



# CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM IN NEVADA:

## PART I – TRENDS, FACTORS, AND POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

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## INTRODUCTION

Chronic absenteeism has become a significant concern for school districts nationwide, especially as schools attempt to navigate increased educational needs post-COVID. An estimated 23 percent of students in the United States were chronically absent in the 2023-24 school year, an 8 percent increase from 2018-19 ([DiMarco, 2025](#)). The chronic absenteeism rates in Nevada are even greater than the national average, at 25.6 percent. Chronic absenteeism's complex and interconnected nature means that meaningful solutions are best achieved when school administrators, teachers, lawmakers, parents and guardians, and students work together.



**An estimated 23 percent of students in the United States were chronically absent in the 2023-24 school year. Nevada's rate is 25.6 percent.**



## BACKGROUND

A student is deemed chronically absent when they miss ten percent or more of the school year, or 18 days during a typical 180-day school year, for any reason ([Attendance Works, 2016](#)). Chronic absenteeism does not distinguish between excused and unexcused absences.

Absenteeism differs from “truancy,” which is used solely to describe unexcused absences. Each state has its own guidelines to determine when a student is truant and how to apply resulting repercussions ([Rosales, 2024](#)). In Nevada, a student is truant when they miss a day of school without an approved excuse ([Nevada Revised Statutes \(NRS\) 392.130\(1\)](#)). Approved absence excuses include:

- A child’s physical or mental inability to attend school;
- Observance of a religious holiday;
- A medical emergency concerning a member of his or her family;
- Compliance with a court order;
- A funeral or similar event of grieving;
- A family emergency; and
- Temporary homelessness ([NRS 392.130](#)).

However, school administrators cannot excuse an absence even for an approved reason if the student has already missed 10 percent of the school year ([NRS 392.130\(2\)](#)).

A student with three or more unexcused absences in one school year is considered habitually truant, and the school may impose fines or community service, suspend the student’s driver’s license, and involve juvenile courts ([The Defenders, n.d.](#)). Parents and guardians could also face misdemeanor charges, fines, and possible jail time for not ensuring their kids attend school ([The Defenders, n.d.](#)). Often, truancy disproportionately impacts students from minority groups who face barriers to getting absences excused, and the repercussions could further decrease student attendance ([McNeely et al., 2021](#)). These punitive approaches do not apply to excused absences, but there are important educational implications for students who miss a significant amount of school for any reason.



## IMPACTS OF CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM

Chronically absent students miss critical classroom instruction and content. Chronic absenteeism is linked to lower literacy skills, math scores, and graduation rates ([National Assessment Governing Board, n.d.](#); [Oregon Department of Education, n.d.](#); [DeFlich, n.d.](#)). Consistently missing classroom instruction leads to the “iceberg problem,” which explains how unlearned skills compound each year the child advances to a new grade level until, eventually, the student has an “iceberg” of unfinished learning beneath the surface ([New Classrooms, 2019](#)). This phenomenon is especially concerning in cumulative subjects like math, where only 28 percent of students nationwide are considered proficient by grade 8 ([The Nation’s Report Card, n.d.](#)). Each grade level becomes increasingly complex if a student misses foundational math skills year over year. Students who are chronically absent for just one year between grades 8 and 12 are seven times more likely to drop out of high school ([NCEO, 2018](#)). Regular attendance promotes motivation toward educational aspirations, and chronically absent students are less likely to pursue post-secondary education ([Dräger et al., 2024](#); [Ansari et al., 2020](#)). Chronic absenteeism predicts school failure better than test scores. ([Paisner et al., 2024](#)).

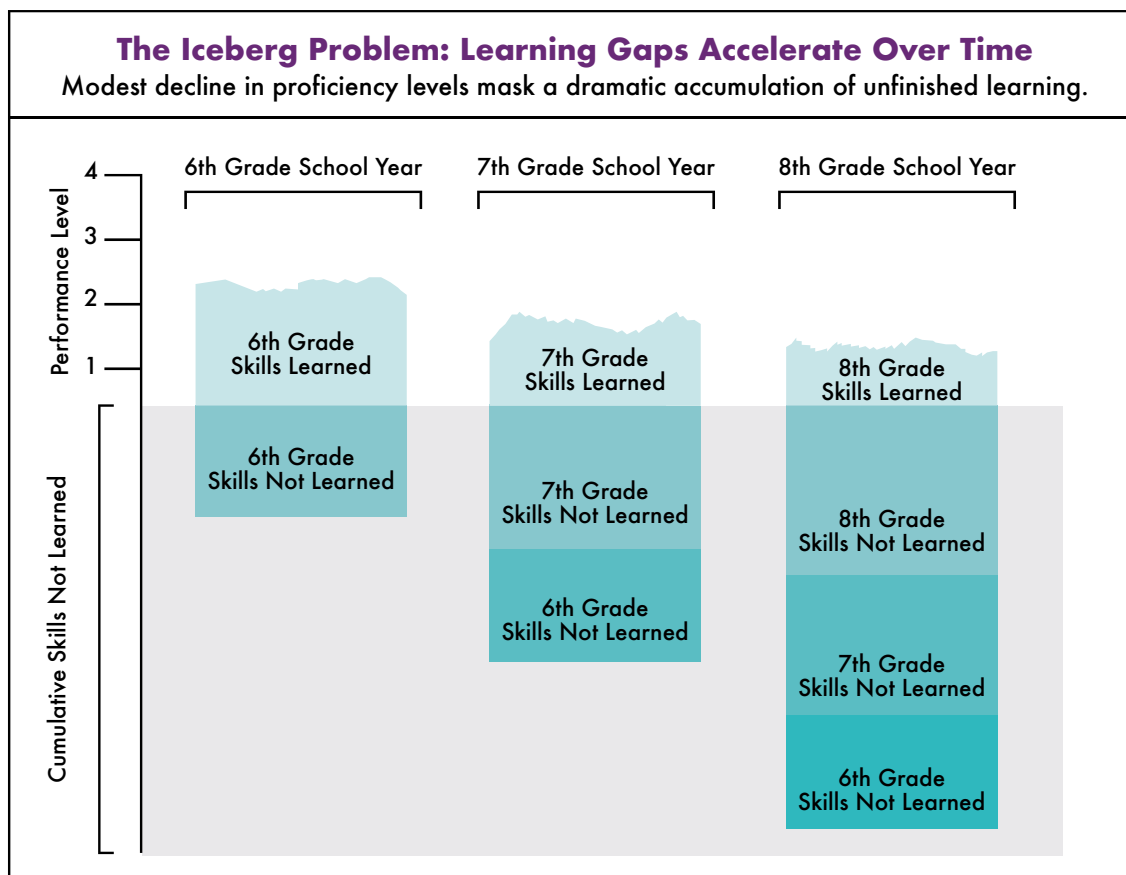
Attending school regularly promotes the student’s sense of belonging, increasing motivation, academic achievement, and socioemotional learning while reducing disruptive behaviors ([Korpershoek et al., 2019](#)). However, when students are chronically absent at the beginning of the school year, it can have an adverse effect on the feeling of community and belonging in the classroom. **More students are likely to be chronically absent by the end of the year if they had chronically absent classmates at the beginning of the year** ([Gottfried et al., 2020](#); [Kirksey, 2024](#)).

Chronically absent students impact the attention and flow of the classroom as teachers attempt to help the missing students catch up, thus affecting students who regularly attend school ([Attendance Works, n.d.](#)). Learning disruptions impact everyone in the classroom, not just those who were absent.



**Students who are chronically absent for just one year between grades 8 and 12 are seven times more likely to drop out of high school.**





Source: Joel Rose. *The Iceberg Problem: Why Grade Level Materials Alone Won't Solve Our Problems* (2022).

Beyond the classroom, chronic absenteeism and unfinished learning can lead to many other lasting, harmful outcomes for students. Education access is considered one of the main social determinants of health, which are “non-medical factors that influence health outcomes” ([World Health Organization, 2025](#)). Higher education levels are connected to longer life expectancy and a decreased risk of disease ([U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, n.d.](#)). Chronically absent students are more likely to experience economic hardship, including unemployment, and require government assistance later in life ([Ansari et al., 2020](#)). Students without a high school diploma have more health issues than adults, likely due to working in lower-paying jobs, limiting their ability to pay for quality health insurance, doctor’s visits, or medications ([Allison et al., 2019](#)).

Additionally, individuals working part-time or in lower-paying jobs often feel less satisfied and supported in their positions. This can lead to unhealthy coping skills and risky behaviors that negatively impact overall health, as well as depression or other mental health concerns ([Allison et al., 2019](#)). Educational attainment is also linked to criminal behavior, with high school graduation significantly related to lower incarceration rates ([Lochner & Moretti, 2001](#)). Finally, chronically absent students are less likely to vote and be civically engaged in their communities, “affecting the overall social fabric of a nation” ([Ansari et al., 2020](#); [Misha, 2024, para. 4](#)).

# CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

Given chronic absenteeism's academic, emotional, and social impact, it is also essential to understand many of the factors that increase the probability of a student missing large amounts of class.

## *Race and Ethnicity*

Chronic absenteeism disproportionately impacts racially diverse students, except for Asian students, who saw the lowest rates of absenteeism in 2022-23 ([U.S. Department of Education, 2025](#)). Notably, almost 50 percent of Native American and Pacific Islander students in the nation were chronically absent in 2022-23 ([U.S. Department of Education, 2025](#)).

## *Economic Disadvantages*

Students living in poverty are "two to three times more likely to be chronically absent—and face the most harm because their community lacks the resources to make up for the lost learning in school" ([Attendance Works, n.d.](#)). Schools in high-poverty areas consistently experience higher levels of chronic absenteeism ([Attendance Works, 2016](#)).

## *Food Insecurity*

Students from food-secure households were 57 percent less likely to be absent from school than those from food-insecure households ([Tamiru & Belachew, 2017](#)). Food insecurity can impact cognitive development and lead to various health issues, which contribute to chronic absenteeism ([Tamiru & Belachew, 2017](#)).

## *Disabilities*

The U.S. Department of Education reports that 36 percent of students with disabilities were chronically absent in 2022-23 ([2025](#)).

## *School Safety*

Students who self-report a fear of bullying, harassment, and violence at school are significantly more likely to be chronically absent. More students in elementary school report school safety fears compared to middle and high schoolers ([Panorama Education, n.d.](#); [DeFlitch, n.d.](#)).

## *Transience/Homelessness*

Unhoused youth are chronically absent at a rate that is double that of housed youth. Additionally, students who change schools one or more times during a school year are four times more likely to be chronically absent than students who do not change schools ([National Center for Homeless Education, 2017](#)).

## *Sexual Minority Youth*

Compared to heterosexual students, sexual minority students report higher rates of chronic absenteeism and mental health concerns such as anxiety and depression, which contribute to chronic absenteeism because of school-based fear ([Burton et al., 2014](#)).

## *Post-Pandemic Attitudes*

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, school leaders observed a noticeable change in how families viewed school attendance ([Diliberti et al., 2024](#)). Many educators have attributed this shift to a perceived lack of urgency among families, with some expressing concern that parents no longer prioritize consistent school attendance for their children, particularly because digital tools introduced during remote learning allow students to catch up on missed work outside the classroom ([Diliberti et al., 2024](#)). This sentiment is echoed in parent survey data, which show that less than half (47 percent) of parents whose children were chronically absent expressed worry about those absences ([Saavedra et al., 2024](#)).

COVID-19 has also influenced caregivers' responses to illness. Throughout the pandemic, caregivers were appropriately told not to send their students to school if they showed any symptoms of sickness. However, students who now may experience noncontagious symptoms like an anxiety-induced stomachache or a runny nose because of allergies are not being sent to school, further contributing to chronic absenteeism rates ([DeMaria et al., 2023](#)).

### Boredom

A recent survey shows that 68 percent of teenagers self-reported being bored at school to some extent ([Ritter, 2024](#)). Boredom was the third highest reason for missing class, behind illness and medical appointments ([Ritter, 2024](#)). When the teens were asked about their beliefs about chronic absenteeism, they pointed to “school being boring (43 percent), too stressful (43 percent), and pointless (42 percent)” ([Ritter, 2024](#)).

### Sense of Belonging

A sense of belonging at school develops when a student feels valued and safe, which increases motivation, focus, and engagement ([Bowen, 2021](#)). In contrast with boredom and isolation, students who feel a sense of belonging perform better academically and report better physical health outcomes, leading to fewer absences due to doctors’ appointments ([Smith et al., 2024](#)). Students who report positive school experiences “are 25 percent less likely to be chronically absent than students who dislike their school experiences” ([Transcend, 2024](#)).

### Teacher Absenteeism

Studies show that teacher absenteeism, often caused by burnout and other mental health concerns, can contribute to student chronic absenteeism rates ([Lang et al., 2024](#); [Knoster, 2016](#); [Black et al., 2014](#)). Additionally, teachers may miss school days due to illness, professional development opportunities, or other job-related stressors such as overcrowded classrooms and a lack of support ([Red Rover, 2023](#); [Frontline Education, 2016](#)). Teacher shortages, including difficulties with hiring and retention, lead to higher rates of student absenteeism ([Diliberti et al., 2024](#)). Students face confusion when classroom instruction is disrupted and may lose motivation to remain engaged without teacher consistency ([Red Rover, 2023](#)). A school leader in a “large urban district with more than 30 percent of students chronically absent noted that ‘sometimes kids do not come to school because there has been a sub in the room all year and it feels awful’” ([Diliberti et al., 2024, p. 8](#)).

School leaders can support teachers by ensuring that buildings are clean, providing frequent, short breaks throughout the school year, and creating a culture of trust between administrators and teachers ([Frontline Education, 2016](#)). When teachers are consistently in the classroom building relationships with their students, they establish a sense of belonging for each student and decrease student absences.



**In Nevada, the average teacher daily attendance has dropped from 85.7 percent in 2021-22 to 76.7 percent in 2023-24 (NDE, 2024).**



## CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM FACTORS AS LAYERS

Students may be more likely to miss school when dealing with several contributing factors of chronic absenteeism, creating a layered impact simultaneously. For example, a student of color is more likely to experience bullying and harassment, leading to poor mental health and discouraging the student from attending school. Students of color are also more likely to experience poverty, which could mean these students need to watch younger siblings while their parent(s) or guardian(s) work or miss school to work themselves. Students living below the poverty level are at a greater risk of developing health issues and may not get the medical attention they need, resulting in more school days missed ([American Psychological Association, 2024](#)). When students struggling with any of these factors do not get their absences excused, they may be subjected to more punitive approaches, which can further exacerbate the issue and lead to mistrust of school administrators or feelings of being misunderstood by the school system ([Blad, 2023](#)). Despite clear trends and patterns about which students are more at risk for chronic absenteeism, each student will also experience their own unique combination of factors that should be considered when creating school policies surrounding absences.

It can be challenging to determine the causes of chronic absenteeism because of the way these factors are related. For example, the U.S. Department of Education found that English Learners (EL) are “20 percent more likely to experience chronic absenteeism compared to non-English learners” ([U.S. Department of Education, 2025](#)). However, other studies show that when adjusted for other factors, such as poverty and race, EL alone did not contribute to chronic absenteeism rates ([Santibañez et al., 2024](#)). Instead of focusing on discovering the cause of absenteeism, it can be helpful to understand the combination of factors that contribute to a student missing class.



**In Nevada, less than 5 percent of the over 62,000 EL students are identified as proficient, which could lead to absenteeism concerns if these students feel confused, isolated, misunderstood, or frustrated in class (NDE, 2024).**

## NATIONAL CONTEXT

It is estimated that during the 2023-24 school year, 23 percent of students nationwide were chronically absent ([DiMarco, 2025](#)). This is down 5 percent from the height of the pandemic, but still up 8 percent from the 2018-19 school year ([DiMarco, 2025](#)). In 2023-24, 61 percent of schools had extreme (over 30 percent) or high (20-29.9 percent) chronic absence ([Attendance Works, 2025](#)). This is down from 65 percent during the pandemic, but significantly higher than the 28 percent of schools experiencing extreme or high chronic absence during the 2017-18 school year ([Attendance Works, 2025](#)). Overall, chronic absenteeism nationwide is trending down, but it still has further to go before reaching pre-pandemic levels. However, reaching pre-pandemic levels alone should not be the ultimate goal. Former U.S. Secretary of Education, Miguel Cardona, shared, “The bare minimum that we aspire to is to get back to what it was in 2019. 2019 was not anything to write home about. Our kids deserve better” ([Stanford, 2024](#)).

### *National Approaches to Addressing Chronic Absenteeism*

Most policies and legislation concerning chronic absenteeism come from individual states. School districts around the nation are trying various approaches to support student attendance. Some of the most popular include:

- Early warning systems to flag students at risk for chronic absenteeism;
- Home visiting programs;
- Teachers calling students’ homes; and
- Hiring staff focused on absenteeism ([Diliberti et al., 2024](#)).

Community partnerships are another common choice nationwide to address absenteeism. Developing strong relationships with community members and organizations that provide student resources and support can help reduce absenteeism rates, especially when schools designate a school-based coordinator to manage these partnerships

([Kelleher & Jordan, 2024](#)). Having real-time tools and databases to track and publicly share attendance statistics has also fostered a strong sense of community, belonging, and ownership that gets everyone involved ([Peetz, 2024](#)).

Federal funding can provide schools with needed resources to support and implement their efforts to fight absenteeism. For example, Title I funding under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) is given to schools with high numbers of low-income students, a well-established risk factor for chronic absenteeism ([Jordan, 2018](#)). The ESSA Title II provides funding for teacher professional development and specifically mentions chronic absenteeism as a qualified topic of study ([Jordan, 2018](#)). During the pandemic, COVID-19 relief funds were distributed to schools nationwide that could target chronic absenteeism by developing tiered support systems, data tracking systems and dashboards, and early warning systems ([Attendance Works, 2022](#)). Since pandemic-related federal funds face a fiscal cliff, it is time to consider other funding sources to tackle this issue.



## NEVADA CONTEXT

Before COVID-19, the Nevada Department of Education (NDE) reported an 18.8 percent chronic absenteeism rate for the 2018-19 school year across all students. This rate reached its peak at 36 percent in 2021-22. Since then, Nevada has followed the national trend in reporting a decrease in absenteeism, with a 25.6 percent rate in 2023-24, but not as low as pre-pandemic levels ([NDE, 2024](#)).

One alarming trend in Nevada is the rate of chronic absenteeism among American Indian and Alaskan Native (AI/AN) students. Almost one-quarter of AI/AN students were chronically absent in 2018-19, which grew to 47.2 percent in 2021-22, and now sits at 49.4 percent in 2023-24 ([NDE, 2024](#)). These students were the only ethnicity with increased absenteeism rates during the 2023-24 school year.

According to a recent report by [Applied Analysis](#), if current chronic absenteeism rates persist, Southern Nevada could face a lifetime cost of \$610 million for the Class of 2025 alone, with cumulative costs for the next 20 graduating classes in CCSD reaching an estimated \$14.4 billion by 2044. However, reducing absenteeism to pre-COVID levels by 2027 through targeted interventions could save \$4.7 billion in lifetime costs, including \$179.6 million in tax revenue and program cost savings, and generate \$4.5 billion in economic benefits, mitigating broader social and unquantifiable losses.

### *Nevada Approaches to Addressing Chronic Absenteeism*

The NDE has published a webpage dedicated to chronic absenteeism with information, resources, and ideas for school districts and families addressing absenteeism rates. Districts and schools are encouraged to regularly track attendance data, use a Multi-Tiered System of Supports, and integrate mental and physical health care interventions to address common causes of absenteeism ([NDE, 2023](#)). Families could prioritize student attendance by scheduling appointments after school whenever possible and creating backup plans for transportation or illness in advance ([NDE, 2023](#)). The NDE also manages the Nevada Accountability Portal, which publishes data every

year to promote transparency on a variety of topics that can influence chronic absenteeism, such as average class size and student-teacher ratios, transiency/student mobility, credit deficiency, and safety metrics ([NDE, 2024](#)).

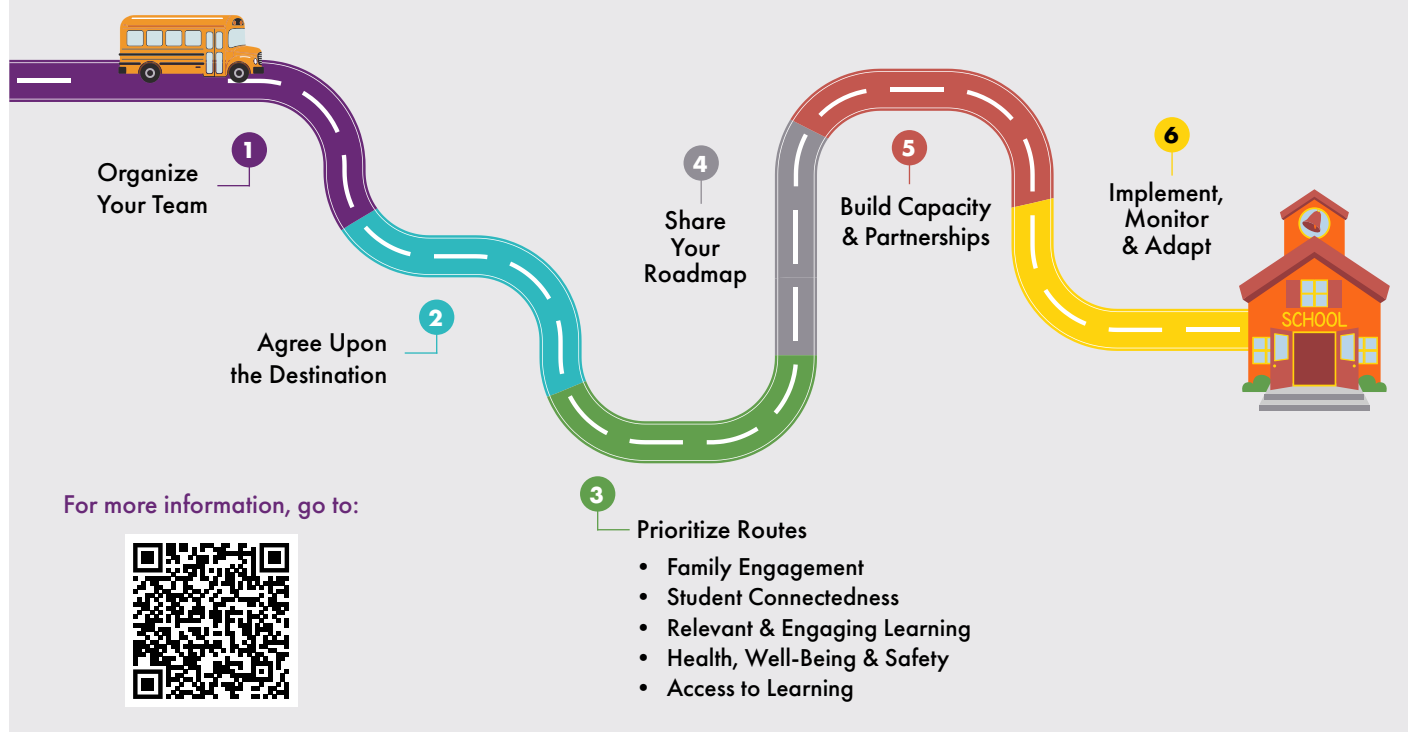
### *50 in 5 Commitment*

In 2024, under the direction of its Superintendent of Public Instruction, Nevada committed to reducing chronic absenteeism by 50 percent in five years ([Garcia, 2024](#)). [The challenge](#), crafted by Attendance Works, includes a blueprint each state can use to coordinate its absenteeism efforts and is outlined in the following six steps:

1. Organize your team;
2. Agree upon the destination;
3. Prioritize routes (family engagement; student connectedness; relevant and engaging learning; health, well-being, and safety; and access to learning);
4. Share your roadmap;
5. Build capacity and partnerships; and
6. Implement, monitor, and adapt ([Attendance Works, n.d.](#)).



## The 50% Challenge - Craft Your Engagement & Attendance State Road Map



School districts around the state have worked tirelessly to develop and implement meaningful ways to address absenteeism to reach the 50 percent in five years goal. In Part III of this briefing series, we share innovative practices from across Nevada’s school districts to reduce absenteeism. For example, the Washoe County School District joined the nonprofit organization Strengthen Our Community in an informational meeting to share initiatives and absenteeism data ([Ramos, 2024](#)). Carson City Mayor Lori Bagwell created the “Mayor’s Attendance Hall of Fame,” bringing excitement and recognition to good attendance, which has helped lower absenteeism rates in the Carson City School District ([Nevada Appeal, 2025](#)). Moreover, Clark County School District partnered with the Harmony Academy at National University to develop a whole-community approach to addressing absenteeism by focusing on the following three main concepts:

1. Using the Harmony Academy curriculum to build belonging and help students feel engaged with their learning;

2. Promoting teacher development at no cost to teachers, “equipping them with tools needed to build positive relationships with their students and among the faculty—and to create an environment where every child feels valued” ([Diaz, 2024](#)); and
3. Using family engagement centers throughout the county to build trust with parents and guardians ([National University, 2024](#); [Diaz, 2024](#)).

CareSource, a government-sponsored healthcare nonprofit, announced they are committing \$300,000 to Communities in Schools of Nevada, which provides wraparound services to Nevada students to address absenteeism in Title I schools ([CareSource Nevada, 2025](#)). These wraparound services include mental health resources, food, and school supplies ([CareSource Nevada, 2025](#)). A holistic approach to addressing absenteeism, with the support of community members, is one of the best ways to ensure student success, as “[t]he social, emotional, and academic components of learning are inextricably linked” ([National University, 2024](#)).

# POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

Effective policy responses to chronic absenteeism should be grounded in data, aligned with student and family needs, and informed by evidence-based strategies. There are a myriad of approaches currently being evaluated and pursued nationally. However, it is important to note that chronic absenteeism is heavily tied to familial contexts, community resources, individual student factors, and school/district capacities, so they must all be prioritized in the strategy. The following considerations provide options for actionable steps to help reduce chronic absenteeism and promote student well-being alongside academic success:



1. **Report Chronic Absenteeism Rates by Grade Level:** Research suggests that while chronic absenteeism is usually considered an issue for high school students, kindergartners have exceptionally high rates of absenteeism ([DiMarco, 2025](#)). Reporting chronic absenteeism rates by grade level will allow school districts to develop targeted strategies ([DiMarco, 2025](#)). If possible, tracking absenteeism using additional demographics, such as socioeconomic status, modes of learning, disabilities, and foster care or homelessness, can also bring awareness and support more specific interventions ([Attendance Works, 2023](#)).
2. **Report Chronic Absenteeism Data Monthly:** Report absenteeism data throughout the school year instead of just at the end, when it is already too late to implement reduction strategies for that year ([DiMarco, 2025](#)).
3. **Develop a Reporting System:** Develop a transparent system for reporting and accountability. This system could allow stakeholders to track the effectiveness of initiatives to reduce absenteeism and assess the return on investment for interventions. This would also help link changes in students and family support services to measurable performance outcomes.
4. **Engage and Fund Community Partnerships:** Several organizations, such as Communities in Schools, are dedicated to keeping students in school and supporting them along the way. Properly engaging with these organizations and adequately funding them could increase their presence in Nevada schools.
5. **Implement Student Voice Practices:** Increase student involvement when developing absenteeism initiatives and incentives, creating ownership and a sense of belonging ([DeMaria et al., 2023](#)).
6. **Provide Families with Comprehensive Learning Resources:** Have updated, easy-to-access, and user-friendly websites for parents and guardians (in English and Spanish at a minimum) with information about chronic absenteeism and the importance of school attendance.
7. **Standardize Terminology:** Standardize terminology and language across policies and communications to ensure clarity and avoid confusion caused by interchangeable terms or colloquialisms.

8. **Utilize Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Tackling Chronic Absenteeism:** Learn how AI can help support absenteeism initiatives. For example, Panorama’s generative AI tools can create early-warning systems to identify at-risk students, draft attendance policies, analyze specific student data and suggest personalized intervention strategies, and write announcements or letters to families and translate those communications to other languages ([Benson & Litzinger, 2025](#)).
9. **Provide Early Interventions and Comprehensive Health Services:** Expanding health care services in schools, such as “screenings, immunizations, and nursing,” can prevent sickness and ensure that low-income students receive care, reducing absences ([Jordan, 2023](#)).
10. **Address Transportation Barriers:** Finding ways to expand bus services or other transportation options ensures that each student can get to class even if their parents, guardians, family members, or friends cannot drive them to school ([Jordan, 2023](#)).
11. **Increase Student Engagement by Expanding Extra-Curricular Offerings:** Introducing or expanding after-school programs and activities has been shown to increase student excitement and connection to school by allowing students the chance to explore their interests, build friendships, and provide mentorship with supportive adults, all of which promote attendance ([Afterschool Alliance, 2025](#)).
12. **Use the Nevada Portrait of a Learner:** Utilize the [Portrait of a Learner](#) as a foundation to create enriching school environments, support teachers, and empower students to feel ownership and purpose in their learning. Additionally, this framework can facilitate meaningful connections through collaboration and communication, help students recognize how their learning can impact their future and the well-being of their community, and develop character traits that allow them to thrive.
13. **Support Student Mental Health:** Utilizing crisis response and other mental health apps, providing calming school spaces (also known as “zen dens”), and prioritizing teacher mental health will help students navigate anxiety, depression, and other mental health concerns that contribute to chronic absenteeism ([NDE & Nevada Department of Public Safety, n.d.](#); [Sparks, 2022](#); [PAR, 2024](#); [Matlach & Denton, n.d.](#)).



## CONCLUSION

Chronic absenteeism is not a standalone issue—it is both a symptom and a cause of deeper academic and societal challenges. This brief explores the multifaceted nature of chronic absenteeism, from its definitions and long-term consequences to the key contributing factors affecting students in Nevada and across the nation. Addressing this issue requires a coordinated approach recognizing students' layered realities and investing in systemic reform and personalized student support.

This brief is the first in a three-part series tackling chronic absenteeism. The second brief will explore one of the most pressing and interconnected factors: student mental health. Finally, the third brief will highlight innovative practices across Nevada that promise to reduce absenteeism and foster student success.



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The Kenny Guinn Center for Policy Priorities is a nonprofit, nonpartisan policy research center addressing key challenges faced by policymakers and all Nevadans.

Our staff researchers, together with academic partners and independent experts across the state, tackle policy issues that range from taxation to water use, healthcare to education, and everything in between. We identify and analyze the complex problems we face as a state and inform decision-makers about actionable, data-driven, and effective policy solutions.

We invite you to join us in creating a brighter future for the Silver State by supporting our mission, signing up for our newsletter, or getting in contact.

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## OUR VISION

Identify and advance sound policies and actionable solutions that support a thriving and prosperous Nevada.



## OUR MISSION

Advancing evidence-based policy solutions for Nevada through research, public engagement, and partnerships.