REL MID-ATLANTIC
Regional Educational Laboratory
at Mathematica

NEWS

Delaware • District of Columbia • Maryland
New Jersey • Pennsylvania

NEWSLETTER

Latest News from the Director

As the current contract cycle for the RELs comes to a close at the end of 2021, we have lots of projects wrapping up—and lots of products coming out, with relevance across the Mid-Atlantic region and beyond. In collaboration with the Pittsburgh Public Schools, we've examined remote learning during the pandemic, using fine-grained data on students' use of online learning systems to identify learning lags and highlight the strong relationship between student engagement and course failure. This process exposed the need to re-engage students who checked out while school buildings were closed—a need that surely exists in schools all over the country. We've also examined the engagement of families, with a study of a teacher home-visiting program in the District of Columbia showing that summer home visits reduced disciplinary incidence and improved attendance the following school year. We've shown how teacher surveys on school climate can shine a light on the performance of principals. To cap off a large portfolio of work on school performance measures, we've proposed a framework designed to make sense of the ways that different measures are useful—or not—for different policy, operational, and instructional decisions. These and other products are described below. With so much here, I've never been more confident that you'll find something useful in this newsletter to inform your work. As always, we at REL Mid-Atlantic are grateful to all of our partners in the field who have given us the opportunity to inform your work toward promoting better and more equitable student outcomes across the region.
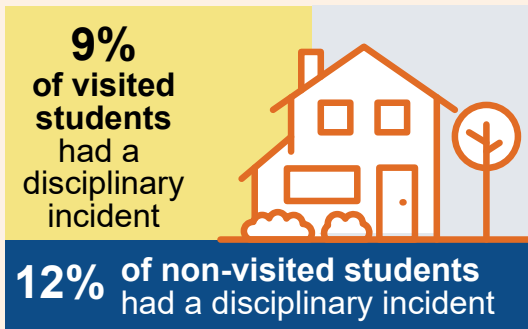**Brian Gill**
Director, REL Mid-Atlantic

Highlights

Understanding pandemic-related learning lags and identifying disengaged students

To determine how student achievement was affected by the pandemic and disruptions to instruction, we partnered with Pittsburgh Public Schools to analyze their remote learning data, looking at both test scores and course grades. Test scores indicated that most students experienced growth, but less than in a typical year. These lags were largest for the youngest students, but course failures increased most in middle and high school. Attendance data indicated that many students were likely failing courses because they were not showing up for their remote classes. Using data from Pittsburgh's learning management system, we looked at how frequently students logged into the system during remote instruction and how many course materials they opened and submitted. We identified how patterns of use changed during the school year and examined how these measures differed across different groups of students. In this webinar staff from Pittsburgh Public Schools and the REL discussed the findings, and how students engaged with online learning applications during remote instruction to help other educators consider policies and interventions that help re-engage students and address lags in learning. Check out this fact sheet to learn more.

9%
of visited students had a disciplinary incident

12% **of non-visited students** had a disciplinary incident

Improving student outcomes with teacher home visits: Evidence from a REL Mid-Atlantic evaluation in DC

Read a new report and infographic examining the benefits of home visits. Using a rigorous quasi-experimental methodology, the research team studied a schoolwide program for elementary and middle grades in the DC Public Schools. The program trains teachers to conduct structured relationship-building home visits with parents and provides financial incentives to conduct the visits. The team found that summer home visits significantly reduced the likelihood of a student having a disciplinary incident, and also slightly improved student attendance the following school year.

Leveling the playing field to identify high school effectiveness

An important indicator of a high school's effectiveness is whether its students graduate and enroll in college. But graduation and college enrollment rates are affected by factors outside of the school's control, which means that simply comparing those rates may not fairly assess the school's contribution to student learning. Read an infographic and report describing a new approach that measures the "promotion power" of individual high schools, putting them on a level playing field and more fairly measuring their effects on those student attainment outcomes.

Surveys of staff can add perspective to principal evaluations

Many school districts assess the performance of their principals by looking at students' test scores and having a supervisor evaluate the principal's leadership. We worked with the District of Columbia Public Schools to understand how teacher surveys can provide valuable additional information for principal evaluations on what we found. Read the full report.
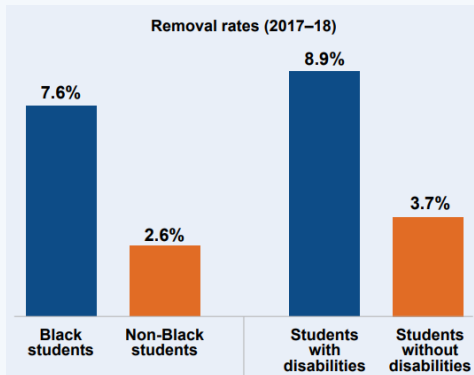
Photo by Rich Clement

RELevant Blog Posts

Making sure school performance measures provide the right diagnosis to improve student outcomes

Measuring school performance has been an important component of state and federal policies for two decades. Measures based exclusively on reading and math proficiency have given way to more sophisticated approaches. But to avoid drowning in data, educators and policymakers need to understand how different measures inform different decisions. Read this new blog from our director, Brian Gill, for a new classification framework that makes sense of different measures of school performance, drawing on a wide range of REL Mid-Atlantic's work with stakeholders in the region. Listen to a related webinar discussion.

Removal rates (2017–18)

7.6% — Black students
2.6% — Non-Black students
8.9% — Students with disabilities
3.7% — Students without disabilities

Engaging in equity: Alternatives to suspension and expulsion

REL Mid-Atlantic partnered with the Maryland State Department of Education to better understand discipline disparities--instances where students in certain demographic groups are subject to disciplinary actions at a greater rate than the total population in the school—and help the state make progress in addressing these disparities. Read a new blog that examines how districts across the country are using professional development, community partnerships, mindfulness training, and other techniques to address these issues with an equity lens. Check out the related infographic.

Identifying students at imminent risk of academic problems

Identifying students at risk of near-term academic problems helps districts target services to prevent problems before they occur and lead to more serious consequences, such as dropout. A recent REL Mid-Atlantic study and infographic found two approaches—a simple early warning system and a more sophisticated computer algorithm—had similar predictive accuracy, but the algorithm gives districts more information and therefore more opportunity to develop different kinds of responses for students at different levels of risk. Relatedly, read a blog from a second study that explored what we found out about the benefits of incorporating data on SEL competencies and school climate into early warning systems.

Getting a clear picture of incoming enrollment

Predicting incoming enrollment is a challenge for many districts with school choice systems, substantial student mobility, or both. Inaccurate predictions can disrupt learning as districts adjust by reshuffling teachers and students well into the fall semester. A recent study and infographic with the School District of Philadelphia explored how machine learning algorithms might improve predictions of incoming cohort size.

Two new videos on culturally responsive teaching and trauma-informed instruction

Culturally responsive teaching means understanding that what students experience outside the classroom can affect the way they learn inside it. In this video, REL Mid-Atlantic shares tips on what it takes to build a culturally responsive classroom.

Trauma-informed education means teaching with an awareness that children go through serious, challenging events, and those experiences can affect learning. In this video, REL Mid-Atlantic shares tips on what it takes to create a trauma-informed classroom.

Connect with Us

For more frequent updates from us and our nine REL partners across the country and to receive the latest research updates from the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences, please follow us on Twitter @RELMidAtlantic!