



The Role of the School Nurse in Addressing Student Absenteeism

Melanie K. Bales, MSN, BSN, RN, CMS,
GASN State Director
Assistant Director, Student Support,
District School Nurse Administrator,
Cobb County School District

Lynne P. Meadows, MSN, BSN, RN, FNASN,
GASN Data Coordinator
Director District Health Services,
Fulton County School System

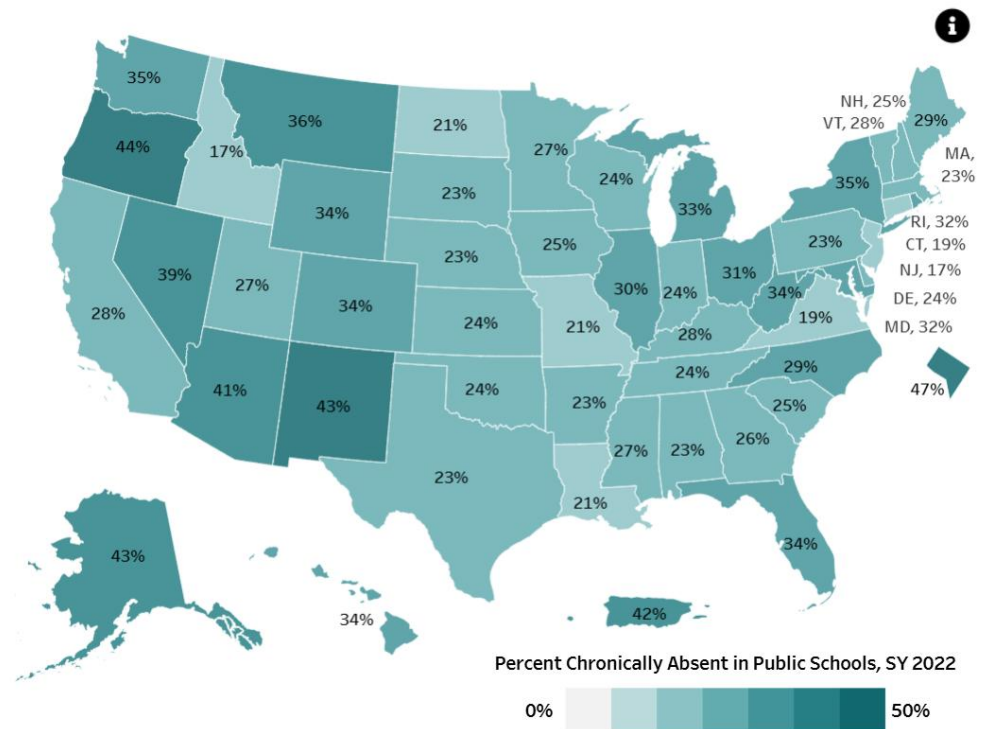
Introduction

Discuss:

- Importance of regular school attendance.
- Widespread absenteeism is a problem nationwide, and it is far higher than it used to be – a profound change for schools post-pandemic.
- Chronic absenteeism is now more than 50% higher than it used to be.
- There are about 48 million public school students (K–12), and almost 1 in 4 of them, or 11 million students, are missing a lot of school.
- The purpose of the presentation is to discuss the school nurses' role in addressing absenteeism.

Georgia's Data

According to the Department of Education 2022-2023 data, the rate of absenteeism in Georgia is 26%.



Understanding Student Absenteeism

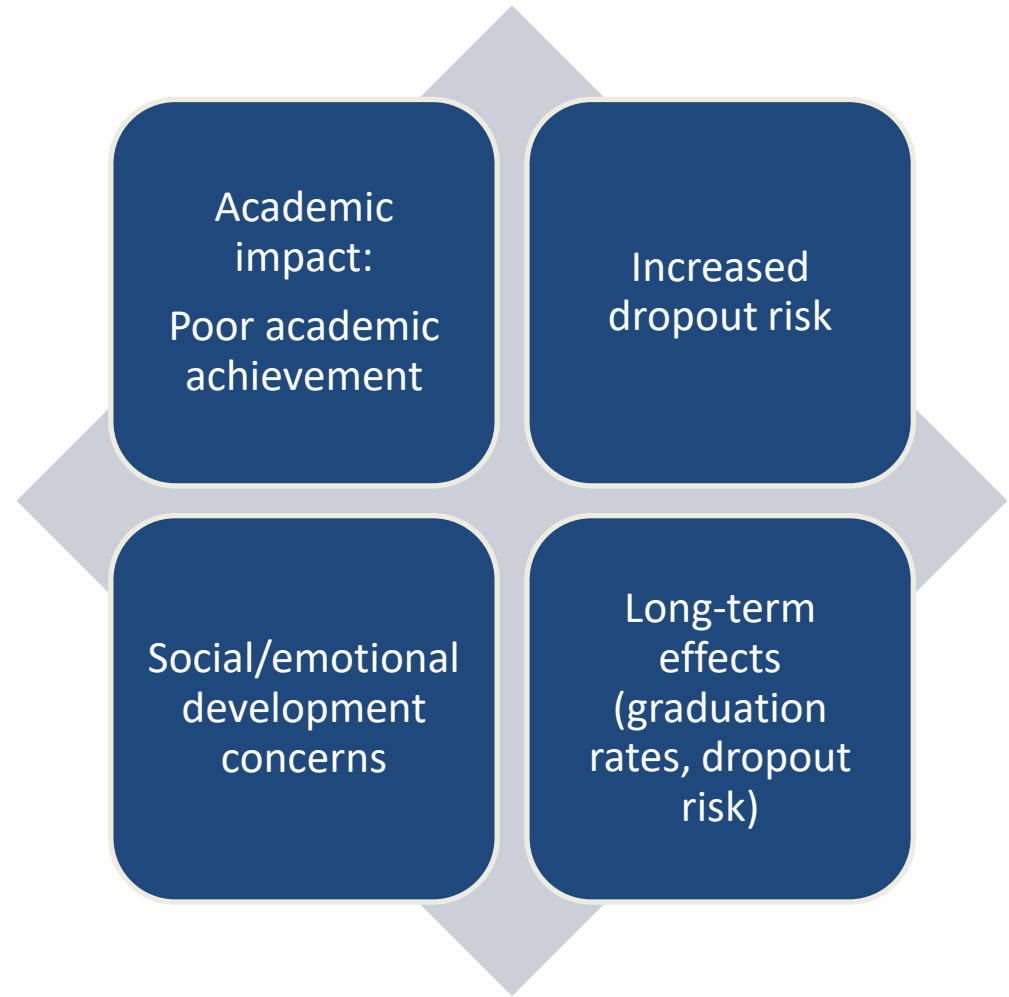
Occasional absenteeism is different from Chronic absenteeism – it is a pattern of repeated, often unexcused, absences that indicate an underlying issue.

Definition: **Chronic absenteeism** (students missing 10% or more of school or approx. 18 days in a year for any reason) **vs Occasional absenteeism** (a few scattered absences throughout the school year, often due to valid and unavoidable reasons like short-term illness or a family emergency).

- Common causes of chronic absenteeism:
- Illness (acute/chronic)
- Mental health issues
- Family or social issues
- Lack of access to healthcare



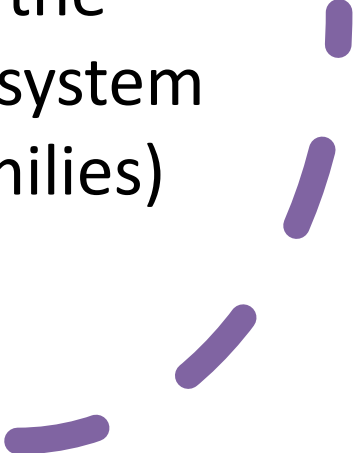
Consequences of Absenteeism



The School Nurse's Role Overview

Why it Matters

Missing school doesn't just mean missing instruction; it also means missing opportunities to build social-emotional skills, form friendships, and participate in the school community.

- What does a licensed school nurse do?
 - How the nurse fits into the larger student support system (counselors, admin, families)
- 



Health-Related Causes of Absenteeism



Chronic illnesses (asthma, diabetes, etc.)



Poorly managed health conditions



Lack of immunizations



Mental health challenges



Students at Risk

Journalist: [illegible]

How the School Nurse Identifies At-Risk Students

Tracking attendance and health data

Screenings and referrals

Communication with families and teachers



Prevention and Intervention Strategies



Health education (hygiene, nutrition, disease prevention)



Individualized healthcare plans



Case management and care coordination



Immunization clinics



Medication administration at school

Collaboration & Communication

Licensed School Nurses work with:

Families

School-Based
Health Centers

Teachers and
School
Administration

Counselors and
Social Workers

Community
health
providers

Attendance
review teams

Community
organizations





Barriers and Challenges

Limited licensed nursing staff

Lack of resources or funding

Communication gaps with families

Privacy and consent issues

Example from the Field – A School Nurse's Impact on Students



STUDENT:

18-YEAR-OLD SENIOR IN HIGH SCHOOL DIAGNOSED WITH ASTHMA
WE WILL CALL HER BETH.



PROBLEM:

THE STUDENT MISSED SEVERAL DAYS DUE TO HER UNCONTROLLED ASTHMA AND UNDIAGNOSED GRIEF
WITHIN A SPAN OF 3 MONTHS, 911 WAS CALLED MULTIPLE TIMES
THE STUDENT HAD LOST SEVERAL FAMILY MEMBERS DURING THE PANDEMIC



NURSE INTERVENTION:

THE STUDENT WAS SEEN IN THE SCHOOL CLINIC SEVERAL TIMES, AND THE SCHOOL NURSE REFERRED THE STUDENT TO A LOCAL FQHC/SCHOOL-BASED HEALTH CENTER.

THE TEAM ESTABLISHED A RAPPORT WITH HER & GAINED HER TRUST.

THE SCHOOL NURSE AND MEDICAL TEAM WERE ABLE TO PROVIDE HER WITH ONGOING MEDICAL HEALTH SERVICES AND CONNECTED HER WITH MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES AND SUPPORT.



OUTCOME:

*IMPROVED HEALTH STATUS
*IMPROVED ATTENDANCE
*IMPROVED ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE
BETH WAS ABLE TO GRADUATE ON TIME.



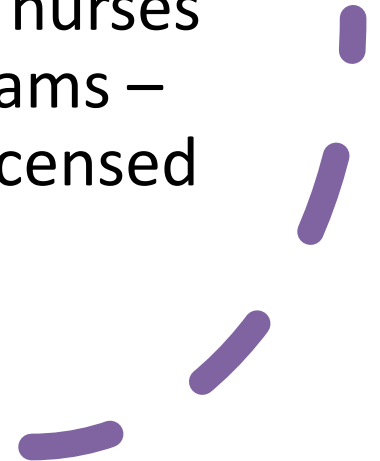
Recommendations & Best Practices

- Need at least one licensed school nurse in every Georgia school
- Improve access to data tracking systems
- Engage families early
- Develop policies that support health and attendance
- Follow state and federal laws and guidelines
- Use referrals effectively
- Incorporate behavioral health support



Conclusion

- Licensed School Nurses play an integral part in addressing chronic absenteeism.
- Licensed School Nurses play a vital role in identifying students at risk and collaborating with school teams and families to address concerns.
- Support licensed school nurses and school health programs – every child deserves a licensed school nurse!



Q&A



References

- Black LI, Elgaddal N. Chronic school absenteeism for health-related reasons among children ages 5–17 years: United States, 2022. NCHS Data Brief, no 498. Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics. 2024. DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.15620/cdc/147885>
- Los Angeles Times: <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2025-08-26/chronic-absenteeism-student-attendance-drops-covid>
- Panorama Education - 15 Questions to Ask to Address Chronic Absenteeism: <https://www.panoramaed.com/blog/15-questions-to-ask-to-address-chronic-absenteeism>
- *QuickStats*: Percentage of Children and Adolescents Aged 5–17 Years Who Had Chronic School Absenteeism Due to Illness, Injury, or Disability During the Past 12 Months, by Age Group and Year — National Health Interview Survey, United States, 2019 and 2022. MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep 2024;73:189. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm7308a6>
- School Nurses' Role in Combating Chronic Absenteeism . National Association of School Nurses. (2015, March 27). <https://www.nasn.org/nasn-resources/fact-sheets-infographics>
- U.S. Department of Education – Chronic Absenteeism: <https://www.ed.gov/teaching-and-administration/supporting-students/chronic-absenteeism#:~:text=Chronic%20absenteeism%20%E2%80%94%20defined%20as%20students,absenteeism%20from%20coast%20to%20coast.>