

A Statewide Look at Attendance and Chronic Absenteeism in Elementary Schools in Oregon

On an average day in an Oregon elementary school, about 95 percent of students are present.ⁱ Without investigating further, this statistic suggests that students are making it to school on a regular basis. However, an alternative measure of attendance shows that many individual students have dramatically lower attendance rates than their peers. Students identified as chronically absent missed more than 10 percent of school days in a school year.ⁱⁱ Over 17 percent of students in Oregon public schools were chronically absent in the 2014-15 school year. Within elementary schools, a slightly lower but still concerning 14 percent of students were chronically absent.ⁱⁱⁱ

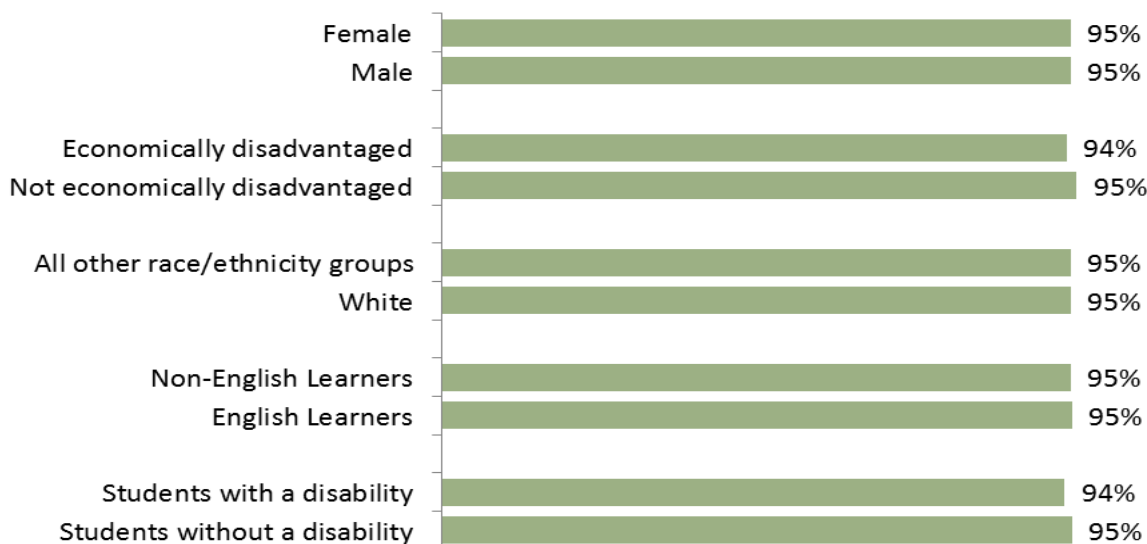
This brief highlights the importance of using a measure like chronic absenteeism, rather than average daily attendance, in order to identify concerning patterns in elementary attendance rates. The chronic absenteeism measurement is

better able to shine a light on the number of individual students struggling with attendance. Subsequent briefs in this series will examine the implications of chronic absenteeism for students and highlight different ways schools can use data to identify and support these students.

Attendance rates mask student attendance issues

Historically, schools and districts were encouraged to track attendance at an aggregate level using the attendance rate of the entire student body on each school day averaged over the entire school year. In the 2014-15 school year, Oregon elementary schools had an average daily attendance rate of 95 percent. Figure 1 shows that most student groups had about the same average attendance rates. Examined in this light, attendance does not appear to be a serious concern for Oregon students.

Figure 1: Average daily attendance rates suggest that attendance is not a serious concern



Source: Oregon Department of Education, statewide averages, grades K-5, SY 2014-15.

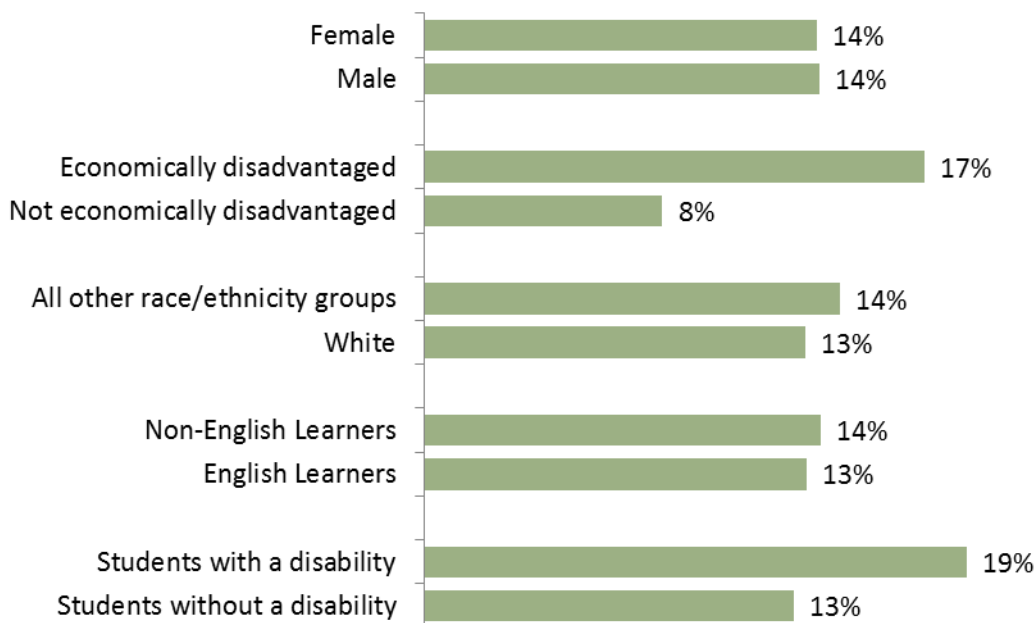
Chronic Absenteeism rates reveal many students struggle to make it to school consistently

Chronic absenteeism rates, however, tell a very different story. Statewide, nearly 14 percent of elementary school students were chronically absent in 2014-15. These students missed an average of at least one school day every two weeks. Furthermore, the chronic absenteeism measure reveals concerning trends across student groups that are not apparent in average daily attendance data. Figure 2 shows that several student groups have chronic absenteeism rates higher than the state average.

Economically disadvantaged students have a chronic absenteeism rate of 17 percent, a rate 9 percentage points higher than those who are not economically disadvantaged. Students with disabilities have a rate of 19 percent, a rate 6 percentage points higher than those not identified with a disability.

This presents a much different picture of attendance rates than the average daily measure. The chronic absenteeism measure is much more sensitive to attendance challenges among student groups, and reveals concerning trends that were previously masked in averaged data.

Figure 2: Chronic absenteeism rates suggest that attendance is problematic for several student groups



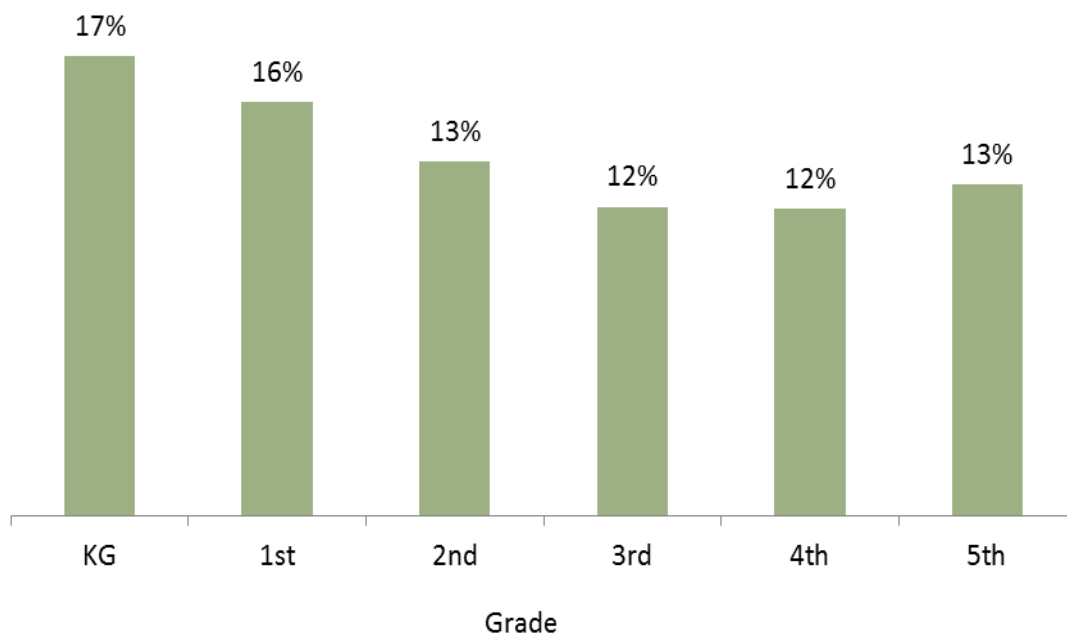
Source: Oregon Department of Education, statewide averages, grades K-5, SY 2014-15.

Chronic absenteeism affects Kindergarten and 1st graders more than other elementary school students

Chronic absenteeism rates vary significantly by grade. Figure 3 shows that 17 percent of Kindergarten students in 2014-15 were chronically absent. Rates were also relatively high in first grade, where they hovered around 16 percent. Second grade chronic absenteeism rates fell to 13 percent, where they remain relatively flat for the remaining years of elementary school. Grades 2 through 5 show the lowest rates of chronic absenteeism for all grades. Statewide, chronic absenteeism rates rise as students enter middle school.

A later brief will examine the patterns of students with and without early incidents of chronic absenteeism. Students who have early experiences with chronic absenteeism are more likely than their peers to have subsequent years of chronic absenteeism.

Figure 3: Elementary school chronic absenteeism rates are the highest in a student's earliest years of school



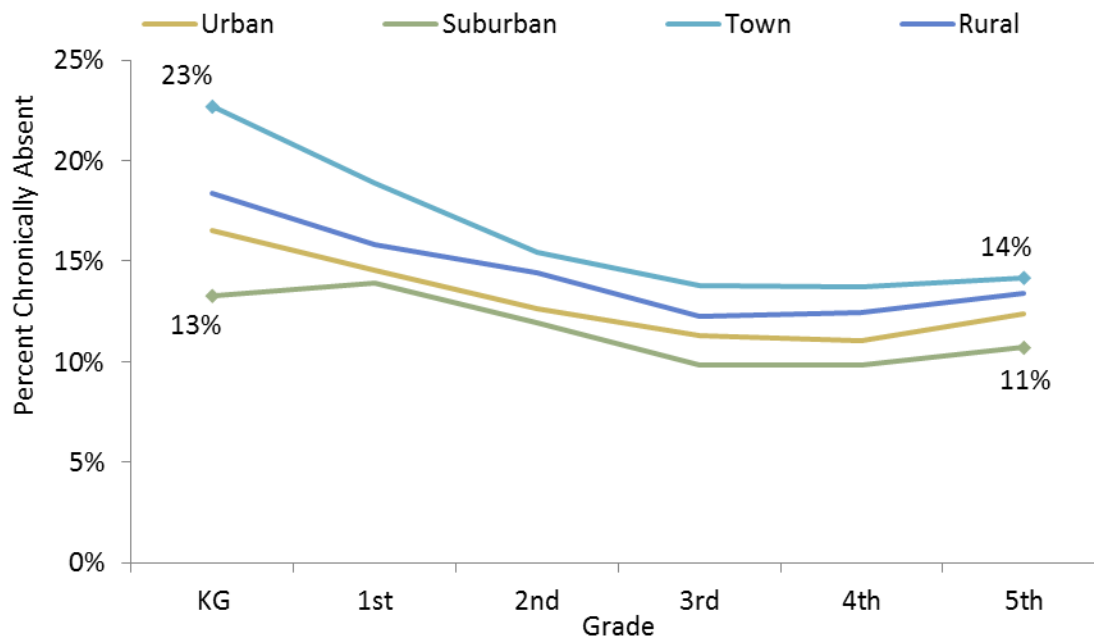
Source: Oregon Department of Education, statewide averages, K-5 students with 75 days or more enrolled, SY 2014-15

Students in towns and rural areas have higher rates of chronic absenteeism

Chronic absenteeism also varies for students living in different types of geographic areas. Figure 4 uses codes developed by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) to describe a school's location. The codes are based on a school's proximity to densely populated areas. Urban includes schools inside an urbanized area and inside a principal city. Suburban includes schools inside an urbanized area (areas with 50,000 people or more), but outside a principal city. Town includes schools inside urban clusters, areas with 2,500 to 50,000 people. Rural includes schools that are outside an urban cluster.^{iv}

Figure 4 shows chronic absenteeism rates by grade and by geographic areas. Within grade patterns follow the statewide trends across all geographic regions. Differences are seen between geographic area types. Suburban students have the lowest rates of chronic absenteeism, followed by urban and rural students. Students living in towns have the highest rates of chronic absenteeism. These differences suggest there may be unique challenges for students across different geographic settings.

Figure 4: Chronic absenteeism rates vary by geographic setting, with rates especially high in towns

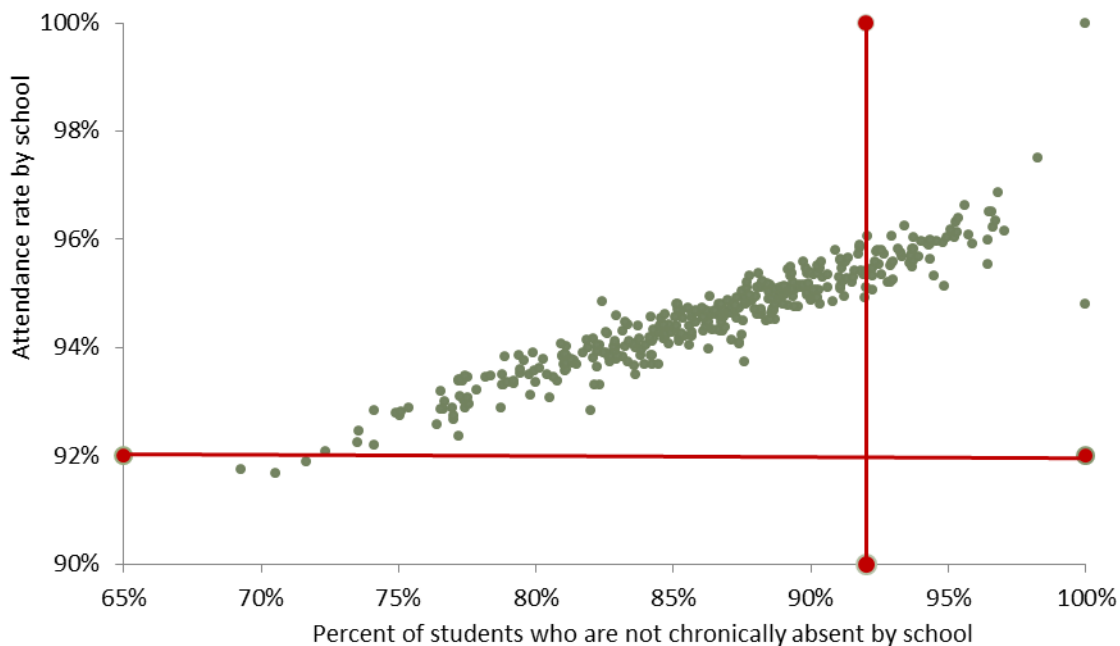


Source: Oregon Department of Education, statewide averages, K-5 students with 75 days or more enrolled, SY 2014-15. Geographic designations from NCES Common Core of Data

Many elementary schools meet statewide attendance objectives, but have high rates of chronic absenteeism

More than 97 percent of K-5 schools statewide had an average daily attendance rate of 92 percent or better for the 2014-15 school year. This rate is the target established as part of the Annual Measurable Objectives (AMO), or the state goals for student achievement. By comparison, only about 18 percent of schools had a “not chronically absent” rate above 92 percent (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Most K-5 schools have 92% average daily attendance, but only about 18% have more than 92% of students who are not chronically absent



Source: Oregon Department of Education, K-5 Elementary Schools, SY 2014-15.

Nearly all elementary schools have students struggling with chronic absenteeism

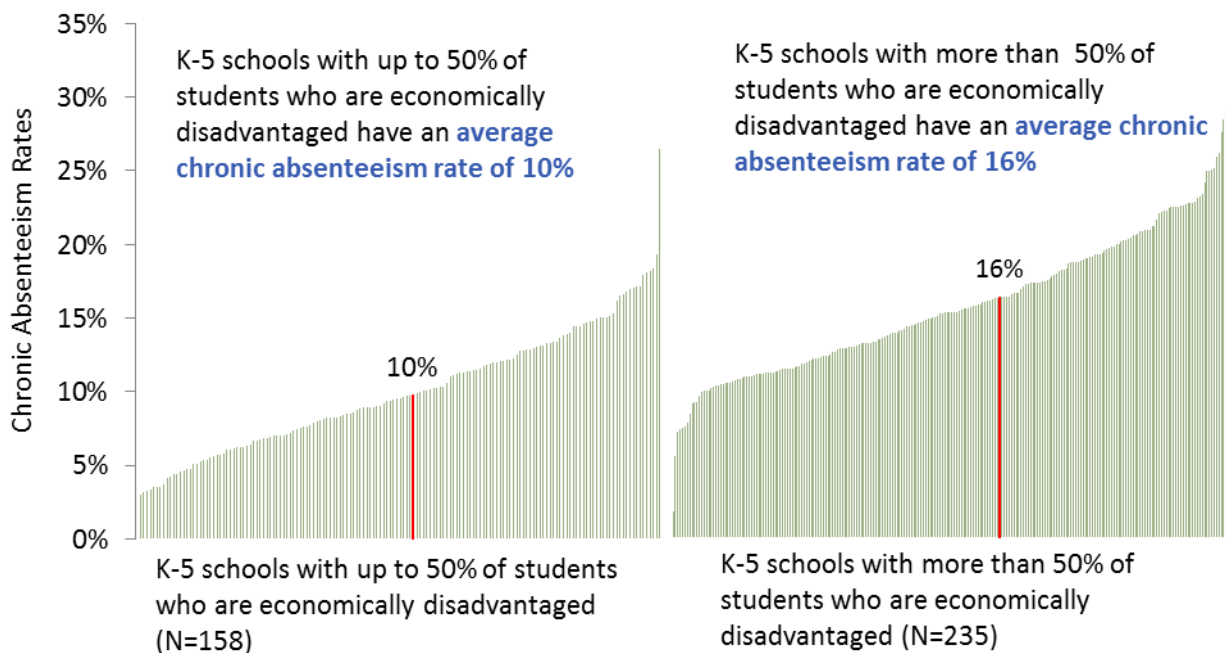
Figure 6 shows chronic absenteeism rates from more than 390 K-5 elementary schools divided into two groups: schools with less than 50 percent of students who are economically disadvantaged and schools with more than 50 percent of students who are economically disadvantaged.

The figure shows that schools with less than 50 percent of students who were economically disadvantaged had an average chronic absenteeism rate of 10 percent. Yet, the rates range widely from 0 to 26 percent.

Similar to the first group, Figure 6 shows schools with more than 50 percent of students who are economically disadvantaged had an average chronic absenteeism rate of 16 percent. The rates of chronic absenteeism also vary widely, ranging from 0 to 30 percent.

While schools with lower rates of economically disadvantaged students had lower rates of chronic absenteeism, Figure 6 highlights that almost all elementary schools have students struggling to make it to school consistently.

Figure 6: Schools with more economically disadvantaged students had higher chronic absenteeism rates



Source: Oregon Department of Education, K-5 Elementary Schools only, SY 2014-15.

Statewide Data Overview

The data show that many elementary school students still struggle to make it to school consistently, despite strong overall attendance rates.

Some student groups struggle more with attendance than others, including economically disadvantaged students and students with a disability. Younger students and students who live in towns and rural areas struggle more with attendance as well. The data suggest that many students need more support to make it to school on a regular basis, and that support can be targeted to specific student groups. The next brief in this series will contain an analysis of the implications of chronic absenteeism for academic outcomes.

ⁱ Attendance is calculated as the number of days present divided by sum of days present and days absent throughout this series of briefs. The calculation excludes students with less than 75 days in a district in this brief. All absences are included in this calculation, regardless of reason (e.g. excused, unexcused, suspensions).

ⁱⁱ Chronic absenteeism is calculated using attendance as of May 1st in the district the student attended on May 1st. Rates only include students with 75 or more days at the district level unless otherwise noted.

ⁱⁱⁱ Elementary school statistics include all students in grades K through 5.

^{iv} For more information on the NCES geographic codes visit https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/rural_locales.asp.