



Press Release

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SAN FRANCISCO, June 25, 2024 – More states than ever are releasing chronic absence data earlier in the school year, according to a [new report](#) from Attendance Works, a non-profit initiative.

Publicly available data, reported as quickly as possible, alerts us all to the size of the problem, shows where serious challenges as well as improvements are occurring, and makes it easier to bring groups together to take action.

“Although chronic absence rates were relatively stable before the pandemic, this is no longer the case. The dynamic nature of chronic absence in schools today makes it essential to have publicly available data as quickly as possible,” said Hedy Chang, executive director and founder of Attendance Works.

[Stemming the Surge in Chronic Absence: What States Can Do, A Fourth Annual Review of State Attendance Policy and Practice](#), released today, underscores that states are critical to supporting districts and schools now struggling to implement effective responses to high levels of chronic absence (missing 10% of school for any reason).

This report presents an analysis of state level attendance policy and practice. For our review we gathered data from the websites for all 50 states and the District of Columbia; additional information was gathered through a survey. The report includes a [table](#) describing the attendance policy and practice as well as the available chronic absence data.

- **The report urges state level efforts to create more comparable chronic absence data.** Having consistently collected and comparable data can be used to detect differences between schools and districts, locate those that need additional help, and identify which schools or districts are “bright spots” getting better results. To improve data comparability, states should adopt a common definition of a day of attendance and publicize it whenever attendance data is shared.

In addition, our review finds states have widely varying enrollment policies, which are likely affecting chronic absence calculations and adding to the challenge of comparing data across states. State policies about how long students must be enrolled to be included in state chronic absence calculations vary tremendously, from 1 day to 181 days!

States can take steps to prevent districts from simply dropping students from their rolls if they have accumulated a large number of absences. Three states — Connecticut, New Mexico and Kentucky — require extensive outreach and intervention before a student can be dropped from the rolls, if a family has not provided documentation of a move or a transfer. This type of outreach may be even more important in the aftermath of the pandemic.

- **States vary in how they count students for funding purposes.** The approach to funding can shape how districts pay attention to attendance in both positive and problematic ways. While the majority of states primarily fund based upon average daily membership or student counts, average daily attendance is used in the two largest states.
- **States are taking a variety of steps to improve student attendance and engagement.** Connecticut, Maine, New Jersey and New Mexico, for example, have passed legislation requiring a team approach when chronic absence affects a high percentage of students. Other approaches include investing in more real-time data reports, offering comprehensive guidance, encouraging cross-departmental work to leverage existing initiatives, and shifting away from ineffective punitive practice including banning suspensions and monitoring excused vs. unexcused absences. These strategies illustrate how states can make a difference.
- **At least 16 states are helping shift districts away from ineffective punitive practice by banning suspensions for truancy.** Suspensions do not typically help schools identify or address the reasons students miss school in the first place, and they can cause students to fall further behind because they miss even more time in class. Studies show that students who face school suspensions are more likely to experience academic setbacks, repeat grades or even drop out.

To support states, *Stemming the Surge in Chronic Absence* offers 10 recommendations for how they can advance local action. Grouped into three priority categories — develop comparable data, ensure public reporting of data and take action — each recommendation offers state approaches in policy and practice to improve student attendance and engagement.

“Every day a student is in school represents an opportunity to learn, build relationships and access support,” said Chang. “Governors, state education agencies and policy makers are especially well-positioned to ensure everyone is aware of the size and scale of the challenge and have the tools and strategies to improve student attendance and engagement.”

Attendance Works is a national and state initiative that promotes equal opportunities to learn and advances student success by reducing chronic absence. Learn more at www.attendanceworks.org.