



NHCSL

THE NATIONAL HISPANIC CAUCUS OF STATE LEGISLATORS

RESOLUTION

No. 2019-11

Addressing Chronic Absenteeism in Schools

Reported to the Caucus by the NHCSL
Education Task Force
Sen. Martín Quezada (AZ), Chair

Sponsored by Rep. Patricio Ruiloba (NM)

Unanimously ratified by the Caucus on December 5, 2019

1 **WHEREAS**, the total time of quality instructional contact is one of the most powerful
2 variables in determining student learning and only when students are in school every
3 day can the educational system fulfill its promise of equalization; and,

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5 **WHEREAS**, many students experience significant adversity in their lives, including
6 healthcare issues, violence, poverty, food insecurity, and other difficult
7 circumstances, that make it difficult for them to attend and take advantage of the
8 opportunity to learn at school; and,

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10 **WHEREAS**, students who are chronically absent (who miss at least 10 percent of the
11 school year each year) are at a serious risk of falling behind in school; and,

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13 **WHEREAS**, chronic absenteeism focuses on both excused and unexcused absences,
14 recognizing the importance of all missed school time; and,

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16 **WHEREAS**, more than 7 million children nationally, or 1 in 6 students, missed 10
17 percent or more of the school days during the 2015-2016 school year;¹ and,

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19 **WHEREAS**, students of color, including black, Hispanic, and American Indian
20 students, experience greater rates of chronic absenteeism than their white peers; and,

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22 **WHEREAS**, compared with white students, black students are 40 percent more likely
23 to miss 10 percent or more of the school year, Hispanic students are 17 percent more
24 likely, and American Indian students are 50 percent more likely;² and,

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26 **WHEREAS**, consistent attendance is a critical factor for students to build and
27 maintain a foundation for ongoing learning and academic success throughout life,
28 including closing the persistent achievement gap among students of color and their
29 peers; and,

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31 **WHEREAS**, chronic absenteeism occurs at every grade level, but is highest among
32 high school students and among students in the elementary grades;³ and,

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34 **WHEREAS**, when students do not attend school, they miss critical instructional time
35 that often cannot be replicated; and

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37 **WHEREAS**, chronic absenteeism is linked to a number of negative outcomes,
38 including low proficiency rates in math and English, diminished health, an increased
39 likelihood of dropping out, an increased likelihood of needing college remediation,
40 and an increased likelihood of involvement in the criminal justice system;⁴ and,

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42 **WHEREAS**, the reasons for chronic absenteeism are as varied as the challenges that
43 students and their families face, including poor physical and mental health,⁵ limited

¹ See Department of Education, *Chronic Absenteeism in the Nation's Schools: A hidden educational crisis* (Jan. 2019), available at <https://www2.ed.gov/datastory/chronicabsenteeism.html>

Data is from the 2015-2016 Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC). Almost every public school in the country is included in the CRDC. The data helps us understand who is chronically absent, at what grade levels chronic absenteeism tends to occur, and how chronic absenteeism compares community-by-community and state-by-state.

² See note 1.

³ See Rebecca A. London, et al, *The Dynamics of Chronic Absence and Student Achievement* (Oct. 3, 2016), available at <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1119285.pdf>

This analysis finds that it is difficult to determine the underlying factors of chronic absenteeism, but speculates that transportation, parent work schedules, student family obligations, student health, school environment, and other issues play important roles. Regarding policy intervention, the study suggests states define chronic absenteeism, school districts track attendance patterns for individual students, and states describe attendance intervention systems for parents and students.

⁴ See University of Delaware Center for Research in Education & Social Policy, *Chronic Absenteeism and Its Impact on Achievement* (June 2018), available at https://www.cresp.udel.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/P18-002.5_final.pdf

⁵ See Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, *The Relationship Between School Attendance and Health* (Sept. 1, 2016), available at <https://www.rwjf.org/en/library/research/2016/09/the-relationship-between-school-attendance-and-health.html>

Stress, violence or trauma at home or at school can lead to increased absences. Both physical and mental health must be acknowledged as reasons for chronic absenteeism.

44 transportation, and a lack of safety – which can be particularly acute in disadvantaged
45 communities and areas of poverty;⁶ and,

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47 **WHEREAS**, the federal Every Students Succeeds Act (ESSA) empowered states to
48 create unique state accountability systems that include measures of “school quality
49 or student success,” which includes the ability to focus on chronic absenteeism; and,

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51 **WHEREAS**, 36 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico included chronic
52 absenteeism in their school accountability plan as one school quality or student
53 success measure, though many states still focus on unexcused absences or other
54 measures to trigger intervention; and

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56 **WHEREAS**, state ESSA plans outline strategies to leverage federal funds to improve
57 attendance through teacher training, improving health services, family engagement,
58 and school climate.

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60 **THEREFORE, BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED**, that the National Hispanic Caucus of State
61 Legislators understands that chronic absenteeism leads to unfortunate outcomes for
62 and should be considered one of the most important indicators of student success and
63 school accountability; and,

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65 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that all states and territories address chronic
66 absenteeism in their schools and implement strategies such as teacher training,
67 improving health services, and family engagement to decrease the number of
68 students with a large amount of absences; and,

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70 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that NHCSL calls on all states and territories to collect
71 desegregated data by race and ethnicity on this issue; and,

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73 **BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED**, that NHCSL calls on the remaining states that have not
74 included chronic absenteeism as a “school quality or student success” (SQSS)
75 measure, to require it as an annual school performance measure.

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77 THE NHCSL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE UNANIMOUSLY AMENDED AND APPROVED
78 THIS RESOLUTION ON AUGUST 2, 2019 AT ITS SUMMER MEETING IN SANTA FE, NM.

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80 THE NATIONAL HISPANIC CAUCUS OF STATE LEGISLATORS UNANIMOUSLY
81 RATIFIED THIS RESOLUTION ON DECEMBER 5, 2019, AT THE ANNUAL MEETING IN
82 SAN JUAN, PR.

⁶ See note 4.