

Why School Attendance Matters for Child Welfare

Putting the Pieces Together for Children & Families: A National Conference on Substance Abuse, Child Welfare & The Courts

Speakers

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What does School Attendance Have to Do With Child Welfare Or Treatment?

A Lot!

- Nationally, 70% of all children who are in foster care are of school age (490,000)
- In the RPG caseload across 53 sites, 41% of the child caseload of 19,000 is of school age (6-18)
- Children in the child welfare system have lower school attendance due to family instability and the effects of parental and adolescent substance abuse*

Lenssen, Doreleijers, van Dijk, & Hartman, (2000) *Journal of Adolescence*, 23, 287-30.

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Other child welfare risk factors can affect attendance

- The frequent mobility of children removed to foster care, kinship care, or other out-of-home care affects attendance (57% changed schools in one study)*
- Disabilities among child welfare children (11% of total) can affect attendance
- The rate of substance abuse or dependence among all youth 12-17 is 7.0%, which = 1.7 million youth; of youth ever in foster care, illicit drug use is 33.6% vs. 21.7% among youth never in foster care

*Conger and Finkelstein, Foster Care and School Mobility, (2003)

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Part I: The Basics

What Do We Mean By School Attendance?

What do We Know about the Role Attendance Plays in Improving Outcomes For Children and Youth?





What Do We Mean By Attendance?

Defining Key Terms

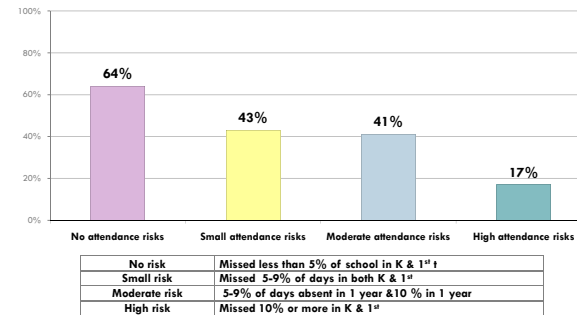
- ❑ **Average Daily Attendance:** The percentage of enrolled students who attend school each day.
- ❑ **Satisfactory Attendance:** Missing 5% or less of school in an academic year.
- ❑ **Chronic Absence:** Missing 10% or more of school in an academic year for any reason—excused or unexcused.
- ❑ **Severe Chronic Absence:** Missing 20% or more days of school per year – approximately two months of school.
- ❑ **Truancy:** Typically refers *only* to unexcused absences and is defined by each state.

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Students Chronically Absent in Kindergarten & 1st Grade Much Less Likely to Read Proficiently in 3rd Grade

Percent Students Scoring Proficient or Advanced on 3rd Grade ELA Based on Attendance in Kindergarten and 1st Grade



No risk	Missed less than 5% of school in K & 1 st grade
Small risk	Missed 5-9% of days in both K & 1 st grade
Moderate risk	5-9% of days absent in 1 year & 10% in 1 year
High risk	Missed 10% or more in K & 1 st grade

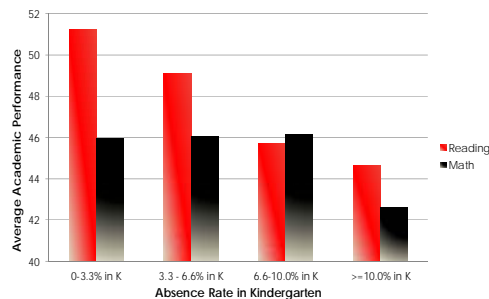
Source: Applied Survey Research & Attendance Works (April 2011)

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The Long-term impact of Chronic Kindergarten Absence Is Most Troubling for Poor Children

5th Grade Math and Reading Performance By K Attendance



Source: ECLS-K data analyzed by National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP)
 Note: Average academic performance reflects results of direct cognitive assessments conducted for ECLS-K.


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Chronic Absence is Especially Challenging for Low-Income Children

- ❑ Kindergarten and 1st grade can reduce the achievement gap for low-income vs. middle class students, but only if they attend school regularly. (Ready 2010)
- ❑ The negative impact of absences on literacy is **75% larger** for low-income children whose families often lack resources to make up lost time on task. (Ready 2010)
- ❑ Only **17% of low-income children** in the United States read proficiently by 4th grade. (NAEP 2009)

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Chronic Absence is Especially Challenging for Low-Income Children

- ❑ Poor children are 4x more likely to be chronically absent in K than their highest income peers.
- ❑ Children in poverty are more likely to lack basic health and safety supports that ensure a child is more likely to get to school. They often face:
 - Unstable Housing
 - Limited Access to Health Care
 - Poor Transportation
 - Inadequate Food and Clothing
 - Lack of Safe Paths to School Due to Neighborhood Violence
 - Chaotic Schools with Poor Quality Programs, etc.

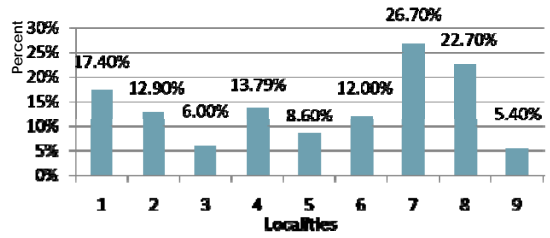
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* (Romero & Lee 2007)




Chronic Early Absence Can Reach High Levels.

Nationally, 1 out of 10 Kindergartners & 1st Graders are Chronically Absent. Levels Can be Higher Locally.



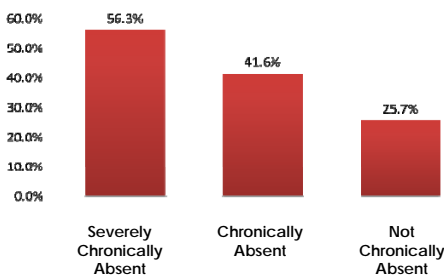
Locality	Percent
1	17.40%
2	12.90%
3	6.00%
4	13.79%
5	8.60%
6	12.00%
7	26.70%
8	22.70%
9	5.40%

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Chronically Absent 6th Graders Have Lower Graduation Rates


Dropout Rates by Sixth Grade Attendance
(Baltimore City Public Schools, 1990-2000 Sixth Grade Cohort)



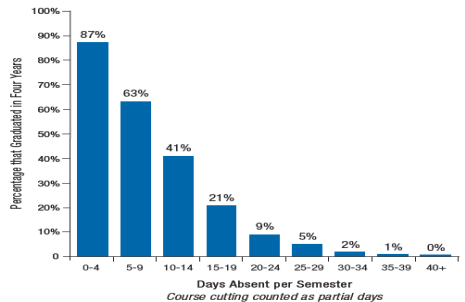
Attendance Category	Dropout Rate
Severely Chronically Absent	56.3%
Chronically Absent	41.6%
Not Chronically Absent	25.7%

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Source: Baltimore Education Research Consortium SY 2009-2010



9th Grade Attendance Predicts Graduation for Students of All Economic Backgrounds



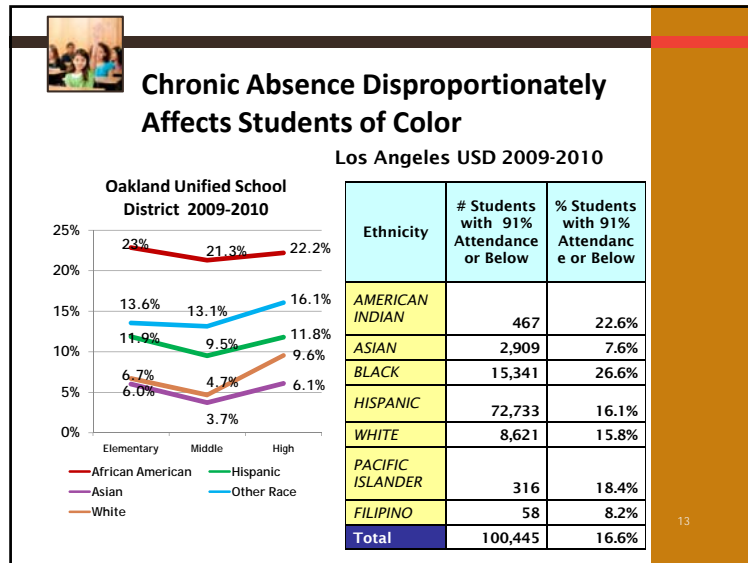
Days Absent per Semester	Percentage that Graduated in Four Years
0-4	87%
5-9	63%
10-14	41%
15-19	21%
20-24	9%
25-29	5%
30-34	2%
35-39	1%
40+	0%

Course cutting counted as partial days

Note: This Chicago study found attendance was a stronger graduation predictor than 8th grade test scores.

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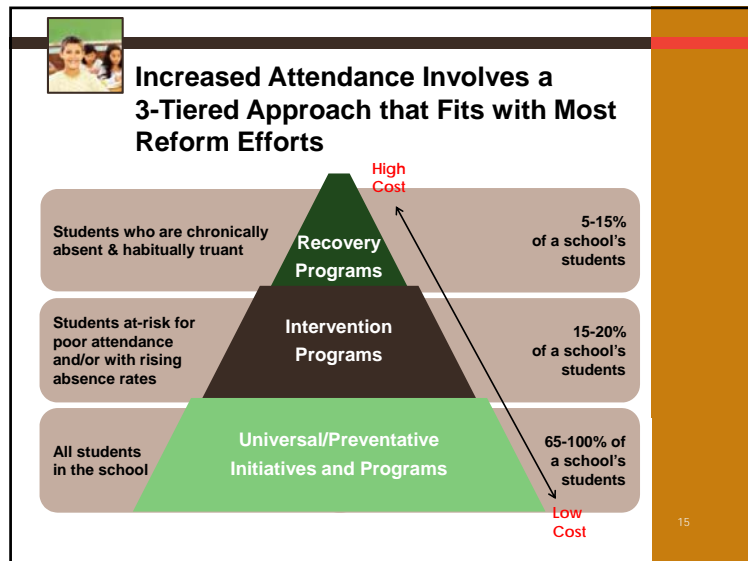
Source: Allensworth & Easton, *What Matters for Staying On-Track and Graduating in Chicago Public Schools*, Consortium on Chicago School Research at U of C, July 2007



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- ### Schools + Communities CAN Make a Difference
- #### Characteristics of Successful Attendance Initiatives
- Partner with community agencies to help families carry out their responsibility to get children to school.
 - Make attendance a priority, set targets and monitor progress over time.
 - Engage parents and students in identifying and addressing school, family, and community issues that contribute to chronic absence.
 - Clearly communicate expectations for attendance to students and families.
 - Begin early, ideally in Pre-K.
 - Combine targeted interventions with universal strategies that nurture an engaged learning environment, build a culture of attendance and ensure physical health and safety at school.
 - Offer positive supports before punitive action.

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- ### Improving Attendance Takes A Cross-Disciplinary Approach
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- #### Universal Attendance Supports
- Safe and supportive school environment
 - Inviting and engaging classroom environment
 - Intentional family involvement and participation
 - On-going attention to attendance data
 - Rapid parent contact for unexplained absences
 - Recognition for good and improved attendance
 - Collaboration with afterschool programs and early childhood programs to build a culture of attendance
 - Increased access to school based health supports
 - A school plan and budget that reflects high attendance priorities
- #### Individual Assessments and Intervention
- Refer chronically absent/ truant students for intervention
 - Identify and remove barriers
 - Provide on-going support
- #### Recovery Strategies
- Interagency Staffing
 - Case management and wrap-around services
 - Referral as last resort for court-based intervention
- Baltimore Student Attendance Work Group adapted from Scott Perry, Attendance Audit, Oregon

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Part II: The Baltimore Story - Making Attendance A Community Priority



**Baltimore Student
Attendance Campaign**



Baltimore City Public Schools By the Numbers

- 85,000 public school students k – 12
- 200 schools
- 83% Free and Reduced Meals
- 90% Average Daily Attendance
- 31% Chronic Absence
- 30% Highly Qualified Teachers
- 32% Student Mobility
- 88% African-American
- 9% White
- 3% Hispanic

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Baltimore's Attendance Strategy Year One

- **Examine the Data.** Researched the extent, causes, and consequences of chronic absence. Found 25% of kindergartners and 42% of 9th graders are chronically absent.
- **Spread the Word.** The Open Society Institute-Baltimore hosted a forum series on attendance.
- **Get Leaders on Board.** Baltimore's mayor and City Schools CEO incorporated attendance measures into school reform efforts that were already in full swing.
- **Identify Partners.** A work group comprised of over 100 representatives of city agencies, state agencies, parents, students, universities, foundations, public interest groups, program providers and student organizations worked together to develop recommendations to dramatically increase student attendance.

Baltimore's Attendance Strategy Year Two

- **Maintain the momentum to improve attendance by strengthening the universal approaches** to improving attendance.
- **Deepen the work focused on special populations through the implementation of a multi-agency, public-private partnership** that will serve as an attendance collaborative.
- **Implement a coordinated campaign** with partners that have expertise in particular areas including efforts to address mobility, homelessness, transportation, and health.
- **Implement a marketing campaign designed to engage students, parents, and the community in the issue of attendance** and garner their active participation with improving attendance in Baltimore.
- **Target chronically absent students in transition grades K, 6, and 9** for special interventions and supports.

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Work Group Recommendations Include Strategies to:

- Institute a text messaging transportation campaign to gather data about student’s experiences getting to and from school and use that data to improve service,
- Increase the use of and institutionalize attendance best practices through a change in direction for the Office of Attendance and Truancy from a student focused lens to a school focused lens,
- Leverage the impact of after-school and community schools on attendance,
- Improve City Schools identification and responsiveness to homeless youth, and
- Change student and parent attitudes about attendance.

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City Schools’ Leveraging Attendance as a “Must Respond to Indicator”

- CEO and Mayoral repeated public recognition of the importance of school attendance
- Bi-weekly District level attendance stat meetings to monitor trends, offer support to schools, and create accountability
- Improving District and School data analysis and reporting including principal dashboards and revisions to the daily absence report
- Partnering with Department of Social Services and the Family Preservation Unit utilizing absenteeism as a flag for a potential referral
- Revised the Discipline Code to dramatically decrease the number of offenses schools could suspend for (focused on offenses like truancy, cutting class, and required tiered responses to negative behavior)

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Part III: Lessons Learned

- **What led Baltimore City Dept of Social Services to become involved?**
- **What has BSDSS done in partnership with schools?**
- **Any insights gained about improving outcomes for children and youth?**



BCDSS Overview

- ~\$647 million
- ~2300 employees
- 16 sites in Baltimore providing
 - Public Assistance
 - Temporary Cash Assistance
 - Food Stamps
 - Medical Assistance
 - Workforce Development
 - Child Protection and Foster Care
 - Adult Protection and Social Services
 - Homeless Services



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BCDSS Performance FY2007 – FY2010:

- Kids in foster care: DOWN 28%
- Payment accuracy: STABLE 98%
- Kids in group homes: DOWN 71%
- Kids waiting for adoption: DOWN 57%
- Adoptions: UP 59%
- Exits to families: UP 47%

<http://www.aecf.org/~media/Pubs/Initiatives/Leadership%20Development/SharpeningLeadershipSkillstoImproveChildOutcomesinBaltimoreMaryland/BCDSSRBLFINAL.pdf>

BCDSS: meeting the needs of Baltimore City

- **Child Protection Services** are available 24 hours a day to keep children safe;
- **Foster Care** is a heartbreaking “solution” – we want to avoid it if we can do so safely
- **Prevention** starts too late if we only take action when child protection is called.
- **Solution:** leverage partnerships to engage with families at the earliest indicators of distress and trouble.

BCDSS: Partnerships for Public Service Announcements

Aligning with partners across the city to get out the message:

Agency	Message
Public Health	Back to Sleep Smoking Cessation Good Nutrition Prenatal care
Fire	Smoke Alarms
Police	Gun safety
SCHOOLS	ATTENDANCE

City Schools Partnership with BCDSS

- Data sharing agreement between City Schools and BCDSS: matches school data with kids in foster care.
- Case workers use child-specific data to inform case work:
 - Case worker alerted when a child misses more than 10% of school.
 - Working to provide real-time access to parent portal for child-specific information

City Schools Partnership with BCDSS

Social Workers in the Schools - Networks

- Participate in Student Support Teams and attendance hearings.
- Attend weekly AttendanceStat and SafetyStat meetings at District Office at which receive school-specific and child-specific data
 - Use data to partner with Attendance Monitors in responding strategically to families
 - Aggressive response for grades K-2.

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City Schools Partnership with BCDSS

Networks (cont'd)

- Last year, poor attendance resulted in identification of 700 students per month whose families could use support from Family Preservation workers
- Home visits over the summer to 315 students in kindergarten through second grade who had been chronically absent in the prior year.

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Insights Gained

- Many barriers to attendance are solvable in the short term.
- There are recurring patterns of factors negatively impacting attendance, including: asthma, poor transportation, lack of safe paths to school, separation anxiety/transition to school, ADHD and behavioral issues.

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Insights Gained (cont'd)

- Schools are an excellent conduit for connecting families to resources.
- Students and families respond very well when they are engaged using a strength-based, partnership model.
- If we can improve attendance in the early years, we may be able to avoid interventions like foster care.

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In Conclusion

- CPS Hotline – need community to continue to make calls when they think a child is being abused or neglected

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- Strengthened community partnerships yield positive results for each partners' critical indicators

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