

Student Attendance and Academic Achievement



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Three Main Ideas and One Key Question



- Idea 1 - Attendance (time with an instructor) is related to educational outcomes
- Idea 2 - Attendance rates differ by student characteristics
- Idea 3 - The current focus is on chronic absenteeism and truancy...but any absence for any reason is negatively correlated with achievement

- Key Question – what is the role of attendance in policy and accountability systems?



Working Definitions



- ***Unexcused Absence***: any absence not meeting the criteria for an excused absence
- ***Excused Absence***: an absence verified by a parent, guardian, or other adult... (medical, religious/cultural, disciplinary, and others)
- ***Regular Attendance***: missing 5 or fewer days per school year
- ***Truancy***: more than 10 unexcused absences in the school year
- ***Chronic Absentee***: 18 to 35 absences in a school year
- ***Excessively Chronic Absentee***: 36 or more absences in a school year

There is an intuitive connection between attendance and outcomes but minimal experimental - causal evidence.



First Important Idea



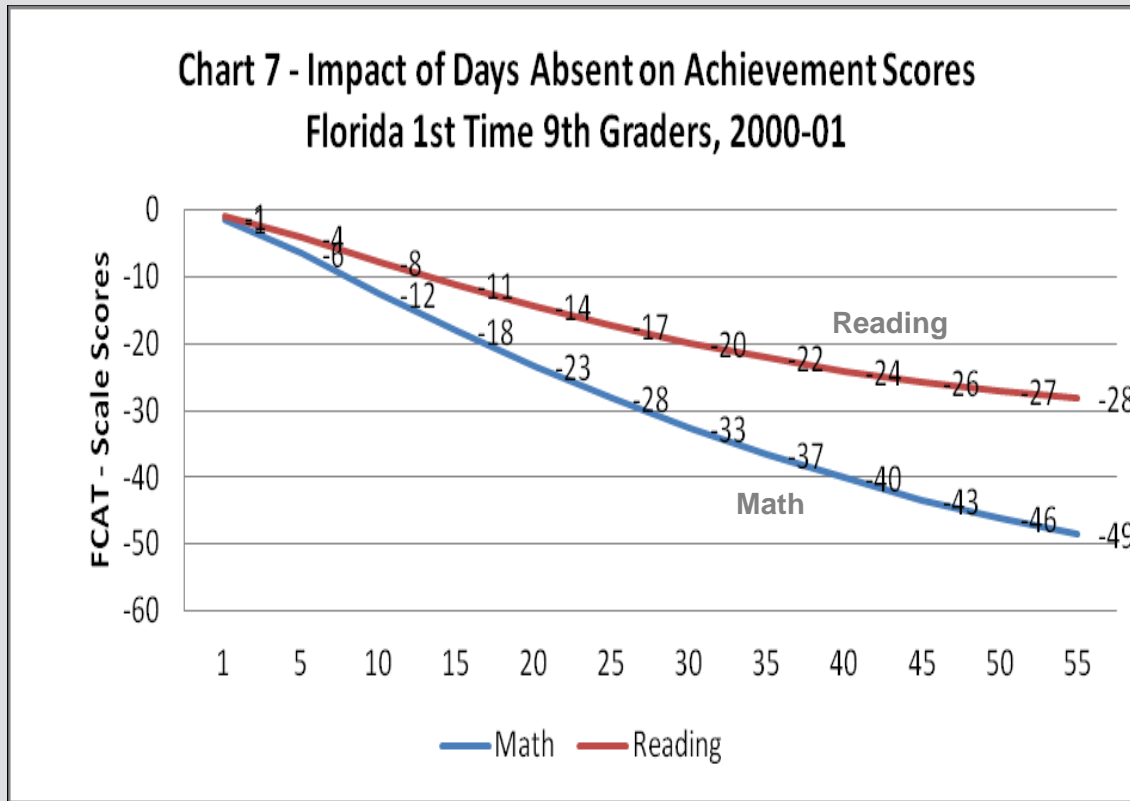
Attendance (time with an instructor) is related to educational outcomes.

Let's take a look at some national data and then some Washington data supporting this relationship.



Florida HSPE

Attendance Related to Student Performance



- Source: (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012) *The Importance of Being in School: A Report on Absenteeism in the Nation's Public Schools*.

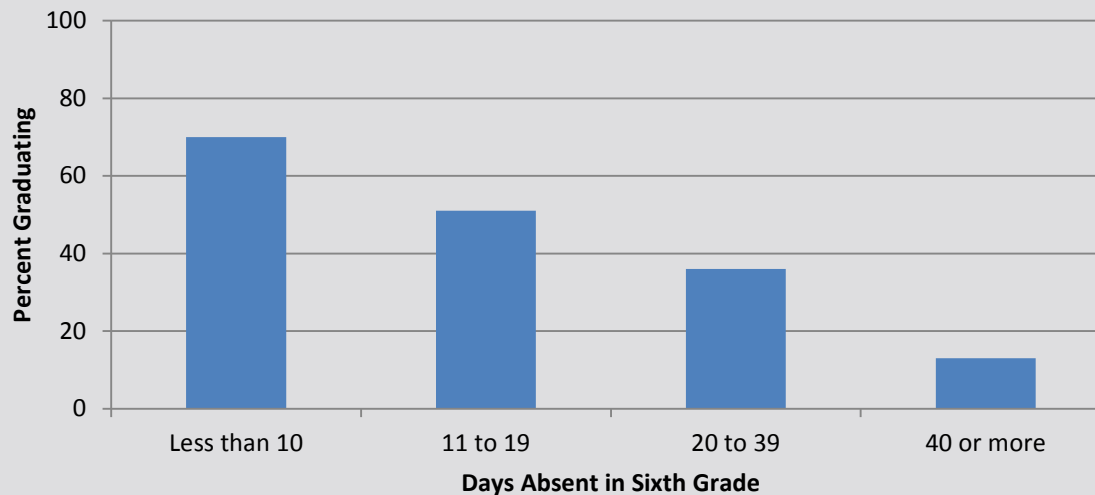


Baltimore Graduation Rates

Attendance Related to Student-Level Outcomes



**Graduation Rate
by 6th Grade Absences**



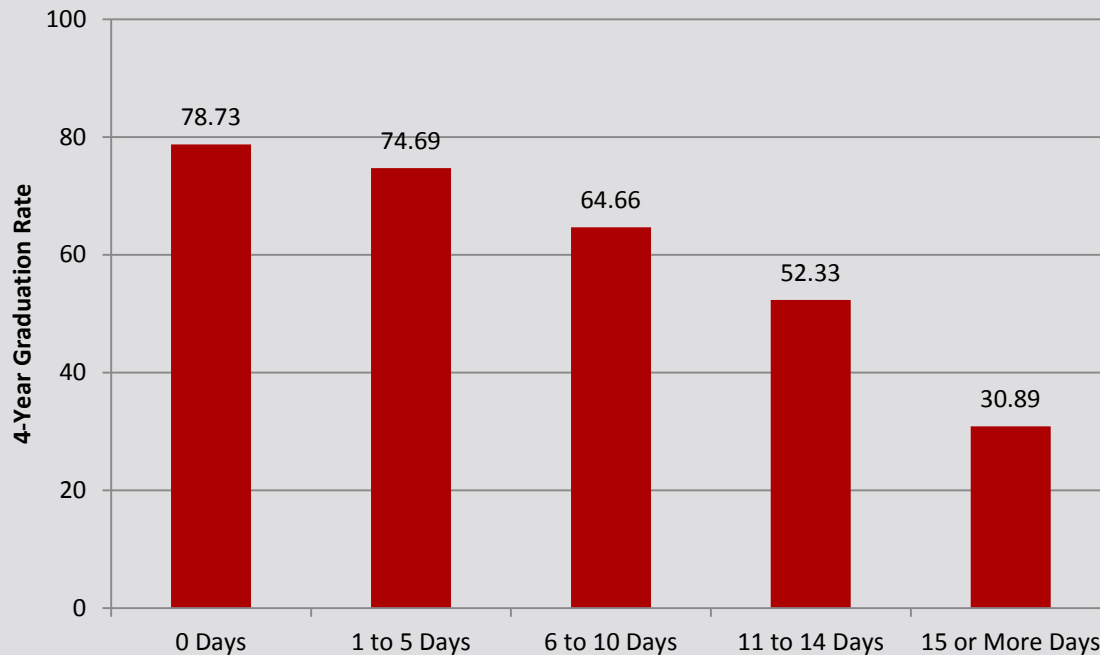
Source: Baltimore Educational Research Consortium, (2011). *Destination Graduation: Sixth Grade Early Warning Indicators for Baltimore City Schools: Their Prevalence and Impact*



Georgia Graduation Rates Absences Related to Student-Level Outcomes



8th Grade Absences



J.D. Barge, (2011). *Student Attendance and Student Achievement 2011*. Georgia Department of Education. Find the full presentation at <http://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/Policy/Pages/Student-Attendance-Improvement.aspx>

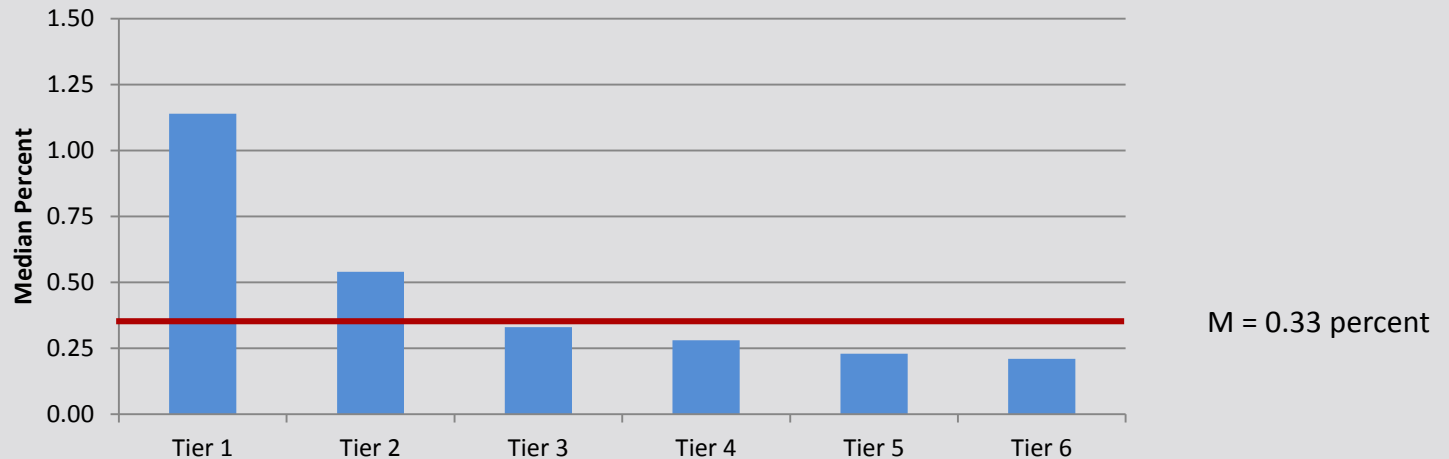


Washington Index Data

Absences Related to School-Level Outcomes



**Unexcused Absence Rate
by Index Tier Level**



Second Important Idea



Attendance rates and patterns differ by student characteristics.

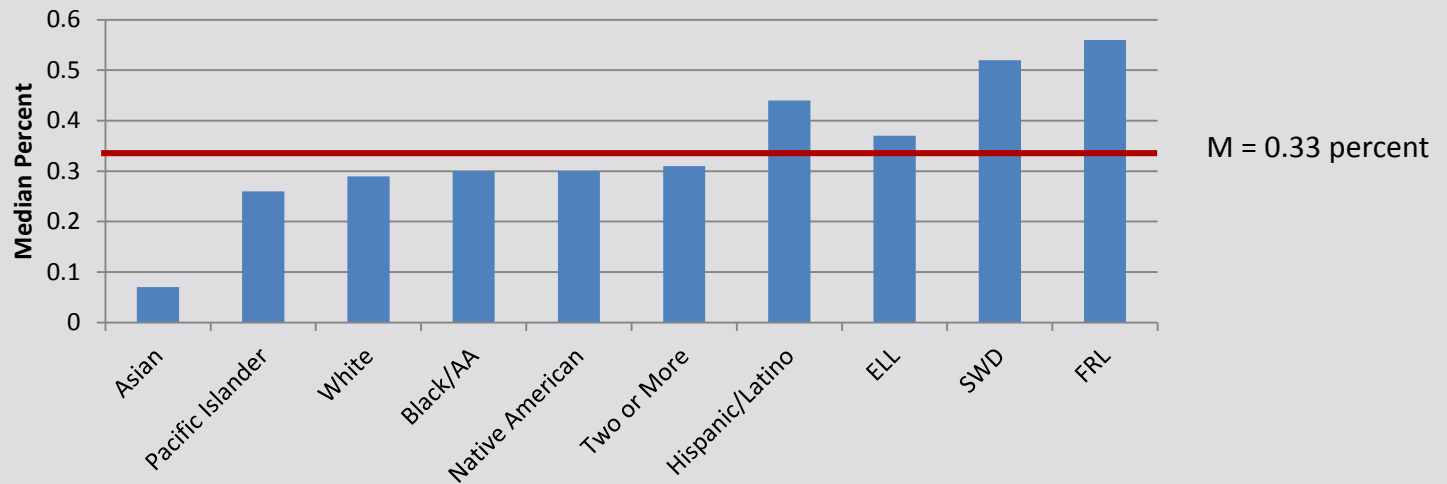


Unexcused Absence Rates by ESEA Subgroup



In Washington, the FRL student group shows the highest unexcused absence rate in elementary and middle schools.

**Unexcused Absence Rate
by Subgroup**

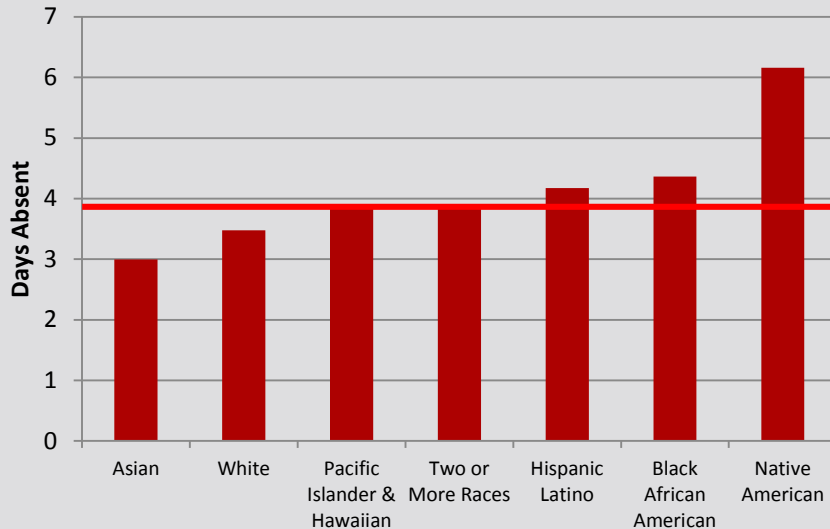


Full Day Absences by Subgroup for Any Reason

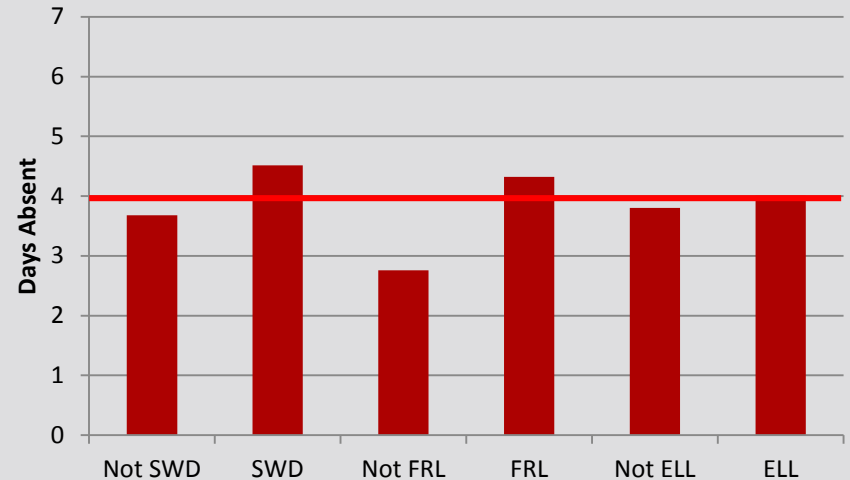
- Elementary and Middle Schools

- Elementary and Middle Schools

Average Full-Day Absences by **Race/Ethnicity**



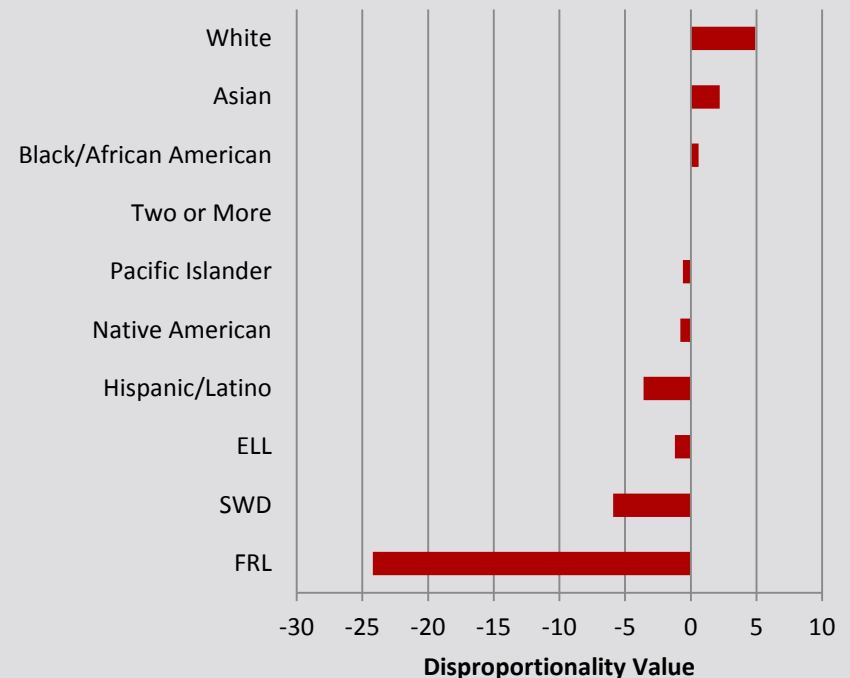
Average Full-Day Absences by **ESEA Subgroup**



Unexcused Absence Disproportionality

- A disproportionality value of zero means that a subgroup contributes the expected percentage of unexcused absences at schools.
- A disproportionately high percentage of unexcused absences are attributed to the students qualifying for FRL.
- Example: a school comprised of 51 percent FRL students would have 75 percent of the unexcused absences attributed to the FRL group.

- In this measure, a negative value is undesirable.



Third Important Idea



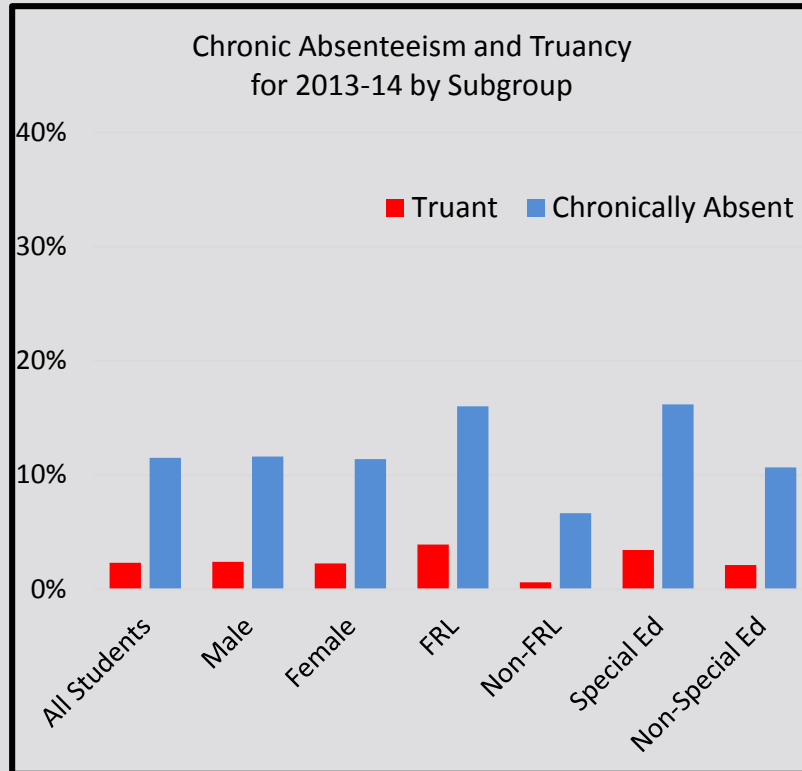
Any absence (or lost instruction) for any reason is negatively correlated with achievement but...

Chronic absenteeism and truancy are especially destructive and widespread.



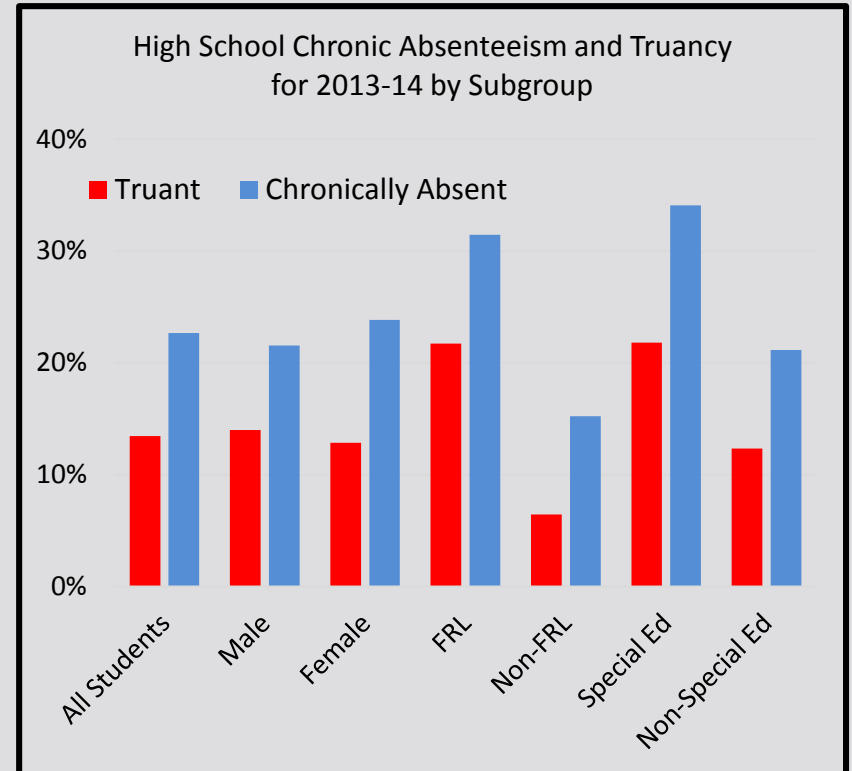
Chronic Absenteeism and Truancy

Elementary and Middle Schools



- 16 percent of FRL students are chronically absent in elementary and middle school.

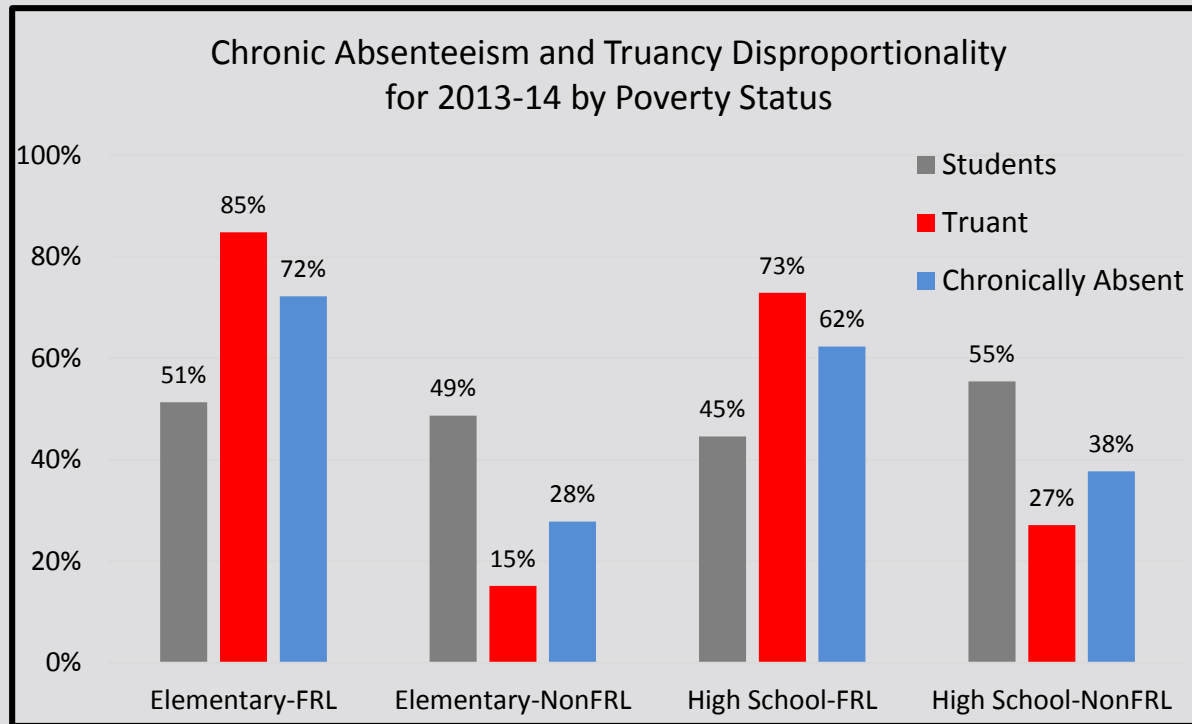
High Schools



- 31 percent of FRL students are chronically absent in high school.



Disproportionality based on Poverty Status



Real Students at a Real School



“Were you the person responsible for the *Chronic Absenteeism and Truancy data Memo* set to be featured this week in the January State Board of Education Board meeting? If so I wanted to tell you that your memo was deeply encouraging for me.

I haven’t heard anyone in Washington State discussing these powerful findings on Chronic Absenteeism. It encouraged me to know that the Washington State Board of Education is coming on board with the important focus on Chronic Absenteeism.

When [we] examined the prevalence of Chronic Absenteeism in our school-we were floored! We started the 2014-2015 school year with **83+ students** with very concerning attendance patterns: All of which were ‘excused absences by parents/guardians.’”

What changed at this school?



Case Study – An I-5 Elementary School



- District policy is to initiate formal action in cases of excessive excused absences (20% of school days). The practice below resulted in the identification and close monitoring of 20 students:
 - ✦ Close monitoring at 15% excused absences
 - ✦ Parent conference and “contract” at 17% excused absences
 - ✦ Truancy petition at 20% absences when contract is violated
- School policy was put into place to initiate close monitoring of students with 10-15% excused absences
 - ✦ The problematic attendance list increased from 20 to 85 students
 - ✦ This was 5.6% of the school population to 22.8% of the school population
- Under the current intervention plan, 45 of the 85 students (53%) have perfect attendance



Debunking Myths About Student Attendance



- **Myth 1 - Missing a few days of school each year is normal and doesn't matter that much.**
 - ✦ Any absence is negatively associated with academic performance and starts shaping attitudes about school
- **Myth 2 - We don't need to worry about attendance until middle or high school.**
 - ✦ Absenteeism is more prevalent in middle and high school, but it affects large numbers of younger students.
- **Myth 3 - Most schools already monitor student absences.**
 - ✦ When schools and school districts analyze all absences (unexcused, excused, and suspensions) they are often surprised at how many students are missing 10 days or more each school year.
- **Myth 4 - Because families are ultimately responsible for children getting to school, there's not much schools can do to improve attendance.**
 - ✦ Student attendance improves when school staff members, parents, students, health and social services and others come together to review data, identify issues related to cause and effect, and then develop strategies to improve student attendance.



Contact Information



Please contact andrew.parr@k12.wa.us if you have questions or comments about this work.

