

# 1 in 4 city students miss 1st day

**JUSTIN MURPHY**

@CITIZENMURPHY

About one in four Rochester students missed the first day of school Wednesday, a discouraging sign given the district's intensive efforts to boost attendance.

The K-12 rate was 76.6 percent Wednesday and 78.8 percent Thursday. By comparison, the first-day attendance rate in September 2014 was 83.6 percent.

The rates from kindergarten to fourth grade were all between 80 and 82 percent. Ninth and 10th grades were

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### Students

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about 72 percent.

Superintendent Bolgen Vargas expressed frustration that the community has not joined the school district in its efforts to get children, especially the youngest ones, to school.

"We need a critical mass of citizens helping us to solve this problem," he said. "I believe there's an expectations issue here, and that (high) expectation needs to be in multiple places."

Many of the district's priorities, including expansion of extracurricular and enrichment activities, are targeted at attendance. Vargas has gone so far as to knock on truant students' doors and escort them to school himself.

The results of that effort have been mixed. Attendance in primary grades was up last year, but it was down in the high schools. Almost no schools or programs in Rochester meet the 95 percent threshold that experts agree is necessary to enable significant academic progress and, eventually, graduation.

Chronic absence, defined as 80 percent attendance or lower, was 28 percent in grades K-6 in 2014-15. That means missing one day of school a week.

The most difficult cases are the many city children who are homeless or in foster care, who are in the criminal justice system or who don't have a stable home. Vargas called on parents, neighbors, churches and other community organizations to help those children wherever they can.

"If a mom or dad wants their child to get out of poverty, it's through education," he said.

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