

The Effects of Chronic Absenteeism

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Learning builds from day to day. Lesson plans are built around a progression in mastering concepts and information. It is not possible for a student to do his/her best if they are not in school to manage class work, take notes and to interact with educators and student peers regarding course curriculum.

When a student misses multiple days of school it is called *chronic absenteeism*. Chronic absenteeism is defined as missing 10% of the school year. In practical terms that translates to 6 days in a trimester or 18 days in a school year; this includes both excused and unexcused absences. It is a routine practice for parents/guardians to receive a cautionary letter or phone call when their student's absenteeism approaches 10%. Often times these same parents/guardians question the validity of these notifications if their student has been absent due to chronic illness, vacation, or family emergency. However, it is not why a student is absent, but *how much* a student is absent that really matters. Chronic absenteeism not only affects student achievement, it can affect a student's attitude and behavior at school. When a student has attendance issues, achievement issues and behavior issues it increases their risk of dropping out of school.

It is helpful for schools to have clear policies and procedures on how to respond to chronic absenteeism and to practice consistent communication with students, parents and county agencies when concerns arise. Through the data that schools are required to collect on absenteeism we are able to assist students and their families in improving chronic absenteeism by promptly addressing it. Schools can also help students improve attendance through education about the effects of chronic absenteeism and individualized goal setting.

Parents can help improve their child's attendance by working with the school to identify why their child is missing school, to address underlying concerns and to establish concrete expectations of attending school and not to negotiate away from these expectations. Satisfying the basic needs of a good night's sleep, a proper breakfast and getting to school on time can greatly impact a child's attendance. Whenever possible, non-urgent medical appointments should be scheduled when school is not in session.

Students with good homework habits are less likely to miss school and if they do miss school they are more likely to complete makeup work in a timely fashion. Students who are disorganized; unsure of their assignment responsibilities and or have numerous outstanding assignments are more likely to become causality to chronic absenteeism.

Helping students understand that consistently attending school improves achievement and gives those increased opportunities and choices when they graduate falls squarely on all of our shoulders. Attending school on regular basis does matter. Attendance is a key driver in a student's achievement in the classroom, standardized test scores, high school graduation, and college entrance. Chronic absenteeism is a problem that can be remedied if addressed by all responsible parties: the student, the parent/guardian, the school and the community.