

CHRONIC STUDENT ABSENTEEISM IS A CRITICAL ISSUE

For students to succeed academically, they must be present and engaged at school. Research shows that chronic absenteeism can affect academic performance and is a key early warning sign that a student is more likely to drop out of high school. According to the [United States Department of Education \(U.S. DOE\) Office for Civil Rights](#), approximately one in six students nationwide—or 16 percent of students—missed 15 or more days during School Year (SY) 2015–2016.

Nevada students are no exception to this nationwide issue. As reported by [Education Week](#), U.S. DOE data shows Nevada had the eighth highest overall chronic absenteeism rate in the nation in SY 2015–2016. Further, Nevada ranks tenth highest in the nation for percentage of schools with high and extreme levels of chronic absence, according to [Attendance Works](#).

Nevada school districts report varying levels of chronic absence, with more than half of the districts experiencing rates of over 15 percent. However, research by Nevada’s Department of Education (NDE) suggests the overall statewide rate has decreased in recent years. In SY 2017–2018, for example, [NDE states](#) that 105 Nevada schools saw chronic absenteeism rates drop by 10 percent or more.

WHAT IS CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM?

According to the [Education Commission of the States](#), chronic absenteeism is generally understood as a measure of how much school a student misses for any reason—including excused, unexcused, and discipline-related absences. In terms of what counts as an absence, the [U.S. DOE states](#), “A student was absent if he or she was not physically on school grounds and was not participating in instruction or instruction-related activities at an approved off-grounds location for at least half the school day.”¹ The U.S. DOE further defines chronic

student absence as missing 10 percent or more of a school year.

In January 2019, NDE refined its definition of chronic absenteeism in an effort to more consistently track the measure across Nevada’s school districts, as well as meet federal reporting requirements. The Department’s “[Revised Guidance Memorandum #18-06](#)” provides direction regarding chronic absenteeism at the local school district level, based on the definition provided by the U.S. DOE.

CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM BY THE NUMBERS (SY 2015–2016)

16%

of students nationwide
were considered
chronically absent.

20.1%

of students in Nevada
were considered
chronically absent.

Nevada had the
8th highest
rate of chronic
absenteeism in the U.S.

WHAT CAUSES STUDENT ABSENCES?

Collecting data about the reasons for missed school can be challenging, thus making it difficult to determine the root causes of chronic absence. However, research does suggest a variety of reasons why some students are chronically absent. These include:

- Bullying and other safety issues;
- Disengagement from the school system;
- Family and work responsibilities;
- Homelessness;
- Ineffective school discipline;
- Limited transportation options and unsafe routes to school;
- Poor health; and
- Undiagnosed disabilities.

Though difficult to track, understanding potential causes of chronic absence may help determine effective policy interventions.

WHICH STUDENT POPULATIONS ARE MOST AFFECTED?

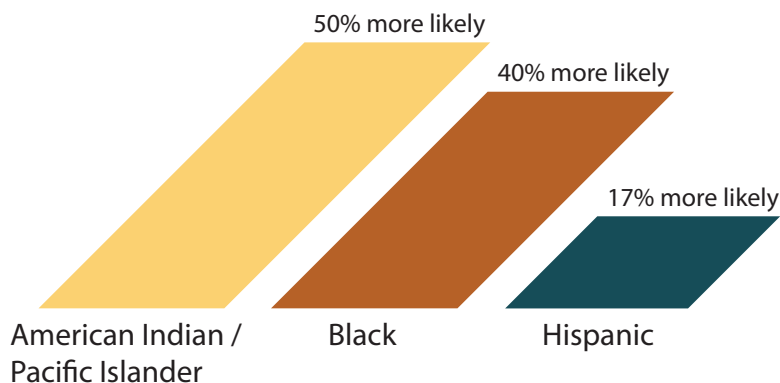
Chronic absenteeism affects students from all backgrounds and at all grade levels, but data indicates some student groups are disproportionately affected, particularly those already facing significant academic challenges.

Furthermore, according to the U.S. DOE, rates of chronic absence peak in high school; however, research by the [National Center for Children in Poverty](#) suggests that students in the early elementary grades also experience high rates of chronic absence and, consequently, some discernable detrimental effects on school success.

Nevada uses chronic absenteeism as an indicator of the school quality or student success measure in its Every Student Succeeds Act state plan.

STUDENT POPULATIONS AND CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM

Compared to their white peers, some student groups are more likely to lose three weeks or more of school.



Source: [U.S. DOE Office for Civil Rights](#)

English learners are

1.2 times less

likely to be chronically absent than non-English learners.

Students with disabilities are

1.5 times more

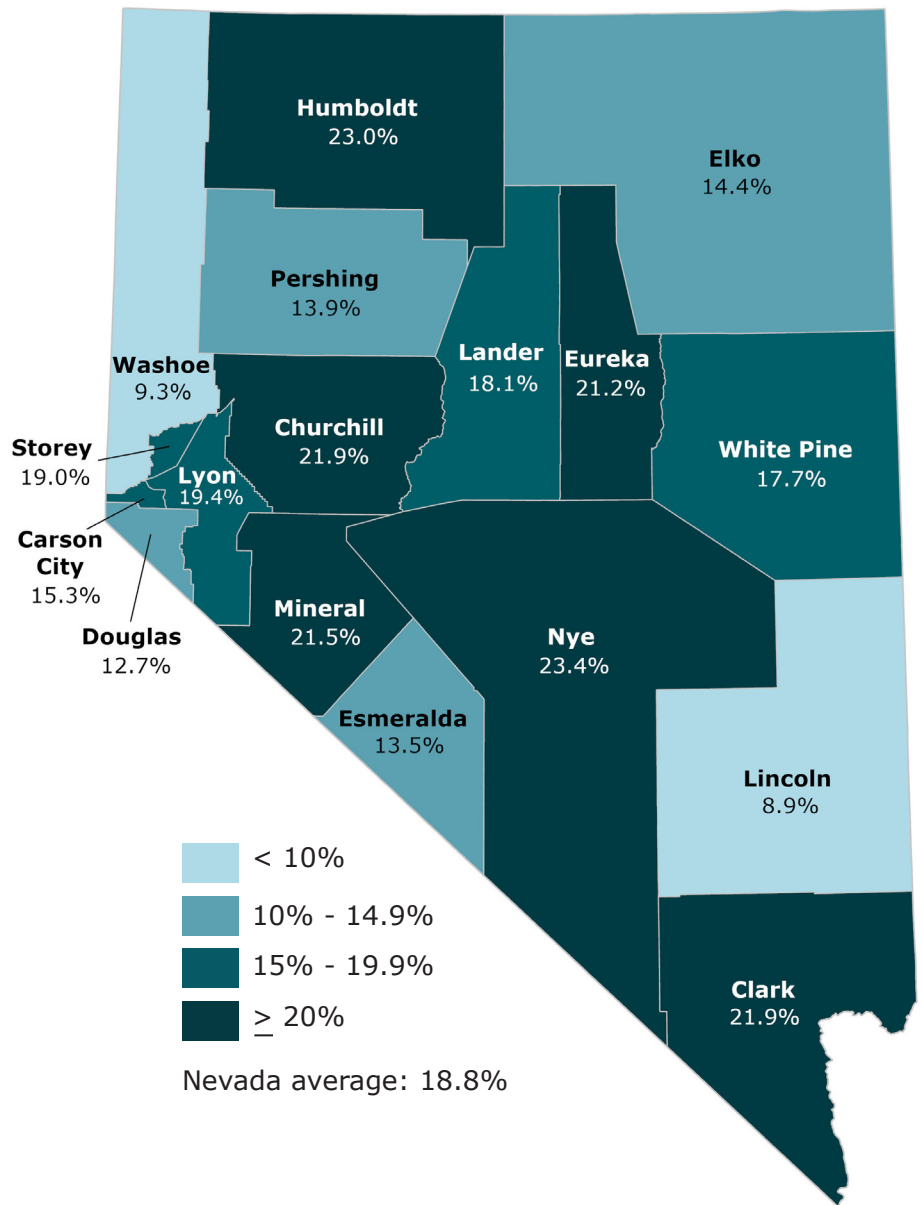
likely to be chronically absent than students without disabilities.

CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM RATES IN NEVADA

Using national data reported by school districts to the U.S. DOE Office for Civil Rights, [The Hamilton Project](#) reports that Nevada’s chronic absenteeism rate was 20.1 percent in SY 2015–2016, compared to the national average of 15.5 percent. Since then, it appears the rate in Nevada has decreased. According to NDE, the statewide rate during SY 2017–2018 was 19.49 percent, followed by 18.8 percent during SY 2018–2019.

As of SY 2018–2019, absenteeism rates vary across Nevada’s districts, from the lowest rate of 8.9 percent in Lincoln County School District to a high of 23.4 percent in Nye County School District.

CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM RATES, BY NEVADA SCHOOL DISTRICT (SY 2018–2019)



While Nevada's chronic absenteeism rate ranks high nationally, it appears to be decreasing:

20.1%

in SY 2015–2016



18.8%

in SY 2018–2019

Source: [Nevada Report Card](#), NDE

Sources: [The Hamilton Project](#); [Nevada Report Card](#), NDE

WHAT IS BEING DONE TO ADDRESS CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM?

NEVADA

Nevada's school districts have implemented a variety of strategies to reduce chronic absenteeism, including:

- **Increasing resources for certain staff**—such as school resource officers, truancy reduction officers, attendance enforcement officers, and others—who make contact with chronically absent students and their families;
- **Working with attendance review boards and courts** to hear matters concerning student absence and to help address chronic absence and encourage attendance;
- **Keeping families informed of absences** in various ways, including phone calls to the student's home; and
- **Implementing awards and incentives** to encourage attendance.

In addition to district and state interventions, organizations like Communities in Schools work to address chronic absenteeism and other barriers to success by identifying unique needs and providing specific resources to families.

OTHER STATES

OREGON

Other states are similarly working to reduce chronic absenteeism. In Oregon, for example, the state Department of Education recently launched a [website](#) with information, toolkits, and resources for educators and families. The website provides links to relevant research and identifies state, district, and community-based efforts to address chronic absenteeism, including improved data collection and increased funding for related programs.

CALIFORNIA

In California, a [Child Welfare and Attendance](#) support service combines counseling and other interventions to address persistent student attendance and behavior issues. The state requires school districts and counties to appoint a supervisor of attendance, and assistant supervisors if necessary, to oversee student attendance in each district or county. Among other duties, the supervisor is responsible for raising awareness of the effects of chronic absenteeism and identifying students with attendance problems as early as possible in order to provide appropriate support and interventions. Strategies may include family conferences; referrals to counseling personnel; promotion of activities and awards that support better attendance; collaboration with relevant stakeholders, such as child welfare services, courts, health care agencies, and law enforcement; and other approaches.

Many such public and private programs are relatively new or recently expanded. Their progress will likely be of great interest to parents, policymakers, and other stakeholders interested in combating chronic absenteeism in Nevada and nationwide.

¹ U.S. Department of Education, "[FS195—Chronic Absenteeism File Specifications v15.0](#)," August 2018, p. 4.