



# AVOIDING THE ATTENDANCE SLUMP: STRATEGIES TO MAXIMIZE LEARNING TIME IN JUNE

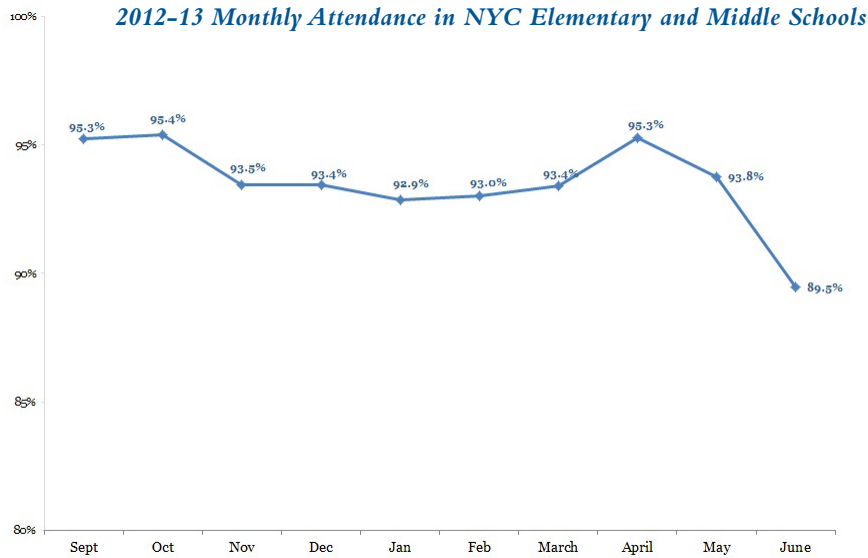
*ExpandED Schools works to build education enrichment into an expanded school day because extra time spent in engaging learning activities leads to better outcomes in school and beyond. There's one month, however, when students in many schools lose learning time: June. In 2013, NYC elementary and middle schools saw their average attendance drop from 95.3% in April to 89.5% in June. In this report, we offer some specific strategies to increase learning time and attendance rates, boost engagement, minimize summer learning loss, and accelerate performance in the next grade.*

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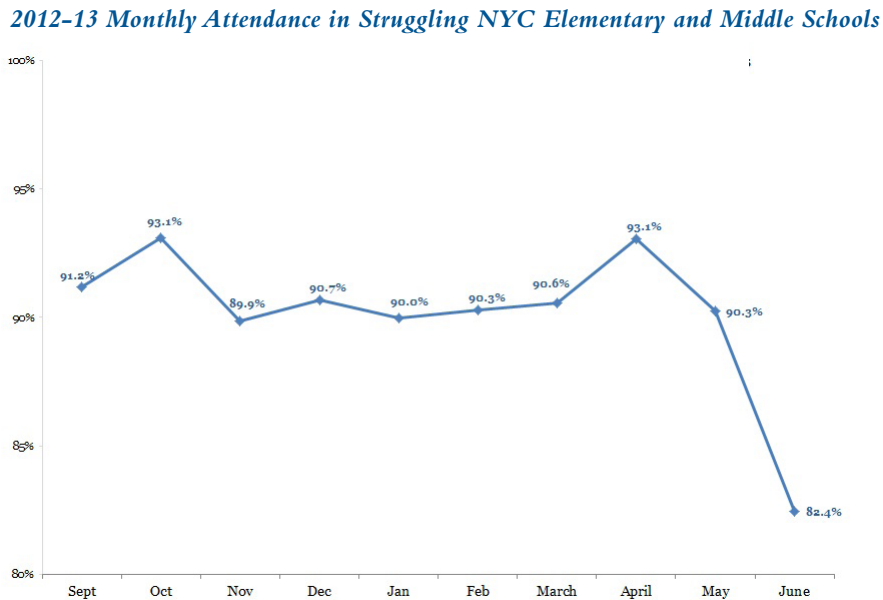
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## THE SPRING SLIDE AND THE JUNE SLUMP

**Many think of the statewide tests as the culmination of a year of study, yet more than 20% of the school year remains after testing is completed.** While average attendance rates per month are fairly consistent between September and April, a troubling pattern starts in May and worsens in June. Across city elementary and middle schools, there is a 5.8 percentage point difference between April attendance rates and June attendance rates.



This gap is further magnified among struggling schools. The figure below represents monthly attendance patterns in 2012-13\* in struggling schools, recently designated Renewal Schools. Average attendance of 93.1% in April dropped to 82.4% in June.



How much school are students actually missing in June (and in some cases, May)? While students in struggling schools miss an average of 1.6 days per month between September and April, they miss an average of 3.3 days in June, more than twice what is typically seen in all previous months—and three times what is seen in April, the month of state testing.

\*Because of severe winter weather in early 2014, we use 2013 data as it is more representative of typical monthly attendance patterns. Spring attendance patterns are similar in both academic years.

While a large number of schools across the city show this troubling attendance pattern, there are many schools that are able to temper, or altogether avoid, the spring slide and the June slump. We asked leaders in ExpandedED schools to provide insight into their monthly attendance patterns, both for schools that showed significant April to June decreases as well as those that showed consistently high monthly attendance across the entire school year.

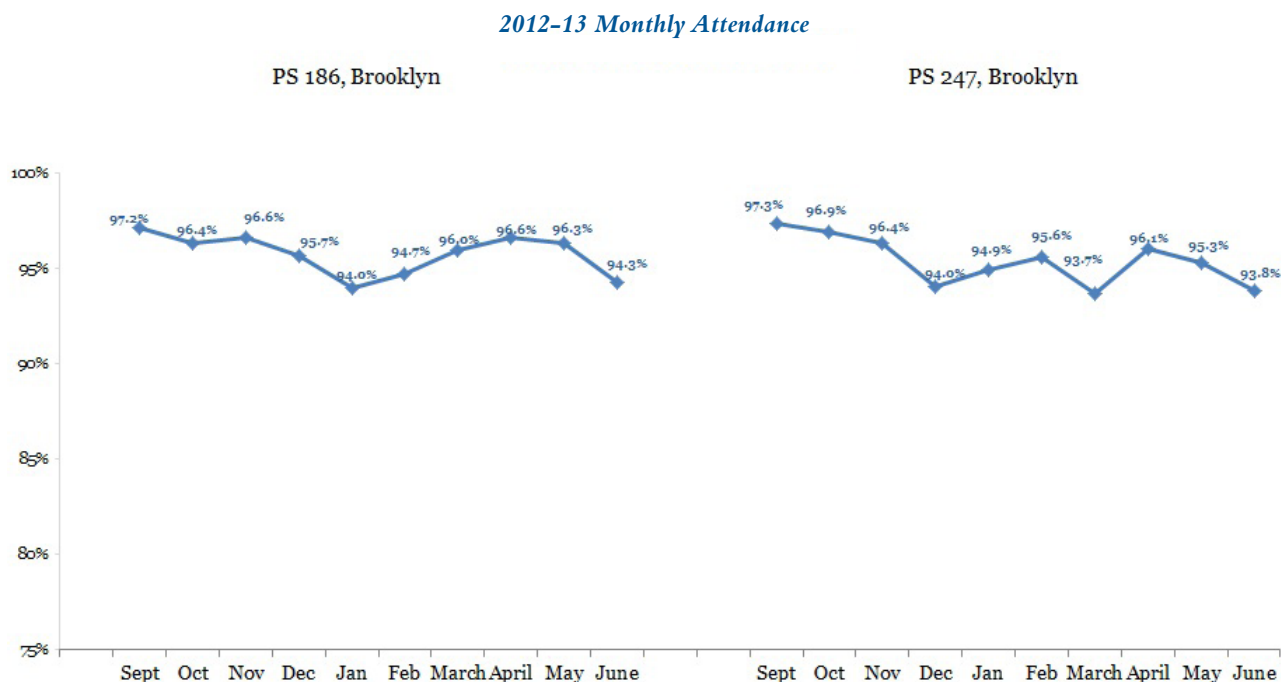
## REASONS FOR APRIL-JUNE ATTENDANCE DROP

When we asked school leaders why their schools experienced drops in June attendance, they offered a set of explanations signaling that expectations among teachers and parents drive student attendance in the final weeks of school. The following themes emerged:

- **Culminating events early in June** When prom or graduation events occur early or even in mid-June, they signal that the school year is over, and remaining days are optional. Looking at daily attendance rates confirms this trend.
- **The need to prepare for the next school year** In describing the desires for programs to end early, the previously mentioned administrator said, “[Teachers] preferred to use the last two weeks of school to clean up their rooms, finalize their school paperwork, finish end of the year projects and portfolios, [and] prepare for final report cards.”
- **Post-testing mindsets** Schools with significant attendance drops noted that after the New York state tests are over in April, parents and students become more relaxed and feel that the year is basically over.
- **Early vacations** Schools with big June slumps noted that parents don’t seem to value the final weeks of school and pull students out to begin summer vacations early. This is often seen at schools that seem to wind down throughout June.
- **School trip policies** While some schools use field trips as an incentive to boost June attendance, others caution that these trips may lower attendance, because students who are prohibited from going on the trip (due to high costs, missing permissions slips, or policies against participation by students with behavioral infractions or low attendance during the year) are unlikely to attend school on the day of the trip.
- **Wind-down of work with school partners** Not all after-school programs run for the 36 weeks that school is in session, and many do not run programming in the final few weeks of school due to funding constraints, contract requirements, or desires of school leaders or faculty. As one administrator noted, “The teachers and school administration expressed concern that having programming until the last day of school would be too much of a strain on the educators.” This reinforces the idea with parents and students that the school year is winding down.

## STRATEGIES FOR AVOIDING THE SPRING SLIDE AND JUNE SLUMP

**While many schools across the city are plagued by the June attendance drop, some appear immune.** Among schools with the highest annual attendance rates in the city, the difference between April and June attendance is typically less than one percentage point. When examining attendance patterns among our ExpandedED schools, we were able to identify a cohort who avoided the June drop (See figure below). These schools maintain an attendance rate of 95%, while the best in the city average around 97%.



A variety of strategies are offered for avoiding the June slump, which all schools can implement to increase end-of-year student engagement and make use of extra learning time to meet broad school goals.

- **Mentoring programs** During the last quarter of the year (April-June) at PS 247 in Brooklyn, which partners with NIA Community Services Network, each fifth grader is assigned a kindergarten student to buddy with or mentor. According to NIA Director Kathy D’Antuono, the fifth graders “are responsible for helping their charge get ready for 1st grade. The fifth graders take it very seriously, too. At the end of program, they receive a ‘Group Leader in Training’ certificate. I must say, they really enjoy it and know they must fulfill their responsibility through the end of the year.”
- **Spirit week** Similar to mentoring programs, schools use time in June to build positive school culture with events such as spirit week to keep students engaged and meet non-academic school and student goals.

- **Shows/showcases** Schools often credit the preparation for and participation in end-of-year shows/showcases in their expanded learning program for keeping end-of-year attendance high. As one school noted, “Students very much want to be a part of it. It's sort of their farewell to the program.”
- **Field trips** Field trips are cited as a great way to keep students engaged as the year winds down, if policies include children on trips rather than exclude them. At MS 223 in the Bronx, community partner Areté Executive Director Patricia Charlemagne noted, “There are four major school trips planned during that month. Those trips are used to incentivize attendance during the school day and the expanded day.”
- **Intentional or incentivized scheduling** Moving key events such as graduations and proms to the final days of school often proves effective in maintaining student participation. In some cases, good attendance is a prerequisite for participation in these events.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**Engage parents, teachers and students in boosting end-of-year attendance.** How parents, teachers and students regard the importance of late spring months is a critical lever in ensuring attendance. Schools leaders can lead discussions with stakeholders. In doing so, they can recognize burnout, but discuss the importance of late-year attendance and ask for ways to ensure that time in June is used to meet school goals. Teams could review which school goals are particularly conducive to activities in post-testing months. Strong learning activities in the spring can signal to parents that there is less focus on preparation for state tests and more focus on opportunities that enable children to engage in the community around them and practice newfound skills in applied settings. Teachers can promote the importance of attendance in May and June to their peers and to families. Strategies to relieve the need for end-of-year clean up, perhaps engaging volunteers or community partner staff to clean up classrooms, or offering data entry support, might free up time for teachers to focus on instruction. A team that includes community partners can meet regularly to discuss attendance issues throughout the year. Some specific activities that might boost attention and attendance are as follows:

- Award parents monthly certificates or rewards for getting children to school on time.
- Assemble a school team to welcome students at the door every morning, such as at P.S. 89 in Cypress Hills, Brooklyn.
- Have regular, brief all-school assembly meetings and publicly acknowledge children who have good attendance.
- Reward students that have improved their attendance over the course of the year as well as the students that have met the 100% mark.

**Offer applied and accelerated learning opportunities.** Making use of the relative freedom of May and June, offer educators opportunities to try new instructional techniques, offer acceleration lessons to prepare students for the following school year, or offer applied and hands-on learning opportunities

that are difficult to conduct during the earlier months. Late spring is a wonderful time to do field-based science and math work in nearby parks or neighborhoods. Prepping young people for a summer of reading, such as the READS project, can reap literacy benefits and capitalize on summer months for extra learning. These kinds of engaging projects can send a message to parents that it is important to send their children to school after state testing time.

**Continue after-school programs until the end of the school year.** The SONYC and COMPASS initiatives put in place by the Department of Youth and Community Development require 36 weeks of programming for a minimum of 9 hours per week. This policy may curb some of the June school-day attendance drop-off that results from winding down after-school programming in the final weeks of school. School leaders and community partners should work together to ensure that attendance remains high, perhaps offering 8-week intensives for May and June months so that June activity sessions are still highly relevant.

**Consider school trip policies.** Administrators varied in their opinion on whether field trips at the end of the year helped or hindered school attendance. Schools should reconsider policies related to school trips that may hinder attendance.

**Hold promotion celebrations at the very end of the year.** Holding culminating events such as theater productions, proms and graduation ceremonies at the end of the year appears to be a useful strategy for boosting end-of-year attendance. Conversely, schools that hold these events in early or mid-June often note a drop in attendance afterwards. Schools may move these events to a later date, and consider making school attendance a prerequisite to attending these desirable events.

**Maximize the benefit of community partners.** Community partners are key since they are present at pickup time and can speak to parents and caregivers. They are also a conduit for more parent connections to the school. Many administrators cite end-of-year events hosted in collaboration with their community partner, such as shows and showcases, as reasons for high June attendance.

## LOOKING AHEAD

**School staff and their community partners are experts in making the most of limited resources on behalf of young people. Working together to take advantage of June school days will help ensure students have extra time practicing a skill, developing a talent, or working on projects in an environment without the pressures of state tests. Just with any change, the entire school community must come together to develop and test strategies to boost June attendance. These strategies will pay dividends in minimizing the effects of summer learning loss, accelerating learning for the following school year, and supporting young people to reach their full potential.**

## ABOUT EXPANDED SCHOOLS

ExpandedED Schools is a nonprofit dedicated to closing the learning gap by increasing access to enriched education experiences. We believe that more time + more role models + more opportunities equals more kids discovering their talents and developing their full potential. Since our founding in 1998 we have closed the learning gap for more than 800,000 kids.

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