



CENTERING FAMILY VOICE IN ABSENTEEISM

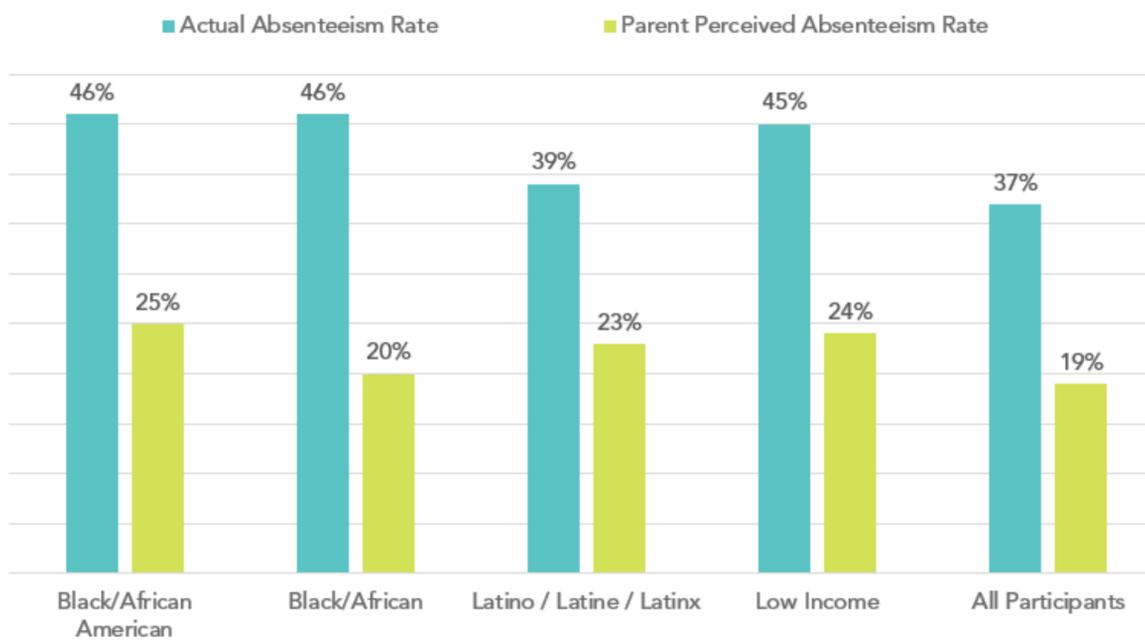
In Minneapolis, chronic absenteeism rates are **2x what they were in 2019**.

While school and ecosystem leaders are working to identify root causes and solutions, they have not found a strong family voice to sit at the table. **To understand parent and guardian perspectives on absenteeism Great MN Schools conducted family focus groups** with a total of 135 participants – primarily low-income and/or BIPOC participants who have been most affected by the issue—to **gain insight into how they experience and view school attendance challenges**.

Key Insights

- Parents and guardians often perceive their child’s attendance differently from recorded absenteeism rates, **highlighting a gap in communication and awareness**.
- **Students and families do not feel a strong sense of belonging in schools, leading to lower prioritization of classroom time.**
- Parents and guardians feel schools have not done enough to **clearly communicate sick policies or provide resources and support**.

Actual vs Perceived Absenteeism Rates



Parents and guardians severely underestimate how often children miss school

When asked how often their students missed school, only

19%

of participants said their student missed a month or more of school in the most recent year.

In reality....

37%

of students are actually chronically absent.

Students and families do not feel a strong sense of belonging in schools

- Parents and Guardians said they were overwhelmed, lacked capacity, and **didn’t know where to go for help**.
- **18%** of participants said mental health was an attendance barrier. Black/African American participants were **3x** as likely to report mental health issues.
- Participants felt teachers **did not understand their community** and would **escalate or dismiss students’ concerns** instead of addressing them with resolution in mind.

“ *I don't want to build a relationship with a teacher that doesn't value my voice... I have to explain to my 17 year old son, a big black kid, how to cater his language to his white teacher. You come off combative.* ”



SCAN THIS QR CODE TO READ THE FULL CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM REPORT



Parents and guardians feel improperly informed of their school's sick policy

1/3 of participants said they did not understand their school's sick policy. Parents and guardians feel confused about how to determine if an illness is severe enough to keep their student at home.

“ I don't think the school understands their own policies. Sometimes the nurse will ask the teacher if a student should go home, and the teacher will have different priorities than the rules as parents understand it. ”



Parents and guardians ask for stronger communication and support

Participants are looking to schools to improve communication of sick policies and more readily share resources. In particular, individualized outreach means a lot to families.

“ It would be nice for teacher to approach student and tell them they are watching out for them. ”



Families are not just stakeholders - They are partners in combatting absenteeism

Absenteeism is a complex issue, not just about disengagement, but shaped by factors like **unclear sick policies, transportation difficulties, and mental health struggles.**

To move forward, we must...

- Incorporate stronger school-family communication
- Involve culturally responsive practices
- Address systemic barriers such as transportation and mental health support



By adopting a collaborative approach, we can create more supportive environments that encourage consistent school attendance for all students.

Great MN Schools is a nonprofit dedicated to ensuring every child in Minneapolis attends a great school. This work would not have been possible without collaboration from our community partners:

