



ABSENTEEISM IN MINNESOTA

SUMN.org FACT SHEET

2018

What is the issue?

Overview

Missed school—whether partial or full days, excused or unexcused—can add up over time. Chronic absence is associated with poor academic performance, and is the leading indicator that a student will drop out of high school. There are numerous reasons kids miss school, including poor health, not feeling safe at school, or needing to help care for siblings or parents. Schools and communities can play a role in supporting youth and their parents/caregivers to improve attendance. By understanding truancy, educational neglect and chronic absenteeism, as well as the reporting procedures and practices of schools, communities can positively grow consistent school attendance and impact student developmental outcomes.

*Every day a student is absent from school, an opportunity for learning is lost—
Attendance Works.org*

In this report, we define truancy, as measured by Minnesota schools; the scope and prevalence of the issue; the effects of absenteeism on students' mental and physical health, as well as on their school performance; and ways to combat truancy in schools. Two case studies from Minnesota communities—one outstate, one metro—are included.

How is truancy measured?

Minnesota Statutes

Minnesota cares about school attendance and has implemented state laws and district policies regarding compulsory school attendance. **Truancy** is defined as any missed day or partial day—even just one school period—with no excuse. Students with **7 or more unexcused absences** in a year (of either full or partial days) meet the statute for **educational neglect** or **habitual truancy**. Students who are **absent for 10% or more of the school year** (based on percent of hours attended), whether excused or unexcused, are considered **chronically absent**. Schools and districts track attendance for both habitual truancy and chronic absence.

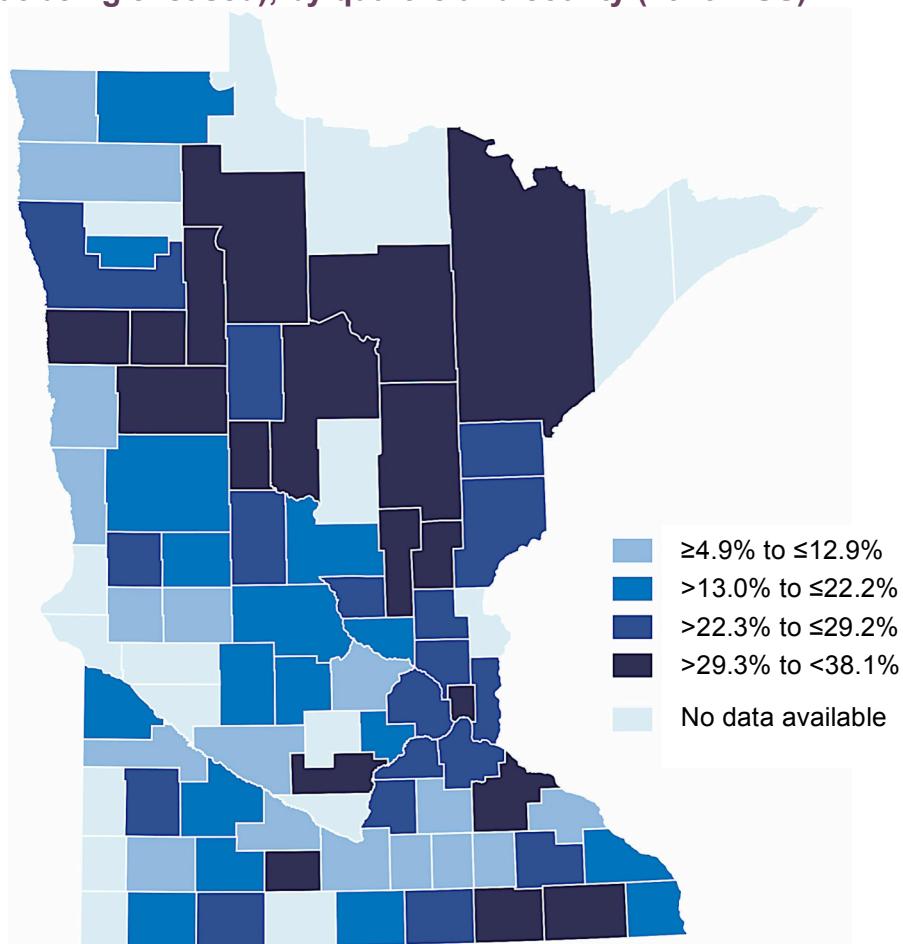
Minnesota Student Survey (MSS)

The MSS asks students to report the number of times during the past 30 days they skipped part of a day of school and/or an entire day, without being excused. Response options include: 0, 1-2, 3-5, 6-9, and 10 or more times. Students are not asked why they skipped.

It is important to note that these are data self-reported by students, which may not align with records maintained by schools and districts. Schools may wish to compare their own data to students' reported data (which can be found at the county level at SUMN.org).

How prevalent is truancy in Minnesota?

Figure 1. Minnesota truancy rates (skipping at least one full day of school in the past month, without being excused), by quartile and county (2016 MSS)



Some of the highest rates of truancy are reported in the middle-north section of the state. The metro area reports moderately high rates, in the 3rd and 4th quartiles.

A substantial number of students are already reporting skipping school in 8th grade, indicating that prevention efforts should be implemented in middle or elementary school. However, students are more likely to report skipping just once or twice in the past month, as opposed to more often.

Figure 2. By 8th grade, more than 1 of 6 students already report skipping 1+ full or partial days in the past 30 days (2016 MSS)

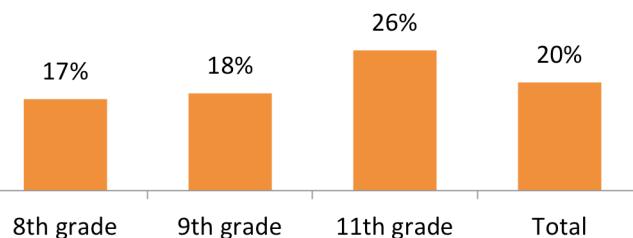
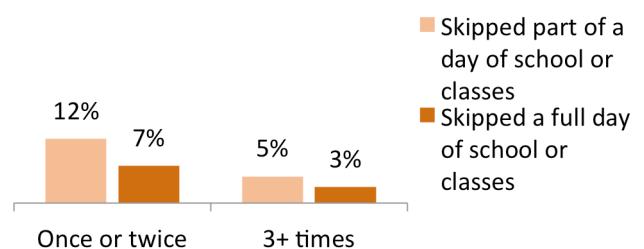


Figure 3. Students were over twice as likely to report skipping once or twice—as opposed to 3 or more times—in the past 30 days (2016 MSS)



Why does attendance matter?

Numerous studies show that students who attend school regularly are more likely build the good habits they need to graduate and succeed in a job. Students who are in school more perform better, from early childhood through graduation.

MSS Findings

While MSS data can't show whether or not one factor *causes* another (i.e., whether skipping school causes poor grades), it can show the extent to which one factor is associated with another.

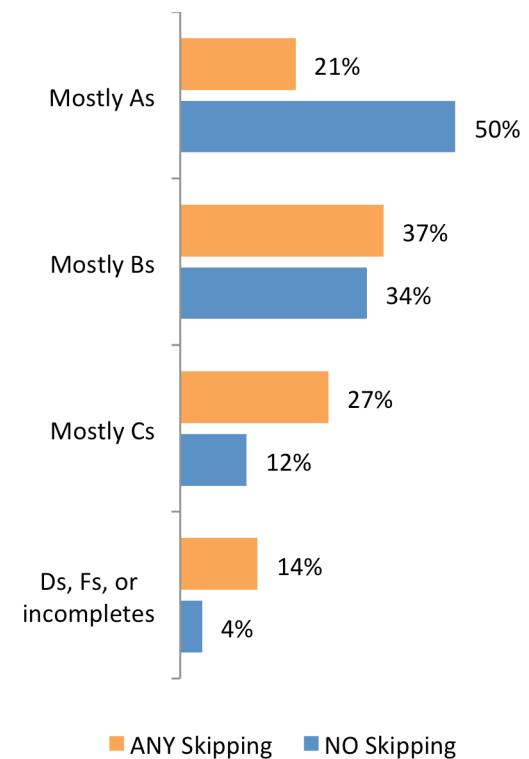
Minnesota 8th, 9th, and 11th graders reporting *NO* past-month skipping were:

- 2.4 times more likely to report usually **getting A grades**: 50% vs. 21% (see Figure 3)
- 1.4 times more likely to report greater **educational engagement**: 80% vs. 56%

They were also:

- 1.7 times less likely to say they don't **feel good about their future**: 24% vs. 42%
- 1.6 times less likely to say they don't **feel in control of their life and future**: 25% vs. 41%

Figure 4. Minnesota students who did NOT skip school in the past month were 2.4 times more likely to report getting mostly A grades (2016 MSS)



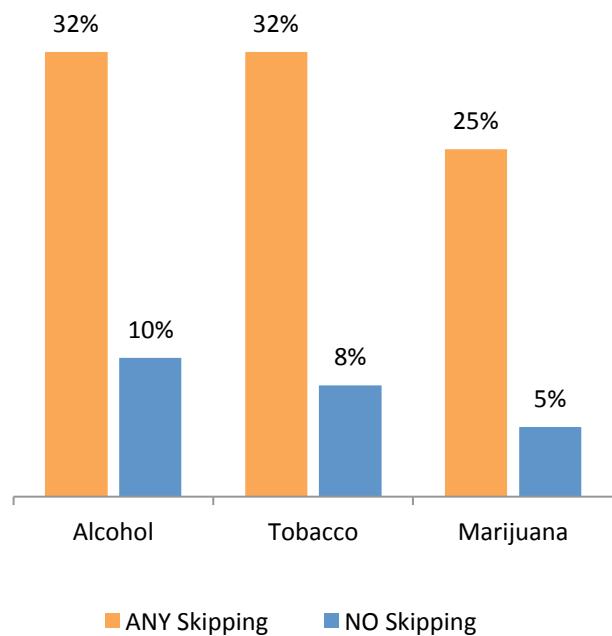
CASE STUDY: Saint Paul Public Schools

To combat absenteeism, Saint Paul Public Schools (SPPS) partnered with the City of Saint Paul, the Ramsey County Attorney's office, and the Saint Paul Children's Collaborative to develop the "Attendance Matters" Awareness Campaign. The campaign educates students and their families about the differences between excused and unexcused absences, and about the consequences—for both the students and their caretakers—of truancy.

The campaign also highlights SPPS's Truancy Intervention Program (TIP), a multi-step process to address individual cases of chronic truancy. As part of the TIP process, letters are sent to caretakers of students who have more than 3 unexcused absences, offering tips on improving students' attendance, and outlining consequences of violating school attendance laws. The process of addressing truancy may also include:

- Meetings with the Assistant County Attorney
- Participation in a Student Attendance Review Team (SART) hearing
- Required parenting classes or counseling
- In some situations, fines may be imposed and court hearings may be scheduled for caretakers

Figure 5. Minnesota 8th, 9th, and 11th graders who skipped school in the past month were much more likely to report past-month alcohol, tobacco, and marijuana use (2016 MSS)



How is absenteeism associated with poor youth health outcomes?

While substance use and mental health issues may be risk factors for missed school, the association is complex. Absenteeism shares a number of risk factors with both. Examples include adverse childhood experiences, family conflict, homelessness, and chronic stress.

MSS Findings

Minnesota students reporting ANY past-month skipping were more likely to report substance use:

- 2.6 times more likely to report past-month **alcohol use** (see Figure 5)
- 2.8 times more likely to report past-month **tobacco use** (see Figure 5)

They were also more likely to report mental health issues:

- 1.4 times more likely to report past two-week **depressive symptoms**: 31% vs. 22%
- 1.5 times more likely to report **past-year suicidal thoughts**: 18% vs. 12%

CASE STUDY: Itasca County

Since 2003, the Itasca County Truancy Prevention Program (ICTPP) has been operated by Ross Resources, Ltd. and is jointly funded through the Itasca County Family Services Collaborative, Itasca County Health and Human Services, the Itasca County Probation Department, and four school districts located in the county. The ICTPP has adopted the framework of the Science of the Positive*, after two school districts were introduced to the framework through Planning and Implementation Grants. Ten Truancy Prevention Specialists are embedded in 14 different school sites working with students and families to remove barriers that prevent school attendance.

The program focuses on building infrastructure around prevention strategies including:

- Focusing on the positive: 93% of students meet the required attendance criteria; only 16% are chronically absent
- Emphasizing relationships and interpersonal connections within families, schools, and communities
- Involving community adults and other stakeholders in preventing truancy
- Training adults in multiple sectors about the effects of truancy and how to reduce absenteeism

*Dr. Jeff Linkenbach, www.montanainstitute.com

Which youth are most at risk?

National research shows that low-income children, children of color and students with disabilities are at increased risk for chronic absenteeism. Students with Adverse Childhood Experiences (see Figure 5) are also disproportionately impacted by absenteeism.

MSS Findings

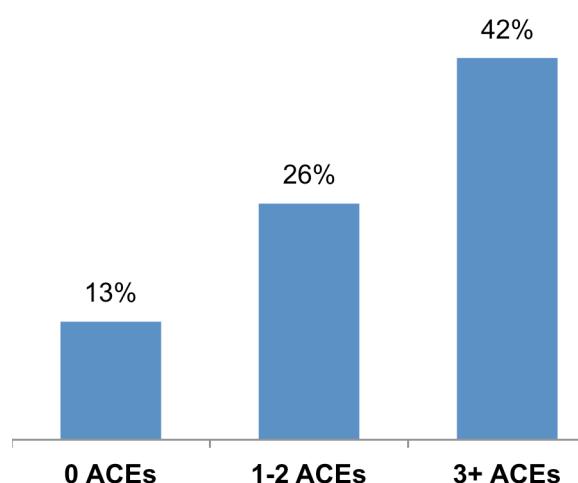
Data from Minnesota's 2016 MSS show that children with food or housing insecurity were more likely to have skipped class:

- Students who had to **skip meals** in the past month because their family couldn't afford food were 2.3 times more likely to report any unexcused absences: 42% vs. 18%
- Students who had to **stay in a shelter** or at someone else's home in the past year because they had no other place to stay were 2 times more likely to report truancy: 37% vs. 18%
- Students with **3+ ACEs** were 3.2 times more likely to report truancy compared to students with no ACEs: 42% vs. 13% (see Figure 6)
- Students experiencing weekly **bullying** were 1.7 times more likely to report truancy: 30% vs. 18%

Data from Minnesota's statewide 2016 MSS show:

- **Students of color** were more likely to report any past-month unexcused absences: 40% of American Indian students, 23% of Asian students, 31% of Black students, 31% of Hispanic students, and 16% of White students
- **LGB** students were more likely to report any past-month unexcused absences: 33% of bisexual students, 30% of lesbian or gay students, and 21% of heterosexual students

Figure 6. The percentage of Minnesota students reporting any past-month skipping increased by number of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) reported by the student (2016 MSS)



Adverse Childhood Experiences from the Minnesota Student Survey:

- A parent/guardian in jail
- Alcohol abuse at home
- Drug abuse at home
- Verbal abuse
- Physical abuse
- Domestic abuse
- Sexual abuse

Which protective factors can play a role?

Caring Adults

All community stakeholders can play a role in reducing barriers to regular school attendance for youth. For example, MSS data show that Minnesota **students who feel that school staff and other adults in the community care about them** are more likely to attend class consistently.

- Minnesota 8th, 9th, and 11th graders who think **teachers and other adults at school care about them** very much or quite a bit were **1.8 times less likely** to report skipping school in the past 30 days: 13% vs. 25% (compared to those who think school staff care some, a little, or not at all)
- Similarly, youth who think **adults in the community care about them** very much or quite a bit were **1.7 times less likely** to report skipping school in the past month: 13% vs. 23%

What can be done to boost attendance?

Strategies for Schools

- **Recognize both good attendance and improved attendance**
 - ✓ Offer incentives such as certificates, extra recess time, or healthy snacks
 - ✓ Hold contests, such as competitions between classes or grades, or a student poster contest highlighting the importance of attendance
 - ✓ Focus on positive messaging, highlighting the importance of attendance rather than negative consequences resulting from truancy
- **Engage students and their parents/guardians**
 - ✓ Raise awareness of school attendance policies, and the importance of attendance, through parent-teacher conferences or materials sent home with students
 - ✓ Educate parents about excused vs. exempted vs. unexcused absences.
 - ✓ Meet with parents and guardians in community settings, like libraries or cafes
- **Track the right data**
 - ✓ Track individual students' tardiness and chronic absences in addition to average school-wide attendance
 - ✓ Track both excused and unexcused absences to see how many kids are missing too much school for any reason
- **Provide personalized early outreach and intervention**
 - ✓ Identify barriers faced by families such as transportation issues or family illness
 - ✓ Assign school staff and peer-to-peer mentors for students struggling with chronic absence
 - ✓ Provide a school liaison who can connect families with community supports
 - ✓ Link families to mental health services for both youth and caregivers
- **Develop programmatic response to barriers**, such as ensuring students have safe routes to school or providing breakfast in the classroom
- **Educate the broader community** about the importance of attendance in building the future workforce; make school attendance a community norm.

Resources

- Attendance Works: <http://www.attendanceworks.org/>
- Mapping the Early Attendance Gap: Charting a Course for School Success:
<http://www.attendanceworks.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Mapping-the-Early-Attendance-Gap-Final-4.pdf>
- United Way: <https://admin.unitedway.org/our-impact/focus/education/out-of-school-time/featured-topics/attendance>
- National Center for School Engagement: <http://schoolengagement.org/>
- Minnesota Department of Education, World's Best Workforce:
<http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/dse/wbwf/>

SUMN.org

SUMN is a one-stop-shop for data, tools, and prevention resources. Visitors can search county, regional, and state level data by topic, by location, and by demographic producing tables, charts, graphs, and maps. View and download data products, such as this fact sheet, and find tips on finding, analyzing, translating, using, and disseminating data.

- Use the 'Data by Topic' search function to access county level data
- Visit the 'Publications' page to find SUMN fact sheets on a variety of risk and protective factors.

Funded by the Minnesota Department of Human Services Alcohol and Drug Abuse Division

Contact Us

Find more data on absenteeism and other topics at [SUMN.org](http://sumn.org)

For questions or more information regarding the State Epidemiological Outcomes Workgroup or SUMN.org, please email: info@sumn.org