

The Chronically Out-of-School Indicator Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is the Chronically Out of School Indicator?

The Chronically Out of School Indicator is a new accountability measure in Tennessee as part of our accountability framework under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). The indicator is based on what is commonly referred to in research as “chronic absenteeism.” The measure is the percentage of students who have missed 10 percent or more of the days a student is enrolled in school—for any reason, including excused absences and out-of-school suspensions. By including this indicator as part of the accountability framework, we are underscoring the importance of student attendance in school every day.

2. Why is understanding and addressing chronic absenteeism important?

Multiple research studies link poor attendance with reduced academic outcomes, and many subgroups are disproportionately represented in chronic absenteeism data. From a Tennessee perspective, we know that students who are chronically absent in kindergarten are 15 percentage points less likely to reach proficiency in either third grade math or ELA. We also know that Tennessee students who are chronically absent in ninth grade are 30 percentage points less likely to earn an on-time diploma (62 percent versus 92 percent). The harmful effects of poor attendance are cumulative and may be masked if absences do not occur consecutively. Students tend to repeat poor attendance patterns, further compounding harmful effects.

Key Terms

Average Daily Attendance: The percent of enrolled students who attend school each day. While the average daily attendance rate has been used for reporting purposes for many years, the sole use of average daily attendance tends to mask significant attendance problems.

Truancy: A legal term that refers only to unexcused absences. A Tennessee student is considered truant at five unexcused absences and may be subject to legal intervention.

Chronic Absenteeism: Missing school for any reason (excused, unexcused, suspended/expelled). Commonly defined as missing 10 percent or more of instructional days, the threshold at which research indicates most students are at risk of negative academic and social consequences.

Exclusionary Discipline: The removal of a student from his/her regular academic program for disciplinary purposes.

Chronically missing school is reflective of conditions at school and/or barriers at home or in the community that can be successfully addressed. Districts and schools have access to rich attendance data that can be monitored throughout the school year in order to minimize attendance barriers and maximize learning time.

3. How does the Chronically Out of School Indicator impact an IEP team's ability to address attendance issues related to a student's disability?

IEP teams must make decisions based on the individual needs of students, taking into consideration their least restrictive environment. The Chronically Out of School Indicator does not include these special circumstances.

4. How will my school or district be measured under the new Chronically Out of School Indicator?

Under Tennessee's new ESSA accountability framework, district determinations and school grades will include the Chronically Out of School Indicator.

District

Districts will be assessed on student performance as measured through three pathways. The score is calculated by averaging the **best of** absolute performance or AMO target **and** value-added pathways. Districts will be assessed on **both all students and subgroup performance**.

- The absolute performance pathway measures the percent of students who are chronically out of school.
- The AMO target is a cohort-level comparison target to reduce the percent of students who are chronically out of school.
- The value-added pathway is a student-level comparison to measure reduction in chronic absenteeism for students who were chronically absent in the prior year, setting a growth expectation based on state-level performance versus the prior year.

School

Schools will be assessed on school performance as measured through two pathways. The grade a school will receive on this indicator will be the **best of** absolute performance or school performance relative to an AMO target. Schools will receive a grade for **all students and for subgroup performance**. Overall, the Chronically Out of School Indicator will count 10 percent of a school's grade.

- The absolute performance pathway measures the percent of students who are chronically out of school.
- The AMO target is a cohort-level comparison target to reduce the percent of students who are chronically out of school.

5. What can we do to prepare? What data are important to consider?

The key to reducing chronic absenteeism is to understand the many factors that may be impacting attendance. Fortunately, there are numerous rich data sources that can be helpful in identifying the unique nature of attendance patterns at each school or across the district. Successfully addressing chronic absenteeism starts with examining available data and identifying root causes.

a) *Student management system – attendance and discipline data*

A logical first step is to dig into attendance and discipline data contained within the district's student management system. Remember that chronic absenteeism and the chronically out of school indicator include three broad categories: excused absences, unexcused absences and out-of-school suspensions.

- How do chronic absenteeism rates differ across schools, grades and subgroups within the district?
- How many of the absences can be attributed to excused, unexcused or disciplinary reasons.
- Are there periods within the school calendar that are particularly problematic?

At the building level, this review can be similar with an additional opportunity to identify crossovers with students who may already be identified via RTI² or other ongoing support initiatives.

Similarly, discipline data can be helpful in identifying the nature of students receiving exclusionary discipline, the behaviors resulting in discipline and the possibility of introducing disciplinary alternatives such as restorative practices.

b) *Coordinated school health/school nurses – student health conditions*

Student health, including seasonal as well as chronic conditions such as asthma or diabetes, can be a significant factor in student absences. Coordinated school health directors and school nurses are an excellent source of data on district and building-level chronic health conditions of students. These same persons can be an excellent source of suggestions and practices in reducing health-related absences.

c) *Student/family support services – barriers to attendance*

Student support personnel such as parent engagement specialists or family resource center directors are an excellent source of information on barriers that students and families may be encountering in getting to school.

d) *Students and parents – barriers, school climate/culture, instructional opportunities*

A frequently overlooked source of invaluable qualitative data is students and caregivers themselves. Student and parent survey resources are available at no cost from the department of education. These surveys provide an opportunity to better understand student and parent perceptions of their school experience. Learn more [here](#), and contact Kimberly.Daubenspeck@tn.gov if you are interested in utilizing the surveys. An alternative would be to conduct interviews or focus groups with students and/or parents and caregivers.

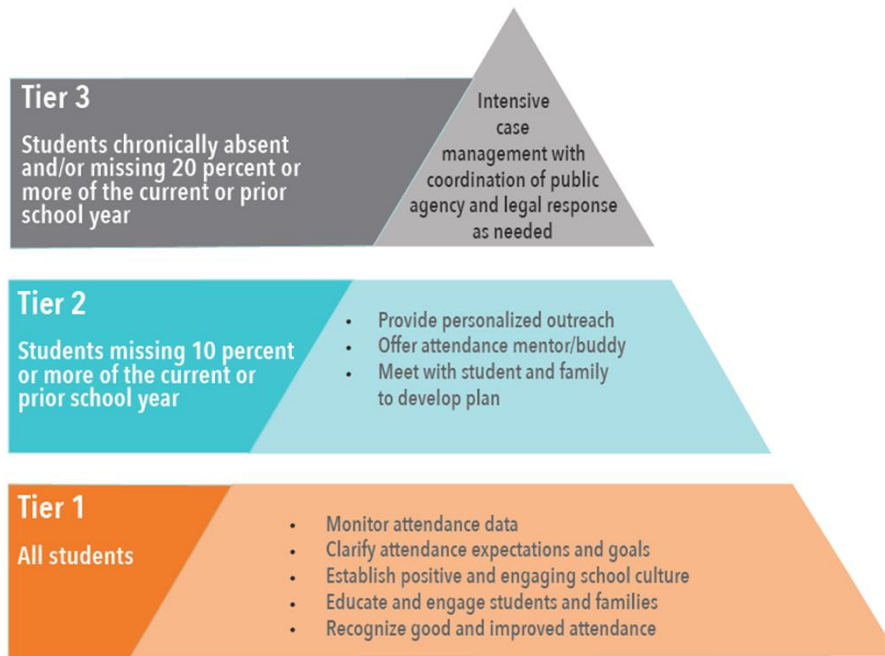
e) *Transportation, other nontraditional sources – barriers, climate/culture*

Valuable information can come from unexpected sources. For example, one rural Tennessee family resource center relies upon reports from bus drivers to identify students and families in need of assistance. Similarly, pediatricians can be a great source of information and a

powerful partner in addressing student health conditions. We encourage you to be creative in thinking about the many individuals who might have insight into your students' lives.

6. What should we do after reviewing data?

Effectively addressing chronic absenteeism requires multiple levels of response. The Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) provides a strong model for developing those supports using resources that are currently available in most Tennessee schools and districts.



While the identification of tier thresholds can and should vary, a good starting point is to consider students with chronic absence rates between 10 and 19 percent as being in Tier 2 and students with rates at 20 percent or above as being Tier 3.

A few important points to consider include:

- A solid Tier 1 foundation for all students is essential and will ultimately reduce students moving into Tiers 2 and 3.
- Effective, engaging instruction for all students is the most important factor relative to improving attendance and ultimately supporting student success.
- Recognizing good and improved attendance can and should be more encompassing than perfect attendance awards
- Monitoring attendance and discipline trends on an ongoing basis is key to intervening on a timely basis. Consider poor or worsening attendance patterns to be an early warning indicator.
- Best practice indicates that Tier 2 students generally require some level of individualized attention. Depending upon the number of students and staff resources, external assistance may be in order.

- Parents and caregivers respond best to personalized, positive messaging delivered by someone with whom they have an existing relationship. Automated attendance calls lose their effectiveness as absences increase.
- Attendance messaging is most effective when delivered early in the school year and before poor attendance patterns develop.

Attendance Works has produced an outstanding guide for helping schools develop a multi-tiered response to chronic absenteeism which includes examples of strategies in each of the three tiers along with worksheets for helping a school team develop a response that is specific to their unique situation. The resource guide can be found [here](#).

7. Where can I go to learn more and to find available resources?

The [“Student Supports Overview” webpage](#) provides a gateway to resources available through the Tennessee Department of Education to help schools address the varied needs of students and families. Focus areas include school climate/culture, health and nutrition, behavior and discipline, as well as student and family support.

A few additional resources include:

- Attendance Works is a national leader in the field of chronic absenteeism. All of their resources, including an extensive set of parent communication and training materials, are available at no cost and easily accessible from their well-developed [website](#).
- [Every Student, Every Day](#) is a community toolkit produced by the U.S. Departments of Education, Justice, Health and Human Services, and Housing and Urban Development.
- [Chronic Absenteeism in Tennessee’s Early Grades](#) is a research brief prepared by the research office of the Tennessee Department of Education.