



## How Much Does 9<sup>th</sup> Grade Attendance Matter?

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### Key Findings:

The relationship between 9<sup>th</sup> grade attendance and graduation rate is dramatic and clear.

The better a student's attendance in 9<sup>th</sup> grade, the higher the probability that he or she will graduate on time.

There is no "cliff" – no matter what your attendance rate is, a few more absences is associated with a meaningful drop in graduation rate.

It is never too late! Even if a student misses a lot of school early in the year, strong attendance during the second half of the school year improves their chances of graduating on time dramatically.

As students develop and progress through their education, every year matters. However, research shows that success in 9<sup>th</sup> grade is especially important. Students that fall behind during this critical year are more likely to drop out than those that fall behind earlier or later.

To make matters worse, 9<sup>th</sup> grade is particularly challenging for several reasons. For most students the shift from 8<sup>th</sup> grade to 9<sup>th</sup> grade comes with transitions to a new school, to a new scheduling format, to new social dynamics, and to new academic expectations. In addition, this moment often coincides with an increase in autonomy, which brings increased opportunities to make poor decisions.

Together, these challenges raise barriers to a successful year. The problem gets worse, however, when students respond to these challenges by disengaging, and staying away from school. 9<sup>th</sup> graders with strong attendance are much more likely to succeed, but **in the School District of Philadelphia, absences almost double from 8<sup>th</sup> grade to 9<sup>th</sup> grade.**

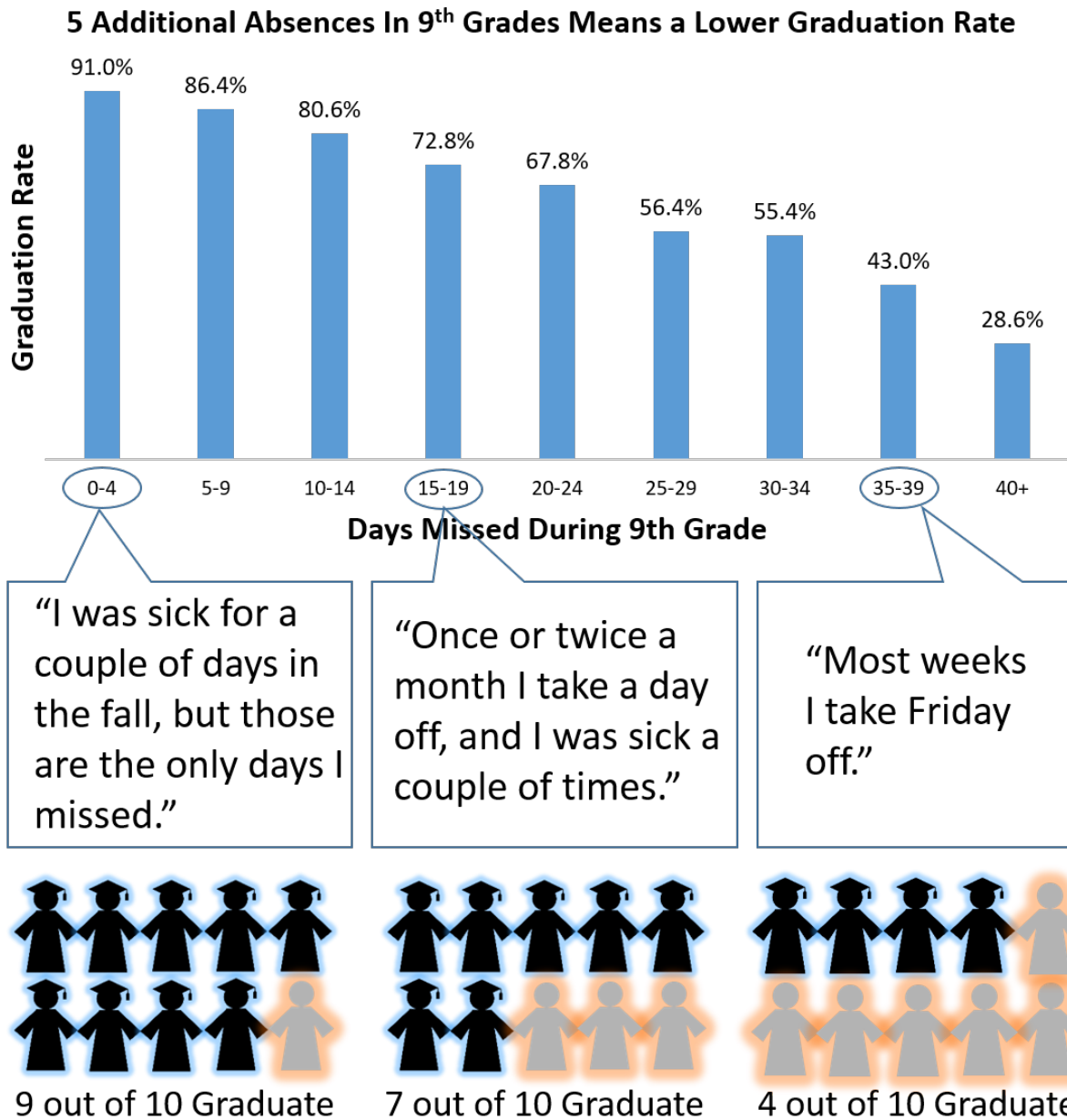
### Every Absence Matters

Missing just a few days can have a big impact, and this is true for students at every attendance level. In all cases, attending just a few more days is associated with a higher probability of graduating on time – and **missing just a few days in 9<sup>th</sup> grade is related to lower graduation rates.**

### It is Never Too Late!

To maximize their potential, students must attend almost every day, all year long. However, changing attendance habits for the better makes a big difference. We looked at students that had poor fall semester attendance, missing at least one out of every five days. If those students continued to miss that much school, their graduation rate was only **21%**. However, if those same students committed to excellent attendance, and missed only one or two days total during the second half of the year, then their graduation rate was **77%**.

This bar chart shows just how much 9<sup>th</sup> grade attendance matters for graduation. The call out boxes give examples of how someone might be thinking about missing school – and how quickly it can add up to make a real difference for graduating on time.



\*All analyses and statistics conducted using administrative data for students that were first-time 9<sup>th</sup> graders in 2012-2013, were enrolled in SDP schools for at least 10 days during that year, and did not depart SDP for another district within 4 years (n=7,820).

\*\*This pattern is also present in other school districts. See for example: [https://toandthrough.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/uploads/documents/UChiToThrough\\_IssueBrief\\_ATTENDANCE.pdf](https://toandthrough.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/uploads/documents/UChiToThrough_IssueBrief_ATTENDANCE.pdf) which inspired this focus brief.