

Why September Matters: Improving Student Attendance

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This brief examines absences in September and students' attendance over the rest of the year. Attendance should be addressed before it becomes problematic. Chronic absenteeism, missing more than 20 days of a school year, is an early indicator of disengagement. High absence rates have negative consequences not only for individual students, but also for classroom instruction and school climate.

Does September attendance relate to a student's later attendance? A majority of Baltimore City students (77.6%) missed fewer than two days in September. This ranged from 83.3% for students in K-grade 5 to 63.3% for students in high school. However, across the district 8.0% of students missed more than four days, ranging from 2.8% for K-grade 5 to 20.5% for high school students.

Percent of Baltimore City Students Enrolled 90 or More
by September Absences and Grade Level

Days Absent September	% PreK	% K - 5	% 6 - 8	% 9 - 12	% All Grades
< 2	81.3	83.3	82.8	63.3	77.6
2 to 4	15.5	13.9	12.7	16.2	14.4
> 4	3.2	2.8	4.5	20.5	8.0

*Enrolled More than 90 Days

Students who missed fewer than 2 days in September continued to average fewer than 2 days absent each month.

Next, we examined attendance for October through May broken into the three September attendance categories. The consistency of the patterns suggests that attendance habits established in September persist over the whole year. Students who in September missed:

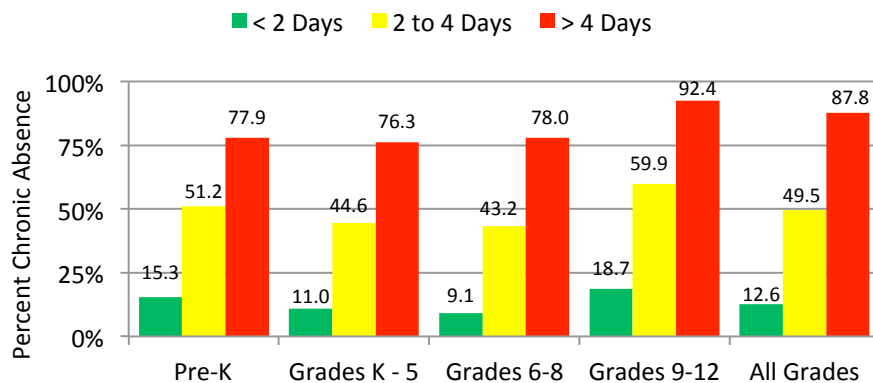
- Fewer than 2 days, continued to average fewer than 2 days absent each month, and over the year were absent an average of 10 days
- Fewer than 2 days, continued to average fewer than 2 days absent each month, and over the year were absent an average of 10 days
- Between 2 and 4 days, missed 2 to 3 days each month, totaling 25 days for the year, and
- More than 4 days, missed an average of 6 to 9 days each month, leading to a total of 70 days on average for the year.

Policy Brief

Informing Policy and Practice to Benefit Baltimore's Children

How does September attendance relate to chronic absence for the year? A small proportion of students (12.6%) who missed fewer than 2 days in September went on to be chronically absent. In contrast, nearly half (49.5%) of those missing 2 to 4 days in September went on to be chronically absent, and 87.8% of students absent for more than 4 days in September were chronically absent over the whole school year.

Figure 2. 2012-13 Chronic Absence Rate by September Absences



Students who missed 2 to 4 days in September were 5 times more likely than those who missed fewer than 2 days to be chronically absent for the year.

Additional analyses predicted students' chronic absence for the year by their September attendance, controlling for student demographic characteristics, service receipt, and attendance the previous school year (2011-12). Students who missed 2 or more days in September were significantly more likely to be chronically absent for the year. In fact,

- Students who missed 2 to 4 days in September were 5 times more likely to be chronically absent than students who were absent fewer than 2 days
- Students who missed more than 4 days were over 16 times as likely to be chronically absent than students who were absent fewer than 2 days

These results suggest that schools need to pay attention to student attendance from the earliest days in September, and intervene to get students back on track quickly.

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