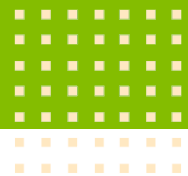




Viewpoints

Know the Difference Between Truancy and Absenteeism



Chronic absenteeism and chronic truancy are often used interchangeably, but they represent distinct issues in education that require different approaches. Chronic absenteeism refers to students missing a significant number of school days for any reason, including excused and unexcused absences, illnesses, or family emergencies. It captures a broader problem of students disengaging from school, and it can be an indicator of deeper systemic issues, such as lack of access to healthcare, unstable housing, or mental health challenges. Addressing chronic absenteeism often requires a holistic approach that involves families, social services, and educational support to remove barriers that prevent regular school attendance.

On the other hand, chronic truancy specifically refers to unexcused absences where students are intentionally skipping school without a legitimate reason. While truancy is often seen as a behavioral issue, it can be driven by factors such as academic struggles, bullying, or disengagement with school culture. Identifying chronic truancy requires schools to not only enforce attendance policies but also to address underlying causes of disengagement, providing interventions like counseling, mentorship, and alternative

learning environments. Unlike absenteeism, which may involve broader family and societal challenges, chronic truancy often signals an immediate need for targeted behavioral and emotional support within the school environment.

Nearly a quarter of California's K-12 students missed several weeks' worth of school during the 2022-23 school year — a decrease of 5 percentage points in chronic absenteeism from the previous school year, but a sign of the lingering effects of the pandemic.

Even as schools re-opened for in-person instruction, chronic absences shot up from 12.1% pre-pandemic to 30% during the 2021-22 school year.

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