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Press Release

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Analysis Finds More Than One in Four Students Attend Schools with High or Extreme Levels of Chronic Absence

New Interactive Map Shows Absence Data at State, District, and School Levels

SAN FRANCISCO, Aug. 31, 2018 – Nearly 8 million students in the nation were chronically absent in the 2015-16 school year, while one out of every four students attend schools with high or extreme levels of chronic absence. Now for the first time, a new analysis of federal data on school absenteeism will show that data at the state, district, and individual school level.

[Data Matters: Using Chronic Absence to Accelerate Action for Student Success](#), released by Attendance Works and the Everyone Graduates Center at Johns Hopkins University, is the most comprehensive analysis to date of data on chronic absence in the nation's schools. The researchers say the inclusion of chronic absence in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) represents a turning point in education policy that has made the measurement of absenteeism a key component of state policy.

"Chronic absence data casts a spotlight on where we as a country have failed to provide all students with an equal opportunity to receive a quality education," said Hedy Chang, Executive Director of Attendance Works and a co-author of the report.

Chronic absence – defined as missing 10 percent of school days for any reason, including suspensions, excused and unexcused absences – is an ongoing problem that negatively affects student achievement in every state in the nation. The data show an increase of more than 800,000 chronically absent students in the 2015-16 school year compared to 2013-14, and the percentage of students chronically absent grew in most states (37). The researchers note that much of that growth can be attributed to more accurate reporting.

An [interactive data map](#) developed by The Hamilton Project at the Brookings Institution allows everyone to explore chronic absence rates at the school, district, and state level, data that often has not yet been made easy to find or use. [State data reports](#) for all 50 states and the District of Columbia enable anyone interested to see how state data differs from national trends.

“ESSA presents an opportunity to address chronic absence through accountability and transparency, but its implementation requires knowing who is chronically absent,” said Lauren Bauer, Fellow in Economics Studies at The Hamilton Project. “The interactive data map lets everyone – from parents to policymakers – see where and for which students is chronic absence a challenge.”

The study, released in connection with [Attendance Awareness Month](#) in September, compares the first-ever release of chronic absence data in the U.S. Department of Education’s 2013-14 Civil Rights Data Collection to the most recent 2015-16 school year CRDC release. Other key findings include:

- While nationwide, 15 percent of all students, or at least one out of seven, are chronically absent, the rates vary widely by state and within states. Chronic absence is found in every type of locale – rural, town, suburban, and urban.
- The number of schools with at least 20 percent or more students chronically absent increased between the 2013-14 and 2015-16 school years.
- Just over half (nearly 52 percent) of all chronically absent students are concentrated in schools with high (20-29 percent) or extreme (30 percent or higher) levels of chronic absence.
- While nearly half (44 percent) of high schools have high and extreme levels of chronic absence, elementary schools should not be overlooked. Slightly more elementary schools than high schools have high and extreme levels of chronic absence.
- Schools serving children in special education, alternative education and vocational education, as well as schools with higher levels of poverty, are much more likely to have extreme levels of chronic absence.
- Chronic absence disproportionately affects particular student populations, with higher rates evident for Native American, Hispanic, African-American, Hawaiian and Pacific Islander students.

The report also shares a sampling of the tools available to schools, districts and community partners for identifying the causes of chronic absenteeism and developing solutions tailored to local challenges and resources. Recommendations for key partners illustrate how they can begin to take action or deepen ongoing efforts to improve attendance so that every student has an equal opportunity to learn.

“Everyone using chronic absence data, from administrators to teachers to elected officials and community organizations, needs to make sure that data is used to drive positive problem-solving, and not blame,” said Robert Balfanz, director of the Everyone Graduates Center at Johns Hopkins University.

“We must all use this new educational metric of chronic absence to interrupt patterns of inequity and improve outcomes for all children, particularly our most vulnerable students who deserve an equal opportunity to learn and thrive,” Chang adds.

Attendance Works (www.attendanceworks.org) is a national and state initiative that promotes better policy and practice around school attendance. The initiative promotes tracking chronic absence data for each student beginning in kindergarten, or ideally earlier, and partnering with families and community agencies to intervene when poor attendance is a problem for students or schools. The Attendance Works website offers free, downloadable resources to help address chronic absence.

The mission of the Everyone Graduates Center at the Johns Hopkins University School of Education (www.every1graduates.org) is to develop and disseminate the know-how required to enable all students to graduate from high school prepared for college, career, and civic life. The Center seeks to identify the barriers that stand in the way of all students graduating from high school prepared for adult success, to develop strategic solutions to overcome the barriers, and to build local capacity to implement and sustain them.

The Hamilton Project at the Brookings Institution (<http://www.hamiltonproject.org>) offers a strategic vision and produces innovative policy proposals on how to create a growing economy that benefits more Americans. The Project’s strategy reflects a judgment that long-term prosperity is best achieved by fostering economic growth and broad participation in that growth, by enhancing individual economic security, and by embracing a role for effective government in making needed public investments.