

Colorado Doubles Down on Reducing Chronic Absence with Statewide Support and Local Innovation

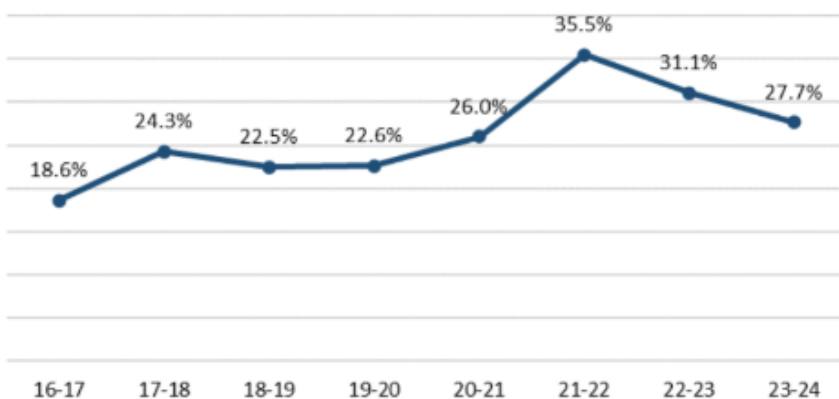


By Attendance Works, in partnership with the Colorado Department of Education

At A Glance

Colorado and Attendance Works have a growing partnership grounded in a shared commitment to rethinking attendance awareness through innovation, local partnerships, and a strong commitment to student engagement and well-being. As a state partner of the [50% challenge](#)—a national initiative to cut chronic absence by 50% over five years—Colorado believes in supporting initiatives designed to reengage students and strengthen school-community connections. Importantly, 40 districts in Colorado have individually opted into the 50% challenge, underscoring the state's approach to localized ownership and implementation. Under the leadership of Education Commissioner Susana Córdova, Colorado launched its “[Every School Day Matters!](#)” attendance campaign. In response, the state embedded attendance priorities within its strategic plan and leveraged existing programs in dropout prevention, health and wellness, family engagement, school improvement, and other student supports. In 2022-2023, Colorado had the [fifth-highest chronic absence rate](#) in the nation. Despite the challenges, the state was committed to improving attendance, beginning with a [strategic plan](#) that includes developing tools and best practices to support a culture of belonging, expanding instructional practice, and persistence and reengagement of students. Additionally, the state is experimenting with targeted funding for districts to improve attendance and engagement.

State Chronic Absentee Rate from 2016-2017 to 2023-2024



The department is building on promising progress; the state's [chronic absence rate declined](#) from 35.5% in 2021-2022 to 27.7% in 2023-2024. Put another way, daily attendance rates increased 0.7% across Colorado, with 16 districts seeing improvements of 2% or more compared to last year, an increase of 850,000+ instructional days. Over 70% of school districts improved attendance rates.



“We are committed to joining with schools, districts, and communities from around Colorado and with other states that have committed to reducing chronic absenteeism by 50% from its pandemic high.”

Susana Córdova, Colorado Education Commissioner

Key Strategies to Combat Chronic Absence

- **Collaborative Learning Cohorts:** Colorado launched professional learning cohorts that bring districts across the state together six times a year to collaborate, understand their chronic absence data, reflect, and problem-solve. The peer-to-peer support helps districts build effective plans and drive measurable change.
- **Awareness and Engagement Resources:** Through the “Every School Day Matters!” attendance campaign, CDE has expanded the tools and guidance available to schools, creating a comprehensive Attendance Guidebook with clear definitions for attendance metrics, data tracking tools, and best practices to help districts analyze metrics and create solutions based on their attendance data. CDE is prioritizing physical and mental health and is targeting resources to support engagement/attendance.
- **Targeted Use of Funding:** CDE has provided guidance to districts and worked to target state and federal school improvement funding and other state grants to boost attendance. In 2023, six districts were awarded a combined \$350,000 to support tailored and outcome-driven attendance strategies, and three additional districts were awarded school improvement funds.

School District Success Spotlights

Garfield Re-2 School District

- In 2023-24, Garfield Re-2 increased its attendance rate by 2.1%, from 92.1% to 94.2%, and reduced its absence rate to 13.9% – much better than 29.8% the year before. Its 50.1% improvement was among the largest reductions in Colorado.
- Every school has an attendance officer and an attendance team charged with implementing changes and efforts decided by the school and district.
- District leadership launched community tours to hear directly from parents about root causes of absences, increased support and communication with elementary families, and prioritized re-engagement efforts for secondary students post-pandemic.
- Garfield Re-2 increased availability of services for students by engaging community partners, such as mental health professionals.
- The district partnered with the community to create a Student Attendance Review Board for wraparound services, where students and parents could meet with representatives from any entity a student may have contact with or need, such as Human Services, transportation, and mental health providers.

Denver Public Schools

- In July 2023, DPS appointed a School Improvement Planning and Attendance Systems Manager to spearhead a district-wide attendance initiative.
- DPS increased its attendance rate to 89.4% in 2023-24 from 88.4% in 2022-23. The statewide average is 91.5%. Chronic absence also improved, dropping to 37.1% in 2023-24 from 41.1% in 2022-23.
- In July 2024, DPS launched a new district-wide attendance strategy focused on a positive, solutions-oriented approach.
 - Parents receive monthly updates on their child’s attendance so they can closely monitor and make sure their child is missing fewer than two days per month on average.
 - DPS positively reinforces good habits by sending out certificates to both parents and students whose attendance rates are better than their school’s target rate.

Adams 12 Five Star Schools

- Adams 12 launched a coordinated, cross-departmental initiative to deliver targeted, intensive supports by region for students who are chronically absent.
- The district strengthened collaboration across multiple offices — including student services, homelessness support, and foster care programs — to ensure that highly mobile and vulnerable students receive comprehensive, wraparound support.
- It enhanced data systems by updating and streamlining the data collection process, leading to more consistent, accurate information to drive interventions and monitor progress.
- Adams 12 has steadily reduced its chronic absence rate from 37.8% in 2022 to 31.1% in 2024, reflecting a 6.7% decrease and a reduction of over 2,300 chronically absent students in just two years.

Alamosa School District

- Alamosa launched its Every Day Matters campaign in the 2022-23 school year.
- The campaign is an integrated approach that connects multiple initiatives, including:
- A more systematic approach connecting early interventions and the truancy court processes.
- Broader work on creating a Multi-Tiered System of Supports across the district and at each school.
- Efforts to deepen family and community engagement in promoting consistent student attendance.
- The district worked with local businesses to help advertise and share the message that Every Day Matters, including a local coffee shop that included stickers on cups of coffee.
- Staff members increased meetings with families, calling them “Voice Visits” – to find out reasons why their student was absent and to try to figure out the barriers of why they aren’t regularly attending.
- The district reduced their chronic absenteeism rate in 23-24 by 5 percentage points (from 30.5% to 25.4%) and improved their average daily attendance to 92.7%.



“Instead of focusing on consequences, we’re engaging families with supportive, solution-based communication. Families receive regular updates on their child’s attendance, with clear information on whether their child risks becoming chronically absent.”

Dr. Alex Marrero, Superintendent of Denver Public Schools



"We met to figure out what those structures were going to look like, removing those barriers, setting those goals, and communicating, communicating and communicating that "every school day matters"

Heather Grumley, Superintendent of Garfield Re-2



"We are joining the challenge to help parents and children understand how important it is to be in school and how it helps set students up for success."

Jack Daly, Superintendent of Woodlin School District R 104



"One of our core values is high expectations. By setting high standards for attendance, we demonstrate that we genuinely care about our students' academic and social-emotional growth. When our students are in school, they are learning."

Joanna Polzin, Superintendent of Englewood Schools Arapahoe #1