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Data Matters

Using Chronic Absence to Accelerate Action for Student Success

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Attendance Works
Advancing Student Success By Reducing Chronic Absence

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Acknowledgements

Introduction

Over the past decade, chronic absence has gone from being a virtually unknown concept to a national education metric that provides every school in the nation with critical data on how many students are missing so many days of school it jeopardizes their academic success. The inclusion of chronic absence in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was a watershed moment that made this metric an integral component of efforts to help students succeed in school and later in life.

Signed into law in December 2015, ESSA requires all states to include in their school report cards how many students are chronically absent. It also mandates that states choose five indicators to measure school performance – four academic measures of achievement and a fifth measure of school quality or school success. In response, 36 states and the District of Columbia chose chronic absence as a metric for school accountability in their implementation plans. Increasingly available, chronic absence data offers a unique tool for spotlighting where we as a country have failed to provide all students with an equal opportunity to receive a quality education. It sheds light on how our nation has not recognized that barriers to getting to school cause students to miss so much class that they fall academically behind. Pinpointing where chronic absence levels are high offers educators and policymakers an unprecedented opportunity to anticipate which schools and students will need additional support in order to ensure an equal opportunity to learn.

Chronic absence can have adverse consequences for academic achievement throughout a child's life. Starting as early as pre-kindergarten and kindergarten, absenteeism can affect a child's ability to read well by the end of third grade. Missing valuable instruction time can lead a student to fail courses in middle school, drop out from high school and show less persistence in college. Especially hard hit are children who live in poverty, have chronic health conditions or disabilities, or experience homelessness or frequent moves. [1]

The most current national data released by the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR) shows that nearly 8 million students in the United States were chronically absent in the 2015-16 school year.

Find Your Chronic Absence Data!

The Hamilton Project at the Brookings Institution has created an interactive map that allows everyone to explore chronic absence at the school, district, state and country level. Comprehensive and easy to use, the map allows users to track and compare levels of chronic absence across states, school districts and schools. Users can examine the scope of chronic absence by school characteristics (grade span and location) and student characteristics (gender, race, English Language learner or students with disabilities).

The map makes it possible for everyone, including parents and community leaders, to have access to chronic absence data even if educational authorities have not yet made it easy to find or use for their schools, district or state. Although the map is based upon data from 2015-16 school year the data is still telling. Chronic absence is likely to be a problem if data shows that it was a challenge several years ago. Use the interactive map to discover if there is a problem, then look into more current data.

Our analysis of this data from 94,549 schools shows an increase of over 800,000 chronically-absent students since the data was first collected in the 2013-14 school year. Rather than representing a jump in absenteeism, improved reporting accuracy by school districts and states appears to explain a significant portion of this growth. Over that same two-year period, the percentage of schools with high or extreme levels of chronic absence rose from

What is Chronic Absence?

Attendance Works recommends that chronic absence be defined as missing 10 percent of school—the equivalent of two days every month or 18 days over a 180-day school year—because this better enables early detection and action to improve attendance.

In this brief's data analysis, however, chronic absence refers to missing 15 or more days because this is the data point captured in the Civil Rights Data Collection for school year 2013-14 and 2015-16 the most current national dataset.

Chronic absence is different than truancy, which typically refers only to unexcused absences. Chronic absence level (how many students don't attend school regularly) differs from average daily attendance (how many students typically attend school each day).

Both truancy and average daily attendance can easily mask substantial levels of chronic absence. Chronic absence data often reveal an undetected challenge among our youngest students who may miss a substantial amount of school but for whom many absences are excused.

20 to 24 percent of all schools. This means that over half of the nation's chronically-absent students are found in less than a quarter of the nation's schools.

Chronic absence is a pervasive challenge in every state. Our analysis shows that across the country, 15 percent of students, or one out of seven, are chronically absent. But the percentage of students who miss too many days is much higher in some states than in others. In eight states and the District of Columbia, for example, more than 20 percent of all students were chronically absent during the 2015-16 school year.

When chronic absence reaches high levels in a school or classroom, it can affect every child's opportunity to learn, because the resulting classroom churn can make it more difficult for teachers to meet their students' diverse learning needs. Our analysis shows that absenteeism is found in every locale, whether rural, town, suburban or city. Yet this pattern varies significantly by state.

Our analysis also found that greater poverty can predict higher levels of absenteeism. But this is not always the case. It is equally important to note that some high-poverty schools have low chronic absence because they have adopted effective, prevention-oriented approaches to motivate daily attendance and help students and their families overcome challenges to getting to class.

As states begin to make chronic absence data available, some have not yet made the data easy for districts or schools to find or use. This brief, the accompanying interactive data map developed by The Hamilton Project, and the state chronic absence reports produced by the Everyone Graduates Center at Johns Hopkins University, seek to highlight the value of making data transparent and available to families, community partners and other stakeholders, outside school systems.

Although the data are not for the current school year, they are still telling. High levels of chronic absence in years past is a warning sign that it remains a problem today. With easy-to-understand absence data in hand, parents, businesses, public agencies, non-profits and other stakeholders can determine whether to push for resources to detect and address barriers that keep students from getting to school.

Whether or not this data makes a difference depends on what we do with it. Data can and will make a difference, if combined with the power of story, advocacy and compassion. Change happens when we all act to ensure that the policy win gained with the passage of ESSA translates into a real difference in how children and families, especially our most vulnerable, are treated in our schools. Change happens when we promote positive and collaborative problem-solving rather than blaming others—in the school house, community and state house. Change happens when we recognize that success does not occur overnight but requires persistence over time.

Aimed at motivating action, this report:

- Shares key findings from our analysis of the scale, scope, and concentration of chronic absence in schools nationwide and reflects upon how those patterns can vary by state.
- Discusses how to use chronic absence data to anticipate and put in place effective solutions to poor attendance that are tailored to local realities.
- Recommends steps that key stakeholders — whether they operate at a school, district or state level—can take to support a data driven approach to reducing chronic absence.

A Brief History of Chronic Absence Data

When the seminal 2008 report Present Engaged and Accounted For[2] found that one of 10 kindergartners and first-graders were academically at risk due to chronic absence. This research explained for the first time that "chronic absence," defined as missing too much school for any reason, including excused or unexcused absences and suspensions, was a major challenge nationwide affecting student achievement, starting with our youngest students. But few practitioners and policymakers had heard of the term "chronic absence." Most schools, districts and states assumed that they were paying adequate attention to absenteeism because they took attendance daily, monitored truancy (unexcused absences) and, often, calculated average daily attendance (ADA), meaning how many students typically show up every day. Most did not realize that ADA and truancy figures easily mask high levels of chronic absence. Moreover, most districts still used paper and pencil to track attendance, making it extremely difficult to calculate chronic absence rates.

Ten years later, chronic absence is part of federal education policy and has joined academic achievement and graduation rates as a critical measure of student progress and school quality across the country. Today, all districts collect attendance data electronically as part of their student information systems and a growing number have put in place real-time chronic absence reporting features.

What explains this rapid growth in awareness and change in national education policy? It is the result of research, local initiatives that demonstrate what is possible (proof points), coalition building and the availability of data.

Research: Since 2008, research from across the United States has produced significant and growing evidence of the adverse impact of chronic absence on a range of academic and other child outcomes, starting as early as preschool. Studies[3,4] show that chronic absence is associated with lower achievement throughout a student's academic life, from a lack of school readiness to falling behind in early literacy and numeracy, greater grade-level retention, failing middle school courses, dropping out of high school, and less persistence in college. Most recently, researchers have begun testing promising interventions to increase attendance, for example by providing mentors or through more effective messaging to families. These efforts complement other empirical work and case studies showing that chronic absence can be reduced.

Proof Points: For the past decade, pioneering practitioners from across the country have launched successful efforts that produced concrete proof that chronic absence can be turned around, especially when schools, families and community partners work together. Adopting a data-informed approach to motivate daily attendance as well as to address barriers to getting to school, these local initiatives demonstrate the benefit of using data to activate prevention and early intervention strategies before students fall behind academically. This local innovation has been accelerated by the work of national initiatives, such as the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading which have created opportunities for communities to exchange strategies and tools.

Coalition Building: In 2012, national organizations began working together, across disciplines and political lines, to promote a national Attendance Awareness Campaign aimed at raising awareness that chronic absence is a significant but solvable challenge undermining efforts to improve achievement. As this Campaign enters its sixth year, September is now widely known as Attendance Awareness Month and over 600 local superintendents have made a public commitment to prioritize attendance in their community.

National Data: National data on chronic absence was collected for the first time in the 2013-14 school year and released in June 2016 by OCR as part of the Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC). Submitted directly by districts,[5] the data was collected again in 2015-16 and publicly released in April 2018. This data offered undeniable proof that chronic absence is a major challenge contributing to educational inequities and requires attention from every state.

The early proof points, combined with research and bipartisan coalition-building, led to the inclusion of chronic absence in ESSA. The law requires all states to include chronic absence in their school report cards and to choose a fifth, non-academic accountability metric in their ESSA implementation plans. Because chronic absence was widely known to fit the rigorous selection criteria for this additional indicator[6], it was chosen as a school accountability measure by 36 states and the District of Columbia.

While the release of national data was a major step forward, the quest for high-quality, easy-to- understand chronic absence data is far from over. Chronic absence data will no longer be collected by OCR, but the collection will continue through the US Department of Education's Ed Facts Division, which defines chronic absence differently.

The OCR defines chronic absence as missing 15 days of the school year. But Ed Facts will define it as missing 10 percent or more of school days. In addition, it is not yet clear how states will present chronic absence data on school report cards. Diligent monitoring will be needed to ensure that data continue to be offered so all stakeholders can use it to ensure that all students have an equal opportunity to learn.

Analyzing Chronic Absence Data: What Can We Learn?

To better understand the challenge we face as a nation, Attendance Works asked researchers at the Everyone Graduates Center at The Johns Hopkins University and the Hamilton Project at the Brookings Institution to help us examine five questions related to chronic absence in schools.

1. What were the chronic absence levels in schools across the country in the 2015-16 school year and how did they change since the 2013-14 school year? What are the patterns by state?

In keeping with our prior report, Portraits of Change[7], school levels of chronic absence were defined as

- Extreme (30 percent or more of students)
- High (20-29 percent of students)
- Significant (10-19 percent of students)
- Modest chronic absence (5-9 percent of students)
- Low (less than 5 percent of students)

2. What is the relationship between particular school and student characteristics (e.g., ages of students, type of locale and presence of poverty) and higher or lower levels of chronic absence in a school? What are the patterns by state?

3. What is the distribution of chronic absence levels in schools for each state in the 2015-16 school year? How do these differ from the 2013-14 school year?

4. What are the number and percentage of chronically absent and enrolled students in schools with specific levels of chronic absence, nationwide and by state?

5. What is the percentage of chronically absent students by state and how does this vary by ethnicity?

Researchers examined the chronic absence levels in 94,549 schools across the nation in the 2015-16 and 2013-14 school years using the most current data from the Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC), released by OCR. Information about school characteristics was added from the U.S. Department of Education's Common Core of Data.[8] The analysis updates the findings in the Attendance Works 2017 report, Portraits of Change, which analyzed data from 2013-14. The section below describes our ten findings as we examined the five questions above.

Key Findings

1 In the 2015-16 school year, nearly 8 million students in the nation were chronically absent, an increase of more than 800,000 students from the 2013-14 school year. Improved reporting accuracy explains some of the growth in the number of chronically absent students.

While the number and percentage of chronically absent students increased nationwide between the 2013-14 and 2015-16 school years, the extent to which this occurred varied across states. Most states (37) saw an increase in the percentage of students considered chronically absent. Chronic absence remained unchanged in 10 states and decreased slightly in three states and the District of Columbia.

Improved reporting accuracy appears to explain a significant portion of the growth. National data on chronic absence was collected for the first time in 2013-14 as part of the CRDC. In general, data was submitted directly by districts and not through states. As with any first-time effort, consistency and accuracy were challenging even though OCR provided districts with definitions and instructions. Historically, there has not been a national standard for collecting attendance data and the definition of what constitutes a day of absence has varied widely across localities and states. For example, not all districts or states have historically included days missed due to suspensions when reporting the number of days of absence for each student. Increased awareness of OCR protocols, gained during the second round of data collection, likely led to better and more consistent reporting. Determining to what extent data accuracy explains increases and whether other factors are at play requires gaining a deeper understanding of state and local conditions.

State-by-State Analysis of Chronic Absence

To best understand how many and which schools are most affected by chronic absence, data must be examined at the state and local levels. Researchers at the Everyone Graduates Center at Johns Hopkins University produced state-by-state analyses of chronic absence data for the 2013-14 and 2015-16 for all 50 states and the District of Columbia. The data charts will enable anyone interested to see how state and local level data differs from national trends. Find and download the state **charts here**.

This report views the decrease, during the reporting years, in the percentage of schools reporting zero chronic absence as a sign of improved accuracy because it is unusual for a school to have no students who are chronically absent. With attendance, inaccurate data collection typically results in undercounts. For example, educators are more likely to mark children as present rather than absent even though they were not in class, given current educational policies. For example, in some states school funding is based upon average daily attendance, and many district data systems are set with a default of present.

Almost half of the increase in the number of chronically absent students nationwide in the 2015-16 school year (just over 380,000 students) came from roughly 5,500 schools that reported no chronically absent students in the 2013-14 school year. Based upon state data reports attached to this report, the percentage of schools reporting no students chronically absent decreased in 44 states since 2013-14. The size of the decrease varied significantly across states – ranging from less than .5 to 14 percentage points.

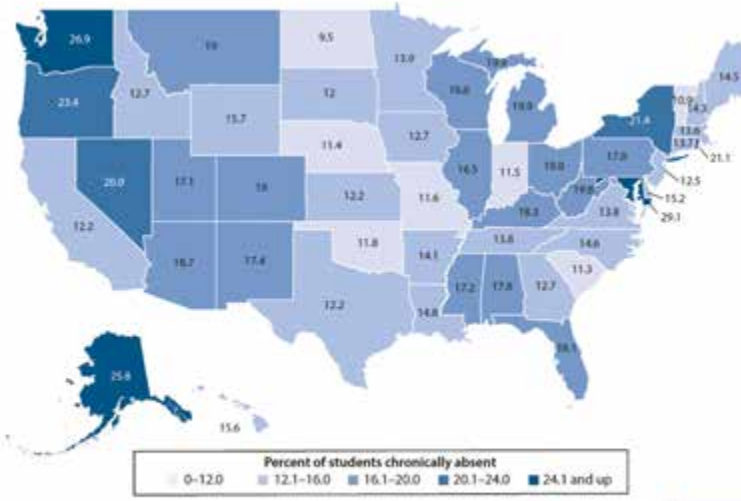
The extent to which data accuracy and consistency is an issue varies by state. Connecticut, for example, has a long history of auditing attendance data and advancing effective practices to reduce chronic absence. In Connecticut, no traditional public schools had missing data in either year of data collection and only two alternative schools had missing data. The number of schools reporting no chronic absence decreased from 38 to 27. Moreover, the overall share of chronically absent students went down between 2013-14 and 2015-16, consistent with Connecticut's efforts to reduce chronic absence. By comparison, in Florida, where attendance practices are highly decentralized, the number of schools reporting no chronically absent students decreased from 236 to 181 between 2013-14 and 2015-16. The share of students who were chronically absent increased by 1 percentage point. The Florida schools that continue to report no chronic absenteeism are predominantly virtual, alternative and charter schools. For more information, read this post from The Brown Center Chalkboard blog from the Brookings Institution and the 2018 report, "Writing The Rules for Tackling Chronic Absence," from FutureEd, a think tank based at Georgetown University.

2 Chronic absence is a pervasive challenge affecting the entire nation. Nationwide, 15 percent of all students, or one of seven, is chronically absent. Every state has chronically absent students. In some states, however, the percentage of students who are chronically absent is much higher than in other states. In eight states and the District of Columbia, more than 20 percent of students were chronically absent in 2015-16. (See Figure 1 and the comparison state table in Appendix A.)

Moreover, in *every* state, there were schools that reported a significant level, meaning 10 percent or more of students were chronically absent. In 58 percent of schools nationwide, at least one in 10 students was chronically absent. This represents about 52,000 schools.

FIGURE 1

Percentage of Students Chronically Absent, by State, 2015-16



Source: Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC), U.S. Department of Education, 2013–14, 2015–16.
Note: The CRDC defines chronic absenteeism as missing 15 or more days of school in a school year. The District of Columbia has a value of 31.0%.

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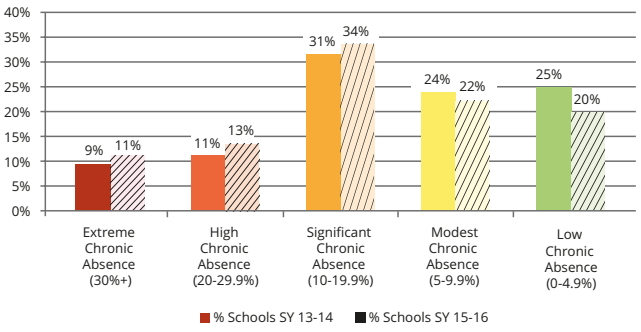
FIGURE 2

Distribution of Chronic Absence Levels Across Schools, 2013-14 and 2015-16



3 The proportion of schools with at least 20 percent or more students chronically absent increased between 2013-14 and 2015-16. As Figure 2 shows, the percentage of schools with high (20-29 percent of students) and extreme (30 percent or more of students) levels of chronic absence increased from 11 to 13 percent and 9 to 11 percent, respectively.

Levels of high and extreme chronic absence vary by state, from 9 to 61 percent of all schools. On average, 24 percent of all schools in a state have either high or extreme levels of chronic absence. (See Appendix A for a comparison state table.)

4 Just over half (nearly 52 percent) of all chronically absent students are concentrated in schools with high or extreme levels of chronic absence, while over a third (33 percent) attend schools with significant rates of chronic absence. Table 1 shows how many and what percentage of chronically absent students attended schools with various levels of chronic absence.

It is important to keep in mind, however, that this distribution can look very different at the state level. For example, in South Carolina, schools with high and extreme levels of chronic absence serve only 24 percent of all chronically absent students. The largest percentage (44 percent) of chronically absent students attend schools with chronic absence rates of 10 to 19 percent.

5 A greater percentage of high schools have high and extreme levels of chronic absence, but by numbers of schools, slightly more elementary schools have high and extreme levels of chronic absence than high schools. As Figure 3 shows, 44 percent of high schools have high or extreme chronic absence rates compared to the approximately 21 percent of middle schools and 16 percent of schools serving elementary students.

FIGURE 3

Nationwide Chronic Absence Levels, by Grades Served, Percent of Schools 2015-16

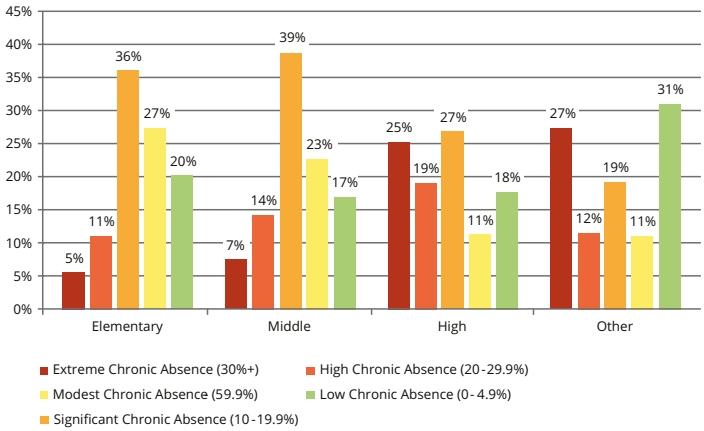


Table 1. Nationwide Chronic Absence Levels, by School and Student Concentration, 2015-16

Nationwide School Chronic Absence Levels	# Schools	Total Enrollment	Percent Total Enrollment	Number of Chronically Absent Students	Percent of all Chronically Absent Students
Extreme Chronic Absence (30%+)	11,783.00	5,321,592	10.6	2,438,019	30.6
High Chronic Absence (20-29.9%)	12,625.00	7,639,346	15.2	1,846,905	23.2
Significant Chronic Absence (10-19.9%)	31,000.00	18,372,440	36.5	2,639,038	33.1
Modest Chronic Absence (5-9.9%)	20,411.00	11,450,804	22.8	874,105	11.0
Low Chronic Absence (0-4.9%)	18,730.00	7,489,359	14.9	169,005	2.1
Total (n)	94,549	50,273,541	100	7,967,072	100

Table 2. Nationwide Chronic Absence Levels by Grades Served, Number of Schools 2015-16

School Chronic Absence Levels SY 15-16 by Grades Served	Number Elementary Schools	Number Middle Schools	Number High Schools	Number Other Schools	Total
Extreme Chronic Absence (30%+)	2770	1178	4633	1566	10147
High Chronic Absence (20-29.9%)	5593	2273	3498	661	12025
Significant Chronic Absence (10-19.9%)	18203	6135	4928	1100	30366
Modest Chronic Absence (5-9.9%)	13795	3611	2072	635	20113
Low Chronic Absence (0-4.9%)	10149	2701	3257	1774	17881
Grand Total (n)	50510	15898	18388	5736	90532

Yet, elementary schools should not be overlooked. As Table 2 shows, a slightly larger number of elementary schools have high or extreme chronic absence than high schools (8,363 vs 8,131). This statistic reflects the fact that there are more elementary schools than high school and elementary school tend to be smaller. Moreover, overall data for an elementary school often mask high levels of absence in kindergarten and first grade since the upper elementary grades tend to have the very lowest levels of chronic absence.

6 Schools serving children in special education, alternative education and vocational education are much more likely to have extreme levels of chronic absence (See Figure 4). Further analysis is needed to understand why these patterns exist. For example, do these schools serve students experiencing educational or life challenges that traditional schools have not been able to meet? Are high levels of chronic absence a warning sign that these non-traditional educational settings are not engaging and educating their students? Or do the disparities reflect differences in data collection and reporting practices? In California, for example, alternative schools monitor attendance on an hourly basis, while most traditional schools consider a child in attendance if marked present for any period during the day.[9] Data on chronic absence across school types should be reviewed at the state level so local knowledge of the populations served and the attendance processes can be brought to bear.

This juxtaposition of low chronic absence in a school with high poverty rates can be used to identify potential bright spot schools engaged in effective strategies for reducing chronic absence.

FIGURE 4

Nationwide Chronic Absence Levels by School Type, 2015-16

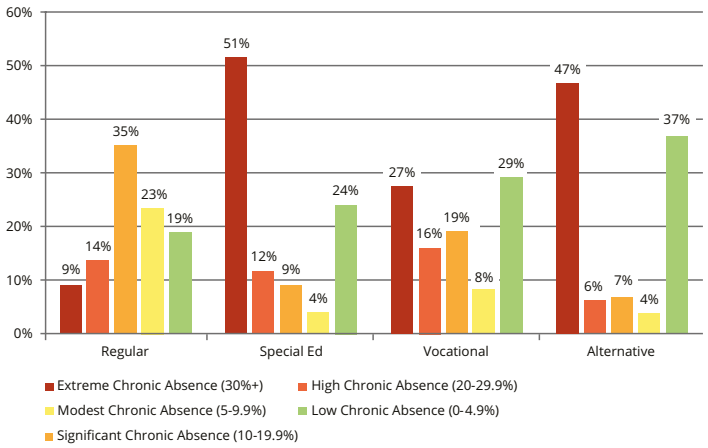


FIGURE 5

Nationwide Chronic Absence Levels, by School Concentration of Poverty, 2015-16

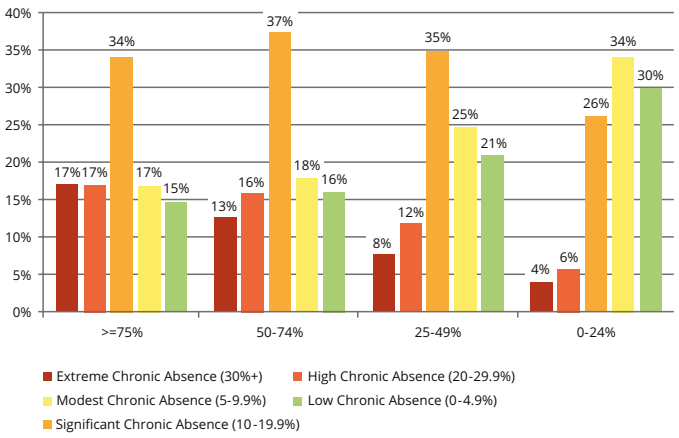
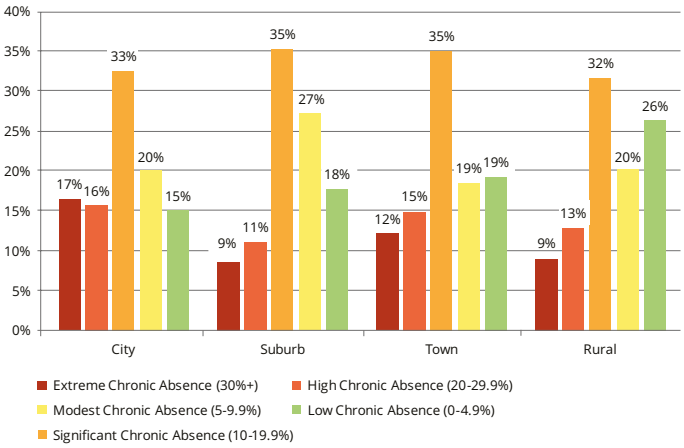


FIGURE 6

Nationwide Chronic Absence Levels, by School Locale, 2015-16



7 Schools with higher levels of poverty are more likely to experience high and extreme levels of chronic absence. As Figure 5 shows, national data suggests that higher levels of chronic absence were much more likely in schools with a very high proportion (75 percent or greater) of students living in poverty than those with a low proportion (25 percent or less). It is equally important to note that there were schools with low levels of chronic absence among those that served the highest concentration of poverty. This juxtaposition of low chronic absence in a school with high poverty rates can be used to identify potential "bright spot schools" that are implementing effective strategies to address chronic absence. Data and practice need to be examined and verified before concluding that a school is a bright spot.

8 Chronic absence is found in every type of locale – rural, town, suburban and city. National data shows a slightly higher concentration for cities but high levels exist in every locale. (See Figure 6.) However, these patterns vary significantly by state. In Washington state, for example, chronic absence levels are much higher for rural and town than urban locales. (See the Washington state data chart).

9 Data suggests that poverty, not locale, remains the driving factor. Table 3 shows chronic absence levels are much higher, regardless of locale, in schools where a majority (75 percent or more) of students live in poverty. Low levels of chronic absence are most common in schools where a minority (less than a quarter) of students live in poverty, regardless of locale.

Table 3. Nationwide School Chronic Absence Levels, by Locale and Percentage Poverty, 2015-16

	Percent of Schools					
Locality and Percent Poverty	0-4.9% Chronic Absence	5-9.9% Chronic Absence	10-19.9% Chronic Absence	20%-29.9% Chronic Absence	30%+ Chronic Absence	N
City, 75%+ Poverty	**12**	**16**	**32**	**19**	**21**	**10112**
City, 0-24.9% Poverty	31	32	24	7	6	2792
Suburban, 75%+ Poverty	**11**	**18**	**40**	**17**	**14**	**5764**
Suburban, 0-24.9% Poverty	28	39	26	5	3	8215
Town, 75%+ Poverty	**20**	**17**	**33**	**14**	**16**	**2828**
Town, 0-24.9% Poverty	27	23	32	9	8	890
Rural, 75%+ Poverty	**25**	**16**	**30**	**15**	**14**	**4581**
Rural, 0-24.9% Poverty	35	28	27	7	4	3432

10 Chronic absence disproportionately affects particular student populations. Patterns, however, vary across states and locales. National data shows that while the majority of students of any demographic group are NOT chronically absent, some populations are more likely to experience chronic absence than others. (See Table 4.).

Our analysis also reveals that state or local data do not always mirror national trends. In Alabama and Mississippi, for example, white students are more likely to be chronically absent than African-American students. This runs counter to the national trend. (See Table 4). Find out more about state and local data from this interactive data map. These findings reveal the critical importance of avoiding making assumptions based on national data.

Table 4. Nationwide Chronic Absence Levels, by Population Group, 2015-16

Sub-population	Percent Chronically Absent
Native American	**25**
Hispanic	**22**
African-American	**19**
Nonwhite	**17**
Hawaiian and Pac Island	**16**
National Average	**15**
Alaska Native	**15**
White	**14**
Limited English Proficiency	**13**
Asian	**8**

In Alabama and Mississippi, for example, White students were more likely to be chronically absent than African American students. Such data reveals the critical importance of avoiding making any assumptions and instead using data to understand local realities.

Leveraging Chronic Absence Data to Anticipate Need and Develop Solutions

Chronic absence data is an invaluable tool for anticipating what is needed to improve attendance. This section explores how the data can be used by discussing these questions:

A. **What are the benefits of monitoring chronic absence data?**

B. **Who has access to chronic absence data?**

C. **How can chronic absence data be used to target intervention?**

D. **How can data be gathered to understand the factors affecting attendance?**

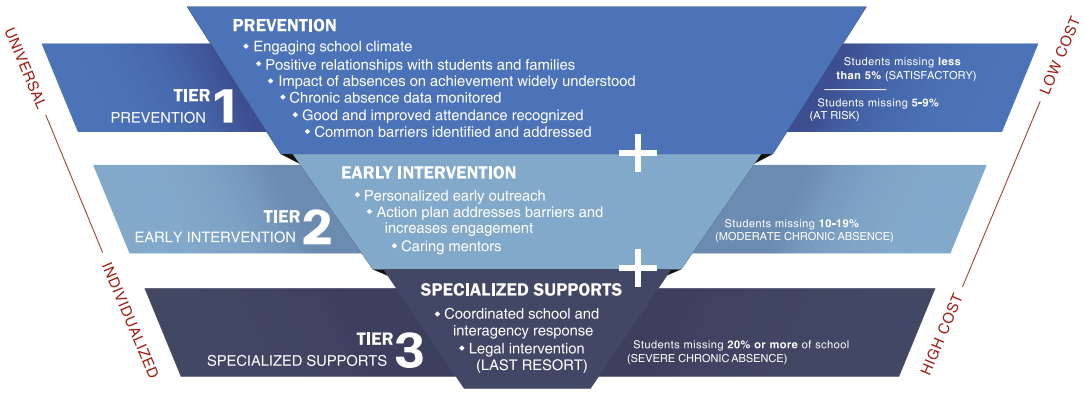
A. What are the benefits of monitoring chronic absence data?

Improving attendance requires positive problem-solving and shifting away from the traditional truancy response to poor attendance. Schools and districts that use this truancy response typically wait too long to act , letting unexcused absences pile up before they, for example, send a warning letter, followed by setting up a meeting with the student's family and eventually threatening court action if the truancies persist. Unfortunately, with this approach, students develop a poor attendance habit and miss so much school that they likely are academically behind before any intervention occurs. Chronic absence data is powerful because it helps schools, districts and communities interrupt and change poor attendance patterns before academic performance is negatively affected. Real time data can be used to identify who needs help immediately. Schools can use prior-year data to anticipate what supports and interventions need to be in place by the start of school. Studies show that the best predictor of chronic absence for a student is chronic absence during the prior school year and/or during the first month of school.[10]

When schools target students who have a history of chronic absence with proven interventions, the students can improve their attendance during a subsequent year. For districts and states, knowing how many students are chronically absent and knowing their level of absenteeism can help with selecting the type and intensity of supports needed. As Figure 7 shows, schools should be prepared to provide students with higher levels of absenteeism more personalized supports that are coordinated, as needed, with other agencies. School levels of chronic absence tend to be relatively stable over time, especially if there are no significant changes in practice or external conditions (such as a significant increase in poverty levels, a change in the availability of health care or a major natural disaster). Higher levels of chronic absence indicate that more help is needed. These levels also serve as a warning sign of systemic challenges and of the absence of a multi-tiered system of support, as illustrated in the pyramid in Figure 7.

FIGURE 7

Three-Tiered System of Intervention



B. Who has access to chronic absence data?

Historically, chronic absence data has been difficult to obtain. But, the landscape is quickly changing. A growing number of districts now produce chronic absence reports. This is a positive development since districts are better positioned than individual schools to produce reports and to capture data about highly mobile students. Some districts use the Microsoft Excel-based attendance tracking tools offered at no cost by Attendance Works. Many districts are building chronic absence metrics into the real time data reports automatically produced by their student information systems.

Even when districts have chronic absence reports, however, parents, businesses public agencies, non-profits and other external partners may not be able to obtain them easily. Districts need to exercise caution regarding data sharing and are not allowed, without the consent of the student and family, to share data that identifies individuals. Some districts, such as California's Oakland Unified School District (OUSD), have found ways to create transparency and protect confidentiality. Because aggregate data can be shared, OUSD created external chronic absence data reports that are publicly available on its website, in addition to its internal reports, which have privacy protections.

Most states are still in the early phase of providing chronic absence data to the public. Some have yet to post it; others have the statistics on their websites but they are complex and challenging to find. Positive examples do exist: Connecticut's EdSight data portal is easy to use and offers five-year trend data on chronic absence by district, school, student subpopulation and grade.

Studies show that the best predictors of chronic absence for a student is chronic absence in the prior school year and/or during the first month of school.

External partners can also play a role in making chronic absence data more accessible. When the California Department of Education released chronic absence information on its website for the first time, Attendance Works, the University of California Davis Center for Regional Change and Children Now crunched the numbers and presented them in an easy-to-use way. Their 2018 report, Seize the Data Opportunity in California, describes the scale and concentration of chronic absence in California. An accompanying interactive chronic absence story map, developed by the Center for Regional Change, enables users to drill down to school, district and regional chronic absence levels in the state.

Over time, as the ESSA requirement to include chronic absence data in school report cards is implemented, data will become easier to obtain. In the meantime, if data is not available or easy to manipulate, stakeholders can use the Hamilton Project's interactive data map and state reports to gain an initial understanding of the scale and concentration of chronic absence.

C. How can chronic absence data be used to target intervention?

We recommend first drawing upon available data to answer the following three key questions.

1. **What is the scope and scale of chronic absence in my school, community, district or state?**

2. **Which students are most affected by chronic absence? Are these patterns consistent across grade levels? Do these patterns differ across demographic groups?**

3. **When is an in-depth analysis needed to understand the factors affecting attendance?**

The section below provides information that can be used to explore each question and resources to gain a deeper understanding of what factors contribute to chronic absence or can be leveraged to improve attendance.

Question 1: What is the scope and scale of chronic absence in my school, community, district or state?

The section discusses what to examine, for each level of analysis.

At the school level: What is the percentage and number of students chronically absent? If only a few students are affected, a targeted approach involving case management of those students is likely sufficient. If a larger number and proportion of students are chronically absent, a school-wide approach and the support of community partners may be needed.

If more detailed information is available, find out how many students fall into each attendance tier: satisfactory attendance (missing less than 5 percent of school), at-risk attendance (missing 5-9 percent), moderately chronically absent (missing 10-19 percent) and severely chronically absent (missing 20 percent or more) (See Figure 7). What do these numbers reveal about the level of resources needed to implement a tiered approach? Consider mapping the number of students who require each tier of intervention. Click here for resources to help.

At the district level: What are the levels of chronic absence across your district's schools? Are the vast majority of chronically absent students concentrated in particular regions, schools or spread out? Do you have any "bright spot schools" that have managed to have relatively low chronic absence despite serving a population that typically experiences higher chronic absence?

At state level: What are the levels of chronic absence across your state's schools? Are the schools with high or extreme levels concentrated in particular districts, regions or locales?

Are chronically absent students concentrated in schools with high or extreme chronic absence levels or are large numbers also found in schools with 10-19 percent levels?

Question 2: Is chronic absence concentrated among particular subpopulations or grades? Do the patterns of grade level chronic absence differ across student subpopulations?

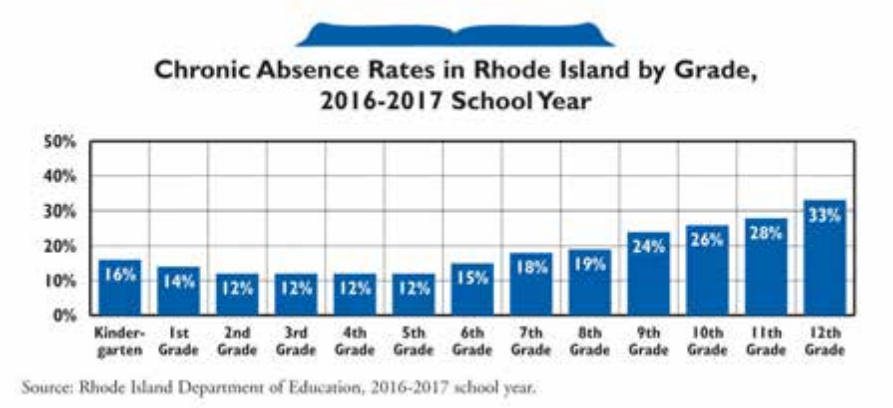
As discussed earlier, chronic absence rates are often higher among particular student subgroups (ethnicity, participation in special education, receiving free and reduced-price lunch, English Language learners, homeless students or participation in foster care). Knowing which students are most affected helps with targeting resources, tailoring supports and identifying community partners with the skills and resources (experience, culture, language, disciplinary expertise, specialized funding, etc.) to support those students.

For example, Oregon's analysis of state data identified Native American students as having extremely high levels of chronic absence. This led to further analysis and a partnership between Tribal governments and the Oregon Department of Education to create the Tribal Attendance Pilot Project which is successfully reducing chronic absence among Native American students.

Another important analysis is to examine chronic absence patterns by grade. Typically, chronic absence appears U-shaped, as illustrated by a graph from Rhode Island Kids Count 2018. (See Figure 8.) Some variations, however, can exist. Some districts, for example, see chronic absenteeism decline among students during their last years of high school because the students with high levels of absenteeism have already dropped out.

FIGURE 8

Chronic Absence Rates in Rhode Island



Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, 2016-2017 school year.

Of course, aggregate school-level data can mask challenges that face a particular grade. In elementary schools, for example, kindergartners typically have high levels of chronic absence while the upper-elementary grades have the best attendance. But high levels of kindergarten chronic absence are easily masked by the overall figure for an elementary school. (See Figure 9.)

Another essential analysis is examining patterns of chronic absence by grade for each key student subgroup. Typically, the most vulnerable students, who most depend on the resources of public school to learn, experience chronic absence at the youngest ages.

An analysis of data from Oakland Unified School District, for example, revealed especially high percentages of chronic absence in kindergarten, particularly for African-American students. (See Figure 10). It is important, however, to look at both the percentage and the number of chronically absent students. For example, the number of chronically absent Hispanic children in kindergarten and transitional kindergarten[11] was slightly greater than the number of African-American kindergartners in Oakland, but because the Hispanic student population is larger than the African-American population, a lower percentage of Hispanic students was chronically absent.

Question 3: When is an in-depth analysis needed to understand the factors affecting attendance?

Chronic absence data can be used to determine when further investment is needed to examine the underlying causes of chronic absence in order to develop effective and meaningful solutions. If chronic absence only affects a few students, focus on learning from their experiences and situations. If chronic absence affects many students from a particular sub-population or place, invest more in finding out what is happening for those populations, schools or perhaps geographic regions.

Knowing the underlying causes of chronic absence (as well as the assets that can be leveraged to address them) is essential to developing solutions. Attendance Works has found it helpful to group chronic absence causes in four categories: barriers, negative school experiences, lack of engagement and misconceptions. (See Figure 11.)

When chronic absence occurs for a student or a school, understanding which factors contribute to poor attendance helps determine the supports or interventions that can improve the situation. For example, messaging about the adverse impact of

FIGURE 9

Oakland Unified School District
2017-18 Percent Chronic Absent By Ethnicity and Grade

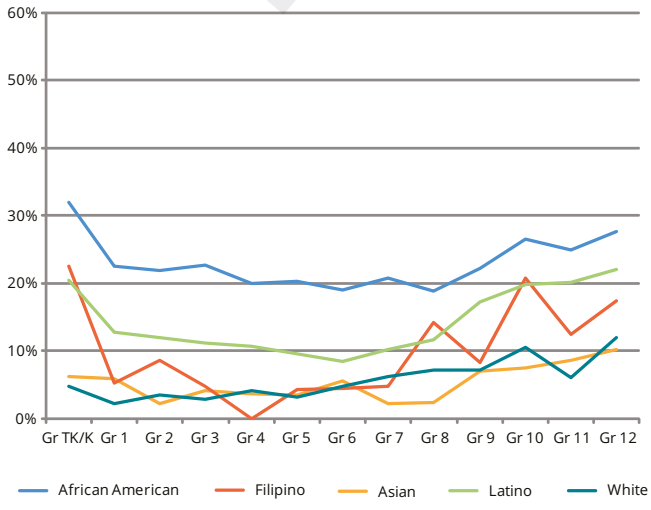


FIGURE 10

Oakland Unified School District
2017-18 Number Chronic Absent By Ethnicity and Grade

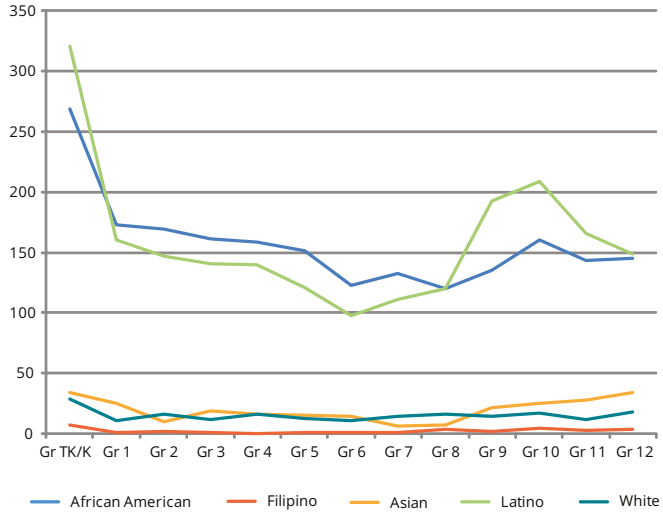


FIGURE 11

Factors Contributing to Chronic Absence

Barriers	Negative School Experiences	Lack of Engagement	Misconceptions
• Illness, both chronic and acute • Lack of health, mental health, vision, or dental care • Trauma • Unsafe path to/from school • Poor Transportation • Frequent moves or school changes • Involvement with child welfare or juvenile justice systems	• Struggling academically or socially • Bullying • Suspensions and expulsions • Negative attitudes of parents due to their own school experience • Undiagnosed disability • Lack of appropriate accommodations for disability	• Lack of culturally relevant, engaging instruction • No meaningful relationships with adults in school • Stronger ties with peers out of school than in school • Unwelcoming school climate • Failure to earn credits/no future plans • Many teacher absences or long-term substitutes	• Absences are only a problem if they are unexcused • Missing 2 days per month doesn't affect learning • Sporadic absences aren't a problem • Attendance only matters in the older grades

missing just two days a month is unlikely to change behavior if a student is not attending school because he or she has asthma and has difficulty breathing at school, due to poor respiratory conditions in the classroom. Such a scenario is not unusual given that health-related challenges are among the leading causes of absenteeism.[12]

If a school is aware of this situation, it could integrate messaging about chronic absence into a school-wide campaign to address asthma, highlighting that the campaign was launched in part because missing too much school, even when the absences are excused, can cause children to fall behind.

The degree of student absenteeism offers clues to the nature of the attendance challenges. Students who are moderately chronically absent (missing 10-19 percent of the school year) are likely to have fewer and less difficult attendance-related issues while students who are severely chronically absent are likely to face multiple and significant barriers, (e.g. they are involved in the child welfare system; have an undiagnosed disability; or do not find school to be a welcoming place). Similarly, when schools have high or extreme levels of chronic absence, this often indicates that multiple causes of chronic absence exist for large numbers of students and is a warning sign that there are inadequate Tier 1 level supports for engagement and prevention of absenteeism, as described in Figure 7 (p.15).

D. How can data be gathered to understand the factors affecting attendance?

If chronic absence affects many students, a working group should be formed to gain a deeper understanding of the barriers that keep students from to getting to school and that can consider the assets that can be leveraged to support attendance . The working group should involve leadership from the school, district and community partners and include a way to engage teachers, students and families. Buy-in and support from site administrators who implement the solutions is essential. Site administrators should also determine whether an existing group – such as a school leadership committee or attendance team – can serve as the working group or if an ad hoc committee needs to be created. A district-level working group may be needed if the exploration is focused on a student population found in multiple schools.

The working group should agree on how data should be gathered, oversee implementation of this and make sure that diverse perspectives are represented to best interpret results and support implementation of emerging solutions. Schools and communities should not underestimate the value of involving students and families in this process.

Tools and Strategies

A variety of quantitative and qualitative tools and strategies can be used to unpack what affects attendance. The examples below provide approaches that can capture:

1. **Student and Family Perspectives**
2. **Relevant District Data**
3. **Community and Agency Data**

In several cases, the strategy is both an intervention and a way to gain insights about barriers to attendance. Schools and communities can also combine Tier 1 activities – such as creating a warm welcoming environment, positive messaging, recognizing good and improved attendance, or providing breakfast in the classroom – with gaining a deeper understanding of barriers.

This section describes a few of the tools developed by pioneering practitioners and researchers throughout the country. Our goal is to shine a light on what is possible and encourage greater sharing so everyone can leverage what already exists and learn from each other.

1. Student and Family Perspectives

An essential starting point is to find out from students and families, particularly those experiencing chronic absence, why it is so difficult to get to school and what would help improve attendance.

- **Student and Family Surveys (Florida):** The Problem Solving and Response to Intervention (PS/RtI) project is a collaborative effort of the Florida Department of Education and the University of South Florida. It developed and nationally validated two surveys: one for chronically absent students (grades 6-12) and one for parents of chronically absent preschool/Head Start students. The surveys can be found here.

- **Absence Reasons Study (Austin, Texas)** In 2013, E3 Alliance conducted a study to collect detailed information about why Central Texas students miss school. After finding that the largest cause of absences was related to acute illnesses, E3 Alliance and their partners launched a large-scale, school-based flu immunization campaign that has been named a national model by the CDC. An evaluation found that the campaign resulted in a demonstrable reduction in student absences and a significant increase in state funding based upon improved attendance.

- **Phone Banking (Cleveland):** Cleveland Metropolitan School District created a phone bank to reach out to and support chronically absent students and their families. Volunteers including staff, administrators and community partners received a script and check-list of barriers to ensure that each student's needs were addressed and to identify common barriers. See this PBS News Hour story.

- **Assessment by Professionals of Chronically Absent Students (Sacramento):** The Sacramento City Unified School District collaborated with the University of California Davis Center for Regional Change and a local nonprofit to develop an assessment used by professionals who work closely with chronically absent students. The assessment was not administered as a survey directly to the students, but rather through conversational observations that the professionals (social workers and educators participating in the Parent Teacher Home Visiting Project then entered into an online system. As this brief discusses, analysis found, on average, 10 attendance barriers for each student. The top three most frequent involved were health, , parental discretion and transportation. The most common factor motivating attendance was relationships with teachers, peers and mentors.

- **Success Mentors (New York City):** Students with a chronic absence history met with a mentor at least three times weekly who encouraged daily attendance and helped secure supports. Students with success mentors attended nearly two more weeks of school each year and had better academic outcomes than peers without mentors. By building trusting relationships, mentors motivated students to attend school even when difficult. They also learned about attendance barriers and connected students and families to resources. See this evaluation for more information.

- **School Environment and Attendance Tool.** Developed by Attendance Works, the Scan of Environment and Attendance Tool (SEAT) helps school leaders engage students, parents and community members, along with school staff, in assessing the strengths and opportunities related to the underlying issues that contribute to student attendance, including climate, culture and the physical environment.

2. Relevant District Data

Beyond chronic absence data, school districts collect other relevant district data that can be mined for clues about what contributes to chronic absence. The section below offers examples of how to use this data.

- **Suspension and Discipline Data:** Districts should have records on suspensions and, possibly, other school discipline data that can be analyzed by student, school, subpopulation and reason for suspension. Suspensions and other disciplinary measures contribute to chronic absence because students miss school and instruction. This experience also can generate negative feelings that lead to more missed school, after a suspension. While it is sometimes necessary to remove a student who poses a physical threat to others, students are often suspended for minor incidents (e.g. willful defiance, violating the dress code) that could be addressed differently. Consider these insights from Open Society Institute-Baltimore.

- **Attendance Patterns over Time:** Districts collect daily attendance data that can be charted during a school year to identify and anticipate attendance dips that shed light on situations contributing to absence (e.g. half-day professional development days, bad weather, days adjacent to holidays, the onset of allergy season, the last days of the school year) that can be addressed. See these charts created by The New School in New York City.

- **Chronic Health Conditions:** Many districts have information on students with a chronic health condition (e.g. asthma, diabetes, food allergy). This data can be used to see if students with these health conditions are more likely to be chronically absent and if this varies by school. Variations may suggest that some schools are better than others at managing the impact of the health conditions by partnering with students and families. See this toolkit from Healthy Schools Campaign: **Addressing_Health-Related_Chronic_Absenteeism_Toolkit_for_Action.**

- **School Climate Surveys:** Many state departments of education and school districts survey students and often teachers and parents to gather their perceptions of their school's climate. Survey results reveal whether students feel socially, emotionally and physically safe at school and whether issues such as bullying, harassment or lack of meaningful connections to adults contribute to chronic absence. See the resources created by the National School Climate Center and the National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments.

3. Community and Agency Data

Sharing data across sectors shines light on factors outside of school that affect attendance.

- **Transit Routes (Sacramento):** The University of California Davis Center for Regional Change used several data sources to identify locations in the Sacramento City Unified School District that need transit service improvements, based on neighborhood demographics, school choices and existing transit service. This study highlighting results for Sacramento's Oak Park neighborhood found an association between transportation conditions and student performance outcomes, suggesting that long travel times to school may contribute to reduced academic performance and increased absenteeism.
- **Health Data (National and Chicago):** Local public health agencies and health providers can provide important community-level data on leading health issues impacting children. Recognizing the inextricable link between health and education, the Chicago Department of Public Health and the Chicago Public Schools have an interagency data sharing agreement. Read more here.
- **Kindergarten and Early Childhood Data (Baltimore):** Researchers used data to examine the kindergarten readiness and attendance of children previously enrolled in publicly- funded early education programs vs. similar kindergartners not previously enrolled. Children who do not attend publicly-funded early education are less likely to be kindergarten-ready and they miss more school, researchers found. Conversely, children enrolled in these programs were more likely to be kindergarten-ready and less likely to be chronically absent. The most vulnerable populations benefit the most from publicly funded early education programs. Read more here.
- **Integrated Data Systems (Allegheny County, Pennsylvania):** The Allegheny County Department of Human Services (DHS) Data Warehouse connects data from DHS programs, 10 public school systems, the courts and jail, plus the housing authorities of Allegheny County and the City of Pittsburgh. DHS staff use the data warehouse to examine chronic school absenteeism among Pittsburgh Public Schools students. Analysis found that nearly one quarter of Pittsburgh students were chronically absent. Students with DHS involvement were at particular risk of high absenteeism. They accounted for 58 percent of students missing at least 20 percent of school days. Students involved with the mental health and/or child welfare systems and/or receiving public benefits were most likely to miss at least 10 percent of school days. Nearly half of the middle and high school students in out-of-home placement were chronically absent. The department used these findings to begin countywide discussions and create partnerships to address chronic absenteeism among these youth. For further information, read this case study and brief showing how the data was leveraged to inform local schools' efforts.

Recommendations for Action

Stakeholders at multiple levels play critical roles in reviewing data for accuracy, helping to understand the scale and size of the chronic absence challenge, and developing solutions based on a clear understanding of attendance barriers. Engaging a wide range of educators, students, and family and community members in supporting this work and nurturing shared accountability is key to reducing chronic absence. These important functions shape the recommendations below. Many refer to analyzing local chronic absence data. The interactive data map developed for this report is a good place to start.

For Students and Families:

- **Review your absences.** How many total days did you or your student miss last year? Eighteen days or more is chronic absence. Missing between nine and 17 days can also affect academic achievement. If you have too many absences, consider filling out a student attendance success plan and reach out to someone at school or in your community who can help address your attendance barriers.
- **Find out if chronic absence is a challenge at your school.** Look at the Hamilton Project's interactive data map and ask your school for the most recent data.
- **Engage other students and families.** Work with your school to ensure that students and families identify and analyze common attendance barriers as well as develop cooperative solutions.
- **Ask your principal about your school's attendance plan.** Find out how your school addresses attendance and who oversees this work. Use a comprehensive approach that begins with prevention and early intervention. Explore how students and families can strengthen the work.
- **Monitor and advocate for district and community support.** Ask your principal and district officials about available attendance notifications and supports plus how they ensure that students and families receive them.

For Community Agencies and Partners:

- **Determine which and how many schools are heavily affected by chronic absence in your locality or state.** Examine this report's interactive data map and reports from districts or states.
- **Engage in positive messaging** about the importance of regular school attendance with the children and families you serve.
- **Build an attendance indicator into support plans** for your clients and train staff to ask about child attendance.
- **Contact schools and districts to find out their plans for improving attendance,** especially those with high chronic absence levels.
- **Help schools and districts unpack attendance barriers and solutions.** Engage students and families to offer insights through surveys or focus groups. Offer insights from relevant data gathered by your agency on health, transportation and community supports.
- **Respond to high levels of chronic absence by strategically allocating resources** related to health, afterschool programs, transportation, early childhood, family support, youth development, mentoring, private donations, etc.

For State Departments of Education:

- **Ensure that data is high quality and consistent.** Offer training and guidance to Local Education Agencies on how to submit student absence data to the state. Consider offering training on how to review aggregate data to identify potential data quality issues. Investigate and address issues.

- **Ensure that school report cards are easy to understand** so people can use chronic absence data, among other educational metrics. See recommendations from the Data Quality Campaign for developing meaningful report cards.

- **Use chronic absence data as a factor** in determining the allocation of related grant funding and technical assistance, as well as in conjunction with other performance indicators in order to identify broader issues.

- **Provide available guidance and professional development** to help school districts and county superintendents advance a multi-tiered approach to improving attendance that begins with prevention.

- **Explore the need for establishing different performance standards for different types of schools and districts** (e.g. elementary versus K-12 versus high school).

- **Convene state agencies to review chronic absence data and develop interagency strategies targeted** to schools, counties and populations with high chronic absence levels.

- **Use data to examine the need for regional solutions** and when needed, bring together key local and state stakeholders to develop actions.

- **Offer guidance and materials on effective strategies** for reducing chronic absence, including information on how to set realistic improvement goals. Ensure that this guidance is integrated into efforts related to improving school climate, education equity and academic achievement.

- **Establish a professional learning network** focused on alternative education settings.

- **Develop and implement a state plan to reduce chronic absence.** Use this self-assessment to inform your work.

- **Partner with university and research institutions** on research and evaluation related to attendance and chronic absenteeism

For School Leaders and Administrators:

- **Examine how chronic absences affects your school.** Review the percentage and number of students who are chronically absent. Review the data for accuracy and identify which students are most affected, by grade and subgroup.

- **Ensure that your school has a team responsible for attendance.** The team should routinely monitor attendance data, develop an effective school-wide strategy informed by an understanding of underlying causes, and ensure that students are connected to supports that match their needs. Attendance Works has created guidelines for attendance teams.

- **Engage students, families, school staff and community partners.** Work together to identify and analyze attendance barriers as well as to develop solutions. Integrate this work into existing family engagement efforts.

- **Use data to identify "bright spots" in your community where attendance is better than average.** See if what they are doing could work at your school.

- **Use your chronic absence data to assess the need for additional supports and community-based partners.** Use the Attendance Works pyramid to map resources and gaps for creating a comprehensive, multi-tiered attendance approach that begins with prevention and early intervention.

- **Incorporate attendance goals and strategies into your school's improvement plan.** Consider using this school practice self-assessment tool and deepening staff knowledge of effective practice by watching these Teaching Attendance online learning modules.

For District Leaders and Administrators:

- **Ensure that promoting regular attendance is a top priority.** Communicate this priority to all staff and to families.

- **Examine chronic absence data** for schools, student populations and grade levels to determine how much chronic absence is a problem and for whom.

- **Establish district goals related to attendance and chronic absence** and communicate them to all stakeholders.

- **Review district attendance policies and procedures to ensure that:**

  a. Chronic absence is identified at the earliest time possible, using current and prior year data.
  b. Principals and school site staff are well-versed on district attendance policies and procedures; and attendance personnel are trained to enter attendance data consistently and accurately into your student information system.
  c. They require the creation of a site-based attendance team if the overall level of chronic absence in a school reaches a particular level.
  d. The district has a skilled administrator responsible for overseeing attendance.

- **Promote effective use of data by:**

  a. Leveraging student information system functionality or using available tools to implement and utilize an early warning system for attendance at the district and or school site level.
  b. Routinely monitoring attendance data throughout the year, annually reviewing data to see how your district and schools are doing, and comparing your data with county and state data.
  c. Building principals' capacity to monitor and use data from your early warning system to develop strategies to address identified problem areas; to develop attendance teams; to learn from each other; and to put in place a multi-tiered attendance intervention. Principals also can engage the entire staff, including teachers, in supporting attendance as an integral part of an overall approach to addressing social emotional learning and academic success.
  d. Offering guidance on setting meaningful attendance goals. Help schools set ambitious but achievable goals. Encourage them to set improvement goals, using baseline data from the prior school year and the anticipated level of support available.

- **Celebrate and share strategies illustrated in "bright spots"** about schools, principals and school staff that have improved or supported attendance, especially among vulnerable populations.

- **Provide materials and supports for positive engagement** and attendance messaging across schools.

- **Convene key agencies and community partners** to work with the most affected schools to unpack and address barriers.

- **Collaborate with community partners to examine geographic concentrations of chronically absent students and relevant community factors** (poverty, subsidized housing, health conditions and resources, early childhood programming, youth/family support gaps, transit, etc.). Use secondary and locally-collected data to target resources. Enlist help from government and research institutions that have mapping capacity.

- **Develop and implement a district and community action plan**. See these resources on our Superintendents Call to Action website page.

- **Collaborate with university and research institution partners t**o engage in research related to attendance and chronic absenteeism.

For School Board Members:

- **Examine chronic absence data** for schools, student populations and grade levels in your district or county to determine how much chronic absence is a problem and for whom.

- **Build awareness of chronic absence and how it can be addressed among leaders in your school district.** Encourage implementation of this report's recommendations.

- **Promote training for district supervisors** that ensures that they understand what chronic absence is and how they can promote data-driven strategies.

- **Bring together your district and other public agencies or community partners** to review data on chronic absence and develop plans for improving attendance.

- **Ensure that your district is developing and implementing a plan** to reduce chronic absence that integrates with other district-wide initiatives.

For Regional Educational Associations and County Offices of Education:

- **Review school-level chronic absence across your county and region,** looking for patterns that require interagency collaboration across jurisdictional lines to address them.

- **Review attendance policies and procedures for county-operated schools** to ensure that they promote identifying students' attendance and truancy issues as early as possible and to ensure that students exiting county-operated schools enroll in district schools.

- **Strengthen school districts' capacity to address chronic absence in their ESSA implementation plans.** Offer guidance about how to set meaningful goals, review and analyze data, and adopt effective strategies for reducing chronic absence.

- **Celebrate and share the practices and strategies of "bright spot" school districts.**

- **Bring together key county agencies and community partners to review chronic absence data with school districts** and to determine how everyone can work together to unpack and address attendance barriers.

- **Develop professional learning networks** to help school districts and their partners put in place a multi-tiered attendance intervention, learn from each another, and identify promising practices within and across districts. Encourage meetings between county and district attendance supervisors, within or across counties, for professional development, sharing effective strategies and identifying shared concerns.

- **Create county-wide attendance messaging campaign materials and resources** that can be tailored locally.

- **Support districts' efforts to examine data maps, exploring the relationship between chronic absence and relevant community factors** (e.g. poverty, subsidized housing, health conditions and resources, early childhood programming, youth/family supports, transit access, etc.).

- **Create a task force to unpack barriers to attendance and address chronic absence in alternative schools.**

For Research Institutions and Schools of Education:

- **Partner with your state Department of Education** to conduct further in-depth analyses of chronic absence data in conjunction with other performance indicator data.

- **Partner with school districts on data analysis** to assess chronic absence and its causal factors.

- **Help school districts evaluate the impact of interventions** and share the results broadly.

- **Examine the interactions between performance indicators** (e.g. How does chronic absence interact with suspensions and achievement and vice versa?) and help identify effective integrated approaches to improve student achievement.

- **Conduct additional research** to determine when and how high levels of absenteeism impact school learning environments for all students, including students who maintain good attendance, and identify effective practices to improve attendance, including examining how school calendars and schedules impact attendance.

- **Incorporate addressing chronic absenteeism into credentialing programs** for teachers, pupil support personnel and administrators.

Conclusion

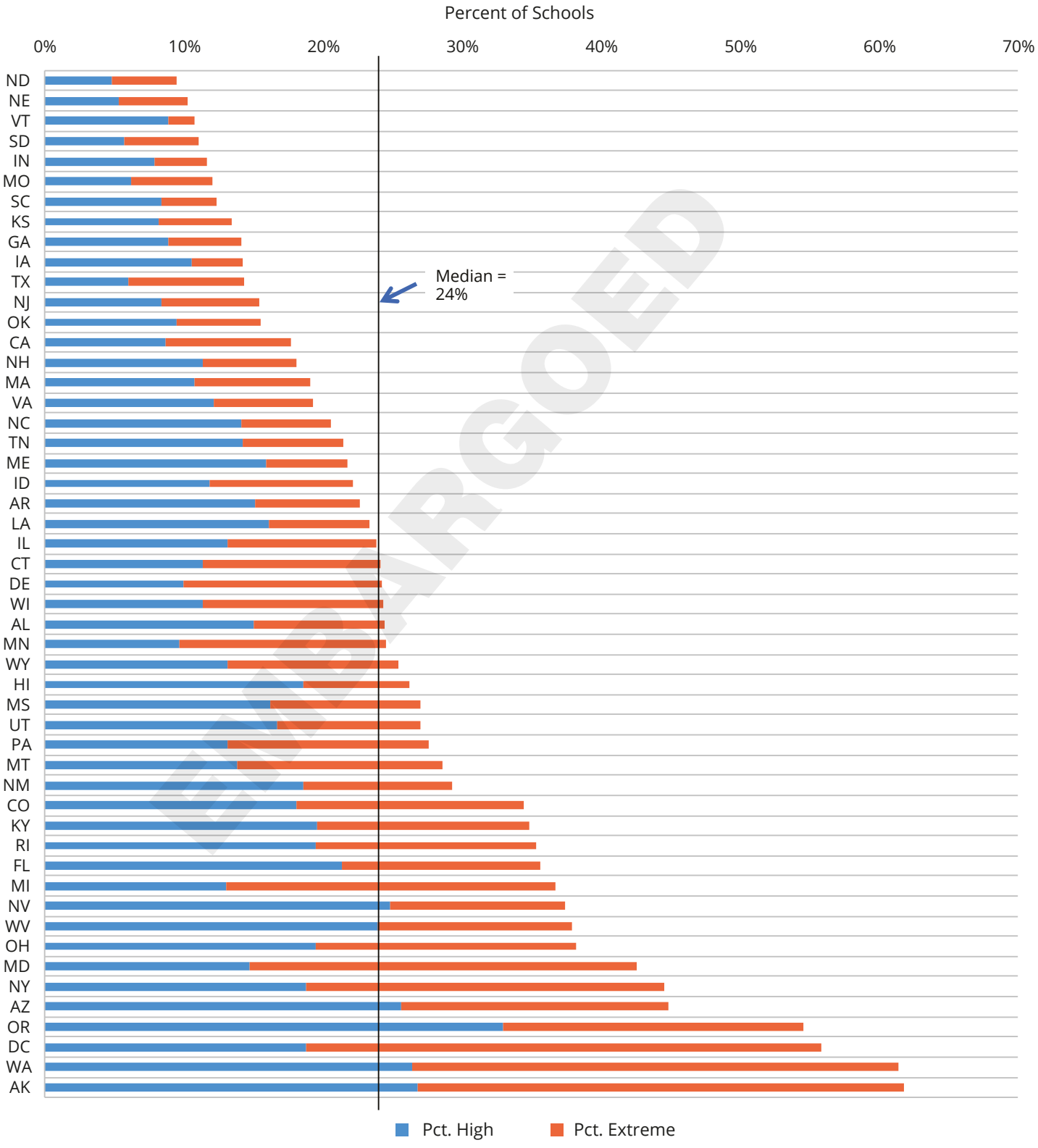
Chronic absence data is a powerful tool for organizing and accelerating efforts to improve outcomes for children. Most people understand from common sense as well as research that children need to be present in the classroom to gain from what is offered at school. As a result, key stakeholders quickly and easily understand that high levels of chronic absence in their school or community is a challenge worth working together to address.

Equally helpful, chronic absence data is highly responsive to community efforts to improve attendance. When barriers to attendance persist, the data shows that students don't show up to class. When communities put the right supports and solutions in place, the data confirms that students are getting to school. Attendance rises!

Chronic absence data, alone, however, is insufficient to produce change. A major danger with the growing availability of chronic absence data is that it will be used to blame and penalize children and families. Everyone using chronic absence data, from administrators to teachers to elected officials and community organizations, needs to make sure that data is used to activate positive problem-solving. To leverage the policy win achieved through ESSA, we must all use this new educational metric—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.

Appendix A

States Ranked by Percent of Schools with High and Extreme Levels of Chronic Absence



Number of Schools with High and Extreme Chronic Absence, and Percent of Chronically Absent Students, By State in Alphabetical Order

	School Year 2015-16						
State	No. Schools with High CA	No. Schools with Extreme CA	Total # Schools	Percent School With High or Extreme CA	Total No. of Students	No. Chronically Absent Students	Percent of Students Chronically Absent
Alabama	208	130	1382	24	746,839	132,607	17.8
Alaska	135	176	503	62	132,342	34,173	25.8
Arizona	501	376	1955	45	1,134,663	212,332	18.7
Arkansas	160	79	1055	23	485,821	68,688	14.1
California	871	904	10003	18	6,282,366	764,669	12.2
Colorado	329	297	1814	35	901,978	171,035	19.0
Connecticut	136	152	1192	24	537,516	73,446	13.7
Delaware	23	33	231	24	139,175	21,223	15.2
District of Columbia	40	79	213	56	82,585	25,600	31.0
Florida	829	555	3882	36	2,784,084	503,832	18.1
Georgia	211	125	2380	14	1,769,640	225,317	12.7
Hawaii	54	22	290	26	182,913	28,502	15.6
Idaho	84	73	709	22	297,049	37,759	12.7
Illinois	520	428	3966	24	2,032,308	335,094	16.5
Indiana	146	70	1853	12	1,034,752	119,374	11.5
Iowa	141	49	1335	14	503,130	63,688	12.7
Kansas	110	70	1338	13	492,837	60,050	12.2
Kentucky	267	207	1359	35	689,683	126,509	18.3
Lousiana	218	98	1352	23	723,781	106,841	14.8
Maine	93	34	584	22	178,460	25,910	14.5
Maryland	210	398	1428	43	895,281	260,721	29.1
Massachussetts	196	152	1822	19	954,716	129,770	13.6
Michigan	453	822	3470	37	1,550,246	308,112	19.9
Minnesota	198	305	2047	25	883,191	122,477	13.9
Mississippi	157	105	969	27	492,340	84,924	17.2
Missouri	142	134	2294	12	932,436	108,461	11.6
Montana	114	122	824	29	148,318	28,171	19.0
Nebraska	54	49	1004	10	318,350	36,360	11.4
Nevada	162	82	651	37	471,356	94,459	20.0
New Hampshire	54	32	476	18	183,397	26,186	14.3
New Jersey	213	178	2530	15	1,373,188	172,304	12.5
New Mexico	161	93	866	29	340,244	59,367	17.4
New York	919	1264	4899	45	2,731,958	585,666	21.4
North Carolina	368	166	2596	21	1,554,493	227,473	14.6
North Dakota	23	22	476	9	111,077	10,569	9.5
Ohio	697	670	3577	38	1,760,243	334,678	19.0
Oklahoma	171	107	1795	15	697,577	82,415	11.8
Oregon	420	275	1274	55	575,015	134,339	23.4
Pennsylvania	397	438	3023	28	1,728,394	293,035	17.0
Rhode Island	59	48	303	35	141,895	29,873	21.1
South Carolina	103	49	1225	12	767,540	86,671	11.3
South Dakota	39	36	679	11	137,870	16,601	12.0
Tennesseee	255	130	1794	21	1,000,786	137,973	13.8
Texas	510	708	8474	14	5,312,904	648,671	12.2
Utah	163	101	976	27	665,998	114,192	17.1
Vermont	27	6	305	11	83,429	9,115	10.9
Virginia	236	138	1938	19	1,287,082	177,354	13.8
Washington	585	774	2212	61	1,097,426	295,733	26.9
West Virginia	170	99	710	38	279,536	55,349	19.8
Wisconsin	245	278	2151	24	870,953	144,421	16.6
Wyoming	48	45	365	25	95,315	14,983	15.7

Endnotes