

School Medicaid and Sustaining School-Based Mental Health Services to Reduce Chronic Absenteeism

IMPACT OF CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM

Chronic absenteeism* is broadly defined as missing 10 percent or more of the school year for any reason, including excused or unexcused absences as well as suspensions.

When children are not in school, they can fall below grade level, putting them at increased risk of not graduating from high school. Missed school time can also affect relationships and pose long-term negative implications for social-emotional development and executive functioning.

During the pandemic, chronic absence **nearly doubled**, rising from 16% pre-2020 to almost 30% by the 2021-2022 school year.

The latest data shows mostly modest declines nationally and even slight increases in several states.

STUDENT HEALTH IS A LEADING DRIVER OF CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM

Physical health conditions, such as asthma and unmet oral health needs, and mental health conditions like anxiety, depression and trauma are among the leading causes of absenteeism.

Recent data suggest an alarming rise in missed days of school due to mental health needs.

A Youth Trust Survey of 500,000 students found that **nearly half (48%) reported that depression, anxiety and stress are making it difficult for them to do well in school**, a substantial increase from 39% in 2020.

SCHOOL HEALTH SERVICES REDUCE CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM

Research shows that school health services and providers play a critical role in promoting regular attendance.

A 2023 study of three rural school districts in North Carolina found that access to school-based telemedicine services providing physical and mental healthcare reduced the likelihood of chronic absenteeism by 29%.

The presence of a school nurse is associated with fewer missed days of school. Students with high numbers of partial-day absences are likely to consult their school nurse for support, highlighting the significant role school nurses play in recognizing early warning signs and preventing chronic absence.

**Thank you to Attendance Works and Mental Health America. This factsheet draws on information from "The Impact of School Mental Health Services on Reducing Chronic Absenteeism" by Attendance Works, Mental Health America and Healthy Schools Campaign (May 2024).*

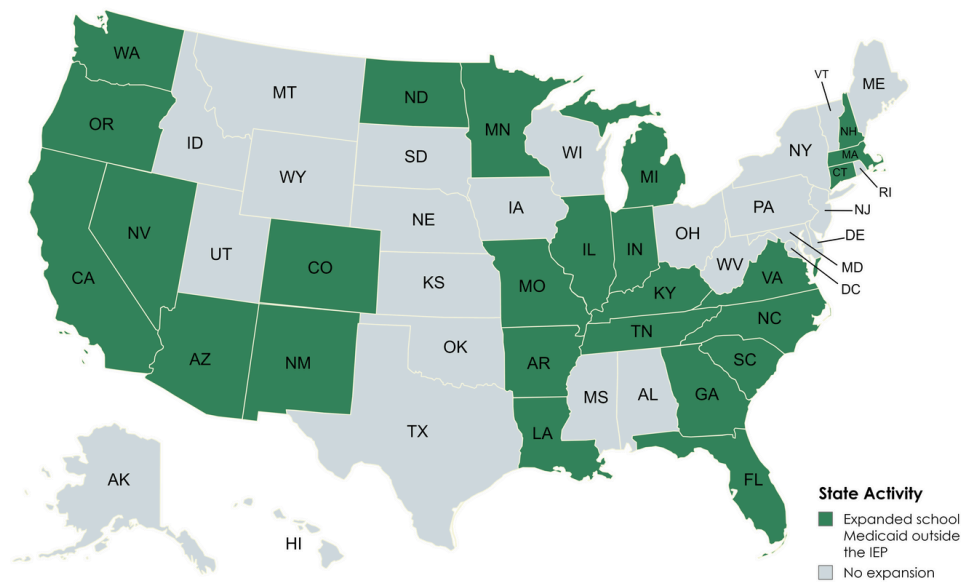
SCHOOL MEDICAID PROVIDES SUSTAINABLE FUNDING FOR STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES THAT CAN REDUCE ABSENTEEISM

Each year, Medicaid pays billions of dollars to cover eligible physical, behavioral and mental health services provided to students. States can expand Medicaid-funded school health services, allowing school districts to receive reimbursement for more types of health services and providers shown to improve attendance.

State school Medicaid programs can generate sustainable revenue for school-based health providers, including nurses, psychologists and counselors. School health providers are on the front lines of the student mental health and chronic absenteeism crises.

As schools face declining resources for mental health services, expanding school Medicaid can sustain and increase school health investments needed to reduce chronic absenteeism.

STATES THAT HAVE MADE ADVANCES IN EXPANDING SCHOOL MEDICAID



States that have expanded billing are experiencing a significant financial boost.

However, not all state expansions look the same. Many states have only partially expanded their school Medicaid program and have more work to do to fully implement and maximize the program's potential to meet student health needs and curb absenteeism.

New federal guidance encourages states to include all Medicaid-covered students and providers in the state Medicaid plan and to permit school districts to bill for all medically necessary services.

States should cover a comprehensive range of services and school health providers in their school Medicaid program. The resulting increased Medicaid reimbursement can better support school district efforts to address the health-related drivers of chronic absenteeism.

The chart below includes examples of commonly eligible health services and providers:

School Health Services	School Health Providers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physician services • Nursing services • Psychology • Counseling • Social work services • Vision services • Audiology services • Speech therapy • Occupational therapy • Physical therapy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nurse practitioner • Registered nurse • Licensed practical nurse • Health technician • Certified school psychologist • Credentialed school counselor • Credentialed school social worker • Licensed marriage and family therapist • Speech language pathologist • Occupational therapist
School Mental Health Services	School Mental Health Providers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Psychological assessments • Psychosocial assessments • Individual psychology and counseling • Group psychology and counseling • Medication administration • Peer support services • Case management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Licensed psychologist • Certified school psychologist • Licensed counselor • Credentialed school counselor • Licensed social worker • Credentialed school social worker • Licensed marriage and family therapist • Behavior health analysts • Registered nurse

Resources to Get Started:

- **U.S. Department of Education** and **Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services** offer resources to help states expand school Medicaid services. [Refer to this step-by-step fact sheet to get started.](#)
- **Healthy Students, Promising Futures**, a Healthy Schools Campaign initiative, offers publications and resources to help you learn more, including the comprehensive [“Guide to Expanding Medicaid-Funded School Health Services,”](#) which provides an introduction to school Medicaid expansion and outlines opportunities to leverage more funding for student health services.