



## Reasons for Chronic Absenteeism (RCA)

Chronic absenteeism, commonly defined as missing 10% or more of instructional days per school year, has significant impact on student outcomes. It is associated with decreased reading levels, overall academic performance, on-time graduation rates, and post-secondary enrollment as well as increased dropout rates.<sup>1,2</sup> Fortunately, chronic absenteeism rates are alterable at the student and system level when interventions are appropriately targeted and matched to student needs.

In order to efficiently and effectively match interventions to student needs, there is a need for reliable and valid data that provide sufficient information to understand the various challenges students experience. The Reasons for Chronic Absenteeism (RCA) Survey was developed and underwent extensive validation processes including an expert panel review, student reviewers, and a national validation study to ensure the technical adequacy of the items and instrument.

The RCA is designed for secondary students (6<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade) who have missed 10% or more instructional days. The survey is comprised of 14 demographics and perception of absences questions; 28 items measuring multifaceted reasons for absences; and three open-ended questions asking about other reasons for missing school, the reasons they do come to school, and what would help them come to school more often. Students respond to each of the items that ask why they missed school using a 0-3 scale with response options of Never, Rarely, Sometimes, or Usually. Students may take the survey via an online survey platform (e.g. SurveyMonkey®, Qualtrics®, etc.) or hardcopy. Survey administration takes approximately 10 minutes and multiple students may take the survey at one time. Students may be provided the explanation that they are taking the survey so school staff better understand why students miss school. Please allow students privacy to independently answer questions.

| Demographic Items                                                                            |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| What is the name of your school?                                                             |
| How old are you? (10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21)                            |
| What is your gender? (male, female, other [for example: transitioning, transgendered, etc.]) |
| What grade are you in? (6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12)                                              |
| Do you get free or reduced price lunch? (yes/no)                                             |
| What is your mother's level of education?<br>some high school<br>high school diploma         |

<sup>1</sup> Balfanz, R., & Byrnes, V. (2012). *Chronic Absenteeism: Summarizing what we know from nationally available data*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Center for Social Organization of Schools.

<sup>2</sup> Chang, H. & Romero, M. (2008). *Present, engaged and accounted for the critical importance of addressing chronic absence in the early grades*. National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP): The Mailman School of Public Health at Columbia University.

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>GED</p> <p>some college</p> <p>2-year or associates degree</p> <p>4-year or bachelors degree</p> <p>masters degree</p> <p>doctorate degree</p>                                                                                                                                       |
| <p>What is your Race? (*if more than one race select multi-racial)?</p> <p>Multi-racial</p> <p>Asian</p> <p>Black/African American</p> <p>Hispanic/Latino</p> <p>White</p> <p>American Indian or Alaskan Native</p> <p>Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander</p> <p>Prefer not to say</p> |
| <p>Do you get special education services? (yes/no)</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <p>Is English your first language or the language you use most often? (yes/no)</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <p>What are your grades?</p> <p>All A's</p> <p>A's and B's</p> <p>Mostly B's</p> <p>B's and C's</p> <p>Mostly C's</p> <p>C's and D's</p> <p>Mostly D's</p> <p>D's and F's</p> <p>Mostly F's</p> <p>A mix of grades</p>                                                                  |
| <p>About how many days of school did you miss <u>last year</u>?</p> <p>5 days or less</p> <p>6-10 days</p> <p>11-15 days</p> <p>16-20</p> <p>More than 20 days</p>                                                                                                                      |
| <p>About how many days of school did you miss in the <u>last month</u>?</p> <p>0-1 days</p> <p>2-3 days</p> <p>4 or more days</p>                                                                                                                                                       |
| <p>Compared to other students, how many school days did you miss last year?</p> <p>The same as other students</p> <p>More than other students</p> <p>Fewer than other students</p>                                                                                                      |
| <p>How do you usually get to/from school?</p> <p>Walk or ride a bike</p> <p>By bus</p> <p>By car</p>                                                                                                                                                                                    |

**Survey Items/Directions:**

Please rate each question as being Never, Rarely, Sometimes, or Usually the reasons you miss school.

- Never means that it is never a reason you have missed school.
- Rarely means that it is not very often a reason you have missed school.
- Sometimes means that it is a reason you have missed school more than 3 times.
- Usually means that it is often the reason you have missed school.

| Item                                                                       | Never | Rarely | Sometimes | Usually |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|--------|-----------|---------|
| 1. I was sick (short term: flu, cold, headache).                           |       |        |           |         |
| 2. I was sick (long term: asthma, allergies, chronic-illness).             |       |        |           |         |
| 3. I did not feel safe <i>on the bus ride or walk to or from school.</i>   |       |        |           |         |
| 4. I hung-out with friends or family instead of going to school.           |       |        |           |         |
| 5. I had an appointment (doctor, dentist, counselor, etc.).                |       |        |           |         |
| 6. I did not get my work done or study for a test.                         |       |        |           |         |
| 7. I stayed up too late and missed school or overslept.                    |       |        |           |         |
| 8. There were problems with the car (would not run, ran out of gas, etc.). |       |        |           |         |
| 9. I did not want to be teased or bullied.                                 |       |        |           |         |
| 10. I think school is boring.                                              |       |        |           |         |

| Item                                                                                | Never | Rarely | Sometimes | Usually |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|--------|-----------|---------|
| 11. I missed the bus, or the bus was late or the bus did not come.                  |       |        |           |         |
| 12. I did not feel safe <i>at school</i> .                                          |       |        |           |         |
| 13. There was no reason for me to go to school.                                     |       |        |           |         |
| 14. I had to take care of or help a family member (child, sibling, relative, etc.). |       |        |           |         |
| 15. No one misses me when I don't come to school.                                   |       |        |           |         |
| 16. I had to work.                                                                  |       |        |           |         |
| 17. I did not want to walk in bad weather.                                          |       |        |           |         |
| 18. My parents don't care if I miss school.                                         |       |        |           |         |
| 19. I had to go to court or was in jail or juvenile detention center.               |       |        |           |         |
| 20. I did not want to see another student(s) because of drama or conflict.          |       |        |           |         |
| 21. I was out of town.                                                              |       |        |           |         |
| 22. I had a family emergency (death, illness, injury, drama, etc.).                 |       |        |           |         |
| 23. I was suspended.                                                                |       |        |           |         |

| Item                                                                                                               | Never | Rarely | Sometimes | Usually |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|--------|-----------|---------|
| 24. I didn't have the right or clean clothes or supplies for school.                                               |       |        |           |         |
| 25. I was homeless or had no place to stay.                                                                        |       |        |           |         |
| 26. The water, heat, or power were turned off at home.                                                             |       |        |           |         |
| 27. I did not want to get in-trouble for being late or tardy.                                                      |       |        |           |         |
| 28. My school is not a nice place to be (people are not nice, people don't care about others, unfair rules, etc.). |       |        |           |         |
| 29. I did not want to go to a class.                                                                               |       |        |           |         |
| 30. I get sent to the office too much.                                                                             |       |        |           |         |
| 31. I was too sad/depressed or anxious/upset to come to school.                                                    |       |        |           |         |
| 32. I had to move.                                                                                                 |       |        |           |         |
| 33. Are there any other reasons not listed that you miss school?                                                   |       |        |           |         |
| 34. What are the reasons you do come to school (e.g. friends, clubs/sports, etc.)?                                 |       |        |           |         |
| 35. What would help you come to school more often or miss fewer days?                                              |       |        |           |         |

For additional information on the hardcopy version or survey administration and scoring contact:  
 Amber Brundage, Coordinator for Research & Evaluation, [abrundage@mail.usf.edu](mailto:abrundage@mail.usf.edu)

**Preferred Citation:** Brundage, A., & Castillo, J. (2017). *Reasons for Chronic Absenteeism (RCA)*. Florida's Problem Solving/Response to Intervention Project, University of South Florida