



## The Impact of Chronic Absenteeism

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### Chronic Absenteeism

*The Data, the Causes, and the Way Forward*

Chronic absenteeism, defined as missing 10% or more of the school year, (usually around 18 days), has long been a challenge for schools and has worsened significantly since the pandemic. Consistent attendance is vital, ensuring students have access to critical learning, social and emotional support, nutritious meals, healthcare, and the stability of a structured environment. Since the 2017-2018 school year, the national chronic absenteeism rate has more than doubled, reaching 26% of students, prompting school districts nationwide to focus on its underlying causes. (1) In Doña Ana County, we are seeing similar trends. Our new dashboard shows that chronic absenteeism has steadily increased over the past four years, affecting all grade levels and districts—including Las Cruces Public Schools (LCPS), Hatch Valley Public Schools (HVPS), and Gadsden Independent School District (GISD). **In the 2023-2024 school year, 32% of students were chronically absent**, a significant rise compared to pre-pandemic levels.

[Click here to explore our dashboard on chronic absenteeism](#)

Chronic absenteeism grew by 119 percent in New Mexico from 2019 to 2023, the largest increase in the nation.



Source: New Mexico Legislative Finance Committee Program Evaluation No. 24-03, Student Attendance and Performance

### Why Does This Matter?

Addressing chronic absenteeism is critical for student success. In 2023, research showed that chronically absent students were 13-14% less likely to be proficient in English, math, and science than their regularly attending peers. (2) For example, 36.5% of non-chronically absent students in grades 3-8 tested proficient on the New Mexico Measures of Student Success and Achievement (NM-MSSA), compared to 22.1% of chronically absent students. This achievement gap holds even when accounting for income.

Beyond individual performance, absenteeism affects entire classrooms. A 10% increase in chronic absenteeism in New Mexico's third through fifth grades in 2023 led to a 5% decrease in overall class proficiency. Chronic absenteeism can lower academic achievement for all students, not just those absent, making it a critical issue for school-wide success.

### Key Insights and Challenges

Chronic absenteeism is rising nationwide, driven by factors like prolonged remote learning, inhospitable school culture, and socioeconomic disparities. Research indicates students of color, English Language Learners, students with disabilities, and students who live in poverty are disproportionately impacted. (3) In Doña Ana County, while our analysis did not find a direct correlation between chronic absenteeism and the percentage of economically disadvantaged students (or other specific groups) in a school, the issue is concerning. High-poverty schools, which have long faced elevated absenteeism, struggle with barriers such as limited transportation and high student mobility rates that affect attendance.

A recent New Mexico Legislative Finance Committee (LFC) report highlights key reasons for chronic absenteeism. (4) Survey responses from nearly 500 attendance team participants identified illness, parental decisions, and lack of student engagement as primary factors. Teacher absences and transportation barriers also contribute to the problem. To address these, the New Mexico Public Education Department (PED), districts, and schools are aiming to improve engagement with parents and students while addressing systemic issues that drive absenteeism. Mental health is another significant factor. Many students have experienced a decline in emotional well-being since the pandemic, making it harder to stay engaged in school. (5) (6)

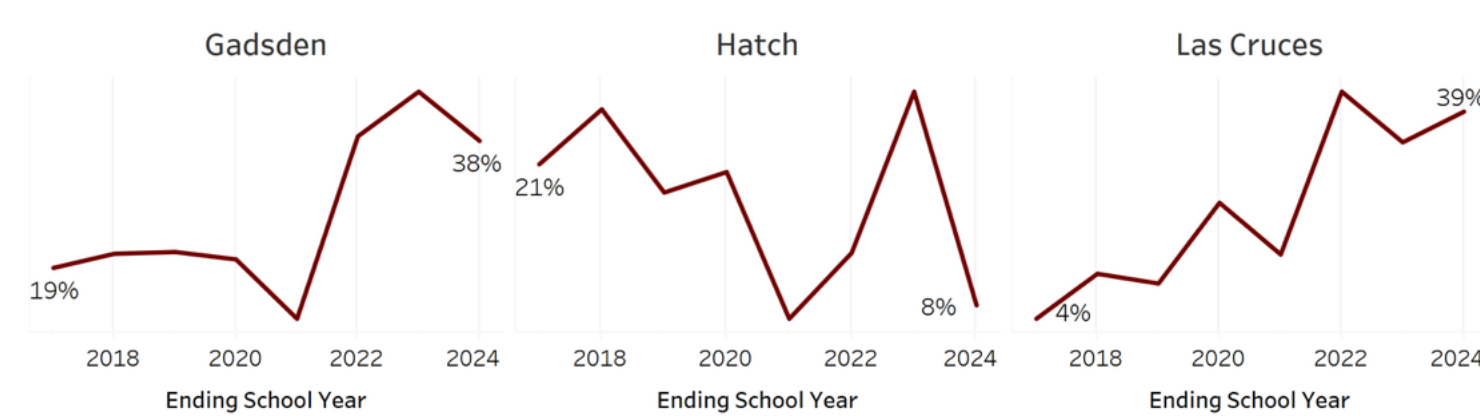
As absenteeism continues to rise, it's crucial to understand how these factors intersect within our district. While efforts are underway to address the issue, a deeper understanding of students' social, emotional, and logistical barriers will be key to finding long-term solutions.

### In Doña Ana County School Districts

Chronic absenteeism remains a significant issue across all districts in Doña Ana County, with rates increasing dramatically since 2016. In the LCPS district, only 4% of high school students were chronically absent during the 2016-2017 school year. This number climbed to 24% by 2019-2020 and surged to 39% by 2023-2024. GISD also faces a concerning trend, with 38% of high school students chronically absent in 2023-2024. Although this marks a slight improvement from 41% in 2022-2023, it is still a significant increase compared to 19% in 2016-2017. HVPS has shown a different trajectory; after chronic absenteeism rates for high schoolers peaked at 27% in 2022-2023—double the pre-pandemic level—they saw a dramatic improvement, dropping to 8% in 2023-2024.

[Click here to explore our dashboard on chronic absenteeism](#)

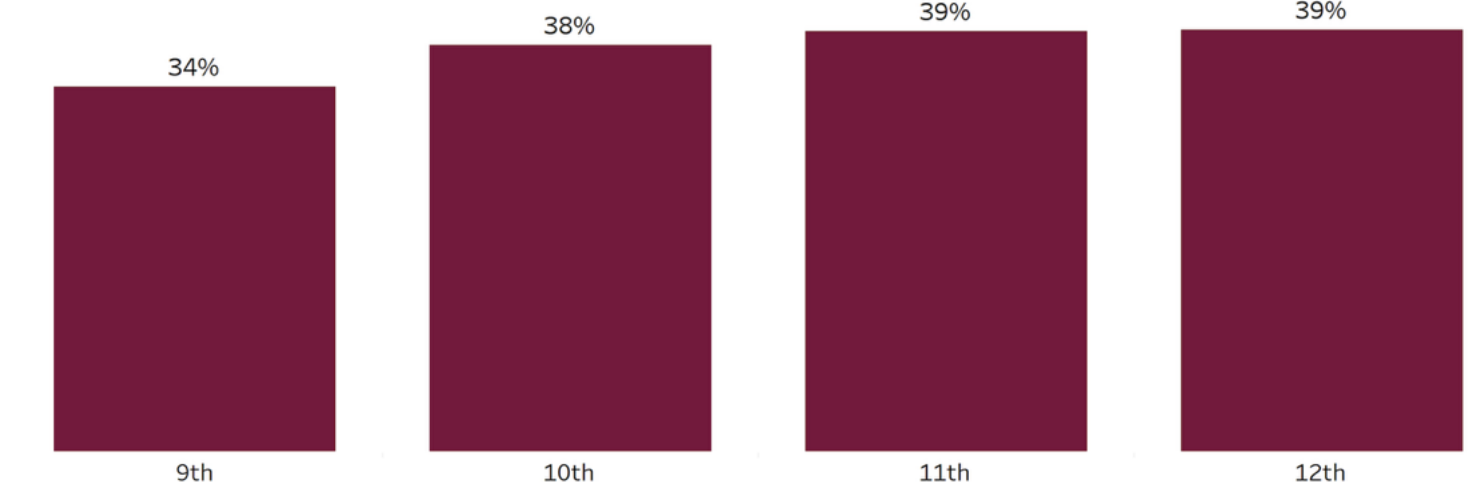
#### Trends in High School Chronic Absenteeism Rates by District, 2016-2024



Source: New Mexico Public Education Department. Note: Enrollment numbers may be higher than actual enrollment because students transferring mid-year are counted as enrollments at multiple school or district sites. This is not applicable to SY 2023-24.

By grade level, 34% of 9th graders, 38% of 10th graders, and 39% of juniors and seniors in Doña Ana County were chronically absent in SY 2023-2024. This is troubling since the New Mexico Legislative Finance Committee found that chronically absent students are five times more likely to drop out, often by 10th grade. (7)

#### Percentage of Students Chronically Absent in Doña Ana County High Schools by Grade Level, 2023-2024



Source: New Mexico Public Education Department.

[Click here to explore our dashboard on chronic absenteeism](#)

### How Student Engagement is Being Addressed

Organizations and initiatives in New Mexico, such as the [Doña Ana Kinder-Career Coalition](#), [Future Focused Education](#), [Doña Ana County Resilience Leaders](#), the [College and Career Pathways Alliance](#), and the New Mexico Public Education Department's [Innovative Zones](#), are dedicated to engaging students and promoting school retention. For example, the Innovation Zone Initiative seeks to transform our education system by replacing traditional graduation requirements with community-centered capstone projects as an alternative to standardized testing. (8) Students have already responded positively to these changes. LCPS is launching several initiatives to improve student attendance: partnering with New Mexico State University to deploy social workers for family engagement through calls and home visits and collaborating with Graduation Alliance to offer wrap-around support and academic coaching. (9) PED and districts have launched numerous efforts, spending at least \$24.8 million in FY23 and FY24 on student attendance initiatives. (10) Ensuring that students attend school every day is crucial for their academic success, personal growth, and future opportunities, as consistent attendance lays the foundation for a brighter future.

To learn more about the initiatives launched to improve student engagement, explore our [previous newsletter](#).

#### Sources:

- (1) [Why School Absences Have 'Exploded' Almost Everywhere](#)
- (2) [New Mexico Legislative Finance Committee Program Evaluation, Student Attendance and Performance](#)
- (3) [Understanding Chronic Absenteeism](#)
- (4) [New Mexico Legislative Finance Committee Program Evaluation, Student Attendance and Performance](#)
- (5) [The Impact of School Mental Health Services on Reducing Chronic Absence](#)
- (6) [3 years since the pandemic wrecked attendance, kids still aren't showing up to school](#)
- (7) [Legislative Finance Committee Progress Report, High School Graduation](#)
- (8) [CCA Newsletter: New Graduation Requirements Signed into Law and Community Organizations Aim to Improve Student Engagement](#)
- (9) [There's a lot of work to be done: 30% of LCPS students excessively absent](#)
- (10) [New Mexico Legislative Finance Committee Program Evaluation, Student Attendance and Performance](#)



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