# Profiles in Invisibility

When students are chronically absent, they face more challenges than their peers do reaching graduation on time. Missing class often means falling behind and losing valuable opportunities to learn content, practice skills, and get support from teachers and counselors. The repercussions of absenteeism can multiply as students see the work needed to catch up as an ever-growing uphill climb and stop thinking of school as a place for them.

When addressing chronic absenteeism, though, there are a multitude of reasons why a student may decide not to come to school. The following four scenarios come from the reflections of transfer school students in New York City public schools.

## Do any of these scenarios look familiar to you?

### Case #1: Too Far Behind

A high school student begins to fall behind in class work midway through the semester when the workload increases across all classes. Feeling pressured by the fact that he is starting to accumulate too much makeup work and unsure how to do it all, he decides that if he doesn’t come to school, his teachers may not even notice how behind he is.

### Case #2: Outside Demands

To help her mother pay rent and buy food for herself and three siblings, a high school student works the evening shift at a nearby restaurant after school. She tries to complete her homework when she gets home but finds herself regularly exhausted from the demands of school, work, and home life. She decides it might be easier to stop coming to school, since her teachers may never understand the pressures she’s facing.

### Case #3: Self-Protection

A student walks into the school building on the first day of returning from a weeklong absence due to unforeseen circumstances. Expecting to find her teachers happy to see her, instead she is greeted by an English teacher who immediately tells her she needs to make up a test and come after school to catch up on everything she missed. As she walks into her first period class, her science teacher scolds her, “Where were you? You shouldn’t miss this much school! You’re never going to be able to catch up.” This only makes the student want to walk right out the door again.

### Case #4: Anger Management

After being teased by another student, a high-schooler eventually can’t keep his cool any longer and loses his temper. Even though he wasn’t the instigator of the fight, he gets suspended for two days. When he returns to school, the student who teased him starts to pick on him yet again. The next thing he knows, he finds himself getting into another fight and is suspended again. When he returns to class, he has no idea what is going on, and his teachers seem to be avoiding making eye contact with him. It feels as if he has disappeared.