

School Attendance, Absenteeism, and Student Success

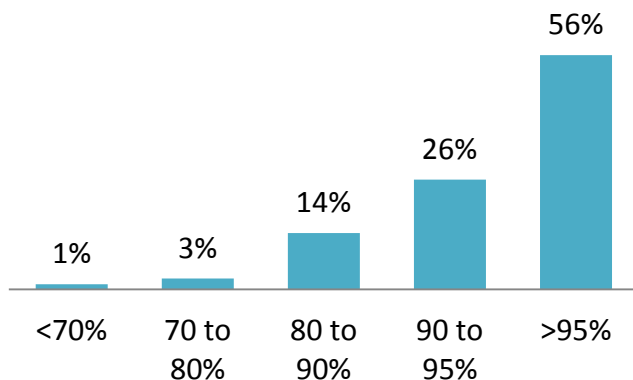
This brief highlights the high correlation between attendance, absenteeism, and student outcomes. We focus on students whose attendance rates are below 90 percent—students who are sometimes referred to as “chronically absent.” We first examine how chronic absenteeism and student characteristics are correlated. We then look at how chronic absenteeism relates to student success as measured by standardized test scores and high school on-time graduation rates.

We find that, in particular, students who are in poverty and American Indian/Alaska Native students have higher rates of chronic absenteeism than their peers. Female students have higher rates of chronic absenteeism than male students in later grades. Fewer chronically absent students meet state standards on math and reading tests than their peers. Chronically absent students have a lower on-time graduation rate than their peers, lagging about 16 percentage points behind.

Chronic Absenteeism affects about 17 percent of Oregon students

Attendance varies across racial and ethnic
About 83 percent of students attend school at least 90 percent of the time, while 17 percent are considered chronically absent. As Graph 1 shows, the vast majority of chronically absent students have attendance rates between 80 and 90 percent.

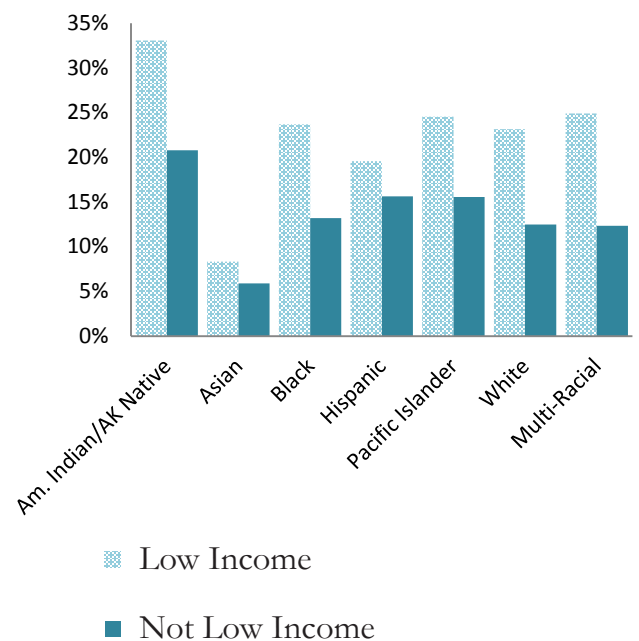
Graph 1: Share of Students by Attendance Rate Category



groups and across income levels

We observe differences in chronic absenteeism when we evaluate students by ethnicity and economic status. Students from lower-income families have higher rates of chronic absenteeism for all ethnic groups. Graph 2 shows that the share of students who are chronically absent varies by both ethnicity and economic status. Asian students stand out with dramatically lower rates of chronic absenteeism for both low-income and higher

Graph 2: Percent Chronically Absent by Ethnicity and Economic Status

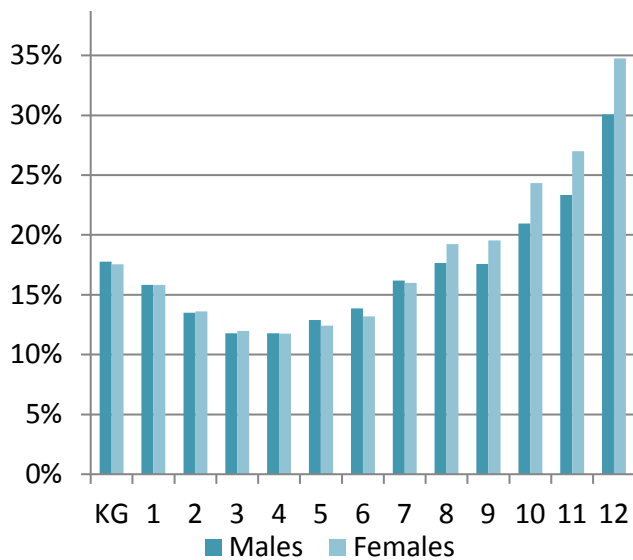


income students. American Indian/Alaska Native students have much higher rates of chronic absenteeism across both income groups. The gaps by economic status across racial and ethnic groups are relatively large, averaging about ten percentage points. The exceptions are for Asian students (2.4 percentage points) and Hispanic students (3.9 percentage points).

Male students have fewer instances of chronic absenteeism than female students in high school

Attendance rates by gender do not vary much in the early grades, but the trend changes in Middle School.

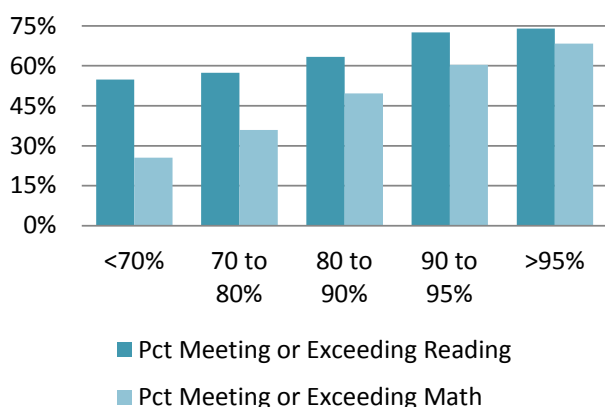
Graph 3: Percent Chronically Absent by Gender and Grade



Through 7th grade, a larger share of males are chronically absent in most grades, but starting in 8th grade, a larger share of females are chronically absent. Graph 3 shows the gap grows to nearly 5 percentage points by the 12th grade.

Students with higher attendance rates are more likely to meet academic standards

Graph 4: Percent of Students Meeting or Exceeding State Standards

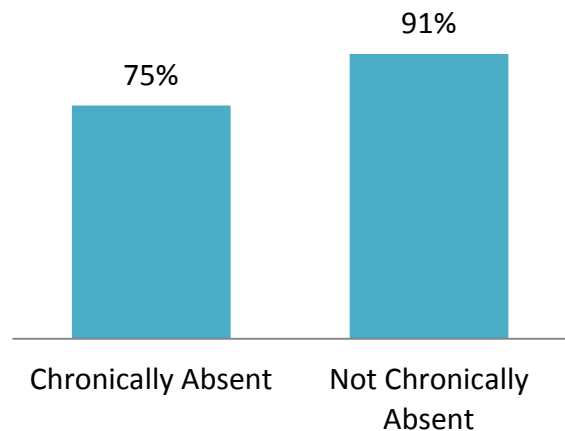


In Oregon, both attendance and chronic absenteeism vary among student groups, and those students who have higher attendance rates are far more likely to meet state academic standards, particularly in math. Graph 4 shows the gaps between chronically absent students and their peers. In math, 66% of students who are not chronically absent meet state standards, while only 46% of chronically absent students meet the standards. For reading, 74 percent of students who are not chronically absent meet standards, while only 62 percent of chronically absent students do.

Students with better attendance graduate on time at higher rates

We also see that high school graduation rates vary by attendance and absenteeism. Among students in the 12th grade, those with attendance rates of 90 percent or above had a graduation rate of 91 percent¹. For those with attendance rates below 90 percent, the rate is 75 percent, a difference of 16 percentage points.

Graph 5: On-Time Graduation Rate by 12th Grade Attendance



While low attendance, in itself, is not likely to be the cause of the lower probability of graduating from high school, measures taken to improve attendance have the potential to also improve high school graduation rates. With over 25 percent of 12th graders having attendance rates below 90 percent, and the strong relationship between attendance and on-time graduation, improvement of student attendance will likely improve graduation rates, perhaps substantially.

¹This calculation of the graduation rate is different than the Cohort Graduation Rate reported elsewhere in that it does not include students who dropped out prior to 12th grade in the denominator.

Examples of Success from the Field

ODE staff spoke with principals from five Oregon schools that had low rates of chronic absenteeism compared to schools with similar demographics during the 2014-15 school year: Echo Shaw Elementary School, Free Orchards Elementary School, Dayton Junior High School, Valor Middle School, and North Marion High School. Each school takes a unique approach to encouraging student attendance, yet they share some common threads.

- **A focus on making school a positive environment**
- **Routine review of attendance data with systematic follow-up**
- **Creative strategies and solutions to promote attendance**

A focus on making school a positive environment

Strong attendance starts with creating an environment in which students feel welcome, important, engaged, and connected. Some strategies to build this environment are as simple as administrators and teachers welcoming students in the hallway, taking the time to check in as they start their day.

Many of the schools interviewed use programs like Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) as the framework to build a positive environment in which students participate in making the school a place where everyone feels welcome. One school altered its curriculum to help students connect their schoolwork to real world applications. The change has helped students understand the relevance of what they

are learning in school and increased engagement. Another school focuses on connecting students to activities and clubs. Methods varied widely based on the needs of students in each school, but all the schools highlighted focused on creating a positive school environment.

Routinely review attendance data

Staff at Free Orchards Elementary sit down together every week to review student attendance patterns. Their philosophy – don't let a kid slide, not even for a week or two. Staff at Dayton Junior High also meet weekly as a team to look for students struggling to make it to school. At Echo Shaw elementary, the counselor takes a close look at the data once a month. Valor Middle School relies on an automated process. Once a student hits a threshold, the administrative team automatically gets an alert. North Marion High School reviews data every three weeks.

Each school uses a different system, but each follows the process faithfully and routinely. Tracking the data is central to identifying students who may be in need of some extra help getting to school. It may help point out larger, systematic issues around school culture and engagement that need to be addressed.



Creative strategies and solutions to promote attendance

Each school has strategies and systems to help students overcome barriers to attending school and to help students become more engaged in school. Some examples are listed below.

Attendance club

The counselor at Free Orchards set up an attendance club for students struggling with attendance. Students in the club start their day by visiting the counselors office, putting a sticker on their chart, and receiving a warm greeting from the counselor.

Bad day trigger

At Valor, teachers notify the principal when they notice a student having a bad day. An administrator or counselor connects with the student as soon as possible to talk about what's going on. This helps staff identify problems before they start affecting attendance.

Class focused on college and career ready skills

At North Marion, students have a 30 minute class period 4 times a week dedicated to keeping students on track with schoolwork, attendance, grades and other issues that arise. Once a week the class uses curriculum provided by a counselor which focuses on skills that will help students become college and career ready.

Create a resource counselor position

Administrators at Valor decided that families face enough challenges that affect student attendance that the school needed a staff member to work on addressing these needs. The principal rearranged staffing to free up a teacher to fill this role.

Classroom Changes

Dayton Junior High is working with Innovate Oregon and other industry partners to restructure classes and make the connection between school and work clearer. Each department has at least one class that limits instruction to 3 days a week. The other two days are dedicated to class projects that require students to collaborate to solve a real world problem. For example, students designed an app to replace their binder organization system. The collaborative nature of the projects encouraged students to attend school because the work was engaging and students feel more dependent on each other. Missing school meant letting their group down.

Connection points

North Marion High supports multiple clubs to help as many students as possible participate in an activity or school group.

Home visits

At Echo Shaw, an administrator and the teacher do a home visit for new students. The principal commented that at least a few students ask her every year, "Do you remember when you visited my house?" The visit helps staff form positive relationship with parents and students.

Linking the learning

Dayton Junior High focuses on explaining why each lesson is important to the student. They link the explanation of the lesson to exams and the overall learning goals for the year. This helps students understand why they are being asked to complete a task.

Partnering with local dentist and doctor offices

Hillsboro School District works with local dentist and doctor offices to display table tents with messages encouraging parents not to schedule appointments during the school day whenever possible.

Tribe work

Echo Shaw Elementary staff use "tribe work" in their classrooms to help foster a sense of community among students. Each classroom is framed as a tribe and all the members (students) are important to making it work. The tribe misses them when they aren't at school.

Wake up call

A staff member at Echo Shaw started calling a student every morning to make sure he was awake and getting ready for school at an agreed upon time. At Dayton Junior High, staff purchased alarm clocks for students struggling with this issue.

Additional Resources

Attendance Works:

<http://www.attendanceworks.org/tools/>