



Patterns and predictors of **CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM** in D.C. middle and high schools

Chronic absenteeism—missing at least 10 percent of the school year—is a persistent post-pandemic challenge for D.C.’s public schools, especially for secondary school students. In school year 2023-24, 56% of D.C.’s public high school students were chronically absent, compared to 40% of all students.

Drawing on student-level records from the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) across four school years—two pre-pandemic (2017-18, 2018-19) and two post-pandemic (2021-22, 2022-23)—**this report has three key findings**, outlined in this summary.

Read the full report at dcpolicycenter.org.

Finding #1

Chronic absenteeism has shifted in who it affects and when it increases.

Chronic absenteeism spikes at the transition to high school, with 9th grade emerging as a clear inflection point.

8th graders experienced the largest increase post-pandemic in chronic absenteeism (**21 percentage points**).

Female students are now **more likely** to be chronically absent, reversing a pre-pandemic pattern.

Black and **economically disadvantaged** students experienced the largest increase in chronic absenteeism post-pandemic.

Post-pandemic, the share of peers who are chronically absent within a school is **less likely** to be associated with individual behavior.

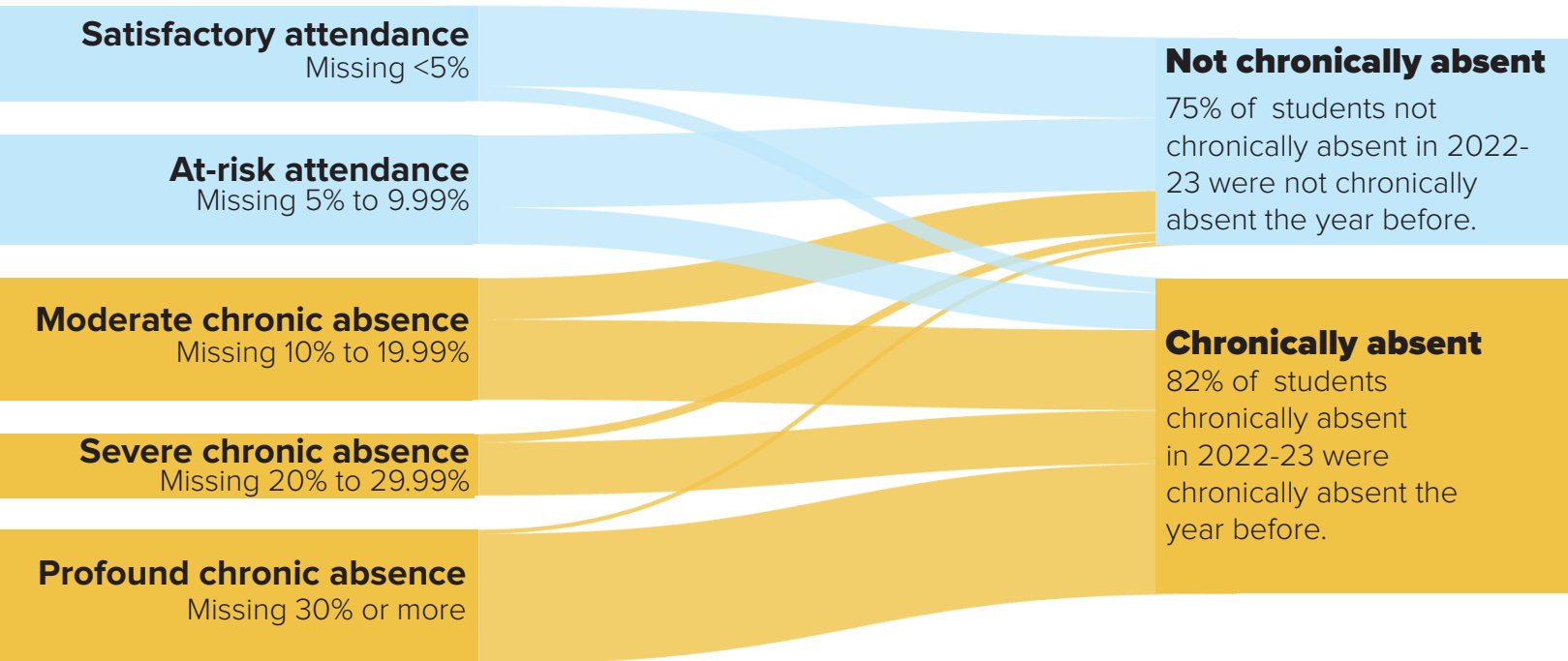
Finding #2

Chronic absenteeism is persistent and sticky.

82% of students chronically absent in school year 2021-22 were chronically absent in school year 2022-23.

Students missing 10-19.99% of the school year (moderate chronic absence) and **economically disadvantaged** students were **most likely** to improve their attendance year to year.

Absenteeism “stickiness” from school year 2021-22 to school year 2022-23



Finding #3

The strongest predictors of chronic absenteeism are consistent with pre-pandemic.

- **Economic disadvantage, 9th grade repetition, and prior-year chronic absenteeism** are the most powerful predictors of future absenteeism.
- Students scoring below expectations on the 8th grade statewide assessment are **more likely** to be chronically absent in 9th grade.
- Attending a DCPS school instead of a charter school is also associated with higher absenteeism.

Policy implications

The District has a goal of reducing chronic absenteeism to 24% by school year 2027-28. To reach this goal, schools can:

- **Intervene early**, concentrating on middle school (Grades 6-8).
- **Provide intensive support** for 9th grade, with additional focus on repeaters.
- **Prioritize outreach** to students with moderate chronic absenteeism.
- **Study and scale school practices** that are associated with lower absenteeism.
- **Monitor the emerging gender gap** that disfavors female students, as well as the persistence of structural barriers for economically disadvantaged students.