



CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM

LPRO: LEGISLATIVE POLICY AND RESEARCH

ISSUE BRIEF

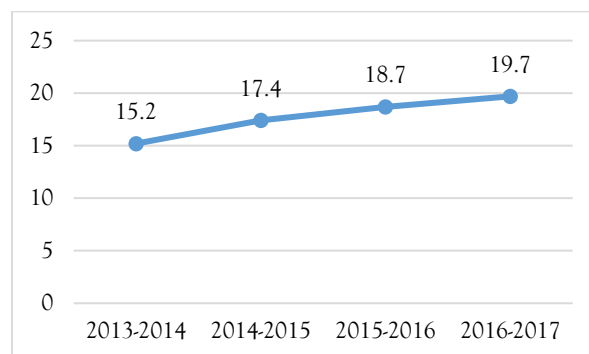
The U.S. Department of Education (ED) defines students as chronically absent when they miss 15 or more days in any school year, while the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) defines it as missing 10 percent or more of school days. Chronically absent students have been shown to score lower on standardized tests,¹ graduate at lower rates,² and stall progress in reading even among very young children.³

CHRONICALLY ABSENT STUDENTS IN OREGON

Oregon ranks third among states with the most chronically absent students, according to data collected by the ED and compiled by researchers at Johns Hopkins University. Using the federal definition, 22.7 percent of Oregon's students were chronically absent during the 2013-2014 school year. The states with higher percentages of chronically absent students that year were Washington and Alaska. The three best-performing states were South Carolina, with a rate of 8.4 percent; Indiana, with a rate of 9.7 percent; and North Dakota, with a rate of 9.8 percent.

Oregon has kept data on chronic absenteeism since the 2013-2014 school year. Since that time, the percentage of students chronically absent has increased, as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Percentage of Oregon Students Chronically Absent, 2013-2017



Source: Legislative Policy and Research Office
Data: Oregon Department of Education

¹ *Absences Add Up: How School Attendance Influences Student Success*, Attendance Works, 2014.

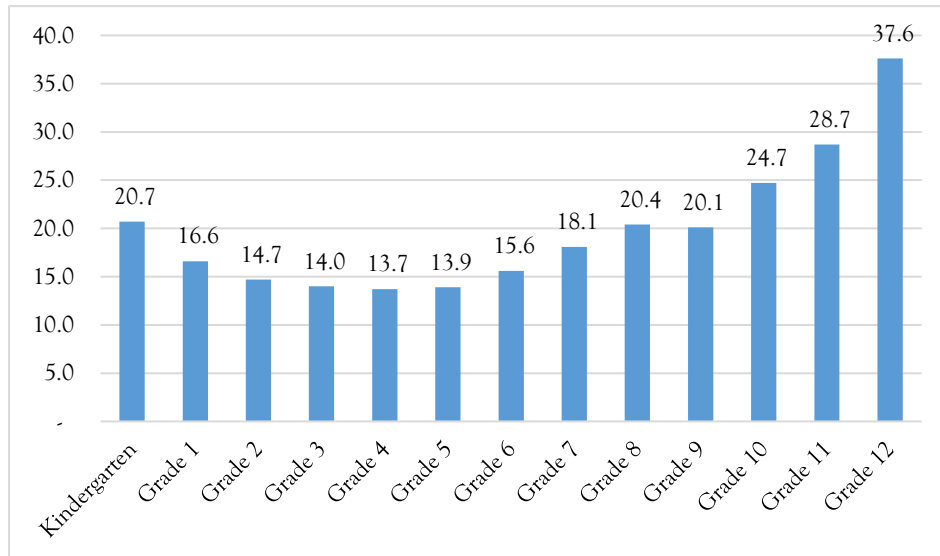
² *School Attendance, Absenteeism, and Student Success*, Oregon Department of Education, 2015.

<<http://www.oregon.gov/ode/students-and-family/healthsafety/Documents/school-attendance-absenteeism-and-student-success-final.pdf>>.

³ *Mapping the Early Attendance Gap*, Attendance Works, 2015.

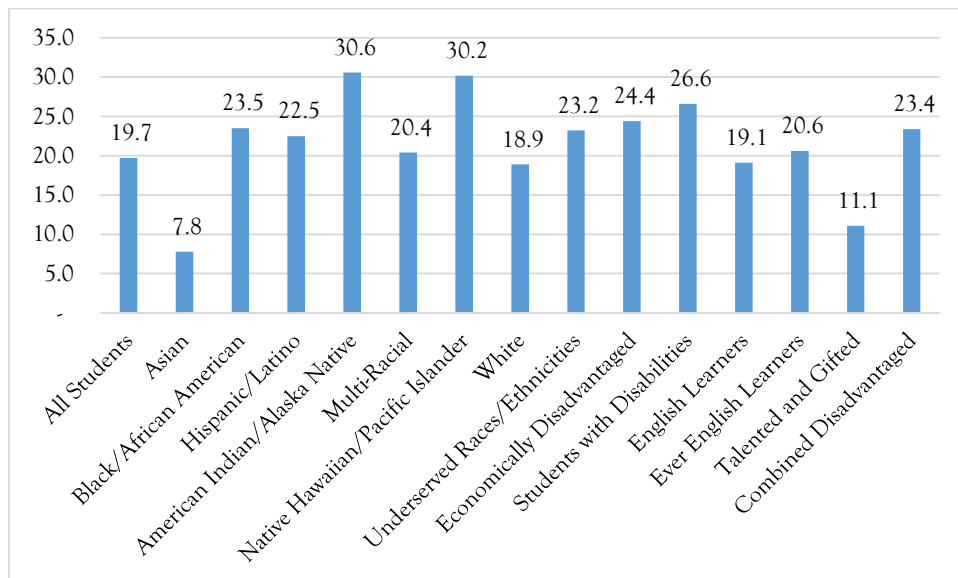
ODE maintains statistics on the percentage of students chronically absent in each grade, as well as in disaggregated subgroups. Figure 2 shows Oregon’s chronic absenteeism rates for the 2016-2017 school year broken out by grade level, while Figure 3 shows the percentage of students chronically absent in each disaggregated subgroup.

Figure 2: Percentage of Students Chronically Absent, by Grade Level, 2016-2017 School Year



Source: Legislative Policy and Research Office
 Data: Oregon Department of Education

Figure 3: Percentage of Students Chronically Absent, by Subgroup, 2016-2017 School Year



Source: Legislative Policy and Research Office
 Data: Oregon Department of Education

OREGON'S STATEWIDE CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM PLAN

In 2016, the legislature enacted House Bill 4002. The bill required ODE and the Chief Education Office (ChEO) to develop a statewide education plan addressing chronic absenteeism. The plan consists of five elements:

1. a process for publicly disclosing annual information on chronic absence rates for each school;
2. guidance and best practices for all schools and districts to use to track, monitor, and address chronic absences and improve attendance;
3. a process for identifying schools in need of support to reduce chronic absences and improve attendance;
4. a description of technical assistance available to schools identified as needing support, including technical assistance that will be provided by ODE or ChEO; and
5. estimated costs associated with implementing the plan.

The plan estimated the cost of implementation at over \$6.8 million. During the 2017 legislative session, approximately \$6.2 million was allocated to ODE to implement the plan.

PILOT PROJECTS

House Bill 4002 also provided \$500,000 to be distributed to school districts for pilot programs to reduce chronic absenteeism by implementing trauma-informed practices, or practices that address the effects of traumatic events in students' lives. The bill requires ODE and ChEO to report back to the legislature by October 15, 2019 on results of the funded pilot programs. Central High School in Independence and Tigard High School both received \$200,000, and \$50,000 was awarded to the Oregon School-Based Health Alliance (OSBHA) to act as their technical assistance provider. ChEO meets with OSBHA and a leadership team from both schools each month. The team consists of the school principal and/or superintendent, associate principal, head counselor, dean of students, school psychologist, and other school-based professionals. Each school hired a full-time trauma-informed school coordinator responsible for providing ongoing professional development, assisting school leaders, and collecting and submitting data.

TRIBAL ASSISTANCE PILOT PROJECTS

Because of high rates of chronic absenteeism among tribally enrolled students, ODE's state plan for American Indian and Native Alaskan students included Tribal Attendance Pilot Projects (TAPPs). TAPP programs are designed to connect school districts, families, and tribal governments, and are currently in place in nine school districts, in cooperation with the state's nine federally recognized tribes. The participating school districts are: Coos Bay, Harney County, Jefferson County, Klamath, Lincoln County, North Bend, Pendleton, South Umpqua, and Willamina. In these districts, 17 schools are participating, and over half showed improvement as of June 2017.

Each TAPP program created a family advocate based on a job description co-created by tribes and districts. Tribes approved applicant pools, while districts hired and supervised the employees. ODE provides technical assistance and training to family advocates and school district staff, creates and maintains a blog, conducts site visits, and evaluates the programs.

TAPP schools encouraged attendance by creating t-shirts, distributing reward tags for students achieving attendance goals, posting welcome signs in native languages, and hosting equity trainings for district personnel, among others. TAPP also includes efforts to build relationships between school and district personnel and tribal families and governments. One example of these efforts is the placement of in-service days on tribal holidays so native students would not miss school and be counted as absent on those days.