



Illinois State Board of Education

Illinois Attendance Commission

Chronic Absence:

- Definition
- History
- Effects
- Solutions

What is Chronic Absence?

- *"Chronic absence" means absences that total 10% or more of school days of the most recent academic school year, including absences with and without valid cause ... – 105 ILCS 5/26-18*
- This definition was signed into law on August 18, 2017
- This translates into two missed school days each month!



When Do Absences Become a Problem?



**Chronic Absence:
18 or more days**



**Warning Signs:
10 to 17 days**



**Satisfactory:
Less than 9 absences a year**

These numbers presume a 180-day school year.



Hiding in “Plain Sight”

- States have focused on average daily attendance (ADA) figures as the basis for school funding.*
- ADA figures hide the attendance patterns of students whose attendance rate is below average.
- It all depends whether absences are due to most students missing a few days or a significant minority with excessive absences.

* Illinois no longer uses ADA figures for school funding purposes.

Charles Bruner, Anne Discher, and Hedy Chang. *Chronic Elementary Absenteeism: A Problem Hidden in Plain Sight*. November 2011.



Background

- State Representative Linda Chapa LaVia and State Senator Jacqueline Collins collaborated on legislation in the wake of a 2013 Chicago Tribune series, *Empty Desk Epidemic*, that detailed the stories and cited the statistics about chronic absence and truancy in the Chicago Public Schools.
- Their legislation created the Truancy in Chicago Public Schools Task Force that met from December 2013 until July 2014 and provided a report with recommendations to the Illinois General Assembly.



Background, continued

- This report detailed multiple recommendations regarding data collection and analysis, prevention policies, and interventions but also specifically highlighted the need for a permanent commission to address chronic absence statewide and serve as a clearinghouse for resources to ameliorate the problem.
- The Attendance Commission was created with the signature of the governor on August 21, 2015 to legislation that had been sponsored jointly by Representative Chapa LaVia and Senator Collins.



Background, continued

- The Attendance Commission has been meeting since December 2015 and will terminate in 2020.
- Over time, the Commission has studied the problem of chronic absenteeism, collaborated with other advisory councils to advance policy, and lobbied to encourage legislation to amend current School Code law around definitions and the need for supports for families.



Changes to the Illinois School Code

- Public Act 099-0432 - Creation of the Attendance Commission
- Public Act 100-0156 – Definition of Chronic Absenteeism
- Public Act 100-0147 - Average Daily Attendance by Grade Level
- Public Act 100-0448 - Average Daily Attendance on Report Card for Students with IEPs and 504 Plans
- Public Act 100-0819 - Preschool Attendance and Supports
- Public Act 100-0825 - Revised Provisions in the Denial of Enrollment to Truant Students
- Public Act 100-0918 - Definition of a Truant



Focus on Chronic Absence

- Recent legislation (Public Act 100-0156) mandates the review of absence data to determine the chronic absence status for students and to provide supports for afflicted families.
- The Illinois ESSA plan incorporates student attendance numbers as part of the logarithm to determine school quality and student success beginning with the 2018-2019 school year.

Chronic Absence Statistics

- According to data collected by Attendance Works, a national initiative on chronic absence, **16.5% of Illinois students** were chronically absent during the 2015-2016 school year.
- Illinois data from the 2017-2018 school year demonstrates **17%** of students missed 10% or more of school days in a single school year.
- Chronic absence in Illinois is increasing.

Chronic Absence Statistics, continued

According to the 2018 Illinois Interactive Report Card, the following four groups of students have the highest rates of chronic absence:

- 33% of Native American students
- 27% of Black students
- 25% of students with disabilities
- 23% of low income students



Chronic Absence Statistics, continued

Across the nation, these students miss more school than their peers:

- Children from homes below the poverty level
- Native American, Hispanic, African-American, and Hawaiian/Pacific Islander students
- **Students with disabilities**
- Those enrolled in alternative programs or vocational schools
- **The youngest of students as well as the oldest**



States Are Not Alone

- **Attendance Works** is a national initiative led by Hedy Chang that provides states with data and advisories to tackle chronic absenteeism.
- Robert Balfanz, a professor and the director of the **Everyone Graduates Center** at Johns Hopkins University, is a leading researcher into student absence.
- The University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research builds the capacities of Chicago schools to problem-solve around attendance issues and other areas of concern.

All have contributed greatly to the research into the problem and advocacy for data-driven solutions.



Effects of Chronic Absence

- “The incremental effect of daily school attendance facilitates the transition of a student from school to career as a functioning and productive member of society.
- Conversely, the incremental effect of missed school days renders a young person ill-equipped to compete or contribute. Chronic rates of absence and truancy portend prospects that provide less of a transition but rather an eventual erosion of choices, possibilities, and hope.”

Attendance Commission Annual Report. March 15, 2016

Effects of Chronic Absence, continued

- Chronic absence in kindergarten is associated with lower academic performance in first grade. The impact is twice as great for low-income students.
- A Baltimore study found a strong relationship between sixth-grade attendance and the percentage of students graduating on time or within a year of their expected high school graduation.
- Chronic absenteeism increases achievement gaps at the elementary, middle, and high school levels.

Robert Balfanz and Vaughan Byrnes. *The Importance of Being in School: A Report on Absenteeism in the Nation's Public Schools*. 2012



Effects of Chronic Absence, continued

- “If children aren’t in school, they don’t learn. Improving school attendance improves success in school.” Hedy Chang
- A 2013 study by the University of Chicago’s Consortium on Chicago School Research concluded that preschoolers who were chronically absent had weaker social-emotional development and more trouble with basic academic skills later on when compared to their peers with better attendance rates.

Preschool Attendance in Chicago Public Schools: Relationships with Learning Outcomes and Reasons for Absences. September 2013.



A Word About Early Childhood

- The ill effects of absence from school for our youngest students cannot be emphasized enough.
- Study after study have demonstrated the deleterious effects of missed school time in prekindergarten and kindergarten programming.
- The effect of poor academic outcomes lingers through life.
- The routine of missed school days in early life disposes a child to develop a lifelong pattern of absence, unreliability, and poor work habits.



Fixing the Problem

- “The history of attendance in this country has been looking at attendance as a matter of compliance ...which is, in fact, the opposite of what we know works. What we know works is taking a positive, problem-solving approach.
- They (schools) should use the data to identify where they can target support and resources to fix the problem.”

Hedy Chang, as quoted by Blad, E. “1 in 7 students found to be 'chronically absent,' report finds.”
Education Week, 38(3), 10.

Fixing the Problem, continued

- ESSA advises increased accountability for states to ensure every child is in school and working toward a productive future.
- ESSA requires that chronic absence must be reported.
- The new definition of chronic absence in the Illinois School Code mandates that chronically absent students must be identified and supports must be provided to address the reasons for their absences.

Looks Like They Are All Here!

- Look beyond average daily attendance figures.
- **Don't look at the forest; look at the trees.**



Data and Dialogue Drive the Diagnosis

- Were any trees missing? 😊
- A reliable data system that is updated continually and can be accessed easily will inform you who is missing.
- Dialogue with the student and the family will reveal the reasons for the absence.

Data Drives Action

At the September 6, 2018 Attendance Commission meeting, Hedy Chang of Attendance Works said,

- Having accurate data systems is key to support for students.
- A data-driven, systemic approach has the benefit of inducing accountability
- Actionable data that is accurate, reliable, and accessible works in conjunction with strong policies which build school and district capacity to problem solve and implement best practices toward solutions.



Data Access

- ISBE recently launched a data retrieval system that incorporates data from six ISBE systems, is updated on a nightly basis, and provides users with access to live, actionable data, including student attendance numbers.
- Ed 360 is a free, mobile-friendly, secure web application built to support student instruction and record-keeping through the use of the state data warehouse.

Data Access, continued

- Of the 852 school districts in Illinois, 701 (4-24-19) have joined Ed 360.
- In its 2018 Annual Report to the General Assembly, the Attendance Commission recommended that every school district in Illinois take advantage of Ed 360's unique and comprehensive web-based data storehouse to access student attendance data and identify who is in need of attendance supports and interventions.

<https://www.isbe.net/ed360>

Ensuring Data Quality for Use

- Attendance data must be recorded and updated for accuracy by trained clerks and teachers throughout the school day via a reliable system.
- School staffs and district leaders should be able to access and use the data effectively.
- Data that indicate a truancy or a pattern of absence should trigger an immediate response and action by staff.



Problem Solving Time

- Your data will tell you who, but it will not tell you why. The “why” is the key to the solution.
- Only the family can tell you why.
- Only the family can ultimately fix the problem.
- They will most likely **need your help**, however.



Family Engagement Prologue: Why Do Students Miss School?

- Some students **cannot attend** school due to illness, family responsibilities, housing instability, the need to work, or involvement with the juvenile justice system.
- Some students **will not attend** school to avoid bullying, unsafe conditions, harassment, and embarrassment.
- Some students **do not attend** school because they, or their parents, do not see the value in being there, they have something else they would rather do, or nothing stops them from skipping school.

Robert Balfanz and Vaughan Byrnes. *The Importance of Being in School: A Report on Absenteeism in the Nation's Public Schools*. 2012.



Family Engagement

- Children thrive when their education and development is supported and encouraged in school and at home.
- The school environment must be warm and welcoming to all.
- Communication between school and home must be frequent and embedded in school policy.
- Parents must be included in all decisions.

ISBE Family Engagement Framework: A Guide for Illinois Districts, Schools, and Families

<https://www.isbe.net/Documents/fe-guide.pdf#search=Family%20Engagement%20Guide>



Solving the Problem

- Established family engagement protocols enable expedient solutions of most student problems.
- Tiered interventions that incorporate the family will yield improved student outcomes.
- Tiered interventions which are tailored to students' specific needs will remove barriers to learning, including the reasons for chronic absenteeism.



In-school Tiered Interventions

- “The Illinois Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) is a framework for continuous improvement that is systemic, prevention focused, and data-informed, providing a coherent continuum of supports responsive to meet the needs of all learners.”
<https://www.ilmtss.net/about/>
- Multi-tiered frameworks allow for universal screening and progress monitoring to accurately identify the problem, improve outcomes, and sustain improvements.



In-school Tiered Interventions (continued)

Tier Three: Chronically Absent Students

Tier Two: At-risk Students

Tier One: Entire School Community

Interventions in General

Tier One interventions are universally applied to lay the groundwork for clear policy communication and family engagement.

Tier Two interventions are specific to students at risk for chronic absence and are the result of dialogue to determine the causes for absence.

Tier Three interventions are targeted to the unique problems of chronically absent students and are rooted in daily communication and inter-agency involvement (may also include law enforcement).

Tier One Interventions

Tier One interventions for the **entire** school community include the following measures:

- Foster an engaging school climate.
- Build positive relationships with students and families.
- Communicate the relationship between school attendance and academic achievement.

Heidi Chang of Attendance Works at September 6, 2018 Attendance Commission Meeting

Tier One Interventions (continued)

- Communicate district attendance policy often and in varying formats (flyers, parent handbook, parent meetings).
- Recognize good and improved attendance.
- Identify and address common barriers to attendance.
- **Think of parents as partners** in the effort to educate and guide their children.



Tier One Interventions (continued)

- United Way in the Quad Cities (Rock Island and Moline in Illinois and Davenport and Bettendorf in Iowa) undertook efforts to improve students' ability to read at grade level.
- They found patterns of chronic absence contributed to low academic achievement.
- They started a public relations campaign to inform parents and children about the importance of school attendance.
- United Way provided funding to several schools to use in any way they wanted to support improved attendance.

Tier One Interventions (continued)

- Some of the money remained unspent.
- Several participating schools purchased stickers and trinkets to give to children who came to school. Some gave them tickets toward an end-of-the-school year raffle of a bike or electronics.
- The schools that gave out stickers and trinkets showed the most gains in student attendance levels.
- Immediate gratification won!



Tier Two Interventions

Tier Two interventions include the following:

- Small group activities
- Increased amount of personalized outreach to student and family
- Action plan to address barriers and increase engagement
- Caring mentors



Tier Two Interventions (continued)

- Personalized outreach
 - Phone call, email, or home visit
 - Scheduled meetings between parents and staff
 - Determination of reason for absences
 - Link student/family to appropriate resources in the district and/or the community
 - Follow-up with student and family

Tier Three Interventions

Tier Three interventions include the following:

- Coordinated school and inter-agency response to isolate the problem and offer solutions (legal, medical, mental health, housing, financial, safety, etc.)
- Legal response is necessary if student and/or parent unwilling to cooperate.

Tier Three Interventions (continued)

- Schools and districts should maintain a referral list of area agencies and organizations that have the capacity to help families with mental and physical health problems, addiction, unemployment, homelessness, and safety issues.
- Tier Three interventions should be intensive, individualized, and targeted to provide the unique support a student and the family require for change.



Final Thoughts

- Develop a timely, effective, and accessible system for recording student attendance data.
- Access the data frequently and program your data system for automatic alerts and messaging in response to student absence and truancy.
- Initiate dialogue immediately with students and parents over repeated absences or a truancy occurrence.
- Be accountable. Be equitable. Be supportive.



Sage Advice



Sage Advice

NO MATTER HOW YOU FEEL:
GET UP. DRESS UP.
SHOW UP AND
NEVER GIVE UP



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www.attendanceworks.org



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