

Risk of Chronic Absenteeism Among New York Students

Current and proposed policies that require rigorous curricula, high quality instruction and a higher age for when students are able to leave school are grounded in a basic assumption that children are actually present in school and will be able to benefit from such policies. While schools measure *overall* school attendance using the average daily attendance (ADA) rate, many schools do not collect information regarding which students are chronically absent.

Our ability to identify students who are chronically absent (i.e., those who miss 10 percent of school) is the fundamental first step in helping children achieve academic success and eventual self-sufficiency. Various studies have found that students who are chronically absent in kindergarten and first grade are less likely to read proficiently in third grade. Additionally, we have learned chronically absent sixth grade students have lower graduation rates. Furthermore, while all children, regardless of their socio-economic background, do worse when chronically absent, poor school attendance is particularly problematic among children living in poverty (1, 2). The findings from these studies are maintained when chronic absenteeism is examined within New York schools.

- A study undertaken by the Campaign for Fiscal Equity found that at least 20 percent of fourth grade students in the New York City School District were chronically absent during a school year and that these students tended to have lower scores on the state math and English language arts exams than their peers who were present more often (3).
- Forty percent of all students in the Buffalo City School District were shown to be chronically absent and this was even higher among Hispanic and African American children. Furthermore, poor attendance began early in Buffalo students' academic career as noted by the fact that 43 percent of kindergarten students were chronically absent (4).

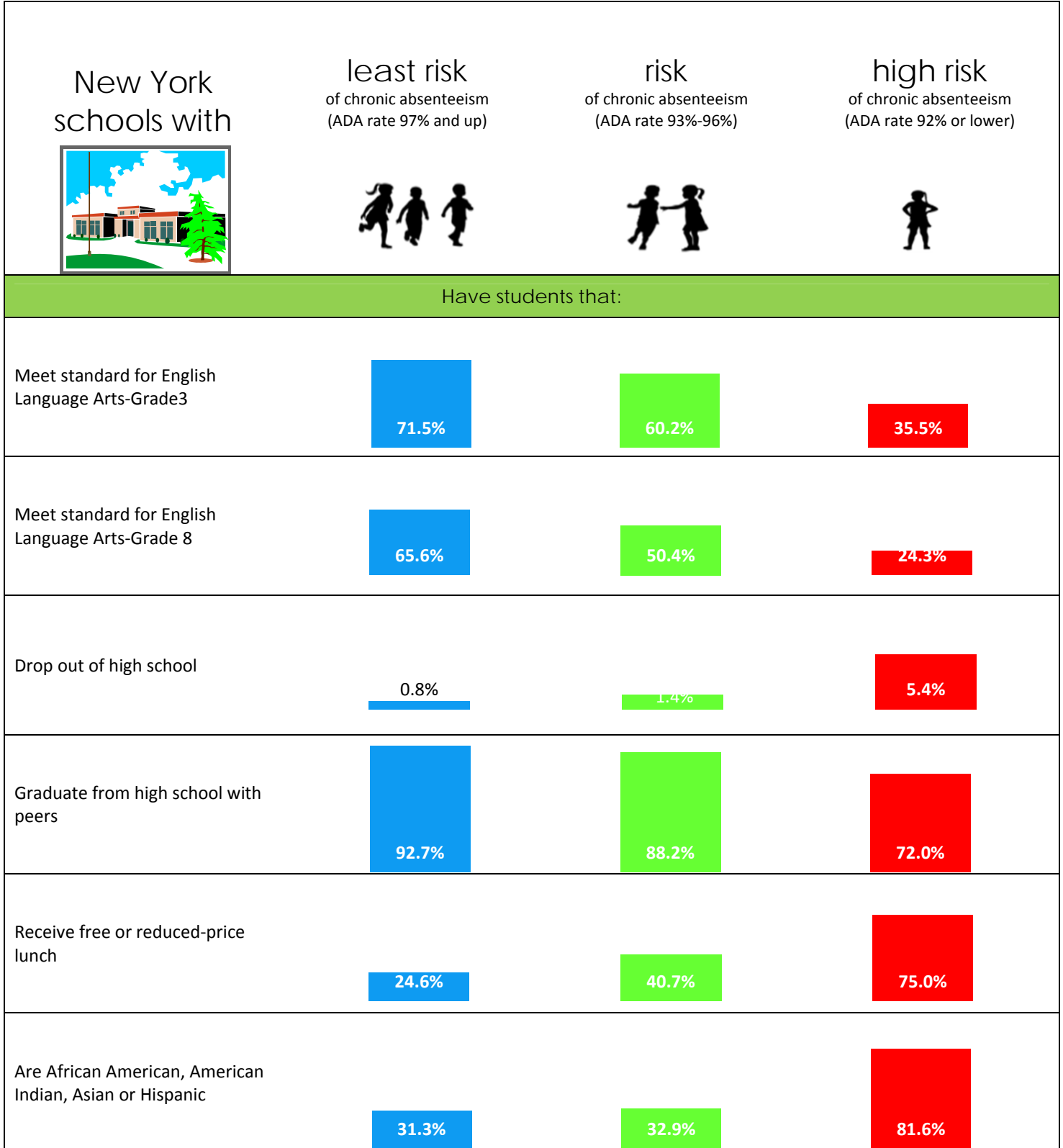
Students are chronically absent for many reasons, including illnesses like asthma, safety concerns (e.g., bullying), academic failure, transportation problems and family issues. Despite its complexity, chronic absenteeism merits careful attention and action since our ability to identify and support students and their families has the potential to reduce the achievement gap, turn around under performing schools, and increase students' readiness for college and careers.

Moreover, *chronic absenteeism is one of the earliest indicators that a student is not on track*, which necessitates that we take action at a point in time when prevention interventions are most likely to succeed.

It has been noted that chronic absenteeism is not the same as truancy or average daily attendance and while the ADA rate is not as informative as chronic absenteeism, nor does it allow schools to identify students who could benefit from assistance, a recent study examined the extent that varying levels of ADA rates predict chronic absenteeism (2). These levels were used to examine student and school characteristics of schools statewide and serve as a starting point in our understanding of chronic absenteeism and our ability to take steps to reduce it. Results are presented on the following page.

References

1. Chang, H. & Romero, M. (September, 2008). Present, engaged and accounted for: The critical importance of addressing chronic absence in the early grades. National Center for Children in Poverty: New York.
2. Bruner, C., Disher, A. & Chang, H. (November, 2011). Chronic elementary absenteeism: A problem hidden in plain sight. Accessed November 2011 at: www.edweek.org/media/chronicabsence_15chang.pdf
3. Campaign for Fiscal Equity Inc (May, 2011). Taking attendance seriously: How school absences undermine student and school performance in New York City. Accessed at: <http://graphics8.nytimes.com/packages/pdf/nyregion/20110617attendancereport.pdf>
4. Buffalo Public Schools Attendance Counts PowerPoint presentation, New York State Promise Zones (September, 2011).



Data Source: New York State Education Department Report Card Database, 2011. Analyses by Council on Children and Families
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