



A Primer on Attendance and Chronic Absenteeism on the Nation's Report Card and Beyond

Historic declines in student achievement present our most pressing problem in education today. But closely connected to that, and as urgent, is a steep rise in chronic absenteeism.

On the most recent Nation's Report Card, or National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), **22% of 4th graders reported they were absent five or more days in the previous month. That is double the percentage who reported that in 2019.** The results were similar for eighth-graders and similar across states and subgroups of students.

The survey findings correspond with other data showing a rise in chronic absenteeism, making it one of the biggest obstacles to the nation's post-COVID academic recovery. For example, 72% of schools reported an increase in the 2021-22 school year compared to pre-pandemic levels, according to the [School Pulse Panel](#),¹ another national survey. And while [research](#) shows chronic absentee rates improved across states in 2023, they still remain 75% higher than before the pandemic. The [National Center for Educational Statistics](#) (NCES) sees an association between the rise in absenteeism and decline in student achievement.

If students aren't in school, how can they learn? Experts predict academic recovery will be nearly impossible if chronic absenteeism persists.

As is the case when tackling achievement declines, schools should use data to drive decisions around policies and practices to improve attendance.

How Student Attendance and Chronic Absenteeism are Captured on the Nation's Report Card

The Nation's Report Card, coming out early 2025, includes three survey questions on absenteeism at all grades for students, teachers, and administrators.

2024 NAEP Student Question

This has been asked on the student questionnaire since 1990.

How many days were you absent from school in the last month?

- None
- 1 or 2 days
- 3 or 4 days
- 5 to 10 days
- More than 10 days

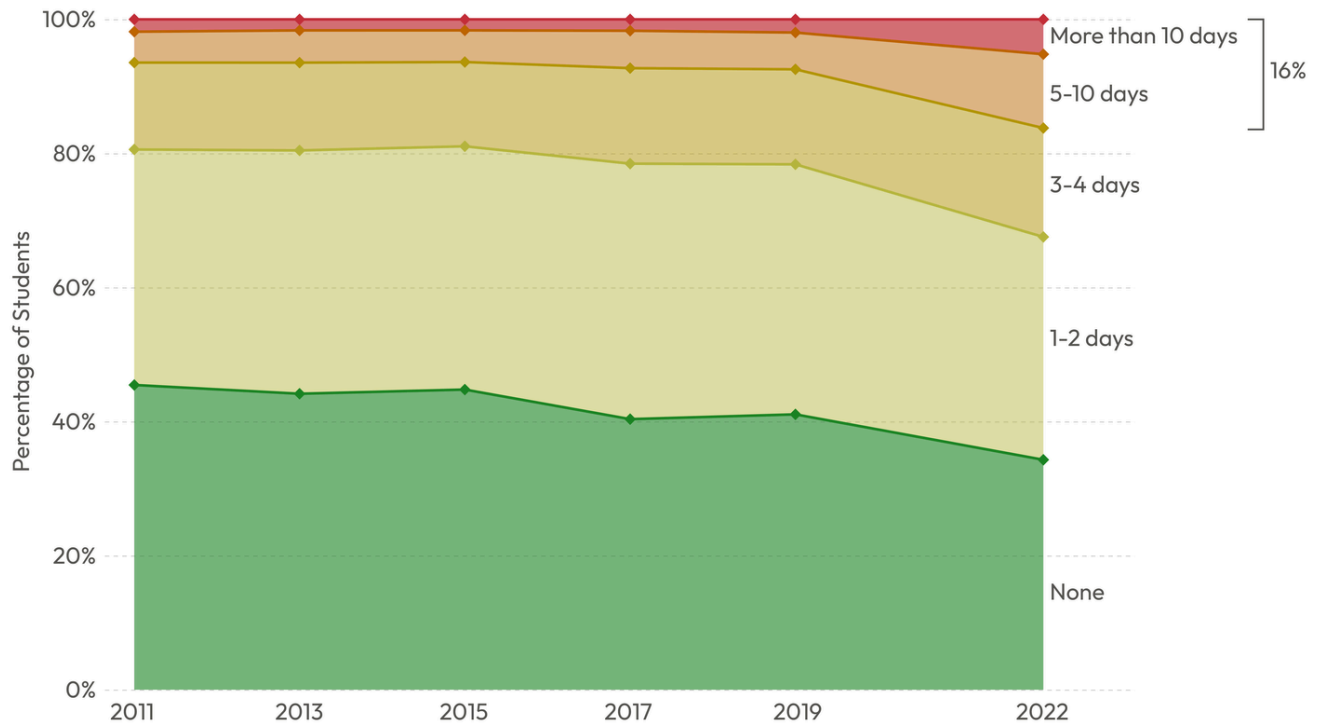
Table of Contents

Absenteeism and NAEP Achievement Association	3
Attendance and Chronic Absenteeism Research Questions for the Field	4
Definition of Terms and Resources	5
Attendance and Absenteeism Data Sources	6

1. Approximately 2,400 public elementary, middle, high, and combined-grade schools were sampled for the monthly data collection. While the results presented in the dashboard have been weighted and adjusted for non-response, these experimental data should be interpreted with caution. Experimental data may not meet all NCES quality standards. [Learn more](#) about School Pulse Panel.

The proportion of 8th graders who reported being absent from school 5+ days in the previous month more than doubled between 2019 and 2022.

(Question: How many days were you absent from school in the last month?)



Differences between student-reported absenteeism rates in 2019 and 2022 are statistically different ($p < .05$).

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), Mathematics Student Questionnaire (Grade 8): 2011, 2013, 2015, 2017, 2019, 2022.

2024 NAEP Teacher Question

This is new to the 2024 administration of NAEP. The findings are in terms of percentage of students. It is appropriate to state, “X% of students had teachers who reported that Y% of students have been absent from school 10% or more of all school days.”

During this school year, what percentage of your students have been absent from school 10% or more of all school days?

- None
- 1–5%
- 6–10%
- 11–25%
- 26–50%
- 51–75%
- 76–90%
- Over 90%

2024 NAEP Administrator Question

This is new to the 2024 administration of NAEP. The findings are in terms of percentage of students. It is appropriate to state, “X% of students had administrators who reported that Y% of students have been absent from school 10% or more of all school days.” A similar question was asked in previous years², but this new item may not be linked to the previous question and results.

During this school year, what percentage of your students have been absent from school 10% or more of all school days?

- None
- 1–5%
- 6–10%
- 11–25%
- 26–50%
- 51–75%
- 76–90%
- Over 90%

2. The previous administrator question was, ‘About what percentage of your students is absent on an average day? (Include excused and unexcused absences).’ Response categories were: 0-2%, 3-5%, 6-10%, and more than 10%.

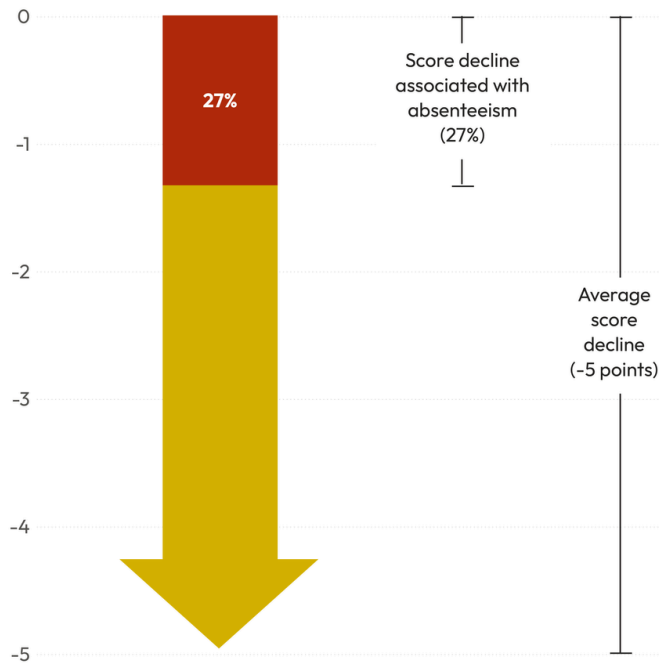
Absenteeism and NAEP Achievement Association

The 2022 Nation's Report Card shows an association between student absenteeism and declines in NAEP scores. Controlling for shifts in demographics, NCES finds that the percentage of score declines between 2019 and 2022 associated with absenteeism are:

- 4th grade: 27% of the 5 point drop in math and 45% of the 3 point drop in reading.
- 8th grade: 16% of the 8 point drop in math and 36% of the 3 point drop in reading.

On average, NAEP Grade 4 Math scores dropped 5 points between 2019 and 2022.

27% of that decline is associated with rising rates of absenteeism.



NOTE: The observed association between the rising absenteeism rate and NAEP score declines does not imply a causal relationship.

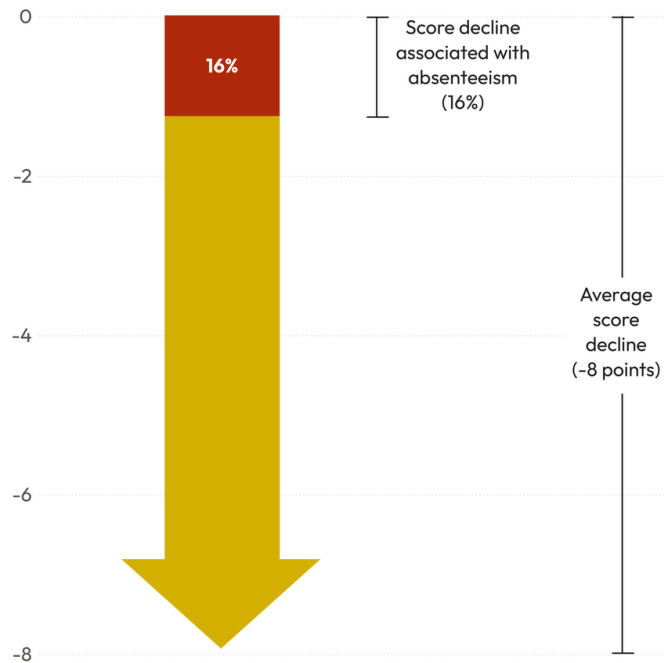
The analysis controlled for student race/ethnicity, gender, status as an English learner, eligibility for the National School Lunch program, number of books in the home, and status as a student with a disability.

NAEP subject and grade scales are independent and numeric results should not be directly compared.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2019 and 2022 Mathematics Assessments (Grade 4).

On average, NAEP Grade 8 Math scores dropped 8 points between 2019 and 2022.

16% of that decline is associated with rising rates of absenteeism.



NOTE: The observed association between the rising absenteeism rate and NAEP score declines does not imply a causal relationship.

The analysis controlled for student race/ethnicity, gender, status as an English learner, eligibility for the National School Lunch program, number of books in the home, and status as a student with a disability.

NAEP subject and grade scales are independent and numeric results should not be directly compared.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2019 and 2022 Mathematics Assessments (Grade 8).

Attendance and Chronic Absenteeism Research Questions for the Field

The Nation's Report Card is a catalyst to improve student achievement. Researchers, in particular, can provide thoughtful analyses to leaders and practitioners using NAEP data. The following questions for the field focus on what to consider about attendance and student learning, both using the Nation's Report Card and other data sources, like state and district attendance data.

Key Questions on Attendance and Chronic Absenteeism using NAEP data

- What is the link between reported attendance and NAEP score changes on the 2024 Nation's Report Card, due out in early 2025?
- How does socioeconomic status and economic disadvantage relate to reported attendance?
- How do student-, teacher-, and administrator- reported attendance rates converge or diverge?
- Where across the nation are the highest levels of reported absences? By region? By state?
- What subgroups report the most frequent absences? What is the interaction of those subgroup patterns with economic disadvantage?
- Among students who report the most absences, on what subscales for math do they see the greatest declines?

Key Questions on Attendance and Chronic Absenteeism using other data sources (such as state or district data)

- For states that created policies to boost attendance, how have attendance patterns changed since policy enactment?
- How do student absenteeism and teacher absenteeism relate to each other? Between student absenteeism and teacher satisfaction?
- How much variation in attendance is there at the school, district, and state levels? How much of the variation in reported attendance is explained by differences in the school students attend, their school district, and their state?
- How do district policies on student absences influence teacher absences? Do increased teacher absences lead to increased student absences?

Definition of Terms and Resources

Attendance: Schools and districts track daily attendance for students, often taken once a day, and sometimes for older students, by class period.

Average Daily Attendance (ADA) is the total days of student attendance divided by the number of instructional days for the specified time period. This measure is sometimes used in funding formulas (instead of enrollment, or how many students are enrolled in a school or district.)

- **Resource:** [Average daily attendance \(ADA\) in public elementary and secondary schools, by state or jurisdiction: Selected school years, 1969-70 through 2020-21](#)

Absenteeism: Students are absent from school for excused or unexcused reasons. There are no standard definitions of excused and unexcused absences as these are determined by schools, districts, and states and therefore data are *not* comparable *across or even within* states.

- **Excused absences** commonly include missing school due to an illness (sometimes requiring a doctor's note), observance of a religious holiday, or a death in a student's immediate family.
- **Unexcused absences** are any absences that do not meet the definition of a school or district's excused absence policies.³ If schools track attendance by class period, sometimes common in high school, a student could be marked absent if they miss too many class periods (if they are late to school, leave early, or "skip" a class).

Chronic Absenteeism is now typically defined as being absent from school for at least **10% of instructional days** regardless as to why a student missed school. (States sometimes measure this as a percent of days absent or a number of days absent that equate to 10%.) Chronic absenteeism includes both excused and unexcused absences and when students miss school due to suspension.

For the average school year of 180 days, this means being absent for **18 or more school days in a school year**; or missing **two or more days per month**; or missing **three weeks or more**; or **a month of school or more**. However, there is no federal definition of chronic absenteeism.

Average Daily Attendance (ADA) and **chronic absenteeism** are NOT the inverse of each other. If a school has an ADA rate of 90%, that means, on any given day, 90% of students are at school and 10% are absent. For a school of 500 students, that means 50 students or two entire classrooms are not present on a given school day. Nationally, the best estimates are that 26% of students are chronically absent, missing at least one month of school; and schools have a 90% ADA, meaning on any given day, 90% of students are in school, but some students may be absent at least 10% of their school days.

3. **Truancy** is defined as being absent from school more often than what is accepted by a school or district's policy. There is no standard or federal definition for truancy; however, states were required to report rates to the U.S. Department of Education with the passage of No Child Left Behind in 2001 through 2015, when ESSA reporting requirements transitioned to chronic absenteeism rates.

Attendance and Absenteeism Data Sources

In addition to the challenge of differing definitions of attendance and absenteeism, data come from multiple sources and are often reported several years after the end of the school year. Following are several sources of attendance and absenteeism data:

Federal Resources

- **EdData Express** within the U.S. Department of Education has data on the 2021-22 school year, where 14.7 million students were chronically absent from school.
 - The **Office of Civil Rights** within the U.S. Department of Education reports “[Chronic Absenteeism in the Nation’s Schools](#)” by race, ethnicity, gender, English language status, and special education status, using data from the 2015-16 school year.
- **National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)** has 2022 self-reported survey data for 4th and 8th grade students nationally, at the state level, and for 26 large urban districts. The 2024 NAEP includes questions for students, teachers, and school administrators about chronic absenteeism.
- **School Pulse Panel**, administered by the National Center for Education Statistics, finds that 72% of all public schools reported that chronic absenteeism “increased a little” or “increased a lot” compared to a typical pre-pandemic school year.

State Resources

- Under Title I, states are required to report rates of chronic absenteeism. However, the definition of chronic absenteeism can differ state-to-state. Thirty-six states and DC [use chronic absenteeism as an accountability measure of student success or school quality metric](#) under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).
- Rhode Island publishes the [Student Attendance Leaderboard](#) and other dashboards, providing real-time attendance rates by school for the current school year.

Independent Research and Resources

- [Research Resources from AttendanceWorks](#)
AttendanceWorks
- [Ready to Learn Tracker Chronic Absenteeism: 2017-2023](#)
AEI/CCi
- [Long COVID for Public Schools: Chronic Absenteeism Before and After the Pandemic](#)
Nat Malkus/AEI
- [Tracking State Trends in Chronic Absenteeism](#)
FutureEd
- [Team Sport: Rhode Island’s Statewide Strategy for Reducing Chronic Absenteeism](#)
Liz Cohen/FutureEd
- [Attendance Legislation in the United States](#)
Lauren Burr, Mark Ziegler-Thayer, and Jenny Scala/AIR
- [Higher chronic absenteeism threatens academic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic](#)
Thomas Dee/Stanford University
- [Chronic Absenteeism in the Classroom Context: Effects on Achievement](#)
Michael Gottfried/University of Pennsylvania