



Absences Add Up: How School Attendance Influences Student Success

By Alan Ginsburg, Phyllis Jordan and Hedy Chang

August 2014

This analysis of national testing data shows that students with higher absenteeism rates have lower scores on national standardized tests. It reinforces a growing body of research confirming the connection between school attendance and student achievement and reveals the critical importance of intervening as soon as absences begin to add up, whether early in a child's school career or at the beginning of the school year. The good news is poor attendance can be turned around when policies and practices encourage schools and communities to partner with students and their families to monitor their data and implement promising and proven practices.



Attendance
Works

Amid the sometimes fierce debate about improving our nation's schools lies an indisputable truth: Students must attend school regularly to benefit from what is taught there. But each year, an estimated 5 million to 7.5 million U.S. students miss nearly a month of school. This lost instructional time exacerbates dropout rates and achievement gaps. It erodes the promise of early education and confounds efforts to master reading by the end of third grade. Too often, though, states and school districts overlook this problem because they simply aren't looking at the right data. They know how many students show up for school every day and how many are truant, but they don't add up all absences – excused and unexcused – to see how many students miss so many days that they are headed off track academically.

A new state-by-state analysis of national testing data demonstrates that students who miss more school than their peers score lower on the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP). This is true at every age, in every racial and ethnic group and in every state and city examined. In many cases, the students with more absences have skill levels one to two years below their peers. While students from low-income families are more likely to be chronically absent, the ill effects of missing too much school hold true for all socio-economic groups.

This analysis of results from the 2013 NAEP offers a unique nationwide and state-by-state snapshot of how students with poor attendance perform compared to their better attending peers. The NAEP, considered the Nation's Report Card, is given every two years to a sample of fourth- and eighth-grade students in all 50 states and 21 large cities. In addition to testing math and reading skills, NAEP asks students a series of non-academic questions, including how many days they missed in the month before the exam, which is typically given from late January to early March. This analysis defines poor attendance as missing three or more days in that period, regardless of whether the absences were excused or unexcused. While the information is self-reported and limited to a single month, the results nonetheless reflect many of the achievement and demographic trends found in research involving data from the entire year. The state-by-state data, as well as the city information, provide comparison points for states and cities that have not looked closely at their rates for excused and unexcused absences. The information also underscores the need for states and cities to take a deeper dive into their own data to analyze chronic absence for an entire school year so that they know the full scope of the attendance problem.

DEFINING TERMS

Average Daily Attendance: The percentage of a school's student body that attends on a typical day. The definition is the same nationwide, but does not provide student-level data.

Truancy: A measure of how many students miss school without an excuse. The definition varies from state to state.

Chronic absence: A measure of how many students miss a certain percentage or number of days, including excused and unexcused absences and suspensions. Researchers often track 10 percent of the school year, but there is no common definition among states.

Poor Attendance in NAEP: Missing 3 or more days in the month before the assessment.



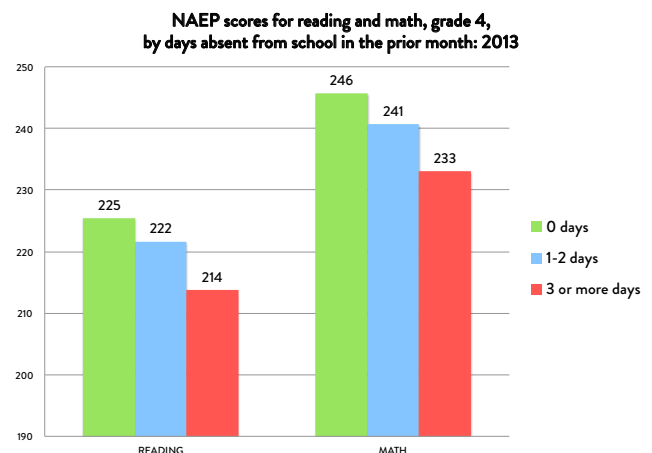
Key Findings include:

1. Poor attendance is a national challenge. About one in five students in both fourth and eighth grade reported missing **three or more days** in the month before the test. If that pattern persisted all year, the students would have missed 27 days or about 15 percent of the school year. About 3 percent of students missed 10 or more days in the prior month, a level of absenteeism associated with the weakest scores.

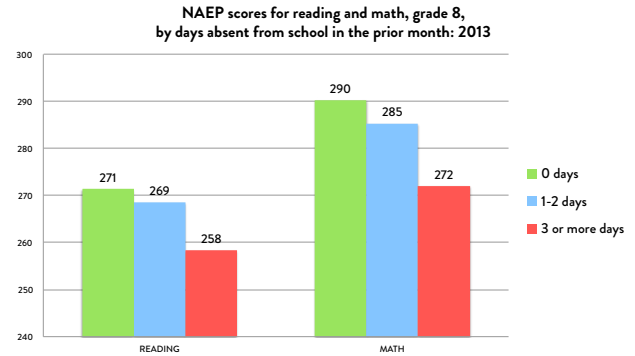
- While absenteeism was a problem in every state, some states had greater rates of students missing three or more days in the prior month. Montana and New Mexico had among the worst statewide absenteeism rates at the fourth grade level, with 25 percent or more of students reporting that they missed 3 or more days prior to the assessment. At the eighth grade level, they are joined by Arizona, Oklahoma, Oregon and Wyoming. (See Appendix I for state-by-state tables)
- California, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Texas and the Department of Defense schools have the best reported rates of attendance at the fourth grade level, using the same standard of missing 3 or more days in the prior month. In eighth grade, the states with the best records are Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Massachusetts, Texas, Vermont and DOD schools.
- Absenteeism rates are especially high in some of the 21 large cities where the NAEP is administered to a sample of students. In Detroit, for instance, about a third of the students reported missing three or more days in the past month, compared to the 20 percent national average. Cleveland, the District of Columbia, Milwaukee and Philadelphia also had high rates. (See Appendix 1 for city-by-city tables).
- Absenteeism rates of 3 or more days were consistently the lowest in the large urban districts of Houston and Miami-Dade.

2. Student attendance matters for academic performance. The association between poor attendance and lower NAEP scores is robust and holds for every state and for each of the 21 urban districts regardless of size, region or composition of the student population.

- Students reporting missing 3 or more days of school in the prior month had lower average NAEP scores in reading and math than students with fewer absences. In fourth grade, the absentee students scored an average 12 points lower on the reading assessment than those with no absences – more than a full grade level on the NAEP achievement scale. In eighth grade, absentee students scored an average 18 points lower on the math assessment.

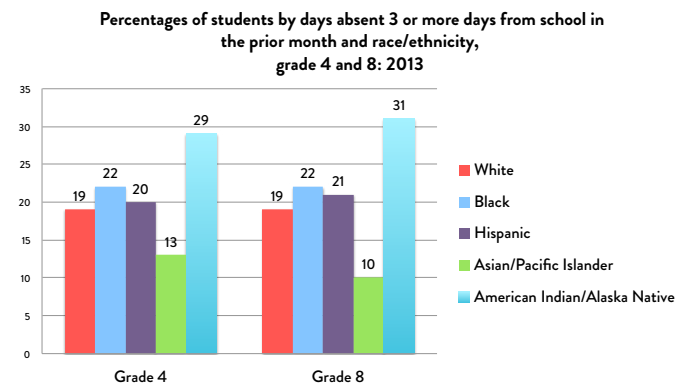
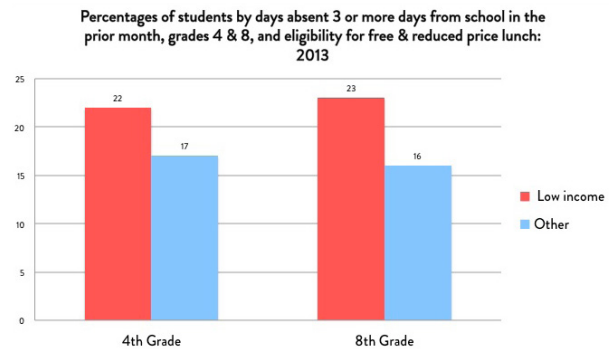


- Along with test scores, proficiency rates were lower for students who missed more school. About 28 percent of the students missing three or more days in the prior month scored proficient or better on the fourth grade reading assessment, compared to 38 percent of those who missed no days in the prior month.



3. Poor attendance contributes to the achievement gap for students struggling with poverty and from communities of color.

- Students eligible for free and reduced price meals, a common marker for low-income status, are more likely to miss three days or more in the prior month. In fourth grade, these students are 30 percent more likely to miss that much school. In eighth grade they are 40 percent more likely.
- Low-income students generally scored lower on the NAEP than their more affluent peers, although the students from all socio-economic groups experienced lower test scores when they missed too much school. Low-income fourth graders with poor attendance scored 10 points (equivalent to one grade on the NAEP scale) lower than those with perfect attendance. For fourth graders from more affluent families, the difference was 8 points.
- Native-American students reported the highest rates of poor attendance, and Asian/Pacific Islanders experienced the lowest rates, findings consistent with several state and local analyses. African American and Hispanic students have rates slightly higher than white students. Again, students from all racial and ethnic groups experienced lower scores when they had higher rates of absenteeism.



For supplementary data tables, go to:

<http://www.attendanceworks.org/research/absences-add-supplementary-materials>



The Research Case

The NAEP analysis reinforces a growing body of research showing the pernicious effects of chronic absence throughout a student's academic career. We know:

- **Poor attendance in the first month of school can predict chronic absence** for the entire year. A new study by the [Baltimore Education Research Consortium](#) found that half the students who missed two to four days in September went on to be chronically absent for the year, missing an average of 25 days. Nine out of 10 students who missed at least 5 days in September were chronically absent, averaging 70 absences. (See Appendix II for more details)
- **Absenteeism in kindergarten can affect whether a child develops the grit and perseverance** needed to succeed in school. A recently released study by researcher Michael Gottfried at the University of California, Santa Barbara shows the negative impact of chronic absenteeism on both academic performance and social-emotional skills needed to persist and engage in learning. The effects are particularly pronounced among students who miss four or more weeks of school. (See Appendix II for more details)
- **Absenteeism in preschool and kindergarten can influence whether a child will be held back in third grade.** [Several studies](#) document a link between chronic absence – missing 10 percent of the school year – in the early grades and a child's ability to master reading by the end of third grade. Researchers in Baltimore and Chicago found the effects starting in preschool. With 14 states now linking third grade promotion to reading performance, chronic absence can undermine the broader efforts to improve literacy. (See Appendix II for more details)
- **Absenteeism in middle and high school can predict dropout rates.** As early as 6th grade, absenteeism becomes an indicator that a student will drop out, [Johns Hopkins University research](#) shows. Other early warning signs include poor grades in core courses and behavior leading to suspensions. [A statewide study in Utah](#) found that a student who is chronically absent in any year between 8th and 12th grade is 7.4 times more likely to drop out.
- **Absenteeism influences not just chances for graduating but also for completing college.** A new analysis of [Rhode Island data](#) found that only 11 percent of the chronically absent students who graduated from high school made it to a second year of college, compared to 51 percent of students with better high school attendance records.
- **Improving attendance is an essential strategy for reducing achievement gaps.** State and [national data](#) shows that students from low-income families are more likely to be chronically absent than their peers, often because they face challenges to getting to school, such as a lack of access to health care, community violence, unreliable transportation and unstable housing. Low-income students also lose out more when they are absent, perhaps because their families lack resources to make up for lost time, [research shows](#). Children of color also have disproportionately higher rates of absenteeism and lower achievement levels. Some [local research](#) has found chronic absence occurs much earlier for some groups, including African American students, than others. In this case, it is essential to intervene early to ensure an equal opportunity to learn.



- **When students reduce absences, they can make academic gains.** When [Chicago focused on attendance](#) and other risk factors in ninth grade, graduation rates rose. When [New York City reduced chronic absence](#) rates through its success mentoring program, more students stayed in school until graduation. In the early grades, [several studies](#) suggest that the children who arrived with the weakest skills and attended regularly saw outsized gains in achievement.
- **Research points to effective strategies for improving attendance.** Early warning systems, like that used in Chicago, and programs that offer preventative supports early in the school year, like New York City's Success Mentors, are evidence-based approaches that prevent or reduce chronic absence. Effective strategies use data to target action, engage students and families working together to improve attendance, and bring in extra resources (health, social, transportation etc.) to support those struggling with chronic absenteeism.

Taken together with other research, the NAEP analysis shows definitively how absenteeism can undermine student achievement and our goals for school improvements. Research and experience also shows that when we turn around chronic absence, we can turn around the trajectory of a student's academic career. Parents, schools and state leaders can work together to ensure we pay attention to student absenteeism and intervene to put students back on track for success.

See Appendix II for more details on recent research

Recommendations

The extent of absenteeism that the NAEP analysis and others studies document from kindergarten through high school, along with its direct connection to student achievement, demands that school districts and state education agencies take action to staunch the loss of valuable instructional time. This is important for educators and policymakers investing in early education to ensure students have a strong start in school. This is critical for those working to ensure all children master reading before moving into fourth grade. And this is paramount for those working to increase our nation's graduation rates and improve our standing in the 21st century economy. We have a better chance of meeting goals if we have more students attending school regularly.

Policymakers and advocates at the local, state and federal level can take several key steps to support this work including:

1. **Standard definition.** Promote a standard definition in order to calculate chronic absenteeism across districts and states. The definition should clarify that chronic absence includes excused and unexcused absences (truancy), as well as days missed to suspensions or children switching schools. At a minimum, a standard definition should exist for each state so they can compare rates across all of their schools and districts.

We also recommend exploring the development of a national definition of chronic absence for the purpose of reporting and comparing rates across states. A [2014 analysis by the Data Quality Campaign](#) found that only 17 states report that they track chronic absence, and few use the same definition. This NAEP analysis provides the first consistent measure of student-level absenteeism that allows for comparison across states, but it is



only a snapshot in time. A better measure for state-by-state comparison would be the proportion of students missing 10 percent of the school year. This definition, recommended by Attendance Works, can be applied to districts regardless of the length of school year and allows for earlier attention to intervention.

If adopted, a standard national metric could be used for reporting purposes only. States would retain the authority to define chronic absence for the purposes of accountability within their own states based upon their own realities and historical practice.

2. **Attendance Tracking:** Invest in tracking individual attendance and absences with longitudinal student databases. Most school district data systems include this information, but this [Data Quality Campaign brief](#) shows six states do not include it in statewide systems. Support accurate and consistent entry of attendance data.
3. **Chronic Absence Data:** Ensure that reports providing chronic absence data for every district, school, grade and student subgroup are produced and made publicly available through school and district report cards. School districts can also send the data – broken down by grade, school and other indicators – to principals and teachers regularly so that they can address barriers to attendance or reach out to students with high rates of absenteeism.
4. **Parent Engagement:** Provide parents with actionable, real-time data on their children's attendance, as well as an alert if their children are accruing so many absences – excused and unexcused – that they are academically at risk. Ensure opportunities exist for school staff or community partners to meet with parents to review the data on absenteeism for their children and identify how to work together to improve attendance.
5. **Public awareness:** Convey why absenteeism matters for doing well in school, graduating from high school and eventually succeeding in the workplace. Encourage schools to promote good attendance for all students with incentives, contests and positive messaging.
6. **Strategies for intervening:** Help schools and community partners to intervene with chronically absent students through community-wide approaches to health and transportation challenges, as well as personalized outreach. These interventions can use data from the first month of school and from the past year, along with other factors, to identify which students are at risk of chronic absence. The students and their families should be a priority for linking to positive supports that motivate good attendance. For additional insights into effective strategies, see [The Power of Positive Connections: Reducing Chronic Absence Through PEOPLE: Priority Early Outreach for Positive Linkages and Engagement](#)
7. **Early Warning for Third-Grade Retention:** Address poor attendance as a red flag that students need extra support to read well by the end of third grade. This is especially important in states with retention policies that hold back struggling third grade readers. As early as kindergarten, schools should look at absenteeism, along with reading assessments, to identify which students need support.
8. **Early Warning for High School Dropout:** Adopt early warning indicator systems that track attendance and other warning signs that students may drop out of high school. As early as middle school, school districts should track absenteeism, as well as course failure and disciplinary action, to determine which students are off track for graduation.



9. Accountability: Build chronic absence into accountability systems so that district and school improvement plans include strategies for nurturing a culture of attendance, partnering with students and families to identify and address causes of absences, and intervening effectively with chronically absent students.

10. Resource Allocation: Use chronic absence rates to determine allocation of community resources, such as where to place health services, early education and afterschool programs and volunteer tutors. These resources have proven successful in reducing absenteeism.

11. Research: Invest in qualitative and quantitative research to identify what are effective solutions for different racial and ethnic populations and age groups, as well as in different settings such as inner-city neighborhoods and rural communities. While the research shows that absenteeism affects outcomes for students of all backgrounds, it is important to recognize that solutions must be grounded in an understanding of the particular barriers to attendance faced by students and families of different linguistic, cultural, racial and socio-economic backgrounds as well as the assets different types of families and communities bring to the table.

NAEP Scores and Grade Level Equivalency

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) rates student skill levels as basic, proficient or advanced based on their scores on the assessments. In addition, many students score below the basic level. This report displays the association between student attendance and the percent of students achieving at the NAEP proficient level or above, as proficiency represents solid academic performance for each grade assessed. Note NAEP proficiency is a national standard and does not equate with student proficient performance on state-level tests, which are set by each state.

NAEP Skill Level	4th Grade Scores	8th Grade Scores
Basic	208	243
Proficient	238	281
Advanced	268	323

Researchers who interpret NAEP data estimate that 10 points on the NAEP scale is the equivalent of one grade worth of skills. That figure was derived by dividing the roughly 40 points between grades 4 and 8 on the NAEP reading and math scales by 4 to represent an average grade change.



PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS WITH POOR ATTENDANCE

Percentages of grade 4 and 8 students by days absent from school 3 or more days in the prior month, 2013		
Jurisdiction	Days Absent Prior Month	
	4th Grade	8th Grade
	%	%
National	19	20
Alabama	22	20
Alaska	‡	‡
Arizona	23	25
Arkansas	24	21
California	18	19
Colorado	23	23
Connecticut	21	21
Delaware	21	21
District of Columbia	27	27
Florida	19	22
Georgia	17	18
Hawaii	23	24
Idaho	19	21
Illinois	17	17
Indiana	17	17
Iowa	19	19
Kansas	23	22
Kentucky	20	20
Louisiana	21	22
Maine	21	22
Maryland	20	20
Massachusetts	18	16
Michigan	22	21
Minnesota	20	20
Mississippi	21	20
Missouri	19	20
Montana	26	29
Nebraska	20	22
Nevada	22	22
New Hampshire	18	19
New Jersey	21	19
New Mexico	25	27
New York	20	20
North Carolina	21	22
North Dakota	20	24
Ohio	20	21
Oklahoma	23	26
Oregon	23	25
Pennsylvania	19	20
Rhode Island	21	21
South Carolina	19	20
South Dakota	19	20
Tennessee	22	20
Texas	16	17
Utah	23	24
Vermont	22	18
Virginia	20	19
Washington	22	21
West Virginia	24	21
Wisconsin	20	20
Wyoming	24	27
DoDEA	18	17

‡ Reporting standards not met.

*Days absent is for math responders at grade 8, as some Limited English Proficient students do not take the NAEP reading assessment and their attendance is not counted.

Source: NAEP Data Explorer. Prepared for Attendance Works by Alan Ginsburg

Urban district percentages of grade 4 and 8 students by days absent from school 3 or more days in the prior month, 2013		
Jurisdiction	Days Absent Prior Month	
	Grade 4	Grade 8
	%	%
National	19	20
Albuquerque	24	23
Atlanta	19	23
Austin	17	20
Baltimore City	25	24
Boston	19	21
Charlotte	20	24
Chicago	19	16
Cleveland	25	30
Dallas	17	21
Detroit	30	33
District of Columbia (DCPS)	26	28
Fresno	18	24
Hillsborough County (FL)	18	25
Houston	15	18
Jefferson County (KY)	21	20
Los Angeles	18	19
Miami-Dade	16	16
Milwaukee	27	28
New York City	22	22
Philadelphia	28	24
San Diego	22	21

SOURCE: NAEP Data Explorer. Prepared by Alan Ginsburg for Attendance Works



GRADE 4 SCORES FOR READING AND MATH BY STATE

State NAEP scores for math, grade 4, for students with 3 or more days absent from school in the prior month, 2013

Jurisdiction	Days Absent Prior Month			Diff. in NAEP score: None minus 3 or more days absent prior month*
	None	1-2 days	3 or more days	
National	246	241	233	13
Alabama	237	232	227	10
Alaska	‡	‡	‡	‡
Arizona	244	239	234	10
Arkansas	243	240	235	8
California	239	230	224	15
Colorado	251	246	240	11
Connecticut	247	245	233	15
Delaware	247	244	234	13
District of Columbia	235	230	218	17
Florida	245	240	234	12
Georgia	244	240	230	13
Hawaii	250	243	231	19
Idaho	243	241	236	6
Illinois	243	238	230	13
Indiana	252	248	241	11
Iowa	250	246	237	13
Kansas	250	247	238	11
Kentucky	245	242	232	13
Louisiana	235	232	223	12
Maine	249	245	240	9
Maryland	249	247	234	15
Massachusetts	257	251	246	11
Michigan	242	237	228	15
Minnesota	257	253	246	11
Mississippi	233	233	225	8
Missouri	242	241	231	11
Montana	247	245	239	8
Nebraska	248	242	234	13
Nevada	240	237	228	12
New Hampshire	257	252	245	12
New Jersey	251	246	240	12
New Mexico	236	234	225	11
New York	246	239	230	16
North Carolina	250	245	234	16
North Dakota	249	247	240	10
Ohio	250	245	236	14
Oklahoma	242	239	234	8
Oregon	244	240	233	11
Pennsylvania	249	243	235	14
Rhode Island	247	241	231	16
South Carolina	241	237	224	18
South Dakota	244	242	232	12
Tennessee	245	239	230	15
Texas	245	241	233	12
Utah	246	245	235	10
Vermont	251	249	242	8
Virginia	250	245	239	11
Washington	251	245	239	13
West Virginia	242	238	230	12
Wisconsin	250	243	236	13
Wyoming	249	247	242	8
DoDEA	247	245	239	9

*A 10 point difference is about equivalent to a one-year gain on NAEP between grades 4 and 8.

‡ Reporting standards not met.

SOURCE: NAEP Data Explorer. Prepared for Attendance Works by Alan Ginsburg

State NAEP scores for reading, grade 4, by days absent from school in the prior month, 2013

Jurisdiction	Days Absent Prior Month			Diffc. In NAEP scores: none minus 3 or more days absent prior month*
	None	1-2 days	3 or more days	
National	225	222	214	12
Alabama	223	220	209	14
Alaska	‡	‡	‡	‡
Arizona	218	213	204	14
Arkansas	221	220	211	10
California	217	209	206	10
Colorado	229	227	220	9
Connecticut	233	230	222	10
Delaware	230	225	218	12
District of Columbia	212	209	192	20
Florida	231	228	218	12
Georgia	224	221	216	8
Hawaii	221	213	204	17
Idaho	223	222	209	14
Illinois	223	216	211	12
Indiana	229	226	216	13
Iowa	229	223	213	16
Kansas	227	223	219	8
Kentucky	228	223	218	11
Louisiana	215	210	201	14
Maine	229	225	218	10
Maryland	234	234	225	9
Massachusetts	236	233	223	13
Michigan	222	216	210	13
Minnesota	230	228	220	10
Mississippi	213	207	201	12
Missouri	226	223	213	12
Montana	226	225	216	10
Nebraska	228	225	213	14
Nevada	218	213	206	12
New Hampshire	234	233	226	8
New Jersey	232	231	220	12
New Mexico	210	206	199	11
New York	228	224	215	12
North Carolina	225	223	214	11
North Dakota	226	226	216	10
Ohio	228	225	214	13
Oklahoma	220	218	211	9
Oregon	224	220	212	11
Pennsylvania	230	227	217	12
Rhode Island	230	222	210	20
South Carolina	218	215	202	16
South Dakota	222	219	205	17
Tennessee	224	222	208	16
Texas	221	214	209	12
Utah	226	224	215	12
Vermont	231	229	222	10
Virginia	232	231	217	15
Washington	230	223	218	11
West Virginia	218	215	210	8
Wisconsin	224	221	214	10
Wyoming	227	227	223	3
DoDEA	234	233	226	8

*A 10 point difference is about equivalent to a one-year gain on NAEP between grades 4 and 8.



GRADE 8 SCORES FOR READING AND MATH BY STATE

State NAEP scores for reading, grade 8, by days absent from school in the prior month, 2013

Jurisdiction	Days Absent Prior Month			Diffc. In NAEP score: none minus 3 or more days absent prior month*
	None	1-2 days	3 or more days	
National	271	269	258	13
Alabama	260	259	249	11
Alaska	‡	‡	‡	‡
Arizona	264	262	253	11
Arkansas	264	264	253	11
California	266	261	251	14
Colorado	274	274	263	11
Connecticut	280	274	264	17
Delaware	268	269	258	10
District of Columbia	253	251	239	14
Florida	271	266	257	14
Georgia	268	265	256	12
Hawaii	265	259	250	15
Idaho	273	272	262	10
Illinois	270	268	255	15
Indiana	271	266	258	14
Iowa	273	269	261	12
Kansas	270	268	260	10
Kentucky	273	271	261	11
Louisiana	261	259	247	13
Maine	272	273	259	13
Maryland	279	275	262	16
Massachusetts	280	278	267	14
Michigan	271	266	258	13
Minnesota	274	272	261	13
Mississippi	255	256	245	10
Missouri	270	268	260	10
Montana	274	275	266	8
Nebraska	272	272	260	12
Nevada	266	262	253	14
New Hampshire	277	277	265	11
New Jersey	279	277	268	11
New Mexico	260	258	248	12
New York	272	267	256	16
North Carolina	267	268	254	13
North Dakota	269	270	262	7
Ohio	274	270	259	16
Oklahoma	266	264	255	11
Oregon	272	269	263	9
Pennsylvania	276	274	263	13
Rhode Island	274	265	256	17
South Carolina	265	263	251	14
South Dakota	271	270	260	11
Tennessee	268	267	256	12
Texas	268	263	256	12
Utah	274	270	264	10
Vermont	277	276	267	10
Virginia	271	270	257	13
Washington	275	273	265	10
West Virginia	263	257	250	13
Wisconsin	272	269	257	16
Wyoming	273	273	266	7
DoDEA	279	277	273	5

*A 10 point difference is about equivalent to a one-year gain on NAEP between grades 4 and 8.

State NAEP scores for math, grade 8, by days absent from school in the prior month, 2013

Jurisdiction	Days Absent Prior Month			Diffc. In NAEP score: none minus 3 or more days absent prior month*
	None	1-2 days	3 or more days	
National	290	285	272	18
Alabama	273	272	257	17
Alaska	‡	‡	‡	‡
Arizona	285	281	270	14
Arkansas	284	277	269	15
California	281	276	265	16
Colorado	293	294	278	15
Connecticut	290	287	273	17
Delaware	287	286	268	20
District of Columbia	269	269	257	12
Florida	286	283	269	17
Georgia	283	281	266	17
Hawaii	290	280	268	21
Idaho	291	287	278	12
Illinois	290	285	272	18
Indiana	294	286	274	21
Iowa	290	287	272	18
Kansas	294	290	280	14
Kentucky	286	281	270	16
Louisiana	277	276	261	15
Maine	293	292	277	16
Maryland	293	287	274	20
Massachusetts	306	301	284	22
Michigan	288	281	265	23
Minnesota	299	296	285	15
Mississippi	274	272	264	10
Missouri	288	283	272	16
Montana	293	292	282	12
Nebraska	290	287	275	15
Nevada	284	279	266	18
New Hampshire	301	296	286	15
New Jersey	303	295	284	19
New Mexico	279	275	264	14
New York	289	283	267	21
North Carolina	291	289	271	21
North Dakota	293	293	283	10
Ohio	298	290	272	25
Oklahoma	282	277	265	17
Oregon	288	284	277	12
Pennsylvania	295	291	277	18
Rhode Island	294	283	268	26
South Carolina	285	279	272	12
South Dakota	292	287	277	15
Tennessee	284	279	263	22
Texas	294	288	273	21
Utah	289	287	274	14
Vermont	299	297	287	12
Virginia	294	289	273	21
Washington	295	290	281	14
West Virginia	280	276	262	18
Wisconsin	293	290	277	16
Wyoming	292	290	281	11
DoDEA	294	290	283	11

*A 10 point difference is about equivalent to a one-year gain on NAEP between grades 4 and 8.



SCORES FOR READING AND MATH IN URBAN DISTRICTS

Urban district NAEP scores for math, grade 4, by days absent from school in the prior month, 2013

Jurisdiction	Days Absent Last Month			Diffc. In NAEP score: none minus 3 or more days absent prior month*
	None	1-2 days	3 or more days	
National	246	241	233	13
Albuquerque	238	235	229	9
Atlanta	238	230	225	13
Austin	250	243	233	17
Baltimore City	227	223	217	10
Boston	243	232	228	15
Charlotte	253	247	234	19
Chicago	235	231	218	17
Cleveland	219	217	211	9
Dallas	239	231	225	14
Detroit	210	204	199	11
District of Columbia (DCPS)	235	230	217	18
Fresno	223	219	210	13
Hillsborough County (FL)	247	240	235	12
Houston	240	233	224	16
Jefferson County (KY)	239	234	223	16
Los Angeles	232	227	219	13
Miami-Dade	241	236	228	13
Milwaukee	227	220	215	12
New York City	243	233	225	18
Philadelphia	229	223	217	12
San Diego	245	240	235	10

*A 10 point difference is about equivalent to a one-year gain on NAEP between grades 4 and 8.

SOURCE: NAEP Data Explorer. Prepared by Alan Ginsburg for Attendance Works

Urban district NAEP scores for reading, grade 4, by days absent from school in the prior month, 2013

Jurisdiction	Days Absent Prior Month			Diffc. In NAEP score: none minus 3 or more days absent prior month*
	None	1-2 days	3 or more days	
National	225	222	214	12
Albuquerque	210	207	200	11
Atlanta	219	214	203	15
Austin	225	221	210	15
Baltimore City	206	205	200	6
Boston	219	214	204	15
Charlotte	230	227	219	11
Chicago	212	203	197	15
Cleveland	193	189	187	6
Dallas	208	202	200	7
Detroit	193	192	184	9
District of Columbia (DCPS)	212	211	190	22
Fresno	200	193	188	12
Hillsborough County (FL)	232	228	217	15
Houston	211	206	198	13
Jefferson County (KY)	225	222	209	16
Los Angeles	209	201	199	10
Miami-Dade	226	224	211	15
Milwaukee	202	200	194	8
New York City	222	215	206	16
Philadelphia	204	202	191	13
San Diego	223	212	214	10

*A 10 point difference is about equivalent to a one-year gain on NAEP between grades 4 and 8.

SOURCE: NAEP Data Explorer. Prepared by Alan Ginsburg for Attendance Works

Urban district NAEP scores for math, grade 8, by days absent from school in the prior month, 2013

Jurisdiction	Days Absent Prior Month			Diffc. In NAEP score: none minus 3 or more days absent prior month*
	None	1-2 days	3 or more days	
National	290	285	272	18
Albuquerque	279	275	263	16
Atlanta	272	269	256	16
Austin	292	283	273	19
Baltimore City	266	260	252	14
Boston	292	283	265	27
Charlotte	297	291	274	23
Chicago	273	270	257	16
Cleveland	254	259	245	9
Dallas	281	274	263	18
Detroit	244	243	233	11
District of Columbia (DCPS)	264	266	249	15
Fresno	266	262	247	19
Hillsborough County (FL)	287	289	272	15
Houston	288	278	266	22
Jefferson County (KY)	277	278	258	19
Los Angeles	270	263	253	17
Miami-Dade	279	275	256	23
Milwaukee	264	258	248	16
New York City	284	273	257	27
Philadelphia	275	269	252	23
San Diego	284	276	266	18

*A 10 point difference is about equivalent to a one-year gain on NAEP between grades 4 and 8.

SOURCE: NAEP Data Explorer. Prepared by Alan Ginsburg for Attendance Works

Urban district NAEP scores for reading, grade 8, by days absent from school in the prior month, 2013

Jurisdiction	Days Absent Prior Month			Diffc. In NAEP score: none minus 3 or more days absent prior month*
	None	1-2 days	3 or more days	
National	271	269	258	13
Albuquerque	261	258	246	15
Atlanta	260	254	245	15
Austin	266	263	252	13
Baltimore City	256	254	244	12
Boston	262	259	244	18
Charlotte	270	271	255	16
Chicago	257	255	241	16
Cleveland	241	243	234	7
Dallas	254	254	243	11
Detroit	244	239	236	8
District of Columbia (DCPS)	251	248	234	18
Fresno	250	244	236	14
Hillsborough County (FL)	271	268	258	13
Houston	256	253	242	15
Jefferson County (KY)	265	262	250	15
Los Angeles	255	250	237	18
Miami-Dade	262	259	247	15
Milwaukee	248	248	231	17
New York City	262	257	246	16
Philadelphia	253	251	240	13
San Diego	263	259	255	8

*A 10 point difference is about equivalent to a one-year gain on NAEP between grades 4 and 8.

SOURCE: NAEP Data Explorer. Prepared by Alan Ginsburg for Attendance Works



APPENDIX II: Summary of Recent Research

This brief contains information from several new research studies that were released recently or about to be released. Below is a summary of these studies.

A. Why September Matters: Improving Student Attendance

A new analysis from the Baltimore Education Research Consortium provides evidence that poor attendance early in the school year can predict chronic absence. In [Why September Matters: Improving Student Attendance](#), Linda S. Olson studies attendance in the Baltimore City Public Schools for pre-kindergarten through 12th grade students in September and throughout the rest of the 2012-13 school year. She focused on students who missed 20 days of school in excused or unexcused absences, which is Maryland's measure of chronic absence. The study found:

- Students who missed fewer than 2 days in September typically had good attendance rates for the entire year.
- Half the students who missed 2-4 days in September went on to miss a month or more of school, which is known as chronic absence. This group missed an average of 25 days.
- Nearly 9 out of 10 students who missed more than 4 days in September were chronically absent that year. These students missed an average of 70 days.

B. Chronic Absence and Its Effects on Students' Academic and Socioemotional Outcomes

A study that was accepted for publication in August 2014 in the *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk* reflects on how chronic absence correlates with weaker achievement scores and social-emotional skills in kindergarten. For the analysis, researcher Michael A. Gottfried at the University of California Santa Barbara used a U.S. Department of Education data base that tracks 10,740 students. That data base, known as the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, includes results for kindergarten tests measuring reading and math ability, as well as six social and emotional skills. While many researchers define chronic absence as missing 10 percent of the school year or about 18 days, Gottfried divided the absentee students into two levels – those missing 11 to 19 days (what he calls “moderate”) and those missing 20 or more days (which he calls “strong”).

Gottfried's findings include:

- About 13 percent of the students were chronically absent – 10 percent of them at the moderate level and 3 percent at the strong level.
- Chronically absent students at both levels performed below their better-attending peers on math and reading skills assessments. The differences were wider in math than reading, and more significant for those missing a month or more than for those at the moderate level.
- Chronic absence is associated with a lack of certain social skills, including a child's ability to pay attention, work independently, adapt to change and persist in tasks. It also reflects a lack of eagerness to learn new things and a lack of engagement in school. Again, the differences are greater for the students who miss more school. Poor attendance did not correlate with a child's ability to control emotions or make friends.



- A comparison of social skills testing done in the fall and spring of the kindergarten years found that most students started school with similar levels of engagement. Those with worse attendance showed decreases in their engagement in school and eagerness to learn by the spring testing.
- Family circumstances mattered for chronic absence. Students from low-income families whose parents were not married were more likely to be chronically absent.
- Parent involvement mattered for chronic absence. Students with lower absences had parents who were more likely to take them to book stores, music lessons or tutoring, among other activities.
- Attending preschool mattered. Students who did not attend preschool were more likely to be chronically absent in kindergarten.

C. Attendance in the Early Grades: Why It Matters for Reading. A 2014 brief from Attendance Works and the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading provides a scan of the research documenting how chronic absence early on can leave a child unable to read well. The research points include:

- **A 2011 California study connected early attendance with third grade reading mastery**, which is considered a key indicator of future academic success. [Applied Survey Research](#) found that 64 percent of the students with good attendance in kindergarten and first grade scored proficient on the state's third grade English language arts test. That compares to 17 percent of students chronically absent in both kindergarten and first grade. These trends reflect the increased emphasis on literacy skills in the early grades. From 1998 to 2006, kindergarten teachers reported devoting 25 percent more time to teaching early literacy, up from 5.5 hours to seven hours per week, according to the [working paper](#) recently released by the University of Virginia.
- **Missing this critical literacy instruction in kindergarten and first grade has graver consequences for children from low-income families** than their more affluent peers, according to a [2010 study by Douglas D. Ready](#). Tapping a national data base, Ready found that chronically absent children gained 14 percent fewer literacy skills in kindergarten than those who attended more regularly. The negative impact, though, is 75 percent greater for a low-income student in kindergarten than for more affluent peers and 40 percent greater in first grade. Ready's study showed that poor children are far more likely to be chronically absent.
- **The effects of absenteeism on literacy skills start before kindergarten, two recent studies show.** [The University of Chicago Consortium of Chicago School Research](#) followed 25,000 3- and 4-year-olds served by Chicago Public Schools school-based preschool programs and found that nearly half of 3-year-olds and more than one-third of 4-year-olds missed at least 10 percent of the school year. Chronic absence for 4-year-old students correlated with weaker kindergarten readiness scores, including letter recognition and pre-literacy scores. The effects were particularly pronounced for the children who arrived at preschool with the weakest skills. Once again, these are the students who were more likely to be chronically absent, the 2013 study found. And for every year a student is chronically absent, his or her chance for reading success diminished. [The Baltimore](#)



[Education Research Consortium](#) also focused on Pre-Kindergarten (PreK) and Kindergarten (K) attendance and followed these young students over time. The 2012 study finds that students with low attendance in both PreK and K often continue to have low attendance, are more likely to be retained by grade 3 and on average have lower academic outcomes than peers with better attendance.

- **The good news is that when students attend school regularly, they can see outsized literacy gains.** Ready's study showed that low-income kids who attended regularly appeared to benefit from the instruction more than their higher income peers. They gained 8 percent more literacy skills in kindergarten and nearly 7 percent more in first grade. This narrows the reading gap between rich and poor by nearly a third. Likewise the Chicago research showed that students who arrived at preK with the weakest skill and attended regularly saw the biggest gains. And when chronically absent students improve their attendance, they can get back on track academically, the Baltimore research found.





Attendance Works is a national organization dedicated to improving the policy, practice and research around attendance. Its website offers materials, research and success stories about reducing chronic absence. Attendance Works also offers technical assistance to school districts and communities.

This report was made possible by through generous financial support provided to Attendance Works by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Campaign for Grade-Level Reading and W.K. Kellogg Foundation. We appreciate their support and acknowledge that the conclusions in the report are those of the Attendance Works team alone.

www.attendanceworks.org