

Student Absenteeism

INDICATORS ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH



Between 1994 and 2015, the percentage of eighth-graders who missed three or more days of school in the past month decreased significantly for black and Hispanic students, but not for white students.

Importance

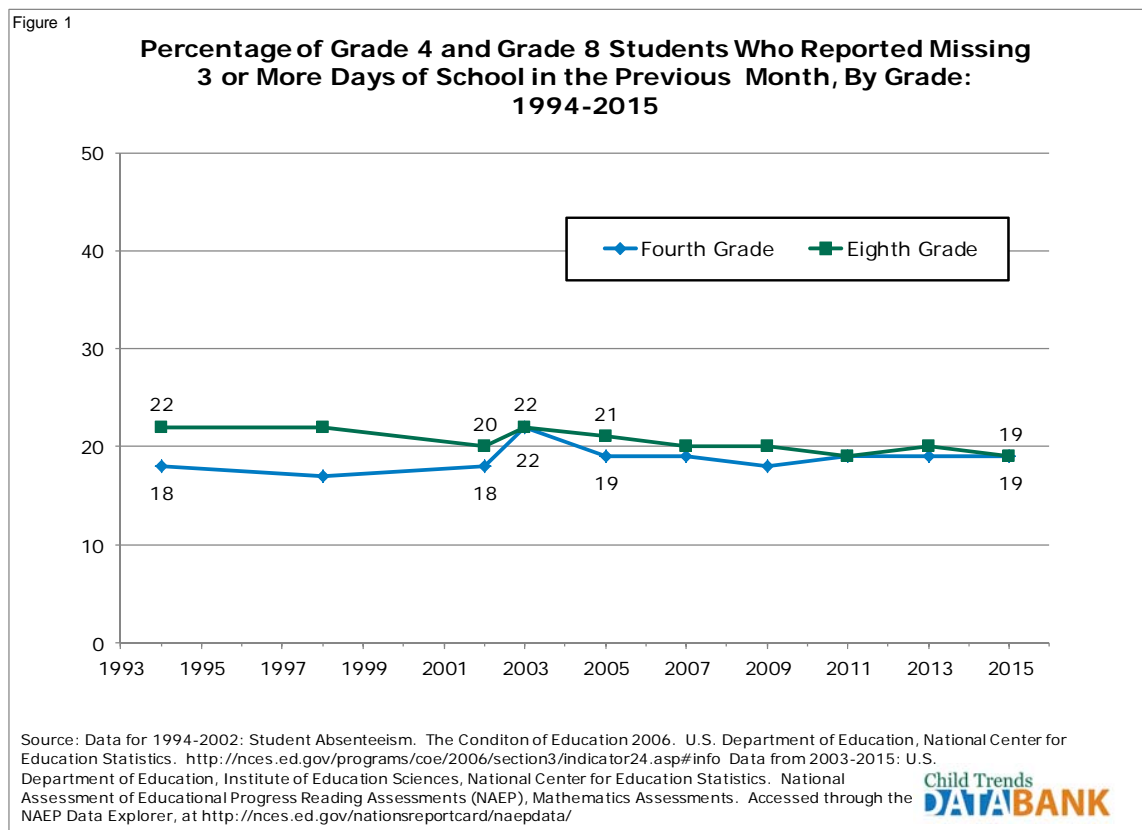
Attendance is an important factor in school success among children and youth. Studies show that better attendance is related to higher academic achievement for students of all backgrounds, but particularly for children with lower socio-economic status.^{1,2} Beginning in kindergarten, students who attend school regularly score higher on tests than their peers who are frequently absent.³

Chronic truancy (frequent unexcused absence) is a strong predictor of undesirable outcomes in adolescence, including academic failure, dropping out of school, substance abuse, gang involvement, and criminal activity.^{4,5} However, chronic absence (regardless of reason) is increasingly identified as an important “early warning sign” that a student is at risk for school failure and early dropout. Chronic absenteeism is usually defined as missing ten percent or more of school days. Unfortunately, few school districts currently have the capacity to analyze attendance data to identify those students who are chronically absent.⁶

Many factors can contribute to student absenteeism. Family health or financial concerns, poor school climate, drug and alcohol use, transportation problems, and differing community attitudes towards education are among the conditions that are often associated with a child’s frequent absence from school.⁷

Trends

From 1994 to 2005, there was no significant change in the percentage of fourth-grade students who reported that they were absent from school for three or more days in the last month (18 percent in 1994, and 19 percent in 2015). However, among eighth-grade students this percentage declined slightly, from 22 percent in 1994 to 19 percent in 2015. (Figure 1)

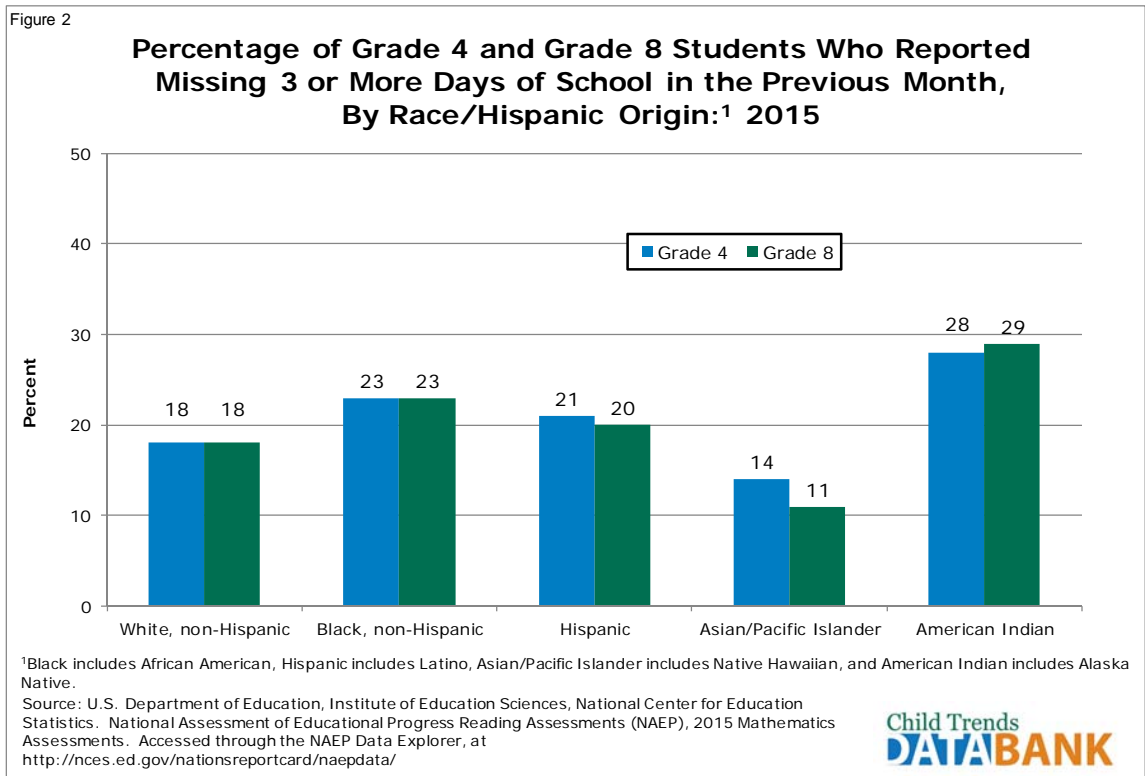


The percentage of eighth-grade black and Hispanic students who reported missing three or more days of school decreased significantly from 1994 to 2015 (from 27 percent for each group in 1994, to 23 and 20 percent, respectively, in 2015). (Appendix 2) Attendance among fourth-grade students in these groups remained relatively stable from 1994 to 2015. (Appendix 1)



Differences by Race/ Hispanic Origin⁸

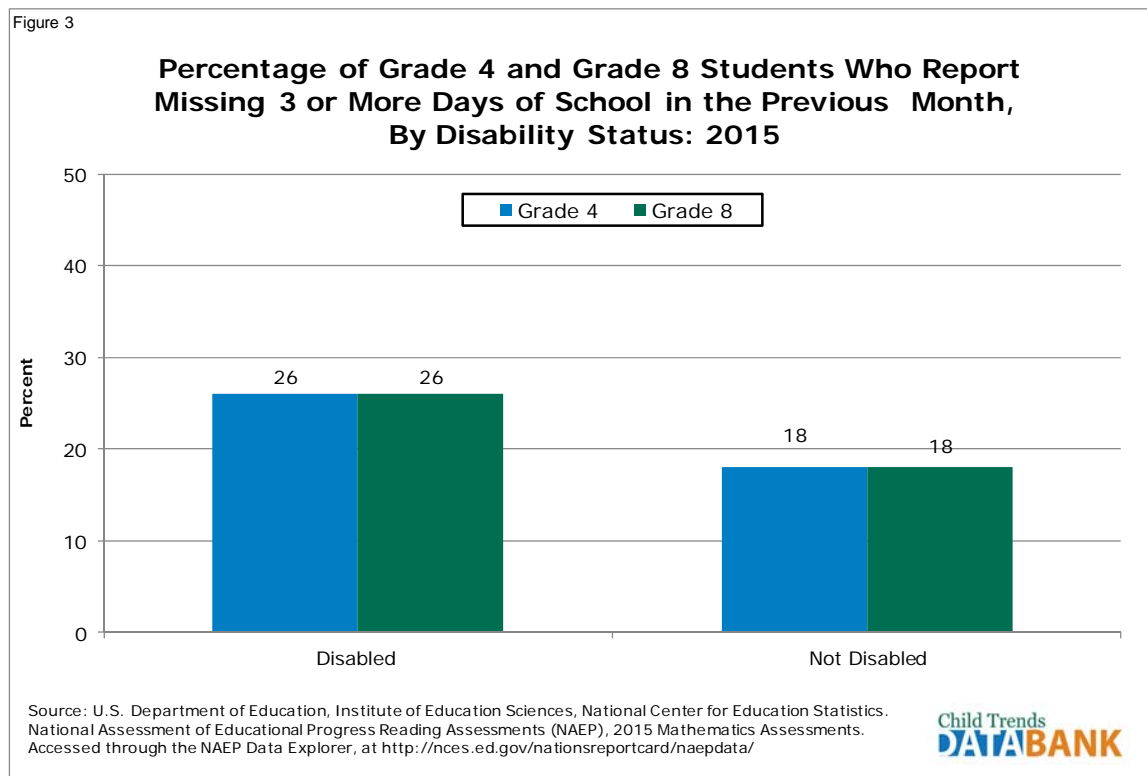
In 2015, both fourth- and eighth-grade American Indian students were more likely than black, Hispanic, and white students to report they missed three or more days of school in the last month (28 versus 23, 21, and 18 percent, respectively, in fourth grade; and 29 versus 23, 21, and 18 percent, respectively, in eighth grade). At both grade levels, Asian/Pacific Islander students were the least likely to have missed three or more days in the past month (14 percent in fourth grade, and 11 percent in eighth grade). (Figure 2)



Differences by Disability Status

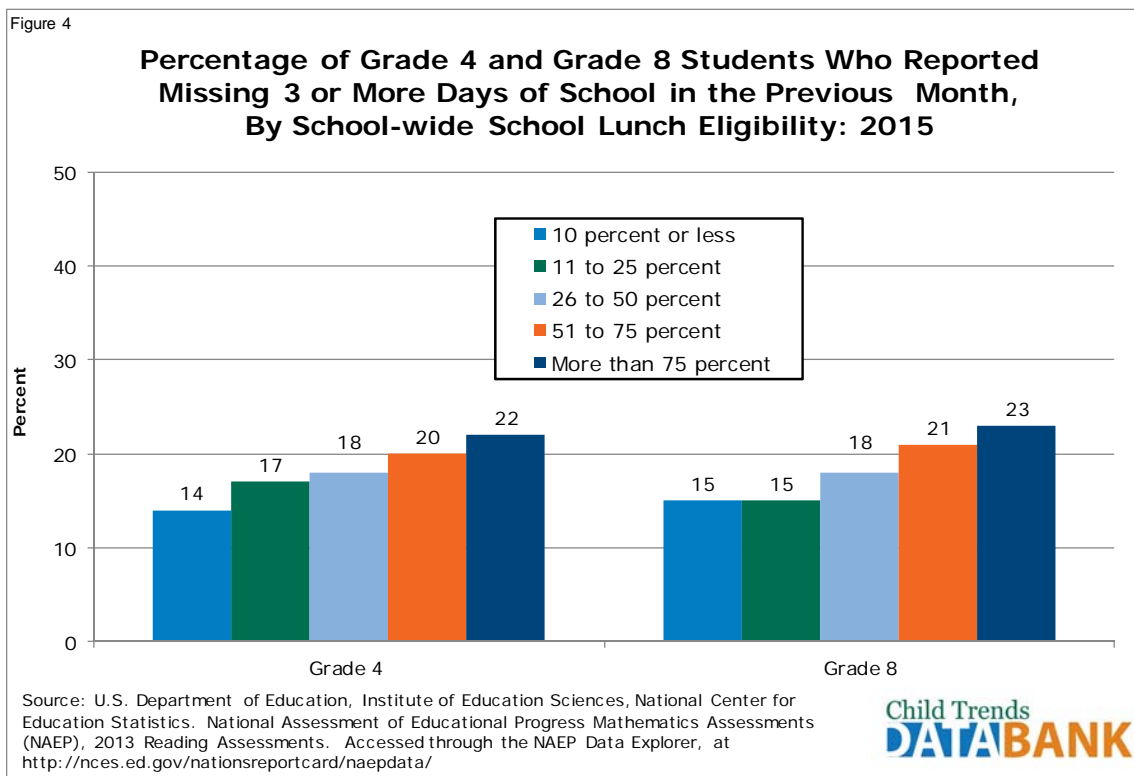
Students classified as having a disability are more likely than students without a disability to have missed three or more school days within the past month. In 2015, 26 percent of fourth- and eighth-graders with a disability reported missing three or more school days, compared with 18 percent of students without a disability. (Figure 3)

Figure 3



Differences by School-Wide Percentage of Students Eligible for Free or Reduced-Price Lunch

Students attending schools where more than 50 percent of the students were eligible for free or reduced price lunch (a proxy for community poverty) are more likely to report missing three or more days of school than are students attending schools with an eligibility rate of 10 percent or lower. In 2015, 23 percent of eighth-graders, and 22 percent of fourth-graders, at schools with a greater than 75-percent eligibility rate reported missing three or more days of school in the past month. This compares with 14 percent of fourth-graders, and 15 percent of eighth-graders, in schools where 10 percent or fewer students were eligible. (Figure 4)



In addition to school-level differences, children who were themselves eligible for free or reduced price lunch were more likely to miss more than three days of school in the previous month. In 2015, 23 percent of fourth-graders and eighth-graders who were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch were chronically absent, compared with 15 percent of fourth- and eighth-graders who were not eligible. (Appendix 1 and Appendix 2)



Differences by School Location

In 2015, students attending schools in cities or towns were more likely to be absent three or more times a month than were students attending schools in suburban or rural areas. Among eighth-graders, 20 percent, each, of those whose school was in a city or town were absent for three or more days in the past month, compared to 18 percent in the suburbs and 19 percent in rural areas. (Appendix 2)

State and Local Estimates

Estimates of absenteeism for states and major metropolitan areas are available from the *NAEP Data Explorer, 1992-2015 Reading Assessments*, at <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/nde/>

To access the data, click on “Main NDE,” then select fourth-grade or eighth-grade reading, the level (national, state, city, regional), and in the “select variables” tab, click on “student factors” and then “academic record and school experience.”

International Estimates

International estimates are available from the Trends in International Math and Science Study publication, *How Serious are School Attendance Problems? School Contexts for Learning and Instruction*.

http://timss.bc.edu/PDF/t03_download/T03_M_Chap8.pdf (See Exhibit 8.6)

National Goals

The No Child Left Behind Act, signed into law in January 2002, provides increased accountability for states, school districts, and schools, as well as more flexibility for states and local agencies in how they use federal education dollars. The Adequate Yearly Progress measures hold elementary and middle schools accountable for student absenteeism.

For more information visit: <http://www.ed.gov/nclb/landing.jhtml>



What Works to Make Progress on This Indicator

For examples of promising approaches that have been implemented in schools communities, as well as at the policy level, see <http://www.attendanceworks.org/what-works/>

Also, see Child Trends' LINKS database ("Lifecourse Interventions to Nurture Kids Successfully"), for reviews of many rigorously evaluated programs, including the following which have been shown to be effective at decreasing absenteeism:

- Behavior Treatment Program for Children with Asthma: www.childtrends.org/?programs=behavior-treatment-program-for-children-with-asthma
- Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS): www.childtrends.org/?programs=big-brothersbig-sisters-community-based-mentoring
- Career Academies: www.childtrends.org/?programs=career-academies
- Case-Management Program for Academic Enhancement: www.childtrends.org/?programs=case-management-program-for-academic-enhancement
- Developmental Group Therapy: www.childtrends.org/?programs=developmental-group-therapy
- Leeds Truancy Project: www.childtrends.org/?programs=leeds-truancy-project
- Multisystemic Therapy (MST): www.childtrends.org/?programs=multisystemic-therapy
- Ohio Learning, Earning, And Parenting Program (LEAP): www.childtrends.org/?programs=ohio-learning-earning-and-parenting-program-leap
- Positive Action Program: <http://www.childtrends.org/?programs=positive-action-program>
- Preventing Adolescent Problems: www.childtrends.org/?programs=preventing-adolescent-problems
- School Attendance Demonstration Project: www.childtrends.org/?programs=school-attendance-demonstration-project
- School to Jobs: www.childtrends.org/?programs=school-to-jobs
- Woodrock Youth Development Project (WYDP): www.childtrends.org/?programs=woodrock-youth-development-project-wydp



Related Indicators

- Children who Repeated a Grade: www.childtrends.org/?indicators=children-who-repeated-a-grade
- Educational Attainment (Youth): www.childtrends.org/?indicators=educational-attainment
- Unsafe at School: www.childtrends.org/?indicators=unsafe-at-school

Definition

From 1994 to 2000, students responded to the question, “How many days of school did you miss last month?” After 2001, students responded to, “How many days were you absent from school in the last month?” Accommodations for students with disabilities were not permitted in 1994.⁹

Data Sources

- Data from 2003-2015: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics. National Assessment of Educational Progress Reading Assessments (NAEP), Mathematics Assessments. Accessed through the NAEP Data Explorer, at <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/naepdata/>
- Data for 1994-2002: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2006) Student Absenteeism. *The Condition of Education 2006*. (24-2006). Table 24-2. <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/2006/section3/indicator24.asp#inf>

Raw Data Source

U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics. National Assessment of Educational Progress Mathematics Assessments (NAEP), 1994, 1998, 2002, 2003, 2005, 2007, 2009, 2011, 2013, and 2015 Mathematics Assessments.



Appendix 1 - Percentage of Fourth-Graders Who Reported Missing 3 or More Days of School in the Previous Month: Selected Years, 1994-2015

	1994	1998	2002	2003	2005	2007	2009	2011	2013	2015
Total	18	17	18	22	19	19	18	19	19	19
Gender										
Male	18	16	17	21	19	19	18	19	19	19
Female	18	18	18	23	20	20	19	20	20	19
Race/Hispanic Origin¹										
Non-Hispanic White	17	16	17	22	19	18	17	19	19	18
Non-Hispanic Black	21	18	20	24	22	22	21	22	22	23
Hispanic	23	20	19	22	21	21	21	21	20	21
Asian/Pacific Islander	12	‡	13	14	14	13	11	13	13	14
American Indian	‡	‡	24	31	26	28	25	29	29	28
English Language Learner²										
Yes	—	23	20	22	20	21	21	20	21	21
No	—	17	18	22	19	19	18	19	19	19
Classified as having a disability										
Yes	—	26	23	27	25	24	24	26	26	26
No	—	16	17	21	19	19	18	19	19	18
Language other than English spoken in home										
Yes	19	18	19	22	20	20	19	19	19	20
No	18	16	17	22	19	19	18	20	20	19



	1994	1998	2002	2003	2005	2007	2009	2011	2013	2015
Student Eligibility for free or reduced-price lunch³										
Eligible	—	21	21	25	22	23	22	23	22	23
Not eligible	—	14	16	20	17	16	15	16	17	15
School Location										
Central City	20	17	18	22	20	—	—	—	—	—
Urban fringe/large town	17	16	17	20	18	—	—	—	—	—
Rural/Small Town	17	18	18	23	20	—	—	—	—	—
City	—	—	—	—	—	20	19	20	20	20
Suburb	—	—	—	—	—	18	17	18	18	18
Town	—	—	—	—	—	21	20	20	20	21
Rural	—	—	—	—	—	19	18	20	20	20
Percent of students in school eligible for free or reduced-price lunch										
10 or less	—	14	15	18	16	14	14	15	15	14
11 to 25	—	16	16	20	17	17	16	16	17	17
26 to 50	—	16	18	23	19	19	18	19	18	18
51 to 75	—	19	19	24	21	22	20	21	21	20
More than 75	—	19	21	23	22	23	22	22	22	22

- Data not available.

‡ Reporting standards not met (too few cases).

NOTE: From 1994 to 2000, students responded to the question "How many days of school did you miss last month?" After 2001, students were asked "How many days were you absent from school in the last month?" Accommodations were not permitted for the 1994 assessment, but they were permitted for all other assessment years reported here.



¹Black includes African American, Hispanic includes Latino, Asian/Pacific Islander includes Native Hawaiian, and American Indian includes Alaska Native.

²In testing years previous to 2005, English language learners (ELL) were identified as limited English proficient (LEP).

³This information was not available for a small percentage of students (2 percent of the total population in 2005).

Sources: Data for 1994-2002: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2006) Student Absenteeism. *The Condition of Education 2006*. (24-2006). Table 24-2. <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/2006/section3/indicator24.asp#inf> Data from 2003-2015: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics. National Assessment of Educational Progress Reading Assessments (NAEP), Mathematics Assessments. Accessed through the NAEP Data Explorer, at <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/naepdata/>



Appendix 2 - Percentage of Eighth-Graders Who Reported Missing 3 or More Days of School in the Previous Month: Selected Years, 1994-2015

	1994	1998	2002	2003	2005	2007	2009	2011	2013	2015
Total	22	22	20	22	21	20	20	19	20	19
Gender										
Male	22	21	19	22	21	19	19	19	19	18
Female	22	22	20	22	21	20	20	20	20	20
Race/Hispanic Origin¹										
Non-Hispanic White	20	21	19	21	20	18	19	18	19	18
Non-Hispanic Black	27	22	22	24	25	24	23	23	22	23
Hispanic	27	24	22	25	24	23	22	22	21	20
Asian/Pacific Islander	21	15	12	11	12	11	11	11	10	11
American Indian	‡	‡	32	33	30	29	28	28	31	29
English Language Learner²										
Yes	—	26	23	24	24	24	23	24	21	22
No	—	22	20	22	21	20	20	19	19	19
Classified as having a disability										
Yes	—	31	28	32	29	28	28	27	28	26
No	—	21	19	21	20	19	19	19	19	18
Language other than English spoken in home										
Yes	24	22	21	23	22	21	20	20	20	19
No	21	22	19	21	20	19	19	19	19	19



	1994	1998	2002	2003	2005	2007	2009	2011	2013	2015
Student Eligibility for free or reduced-price lunch³										
Eligible	—	26	24	26	26	25	24	24	23	23
Not eligible	—	20	18	20	18	17	17	16	16	15
School Location										
Central City	24	22	21	23	22	—	—	—	—	—
Urban fringe/large town	21	21	20	20	20	—	—	—	—	—
Rural/Small Town	20	23	19	22	19	—	—	—	—	—
City	—	—	—	—	—	22	21	20	21	20
Suburb	—	—	—	—	—	18	19	18	18	18
Town	—	—	—	—	—	20	20	20	21	20
Rural	—	—	—	—	—	20	19	19	19	19
Percent of students in school eligible for free or reduced-price lunch										
10 or less	—	18	16	18	17	15	15	14	14	15
11 to 25	—	20	19	20	18	17	18	17	17	15
26 to 50	—	22	20	23	21	20	20	19	18	18
51 to 75	—	27	22	24	23	22	22	22	22	21
More than 75	—	25	25	26	26	26	24	24	24	23

- Data not available.

‡ Reporting standards not met (too few cases).

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Endnotes

¹ Epstein, J. L., & Sheldon, S. B. (2002). Present and accounted for: Improving student attendance through family and community involvement. *Journal of Educational Research, 95*(5), 308-318.

² Ready, D. D. (2010). Socioeconomic disadvantage, school attendance, and early cognitive development: The differential effects of school exposure. *Sociology of Education, 83*(4), 271-286.

³ Epstein, J. L., & Sheldon, S. B. (2002). Op. cit.

⁴ McCluskey, C. P., Bynum, T. S., & Patchin, J. W. (2004). Reducing chronic absenteeism: An assessment of an early truancy initiative. *Crime and Delinquency, 50*(2), 214-234.

⁵ Baker, M. L., Sigmon, J. N., & Nugent, M. E. (2001). Truancy reduction: Keeping students in school [Electronic Version]. *Juvenile Justice Bulletin*. Available at <http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojdp/188947.pdf>

⁶ Bruner, C., Discher, A., & Chang, H. (2011). Chronic elementary absenteeism: A problem hidden in plain sight. A Research Brief from Attendance Works and Child and Family Policy Center. Retrieved from <http://www.edweek.org/media/chronicabsence-15chang.pdf>

⁷ Teasley, M. L. (2004). Absenteeism and truancy: Risk, protection, and best practice implications for school social workers. *Children and Schools, 26*(2), 117-128.

⁸ Hispanics may be any race. Estimates for whites, blacks, Asian/Pacific Islanders, and American Indians in this report do not include Hispanics.

⁹ When accommodations are permitted, more students with disabilities and English language learners are able to take the assessments. For more information, see <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/about/inclusion.asp>