

What do we Know about Students who Frequently Missed School? 2019 & 2022 Minnesota Student Survey

Because of the renewed attention to chronic absenteeism, this brief report contains information from the Minnesota Student Survey (MSS), taken by students in grade 5, 8, 9, and 11 (see the last page for more background information on the MSS).

In prior presentations to MN legislative committees, Representative Bakeberg has argued that students who are chronically absent experience school differently than students are not chronically absent. For example, students who miss substantial amounts of school do not find what they are learning to be relevant to them or their futures.

The evidence from the MSS supports this assertion. In important and multiple ways, students who miss substantial amounts of school are different than those who do not miss much school.

HIGHLIGHTS:

- The percentage of students missing 3 or more days during the prior 30 days of school increased from 17% in 2019 to 24% in 2022 (a 40% increase). This is consistent with statewide data—although based on statewide data, the chronic absenteeism rate is higher.
- The reasons for missing school have not changed in substantial ways. In 2022, just over 20% of students who missed at least one day of school in the prior 30 days indicated it was because of COVID-19 (the only substantial difference from 2019).
- Students who missed 3 or more days in the prior 30 days of school:
 - Report more than a half-point lower school grades (2.8 versus 3.4 on average).
 - Report lower levels of commitment to learning, social competence, and positive identity and outlook.
 - Report lower levels of teacher and school support as well as family and community support.
 - Report higher levels of mental distress and mental health challenges.
 - Are more likely to engage in substance use (marijuana, alcohol, other drugs).
 - Are more likely to experience discipline in school
 - Are less likely to have college goals.
 - Are less likely to find what they learn in school to be useful.

Does chronic absenteeism cause these differences or do these various school outcomes and contexts cause chronic absenteeism? The research on school outcomes and contexts suggests that there is likely a two-way effect: **chronic absenteeism is likely to cause and be caused by these many school outcomes and contexts—potentially leading to a difficult-to-escape cycle.**

During the last 30 days, how many times did you miss a full day of school? (Do not include school-sponsored activities like field trips, sports, academic or music events)

	2019	2022
None	46.4%	40.6%
Once or twice	36.5%	35.3%
3 to 5 times	12.3%	15.1%
6 to 9 times	3.2%	5.3%
10 or more times	1.6%	3.7%

Note. Included 156,652 students in 2019 and 129,131 students in 2022.

What are the reasons you missed a full or part of a day of school in the last 30 days?
(Mark ALL that apply) [Ordered by most frequent reason in 2022]

Reason	2019	2022
Felt sick	52.4%	53.9%
Medical, dental or other health-related appointment	42.2%	40.2%
Had or exposed to COVID-19	NA	20.6%
Other reason	20.4%	18.6%
Didn't get enough sleep	14.7%	16.9%
Vacation or trip	15.6%	16.2%
Felt very sad, hopeless, anxious, stressed or angry	11.2%	14.2%
Missed your ride or didn't have a way to get to school	9.5%	9.0%
Bored with or not interested in school	6.4%	8.5%
Behind in schoolwork or not prepared for a test or class assignment	5.9%	5.9%
Had to take care of or help a family member, sibling or friend	4.2%	4.2%
Didn't feel safe at school	2.0%	3.8%
Suspended from school	1.4%	1.5%
Had to work (for pay or to help with family business or chores)	1.1%	1.2%
Had no place to shower or wash clothes	0.2%	NA
Wanted to use alcohol or drugs	0.8%	NA

NA = not asked in that year.

In total, 51,116 (42.2% in 2019) and 40,574 (40.2% in 2022) students reported to miss school because of a healthcare appointment. In both years, over two-thirds of these students also reported other reasons for missing school.

Of those missing school only because of healthcare appointments, about 2% to 3% of them reported to miss school 3 or more days. It is clear that the vast majority of students who missed 3 or more days in the past 30 days were not missing only because of healthcare appointments.

Over half of students reported more than one reason (2 on average).
The number of reasons has not changed much from 2019 to 2022.

In both 2019 and 2022, approximately 36% of students missed a full day of school once or twice in the previous 30 days. We removed these students to more directly compare those students who missed 3 or more days to those who did not miss school.

To examine differences of students who missed 3 or more days of school in the prior 30 days compared to those who did not miss school, we examined their responses to other MSS items.

<i>Excluding students who missed 1 or 2 days of school...</i>	2019	2022
Did not miss school in prior 30 days	73%	63%
Missed school 3 days or more in prior 30 days	27%	37%

Note. Reduced sample included 105,215 students in 2019 and 83,587 students in 2022.

A standard in education research is to attend to differences in scores that are at least 0.20 standard deviations (*SDs*), which means that the difference is practically meaningful or not ignorable. Technically, this is referred to as Cohen's standardized mean difference effect size, the number of *SDs* difference between groups. Often, funders are willing to invest in interventions that yield effects of 0.20 *SDs* or larger.

DIFFERENCES for Students who Missed 3 Days of School or More

The first set of characteristics are based on differences of 0.30 *SD* or larger (the effect size is reported in parentheses). Each is reported in terms of the effect for those students who missed school 3 or more days in the previous 30 days.

Students who missed 3 or more days of school reported:

- Lower average grades of 2.8 compared to 3.4 (more than a half grade point difference; effect size of 0.58)
- lower level of commitment to learning (0.40)
- more likely to experience at least one trauma (0.36; based on adverse childhood experiences or ACEs)
- more often bothered by feeling down, depressed, or hopeless (0.39)

- more often bothered by not being able to stop or control worrying (0.36)
- less likely to report very good to excellent health (0.35)
- lower level of social competence (0.34)
- more likely to have used alcohol, marijuana, or other drugs at least once during the previous 12 months (36% compared to 22%) (0.33)
- more likely to experience significant mental distress (0.33)
- feeling less in control of their life and future (0.32)

In addition, there were a set of characteristics where differences were greater than the minimal 0.20 *SDs* threshold often used to report practically meaningful differences.

Students who missed 3 or more days reported:

- to be twice as likely to be sent to the office for discipline (0.29)
- less likely to feel safe at school (0.29)
- lower levels of a sense of belonging in school (0.29)
- less likely to have 4-year college goals (55% compared to 69%) (0.29)
- lower levels of positive identity (0.28)
- lower levels of empowerment (0.28)
- less likely to report school rules are fair (0.28)
- less likely to feel safe going to and from school (0.27)
- lower levels of teacher/school support (0.26)
- lower levels of family/community support (0.25)
- less likely to report things they learn at school are useful (0.24)

Finally, to illustrate ways in which students who missed school 3 or more days in the previous 30 days are *not so different* than those who did not miss school, here are a few items where the differences were relatively small (not practically meaningful).

Students who missed 3 or more days reported to be relatively similar to those who did not miss school regarding:

- eating fruits and vegetables at least once a day (0.13)
- accepting people who are different from them (0.11)
- having pre-diabetes or diabetes (0.09) or allergies that require carrying an EpiPen (0.04)
- where students go after school (0.01 to 0.09 across a variety of places); although slightly less likely to stay at school (0.09) and slightly more likely to go to a park or other outdoor space (0.09) [again all of these differences are not practically meaningful]
- participation in after-school school sponsored activities (0.09); leadership activities such as school councils (0.03); artistic activities such as music, dance, or art (0.06); or community clubs and programs (0.01)

Background on the MSS

An interagency team from the MN Departments of Corrections, Education, Health, Human Services, and Public Safety manages the Minnesota Student Survey (MSS) to monitor important trends and support planning efforts of the collaborating state agencies and local public school districts, as well as other youth serving agencies and organizations across the state.

Although it began in the late 1980s, since 2013, the MSS has been administered every 3 years in grades 5, 8, 9, and 11. All public school districts are invited to participate; it is optional for schools and students. A majority of schools (81% to 70%) and students (64% to 51%) participate.

School District and Student Participation Rates from 2019 & 2022

Population	2019	2022
School Districts	81%	70%
Students	64%	51%

Beginning in 2013, developmental assets and supports were added to the MSS from Search Institute's *Developmental Asset Profile*. Those measures included:

Commitment to Learning

caring about doing well in school, paying attention in class, going to class prepared, interested in learning, finding school learning useful, and being a student is an important part of who I am.

Positive Identity and Outlook

having a sense of control of one's life, feeling good about self and future, dealing well with disappointment and life's challenges, and thinking about one's purpose in life.

Social Competence

saying no to dangerous/unhealthy things, building friendships, expressing feelings appropriately, planning ahead and making good choices, resisting bad influences, resolving conflicts without violence, accepting differences in others, and recognizing the needs and feelings of others.

Empowerment

having a sense of safety at home, at school, and in the neighborhood; feeling valued and appreciated; being included in family roles; and having responsibilities.

Family/Community Support

feeling cared for by parents, other adult relatives, friends, and other adults in the community.

Teacher/School Support

reporting that adults at school treat students fairly and listen to students; that school rules are fair; that teachers care about students and care about and are interested in you.

Sense of Belonging

feeling cared for by parents, adults in the community, and friends; feeling in control of one's life and having influence in one's future; ability to build relationships; feeling valued and appreciated; and accepting others who are different.