



EARLY LEARNING FACT SHEET

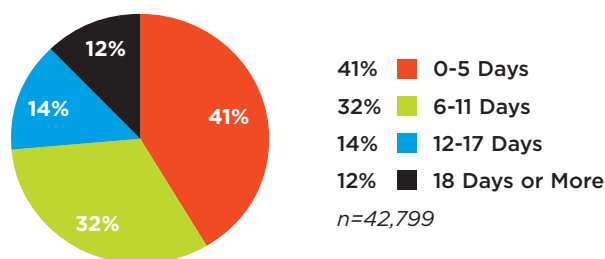
Promoting early learning and development Birth to 8

Focus on Reducing Chronic Early Absence

During the early elementary school years, children develop important skills and approaches to learning that are critical for school success. **Students who are chronically absent from school during these early years miss opportunities** to learn and develop positive relationships within the school community.¹

There is a growing recognition nationally that average daily attendance does not tell the whole story and that schools, districts, and states should also track chronic absence rates.^{2,3} Chronic absence is defined as missing 10% or more of the school year (18 or more days for a 180-day school year).⁴

SCHOOL ATTENDANCE IN RHODE ISLAND BY NUMBER OF DAYS MISSED, GRADES K-3, 2013-2014 SCHOOL YEAR



Source: Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2013-2014 school year. Includes only students who were enrolled for at least 90 days. Totals may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

- Chronic absence rates are high in kindergarten and then decline in early elementary school before increasing again in middle and high school. During the 2013-2014 school year, 16% of Rhode Island kindergarten students, 12% of first graders, 10% of second graders, and 10% of third graders were chronically absent.⁵
- Children in low-income families are much more likely to have high rates of chronic absence in the early grades than higher-income children. In Rhode Island, during the 2013-2014 school year, 19% of low-income K-3 students were chronically absent, compared to 5% of higher-income K-3 students.⁶
- Chronic early absence is often the result of a combination of school, family, and community factors. Chronic illness, lack of access to health care, unreliable transportation, lack of clean or appropriate clothes, lack of affordable housing, bullying, or ambivalence or alienation from school can all lead to chronic absence.^{7,8}

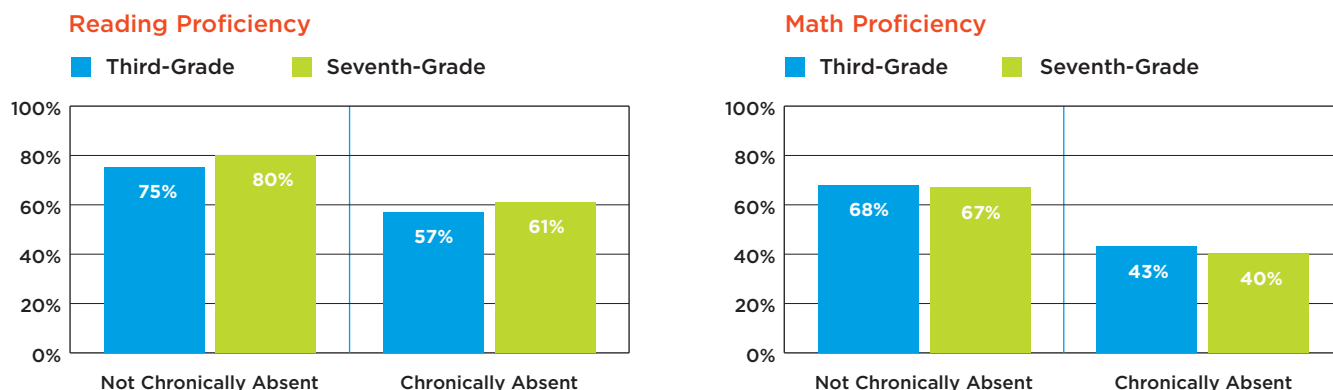
Poor Attendance in September Can Predict Chronic Absence

A recent study of students in Baltimore found that attendance patterns established in September persisted for the entire year. Students who missed fewer than two days of school in September were absent an average of 10 days for the entire school year. In comparison, students who were absent two to four days were absent an average of 25 days, and students absent more than four days were absent an average of 70 days over the course of the school year.⁹

Chronic Absence and Student Achievement

According to national research, children who are chronically absent in kindergarten show lower levels of achievement in math, reading, and general knowledge in first grade. Among poor children, chronic absence in kindergarten can predict low educational achievement at the end of fifth grade.¹⁰ A new analysis from the Rhode Island DataHUB shows that Rhode Island children who are chronically absent in kindergarten have lower levels of achievement in math and reading as far out as the seventh grade and are more than twice as likely to be retained.¹¹

CHRONIC ABSENCE IN KINDERGARTEN ASSOCIATED WITH REDUCED READING AND MATH PROFICIENCY IN THIRD AND SEVENTH GRADE, RHODE ISLAND, 2004-2005 KINDERGARTNERS



Source: RI DataHUB. (n.d.). *Chronic absenteeism among kindergarten students*. Retrieved July 31, 2014, from <http://ridatahub.org/datastories/chronic-absenteeism-in-kindergarten/1/>

Recommendations

- Develop systems that provide frequent reports on student absenteeism at the state, district, and school levels. These reports should include breakdowns by subgroup (e.g., grade, income), analyze patterns of absenteeism (e.g., days of week, month of year), and identify individual students with troubling absenteeism patterns so appropriate strategies for intervention can be identified.
- Monitor attendance regularly and contact parents as soon as troubling absence patterns appear. Intervene early to get students back on track before absences build up and students fall behind.
- Nurture a *culture of attendance* by helping parents understand the importance of coming to school on time and every day in the early grades.

References

- ^{1,10} Chang, H. N. & Romero, M. (2008). *Present, engaged, and accounted for: The critical importance of addressing chronic absence in the early grades*. New York, NY: National Center for Children in Poverty, Mailman School of Public Health, Columbia University.
- ⁹ Olson, L. S. (2014, July). *Why September matters: Improving student attendance*. Baltimore, MD: Baltimore Education Research Consortium.
- ¹¹ RI DataHUB. (n.d.). *Chronic absenteeism among kindergarten students*. Retrieved July 31, 2014, from <http://ridatahub.org>
- ^{2,7} Balfanz, R. & Byrnes, V. (2012, May). *The importance of being in school: A report on absenteeism in the Nation's public schools*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Center for Social Organization of Schools.
- ³ Attendance Works. (2013, September). *How states can advance achievement by reducing chronic absence*. Retrieved September 11, 2014, from www.attendanceworks.org
- ⁴ Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. (n.d.). *InfoWorks! Understanding data: Dictionary of data terms*. Chronic absenteeism. Retrieved September 11, 2014, from <http://infoworks.ride.ri.gov>
- ^{5,6} Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2013-2014 school year.



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