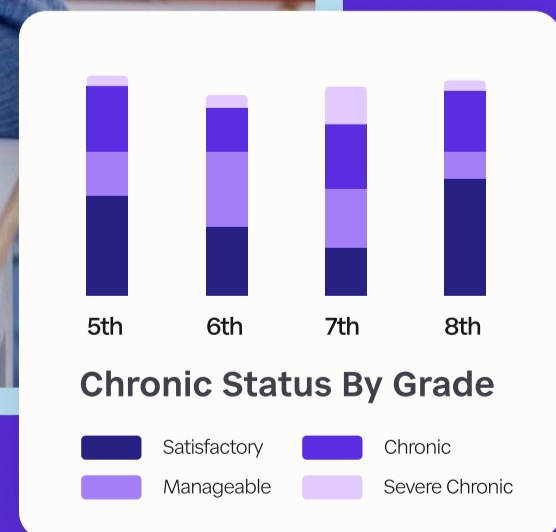
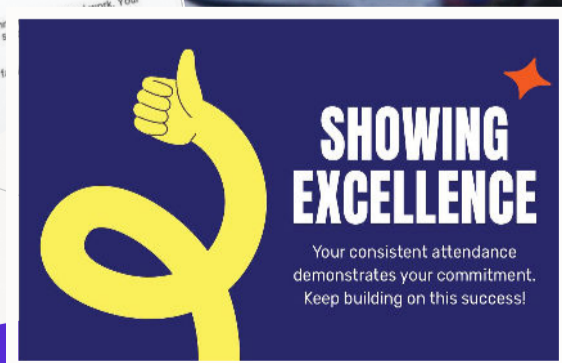


REPORT

How 89 School Districts Reduced Chronic Absenteeism by 36%

New Data & Strategies from the Field



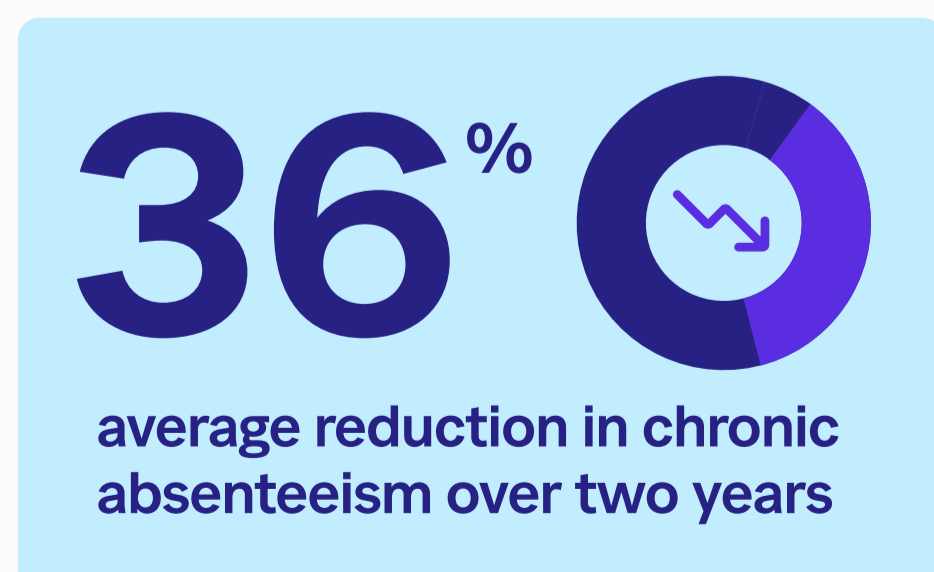
Chronic absenteeism has become one of the most pressing challenges in American K-12 education. The numbers are stark: chronic absenteeism, defined as missing 10% or more of school days for any reason, reached an all-time high of 31% nationwide in the 2021-2022 school year. It improved slightly in the 2022-2023 school year, to 28% according to the U.S. Department of Education. Most recently, AEI reports that chronic absenteeism dropped to 23.5% in the 2024-25 school year, which is still significantly higher than most districts experienced pre-pandemic.

The improvement is encouraging, but still means that almost one in four students misses enough school to fall behind academically, which often leads to further disengagement and can impact graduation rates.

The most recent Education Recovery Scorecard, which tracks academic recovery and related indicators across states and districts, has flagged chronic absenteeism as one of the central barriers to student academic recovery.

Research consistently links chronic absenteeism to lower reading proficiency in early grades, reduced academic achievement over time, weakened student-teacher relationships, and significantly higher dropout risk. For districts working to close learning gaps and restore academic progress, reducing chronic absenteeism has to become more than a compliance checkbox or operational goal. Tackling chronic absenteeism proactively and consistently is a foundational condition for learning.

This isn't new information for district leaders. Chronic absenteeism has received national media attention in the last few years. Yet many districts are still struggling to move the needle. Attendance staff are stretched thin, traditional interventions are losing effectiveness, and families who most need outreach are often the hardest to reach. The question facing school leaders is what actually works to change the status quo.



This analysis looks at state-reported data from 89 districts serving over 513,000 students. These districts achieved a 36% average reduction in chronic absenteeism over two years. The findings show that districts that shift to proactive, structured strategies that prioritize family-engagement consistently see significant attendance improvements.



Methodology

We analyzed state-reported chronic absenteeism data for 89 districts across nine states: Alabama, California, Colorado, Georgia, Illinois, Massachusetts, Mississippi, Texas, and Virginia. Districts range in size from fewer than 1,000 students to more than 20,000, representing a broad cross-section of geographic settings, community types, and demographic profiles. The districts analyzed adopted structured, proactive attendance strategies between the 2022–23 and 2024–25 school years through SchoolStatus Attend.

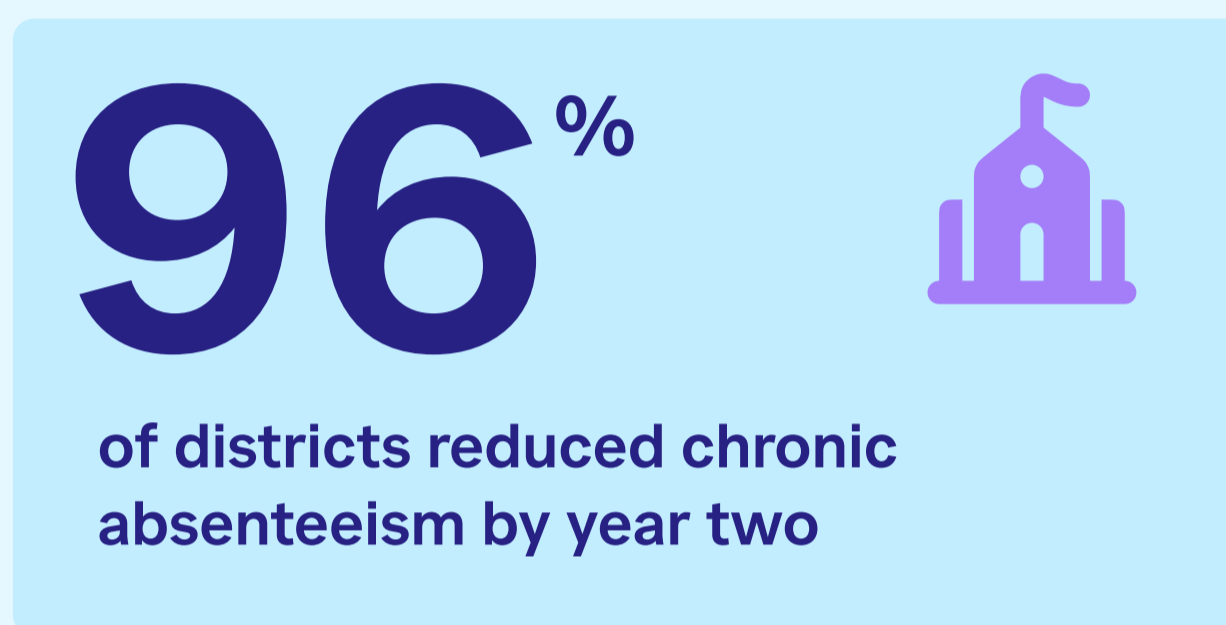
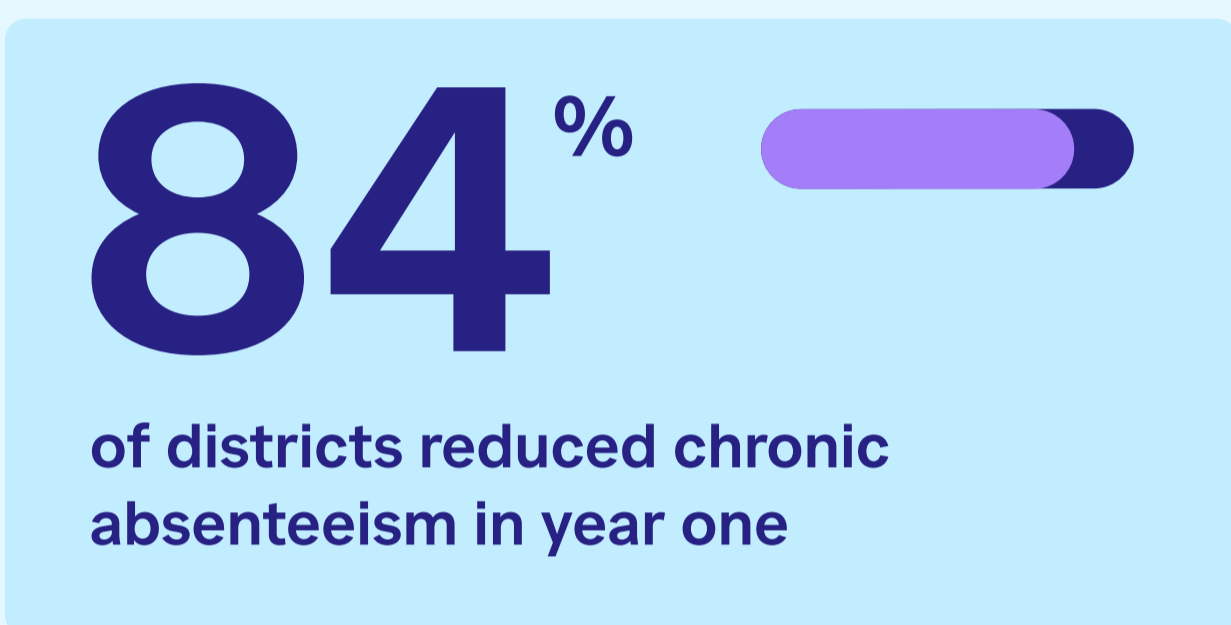
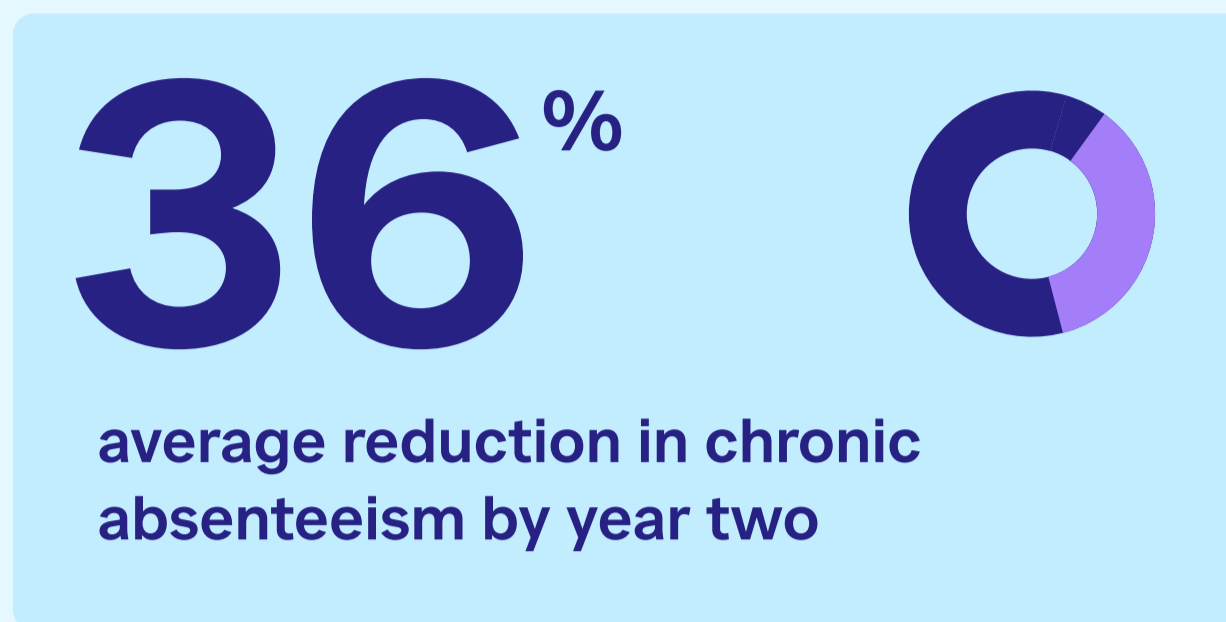
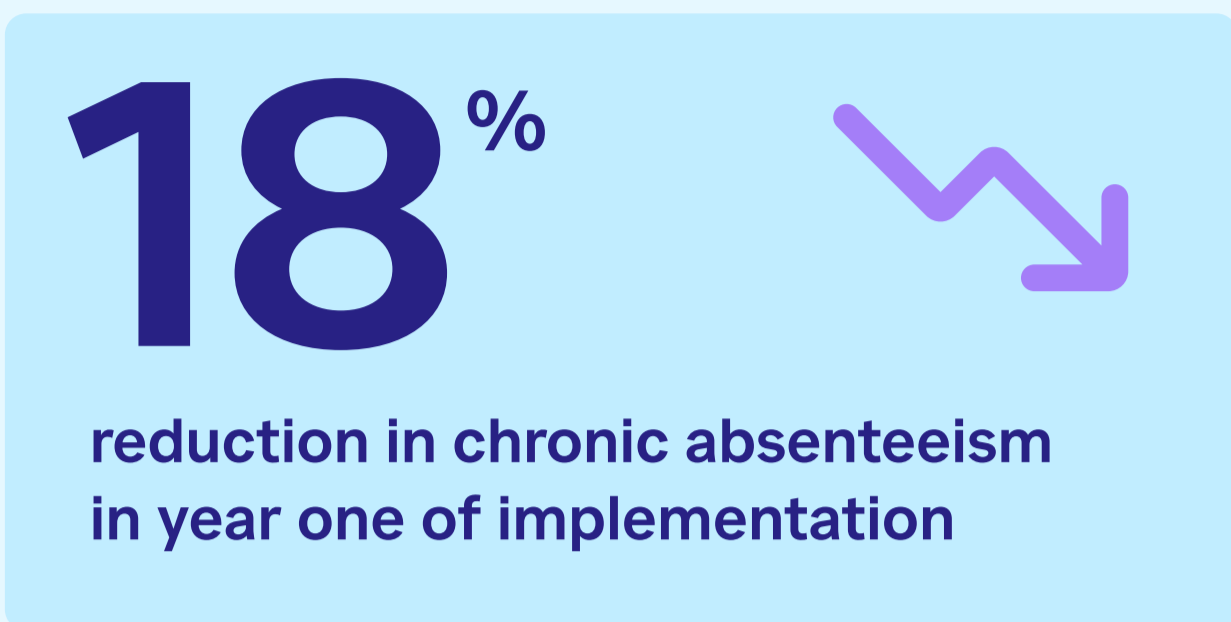
We tracked three points in time:

- **Year Zero:** The school year before the district adopted structured, proactive attendance strategies through SchoolStatus Attend
- **Year One:** The district's first full year implementing the solution
- **Year Two:** The second year of implementation (data currently available for 47 of 89 districts)

Chronic absenteeism is defined as missing 10% or more of enrolled school days for any reason (excused, unexcused, or suspension). All percentage changes reflect the rate of change relative to Year Zero, giving every district a fair comparison point regardless of starting conditions. For example:

- Manassas Park City Schools (VA) reduced chronic absenteeism from 20.9% to 15.5%, a 25.8% decrease
- Upper Lake Unified School District (CA) reduced chronic absenteeism from 48.6% to 27.8%, a 35% decrease

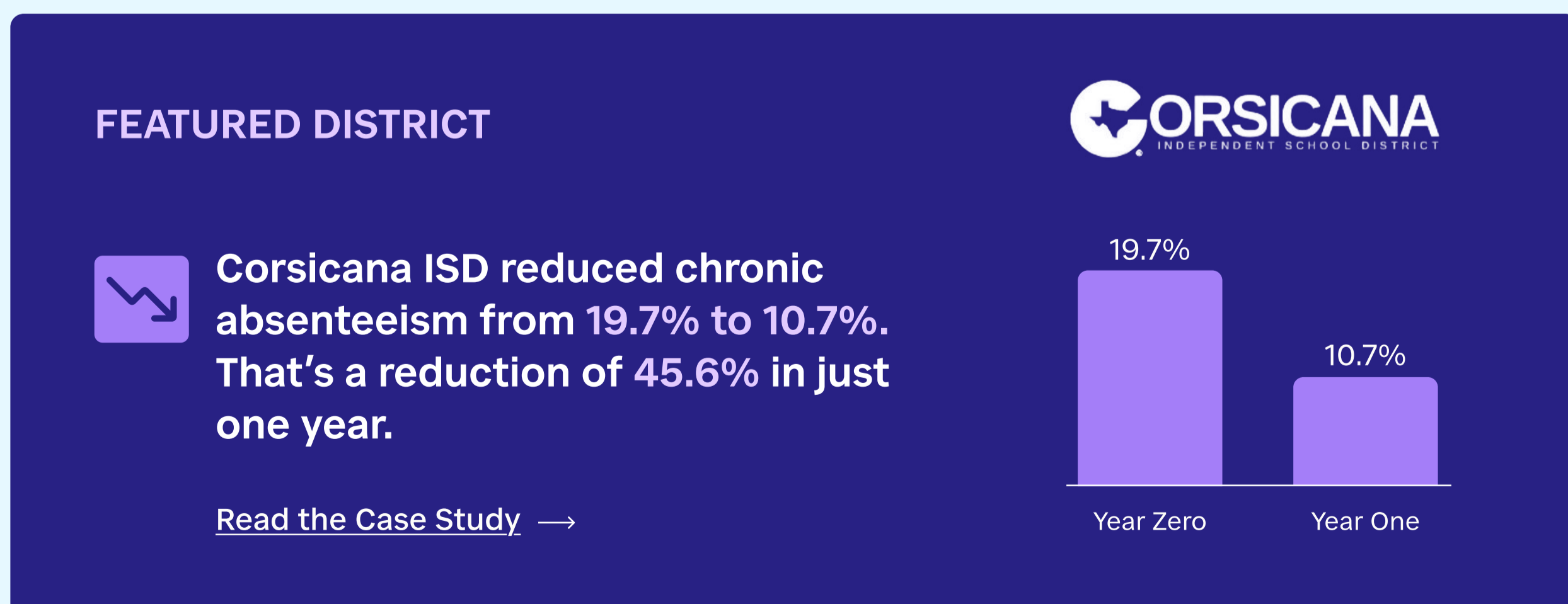
Key Findings



Year One Results

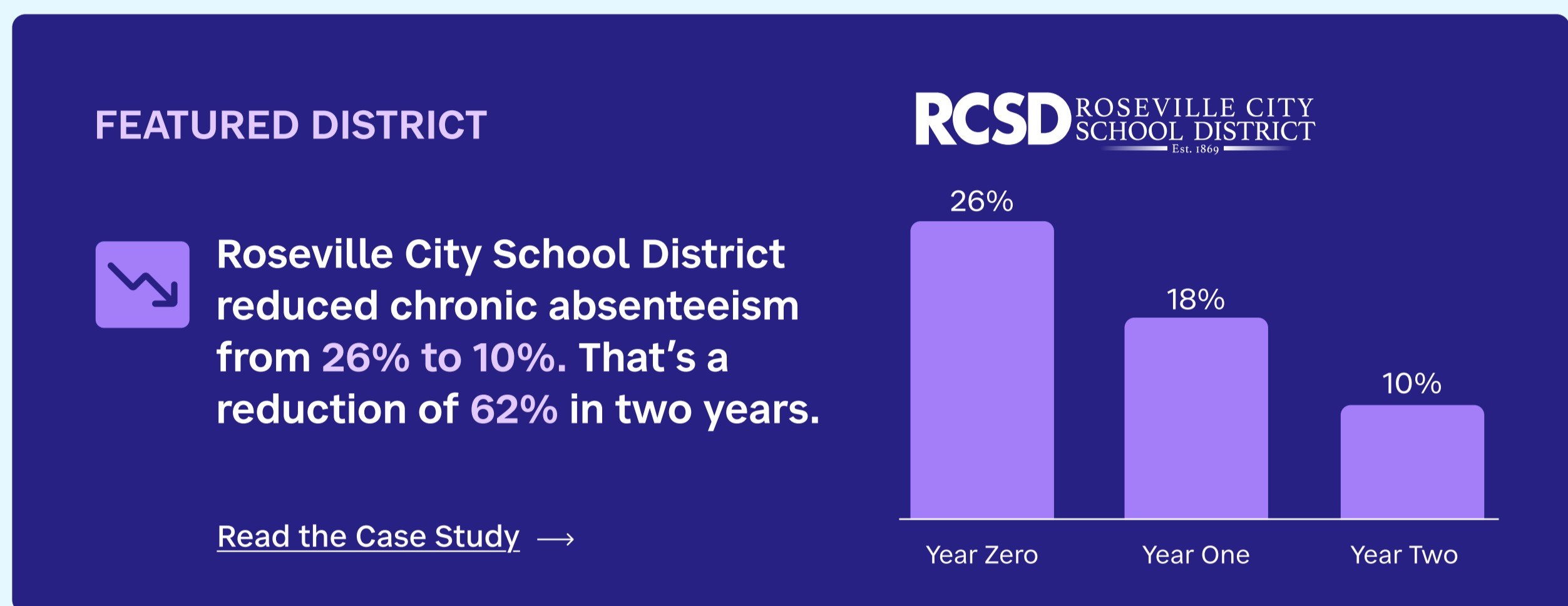
In their first year of implementation, districts saw an average reduction of 18% relative to year zero. This early progress reflects the impact targeted outreach and systematic early intervention have on student attendance patterns.

Overall, 84% of districts reduced chronic absenteeism, with some far exceeding the average.



Results Across District Sizes

Notably, these improvements were seen across all district sizes. Districts with fewer than 1,000 students and those with 10,000–20,000 students both averaged 21% reductions in year one, three percentage points above the combined results. The strategies driving these outcomes are transferable across contexts, regardless of budget or location.



Year Two Results

Results continued to strengthen in year two, with 96% of districts reporting reduced chronic absenteeism. The average cumulative reduction is 36% relative to year zero. The jump from 18% to 36% over two years demonstrates that attendance improvement requires a sustainable process, which compounds as staff build relationships, families develop trust, and systems become more refined.

Year two analysis includes 47 districts that have two full years of state-reported data between 2022–23 and 2024–25 school years. As with year one, there were a number of districts that showed attendance gains far above the average.

What's Working: Strategies Behind the Results

Three consistent themes emerge across the districts analyzed.

1. Personal Outreach Instead of Mass Notifications

The most effective attendance intervention is a direct, personal conversation. When families feel a genuine connection to the school, when they hear from someone who knows their child by name, they are far more likely to engage.

Positive first contact goes a long way toward preventing chronic absenteeism. Schools that reach out before there is a problem build trust with families. Those families are more likely to pick up the phone or respond to a text or email when attendance starts to slide. Research shows that families who responded to a message from a teacher or school staff in August or September were more than twice as likely to stay engaged throughout the year compared to families who don't connect early.



If you're not able to call or conference with every family when a student starts missing class, send a personalized letter. Text notifications often get ignored or buried in spam. Just one mailed intervention letter returns 54% of students to regular attendance.

The districts in this analysis prioritized one-on-one outreach. They created time to build the relationships that matter by reducing the amount of time attendance staff and principals spent on clerical tasks. Centralizing fragmented data and automating and streamlining processes helped them focus on uncovering the human stories behind absences rather than getting bogged down by paperwork.

"When we took away the clerical piece of attendance interventions, principals became more connected to students and families. They started to recognize the real-life barriers to attendance. Now, they're connected to people and not paper."

DR. MARGIE BOULWARE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF SPECIAL PROGRAMS AT CORSICANA ISD

2. Early Identification Before Students Reach Chronic Status

In most districts, traditional reporting systems are retrospective, showing what happened last month or last semester. By the time a student appears on a standard chronic absenteeism list, they have likely fallen behind academically, and the barriers to re-engagement are harder to overcome.

The districts in this analysis shifted to a proactive model that surfaces attendance risk signals early in the school year. Districts that reach out after three to five absences can communicate the importance of attendance early in the year. This gives families a clear picture and enough time to course-correct. Districts that use early absence data to trigger outreach in the fall consistently see higher attendance rates in winter and spring.

3. Sustained, Year-Over-Year System Building

Attendance improvement is a system, and systems build on themselves. The 36% average reduction by year two reflects the power of sustained effort.

The doubling of improvement rates between year one and two shows that each year:

- Educators understand their communities better
- Families accumulate more positive touchpoints with the school
- Trust motivates families to answer your calls, and students to show up on hard days

By year two, these districts were fully committed to consistency: consistent outreach cadences, consistent messaging, and consistent investment in staff capacity.

The Impact on Learning Recovery

Attendance improvement is a prerequisite for everything schools want to accomplish. A 36% reduction in chronic absenteeism means that over one-third of students who were missing critical instructional time are back in their seats, re-engaged with their coursework, and participating in district learning recovery work.

There is also a financial dimension to attendance. In many other states, school budgets are tied directly to Average Daily Attendance (ADA). Every student who moves from chronic to regular attendance represents funding that districts can reinvest.

What Districts Can Do Next

Put the three key strategies observed across these 89 districts into practice with five evidence-based tactics for districts of all sizes.



1: Start Monitoring Early in the School Year

Track attendance patterns from day one. Flag students at risk of becoming chronically absent within the first 30–60 days so you can reach out early. Look for systems or protocols that use predictive analytics and real-time attendance data. Don't rely on outdated information. The window for low-stakes intervention is widest at the start of the year. Waiting for end-of-semester data means trying to reverse trends that have become habits.



2: Make Outreach Personal

Automated messages have a limited effect on families and students who are disengaged. A direct phone call, one-on-one conference, or home visit from someone who knows the student is dramatically more effective. Train and empower your outreach staff to lead with relationships.



3: Remove the Administrative Burden from Attendance Staff

If your team is spending hours generating letters, stuffing envelopes, or manually compiling reports, that time is not being spent on conversations that can truly change outcomes. Find ways to streamline and automate administrative tasks so staff can prioritize direct family engagement.



4: Invest in Family Trust, Not Just Crisis Contact

Families who hear from the school only when something is wrong are more likely to feel defensive or angry. Include positive touchpoints in your communications home, like celebrating good attendance and sharing student milestones. When a family has a positive relationship with the school, you can approach a concern as partners who are dedicated to supporting their student. They are more likely to pick up the phone and more likely to share the real barriers their student is facing.



5: Commit to a Multi-Year Approach

Year two results show the impact of consistency. Approach attendance improvement as a long-term investment in both relationships and process improvements. Set realistic expectations, aligned with your strategic goals, and measure progress year over year. Whether your main goal is to increase average daily attendance, reduce chronic absenteeism, or improve graduation rates, set benchmarks for the next two, three, or four years, rather than seeking immediate transformation.

About SchoolStatus

SchoolStatus connects educators and families around the topics that matter most. The company partners with K-12 districts to improve attendance, engage families, and build trust so students can succeed. A recognized education technology leader, SchoolStatus enables districts and educators to move from noisy, reactive messages to proactive support on important topics including attendance, literacy progress, and overall student readiness. SchoolStatus supports districts in all 50 states and serves more than 22 million students nationwide.

The funding of this report reflects SchoolStatus' ongoing commitment to tackling chronic absenteeism in partnership with districts throughout the U.S.

