



ABSENTEEISM IN ITASCA COUNTY

SUMN.org FACT SHEET

2017

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, 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.

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

How is it measured?

Minnesota Statutes

Minnesota cares about school attendance and has implemented state laws and district policies regarding compulsory school attendance. Students with **7 or more unexcused absences** in a year meet the statute for **educational neglect** or **truancy**. Students who are **absent for 10% or more of the school year**, whether excused or unexcused, are considered **chronically absent**. Schools and districts track attendance for both 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. In Itasca County, the 2016 MSS was completed by 367 eighth-graders, 416 ninth graders, and 288 eleventh graders for a combined sample of 1,071 students.

How prevalent is truancy in Itasca County?

Figure 1. Itasca County students were more likely than average to report skipping one or more full or partial days in the past 30 days (2016 MSS)

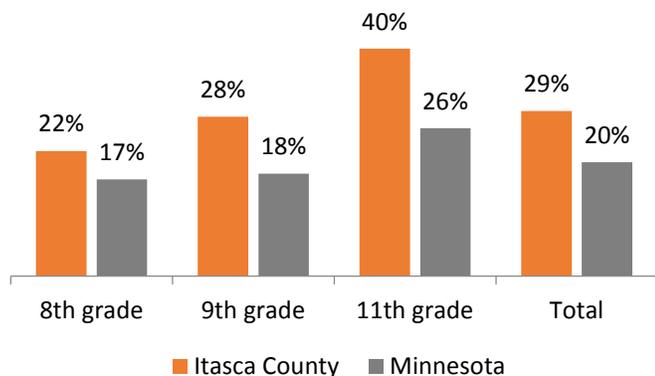


Figure 2. Eight percent of Itasca County 8th, 9th and 11th graders skipped part of a day 3 or more times in the past 30 days (2016 MSS)

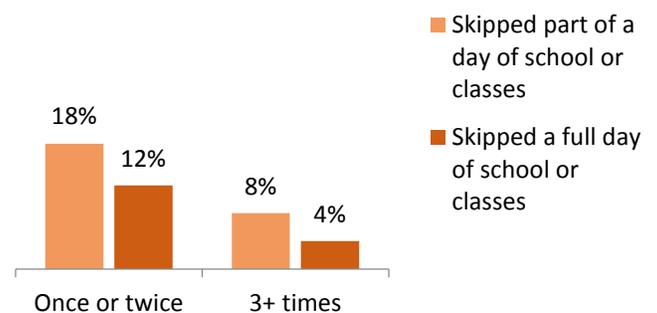
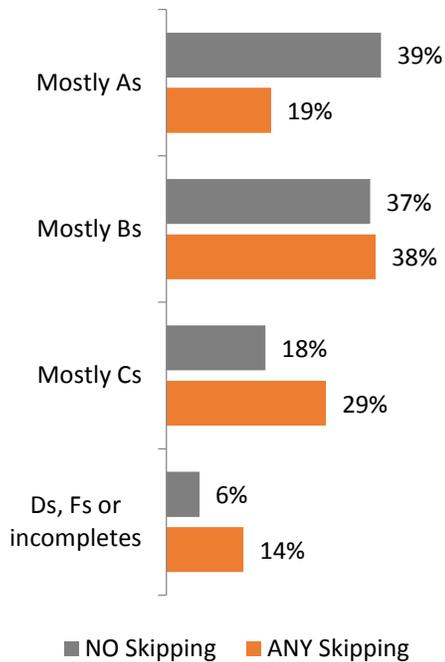


Figure 3. Itasca County students who did NOT skip any school in the past 30 days were 2x more likely to report getting mostly A grades (2016 MSS)



Why does attendance matter?

Numerous studies show that students who don't attend school regularly don't build the good habits they need to graduate and succeed in a job. Students who are in school more do 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.

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

- **2x more likely to report usually getting A grades:** 39% vs. 19% (see Figure 3)
- **1.6x more likely to report greater educational engagement:** 73% vs. 46%

They were also...

- **2x less likely to say they don't plan to graduate from high school or just plan to get their G.E.D.:** 2% vs. 4%
- **1.7x less likely to say they don't feel good about their future:** 24% vs. 41%
- **1.3x less likely to say they don't feel in control of their life and future:** 26% vs. 35%

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 up-stream risk factors with both. Examples include adverse childhood experiences, family conflict, homelessness, and chronic stress.

MSS Findings

Itasca County students reporting *ANY* past-month skipping were:

- 2.5x more likely to report **past-month alcohol use** (see figure 4)
- 3.7x more likely to report **past-month marijuana use** (see figure 4)
- 1.7x more likely to report **past-two week depressive symptoms:** 38.3% vs. 22.4%
- 1.5x more likely to report **past-year suicidal thoughts:** 21% vs. 14%

Figure 4. Itasca County 8th, 9th and 11th graders who skipped school in the past month were much more likely to report past-month alcohol, tobacco and drug use (2016 MSS)

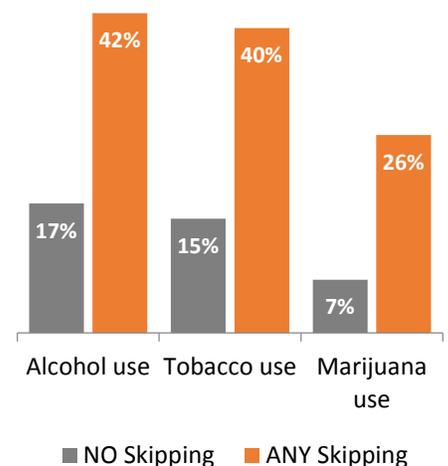
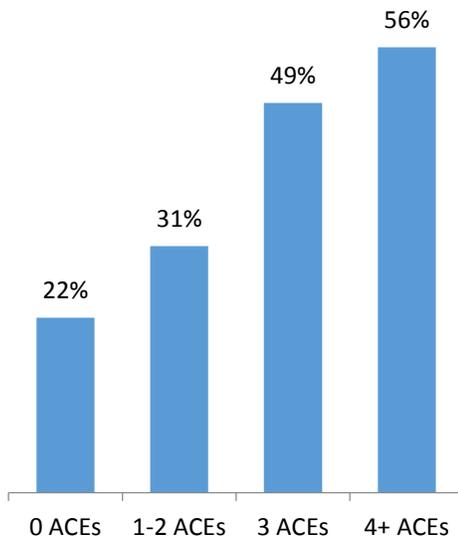


Figure 5. The percentage of Itasca County students reporting any past 30 day skipping increased by number of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) reported.



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 (ACEs) are also disproportionately impacted by absenteeism.

MSS Findings

Data from **Itasca County's** 2016 MSS show:

- Students who had to **skip meals** in the past month because their family couldn't afford food were 1.5x more likely to report any unexcused absences: 42% vs. 28%
- 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 1.7x more likely to report truancy: 46% vs. 27%
- Students with **4+ ACEs** were 2.5x more likely to report truancy compared to students with no ACEs: 56% vs. 22% (see Figure 5)
- Students who experienced bullying on a weekly basis were 1.5x more likely to report truancy: 39% vs. 26%

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

Which protective factors can play a role?

Caring Adults

Absenteeism is a problem that affects the whole community. All community stakeholders can play a role in reducing barriers to regular school attendance for youth. For example, 2016 MSS data show that Itasca County **students who feel that school staff, and other adults in the community, care about them** are less likely to report skipping school.

- Itasca County 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: **19% vs. 34%** (compared to those who think school staff care some, a little, or not at all)
- Similarly, Itasca County youth who think other adults in the community care about them very much or quite a bit were **1.5 times less likely** to report skipping school in the past 30 days: **22% vs. 32%**

According to Itasca County's 2014 Youth Voice survey results...

If youth have strong relationships with non-family adults, they are:

- ✓ **21% more likely to set personal learning goals**
- ✓ **18% more likely to be committed to learning**

<http://www.sparkfutures.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/BeyondFamiliesReport2017.pdf>

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.
 - ✓ Make home visits
- **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
- **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. Involve the board community in messaging about the importance of attendance.

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

To learn more about Itasca County efforts to address absenteeism, please email: info@rossresources.org

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