



Press Release

Contact:

Catherine Cooney
Attendance Works
catherine@attendanceworks.org
202-487-0048

Robert Balfanz
Everyone Graduates Center, Johns Hopkins University
rbalfanz@jhu.edu
410-279-8399

Who is Missing School? Analysis Finds Chronic Absence Impacts Students of All Backgrounds and Living in Every Location

SAN FRANCISCO, November 17, 2023 –The pandemic-induced dramatic increase in chronic absence affects students of all backgrounds and living in every location, according to a new analysis of data from the U.S. Department of Education for the 2021-22 school year. Today’s extraordinary levels of chronic absenteeism are also widening educational inequities.

[All Hands on Deck: Today’s Chronic Absenteeism Requires a Comprehensive District Response and Strategy](#), released today by [Attendance Works](#) and the [Everyone Graduates Center](#) at Johns Hopkins University, illustrates why taking steps to address today’s troubling absenteeism is in everyone’s interest.

The analysis offers recommendations for district and state action and lists four proven strategies to improve student engagement and attendance: family engagement, school connectedness, community schools and expanded access to health services.

The findings include:

- Of the 14.7 million students chronically absent, approximately 5.3 million live in cities, another 5.1 million are in suburbs. Nearly 2.6 million live in rural areas and 1.5 million live in towns.
- Chronic absenteeism affects students from all ethnicities. For example, in the 2021-22 school year, the largest number of chronically absent students were white (5.2 million), closely followed by Latino (5 million) and African American (2.9 million). Chronic

absence also affected large numbers of students with disabilities (2.7 million) and English learners (1.9 million).

- Students from communities that have historically had less access to equal opportunities to learn are much more likely to be enrolled in schools facing extreme levels of chronic absence. When a school has 30%+ levels of absenteeism, the educational experience of peers, not just chronically absent students, is affected by the constant churn of students in classrooms which affects both teaching and learning.
 - In almost half (41%) of the most economically challenged districts, the vast majority (75%) of their schools have extreme levels of chronic absence. In these districts, 75% or more of their students receive free or reduced-price lunch (FRLP).
 - By contrast, in the majority (65%) of more affluent districts, no school has an extreme level of chronic absence. In these districts, fewer than 25% of students receive free or reduced-price lunch.

The data are a call to action for districts, supported by states and communities, to lead an all-hands, multi-pronged approach to improve student attendance and engagement. Districts should start by re-engaging students and families, listening to their challenges and working as partners to identify and create solutions for attendance barriers.

“Almost every student is affected by today’s exceptional levels of chronic absence. Improving attendance and engagement must start with a district-led response and strategy, that includes organizing everyone, such as public agencies and community organizations, to re-establish a culture of daily attendance and address the root causes of missing school for students and families,” said Hedy Chang, executive director of Attendance Works.

“Our analysis shows that districts facing higher concentrations of poverty face an even greater chronic absence challenge. This tells us we need to increase our investments while encouraging multiple strategies woven into a coordinated, comprehensive approach,” said Robert Balfanz, director of the Everyone Graduates Center at Johns Hopkins University.

This analysis is the second in a three-part series of articles unpacking the recent chronic absence data collection released by the U.S. Department of Education for the 2021-22 school year. We plan to release part three in January, 2024. Read part one, [Rising Tide of Chronic Absence Challenges Schools](#).