ATTENDANCE WORKS

EVERYONE GRADUATES CENTER

PREVENTING MISSED OPPORTUNITY:

Taking Collective Action to Confront Chronic Absence

SEPTEMBER 2016

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Attendance Works and the Everyone Graduates Center are pleased to partner on *Preventing Missed Opportunity: Taking Collective Action to Confront Chronic Absence*. Attendance Works drew upon its experience working with districts and states across the country to lay out the implications for action and policy. The Everyone Graduates Center analyzed the scale, scope and concentration of chronic absence in the United States.

While Hedy Chang and Robert Balfanz are the primary authors, this brief reflects significant contributions from a number of individuals. Vaughn Byrnes of the Everyone Graduates Center provided the data analysis. The brief benefited greatly from the Attendance Works team. Catherine Cooney oversaw and managed the editing and production process. Lauren Keane created the design. Sue Fothergill shaped the policy recommendations and worked with Leo Fothergill to create the Chronic Absence Story Map, which would not have been possible without Leo's vision and technical skills. Other team members offered timely and insightful assistance, including Linda Bowen, Julie Farrar, Karissa Yee Findley, Nicole Johnson, Phyllis Jordan, Cecelia Leong, Annie Reed, Jane Sundius, Louise Wiener and Cathy Wolfenden.

We also deeply appreciate the willingness of many colleagues from around the country to review drafts of the report. Their insights helped us hone our concepts and narrative.

This brief was made possible by the generous support of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Campaign for Grade Level Reading, The California Endowment and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. While their support is appreciated, the conclusions are those of the authors alone.

Attendance Works (www.attendanceworks.org) is a national initiative dedicated to improving attendance policy, practice and research. Its website offers a rich array of free materials, tools, research and success stories to help schools and communities work together to reduce chronic absence.

The Everyone Graduates Center (www.every1graduates.org) at Johns Hopkins University, School of Education seeks to identify the barriers that stand in the way of all students graduating from high school prepared for adult success, develop strategic solutions to overcome the barriers and build local capacity to implement and sustain them.

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INTRODUCTION

In the United States, the promise of an equal opportunity to learn regardless of the circumstances or social class is a widely accepted civil right that binds us together as a nation. It is a hope that inspires families and children to invest in themselves and the communities in which they live. It is a belief that bolsters the morale of our teachers and their community partners by acknowledging the priceless contribution they make when they inspire, engage and educate our children and youth. It is a shared value that helps policy makers prioritize investments in the education of a next generation and maintain the foundation we need for a strong economy and civil society.

Chronic absence (missing so much school that a student is academically at risk) is one of the earliest signs that we are failing to provide an equal opportunity to learn. Studies show that missing just 10 percent or more of school — whether absences are excused, unexcused or due to suspension — predicts lower levels of numeracy and literacy by third grade, class failure in middle school, higher levels of suspension, higher likelihood of high school dropout and lower levels of persistence in college.[1] Chronic absence is problematic starting in preschool and kindergarten. The academic impact of absenteeism is greatest for children living in poverty whose families typically have fewer — and less access to — resources to make up for the lost school learning opportunities.[2]

The recent release of the first-ever national data set on chronic absence by the U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights (OCR) reveals that this promise of an equal opportunity to learn is being broken for far too many children. More than 6.5 million students, or about 13 percent, miss three or more weeks of school, which is enough time to erode their achievement and threaten their chance of graduating. More than half of those chronically absent students are in elementary or middle school. Students from communities of color (African American, Native American, Pacific Islander and Latino) as well as with learning disabilities were disproportionately affected.

The OCR data set, combined with additional statistics from the Census Bureau and the National Center for Education Statistics, allows us, for the first time, to use concrete, quantitative information, to examine:

- **Where is chronic absence found in the United States?**
- **Is it highly concentrated or spread out across the nation?**
- **Does it exist in rural, urban and suburban settings?**
- **What is the connection to poverty and race?**
- **What are the characteristics of the communities that struggle the most with poor attendance?**

As this brief will show, the findings of this analysis are both sobering and, in some cases, surprising.

At the same time, progress is being made. A growing number of efforts from across the country — San Francisco, Grand Rapids, Connecticut and Arkansas — show that chronic absence is a solvable problem. Especially in the most impacted schools and districts, success requires a community-wide effort that emphasizes the importance of showing up for school, creates a welcoming environment once students arrive there and addresses barriers such as unreliable transportation, asthma or a dangerous walk to school.

A common thread throughout these success stories is access to real-time data to trigger action. This report provides an in-depth discussion of the key steps that need to be taken, particularly by states but also at the local level, in order to ensure districts, schools, community partners and families have the chronic absence data they need.

THESE STEPS INCLUDE:

- **Step 1. Invest in consistent and accurate data collection.**
- **Step 2. Use data to understand need and disproportionate impact in order to target resources.**
- **Step 3. Leverage data to identify places that are getting results.**
- **Step 4. Share data with key stakeholders.**
- **Step 5. Equip stakeholders to unpack barriers and take action.**
- **Step 6. Create shared accountability.**

The challenge and opportunity is to avoid making the all too common, incorrect assumption that children miss school because they or their parents simply do not care. States and districts that have successfully reduced chronic absence are instead using it as a trigger for collective, strategic, creative problem-solving and action. Part of the power of using chronic absence as an education indicator is that it is an easily understood metric that supports and reinforces cross-sector collaboration. Particularly in communities facing concentrated poverty and high levels of chronic absence, helping families overcome the barriers to getting their children to school is not a matter for schools alone. It requires all of us — schools, public officials, public agencies, civic organizations, businesses, philanthropic groups, families and students — to work together and use chronic absence data to focus attention and target interventions so all children have an opportunity to learn and realize their dreams. Implementation of the federal Every Student Succeeds Act offers an unprecedented opportunity for advancing action and accountability for chronic absence across the nation.

WHERE ARE THE NATION'S CHRONICALLY ABSENT STUDENTS FOUND?

The chronic absenteeism data released by the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR) survey awoke the nation to the magnitude of its chronic absenteeism challenge with its findings of more than 6.5 million, or about 13 percent, students missing three or more weeks of school in the 2013–14 school year. To reduce chronic absenteeism, however, we will need to focus our efforts on the places where these students are found.

Chronic absence affects nearly all school districts, with 89 percent reporting some level of chronic absence. In the vast majority, chronic absence affects relatively small numbers of students. Closer analysis of the OCR data shows that chronic absence is highly concentrated in a small subset of schools and districts. Nationwide, half of the chronically absent students can be found in just 4 percent of the nation's school districts and 12 percent of its schools. The numbers behind these percentages put the concentration in sharper relief. Some 16,240 school districts reported chronic absence data to OCR. Half of those chronically absent students attend just 654 of these school districts. Likewise, 92,730 schools reported data on chronically absent students, and half of them are found in 11,471 schools (12 percent).

As can be seen in Table 1 (p.7), the great concentration of half the nation's chronically absent students in 4 percent of its school districts is counterbalanced by a grand diffusion of a quarter of the nation's chronically absent students across nearly 14,000 districts. Many of these school districts are very small, with an average enrollment of 1,259 students. As a result, some of these districts still have high rates of chronically absent students, even if they are few in overall number.

About OCR Chronic Absence Data

The 2013-14 Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) is a survey of virtually all (99.5%) public schools and (99.2%) school districts in the United States. Chronic absence, defined as missing 15 days for any reason, was added for collection for the first time. As is often the case with an initial data collection, some data is incomplete. Data was not always submitted correctly and in a few cases, it was never submitted or certified. Our analysis was developed before corrections were submitted to OCR for Florida or New York City. Nonetheless, we believe these gaps do not change the overall patterns and suggest the overall levels of students missing 15 or more days are an underestimate.

Table 1. Where are the Nation's CA Students found, By Quarter and By District? 2013-14

	Total Number of Students Chronically Absent (CA)	Number of Districts	Average Number of Students CA	Min Number Students CA	Max number of Students CA	Percent of All Districts
ALL	6,472,466	16,240	399	0	72,376	100
1st Quarter	1,618,012	13,943 *	116	0	587	86
2nd Quarter	1,617,319	1,642	985	587	1,805	10
3rd Quarter	1,618,036	530	3,053	1,806	5,729	3
4th Quarter	1,619,079	124	13,057	5,817	72,376	1

** Includes 1, 798 districts reporting 0 chronically absent students*

What is true at the national level is also true at the state level. Between 1 percent and 3 percent of districts account for 25 percent of many states' chronically absent students, and 10 percent or fewer districts account for 50 percent of chronic absentees. Taken a step further, we see that in 40 states, 25 percent or less of the districts account for 75 percent of the states' chronically absent students (state by state details can be seen in Table 7 (p.16) and found in the Chronic Absence Data Map.)

But that's not the whole story. Table 2 below highlights Texas and California, the two states that, because of their size, have the greatest number of chronically absent students (a combined 1,326,175 of the nation's 6,472,446 chronically absent students). Both states have more than 1,000 school districts and report 12 percent of their students missing three weeks of school, close to the national average. Yet one-quarter of the reported chronically absent students in Texas are found in just 16 districts, or 1 percent of the total, and in California they are found in 14 districts, also 1 percent of the total districts. This means that about 10 percent of the nation's chronically absent students can be found in just 30 school districts in Texas and California.

What this shows is that while most districts and schools have chronically absent students, a small subset of districts and schools are confronting a challenge of a much larger scale and magnitude. Every district and school needs to pay attention to chronic absenteeism and create climates, cultures and positive messaging that promote regular attendance. The subset of districts and schools where most of the nation's affected students are found, however, will need to take a much more comprehensive, multi-tiered and multi-sector approach, and many of them are going to need help. Not only are the scope and magnitude of the chronic absence challenges they face high, but many of these districts face a broader range of challenges that locations with low rates of chronic absenteeism don't experience in the same manner or intensity.

Table 2. Concentration of Chronic Absenteeism at District Level in California and Texas 2013-2014

State	Enrollment	Total Students Chronically Absent (CA)	Percent of Students Chronically Absent	Total Districts	Number of Districts that Account for…			Percent of Districts that Account for…		
					25% of CA Students	50% of CA Students	75% of CA Students	25% of CA Students	50% of CA Students	75% of CA Students
CA	6,035,665	719,747	12	1,019	14	61	167	1	6	16
TX	5,176,572	606,428	12	1,202	16	53	136	1	4	11

WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE 4 PERCENT OF SCHOOL DISTRICTS WITH HALF OF THE NATION'S CHRONICALLY ABSENT STUDENTS?

School districts are the most significant unit in the U.S. educational system. Federal and state policy, regulations and funding enable and constrain local actions, but it is at the district level that the decisions are made and actions taken to shape the day-to-day experiences of students and their families. The challenges that school districts face and the resources they have to confront them are also affected by the larger social, economic, cultural and political forces that have shaped neighborhoods and communities within their boundaries. Thus, to fully understand the characteristics of the school districts where most of the nation's chronically absent students are found (see the Chronic Absence Story Map) requires a more in-depth investigation than can be accomplished in this brief. A few key features, however, can be highlighted.[3]

There are two very different types of districts among the 4 percent. Some are larger, mostly suburban districts with chronic absenteeism rates just slightly above to slightly below the national average. These districts have large numbers of chronically absent students, in part because of their size and perhaps in part because of growing low-income and diverse populations. For example, it would likely be a surprise to many that Fairfax County, Va., and Montgomery County, Md., two relatively affluent school districts in suburban Washington, D.C., with strong reputations for being well run and achieving academic success, are among the top 15 districts in the nation in number of chronically absent students.

As seen in Table 3 (p.12), Fairfax reports 12 percent of its more than 180,000 students as chronically absent, and Montgomery reports 16 percent of its more than 150,000 students. As a result, each county has in excess of 20,000 chronically absent students. Each educates substantial low-income populations — 27 percent and 34 percent free and reduced-price lunch students, respectively — but their overall childhood poverty rates at 7 percent are low compared to many of the other districts with concentrations of chronic absence. Thus, among the 4 percent, there are a set of larger, more resourced, typically suburban districts. Many of them have fairly recent influxes of lower-income and diverse student populations and may not be fully aware of the magnitude of their chronic absenteeism challenge. However, once alerted, they may also have greater capacity to address it. Overall, 45 percent of the districts in the 4 percent are classified as suburban.

Hope SF: Revitalizing Communities, Transforming Lives

In San Francisco, Hope SF, a cross-sector initiative dedicated to transforming public housing without large-scale displacement, found that over 53 percent of students living in public housing were chronically absent versus less than 10 percent city-wide. Hope SF has begun reducing chronic absence among students in public housing by combining the power of resident-led strategies like walking school buses, with interagency data sharing, education liaisons based at housing sites, and closer collaboration with schools and the department of public health. Close attention is also being paid to helping residents as well as the professionals understand the impact of trauma and its implications for how they carry out their work. Read more here.

The second set of districts in the 4 percent are urban school districts with large populations of minority students living in poverty. In total, 47 percent are urban school districts of modest to large size. One quarter of all districts and half the urban districts in the 4 percent are highly segregated by race and income. At least 79 percent of the students in these districts are minority, and at least 28 percent of the children between the ages 5 and 17 live in poverty. In these districts, chronic absenteeism rates are typically two, to as much as four times, higher than the national average. Table 4 (p.12) highlights school districts in Baltimore, Philadelphia, Milwaukee, Cleveland and Detroit.

These are among the districts with both the highest rates of chronic absenteeism and the greatest percentage of children living in poverty. These cities also share nearly 100 years of historical actions that aimed to segregate African American populations in sections of the city with the poorest housing, greatest proximity to industrial pollutants, greatest exposure to violence, and highest unemployment rates, resulting in widespread inter-generational poverty.

Concentrated chronic absenteeism both reflects and exacerbates the problems these communities face. All of the factors described above affect the current ability of families to get their children to school[4], while chronic absence makes it less likely that families will achieve better outcomes. In addition, when chronic absence reaches high levels, it can affect every student's opportunity to learn, since the resulting classroom churn can make it more difficult for teachers to provide engaging educational experiences and meet the diverse learning needs of all their students.[5]

Tensions between schools and poor communities, especially poor communities of color, can also exacerbate efforts to address absenteeism. Although feeling welcome and engaged by the school is essential to motivating students and their families to show up every day, negative past experiences with schools may make it difficult for families to trust and connect with schools. Punitive reactions (i.e., suspensions, expulsions, threatening letters, and lost opportunities, such as after-school programs, recess and field trips) on the part of school personnel toward children can create more distrust and, in some cases, increase time missed from the classroom.[6]

Yet, these highly impacted cities are also currently the location of some of the most vibrant and emerging comprehensive efforts to combat chronic absenteeism. All of these districts, for example, are participating in the White House and Department of Education's My Brother's Keeper Student Success Mentor Initiative, which is using evidence-based strategies to reduce chronic absenteeism by linking chronically absent students and their families with school-based mentors, nested in larger support systems.

Grand Rapids: Challenge 5, Strive for Less Than Five Days

When educators and community leaders in Grand Rapids found that over 35 percent of the students in the public schools missed nearly a month of school every year, they knew they needed to turn around school attendance. Their response was innovative community-wide messaging challenging all students to reduce absences, building school capacity to use data to take action, and supporting students and families with serious barriers to getting to school. The results have been startling: Over the past three years, these efforts have brought down chronic absence rates to 22.5 percent (a 38 percent drop) and engaged the entire community. Read more here.

As Table 4 (p.12) shows, these districts essentially educate only low-income and minority students. Fully one-third to a stunning one-half of the children who reside within these school district boundaries live in poverty, U.S. Census Bureau data show. The actual rate for the school system will be higher, as the more affluent families who live within the district boundaries are likely to send their children to private schools. This intense concentration and large numbers of students living in segregated, high-poverty neighborhoods then result in staggering rates of chronic absenteeism. Across all these districts, fully one-half of their high school students are chronically absent, and in several, the rate in elementary schools is at least as high.

The connection between educating primarily high-poverty and minority students living in segregated neighborhoods and extremely high rates of chronic absenteeism is not limited to the nation's big cities. This can be seen by looking at smaller to medium-size cities in New York state, which, in addition to New York City, account for half of the chronically absent students across the state. Table 5 (p.12) shows the characteristics of these cities. Several things stand out. In many, their high rates of chronic absenteeism are matched or exceeded by the rate of children living in poverty. Rochester, Buffalo, Syracuse and Utica, for example, each have chronic absenteeism rates and childhood poverty rates that are among the highest in the nation. In some of the cities, those rates are sky high for minority and special education students. In Rochester, Schenectady, Troy and Ithaca, the chronic absenteeism rates for African Americans, Hispanics and students with disabilities are all close to 40 percent, and in some cases, considerably higher.

Similar patterns can be found in Ohio, Michigan, Pennsylvania and Illinois. This presents a significant challenge to national and state efforts to reduce chronic absenteeism, as these large states have multiple medium-sized struggling districts, with high rates of poverty and chronic absenteeism, that are often economically and socially isolated from not only the rest of the state, but also their immediate surroundings.

Table 3. Chronic Absenteeism in Two Large Suburban Districts 2013-2014

State	School District	Number of Students Chronically Absent (CA)	Percent of All Students CA	Percent FRL	Percent Minority	Enrollment	Locale	CA Rate in Elementary Schools	CA Rate in Middle Schools	CA Rate in High Schools	Percent of Children 5-17 living in poverty
MD	MONTGOMERY COUNTY	24,149	16	34	68	152,013	Suburb	13	12	23	7
VA	FAIRFAX	21,565	12	27	58	183,640	Suburb	9	10	17	7

Table 4. Poverty, Percent Minority, and Chronic Absenteeism by Grade Level in Highly Impacted Cities 2013-2014

State	School District	Number of Students Chronically Absent (CA)	Percent of All Students CA	Percent FRL	Percent Minority	Enrollment	Locale	CA Rate in Elementary Schools	CA Rate in Middle Schools	CA Rate in High Schools	Percent of Students 5-17 living in poverty
PA	PHILADELPHIA	52,770	37	83	86	143,964	City	32	35	51	36
MD	BALTIMORE	31,199	37	85	92	85,035	City	31	20	54	32
MI	DETROIT	31,162	58	80	98	54,181	City	59	52	54	51
WI	MILWAUKEE	30,196	38	83	86	78,645	City	31	42	57	40
OH	CLEVELAND	18,023	47	87	85	38,551	City	41		63	48

Table 5. Chronic Absenteeism Across Small and Medium Size Cities in New York State 2013-2014

School District	Number of Students Chronically Absent (CA)	Percent of All Students CA	Percent FRL	Percent Minority	Enrollment	Percent of Black Students CA	Percent of Hispanic Students CA	Percent of Spec. Ed. Students CA	Percent of Children 5-17 years old living in poverty
ALBANY CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT	2,744	31	68	79	8,824	34	38	42	32
BUFFALO CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT	9,492	28	18	79	33,470	27	41	36	41
ELMIRA CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT	2,000	30	59	25	6,592	35	53	38	34
KINGSTON CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT	1,752	27	0	40	6,477	33	31	34	17
NIAGARA FALLS CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT	2,097	29	53	52	7,152	30	34	31	31
ROCHESTER CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT	12,561	42	63	90	29,986	40	50	51	45
SCHENECTADY CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT	3,716	38	68	70	9,717	43	47	51	34
SYRACUSE CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT	7,047	34	62	76	20,764	31	49	35	48
TROY CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT	1,402	36	0	52	3,846	39	47	46	38
UTICA CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT	2,443	25	75	63	9,648	31	32	31	47

WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE 500 SCHOOL DISTRICTS WITH CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM RATES OF 30 PERCENT OR MORE?

There is a final grouping of districts in need of attention. When it released the attendance data in June, the Office for Civil Rights noted that there are about 500 school districts where the rate of chronic absenteeism exceeds 30 percent, more than two times the national average. Some of these districts are also among the 4 percent where half of all chronically absent students can be found, but a good number of them are smaller, rural and town districts. While most of the districts with high numbers of chronically absent students are urban and suburban, most of those reporting rates of 30 percent or higher are found in rural and town districts. Many of these districts, moreover, have only small populations of students of color.

It is in the rural areas and towns where high rates of chronic absenteeism and poverty are found among white students. Table 6 (p.14) shows a representative sampling of these districts and their characteristics.

Figure 1 (p.14) shows the states that report five or more districts with 30 percent or more chronically absent students. Washington stands out, reporting 119 districts with 30 percent or greater chronic absenteeism rates. This equals more than a fifth of all such districts reported in the U.S., and twice as many as the next closest state, Texas. It is possible that part of this is due to differences in how Washington reported its data compared to other states. But this is not as comforting as it might seem. It is also possible that Washington was more accurate in its reporting than other states, perhaps in fully counting days suspended as absences.

Texas also stands out on this list, reporting 51 primarily rural and town districts spread across a wide geographic area where close to one-third of students are chronically absent.

Arkansas Campaign for Grade-Level Reading

As part of its comprehensive early literacy effort, the Arkansas Campaign for Grade-Level Reading launched Make Every Day Count to help schools, districts and communities track chronic absence as well as develop and implement plans for keeping children in the classroom. Three elementary schools – Marvell-Elaine, Monitor and Parson Hills – saw substantial reductions in chronic absence once they invested in universal supports to engage children and families along with targeted interventions, like home visits and attendance buddies, for students who needed more. Click here to learn more.

Figure 1: States with 5 or More School Districts with Chronic Absence Rates At or Above 30% - 2014 Office of Civil Rights Data

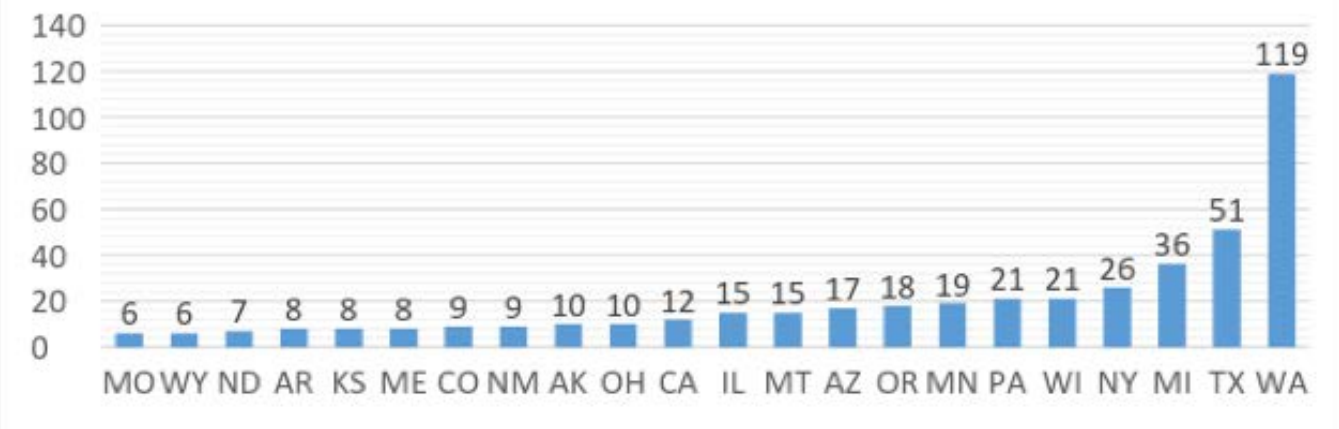


Table 6. Sample Rural Areas and Towns with Chronic Absenteeism Rates of 30 Percent or More 2013-2014

State	School District	Number of Students Chronically Absent (CA)	Percent of All Students CA	Percent FRL	Percent Minority	Enrollment	Locale	Percent of Children 5-17 living in poverty
AL	Colbert County School District	865	31	69	17	2,752	Rural	27
AR	Bradford School District	158	31	78	3	504	Rural	38
ID	Mountain View School District 244	359	30	51	11	1,188	Town	22
KS	Brewster Unified School District 314	32	30	46	14	106	Rural	26
MI	Cass City Public Schools	370	33	57	6	1,110	Rural	21
WI	River Valley School District	404	30	36	5	1,342	Rural	12

Examining where the nation's chronically absent students are found helps us develop a deeper understanding of what it will take to significantly reduce the number of students who are not attending school regularly. Five clear patterns emerge:

1. Chronic absenteeism is highly concentrated. It is nothing short of astounding that half of the nation's chronically absent students can be found in just 4 percent of its districts and 12 percent of its schools.

2. Chronic absenteeism follows poverty wherever it is found in significant concentration. This includes both big cities, which have majority minority populations, and small towns and rural areas that are largely white.

3. Many of the districts with high numbers or rates of chronically absent students are in economically and socially isolated small to medium-sized cities, as well as towns and rural areas. In these places, the geography of chronic absenteeism complicates its solution.

4. The places with the greatest rates of chronic absenteeism have often experienced inter-generational poverty and residential segregation that have isolated primarily African American students in neighborhoods rife with multiple factors that make it harder to attend school regularly. These include substandard housing, exposure to industrial and automotive pollutants — both of which drive higher rates of asthma — limited health and dental care, food insecurity, evictions and greater exposure to violence. These areas most need chronic absenteeism to be addressed with a multi-sector and two-generation response.

5. Large numbers of chronically absent students are also found in perhaps unexpected places, such as large suburban school districts — many with strong reputations — that are experiencing an influx of lower income and more diverse families. In some places, district leaders may not be aware of the extent of the absenteeism challenge. These districts often have resources that can be mobilized to address the challenges that are keeping students from attending school. But the key is recognizing that there is a problem.

Table 7. Concentration of Chronic Absenteeism at School District Level Across States 2013-2014

State	Enrollment	Total Students Chronically Absent (CA)	Percent of Students CA	Total Districts	Number of Districts that Account for…			Percent of Districts that Account for…		
					25% of CA Students	50% of CA Students	75% of CA Students	25% of CA Students	50% of CA Students	75% of CA Students
AL	741,992	92,916	13	147	6	20	45	4	14	31
AK	129,440	29,824	23	53	1	2	5	2	4	9
AZ	1,099,939	181,127	16	577	6	20	54	1	3	9
AR	480,903	55,841	12	249	3	14	52	1	6	21
CA	6,035,665	719,747	12	1,019	14	61	167	1	6	16
CO	879,656	142,456	16	185	2	6	16	1	3	9
CT	547,017	79,288	14	193	4	16	42	2	8	22
DE	132,830	20,225	15	37	2	4	8	5	11	22
FL	2,723,643	121,890	4	74	2	4	11	3	5	15
GA	1,737,405	192,708	11	200	4	15	43	2	8	22
ID	289,583	30,017	10	148	2	7	18	1	5	12
IL	2,052,119	266,528	13	929	3	27	113	0	3	12
IN	1,031,971	100,370	10	355	9	29	80	3	8	23
IA	500,841	63,766	13	343	6	27	97	2	8	28
KS	493,711	69,247	14	295	3	10	41	1	3	14
KY	686,436	99,385	14	175	2	21	58	1	12	33
LA	710,413	94,451	13	115	4	12	28	3	10	24
ME	175,355	25,674	15	183	8	20	40	4	11	22
MD	881,690	133,795	15	25	2	3	7	8	12	28
MA	949,063	120,339	13	397	4	22	85	1	6	21
MI	1,569,469	284,619	18	862	19	90	219	2	10	25
MN	859,347	106,475	12	492	6	27	80	1	5	16
MS	495,250	78,147	16	158	4	18	44	3	11	28
MO	906,918	106,844	12	555	7	25	75	1	5	14
MT	145,050	25,237	17	395	4	10	29	1	3	7
NE	307,061	32,160	10	263	1	3	13	0	1	5
NV	453,521	82,209	18	19	1	1	2	5	5	11
NH	187,021	24,151	13	179	3	15	36	2	8	20
NJ	1,337,765	161,135	12	655	13	51	140	2	8	21
NM	334,239	37,015	11	136	3	7	17	2	5	13
NY	2,737,612	305,457	11	946	6	60	205	1	6	22
NC	1,529,398	211,106	14	243	4	15	41	2	6	17
ND	104,730	10,226	10	170	2	5	13	1	3	8
OH	1,764,066	265,086	15	975	10	82	250	1	8	26
OK	685,574	78,916	12	529	3	16	59	1	3	11
OR	566,101	128,359	23	198	3	11	32	2	6	16
PA	1,737,450	264,603	15	689	4	53	181	1	8	26
RI	140,800	27,155	19	52	1	3	10	2	6	19
SC	747,065	62,961	8	90	5	12	26	6	13	29
SD	135,664	15,859	12	155	1	2	10	1	1	6
TN	989,392	123,982	13	140	1	6	26	1	4	19
TX	5,176,572	606,428	12	1,202	16	53	136	1	4	11
UT	631,578	99,337	16	132	2	5	10	2	4	8
VT	80,457	9,237	11	224	8	23	56	4	10	25
VA	1,277,821	167,967	13	164	3	9	31	2	5	19
WA	1,072,558	264,647	25	305	8	24	59	3	8	19
WV	284,899	40,033	14	56	3	7	17	5	13	30
WI	874,518	139,175	16	451	2	17	75	0	4	17
WY	93,896	13,790	15	55	2	6	14	4	11	25

SIX STEPS FOR USING CHRONIC ABSENCE DATA TO TAKE ACTION

While the data from the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) allows us to gain an understanding of the scale, scope and concentration of chronic absence across the U.S., it is just a starting point. When released, OCR data is already two years old. States and school districts should do their own analyses to reflect real-time data and allow for a more in-depth examination of attendance patterns. Until recently, however, most states and localities have been missing out on the opportunity to use chronic absence data to inform when and how to effectively and efficiently target school and community resources.

Virtually all districts and most states already collect the data needed for monitoring chronic absence. Teachers take attendance every day, often for every period for middle and high school. This data is then submitted on a daily basis to the district, which maintains it in an electronic database, along with a host of other details, ranging from days enrolled, to ethnicity or home language, as well as academic performance. Attendance data is typically uploaded, at least once a year if not more often, to a longitudinal student database.

This existing data is a treasure trove that could be used to inform decisions about when and where to invest the resources, such as health services, public transportation, volunteer services, afterschool programming or preschools. The magnitude of the problem also offers us clues about what types of barriers to attendance students face. When a large number of students and families are affected, the challenges tend to be more systemic in nature and frequently require solutions that involve a combination of school and community practices and resources to resolve.

This section describes how states and districts can leverage the data they have to build a systemic response to reducing chronic absence.

THE SIX KEY STEPS ARE:

- **Step 1. Invest in consistent and accurate data.**
- **Step 2. Use data to understand need and disproportionate impact in order to target resources.**
- **Step 3. Leverage data to identify places getting results.**
- **Step 4. Share data with key stakeholders.**
- **Step 5. Equip stakeholders to unpack barriers and take action.**
- **Step 6. Create shared accountability.**

STEP 1. INVEST IN CONSISTENT AND ACCURATE DATA

The ability to compare results and draw conclusions from any data set depends on the quality, consistency and accuracy of the data upon which it is based. This section offers strategies for ensuring that high-quality chronic absence data is in place.

A. Adopt a Common Definition of Chronic Absence

Chronic absence, broadly defined, refers to missing so much school for any reason that a child is at risk of falling behind academically. Currently, however, definitions of chronic absence still vary. The OCR, for example, defined it as missing 15 days or more of school for any reason for its initial data collection.

Many researchers[7] and a growing number of states, such as California, Connecticut, Indiana, Iowa, Mississippi, New Jersey, Ohio, Oregon, Rhode Island, Tennessee and Washington, use missing 10 percent or more of school as the threshold.

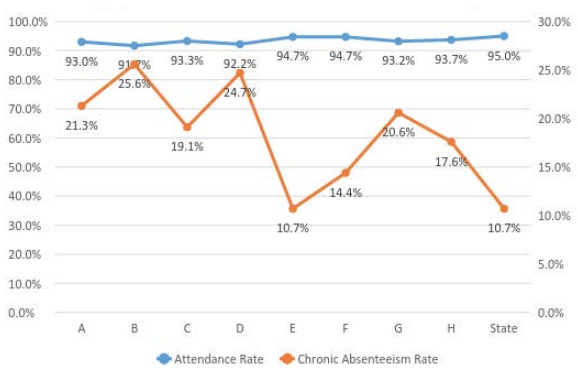
We recommend defining chronic absence as missing 10 percent or more of school for any reason whether the absence is excused, unexcused or due to suspensions. Here are the reasons for using the 10 percent definition.

- It is based on research showing that missing that much school is associated with lower academic performance and dropping out.
- It promotes the early identification of students, because schools and communities can use the 10 percent absence rate as a trigger for intervention from the start of school and throughout the year, rather than waiting for a student to miss 15 or more days before intervening.
- It allows for better detection of attendance problems among highly mobile students who often move too frequently to ever accumulate 15 to 20 days of absence in a single school or district.
- It offers comparable data across states and districts that have school years of different lengths.

In some states, adopting this definition of chronic absence requires changing existing terms. For example, the state of Indiana originally used 10 days of unexcused absences to define both habitual truancy and chronic absence. In order to define what is chronic absence and clarify the difference with truancy, lawmakers passed legislation that defined terms and required schools with a "B" grade to develop chronic absence reduction plans.

Extensive public education about what is chronic absence and how it differs from other attendance metrics, particularly truancy (only unexcused absences) and average daily attendance (how many students show up each day), is often needed to ensure people have a clear understanding. Connecticut, for example, has invested heavily in educating all of its stakeholders about how high levels of chronic absence can be masked when schools only monitor average daily attendance. The state department of education found using graphics like this is extremely helpful for conveying this point. (See Figure 2.)

Figure 2:
Attendance Rate and Chronic Absenteeism, 2013-14
(Eight Alliance Districts with Network Schools)



B. Offer Guidance on How to Count a Day of Instruction or Absence

Another critical element of having comparable data is clarifying what counts as a day of attendance or absence, ideally across each state.

Practice in this area varies, particularly for students in middle and high school, where monitoring period attendance has increasingly become the norm. The Maryland Department of Education, for example, defines a student as being in a full day as long as a student is present for four or more hours. A student who has attended fewer than four hours, but more than two, is counted as being present for half a day. In California, where funding is based upon average daily attendance, students are typically considered present as long as they are marked as such for at least one period during the school day.

Ideally, a state has definitions of attendance and absence that capture missed instructional time as fully as possible. Counting out-of-school suspension as an absence is absolutely critical, since it represents time that a student is not receiving instruction. While typically in-school suspensions are treated as being present in school, we also recommend ensuring that it is coded and tracked so the impact on achievement can be analyzed and addressed. In addition, we recommend tracking half days as well as full days of absence and allowing half days to be added up and converted to full-day absences.

Regardless of the definition used, it should be widely understood across the state so that schools and districts enter data in a consistent manner. Understanding the definition will also help interested stakeholders better interpret the results of a chronic absence analysis.

C. Ensure Standard Protocol Exists for Collecting Attendance Data

A clear attendance protocol that comes with training, communicated to key school staff and implemented with fidelity, can also go a long way towards promoting quality data collection. Such protocols should encourage schools to clearly define who is responsible for entering and monitoring attendance data, and give clear direction on how to document when a student is declared absent or tardy along with what steps should be taken when absences occur and add up.

The extent to which such protocols already exist can vary across states, districts and schools. While the specifics need to be determined at the site level, the district can offer guidance about what should be in place as offered in these examples from Baltimore, Maryland and Los Angeles Unified School District.

The state can provide guidance and technical assistance to help districts put such guidance in place if they don't have it already, as well as create opportunities for districts to share guidance and manuals so they can benefit from each other's work.

D. Create Systems for Assessing Data Accuracy

Most student information systems can help assess accuracy by generating reports that track completion of attendance records and flag any data anomalies that indicate data entry errors. Chronic absence reports will not be reliable if there are long lags in attendance reporting at the school site, particularly if a student is marked "present" by default. States and districts can also institute auditing procedures to check for data accuracy. This can be automated or conducted periodically to spot check for obvious discrepancies.

STEP 2. USE DATA TO UNDERSTAND NEED AND DISPROPORTIONATE IMPACT IN ORDER TO TARGET RESOURCES

Attendance data is a powerful tool for understanding what the level of need is and who needs additional support to get to school to benefit from the instruction. States and districts can use data to take a multi-tiered approach to reducing chronic absence and determine which populations of students most need support.

A. Adopting a Multi-Tiered System of Support

Attendance Works encourages communities to take a comprehensive, multi-tiered system of support approach to reducing chronic absence. In this model, every student has access to the first tier of supports, with additional interventions becoming available if what has been provided is not sufficient to improve their attendance. (See Figure 3 on p.21)

TIER I STRATEGIES are universal approaches that should be available to every student in a school building. They include creating a warm, engaging school climate where students feel welcomed and noticed, as well as helping families recognize that missing just two days a month can cause a student to fall off track academically.

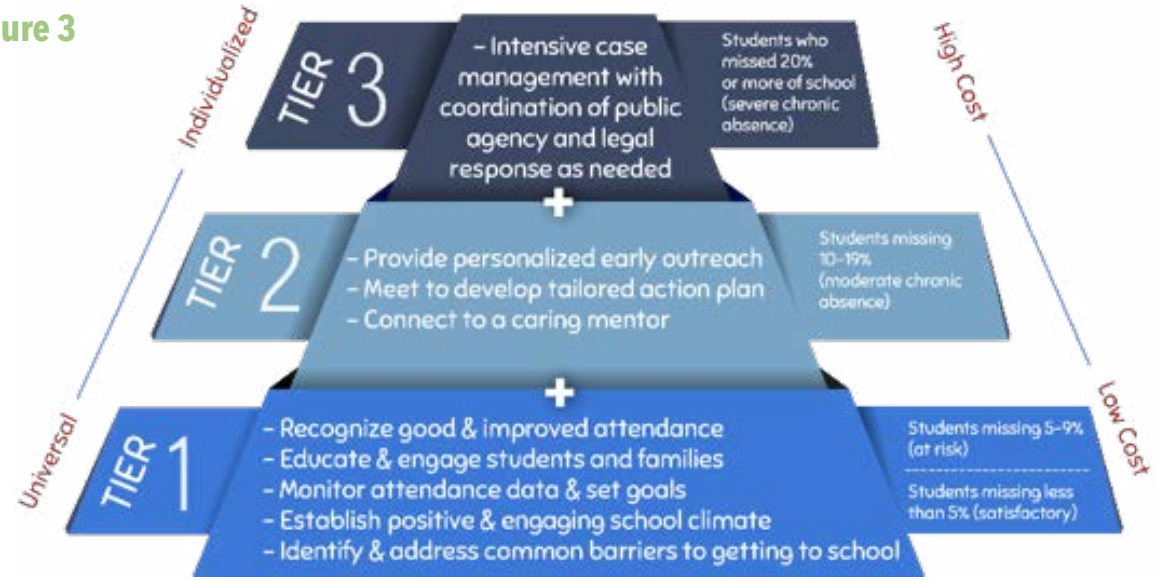
Schools serving larger numbers of students living in poverty should consider practices that address common attendance barriers such as uniform closets, breakfast-in-the-classroom programs, expanded after-school opportunities, and school health programming. Tier 1 supports are often sufficient to maintain the attendance of students missing less than 5 percent of school and improve attendance for students missing 5 to 10 percent.[8]

TIER II STRATEGIES are early interventions designed to help moderately chronically absent students (missing 10–20 percent of school). Attendance data from the prior year as well as year-to-year information about the level of absenteeism can be used to determine which students would benefit most from a higher level of prevention and support. Taking a more personalized approach is essential to engaging students and their families and understanding the challenges they face getting to school.

Tier II supports include home visits and personalized outreach by teachers and other school staff and developing tailored action plans and mentoring, such as the national MBK's Success Mentors model.

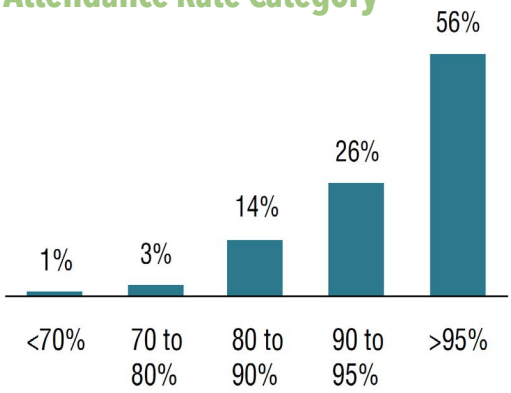
TIER III Strategies are intensive supports offered to severely chronically absent students who face the greatest challenges to getting to school. These students and their families often may already be known to child welfare and juvenile justice systems or are struggling with homelessness. In these cases, a coordinated, cross-agency approach is important for addressing the underlying causes of absenteeism. This approach can also ensure that their involvement with the system, for example, placement in a foster home or required appearances in court, are not causing additional absenteeism. Chronic absence data can help to provide a point of coordination for agency-involved families and students.

Figure 3



Knowing how many students are present at each one of these tiers in a particular school or community helps paint a picture of the resources needed to address the problem. In the December 2015 brief School Attendance, Absenteeism, and Student Success, the Oregon Department of Education used its data to describe a statewide assessment of the intensity of its absenteeism. They found that 56 percent had satisfactory attendance, 26 percent had at-risk attendance, and most of its chronically absent students struggled with moderate levels of absenteeism. Less than 4 percent experienced severe chronic absence. Such information provides Oregonians with critical information about the level of resources that they are likely to need to address their chronic absence challenge and suggests that expanding tier II types of supports could make a significant difference. (See Figure 4.)

Figure 4: Share of Students by Attendance Rate Category



EXAMINING BANDS OF ATTENDANCE

Attendance Works recommends going beyond a simple analysis of how many and which students are chronically absent. Our free data tools, available here, help users to examine how many students fall into these bands of attendance:

- **Severe Chronic Absence**: Missing over 20 percent (or attending less than 80 percent) of school days enrolled
- **Moderate Chronic Absence**: Missing 10–19 percent (or attending 81–90 percent) of school days enrolled
- **At-Risk Attendance**: Missing 6–9.99 percent (or attending 91–95 percent) of school days enrolled
- **Satisfactory Attendance**: Missing less than 5 percent (or attending more than 95 percent) of school days enrolled

These levels of absenteeism can help educators and community partners predict the nature of the interventions needed to improve attendance.

A multi-tiered approach can also inform technical assistance and capacity building.

Districts can offer a basic level of universal support to all schools. Districts could, for example, leverage technology to help all schools generate personalized letters informing each family about how much school their student has missed and reminding them of the impact on academic achievement.[9] In addition, districts can make sure all school administrators have easy access to data on which students are chronically absent, receive tips about how to organize teams to develop a school-wide strategy for improving attendance, and have easy access to flyers, posters and other positive messaging materials. More intensive technical assistance as well as resources (mentoring, health services, quality afterschool programming, etc.) available from community partners could be targeted to schools with the larger numbers and higher rates of students at risk for chronic absence. Data on chronic absence as well as poverty can be used to determine which schools should receive the most help.

States can take a similar approach. States can provide districts with easy-to-use attendance messaging materials and campaigns. States can leverage the resources and ideas offered by Attendance Works in the Count Us In Toolkit. New York's Every Student Present Campaign is an excellent example. States can offer guidelines to districts about how to put in place effective attendance-improvement strategies.

California, for example, provides all districts with access to a School Attendance Review Handbook and offers online examples of standard forms for communicating to parents about attendance. These materials were jointly developed by the California Department of Education in consultation with school districts and county offices of education.

State-level data on chronic absence, poverty levels and academic achievement can be used to identify which districts require greater levels of assistance. High-poverty school districts facing high rates of chronic absence are more likely to need assistance from the state, while relatively more affluent school districts are more likely to be able to secure resources from within their own community to address the needs of chronically absent students. State data can also be used to identify districts facing similar challenges, such as sparsely populated rural districts with high rates of chronic absence, which could benefit from participating in a community of practice to share lessons learned among peers or a more collective or regional approach to technical assistance.

B. Find Out Who is Most Affected

States and communities should also leverage their data systems to examine which populations of students are most affected by chronic absence. They should examine whether differences exist in chronic absence rates by grade, student sub-population (ethnicity, special education, gender, and free and reduced price lunch) as well as neighborhood.

CHRONIC ABSENCE BY GRADE

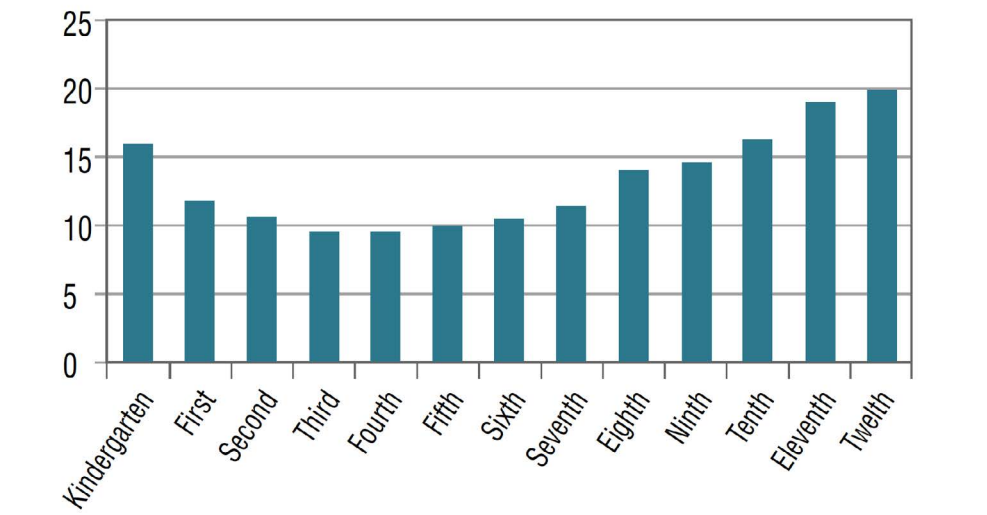
Overall levels of chronic absence for a school or district can easily mask spikes in particular grades. This is especially true in the elementary grades when high levels of kindergarten chronic absence are hidden by the especially good attendance of students in grades three through five.

This graph (Figure 5) depicting the proportion of chronically absent students by grade in the state of Utah in 2010-11 illustrates the U-shaped curve that typically emerges. Chronic absence starts high in kindergarten, reaches the lowest levels in upper elementary school, only to rise again starting in the transition from middle to high school.

It is also important to keep in mind that this curve can vary. Sometimes, for example, depending upon the nature of the transition to middle school, chronic absence might spike in 6th grade. Or if there is a high dropout rate, chronic absence can appear to dip in 11th and 12th grades because the students with the worst attendance are no longer in the data system. OCR's CRDC does not yet collect chronic absence data in preschool, but in communities where it is tracked, the rates are consistently high. Baltimore, however, found that a focus on reducing chronic absence in Head Start programs had an impact on chronic absence from kindergarten forward and an impact on reading scores by third grade.

Understanding which grades are affected most informs the strategy for intervention. If high rates are occurring in the transition years, schools and communities could benefit from intentionally integrating messaging and attendance interventions into initiatives aimed, for example, at helping children enter kindergarten ready to learn, or preparing eighth-graders to navigate the difficult transition to high school.

Figure 5: Chronically Absent Students by Grade, Utah 2010-11



CHRONIC ABSENCE BY STUDENT POPULATION

States and districts can also leverage their more robust data sets to paint more nuanced pictures by, for example, looking at the intersection between grades and other dimensions like income, special education status or ethnicity.

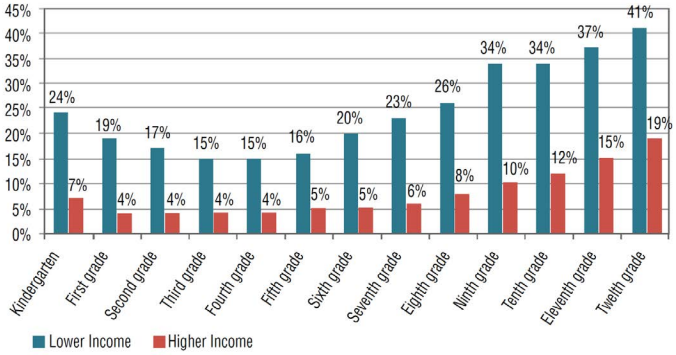
Data from Rhode Island, for example, revealed that chronic absence is not only high in the early grades, it is much higher for children from low-income families and students with disabilities (see Figure 6). On average, chronic absence rates are 17 percentage points higher for students from low-income families than for those from higher-income families, and chronic absence rates for students with disabilities are 9 percentage points higher than for students without disabilities.

Another example is Figure 7 (p.25), an analyses of chronic absence by race and grade for students in Oakland, Calif. The analyses reveal especially high rates of chronic absence in kindergarten, especially for black students. They also demonstrate the importance of looking at both the percentage and number of chronically absent students. Any response from the school or district would need to take into account the large numbers of Latino kindergartners missing too much school, even though their rate of chronic absence was not as high as some other ethnic groups.

Once districts have this data, they can gather statistics from other agencies and enlist a variety of stakeholders (students and families, community leaders, health and social workers and other professionals) in order find out what these patterns suggest about the potential causes of absenteeism and develop possible solutions. For example, are the disproportionately high levels of chronic absence among the lowest income children a reflection of particular economic challenges facing their families?

An early effort to address chronic absence at Robert L. Bailey IV Elementary School in Providence, R.I., for example, discovered that a major cause of absenteeism was the large number of parents working the night shift who fell asleep in the morning before they could bring their kindergartners to school.[10] Are high rates of chronic absence among special education students related to their health needs or a result of a lack of appropriate educational placements? Are the high levels of chronic absence among African American youngsters in Oakland, Calif., related to asthma, at least in part by early exposure to environmental hazards in their neighborhoods? Information about the ethnicity of chronically absent students also informs decisions about which school staff and community partners would be best equipped to provide outreach and support. A key

Figure 6: Rhode Island School Year 2013-14 Chronic Absence Rates by Income Level



Rhode Island School Year 2013-14 Chronic Absence Rates – IEPs

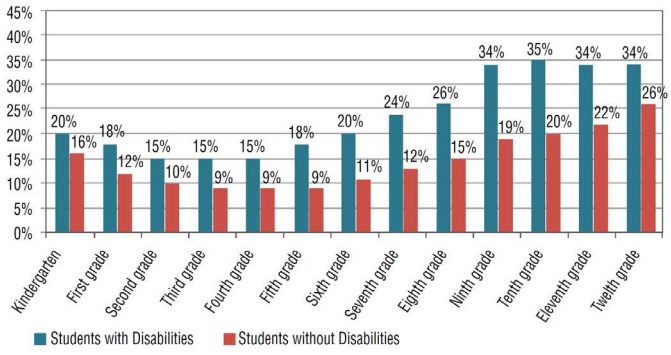
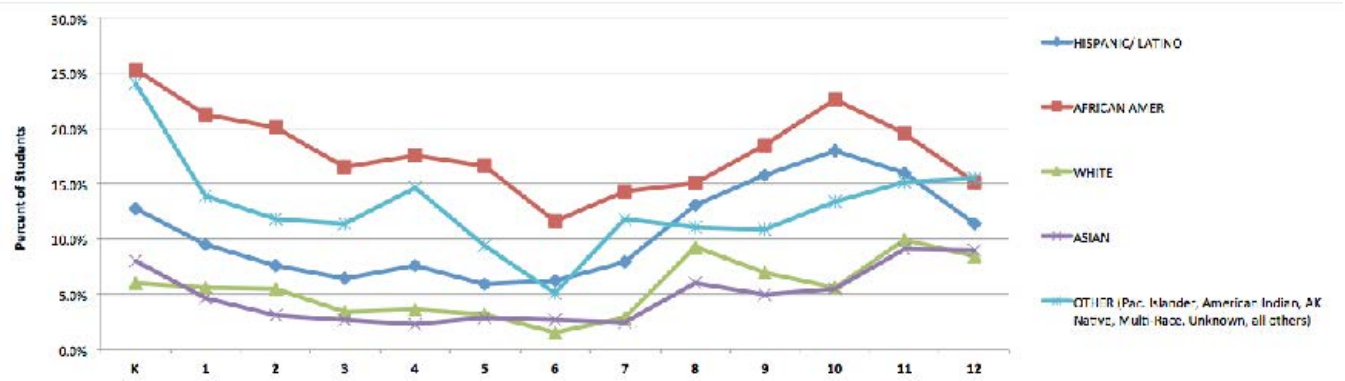
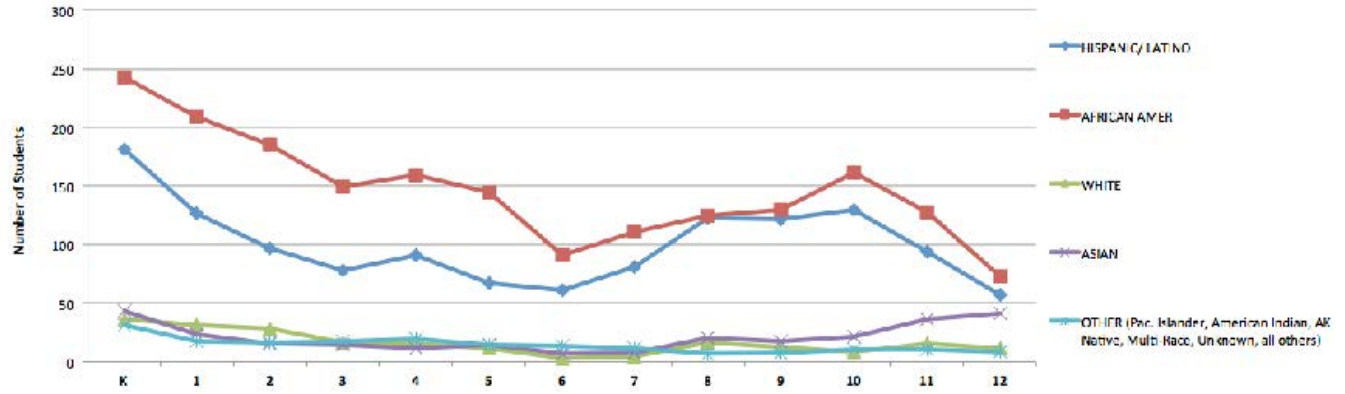


Figure 7

What percentage of students are chronically absent by race/ethnicity and grade?



How many students are chronically absent by race/ethnicity and grade?



Source: Oakland Unified School District

component of engaging families is having a deep understanding of their home culture as well as the ability to communicate in their home language.

Data should also be used to confirm whether the national trends showing chronic absence disproportionately affects low-income students of color (Native American, African American and Latino student populations) hold true for a particular state, district or school or whether it reveals a different reality. In the brief Counting the Future, which paints a picture of the impact and the prevalence of chronic absence in Mississippi, the data revealed that white students, not African American students, had the highest rates of chronic absence. The Mississippi Department of Education and its partner, Mississippi Kids Count, are now exploring what might explain this situation.

Incidentally, data from the state of Georgia also reveals a higher incidence of chronic absence among white students.[11]

CHRONIC ABSENCE BY GEOGRAPHY

Analyzing the connection between chronic absence and where students live is also important. State officials could examine whether chronic absence is found in equal measure across the state or more likely to affect particular regions or types of communities (rural, urban or suburban).

Within a district, an even finer analysis can be very helpful. Consider an analysis, conducted by the Baltimore Education Research Consortium, of chronic absence data for preschoolers and kindergartners in

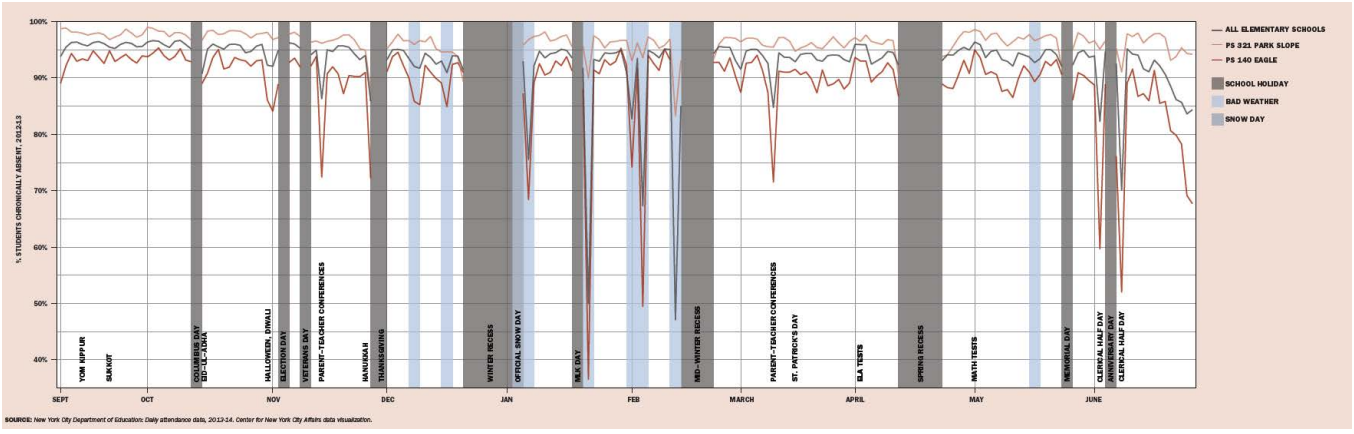
the city of Baltimore. While chronic absence was widespread in preschool throughout the city, overlaying preschool and kindergarten data revealed that children living in a handful of neighborhoods were at much higher risk of multiple years of chronic absence. Informed by this data analysis, the Baltimore City Department of Social Services determined it would target those same neighborhoods with an initiative that involved home visits from family preservation workers to offer support and services. As a result, these family preservation workers were able to help families addressing a range of challenges, such as asthma, unsafe paths to school, and physical and behavioral health needs, which then resulted in reduced levels of chronic absence.

AVERAGE DAILY ATTENDANCE DATA

While this brief has emphasized the use of chronic absence data, other forms of attendance data, especially average daily attendance, can also be informative. In particular, monitoring fluctuations in average daily attendance over the course of a school year can help a district or school identify the need for universal strategies, such as offering special incentives the day after a holiday, rethinking the approach to parent–teacher conferences, or ensuring all students have access to rain gear or warm winter coats before bad weather sets in.

Consider the example created by the New School as part of its report A Better Picture of Poverty: What Chronic Absenteeism and Risk Load Reveal About NYC's Lowest-Income Elementary Schools. The graph (Figure 8) shows the average daily attendance for three schools for every day of the school year from the months of September through February. The school in deep red served students facing the greatest number of risk factors related to family, school and neighborhood social and economic conditions. It also illustrates that all schools suffered from decreases in attendance during times of bad weather (depicted by the light gray columns), school holidays, and also parent–teacher conferences. The school with students facing the largest economic challenges was notably affected the most.

Figure 8



Source: Center for New York City Affairs, the New School

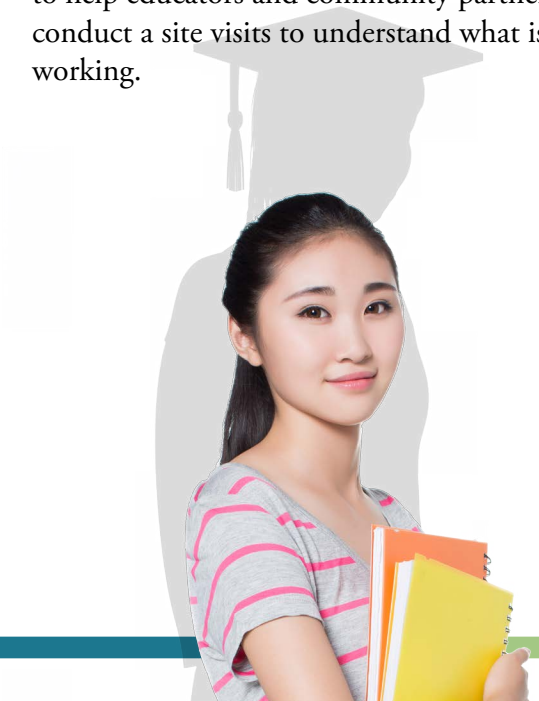
STEP 3. LEVERAGE DATA TO IDENTIFY PLACES GETTING RESULTS

Data can also identify districts, schools or communities that have markedly lower levels of chronic absence despite facing a number of challenges that can contribute to barriers to attendance. Chronic absence is considered a good candidate for an indicator of school quality precisely because multiple studies have found variations in levels of chronic absence across schools facing similar levels of poverty and serving similar ethnic populations. Typically, such differences do not occur by chance, but instead are a reflection of something the district or school — often together with families and community partners — are doing to promote attendance and reduce barriers to getting to class.[12]

Technology can make it easier to compare chronic rates across districts or schools with similar demographics in order to find these positive outliers. The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction for Washington, for example, built in the capacity to make such comparisons when it publicly released an interactive chronic absence database for its school districts in February 2016.[13] Attendance Works' free District Attendance Tracking Tool includes a spreadsheet showing every school along with its chronic absence rates and the percent of students receiving free and reduced price lunch. District staff, who can also bring to bear additional information about schools and their student populations, can use this spreadsheet to identify schools that have lower chronic absence rates than peers with similar demographics.

Identifying these positive outliers is important for a number of reasons. They offer concrete and real proof that chronic absence isn't inevitable but is something that schools and communities working together can change. Without these inspiring stories, educators might assume that they cannot do anything to address chronic absence, when in fact improving attendance depends upon their taking responsibility for creating a warm and engaging school climate and being willing to collaborate with community partners. The disproportionate impact of chronic absence on children from communities of color and those living in poverty makes this strategy even more essential. These concrete positive examples are necessary for countering negative stereotypes that students aren't in school because their families simply do not care.

Leveraging the power of positive outliers also requires investing in how they are documented and shared with others. The story must be told in a way that highlights the practices, programs or policies that allowed for a different result to be achieved. Reports such as Showing Up Matters: The State of Chronic Absenteeism in New Jersey, Showing Up, Staying In by Oregon's Children's Institute, or REL West's Reducing Chronic Absence video offer excellent examples of how bright spots can be thoughtfully used to inspire action. Attendance Works offers this Positive Outlier Toolkit to help educators and community partners conduct a site visits to understand what is working.



STEP 4. SHARE DATA WITH KEY STAKEHOLDERS

Chronic absence data only makes a difference if it is available to key stakeholders positioned to use it to take action individually and collectively. What each stakeholder needs to see and how often depends on who they are and how they will use the data. Students and families, as well as school staff or community parents who work closely with them, need it most frequently so they can take immediate action to prevent further absences.[14] Missing 10 percent of the prior academic year and just missing 10 percent (just two days) of the first month of classes is an early warning sign of poor attendance.[15] Real-time data is a critical element of an early warning system that positions parents, school staff and community partners to notice and address absences before students miss so much school they have fallen academically behind. Such an approach can be integrated with a broader strategy for early warning that also incorporates a focus on other indicators such as those referenced in Everyone Graduate's Attendance, Behavior and Course Failure method.

The nature of the data and the frequency of reporting change when the purpose is less for early intervention, and more for program planning and accountability. For these purposes, aggregate reports are needed depict overall patterns so stakeholders can help unpack causes of absenteeism, develop solutions and monitor if progress is being made. Such aggregate portraits of absenteeism should not only highlight chronic absence but also offer to analyze attendance by the bands described earlier (satisfactory, at-risk, moderate chronic absence and severe chronic absence).

Aggregated reports should make it easy to examine patterns by school, grade and sub-population as well as review trends for the past several years. Such aggregate information can be widely shared without raising concerns about confidentiality.

How data should be shared depends upon local conditions. In a few states, such as Hawaii, the department of education can generate all of the needed reports because attendance data is uploaded daily into the state longitudinal student data system. A more common scenario is that each school district has its own student information system and attendance data is uploaded at least once a year, though sometimes more frequently, to a state longitudinal student database. In this case, districts must take responsibility for generating frequently needed reports and real-time dashboards. In Connecticut, for example, the State Department of Education (SDE) makes annual chronic absence data across a four-year period by district, school, grade and student sub-group available online through EdSight, SDE's searchable web-portal. In the meantime, districts within Connecticut, such as New Britain, use their own data systems to generate biweekly reports for schools, including lists of students who need attention because of chronic absence.

Table 8 (p.29) outlines the key stakeholder groups that should be priorities for receiving chronic absence data. It also offers suggestions, by group, for what data they should see, how they could use it and how often it would be needed.

DIPLOMAS NOW targets attendance as it helps the toughest middle and high schools in America's largest cities prepare students to graduate from high school ready for college or a career. This innovative model improves a school's curriculum and instruction while providing students with the right support to improve their ABCs – attendance, behavior, and course performance. Partnering with 41 middle and high schools across the country, it unites three national nonprofits: JohnsHopkins University's Talent Development Secondary, Communities in Schools and City Year. Preliminary results show a 17 percent reduction in chronic absence among 6th graders. Read more about Diplomas Now here.

Table 8 Sharing Chronic Absence Data with Key Stakeholders

Who Should Have Access?	What Data Do They Need? How Often?	What Could They Do With It?
Students and Families	Daily access to their own attendance data with an alert if absences are adding up. Aggregate attendance data (showing bands of attendance) for their school broken down by grade and subgroup on quarterly basis.	Understand they need to avoid unnecessary absences or seek help to address barriers. Offer insights about causes of absenteeism and potential solutions and hold schools accountable.
Teachers, Counselors, Social Workers and Attendance Staff	Daily access to attendance data for students they work with plus an alert if absences are adding up. Aggregate attendance data (showing bands of attendance) for their school broken down by grade and subgroup on quarterly basis.	Acknowledge good attendance and reach out if absences are adding up. Offer insights about causes of absenteeism and potential solutions.
Principals and School Attendance Teams	Daily access to attendance data for individual students Weekly or biweekly lists of chronically absent students Aggregate absenteeism data on monthly or quarterly basis with comparison to district norms and schools with similar demographics.	Ensure the needs of chronically absent students are being addressed. Develop and maintain a comprehensive tiered approach to improving attendance and identify when programmatic or policy changes are needed.
District Leadership and Local Policymakers	Aggregate absenteeism data (including three-year trends district-wide, by grade, school, subpopulation and neighborhood.	Assess effectiveness of local policies and practice for reducing chronic absence; identify exemplary schools well as those needing extra support.
State Dept. of Education and other State Policymakers	Aggregate absenteeism data (including three year trends) statewide by grade, district, school and student subpopulation.	Assess effectiveness of state policies and practice; hold districts accountable for improving practice; identify exemplary districts and those needing extra supports.
Community Partners	Aggregate absenteeism data (including three year trends) statewide by grade, district, school and subpopulation. Attendance data for students served by their agencies.	Identify districts and schools in need of their support and resources and help with unpacking and addressing barriers to attendance. Help students and families overcome attendance barriers and evaluate impact of services.
General Public	Aggregate absenteeism data (including 3 year trends) statewide by grade, district, school and subpopulation on annual basis.	Hold districts, schools and policy makers accountable for reducing chronic absence

STEP 5. EQUIP STAKEHOLDERS TO UNPACK BARRIERS AND TAKE ACTION

Once data is available, people need to be equipped to use it to understand why absences are occurring in the first place in order to develop the appropriate solutions and take appropriate action. This is as true for the parent wondering what to do when she discovers her high school student is at risk for dropping out because he has missed so many classes as it is for the superintendent and mayor joining forces to mobilize their community to reduce chronic absence. All stakeholders will be better able to understand barriers to attendance and their implications for action if they can:

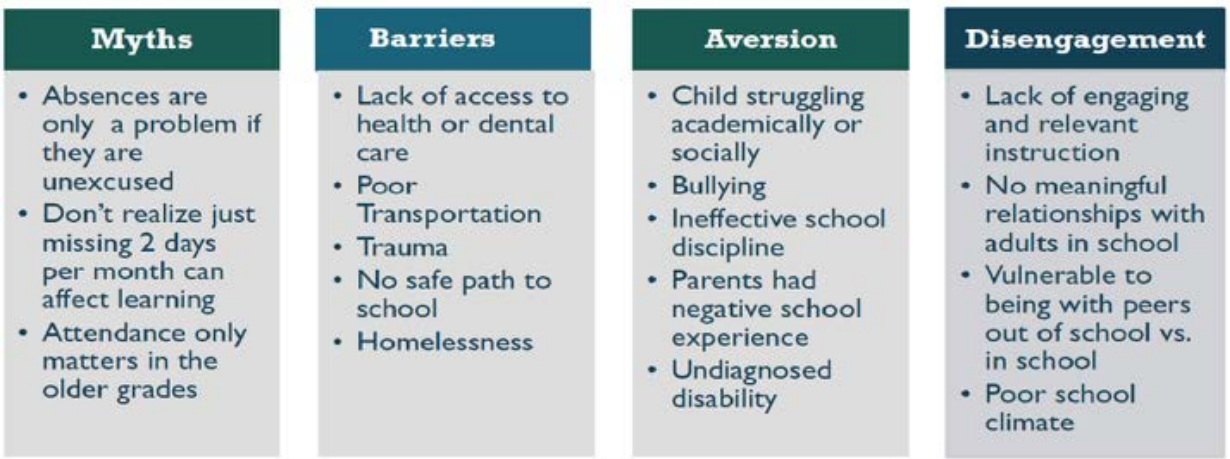
- **A. Understand what contributes to chronic absence**
- **B. Draw upon qualitative not just quantitative data matters**
- **C. Gain access to data across agencies and disciplines**
- **D. Participate in a team or forum that supports collective data-driven action**

A. Understand What Contributes to Chronic Absence

Students typically miss school for reasons related to four broad categories — myths, barriers, aversion and disengagement — depicted in Figure 9 below. Understanding these factors can help with responding to the needs of an individual student and identifying what the biggest challenges are for the largest numbers of students so that appropriate programmatic interventions can be put in place.

Users of chronic absence data should also know that the size and scale of the problem can also offer clues about the nature of the attendance challenges. Severe chronic absence often reflects when students and families face multiple challenges, perhaps across all four categories. If only a small number of students are chronically absent, then issues are more likely to be individual in nature. Large numbers of chronically absent students in a particular school or neighborhood is often a sign of more systemic challenges.

Figure 9



B. Drawing Upon Qualitative as Well as Quantitative Data Matters

Ideally qualitative, not just quantitative, data is available to deepen the analysis of the factors contributing to chronic absence for a particular student, school, community or state. Not everything is easily measured, and perceptions about what makes it difficult to get to school can have a tremendous impact on behavior. Qualitative information helps ground strategies in a deeper understanding of the lived experience of the students and families who are struggling with chronic absence.

Students and their families, themselves, are especially critical sources of this information. Communities can solicit their insights through a variety of techniques ranging from interviews, focus groups and surveys to looking for patterns in data collected from families by case managers. In Baltimore, one research effort engaged preschool parents in unpacking barriers to attendance by distributing disposable cameras and encouraging parents to take pictures of what makes it difficult to get to school or preschool. One participating parent, for example, shared a photo of a daunting and wide road without a cross walk.

Attendance Works has developed this guidance for drawing upon a combination of qualitative and quantitative sources of information that can shed light on the factors that contribute to chronic absence in schools.

C. Access to Data Across Agencies and Disciplines

Access to data across agencies and disciplines is an extremely helpful tool given that the barriers that keep students from getting to class occur in such a wide variety of settings — home, school and community. A Better Picture of Poverty: What Chronic Absenteeism and Risk Load Reveal About NYC's Lowest-Income Elementary Schools identified 18 factors that when combined represent the "risk load" of a school. These included indicators such as the percentage of the student body living in temporary or public housing, the number of students' families that have at some time faced allegations of child abuse or neglect, and adult educational attainments in the community served by the school as well as a school's own stability and viability, including data on school safety, turnover among administrators and classroom. Schools with the highest levels of persistent chronic absence had the highest number of risks. How many and which risks were present, however, varied tremendously across schools in New York City. The results of the risk load analysis offer schools important insights on which and how much outside support is needed to address chronic absence in a given school community.

Another innovative example is MapLIT, an interactive mapping tool developed by Read On Arizona, a statewide literacy effort associated with the national Campaign for Grade Level Reading. Located at www.ReadOnArizona.org/MapLIT, this tool provides communities with geographic views of select data for all Arizona public and charter elementary schools and preschool locations, including attendance and retention rates, chronic absenteeism, race/ethnicity, reading assessment scores, full-day kindergarten sites, library locations, school district boundaries, school locations and much more.

D. Participating in a Team or Forum that Supports Collective Action

Data alone, however, doesn't change practice or policy. A key component of equipping key stakeholders is to take action in ensuring that they are part of a team or forum for reviewing the data and determining how to take action to ensure students receive the supports they need. Such teams or forums are needed at every level of the system, school, district and community. Their success depends upon their ability to meet regularly and involve the right people and organizations with the resources and the authority to address the barriers that are identified from reviewing the data. Additional key ingredients include school, district or community leaders who have the authority and credibility to convene the meetings as well as staff to help organize the agendas and ensure follow-through.

STEP 6. CREATE SHARED ACCOUNTABILITY

Passed in December 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which guides federal investments in elementary and secondary education, creates new opportunities for using data to create public accountability around chronic absence. Chronic absence is already a required reporting element under ESSA. State Education Agencies must release an annual state report card describing how the state is meeting Title I requirements, including rates of chronic absenteeism. Local Education Agencies are also required to prepare and disseminate report cards to the public that include the same minimum requirements as the SEA report cards (e.g., the requirement to include rates of chronic absenteeism).

States have the option of going beyond public reporting to including chronic absence as an indicator of school quality and student engagement in new ESSA accountability systems. By building chronic absence into ESSA accountability systems, states could ensure that districts and schools use chronic absence data to measure progress and identify where additional support is needed to improve student performance. ESSA could help ensure that schools with high rates of chronic absence are required to examine the extent of the chronic absence challenge and, if chronic absence is affecting a significant percentage of their students, to describe how they will improve student attendance, especially among the most vulnerable populations.

Multiple states have already built accountability into their systems prior to passage of the ESSA. Indiana, for example, approved legislation in 2013 that defines chronic absence as a separate measure from truancy, adds chronic absence to school data reports and requires addressing absenteeism in school improvement plans for all but the highest-performing schools. California's Local Control Funding Formula requires districts to track and monitor chronic absence as part of their local control accountability plans, which are required for receiving state funding. Connecticut recently launched the Next Generation Accountability System. Chronic absenteeism is one of 12 indicators included in this new, broader set of performance measures aimed at offering a more comprehensive and holistic picture of how schools and students are performing.

Connecticut has leveraged data in its longitudinal student data system, along with local success stories to help key stakeholders across sectors understand that that chronic absence is an overlooked challenge and opportunity that could be used to improve achievement. Connecticut has built chronic absence into its accountability system for school improvement and has started to see statewide reductions. Read here for more information.

States should carefully consider exercising this option as they develop their accountability systems over the course of the 2016–17 school year. As part of this process, they should consider combining chronic absence with other measures of engagement and school climate. Incorporating suspension, expulsion and student mobility rates as well as school climate measures in addition to chronic absence is a holistic approach that can offer important insights to schools about how to improve student achievement. See Table 9 (p.33).

See this policy brief, Chronic Absence: Our Top Pick for the ESSA School Quality or Student Success Indicator, for more information.

Table 9 How Chronic Absence Fits as ESSA Indicator	
ESSA Indicators Must:	
Be applicable to every student.	All enrolled students are included in attendance counts; no students are excluded.
Provide summary and disaggregated data.	Chronic absence rates can be reported separately for all subgroups of students in a school, district and state.
Be comparable across a state's school districts.	States already have protocols that standardize attendance taking and reporting. The U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights has recently required states to track and report a standard measure of chronic absence. As a result, chronic absence rates will be comparable within states and, unlike many indicators, across the nation.
Be able to distinguish differences in performance among schools.	Chronic absence levels vary substantially among students and schools within any district or state. These variations are not random; they represent meaningful differences in student engagement, achievement and success. [16]
Be valid.	Test scores are measures of test success, which can be strongly or weakly related to subject matter mastery. Chronic absence, on the other hand, measures how much school has been missed.
Be reliable.	Counting errors aside, taking attendance and computing chronic absence repeatedly will yield consistent results.
Have a proven impact on achievement.	An abundance of studies link chronic absence to academic achievement. Click here for a compilation of research on chronic absence and its relationship to student success.

CONCLUSION

Chronic absence is a national crisis that we cannot afford to ignore. A day lost to school absenteeism is a day lost to learning. It is a challenge affecting learning in nearly every state.

The good news is a growing number of communities have shown that chronic absence is not inevitable. These success stories prove that improving attendance is possible, even in the most challenged communities. The key is everyone – students, families, schools and community partners – using real-time data to monitor when absences are adding up, and working together to address challenges to getting to school before students have lost too much time in the classroom. While solutions always will need to be tailored to local realities, much has already been learned about what works to reduce chronic absence.

Chronic absence data, especially at the state level, can be used to identify districts and communities that will require the greatest levels of support given the size, scale and intensity of their chronic absence challenge. Because of the size of the challenge before us, it is essential to use data to make strategic decisions about how to most effectively target resources.

Implementation of the federal Every Student Succeeds Act offers an unprecedented opportunity to advance effective practices for reducing chronic absence at scale. The law's reporting requirement will create more public accountability for examining this previously overlooked metric. At the same time, it is important to recognize that the biggest risk of inclusion in ESSA is that schools and districts will treat chronic absence simply as a bureaucratic reporting requirement. Real progress will only be made if districts, schools and their community partners fully recognize its value as an actionable data point that helps them take collective action that has a direct impact on improving outcomes, especially for our most vulnerable students.

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