



# How Tackling Chronic Absenteeism Can Supercharge Your EdTech Product

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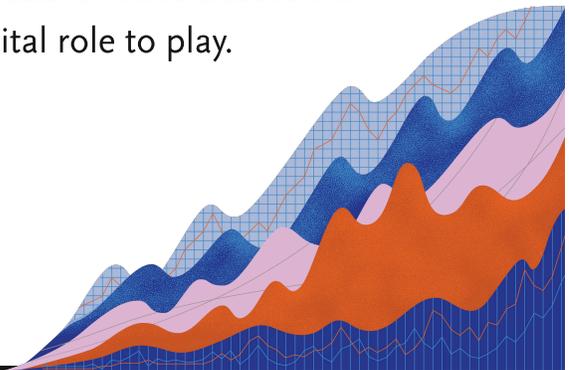
Chronic absenteeism is an often overlooked, yet critically important issue facing schools and educators today.



Studies show that students who miss 10% or more of school days, whether excused or unexcused, are significantly more likely to fall behind academically, struggle socially, and **ultimately drop out of school entirely.**

This challenge presents a unique opportunity for edTech product owners and developers. By understanding the drivers and impacts of chronic absenteeism, you can design tools and solutions that empower schools, teachers, and families to address this problem head-on.

**Keeping students engaged, informed, and present in the classroom should be a top priority** - and edTech has a vital role to play.



# How Tackling Chronic Absenteeism Can Supercharge Your EdTech Product

In this report, we'll explore the landscape of chronic absenteeism, its consequences, and how forward-thinking edTech innovators can leverage data, technology, and thoughtful design to help turn the tide.



**Data**



**Technology**



**Thoughtful  
Design**

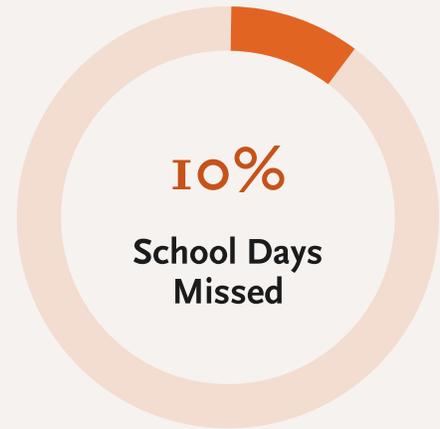
Reducing chronic absenteeism isn't just good for students - **it's essential for the long-term success of your edTech products and the communities they serve.**



# What is Chronic Absenteeism?

According to the American Federation of Teachers, chronic absenteeism is “defined as missing at least 10 percent of days in a school year for any reason, including excused and unexcused absences.”

“For example, a student who misses as few as two days per month for each month of the school year is described as being chronically absent. In a school year, that’s 18 to 20 total missed school days.”



## Why is it Important to Address Chronic Absenteeism?



**Lasting Impact.** According to a recent [Vox report](#), “Chronic absenteeism worsens existing problems and can lead to poor academic and long-term economic outcomes for students at all grade levels.”



**Classroom Disruption.** “Constant absences create chaotic classroom environments, with teachers needing to help students make up missed work or missing students disrupting the balance of classrooms that might be necessary for certain lessons.”



**Engagement.** “Chronic absenteeism increases educational inequality since it has risen more among disadvantaged students, particularly those with disabilities and those from lower-income households.”

## Impacts of Chronic Absenteeism



### Chronically absent students:

- 01** are behind academically
- 02** have higher dropout rates
- 03** have decreased feelings of connection with both peers and teachers



### Students with chronically absent peers:

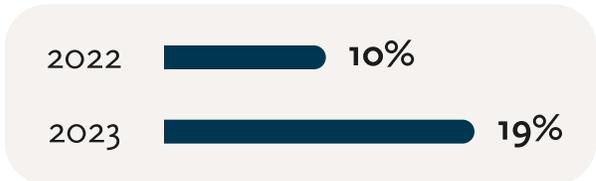
- 01** make slower academic progress as teachers shift the class pace to catch up absent students when they return
- 02** have a higher chance of disengaging academically
- 03** are more likely to be absent in the future

# COVID and Chronic Absenteeism

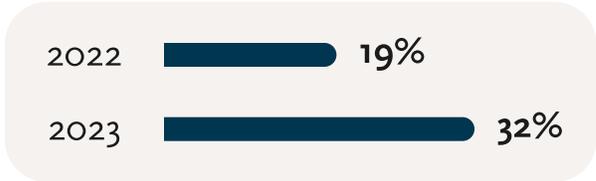
Chronic absenteeism has increased significantly after the pandemic.

According to a recent study conducted by The New York Times:

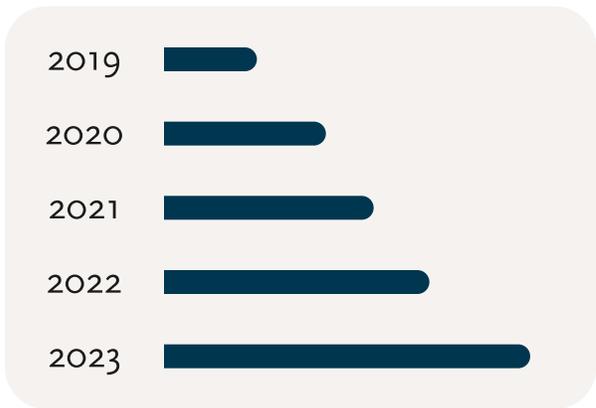
**Chronic absenteeism rates in higher socioeconomic districts** have nearly doubled in the 2022-23 school year from 10 percent to 19 percent.



**Low socioeconomic communities,** who started out with higher absenteeism, saw an increase in the 2022-23 school year from 19 percent to 32 percent.



**Communities of color** faced higher spikes in chronic absenteeism than their white counterparts from 2019-2023.



# How Can EdTech Help?

As edTech product creators, we can help educators support students who are struggling with chronic absenteeism by...



Creating products that streamline data tracking.



Incorporating automated outreach capabilities into products, making collaboration with families easier and timelier.



Increasing social emotional learning content in EdTech products to grow students' emotional intelligence and to reinforce the work teachers are already doing in creating a sense of belonging.



Prioritizing adaptive learning capabilities to meet students where they are when returning to class.



Facilitating learning opportunities for parents about the connection between attendance and student success.



# Our Report

We've framed this work using a “challenge” and “suggested strategy” model.

Our research uncovered a number of challenges that contribute to chronic absenteeism. In response to each challenge, a corresponding suggested strategy follows.





## Challenge #1

### Understanding the Root Causes of Chronic Absenteeism in Students



Students are now chronically absent at a higher rate due to struggles with mental health, transportation, feeling safe or welcome in school, and the grief that comes with losing a loved one. Every student is different and has a unique set of needs and reasons for why they may be chronically absent.

(Data Quality Campaign)





## Strategy #1

### Robust Data Tracking

Including data tracking features makes identifying at risk students easier by illuminating patterns that might not be obvious at first glance.

Data filters such as where students are commuting to school from, race, socioeconomic status, and familial relationships (including siblings who are also school-aged) can make targeted intervention more effective.



Attendance data that is disaggregated by school, grade, neighborhood, and demographic variables, like gender and socioeconomic status, can help shine a light on these reasons for chronic absenteeism.

(Data Quality Campaign)





## Challenge #2

### Pandemic Habits and Declining School Attendance



Districts relaxed their expectations and messaging around daily attendance during the pandemic, and students got into the habit of not attending school.

(RAND)





## Strategy #2

### Automated Outreach

Automated outreach makes consistent contact with parents/guardians possible for school staff who are supporting hundreds of students' academic and social emotional needs.

EdTech products with customizable automated outreach options allow communication to be tailored to the individual needs of students, parents, and educators.



Research shows that increasing effective communication with families, through positive text messaging, email and telephone calls, can help improve rates of attendance among students.

(American Institute for Research)





## Challenge #3

### Pandemic-Driven Mental Health Issues Fuel School Avoidance



...the pandemic has intensified mental health issues, including anxiety and depression, prompting many students to avoid school altogether.

(Freedonia Group)





## Strategy #3

### SEL-Focused Content

Weaving social-emotional content into all EdTech products can help chronically absent students build skills that support an acknowledgement and acceptance of their emotions both in and out of school.

SEL-focused content that teachers can pull from can also support community building in the classroom.



School districts should try more and new approaches to improve students' relationships with adults and students at school. Although no silver bullet can improve attendance, a through line in the approaches that interviewed leaders did perceive as helpful was increasing students' social connectedness at school.

(RAND)





## Challenge #4

### Academic Struggles Fuel a Cycle of Absenteeism



Students who are behind academically may not want to attend,  
but being absent sets them further back.

(New York Times)





## Strategy #4

### Adaptive Learning

Adaptive and customizable learning products can help students feel less overwhelmed about returning to school and making up missing work by meeting students where they are following sporadic or extended periods of absence.

Adaptive learning products can also support the teacher in keeping the rest of the class on pace, as they do not have to revisit material or slow down curriculum when absent students return.



When students are absent, they fall behind on work. As missed work piles up, anxiety about returning and not understanding new material keeps some students out of school longer.





## Challenge #5

### Shifting Perspectives on School Attendance Post-Pandemic



Some education leaders warn that the pandemic changed the way parents and students think about school. Attendance is now viewed as optional for some parents, while others have grown more sensitive to the slightest signs of illness in their children.

(Vox)





## Strategy #5

### Educational Platforms for Parents

Educational platforms for parents that offer information sessions and serve as a hub for up-to-date research on the impacts of chronic absenteeism can support re-engagement and foster a renewed commitment to in-person learning in a post-Covid world.

Parent-facing educational platforms that create a space to connect teachers and parents can also help to reframe the importance of attendance through teacher-led info-sessions.



Ultimately, if families don't understand the impact of even a few absences, the importance of school attendance won't be prioritized at home.

(Vox)





Chronic absenteeism is a complex, multi-faceted challenge, but one that presents a crucial opportunity for edTech companies to make a meaningful impact.

By designing tools and solutions that address the root causes of student **disengagement** and absenteeism, you can help strengthen the educational experience, improve student outcomes, and unlock new potential for your products.

Whether it's leveraging data analytics to **identify at-risk students**, building communication platforms to **strengthen school-family connections**, or creating innovative **attendance-tracking** and **incentive systems** - the possibilities are vast.

The edTech leaders who rise to this challenge will not only be rewarded with loyal customers and growing market share, but will also play a vital role in transforming lives and communities.





## Ready to tackle chronic absenteeism through better design?

Backpack Interactive helps organizations research and design purpose-driven, scalable, digital learning experiences.

Work with our specialized design team to support educators and improve student engagement.

[Get in touch](#)



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