own "success," *Educated* risks being read as inspiration porn of sorts, reinforcing tired tropes about school as a panacea for all.

Yet, beneath the school-as-social-mobility veneer lies something far more interesting: a meditation on the tensions, trade-offs, and possibilities that arise when we are confronted with drastically new ideas about the world and our place in it. It is perhaps here that *Educated* is at its best. On one hand, pursuing an education is a measure of empowerment. With it, Westover learns to move through life with an expanded worldview, as a self-determining woman who comes to shape her own reality. On the other hand, this newfound intellectual freedom costs her dearly:

> The distance—physical and mental—that had been traversed in the last decade nearly stopped my breath, and I wondered if I had perhaps changed too much. All my studying, reading, thinking, traveling, had it transformed me into someone who no longer belonged anywhere?" (p. 312)

Thus, alongside the more visible forms of mobility Westover describes throughout Parts II and III, readers also learn about the devastating losses that accompany her success—the loss of a sense of kinship and the separation of identity and culture that occur as she becomes alienated by family and regarded as an interlocutor among peers.

While a sharper analytic frame could have rendered the political dimensions of the author's personal struggles more legible by interrogating the classed, gendered, and racial aspects that shaped her journey, Westover offers a revealing look into the underexplored aspects of what it is like to navigate college as an outsider. And while the particulars of her individual experience are undoubtedly unique, the themes that resonate throughout the text—belonging, struggle, self-determination—speak more broadly to the experiences and aspirations of nontraditional college-goers. As such, *Educated* will likely be a valuable resource to higher education policy makers and practitioners, those who are increasingly tasked with supporting but not necessarily *understanding* the experiences of nontraditional students.

RAQUEL L. JIMENEZ

Absent from School: Understanding and Addressing Student Absenteeism

edited by Michael A. Gottfried and Ethan L. Hutt

Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2019. 288 pp. $34.00 (paper), $66.00 (cloth).

For two years, I taught in a high-poverty city school overwhelmed by absenteeism. To be considered "chronically absent," students had to be absent at least 10 percent (or eighteen days) of the school year. Many students, however, were absent much more than that. Some names on my class rosters I never attached

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to faces. I made phone calls home to out-of-service phone numbers. I received exasperated shrugs from administrators and colleagues when I asked them how to reach a particular student's parent or guardian. Teachers conducted home visits for especially egregious cases. Sometimes chronically absent students would answer the doors themselves, and a group of us could make the case to these students directly for why they should attend school. Other times our knocking, like many of our phone calls, went unanswered.

Given how difficult it is to meet students' academic needs when they are missing from school, it is promising that policy makers and school leaders are now thinking more concretely about chronic absenteeism and what schools can do to address it. This is partly a result of the 2015 Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), a reauthorization of the fraught No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation of 2002. In addition to mandating a wider set of student achievement measures, ESSA requires schools to report, on a School Quality or Student Success (SQSS) indicator, some measure of learning that test scores cannot necessarily capture. ESSA affords states flexibility in what they choose to investigate for a SQSS. Nearly forty states have chosen to engage with student attendance for their additional indicator. This engagement is encouraging, considering evidence that attendance can be a stronger predictor of students' academic achievement than their scores on tests (Allensworth & Easton, 2007; Balfanz, Herzog, & Mac Iver, 2007). But when it comes to a problem as deceptively straightforward as absenteeism, there is concern that schools may approach the problem too simplistically.

It is within this context that *Absent from School: Understanding and Addressing Student Absenteeism* has emerged. The judicious volume edited by Michael A. Gottfried and Ethan L. Hutt marshals work from an impressive array of scholars to explore a problem that has long plagued schools but has too often been swept under the rug. While any of the book's chapters can stand on their own, together they comprise an accessible text that is as cautionary as it is expectant at a critical moment for US schools. Though contributors are steadfast in their belief that schools are well positioned to meaningfully address their students' absenteeism, a guardedness throughout tempers their enthusiasm. This measured stance is one of the book's greatest strengths, as it resists advancing the one-dimensional cure-alls school systems too often seek. Indeed, policy makers and school leaders cannot leave the volume without viewing absenteeism—its measurement, policies, potential interventions—in more complicated ways. And yet, the portrait the book renders could be more complex still. The former schoolteacher in me could not help but feel distanced from a problem I confronted daily. While *Absent from School* provides a fascinating primer on absenteeism at a time when states' engagement with it has never been greater, its reliance on high-altitude, quantitative metrics to illuminate the problem runs the risk of erasing its human face as scholars opt not to examine how students, parents, teachers, and administrators themselves experience chronic absenteeism.

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Absent from School commences methodically. In the introduction, editors Gottfried and Hutt present well-trodden “myths” about absenteeism the ensuing chapters aim to combat. These include generalizations like “Measuring Absenteeism Is a Straightforward Process” and “The Ways Schools Can Reduce Absences Are Straightforward.” The underlying message here is clear: absenteeism is far more complex than educators typically make it out to be. It is not simply a matter of students either being in school or not being in school; rather, absenteeism raises myriad questions of measurement, policy, and practice. Moreover, the problem of absenteeism is one of equity, of the relationships schools build (or do not build) with the families they purport to serve, and of the roles schools can reasonably play in addressing what occurs beyond their walls.

The book’s first chapters illustrate in accessible terms absenteeism’s magnitude, particularly for low-income students of color, while complicating existing assumptions about its measurement. Authors collectively urge readers to consider variation among absent students. Drawing on nationally representative, longitudinal data, for example, Kevin A. Gee finds that while schools themselves certainly play their part, the most variation driving absenteeism can be attributed to students’ individual differences (e.g., health, gender, race/ethnicity, prior absenteeism). Zooming out, Stacy B. Ehrlich and David W. Johnson highlight particular schooling transitions (e.g., students entering kindergarten, students progressing to high school) as crucial crossroads in the attendance story. And in discussing what schools might do, Shaun M. Dougherty and Joshua Childs assert that interventions “should consider the range of experiences students have” and uncover the “root causes of why students miss school” (p. 66). Together, these foundational chapters raise the stakes in suggesting that schools’ efforts to stem absenteeism may be doomed at their outset if how they measure and analyze the problem fails to consider its many complexities and causes. An anxiety simmers beneath scatterplots illustrating disparities in attendance by racial background and absenteeism’s association with low achievement. Given the lasting impacts of NCLB, which narrowed schools’ priorities and hastened “one-size-fits-all” approaches, this anxiety is well founded. By focusing on average attendance rates alone—by failing to recognize variation and individual differences—schools could fall into similar traps when addressing absenteeism under ESSA.

Additional contributors to *Absent from School* complicate another of Gottfried and Hutt’s myths, “The Ways Schools Can Reduce Absences Are Straightforward,” by dissecting the problem in creative ways. In a timely chapter titled “Schools as Sanctuaries?” Carolyn Sattin-Bajaj and Jacob Kirksey consider the intersection of immigration apprehensions and attendance. Triangulating and geocoding data from the Department of Education’s Early Childhood Longitudinal Study with annual Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) data, they find that in 2010–2011, a school year when deportations were on the rise, increased ICE activity and arrests in schools’ surrounding neighbor-

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hoods were associated with a *decrease* in absenteeism. This inverse relationship, the authors point out, suggests that schools might play mediating roles when divisive immigration rhetoric and enforcement is increasingly becoming the norm. Another chapter, "Can School Buses Drive Down (Chronic) Absenteeism?" explores the intersection of attendance and school transportation. Using data from grades K–6 in New York City's public schools, Sarah A. Cordes and colleagues find bus riders slightly less likely to be chronically absent than nonriders. While the idea of a "bus gap" is intriguing, the authors note that their findings say more about the schools that riders attend rather than the transportation afforded to them.

Although these solutions-oriented contributions engage with absenteeism from many different vantage points, they, too, come with warnings attached. Having schools use text messaging to nudge attendance rates upward, one chapter's focus, requires that parents opt in. Expanding transportation poses several logistical challenges. Despite the relationship between student health and absenteeism, Jennifer Graves and coauthors refrain from promoting school-based health centers outright, calling instead for further research before schools begin embracing the intervention wholesale. And Rekha Balu's review of four multisite randomized field trials reads as an extended cautionary tale that concludes by issuing this sobering reminder: "No single intervention is best, and design needs to be adapted to type of student, need, and circumstance" (p. 212). While this may not be what policy makers and school leaders want to hear, they certainly hear it often in *Absent from School*.

Perhaps the book's most captivating and confounding chapter is "Tackling Truancy" by Kaitlin Anderson, Anna J. Egalite, and Jonathan N. Mills. Focusing on data from Arkansas schools, the authors explore the state's 2013 ban on a counterintuitive policy that actually enforced out-of-school suspensions to quell absenteeism. While the authors find that in the ban's wake schools saw decreases in out-of- and in-school-suspensions, attendance failed to budge. These findings call into question the power states hold to address absenteeism given their distance from individual school contexts. But Anderson and coauthors' findings also raise a more fundamental question: What is actually happening in schools?

Though *Absent from School* seeks universals in particulars, scrutinizing especially illustrative districts and parsing data with noble restraint and care, I was disappointed to find that Gottfried and Hutt's volume falls short of capturing the experiences of schools confronting and wrestling with absenteeism's challenges in real time, during every school day. *Absent from School*, it appears, has its own attendance issues. With the exception of Ehrlich and Johnson's chapter, which draws partly on anecdotal data from schools to make its case, and Ken Smyth-Leistico and Lindsay C. Page's showcase of text message exchanges between schools and parents, the emphasis here is largely on big data. Absent are the voices of chronic absentees themselves, of parents, of teachers, of school leaders. This reader could not help but wonder: Why do absent stu-

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dents say they are not in school? What does school mean to them? How do parents of these students make sense of their children's poor attendance? What are the experiences of teachers and school leaders attempting to address the issue on the "street level"?

There is no question that this collection of scholarship offers an accessible and penetrating read for school leaders and policy makers. It is a compelling catalyst for what contributing author Heather Hough calls "honest conversations" about the many sides of a familiar, thorny problem (p. 24). But considering the issues of equity already bound up in absenteeism—that the students most vulnerable to absenteeism are also our most marginalized and that states might respond to absenteeism by perpetuating it further with out-of-school suspensions—a more varied approach to the problem would do those issues of equity even better service. Wide-ranging problems require wide-ranging research methodologies. Ethnography, participatory action research, and mixed-methods research, for example, would all help to further achieve the sensitive, nuanced view of absenteeism that *Absent from School* promotes.

The proliferation of attendance data across so many states presents both affordances and challenges. Having extensive attendance data at their fingertips can allow states and districts to more deliberately tackle the problem of absenteeism. At the same time, data do not speak for themselves. A problem as multifaceted as chronic absenteeism demands more than the one-off blanket intervention or the contextually illiterate top-down policy. Accordingly, *Absent from School*'s handwringing is a refreshingly reserved way to approach a serious problem and its accompanying surge of data. While the authors' caution may sometimes read louder than their optimism, I hope policy makers and school leaders will do some handwringing themselves.

Chronic absenteeism was the bogeyman of superintendents during the Common Schools era, who lamented it in school reports as an "evil" to overcome. Although we have different terms to describe the problem today, the data showcased in *Absent from School* demonstrate that the problem is no less distressing. Nevertheless, when schools confront so many other challenges within their walls, the names of absent students punctuating class rosters can be quickly written off as other people's problems. With ESSA's passage, this trend could be changing. As Ehrlich and Johnson powerfully put it, "schools will now be accountable for their students' absences in a way this country has never before seen" (p. 84). But nothing is straightforward, and let's hope schools take this lesson to heart.

JEREMY T. MURPHY

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Where Teachers Thrive: Organizing Schools for Success

by Susan Moore Johnson

Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2019. 296 pp. $34.00 (paper).

A commonly cited research finding states that a child's teacher is the single-most-important school-based factor that affects a student's learning (Chetty Rockoff, Friedman, 2014). Following this premise, policy makers and researchers have advanced and evaluated policies meant to improve the quality of teachers at almost every level of schooling, including teacher evaluation, hiring and firing decisions, and reforms in teacher compensation. Though few of these policies were created or implemented for the first time in the past twenty years, they have received enormous attention during the period, most notably with the 2008–2009 Race to the Top initiative that heavily incentivized states to adopt these policies in a strong and uniform way.

Drawing on almost a decade of field research, Susan Moore Johnson adds important evidence to how these policies support and constrain schools in their efforts to improve. In *Where Teachers Thrive*, Johnson draws on data from three studies featuring fourteen schools in which she and coinvestigators conducted extensive interviews with teachers, administrators, and other staff to examine eight challenges facing schools as they seek to hire, develop, and retain quality teachers for their students.

The three studies that support the evidence provided in the book were each conducted with a different focus. Because different criteria were used to recruit schools in each case, Johnson was able to draw from a diverse cast of schools and practices to provide evidence on various approaches to practice. In the Second Stage Teachers in Urban Schools study, Johnson and colleagues focused on teachers in years 4–10 of their careers to understand whether and how teachers at this stage continue to learn and grow, as well as to solicit their opinions on professional development, evaluation, and curriculum. In the Teaching in Context study, the researchers focused on examining schools in a single struggling district and recruited a set of schools that varied on both academic performance (as measured by test scores) and teachers' workplace satisfaction (as measured by a state survey). Finally, the Teaching in Successful Schools study focused closely on schools that served predominantly poor and minority students, that had all received the highest rating for effectiveness from the state, and that represented an even mixture of both district and charter schools. The fourteen schools showcased throughout the book are similar in the students they serve and the settings in which they do so, but they are diverse in terms of their outcomes and practices. In large part, the book is successful because it is able to learn deeply from comparing these schools. The

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