

SPOTLIGHT

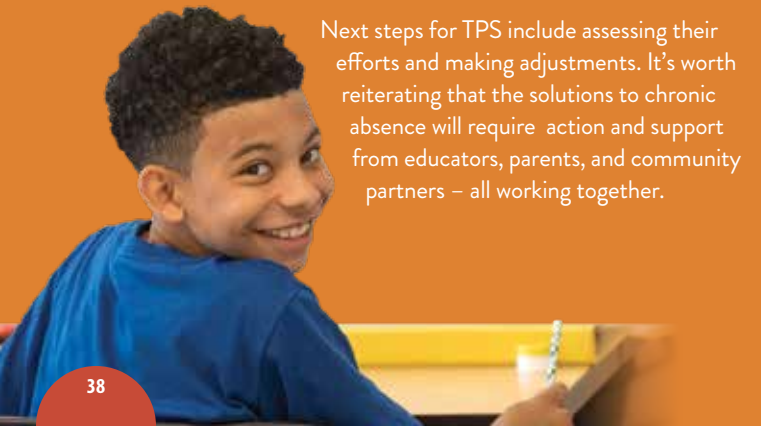
TPS Takes on Chronic Absence

Attendance is a community indicator – one the Graduate Tacoma partnership tracks in order to determine how to affect it from a broader-based perspective.

TPS has its own attendance measures and systems in place, but chronic absence persists and begs community involvement to reach solutions. TPS staff at all levels work to understand the causes of chronic absence and reverse its upward trend, especially among high schoolers. Here are a few of the things TPS is doing to address the issue:

- High school principals can see data in real time that tells them who's on the verge of chronic absence. They then work with students to get them back on track.
- If a student is absent without parental permission, parents are notified quickly with an automated phone call.
- This marks the second year TPS has sent nudge letters to the parents of students who have missed 10% or more of school days.
- A joint TPS and Graduate Tacoma Attendance Awareness campaign – in collaboration with several community partners – promotes messaging around the importance of attendance.
- Parents and guardians in every student household are provided with an absence tracker, to help monitor their students' missed school days.
- From school to school, rewards and recognition for good attendance vary. Manitou Park Elementary, for example, has been particularly successful in this realm.
- When it comes to truancy, TPS has taken a whole-child approach, working with students to understand their individual situation and find solutions to meet their educational needs.

Next steps for TPS include assessing their efforts and making adjustments. It's worth reiterating that the solutions to chronic absence will require action and support from educators, parents, and community partners – all working together.



COMMUNITY INDICATORS

ATTENDANCE

KEY FINDINGS

Absence Rates Call Attention to Disparity

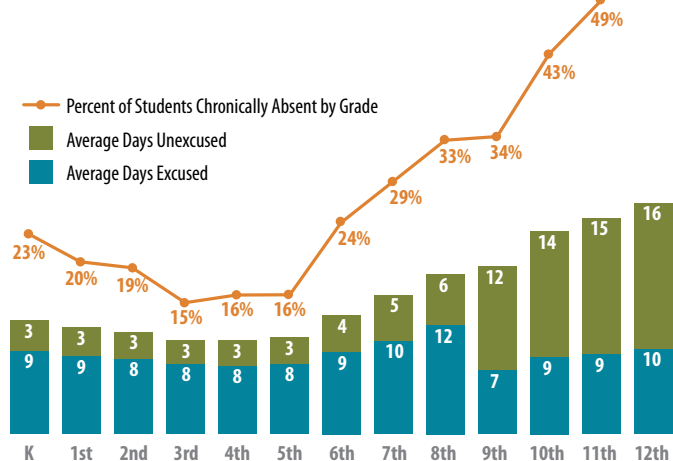
To track attendance, we measure chronic absence (missing 10% or more of the school year, excused or unexcused). The overall rate of chronic absence has remained stagnant since 2013-14, inching up one point this year to 28% since 2016. When we start to pull apart that percentage, patterns become clear.

First, chronic absence levels for elementary and middle school students are relatively low – 18% and 29% on average, respectively. Not until high school does the chronic absence rate start to skyrocket – driven by unexcused absences – to an average of 45%. That is especially true for students living in poverty, who are nearly twice as likely (55%) as their more affluent peers to be chronically absent.

Chronic absence gaps by race and poverty begin to widen in high school: In elementary school, Students of Color post as “chronically absent” from 5 to 14 points more often than their White peers. By high school, the gap in chronic absence among Students of Color expands to 14 to 26 points, nearly double the middle school levels. Chronic absence rates for Black and Pacific Islander students have risen across the district in nearly every grade since 2014-15 (on average, up 3% and 5% respectively). Elementary students in poverty lag behind those not in poverty by 12%. That gap has almost doubled by the time those students are in high school (22%).

CHRONIC ABSENCE (18+ DAYS) – 2016-17

UNEXCUSED VS EXCUSED ABSENCES

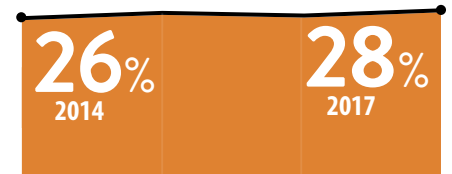


Data Source: TPS

DATA TRENDS

BASELINE TO CURRENT

Chronic Absence, K-12 Average



AIMING HIGHER GOAL: Decrease the percentage of students who are chronically absent – missing 10% (18 days) or more of the school year, excused or unexcused.

DEMOGRAPHIC BREAKOUT

TPS Chronic Absence Rates, Grades K-12

