



Lingering Absence in Public Schools

Tracking Post-Pandemic Chronic
Absenteeism into 2024

Nat Malkus

JUNE 2025

Introduction

Chronic absenteeism surged from 15 percent of K–12 students in 2019 to more than 28 percent in 2022, and it remains one of the greatest post-pandemic challenges facing US public schools. Drawing on the American Enterprise Institute’s Return to Learn Tracker chronic absenteeism data collection, which includes district-level data from 44 states, this report documents modest progress: National chronic absenteeism fell to 25.4 percent in 2023 and to 23.5 percent in 2024. During the pandemic, absenteeism grew proportionally across many district characteristics relative to their pre-pandemic baseline rates, but absolute increases were larger in low-income, low-achieving,

and minority-serving districts. Since 2022, those gaps persist as absenteeism rates slowly decline.

Because missing school negatively affects students, national advocates have urged states and districts to aim to cut their 2022 chronic absenteeism rates in half by 2027. Fifteen states have formally adopted that target, yet across all states with 2024 data, only 34 percent of students were in districts on pace to meet that goal, and just 39 percent of districts were on pace to return to pre-pandemic levels by 2027. Without an accelerated, coordinated push, the country’s schools risk arriving at a “new normal” in which millions more students each year will be chronically absent than were before the pandemic’s surge.

Lingering Absence in Public Schools

Tracking Post-Pandemic Chronic Absenteeism into Year Four

Nat Malkus

It has been over five years since the US shut down for COVID, and in many ways, the country has moved past the pandemic. For US schools, however, the pandemic's toll has not passed so quickly. Student academic achievement remains depressed, and chronic absenteeism continues to hover substantially above the pre-pandemic baseline.

Measured as the percentage of students who miss 10 percent or more of a school year, chronic absenteeism was a serious concern even before the pandemic. In 2018 and 2019, about 15 percent of K–12 public school students in the US were chronically absent—a number so high that numerous observers and the US Department of Education labeled it a “crisis.”¹

Then the pandemic struck and took this crisis to unprecedented levels. In January 2024, I issued a report, *Long COVID for Public Schools: Chronic Absenteeism Before and After the Pandemic*, which documented these post-pandemic changes in

absenteeism.² I found that during the 2022 school year, 28.5 percent of students were chronically absent, an increase of about 90 percent (or more than 13 percentage points) over pre-pandemic rates. (In this report, I refer to school years by the spring year—for example, “the 2017 school year”—instead of “the 2016–17 school year.”) The data then available showed that by the 2023 school year—the first fully post-pandemic school year—that rate had fallen, but only to 26 percent. Now, more complete data for the 2023 school year show that rate was 25.4 percent, with the difference due mostly to rounding.

With data from 44 states and Washington, DC, through the 2024 school year, I show in this report that in 2024, the chronic absenteeism rate fell almost 2 percentage points, to 23.5 percent. This 2024 decline still fits well with the description I gave over one year ago, when I argued that “rates are falling, but not nearly fast enough.”³

In this report, I use more complete data from 2023 and new data from 2024 to update my findings in *Long COVID for Public Schools* and describe how the chronic absenteeism trends identified in that report, and others, continue to develop.⁴ As before, the data show widespread pandemic increases in chronic absenteeism that were larger in more-disadvantaged districts and districts that had higher rates of chronic absenteeism before the pandemic. In many of these districts, chronic absenteeism rates remain alarmingly high.

Additionally, the data in this report continue to show that despite tremendous variation in chronic absenteeism rates before and after the pandemic, the *relative* increases in absenteeism during the pandemic were—and remain—conspicuously even across groups.

All told, the data continue to demonstrate that chronic absenteeism rates remain substantially elevated and that hopes of post-pandemic academic recovery still require getting students to attend school more consistently.

This report draws on data from the American Enterprise Institute’s Return to Learn Tracker (R2L), which I created at the beginning of the pandemic to collect weekly data on the remote-learning status of 8,600 school districts that collectively educated 89 percent of public school students. Five years after the pandemic began—and three years after nearly every school in the US returned to in-person instruction—chronic absenteeism rates continue to suggest that the “Return to Learn” name remains apt: Too many students do not attend school consistently.

This report consists of six sections. I begin with a basic overview of research on chronic absenteeism. Then, I report chronic absenteeism rates throughout the pandemic, overall and by state. In the third and fourth sections, I examine changes in absenteeism by district characteristics and student race. In the fifth section, I gauge states’ progress since 2022 against two benchmarks. And in the final section, I discuss these results and why they warrant urgent and sustained attention. Further information on the data and methods I use in this report and additional tables are in the appendixes.

Chronic Absenteeism Before the Pandemic

The vast majority of states began collecting and reporting chronic absenteeism data following 2015, after the Every Students Succeeds Act (ESSA) went into effect, as a required “nontraditional measure of student progress.”⁵ Before ESSA, states typically collected only average daily attendance, a measure that often fails to account for severe absenteeism. As Robert Balfanz and Vaughan Byrnes illustrated, “it is possible for a school to have 90 percent average daily attendance and still have as many as 40 percent of its students chronically absent because on different days different students are in school.”⁶

Well before the pandemic, and even before states routinely collected data on it, chronic absenteeism rates were a problem. One 2012 study estimated that each year, between 5 million and 7.5 million of the roughly 50 million US students in pre-K–12 schools were chronically absent.⁷ Research has consistently shown that chronic absenteeism rates are higher for low-income students; black, Hispanic, and Native American students; and students with special education designations.⁸

Unsurprisingly, chronic absenteeism is associated with poor outcomes for students, including lower standardized test scores.⁹ Emma García and Elaine Weiss found that eighth graders who missed three or more days of school in the month before the 2015 National Assessment of Educational Progress scored between 0.3 and 0.6 standard deviations lower than those with no absences during that period.¹⁰ These effects tend to add up over time: Chronic absenteeism is strongly predictive of course failure and high school non-completion.¹¹ It is also negatively associated with social and emotional outcomes, perhaps particularly in middle school.¹²

Chronic absenteeism does not just affect the students who miss school. Indeed, there is evidence that when students are chronically absent, their non-chronically absent peers suffer as well.¹³ Michael A. Gottfried found that chronically absent students may negatively affect their peers’ achievements in reading and math.¹⁴ Gottfried also suggested that chronically

absent students are more likely to have academic and behavioral problems when they return to school, forcing teachers to spend more time addressing their needs at the expense of other students' needs. Several studies have also noted that students who were chronically absent in earlier grades were more likely to continue to be chronically absent in later grades.¹⁵

While *chronic absenteeism* is this report's focus, its associated negative effects apply to *absences at every level*—in other words, every day of absence matters for students' academic progress. Multiple studies and forthcoming research show how lower academic achievement is consistently linked to absences at every level, indicating that while *chronic* absenteeism is a significant problem, every day of absence affects students' academic progress.¹⁶

Reducing absenteeism, then, is an important goal for schools—both for chronically absent and non-chronically absent students. Luckily, several school-based interventions have been shown to reduce absenteeism. Low-cost approaches, such as targeted communication with families, tend to yield relatively modest reductions in absenteeism.¹⁷ Meanwhile, more aggressive strategies, including expanded transportation services and sustained mentoring supports, produce larger gains at a higher expense.¹⁸ Given the scope of the chronic absenteeism problem, it's likely that broad, systemic efforts—not merely isolated student- or school-level programs—are needed to substantially reduce chronic absenteeism levels.

Chronic Absenteeism Nationally and by State

Chronic absenteeism was a serious issue before the pandemic, with about 15 percent of students chronically absent in 2018 and 2019, both years with ample data coverage. Given school closures, remote instruction, and questionable reporting, I treat data from the two subsequent years, 2020 and 2021, as unreliable. Accordingly, I treat 2022 as the first year since the beginning of the pandemic with reliable data. That year, chronic absenteeism peaked at 28.5 percent nationwide. The following year, the chronic

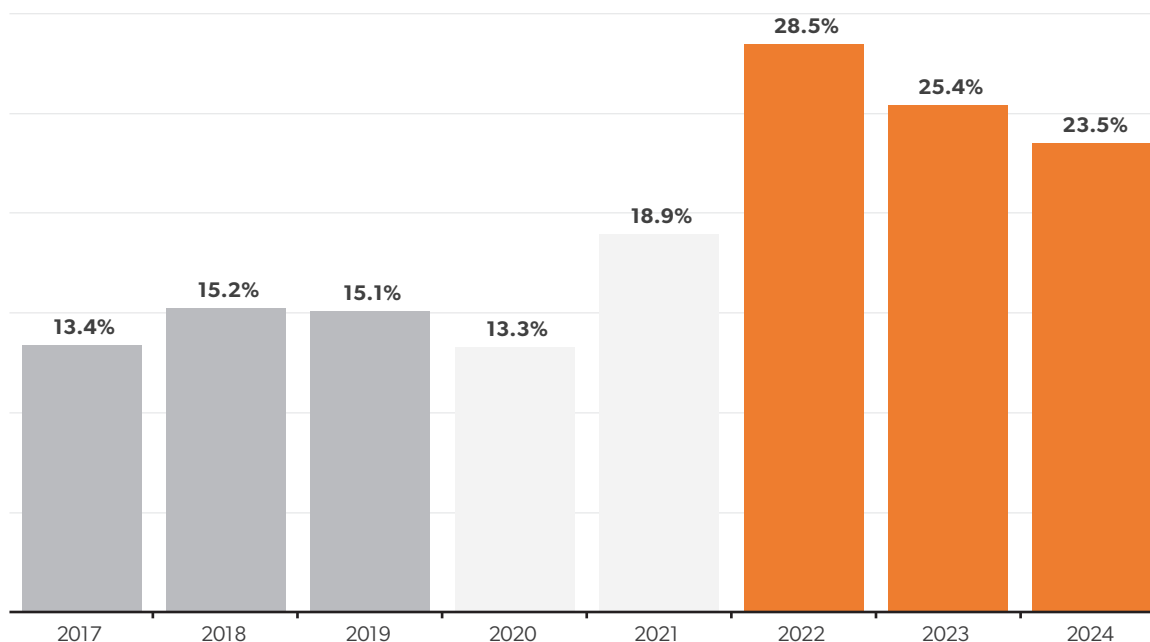
absenteeism rate fell by just over 3 percentage points to 25.4 percent, with 46 states reporting data. And in 2024, the chronic absenteeism rate declined another 1.9 percentage points to 23.5 percent, with 44 states reporting data (Figure 1).¹⁹

This pattern of declines can be seen as a glass half full or a glass half empty. The 3 percentage-point decline from 2022 to 2023 *was* substantive progress. However, this change occurred between 2022—a year when COVID case rates peaked during the Omicron surge—and 2023, when COVID had receded dramatically. In that light, a 3 percentage-point decline could be considered disappointing. Similarly, the almost 2 percentage-point decline from 2023 to 2024 was a smaller step in the right direction.²⁰ This slowing pace of improvement calls into question whether chronic absenteeism rates will return to their pre-pandemic baseline in the near future.

Chronic absenteeism shows similar patterns but different absolute measures across states (Figure 2). While the large differences among states, both pre- and post-pandemic, make it tempting to compare them to one another, such comparisons should be made with considerable caution. Chronic absenteeism is a fairly consistent metric across states, but it is built from counts of absences, which are not consistently measured from one state or district to the next. In one district, an absence might mean missing a whole day, but in another, missing part of a day may be sufficient to count as an absence. Likewise, some districts count absences by the day and others by the half day. Such measurement differences can yield different rates for the same attendance behavior.

States also differ in whom they include in their absenteeism counts. Some states' chronic absenteeism data include all students enrolled for at least 10 days, while others include only students enrolled for at least 100. Since mobile students often have higher rates of chronic absenteeism, this means states that more credibly record absences can appear to have higher rates because they have stricter metrics.

For these reasons, comparisons across states should be treated with significant caution. For example, Alaska and Alabama, which had 2024 chronic absenteeism rates that differed by 26 points, likely

Figure 1. US Chronic Absenteeism Rates: School Years 2017–24

Source: Return to Learn Tracker, “Chronic Absenteeism: 2017–2024,” American Enterprise Institute, <https://www.returntolearntacker.net>.

Note: Pre-pandemic years are in grey, pandemic years that had potentially unreliable attendance data are in light grey, and post-pandemic years with reliable data are in orange. School years are referred to by the spring year.

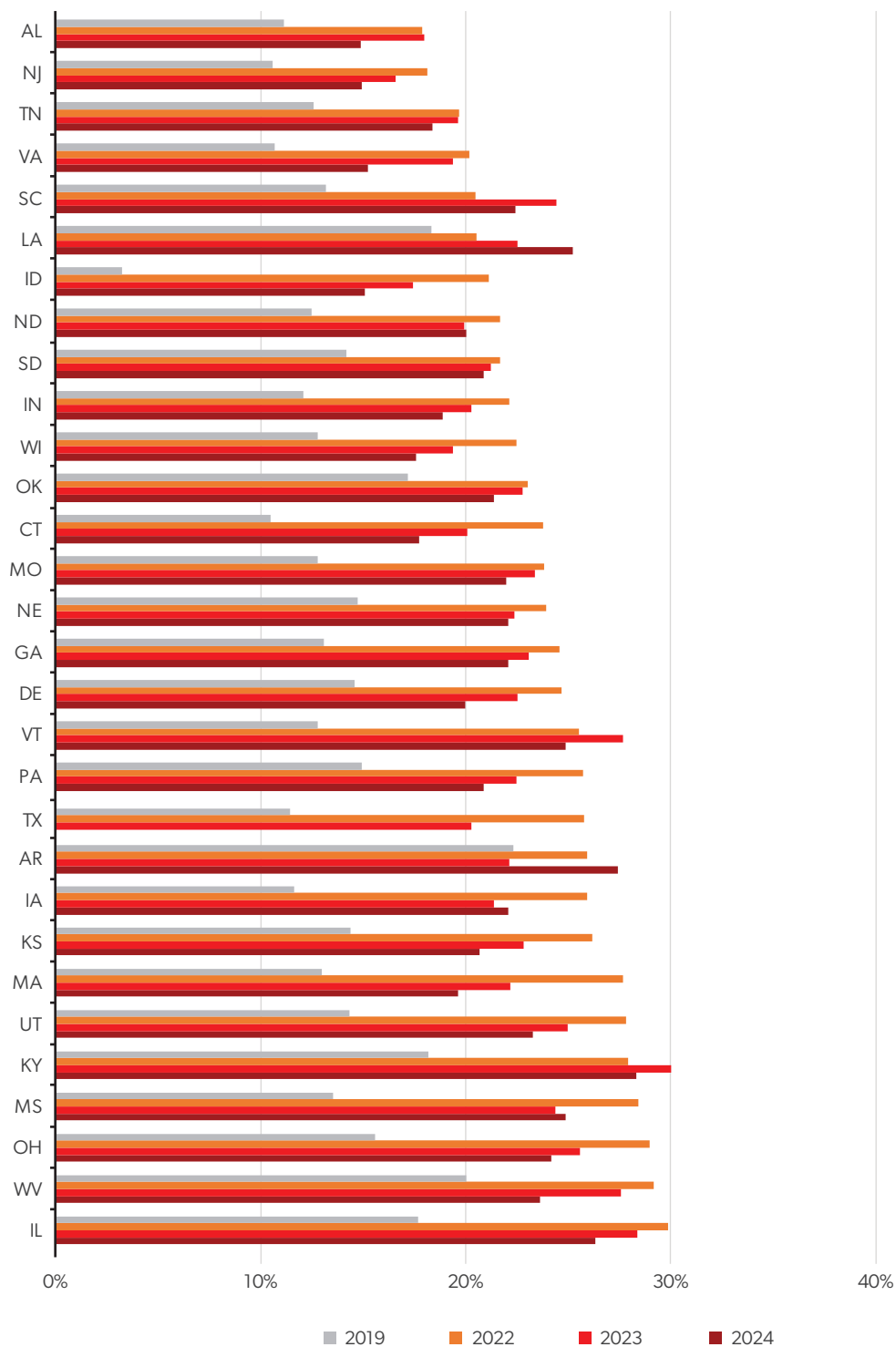
have meaningfully different chronic absenteeism rates. Alabama and Tennessee might not, despite a difference of 3 percentage points.²¹

In my view, what is more important for understanding the current state of absenteeism is change in states over time, and along these lines, states are quite similar. Nonetheless, examining differences across states and identifying common patterns over time is informative.

In 2019, Alaska had the highest rate of chronic absenteeism among the states, at 28 percent, and all states with state-supplied data were above 10 percent.²² Nationwide, the average chronic absenteeism rate was 15 percent; the middle 50 percent of students attended districts with rates between 9.5 and 18.8 percent, and the middle 80 percent of students attended districts with chronic absenteeism rates between 6.6 and 25.2 percent.²³

By 2022, the national average chronic absenteeism rate jumped above 28 percent, an increase of 88 percent from 2019. To put this increase in perspective, this national average exceeded Alaska’s average from 2019, when it was the state with the highest chronic absenteeism rate. In 2022, Arizona and Washington, DC, each at 48 percent, had the highest rates of chronic absenteeism, followed closely by Alaska at 46 percent. Alabama and New Jersey, each at 18 percent, had the lowest reported rates (Table B2). Despite such wide differences in states’ rates, the patterns of change were similar. Every state’s rate was higher in 2022 than its pre-pandemic baseline, and 46 states had increases of at least 50 percent above their 2019 rates.

The range of chronic absenteeism rates across districts also grew by 2022, when the middle 50 percent of students attended school in districts with

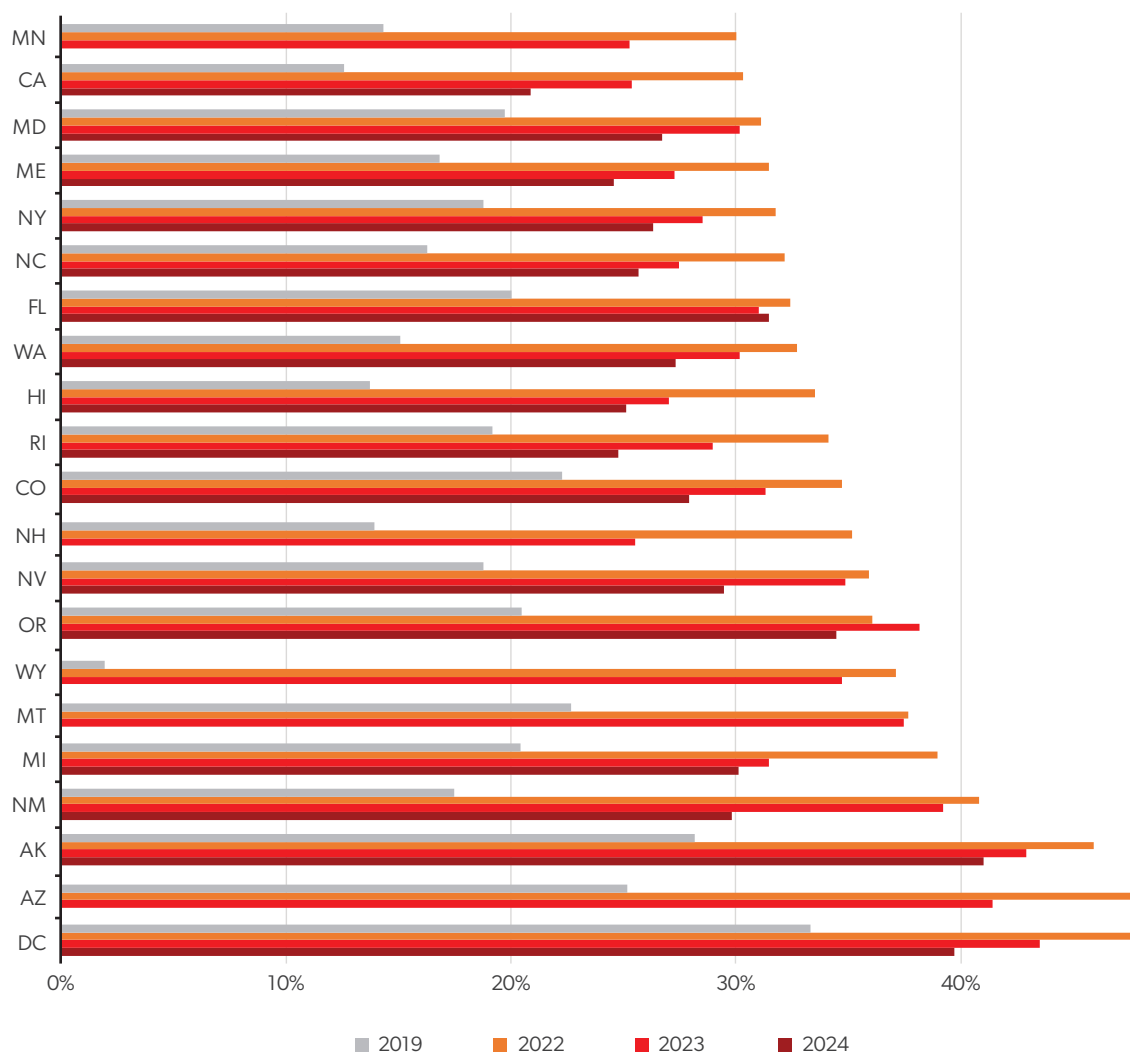
Figure 2. States' Average Chronic Absenteeism Rates in the Pandemic Era: School Years 2019–24

Source: Return to Learn Tracker, "Chronic Absenteeism: 2017–2024," American Enterprise Institute, <https://www.returntolearntacker.net>.

Note: School years are referred to by the spring year.

Continued on the next page

Figure 2. States' Average Chronic Absenteeism Rates in the Pandemic Era: School Years 2019–24
(continued from previous page)



Source: Return to Learn Tracker, "Chronic Absenteeism: 2017–2024," American Enterprise Institute, <https://www.returntolearntacker.net>.

Note: School years are referred to by the spring year.

chronic absenteeism rates between 19.5 and 36.7 percent. This range is remarkable not only because the 25th percentile in 2022 was well above the average chronic absenteeism rate in 2019 but also because the 2022 interquartile range, at 17 points, is larger than the 2019 mean. Similarly, by 2022,

the range between the 10th and 90th percentiles had grown considerably, with districts in the 10th percentile experiencing chronic absenteeism rates of 13.7 percent—slightly lower than the 2019 mean—and districts in the 90th percentile experiencing chronic absenteeism rates of 43.7 percent.

Table 1. Chronic Absenteeism Averages as Pre-Pandemic Percentile by State: 2022–24

Percentile in 2019				Percentile in 2019				Percentile in 2019			
State	2022	2023	2024	State	2022	2023	2024	State	2022	2023	2024
US	95	91	86	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
AK	94	92	91	KS	94	91	77	OK	78	76	72
AL	94	94	86	KY	94	95	95	OR	99	99	99
AR	73	48	79	MA	99	85	81	PA	87	75	74
CA	98	97	95	MD	91	91	90	RI	78	78	76
CO	88	84	83	ME	98	98	91	SC	99	100	99
CT	94	93	82	MI	90	85	83	SD	84	84	84
DC	100	100	100	MO	94	94	89	TN	97	97	84
DE	99	99	99	MS	100	99	99	UT	98	93	92
FL	99	98	98	NC	99	98	96	VA	98	98	90
GA	99	99	99	ND	90	90	90	VT	94	97	94
IA	100	98	98	NE	80	80	79	WA	99	99	99
ID	100	100	100	NJ	88	86	82	WI	87	84	78
IL	91	91	89	NM	98	98	95	WV	88	88	85
IN	92	91	89	NY	94	93	93	—	—	—	—

Source: Return to Learn Tracker, “Chronic Absenteeism: 2017–2024,” American Enterprise Institute, <https://www.returntolearntacker.net>.

Note: In 2024, average chronic absenteeism in Alaska would have equaled Alaskan districts’ 91st percentile rates in 2019. School years are referred to by the spring year.

In 2023, rates declined in 45 of 51 states (including Washington, DC), but not by much. Only 22 of 51 states saw their 2022 rates decline by at least a tenth. Five states (Arizona, Hawaii, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, and Michigan) saw declines of more than 5 percentage points, and another six had declines of 5 points. In addition to the six states where absenteeism grew in 2023, 10 states saw declines of less than 2 points. In short, in 2023, rates mostly declined, but in most states they did not decline sharply.

By 2024, the average chronic absenteeism rate fell to 23.5 percent. Half of students attended school in districts with rates between 15.8 percent (still above the pre-pandemic national average) and 30.3 percent.²⁴ Six of the 45 states reporting data actually saw increases in chronic absenteeism in 2024 relative to 2023, and four had record highs. Just one state saw a decline of more than 5 percentage points (New Mexico), and two had declines of 5 points. Beyond the six states where rates increased in 2024, 22 states

saw declines of less than 2 points. Like in the prior year, rates mostly declined in 2024, but these declines were even more modest.

Post-pandemic chronic absenteeism rates are hard to put in perspective, but Table 1 helps contextualize them by indicating where each state’s post-pandemic average would rank in its own 2019 distribution of chronic absenteeism rates. In other words, for each state, the table reports the percentile position of the 2022, 2023, and 2024 state averages when measured against that state’s 2019 chronic-absenteeism percentiles.

Consider Alaska. If a district’s 2019 rate had matched Alaska’s 2022 state average, it would have landed in the 94th percentile of Alaska’s districts in 2019, and if a district’s 2019 rate had matched Alaska’s 2024 state average, it would have landed in the 91st percentile of Alaska’s districts in 2019.

Nationally, the US average mapped to the 95th percentile in 2022 and to the 91st and 86th percentiles in 2023 and 2024, respectively. Put simply, a

2019 district with a 23.5 percent absenteeism rate—the 2024 national average—would have outranked 85 percent of districts that year.

Percentile patterns are fairly similar across states relative to their pre-pandemic baselines. In Massachusetts, the 2022 state average exceeded the rate of 98 percent of districts (weighted by enrollment) in 2019, then slid to the 85th percentile in 2023 and the 81st percentile in 2024. Given that states' averages would cluster around the 50th percentile in 2019, all these shifts represent striking increases.

In 2022, of the 41 states in Table 1, 31 had average chronic absenteeism rates above their own 90th percentile rates from 2019, seven states were between the 80th and 90th percentiles from 2019, and just three were below the 80th percentile. Most states improved in 2023 and 2024. However, in 2024, no state was below its own 2019 72nd percentile. Twenty-two states remained at or above their 2019 90th percentile rates, 12 states remained between their 2019 80th and 90th percentile rates, and just seven fell below their 2019 80th percentile rates.

What Kinds of Districts Struggle the Most?

With district-level data from across the country, I next examine what district characteristics are associated with higher chronic absenteeism rates. The broad picture is stark: In 2024, 94.7 percent of US students attended a district with an absenteeism rate exceeding its 2019 level. Districts that already had high absenteeism before the pandemic recorded the largest jumps in 2022, and, despite some improvement, still posted the highest rates in 2024.

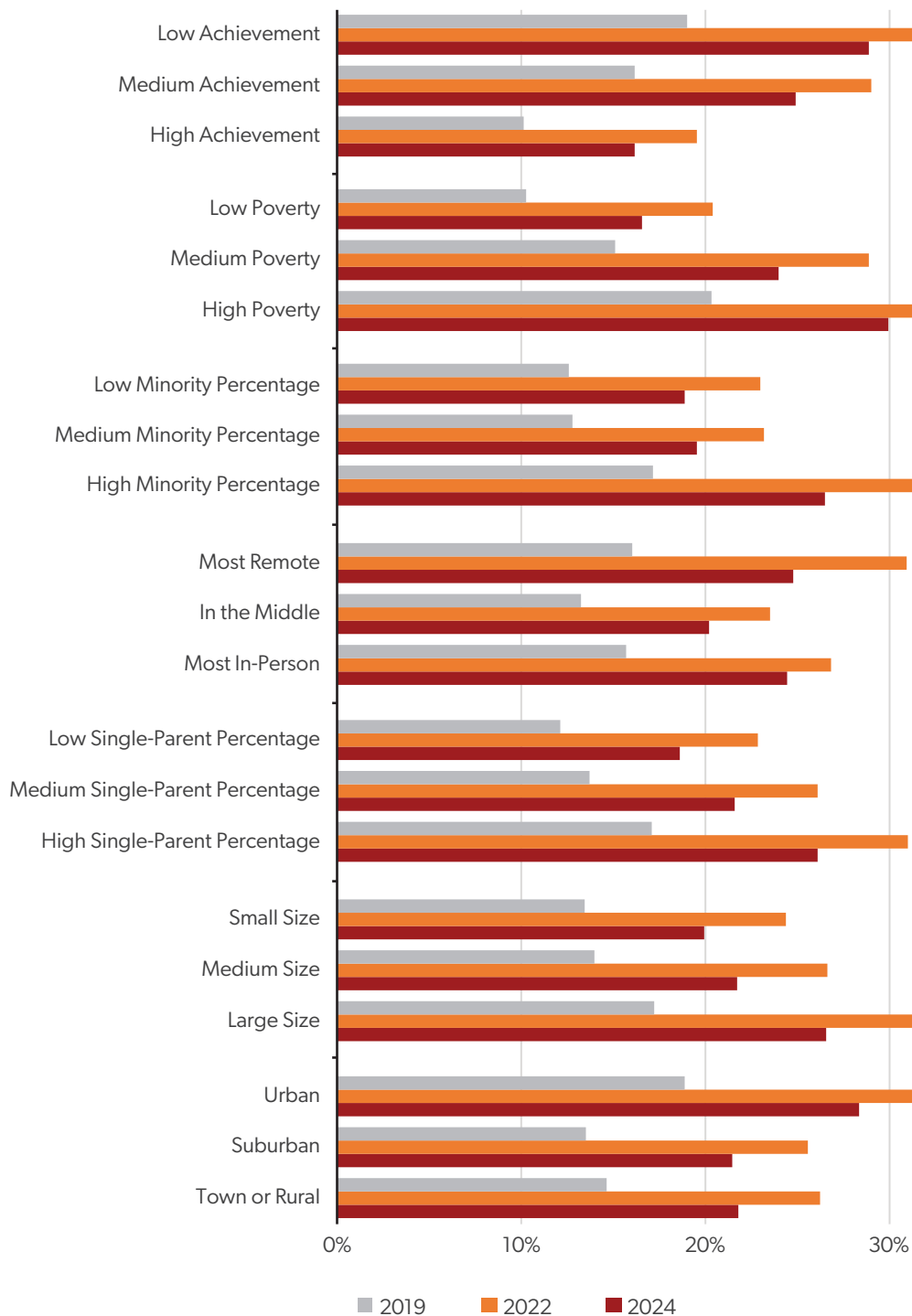
For every characteristic I examine—prior achievement, poverty, urbanicity, and several others—I group districts into student-weighted terciles so each category contains roughly one-third of the nation's enrollment. When I refer to “high-poverty” or “low-achievement” districts, therefore, I am speaking of a large share of students, not just those at the extremes. (See Figure 3.)

First, I examine the relationship between a district's pre-pandemic student achievement and its chronic absenteeism rates over time. In the bottom-achieving tercile, chronic absenteeism rates climbed from 19 percent in 2018 to 35 percent in 2022, a 16-point jump. Middle-achieving districts rose from 16 percent to 29 percent, and the highest-achieving tercile went from 10 percent to 19 percent—increases of 13 and 9 points, respectively. Between 2022 and 2024, absenteeism declined everywhere, but the lowest-achieving districts registered the largest drop—6 points, compared with 4 and 3 points in the middle and top terciles. Despite such an impressive decrease, the lowest-achieving tercile still ended 2024 with the highest rates of chronic absenteeism.

Although these absolute changes vary, the relative changes are surprisingly similar. By 2022, absenteeism in low-, middle-, and high-achieving districts stood roughly 80 percent to 93 percent above their 2019 baselines. (See Table B4.) By 2024, those figures had fallen but were even closer proportionally, at 52 percent to 60 percent above pre-pandemic levels. The same proportional pattern appears when districts are grouped by poverty, minority-student percentage, duration of 2021 remote instruction, single-parent percentage, district size, and urbanicity. Districts that entered the pandemic with higher absenteeism rates saw the steepest increases through 2022 and somewhat sharper declines thereafter, yet their percentage movements relative to the baseline track closely across categories.

Together, these comparisons bear out the sobering conclusions I first highlighted in *Long COVID for Public Schools*. Chronic absenteeism has risen severely and almost universally: No district type saw an increase of less than 70 percent relative to its 2019 baseline. At the same time, however, chronic absenteeism has risen most, in absolute terms, among disadvantaged students—the very groups that suffered the greatest learning losses during the pandemic and can least afford the additional harms of chronic absenteeism. Although the subsequent declines are somewhat larger in the districts that experienced the biggest spikes, those declines are proportional

Figure 3. Pandemic-Era Chronic Absenteeism Rates by District Characteristics: School Years 2019, 2022, and 2024



Source: Return to Learn Tracker, "Chronic Absenteeism: 2017–2024," American Enterprise Institute, <https://www.returntolearntacker.net>.

Note: School years are referred to by the spring year.

Table 2. Chronic Absenteeism by Student Race: School Years 2020, 2022, and 2023

	2020	2022	2023	2020 to 2022		2022 to 2023		Approximate Students Included Each Year (Millions)
				Percentage-Point Change	Percentage Increase	Percentage-Point Change	Percentage Increase	
All Students	14%	29%	27%	15.2	109%	-2.4	-8%	41.5
Asian	7%	15%	15%	8.0	110%	0.1	1%	1.8
Black	19%	39%	36%	20.2	108%	-3.3	-9%	6.5
Hispanic	16%	36%	33%	20.2	125%	-3.4	-9%	10.1
White	11%	24%	22%	12.5	111%	-2.1	-9%	19.4

Source: Author's calculations using US Department of Education, ED Data Express, "Percent Chronically Absent Students," 2019–20, 2021–22, and 2022–23; and National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data, "Public Elementary/Secondary School Universe Survey Data," <https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/pubschuniv.asp>.

Note: Data come from 78,000 schools with data in 2020, 2022, and 2023, excluding California. School years are referred to by the spring year.

to pre-pandemic levels, meaning that gaps between district types remain substantial.

Chronic Absenteeism by Race

So far, I have examined how chronic absenteeism has differed by *district* characteristics. In this section, I examine how chronic absenteeism has differed by *student* race. The US Department of Education's EDFacts data provide chronic absenteeism counts for each school, overall and by student race, for the 2020 through 2023 school years. I aggregated these numbers to estimate chronic absenteeism rates for Asian, black, Hispanic, and white students using counts from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Common Core of Data (CCD) files. Note that these data, displayed in Table 2, should be interpreted with caution, but they remain the best available national data for comparisons by student race.²⁵

The changes in chronic absenteeism rates by race resemble the patterns in chronic absenteeism rates by district type: Racial groups with higher pre-pandemic rates also had higher absolute increases. In 2020, 19 percent of black students—the highest rate of any racial demographic that year—were chronically

absent. By 2022, that number had jumped to 39 percent, a 20-point increase.

Chronic absenteeism among Hispanic students also rose 20 points, from 16 percent in 2020 to 36 percent in 2022. White students' absenteeism rates stood at 11 percent in 2020 before climbing to 24 percent in 2022, a 12.5-point increase. Chronic absenteeism rates for Asian students increased by 8 points, from a pre-pandemic low of 7 percent in 2020 to 15 percent in 2022. Interestingly, Asian students' chronic absenteeism rates did not decrease at all from 2022 to 2023, while white, black, and Hispanic students' rates fell by 2.1, 3.3, and 3.4 points, respectively.

In short, chronic absenteeism increased dramatically for all students between 2020 and 2022 and declined slightly in 2023. But the demographics with the highest 2020 levels experienced the largest absolute gains in chronic absenteeism by 2022 and larger declines a year later, reflecting similar patterns in disadvantaged school districts.

Post-Pandemic Progress on Absenteeism

I have argued that post-pandemic absenteeism is the most urgent challenge facing US schools. Reducing it to acceptable levels will require a sustained,

coordinated push by governors, state and local education leaders, teachers, and parents. Clear goals and regular monitoring are essential to that effort. Over the past year, I have partnered with Attendance Works and the Education Trust, two leading education advocacy and research organizations, to persuade states and districts to adopt a concrete target: Cut chronic absenteeism rates in half within five years. To date, 15 states—Alabama, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Iowa, Maryland, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, Ohio, Rhode Island, Virginia, Washington, and West Virginia—and Washington, DC, have formally embraced this benchmark, and more are expected to follow.²⁶

The target of 50 percent in five years rests on three simple ideas. First, even the pre-pandemic chronic-absence rate—about 15 percent of students—was unacceptably high. Second, every state experienced a broadly similar surge of roughly 90 percent by 2022. Third, if states do not bring rates down quickly, higher levels could become normalized for schools and families, locking in an unacceptable post-pandemic plateau. The five-year time span, which ends in 2027, is intended to promote urgency and focus over time.

In Table 3, I track each state’s progress toward the five-year goal, identifying the percentages of students in 2023 and 2024 who are on track to reach that goal by 2027. I also track progress toward each state’s 2019 baseline because, while I view those rates as a timid benchmark for success, they provide a more immediate measure of post-pandemic recovery.

The 50 percent target for 2027 remains daunting. Across all districts with 2024 data, 43 percent of students attended schools in districts that were not on track—that is, not on pace to meet the goal by 2027—in either 2023 or 2024 to cut chronic absenteeism rates by 50 percent by 2027. (Table 3). Among the 45 states reporting 2024 figures, 15 had more students on track in 2024 than were on track in 2023 only or than were off track in both years. California led the pack, with 79 percent of its students in on-track districts in 2024. Ten other states—Connecticut, Hawaii, Idaho, Maine, Massachusetts,

Michigan, Nevada, New Mexico, Rhode Island, and Virginia—had a majority of students in districts on pace to cut absenteeism by half within five years.²⁷

Districts fare somewhat better against the softer benchmark of merely returning to their own pre-pandemic levels by 2027. (This benchmark is easier to reach in some, but not all, states, as some had 2022 rates that were more than double their pre-pandemic baseline.) Based on this benchmark, 39 percent of students were in on-track districts in 2024, and 38 percent were in districts that were not on track in either 2023 or 2024. Of the 45 states with 2024 data, 22 had more students in 2024 on track to match their 2019 baseline than were in either of the other two categories. Now, 17 states have a majority of students in districts projected to reach their 2019 absenteeism rates within the five-year window. (See Table 4.)

Discussion

The newest attendance data confirm that chronic absenteeism remains a problem—one I continue to argue is the most urgent challenge confronting US schools. Declines since the 2022 peak have been modest, and the pace of improvement appears to be slowing. What would have counted as progress before the pandemic now looks meager next to the massive spike in chronic absenteeism during and since the pandemic.

The basic pattern I documented last year in *Long COVID for Public Schools* still holds. Chronic absenteeism remains high for nearly all students: Across all student subgroups and over the two post-pandemic years, absenteeism has been retreating at strikingly similar rates, just as it rose at similar rates during the peak year of 2022. Still, the students with the highest chronic absenteeism rates before the pandemic continue to miss the most school.

This report focuses on *chronic* absenteeism, but chronic absenteeism is merely the most visible edge of a broader problem: Students at every attendance level are missing more school than they did before the pandemic. Even those who remain below the

Table 3. Districts on Track to Cut 2022 Chronic Absenteeism by 50 Percent by 2027: School Years 2023 and 2024

State	Never	In 2023 Only	In 2024	State	Never	In 2023 Only	In 2024
US	43%	23%	34%	MS	55%	19%	27%
AK	64%	16%	21%	MT†	63%	37%	*
AL	56%	8%	36%	NC	38%	13%	49%
AR	46%	41%	15%	ND	48%	24%	28%
AZ†	35%	64%	*	NE	54%	11%	36%
CA	19%	3%	79%	NH†	8%	92%	*
CO	56%	6%	38%	NJ	51%	13%	36%
CT	33%	3%	64%	NM	36%	18%	54%
DC	75%	6%	18%	NV	31%	2%	68%
DE	52%	6%	42%	NY	31%	45%	25%
FL	86%	12%	4%	OH	45%	17%	38%
GA	60%	16%	24%	OK	66%	9%	25%
HI	0%	0%	100%	OR	89%	3%	9%
IA	23%	47%	30%	PA	46%	10%	44%
ID	23%	5%	71%	RI	44%	3%	54%
IL	52%	24%	24%	SC	77%	15%	7%
IN	50%	13%	37%	SD	61%	23%	16%
KS	37%	14%	49%	TN	76%	2%	22%
KY	95%	1%	4%	TX	11%	88%	*
LA	69%	22%	10%	UT	21%	27%	46%
MA	16%	9%	75%	VA	45%	1%	53%
MD	71%	10%	21%	VT	63%	0%	37%
ME	39%	5%	54%	WA	50%	10%	39%
MI	20%	18%	62%	WI	41%	15%	43%
MN	39%	61%	*	WV	32%	5%	32%
MO	69%	10%	19%	WY†	67%	33%	*

Source: Author's calculations using Return to Learn Tracker, "Chronic Absenteeism: 2017–2024," American Enterprise Institute, <https://www.returntolearntracker.net>.

Note: * No data available for 2024. † Data come solely from ED Facts. School years are referred to by the spring year.

"chronic" threshold are accruing more absences, and every missed day chips away at student learning. The root problem schools are facing is a nationwide rise in absenteeism that affects far more than those counted as chronically absent.

Beyond absenteeism's toll on students are the burdens it creates for teachers and administrators. Teachers face more demands to reteach content and differentiate instruction for students who are frequently absent. School and district leaders must divert more of their scarce resources to reengage

students. Focusing on curbing absenteeism is surely not what teachers and leaders want to be doing—nor is it the best use of their time.

State and local governments should see that absenteeism functions as a tax. Public schools are among the largest line items in state and local government budgets. Absenteeism erodes schools' effectiveness, meaning governments are seeing worse outcomes from public schools, at similar rates of spending, than they were before the rise in absences. So long as elevated absenteeism persists, governments

Table 4. Districts on Track to Return to 2019 Chronic Absenteeism Levels by 2027: School Years 2023 and 2024

State	Never	In 2023 Only	In 2024	State	Never	In 2023 Only	In 2024
US	38%	22%	39%	MS	46%	29%	26%
AK	31%	37%	33%	MT†	60%	40%	*
AL	43%	8%	49%	NC	37%	15%	48%
AR	26%	46%	29%	ND	40%	23%	37%
AZ†	28%	70%	*	NE	49%	14%	37%
CA	20%	5%	75%	NH†	7%	93%	*
CO	28%	2%	70%	NJ	47%	6%	46%
CT	33%	3%	65%	NM	41%	6%	59%
DC	9%	3%	88%	NV	31%	4%	66%
DE	51%	8%	42%	NY	26%	10%	64%
FL	74%	18%	10%	OH	39%	17%	44%
GA	57%	17%	26%	OK	53%	12%	34%
HI	0%	0%	100%	OR	83%	5%	12%
IA	24%	41%	35%	PA	39%	9%	52%
ID	32%	23%	44%	RI	31%	2%	67%
IL	47%	23%	30%	SC	72%	15%	12%
IN	46%	10%	43%	SD	55%	22%	23%
KS	31%	11%	58%	TN	60%	5%	35%
KY	91%	2%	7%	TX	15%	85%	*
LA	68%	11%	21%	UT	23%	28%	43%
MA	11%	10%	79%	VA	40%	1%	58%
MD	49%	10%	42%	VT	61%	2%	39%
ME	37%	5%	55%	WA	48%	16%	35%
MI	17%	20%	63%	WI	36%	8%	55%
MN	38%	62%	*	WV	18%	5%	57%
MO	66%	13%	19%	WY†	91%	9%	*

Source: Author's calculations using Return to Learn Tracker, "Chronic Absenteeism: 2017–2024," American Enterprise Institute, <https://www.returntolearntacker.net>.

Note: * No data available for 2024. † Data come solely from ED Facts. School years are referred to by the spring year.

can either spend the same amount to receive less educational output or spend more to get back to the same (pre-pandemic) level of output. Either way, absenteeism is a cost that should be a compelling concern, over and above valid concerns for schools and students.

I end with a profound question: After the pandemic, what will become the new normal for school attendance? Before the pandemic, a stable 15 percent of students were chronically absent; in 2022, the figure spiked to 28 percent. A year later, chronic

absenteeism dropped to 25 percent. That 3-point drop offered hope that rates could fall quickly enough to meet both goals discussed above: to return to pre-pandemic levels and cut absenteeism's 2022 highs in half by 2027.

But in 2024, the decline slowed to just under 2 points—even as many states rolled out stronger attendance initiatives. If this slower improvement rate holds steady, the pre-pandemic average will not be reached until 2029. Should the pace keep decelerating at the same rate it did between 2023 and 2024,

the country could stall at over 20 percent around 2030—with no guarantee of further improvements.

Of course, predicting the exact trajectory matters less than accelerating it. Governors, district and school leaders, teachers, families, and students must act decisively to reverse the pandemic’s lingering absence problem. If we fail in that effort, a crisis triggered in 2020 could define schooling for years to come.

About the Author

Nat Malkus is a senior fellow, the deputy director of education policy at the American Enterprise Institute, and an affiliate of AEI’s James Q. Wilson Program in K–12 Education Studies, where he specializes in empirical research on K–12 schooling.

Appendix A. Return to Learn Chronic Absenteeism Data and Methods

State-sourced data serve as the primary data in R2L's chronic absenteeism tracker. I collected district-level chronic absenteeism data from each state, as available, for the 2017 through 2024 school years. To obtain chronic absenteeism rates, I collected the numerators (the number of students who were chronically absent) and denominators (the total number of students eligible for inclusion in chronic absenteeism counts for each district) and then divided them.²⁸

All percentages in this report are drawn from district-level data and weighted by the percentage of students. Some percentages may differ slightly from state-reported totals because this report aggregates data across districts, I exclude districts that are identified as virtual or largely virtual, or missing data are supplemented from *EDFacts* data, as discussed below.

Some states posted chronic absenteeism data only in select years. Currently, R2L includes state-sourced data for 23 states in 2017, 40 (including Washington, DC) in 2018, and 46 in 2019. Thirty-five states provided data for 2020, and 46 states did so for 2021. However, in both these years, due to the school closures in March 2020 that endured throughout that year and the remote instruction that varied considerably through the 2021 school year, attendance itself and traditional attendance-collection data systems were compromised enough to make questionable the quality and comparability of chronic absenteeism rates.

For 2022 and 2023, R2L has state-sourced district-level data for 47 states; for 2024, it reports data for 45 states. (Minnesota and Texas are the only states that regularly report chronic absenteeism but have not yet released 2024 data.) Data for additional states are added to the R2L chronic absenteeism collection as they become available. For the most up-to-date data, visit www.ReturntoLearnTracker.net/ChronicAbsenteeism.

I supplement missing state-sourced data with chronic absenteeism counts from the US Department of Education's *EDFacts* data collection, which is available through its ED Data Express platform. These data include counts of chronically absent students at the local education agency (LEA) level for 2018 and 2019 and at the school and LEA level by student race for 2020–23. The *EDFacts* data provide the best available numerators for calculating chronic absenteeism rates, but unfortunately, they do not include matching denominators. After consulting with NCES staff, I merged the *EDFacts* data with NCES CCD K–12 student membership counts to obtain the denominators.

As noted in *Long COVID for Public Schools*, these CCD denominators are imperfect matches to the *EDFacts* numerators. At the direction of NCES, the *EDFacts* chronic absenteeism counts include the number of all students enrolled in a site for at least 10 days who were absent for any reason for 10 percent or more of their enrollment. In contrast, many states use denominators for their chronic absenteeism rates that include only students who were enrolled for a longer period, such as a semester or 100 days in the school year. In addition, the CCD enrollment counts do not include all students who were enrolled for 10 days or more, and thus the *EDFacts* counts for chronically absent students are drawn from a different, and larger, pool of students than are included in CCD enrollment counts.

If all students at a site were enrolled for the entire year, the two denominators would produce identical rates. However, schools and districts with more mobile students will have more students who could be in the *EDFacts* chronic absence counts than would be in the CCD enrollment, thereby overestimating chronic absenteeism.²⁹ Consequently, the resulting rates lead to a potential upward bias in the *EDFacts* rates and, though relatively small, that bias is likely to be higher in schools with higher intra-year student mobility.

As such, I use estimates based on *EDFacts* data from ED Data Express for 2018–23 for districts where no state-sourced data are available. The portion of R2L data taken from ED Data Express, rather than state-sourced data, is shown in Table B1 and represents only a small share of districts in 2019, 2021, and 2022 and relatively larger shares in 2018 and 2020. In most years, over 95 percent of students were represented by state-sourced data; the remaining 5 percent of students primarily attended schools in states that do not report chronic absenteeism (Montana, New Hampshire, and Wyoming).

I use several other data sources to compare rates of chronic absenteeism across districts. LEA location data come from CCD's Education Demographic and Geographic Estimates (EDGE) data files. Urbanicity, school district size, and minority percentage figures also come from CCD data. Poverty estimates for districts use Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates data from 2022.

Data on the duration of in-person instruction in the 2021 school year for about 8,500 districts come from R2L. Data on historic achievement come from the Stanford Education Data Archive's data for 2019 and thus reflect pre-pandemic achievement levels used to compare similar districts over time. Data on prevalence of single-parent households come from the Census Bureau's American Community Survey 2020 county-level estimates, which I then cross-walked to districts using EDGE data files.

All estimates in this report are student-weighted and represent the percentage of students attending districts with a given rate of chronic absenteeism. Unweighted estimates would treat differently sized districts with equal weight, giving a district with 200 students the same weight as a district with 200,000 students. Therefore, percentages reflect the percentage of students attending districts with a given average rate of chronic absenteeism rather than the average of district rates.

Appendix B. Additional Data

**Table B1. Return to Learn Chronic Absenteeism Data Drawn from ED Facts, by State:
School Years 2018–23**

State	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
US	17%	4%	19%	2%	3%	3%
AL	—	—	100%	—	—	—
AZ	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
CO	—	—	2%	—	—	—
DC	—	100%	100%	—	—	—
DE	—	—	100%	1%	1%	1%
HI	100%	—	—	—	—	—
IA	100%	100%	—	—	—	—
ID	100%	100%	1%	3%	6%	5%
KY	—	—	100%	—	—	—
LA	100%	—	—	—	—	—
MI	1%	<1%	<1%	18%	<1%	<1%
MN	—	—	100%	100%	—	—
MS	—	—	100%	—	1%	1%
MT	—	—	—	—	—	100%
NE	100%	—	—	—	—	—
NH	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
NJ	—	—	100%	—	—	—
NV	100%	—	100%	—	—	—
NY	1%	1%	100%	1%	1%	1%
OK	<1%	2%	100%	1%	—	1%
OR	—	—	100%	—	—	—
SC	<1%	<1%	2%	—	<1%	—
SD	—	—	100%	—	—	—
TN	1%	—	—	—	—	—
TX	100%	—	—	—	—	—
UT	—	—	—	—	—	1%
WA	—	—	1%	—	—	1%
WY	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Source: Return to Learn Tracker, “Chronic Absenteeism: 2017–2024,” American Enterprise Institute, <https://www.returntolearntacker.net>.

Note: Percentages are student weighted. No ED Facts data were available for 2017 or 2023 or used for 2018–23 in states not listed. California has no chronic absenteeism data in state or ED Facts data collection for 2020. School years are referred to by the spring year.

Table B2. Chronic Absenteeism Rates by State: 2017–24

School Year (Spring)									School Year (Spring)								
State	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	State	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
US	13.4%	15.2%	15.0%	13.3%	18.9%	28.5%	25.4%	23.5%	MS	—	17%	14%	9%	21%	28%	24%	25%
AK	24%	25%	28%	17%	—	46%	43%	41%	MT	—	21%	23%	12%	27%	38%	37%	—
AL	—	—	11%	9%	8%	18%	18%	15%	NC	—	15%	16%	10%	27%	32%	27%	26%
AR	20%	24%	22%	22%	17%	26%	22%	27%	ND	—	11%	12%	11%	16%	22%	20%	20%
AZ	—	25%	25%	16%	25%	48%	41%	—	NE	—	16%	15%	15%	21%	24%	22%	22%
CA	11%	12%	13%	—	14%	30%	25%	21%	NH	—	16%	14%	13%	18%	35%	25%	—
CO	19%	24%	22%	23%	26%	35%	31%	28%	NJ	10%	11%	11%	8%	13%	18%	17%	15%
CT	—	11%	10%	12%	19%	24%	20%	18%	NM	14%	16%	17%	15%	30%	41%	39%	30%
DC	—	29%	33%	29%	31%	48%	44%	40%	NV	—	20%	19%	20%	31%	36%	35%	29%
DE	16%	16%	15%	17%	22%	25%	23%	20%	NY	—	18%	19%	21%	24%	32%	28%	26%
FL	—	20%	20%	17%	25%	32%	31%	31%	OH	13%	15%	16%	10%	23%	29%	26%	24%
GA	—	13%	13%	9%	21%	25%	23%	22%	OK	—	16%	17%	19%	19%	23%	23%	21%
HI	—	19%	14%	8%	18%	34%	27%	25%	OR	20%	20%	20%	22%	28%	36%	38%	34%
IA	—	11%	12%	17%	21%	26%	21%	22%	PA	15%	15%	15%	15%	18%	26%	22%	21%
ID	—	3%	3%	8%	16%	21%	17%	15%	RI	19%	19%	19%	18%	28%	34%	29%	25%
IL	—	16%	18%	11%	21%	30%	28%	26%	SC	—	12%	13%	14%	8%	20%	24%	22%
IN	10%	11%	12%	11%	19%	22%	20%	19%	SD	—	13%	14%	11%	18%	22%	21%	21%
KS	—	14%	14%	14%	18%	26%	23%	21%	TN	—	13%	13%	13%	15%	20%	20%	18%
KY	—	18%	18%	12%	22%	28%	30%	28%	TX	—	13%	11%	7%	15%	26%	20%	—
LA	—	15%	18%	12%	29%	21%	22%	25%	UT	12%	13%	14%	9%	19%	28%	25%	23%
MA	13%	13%	13%	13%	18%	28%	22%	20%	VA	12%	11%	11%	12%	11%	20%	19%	15%
MD	—	20%	20%	18%	24%	31%	30%	27%	VT	10%	10%	13%	16%	23%	25%	28%	25%
ME	16%	16%	17%	18%	21%	31%	27%	25%	WA	15%	15%	15%	9%	19%	33%	30%	27%
MI	16%	21%	20%	21%	20%	39%	31%	30%	WI	12%	13%	13%	13%	16%	22%	19%	18%
MN	13%	14%	14%	15%	17%	30%	25%	—	WV	—	19%	20%	19%	13%	29%	28%	24%
MO	11%	12%	13%	15%	17%	24%	23%	22%	WY	—	2%	2%	2%	2%	37%	35%	—

Source: Return to Learn Tracker, “Chronic Absenteeism: 2017–2024,” American Enterprise Institute, <https://www.returntolearntacker.net>.

Table B3. State-Sourced Chronic Absenteeism Rates by State: School Years 2017–2024

School Year (Spring)									School Year (Spring)								
State	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	State	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
US	13%	15%	15%	13%	19%	28%	25%	24%	MS	—	17%	14%	—	21%	28%	24%	25%
AK	24%	25%	28%	17%	22%	46%	43%	41%	MT	—	21%	23%	12%	27%	38%	0%	—
AL	18%	18%	11%	0%	8%	18%	18%	15%	NC	—	15%	16%	10%	27%	32%	27%	26%
AR	20%	24%	22%	22%	17%	26%	22%	27%	ND	—	11%	12%	11%	16%	22%	20%	20%
CA	11%	12%	13%	—	14%	30%	25%	21%	NE	—	—	15%	15%	21%	24%	22%	22%
CO	19%	24%	22%	22%	26%	35%	31%	28%	NJ	10%	11%	11%	—	13%	18%	17%	15%
CT	—	11%	10%	12%	19%	24%	20%	18%	NM	14%	16%	17%	15%	30%	41%	39%	30%
DC	—	29%	0%	0%	31%	48%	44%	40%	NV	—	—	19%	—	31%	36%	35%	29%
DE	16%	16%	15%	0%	22%	25%	22%	20%	NY	—	18%	19%	—	24%	32%	28%	26%
FL	—	20%	20%	17%	25%	32%	31%	31%	OH	13%	15%	16%	10%	23%	29%	26%	24%
GA	—	13%	13%	9%	21%	25%	23%	22%	OK	—	16%	17%	—	19%	23%	23%	21%
HI	—	—	14%	8%	18%	34%	27%	25%	OR	20%	20%	20%	—	28%	36%	38%	34%
IA	—	—	—	17%	21%	26%	21%	22%	PA	15%	15%	15%	15%	18%	26%	22%	21%
ID	—	—	—	8%	16%	21%	17%	15%	RI	19%	19%	19%	18%	28%	34%	29%	25%
IL	—	16%	18%	11%	21%	30%	28%	26%	SC	—	12%	13%	13%	8%	20%	24%	22%
IN	10%	11%	12%	11%	19%	22%	20%	19%	SD	—	13%	14%	—	18%	22%	21%	21%
KS	—	14%	14%	14%	18%	26%	23%	21%	TN	—	13%	13%	13%	15%	20%	20%	18%
KY	—	18%	18%	—	22%	28%	30%	28%	TX	—	—	11%	7%	15%	26%	20%	—
LA	—	—	18%	12%	29%	21%	22%	25%	UT	12%	13%	14%	9%	19%	28%	25%	23%
MA	13%	13%	13%	13%	18%	28%	22%	20%	VA	12%	11%	11%	12%	11%	20%	19%	15%
MD	—	20%	20%	18%	23%	31%	30%	27%	VT	10%	10%	13%	16%	23%	25%	28%	25%
ME	16%	16%	17%	18%	21%	31%	27%	25%	WA	15%	15%	15%	9%	19%	33%	30%	27%
MI	16%	21%	20%	21%	20%	39%	31%	30%	WI	12%	13%	13%	13%	16%	22%	19%	18%
MN	13%	14%	14%	—	—	30%	25%	—	WV	—	19%	20%	19%	13%	29%	28%	24%

Source: Return to Learn Tracker, “Chronic Absenteeism: 2017–2024,” American Enterprise Institute, <https://www.returntolearntracker.net>.

Note: Only data taken from state departments of education are included in this table. Arizona’s chronic absenteeism rates, which reflect only K–8, are excluded. Montana, New Hampshire, and Wyoming do not report state chronic absenteeism data.

Table B4. Change in Chronic Absenteeism Rate by District Type: School Years 2019, 2022, and 2024

District Type					Percentage of Change from 2019	
		2019	2022	2024	2022	2024
Achievement	Low	19%	35%	29%	185%	152%
	Medium	16%	29%	25%	180%	154%
	High	10%	20%	16%	193%	160%
Poverty	Low	10%	20%	17%	198%	161%
	Medium	15%	29%	24%	191%	159%
	High	20%	35%	30%	174%	147%
Minority Percentage	Low	13%	23%	19%	183%	150%
	Medium	13%	23%	20%	182%	153%
	High	17%	32%	27%	185%	154%
In-Person Instruction in 2021	Most Remote	16%	31%	25%	193%	155%
	In the Middle	13%	24%	20%	177%	152%
	Most In-Person	16%	27%	24%	171%	156%
Single-Parent Percentage	Low	12%	23%	19%	189%	154%
	Medium	14%	26%	22%	191%	158%
	High	17%	31%	26%	182%	153%
Size	Small	13%	24%	20%	182%	149%
	Medium	14%	27%	22%	191%	156%
	Large	17%	31%	27%	182%	155%
Urbanicity	Urban	19%	34%	28%	182%	150%
	Suburban	14%	26%	21%	190%	159%
	Town or Rural	15%	26%	22%	179%	149%

Source: Return to Learn Tracker, "Chronic Absenteeism: 2017–2024," American Enterprise Institute, <https://www.returntolearntacker.net>.

Note: School years are referred to by the spring year.

Notes

1. Hedy Chang, “Absent an Education,” *US News & World Report*, June 8, 2016, <https://www.usnews.com/opinion/articles/2016-06-08/chronic-absenteeism-is-a-national-crisis>; and US Department of Education, “Chronic Absenteeism in the Nation’s Schools,” <https://web.archive.org/web/20240902020705/https://www2.ed.gov/datastory/chronicabsenteeism.html>.
2. Nat Malkus, *Long COVID for Public Schools: Chronic Absenteeism Before and After the Pandemic*, American Enterprise Institute, January 31, 2024, <https://www.aei.org/research-products/report/long-covid-for-public-schools-chronic-absenteeism-before-and-after-the-pandemic/>.
3. Malkus, *Long COVID for Public Schools*, 2.
4. Thomas S. Dee, “Higher Chronic Absenteeism Threatens Academic Recovery from the COVID-19 Pandemic,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, January 9, 2024, <https://www.pnas.org/doi/10.1073/pnas.2312249121>; and Tom Swiderski et al., “Student-Level Attendance Patterns Across Three Post-Pandemic Years,” *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.3102/01623737251315715>.
5. Emma García and Elaine Weiss, *Student Absenteeism: Who Misses School and How Missing School Matters for Performance*, Economic Policy Institute, September 25, 2018, <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED593361.pdf>; Phyllis W. Raegen Miller, *Who’s In: Chronic Absenteeism Under the Every Student Succeeds Act*, FutureEd, September 2017, 1–21, <https://www.future-ed.org/whos-in-chronic-absenteeism-under-the-every-student-succeeds-act/>.
6. Robert Balfanz and Vaughan Byrnes, *The Importance of Being in School: A Report on Absenteeism in the Nation’s Public Schools*, Johns Hopkins Center for Social Organization of Schools, May 2012, https://new.every1graduates.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/FINALChronicAbsenteeismReport_May16.pdf.
7. Balfanz and Byrnes, *The Importance of Being in School*.
8. Malkus, *Long COVID for Public Schools*; Hedy N. Chang and Mariajosé Romero, *Present, Engaged, and Accounted For: The Critical Importance of Addressing Chronic Absence in the Early Grades*, National Center for Children in Poverty, September 2008, <https://www.attendanceworks.org/present-engaged-and-accounted-for/>; García and Weiss, *Student Absenteeism*; and Mariajosé Romero and Young-Sun Lee, *A National Portrait of Chronic Absenteeism in the Early Grades*, National Center for Children in Poverty, October 2007, <https://academiccommons.columbia.edu/doi/10.7916/D89C7650>.
9. Jing Liu et al., “The Short- and Long-Run Impacts of Secondary School Absences,” *Journal of Public Economics* 199 (July 2021): 104441, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0047272721000773>; Chuansheng Chen and Harold W. Stevenson, “Motivation and Mathematics Achievement: A Comparative Study of Asian-American, Caucasian-American, and East Asian High School Students,” *Child Development* 66, no. 4 (1995): 1215–34, <https://srcd.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1467-8624.1995.tb00932.x>; Michael A. Gottfried, “Excused Versus Unexcused: How Student Absences in Elementary School Affect Academic Achievement,” *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 31, no. 4 (2009): 392–415, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.3102/0162373709342467>; and Michael A. Gottfried and J. Jacob Kirksey, “When’ Students Miss School: The Role of Timing of Absenteeism on Students’ Test Performance,” *Educational Researcher* 46, no. 3 (2017): 119–30, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/epub/10.3102/0013189X17703945>.
10. García and Weiss, *Student Absenteeism*.
11. Balfanz and Byrnes, *The Importance of Being in School*; David Silver et al., “What Factors Predict High School Graduation in the Los Angeles Unified School District,” University of California, Santa Barbara, and Gervitz Graduate School of Education, June 2008, <https://www.issuelab.org/resources/11619/11619.pdf>; Elaine Allensworth and John Q. Easton, *What Matters for Staying On-Track and Graduating in Chicago Public Schools*, University of Chicago Consortium on School Research, July 2007, <https://consortium.uchicago.edu/publications/what-matters-staying-track-and-graduating-chicago-public-schools>; and Baltimore Education Research Consortium, *Destination Graduation: Sixth Grade Early Warning Indicators for Baltimore City Schools; Their Prevalence and Impact*, February 2011, <https://baltimore-berc.org/pdfs/SixthGradeEWIFullReport.pdf>.

12. Esteban M. Aucejo and Teresa Foy Romano, "Assessing the Effect of School Days and Absences on Test Score Performance," *Economics of Education Review* 55 (December 2016): 70–87, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0272775715301655>; Gottfried, "Excused Versus Unexcused"; Michael A. Gottfried, "The Detrimental Effects of Missing School: Evidence from Urban Siblings," *American Journal of Education* 117, no. 2 (February 2011): 147–82, <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/10.1086/657886>; Michael A. Gottfried, "Chronic Absenteeism and Its Effects on Students' Academic and Socioemotional Outcomes," *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk* 19, no. 2 (2014): 53–75, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10824669.2014.962696>; Lucrecia Santibañez and Cassandra M. Guarino, "The Effects of Absenteeism on Academic and Social-Emotional Outcomes: Lessons for COVID-19," *Educational Researcher* 50, no. 6 (August 2021): 392–400, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/epub/10.3102/0013189X21994488>; García and Weiss, *Student Absenteeism*; and Seth Gershenson et al., "Are Student Absences Worth the Worry in U.S. Primary Schools?," *Education Finance Policy* 12, no. 2 (2017): 137–65, <https://ideas.repec.org/a/tpr/edfpol/v12y2017i2p137-165.html>.
13. Joshua Goodman, *Flaking Out: Student Absences and Snow Days as Disruptions of Instructional Time*, Working Paper No. 20221 (National Bureau of Economic Research, June 2014), <https://www.nber.org/papers/w20221>; and Scott E. Carrell and Mark L. Hoekstra, "Externalities in the Classroom: How Children Exposed to Domestic Violence Affect Everyone's Kids," *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics* 2, no. 1 (2010): 211–28, <https://www.aeaweb.org/articles?id=10.1257/app.2.1.211>.
14. Michael A. Gottfried, "Chronic Absenteeism in the Classroom Context: Effects on Achievement," *Urban Education* 54, no. 1 (2015): 3–34, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0042085915618709>.
15. See Balfanz and Byrnes, *The Importance of Being in School*; and Romero and Lee, *A National Portrait of Chronic Absenteeism in the Early Grades*.
16. Liu et al., "The Short- and Long-Run Impacts of Secondary School Absences"; Gershenson et al., "Are Student Absences Worth the Worry in U.S. Primary Schools?"; Todd Rogers et al., "3 Things You Need to Know About Chronic Absenteeism," *Education Week*, October 31, 2024, <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/opinion-3-things-you-need-to-know-about-chronic-absenteeism/2024/10>; and David Blazar and Seth Gershenson, "What Are the Effects of Absenteeism?," American Enterprise Institute Chronic Absenteeism Research Working Group (forthcoming).
17. EveryDay Labs et al., *Efficacy of EveryDay Labs Nudges in DC Public and Public Charter Schools*, Spring 2025, <https://4875399.fs1.hubspotusercontent-na1.net/hubfs/4875399/DC%20RCT%20Report%20Spring%202025.pdf>; Todd Rogers and Avi Feller, "Reducing Student Absences at Scale by Targeting Parents' Misbeliefs," *Nature Human Behaviour* 2, no. 5 (2018): 335–42, <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41562-018-0328-1>; Ken Smythe-Leistico and Lindsay C. Page, "Ready . . . Set . . . Text! Reducing School Absenteeism Through Parent-School Two-Way Text Messaging," in *Absent from School: Understanding and Addressing Student Absenteeism*, ed. Michael A. Gottfried and Ethan L. Hutt (Harvard Education Press, 2019), 165–80; and Carly D. Robinson et al., "Reducing Student Absenteeism in the Early Grades by Targeting Parental Beliefs," *American Educational Research Journal* 55, no. 6 (2018): 1163–92, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.3102/0002831218772274>.
18. Michael A. Gottfried and Jay Stratte Plasman, "Linking the Timing of Career and Technical Education Coursetaking with High School Dropout and College-Going Behavior," *American Educational Research Journal* 55, no. 2 (2018): 325–61, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.3102/0002831217734805>; and Joshua Childs and Ain A. Grooms, "Improving School Attendance Through Collaboration: A Catalyst for Community Involvement and Change," *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk* 23, no. 1–2 (2018): 122–38, <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1174330>.
19. In *Long COVID for Public Schools*, this number was slightly different because it used data, then available, for 36 states. Malkus, *Long COVID for Public Schools*.
20. This decline was slightly larger (2.11 percentage points) in districts with data in both years, compared with 1.89 points for the nation using all available data in both years.
21. The choice of states in these examples is illustrative and should not suggest any particular state has problematic attendance recordkeeping. Attendance Works, *More Essential Than Ever: States Taking Action to Improve Attendance*, *A Fifth Annual Review of State Attendance Policy and Practice*, June 2025, <https://www.attendanceworks.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/2025-Policy-Brief.pdf>.

22. Idaho's and Wyoming's very low rates early in this period are suspicious and come from *EDFacts* data.
23. Some state data files were revised, replaced, or supplied after *Long COVID for Public Schools* was published in 2024, nominally affecting some estimates. These data reflect the most current version of the R2L chronic absenteeism data collection, which will be updated with the most recent data available.
24. In 2024, 80 percent of students attended districts with chronic absenteeism rates between 11.2 percent and 36.2 percent.
25. The Education Department's *EDFacts* national chronic absenteeism data by student race are available beginning in 2020 and should be interpreted with caution for two reasons. First, the 2020 data come from the 2019–20 school year, which was abruptly disrupted by the pandemic, so they approximate—but do not perfectly capture—pre-pandemic rates. Second, the *EDFacts* numerator and CCD denominator are not fully aligned, biasing the level estimates upward. Even so, these data provide the best available nationwide comparison across racial groups.
26. An updated list of states that have adopted the 50 percent challenge is available on the Attendance Works website. The list enumerated in this report was current on June 5, 2025. Attendance Works, website, <https://www.attendanceworks.org/states-participating-in-the-50-challenge/>.
27. Hawaii is a special case because it has only one district.
28. Not all states provided numerators and denominators. Where necessary, I algebraically derived numerators or denominators when rates were available but either numerators or denominators were unavailable.
29. For these reasons, I remove *EDFacts*' supplied rates that exceed 100 percent.