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## **PRESS RELEASE**

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**New Analysis Shows That States Participating in [The 50% Challenge](#) Have Reduced Student Absenteeism by Greater Numbers Than Other States**

**16 States and Washington, D.C., From Blue and Red Regions That Collectively Educate One-Third of America's Students, Have Embraced Comprehensive, Prevention-Oriented Plans to Boost Student Attendance and Achievement**

**Reducing Chronic Absence Remains a Top Priority Across Partisan Lines**

August 21, 2025 — Today, Attendance Works, EdTrust and Nat Malkus of the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) are hosting an event with state, district and community leaders calling for continued action to address the critical and urgent issue of student chronic absence.

The event will be held **TODAY, Thursday, August 21 from 3–4:50 p.m. ET**, in Washington, D.C. and can be viewed [via livestream](#). Reporters are also welcome to attend in-person at AEI's Auditorium, 1789 Massachusetts Ave NW.

Despite partisan differences in education policy, everyone can agree that students should attend school regularly. Today's forum will showcase inspiring examples of how states and localities can collaborate across silos, develop and implement innovative solutions focused on prevention and sustain action to improve student attendance and engagement.

Chronic absence — defined as missing 10% or more days in a school year, for any reason — remains a problem for our nation's schools, but educators in red and blue states are making progress. Last July, Attendance Works, EdTrust and Malkus came together to establish The 50% Challenge: a call for states

to commit to reduce chronic absence by 50% over the next five years. With California and Georgia recently joining, there are now [sixteen states and Washington, D.C.](#) signed on to the pledge. Collectively, these states educate one-third of America's students. Analysis by Malkus shows that states participating in the challenge have reduced absenteeism by greater numbers than other states.

"Reducing today's chronic absence levels won't be accomplished overnight, but it can be done. Today's speakers offer us a glimpse into what this involves: a comprehensive and data-driven approach that avoids placing blame and supports the creation of partnerships between communities, schools, students and their families," said Hedy Chang, founder and executive director of Attendance Works. "It's vital that state education agencies and policymakers lead the way by ensuring districts are equipped to advance effective approaches to improving attendance in their schools, especially because today's elevated levels of chronic absence can easily overwhelm a district's capacity to respond," Chang added.

"Chronic absenteeism is a national crisis, but some students — students of color, multilingual learners, students with disabilities and children living in low-income communities — face disproportionate barriers in getting to school regularly," said Augustus Mays, vice president of partnerships and engagement at EdTrust. "Schools must work in partnership with families and students to uncover those obstacles and with state leaders and community partners to address them. The leaders at today's panel and the states that have joined this pledge, show what's possible when communities come together to support students."

"The number of chronically absent students has nearly doubled over the course of the pandemic and has declined slowly in the years since," said Nat Malkus, senior fellow and deputy director of Education Policy Studies at AEI. "The good news: The states that joined The 50% Challenge saw substantially larger reductions in chronic absenteeism than those that did not. This progress is promising, but there is a long way left to go. In order to resolve this attendance crisis, we need states, districts, community partners and parents to work together to promote and achieve consistent attendance. That's why we've brought together leaders at multiple levels to share their experience tackling chronic absenteeism."

Panelists and speakers include:

- Hedy Chang, executive director and founder, Attendance Works
- Nat Malkus, deputy director, Education Policy Studies, American Enterprise Institute
- Augustus Mays, vice president of partnerships and engagement, EdTrust
- Stephen D. Dackin, director, Ohio Department of Education and Workforce
- Emily Anne Gullickson, superintendent of public instruction, Virginia Department of Education
- Charlene M. Russell-Tucker, commissioner, Connecticut State Department of Education
- Rey Saldaña, president, Communities in Schools
- Sonja Brookins Santelises, CEO, Baltimore City Public Schools

## About Attendance Works

Attendance Works is a national and state initiative that advances success in school and beyond for all students by inspiring and catalyzing policies and practices that prevent and reduce chronic absence. Visit [www.attendanceworks.org](http://www.attendanceworks.org) to find an array of strategies and downloadable tools to help schools, districts and states improve student attendance and engagement.

## About EdTrust

EdTrust is committed to advancing policies and practices to dismantle the racial and economic barriers embedded in the American education system. Through our research and advocacy, EdTrust improves equity in education from preschool through college, engages diverse communities dedicated to education equity and justice and increases political and public will to build an education system where students will thrive.

## About Nat Malkus

Nat Malkus is a senior fellow and the deputy director of education policy at the American Enterprise Institute, a public policy think tank dedicated to defending human dignity, expanding human potential and building a freer and safer world. Specializing in empirical research on K–12 schooling his recent work has focused on chronic absenteeism in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic.

