

Chronic Absenteeism in Oregon: What We Know and Why It Matters



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Think about a time when you missed school...



Scenario:

You are in high school. You have a very important test today. You live with your mother and your 7-year old sister. Your sister becomes ill that morning and your mother asks you to stay home and care for her. She says that she will be fired from her job if she misses one more day.

What do you do?

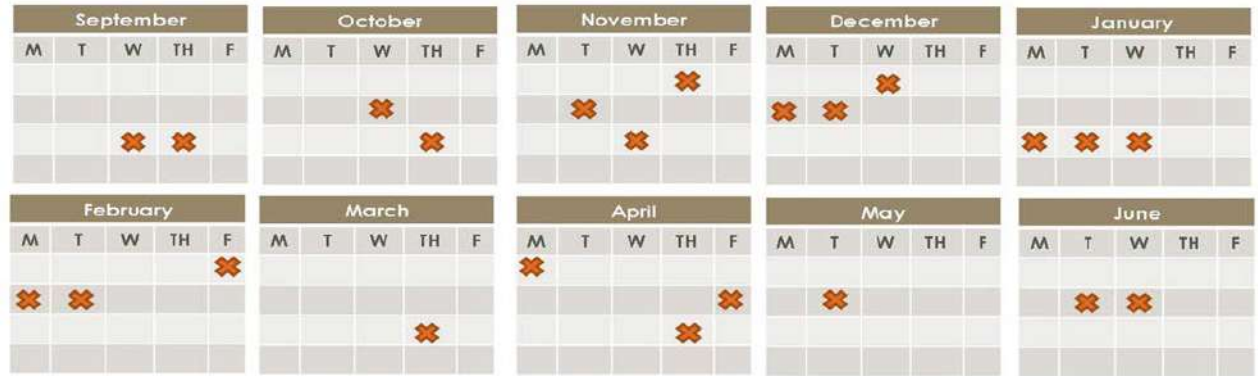
Research supports the commonsense belief that children suffer academically if they are not in class to learn.



What is Chronic Absenteeism?

Definition: Missing 10% of school for *any* reason.

- ☐ Excused
- ☐ Unexcused
- ☐ Suspension
- ☐ Expulsion



Why Does It Matter?

- ❑ Chronic Absenteeism is the **strongest predictor of dropping out of high school** - stronger than other factors such as number of suspensions or student test scores, even when taking into account student demographics (Byrnes & Reyna, 2012).
- ❑ Significant gaps in academic performance are **apparent in third grade and persist all the way through high school for students who are chronically absent**, leading to increased dropout and decreased graduation rates (Buehler, Tapogna & Chang, 2012).

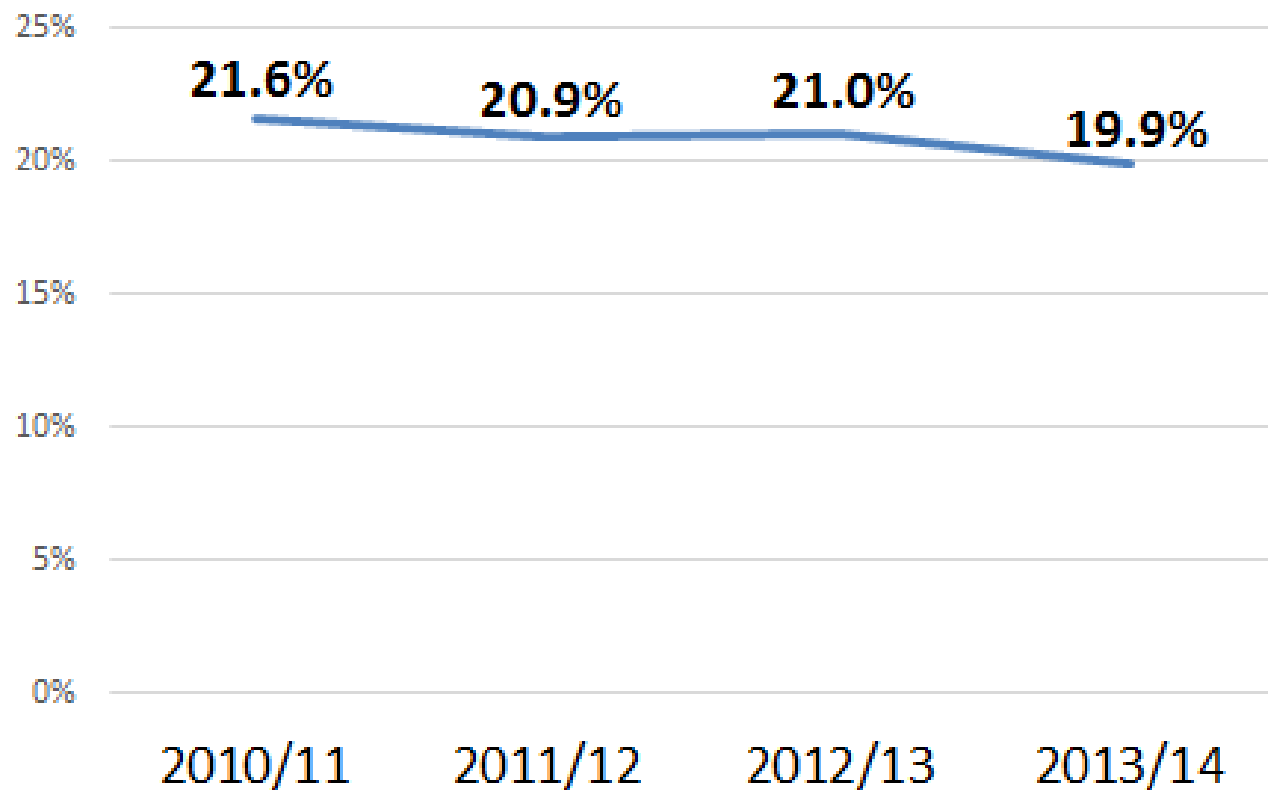
Oregon Statistics

- ❑ In the 2009-10 school year, nearly a **quarter of all K-12 students in Oregon were chronically absent; this drops to one-in-five by 2013/14**
- ❑ The student attendance records of 480,000 Oregon public school students in 1,150 schools revealed that **chronic absenteeism affected schools in every Oregon community, including schools that met their 90% ADA goal**
- ❑ Problems with chronic absenteeism were apparent at **every grade level**, starting with **24 percent of kindergarten students** and dipping to about 14 percent of third graders before climbing to **38 percent in the 12th-grade**.

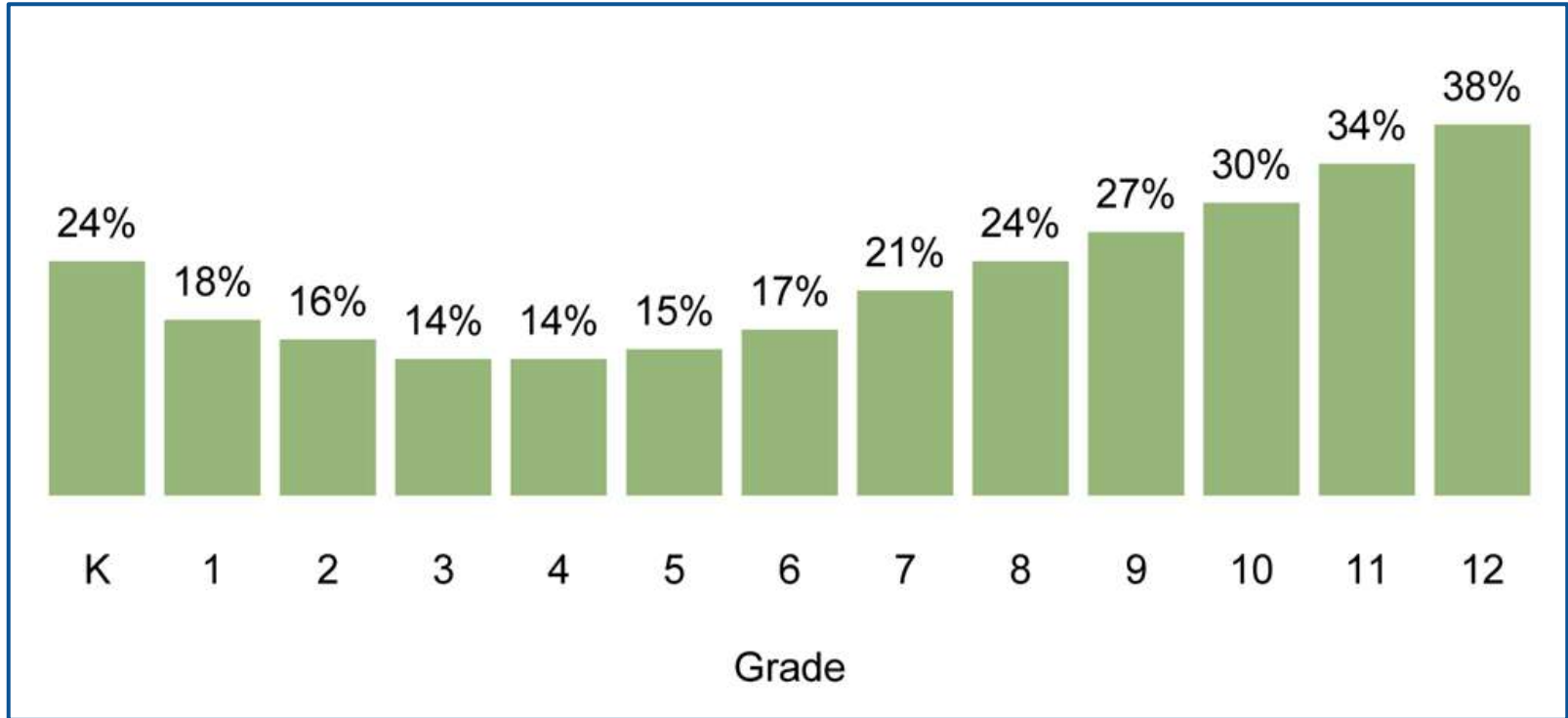
Buehler, Taponga & Chang (2012). Why being at school matters: Chronic Absenteeism in Oregon Public Schools. The Chalkboard Project. Retrieved:

<http://chalkboardproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Oregon-Research-Brief-June-20-2012.pdf>

Chronic Absenteeism in Oregon



23% of K-12 students in Oregon were chronically absent in 2009-10

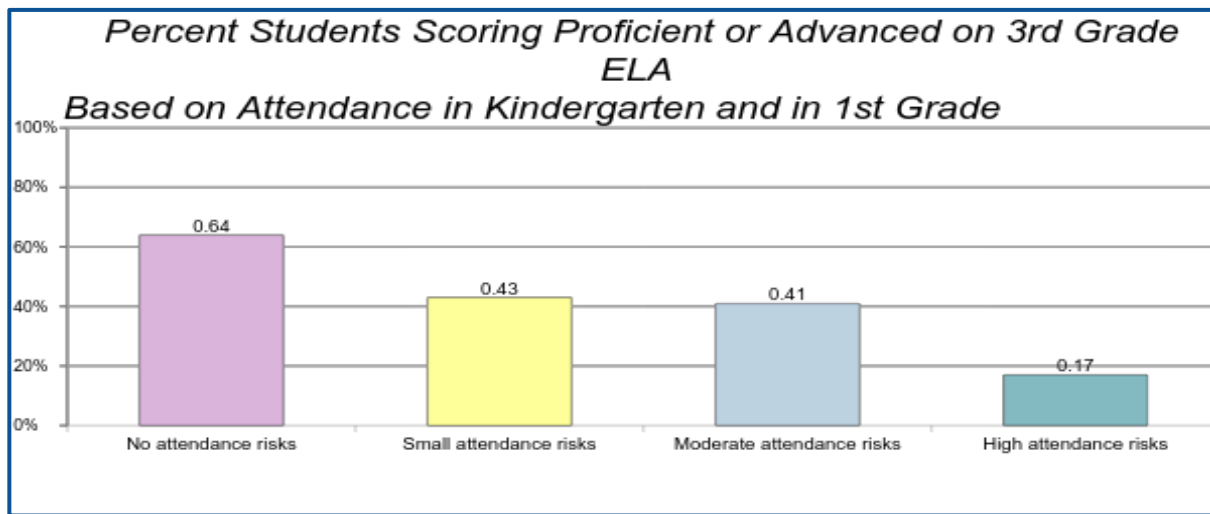


Attendance matters most for the children who enter school the farthest behind, which is evident as early as pre-K.



**Analyses control for prior preschool experience, race, gender, neighborhood poverty and social status, special education status, ELL status, and program type. Missing data points represent values with fewer than 30 students*

Student 3rd Grade ELA Scores



No risk	Missed less than 5% of school in K & 1 st
Small risk	Missed 5-9% of days in both K & 1 st
Moderate risk	Missed 5-9% of days in 1 year & 10 % in 1 year
High risk	Missed 10% or more in K & 1 st

Populations Most At Risk...

- ❑ Children of color
- ❑ Children from economically disadvantaged home
- ❑ Children with disabilities
- ❑ K-3rd grade children in rural communities

Buehler, Tapanoga, & Chang, (2012). Why being at school matters: Chronic Absenteeism in Oregon Public Schools. The Chalkboard Project. Retrieved: <http://chalkboardproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Oregon-Research-Brief-June-20-2012.pdf>

Education is a Predictor of Health

- ❑ **Children who do not complete high school** are likely to become adults who have **employment problems, lower health literacy, higher rates of illness, and earlier deaths than those who graduate from high school.**
- ❑ Improving high school graduation rates may be more cost-effective than most medical interventions in reducing health disparities.
- ❑ Graduation from high school is associated with an **increase in the average lifespan of 6 to 9 years.**
- ❑ Dropouts are more likely to **commit crime or rely on government assistance for health care, housing and food. Dropouts are less likely to raise healthy, well-educated children.** (multigenerational solutions)

Health is a Predictor of Education

Healthy Kids Learn Better!

- ❑ Children who report **greater health challenges** also **report poorer average school grades**.
- ❑ Students with **poorer health** report **missing more days** of school.
- ❑ **Greater numbers of health challenges** are associated with **poorer educational outcomes**.
- ❑ High schools with more complete **health infrastructure** have **higher graduation rates**.

FIGURE 4: PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS WITH GOOD GRADES IN SCHOOL BY PRESENCE OR ABSENCE OF HEALTHY FACTORS

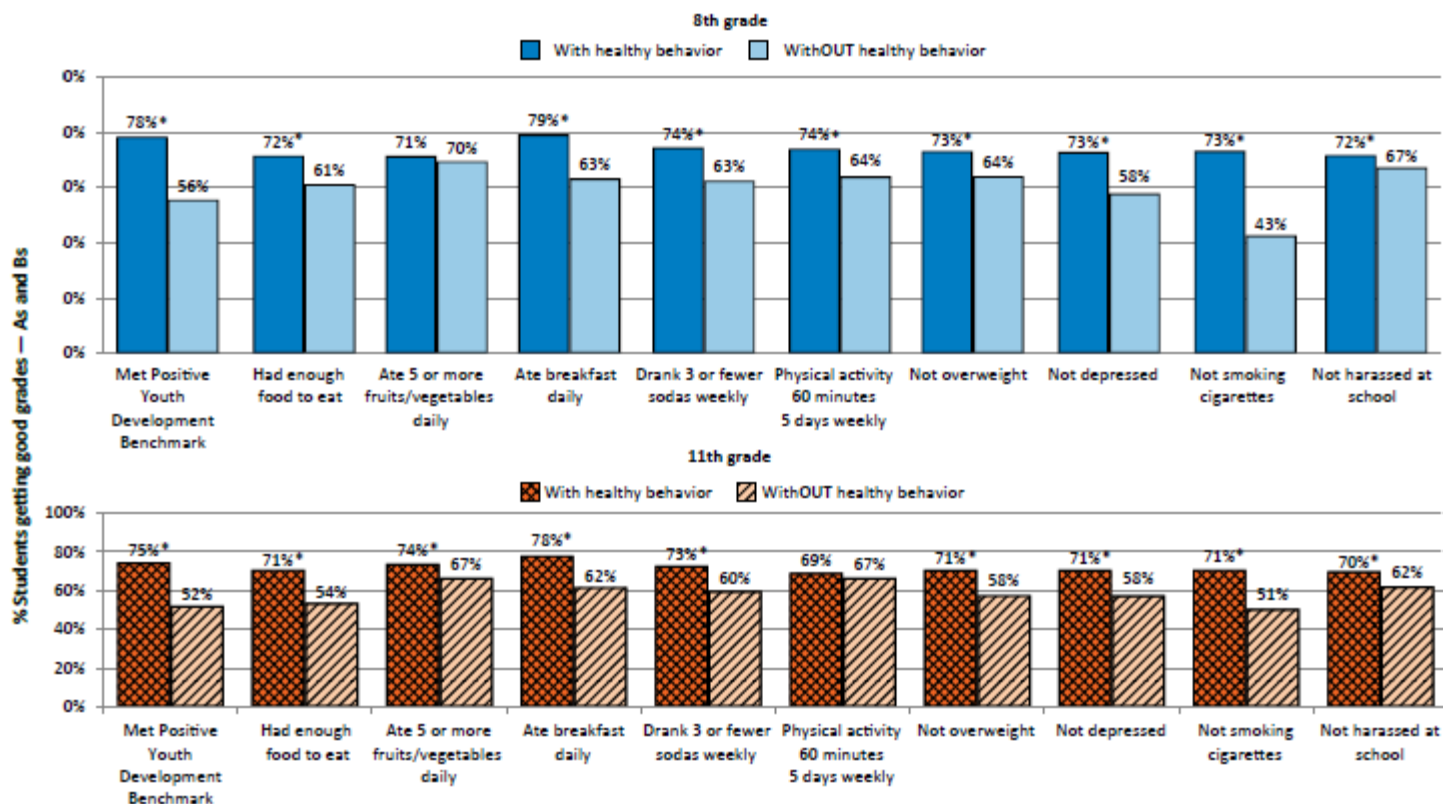
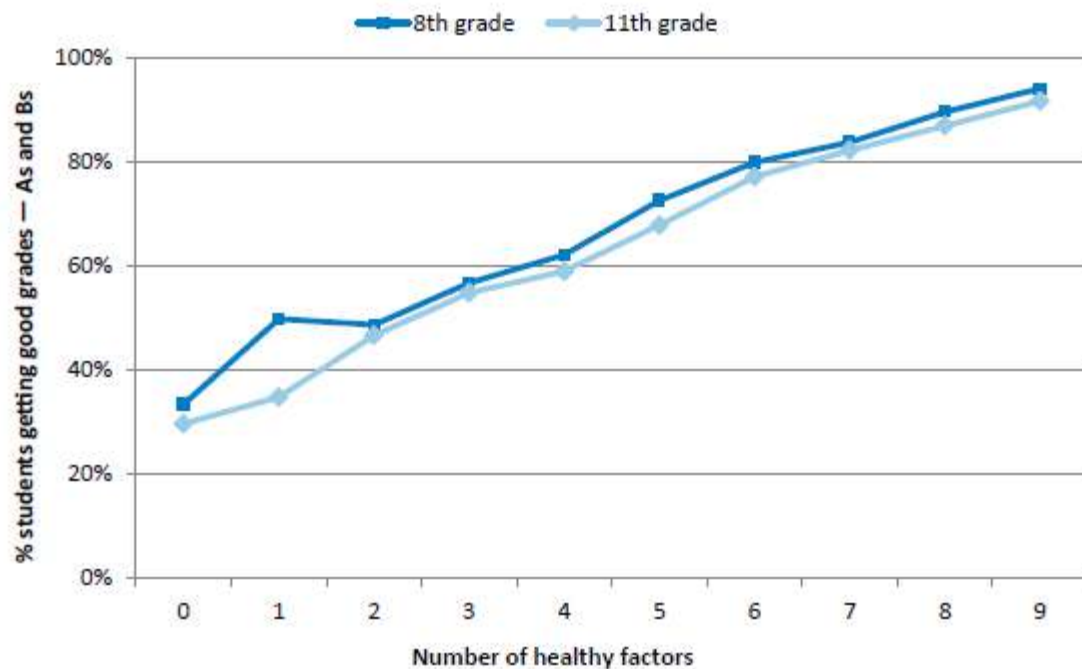
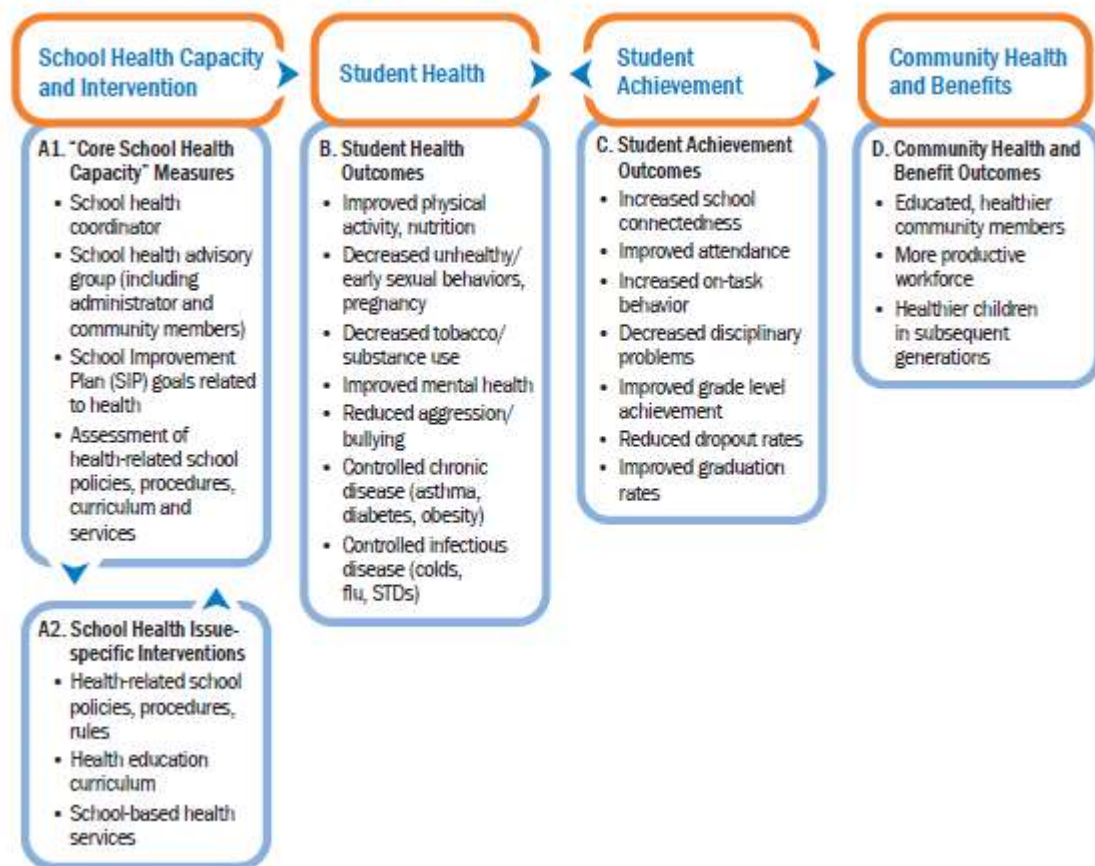


FIGURE 5: PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS WITH GOOD GRADES IN SCHOOL BY NUMBER OF HEALTHY FACTORS



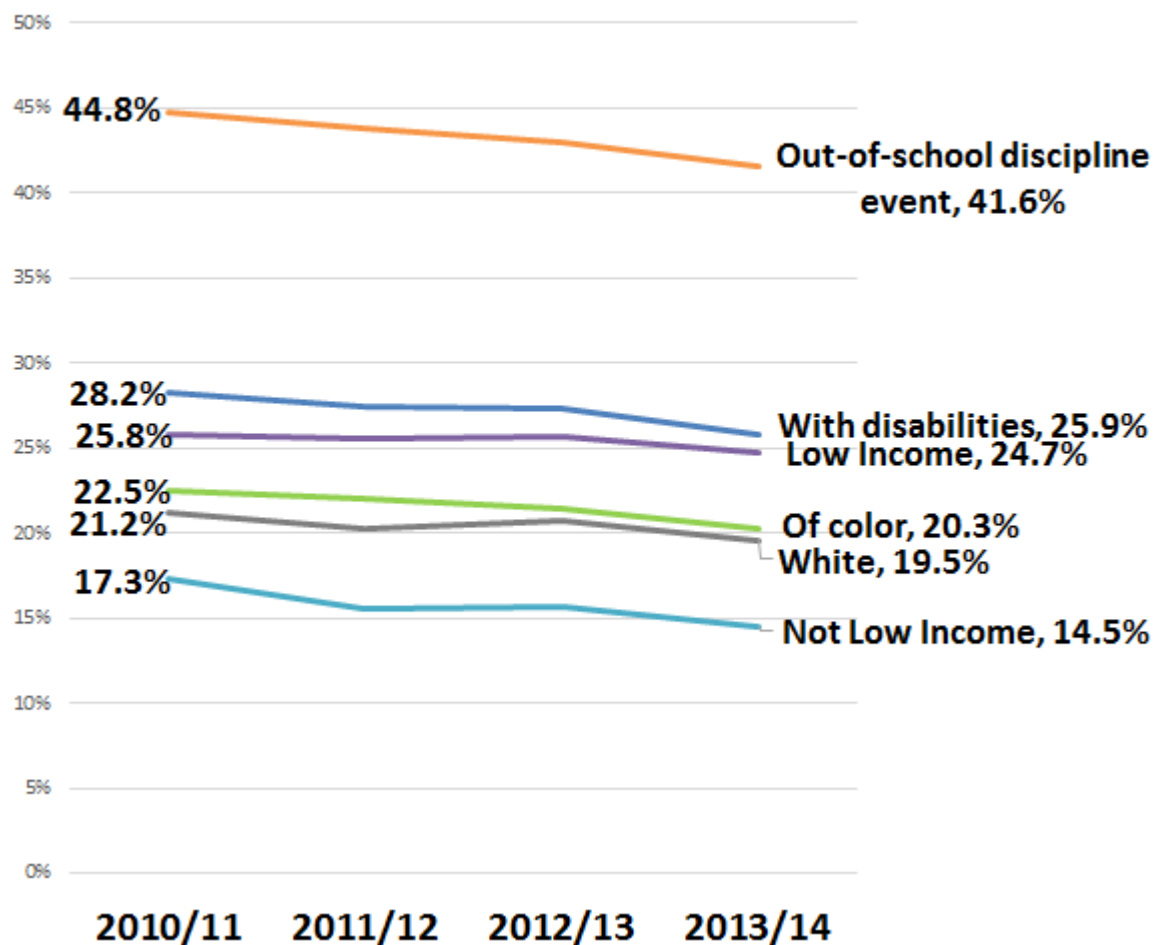
Source: Oregon Healthy Teens Survey, 2006-2009 combined. Data provided by 13,536 8th-grade and 14,925 11th-grade student respondents. Healthy factors include the sum of up to 9 factors: sufficient fruit/vegetable consumption, eating breakfast, drinking fewer sodas, sufficient physical activity, maintaining a healthy weight, not experiencing depression, not smoking cigarettes, not feeling harassed at school, and meeting the *Positive Youth Development Benchmark*. Having enough food to eat was not included here because this question was only asked on the 2009 survey. Using a linear regression model, the percentage of students getting good grades is significantly associated with the number of healthy factors ($p < 0.001$) for students in 8th and 11th grades respectively. The question of differential impact of some health behaviors on grades is an area of further research.

FIGURE 2: SCHOOL HEALTH LOGIC MODEL



Students with High Needs

Chronic Absenteeism Rates, Oregon



Student absence is complex

Myths	Barriers	Aversion
Absences are only a problem if they are unexcused	Lack of access to health care	Child struggling academically
Sporadic versus consecutive absences aren't a problem	Poor transportation	Lack of engaging instruction
Attendance only matters in the older grades	No safe path to school	Poor school climate and ineffective discipline
		Parent had negative school experience

Impact

Research into the impact of chronic absenteeism has shown an association with:

- delayed achievement in the early years
- widening gaps between student achievement
- higher suspension rates
- increased dropout rates
- decreased high school graduation rates
- lower college enrollment
- decreased college persistence

Underlying Factors: Reasons for Chronic Absenteeism^{1,2,3}



CAN'T

Barriers preventing attendance

- Illness (chronic illness; lack of access to healthcare)
- Transportation (unreliable)
- Family Crisis (foreclosure; death)

WON'T

Aversion to something at or on the way to/from school

- Challenging community conditions (gang violence; no safe route)
- Poor school climate (bullying, racism, ineffective school discipline)
- Academic struggle, lack of engaging instruction
- Negative school experience of parent

DON'T

Would rather be somewhere else

- Disengagement (feeling school won't help lead to a better future; lack of connection to adults and peers at school)
- Belief in myths (sporadic absence doesn't matter; attendance only matters in older grades because kindergarten is not compulsory)

Practices to Improve Outcomes

1. Discourse shifts on how we discuss issue
2. Partnerships with students, parents, and service providers
3. Early supports for students who are slipping
4. School climate
5. Teacher practices: Behavioral and structural
6. Upstream improvements

1. Advice for dialogue about the issue

- o Students and families make “irresponsible choices” and “don’t value education”
- INSTEAD...
 - o Parents and students face significant family and school-related barriers to regular attendance. Despite valuing education, families sometimes need to keep children home or cannot get them physically to school. School barriers also block students from attending regularly: they make self-protective choices to miss school, preserving their dignity and wellbeing

2. Authentic Partnerships

- Complexity means we cannot solve this alone
- We must communicate with humility about our roles in the problem
 - Without this, we will be insincere about partnering
 - If we are “Teflon-coated,” we won’t be open to our contributions to problems or solutions
- This is true for partnerships with students, families and service providers
- Expand spaces for community partners to support students and families that the school cannot reach (both practically and ideologically)

3. Students who slide will disengage

- Most families do not have resources for tutoring
- Students struggle with
 - Saying they do not understand, or try it once, and don't ask again
 - Asking for extra help outside the classroom
 - Internalizing a sense of inadequacy that they can't achieve
- Need assertive engagement, shouldering responsibility for student success
 - Have extra help available in multiple formats
 - Need to leverage family support to catch up
 - Need to be effectively tracked

4. School Climate

- Conduct a school climate audit, beginning with community partners, to identify the strengths and challenges in place
 - Later expand to include the voices of all students and parents
- Aim for
 - Welcoming and affirming for all students and parents
 - Language access
 - Racial, cultural, income and disability respect
- Lessen the experience of being an outsider

5a. Teacher Practices: Structural

- Teaching teams where colleagues learn from and stretch each other, and share information on student histories and challenges
- Professional development
 - Culturally responsive pedagogy
 - Anti-racism and anti-oppressive practice
 - Inclusive classrooms
 - Implicit bias and unpacking conventions that marginalize student groups
 - Parent communication
 - Teaching content to parents to support their children

5b. Teacher Practices: Behavioral

These can be implemented immediately...

- Greet every student, every day, with kindness
- Contact all parents with affirmation of their child's strengths
- Learn the histories of students' heritage
 - Check the curriculum against these histories and integrate affirming content where missing
- Be on your own course of dismantling bias, white privilege and positional privilege
- End the use of sarcasm or belittling humor
- Aim for engaged, active student experiences

6. Upstream Improvements

- Smaller classrooms so teachers can reach out to struggling students AND their parents
- Greater diversity of educators
- A district-wide late bus... better to miss half a day than the whole day
- School discipline needs standardized, rights-infused, restorative approaches
- Build a safety net under students who struggle the most
- Expand course offerings that prepare students for employment after high school
- Further upstream: Living wage jobs that pay the bills

Partners: *The complexity of the issue requires a broad spectrum of Partners*

- ❑ ODE & PHD joint focus/Steering Committee/MOU
- ❑ Presenting to ODE Student Services Staff
- ❑ ODE Nutrition Education & Programs
- ❑ Achievement compacts: 6th & 8th grades
- ❑ Participation in Network for Advancing State Attendance Policy and Practice (NASAPP)
- ❑ Attendance Works: <http://www.attendanceworks.org/>
- ❑ OEIB: Priorities for chronic absenteeism & 3rd grade reading/Local study
 - ❑ Scott Perry: Attendance Audits
 - ❑ The Children's Institute
 - ❑ All Hands Raised
 - ❑ Oregon Tribes
 - ❑ Attendance Works ([Oregon Link](#))
 - ❑ ECO Northwest
 - ❑ Upstream Public Health
 - ❑ Oregon Department of Human Services
 - ❑ Chalkboard Project
 - ❑ Portland State University and Coalition of Communities of Color