



Chronic Absence as ESSA School Quality and Student Success Indicator

The *Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)* requires states to choose at least one non-academic indicator to measure school quality or student success. Chronic absence is a powerful indicator that directly impacts student success. It meets or exceeds all of the rigorous criteria ESSA has established for accountability measures and is:

- An early predictor of student performance.
- One of the only available measures for the early grades.
- Actionable.
- Already reported by school districts to the U.S. Department of Education and is based on data they already maintain in their systems.

What is Chronic Absence?

Most children miss a few days of school each year without long-term consequences. However, when they are chronically absent, defined as **missing 10 percent of school days within one academic year for any reason**, their school success is at significant risk.

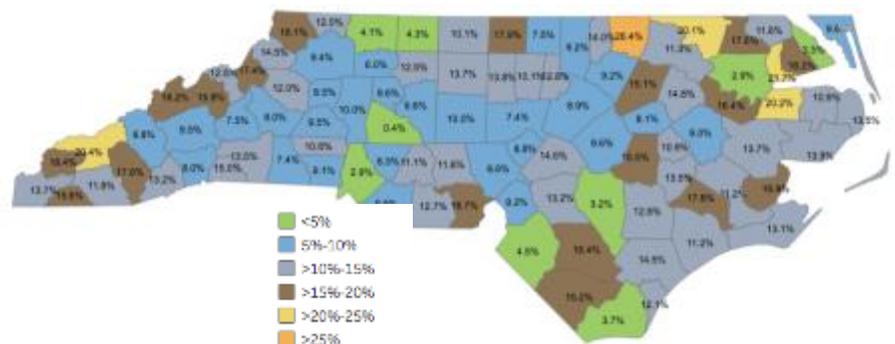
Why does Chronic Absence Matter?

It is more difficult for children to learn to read and to gain other foundational academic skills when they miss many school days. As early as pre-kindergarten, students who are chronically absent are less likely to read proficiently by the end of third grade and more likely to be retained. Chronically absent kindergartners are less likely to develop the social skills needed to persist in school. The problems multiply when students are chronically absent several years in a row.

Chronic Absence in the Early Grades in North Carolina

Nationwide, 11 percent of elementary school students are chronically absent, and there are racial and ethnic gaps. The numbers are similar in North Carolina: in 2012, two-thirds of LEAs had from 5 to 15 percent of their elementary-school students chronically absent. Percentages range from a low of 0.4% in Rowan County to a high of 26.4% in Warren County. Statewide, Hispanic students, on average, see the lowest chronic absence rates at 10 percent, while American Indian and Pacific Islander/Hawaiian students see the highest at 23 and 24 percent, respectively. Eleven percent of Asian elementary-school students are chronically absent, compared to 12 percent of Black, 13 percent of White, and 17 percent of “two or more race” students.

Chronic Absenteeism by Local Education Agency (LEAs) for schools with K, 1st, 2nd and/or 3rd grade students. 2012.
Note: Per DPI policy, data for LEAs with more than 0 but fewer than 5 chronically absent students have been suppressed.



Why Choose Chronic Absence as an ESSA School Quality or Student Success Indicator?

Chronic absence is an early warning indicator

Chronic absence data can reveal that a student needs help long before test scores or grades do. Using chronic absence as a trigger for early interventions could be an important strategy for closing the achievement gap for low-income children and affected racial minorities.

Chronic absence puts focus on the early grades

Since students are not tested until the third grade, many district accountability systems largely ignore the early grades (PK-2). An indicator like chronic absence, which can be measured for all children, shifts some focus to the early grades. Including the early grades in measurements of school quality encourages investment and continuous improvement in early learning.

Chronic absence data is actionable to improve student outcomes

States and districts can use chronic absence rates to identify schools and districts that need support and technical assistance. Districts and schools can analyze their chronic absence data, combined with student, parent and/or teacher surveys, and use the results to support parent and teacher engagement. Data can help them better understand students' barriers to attendance, work with families and community partners to remove those barriers, request resources, and communicate the importance of daily attendance.

Chronic absence data is already collected by schools

Since schools already have to report chronic absence data to the federal Department of Education, additional funding would not be needed to collect the data.

Chronic absence meets the ESSA selection criteria

Chronic absence is one of the few indicators available now to all states that meets or exceeds the rigorous ESSA criteria for selecting indicators, including being applicable to every student, comparable across districts, and able to distinguish differences in performance among schools; being valid and reliable; providing summary and disaggregated data; and having a proven impact on student achievement.

Chronic Absence is supported by the NC Pathways to Grade-Level Reading Measures of Success Framework

North Carolina state leaders – working with a Data Action Team composed of 30 experts from NC's leading universities, research institutes, government agencies, and think tanks – identified shared birth-to-eight, whole-child measures of success to put children on a pathway to grade-level reading. The NC Pathways to Grade-Level Reading Initiative is creating partnerships among the state's early learning and education, public agency, policy, philanthropic and business leaders to define a common vision, shared measures of success and coordinated strategies that support children's optimal development beginning at birth.

Disaggregated data on chronic absence in the early grades in North Carolina is available online at www.buildthefoundation.org/chronic-absence.

The [North Carolina Early Childhood Foundation](http://www.buildthefoundation.org) is driven by a bold vision: Each North Carolina child has a strong foundation for lifelong health, education and well-being supported a premiere birth-to-eight system. We promote understanding, spearhead collaboration, and advance policies to ensure each North Carolina child is on track for lifelong success by the end of third grade.

This brief is based on Attendance Works' national [Chronic Absence: Our Top Pick for the ESSA School Quality or Student Success Indicator](#) policy brief. The [Attendance Works](#) website offers additional strategies to help districts, schools, and communities reduce chronic absence. NC-specific data on chronic absence sourced from the US Department of Education Office of Civil Rights Data Collection, with analysis by NC Early Childhood Foundation.