

Your Question:

You asked for a general overview of chronic absenteeism and how states are addressing the issue outside of legislation.

Our Response:

Chronic absenteeism — typically defined as missing 10% or more school days for any reason in a single year — has a [negative impact](#) on student achievement, including third grade reading, middle school engagement and high school graduation. In 2020-21, over [14.7 million students](#) nationwide were considered chronically absent. While [preliminary data](#) from 11 states showed that the rate of chronic absenteeism fell from 30% to 27.8% between the 2021-22 school year to the 2022-23 school year, the proportion of students that attended schools with high rates of chronic absenteeism doubled between the 2017-18 and the 2021-22 school year.

According to a 2024 FutureEd [report](#), chronic absenteeism saw a modest recovery in the 2022-23 school year compared to the 2021-22 school year. Of the 42 states and the **District of Columbia** that have released their 2022-23 chronic absenteeism data, 30 states reported improvements in chronic absenteeism rates of five percent points or fewer.

Policymakers and leaders at the state and system levels play [key roles](#) in advancing approaches to improve attendance in schools because high levels of chronic absenteeism can overwhelm a district's capacity to respond. Attendance Works has published a [tiered approach](#) that states can adopt to help address chronic absenteeism. The report outlines five approaches states can take to help address chronic absenteeism, including:

- Publishing comparable, timely and accurate data.
- Creating and promoting messaging about the importance of attendance every day for student success and well-being.
- Building capacity to address chronic absences.
- Integrating attention to chronic absences into existing initiatives.
- Creating a tailored action plan based on current data and existing resources.

The following information provides examples of initiatives and policies to address chronic absenteeism in mid-Atlantic and northeastern states.

State Initiatives to Address Chronic Absenteeism

Connecticut: The state has established numerous [policies](#) related to chronic absenteeism. In addition to [defining chronic absenteeism](#) and establishing [absenteeism prevention and intervention plans](#) in policy, the state department, in collaboration with Gov. Ned Lamont, has established the [Learner Engagement and Attendance Program](#) (LEAP) to address chronic absenteeism. In 2021, the program was launched in response to student absenteeism and disengagement from school due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The program targeted 15 districts to provide home visits to establish trusting relationships, help return the students to more regular school attendance, and assist with placement in summer, after-school, and learning programs. Additional information on LEAP outcomes can be found in this 2023 [report](#) ([executive summary](#), [project details](#)).

Maryland: The Maryland Department of Education has identified a series of programs that help address [factors](#) related to chronic absenteeism. The programs include:

- **[Maryland School Mental Health Response Program](#):** The Maryland State Department of Education has developed the Maryland School Mental Health Response Program to provide timely consultation and support to school systems to address student and family mental health concerns. The Maryland School Mental Health Response Program consists of six components — the Maryland School Mental Health Team, an expansion of current programs, an electronic/web-based hub, research and evaluation, strategies to provide sustainability and partnerships with community mental health agencies.

This program provides school and district leadership with direct access to the Maryland School Mental Health Response Team. The program’s mission is to support, enrich, and enhance, not replace, the work of school psychologists, school counselors, pupil personnel workers, school social workers and school nurses. The team provides professional support and consultation services, develops a learning community of practice, and offers training and professional development opportunities for schools and LEAs regarding current mental and behavioral health concerns.

- **[Maryland Advancing Wellness and Resilience in Education Grant](#):** The grant program seeks to build or expand the capacity of the state education agency in partnership with state mental health agencies overseeing school-aged youth with three local education agencies. Specifically, the grant seeks to increase awareness of mental health issues among school-age youth, provide training for school personnel to detect and respond to mental health issues, and connect school-age youth and their families to needed services.
- **[Anti-Bullying Model Policy](#):** Maryland’s Model Policy to Address Bullying, Harassment, or Intimidation was updated for 2021. The policy defines terms, procedures, interventions and supports, prevention and educational programs, and professional learning.

New Jersey: The New Jersey Department of Education developed a [resource](#) in 2023 to provide districts with guidance on responding to chronic absenteeism. The guidance incorporates New Jersey-specific rules, regulations, and a span of available resources. This resource provides a step-by-step guide that begins with identifying key district members, collecting and analyzing actionable data, and supports the district in ultimately installing and operating a tiered model to address student absenteeism and encourage regular attendance.

Rhode Island: Since a lack of real-time data on chronic absenteeism can [hamper](#) responses to absenteeism, Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) and the Governor’s Innovation Office developed a [live dashboard](#) that shows the number of students who are chronically absent or on track to be chronically absent. This tool allows schools to track trends in attendance and make interventions based on the data. Through their efforts, they have created:

- **Attendance Incentives:** The department works with businesses to provide incentives for students and schools to have good attendance at the end of the school year.
- **Data Dashboards:** The [attendance dashboard](#) within RIDE’s Data Center uses students’ home addresses to present chronic absenteeism on maps based on census tracts and block groups. RIDE has also mapped demographic information by census tract and block group to see whether certain characteristics of the community may be impacting student attendance.

- **Helpful Documents:** The department has provides resources from the Chronic Absenteeism Working Group [kick-off](#), a [menu of commitments](#) for the Attendance Matters RI effort, and information on what is known about chronic absenteeism in Rhode Island ([English](#), [Spanish](#), [Portuguese](#)).
- **Student and School Spotlights:** Besides the resources, the department highlights four students and their school's efforts to improve student attendance.

Virginia: The state superintendent and governor convened a [Chronic Absenteeism Task Force](#), which is charged with developing resources and distributing action plans for districts to address record-high student absenteeism. The task force is part of the state's [All In VA](#) initiative.

Additionally, the state superintendent has provided an [ActionKit for Improving Attendance](#), a roadmap designed for school districts to review and expand their district's attendance planning. Superintendents and school leaders can use this four-step roadmap to design customized attendance strategies that meet their school and division needs. The State Department of Education also provides information on forming attendance teams at the district level, a multi-tiered approach for improving attendance, and additional resources from outside organizations and other states.

Additional Resources

- [Turning Back the Tide: The Critical Role of States In Reducing Chronic Absenteeism](#) (ECS blog post)
- [Addressing Chronic Absenteeism](#) (Attendance Works)
- [State Strategies for Fighting Student Chronic Absenteeism](#) (Attendance Works)
- [Legislative Tracking: 2024 Student-Absenteeism Bills](#) (FutureEd)
- [Attendance Policies and Practices 50-State Scan](#) (Attendance Works)
- [Attendance Works Research and Reports](#)