

A Deep Exploration of Chronic Absenteeism: Causes, Consequences, and Potential Solutions

University of Southern California

Dornsife CESR Center for Applied Research
in Education

Amie Rapaport
Anna Saavedra
Morgan Polikoff
Daniel Silver
Marshall Garland

We are grateful to the **Center for Reinventing Public Education** and the **Walton Family Foundation** for their financial support, while also acknowledging the opinions, findings, conclusions, and recommendations expressed in this material are the authors', and do not necessarily reflect the views of the foundation. The authors assume full responsibility for the accuracy of the report's contents.

Many thanks to the **Understanding America Study (UAS)** administration team, including **Marco Angrisani, Jill Darling, Bart Orriens,** and **Bas Weerman**, for supporting our survey's administration, and to **Arie Kapteyn** and **Tania Gutsche** for their overall leadership of the UAS panel.

Special thanks in this volume to the adults and teens who completed surveys analyzed for this report. We could not do this work without you and are so grateful for your time and thoughtful responses.

SUGGESTED CITATION

Rapaport, A., Saavedra, A.R., Polikoff, M., Silver, D., & Garland, M.W. (2026). *A deep exploration of chronic absenteeism - causes, consequences, and potential solutions*. Volume II. Root Causes of Absenteeism: A Nationally Representative Survey of Adults and Teens. University of Southern California.

<https://dornsife.usc.edu/cesr/care>

CONTENTS

Introduction: A Deep Exploration of Chronic Absenteeism —Causes, Consequences, and Potential Solutions	1
Volume II. Root Causes of Absenteeism: A Nationally Representative Survey of Adults and Teens	2
Volume II Summary	3
Research Approach	5
Survey Fielding and Response Rates	7
Samples	8
Results	10
Appendix A. Adult Survey	23
Appendix B. Teen Survey	30



Introduction

This report is the second volume in a three-volume series, enabling us to release results as they become available. Results across the three volumes address a pressing policy need by determining which interventions have the potential to reduce absenteeism rates nationwide. Featured in the first Volume, interviews with panel members provided a rich, in-depth understanding of today's attendance context, informed the development of survey questions, and provided detailed examples of absence reasons.

In the present **Volume II**, we share nationally representative estimates from UAS surveys quantifying the prevalence of different absence reasons, overall and by key student subgroups.

Volume II. Root Causes of Absenteeism: A Nationally Representative Survey of Adults and Teens





Volume II Summary

In this volume we use results from a probability-based survey panel of adults, and the teens in their households about the root causes of absenteeism during the 2024-25 school year. These nationally representative, population-based estimates can help inform efforts to improve the absenteeism crisis in our nation. Key takeaways include:

- Almost all students miss school at least sometimes for physical health reasons. No other reason is nearly as prevalent.
- Less common reasons for missing school—such as disengagement (i.e., “just didn’t want to go”), serious mental health issues, transportation barriers, and suspensions—are responsible for many missed days among those students who miss for those reasons.
- Aggregating unique reasons to broad reason categories shows that issues in the school building’s domain—like bullying, school safety, and suspensions—account for as many or more missed days among those who miss for those reasons as physical health reasons (mild illness, contagious illness, doctor’s appointments, etc.). These school-related issues account for more missed days among the smaller group of students who miss for that reason than any other category, including reasons related to fun (like vacation), mental health, problems getting to school (car trouble, missing the bus) or family/personal (taking care of a sibling, death in the family, etc.).
- The only absence pattern by student subgroup that replicates across both teen and adult reports is that lower income teens are more absent than higher income teens.
- Non-chronically absent versus chronically absent teens show clear differences in the primary reasons for missing school and in their attitudes about how much school is okay to miss.
- Student engagement measures—including grades and self-reported caring about school—are key predictors of different absence patterns.

Student engagement measures—including grades and self-reported caring about school—are key predictors of different absence patterns.

- Mental health continues to be critically related to absence patterns, with students reporting mental health struggles missing much more school than those who do not.

From these insights, critical lessons emerge:

- Districts need to overhaul their absence capture systems to collect more informative data about the underlying reasons for absences, which will allow for more aligned, potentially more effective, interventions.
- Student disengagement and lack of valuing in-school attendance should be a key focus of school responses to the absenteeism crisis.
- Mental health continues to be a critical factor in the chronic absenteeism landscape. In-school mental health services may help, but so might other interventions that directly or indirectly address mental health, such as phone-free schools.



Research Approach

During the spring and summer of 2025, we used the [Understanding America Study \(UAS\)](#) panel, and accompanying UASTeen panel, to survey adults and teens about their school attendance during the 2024-25 school year.

The UAS

The UAS is a probability-based Internet panel using Address-based Sampling methods, drawing from US Postal Service delivery sequence files to recruit and retain participants. Established in 2014, it currently includes about 10,500 members. Respondents without Internet access receive a tablet and broadband Internet, facilitating representativeness in lower-income and rural areas that would be otherwise difficult to reach.

The UAS administration team makes statistical adjustments—at the time of recruitment, and after responses are collected—to adjust for the varying probabilities that a certain subgroup of individuals will respond to recruitment materials or survey requests. Sample weights are constructed in two stages.¹ Though statistical adjustments mitigate the risk of non-response bias, the UAS continues to make efforts to recruit from the hardest-to-reach populations and to obtain responses from those less likely to respond. As a result, the UAS provides considerably higher data quality than the approaches of many other surveys (Angrisani et. al, 2019; Hays, Liu, and Kapteyn, 2015), particularly convenience samples in which participants who are easy to locate and opt-in to participate.²

When surveying adults about school-aged children, if a respondent has more than one school-aged child living in the household, our survey platform randomly selects one for the respondent to answer about. Adult responses can be interpreted as population-level estimates.

¹First, base weights are calculated to account for unequal inclusion probabilities resulting from the adaptive sampling procedure. Second, post-stratification weights are applied to adjust for differential nonresponse and to align each survey's final sample with the reference population on key demographic variables, including sex, race/ethnicity, age, education, and geographic location (Census region).

²UAS documentation provides detailed explanations of the various methods employed to minimize nonresponse bias at the recruitment, data collection, and reporting stages (<https://uasdata.usc.edu/page/Methodology>).

UASTeen

Beginning in spring 2025, the UAS team began recruiting teens from UAS households to join UASTeen. After obtaining parent permission, UAS staff reach out to teens themselves with an invitation to join the study. Participating teens gain access to the same UAS platform and infrastructure as UAS panel members, responding to texts and emails inviting them to participate in surveys, and receiving monetary incentives independent of the adults in their households. This introduces some selection factors above and beyond selection into the UAS panel that cannot be completely controlled or adjusted for (e.g., factors influencing parent permission and teen interest).

We constructed sampling weights for teens that use base-weights from household recruitment (which correct for differential probabilities of inclusion of households into the UAS) in addition to weights that correspond to several teen-specific population benchmarks—such as gender, age, race, and geographic location—using estimates from the American Community Survey (ACS). Nonetheless, selection into the panel—either at the household or, conditional on household inclusion, the individual teen level—may hinge on factors that are not captured by these weights. Given the probability-based household recruitment used by the UAS and this weighting strategy, we expect that teen data supports reasonably accurate population-level inferences.

At the time of this writing, approximately 520 teens have joined and are regularly answering surveys.



Survey Fielding and Response Rates

The UAS team invited 4,000 adults from the UAS panel to complete a survey about their selected child's absences from the 2024-25 school year in May, 2025. A total of 3,056 responded, for an overall response rate of 76%. Not all invited adults were ultimately eligible to answer questions, as some had children who had graduated or otherwise 'aged out' of the target sample. A total of 2,314 adults completed the survey about a child in their household. A copy of the full adult survey instrument is included in Appendix A.³

We invited every teen active in the teen panel from June through September of 2025 to complete the absenteeism survey, including new teens as they joined the panel during the fielding window. Thus, the total number of teen invites grew during the time of data collection, with 509 ultimately invited to participate. A total of 434 teens completed the survey, yielding a response rate of 85%. A copy of the full teen survey instrument is included in Appendix B.

³—Upon examining response patterns, we wondered whether respondents ever “double counted” absences that had multiple reasons underlying them—such as mental health struggles overlapping with bullying. We conducted cognitive interviews with a random sample of adult respondents and found that none ever struggled with how to count absence days, either as an emergent concern/conflict, or when given three hypothetical examples describing an absence that had multiple reasons. All respondents talked through the instinct to choose the dominant reason if such a case arose, but none reported ever experiencing that conflict when answering the survey.

Samples

Both the adult and teen samples are weighted to be nationally representative.

Adult Sample

Though we sometimes refer to the adult sample as “parents”, the respondent is a non-parent (including grandparent, older sibling, or other family member) approximately 29% of the time. For this analysis and report, we limit adult responses to the 1,178 adults responding about a secondary grade student (grades 6-12) enrolled in school (i.e., not homeschooled). Table 1 shows the composition of the sample of adults responding about a student in grades 6-12 along several demographic variables compared to the US nationwide population of adult households.

TABLE 1. WEIGHTED ADULT SAMPLE DEMOGRAPHICS COMPARED TO POPULATION PARAMETERS

CHARACTERISTIC	RESPONDING ADULT SAMPLE*	OVERALL % NATIONWIDE POPULATION
Race/Ethnicity		
White	59%	58%
Black	12%	12%
Asian	6%	6%
Hispanic	20%	19%
Other	4%	2%
Household Income		
Less than \$25k	15%	14%
\$25k - \$49k	19%	17%
\$50k - \$74k	14%	15%
\$75k - \$149k	31%	29%
Greater than \$150k	20%	26%
Household Education		
High school or less	40%	39%
Some college	25%	28%
Bachelor's degree or more	35%	33%

*Note: UAS's survey-specific sample weights make each survey data set representative of the U.S. population aged 18 and older with respect to a pre-defined set of socio-demographic variables.

We limit the teen sample to the 388 enrolled in a traditional or remote school environment, excluding homeschooled teens. Table 2 shows the composition of the teen sample along several demographic variables compared to the nationwide population.

TABLE 2. WEIGHTED TEEN SAMPLE DEMOGRAPHICS COMPARED TO POPULATION PARAMETERS

CHARACTERISTIC	RESPONDING TEEN SAMPLE	POPULATION ESTIMATES (ACS, 2023)
Race/Ethnicity		
White	48%	49%
Black	10%	12%
Asian	5%	5%
Hispanic	25%	26%
Other	11%	8%
Household Income		
Less than \$25k	16%	9%
\$25k - \$49k	14%	13%
\$50k - \$74k	12%	14%
\$75k - \$149k	37%	33%
Greater than \$150k	22%	31%
Household Education		
High school or less	18%	31%
Some college	33%	30%
Bachelor’s degree or more	49%	39%

Table note: Household-level population estimates were calculated for the sub-sample of ACS respondents who reported at least one biological or step-child aged 13-17 residing in the household at the time the survey was collected.



Results

Context for Interpreting Results

Teens report substantially more absences than their parents report about them.

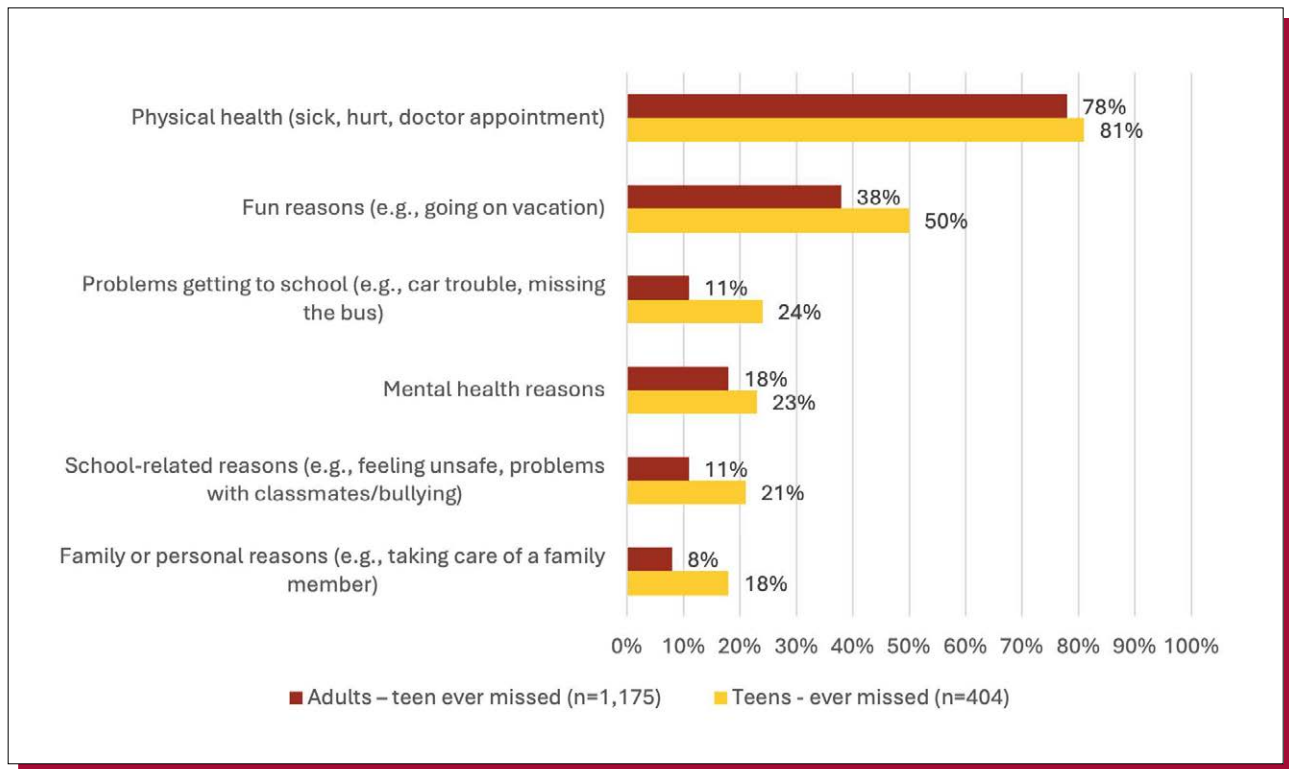
When asked to provide the number of days of school missed for each of a list of reasons (e.g., physical health, mental health, taking care of a family member) during the previous school year, parents of teens reported an average sum of 11.3 days, while teens themselves reported nearly three times more days absent, with an average of 31.5. The “truth” is likely somewhere in the middle, as adult reports underestimate the percent of teens who meet the threshold for chronic absenteeism—missing 18 or more days in a 180-day year—at 15%, while teens’ reports overestimate it (59%). Notably, the prevalence or “commonality” of a given reason was mostly consistent regardless of who was reporting. Teens simply report more absences for every reason.

Root Causes of Absenteeism

Nearly all teens report absences for physical health reasons.

Almost all teens—approximately 80%—report missing at least one day of school for physical health reasons, like being sick, going to the doctor, or not feeling well, replicating [other studies](#) finding illness as the number one driver of absences. Only about half as many (38%) ever miss school for “fun reasons” like family vacations or traveling for a non-school related event, according to parents, though 50% of teens report doing so. Every other absence reason was much less common overall (Figure 1). Approximately one in four teens reported missing school for mental health, transportation barriers, or school-related reasons like feeling unsafe or having problems with classmates. For parents, these numbers were even less—just 8-18% reported their teens missed school for these reasons.

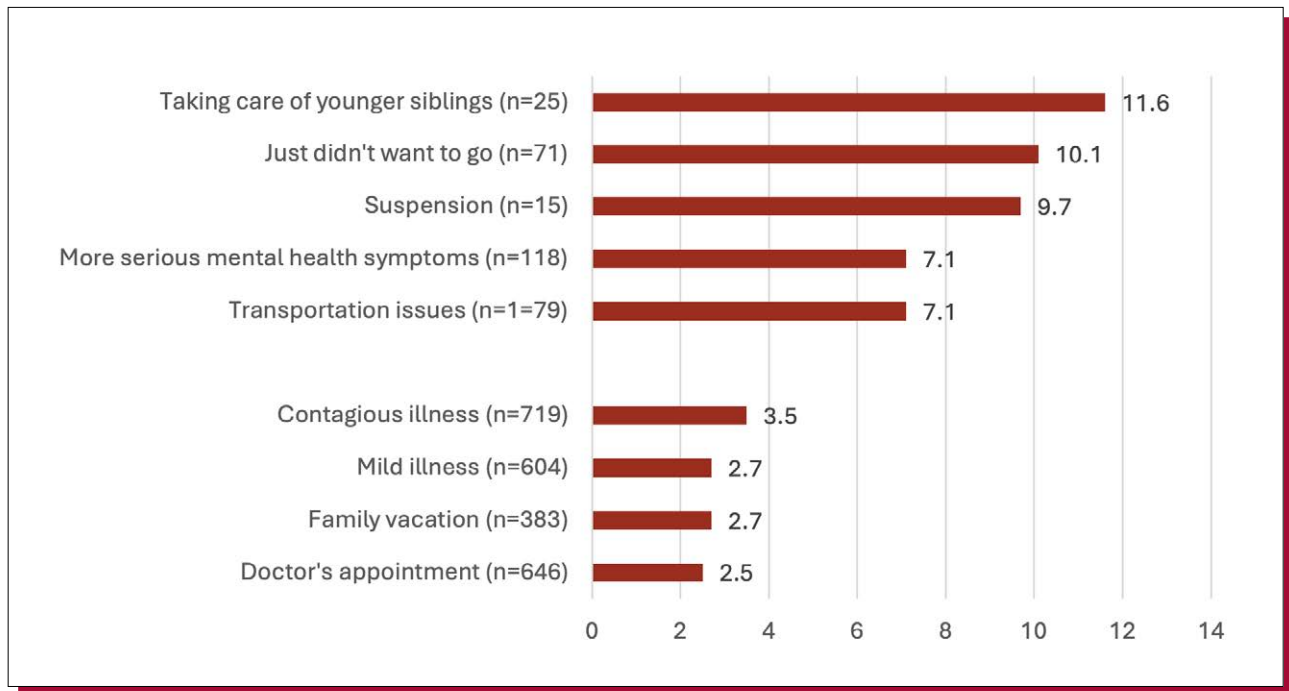
FIGURE 1. PERCENT MISSING FOR BROAD CATEGORIES OF ABSENCE REASONS, REPORTED BY ADULTS AND TEENS



For some less common root causes, students report many missed days for those reasons in particular.

Though almost all students miss school for health-related reasons, issues that affect fewer students account for disproportionately more days missed among those students (Figure 2). According to parents of teens, among the 71 students who missed school because they “just didn’t want to go”—those students missed an average of 10.1 days for that reason alone. The 118 students who missed for “more serious mental health symptoms” missed an average of 7.1 days specifically for that reason. Among the 79 students whose parents reported they missed because of transportation issues, they missed an average of 7.1 days for that reason alone. And even more rare reasons—those who were suspended (n=15) or who had to take care of younger siblings (n=25), missed an average of 9.7 days and 11.6 days each for those reasons. In contrast, more common absence reasons account for fewer days such as 2.5 days for doctor’s appointments among the 646 who missed for that reason, or the 2.7 days missed for family vacation among the 383 who missed for that reason.

⁴-We only include parent reports here given the smaller teen sample sizes when looking at less common absence reasons.

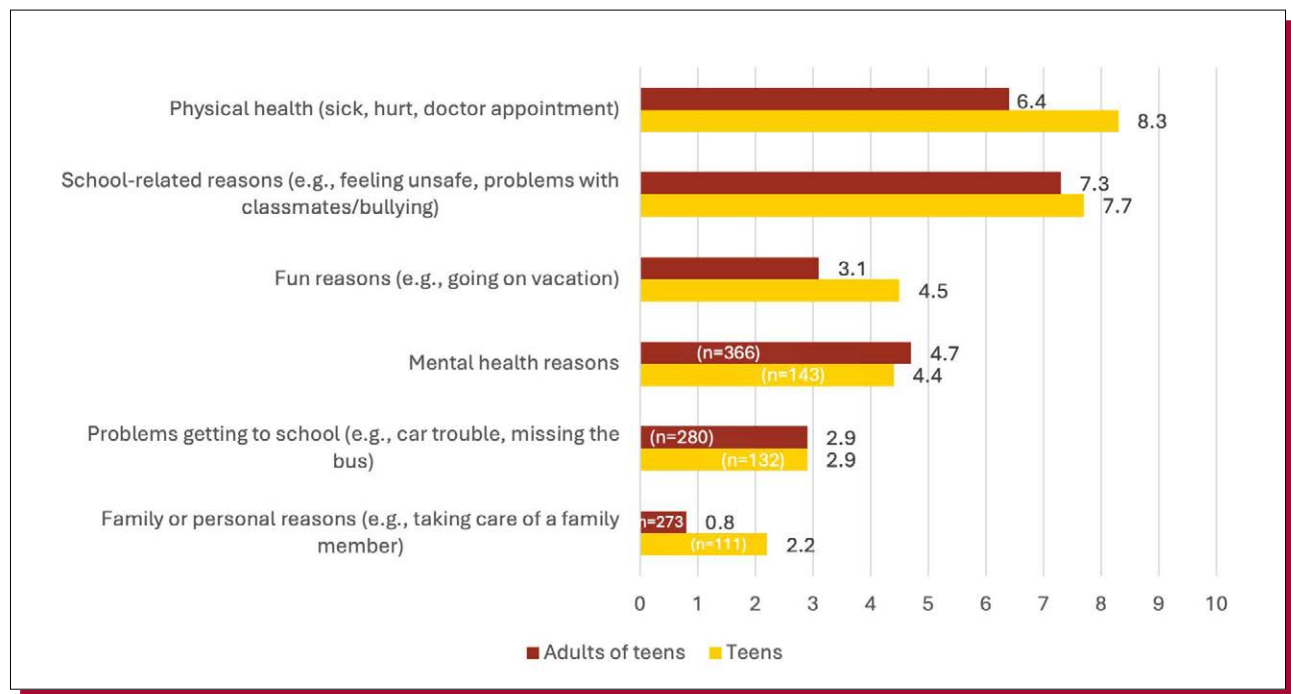
FIGURE 2. AVERAGE DAYS MISSED, SPECIFIC REASONS, ADULT REPORTS

Among the physical health reasons for absences, different types of absence reasons add up—average days missed for contagious illness (3.5), mild illness (2.7), and doctor’s appointments (2.5) are small alone, however affect many more students and are likely to co-occur for a single student.

Among teens missing for school-related reasons—like bullying, feeling unsafe, or “not wanting to go”—they miss more days than those missing for almost any other reason.

When looking to inform absence policy or attendance interventions, absence reasons that bundle into broader groupings are helpful for informing potential solutions. School-related factors—like peer problems/bullying, feeling unsafe at school, suspensions, and student disengagement (i.e., “just not wanting to go”)—account for as many days missed on average as physical health reasons (between 6 and 8 depending upon who is reporting, Figure 3), though fewer students report missing for these reasons. Intervention strategies that focus on communication with families about illness policies are unlikely to impact absence rates among the group of children missing because of school-related factors. For some students, being bullied, (academically or emotionally) disengaged, feeling unsafe, suspensions, etc. are affecting absences as much or more than physical health.

FIGURE 3. AVERAGE DAYS MISSED, BROAD CATEGORIES, ADULT AND TEEN REPORTS

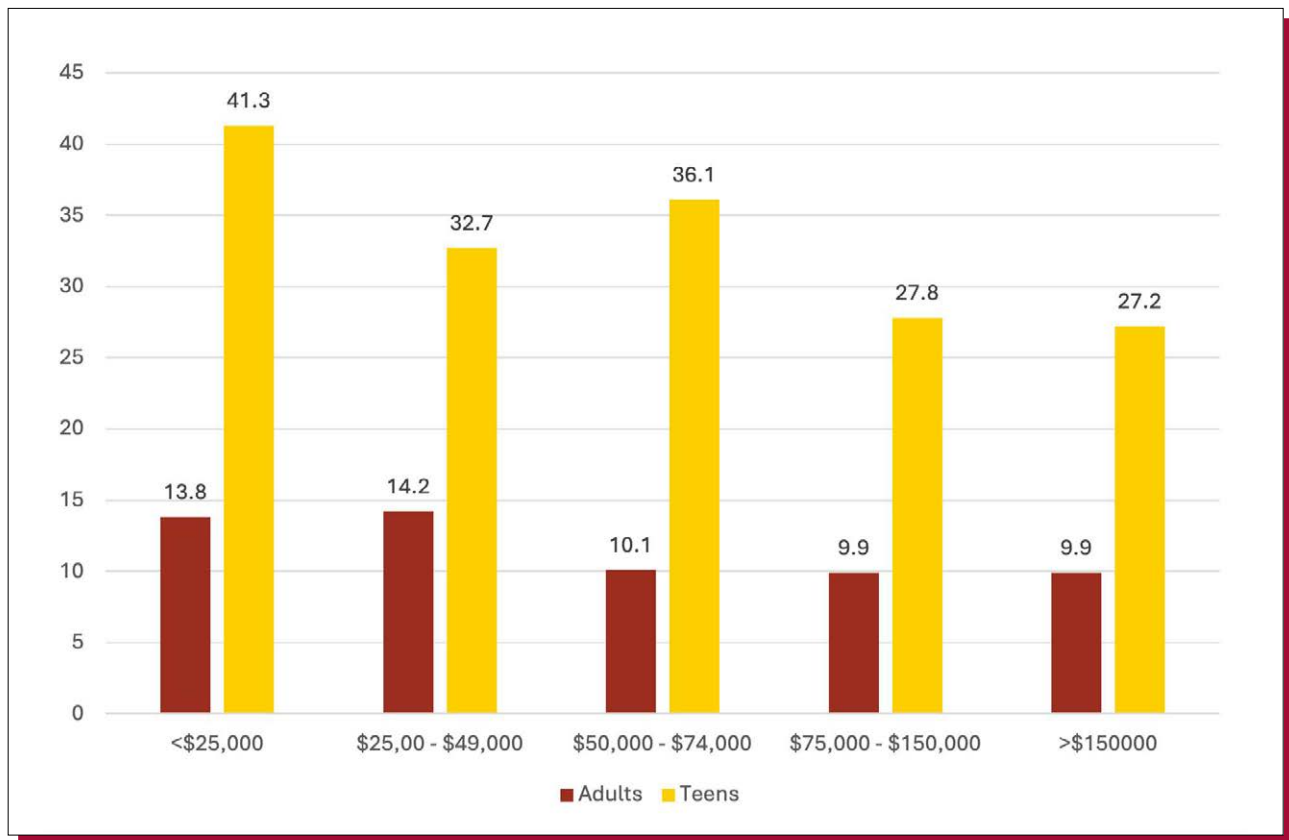


Differences in Root Causes by Student Subgroups

Teens from lowest income households are absent more often than teens from highest income households.

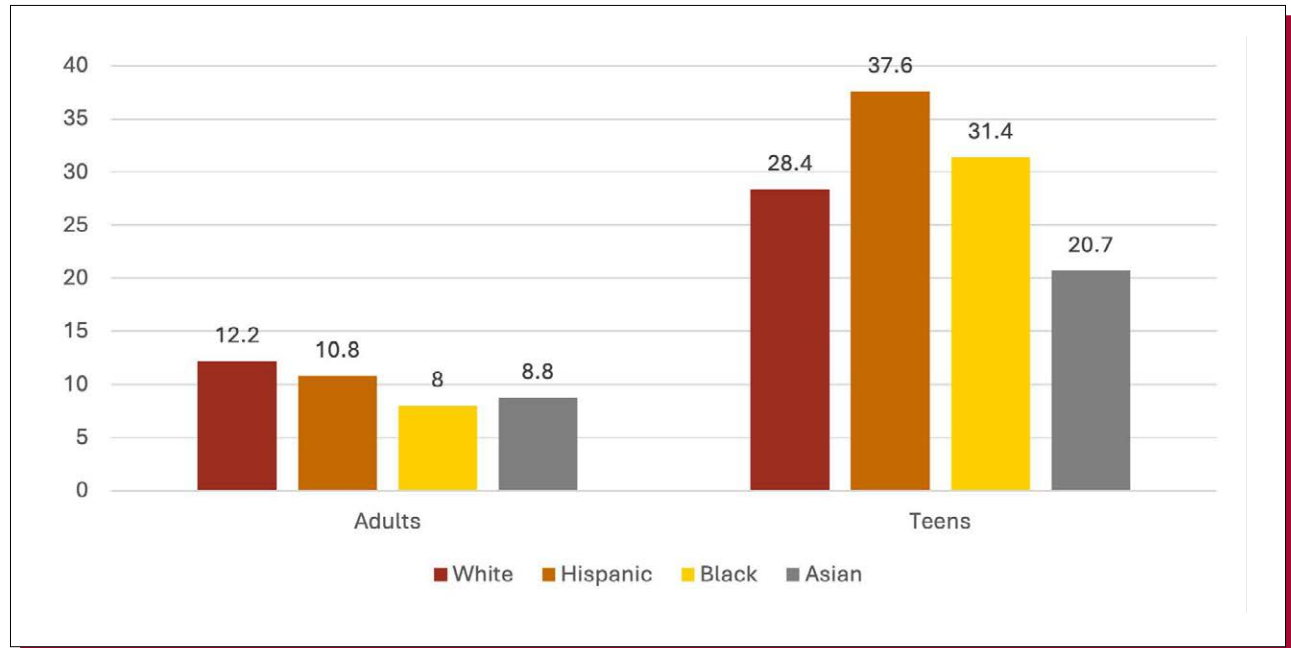
Designing interventions to curb chronic absenteeism requires understanding how the root causes of missed days of schools may vary across different contexts. Mirroring [other studies](#) conducted over [the last several years](#), students in the lowest income households are missing more school than those in higher-income households (Figure 4). Teens in the lowest income households reported an average of 41 missed days of school each year, compared to approximately 27 in the two highest income brackets. Among parents of teens, the same pattern emerged—albeit at a much lower level—with the lowest income parents reporting an average of 14 days absent compared to ten in the highest income brackets.

FIGURE 4. TOTAL DAYS MISSED, BY HOUSEHOLD INCOME, ADULT AND TEEN REPORTS



According to teens, Hispanic students report more absences than any other group.

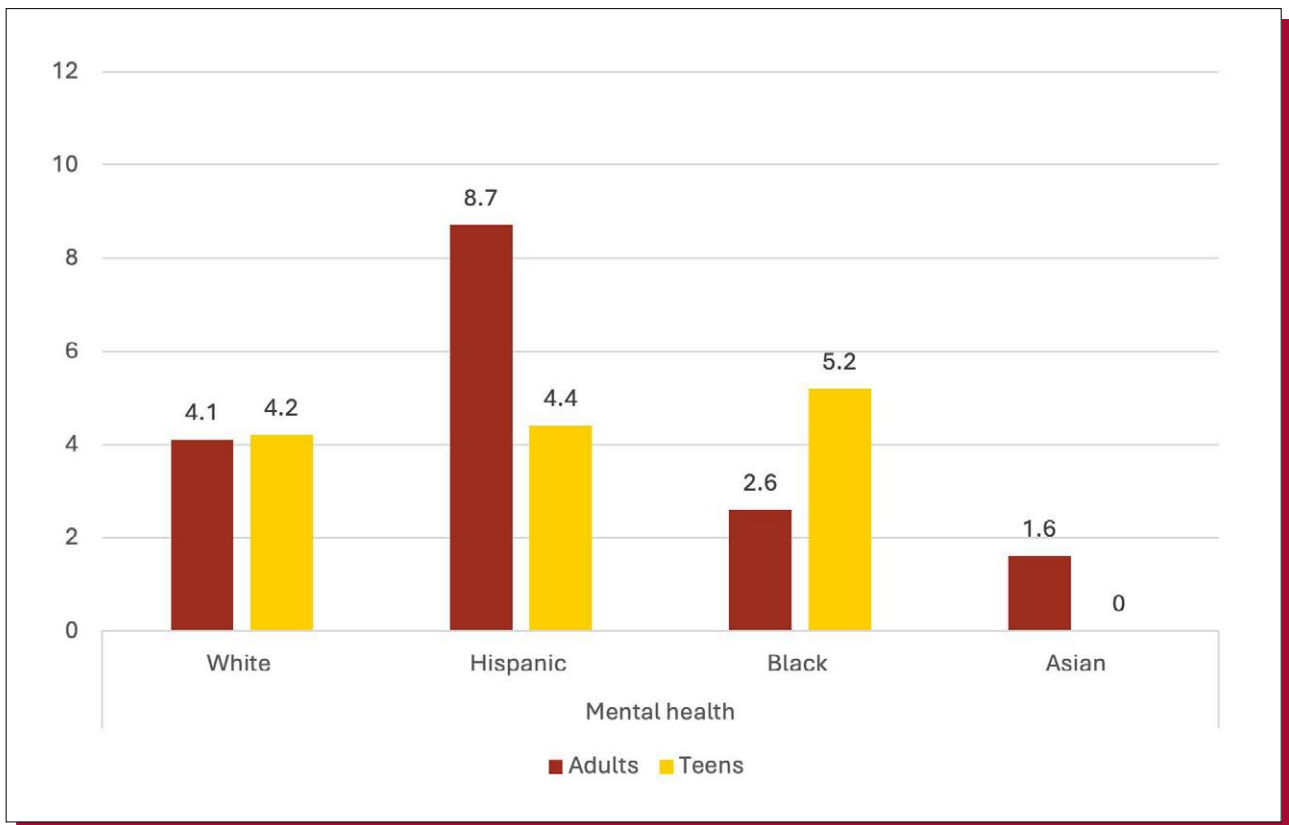
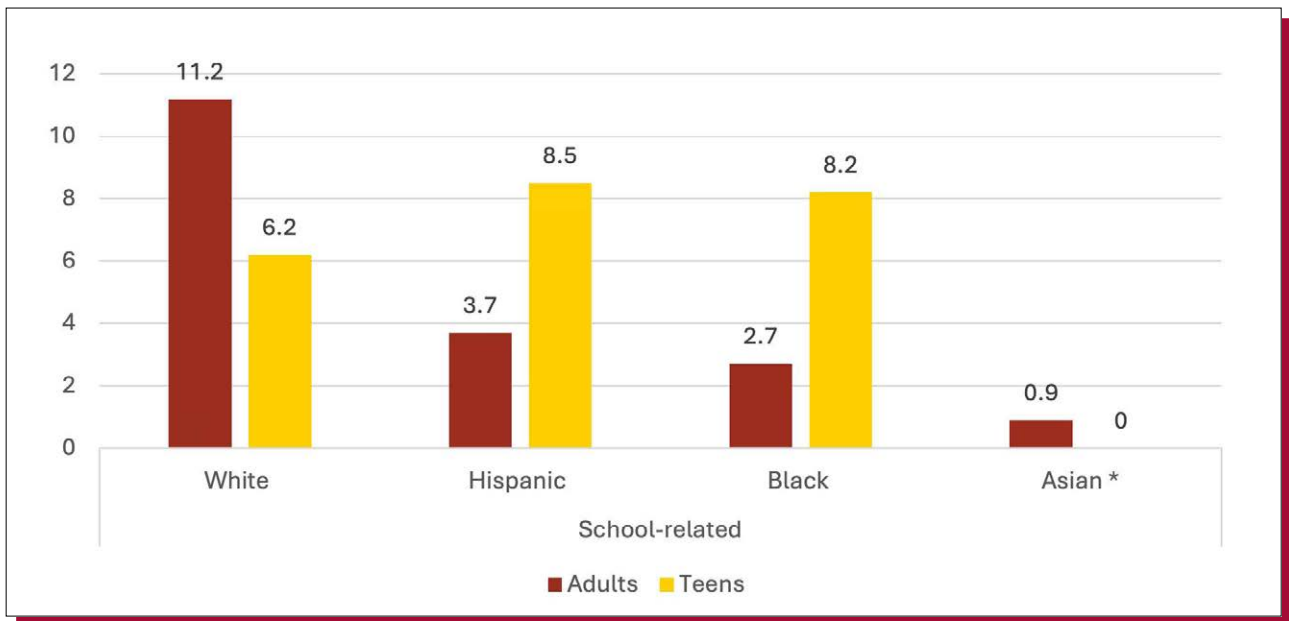
According to teens, Hispanic students miss significantly more school than other groups with an average of 38 days missed, compared to a range of 21 – 31 among every other group (Figure 5). This pattern does not replicate in teens' parents' reports, where absences do not vary as much by racial/ethnic subgroup, with white students showing the most days absent (12) compared to Black students with the lowest (8). Teen reports here corroborate what other [research](#) has shown on chronic absenteeism since the pandemic.

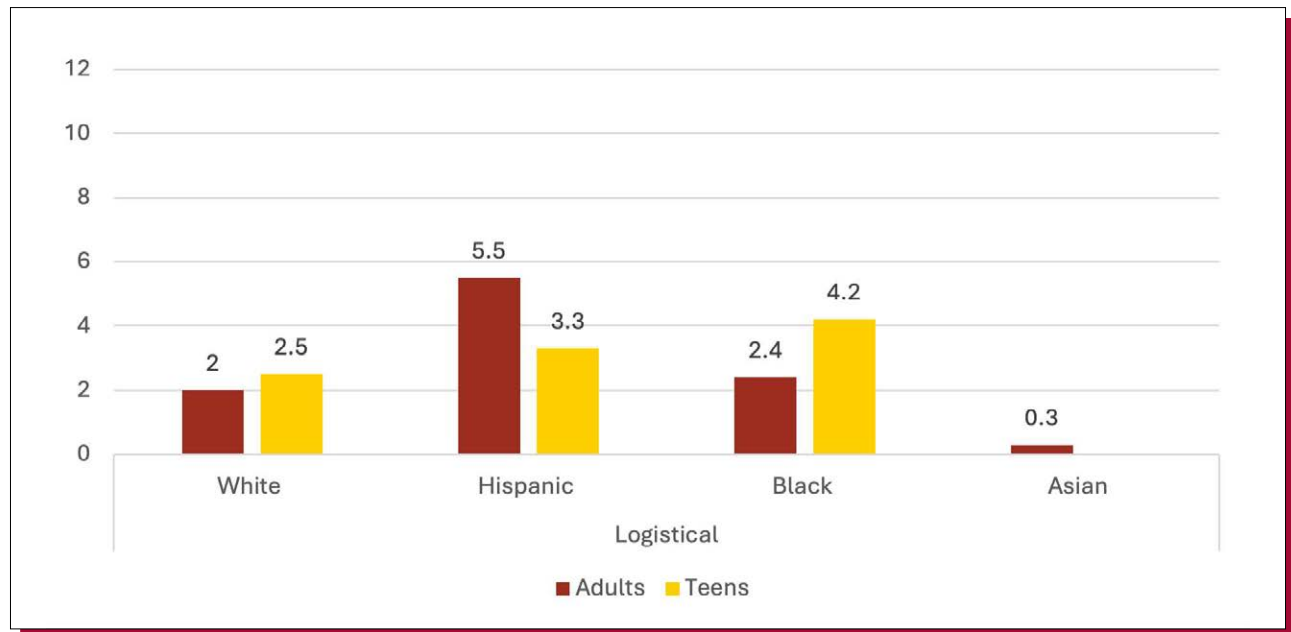
FIGURE 5. TOTAL ABSENCES BY RACE/ETHNICITY, ADULT AND TEEN REPORTS

Different reasons underlie absences for racial subgroups according to parent reports; not so according to teen reports.

According to parent reports, White students miss much more school than their peers for “school-related” reasons with an average of 11 days among those who miss for that reason—compared to 4 or fewer among other groups (Figure 6). Hispanic students, in contrast, miss more days for mental health reasons (9 days) and logistical reasons (6 days) compared to their peers (2-4 for mental health reasons and 1-2 for logistical reasons). These patterns do not replicate among teen’s own reports, which show more similarities than differences across groups, though White students report slightly fewer days missed for school-related and logistical reasons compared to everyone else.

FIGURE 6. AVERAGE DAYS ABSENT FOR A) SCHOOL-RELATED, B) MENTAL HEALTH, AND C) LOGISTICAL REASONS, BY RACE/ETHNICITY, ADULT AND TEEN REPORTS





*Asian teen subgroup reporting absence for given reason too small to populate estimate for number of days missed

The reasons underlying absences vary between students who are and are not chronically absent.

Among students who do not meet the criteria for being chronically absent, missing school is largely attributable to physical health—with contagious illness and doctor’s appointments accounting for 57% of total absences (Table 3). In contrast, these reasons account for just 35% of chronically absent students’ missed days. Rather than simply missing more school for the same reasons, chronically absent students are missing more school for more reasons—with a particularly clear difference in the “Just didn’t want to go” reason (9% among chronically absent while only 2% among the not chronically absent).

TABLE 3. PROPORTION OF ABSENCES ACCOUNTED FOR—DIFFERENCES BETWEEN CHRONICALLY ABSENT AND NON-CHRONICALLY ABSENT TEENS, ADULT REPORTS

PERCENT OF ABSENCES ACCOUNTED FOR			
	CHRONICALLY ABSENT	NOT CHRONICALLY ABSENT	DIFFERENCE
Contagious illness	13%	27%	-14 pp
Routine doctor appointment	10%	16%	-6 pp
Family vacation	5%	10%	-5 pp
Mild illness symptoms	12%	13%	-1 pp
Transportation issue	4%	3%	+1 pp
More serious mental health issue	6%	4%	+2 pp
Taking a mental health day	5%	3%	+2 pp
Just didn't want to go	9%	2%	+7 pp

These different underlying absence reasons between chronically absent and non-chronically absent students suggests very different policy responses. Different communication approaches might be needed with families of students missing more or less school—a one-size fits all messaging strategy that is efficient and low-cost may not be all that effective.

Other Contributors to Absence Patterns

Everyone thinks it's ok to miss quite a bit of school—though even more so among teens.

On a continuous measure, adults with teens report that about 11 days, on average, are ok to miss. Teens' barometer for what is acceptable was 15. There was not much variation around these means by subgroups, including by gender, student age, race, etc.—among adults the average response ranged from about 8 to 12 across subgroups, while among teens it ranged from about 12 to 18. With most schools operating on a 180-day school year, parents and teens are reporting that missing between 6% and 8% of school is acceptable. While these estimates do not reach the threshold for chronic absence at 10%, the general population is showing quite a high tolerance for missed days of school.

A key difference emerged by whether the teen in the household had a pattern of chronic absence. In those households, adults and teens both believed it is ok to miss 17 days (close to 10% of a

school year), on average, while in households with non-chronically absent teens the average was closer to 10 days (approximately 6% of a school year). This suggests that attitudes and opinions about the impact of many absences may be related to actual absence behaviors. In fact, while on average 86% of teens did not think they “miss too much school”, among those missing more or less than 18 days (chronically absent versus not), this attitude was not much different, at 78%. Though this research is correlational in nature, interventions designed to change parent and teen opinions about acceptable absence limits may have promise for changing actual absence patterns.

Attitudes/values about school/school engagement may be a key driver of absences for “school-related reasons”.

Another dimension apparently related to differences in actual reported absence days—particularly absences for school-related reasons—was students’ attitudes/values about school itself (Table 4). Students who answered a prior survey question indicating they care “a lot” about how they do in school (65% of teens) reported 12 fewer absences than students who care “a little or less” (35% of teens). Notably, the majority of those days came school-related reasons (8 among students who care “a lot” compared to 18 for students who care “a little” or less.

A related factor is student grades. Those earning mostly As and Bs (73%) compared to Bs or lower (27%) reported 10 fewer absences—mostly accounted for by fewer “school-related” absences (11 versus 17). The gap was not nearly as large for other absence categories.

TABLE 4. AVERAGE DAYS ABSENT BY SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT DIMENSIONS, TEEN REPORTS

	CARES ABOUT HOW THEY DO		GRADES	
	A LOT (65%)	A LITTLE OR LESS (35%)	AS/BS OR BETTER (73%)	BS OR LOWER (27%)
School-related	7.6	18.4	11.1	16.7
Physical health	7.6	11.1	8.5	10.5
Mental health	5.2	7.3	5.0	7.8
Fun	4.0	6.5	4.8	5.9
Logistics	3.5	5.1	3.5	5.0
Family	2.2	6.2	3.2	5.6
Total absences	26.9	37.1	26.9	36.9

The relationship between mental health and absences

The relationship between mental health and absence continues to emerge as critical to understand. We examined absence patterns using two different measures of mental health—a self-reported response to a question about whether they struggled this year with their “psychological well-being or mental health,” and their score on a mental health screener, the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire. Those with mental health struggles missed more school based on either measure. Those who admitted to struggling this year missed an average of 12 more days than those who did not, and those whose SDQ flagged them as having an outlier score on one more domains missed an average of 18 more days (Table 5). Physical health, mental health, and school-related reasons categories drove the differences.

TABLE 5. AVERAGE DAYS ABSENT BY MENTAL HEALTH MEASURES, TEEN REPORTS

	MENTAL HEALTH			
	DID NOT STRUGGLE WITH MENTAL HEALTH (68%)	STRUGGLED WITH MENTAL HEALTH (32%)	NO FLAGS ON SCREENER (34%)	AT LEAST 1 FLAG ON SCREENER (66%)
School-related	7.1	8.3	2.8	9.0
Physical health	7.7	10.0	5.3	10.1
Mental health	2.8	5.8	2.7	5.0
Fun	4.6	4.2	3.1	5.2
Logistics	2.6	3.6	2.2	3.2
Family	2.3	1.7	0.6	2.6
Total absences	27.7	39.4	18.9	37.7

What Next?

Our results suggest several practical implications for schools and districts. First, to inform targeted interventions, attendance monitoring systems need to track more meaningful information than current systems tend to allow. This may entail reporting system overhauls,

from prioritizing differentiation between “excused” versus “unexcused” absences to adding reasons such as those we used in our study. Getting families to transparently report on the reasons for missed school may be a challenge until new norms are established, especially if families perceive that their answers may subject students or families to discipline. Building trusting relationships between schools and families will be essential to these efforts.

Second, student disengagement and lack of valuing in-person attendance—or the value of school in general—are key drivers of absenteeism. Those students who miss because they don’t care or don’t want to go, are missing a great deal of school for these reasons, which accumulate on top of the more intractable illness absences. Adults with chronically absent teens, and those teens themselves, find it acceptable to miss 10% of the school year—a core value that clearly underlies a greater likelihood of students missing more school.

Messaging campaigns—to both parents and teens—can explore ways to boost the perceived value of school attendance. Of course, even better than messaging about the value of in-person attendance would be working with families to actually make school feel more valuable to them. And schools need to confront the message we reported in Volume 1, and which is further supported here, that broad changes inside the school building are needed to address student ambivalence and absenteeism. These include better aligning to student interests, offering more engaging instruction, improving school climate (perceived safety, relationships between teachers and students), etc. Attendance Works’ [attendance playbook](#), which offers 27 absenteeism interventions—offers at least five strategies like this, including student-teacher relationships, relevant instruction, positive greetings at the door, targeted youth engagement, among others. These may not be the “easiest” for schools to tackle, as school notification systems and messaging interventions tend to be low-cost/low-lift interventions. But these large-scale, school-building-based changes may be what are really needed to move the needle on student attendance.

And third, as we have [previously](#) shown, we again find absenteeism is higher among students struggling with their mental health. This speaks to the ongoing need to support students’ social and emotional wellbeing. School-provided mental health support may help to reduce absence, but there are multiple factors—in and out of school—that are contributing to students’ mental health challenges. One external factor—the pervasiveness of cell phones and social media use, is already a major policy focus in schools. Support for phone-free schools [is growing](#), and in our view, offers nothing but forward progress. It will take time to learn the impact of lessened tech access during the school day, for students’ mental health, engagement, and attendance patterns.

In our next Volume we explore what parents and teens believe will be effective for reducing absenteeism and for improving attendance. We also test a brief messaging intervention to learn whether information about the value of attendance can meaningfully impact teens' decisions to go to school, and we explore whether and which school policy decisions may hold the most promise for getting students back to the classroom.



Appendix A. Adult Survey

This survey asks questions about your experiences and opinions related to K-12 education. Your input makes a difference! The perspective of UAS respondents has contributed to shaping public policy in school districts nationwide. We appreciate your contributions to this important research.

I. Basic child information for current school year

1. Is [NAME] enrolled in a public, private, charter or virtual school for the 2024-25 school year, or are they homeschooled, or does some other situation apply?
 - Yes
 - If yes: What kind of school is [NAME] enrolled in?
 - Public school
 - Private school
 - Charter school
 - Virtual School
 - Other
 - Unsure
 - No, [NAME] is not enrolled and is homeschooling;
 - No [NAME] is neither enrolled nor homeschooling (e.g. dropped out, taking a year off, pursuing a GED);
 - No, some other situation applies (please specify):
2. In what grade is [NAME] in this 2024-25 school year?
[Drop down: Kindergarten -12th grade]

II. How child is doing in school

3. Which best describes the grades [NAME] has earned so far this school year? If the child you are answering about is too young to earn letter grades or his/her school does not administer letter grades, answer according to how you would characterize the feedback s/he receive from teachers: **[Mostly As; Mostly As and Bs; Mostly Bs and Cs; Mostly Cs; Mostly Cs and Ds; Mostly Ds; Don't know]**
- Overall
 - In math classes
 - In science classes
 - In Social studies classes
 - In English classes
4. How concerned or unconcerned are you about each of the following now, in spring 2025: **[not at all concerned, a little concerned, concerned, very concerned]**
- [NAME]'s psychological well-being
 - The amount [NAME] is learning this year compared to a typical school year
 - How engaged [NAME] is in school this year
 - How [NAME] is doing socially
 - [NAME]'s progress in math
 - [NAME]'s progress in science
 - [NAME]'s progress in reading/language arts

III. Attendance/Absences

5. This school year (from fall 2024 to spring 2025) approximately how many days was [NAME] absent from school?:
- 0
 - 10 or fewer
 - 11-15
 - 16-20
 - 21-25
 - 26 or more
 - I don't know

If q5 >0

6. We are trying to understand why children miss school. Below, see a list of reasons for why children tend to miss school. For each, tell us if [NAME] was ever absent this year for any one of these reasons. Select yes or no for each.
- Physical health reasons, like being sick, hurt, going to the doctor, or having period/ menstrual cramps, etc. **[yes, no]**
 - Mental health reasons, like feeling anxious, depressed, or very stressed **[yes, no]**
 - Fun reasons, like going on vacation, skipping school, or traveling for a sport or activity not related to school **[yes, no]**
 - Problems getting to school, like car trouble, missing the bus, or bad weather
 - Family or personal reasons, like helping care for someone who is sick or problems with housing **[yes, no]**
 - School-related reasons, like feeling unsafe at school, problems with classmates, or general lack of interest in school **[yes, no]**
 - Other reason(s) that do not fit into one of these categories **[yes, no]**
7. For each “yes” in q6: Approximately how many full days of school did [NAME] miss for each of the reasons given. If you do not see a reason your child missed school, tell us using the “other” option. **[enter number]**

Please look at all the reasons before answering so you can see all the options we provide. If [NAME] missed school for any reason not listed, use the ‘other reason’ box at the bottom of the page.

If Physical health reasons = yes

- Potentially contagious illness (like the flu, fever, diarrhea, COVID, or other illness meeting school criteria for keeping your child home)
- Mild illness symptoms (like a headache, stomachache, or cough)—but no fever, not seriously ill
- Period cramps or other period-related issue
- Complications from chronic or extreme illness or injury (surgery, concussion, broken bone, etc.)
- Routine doctor appointment—including well-checks, dentist, orthodontist, physical therapy, mental health, disability assessments

If Mental health reasons = yes

- Taking a break/mental health day
- More serious mental health symptoms, like depression or anxiety

If Fun or personal reasons = yes

- Family vacation or special family event (like a wedding)
- Skipped school just for fun (“playing hooky”)
- Went to a non-school event, like a sports, dance, or cheer competition

If Problems getting to school = yes

- Transportation issue (missed the bus, car trouble)
- Bad weather made it hard to get to school
- Had to work

If Family or personal reasons = yes

- Had to take care of a younger sibling or other family member
- There was a death, funeral or serious illness in the family
- Court or custody-related issue
- Experiencing housing problems or doesn’t have stable housing

If School-related reasons = yes

- Bullying or a problem with classmates at school
- Behavior or discipline issues at school
- Serving school suspension
- Schoolwork wasn’t ready, not prepared for a test, missing an assignment, or something similar
- I didn’t want my child to take part in a specific lesson happening that day
- Feels unsafe at school
- Just didn’t want to go

If Other = yes

- Please describe the other reasons for [[selectedchild]] absences this past year that do not appear in the list on the previous screen.

IV. Opinions on Absences

8. Regardless of whether [NAME] missed school, how likely are you to allow [NAME] to miss school for each: **[definitely would not allow, probably would not allow, probably would allow, definitely would allow]**
- Mild illness symptoms (like a headache, stomachache, or cough)—but no fever, not seriously ill
 - Routine doctor appointment—including well-checks, dentist, orthodontist, physical therapy, mental health, disability assessments
 - Taking a break/mental health day
 - More serious mental health symptoms, like depression or anxiety
 - Family vacation or special family event (like a wedding)
 - Skipping school just for fun (“playing hooky”)
 - Going to a non-school event, like a sports, dance, or cheer competition
 - Transportation issue (missing the bus, car trouble)
 - Bad weather making it hard to get to school
 - To work
 - To take care of a younger sibling or other family member
 - Death, funeral or serious illness in the family
 - Bullying or a problem with classmates at school
 - Behavior or discipline issues at school
 - Schoolwork not ready, not prepared for a test, missing an assignment, or something similar
 - To skip a specific lesson happening that day
 - Feeling unsafe at school
 - Just doesn’t want to go to school
 - Cramps or other period-related issue
9. In a typical school year, how many days do you think it’s ok for a child to miss school, for any reason (there are usually about 180-days in a school year?)
[open-ended numeric entry]

10. How much do you agree or disagree with the each of the following:

[Strongly disagree, disagree, agree, strongly agree]

- a. [NAME] misses too much school.
- b. Schools should make good attendance a priority.
- c. Absenteeism is a problem at [NAME]'s school.
- d. Absenteeism is a problem in other schools.
- e. Parents would make their child go to school more if they knew that absenteeism was a problem for schools and teachers.
- f. In-person learning is important for student success.
- g. Having good attendance is important to me.
- h. Schools are too strict about attendance.
- i. Online apps (like Google classroom or an online portal) make it easier for children to miss school.
- j. If a child has good grades, missing school doesn't really matter.
- k. Children should be able to take a mental health day sometimes.
- l. [NAME] doesn't miss anything important when absent.
- m. Going to school in person is important for social reasons.
- n. Missing school often is fine with me because I don't trust [NAME]'s teachers anyway
- o. I think its ok for students to 'work from home" sometimes if they want to.
- p. t's the parents' job to make sure kids are going to school regularly.
- q. It is the school's responsibility to make sure kids are going to school regularly.
- r. Poor attendance is a result of families not valuing education enough.

11. Is there an adult home during the day in your household?

If yes: How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement? *I probably let [NAME] stay home from school more easily because an adult is home during the day.*

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

If no: How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement? *I would probably let [NAME] stay home from school more easily if an were home during the day.*

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

V. Ideas to Improve Attendance

12. Which of the following do you think would help improve student attendance?

[definitely wouldn't work, likely wouldn't work, likely would work, definitely would work]

- Giving students certificates or other awards for good attendance
- Schools paying students a small bonus each semester for good attendance
- Schools charging parents a small fine for unexcused absences
- Giving classrooms rewards for good attendance like a pizza party, or a free period
- Giving lunch detention (or a similar consequence) when students miss too many days
- Counting attendance as part of students' grades
- Improving relationships between students and teachers
- Improving communication between parents and teachers
- Making learning more interesting and fun
- Doing more group projects so students feel their presence matters to others
- Improving teacher quality
- Making the school safer
- Creating a more supportive school culture
- Teaching parents about why school attendance matters
- Teaching students about why school attendance matters

13. What is the number one thing schools can do to improve student attendance?

Appendix B.

Teen Survey

This survey will ask you questions about your school and your attendance record this past year, as well as some additional information just about you. Please take your time and be honest as you go. Your answers are confidential and private—they will not be shared with your parents, your teachers, or with anyone who knows you.

I. Basic information for current school year

1. During this last school year (2024-25) which type of school did you go to?
[A public school, a private school, a charter school, a virtual school, I'm homeschooling, I don't go to school, something else]
 - If "I don't go to school" or "something else":
 - Are you: (select all that apply)
 - Pursuing your GED
 - Working (part or full time)
 - Taking some time off school
 - Something else (please explain)
2. What grade were you in during this last school year (2024-25)?
[Dropdown: 5th grade—12th grade, was not currently enrolled in school]

II. How doing in school

As you complete this survey, remember that you are not being judged—we just want honest answers to our questions about school. Your honesty helps our research more than anything else! Your answers are private and won't be shared with parents, teachers, peers, or anybody else.

This set of questions is about how you are doing in school.

3. Would you say you are an A student, a B student, mostly A and B student?
Pick from the choices below the one that best describes you.
- Mostly As
 - Mostly As and Bs
 - Mostly Bs
 - Mostly Bs and Cs
 - Mostly Cs
 - Mostly Cs and Ds
 - Mostly Ds or lower
4. How much do you care about how you do in school?
- I don't care at all
 - I barely care
 - I care a little
 - I care a lot
5. This school year, how much have you struggled or had a hard time with each of the following (think about how often something felt tough or stressful for you):
[Not at all, a little bit, pretty often, almost all the time]
- a. Your psychological well-being or mental health?
 - b. Relationships with your friends?
 - c. Relationships with your parents
 - d. Relationships with your teachers

III. Attendance/Absences

As you complete this survey, remember that you are not being judged—we just want honest answers to our questions. Your honesty helps our research more than anything else! Your answers are private and won't be shared with parents, teachers, peers, or anybody else. We want to understand why kids miss school, and how kids think about their attendance.

6. This school year (from August 2024 to June 2025) approximately how many days were you absent from school? **[0, 1 - 10, 11-15, 16-20, 21-25, 26 or more, I don't know]**

If q10 > 0

7. Below you will see a list of reasons for why people miss school. For each, tell us if you were ever absent this year for any of these reasons. Select “yes” or “no” for each one:
- Physical health reasons, like being sick, hurt, going to the doctor, having period/ menstrual cramps, etc. **[yes, no]**
 - Mental health reasons, like feeling anxious, depressed, or very stressed **[yes, no]**
 - Fun reasons, like going on vacation, skipping school, or traveling for a sport or activity not related to school **[yes, no]**
 - Problems getting to school, like car trouble, missing the bus, or bad weather **[yes, no]**
 - Family or personal reasons, like helping care for someone who is sick or problems with housing **[yes, no]**
 - School-related reasons, like feeling unsafe at school, problems with a classmate, not having an assignment ready, or general lack of interest in school **[yes, no]**
 - Other reason(s) that do not fit into one of these categories **[yes, no]**
8. **For each “yes” in q7:** Approximately how many days did you miss for each of the reasons given? If you do not see a reason you missed school, tell us using the “other” option. Please look at all the reasons before answering so you can see all the options we provide. If you missed school for any reason not listed, use the “other reason” box at the bottom of the page.

Physical health reasons

- You were sick with something contagious (e.g., flu, fever, diarrhea, COVID, or other illness meeting school criteria for staying home)
- You had mild illness symptoms (headache, stomachache, cough)—but no fever, not seriously ill
- You had period cramps or another period-related issue.
- You had complications from chronic or extreme illness or injury (like surgery, concussion, a broken bone, etc.)
- You had a routine doctor’s appointment—including well-checks, dentist, orthodontist, physical therapy, mental health, etc.

Mental health reasons

- You needed a break (sometimes called a “mental health day”)
- You were feeling very anxious or depressed

Fun reasons

- Family vacation or attending a special event like a wedding
- Skipped school just for fun
- Went to a non-school event, like a sports, dance, or cheer competition

Problems getting to school

- Transportation issue (missed the bus, car trouble)
- Bad weather made it hard to get to school
- (If child = 14+) You had to work

Family or personal reasons

- Had to take care for a younger sibling or other family member
- There was a death, funeral, or serious illness in the family
- Court or custody-related issue
- Experiencing housing problems or unstable housing

School-related reasons

- Experiencing bullying or another problem with kids at school
- Serving school suspension
- Your schoolwork wasn't ready, you weren't prepared for a test, you were missing an assignment, or something similar.
- One or more of your parents did not want you participating in a specific lesson happening that day
- You felt unsafe at school
- You just didn't want to go

Other reason

Please describe the other reasons for your absences this past year that do not appear in the list on the previous screen. **[open-ended box]**

9. Do you think it should be ok for you to miss school for each of the following reasons:
[definitely not ok, probably not ok, probably ok, definitely ok]
- a. Mild illness symptoms (headache, stomachache, cough)—but no fever, not seriously ill
 - b. Routine doctor’s appointment—including well-checks, dentist, orthodontist, physical therapy, mental health, etc.
 - c. Needing a break (sometimes called a “mental health day”)
 - d. Feeling very anxious or depressed
 - e. Family vacation or attending a special event like a wedding
 - f. Skipping school for fun
 - g. Going to a non-school event, like a sports, dance, or cheer competition
 - h. Transportation issue (missing the bus, car trouble)
 - i. Bad weather making it hard to get to school
 - j. (If child = 14+) A work schedule conflict
 - k. Caring for a younger sibling or other family member
 - l. Death, funeral, or serious illness in the family
 - m. Experiencing bullying or another problem with kids at school
 - n. Not having schoolwork ready, not being prepared for a test, missing an assignment, or something similar.
 - o. A parent keeping you from a particular lesson at school that day
 - p. Feeling unsafe
 - q. Just not wanting to go
 - r. (if child gender = female/non-binary) Period cramps or other period-related issue.
10. How many days in a 180-day school year do you think is ok for a student to be absent?
[(open-ended numeric entry)]
11. How much do you agree or disagree with the each of the following:
[Strongly disagree, disagree, agree, strongly agree]
- a. I miss too much school.
 - b. Schools should make good attendance a priority.
 - c. Kids in my school are absent too often.
 - d. Students would go to school more if they knew that being absent makes things harder for teachers and schools.

- e. In-person learning is important for me to do well academically.
- f. Having good attendance is important to me.
- g. Schools are too strict about attendance.
- h. Online apps or platforms (like google classroom or an online portal) makes it easier to miss school.
- i. If I have good grades, missing school doesn't really matter.
- j. I should be able to take a mental health day sometimes.
- k. I don't miss anything important when I'm absent.
- l. Going to school in person is important for social reasons.
- m. Missing school stresses me out.
- n. My parents decide whether or not I can miss a day of school.
- o. My parents always know when I am absent.
- p. I might go to school more if I knew that being absent makes things harder for schools and teachers.
- q. I think it's ok for students to "work from home" sometimes if they want to.

12. Which of the following do you think would help improve student attendance? **[for each, definitely would not work, likely would not work, likely would work, definitely would work]**

- a. Giving students certificates or other awards for good attendance
- b. Schools paying students a small bonus each semester for good attendance
- c. Schools charging parents a small fine for unexcused absences
- d. Giving classrooms rewards for good attendance like a pizza party, or a free period
- e. Giving lunch detention (or a similar consequence) when students miss too many days.
- f. Counting attendance as part of students' grades.
- g. Improving relationships between students and teachers.
- h. Improving communication between parents and teachers.
- i. Making learning more interesting and fun.
- j. Doing more group projects so students feel their presence matters to others.
- k. Improving teacher quality
- l. Making the school safer.
- m. Creating a more supportive school culture.
- n. Teaching parents about why school attendance matters.
- o. Teaching students about why school attendance matters.

13. What is the number one thing schools can do to improve student attendance?

[open-ended]

IV. STRENGTH AND DIFFICULTIES QUESTIONNAIRE

For the last set of questions, answer about how you've felt over the last six months.

14. For each item, select the response for "Not True", "Somewhat True" or "Certainly True". Answer as best you can, even if you are not absolutely certain. **[random order—split in two screens]**

- a. I try to be nice to other people. I care about their feelings.
- b. I am restless, I cannot stay still for long.
- c. I get a lot of headaches, stomach-aches, or sickness.
- d. I usually share with others, for example games, food, etc.
- e. I get very angry and often lose my temper.
- f. I would rather be alone than with people of my age.
- g. I usually do as I am told.
- h. I worry a lot.
- i. I am helpful if someone is hurt, upset, or feeling ill.
- j. I am constantly fidgeting or squirming.
- a. I have one good friend or more.
- b. I often fight with other kids or make them do what I want.
- c. I am often unhappy, depressed, or tearful.
- d. Other people my age generally like me.
- e. I am easily distracted, I find it difficult to concentrate.
- f. I am nervous in new situations. I easily lose confidence.
- g. I am kind to younger children.
- h. I am often accused of lying or cheating.

- i. Other children or young people pick on me or bully me.
- j. I often offer to help others (parents, teachers, children).
- k. I think before I do things.
- l. I take things that are not mine from home, school, or elsewhere.
- m. I get along better with adults than with people my own age.
- n. I have many fears, I am easily scared.
- o. I have a good attention span and see work through to the end.

15. What's one thing you wish adults understood about teens? **[open-ended]**