



# The Facts About Chronic Absence

## Prevalence

- Nationwide an estimated 5 million to 7.5 million students are chronically absent each year, meaning they miss 10 percent or more of the school year in excused and unexcused absences. That's about 18-19 days in a typical year. <sup>i</sup>
- High levels of chronic absence are found in urban, suburban and rural communities. In some school districts, as many as one in four students are chronically absent. <sup>ii</sup>
- This is not just a high school problem. One in 10 kindergarten and 1st grade students is chronically absent. <sup>iii</sup>
- Low-income students are four times more likely to be chronically absent than their middle class peers. <sup>iv</sup>
- Chronic absence occurs even when the absences occur sporadically throughout the year. <sup>v</sup>

## Impact

- Students who are chronically absent in kindergarten and first grade are less likely to read proficiently by the time they finish third grade. Preliminary data in California found that 17 percent of those students were reading on grade level at the end of third grade, compared to 62 percent who attended regularly. <sup>vi</sup>
- Lower levels of third grade reading are also found among children chronically absent in preschool and kindergarten or who did not ever attend preschool. <sup>vii</sup>
- By sixth grade, chronic absence becomes an early warning sign that a student may drop out of high school, a Baltimore study found. <sup>viii</sup>
- By ninth grade, it is a better indicator than eighth-grade test scores that a student will drop out. <sup>ix</sup> A study in Utah found that a student chronically absent any year between eighth and 12th grade was 7.4 times more likely to drop out. <sup>x</sup>
- Children with certain risk factors—including poverty, homelessness and chronic illness—are both more likely to be chronic absent and especially hard hit because they often lack the resources to make up for the lost opportunities to learn in the classroom. <sup>xi</sup>
- Chronic absence is often higher among children with disabilities. This requires examining the nature of the disability and how well the educational needs of these children are being met.
- In school districts where state funding is determined by average daily attendance, chronic absence is costing districts millions of dollars each year.

## Monitoring

- Many schools, and districts and preschools have no idea how big the problem is because they don't track how many students are chronically absent.
- Schools typically look at average daily attendance (the percentage of students who show up every day) or at truancy (unexcused absences) but not at how many kids miss so many days in excused and unexcused absences that they are headed off track academically.
- A school can have 95 percent of its students show up for school every day and still have 20 percent who are chronically absent, since school-wide averages don't show whether all students are missing a few days or a subset of students is missing school frequently. <sup>xii</sup>
- There is no federal requirement to track chronic absence, and few states require school districts report the data. Most states and districts have the capacity to calculate chronic absence based upon the attendance data in their student databases.
- Chronic absence can be reduced when schools, communities and families work together to track the data, build a culture of attendance and address barriers to good attendance.

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- <sup>i</sup> Balfanz, R., and Byrnes, V., *The Importance of Being in School: A Report on Absenteeism in the Nation's Public Schools*. Johns Hopkins University Center for Social Organization of Schools, Baltimore, Md., 2012.
- <sup>ii</sup> Balfanz and Byrnes, Chang, Hedy and Romero, Mariajose, *Present, Engaged and Accounted For: The Critical Importance of Addressing Chronic Absence in the Early Grades*, National Center for Children in Poverty, New York, NY, September 2008.
- <sup>iii</sup> Chang and Romero
- <sup>iv</sup> Romero Mariajose, *How Maternal, Family and Cumulative Risk Affect Absenteeism in Early Schooling*, National Center for Children in Poverty, February 2008
- <sup>v</sup> Nauer, Kim, White, Andrew & Yerneni, Rajeev. *Strengthening Schools by Strengthening Families: Community Strategies to Reverse Chronic Absenteeism in the Early Grades and Improve Supports for Children and Families*, Center for New York City Affairs at the New School. October 2008.
- <sup>vi</sup> *Attendance in Early Elementary Grades: Association with Student Characteristics, School Readiness and Third Grade Outcomes*, Applied Survey Research, May 2011.
- <sup>vii</sup> Connolly, Faith and Olson, Linda S., *Early Elementary Performance and Attendance in Baltimore City Schools' Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten*, Baltimore Education Research Consortium, Baltimore, Md., March 2012.
- <sup>viii</sup> Balfanz, Robert, Lisa Herzog and Douglas J. MacIver, *Preventing Student Disengagement and Keeping Students on the Graduation Path in Urban Middle-Grades Schools: Early Identification and Effective Interventions*, *Educational Psychologist*, 42(4), 223–235, 2007.
- <sup>ix</sup> Allensworth, E. M., and Easton, J. Q., *What Matters for Staying On-track and Graduating in Chicago Public High Schools: A Close Look at Course Grades, Failures, and Attendance in the Freshman Year*, University of Chicago, Consortium on Chicago School Research, Chicago, IL, 2007.
- <sup>x</sup> Chronic Absence in Utah, Utah Education Policy Center at the University of Utah, 2012.
- <sup>xi</sup> Ready, Douglas D., *Socioeconomic Disadvantage, School Attendance, and Early Cognitive Development, The Differential Effects of School Exposure*, *Sociology of Education*, October 2010.
- <sup>xii</sup> Bruner, Charles, Anne Discher and Hedy Chang, *Chronic Elementary Absenteeism: A Problem Hidden in Plain Sight*, Child and Family Policy Center and Attendance Works, November 2011