

School attendance numbers hide big problems

By Elissa Nadworny, NPR

Every morning, the familiar routine plays out in hundreds of thousands of classrooms: A teacher looks out over the desks, taking note of who's in their seats and who isn't.

On any given day, maybe there are one or two empty chairs. One here, one there. And that all goes into the school's daily attendance rate.

But here's what that morning ritual doesn't show: That empty desk? It might be the same one that was empty last week or two weeks ago. The desk of a student who has racked up five, 10, 20 absences this year.

It's called chronic absence. The official definition: missing more than 10 percent of the school year – just two days a month.

And the real-life implication: a warning sign for a student on the brink of failing or dropping out.

Read the whole story