

ATTENDANCE COUNTS

COMMUNITY TOOLKIT



INTRODUCTION TO THE TOOLKIT

CHRONIC ABSENCE IN NC

- North Carolina now has a statewide definition of chronic absence, adopted by the State Board of Education in February 2018. A student is chronically absent when he or she misses 10 percent of school days in a year—about 18 days total.
- Nearly one in eight young students in North Carolina misses more than 15 days of school every year—that's almost two days each month, and research shows it's enough to impact learning.
- For the last year reported—2015-2016—nearly three out of every four Local Education Agencies (LEAs) in North Carolina reported from 5 to 15 percent of their elementary school students as chronically absent.

We can address the obstacles to regular attendance starting in prekindergarten so children have the best opportunity to learn and succeed in school. Research demonstrates that regular school attendance is key to early literacy development, learning, achievement and motivation.

For the second year, the North Carolina Early Childhood Foundation (NCECF) has developed an Attendance Counts Community Toolkit to support partners in highlighting the importance of regular attendance in preschool and the early grades. The tools aim to strengthen NC Campaign for Grade-Level Reading and other community efforts to support school districts and schools working to improve attendance.

ATTENDANCE COUNTS COMMUNITY TOOLKIT

In the lead-up to national Attendance Awareness Month in September, communities across NC are encouraged to:

- Shine a spotlight on the importance of regular school attendance, especially its relationship to third grade reading.
- Work cooperatively with school districts and schools to improve school attendance.

- Use the Attendance Counts Community Toolkit to promote the importance of school attendance. The toolkit contains:
 - Attendance Counts 2019 Fact Sheet
 - An Attendance Awareness Month Proclamation for Superintendents
 - Social Media Tools to get the word out about Attendance Awareness month in September and why attendance counts.

TAKE ACTION

- Share NCECF's Attendance Counts 2019 Fact Sheet with the district superintendent, elementary school principals, and pre-kindergarten providers in your community.
- Ask your Superintendent to sign the Attendance Awareness Month Proclamation and the Call to Action and share it with all principals in the district.
- Plan activities and events and engage local media to promote Attendance Awareness Month in September.
- Share stories and photos from Attendance Awareness Month through social media. Use hashtag #schooleveryday and #AttendanceCounts.

MORE TO COME

For Attendance Awareness Month, NCECF will release in September a report focusing on NC school and community level policy and practice around chronic absence. The report is based on 1500 responses to a school-level self-assessment survey. The survey was circulated to NC preschool, Head Start and elementary school teachers, staff, family members and volunteers. We will also highlight bright spots by sharing case studies of NC schools that are focused on increasing school attendance.

ATTENDANCE COUNTS

SCHOOL ATTENDANCE MATTERS

Regular school attendance in the early years puts children on track for becoming proficient readers. The opposite is also true. Chronic absence in kindergarten is associated with lower levels of literacy in first grade and lower likelihood of grade-level reading by the end of third grade. During the 2015-16 school year, more than 64,000 North Carolina elementary school children were chronically absent.

WHAT IS CHRONIC ABSENCE?

Most children miss a few days of school each year without long-term consequences. However, when they are chronically absent, defined nationally and in NC as **missing 10 percent of enrolled school days within one academic year for any reason**, their school success is at significant risk.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Chronically absent students are found in every type of community—urban, suburban and rural. Student health, including a lack of preventative care, is a leading contributor to chronic absence, including physical, mental, behavioral, vision, dental, social and emotional health. Issues connected to a child's environment, such

as housing and food insecurity, and school factors, such as safety, relationships with teachers, and bullying, can impact chronic absence as well.

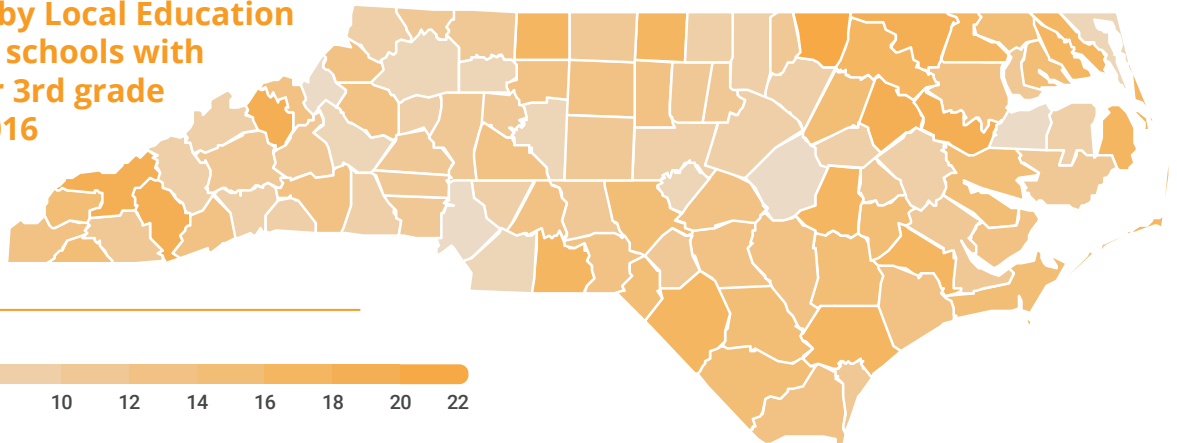
CHRONIC ABSENCE IN THE EARLY GRADES IN NC

In North Carolina in 2015-16, 11 percent of elementary school students were chronically absent, which is consistent with the national rate. There are disparities by race/ethnicity. American Indian/Alaska Native students have the highest rates of chronic absence in North Carolina at 21 percent, followed by multiracial students (15 percent), and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander students (13 percent). Eleven percent of both black and white students were chronically absent. The lowest rates were among Hispanic (9 percent) and Asian (7 percent) students.

Rates vary significantly by district as shown on the map below. For the last year reported—2015-2016—nearly three out of every four Local Education Agencies (LEAs) in North Carolina reported from 5 to 15 percent of their elementary school students as chronically absent. In some districts, however, chronic absence was as high as 23 percent. *Experts at the national organization Attendance Works say that chronic absence rates under about five percent are likely due to data collection errors.*

Chronic Absence by Local Education Agency (LEAs) for schools with K, 1st, 2nd and/or 3rd grade students. 2015-2016

Note: Per NC Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) policy, percentages less than five cannot be displayed.



Data by school district is provided in NCECF's 2018 report *Attendance Counts: Chronic Absence in North Carolina*.

WHY FOCUS ON CHRONIC ABSENCE?

IT IS AN EARLY WARNING INDICATOR.

Chronic absence data can reveal that a student needs help before test scores or grades do. Incorporating chronic absence data in early warning systems is a way to identify early on which students need more support. The new federal Every Student Succeeds Act requires that chronic absence data be regularly collected and reported in the K-12 education system.

IT PUTS FOCUS ON THE EARLY GRADES.

Traditional measures of proficiency (test scores, grades) are not appropriate for young children. As a result, students in grades K-2 are often not included in school, district and state accountability systems. This can drive attention and resources towards the tested grades and away from younger students. Chronic absence is measurable and actionable starting in preschool.

IT IMPACTS LEARNING.

Chronic absence in the early grades has been connected to lower third-grade reading and math test scores, grade retention, dropping out of high school and substance use.

IT IS ACTIONABLE AT THE SCHOOL AND DISTRICT LEVELS.

Districts and schools can analyze their attendance data, combined with student, family and teacher input, and use the results to support parent and teacher engagement. Data can help district and school leaders better understand students' barriers to attendance, work with families and community partners to remove those barriers, request resources, and communicate the importance of daily attendance.

NC MOMENTUM ON REGULAR ATTENDANCE

THE STATE ADOPTS A DEFINITION. *In February 2018, the NC State Board of Education approved a state definition of chronic absence. A chronically absent student in North Carolina is a student who misses 10 percent of school days in a year—about 18 days total.*

LEGISLATURE ENCOURAGES ATTENDANCE RECOGNITION PROGRAMS. *The NC General Assembly passed a bill during the 2018 short session encouraging school districts to adopt student attendance recognition programs to promote regular attendance.*

NCECF SHARES STRATEGIES. *In April 2019, NCECF spoke to the NC School Boards Association to discuss chronic absence and share both state and local strategies to address it.*

CROSS-SECTOR STATE LEADERS FOCUS ON REGULAR ATTENDANCE. *The Pathways to Grade-Level Reading Action Framework was released in 2019 and includes strategies for improving third-grade reading proficiency. Regular school*

attendance was identified as a critical issue by hundreds of Pathways stakeholders, and it is one of three areas of focus in the [Action Framework](#).

NC COMMUNITIES JOIN CAMPAIGN FOR GRADE-LEVEL READING. *Regular school attendance is one of the three pillars of the national Campaign for Grade-Level Reading. There are 14 Campaign communities in North Carolina.*

NC SCHOOL DISTRICTS COMPLETE SELF-ASSESSMENT SURVEY. *Half of NC's school districts have completed a self-assessment created by Attendance Works that asks about their attendance policies and practices.*

PARENTS, TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS SHARE THEIR KNOWLEDGE ON CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM. *1500 NC preschool, Head Start and elementary school teachers, staff, parents and volunteers completed a self-assessment survey about their schools' attendance policies and practices and the causes of chronic absence in their communities.*

CALL TO ACTION

SUPERINTENDENTS CAN:

- Declare September as Attendance Awareness Month by signing the Proclamation in this toolkit and the [Call to Action](#).
- Share the Proclamation with principals.

SCHOOLS CAN:

- Engage students and parents about why attendance counts.
- Recognize good and improved attendance with incentives such as contests and awards.
- Monitor attendance data and practice.
- Use data to provide personalized early outreach to families and students who are already missing too many days of school.

- Develop programmatic responses to barriers to regular attendance, which can include, for example, improved access to health care and providing tutoring and mentoring.

COMMUNITIES CAN:

- Ask your district Superintendent to declare September as Attendance Awareness Month by signing the Proclamation and the Call to Action.
- Plan activities and events and engage local media to promote Attendance Awareness Month.
- [Share stories](#) and photos from Attendance Awareness Month on social media. Use hashtags #schooleveryday, #AttendaNCeCounts and #bthru8pathways.

School District Superintendents are encouraged to sign the proclamation below, naming September as Attendance Awareness Month in your community. Email the signed proclamation to ncecf@buildthefoundation.org. We will post the list on the NCECF website in September.

FROM THE OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

PROCLAMATION OF SEPTEMBER AS ATTENDANCE AWARENESS MONTH

WHEREAS regular attendance is essential to grade-level reading, academic achievement and graduation,

WHEREAS early chronic absence—missing 10 percent or more of school days for any reason including excused and unexcused absences, or just two or three days a month—is associated with lower academic achievement, truancy in middle school, and school dropout,

WHEREAS regular attendance puts children on track for becoming proficient readers by the end of third grade, decreases their likelihood of being retained, and supports the development of social-emotional skills needed to persist in school,

WHEREAS all students—even those who attend regularly—are affected by chronic absence because teachers must spend time reviewing for students who missed lessons,

WHEREAS chronic absence is an early warning indicator that can reveal that a student needs help long before test scores or grades do,

WHEREAS chronic absence exacerbates the achievement gap between students in low-income communities, many of whom are students of color, and their peers. Students from low-income communities are more likely face systemic barriers to getting to school and more likely to be impacted academically by missing school,

WHEREAS attendance is actionable and districts across the country are increasing attendance by recognizing good and improved attendance, engaging students and families, monitoring attendance data and practice, providing personalized early outreach as needed, and developing systemic responses to attendance barriers,

WHEREAS attendance is now a required reporting metric under the federal Every Student Succeeds Act and an area of focus for both the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading and the North Carolina Pathways to Grade-Level Reading Initiative,

WHEREAS improving attendance takes commitment, collaboration and tailored approaches to the challenges and strengths in each community,

WHEREAS regular attendance can be significantly increased when schools, families and communities work together to monitor and promote regular attendance and address barriers that keep children from getting to school,

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that as the Superintendent of _____,

I, _____, proclaim our school district will stand with the nation in recognizing September as “Attendance Awareness Month.” We hereby commit to focusing on reducing chronic absenteeism to give all children an equitable opportunity to learn, grow and thrive academically, emotional and socially.

ATTENDANCE COUNTS

FACEBOOK

Follow and cross-post at:
/buildthefoundation • /attendancecounts

TWITTER

Follow and cross-post at:
@ncecf • @attendanceworks

FACEBOOK POST IMAGE	FACEBOOK POST CONTENT
	Chronic absence in North Carolina is defined as missing 10% of school days—that's 18 days—within one academic year for any reason, excused or unexcused. #schooleveryday
	School attendance counts as early as preschool. Consistent school attendance in the early grades boosts children's learning, achievement and motivation. #schooleveryday
	Consistent school attendance matters! Attendance is an early predictor of academic performance, and chronic absence can be an early indicator that a student needs support. #schooleveryday
	School attendance is habit forming! As early as preschool, going to school everyday can create a good habit of attendance! #schooleveryday
	Chronic absence is solved when the whole community plays a part. From mayors to doctors to faith and business leaders, everyone can help make regular attendance a community priority! #schooleveryday

TWITTER POST IMAGE	TWITTER POST CONTENT
	Children missing 10% of school days in NC—excused or unexcused—is the definition of chronic absence. #schooleveryday #bthru8pathways
	AttendaNCe Counts! Regular attendance in the early grades boosts children's learning, achievement and motivation. #schooleveryday #bthru8pathways
	School attendance is an early predictor of academic performance, and chronic absence can be an early indicator that a student needs help. #schooleveryday #bthru8pathways
	September is School Attendance Awareness Month. Your whole community can help reduce chronic absence. Find out how. #schooleveryday #bthru8pathways

DOWNLOAD THE SHAREABLE IMAGES

<https://bit.ly/2z8QG4W>

CONNECT WITH US

<https://www.facebook.com/buildthefoundation/>

BLOG or NEWSLETTER

Use the content below to post about school attendance on your blog or in your newsletter.

September is School Attendance Awareness Month!

Regular attendance in the early grades boosts children's learning, achievement and motivation.

*Attendance is so important that North Carolina has adopted a standard definition of chronic absence to ensure we have good data to drive policy and practice. Chronic absence is defined as missing **10 percent of enrolled school days within one academic year for any reason.***

When communities come together, they can reduce chronic absence.

National Attendance Awareness Month in September is the perfect time to shine a spotlight on the importance of regular school attendance, especially its relationship to third grade reading success, and work cooperatively with school districts and schools to improve school attendance.

The new AttendaNCe Counts Community Toolkit from the NC Early Childhood Foundation (NCECF) can get you started. It includes:

- AttendaNCe Counts 2019 Fact Sheet
- An Attendance Awareness Month Proclamation for Superintendents
- Social media tools to get the word out about Attendance Awareness Month and why attendance counts.

By signing the proclamation, superintendents are showing their commitment to reducing chronic absence in their districts. Superintendents across the country are increasing attendance by recognizing good and improved attendance, engaging students and families, monitoring attendance data and practice, providing personalized early outreach as needed, and developing systemic responses to attendance barriers.

In September, NCECF will release a new report that focuses on NC school and community level policy and practice around chronic absence. The report is based on 1500 responses to a survey shared with NC preschool, Head Start and elementary school teachers, staff, family members and volunteers. NCECF will also highlight bright spots in new case studies of NC school districts and schools focused on increasing school attendance.

Remember, AttendaNCe Counts!



PROMOTING
UNDERSTANDING

SPEARHEADING
COLLABORATION

ADVANCING
POLICIES



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