



Absenteeism: Impacts and Solutions

Post-pandemic, absenteeism continues to be a problem.

No state has returned to its pre-pandemic attendance rate, with most still reporting “chronic” absenteeism at over 20% ([Return to Learn](#); [Gee et al., 2025](#)). Attempts to change behavior—like nudge letters—are helpful but don’t address the **root cause** of why students aren’t attending, and remote learning options don’t improve social losses and belonging ([Iver et al., 2021](#); [Rogers et al., 2017](#); [Blazar et al., 2025](#)). Partnerships with parents and the strategic use of data are also critical facets of any lasting solution, but there’s still more to tackle at the core of absenteeism.

Here’s what the research tells us:

- **The impact of absenteeism is multifaceted**, resulting in weaker socialization and reading skills and lower grades, test scores, graduation rates, and college enrollment and completion ([Godfried 2014](#)).
- **Every absence matters**. There is no tipping point when it comes to absenteeism. Each and every missed day negatively impacts academic performance ([Allensworth et al., 2025](#); [Blazar et al., 2025](#)).
- **Absences impact all students**. When teachers are managing learning loss, they have less time for the whole class, including those who don’t miss class ([Blazar et al., 2025](#), [May et al., 2024](#)).



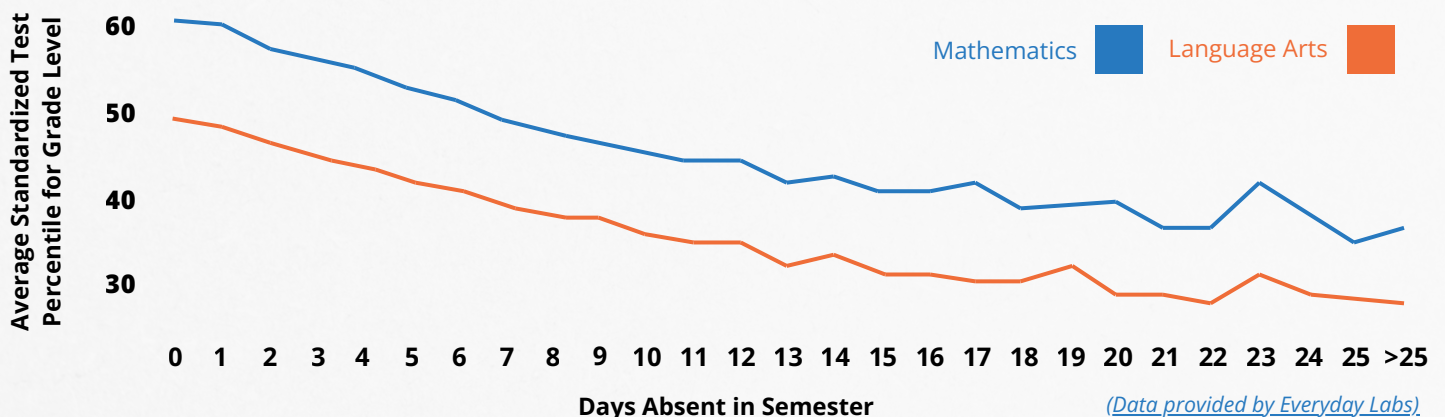
WHAT CAUSES ABSENTEEISM?

The causes of absenteeism are often connected, and so may be the solutions. For example, an increased sense of belonging not only boosts attendance, it also addresses engagement and feelings of academic failure ([Allensworth et al., 2025](#); [Solomon et al., 2000](#); [Schaps et al., 2004](#); [Watson et al., 1997](#)).

The result is additive, not isolated.

THE WATERFALL EFFECT

Like a waterfall, the effects of absenteeism **flow downstream**. Each missed day impacts student achievement, and those losses build from elementary school through middle and high school.



Absenteeism is the symptom. SEL addresses the root cause.

A superintendent facing absenteeism told his staff, “You are the solution.”

Meaning that when students feel welcome and supported, they show up to class ([Allensworth et al., 2025](#); [Berman, 2025](#)).

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is the key to creating this kind of school. It appears in how students are greeted and how adults help them succeed academically and resolve conflicts. It’s in the way teachers and staff engage with students and each other. It’s how students feel in school: safe, supported, and seen.

When students experience SEL, school becomes a place they want to be. Students who show improvements in social and emotional competencies over the course of the year were less likely to be absent ([Johnson et al., 2026](#)). SEL provides strategies for welcoming students back, addressing the academic and social losses caused by absenteeism, and creating a system that cuts off absenteeism at the root cause.

#

Just the facts

In 2022-23, just 42% of students reported that they feel like a part of their school community

([Youth Truth Survey, 2024](#)).

HOW WE HELP

CASEL has developed a comprehensive approach to **boost attendance** by addressing the **three interlocking levers that schools can control**:



RELATIONSHIPS

“I am known.”



SCHOOL CULTURE

“I belong here.”



ENGAGEMENT

“What I’m learning matters.”

Through district partnerships, we offer guidance to:

Strengthen Relationships
through supportive networks for students, welcoming routines, and relationship-centered discipline practices.

Build Community
with practices like purposeful morning and closing meetings, advisory structures, peer connections, and student-led activities.

Engage Students
through collaborative learning practices and strategies to promote engagement for students in the classroom.

Learn more about [CASEL’s initiative on attendance](#) and read our brief, [Connection That Keeps Students Coming Back](#).

Interested in partnering with CASEL to tackle the root causes of absenteeism? Contact opportunities@casel.org.