, absences increased for grade 11 students from 1999 ($M=11.0$) to 2000 ($M=13.5$), $F(1, 1190)=14.1, p<.001$. These increases did not differ between Northeast High School and the comparison schools, suggesting that absences increased from year to year independently of school attendance waiver policy.

The absence data for Dillard High School and its non-block comparison schools are shown in Table 10. Across both years, examination of the data revealed that students tended to be absent at Dillard High School ($M=15.0$) more often than similar students at comparison schools ($M=11.2$), $F(1, 2418)=82.6, p<.001$. Across both groups of students, students were more likely to be absent at the higher grade levels (grade 10 cohort=11.8; grade 11 cohort= 12.7; grade 12 cohort=14.7), $F(2, 2418)=19.2, p<.001$, and from year to year (1999=12.0; 2000=14.2), $F(1, 2418)=91.1, p<.001$. These main effects were qualified by the three-way interaction, indicating that the average number of absences per student was a function of the School, Grade Cohort, and School Year, $F(2, 2418)=6.6, p=.001$. Follow-up simple effects analyses conducted for each cohort found similar patterns. Specifically, the two-way interactions between School and Year were significant, $F_s > 4.5, ps < .02$. These interactions were driven by increased absences among the comparison students ($F_s > 9.6, ps < .001$) and not among the Dillard High School students ($F_s < 1$ for grades 10 and 11 cohorts; $F(1, 400)=3.8, p=.07$ for the grade 12 cohort).

Table 10.

Absences at Dillard High School and Comparison Non-Block Schools by Cohort and School Year.

Grade Cohort	Absence Year	Dillard High School				Comparison				Total			
		<i>Mdn</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mdn</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mdn</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>
10	1999	10	13.92	13.41	439	6	8.21	7.61	439	8	11.07	11.27	878
	2000	9	14.93	17.48	439	7	9.96	10.73	439	8	12.44	14.70	878
11	1999	11	14.33	12.32	372	7	9.21	9.20	372	9	11.77	11.16	744
	2000	10	14.80	16.53	372	9	12.53	11.75	372	9	13.66	14.37	744
12	1999	11	15.39	14.27	401	7	10.91	11.74	401	9	13.15	13.25	802
	2000	12	16.45	15.62	401	12	16.72	16.72	401	12	16.59	16.17	802
Total	1999	11	14.53	13.39	1212	7	9.41	9.68	1212	9	11.97	11.96	2424
	2000	10	15.39	16.59	1212	9	12.98	13.57	1212	10	14.19	15.20	2424

Mean absences for Dillard High School and comparison students were then examined within grade level and across cohorts. The absences among grade 10 students (grade 10 cohort in 2000 and grade 11 cohort in 1999) only differed as a function of School (Dillard=14.6; Comparison=9.6), $F(1,$

1618)=208.1, $p<.001$. Year to year differences and the interaction were not significant, $F_s <1.7$. Comparisons among grade 11 students (grade 11 cohort in 2000 and grade 12 cohort in 1999), showed the interaction involving School and Year, $F(1, 1542)=6.9, p<.01$. Whereas the number of absences were steady at Dillard High School (1999=15.4; 2000=14.8; $F(1, 771)=1.9, ns$), absences increased at the comparison schools,(1999=10.9; 2000=12.5; $F(1, 771)=5.6, p<.02$).

The absence data for South Plantation High School and its non-block comparison schools are shown in Table 11. As was found with the preceding analyses, across both years, students in the higher grade levels tended to have more absences (grade 10 cohort=10.2, grade 11 cohort=11.3; grade 12 cohort=14.8), $F(1, 2484)=45.4, p<.001$. Also, the familiar pattern of more absences in the 2000 school year ($M=12.9$) than in the 1999 school year ($M=11.4$) was also present, $F(1, 2484)=101.3, p<.001$. Finally, the School by School Year interaction was apparent, $F(1, 2484)=74.2, p<.001$. The mean number of absences per student held steady from year to year at South Plantation High School ($M_s=12.8, 12.2$) ($F<1$), but increased at the comparison schools ($M_s=9.9, 13.6$), $F(1, 1244)=215.0, p<.001$.

Table 11.

Absences at South Plantation High School and Comparison Non-Block Schools by Cohort and School Year.

Grade Cohort	Absence Year	South Plantation High School				Comparison				Total			
		<i>Mdn</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mdn</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mdn</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>
10	1999	8	10.50	8.85	399	6	8.83	8.68	399	7	9.66	8.80	798
	2000	8	10.42	8.65	399	8	10.91	10.85	399	8	10.67	9.81	798
11	1999	9	11.81	12.74	414	7	9.58	9.76	414	8	10.70	11.40	828
	2000	9	10.89	8.30	414	9	12.90	12.17	414	9	11.90	10.46	828
12	1999	13	15.95	14.22	432	8	11.32	11.35	432	10	13.64	13.06	864
	2000	13	15.01	9.93	432	13	16.73	15.18	432	13	15.87	12.85	864
Total	1999	10	12.83	12.43	1245	7	9.94	10.08	1245	8	11.38	11.40	2490
	2000	11	12.17	9.24	1245	10	13.59	13.14	1245	10	12.88	11.37	2490

Mean absences were then examined within grade level and across cohorts. The absences among grade 10 students (grade 10 cohort in 2000 and grade 11 cohort in 1999) showed the two-way interaction between School and Grade Cohort, $F(1, 1622)=4.0, p<.05$. Whereas the mean number of absences among grade 10 students did not differ from year to year at South Plantation High School ($M_s=11.8, 10.4; F=1.1$), mean absences increased at the comparison schools ($M_s=9.6, 10.9; F(1, 811)=3.2, p=.08$). The two-way interaction was also significant at the 11th grade level, but exhibited a different form, $F(1, 1688)=30.0, p<.001$. Absences *decreased* among 11th graders from 1999 ($M=16.0$) to 2000 ($M=10.9$) at South Plantation, $F(1, 844)=30.6, p<.001$, but increased at the comparison schools ($M=11.3, 12.9$), $F(1, 844)=5.3, p=.02$.

The effect of attendance waivers on mean absences per student differed across the three attendance waiver schools. The analyses revealed:

- Northeast High School students had fewer mean absences than did similar students at other comparison schools. Mean absences increased across cohort grade levels and from year to year for students in both groups.
- Dillard High School students had more absences on average than did similar students at comparison schools. Among all students, absences increased at the higher grade levels and absences increased from year to year. However, the year-to-year increases in absences were greater among comparison students than among the Dillard High School students.
- South Plantation High School students maintained consistent levels of absences from 1999 to 2000 while the comparison students showed increases. Within grade level, South Plantation students showed steady or decreasing numbers of absences while the comparison students showed increases.

Norm-Referenced Tests. Is there a relationship between attendance and performance on norm-referenced tests? To answer this question, the relationship between attendance at school and performance on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test-Norm-Referenced Test (FCAT-NRT) was assessed as the correlation between number of days absent and the normal curve equivalent scores (NCEs). These correlations were computed separately for reading and mathematics, and separately for each of the three attendance waiver schools and their respective comparison schools. The data are summarized in Table 12. In all cases, the coefficients were between -.01 and -.18, inclusively. Although the coefficients were negative, indicating that higher scores were associated with fewer absences, the magnitude of these coefficients was small indicating that the relationships were trivial (shared variance, r^2 , varied between 0 and .03). For all practical purposes, there was no relationship between attendance and NRT scores at these schools.

Table 12.
Correlations Between Absences and FCAT-NRT Scores.

	Mathematics			Reading		
	<i>r</i>	r^2	<i>n</i>	<i>r</i>	r^2	<i>n</i>
Northeast High School	-.11	.01	347	-.10	.01	351
Comparison	-.17	.03	367	-.14	.02	365
Dillard	-.18	.03	390	-.08	.01	398
Comparison	-.11	.01	377	-.09	.01	382
South Plantation High School	-.06	.004	378	-.01	.00	378
Comparison	-.16	.03	362	-.11	.01	362

Although attendance may not be a predictor of performance on the NRT, other aspects of the attendance waiver policies may influence scores. To examine this possibility, gains on NRTs were examined within students at the attendance waiver and comparison schools using the grade 10 cohorts. These students were in grade 9 in the 1999 school year and took the Stanford Achievement Tests, 8th Edition (SAT8). They were in grade 10 in the 2000 school year and took the FCAT-NRT. Analyses were conducted by comparing the mean NCEs on the SAT8 with the NCEs on the FCAT-NRT in 2(School) X 2(Test: SAT8 vs. FCAT-NRT) ANOVAs with repeated measures on the last factor. Prior to computing the analyses, SAT8 scores were converted to equivalent SAT9 scores so that valid

comparisons could be made with the FCAT-NRT. Again, these analyses were conducted separately for each of the three attendance waiver schools and separately for each subtest.³

Table 13 shows the NRT data for Northeast High School and comparison high school students. Examination of the mathematics data indicated that Northeast High School students had lower NRT scores ($M=51.2$) than did the comparison students ($M=56.9$), $F(1, 655)=13.3$, $p<.001$. Overall, scores decreased from when students took the SAT8 ($M=57.6$) to when they took the FCAT-NRT ($M=50.4$), $F(1, 655)=93.9$, $p<.001$. The size of the decline in NRT scores was consistent across the schools as the interaction was non-significant, $F<1$.

Table 13.

Northeast High School and Comparison Schools Mean NRT Scores.

Norm-Referenced Test	Northeast High School			Comparison			Total		
	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N
SAT8 Mathematics	54.4	25.1	364	60.9	26.4	358	57.6	25.9	722
FCAT Mathematics	47.9	17.2	347	52.8	19.4	367	50.4	18.5	714
SAT8 Reading	46.2	15.8	375	48.4	18.4	359	47.3	17.2	734
FCAT Reading	40.0	19.1	351	41.9	18.8	365	40.9	18.9	716

The reading data for Northeast High School and its comparison schools are also presented in Table 13. A marginal main effect of school indicated that Northeast High School students tended to earn lower reading scores ($M=43.1$) than similar students at the comparison schools ($M=45.2$), $F(1, 667)=3.5$, $p=.06$. Students also declined overall from when they took the SAT8 in 1999 ($M=47.3$) to when they took the FCAT-NRT in 2000 ($M=40.9$), $F(1, 667)=136.8$, $p<.001$. This decline was consistent across schools as the interaction was non-significant, $F<1$.

Table 14 displays the NRT data for Dillard High School and its comparison schools. In both mathematics ($F(1, 706)=57.7$, $p<.001$) and reading ($F(1, 711)=340.5$, $p<.001$), students' mean NCEs declined from grade 9 (SAT8: Mathematics=47.3; Reading=41.9) to the grade 10 (FCAT-NRT: Mathematics=41.8; Reading=32.8) across Dillard and its comparison schools. The interaction between School and Test was found for both mathematics ($F(1, 706)=8.6$, $p<.01$) and reading ($F(1, 711)=25.2$, $p<.001$) showing that the scores at Dillard and the comparison schools did not decline the same amount. The mean difference in mathematics scores at Dillard High School ($M=3.8$) was smaller than the mean difference at the comparison schools ($M=7.0$), $F(1, 706)=8.7$, $p<.01$. The mean difference in reading scores at Dillard ($M=6.9$) was also smaller than at the comparison schools ($M=11.3$), $F(1, 711)=25.2$, $p<.001$.

Table 14.

Dillard High School and Comparison Schools Mean NRT Scores.

³ The predictive validities were moderate, ranging from .66 to .70 for mathematics and from .70 to .75 for reading.

Norm-Referenced Test	Dillard High School			Comparison			Total		
	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N
SAT8 Mathematics	46.1	23.3	376	48.4	24.4	396	47.3	23.9	772
FCAT Mathematics	42.3	16.7	390	41.4	17.5	377	41.8	17.1	767
SAT8 Reading	40.6	15.2	370	43.1	15.5	400	41.9	15.4	770
FCAT Reading	33.7	16.0	398	31.8	17.8	382	32.8	16.9	780

Table 15 shows the NRT data for South Plantation High School and its comparison schools. There were no significant differences in the mathematics scores of South Plantation High School students and comparison school students. However, overall, students' scores declined from when they took the SAT8 ($M=63.5$) to when they took the FCAT-NRT ($M=54.7$), $F(1, 692)=155.7$, $p<.001$. In reading, the South Plantation High School students earned higher scores ($M=50.4$) than did similar students at the comparison schools ($M=47.0$), $F(1, 700)=4.5$, $p<.05$. However, overall in reading, students at both South Plantation and the comparison schools showed lower scores when they took the FCAT-NRT ($M=44.8$) than when they took the SAT8 ($M=52.6$) $F(1, 700)=257.9$, $p<.001$.

Table 15.

South Plantation High School and Comparison Schools Mean NRT Scores.

Norm-Referenced Test	South Plantation High School			Comparison			Total		
	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N
SAT8 Mathematics	64.8	26.2	357	62.2	26.4	372	63.5	26.3	729
FCAT Mathematics	56.2	19.1	378	53.2	20.5	362	54.7	19.9	740
SAT8 Reading	54.0	17.3	365	51.2	17.5	374	52.6	17.4	739
FCAT Reading	46.7	18.5	378	42.8	19.3	362	44.8	19.0	740

The NRT data showed little evidence of score gains at the attendance waiver schools. Overall, the 10th grade scores (FCAT-NRT) were lower than the 9th grade scores (SAT8). Northeast High School and South Plantation High School students showed differences that were similar to those displayed by their peers at comparison schools. The difference between the 9th and 10th grade scores were smaller for students at Dillard High School than for their comparison students. Given that this pattern was found at only one of the three schools examined, little support is tendered for academic enhancement due to attendance waivers.

FCAT-Sunshine State Standards. Norm-referenced tests are designed to discriminate between students so that relative standing compared to other students can be ascertained. In order to do this, NRT items tend to be of greater difficulty than those found on criterion-referenced tests, which are designed to ascertain whether students have met some level of performance. For this reason, the FCAT-NRT may not be the ideal instrument for assessing short-term gains. The FCAT-SSS, having criterion-referenced test properties, may provide an alternative view of student performance.

To determine whether there was a relationship between attendance at school and performance on the FCAT-SSS, correlations were computed between the number of days absent and achievement levels. These correlations were computed separately for mathematics, reading, and writing. Again, coefficients were computed separately for each of the three attendance waiver schools and their respective comparison schools. The data are summarized in Table 16. In all cases, the coefficients were between -.20 and .01, inclusively. Although the coefficients were mostly negative, indicating that higher scores were associated with fewer absences, the magnitude of these coefficients was small indicating that the relationships were trivial (shared variance, r^2 , varied between 0 and .04). These data indicated that there was no relationship between attendance and FCAT-SSS scores at these schools.

Table 16.
Correlations Between Absences and FCAT-SSS Scores.

	Mathematics			Reading			Writing		
	<i>r</i>	r^2	<i>n</i>	<i>r</i>	r^2	<i>n</i>	<i>r</i>	r^2	<i>n</i>
Northeast High School	-.06	.003	373	-.06	.004	375	-.09	.008	376
Comparison	-.18	.03	388	-.16	.02	387	-.10	.01	389
Dillard	-.20	.04	408	-.14	.02	405	<.01	.000	402
Comparison	-.10	.01	422	-.05	.002	421	-.06	.003	425
South Plantation High School	-.13	.01	384	-.09	.008	383	-.05	.002	384
Comparison	-.18	.03	388	-.13	.02	386	-.07	.005	389

Prior to the 2000-01 school year, FCAT-SSS had only been administered at grade 10 at the high school level, and it has not been vertically equated with the assessment given at the other tested grade levels. Therefore, within-student gains cannot be examined. However, between-students comparisons are possible. The grade 10 cohort provided the necessary data for comparisons between the attendance waiver schools and the comparison schools. The number and percent of students scoring at each achievement level in mathematics at Northeast High School and its comparison schools are shown in Table 17. These data are displayed graphically in Figure 1.

Table 17.

Number and Percent of Northeast High School and Comparison Students Scoring at Achievement Levels 1-5 in FCAT-SSS Mathematics.

		FCAT Mathematics Achievement Level					Total
		1	2	3	4	5	
Northeast High School	<i>n</i>	94	98	104	68	9	373
	%	25.2	26.3	27.9	18.2	2.4	100.0
Comparison	<i>n</i>	95	95	85	89	24	388
	%	24.5	24.5	21.9	22.9	6.2	100.0
Total	<i>n</i>	189	193	189	157	33	761
	%	24.8	25.4	24.8	20.6	4.3	100.0

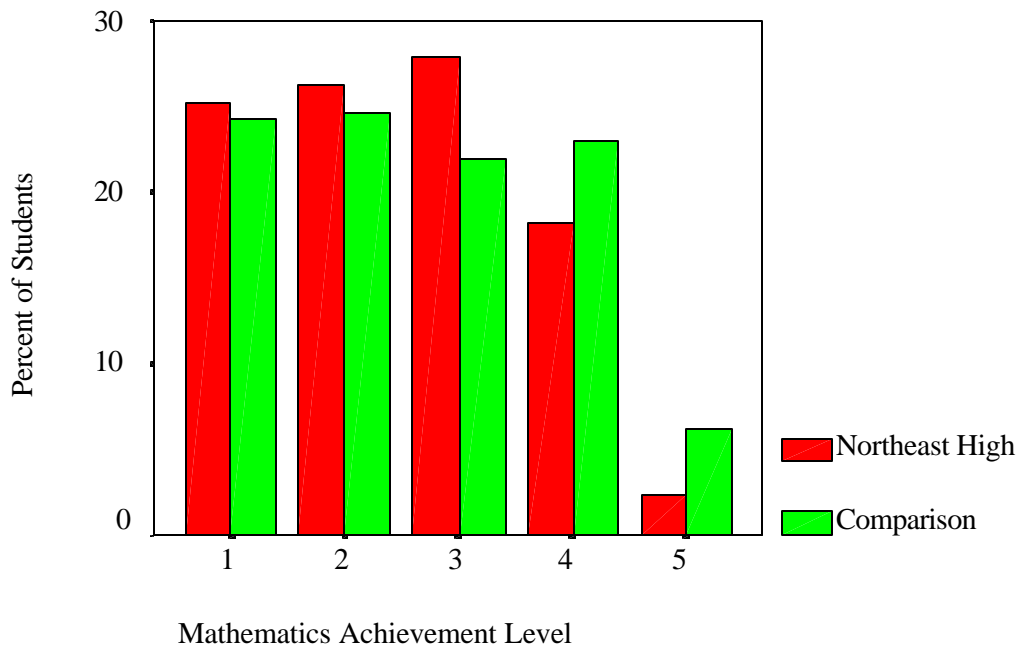


Figure 1. Distribution of Mathematics Achievement Levels by School

Examination of the data suggests that proportionally fewer students at Northeast High School scored at levels 4 (18.2%) and 5 (2.4%) in mathematics than did similar students at the comparison schools (level 4= 22.9; level 5 = 6.2). However, this apparent difference at the higher achievement levels was not sufficient to warrant a conclusion of actual differences in student performances across schools, $Z=1.3$, $p < .19$.⁴

⁴ The test statistic for the FCAT-SSS distributions is the Mann-Whitney test for independent samples. This test examines whether the distribution of achievement levels for the attendance waiver student is the same as the distribution for the comparison student.

Table 18 and Figure 2 display the reading data for Northeast High School and comparison students. Examination of the data shows similar patterns at both schools: More than one-third of students scoring at each of levels 1 and 2, with progressively fewer students scoring in levels 3, 4, and 5. This pattern did not differ across schools, $Z < 1$.

Table 18.

Number and Percent of Northeast High School and Comparison Students Scoring at Achievement Levels 1-5 in FCAT-SSS Reading.

		FCAT Reading Achievement Level					Total
		1	2	3	4	5	
Northeast High School	<i>n</i>	138	143	71	17	6	375
	%	36.8	38.1	18.9	4.5	1.6	100.0
Comparison	<i>n</i>	142	142	75	19	10	388
	%	36.6	36.6	19.3	4.9	2.6	100.0
Total	<i>n</i>	280	285	146	36	16	763
	%	36.7	37.4	19.1	4.7	2.1	100.0

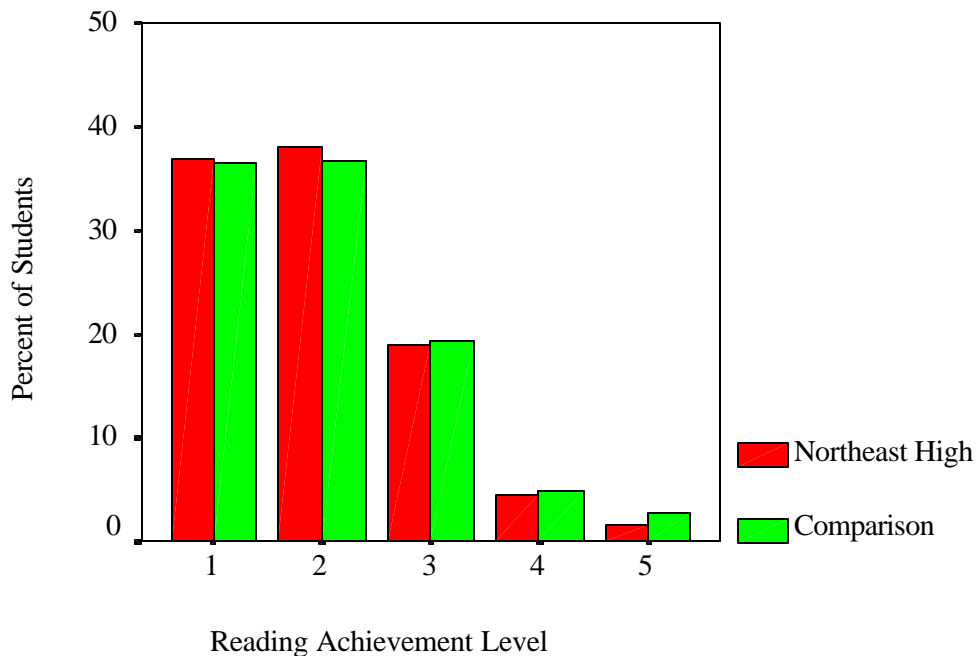


Figure 2. Distribution of Reading Achievement Levels by School

Writing assessment data are presented in Table 19. Approximately 86% of the students at Northeast High School and at the comparison schools met or exceeded the criterion of 3.0 or better (on a scale of 1.0 to 6.0) and this rate did not differ across schools, $Z < 1$, *ns*.

Table 19.

Number and Percent of Northeast High School and Comparison Students Scoring 3.0 or Better on the FCAT-SSS Writing.

		3.0 or Better		Total
		No	Yes	
Northeast High School	<i>n</i>	52	324	376
	%	13.8	86.2	100.0
Comparison	<i>n</i>	56	333	389
	%	14.4	85.6	100.0
Total	<i>n</i>	108	657	765
	%	14.1	85.9	100.0

On the Reading, Mathematics, and Writing subtests of the FCAT-SSS, Northeast High School students gave similar levels of performance as similar students at the comparison schools.

FCAT Mathematics data for Dillard High School and comparison schools are shown in Table 20 and Figure 3. Nearly half (49.0%) of Dillard’s students scored at Level 1 while 37.1% of similar students at comparison schools scored at this level. Overall, Dillard students tended to score at lower achievement levels relative to the comparison students, $Z=3.0, p<.01$.

Table 20.

Number and Percent of Dillard High School and Comparison Students Scoring at Achievement Levels 1-5 in FCAT Mathematics.

		FCAT Mathematics Achievement Levels					Total
		1	2	3	4	5	
Dillard High School	<i>n</i>	200	114	61	31	2	408
	%	49.0	27.9	15.0	7.6	.5	100.0
Comparison	<i>n</i>	156	134	85	39	7	421
	%	37.1	31.8	20.2	9.3	1.7	100.0
Total	<i>n</i>	356	248	146	70	9	829
	%	42.9	29.9	17.6	8.4	1.1	100.0

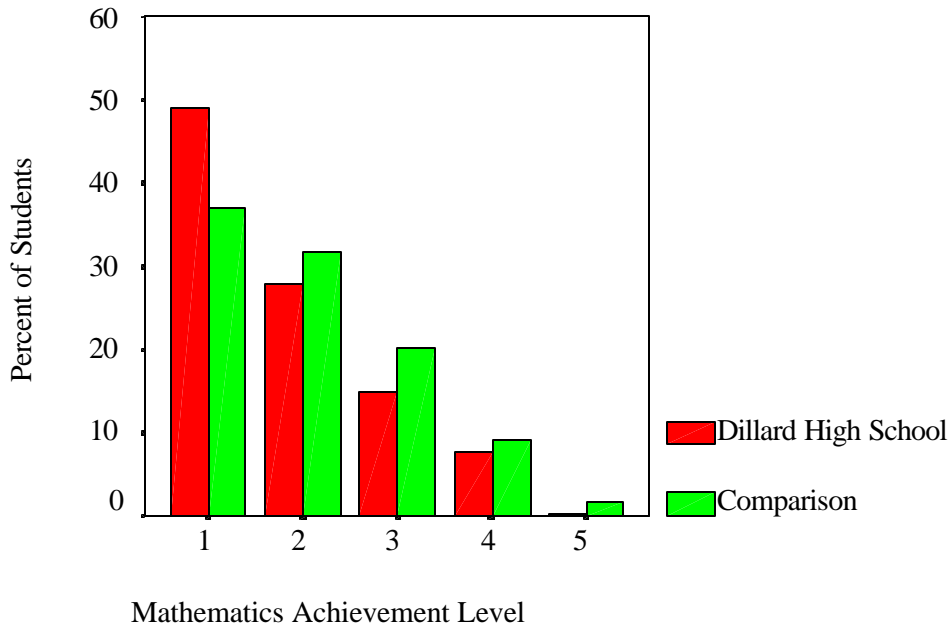


Figure 3. Distribution of Mathematics Achievement Levels by School

FCAT Reading performance among Dillard students and similar comparison students are summarized in Table 21 and Figure 4. More than half of the Dillard students (55.6%) scored at Level 1, compared with 47.6% of the comparisons students. Although the Dillard students tended to score lower than the comparison students, this difference did not reach statistical significance, $Z=1.5$, $p=.15$.

Table 21.

Number and Percent of Dillard High School and Comparison Students Scoring at Achievement Levels 1-5 in FCAT Reading.

		FCAT Reading Achievement Levels					Total
		1	2	3	4	5	
Dillard High School	<i>n</i>	225	124	48	7	1	405
	%	55.6	30.6	11.9	1.7	.2	100.0
Comparison	<i>n</i>	201	161	42	12	6	422
	%	47.6	38.2	10.0	2.8	1.4	100.0
Total	<i>n</i>	426	285	90	19	7	827
	%	51.5	34.5	10.9	2.3	.8	100.0

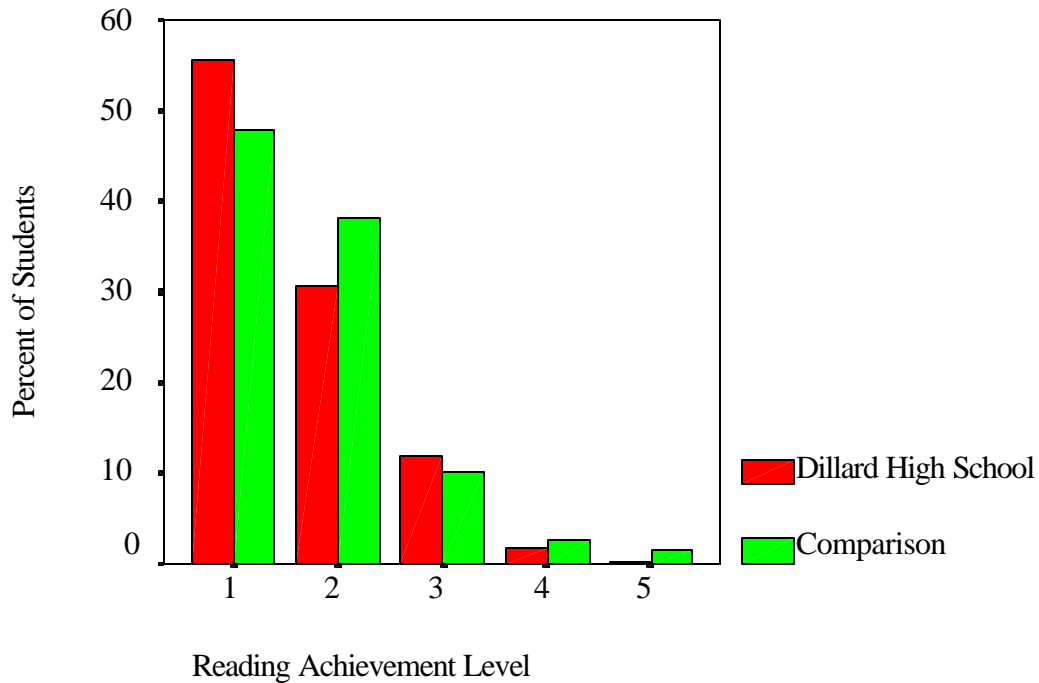


Figure 4. Distribution of Reading Achievement Levels by School

FCAT Writing assessment data are summarized in Table 22 for Dillard High School and similar comparison students. More than 80% of the students at Dillard and the comparison schools scored 3.0 or better (on a scale of 1.0 to 6.0). The performance did not vary between Dillard High School and the comparison students, $Z=1.1$, *ns*.

Table 22.

Number and Percent of Dillard High School and Comparison Students Scoring 3.0 or Better on the FCAT Writing Assessment.

		3.0 or Better		Total
		No	Yes	
Dillard High School	<i>n</i>	74	328	402
	%	18.4	81.6	100.0
Comparison	<i>n</i>	64	361	425
	%	15.1	84.9	100.0
Total	<i>n</i>	138	689	827
	%	16.7	83.3	100.0

Table 23 and Figure 5 shows the distribution of South Plantation High School and comparison school students in the FCAT Mathematics achievement levels. Examination of the data indicates that, across schools, approximately equal proportions of students scored at each achievement level, $Z < 1$.

Table 23.

Number and Percent of South Plantation High School and Comparison Students Scoring at Achievement Levels 1-5 in FCAT Mathematics.

		FCAT Mathematics Achievement Levels					Total
		1	2	3	4	5	
South Plantation High School	<i>n</i>	73	79	96	108	28	384
	%	19.0	20.6	25.0	28.1	7.3	100.0
Comparison	<i>n</i>	80	96	95	87	29	387
	%	20.7	24.8	24.5	22.5	7.5	100.0
Total	<i>n</i>	153	175	191	195	57	771
	%	19.8	22.7	24.8	25.3	7.4	100.0

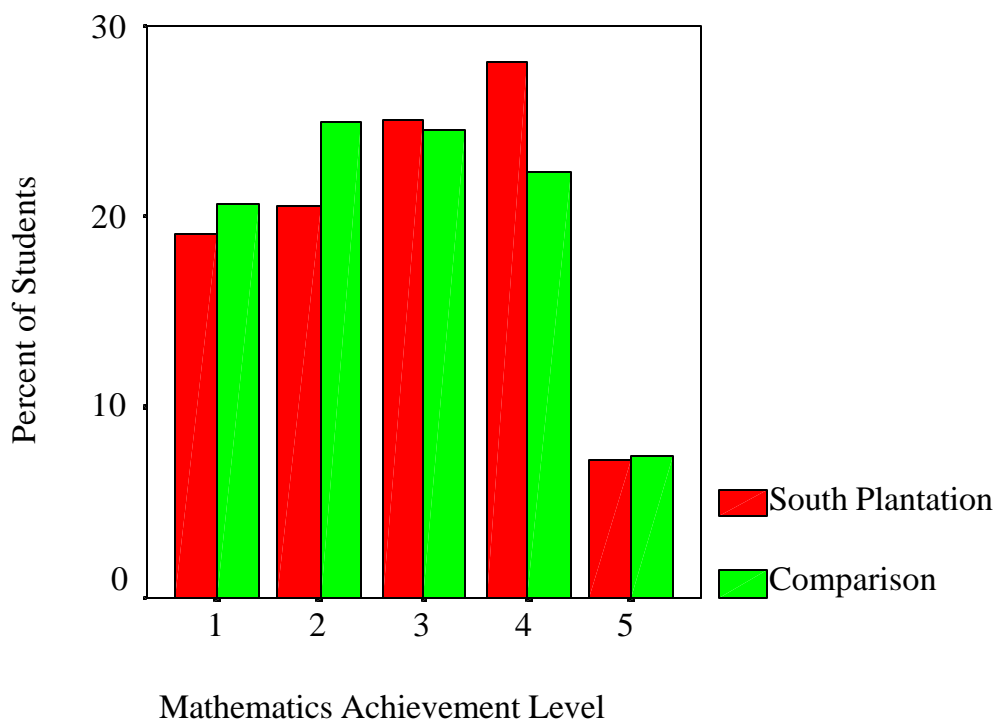


Figure 5. Distribution of Mathematics Achievement Levels by School

Table 24 and Figure 6 show the distribution of students in the FCAT Reading achievement levels. The distribution of students at South Plantation High School is similar to that of the students from the comparison schools, $Z < 1$.

Table 24.

Number and Percent of South Plantation High School and Comparison Students Scoring at Achievement Levels 1-5 in FCAT Reading.

		FCAT Reading Achievement Levels					Total
		1	2	3	4	5	
South Plantation	<i>n</i>	115	120	95	32	21	383
High School	%	30.0	31.3	24.8	8.4	5.5	100.0
Comparison	<i>n</i>	108	149	86	26	16	385
	%	28.1	38.7	22.3	6.8	4.2	100.0
Total	<i>n</i>	223	269	181	58	37	768
	%	29.0	35.0	23.6	7.6	4.8	100.0

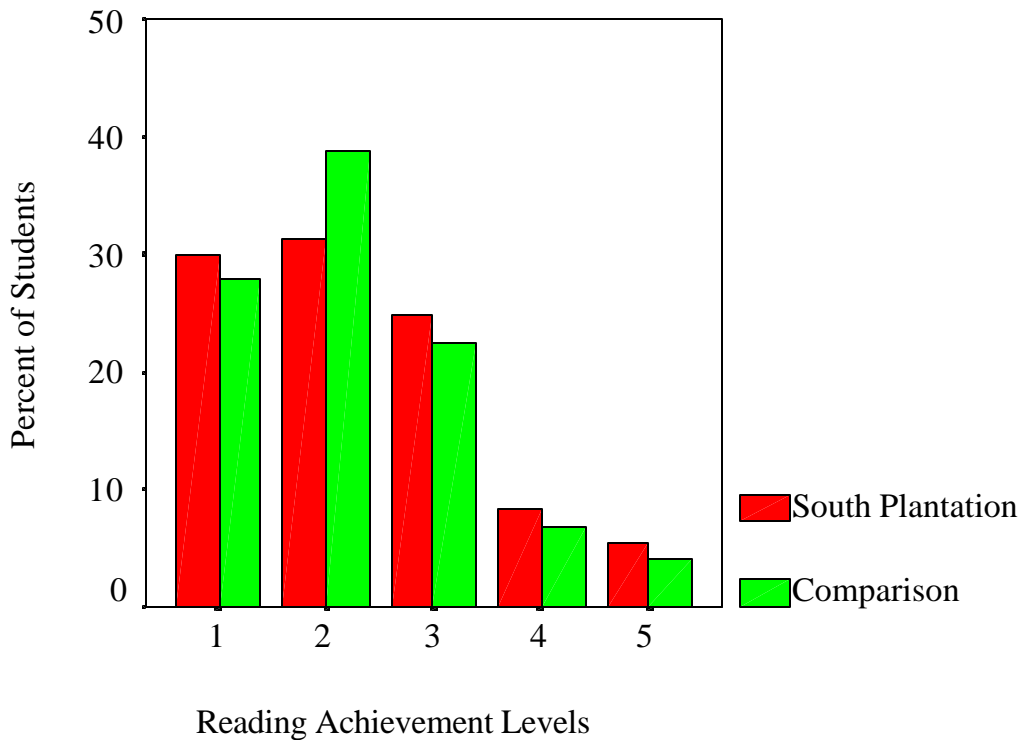


Figure 6. Distribution of Reading Achievement Levels by School

Table 25 summarizes the FCAT Writing data for the South Plantation and comparison students. Examination of the table indicates that a slightly higher proportion of the South Plantation students met the criterion of 3.0 or better (94.3% vs. 91.2%), however this difference was not sufficient to reach statistical significance, $Z=1.7$, $p=.09$.

Table 25.

Number and Percent of Student Scoring 3.0 or Better on the FCAT Writing Assessment.

		3.0 or Better		Total
		No	Yes	
South Plantation High School	<i>n</i>	22	362	384
	%	5.7	94.3	100.0
Comparison	<i>n</i>	34	354	388
	%	8.8	91.2	100.0
Total	<i>n</i>	56	716	772
	%	7.3	92.7	100.0

The distribution of scores on the FCAT-SSS did not vary between the attendance waiver schools and their respective comparison students for any of the three subtest areas. The one exception to this general finding was that Dillard High School students tended to score lower in mathematics than did their comparison peers. These findings suggest that attendance waivers had no impact on student performance as measured by the FCAT-SSS.

Grade Point Averages

Assessments like the FCAT-NRT and the FCAT-SSS may have been insensitive to effects that attendance waiver policies may have had on student performance. Perhaps a performance measure more closely tied to classroom attendance would be more sensitive to attendance waiver policies. To this end, analyses of grade point averages (GPAs) were conducted. Weighted comparison groups were again used to ensure fair comparisons between the attendance waiver and comparison schools.

To determine whether a relationship existed between grades earned in class and attendance, correlation coefficients were computed between GPAs and attendance across students for each school and grade cohort within school. As shown in Table 26, the coefficients were negative and of moderate magnitude. This suggested, the more often a student was absent, the lower that student's grades. The shared variance ranged from .06 to .37 suggesting that the degree to which attendance and grades were related was variable, but the variance in attendance could account for up to one-third of the variance in grades.

Table 26.

Correlations Between Absences and Grade Point Averages by Grade Cohort and School.

School	School Year	Cohort								
		10			11			12		
		<i>r</i>	<i>r</i> ²	<i>n</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>r</i> ²	<i>n</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>r</i> ²	<i>n</i>
Northeast High	1999	-.44	.19	405	-.42	.18	309	-.25	.06	288
	2000	-.52	.27	405	-.52	.27	309	-.49	.24	288

Comparison	1999	-.39	.15	405	-.45	.20	309	-.46	.21	288
	2000	-.48	.23	405	-.53	.28	309	-.48	.23	288
Dillard High	1999	-.52	.27	439	-.34	.12	372	-.45	.20	401
	2000	-.61	.37	439	-.50	.25	372	-.55	.30	401
Comparison	1999	-.32	.10	439	-.41	.17	372	-.40	.16	401
	2000	-.45	.20	439	-.52	.27	372	-.35	.12	401
South Plantation High	1999	-.28	.08	399	-.40	.16	414	-.43	.18	432
	2000	-.38	.14	399	-.36	.13	414	-.38	.14	432
Comparison	1999	-.38	.14	399	-.39	.15	414	-.39	.15	432
	2000	-.45	.20	399	-.46	.21	414	-.40	.16	432

To determine whether there were systematic effects of attendance waiver policy on student grades, unweighted non-cumulative GPAs were examined. Students' GPAs were submitted to 2(School) X 3(Grade Cohort) X 2(School Year) mixed-model ANOVAs with repeated measures on the last factor. Table 27 shows the data for Northeast High School and comparison students. Across School, examination of the data showed that mean GPAs are higher with the higher grade cohorts (Grade 10 cohort=2.55; Grade 11 Cohort= 2.63, Grade 12 Cohort=2.79), $F(2, 1998)=17.5, p<.001$. Also evident was that GPAs increased from the 1999 ($M=2.60$) to the 2000 ($M=2.68$) school year, $F(1, 1998)=44.2, p<.001$. However, these patterns did not differ between Northeast High School and the comparison students.

Table 27.

Unweighted, Noncumulative GPAs for Northeast High School and Comparison Students.

Grade Cohort	School Year	Northeast High School			Comparison			Total		
		Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N
10	1999	2.53	.79	405	2.55	.82	405	2.54	.81	810
	2000	2.51	.89	405	2.61	.88	405	2.56	.89	810
11	1999	2.50	.74	309	2.64	.81	309	2.57	.78	618
	2000	2.63	.84	309	2.73	.84	309	2.68	.84	618
12	1999	2.74	.69	288	2.71	.75	288	2.73	.72	576
	2000	2.84	.68	288	2.86	.76	288	2.85	.72	576
Total	1999	2.58	.75	1002	2.62	.80	1002	2.60	.78	2004
	2000	2.64	.83	1002	2.72	.84	1002	2.68	.84	2004

Table 28 displays the GPAs for Dillard High School and comparison students. In this instance, the ANOVA indicated a three-way interaction between School, Grade Cohort, and School Year, $F(2, 2418)=26.9, p<.001$. This finding indicated that the observed GPA was contingent upon the combined effect of the three factors. To investigate the source of this interaction, simple effects analyses were conducted at each level of grade cohort. Among the grade 10 cohort, GPAs did not differ among

School Years or School, $F_s(1, 876) < 2.7$, $p_s > .10$. At the grade 11 cohort, Dillard High School students had lower GPAs ($M=2.27$) than did their comparison peers ($M=2.40$), $F(1, 742) = 6.4$, $p = .01$. At the grade 12 cohort, an interaction between School and School Year was found, $F(1, 800) = 55.8$, $p < .001$. In 1999, the Dillard High School students ($M=2.35$) had lower GPAs than did their comparison peers ($M=2.45$), $F(1, 800)=11.2$, $p < .01$. However, in 2000 the Dillard High School students ($M=2.81$) obtained higher GPAs than did the comparison students ($M=2.45$), $F(1, 800)=54.8$, $p < .001$.

Table 28.

Unweighted, Noncumulative GPAs for Dillard High School and Comparison Students.

Grade Cohort	School Year	Dillard High School			Comparison			Total		
		Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N
10	1999	2.27	.81	439	2.27	.77	439	2.27	.79	878
	2000	2.26	.91	439	2.32	.84	439	2.29	.88	878
11	1999	2.27	.75	372	2.38	.78	372	2.32	.77	744
	2000	2.26	.78	372	2.42	.80	372	2.34	.79	744
12	1999	2.35	.70	401	2.45	.70	401	2.40	.70	802
	2000	2.81	.73	401	2.59	.65	401	2.70	.70	802
Total	1999	2.30	.76	1212	2.37	.76	1212	2.33	.76	2424
	2000	2.44	.86	1212	2.44	.78	1212	2.44	.82	2424

The GPAs for South Plantation High School and comparison students are shown in Table 29. A small, but significant, two way interaction between Grade Cohort and School Year was indicated by the ANOVA, $F(2, 2484)=9.5$, $p < .001$. Follow up simple effects analyses conducted separately for each cohort showed the interaction between School and School Year for the grade 10 cohort, $F(1,796)=16.0$, $p < .001$. At South Plantation High School, GPAs decreased for the grade 10 cohort from 2.72 to 2.59 but increased slightly for the comparison students from 2.53 to 2.57. The School-by-School Year interactions were marginal for the grade 11 ($F(1, 826)=3.7$, $p = .06$) and grade 12 ($F(1, 862)=4.0$, $p = .05$) cohorts. Among the grade 11 cohort, GPAs did not differ significantly between School Year or School. Among the grade 12 cohort, GPAs for students at both schools increased from 1999 ($M=2.55$) to 2000 ($M=2.74$), $F(1, 862)=92.8$, $p < .001$.

Table 29.

Unweighted, Noncumulative GPAs for South Plantation High School and Comparison Students.

Grade Cohort	School Year	South Plantation High						Total		
		School			Comparison			Mean	SD	N
		Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N
10	1999	2.72	.73	399	2.53	.82	399	2.62	.78	798
	2000	2.59	.86	399	2.57	.87	399	2.58	.86	798
11	1999	2.60	.83	414	2.53	.81	414	2.57	.82	828
	2000	2.59	.85	414	2.59	.82	414	2.59	.84	828
12	1999	2.46	.79	432	2.64	.73	432	2.55	.77	864
	2000	2.69	.74	432	2.79	.69	432	2.74	.71	864
Total	1999	2.59	.79	1245	2.57	.79	1245	2.58	.79	2490
	2000	2.62	.82	1245	2.65	.80	1245	2.64	.81	2490

The GPA data did not offer evidence that attendance waiver policies improved classroom performance. Northeast High School had GPAs that were similar to those of similar students at other block-scheduled schools. Dillard High School students only showed a favorable effect among the grade 12 cohort. These students showed an increase in GPAs from 1999 to 2000 that was larger than the increase shown by similar students at other non-block schools. The grade 10 and 11 cohorts in the Dillard High School comparisons did not show similar effects. Finally, at South Plantation High School, GPAs were lower among the grade 10 cohort in 2000 relative to the 1999. However, the grade 12 cohort showed similar increases from 1999 to 2000 for both South Plantation students and comparison students.

Quantitative Analyses Summary and Conclusions

The quantitative analyses reported above provide an objective examination of student performance as related to attendance policies. Attendance, norm-referenced test scores, FCAT-SSS test scores, and grade point averages were the measures of student performance. The standard for comparisons were demographically similar students, selected through statistical weighting procedures, who attended schools that did not have attendance waiver policies. Analyses based on these parameters led to the following conclusions:

- There was no consistent pattern across the attendance waiver schools related to absentee rate.
 - Northeast High School students had fewer mean absences than did similar students at other comparison schools.
 - Dillard High School students were more likely to be absent than were similar students at comparison schools. The year-to-year increases in absences were greater among comparison students than among the Dillard High School students.
 - South Plantation High School students maintained consistent levels of absences from 1999 to 2000 while the comparison students showed increased absences.
- The NRT data showed little evidence that performance was enhanced due to attendance waivers. Common across schools, the 10th grade scores were lower than the 9th grade scores.

Northeast High School and South Plantation High School students showed differences in performance between grades 9 and 10 that were similar to those displayed by their peers at comparison schools. However, the difference between the 9th and 10th grade scores was smaller for students at Dillard High School relative to the comparison students.

- The distribution of FCAT-SSS achievement levels was similar between students at the attendance waiver schools and their respective comparison students for each of the three subtest areas.
- Examination of course grades as indexed by GPAs did not offer evidence that attendance waiver policies improve classroom performance.
 - Northeast High School had GPAs that were similar to those of similar students at other block-scheduled schools.
 - Only the grade 12 cohort at Dillard High School showed a favorable result with greater increases in GPAs than did similar comparison students.
 - South Plantation High School students showed mixed results with GPAs decreasing from 1999 to 2000 for the grade 10 cohort, but increases among the grade 12 cohort during the same time period. However, the increases found among the grade 12 cohort were similar to that seen among similar comparison students.

Recommendation

The data does not indicate academic advantages supporting achievement for students enrolled in schools operating under attendance waivers. Therefore, before further attendance waivers are granted, schools applying for the waivers should research the various attendance models that have been implemented in other schools and school districts to identify models that best promote student achievement. How application of a proposed model will impact student achievement in the school should be clearly delineated and supported with empirical evidence.

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