

New Mexico Legislative Finance Committee
Program Evaluation No. 24-03

Student Attendance and Performance



June 13, 2024

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June 13, 2024

Dr. Arsenio Romero, Cabinet Secretary
Public Education Department
300 Don Gaspar Ave.
Santa Fe, New Mexico 87501

Secretary Romero:

The Legislative Finance Committee (LFC) is pleased to transmit the evaluation *Student Attendance and Performance*. The program evaluation reported current state trends in attendance, appropriations and spending, national best practices for improving attendance, the impact of absenteeism on student educational outcomes, and the role of local education authorities and the Public Education Department in addressing absenteeism in New Mexico. An exit conference was held with you and your staff on May 28, 2024, to discuss the report's contents.

The report will be presented to the LFC on June 13, 2024. LFC would like plans to address the recommendations within this report from the Public Education Department within 30 days of the hearing.

I believe this report addresses issues the LFC asked us to review and hope the department will benefit from our efforts. We very much appreciate the cooperation and assistance we received from you and your staff.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Charles Sallee".

Charles Sallee, Director

Cc: Senator George K. Muñoz, Chair, Legislative Finance Committee
Representative Nathan Small, Vice-Chair, Legislative Finance Committee
Daniel Schlegel, Chief of Staff, Office of the Governor
Representative G. Andres Romero, Chair, Legislative Education Study Committee
Senator William P. Soules, Vice-Chair, Legislative Education Study Committee
Wayne Probst, Cabinet Secretary, Department of Finance and Administration
Stan Rounds, Executive Director, New Mexico Superintendents' Association and the New Mexico Coalition of Education Leaders

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Summary

New Mexican students miss more days of school than their peers nationally, hampering learning.

Students need to attend class to reap the benefits of school. Whenever a student misses school, whether excused or unexcused, it decreases their learning outcomes and may even reduce their likelihood of graduating high school. Chronic absenteeism—defined as missing more than 10 percent of school—grew by 119 percent in New Mexico from school year 2019 to school year 2023, the largest increase in the nation. Most recently, in the 2023 school year, over 124 thousand New Mexico students were chronically absent raising the dropout risk for these students.

In 2019, New Mexico enacted the Attendance for Success Act, changing the state’s focus from students with many unexcused absences (habitually truant) to those frequently absent for any reason (chronically absent). The law also shifted district responses to absences from a punitive to a more supportive approach. However, this new reporting and a large increase in absences led to more chronically absent students compared to those who had been previously reported as habitually truant.

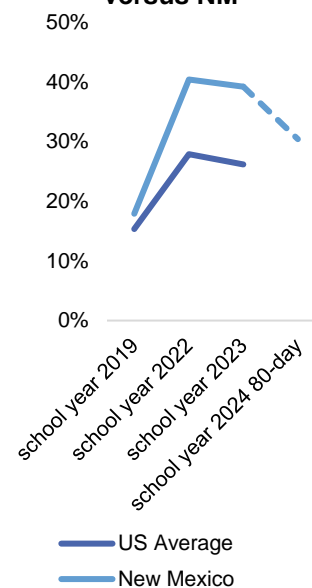
A survey of attendance personnel in schools and school districts identified illness, parent decisions, and lack of engagement as the main reasons students are chronically absent, which is in line with national research. No matter the reason for the absence, student absence in early grades hampers later academic success. Chronically absent students are roughly 14 percent less likely to meet academic proficiency. Additionally, student absences in third grade decrease the likelihood of high school graduation such that students with 10 percent less attendance in third grade are 12 percent to 18 percent less likely to graduate.

The state’s Attendance for Success Act aligns with many best practices, including tiered interventions and requirements for district or school personnel to meet with families with attendance challenges. However, the Public Education Department (PED) has yet to provide guidance or rule on implementing these interventions, leading to inconsistent district practices. Further, some teachers and school personnel might struggle with accurate attendance taking, and disparate data systems across districts further complicate accurate attendance reporting. PED clarification on how to take attendance and a statewide student information system could improve data collection.

Lastly, the state could be influencing local initiatives to improve attendance, including allowing calendars to be adjusted at the school level to meet student cultural needs, and explicitly allowing extra school for chronically absent students.

Key Findings

Chart 1. Chronic Absence Rates from School Year 2019 to School Year 2023, US versus NM



Note: school year 2020 and school year 2021 data was not included due to the irregularities caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. Data from states with publicly available attendance information.

Source: LFC Analysis of Future Ed and PED data

- Absenteeism decreases academic proficiency and graduation rates.
- Inconsistent attendance practices likely undercount absences.
- Strategies to reduce absenteeism are inconsistently implemented.

Key Recommendations

The Legislature should consider:

- Amending the Attendance for Success Act to allow districts to require extra instruction time for excessively absent students.

The Public Education Department should:

- Publish rules regarding how districts take attendance. This guidance should be different for elementary versus secondary schools and should allow for some district flexibility;
- Determine if Nova, PED's new data system, will meet state and district needs for reliable real-time data in the next six months. If not, PED should conduct a feasibility study to determine how to best automate real-time data collection from districts that allow for collection of average daily attendance, including exploring a single statewide student information system;
- Develop and publish a strategic plan as to how PED can support districts regarding attendance; and
- Produce and publicly post a list of best practice interventions to improve absenteeism and post templates for letters home regarding student absences.

The Public Education Department and Districts should work together to:

- Provide parents with information on the impact of attendance on their child's academic outcomes;
- Focus on attendance at elementary and middle schools, given the impact of poor attendance in early grades; and
- Implement and evaluate teacher incentive programs to determine if incentives help increase teacher attendance.

Districts should:

- Allow schools within a district to set separate calendars to meet cultural needs.

Background

Since the pandemic, the rate of students missing more than 10 percent of school (chronic absence) has roughly doubled nationally and more than doubled in New Mexico. National research indicates a strong relationship between lower attendance, lower proficiency, and graduation rates. Additionally, students who are not in school miss out on free school meals and classroom engagement. Student absences impact not only the absent student, but the whole classroom. New Mexico's increased absenteeism is also affected by recent statutory changes, which changed reporting requirements mandating information on chronic absenteeism (all absences) rather than habitual truancy (only unexcused absences) starting in the 2020 school year.

National research finds chronic absence in early grades affects reading and math proficiency in the near term and may eventually impact high school graduation rates.

Nationally, studies have shown that chronically absent students have worse academic outcomes in reading and math than students who were not chronically absent. The effects of chronic absenteeism impact not just the chronically absent individual but their classmates as well. Research suggests students in classrooms with a higher percentage of chronically absent students had lower test scores, likely because teachers must shift their time and attention to catch students up and deal with increased behavioral disruptions. Research also suggests increases in chronic absenteeism since the pandemic are associated with the length of school closures during the 2021 school year.

The negative effects of missing school in one year can also set students back years later. One study from Chicago public schools found students who were chronically absent in fourth through sixth grade were two months behind on measures of math achievement in eighth grade compared to students who were not chronically absent in those years. Another study from California public schools found only 17 percent of the students who were chronically absent in both kindergarten and first grade achieved reading proficiency by the end of third grade. In contrast, 64 percent of students with no attendance issues in kindergarten and first grade performed at grade level.

Chronic absenteeism negatively impacts the likelihood that a student will graduate from high school. Attendance is a better predictor of dropping out than low grades or test scores, likely because absenteeism behavior generally does not last just one year, but is persistent with cumulative effects over multiple years. A longitudinal study examining chronic absence in fourth through sixth grade found chronic absence reduced the probability of four-year graduation by 18 percentage points (and any high school completion by age 21 by 11 percentage points). In a

Absence Terminology

Chronic absenteeism: students missing at least 10 percent of school days including both excused and unexcused absences (i.e., missing 18 or more days of a 180 day school year).

Habitual truancy: students accumulating 10 or more unexcused absences within a school year.

Excused absence: means absence from a class or school day for a death in the family, medical absence, religious instruction or tribal obligations or any other allowable excuse pursuant to the policies of the local school board.

Unexcused absence: means an absence from a class or school day for which the student does not have an allowable excuse pursuant to the Attendance for Success Act or policies of the local school board.

Source: Attendance for Success Act

study of Baltimore City Schools, the probability of graduation dropped from 70 percent for students with 10 or fewer days absent in sixth grade to only 29 percent for students who were chronically absent.

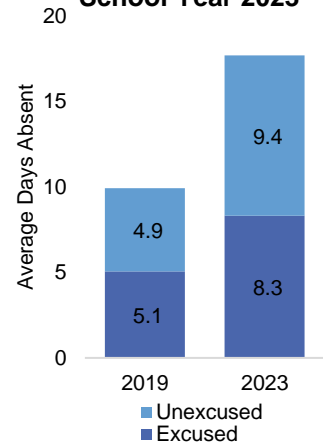
Chronic absenteeism increased the most in New Mexico after the pandemic.

Growing absenteeism has been a problem nationwide since the pandemic, but New Mexico saw one of the largest increases. From school year 2019 to 2023, the state saw a 119 percent increase in chronic absenteeism, compared to an average increase of 71 percent nationally. The state’s chronic absenteeism rate increased from 17.9 percent to 39.2 percent of students and was the second highest of the 31 states reporting for school year 2023. However, New Mexico’s chronic absenteeism during the 2023 school year was lower than in school year 2022. (See Appendix B.)

Preliminary data show the historically high chronic absenteeism rate in New Mexico may be decreasing but is still at least 10 percentage points higher than pre-pandemic. Data covering the first half of school year 2024 shows chronic absenteeism declining by around 22 percent. While chronic absenteeism remains a major problem, and rates are around double the pre-pandemic baseline, the 80-day snapshot of student attendance in the current school year (most recent available) declined to 30.4 percent from 39.2 percent at the end of the 2023 school year. While it is too soon to say whether this decline will be sustained through the end-of-year data, the numbers suggest an improvement in student attendance.

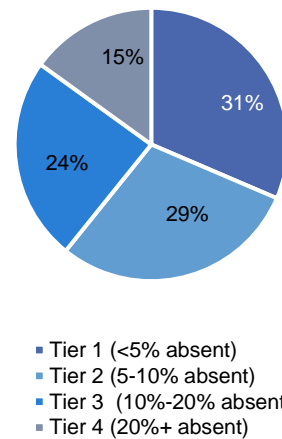
Both excused and unexcused absences have increased in recent years. The difference stems from the 2019 state Attendance for Success Act mandating the counting of *all absences*, while the previous Compulsory School Attendance law considered *only unexcused absences* in measuring habitual truancy. As all absences increased since 2020, the margin between the two measures has also widened to nearly 12 percent in 2023, up from only 2 percent in 2019. Even so, both measures show a sharp increase in absenteeism and underscore the problems with school attendance nationwide. The widening gap between the two measures may be an artifact of new groups of students with highly engaged parents missing school. Such parents would be more likely to take steps to have those absences excused. The gap might also result from cultural changes caused by the pandemic, leading students to consider staying home more often for minor illnesses—an excusable absence. In any case, while the two measures show the same trend, by design, more students are considered chronically absent than would have been considered habitually truant.

Chart 2. Average Excused and Unexcused Absences, School Year 2019 vs. School Year 2023



Source: LFC Analysis of PED data

Chart 3. Most New Mexico Students are Missing Less than 10 Percent of School Days, 2023 School Year



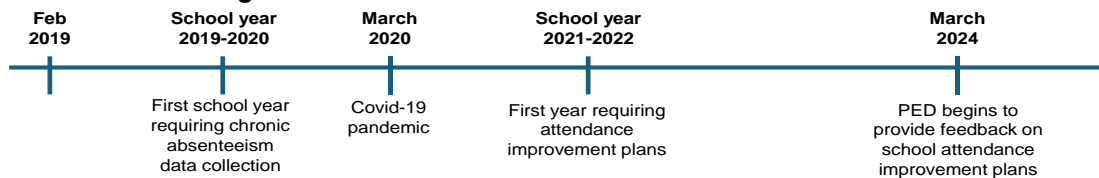
Source: LFC analysis of PED data

New Mexico’s Attendance for Success Act changed how the state oversees student attendance reporting and interventions.

New Mexico enacted the Attendance for Success Act in 2019, requiring districts to report absences and track chronic absenteeism rather than reporting habitual truancy. The act also created intervention tiers that do not require court involvement. Prior to the Attendance for Success Act, the state’s approach to absenteeism focused on more punitive measures, including reports to probation services, revocation of student driving privileges, and potentially parental fines or imprisonment.

New Mexico’s move to a less punitive approach to attendance and focusing on chronic absenteeism is part of a national trend that started when chronic absenteeism was selected as a student success indicator in the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2016. According to an educational research group from Georgetown University, 37 states, including New Mexico, use chronic absenteeism to measure student success in their ESSA plan.

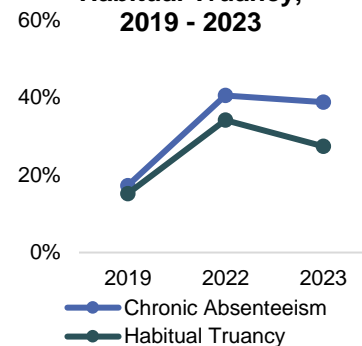
Figure 1. New Mexico Attendance for Success Act Timeline



Source: LFC files

The Attendance for Success Act replaced habitual truancy with chronic absenteeism, measuring how many students miss more than 10 percent of school days, regardless of whether the absence is excused or unexcused. Besides creating a common definition for chronic absenteeism, the Attendance for Success Act also added reporting requirements for schools and districts with a chronic absenteeism rate above 5 percent, requiring these schools submit an attendance improvement plan ([22-12A-1](#) to [22-12A-14](#) NMSA 1978). The plans require schools include chronic absenteeism rates for various demographic groups, interventions the schools use to improve the absenteeism rate, and roots cause analysis. However, how the Public Education Department (PED) uses this information to improve support and oversight of school districts is not specified. Beyond reporting and definitions, the act highlights four intervention tiers: whole school prevention, individualized prevention (for students missing between 5 percent and 10 percent of school days), early intervention (for students missing at least 10 percent but less than 20 percent of school days), and intensive support (for students missing more than 20 percent of school days). While the act specifies intervention tiers, it does not specify how interventions should be

Chart 4. New Mexico Chronic Absenteeism vs. Habitual Truancy, 2019 - 2023



Note: chronic absenteeism is missing at least 10 percent of days while habitually truant is having at least 10 unexcused absences from school.

Source: LFC analysis of PED data

implemented at each tier, such as when a school should use incentives versus home visits.

The Attendance for Success Act follows multiple national best practices, including implementing a supportive rather than a punitive approach to student absence. Research nationally points to the need for nonpunitive approaches in dealing with student absence, finding punitive approaches are not as effective in improving attendance. Following these best practices, the Attendance for Success Act requires intervention tiers with more absent students receiving more intensive support, management, and interventions. The act also requires districts to monitor school chronic absenteeism rates, a research-based practice that can reduce chronic absenteeism. Finally, the act requires every school to have an attendance team and mandates every school with chronic absenteeism rates above 5 percent submit an attendance improvement plan to PED.

In school year 2023, 124.6 thousand students were chronically absent, with at-risk students more likely to be chronically absent.

Chronically absent students are at risk for declines in test scores and may be less likely to graduate. Although total public school enrollment has declined since 2015, consistent with the state population trend, the overall chronically absent population has increased sharply since 2020. Native American, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and African American students have been the most chronically absent ethnic groups in recent years. Among other sub-groups, students facing housing insecurity, students with disabilities, and English learners are also absent at higher rates than their peers (See Appendix C.) Because New Mexico schools provide free meals to students as well as other supports, being absent from schools means that some students who need these supports are not receiving them.

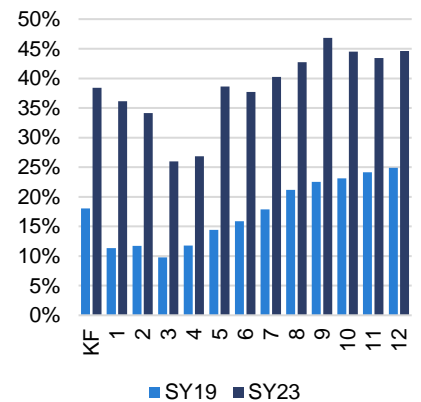
Students in the later elementary school grades tend to have the best attendance in New Mexico, while kindergarten and high school students were the most absent. While the causes of this attendance are unclear, the data show that chronic absenteeism takes on a U-shaped trend across K-12 grade levels. As children enter school in kindergarten and the primary grades, they are more likely to miss class, compared to students in the middle grades—second through seventh grade—with the best attendance among all students. This U-shaped chronic absenteeism rate pattern also mirrors other states’ attendance patterns. (See Appendix D for additional trend information.)

Table 1. Key Differences between Attendance for Success and the Previous Compulsory School Attendance Act

	Attendance For Success Act	Compulsory School Attendance Act
Reporting	Rate of students missing at least 10 percent of school days	Rate of students missing 10 unexcused days and unexcused absences
Plans required	For schools with 5%+ chronically absent students, must submit an attendance improvement plan to PED	None
Interventions	Tiered interventions progressing from Tier 1 (universal) to Tier 4 excessively absent	Parent notification at 5 unexcused absences, student reported to probations services.
School team required?	Yes	No
Most severe consequence to families	May report families to CYFD	Monetary fines up to \$500 and imprisonment 6 months

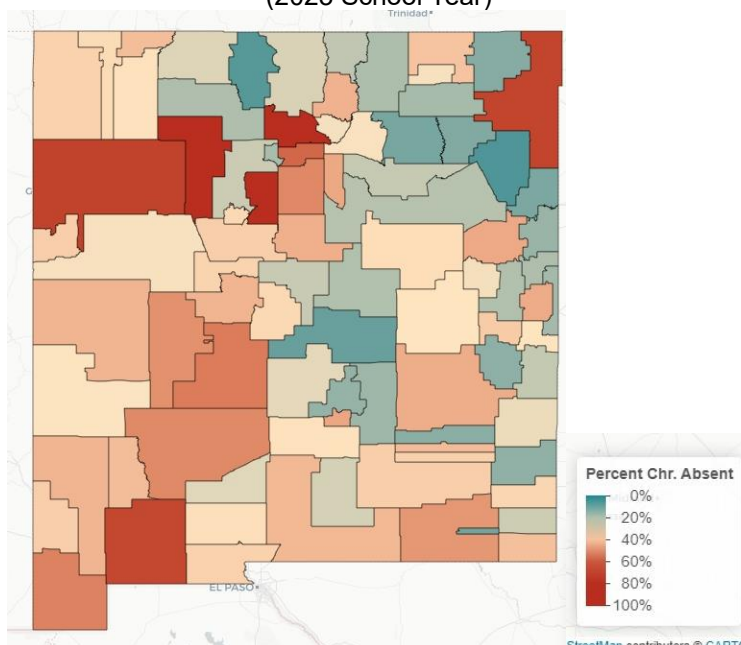
Source: LFC analysis of statute

Chart 5. Chronic Absenteeism by Grade, SY19 and SY23



Source: LFC analysis of PED data

Figure 2. Some districts, including those with high proportions of Native American students, struggle with absenteeism more than others.
(2023 School Year)



Note: LFC and PED are investigating the data regarding Clayton municipal schools attendance rates.
Source: LESC analysis

PED and districts spent at least \$24.8 million in FY23 and FY24 on student attendance initiatives.

The Legislature directly provides attendance funding to PED, and districts also use other funding to support attendance initiatives at the local level. The Legislature passed the Attendance for Success Act in 2019 without any associated appropriation. However, just over a year after passing, pandemic-related disruptions led to a steep rise in chronic absenteeism and schools were newly required to commit more resources to attendance-related interventions. In response, the Legislature allocated direct funding for attendance initiatives to PED for FY24 and FY25 and an additional \$1.4 million in FY24 for an attendance improvement plan application portal. Before the Attendance for Success Act, New Mexico funded truancy and dropout prevention, allocating \$4 million in FY19 through a below the line appropriation.

Beyond these initiatives, districts also spent at least \$19.8 million on staff in FY23, with at least 64 districts funding attendance for personnel with their operational funds. However, this amount is still only 0.5 percent of the over \$4.1 billion in state general fund revenue allocated to districts as part of the annual student equalization guarantee (SEG) public school funding formula.

PED was appropriated \$5 million in FY24 to address student attendance and primarily used these funds for grants and contracted support. In fall 2023, PED awarded \$2.5 million of its \$5 million appropriation for improving school attendance to seven of the largest school districts in the state. (See Appendix E for funding awards to districts.) However, only two of these seven districts had absenteeism rates above the state average. Beyond the \$2.5 million in grants, PED also contracted with an outside group for just under \$1 million to continue a virtual coaching and messaging service called ENGAGE New Mexico, which has uncertain outcomes. In addition, PED contracted with Real Time Solutions for up to \$500 thousand to provide marketing and media coordination for the attendance support and awareness campaign and promote attendance support and awareness.

Since 2020, PED spent at least \$9.3 million on attendance recovery through Graduation Alliance. However, while expense increased, the number of students to be served decreased, and outcome monitoring remains minimal.

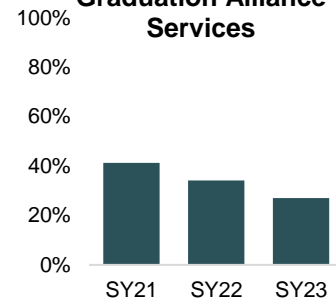
As noted in previous LFC reports, when schools switched to remote learning, student absenteeism and disengagement increased. To address these concerns, in spring 2020, PED signed an emergency contract with Graduation Alliance for \$450 thousand to serve approximately 17,500 students over a 2-month period from April to June 2020. The scope of work included establishing an Attendance Project, providing outreach to families, triaging student need, and reporting metrics to PED. This initial emergency contract specified PED would go through a competitive bid process if schools continued to be virtual for SY21. However, PED continued to contract with Graduation Alliance through sole source contracts. (See Appendix F.) In 2021, Searchlight New Mexico reported Graduation Alliance, was making millions with few families engaging in the services provided and limited outcome tracking. In the most recent contract for \$986.8 thousand over a 9-month period from October 2023 to June 2024, there is no explanation why the contractor is serving few students for more money over a longer period.

Enrollment of at-risk students in the ENGAGE NM program fell from 41 percent in 2021 to 27 percent in 2023. For school year 2021 of the 38.5 thousand students referred to Graduation Alliance, just under 16 thousand chose to enroll in the service. Graduation Alliance provides an attendance coach to help work with students and families with the goal of improving student attendance by addressing barriers to getting to school or showing up for class. However, the uptake of this service declined from school year 2021 to school year 2023, down to only approximately 25 percent participating. Since 2020 of the over 72 thousand students referred, roughly 36 percent chose to participate. If the majority eligible do not participate, the likelihood of an overall positive impact from Graduation Alliance for the state is small.

Source: Grad Alliance, PED, Sunshine Portal

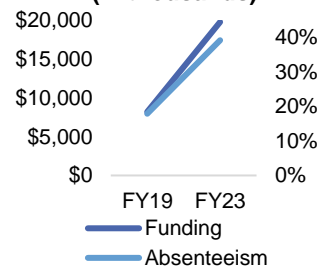
In SY23 districts spent at least \$19.8 million on an estimated 354 staff dedicated to student attendance, approximately 141 percent more funding and 36 percent more staff than in FY19. To put this in context chronic absenteeism increased 119 percent in New Mexico between the 2019 and 2023 school years. Beyond direct PED allocations for spending on services to address chronic absenteeism, districts also hire attendance coaches or staff focused on improving student attendance in school using \$8.5 million in operational and \$11.3 million in federal funds, including ESSER, Title I, and IDEA B. In SY19, New Mexico spent around \$8.2

Chart 6. Percent of At-Risk Students Referred Using Graduation Alliance Services



Source: Graduation Alliance Annual Report

Chart 7. Student Support Personnel Funding and Absenteeism, FY19 to FY23 (in thousands)



Source: LFC analysis of PED data

million for a total of approximately 261 staff. In both SY19 and SY23, districts may have had staff focused on attendance but may have classified these staff differently or may not have dedicated staff positions that focused most of their time on attendance and student support.

Table 2. Expenditures on School Support Staff by Funding Source, FY23

Funding Source	Estimated FTE	Total Expenditure
ESSER III	47.8	\$2,666,432
IDEA-B	88.8	\$4,957,218
Operational	151.7	\$8,465,487
Title I	66	\$3,682,489

Note: FTE estimated using actual operational data

Source: LFC analysis of PED Operating Budget Management System (OBMS)

Absenteeism Decreases Academic Proficiency and Graduation Rates

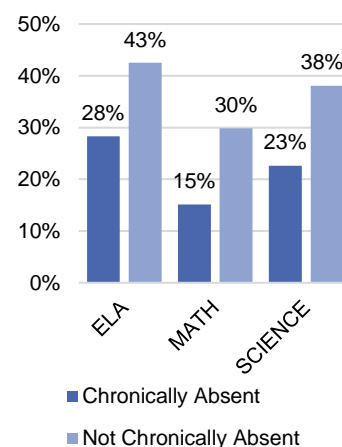
Both national and New Mexico-specific data show the negative impact of student absenteeism on test and graduation outcomes. In New Mexico, proficiency rates are more than 10 percentage points lower for chronically absent students than for non-chronically absent students, and as classroom chronic absenteeism increases, classroom proficiency rates decrease. If the converse is true, simply by showing up for an extra 18 days a year (or 10 percent of school days), students can significantly improve their learning and test scores. Furthermore, the likelihood of graduating increases between 12 percent and 18 percent as students attend 10 percent more school, likely due to increased instructional time. While data show students who miss more days of school have worse outcomes, there is not a steep cutoff at 10 percent of missed school days, confirming a previous LFC report finding. (See Appendix G.)

Beyond the negative impacts of absenteeism, LFC staff received survey responses from almost 500 attendance team participants who reported illness, parental decisions, and lack of engagement and motivation as the primary reasons for students being chronically absent. To address these factors, PED, districts, and schools need to examine how they engage parents and students as well as think of other persistent factors, such as teacher absences or transportation barriers that can cause student absences, and improve current practices.

In 2023, chronically absent students were 13 percent to 14 percent less likely to be proficient than non-chronically absent students.

LFC staff analysis found 36.5 percent of third- through eighth-grade students who were not chronically absent tested proficient on the New Mexico Measures of Student Success and Achievement (NM-MSSA) in English, math, and science combined compared with just 22.1 percent of those chronically absent. Additional analysis of 2019 TAMELA and Istation scores (the standardized test Kindergarten through 2nd grade), and 2023 Istation scores show a similar result: non-chronically absent students consistently outperform their chronically absent peers. Previous LFC reports also found test proficiency declines with more missed days of school. Even after controlling for income, the effect of attendance on proficiency remained. (See Appendix H for additional analysis.)

Chart 8. 2023 NM-MSSA Proficiency and Chronic Absenteeism



Source: LFC analysis of PED data

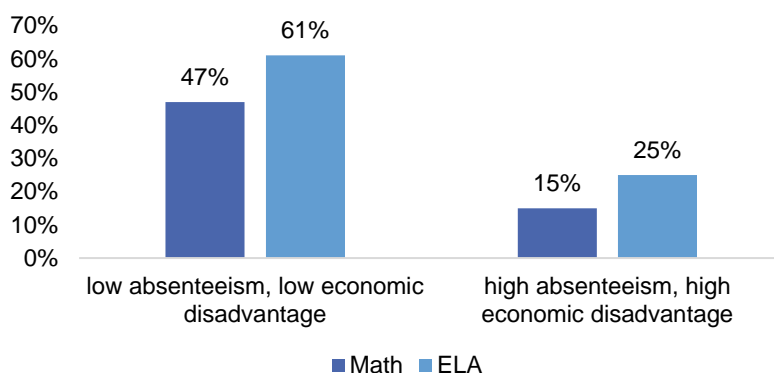
Following national research, chronic absenteeism of a few students can bring down the scores of an entire classroom.

If a classroom of students has several students chronically missing, the impact of those absences is felt even by students in the class who are not themselves absent. Specifically, a 10 percent increase in the chronic absenteeism of third, fourth, and fifth grades in New Mexico in the 2023 school year decreased the overall proficiency of all students in the classroom by 5 percent. The classroom impact of absences varies across classrooms based on average student family income, but the analysis holds for both math and English language arts test scores and when additional controls are added. Research conducted in Delaware has also found similar relationships, such that absenteeism in kindergarten through third grade impacts both student and whole-school academic performance.

Career and technical education (CTE) enrollment does not appear to be connected to a school's chronic absence rate.

National research finds some types of CTE can lead to decreased absences. However, in New Mexico, there does not appear to be a meaningful correlation between chronic absenteeism and the units of CTE offered per student. Surprisingly, the data from the 2023 school year indicates a small relationship where increased CTE enrollment was slightly associated with an increase in chronic absenteeism. Importantly, the analysis did not look at other factors that may lead to more CTE being offered, such as school demographics, a student population that is less interested in traditional school overall, nor the types or depth of CTE offered at the school.

Chart 9. Proficiency Rates by Classroom Absenteeism and Economic Disadvantage



Note: low classroom absenteeism was defined as less than 24 percent chronically absent while high chronic absenteeism was defined as more than 36 percent chronically absent. Low economic disadvantage was defined as less than 41 percent of students economically disadvantaged while high economic disadvantage was defined as more than 56 percent of students economically disadvantaged.

Source: LESC analysis of PED data

Both excused and unexcused absences have a small, negative impact on proficiency levels, though the impact of unexcused absences is slightly larger.

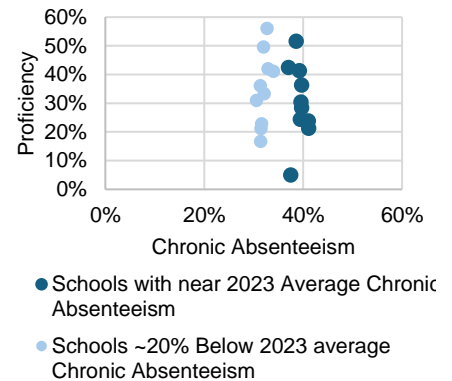
Analysis of 2023 attendance and proficiency data show both types of absences cause a reduction in proficiency scores on the NM-MSSA Math and English language arts tests. Consistent with expectations, unexcused absences are associated with a larger decrease in proficiency than excused absences. In both cases, the effect is small but significant. This analysis supports national best practice to combine excused and unexcused absences because both similarly negatively impact proficiency. However, it is useful to measure excused and unexcused absences separately because unexcused absences could be used as a proxy for parental engagement since parents must contact the school to excuse absences.

Attendance in early grades is a strong predictor of later graduation rates.

Consistent with research, elementary attendance is a strong indicator of future graduation both in New Mexico and nationally. In New Mexico, a 10 percent increase in attendance in third grade predicts up to an 18 percent increased chance of graduating. This relationship is largest if a student is moving from a very low attendance rate. For instance, if a student attends 70 percent of third grade, there is a 35.6 percent likelihood of graduation, whereas if a student attends 80 percent of third grade the likelihood jumps to 53.8 percent. This highlights the importance of attendance in early grades and the likely compounding effect of chronic absenteeism. (See Appendix I for methodological information.)

New Mexico third-grade students missing 20 percent of school (or 36 days of the 180-day school year) had a 25 percentage point lower high school graduation rate than those who missed 5 percent. On average, third-grade students in New Mexico in the 2012 school year attended nearly 95 percent of school days and had an almost 80 percent chance of graduating high school. However, students with lower attendance had lower chances of graduating high school. Those with a 90 percent attendance had about a 71 percent chance of graduating, while those with 80 percent attendance had less than a 55 percent chance of graduating. Importantly, the impact of attendance on graduation shows a steady decrease rather than a sharp drop when students become chronically absent, indicating that adding or missing a few extra days in early grades likely impacts future high school graduation rates. Additional analysis also considered the same cohort in their eighth-grade year of 2016-2017. Those results were largely consistent with the third-grade data, though by eighth grade, higher attendance predicted a slightly higher chance of graduation and lower attendance predicted a lower chance of graduation than it did when the students were in third grade. The increase in the strength of this relationship likely has at least two reasons behind it: One, students who were absent in eighth grade are likely the same students who were absent in third grade, and two, the length of time to graduation is shorter between grades eight and 12 than between grades three and 12. Although many factors drive the graduation rate, including family income and student achievement, this analysis shows the impact of attendance.

Chart 10. 2023 Average versus 20 Percent Improved Chronic Absenteeism and ELA (English) Proficiency



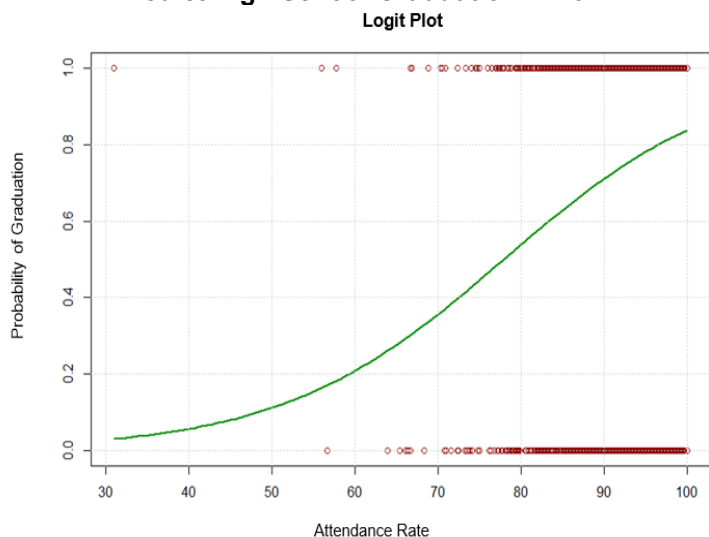
Source: LFC analysis of PED data

Table 3. Third Grade Attendance and Graduation Rate

Attendance for Success Act Tiers: % Absent	Logit Model Predictions	
	2012 Third Graders Rate of Attendance	2021 Predicted Graduation Rate
Tier 1: < 5 percent	100	83.8%
Tier 2: 5 - 10 percent	95	78.1%
Tier 3: 10 - 20 percent	85	62.8%
Tier 4: 20 percent or greater	70	35.6%
2021 State Graduation Rate (Actual)		76.8%

Source: LFC analysis of PED data

**Figure 3. Third Grade Attendance Rates During School Year 2012
Predict High School Graduation in 2021**



Source: LFC analysis of PED data

To increase instructional time, the state needs to consider the number and length of school days and student absences.

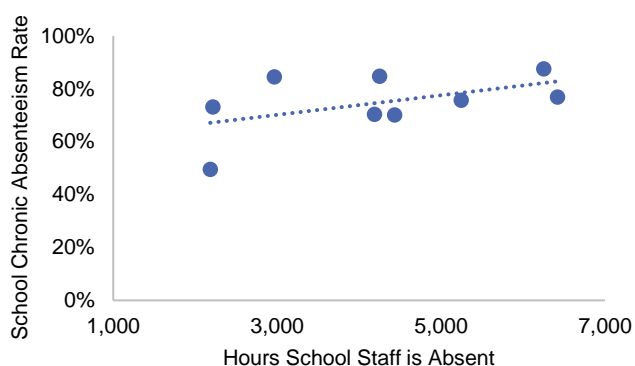
In 2023, the average New Mexico district had 167 days on the school calendar, but because of absences, students on average only attended about 152 days. Targeted interventions that reduce chronic absenteeism could have a greater impact than adding days to the school calendar, as was seen in research conducted in North Carolina, where a study found reducing absenteeism had a larger impact on student test scores than extending the school year. When determining how to add quality instructional time, districts and the state should consider the length and number of school days and should also improve attendance because reducing absenteeism will effectively add a large amount of instructional time for many students.

Analysis at the individual student level shows a positive and significant relationship between days attended and proficiency levels on both NM-MSSA English and math. Analysis shows, with a high degree of certainty, that the more days a student attends (either because they have an extended school calendar or because they are absent less), the higher their scores tend to be on the NM-MSSA test. The relationship holds for both NM-MSSA English and math. Even so, the magnitude of the effect is small. The magnitude of attendance on NM-MSSA math scores is marginally higher.

Teacher absences are strongly correlated with student absences, confirming national research.

For three school districts that provided data to LFC staff, teacher or school staff absences related to student absences. When there are higher teacher or staff absences, students are more likely to have higher chronic absenteeism rates. LFC staff asked PED for statewide teacher absence data, but PED does not collect this data.

Chart 11. Relationship between School Staff Attendance and Student Chronic Absentee Rates for One School District



Source: LFC analysis of district and PED data

This relationship aligns with national research, which shows teacher absences are correlated with student absences and other factors, including test scores and college attendance. Concerningly, national data find increases in teacher and staff absences after Covid-19. Research suggests that teacher incentive programs may help reduce teacher absences; however, there have been few published reports. Some incentive programs shown to work from other states include bonuses for attendance or a sick leave buy-back program, monetary compensation for missing fewer than seven days, or both raising salaries and imposing small penalties when teachers are absent.

School attendance team members report illness, parental decisions, and lack of engagement as primary reasons for student absences.

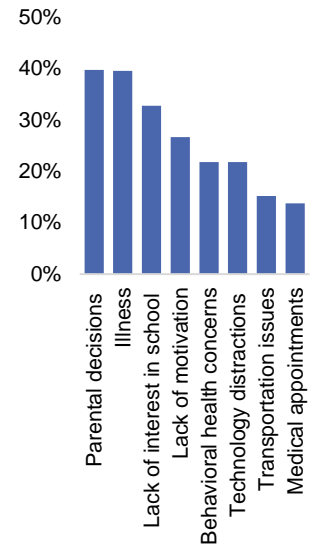
Surveyed attendance personnel at districts and schools report the primary causes for chronic absence as illness, parental decisions (such as vacations or allowing students to stay home), and a lack of interest or motivation by students and families. These attendance teams are staff, including

principals, counselors, teachers, and some dedicated attendance staff, who focus on improving attendance at their school site. Importantly, these attendance team members report that interventions are working to reduce absenteeism. This survey, as well as others that focus on determining causes of student absence, point to focusing interventions on parents, engaging students, and improving transportation as a means to improve student attendance and performance.

These causes of absenteeism are largely in line with national research. Attendance team members also report that parents should be the primary focus of attendance interventions, followed by students, schools, and the community. Attendance issues can also occur for several other reasons, and targeted interventions at the individual level for many students are likely needed. (See Appendix J for a complete list of reported main causes of chronic absenteeism.)

The perceived causes of absenteeism are complex, demanding more than one singular solution. As shown in Legislative Education Study Committee analysis of LFC staff survey results, causes, impacts, and solutions to chronic absenteeism are often compounded and may require resources outside of school. Mental health challenges among students, for example, were reported in survey results as a cause of absenteeism, an impact of high levels of absenteeism, and mental health support could address absenteeism. Similarly, survey results from school personnel showed concerns about poverty and family access to resources are also a cause of absenteeism and a potential area to address. These examples illustrate the reciprocal nature of absenteeism issues and how solutions may require support in areas that may be difficult for schools to address—for example, broader access to mental health resources and addressing underlying poverty that impacts a student's ability to attend school. However, other factors can be addressed at a school level, such as providing counselors or working to improve parent engagement. (See Appendix I for methodology and additional word clouds.)

Chart 12. Attendance Team Member's Report of Main Causes for Chronic Absenteeism



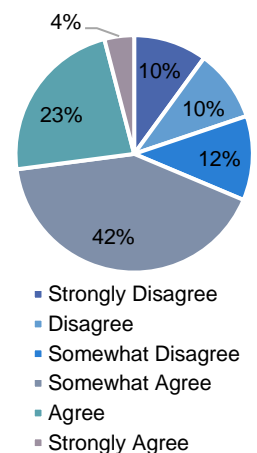
Note: See Appendix J. for a complete list of causes of chronic absenteeism
Source: LFC files

Figure 4. Potential Points of Action to Improve Attendance



Note: Size of words is determined based upon frequency of use in survey responses
Source: LESC analysis of LFC survey

Chart 13. Do Current Interventions Used Improve Attendance? (n=469 team members)



Source: LFC files

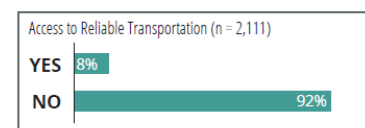
According to the survey, parent outreach and increased communication were the most common intervention types used at schools and 69 percent reported at least some improvement based upon the interventions used at their school. These interventions relate to reported reasons for chronic absenteeism. Parent outreach may help change parent behavior and decision-making regarding when to take children out of school. Increasing communication between the parent or student and the teacher can help students and families become more engaged, another one of the main factors leading to absenteeism. However, roughly 31 percent of respondents still did not think the current interventions used by their school were leading to improved attendance. For those schools, having resources to turn to for different, evidence-based strategies may be needed.

PED and schools need to engage parents better and ensure that families understand the importance of attending school. PED is planning to launch an attendance campaign next fall to highlight the importance of going to school for children to meet their career goals (see Appendix K for a sample of the images PED plans to use). This campaign is budgeted at \$500 thousand. However, while the current information may inspire students to want to go to school, PED will also want to ensure there is content to help parents understand the value of students attending school.

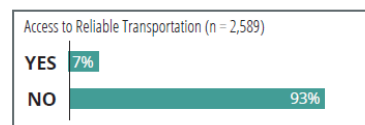
According to Graduation Alliance, over 90 percent of students engaged with their attendance coaching services reported not having reliable transportation to school. Graduation Alliance, an organization PED contracts with to provide attendance coaching services, collects data on barriers to attendance for those students who use their services. PED spends roughly \$130 million annually on transportation for kindergarten through 12th grade. However, since Graduation Alliance began collecting data on New Mexico students at risk for chronic absence, 92 percent of kindergarten to fifth-grade students and 93 percent of sixth through 12-grade students report no access to reliable transportation. This is the largest barrier identified. Transportation was not flagged as a main cause of statewide attendance in the team survey, but it is likely a persistent problem for many families. For some families, transportation has also likely been a problem before the pandemic and is a problem the state can help address by ensuring access to bus routes or other novel practices. (See Appendix L for information on bus driver openings.)

Figure 5. Access to Transportation is a Potential Problem for the Majority of Students At-Risk of Chronic Absenteeism

K-5 (2,121 Total Respondents)



6-12 (2,630 Total Respondents)



Note: The survey does not differentiate between buses or family vehicles.

Source: Graduation Alliance

Recommendations

The Public Education Department should:

- Collect data on teacher absences.

The Public Education Department, Districts and schools should:

- Focus resources and attention on attendance at elementary and middle schools given the impact of poor attendance in early grades.

The Public Education Department and Districts should:

- Provide parents with information on the impact of attendance on their child's academic outcomes; and
- Implement and evaluate teacher attendance incentive programs.

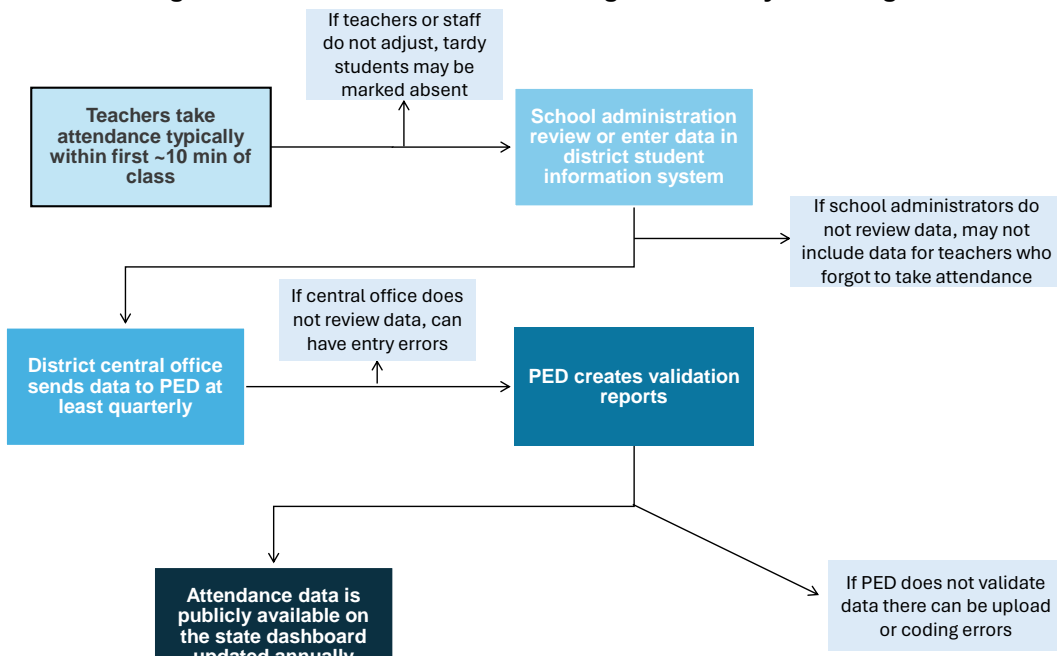
Inconsistent Attendance Practices Likely Undercount Absences

Accurate attendance taking is needed to understand the size of the chronic absenteeism problem. Without accurate attendance taking, schools may not be applying interventions outlined in the Attendance for Success Act to students who should be receiving these services. Data shows while some districts have many schools and teachers taking attendance daily, others struggle, with only 60 percent of teachers taking attendance every class period in some cases. The problem is compounded by some student information systems defaulting all student attendance to “present,” leading to an undercount of absences by teachers who fail to take attendance. A survey of attendance teams highlights that roughly 37 percent of respondents stated teachers take attendance less than 95 percent of the time. Efficient use of student information systems and examining data practices at a district and state level may help ensure accurate attendance data is both taken and reported.

Accurate attendance ensures the state makes appropriate decisions.

Many districts have difficulty ensuring all teachers are taking accurate attendance. Beyond teachers taking attendance in the classroom, attendance data is also sent to the district’s central office and reviewed by PED. However, there are many potential places where the attendance-taking process faces challenges, including when students come to school

Figure 6. Accurate Attendance Taking Faces Many Challenges



When schools and districts fail to review their data thoroughly, inaccurate data may be reported by PED.

At a charter school visited by LFC staff, issues with student data systems led to an overestimation of student absences. In another district, a lack of review from district administrators led to uncertainty about absenteeism rates.

Figure 7. Summary Attendance Taking Sample

- 20% of Bernalillo schools took attendance less than 95% of the time.
- 26% of teachers did not take attendance at least 10% of the time in an APS high school.
- 40% of teachers at a Lovington high school did not take attendance for at least 1 class period.

Source: District files

late, which leads to uncertainty over who enters tardy information and problems in data uploading or validation that can lead to published inaccuracies. For the state to fully understand the size of the attendance problem, PED and districts must have accurate data from which to make decisions.

PED has not yet published formal rules on taking attendance but issued some guidance this year. In March 2024, PED sent a memo to all school districts highlighting how attendance should be taken, including that students who are absent from school for interscholastic activities should be marked as present. (See Appendix M.) While this guidance to districts is useful in helping ensure all districts take attendance the same way, the guidance was provided more than four years after the Attendance for Success Act became law. Guidance should be formalized through rule and be posted on PED’s attendance website so districts can easily access the information as needed.

Some teachers do not take attendance daily. The attendance team survey data indicated a minority of teachers do not always take attendance. At one Albuquerque high school, over 20 percent of teachers missed taking attendance more than 10 percent of days during the first semester of this year. In Lovington, in the first week of school, an average of 40 percent of high school teachers missed taking attendance for at least one period. However, some districts have focused on taking attendance, with Bernalillo Public Schools seeing perfect attendance taking from 35 percent of teachers and attendance taking more than 95 percent of the time for 80 percent of their schools for quarter three.

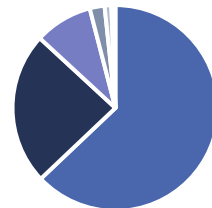
Beyond district data on attendance taking, attendance team members also reported a minority of teachers do not take attendance as frequently as is required. According to survey respondents, while roughly 63 percent said teachers take attendance at least 95 percent of the time, 37 percent said teachers did not take attendance regularly. Specifically, 24 percent said teachers only take attendance between 85 percent and 95 percent of the time and 13 percent said teachers at their school take attendance less than 85 percent of the time.

Contrary to state law, at least one district marks students as absent for interscholastic activities. National best practice includes publishing comparable, timely and accurate data. However, if the data is not collected consistently, it results in unreliable data which is much harder to use. As was stated in the Legislative Education Study Committee hearing in November 2023, at least one district reported students as absent during interscholastic activities. By contrast, the Attendance for Success Act specifies that students should be marked as present when participating in such activities.

To help ensure teachers take attendance, in at least one elementary school, the student information system automatically notifies teachers if attendance was not recorded. Teachers may forget to take attendance. However, email reminders from the school administrator or

California mandates accurate attendance taking through contracts and can fine teachers for failure to take attendance. In California, the state requires teachers take attendance within the first 15 minutes of class and may fine teachers who do not comply. This strict approach may help increase accurate attendance taking. Beyond a policy which holds teachers accountable for accurate attendance taking, the state and districts provide policies and templates to help with attendance taking. For instance, a School District in California publishes memos for principals to use with teachers not taking attendance regularly (see Appendix N.). PED could work with districts where attendance is not regularly taken to implement teacher contracts and principal memos to teachers.

**Chart 14.
Percent of
Teachers Taking
Daily
Attendance
According to
Attendance
Team Survey**



- more than 95%
- 85% to 95%
- 75% to 85%
- 65% to 75%
- 50% to 75%
- less than 50%

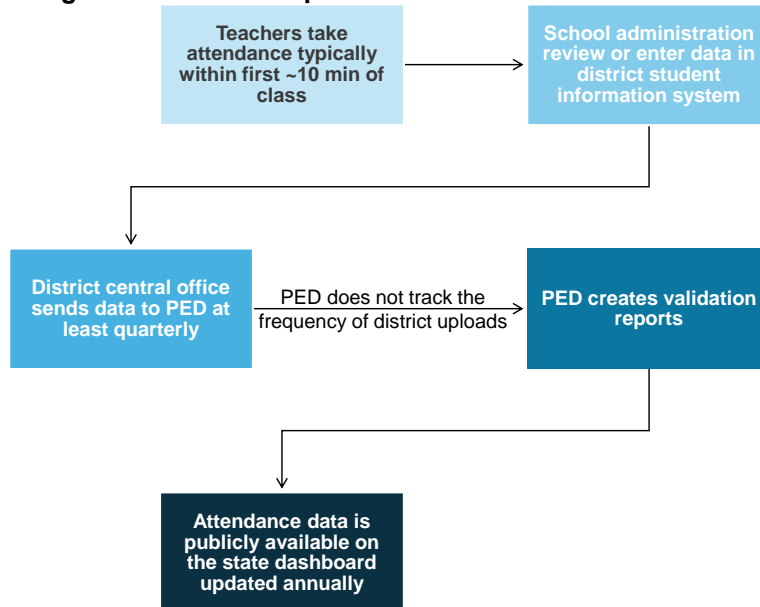
Source: LFC files

secretary may help ensure teachers take attendance. At an elementary school in Lovington, the secretary set up automatic notifications for teachers if they had not completed attendance within the first 15 minutes of the day. Automatic reminders can also be helpful for support staff who may not be able to send individual emails daily. However, only some student information systems, including Synergy, offer these types of real-time feedback.

Simplifying data collection can increase district capacity and provide cost savings.

PED collects data from several different student information systems (SIS), which each district or regional educational cooperative buys individually. These SIS collect data on student attendance, achievement, and demographics. The Nova system at PED is supposed to integrate data from the multiple SIS statewide and save the data in a usable format for state use. One of the goals of implementing the roughly \$6.5 million Nova system in 2019 was to have real-time data for statewide decisions. However, in its first year of use, Nova is not providing real-time attendance data at the state level, and PED is not tracking how frequently districts upload information as long as they meet the requirement to upload data at the 40-, 80-, and 120-day intervals. PED should incentivize districts to use a single SIS to streamline information processing. However, doing so may pose logistical challenges, including the training and cost of implementing and operating a new SIS. If PED bought or helped facilitate collective purchasing of SIS software, districts collectively could save up to \$13.3 million and more easily operate some evidence-based interventions, such as real-time text notifications when students are absent from school.

Figure 8. Process Map of How Student Attendance Data is Managed



Source: LFC files and PED

New Mexico’s data systems are inefficient and cost more than other states, but collective purchasing of SIS and PED assistance could increase efficiency. In New Mexico, 59 percent of districts use PowerSchool as their SIS while another roughly 12 percent of districts, including Albuquerque Public Schools, use Synergy. Districts frequently buy their own SIS and will issue a request for proposals (RFP) individually rather than working with other districts to collectively purchase the software. However, Legislative Education Study Committee (LESC) staff reported small districts may work with their local regional education cooperative to collectively purchase an SIS. If New Mexico could follow Delaware or Nevada in having a statewide SIS, assuming similar costs, the state could see between an estimated \$35 to \$42 per student in savings, or an estimated \$11.1 million to \$13.3 million in overall cost savings.

Beyond the cost-saving component of providing a statewide SIS, SIS can also be used for research-based attendance interventions, including notifying parents of a child’s absence in real-time. The commonly used SIS in New Mexico have different attendance functions and can notify parents of their child’s absence through email or text message. Research shows this intervention can reduce chronic absenteeism rates by 2.4 percent to 7.3 percent. Moreover, if there were a statewide SIS that was PED-supported or if PED helped provide training on SIS, fewer district resources would be needed to implement a real-time parent notification system.

A 2017 Thornburg Foundation report found New Mexico’s education systems result in more staff hours than comparison states that have more modern data systems and that New Mexico’s systems cost more. Specifically, when adjusting for inflation, New Mexico spends approximately \$49 per student on its SIS while Nevada spends only \$7 per student. Beyond the dollars spent on these systems, New Mexico school districts spend up to 15 thousand staff hours annually on complying with reporting requirements and 66 percent more resources on reporting than peers in states with advanced data collection systems. Nevada and Delaware have a unified state SIS while Texas provides options for districts to use a statewide SIS rather than have districts purchase and maintain their own SIS.

Consolidating multiple reporting requirements focused on student improvement could reduce the reporting burden and increase cross-collaboration. In addition to the attendance improvement plans, schools also submit school improvement plans (90-day plan) and a multi-layered system of supports plan (MLSS plan) to PED. While these three reports have slightly different goals, each focuses on improving school performance by examining student learning, social-emotional components, and attendance. These factors are likely related; therefore, creating one plan could help reduce the reporting workload and allow for a less fragmented, more comprehensive understanding of a school’s current situation and the strategies in place to improve attendance, social-emotional learning, and academics.

Table 4. Funding History for a Real-Time Data Management System at PED (in thousands)

Year	Funding
2019	\$651.5
2020	\$1,140
2021	\$1,500
2024	\$3,170
Total	\$6,461.5

Note: The 2021 appropriation was for cybersecurity and data system upgrades. LFC staff were unable to determine how much of the appropriated funds went toward Nova.

Source: HB2 2019, 2020, 2021, 2024

Table 5. Districts Predominantly Use PowerSchool as their Student Information System

	Number	%
Edupoint/Synergy	23	12%
Infinite Campus	9	5%
JupiterEd	7	4%
MarkersPro	7	4%
Pearson	1	1%
PowerSchool	111	59%
Rediker	1	1%
Skyward	18	10%
None	11	6%

Source: PED

Table 6. Cost per Student of Student Information System reporting in Various States

New Mexico	\$49.03
Texas	\$31.66
Delaware	\$14.47
Nevada	\$7.03

Note: Costs are adjusted for inflation

Source: Thornburg

Recommendations

The Public Education Department should:

- Publish rules on how schools should take attendance to ensure consistent practices statewide;
- Consolidate the MLSS, attendance improvement, and 90-day reporting requirements into one plan to increase plan coordination and allow for more efficient allocation of staff time; and
- Determine if Nova will meet state and district needs for reliable real-time data within the next six months. If not, PED should conduct a feasibility study to determine how to best automate real-time data collection from districts that allow for the collection of average daily attendance at the state level, including exploring a statewide student information system.

Strategies To Reduce Absences are Implemented Inconsistently

The Attendance for Success Act aligns with best practices by including intervention tiers based on level of absences and specifying when to set up meetings with parents and build individualized student attendance plans. At each intervention tier, districts and schools should use different strategies to improve student attendance but the act does not specify how to implement each intervention tier. PED has yet to provide guidance and rule to direct districts, and the result has been inconsistent quality strategy interventions across districts.

The act also requires districts to devote staff time to attendance, both through school attendance teams and attendance improvement plans. Schools with more than 5 percent of the student body chronically absent must create a school attendance improvement plan. However, PED only just started providing written feedback on these plans. To ensure enough staff time is devoted to attendance, some districts use existing resources to fund attendance personnel, with at least 64 districts funding at least 354 attendance personnel in school year 2023. These personnel help to meet act requirements, including holding individualized attendance meetings with students who are chronically absent and establishing school- and district-wide attendance interventions. While some districts may have enough attendance personnel, those that do not should prioritize funding these positions.

Research on best practices is available, but PED is not consistently providing this information to districts to ensure the use of strong interventions. Students may be absent for various reasons. Therefore, schools and districts will likely need to use multiple interventions based on the cause of each individual student's reason for chronic absence and the acuity of chronic absence. New Mexico is currently implementing some of the interventions shown to work; however, the quality of implementation needs to be assessed. PED should provide assistance and guidance to schools and districts about when to implement specific interventions based upon student-specific information and intervention tiers.

Table 7. PED Has Not Consistently Provided Guidance as to What Strategies to Use to Improve Attendance

Tier	% Absent	Attendance for Success Act Requirements of Schools	Best Practices from Research	Guidance PED Could Provide
Tier 1: Whole School Prevention	N/A		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family Engagement Community Schools Strong teacher-student relationships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> List of universal evidence-based intervention strategies
Tier 2: Individualized Prevention	5%-10%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Talk to parents 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guidance on how to talk with families about student absences
Tier 3: Early Intervention	10%-20%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Letter home to parents Meet with family Build a plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Targeted home visits Mentorship and tutoring Youth engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assistance on how to implement home visits, mentorship, and tutoring Template letters regarding meeting to discuss attendance
Tier 4: Intensive Support	20+%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Letter home Meet with family Identify specialized supports Establish nonpunitive consequences Apprise student and parent of consequences of more absences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Case management Housing support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guidance on appropriate nonpunitive consequences (e.g. extra school) Help identifying specialized supports statewide

Source: Attendance for Success Act, Future Ed and Attendance Works Attendance Playbook

Some districts implement innovative interventions to reduce student absences, and these could be expanded at the school or district level. Other potentially impactful interventions such as allowing for calendars to be set at the school level,¹ have yet to be used but could make a sizable impact, specifically for some minority groups. Turnover and a lack of planning has hampered PED support, but PED can provide leadership and assistance to school districts both through providing guidance as to which interventions to use as well as how to comply with the Attendance for Success Act. This support from PED will help ensure districts use strong interventions consistently.

¹ This recommendation would be only for some schools that have calendars that prevent a majority of students from attending due to cultural events.

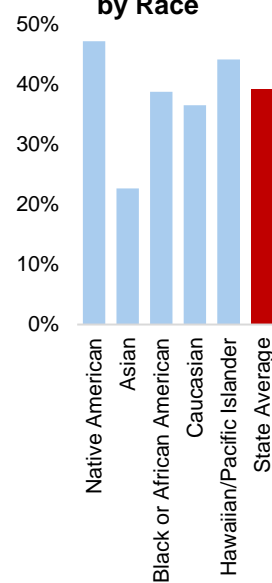
Adjusting school calendars, requiring extra school, and withholding credit for poor attendance can help reduce chronic absenteeism and increase instructional time.

Additional policy changes and practices implemented at the local level may effectively address chronic absenteeism. In some districts, adjusting the district calendar by school for cultural inclusivity could substantially improve attendance. Other districts require extra school for those who missed to deter absences and make up learning time. Additionally, many districts could benefit from a clarification on the permissibility of non-credit for poor attendance. These additional steps can reduce chronic absenteeism and increase learning time.

In districts with high proportions of Native American students, calendars should be adjusted at the school level to promote cultural inclusivity and reduce chronic absenteeism. Students from New Mexico’s tribes and pueblos miss school for feast days, cultural holidays, and associated preparation for these events. A 2021 LFC report on the Indian Education Act noted amendments required “Native American-serving school districts and charter schools...implement systemic frameworks for improving Native American student educational outcomes.” Aligning school calendars with appropriate tribal and pueblo events is a systemic effort that would directly address the student outcomes targeted by the act. Implementation, however, faces notable barriers. First, some districts may have sizeable populations from multiple tribes and pueblos, meaning large groups of students will be absent on different days. Second, cultural days are numerous and can occur with relatively short notice.

Many schools serve only one or two tribes or pueblos, even while their district may serve more. For instance, in Bernalillo Public Schools, while the district serves multiple tribes and pueblos, Santo Domingo elementary and middle schools, Cochiti elementary and middle schools, Algodones Elementary, and other schools have a preponderance of students from one tribe or pueblo. In districts confronting such challenges, calendars should be constructed with tribal consultation to avoid marking large proportions of Native American students absent. Both districts and schools should also find methods to manage unplanned or short-notice cultural events. Districts could add days to the calendar in anticipation of unplanned cultural days, similar to the management of cancellations due to inclement weather. In addition, meeting this challenge would be consistent with efforts to respond to the *Martinez-Yazzie* decision. More effective calendars could facilitate students’ culturally and linguistically relevant education and provide additional instructional time to improve the proportion of Native American students graduating ready for college or career.

**Chart 15.
Chronic
Absenteeism
by Race**



Source: LFC analysis of PED data

Extra school through night, Saturday, or summer school can be an effective tool for districts to deter chronic absenteeism and provide a venue to recover lost instruction. Some districts require or strongly recommend chronically absent students make up lost instructional time in evening, weekend, and summer school. Extra school has several benefits. First, it is not excessively punitive—it does not threaten already vulnerable families with legal action or monetary fines. Second, it offers a deterrent to students who may push the limits of chronic absenteeism with impunity while also providing instructional support and time to make up missing assignments. Last, such programs do not rely on any outside entity to act. Districts may implement and enforce extra instructional time on-site with school personnel.

Extra school can be either instructional time or supervised study time. These two pathways can provide support to chronically absent students and a deterrent for some students at-risk of chronic absence.

In practice, some school districts successfully implemented versions of extra school that encourage attendance and offer the means to get students who have become chronically absent back on track. For example, Lovington, which posted the lowest chronic absenteeism rate in the state for districts with more than 1,000 students, uses night school. Students referred to “opportunity school” must attend school one evening each week. They do not receive instruction but are required to make up missed work based on the number of unexcused absences accrued in a class period (at least 10). Lovington had 51 students enrolled in the opportunity school in fall 2023 and this fell to 18 in spring 2024. While the drop in students attending opportunity school does not mean the program is directly responsible for the drop in student unexcused absences, it could be a contributing factor (See Appendix O for an additional example of extra school.) Neither statute nor rule provide clear direction for districts regarding how to implement extra school for students who may be behind due to excessive absences. Clarifying how and when districts could implement extra school may help districts use this potentially effective tool.

State law does not specify how and when course credit can be withheld due to excessive absences. While law does not prohibit students from receiving a grade of “no credit” or retaining students, many schools have moved to “standards-based grading,” a set of practices around student learning that emphasizes assessing students on what they can demonstrate academically rather than behavior, attendance, or any other nonacademic component of school. Many schools in New Mexico have embraced standards-based grading as best practice, and in doing so may have created the belief among some officials that using attendance as part of a grade, or as the factor that holds students back is inappropriate or even illegal. PED should clarify that retention or withholding credit is allowed and may be deployed when students have missed substantial days of school (greater than 20 percent of days enrolled or those students in Tier 4 according to the Attendance for Success Act) and have been unresponsive to other interventions.

PED has not consistently provided attendance information, likely leading to inconsistent quality strategies.

PED can provide a variety of support to districts through funding, technical assistance, and training. However, PED has not consistently provided this support due to staff turnover, lack of strategic planning, and lack of clearly defined departmental roles in addressing absenteeism. This can lead to differences in implementing the Attendance for Success Act at the district level. One example of this is through the required attendance improvement plans, which schools with more than a 5 percent chronic absenteeism rate must complete. Beyond support and feedback on these plans, PED should also create its own strategic plan and internal procedure documents to ensure it provides the needed type and amount of assistance. PED can also summarize national best practices and make this information available to schools and districts. Looking at district responsibilities, districts will likely need to fund additional positions and prioritize attendance personnel both to ensure the capacity to consistently implement attendance strategies shown to work and to comply with the Attendance for Success Act.

PED could increase consistency and transparency regarding attendance procedures at the state level by creating a statewide strategic plan and internal processes focused on attendance. PED has experienced significant staff turnover in key attendance positions, which has led to a loss of institutional knowledge when processes, guidance, and procedures were not clearly written and communicated. PED can create these documents to help both districts and PED transition more smoothly in the future when turnover occurs.

Turnover of certain attendance staff positions led to a lack of information and guidance because PED does not yet have internal process documents around attendance or documents on the state goals for attendance. Many staff within the Safe and Healthy Schools Bureau changed over the last year. Personnel losses include the division director, deputy director, the deputy secretary, and the attendance coordinator all within the last year. In November 2023, the former school attendance coordinator died unexpectedly. Within this past year, the director of safe and healthy schools retired, and the deputy secretary overseeing the division changed. Such high turnover can lead to a loss of institutional knowledge unless internal procedures are documented. PED stated, while they are working to create these internal documents, they currently do not exist.

Creating these internal and public-facing documents will ensure the agency has a quicker recovery from turnover and allow for better support for districts. Without these documents, team members need to rebuild processes and rerun analyses to help districts. This rebuilding can take valuable time when districts and schools need more immediate assistance and can lead to uncertainty at all levels. PED should continue writing these internal documents and establish a public-facing strategic plan so PED,

districts, and schools can tell if they have met statewide goal regarding attendance.

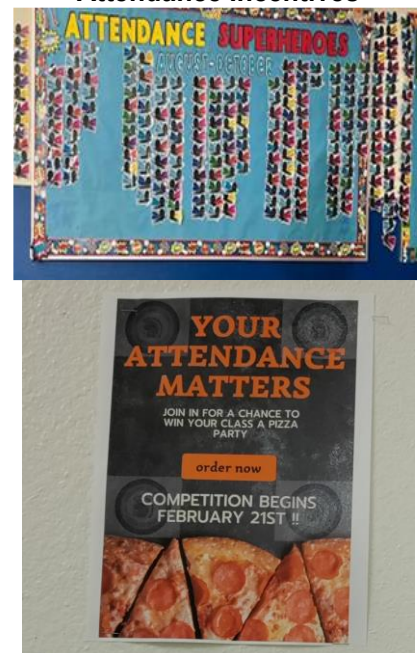
A lack of information regarding how interventions shown to improve attendance should be implemented leads to inconsistent practices across districts. National literature highlights several different evidence-based, research-based, or promising strategies that can be used to improve student absenteeism. These include school-wide interventions, such as improving the school environment to high-intensity case management for the most at-risk students dealing with multiple challenges. Throughout the state, many strategies proven to work are being used (See Appendix P for a list of programs.) However, districts vary in what interventions they use and how they use them. This can lead to different outcomes.

Some schools use incentives to improve student attendance, but research is mixed on their effectiveness. LFC staff visited schools from four districts, each of which used incentives to improve attendance, where students receive a reward for either very good or highly improved attendance. These incentives varied from stickers, pencils, or other low-cost items to large ticket items, such as a television or computer. Many schools have bulletin boards in the halls showing grade or class level attendance because the whole school may compete for which class or grade has the best or most improved attendance.

However, the national research on incentives for attendance is mixed, with some research showing positive impacts while other research shows no impact. Therefore, understanding how to implement incentive programs consistently that lead to positive impacts could be useful at the district and school levels. Santa Fe public schools published guidance regarding what is and is not appropriate for attendance incentives, specifying that incentives must be low-cost, nominal, not food-based, and should include students whose attendance improved rather than only perfect attendance. Having guidance such as this from PED could be useful, especially for smaller districts that may not have the resources to determine what interventions have been shown to work.

Creating an early warning system that includes parental notification is considered a best practice and can improve student attendance when done well. In New Mexico, many districts notify families regarding student absence. Parental notification practices vary by district and can be a holdover from the repealed Compulsory School Attendance Act requirements if families are only notified of unexcused absences. Districts across the state contact families when students are absent. For instance, Santa Fe Public Schools send letters to families after students miss three school days, regardless of whether these absences are excused. However, according to both Rio Rancho's and Los Alamos's school board policy, after three unexcused absences, parents are notified, after five unexcused absences the school creates a student success plan, and after 10 consecutive unexcused absences the student is disenrolled—a practice required under the previous act. In Los Alamos, 10 unexcused full-day absences also result in a referral to the Children, Youth and Families

Figure 9. Examples of Positive Attendance Incentives



Source: LFC files

Department. Having different procedures for when and how to notify families, as well as what actions districts take when a student is absent, can lead to different outcomes.

Figure 10. Los Alamos Policy Regarding Unexcused Absence Notification

Unexcused Full Day Absences	3	5	7	10	10 +
School contacts Parent/Guardian	X	X	X	X	X
School Interventions and Strategies (SAT and IEP)		X	X	X	X
Written Notice to Parents from School		X	X	X	X
Parent and Student Conference with School Staff		X	X	X	X
Referral to Children Youth and Family Department				X	X

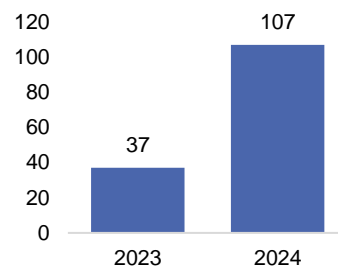
Source: Los Alamos Public Schools

Other states post best practice interventions and additional resources known to improve attendance on the state’s department of education website. Providing districts with a list of known practices they can use that will likely improve student attendance can help ensure districts use evidence- or research-based interventions. However, New Mexico does not currently post this type of information. Beyond a list of interventions, the state of Washington also posts template letters to families that districts can use to inform families when a student has missed enough days to require intervention. Washington state law requires a parent conference after five excused absences in one month or 10 excused absences within the year. Because New Mexico law requires schools talk to parents after a student is absent 5 percent of the time and requires an in-person meeting after a student is absent at least 10 percent of the time, New Mexico could benefit from template letters, especially for small districts with fewer administrative staff.

PED can help implement and select interventions by providing a list of interventions shown to work and build district capacity through training and resources to districts. PED is working with Real Time Solutions to create “attendance kits” for schools that include templates, attendance banners, pledge cards, and posters, as well as digital lesson plans and classroom resources for \$800 thousand. However, PED has other, lower-cost options it can also deploy, such as posting information on their website to allow for easy access to attendance information.

Roughly 14 percent of schools did not submit required attendance improvement plans for the 2024 school year, and the quality of the submitted plans varied. The number of schools failing to submit a plan for the current school year (107 schools) is higher than in the 2023 school year, when 37 schools, or 4 percent of schools required to submit a plan, did not. School compliance with the act is necessary for PED to report and support schools and districts in meeting their goals. Last year, 28 schools were not required to submit an attendance improvement plan because their chronic absenteeism rate was below 5 percent. For the current school year, the number of schools not required to submit a plan increased to 35.

Chart 16. The Number of Schools Not Submitting Required Attendance Improvement Plans Increased from 2023 to 2024

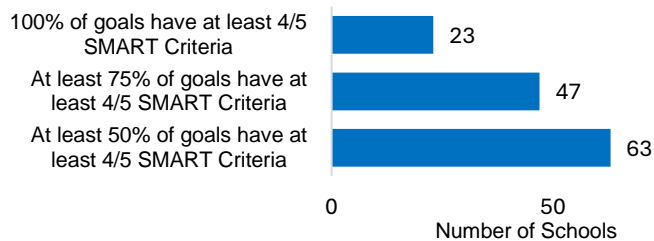


Source: PED

Student Attendance and Performance

While most schools include some best practices in their attendance improvement plans, only 23 percent of school plans meet SMART—specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound—goal criteria. PED’s Spring 2024 Attendance Conference focused on how to improve attendance improvement plans, specifically teaching attendance teams about SMART goals and how to write these goals. SMART goals are standards that can increase the likelihood of meeting a goal. LFC staff sampled school attendance improvement plans to determine their quality and uniformity. Only two out of the 88 schools randomly sampled had all interventions that met all five SMART goal criteria. PED should consider providing guidance on incorporating SMART goals in attendance plans given variable plan quality. Attendance improvement plans could include a dedicated space to list the specific staff responsible for facilitating the intervention and data collection and a space for the timing of the intervention, including when the school hopes to achieve the identified goal. (See Appendix Q for additional information.)

Chart 17. Number of Schools Meeting SMART Goal Criteria



Note: Of the 88 schools examined in a random representative sample

Source: LFC analysis of PED data

Moreover, consistent guidance through conferences, training, and publicly posted information on expectations could further improve attendance plan quality. Currently, districts and schools are provided written instructions for attendance plans in an online portal that describes the purpose of attendance improvement plans and defines key terms. However, PED does not provide guidance as to what the performance measure or data collection plan boxes for each strategy should include. This was the first year PED provided written feedback to schools and school districts on attendance plans, and as of March 6, 21 percent, or 163 schools out of the 778 required to submit a plan had received feedback. Feedback included the strengths of the plan, such as naming specific staff or stakeholders, as well as ways the plan could be improved, such as by utilizing student surveys or considering community partners that could offer support for chronically absent students.

Recommendations

The Legislature should consider:

- Amending the Attendance for Success Act to include specifying that districts can require additional instructional time for students who are excessively absent.

The Public Education Department should:

- Implement rule explaining that giving a student no credit is allowed and may be deployed when students have missed substantial days of school (greater than 20 percent of days enrolled) and have been unresponsive to other interventions;
- Implement rule that districts can require additional instructional time for students who are excessively absent;
- Work with districts to allow for local innovative interventions strategies to be evaluated and be brought to other similar districts;
- Develop and publish a strategic plan as to how PED can support districts regarding attendance. This plan should include a target for statewide chronic absenteeism rates and this target should be included in the Public Education Department's Accountability in Government Act performance measures;
- Develop and provide to relevant internal staff written processes to address attendance procedures;
- Produce and publicly post a list of best practice interventions to improve absenteeism as well as post templates for letters home regarding student absences;
- Consider incorporating guidance on both how to incorporate SMART goals and performance and data measurement through their existing efforts given variable plan quality; and
- Monitor how districts implement statute and ensure consistent implementation of statute including with feedback on attendance improvement plans that focus on building district capacity.

Districts should:

- Examine current district calendars and develop more culturally inclusive practices that minimize absences for relevant student populations; and
- Determine where it would be appropriate to have night, Saturday or summer school to help students recover from a high rate of absences.

Agency Response



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ARSENIO ROMERO, PHD
SECRETARY OF PUBLIC EDUCATION

MICHELLE LUJAN GRISHAM
GOVERNOR

May 30, 2024

Sent Via Email

Dear Chairman Muñoz and members of the Legislative Finance Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the June 2024 Program Evaluation of Student Attendance and Performance. The New Mexico Public Education Department (NMPED) would like to thank the Legislative Finance Committee (LFC) for their thoroughness, diligence, and willingness to collaborate while conducting this evaluation. NMPED is committed to removing barriers to opportunity and improving educational outcomes for all students. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, student chronic absenteeism has emerged as a critical challenge to academic recovery nationwide. This negative impact has been amplified for our most vulnerable students.

While low attendance rates were a serious concern prior to COVID-19, it has become apparent that there are additional challenges and barriers that our children are facing which must be addressed if we are to reduce rates of chronic absenteeism and re-engage students in learning. NMPED is in the process of developing a comprehensive plan to address absenteeism which aligns closely with many of the recommendations in this report. This response addresses those findings and recommendations.

Finding 1: Absenteeism decreases academic proficiency and graduation rates.

NMPED concurs with this finding but is encouraged that the rate of chronic absenteeism has dropped from a high of 40.73% in the 2021-2022 school year to a rate of 30.4% at the 80-day mark for the 2023-2024 school year. NMPED would also like to echo the statement in the report about the complex nature of the absenteeism problem and the need to address the issue with multiple solutions and areas of support. While some students may face logistical challenges such as transportation or homelessness, others are not attending due to a lack of access to engaging learning opportunities or a feeling that they don't belong. NMPED's plan for improving

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May 30, 2024
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attendance hinges not only on removing barriers but also on increasing student engagement and sense of connectedness to school.

Recommendation: Provide parents with information on the impact of attendance on their child's academic outcomes.

In July, NMPED will launch an attendance awareness campaign branded “Be Here NM”. The driving theme of the campaign is the relationship between school attendance and career success. The advertisements invite students to imagine themselves in a high-interest career like veterinary medicine and see that the career path begins with attending school every day. The initial campaign will be featured on billboards across the state and be accompanied by radio spots and a comprehensive social media push.

In conjunction with this campaign, there is also a school “activation” strategy. Every school in the state will receive a large vinyl banner titled “Why I come to school every day!” and an assortment of permanent markers. Directions will be provided for launching a student attendance pledge campaign that begins with students writing on the banner what motivates them to come to school. The banners are intended to remain hanging in schools as a reminder to students that they benefit from attending daily. Accompanying this are attractive attendance incentives like phone pop-its for secondary students branded with the Be Here NM logo or coloring books for elementary school students with illustrations of the same high interest professions in the advertisements.

The campaign is anchored with a website that has resources for parents and “attendance kits” for schools. The kits include branded digital templates for parent letters that inform them about the importance of daily attendance, templates for recognition certificates, pledge cards, posters, career exploration lesson plans, suggested social media posts, and short articles that can be inserted into school communications.

Recommendation: Focus resources and attention on elementary and middle school.

As noted in the report, chronic absenteeism is highest in the primary and high school grades. The challenge in the early grades may be due in part to parents having the misperception that attendance in these grades is less important. Nothing could be further from the truth and much of the messaging identified in the previously mentioned attendance awareness campaign addresses these myths.

Beginning in the Fall of 2024, NMPED will launch a kindergarten attendance initiative. This initiative will consist of four 2-hour virtual workshops with a target audience of schools and districts with high rates of chronic absenteeism in kindergarten. The workshops will consist of one hour sharing developmentally appropriate best practices, and one hour of presentations by content experts on current trends and research.

Recommendation: Collect data on teacher absences.

Teachers are one of the most important factors in a student's education, and the more contact effective teachers have with students, the more likely the teachers will be able to effect positive student outcomes. The agency is interested in considering collecting teacher attendance

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information, not as part of an evaluation system, but to better understand how teacher attendance influences student achievement and to consider the factors that influence teacher attendance.

Finding 2: Inconsistent attendance practices likely undercount absences.

The Attendance for Success Act explicitly identifies in section 8 that “beginning the first day of school, a classroom teacher or that teacher’s designee shall be responsible for taking accurate attendance for every class.” Currently, it is incumbent on school administration to ensure that this has taken place. Many SIS systems include functionality that assists administrators in identifying teachers who have not taken attendance for the day. NMPED will provide supporting guidance documents and identify classroom strategies for taking attendance while students are engaged in warm-up or SEL activities.

Recommendation: Publish rules on how schools should take attendance to ensure consistent practices statewide.

The NMPED will issue guidance documents as part of a larger strategy to provide more guidance around procedures for attendance data collection and use. This will ensure that the information is available in a timely manner, and NMPED will address the question of if there is a need for additional rule after these documents are in place.

Recommendation: Consolidate the MLSS, attendance improvement, and 90-day reporting requirements into one plan to increase plan coordination and allow for more efficient allocation of staff time.

When possible, consolidating reporting requirements is key to reducing administrative burden for public schools, districts, and NMPED. NMPED is in the process of reviewing reporting requirements for these plans and considering what redundancies can be eliminated across all plans in upcoming school years. Since Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham’s executive order 2022-058, directing NMPED to reduce burdensome reporting requirements by 25 percent, NMPED has reduced reporting burdens across the agency, including reducing the number of questions in the Education Plan, eliminating the instructional materials section of the Education Plan, streamlining requirements in the school safety plan template, narrowing the requirements in the Student Assistance Team Process, and improving data collection efficiency by reducing required reporting fields and transitioning to the Nova data system.

Recommendation: Determine if Nova will meet state and district needs for reliable real-time data within the next six months. If not, PED should conduct a feasibility study to determine how to best automate real-time data collection from districts that allow for the collection of average daily attendance at the state level, including exploring a statewide student information system.

The Nova real time data system is in its first implementation year, and data collection in the Nova system is improving at each reporting period. Initial issues with student information systems aligning to Nova and the Ed-Fi data standard have been ameliorated, and schools are learning to maintain accurate data in their student information systems. Reports are available for schools and for NMPED to access data in Nova, and a new data warehouse will become available for public access of Nova data over the summer.

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Finding 3: Strategies to reduce absences are implemented inconsistently.

Recommendation: Develop and publish a strategic plan as to how PED can support districts regarding attendance. This plan should include a target for statewide chronic absenteeism rates and this target should be included in the Public Education Department's Accountability in Government Act performance measures.

NMPED is in the process of drafting a comprehensive guidance document for attendance improvement. It will include a strategic plan aligned to the larger NMPED Strategic Plan, a framework for foundational conditions to support attendance, and a model identifying tiered research-based strategies to address absenteeism. In addition to this, NMPED is developing multiple guidance documents outlined below.

Recommendations: Produce and publicly post a list of best practice interventions to improve absenteeism as well as post templates for letters home regarding student absences. Consider incorporating guidance on both how to incorporate SMART goals and performance and data measurement through their existing efforts given variable plan quality. Monitor how districts implement statute and ensure consistent implementation of statute including feedback on attendance improvement plans that focus on building district capacity.

NMPED is currently developing guidance for the creation and self-evaluation of attendance improvement plans. This includes the resources previously mentioned in the attendance awareness campaign and strategic plan as well as the creation of a rubric to evaluate plan quality. In addition to functioning as a self-assessment tool, it will form the basis of training for plan reviewers. NMPED currently has one staff member in the role of Attendance Improvement Coordinator. Moving forward, NMPED intends to require that every district in the state have at least one person trained to review and evaluate school plans and provide meaningful feedback based on the rubric and their knowledge of the community. NMPED would review and provide feedback for all district and charter school plans annually.

Recommendation: Implement rule that districts can require additional instructional time for students who are excessively absent.

The Attendance for Success Act requires that schools provide “additional opportunities to students who are struggling with attendance”. This could include additional time in the evening, on a Saturday, or online. NMPED can provide guidance on possible models for providing additional instructional time for students.

Recommendation: Implement rule explaining that giving a student no credit is allowed and may be deployed when students have missed substantial days of school (greater than 20 percent of days enrolled) and have been unresponsive to other interventions.

Credit is a term, specific to high school courses, that is granted based on a grade above a certain threshold. Grades should reflect skills and knowledge mastered rather than a measure of a desired behavior. Typically, students who are chronically absent have difficulty maintaining a passing grade in an appropriately rigorous class and a denial of credit is a natural consequence rather than a policy. In grades K through 8, this would more appropriately be called “retention” to indicate that a student will be retained in the same grade for an additional year. While

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retention may be an appropriate response for some students who have missed an excessive amount of school, it should be considered on a case-by-case basis looking at all factors influencing the student's behavior and achievement. Research on the effectiveness of holding students back is mixed, with some studies indicating that retained students are much more likely to be drop-outs.

NMPED would like to express its gratitude for this work and the insight that it provides into student attendance and performance in our state.

Sincerely,

DocuSigned by:



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Arsenio Romero, PhD

Secretary of Public Education

cc: Candice Castillo, Ed.D., Deputy Cabinet Secretary of Identity, Equity and Transformation
Charles Sallee, Director, Legislative Finance Committee
Legislative Finance Committee Staff

Appendix A. Scope and Methodology

Evaluation Objectives

- Report current state trends in attendance, including statutes, appropriations and spending;
- Examine the impact of absenteeism on student educational outcomes; and
- Identify the role of local education authorities and the Public Education Department in addressing absenteeism in New Mexico as well as national best practices for improving attendance
-

Scope and Methodology

- Reviewed academic studies, policy research, school district, and public education department data regarding the relationship between student attendance and student outcome;
- Analyzed attendance, demographic test proficiency, and high school graduation data statewide;
- Conducted 11 site visits of elementary, middle, and high schools in four school districts.
- Met with stakeholders, researchers, and non-profit organizations both in and outside New Mexico;
- Conducted an attendance team member survey statewide; and
- Examined applicable laws, administrative rules, regulations, and policies.

Evaluation Team

Sarah Dinces, Ph.D. Project Lead, Program Evaluator
John Valdez, Ph.D. Program Evaluator
Margaret Klug, Program Evaluator
Jessica Hathaway, LESC Senior Policy Analyst
Tim Bedeaux, LESC Senior Policy Analyst

Authority for Evaluation

LFC is authorized under the provisions of Section 2-5-3 NMSA 1978 to examine laws governing the finances and operations of departments, agencies, and institutions of New Mexico and all of its political subdivisions; the effects of laws on the proper functioning of these governmental units; and the policies and costs. LFC is also authorized to make recommendations for change to the Legislature. In furtherance of its statutory responsibility, LFC may conduct inquiries into specific transactions affecting the operating policies and cost of governmental units and their compliance with state laws.

Exit Conference

The contents of this report were discussed with Arsenio Romero, PED Cabinet Secretary; Dr. Candice Castillo, PED Deputy Secretary; Gregory Frostad, PED Deputy Secretary, Denise Terrazas, Director of Policy, Amelia Milazzo, Deputy Director of Identity, Equity and Transformation on May 28, 2024.

Report Distribution

This report is intended for the information of the Office of the Governor, Department of Finance and Administration, Office of the State Auditor, and the Legislative Finance Committee. This restriction is not intended to limit distribution of this report, which is a matter of public record.



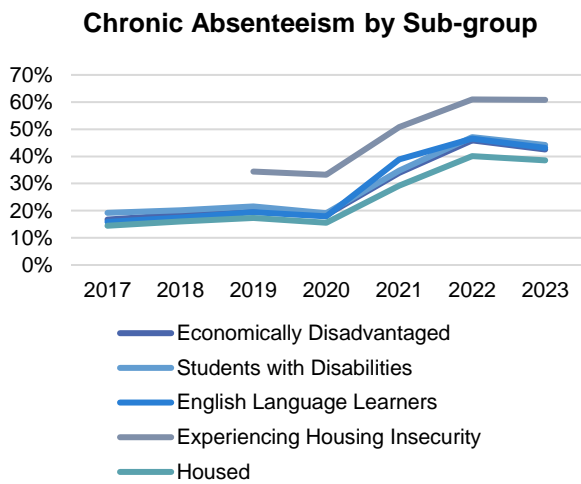
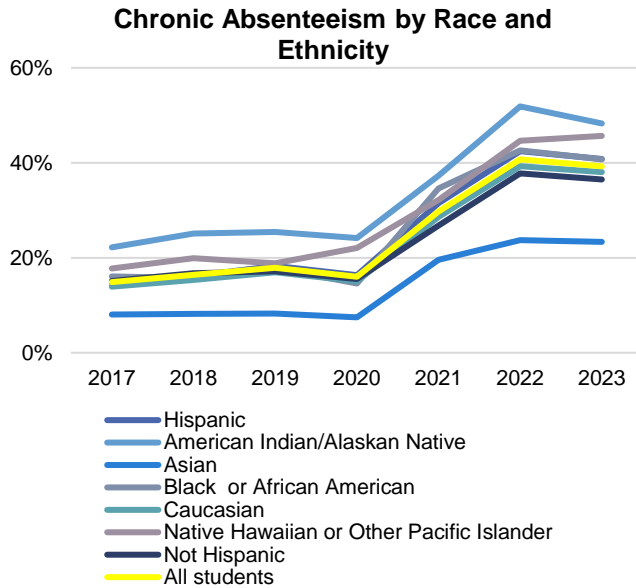
Micaela Fischer, CFE
Deputy Director for Program Evaluation

Appendix B. Chronic Absenteeism Rates by State and Change in Absenteeism from SY19 to SY23

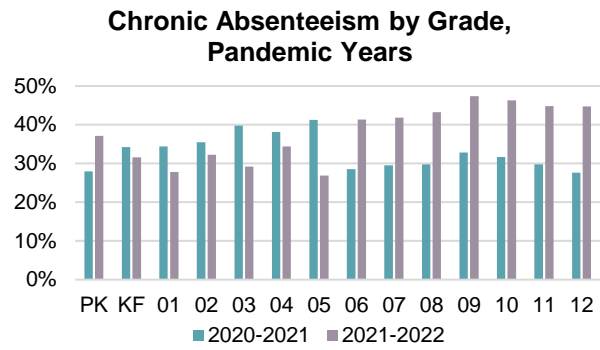
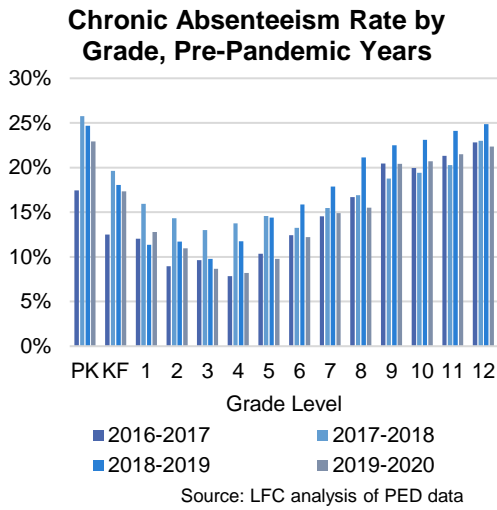
State	SY2018-2019	SY2021-2022	SY2022-2023	Diff 18/19 to 22/23	% change
Alabama	11.17%	17.90%	17.90%	6.73%	60.25%
California	12.10%	30%	24.90%	12.80%	105.79%
Colorado	22.50%	35.50%	31.10%	8.60%	38.22%
Connecticut	10.40%	23.70%	20%	9.60%	92.31%
Delaware	13.20%	24.80%	20.80%	7.60%	57.58%
District of Columbia	30%	48.10%	43.60%	13.60%	45.33%
Georgia	13%	24.40%	22.90%	9.90%	76.15%
Hawaii	14.70%	36.90%	30%	15.30%	104.08%
Idaho	na	20.60%			
Illinois	17.50%	29.80%	28.30%	10.80%	61.71%
Indiana	10.60%	21.10%	19.30%	8.70%	82.08%
Iowa	12%	21%	25.60%	13.60%	113.33%
Kansas	13.90%	25.40%	21.80%	7.90%	56.83%
Kentucky	17.80%		29.80%	12.00%	67.42%
Louisiana	na	19.40%			
Maine	16.70%	31.50%	27.30%	10.60%	63.47%
Massachusetts	12.90%	27.70%	22.20%	9.30%	72.09%
Michigan	19.70%	38.50%	30.80%	11.10%	56.35%
Mississippi	13%	28%	23.90%	10.90%	83.85%
Missouri	12.70%	23.80%	23.40%	10.70%	84.25%
Nebraska	14.70%	23.90%	22.40%	7.70%	52.38%
Nevada	18.80%	36%	34.90%	16.10%	85.64%
New Mexico	17.90%	40.40%	39.20%	21.30%	118.99%
North Carolina	15.90%	31.20%	26.70%	10.80%	67.92%
North Dakota	12%	22%	20%	8.00%	66.67%
Ohio	16.70%	30.20%	26.80%	10.10%	60.48%
Oklahoma	14%	19.50%	20%	6.00%	42.86%
Oregon	20.40%	36.10%	38.10%	17.70%	86.76%
Rhode Island	19.10%	34.10%	28.90%	9.80%	51.31%
South Carolina	13.10%	20.30%	24.70%	11.60%	88.55%
South Dakota	14%	22%	21%	7.00%	50.00%
Utah	14.30%	27.20%	25.20%	10.90%	76.22%
Virginia	10.60%	20.10%	19.30%	8.70%	82.08%
Average	15.33%	27.88%	26.15%	10.82%	70.56%

Source: FutureEd, Georgetown University

Appendix C. Chronic Absenteeism by Group



Appendix D. Chronic Absenteeism by Grade



Appendix E. PED Attendance Improvement Grant Award Information

Attendance Grant Awards, Fall 2023

District	Grant Amount	2022-2023 Absenteeism Rate
Albuquerque Public Schools	\$650,000	37.7%
Farmington Municipal Schools	\$250,000	35.3%
Gadsden Independent Schools	\$250,000	37.0%
Las Cruces Public Schools	\$300,000	34.5%
Rio Rancho Public Schools	\$250,000	35.7%
Roswell Independent Schools	\$300,000	43.8%
Santa Fe Public Schools	\$500,000	50.8%

Source: PED data

Appendix F. Graduation Alliance Emergency and Sole Source Contracts

GRAD Alliance Emergency and Sole Source Contracts 2020-2023

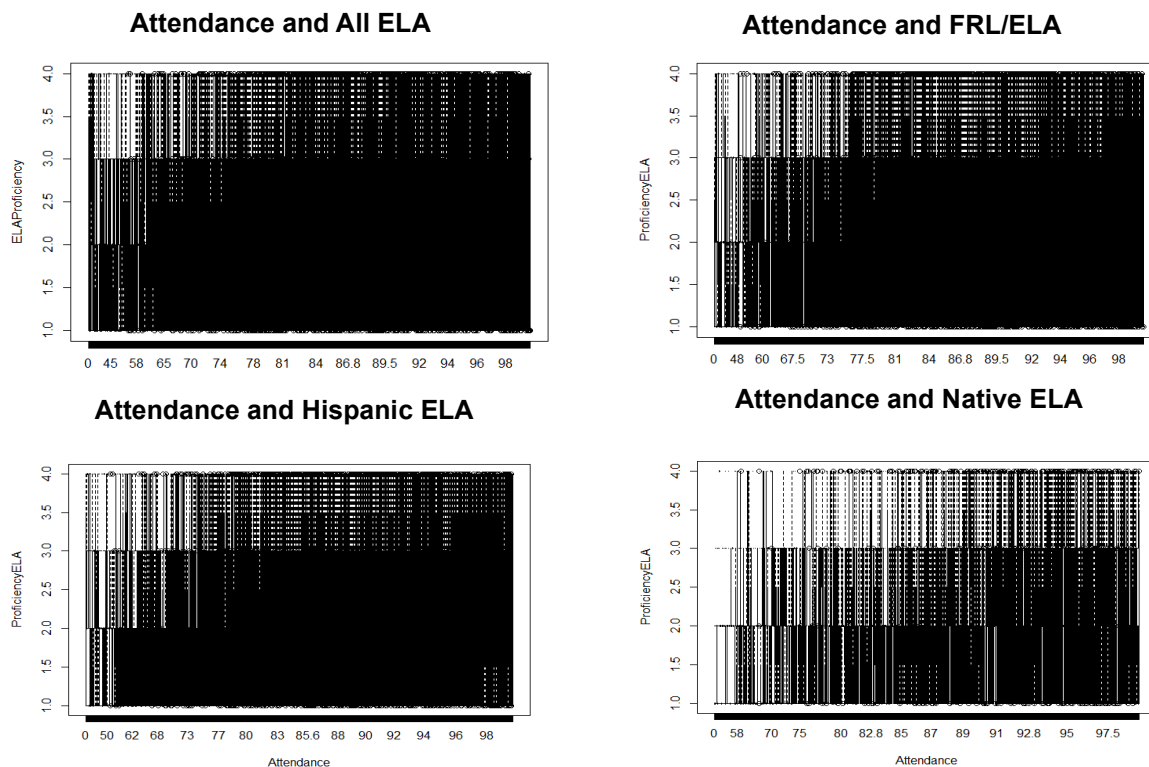
Date Contract Approved	Contract Length	Amount	Number of Students to Serve
4/24/2020	2 months	\$450,000	17,500
7/21/2020	11 months	\$1,691,000	not specified
9/1/2020	10 months	\$1,667,500	not specified
9/8/2021	10 months	\$2,000,000	15,500
8/4/2022	11 months	\$986,824	7,000
1/9/2023	5 months	\$1,500,000	10,640
10/17/2023	8½ months	\$986,823.62	7,500
Total Expenditure			\$9,282,147

Source: LFC analysis of Sunshine Portal data

Appendix G. Attendance and Proficiency Visualizations

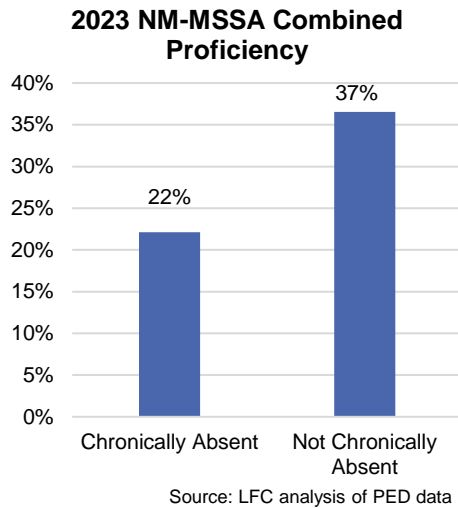
The LFC conducted an analysis of attendance and proficiency level to plot visually the impact of absences on state assessment achievement. This analysis aimed to determine whether student performance on assessments declined precipitously at some level of attendance. Such a drop off in performance would be consistent with the Attendance for Success Act’s thresholds for administrative interventions which take place a 5 percent, 10 percent, and 20 percent. These thresholds would make the most sense if the data also show corresponding declines in performance when students miss five percent, 10 percent, or 20 percent of school.

To complete this analysis, staff compiled a database of SY23 student level data with percent attendance, race/ethnic group, FRL status, and proficiency level on the NM-MSSA (ranging from zero to four, with scores of three and four counting as “proficient”). Next, staff graphed a box and whisker plot with percent attendance on the x-axis and proficiency level on the y-axis. Since percent attendance was recorded up to five decimal places, effectively most students would be shown as an individual line from their level of attendance on the x-axis to their score on the assessment on the y-axis. In any case where more than one student had the exact same percent attendance to the fifth decimal place, a typical box and whisker would be plotted with the box spanning the first and third quartile and the whiskers extending to the limits of the range. Because there were thousands of observations even when the data was broken down by race, the effect is a plot that graphically conveys the likelihood of various levels of proficiency given any percent of attendance. Denser areas show high probabilities and lighter areas with fewer lines and more white space show lower probabilities.



The examples above all plot various groups against their performance on the English (ELA) portion of the NM-MSSA. The top left is all students that took the assessment in SY23, the top right is only students on FRL, the bottom left is all Hispanic students, and the bottom right is all Native American students. In each, the gradient from dark to light as the eye moves from right to left, or from high attendance to low attendance, is relatively smooth. This gradient indicates an absence of any particular point where student performance abruptly drops off. Instead, attendance is a strong predictor of proficiency level, and consistently predicts proficiency levels across the various percentages of attendance.

Appendix H. Additional Analysis Showing the Impact of Absences on Test Proficiency



2019 TAMELA Proficiency and Chronic Absenteeism

	Percent Proficient
Math	
Chronically Absent	28.7%
Not Chronically Absent	49.3%
English (ELA)	
Chronically Absent	46.4%
Not Chronically Absent	61.9%

Source: LFC analysis of PED data

Students with regular attendance were about 13 percent more likely to be proficient than their chronically absent peers in both 2019 and 2023. Though proficiency levels have trended down since 2019, students that were chronically absent have been consistently less likely to achieve proficiency in Istation testing. In 2019, non-chronically absent students were proficient 12.8 percent more than chronically absent students. This result is consistent with 2019 TAMELA results. In 2023, non-chronically absent students were proficient 13.3 percent more than their chronically absent peers on the Istation assessment. These measures of kindergarten through second grade achievement are consistent with the results from NM-MSSA for third through eighth grade students.

Istation Proficiency and Chronic Absenteeism

Average Proficiency

	2019	2023
Chronically Absent	2.65	2.28
Not Chronically Absent	3.07	2.65

Percent Proficient

	2019	2023
Chronically Absent	49.72%	35.36%
Not Chronically Absent	62.54%	48.63%

Source: LFC analysis of PED data

Appendix I. Methodology

Longitudinal Analysis of the effect of attendance on probability of graduation.

To determine if attendance impacted the likelihood of graduation, LFC staff needed to merge multiple files, and estimate probability of graduation for students based on the number of absences they had in 3rd and 8th grades.

1. Merged SY12 attendance file with SY21 demographic file using student ID. SY21 is the most recent year for which LFC had complete outcome data at the student level. Students graduating on-time in 2021 would have been in third grade in the SY12 year.
2. To estimate the probability of graduation, a binary variable, using attendance, we utilized a logistic regression model, or LOGIT. LOGIT models use the form $p(x) = \frac{1}{1+e^{-(\beta_0+\beta_1x)}}$. Here $p(x)$ = the probability of graduation, given the percentage of attendance in third grade. Our estimates of the intercept (β_0) and the independent variable coefficient (β_1) were both significant at the .001 threshold. The coefficients yield the equation: $p(x) = \frac{1}{1+e^{-(-5.82+.075*x)}}$. By plugging in various values of x, the model predicts graduation given various levels of third grade attendance.
3. We carried out a similar process using eighth grade attendance for the same cohort from the SY2016-2017 year, matching their attendance records with outcome data from SY2020-2021. That model yielded the equation: $p(x) = \frac{1}{1+e^{-(-7.32+.091*x)}}$. Again, various levels of attendance were plugged into the equation to predict probabilities of graduation given attendance.
4. The two sets of predictions, one based on third grade attendance, one on eighth grade attendance are below. Note both were calculated with data from the same cohort of students. Income was not controlled for in these analyses.

Third Grade Attendance and Graduation Rate		Eighth Grade Attendance and Graduation Rate	
Logit Model Predictions		Logit Model Predictions	
2012 Third Grade Rate of Attendance	2021 Predicted Graduation Rate	2017 Eighth Grade Rate of Attendance	2021 Predicted Graduation Rate
100	83.8%	100	86.5%
95	78.1%	95	80.2%
90	71.1%	90	71.9%
85	62.8%	85	61.8%
80	53.8%	80	50.6%
75	44.5%	75	39.3%
70	35.6%	70	29.0%
2021 State Average (Actual)		2021 State Average (Actual)	
76.8%		76.8%	

Source: LFC analysis of PED data

Source: LFC analysis of PED data

Per expectations, higher attendance predicts a higher rate of graduation, and lower attendance predicts a lower rate of graduation. In addition, higher attendance in eighth grade predicts higher graduation rates than similar attendance in third grade. The same is true for lower attendance in eighth grade versus third grade. At 90 percent attendance—a figure closer to the average attendance across the grades, both models predict about a 71 percent probability that the student will graduate.

5. As a robustness check, a chi-square analysis was run using graduation as the dependent variable, and chronic absenteeism (rather than attendance) as the independent variable. As both are categorical variables taking on the values of 0 or 1 only, a chi-square test is appropriate. Both the third grade and eighth grade chronic absenteeism data were statistically significant indicators of graduation, with p-values of 2.2×10^{-16} , which suggests we reject the null hypothesis that graduation is independent of chronic absenteeism.

Instructional time analysis

To calculate average instructional time by district, LFC staff needed a way to estimate the number of hours the average student spent in school in SY23. Hours varied within districts by grade. To estimate a district average, LFC took a weighted average of hours per day each grade spent in school. For example, if a school required 6 hours per day for kindergarten, and 7 hours per day for grades 1-12, the average was calculated as $(6 * \frac{1}{13}) + (7 * \frac{12}{13})$. This created a reasonable estimate of average hours per day by district. Then, to create an estimate of average days attended, we subtracted the sum of average excused and unexcused absences from the total required instructional days. This yields the number of days attended on average. Multiplying average hours per day and average days attended over the course of the year gives total average hours attended per year per student.

Proficiency and Attendance

To estimate the effect of attendance or absenteeism on test proficiency, LFC staff conducted a series of linear regression analyses using multiple measures of attendance, and three different proficiency assessments. The attendance measures included: percentage of days/classes attended, excused absences, unexcused absences, and chronically absent status (categorical variable: 1, 0). Assessments changed over the last several years in New Mexico. For 2019, the pre-pandemic year in our analysis, regressions were run with Istation for grades K-2, and the Transition Assessment of Math and English Language Arts (TAMELA) for grades 3-11. Post pandemic, the Istation remained and provided a longitudinal comparison case, but New Mexico replaced TAMELA with the New Mexico Measures of Student Success and Achievement (NM-MSSA) for grades three through eight. As family income level is a known cause of proficiency as well, LFC used Free/Reduced Lunch (FRL) qualification as a proxy variable to control for family income.

1. Starting with 2019 Istation data, bivariate regression analysis using percent attendance and Istation proficiency level (scores range one to five, with four and five counting as “proficient”) revealed a statistically significant relationship. The calculated coefficient of .035 indicates that a one percent increase in attendance predicts a .035 increase in proficiency level. All other factors kept equal this model expects a student with perfect attendance to score .35 higher than a student with only 90 percent attendance. When running the same regression but including FRL, both independent variables are significant. All other factors held constant, the model expects a student with FRL status to score .64 lower than a student not qualified for FRL. This is a larger impact than that of attendance. When FRL is included, the model predicts a one percent increase in attendance will increase proficiency level by .026, or a ten percent increase in attendance will increase proficiency level by .26. LFC staff analysis also considered using Percent Unexcused absences and Percent Excused Absences in two additional analyses (each also included FRL). Per the model each additional percent of unexcused absences leads to a .062 lower proficiency score. Excused absences were not statistically significant as a cause of 2019 Istation scores.

2. LFC staff then ran the same set of regression analyses using 2023 Istation data. Percent attendance was still significant with a coefficient of .032 in the bivariate analysis with proficiency level, and .027 when we controlled for FRL. FRL was significant in this analysis as well with a coefficient of .65—similar to the 2019 analysis. Percent of unexcused absences was significant with a coefficient of -.031, a figure about half of the magnitude of the same figure in 2019. Unlike in 2019, percent of excused absences were a statistically significant cause of proficiency level in a model that also controlled for FRL. The 2023 model predicts a one percent increase in excused absences would lead to a .02 decrease in proficiency level. Likewise, it predicts a ten percent increase in excused absences corresponds to a .2 decrease in proficiency level.
3. Four regression analyses were run on the 2019 TAMELA assessment results. One test of the English (ELA) results showed a coefficient of .031 for the percentage of attendance—close to the result in the Istation analyses. Three regressions on the Math assessment showed significant and consistent results for percentage of attendance, excused absences, and unexcused absences. In each the results were significant and consistent with LFC staff predictions. The coefficients were: .029 for percentage of attendance, -.0054 for excused absences and -.031 for unexcused absences.
4. The 2023 NM-MSSA results were subject to the same regression analyses as TAMELA and Istation. ELA and MATH results were separately analyzed, each served as the dependent variable for percent attendance, excused absences and unexcused absences all while controlling for FRL. In both, percent excused was statistically significant with ELA's coefficient of .018 and Math's -.02. This suggests that each percent of school attended increases proficiency score, and with slightly greater magnitude for a student's math score. Both effects decrease in magnitude, but remain statistically significant when the model controls for the effect of FRL. When disaggregating absences, and controlling for FRL, both excused and unexcused absences are statistically significant indicators of ELA and math scores. For ELA, the analysis shows unexcused absences decrease proficiency scores by .017 per absence, while excused absences decrease proficiency level by .011. For math, unexcused absences decrease proficiency scores by .018 per absence, while excused absences decrease proficiency level by .016. In both cases, unexcused absences have a slightly larger effect on proficiency levels, but both excused and unexcused absences lead to lower test scores.

CTE and Chronic Absenteeism

To calculate the relationship between CTE utilization and chronic absenteeism, LFC staff used CTE enrollment data provided by PED at the school level. Since a high number of students enrolled could be due to a large student population or a strong interest in CTE, LFC staff divided the CTE enrollment by the student enrollment at the school. This resulted in the units of CTE enrolled by population metric. This metric was then correlated with school chronic absenteeism rates. LFC staff used the chronic absenteeism data on the PED dashboard. The correlation found a slight positive relationship with $r=.208$ and an $r^2=.0433$. However, this analysis did not control for confounding factors.

Attendance Team Survey

To determine the underlying causes of chronic absenteeism and how absenteeism changed since the pandemic, LFC staff surveyed attendance team members statewide. LFC staff received contact information for all school attendance team members from PED. LFC staff created a survey planet survey (see below for questions). The link was sent to these team members asking them to complete the survey within two weeks. Of the 2,303 attendance team members emailed, LFC staff received a response from 473. This resulted in a confidence interval of 95 percent and a margin of error of almost 4 percent. Additionally, LFC staff conducted two focus groups, one in the evening and one in the morning to get a deeper understanding of the results of the survey. Each focus group lasted approximately 1.5 hours.

Post survey, LFC staff examined the frequencies of different responses as reported in the report. LESC also conducted qualitative analysis of the open-ended question on the survey, with their analysis procedures also listed below.

Survey Questions for Attendance Teams

1. What type of school do you work in?
 - a. elementary,
 - b. middle
 - c. high school
2. In your opinion the school has
 - a. A big problem with chronic absenteeism
 - b. A medium problem with chronic absenteeism
 - c. A small problem with chronic absenteeism
 - d. Is doing a little better than others with student attendance
 - e. Is doing pretty well with student attendance
 - f. IS doing really well with student attendance
3. Select all of the below reasons for students being chronically absent at your school (shuffle answer order to address potential selection bias and broken into 3 questions on survey):
 - a. **Illness:** Common colds, flu, stomach bugs, and other illnesses can keep students at home.
 - b. **Medical appointments:** Regular check-ups, dental visits, or therapy sessions can require students to miss school.
 - c. **Chronic health conditions:** Students with conditions like asthma, diabetes, or allergies may need to miss school for management or treatment.
 - d. **Mental or behavioral health concerns:** Anxiety, depression, or other mental health issues can lead to absences.
 - e. **Family emergencies:** Situations such as accidents, deaths, or sudden crises in the family can necessitate absences.
 - f. **Transportation issues:** Lack of reliable transportation, missed buses, or car troubles can prevent students from reaching school.
 - g. **School phobia:** Some students may experience anxiety or fear related to attending school.
 - h. **Bullying:** Persistent bullying or harassment at school can lead to absenteeism.
 - i. **Family obligations:** Responsibilities such as caring for younger siblings or assisting with family businesses can cause absences.
 - j. **Homelessness:** Families experiencing homelessness may face challenges in ensuring regular school attendance.
 - k. **Cultural or religious observances:** Important cultural or religious events may coincide with school days, leading to absences.
 - l. **Parental decisions:** Parental choices, such as extended vacations or opting for homeschooling, can result in student absences.
 - m. **Legal issues:** Court appearances or involvement with the legal system can cause students to miss school.
 - n. **Financial constraints:** Families facing financial difficulties may prioritize work over school attendance for their children.
 - o. **Learning disabilities:** Students with learning disabilities may struggle in school, leading to absences due to frustration or avoidance.
 - p. **Language barriers:** English language learners or students from non-English-speaking households may face challenges attending school regularly.
 - q. **Pregnancy or parenting responsibilities:** Pregnant or parenting students may miss school due to medical appointments or childcare duties.
 - r. **Academic disengagement:** Lack of interest in school or feeling disconnected from the curriculum can lead to absenteeism.
 - s. **Trauma:** Students who have experienced trauma, such as abuse or violence, may struggle to attend school regularly.
 - t. **Extracurricular commitments:** Intensive involvement in sports, arts, or other activities may conflict with school schedules.

- u. **Lack of motivation:** Students who lack motivation or direction may skip school without a clear reason.
 - v. **Peer influence:** Pressure from peers to skip school or engage in unauthorized activities can contribute to absenteeism.
 - w. **Unstable living situations:** Students in foster care or temporary housing may face disruptions that affect school attendance.
 - x. **Technology distractions:** Excessive use of technology or social media may lead to staying up late and subsequently missing school.
 - y. **Health concerns of family members:** Students may stay home to care for sick family members or younger siblings.
 - z. **Work commitments:** Students who work part-time jobs may struggle to balance work and school responsibilities.
 - aa. **School-related stress:** High levels of academic pressure or conflicts with teachers or classmates can result in absences.
 - bb. **Other reason not included (please specify)**
4. Of the reasons selected above, what were the top 3 reasons for students being chronically absent from your school?
 5. What are the top 3 impacts of chronic absenteeism on the school?
 - a. Reduced Academic Achievement
 - b. Decreased Funding
 - c. Disruption of Classroom Dynamics
 - d. Increased Workload for Teachers
 - e. Negative School Culture
 - f. Underutilization of Support Services (e.g. the student body is not using tutoring or counseling services as much as is needed)
 - g. Impacts on Accountability Measures
 - h. Increased Teacher Burnout
 - i. Other (please specify)
 6. What are the top 3 impacts of chronic absenteeism on the student?
 - a. Reduced Academic Achievement
 - b. Decreased connection with peers
 - c. Decreased connection with Teachers
 - d. Negative view of school
 - e. Underutilization of Support Services (e.g. student is not regularly meeting with a tutor)
 - f. Increased likelihood of retention or special education services
 - g. Increased likelihood of dropout
 - h. Increased involvement with juvenile justice
 - i. Other (please specify)
 7. Who should be the focus of future interventions targeting student absenteeism (Rank from 1 as the most important to 4 as the least important) ?
 - a. Parents
 - b. Students
 - c. Teachers
 - d. Community
 8. What are the top three interventions deployed by your school to address absenteeism (if school is not currently implementing any interventions, select Other and specify that in the response)?
 - a. Mentorship
 - b. Tutoring
 - c. Parental Outreach
 - d. Pay for Attendance
 - e. Case Management

- f. Increasing transportation options
 - g. Increased communication between teacher and child or parent
 - h. Course offerings to focus on student interests beyond traditional academic classes
 - i. Other (specify)
9. The current interventions being used by your school improve attendance
- a. Strongly disagree
 - b. Disagree
 - c. Somewhat disagree
 - d. Somewhat agree
 - e. Agree
 - f. Strongly Agree
10. What would it take to see meaningful improvements for student absenteeism? (select the top 2)
- a. More school personnel (counselors, attendance coaches, teachers)
 - b. More money
 - c. More social services in the community
 - d. Changing parent beliefs/engagement
 - e. Other (please specify)
 - f. No change is needed
11. In your opinion using punishment as an approach to address absenteeism is:
- a. Very helpful
 - b. Helpful
 - c. A little helpful
 - d. A little harmful
 - e. Harmful
 - f. Very Harmful
12. What percentage of teachers at your school take attendance daily?
- a. More than 95%
 - b. 85% to 95%
 - c. 75% to 85%
 - d. 65% to 75%
 - e. 50% to 75%
 - f. Less than 50%
13. If you were an educator pre-COVID-19, how has chronic absenteeism changed since 2019?
- a. Chronic absenteeism has increased a lot since COVID-19
 - b. Chronic absenteeism has increased a little since COVID-19
 - c. Chronic absenteeism has decreased a little since COVID-19
 - d. Chronic absenteeism has decreased a lot since COVID-19
14. What are the underlying reasons for your above response
- a. Changes in student engagement?
 - b. Changes in attitudes towards illness
 - c. Changes in beliefs regarding need to be in school
 - d. Other (please specify)
15. What district is your school in?
16. What is the name of your school?
17. How would you describe the student body?
- a. Mostly low-income
 - b. Somewhat low-income
 - c. Somewhat high-income
 - d. Mostly high-income
18. How would you describe the student body?
- a. There is a mix of a number of ethnicities

- b. Most students are of Hispanic origin
 - c. Most students are of Native American origin
 - d. Most students are of Caucasian origin
 - e. Other (please specify)
19. Please provide any additional information that can help us understand the causes and impact of chronic absenteeism in your school.
20. Please provide your email below if you have an interest in potentially joining a round table discussion on absenteeism and solutions.

Qualitative Data Analysis

As an additional component of LESC data analysis, LESC staff completed qualitative review of a survey created by LFC staff and administered to members of attendance teams from school districts and charter schools statewide. This section focuses on analysis of an open-ended survey question that asked respondents to: *“Please provide any additional information that can help us understand the causes and impacts of absenteeism at your school.”*

Data Cleaning and Segmenting. The survey prompt elicited 240 responses, ranging in length from a few words to several paragraphs. After cleaning out unusable responses (for example, “not applicable” as an answer to the survey prompt), 236 responses were analyzed. As the survey prompt evaluated two constructs (both *causes* of absenteeism and *impacts* of absenteeism), initial cleaning of the responses included segmenting of responses into four categories: 1) Responses that answered the question to identify *both* causes and impacts of absenteeism (42 responses); 2) Responses that identified only causes of absenteeism (153 responses); 3) Responses that identified only impacts of absenteeism (Seven responses); and 4) Responses that did not offer either a cause or impact of absenteeism, but offered other insights or ideas to address chronic absenteeism (34 responses).

Analysis and Methodology

Thematic Coding. After segmenting the data, qualitative analysis was completed through a process of both deductive and inductive code development. LESC staff first developed deductive, a priori thematic codes—a priori referring to codes developed prior to analysis using existing research frameworks—for both “causes” and “impacts” of chronic absenteeism. These codes were modified with inductive edits if novel, or otherwise notable, causes outside of the initial framework were identified during thematic coding.

For causes of absenteeism, initial thematic codes were developed using a modified and expanded version of a [framework](#) for understanding school attendance challenges developed by Attendance Works, a national nonprofit focused on reducing chronic absence. While this framework is often utilized in attendance research, LESC staff do note its limitations in determining root causes because often, root causes fall into multiple categories. As a result, thematic codes developed expand on the framework, while still recognizing its limitations. “Cause” thematic codes included five broad areas:

1. **Barriers to attendance** that could be systemic or structural in nature. These include, but may not be limited to, factors such as child illness, poor transportation options or infrastructure, a child experiencing housing instability, family poverty, trauma, or a multitude of other barriers that prevent a student from sufficiently accessing, or engaging with, the school environment.
2. **Aversion to the school environment** that creates an active aversion to being at school. This includes, but may not be limited to, factors such as a child having mental health challenges, struggling academically, experiencing bullying at school, or not feeling a connection to educators or the school environment, and/or the school lacking a culture of safety or belonging, having poor discipline practices, or other environmental factors that result in an actual aversion to the school environment.
3. **Disengagement from the school environment** that is less about aversion and more about environmental or behavioral factors that culminate in students not actively being averse to school, but rather having trouble engaging in the school environment. This may include factors such as a lack of relevant courses, a lack of academic supports, being distracted by social media while at school, or other similar disengagement factors.
4. **Misconceptions or misalignment** about the role of academics and school, which captures *perceived* misconceptions or misalignment by school personnel about the importance of school or role of student absences negatively impacting students. This theme largely captures beliefs from school personnel that families and/or parents are choosing other priorities over school, or may lack the same values about school as school personnel do. It also captures views from school personnel that families are lacking routines that prioritize school over other activities such as vacations, time off, or other commitments during school hours.
5. **Emerging factors or school shifts** that have emerged in recent years largely, but perhaps not entirely, because of the Covid-19 pandemic. This includes, but may not be limited to, factors such as an attachment to remote learning, a fear of Covid-19 or other illness transmission, a lack of relationship between families and schools because of the pandemic, a change in school policies that have created confusion for families around school attendance when children are sick, and increased family responsibilities (such as caring for younger siblings) on children.

For “impacts,” LESC staff developed a deductive coding framework focused on impacted parties or environments:

Student Attendance and Performance

1. School and classroom impacts;
2. Child/student impacts;
3. Educator and school personnel impacts;
4. Community impacts; and
5. Family and parent impacts.

Because responses to the survey sometimes included both causes and impacts of absenteeism in a single response, all responses were evaluated for both constructs, and thematic coding was applied simultaneously, meaning each excerpt could have been coded with multiple codes. In total, thematic coding of the causes included 195 responses (42 responses that address both cause and impact and 153 responses that address only cause) and thematic coding of impacts included 49 responses (42 responses that address both cause and impact and seven responses that address only impact).

Textual Analysis. In addition to thematic coding, LESC staff completed textual analysis of the survey responses using statistical software. In this analysis, machine learning is used to understand and interpret the text, identify key themes and phrases from the responses, and provide insights from the open-ended text. The analysis segmented not only causes and impacts of absenteeism, but also identified responses that included a solution or idea (55 responses).

Using statistical analysis, phrases and/or key words were also assigned a “rake score” that indicates the importance of the phrases from the survey responses. This score is calculated by looking at how frequently certain words appear together and how central these words are to the overall discussion. A higher “score” indicates a phrase is more significant and potentially more relevant to understanding the key topics or concerns expressed by respondents. The word clouds generated using this method elevate key concepts identified through this textual analysis and are included in Graphics 1, 2, and 3 (below).

Findings

Reported Causes of Absenteeism Challenges. Of the 195 survey responses thematically analyzed for causes, 79 responses (41 percent) identified “barriers,” 36 responses (18 percent) identified “aversions,” 36 responses (18 percent) identified “disengagement,” 132 responses (68 percent) identified “misconceptions or misalignment,” and 21 responses (11 percent) identified “emerging factors or school shifts” as reasons, or causes, behind high levels of student absenteeism.

Table 4: Attendance Causes Reported by School Attendance Team Members

Cause of Absenteeism	Barriers (Systemic/structural, behavioral, or otherwise) to attending school	Aversion (To school environment)	Disengagement (From school environment)	Misconceptions or Misalignment (About the importance/role of school)	Emerging Factors/School Shifts (As an expression of Covid-19 impacts and recent learning shifts)
Count of Responses	79	36	36	132	21
% of Responses	41%	18%	18%	68%	11%

Source: LESC Analysis of LFC Survey

Of responses identifying causes, 68 percent of school personnel surveyed (132 responses) reported a belief, opinion, or view that misconceptions, or misalignment, about the importance of being at school are a leading cause of attendance challenges. As noted above, these can be characterized by factors such as parent behaviors (for example, choosing other activities such as vacations or medical appointments rather than school attendance), a lack of shared belief between schools and families about the value or role of school, a belief from school staff that parents and families are not being held accountable for attendance, or a lack of family routines related to school. Importantly, these responses only capture the beliefs, views, or opinions

of school personnel who perceive misconceptions or misalignment as a root cause behind absenteeism, but it does not include a full perspective on the issue from families, parents, and students directly.

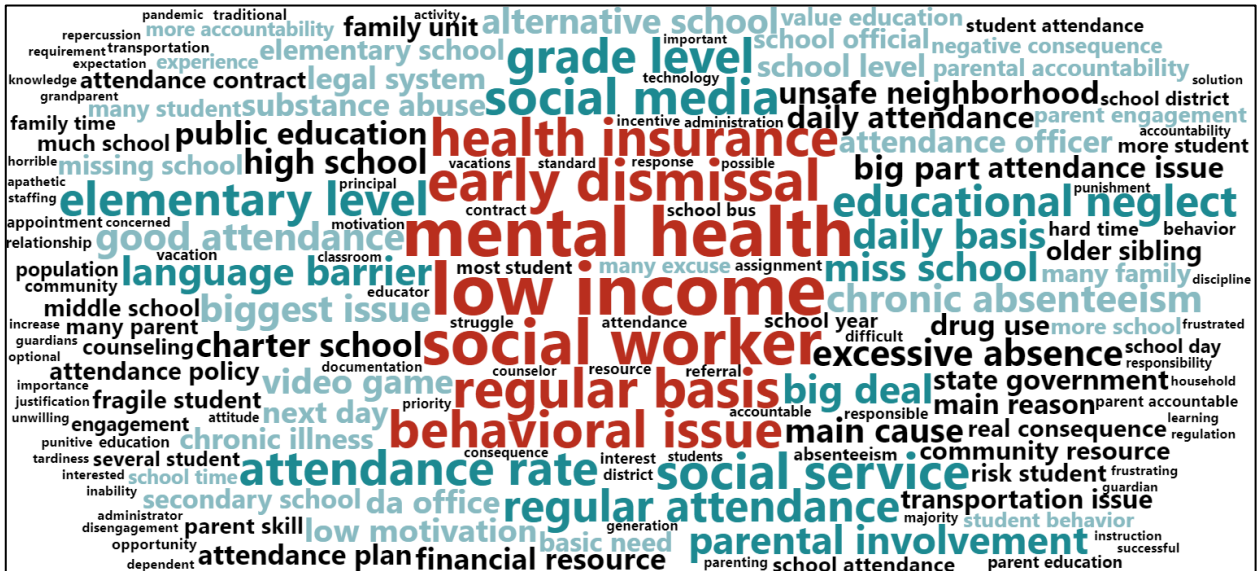
School personnel surveyed also indicate barriers are the second leading cause of school attendance challenges (79, or 41 percent, of responses). Specific factors categorized as barriers can be either systemic, structural, or behavioral in nature and include items as varied as illness among students (acute or chronic), poor transportation and community infrastructure, challenging home environments, childhood trauma, an inability for school staff to reach family members, family poverty, an identified need for children (particularly high school students) to work rather than attend school, or other barriers. In the survey, respondents also noted barriers such as a lack of partnerships between school districts and tribes to support Indigenous students and challenges with students crossing the border to attend school that may be more specific to New Mexico's context.

Causes related to aversions and disengagement from school were represented equally in the responses from school personnel (36, or 18 percent, of responses). Aversions can include factors such as anxiety, mental health challenges, academic struggles, a lack of belonging at school, a lack of connection to an educator or other adults at school, or poor classroom culture. Disengagement factors include a lack of motivation, social media distractions, a lack of extracurriculars or enrichment options, skipping classes or ditching school, or an identified lack of academic support or structures conducive to student needs.

Emerging factors or school shifts were identified the least by school personnel as causes (21 responses, or 11 percent). Specific behaviors included in emerging factors or school shifts are items that may be resulting from pandemic impacts still being felt in classrooms although some of these emerging behaviors have been noticed outside of pandemic impacts. This theme includes behaviors such as an attachment to remote learning, a fear of Covid-19 or other illness transfer, an increase in grandparents raising grandchildren, student school refusal post-pandemic, a shift in school policies requiring more time out when students are ill, and a lack of relationships between families and students as a result of the pandemic.

In addition to thematic coding, textual analysis allowed generation the figure shown below, which demonstrates the complexity of causes behind school absenteeism while also finding that issues such as family income, mental health needs, and a need for social workers (and other mental health professionals) are central to root causes behind attendance challenges.

Text Analysis of Causes of Absenteeism



Source: LESC Analysis of LFC Survey

Impacts of Absenteeism Challenges. Of the 49 responses analyzed for causes, 19 responses (39 percent) identified classroom or school impacts, 22 responses (45 percent) identified child/student impacts, 18 responses (37 percent) identified educator or personnel impacts, seven responses (14 percent) identified community impacts, and 11 responses (22 percent) identified family or parent impacts as a result of high levels of chronic absenteeism.

Responses from school personnel cite impacts on children/students as the most prevalent related to absenteeism (22 responses, or 45 percent). Child/student impacts includes factors such as poor academic achievement, low student morale, an increase in concerning child behaviors, low motivation, or low self-esteem, among other negative impacts.

Following impacts on children and students, school personnel noted an increase in school and classroom impacts (19 responses, or 39 percent). School and classroom impact manifest in behaviors or factors such as low morale, students feeling unsafe at school, a negative school culture, physical altercations among students, an increased presence of long-term substitute teachers, and impacts to other students in the classroom, whether those students are absent or not.

Table 5: Attendance Impacts Reported by School Attendance Team Members

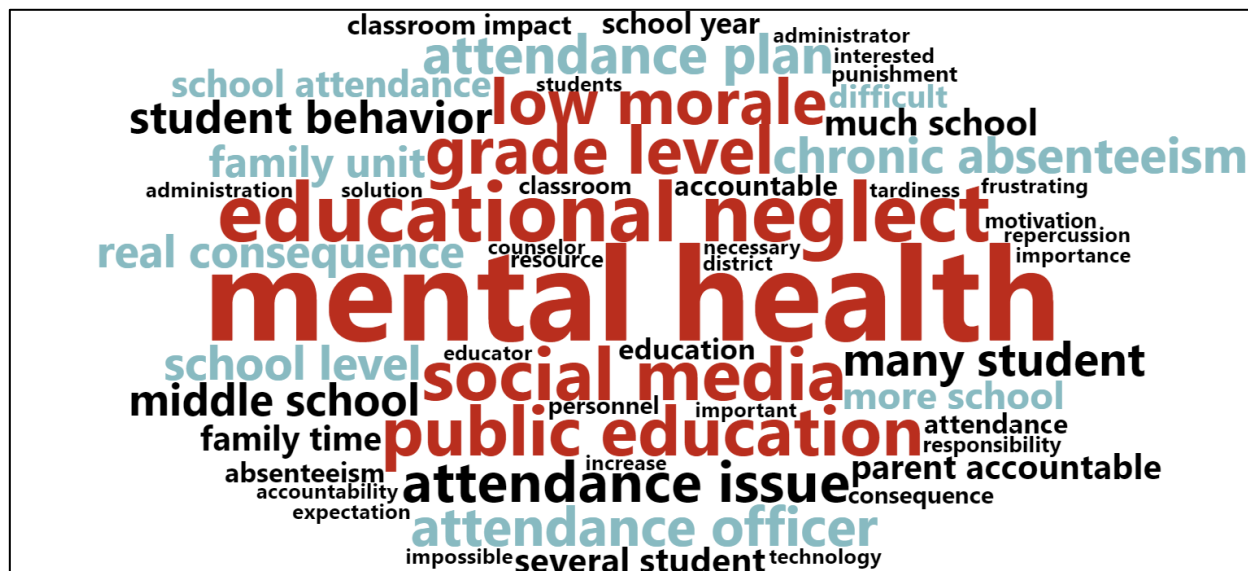
Impact of Absenteeism	School and Classroom Impacts	Child/Student Impacts	Educator Impacts	Community Impacts	Family and Parent Impacts
Count of Responses	19	22	18	7	11
% of Responses	39%	45%	37%	14%	22%

Source: LESC Analysis of LFC Survey

Impacts to educators and school personnel are also cited by attendance team members (18 responses, or 37 percent). Educator impacts can include low educator morale, increased teacher absences, increased educator stress, educators unable to meet increased workloads because of absenteeism, and other negative impacts to school personnel.

The figure shown below visualizes textual analysis of impacts reported by school personnel. Rising to the top of impacts that result from high levels of absence are issues such as low morale, students not achieving at grade level, concerns about educational neglect, and poor mental health.

Text Analysis of Impacts of Absenteeism



Source: LESC Analysis of LFC Survey

Solutions or Ideas to Address Absenteeism. The final textual analysis completed includes review of 55 responses that indicated possible solutions or ideas generally visualizes these ideas (shown in body of text). Solutions offered by school personnel were varied, likely in recognition of the complexity of school attendance challenges. There was a clear call for additional parent and family accountability in the form of additional regulations, however, importantly, these needs were identified alongside parent and family engagement. Numerous survey responses offering solutions indicated parents and families may benefit from education and connection to resources, such as community organizations, to address underlying challenges with poverty and basic family needs. Multiple responses noted attendance may require equal measures of incentives and support, just as much as potential consequences. Mental health and a need for school personnel (social workers, counselors) to help with this was also noted. Finally, attendance team members who responded to the survey indicated a clear need for additional personnel to support teachers with attendance, such as attendance offices or attendance coaches or officers.

Limitations. Inherent in its construct and audience, this survey focuses on attitudes and perspectives from members of attendance teams that work in schools. While this includes a variety of roles (educators, administrators, counseling and/or social work staff, and additional school functions), the findings from the survey are limited to the perspective of school personnel. It does not include responses from parents or families directly, and therefore, interpretations should recognize the limitations of this survey to offer a full perspective on attendance issues. Notably, school personnel in the survey identify a lack of parent and family engagement, or parental behaviors, as a frequent cause of absenteeism challenges (68 percent of survey responses naming causes of absenteeism cite some form of this perspective), particularly for elementary aged students. Additionally, while review of survey data can offer a nuanced view of complex questions, it has inherent limitations. Clear thematic coding processes were followed to generate the most objective review of the survey question, and data was thoroughly cleaned for textual analysis using machine learning processes—however, graphic visualizations of survey responses should be interpreted with

caution. Anonymized survey responses could be offered as an appendix to the evaluation to ensure integrity to respondents' full ideas and responses.

Teacher Attendance and Student Absences

To determine if teacher and school staff absences are correlated with student chronic absenteeism LFC staff conducted a correlation of total staff hours absent and chronic absenteeism data by school for three school districts. LFC staff found a strong correlation of .5097 and an $r^2 = .2598$ for the first district. At another district, the district provided teacher absences for SY24. LFC staff used teacher absences and correlated that with student absences through the 80-day snapshot. The relationship was slightly smaller than in the first district with a Spearman's $r = .4192$, and an $r^2 = .1757$. Finally, one last district provided teacher absence data for SY23, LFC staff found a slightly smaller correlation with an Spearman's $r = .386$ and an $r^2 = .149$. The data from this last school district was ranked as the distribution was not normal.

Impact of Classroom Absenteeism on Proficiency Quantitative Data Analysis

Data. LESC staff combined data from three datasets to perform an analysis of the impact of chronic absenteeism on student achievement at the classroom level. All data were provided by the Public Education Department (PED) for the 2022-2023 school year. PED provided datasets of student course enrollments, student-level attendance, and student-level academic achievement in English language arts (ELA) and math from the New Mexico Measures of Student Success and Achievement (NM-MSSA) standardized assessment. LESC staff combined the three datasets using unique student IDs.

To isolate and magnify the “classroom effect,” LESC staff limited observations to only third-, fourth-, and fifth- grade students, under the assumption that elementary school students generally spend an academic year in one classroom with one teacher. Some elementary schools use unique block scheduling techniques where students will be associated with multiple teachers. In these cases, LESC staff estimated a “teacher of record,” where students were linked to the teacher which had the greatest number of associations in the data. Cases where a teacher of record could not be determined were dropped. These assumptions eliminated 7,422 of 57,739 students (~13 percent).

Students who were missing from any of the three data sources were omitted from the analysis. In addition, to ensure student assessment data was correctly associated with teachers, LESC staff eliminated entries where the students' assessment data was associated with a different school than their attendance data. These assumptions eliminated an additional 4,146 students.

Combining student assessment results with class roster data, LESC staff compiled a dataset of 2,860 third-, fourth-, and fifth- grade classrooms in which each student was placed with their teacher of record. Due to omissions of student records required by aforementioned assumptions, some classrooms were missing proficiency and absenteeism data for a number of students. LESC staff eliminated classrooms where data was not available for more than one student. LESC staff also eliminated classrooms that appeared to have fewer than five students. These assumptions eliminated 725 of 2860 classrooms (25 percent).

The final total observations included in this analysis were 2,135 classrooms accounting for achievement results of 39,222 students. The classrooms remaining in the sample are demographically similar to the state at large, as shown in the table below. However, students in the sample tended to have higher proficiency rates in both English and math than the statewide average. It is worth noting, the assumptions used to clean the data likely disproportionately eliminated highly mobile students, a group of students known to struggle on standardized assessments. The purpose of this research was to better understand the impact of chronic absenteeism among students who were in the classroom all year long. Future researchers may wish to evaluate how the results of this study may differ for students who are chronically absent and highly mobile.

**Demographics of Analysis Sample
compared with Statewide Demographics**

	New Mexico (Statewide)	Sample Used for this Analysis
N. Students (Grades 3-5)	57,739	39,222
N. Classrooms	2,860	2,135
Percent Econ. Disadv.	47.8%	47.8%
Percent English Learners	20.1%	21.0%
Percent Proficient, ELA	37.9%	39.7%
Percent Proficient, Math	26.6%	27.9%

Source: LESC Analysis of PED Data

Methodology. To analyze the impact of chronic absenteeism on student proficiency in English and math, LESC staff constructed three ordinary least squares regression models for English and three for math. In both subjects, the first model looks only at the effects of chronic absenteeism, the second model includes percent of students economically disadvantaged, and the third includes percent economically disadvantaged, percent English learners, and class size as other related variables.

A student is considered chronically absent if they missed more than 10 percent of their days enrolled for any reason, both excused and unexcused. This definition is consistent with national standards and the definition of chronic absenteeism in the state’s Attendance for Success Act.

Economically disadvantaged students are students who are “directly certified” as eligible for free and reduced-fee lunch (FRL). The direct certification process is based on information obtained from other state agencies. Students may be directly certified for FRL if their family receives SNAP or TANF benefits or if the student is a foster child, experiencing homelessness, or a migrant. The direct certification process is a more precise indicator of student poverty than simply using a student’s eligibility for free and reduced fee-lunch, especially given that some higher-income students may be eligible for FRL based on the school-wide community eligibility provision. English learners are students who are classified as such after taking a screening English fluency proficiency assessment called the WIDA Screener.

The table below displays a correlation matrix of the variables of interest. Evident from the table are a wide variety of magnitudes and directions of the correlation coefficients. The dependent variables in this analysis are the percentage of students that are proficient at the classroom-level in ELA or math. Not surprisingly, the correlation coefficient between ELA and math proficiency rates is 0.79, which indicates that classrooms demonstrating strong ELA scores will also demonstrate strong math scores.

Both ELA and math proficiency rates have a low to moderate negative correlation ($r = -0.38$) with chronic absenteeism but a stronger negative correlation with economically disadvantaged ($r = -0.66$) and ($r = -0.57$), respectively.

Classroom-level chronic absenteeism has a moderate, positive relationship with percent economically disadvantaged ($r = 0.42$), suggesting that classrooms with higher proportions of low income students tend to have higher proportions of students who are chronically absent. This moderate correlation suggests multicollinearity in the regression models and therefore, some caution should be used when interpreting the results as to not conflate the impacts of chronic absenteeism and poverty.

Correlations Between Variables of Interest

	<i>Percent Proficient ELA</i>	<i>Percent Proficient Math</i>	<i>Percent Chronically Absent</i>	<i>Class Size</i>	<i>Percent Econ. Disadv.</i>	<i>Percent English Learners</i>
<i>Percent Proficient ELA</i>	1					
<i>Percent Proficient Math</i>	0.79	1				
<i>Percent Chronically Absent</i>	-0.38	-0.38	1			
<i>Class Size</i>	0.09	0.08	0.04	1		
<i>Percent Econ. Disadv.</i>	-0.66	-0.57	0.42	-0.13	1	
<i>Percent English Learners</i>	-0.40	-0.29	-0.06	-0.08	0.35	1

Source: LESC Analysis

Results. The results of each model are reported below. Model 1 suggests that at the classroom level, chronic absenteeism has a negative impact on both ELA proficiency and math proficiency. The degree of the impact is such that, for every 10 percentage point increase in chronic absenteeism, the classroom’s proficiency rate will decline on average 5 percentage points in either subject.

OLS Results Regarding Impact of Chronic Absenteeism on Classroom-Level ELA and Math Proficiency Rates

	ELA Proficiency			Math Proficiency		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Percent Chronically Absent	-0.488*	-0.159*	-0.188*	-0.490*	-0.223*	-0.241*
Percent Econ. Disadv.		-0.609*	-0.526*		-0.495*	-0.444*
Percent English Learners			-0.201*			-0.115*
Class Size			0.000			0.001
(Intercept)	0.537*	0.735*	0.740*	0.420*	0.581*	0.570*
N. Obs.	2135	2135	2135	2135	2135	2135
R-Squared	0.143	0.443	0.480	0.148	0.351	0.364
Adj. R-Squared	0.143	0.443	0.479	0.147	0.350	0.363

* denotes significance at the $p < 0.001$ level.

Source: LESC Analysis

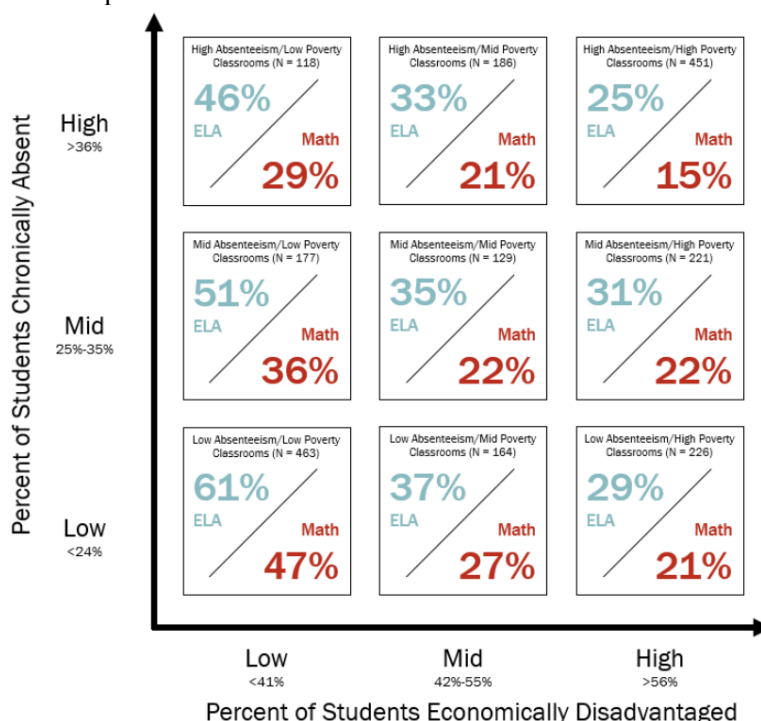
Model 2 shows chronic absenteeism maintains its statistical significance when controlling for the percent of students in the classroom considered economically disadvantaged. However, when considered together, students’ poverty level has a larger significant impact than chronic absenteeism. For each 10 point increase in the percentage of economically disadvantaged students, classrooms experience a decline of about 6 percent proficient in ELA and about 5 percent in math on average. Independent of this level of poverty, chronic absenteeism maintains an additional, albeit smaller relationship, with proficiency, contributing to a decline of about 1.6 percentage points in ELA and 2.2 percentage points in math for each 10 percent of the class chronically absent.

Finally, Model 3, the most sophisticated model, includes covariates for percent English learners and class size. For both ELA and math, chronic absenteeism maintains a statistically significant relationship with ELA and math proficiency rates, even when controlling for all three other covariates. Model 3 has the greatest adjusted R-squared coefficient among the three models, suggesting it is the best-fit of the present options for understanding the variance in student proficiency rates. As stated, the high correlation between poverty and chronic absenteeism suggests that in high poverty classrooms, students are more likely to be

chronically absent. LESC staff examined the compounding effect of chronic absenteeism and poverty by constructing visualizations of theoretical low-poverty and high-poverty classrooms.

To better understand the nuance in this relationship, LESC staff divided classrooms into nine groups based on their demographic characteristics. The divisions occurred along two axes for the major independent variables in this analysis, chronic absenteeism and economically disadvantaged status. First, classrooms with less than 41 percent economically disadvantaged students were considered “low” poverty, classrooms between 42 percent and 55 percent economically disadvantaged were considered “mid” poverty, and classrooms with greater than 56 percent economically disadvantaged were considered “high” poverty. Second, classrooms with less than 24 percent of students chronically absent were considered “low” absenteeism, classrooms with between 25 percent and 35 percent of students chronically absent were considered “mid” absenteeism, and classrooms with more than 35 percent of students chronically absent were considered “high” absenteeism. Figure 1 below displays the average ELA and math proficiency rates in classrooms along those cross-sectional lines.

Classrooms with low chronic absenteeism and low poverty have an average of 61 percent proficient in ELA and 47 percent in math. As these classrooms increase in absenteeism, moving upward in the matrix in Figure 1, proficiency drops substantially. Low poverty classrooms with high absenteeism have 46 percent proficient in English and 29 percent in math.



Source: LESC Analysis

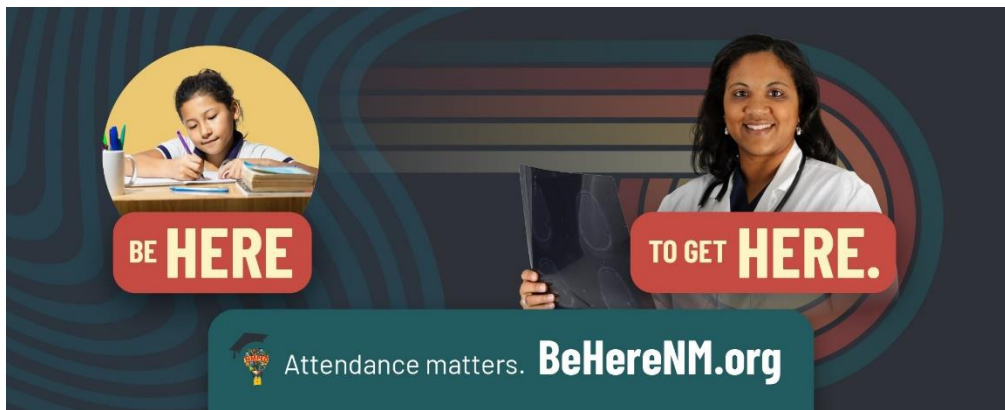
However, a much stronger relationship can be seen as poverty increases, moving from left to right across the matrix. As students begin to face greater economic disadvantages, the percent of students proficient in English and math plummet. In low absenteeism classrooms, increasing from 41 percent economically disadvantaged to 56 percent economically disadvantaged decreases ELA proficiency from 61 percent to 29 percent and math proficiency from 47 percent to 21 percent. Classrooms with both high absenteeism and high poverty have the lowest proficiency rates, with just 25 percent of students proficient in ELA and 15 percent proficient in math.

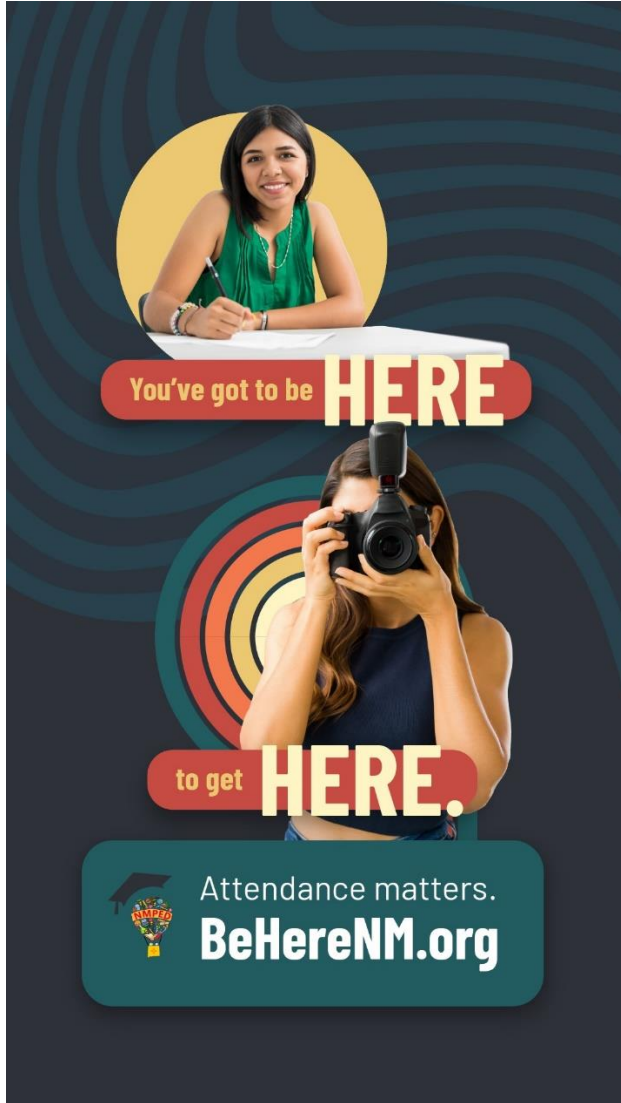
Limitations and Future Research. LESC staff identified two shortcomings with the present approach to classroom-level analysis of chronic absenteeism. First, while this analysis explains how chronic absenteeism may be affecting student achievement, it does little to further our understanding of the root causes of chronic absenteeism. For this reason, it is difficult to ascribe “solutions” to chronic absenteeism without further study of the underlying social and economic situations families may be facing. Future research should focus on understanding the effectiveness of certain interventions at reducing chronic absenteeism. Second, it is important to remember this quantitative analysis examines only elementary school students. For these students, the underlying causes of absences are likely much more related to home and family situations; elementary school students may have little control over the factors that lead to missing school. Future research should also examine the impacts and root causes of absenteeism among middle and high school students, especially given that older students gain more agency over their decisions to be absent or truant as they age.

Appendix J. Attendance Team Survey Results on Causes of Chronic Absenteeism

	N	%
Illness	187	40%
Medical appointments	65	14%
Chronic health conditions	33	7%
Mental or behavioral health concerns	103	22%
Family emergencies	47	10%
Transportation issues	72	15%
School phobia - some students may experience anxiety or fear related to attending school	56	12%
Bullying	13	3%
Family obligations	37	8%
Homelessness or Unstable Living Conditions	61	13%
Cultural or religious observances	7	1%
Parental decisions - such as extended vacations or opting for homeschooling, can result in student absences	188	40%
Legal issues	4	1%
Financial constraints	8	2%
Learning disabilities	3	1%
Language barriers	2	0%
Pregnancy or parenting responsibilities	3	1%
Lack of interest in school or feeling disconnected from school	155	33%
Trauma	22	5%
Extracurricular commitments	11	2%
Lack of motivation	126	27%
Peer influence	13	3%
Technology distractions - excessive use of technology / social media may lead to staying up late and subsequently missing school	103	22%
Health concerns of family members	13	3%
Work commitments	13	3%
School-related stress	9	2%
Other	43	9%

Appendix K. Example Advertisements Schedule to Be Included in PED Attendance Campaign





You've got to be **HERE**

to get **HERE.**

Attendance matters.
BeHereNM.org

Appendix L. Information Regarding Bus Drivers Needed in New Mexico School Districts

Open Bus Driver Positions in New Mexico

	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Number of districts with open positions	50	37.7%
Number of districts with multiple positions open	21	42% of districts with open positions
Total positions open	92	

Note: 134 districts and charter schools included job openings on their website.

Source: School district websites

Appendix M. PED Memo on Attendance Taking



STATE OF NEW MEXICO
PUBLIC EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
300 DON GASPAR AVE.
SANTA FE, NEW MEXICO 87501-2786
Telephone (505) 827-5800
www.ped.state.nm.us

ARSENIO ROMERO, PhD
SECRETARY OF PUBLIC EDUCATION

MICHELLE LUJAN GRISHAM
GOVERNOR

March 18, 2024

MEMORANDUM

TO: District and School Leaders
FROM: Safe and Healthy Schools Bureau
RE: Definition of school absence

This memo serves as a reminder about what qualifies as an absence for the purposes of reporting under the Attendance for Success Act 22-12A-2 NMSA 1978. Below are the definitions from the statute:

1. "Absent":
Definition: Not in attendance for a class or school day for any reason, whether excused or not.
Exception: The term "absent" does **not** apply to **participation in interscholastic extracurricular activities**.
2. "Interscholastic Extracurricular Activities":
Definition: These are activities sponsored by a public school or an organization whose principal purpose is the regulation, direction, administration, and supervision of interscholastic extracurricular activities in public schools.
3. "School Day"
Definition: A portion of the school day that is at least one-half of a student's approved program.

Based on these definitions:

Students should not be recorded as absent if they are participating in a school-sponsored activity such as a field trip or involvement in a co-curricular or extracurricular activity during the school day.

If you have further inquiries, you can consult [the act](#) directly or contact the Safe and Healthy Schools Bureau at safe.healthyschools@state.nm.us.

SAMPLE MEMO

Punctually and accurately inputting student attendance is very important, not only for the district but for the student as well. Attendance should be taken and inputted into Aeries after class begins, taking care to verify that the individual students are marked correctly. At the end of class, the attendance should be double-checked in Aeries to ensure any necessary updates are entered, and that Aeries itself saved the attendance correctly. The following are some examples of why the correct attendance taking procedures are vital:

- **Student safety.** In the event of a disaster, emergency responders may need to know names and current number of students that are on campus. This information would be used to aid in search-and-rescue operations, as well as determine a list of missing students if necessary.
- **Parental concern.** If a student is marked absent incorrectly, and the auto-call goes out to the student's parent/guardian, informing them of the absence, this can result in a very scary situation for those parents/guardians who escort their children to the bus or school.
- **Accidental truancy.** After a three (3) unexcused all-day absences/tardies, or twelve (12) excused period absences, Aeries will "flag" the offending student for generation of a truancy letter. The office attendance staff regularly checks Aeries for these notifications. If it is a mistaken absence that caused the truancy notification, and the letter is generated and sent to the parents before it is corrected, this can potentially cause some major problems. The student will now be recorded in Aeries as a truant, the parents will get a Truancy Letter by mistake (which can be problematic for both the student and the office staff), and now it becomes much harder for the office attendance staff to properly track the students who are legitimately truant. In some cases, if the student has already received a legitimate "first truancy letter", 1 more absences will trigger letter two.

Funding for our district. For every day a student is absent, we lose approximately \$50 per student. When reports are submitted to the state to request our funding for the current fiscal year, having a large amount of students incorrectly marked absent can equate to a significant loss of money, which directly impacts our ability to fund school programs, hire more staff, etc

https://libertyuhsd-my.sharepoint.com/:w:/r/personal/shaht_luhsd_net/_layouts/15/questaccess.aspx?docid=194fb4559452d49e8ace891f5cf4b9c87&authkey=Af4AizZkxgkp07kASmFaTmE

Appendix O. Additional Example of Extra School in New Mexico

Another example of extra school is Ortiz Middle School in Santa Fe which strongly recommends students that miss more than 175 class periods (~25 days of school) attend summer school where they can recover the time that they missed. Studies on student achievement following summer instruction in mathematics have demonstrated better outcomes suggesting that best practices for making up missed time is additional instruction time.

May 1, 2024

Dear Parent or Guardian of _____

During the 2023-2024 school year, teachers and staff at Ortiz Middle School have worked to ensure your child has received every opportunity to acquire the skills necessary to prepare for the next grade level. The Standards Based grading system reflects a student's understanding and mastery of curriculum standards. In addition, this year we have emphasized the importance of attendance.

Based on this grading system your student is at the beginning level of mastery in two or more subjects and/or your child has missed 175 or more class periods. This is equal to missing approximately one month or more of school. This indicates your child is struggling with or unable to acquire the skills necessary to advance to the next grade. We strongly recommend that your child attend summer school. Summer school will be offered at Capital High School for Ortiz students from June 10-28th from 9-2. Breakfast and lunch will be provided. Transportation will be provided for families that need it. If you have any questions, please contact the grade level counselor: 6th -Ms. Wolfe, 7th- Ms. Roberson, 8th Ms. Champion.

- Yes, my child will be attending summer school
- My child will need transportation
- No, my child will not be attending summer and I recognize they may not be fully prepared for the next school year.

Parent Name Printed _____ Signature _____ Date _____

Best number to reach you _____

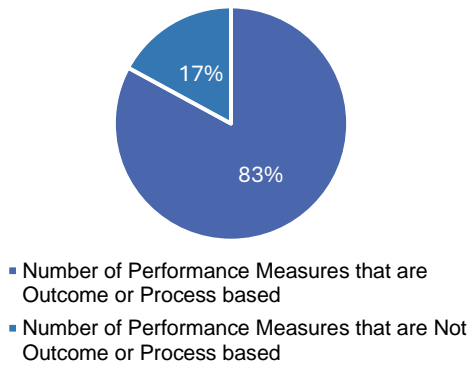
Appendix P. List of Different Attendance Program Operating in New Mexico

Selected Different Attendance Interventions in New Mexico			
Intervention	Brief Description	Where Operated	Evidence-base
Incentives	Rewards for attendance, these can be at the individuals, class, grade, or school level and the value of the incentives varies by district and school.	Used in at least Albuquerque, Bernalillo, Santa Fe, Lovington	Mixed
Home Visits	Going to the students home to discuss attendance barriers and how to address these. Varies by district and school	Varies by school but at least some schools in Bernalillo, Lovington, and Santa Fe	Strong
Greeting Students at the door	Addressing students by name as they enter school. Research shows this can help with engagement and building relationships	At least in Bernalillo and Lovington	Some
Student Contracts	Some schools and districts have students sign an attendance contract to improve awareness that attendance matters and hold students accountable for their actions	At least in Lovington and Santa Fe	None currently
Parent Contracts	Some schools have parents sign attendance contracts to matters and hold parents accountable for their actions	At least in Bernalillo	None currently
Parent School conferences	This intervention is included in the AFSA and is where school officials and parents discuss student absences to address root causes and create accountability	At least in Santa Fe, Lovington, Bernalillo	Some data from a school district finding after these conferences attendance improves
ENGAGE NM	An online coaching and attendance recovery resource funded by PED.	In 49 districts throughout NM in SY23	Components of this intervention have been found to work but current intervention has not had strong research
Project AWARE	Aims to increase awareness of indigenous youth mental health and provide mental health services to students and training to staff	At least in Santa Fe	None yet
Attendance mailers, fliers and signage	Aims to increase awareness of attendance of attendance for parents and students	At least in Santa Fe	Campaigns can have small impacts, unclear what the impact is on attendance
School nurses	Provide nursing services to students at a school setting that can therefore lead to fewer students and families seeking care outside of the school setting.	At least in Lovington (hired nurses post covid in all schools), however many other districts also have school nurses but can vary by school site	Some
Student based health centers	Provide health services to students at a school setting that can therefore lead to fewer students and families seeking care outside of the school setting.	At least in Albuquerque and Santa Fe	Some
Extra school	Recommended or required extra school for students who miss beyond a specific threshold.	At least in Lovington and Santa Fe	Yes, tutoring has strong impacts however different variations on tutoring may have different impacts.
Community Schools	Schools that are connected to their community and receive community input and resources to help students meet their comprehensive needs.	At least in Albuquerque and Santa Fe	Some evidence however fidelity of the model is key for success
Positive Behavior Incentive Systems (PBIS)	A tool to reward positive behavior of students including on metrics such as attendance. Data can be tracked at the individual, class, grade, or school level.	At least in Lovington and Albuquerque	
Free meals	Free meals for students at school	Statewide	Strong, particularly for lower grades

Appendix Q. Additional Analysis on Attendance Improvement Plans

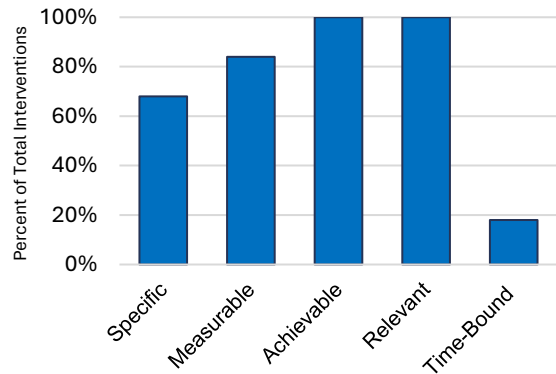
Breaking down each of the criteria, 68 percent of all the interventions were specific, 84 percent were measurable, 100 percent were achievable and relevant, and 18 percent were time-bound. The performance measures of each intervention were also evaluated to assess whether they were outcome or process based or not and 83 percent were found to be outcome or process based. Additionally, the number of people on the attendance teams of the sampled schools ranged from 1 to 14, with an average of 5. Schools varied significantly in the number of interventions discussed within the attendance improvement plan, ranging from 4 to 38, with an average of 13 interventions per school.

Number of Performance Measures That Are Outcome or Process Based



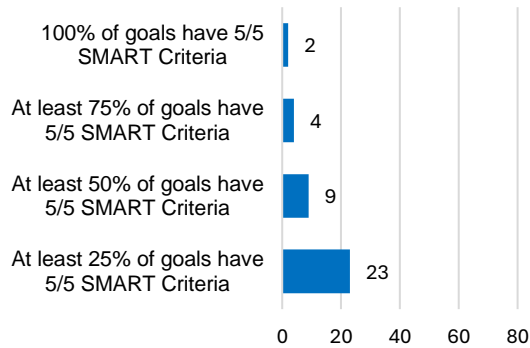
Source: LFC analysis of PED data

Number of Interventions Meeting Each SMART Goal Criteria



Source: LFC analysis of PED data

Number of Schools with at least x% of Interventions Meeting All of the SMART Goal Criteria



Source: LFC analysis of PED data

Example of common attendance improvement plan (from Tier 1): Is not specific, measurable, or time-bound

Strategy	Performance Measure	Data Collection Plan
Incentives for grade levels/classrooms with best attendance and most improved attendance	Attendance Rates	Synergy/PowerSchool

Tier 1: Whole School Prevention <5%
Tier 2: Individualized Prevention 5-10%
Tier 3: Early Intervention 10-20%
Tier 4: Intensive Support >20%

	Strategies
Tier 1: Whole School Prevention <5%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating engaging school climate • Developing positive relationships with students and families • Sharing impact of absences so it is widely understood • Recognizing good or improved attendance • Identifying and addressing common barriers to attendance •
Tier 2: Individualized Prevention 5-10%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personalized outreach • Assessing student and family needs • Service coordination with health and social service providers to meet needs • Individualized action plans that address chronic absences and barriers to attendance and increase school engagement.
Tier 3: Early Intervention 10-20%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing individualized student intervention plans that focus on keeping the student in an educational setting with weekly progress monitoring and contract for attendance
Tier 4: Intensive Support >20%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Giving written notice to the student’s family with a scheduled time to meet with the school principal and the attendance team • Establishing non-punitive consequences at the school level • Identifying appropriate specialized supports that may be needed to help student address the underlying causes of excessive absenteeism • Notifying the student and their family about the consequences for further absences

Appendix R. Selected Citations

EveryDay Labs 2021. "The Power of Being Present: A Comprehensive Summary of Student Absenteeism Research. Accessed from:

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