

Decoding NAEP: Attendance Matters

February 18, 2025



Panelists



Thomas Kane, Ph.D.
Walter H. Gale Professor of
Education and Economics
Harvard Graduate School of
Education



Hedy Chang
Founder & Executive Director
Attendance Works

Panelists



Kari Sullivan Custer
Lead for Chronic Absenteeism
Connecticut State Department
of Education



Lewis Ferebee, Ed.D.
Chancellor
District of Columbia
Public Schools



Lori Masseur
Early Learning Director
Read On Arizona



Ernise Singleton, Ph.D.
Assistant Superintendent
Office of Career and College
Readiness
Louisiana Department of
Education



Pivoting from Pandemic Recovery to Long-Term Reform: A District-Level Analysis

Daniel C. Dewey, Erin Fahle, Thomas J. Kane, Sean F. Reardon, Douglas O. Staiger



Center for Education Policy Research
HARVARD UNIVERSITY



The Educational Opportunity Project
at Stanford University

Data

- We use the NAEP to make state proficiency comparable across states and over time.
 - *In the future, the biennial NAEP release for states will be accompanied by district-level trends.*
- 43 states
 - States missing because of low participation in state tests (AK, NY, CO, OR, DC (math))
or only two proficiency categories reported (NM)
or students taking out-of-grade tests (VA for math)
or missing district-level one or two years (WV (reading), AR(reading), ME, MT, VT)
- Math and Reading
- By race/ethnicity, economic status, gender
- 8,719 school districts (~35 million students, ~100 million test scores)
- 79% of US total grade 3-8 enrollment

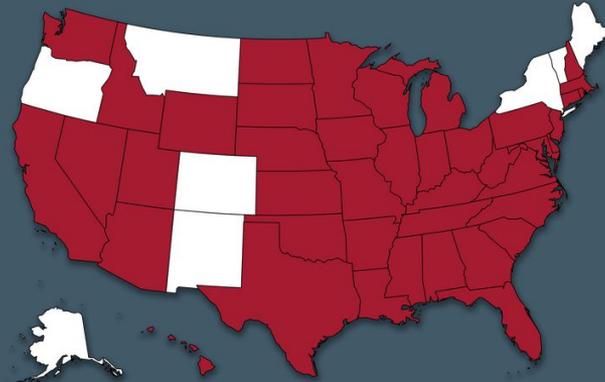
Although No State Improved in Both Math and Reading on the NAEP, the Education Recovery Scorecard Highlights the Work of **Over 100 Districts** Performing Above Pre-Pandemic Levels in Both Math and Reading

[READ THE FULL REPORT](#)

[READ THE PRESS RELEASE](#)

Explore:

- [District Success Stories](#)
- [List of Recovered Districts in Math and Reading](#)



[Click here for state press releases and district level data.](#)

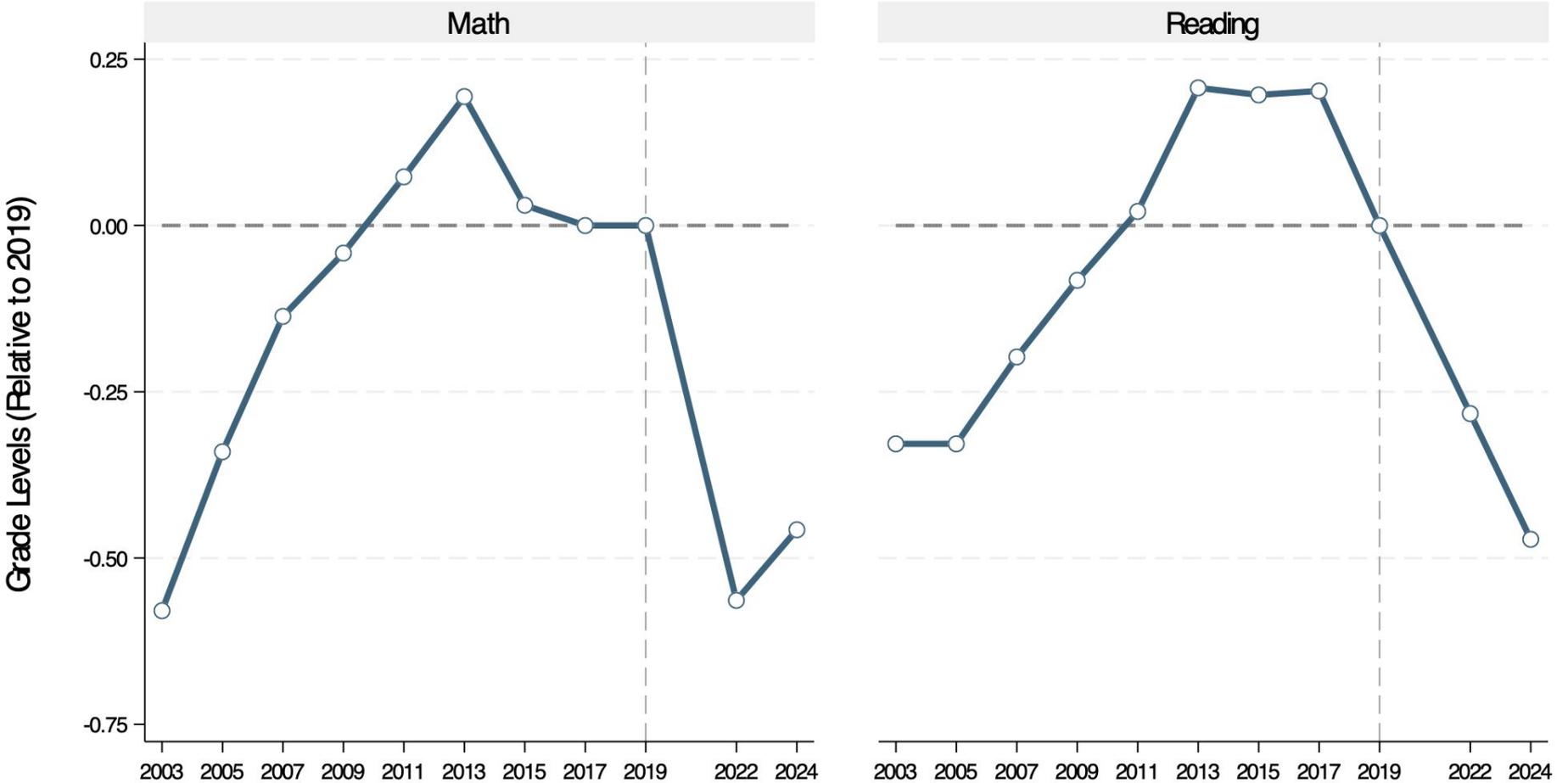
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National Test Score Trends, 2003-2024, Grades 3-8



Between-District Gaps Grew (esp. in Math)

District Demographic Characteristic	Top-Bottom Decile Gap (Grade Levels)		Change (Grade Levels)	Percentage Change
	2019	2024	2019-24	2019-24
Math				
Low vs High % FRPL	3.71	4.10	0.39	11%
Low vs High % Black	1.68	1.96	0.28	17%
Low vs High % Hispanic	1.16	1.33	0.17	14%
Reading				
Low vs High % FRPL	3.70	3.90	0.21	6%
Low vs High % Black	1.41	1.48	0.07	5%
Low vs High % Hispanic	1.38	1.44	0.06	4%

The math gap between the lowest and highest poverty districts grew from 3.7 grade levels to 4.1 grades levels from 2019-2024, an 11% increase.

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The math gap between the districts with the lowest and highest proportions of Black students grew from 1.7 grade levels to 2.0 grades levels from 2019-2024, an 17% increase.

Gender Gaps Emerged in Math

Within-District Gap	Gap (Grade Levels)		Change (Grade Levels)	Percentage Change
	2019	2024	2019-2024	2019-24
Math				
Nonpoor -Poor Gap	1.66	1.71	0.05	3%
White - Black Gap	2.08	2.22	0.14	7%
White - Hispanic Gap	1.30	1.46	0.16	12%
Female - Male Gap	0.02	-0.28	-0.30	
Reading				
Nonpoor -Poor Gap	1.81	1.79	-0.02	-1%
White - Black Gap	2.05	2.06	0.00	0%
White - Hispanic Gap	1.40	1.45	0.06	4%
Female - Male Gap	0.92	0.82	-0.10	-11%

The average within-district female-male math was 0 in 2019 (girls and boys had equal math skills); girls math skills have fallen much more than boys: by 2024, girls were 0.3 grade levels behind boys in math

educationrecoverycorecard.org

District Fact Sheets

Statewide Data

DOWNLOAD

Search for a district

Search by district name or ID

Quabbin - 2500001

DOWNLOAD

Spencer E Brookfield - 2500002

DOWNLOAD

Southwick Tolland Granville Regional School District - 2500013

DOWNLOAD

Up Island Regional - 2500043

DOWNLOAD

Manchester Essex Regional - 2500067

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Ayer Shirley School District - 2500542

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Monomoy Regional School District - 2500544

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Abington - 2501650

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Acton Boxborough - 2501710

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Adams Cheshire - 2501780

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Amesbury - 2501860

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Andover - 2501950

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Arlington - 2501980

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Ashburnham Westminster - 2502040

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Ashland - 2502100

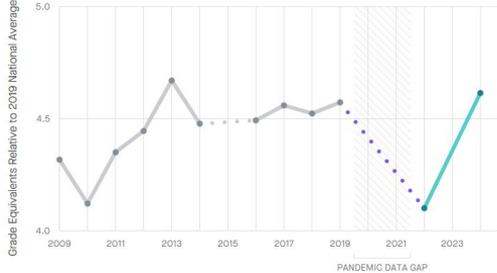
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Athol Royalston - 2502160

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Lexington, MA

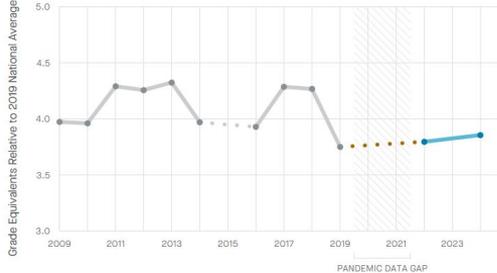
Math Performance, Grades 3-8, 2009-2024



Average Math Scores and Trends in Scores in Grade Level Equivalents Relative to the 2019 National Average

2019 Average	4.57
2022 Average	4.10
2024 Average	4.61
2019-2022 Change	-0.47
2022-2024 Change	+0.51
Since 2019	+0.04

Reading Performance, Grades 3-8, 2009-2024



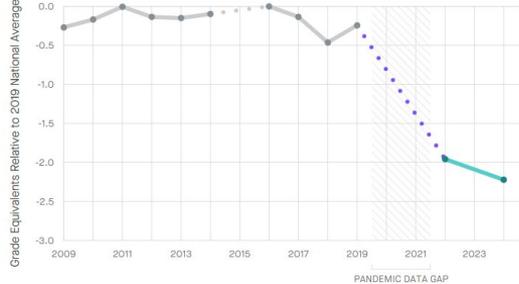
Average Reading Scores and Trends in Scores in Grade Level Equivalents Relative to the 2019 National Average

2019 Average	3.75
2022 Average	3.79
2024 Average	3.85
2019-2022 Change	+0.05
2022-2024 Change	+0.06
Since 2019	+0.10



Lynn, MA

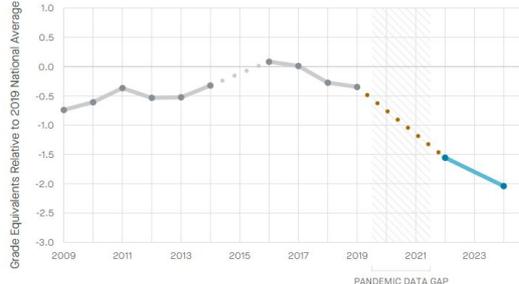
Math Performance, Grades 3-8, 2009-2024



Average Math Scores and Trends in Scores in Grade Level Equivalents Relative to the 2019 National Average

2019 Average	-0.24
2022 Average	-1.96
2024 Average	-2.22
2019-2022 Change	-1.71
2022-2024 Change	-0.27
Since 2019	-1.98

Reading Performance, Grades 3-8, 2009-2024



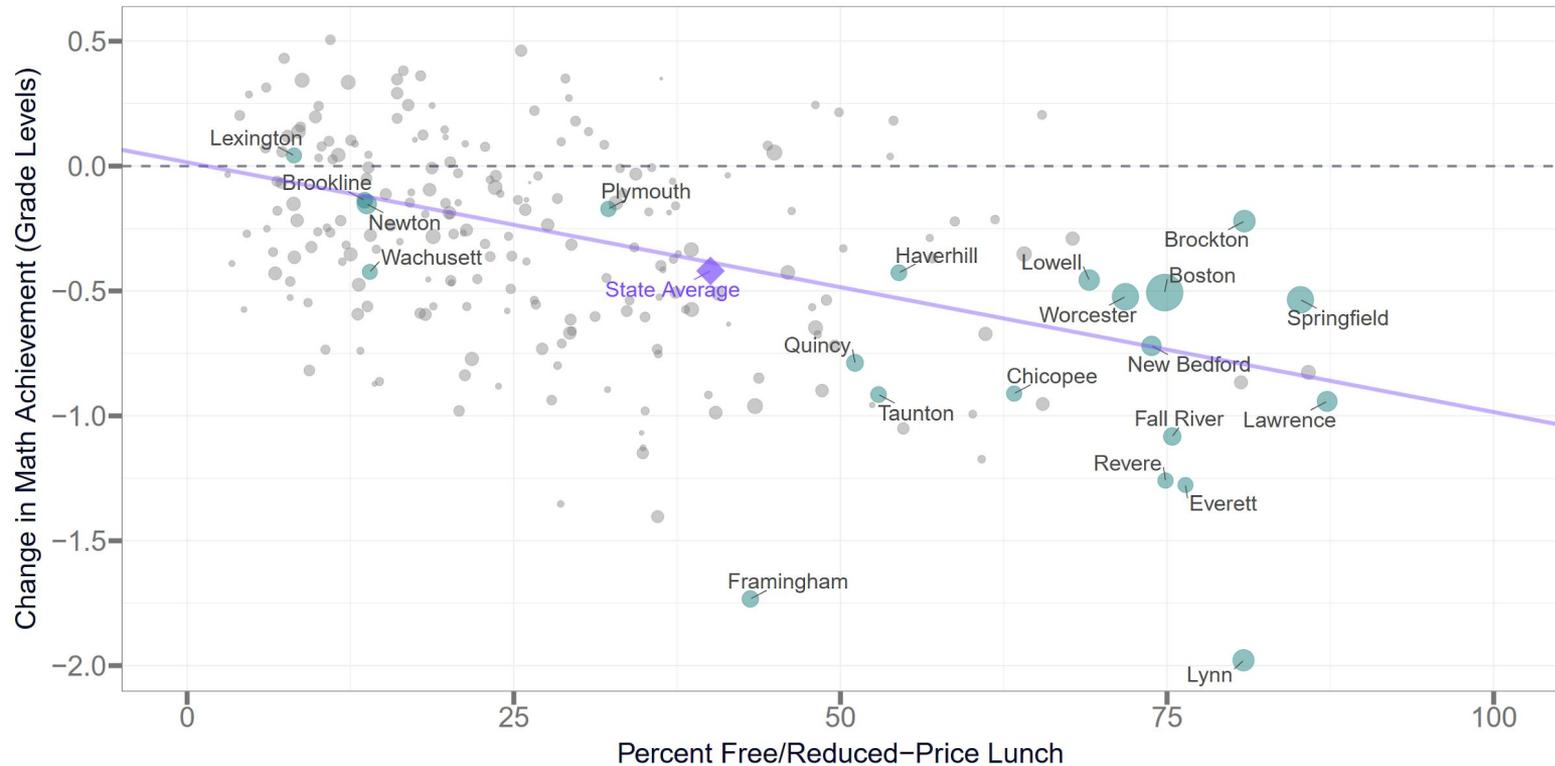
Average Reading Scores and Trends in Scores in Grade Level Equivalents Relative to the 2019 National Average

2019 Average	-0.35
2022 Average	-1.55
2024 Average	-2.04
2019-2022 Change	-1.21
2022-2024 Change	-0.48
Since 2019	-1.70



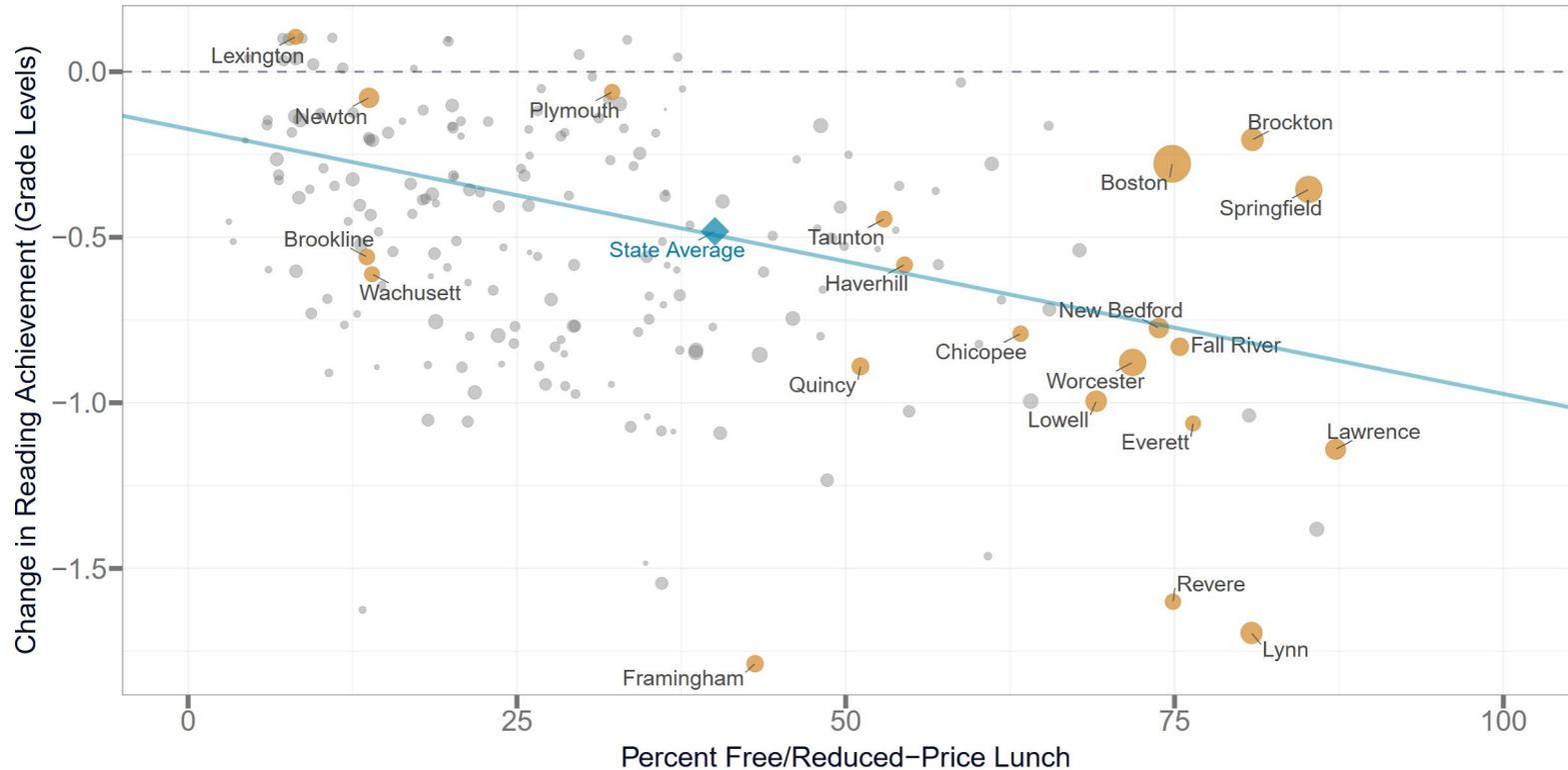
High Income Districts 4 x More Likely to Recover

Change in Math Achievement 2019–2024
by Percent FRPL in Massachusetts Districts



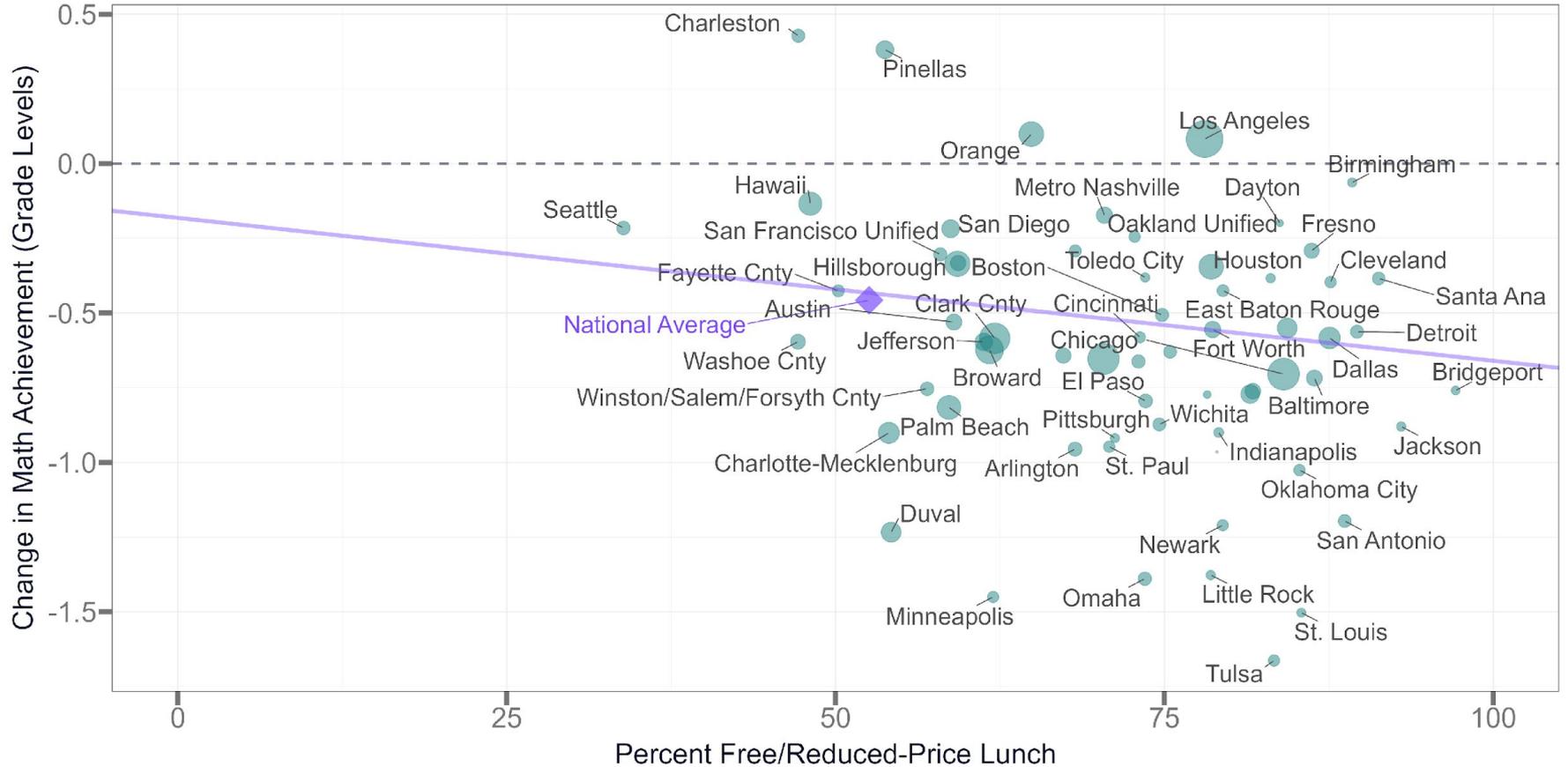
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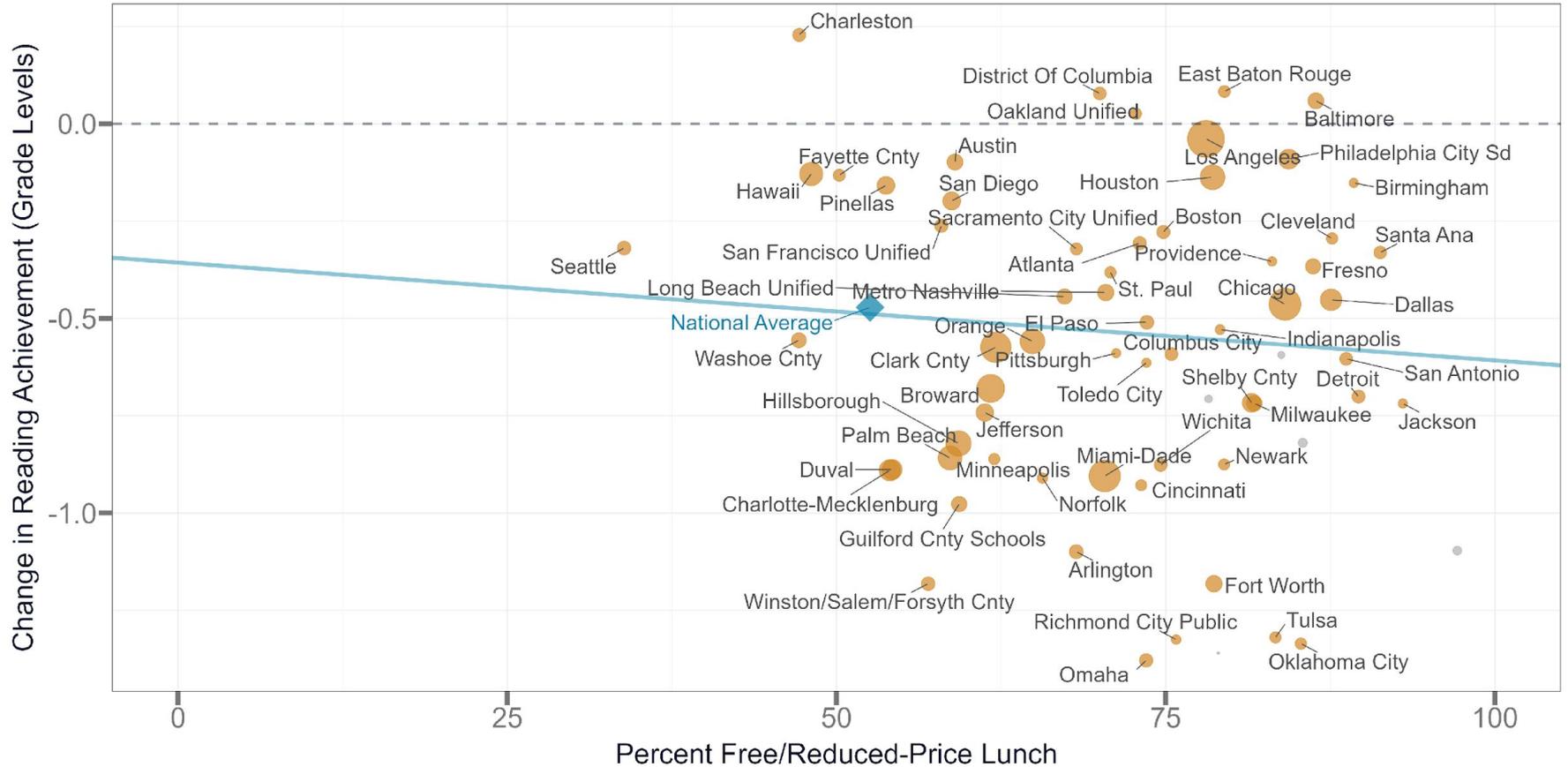
Source: Education Recovery Scorecard, by Harvard CEPR and Stanford SEDA. For details on the methodology see <https://edopportunity.org/methods>.

Change in Math Achievement 2019-2024 by Percent FRPL in CGCS Districts



Source: Education Recovery Scorecard, by Harvard CEPR and Stanford SEDA. For details on the methodology see <https://edopportunity.org/methods>.

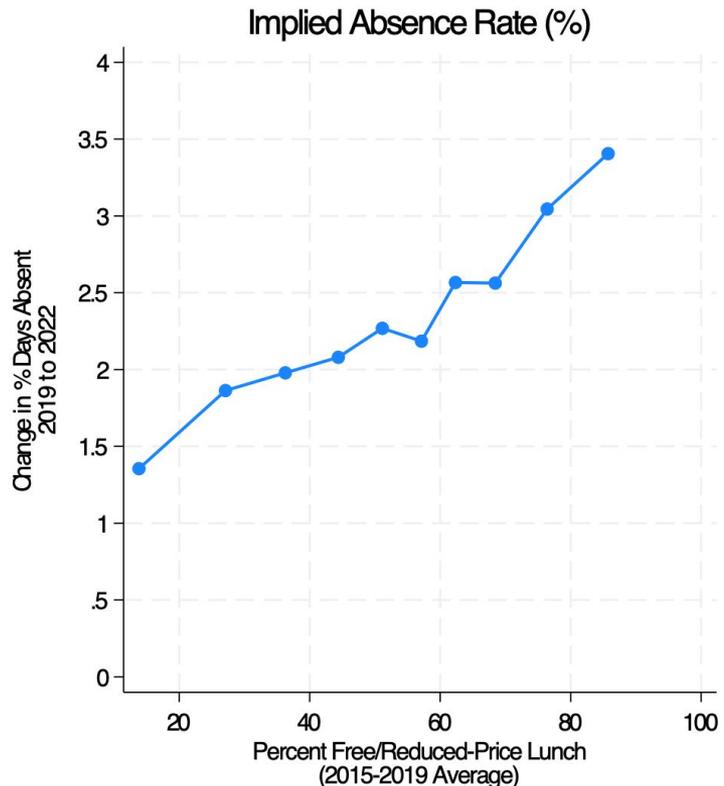
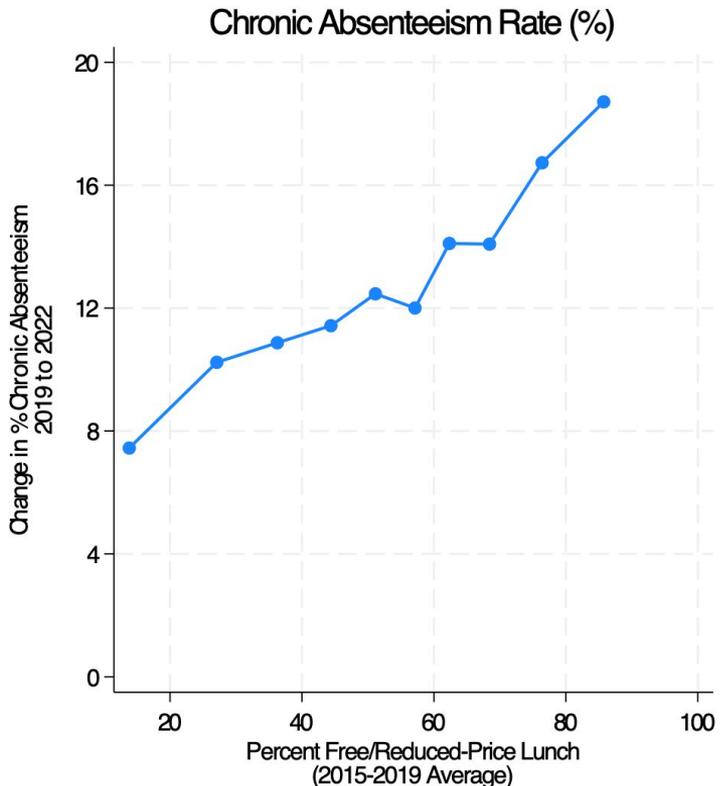
Change in Reading Achievement 2019-2024 by Percent FRPL in CGCS Districts



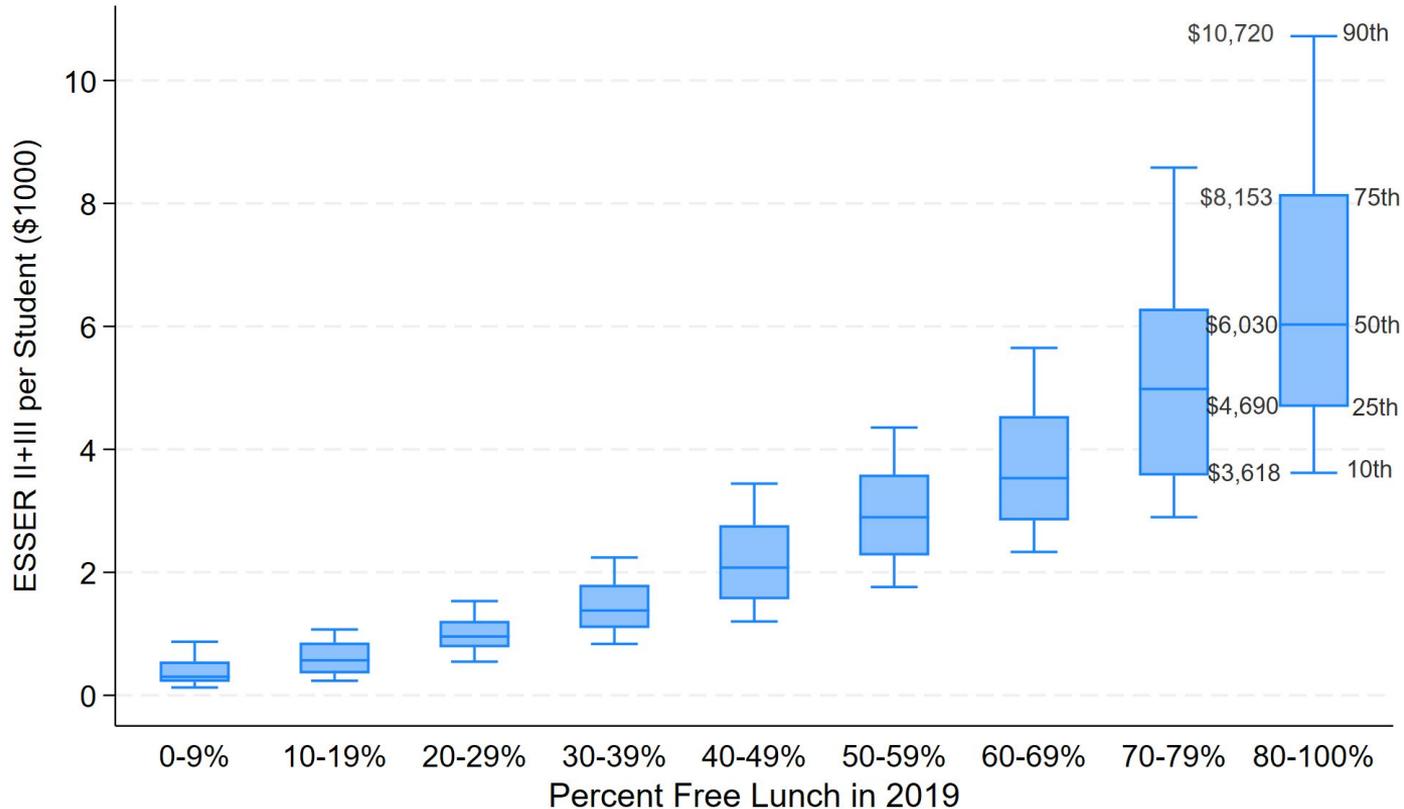
Source: Education Recovery Scorecard, by Harvard CEPR and Stanford SEDA. For details on the methodology see <https://edopportunity.org/methods>.

Widespread Rise in Absenteeism Slowed Recovery (Especially in Higher Poverty Districts)

Change in Absenteeism by District Poverty

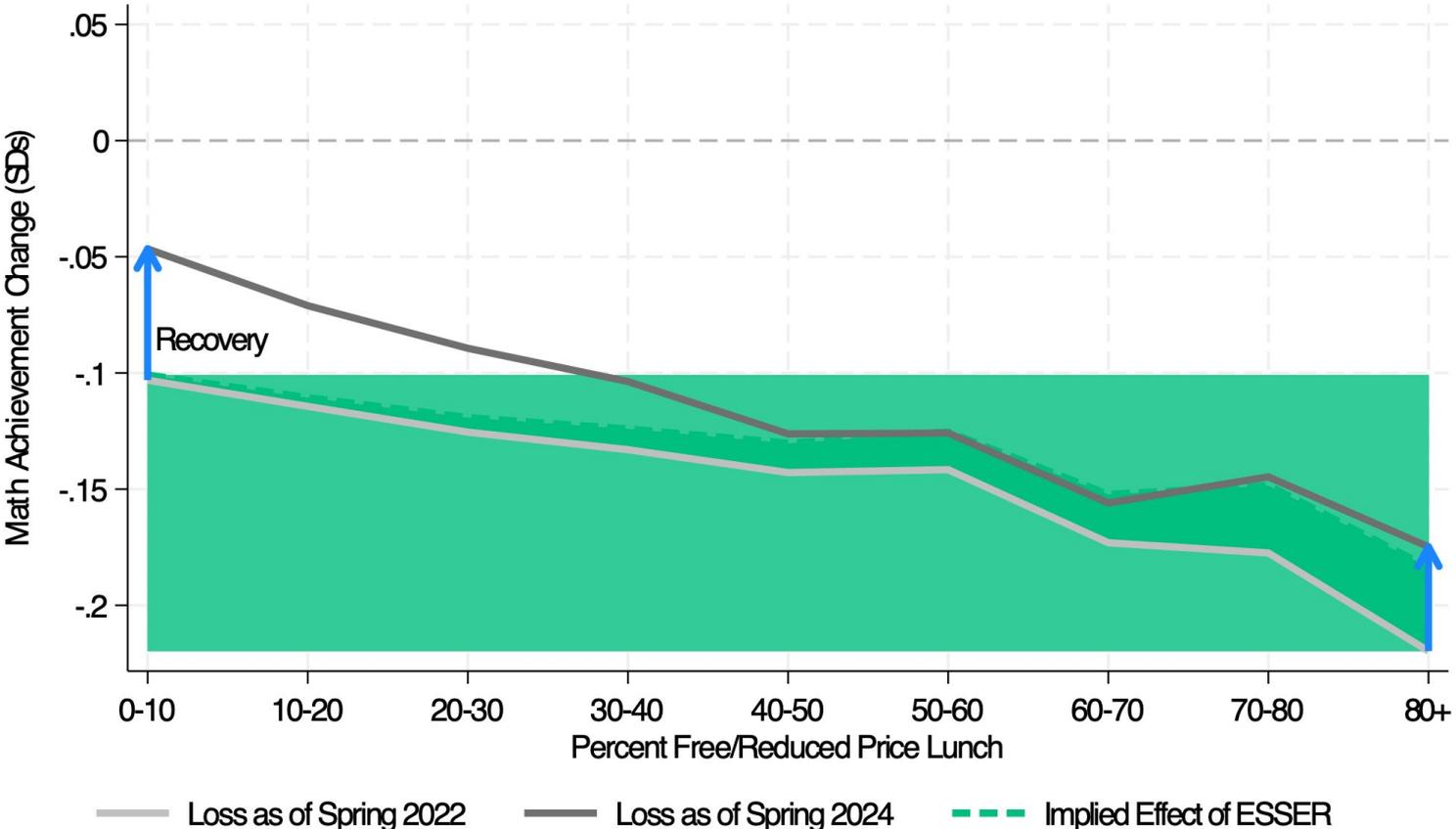


Districts with Similar Poverty Rates Received Different Amounts of Aid



EMBARGOED TILL FEB 11, 2025

Federal Pandemic Relief Boosted Recovery in High Poverty Districts

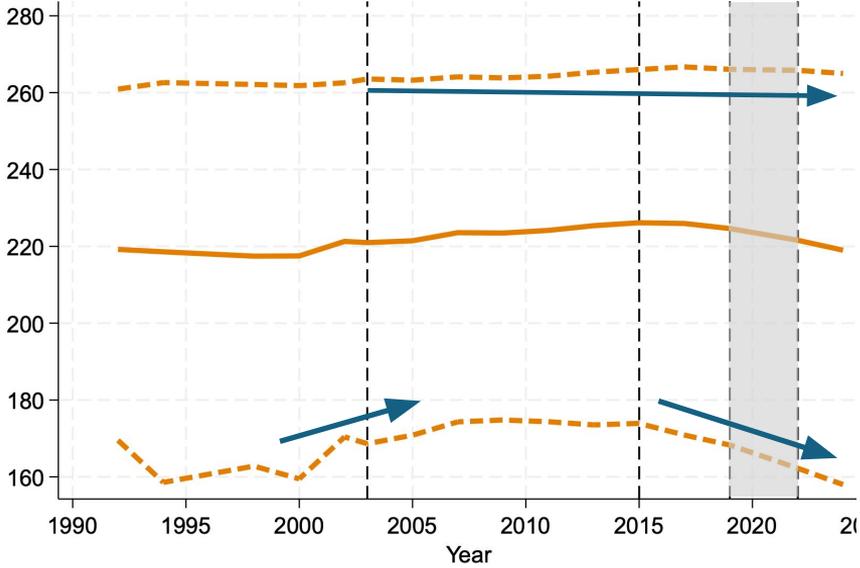


Struggling Readers Continue Decline

4th Grade Reading

NCLBA

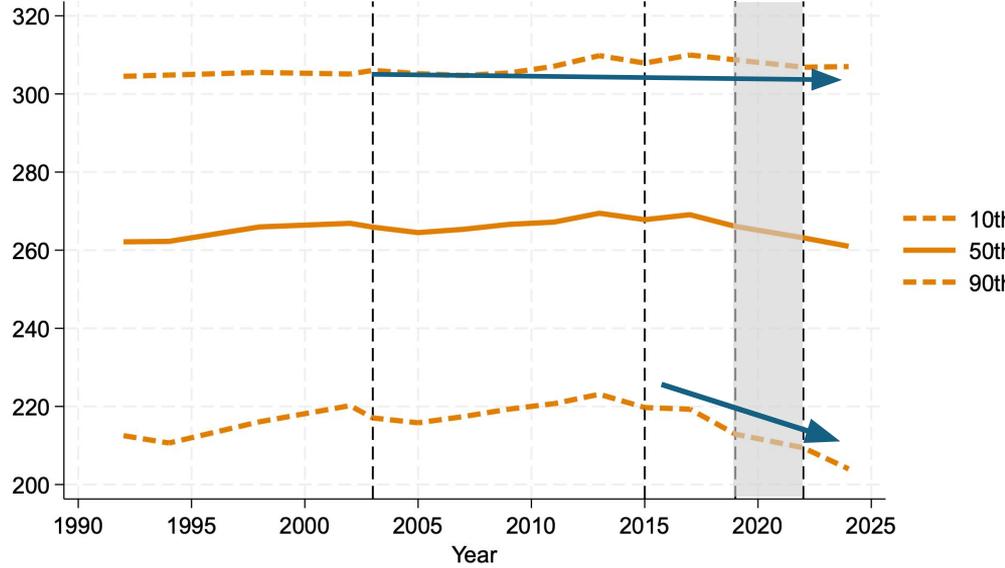
ESSA



8th Grade Reading

NCLBA

ESSA

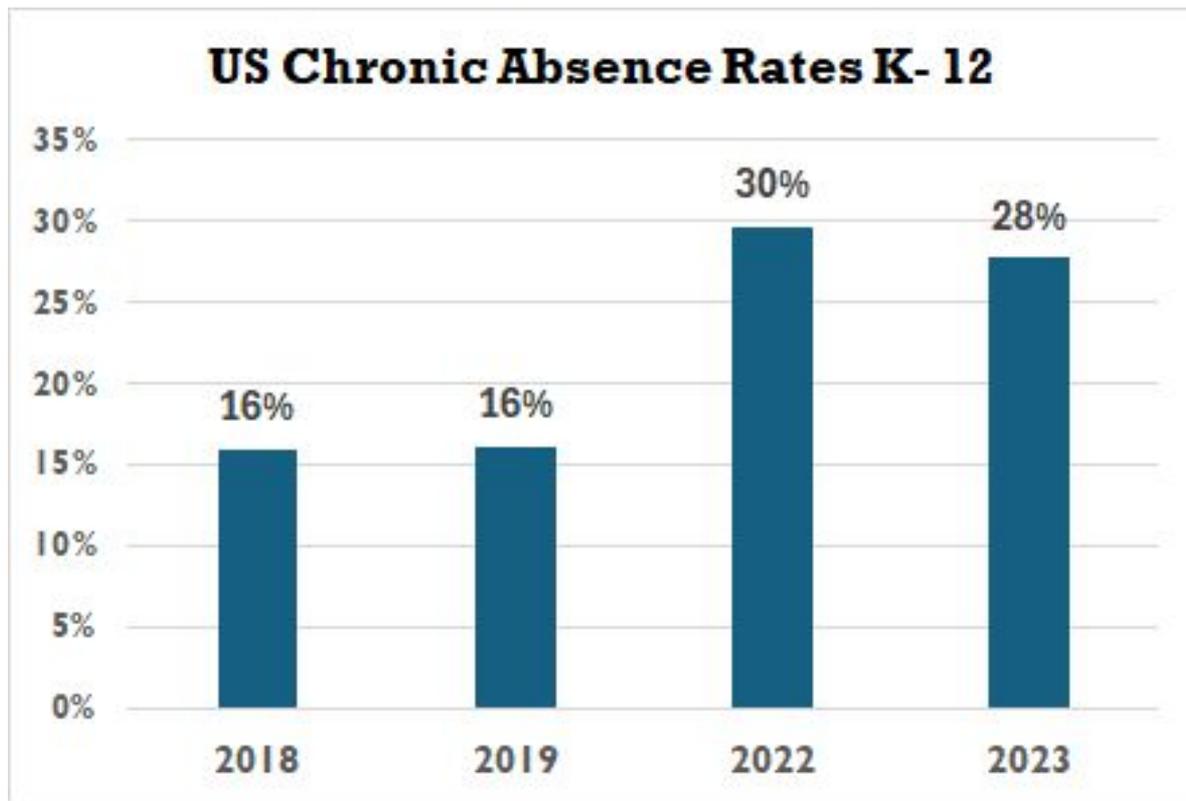


10th
50th
90th

Pivoting from Pandemic Recovery to Long-Term Reform

1. States and districts should **double down on academic catch up** efforts previously funded by federal relief.
2. Mayors, employers and other community leaders should **join schools in tackling student absenteeism**.
3. Teachers must **inform parents** when their child is not at grade level.
4. We must **learn what's working** (and what is not) in the recent literacy reforms/cell phone bans.

National Chronic Absence Crisis

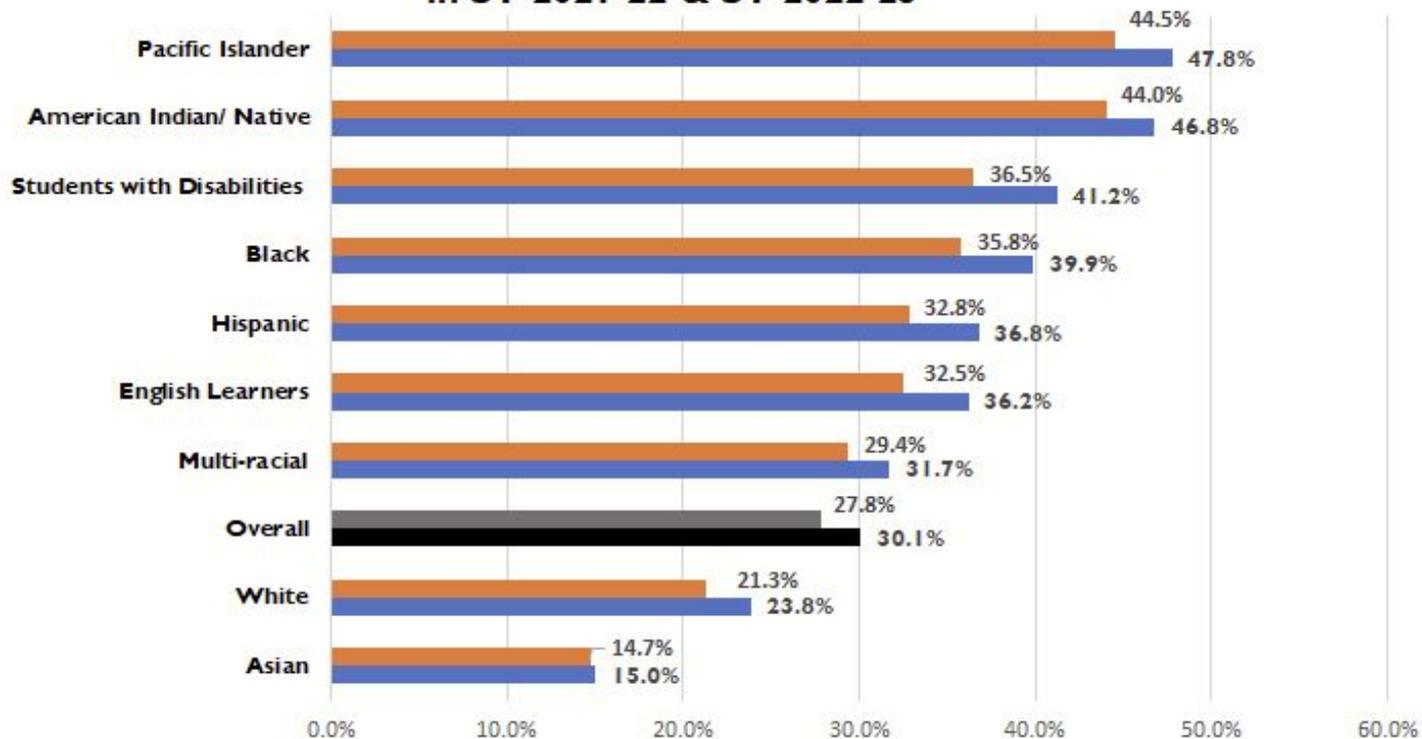


Source: US Department of Education, Ed Facts

- ✓ The number of chronically absent students grew from 8.1 to 14.7 million in 2022. It still affected 13.4 million in 2023.
- ✓ Emerging 2024 data shows some decrease but still elevated.

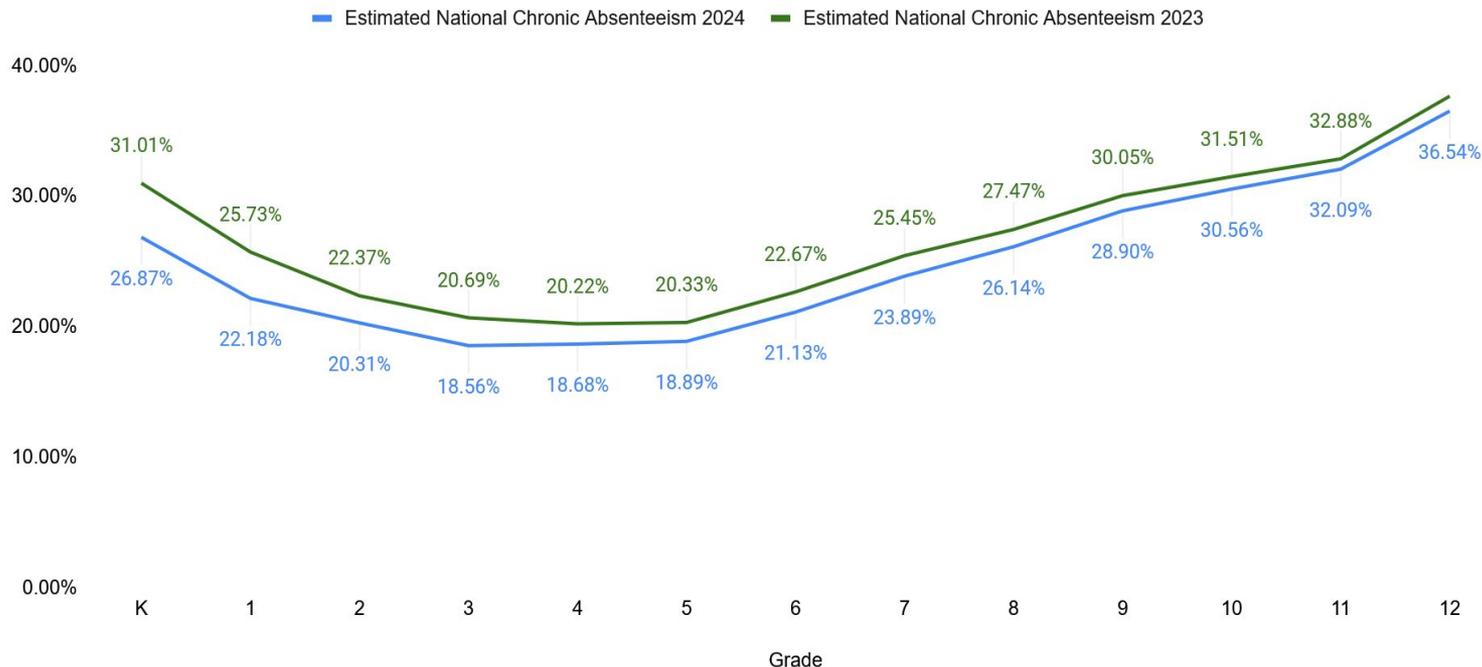
Chronically absent students are from all backgrounds. But some groups are more affected.

Chart I. Chronic Absence Rates By Student Population
in SY 2021-22 & SY 2022-23



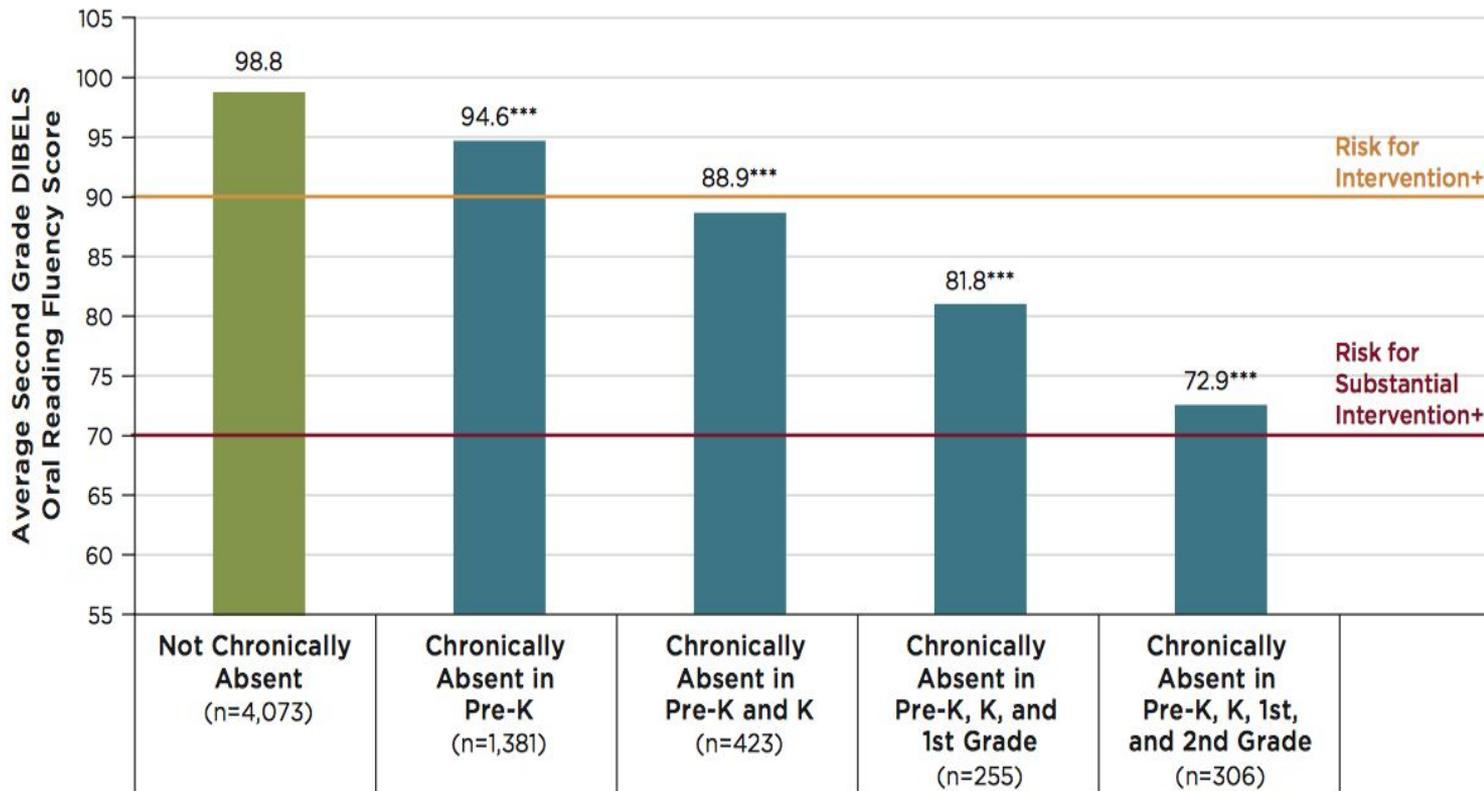
Reducing chronic absence must begin in kindergarten (ideally preschool)

Chronic Absence by Grade 2024 & 2023



Note: These estimates are based upon data from 14 states (CO, CT, DE, GA, HI, IL, IN, IA, MI, ME, NE, OH, OR, WA) representing around 17% of the K-12 public school population.

2nd Graders who were never chronically absent were more likely to be able to read on grade level than students with patterns of chronic absence.



Note: ***Indicates that scores are significantly different from scores of students who are never chronically absent, at $p < .001$ level. + In the DIBELS 6th Edition Assessment and Scoring Guide (Good & Kaminski, 2002), these are labeled as "Some Risk," indicating the need for additional intervention and "At Risk," indicating the need for substantial interventions.

UCHICAGO CCSR

Ehrlich, Stacy B., et al. University of Chicago, 2014, pp. 1–64,

Preschool Attendance in Chicago Public Schools Relationship with Outcomes and Reasons for Absence.

www.attendanceworks.org

Students who are chronically absent in preschool are five times more likely to be chronically absent in second grade.

Source: Erlich, Stacey et al, *Preschool Attendance in Chicago Public Schools: Relationships with Learning Outcomes and Reasons for Absences*, May 2014, <https://consortium.uchicago.edu/publications/preschool-attendance-chicago-public-schools-relationships-learning-outcomes-and-reaso-0>



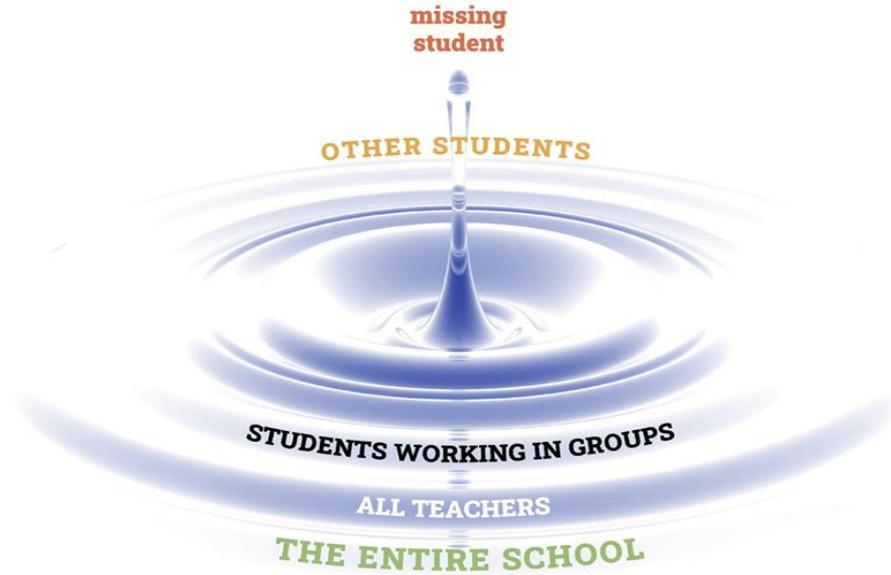
Chronic absence is especially challenging for low-income children

- ✓ Poor children are **4x** more likely to be chronically absent in K than their highest income peers.
- ✓ Children in poverty are more likely to lack basic health and safety supports (health care, transportation, stable housing, food, clothes, etc.) that ensure a child is more likely to get to school.
- ✓ The adverse impact of absenteeism on literacy development is **75% greater** for these children than for their middle-class peers.

Sources: [M. Romero and Y.S. Lee, A National Portrait of Chronic Absenteeism in the Early Grades, The National Center for Children In Poverty, Columbia University, October 2007.](#) [Ready, Douglas D., Socioeconomic Disadvantage, School Attendance, and Early Cognitive Development, The Differential Effects of School Exposure, Sociology of Education, October 2010](#)



When multiple students miss school, the impact ripples



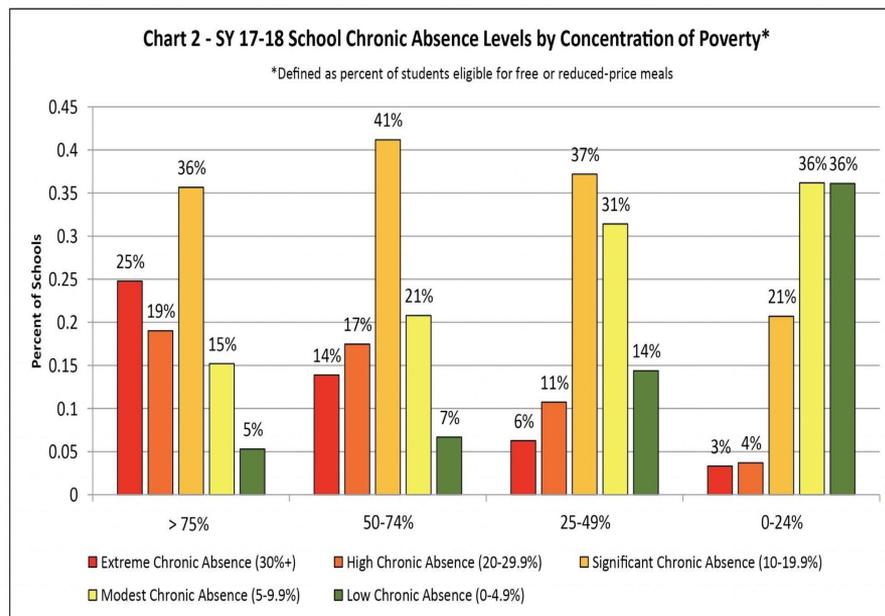
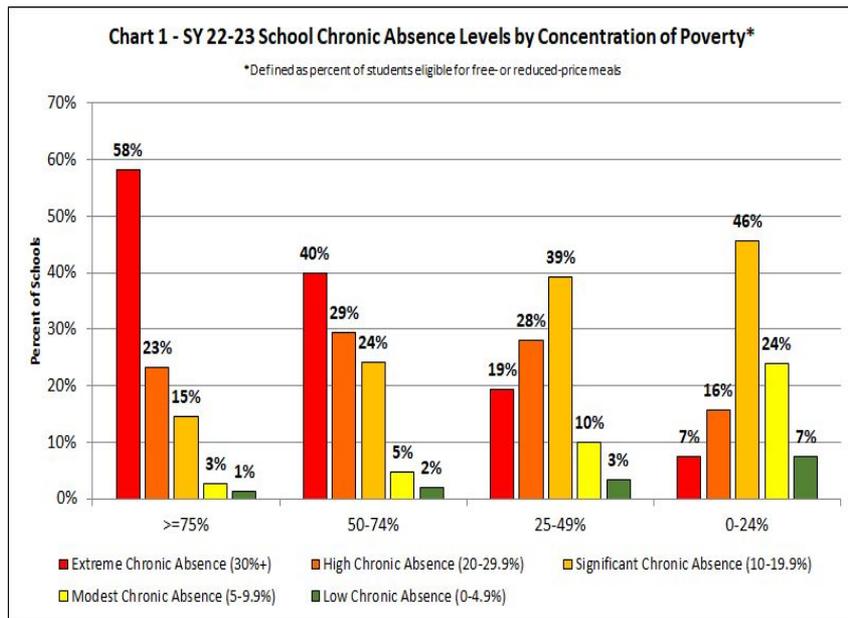
In SY 2022-23
61% of schools had a chronic absence rate of **20%+** versus **28%** prior to the pandemic

**The vast majority of schools experienced high chronic absence.
The largest increase has occurred among elementary schools.**

	Elementary Schools			Middle Schools			High Schools			All Schools		
	2017-18	2021-22	2022-23	2017-18	2021-22	2022-23	2017-18	2021-22	2022-23	2017-18	2021-22	2022-23
Number of schools with 30% or more students chronically absent	3,550	19,828	15,714	1,353	6,430	5,154	6,433	11,778	10,339	12,493	39,890	32,971
Number of schools with 20% or more students chronically absent	9,233	31,362	28,796	3,640	10,541	9,591	10,474	16,126	15,271	24,912	60,379	55,984

For more information, see: <https://www.attendanceworks.org/rising-tide-of-chronic-absence-challenges-schools/>

Schools serving more students and families struggling with poverty are most affected by extreme and high levels of chronic absence.



For more information, see: <https://www.attendanceworks.org/rising-tide-of-chronic-absence-challenges-schools/>

The key to reducing chronic absence is to find and address what causes students to miss school

Barriers

- Chronic and acute illness
- Family responsibilities or home situation
- Trauma
- Poor transportation
- Housing and food insecurity
- Inequitable access to needed services (including health)
- System involvement
- Lack of predictable schedules for learning
- Lack of access to technology
- Community violence

Aversion

- Struggling academically and/or behaviorally
- Unwelcoming school climate
- Social and peer challenges
- Anxiety
- Biased disciplinary and suspension practices
- Undiagnosed disability and/or lack of disability accommodations
- Caregivers have/had negative educational experiences

Disengagements

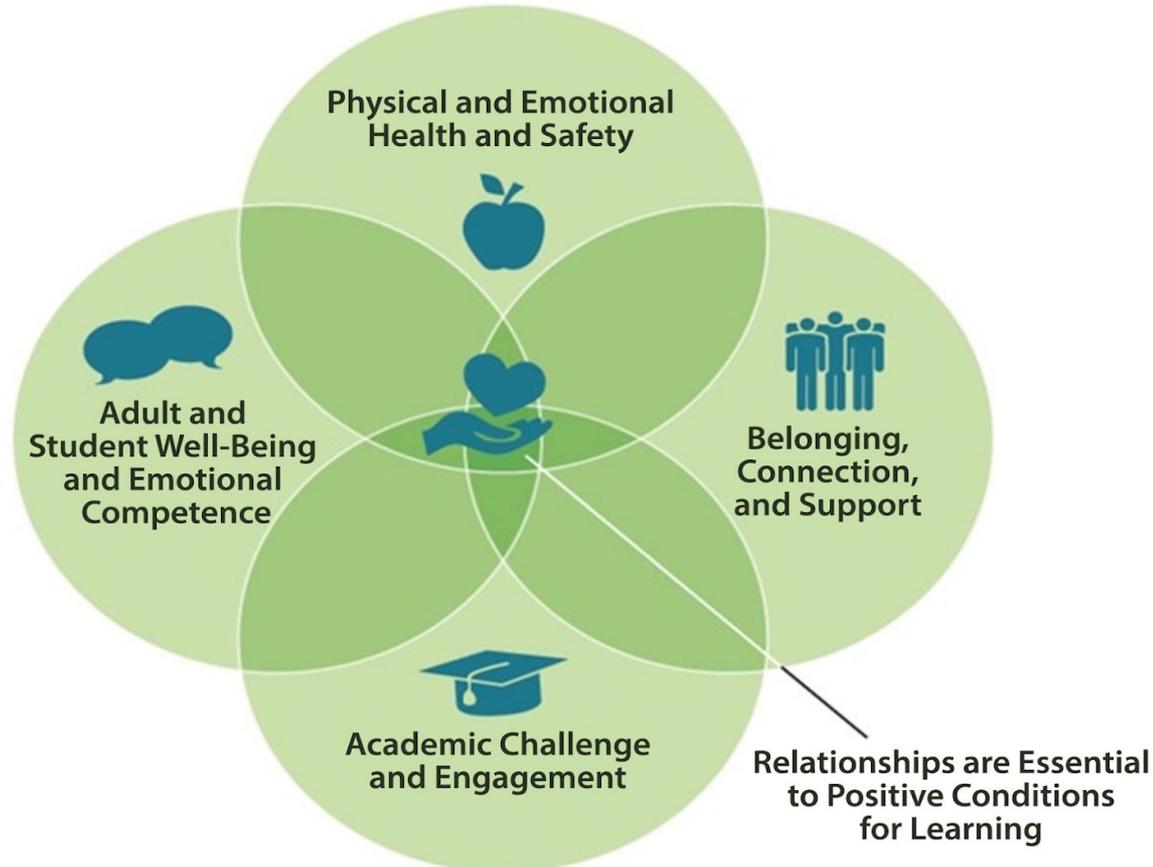
- Lack of challenging, culturally responsive instruction
- Bored
- No meaningful relationships to adults in the school (especially given staff shortages)
- Lack of enrichment opportunities
- Lack of academic and behavioral support
- Failure to earn credits
- Need to work conflicts with being in high school

Misconceptions

- Absences are only a problem if they are unexcused
- Missing 2 days per month doesn't affect learning
- Lose track and underestimate TOTAL absences
- Assume students must stay home for any symptom of illness
- Attendance only matters in the older grades
- Suspensions don't count as absence

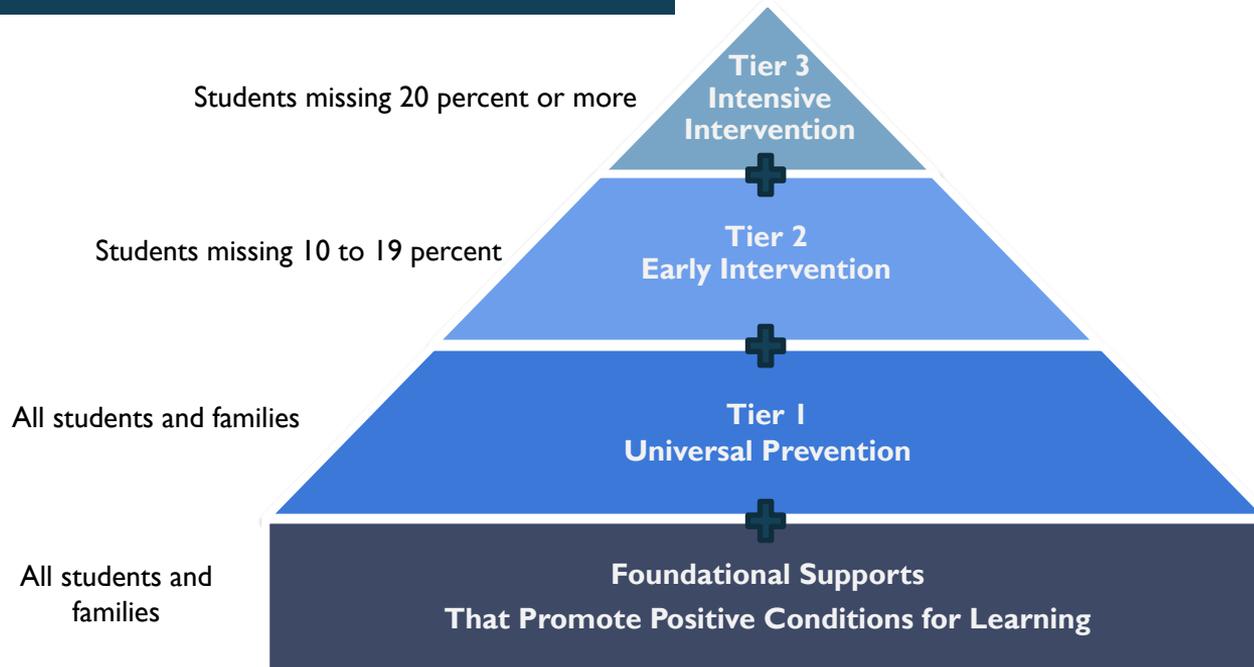
<https://www.attendanceworks.org/chronic-absence/addressing-chronic-absence/3-tiers-of-intervention/root-causes/>

High levels of absence reflect an erosion in positive conditions for learning





Multi-tiered support systems that begin with prevention are essential



Upcoming GLR Learning Tuesdays Webinars:

DECODING NAEP

Decoding NAEP: Different Contexts, Different Results?
Tuesday, February 25, 3:00–4:30 pm ET/12–1:30 p.m. PT

PARTNER WEBINARS

For-profit Child Care: Implications, Challenges and Opportunities
Tuesday, March 4, 3:00–4:30 pm ET/12–1:30 p.m. PT

DECODING NAEP

Decoding NAEP: Parents
Tuesday, March 11, 3:00–4:30 pm ET/12–1:30 p.m. PT

DECODING NAEP

Decoding NAEP: The Perspectives of State Chiefs
Tuesday, March 18, 3:00–4:30 pm ET/12–1:30 p.m. PT

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