



MOVING UP: The Importance of Attendance in Addressing the Achievement Gap in Mississippi

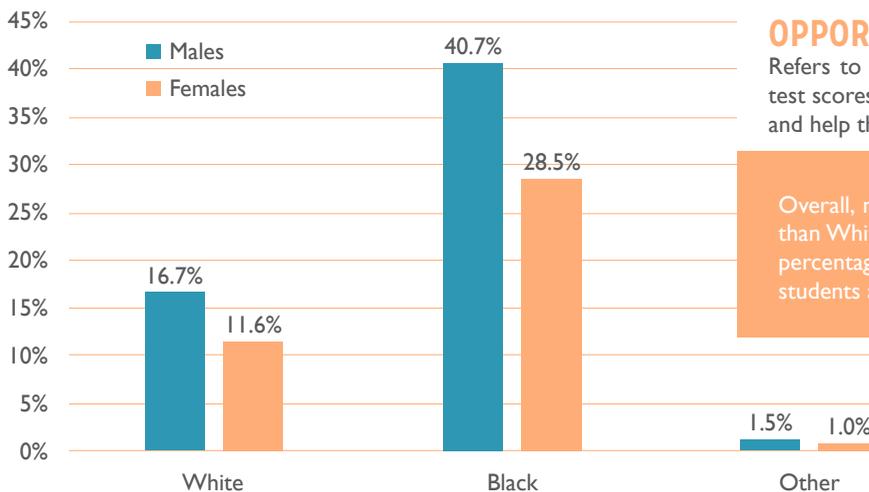
For the past two years, Mississippi KIDS COUNT has studied school attendance patterns among Mississippi public school students and the impact those patterns can make on student achievement, particularly among students in the lowest-achieving quartile. Since good attendance is one predictor of student success, it is important to examine chronic absence rates among Mississippi students. Defined as the percentage of students who miss ten percent or more of the school year, including excused and unexcused absences (about 18 days in a 180-day school year), chronic absence is an important indicator of whether students are at academic risk and how likely they are to improve their achievement levels.

Based on a model conducted by the Denver Public school system (DPS), researchers from Mississippi KIDS COUNT looked at trends impacting students who fall into what the Denver system calls the “Opportunity Quartile.”¹ The term refers to students who based on state achievement scores are most in need of significant intervention (lowest achieving quartile) to get them back on track for graduation.

Using the framework established by DPS, Mississippi KIDS COUNT took a look at who makes up the state’s Opportunity Quartile. Like Denver, most students in Mississippi’s Opportunity Quartile are males of color. Using third grade MCT2 language arts test scores provided by the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE), researchers tracked students from 3rd to 8th grades to determine what factors predict whether students move out of the quartile by the beginning of high school. While the majority of students in Mississippi’s Opportunity Quartile remain there, good attendance is an important predictor of whether students are able to move out.

¹Denver Public Schools, Assessment Research & Evaluation. (2015, May). Moving out of the opportunity quartile. Retrieved from http://dpsare.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/ResearchBrief_OpportunityQuartile1415.pdf

WHO MAKES UP MISSISSIPPI’S OPPORTUNITY QUARTILE?



OPPORTUNITY QUARTILE:

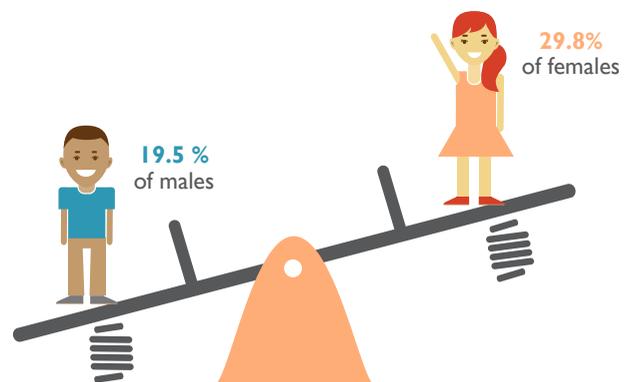
Refers to the bottom 25% of students who, based upon MCT2 test scores, need significant intervention to raise their test scores and help them reach their potential.

Overall, more Black students are in the Opportunity Quartile than White students. Black male students make up the largest percentage of the quartile, at 40.7%, followed by Black female students at 28.5%.

WHO MOVES OUT OF THE OPPORTUNITY QUARTILE?

Overall, only 26% of students who were in the Opportunity Quartile in 3rd grade had moved up by 8th grade, suggesting that the academic trajectories of most students (74%) are set by 3rd grade. This finding underscores the importance of intervening early, before third grade, to ensure that students have the opportunity to reach their full potential.

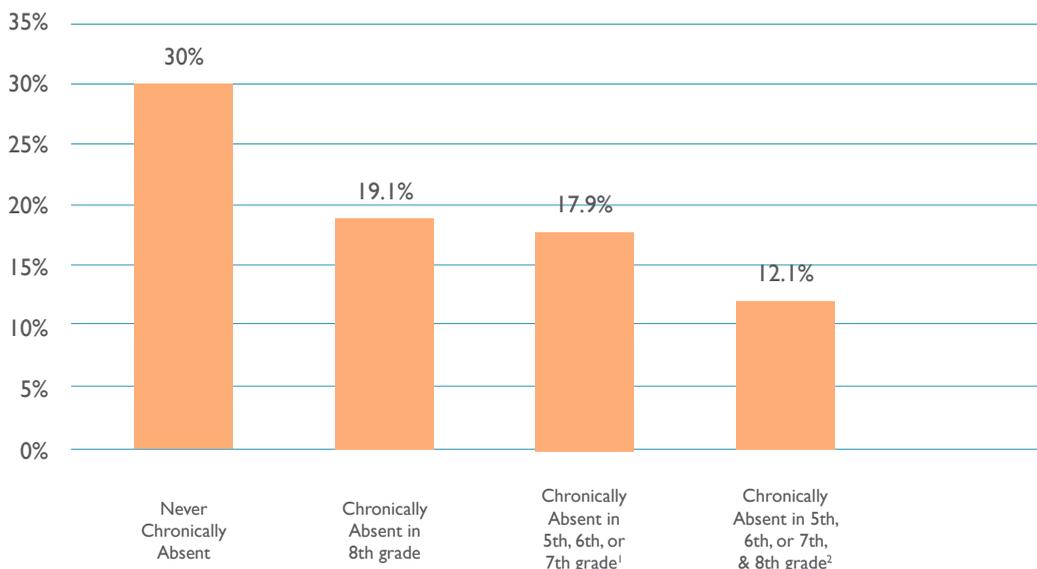
We also assessed whether students’ race, gender, and attendance patterns predicted whether third graders in Mississippi’s Opportunity Quartile had significantly improved their literacy achievement by 8th grade. Overall, Black and White students moved out of the quartile at about the same rate (23.5% versus 23.9%). We found that there were significant differences between males and females. While only 29.8% of girls in the Opportunity Quartile moved out, an even smaller percentage of boys (19.5%) moved out.



HOW DOES ATTENDANCE IMPACT THE OPPORTUNITY QUARTILE?

Attendance plays a significant role in movement out of Mississippi's Opportunity Quartile. Students who are chronically absent, overall, are less likely to move out than those who are never chronically absent. However, outcomes are worse for students who are chronically absent in the year of the test and in previous years.

Of those who were never chronically absent, 30% moved out of the Opportunity Quartile by 8th grade. Students who were chronically absent in the year of the test AND in a previous year had the worst outcome; 12.1% moved out of the opportunity quartile. These students were also 68.5% less likely to move out than students who were never chronically absent. These results suggest that while chronic absence in any year is detrimental, chronic absence in the years before 8th grade is especially detrimental to students' chances to move out of the Opportunity Quartile.



¹Chronically absent in at least one year of 5th, 6th, or 7th grade, but **NOT** 8th grade

²Chronically absent in any one year of 5th, 6th, or 7th grade, **AND** were chronically absent in 8th grade

METHODOLOGY

The Opportunity Quartile analysis was conducted on a cohort of Mississippi public school students who were third graders in the 2008-09 school year. Students were assigned to this quartile (the bottom 25%) based on their raw scale score on the MCT2 language arts test. By the 2013-14 school year, this same cohort reached 8th grade (the final year of MCT2 testing). Once again, students were assigned to the quartile based on their raw scale score of their final MCT2 language arts test. A "change in quartile" variable was then constructed to determine if a given student had moved out of the quartile, or remained in the quartile.

ACTION PLANS FOR STAKEHOLDERS

INTERVENE EARLY to promote reading proficiently by third grade. Only 26% of students who were in the Opportunity Quartile were no longer there in eighth grade.

TARGET INTERVENTIONS to ensure that students have an equal opportunity for achievement. Females were 1.7 times more likely to move out of the Opportunity Quartile than males.

IDENTIFY students who are considered at-risk for chronic absence based on attendance the previous year or within the first two months of the school year. Students who were persistently chronically absent, had 68% lower odds of moving out of the Opportunity Quartile than those who were never chronically absent.

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