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States Commit to Meaningful Action on Chronic Absenteeism

WASHINGTON – Fourteen states have committed to [cut chronic absenteeism by 50% over five years](#), answering a challenge by a group of education advocates to urgently address a pressing issue that, if not fixed, could have long-term detrimental effects for our nation’s students.

Today’s [list of state education leaders](#) (use page password: state50%) represents a bipartisan commitment to take action for [more than 9 million students](#) and address an issue that is dragging down student well-being and achievement nationwide. This mix of states, representing all regions of the country, shows the reach of chronic absenteeism and how seriously education leaders are taking the problem.

Chronic absenteeism, or missing more than 10% of school days for any reason, spiked during the COVID-19 pandemic and has remained high in the years since, for students across the country in all demographic groups. Sustained high rates of absenteeism threaten students’ social, emotional, and academic development, and can have consequences not only for the absent students but also for their classmates.

“Addressing chronic absence in the aftermath of the pandemic is a shared responsibility that requires all of us working together,” said Hedy Chang, executive director of Attendance Works. “Improving student attendance will require not just goals, but concrete plans, perseverance and follow through. Governors, state education agencies and policy makers are uniquely positioned to alert everyone to the size of this challenge and to ensure they have the tools and strategies to improve engagement and attendance in school.”

In recognition of this problem, Attendance Works, EdTrust, and Nat Malkus of AEI [came together earlier this summer](#) to [publicly call on state leaders](#) to commit to dramatically reducing chronic absenteeism.

“We are grateful for the state leaders who have publicly committed to this pledge and will be coordinating with advocates across the country to ensure this important work continues in these states and others,” said Denise Forte, president and CEO of EdTrust. “The reasons for chronic absenteeism are varied, from health and transportation challenges to harmful discipline practices to a lack of authentic and culturally responsive family engagement. Students and families need education leaders to make chronic absenteeism a top priority this year, particularly ensuring success for the Black and Latino students and those from low-income backgrounds who are too often inadequately supported by their schools.”

State education leaders who have signed on to the pledge as of Sept. 4 are:

- Alabama Superintendent Eric Mackey
- Arkansas Commissioner Jacob Oliva
- Colorado Commissioner Susana Córdova
- Connecticut Commissioner Charlene Russell-Tucker
- Iowa Director McKenzie Snow
- Maryland Superintendent Carey Wright
- Nebraska Commissioner Brian Maher
- Nevada Superintendent Jhone Ebert
- New Mexico Deputy Cabinet Secretary Candice Castillo
- Ohio Director Stephen Dackin
- Rhode Island Commissioner Angélica Infante-Green
- Virginia Superintendent Lisa Coons
- Washington Superintendent Chris Reykdal
- West Virginia Superintendent Michele Blatt

“State leaders have a key role to play in turning back the post-pandemic surge in chronic absenteeism,” said Nat Malkus of AEI. “Chronic absenteeism is a crisis, and to fight it we need an all-hands-on-deck effort. By setting ambitious targets for improving regular attendance, state leaders can focus the attention of everyone — district and community leaders, educators and administrators, and parents and students — on a common target. These leaders are committed to maintain that focus for years to come and prevent elevated absenteeism from becoming the new normal.”

State education leaders interested in committing to this pledge should contact Attendance Works for more information. Additional information about chronic absenteeism and strategies to address it is available from [Attendance Works](#) and [EdTrust](#).

About Attendance Works

Attendance Works is a national and state initiative that promotes equal opportunities to learn and advances student success by inspiring and catalyzing policies and practices that prevent and reduce chronic absence. Our website offers an array of strategies and downloadable tools to help schools, districts and states address chronic absenteeism.

About EdTrust

EdTrust is committed to advancing policies and practices to dismantle the racial and economic barriers embedded in the American education system. Through our research and advocacy, EdTrust improves equity in education from preschool through college, engages diverse communities dedicated to education equity and justice, and increases political and public will to build an education system where students will thrive.

About Nat Malkus

Nat Malkus is a senior fellow and the deputy director of education policy at the American Enterprise Institute, a public policy think tank dedicated to defending human dignity, expanding human potential, and building a freer and safer world. Specializing in empirical research on K–12 schooling, his recent work has focused on K–12 school responses to the COVID-19 pandemic.