

Tackling Chronic Absence



Sarah Jonas
Sr. Director for Regional Initiatives,
The Children's Aid Society
National Center for Community Schools

Definitions



Average Daily Attendance: the percentage of enrolled students who attend school each day

Chronic Absence: missing 10% or more of school over the course of an academic year for any reason (excused or unexcused). *2 days missed/month, for 10 months=CA*

Severe Chronic Absence: missing 20% or more of school per year (approximately two months)

Satisfactory Attendance: missing 5% or less over the course of an academic year

Truancy: refers *only* to unexcused absences and is defined by each state

Source: Hedy Chang



Why is Chronic Absence Important?

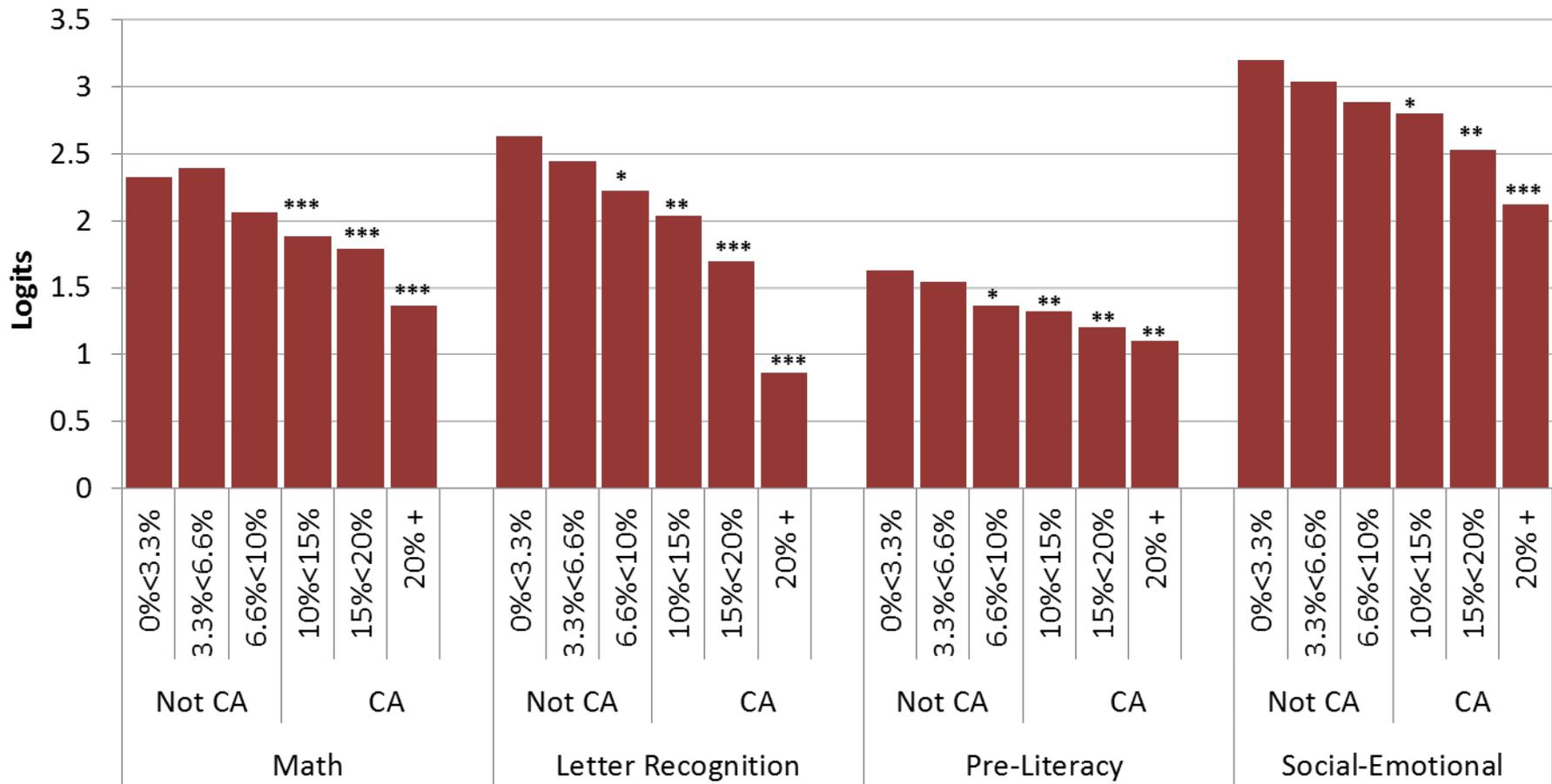


- ◆ Chronic absence is associated with **negative outcomes** including **low academic achievement, school truancy, dropping out, delinquency and substance abuse.**
- ◆ The **educational experience of regularly attending students can be adversely affected** when teachers must divert their attention to meet the learning and social needs of chronically absent children when they return to school.



Students with lower preschool attendance have lower kindergarten readiness scores

Not controlling for prior knowledge



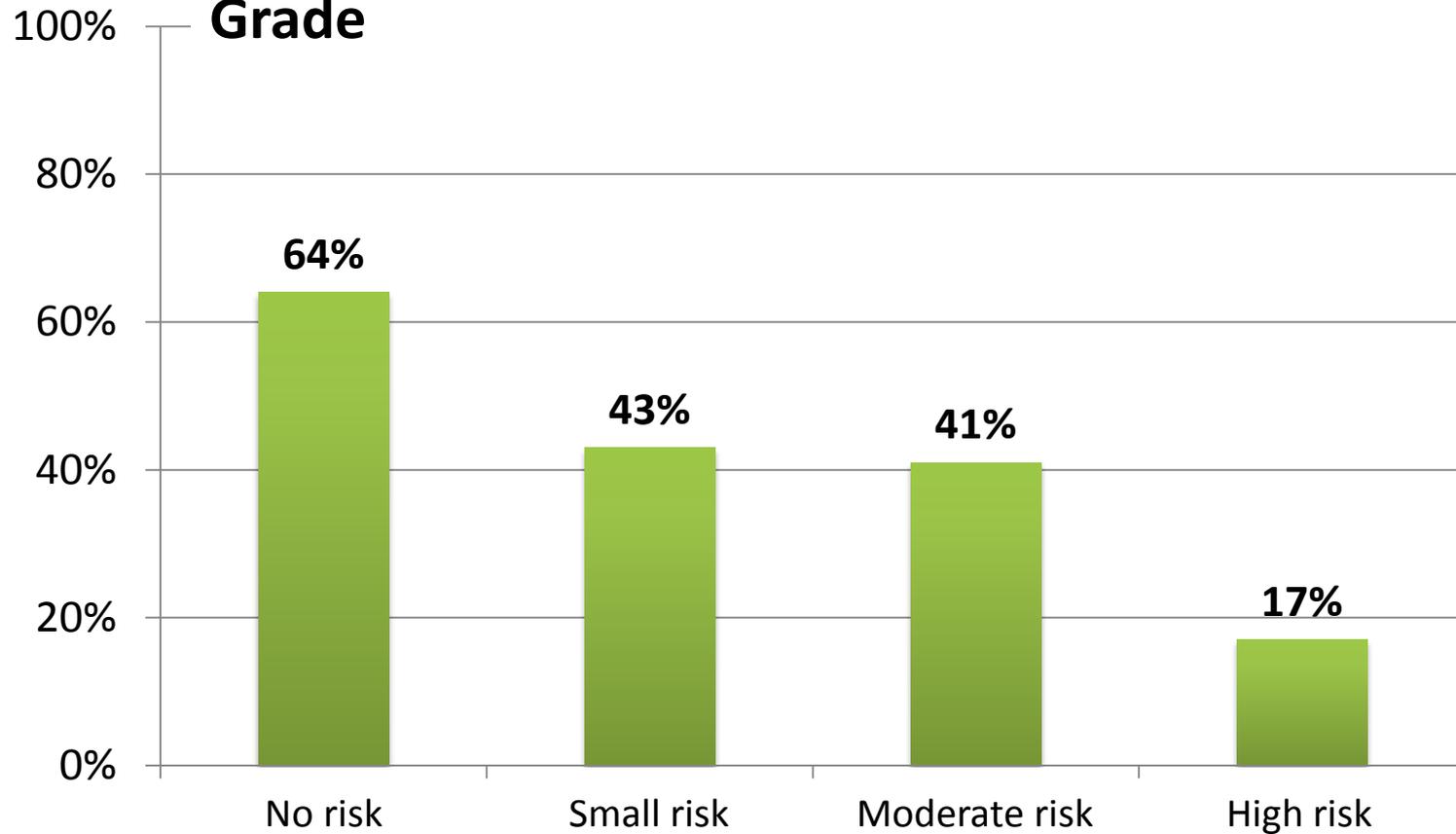
* Indicates that scores are significantly different from scores of students with absences between 0% and 3.3% at $p < .05$ level;

** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$



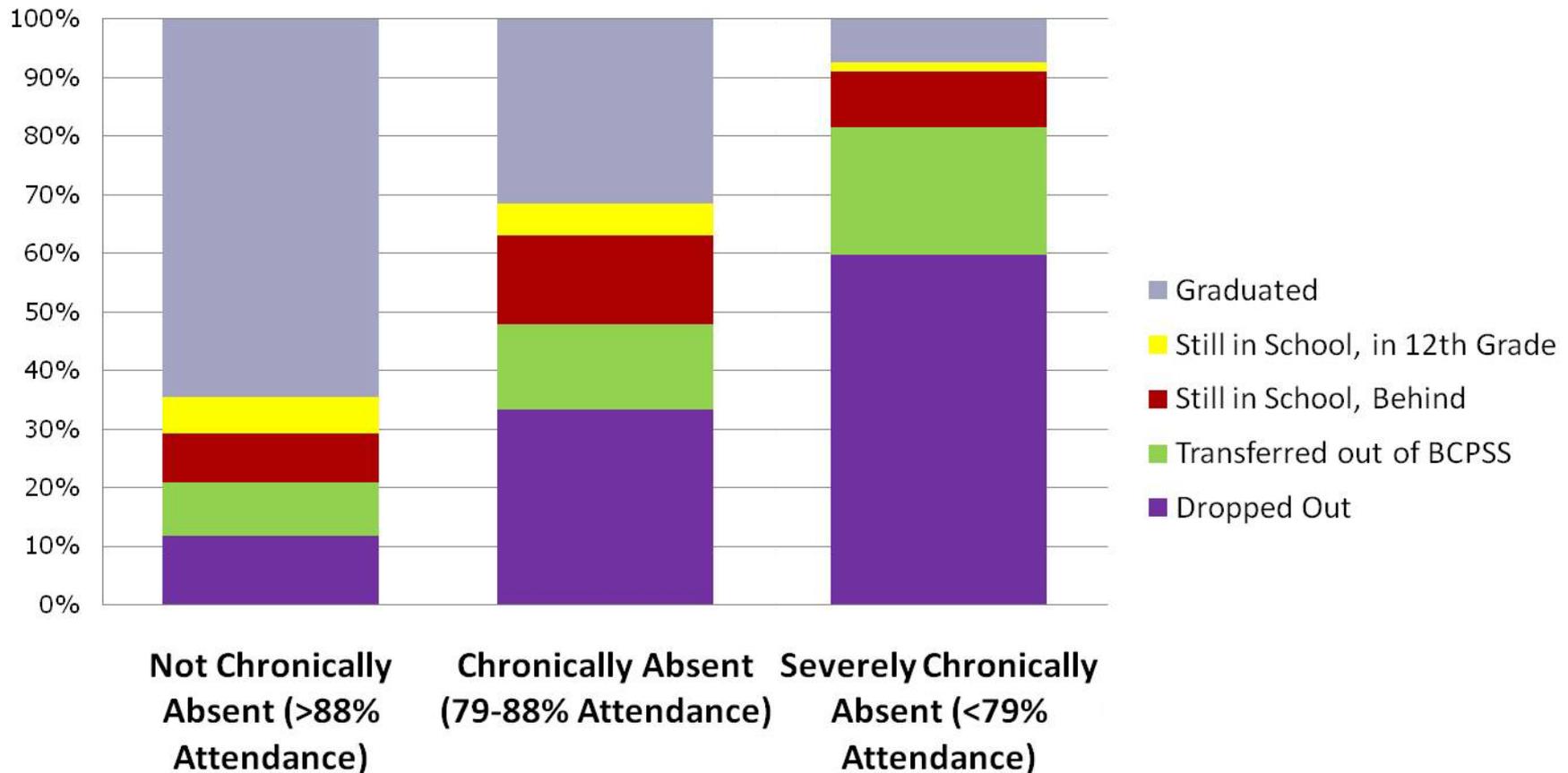
Students Chronically Absent in K & 1st Grade Much Less Likely to Read Proficiently in 3rd Grade

% Proficient or Advanced on 3rd Grade ELA



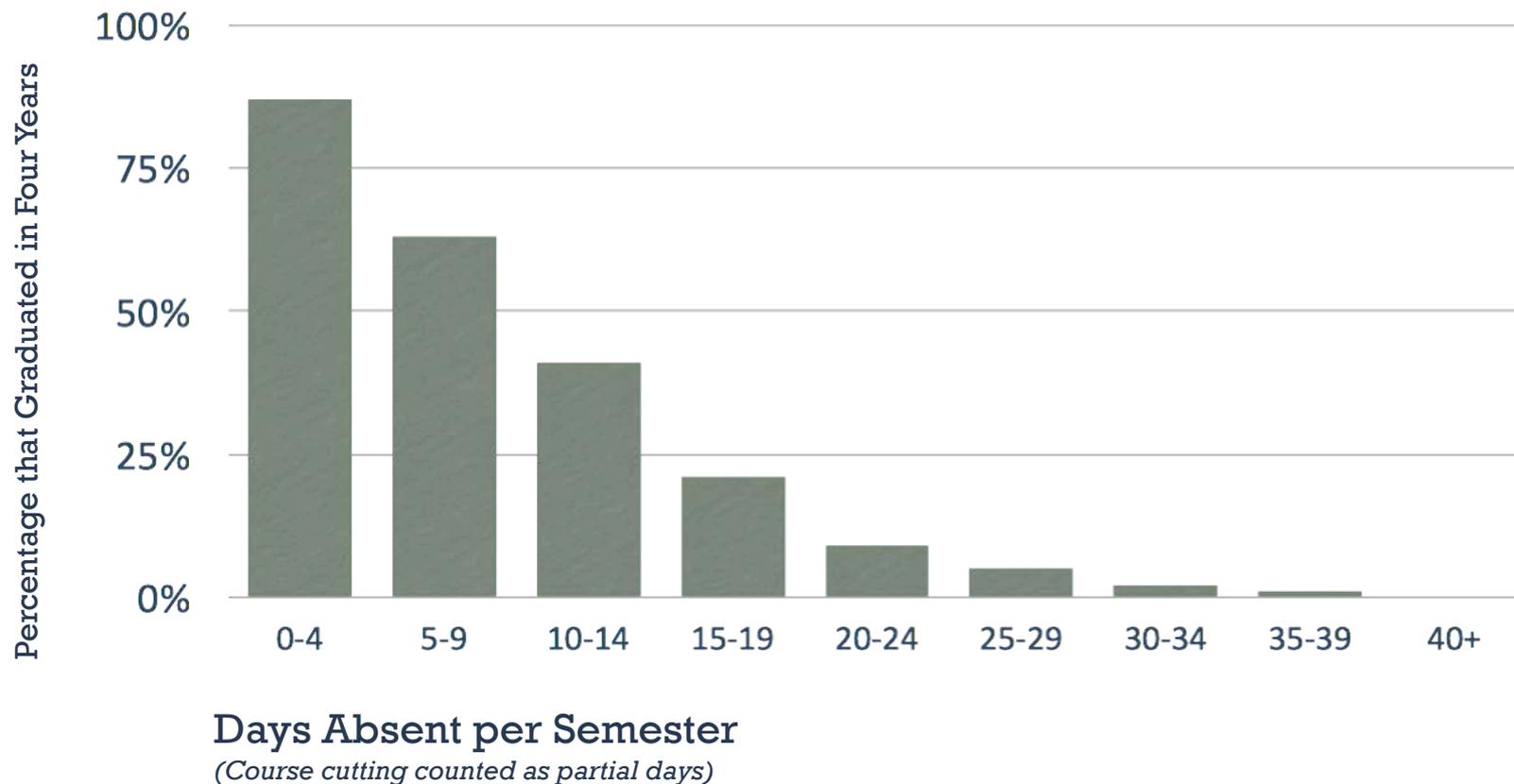
Risk level, according to Kindergarten & 1st Grade absences

Poor 6th Grade Attendance Predicts Dropout Rates



Source: Baltimore Education Research Consortium

9th Grade Attendance is a Better Graduation Predictor than 8th Grade Test Scores



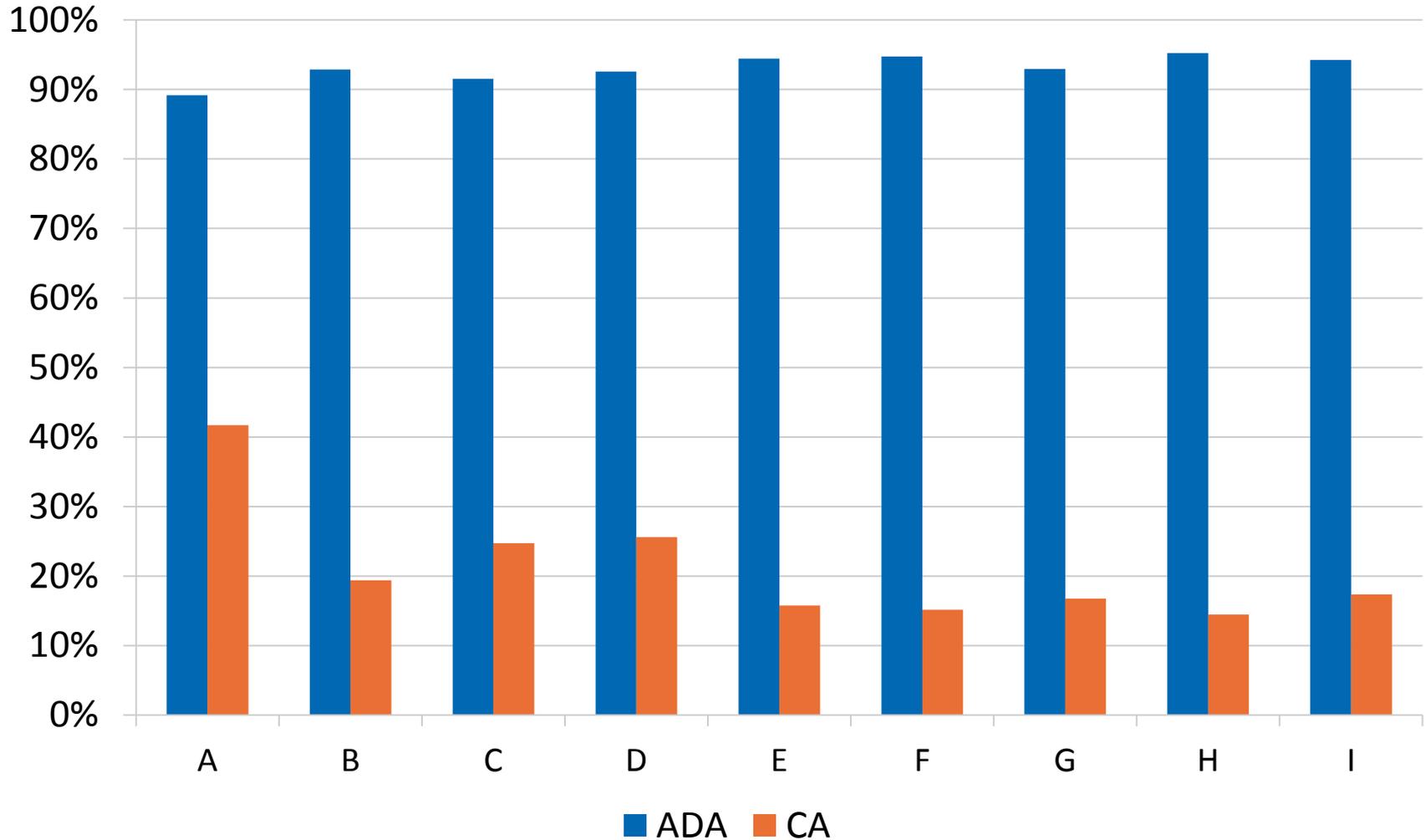
Source: Allensworth & Easton, *What Matters for Staying On-Track and Graduating in Chicago Public Schools*, Consortium on Chicago School Research at U of C, July 2007



True or False?

Tracking Average Daily Attendance will show you if you have a Chronic Absence issue at your school.

ADA & Chronic Absence in a NYC CFN (6th-8th Grades)



Turn and Talk:

What are some reasons that children are chronically absent in your school?

Schools + Communities Can Make a Difference



Characteristics of Effective Strategies

- ◆ Partner with community agencies to help parents carry out their responsibility to get children to school
- ◆ Make chronic absence a priority, set a target and monitor progress
- ◆ Examine factors contributing to chronic absence
- ◆ Combine universal and targeted strategies
- ◆ Offer positive supports before punitive action
- ◆ Community schools are uniquely positioned to prevent and reduce chronic absenteeism



**Structures & Supports from
New York City's
Every Student, Every Day Pilot
2010-2013**

Every Student, Every Day: 4 Components



- ◆ Success Mentors matched to Target Students
- ◆ School Wide Strategies
- ◆ Weekly Attendance Team Meeting
- ◆ Connecting Families to Community Resources



Success Mentors Targeted Supports

What is a Success Mentor?



- ◆ Success mentors are caring adults (or peers) who work with chronically absent students to address the barriers keeping them from coming to school each day.



Who can be a Success Mentor?



- ◆ Any person with whom the mentee has a good relationship

Teachers

Guidance Counselors

School Aides

Administrators

AmeriCorps Members

CBO Staff

Security Guards

Parent Coordinators

Social Work Interns



What do Success Mentors do?



- ◆ Get matched with students who have history of chronic absenteeism or are showing signs of becoming chronically absent (early warning)
- ◆ Morning meet and greet
- ◆ Phone call home every time student is absent
- ◆ Meet one-on-one and/or in small groups
- ◆ Track students' attendance and improvements
- ◆ Recognize and celebrate even small successes (with students and their families)
- ◆ Work as a team to identify supports and interventions
- ◆ Reach out to and engage students' families



How do you choose the mentees?



- ◆ You may want to consider focusing on a transition grade, such as Kindergarten, 6th or 9th grade
- ◆ Many schools have found it most effective to match mentors to students with individual rates of attendance between 75 and 90% (e.g. students “on the cusp,” who, with a bit of extra support, to make it to satisfactory attendance)
- ◆ Assign classroom teachers 1-3 mentees, non-instructional school staff such as guidance counselors or parent coordinators can be assigned up to 15 mentees



Tips for Success



- ◆ Assign a point person from your staff to manage the Success Mentor program
- ◆ Make sure Success Mentors are given weekly attendance data reports on how their mentees are doing—this makes it easy for them to track their students progress
- ◆ Recognize and celebrate the efforts of your Success Mentors



School-Wide Strategies: Universal Supports

School-Wide Strategies to Promote Good Attendance



- ◆ Goal is to promote a positive school-wide culture that encourages all students to attend school every day
- ◆ Strategies include:
 - attendance award assemblies for good *and* improved attendance
 - class competitions for best attendance
 - engaging clubs/activities before, during or afterschool



Weekly Attendance Meeting
Goal: To Review and Monitor
Targeted and Universal Supports

Weekly Attendance Team Meeting



PRINCIPAL



PRINCIPAL'S
LEADERSHIP
TEAM



SUCCESS
MENTORS



CBO
LEADERS



Identify At-Risk & Chronically
Absent Students -- Develop &
Track Interventions

GOAL = STRATEGIC COLLABORATION
FOR IMPROVED OUTCOMES

Weekly Meeting Best Practices



- ◆ Takes place same day & time each week
- ◆ Use Weekly Meeting agenda
- ◆ Led by principal or principal's designee
- ◆ Include Success Mentors
- ◆ Invite key community-based partners
- ◆ Community-based partners sign confidentiality agreement to review student level data



Families as Partners in Reducing Chronic Absenteeism

Strategies for Engaging Families



- ◆ Phone calls home every time student is absent—goal is to build positive relationship with family, learn the reason for CA
- ◆ Messaging to families about the importance of good attendance and negative impact of CA
- ◆ Connecting families to resources to help remove barriers to good attendance
- ◆ Attendance Works' *Bringing Attendance Home* Parent Toolkit
 - Parent video
 - Parent handouts/tip sheets in different languages
 - Parent activities that explain chronic absenteeism and its impact



Does it work?

**Evaluation of Every Student, Every Day Pilot
Conducted by Johns Hopkins University
Everyone Graduates Center**

Key Finding: Task Force Schools Significantly Reduced Chronic Absenteeism

- All three cohorts of task force schools **consistently outperformed** comparison schools.
- **Positive impacts were consistent** across elementary, middle, high schools, and alternative schools.
- **Impacts greatest for students who benefit most from being in school:** high poverty students & students in temporary housing.

Key Finding: Success Mentors & Supporting Infrastructure Substantially Improved Student Attendance

- **Students with prior histories of chronic absenteeism with a Success Mentor gained nearly two additional weeks of school (9 days), which is educationally significant.**
- **In the top 25% of schools, students with Success Mentors gained one additional month of school.**
- **High School students with Success Mentors (including those overage for their grade) were 52% more likely to remain in school the following year.**
- **Mentees reported they liked having a mentor and the mentor helped improve their attendance, schoolwork, motivation, and confidence.**

Resources



- ◆ **Taskforce Site**
<http://www.nyc.gov/html/truancy/html/home/home.shtml>
- ◆ **Attendance Works**
<http://www.attendanceworks.org>
- ◆ **Strengthening Schools by Strengthening Families**
http://www.newschool.edu/milano/nyc affairs/publications/schools/strengthening_schools.aspx
- ◆ **National Mentoring Partnership**
<http://www.mentoring.org>

