

Understanding Student Attendance

What is student attendance?

Student attendance refers to the frequency and consistency with which students are present and participate in school activities on scheduled school days during the school year.

Why is measuring successful transition important?

Frequent and consistent attendance is critical because research shows that attendance issues in earlier grades tend to worsen in later grades and predict poor academic performance and a higher likelihood of dropping out of school before graduation.¹ Students who are not in school not only lose instructional time and risk falling behind, but also miss opportunities to connect with trusted adults, form strong peer relationships, and access valuable support services provided at full-service community schools.²

In addition, students who struggle with the transition from elementary to middle school (entering 6th grade) or from middle to high school (entering 9th grade) may become disengaged and therefore attend school less regularly.^{3,4} In contrast, students who experience a smooth transition between school levels are likely to maintain higher levels of engagement and therefore are more likely to attend on a regular basis. As a result, tracking student attendance from grades 6 through 9 provides one way to evaluate the extent to which students successfully transition from elementary to middle school and then from middle to high school.

Who gets measured?

Per U.S. Department of Education guidelines, Ascend tracks attendance on an annual basis for students in grades 6 through 9 at the three Promise Neighborhood schools serving these grades: Milner and M.L. King, Jr. middle schools and Weaver High School.

How is student attendance measured?

Per U.S. Department of Education and Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) guidelines, student attendance is measured through two separate indicators: the average daily attendance (ADA) rate, required to be measured by the [*Every Child Succeeds Act of 2015*](#), and the percentage of students who are chronically absent (CA).

According to CSDE policy, a student is considered “in attendance” if they spend at least half of the day participating in school activities. For a given student, average daily attendance is the percentage of days they are marked as “in attendance” divided by the total number of school days in which they were enrolled. **Average daily attendance (ADA)** can also be used to describe a group of students (e.g., a grade or school) as the weighted average of all students’ ADA, calculated by:

1. Counting the total number of days all students were in attendance (e.g., number of days in attendance for student 1 plus the number of days in attendance for student 2, and so forth) and the total number of days all students were enrolled (e.g., number of days student 1 was enrolled plus the number of days student 2 was enrolled, and so forth).*
2. Dividing the total number of days all students were in attendance by the total number of days all students were enrolled.
3. Multiplying by 100 to get the average daily attendance (i.e., percentage of enrolled days students were in attendance, on average) during the school year.

**This accounts for the fact that not all students are enrolled in a given school for the same number of days (e.g., if a student transfers in or out of the school during the school year).*

For ADA, higher percentages are better, showing that students are active and present for more days on average during the school year.

When a student is not in attendance for 10% or more school days *for any reason*, they are considered “chronically absent.” The **chronic absenteeism (CA)** rate measures the percentage of students in a grade or school who are chronically absent and is calculated by:

1. Counting how many students were chronically absent (missed more than 10% of enrolled school days) during the school year.
2. Counting how many students were enrolled in the school year.
3. Dividing the number of students who were chronically absent by the total number of students enrolled.
4. Multiplying by 100 to get the percentage of students who were chronically absent during the school year.

For CA, lower percentages are better, showing that fewer students are missing 10% or more school days.

Where does the data come from?

The information comes from publicly available data from the Connecticut State Department of Education (see public-edsight.ct.gov), though some details are limited due to privacy rules. This data lets Ascend track attendance rates each year by grade level (focused on grades 6 – 9), by school, and for the three Promise Neighborhood schools serving 6th – 9th graders combined. For comparison, Ascend also calculates ADA and CA for other Hartford Public Schools and for schools across the state.

How to Read the Graphs

The graphs below show the average daily attendance (ADA) and chronic absenteeism (CA) rate for 6th – 9th grade students from 2021-22 to 2024-25.

The orange line in each graph shows the ADA or CA rate for the Ascend Promise Neighborhood middle and high schools, the blue line shows the ADA or CA rate for the other Hartford Public Schools, and the pink line shows the ADA or CA for all other Connecticut public schools. The dashed green line represents the Ascend target value set for these indicators for the years covered by the Promise Neighborhood grant.

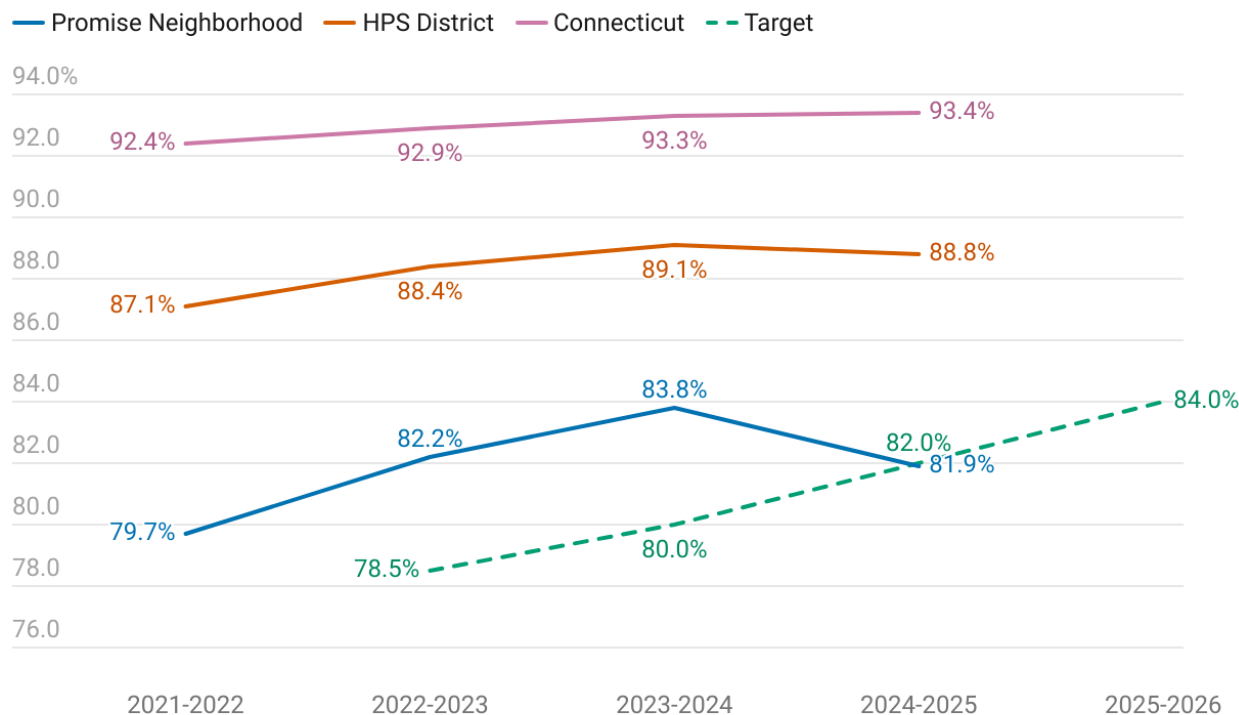
What do the results show?

Average Daily Attendance (ADA)

For ADA, higher numbers are better!

Average Daily Attendance (ADA)

Percentage of enrolled days students were in attendance, on average



Years refer to school years. For example, 2024-2025 refers to the school year from Aug 2024 through Jun 2025.
Chart: Connecticut Data Collaborative • Source: Connecticut State Department of Education • Created with Datawrapper

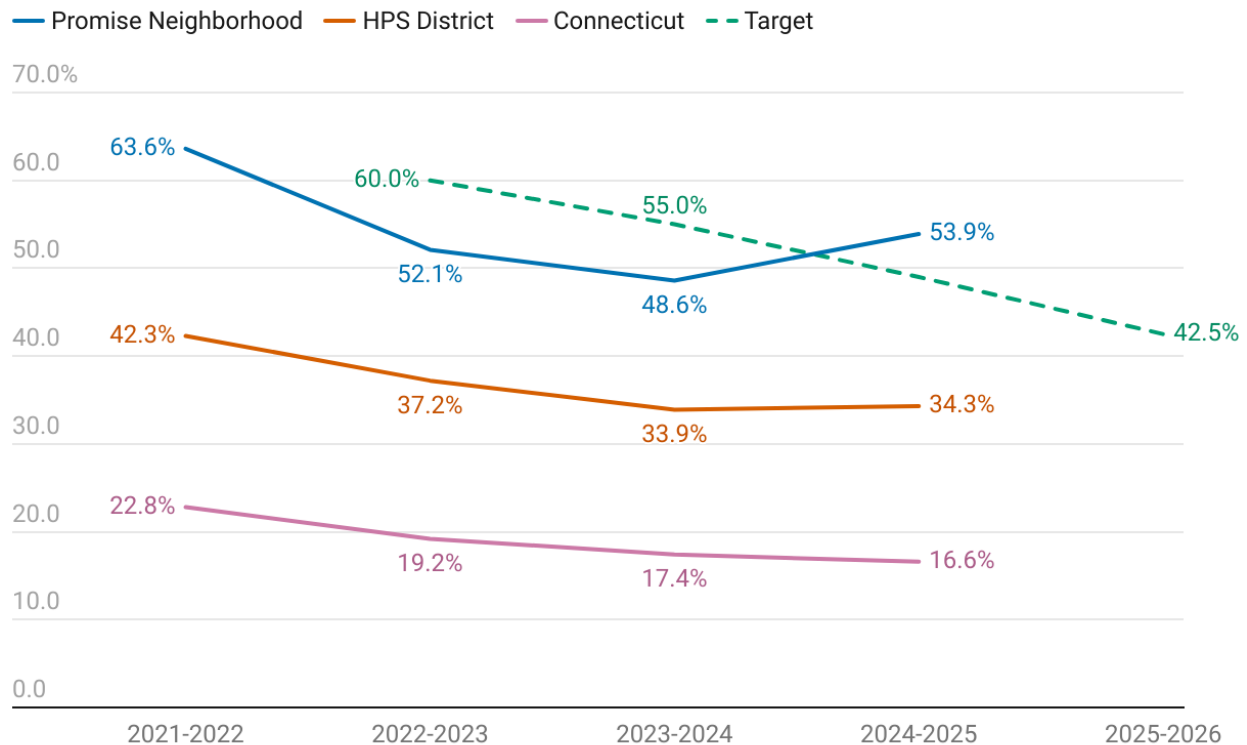
- In 2024-25, students at Ascend Promise Neighborhood schools attended school an average of 81.9% of days they were enrolled, essentially meeting the target value set for the year.
- Compared to 2023-24, after two years of improvement in ADA, attendance for 6th–9th grade students attending the Ascend Promise Neighborhood schools decreased by 1.9 points in the 2024–25 school year.
 - Further inspection of results by grade levels indicates a likely “cohort effect” – this year’s 8th grade students accounted for the largest decline in ADA in 2024–25, and they are the *same cohort* of students who accounted for the largest decline in ADA in 2023–24 (when they were 7th graders).
 - This same cohort also accounted for only a small improvement in ADA in 2022–23 (when they were 6th graders), relative to students in other grades that year.
- Despite the recent decline in ADA in 2024-25, Ascend Promise Neighborhood schools have achieved a 2.2-point increase in ADA over the baseline and have met or exceeded the target value set for each year of the grant so far.
- Ascend Promise Neighborhood schools continue to have lower ADA than other schools in the district and the state. While ADA has generally trended upward for all three over the past four years, the Ascend Promise Neighborhood schools had been improving faster and closing the gap with the rest of the district and state until 2024-25, when the decline in ADA for Ascend Promise Neighborhood schools diminished some of those earlier gains.

Chronic Absenteeism (CA)

For CA, lower numbers are better!

Chronic Absenteeism

Percentage of students who are chronically absent during a school year*



Years refer to school years. For example, 2024-2025 refers to the school year from Aug 2024 through Jun 2025.

*A student is considered "chronically absent" if they are absent for any reason for 10% or more school days.

Chart: Connecticut Data Collaborative • Source: Connecticut State Department of Education • Created with Datawrapper

- In 2024-25, 53.9% of students attending Ascend Promise Neighborhood schools were chronically absent, which is 4.9 points above the target value for the year.
- Compared to 2023-24 and after two years of declines, CA increased by 5.3 points for 6th–9th graders attending Ascend Promise Neighborhood schools in the 2024-25 school year.
 - Further inspection of results by grade levels indicates that the increase in CA rates was due primarily to the cohort of students who were in 8th grade last year. Their CA rate jumped 18.3 points to 54.5% in 2024–25.
 - They also represent the same cohort of students who experienced a 13-point increase in the CA rate in 2023–24, while the CA rate declined for all other cohorts that year.

- Despite the increase in CA last year, Ascend Promise Neighborhood schools have achieved a net 9.7-point decrease in CA since baseline, beating the target value in two of the last three years.
- Ascend Promise Neighborhood schools continue to experience higher rates of chronic absenteeism than other schools in the district and state, but the gap has narrowed slightly since the start of Ascend. While CA has generally trended downward for all three over the past four years, the Ascend Promise Neighborhood schools had been improving faster and closing the gap with the rest of the district and state until 2024-25, when the increase in CA for Ascend Promise Neighborhood schools diminished some of those earlier gains.

Why is this happening?

Since 2017-18, Hartford Public Schools has been working with [Attendance Works](#), a nationally recognized leader in attendance strategies. Together, they have been working to develop and implement a comprehensive strategy for addressing attendance challenges and rising chronic absenteeism rates, starting with collecting information from families regarding reasons for their students' absences. Some of the most prominent reasons parents report for student absences include^{5,6}:

- Acute illness or chronic medical conditions
- Attending medical appointments
- Student/family traveled out of the country
- Student/family were on vacation
- Family emergency

To address rising student absenteeism rates, which doubled across the state and nation after the COVID Pandemic, the district coordinated several previously siloed roles and initiatives, including the Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS), Family & Community Support Service Providers (FCSSPs), and home visits within school-based Attendance Culture/Climate and Engagement (ACE) teams. ACE teams were then leveraged to identify and address the most common root causes or systemic barriers to students attending school, including:

- Health issues such as asthma, diabetes, mental health, or oral health⁷
- Food insecurity⁷

- Lack of transportation to/from school (e.g., no nearby school bus stops)⁷
- Unsafe routes to school⁷
- Student and/or family disengagement⁸
- Work or family childcare obligations placed on older students⁹

More research is needed to better understand the current trends behind attendance and chronic absenteeism, especially at the Ascend Promise Neighborhood schools.

Similarly, further input is needed from students and families to gain their perspective on potential root causes and the most effective solutions.

How can Ascend help improve student attendance?

Several programs within Ascend support student attendance and more successful transitions between school levels for children in our neighborhood:

[Easy Breathing](#) is an evidence-based asthma management program offered through school nurses, primary care clinics, and Community Health Services. This program is designed to:

- Improve recognition of asthma
- Assist clinicians in developing a systematic, standardized approach to asthma management in their practice
- Decrease the need for unnecessary medical services and reduce health care costs for people with asthma

[Ascend Family Navigators](#), from The Village for Families and Children, provide additional supports for the Ascend Promise Neighborhood schools. They:

- Hold regular hours within each school to work with students and families
- Collaborate with Family & Community Service Support Providers (FCSSPs) and other school-based staff to identify barriers to attendance
- Connect students and their families to services and resources within the community

Hartford Public Schools offers multiple programs, services, and supports to students and their families as part of the Full-Service Community School model implemented at each of the Promise Neighborhood schools. These services may be provided by either school staff (e.g., FCSSPs, School Social Workers) or community-based organization partner(s), or both working in conjunction with each other. They provide the following types of support to students and to other members of their families:

- **Integrated Student Supports** (at all schools) promote students' academic success by developing and coordinating supports that target academic and non-academic barriers to achievement, including providing resources and supports to meet basic needs.
- **Family Engagement** services (at all schools) involve outreach and engagement with family members, including providing direct assistance to family members of the student. A few examples include Parent Engagement Groups, home visits, back-to-school events, and parent-teacher conferences.
- **Referrals** to outside organizations (at all schools) address needs that require a higher level of care or access to resources available outside of the school, such as housing, employment, food, and energy assistance.
- **Family Resource Centers** (at S.A.N.D. and Wish elementary schools) provide access to a range of services that support children's healthy development and education. They provide early childhood education, child care, and family support services to meet the specific needs that are presented when engaging with families.
- **Career and Workforce Development** (at MLK and Milner middle schools and Weaver High School) includes programs and services that support post-secondary education and career development, in-school or out-of-school, such as those that link students to higher education, vocational training, or work-based learning opportunities, or connect classroom learning to career pathways. This area also includes efforts to engage parents and provide financial resources for continued learning and/or student transition assistance.

The **Truancy and Family with Service Needs Court Diversion Program**, in partnership with the City of Hartford Department of Families, Children, & Youth (DFCY) and The Village for Families and Children, helps:

- Address students' truancy concerns
- Address any underlying issues contributing to absentee patterns

- Return students to the path of academic success

The data reveals an opportunity to continue engaging these programs to support student attendance and decrease chronic absenteeism.

References

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