D.C. POLICY CENTER

Education Policy Initiative

PUBLIC HEARING

Chronic Absenteeism and Truancy

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

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Hearing Room 412 (Track B)

John A. Wilson Building

Testimony of Hannah Mason

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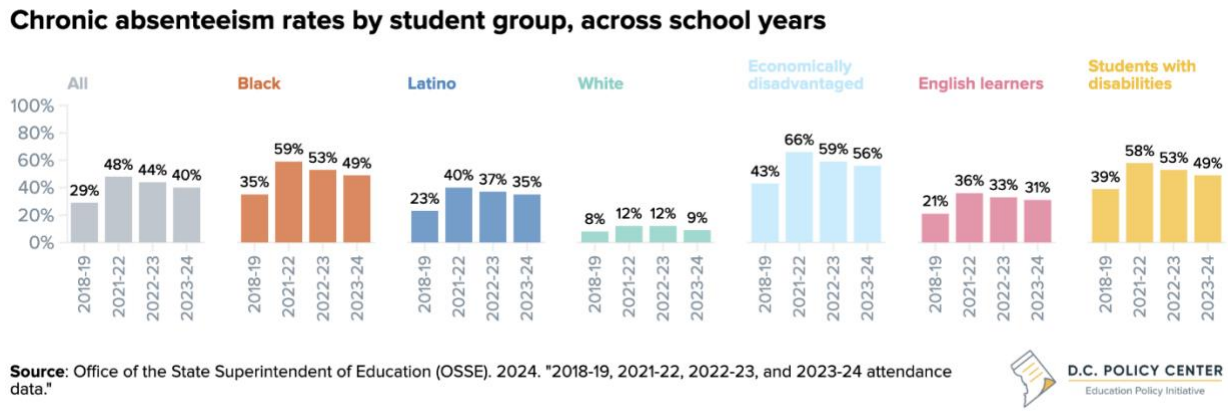
D.C. Policy Center

Good afternoon, Chairman Mendelson and members of the Committee of the Whole.

My name is Hannah Mason, and I am the Senior Education Research Analyst of the Education Policy Initiative at the D.C. Policy Center, an independent think tank focused on advancing policies for a strong, competitive and vibrant economy in the District of Columbia.

Today, my testimony will focus on an uptick in chronic absenteeism as of February 2025, trends from post-pandemic years that may still be influencing attendance patterns, and strategies that schools are implementing that support improving attendance.

Post-pandemic in school year 2021-22, chronic absenteeism[i], rose to 48 percent[ii] from 29 percent in school year 2018-19.[iii] However, D.C. is working hard to mitigate these high numbers and has committed to cutting chronic absenteeism in half to 24 percent by school year 2027-28.[iv] Our recent findings have found that chronic absenteeism is a barrier to college and career readiness. For example, 7 in 10 high school graduates with satisfactory attendance[v] enrolled in postsecondary compared to 3 in 10 graduates with profound chronic absence.[vivii] These metrics show how critical attendance is to success after high school.

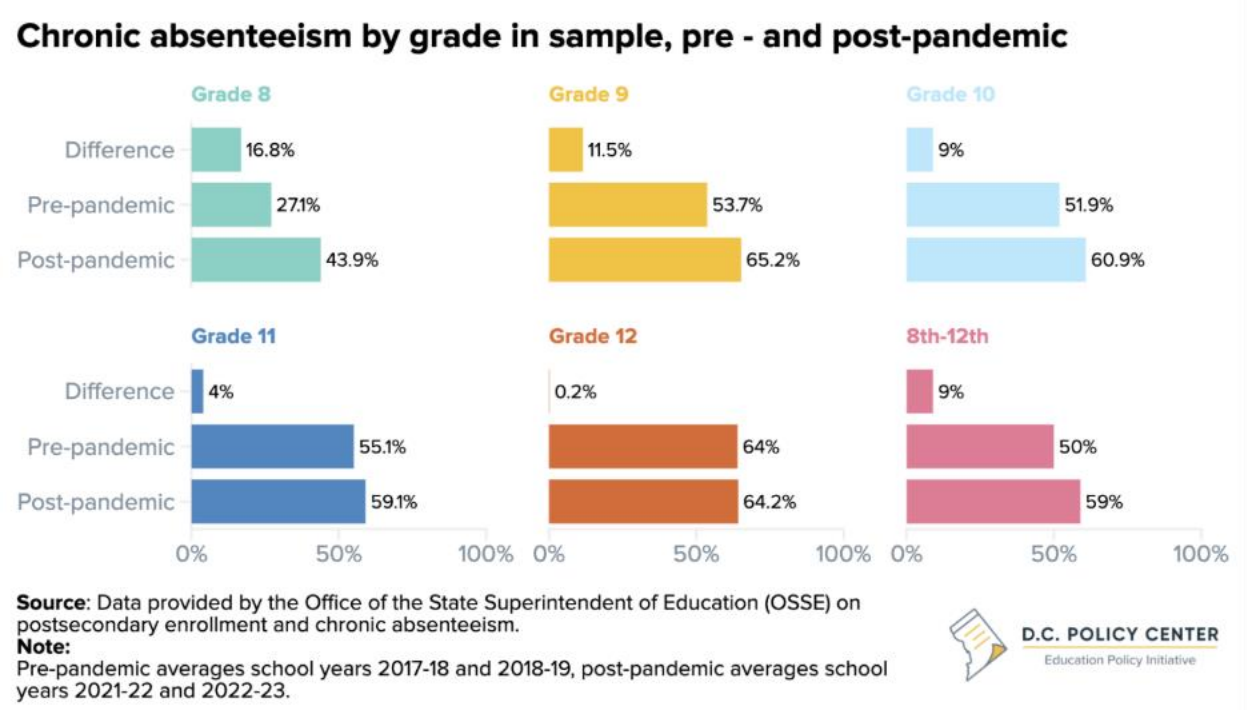


The Education Policy Initiative (EPI)'s recent publication on chronic absenteeism uses student-level data from the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) for four school years - two pre-pandemic (2017-18, 2018-19) and two post-pandemic (2021-22, 2022-23) to highlight three main findings:

1. Chronic absenteeism has shifted in who it affects and when it escalates. Chronic absenteeism spikes at the transition to high school, with 9th grade serving as a clear inflection point. 8th graders experienced the largest post-pandemic (school years 2021-22 and 2022-23) increase in chronic absenteeism (21 percentage points). Female students are more likely to be chronically absent post-pandemic, and Black and economically disadvantaged students experienced the largest increase in chronic absenteeism. Despite missing, a larger share of chronically absent students are meeting or exceeding expectations on statewide assessments. Lastly, pre-pandemic, a school's overall chronic absenteeism rate was associated with individual behavior, but post-pandemic this peer effect is less pronounced in high schools.[viii]

2. Chronic absenteeism is persistent and sticky.

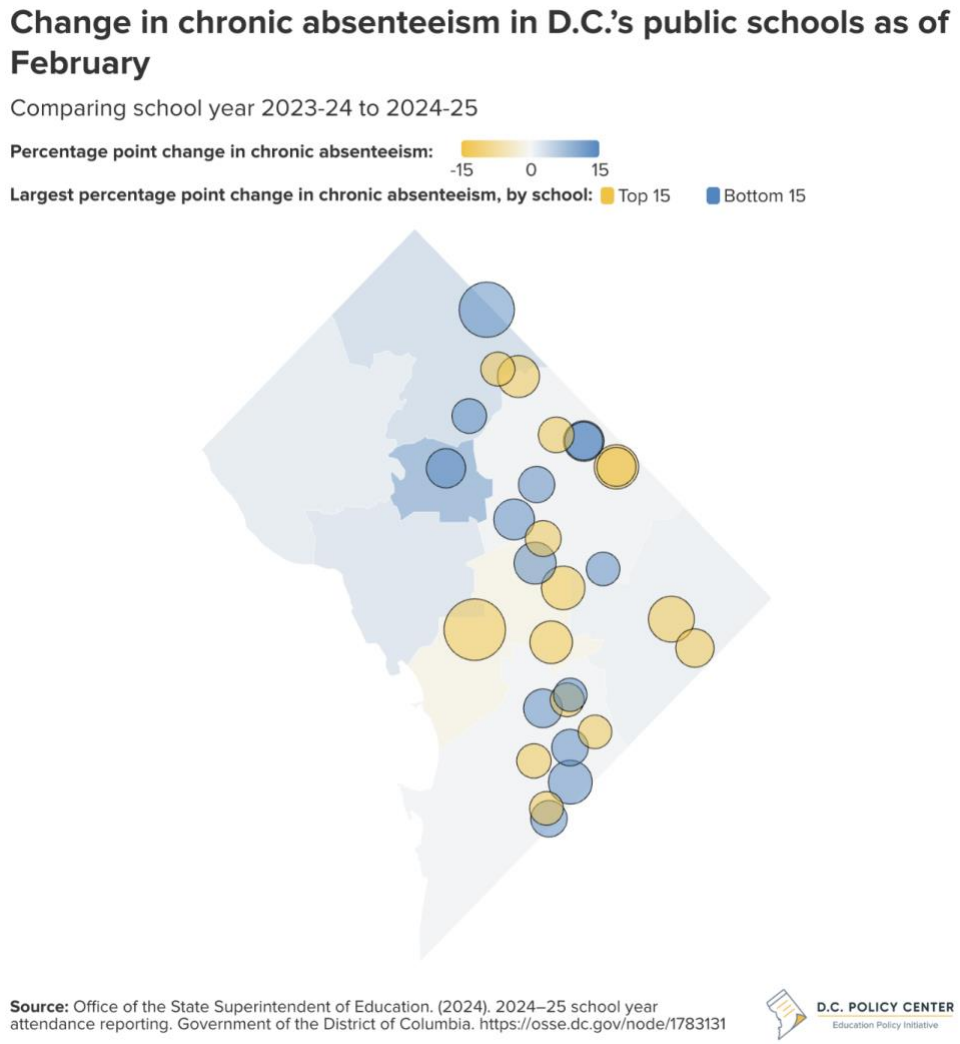
Once students become chronically absent, they tend to remain chronically absent. Among those chronically absent in school year 2021-22, 82 percent were also chronically absent the following school year. Students right above the chronic absenteeism threshold (missing just above 10-19.99 percent) and economically disadvantaged students were more likely to improve their attendance year to year.



3. The strongest predictors of chronic absenteeism are consistent, but their weights have changed.

Economic disadvantage, 9th grade repetition, and prior year chronic absenteeism are the strongest predictors for future absenteeism. Students scoring below expectations on the 8th grade statewide assessment are more likely to become chronically absent the following year and attending a District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) school rather than a public charter is also associated with higher absenteeism. These findings are important to highlight why chronic absenteeism is an important metric to decrease.

Final attendance data for school year 2024-25 shows that chronic absenteeism increased by 0.3 percentage points to 39.5 percent, and chronic truancy remained unchanged at 36.8 percent. [ix]Mid-year attendance updates with school information show that schools in Wards 1 and 4 have larger increases in chronic absenteeism.[x]



In interviews, school leaders pointed to strategies such as increased student check-ins and trusted adult relationships that led to their school's attendance growth.

Other promising methods for improving attendance include providing school-based health care, developing relevant curriculum, free meals, and laundry.[xi] Implementing evidence-based recommendations to improve attendance, especially among high school students, is critical to enhancing student outcomes and continuing the academic gains shown in the DC CAPE results.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I welcome any questions you have.

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[i] Chronic absenteeism is defined as a student who has been absent – both excused and unexcused, including partial and full-day absences – for at least 10 percent of their enrolled instructional days.

[ii] Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE). 2022. District of Columbia Attendance Report. OSSE. Retrieved from https://osse.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/osse/publication/attachments/2021-22%20Attendance%20Report%20%28Nov%2028%202022%29.pdf

[iii] Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE). 2019. District of Columbia Attendance Report. OSSE. Retrieved from https://osse.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/osse/publication/attachments/2018-19%20School%20Year%20Attendance%20Report.pdf

[iv] Coffin, C., & Mason, H. 2025. Chronic absenteeism as a barrier to college and career readiness in D.C. D.C. Policy Center. Retrieved from https://www.dcpolicycenter.org/publications/chronic-absenteeism-as-a-barrier-to-college-and-career-readiness-in-d-c/

[v] Satisfactory attendance is defined as missing less than 5% of the school year.

[vi] Profound chronic absence is defined as missing 30%+ of the school year.

[vii] Coffin, C., & Mason, H. 2025. Chronic absenteeism as a barrier to college and career readiness in D.C. D.C. Policy Center. Retrieved from https://www.dcpolicycenter.org/publications/chronic-absenteeism-as-a-barrier-to-college-and-career-readiness-in-d-c/

[viii] Coffin, C., & Mason, H. 2025. *Patterns and Predictors of Chronic Absenteeism in D.C. Middle and High Schools*. D.C. Policy Center. Retrieved from https://www.dcpolicycenter.org/publications/patterns-and-predictors-of-chronic-absenteeism-in-d-c-s-middle-and-high-schools/

[ix] Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE). 2025. "2024-25 Attendance Brief: Attendance data for the 2024-2025 school year." OSSE. Retrieved from https://osse.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/osse/page_content/attachments/AttendanceBrief_1Pager_2025.pdf

[x] Imran, Anoosha. 2025. "Chart of the week: Schools in Wards 1 and 4 have larger increases in chronic absenteeism as of midyear reporting." D.C. Policy Center. Retrieved from https://www.dcpolicycenter.org/publications/chart-of-the-week-schools-in-wards-1-and-4-have-larger-increases-in-chronic-absenteeism-as-of-midyear-reporting/

[xi] Jordan, P. 2023. *Attendance Playbook: Smart strategies for reducing student absenteeism post-pandemic*. FutureEd. Retrieved from https://www.future-ed.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Attendance-Playbook.5.23.pdf