

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM INDICATOR?

The Chronic Absenteeism indicator has three purposes:

- To highlight the importance of regular school attendance to student success in school and beyond
- To encourage schools to actively engage with students and their families in eliminating barriers to regular attendance
- To ensure students receive the supports needed to attend school every day

Because chronic absenteeism has been linked to lower academic performance, higher dropout rates and diminished success after high school, Oklahoma has included Chronic Absenteeism as an indicator in the school accountability system adopted under the requirements of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). It is important to note that the Chronic Absenteeism school accountability indicator is not the same as a local district attendance policy. Local attendance policies vary in how they code absences (excused or unexcused, school activity, medical, etc.). Even excused absences count toward the Chronic Absenteeism indicator in order to identify and support students whose absences put them at academic risk. Absences of as few as two days per month put a student at risk of falling behind academically. To maximize instructional time, therefore, the state accountability system accounts for all absences – excused or unexcused – regardless of reason.

Further, chronic absenteeism is not a zero-tolerance indicator. Students are considered chronically absent if they have missed only 10 percent or more of instructional time during the school year (for a standard academic calendar, that equates to approximately 18 days). For example, a student who misses a week due to the flu is not immediately identified as chronically absent. That student would have to miss an additional 13 days in a traditional school calendar in order to be identified as chronically absent. The goal of this indicator is to identify and support students who have missed enough school that it could put them at risk of academic failure.

However, special circumstances may exist for students with significant medical conditions, and Oklahoma law, at 70 O.S. § 1210.545, requires the State Board of Education to outline the requirements for a significant medical exemption. In March 2018, the State Board of Education approved an emergency rule for medical exemptions that was then signed by the governor. The rule, at Oklahoma Administrative Code [210:10-13-24. Medical exemptions from chronic absenteeism](#), outlines the criteria for an exempted absence. Among other scenarios, this exemption applies to students who are receiving treatment for a chronic or terminal disease or students who have lost an immediate family member.

In addition, students with disabilities on an IEP or Section 504 plan may have absences that should not count toward chronic absentee status:

(d) Absences from school that do not accrue toward chronic absentee status. A student with disabilities who is on an Individualized Education Program (IEP), or a student with a physical or mental impairment who is on a Section 504 Plan, is considered in attendance and does not accrue absences while receiving offsite services addressed in the IEP or Section 504 plan. A student on an IEP or Section 504 Plan whose condition worsens or who requires more frequent treatments should have their IEP or Section 504 Plan updated accordingly. A student who is receiving homebound education services from their school district is considered in attendance and does not accrue absences while in homebound status.

HOW CAN THE IEP OR SECTION 504 TEAM ADDRESS THE NEEDS OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES WHO ARE CHRONICALLY ABSENT?

- Meet to address the student's individual needs and determine appropriate interventions/strategies.
- Formally document health or related issues that interfere with school attendance and indicate steps to mitigate adverse outcomes from absences.
- Recognize barriers or underlying causes of the student's chronic absences.
- Make modifications to existing IEPs or Section 504 plans as a result of monitoring, review and oversight of the student's progress in light of the number of absences.
- Consider how the student can be provided with instruction and supportive services by qualified personnel during periods of extended absence, when possible.
- Consider how students who are unable to be tutored or otherwise receive instruction during their absence from school can be provided supplemental instruction.
- Act quickly to address absences directly related to a student's disability, such as anxiety or depression, that lead to refusal to attend or stay in school. Students may need a behavior intervention plan or attendance incentives incorporated in their Section 504 Plan or IEP to help them overcome issues that interfere with attendance. At the high school level, where rates of absenteeism often increase, involve students in developing solutions and strategies for reducing absences and improving the school climate.

WHEN DO YOU COUNT A STUDENT WITH DISABILITIES PRESENT?

If a student is receiving specific services (even out-of-school care) outlined in an IEP/504 plan in order to receive FAPE, that student should be marked present.

- Services are not limited to those documented in the special education and related services section of the IEP. Services may include doctor's visits or other medical absences that are due to the child's disability. As long as the team has determined that the reason for an absence is due to the child's disability and the information is documented in the IEP/504 plan, the student should be considered present. Documentation may include:
 - Expectations of absences (number of days) based on type of disability and specific services identified.
 - Modifications made as a result of monitoring, review and oversight of the student's progress in light of the expected number of absences
 - How the student will be provided with instruction and supportive services by qualified personnel during periods of extended absence, when possible.
 - If a condition worsens or a change in services is required, the IEP/504 plan must be updated accordingly.
- If a student is receiving services outside the school setting, the LEA must ensure that all responsible parties are aware of the outside services and when the student is receiving the services.
- The LEA must also ensure that students receiving outside services during the school day continue to have access to and make progress in the general education curriculum.
- Students receiving homebound education services from their school district are considered in attendance.

WHEN DO YOU COUNT A STUDENT WITH DISABILITIES ON AN IEP OR SECTION 504 PLAN ABSENT (WHETHER EXCUSED OR UNEXCUSED) FOR THE PURPOSE OF ACCRUING CHRONIC ABSENTEE STATUS?

- If a parent takes a child out of school for services (i.e., speech, occupational therapy, physical therapy, counseling or other therapy) but the IEP team determines those services are not needed for educational purposes and are not documented on the IEP/504 plan, the student should be marked absent.
- If a parent takes a child out of school for services (i.e., speech, occupational therapy, physical therapy, counseling or other therapy) but the IEP team determines comparable services can be provided by the district and have been offered by the district, the student should be marked absent.
- If a student misses school but is not receiving a specific service during that time (i.e., is not attending because of anxiety or depression) that student should be marked absent.

ARE THERE OTHER CONSIDERATIONS TO KEEP IN MIND REGARDING THE CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM INDICATOR?

- If the reason for absences is not documented in the IEP and the absences are **not** related to the disability, the school can still request a medical exemption if the student absence(s) meets the required criteria. Medical exemptions are only available for a student with a documented severe or chronic health condition (including mental health). Examples of absences that may be eligible for a medical exemption are: recurring treatments like chemotherapy or dialysis, doctor or therapist appointments related to an ongoing condition and other severe or chronic condition-related absences.
- Whether a student's absence is unexcused or excused should be determined by district policy.
- The impact of a student's absence (regarding grades, completion of coursework, etc.), whether excused or unexcused, should be determined by district policy.

RESOURCES

Students with Disabilities and Chronic Absenteeism – National Center on Educational Outcomes

- <https://nceo.umn.edu/docs/OnlinePubs/NCEOBrief15.pdf>

Chronic Absenteeism and Students with Disabilities: Health Issues of Students with Disabilities: Impact on Attendance – National Center on Educational Outcomes

- <https://nceo.umn.edu/docs/OnlinePubs/ChronicAbsenteeismHealthIssuesSWD.pdf>