



Absenteeism in Context

What Time, Data, and Teachers Tell Us About Student Engagement in ECISD

Phase 1: Results

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WHY ATTENDANCE RESEARCH?

- Extends our ongoing partnership at no cost to ECISD
- Study Phase 1 (shared tonight)
 - Review of current research on causes and effects of absenteeism
 - Initial interviews with principals, teachers, and attendance clerks on selected campuses
 - Quantitative research looking at attendance trends.
- Study Phase 2 (2025-26 school year)
 - Incorporating family and parental voices
 - Extending our quantitative work through a survey and additional analyses.

Guiding Questions

- What are the barriers to student attendance?
- What are the research-based best practices for addressing chronic absenteeism and improving attendance?
- Can we audit of our attendance practices in ECISD to align with those research-based best practices?

Chronic Absenteeism

Defined as missing 10% or more of enrolled school days within a school year, including both excused and unexcused absences

TEXAS TECH™

Research on Attendance

ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS AFFECTING ATTENDANCE

Poverty increases chronic absence; low-income students miss more school (Ready, 2010; Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Sosu et al., 2021).

Health issues like asthma, mental health, and lack of care access predict absences (Hsu et al., 2016; Johnson et al., 2019; Chang & Jordan, 2015).

Transportation barriers reduce attendance, especially for students with long or complex commutes (Gottfried, Ozuna, & Kirksey, 2021; Stein & Grigg, 2019).

Housing instability and student mobility (e.g., foster care, homelessness) disrupt school continuity (Lenhoff & Singer, 2023; Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012).

Food insecurity hurts attendance; universal free meals, school meal access reduces chronic absence (Gottfried & Kirksey, 2022; Kirksey & Gottfried, 2021).

SCHOOL FACTORS AFFECTING ATTENDANCE

School climate matters: safe, respectful environments reduce chronic absence (Daily et al., 2020; Van Eck et al., 2017).

Discipline policies like suspensions contribute to later absenteeism (Singer, 2025).

Curriculum disengagement pushes students away; relevant, interactive learning keeps them present (Chang & Jordan, 2015; Lansford & Kirksey, 2024).

Peer belonging improves attendance; students with “familiar faces” miss less school (Kirksey & Elefante, 2024; Kirksey & Gottfried, 2018).

EDUCATOR FACTORS AFFECTING ATTENDANCE

Teachers vary in their ability to reduce student absences; attendance is a unique dimension of effectiveness (Gershenson, 2016).

Teachers with strong preparation reduce chronic absence (Kirksey, 2024; Gottfried, Kirksey, & Hutt, 2021).

Positive teacher-student relationships promote daily attendance, especially for high-need students (Roorda et al., 2011; Gottfried, Kirksey, & Fletcher, 2022).

Principal leadership shapes attendance culture; effective leaders lower chronic absenteeism, especially in high-poverty schools (Bartanen, 2020).

TEXAS TECH™

Our 2024-25 Research in ECISD

QUALITATIVE DATA

Principals	Teachers	Attendance Clerks	Central Office
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 13 campuses participated• 5 high schools• 3 middle schools• 5 elementary schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Focus groups of 2-4 teachers• 8 focus groups completed• All school types represented	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 9 interviews with attendance clerks and/or office staff• All school types represented	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 4 interviews completed• Wide range of roles and perspectives
<p>All interviews and focus groups asked participants about district practices and procedures regarding attendances, family engagement practices, and their perceptions of causes for attendance issues and possible solutions</p>			

QUANTITATIVE DATA

District Data (2021–2024):

Student-level attendance (daily + six-week), chronic absence flags, course schedules linked to teacher rosters, TIA designations, Opportunity Culture roles, and full student demographics (grade, race/ethnicity, SPED, EB, ED). Enables real-time analysis of early warning signs, subgroup patterns, and within-district staffing impacts.

Texas ERC Data (Statewide, 2012-2024):

Longitudinal trends in absenteeism across grades and student groups. Focused analysis of teacher effects on chronic absence independent of environmental- and school-level factors.

Combined, these datasets allow us to examine both localized interventions and broader policy-relevant patterns in chronic absenteeism.

Findings

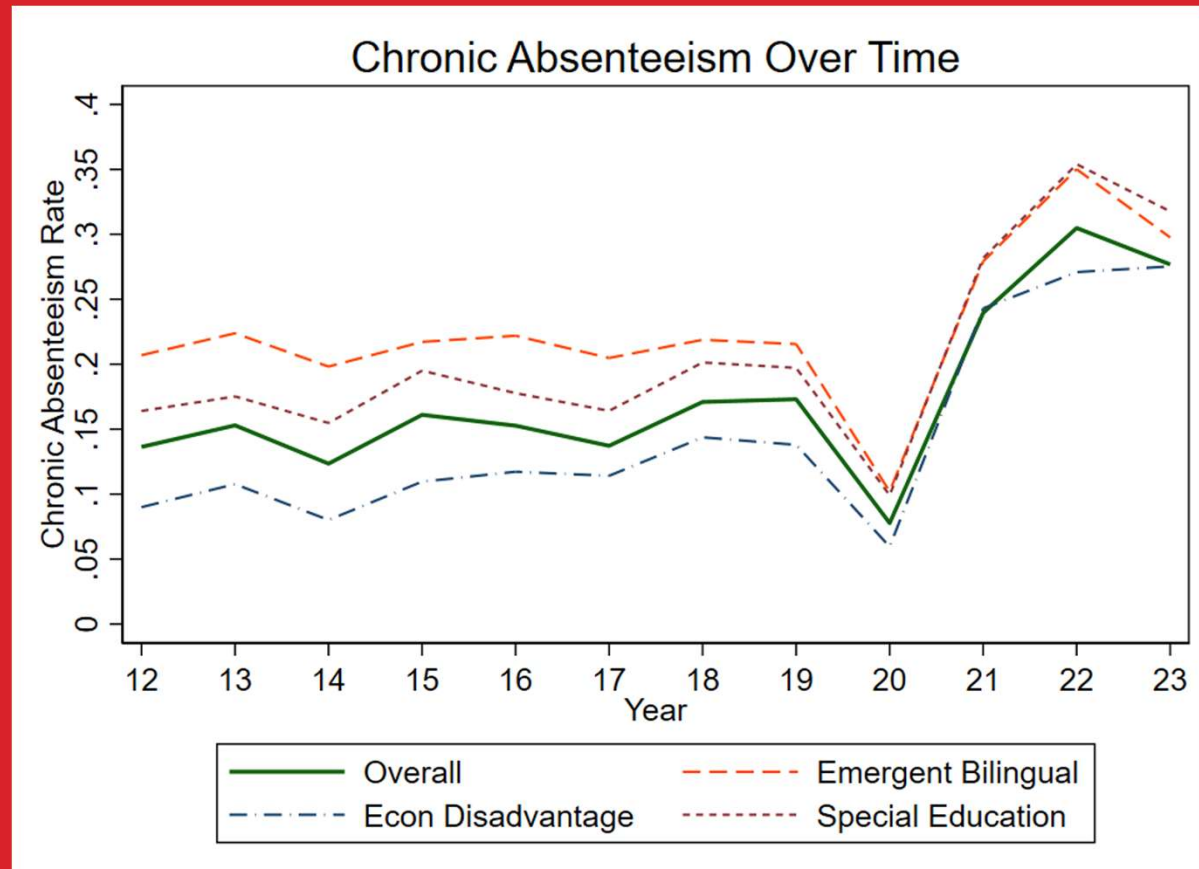
Motivating Our Next Phase

LOCAL AND NATIONAL TRENDS

National Trends	ECISD-Specific
COVID impact – nationally, chronic absenteeism rose from 15% in 2018-19 to 28% in 2021-22 and remains high	Oil and gas industry – students perceive a pathway to a high wage job without educational attainment
Disproportionate impact – chronic absenteeism disproportionately impacts economically disadvantaged students	Mobility – participants report high levels of student mobility within and between ECISD and other districts
Variation across schools – not all schools in a district experience the same levels of absenteeism.	Efficacy of district supports – participants report consistent, helpful engagement with the Community Outreach Center and social workers
Limited evidence – there is limited research, especially post-COVID, on the efficacy of attendance practices	

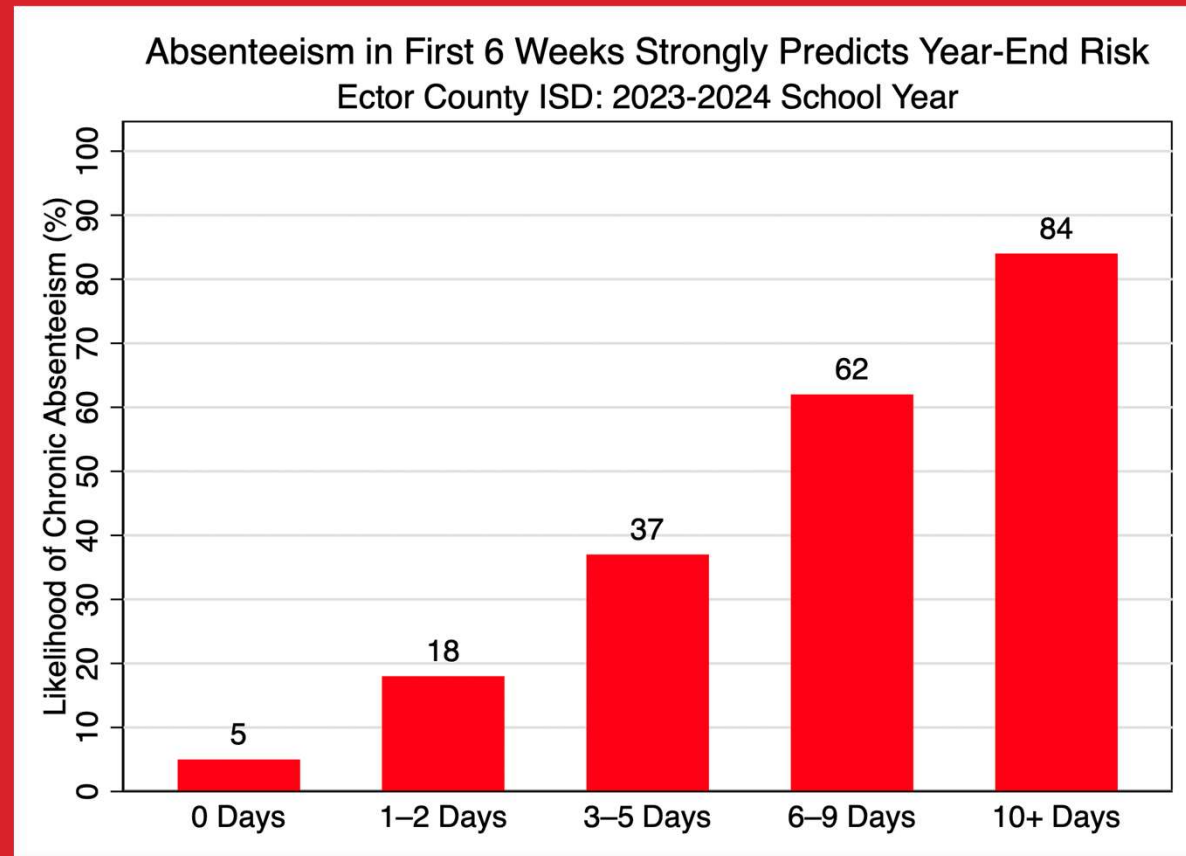
CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM OVER TIME IN ECISD

- Chronic absenteeism spiked post initial COVID-19 school closures
- Emergent Bilingual and Special Education students exhibit higher rates of chronic absenteeism



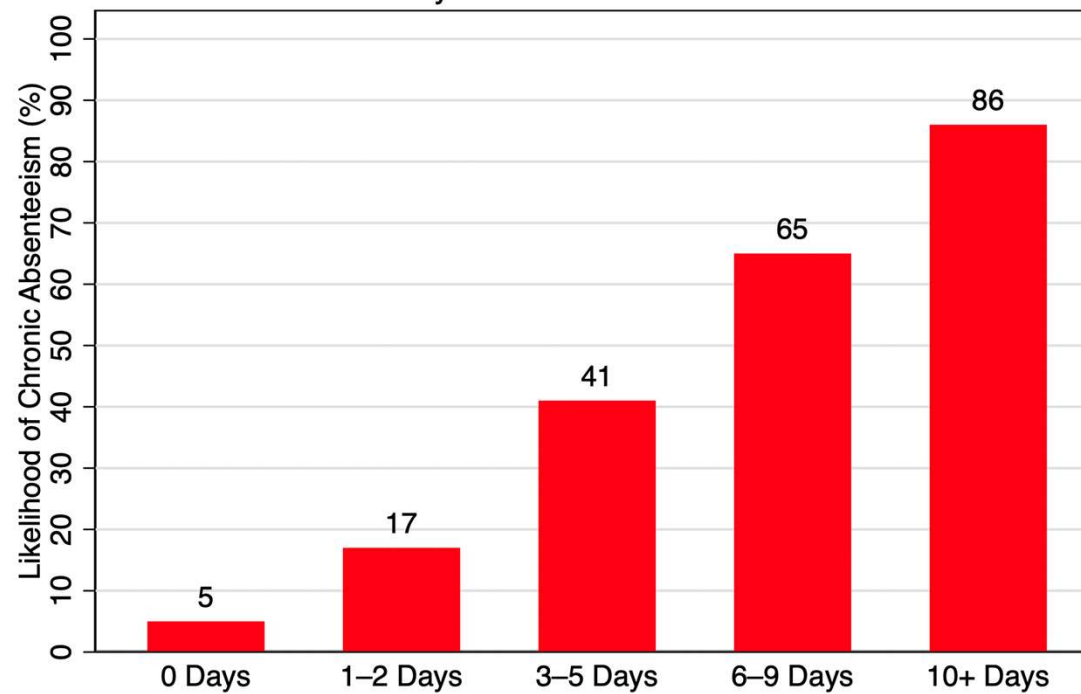
EARLY YEAR ATTENDANCE PREDICTS CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM

- Signs of chronic absenteeism can be seen as early as the first six weeks of the school year
- Trends are the same regardless of student demographics



ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Absenteeism in First 6 Weeks Strongly Predicts Year-End Risk
Elementary School: 2023-2024 School Year

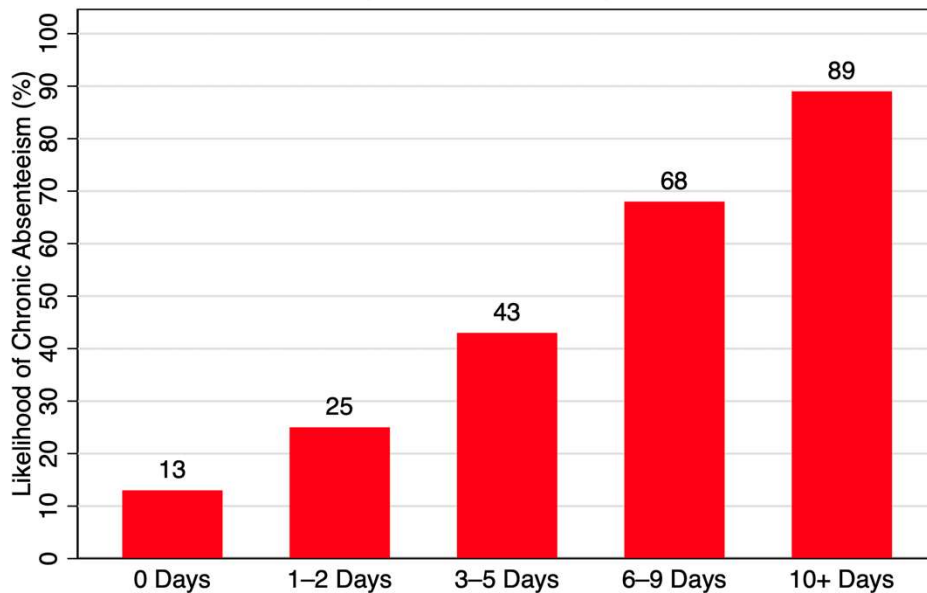


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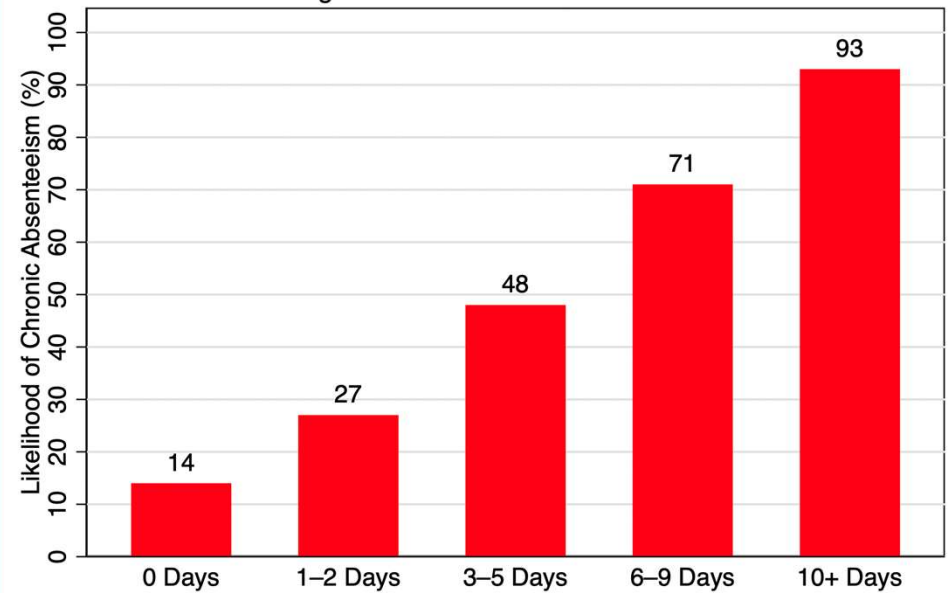
- 0 Break up elementary, middle, and high school
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MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL

Absenteeism in First 6 Weeks Strongly Predicts Year-End Risk
Middle School: 2023-2024 School Year



Absenteeism in First 6 Weeks Strongly Predicts Year-End Risk
High School: 2023-2024 School Year

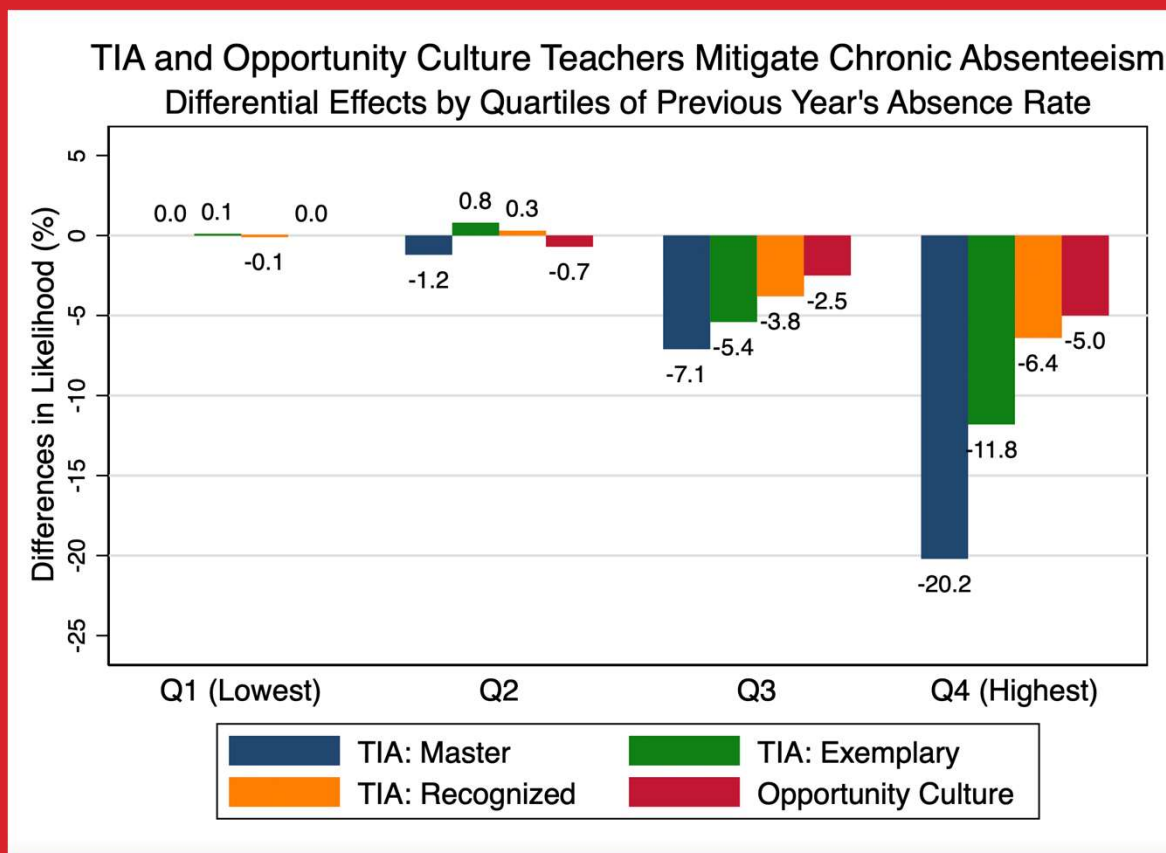


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- 0 Break up elementary, middle, and high school
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TEACHER INCENTIVE ALLOTMENT AND OPPORTUNITY CULTURE

- ECISD's investments in TIA and Opportunity Culture are supporting better attendance
- Teachers are making the greatest impact on students with previous history of poor attendance
- Effects shown are directly attributable to teachers, accounting for differences in school context



**Consistent knowledge
and implementation of
district tiers of
attendance support**

**“They’re [the teachers]
able to let me know who's
absent...[our] attendance
clerk is constantly
updating and reviewing
attendance”
- Principal**

**The Community Outreach
Center is valued by
campuses and frequently
involved in attendance
issues**

**“We have an excellent
student support system
within the district”
- Principal**

**Perceived parental apathy
at the elementary school
level**

“It’s a lack of parents being responsible, they’re just not waking up”

- Principal

“Parents don’t want to bring their child to school”

- Principal

**Staff at schools of choice
perceive reduced
attendance issues**

**“Overall, our attendance
is always really good”**

- Principal

Comprehensive high schools balance size and the need for students to enter and exit during the day

**“We have 143 exterior
doors”**

- Principal

**“Kids come and go all day
long for dual credit”**

- Principal

**Economic conditions and
related student mobility
pose challenges**

“Students will say, 'I can make six figures driving an oil truck'”

- Central Office

“We have students who come from school systems [in other countries] where attendance is not an expectation or a requirement”

- Principal

The 2 mile radius for bus access may pose some challenges, especially for elementary students walking across busy streets

**“Offer transportation for kids coming
across the intersection”
- Attendance Clerk**

**Principals balance
attendance and dropout
metrics, and what they
perceive to be the trade-offs**

“Schools kind of get dinged for attendance. They also get dinged for dropouts...[after turning in data to the State] I would go ahead and withdraw them. I knew I’d take a hit on a dropout, but we would be intentional in [next steps]”

-Principal

NEXT STEPS AND CONSIDERATIONS

Next Steps

- Continue data analysis
- Deeper comparisons across schools
- Survey teacher and principal practices

Considerations

- Work with families to identify root causes of attendance issues
- Consider transportation and walking safety practices
- Invest in high-quality teachers
- Consider teacher-student assignments

Questions

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