

# Del Norte County Unified School District: School Absence, 2012-2013



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Humboldt State University  
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# Del Norte County Unified School District: School Absence 2012-2013

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by The California Center for Rural Policy at Humboldt State University

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# Executive Summary

## **Background & Significance**

Del Norte County and the adjacent tribal lands (DNATL) is one of fourteen places in California participating in Building Healthy Communities (BHC), a ten-year initiative of The California Endowment (TCE). The goal of BHC is to “support the development of communities where kids and youth are healthy, safe and ready to learn” (more information at <http://www.calendow.org/healthycommunities/index.html>). One of the big results the initiative is aiming for is an increase in school attendance. This report was prepared by the California Center for Rural Policy (CCRP) to show trends in school attendance in the Del Norte County Unified School District. The Del Norte County School Board has adopted a goal to improve school attendance. During the 2011-2012 school year, schools implemented a variety of incentives aimed at increasing attendance.

Studies have shown a positive association between education level and overall health.<sup>1-3</sup> Indeed, education level may be the strongest and most consistent predictor of good health, rather than income or occupation.<sup>1</sup> School attendance, particularly during the early years, can have profound effects on health and future academic success.<sup>6,7,8</sup> Chronically absent students have lower academic performance and are less likely to graduate from High School.<sup>10-13</sup> Increasing school attendance can benefit individual health, strengthen the local economy, and reduce crime and violence.<sup>14-18</sup>

## **Methods**

This report provides an analysis of school absence data from the Del Norte County Unified School District: (Bess Maxwell, Crescent Elk, Del Norte High, Joe Hamilton, Margaret Keating, Mary Peacock, Mountain, Pine Grove, Redwood, and Smith River). The absence definitions used in this report were developed by Attendance Works (<http://www.attendanceworks.org/>). Chronic absence is defined as the percent of students missing 10% or more of total school days. The school year in the Del Norte County Unified School District is 180 days.

## **Summary of Findings**

### ***Del Norte County Unified School District***

- In the past year (2012-13):
  - 18% of students were chronically absent from school.
  - Kindergarten students had the highest percent of chronic absence with 30% of students missing 10% or more of school days.<sup>a</sup>
  - 28% of American Indian students had chronic absence (significantly higher than other races/ethnicities).
  - Students receiving free/reduced price lunch were significantly more likely to be chronically absent (22%) compared to students not receiving free/reduced price lunch (13%).
  - Students with special needs were significantly more likely to be chronically absent (25%) compared to students without special needs (17%).
  - The percent of students with chronic absence ranged from 8% at Smith River to 30% at Margaret Keating.
- In the past 3 years (2010/11, 2011/12 and 2012/13)
  - Overall, total district chronic absence rates **did not** change significantly.
  - Chronic absence rates significantly **increased** among students in 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grades.
  - Chronic absence rates showed some **improvement** in grades 5 and 6 between 2010/11 and 2011/12.
  - Most schools in the district **did not** have a significant change in chronic absence rates (Crescent Elk, Joe Hamilton, Margaret Keating, Mary Peacock, Pine Grove, Redwood, and Smith River).
  - Chronic absence rates significantly **increased** at Del Norte High (from 12% in 2010/11 to 20% in 2012/13)
  - Chronic absence rates significantly **decreased** at Bess Maxwell Elementary (from 28% in 2010/11 to 17% in 2011-12)

*Continued on next page*

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<sup>a</sup> Kindergarten is not compulsory in California. Kindergarten in Del Norte varies from half day to intermediate or full day.

## Conclusions and Next Steps

Approximately 1 out of every 6 students in the Del Norte County Unified School District is chronically absent from school. Comparison data for California as a whole is lacking, so it is not possible to determine how Del Norte compares to California. Nationally, however, an estimated 1 out of every 10 students is chronically absent. Compared to national data, Del Norte has a much higher rate of chronic absence.<sup>19</sup> This analysis shows that certain groups of students are more likely to be chronically absent from school than others. Kindergarten and American Indian students are significantly more likely to be chronically absent from school compared to other grades and other races/ethnicities. Students receiving free/reduced price lunch and special needs students are also more likely to be chronically absent compared to other students. These findings are consistent with national studies and studies in other states, which have found high rates of chronic absence among these same groups of students (American Indian, low-income, special needs, and kindergarten students).<sup>9,19,21</sup>

In the past 3 years chronic absence rates did not change significantly in the district as a whole and at most schools; however, chronic absence rates worsened at Del Norte High and improved at Bess Maxwell. These findings raise an important question— why was there no improvement in overall absence rates after a year of interventions? There are several possible reasons for this, all of which should be explored further. Were sufficient school site and district level strategies implemented? Attendance Works recommends key school site strategies (monitor attendance data and practice; engage students and parents; recognize good and improved attendance; provide personalized early outreach; and develop programmatic responses to systemic barriers) and district level strategies (positive messaging; capacity building; actionable data; and shared accountability). To what extent were these strategies implemented in the Del Norte County Unified School District?

Additional questions to consider—Was there insufficient dosage of interventions? Perhaps incentive efforts did not reach enough students. Was there a lack of fidelity in implementation of incentives? Perhaps there was inconsistency in how interventions were used in schools and classrooms. Were the interventions insufficiently comprehensive? The data show that students receiving free/reduced price lunch and students with special needs are missing more school than other students, suggesting there are complex psycho-social issues involved. Through the qualitative information provided by the Youth Services Coordinator we got an initial glimpse of why students are not making it to school. Given that health/mental health issues, family issues, and transportation were identified as barriers, it will be important to develop a process to align and increase resources to address these issues.

Another question is how much of a role is suspension playing in chronic absence? Overall suspension rates in DNCUSD are high (12% of students were suspended at least once during the 2012/13 school year, which is higher than the California average of 6%).<sup>20</sup> A more in depth analysis of the interplay between chronic absence and suspensions would be warranted.

Since Bess Maxwell showed some reduction in chronic absences, further analyses should explore what strategies were implemented at the school over the past few years. These strategies could then be considered for implementation at other schools.



## **Background**

Del Norte County and the adjacent tribal lands (DNATL) is one of fourteen places in California participating in Building Healthy Communities (BHC), a ten-year initiative of The California Endowment (TCE). The goal of BHC is to “support the development of communities where kids and youth are healthy, safe and ready to learn” (more information at <http://www.calendow.org/healthycommunities/index.html>). One of the big results the initiative is aiming for is an increase in school attendance. This report was prepared by the California Center for Rural Policy (CCRP) to show trends in school attendance in the Del Norte County Unified School District. The Del Norte County School Board has adopted a goal to improve school attendance, which aligns with the Building Healthy Communities Initiative. During the 2011-2012 school year, schools implemented a variety of incentives aimed at increasing attendance.

## **Why Attendance Matters**

Studies have shown a positive association between education level and overall health.<sup>1-3</sup> Indeed, education level may be the strongest and most consistent predictor of good health, rather than income or occupation.<sup>1</sup> Lower levels of education have been associated with high blood pressure, smoking, high cholesterol, and shorter life expectancy.<sup>1,4</sup> Compared to less educated individuals, those with more education are less likely to report fair/poor health and more likely to engage in healthy behaviors such as exercise, healthy eating, maintaining a healthy body weight, and abstaining from tobacco use.<sup>3,5</sup>

School attendance during the early years can have profound effects on health and future academic success. Attendance in preschool has been associated with positive health outcomes including less risk of overweight/obesity, improved mental health and social competence, and decreased crime later in life.<sup>6,7</sup> Children who attend Head Start or preschool are more likely to complete high school and less likely to require special education classes. Attendance in Head Start has been shown to improve cognitive, verbal and social ability among socially disadvantaged children.<sup>8</sup>

National studies have shown that students who are chronically absent in kindergarten (missing 10% or more of school days) have lower academic performance in first grade. This relationship is true for all children regardless of gender, ethnicity or socioeconomic status, but it is particularly strong for Latino children and poor children. When poor children are chronically absent in kindergarten they have the lowest levels of educational achievement at the end of fifth grade.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, kindergarten and first grade students who are chronically absent are much less likely to have proficient English and Math skills in third grade.<sup>10</sup> This is important, because students who don't read proficiently by third grade are four times more likely to not graduate from high school compared to proficient readers.<sup>11</sup> Studies have also shown that chronically absent sixth and ninth graders have lower graduation rates.<sup>12,13</sup>

Chronic absence is costly in many ways. Students with lower attendance and lower levels of education have reduced earning potential, school districts lose a significant amount of money when students are absent, and lower levels of education are associated with higher rates of crime and violence.<sup>14,15</sup> Adolescents with low literacy skills are more likely to be a victim or perpetrator of violence than adolescents with age appropriate reading levels.<sup>14</sup> Male high school dropouts are 47 times more likely than college graduates to be incarcerated. It has been estimated that the average high school dropout will cost taxpayers over \$292,000 due to lower tax revenues, higher cash and in-kind transfer costs, and imposed incarceration costs.<sup>15</sup>

The evidence is clear—Increasing school attendance can benefit individual health, strengthen the local economy, and reduce crime and violence.<sup>14-18</sup>



Schools generally track average daily attendance and unexcused absence (truancy), but rarely track both excused and unexcused absence for individual students.<sup>9</sup> Average daily attendance rates can mask chronic absence. For example, in a school with 95% average daily attendance, up to 30% of the students could be chronically absent.<sup>9</sup>

## **Methods**

The Del Norte County Unified School District (DNCUSD) provided the data presented in this report. DNCUSD uses Aeries software as a database for student attendance and other information. Attendance Works created district and school attendance tracking tools in Microsoft Excel. DNCUSD imported data from Aeries into the tracking tools for automated attendance calculations. CCRP conducted additional calculations and created graphs using Microsoft Excel. Only Del Norte County Unified School District schools are included in this report (Bess Maxwell, Crescent Elk, Del Norte High, Joe Hamilton, Margaret Keating, Mary Peacock, Mountain, Pine Grove, Redwood, and Smith River). Sunset High is not included as they track attendance differently from other schools. The absence definitions used in this report were developed by Attendance Works (<http://www.attendanceworks.org/>). Calculations for Del Norte High are the same as for other schools and are based on whole day attendance. While it is recognized that high school students may miss some class periods, calculations based on percent of class periods missed have not yet been developed. Please note that the method for extracting data from Aeries was refined, so results in this report may differ slightly from results in prior reports. This report should replace any prior reports. All data presented in this report was extracted in the same way, so this does not explain any observed changes in chronic absence rates.

### **Definitions of Terms**

#### **Chronic Absence**

Percent of students missing 10% or more of total school days. Combines severe chronic and moderate chronic absence.

#### **Severe Chronic Absence**

Percent of students missing 20% or more of total school days.

#### **Moderate Chronic Absence**

Percent of students missing 10 to 19.99% of total school days.

#### **At-Risk Attendance**

Percent of students missing 5 to 9.99% of total school days.

#### **Satisfactory Attendance**

Percent of students missing less than 5% of total school days.

#### **Statistical Significance**

Whenever comparisons are made between groups there is always the possibility of finding a difference simply by chance. In research we like to find “true” differences and not differences that have occurred by chance. By convention, most researchers use a significance level of 95% to determine if a difference is significant. This means there is less than a 5% probability that the difference observed has occurred by chance alone. For this analysis, tests of statistical significance were conducted where appropriate.

Absence definitions from Attendance Works <http://www.attendanceworks.org/>

## **Findings**

Analyses of school attendance rates are presented in the following order:

- District Level:
  - By Grade
  - By School
  - By Race/Ethnicity
  - By Free/Reduced Price Lunch Status
  - By Special Needs Status
- School Level:
  - By Grade
  - By Year

This is followed by an analysis of the main reasons for absences and a list of attendance improvement efforts.

### ***Del Norte County Unified School District Summary of Findings***

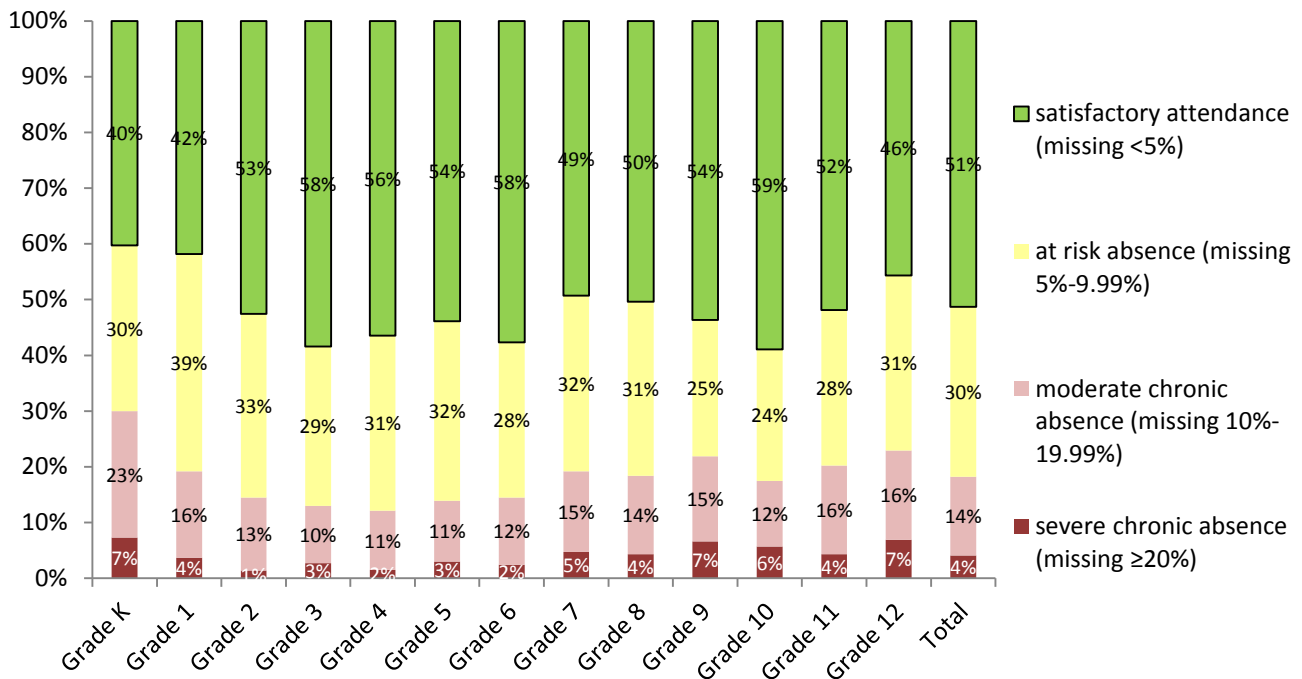
- In the past year (2012-13):
  - 18% of students were chronically absent from school.
  - Kindergarten students had the highest percent of chronic absence with 30% of students missing 10% or more of school days.
  - 28% of American Indian students had chronic absence (significantly higher than other races/ethnicities). White and Asian students had similar rates of chronic absences (18% each), and Latino/Hispanic students had the lowest rates of chronic absences (13%).
  - Students receiving free/reduced price lunch were significantly more likely to be chronically absent (22%) compared to students not receiving free/reduced price lunch (13%).
  - Students with special needs were significantly more likely to be chronically absent (25%) compared to students without special needs (17%).
  - The percent of students with chronic absence ranged from 8% at Smith River to 30% at Margaret Keating.
- In the past 3 years (2010/11, 2011/12 and 2012/13)
  - Overall, total district chronic absence rates **did not** change significantly.
  - Chronic absence rates significantly **increased** among students in 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, and 11<sup>th</sup> grades.
    - Among 9<sup>th</sup> grade students chronic absence rates **increased** from 12% to 22%.
    - Among 10<sup>th</sup> grade students chronic absence rates **increased** from 9% to 18%.
    - Among 11<sup>th</sup> grade students chronic absence rates **increased** from 10% to 20%.
  - Chronic absence rates showed some **improvement** in grades 5 and 6 between 2010/11 and 2011/12.
  - Most schools in the district **did not** have a significant change in chronic absence rates (Crescent Elk, Joe Hamilton, Margaret Keating, Mary Peacock, Pine Grove, Redwood, and Smith River).
  - Chronic absence rates significantly **increased** at Del Norte High (from 12% in 2010/11 to 20% in 2012/13)
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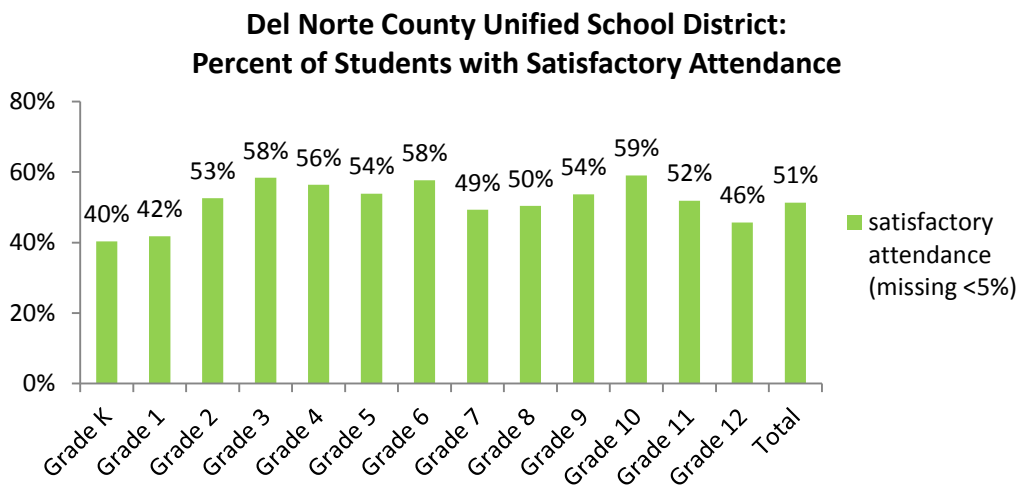
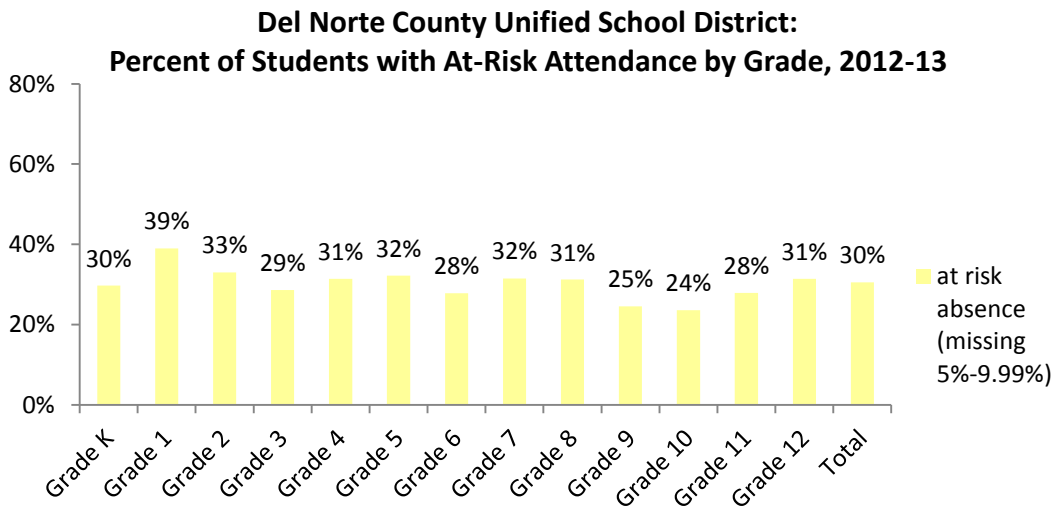
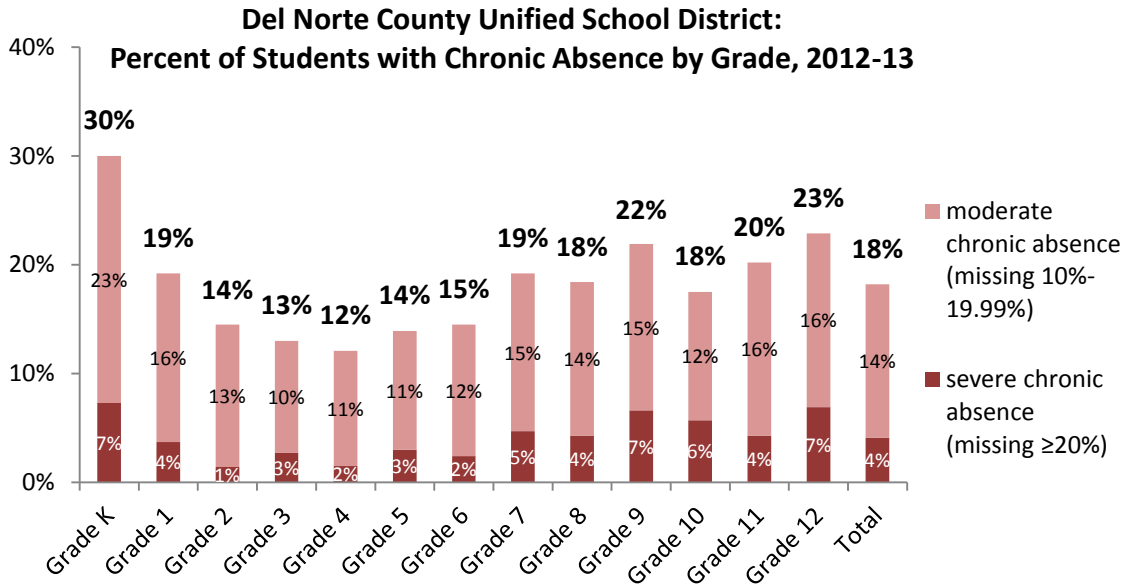
# District Level Data

## Del Norte County Unified School District: Absence by Grade, 2012-13

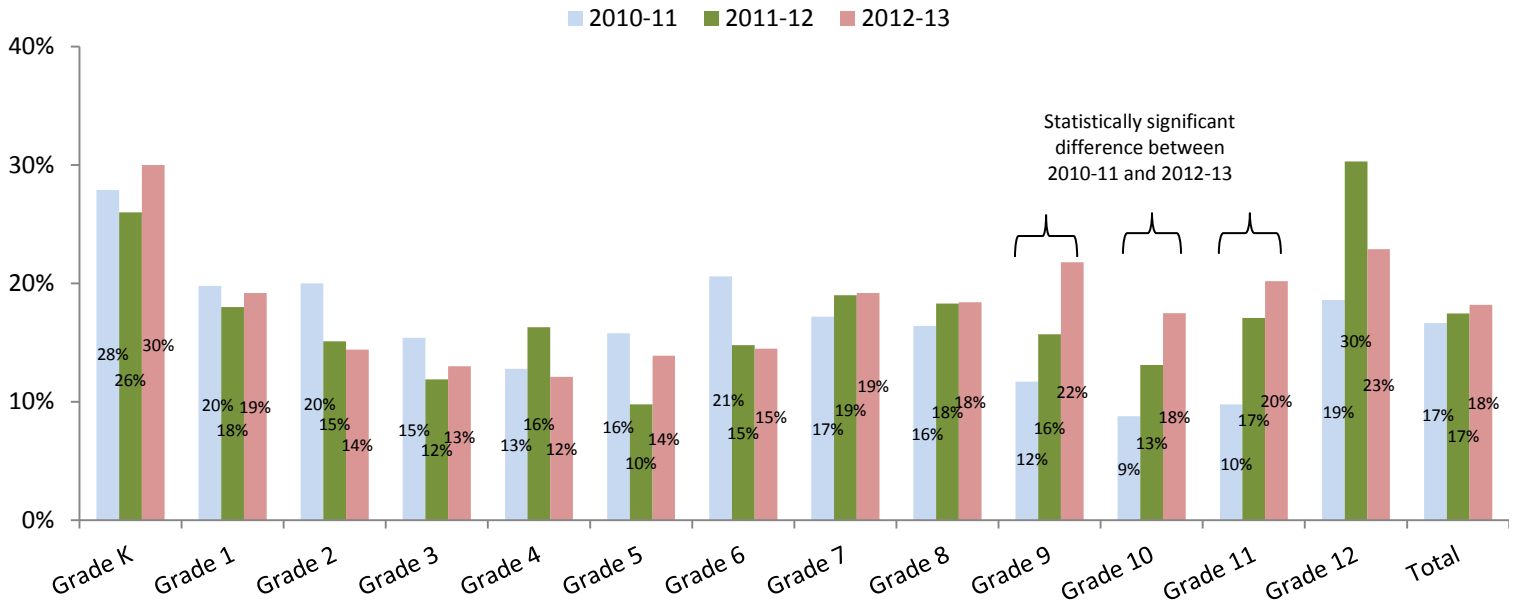
GRADE	Total students	# of students w/severe chronic absence	% of students w/ severe chronic absence	# students w/ moderate chronic absence	% students w/ moderate chronic absence	# of students w/ at-risk absence	% of students w/ at-risk attendance	# of students w/ satisfactory attendance	% of students w/ satisfactory attendance
K	300	22	7%	68	23%	89	30%	121	40%
1	328	12	4%	51	16%	128	39%	137	42%
2	291	4	1%	38	13%	96	33%	153	53%
3	262	7	3%	27	10%	75	29%	153	58%
4	264	4	2%	28	11%	83	31%	149	56%
5	267	8	3%	29	11%	86	32%	144	54%
6	248	6	2%	30	12%	69	28%	143	58%
7	276	13	5%	40	15%	87	32%	136	49%
8	234	10	4%	33	14%	73	31%	118	50%
9	229	15	7%	35	15%	56	25%	123	54%
10	229	13	6%	27	12%	54	24%	135	59%
11	208	9	4%	33	16%	58	28%	108	52%
12	188	13	7%	30	16%	59	31%	86	46%
Total	3324	136	4%	469	14%	1013	30%	1706	51%

## Del Norte County Unified School District: Absence by Grade, 2012-13





**Del Norte County Unified School District:  
Percent of Students with Chronic Absence by Grade Over Time  
(missing 10% or more of school days)**

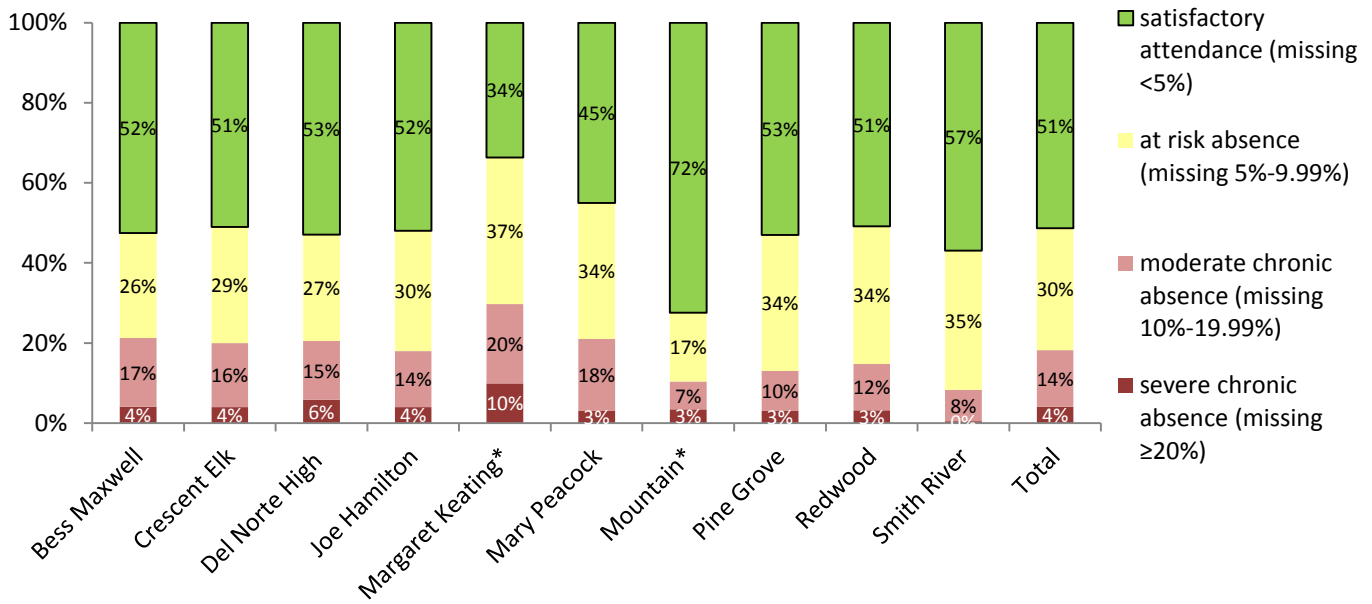


Between 2010-11 and 2012-13, there was a statistically significant difference (at the 95% level) in the percent of students with chronic absence in grades 9, 10, and 11. Grades 5 had a statistically significant decrease (at the 95% level) between 2010-11 and 2011-12. Grade 6 had a statistically significant decrease (at the 90% level) between 2010-11 and 2011-12. Other grades and district total did not change significantly between years.

**Del Norte County Unified School District: Absence by School, 2012-13**

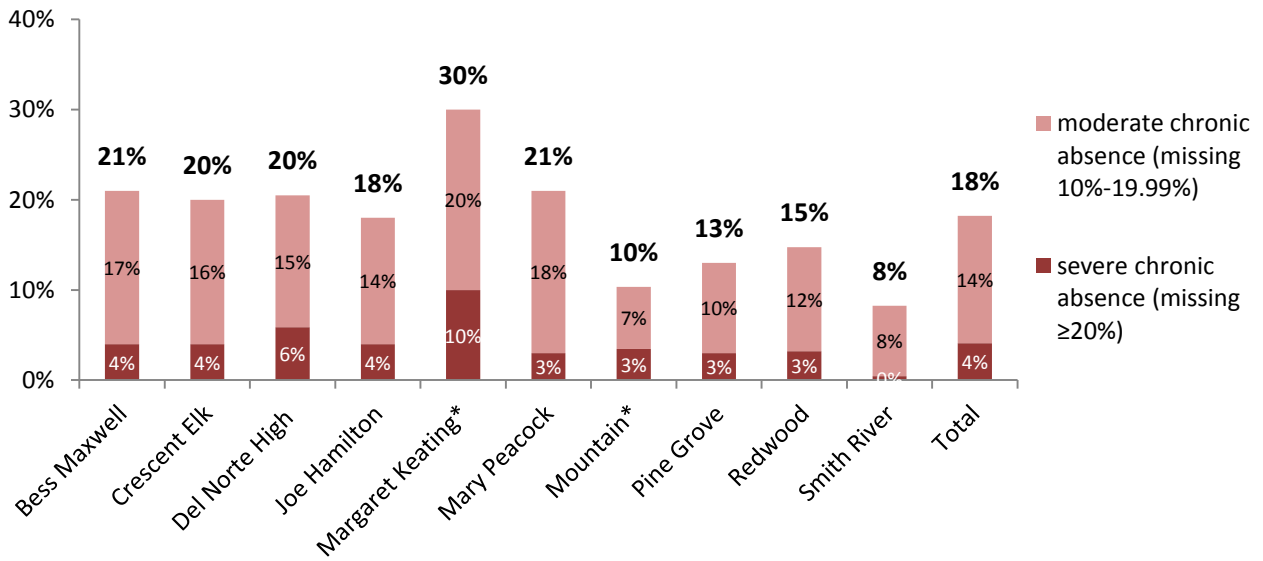
School	Total students	# of students w/severe chronic absence	% of students w/ severe chronic absence	# students w/ moderate chronic absence	% students w/ moderate chronic absence	# of students w/ at-risk absence	% of students w/ at-risk attendance	# of students w/ satisfactory attendance	% of students w/ satisfactory attendance
Bess Maxwell	267	11	4%	46	17%	70	26%	140	52%
Crescent Elk	500	21	4%	78	16%	146	29%	255	51%
Del Norte High	854	50	6%	125	15%	227	27%	452	53%
Joe Hamilton	294	11	4%	42	14%	89	30%	152	52%
Margaret Keating	71	7	10%	14	20%	26	37%	24	34%
Mary Peacock	381	12	3%	68	18%	130	34%	171	45%
Mountain	29	1	3%	2	7%	5	17%	21	72%
Pine Grove	230	7	3%	22	10%	79	34%	122	53%
Redwood	468	15	3%	54	12%	161	34%	238	51%
Smith River	230	1	0%	18	8%	80	35%	131	57%

### Del Norte County Unified School District: Absence by School, 2013



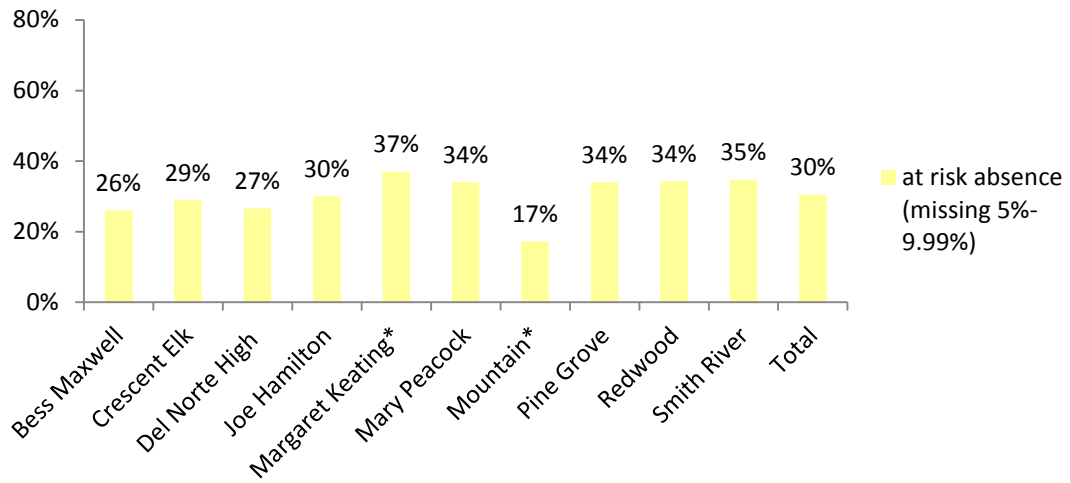
\*These schools have enrollment less than 100 students, so percentages are less stable

### Del Norte County Unified School District: Percent of Students with Chronic Absence by School, 2012-13



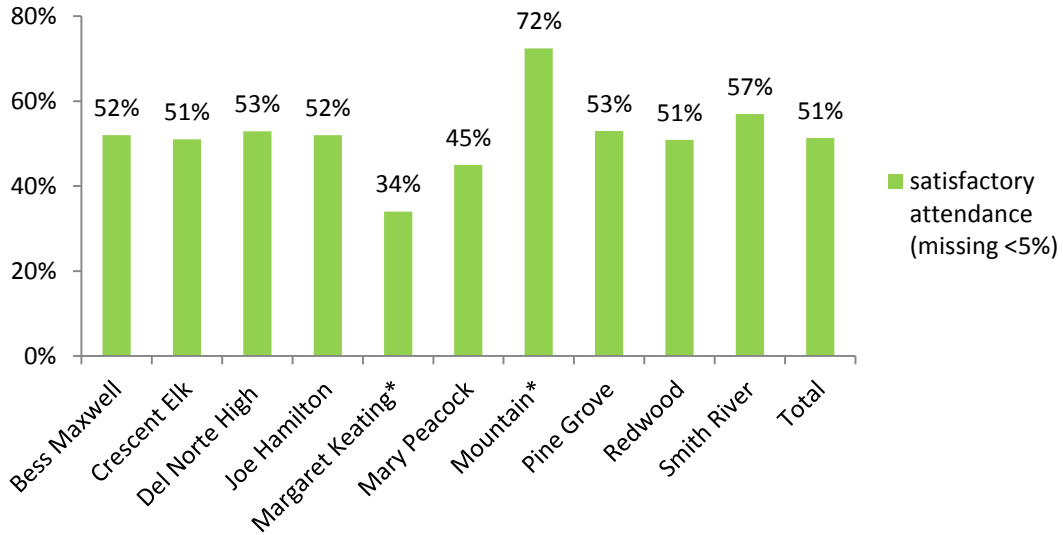
\*These schools have enrollment less than 100 students, so percentages are less stable

**Del Norte County Unified School District:  
Percent of Students with At-Risk Attendance, 2012-13**



\*These schools have enrollment less than 100 students, so percentages are less stable

**Del Norte County Unified School District:  
Percent of Students with Satisfactory Attendance,  
2012-13**



\*These schools have enrollment less than 100 students, so percentages are less stable

**Del Norte County Unified School District: Absence by Race/Ethnicity, 2012-13**

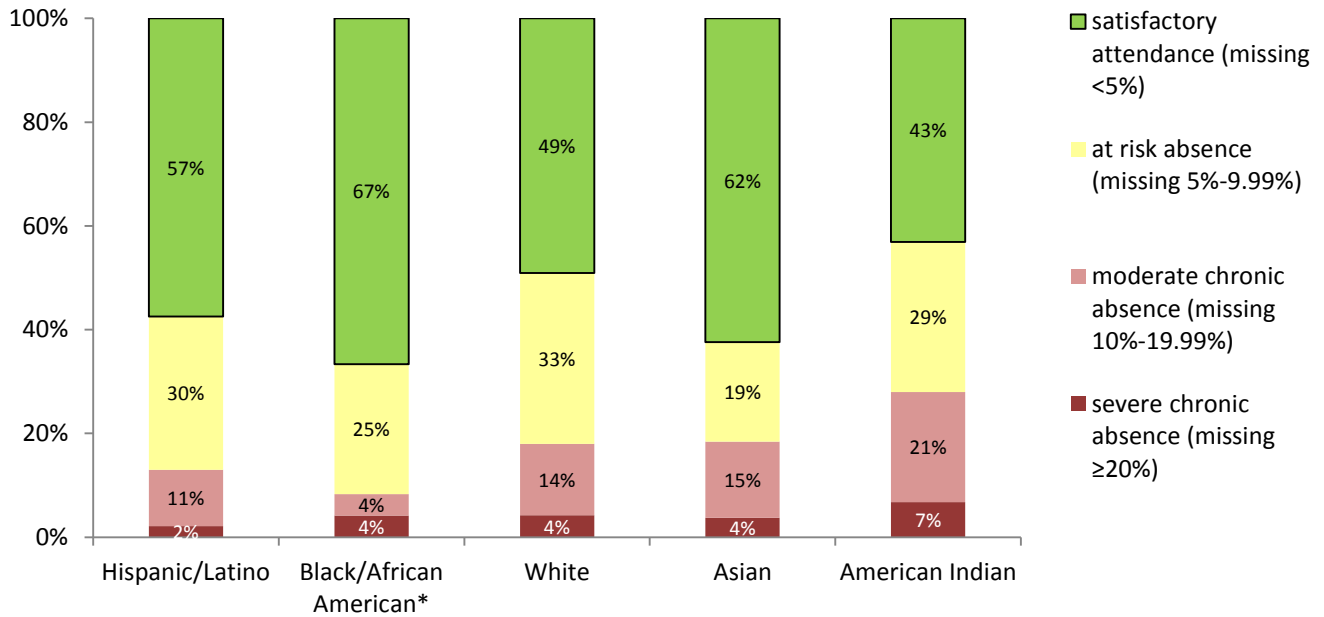
Race/Ethnicity	Total students	# of students w/severe chronic absence	% of students w/ severe chronic absence	# students w/ moderate chronic absence	% students w/ moderate chronic absence	# of students w/ at-risk absence	% of students w/ at-risk attendance	# of students w/ satisfactory attendance	% of students w/ satisfactory attendance
Hispanic/Latino	701	15	2%	76	11%	207	30%	403	57%
Black/African American*	24	1	4%	1	4%	6	25%	16	67%
White	1852	78	4%	255	14%	610	33%	909	49%
Asian	266	10	4%	39	15%	51	19%	166	62%
American Indian	457	31	7%	97	21%	132	29%	197	43%

Note: only showing race/ethnicity when more than 20 students

\*Total number of enrolled students identified as Black/African American is 24, so percentages are less stable.



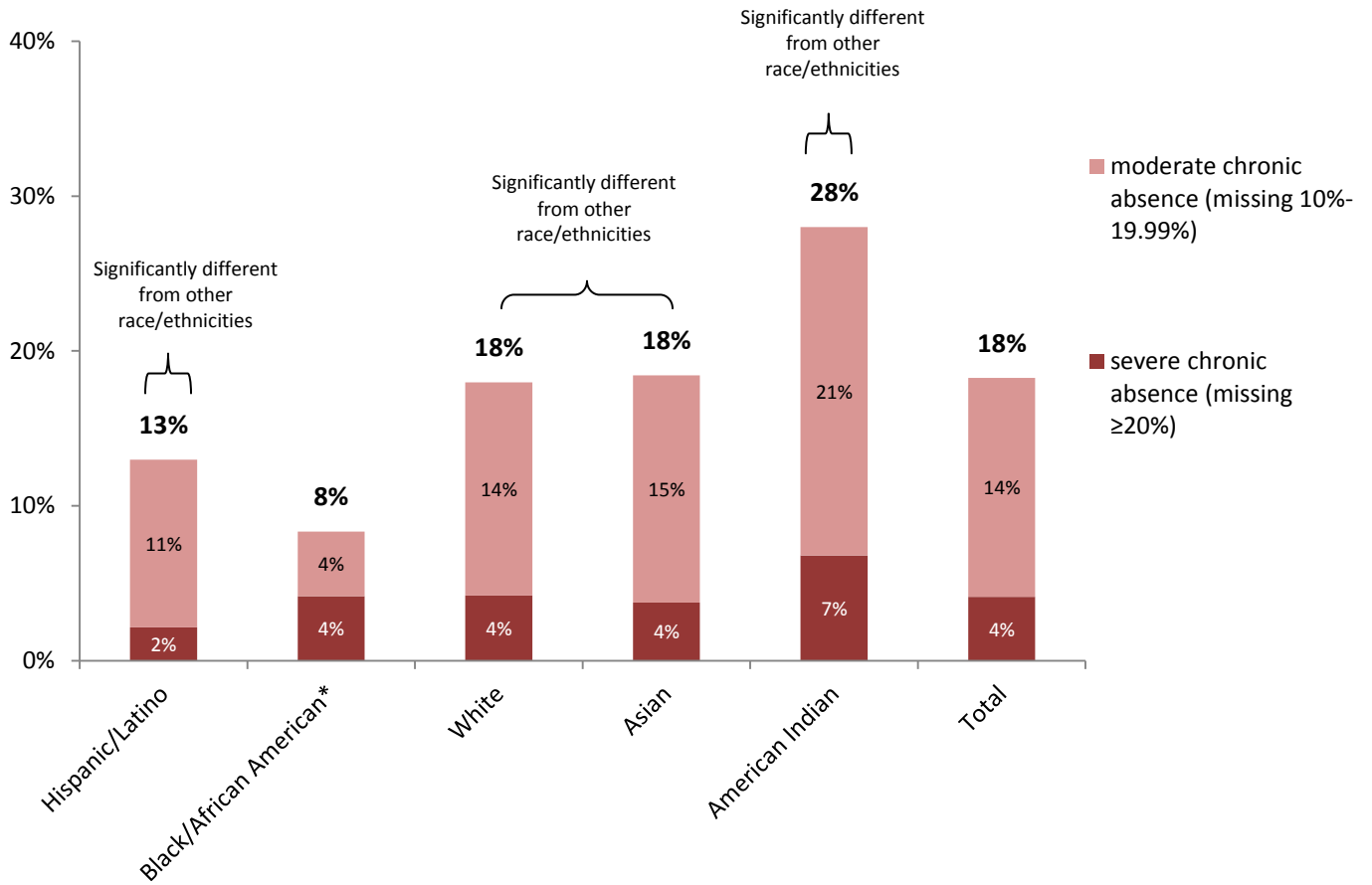
### Del Norte County Unified School District: Absence by Race/Ethnicity, 2012-13



Note: only showing race/ethnicity when more than 20 students

\*Total number of enrolled students identified as Black/African American is 24, so percentages are less stable.

**Del Norte County Unified School District:  
Percent of Students with Chronic Absence by Race/Ethnicity, 2012-13**



Note: only showing race/ethnicity when more than 20 students.

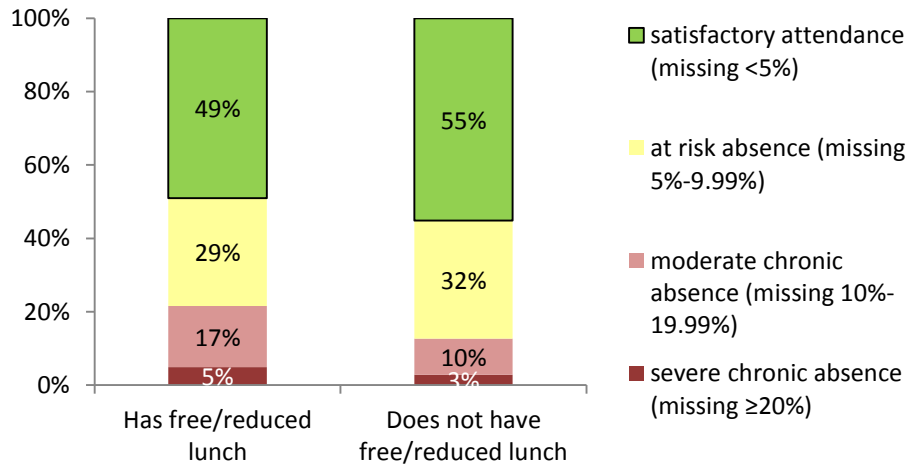
Differences between races/ethnicities shown are statistically significant (at the 95% level).

\*Total number of enrolled students identified as Black/African American is 24, so percentages are less stable and too small to calculate statistical significance.

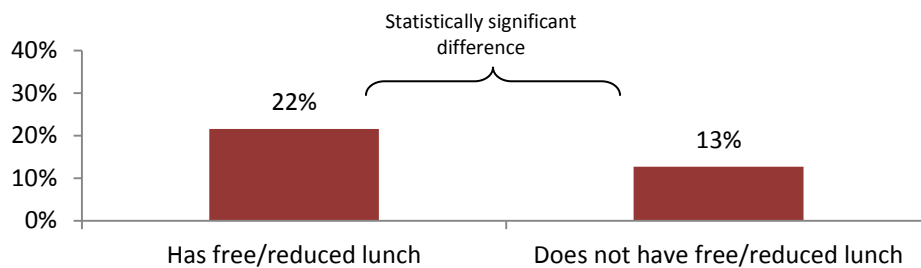
**Del Norte County Unified School District:  
Absence by Free/Reduced Price Lunch Status, 2012-13**

FREE/ REDUCED LUNCH STATUS	Total students	# of students w/severe chronic absence	% of students w/ severe chronic absence	# students w/ moderate chronic absence	% students w/ moderate chronic absence	# of students w/ at-risk absence	% of students w/ at-risk attendance	# of students w/ satisfactory attendance	% of students w/ satisfactory attendance
Has free/reduced lunch	2069	101	5%	345	17%	609	29%	1014	49%
Does not have free/reduced lunch	1255	35	3%	124	10%	404	32%	692	55%

**Del Norte County Unified School District:  
Absence by Free/Reduced Price Lunch Status, 2012-13**



**Del Norte County Unified School District:  
Percent of Students with Chronic Absence  
by Free/Reduced Price Lunch Status, 2012-13  
(missing 10% or more of school days)**

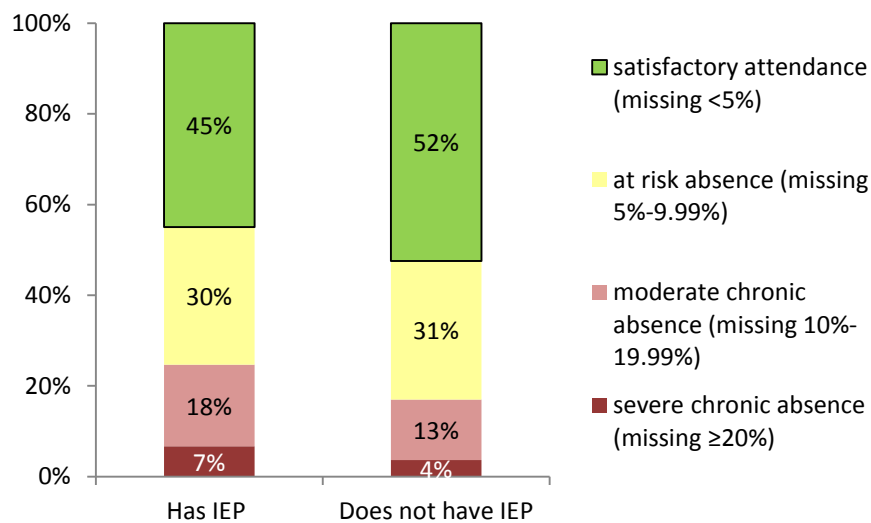


Differences between free/reduced lunch status are statistically significant (tested at the 95% level).

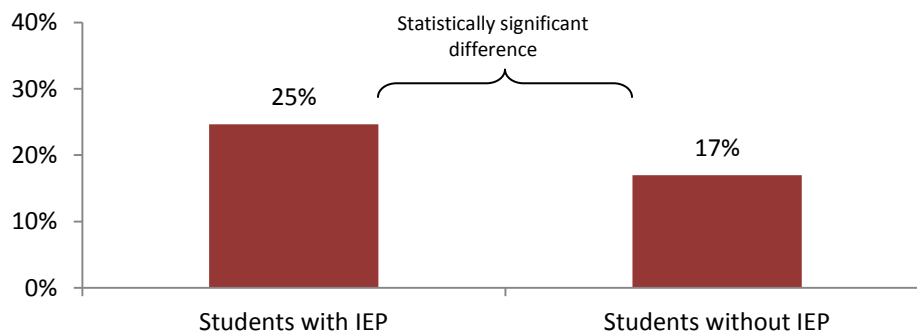
## Del Norte County Unified School District: Absence by Special Needs, 2012-13

Individualized Education Program (IEP) Status	Total students	# of students w/severe chronic absence	% of students w/ severe chronic absence	# students w/ moderate chronic absence	% students w/ moderate chronic absence	# of students w/ at-risk absence	% of students w/ at-risk attendance	# of students w/ satisfactory attendance	% of students w/ satisfactory attendance
Has IEP	511	34	7%	92	18%	155	30%	230	45%
Does not have IEP	2807	102	4%	375	13%	857	31%	1473	52%

**Del Norte County Unified School District:  
Absence by IEP Status, 2012-13**



**Del Norte County Unified School District:  
Percent of Students with Chronic Absence by IEP Status  
(missing 10% or more of school days)  
2012-13**



Differences between IEP status are statistically significant (tested at the 95% level).

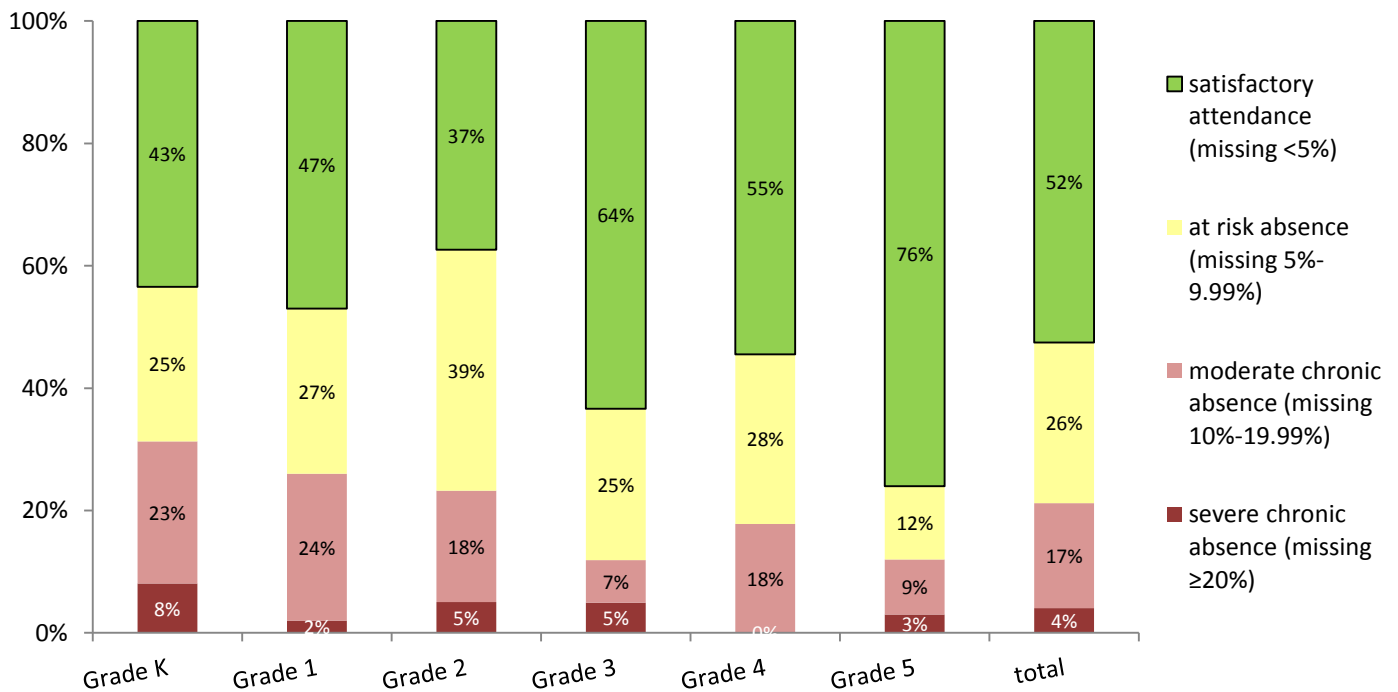
# School Level Data

## Bess Maxwell Elementary

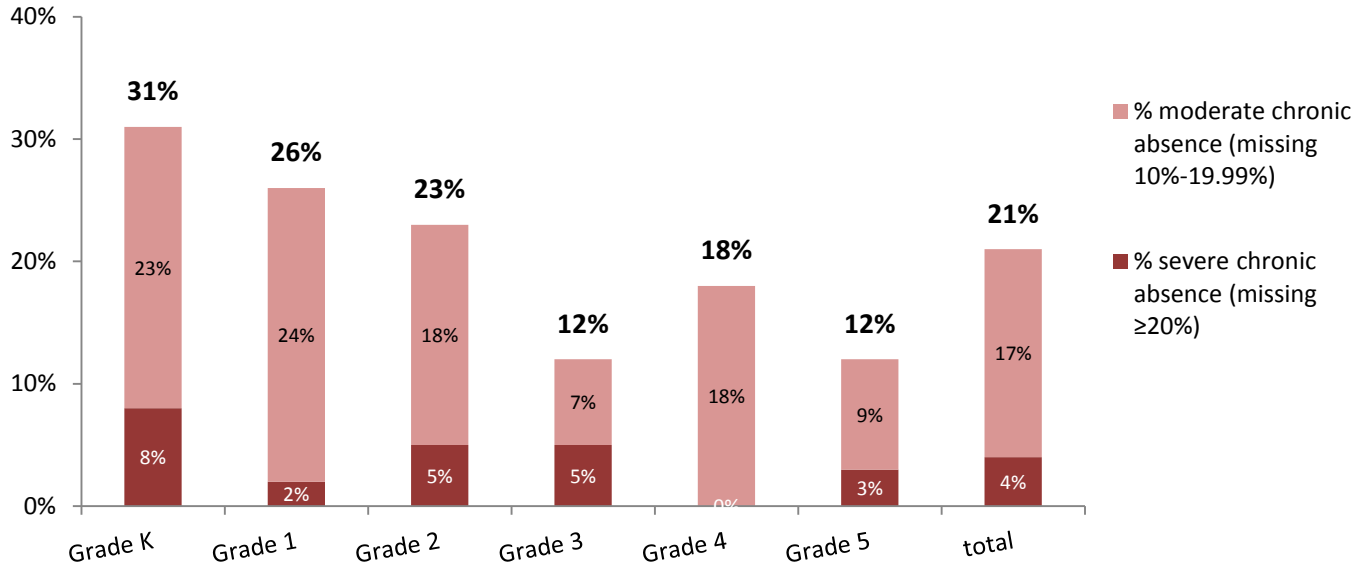
2012-13

GRADE	Total students	# of students w/severe chronic absence	% of students w/ severe chronic absence	# students w/ moderate chronic absence	% students w/ moderate chronic absence	# of students w/ at-risk absence	% of students w/ at-risk absence	# of students w/ satisfactory attendance	% of students w/ satisfactory attendance
K	60	5	8%	14	23%	15	25%	26	43%
1	51	1	2%	12	24%	14	27%	24	47%
2	38	2	5%	7	18%	15	39%	14	37%
3	44	2	5%	3	7%	11	25%	28	64%
4	40	0	0%	7	18%	11	28%	22	55%
5	34	1	3%	3	9%	4	12%	26	76%
Total	267	11	4%	46	17%	70	26%	140	52%

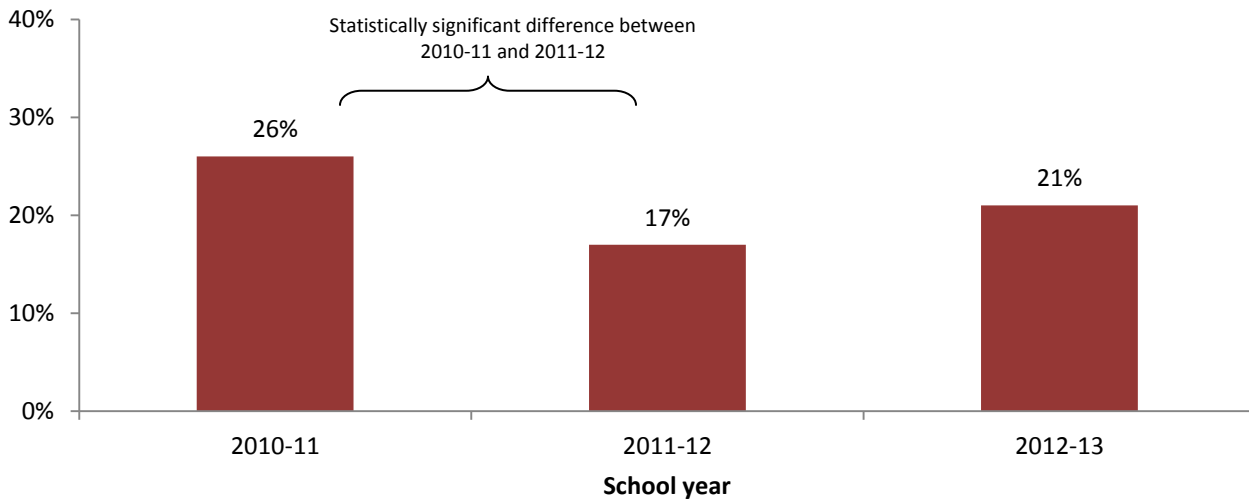
**Bess Maxwell Elementary:  
School Absence by Grade, 2012-13**



**Bess Maxwell Elementary:  
Percent of Students with Chronic Absence, 2012-13**



**Bess Maxwell Elementary:  
Percent of Students with Chronic Absence by Year  
(missing 10% or more of school days)**



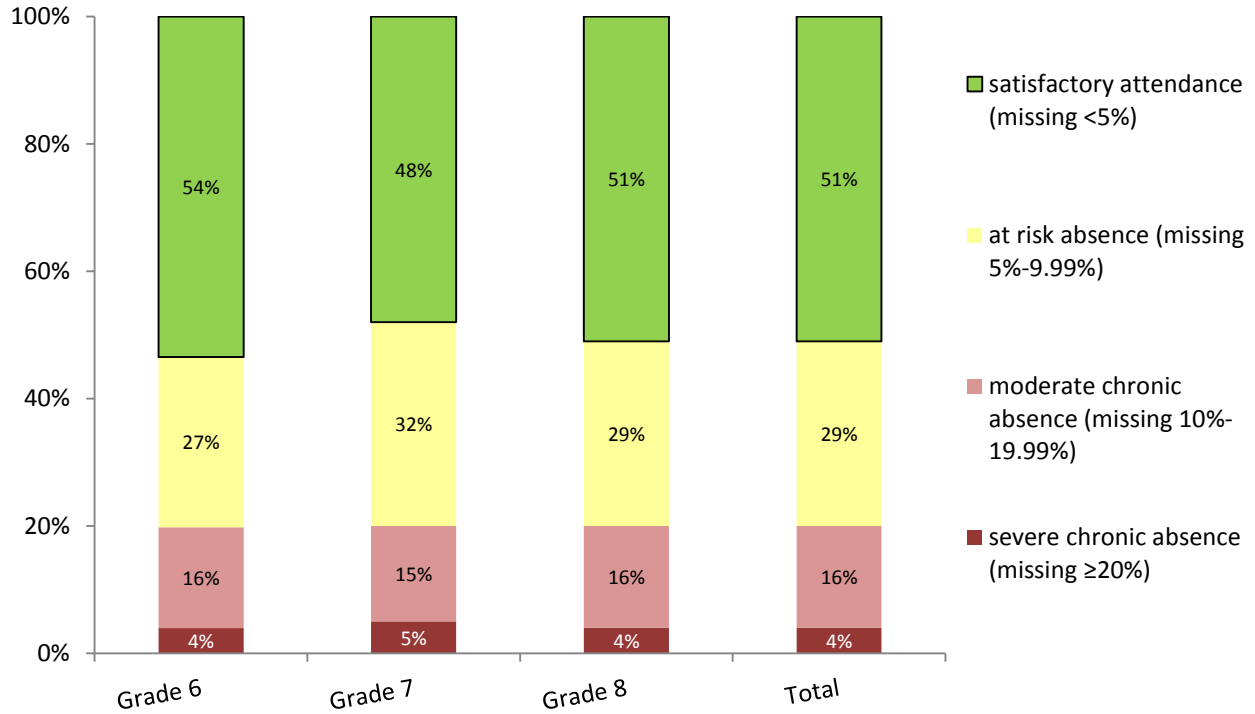
Between 2010-11 and 2011-12, there was a statistically significant difference (at the 95% level) in the percent of students with chronic absence.

**Crescent Elk Middle School**

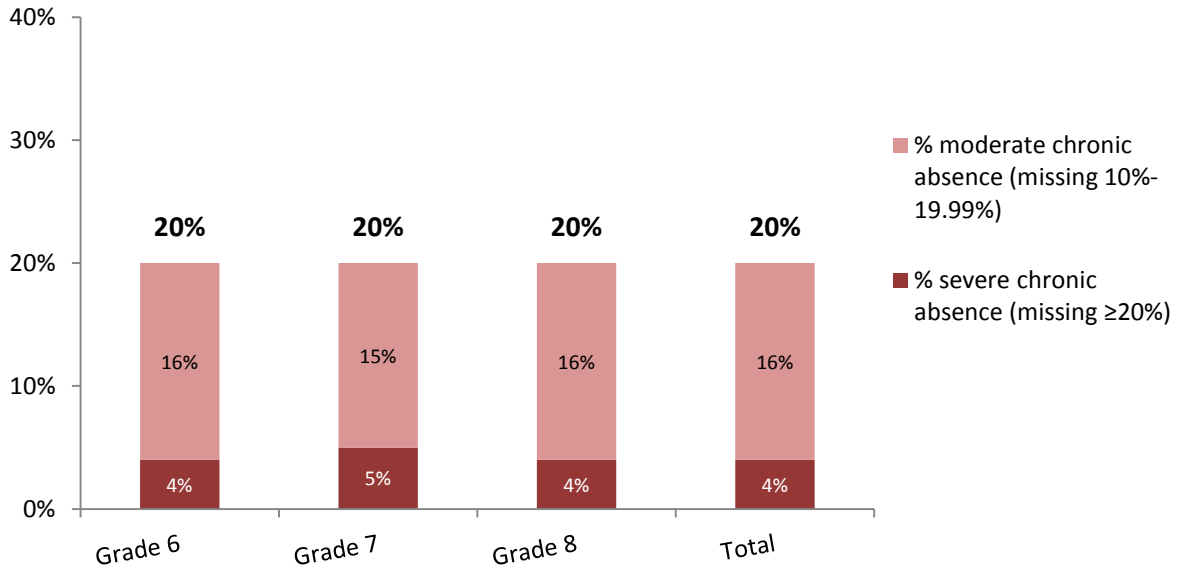
**2012-13**

GRADE	Total students	# of students w/severe chronic absence	% of students w/ severe chronic absence	# students w/ moderate chronic absence	% students w/ moderate chronic absence	# of students w/ at-risk absence	% of students w/ at-risk attendance	# of students w/ satisfactory attendance	% of students w/ satisfactory attendance
6	165	6	4%	26	16%	44	27%	89	54%
7	179	9	5%	27	15%	57	32%	86	48%
8	156	6	4%	25	16%	45	29%	80	51%
Total	500	21	4%	78	16%	146	29%	255	51%

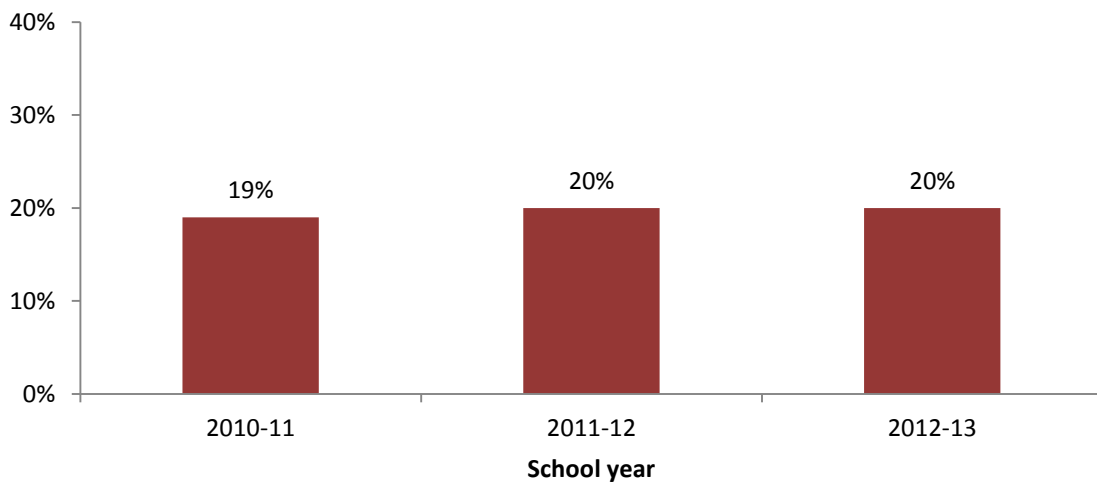
**Crescent Elk:  
School Absence by Grade, 2012-13**



**Crescent Elk:  
Percent of Students with Chronic Absence, 2012-13**



**Crescent Elk:  
Percent of Students with Chronic Absence by Year  
(missing 10% or more of school days)**



Differences between years are **not** statistically significant (tested at the 95% level).

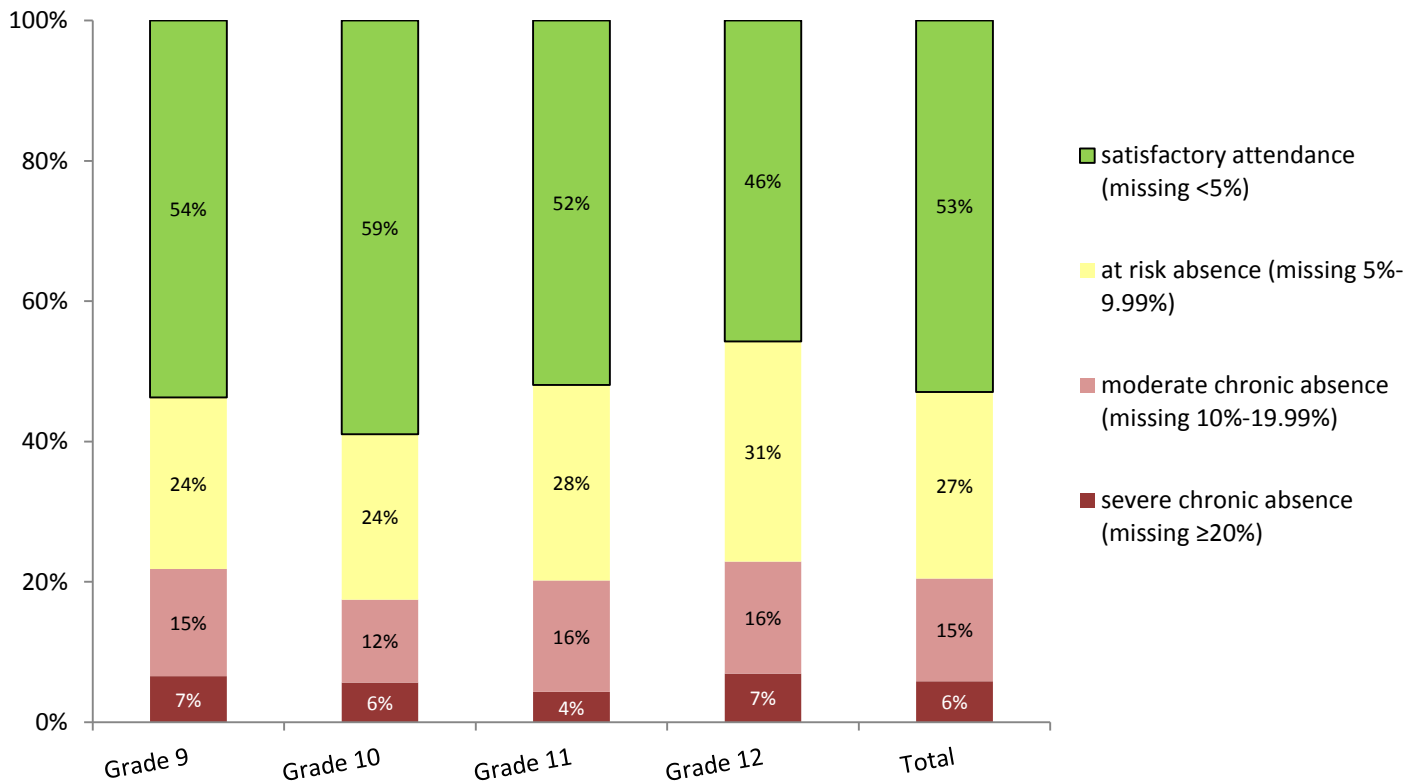


# Del Norte High School

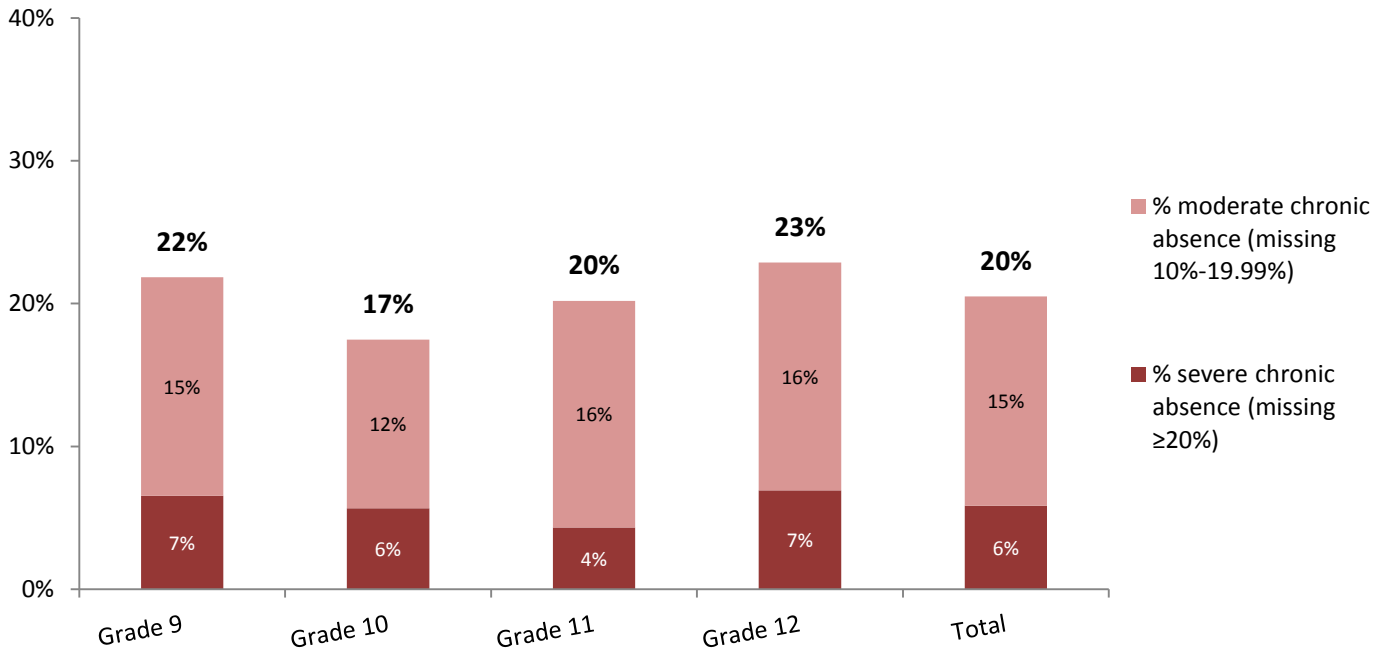
2012-13

GRADE	Total students	# of students w/severe chronic absence	% of students w/ severe chronic absence	# students w/ moderate chronic absence	% students w/ moderate chronic absence	# of students w/ at-risk absence	% of students w/ at-risk attendance	# of students w/ satisfactory attendance	% of students w/ satisfactory attendance
9	229	15	7%	35	15%	56	24%	123	54%
10	229	13	6%	27	12%	54	24%	135	59%
11	208	9	4%	33	16%	58	28%	108	52%
12	188	13	7%	30	16%	59	31%	86	46%
Total	854	50	6%	125	15%	227	27%	452	53%

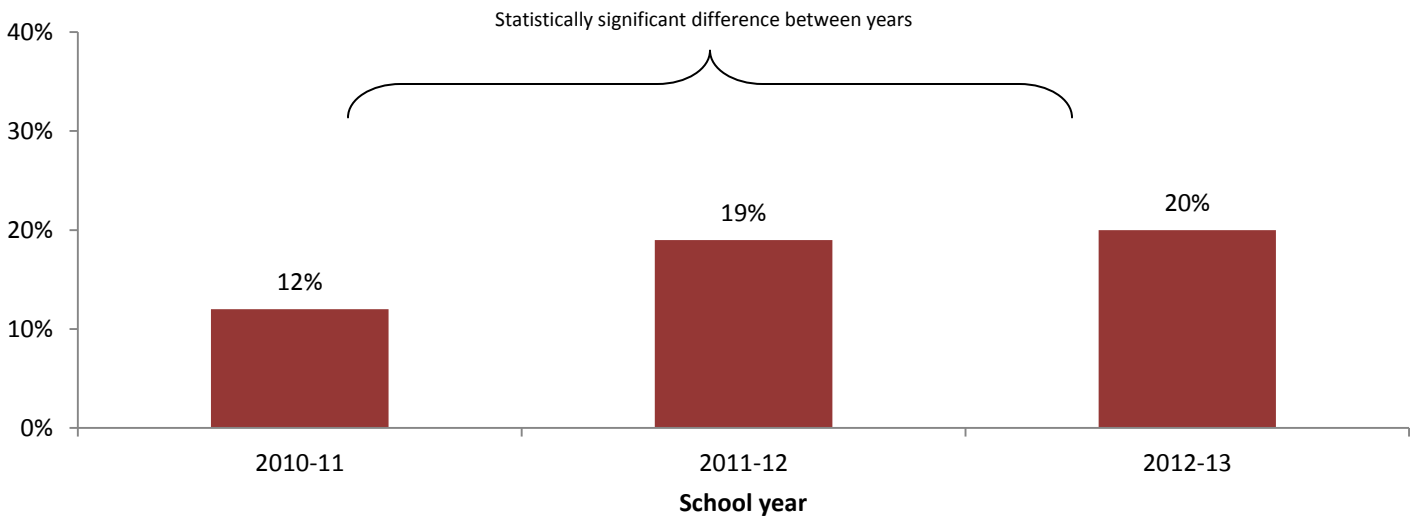
**Del Norte High School:  
School Absence by Grade, 2012-13**



**Del Norte High School:  
Percent of Students with Chronic Absence, 2012-13**



**Del Norte High School:  
Percent of Students with Chronic Absence by Year  
(missing 10% or more of school days)**



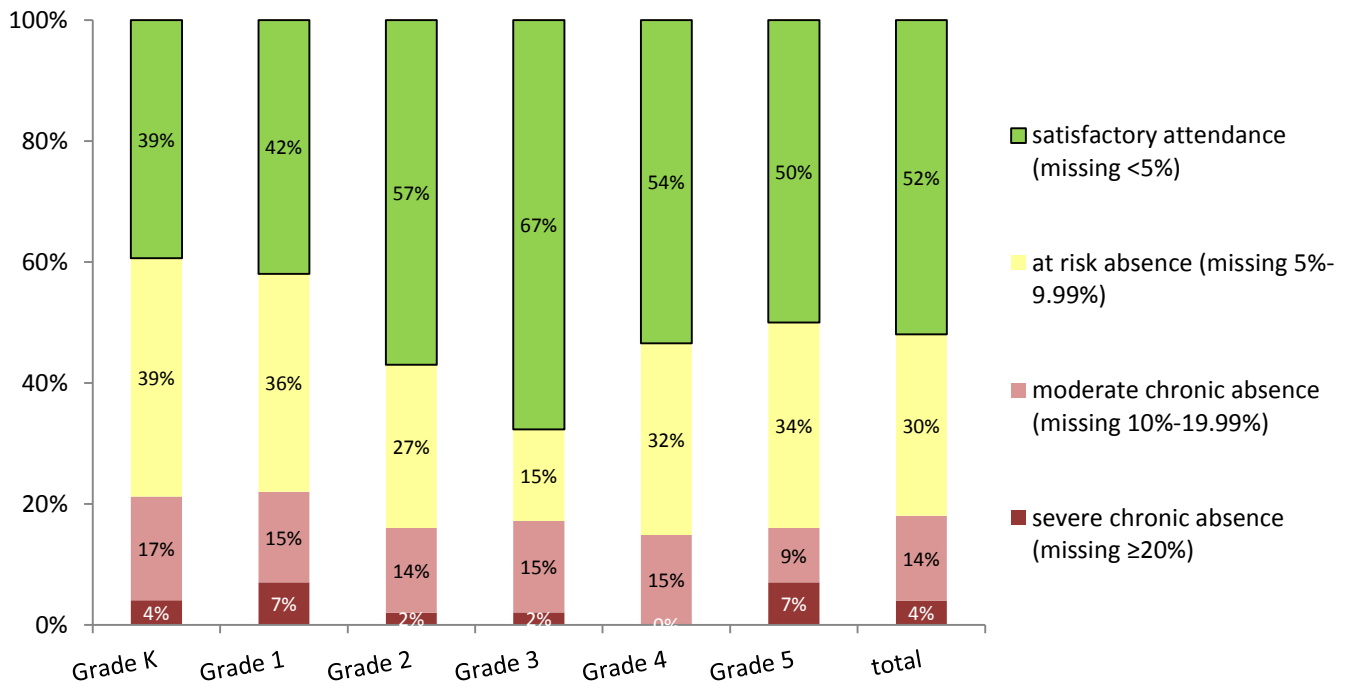
Differences between years are statistically significant (at the 95% level).

Joe Hamilton

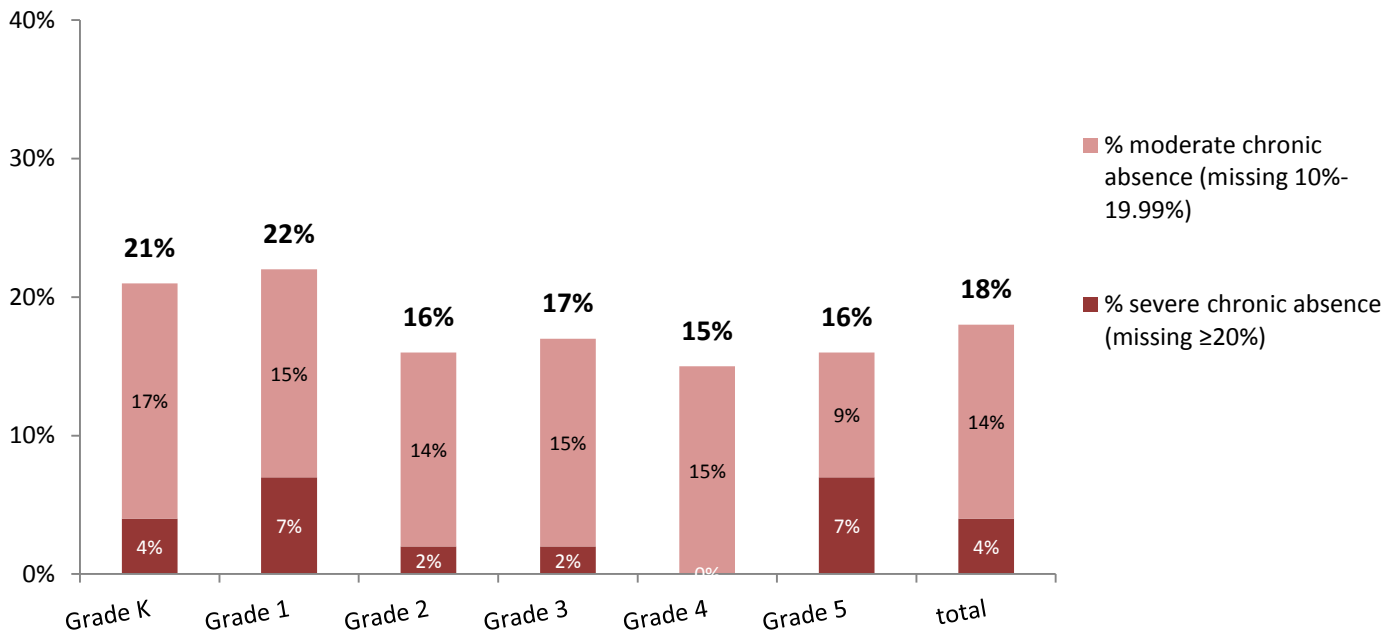
2012-13

GRADE	Total students	# of students w/severe chronic absence	% of students w/ severe chronic absence	# students w/ moderate chronic absence	% students w/ moderate chronic absence	# of students w/ at-risk absence	% of students w/ at-risk attendance	# of students w/ satisfactory attendance	% of students w/ satisfactory attendance
K	46	2	4%	8	17%	18	39%	18	39%
1	55	4	7%	8	15%	20	36%	23	42%
2	56	1	2%	8	14%	15	27%	32	57%
3	52	1	2%	8	15%	8	15%	35	67%
4	41	0	0%	6	15%	13	32%	22	54%
5	44	3	7%	4	9%	15	34%	22	50%
Total	294	11	4%	42	14%	89	30%	152	52%

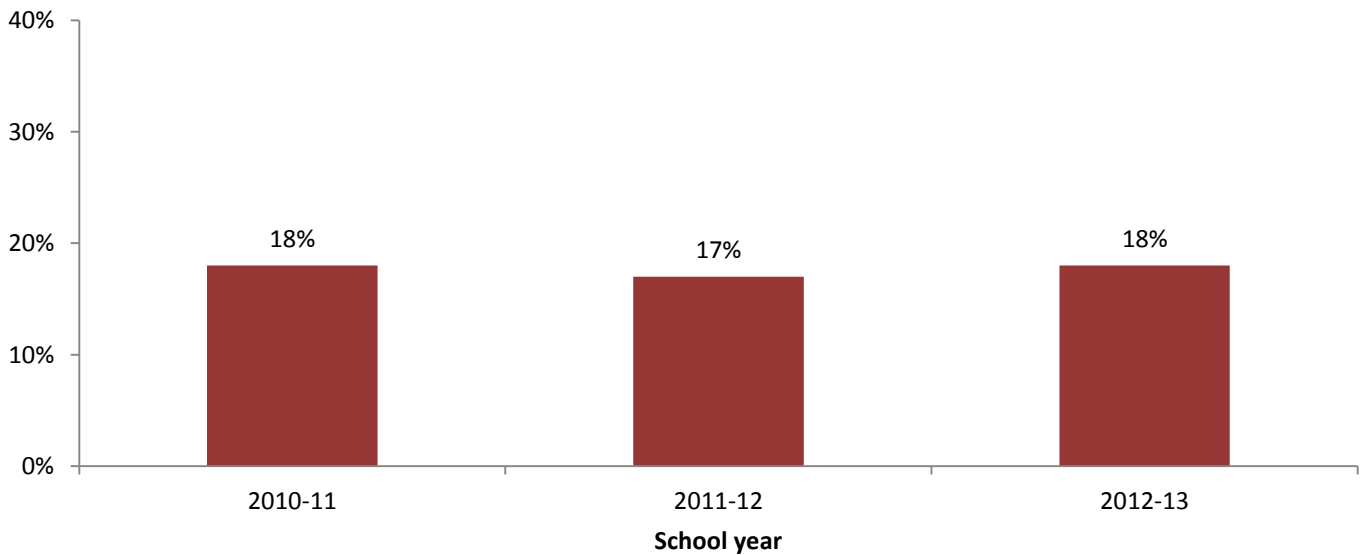
Joe Hamilton Elementary:  
School Absence by Grade, 2012-13



**Joe Hamilton Elementary:  
Percent of Students with Chronic Absence, 2012-13**



**Joe Hamilton Elementary:  
Percent of Students with Chronic Absence by Year  
(missing 10% or more of school days)**



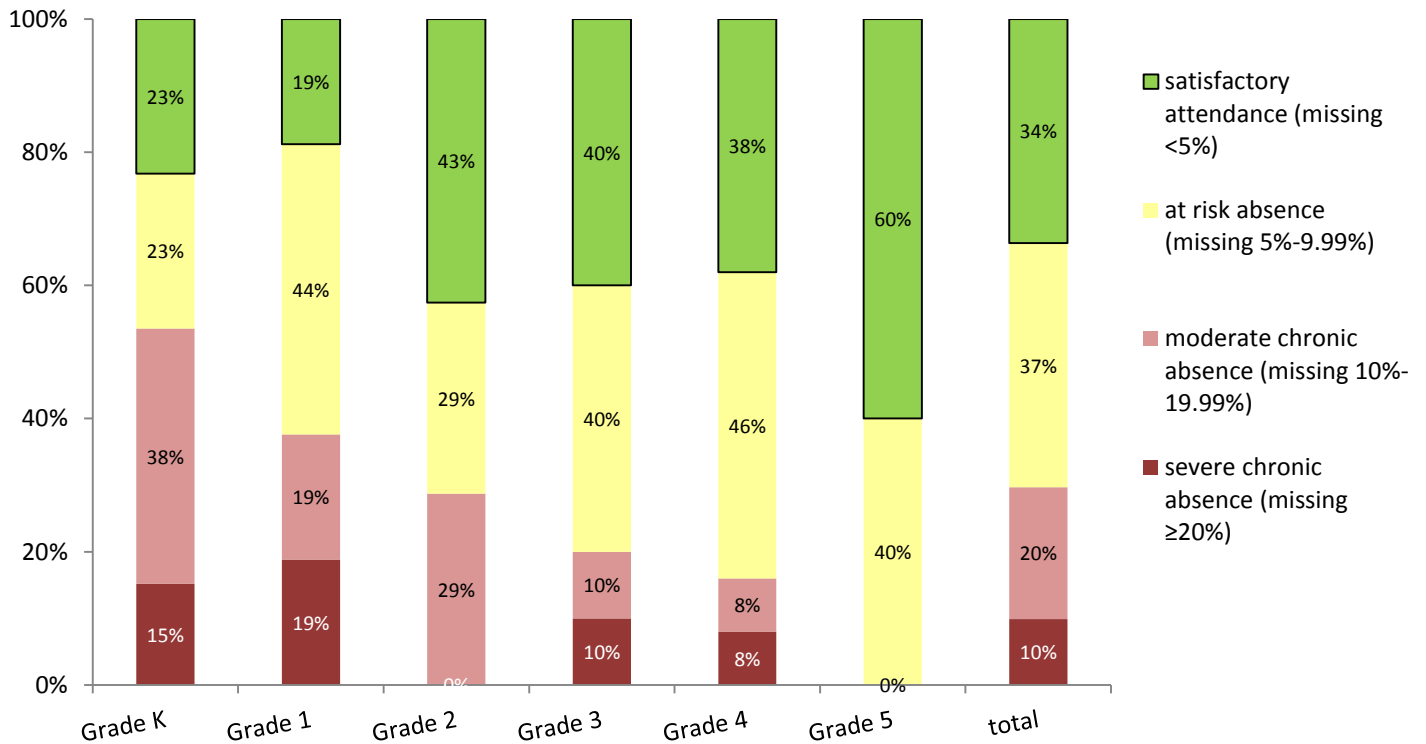
Differences between years are **not** statistically significant (tested at the 95% level).

# Margaret Keating

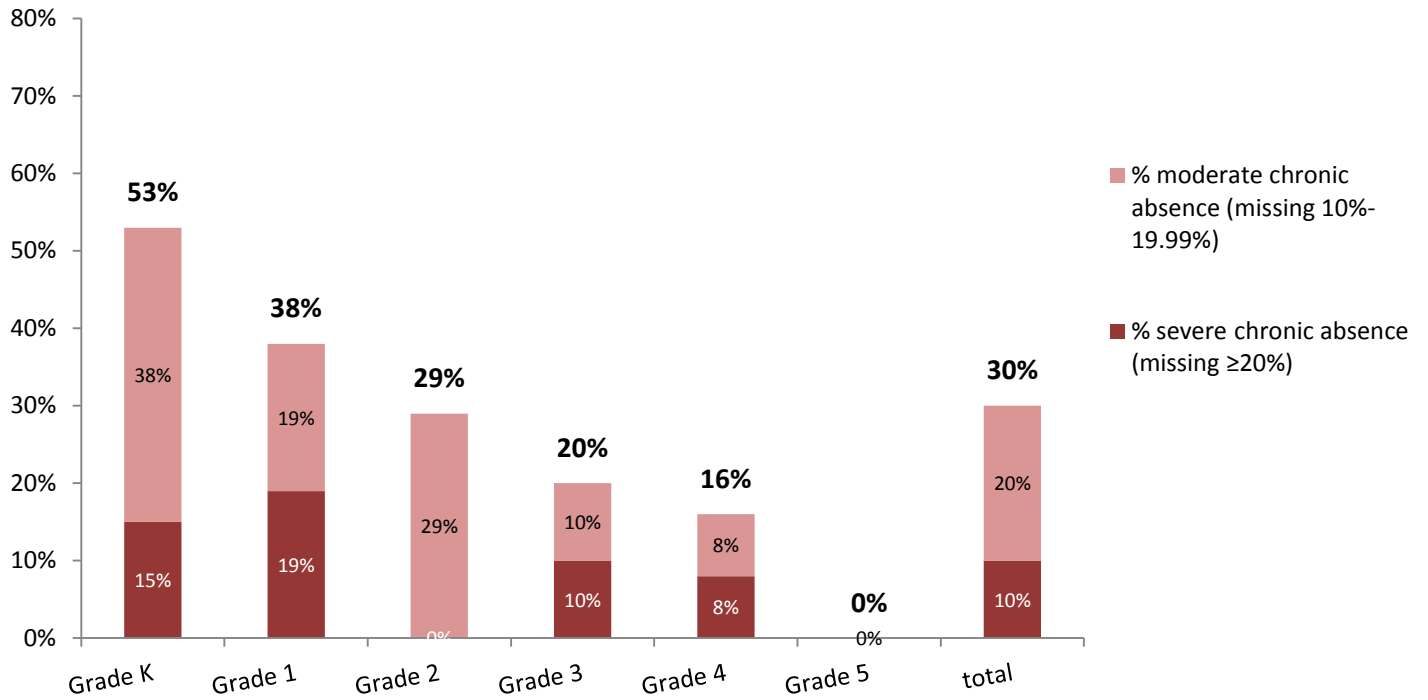
2012-13

GRADE	Total students	# of students w/severe chronic absence	% of students w/ severe chronic absence	# students w/ moderate chronic absence	% students w/ moderate chronic absence	# of students w/ at-risk absence	% of students w/ at-risk attendance	# of students w/ satisfactory attendance	% of students w/ satisfactory attendance
K	13	2	15%	5	38%	3	23%	3	23%
1	16	3	19%	3	19%	7	44%	3	19%
2	14	0	0%	4	29%	4	29%	6	43%
3	10	1	10%	1	10%	4	40%	4	40%
4	13	1	8%	1	8%	6	46%	5	38%
5	5	0	0%	0	0%	2	40%	3	60%
Total	71	7	10%	14	20%	26	37%	24	34%

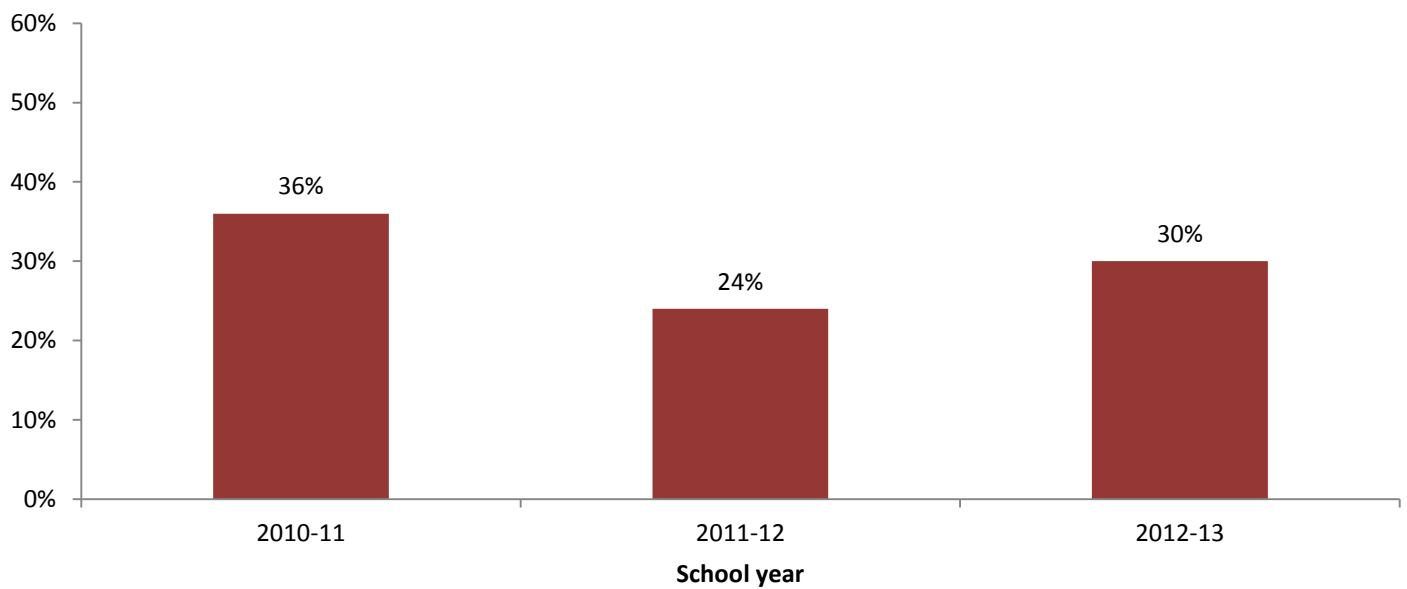
**Margaret Keating Elementary:  
School Absence by Grade, 2012-13**



**Margaret Keating Elementary:  
Percent of Students with Chronic Absence, 2012-13**



**Margaret Keating Elementary:  
Percent of Students with Chronic Absence by Year  
(missing 10% or more of school days)**



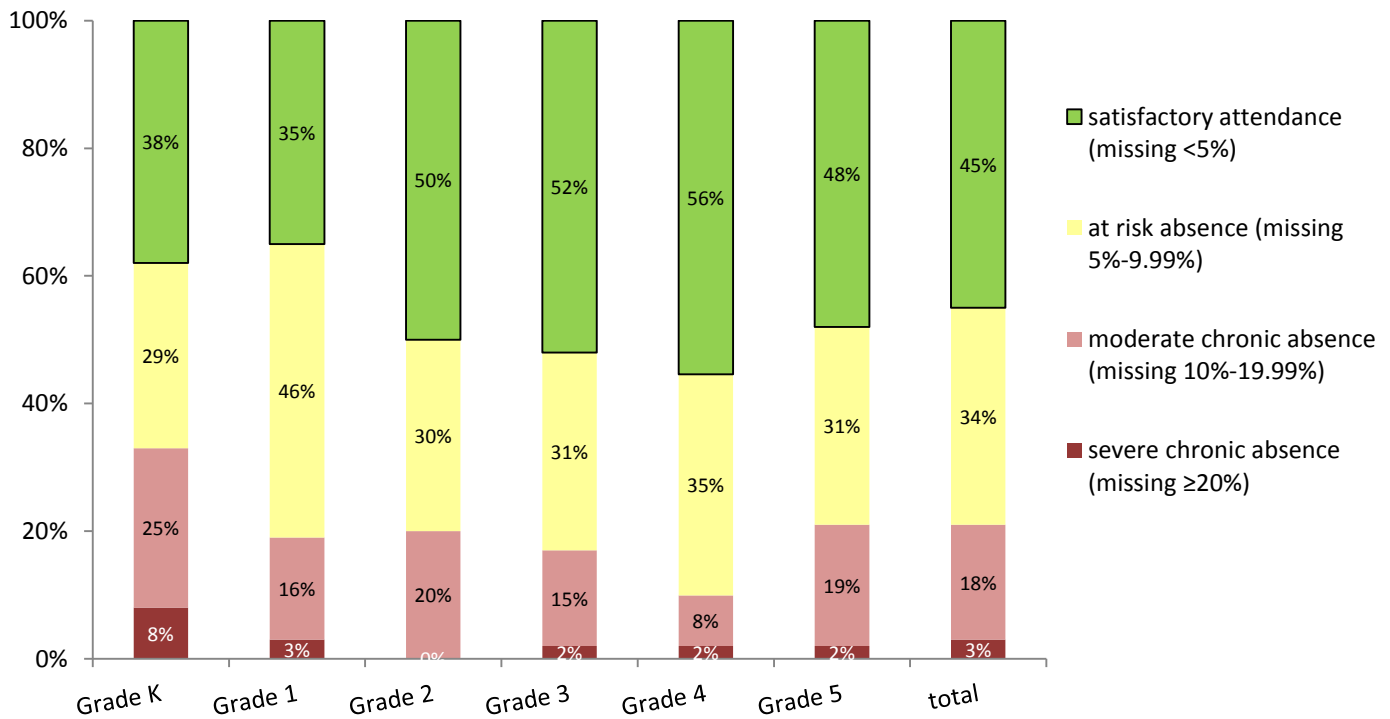
Differences between years are **not** statistically significant (tested at the 95% level).

# Mary Peacock

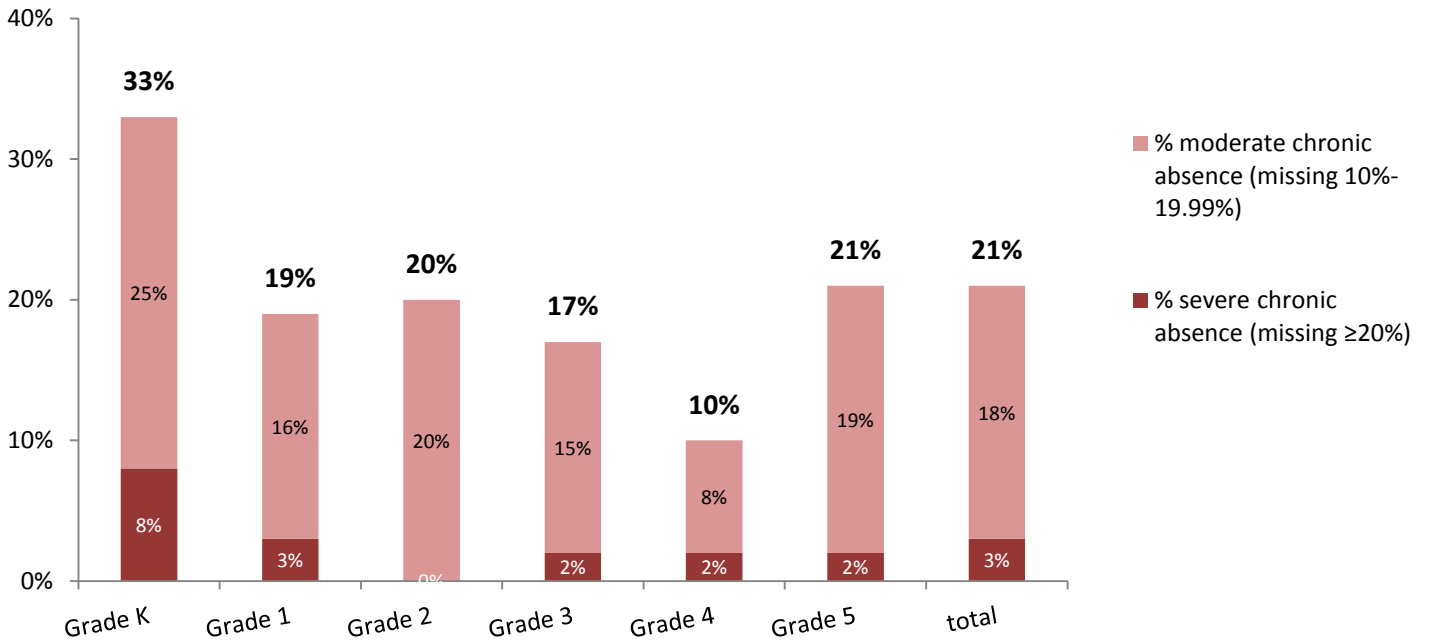
## 2012-13

GRADE	Total students	# of students w/severe chronic absence	% of students w/ severe chronic absence	# students w/ moderate chronic absence	% students w/ moderate chronic absence	# of students w/ at-risk absence	% of students w/ at-risk attendance	# of students w/ satisfactory attendance	% of students w/ satisfactory attendance
K	87	7	8%	22	25%	25	29%	33	38%
1	80	2	3%	13	16%	37	46%	28	35%
2	60	0	0%	12	20%	18	30%	30	50%
3	48	1	2%	7	15%	15	31%	25	52%
4	52	1	2%	4	8%	18	35%	29	56%
5	54	1	2%	10	19%	17	31%	26	48%
Total	381	12	3%	68	18%	130	34%	171	45%

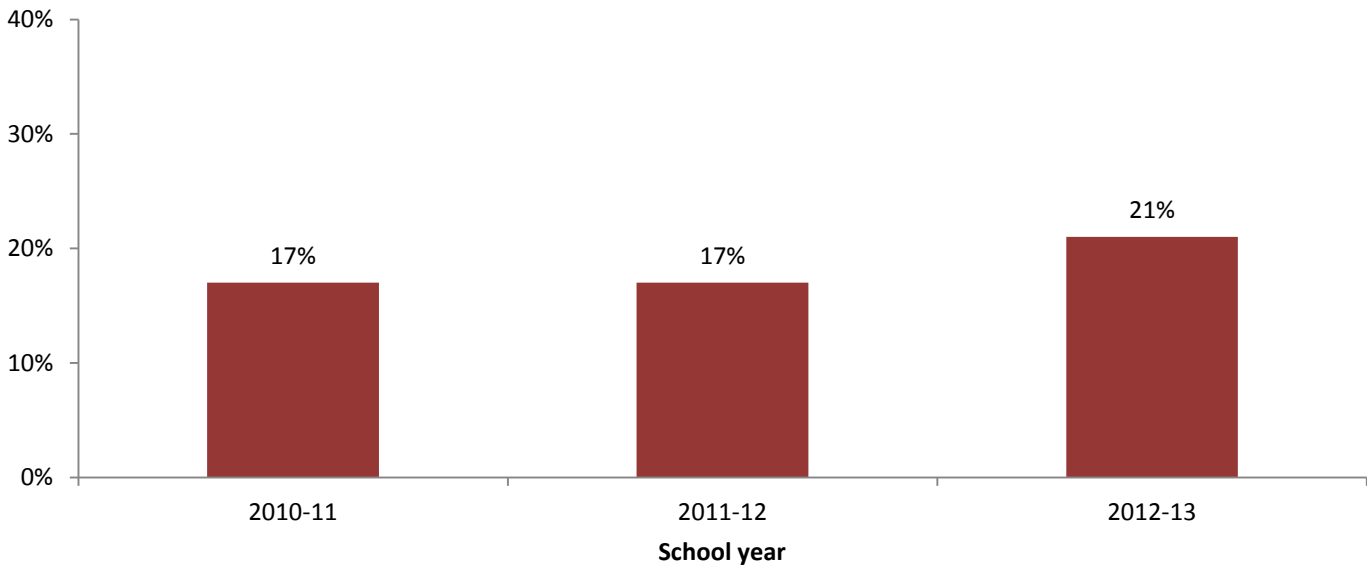
**Mary Peacock Elementary:  
School Absence by Grade, 2012-13**



**Mary Peacock Elementary:  
Percent of Students with Chronic Absence, 2012-13**



**Mary Peacock Elementary:  
Percent of Students with Chronic Absence by Year  
(missing 10% or more or school days)**



Differences between years are **not** statistically significant (tested at the 95% level).

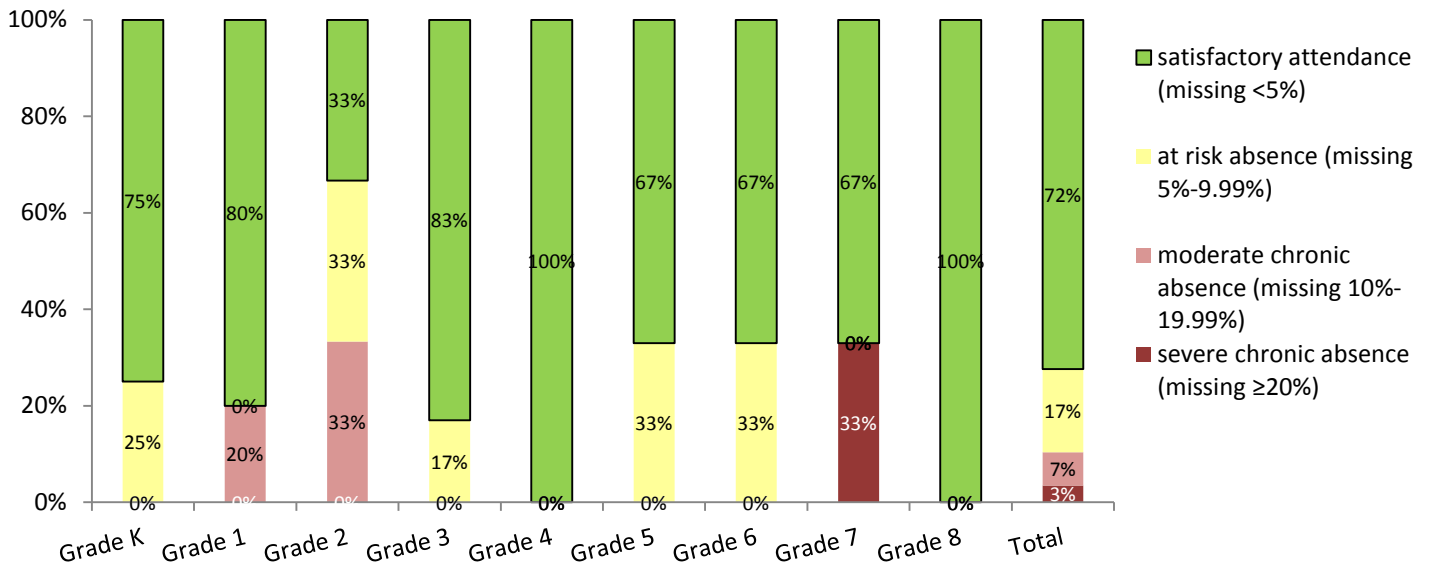


# Mountain

2012-13

GRADE	Total students	# of students w/severe chronic absence	% of students w/ severe chronic absence	# students w/ moderate chronic absence	% students w/ moderate chronic absence	# of students w/ at-risk absence	% of students w/ at-risk attendance	# of students w/ satisfactory attendance	% of students w/ satisfactory attendance
K	4	0	0%	0	0%	1	25%	3	75%
1	5	0	0%	1	20%	0	0%	4	80%
2	3	0	0%	1	33%	1	33%	1	33%
3	6	0	0%	0	0%	1	17%	5	83%
4	1	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	100%
5	3	0	0%	0	0%	1	33%	2	67%
6	3	0	0%	0	0%	1	33%	2	67%
7	3	1	33%	0	0%	0	0%	2	67%
8	1	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	100%
Total	29	1	3%	2	7%	5	17%	21	72%

Mountain:  
School Absence by Grade, 2012-13



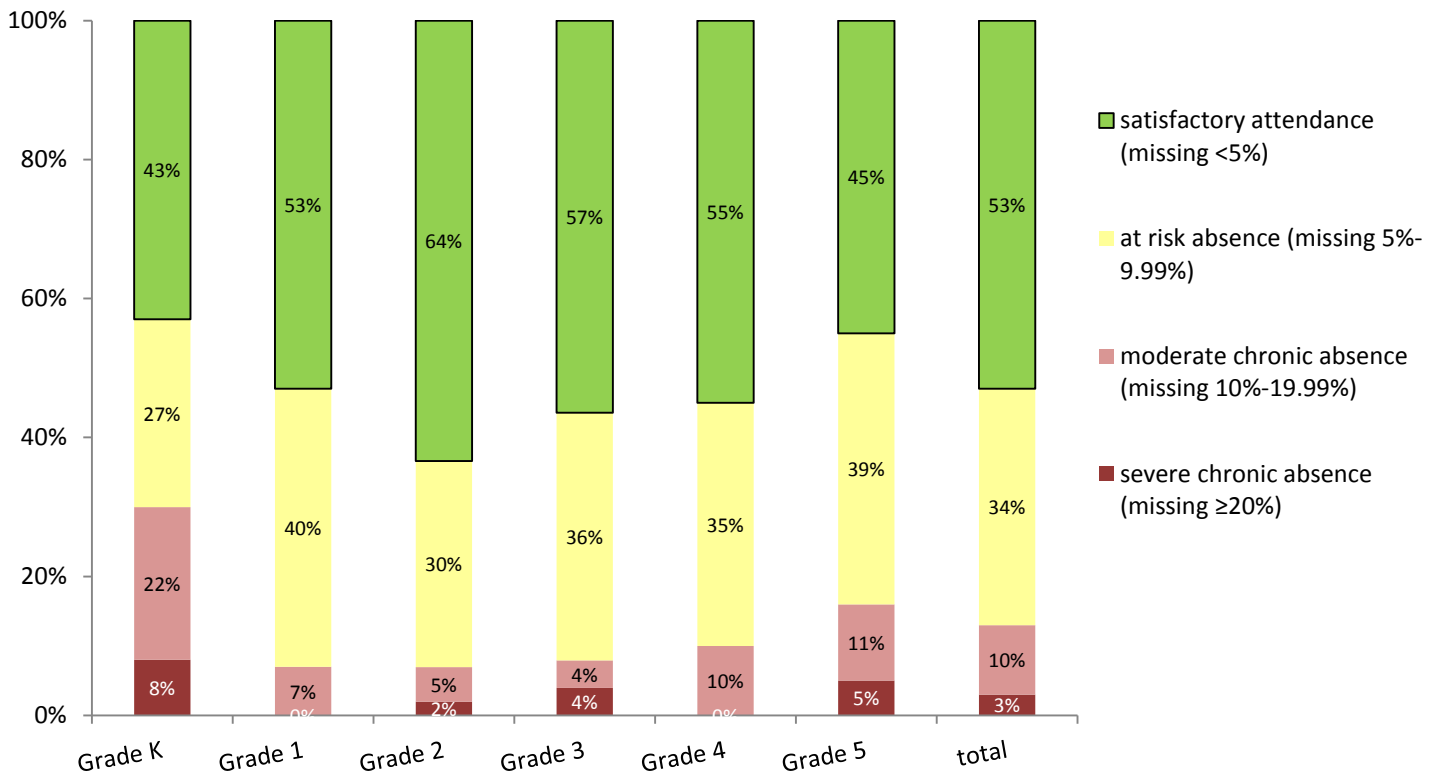
Due to small numbers percentages are less stable and additional analysis not conducted.

# Pine Grove

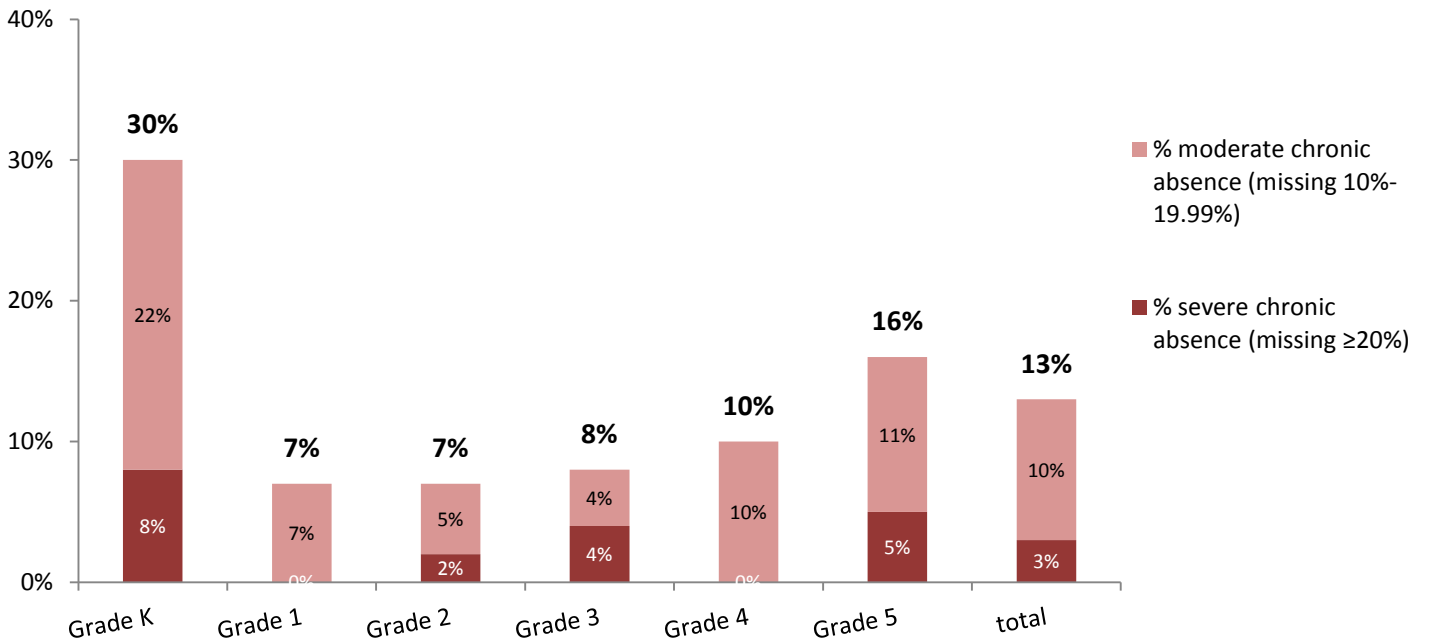
2012-13

GRADE	Total students	# of students w/severe chronic absence	% of students w/ severe chronic absence	# students w/ moderate chronic absence	% students w/ moderate chronic absence	# of students w/ at-risk absence	% of students w/ at-risk attendance	# of students w/ satisfactory attendance	% of students w/ satisfactory attendance
K	37	3	8%	8	22%	10	27%	16	43%
1	43	0	0%	3	7%	17	40%	23	53%
2	44	1	2%	2	5%	13	30%	28	64%
3	28	1	4%	1	4%	10	36%	16	57%
4	40	0	0%	4	10%	14	35%	22	55%
5	38	2	5%	4	11%	15	39%	17	45%
Total	230	7	3%	22	10%	79	34%	122	53%

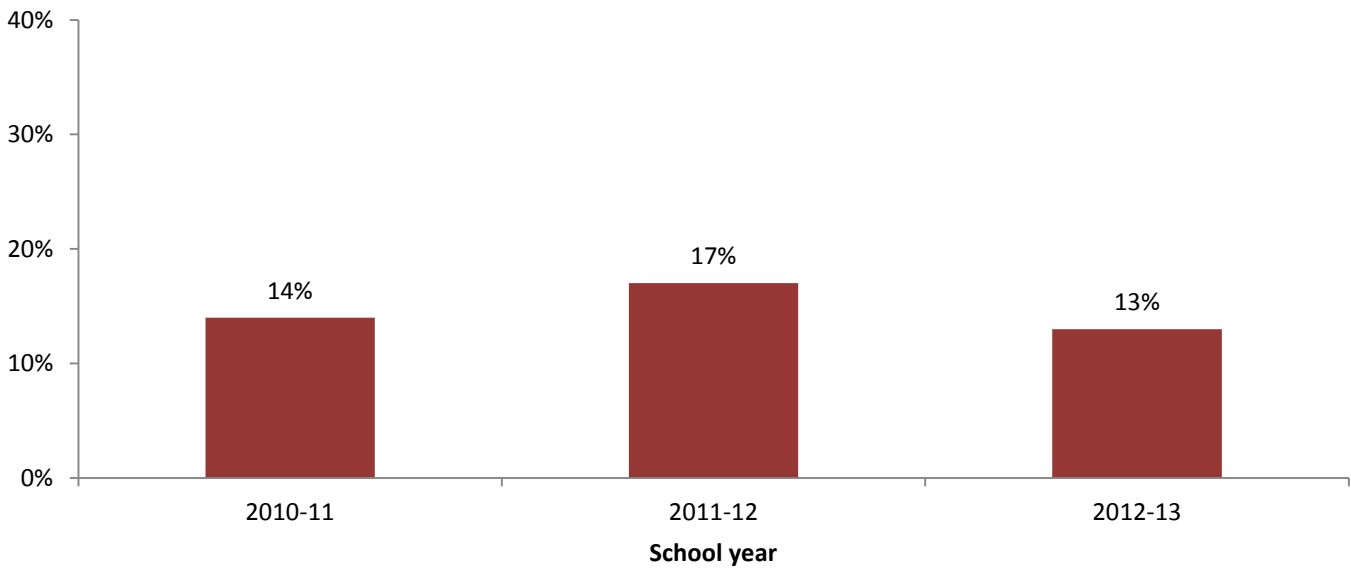
**Pine Grove Elementary:  
School Absence by Grade, 2012-13**



**Pine Grove Elementary:  
Percent of Students with Chronic Absence, 2012-13**



**Pine Grove Elementary:  
Percent of Students with Chronic Absence by Year  
(missing 10% or more of school days)**



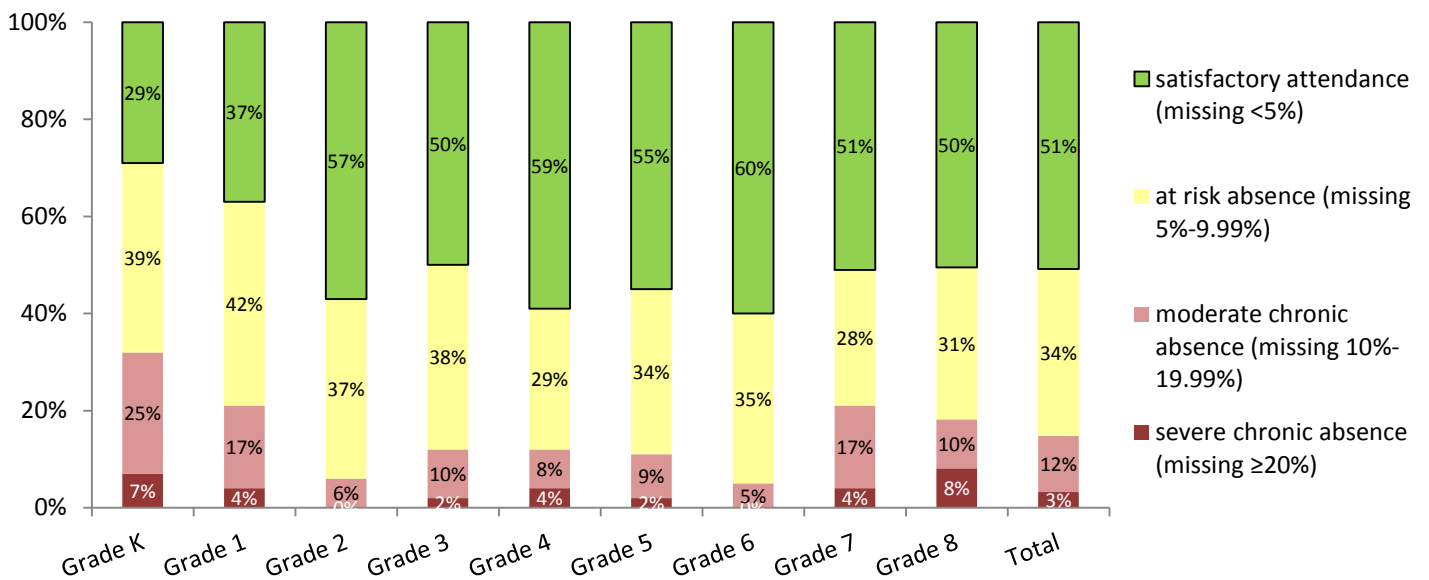
Differences between years are **not** statistically significant (tested at the 95% level).

# Redwood

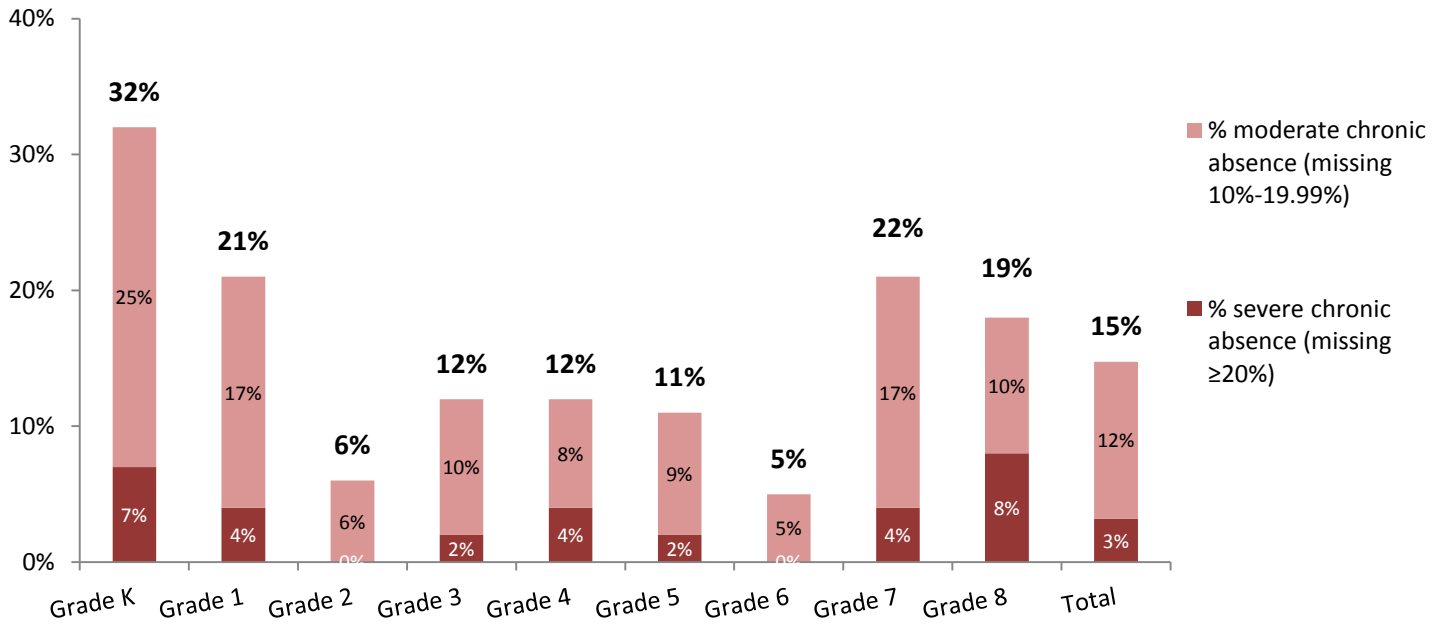
2012-13

GRADE	Total students	# of students w/severe chronic absence	% of students w/ severe chronic absence	# students w/ moderate chronic absence	% students w/ moderate chronic absence	# of students w/ at-risk absence	% of students w/ at-risk attendance	# of students w/ satisfactory attendance	% of students w/ satisfactory attendance
K	28	2	7%	7	25%	11	39%	8	29%
1	52	2	4%	9	17%	22	42%	19	37%
2	51	0	0%	3	6%	19	37%	29	57%
3	50	1	2%	5	10%	19	38%	25	50%
4	49	2	4%	4	8%	14	29%	29	59%
5	64	1	2%	6	9%	22	34%	35	55%
6	57	0	0%	3	5%	20	35%	34	60%
7	69	3	4%	12	17%	19	28%	35	51%
8	48	4	8%	5	10%	15	31%	24	50%
Total	468	15	3%	54	12%	161	34%	238	51%

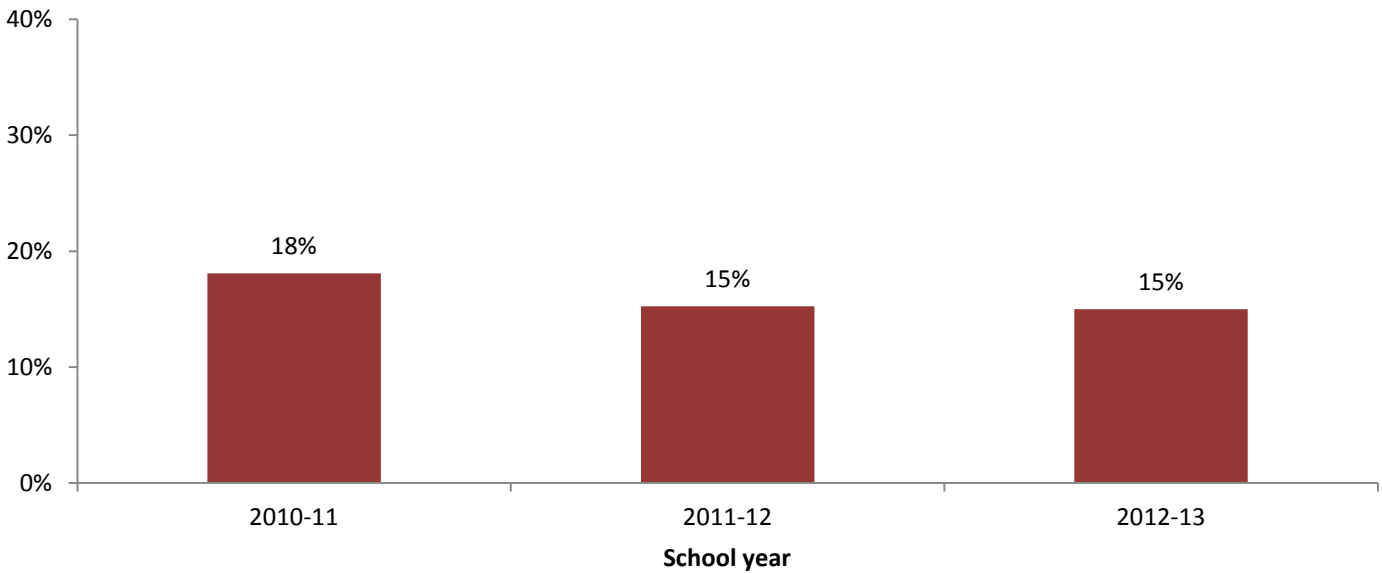
Redwood:  
School Absence by Grade, 2012-13



**Redwood:  
Percent of Students with Chronic Absence, 2012-13**



**Redwood:  
Percent of Students with Chronic Absence by Year  
(Missing 10% or more of school days)**



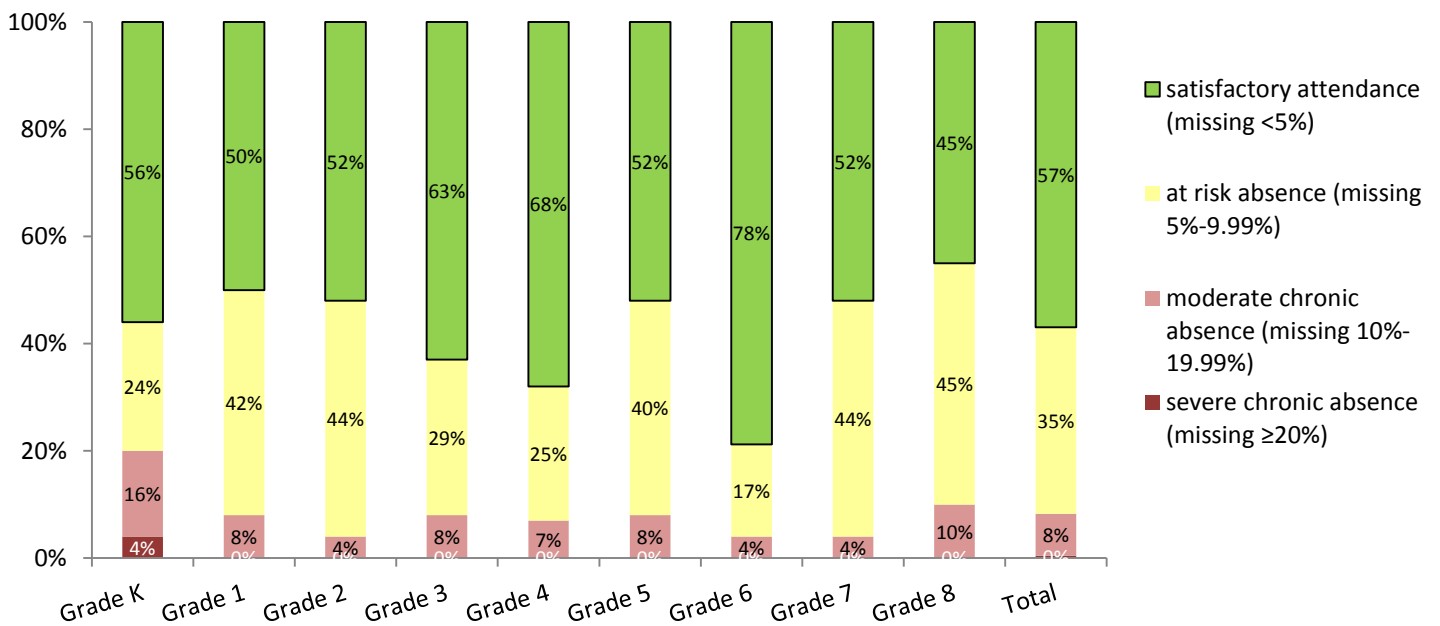
Differences between years are **not** statistically significant (tested at the 95% level).

# Smith River

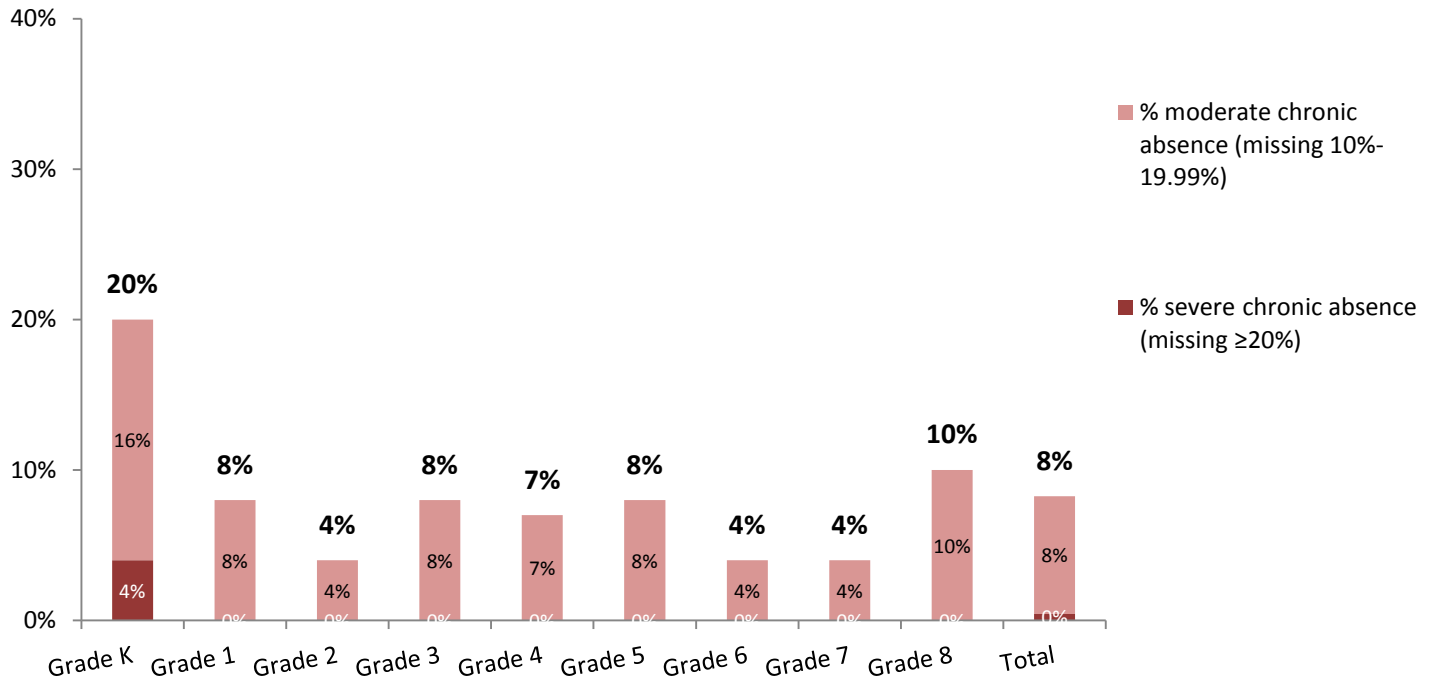
2012-13

GRADE	Total students	# of students w/severe chronic absence	% of students w/ severe chronic absence	# students w/ moderate chronic absence	% students w/ moderate chronic absence	# of students w/ at-risk absence	% of students w/ at-risk attendance	# of students w/ satisfactory attendance	% of students w/ satisfactory attendance
K	25	1	4%	4	16%	6	24%	14	56%
1	26	0	0%	2	8%	11	42%	13	50%
2	25	0	0%	1	4%	11	44%	13	52%
3	24	0	0%	2	8%	7	29%	15	63%
4	28	0	0%	2	7%	7	25%	19	68%
5	25	0	0%	2	8%	10	40%	13	52%
6	23	0	0%	1	4%	4	17%	18	78%
7	25	0	0%	1	4%	11	44%	13	52%
8	29	0	0%	3	10%	13	45%	13	45%
Total	230	1	0%	18	8%	80	35%	131	57%

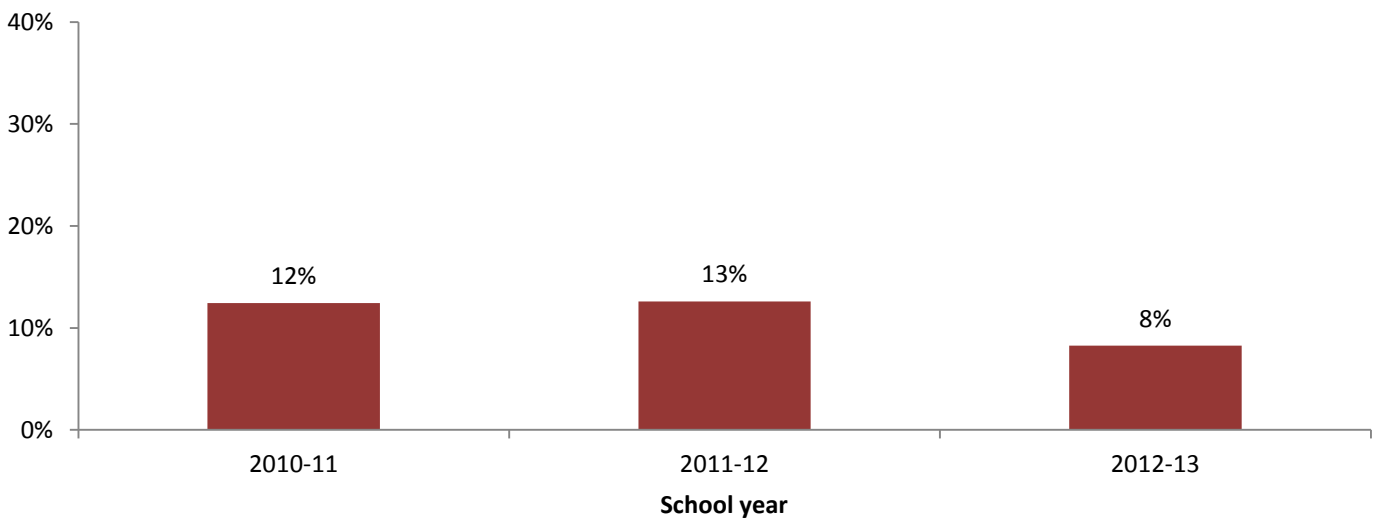
Smith River:  
School Absence by Grade, 2012-13



**Smith River:  
Percent of Students with Chronic Absence, 2012-13**



**Smith River:  
Percent of Students with Chronic Absence by Year  
(missing 10% or more of school days)**



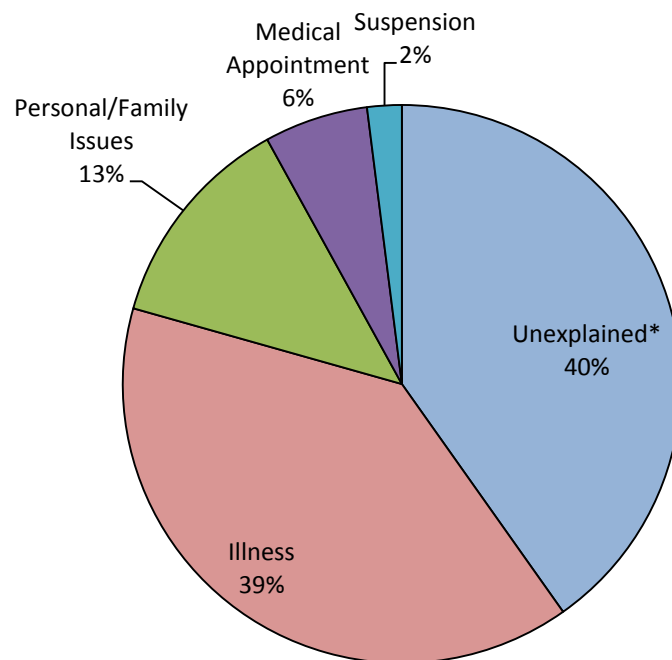
Differences between years are **not** statistically significant (tested at the 95% level).

## Reasons for Absences

Understanding the reasons for absences can help target interventions for improving attendance. In 2011-2012 the Del Norte County Unified School District focused on understanding absences for the grades and students with the highest levels of absence. Students in kindergarten, first, and sixth grade who missed 10% or more of school days in the initial few months of school received a phone call home to ascertain the reason(s) for the absences. Additionally, students in other grades received a call home if concerns were expressed by principals, teachers, or secretaries. Each week, the Youth Services Coordinator would check the attendance records to identify students in kindergarten, first, and sixth grades who missed 10% or more school days in the prior week, which would prompt a phone call home. Using this method, a total of 196 students were tracked during the 2011-2012 school year (grades K through 7). Approximately half of the phone calls resulted in a conversation with a parent, while the remainder resulted in leaving a message, no answer, disconnected phone, no phone, or the need for a translator. Home visits were attempted if no contact was made by phone or attendance continued to be a problem. A total of 39 home visits were made and an additional 16 were attempted. Referrals to the school nurse were made when there were frequent absences due to illness. A total of 41 nurse referrals were made resulting in 10 home visits by nurses. Transporting students to school was provided for 8 students on multiple occasions.

Among the 196 students who were tracked, there were 5,123 absences (average of 26 absences per student tracked). Often there would be more than one reason for a given absence. The highest percent of absences were unexplained (no reason given or parent/guardian not reached) (40%), followed by illness (39%), personal/family issues (13%), medical appointments for the student (6%), and suspension (2%).

**Predominate Reasons for Absences from School among  
196 Chronically Absent Students (grades K-7)  
2011-2012**



Source: Del Norte County Unified School District.

Notes: The Youth Services Coordinator tracked the main reasons for absences among chronically absent students. This graph shows the distribution based on the percent of all absences.

\*Unexplained absences- either no reason was given or parent/guardian was not reached.



The Youth Services Coordinator summarized the predominate reasons provided by families for students missing school frequently. Her overarching observation was, “there are no stereotypes with families – meaning everyone has a unique story.” It was not uncommon for there to be multiple reasons for a given absence. Illnesses, such as colds and flu were commonly mentioned. Transportation to school was a common problem. Issues such as domestic violence and bullying at school were also mentioned as reasons for missing school. The reasons shown here are in no particular order and are based on the Youth Services Coordinator overall observations.

### **Summary of Predominate Reasons Provided by Families for Absences among Chronically Absent Students, 2011/12**

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#### **Kindergarten/First Grade**

- Parents believe kindergarten is important but not essential.
- When child is anxious about going to school – easier for parent to keep him or her home.
- Parents keep sick child home until they are **fully** recovered.
- Concern about getting other students sick.
- It’s okay to take kindergarteners out of school for vacation and family activities.
- Parents have out of town business or medical appointments and need to take young children with them.
- Student has behavior issues at school and parent chooses to keep them home if they are starting to have a bad day.
- Families live in no busing zone and are unable to transport student by car during bad weather.

#### **Sixth graders**

- Stomach aches in girls.
- Students becoming defiant at home as well as school.
- Skipping school.
- Early use of marijuana.
- Parents unable to motivate student to go to school.
- Developmental issues.

#### **For all students**

- Transportation problems– need bus tickets.
- Older sibling has chronic illness or disabilities and doesn’t go to school, so parent keeps younger student home – vice-a-versa.
- Parent lonely, depressed.
- Students with significant disabilities miss more school on the average.
- Family Issues /sharing custody and visitation issues.
- Parents and custodial grandparents have major illnesses.
- Families with sick parents tend to have sick children – parents’ illness reflected in students’ health.

Source: Del Norte County Unified School District.

Notes: The Youth Services Coordinator tracked the main reasons for absences among chronically absent students and summarized the common themes reported by families.

## Attendance Improvement Efforts

The Del Norte County Unified School District implemented several interventions during the 2011-2012 school year aimed at improving attendance. These included both school-wide incentives and targeted student-level incentives.

School-wide incentives differed slightly at each school, but included strategies focused on recognizing, honoring, and rewarding students or classrooms with improved or perfect attendance. Students and classrooms were recognized and honored in various ways including: announcements at attendance assemblies, posting attendance on bulletin boards, necklaces with tokens, and notes home to parents. Rewards included popcorn parties, trophies, awards, raffle tickets, gift certificates, prizes, and playground equipment.

Chronically absent students were invited to participate in the student-level incentives program. Sixty five students in participated in the program (grades K through 7). These students received incentives, such as books and gift certificates for good attendance. Of the sixty five students who participated, all except eight showed some improvement in attendance after the incentives.

School	Attendance Incentives 2011-12
Bess Maxwell	Attendance assemblies Honoring Students Classroom awards for 100% attendance Project Wisdom Notes home to parents
Joe Hamilton	All day, every day- raffle tickets (swimming passes, bikes at end of year) Every week and every month- announce classes at top. At end of month- Class at top gets popcorn party. Best class gets a trophy. Class $\geq 96\%$ for month gets to pick new playground equipment.
Margaret Keating	Attendance rate is posted Attendance prizes for perfect attendance
Mary Peacock	Weekly classroom all day, every day token for necklace. Trophy Perfect attendance for month- certificates, Wal-Mart certificate etc.
Pine Grove	Class with best attendance is recognized at assembly. Random prize drawing for all day, every day- also posted on bulletin board. If present for every day of testing- popcorn party.
Redwood	Quarterly perfect attendance awards Popcorn parties Education with parents
Smith River	Each class with 10 days of perfect attendance- popcorn party. Also recognize students with improved attendance.
Crescent Elk	Awards Quarterly Assemblies for academic awards Food to celebrate Lots of talking about attendance in classes & with parents

## **Conclusions & Next Steps**

Approximately 1 out of every 6 students in the Del Norte County Unified School District is chronically absent from school. Comparison data for California as a whole is lacking, so it is not possible to determine how Del Norte compares to California. Nationally, however, an estimated 1 out of every 10 students is chronically absent. Compared to national data, Del Norte has a much higher rate of chronic absence.<sup>19</sup> This analysis shows that certain groups of students are more likely to be chronically absent from school than others. Kindergarten and American Indian students are significantly more likely to be chronically absent from school compared to other grades and other races/ethnicities. Students receiving free/reduced price lunch and special needs students are also more likely to be chronically absent compared to other students. These findings are consistent with national studies and studies in other states, which have found high rates of chronic absence among these same groups of students (American Indian, low-income, special needs, and kindergarten students).<sup>9,19,21</sup>

In the past 3 years chronic absence rates did not change significantly in the district as a whole and at most schools; however, chronic absence rates worsened at Del Norte High and improved at Bess Maxwell. These findings raise an important question— why was there no improvement in overall absence rates after a year of interventions? There are several possible reasons for this, all of which should be explored further. Were sufficient school site and district level strategies implemented? Attendance Works recommends key school site strategies (monitor attendance data and practice; engage students and parents; recognize good and improved attendance; provide personalized early outreach; and develop programmatic responses to systemic barriers) and district level strategies (positive messaging; capacity building; actionable data; and shared accountability). To what extent were these strategies implemented in the Del Norte County Unified School District?

Additional questions to consider—Was there insufficient dosage of interventions? Perhaps incentive efforts did not reach enough students. The student-level incentives were used with 65 students and most of these showed some improvement. However; there were 605 chronically absent students in the district, so perhaps not enough of these students were involved in the student-level incentives. Moreover, there were no incentives implemented at Del Norte High School, which is the school that showed a worsening in chronic absence. Was there a lack of fidelity in implementation of incentives? Perhaps there was inconsistency in how interventions were used in schools and classrooms. Were the interventions insufficiently comprehensive? The data show that students receiving free/reduced price lunch and students with special needs are missing more school than other students, suggesting there are complex psycho-social issues involved. Through the qualitative information provided by the Youth Services Coordinator we got an initial glimpse of why students are not making it to school. Given that health/mental health issues, family issues, and transportation were identified as barriers, it will be important to develop a process to align and increase resources to address these issues. A process should be developed to systematically capture reasons for absences, which should include high school students.

Another question is how much of a role is suspension playing in chronic absence? CCRP is currently analyzing suspension data for DNCUSD and there was a significant increase in suspensions at Del Norte High School between 2011/12 and 2012/13, so perhaps this at least in part, explains why Del Norte High School had a worsening in chronic absences during this time period. Overall suspension rates in DNCUSD are high (12% of students were suspended at least once during the 2012/13 school year, which is higher than the California average of 6%).<sup>20</sup> A more in depth analysis of the interplay between chronic absence and suspensions would be warranted.

Since Bess Maxwell showed some reduction in chronic absences, further analyses should explore what strategies were implemented at the school over the past few years. These strategies could then be considered for implementation at other schools.

The Del Norte County School Board has adopted a goal to improve school attendance, which aligns with the Building Healthy Communities Initiative. This will require district, school, family, and community-wide sustained efforts. Absence rates and improvement efforts should continue to be tracked over time to monitor changes. It is expected that it will take time and sustained efforts to see and maintain improvements.

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