

RESEARCH BRIEF

Still Missing Too Much School

A Follow-Up Analysis of Arizona
Chronic Absence Trends in Grades 1–8

JANUARY 2025

To accelerate recovery and ensure that students and educators in Arizona receive the support they need, schools, districts, and the state must fully understand chronic absence patterns.

About Helios Education Foundation

Helios Education Foundation exists to support postsecondary attainment for all students, especially from low-income and underrepresented communities in Arizona and Florida. Driven by our fundamental beliefs of community, equity, investment, and partnership, Helios has invested more than \$350 million in partnerships and initiatives focused on improving education outcomes in the two states we serve.

We take a multi-pronged approach—working across four domains, including performance-based community investments, systemic public policy efforts, research and data, and impact-driven communications—that together support the significant changes required to foster equitable progress across the education continuum.

About WestEd

WestEd is a nonpartisan, nonprofit research, development, and service agency that partners with education and other communities throughout the United States and abroad to promote excellence, achieve equity, and improve learning for children, youth, and adults. WestEd has more than a dozen offices nationwide. More information about WestEd is available at [WestEd.org](https://www.wested.org).

Authors

Vanessa Ximenes Barrat, WestEd
Lenay Dunn, Ph.D., WestEd
Alina Quach, WestEd
Paul Perrault, Ph.D., Helios Education Foundation
Kimberly Lent Morales, Helios Education Foundation
Ian Hickox, Collaborative Communications



Compared to pre-pandemic rates for the 2018–19 school year, chronic absence rates doubled across nearly every grade level in 2022–23 and for all groups of students.

Introduction

Students across the United States continue to miss an extraordinary amount of school. This trend that has persisted since the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to an explosion of chronic absence rates nationwide.

In the 2021–22 school year, national chronic absence rates—defined as students missing 10 percent or more of the school year—nearly doubled, rising from 16 percent before the pandemic to nearly 30 percent by the 2021–22 school year. This amounts to 14.7 million students, each missing approximately 18 days or more.¹

In the years since, schooling has normalized, and the severe disruptions to the school schedule that characterized the pandemic have largely disappeared. Although it has moderated slightly, overall chronic absence remains high—and well above pre-pandemic levels. During the 2022–23 school year, 44 states released chronic absence data, with 33 reporting improvements of five percentage points or fewer. That year, Arizona’s chronic absence rate was 28.1 percent, the 15th highest among states that reported. In the 2021–22 school year, it was the 13th highest (32 percent).²

The fact that chronic absence rates remain elevated despite improvements has real consequences for teaching, learning, and student achievement. Unsurprisingly, missing too much school is associated with poor learning outcomes, patterns of subsequent absence in later grades, and an increased likelihood that students will drop out of school. It also impacts learning environments and school culture; when large numbers of students regularly miss school, it makes it much harder for teachers to provide the consistent instruction that enables students to thrive.

About the Research

In 2022, Helios Education Foundation and WestEd partnered to conduct a statewide study of K-8 chronic absence in Arizona. The analysis examined trends in student absences, chronic absence rates by student group and grade level, and how rates compared before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. Select findings from this study were published in *Missing Too Much School: Trends in K-8 Chronic Absence in Arizona During the Pandemic*.

As an extension of the 2022 research, this brief expands on the analysis to include the 2021–22 and 2022–23 school years and looks at the association between chronic absence and student academic performance. Additionally, it examines attendance by enrollment in the Arizona Online Instruction (AOI) program, a category of attendance that became more prevalent after the post-pandemic rise in online instruction. It also includes spotlights on promising practices from districts and organizations in Arizona.

The Arizona Department of Education (ADE) generously provided the data for this study. Additionally, Murphy Elementary School District, Valley of the Sun United Way, Alhambra Elementary School District, and Read On Arizona provided information for the partner and district spotlights.

¹ <https://www.attendanceworks.org/rising-tide-of-chronic-absence-challenges-schools/>

² <https://www.future-ed.org/tracking-state-trends-in-chronic-absenteeism/>

Summary of Previous Findings from *Missing Too Much School*

As previously reported, Arizona's chronic absence rate ranged from 12 to 14 percent in the three school years before the pandemic, with approximately 100,000 students chronically absent each year.

Amid pandemic-related school disruptions, chronic absence rates in Arizona spiked in 2020–21.

This increase was particularly evident among students who attended more than one school. Additionally, students from certain groups—including economically disadvantaged, English language learners, American Indian or Alaska Native, Black/African American, and Hispanic—experienced disproportionately higher rates of chronic absences than other groups.

Arizona students were also more mobile during the 2020–21 school year than they were in the previous two years, meaning that more students changed schools at least once during the school year. Early elementary-grade students, especially, were more likely to withdraw or transfer to another school than students in older grades.

An Updated Overview of Chronic Absence in Arizona

In Arizona, chronic absence is officially defined as missing 10 percent or more of the school year for any reason *while enrolled at a given school*. This amounts to 18 days missed in a typical 180-day school year during which a student does not change schools.

Therein lies a notable limit of the official state definition; it does not fully account for student mobility and the overall number of days missed during the school year for students who changed schools mid-year. A student who misses 10 days while attending one school and 10 days while attending another during the same school year may not be counted as chronically absent.

Throughout this brief, chronic absence rates are calculated and discussed in two ways, using:

- **The official state definition**, which classifies chronic absence as 10 percent of school days missed at a single school.
- **An alternative definition** that adds up all school days missed during the school year, regardless of whether a student changed schools or not.

Accounting for absences across all schools of enrollment suggests that the actual rate of students who miss 10 percent or more of the school year is approximately one percentage point higher than the official rate most years.

SCHOOL DISTRICT SPOTLIGHT

MURPHY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DISTRICT

Small things matter when tackling huge student absenteeism issues.

With an emphasis on parent communication and support, leveraging technology, and positive feedback, Murphy Elementary School District in southwest Phoenix has been able to improve attendance and meaningfully reduce chronic absence.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, 21 percent of students districtwide were considered chronically absent, a figure that surged to 62 percent during the 2021–22 school year as students returned to in-person learning. Through targeted efforts, the district has reduced this rate to roughly one-third of students, and district officials are optimistic about continued progress in the coming years.

Central to this success is the district's emphasis on building strong relationships with parents. Principals regularly host coffee sessions with parents where they reinforce the importance of consistent attendance and even drive students to school and back when transportation is an issue.

“The minute we leave school to pick up a student, parents understand that education is important to us,” said Erika Mancilla, principal at William R. Sullivan School. “They appreciate that, and they know we’re serious.”

To further support families, the Murphy Elementary School District also provides school uniforms—an essential resource that prevents some students from staying home—and celebrates attendance milestones with rewards like pizza, ice cream, and nachos.

Additionally, a district committee focusing on enrollment and attendance prioritizes building positive, consistent relationships with parents. A digital communication tool connects school communities through photos, videos, and other messages. And the district offers mental health support, tutoring, mentorship programs, and after-school enrichment to address students' needs holistically.

Collectively, these efforts have led to not only better attendance rates but also academic gains. During the 2023–24 school year, all three Murphy schools earned a “B” letter grade for the first time under Arizona's A-F grading system.

“As we’ve made student attendance a priority within our district, we have also seen a coordinated increase in performance,” said Murphy Superintendent Nate Dettmar. “If the students are not there, they obviously can’t learn.”

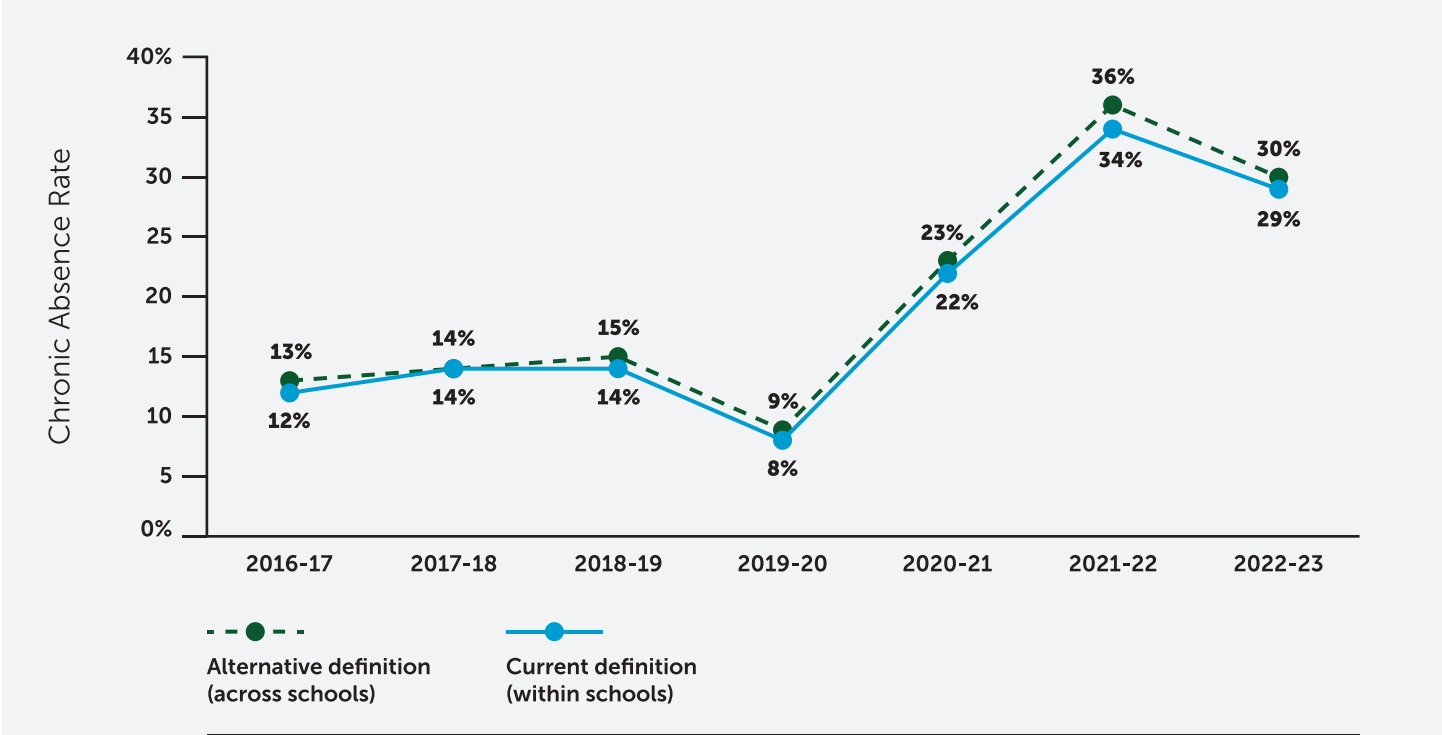
Looking ahead, Murphy aims to reduce chronic absenteeism by 5 percent annually across all grades, with a particular focus on grade 3, a pivotal learning year.

Chronic absence rates peaked in the 2021–22 school year at 34 percent. Compared to this peak, chronic absence in 2022–23 declined by five percentage points, potentially signaling the beginning of a recovery. Despite this decline, chronic absence rates statewide were still more than twice as high in 2022–23 as they were pre-pandemic and are above the levels during the pandemic in the 2020–21 school year, as reported in the 2022 brief *Missing Too Much School*.

Chronic Absence Rates Doubled Across Nearly Every Grade Level in 2022–23 Compared to Pre-Pandemic Levels

Using the most recent data available (2022–23 school year), we examined chronic absence rates by grade level and by student mobility. These analyses show that chronic absence was pervasive across grade levels and especially pronounced for mobile students. Compared to pre-pandemic rates for the 2018–19 school year, chronic absence rates doubled across nearly every grade level in 2022–23 and for all groups of students.³

2022–23 Chronic Absence Rates Declined But Still 2X Higher than Pre-pandemic



Source: Authors’ analysis based on Arizona Department of Education data
Note: Statewide Annual Rates of Chronic Absence, SY2016–17 to SY2022–23. Excluding students in kindergarten, the analysis population included 693,749 students in 2016–17, 682,924 in 2017–18, 692,796 in 2018–19, 693,947 in 2019–20, 669,149 in 2020–21, 672,888 in 2021–22, and 667,435 in 2022–23.

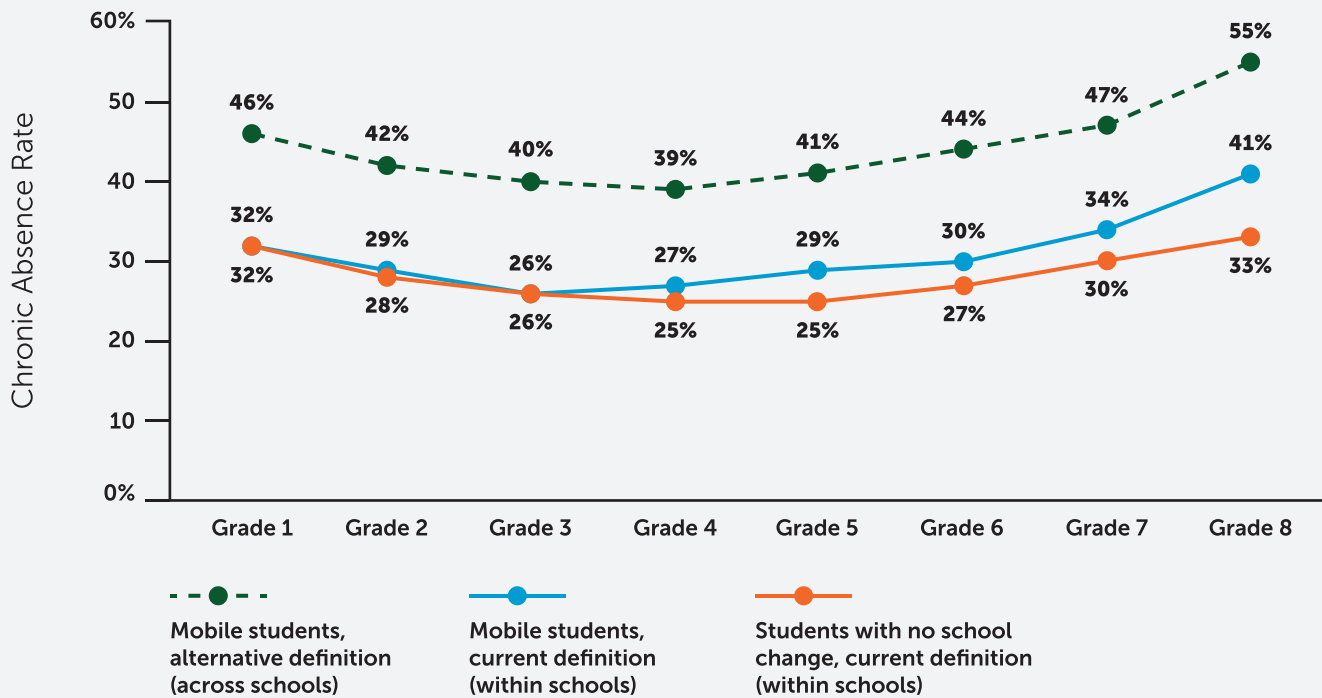
³For students with some Arizona Online Instruction (AOI) enrollments, changing schools does not imply the same challenges as for those with only non-AOI enrollments. As such, the relationship between mobility and chronic absence was examined only for students with non-AOI enrollments.

The Difference Between Chronic Absence Rates of Mobile Students and Non-Mobile Students Grew in 2022–23

For mobile students who changed schools at least once during the 2022–23 school year, chronic absence rates were generally higher than those who did not change schools (according to the official state definition), especially in grades 5 through 8.

Additionally, examining cumulative absences across all schools where a student was enrolled shows that mobile students were chronically absent at rates that were at least 10 percentage points higher at each grade level when compared to students who did not change schools. This was especially pronounced among mobile grade 8 students, 55 percent of whom were chronically absent in 2022–23.

Mobile Students in Grades 1, 7, and 8 Most Likely to Be Chronically Absent



Source: Authors' analysis based on Arizona Department of Education data

Note: Chronic Absence by Grade Level by Mobility, SY2022–23. Excluding students in kindergarten and Alternative Online Instruction students, the analysis population included 646,802 students in grades 1 through 8 in 2022-23.



Arizona Online Instruction Program and Chronic Absence

Students in Arizona can enroll in schools that participate in the Arizona Online Instruction (AOI) program, which has different rules for tracking attendance and chronic absence. In school years 2021–22 and 2022–23, most Arizona students (95 percent and 97 percent, respectively) were enrolled as non-AOI.

Although they represent a comparatively small segment of the K-8 student population in Arizona, it is notable that students enrolled in AOI schools had higher chronic absence rates than those in non-AOI schools in both 2021–22 and 2022–23. This gap widened in 2022–23, with chronic absence rates among students in AOI schools remaining relatively stable at 35 percent, while rates among students in non-AOI schools decreased from 34 percent to 28 percent.

Pre-, Mid-, and Post-pandemic Cohort Analysis

In addition to analyzing changes in chronic absence rates before, during, and after the pandemic, cohort analyses—that is, tracking a set group of students from one school year to another—provide further insight into how the pandemic influenced chronic absence. This type of analysis enabled comparisons of the chronic absence rates in grade 5 and 7 for three cohorts of students, each of which started grade 5 in successive school years:

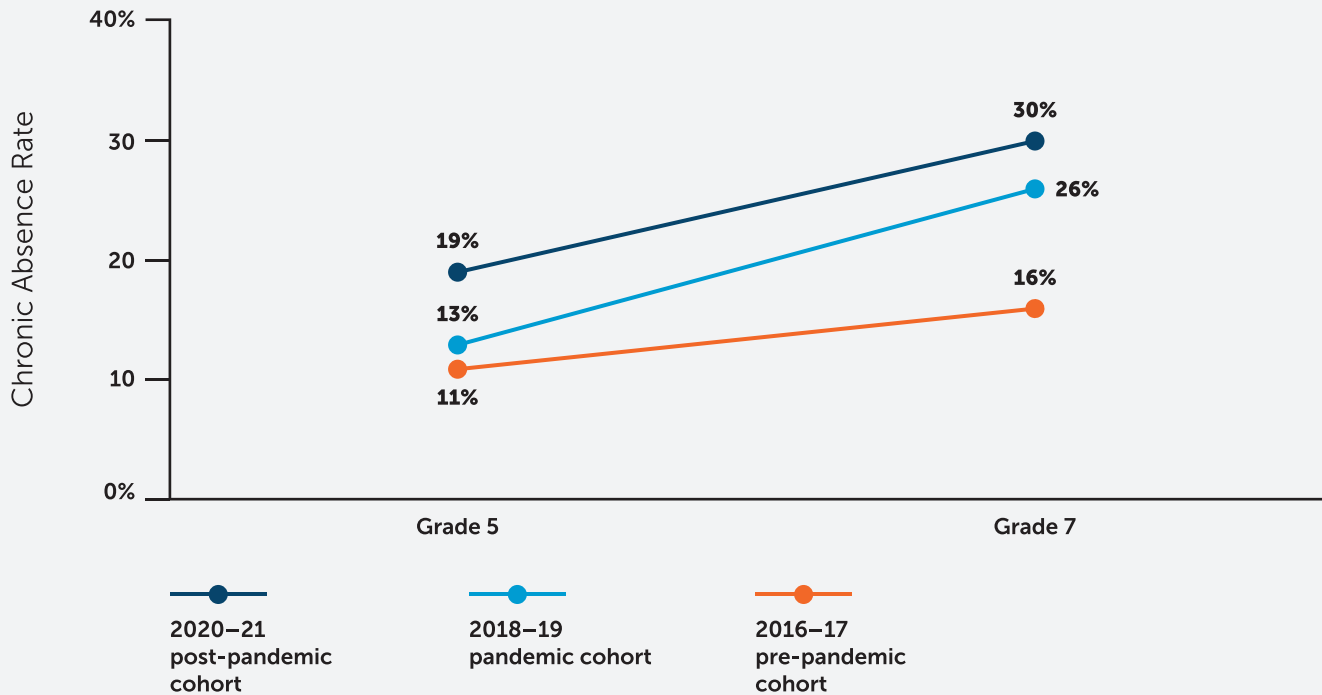
- Entered grade 5 in 2016–17 to seventh grade in 2018–19, the pre-pandemic cohort
- Entered grade 5 in 2018–19 to seventh grade in 2020–21, the pandemic cohort
- Entered grade 5 in 2020–21 to seventh grade in 2022–23, the post-pandemic cohort

The Post-Pandemic Cohort Had the Highest Levels of Chronic Absence

The cohort analysis indicates that chronic absence rate increases from grade 5 to grade 7 were smaller for the pre-pandemic cohort than for the pandemic cohort. Post-pandemic, the increase in chronic absence rates from grade 5 to grade 7 remains high—in line with what was observed during the pandemic. The post-pandemic cohort began 5th grade with a higher chronic absence rate than the other cohorts. Chronic absence in grade 7 was substantially higher overall in the post-pandemic cohort compared to the other two cohorts.

As with the increases in chronic absence rates at every grade level, chronic absence increased among all student groups during the pandemic.

2020–21 Cohort Chronic Absence in Grade 7 Is Nearly Double the 2016–17 Cohort Rate



Source: Authors' analysis based on Arizona Department of Education data

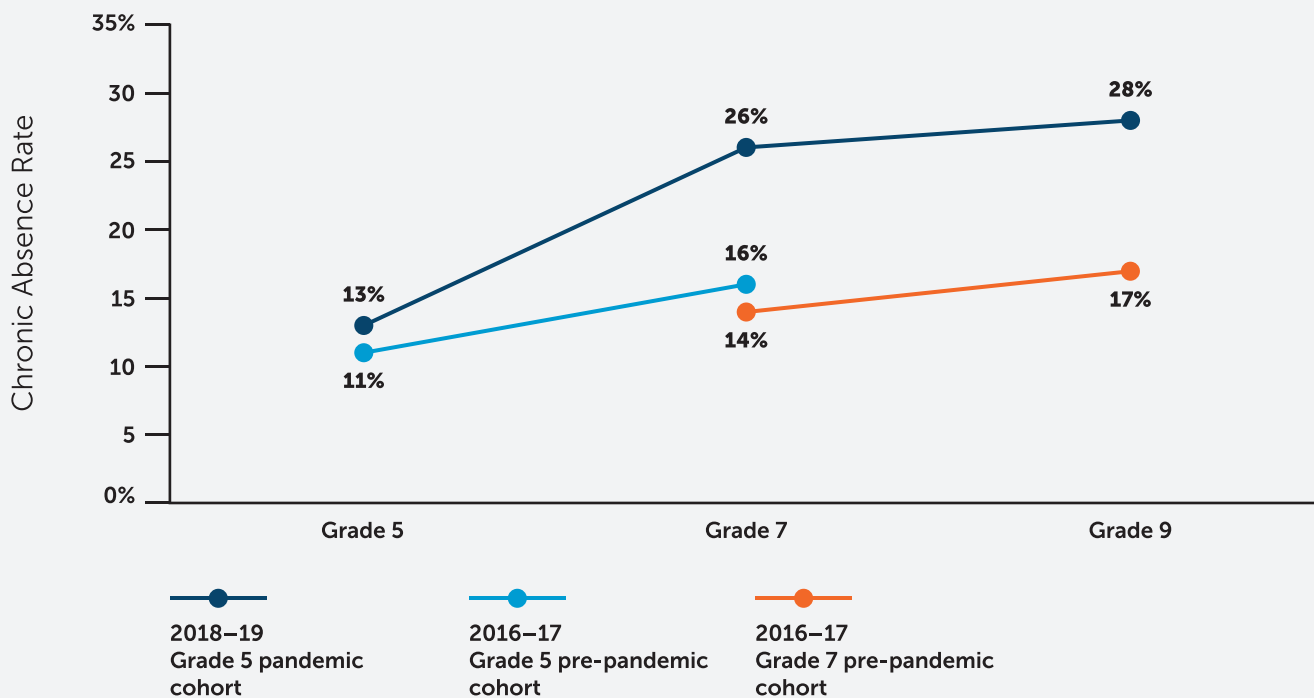
Note: Percent of Students Chronically Absent in Grade 5 and Grade 7, by Grade 5 Cohort. The analysis population included 79,832 students in the 2016–17 grade 5 pre-pandemic cohort; 81,322 students in the 2018–19 grade 5 pandemic cohort; and 73,042 students in the 2020–21 grade 5 post-pandemic cohort.

The Pandemic Cohort's Pattern of Higher Chronic Absence Continued Into High School

The cohort analysis can also be extended to include students who enrolled in grade 7 in 2016–17 and were in grade 9 in 2018–19. This cohort provides a pre-pandemic comparison for chronic absence levels and the relative increase in chronic absence between grades 7 and 9. When the 2018–19 pandemic cohort progressed to post-pandemic school years, chronic absence rates stabilized at 28 percent in grade 9 but remained significantly higher than pre-pandemic grade 9 students (17 percent chronically absent).



By High School, Chronic Absence Remains Much Higher Among the Pandemic Cohort



Source: Authors' analysis based on Arizona Department of Education data

Note: Percent of Students Chronically Absent in Grade 5, Grade 7, and Grade 9, Pre-pandemic and During the Pandemic. The analysis population included 79,832 students for the 2016-17 grade 5 pre-pandemic cohort; 75,839 students for the 2018-19 grade 5 pandemic cohort; and 76,871 students for the 2016-17 grade 7 pre-pandemic cohort.

PARTNER SPOTLIGHT

SUPPORTING ATTENDANCE ACROSS MARICOPA COUNTY

Valley of the Sun United Way views chronic absenteeism as an alarming yet solvable challenge that demands collaboration among schools, communities, and families. By leveraging data to identify and target specific interventions, Valley of the Sun United Way aims to address the root causes of absenteeism effectively.

In partnership with the statewide early literacy collaborative Read On Arizona, Valley of the Sun United Way is equipping educators across Maricopa County with the tools they need to tackle attendance issues. This effort focuses on professional development, capacity building, and fostering community collaboration through several key activities:

Key Initiatives to Combat Chronic Absenteeism

- **Technical Assistance.** Partnering with Attendance Works, a national leader in evidence-based strategies to reduce absenteeism and combat learning loss, to provide expert guidance and support.
- **Task Force.** Participating in the Arizona Chronic Absence Task Force that developed recommendations to improve school attendance. The task force also published a resource guide to serve as a roadmap for addressing attendance challenges.
- **Learning Communities.** Establishing learning communities composed of literacy hubs, schools with high absenteeism rates, and educational leaders. Participants engage in online professional development modules provided by Attendance Works, ensuring consistent access to best practices.

A grant from Helios Education Foundation helped amplify Valley of the Sun United Way's work by adding critical elements like coaching and mentoring for schools and districts. This ensures the effective implementation of strategies learned through Attendance Works training. Schools receive guidance on using evidence-based practices and instituting systematic changes to address attendance issues before they escalate.

Over a three-year period, this partnership will deliver coaching and mentoring to more than 3,000 K-12 teachers and administrators across districts of varying sizes in Maricopa County.

Additionally, Valley of the Sun United Way launched the Attendance Matters awareness campaign at the start of the 2023–2024 school year. This campaign communicates the importance of consistent attendance and its impact on academic success. Through clear messaging, it equips parents and educators with the knowledge to prevent absenteeism and re-engage students.

Valley of the Sun United Way's work ultimately aims to improve third grade reading proficiency rates, as missing too much school can significantly hinder the development of early literacy skills.

Understanding Cohort Chronic Absence Rates among Different Student Populations

Gaps Between Student Groups Increased During the Pandemic But Are No Longer Widening

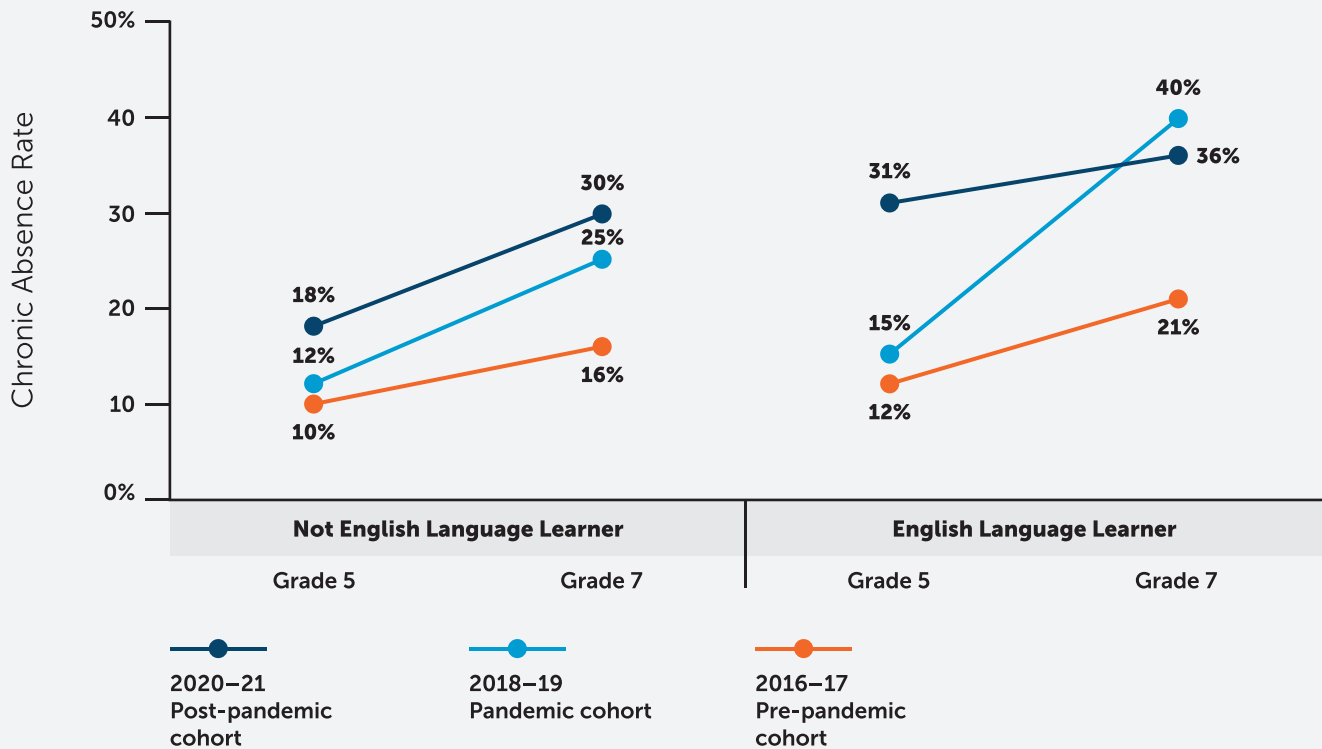
As with the increases in chronic absence rates at every grade level, chronic absence increased among all student groups during the pandemic. Encouragingly, these rates have leveled out for many groups. The gaps in chronic absence rates between vulnerable student populations and other students that increased during the pandemic have not continued to widen.

The Dramatic Rise in Chronic Absence for English Learners During the Pandemic Has Levelled Out

When comparing chronic absence rates for English Language Learners (ELL) and non-English Language Learners in the three cohorts, it is notable that the gap in grade 7 chronic absence rates between the two groups stopped widening post-pandemic (30 percent for non-ELLs and 36 percent for ELLs). However, chronic absence rates remained significantly higher than pre-pandemic for both groups of students.

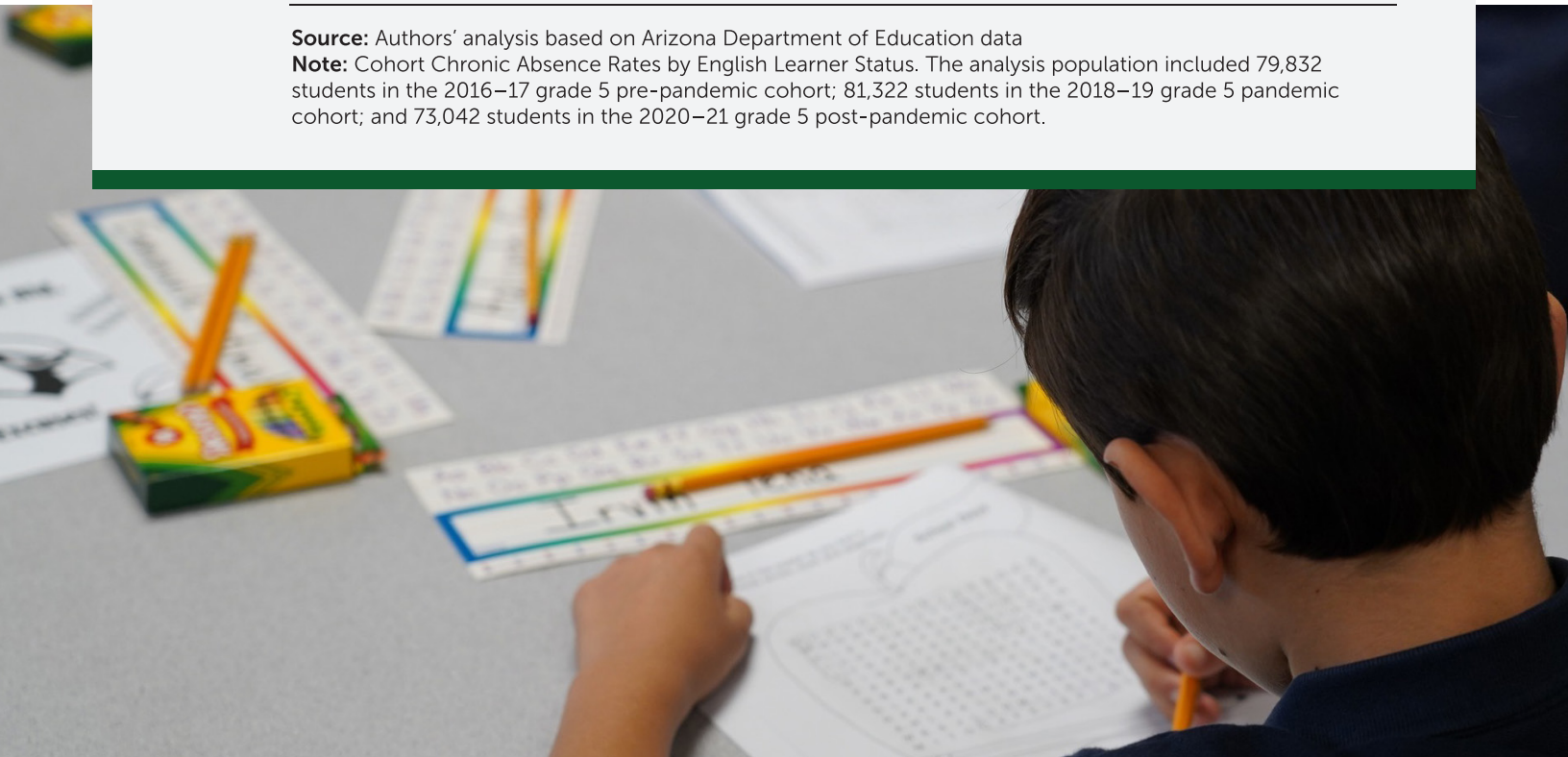


ELLs Have Higher Rates of Chronic Absence than Non-ELL Peers, But Rates Are Leveling Out



Source: Authors' analysis based on Arizona Department of Education data

Note: Cohort Chronic Absence Rates by English Learner Status. The analysis population included 79,832 students in the 2016-17 grade 5 pre-pandemic cohort; 81,322 students in the 2018-19 grade 5 pandemic cohort; and 73,042 students in the 2020-21 grade 5 post-pandemic cohort.



DISTRICT SPOTLIGHT

ALHAMBRA ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DISTRICT

A personalized, all-hands-on-deck strategy is helping Phoenix's Alhambra Elementary School District tackle chronic absenteeism and bring children back into classrooms.

The district implemented a two-tiered approach to address a spike in chronic absenteeism that was caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. This comprehensive strategy has produced encouraging results in just two years: chronic absenteeism dropped from 62 percent during the 2021–2022 school year to 43 percent in 2023–2024. The district's impressive results stems from a mix of data-driven initiatives, parent education efforts, a suite of student support programs and resources, and strategic community partnerships.

YEAR ONE

Establishing a Foundation of Support

In the first phase, the district established attendance improvement teams at each school, prioritizing a culture of support and individualized attention for students.

Teachers and staff, with assistance from the Valley of the Sun United Way and the National Coalition for Improvement in Education, identified students who were consistently absent and paired them with a caring adult—such as a teacher, principal or administrator—who provided regular check-ins and encouragement.

Chronic absenteeism is exacerbated for students who lack basic needs, so the district's Family Resource Center enables counselors and social workers to offer food boxes, hygiene kits and clothes while the Wesley Community & Health Centers provides free weekly medical services to families. An eye clinic also supported students by offering free exams and glasses.

YEAR TWO

Strengthening Engagement with Parents

The second phase focused on deeper parental engagement and fostering trust. Teachers initiated caring conversations with families, asking non-punitive questions to try to uncover and address attendance barriers.

"It's all about having empathetic, inquisitive talks—'Tell me about your child' or 'What do you hope for your child's future?'" explained Colleen O'Toole, the district's Student Information System Analyst.

Building on its success, the Alhambra Elementary School District has joined a statewide coalition to reinforce a central message: Every minute in school matters. Through this thoughtful, two-tiered approach, Alhambra Elementary School District has shown how a community-driven strategy can effectively combat chronic absenteeism and create lasting change.

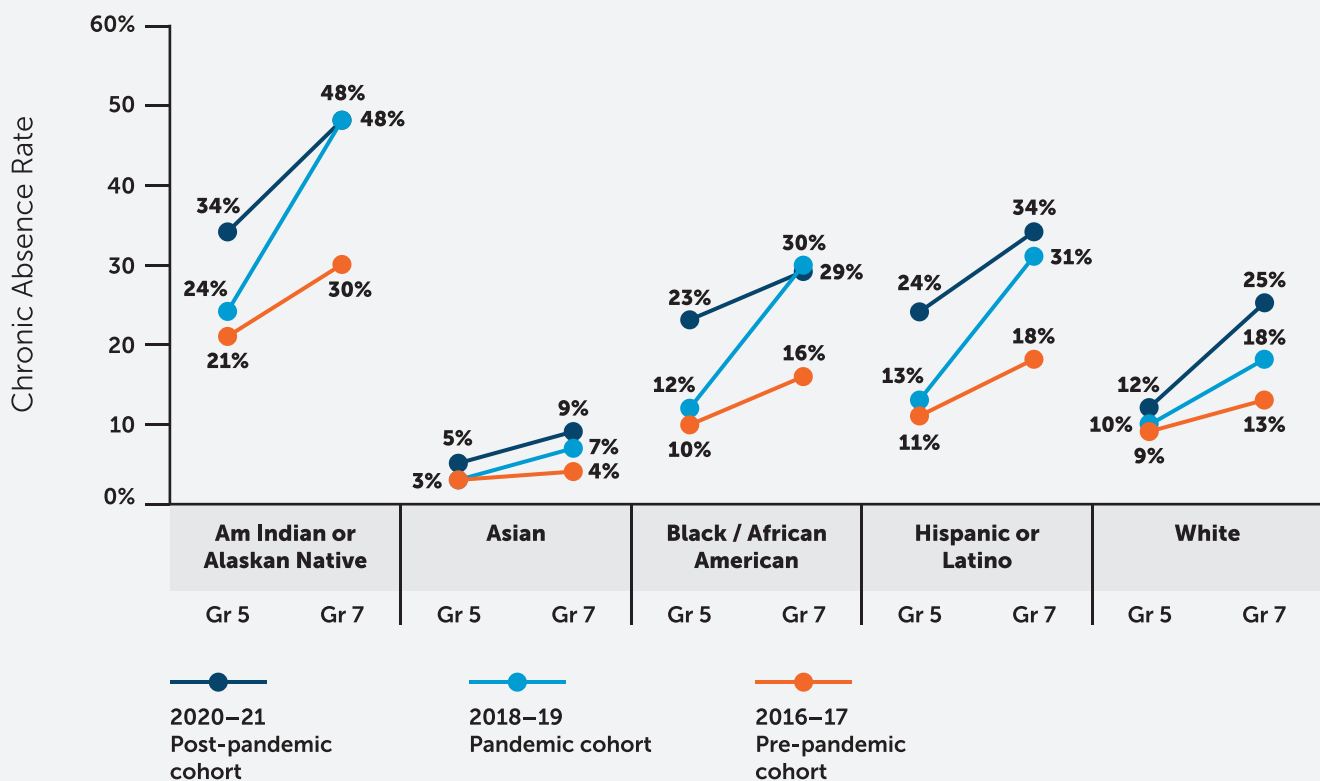


The gaps in chronic absence rates between vulnerable student populations and other students that increased during the pandemic have not continued to widen.

The Gaps Between Vulnerable Student Groups and Other Student Groups Remain Significant But Are Not Widening Post-pandemic

Among groups that experienced the largest increases in chronic absence during the pandemic, the gaps in chronic absence for their peers have stopped increasing post-pandemic—even if rates for all racial/ethnic groups remained above pre-pandemic levels. Black/African American students in the post-pandemic cohort saw notably smaller increases in chronic absence rates between grades 5 and 7 than other cohorts.

Biggest Gaps Between Groups Did Not Continue Widening

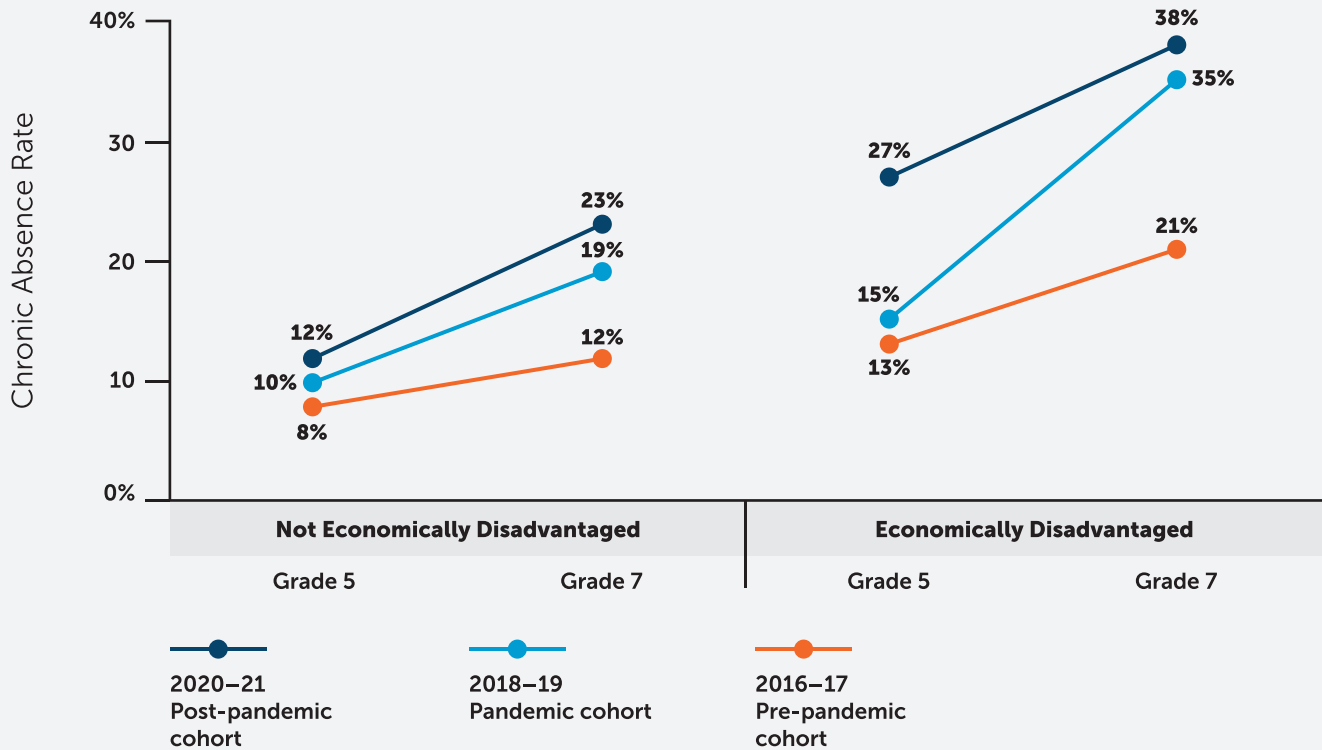


Source: Authors' analysis based on Arizona Department of Education data

Note: Cohort Chronic Absence Rates by Race/Ethnicity. The analysis population included 75,412 students in the 2016-17 grade 5 pre-pandemic cohort; 77,258 students in the 2018-19 grade 5 pandemic cohort; and 69,576 students in the 2020-21 grade 5 post-pandemic cohort. Students identified as Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, Multiple Races, and missing are not reported in this memo.

Similar to other groups, the gap in chronic absence among students considered economically disadvantaged stopped increasing during the post-pandemic school years. However, chronic absence rates for economically disadvantaged students remained significantly higher than pre-pandemic levels.

For Economically Disadvantaged Students, Chronic Absence Rates Remain Elevated



Source: Authors' analysis based on Arizona Department of Education data

Note: Cohort Chronic Absence Rates by Economically Disadvantaged Status. The analysis population included 79,832 students in the 2016–17 grade 5 pre-pandemic cohort; 81,322 students in the 2018–19 grade 5 pandemic cohort; and 73,042 students in the 2020–21 grade 5 post-pandemic cohort.

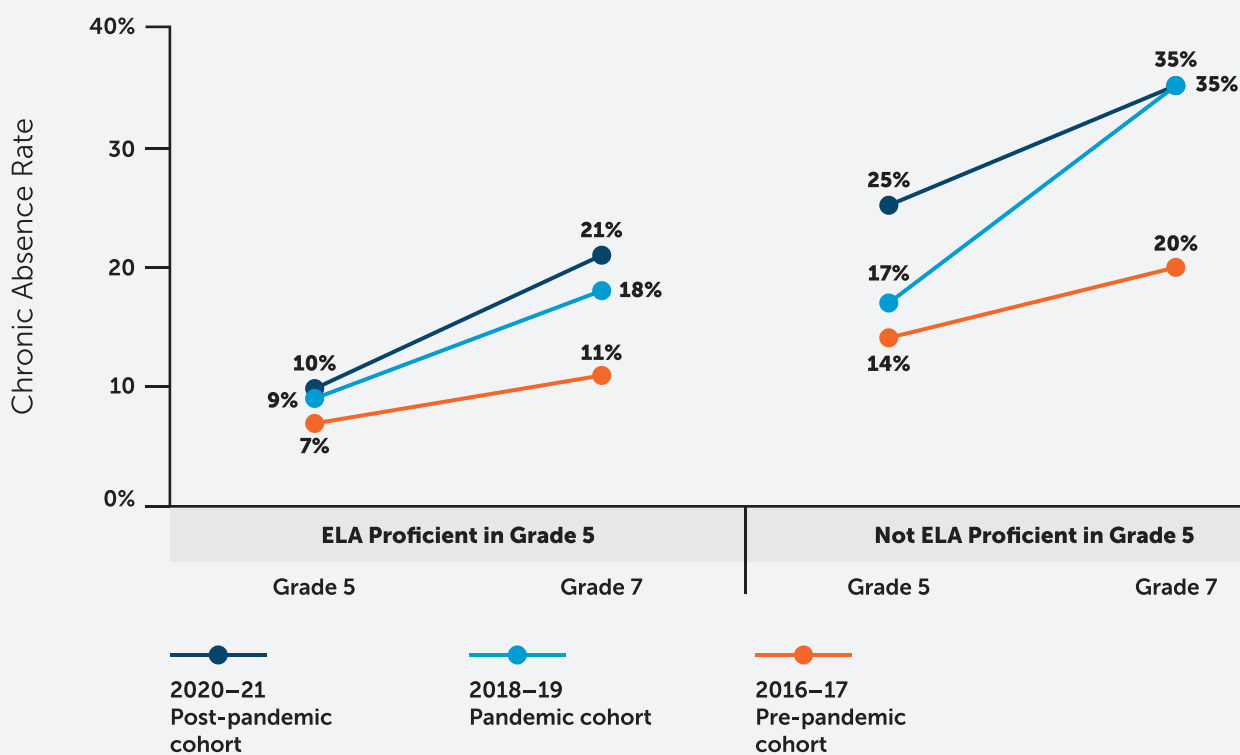
Academic Proficiency is Associated with Lower Rates of Chronic Absence

Students who were not proficient in English Language Arts (ELA) and math in grade 5 had higher levels of chronic absence, and chronic absence rates for these students increased more during the pandemic than they did for their proficient peers.

The increase in chronic absence rates from grades 5 to 7 was steepest during the pandemic, particularly for students who were not proficient in ELA in grade 5. Their chronic absence rates increased by 18 percentage points compared to 9 percentage points for ELA proficient students.



ELA Proficient Students Were Less Likely to Be Chronically Absent in Grade 7 Pre-, Mid-, and Post-pandemic



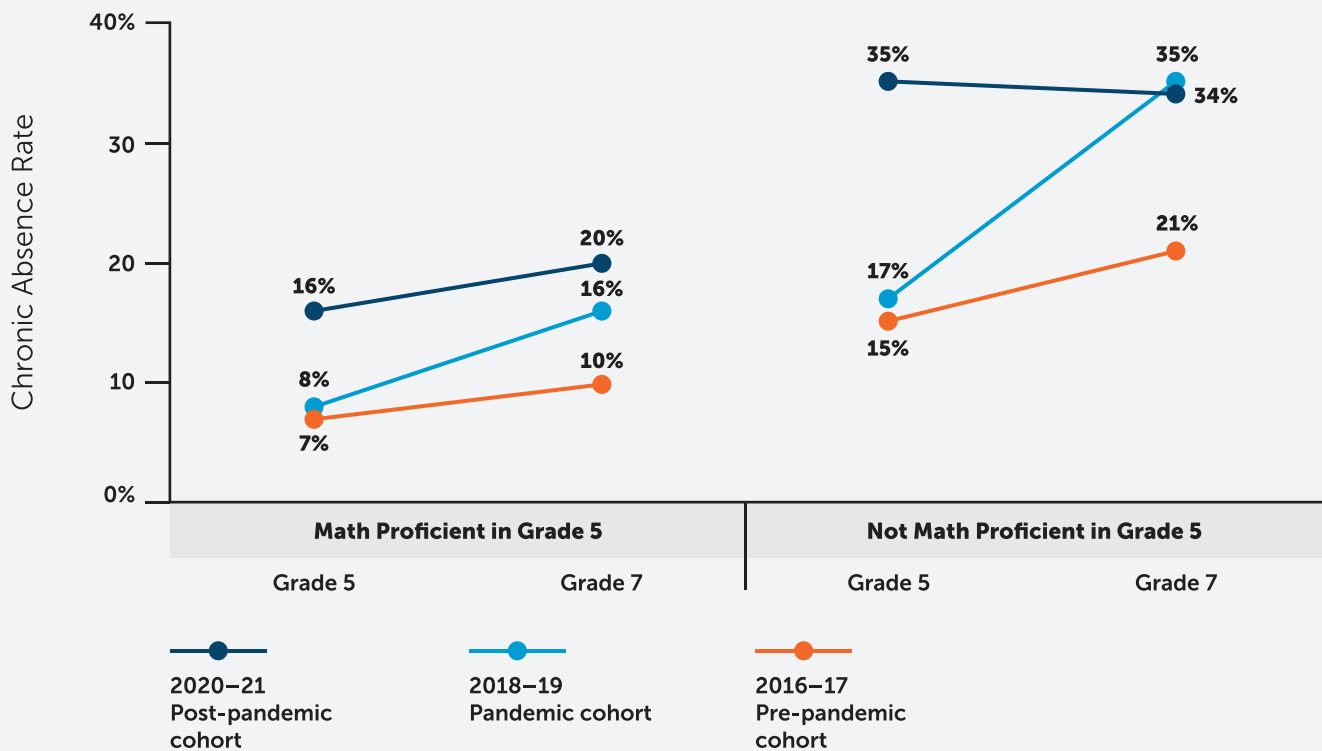
Source: Authors' analysis based on Arizona Department of Education data

Note: Chronic Absence Rates by Grade 5 ELA Proficiency: 2016–17, 2018–19, and 2020–21 Cohorts. Populations of analysis included students who completed the AASA for ELA, including 78,845 students in the 2016–17 grade 5 pre-pandemic cohort; 79,894 students in the 2018–19 grade 5 pandemic cohort and 64,919 students the 2020–21 grade 5 post-pandemic cohort.

Similarly, pre-pandemic chronic absence rates were higher for students without math proficiency in grade 5 than their peers who had reached math proficiency (15 percent and 7 percent, respectively).

For the 2018–19 pandemic cohort, chronic absence among students who were not proficient in math in grade 5 increased by 18 percentage points (compared to 8 percentage points for math-proficient students).

Math Proficient Students Were Less Likely to Be Chronically Absent in Grade 7 Pre-, Mid-, and Post-pandemic



Source: Authors' analysis based on Arizona Department of Education data

Note: Chronic Absence Rates by Grade 5 Math Proficiency: 2016–17, 2018–19, and 2020–21 Cohorts. Populations of analysis included students who completed the AASA for math, including 78,788 students in the 2016–17 grade 5 pre-pandemic cohort; 79,841 students in the 2018–19 grade 5 pandemic cohort and 64,840 students.

What Arizona Can Do

The post-pandemic school years have brought a slow return to stability for students. The frequent and extended disruptions to schooling have subsided, and most students have the opportunity to attend school each day. Although chronic absence rates are no longer spiking, they remain well above pre-pandemic levels.

To accelerate recovery and ensure that students and educators in Arizona receive the support they need, schools, local education agencies, and the state must fully understand chronic absence patterns.

This includes not only tracking within-school absences (as defined by the state's official chronic absence criteria) but also monitoring and reporting absences across schools for mobile students. Such detailed tracking can provide a clearer picture of which students are missing too much school.

Schools and the state can continue to strengthen efforts to boost regular attendance, especially among the student groups most affected by the rise in chronic absence during the pandemic and whose rates remain high post-pandemic. These efforts are essential to helping students recover from lost instructional time, catch up on their learning, and continue to address the very real damage inflicted by the pandemic.



The fact that chronic absence rates remain elevated despite improvements has real consequences for teaching, learning, and student achievement.

PARTNER SPOTLIGHT

ARIZONA CHRONIC ABSENCE TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS

In 2023, Read On Arizona convened the Arizona Chronic Absence Task Force, bringing together school district leaders, community partners, state agencies, the Governor's Office, legislative staff, and education stakeholders. With input from Attendance Works, the task force developed a comprehensive [Arizona Chronic Absence Resource Guide](#) to support schools in addressing attendance challenges. The task force also identified the following priorities and recommendations to get students back to school and back on track:

1 / Build awareness and urgency with clear, compelling calls to action.

- **Adopt a statewide goal.** Reduce chronic absence to pre-pandemic levels by 2030. This goal aligns schools, districts, and communities toward shared progress, with the task force meeting annually to track progress.
- **Re-engage families.** Use messaging that highlights the impact of attendance on student success and pair it with outreach strategies to personally connect with students and families.
- **Activate a statewide campaign.** Collaborate with cross-sector partners and local leaders on a multi-year, statewide awareness campaign promoting regular school attendance as a community-wide priority.

2 / Collect actionable data to identify challenges and drive solutions.

- **Revisit chronic absence definition.** Arizona's definition of chronic absence should account for student mobility. This will make it possible for schools to better identify and support at-risk students.

- **Update accountability metrics.** Adjust the A-F school grading system to reflect meaningful improvements in attendance and better inform parents making educational decisions.
- **Prioritize data collection.** Expand attendance data tracking by grade and subgroup, ensuring all schools and districts have access to comprehensive and actionable data via tools like MapLIT.

3 / Promote systematic, evidence-based prevention and intervention strategies.

- **Support schools with resources.** Equip schools with the Arizona Chronic Absence Resource Guide and expand professional development programs that teach evidence-based strategies to address absenteeism. Scaling successful initiatives and securing funding should be top priorities.
- **Adopt a tiered framework.** Implement a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) to address attendance challenges. MTSS provides prevention, targeted support, and intensive interventions based on the severity of a student's absenteeism.

By raising awareness, leveraging data, and implementing proven strategies, the Arizona Chronic Absence Task Force aims to reduce absenteeism and help students succeed. Visit [Read On Arizona's website](#) for the full recommendations.

Appendix

Methodology Overview

The same methodology used in our 2022 study and brief was applied to these additional years. These methods include student-, school-, and grade-level descriptive statistics for the 2021–22 and 2022–23 K–8 population of students enrolled in an Arizona public school. Using a unique student identifier, these data were then merged with the 2016–17 to 2020–21 data used in the original report.

Data for grade 9 students were linked to the K–8 longitudinal analysis to be able to follow the 2018–19 cohort of grade 5 students up to the last year of data available.

Although kindergarten students were included in Helios and WestEd’s previous study, ADE typically excludes kindergarten students from the chronic absence calculation.⁴ For the 2021–22 and 2022–23 data provided by ADE, nearly no kindergarten student was classified as chronically absent. As a result, the chronic absence rates for 2021–22 and 2022–23 in this study exclude kindergarten students. Additionally, chronic absence rates for previous school years have been recalculated to exclude kindergarten students to enable consistency and comparison.

Student Characteristics Analyses

Mobility. The same methodology for defining student mobility in the original report was used, in which a student was classified as mobile if they enrolled in more than one school in an academic year. However, it is unclear whether attending multiple schools for students with online instruction has the same mobility interpretation as for students with a traditional attendance accounting, so their data was analyzed separately.

Academic Performance. Student performance on the Arizona Academic Standards Assessment (AASA) in English Language Arts and Mathematics was used as indicator of academic performance. Assessment results of Partially Proficient and Minimally Proficient were considered Not Proficient and results of Proficient and Highly Proficient were considered Proficient, based on ADE’s definition of passing and not passing these assessments.⁵

Arizona Online Instruction Program. Because the business rules differ by type of attendance accounting, chronic absence rates were also examined separately by enrollment in the Arizona Online Instruction Program⁶ (AOI versus non-AOI). Since changing schools does not imply the same challenges as for those with only non-AOI enrollments, analyses involving mobility excluded students enrolled in AOI.

⁴ <https://www.azed.gov/sites/default/files/2022/11/2022%20K-8%20Traditional%20Schools%20Business%20Rules%20v13.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.azed.gov/sites/default/files/2023/04/AASA%20Reporting%20Guide.pdf>

⁶ <https://azsbe.az.gov/schools/arizona-online-instruction-program>

English language learner (ELL) status. The ELL need is defined as any student with less than proficient overall proficiency level on the Arizona English Language Learner Assessment (AZELLA) as provided by ADE. Six categories were available in the ADE data and were grouped for this analysis into the following two categories: 1) Not ELL and 2) ELL. The ELL category includes students reclassified in the current fiscal year and students with an ELL need either withdrawn by parents or due to their SPED status. Students were classified as ELL for a school year if they were identified as ELL at any point during the school year. For the cohort analyses, a student was classified as ELL if they were classified ELL at any point in grades 5 or 7.

Economic Disadvantaged Status. Indicates a family or individual economic need as provided by ADE. Examples include annual income at or below the official poverty line, eligibility for free school lunch, eligibility for Aid to Families with Dependent Children and other public assistance programs, and eligibility for participation in programs assisted under Title I of the WIA. A student was classified as having an economic disadvantage for a school year if he was classified as economically disadvantaged at any point during the school year. For the cohort analyses, a student was classified as economically disadvantaged based on their status in the latest year of data.

Race/ethnicity. Race and Ethnicity were provided by ADE. Students identified as Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander and Multiple Races were combined into the category Other but not reported in this memo because of small cell sizes. Race and Ethnicity were consolidated into one variable: Students who reported Hispanic or Latino ethnicity were classified as Hispanic or Latino, regardless of any other race reported therefore other races (American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African American, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, or White) correspond to non-Hispanic students. For the cohort analyses, race/ethnicity was defined based on information from the latest year of data.



ARIZONA

4747 N 32nd St.
Phoenix, AZ 85018
Ph: (602) 381.2260

FLORIDA

101 E Kennedy Blvd.
Suite 2050
Tampa, FL 33602
Ph: (813) 387.0221