

# ATTENDANCE MATTERS

Strive for 5: Attend School All Week!



Students who miss less than 10% of school have increased rates of reading proficiency by 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, middle school achievement, and high school graduation.

## Chronic absenteeism is a critical issue affecting student success and school performance.

Chronic absenteeism is defined as missing 10% or more of the school year for any reason—including excused, unexcused, or disciplinary absences. Creating a routine of attending school begins in kindergarten and is linked to higher academic achievement, graduation rates, and career success. Students who are chronically absent miss valuable instructional time, fall behind academically, and often struggle to stay connected to their peers and school community. Absenteeism can stem from a range of factors, including health issues, transportation challenges, mental health needs, school climate concerns, or family responsibilities. Addressing chronic absenteeism requires a comprehensive approach that engages families, schools, and communities in supporting students' physical, emotional, and academic well-being.

## Factors Contributing to Chronic Absence

### Myths

- Absences are only a problem if they are unexcused.
- Sporadic vs. Consecutive absences aren't a problem.
- Attendance only matters in the older grades.

### Barriers

- Lack of access to health/dental care
- Transportation
- Community & family stress
- No safe path to school
- Housing insecurity

### Aversion

- Child struggling academically or socially
- Bullying
- Ineffective school discipline
- Parents had negative school experience
- Undiagnosed disability

### Disengagement

- Lack of engaging or relevant instruction
- No meaningful relationships with adults in school
- Vulnerable to being with peers out of school vs. in school
- Poor school climate

## Fast Facts



### Breakfast Matters

Providing students with breakfast is associated with lower tardy rates, fewer disciplinary office referrals, and improved attendance rates.



### Family Matters

Family obligations (such as caring for siblings or other family members) can prevent students from attending school.



### Connection Matters

Students who feel connected with teachers and their peers exhibit better attendance and lower dropout rates.

# Alternatives to Suspension

**Exclusionary discipline practices, such as out-of-school suspension, often result in students missing valuable instructional time and becoming disengaged from school, which contributes to chronic absenteeism.**

Schools can use practices that focus on healing to reduce absenteeism by creating a supportive and positive school climate. Implementing alternatives to suspension, such as in-school suspension with academic and behavioral supports, behavior intervention plans, and tiered discipline systems, allows schools to address student behavior without removing students from the learning environment. Approaches such as peer mediation, conflict resolution discussions, and reentry meetings after absences or disciplinary incidents give students a voice, promote mutual respect, and reinforce the idea that school is a safe and caring place.

These approaches emphasize accountability and support, helping students correct behavior while staying connected to their education and their peers. Keeping students in school through supportive interventions promotes better academic outcomes and encourages students to remain present, engaged, and invested in their school community.

## Tiers of Support

### Tier 3: Intensive Intervention

*Absent > 20% school days  
or 4-5 days per month*

- Specialized supports
- Home visits
- Mentor daily check-in with student
- Notifications of consequences for future absences



### Tier 2: Early Intervention

*Absent > 10% school days  
or 2-3 days per month*

- Meeting with family about absences
- Attendance contract
- Intervention plan to address barriers
- Intervention plan to provide service coordination
- Physical/mental health supports



### Tier 1: Whole School Prevention

*Absent > 5% school days  
or 1-2 days per month*

- Wellness checks - outreach to students and families
- Discuss impact of absences on grades
- Identify barriers
- Develop robust preventions
- Daily check-in with adult (mentor)



### Foundational Supports

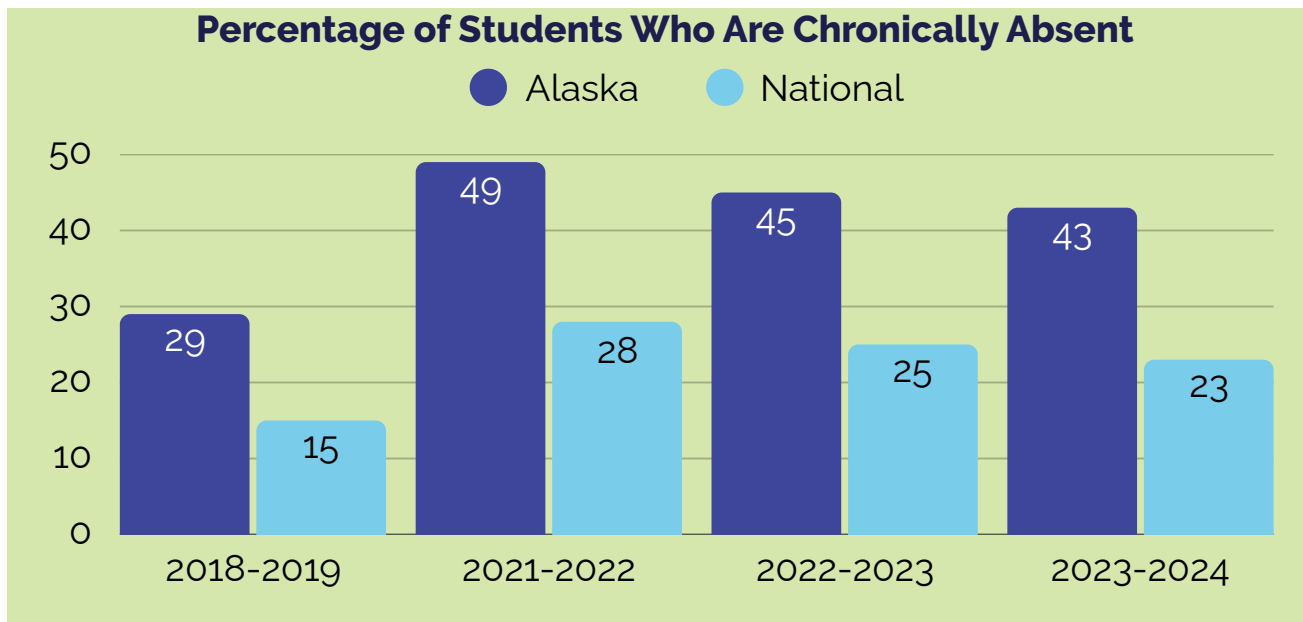
- Recognize good attendance
- Focus on improving school culture
- Communicate attendance expectations clearly
- Monitor and document daily class attendance
- Student and parent engagement



# Alaska and National Data

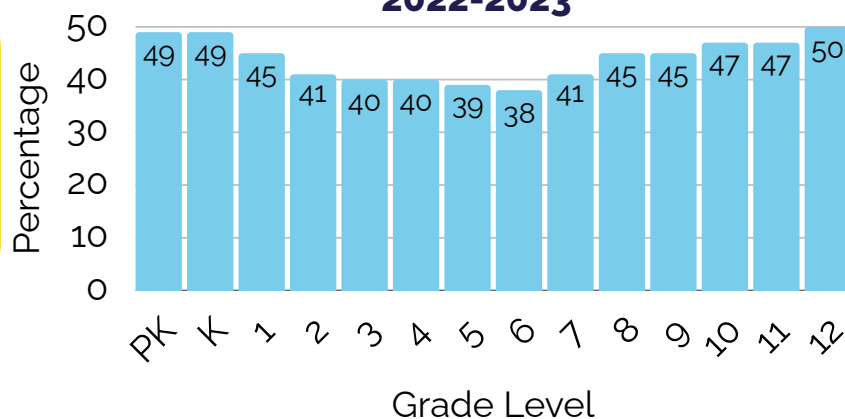
## National and Alaska Absenteeism Rates

Many states have been closely tracking absenteeism rates among students since the COVID-19 impact. See the chart below for national rates compared to youth in Alaska:



During the 2021-2022 school year, 95% of elementary schools, 97% of middle schools and 83% of high schools had extreme chronic absence.

## Alaska Chronic Absentee Rate by Grade Level 2022-2023



The state of Alaska is implementing several initiatives to address the chronic absence rates among their students. The state has created a toolkit for districts, schools, and communities to address absenteeism rates. This toolkit includes resources on self-assessment, attendance incentives and certificates, parent communication, parent and community engagement, and multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) planning around absenteeism.

Along with this toolkit, Alaska's Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) provides several attendance resources for schools, including an [attendance awareness exercise](#) for elementary students, [an attendance success plan](#) for secondary schools, and resources for families to [build positive attendance habits](#).





[Alaska Department of Education and Early Development](#)

# Attendance and the Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child Model

The Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child components can support attendance in your school.

## Family & Community Engagement

Families are more likely to support regular school attendance when they feel welcomed and see that school staff genuinely care about their child's presence and success. Schools can promote consistent attendance by:

-  Cultivate a sense of belonging for students and families through meaningful connection.
-  Address barriers to attendance, such as lack of transportation or family obligations, in partnership with families.
-  Collaborate with local organizations to address factors that affect attendance (e.g., housing, transportation, food insecurity).
-  Communicate regularly with families about the importance of attendance and how they can help.



## Health Services

While it's essential for students to stay home when contagious, it's equally important for them to learn how to manage feeling **mildly** unwell while still engaging in school.

- School anxiety, which often manifests as physical complaints, is a **leading cause of absenteeism**.
- Build self-management skills by teaching students (and their families) to listen to their bodies, recognize the difference between minor and more serious symptoms, and communicate their needs.
- Provide access to school nurses or health professionals to address minor health issues.
- Encouraging thoughtful use of "sick days" minimizes lost classroom time and eases the burden on families managing work and childcare responsibilities
- Respond to patterns in health-related absenteeism and collaborate with families to manage chronic conditions like asthma and seasonal allergies.



- Partner with a local clinic, public health, or pediatric provider for district-level consultation related to school community health & safety issues.
- Develop district-wide illness-specific policies to ensure consistency between schools to foster trust between school staff and families



# Attendance and the Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child Model

The Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child components can support attendance in your school:

## School Climate

A positive school climate plays a critical role in improving student attendance. When schools foster a welcoming environment, students are more likely to feel safe, supported, and motivated to attend regularly.

- Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) create a learning environment that holds clear school-wide expectations for students and staff.
- Support educators: staff well-being directly contributes to a positive school climate.
- Ensure students feel safe at school.
- Address issues like bullying, exclusion, and peer conflict.
- Recognize and celebrate good or improved attendance.
- Help students feel challenged and capable with engaging academic experiences.
- Offer opportunities for students to manage emotional or physical distress in healthy ways.



## Nutrition Environment & Services

Students who participate in school breakfast have improved attendance, behavior, and academic performance. Children who eat breakfast at school closer to class and test-taking time perform better on standardized tests than those who skip breakfast or eat breakfast at home.



Eating school breakfast increases student attendance by an average of 1.5 days of school per year and is linked to improved attendance for three in five low-income students.



In 2024-25, 79% of Alaska schools (395 of 502) participated in the school breakfast program, and 45% of schools (226 of 502) were enrolled in Community Eligibility Provision where breakfast is offered at no cost to all students.



[Grab and go](#) classroom-based programs and [Second Chance Breakfast](#), where breakfast is served after first period are increasingly popular alternatives to traditional before school cafeteria-based breakfast programs.

# National Resources

## Alliance for a Healthier Generation:

The Alliance for a Healthier Generation's Chronic Absenteeism resource hub offers tools to help schools address health-related causes of absenteeism. It includes strategies for family engagement, professional development, and community collaboration, all aimed at improving student attendance through a focus on health and wellness.

## Kaiser Permanente:

Kaiser Permanente's Thriving Schools Attendance page offers resources to help schools address chronic absenteeism. It provides guidance on identifying and mitigating barriers to attendance—such as illness, transportation, and family challenges—and includes tools like health attendance handouts and links to national initiatives like Attendance Works. The page emphasizes early intervention and cross-sector collaboration to keep students engaged and present in school.



## All in for Attendance:

The All In for Attendance initiative, developed by the Johns Hopkins University Center for School Health in partnership with Kaiser Permanente and Attendance Works, is a comprehensive resource aimed at addressing chronic absenteeism through a public health lens, redefining school attendance not just as an educational concern, but a reflection of broader health, equity, and community conditions. All In for Attendance offers a powerful approach to improving school attendance by promoting collaboration, leveraging data, and addressing the underlying social and health-related barriers that keep students from showing up and thriving.

## Attendance Works:

Attendance Works is a national nonprofit initiative dedicated to reducing chronic absenteeism and promoting student success through improved attendance. The organization offers a wealth of free, research-based resources—including toolkits, handouts, data tools, and videos—to help schools, districts, and communities implement effective, multi-tiered strategies for improving attendance. Their approach emphasizes positive engagement, actionable data, and collaborative partnerships to address barriers to attendance and foster a culture of regular school participation.



# Local and Culturally Relevant Resources

## **State Board of Education Attendance Report:**

The Alaska Department of Education & Early Development's December 2024 State Board of Education Attendance Report highlights a significant concern: during the 2022–2023 school year, 45% of Alaska's students were chronically absent, defined as missing more than 10% of the school year. The report underscores the long-term academic risks associated with chronic absenteeism and advocates for early identification and intervention. It emphasizes the importance of collaborative efforts among districts, families, and communities to address the underlying causes of absenteeism and foster a culture that values consistent school attendance.

The logo features the text "STRIVE FOR 5" in large, bold, blue capital letters. Below it, the phrase "Attend School All Week!" is written in a smaller, green, sans-serif font. The entire logo is set against a white background with a yellow border.

## **Stronger Together: The Power of School and Family Partnership:**

The Association of Alaska School Boards (AASB) is committed to helping kids succeed and creating educational equity for all students in Alaska. Stronger Together: The Power of School and Family Partnership in Alaska provides a roadmap and key milestones for family, student, and school partnerships.

## **Alaska Department of Education and Early Development:**

The Alaska DEED Attendance page positions chronic absenteeism as a critical barrier to student achievement. It provides toolkits, strategic frameworks, and mandated data reporting to help districts engage families, track attendance, and foster a culture where every student shows up ready to learn.



## **Sources:**

- Attendance Works. School Breakfast: Reducing Chronic Absenteeism & Supporting Student Success. <https://www.attendanceworks.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/BreakfastAndAttendance-PolicyBrief-2017.pdf>
- Attendance Works. School Climate Relates to Chronic Absence. [https://www.attendanceworks.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/How\\_School-Climate\\_relates\\_to\\_chronic-absence\\_attendance\\_works\\_1-s2.0-S0022440516300607-main.pdf](https://www.attendanceworks.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/How_School-Climate_relates_to_chronic-absence_attendance_works_1-s2.0-S0022440516300607-main.pdf)
- Food Research & Action Center. Research Brief: Breakfast for Learning. <https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/breakfastforlearning-1.pdf>
- Alaska Department of Education and Early Development resources <https://education.alaska.gov/attendance>