

Why School Attendance Matters

(Adapted from the Attendance Works Website)

Across the country, [more than 7 million students](#) are missing so many days of school that they are academically at risk. Chronic absence — missing 10 percent or more of school days due to absence for any reason—excused, unexcused absences and suspensions, can translate into third-graders unable to master reading, sixth-graders failing subjects and ninth-graders dropping out of high school.

Studies have also found that chronic absence in kindergarten is associated with lower academic performance in first grade for all children regardless of gender, ethnicity or socioeconomic status.

This isn't simply a matter of truancy or skipping school. In fact, many of these absences, especially among our youngest students, are excused. Often absences are tied to health problems, such as asthma, diabetes, and oral and mental health issues. Students may also miss school due to the timing of family trips and/or vacations. Monitoring chronic absence and its impact is relatively new to schools, yet evidence shows that students who miss an average of just two or more days of school each month are at greater risk of being unsuccessful in school..

Truancy Vs. Chronic Absence

TRUANCY

- Counts only unexcused absences
- Emphasizes compliance with school rules
- Relies on legal & administrative solutions

Vs.

CHRONIC ABSENCE

- Counts all absences: excused, unexcused & suspensions
- Emphasizes academic impact of missed days
- Uses community-based, positive strategies

While chronic absence presents academic challenges for students not in class, when it reaches high levels in a classroom or school, all students may suffer because the resulting classroom churn hampers teachers' ability to engage all students and meet their learning needs.

The good news is that work being done throughout the country shows that chronic absence is a solvable problem. What works is taking a data-driven, comprehensive

approach that begins with engaging students and families as well as preventing absences from adding up before the student falls behind academically.

The challenge of improving attendance is to avoid making the incorrect assumption that chronically absent students or their parents simply do not care. By working together, schools, families and students — can ensure all children can get to school every day so they have an opportunity to learn, grow and realize their dreams.

The Sierra Unified School District currently has an unfortunately high rate of chronic absenteeism. About 20% of SUSD's students miss 10% or more of the school year. While this fact does not seem to have substantially impacted the percentage of students who successfully graduate (2017 graduation rate was 99%), it is likely to impact the academic performance of those students who miss school at high rates. In a world where education and training has become increasingly important in order to find a well-paying job/career, success in grades K-12 is critical.