

ATTENDANCE COUNTS

SCHOOL ATTENDANCE MATTERS

Regular school attendance in the early years puts children on track for becoming proficient readers. The opposite is also true. Chronic absence in kindergarten is associated with lower levels of literacy in first grade and lower likelihood of grade-level reading by the end of third grade. During the 2015-16 school year, more than 64,000 North Carolina elementary school children were chronically absent.

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 nationally and in NC as **missing 10 percent of enrolled school days within one academic year for any reason**, their school success is at significant risk.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Chronically absent students are found in every type of community—urban, suburban and rural. Student health, including a lack of preventative care, is a leading contributor to chronic absence, including physical, mental, behavioral, vision, dental, social and emotional health. Issues connected to a child’s environment, such

as housing and food insecurity, and school factors, such as safety, relationships with teachers, and bullying, can impact chronic absence as well.

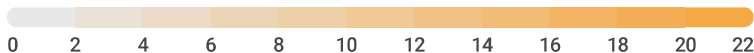
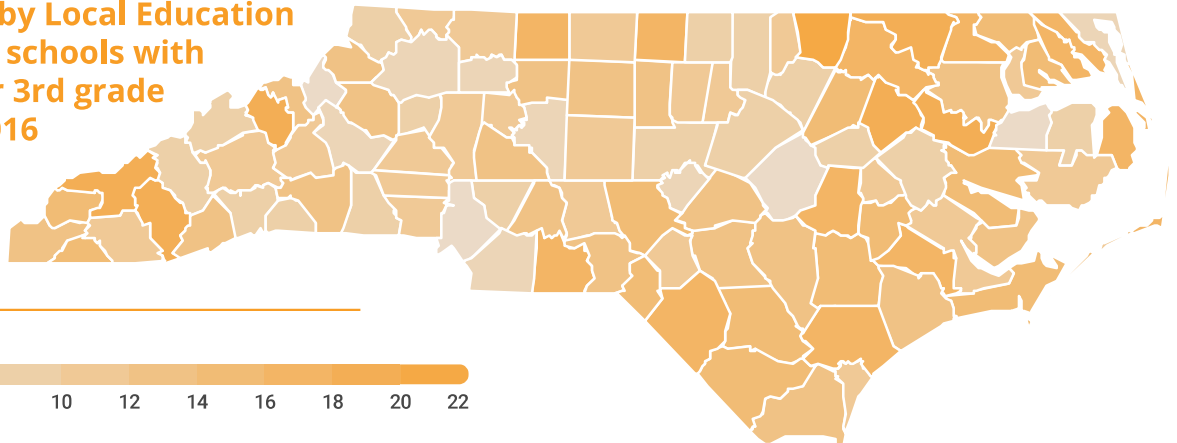
CHRONIC ABSENCE IN THE EARLY GRADES IN NC

In North Carolina in 2015-16, 11 percent of elementary school students were chronically absent, which is consistent with the national rate. There are disparities by race/ethnicity. American Indian/Alaska Native students have the highest rates of chronic absence in North Carolina at 21 percent, followed by multiracial students (15 percent), and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander students (13 percent). Eleven percent of both black and white students were chronically absent. The lowest rates were among Hispanic (9 percent) and Asian (7 percent) students.

Rates vary significantly by district as shown on the map below. For the last year reported—2015-2016—nearly three out of every four Local Education Agencies (LEAs) in North Carolina reported from 5 to 15 percent of their elementary school students as chronically absent. In some districts, however, chronic absence was as high as 23 percent. *Experts at the national organization Attendance Works say that chronic absence rates under about five percent are likely due to data collection errors.*

Chronic Absence by Local Education Agency (LEAs) for schools with K, 1st, 2nd and/or 3rd grade students. 2015-2016

Note: Per NC Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) policy, percentages less than five cannot be displayed.



Data by school district is provided in NCECF's 2018 report *Attendance Counts: Chronic Absence in North Carolina*.

WHY FOCUS ON CHRONIC ABSENCE?

IT IS AN EARLY WARNING INDICATOR.

Chronic absence data can reveal that a student needs help before test scores or grades do. Incorporating chronic absence data in early warning systems is a way to identify early on which students need more support. The new federal Every Student Succeeds Act requires that chronic absence data be regularly collected and reported in the K-12 education system.

IT PUTS FOCUS ON THE EARLY GRADES.

Traditional measures of proficiency (test scores, grades) are not appropriate for young children. As a result, students in grades K-2 are often not included in school, district and state accountability systems. This can drive attention and resources towards the tested grades and away from younger students. Chronic absence is measurable and actionable starting in preschool.

IT IMPACTS LEARNING.

Chronic absence in the early grades has been connected to lower third-grade reading and math test scores, grade retention, dropping out of high school and substance use.

IT IS ACTIONABLE AT THE SCHOOL AND DISTRICT LEVELS.

Districts and schools can analyze their attendance data, combined with student, family and teacher input, and use the results to support parent and teacher engagement. Data can help district and school leaders 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.

NC MOMENTUM ON REGULAR ATTENDANCE

THE STATE ADOPTS A DEFINITION. *In February 2018, the NC State Board of Education approved a state definition of chronic absence. A chronically absent student in North Carolina is a student who misses 10 percent of school days in a year—about 18 days total.*

LEGISLATURE ENCOURAGES ATTENDANCE RECOGNITION PROGRAMS. *The NC General Assembly passed a bill during the 2018 short session encouraging school districts to adopt student attendance recognition programs to promote regular attendance.*

NCECF SHARES STRATEGIES. *In April 2019, NCECF spoke to the NC School Boards Association to discuss chronic absence and share both state and local strategies to address it.*

CROSS-SECTOR STATE LEADERS FOCUS ON REGULAR ATTENDANCE. *The Pathways to Grade-Level Reading Action Framework was released in 2019 and includes strategies for improving third-grade reading proficiency. Regular school*

attendance was identified as a critical issue by hundreds of Pathways stakeholders, and it is one of three areas of focus in the [Action Framework](#).

NC COMMUNITIES JOIN CAMPAIGN FOR GRADE-LEVEL READING. *Regular school attendance is one of the three pillars of the national Campaign for Grade-Level Reading. There are 14 Campaign communities in North Carolina.*

NC SCHOOL DISTRICTS COMPLETE SELF-ASSESSMENT SURVEY. *Half of NC's school districts have completed a self-assessment created by Attendance Works that asks about their attendance policies and practices.*

PARENTS, TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS SHARE THEIR KNOWLEDGE ON CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM. *1500 NC preschool, Head Start and elementary school teachers, staff, parents and volunteers completed a self-assessment survey about their schools' attendance policies and practices and the causes of chronic absence in their communities.*

CALL TO ACTION

SUPERINTENDENTS CAN:

- Declare September as Attendance Awareness Month by signing the Proclamation in this toolkit and the [Call to Action](#).
- Share the Proclamation with principals.

SCHOOLS CAN:

- Engage students and parents about why attendance counts.
- Recognize good and improved attendance with incentives such as contests and awards.
- Monitor attendance data and practice.
- Use data to provide personalized early outreach to families and students who are already missing too many days of school.

- Develop programmatic responses to barriers to regular attendance, which can include, for example, improved access to health care and providing tutoring and mentoring.

COMMUNITIES CAN:

- Ask your district Superintendent to declare September as Attendance Awareness Month by signing the Proclamation and the Call to Action.
- Plan activities and events and engage local media to promote Attendance Awareness Month.
- [Share stories](#) and photos from Attendance Awareness Month on social media. Use hashtags #schooleveryday, #AttendaNCeCounts and #bthru8pathways.