A Guide to the Attendance Works
Online Preschool Chronic Absence Reports

Some "How To's" for Using Chronic Absence Data

The Attendance Works chronic absence charts and reports capture the data necessary to collect, analyze, and act on the attendance requirements of the recently revised Head Start Performance Standards and the preschool recommendations in the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

The Head Start standards require Head Start agencies to monitor children's attendance individually, engage families in understanding the importance of consistent attendance, and work with families and community partners to constructively address the issues that may impede children's development of positive attendance habits.

Through collaborative agreements with Attendance Works, the technology providers ChildPlus, COPA and myHeadStart have added an online version of the Attendance Works Preschool Attendance Tracking Tool to their online attendance reports. Others, such as Shine, have created their own form of online chronic absence reports to answer similar questions. Look for them in the attendance reports section on each technology provider's website.

Online data makes it convenient for programs to gather attendance data across multiple months. This makes it possible to analyze attendance and absence patterns, and target your strategies to reduce chronic absence and increase consistent attendance.

What is Chronic Absence?

Chronic absence is defined as missing 10 percent or more of preschool or school, whether those absences are excused, unexcused or suspensions. Research shows that from preschool forward, missing instructional time, regardless of the reason, undercuts student achievement, including meeting the important milestone of reading by grade three.
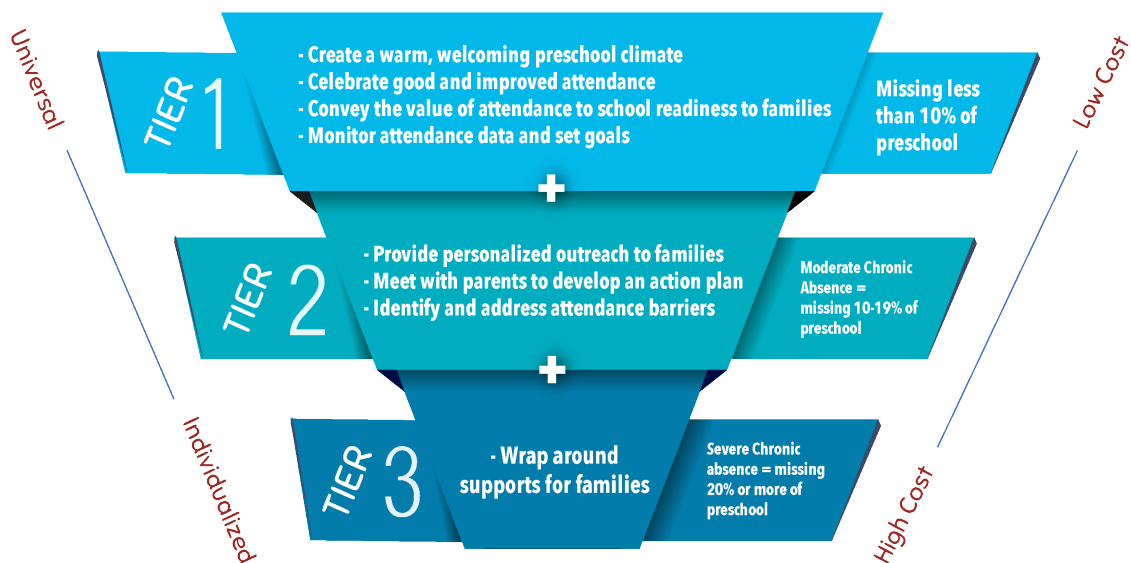
Chronic absence is different from truancy (unexcused absences) and Average Daily Attendance (ADA), which often masks attendance problems among the most vulnerable children. Tracking chronic absence identifies attendance challenges that can be addressed with early intervention and school readiness, productive transition to kindergarten and ultimately, students' lifelong achievement.

Defining Terms Related to Attendance

Attendance Works charts chronic absence in three tiers defined by the level of chronic absence that each individual student exhibits. Each tier generates a set of strategies to support improving consistent attendance.

- **Tier 1 = Not Chronically Absent**: Missing less than 10 percent of total school days
    This tier uses ongoing, universal messaging and recognition to support chronic absence prevention and the development of strong attendance routines.

- **Tier 2 = Moderate chronic absence:** Missing 10-19.99 percent of total school days
    This tier identifies preschool families in need of individualized outreach to support understanding the importance of consistent attendance. This outreach also can help problem solve around barriers that can be reduced through collaboration.

- **Tier 3 = Severe chronic absence**: Missing 20 percent or more of total school days
    This tier identifies preschool families that may need support from community resources, and individualized outreach to address barriers not readily addressed by the preschool alone.

Universal

Low Cost

TIER 1
- Create a warm, welcoming preschool climate
- Celebrate good and improved attendance
- Convey the value of attendance to school readiness to families
- Monitor attendance data and set goals

Missing less than 10% of preschool

+

TIER 2
- Provide personalized outreach to families
- Meet with parents to develop an action plan
- Identify and address attendance barriers

Moderate Chronic Absence = missing 10-19% of preschool

+

TIER 3
- Wrap around supports for families

Severe Chronic absence = missing 20% or more of preschool

Individualized

High Cost

The online Attendance Works reports make it easy to track absence rates. The charts and reports are available by agency, by site or by classroom to help site level staff identify patterns that warrant further attention. The charts and reports can also establish strategies that are targeted to need and district / agency level staff to identify places in need of additional support.

The charts provide an at-a-glance visualization of attendance rates and can be annotated by number of children, percent of children or both, based on your selections on the report filter page. The statistical reports identify the cumulative attendance rate of individual children in each category to help in the analysis of challenges to be addressed.

Additional program and demographic filters for reports, such as gender, English Language Learners, special needs students, and other demographic considerations can provide meaningful insights for strategic planning, for professional development, for family engagement and for research purposes. These additional filters are particularly useful in larger agencies, districts, states and regions where the scale of data in the subsets can be meaningful.

Among the basic Analysis Questions this new data tool can help you explore are:

1. **Which students in the preschool** need monitoring/intervention?

2. How do attendance patterns differ:
   - Across a **set of preschool sites?**
   - Across a **set of preschool classrooms?**
   - Among students from **different racial/ethnic backgrounds**?

3. Are attendance patterns **changing over time**?

   If so, what are the trends over time for different age levels?

Expanded Analysis Questions the data tool can help you explore are:

- How do attendance patterns differ:
  - Between **boys and girls**?
  - Between **full-day and half-day** programs?
  - Between **full-week and part-week** programs?
  - Between **children with special needs** and children without special needs?
  - Between **English Language Learners** and students proficient in English?
  - Between students who have **health insurance** and those who do not?
  - Among students from different zip codes?
  - Among students depending on different preschool **funding source**?

The tool provides the basic information needed for Head Start agencies to create meaningful strategies supported by family engagement activities. The Attendance Works Early and Often Toolkit : Showing Up in Preschool Matters 2.0 provides research, successful strategies and materials from large group to individualized child and family engagement materials.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. When should I start analyzing my preschool attendance data?

Many preschools have rolling enrollment at the start of the school year. Others adjust classes during the first few weeks of school. While sites should collect attendance data starting with the first day of school, analysis of patterns should begin once changes in classroom rosters are stabilized, likely in the first few weeks of school or by the first Monday in October.

Note that sites can and are encouraged to capture their first data snapshot no later than early December and track monthly attendance thereafter. However, sites are not precluded from starting to track their data later in the year if needed.

2. What period of time should I use to evaluate attendance trends?

Preschool schedules are not standard. Some follow a standard 180-day school year — attending five days each week. Others have shorter attendance years, or shorter school weeks.

Preschool absence patterns often reflect differing preschool schedules. Attendance Works recommends that users take into account the different schedules and durations of enrollment when assessing results and comparing different preschools or sub-populations of students to ensure the ability to compare data.

As an example, a student on a three-day per week schedule who attends all three days of school will have an absence rate of 0 percent, while a student on a five-day/week schedule who attends three out of five days will have an absence rate of 40 percent. Both students attended school for the same number of days, but only in the latter case is the student considered chronically absent because of the days he was expected to attend but was absent.

3. Are there typical trends we should expect?

Virtually every program experiences declines in attendance during the holidays, especially December and January. However, these dips can be prevented through careful planning. Use your data to recognize – and celebrate – strong regular attendance, and plan targeted support and "Back to School" events in January. See the Attendance Works Early and Often Toolkit 2.0 for ideas to encourage good attendance year-round.

Chronic absence is typically high in preschools largely because it has not been addressed. Experience indicates chronic absence is a solvable problem in environments which consistently address attendance with clear information and consistent positive strategies.

Reducing chronic absence means the impact of your program is likely to improve and your preschoolers can transition to kindergarten with strengthened school readiness.