

Reducing Chronic Absence

What to Learn from Your State's ESSA Plan

Under ESSA, all states are required to report on chronic absence in local and state report cards and states have the opportunity to include a non-academic indicator in their systems of accountability for schools. The vast majority (36 states plus Washington DC) have chosen to use a chronic absence metric as an accountability metric for school improvement. Learn more about how your state plans to incorporate rates of chronic absence into the new accountability system in your state's ESSA plan, under Title I.

Guidance for School Improvement

Schools and districts can have a significant impact on reducing rates of chronic absence, using a problem-solving, non-punitive approach to school-wide practices and targeted intervention. For example, interventions might include:

- creating a more engaging school environment that ensures every student and family feels welcome,
- helping students and families monitor their own attendance and understand the consequences of lost learning time,
- reducing suspensions by adopting more effective school discipline practices,
- offering additional academic support for students at risk of failing,
- offering additional after school programming (e.g. arts programs),
- addressing transportation access, or
- working with families and community members to address community-specific barriers to attendance.

Large numbers of chronically absence students typically signifies a systemic problem that requires programmatic or policy action. Addressing chronic absence beginning in the early grades is critical to ensuring all children, especially the most vulnerable, have an equal opportunity to learn from what is taught in the classroom.

Schools and districts should ensure that all absences are included in data collection, whether or not this is required at the state level; regardless of reason (suspension, excused absence, partial days), lost instructional time affects student academic performance and dropout rates. Accurate, easy-to-understand, real-time, and comparable data reports are essential to taking action in a timely manner.

Find Support for this Strategy in ESSA

TITLE I, PART A: Improving Basic Programs Operated by Local Educational Agencies
TITLE IV, PART A: Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants



Chronic Absenteeism

Chronic absenteeism —typically defined as missing 10 percent or more of the school year — is linked to lower academic proficiency. More than 7 million students in the US are chronically absent.

Learn more at attendanceworks.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/AAM-Policy-Brief-091214-2.pdf.

Sample: Root-cause analysis on chronic absenteeism	
Outcome	Root-Cause Questions
Rate of Chronic Absenteeism for all students, and each student subgroup	<p>For the groups of students most affected by chronic absence, what do you see as the main factors causing them to miss so much school?</p> <p>Do they face major barriers such as chronic illness and lack of access to health care, unreliable transportation, unstable housing, or lack of a safe path to school?</p> <p>Are chronically absent students experiencing negative school experiences related to bullying, ineffective discipline policies, and/or undiagnosed disabilities?</p> <p>Do students lack engaging educational experiences either during or afterschool?</p> <p>What is the rate of engagement of families of chronically absent students?</p> <p>Do students and families understand the impact of absence from school (excused or unexcused)?</p> <p>Additionally, what are the attendance data collection practices in the school and are these practices giving us actionable data?</p>

Essential Stakeholders

- ✓ Students and families of students with low attendance, including those experiencing significant barriers to consistent attendance
- ✓ Teachers and school leaders, as well as other in-school staff and paraprofessionals
- ✓ Public agencies with insights and resources related to health, transportation, housing, and social services
- ✓ Civil rights organizations and community-based organizations focused on additional supports for families and students, including those with significant rates of absence and those at risk of dropping out
- ✓ Early childhood education and childcare providers

Ask the Experts

- ✓ [Portraits of Change: Aligning School and Community Resources to Reduce Chronic Absence](#) (Attendance Works)
- ✓ [The Attendance Imperative: How States Can Advance Achievement by Reducing Chronic Absence](#) (Attendance Works)



Keep in Mind

Chronic absence data is relatively new for most districts. However, more important and actionable than the outcomes data (rates of chronic absence) are the root causes that are specific to your community and students.