



Press Release

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ALMOST 10,000 PUBLIC SCHOOLS REPORTING 30% OF STUDENTS ARE CHRONICALLY ABSENT

Huge Variances Found Across Schools; Problem Can Be Addressed with Prevention and Early Intervention

SAN FRANCISCO, Sept. 1, 2017 – There are almost 10,000 public schools across the United States – or 11 percent of the total – at which chronic student absence rates affect 30 percent or more of their students, a new analysis shows.

The problem is almost as challenging at another 10,000 schools where 20-to-29 percent of the students are chronically absent. At such high levels, all students in the classroom are affected when teachers have to deal with the churn of sporadic attendance.

The analysis, released today by Attendance Works and the Everyone Graduates Center, found that overall, more than 7 million students nationwide are chronically absent from school. Chronic absence is defined as missing so much school for any reason – including excused, unexcused or suspensions – that students are in trouble academically.

The analysis, “[*Portraits of Change: Aligning School and Community Resources to Reduce Chronic Absence*](#),” was prepared by researchers Hedy N. Chang and Robert Balfanz. The report includes examples of attendance initiatives from around the country that show how chronic absence can be turned around, even when it reaches high levels in a school or district or among a particular student population. It also shares how partners such as

businesses, nonprofits and local governments can team up with educators and add support and resources. Individual charts provide an analysis of [school level chronic absence for each of the 50 states](#).

“Missing too many days of school for any reason puts children at risk academically and can translate into a child who can’t read by the end of third grade, fails courses in middle school and eventually drops out of high school,” said Chang, Executive Director of Attendance Works.

Released in connection with Attendance Awareness Month in September, the report relies on federal data to show that high levels of chronic absence can be found in schools throughout the country regardless of setting: rural, town, suburban and urban districts. The absence levels are significantly higher, however, in schools with larger percentages of low-income students.

“Our analysis takes a second look at national data and finds that some schools are much more affected by chronic absence than others,” said Balfanz, a Johns Hopkins University researcher who leads the Everyone Graduates Center. “The size of the challenge can inform the level of resources needed. Reducing chronic absence begins with universal prevention for all students, providing early intervention as soon as a student becomes chronically absent and turning to intensive supports as needed. Addressing higher levels chronic absence typically requires a community-wide approach.”

The new analysis reveals:

***One out of every 10 schools in the nation, or 9,921 schools, has extreme chronic absence (30 percent or more of students chronically absent), while another 11 percent face high levels (20-29 percent of students chronically absent).** Almost half of all schools have a more modest problem, with less than 10 percent of students chronically absent.

***Across states, the percentage of all schools with extreme chronic absence varies significantly from two percent to 29 percent.** An issue worth further exploration is what factors might explain these variations including differences in data collection, social and economic challenges (e.g., poverty, access to health care, prevalence of chronic illness) as well as prior investment in policies and programs to improve attendance.

***Chronic absence levels are higher in schools with larger percentages of low-income students.** Schools with greater percentages of students from low-income backgrounds are more likely to experience high and extreme chronic absence levels, whereas those with fewer low-income students typically experience modest or low levels.

***While national data show that schools with extreme chronic absenteeism are more likely to be located in urban areas – rather than suburban, town or rural locations – this pattern does not hold true in all states.** One in five urban schools report extreme chronic absence as compared to about one in ten suburban, town or rural schools. But in

Wyoming and California, for example, chronic absence levels were higher in rural communities than in cities.

***Nationally, high schools have the highest chronic absence rates. About one-quarter of all schools with students in grades 9-12 have extreme chronic absence.**

***Among different types of high schools, special education and alternative high schools are most likely to have extreme chronic absence.** About half of these schools have 30 percent or more of students missing 15 or more days, and more vocational high schools than regular high schools report extreme rates of chronic absenteeism. High levels of chronic absence among students in special education and alternative schools holds true for elementary and middle school as well.

The report describes how states and districts can use chronic absence data to identify where chronic absence is a problem and target where additional resources are needed for prevention and early intervention. Schools with higher levels typically require a more comprehensive approach as well as more support from community partners and public agencies.

“The key to chronic absence data is avoiding a blame game and using data to identify and address barriers to getting to school,” added Chang.

Chronic absence data is increasingly available, providing more opportunity than ever before to use data to identify students who are missing too much school, align existing resources and take timely action. Under the federal Every Student Succeeds Act, chronic absence is a required reporting metric for local and state report cards and an optional measure for school accountability.

The emphasis on that metric is driven not only by the clear impact of absence on individual academic achievement, but also by the impact on all students when teachers have to deal with the churn of sporadic attendance.

“While not a substitute for quality teaching, reducing chronic absence is key to realizing the benefits of investments in improved instruction and curriculum,” said Chang. “By reducing chronic absence and ensuring all students have an equal opportunity to learn, we lay a foundation for vibrant, healthy, economically viable communities.”

[Attendance Works](#) is a national initiative dedicated to improving the policy, practice and research around attendance. [Everyone Graduates Center](#) supports the development of tools and models designed to keep all students on the path to graduation. Together with eight other national partners (America's Promise Alliance, the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading, Get Schooled, Healthy Schools Campaign, the Institute for Educational Leadership, Mentor, Points of Light, and United Way), they convene the [national campaign](#) dedicated to promoting awareness of the importance of regular attendance as soon as students return to school in September.

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