

Student Attendance: Changing the **Conversation**

Georgia Department of Education

What Do We Hear?



Richard Woods,
Georgia's School Superintendent
"Educating Georgia's Future"
ga DOE.org

- Too many schools are **underperforming**.
- Too many students are **underperforming**.
- Too many students are **unprepared** for school.
- Too many students **skip school**.
- Too many students have **poor attendance**.
- Too many students are **bored** with school.
- The **dropout rate** is too high.
- The **suspension rate** is too high.

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What We Are Doing?



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- **Increasing** academic standards
- **Increasing** academic rigor
- **Increasing** accountability
- **Developing** strategic plans
- **Developing** school improvement plans
- **Developing** pathways to college and careers
- **Encouraging** innovation



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Are We Missing Something?

Maybe The Correct Question is:

Who Are We Missing?

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Who Are We Missing?



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education

Who Are We Missing?



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Number of Georgia Students Absent* 15 Days or More

2009	2010
161,107	180,995

Research shows that the negative affect of excused and unexcused absences is similar.

180,995

9.7%

*Excused and Unexcused

Who Are We Missing?



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Number of Georgia 8th Graders Absent 15 Days or More

2009	2010
12,096	13,913



12.3%



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Georgia 8th Grade Student Absences and Graduation Rate (within four years)

Days Absent	Graduation Rate
0 Days	81.89%
1 to 5 Days	80.17%
6 to 10 Days	71.91%
11 to 14 Days	61.08%
15 or More Days	38.09%

20%



Georgia 9th Grade Student Absences and Graduation Rate (within four years)



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Days Absent	Graduation Rate
0 Days	80.52%
1 to 5 Days	82.24%
6 to 10 Days	72.68%
11 to 14 Days	61.27%
15 or More Days	30.73%

19%

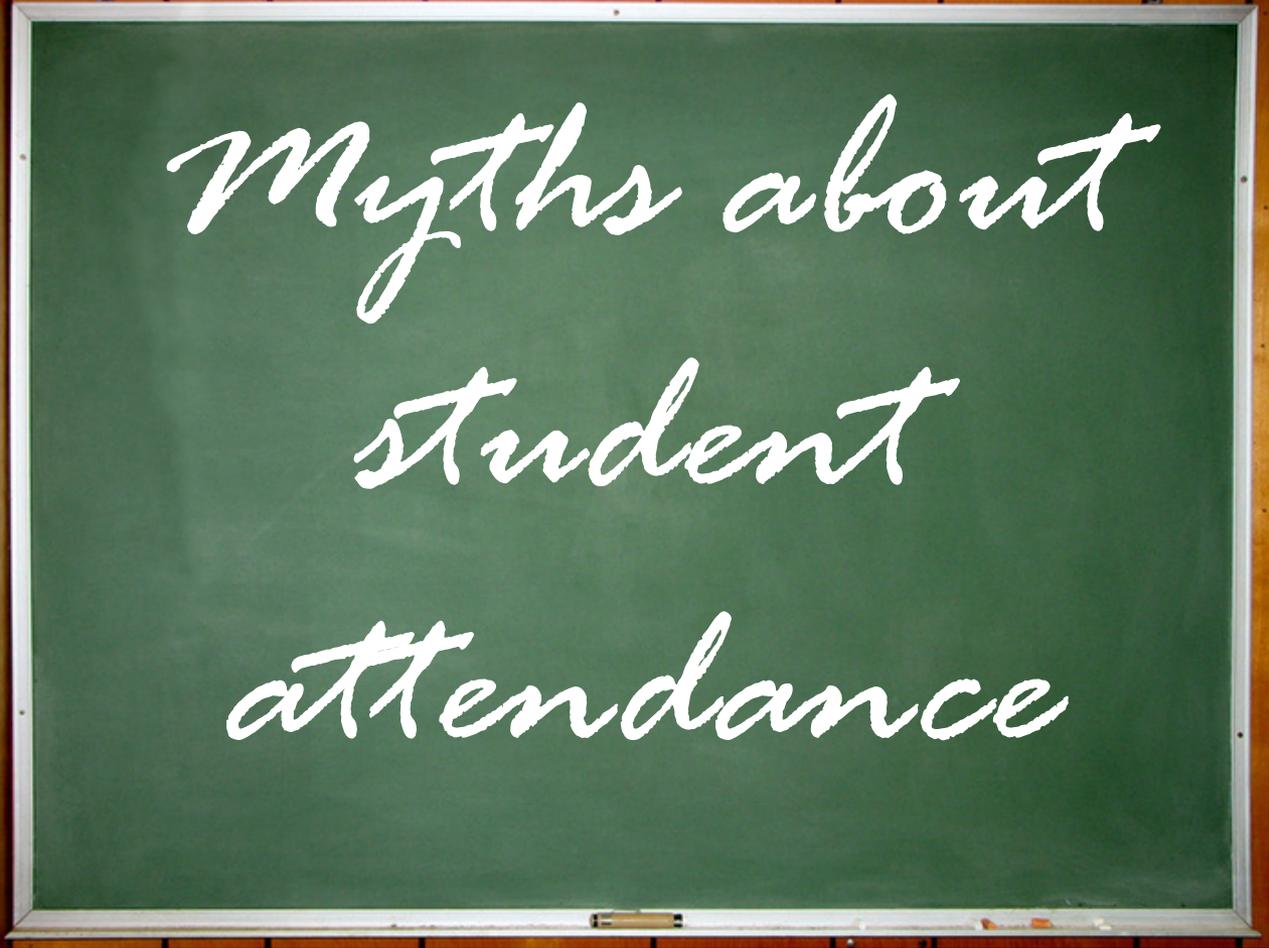
Georgia 10th Grade Student Absences and Graduation Rate (within four years)



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Days Absent	Graduation Rate
0 Days	83.77%
1 to 5 Days	86.26%
6 to 10 Days	78.79%
11 to 14 Days	70.65%
15 or More Days	39.52%

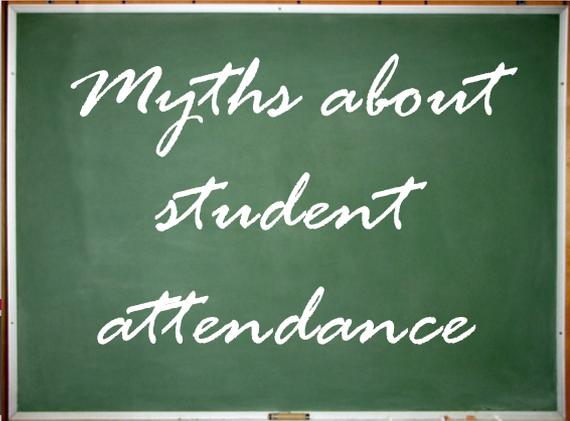
13%



Myths about
student
attendance

Myths About Student Attendance

1. Missing a few days of school each year is normal and doesn't matter that much.
2. We don't need to worry about attendance until middle or high school.
3. Most schools already monitor student absences.
4. Because families are ultimately responsible for children getting to school, there's not much schools can do to improve attendance.



*Myths about
student
attendance*

1. Missing a few days of school each year is normal and doesn't matter that much.

- Data indicate that missing more than five days of school each year, regardless of the cause, impacts student academic performance and starts shaping attitudes about school.
- From the 6th grade through the 9th grade, student attendance is a better predictor of dropping out than standardized test scores.
- Excused absences and unexcused absences have similar impact on student academic performance.

2. We don't need to worry about attendance until middle or high school.

- While absenteeism is more widespread in middle and high school, it still affects vast numbers of younger students.
- Data shows that standardized test scores are significantly affected by elementary students' attendance patterns, to the point that the number of absences is related to the student's chances of "passing" the CRCT (Meets or Exceeds).
- Elementary students' school attendance habits often carry over into middle and high school.

3. Most schools already closely monitor student absences.

- Even when teachers take roll daily, the data they collect is not typically analyzed to reveal absence patterns.
- Most schools measure school-wide attendance or they track truancy, which does not capture excused absences.
- When schools and school districts analyze all absences (unexcused, excused, and suspensions) they are often surprised at how many students are missing 10 days or more each school year.

➤ **Georgia is ranked 10th in the nation for out-of-school suspensions**

4. Because families are ultimately responsible for children getting to school, there's not much schools can do to improve attendance.

- Schools and school districts that have made a concentrated, systemic review of student absences have developed effective strategies.
 - A review of student absences has been used to identify which students are absent (excused and unexcused), to look for patterns and locations and possible related causes (such as school climate factors, environmental factors, health factors, transportation, etc.)

- Schools and school districts that conducted close reviews of student absences found that health issues accounted for many absences.
 - 27% of Georgia's children between the ages of 10 and 13 are obese.
 - 10% of Georgia's children suffer from asthma (75,000 students missed over 470,000 school days).
 - Dental health issues are the leading cause of health-related school absences.





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- Schools and school districts that reviewed student discipline policies, procedures, and discipline data and subsequently implemented a school-wide school climate improvement strategy (such as Positive Behavior Intervention Supports – PBIS) reduced out-of-school suspensions (absences).
- Schools and school districts that developed strategies to improve school climate have seen reductions in negative peer interaction issues, such as bullying, that impact student attendance.

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- Schools and school districts bring school staff members, parents, students, health and social services and others together to review data, identify issues related to cause and effect, and then develop strategies to improve student attendance.



Collect and
Analyze Data &
Other Information

Identify Priorities
& Objectives

Develop a Plan

Changing the Conversation



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- **Awareness:** Student academic performance is related to student attendance.
- **Acceptance:** Student academic performance is related to student attendance and the effectiveness of educational improvement strategies will be limited unless student attendance improves for all students, not just chronically truant students.
- **Action:** Schools need to review student attendance data and develop strategies.

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Student Attendance Improvement

Data indicate that missing more than five days of school each year, regardless of the cause, begins to impact student academic performance and starts shaping attitudes about school. Chronically truant students are not the only students negatively impacted by absences. For students in the 6th grade through the 9th grade, student attendance is a better predictor of dropping out of school than test scores. This predictor is not limited to chronically truant students. Excused absences and unexcused absences have similar impact on student academic performance.

Do you have an effective practice to improve student attendance? Tell us about it! policy@doe.k12.ga.us

Attendance Tools within the Georgia Statewide Longitudinal Data System (SLDS)

Changing the Conversation

"Making education work for all Georgians...starts with student attendance."

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"What's possible?"

Keep asking that question until the conversation changes.

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