

Monitoring Chronic Absence

Regular Attendance Is Essential to Succeeding in School

What Is Chronic Absence?



Chronic absence—missing excessive amounts of school for any reason—is a predictor of third graders being unable to read on grade level, middle school students failing key courses, and ninth graders dropping out of high school. Attendance Works proposes counting students as chronically absent when they have missed 10 percent or more of school days. This research-based threshold allows for easy comparisons across districts and promotes earlier identification of students to trigger intervention. Chronic absence affects 7.5 million

students nationwide, including 1 in 10 kindergarten and first graders, exacerbating achievement gaps and contributing to dropout rates. Children living in poverty are more likely both to be chronically absent and to suffer academically because of those missed days. Schools and districts might not realize the scope of their attendance problems. Although most schools and districts monitor how many students show up daily (average daily attendance) and how many miss school for unexcused reasons (truancy), they do not always count how many students are missing enough school to be off track academically (chronic absence).

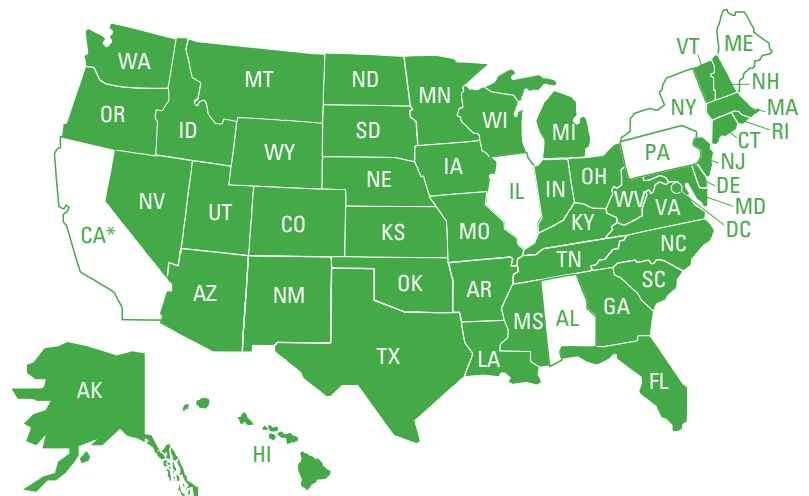
Why Monitoring Chronic Absence Matters

- Developing a habit of regular attendance is essential to succeeding in school and in the workplace.
- Chronic absence affects far too many students, exacerbating achievement gaps and contributing to dropout rates.
- Schools, districts, and states may not realize the scope of their attendance problems because chronic absence is easily masked by average daily attendance and truancy figures.
- Intervening early can save districts and schools money in costly remediation when absences continue unchecked.

While schools and districts are responsible for monitoring student attendance, states can play a critical role in securely collecting attendance data, calculating chronic absence, and supporting interventions.

According to *Data for Action 2013*,* states can provide districts with data for multiple years and include students who frequently move across districts. Forty-five states collect data on students' total absences, which can be used to calculate chronic absence.

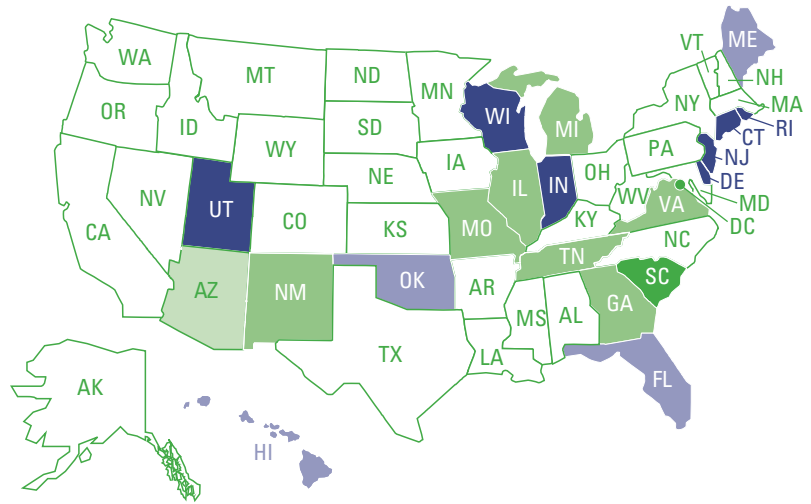
 States that collect data on students' total absences



States' definitions of chronic absence vary.

According to *Data for Action 2013*, 21 states indicate that they collect data on chronic absence, but their definitions of chronic absence vary. Some states include only unexcused absences, which is a truancy measure.**

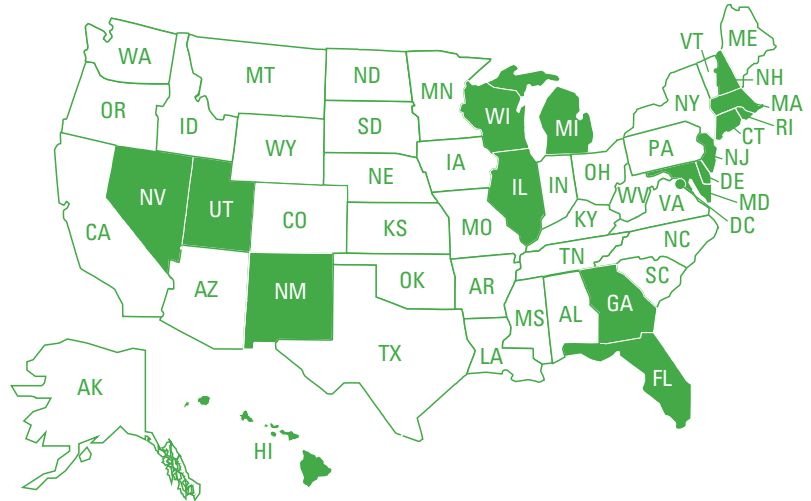
- Definition not provided (2 states)
- Definition based on percentage of days missed (7 states)
- Definition based on truancy (unexcused absences) (7 states)
- Definition based on total number of days missed (4 states)
- Definition based on excused absences (1 state)



High levels of chronic absence in a classroom, school, neighborhood, or district can be a key indicator of systemic problems in a school or community.

According to *Data for Action 2013*, 17 states indicate that they publicly report chronic absence rates, such as in district and school report cards. As noted above, states' definitions of chronic absence vary.

- Publicly report chronic absence rates



* The Data Quality Campaign's *Data for Action* is a series of analyses that highlight state progress and key priorities to promote the effective use of data to improve student achievement. California did not participate in 2013. For more information, including contact information for state respondents, visit www.DataQualityCampaign.org/DFA2013.

** According to information from Attendance Works, two additional states also collect data on chronic absence. California Education Code 60901 defines chronic absence as missing 10 percent of school days. The Maryland Report Card monitors students missing 20 days or more of school.

To learn more, read *Present, Engaged & Accounted For: The Critical Importance of Addressing Chronic Absence in the Early Grades*; *Chronic Elementary Absenteeism: A Problem Hidden in Plain Sight*; *The Importance of Being in School: A Report on Absenteeism in the Nation's Public Schools*; and *The Attendance Imperative: How States Can Advance Achievement by Reducing Chronic Absence*.



Attendance Works is a national and state initiative that promotes awareness of the important role that school attendance plays in achieving academic success starting with school entry. For more information, please visit www.attendanceworks.org.



The Data Quality Campaign (DQC) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, national advocacy organization committed to realizing an education system in which all stakeholders—from parents to policymakers—are empowered with high-quality data from the early childhood, K-12, postsecondary, and workforce systems. To achieve this vision, DQC supports state policymakers and other key leaders to promote effective data use to ensure students graduate from high school prepared for success in college and the workplace.