Student Attendance Report for

School Year 2020-2021

August 2021

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Executive Summary

To support attendance and engagement of students as they participate in varied school learning models (i.e., in-person, hybrid, remote), the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) established a new system to collect student-level attendance data on a monthly basis. Terms and definitions, along with cautionary notes regarding these data are included in the appendix. All months of attendance data (September 2020 through June 2021) have now been collected from all districts. Moreover, October 2020 through June 2021 data were reported separately for in-person and remote days.

An analysis of these attendance data indicates the following:

- Among students without high needs (i.e., those who are not English learners, do not have a disability, and are not from a low-income family), year-to-date (YTD) attendance rates exceed 95.0% and are comparable to their 2019-20 attendance rate. These students comprise nearly 48 percent of the statewide public school student population.
- Among students with high needs (i.e., those who are English learners, students with disabilities, and/or from a low income family) 2020-2021 attendance rates are substantially lower than they were in 2019-20. This is particularly pronounced among students who are eligible for free meals and have at least one other high-need factor (e.g., free meal eligible students who also have a disability).
- In October 2020 through June 2021 combined:
    - 2.8 percent of students were scheduled to attend school ***fully in-person*** which has been steadily decreasing from 24.1 percent in the month of October. Another 21.8 percent of students were scheduled for ***mostly in-person*** (i.e., at least 75% of school days or at least 16 out of an estimated 20 school days in an average month were in-person) which fluctuated through the year from a low of 12.4 percent in October.
    - 49.0 percent of students were scheduled to attend school in a ***hybrid*** format (i.e., between 25 and 75 percent, inclusive, or between 6 and 15 out of an estimated 20 school days in an average month were in-person) which has been generally increasing from a low of 31.6% in October.
    - 18.8 percent of students were ***mostly remote*** (i.e., below 25 percent or between 1 and 5 out of an estimated 20 school days in an average month were in-person) which has been

increasing each month from 9.5 percent in October. 7.6 percent of students were ***fully remote*** (0 days in-person), decreasing each month from a high of 22.4% in October.

  - Overall, some previously in-person students experienced some remote days in June. As a result, some of their participation status changed further away from in-person. At the same time, some fully remote students were able to attend school in-person in June which led to a reduction in the percentage of students who are fully remote in 2020-21.
  - Students with high needs tended to be fully remote at greater rates than their peers. Specifically, a greater proportion of English learners (10.8 percent), students eligible for free meals (12.1 percent), and students who are experiencing homelessness (16.7 percent) were fully remote as compared to the state average (7.6 percent) though these percentages have been declining each month since October as more fully remote students attended school in-person for some days.
  - For all students and student groups, the attendance rate on remote days (90.7%) was lower than on in-person days (94.6%). This was particularly acute for students with disabilities (85.5% versus 92.2%), English learners (86.6% versus 92.6%), those eligible for free meals (85.9% versus 91.6%), and those who were experiencing homelessness (77.7% versus 86.7%).

- When high percentages of vulnerable groups of students are fully remote and their attendance on remote days is below 90 percent (i.e., on average chronically absent), it follows that the chronic absenteeism rate for these student groups is substantially higher than the state average. Specifically, while the state average chronic absenteeism rate is 20.7 percent, 33.9 percent of English learners, 32.5 percent of students with disabilities, 36.1 percent of free meal eligible students, and 57.9 percent of students experiencing homelessness were chronically absent this year.

CSDE is partnering with the State Education Resource Center (SERC) to build communities of practice and a system of supports for districts that bring together the latest research, national experts, and promising practices. CSDE Turnaround and Student Support offices are also using disaggregated to target supports to districts reflecting challenges with student attendance.

Introduction

In the 2020-21 school year, schools across Connecticut used one of three learning models, i.e., fully in-person where all students attend school in-person on all days; hybrid where all students attend school in-person on some but not all days; or fully remote where all students receive instruction remotely through technology or other means on all days. Since reopening in late August/early September, many districts changed their learning models during the 2020-21 academic year based either on a district schedule (e.g., planned change in week 4 from hybrid to fully in-person) or on local health conditions (e.g., change from fully in-person to remote for two weeks due to increased infections and positivity rate in the local community). The school reopen plans also allowed parents to opt their students into full remote learning.

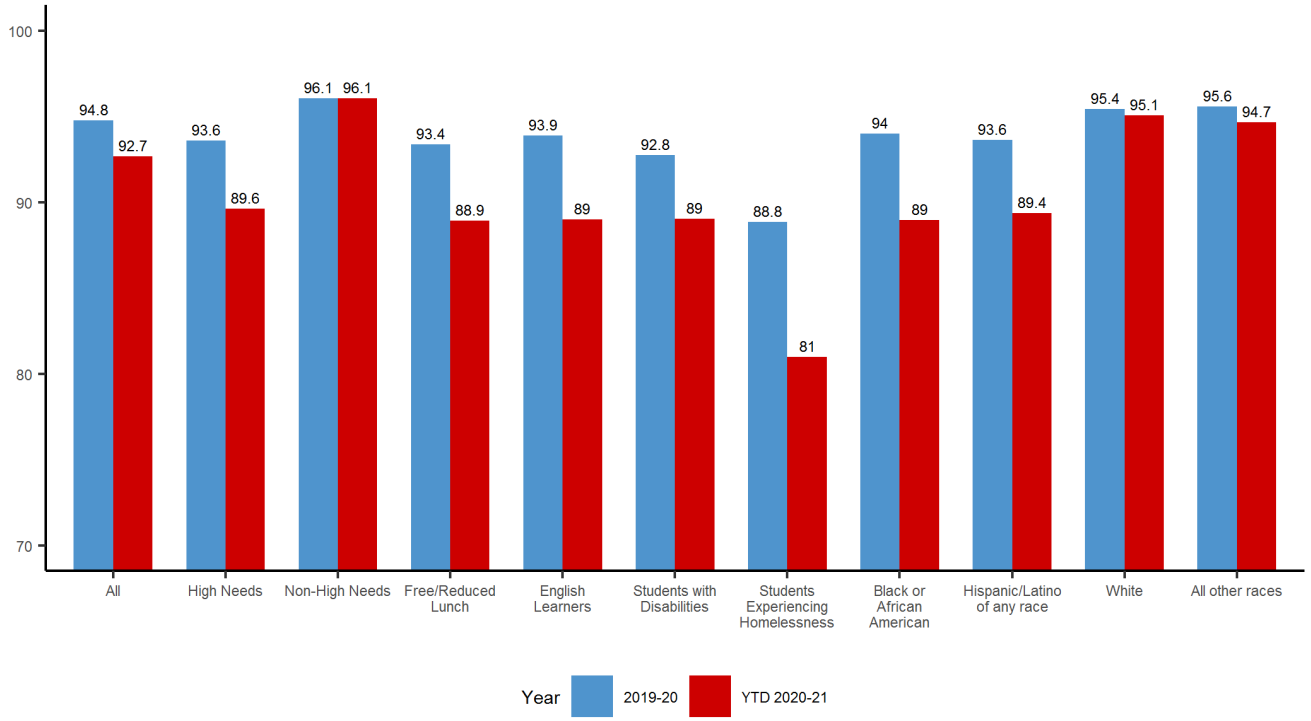
In its resolution that permits remote learning days to count toward the 177 school day requirement, the State Board of Education affirmed that its authorization for hybrid or remote programming due to unavoidable emergency is contingent upon school districts providing rigorous learning and engagement opportunities that are aligned with State standards and Board expectations. The Board also charged the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) with ensuring fidelity to this expectation by collecting whatever data are necessary and making that information transparent.

Therefore, the CSDE established two new data collections: a weekly collection regarding a district's learning model and a monthly student-level attendance data collection to collect the number of days of membership and attendance for each student each month. This report analyzes attendance information for the months of September 2020 through June 2021. Additionally, membership and attendance starting in October 2020 data were reported separately for in-person and remote days; this allowed for an examination of attendance patterns for different groups of students on in-person vs remote days.

Results

Figure 1 compares the 2019-20 attendance rate to the 2020-21 attendance rate.

Figure 1: 2019-20 Attendance Rate Compared to 2020-21 Attendance Rate



Overall, attendance in 2020-21 is slightly lower than in the 2019-20 school year. When the data are disaggregated by student group, it is evident that among students from historically underperforming groups (e.g., English learners, students with disabilities, free- or reduced-price meal eligible students, Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, students experiencing homelessness), the YTD attendance rate in 2020-21 is substantially lower than its corresponding value in 2019-20. An attendance rate that is 90 percent or less can be interpreted to mean that on average, that group of students is chronically absent; they're absent on 1 out of 10 days. Students with high needs are approximately 52 percent of the statewide public school student enrollment.

Among students without high needs (i.e., those who are not English learners, do not have a disability, and are not from a low-income family), YTD attendance rates in 2020-21 exceed 95.0% and are comparable to their 2019-20 attendance rate. These students comprise approximately 48 percent of the statewide public school student enrollment.

A further disaggregation of the statewide data reveal that the following student groups exhibit substantially lower attendance rates in 2020-21 as compared to those in the 2019-20 school year (see Table 1):

- English learners;
- Students eligible for free meals; and
- Students with disabilities who are also identified as either English learners or are eligible for free meals.

Free meal eligible students who are English learners and/or students with disabilities reflect some of the lowest attendance rates in 2020-21 and those rates are lower than the corresponding group attendance rates during the 2019-20 school year (see Table 1). For instance, among students eligible for free meals, those who are also identified as English learners *and* students with disabilities evidence the lowest attendance rate of 84.8 which is substantially lower than the attendance rate for the same group of students in 2019-20 of 91.6. Free meal eligible students who are identified as having a disability show a low attendance rate of 84.9, while those free meal eligible students who are identified as English learners have an attendance rate of 88.5 which is well below the 93.9 attendance rate in 2019-20.

Table 1: Attendance Rate by FRL, EL, and Special Education

FRL Type*	English Learner	Special Education	Number of Students	Attendance Rate in 2020-21 (%)	Attendance Rate 2019-20 (%)
N	No	No	236,931	96.1	96.1
N	No	Yes	32,578	93.4	94.6
N	Yes	No	10,044	91.3	95.0
N	Yes	Yes	1,570	91.7	94.6
F	No	No	120,400	89.2	93.6
F	No	Yes	30,787	84.9	91.0
F	Yes	No	19,481	88.5	93.9
F	Yes	Yes	6,818	84.8	91.6
R	No	No	23,578	93.3	95.4
R	No	Yes	4,307	90.4	93.6
R	Yes	No	2,421	93.0	95.7
R	Yes	Yes	689	91.2	95.2

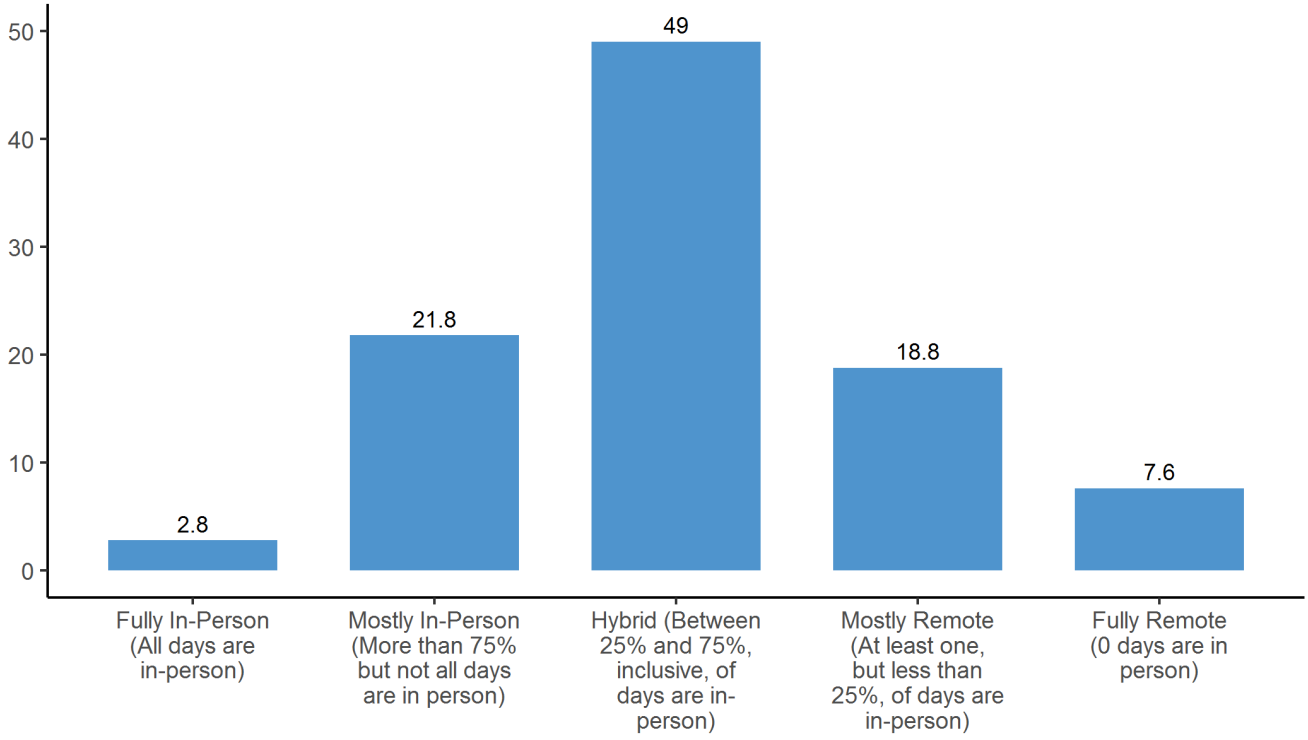
*FRL Type – F=Free, R=Reduced, and N=Not eligible for FRL.

Membership and attendance in October 2020 through June 2021 were reported separately for in-person and remote days; this allowed for an examination of enrollment and attendance patterns on in-person vs remote days.

A majority of students were scheduled to attend in a hybrid format (see Figure 2).

- 2.8 percent of students were scheduled to attend school ***fully in-person*** which has been steadily decreasing from 24.1 percent in the month of October. Another 21.8 percent of students were scheduled for ***mostly in-person*** (i.e., at least 75% of school days or at least 16 out of an estimated 20 school days in an average month were in-person) which fluctuated through the year from a low of 12.4 percent in October.
- 49.0 percent of students were scheduled to attend school in a ***hybrid*** format (i.e., between 25 and 75 percent, inclusive, or between 6 and 15 out of an estimated 20 school days in an average month were in-person) which has been generally increasing from a low of 31.6% in October.
- 18.8 percent of students were ***mostly remote*** (i.e., below 25 percent or between 1 and 5 out of an estimated 20 school days in an average month were in-person) which has been increasing each month from 9.5 percent in October. 7.6 percent of students were ***fully remote*** (0 days in-person), decreasing each month from a high of 22.4% in October.
- Overall, some previously in-person students experienced some remote days. As a result, some of their participation status changed further away from in-person. At the same time, some fully remote students were able to attend school in-person in June which led to a reduction in the percentage of students who are fully remote in 2020-21.

Figure 2: Percentage of Students by Learning Model (2020-2021)



Students with high needs tended to be fully remote at greater rates than their peers. Specifically, a greater proportion of English learners (10.8 percent), students eligible for free meals (12.1 percent), and students who are experiencing homelessness (16.7 percent) were fully remote as compared to the state average (7.6 percent) though these percentages have been declining each month since October as more fully remote students attended school in-person for some days.

Figure 3: Percentage of Students Fully Remote by Student Group (2020-2021)

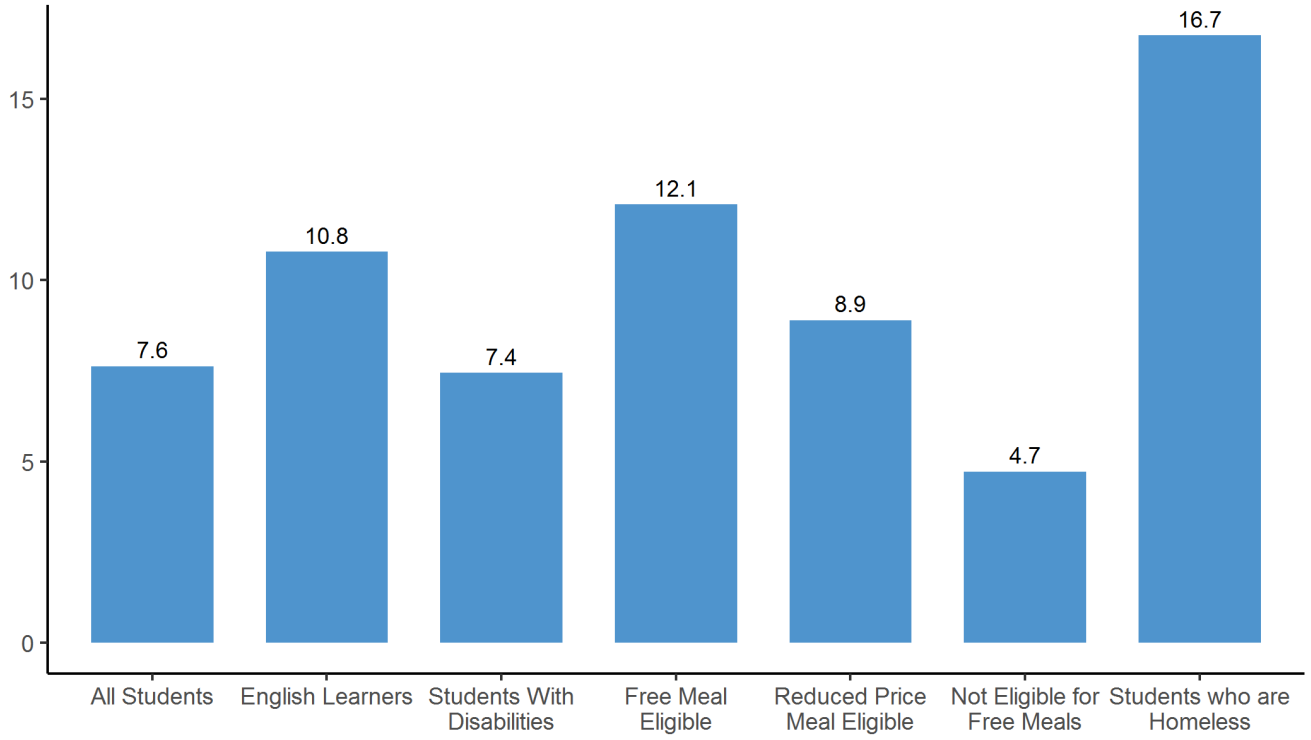
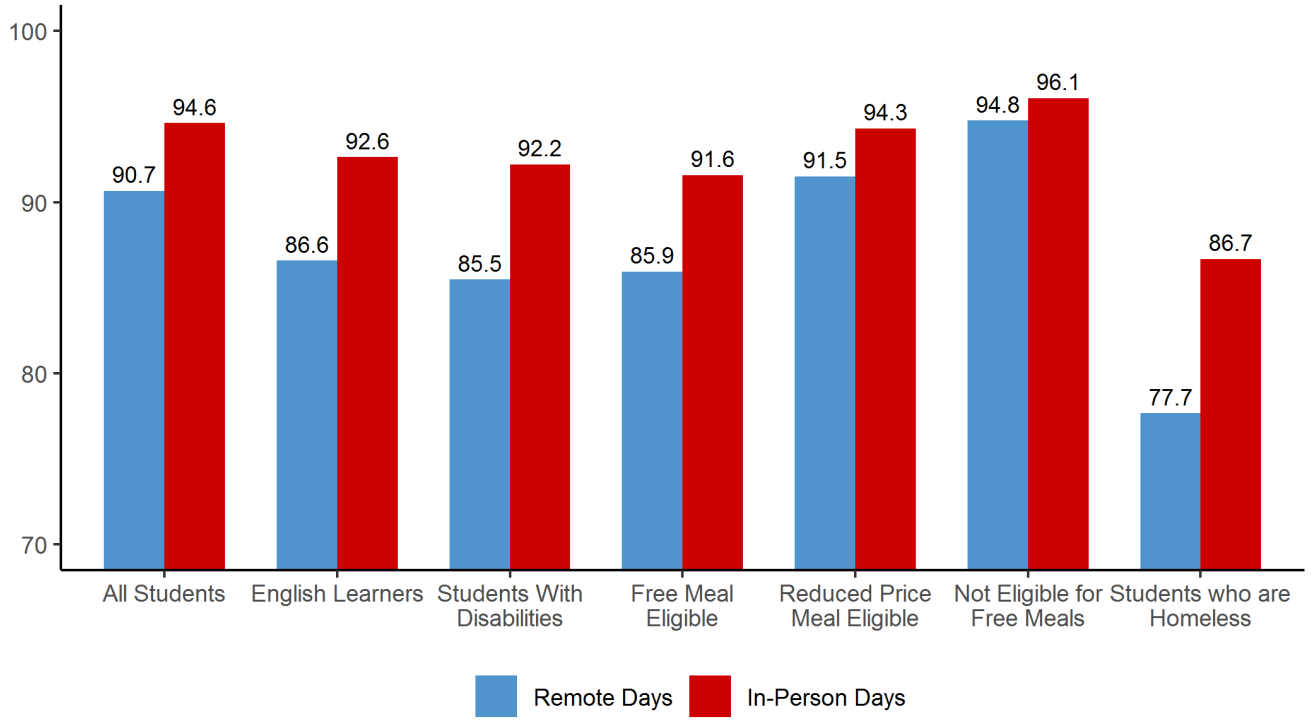


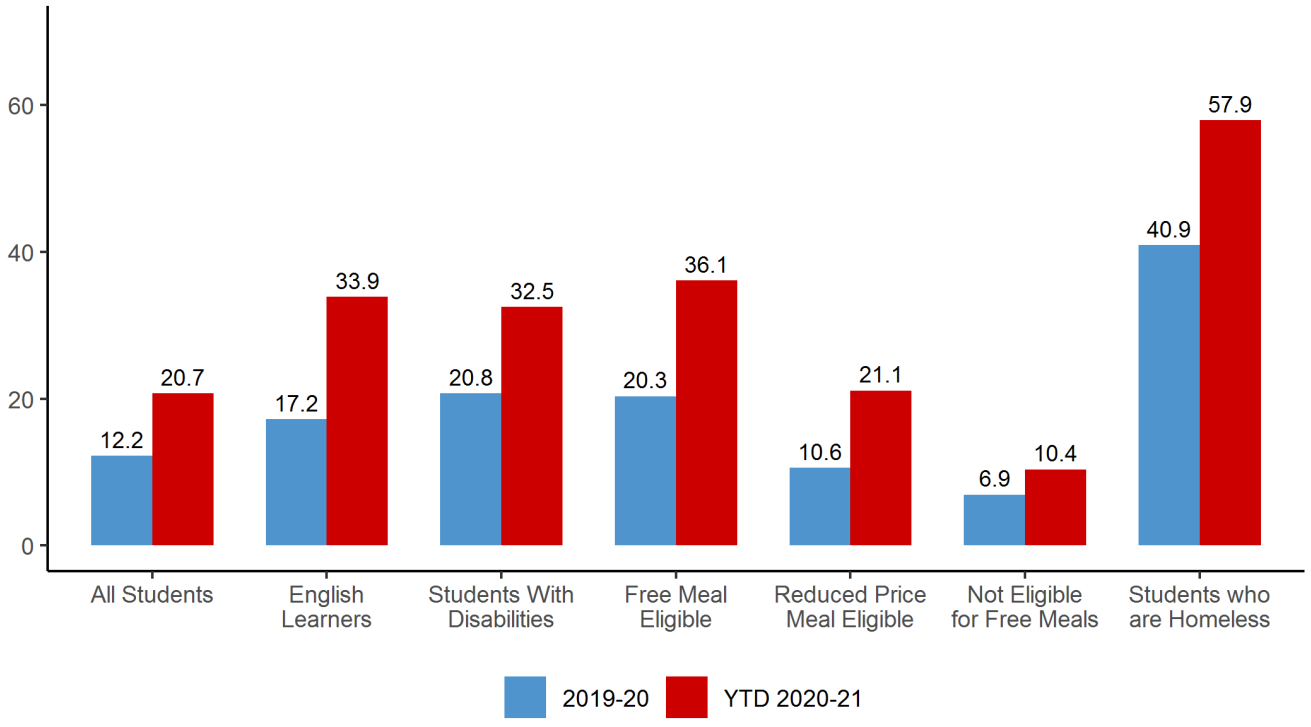
Figure 4 shows that the attendance rate for all students on remote days (90.7 %) was lower than on in-person days (94.6%). This was particularly acute for students with disabilities (85.5% versus 92.2%), English learners (86.6% versus 92.6%), those eligible for free meals (85.9% versus 91.6%), and those who were experiencing homelessness (77.7% versus 86.7%).

Figure 4: Attendance Rate on Remote vs In-Person Days by Student Group (2020-2021)



When high percentages of vulnerable groups of students are fully remote and their attendance on remote days is below 90 percent (i.e., on average chronically absent), it follows that the chronic absenteeism rate for these student groups is substantially higher than the state average (see Figure 5). In school year 2020-2021, there have been approximately 177 school days; therefore, a student missing 18 or more days would be considered chronically absent. Specifically, while the state average chronic absenteeism rate is 20.7 percent, 33.9 percent of English learners, 32.0 percent of students with disabilities, 36.1 percent of free meal eligible students, and 57.9 percent of students experiencing homelessness are chronically absent so far this year.

Figure 5: Percentage of Students Chronically Absent (2020-2021 compared to 2019-20)



*Calculations are based only on in-person school days until mid-March 2020.
**Calculations include both in-person and remote days.

Conclusion

This analysis should be interpreted with caution considering that this is a new data collection where the data include remote days of attendance and reflect some variation in the implementation of district practices.

The June report continues to show that students from traditionally underperforming groups (i.e., EL, special education, free- or reduced-price meal eligibility) have lower YTD attendance rates in 2020-21 than during the 2019-20 school year. The attendance challenges were compounded among students who reflected multiple high need factors; in fact, students eligible for free meals who are English learners and/or students with disabilities reflect some of the lowest attendance rates YTD in 2020-21.

Overall, students with high needs tend to be fully remote at greater rates than their peers. Furthermore, all student groups exhibit lower attendance rates on remote days than on in-person days, and this pattern is most acute among our students with the highest needs. Consequently, students with high needs who are free meal eligible, English learners, and students with disabilities exhibit substantially higher rates of chronic absenteeism than their peers. The 2020-21 chronic absenteeism rates are all higher than those in 2019-20.

District-level disaggregated data by student group along with data visualizations are being used by CSDE staff to identify and support districts where YTD attendance is substantially lower than it was in the 2019-20 school year. CSDE is also partnering with SERC to build communities of practice and a system of supports for districts that bring together the latest research, national experts, and promising practices.

Appendix

Terms and Definitions

How does Connecticut define attendance?

According to State Board of Education policy, "A student is considered to be 'in attendance' if present at his/her assigned school, or an activity sponsored by the school (e.g., field trip), for at least half of the regular school day."

How is attendance tracked on remote learning days for state reporting purposes?

In the 2020-21 school year, a student's attendance on a given day can be either in-person or remote. The CSDE developed and disseminated brand new guidance for districts on how to track attendance on remote days for state reporting. This guidance was disseminated originally on September 4. According to this guidance a remote student can be considered as being 'in attendance' on a particular day if the total time spent on one or more of the following activities equals at least half the school day: synchronous virtual classes; synchronous virtual meetings; time logged in electronic systems; and/or assignment submission/completion.

What is attendance rate? How is it calculated?

Attendance rate is the percentage of membership days that meet the definition of "in-attendance." It can be calculated for an individual student or a group of students. For example, if student A is enrolled in school for 180 days in a school year (membership) and attends 171 days (attendance), then student A's attendance rate is 171 divided by 180 or 95% or 0.95. For a group of students (e.g., districts, school, student group), the attendance rate is the sum total days of attendance for all students divided by the sum total days of membership for those students.

What is chronic absenteeism? How does it differ from an attendance rate?

A student with an attendance rate that is at or below 90 percent is said to be chronically absent. The chronic absenteeism rate for a group of students is the percentage of students with an attendance rate that is at or below 90 percent. Please see Calculating Student Attendance Quick Reference for a detailed explanation of the differences between the attendance rate and chronic absenteeism metrics.

A Few Notes of Caution

Please note the following cautionary points when reading this report.

- This is the first time in its history that the CSDE is collecting and reporting attendance data for the first month of a school year. Normally, the CSDE collects attendance only once annually at the end of the school year through the June Public School Information System (PSIS) collection. The June PSIS membership and attendance data are used to report chronic absenteeism rates on EdSight, which are subsequently included in the Next Generation Accountability System. As with any new data collection, data quality is expected to improve as the collection system matures and data providers gain greater understanding of what and how to collect and report accurate data.

- September is a month of significant change in public education systems as districts follow up to determine the status of returning students, while also enrolling new students who may be entering the district. A few districts with higher ongoing family mobility continued to see fluctuations in their enrollment; most districts, however, started to see a stabilization of their student enrollment after September. These fluctuations also impacted September's attendance data.

- A new concept of "remote attendance" has been introduced for the very first time. While the definition of attendance is unchanged (i.e., presence for at least half a school day), the CSDE's guidance on how to track attendance on remote days expects districts to consider synchronous and asynchronous approaches to determine whether a student is "in attendance." This has fundamentally changed *who* determines attendance, especially in elementary and middle schools. While previously front-office staff may have assumed some responsibility for tracking and reporting attendance, now classroom teachers are expected to utilize student participation to determine and record whether a student is "in attendance."

- Anecdotal evidence suggests that districts operationalized the state's remote attendance guidance in slightly different ways. For example, some districts would record attendance on a remote day by 5 pm on that day, while others would record attendance on the following day in order to allow students the opportunity to submit work after school hours and be marked "present." Another difference is whether a student who should otherwise be attending school in-person on a given day is allowed the flexibility to be "present" remotely due to extenuating circumstances; some districts started the school year by permitting this practice especially for health reasons, while others chose to mark the student

as “absent” even if that student participated remotely and completed work. The CSDE recently published additional clarifications to bring even greater consistency to these areas.

- With many districts opening in a hybrid format, and around a third of students statewide learning remotely, access to a device and internet connectivity have become essential school supplies. A donation from the Partnership for Connecticut brought 60,000 laptops to high school students in the 33 Alliance Districts by July 2020. Additionally, in late July, Governor Lamont launched the Everybody Learns Initiative which is bringing 82,102 laptops and Chromebooks, 12,774 hotspots, and broadband cable to students. When reviewing the YTD attendance in this report, it should be noted that while the hotspots were delivered in early September, the majority of laptops/Chromebooks were scheduled to be delivered in October with installation of broadband cable internet also underway.
- Since there is no similar monthly attendance data in prior years, comparisons of 2020-21 attendance are made to the 2019-20 attendance rates that were based on data collected for in-person school days through mid-March 2020.