



Chronic Absenteeism and State Policy: A 2026 Overview

State policies addressing chronic absenteeism are built around several policy elements: defining chronic absenteeism, collecting and reporting attendance data, holding schools and districts accountable, establishing attendance teams, early interventions, and providing support rather than taking punitive action.

Highlights

- 37 states have a definition of chronic absenteeism.
- Most states use a definition of 10% or greater for chronic absence (all reasons, excused and unexcused).
- The U.S. Department of Education uses the standard of missing at least 10% of school days, or roughly 18 days in a 180-day school year, for any reason.
- Many states emphasize multi-tiered systems of support, attendance teams and early family outreach.
- Several states specify parent meetings and individualized prevention plans in law or guidance.

Defining Chronic Absenteeism in SREB States

- **Alabama** defines chronic absenteeism in state statute as missing 10% or more of school days per school year (unexcused and excused absences). [Alabama Administrative Code Rule 290-3-1-.02](#)
- **Arkansas** defines chronic absence as missing 10% of the year for any reason (excused, unexcused, suspension).
- **Delaware** defines chronic absenteeism as a student missing 10% or more of school days in a single academic year (excused and unexcused absences).
- **Florida** has an early warning system that uses less than 90% attendance as a risk flag;

truancy is defined in statute as 15 unexcused absences in 90 days.

<https://www.fldoe.org/core/fileparse.php/7506/urlt/SGC-FOIL-Spring24-May.pdf>

- **Georgia** [Rule 160-5-1-.10](#) governs attendance and defines truancy as more than five unexcused absences during a school year. <https://gadoe.org/whole-child-supports/attendance>

State law requires school districts to establish student attendance and school climate committees to address truancy and chronic absenteeism along with school climate issues. [O.C.G.A. Section 20-2-690.2](#)

- **Kentucky** defines chronic absenteeism as missing 10% or more of the enrolled academic year for any reason. <https://education.ky.gov/school/Pages/Chronic-Absenteeism.aspx>
- **Louisiana** defines chronic absenteeism as missing more than 10% of the school year, or approximately 18 days (excused and unexcused absences).
- **Maryland** uses absenteeism as a School Quality and Student Success indicator in the Maryland School Report Card. <https://www.marylandpublicschools.org/stateboard/Documents/2025/0826/Chronic-Absenteeism-Update-A.pdf>

[House Bill 575 \(2026\)](#) requires that districts allow excused absences for students who miss school to participate in a civic engagement activity, such as testifying at a legislative hearing or meeting with legislators.

- **Mississippi** defines chronic absenteeism as missing 10% of the school year (about 18 days) for any reason; The Mississippi Department of Education publishes statewide reports. <https://www.mdek12.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/33/2025/11/ChronicAbReport2024-25-2025-102125.pdf>

[Senate Bill 2103 \(2026\)](#) requires school districts to monitor and intervene on chronic absenteeism using tiered strategies and requires the state to fund one attendance officer for every 4,000 enrolled students.

- **North Carolina** references, in the [Governor's proclamation for Attendance Awareness Month](#), the chronic absenteeism definition of missing 10% or more of the school year for any reason. Attendance is a key element of the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction and State Board of Education's joint strategic plan. <https://www.dpi.nc.gov/blog/2025/09/23/ncdpi-marks-attendance-awareness->

[month-plan-help-schools-reduce-chronic-absenteeism](#)

- **Oklahoma** considers a student chronically absent after missing 10 percent or more of school days (excused and unexcused absences). Missing 10 percent of school days would be approximately 18 days in a normal 180-day school calendar — just two days per month. <https://oklahoma.gov/education/services/family-community-engagement/chronic-absenteeism/chronic-absenteeism-for-schools.html>
- **South Carolina** defines chronic absenteeism as missing more than 50% of the instructional day for more than 10% of the enrollment period. The total number of chronically absent students are included on district and school report cards. <https://ed.sc.gov/districts-schools/student-support/chronic-absenteeism/>
- **Tennessee** defines chronic absenteeism as missing 10% or more of school days including suspensions. The Chronically Out of School Indicator is a part of district and school accountability. <https://www.tn.gov/education/families/student-support/chronic-absenteeism.html>

Under [Senate Bill 1968 \(2026\)](#), a student transferring during the school year will have the number of unexcused absences reported to their next school, and any future unexcused absences will be added on a cumulative record. The legislation removes the five-hour limit on the amount of community service a judge may order for the parent or guardian of a student with five or more unexcused absences during a school year.

- **Texas** defines a chronically absent student as a student that is absent for more than 10% of the required instructional time. <https://statutes.capitol.texas.gov/?tab=1&code=ED&chapter=ED.48&artSec=48.009>

Chronic absenteeism is considered a key indicator for students at risk of dropping out. The Texas Education Agency encouraged school districts to update attendance monitoring systems and encourage collaboration among staff to identify and develop support plans for chronically absent students. <https://tea.texas.gov/taa-letters/sb-991-expansion-risk-student-definition>

- **Virginia** defines chronic absenteeism as missing 10% or more of the academic year for any reason and uses it in accreditation and federal accountability reporting. <https://www.doe.virginia.gov/parents-students/parent-resources/attendance>

[House Bill 653 \(2026\)](#) allows students up to five excused absences per year to visit a family member who is actively serving in the military and deployed outside the U.S.

- **West Virginia** defines chronic absenteeism as students who miss more than 10% of school days for any reason. <https://wvde.us/student-support-wellness/communities-schools/attendance-matters>

STATEWIDE STRATEGIES AND TOOLKITS

Georgia — statewide Whole Child Supports effort

Georgia's resource page is especially useful because it combines policy, implementation resources and data. Districts can access a model attendance protocol, statewide Attendance Dashboard, chronic absenteeism infographic, parent flyers in English and Spanish, research and other materials.

[Georgia Student Attendance Resources](#)

The Georgia Department of Education reports that its Office of Whole Child Supports intensified attendance efforts during 2024–25, while the state's chronic absenteeism rate declined to 19.5%, down from 21.3% in 2023–24 and 23.9% in 2021–22.

Kentucky Chronic Absenteeism Toolkit

The Kentucky Department of Education published its new toolkit in June 2026 to support district and school communications with students, staff, families and communities. It includes ready-to-use and customizable materials rather than simply explaining state attendance requirements.

[Kentucky Chronic Absenteeism Toolkit](#)

Among the downloadable materials are an “Attendance Matters” fact sheet, “You Belong! Attendance Matters” posters, elementary and secondary “We Missed You” materials, a chronic absenteeism one-pager, educator strategy sheet and family one-pager. KDE also allows districts to request technical assistance or training.

Louisiana — Power of Presence

Louisiana has one of the newest comprehensive statewide strategies. The Louisiana Department of Education describes The Power of Presence as a research-based strategy for improving attendance and removing barriers to learning. Importantly, it moves beyond an awareness campaign and provides a tiered support system, definitions and procedures, guidance for attendance teams and data use, and strategies for family/community partnerships.

[*Louisiana Attendance Resources — Power of Presence*](#)

Louisiana also ran a 2024–25 pilot involving seven school systems in partnership with EveryDay Labs, BESE and other partners.

Virginia reports that chronic absenteeism declined from 20% in 2022–23 to 14.8% in 2024–25.

Mississippi — communication toolkit

MDE maintains a dedicated chronic absenteeism resource area that includes an Attendance Awareness Communication Toolkit and its Every School Day Counts campaign/resources

[*Mississippi Chronic Absenteeism Resources*](#)

Oklahoma — collection of implementation tools

The Oklahoma Department of Education has built a particularly useful school/district improvement infrastructure around attendance. Its resources include separate school and district chronic absenteeism self-assessments, action-planning guidance, professional-development modules, family-engagement resources, presentations and toolkits.

[*Oklahoma Chronic Absenteeism Resources*](#)

More recently, OSDE added Attendance Data to Action webinars, slide decks and a toolkit designed to help schools turn accountability data into interventions.

Virginia — ActionKit and Task Force model

Virginia is particularly interesting as a statewide implementation model. The Chronic Absenteeism Task Force developed resources and action plans for school divisions, while the Virginia Department of Education's Superintendent's ActionKit for Improving Attendance provides divisions with a four-step roadmap for reviewing their attendance systems and developing customized strategies. VDOE also explicitly encourages school- and division-level attendance teams.

[*Virginia School Attendance Resources*](#)

West Virginia — 50% Challenge

West Virginia's recent initiative is notable from a policy/goal-setting perspective. In 2025, the West Virginia Department of Education announced that the state is participating in the 50% Challenge, committing to cut chronic absenteeism by half by 2029.

West Virginia Attendance Matters

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