

# COUNSELING DEPARTMENT

## Why Is School Attendance Important?

## The Effects of Chronic Absenteeism



Chronic absenteeism is a national crisis that is seen throughout our schools. Many factors have contributed to the rise in students having inconsistent attendance including COVID concerns, the rise in mental health challenges, lack of motivation, inability to feel personal success, poor family support, lack of value in education, social emotional concerns, and issues surrounding negative peer interactions and relationships. As many as one in six students in the United States miss enough school to be considered chronically absent. The negative effects of absenteeism on a student's education can be profound, and they often carry into adulthood which in turn, negatively impacts their ability to be successful in the workplace. Creating poor attendance habits early in a student's educational career can carry over into having poor patterns of attendance at work.

The harmful impact of chronic absenteeism threatens all students, but the risks are not born equally. Students of color, students who live in poverty, students with diagnosed and undiagnosed mental health concerns, and students with chronic health conditions and/or disabilities all experience disproportionately high absence rates. The increased use of technology, internet, gaming, and social media have also contributed to a rise in school absence by causing students to not get adequate sleep- in turn leading students to oversleep and miss class.

## Why Is School Attendance Important?

School attendance is a powerful predictor of student outcomes. In fact, irregular attendance can be a better predictor of whether students will drop out of school before graduation than test scores. The correlation between attendance and dropout rates has important ramifications that go beyond the classroom. Compared to their peers who graduate, students who fail to complete their high school education are more likely to live in poverty, suffer poor physical and mental health, and become involved in the criminal justice system.



## School Attendance Facts

In looking at national attendance data it is evident that the problem is widespread. The following are current attendance facts:

- ⊕ More than seven million students in the U.S.—16 percent of the student population—missed 15 or more days of school.
- ⊕ Approximately 800 school districts reported more than 30 percent of their students missed at least three weeks of school.
- ⊕ Chronic absenteeism rates are highest in high schools, where about one in five students is chronically absent.
- ⊕ More than 25 percent of students were chronically absent in six states (Alaska, Nevada, New York, Oregon, Rhode Island, Washington) and the District of Columbia.
- ⊕ Every state had schools that reported 10 percent or more of students as chronically absent.

## Causes of Poor School Attendance

Many factors are associated with poor school attendance:

- **Physical Health Issues.** Health conditions such as asthma, influenza, diabetes, tooth decay, and obesity are all associated with higher rates of student absenteeism.

- **Poor Peer Relationships.** Approximately 20 percent of students in the U.S. aged 12 to 18 experience negative peer interactions. This behavior can include emotional abuse (name-calling, insults, teasing), the threat of harm or actual physical abuse (being pushed, tripped, or beaten), destruction of property, and ostracization (exclusion, being made the subject of rumors or lies). In the U.S., low socioeconomic status is a common factor in bullying. Since the COVID shut down, more students have struggled with being able to manage relationships positively. Social distancing and isolation drastically impacted kid's ability to socially interact, problem solve, make and keep friends, and manage their emotions in healthy ways.
- **Socioeconomic Hardship.** Socioeconomic hardship can lead to unstable housing or homelessness, as well as limited transportation resources. One child in six lives in poverty in the U.S., according to Children International.

Academic struggles can also cause students to become disengaged with school, which is one of the reasons that students with learning deficits, mental health concerns, and behavioral issues struggle with absenteeism. Students can fall into a deep attendance hole. They originally miss a few days of school and continue to avoid school in response to feeling academically behind. They feel overwhelmed with the amount of back work needing to be completed and fall into a pattern of continued avoidance. Even being tardy or late for school can cause a child to miss important instruction and in turn lead to feeling behind.

*Let's work together to come up with a plan to assist students in feeling successful and not emotionally/academically overwhelmed with attending school.*

## **Mental Health and School Attendance**

Mental health issues are among the factors that contribute to chronic absences. Diagnoses of anxiety disorder and depression have drastically increased over the past two years. As many as 2.8 million children aged 12 to 17 in the U.S. have at least one major depressive episode in a year. Approximately 80 percent of children with an anxiety disorder and 60 percent with depression are not treated, according to the Anxiety and Depression Association of America. One in four children will experience a mental health challenge in their lifetime. Chronic absenteeism has also been linked to trauma, which can include experiences ranging from abuse and neglect to the loss of a loved one. More than half of students will experience a traumatic event by the time they reach adulthood.



## Effects of Poor School Attendance

When children are absent from school, they miss out on consistent instruction that is needed to develop basic skills. Children in early grades are particularly susceptible to falling behind in fundamental reading skills, which can have a snowball effect that impacts future learning.

Children who have learning and behavioral challenges can be especially vulnerable to the impact of absenteeism because missing school reduces opportunities for any interventions that might be necessary for their success. If teachers can't provide the direct instruction required for learning, it becomes difficult to decipher whether lack of academic growth is due to a true disability or due to excessive absence from school, essentially confusing the symptom for the cause.

Students who fail to read at grade level by the end of third grade are four times more likely than students who achieve proficiency to drop out of high school. Adults without a high school education generally earn lower incomes and experience higher unemployment than their peers who do earn a high school diploma, putting them at greater risk for poverty.

Poor attendance can also have a negative effect on social and emotional development. For example, students who are chronically absent in the early years of their education may not learn crucial school readiness skills (abilities such as critical thinking, problem solving, social skills, and creative thinking), and can fall behind their peers in social-emotional development. Excessive absences are also associated with lower scores on standardized tests, which typically assess primary skills and concepts.



## Strategies for Parents

Parents who are concerned that their child has a problem with school attendance or school avoidance can implement several strategies:

- **Talk with the Child.** Conversations are the first step to understanding root causes and working toward a solution.
- **Contact the School.** Teachers, counselors, and administrators may be able to provide additional information that helps determine what is causing a child to miss school. Contacting the school also starts a conversation that can be mutually beneficial, and it demonstrates engagement.
- **Speak Positively About School and Become an Involved Parent.** When a child sees the parent value education, they begin to see the value in school. Make an effort to go through their take-home folder every night, assist with and encourage regular homework completion, check the Power School Parent Portal to stay up to date with grades and assignments, and make school discussion a regular conversation in your home. Even if a parent has had a bad educational experience, it is vital to not let that trauma negatively impact their child's school experience. Stay in contact with teachers, call the counselor if necessary, attend school events, actively participate in school activities; show your child school is important in your life and in theirs.
- **Set Attendance Goals with the Child.** Creating a plan and tracking progress can encourage better attendance and provide opportunities for conversations and support. Simple steps such as making sure a child gets enough sleep and taking steps to prepare for school the day the night before can also be effective.

*Pine Valley's commitment to school attendance is stronger than ever.*

The school has put programs in place to recognize strong and consistent attendance in our students. We will continue to reinforce consistent attendance with students who currently demonstrate commitment to being in school and motivate those who need more support in getting to school regularly. We thank parents for supporting us in remaining committed to consistent school attendance.

