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Student Attendance Report for Year-to-Date as of October 2020



November 2020

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	3
Introduction.....	4
Results	5
Conclusion	10
Appendix.....	11
Terms and Definitions	11
A Few Notes of Caution	12

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. Two months of attendance data (September and October 2020) have now been collected from all districts. Moreover, October 2020 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) YTD 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:
 - 24.1 percent of students (over 120,000) were scheduled to attend school **fully in-person**, while another 12.4 percent (nearly 62,000) were scheduled for **mostly in-person** (i.e., at least 75% or at least 16 out of 21 school days were in-person).
 - 31.6 percent of students (over 158,000) were scheduled to attend school in a **hybrid** format (i.e., between 25 and 75 percent, inclusive, or between 6 and 15 out of 21 school days were in-person);
 - 9.5 percent of students (over 47,000) were **mostly remote** (i.e., below 25 percent or between 1 and 5 out of 21 school days were in-person) while 22.4 percent of students (nearly 112,000) were **fully remote** in October (0 days in-person). Notably, 36.8 percent of English learners, 33.2 percent of students eligible for free meals, and 42.2 percent of students who are experiencing homelessness were fully remote.

- For all students and student groups, the attendance rate on remote days (90.6%) was lower than on in-person days (95.1%). This was particularly acute for students with disabilities (85.0% versus 92.5%), English learners (86.2% versus 91.9%), those eligible for free meals (85.8% versus 92.0%), and those who were experiencing homelessness (77.4% versus 86.6%).

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.

Introduction

In the 2020-21 school year, schools across Connecticut are using 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 have changed their learning models in the first two months 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 allow parents to opt their students into full remote learning.

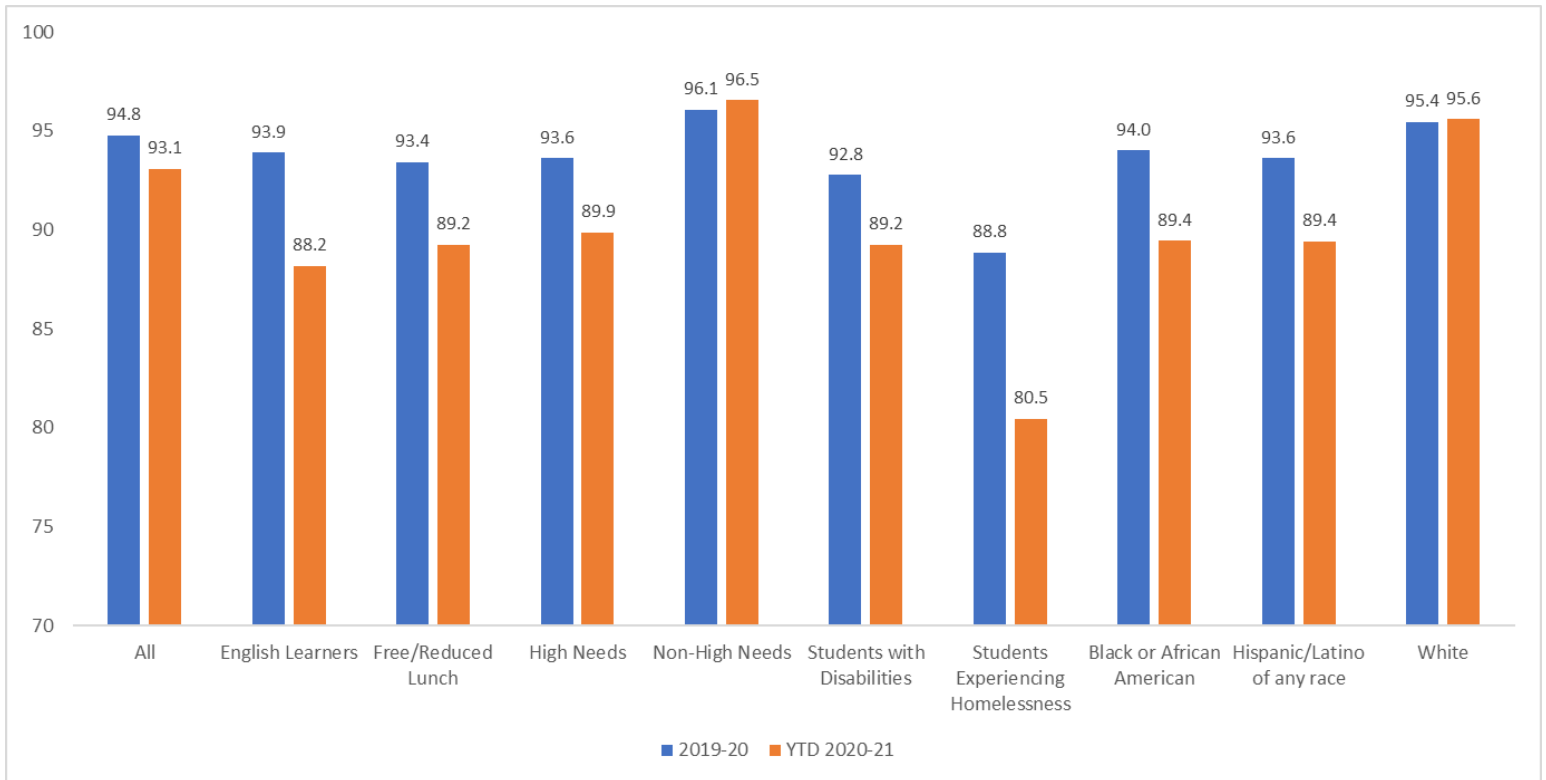
In its resolution that permits remote learning days to count toward the 177 school day requirement, the State Board of Education affirmed that its authorization for hybrid or remote programming due to unavoidable emergency is contingent upon school districts providing rigorous learning and engagement 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 and October 2020. Additionally, membership and attendance 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 during the month of October.

Results

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

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



Overall, attendance rate YTD 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.

Conversely 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 YTD 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 YTD 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 84.0 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 85.2, while those free meal eligible students who are identified as English learners have an attendance rate of 87.8 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	YTD Attendance Rate (%)	Attendance Rate 2019-20 (%)
N	No	No	236,844	96.5	96.1
N	No	Yes	32,570	93.9	94.6
N	Yes	No	10,328	90.3	95.0
N	Yes	Yes	1,576	90.6	94.6
F	No	No	124,557	89.8	93.6
F	No	Yes	31,696	85.2	91.0
F	Yes	No	19,994	87.8	93.9
F	Yes	Yes	6,927	84.0	91.6
R	No	No	23,412	93.9	95.4
R	No	Yes	4,260	90.9	93.6
R	Yes	No	2,418	92.1	95.7
R	Yes	Yes	685	90.5	95.2

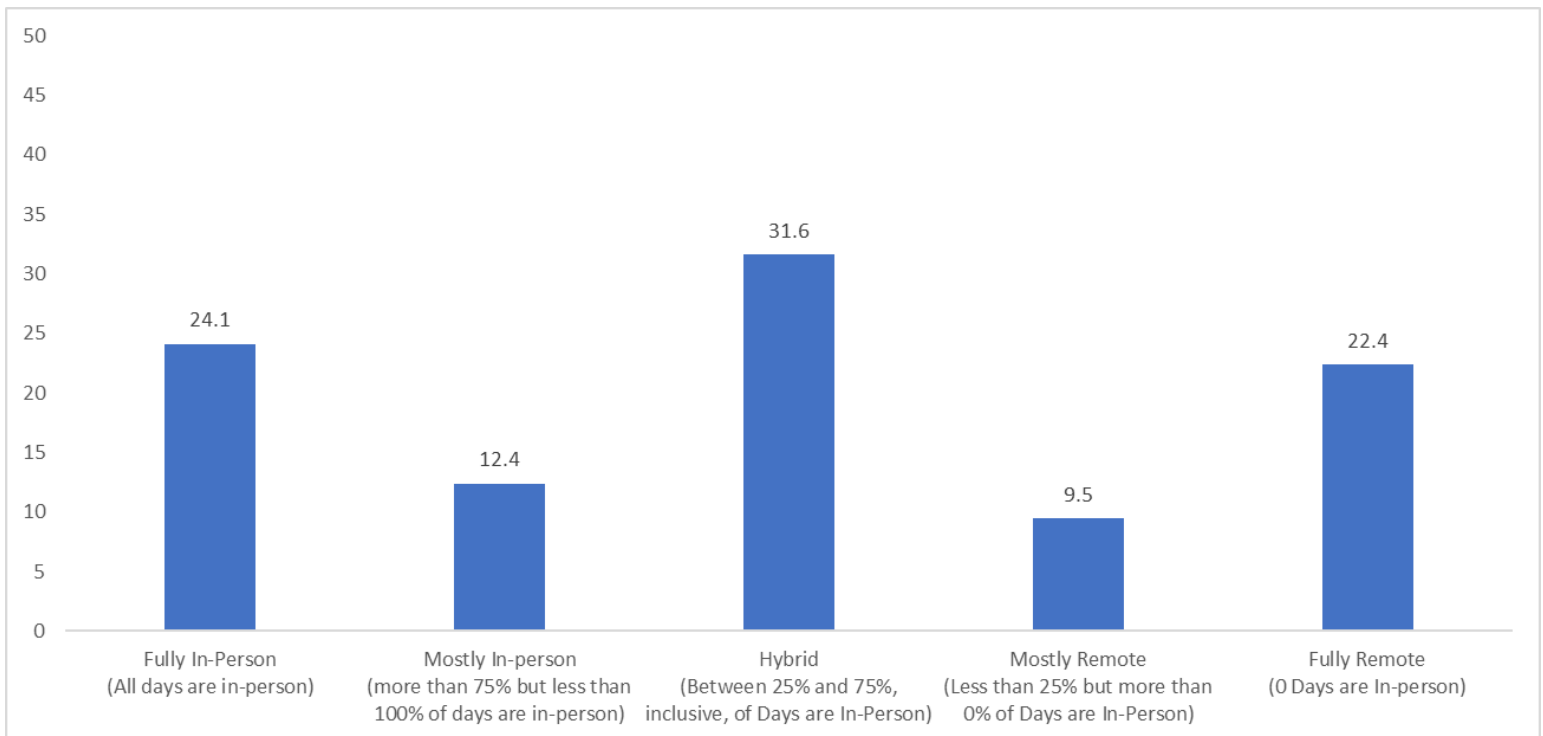
*FRL Type – F=Free, R=Reduced, and N=Not eligible for FRL.

Membership and attendance in October 2020 data 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 either an in-person or hybrid format (see Figure 2).

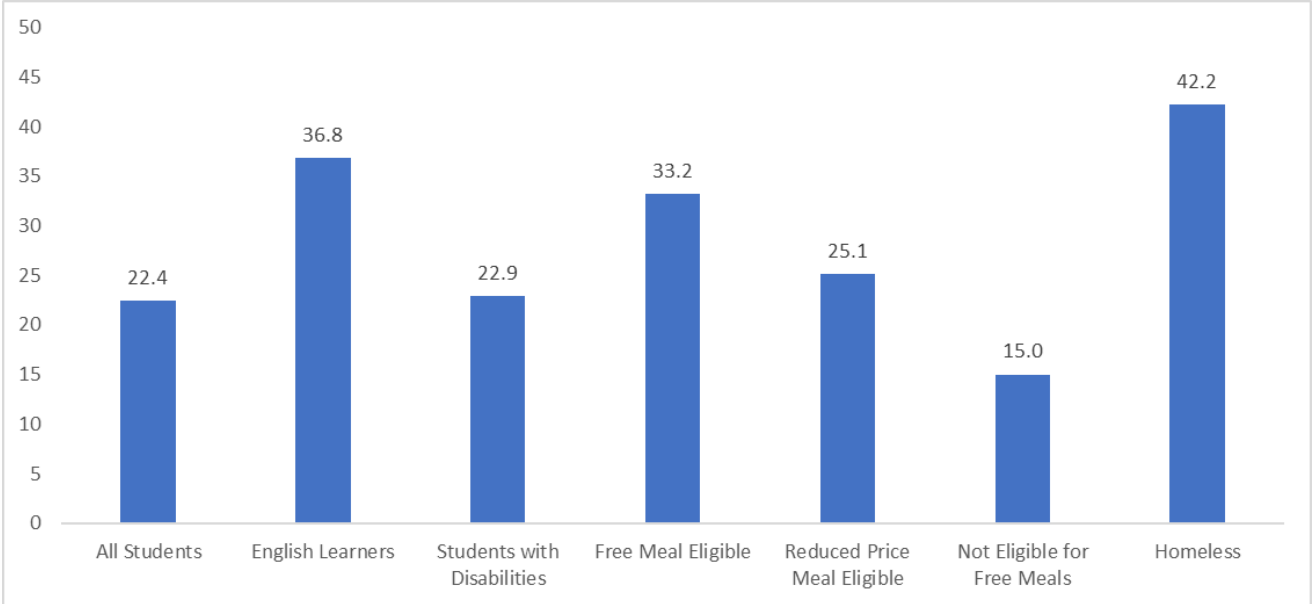
- 24.1 percent of students (over 120,000) were scheduled to attend school **fully in-person**, while another 12.4 percent (nearly 62,000) were scheduled for **mostly in-person** (i.e., at least 75% or at least 16 out of 21 school days were in-person).
- 31.6 percent of students (over 158,000) were scheduled to attend school in a **hybrid** format (i.e., between 25 and 75 percent, inclusive, or between 6 and 15 out of 21 school days were in-person);
- 9.5 percent of students (over 47,000) were **mostly remote** (i.e., below 25 percent or between 1 and 5 out of 21 school days were in-person) while 22.4 percent of students (nearly 112,000) were **fully remote** in October (0 days in-person).

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



Students with high needs tended to be fully remote at greater rates than their peers. While 22.4 percent of all students were fully remote, 36.8 percent of English learners, 33.2 percent of students eligible for free meals, and 42.2 percent of students who are experiencing homelessness were fully remote (see Figure 3).

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



In October, 51 percent of all student days were in-person days (see Figure 4). However, among English learners, only 44.2 percent of days and among free meal eligible students, only 42.4 percent of all student days were in-person in October. For students who were experiencing homelessness, only 33 percent of all school days were in-person days in October.

For all students and student groups, the attendance rate on remote days was lower than on in-person days (90.6 versus 95.1; see Figure 5). This was particularly acute for students with disabilities (85.0 versus 92.5), English learners (86.2 versus 91.9), those eligible for free meals (85.8 versus 92.0), and those who were experiencing homelessness (77.4 versus 86.6).

Figure 4: Percentage of Total Student Days that are In-Person by Student Group (October 2020)

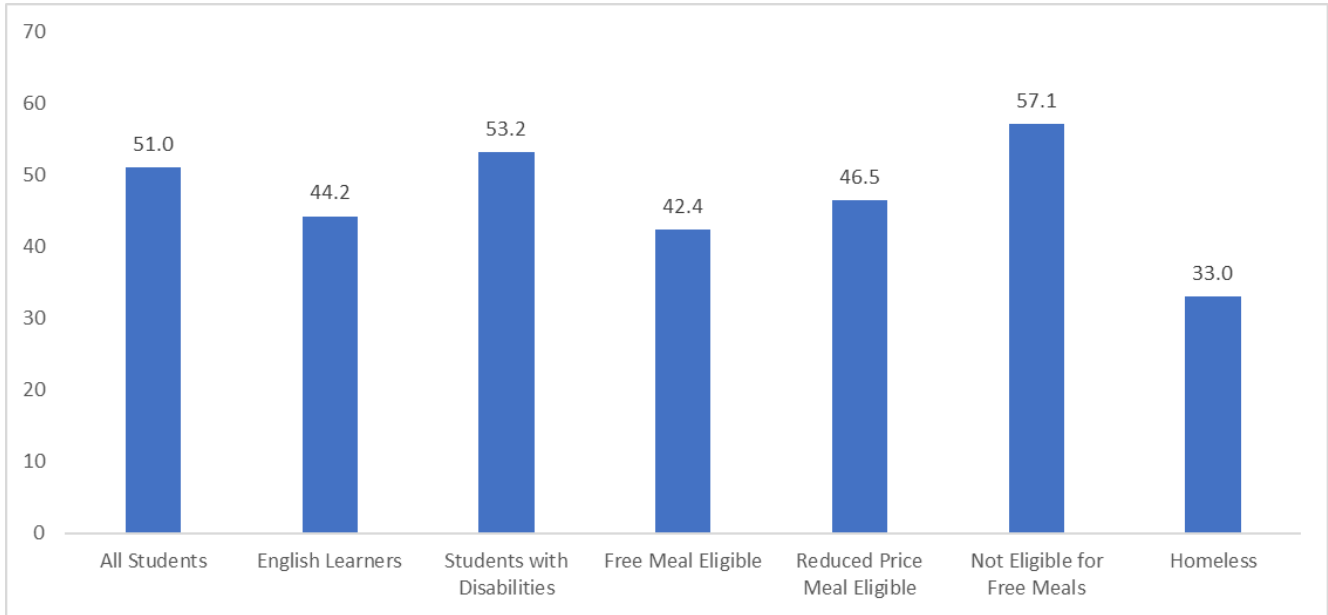
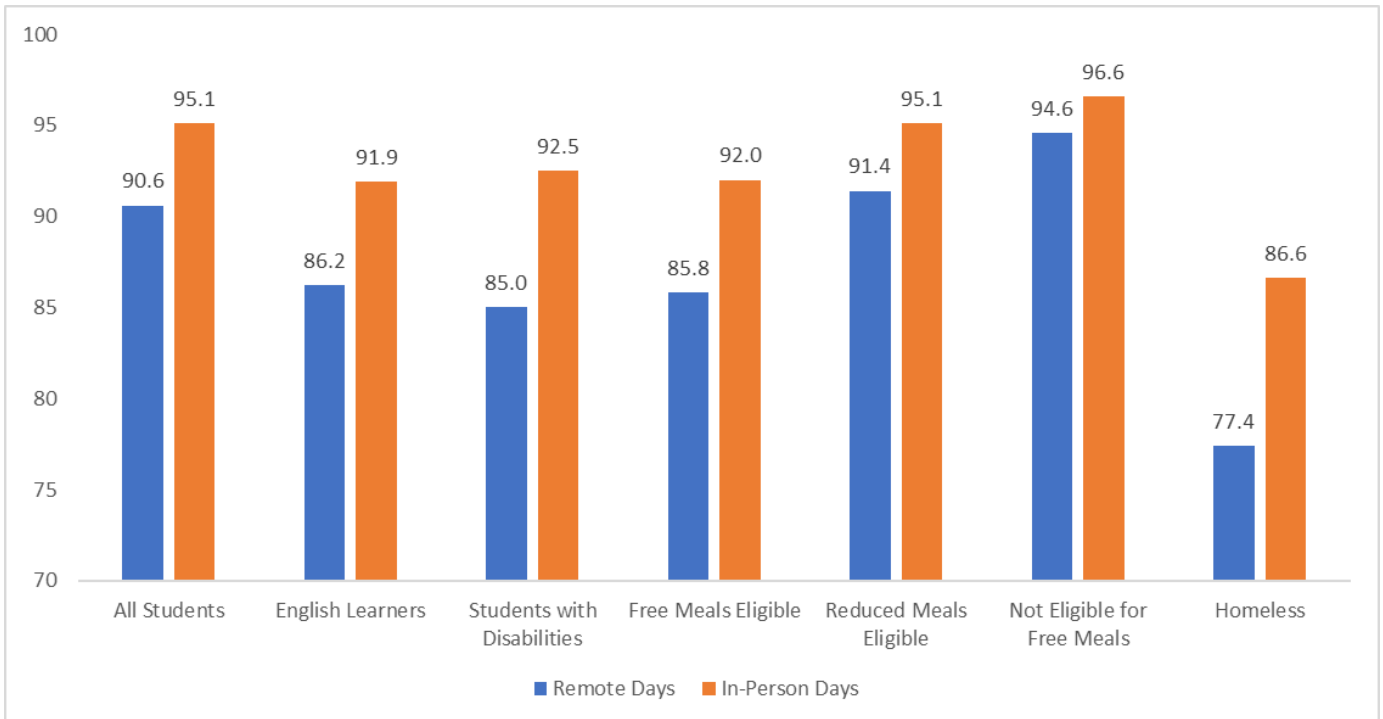


Figure 5: Attendance Rate on Remote vs In-Person Days by Student Group (October 2020)



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 October report continues to show that students from traditionally underperforming groups (i.e., EL, special education, free-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 (e.g., students eligible for free lunch who were also receiving special education services).

Overall, students with high needs tend to be fully remote at greater rates than their peers; overall, less than 50 percent of their school days are in-person days. 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.

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 will continue to see fluctuations in their enrollment; most districts, however, will start to see a stabilization of their student enrollment in the months ahead. These fluctuations will also impact 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 are being delivered in October with installation of broadband cable internet still 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.