Maryland
STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Chronic Absenteeism Trends and Bright Spots

January 18, 2024

PRESENTED BY

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Interim State Superintendent of Schools

Presentation Outline

1. Maryland Definitions
2. Attendance Trends
3. Bright Spot for Attendance
4. MSDE Support

Maryland Attendance, Chronic Absenteeism, and Truancy

Attendance refers to a student's presence or absence in an instructional program approved by the state, district, and/or school.

- Absence for all or any portion of a school day, for any reason other than a lawful absence, is presumed to be unlawful. Lawful absences include death in the immediate family, illness, pregnancy, court summons, hazardous weather conditions, work, observance of a religious holiday, state emergency, suspension, and lack of authorized transport.
- MSDE collects attendance three times per year in the Fall, Spring, and End of the School Year.

Students are chronically absent when absent 10% or more of the school days while enrolled at that school. **Chronic absenteeism includes both lawful and unlawful absences.**

Truancy is defined as a student who is unlawfully absent from school for more than eight days in any quarter, 15 days in any semester, or 20 days in a school year.

Why is attendance important?

Students with higher attendance have more positive outcomes:

- Preschoolers with higher attendance have higher Kindergarten readiness skills and Grade 3 reading scores, particularly for Black/African American children and students from low-income families.[2]

- Elementary and middle school students with higher attendance have higher academic achievement (GPA and standardized reading and math tests).[3]

- Students with lower attendance have higher course failure and school dropout rates.[4]

- Students with lower attendance have poorer social skills, higher unemployment, and higher engagement in health risk behaviors.[4]

- Students who are absent in the early grades are more likely to be absent in later grades.[5, 6]

[2] Cincinnati Public Schools (2020). Comprehensive and longitudinal outcomes: Cincinnati Public Schools. Retrieved from: https://www.uwgc.org/sites/default/files/2023-09/UWGC_SB6_CPS_CCHMC_Kindergarten-Longitudinal-Evaluation_Final_20200129.pdf

[3] Gottfried, M. A. (2010). Evaluating the relationship between student attendance and achievement in urban elementary and middle schools: An instrumental variables approach. *American Educational Research Journal, 47*(2), 434-465. http://www.jstor.org/stable/40645446

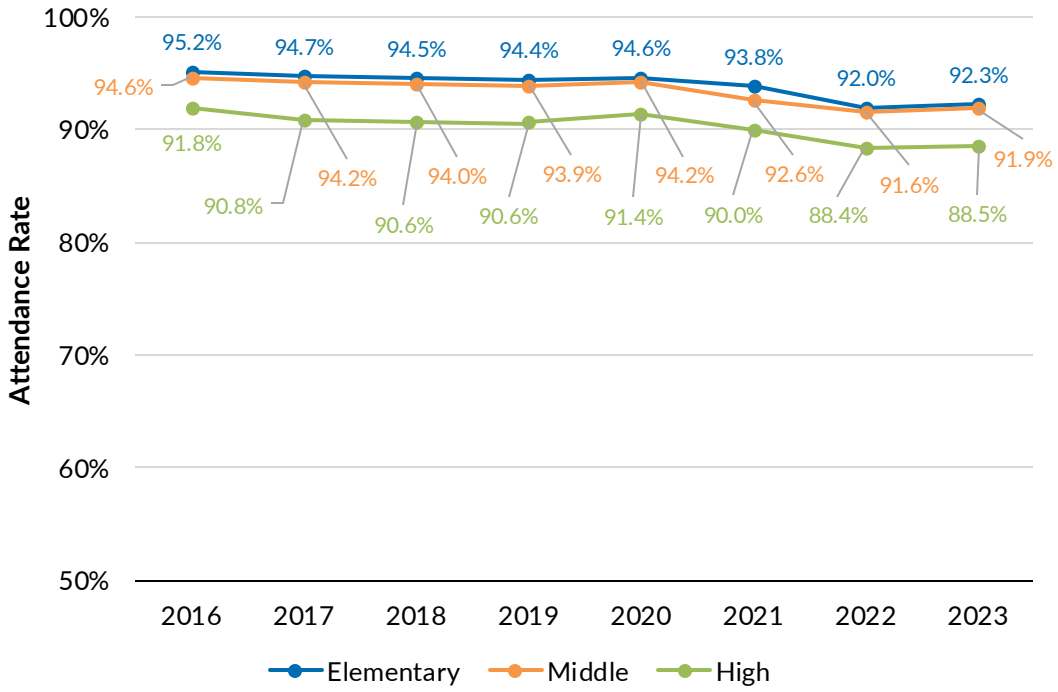
[4] Allison, M. A., Attisha, E., Lerner, M., De Pinto, C. D. (2019). The link between school attendance and good health. https://publications.aap.org/pediatrics/article/143/2/e20183648/37326/The-Link-Between-School-Attendance-and-Good-Health

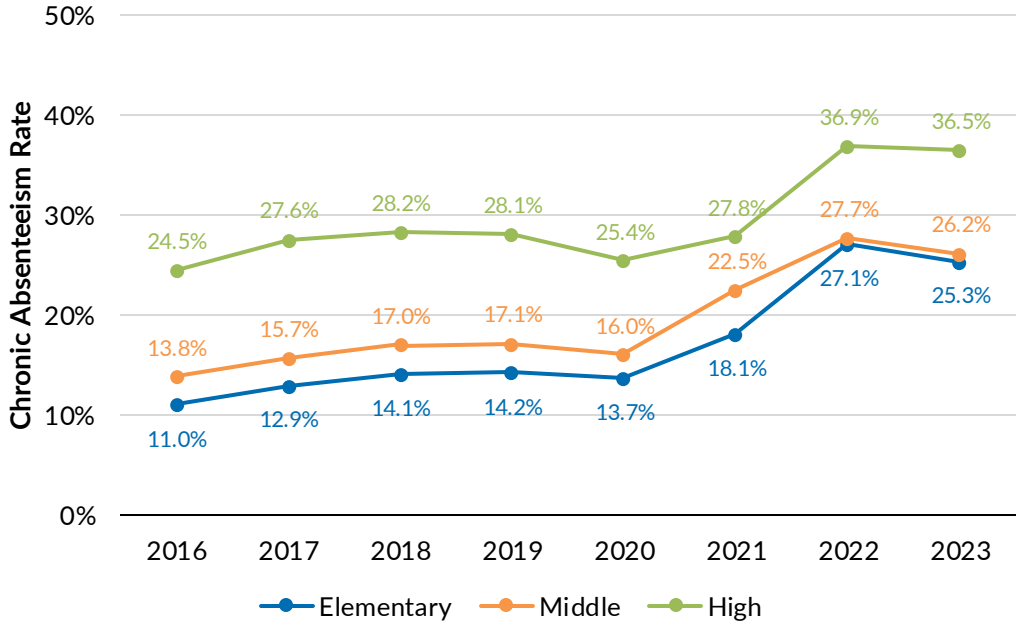
[5] Ansari, A., & Pianta, R. C. (2019). School absenteeism in the first decade of education and outcomes in adolescence. *Journal of School Psychology, 76*, 48-61. https://www.doi.org/10.1016/j.jsp.2019.07.010

[6] Ehrlich, S. B., Gwynne, J. A., & Allensworth, E. M. (2018). Pre-kindergarten attendance matters: Early chronic absence patterns and relationships to learning outcomes. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 44*, 136-151. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2018.02.012

State Trends in Attendance Rate and Chronic Absenteeism

Attendance rates have dropped up to three percentage points since 2016, and chronic absenteeism increased by 10+ percentage points. Attendance and chronic absenteeism rates are similar for elementary and middle schools.

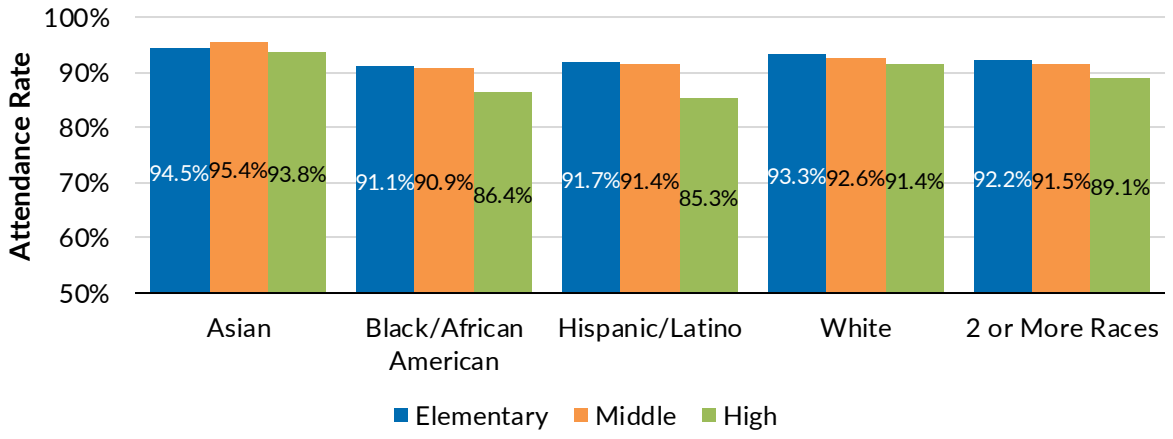


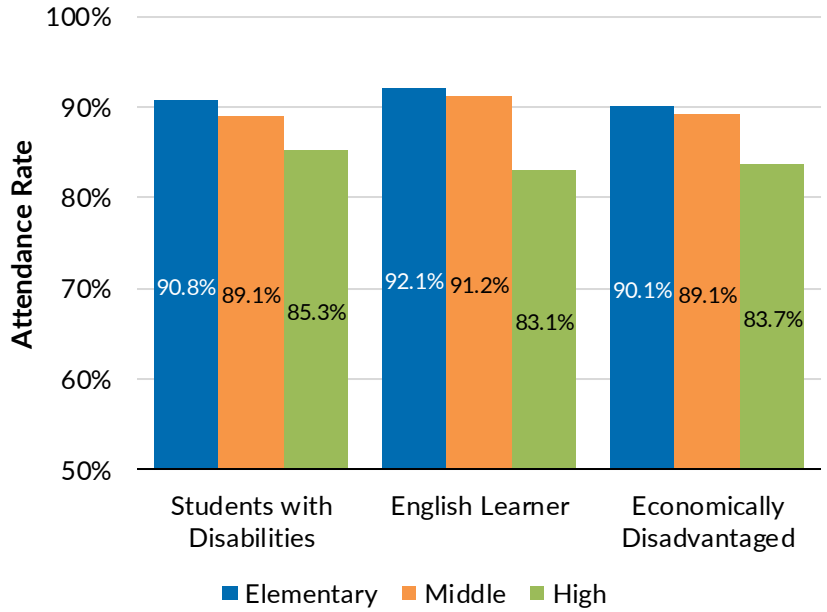


Grade spans are as follows: Elementary – grades 1-5; Middle – grades 6-8; High – grades 9-12

Attendance Rate by Student Group (SY 2023)

Asian and White students had the highest attendance rates in SY 2023. Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, and special service groups (students with disabilities, English learners, and economically disadvantaged) have lower attendance rates.

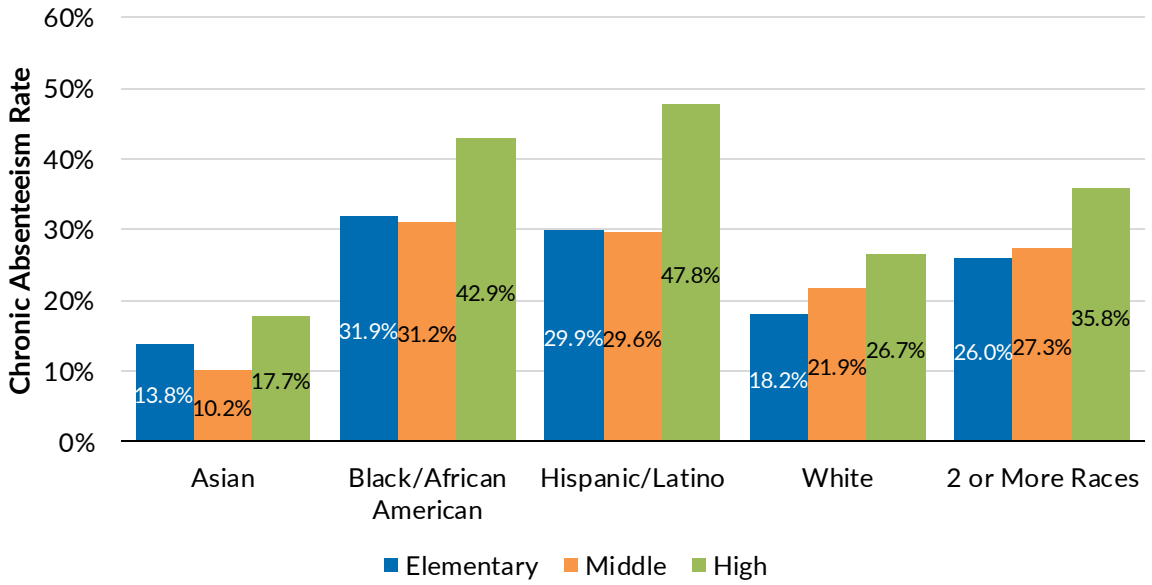


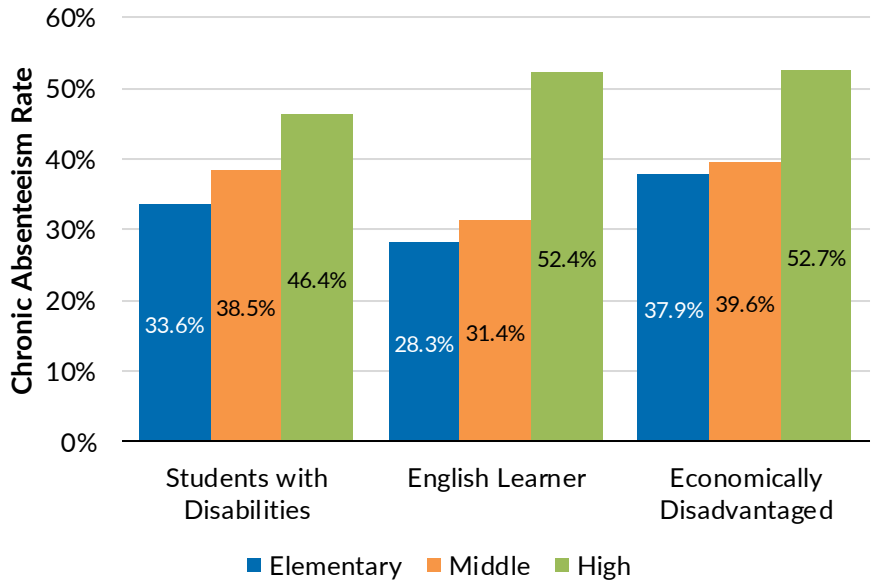


Grade spans are as follows: Elementary – grades 1-5; Middle – grades 6-8; High – grades 9-12

Chronic Absenteeism by Student Group (SY 2023)

Asian and White students had the lowest rates of chronic absenteeism in SY 2023, whereas Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, and special service groups have the highest rates of chronic absenteeism.

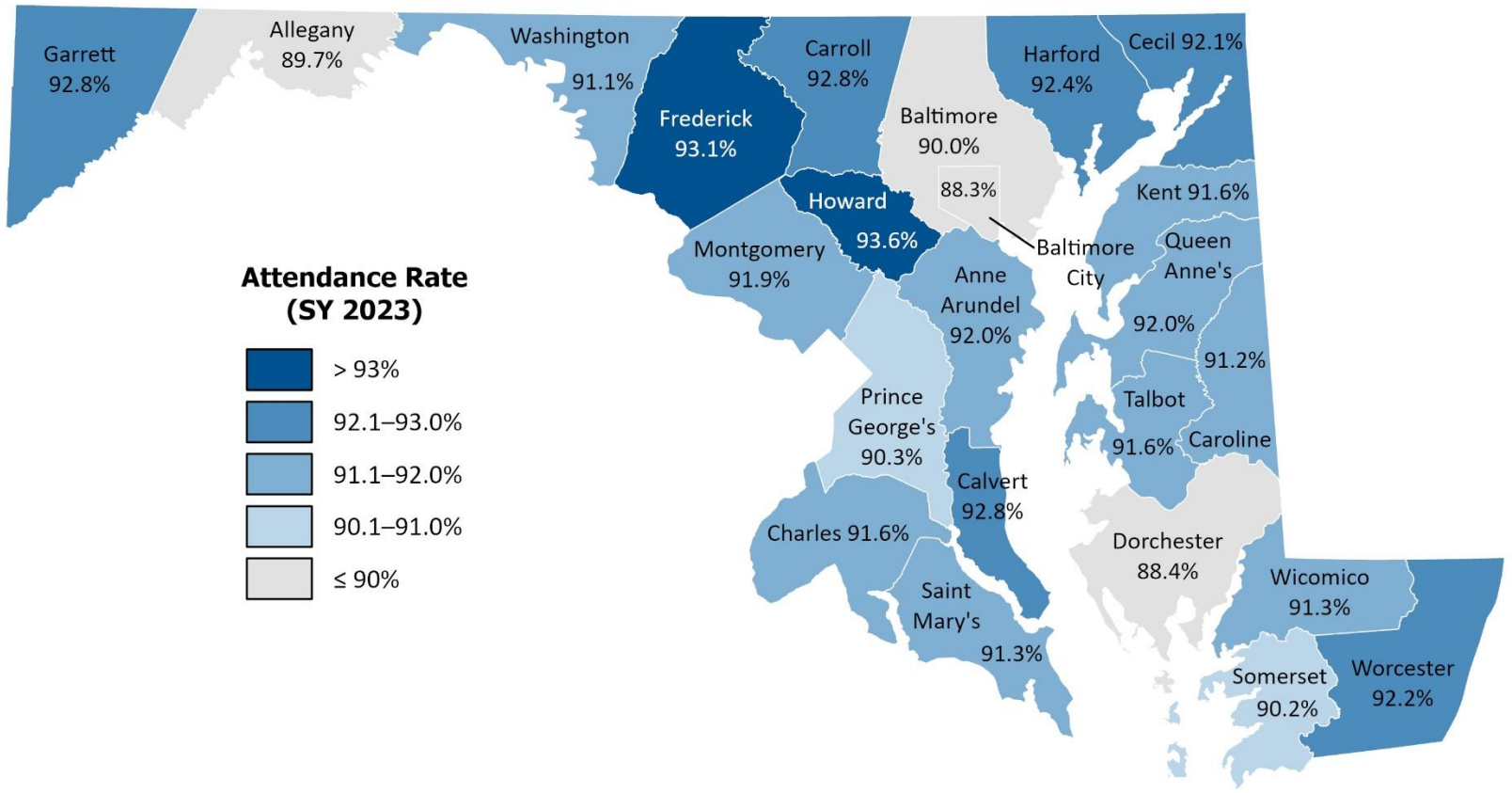


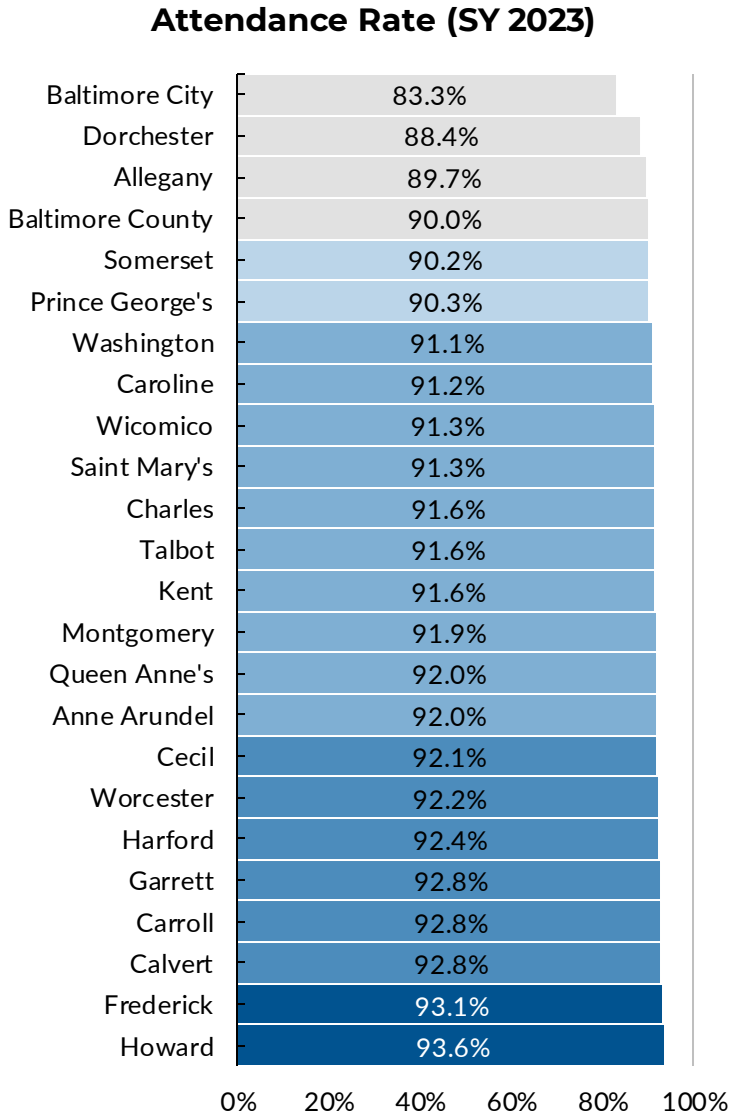


Grade spans are as follows: Elementary – grades 1-5; Middle – grades 6-8; High – grades 9-12

Attendance Rate by LEA in SY 2023

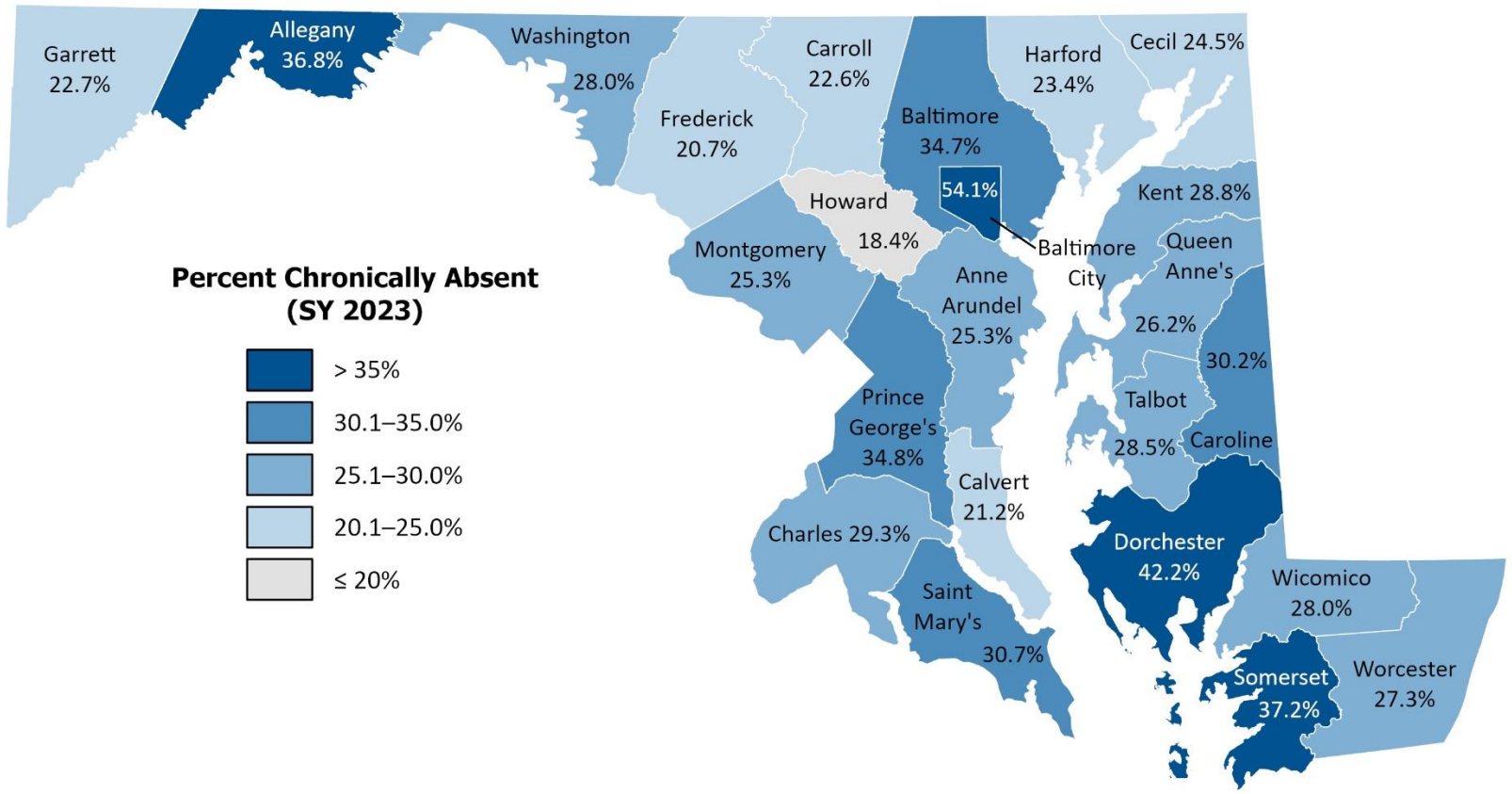
Attendance rates varied from 83% to 94% in SY 2023.

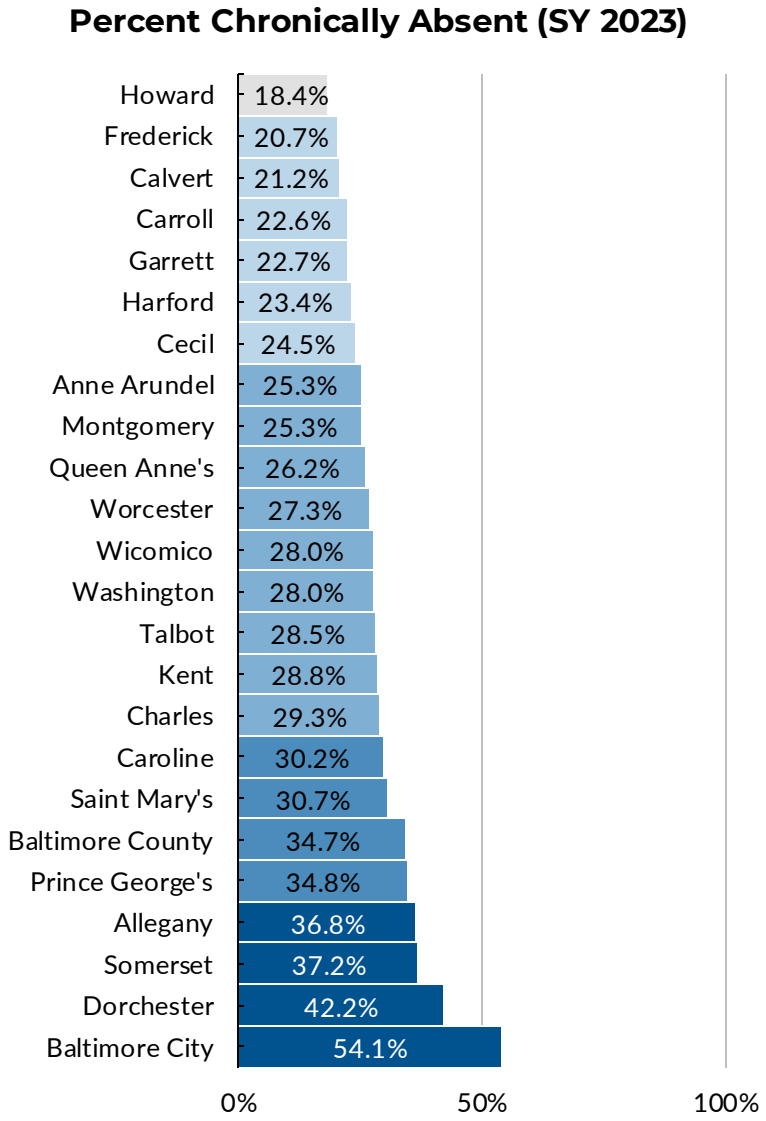




Chronic absenteeism by LEA in SY 2023

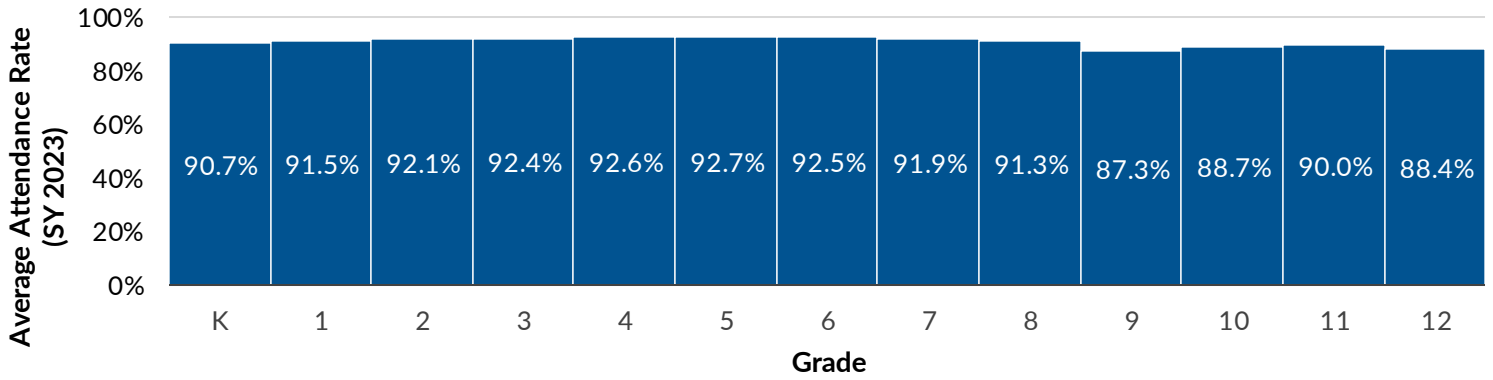
Chronic absenteeism rates varied from 18% to 54% in SY 2023.



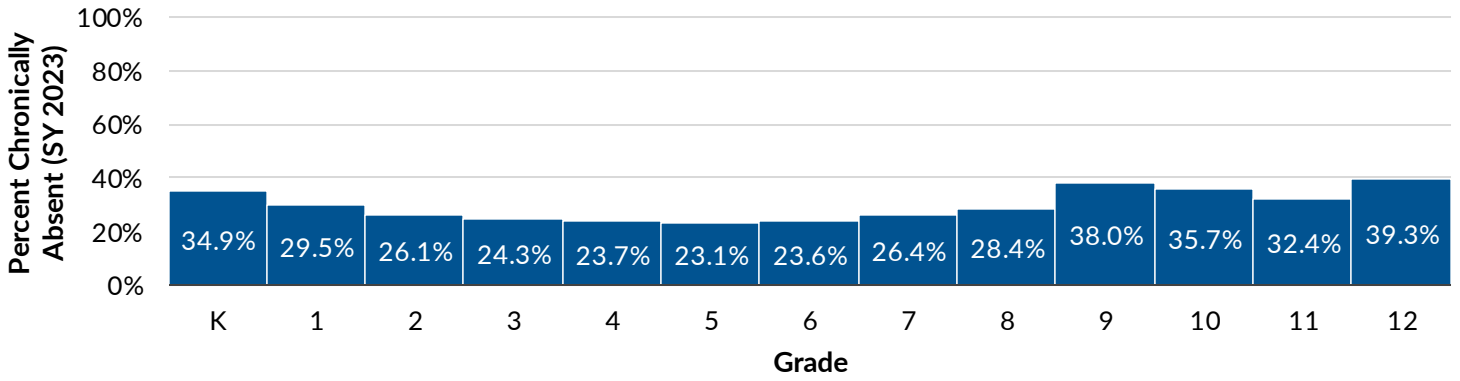


Attendance Trends by Grade (SY 2023)

Attendance rate is lowest in grades 9 and 12, and highest in grade 5.



Chronic absenteeism was lowest in grades 4-6 and highest in grades 9-12.

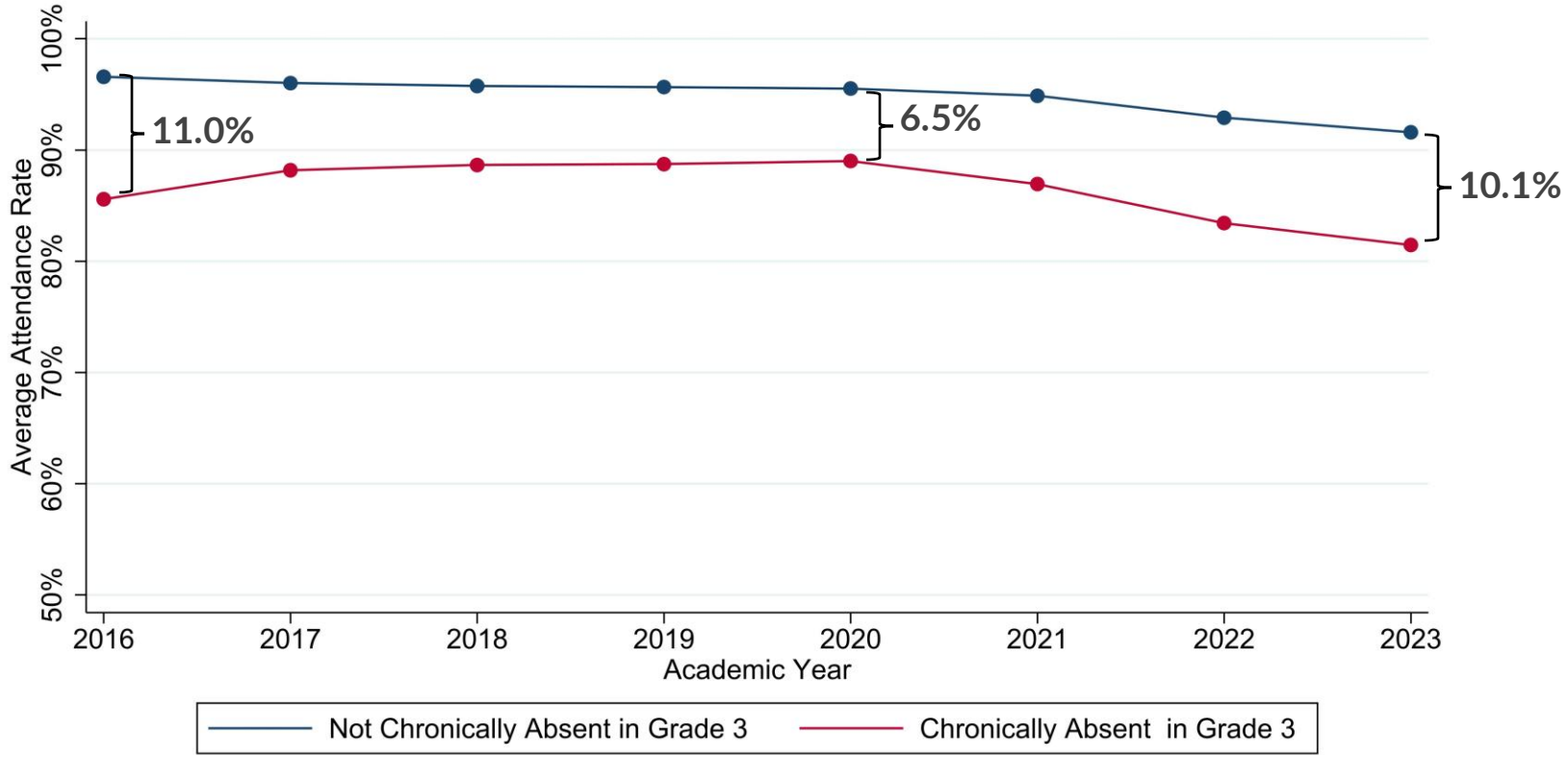


Attendance Cohort Analysis (Part 1 of 2)

Students chronically absent in grade 3 in SY 2016 were consistently more likely in following years to have a lower rate of attendance as compared to students that were not chronically absent in SY 2016.

Of a cohort of 2016 grade 3 students followed to grade 10, two groups of students were identified: students that **were chronically absent in 2016** and students that **were not chronically absent in 2016**.

Differences in average attendance rates between these two groups persisted through middle school and into high school.



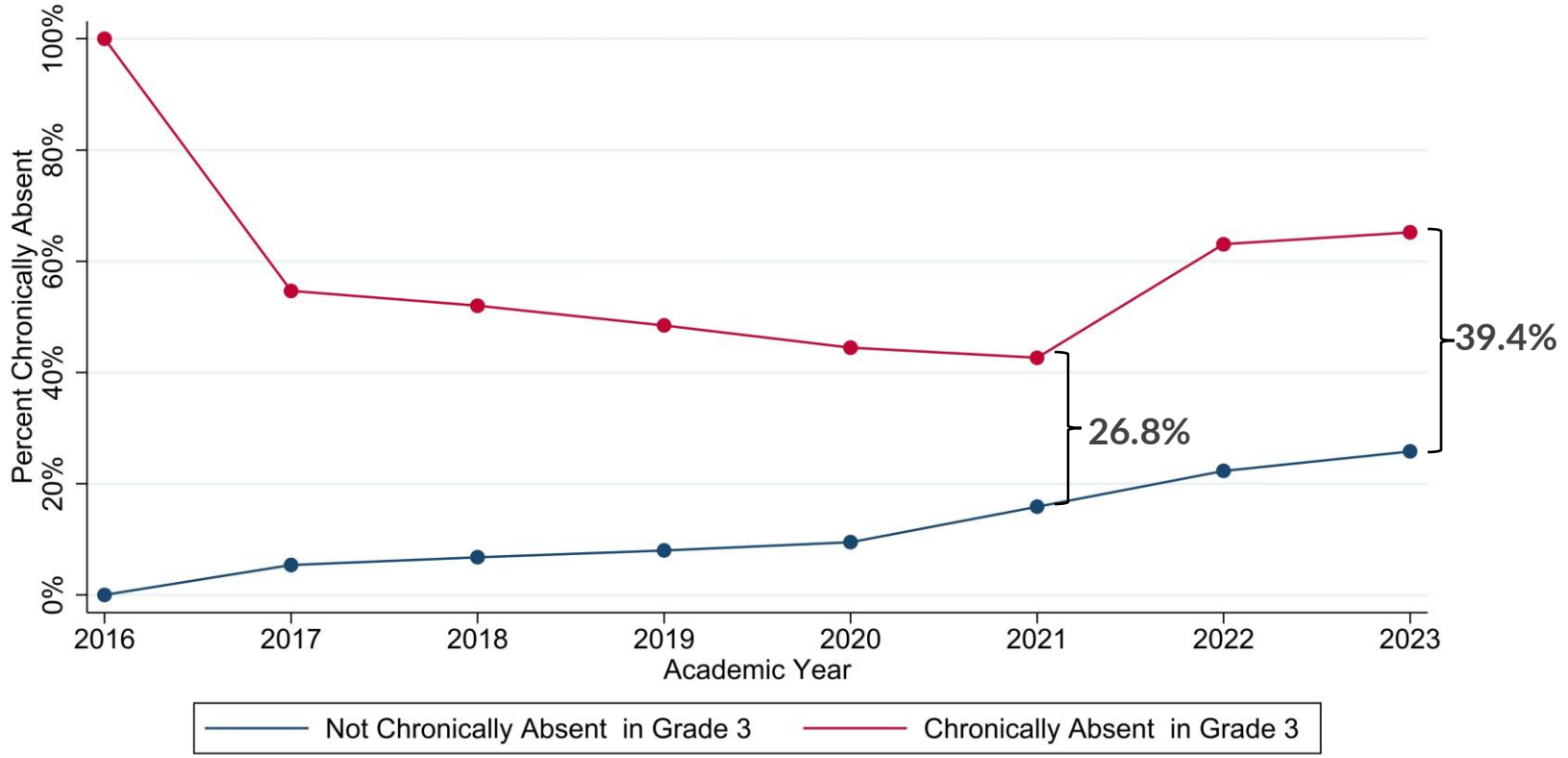
Note: Cohort analysis only includes students in membership for at least 10 days and with continuous grade promotion each year. Cohort included 48,654 students in grade 3 in 2016.

Attendance Cohort Analysis (Part 2 of 2)

Students chronically absent in grade 3 in SY 2016 were consistently more likely in the following years to be chronically absent than students not chronically absent in SY 2016.

Of a cohort of 2016 grade 3 students followed to grade 10, two groups of students were identified: students that **were chronically absent in 2016** and students that **were not chronically absent in 2016**.

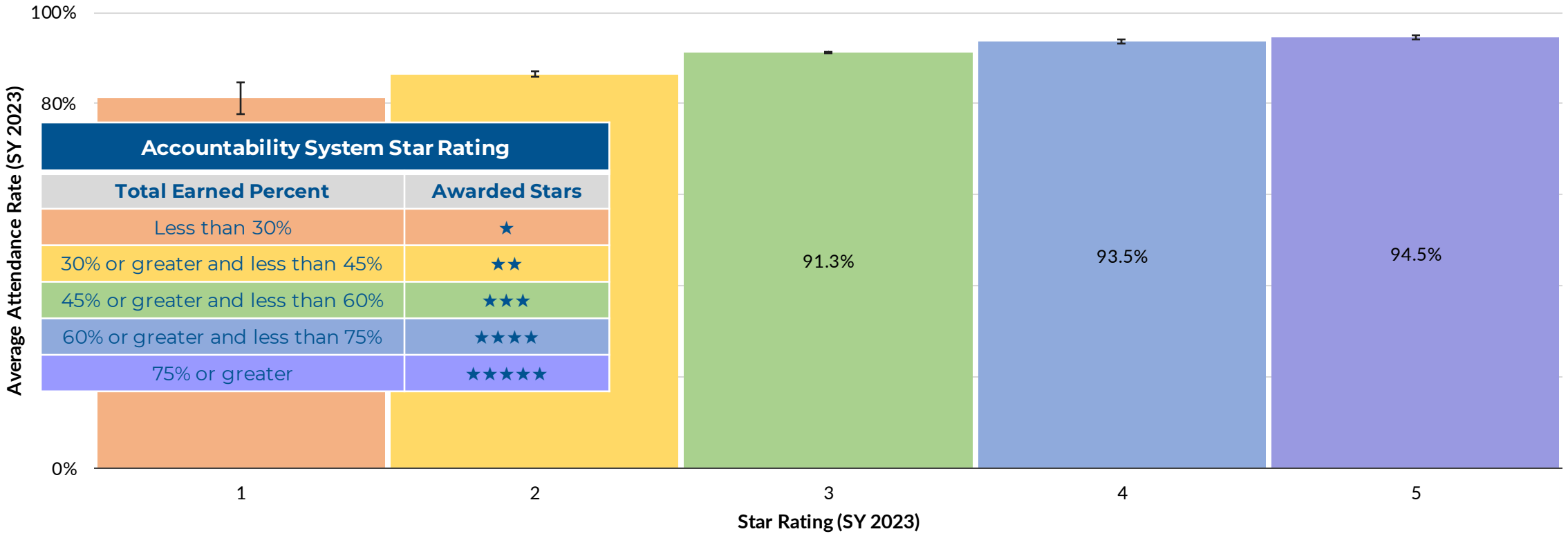
The difference in chronic absenteeism between the two groups persisted in the following years and ranged from 26.8% (SY 2021) to 39.4% (SY 2023).



Note: Cohort analysis only includes students in membership for at least 10 days and with continuous grade promotion each year.

Attendance Rate and School Ratings

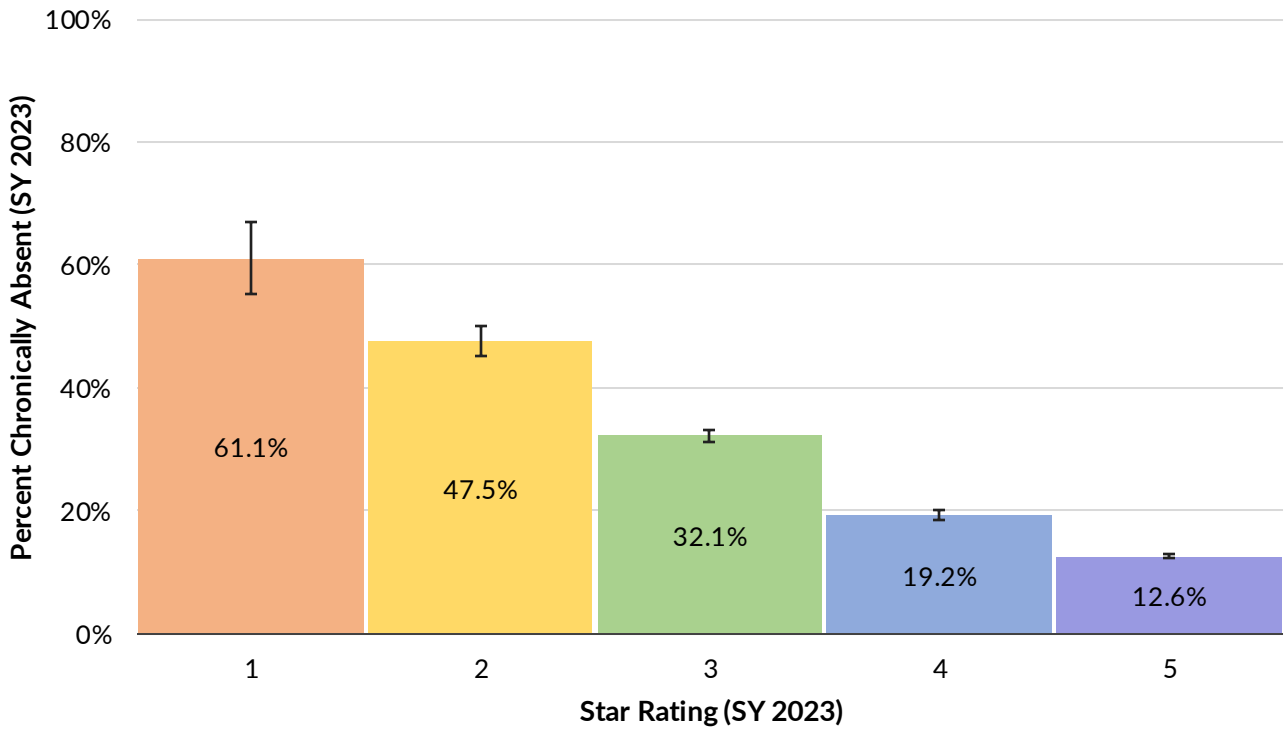
Average attendance rates range from 81.1% for schools that earned a 1-star rating to 94.5% for schools that earned a 5-star rating in SY 2023.



Chronic Absenteeism and School Ratings

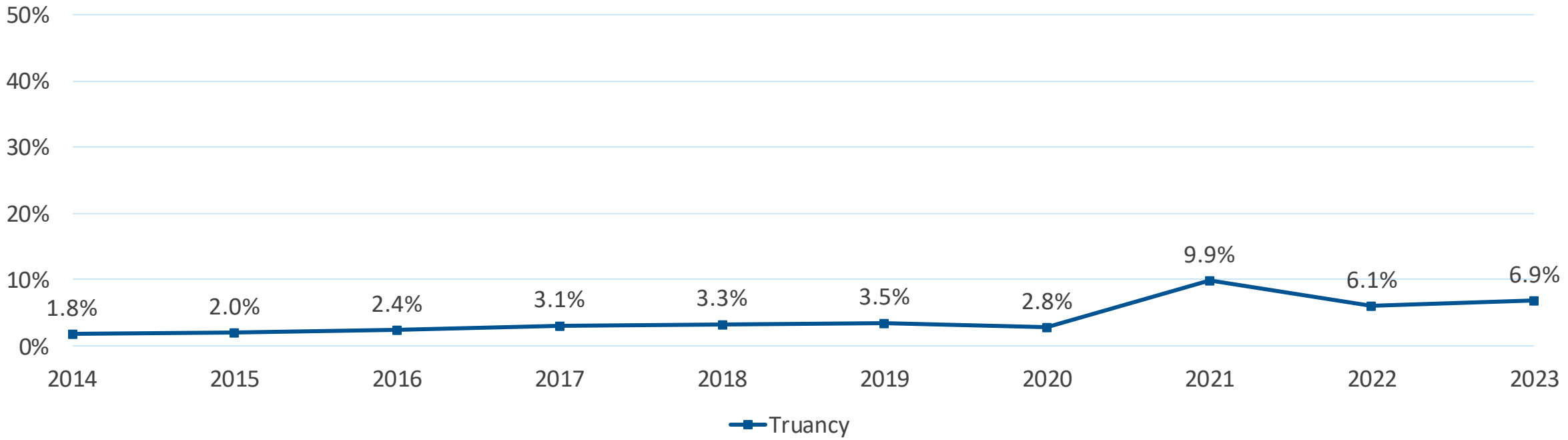
Average chronic absenteeism rates range from 61.1% for schools that earned a 1-star rating to 12.6% for schools that earned a 5-star rating in SY 2023.

Accountability System Star Rating	
Total Earned Percent	**Awarded Stars**
Less than 30%	★
30% or greater and less than 45%	★★
45% or greater and less than 60%	★★★
60% or greater and less than 75%	★★★★
75% or greater	★★★★★



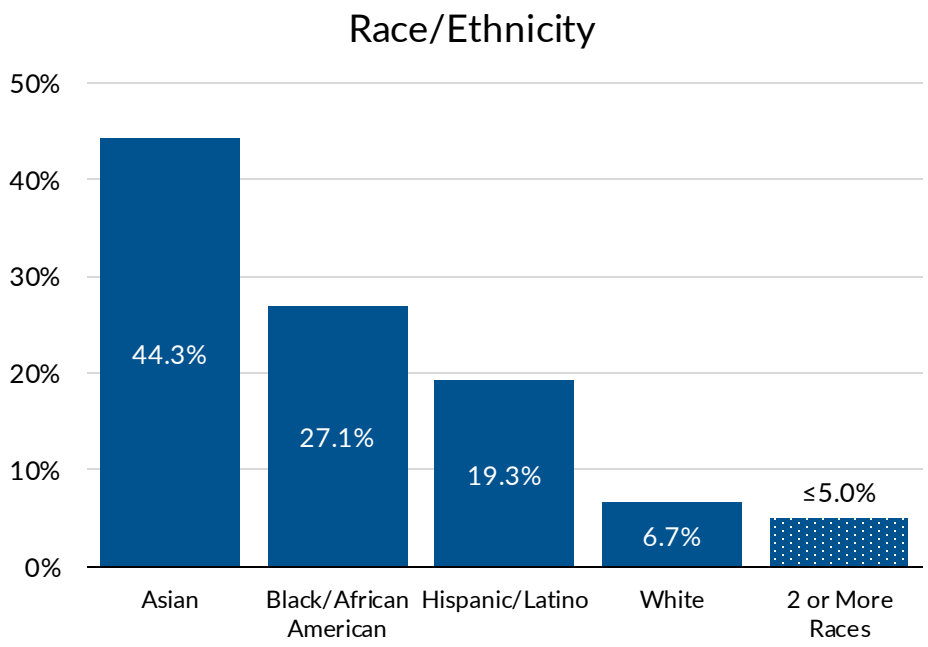
Habitual Truancy

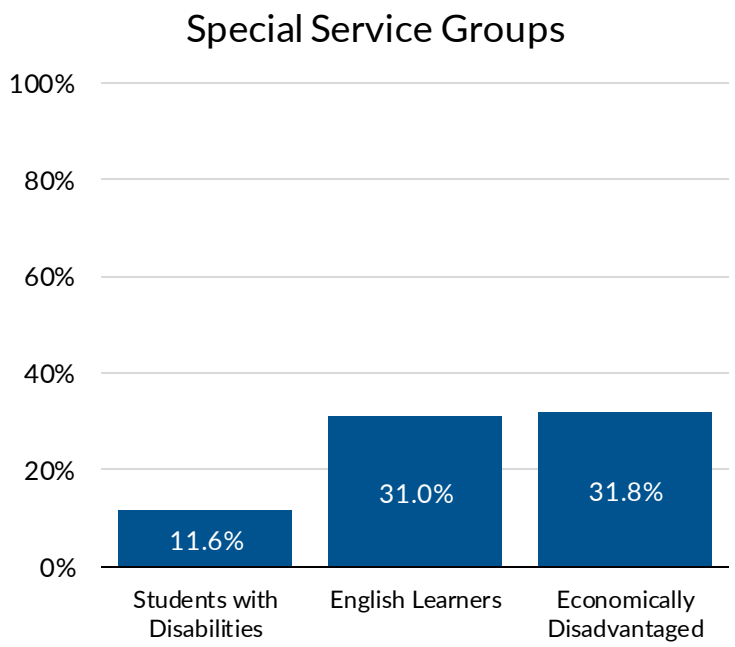
Truancy is defined as a student who is unlawfully absent from school for more than eight days in any quarter, 15 days in any semester, or 20 days in a school year. The habitual truancy rate for all students was 6.9% in school year 2022-2023.

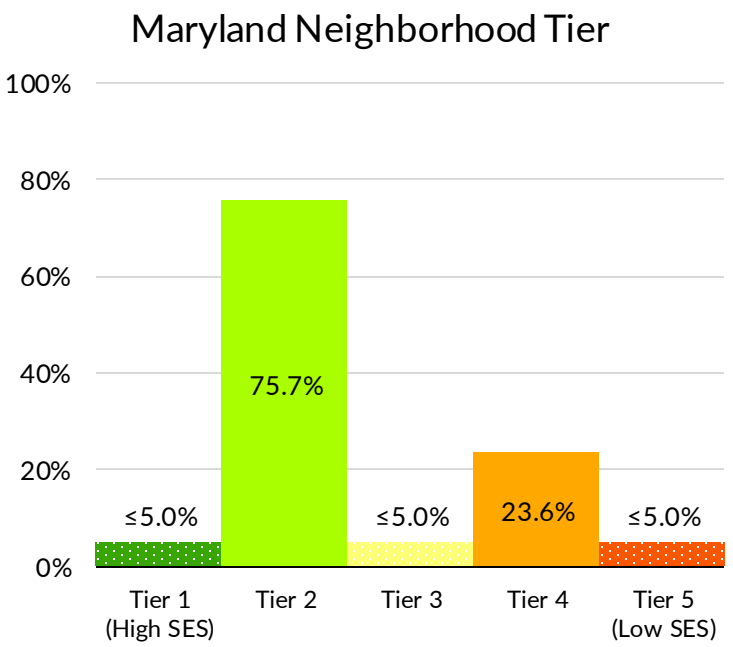


Attendance Highlight: Woodbridge Elementary School (SY 2023)

Woodbridge Elementary School (ES)had a **chronic absenteeism rate of 9.2% in SY 2023, a decrease of 9.6% from 2019 and 18.7% from 2022.** Nearly a third of students are economically disadvantaged; similarly, nearly a third of students are English Learners. Most students reside in either Tier 2 or Tier 4 block groups of the Maryland Neighborhood Tiers.







Note: Bars with stippled patterns represent data suppressed due to low counts.

Woodbridge ES Data – What actions contributed to the decrease in Chronic Absenteeism?

- **Leadership** at the school – starts with the Principal
- An **Attendance Committee** meets weekly to review attendance and chronic absenteeism data.
- Woodbridge Elementary School:

  - maintains its **own attendance records**
  - **uses attendance data** to determine who has missed 10% or more of school each day
  - keeps two lists of chronically absent students - those who are **chronically absent** and those who have **significant early dismissals or late arrivals**.

Woodbridge ES Tier 1 (Universal Prevention) Interventions

- On half days, the school has worked with the PTA to have volunteers provide a program for students to be able to remain in the school until the normal school day would have ended.

  Although there is a small fee for students to stay for this program, it is waved especially for students who are chronically absent.

  This r**educes the number of students who would have had to be absent because their parents would not have been able to pick them up in the middle of the day**.

- The school runs attendance contests.
- **Teachers are required to call home** when a student misses three days throughout the year or two days of school in a row.
- Families are explained reasons to keep a student home when sick. If the parent is not sure, the **student can see the nurse first thing in the morning**.

Woodbridge ES Tier 2 (Early) and Tier 3 (Intensive) Family and Student Interventions

- Interventions are implemented for students who are chronically absent.
- Families are sent a letter asking them to come in to meet with the attendance committee.
- The school works together with the families to explain school expectations.
- The school connects the families to resources, community partners, and other families to help fill the gap with transportation, housing instability, chronic illness, etc.
- Students who are chronically absent are put on check-ins with the school counselor. They earn stickers for attendance and are provided incentives when their sticker chart is filled.
- Baltimore County uses an attendance tracker that has colors and visuals to help families track their student's attendance.

What contributes to chronic absenteeism?

In *The 74*, January 2024, Hedy Chang, Attendance Works Executive Director, highlighted **one of the contributing factors** in schools with a high level of chronic absenteeism, stating:

> "a school's climate must be missing core elements that make kids feel safe and engaged. To get students to attend school regularly, administration will have to launch a school-wide effort to create a secure and welcoming environment.
>
> "My first question would be, 'Do I make sure that every kid has an adult on that campus they can talk to?'" Chang said. Physical and emotional safety and a feeling of belonging are among the core conditions necessary to engage students, she said. "You can send out communications saying, 'we miss you,' but if a student doesn't feel like anybody at the school cares about them, some little note might not do a lot."

Types of Programs Offered by MSDE to Address Factors that Contribute to Chronic Absenteeism

- Maryland School Mental Health Response Team
- Maryland Advancing Wellness and Resilience in Education (MD-A.W.A.R.E) grant which supports adult and student well-being and emotional competence
- Anti- Bullying Model Policy and development of strategies to reduce bullying
- Reducing barriers that contribute to students not attending school through work of the Student Services and Strategic Planning Branch of school psychologists, pupil personnel workers, social workers, and climate specialists
- School health services support
- Support of restorative practices
- Administration of an annual school survey which is part of the MD Report Card
- Efforts to reduce suspensions

Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

Briefing on Contributing Factors of Chronic Truancy in the Maryland Public School System

January 18, 2023

MARYLAND STATE EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

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Cheryl Bost
MSEA President

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Residency Investigator – Baltimore County Public Schools and ESPBC President

Samantha Zwerling
MSEA Managing Director for Political & Legislative Affairs

MARYLAND STATE EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

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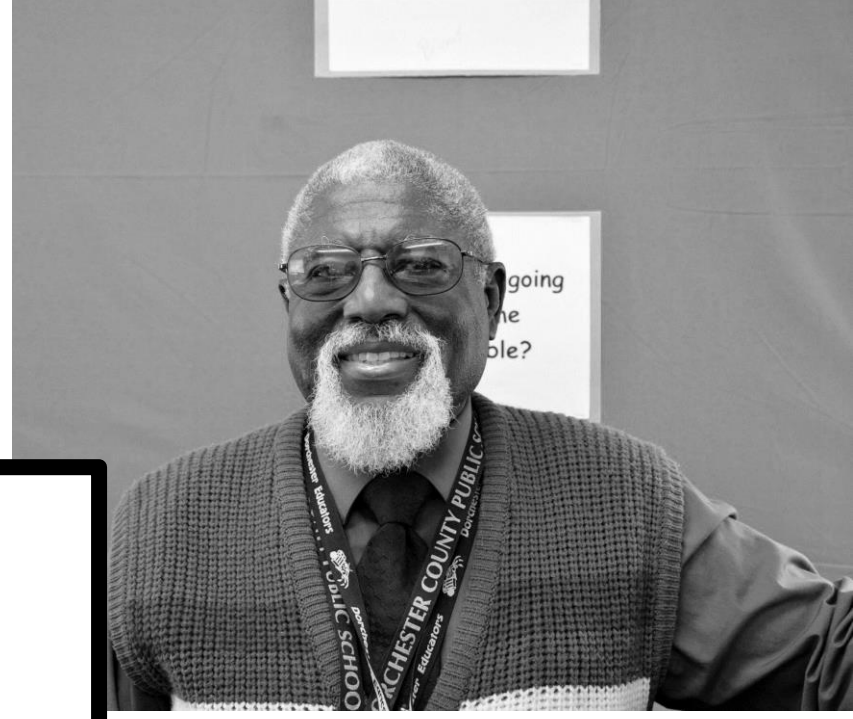

Who is MSEA?

- 75,000 educators state wide
- 23 of 24 school districts
- 38 local associations
- Teachers, counselors, staff, administrators, higher ed staff, specialists, students, retirees

Truant Student

- **Unlawful** absence for more than:
  - 8 days in any quarter;
  - 15 days in any semester; or
  - 20 days in a school year.
- MD Code, Education, § 7-302.2(a).
- Lawful absences are established by COMAR and include:
  - Death in the family, illness, hazardous weather, etc.

Chronic Absenteeism

- Defined by MSDE and used as a school quality and student success indicator on MD Report Card
- This measure “identifies the number of students who are expected to attend school for at least 10 days and who were absent 10% or more of the school days while enrolled at that school.”
- Lawful and unlawful absences are measured
- Among all Maryland students:
  - 2018: 19.4%
  - 2022 30.9%

Impacts of Chronic Absenteeism

- Lower academic achievement
- Higher risk of continuing to be chronically absent in future grades
- Higher likelihood of dropping out of high school
- Negative health outcomes
- More likely to interact with the criminal justice system

Reasons Students are Absent

- Cannot attend school
  - Illness, family circumstances, housing instability, need to work, involvement with juvenile justice system
- Will not attend school
  - Bullying, unsafe conditions, harassment, embarrassment
- Do not attend school
  - Do not see value, something else they would rather do

Experience in Baltimore County

- Many jobs categories work on getting students to school
- School staff are worried about how absenteeism affects “grading” of schools
- Change in drop-out age from 16 to 18 causing challenges

Solutions

- More staff, more staff collaboration, more staff training, more career & tech ed, more virtual options, more night school options

Solutions in the Blueprint for Maryland's Future

MSEA

More staff and more staff collaboration time

Career and Technical Education

School Based Health Centers

Healthy Meals

Mental Health Supports

Community Schools

We look forward to working together

Cheryl Bost
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MSEA

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Bearing Strange Fruit:

How Structural Violence and Disinvestment Harm our Youth

JOHNS HOPKINS
SCHOOL of EDUCATION

Nobody Asked Me
www.nobodyaskedmebmore.org

About Nobody Asked Me Campaign and Research Team

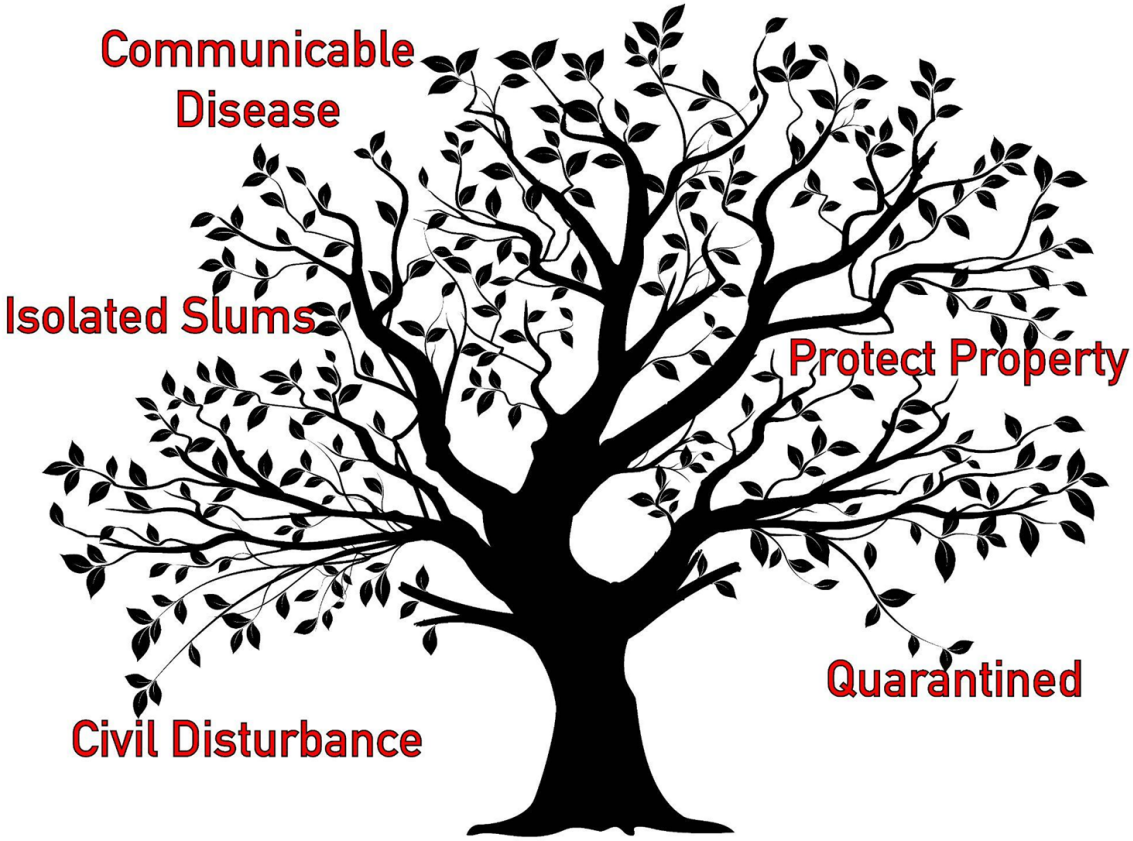
Led by Dr. Richard Lofton and Larry Simmons, The Nobody Asked Me Campaign is a community research project that aims to empower students, families, and community members and highlight their experiences living within Baltimore. The project centers community voices to strengthen Baltimore City Public Schools in hopes of ensuring students will receive a “thorough and efficient” education, and that they will be in safe, healthy, and healing environments where they can learn and develop the skills to thrive in Baltimore.

Leadership

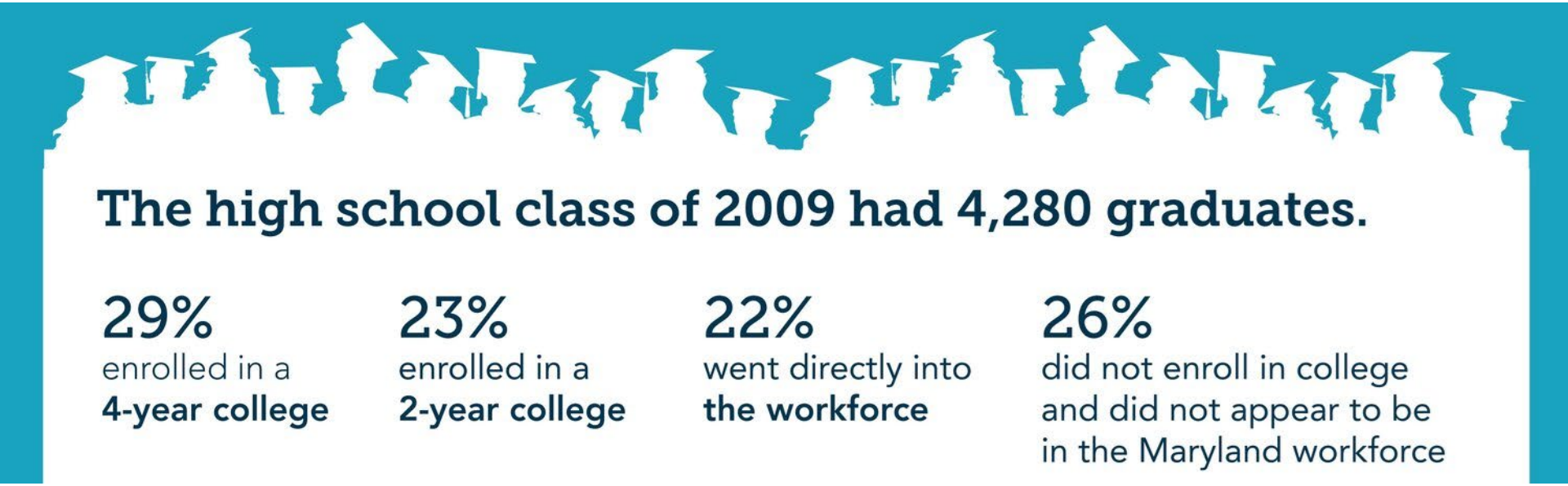
Dr. Richard Lofton is a sociologist and applied researcher. His extensive research delves into diverse topics including academic placement, racially diverse schools, mentoring programs, concentrated poverty, and social and emotional development. At the forefront of Dr. Lofton's work is the Principal Investigator role in the Nobody Asked Me Campaign, a research initiative amplifying the voices and experiences of over 180 African American students and parents in Baltimore. Through collaborative efforts with community activists, city agency directors, school board members, and experts, the campaign aims to co-produce policies and strategies that promote equity and justice in educational resources, opportunities, and experiences.

A native of West Baltimore, Larry Simmons is deeply committed to enhancing the health, wellness, and economic vibrancy of Baltimore's neighborhoods. Throughout his professional journey, he has demonstrated a profound dedication to serving communities across the city and has earned a reputation as a natural advocate with a keen ability to expose injustice. With over 20 years of experience in directing youth and community development programs, community organizing, and coordinating city-wide services, Larry stands as a valued and respected community leader. His role as a connector bridges siloed city initiatives, bringing together non-traditional stakeholders and leaders to form partnerships that advance community engagement and advocacy, particularly for those in need. Larry's unwavering presence and commitment underscore his belief that the success of our children is crucial for the future well-being of the community.

Historical Strange Fruit



Outcomes



(Baltimore's Promise, 2018)

The Research

Research shows a ***double isolation*** in these four areas for many Baltimore students:

A) Housing
B) Criminal Justice System
C) Education
D) Pathways to Economic Success

Strange Fruit in Education

Strange fruit has manifested into Structural Violence and Disinvestment, which has led to *Mundane Terror*

Disinvestment

"The withdrawal or withholding of public or private capital- typically accompanied by the physical deterioration of neighborhood's housing stock, infrastructure, schools and public spaces"

Aalber, 2006

Capturing the Experiences

We have interviewed over 200 youth and their family members

Selection Criteria:

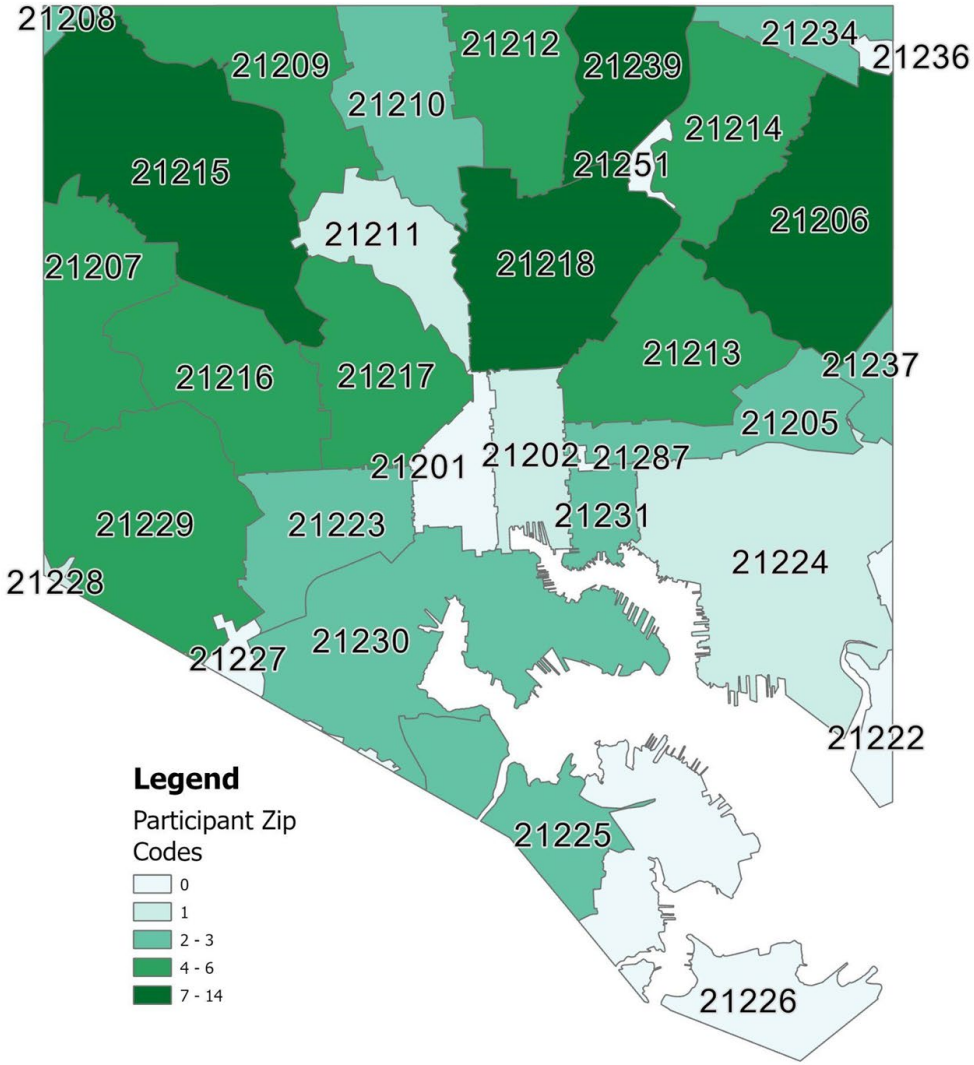
- Be a current or former Baltimore City Public School student
- Be a family member of a current or former BCPSS student
- "Youth" participants must be between the ages of 14 and 24 years
- For "family" participants, there were no age constraints

Nobody Asked Me

www.nobodyaskedmebmore.org

Johns Hopkins School of Education

Location of NAM Participants by Baltimore City Zip Code



General Findings

Students encounter "Mundane Terror" through interactions with **law enforcement**, on their **commutes**, in their **neighborhoods**, cold and hot **classrooms**, and through **deficit framing**.

Terror on the Commute

"I could not even tell you the amount of times **students got jumped on the way home from school**… It was a very, very regular occurrence, especially **because we had to use the public school buses.** And so, my parents would say, 'You should use the bus to get home, but if it's getting a little late, just call us. We'll come pick you up.' I had several friends who were followed."

- Theo

The Terror of Deficit Framing

"They don't give transportation for especially buses, for kids to be able to make it to school on time, mainly because the **budget's being cut short and we're not getting a lot of funding because we don't have the best reputation**… So with the city's budget…that comes with…**our reputation being completely destroyed by the reputation of Black people**, due to our history and with our history being tied into now and how gang violence and drug distribution, mainly throughout the black community, black men, specifically. **That ties into how much the government wants to control our budget and how much money is flowing into our city because they don't necessarily want it to go into the wrong place."**

- Jaleel

Disrupted Learning Opportunities

You would just be hot. It was terrible. There was a time when I was at City where we were actually, I think all of Baltimore City schools ***shut down for four days because a lot of schools didn't have heat***... We had heat at City, but it was broken. And we'd be in class, and it'd get 40 degrees. So, we were out for four days… I think that was pretty bad being in the cold, but I think the heat is even worse. ***Not having air conditioning***, you cannot focus when it's 80 degrees and you're sitting down just like... I mean, I sweat a lot. So, I would be sweating in class. ***It was terrible going to school.***

- Terry, 21

Students Encounter Mundane Terror

1. **Interactions with police, peers, and sexual predators**
2. **Commute to and from their schools**
3. **Unsafe and unhealthy school infrastructure**
4. **Deficit framing of Black youth**
5. **Psychological distress of no escape**

Ending Mundane Terror

Social and emotional development must be tied to transforming structures

A. Students need environments so they can heal from structural violence and disinvestment
B. Mundane terror must be addressed to pursue academic success

Structural violence and disinvestment interact with interpersonal violence

A. Mundane terrors happens for students when there are accumulation of factors that causes them to feel unsafe and uncomfortable

General Findings

There is a misalignment between youth aspirations and school/city services for career readiness and opportunity. Black youth are socialized through various educational, private, and state-sponsored structures towards low-wage jobs careers.

Structuring Aspiration

Interviewer: *What else do you want to achieve in your life?*

Danny: I want to move somewhere safer and provide for my family and just be really successful. You know, just like live differently from how I am living now live the, my imagined life, like my dreams.

Lack of Investment in Students

Interviewer: And where would you want that money to go to in schools?

Allie: Just better resources. I mean, say, maybe not relying on MTA buses, having more extracurricular activities that are available to all students across Baltimore… I think just investing more in the students. Also, maybe having more mental health professionals at schools…having that in elementary and middle schools I think could really help and just putting more money into our students and investing in Baltimore's youth because I think you can make a change with that.

- Allie, 21-year-old Former BCPSS Student

Pathways To Address Mental Health

"I think mental health isn't something that's discussed enough, especially within like a lot of urban populations. Most of Baltimore's demographic is people of color. So, that's something that's not really discussed. It definitely could hinder a lot of students because then you're like, all right, you're already a teenager, which is the worst time of life. And then on top if that, you're in high school, which is like, unnecessarily stressful, because it can determine so many things for you. And then on top of that, now you're trying out public transportation, maybe you're trying to get a job. Its like all these things stacking up against you."

Cara, 17

Students Interaction with School Culture

1. Witnesses to school violence
2. Experience judgement and and underinvestment from schools, districts
3. Feel stifled by school opportunities, rules, and norms

Addressing Pathways

1. Racism has caused students to believe that they can't get meaningful work in the city
2. Students had high aspirations but were unaware of the multiple job opportunities
3. Misalignment with students' aspirations and educational experiences
4. Pathways must address mental health

Youth Want Change

"If I would change… if I could change, what would I change? **I would try to change the people mindset.**"

-Kiana, 16

Recommendations

1. Discern and dismantle the strange fruit that justify structural or physical violence
2. Acknowledge the resiliency and agency that students bring to schools
3. Students need to heal from intergenerational trauma
4. Experts, researchers, non-profits and school personnel must work together for policies to support teachers, administrators and students

Recommendations

5. Youth need safe and reliable transportation
6. Youth need livable wages after they graduate from high school and college
7. Hold employers accountable for not hiring BCPSS students
8. Work to provide safe, healthy and healing environments in schools that address mental health, and basic human needs

Feeling Judged

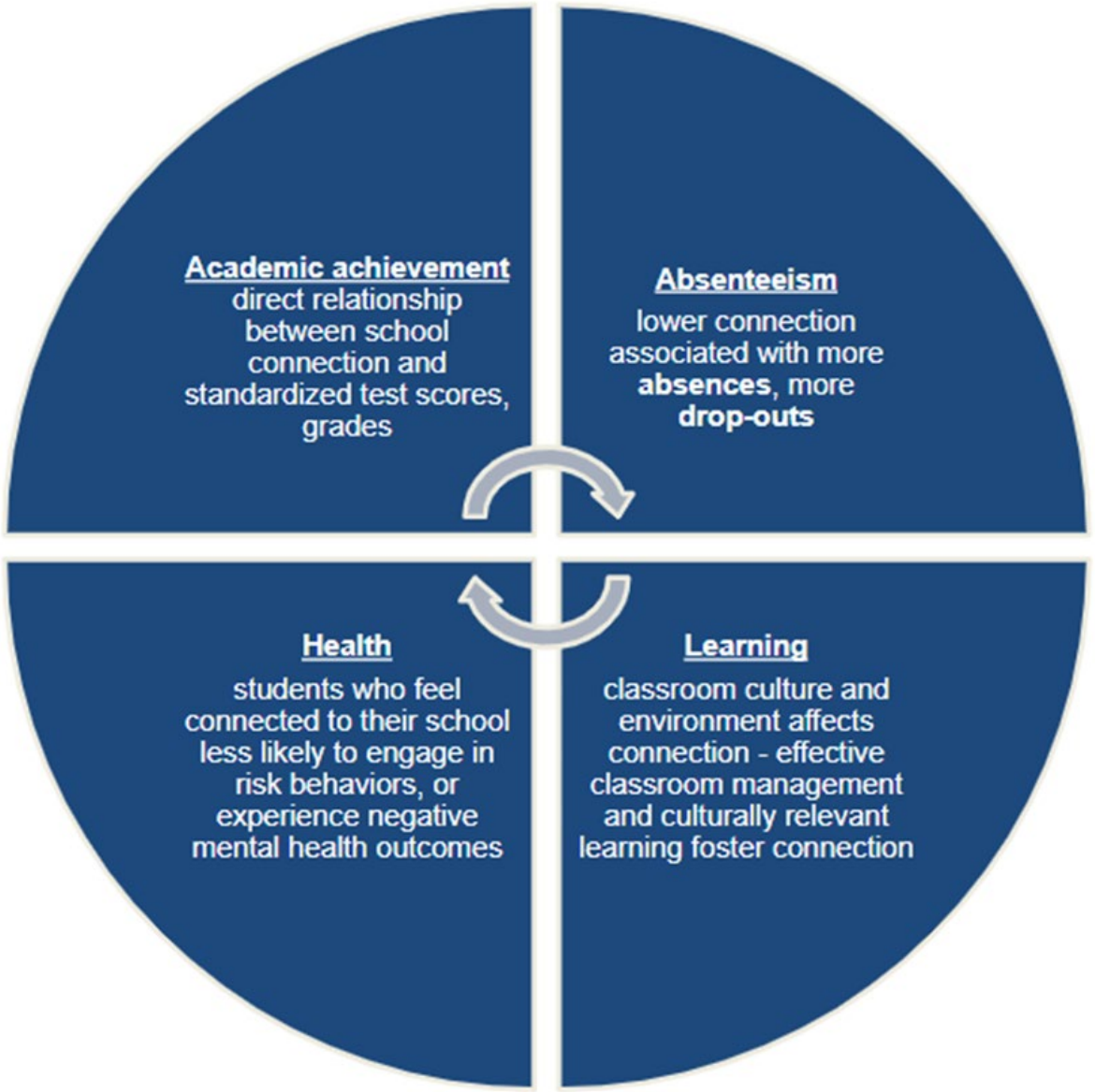
I would say again, just being judged, and getting tired of being judged, and retaliating, and with administrators not knowing specifically why these things are happening, it causes a disconnect between them and the student body and the administration body. And it creates even more violence to whereas though the teachers are now being attacked because they're tired of the teacher's not listening or understanding or picking on them as I were saying earlier.

- Bill, 16

When Violence Becomes Routine

- Beyond academics, violence as well as policing shape the daily lives of many youth in Baltimore:
  - Changes in daily routines to avoid both violence and criminalization
  - Bell (2019): "Violence undermines some of the most basic, but rarely invoked, privileges of American citizenship and of humanity: safety, friendship, and dreams."

Conditions for Success



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