

UNDERSTANDING THE COMPLEXITIES OF SDOH ON CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM

Absenteeism is tied to academic success with a direct impact on grades and lifetime outcomes. Students who do not participate in classroom instruction have a difficult time keeping up with the educational activities and information provided.

A student is considered chronically absent when they miss 10% or more of their enrollment requirements. This includes all absences whether excused, unexcused or suspensions. There are many factors related to SDOH that influence absenteeism and include the following:

BARRIERS	NEGATIVE SCHOOL EXPERIENCE	LACK OF ENGAGEMENT	MISCONCEPTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Illness, both chronic and acute • Lack of health, mental health, vision, or dental care • Trauma • Unsafe path to/from school • Poor transportation • Frequent moves or school changes • Involvement with child welfare or juvenile justice system 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Struggling academically or socially • Bullying • Suspensions and expulsions • Negative attitudes of parents due to their own school experience • Undiagnosed disability • Lack of appropriate accommodations for disability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of culturally relevant, engaging instruction • No meaningful relationships with adults in school • Stronger ties with peers out of school than in school • Unwelcoming school climate • Failure to earn credits/no future plans • Many teacher absences or long-term substitutes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Absences are only a problem if they are unexcused • Missing 2 days per month doesn't affect learning • Sporadic absences aren't a problem • Attendance only matters in the older grades

Source: Nebraska Department of Education

DEFINITIONS

TRUANCY V.S. CHRONIC ABSENCE

TRUANCY

Counts only unexcused absences

Emphasizes compliance with school rules

Relies on legal & administration solutions

V.S.

CHRONIC ABSENCE

Counts all absences: excused, unexcused & suspensions

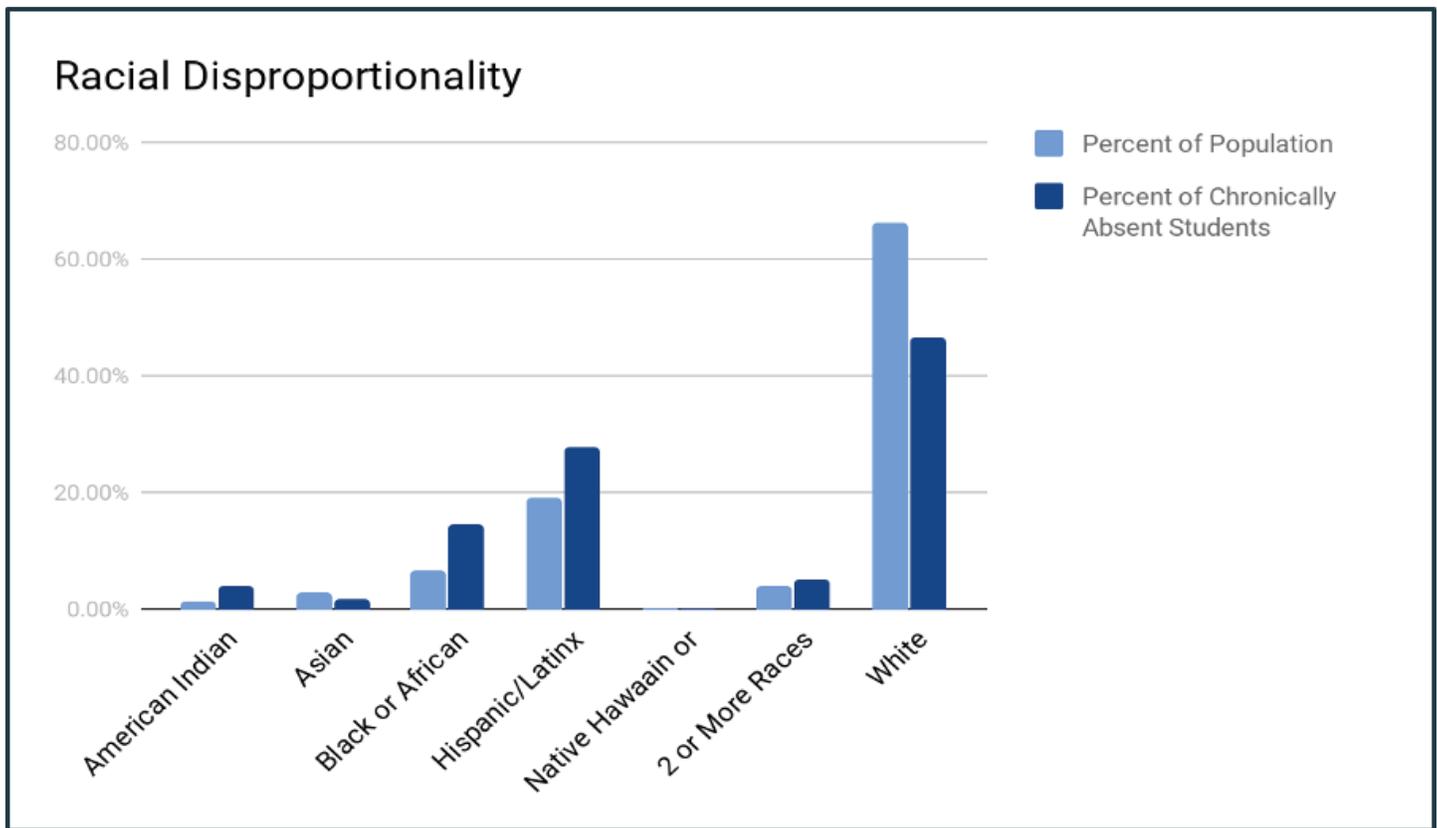
Emphasizes academic impact of missed days

Uses community-based positive strategies

Source: Attendance Works

DATA

- For school year 2019/2020, 10% of Nebraska students were chronically absent
- Students in junior and senior high are more chronically absent than those in elementary
- As reflected in the chart below, students of color are disproportionately chronically absent



Source: Nebraska Department of Education

HEALTH OFFICE CONSIDERATIONS

COLLABORATING WITH OTHER SCHOOL STAFF

- Create a school climate that encourages students to come to school every day, welcoming culture of attendance
 - Cultivate an atmosphere where students feel respected and safe
 - Share visuals (bulletin boards, banners, posters) that reflect attendance messaging
- Assess student and family needs and intensify outreach
 - Work with relevant community agencies to develop a comprehensive educational plan that also addresses student and family needs
 - Create a cross-agency team to support students who are chronically absent to include healthcare providers, social workers, county attorney or law enforcement

WORKING WITH PARENTS/GUARDIANS

Here are some helpful tips you can give parents to work with students to increase attendance in school.

1. Set attendance goals with your child and track your child's attendance on a calendar. Try offering small rewards for not missing any school, such as a later bedtime on weekends.
2. Help your child get a good night's sleep. A lack of sleep is associated with lower school achievement starting in middle school, as well as higher numbers of missed school and tardiness. Most younger children need 10-12 hours per night and adolescents (13-18 years of age) need 8-10 hours per night.
3. Try to schedule dental or medical appointments before or after school hours. If children have to miss school for medical appointments, have them return immediately afterward so they do not miss the entire day.
4. Schedule extended trips during school breaks. This helps your child stay caught up in school learning and sets the expectation for your child to be in school during the school year. Even in elementary school, missing a week of classes can set your child behind on learning.
5. Don't let your child stay home unless he or she is truly sick. Reasons to keep your child home from school include a temperature greater than 101 degrees, vomiting, diarrhea, a hacking cough, or a toothache. Keep in mind, complaints of frequent stomachaches or headaches can be a sign of anxiety and may not be a reason to stay home.
6. Talk with your child about the reasons why he or she does not want to go to school. School-related anxiety can lead to school avoidance. Talk to your child about their symptoms and try to get them to talk about any emotional struggles they may have with issues like bullying, fear of failure, or actual physical harm. If you are concerned about your child's mental health, talk with your pediatrician, your child's teacher, or school counselor.
7. If your child has a chronic health issue such as asthma, allergies, or seizures, talk with your pediatrician about developing a school action plan. Meet with and get to know the nurse at your child's school. If you need guidance and documentation for an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or 504 Plan, ask for your pediatrician's help accessing services at school.
8. Follow the rules. Be sure you know what your school's requirements are for when your child will be absent or late. If you are supposed to call, email, or provide a doctor's note after a certain number of days out, then do it. If we want our children to follow rules, we must lead by example.

Source: www.healthychildren.org

RESOURCES

STATE

Nebraska Every Day Counts! - www.education.ne.gov/csds/chronic-absenteeism

United Way of the Midlands Education & School Attendance - www.unitedwaymidlands.org/investment/education

NATIONAL

AttendanceWorks - www.attendanceworks.org

Healthy Schools Campaign - healthyschoolscampaign.org/issues/chronic-absenteeism

This material was developed by Children's Hospital & Medical Center as a compliment to the Project ECHO School Health series on Social Determinants of Health, Session 2: Understanding the Complexities of SDOH on Chronic Absenteeism, presented by Kathy Brandt and Lane Carr, on January 27, 2021. Additional resources can be found here: www.childrensomaha.org/projectecho