

Reasons for Chronic Absenteeism Among PreK/Head Start Students

Survey Summary Report

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Executive Summary

This report presents information on the results of the *Reasons for Chronic Absenteeism — Parent (RCA-P) Survey* for parents of chronically absent students. The data were collected directly from 1,045 parents or guardians, henceforth referred to as “parent(s)”, of chronically absent PreK/Head Start students who live in a southeastern state from April through June 2017. Participants were recruited to participate based upon their student having missed 10% or more of instructional days during the 2016/2017 school year. The respondents rated survey items on a 0-3 scale which represented the reasons that they “never,” “rarely,” “sometimes,” or “usually” missed school. The percentage of parents who rated items within each category as “sometimes” or “usually” (rating of 2 or 3) the reason for missing school were calculated. The report provides information about parent perceptions of how often their students miss school, the reasons for chronic absenteeism, and ideas for improving attendance. The information provided by the survey may be used to inform a data-based problem-solving process that includes the development of evidence-based interventions to improve attendance in young children.

Findings

Perceptions of Absences. In an effort to better understand parents’ perceptions of their students’ absences, parents were asked to report their students’ number of absences during the school year. Thirty-six percent (**36.2%**) of the parents accurately recalled and/or reported absences consistent with chronic absenteeism. This finding may suggest an intervention opportunity (e.g. more frequent communication from the school/center indicating the “chronic” nature of absenteeism) to increase parent awareness of absences and the impact of chronic absenteeism on student performance.

When parents were asked about their student’s absences in relation to peers, **57.8%** perceived their student’s absence rate to be the same as or less than peers. Although additional analysis is warranted, it appears that this rate may indicate a skewed perception of what are considered typical absence rates, and this certainly indicates an intervention opportunity for correcting misconceptions and building awareness of good attendance patterns. However, in some settings where a large percentage of the students are chronically absent (e.g. 50% or more), this may be a reasonable perception but indicates a need for systemic efforts to reduce barriers to attendance.

Parents were asked their perception of how many days “students in general” miss each school year. A little over two-thirds (**68.8%**) of parents reported their perception of the average number of absences among students in general to be at a rate that is consistent with “good” attendance (i.e., missing roughly 5% or less of school days). It appears that the majority of parents may have a general sense of “good” or ideal attendance rates, but are unaware that their student does not meet that standard with **44.7%** of parents of chronically absent students reporting that their student missed 10 or fewer days.

Finally, as a means to gauge the level of concern parents have related to their students’ absences, parents were asked how concerned they were about their students’ absences. Almost half (**49.6%**) of the parents surveyed reported not being concerned about their students’ absences. This finding may be related to the extent to which parents accurately recalled their students’ absences, and is further evidence of the need for building parent awareness of student absence rates and implications of absences on student outcomes (achievement, graduation, etc.).

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Reasons for Absences. Common barriers to good attendance experienced by students were identified by determining the percentage of parents who endorsed an item as “sometimes” or “usually” the reason their student missed school. The top reported reasons for chronic absenteeism among students as reported by their parents were related to **health** (94.3%; parent or student short-term illness, chronic illness, and medical/dental/mental health appointments or procedures), **transportation** (39.0%; lack of transportation, car problems, not wanting to walk in bad weather, and being out-of-town), **preferred activity outside of school** (38.6%; hung out with family/friends, stayed up too late/overslept, extra-curricular activities), **adult responsibilities** (23.6%; parent work schedule, lack of childcare, or having to help/care for a family member), and **personal stress** (22.9%; too stressed/upset, sad/depressed, and family emergencies).

Parent Reported Ideas for Improving Attendance. The parents provided ideas for supports to improve attendance by responding to open-ended prompts. Top ideas included: **illness prevention** (not getting sick, bullying), and **transportation** (busing, more reliable transportation). These ideas were consistent with the top reported reasons for why their students missed school. Given the multifaceted reasons for absences and proposed strategies for supports, early childhood education centers may need to consider cross-sector partnerships (e.g. health department, housing authority, transportation, community mental health, etc.) to assist families in removing barriers to student attendance.

Introduction

Chronic absenteeism, commonly defined as missing 10% or more of instructional days per school year, has significant impact on student outcomes. Chronic absenteeism in prekindergarten settings has been found to predict absenteeism in elementary years with implications for student achievement.¹ Chronic absenteeism is associated with decreased reading levels, overall academic performance, on-time graduation rates, and post-secondary enrollment as well as increased dropout rates.^{2,3} Fortunately, chronic absenteeism rates are alterable at the student and system level when interventions are appropriately targeted and matched to student needs.

In order to efficiently and effectively match interventions to student needs, there is a need for reliable and valid data that provide sufficient information to understand the various reasons for absenteeism. The *Reasons for Chronic Absenteeism-Parent (RCA-P) Survey* was developed to meet this need. *RCA-P* items were developed based on research and theory related to multifaceted reasons that students miss school. Initially, items were adapted from the *Reasons for Chronic Absenteeism Survey*, which is a version of the survey completed by students that went through a validation process. Next, cognitive interviews with parents of chronically absent PreK/Head Start students were conducted to ensure that they perceived the items as intended. The participants read the items aloud and verbalized their thoughts about what they thought the items were asking and how they would respond based on their experiences. They provided feedback related to item language, content, clarity, and overall organization of the instrument. The items were adjusted based on information gained during the cognitive interviews. The final version of the *RCA-P* used in the validation study was comprised of 26 demographic and perception of absences questions; 49 items measuring multifaceted reasons for absences; and three open-ended questions asking about other reasons for missing school, the reasons their students do come to school, and what would help their students come to school more often. The data were summarized at the PreK/Head Start center, grantee (the organizing or fiscal entity under which centers are clustered), and state level.

This *RCA-P* report provides information about parent perceptions of common barriers to attendance experienced by parents and students that may be used to inform a data-based problem-solving process to develop evidence-based interventions. Specifically, this report provides an overview of common reasons for absences experienced by parents and students in southeastern PreK/Head Start centers as measured by the percentage of parents who endorsed an item as “sometimes” or “usually” the reason they missed school. The various reasons were organized around the following 12 categories:

- Health Related
- Personal Stress
- Physical Safety/Conflict
- School Climate
- School Stress
- Adult Responsibilities
- Housing/Material Instability
- Legal System Involvement
- Suspension
- Transportation
- Preferred Activity Outside of School
- Value of School

¹ Ehrlich, S. B., Gwynne J. A., Stitzel Pareja, A., & Allensworth E. M. (2014). *Preschool Attendance in Chicago Public Schools: Relationship with Learning Outcomes and Reasons for Absences: Research Summary*. Chicago: University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research.

² Balfanz, R., & Byrnes, V. (2012). *Chronic Absenteeism: Summarizing what we know from nationally available data*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Center for Social Organization of Schools.

³ Chang, H. & Romero, M. (2008). *Present, engaged and accounted for the critical importance of addressing chronic absence in the early grades*. National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP): The Mailman School of Public Health at Columbia University.

In addition, the report provides parent perceptions of their students' absences, of absence rates relative to peers, of typical absences rates among students, and of their level of concern about their students' absences. Also provided are parent reports of perceived existing resources or motivators for school attendance and what they think would help their student attend school more regularly or miss fewer days. More detailed information for each of the categories and parent responses within each category are included below.

Participants & Findings

Participants

The data provided are based on 1,045 parents of PreK/Head Start students from 5 grantees and 63 PreK/Head Start centers within a southeastern state. The data were collected via parent or guardian, henceforth referred to as "parent(s)", surveys from April through June of 2017. Grantees and centers were recruited for participation through emails via national listservs for Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS), Multi-tiered System of Supports (MTSS), and attendance. Participant grantees selected which centers would participate in the survey. The researchers provided a half-hour webinar for each participant center that provided background information on chronic absenteeism, survey development, administration procedures, and a review of the survey items and data collection platform (SurveyMonkey®). Centers identified eligible parents for participation (i.e., parents of students who missed 10% of the instructional days during the 2016/2017 school year at time of administration) and facilitated the collection of survey data via emails, letters, in-person appointments, and phone calls to parents.

The average chronic absenteeism rate range among the participant grantees (based on the chronic absenteeism rates of the participant centers) ranged from 17.0% to 55.9%, and the number of reportedly chronic absent students per participant center ranged from 1 to 123. The participant grantees survey completion rates varied from a low of 32.1% to a high of 75.8%. The participant PreK/Head Start center survey completion rates ranged from a low of 2% and a high of 100% in several centers that surveyed all of the parents of their reported chronically absent students. Table 1 below provides a summary of the participant grantee chronic absenteeism and survey completion rates.

Table 1

Participant Grantee Summary

Participant Grantee	Number of Participant Centers	Grantee Average of Reported Chronic Absenteeism Rate for Participant Centers	Range of the Number of Chronically Absent Students per Center	Grantee Average Percentage of Parents Who Completed the Survey (compared to projected number of chronically absent students)	Range of the Reported Parents of Chronically Absent Students Surveyed per Center
Grantee 1	29	32.2%	1-68	64.4%	8-100%
Grantee 2	2	24.0%	20-21	52.6%	24-95%
Grantee 3	15	46.1%	4-123	52.8%	2-100%
Grantee 4	3	17.0%	3-37	75.8%	11-67%
Grantee 5	14	58.5%	5-43	32.1%	2-100%

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Table 2 provides an overview of the participating parents and their students' demographics.

Table 2

Participant Respondent and Student Summary Demographics

Respondent Characteristics		(Total n= 1045)
Relationship to Student		Percentage
Parent		85.9
Guardian		2.6
Grandparent		5.4
Foster Parent		1.0
Other (Aunt, Step-parent, etc.)		5.6
Gender		
Male		10.4
Female		89.5
Other		0.1
Race/Ethnicity		
Multiracial		2.2
Asian		0.6
Black/African American		35.2
Hispanic/Latino		18.1
White		42.8
American Indian		0.3
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander		0.2
Prefer not to Say		0.7
Selected Demographic Characteristics		
English Not Primary Language		17.9
Education- Some High School, High School Diploma or GED		68.0
Education- College Degree (2 or 4 year or Graduate School)		13.4
Employment Status- Full-time		35.5
Employment Status- Part-time		22.0
Employment Status- Unemployed, Retired, Disabled		42.5
Age- 30 or Younger		54.8
Age- 31-40		31.8
Age- Over 40		13.4
Relationship Status- Married/Long-Term Relationship		50.3
Student Characteristics		
Student Grade-Level		
Pre-Kindergarten		23.6
Head Start		74.1
Student Selected Demographics		
		Percentage
Free/Reduced Lunch Eligible		94.0
Receive Special Education		19.3
English Not Primary Language		14.1
Student Gender		
Male		51.6
Female		48.4
Other		0
Student Race/Ethnicity		
Multiracial		6.2
Asian		0.8
Black/African American		33.8
Hispanic/Latino		17.1
White		40.7

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American Indian	0.4
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0.3
Prefer not to Say	0.8

The majority of those who participated in the survey identified as a female parent of at least one chronically absent student and were 30 years old or younger with an education level of some high school or high school diploma/GED. The majority of parents reported their children were enrolled in Head Start and eligible for free or reduced price lunch. There were slightly higher rates of students with disabilities (19.3%) than the national rate (13%). These data are consistent with research indicating that students with disabilities and those from economically disadvantaged households are often over-represented within the chronically absent student population.

The parents reported a fairly equal distribution of male versus female chronically absent students. Forty percent of the students were reported by their parents to be White, a third were reported to be Black/African American, and 17% were reported to be Hispanic/Latino.

Findings

Table 3 below provides an overview of the percentage of all parents who rated items in each category as “sometimes” or “usually” the reason(s) their student missed school. Health Related reasons (94.3% endorsed an item within this domain as “sometimes” or “usually” the reason they missed school) were the most commonly reported, followed by Transportation (39.0%), and Preferred Activity Outside of School (38.6%). On the following pages, more detailed information is provided for each of the categories.

Table 3

Percentage of Endorsements by Category

Overall Responses	
Reason	Percentage
Health Related	94.3
Transportation	39.0
Preferred Activity Outside of School	38.6
Adult Responsibility	23.6
Personal Stress	22.9
School Climate	9.9
Value of School	10.0
School Stress	9.2
Safety/Conflict	7.3
Housing/Material Instability	6.7
Legal System Involvement	3.3
Suspension	2.3

Perceptions of Absences

In order to be eligible to participate in the survey, students had to have missed 16 or more (10% at time of administration) days of school during the 2016/2017 school year. Table 4 provides a summary of parent **perceptions** of the number of school days their student missed during the 2016/2017 school year. A little over one-third (36.2%) of parents accurately recalled and/or reported absences consistent with chronic absenteeism (16+ days at the time of the survey). This finding may suggest an intervention opportunity to increase parent awareness of absences and implications associated with chronic absenteeism.

Table 4

Absences This Year

Reported Number of Absences This Year	Percentage
0-5 days	17.2
6-10 days	27.5
11-15 days	19.1
16-20 days	15.6
21+ days	20.6

Parents also were asked to report their perceived number of student absences within the last month. This statistic may be an indicator of students who are on-pace to be chronically absent during a given year. As few as two absences per month can lead to 18 or more days of school missed per year. Approximately 64% of parents reported two or more student absences in the previous month indicating they may have had an increased likelihood of chronic absenteeism for the year.

Table 5

Absences Last Month

Reported Number of Absences Last Month	Percentage
0-1 days	35.6
2-3 days	40.4
4+ days	24.0

In an attempt to better understand parent perceptions about the frequency of their students' absences, parents were asked two questions related to their students' absences and absences in general. For the first question (Table 6), parents were asked if they perceived that their student had the same, fewer, or greater numbers of absences relative to other students. Over one-half of parents (57.8%) perceived their students' absence rate to be the same as or less than peers. Although further analysis is warranted, it appears that this rate may indicate a skewed perception of what are considered typical absence rates and indicate an intervention opportunity for correcting misconceptions and building awareness of good attendance patterns. However, in some settings where a large percentage of the students are chronically absent (e.g. 50% or more), this may be a reasonable perception but indicates a need for systemic efforts to reduce barriers to attendance.

Table 6

Absences Compared to Others

Absence Rate Compared to Peers	Percentage
Absence Rate Less than Peers	16.2
Absence Rate the Same as Peers	41.6
Absence Rate More than Peers	42.2

For the second question (Table 7), parents were asked their perception of how many days of school “students in general” miss each school year. A little over two-thirds (68.8%) of parents reported their perception of average absences among students in general to be at a rate that is consistent with “good” attendance (i.e. missing roughly 5% or less of school days). It appears that the majority of parents may have a general sense of “good” or ideal attendance rates, but were unaware that their student does not meet that standard (44.7% of parents of chronically absent students reported that their student missed 10 or fewer days; see Table 4). This finding is further evidence for the importance of building awareness of student absenteeism rates and absenteeism’s implications among parents.

Table 7

Average Absences per Year

Reported Number of Average Absences Per Year	Percentage
0-5 days	27.6
6-10 days	41.2
11-15 days	19.0
16-20 days	5.9
21+ days	6.3

As a means to gauge the level of concern parents have related to their students’ absences, parents were asked how concerned they were. Almost half (49.6%) of the parents reported not being concerned about their students’ absences. This finding may be related to the extent to which parents accurately recalled their students’ absences, and is further evidence of the need for building parent awareness of student absence rates and of implications of absences on student outcomes (e.g., achievement, graduation).

Table 8

Level of Concern Regarding Absences

Reported Level of Concern Regarding Student Absences	Percentage
Not Concerned	49.6
Somewhat Concerned	35.0
Very Concerned	15.5

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Resources/Motivators

To better understand parent perceptions of resources or motivators for school attendance, parents were asked to identify the reasons that their students do come to school. The parent responses were then organized into themes, and each instance in which a theme was mentioned was calculated and aggregated. Table 9 provides the top reported reasons for school attendance which were Value of Education (desire to learn, future goals, to get an education), followed by Peer and Adult Relationships. It is interesting to note that despite the students of the survey participants having been identified as chronically absent, many parents recognized that school is a means to achieve future goals and necessary for obtaining a foundational education. This finding may reflect a lack of awareness of student absence rates and/or lack of understanding of the impact of chronic absenteeism on educational outcomes (e.g., course performance, graduation and/or dropout rates).

Table 9

Reasons for School Attendance

Top 5 Responses	
Motivator	Instances Mentioned
Value of Education (Desire to learn, future goals, to get an education)	318
Peer Relationships	180
Relationships- Adults (Teachers, staff, etc.)	105
Enjoyment of School or School Day	52
Parent Support (Parent support for school attendance)	13

Supports

Parents were asked to provide ideas for what they thought would help their students attend school more regularly. Table 10 indicates that the top reported support to improve attendance was to address Illness Prevention (not getting sick), which was closely followed by improved Transportation (busing, more reliable transportation).

Table 10

Supports to Improve Attendance

Top 5 Responses	
Supports	Instances Mentioned
Illness Prevention (Not getting sick)	132
Transportation (Busing, more reliable transportation)	112
Parent/Family Support (Parent persistence in bringing child to school, parent utilizing after-school hours for children's medical appointments, etc.)	19
School Schedule (Provide before- or after- school care, start school later)	18

Response by Category

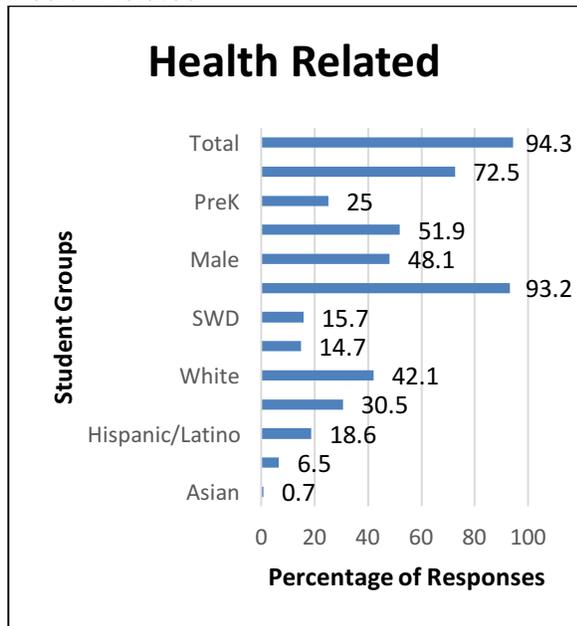
Health Related

Health Related barriers were reported by 94.3% of the parents of chronically absent students to be the reasons their student missed school “sometimes” or “usually”. Health Related barriers were the most frequently reported reasons for students missing school among all the categories. Items within the Health Related category measured both parent and student short-term (cold, flu, etc.) and chronic illnesses (asthma, allergies, disease), medical procedures or appointments, and the perception of becoming or getting sick while at school.

Among student groups, students who were reported to be White or Black/African American and those who qualify for free or reduced price lunch reported health related reasons for missing school most often.

Figure 1

Health Related



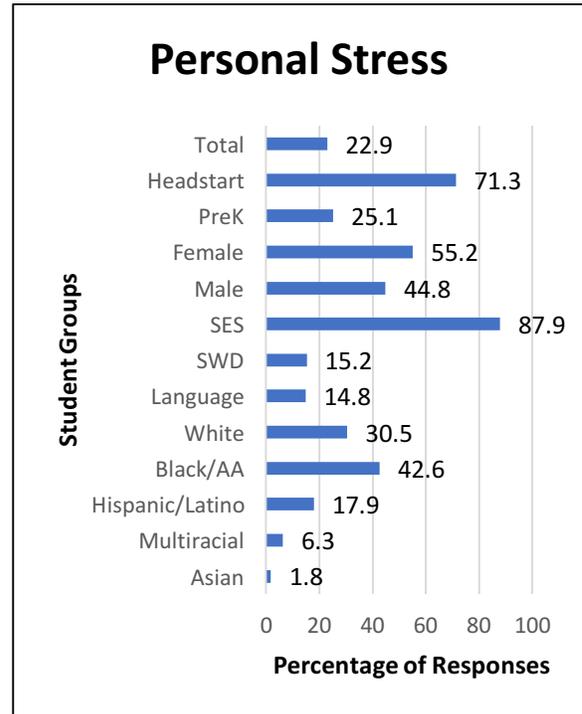
Personal Stress

Personal Stress was reported as “sometimes” or “usually” the reason their student missed school by 22.9% of the parents. Personal Stress included items that measured perceived levels of stress; depression or sadness; being too “upset” to attend school; or family emergencies that may include death, illness, injury, or “drama”.

Among student subgroups, students who were reported to be Female, those who were reported to be White or Black/African American, and those who qualify for free or reduced price lunch were reported to miss school due to personal stress most often.

Figure 2

Personal Stress



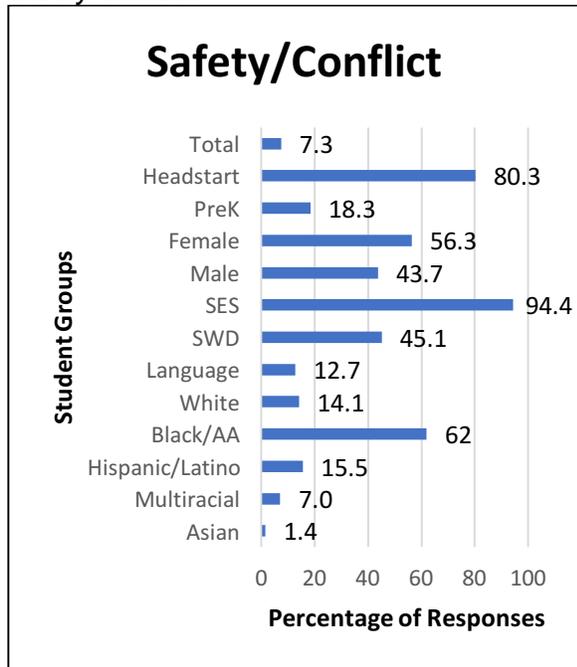
Safety/Conflict

Safety/Conflict reasons were endorsed by 7.3% of parents as “sometimes” or “usually” a reason for absence. Items in the Physical Safety/Conflict category measured perceptions of safety on the bus ride or walk to/from school, safety while at school, teasing/bullying, or avoidance of other students due to conflict.

Among student subgroups, students who were reported to be Female, those who were reported to be Black/African American, those who receive special education, and those who qualify for free or reduced price lunch were reported to miss school due to physical safety/conflict most often.

Figure 3

Safety/Conflict



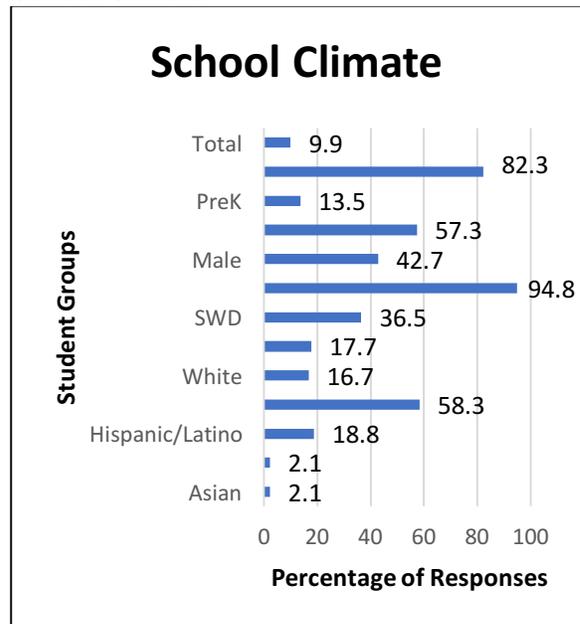
School Climate

School Climate barriers were reported as “sometimes” or “usually” the reasons for missing school by 9.9% of the parents of chronically absent students. School Climate included items that measured perceptions of the physical environment of the school (condition, cleanliness, basic supplies) as well as the affective environment (perceived fairness of rules/discipline practices, kindness of others, recognition of absences by others).

Among student subgroups, students who were reported to be Female, Black/African American, those who receive special education, and those who qualify for free or reduced price lunch were reported as missing school due to school climate most often.

Figure 4

School Climate



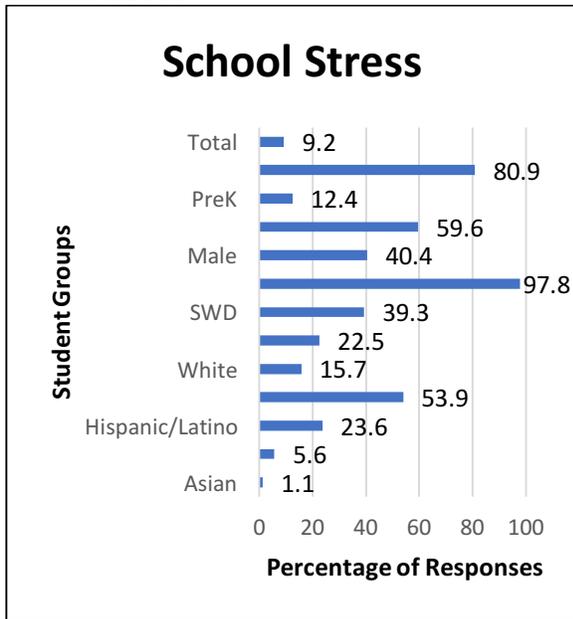
School Stress

School Stress reasons were endorsed by 9.2% of parents as “sometimes” or “usually” the reason for absences. Items in the School Stress category measured the perception of the level of difficulty in school work, lack of preparedness for a class, and avoidance of a teacher or class.

Among student subgroups, students who were reported to be Female, Black/African American or Hispanic/Latino, those for whom English is not their primary language, those who receive special education, and those who qualify for free or reduced price lunch were reported as missing school due to school stress most often.

Figure 5

School Stress



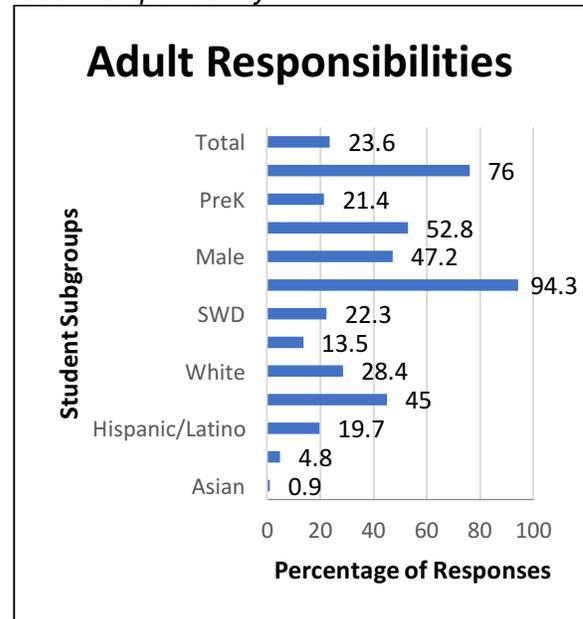
Adult Responsibilities

Adult Responsibilities were reported by parents as “sometimes” or “usually” the reasons their child missed school by 23.6% of the parents of chronically absent students. Adult Responsibilities included items that measured having to work, care for another family member, or help a family member or parent lack of childcare.

Among student subgroups, students who were reported to be Black/African American or White, those who receive special education, and those who qualify for free or reduced price lunch were reported as missing school due to adult responsibilities most often.

Figure 6

Adult Responsibility



Housing/Material Instability

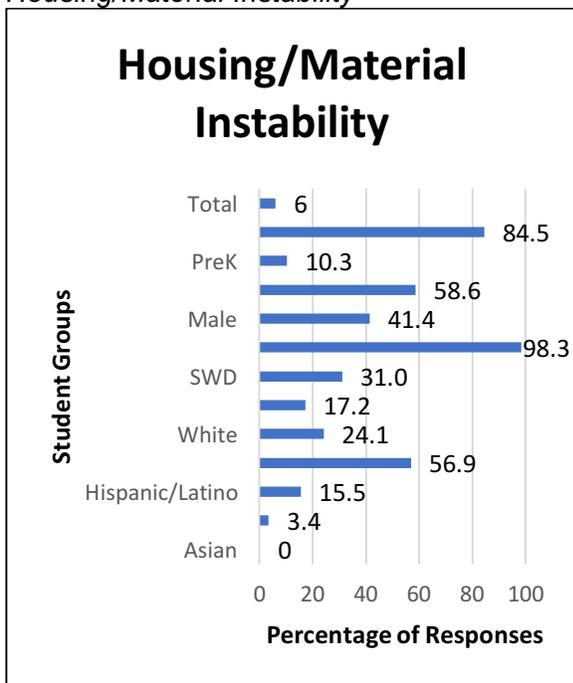
Housing/Material Instability was reported as “sometimes” or “usually” the reasons for missing school by 6% of the parents of chronically absent students.

Housing/Material Instability included items that measured lack of clean or appropriate clothing or materials for school, mobility, lack of housing, or household utilities.

Among student subgroups, students who were reported to be Black/African American or White, those who receive special education, and those who qualify for free or reduced price lunch were reported as missing school due to housing/material instability most often.

Figure 7

Housing/Material Instability



Legal System Involvement

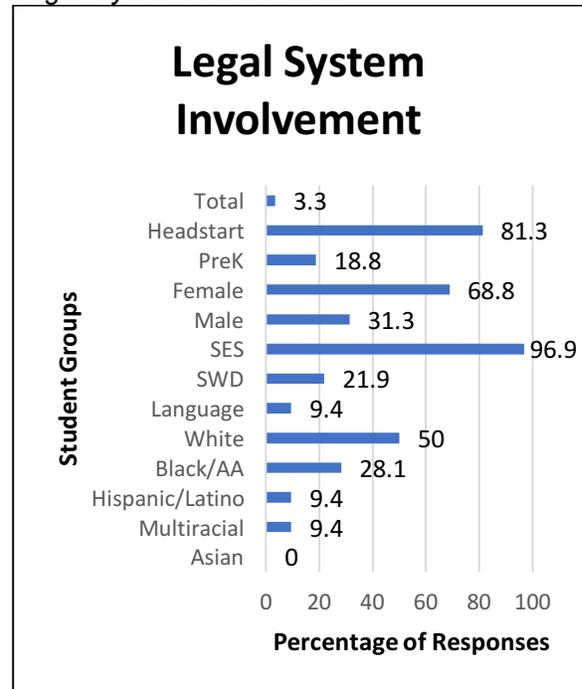
Legal System Involvement reasons were endorsed by 3.3% of parents overall. Items in the Legal System Involvement category measured parent or student incarceration

(juvenile or adult facilities) and missing school due to court attendance.

Among student subgroups, students who were reported to be Female, those who were reported to be Black/African American or White, those who receive special education, and those who qualify for free or reduced price lunch were reported as missing school due to legal system involvement most often.

Figure 8

Legal System Involvement



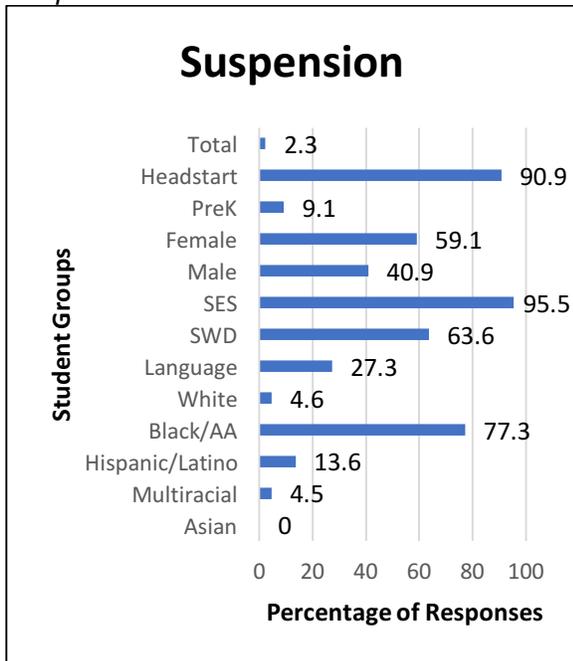
Suspension

Suspensions were reported by 2.3% of the parents to be the reasons their student missed school “sometimes” or “usually”. One item made up this category (student absences due to suspensions). It is important to note that of the 30 students whose parents reported suspension as reasons for absences, 28 were from a single center of which 18 were identified as students with disabilities.

Among student subgroups, students who were reported to be Female, those who were reported to be Black/African American, those for whom English is not their primary language, those who receive special education, and those who qualify for free or reduced price lunch were reported as missing school due to suspensions most often.

Figure 9

Suspension



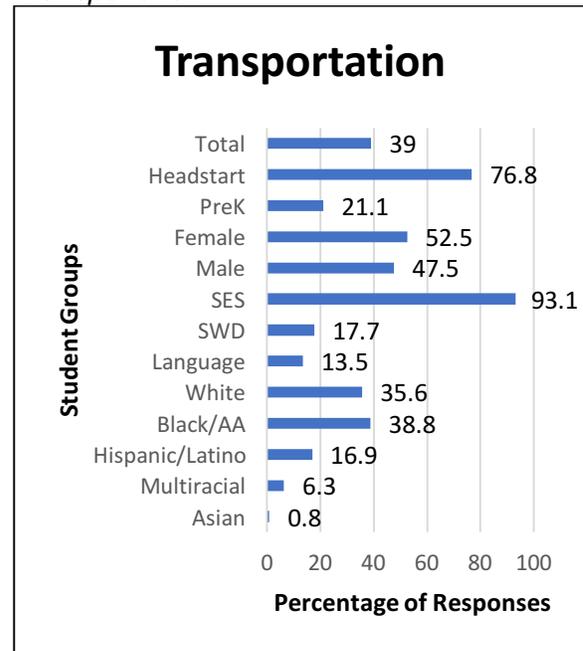
Transportation

Transportation reasons were endorsed as “sometimes” or “usually” the reason for absences by 39% of parents overall. Items in the Transportation category measured lack of transportation, car problems, not wanting to walk in bad weather, or being out of town.

Among student subgroups, those who were reported to be White or Black/African American and those who qualify for free or reduced price lunch reported missing school due to transportation most often.

Figure 10

Transportation



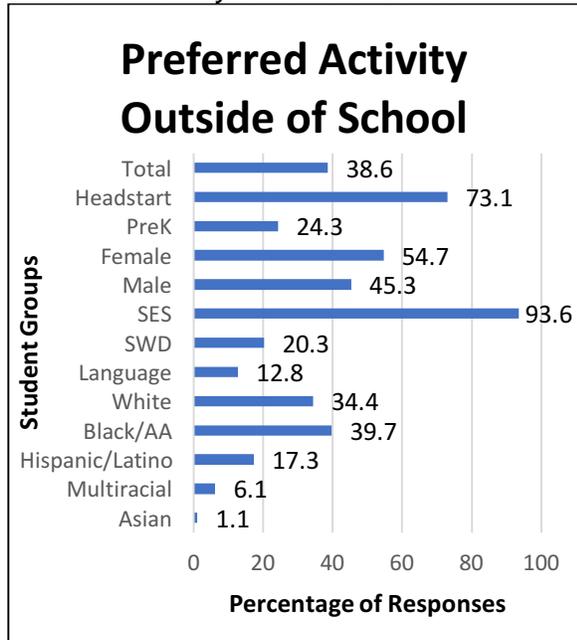
Preferred Activity Outside of School

Preferred Activity Outside of School was reported as “sometimes” or “usually” the reason their students missed school by 38.6% of the parents of chronically absent students. Preferred Activity Outside of School included items that measured hanging out with family/friends instead of attending school, staying up too late to get up for school, oversleeping, and extra-curricular activities.

Among student subgroups, students who were reported to be White or Black/African American, those who receive special education, and those who qualify for free or reduced price lunch were reported as missing school due to preferred activity outside of school most often.

Figure 11

Preferred Activity Outside of School



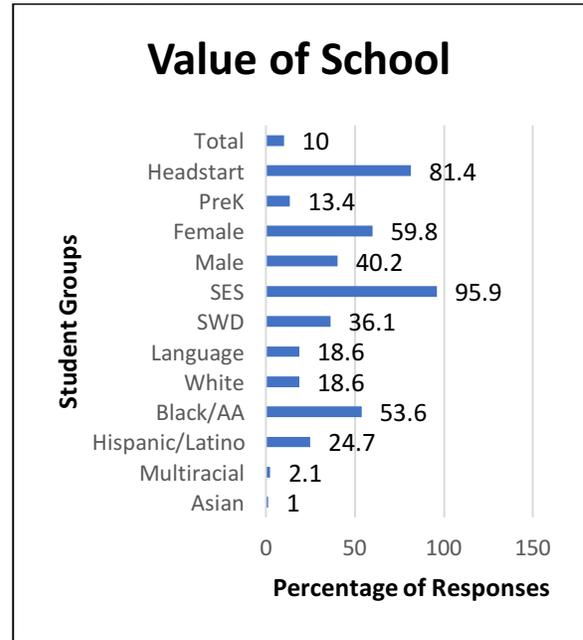
Value of School

Value of School was reported as “sometimes” or “usually” the reasons for missing school by 10% of the parents of chronically absent students. Value of School included items that measured student perceptions that school is boring, school will not help them reach future goals, and a general belief that there is no reason to attend school.

Among student subgroups, students who were reported to be Female, those who were reported to be Black/African American or Hispanic/Latino, those who receive special education, and those who qualify for free or reduced price lunch were as reported missing school due to value of school most often.

Figure 12

Value of School



Summary of Findings and Implications

This report includes data on reasons for chronic absenteeism provided by over 1,000 parents of chronically absent students enrolled in a southeastern state's Head Start or PreK Centers. Below is a summary of the major findings from the survey. Each finding is followed by questions for stakeholders who engage in state- and/or national-level work to consider. Specifically, these are questions regarding the role of states, and national and state organizations focused on attendance issues, in supporting PreK/Head Start centers to address parents' perceptions of chronic absenteeism and to address barriers to students attending school consistently are provided.

One of the most basic strategies to begin to address concerning behaviors is to build general awareness of the behavior and the extent to which it deviates from standard levels of acceptability. Based on the responses to the items measuring perceptions of absences, it appears that parents may be largely unaware of their students' rates of absenteeism over time and misperceive what typical or acceptable rates of absenteeism are among students.

Many states are wrestling with how to respond to the multifaceted reasons for chronic absenteeism through both policy and practice. Rafa⁴ outlines four areas for state action: attendance improvement plans, public awareness initiatives, data usage and early warning systems, and school improvement efforts. Rafa also highlights implementation examples to highlight recommended policy changes. The reader is encouraged to review Rafa's recommendations when considering the questions below given the findings from the *RCA-P Survey* for preschool age children.

Big Idea Question 1: What are the implications of findings from this study (parents' misperceptions regarding their students' absence rates and of the most frequent reasons parents report that students miss school) for state-level policy, regulation development, and implementation guidance?

When answering this question, we encourage the reader to consider a number of additional questions that should inform their response.

- *How can state-level plans address attendance/chronic absenteeism?*
- *How can local-level plans address attendance/chronic absenteeism?*
- *To what extent would consistent definitions of a day of schooling, what constitutes an absence (e.g., full day versus partial day), and what constitutes chronic absenteeism (e.g., number of days) facilitate access to quality data to inform planning and problem-solving efforts?*
- *To what extent can attendance policies related to participation in state-sponsored PreK/Head Start programs impact attendance rates?*
- *Should consistent state-wide data collection and reporting tools/systems (e.g. Early Warning Systems) be made available to facilitate access to and use of data related to absenteeism in preschool settings?*
- *Should state led or supported public awareness campaigns be used to increase general knowledge about the issue?*
- *Should PreK/Head Start centers consider including attendance as part of academic/developmental reporting to parents?*

⁴ Rafa, A. (2017). *Chronic absenteeism: A key indicator of student success*. Education Commission of the States.

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- *How can cross-sector (Community Physical and Mental Health, Housing and Urban Development, Transportation, Education, Child Advocacy, Homelessness, Early Childhood, etc.) task forces be created and supported to comprehensively address the multifaceted needs of families of students who are chronically absent?*
- *To what extent can state and locally led initiatives and policies that improve attendance at the PreK level have a long-term impact on improved attendance at the K-12 level?*
- *To what extent can improvement of attendance at the PreK level result in few resources (fiscal, personnel, time) being expended at the K-12 level?*

Many national and state-level organizations will be critical for supporting states in analyzing chronic absenteeism and in supporting intervention. Given the existing research on chronic absenteeism and what we learned from the *RCA-P*, we encourage readers involved with professional organizations that address absenteeism issues to consider the following questions.

Big Idea Question 2: What is the role of national and state organizations in supporting PreK/Head Start efforts to address chronic absenteeism?

Additional questions for consideration:

- *What can professional organizations do to lobby federal and state policy makers for effective policy related to measuring and addressing chronic absenteeism as early as PreK/Head Start?*
- *What information can be provided to policy makers to aide with consistent definitions of a day of schooling in PreK settings, what constitutes an absence, and what constitutes chronic absenteeism?*
- *How can professional organizations facilitate or support research to better understand the prevalence and patterns of chronic absenteeism among PreK-12 students as well as evidence-based interventions to reduce chronic absenteeism?*
- *How can professional organizations facilitate or support research to better understand the prevalence and patterns of chronic absenteeism among student subgroups (e.g. students with disabilities, students from economically disadvantaged households, etc.) as well as effective evidence-based interventions that may address issues more prevalent among specific student subgroups?*
- *What is the role of professional organizations in building awareness of absenteeism rates and the implications among students, families, and community stakeholders?*
- *How can association stakeholders build awareness or correct misperceptions of what constitutes acceptable rates of absenteeism among students and families?*
- *How can professional association leaders develop cross-sector partnerships (including early childhood research partners) to address chronic absenteeism?*
- *How can family and community engagement be cultivated to address chronic absenteeism?*

The findings from this study can inform answers to the aforementioned questions. The top parent reported reasons for chronic absenteeism among PreK/Head Start students were related to **health** (short-term illness, chronic illness, and medical/dental/mental health appointments), **transportation** (car problems, not wanting to walk in bad weather, and being out-of-town), and **preferred activity outside of school** (hung-out with family/friends, stayed-up too late/overslept). Ideas for supports to improve attendance included **illness prevention** (not getting sick) and **transportation** (available busing, more reliable transportation). In order to address the multifaceted needs of students who are chronically absent through the provision of comprehensive supports, grantees/districts and centers/schools will need to partner with a

variety of stakeholders. State regulatory agencies, state and national organizations, and research and technical assistance providers should consider how to best collaborate with PreK/Head Start centers to identify the needs of their population and to intervene effectively.

Big Idea Question 3: What is the role of state regulatory agencies, national and state organizations, and technical assistance providers in supporting PreK/Head Start efforts to improve chronic absenteeism rates?

A one-size-fits-all approach likely will not work to address chronic absenteeism across PreK/Head Start centers. However, the reader is encouraged to consider how the following strategies align with reasons for chronic absenteeism for their population and align with their context and available resources.

- *Focusing on messaging the importance of PreK/Head Start attendance and the relationship with student outcomes in elementary years and beyond*
- *Focusing on evidence-based practices for physical and mental health promotion and wellness for students and families*
- *Developing community partnerships to support physical and mental health promotion and wellness for students and families*
- *Developing systems for alternative methods to get students to school when their primary transportation mode is not an option (car problems, unsafe routes to school, etc.)*
- *Engaging with family and community partners to facilitate access to services*
- *Developing multi-tiered systems of support to address the academic, behavioral, and social-emotional needs of all students*