Absenteeism in Tennessee schools

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Agenda

- Absenteeism definitions
- Absenteeism in the state
- Chronically absent students
- Lost instructional time due to disciplinary action
- Disciplinary action disparities across student groups
- The relationship between attendance and student outcomes
Absenteeism definitions
Definitions of terms

- **Absent**: Student is marked not present at school, for either unexcused or excused reasons. According to the state attendance policy, a student who is absent for half of the school day should be marked absent.

- **Excused absent**: A student is absent due to excused reasons. This usually requires documentation. However, what constitutes an excused absence is determined by district policy*.

- **Unexcused absent**: A student is absent due to unexcused reasons. District policy defines an unexcused absence*.

*Excused or unexcused absences are a matter of local school board policy as long as the local policy is not in conflict with state law, State Board of Education Rules, Regulations and Minimum Standards and the Student Membership and Attendance Accountability Procedures Manual.

(NOTE: See School Approved Activities Section D-104 and B-105)
Buckets of absenteeism

- **Chronic absenteeism:** absence rate greater than 10%.
  In a 180-day school year, a student is missing more than 18 days.

- **High absenteeism:** absence rate greater than or equal to 6% and less than 10%.
  In a 180-day school year, a student is missing between 11 and 18 days.

- **Mid absenteeism:** absence rate greater than or equal to 3% and less than 6%.
  In a 180-day school year, a student is missing between 6 and 10 days.

- **Low absenteeism:** absence rate less than 3%.
  In a 180-day school year, a student is missing less than 6 days.
Absenteeism in the state
On average, Tennessee students missed 8 days of school last year.
Attendance has been stable across the last six school years.
However, the attendance rate hides the fact that some students are missing a lot of school.

Percent of chronically absent students

Each bar represents a grade level.
Over half of the students in the state miss more than one week of instruction in an 180-day school year.

Each bar represents a grade level.

- Chronic absenteeism
- High absenteeism
- Mid absenteeism
- Low absenteeism

Each bar represents a grade level.
Chronically absent students
Some student subgroups are overrepresented in the chronically absent student population.
About half of chronically absent students in the 3rd and 9th grades have been chronically absent for multiple years in a row.

- **3rd graders (n=6,045)**
  - 1 year: 51.4%
  - 2 years: 20.5%
  - 3 years: 7.9%
  - 4 or more years: 20.2%

- **9th graders (n=12,642)**
  - 1 year: 50.3%
  - 2 years: 22.6%
  - 3 years: 11.0%
  - 4 or more years: 16.1%
The vast majority of students miss less than two days of schools in August.
Students missing two or more days in August are five times as likely as their peers to be chronically absent.

- Less than two days: 8.7%
- Two days: 31.4%
- Three days: 45.9%
- Four or more days: 67.0%
The percent of chronically absent students differs substantially across districts.
Lost instructional time due to disciplinary action
Disciplinary actions are actions that result in the removal of a student for more than half of an instructional day.

- **In school suspension**: The student was removed from his or her regular classroom and assigned to an in-school suspension program for 10 or fewer days.

- **Out of school suspension**: The student was removed from his or her regular classroom and barred from school grounds for 10 or fewer days and did not receive educational services.

- **Expulsion**: The student was expelled from all school district settings, for more than 10 days, with total cessation of educational services.

- **Change of Placement**: The student was assigned to another school facility or program (for more than 10 days) that allowed him/her to continue to participate in the general curriculum at a school setting.
On an average school day, about 5,000 Tennessee students are absent from their classroom due to a disciplinary action.
The vast majority of students receive disciplinary actions due to violation of school rules.

- Violating rules: 84.5%
- Fighting: 7.4%
- Bullying: 1.7%
- Threat: 1.1%
- Assault of student: 1.0%
- Theft: 0.9%
- Possession/Use drugs: 1.3%
- Other: 1.3%
The type of disciplinary action differs by the disciplinary reason.
The number of instructional days missed varies by the disciplinary reason.
In 2013, one in four 9th graders experienced at least one disciplinary action.

Each bar represents a grade level.
Disciplinary action disparities across student groups

Note: The following slides focus only on 9th graders. However, these trends are similar across all grades.
Some student subgroups are overrepresented in student population with at least one disciplinary action.
Black students make up 25% of the 9th grade student body across the state but more than 80% of expulsions.
Black females receive about one more day of out of school suspension for fighting compared to white males.
The relationship between attendance and student outcomes
As absences increase in freshman year, the likelihood that a student will graduate on time decreases.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Absences</th>
<th>Percent of cohort graduating on time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 to 5</td>
<td>93.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 to 10</td>
<td>89.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 to 15</td>
<td>84.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 to 20</td>
<td>77.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 to 25</td>
<td>71.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 to 30</td>
<td>65.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 plus</td>
<td>50.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Students who are chronically absent in their freshman year are not as likely to graduate on time as their peers.
Students are less likely to score a 21 or higher on the ACT if they are chronically absent.

38.1% of students not chronically absent scored a 21 or higher on the ACT.

19.0% of students chronically absent scored a 21 or higher on the ACT.
Even when we control for prior achievement, chronically absent students are less likely to score a 21 or higher on the ACT.
Students who are chronically absent score proficient or advanced on math TCAP at much lower rates than their peers.
About 27% of students who scored basic on the math TCAP in 2013 scored proficient in 2014.
Students who scored basic on the math TCAP in 2013 were more likely to score proficient in 2014 if they had low absenteeism.
Takeaways

- Students are missing lots of instructional time, especially in P4 and high school.
- Attendance rates mask the issues the state and some districts are having with chronic absenteeism.
- About half of chronically absent students are chronically absent for two or more years in a row.
- Students who miss school early in the year are very likely to chronically absent.
- Students lose considerable amounts of instructional time due to disciplinary actions.
- Troublesome differences in the use of disciplinary actions exist among racial subgroups.
- Absenteeism has a negative relationship with student success on achievement measures.