

CHRONICALLY OUT OF SCHOOL IN TENNESSEE

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Under the new **Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)** grading system for Tennessee, 10% of a school's grade is based on the number of students who are chronically absent.

In Tennessee, **chronically absent** is defined as student absences that total 18 or more days (or 10%) of school in one academic year. An absence is defined as missing school for any reason, including excused or unexcused absences, or suspensions.

EVERY DAY, NEARLY 150,000 STUDENTS IN TENNESSEE ARE NOT IN SCHOOL.

WHO IS CHRONICALLY OUT OF SCHOOL IN TENNESSEE?

**PRE-K
STUDENTS**

24%

**4TH
GRADERS**

22%

**9TH
GRADERS**

62%

**12TH
GRADERS**

25%

**STUDENTS
WITH
DISABILITIES**

20.7%

**ECONOMICALLY
DISADVANTAGED
STUDENTS**

19.2%

**ENGLISH
LEARNERS**

8.8%

**AFRICAN
AMERICAN
STUDENTS**

17%

**LATINO
STUDENTS**

10.5%



tn educational equity coalition

WHY ARE STUDENTS IN TENNESSEE CHRONICALLY ABSENT?

To get at the root causes of student absenteeism it is important to recognize the link between school attendance and a variety of other factors, including; **health**, **discipline** and **poverty**. With an array of research supporting the links between chronic absenteeism and health, discipline and poverty, examining these connections provides opportunities for schools, families and advocates to create innovative solutions to improve school attendance.

HEALTH ISSUES



7%
are absent due to
ILLNESS or **INJURY**



16%
of children in TN have
CHRONIC HEALTH ISSUES



140,000
children (ages 0-17)
in Tennessee have **ASTHMA**



Less than half
of all schools in
Tennessee have a
FULL-TIME NURSE

SCHOOL DISCIPLINE PRACTICES



5,000
students are absent every day due
to **SUSPENSION** from schools

1,794

KINDERGARTEN STUDENTS
were either suspended or
expelled

20%

of 9th graders received
a **DISCIPLINARY**
INFRACTION

64%

of suspensions are of
AFRICAN-AMERICAN
students, who are only
24% of total TN enrollment

POVERTY



15,404
homeless children
in Tennessee

23.8% of children under 18
live below the poverty line

THE EVERY STUDENT SUCCEEDS ACT (ESSA)

WHAT THE FEDERAL LAW REQUIRES

The **Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)**, passed by Congress in December 2015, contains a number of meaningful levers that advance education equity for all students. For example, ESSA requires states to include in their accountability framework at least one “indicator of school quality” which is an additional way, beyond test scores, to assess how well schools are serving students.

Specifically, ESSA requires that this additional indicator:

- allow for meaningful differentiation in school performance
- is valid, reliable, comparable, and statewide
- may include one or more measures

ESSA allows each state the flexibility to choose “indicators of school quality,” is as long as they meet the three criteria above.

WHAT THE TENNESSEE ESSA PLAN DOES

The Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE) submitted their final ESSA state plan on April 13, 2017. They chose to select two indicators to measure school quality and student success, and one of these is **Chronically Out of School**. The other is access to Early Post-Secondary Opportunities.

Under Tennessee’s ESSA plan, every school will receive a rating based on the percentage of students who are chronically out of school due to any type of absence. This indicator will count as 10% of a school’s final grade.

Schools can demonstrate performance in this area using one of two pathways:

- 1) Absolute Performance Pathway: the percent of students who are chronically out of school, relative to other schools.
- 2) Performance against an Annual Measureable Objective (AMO) target in reducing the percent of students who are chronically out of school.

Districts will also receive a rating on the Chronically Out of School measure, and they can demonstrate performance using one of three pathways:

- 1) The Absolute Performance Pathway.
- 2) The AMO target: which is a target to reduce the percent of students who are chronically out of school in the district.
- 3) The Value-Added Pathway: utilizing a student-level comparison to measure the reduction in chronic absenteeism for students who were chronically absent in the prior year, and then setting goals for improvement in attendance.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: WHY DOES CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM MATTER?

A: Students who are chronically absent are missing more than a school day; students are missing the opportunity to learn. Chronic absence matters because it adversely affects academic success and affects large numbers of children across Tennessee. The Tennessee Department of Education reports that students who are chronically absent score between 10-20% lower on TCAP tests than students with regular attendance, and are less likely to graduate from high school. Chronic absence in kindergarten is associated with lower academic performance in first grade for all children regardless of gender, ethnicity or socioeconomic status. Going to school regularly is especially critical for children living in poverty, who are less likely to have the resources that help them make up for lost time in the classroom. Among poor children, chronic absence in kindergarten predicts the lowest levels of educational achievement at the end of fifth grade. In addition, as absences increase in freshman year, the likelihood that a student will graduate on time decreases.

Q: WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN TRUANCY AND CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM?

A: Truancy only refers to a student's unexcused absences, and is often associated with inappropriate student or parent behavior that requires a punitive response, typically through the juvenile court system. By focusing on chronic absenteeism, Tennessee will broaden awareness among school communities that missing extended periods of school is often an early warning signal to school personnel, leading to targeted supports for students and families who may be experiencing severe hardship.

Q: WHAT ROLE DO DISCIPLINE AND SUSPENSIONS PLAY IN CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM?

A: Out-of-school suspension of students is one of the key reasons that students miss school. In order to address chronic absenteeism, schools and districts must move away from discipline practices that push students out of school, and that disproportionately impact students of color and those with disabilities. Successfully addressing chronic absenteeism will require a paradigm shift from a punitive to restorative approach, and the implementation of practices that ensure that students do not miss instruction due to suspensions for non-violent behaviors.

Q: WHAT SUPPORT WILL THE TENNESSEE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION PROVIDE TO DISTRICTS AS THEY IMPLEMENT THIS NEW MEASURE?

A: Tennessee will dedicate both state and federal Title IV dollars to provide support and training to districts with a focus on understanding and addressing the factors which may be impacting attendance. The Office of Safe and Supportive Schools will launch a comprehensive resource by August 2017 to guide districts and schools on addressing chronic absenteeism.

Q: WHAT CAN SCHOOLS DO TO AFFECT CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM?

A: Schools play an essential role in promoting attendance by helping parents understand that coming to school, especially in the early years, is important to a child's academic success. Effective and clear communication to diverse families was found to have a significant impact on improving attendance and reducing chronic absence. Schools can create attendance teams, conduct home visits, provide health screenings and services, utilize incentives, and partner with local community-based organizations to address issues related to physical or mental health, or barriers associated with poverty.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Examine chronic absenteeism rates and trends at your local school.

Under the Tennessee ESSA plan schools and districts will report on chronic absenteeism rates across student groups. Are there student groups, or grades, that have higher rates of chronic absenteeism? Are there trends in the reasons for student absences? Are there disproportionate or excessive suspensions occurring at the school? This information must be the basis for any school or district plan to address chronic absenteeism and will provide opportunities for community engagement on solutions.

Find out how you can assist with school attendance efforts at your local school.

Schools that seek to address chronic absenteeism must utilize a variety of strategies: phone calls and home visits, efforts to address school culture and climate, incentive programs, and the provision of services on the school site. Community partners, mentors, and volunteers are essential to creating a culture of strong school attendance and restorative discipline practices. Chronic absenteeism is an early warning indicator for a wide range of issues, and the solutions will require the engagement of families and community members in order to succeed.