What is Chronic Absence?  Why Does it Matter?

Chronic Absence Is A Critical Tool for Community Schools

It can serve as:

A unifying, common goal
Effective tool for resource allocation
Easy to understand measure of progress and success
Unpacking Attendance Terms

Average Daily Attendance
• **Definition:** The % of enrolled students who attend school each day
• **Answers:** What resources are needed given the number of students who typically show up to school?

Truancy
• **Definition:** Typically refers only to unexcused absences and is defined by each state and sometimes by school district.
• **Answers:** How many/which students are skipping school and breaking compulsory attendance laws?

Chronic Absence
• **Proposed National Definition:** Missing 10% or more of school for any reason – excuse, unexcused, etc.
• **Answers:** How many and which students are missing so much school they are academically at risk? Do we need to improve attendance in order to raise achievement?

When 90% Doesn’t Earn an “A”

**Nationally, Students Who Miss More Than 10% Of School (18 out of 180 days) Are At Grave Risk**

- **Chronic Absence** (=>10% absence)
- **Warning Signs** (<10% but >5% absence)
- **Satisfactory Attendance** (=<5% absence)

**Emergency:** =>20% absence
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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attendance Risk</th>
<th>Percent Proficient</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No attendance risks</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small attendance risks</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate attendance risks</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High attendance risks</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

No risk: Missed less than 5% of school in K & 1st
Small risk: Missed 5-9% of days in both K & 1st
Moderate risk: 2-9% of days absent in 1 year & 10% in 1 year
High risk: Missed 10% or more in K & 1st

Source: Applied Survey Research & Attendance Works (April 2011)

The Long-term impact of Chronic Kindergarten Absence Is Most Troubling for Poor Children

5th Grade Math and Reading Performance By K Attendance

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
Absenteeism Is A Problem Even For Higher Achieving Students

Number of days absent had a significant negative effect on CST percentiles in English Language Arts for elementary students in Redwood City CA.

Source: John W. Gardner Center at Stanford University, 2012

Chronically Absent 6th Graders Have Lower Graduation Rates

Spradlin, et al. (2012). Examining the prevalence, scale, and impact of chronic absence in Indiana student-level data analysis. CEEP, University of Indiana.
**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.


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**Moving into Action Requires Knowing If Chronic Absence is a Problem**

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

Chronic Absence For 7 Elementary Schools in Oakland, CA with @ 95% ADA in 2012

98% ADA = little chronic absence, 95%ADA = don’t know; 93% ADA = significant chronic absence
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.

Source: Nauer K et al., Strengthening Schools by Strengthening Families, Center for New York City Affairs New School, Oct 2008

Chronic Absence Versus Truancy
(San Francisco Unified School District)

(Note: SFUSD identified chron/hab truants as = 10 unexcused absences)
Data is Needed for Identifying Programmatic Solutions

- Chronic absence data (as well as other attendance measures) should be examined by classroom, grade, school, neighborhood or sub-population.

- If chronic absence is unusually high for a particular group of students, explore what might be common issues (unreliable transportation, community violence, asthma and other chronic diseases, poor access to health care, unnecessary suspension for non-violent offenses, lack of engaging curriculum, child care or afterschool programming, foreclosures, etc.)

- If chronic absence is unusually low for a high risk population, find out what they are doing that works.

Schools + Communities CAN Make a Difference

Characteristics of Successful Attendance Initiatives

- Partner with community agencies to help families carry out their responsibility to get children to school.

- Make attendance a priority, set targets and monitor progress over time.

- Engage parents and students in identifying and addressing school, family, and community issues that contribute to chronic absence.

- Clearly communicate expectations for attendance to students and families.

- Begin early, ideally in Pre-K.

- Combine targeted interventions with universal strategies that nurture an engaged learning environment, build a culture of attendance and ensure physical health and safety at school.

- Offer positive supports before punitive action.
Increased Attendance Involves a 3-Tiered Approach that Fits with Most Reform Efforts

- **Students who were chronically absent in prior year or starting to miss 20% or more of school**
- **A small fraction of a school’s students**
- **Some of a school’s students**
- **All of a school’s students**

**Recovery Programs**

**Intervention Programs**

**Universal/Preventive Programs**

Solutions Only Work If Grounded in Understanding Of What Leads to Chronic Absence

- **Discretion**
  - Parents don’t know attendance matters
  - School lacks a strong culture of attendance

- **Aversion**
  - Child is struggling academically
  - Child is being bullied

- **Barriers**
  - Lack of access to health care
  - No safe path to school
  - Poor transportation

Special thanks to Dr. Robert Balfanz, Everyone Graduates Center, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD for providing this framework.
Proposed Universal Strategies For Influencing Discretion and Identifying Causes of Absence

- Recognize Good & Improved Attendance
- Parent and Student Engagement
- Personalized Early Outreach
- School Team Monitoring Attendance Data & Practice

Strategies for 3 Tiered Approach

Universal strategies are part of tiered interventions

- Case management and wrap-around services
- Referral as last resort for court-based intervention
- Early outreach, support, mentoring for students with poor attendance
- Identify and remove barriers
- Attendance contracts
- Safe and supportive school environment
- Engaging classroom environments
- Parent education about why attendance matters and how to help each other get students to school
- On-going attention to attendance data
- Recognition for good and improved attendance
- Collaboration with afterschool and early childhood
- School-based health support
Ingredients For Success & Sustainability in a District

- Positive Messaging
- Capacity Building
- Actionable Data
- Shared Accountability
- Strengthens Family/School Relationship

- Conveys importance of building a habit of attendance & what is chronic absence
- Is accurate, regularly reported and easily obtained
- Expands ability to interpret data and adopt best practices
- Ensures monitoring & incentives to reduce chronic absence

Taking a Bottom Up Approach to Policy Change

The Superintendents Call to Action

- Own the Issue
- Mobilize the Community
- Drive With Data

To sign-up for the Call to Action, or to learn more, please visit: www.attendanceworks.org/superintendents-call-to-action
Absenteeism in the Chicago Public Schools: Exploring the Earlier Years

Stacy Ehrlich and Elizabeth Sorice
University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research

What CPS wanted to know

1. What is the extent of absenteeism among CPS students in the early grades (preschool – grade 3)?
2. Who exhibits chronic absenteeism?
3. Why are students absent from preschool?
4. How is attendance in preschool related to learning outcomes in preschool?
5. How is attendance in preschool related to outcomes in later grades?
### Preschool programs and children in CPS, 2011-12

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Total Slots</th>
<th>% Total Preschool Slots</th>
<th>Classrooms</th>
<th>Schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preschool for All (State-funded)</td>
<td>14,900</td>
<td>47.9%</td>
<td>393</td>
<td>240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Partnerships (CPP)*</td>
<td>7,178</td>
<td>23.1%</td>
<td>481</td>
<td>229</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head Start</td>
<td>7,300</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
<td>246</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child-Parent Centers (CPC)</td>
<td>1,200</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuition-based Preschool</td>
<td>540</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Not included in our analyses

- **88%** qualify for free and reduced lunch
- **29.4%** qualify for English Language Learners (ELL) services

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### Preschool students miss much more school than students in K-3rd grade

**Average Absence Rates by Age in 2008-09, 2009-10 and 2010-11**

- Longitudinal analyses, following the same children over time, look similar. The largest increase in attendance is from age 4 to 5.

Data included in these analyses were obtained from the Chicago Public Schools. Data cleaning and analyses were conducted by the Consortium on Chicago School Research. Please direct any data questions to CCSR.
More preschool students are chronically absent than students in kindergarten and beyond

Proportion of Students in the Chicago Public Schools who were Chronically Absent, 2010-2011

Roughly 1/3 of chronically absent 4-year-olds continue to be chronically absent in kindergarten
A quarter of chronically absent preschool students are still chronically absent two years later

Extent of Early Absenteeism: Key Trends

- Preschool students miss more school than do students in kindergarten and the primary grades
  - Absence rates decrease substantially from age 4 to age 5
- While not all chronically absent preschool students continue to be chronically absent in kindergarten, 33% of them do
  - This continues into early elementary school: Roughly a quarter of chronically absent preschool students are still chronically absent in 1st grade
African Americans more likely to be chronically absent than race/ethnic other groups

Data included in these analyses were obtained from the Chicago Public Schools. Data cleaning and analyses were conducted by the Consortium on Chicago School Research. Please direct any data questions to CCSR.

Preschool students from high poverty neighborhoods more likely to be chronically absent than students from moderate/low poverty neighborhoods

- Is race or poverty driving these differences?

Data included in these analyses were obtained from the Chicago Public Schools. Data cleaning and analyses were conducted by the Consortium on Chicago School Research. Please direct any data questions to CCSR.
African American Preschool Students more likely to be chronically absent even after taking into account poverty

Percent Chronically Absent by Race/Ethnicity and Poverty

Data included in these analyses were obtained from the Chicago Public Schools. Data cleaning and analyses were conducted by the Consortium on Chicago School Research. Please direct any data questions to CCSR.

Students enrolled in Child Parent Centers more likely to be chronically absent than students in other programs

Percent of Chronically Absent Preschool Students by Program Type

Data included in these analyses were obtained from the Chicago Public Schools. Data cleaning and analyses were conducted by the Consortium on Chicago School Research. Please direct any data questions to CCSR.
Who misses school more?

- African-American and high-poverty children attend preschool less regularly
- Attendance also differs depending on the program
  - Child-Parent Centers have lower attendance than other programs
  - Partially due to who they serve; do not have information on programmatic activities that may influence attendance

What are the reasons why students are absent from preschool?

- What the most common reasons why preschool students are absent?
- Are reasons for absences different for students with different background characteristics or in different programs?
Reasons for Absences: Data Source

- Teacher logs, 3 times over school year (3-week periods)
  - 60 randomly selected, representative preschool classrooms
  - Time 1: October 31st – November 18th
  - Time 2: January 30th – February 17th
  - Time 3: April 23rd – May 11th

Attendance over the course of nine weeks

- Over these three timepoints (nine weeks), school was in session for an average of 32 days
- The average student in our sample was absent 3.4 days over that same time period, which is an absence rate of 11.7%
Medical-related reasons account for more than half of preschool absences

*Other* includes: school phobia, lack of sleep, religious observances, weather, safety issues, and a general other category.

African American students are they are more likely to be absent for reasons other than illness

*Other* reasons include: school phobia, lack of sleep, religious observances, weather, safety issues, and a general other category.
High-poverty students are absent more with more illness, family, and transportation-related reasons

*Other* reasons include: school phobia, lack of sleep, religious observances, weather, safety issues, and a general other category.

Child-Parent Centers have highest rates of sick- and family-related absences; tuition-based have higher rates of vacation

*Other* reasons include: school phobia, lack of sleep, religious observances, weather, safety issues, and a general other category.
Early implications

- While many students will have better attendance rates as they get older, there is reason to focus on chronic absenteeism in preschool.

- Providing solutions around transportation may help improve attendance for those in most need (Full-day vs. half-day programs? Parent carpools?)

- Other reasons – particularly family-related reasons – need further research to understand whether there are social supports that can help reduce absences within these families.

Continuing work

- Teacher responses to CPS survey
  - Teacher perspectives on: (a) how integrated preschool is with elementary grades, (b) the role of the teacher as an educator, (c) parent involvement, (d) attendance policies, and (e) importance of preschool

- Parent survey (n=633)

- Follow-up parent interviews (n=40)
  - To better understand: (a) experiences with preschool program, (b) importance of preschool, and (c) reasons for absences

- Links between absences and outcomes (in preschool and in early elementary years)
The Grand Rapids Story

a) Scale and scope of the problem

b) Grand Rapid’s main strategies for addressing chronic absence

c) Impact to date

d) Implications for early childhood

Chronic Absence Ranged from @2% to over 20% across districts in Kent County.
Chronic absence Associated with Significantly Worse Achievement in Grand Rapids

Critical Ingredients For Success in Grand Rapids

- Superintendent and Principal Leadership
- District and Building Attendance Policy
- Teacher/Staff Buy-in
- Regular Attendance Meetings
- Parent Outreach
- Attendance Incentives
- Interagency Casemanagement
- Year End Assessment
Absenteeism Trends Overtime in KSSN Schools

- Alger Middle
- Burton Elementary
- Coit Creative Arts
- Harrison Park
- Martin Luther King
- Sibley

Axis Title

0.0% 5.0% 10.0% 15.0% 20.0% 25.0% 30.0% 35.0% 40.0% 45.0% 50.0%