



MISSISSIPPI KIDS COUNT
Social Science Research Center
Family and Children Research Unit
P.O. Box 5287
Mississippi State, MS 39762
Home Page: <http://www.kidscount.ssrc.msstate.edu>

Contact: Anne Buffington|662.325.1590
anne.buffington@ssrc.msstate.edu
Jean Cook|601.359-3519
jcook@mde.k12.ms.us

FOR RELEASE
March 11, 2015

Present and Counting: Looking at School Chronic Absenteeism
Report reveals 15% of Mississippi public school students missing a month or more of school

STARKVILLE – Almost 75,000 Mississippi K-12 public school students missed at least 18 days of instruction time during the 2013-2014 school year according to a report issued by Mississippi KIDS COUNT, located at Mississippi State University’s Social Science Research Center. *Present and Counting: A Look at Chronic Absenteeism in Mississippi Public Schools* marks the first time data provided by the Mississippi Department of Education has been used to examine areas of high chronic absenteeism rates, defined as missing 10 percent or more of the academic year (180 days) for any reason, including excused and unexcused absences, suspensions, and time missed due to changing schools.

Similar to national trends, rates were high in kindergarten (14 percent), tapered off in early elementary years, and increased steadily throughout middle and high school years. The highest was 36 percent in grade 12. Despite an overall state Average Daily Attendance (ADA) of 93 percent, there were still 130 school districts with at least 10 percent of their students chronically absent and 11 districts with 20 percent or more. The school districts with the highest chronic absenteeism percentages were Natchez-Adams (26.0), Moss Point Separate (25.8), and Monroe County (25.4). The lowest were Hollandale (3.0), Benoit (4.7) and Pass Christian (5.8).

“Because it counts excused absences, the Average Daily Attendance can mask a chronic absence problem in a school district,” said Dr. Linda Southward, director of Mississippi KIDS COUNT. “Nationally, the evidence is mounting – there is a clear connection between school attendance and student achievement, particularly in improved math and reading skills by third grade. Improvements in children’s achievements can be made by not only enhancing school readiness so that children are ready to learn in the early years, but also align policies that promote school attendance.”

Across Mississippi school district accountability ratings, the report revealed that 13.4 percent of students in “A” districts were chronically absent compared to 16.4 percent in “D” and “F” districts combined. Nearly 18 percent (17.7) of white females were chronically absent followed by white males (16.5) and black males (14.2).

Nearly one in eight (12 percent) of Mississippi kindergarteners and first-graders missed at least 18 days of instruction time during the 2013-2014 school year, which can negatively impact third-grade reading proficiency. Mississippi students taking the 2013 National Assessment for Education Progress (NAEP) standardized reading test who self-reported that they missed 3 or more days in the month prior to the test scored 12 points lower than their peers who had no absences.

“This report validates what teachers have long known – that missing school negatively impacts student learning,” said Dr. Carey Wright, state superintendent of education. “Being in school every day is critically important for all students from kindergarten through the 12th grade. Chronic absenteeism can not only lower achievement levels, it also puts students at risk for dropping out of school.”

The report contains recommendations to address chronic absenteeism in Mississippi. They include the adoption of a standard definition of chronic absence that districts can use, early identification of students who are considered at-risk for chronic absenteeism based on attendance the previous year or within the first two months of the school year, and the development of action plans for students based on real-time attendance data.

#

The Mississippi KIDS COUNT *Present and Counting* report will be available March 11 at 12:01 am CST at www.kidscount.ssrc.msstate.edu. Additional information is available in the KIDS COUNT Data Center which also contains the most recent national, state, and local data on hundreds of indicators on child well-being. Mississippi KIDS COUNT is part of the national KIDS COUNT network of state-based organizations supported by the Annie E. Casey Foundation.