

Every Day Counts: **Understanding School Absences as a Risk Factor**



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None of the planners or speakers for this activity have relevant financial relationships to disclose.

School Absences

Preliminary data for school year 2022-23 in the United States suggest:

- **Nearly 1 in 10 students was absent on an average school day**
- **Approx. 1 in 4 students was chronically absent (missed 10%+ of school days)**



Chronic absence has increased significantly since pre-pandemic levels.

- In many states, **rates have doubled** since pre-COVID.

2x

Impact of Chronic Absenteeism



Chronic absenteeism in early grades can **lead to below grade-level reading in 3rd grade, which in turn impacts high school graduation rates**



By high school, irregular **attendance is a better predictor of school dropout than test scores**



Not earning a high school diploma is **associated with increased mortality risk or lower life expectancy**

Health Barriers to Attendance and Learning

Common illnesses and injuries

Asthma

Obesity

Teen pregnancy

Vision problems

Oral health

Behavioral health issues

Family health concerns

Health Barriers to Attendance and Learning

Common illnesses and injuries	Asthma	Obesity	Teen pregnancy
Vision problems	Oral health	Behavioral health issues	Family health concerns

Health Barriers to Attendance and Learning

- **Asthma:** Asthma is the leading health-related cause of school absence; children with asthma are three times as likely as their peers to have 10 or more absences per year.
- **Dental health:** Children between 5 and 17 years miss nearly two million school days in a single year nationwide due to dental health-related problems.



[Healthy Schools Campaign: Teledentistry: Reducing Absenteeism by Supporting Student Health](#)

[Healthy Schools Campaign: An Action Plan For Reducing Absences Due to Asthma](#)

Impact of COVID-19

“The biggest reason for the rise [in chronic absenteeism] seems to be simply that students have **fallen out of the habit of going to school every day.**”

NEWSLETTER

The Morning

Where Are the Students?

Attendance at school has come to feel more optional than it did before the pandemic.



An empty classroom at Waco High School. Ilana Panich-Linsman for The New York Times

By **David Leonhardt**

Sept. 5, 2023

Impact of COVID-19

Missed at least 10% of school year:
17% in 2019 up to 28% in 2022!



EDUCATION

3 years since the pandemic wrecked attendance, kids still aren't showing up to school

March 2, 2023 · 12:00 PM ET

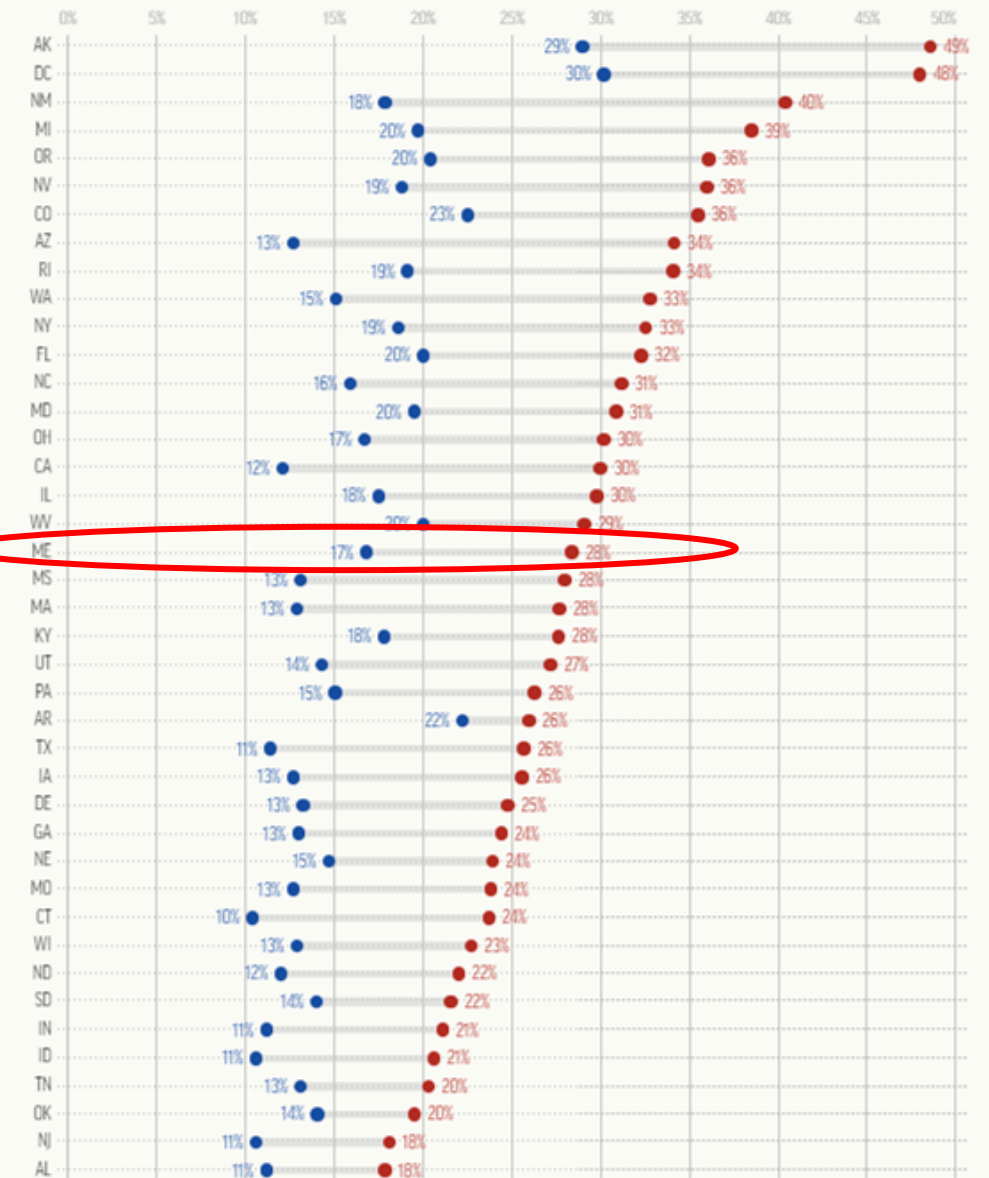
Heard on All Things Considered



Jonaki Mehta

Chronic absenteeism grew in every state

Share of students who missed at least 10% of the school year, 2018-19 versus 2021-22:



Hawaii, Montana, New Hampshire, and Wyoming were excluded because they used a different definition of chronic absenteeism. Other states were excluded due to missing data in one of the school years.

Source: State departments of education / Graphic: Sharon Larye, Thomas Dee

MAY 15, 2024

FACT SHEET: Biden-Harris Administration Announces New Actions and Resources for Increasing Student Attendance and Engagement as Part of the White House Every Day Counts Summit



*We as a country
should not accept
chronic
absenteeism as a
new normal.*

The Administration is calling on states, cities and towns, and schools to cultivate a “culture of attendance” and send a clear message that students need to be in school.

White House Brief



Administration's strategy calls for...

1. Increasing effective communication with families, including the use of tactics like texting, which may be part of creating what Attendance Works refers to as a "culture of attendance"
2. Visiting families at home to help find supportive solutions
3. Making school more relevant for students so they want to be there
4. Meeting the basic needs of students and families, including through investing in Full-Service Community Schools, which, among other features, connect families to supports such as health care, housing, and child care.

California- Absenteeism

COMMENTARY

CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM

Treat chronic absenteeism in California like a public health emergency

- District level: Superintendents should regularly communicate about the importance of attendance.
- Building level: Principals should celebrate good attendance and offer incentives.
- Classroom level: Teachers should reach out personally to families, highlighting successes and addressing issues promptly.

*By framing chronic absenteeism as a public health crisis, we open the door to more effective interventions. One crucial strategy for dealing with public health emergencies is risk communication, which helps convey urgency, provide accurate information, and mobilize stakeholders to take collaborative action. **The impact of proactive attendance management has shown to improve attendance rates threefold for chronically absent students.***



Chronic Absenteeism:

What can be done?
What is primary care
provider's role?

Chronic Absenteeism as a Vital Sign

Vital Signs for Pediatric Health: Chronic Absenteeism

A National Academy of Medicine
Discussion Paper

nam.edu/Perspectives



Pediatricians: Individual Level Interventions/Advocacy

Tier 1: Approaches for ALL youth

- At every primary care visit, **ask about number of missed school days in past month**
- **Promote school attendance** with posters, videos, handouts
- Educate yourself and staff about **appropriate and inappropriate reasons to exclude children from school**
- **Offer extended office hours** or telehealth, encourage follow-up appointments outside of school hours
- **Get to know the school nurse and mental health clinician(s)**

Just 2 days a month puts a learner on pace to be chronically absent



Pediatricians: Individual Level Interventions/Advocacy

Tiers 2 and 3: Missing 2+ Days/Month

- **Prevent, identify, and treat physical and mental health conditions** that are contributing to school absences
- **Collaborate with school professionals and community partners** to manage the health and social challenges of patients and families
- Encourage caregivers of students with excessive absences to seek a **formal school team meeting, intensive case management**
- **Serve as your patient's advocate** and medical expert

Does the student need a health plan? Or a revised plan? Or a 504? Or?



Attendance and Health



Asthma has been a leading cause of school absenteeism, accounting for about 14 million absences each school year, or one third of all days of missed instruction. Children with persistent asthma are more than three times as likely to have 10 or more absences than their peers (Attendance Works, 2015)



Children with poor oral health are nearly three times more likely than their counterparts to miss school as a result of dental pain. (Attendance Works, 2015)



Students not enrolled in an SBHC lost 3 times as much seat time as students enrolled in an SBHC. (Vancura, 2010)

Advocacy
Point- we need
to standardize
this to allow
sharing of
information –
what is your
experience?



WATERBORO ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
FIRST WEEK DOCUMENTS
SY19/20

Welcome back to school! Thank you for your efforts to return all paperwork in a timely manner. Below you will find a list of papers coming home as well as areas to sign indicating your permissions. Thank you again; we are looking forward to a fantastic school year at Waterboro Elementary School!

CHILD'S NAME: _____ GRADE: _____ TEACHER: _____

- Student Information Packet Cover Sheet:** Please return to classroom teacher with appropriate fields signed.
- Synergy Student Profile Page:** Please review information and update, if necessary. If no changes are needed, please write, "No changes needed" at the top and return to the classroom teacher.
- Annual Student Health Questionnaire:** Please fill in all fields as specifically and clearly as possible and return to the classroom teacher.
- Free & Reduced Lunch Application:** OPTIONAL: Please fill in all fields as specifically and clearly as possible, then fold and return to the classroom teacher. The teacher will submit to the office immediately, where the document will be sent to Central Office for processing. This paper should only be completed if you have NOT signed up for Free & Reduced Lunch Benefits online at myschoolapps.com.
- Pesticide Application Form:** Only needs completion if you would like notifications.
- Volunteer Form:** If you are interested in volunteering at the school or for any school events, please go to the District link and fill out the volunteer form. These can be returned to your child's teacher, the school office, or the district office. If you prefer a

AUTHORIZATION FOR RELEASE OF INFORMATION

I, the parent/guardian of the above named child consent to communication and exchange of health information between the school nurse and my child's licensed healthcare provider regarding immunizations, physical exams, medications, and current health status.

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____ Date: _____

PERMISSION TO POST TO THE RSU 57 WEBSITE (Policy JRA-E3)

The RSU 57 District website is designed to include the dynamics of all school activities and projects. In order to honor your child's work by posting schoolwork on the RSU 57 website, the school district needs a signed release from a parent or guardian giving permission to do so.

RSU 57 must have a signed release from a parent or guardian before student's work, name, or pictures can be posted. These postings may include:

- Child's name: This may include listings such as honor roll, sports teams, or special awards.
- Child's work: This may include work that will be posted with the class assignment, building assignment, and your child's first and/or last name.

PLEASE CHECK THE APPROPRIATE BOX AND SIGN THIS FORM.

- I give permission for my child's name, work, and picture to be posted on the RSU 57 website.
- I DO NOT give permission for my child's name, work, and picture to be posted on the RSU 57 website.

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____ Date: _____

Do you have permission to contact health care providers?



Welcome to
a timely
areas to
forward

WATERROD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

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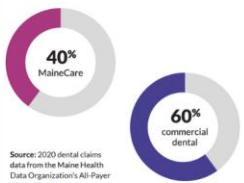
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Lack of oral health care makes it harder for Maine students to stay healthy and learn. Students can help us understand their need for care and how schools can help.



Figure 2. Percentage of Insured Children Under Age 21 with At Least One Preventive Dental Claim in 2020



Source: 2020 dental claims data from the Maine Health Data Organization's All-Payer Claims Database

"Don't have access to dental insurance. It's a gamble who will cover the costs."

"Dentists are expensive so I don't go, even if my mouth hurts"

"It's expensive to get help for the problem with my teeth. I don't want to burden my parents to pay for something when money is tight."

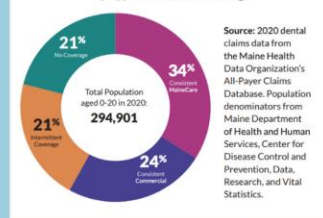
WE NEED TO ADDRESS COST & ACCESS.

"Not aware of how to access free or affordable dental care"

"School nurses should ask if I have been to a dentist and give me ideas if I haven't"

"Ask questions, listen, and show that you are really interested. Doctors can listen and talk to you about your issues."

Figure 1. Maine Children Under Age 21 by Type of Dental Coverage



Source: 2020 dental claims data from the Maine Health Data Organization's All-Payer Claims Database. Population denominators from Maine Department of Health and Human Services, Center for Disease Control and Prevention, Data, Research, and Vital Statistics.

Do you offer oral health services at school?

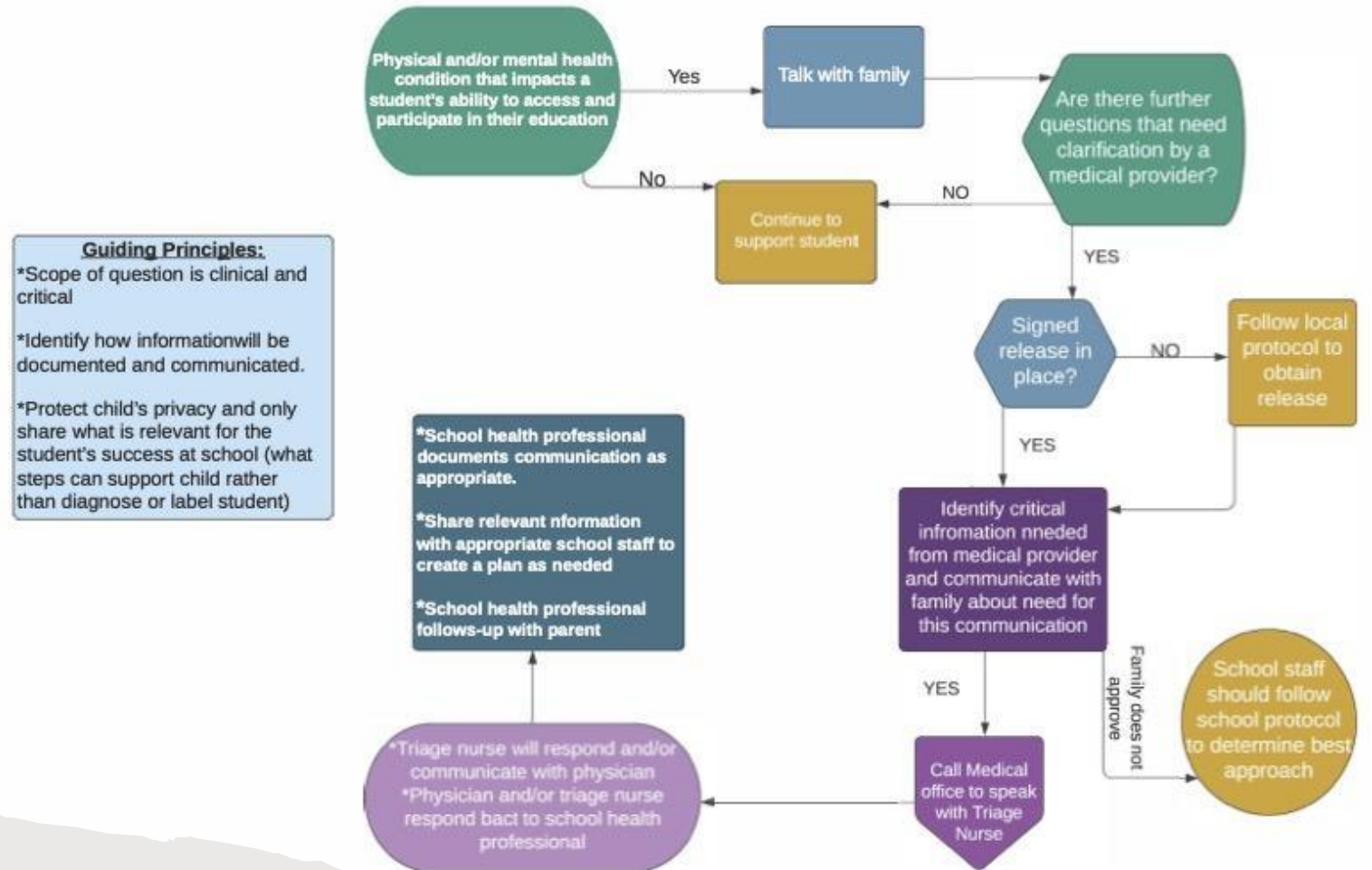
"It's expensive to get help for the problem with my teeth. I don't want to burden my parents to pay for something when money is tight."

Tooth Protectors: <https://www.toothprotectors.org/>

Mainly Teeth: <https://mainlyteeth.com/>

Do you have a relationship with local health care providers?

Standard Operating Procedure: Contact with Medical Provider



Do you share your attendance
and behavior data with your
school health advisor?

Other Wrap-Around Supports



HEALTHY SCHOOL
BUILDING -
HANDWASHING AND AIR
QUALITY



SCHOOL BASED HEALTH
SERVICES & TELEHEALTH



ORAL HEALTH SERVICES



SCHOOL BUSES &
PUBLIC TRANSIT, AND A
SAFER WALK TO SCHOOL



BREAKFAST FOR ALL



LAUNDRY AT SCHOOL

School Nurses: Preventative

Tier 1: Approaches for ALL youth

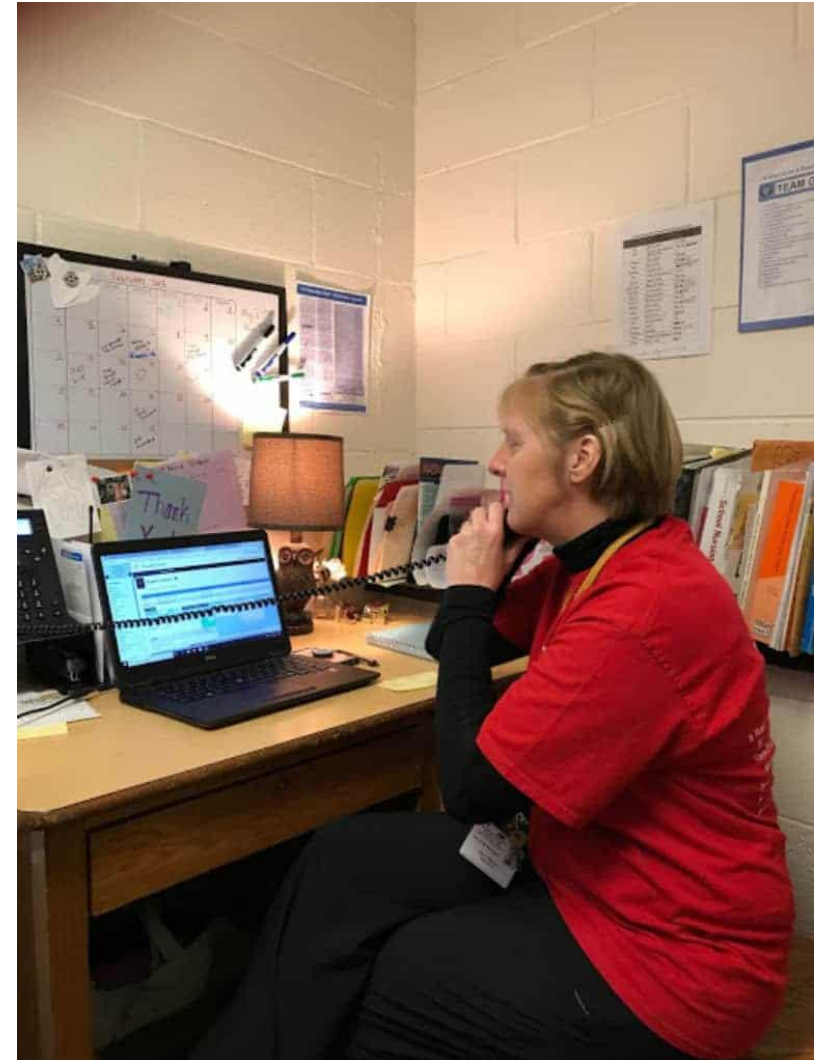
- Health Education: Teach students about the importance of regular attendance and the negative consequences of absenteeism.
- Health Promotion: Promote healthy lifestyle habits, such as regular sleep, exercise, and nutrition, which can contribute to better attendance.
- Chronic Disease Management: Work with students with chronic health conditions to develop individualized plans to manage their illnesses and minimize absences.
- Mental Health Support: Provide resources and support for students experiencing mental health challenges, which can impact attendance.
- School-based health clinics, oral health partnerships, telehealth, and vaccine clinics



School Nurses: Early Intervention

Tier 2: Early Intervention

- **Attendance Monitoring:** Track student attendance data (when & why) and identify students at risk of chronic absenteeism.
- **Review Aggregated Data:** Are there hot spots? Illness or injury trends?
- **Reach Out and Connect:** Reach out to families of absent students to express concern and offer support.
- **Collaborate with Teachers:** Work with teachers to identify academic or behavioral issues that may be contributing to absenteeism.
- **Provide Resources:** Connect families with community resources, such as healthcare providers, social services, or transportation assistance.



School Nurses: Individualized Intervention

Tier 3: Intensive Support

- Individualized Attendance Plans: Develop personalized plans to address the specific needs of chronically absent students.
- Home Visits: Conduct home visits to better understand barriers to attendance and provide support.
- Referrals: Refer students to appropriate specialists, such as counselors, social workers, or medical professionals.
- Collaboration with Community Partners: Work with community organizations to provide additional support and resources.



Small
changes
primary care
providers
can make in
practice:

1. Regularly engage your patients and families around school attendance. *Consider it a pediatric vital sign!*
2. Partner with others to mitigate health-related barriers to attendance and learning.
3. Engage with families, school and community leaders and policy makers to advocate for data, funding and programs that support school attendance.



Questions?

Resources:

Maine DOE Attendance & Dropout Prevention – <https://www.maine.gov/doe/schools/safeschools/attendance>

Maine DOE & Count ME In Attendance Toolkit - <https://www.maine.gov/doe/sites/maine.gov.doefiles/inline-files/School%20Supports%20-%20The%20Importance%20of%20Student%20Attendance%20Toolkit%20-%208.27.2024.pdf>

Handout from the toolkit: When is sick too sick for school? - <https://www.attendanceworks.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Attendance-Works-Too-Sick-for-School-060824.pdf>

Attendance Support Plan - <https://www.maine.gov/doe/sites/maine.gov.doefiles/2024-06/Student%20Supports%20-%20Attendance%20Support%20Plan%20for%20Schools%20-%206.7.2024.pdf>