



Press Release

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New Analysis of Connecticut Data Highlights Stark Attendance Gaps by Learning Mode and Among Student Groups Hard Hit by Covid-19

Chronic absence data will be essential in the new school year for identifying students who need outreach and support

SAN FRANCISCO, June 9, 2021 – Students attending school remotely have the highest levels of chronic absence in the current school year, with in-person students attending most frequently and hybrid students falling in between, according to an analysis of state data from Connecticut.

Chronic Absence Patterns and Prediction During Covid-19: Insights from Connecticut, released on June 9 by Attendance Works and the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE), underscores how timely attendance data are essential in a school year upended by the pandemic. The data shine a light on just how stark chronic absence gaps are, especially by learning mode and among student groups hardest hit by Covid-19.

“Since states and districts can only address and act on what they can see, having data and results in hand for the current school year versus after the fact will be important in driving decision making,” said **Hedy Chang, Executive Director of Attendance Works**. “Our hope is that other states can learn from Connecticut’s approach to absenteeism data.”

“In Connecticut, data drives our decision-making because it is critical to inform how we most effectively address the root causes of chronic absenteeism and ensure positive student outcomes,” said **Charlene Russell-Tucker, Connecticut Acting Commissioner of Education**. “Our focus on collecting and leveraging that data in real time throughout the pandemic has allowed us to focus resources across schools and districts to strengthen and build on the systems of support in place to help ensure students are attending and engaged – both remotely and in-person.”

In March 2020, CSDE took steps to collect consistent attendance data and to release it publicly throughout the pandemic. The CSDE was then able to mobilize resources – webinars, trainings, networking among districts, stakeholder engagement – to support districts in engaging students and ensuring access to consistent learning. Among all 50 states, these metrics make Connecticut uniquely positioned to analyze how patterns of chronic absence differ across remote, hybrid and in-person learning, as well as grades and student groups.

“Connecticut's approach to absenteeism data has given us the chance to demonstrate just how meaningful and valid absenteeism data can be, especially during the pandemic,” said **Kevin Gee, Associate Professor, University of California, Davis**. “We also can now confirm that chronic absence early in the academic year still serves as a strong early warning indicator of absenteeism in the later months of the school year.”

Findings from the analysis of data collected by the CSDE include:

- Students learning remotely had the highest levels of chronic absence and in-person students had the lowest levels, with rates for hybrid students falling in between. High school students fared better with hybrid attendance when compared to elementary or middle school students.
- Over all grades and learning modes, chronic absence rates declined between the fall and winter months.
- Students living in low-income communities and students of color had higher rates of chronic absence in the fall and winter. The concentration of poverty in these communities and the web of systemic challenges families encounter – higher levels of Covid-19 disease and death, loss or reduction in income, limited access to health care, housing and food insecurity, exposure to trauma – all complicate school attendance.

- Patterns of chronic absence by learning mode and grade were not the same across racial and ethnic groups. For example, for Latino students, remote learners in the 9th grade had the highest absenteeism rates. Among white students, remote learners experienced the highest rates in the 8th grade.
- Chronic absence in the start of the school year serves as an early warning sign that a student will be chronically absent in the winter months. For example, in Connecticut, students chronically absent in the fall were 17 times more likely to be chronically absent in the winter, when compared with peers with satisfactory attendance.

Chronic Absence Patterns and Prediction During Covid-19: Insights from Connecticut, includes seven recommendations for how other states and districts can develop their ability to collect and use chronic absence data as a diagnostic tool. Recommendations include:

- Require districts to take attendance daily for elementary students and by period for secondary students.
- Establish a consistent definition of a day of attendance across all learning modes. States should consider adopting a half day as the standard definition since it also reflects the definition adopted by the federal government for the annual [EDFacts](#) data collection.
- Ensure attendance is collected and reported separately for in-person and remote instruction.

“Connecticut was able to conduct this analysis this spring, so it can leverage the results to inform its Covid-19 education relief efforts and school attendance initiatives during summer learning recovery programming and for the 2021-22 school year,” said **Chang**. “Ideally, states would adopt the recommendations in our report during the summer so that districts can put them in place as soon as students are back in class for the 2021-22 school year.”

Attendance Works (www.attendanceworks.org) is a national and state initiative that works to advance student success and help close equity gaps by reducing chronic absence.

The [Connecticut State Department of Education](#), through leadership, curriculum, research, planning, evaluation, assessment, data analyses and other assistance, works to ensure equal opportunity and excellence in education for all students.