

## Little Absences Add Up

In secondary school, [skipping class can often fly under the radar of administrators calculating chronic absenteeism](#), but all those hours add up, finds a new study in the journal AERA Open.

Researchers of Stanford University tracked class-by-class attendance for more than 50,000 middle and high school students in an urban district from 2007-08 to 2012-13. They found that missing individual classes accounted for as many total missed days as full-day absences—added all up, the chronic absenteeism rate rose from 9 percent to 24 percent of the district's secondary students.

"If you are just looking at full-day absences, you are not capturing all of the students who are at risk."

Moreover, while more than half of the full-day absences were excused—including extracurricular trips, for example—more than 9 in 10 of the partial absences were not excused.

"Students are choosing their subjects. They do attend their core classes [reading and math] at a higher rate than their noncore classes, but it is paralleling which classes they like the most. They miss social studies classes the least, math classes the most."

The first and last periods of the day were those most likely to be skipped, with 4 percent to 5 percent of classes gone during those times. This pattern may point to students having trouble getting to and from school, and she said it suggests administrators may be able to mitigate the effects of skipping class by scheduling study halls or advisory periods to bookend critical classes.

## Getting an Early Warning

Chronic absenteeism—missing 10 percent or more of the available school days—has been found to [predict students' later grades](#) and the likelihood of dropping out of school. One new study by the Regional Educational Laboratory Midwest suggests [early-warning systems can help school officials catch students who start to miss early in the year](#) before they fully go off track.

Researchers randomly assigned 73 high schools in three Midwest states (representing more than 37,000 students) to either continue their normal identification and supports for students at risk of not graduating on time, or to use the Early Warning Intervention and Monitoring System that tracks absences and other indicators for each student.

The study found that schools that implemented the early-warning system over the 2014-15 school year had significantly fewer students who were chronically absent than did control schools, 10 percent versus 14 percent. Moreover, overall grade-point averages were higher at the schools using early-warning systems, and significantly fewer students in those schools failed one or more classes than the students in the control-group schools, 21 percent versus 26 percent.

The study found no difference in students' suspension rates at schools that used early-warning systems, but the results still provide early evidence in favor of using warning systems to curtail student absenteeism.

