Reducing Chronic Absenteeism

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Advocates for Children of New Jersey

Joint Committee on Public Schools
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Chronic Absenteeism Defined

- **CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM** measures students who miss 10% of enrolled school days, including excused/unexcused and suspensions

- Average daily attendance counts the average number of students who show up to school

- Truancy counts only unexcused absences
What does this mean?

- Based on a 180-day school year:
  - Any student who misses 18 days or more per year
  - That means about 2 days every month is considered....

CHRONICALLY ABSENT
Every absence hurts a student’s opportunity for success

- *Early years (PK-3) absenteeism leads to:*
  - Long-term reading problems
  - Higher absenteeism rates in later grades
  - Higher rates of retention
- *Absenteeism in the later school years correlates with:*
  - Higher rates of suspension
  - Lower academic achievement
  - Lower odds of reaching second year of college
The more school students miss, the more likely they are to drop out

Newark Graduation Rate in 4 years, 2015 cohort, grouped by 9th grade absenteeism status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attendance Status</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Good Attendance &lt; 5.0%</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approaching Chronic Absence 5.0% - 9.9%</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chronically Absent 10.0% - 19.9%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Severely Chronically Absent &gt; 20.0%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Truancy Vs. Chronic Absence

**TRUANCY**
- Counts only unexcused absences
- Emphasizes compliance with school rules
- Relies on legal & administrative solutions

**CHRONIC ABSENCE**
- Counts all absences: excused, unexcused & suspensions
- Emphasizes academic impact of missed days
- Uses community-based, positive strategies
### Why We May Not Notice Chronic Absence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>September</th>
<th>October</th>
<th>November</th>
<th>December</th>
<th>January</th>
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<tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>February</th>
<th>March</th>
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Absences Add up
Chronic Absence = 18 days of absence = 2 days a month
What the Data Tells Us
Chronic Absenteeism in NJ: A Snapshot (2016-17)

• About 136,000 K-12 students in New Jersey were considered “chronically absent"
  • That was 10 percent of the total student population

• More than 20,000 NJ preschool students were considered “chronically absent"
  • That was 31 percent of the total preschool student population
Chronic Absenteeism, by grade (K-12)

Percentage of students chronically absent by grade K-12, 2016-17

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>KG</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>10.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>12.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>14.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>20.1%</td>
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Now Add Preschool...

Percentage of students chronically absent by grade PK-12, 2016-17
Absenteeism in Demographic Categories (K-12)

Source: NJ Dep’t of Education. Categories may overlap.
# Special Populations

## Chronic Absenteeism Rate by Special Population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Economically Disadvantaged Students</th>
<th>Students with Special Needs</th>
<th>English Language Learners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>District A</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td><strong>22%</strong></td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District B</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td><strong>16%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District C</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td><strong>20%</strong></td>
<td>12%</td>
<td><strong>16%</strong></td>
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Digging Deeper:
Reasons for absences

- For Young Students:
  - Health issues
  - Unreliable transportation
  - Housing Instability
  - School discipline
  - Parent work schedules
  - PK and K viewed as less important
  - Safety in school and in neighborhoods
  - Student/parent choice
  - Family issues
Digging Deeper: Reasons for absences

For Older Students:

- Health issues (physical and mental)
- Student responsibilities
- Transportation/distance from school
- Personal safety
- Suspensions
- School curriculum: relevance and rigor
- Parent disengagement
- School policies
- Lack of link to a trusted adult
No one-size-fits-all solution, but there are common themes

- Need to be **intentional** about attendance strategy
  - Deliberate planning
  - Consistent, persistent implementation (can’t stop messaging in November!)
- **Use data** continuously
  - Target high-absenteeism and at-risk students
  - Identify problems affecting *your specific* student population
- **Build relationships** with parents and families
  - Start outreach early
  - Messaging on importance of school
  - Be *specific* about impact of absences and action steps
How State policy can support better attendance

• New NJ law (P.L. 2018, c.23):
  • NJDOE reporting (no new regs yet)
  • If school has 10% or more chronically absent, must develop action plan:
    • Identifying problems/barriers
    • Develop recommendations
    • Outline communications strategies to parents
    • Establish protocols for informing parents re absences
    • Review school policies to ensure support
State policy (cont.)

- Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)
  - Chronic absenteeism as performance measure
Resources

- ACNJ attendance page: [https://acnj.org/issues/school-attendance/](https://acnj.org/issues/school-attendance/)
- Every Student, Every Day: A Community Toolkit to Address and Eliminate Chronic Absenteeism: [https://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/chronicabsenteeism/toolkit.pdf](https://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/chronicabsenteeism/toolkit.pdf)
Any Questions???

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