

New Report on Absenteeism: Millions of Students Are Missing At Least 10% of School Year

Ten to fifteen percent of the students in the United States are chronically absent, according to a report released this month by researchers at Johns Hopkins University. In other words, five to seven-and-a-half million students are missing at least ten percent of the school year and are losing tens of millions of days of classroom instruction. Yet only six states maintain data on chronic absences: Georgia, Florida, Maryland, Nebraska, Oregon, and Rhode Island.

Dr. Robert Balfanz, a research professor at the Johns Hopkins University School of Education, and Vaughan Byrnes, a research associate, are co-authors of “The Importance of Being in School: A Report on Absenteeism in the Nation’s Public Schools,” which gathers and analyzes available data on chronic absenteeism at the state level. The report makes several policy recommendations, including the following:

- It is imperative for the federal government and state departments of education to measure and report regularly the rates of chronic absenteeism.
- States must engage in policy reviews to ensure that policies encourage every student to attend school every day.
- States must work with school districts, schools, non-profits, the community, and parents to use evidence-based strategies that bring students back to school on a regular basis.

The researchers found that high poverty urban areas report that up to one-third of their students are chronically absent; in poor rural areas, one in four students can miss at least a month’s worth of school. The negative impact that chronic absenteeism has on school success increases, as students who are chronically absent in one year are often chronically absent in multiple years. As a result, particularly in high poverty areas, significant numbers of students are missing staggering amounts of school – from six months to over a year during a five-year period.

The good news, according to the report, is that when schools and school districts become aware of the pervasive nature of absenteeism, they quickly implement attendance campaigns “that are so vigorous and comprehensive they pay off quickly.” The report is available at <https://getschooled.com/attendance-counts/report>