

# Guidelines for Reporting Regular Attendance and Chronic Absenteeism

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**COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

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## Introduction and Background

On January 16, 2018, the U.S. Department of Education (USDE) approved Pennsylvania's Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) [Consolidated State Plan](#). ESSA presents an opportunity to broaden conceptions of school performance to include increased attention to student success and learning conditions, including the importance of regular school attendance. Research indicates there is a positive and statistically significant relationship between student attendance and academic achievement and other student outcomes (Hein et al., 2013; Chang and Romero, 2008; Allensworth et al., 2014; Balfanz et al., 2007). Nationally, over six million students were chronically absent from school during the 2013-2014 school year, representing 14 percent of all students.

This document provides guidance on the chronic absenteeism measure included in Pennsylvania's federal accountability plan; this same measure is reported at the school and student group levels via the Regular Attendance indicator on the [Future Ready PA Index](#). Specifically, the guidelines establish procedures for Local Education Agencies (LEAs) and school administrators to submit absence-related data to the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) that accurately reflect student attendance and are consistent with [child accounting](#) and federal accountability policies.

For more information on attendance coding, please see the Pennsylvania Student Information Management System (PIMS) [user manual](#).

## Requirements

Chronic Absenteeism is calculated for all public schools with 20 or more students based on the number of students who have missed more than 10 percent of enrolled school days across the academic year; this represents 18 days in a 180-day school year. Enrollment of fewer than 90 days of school will exclude a student from that school's calculation as there has not been sufficient opportunity for the school to apply intervention strategies.

Chronic Absenteeism calculations are derived from existing data collections by the Department. Rates of Chronic Absenteeism are reported as "Regular Attendance" on the Future Ready PA Index, and are calculated at the building level, as well as for any group of 20 or more students in a building. Regular Attendance is a lagging indicator based on reporting schedules and validations procedures; in other words, one full school year separates the most recent period for reporting and the publication of school and student group data.

A student is considered absent if they are not physically participating in instruction or instruction-related activities on school grounds or at an approved off-grounds location. Chronically absent students include students who are absent regardless of whether absences are excused or unexcused; whatever the reason for the absence, instructional hours are lost.

For example, out of school suspensions and excused absences for approved family-sponsored educational trips would be coded as absences for purposes of chronic absenteeism and regular attendance measures.

ABSENT (Examples)	PRESENT (Examples)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Absence from school (excused or unexcused)</li> <li>○ Out-of-School Suspension</li> <li>○ Extended illness (not coded homebound)</li> <li>○ Bereavement</li> <li>○ Non-school sponsored approved educational trips</li> <li>○ College visits not part of curriculum or course expectations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Career Education and Work experiences sponsored by the school entity</li> <li>○ In-school Suspension</li> <li>○ Homebound Instruction</li> <li>○ School-sponsored field-trips or college visits</li> </ul>

LEAs should review their locally-developed attendance policies and work with Student Information System (SIS) vendors to ensure compliance with reporting requirements for both federal ESSA accountability and [PA regulatory requirements](#).

When establishing local policy, it is important to consider that LEAs report aggregate counts of days enrolled and days present in PIMS. The LEA, through the use of its SIS, determines how local attendance data is aggregated. Missed hours, periods, or fractions of days may be handled differently by each LEA. For example, consider a student enrolled for 180 days, who is ¼-day late on four occasions. If the LEA considers a student present for the day when the student attends at least half the day, the student would be present 180 days. If the LEA considers the total time present (or absent), the student would be present 179 days (4 x ¼-day = 1 full day). Therefore, depending on local policy, ESSA accountability indicators (Chronic Absenteeism/Regular Attendance) may be calculated with equivalent days.

## Definitions

**Aggregate Days Attendance** – The sum of days present for all students for the days school was in session during the reporting period.

**Aggregate Days Membership** – Total days enrolled for all students for the days school was in session during the reporting period.

**Average Daily Attendance (ADA)** – The average number of students in attendance during the reporting period (aggregate days attendance divided by days in session).

**Average Daily Membership (ADM)** – The average number of students in membership during the reporting period (aggregate days membership divided by days in session).

**Chronic Absenteeism** – Percent of students enrolled for at least 90 days who have missed more than 10 percent of enrolled school days across the academic year.

**Days in Session** – The total number of instructional days completed.

**Homebound Instruction** – Temporarily excuses a student from compulsory attendance on account of illness or other urgent reasons and provides school-supplied tutoring for a limited time to keep students on track academically. These students are counted in both school membership and attendance. For more information on homebound instruction, visit the [PDE website](#).

**In-school Suspension** – Disciplinary exclusion from a classroom or program by placing the student in another part of the school.

**Instructional Time** – Time in the school day devoted to instruction and instructional activities provided as an integral part of the school program under the direction of certified school employees.

**Local Education Agency (LEA)** – A board of education or other legally constituted local school authority having administrative control and direction of public elementary or secondary schools in a city, county, township, school district, or political subdivision in a state, or any other public educational institution or agency having administrative control and direction of a career and technical education program. This term includes state correctional education agencies.

**Out-of-School Suspension** – An action that is administered as a consequence of inappropriate behavior and requires a student be excluded from the building for a specified period of time.

**Regular Attendance** – The Future Ready PA Index display represents the percentage of students who were enrolled for 90 or more school days and present 90 percent or more of enrolled school days, thus not chronically absent.

**School Sanctioned Field Trip** – Programs conducted off school grounds designed to provide students with real world experiences to which admission is not charged to students or parents and a certified school employee accompanies the students.

**Truancy** – A child is “truant” if the child is subject to compulsory school laws and has incurred three or more school days of unexcused absences during the current school year. A child is “habitually truant” if the child is subject to compulsory school laws and has incurred six or more school days of unexcused absences during the current school year.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### 1. What constitutes an absence?

A student is considered absent if they are not physically participating in instruction or instruction-related activities on school grounds or at an approved off-grounds location.

### 2. How does this indicator affect PIMS submissions?

Chronic Absenteeism calculations are derived from existing data collections; no additional PIMS submissions are required.

### 3. What data sources are used for measuring this indicator?

Chronic Absenteeism uses Days Enrolled and Days Present data reported in the PIMS Student Calendar Fact template, which is part of the end-of-year PIMS Child Accounting collection. Students are attributed to a school within the LEA by the Location Code (#2) field reported in the Student template.

The Future Ready PA Index displays the most current single year data, beginning with 2017-18 school year cohort. Two years of chronic absenteeism data are used in accountability determinations under Pennsylvania's ESSA State Plan.

Chronic absenteeism is a "lagging indicator." One full school year separates the most recent period for reporting and the publication of school and student group data.

### 4. How will school performance on Regular Attendance be described and displayed on the Future Ready PA Index?

Rates of Chronic Absenteeism are reported as "Regular Attendance" on the Future Ready PA Index, and are calculated at the building level, as well as for any group of 20 or more students in a building.

The Regular Attendance indicator is measured based on norm-referenced performance standards. Performance standards were set by evaluating Regular Attendance for all public schools during the 2016-17 school year. Performance at the 75th percentile (schools with Regular Attendance rates that exceed those reported by 75 percent of public schools statewide) serve as the 2030 statewide goal.

Three standard ranges are used to describe performance:

- 75th percentile and above – Exceeds Performance Standard (BLUE) = 94.1% or Higher
- 74th-25th percentile – Meets Performance Standard (GREEN) = 80.9% to 94.0%
- 24th percentile and below – Does Not Meet Performance Standard (RED) = 80.8% or Below

In addition, year over year performance will be depicted by an upward ARROW for an increase in performance from the previous year, a solid CIRCLE for maintaining performance from the previous year, or a downward ARROW for a decrease in performance from the previous year.

## **5. What is the formula for Regular Attendance?**

$$\frac{\text{Number of students enrolled for 90 or more school days and present 90 percent or more of enrolled school days}}{\text{Number of students enrolled for 90 or more school days}}$$

## **6. What has changed in the way attendance is presented for accountability?**

Average daily attendance measures the average number of students who are present on any given day during the school year, which may mask which students are at-risk. Regular Attendance is calculated at the student level and therefore meets the requirement for meaningful differentiation for ESSA.

## **7. Why are excused absences included in the indicator calculations?**

The purpose of the indicator is to identify the percentage of students in a school or in a student group who are at-risk of not meeting the on-track performance standards because of missed hours of direct instruction, even when some loss of seat time is excusable.

School entities should continue to use locally-approved policies when determining how excused and unexcused absences are used for the purposes of setting expectations and consequences regarding truancy, student conduct, promotion, retention, etc. However, for reporting purposes, a student can only be indicated as present or absent in accordance with the guidelines in this document.

## **8. What is the difference between absenteeism and truancy?**

Truancy rates only include unexcused absences, while Chronic Absenteeism includes both excused and unexcused absences. Because Chronic Absenteeism is an indicator for on-track student level achievement, the total number of days a student is absent is recorded regardless of the reason the student was absent.

LEAs are required to report unexcused absences of three days or their equivalent in a timely manner. The inclusion of a Chronic Absenteeism indicator for ESSA accountability has no effect on existing truancy regulations.

## **9. Can a student receive online or distance education during an extended absence?**

A student taking an extended absence may be granted cyber or distance learning at the LEA's discretion. However, the program provided must offer the student direct instruction, aligned to the curriculum and to the amount of seat hours the student is missing; it can NOT simply serve as a repository for teachers and students to submit and exchange assignments or for the completion of homework. While participating in the program, the student must be held to the same attendance policies already in place for the LEA's locally approved cyber or distance learning program, as set forth by its Board of School Directors.

## **10. How do students in out-of-district or residential programs affect the calculation?**

Attendance is calculated based on enrollment status. Students are attributed to schools based on the location reported in the PIMS Student Template. Off-site placements for which students are reported out of a school location are not included in Regular Attendance calculations.

**11. Where can my school find information about evidence-based strategies for improving attendance?**

Through a partnership with the Mid-Atlantic Regional Educational Laboratory, PDE participated in two webinars which focused on evidence-based practices to increase student attendance; both sessions have been archived for viewing:

- [February 22, 2018 session](#)
- [October 25, 2018 session](#)