

Chronic Absenteeism at Union Public Schools



Parent, Teacher & Student Surveys – April 2025



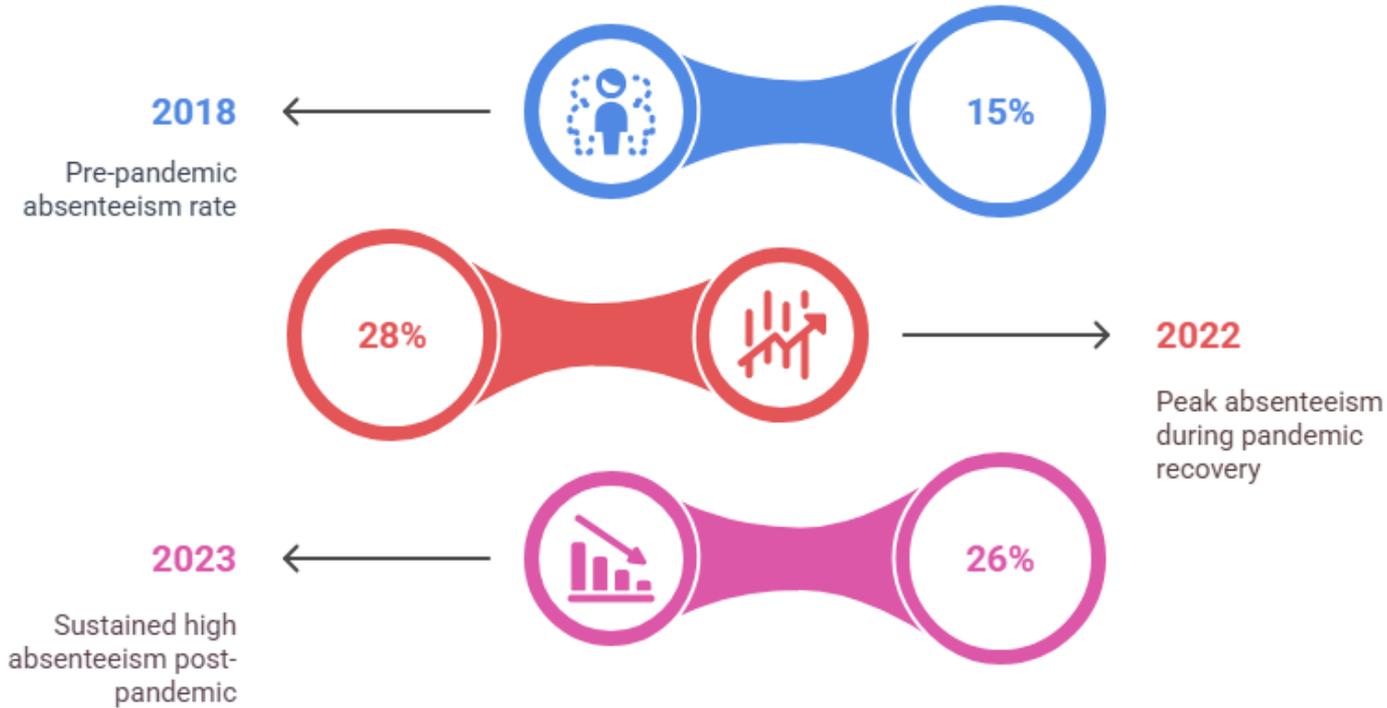
Union Public Schools

Chronic Absenteeism

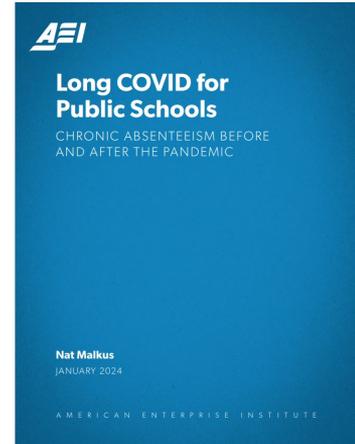
Missing **10% or more** of school days – excused and unexcused absences, as well as suspensions.



National Chronic Absenteeism Rates (2018-2023)

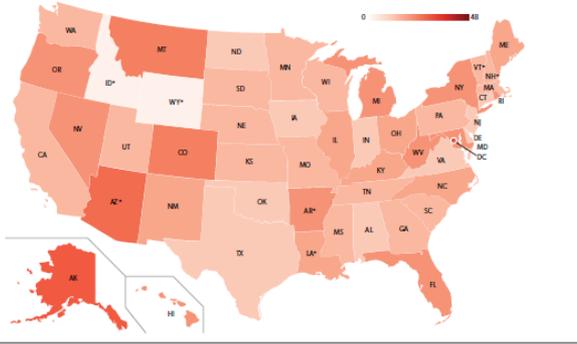


(*Source: [Long COVID for Public Schools: Chronic Absenteeism Before and After the Pandemic](#), by Nat Malkus, American Enterprise Institute, Jan. 2024).



Chronic Absenteeism – National Data

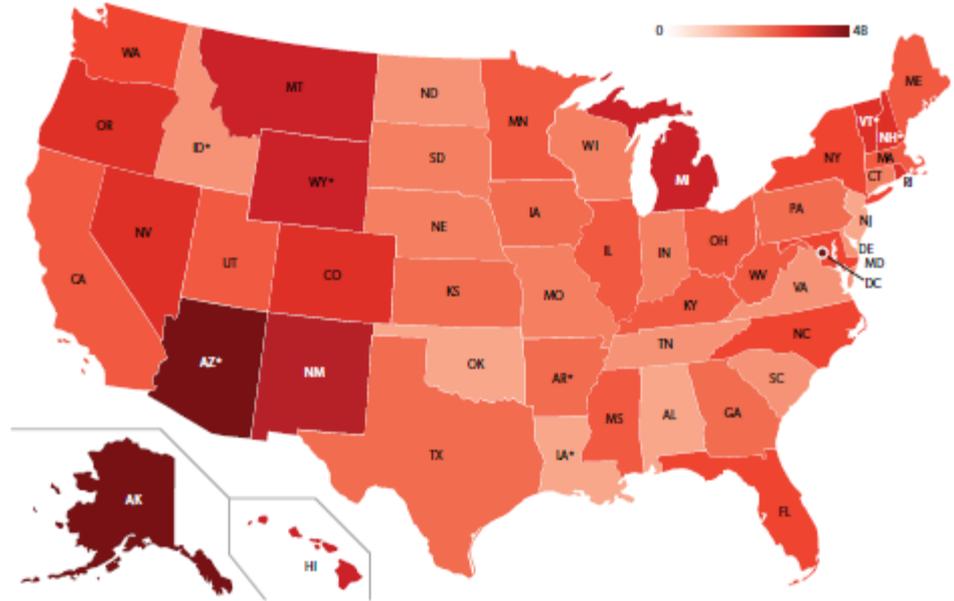
Figure 1. State Average Chronic Absenteeism: 2019



Note: *Estimates are based on data from Ed.gov.

Source: Return to Learn Tracker, "Chronic Absenteeism: 2017–2023," American Enterprise Institute, January 2024, <https://www.returntolearntacker.net>.

Figure 2. State Average Chronic Absenteeism: 2022



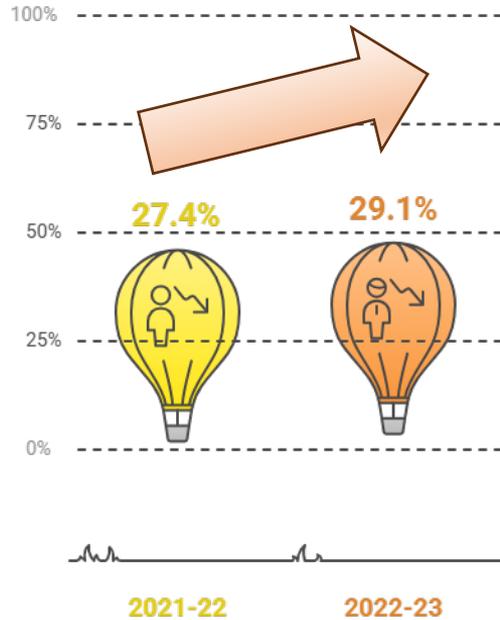
Note: *Estimates are based on data from Ed.gov.

Source: Return to Learn Tracker, "Chronic Absenteeism: 2017–2023," American Enterprise Institute, January 2024, <https://www.returntolearntacker.net>.

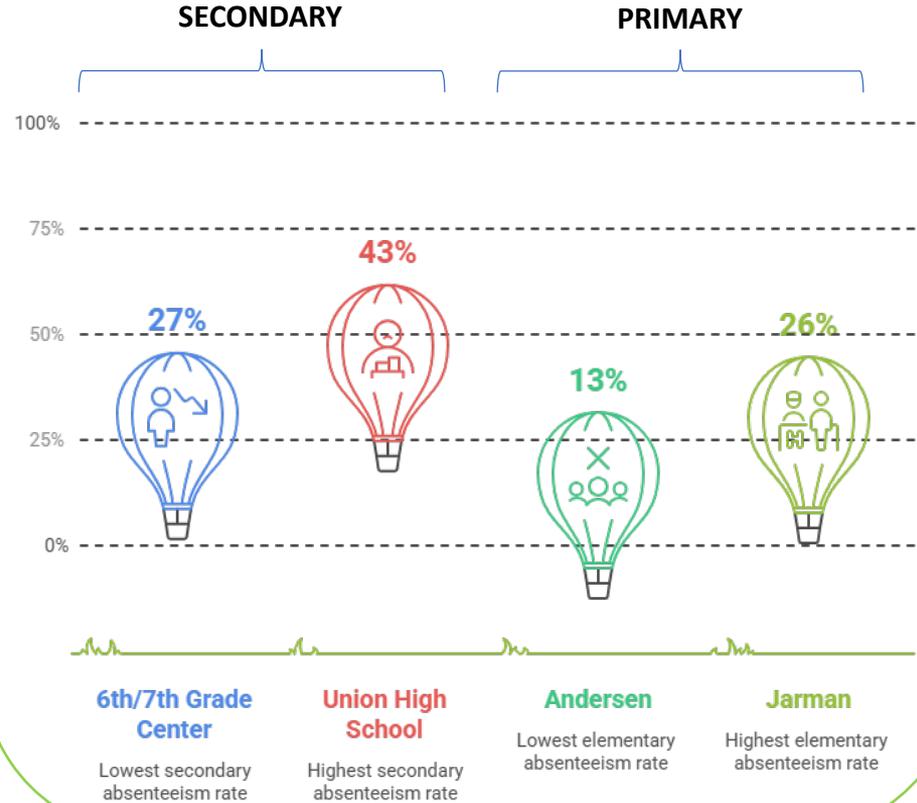
“Chronic absenteeism is likely public schools’ greatest post-pandemic challenge.” – Nate Malkus, American Enterprise Institute

(*Source: [Long COVID for Public Schools: Chronic Absenteeism Before and After the Pandemic](#), by Nat Malkus, American Enterprise Institute, Jan. 2024).

Chronic Absenteeism Rates at Union Public Schools



Chronic Absenteeism Rates in Union Public Schools



Planning Meetings

In preparation for this districtwide initiative to reduce chronic absenteeism, we had a group of about 30 district leaders who met frequently throughout the school year to analyze student attendance data, develop action plans and to make changes as the year progressed. Collectively, cross-functional teams formulated best practices based on the best national research.

Attendance Support Action Steps					
Review & Assess Action Steps					
Department	Key Contact(s)	In what way has your department followed through?	Which action steps still need to be taken?	Which steps will be taken before we meet again in March?	How do you see those steps supporting the district or school goals for daily attendance and/or chronic absenteeism?
Athletics/Fine Arts	M				
Child Nutrition	Br	HOPE Scott Pennington Jessica Hogaboom	We work directly with school counselors to implement the ASCA National Model, an evidence-based framework; This year, all counselors were instructed to create attendance goals; This process includes a thorough 3-year data review.	Stakeholder interviews, creating goals and using evidence-based interventions to work with a specific group of students;	We will meet with all counselors 1:1 to prepare for the school counselor impact showcase on April 17th; At the showcase, all counselors will present their data, goal, intervention, and results;
Communications	CH	McKinney-Vento (Homeless students Unaccompanied Youth Homeless Youth)	Myriam Puleo Erica Robbins	Reviewed weekly attendance, increased phone calls and tracking kids down;	Reviewing weekly attendance, increased phone calls and tracking kids down;
EL	Amy Kara S	Operations	Josh Robinson	Worked on building meaningful interpersonal relationships between staff/students; Continue to build and maintain facilities conducive to learning and motivating to attend.	Continuing commitment to build relationships and maintain facilities as previously described;
Enrollment	Kelly Br	Security	Ty Wardlow	Coordinators are part of their school's attendance team, and they are making calls to families struggling with attendance;	Be more intentional about enrolling students in OST at risk for chronic absenteeism;
		Teaching & Learning Community Schools	Kulsum Siddiqui	Yes we have;	Begin looking at the data tree;
		Teaching & Learning Curriculum Specialists	Shannan Bittle Melissa Brown Andrea Gaines Julie Gardner Faith Rattedal Nia Schell		Conversations with teachers to continue awareness;

District Attendance Summary					
as of December 6, 2024					
Site	ADA Rate to Date 2023	ADA Rate to Date 2024	ADA 2023 to 2024	ADA Goal	ADA Rate to Goal
DISTRICT	91.93%	92.30%	0.3700%	93%	-0.7000%
Andersen	94.34%	94.54%	0.2002%	96%	-1.4564%
Boevers	94.22%	94.21%	-0.0053%	95%	-0.7863%
Cedar Ridge	94.32%	94.19%	-0.1310%	96%	-1.8121%
Clark	94.35%	93.43%	-0.9161%	96%	-2.5691%
Darnaby	94.88%	94.62%	-0.2631%	96%	-1.3792%
Grove	93.94%	94.51%	0.5669%	95%	-0.4884%
Jarman	94.29%	94.36%	0.0692%	94%	0.3582%
Jefferson	93.67%	93.88%	0.2070%	94%	-0.1227%
McAuliffe	94.45%	94.01%	-0.4439%	95%	-0.9919%
Moore	93.69%	93.95%	0.2575%	95%	-1.0513%
Ochoa	93.42%	93.32%	-0.0943%	95%	-1.6772%
Peters	94.79%	94.70%	-0.0897%	96%	-1.3037%
Rosa Park	93.63%	92.87%	-0.7549%	95%	-2.1280%
6/7th Grade	93.15%	93.55%	0.3963%	93%	0.5498%
8th Grade	91.11%	91.49%	0.3804%	91%	0.4895%
UFA	90.45%	91.29%	0.8421%	92%	-0.7057%
High School	87.80%	89.00%	1.2042%	90%	-1.0000%

Site	Chronic Abs % November 2023	Chronic Abs % November 2024	C-Abs % 2023 to 2024	C-Abs % Goal	C-Abs % Rate to Goal
DISTRICT	24.90%	23.60%	-1.300%	23%	0.600%
Andersen	15.72%	12.86%	-2.865%	14%	-1.143%
Boevers	17.98%	17.39%	-0.586%	13%	4.391%
Cedar Ridge	17.43%	17.10%	-0.327%	15%	2.102%
Clark	16.12%	19.91%	3.789%	13%	6.911%
Darnaby	13.60%	12.33%	-1.267%	12%	0.329%
Grove	18.84%	14.44%	-4.396%	13%	1.442%
Jarman	16.76%	16.52%	-0.236%	15%	1.523%
Jefferson	21.04%	14.79%	-6.246%	21%	-6.211%
McAuliffe	15.10%	17.68%	2.586%	19%	-1.316%
Moore	20.82%	19.29%	-1.534%	17%	2.290%
Ochoa	21.74%	20.85%	-0.889%	22%	-1.149%
Peters	15.06%	12.87%	-2.185%	10%	2.874%
Rosa Park	20.89%	22.60%	1.716%	18%	4.602%
6/7th Grade	20.80%	19.89%	-0.915%	19%	0.886%
8th Grade	28.62%	26.71%	-1.910%	29%	-2.291%
UFA	28.81%	28.15%	-0.670%	29%	-0.855%
High School	38.37%	35.47%	-2.898%	37%	-1.533%

Planning

OBJECTIVES

- Reduce chronic absenteeism rates at Union Public Schools by **7% districtwide** during the 2024-25 school year (from 30% to 23%).
- Increase the **daily attendance rate** from **90%** to **93%** districtwide during the same period.



TARGET AUDIENCE

- **Students** – Mainly the 1,903 students (10-15%) who are chronically absent at Union
- **Parents** – Shared responsibility for student attendance
- **Teachers/staff** – Can reinforce student messaging through supportive behavior



Chronic Absenteeism

- Something has changed in our thinking and behavior
- Maybe it's time we look at our audiences and their attitudes
 - **PARENTS**
 - **TEACHERS**
 - **STUDENTS**
(grades 6 -12)



PARENTS & TEACHERS

What are the most important things your school could do to help improve students' daily attendance?



PARTICIPATION

Breakdown of Participation



1,859
Participants

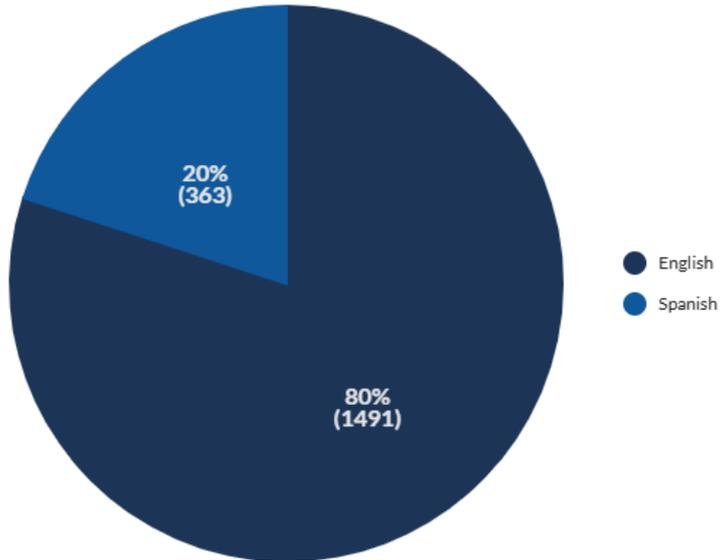


1,199
Thoughts



16,932
Ratings

Participation Languages





PARTICIPATION

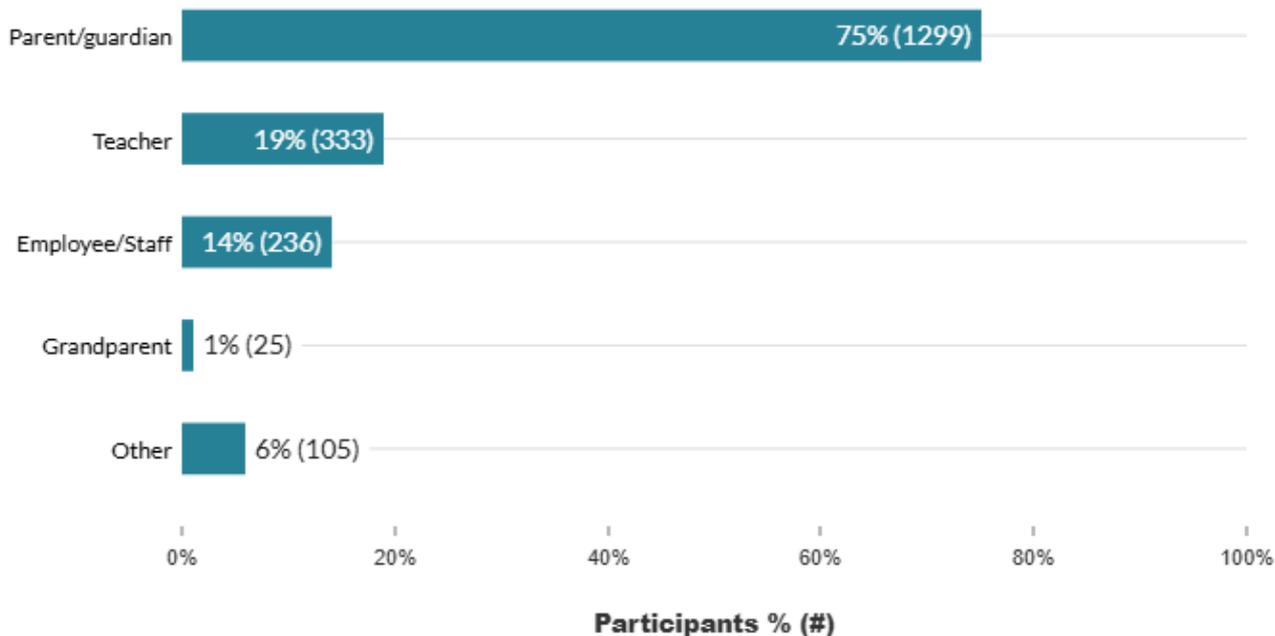
Breakdown of Participation



Q1 | What is your role with relationship to Union? (Check all that apply)

Answered: 1727

Not answered: 132 ?





PARTICIPATION

Breakdown of Participation



1691
Responses



Which school(s) are you/your children associated with? (Select all that apply)

%		Answer (Multiple select)	%		Answer (Multiple select)
4%	(63)	Andersen Elementary	21%	(353)	Union 6/7 th Grade Center
4%	(69)	Boevers Elementary	10%	(175)	Union 8 th Grade Center
5%	(93)	Cedar Ridge Elementary	9%	(158)	Union Freshman Academy
4%	(66)	Clark Elementary	27%	(450)	Union High School
7%	(126)	Darnaby Elementary	2%	(26)	Union Alternative School
5%	(88)	Grove Elementary	5%	(90)	Don't have children attending Union
5%	(93)	Jarman Elementary			
5%	(84)	Jefferson Elementary			
5%	(80)	McAuliffe Elementary			
4%	(61)	Moore Elementary			
7%	(121)	Ochoa Elementary			
4%	(76)	Peters Elementary			
5%	(83)	Rosa Parks Elementary			
2%	(40)	Rosa Parks Early Childhood Educ. Center			



PARTICIPATION

Breakdown of Participation



300

Responses

TEACHER QUESTION

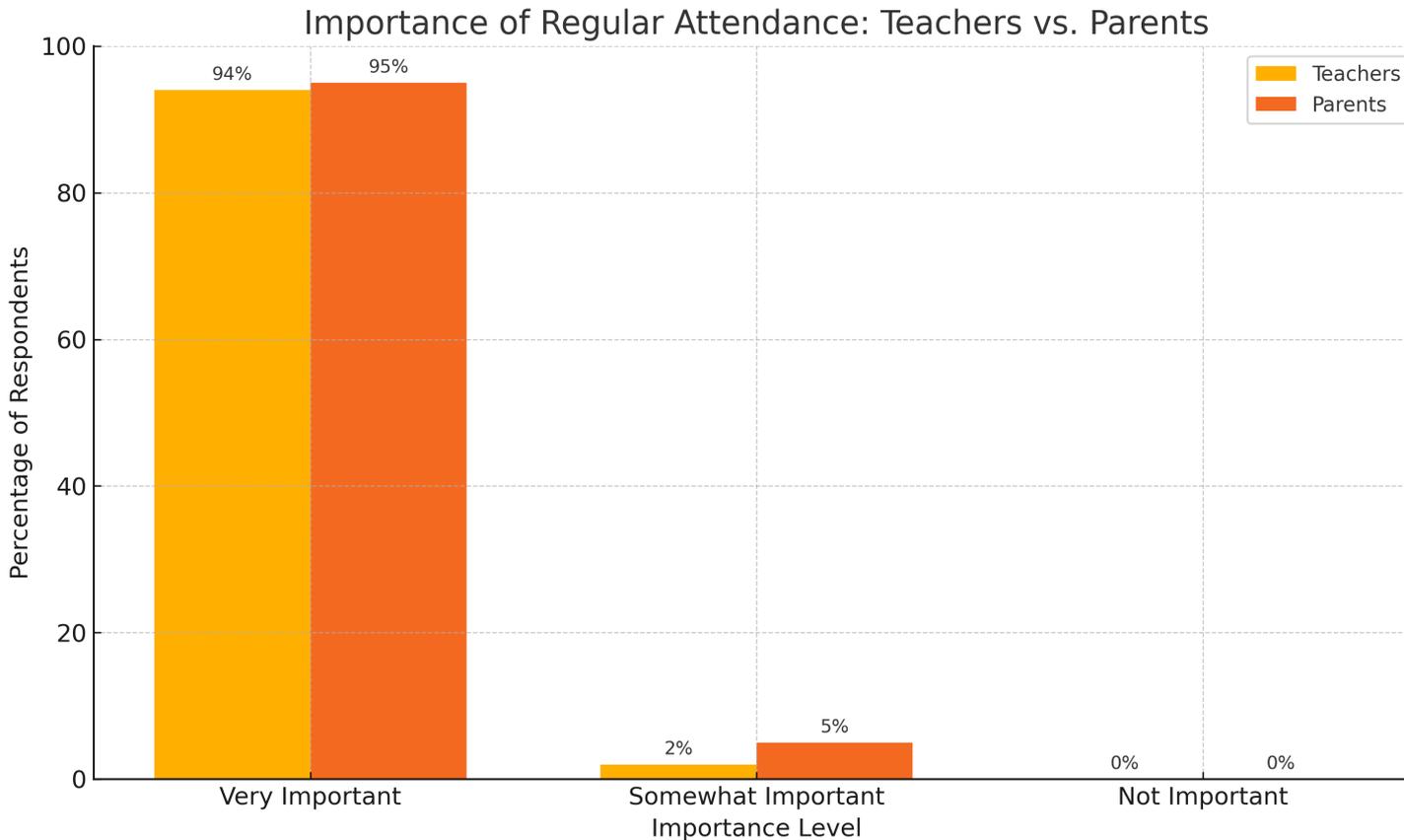
Which grade(s) do you currently teach? (Check all that apply)

%		Answer <i>(Multiple select)</i>
12%	(36)	Pre-K
18%	(55)	Kindergarten
18%	(54)	1st grade
18%	(55)	2nd grade
20%	(61)	3rd grade
21%	(64)	4th grade
22%	(65)	5th grade
9%	(26)	6th grade
9%	(26)	7th grade
9%	(26)	8th grade
10%	(31)	9th grade
16%	(49)	10th grade
17%	(50)	11th grade
14%	(41)	12th grade
1%	(3)	Adult Ed





Importance of Regular Attendance: Teachers vs. Parents

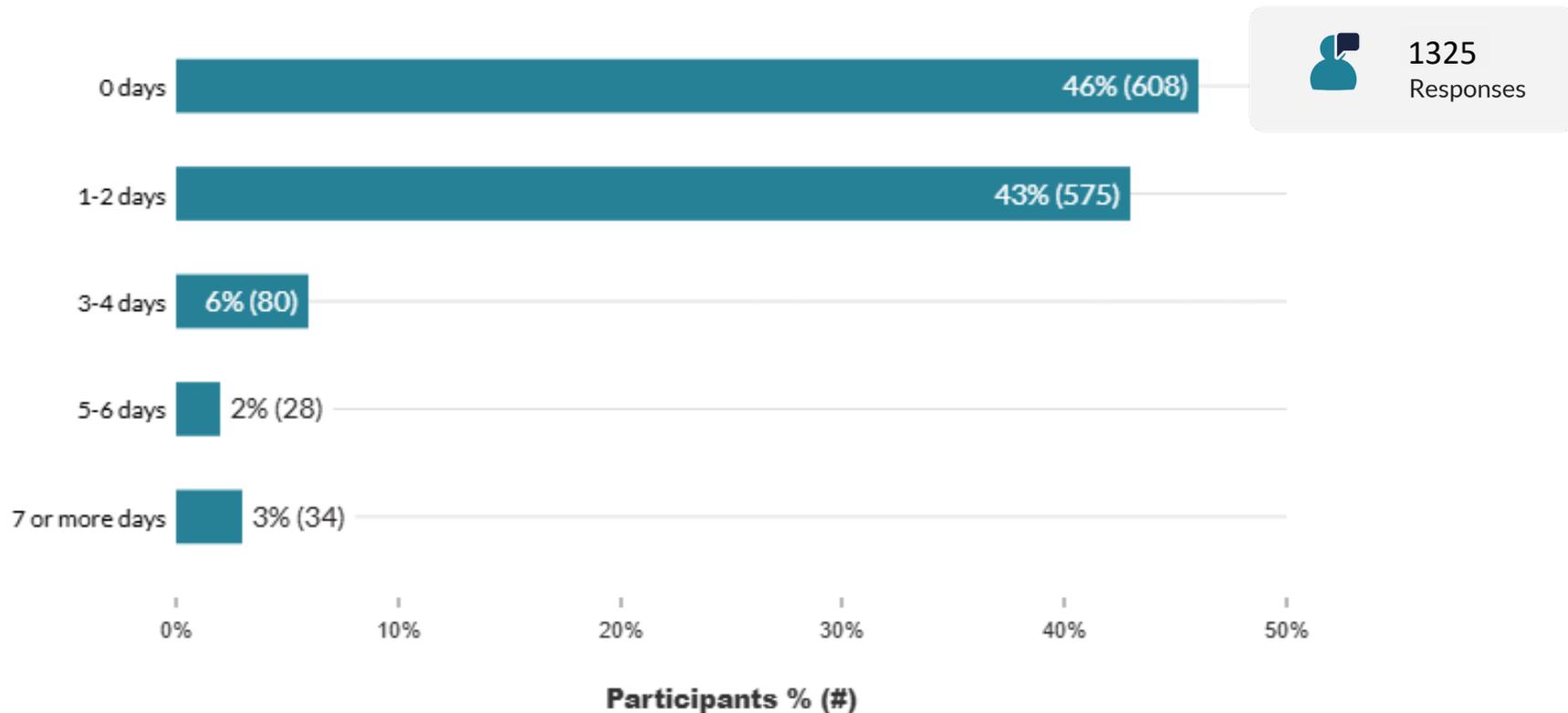




On average, how many days per month are your children absent from school?



PARENT QUESTION

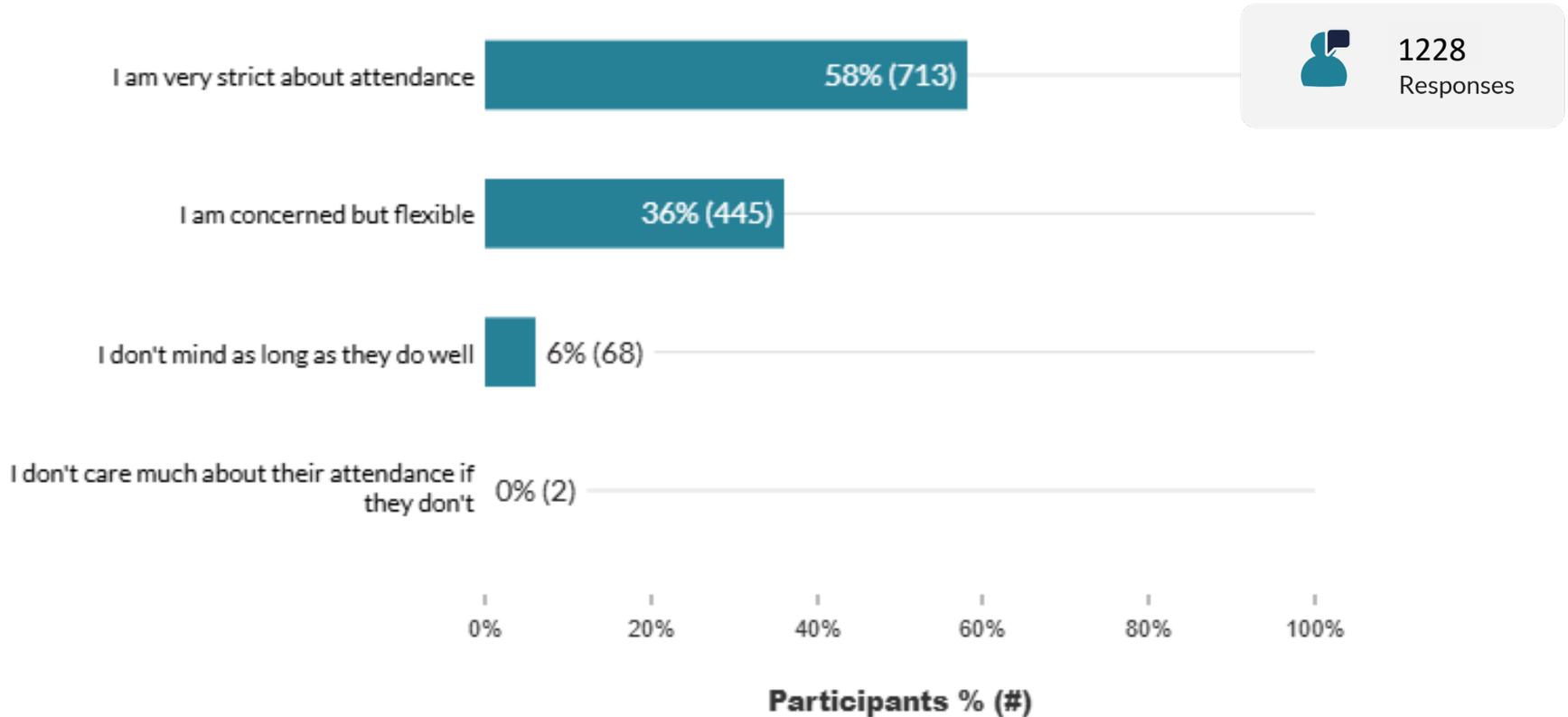




How do you as a parent/guardian feel about your children's school attendance?

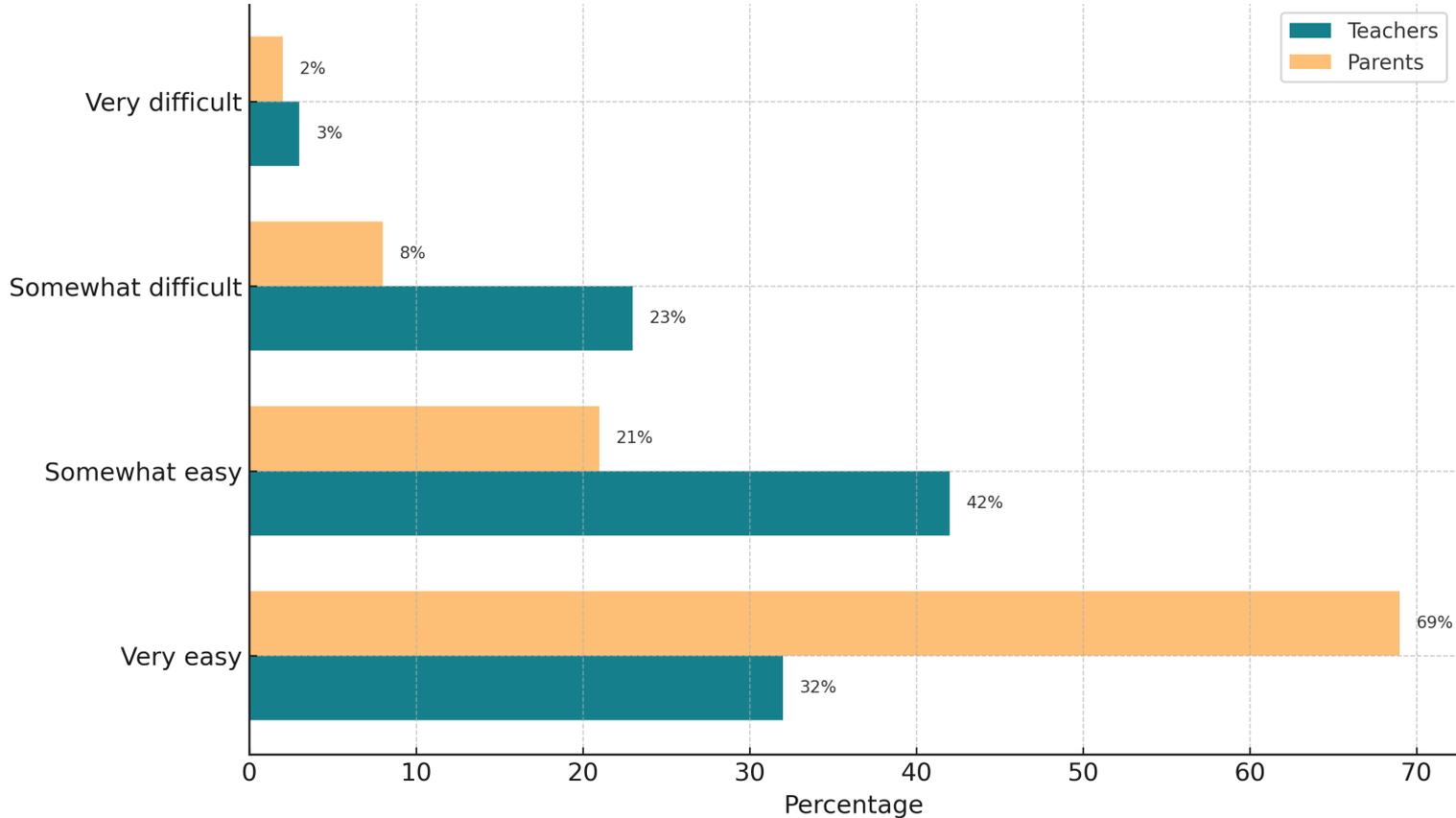


PARENT QUESTION



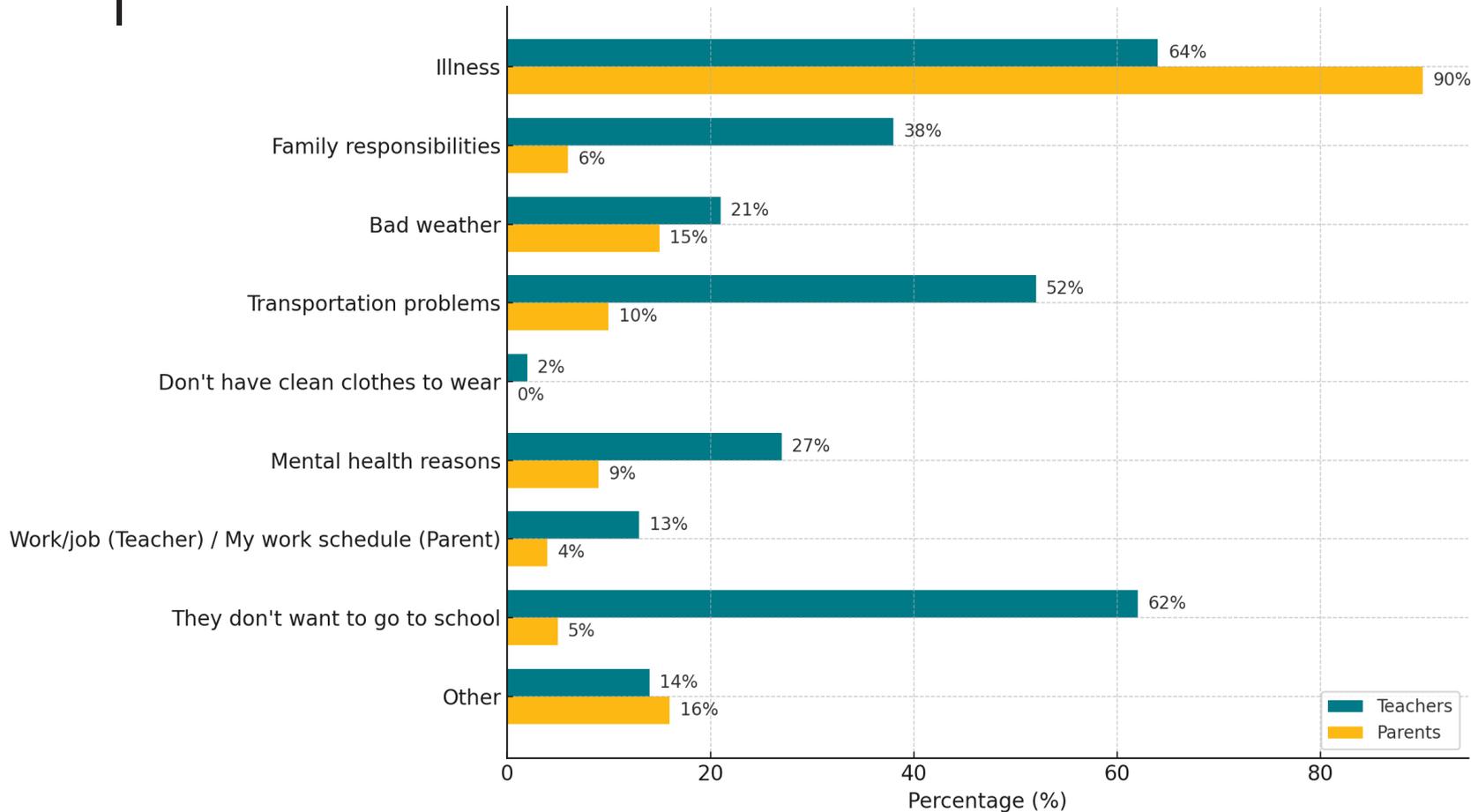


How Easy or Difficult is it for Your Students to Attend School? (Teachers vs. Parents)



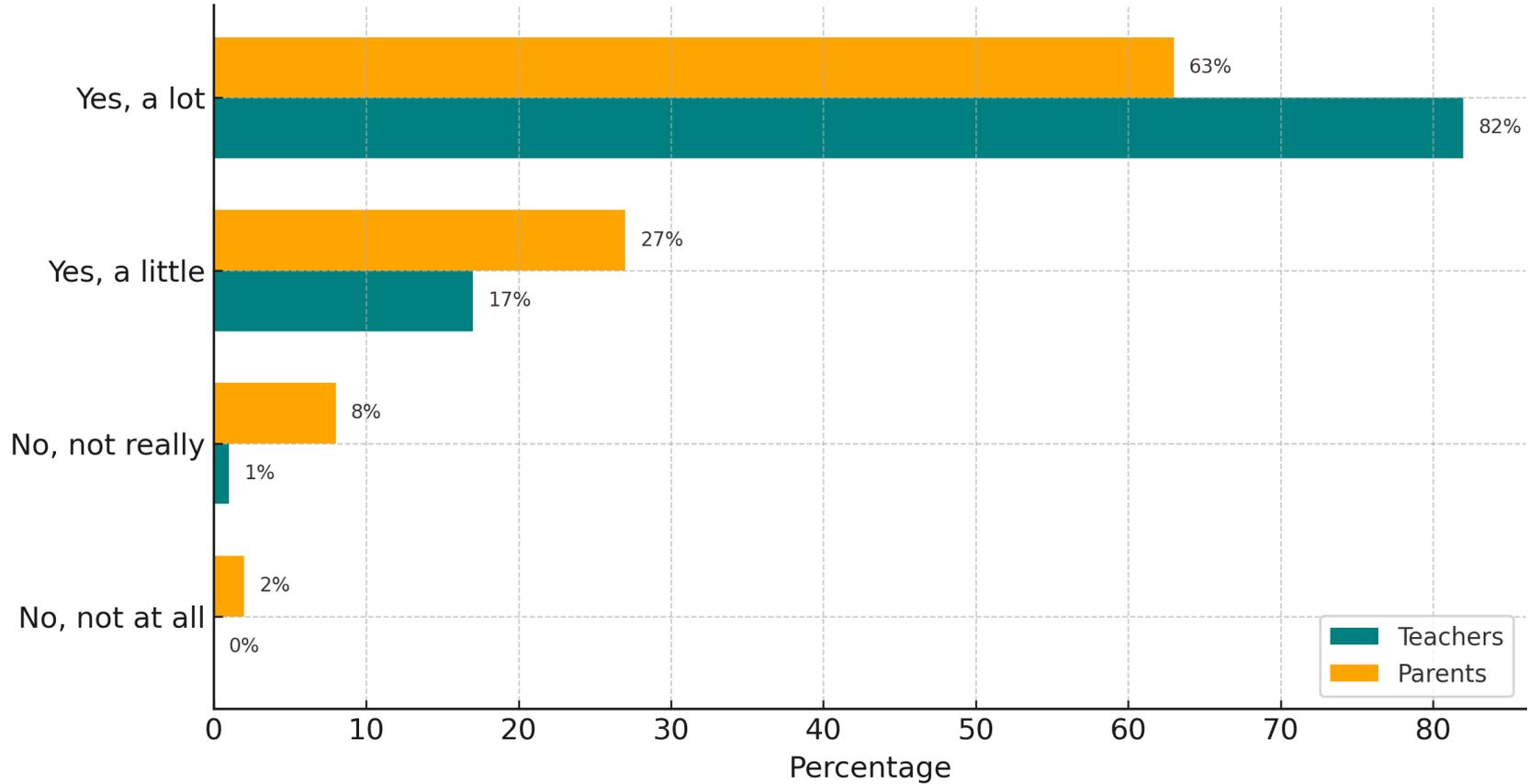


Perceived Reasons for Student Absences: Teachers vs. Parents



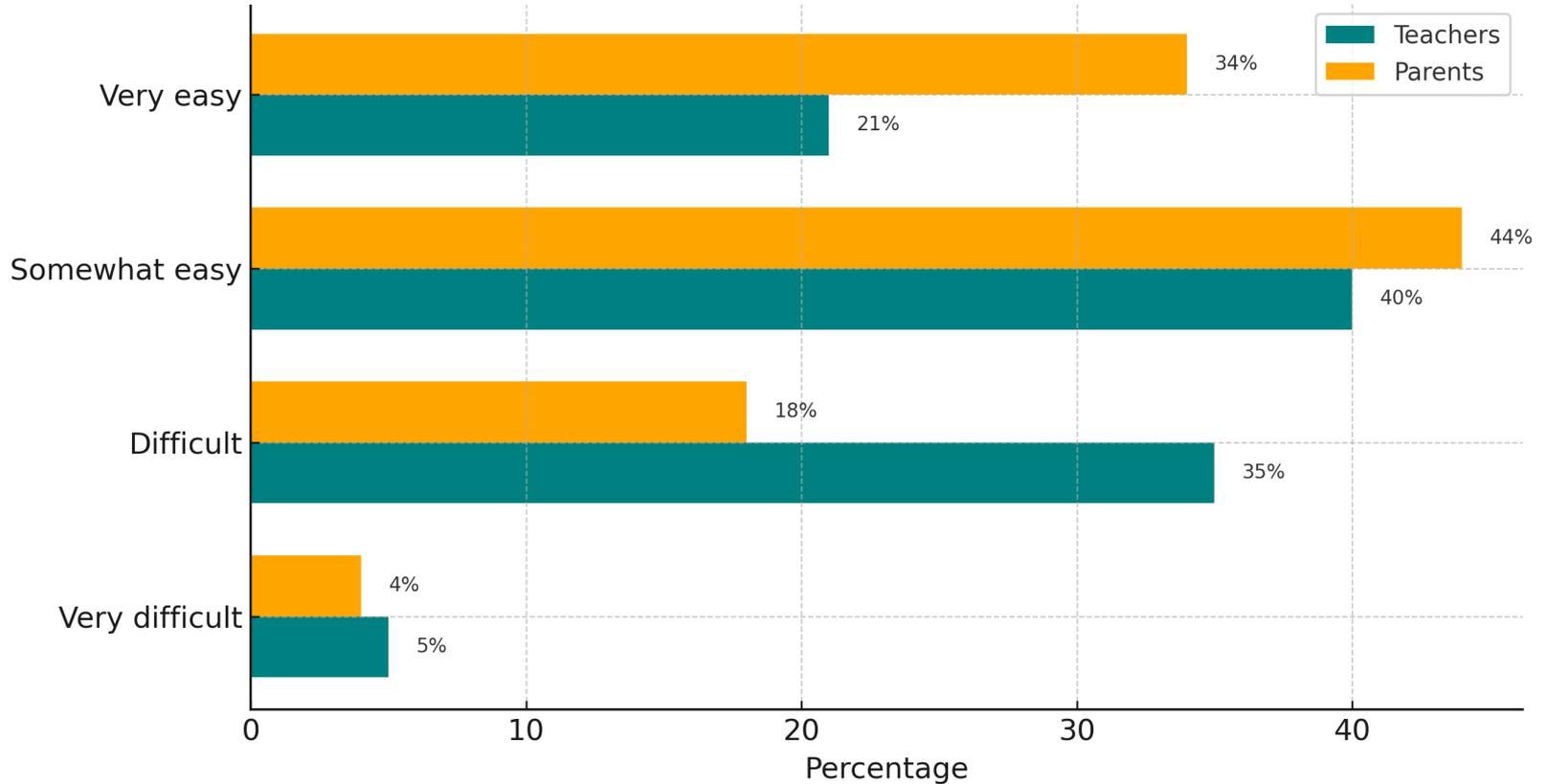


Impact of Missing School on Academic Performance (Teachers vs. Parents)





How Easy Is It for Student(s) to Catch Up on Material When They Missed School? (Teachers vs. Parents)

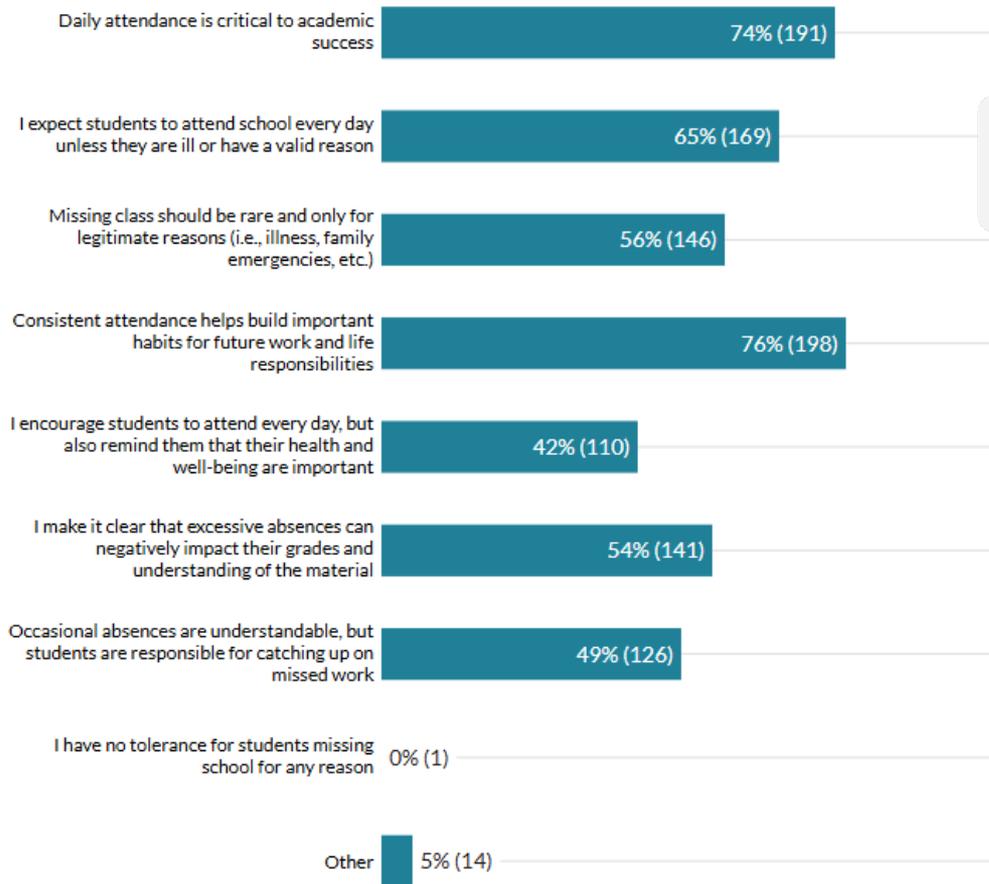




As a teacher, what expectations do you communicate to students about attendance?



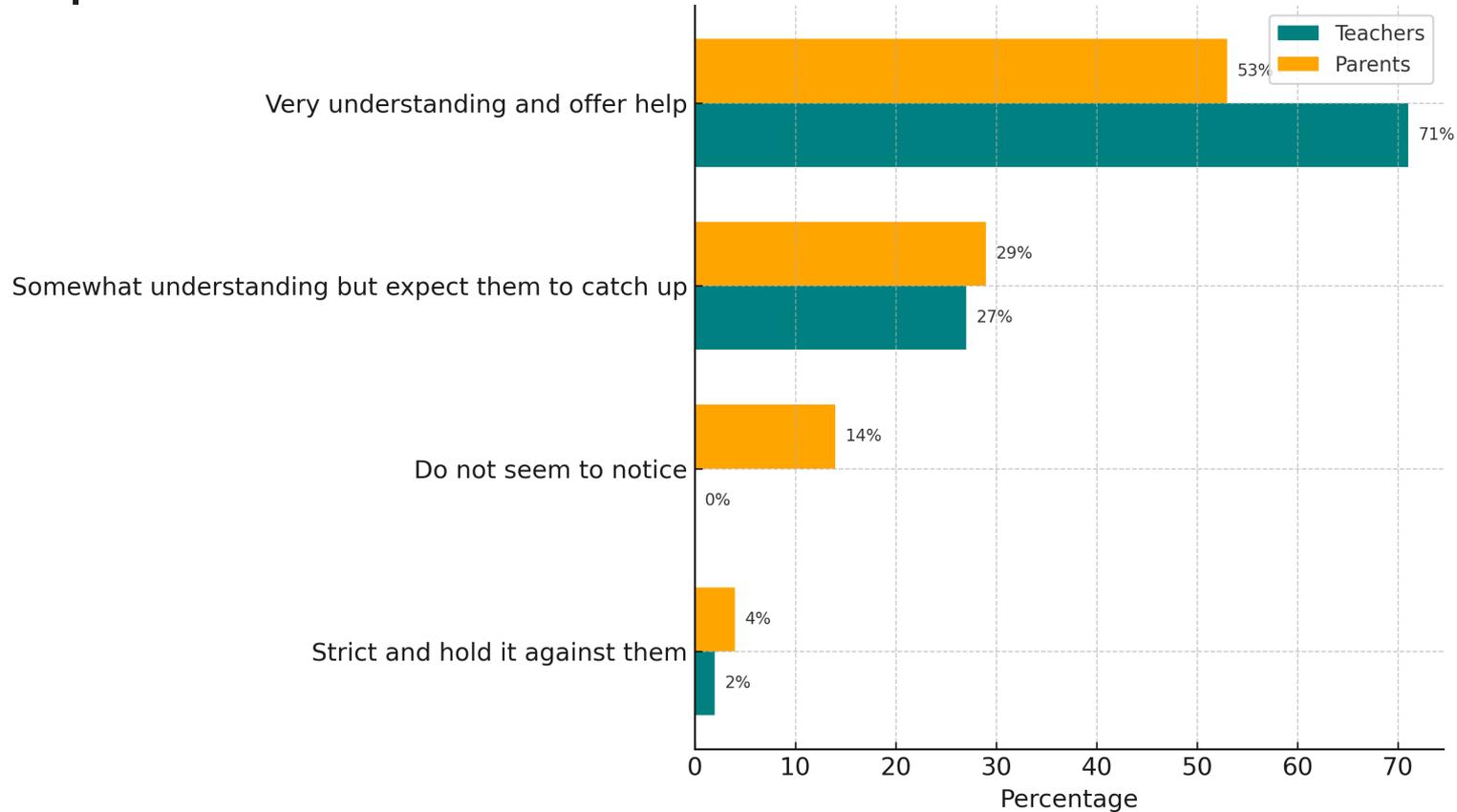
TEACHER QUESTION



259 Responses

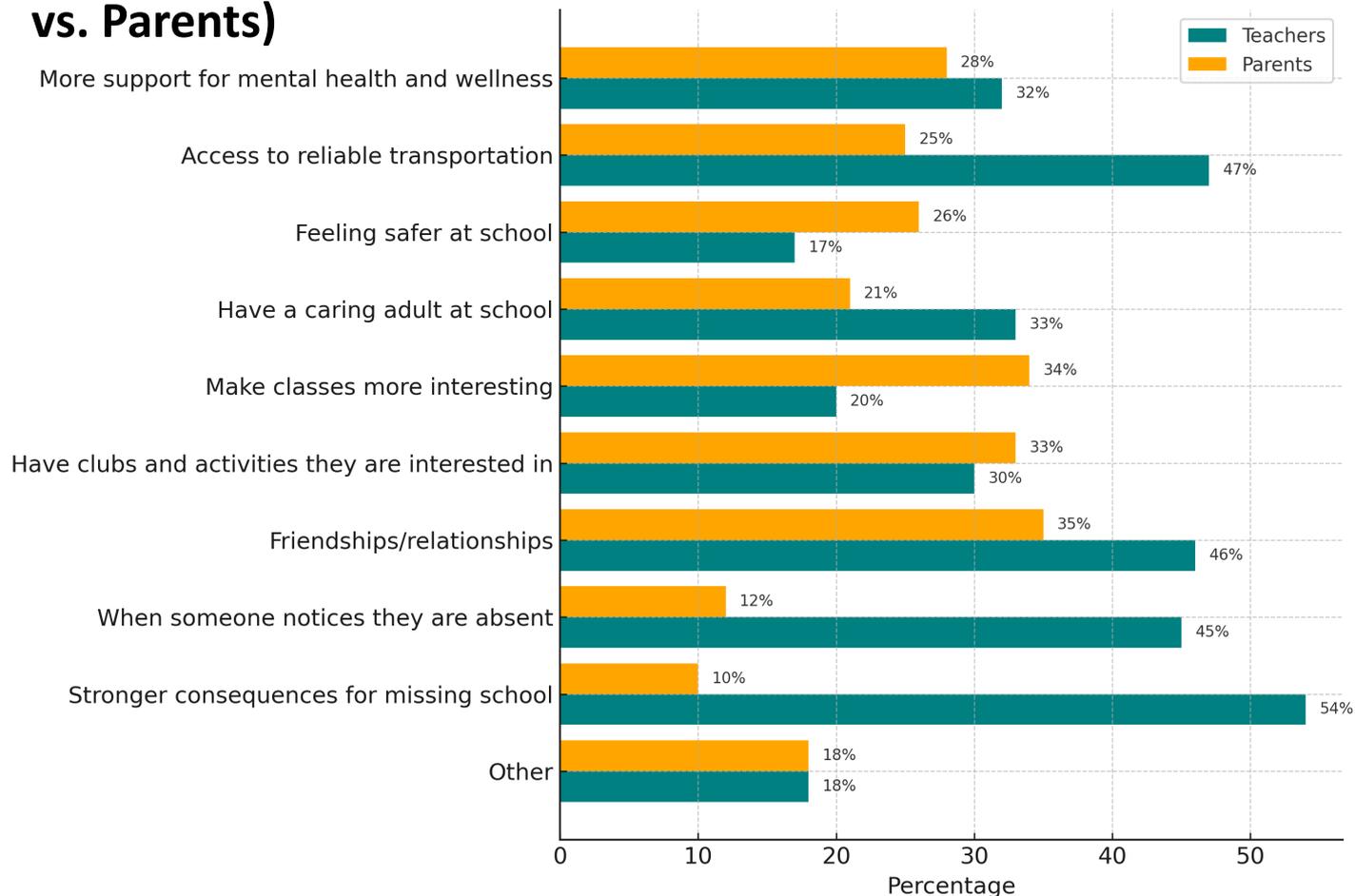


How Do Teachers Respond When Students Return After an Absence? (Teachers vs. Parents)



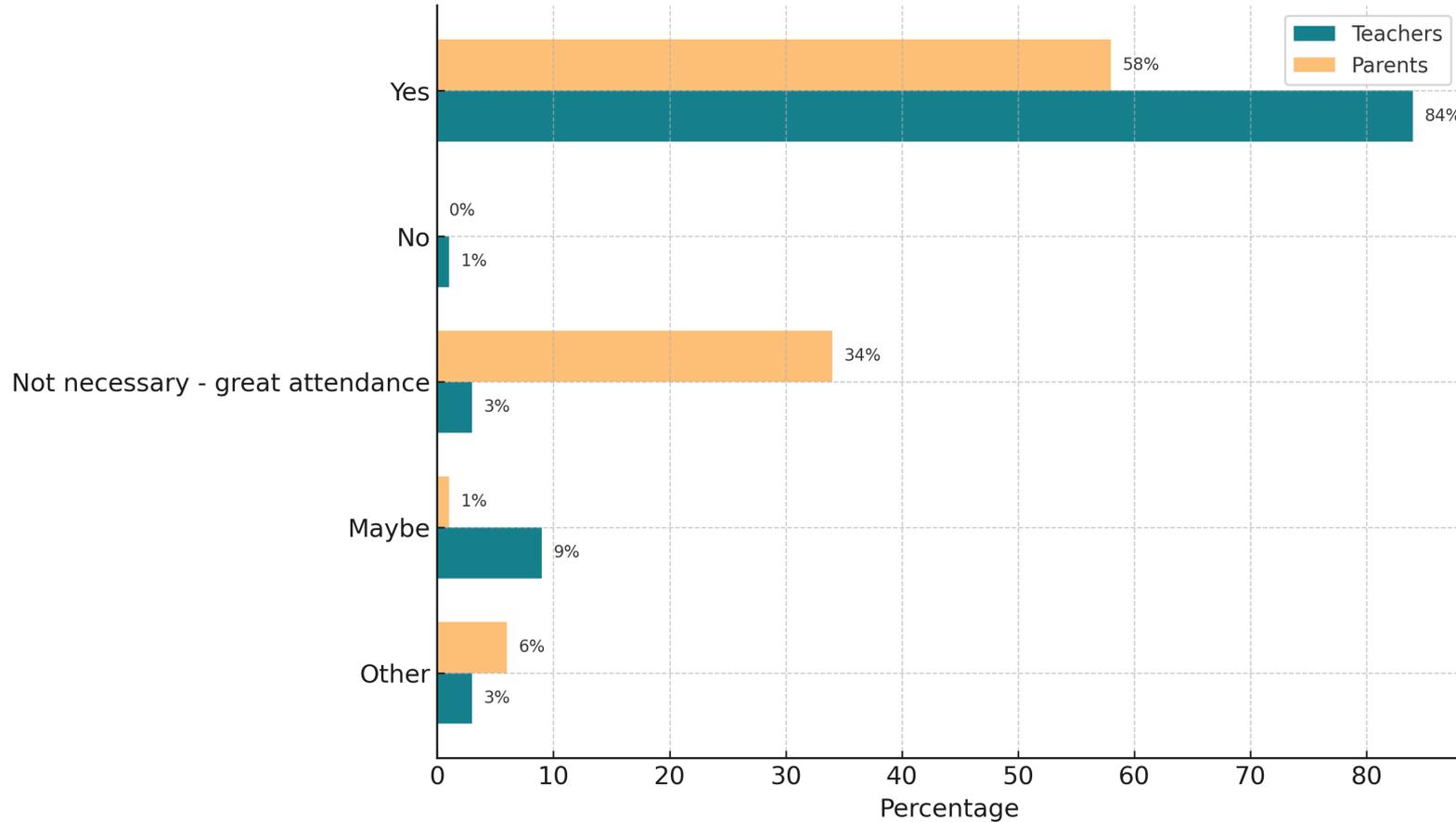


What Could Help Students Attend School More Regularly? (Teachers vs. Parents)





Your Willingness to Work to Improve Attendance This School Year (Teachers vs. Parents)





What are the most important things your school could do to help improve students' daily attendance? (Teachers vs. Parents)





What are the most important things your school could do to help improve students' daily attendance? (Teachers vs. Parents)



Teachers Emphasized

- **Parent Accountability**
- **Incentives** for good attendance and **support** for students falling behind
- **Reliable transportation**
- **Teacher-student relationships** to foster a supportive and engaging environment
- **Mental health support**
- **Communication with parents** to resolve attendance issues

Parents Emphasized

- **Reliable Transportation**
- **Health and Safety:** Address bullying, providing safe environments, and avoiding spread of illness.
- **Engaging Learning Environment**
- **More flexibility/understanding** from teachers.
- **Rewards and Incentives** for good attendance.
- **Communication:** Effective and consistent communication about attendance and school activities.

STUDENTS GRADES 6 – 12

Engagement Summary

Todd Nelson and Chris Payne, Union Public Schools
April 10, 2025

What are the most important things your school could do to help improve your daily attendance?



PARTICIPATION

Breakdown of Participation



1,768
Participants

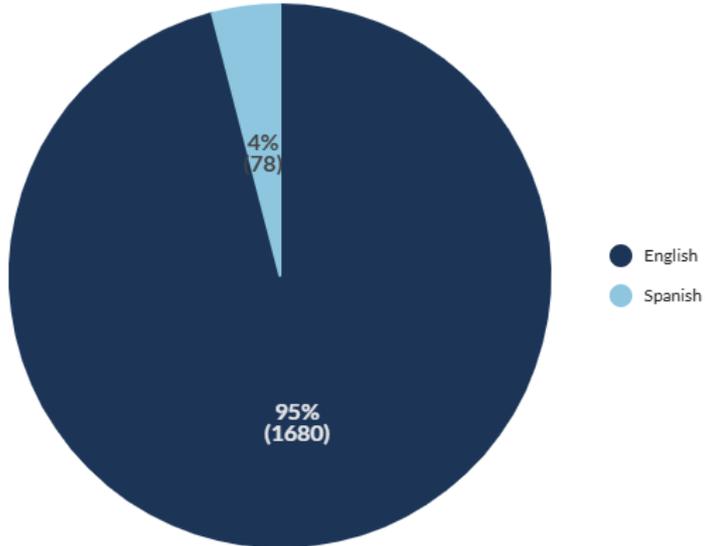


1,345
Thoughts



24,990
Ratings

Participation Languages





PARTICIPATION

Breakdown of Participation



Participation Groups

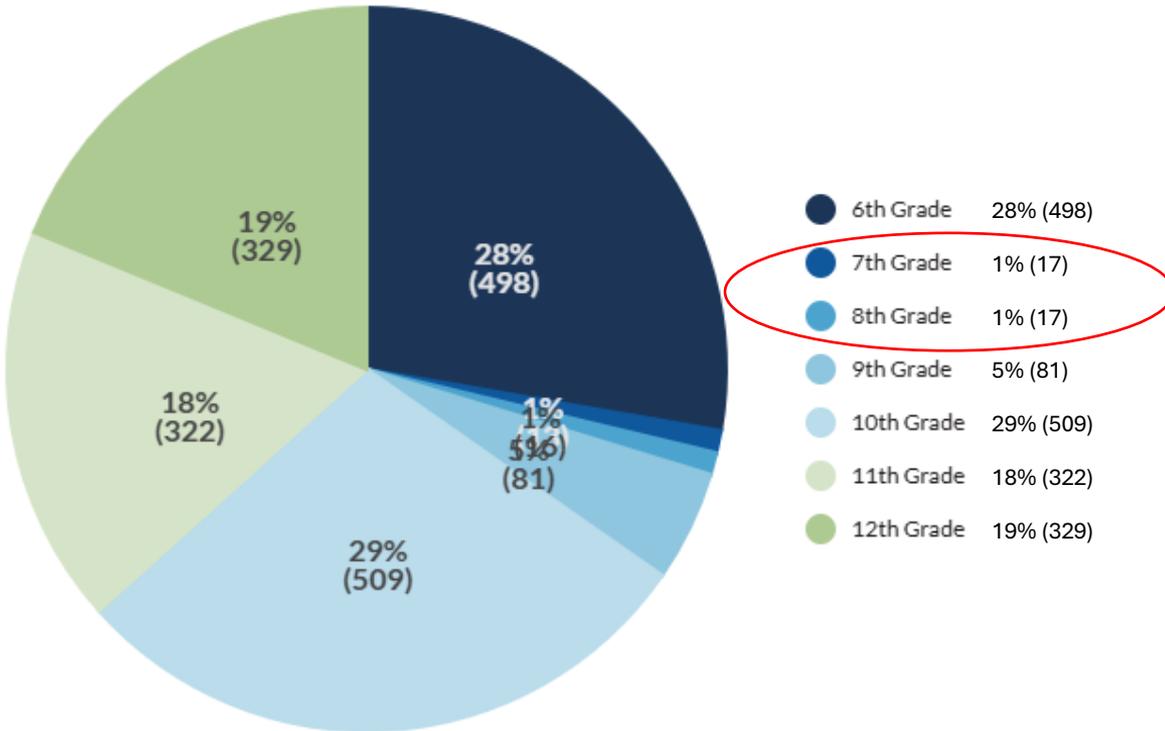
What Grade are you currently in?

 Responded

1768

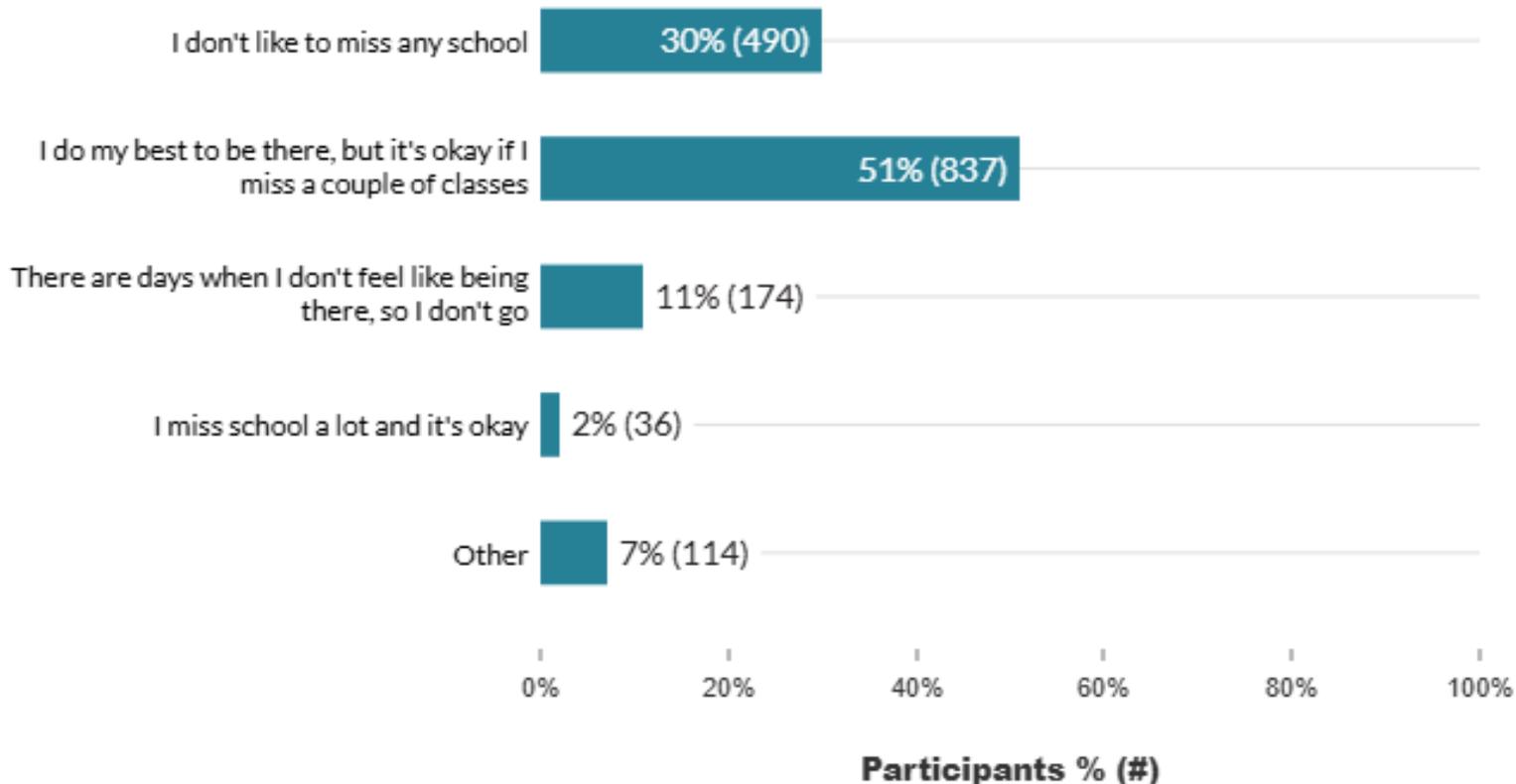
 Completed

1589 90% completed



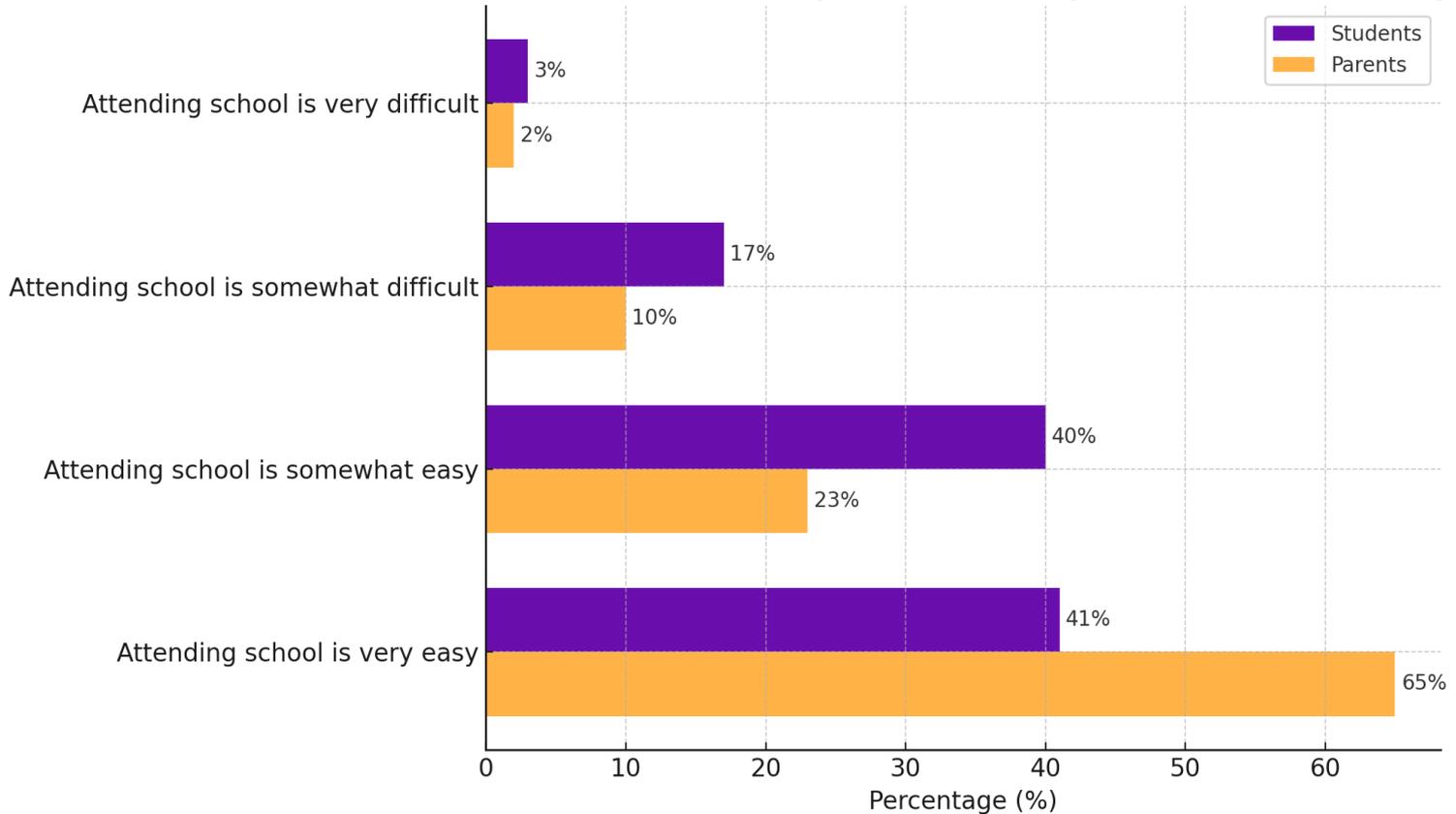


How do you feel about the importance of attending school? (Pick the one that best describes you). **STUDENTS (GR. 6-12) QUESTION**



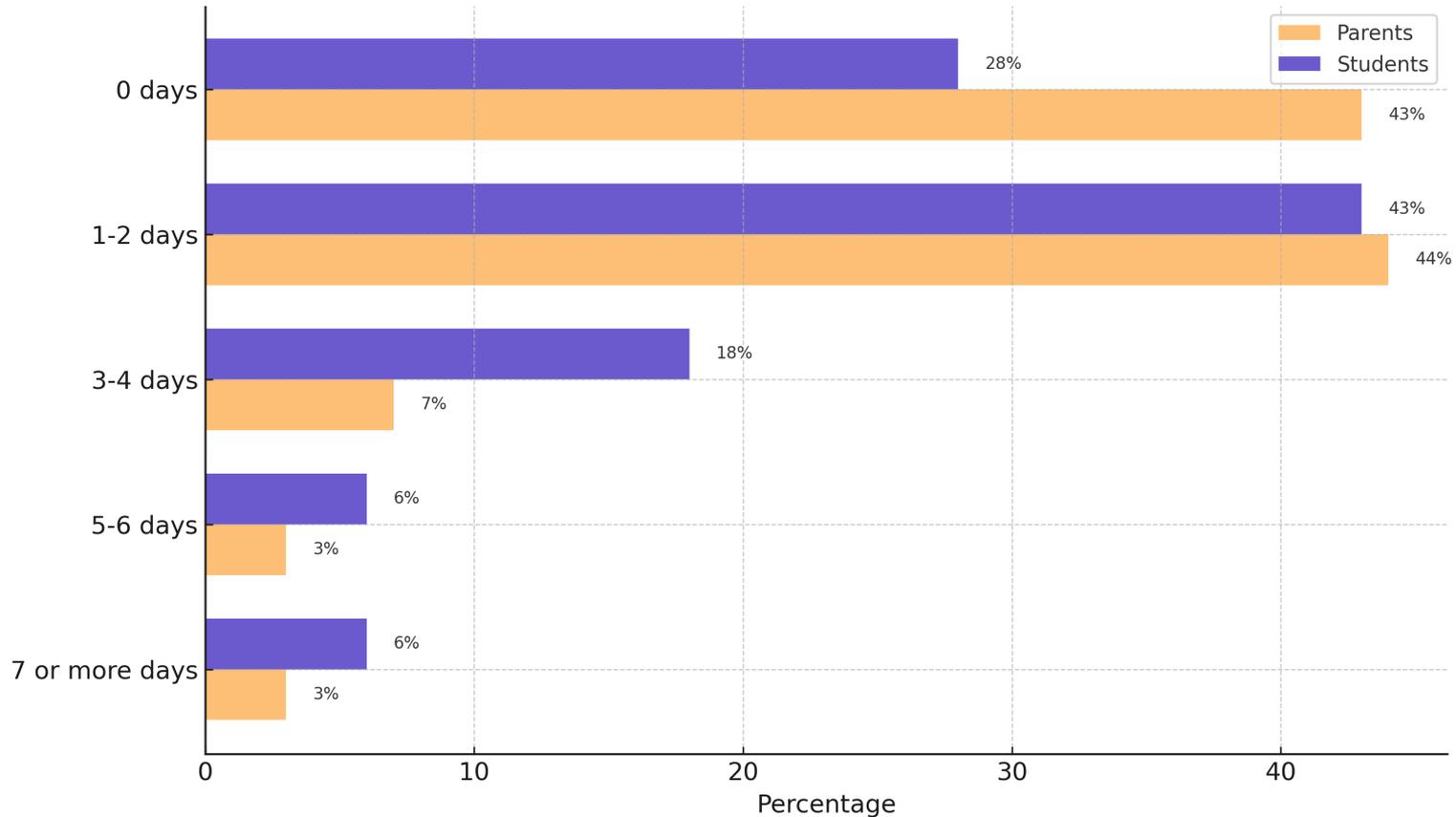


Ability to Attend School Daily: Students (Gr. 6-12) vs. Parent (6-12) Perceptions



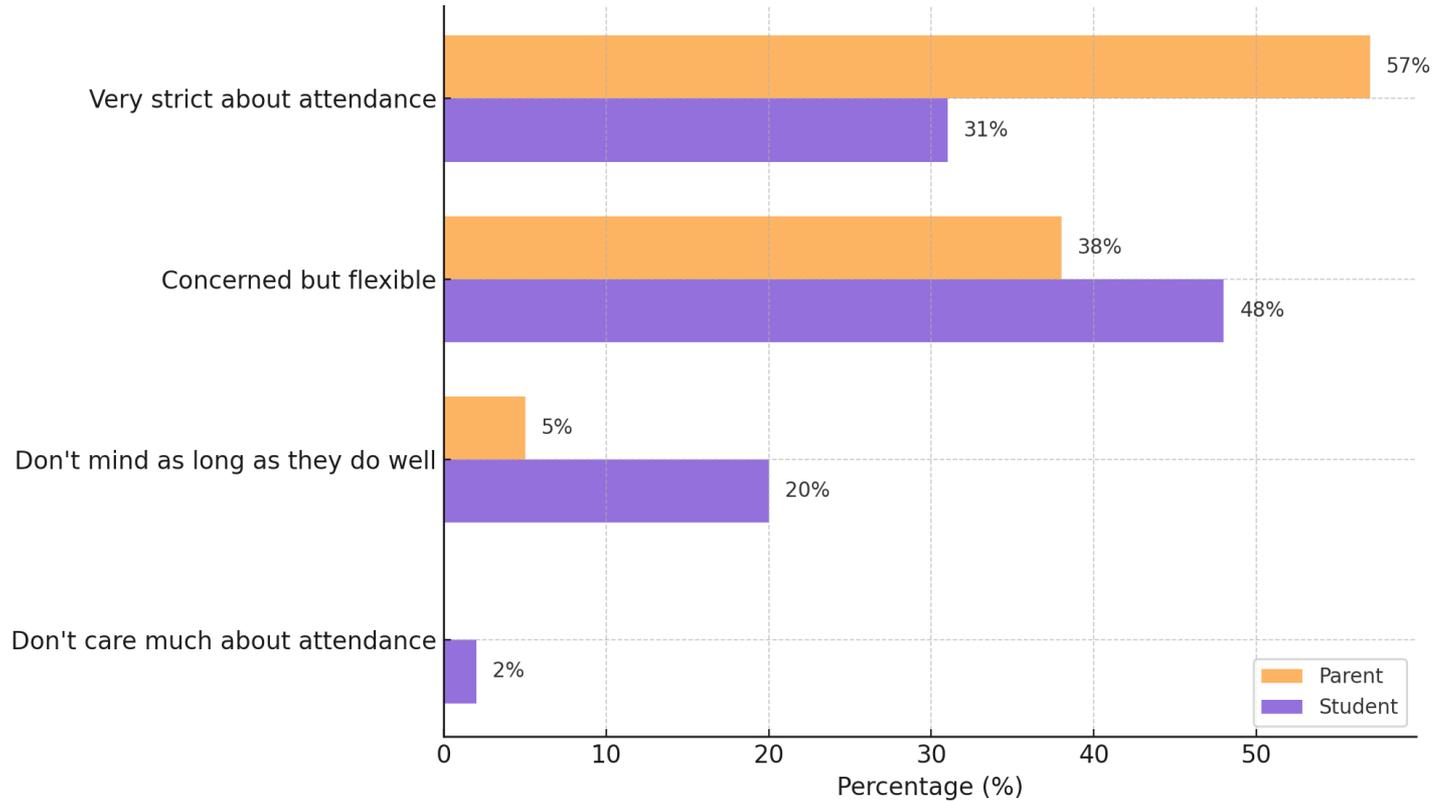


Perceptions of Student Absences Per Month: Students (Grades 6-12) vs. Parents – Grades (6-12)



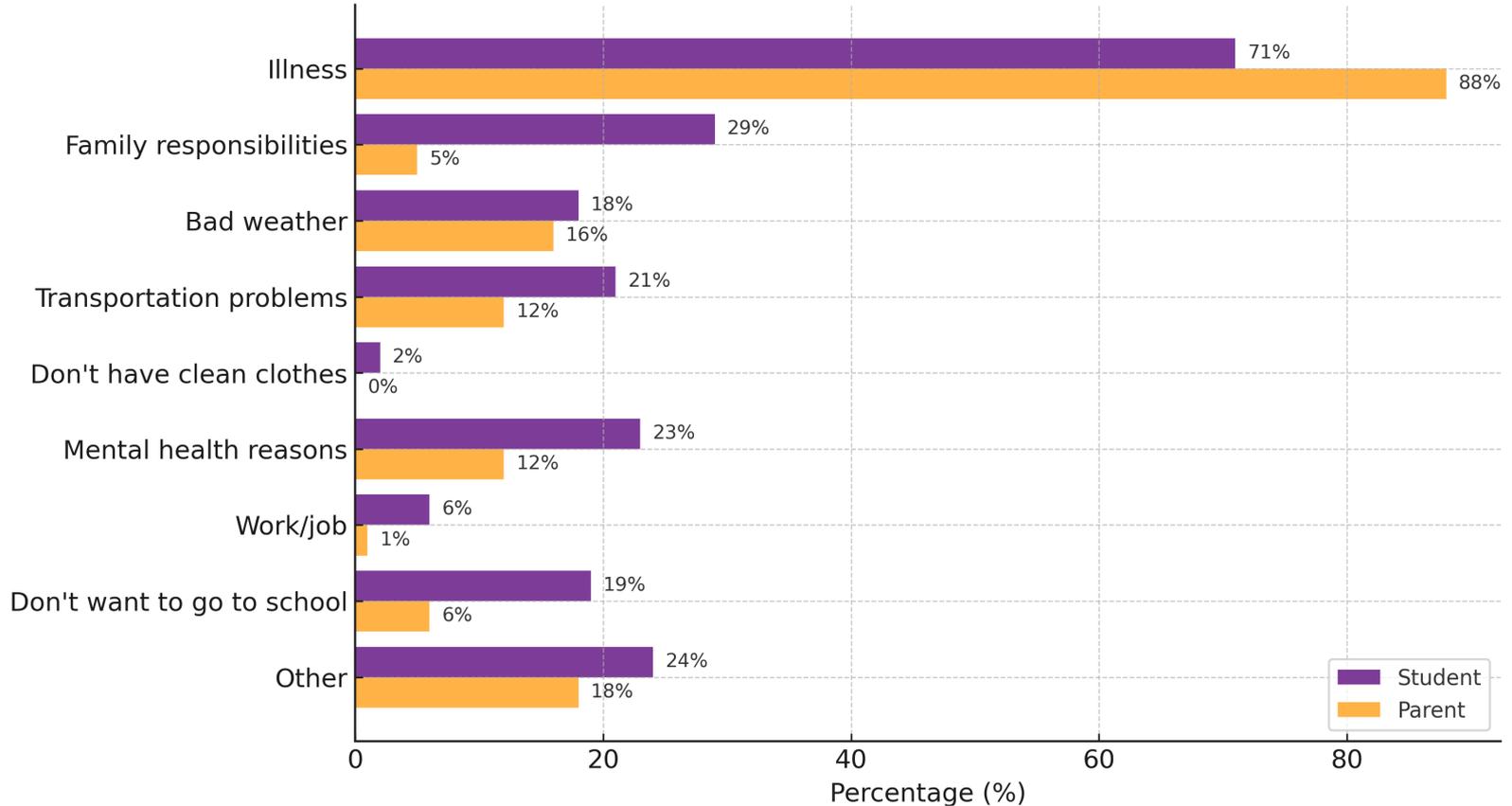


Parent Feelings About School Attendance and Student Perceptions of Parent's Feelings: Students (Gr. 6-12) vs. Parent (6-12)





Most Common Reasons for Student Absences: Students (Gr. 6-12) vs. Parent (6-12) Perceptions





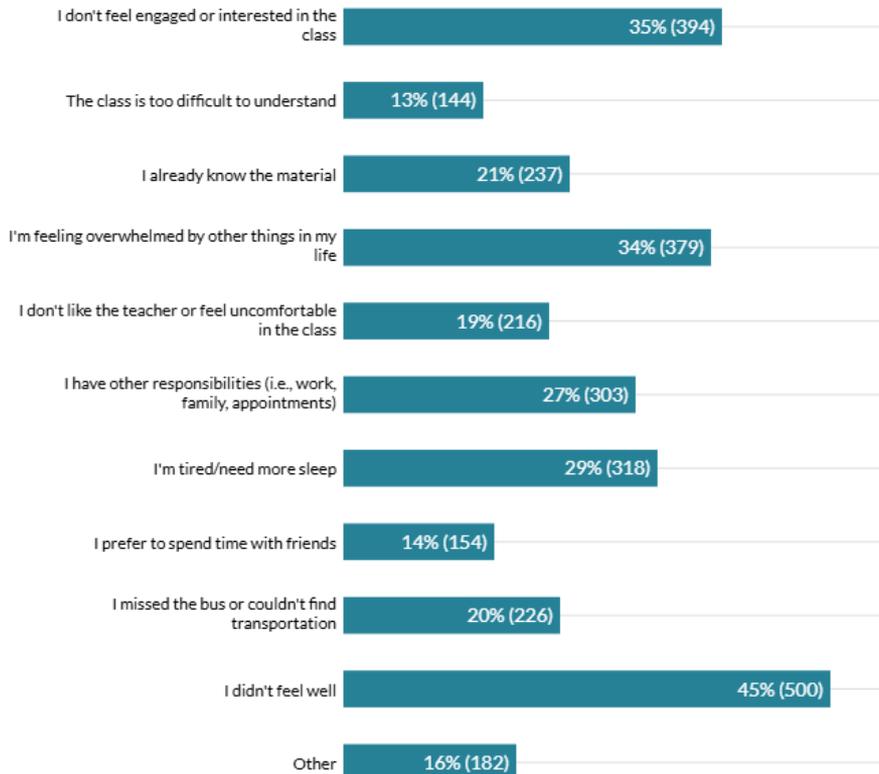
PARTICIPATION

Breakdown of Participation

STUDENTS (GR. 9-12) QUESTION



What are the main reasons you choose to skip a class? Select all that apply. (Grades 9-12 only)

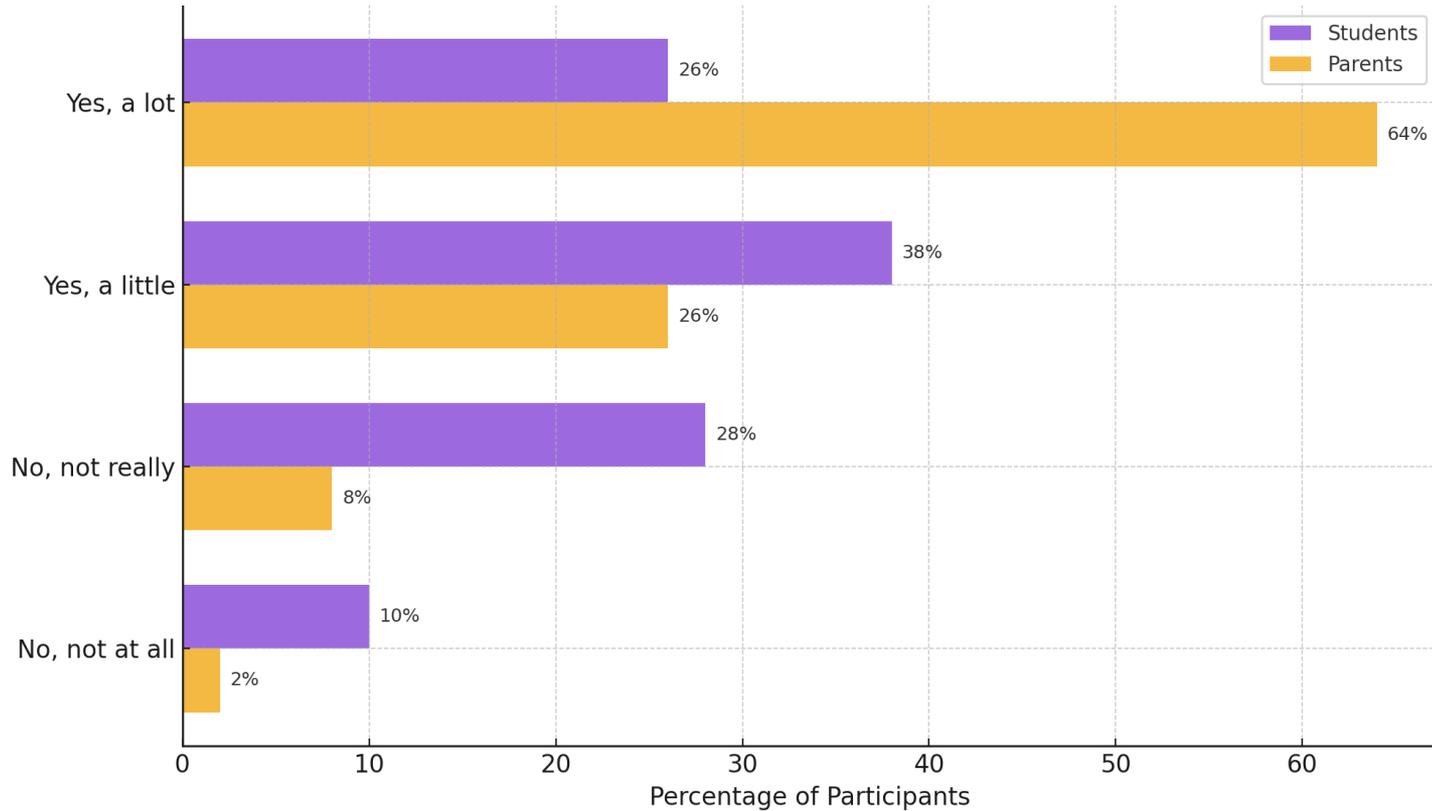


Answered: 1115

Not answered: 653

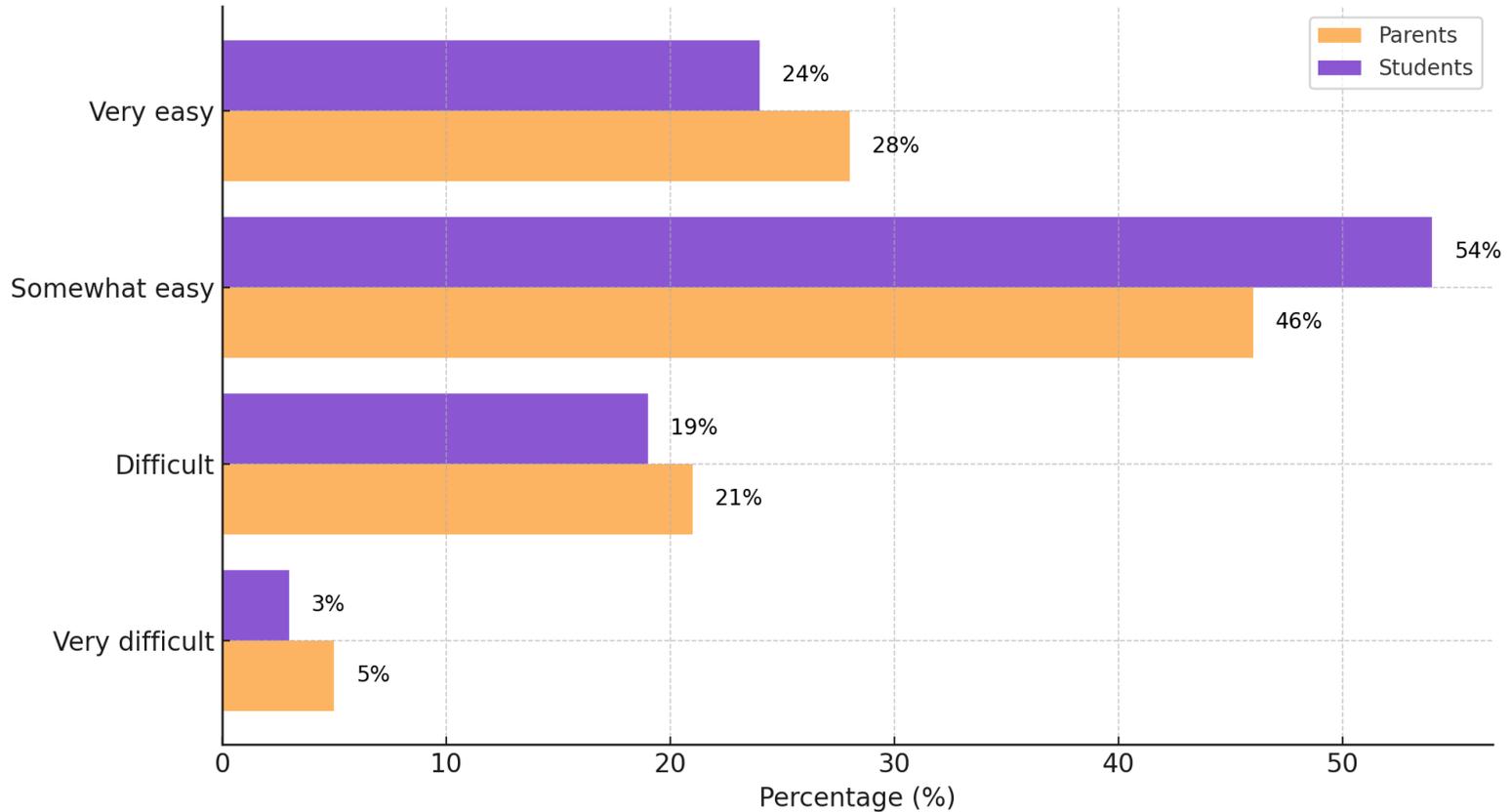


Impact of Missing School on Academic Performance: Students (Gr. 6-12) vs. Parent (6-12) Perceptions



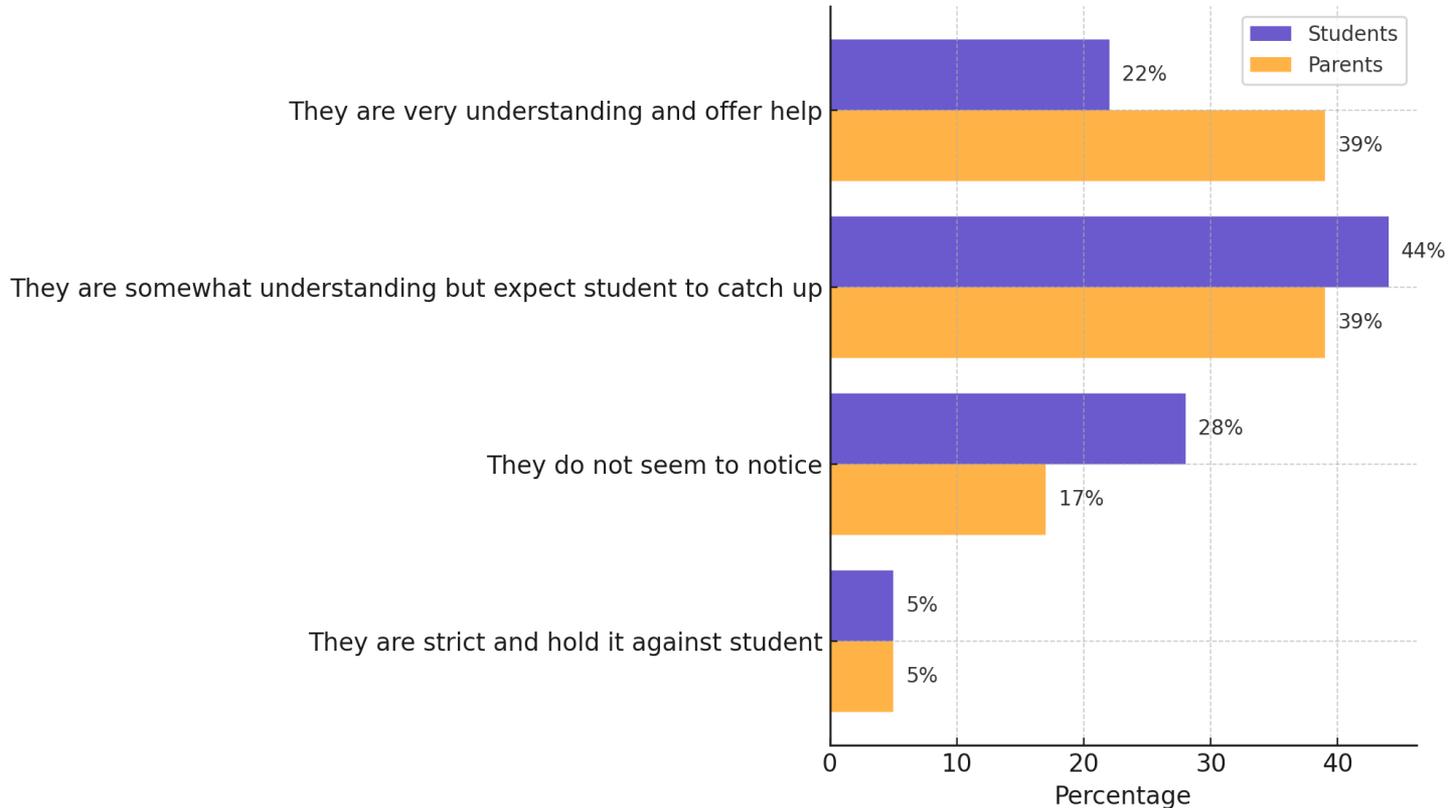


Ease of Catching Up on Missed Material: Students (Gr. 6-12) vs. Parent (6-12) Perceptions



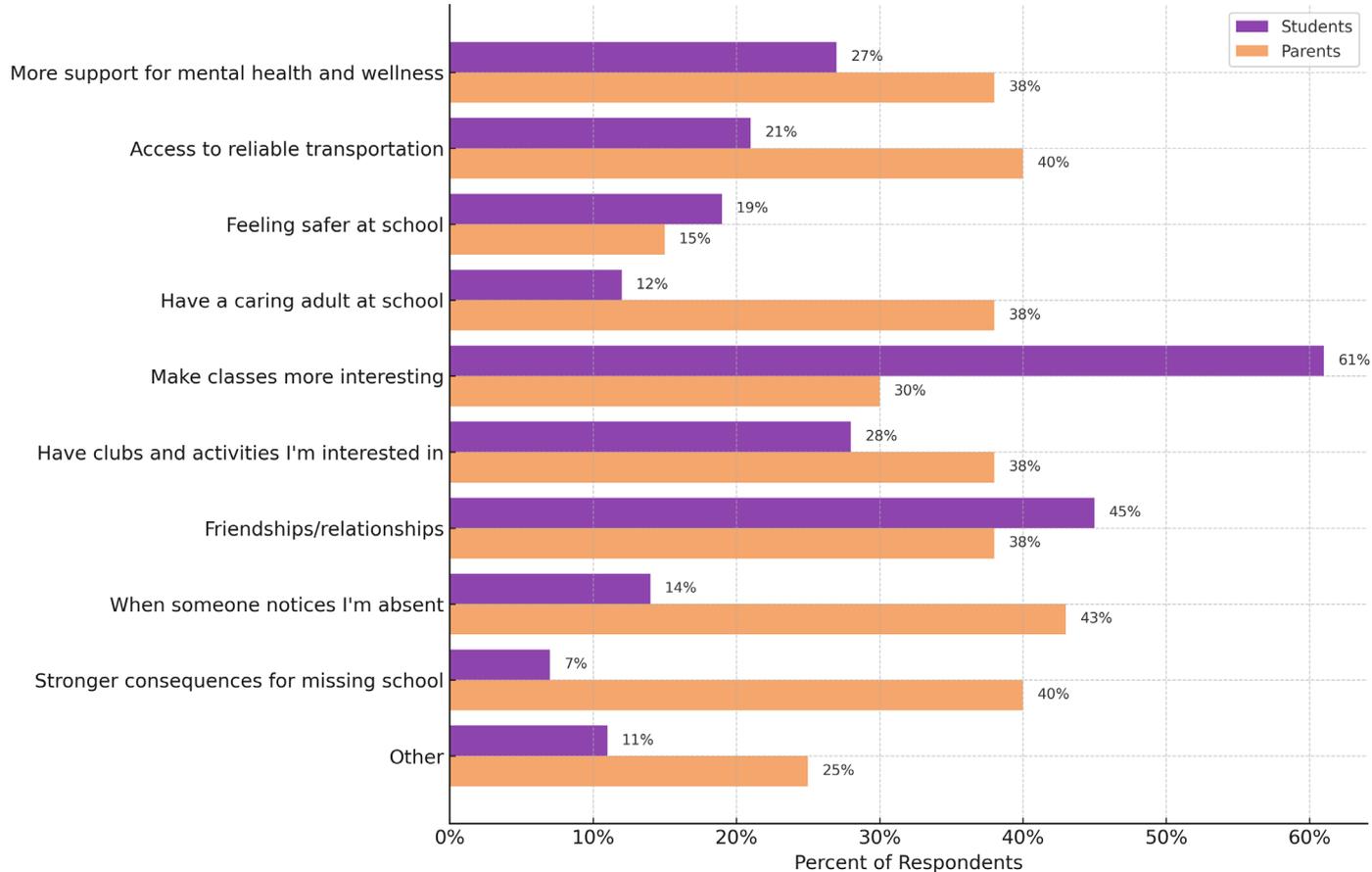


How Teachers or School Staff Respond When Student Misses School: Students (Gr. 6-12) vs. Parent (6-12) Perceptions



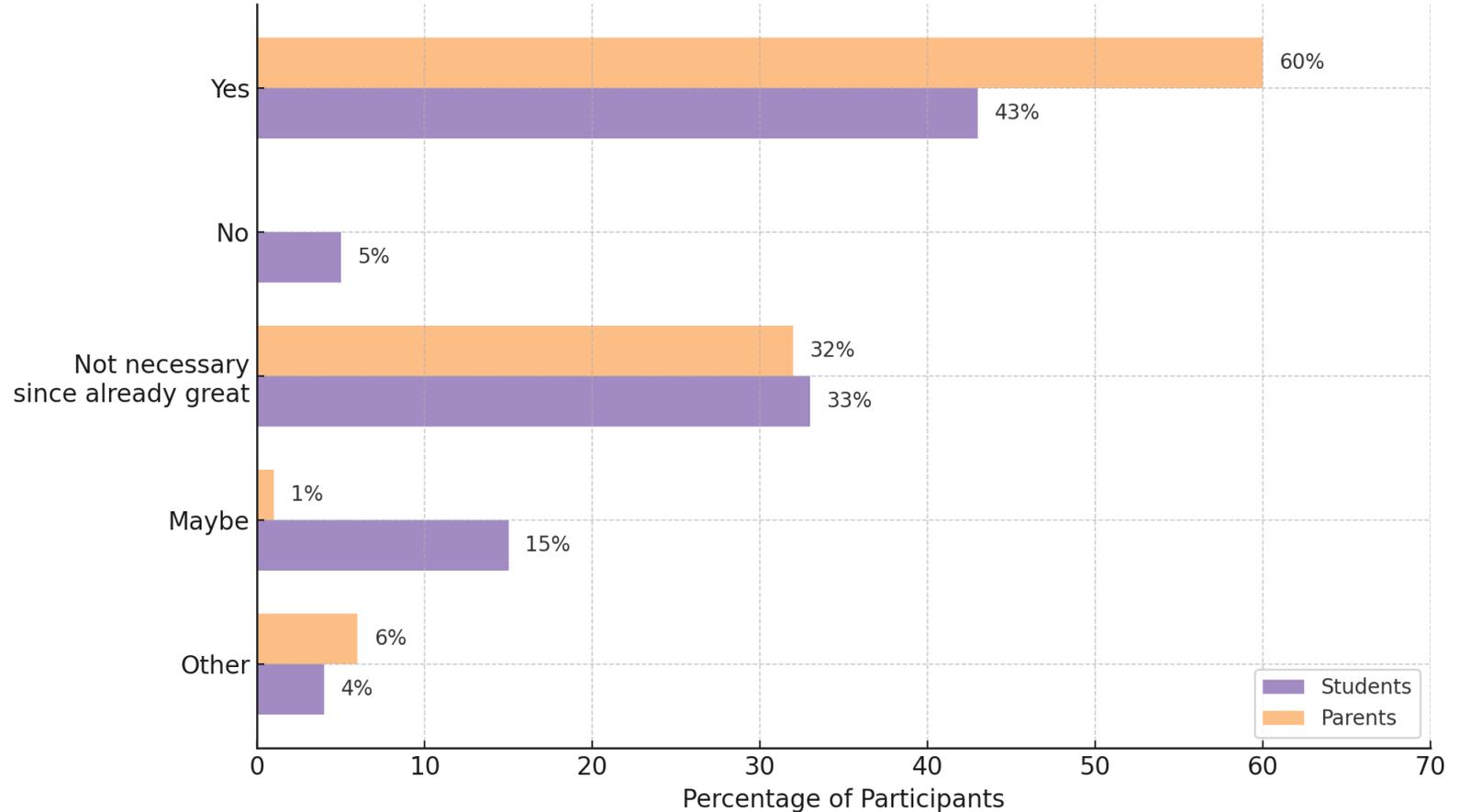


What Could Help Students Attend School More Regularly? Students (Gr. 6-12) vs. Parent (6-12) Perceptions





Willingness to Commit to Improved Attendance: Students (Gr. 6-12) vs. Parent (6-12)





Top Themes **STUDENTS**

What are the most important things your school could do to help improve your daily attendance?



1. Need for teachers who are more **engaging, caring and understanding** of students' situations and a **more supportive classroom environment**.
2. Make classes more **interesting, interactive and engaging**.
3. More **reliable transportation**.
4. More **mental health supports** and a more supportive environment that recognizes the importance of emotional and psychological well-being.
5. More **flexible scheduling** such as later school start times or more adaptable attendance policies.
6. Incentives – offer **tangible rewards** for good attendance and incentives that foster a culture of consistent attendance.
7. More **extracurricular activities**, sports and clubs that create connection.
8. Stronger **academic supports** to help students catch up on missed work.
9. **Cleaner facilities** play a role in students' willingness to attend.

LAME EXCUSE #23

"In Search of Bigfoot!"



BE PRESENT TO WIN
 Thirty percent of Union students were chronically absent last year. We can do better than that! Telling tall tales is easy... but BEING AT SCHOOL requires persistence that pays off.

LAME EXCUSE #27

"Taylor dropped a new album"



BE PRESENT TO WIN
 Thirty percent of Union students were chronically absent last year. We can do better than that! Taylor's love will keep - order a digital download. You don't want your teacher to see a blank space where you should be sitting. Shake it off and get to class. Your successful future depends on it.

LAME EXCUSE #41

"Celebrating my cat's birthday"



BE PRESENT TO WIN
 Thirty percent of Union students were chronically absent last year. We can do better than that! Will your cat be upset if you celebrate another day? Probably! But imagine your teacher's disappointment when you're not in class. BEING AT SCHOOL will make your dreams come true.



'BE PRESENT TO WIN' Chronic Absenteeism Campaign

LAME EXCUSE #52

"Freak earthquake at my house"



BE PRESENT TO WIN
 Thirty percent of Union students were chronically absent last year. We can do better than that! Okay, the ground may move your homework. Maybe it was the quake! Making up excuses is easy. BEING AT SCHOOL takes determination, but it will build a solid foundation for your future.

LAME EXCUSE #79

"New PlayStation coming out today!"



BE PRESENT TO WIN
 Thirty percent of Union students were chronically absent last year. We can do better than that! Skipping school to play games won't score any points with your teacher. BEING AT SCHOOL helps you win at life!

LAME EXCUSE #97

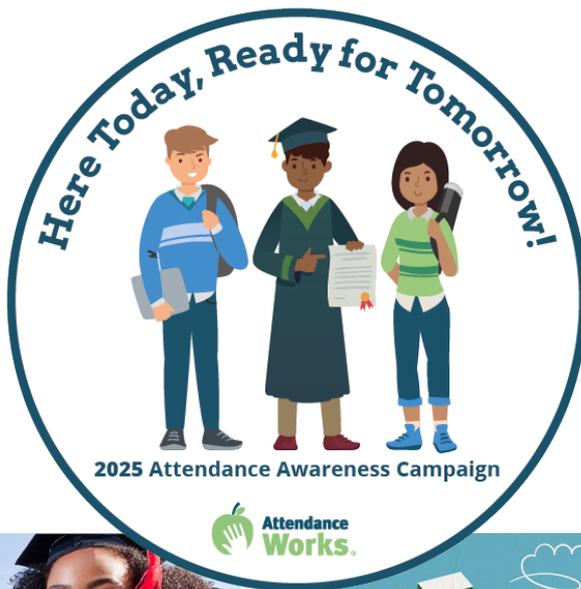
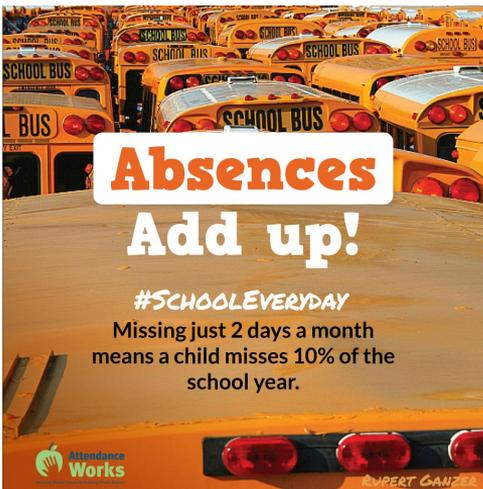
"I'm a 5-day Jeopardy Champion"



BE PRESENT TO WIN
 Thirty percent of Union students were chronically absent last year. We can do better than that! Much like Jeopardy, winning at life means SHOWING UP - especially when it comes to school. Daily Doubles don't happen for those who skip rehearsals. "I'll bet on school" for the win!

RESEARCHING NATIONAL ATTENDANCE CAMPAIGNS

Given the severity of chronic absenteeism and the need for quick action, we had a few short weeks during the summer to create Union's campaign. We briefly explored the idea of utilizing national resources and tagging on to an existing campaign. However, we found the national templates too generic and in our opinion were not compelling enough to move students or parents to action.



Planning

OBJECTIVES

- Reduce chronic absenteeism rates at Union Public Schools by 7% districtwide during the 2024-25 school year (from 30% to 23%).
- Increase the daily attendance rate from 90% to 93% districtwide during the same period.

TARGET AUDIENCE

- **Students** – mainly the 1,903 students (10-15%) who are chronically absent at Union.
- **Parents** – Shared responsibility for student attendance
- **Teachers/staff** – Can reinforce student messaging through supportive behavior
- **Tulsa/Broken Arrow community** – general awareness

STRATEGIES

- Use engaging visuals and humor in print/social media campaign to illustrate the imaginative (and extreme) excuses students use to get out of going to school (i.e., freak earthquakes, Bigfoot, abducted by aliens, etc.).
- Ensure diversity in the campaign (age, grade, race, sex, etc.) consistent with our district demographics

STRATEGIES (cont'd)

- Use compelling headlines and copy that capture the attention of students and parents. Each headline begins with “Chronic Absences...”
 - “Lame Excuse #27 – Taylor [Swift] dropped a new album”
 - “Lame Excuse #41 – Celebrating my cat’s birthday”
- Make students/families aware that 30% of Union students were chronically absent last year
- Brand each poster with the ‘Be Present to Win’ logo (a stylized trophy), reminding them a successful future depends on being present at school

TACTICS

- Posters (displayed in schools) and social media campaign on Facebook and Instagram were launched on Sept. 11, 2024
- A video featuring Union students showing off the poster campaign was distributed with a news release that detailed Union’s goal to reduce chronic absenteeism
- A survey of parents, teachers and students was conducted to gauge attitudes about attendance and how we might better support students and families
- Teachers and administrators met frequently throughout the school year to discuss ideas on how to reduce absenteeism

BUDGET

- \$1,500 for the printing of posters. The posters, video and social media campaign were all created in-house.

Implementation

DEVELOPING THE CREATIVE

Poster and social media copy was developed with an eye toward the outrageous. We needed eye-popping photos that would appeal to students and parents. Some of the “excuses” skewed toward secondary students (grades 6-12). Each poster or social media post began with, “Thirty percent of Union students were chronically absent last year. We can do better than that!” Then we tailored copy to the specific excuse, always closing with the importance of being at school.

[EXAMPLE: Earthquake theme]:

“Okay, the ground swallowed your homework. (Maybe it was the goat). Making up excuses is easy. BEING AT SCHOOL takes determination, but it will build a solid foundation for your future.”

Posters were prominently displayed in the hallways and front entryways of all school sites.

CHRONIC ABSENCES

LAME EXCUSE #52

“Freak earthquake at my house”



Thirty percent of Union students were chronically absent last year. We can do better than that!

Okay, the ground swallowed your homework. (Maybe it was the goat). Making up excuses is easy. BEING AT SCHOOL takes determination, but it will build a solid foundation for your future.

CHRONIC ABSENCES

LAME EXCUSE #79

“New PlayStation coming out today!”



Thirty percent of Union students were chronically absent last year. We can do better than that!

Skipping school to play games won't score any points with your teacher. BEING AT SCHOOL helps you win at life!

VIEW THE COMPLETE POSTER CAMPAIGN

CHRONIC ABSENCES

LAME EXCUSE #19

“I’m chasing space aliens!”



Thirty percent of Union students were chronically absent last year. We can do better than that!

Being M.I.A. chasing UFOs isn't going to endear you to your teachers. School isn't always a walk in the park, but it will equip you with the skills to fend off space invaders.

CHRONIC ABSENCES

LAME EXCUSE #27

“Taylor dropped a new album”



Thirty percent of Union students were chronically absent last year. We can do better than that!

Tay-tay's love will keep - order a digital download. You don't want your teacher to see a blank space where you should be sitting. Shake it off and get to class. Your successful future depends on it.

CHRONIC ABSENCES

LAME EXCUSE #37

“Netflix binge last night”



Thirty percent of Union students were chronically absent last year. We can do better than that!

Watch “Stranger Things” when it won't interfere with class. (The drama is better at school anyway). Being PRESENT may give your personal ratings a boost. Who couldn't use a higher GPA?

SOCIAL MEDIA

A social media component was launched concurrently on Facebook and Instagram beginning September 2024.

facebook

Union Public Schools - Tulsa, OK
Published by Chris Payne
September 4, 2024

CHRONIC ABSENCES – LAME EXCUSE #27: "Taylor dropped a new album" Thirty percent of Union students were chronically absent last year. We can do better than that!

Tay-tay's love will keep – order a digital download. You don't want your teacher to see a blank space where you should be sitting. Shake it off and get to class. Your successful future depends on it.

CHRONIC ABSENCES

LAME EXCUSE #27

BE PRESENT TO WIN

2 comments 13 shares

unionschools

CHRONIC ABSENCES

LAME EXCUSE #23

BE PRESENT TO WIN

View insights Boost post

69 3 5

unionschools CHRONIC ABSENCES – LAME EXCUSE #23: "In Search of Bigfoot!" Thirty percent of Union students were chronically absent last year. We can ...



Overview

Views	1,487
Interactions	78
Profile activity	0

Views

1,487 Views

72.1% Followers 27.9% Non-followers

Home	874
Profile	429
Hashtags	1
Other	183
Accounts reached	992

Interactions

78 Interactions

92.5% Followers 7.5% Non-followers

Likes	69
Shares	5
Comments	3
Saves	1
Accounts engaged	75

CAMPAIGN LAUNCH

NEWS RELEASE & VIDEO



Link to [national attendance research](#)

Link to [CAMPAIGN POSTERS](#)

Link to Union's [CAMPAIGN VIDEO](#)



Union Public Schools News Release

For more information, contact:
Chris Payne, Chief Communications Officer at 918-357-6016, or 918-770-2469 (cell)

Union Public Schools battles chronic absenteeism with 'Be Present to Win' campaign

September 11, 2024 – Union Public Schools is launching a campaign called “Be Present to Win” to reduce chronic absenteeism, a problem that affects about 30 percent of the district’s student population. Chronic absenteeism – defined as students missing 10% or more of school days, which equates to two days every month – has become an epidemic in America’s schools, [nearly doubling from 15 percent to 26 percent](#).

“Certainly, the pandemic didn’t do us any favors, when measures designed to keep students and teachers safe essentially told students school is optional,” said Superintendent Dr. John Federline of Union Public Schools. “While our district did its best to minimize disruption, this pattern is one that has been hard to break. By bringing more focus to bear on absenteeism, and enlisting the help of parents and teachers, we want our students to understand that their future success in career and life depends on them being present at school; thus, ‘Be Present to Win,’ which is the name of our campaign.”

The campaign will use humor to get the attention of Union students, parents and teachers, poking fun at the various “lame excuses” students use to get out of going to school; everything from “Taylor [Swift] dropped a new album” and “Netflix binge last night,” to “freak earthquake at my house” and “celebrating my cat’s birthday.” The campaign will be visible at schools through a series of posters and a social media campaign. [See sample campaign posters.](#) [View VIDEO about the campaign.](#)

During the 2022-23 school year, 29.1 percent of Union students were chronically absent compared with 27.4 percent in 2021-22. In general, chronic absenteeism increases sharply among secondary students at Union, ranging from 27 to 43 percent among the district’s secondary schools. Among elementary students, chronic absenteeism ranges from 13 to 26 percent at Union schools.

The goal is to reduce districtwide chronic absenteeism rates at Union by seven percent during the 2024-25 school year (from 30 percent to 23 percent). Union also seeks to increase the daily attendance rate from 90 percent to 93 percent.

“Being chronically absent and missing two days a month may not seem like a lot, but it adds up,” said Todd Nelson, executive director of research, data and assessment at Union. “When students are gone from school, they miss essential information and are not participating in the learning process. They are

CAMPAIGN LAUNCH STORIES – EARNED MEDIA

- Sept. 11, 2024 – FOX-23 : [Union Public Schools fights absenteeism with new "Be Present to Win" campaign | News | fox23.com](#)
- Sept. 11, 2024 – KOTV-NewsOn6: [Focus On Kids: Union Public Schools Battles Absenteeism With New Campaign \(newson6.com\)](#)
- Sept. 11, 2024 – News9 (Oklahoma City): [Focus On Kids: Union Public Schools Battles Absenteeism With New Campaign \(news9.com\)](#)
- Sept. 12, 2024 – KOTV-NewsOn6: [Union Launches 'Be Present To Win' Campaign To Address Absenteeism \(newson6.com\)](#)
- Sept. 12, 2024 – News9 (Oklahoma City): [Union Launches 'Be Present To Win' Campaign To Address Absenteeism \(news9.com\)](#)
- Sept. 12, 2024 – Tulsa World (online version): [Union Public Schools campaign seeks to reduce absenteeism \(tulsaworld.com\)](#)
- Sept. 13, 2024 – KJRH-Channel 2: [Union schools using humor to combat chronic absenteeism \(kjrh.com\)](#)
- Sept. 15, 2024 – KTUL-Channel 8: [School districts aim to slash chronic absenteeism rates with new initiatives](#)



TULSA WORLD

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 13, 2024 | A7

Union seeking community help

District seeks help to reduce chronic absenteeism rates

LENZY KREHBIEL-BURTON
Tulsa World

With its chronic absenteeism rate still almost double compared to the pre-pandemic years, Union Public Schools is having conversations with parents, students, staff and the community about the need for consistent attendance.

"A few people can't solve this," Union's Senior Executive Director of Research, Design and Assessment Todd Nelson said. "Everyone has to lift a little bit and do their part together, and it can change the trajectory."

Across all grades and sites, 30% of Union students were considered chronically absent last year, with higher rates among pre-kindergarten and high school grades.

By comparison, the district's chronic absenteeism rate was 17% in 2018-19, or the last full school year not impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Chronic absenteeism is defined as missing at least 10% of instructional time for any reason. That amounts to 16 school days over the course of a year, or about two school days each month.

"If a student is chronically absent three years in a row, the overall achievement effect tends to average at about a one year loss in learning," Nelson said. "So being present consistently is really a critical piece to gaining the learning in a given year that needs to happen."

The higher absenteeism rate is not unique to Union: in 4 students nationwide were considered chronically absent during the 2022-23 school year, compared to roughly 15% of all students pre-pandemic.

Although he still wants students to stay home if they are sick, Union Superintendent John Federline acknowledged the impact of habits developed – and in some cases encouraged as a mitigation tool – during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"It was a very difficult gear switch for all of us to get into that mind frame, and then now it's been a difficult gear switch to get out of that mind frame," Federline said. "The effects of COVID continue to reverberate."

"We know it was going to be bad. We had no idea how it would just continue on. Here we are in 2024, and we're still dealing with some of the effects of it."

In an effort to lower its districtwide chronic absenteeism rate, Union has launched "Must be present to win," a campaign incorporating both real and exaggerated excuses given for students' absences into satirical posters and social media posts.

Among those highlighted are Taylor Swift releasing a new album, resting up from a family vacation and going hunting for Bigfoot.

"It is generating some conversation," district spokesman Chris Payne said. "The kids are noticing them and really, the whole purpose is to bring attention to bear on chronic absenteeism and see if we can move the

needle a little." Along with the district-wide campaign, individual schools are utilizing initiatives tailored to their specific community.

Since the 2021-22 school year, Jarman Elementary School, 9015 E. 79th St., has lowered its chronic absenteeism rate by 10% and improved its average daily attendance rate by 2%.

Along with offering student-selected incentives each month to the grade with the best attendance, Principal Shawna Graham said she and her staff have made a point to bring up absenteeism with parents at every possible opportunity, both at in-person events and through regular messages, emails and even phone calls to families whose students are regularly missing school.

"We're definitely making attendance a priority and making sure that parents know the importance of it," she said. "Any time we have a family engagement event, we've made attendance an item we talk about. We've talked about what chronic absenteeism means and shared actual numbers of how many students we had were chronically absent. We would always see shock on parents' faces because the numbers were very high."

Graham's counterpart at Union High School, Beau Brannon, has also begun incorporating more individualized outreach in an effort to combat chronic absenteeism rates that exceeded 40% among sophomores and juniors last year.

Brannon has additional attendance challenges to contend with that his colleagues at almost every

other Union site do not.

"Our students being able to drive is a factor," he said. "Another factor that's not unique to all Tulsa schools but at least for us is that we allow off campus lunch, so we might have students take an extended lunch. We also have virtual classes in the mix as well for some students. We have some really challenging factors here that make it more difficult than for our younger counterparts."

With those challenges in mind, the staff at Union High School have made a point to ensure each of the more than 3,000 students on campus has at least one adult with whom they remain in regular contact.

In addition to relationship building efforts, the school has added a new assistant principal who is tasked solely with student engagement, including meeting with chronically absent students and their families to develop attendance goals.

To further incentivize students to regularly attend school, Union has also been adding and growing programs that students have specifically sought out, including construction and aerospace classes. Since its launch in 2020, more than 1,000 students have taken at least one of Union's construction classes while the school's second year aerospace program has 200 students this year.

"We are trying to provide programs that the kids are excited about," he said. "Unless they are sick, we want them here every day."

lenzy.krehbiel-burton@tulsaworld.com

Evaluation

OBJECTIVE 1: Reduce chronic absenteeism rates at Union Public Schools by 7% districtwide during the 2024-25 school year (from 30% to 23%).

- As of March 2025, Union **reduced chronic absenteeism** by **1.35%** – or **200 fewer students** – compared with the previous year, with two more months remaining in the 2024-25 school year.
 - **26.24% of Union students** were chronically absent compared to 27.59% a year ago.
 - At the site level, several schools showed significant improvement, with reductions in chronic absenteeism:
 - Moore Elementary -1.5%
 - Union High School -2.24%
 - Jefferson Elementary -2.55%
 - Andersen Elementary -2.94%
 - 8th Grade Center -3.34%
 - Grove Elementary -3.87%

OBJECTIVE 2: Increase the daily attendance rate from 90% to 93% districtwide during the same period.

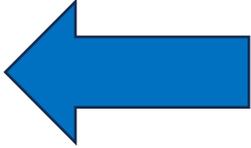
- The district's **average daily attendance (ADA) rate increased only slightly** to **91.21%** as of March 2025 (compared with 91.05% a year ago).
- At the site level, **nine schools** met or exceeded the 93% goal.
 - Several schools demonstrated gains in ADA: 6th/7th Grade Center +.054%
 - 8th Grade Center +0.59%
 - Union Freshman Academy +1.13%; and
 - Union High School +1.22%.

District Attendance Summary

as of *March 28, 2025

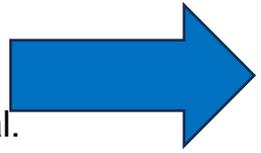
CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM by School Site (Aug. 2024-March 2025)

Site	Chronic Abs % March 2024	Chronic Abs % *March 2025	C-Abs% 2023 - 2024	C-Abs % Goal 2024-2025	C-Abs % Rate to Goal
DISTRICT	27.59%	26.24%	-1.352%	23%	3.24%
Andersen	15.70%	13.84%	-1.854%	14%	-0.16%
Boevers	21.46%	18.22%	-3.236%	13%	5.22%
Cedar Ridge	18.94%	19.72%	0.779%	15%	4.72%
Clark	23.02%	22.74%	-0.288%	13%	9.74%
Darnaby	13.10%	12.67%	-0.431%	12%	0.67%
Grove	20.56%	15.96%	-4.600%	13%	2.96%
Jarman	19.08%	17.02%	-2.056%	15%	2.02%
Jefferson	23.21%	20.32%	-2.893%	21%	-0.68%
McAuliffe	20.08%	18.09%	-1.986%	19%	-0.91%
Moore	18.98%	15.87%	-3.110%	17%	-1.13%
Ochoa	23.08%	25.38%	2.294%	22%	3.38%
Peters	14.96%	14.45%	-0.512%	10%	4.45%
Rosa Parks	23.29%	22.66%	-0.632%	18%	4.66%
6th Grade	22.45%	20.10%	-2.355%	19%	1.10%
7th Grade	27.60%	27.34%	-0.262%	25%	2.34%
8th Grade	32.31%	30.25%	-2.060%	29%	1.25%
UFA	32.57%	30.11%	-2.455%	29%	1.11%
High School	41.48%	39.91%	-1.573%	37%	2.91%



A reduction in chronic absenteeism of 1.352% (or 200 fewer students) vs. previous year

The district's average daily attendance rate increased only slightly to 91.21%, although **nine schools** met the 93% goal.



Site	ADA Rate to Last Fri in March 2024	ADA Rate to Last Fri in March 2025	ADA 2023 - 2024	ADA Goal 2024-2025	ADA Rate to Goal
DISTRICT	91.05%	91.21%	↑ 0.1520%	93%	↓ -1.7947%
Andersen	93.64%	93.77%	↑ 0.122%	96%	↓ -2.2336%
Boevers	93.36%	93.21%	↓ -0.154%	95%	↓ -1.7912%
Cedar Ridge	93.64%	93.34%	↓ -0.307%	96%	↓ -2.6641%
Clark	92.94%	92.32%	↓ -0.626%	96%	↓ -3.6821%
Darnaby	94.38%	94.10%	↓ -0.278%	96%	↓ -1.8965%
Grove	92.65%	93.72%	↑ 1.066%	95%	↓ -1.2848%
Jarman	93.43%	93.41%	↓ -0.022%	94%	↓ -0.5938%
Jefferson	92.66%	92.78%	↑ 0.118%	94%	↓ -1.2227%
McAuliffe	93.39%	93.15%	↓ -0.238%	95%	↓ -1.8519%
Moore	93.49%	93.44%	↓ -0.045%	95%	↓ -1.5567%
Ochoa	92.68%	92.01%	↓ -0.674%	95%	↓ -2.9894%
Peters	94.10%	93.84%	↓ -0.259%	96%	↓ -2.1574%
Rosa Parks	92.67%	92.31%	↓ -0.364%	95%	↓ -2.6932%
6th Grade	92.66%	92.94%	↑ 0.287%	93%	↓ -0.0576%
7th Grade	91.42%	91.71%	↑ 0.293%	91%	↑ 0.7119%
8th Grade	90.11%	90.57%	↑ 0.458%	91%	↓ -0.4280%
UFA	89.40%	90.38%	↑ 0.976%	92%	↓ -1.6234%
High School	86.99%	87.40%	↑ 0.406%	90%	↓ -2.6031%

MEDIA COVERAGE

Results/Reduction in Chronic Absenteeism



- April 9, 2025 – FOX 23: [Video: Union Public Schools reduce chronic absenteeism following attendance campaign | News | fox23.com](#)
- April 9, 2025 – KTUL-Channel 8: [Union Public Schools sees drop in chronic absenteeism for 2024-2025 year](#)
- April 9, 2025 – KOTV-NewsOn6: [Union Public Schools reduces student absenteeism by 1.35% with 'Be Present To Win' campaign](#)
- April 9, 2025 – 102.3 KRMG Radio: [Union Public Schools reduce chronic absenteeism following attendance campaign – 102.3 KRMG](#)



Union Public Schools News Release

For more information, contact:
Chris Payne, Chief Communications Officer at 918-357-6016, or 918-770-2469 (cell)

Union Public Schools reduces student chronic absenteeism by 1.35%

Parents, teachers and students invited to participate in [survey](#) about attendance attitudes

April 9, 2025 – Union Public Schools has made significant progress in reducing chronic absenteeism during the 2024-25 school year – a decrease of 1.35% districtwide, or 200 fewer students, as of March. Chronic absenteeism – defined as students missing 10% or more of school days, which is two days every month – has become an epidemic in America’s schools. As of March 2025, 26.24% of Union students were chronically absent compared to 27.59% a year ago.

“This is a significant improvement for Union given the 200 fewer students who are no longer chronically absent, making it more likely that they will be successful academically and less likely to drop out,” said Superintendent Dr. John Federline. “This is a tribute not only to the students who have shown improvement, but to the hard work of school leaders, teachers and administrators who focused this year on reducing absenteeism. Their diligence is paying off.”

At the beginning of the 2024-25 school year, Union launched a campaign called “Be Present to Win” to reduce chronic absenteeism. Using humor to poke fun at the various excuses students use to get out of school, the district wants students to equate success in career and life with being present at school.

“Good attendance is part of the foundation of student success,” said Dr. Todd Nelson, Senior Executive Director of Research, Design and Assessment. “Research shows that students with three consecutive years of chronic absenteeism can be set back as much as one full year academically.”

The district’s goal for the 2024-25 school year is to reduce chronic absenteeism rates from 30 percent to 23 percent; as of March, Union’s rate is at 26.24%. Union also seeks to increase the daily attendance rate from 90 percent to 93 percent; there has been a slight improvement to 91.21% as of March, compared with 91.05% a year ago.

“We continue to make attendance gains, but we still have work to do,” said Federline. “To keep this tight focus on reducing chronic absenteeism, we are conducting a survey of students, parents and teachers regarding their own attitudes about attendance. We want to see if there are differences among the groups and how we might more effectively combat excessive absenteeism.”

(more)

THE WORK CONTINUES

As Union Public Schools continues to chip away at chronic absenteeism, we continue to look to the data for answers. Five major themes arose from the parent, teacher and student surveys of more than 3,600 people. **Student and parental engagement** are a likely target for our continued efforts.*

1 Transportation*

Transportation solutions were a frequently mentioned category, highlighting the necessity for reliable and accessible buses. Participants emphasized the importance of reinstating bus routes and employing more bus drivers to ensure that all students can get to school without issues. The issue was framed as crucial for working parents who might not be able to drive their children to school. Additionally, ensuring that the transportation is safe and punctual was mentioned as a high priority. Reliable transportation is seen as a basic enabler for daily attendance.

[Show references](#)

2 Parental Engagement

Engaging parents in their children's education and attendance showed strong frequency in the responses. Participants discussed the value of schools communicating with families to understand barriers to attendance and to motivate children. Home visits, better communication, and creating a strong parent network were proposed solutions to increase engagement. Moreover, some suggested legal accountability for parents whose children frequently miss days. Participants conveyed that parental involvement plays a vital role in promoting regular attendance and addressing underlying issues.

[Show references](#)

3 Student Engagement

Ensuring students are engaged and motivated to attend school consistently was highlighted by several participants. Suggestions included creating a positive and welcoming school environment, building personal connections with students, making learning fun, and rewarding good attendance with small incentives. It was frequently noted that feeling valued and understood by both peers and teachers fosters a desire for regular attendance. This category underscores the psychological and social aspects of student attendance.

[Show references](#)

***Note:** A bus driver shortage that caused temporary cancellation of some routes heightened parent and teacher concerns about transportation due to timing of the survey. We are optimistic this will be less of a concern in the future.

4 Health and Safety

Health and Safety were important themes, emphasizing that students need a safe and healthy environment to ensure daily attendance. Concerns about bullying, school security, and the spread of illness were primary issues. Participants recommended that schools take steps to protect children from bullying, ensure campus safety, and promote illness prevention strategies. This category reflects how external factors related to health and safety can significantly impact student attendance.

[Show references](#)

5 Teacher-Student Relationships

Building strong, positive relationships between teachers and students was noted as essential for improving attendance. Participants highlighted the need for teachers to be more empathetic, engaging, and enthusiastic. Regular check-ins, showing genuine care, and maintaining consistent communication were specific strategies mentioned. These strong relationships help create an environment where students feel important and motivated to attend school regularly.

[Show references](#)



THE WORK CONTINUES

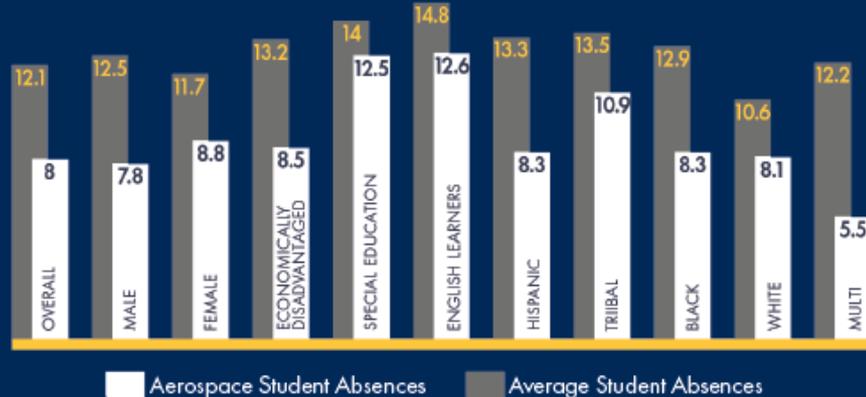
With the introduction of two major new programs – AERONAUTICS and CONSTRUCTION – Union is already seeing strong evidence that high engagement with programming results in lower rates of absenteeism among certain student populations.

UNION AEROSPACE PROGRAM REDHAWKS TAKE FLIGHT 2024-2025 IMPACT REPORT



Outcomes

Data indicates nearly every subset of student population in the aviation program has statistically significant better attendance and demonstrate lower absenteeism rates compared to their respective general school populations.



UNION CONSTRUCTION PROGRAM BUILDING THE FUTURE 2024-2025 IMPACT REPORT



Outcomes

Data indicates certain student populations in the construction program have statistically significant better attendance and demonstrate lower absenteeism rates compared to their respective general school populations.

