



The Power of Attendance:

How Federal, State & Local Policy Can Promote School Success By Addressing Chronic Absence



Advancing Student Success By Reducing Chronic Absence



An Emerging Crisis Facing Our Nation's Students

- ❑ On average, one student in America drops out every 26 seconds; **1.23 million per year**. Close to half of African American and Hispanic youth fail to graduate on time.
- ❑ Jobs that require post-secondary education will make up more than 2/3 of new jobs. According to the National Governor's Association, **dropouts cost the United States more than \$300 billion per year**.
- ❑ Chronic absence is one of the earliest indicators that a student may be off track. **There is strong correlation between dropout and early illiteracy and chronic absence.**



An Antidote to Drop-Out

The 3 A School Success Framework

Attendance Every Day

Achievement Every Year

Attainment Over Time



Attendance is Critical to Student Success

- ❑ **Exposure to Language:** School exposes children to language-rich environments they may not have at home.
- ❑ **Time on Task:** Students who miss too much school fall behind and have a hard time catching up.
- ❑ **Persistence:** Good attendance builds habits, essential for success in school and life.
- ❑ **Engagement:** Attendance indicates an engaged student; absences can signal disengagement.
- ❑ **Classroom Churn:** Too many students missing too many days slow down classroom instruction and affect school climate.
- ❑ **School Funding:** In states where funding depends on enrollment, good attendance pays.



Defining Key Terms

- ❑ **Average Daily Attendance:** The percentage of enrolled students who attend school each day.
- ❑ **Satisfactory Attendance:** Missing 5% or less in an academic year.
- ❑ **Chronic Absence:** Missing 10% or more of school in an academic year for any reason—excused or unexcused.
- ❑ **Severe Chronic Absence:** Missing 20% or more days of school per year – approximately two months of school.
- ❑ **Truancy:** Typically refers *only* to unexcused absences and is defined by each state.



When 90% Doesn't Earn an "A"

Students Who Miss More Than 10% Of School Are At Grave Risk



Chronic Absence
(=> 10% absence)

Warning Signs
(<10% but > 5% absence)

Satisfactory Attendance
(=<5% absence)

Emergency: => 20% absence



Myths to Dispel

MYTH 1:
Attendance in Kindergarten doesn't really matter for academic success.

MYTH 2:
Missing school isn't a big problem until middle or high school.

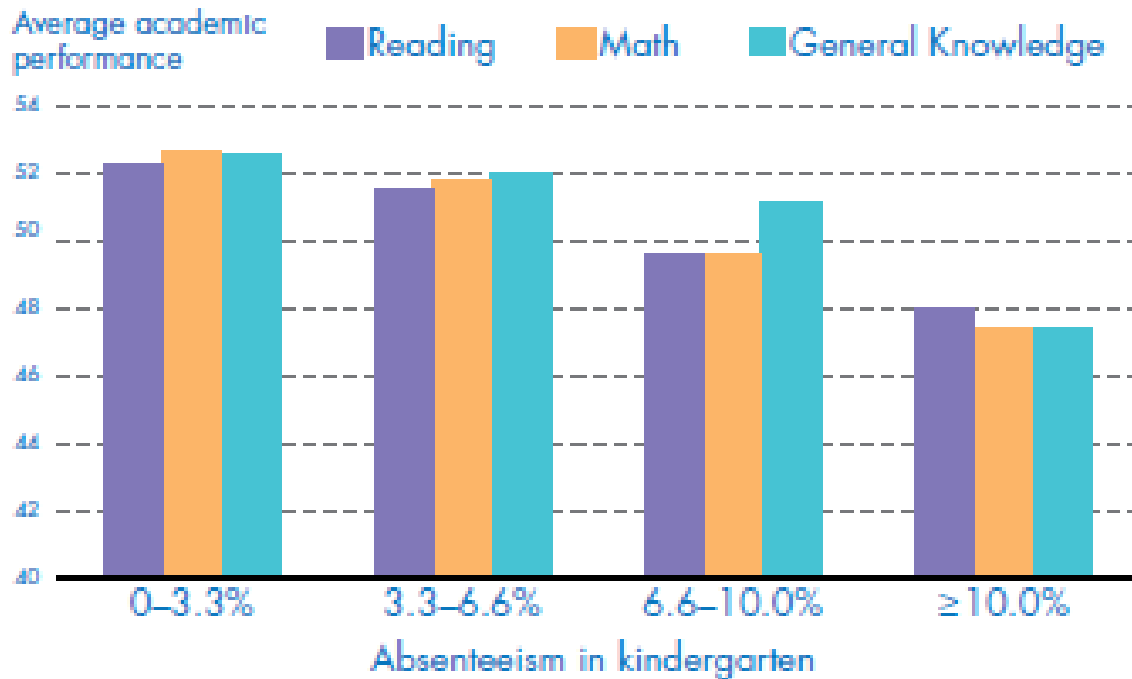
MYTH 3:
Most educators monitor chronic absence.

MYTH 4:
Since attendance is a family responsibility, we cannot do anything to address chronic absence.



Chronic Kindergarten Absence Associated with Lower 1st Grade Achievement for All Children

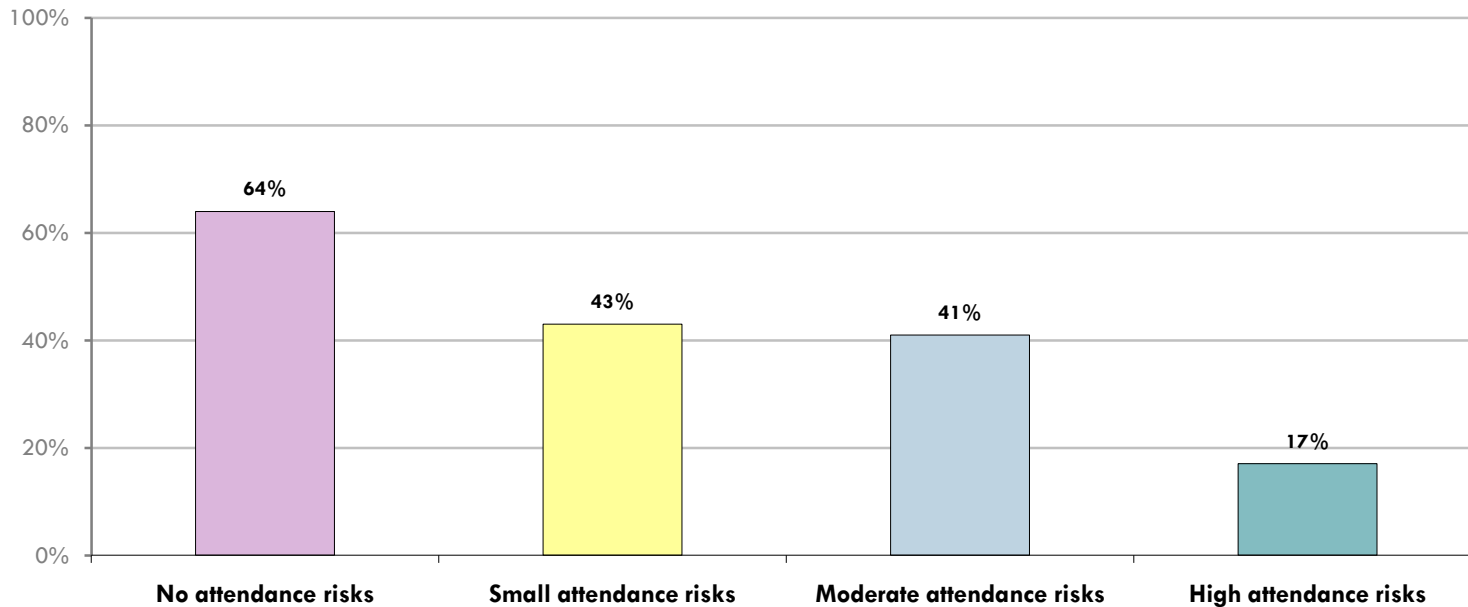
1st Grade Math & Reading Performance by K Attendance





Students Chronically Absent in Kindergarten & 1st Grade Much Less Likely to Read Proficiently in 3rd Grade

Percent Students Scoring Proficient or Advanced on 3rd Grade ELA Based on Attendance in Kindergarten and 1st Grade

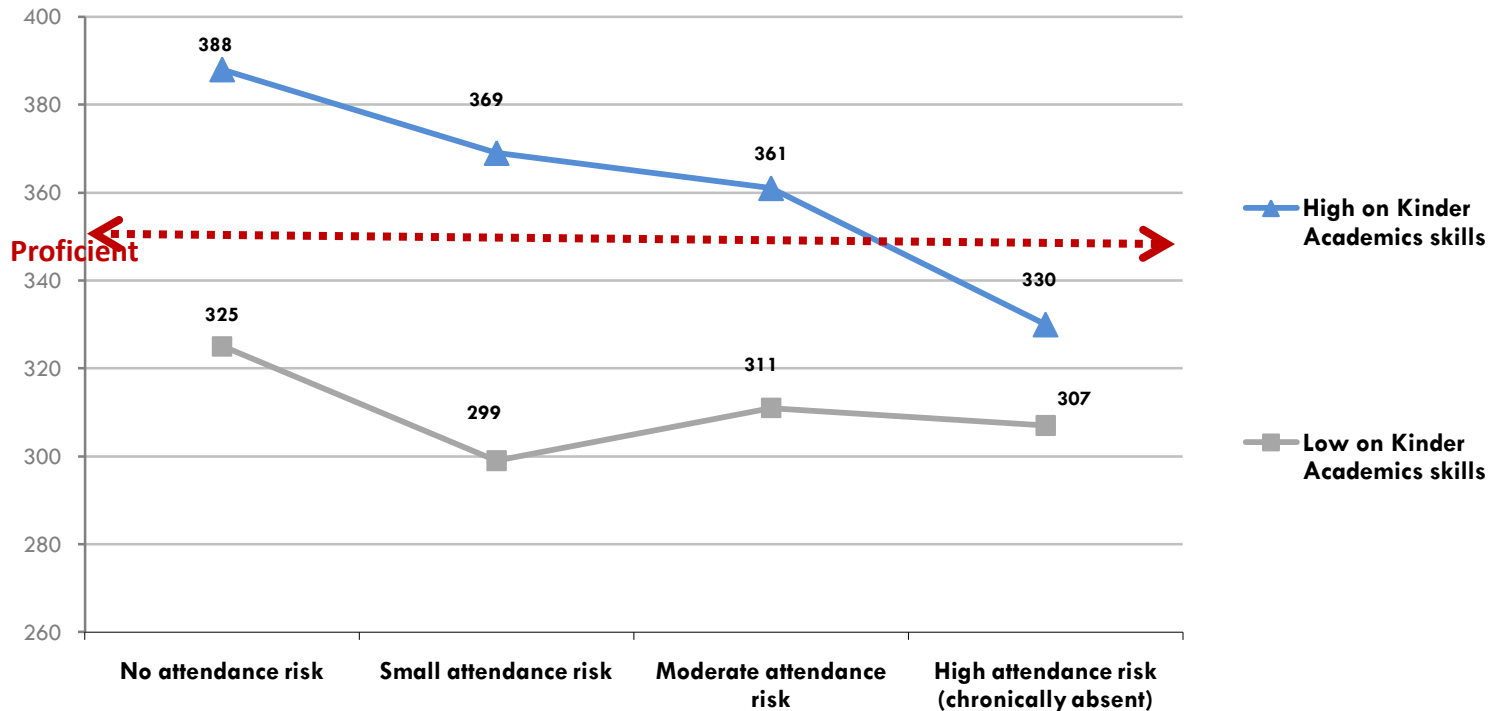


No risk	Missed less than 5% of school in K & 1st t
Small risk	Missed 5-9% of days in both K & 1st
Moderate risk	5-9% of days absent in 1 year & 10 % in 1 year
High risk	Missed 10% or more in K & 1st



School Readiness & Early Attendance Are Critical to Early School Success

3rd Grade ELA Test Scores By Attendance and School Readiness Level



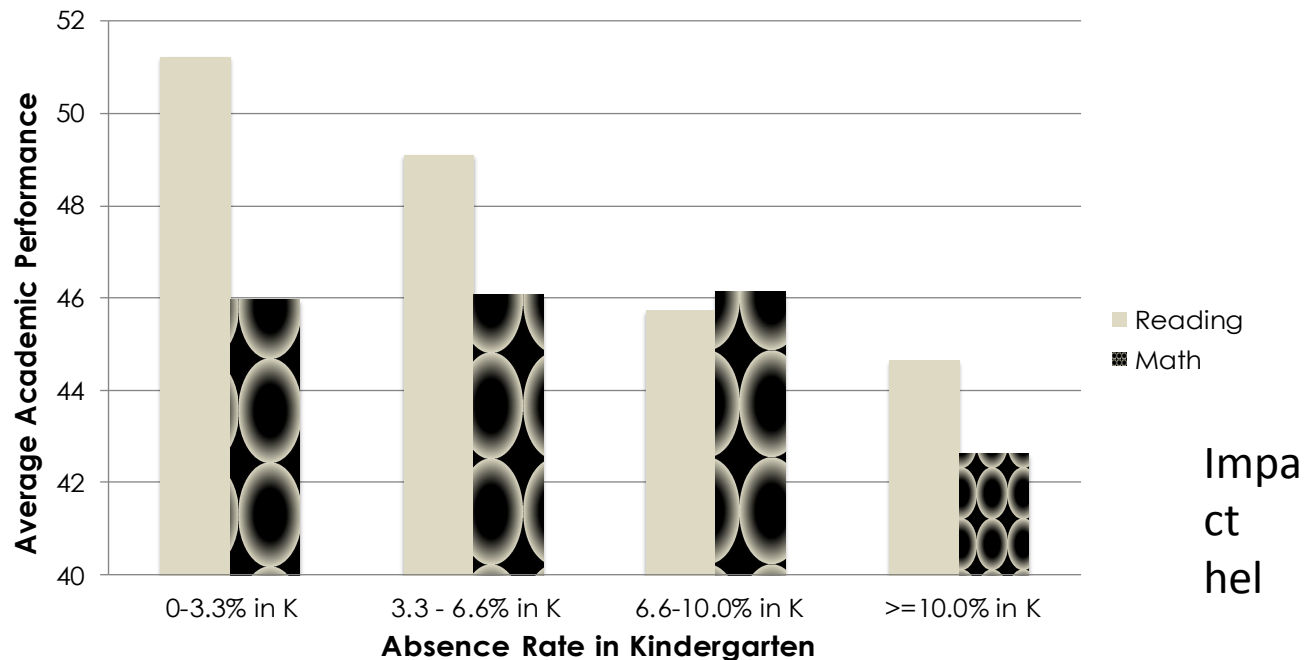
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The Chronic Early Absence Is Most Troubling for Poor Children

Chronic K Absence predicted lower 5th grade performance even for if attendance had improved in 3rd grade.

5th Grade Math and Reading Performance By K Attendance



Impact
hel

11 Source: ECLS-K data analyzed by National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP)
Note: Average academic performance reflects results of direct cognitive assessments conducted for ECLS-K.



Chronic Absence is Especially Challenging for Low-Income Children

- ❑ Poor children are **4 X** more likely to be chronically absent in K than their highest income peers.

- ❑ Children in poverty are more likely to face systemic barriers to school:
 - **Unstable Housing**
 - **Poor Transportation**
 - **Inadequate Food and Clothing,**
 - **Lack of Safe Paths to School Due to Neighborhood Violence**
 - **Chaotic Schools with Poor Quality Programs, etc.**



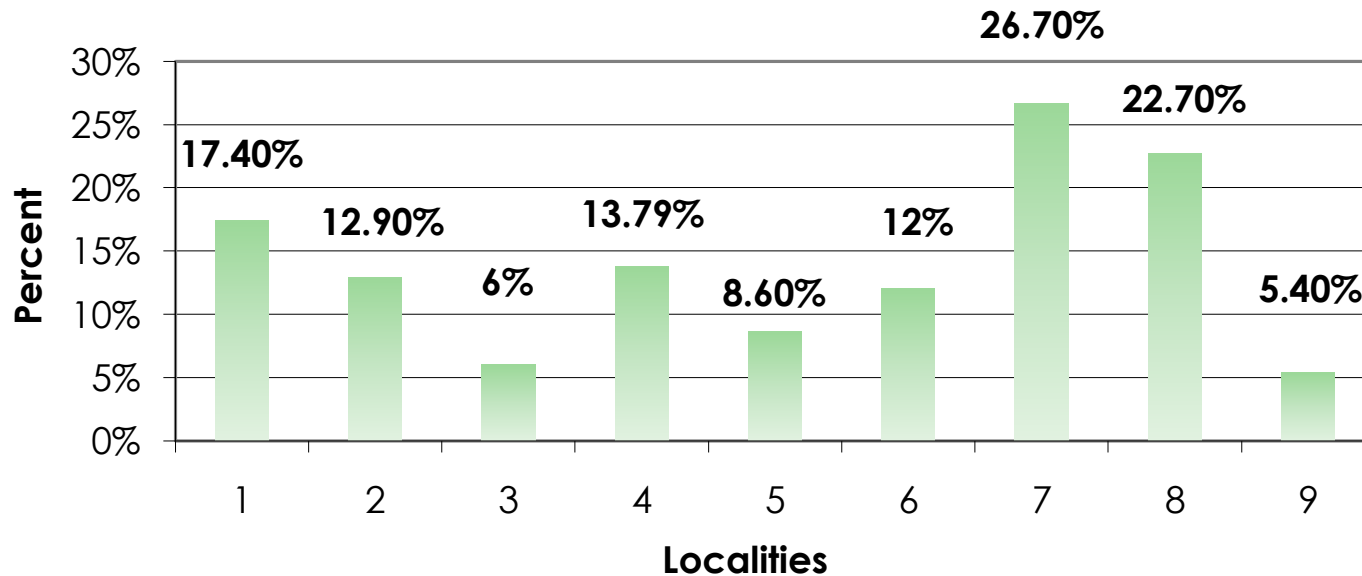
Chronic Absence is Especially Challenging for Low-Income Children

- ❑ Kindergarten and 1st grade can reduce the achievement gap for low-income vs. middle class students, but only if they attend school regularly. (Ready 2010)
- ❑ The negative impact of absences on literacy is **75% larger** for low-income children whose families often lack resources to make up lost time on task. (Ready 2010)
- ❑ Only **17% of low-income children** in the United States read proficiently by 4th grade. (NAEP 2009)



Chronic Early Absence Can Reach High Levels.

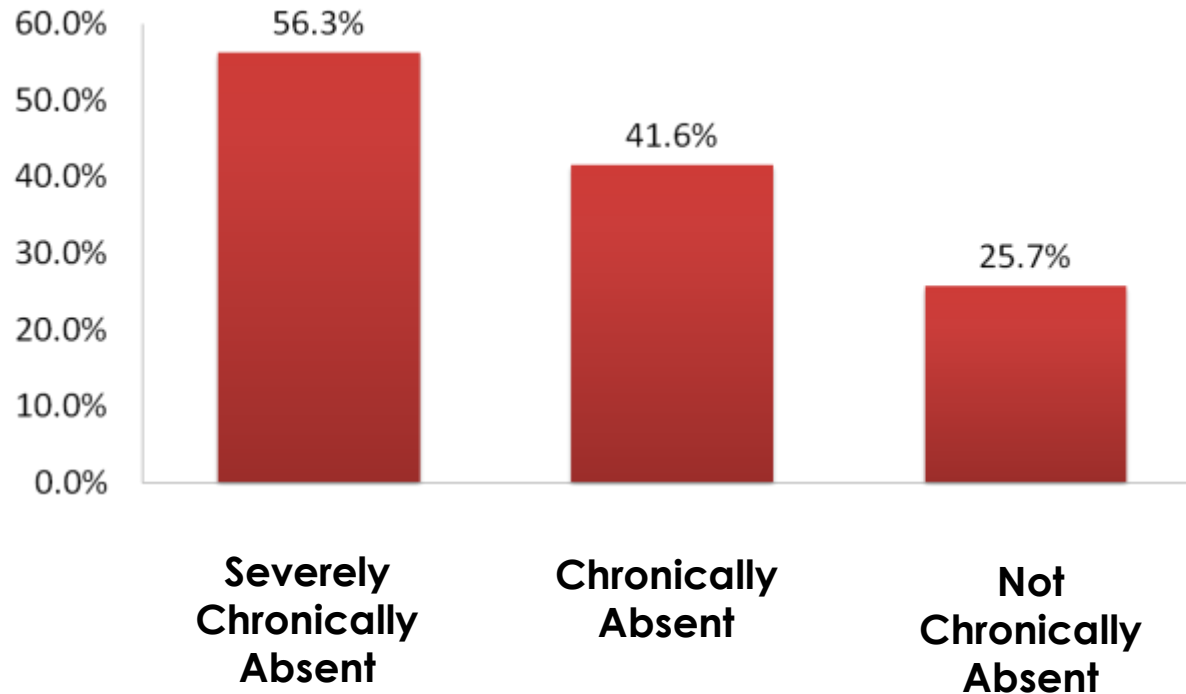
Nationally, 1 out of 10 Kindergartners & 1st Graders are Chronically Absent. Levels Can be Higher Locally.





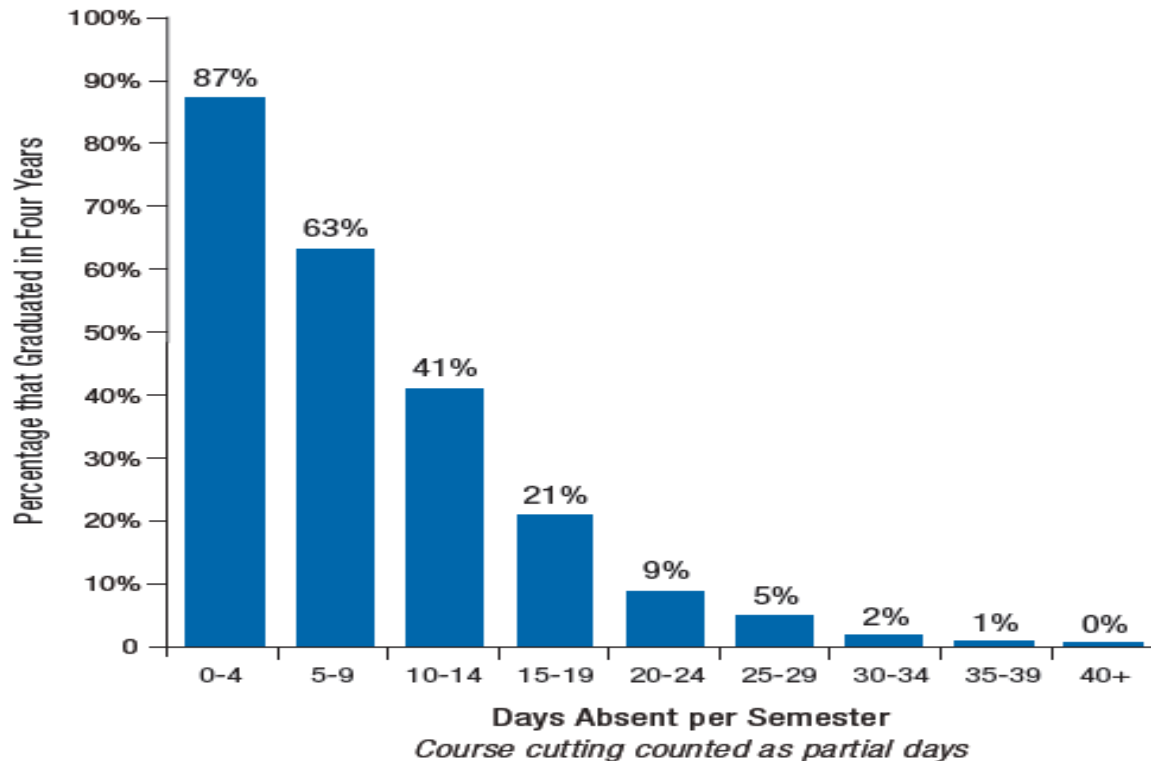
Chronically Absent 6th Graders Have Lower Graduation Rates

Dropout Rates by Sixth Grade Attendance
(Baltimore City Public Schools, 1990-00 Sixth Grade Cohort)





9th Grade Attendance Predicts Graduation for Students of All Economic Backgrounds

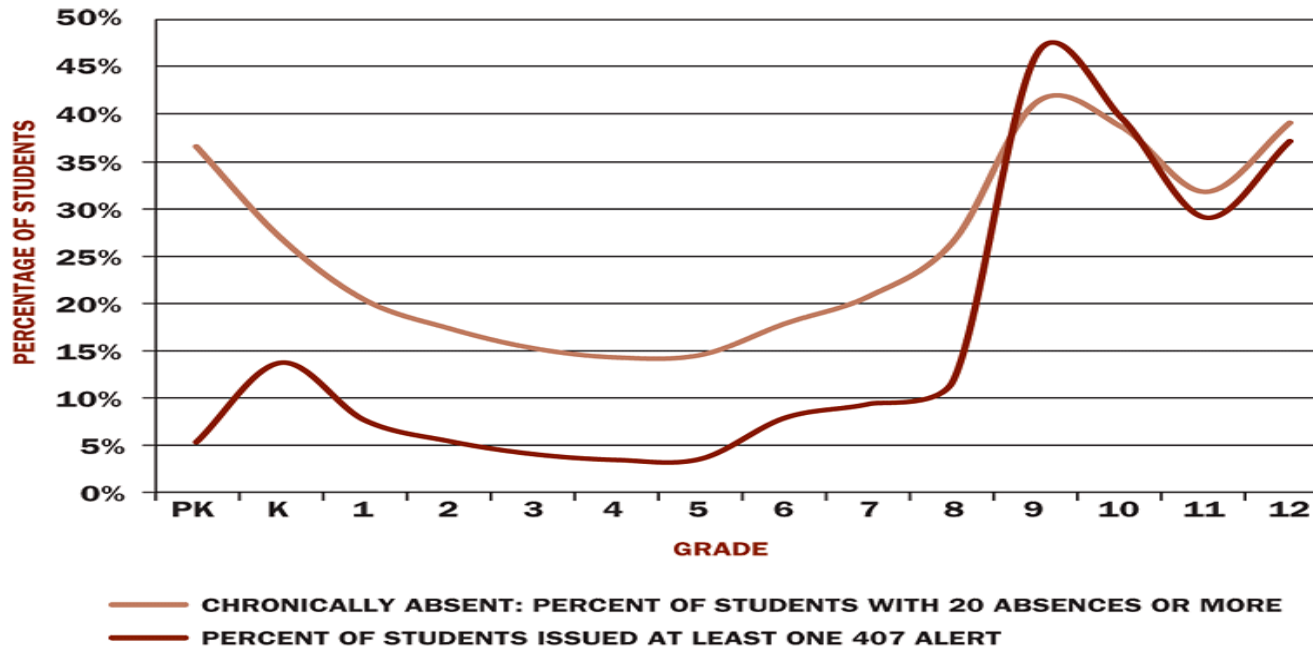


Note: This Chicago study found attendance was a stronger graduation predictor than 8th grade test scores.



Sporadic — Not Just Consecutive — Absences Matter

New York City Schools



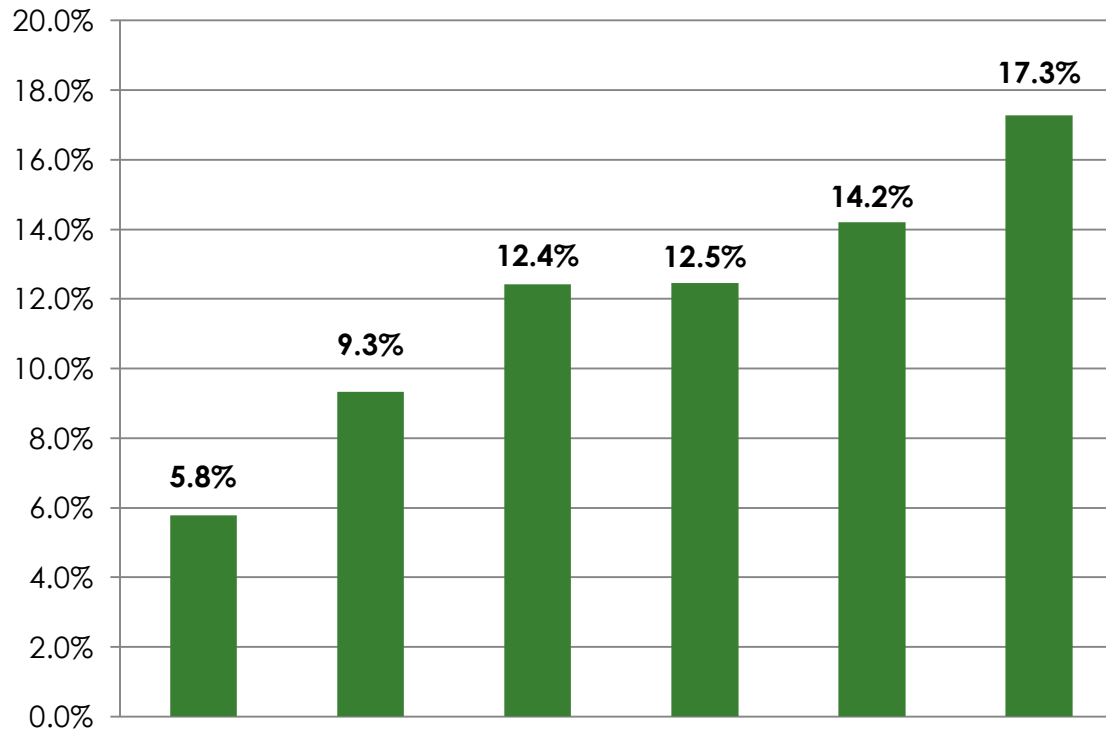
A 407 alert is issued when student misses 10 consecutive days or 20 days over a 40 day period. It misses more sporadic absence.
1 out of 5 elementary school children were chronically absent.



Most Schools Do Not Monitor Chronic Absence

Most Schools Only Track Average Daily Attendance and Truancy. Both Can Mask Chronic Absence.

Variation in Chronic Absence for Schools with 95% ADA in Oakland, CA





Most Do Not Monitor Chronic Absence

- ❑ NCLB does not require tracking of **chronic absence**. States are required to monitor truancy as defined by each state (typically it refers to unexcused absences) and can include attendance as secondary AYP measure. Most use attendance but define it in the aggregate.
- ❑ Most states do not calculate and release data on **chronic absence** even though they have attendance in their longitudinal student data system. Five (CA, CO, NY, ILL, NJ) do not.



All School Absences Reduce Learning, But They Happen for Different Reasons

- ❑ **Suspensions and Expulsions** – school-imposed
- ❑ **Excused Absence** – illness, doctor's visit, court, etc.
- ❑ **Unexcused Absence** – skipping school, sibling or elder care, no note, etc.

And need different solutions...

- ❑ Replace out-of-school suspension with **in-school consequences** whenever possible.
- ❑ Use a problem-solving, **positive approach** to identify and dissolve barriers to attendance.
- ❑ Adopt a **client-focused approach**: Listen and open communication lines from parents and community to schools.



Schools + Communities CAN Make a Difference

Characteristics of Successful Attendance Initiatives

- ❑ Partner with community agencies to help parents carry out their responsibility to get children to school.
- ❑ Make attendance a priority, set targets and monitor progress over time.
- ❑ Examine factors contributing to chronic absence, especially from parent and student perspectives.
- ❑ Clearly communicate expectations to parents.
- ❑ Begin early, ideally in Pre-K.
- ❑ Combine universal strategies that create and engaged learning environment & build a culture of attendance with targeted interventions.
- ❑ Offer positive supports before punitive action.



Examples of Successful Efforts



Baltimore: Fewer unnecessary suspensions, reduced middle school transitions, expanded monitoring of attendance data, and a citywide campaign have **helped cut middle school chronic absence in half.**



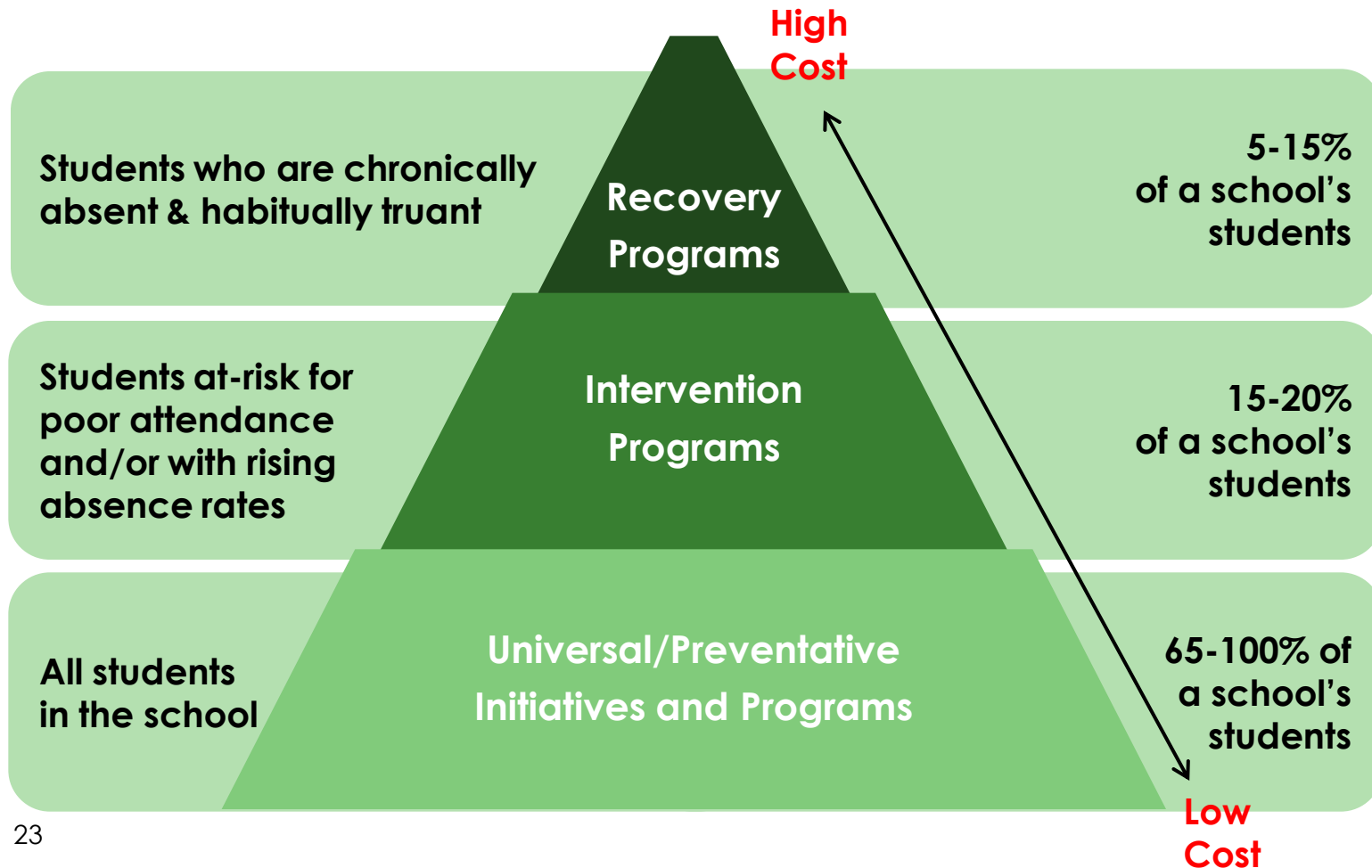
Grand Rapids: A community schools approach including outreach and case management for students with poor attendance **has helped bring chronic absence down and student achievement up.**



New York City: Schoolwide incentives, celebrity wakeup calls and mentoring for at-risk students **have reduced elementary and middle school chronic absence in pilot schools.**



Increased Attendance Involves a 3-Tiered Approach that Fits with Most Reform Efforts





Improving Attendance Takes an Integrated Approach



Universal Attendance Supports

- ❑ Safe and supportive school environment
- ❑ Inviting and engaging classroom environment
- ❑ Intentional family involvement and participation
- ❑ Accurate roll taking every day in a caring manner
- ❑ Rapid parent contact for unexplained absences
- ❑ Recognition for good and improved attendance
- ❑ Collaboration with afterschool programs and early childhood programs to build a culture of attendance
- ❑ Increased access to school based health supports
- ❑ A school plan and budget that reflects high attendance priorities

Individual Assessments and Intervention

- ❑ Refer chronically absent/ truant students for intervention
- ❑ Identify and remove barriers
- ❑ Provide on-going support

Recovery Strategies

- ❑ Interagency Staffing
- ❑ Case management and wrap-around services
- ❑ Referral as last resort for court -based intervention



Tailored Approaches are Most Effective

When chronic absence occurs ,
consider the
role that schools, families, students
and communities each might
play in contributing to and
addressing attendance.

Key factors contributing to chronic
absence can vary by community.
(See [this tool](#) for identifying factors.)

High levels of chronic absence suggest
systemic challenges affecting the
school or community.



Federal Government Should Provide:

1. **Common Data Definition.** Establish common definition of **chronic absence** as missing 10% or more of school including all absences.
2. **Data Systems.** Ensure state longitudinal student databases capture multiple measures of attendance, including **chronic absence**, satisfactory attendance and suspensions starting in pre-K.
3. **Funding.** Use federal grant programs to encourage schools to track and address **chronic absence** and to develop a research base for what works.
4. **Accountability.** Require schools to address attendance in school improvement plans. Include **chronic absence** rates in school report cards & and ED Facts reporting.



States Should Provide:

1. **Data Collection.** Collect total days enrolled and total days absent, ideally through 180 daily attendance records, and include in data bases.
2. **Support for Districts.** Strengthen capacity of districts to track and calculate multiple measures of attendance, and to support chronically absent students, ideally in partnership with other community agencies.
3. **Research.** Analyze the longitudinal impact of chronic absence in combination with poverty and other factors on student growth, high school completion and post-secondary success; share best practices.
4. **Accountability.** Build chronic absence into accountability measures for school improvement, provide incentives for substantial improvement
5. **Reporting.** Publish reports that feature multiple attendance measures and show rates by district, school, grade and student sub-populations.



Why Attendance Data Should be in State Databases and Available to Districts

- ❑ **New Year Roll Over.** Most district information systems “roll over” attendance data each summer and do not make longitudinal attendance data accessible.
- ❑ **Student Mobility. Chronically absent** students are often highly mobile. The state can help provide a fuller history and develop support strategies for vulnerable children.
- ❑ **Equity and Efficiency.** States can provide dropout early warning systems based on attendance far cheaper and more equitably.
- ❑ **Accountability.** States can hold districts and schools accountable for high levels of **chronic absence**.



Districts Should Provide:

- 1. Leadership.** Hold schools accountable for nurturing a school culture that supports good student attendance and intervening when students begin to show poor attendance.
- 2. Reporting.** Publish regular reports for each school with lists of students who have been or are now **chronically absent** by grade. Provide regular reports on current **chronic absence** levels as well as ADA, truancy, and satisfactory attendance by grade and sub-population to site administrators.
- 3. Data Review.** Establish school and site level attendance teams who meet regularly (ideally monthly) to review trends in attendance and discuss implications for action.



And Districts Should Also Provide:

4. **School Wide Attendance Incentives.** Ensure all schools develop and adopt effective school wide approaches to recognizing good and improved student attendance.
5. **Parent Education & Mutual Support.** Support schools in educating parents about the importance of attendance starting with pre-K and encourage families to help each other get to school.
6. **Individual and Programmatic Intervention.** Ensure early outreach to chronically absent students combined, as needed, with case management or follow up with courts. Identify and address systemic barriers to attendance, including a lack of engaging instruction or challenges such as poor transportation, lack of health care, etc.



Districts and Communities Should Work Together

❑ **Community Partnerships**

Forge partnerships with community and public agencies that can:

- serve on attendance data teams offering additional data and insights into barriers to attendance
- support outreach and case management to parents
- provide resources to address common barriers to attendance

Consider using levels of chronic absence to identify which schools are top priority for collaborative relationships with community partners.



In Summary

Focus on Attendance Because:

Increased Student Absences are:

- An early warning sign of potential drop-outs
- Predictive of academic failure
- A flag for student disengagement and struggling schools
- Costly for each school and surrounding community

Measures of Attendance are:

- Available
- Easily understood
- Predictor of failure in school
- Indicator of effective engagement strategies by educators
- A potentially powerful shared outcome that facilitates collaboration



Attendance Works

Advancing Student Success By Reducing Chronic Absence



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www.Attendanceworks.org

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Sue Fothergill, Baltimore Student Attendance Initiative*