

In Their Words: Coordinator Views on Chronic Absenteeism and Policy Gaps

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Executive Summary

Between March and June 2025, University of Denver students, facilitated through professor Dr. David Furjanic, partnered with the Colorado Department of Education's (CDE) Dropout Prevention and Student Re-Engagement Office run by Johann Liljengren. Analyses were conducted based on contact with attendance coordinators from 5 districts and attendance data, such as the goal calculator for districts, state policy, and an attendance overview from the 23-24 year was made available to the evaluation team.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to investigate, from the perspectives on school-based personnel, the systemic causes of chronic absenteeism across K–12 public school districts in Colorado and to evaluate the extent to which current district attendance policies reflect those realities and support equitable non-punitive solutions. The study explored factors impacting student attendance and examines how district policies and practices align with legal expectations and the CDE guidance on addressing absenteeism.

In order to do this, the project team interviewed Attendance Coordinators across a range of districts in Colorado, analyzed attendance policies in those districts, and completed a thematic analysis of the interview data. The study prioritized equity and cultural responsiveness, with the goal of identifying gaps between policy and practice and informing actionable, systems-level recommendations for the CDE and local districts to better support student attendance and academic success statewide.

Methodology

This study utilized a qualitative design combining semi-structured interviews and attendance policy analysis to explore attendance challenges and policy alignment across select Colorado school districts. Attendance Coordinators from five districts were interviewed to gather in-depth insights into local practices, perceived factors impacting attendance, and equity considerations. Interview topics included policy implementation, family engagement, cultural responsiveness, and intervention strategies. A thematic analysis was conducted using a framework grounded in the CDE's definitions of chronic absenteeism sources, with additional themes emerging organically. In parallel, attendance policies from eleven districts were reviewed against nine criteria drawn from Colorado legislation (i.e., C.R.S. 22-33-107) and CDE policy guidance to assess legal compliance and equity orientation. This integrated approach allowed the research team to identify discrepancies between state guidance and district policies, highlight systemic barriers, and develop targeted recommendations.

Key Findings

Upon conclusion of the study, key findings were found:

1. From the policy analysis, it was found that **most districts correctly define habitual truancy and meet notification timelines to parents**, showing better compliance in these areas. However, while several districts meet criteria in spirit, there is a pattern of the use of non-specific language that potentially weakens policy enforceability and clarity.
2. **Districts are actively addressing attendance issues.** They find individual and punitive approaches to be ineffective and developing a relationship with the family to be critical.

Districts also communicated a need for improvement in policies to account for cultural differences.

3. **Attendance coordinators perceive Barriers to be the biggest source of chronic absenteeism**, including another identified source called Within Barriers, which is defined as internal factors out of students' control (e.g., medical conditions, mental health disorders or disabilities). It was also found that sociopolitical factors are another main source of chronic absenteeism

Suggested next steps for CDE include focusing future initiatives and guidance on non-punitive, system-level solutions that address root causes of absenteeism through community engagement, wraparound services, and culturally responsive strategies. In addition, providing more specific, equity-centered policy templates and technical support to districts would help to ensure clarity, compliance, and effectiveness in addressing chronic absenteeism.

In Their Words: Coordinator Views on Chronic Absenteeism and Policy Gaps: Full Report

Introduction and Purpose of Study

Chronic absenteeism continues to pose a significant challenge to educational equity and student success in Colorado and across the nation. Despite efforts by the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) to clarify attendance expectations and enhance data collection, many districts still lack equitable, preventative, and culturally responsive attendance practices, a problem exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

This study emerged in response to concerns raised by the CDE regarding persistent absenteeism across Colorado districts and the need to better understand the perspectives of district attendance leaders. Based on the information provided by the CDE, the research team determined that this study should investigate the relationship between family engagement, cultural responsiveness, district-level structures and student attendance, both at a policy level and from an anecdotal perspective. Specifically, the study aimed to examine the alignment of district attendance policies with CDE's legal and equity-focused criteria, elevate the perspectives of district attendance coordinators, identify common barriers and supports related to chronic absenteeism, and highlight effective strategies for promoting student attendance across diverse school communities.

The study involved analyzing attendance policies from twelve Colorado districts that have been de-identified for the purpose of this report. In addition, interviews were conducted with attendance coordinators from five of these districts between April and May 2025. Graduate students recorded and transcribed the interviews, reviewed the data for thematic content and frequency of discussion topics, and documented key quotes to support interpretation. Students also conducted a thorough policy analysis across all participating districts to identify patterns and gaps between policy and practice.

Findings from this study indicate that punitive systems often alienate families and fail to improve attendance consistently or address the underlying causes of absenteeism. Individual interventions that lack systems-level coordination were also reported to have limited impact. While building relationships with families was consistently described as critical, limited time and resources often hinder the scalability of these efforts. Finally, the study found significant variation across districts in their responsiveness to cultural and sociopolitical factors. These findings emphasize the need for systemic, equity-centered reforms across districts and inform the study's recommendations for more culturally responsive, preventative, and coordinated attendance interventions.

Background

History of the Intervention

Chronic absenteeism is a pervasive and complex challenge facing public education systems across the country, with implications for student academic success, engagement, and long-term outcomes. In Colorado, the CDE defines chronic absenteeism as missing 10% or more of enrolled school days for any reason, whether excused or unexcused. In response to rising absenteeism trends following the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly among historically underserved student populations, the CDE has intensified its focus on systemic attendance interventions. This report represents a collaborative effort between the University of Denver and the CDE to investigate the lived realities underlying chronic absenteeism and to assess the alignment of local attendance policies with state expectations and equitable best practices.

The work described in this report is a systems-level needs assessment aimed at uncovering policy gaps and elevating district-level practices that support student attendance. It integrates qualitative data from interviews with district attendance coordinators and a policy analysis of five district attendance protocols. This approach recognizes that absenteeism is an ecological issue—impacted by students’ individual challenges, family dynamics, school culture, and broader sociopolitical forces. This project draws upon ecological-systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), which frames human development within nested systems—microsystem (family, school), mesosystem (school-family relationships), exosystem (district policies), and macrosystem (sociocultural norms and legislation).

Within the organizational structure of CDE, this project builds upon and complements prior efforts to standardize attendance metrics, streamline data collection, and promote early warning systems. However, it fills a critical gap by elevating qualitative perspectives from those on the ground and assessing not just legal compliance, but cultural responsiveness and equity alignment. This work also intersects with the state’s MTSS framework, which promotes data-driven, tiered supports for academic, behavioral, and engagement challenges—including attendance.

This report is also situated within a broader national movement to reframe attendance interventions from punitive to preventative, mirroring work by Attendance Works and the National Center for Safe and Supportive Learning Environments. As other states move toward tiered systems of supports and trauma-informed frameworks for absenteeism, Colorado is positioned to lead through proactive policy adaptation rooted in the lived experiences of families, educators, and students.

Logic Model of the Project

The evaluation conducted was a thematic analysis across policy and interviews with attendance coordinators. A thematic analysis is a qualitative research method used to identify, analyze and interpret patterns within a set of data. In the case of this study, interview transcripts were used.

The logic model guiding this project is as follows:

- **Inputs:** CDE partnership, university research team, access to district attendance policies, interview data from district attendance coordinators, CDE policy criteria and legal statutes.
- **Activities:** Conduct semi-structured interviews, perform thematic coding, complete district policy review using CDE's nine-point rubric, identify discrepancies and patterns.
- **Outputs:** A comprehensive thematic analysis of barriers, beliefs, and misconceptions; a compliance map of district policies; synthesis of best practices and policy recommendations.
- **Outcomes (Short-term):** Increased understanding of on-the-ground challenges to attendance policy implementation; identification of equity gaps in policy language and practice.
- **Impact (Long-term):** Improved state guidance on culturally responsive, legally aligned attendance interventions; more inclusive, proactive district-level attendance practices.

See the full logic model attached in [Appendix A](#).

Best Practices and Relevant Policies

Best practices for addressing chronic absenteeism emphasize culturally sustaining family engagement, early intervention, trauma-informed support systems, and tiered approaches aligned with MTSS. The U.S. Department of Education and organizations like Attendance Works advocate for relational, not punitive, engagement, pointing to evidence that chronic absenteeism decreases when students feel connected to school and supported by adults (U.S. DOE, 2019; Attendance Works, 2022).

CDE's guidance, rooted in Colorado Revised Statutes (C.R.S.) §22-33-104 and §22-33-107, outlines legal requirements for compulsory attendance and the responsibilities of school districts in monitoring and addressing absences. While these laws set clear expectations, they allow for flexibility in how districts interpret and respond to attendance issues, making equitable implementation essential.

Professional guidelines from the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP, 2020) and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015) also support integrated, data-informed, and family-centered approaches to absenteeism. These guidelines emphasize dismantling systemic barriers for students with disabilities, English learners, and those affected by poverty, mental health challenges, and racial discrimination.

Applying these best practices to local school contexts requires attention to each school community's unique demographic, cultural, and structural realities. This study found that across districts, the most effective strategies include:

- Culturally and linguistically responsive communication protocols with families.
- Shifting from compliance-driven truancy enforcement to supportive case management.
- Integrating attendance monitoring into broader MTSS and student support frameworks.

- Partnering with community-based organizations to address external barriers such as transportation and health care access.

These strategies are particularly applicable to Colorado schools, where vast geographic, linguistic, and socioeconomic diversity shape student attendance patterns. A one-size-fits-all approach is insufficient; thus, the CDE must empower districts to interpret state guidance through an equity lens and tailor interventions accordingly.

Methodology

Timeline

The University of Denver student team developed a two-part plan to better understand attendance challenges across the state of Colorado: (1) a policy analysis of district attendance policies and (2) a thematic analysis of interviews conducted with attendance coordinators statewide. The proposed timeline of activities can be found below (Figure 2). On April 30, 2025, the team submitted a set of proposed interview questions to the CDE Attendance Team for feedback. Suggestions were returned on May 1. The student team initially aimed to complete the analysis of twelve district attendance policies by May 9, but this was ultimately finalized on May 14. Interviews were scheduled for completion by May 16 but were not concluded until May 23. The thematic analysis of interviews was projected for completion by May 30 and was finalized on schedule.

Figure 1. Timeline.



Data Collection

Policy Analysis: Policy analysts on the student team reviewed the attendance policies of 12 Colorado school districts that have been de-identified for the purpose of this report. The purpose of the policy analysis was to determine if current district policies are meeting CDE expectations. Analysts utilized a set of nine criteria based on CDE policy recommendations and legal expectations (e.g., CRS 22-33-107) to determine which parts of district policies met, partially met, or did not meet criteria.

Thematic Analysis: The CDE team emailed interview invitations on May 1 to attendance coordinators from the previously identified school districts. Six coordinators from five different districts scheduled interviews with members of the student team. These interviews, conducted between May 7 and May 23, lasted approximately 30 minutes each and were recorded with participants' permission for data collection purposes. Following the interviews, recordings were transcribed and analyzed using a coding system based on pre-established thematic "buckets" representing known contributing factors to chronic absenteeism (e.g., barriers, aversion, disengagement, and misconceptions). Additional themes were added as they emerged. While the original plan for thematic analysis focused solely on identifying contributing factors to absenteeism, the analysis also revealed broader themes that extended beyond those factors.

Limitations

A primary limitation of our study was the limited representation of rural perspectives, as only one rural school district participated in the interviews. This underrepresentation may have influenced the breadth and applicability of our findings, particularly in understanding attendance challenges unique to rural settings. Additionally, one district did not have its attendance policy publicly available online, which restricted our ability to include them in the policy analysis and may have slightly impacted the comprehensiveness of that portion of the study. Another limitation is that the student team gathered perspectives from only one individual per district (or two, in one case), which may not fully reflect the diverse implementation of attendance practices across different schools and administrators within each district. While these interviews provide valuable insight, caution should be taken in generalizing the findings to represent district-wide practices comprehensively.

Findings

Policy Analysis

Analysis of publicly available attendance policies from each of the 12 districts resulted in a few key findings. It should be noted that no policy from one district was found and thus it has been excluded from the policy findings. Each district's policy was evaluated against the 9 criteria in Figure 3 and received a met, partially met, or didn't meet for each, which was then further

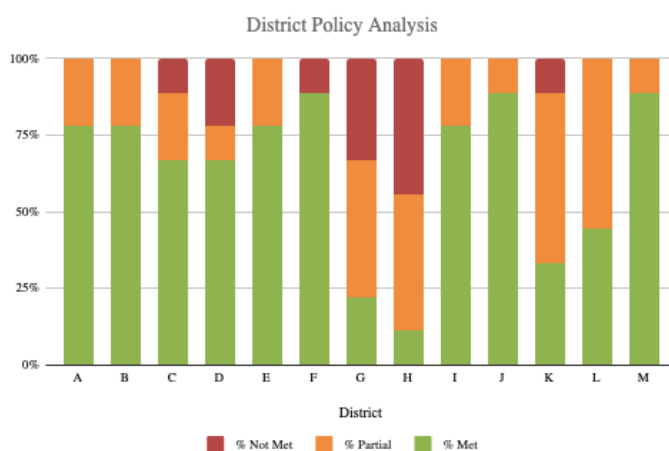
analyzed to provide an overview of which districts are following the state expectations set forth by the CDE. Further breakdown of the data can be found in [Appendix B](#).

Figure 2. Criteria and Legal Expectations.

	Criterion	Legal Expectation (C.R.S. 22-33-107)
1	Attendance Enforcement Authority	Designation of an attendance officer or board responsibility
2	Monitoring & Reporting	Policy outlines methods to monitor daily attendance and follow up
3	Habitual Truancy Process	Policy defines habitual truancy (4+ unexcused in a month or 10+ in a year) and intervention steps
4	Supportive Plans for Absentees	Includes strategies or plans to support students with frequent absences
5	Parent Notification	Timely notice to parents/guardians when a student has unexcused absences or patterns of nonattendance
6	Legal Action Protocol	Clear process for referral to truancy court or other legal measures, after exhaustion of supports
7	Equity Considerations	Policy ensures non-punitive, equitable attendance supports (e.g., addressing barriers, wraparound services)
8	School-Level Procedures	Policy includes procedures at the building level for teachers/admins to track and respond to absences
9	Prevention Programs	References to prevention/intervention programs (e.g., home visits, mentorship, counseling)

A key finding was found that 11 out of the 12 districts correctly defined habitual truancy and met notification timelines to parents. As shown in Figure 4, districts range from 90% to 10% of criteria fully met, with wider ranges when we look at partially met, in which 7 districts fully or partially meet all criteria.

Figure 3. District Policy Analysis.



Interview Content

Systemic Approaches

In addition to factors of chronic absenteeism, attendance coordinators also openly shared some of their perspectives and beliefs regarding attendance issues; some of these were consistent across

interviews. One of these perspectives was shared by a majority of the attendance coordinators: chronic absenteeism needs to be addressed systematically, or in other words, individual responses are not as effective. For example, one attendance coordinator stated “doing attendance [interventions] as a reactive [response] - one student, one family at a time...is not working. It doesn't work, and we need to pull it back and actually do a more tiered systems approach towards attendance”. Along that same line of thinking was the emphasis of needing proactive, rather than reactive, efforts. Fortunately, many of the attendance coordinators eagerly shared their district’s current efforts to produce a more preventative system, regardless of where they were in that process.

Relationships with Families

Due to the impact families can have on students’ attendance, most attendance coordinators also highlighted the need to develop stronger family-school relationships. Depending on the district, methods of building such relationships varied, including promoting two-way communication; involving families in interventions; and utilizing cultural liaisons during meetings with culturally and linguistically diverse families.

Cultural Considerations

Lastly, an overarching sentiment among attendance coordinators was the desire to develop more culturally-sustaining practices. One district specifically highlighted current policies’ narrow reflection of the White, middle-class experience, neglecting other experiences like multigenerational households and other nontraditional family structures. Although more abstract, districts also mentioned the role cultural capital plays in families’ understanding of attendance policies, which may unintentionally reinforce bias or discrimination. Underlying these points was also the desire to adapt attendance policies and practices to accurately address the current culture. Examples of this include transitioning into more tailored and empathetic communication with families and transitioning away from sending truancy letters as well as punitive measures in general.

Thematic Analysis

Barriers

As defined by the CDE, *Barriers* involves external factors students experience such as transportation issues, their family’s lack of childcare, or unsafe neighborhoods. This main source of chronic absenteeism was the most mentioned across interview transcripts, making up **25%** of what was discussed. When discussing *Barriers* within the interviews, the majority of external factors mentioned revolved around transportation issues, whereas lack of childcare and housing security were mentioned much less.

Within Barriers

The team identified this source of chronic absenteeism as a subsection of Barriers. *Within Barriers* addresses the attendance coordinators’ mention of within-student barriers, or internal

factors out of their locus of control, such as mental health disorders, disabilities, or medical conditions; this made up **19%** of what was discussed. The internal factor most mentioned by attendance coordinators was medical conditions, described the frequent absence of students who need to receive medical services during the school day. Next most frequently mentioned were mental health disorders (e.g., anxiety and depression) and the impact of symptoms on students' ability to function and attend school. One attendance coordinator acknowledged students' mental health when they said "Students that are experiencing anxiety just overall, with school, with peers, with engaging academically...I think that's a big challenge as well. If...my anxiety is such that I can't get up [then I can't] connect with school, right?" Lastly, the term disability was mentioned as an internal factor, specifically to describe autism spectrum disorder. Similar to medical conditions, the cause for chronic absenteeism around students' disabilities is the need to receive services during the school day.

Disengagement

As defined by the CDE, *Disengagement* involves students displaying lack of motivation and/or interest in attending school, which may be due to lack of connection with teachers, peers, or the school environment. This source of chronic absenteeism was the second-most mentioned across interviews, making up **13%** of what was discussed. When discussing *Disengagement* within the interviews, attendance coordinators provided a wide variety of responses in terms of categories. The most endorsed reason behind lack of motivation and/or interest in attending school was lack of connection with peers, followed by lack of connection with the school environment. One attendance coordinator provided an example of what a lack of connection with peers may look like: "Kids who aren't necessarily like involved with a sport or a club, and like all their friends don't go to school so...why would [they] go to school - yeah kids want to go to school to see their friends, but if all their friends are over [there] at the park, not in school, [then that makes it] tough". Two other notable mentions were: students not feeling that the teaching they are receiving is engaging, and that older students are more likely to leave school due to their increased access to transportation.

Caregiver Disengagement

The team identified this source of chronic absenteeism as a subsection of Disengagement. *Caregiver Disengagement* addresses the attendance coordinators' mention of caregivers' and/or families' disengagement in particular, and how that then leads to student absence; this made up **7%** of what was discussed. No additional context was provided around attendance coordinators' responses aside from the fact that they perceive some caregivers and/or families to be unengaged, or involved, in their student's education and attendance. Only one other aspect of *Caregiver Disengagement* was mentioned, and it was regarding unaccompanied youth, where one attendance coordinator expressed "Our procedure(s) work for...kids that have some degree of family engagement, but like what about unaccompanied youth or things like that...that's where I see like the biggest, I don't know if you'd call it like, a cultural issue".

Misconceptions

As defined by the CDE, *Misconceptions* involves students misunderstanding the importance of attendance and its impact on their academic progress. There were no endorsements from attendance coordinators for this source of chronic absenteeism. The team believes this result may be due to the fact that most interviewees were at the district level; thus, their perspective may come from a broader lens wherein they are focused more on caregivers than students.

Caregiver Misconception/Miscommunication

Although there was no mention of student misconceptions, there was endorsement of caregiver misconceptions which was often reportedly due to miscommunication, so the team identified a subsection of *Misconceptions* called *Caregiver Misconception/Miscommunication*. This source of chronic absenteeism made up **14%** of what was discussed. When discussing these circumstances within the interviews, attendance coordinators provided the most variety of responses. Each of the following responses were endorsed at maximum twice: caregivers believing that students may take mental health days as often as they want; caregivers believing that attendance is optional in early childhood education; caregivers underestimating how many days their student has missed; caregivers being confused as to when to keep their student home when it comes to sickness; and caregivers misunderstanding how many absences are appropriate. Regarding caregiver communication specifically, attendance coordinators provided further explanation. They endorsed that a lack of communication, inaccessible communication (i.e., only emailing), and conflicting explanations from school staff all may lead to misconceptions from caregivers.

Aversion

As defined by the CDE, *Aversion* refers to students' feelings surrounding school including fear of bullying, learning difficulties, or feeling disconnected. This source of chronic absenteeism was the least mentioned across interview transcripts, making up only **4%** of what was discussed. When discussing *Aversion* within the interviews, attendance coordinators provided two types of general responses: students' academic performance or progress, and students feeling disconnected.

Sociopolitical Factors

A source of chronic absenteeism that emerged from the team's thematic analysis was *Sociopolitical Factors*. This source was identified due to attendance coordinators mentioning the impact of the COVID-19 on student attendance as well as several political factors and/or government policies that have affected students directly, especially around gender expression and immigration; these responses made up **16%** of what was discussed. One attendance coordinator provided several examples regarding the impact of government policies on students, including "We had the FBI come and investigate a gender-neutral bathroom. So, there's this lack of safety around and...I'm like, okay, so I see the data, what's happening in your schools [is]

impacting attendance,” “I heard from several elementary schools that within their Hispanic population, there was some infighting. ‘Well, I’m from Mexico and you’re from Venezuela, so this is all your fault’. Things like that,” and “We did a lot to make sure that school leaders knew what to do in case officials came to the door to ensure that we triple down...on our commitment to making sure that schools were safe for our students, we got that message out as broadly as possible to the community. And the problem is [we were] still getting families who were terrified just getting from their home to school. We had, anecdotally, students just completely decide to drop out. They’re like, ‘this isn’t going to work for us’ and leave school completely”.

Recommendations

Expand Equitable Transportation Solutions

Given that transportation emerged as the most frequently cited external barrier to attendance, the CDE should partner with local districts to emphasize the importance of and expand equitable transportation options. This may include offering free or reduced-fare transit passes for students and families in high-need areas, piloting district-sponsored van routes for students in transitional housing or rural communities and establishing community-based “walking school buses” to increase safety and consistency. Research indicates that reliable transportation is a critical determinant of consistent school attendance and academic achievement (Gottfried, 2017). These approaches should prioritize collaboration with local governments, community organizations, and families to tailor solutions to specific geographic and demographic contexts.

Strengthen Access to Mental and Physical Health Services

Internal barriers, including chronic illness, anxiety, and depression, were the second-most discussed causes of absenteeism. To address this, the CDE could work with districts to co-locate health and mental health services on school campuses and expand telehealth partnerships. Additionally, CDE could offer technical assistance in creating Integrated Student Support frameworks that emphasize early identification and intervention for health-related absenteeism. Empirical literature supports that school-based health centers can improve attendance and reduce health-related absences (Knopf et al., 2016), particularly when services are comprehensive and culturally responsive.

Bolster Culturally Sustaining Family Engagement Practices

Interviewees widely emphasized the importance of authentic relationships with families, and many responses highlighted misconceptions or miscommunication as key contributors to absenteeism. The CDE could develop and disseminate model communication protocols that reflect multilingual access, plain-language summaries of attendance policies, and culturally responsive family partnership practices. Training modules should be offered to districts on how to shift from deficit-oriented views of families to collaborative engagement rooted in trust and cultural humility (Ishimaru, 2014). These efforts will help mitigate unintentional biases embedded in attendance outreach and policy enforcement.

Replace Punitive Measures with Tiered Supports

Several coordinators noted that current policy practices, such as truancy letters and court referrals, often fail to address the root causes of chronic absenteeism and disproportionately affect marginalized students. The CDE should revise guidance to districts encouraging the replacement of punitive measures with a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) framework that includes attendance-specific interventions. This includes tiered responses based on attendance trends, case management approaches, and supportive home visits. Empirical findings show that restorative and supportive approaches are more effective in improving attendance than punitive responses (Attendance Works, 2022).

Address Student Disengagement Through School Climate/Belonging Initiatives

Thirteen percent of interview data referenced student disengagement due to weak peer relationships, low connection to school environments, or unengaging instruction. CDE could support the adoption and implementation of evidence-based school climate strategies that foster a sense of belonging, including advisory periods, mentorship programs, and student voice initiatives. Research underscores the role of school connectedness in preventing absenteeism and improving academic outcomes (CDC, 2009). Specific guidance could include student-led climate audits, social-emotional learning programs, and peer mentoring frameworks tailored to middle and high school students.

Respond to Sociopolitical Factors with Equity-Centered Policy Flexibility

Sociopolitical factors, including fear related to immigration status and anti-LGBTQ+ legislation, were mentioned in 16% of coded responses. The CDE could offer explicit guidance to districts on creating trauma-informed and identity-affirming attendance policies. This includes developing policies that account for the unique needs of students experiencing marginalization, providing equity audits for current attendance practices, and supporting districts in adopting inclusive language and protocols. Policy flexibility grounded in equity can buffer against external social stressors that disrupt student engagement (Berger et al., 2021).

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Colorado Revised Statutes (C.R.S.) §§22-33-104 and 22-33-107.

Appendices

Appendix A: District Data and Proposal

- [Goal calculator](#): This is a goal calculator that the CDE created this year and provided to the evaluation team. You can see the chronic absenteeism rate for each district for the past three years (and can do some sorting if you want to base on demographics and other info).

Logic Model

Environmental Elements and Context: • Statewide drop in attendance in 2021–22 with gradual improvement, but still below 2016 levels • 800,000 additional student days lost; 62% of districts saw decreases in attendance • Student attendance linked to academic performance and graduation outcomes (e.g., NAEP, 3rd-grade reading, high school graduation) • Common barriers include illness, transportation, housing instability, lack of technology • Aversion and disengagement driven by anxiety, peer conflicts, curriculum relevance, and adult connections • Misconceptions persist around the importance of consistent attendance		
Inputs: • Project team and district contacts • Access to district attendance policies and current practice data • Literature on attendance and known barriers • Participation of district attendance coordinators	Activities: • Develop interview questions • Conduct interviews with attendance coordinators • Review district attendance policies • Compare policy language with actual practices • Conduct thematic analysis of interviews to identify patterns in perceived challenges	Outputs: • A comprehensive, thematic report on challenges • Policy recommendations to address those challenges • Summary of cultural considerations in district policy language
Short-Term Outcomes: • Identification and understanding of the perceived challenges to attendance in districts across CO • Increased awareness among stakeholders about attendance challenges across CO districts	Medium-Term Outcomes: • Policy updates in districts reflecting identified student challenges • Greater alignment between policy and practice	Long-Term Outcomes: • Improved K–12 student attendance statewide • Academic improvements (e.g., reading by 3rd grade, NAEP performance) • Reduced dropout rates and improved graduation rates

Appendix B: Policies and Information

Policies/information: Here are a few things that the CDE provided to the evaluation team for use. Most of this is just things that we have produced so not literature or guidance necessarily.

- [State policy](#): This is our basic policy page that outlines state policy and where districts need to make decisions.
- [Attendance overview](#): This is a summary of 23-24 data.
- [Attendance media briefing](#): This is our media briefing from last fall
- [Attendance press release](#): This is the press release we had for last year.

Raw Data for District Policy Analysis

District	Total Criteria	Meets Standard (Yes)	Partial	Does Not Meet (No)	Percent Met	Percent Partial	Percent Not Met
A	9	7	2	0	77.78	22.22	0
B	9	7	2	0	77.78	22.22	0
C	9	6	2	1	66.67	22.22	11.11
D	9	6	1	2	66.67	11.11	22.22
E	9	7	2	0	77.78	22.22	0
F	9	8	0	1	88.89	0	11.11
G	9	2	4	3	22.22	44.44	33.33
H	9	1	4	4	11.11	44.44	44.44
I	9	7	2	0	77.78	22.22	0
J	9	8	1	0	88.89	11.11	0
K	9	3	5	1	33.33	55.56	11.11
L	9	4	5	0	44.44	55.56	0
M	9	8	1	0	88.89	11.11	0

For further details and breakdown per district, please see:

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1b8NO3WIEHUWZRVo_74ajkHl8jRd4PTMo/edit?usp=sharing&ouid=118388634990287654213&rtpof=true&sd=true

Appendix C: Interview Questions and Data

Email Template for Districts

Hello _____,

I hope this message finds you well.

My name is [Tara Purcell/Allie Cohen], and I am a student at the University of Denver working with the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) on a project focused on understanding attendance practices and challenges across school districts. We are conducting interviews with

attendance coordinators to gather insights into how current policies are working, where challenges arise, and how we can better support students and families.

We would be grateful if you would be willing to participate in a brief interview for approximately 30 minutes. Your perspective is incredibly valuable to helping us identify areas of strength, barriers that exist, and potential updates to policies that better reflect the realities faced in schools and communities.

To make scheduling as easy as possible, we have provided available interview times through Calendly with myself and Allie Cohen. Please feel free to select a time that works best for you:

Allie Cohen is available on

- Varies by week, please see link below

Tara Purcell is available on

- Mondays and Tuesdays from 3:00pm – 5:30pm
- Wednesdays 9:30am – 11:30am
- Fridays 1:00pm – 3:30pm

During the interview, we will ask about:

- Your experiences supporting attendance in your district
- Perspectives on your district's current attendance policies and practices
- Barriers to attendance you observe, including cultural and systemic considerations
- Suggestions or recommendations for improvements

Participation is entirely voluntary, and your responses will be kept confidential in any reports or summaries. After you select an interview time, we will send you the list of interview questions for your review prior to the interview date.

Please let me know if you have any questions ahead of time. Thank you very much for considering this opportunity to share your expertise and experiences — we truly appreciate your time and insight!

Warmly,
[Tara Purcell/Allie Cohen]
EdS School Psychology

Finalized Interview Questions

1. Role & Responsibilities

- How would you describe your role in supporting student attendance in your district?
2. Policies & Implementation
 - Can you walk me through your district's current attendance policies and procedures?
 - In your experience, how effective are your district's attendance policies in addressing attendance issues?
 - Are there any gaps between policy and practice that you notice in your day-to-day work?
 - Are there any policies that you feel are outdated or difficult to implement?
 - If you could update or change one part of your district's attendance policy, what would it be and why?
 - How do you help build consistency in your implementation of attendance policies around your district?
 3. Equity & Responsiveness
 - How do your policies account for cultural, linguistic, or socioeconomic differences among families?
 - Can you share examples where standard policies did not fully address a student or family's situation?
 4. Barriers & Challenges
 - What barriers do you believe most impact student attendance in your district? (Barriers, Aversion, Disengagement, Misconceptions)
 - What challenges do you encounter most frequently when trying to support students with chronic absenteeism?
 5. Interventions & Strategies
 - What strategies have you found most helpful in improving attendance?
 - Based on your experience or knowledge of other districts, are there practices you think are especially effective elsewhere that could be adopted?
 - At what point in a student's attendance pattern do interventions typically begin within your district? (percentage)
 6. Family & Community Engagement
 - How does your district engage families and students in conversations about attendance? Are there ways this could be improved?