



CHRONIC ABSENCE:
AN ISSUE FOR
NEW MEXICO TO
ADDRESS

POLICY BRIEF

October 2016



Center for Education Policy Research

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Table of Contents

Introduction	1
A National Problem.....	2
Chronic Absence is Different from Truancy	3
A Problem Across All Grade Levels.....	5
Looking at Some Myths Surrounding Chronic Absence.....	6
Health Factors Related To Absence	7
A Regional Perspective	7
A Selection of National, State and Local Efforts	11
Efforts Underway in Three New Mexico Districts	13
Action Steps that New Mexico can take to Address Chronic Absence	14
Conclusion	15

Introduction

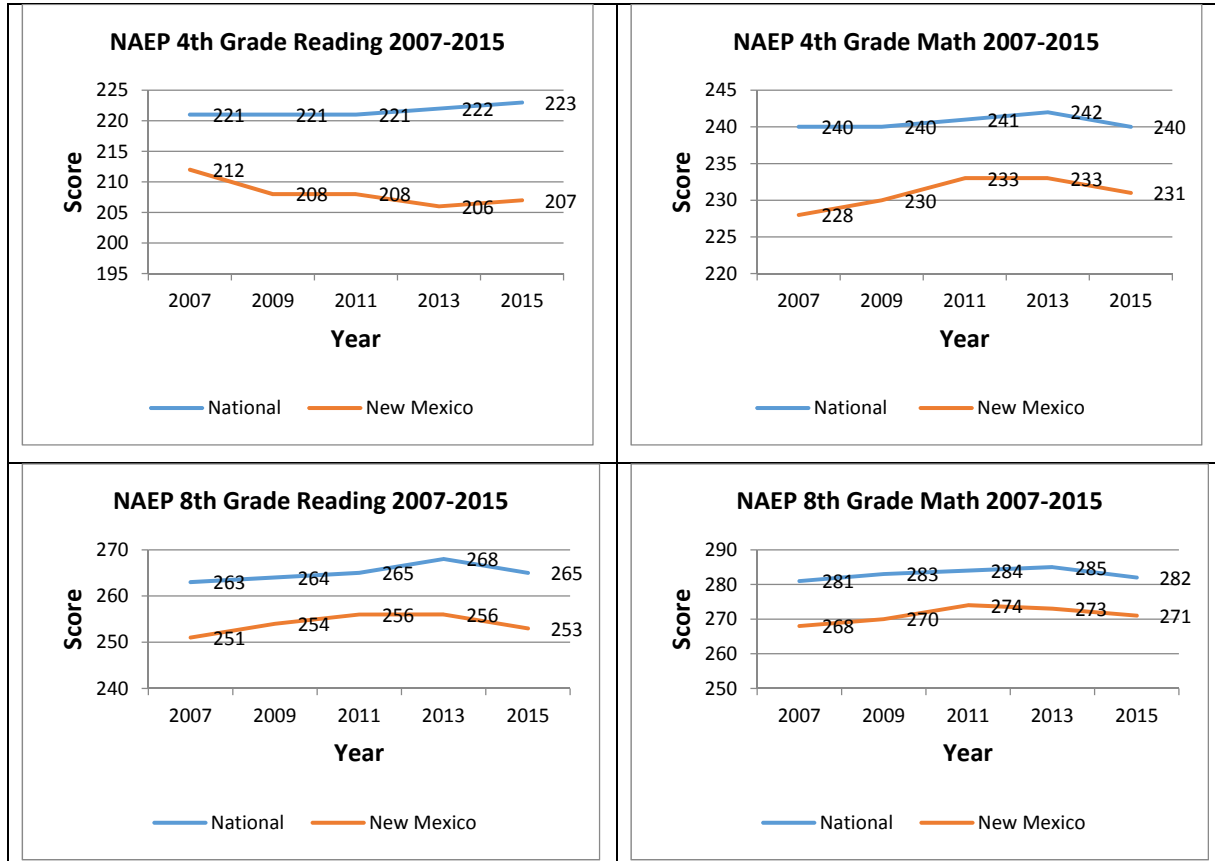
Being in school on an ongoing, regular basis is the single best way to ensure students are getting the education they need to be successful in their current grade as well as those that follow. Regular attendance provides a necessary component for students to become proficient in reading and writing, mathematics, the sciences, as well as acquiring the social and emotional skills needed to get along with their peers and adults and to face the multitude of challenges that life may present.

New Mexico has a problem with chronic absence. Chronic absence is a measure of how much school a student misses for any reason.¹ In a 2014 report, *Absences Add Up*, by Attendance Works, the state ranked second in the nation only behind Montana with 26 percent of its fourth and eighth graders indicating three or more absences a month based on analysis of data associated with the 2013 National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) exam, often referred to as “the nation’s report card.” An analysis of national attendance patterns indicates that about one in five students (~20 Percent) in both the fourth and eighth grades who took the NAEP exam reported missing three or more days in the month previous. If that pattern persisted across each month, these students would have missed twenty-seven days of school or about 15 percent of the academic year. At the eighth grade level, these two states were joined by Arizona, Oklahoma, Oregon and Wyoming. The net result is that those students in fourth grade who reported this level of absence scored 12 points below than those with better attendance, more than a full grade level lower on the NAEP achievement scale. In eighth grade, high absence reporters scored an average 18 points lower on the math assessment.²

The following charts showing trend lines for the New Mexico 4th and 8th grade NAEP reading and math exams illustrates the gap in performance from 2007 to 2015 between the state’s students and those of the nation. In general, New Mexico students scored between 9 and 16 points below their national peers across the various exams and the grade levels. If the same type of poor attendance patterns the study reported for 2013 were in place during the other years, this may provide an explanation for what contributed to the overall poor performance record on the exams.

¹ What is Chronic Absence? (accessed on September 14, 2016 from: <http://www.attendanceworks.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/What-is-Chronic-Absence.pdf>).

² Ginsburg, Alan, Phyllis Jordan, and Hedy Chang. "Absences add up: How school attendance influences student success." Portland, OR: Attendance Works (2014). (accessed on September 14, 2016 from: http://www.attendanceworks.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Absences-Add-Up_090114-1-1.pdf).



A National Problem

The problem posed by chronic absence is nationwide. A summary of findings from the 2013-14 data collected by the U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights indicates that over 6 million students missed fifteen or more days of school during the 2013-14 academic year. This amounts to 13 percent of the national student population or 1 in 8 students. Compared to their white peers, American Indian students are over 50 percent more likely to miss three weeks of school, black students 30 percent more likely, and Hispanic students 9 percent more likely. Yet, English language learners are 1.2 times *less likely* than non-English learner to miss this amount of school. Males and females are roughly equal at 13 percent for missing this time at school.³

Research indicates that missing as little as two days per month over the course of an academic year of nine months may set the stage for students falling behind in their education and skill development. Worse, it can lead to the need to repeat the academic year, an event that can contribute to negative long-term outcomes, including dropping out. Eighteen missed days in New Mexico means the student has been absent for 10 percent of the 180-day school year or nearly four weeks of instruction. Research shows that chronic absence in kindergarten or first grade is a strong

³ US Department of Education, Chronic Absenteeism in the Nation’s Schools: An unprecedented look at a hidden educational crisis. (accessed on October 3, 2016 from: <https://www2.ed.gov/datastory/chronicabsenteeism.html>). U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights. 2013-2014 Civil Rights Data Collection: A First Look. June 7, 2016. Washington D.C. pgs. 7-8 (accessed on June 15, 2016 from: <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/2013-14-first-look.pdf>).

predictor that the child will not read proficiently by grade three.⁴ Chronic absence in the sixth grade is considered as a leading indicator that the student may drop out of high school.⁵ Further research finds that chronic absence in the ninth grade and its contribution to course failure is a better indicator that the child will drop out than the scores received on the eighth grade standardized exam.⁶

Chronic Absence is Different from Truancy

Chronic absence is a separate issue from truancy, which is any unexcused absence. While long recognized as a problem, truancy as part of attendance tracking came into increased focus as part of the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act, which contains the “Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act” that required state education agencies to establish a Uniform Management Information Reporting System, that includes among other information, truancy rates.⁷ Truancy in the state of New Mexico is considered a status offence. That is, it is only considered a violation due to the age of the person, i.e. being a minor. If the number of truancy violations is significant enough, the child is referred to the NM Children, Youth and Families Department that has the discretion of how it will handle the infraction. Chronic absenteeism, however, does not fall under this categorization. According to an FY 2015 report issued by CYFD, of the 1,908 total status offenses reported for FY 15, 1,170 (61.3%) were for truancy. In terms of gender, males with status offenses amounted to 58.2 percent and for ethnicity, 69.8 percent were Hispanic.⁸

The National Center for School Engagement is one of the leading national organizations that is providing leadership on and confronting the issue of truancy through a focus on at-risk youth and their families. By concentrating on truancy (and more generally excessive excused or unexcused absences) the group intends to improve the likelihood of having these youth achieve school success by concentrating on and the promotion of attendance, attachment and achievement.⁹

While other groups have addressed the issue of chronic absence, including the Pew Charitable Trusts, the Regional Education Laboratory (REL) – West, and the Everyone Graduates Center of Johns Hopkins University, the national organization that has provided the most sustained research and focus on the issue has been Attendance Works.¹⁰ Attendance Works was established in 2010 and is a national and state effort that is connected to and funded through the Child and Family Policy Center that is headquartered in Des Moines, Iowa. The three objectives of Attendance Works are as follows:

⁴ *Attendance in Early Elementary Grades: Association with Student Characteristics, School Readiness and Third Grade Outcomes*, Applied Survey Research (2011), pgs. 11-13 (accessed on September 10, 2016 from: <http://www.attendanceworks.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/ASR-Mini-Report-Attendance-Readiness-and-Third-Grade-Outcomes-7-8-11.pdf>).

⁵ Baltimore Education Research Consortium. "Destination Graduation: Sixth grade early warning indicators for Baltimore City Schools." Baltimore: Baltimore Education Research Consortium (2011). pg. ii. (accessed September 11, 2016 from <http://www.baltimore-berc.org/pdfs/SixthGradeEWIFullReport.pdf>)

⁶ Allensworth, Elaine M., and John Q. Easton. "What Matters for Staying On-Track and Graduating in Chicago Public High Schools: A Close Look at Course Grades, Failures, and Attendance in the Freshman Year. Research Report." Consortium on Chicago School Research (2007) pgs. 15-18. (accessed on August 25, 2016 from: <https://consortium.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/publications/07%20What%20Matters%20Final.pdf>).

⁷ PL 107-110 Title IV Part A SEC 4112 (c) (3) (A) & (B) i.

⁸ NM Children, Youth and Families Department. *Juvenile Justice Services (JJS) Annual Report: Fiscal Year 2015*. 2016, pg. 28. (accessed on June 1, 2016 from: <https://cyfd.org/about-cyfd/publications-reports>).

⁹ Readers interested in learning more about the NCSE are encouraged to visit the organization’s website at <http://schoolengagement.org/>.

¹⁰ Please visit <http://www.attendanceworks.org/> for more information on the organization.

- 1) Build public awareness and political will.
- 2) Foster state campaigns.
- 3) Encourage local practice.

The organization provides numerous free and fee-based resources, including prepared handouts, intervention strategies for outreach to parents/caregivers, and software for tracking chronic absence. The organization has also been instrumental in designating September as “attendance awareness month.”

Why the emphasis on improving attendance in September? Research out of Baltimore indicates that nearly half (49.5%) of students across all grades who missed between 2 to 4 days in September went on to become chronically absent for that school year. The suggestion from this research is that schools must pay attention to attendance from the beginning of school forward to identify those students who are falling into a negative attendance pattern and intervene early to avoid it becoming a chronic issue.¹¹ It should be noted that while the US Department of Education uses the level of fifteen days per academic year as the metric for chronic absence for its OCR report, Attendance Works uses a count of eighteen days over the academic year which equates to two days per month over a nine-month academic year.

While appearing as an insignificant amount of time when looked at discretely, missing just two days a month adds up to a total of eighteen days for the school year in what is identified as being chronically absent.¹² And, it doesn’t matter whether the absences are excused or unexcused, the end result is the same—the absent child is not exposed to important subject materials and concepts that are necessary for future proficiency and competence in various academic areas. Their absence necessitates the teacher taking instructional time away from other students to help bring those who were missing up to the level of coverage and understanding their peers possess. Hence, chronic absence

Key Terms for New Mexico
<p>Attendance – means students who are in class or in a school-approved activity. If a student is in attendance up to one-half the total instructional time during a school day, the student will be counted as having attended one-half of the a school day. If the student attends school for more than one-half of the total instructional time, the student will be counted as having attended for the full day.</p>
<p>Unexcused absence – means an absence from school or a class for which the student does not have an allowable excuse pursuant to the compulsory school attendance law or rules of the local school board, governing authority of a private school, or governing board of a charter school.</p>
<p>Habitual truant – means a student who has accumulated the equivalent of ten or more unexcused absences within a school year.</p>
<p>Truancy – any unexcused absence from school.</p>
<p>Chronic Absence – excused or unexcused absences from school that amount to 10 percent of a school year, which in New Mexico amounts to 18 days.</p>
<p><i>Definitions for terms are found in 22-12-1 NMSA 1978 Compulsory School Attendance Law; 6.10.8 NMAC Compulsory School Attendance; and Ginsburg, Alan, Phyllis Jordan, and Hedy Chang. "Absences add up: How school attendance influences student success." Portland, OR: Attendance Works (2014).</i></p>

¹¹ Olsen, Linda S. "Why September Matters: Improving Student Attendance. Policy Brief." Baltimore Education Research Consortium (2014). (accessed on September 20, 2016 from: <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED553161.pdf>).

¹² The Attendance Imperative: How States Can Advance Achievement by Reducing Chronic Absence. Policy Brief. Attendance Works. September 2014, pg. 5. (accessed on September 7, 2016 from: <http://www.attendanceworks.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/AAM-Policy-Brief-091214-2.pdf>).

CHRONIC ABSENCE: AN ISSUE FOR NEW MEXICO TO ADDRESS

is not just a problem for individual students but has a corresponding detrimental effect on the classroom and entire student school population. The pattern of chronic absence also often appears early in a student's school experience. Research that shifted the focus on attendance problems from later grades to early elementary was published in 2008 by the National Center for Children in Poverty. The report focused on the importance of attendance in the early grades K-3rd and the corresponding need for engagement of families and communities to address the issue and the contributing barriers that are often multi-casual in origin as well as offering some possible solutions. It was also an early call for the importance of the use of data to help gain clarity about the issue.¹³

While some absences may be unavoidable, such as those caused by injury, hospitalization, or infectious disease; other absences are most likely avoidable, such as a minor runny nose or a headache. Other reasons that contribute to chronic absence can include turmoil in the family, bullying or feeling unsafe at school, lack of access to reliable transportation, or not having clean or adequate clothing or outerwear.¹⁴ In any case where a pattern of excessive absence appears it is incumbent upon the adults in the school to inquiry about the cause and to provide intervention services either internal to the school or external to the district or larger community.

A Problem Across All Grade Levels

The problem of chronic absence cuts across all grades, genders, ethnicities, and socio-economic levels. Often the problem of chronic absence is unrecognized and therefore, often goes unaddressed. A reason for this failure of recognition is the means by which schools and districts in New Mexico and many across the nation track attendance, a measurement known as average daily attendance (ADA). The ADA is simply the total count of students in a school on any particular day. These counts are then averaged over the course of the school year to calculate an average percentage for attendance.

The ADA is separate from the number that the New Mexico Public Education Department (PED) uses to determine funding allocations across the state's 89 districts. The PED uses certain days of the academic year—specifically the 40th, 80th, and 120th—for making funding decisions. The 40th day count is the most important with adjustments calculated by both the 80th and 120th counts, which are technically referred to as average daily membership (ADM) counts.¹⁵ While this use of the three points in time is an established part of school fiscal support in the state, and is outside of the scope of this paper, it was nonetheless necessary to discuss their use as being a separate measure from the ADA.

The problem with using ADA is that it can and often does miss children who are regularly absent, either on an excused or unexcused basis. For instance, a school with a student population of 200 students may report an ADA rate of 95 percent, which is considered as an indicator of good attendance. However, upwards of 60 students (30 percent of the student body) could be chronically absent over the course of the school year. Conversely, schools that have a 97 percent ADA usually do not have a problem with chronic absenteeism.¹⁶ Because the problem is often “hidden

¹³ Chang, Hedy N., and Mariajose Romero. "Present, Engaged, and Accounted for: The Critical Importance of Addressing Chronic Absence in the Early Grades. Report." National Center for Children in Poverty (2008).

¹⁴ Balfanz, Robert, and Vaughan Byrnes. "The Importance of Being in School: a Report on Absenteeism in the Nation's Public Schools. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Center for Social Organization of Schools." (2012), pgs. 4-5, accessed on September 12, 2016 from: http://new.every1graduates.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/FINALChronicAbsenteeismReport_May16.pdf).

¹⁵ Burrell, Steve. How New Mexico Public Schools are Funded. New Mexico Public Education Department School Budget and Finance Bureau, April 2011, (accessed on September 14, 2016 from <http://www.nmsba.org/2015%20Hatch%20-%20New%20Mexico%20Public%20School%20Funding%20Formula.pdf>).

¹⁶ Bruner, Charles; Discher, Ann; and Chang, Hedy. November 2011. Chronic Elementary Absenteeism: A problem Hidden in Plain Sight. Attendance Works & Child & Family Policy Center. (accessed September 9, 2016 from: <http://www.edweek.org/media/chronicabsence-15chang.pdf>).

in plain sight” it is worthwhile to address some misconceptions about chronic absence and highlight the detrimental effects it can have on student academic achievement.

The compounding problem of chronic absence is perhaps best illustrated in the ongoing challenges the state has in regards to its high school graduates. As noted earlier, chronic absence results in poor academic performance starting at an earlier point in school. If not addressed and corrected the result is disengagement of students that can result in failure to graduate on time or dropping out. A recent report by GradNation: the America’s Promise Alliance, *2016 Building a Grad Nation Data Brief*, showed that New Mexico was last in the nation for its graduation rate of 68.5 percent, more than 13 points behind the national average of 82.3 percent.

Looking at Some Myths Surrounding Chronic Absence

There are various mistaken notions about chronic absences that need to be considered. As reported in a September 2010 online version of Education Week, here are five that Hedy Chang, now executive director of Attendance Works detailed:

- 1) Students don’t start missing a lot of school until middle or high school.
- 2) Absences in early grades don’t really affect academics.
- 3) Most schools already know how many students are chronically absent.
- 4) There’s not much that schools can do to improve attendance; it’s up to the parents.
- 5) The federal government has no role in reducing chronic absence.

In her commentary, Ms. Chang goes on to challenge each of these notions such as pointing out that national research indicates that approximately 1 in 10 kindergartners miss upwards of a month of school each year. That missing school in the early grades of K and 1st is a strong indicator that the child will not be reading proficiently by grade three. These poor starts were particularly damaging to children from families with low incomes as they typically do not have the resources to help remediate these early shortfalls. In addressing the third point, she highlights that schools do not know who is chronically absent, because schools in general do not make the effort to track chronic absence. The measurement is generally not required by districts or states, a situation that is true in New Mexico as well. To correct the problem, schools have many options to deal with chronic absences that are relatively low cost. One of which is tracking daily attendance on a per student basis and providing that information in an accurate manner to a central point in both their home district and state education agencies. This effort would provide a means by which schools could identify students that are exhibiting patterns of chronic absence and provide intervention strategies that involve not only the student but their parent or caregiver as well in order to investigate its causes and explore solutions. Finally, the federal government could require states, districts and school to begin tracking chronic absence rates by using a common way of measuring so that rates could be compared across states, districts, and schools that would illustrate to what extent the issue presents itself across the nation.¹⁷

¹⁷ Chang, Hedy. Five Myths about School Attendance. *Education Week*, published online: September 10, 2010. (accessed on September 24, 2016: <http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2010/09/15/03chang.h30.html>)

Health Factors Related To Absence

A student's ability to be present in school and able to learn is often linked to matters of personal health. If their health is compromised for one or more reasons, their ability to attend school is often impaired. The National Collaborative on Education and Health, an initiative co-convened by the Healthy Schools Campaign and the Trust for America's Health has created a chart that details many of the most prevalent health conditions that tend to inflict low income and minority students the most. These afflictions include: asthma; bullying, violence and abuse; oral health; food insecurity and nutrition; mental health and substance abuse disorders; teen and unplanned pregnancies; and vision issues. Any comprehensive approach to chronic absence that New Mexico seeks to implement will need to consider these health-based elements to improve the likelihood of success.¹⁸ Another report focused on Oregon also makes the connection between poor health in students, chronic absence and the increased likelihood of low achievement and eventually dropping out.¹⁹

A Regional Perspective

As part of the research effort for this policy brief, staff from UNM's Center for Education Policy Research contacted other state educational agency personnel to inquire about current efforts to address chronic absence and truancy. In summary, all of the five states of Texas, Oklahoma, Colorado, Utah, and Arizona consider the issue of truancy to one level or another while Texas, Utah and Colorado have begun to address chronic absence to some degree. Both Texas and Utah have developed working relationships with Attendance Works; however, none of the other states are known to have taken this step. In addition, Colorado Department of Education staff indicated that their state is intending to begin tracking chronic absence in the fall of the 2016-2017 academic year, the specifics of which were not detailed in the held conversation. The list below provides a summary of what CEPR has learned about what other states in the Southwest are doing in terms of tracking truancy and chronic absence.

¹⁸ Leading Health Conditions Impacting Student Attendance, **National Collaborative on Education and Health**, September 2015. (accessed on October 3, 2016 from: <http://www.attendanceworks.org/research/health-issues-and-absenteeism/>).

¹⁹ Henderson, Tia, Caitlin Hill, and Kerry Norton. "The Connection Between Missing School and Health: A Review of Chronic Absenteeism and Student Health in Oregon." (2014), (accessed on September 14, 2016 from <https://www.upstreampublichealth.org/sites/default/files/Chronic%20Absence%20and%20Health%20Review%20FINAL%2010.10.2014.pdf>).

Table 1 Assessment of Southwest Regional State Initiatives on Chronic Absence & Selected Research

State	State Initiatives/Selected Research	Pertinent Statute or Rule
Arizona	The Arizona Department of Education does not track truancy rates per district or for the state as a whole, it is considered a local issue. Infractions of the truancy law may be handled by local law enforcement agencies; however, there is no established uniform standard for how and what truancy data is collected or how it is used.	Arizona Revised Statute (A.R.S.) §15-803
	The state has a statute in place that provides a definition of school attendance, habitually truant, truant and truant child. It also indicates that a child who is determined to be habitually truant or has excessive absences (defined as 10 percent of the required days of attendance, which is the same amount of time generally accepted as the indicator for chronic absence) can be adjudicated as an incorrigible child. ²⁰	
	Chronic absence data is not collected.	
Utah	Utah has made major progress over the recent past to address the issue of chronic absence. As with other states the statutory and rule framework in Utah currently focuses on truancy and excludes a focus on chronic absence.	Utah Administrative Code - Rule R277-607. Truancy Prevention; Utah Code 53A-11-101.7 Truancy – Notice of Truancy – Failure to cooperate with school authorities – Habitual truant citation.
	The University of Utah’s Education Policy Center conducted the first comprehensive review of chronic absence for the state in 2012 and published a research brief on the subject. One of the key findings the study revealed was that although the state had an overall ADA of 95 percent across all its districts, the statistic obscured the fact that 13.5 percent of all students were chronically absent during the same school year (2012). The study identified four variables as predictive of chronic absence: low income, special education, English proficiency, and ethnicity (designated as racial minority). While rates of homelessness for children are low in Utah, the researchers found that this status increased a child’s risk for chronic absence by 2.5 times. Most striking was that the study found that an incidence of chronic absenteeism in even a single year between 8 th and 12 th grade was associated with a seven-fold increase in the likelihood of dropping out. ²¹	
	A study conducted in 2014 by the Utah Voices for Children, posited the problem of chronic absence as a “two generation” issue and focused on ways communities could help identify barriers that families were facing that impaired their ability to successfully get their child to school. ²²	
	Attendance Works and the Healthy School Campaign issued a study in September 2015 entitled, “Mapping the Early Attendance Gap: Charting a Course for School Success,” in which they had encouraged states to dig deep into their attendance data and	

²⁰ A.R.S. §15-803.

²¹ Utah Education Policy Center. "Research brief: Chronic absenteeism." Research Brief, University of Utah, College of Education (2012).

²² Utah Voices for Children, “Attendance and the Early Grades: A Two-Generation Issue,” September 9, 2014. New Publications. (accessed on September 20, 2016: <http://www.utahchildren.org/newsroom/publications/item/517-attendance-and-the-early-grades-a-two-generation-issue?highlight=WyJhdHRlbnRhbmlNlIiwidGhllwiZWfYbHkiLCJncmFkZXMiLCJlYXJseSBncmFkZXMiXQ==>).

CHRONIC ABSENCE: AN ISSUE FOR NEW MEXICO TO ADDRESS

	determine the “who, what, when, where and why” of their chronic absence problem. Utah was one of the featured states. ²³	
Colorado	<p>Colorado tracks and reports data on school truancy in compliance with federal law.</p> <p>Based on conversation with Colorado Department of Education staff, the state intends to track chronic absence data beginning with the 2016-2017 school year. Since this process has just begun it is premature to discuss its efficacy.</p> <p>Colorado Revised Statutes (C.R.S.) provides a definition of habitual truant but not of truancy. A definition for truancy exists in a Q&A document prepared by Janelle Krueger, Principal Consultant, Colorado Department of Education. The document explains how the definition resulted from a survey of various schools districts in the state and a 77% percent majority came to an agreement on the definition of the term.²⁴</p>	<p>C.R.S. 22-33-104. Compulsory school attendance.</p> <p>C.R.S. Section 22-33-107. Enforcement of compulsory school attendance - definitions.</p>
Oklahoma	<p>Oklahoma has truancy laws in place but has no statewide initiative currently addressing chronic absence. Efforts to deal with truancy and dropout prevention appear to be centered on the local level as illustrated by the Check & Connect Tulsa initiative. The program is a partnership between the Community Service Council, Tulsa Public Schools, The Oklahoma Department of Human Services and the Tulsa County Juvenile Bureau and is underway in four West Tulsa Schools. Check & Connect was founded by staff at the University of Minnesota.</p>	<p>Oklahoma State Department of Education 2014 School Law Book Section 763. Truancy – Reports to Department of Public Welfare – Withholding of Assistance Payments; Section 764. Deprived Adjudication Due to Repeated Absence. Oklahoma Statutes §70-24-120. Truancy - Reports to Department of Human Services - Withholding of assistance payments; Oklahoma Administrative Code 210:10-1-3. Reports and records for attendance, enrollment, and transportation</p>
Texas	<p>The state of Texas currently does not monitor chronic absence. As with other states in the Southwest, Texas has a compulsory school attendance act. Efforts for addressing chronic absence are underway in three of the state’s major cities. These include: 1) Austin/Central Texas that is working with other districts across Central Texas in the E3 Alliance that is focused on improving school attendance. In 2011, the Alliance launched the Missing School Matters initiative that regionally includes 14 districts, and is directed towards reducing student absences by 2 percent annually. 2) Houston – The Barbara Bush Houston Literacy Foundation has worked in conjunction with the Houston Independent School District to identify the prevalence and impact of chronic absence. The Foundation released <i>When Students Miss School: The High Cost to Houston</i> (accessed on September 21, 2016 from: http://www.bushhoustonliteracy.org/news-events/reports) which detailed the impact poor attendance has on student achievement, classroom instruction, and district finances. 3) San Antonio – San Antonio Kids Attend to Win sponsored by the P16 Council of Greater Bexar County is focused on improving attendance through a concentration on kindergarten readiness, 3rd</p>	<p>Texas Statutes Sec. 25.085 Compulsory School Attendance.</p>

²³ Jordan, Phyllis; Chang, Heddy, et al. Mapping the Early Attendance Gap: Charting a Course for School Success. September 2015. Attendance Works and Healthy Schools Campaign.

²⁴ Krueger, Janelle. n.d. “Questions and Answers Regarding Colorado’s School Truancy Rates,” Colorado Department of Education (accessed on October 4, 2016 from: <https://www.cde.state.co.us/search/node/truancy> – 6. Truancy QA.

	grade reading proficiency, on-time graduation, and success in college and career.	
New Mexico	<p>New Mexico complies with federal reporting requirements for truancy but has no current statutory or rule framework for monitoring, tracking, reporting or intervention in relation to chronic absence. Habitual truancy is a problem across various districts in the state with composite rates for various school types for SY 2014-15 as follows:</p> <p>Elementary School – 11.90% Middle School – 10.30% High School – 19.90%</p> <p>(data accessed on October 6, 2016 from: NM PED website: http://www.ped.state.nm.us/it/schoolfactsheets.html).</p> <p>Various efforts have been undertaken to address chronic absence and heighten awareness of the issue during 2016, most notably the Head to Toe Conference hosted by the NM Department of Health that occurred on April 21-22, and the Attendance + Engagement = Graduation Conference that happened on September 8, 2016 and coordinated by Mission: Graduate. Both of these conferences were directed towards highlighting the issues surrounding chronic absence, the detrimental effects it has on academic performance and long-term outcomes, and proposing various solutions that can be undertaken by students, parents, schools, government, business, tribes, and members of each community in the state. Mission: Graduate has initiatives underway with Bernalillo Public Schools, Belen Public Schools and Albuquerque Public Schools to help coordinate efforts using school attendance data to focus on chronic absences and develop effective engagement and intervention strategies to address the problems with educators and students and their families.</p>	<p>22-12-1 NMSA 1978 Compulsory School Attendance Law. 6.10.8 NMAC Compulsory School Attendance.</p>

As illustrated by the information on the different states in the Southwest region, New Mexico is not alone in the minimal attention being directed towards monitoring and reporting chronic absence. While efforts are underway in some local communities, a broader coordinated initiative is necessary. To achieve success, the effort to address chronic absence would need to be directed most likely by some entity at the state of New Mexico in collaboration with all school districts, tribes, business leaders and communities to highlight the problem of chronic absence and raise public awareness of the issue and its detrimental effects. The goal of this effort will need to focus on developing effective identification strategies, interventions, supports and solutions that engage students, parents, schools and members of the broader communities in ways to address this pressing issue. The Legislative Finance Committee has looked at the connection of chronic absence and school performance in various reports, with a specific association of the challenges faced by families in poverty including health, mobility and high absenteeism, which result in specific negative impacts during the early grades.²⁵ As pointed out in a policy review of the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) conducted by the UNM Center for Education Policy Research (CEPR), collecting and reporting data on

²⁵ For instance, see Report to Legislative Finance Committee, Public Education Department, Report #04-11 Performance and Improvement Trends: A Case Study of Elementary Schools in New Mexico. October 30, 2014, (accessed on September 29, 2016 from: <https://www.nmlegis.gov/lcs/lfc/lfcdocs/perfaudit/Public%20Education%20Department%20-%20Performance%20and%20Improvement%20Trends-A%20Case%20Study%20of%20Elementary%20Schools%20in%20New%20Mexico.pdf>).

CHRONIC ABSENCE: AN ISSUE FOR NEW MEXICO TO ADDRESS

chronic absenteeism on school reports is supported by the ESSA.²⁶ The shift in federal law has provided the state of New Mexico the opportunity to make data available that will assist educators, policymakers and parents to address the issue of chronic absence in a systematic manner and allow longitudinal tracking and comparison across schools and districts.

While collecting the proper data is important it will need to be made accessible to those people, primarily principals and teachers at the local school level, who can use the data on an ongoing basis. The state of New Mexico can make this a requirement of all schools and districts. The state PED data system known as the Student Teacher Accountability Reporting System (STARS) would need to be modified to allow this collection to happen. However, such a change would provide state, district, and school officials a powerful tool in creating early warning systems that make the now “hidden problem” of chronic absence transparent and facilitate early identification of problem attendance patterns and then allow school officials the opportunity to intervene with the student and family in order to correct the problem of absences before it becomes chronic.

A Selection of National, State and Local Efforts

There are a number of different initiatives happening at the national, state, and local levels to confront chronic absence. The following provides a partial list of efforts occurring at various national, local and state levels.

My Brother’s Keeper (MBK) – A national effort spearheaded by the White House and President Obama to address persistent opportunity gaps faced by boys and young men of color and ensure that all young people can reach their full potential. The initiative has 6 milestones: 1) Getting a Healthy Start and Entering School Ready to Learn; 2) Reading at Grade Level by Third Grade; 3) Graduating from High School Ready for College and Career; 4) Completing Postsecondary Education or Training; 5) Successfully Entering the Workforce; and 6) Keeping Kids on Track and Giving Them Second Chances. The City of Albuquerque and Albuquerque Public Schools are participants in the initiative along with nineteen other districts including Baltimore, Cleveland, Dallas, Detroit, Los Angeles and Santa Fe.²⁷ The CEPR has produced a recent report on MBK and its implementation in Albuquerque.²⁸

Data Quality Campaign (DQC) – The Data Quality Campaign is national advocacy organization launched in 2005 for using data to inform and influence education policy and practice. The DQC has released a recent report, *Opportunities to Make Data Work for Students in the Every Student Succeeds Act* that highlights the need to report chronic absence by school on report cards. It argues that reporting chronic absence matters because it can point to systemic problems in a school or community such as health issues, limited access to transportation, and school climate challenges such as bullying. It also points out that providing a data snapshot of chronic absence is insufficient and that the data collection and reporting effort should be used to develop early warning systems that can identify students at risk for chronic absence and provide intervention support to schools and districts.²⁹ Aimee Rogstad Guidera is president and CEO.

²⁶ CEPR. The Center for Education Policy Research Every Student Succeeds Act Policy Review for the Learning Alliance of New Mexico, August 2016, pg. 10.

²⁷ White House Website. (accessed on October 3 from: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/my-brothers-keeper/#section-about-my-brothers-keeper>). Santa Fe Birth to Career Collaboration (accessed on October 5, 2016 from: <http://www.santafeb2c.org/amicorps-vista.html>). Burgess, Kim. *APS joins ‘positive’ anti-truancy drive*. Albuquerque journal. June 27, 2016. Pgs. A1-2.

²⁸ Damle, R., Good, D., & Dekker, J. (2015). My Brother's Keeper Policy Review. (M. Heredia-Griego). Retrieved from/sites/creativeworks/Data_Driven_Policy_Making/final_cabq_mbk_policy_review_092015.pdf

²⁹ Data Quality Campaign. October 2016 *Opportunities to Make Data Work for Students in the Every Student Succeeds Act*. (accessed on October 12, 2016 from: <http://dataqualitycampaign.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/DQC-ESSA-Opps-10112016.pdf>).

Attendance Works: Established in 2010, Attendance Works is a national and state initiative that promotes awareness of the important role that school attendance plays in achieving academic success starting with school entry. Attendance Works grew out of an earlier effort launched in 2007 known as The Chronic Early Absence Project.³⁰ The goal of the initiative is to ensure that every district in the country not only tracks chronic absence data beginning in kindergarten or ideally earlier, but also partners with families and community agencies to intervene when attendance is a problem for children or particular schools. The effort is built on three objectives: 1) Build public awareness and political will around the issue of chronic absence; 2) Foster state campaigns, because the most effective efforts to confront and correct the issue of chronic absence will require a collaborative statewide effort; and 3) Encourage local practice through technical assistance to communities, schools and districts to monitor attendance data and collaborate to deal with chronic absence.³¹ The executive director is Hedy Chang.

Everyone Graduates Center – located at Johns Hopkins University, the Everyone Graduates Center (EGC) develops and disseminates the know-how required to enable all students to graduate from high school prepared for college, career, and civic life. Through a systematic and comprehensive approach, the Center combines analysis of the causes, location, and consequences of the nation’s dropout crisis with the development of tools and models designed to keep all students on the path to high school graduation, and capacity building efforts to enable states, communities, school districts, and schools to provide all their students with the supports they need to succeed.³² The director of the EGC is Robert Balfanz.

California – The state’s Attorney General issued a report in 2015 entitled, *In School + On Track 2015*, which established “the Elementary School Attendance Imperative,” as a “smart, cost effective approach to economic development, public health and public safety.” By highlighting statistics such as 83 percent of students who are chronically absent in K and 1st grade cannot read at a proficient manner by third grade, and that students who cannot read at grade level by third grade are four times more likely to drop out, the report reinforces awareness of the linkage between early attendance and later academic success or failure. The report also provides a review of various local efforts within the state of California to minimize chronic absence.³³ In 2016, the California Department of Education began collecting individual student attendance data from all districts. The effort will begin in late spring 2017 and will focus on school year 2016-2017. In a parallel action the state Attorney General released the Positive Parent Messaging toolkit, which includes research, communication tools and recommended messages directed towards parents on the importance of good attendance.³⁴ The California Attorney General is Kamala D. Harris.

Baltimore Education Research Consortium (BERC) - is a partnership of the Baltimore City Public Schools (City Schools), Johns Hopkins University, Morgan State University, and other civic and community partners. BERC’s mission is to conduct and disseminate long- and short-term strategic data analysis and research that informs decisions about policy and practice to improve the educational and life outcomes of children in Baltimore. BERC assembles a diverse coalition of partners to formulate questions worth asking, contribute to conversations worth having, and highlight policy implications worthy of action.³⁵ Faith Connolly is the BERC executive director.

³⁰ Jordan and Chang, “Mapping the Early Attendance Gap: Charting a Course for School Success,” pg. 4.

³¹ Attendance Works website: <http://www.attendanceworks.org/about/>

³² Everyone Graduates Center website: <http://every1graduates.org/>

³³ Office of the California Attorney General. *In School + On Track 2015: Attorney General's 2015 Report on California's Elementary Truancy and Absenteeism Crisis*. (accessed on August 18, 2016 from: <https://www.oag.ca.gov/truancy/2015>).

³⁴ Attendance Works. California takes two big steps forward to tackle chronic absenteeism. February 29, 2016. (accessed august 15, 2016 from: <http://www.attendanceworks.org/13385-2/>).

³⁵ The Baltimore Education Research Consortium website: <http://baltimore-berc.org/>

Mission: Graduate – spearheaded by the United Way of Central New Mexico, Mission: Graduate (MG) has the goal of supporting 60,000 new graduates in the region to complete degrees and certificates by 2020. Working with various school and university personnel, government officials, engaged citizens, and members of the local business community situated in Central New Mexico, Mission: Graduate has several efforts underway from early learning and literacy to college entry, completion and movement into careers. MG recently hosted an all-day conference in September 2016 that highlighted various aspects of school attendance. The executive director is Angelo Gonzalez.³⁶

Efforts Underway in Three New Mexico Districts

As noted in the regional perspective section, New Mexico currently does not have requirements in place for districts or schools to track and report chronic absence to the PED. While districts are required to comply with and report a snapshot of attendance to the US Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights, the central problem with the reporting cycle is that the generated report is two years old by the time it is released to the public. Hence, the data reported is for the 2013-2014 academic year. Albuquerque Public Schools district information did not make it into the released OCR data set because it had been submitted in an incorrect format. Nonetheless, the district is involved in some innovative practices directed towards chronic absence and truancy that are noteworthy and addressed briefly below. The other two districts considered include Las Cruces Public Schools and Santa Fe Public Schools, of which the *Albuquerque Journal* reported as having chronic absenteeism rates of 10.4 percent and 33.9 percent, respectively.³⁷ The CEPR has performed a preliminary analysis on the reported data from the OCR for the three districts and has provided visual representations through the Center’s website under the “Data Visualization” tab: <http://cepr.unm.edu/>. Viewers will need to use Tableau reader software for access to the materials. As the reader will note, currently across the state of New Mexico, the emphasis on reporting is still directed towards truancy, not chronic absence.

Albuquerque Public Schools (APS) – Albuquerque Public Schools is the largest school district in the state of New Mexico. Using the district’s website, APS provides various informational pages to explain its truancy prevention and intervention efforts. These include a project overview, best practices rubric, as well as tools that individual schools can use as part of their truancy prevention student contact efforts and intervention initiative, the Student Attendance Success Plan. The district website provides a list of definitions for terms related to attendance and absences and how the attendance monitoring program operates for elementary, middle and high school populations. It also provides a description of the established process for working with students who have been identified as being chronic absent, and how makeup work and grades will be addressed. Of note is the district’s emphasis on raising awareness of student responsibilities related to attendance and suggested tips families can use to promote attendance for their students.

The district website also posted a page on September as Attendance Awareness Month and announced that it has joined a nationwide effort to raise awareness of the importance of attendance during this month for long-term academic success over the course of the year. Efforts include helping schools establish a climate of attendance matters and developing plans for improving attendance; working with United Way to provide grants to 10 elementary schools to raise awareness of attendance and provide incentives; implementing the White House Success Mentor Pilot in two schools; and administering truancy prevention/intervention programs in 26 schools. The district’s efforts will

³⁶ Mission: Graduate website: <https://missiongraduatenm.org/>

³⁷ Burgess, Kim. *Federal report: Too many empty seats in Santa Fe, Clovis Classrooms*. *Albuquerque Journal*, September 18, 2016 (accessed on September 20, 2016 from: <https://www.abqjournal.com/847487/chronic-absences-rampant-in-nm.html>).

be coordinated through the APS Student, Family, and Community Supports Division, whose executive director is Kristine Meurer.³⁸

Las Cruces Public Schools – The Attendance and Support Services Program provides the coordination for the district’s efforts to conform with New Mexico’s Compulsory School Attendance law. The district maintains a website that offers various links on district policies that address compliance with the CSA law, what constitutes excused absences, as well as exclusions and exemptions from school attendance and what the district’s graduation and credit requirements are. It also provides links that offer guidelines for dealing with homeless students and students who have been identified as at-risk of developing or intervening in cases where negative behaviors have developed to avoid movement into juvenile adjudication.³⁹

Santa Fe Public Schools – The district maintains a website that provides online access to all policies. The central focus of the pertinent policies linked to attendance and truancy revolve around a concentration on compulsory school attendance. The pertinent sections include a description of enforcement, exemptions, parent requests, how attendance is to be recorded, a definition of truancy, and how loss of credit will occur in relation to missed school. The policies continue further with a set of definitions of what constitutes excused absences and describes the process and content of how attendance recording is handled with district schools. The applicable policies continue with a description of how truancy procedures are to be handled.⁴⁰

An outside group known as Collective Impacts Initiative in coordination with the Santa Fe Community Foundation operates a blog known as the Santa Fe Data Hub. The group recently reviewed the issue of chronic absence in SFPS. The link to the Hub is provided below.⁴¹

Action Steps that New Mexico can take to Address Chronic Absence

For New Mexico to confront the issue of chronic absence, a coordinated plan of action will be necessary that encompasses every district and school in the state, including charters. While universities that educate the state’s teachers and school leaders can assist, to ensure success the major part of the effort will need to occur at the top level of state. Such leadership could originate with the Governor, the Legislature, the state’s Public Education Department, or as in the state of California, the Attorney General. From there the effort will need to move along the districts through the schools and into the individual classrooms. By extension it will need a collaborative effort that includes: tribes, businesses, NGOs, other state, county and local government officials as well as, and most importantly, parents.

A recent report by Attendance Works and the Everyone Graduates Center entitled, *Preventing Missed Opportunities: Taking Collective Action to Confront Chronic Absence*, details a six-step process that can serve as a point of engagement for various interested stakeholders and to start the broad, statewide conversation on the issue of chronic absence. The effort relies primarily on data that is most likely already being collected by schools but is not effectively being leveraged to help monitor and ascertain chronic absence. With some relatively minor changes in procedures and processes in

³⁸ For access to APS online policies related to truancy visit: <http://www.aps.edu/coordinated-school-health/truancy-prevention> (sidebar links on the same web page provide access to other affiliated policies) and for further information on the Every Day Matters initiative: <http://www.aps.edu/news/every-day-matters> .

³⁹ For access to the district website for LCPS Attendance & Student Support Services visit <http://lcps.k12.nm.us/departments/instruction/attendance-student-support-services/> and for access to the full online versions of the LCPS Board’s policies: <http://lcps.k12.nm.us/school-board/policies-and-regulations/> .

⁴⁰ For access to SFPS policies visit: http://backweb.sfps.info/sfps/docs/school_policies/Polices_300_Series.pdf .

⁴¹ The Collective Impact Initiative’s Santa Fe Data Hub can be accessed at: <http://www.santafedatahub.org/data-spotlight> .

CHRONIC ABSENCE: AN ISSUE FOR NEW MEXICO TO ADDRESS

the classrooms, schools district and the state PED, this underutilized resource can serve as the foundational support for New Mexico to address chronic absence and its associated impact on the academic achievement of the state's children. The process is described briefly as follows⁴²:

Step 1: Invest in Consistent and Accurate Data

- a. Adopt a common definition of chronic absence.
- b. Offer Guidance to Count a Day of Instruction or Absence.
- c. Ensure Standard protocol Exists for Collecting Attendance Data.
- d. Create Systems for Assessing Data Accuracy.

Step 2: Use data to understand need and disproportionate impact in order to target resources.

- a. Adopting a Multi-Tiered System of Support (i.e. bands of absence)
- b. Find Out Who is Most Affected (i.e. grades, populations and geographies)

Step 3. Leverage data to identify places getting results.

Step 4: Share data with key stakeholders.

Step 5: Equip stakeholders to unpack barriers and take action.

- a. Understand what contributes to chronic absence
- b. Draw upon qualitative not just quantitative data matters
- c. Gain access to data across agencies and disciplines
- d. Participate in a team or forum that supports collective data-driven action

Step 6. Create shared accountability.

Conclusion

New Mexico continues to be faced with daunting challenges surrounding poverty, economic stagnation, crime and poor academic achievement. In particular, as shown earlier in this brief, the state persistently lags behind the nation in NAEP scores and was shown to be last in its graduation rate for its student population at 68.5 percent, 13 percent behind the national average.⁴³ Understanding the role that chronic absence plays in these statistics will require getting a better handle on the data of attendance. In conjunction with the efforts surrounding data will be the need to establish a culture of attendance, a task in which policy makers, educators, students, their families and all citizens who are concerned about the state's children will be required to participate.

The opportunity being provided to New Mexico through the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) to include disaggregated data on chronic absence as a measurement for district report cards is one the state can take in the immediate future. Since attendance data is already collected at the school level, providing the necessary support and training for school level teams to structure it in ways that allow chronic absence to be revealed and tracked will offer schools a powerful tool of identification and intervention for those students and their families in need of assistance. Having this effort conducted across all districts and schools in New Mexico and shared via report cards will help foster broader awareness of the problem and, perhaps, towards the development of solutions for chronic absence which can improve the overall academic standing of the state.

⁴² *Preventing Missed Opportunity: Taking Collective Action to Prevent Chronic Absence*. September 2016. Attendance Works and Everyone Graduates Center (accessed on October 2, 2016 from: http://www.attendanceworks.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/PreventingMissedOpportunity_Full_FINAL.pdf).

⁴³ 2016 Building a Grad Nation Data Brief: Overview of 2013-14 High School Graduation Rates.



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