

Oregon’s Statewide Chronic Absenteeism Plan

Overview

The 2015 Oregon Legislature enacted House Bill (HB) 4002 which directed the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) and the Chief Education Office (CEdO) to develop a joint statewide education plan to address chronic absences of students. HB 4002 also specified elements of the plan and directed the two agencies to collaborate with representatives of the Department of Human Services, Oregon Health Authority, Early Learning Division and community and education stakeholders.

In the 2015-16 school year, nearly 102,000 students in Oregon - more than one in six children - were chronically absent from school. Nationally, Oregon’s chronic absenteeism rate consistently ranks within the bottom 20 percent of states. Chronic absenteeism in Oregon has a disproportionate impact on specific populations: Oregon’s American Indian and Alaska Native students, students with disabilities, students of color, students experiencing economic disadvantage and students who have received at least one out-of-school suspension. Chronic absenteeism is a concern for students in every grade, with higher rates in kindergarten and 1st grade and then again across all high school grades. These high absenteeism rates lead to devastating outcomes such as students dropping out, low graduation rates and even juvenile justice contacts.

Chronic absenteeism is a complex issue that requires a thoughtful and complex response. Schools and students cannot fix this problem alone. Cross-sector partnerships with local and state health agencies, community based organizations, community and business members and families must be leveraged to provide essential wraparound support to address the root causes of chronic absenteeism for all students. Creating these partnerships and welcoming school environments can impact absenteeism rates, high school graduation rates, school discipline and academic performance. Best and promising practices are most successful when they are systematically applied with knowledge of the local context.

Frequently Asked Questions

1) What is “Chronic Absenteeism”?



Experts in the field define chronic absenteeism as missing 10 percent or more of school days and severe chronic absenteeism as missing 20 percent or more of school days, including

excused, unexcused and discipline-related absences (Ehrlich, Gwynne, Pareja, Allensworth, Moore, Jagesic, & Sorice, 2014; Buehler, Tapogna & Chang, 2012; Connoly & Olson, 2004).

This definition is used at the National Technical Assistance Center to support attendance intervention, the state and national initiative, Attendance Works and will be used with subsequent national data collection through the Office of Civil Rights. For years, the issue of chronic absenteeism was not widely understood as most states, districts and schools were not measuring it. Instead, many schools use the metric of “Average Daily Attendance” which can greatly mask the number of students who are chronically absent. For example, a school may have a daily attendance rate of 92 percent or higher while one in four students at the school is chronically absent.

2) Why are unexcused absences included in calculating chronic absenteeism?

While great effort is put into improving teaching methods and materials, the simple truth is that none of it matters if students are not in the classroom to receive it. Multiple researchers at both the national and local levels have presented data indicating a strong relationship between missing school for *any reason* and devastating outcomes such as students dropping out, low graduation rates and even juvenile justice contacts.

3) How does Oregon Calculate “Not Chronically Absent Data”?

- The Oregon Department of Education releases “Not Chronically Absent Data” to the public annually. Data is disaggregated by district, school, grade and by population including: Black/African American
- White
- Asian
- Hispanic/Latino
- American Indian/Alaska Native
- Multi-Racial
- Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
- Underserved Races/Ethnicities
- Economically Disadvantaged
- Students with Disabilities
- Limited English Proficient
- Ever Limited English Proficient
- Talented and Gifted
- Combined Disadvantaged

Not Chronically Absent annual report:

<http://www.oregon.gov/ode/reports-and-data/students/Pages/Attendance-and-Absenteeism.aspx>

4) How is Chronic Absenteeism different from truancy?

Chronic absence can occur for a variety of reasons. Sometimes, especially in kindergarten, the challenge is that parents don't realize attendance matters. It can also be a sign that a child and his or her family face a significant barrier to school – like asthma or other chronic illness, unreliable transportation or a crisis in the family. If chronic absence affects large numbers of students, it may reflect challenging community conditions, such as community violence, foreclosures or lack of access to health care. Truancy, which is much more common among older students, indicates that students or their families are not abiding by state compulsory education laws, especially if parents and students fail to respond to offers of support.

5) What are the root causes of Chronic Absenteeism?

The causes of absenteeism are varied and complex. Absenteeism is typically symptomatic of a larger issue for students such as difficulty with transportation; housing; or behavioral, mental, or physical health challenges. Students can also encounter many negative experiences at school that make regular attendance much less likely. Disproportionate discipline for students of color (including absences due to suspensions, bullying, harassment, discrimination, lack of academic success in school and lack of positive school climate and culture all can contribute to absenteeism. These issues are only further compounded for students who also experience difficulties outside of school (e.g., unstable or unsafe housing or chronic health conditions). Researchers Robert Belfanz and Vaughn Byrnes (2012) divide the reasons students miss school into four broad categories:

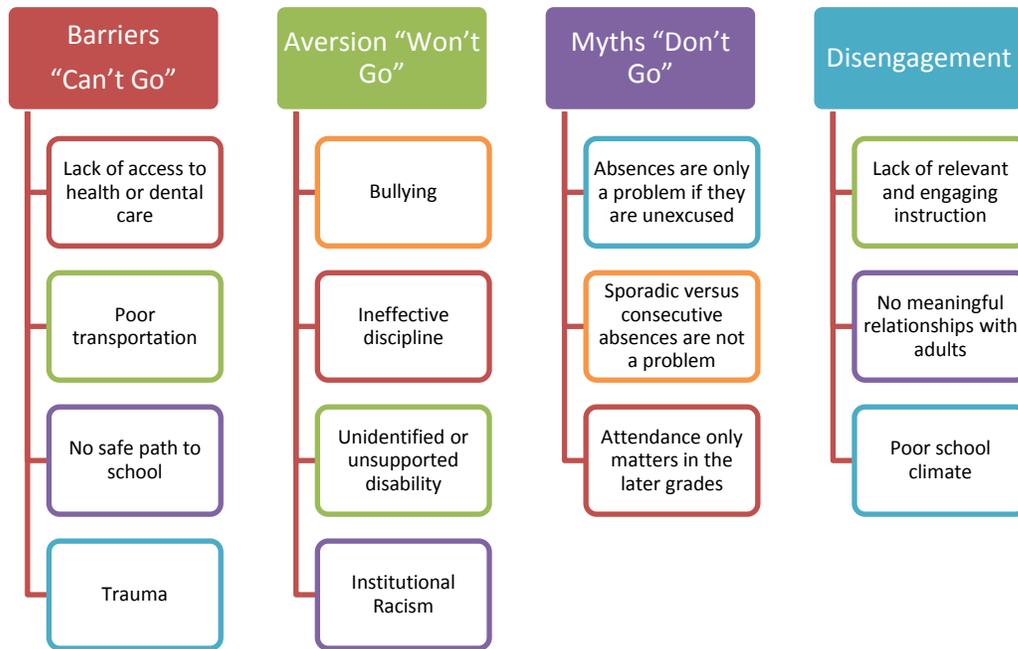
1) **Barriers** - Students who cannot attend school due to illness, family responsibilities, housing instability, lack of medical or dental care, poor transportation, trauma, the need to work or involvement with the juvenile justice system are absent because they are experiencing barriers or “Can't Go” to school.

2) **Aversion** - Students who will not attend school to avoid bullying, unsafe conditions, harassment and embarrassment - at times due to a lack of culturally responsive teaching, an unidentified disability, and ineffective discipline - are experiencing aversion or “Won't Go” to school.

3) **Myths** - Students who do not attend school because they, or their parents, do not see the value in being there, whose parents do not understand the importance of attendance in the early grades, have something else they would rather do or no one stops them from skipping school accrue absences that are supported by myths and they “Don't Go” to school.

4) **Disengagement** - Students who are disengaged from the school community, do not have a meaningful relationship with at least one adult in their school building, do not see

relevance to their lives in the curriculum and do not go to school because it has failed to engage them.



6) What is a Multi-Tiered System of Support and how does it relate to reducing Chronic Absenteeism?

Experts and stakeholders agree that creating a separate service delivery system to address absenteeism is duplicative and inefficient, but also understand that the support needed to combat chronic absenteeism effectively must be comprehensive and multi-faceted. **Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) provide a framework through which the issue of chronic absenteeism may be viewed and addressed.** Many Oregon schools already implement MTSS models such as Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (PBIS) and Response to Intervention (RTI) across the state focusing on literacy, math and behavior. For example, more than 50 percent of Oregon schools entered PBIS fidelity of implementation data last year. An MTSS framework can encompass many of the important interventions and practices that can impact absenteeism (e.g., mentoring or home visits). Key elements of an MTSS framework include:

- A data system to allow daily access to attendance and related data sources;
- Universal screening to determine which students need support;
- Cross-sector team-based problem-solving;
- Continuous progress monitoring for students needing additional support;
- Schoolwide and individualized data-based decision-making;
- Fidelity monitoring;
- Coaching/specialist support;
- Ongoing targeted professional development; and
- Intensifying levels of intervention support.

The three typical tiers of support within an MTSS are outlined below as they may apply to attendance support:

Tier III (Includes Tier 1 & Tier II Strategies): Meets the needs of 1-5% of the student population

Strategies include:

- Functional behavior plan for absences;
- Comprehensive wraparound services

Tier II (Includes Tier 1 Strategies): Meets the needs of 5-10% of the student population

Strategies include:

- Home visits;
- Success mentors;
- Wraparound services;
- Attendance success plan;
- Goal setting & incentives;
- Morning check-in;
- Attendance supervisor; and
- Parent conferences.

Tier I: All Students Receive Strategies Meets the Needs of 80-90% of the student population

Positive School Culture:

- Positive, *visual* and verbal messaging about the importance of good (not perfect) attendance for students, families and the community/incentives when appropriate;
- Positive Behavior Supports & Interventions (PBIS) or like system providing clear policies and expectations related to school behavior, opportunities to practice and recognition;
- Every student identifies, by name, a positive relationship with at least one adult in the building;
- Culturally responsive practices are embedded in the school culture and identified easily through the selection of teaching practices and materials used with students and their families;
- Consideration for equity reflected in practice;
- Establish/maintain partnerships with CBOs, state agencies; Courses are relevant, engaging,

accessible to meet the needs of a diverse student population; and

- Students educational experience reflects consideration for the ‘whole child.’

Data:

- Access to real-time, accurate attendance data and teams to analyze and respond to the students at risk or experiencing CA early and/or with pre-determined frequently;
- Close monitoring of attendance in the first month of school; Phone calls home on 4th and 7th absence

Health:

- Clear policies on when students should and should not stay home with an illness;
- Precautionary measures to keep students and staff healthy e.g. cover your cough, hand washing;
- Every student has adequate nutrition e.g. Breakfast After the Bell;
- Systems in place to identify and respond to the social-emotional needs of students; and
- Families and students are aware of local resources to meet health care, dental and social-emotional needs.

Transportation: Every student has a safe route to school.

Local Considerations:

- Designing school calendar with consideration of culture specific traditions; and
- Specific community needs e.g. washing machines at school, clothing closet, additional transportation needs, tutoring, summer programs, information translated into multiple languages, etc.

7) Why is coaching recommended as part of the Statewide Chronic Absenteeism Plan?

Skill mastery requires coaching and practice. Stakeholders can access lists of strategies and best practices that promise to reduce chronic absenteeism. This information dissemination strategy is an important but insufficient condition of learning and knowledge acquisition. During learning sessions, administrators, educators, families, students and community members invested in reducing chronic absenteeism can receive information on skills and tools, but need the opportunity to practice what they have learned and receive feedback and coaching from each other, peers and facilitators (Bryk, 2010).

8) What are the state laws related to attendance?

The Oregon Revised Statutes (ORS) and the Oregon Administrative Rules (OAR) codify the legal requirements for Oregon’s school-aged children and provide schools with the requirements for student attendance. While school enrollment is not required before a child turns six (by September 1 of current school year), once a student has been enrolled, he or she is required to attend regularly. Parents and guardians are required to send children

between the ages of six and 18 who have not completed the 12th grade to school and maintain a child's regular attendance during the entire school year. To support this, Oregon has statutes that require districts to:

- Assign an Attendance Supervisor (ORS 339.040-.055)
- Adopt attendance notification policies (ORS 339.071-.090)
- Adopt policies on discipline, suspension and expulsion related to attendance (ORS 329.250)

Oregon Revised Statutes: https://www.oregonlegislature.gov/bills_laws/Pages/ORS.aspx

Oregon Administrative Rules:

http://sos.oregon.gov/archives/Pages/oregon_administrative_rules.aspx.

9) What resources are available to Local Education Agencies, schools, parents, students and their community?

Resources:

- [Every Student, Every Day: A National Initiative to Address and Eliminate Chronic Absenteeism](#)
- [Attendance Works](#)

Local Research:

- [Being in School Matters: A new report on chronic absenteeism in Oregon \(May 2016\)](#)
- [The Connection Between Missing School and Health: A Review of Chronic Absenteeism and Student Health in Oregon \(2014\)](#)
- [The Condition of Education for Members of Oregon's Indian Tribes \(Feb. 2014\)](#)
- [Rural Education in Oregon: Overcoming the Challenges of Income and Distance \(Jan. 2016\)](#)
- [Chronic Absenteeism Report \(May 2016\)](#)
- [Showing Up, Staying in: How Oregon Schools Partner with Students, Families, and Communities to Beat Chronic Absenteeism \(Winter 2014-15\)](#)

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