



# Reducing Chronic Absenteeism



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INSIGHTS FOR FAMILIES is provided by your child's school in recognition of your role as a partner in education. Insights is produced by Marcia Latta, communications consultant.

***"Eighty percent of success is showing up."***

**— Woody Allen**

Chronic absenteeism — students who miss 15 or more days for any reason during the school year — is preventing students from being as successful as they could be. According to The Education Trust, "Research shows that chronic absenteeism is associated with a number of negative consequences for students, including lower achievement, disengagement from school, course failure, and increased risk of dropping out." <https://edtrust.org/students-cant-wait/chronic-absenteeism/>

When students don't show up, the coursework becomes harder. Challenging lessons become overwhelming when students miss too much of class and fall behind. This can lead to a cycle of further absences caused by a sense of failure.

### **What is absenteeism?**

Absenteeism includes both excused and unexcused rates of absence from school. Truancy, on the other hand, is only unexcused absences. While some students must miss school due to illness or family obligation, the overall rate of absenteeism is climbing:

- Based on the most recent national data, about 13 percent of students miss 15 or more school days.
- Schools demonstrate higher chronic absenteeism rates for some groups of students — especially low-income students, Native students, and students with disabilities.
- On average, schools with higher chronic absenteeism rates have lower proficiency rates, and vice versa, regardless of how chronic absenteeism is defined. This holds for students overall and for each group of students.
- On average, schools with higher chronic absenteeism rates also have higher discipline rates for students overall.
- Research is clear that schools and districts can impact students' absentee rates. ([www.edtrust.org](http://www.edtrust.org))

### **Must be present to win**

Success at school starts with the simplest requirement: showing up. But schools around the country are battling falling attendance rates. Attendance has been found to be the number one indicator for student success, and students need an estimated three days to catch up after missing only a single day. The problem is a serious academic threat with some studies predicting future failure, starting with the youngest

*(Over)*

grades: “Students who miss just two or three days each month in kindergarten and first grade may never catch up. <http://bit.ly/2QG0LyA>

Parents have the biggest influence on their children and can help ensure that students are at school every day. It may not seem harmful for kids to skip a day or two a month, but those absences add up to a record of chronic absenteeism. Understanding the big-picture impact may help.

Absences in early grades can have a snowball effect. Chronically absent kids in kindergarten and first grade were significantly behind in reading skills by third grade.

High absenteeism can become a long-term habit. Students who miss school at young ages are more likely to skip school when they are older. They also may be more likely to miss work after they graduate.

Chronic absences can reduce graduation rates and success in college. “In a Rhode Island study, only 11 percent of high school students with chronic absences made it to their second year of college. That’s compared to 51 percent of students who didn’t miss that much school.” <http://bit.ly/2QJxNhh>

Students with special needs or learning differences struggle more when they miss school. Each lesson builds on future lessons, so missing one makes it hard to keep up with the instruction. Also, absent kids miss opportunities to be identified for intervention and extra support. <https://u.org/2MU0dEb>

### **What can parents do?**

Students at every grade miss too much school, but kindergartners and high school students tie for the most absences. Some states, such as California, do not require kindergarten. However, if your child is enrolled in kindergarten, help them develop a habit of attendance by going every day. This long-term habit will reduce the chance that they will skip school in high school.

### **Other tips for parents include:**

- Track your child’s absences. A record of missed days will help you identify possible problems.
- Talk with your child. Try to understand why they do not want to go to school and discuss solutions together.
- Talk to your child’s school. Get advice from a teacher, counselor or principal. School professionals are there to help your child succeed. Be sure to communicate with them when you have concerns.
- Consider a learning evaluation if your child is struggling. He or she may need extra support to be successful.
- Have responses ready when your child says they do not want to go to school. Reluctance to attend may be caused by social anxiety, bullying, learning challenges or health issue. Read a list of recommended parent responses in What to Say When Your Child Doesn’t Want to Go to School: <https://u.org/2tpAug0>.