# Chronic absenteeism in New Jersey public schools reaches record high in 2023-24



A recent report reveals that chronic absenteeism among public school students in New Jersey has reached record levels in the 2023-24 school year, continuing a troubling trend that began during the COVID-19 pandemic. The New Jersey School Performance Report shows that about 14.9% of the state's 1.4 million public school students missed 10% or more of the school year, categorising them as chronically absent. This marks a significant increase from the pre-pandemic chronic absenteeism rate of 10.6% recorded in the 2018-19 school year.

The increase in absenteeism is notable in several districts, particularly in South Jersey. An analysis by The Philadelphia Inquirer highlights that some districts have seen steady improvements, yet others, including the Camden City School District and two Renaissance schools in Camden, have experienced rising absentee rates compared to pre-pandemic levels.

KIPP Cooper Norcross, a Renaissance school in Camden, experienced the highest rise in chronic absenteeism among districts with at least 500 students, with rates climbing from 21.1% in 2018-19 to 45.5% in 2023-24—a jump of 24.4 percentage points. A spokesperson for KIPP Cooper Norcross acknowledged the past challenges: “We recognise that strong attendance is key to student success, and like many districts, we faced real challenges after the pandemic,” they said, adding that absenteeism has been steadily declining this school year across all grade levels, particularly in middle school.

At Camden Prep, another Renaissance school in Camden, 50% of students were reported as chronically absent in the current school year, compared to 30% before the pandemic. The school had shown some improvement during the 2022-23 school year, when absenteeism dropped to 32.2%. Maria Alcón-Heraux, spokesperson for Uncommon Schools which operates Camden Prep, told The Philadelphia Inquirer that the school believes the recent statistics are inaccurate and that they have requested a state review of the data. She outlined several measures the school has implemented to combat absenteeism, including revised attendance protocols and enhanced support systems for students with frequent absences, such as home visits by social workers and the dean of students. “Our school support team reaches out to families daily through texts, emails, or phone calls when a student is absent,” Alcón-Heraux stated.

The Camden City School District, which has been under state administration since 2013, also reported a high chronic absenteeism rate of 46.9%, a rise of 13 percentage points compared to pre-pandemic levels. Officials in the district are employing various strategies to encourage students to return to school, including incentives like prizes and parties, alongside intensified outreach efforts to parents.

In Woodbury, where 26.4% of students were chronically absent in 2023-24, Superintendent Andrew Bell emphasised the complexity of the issue. He explained that the district is cautious about reporting students for truancy or removing chronically absent students from enrolment, recognising that numerous factors contribute to absenteeism. “It’s definitely a challenge because there are so many nuances of why kids aren’t in school,” Bell said.

Alongside districts with rising absentee rates, several South Jersey districts have improved attendance figures. These include Audubon, Clementon, Gateway Regional, Gloucester City, Lawnside, and Woodlynne. Notably, Benjamin Banneker Preparatory Charter School in Willingboro reduced its chronic absenteeism rate to 2.6% in 2023-24, the lowest in seven years, down from 5.6% in 2018-19. Richard Wilson Jr., the school's founder, attributed this achievement to an effective incentive system recognising good attendance and adherence to the state truancy policy, which mandates parent court appearances after 10 unexcused absences. Wilson shared, “If a child is not in school, that’s an issue for us,” and highlighted the success of a “battle of the homerooms” initiative, where the class with the best attendance earns the privilege to dress down on Fridays rather than wearing uniforms. “They love to wear what they want to wear,” he said. “We try a lot of incentives to get them to come to school. They need to be in school.”

The New Jersey education system requires schools to be open for 180 days annually, but attendance policies are developed at the district level. Districts with chronic absenteeism rates exceeding 10% are obligated to submit corrective action plans to the state. The report underscores the ongoing challenges faced by schools in supporting student attendance amid the lingering effects of the pandemic.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.nj.gov/education/news/2025/NJDOEReleases2023-2024SchoolPerformanceReports.pdf> - This document by the New Jersey Department of Education supports the information about chronic absenteeism rates in the state, including the rate of 14.9% for the 2023-2024 school year.
2. <https://www.njsba.org/news-information/school-board-notes/release-of-the-2023-2024-school-performance-reports/> - This news release discusses the New Jersey School Performance Reports, which include data on chronic absenteeism trends and efforts to address it across the state.
3. <https://www.schoolstatus.com/wp-content/uploads/SchoolStatus_National-K-12-Attendance-Data-Insights.pdf> - The SchoolStatus report provides a national context for chronic absenteeism, highlighting New Jersey's rates compared to other states and illustrating the varying trends across the U.S.
4. <https://www.nj.gov/education/broadcasts/2025/apr/16/NJSMARTAttendanceDataCollectionforthe20242025SchoolYear.pdf> - This document outlines the approach to collecting attendance data in New Jersey for the upcoming school year, emphasizing the ongoing monitoring of chronic absenteeism.
5. <https://rc.doe.state.nj.us/Documents/ReferenceGuide.pdf> - The reference guide for the 2023-2024 New Jersey School Performance Reports explains how chronic absenteeism is used as an indicator of school quality and student success.
6. <https://www.noahwire.com> - This source generally provides news articles and could cover updates on chronic absenteeism in New Jersey schools.
7. <https://www.inquirer.com/education/nj-school-reports-absenteeism-camden-20250424.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data