

The State of Chronic Absenteeism in NJ

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)



Q: What is “chronic absenteeism”?

A: Chronic absenteeism refers to the number of students who miss 10 percent or more of enrolled school days. Students who miss just two days per month – 18 days over the course of the 180-day school year – would be considered “chronically absent.” A district’s “chronic absence” rate is the percentage of students who are chronically absent in a set time period.

Q: How is chronic absenteeism different from “truancy” or “average daily attendance”?

A: “Truant” students are students with more than 10 absences that are “unexcused,” while chronic absenteeism looks simply at absences, regardless of reason. “Average daily attendance” refers to the average number of students who show up to school on any given day.

Q: Why should schools look at chronic absenteeism data?

A: Students cannot learn if they are not in school, and when students miss more than 10 percent of days, their academic success is at risk. Each absence puts a child further behind, impacting everything from test scores to reading proficiency to graduation rate.

Q: What causes chronic absenteeism?

A: Kids may miss too much school for a variety of reasons. However, national research and ACNJ focus groups reveal that physical and mental health issues, unreliable transportation, unstable housing, school suspensions, and community violence and poverty are risk factors for chronic absenteeism.

Q: How can chronic absenteeism be reduced?

A: Absenteeism requires a community solution beyond the school walls. Different strategies are needed depending on the causes of student absences. However, the general action steps for schools and communities include:

- 1) regular review of attendance data at the school, classroom, and student level;
- 2) intervention strategies to notify and support families and students with underlying issues when absences begin; and
- 3) school climate and culture that encourage attendance.

Q: How was ACNJ’s data collected for this report?

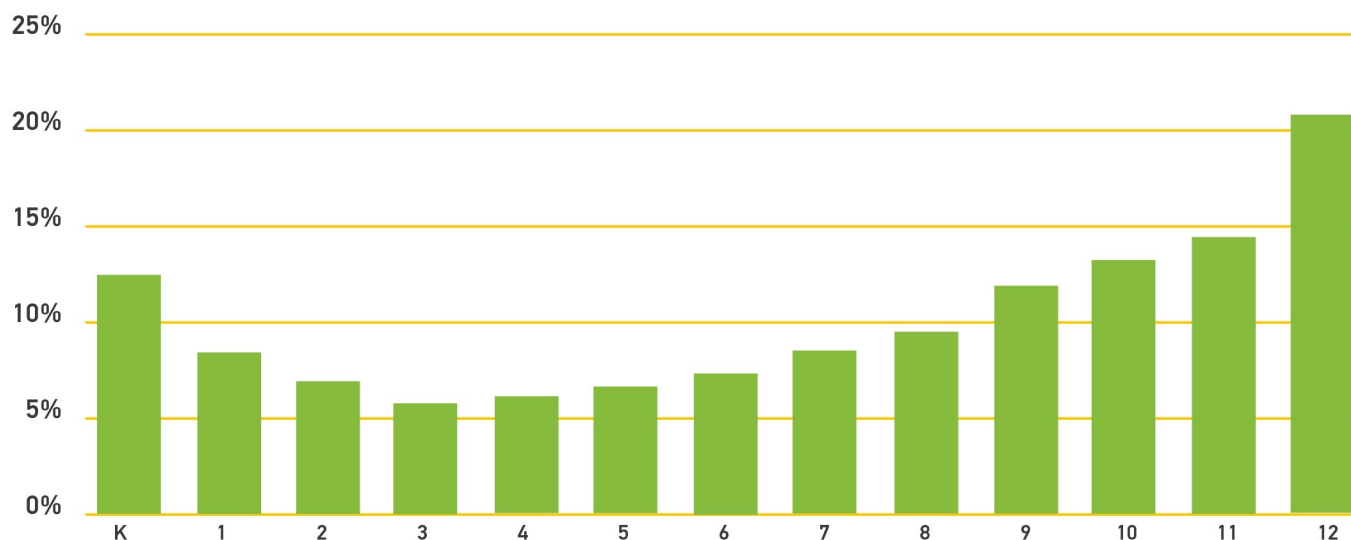
A: ACNJ received its data from the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE). Each year, school districts submit a variety of student data to NJDOE through the NJ SMART system, including the number of days present and enrolled for each student. From there, NJDOE determines how many students missed more than 10 percent of enrolled days in each district by grade.

Q: Why doesn’t this report compare data from the 2014-15 school year with data from the 2013-14 school year?

A: Previously, school districts often had varied practices of collecting and entering attendance data for students. However, as districts became more aware of chronic absenteeism measures, record-keeping and data submission practices evolved, leading to some differences in data between the 2013-14 and 2014-15 school year.

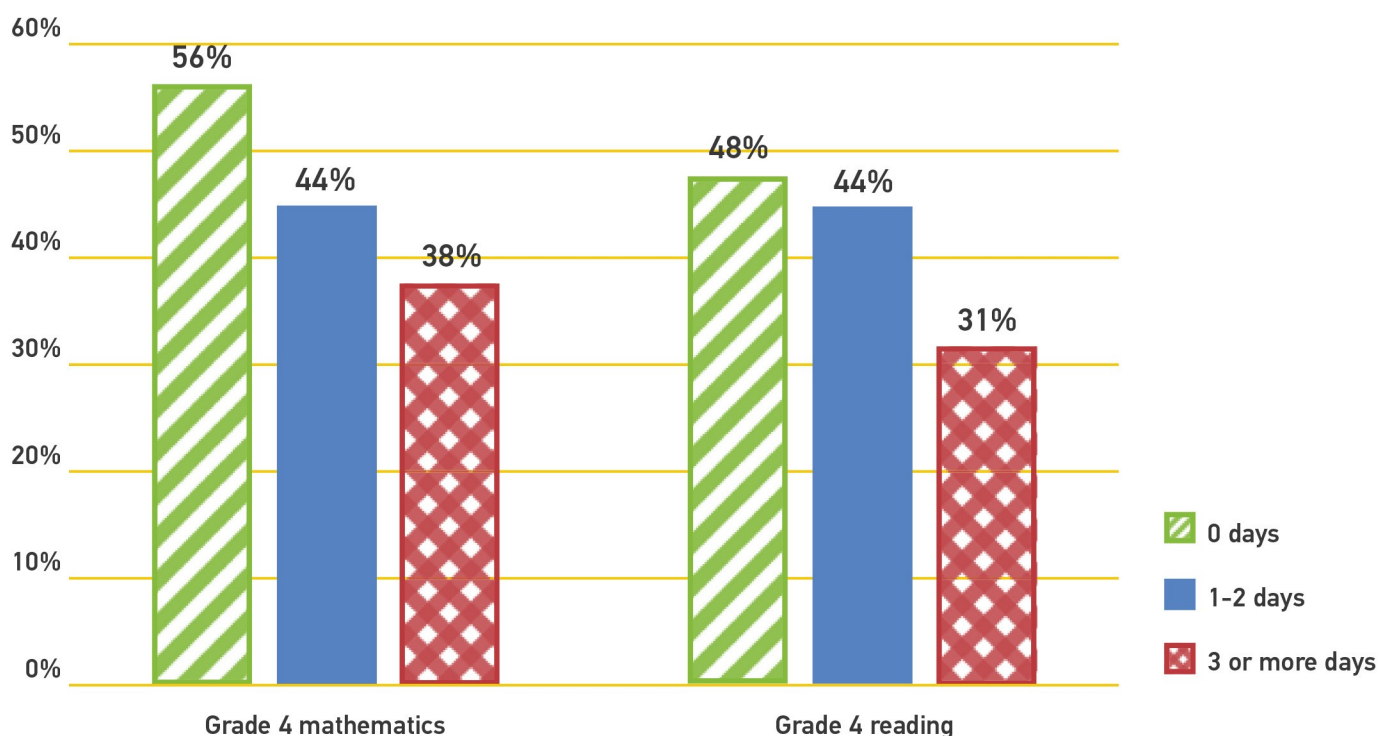
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Percentage of Students Chronically Absent by Grade, 2014–15 School Year



Sources: New Jersey Department of Education and specific district data from Community Charter School of Paterson, Closter Borough, Freehold Twp., Maria Varisco-Rogers Charter School, Newark Prep Charter School, Pace Charter School of Hamilton, Palisades Park, Wharton Borough.

Percentage of NJ Students Scoring Proficient or Above, NAEP Grade 4 2015



Source: National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Data Explorer (2015).

For information about best practices and strategies for improving attendance, visit

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