Chronic Absenteeism in Oregon Schools

Issue Brief

INTRODUCTION

To reach Oregon's education goal of 40-40-20, which seeks to ensure every Oregon student is college and career ready by 2025, a multitude of factors must simultaneously be addressed. One such factor is ensuring that those enrolled in school—attend school[1,2,3,4,5,10].

Students must be at school regularly to take advantage of the learning opportunities offered at school. Common methods for tracking attendance can mask real student attendance crises, which work to quietly undermine reform efforts. Oregon is one of a handful of U.S. states actively tracking student Chronic Absenteeism (CA), which is defined in Oregon as those enrolled students missing 10% or more of school, *excused or not*[7]. **During the 2013-14 school year approximately 81,000 (15%) of Oregon students in standard enrollment whose attendance was tracked on a daily basis were chronically absent from school[8,9].**

Overview

Average Daily Attendance (ADA) is the most common measure of student attendance at school. ADA reports the average % of students who show up to school each day. Truancy reporting, required by federal law, reports only those student absences that are deemed not excused by state definition. Chronic Absenteeism in Oregon, reports students missing 10% or more of school, excused or not, based on the number of students enrolled for at least 75 days in a standard program on May 1st [1,4,5,].

In Oregon, chronic absenteeism disproportionately impacts students from economically disadvantaged families and students with disabilities by a large margin.

Of the approximately 535,000 Oregon students counted in 2013-14: 30,000 Elementary School children were chronically absent with the highest rates in the early years[8,9]

- **ADA 94% |CA 16% or 6,300 Kindergartners**
- **ADA 95% |CA 14% or 6,000 First Graders**
- ADA 95% |CA 12% or 5,000 Second Graders
- ADA 95% |CA 11% or 4,300 Third Graders
- ADA 95% |CA 11% or 4,400 Fourth Graders
- ADA 95% |CA 11% or 4,600 Fifth Graders

18, 000 Middle Grades students were chronically absent with number increasing through the middle grades

- ADA 95% |CA 12% or 4,600 Sixth Graders
- **ADA 95% |CA 14% or 5,900 Seventh Graders**
- **ADA 94% |CA 16% or 6,800 Eighth Graders**

33,000 High School students were chronically absent, topping out with 10,000 Oregonians missing 10% or more of school in Senior year.

- **ADA 94% |CA 17% or 6,900 Freshman**
- **ADA 93% |CA 19% or 7,900 Sophomores**
- **ADA 93% |CA 21% or 8,000 Juniors**
- **ADA 91% |CA 26% or 10,000 Seniors**

Prevalence of Chronic Absence within Subgroup and as a Proportion of Population 2013-14[8,9]

	Chronic Absence within sub-group	% Student Population | % All Chronic Absence
Students with Disabilities	21% | 15,000	13% |19%
Economically Disadvantaged	20% | 56,000	52% | 68%
English Learners	14% |7,000	10% |9%

Prevalence of Chronic Absence within Subgroup and as a Proportion of Population 2013-14[8,9]

	Chronic Absence within sub-group	Student Population % | All Chronic Absence %
American Indian/ Alaska Native	27% |2,200	2% | 3%
Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander	21% | 1,000	1% |1%
Hispanic/Latino	17% | 20,000	22%|24%
Black/African American	16% | 2,000	2% | 3%
Multiracial	16% | 4,000	5| 5%
White	15% | 51,000	65% | 63%
Asian	5% | 1,000	4% |1%

Impact

Chronic absence appears to have a negative cumulative effect through successive years. Research into the impact of chronic absenteeism has shown an association with[2,3,5,7]:

- delayed achievement in the early years
- widening achievement gaps
- higher suspension rates
- increased dropout rates
- decreased high school graduation rates
- lower college enrollment
- decreased college persistence

Addressing the Issue

The more students that attend school on a regular basis, the more opportunity there is for those students to learn, and the more likely it is that they will succeed. Reducing chronic absenteeism is one key piece of the student success puzzle[7,3,9].

Research has shown that an intentional focus on reducing chronic absenteeism does, in fact, work. Proven and promising strategies generally[1,2,3,4,5,6,7,10]:

Measure

- **Student absence data collection** that can be disaggregated and analyzed. Often chronic absence is more pronounced among subsets of schools and/or sub-groups of students.

Monitor

- **Early warning systems** that alert potential issues. For example, poor attendance the first month of school often predicts chronic absence throughout the year.

Act

- **Public awareness** through positive messaging. Educate families and communities about the importance of attendance for student success.
- **Attendance programs** that are personal, relevant, culturally sensitive, and avoid punitive approaches. Tiered strategies including a pyramid of progressive supports.
- **Wrap around strategies** that reduce reasons for absence – Schools can't do it alone. Interagency collaboration for collective impact to address barriers including, but not limited to transportation, school culture and community health.

Underlying Factors: Reasons for Chronic Absenteeism[1,2,3]		
CAN'T Barriers preventing attendance	• Illness (chronic illness; lack of access to healthcare) • Transportation (unreliable) • Family Crisis (foreclosure; death)	
WON'T Aversion to something at or on the way to/from school	• Challenging community conditions (gang violence; no safe route) • Poor school climate (bullying, racism, ineffective school discipline) • Academic struggle, lack of engaging instruction • Negative school experience of parent	
DON'T Would rather be somewhere else	• Disengagement (feeling school won't help lead to a better future; lack of connection to adults and peers at school) • Belief in myths (sporadic absence doesn't matter; attendance only matters in older grades because kindergarten is not compulsory)	

"The extent of chronic absenteeism and its impacts, particularly in communities that educate large numbers of low-income students, are so great that educators and policy makers cannot truly understand achievement and graduation gaps or evaluate the effectiveness of efforts to close them without factoring in the role of chronic absenteeism."

— *Balfanz & Byrnes,* Everyone Graduate Center Johns Hopkins School of Education[3]

Prepared through a public policy internship in collaboration with:
- Oregon Education Investment Board / Equity and Partnership Subcommittee
- Oregon Advocacy Commission Office / Oregon Commission on Hispanic Affairs
- Portland State University / Graduate School of Education

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Disproportionate Discipline in Oregon's K-12 Schools

Issue Brief

INTRODUCTION

To reach Oregon's education goal of 40-40-20, which seeks to ensure every Oregon student is college and career ready by 2025, it is essential that every Oregon student be consistently connected to the most stable, engaging, safe, and supportive learning environment possible.

School discipline strategies and associated policies are receiving attention across the state, (e.g. Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports-PBIS). However, large numbers of students who display behaviors deemed inappropriate are still separated or removed from the learning environment. National research indicates that those who have the greatest academic, social, economic, and emotional needs are disproportionately impacted by discipline policies that remove them from the learning environment leading to increased disengagement from school[2,3,4,6,7,10]. **During the 2011-12 school year approximately 43,000 (8%) of Oregon students were subject to formal disciplinary action** of in or out-of-school suspension, or expulsion[8].

Overview

Of the 43,000 instances of disciplinary action across the state Approximately[8]:

- 70% involved students from low-income families
- 70% involved males
- 25% involved those in elementary school
- 40% involved those in middle school
- 35% involved those in high school
- 60% were related to disruptive behavior
- 60% resulted in out of school suspensions; 4% in expulsions
- 95% lasted less than 10 days; 55% lasted one day or less

Disaggregating data by race and ethnicity and viewing as a proportion of each student subgroup population illustrates with clarity that students of color are disproportionately impacted by disciplinary action. Students within subgroup population with one or more discipline incidents in the 2011-12 school year[8]:

- 16% of all   14,000 Black/African American students
- 11% of all   10,000 American Indian/Alaska Native students
- 9% of all 118,000 Hispanic/Latino students
- 9% of all   4,000 Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander students
- 8% of all   26,000 Multiracial students
- 7% of all 366,000 White students
- 2% of all   22,000 Asian students

Impact

While there are numerous complex challenges to be considered in maintaining a safe and effective learning environment for every teacher and student, in all but the most extreme cases the consequence of exclusion reinforces negative behavior while doing nothing to uncover underlying issues that must be addressed to support positive student engagement in school, community, and life[2,3,4,5,7].

Primary Offense Reported Resulting in Disciplinary Action 2011-12[8]
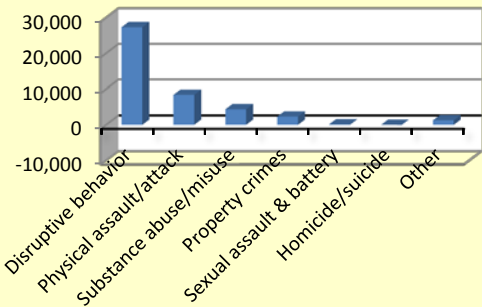
Population vs. Discipline Incidents* 2011-12[8]

	Population Percent	Discipline Incident Percent
Hispanic/Latino	21%	25%
Black/African American	3%	5%
American Indian/ Alaska Native	2%	3%
Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander	1%	1%
Multiracial	5%	5%
Asian	4%	1%
White	65%	60%

*Represents the distribution of total student population in State by subgroup vs. distribution of total student discipline incidents by State subgroup population

The impact of disciplinary action resulting in suspension and expulsion is known to be cumulative, and often has serious and far-reaching consequences for students including, but not limited to[1,3,4,5,7]:

- Immediate loss of educational opportunities
- Academic decline and failure
- Increased likelihood of dropping out
- Increased likelihood of being sent to the juvenile justice system

Underlying factors leading to these disturbing variances have been attributed, but are not limited to[1,2,3,6]:

- Social and cultural factors such as, stereotyping or misperception of communication style as combative, or defiant of authority
- Zero-tolerance policies that can lead to overly harsh punishment for relatively minor infractions
- Inconsistent and overbroad application of disciplinary rules resulting from vague sets of standards
- Institutional racism whereby systemic policies, access to decision making, practices, and structures overtly or covertly disadvantage people of color

Alternative Options

Multifaceted and interconnected approaches that collectively address system, educator, and student responsibilities for behavior and discipline have been shown to be effective in closing opportunity gaps that exist when working to build strong connections between students and school.

Examples of interconnected approaches that engage/address adults, students, and system include, but are not limited to[1,2,4,5,6,7]:

- *Continuous improvement of educator preparation and practice* (e.g. critical reflection on subjective/objective roots of disciplinary action; Courageous Conversations about Race)
- *Building positive educational climates in classrooms and schools* (e.g. promoting a bias-free culture of respect and appreciation of cultural differences)
- *Increased awareness of, and empowerment for, early and ongoing intervention* (e.g. anti-bullying programs; Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports)
- *Focus on disciplinary practices that support student learning* (e.g. restorative practices; replacing zero-tolerance policies)
- *Engagement of family and community supports* (e.g. partnering with out-of-school support systems)

Statewide Graduation Rates 2011-12[8]		
	4 Year Cohort Graduation Rate*	**5 Year Cohort Completion Rate****
American Indian/ Alaska Native	51%	66%
Black/African American	53%	71%
Hispanic/Latino	60%	71%
Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander	66%	78%
Multiracial	69%	85%
White	71%	83%
Asian	81%	85%

*Started in 9th grade and graduated with regular diploma within 4 years

**Started in 9th grade and completed a regular diploma, modified diploma, GED, or community college completion within 5 years

"We must address and overcome the barriers that too often deter students of color and those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds from achieving success in our educational system."

—*Oregon Learns,* Oregon Education Investment Board, 2011[9]

Prepared through a collaborative public policy internship between:

- Oregon Education Investment Board
- Oregon Advocacy Commissions
- Portland State University Graduate School of Education

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Oregon Education Investment Board
775 Court St. NE, Salem, Oregon, 97301

English Learners in Oregon's Education System

Issue Brief

INTRODUCTION

To reach Oregon's education goal of 40-40-20, which seeks to ensure every Oregon student is college and career ready by 2025, it is essential that every Oregon student be consistently connected with the most engaging, supportive, rigorous, and equitable learning environment possible. "Equity is both the means to educational success and an end that benefits us all." [8]

OVERVIEW

Oregon is fortunate to have a growing diversity of speakers of languages other than English[8] across our education system from Pre-K to college (P-20). Between 1997-98 and 2011-12, K-12 students reporting their language of origin as one other than English has risen about 330%.[7] In 2011-12 approximately 123,000 (22%) of Oregon's 560,000 K-12 students reported their language of origin was one other than English[7] and 59,000 (10%) were identified as developing English Language Proficiency (LEP).[7]

EL Terms - There are many terms, often used interchangeably, to refer to students whose first language is one other than English. These terms include, but are not limited to:[2,3,4,6]

EL	English Learners	EOL	English as an Other Language
ELL	English Language Learners	ESL	English as a Second Language
LEP	Limited English Proficient	LTEL	Long-Term English Learners
DLL	Dual Language Learners	EB	Emergent Bilinguals

SUPPORTING ENGLISH LEARNERS

English Learners in our P-20 education system require supportive educational environments that offer developmental pathways to academic language proficiency, access to rigorous academic content, while simultaneously preserving primary language(s).[3,4,6] *Social English*—the language of everyday conversation—is developed relatively quickly (6 months to 2 years). *Academic English*—the language used in school, the workplace, text, and assessments — however, requires an intentional systemic focus over a longer period of time (5+ years).[3,4,6] In the absence of intentional systemic support, those in the process of developing Academic English are more likely to struggle as they progress through schooling and become at-risk for disengaging or dropping out.[5,6] Across the state, strategies, policies, and funding to support English Learners are receiving attention, yet our system continues to fail English Learners allowing too many to unnecessarily fall behind their peers.[7,8]

Diversity - English Learners are a very heterogeneous group leading to a variety of learning needs.[4] Strategies that support some English Learners in certain situations, will not necessarily work for others. Differences among English Learners include, but are not limited to:[1,2,3,4,5,6,10]

- Language of origin (cognate/non-cognate), prior exposure to English
- Immigration status, migrant status, socioeconomic status
- Length and consistency of schooling (in primary language/English), age, grade level (pre-K to college), parent and community engagement in education
- Country/region of origin (developed/developing, conflict/peace, rural/urban)

Largest Limited English Proficient (LEP) Language Groups in Oregon K-12 Schools 2011-12[7]

	Percent of LEP Student Enrollment	Number of LEP Students Enrolled	Total Students Enrolled by Language of Origin
Spanish	77.1%	45,160	76,700
Russian	3.8%	2,220	4,900
Vietnamese	3.1%	1,830	4,450
English*	1.7%	990	431,340
Chinese	1.6%	950	2,880
Somali	1.3%	760	910
Arabic	1.0%	570	890
Ukrainian	0.9%	540	1,160

* Native American/Alaskan Native students may qualify as LEP even though these students have English as their language of origin.

5-Year High School (HS) Cohort Graduation Rate of Limited English Proficient (LEP) Students in Oregon 2011-12[7]

	LEP HS Cohort 4,100	Total HS Cohort 47,600
Regular Diploma	60%	72%
Completer Rate	64%	81%
Alternative Certificate	6%	<1%
Continuing Enrollment	5%	2%
Dropped Out or Completed 5 Years of HS and Did Not Graduate	30%	17%

PROGRAM MODELS

EL Program Models vary greatly, often with the following key differences:[2,3,4,5,6,10]

Bilingual – supports bilingual, bi-literate, bi-cultural development in two languages simultaneously (e.g. dual language immersion, bilingual immersion, 2-way immersion, late-exit, maintenance education)

Bilingual with transitional support – supports English acquisition for transfer to English-only classrooms (transitional bilingual, early-exit)

English-only – supports developing literacy in English (English language development (ELD)), English as a second language (ESL), sheltered English instruction, structured English immersion (SEI), Pull-out (removes students for separate language instruction), Push-in (provides specialized language instruction within the regular classroom)

Points of view vary on how equitably support ELs. Given the diversity of local populations, it is clear that no one-size-fits-all solution exists. There is general agreement however, that the following considerations must be taken into account when determining best practices: [1,2,3,4,5,6,10]

- *Diversity* of the local EL population
- *Support for academic language development and access to academic content* while also preserving first language
- *Accurate and fair identification* (e.g. differentiating between special education or academic under-preparation vs. English Learning needs)
- *Preparation, recruitment, and ongoing development of educators* across the P-20 system (e.g. bilingual/bi-cultural teachers, licensed teachers of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), teachers trained in Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) or Guided Language Acquisition Design (GLAD)
- *Responsibly allocated funding* directly supporting evidence-informed EL programs that meet the needs of the local EL community
- *Proactive community engagement and inclusion*

MEASURING GROWTH[3,7]

Consistent and comparable data of EL progress across the traditional P-20 education system silos is lacking, leading to challenges in understanding EL growth and providing support. In K-12, English Language Development (ELD) standards outline a pathway of progression to proficiency. Oregon measures ELD via the English Language Proficiency Assessment (ELPA). Title III of No Child Left Behind provides federal funding for ELs and requires progress reports toward Annual Measurable Achievement Objectives (AMAO). AMAO data indicates many K-12 Oregon districts serving ELs struggle to reach stated targets (See Table).

Limited English Proficient Students Meeting Reading/Math Standards 2011-12[7]

	Total LEP Students	LEP Met Reading Standard	LEP Met Math Standard
3rd Grade	6,500	36%	38%
4th Grade	5,900	40%	41%
5th Grade	4,500	21%	24%
6th Grade	2,900	9%	19%
7th Grade	2,300	15%	21%
8th Grade	2,000	9%	22%
11th Grade	1,500	21%	20%

Annual Measurable Achievement Objectives (AMAO) for Growth in EL's English Language Acquisition by School District (SD) 2011-12[7]

AMAO 2011-12 Targets	# of SD Met Target	# of SD Did Not Meet Target	# SDs with Too Few ELs *	# SDs with No ELs **
At least 57% of ELs move up one level of English proficiency	38	80	15	64
At least 17% of ELs reach proficiency	74	52	12	64
At least 26.5% of 5-year ELs reach proficiency	72	45	45	64
ELs met district's EL grade level academic target in Reading and Math	11	62	60	64

TOTAL # of Oregon School Districts = 197
*   Too few English Learners in district to report
** District has no EL students

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"…the success of every child and learner in Oregon is directly tied to the prosperity of all Oregonians."

—*Equity Lens,* Oregon Education Investment Board, 2013[8]