

EDUCATION NEWS UPDATE

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March 3, 2023 Education News Update

TEACHING & LEARNING

Graduation rates mixed as schools struggle with chronic absenteeism

Data for 2021-22 show that graduation rates, on the rise prior to the pandemic, declined in some states, but perhaps not as much as initially feared. States reported varied trends in HS graduation rates for 2021-22, the first full in-person school year for many schools and a year when many states still had graduation requirement flexibilities in place. Even states showing improvements in graduation rates showed a rise in absenteeism or dropout rates. In pre-pandemic years, increases in graduation rates were driven by improvements for students more likely to drop out — Black, Latino and low-income students. Some states are still seeing improvements for these subgroups.

Naaz Modan. “Grad rates a mixed bag as states struggle with chronic absenteeism.” *K-12 Dive*. February 24, 2023
[Grad rates a mixed bag as states struggle with chronic absenteeism | K-12 Dive \(k12dive.com\)](https://www.k12dive.com/news/grad-rates-a-mixed-bag-as-states-struggle-with-chronic-absenteeism/)

Helping preschoolers with mental health issues

Children of all ages, even babies, suffered from mental health issues due to pandemic stress. Given how vital this period of their lives is for future development, it’s urgent that the mental health and well-being of infants and young children be addressed. Without intervention and a nurturing environment, the impacts of trauma and stress can be immediate and long-lasting. Those consequences can take many forms—not wanting to be held or touched, acting out, rejecting food, crying inconsolably, reverting to bed wetting, developing separation anxiety. Often, families are not contacted even though they would be an excellent source of helpful information. How a child is doing depends heavily on how their caregivers are doing, and caregivers’ mental health declined during the pandemic. More than [200,000 children](#) in the U.S. lost a parent or primary caregiver to COVID-19, and many of those children were orphaned. Over the last three years, children also missed important opportunities to practice skills that prepare for a lifetime of success: emotion regulation, tolerance for sharing and taking turns, following a schedule, transitioning to different activities. **Mental health consultation** helps by placing a mental health professional in settings that serve infants and young children (e.g., child care centers, pediatrician offices, and family homes). During such consultation, mental health professionals work with adults caring for children to understand and improve policies, practices and learning environment to create a more nurturing and positive space. That includes the various [infant and early childhood mental health programs](#) offered by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Emily Tate Sullivan. “Who’s Looking Out for the Mental Health of Infants and Toddlers?” *Ed Surge News*. February 28, 2023
[Who’s Looking Out for the Mental Health of Infants and Toddlers? | EdSurge News](https://www.edsurgenews.com/whos-looking-out-for-the-mental-health-of-infants-and-toddlers/)

FEDERAL/NATIONAL/INTERNATIONAL

No upside to school vouchers

Education vouchers have caused some of the largest academic drops ever measured in research. 40% of schools funded with vouchers have closed their doors, and students flee them at about a rate of 20% per year. Even with all the negative evidence regarding vouchers, the voucher movement is expanding. Vouchers mostly fund children already in private school. The typical private school using student vouchers isn’t one of the elite private schools. It’s sub-prime: small, often run out of a church property, often popping up specifically to get vouchers. Voucher-supported schools tend to serve the lowest scoring kids, and kids of color—and academic outcomes for such students improved after their return to public schools. Meanwhile, such schools lack transparency and oversight. Josh Cowen. “There is No Upside: A comprehensive look at what’s wrong with school vouchers.” *In the Public Interest*. February 24, 2023
[There is No Upside \(inthepublicinterest.org\)](https://www.inthepublicinterest.org/there-is-no-upside/)

Districts aim to manage risk of ESSER fiscal cliff

Federal rules for Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funding for pandemic recovery require that districts determine their spending plans by 2024 and complete much of the spending by 2025, so districts across the country are trying to determine how to avoid a fiscal cliff that would necessitate program cuts. Many districts are struggling to spend the funds amid staff and supply chain shortages, with districts only having spent 30% of the third and biggest round of federal funding as of last month.

Koby Levin & Ethan Bakuli. “Federal COVID relief aid to schools will dry up soon. Are districts ready?” *Chalkbeat/Detroit*. February 17, 2023
[Michigan school districts begin planning for the end of COVID relief aid - Chalkbeat Detroit](https://www.chalkbeat.com/story/federal-covid-relief-aid-to-schools-will-dry-up-soon-are-districts-ready/?hpid=hp_federal-covid-relief-aid-to-schools-will-dry-up-soon-are-districts-ready%3Ahomepage%2Fstory&hpid=hp_federal-covid-relief-aid-to-schools-will-dry-up-soon-are-districts-ready%3Ahomepage%2Fstory)

Stakes getting higher for pandemic school aid spending

Congress gave school districts roughly four years to spend \$190 billion in federal ESSER relief aid. Most districts underspent at the start, and now, with 20 months remaining, ESSER spending is in overdrive. The concern with slower spending up front is: First, is the money being deployed in a way that gets students back on track? And second, are leaders planning ahead so their district isn't derailed by a fiscal cliff in 2024? Students are still far behind where they should be, especially in math, and chronic absenteeism is making it hard to catch them up. This means asking districts to adapt to their current circumstances to quickly meet student needs. Some districts have done so. Higher spending in the final months makes for a deeper spending cut come the 2024-25 school year. Typically, when districts make big cuts in a single year, kids pay the price. Such deep cuts are often inequitable and impact neediest students the hardest. Districts must forecast their finances without federal relief aid and share with staff and community the financial implications coming their way. And they must scour budgets now for any opportunity to lower ongoing costs, like right-sizing the budget for shrinking enrollment (fewer students equals less revenue), reining in escalating benefits costs or phasing out ineffective programs. Any new investments should be structured as non-recurring commitments (e.g., using one-time bonuses or contract labor). If lawmakers don't see clear benefit from the \$190 billion in federal pandemic spending, getting more education money will be harder. Marguerite Roza. "The Stakes Are Only Getting Higher for Pandemic School Aid Spending." *The 74 Million*. February 28, 2023 [The Stakes Are Only Getting Higher for Pandemic School Aid Spending – The 74 \(the74million.org\)](https://the74million.org/article/the-stakes-are-only-getting-higher-for-pandemic-school-aid-spending)

HBCUs are helping provide ethnically diverse teachers

HBCUs (Historical Black Colleges and Universities) play an outsize role in producing teachers of color in the U.S., where only 7% of teachers are Black, compared with 15% of students. Of all Black teachers nationwide, nearly half are graduates of HBCUs. Research has found that Black students who have at least one Black teacher are more likely to graduate from HS and less likely to be suspended or expelled. Some new research suggests the training found at HBCUs may be part of what makes an effective teacher...the teachers' race did not have an impact on student outcomes, but their training did. For Black students, Black and white HBCU-trained teachers were more effective than their non-HBCU-trained counterparts. HBCUs are key to solving teacher shortages nationwide. Annie Ma. "US has a teacher shortage. HBCUs are helping to change that." *Associated Press*. February 24, 2023 <https://apnews.com/article/hbcu-training-black-teachers-2372cb4f8186dbf05b57e30bf1567e80>

K-2 students make gains; 3rd grade results flat

The number of third graders on track in reading hasn't budged since this time last year, according to new data from curriculum provider Amplify. The results, from 300,000 students in 43 states, are a reminder of the literacy setbacks experienced by those in kindergarten when schools shut down in 2020. But racial gaps have narrowed and K-2 students showed growth over last year as skills among younger students inch back to pre-pandemic levels. Researchers are optimistic about the results and suspect they would have been worse without efforts to curb learning loss. Linda Jacobson. "Exclusive: Despite K-2 Reading Gains, Results Flat for 3rd Grade 'COVID Kids'." *The 74 Million*. February 27, 2023 https://www.the74million.org/article/exclusive-despite-k-2-reading-gains-results-flat-for-3rd-grade-covid-kids/?utm_source=The%2074%20Million%20Newsletter&utm_campaign=334a14f3f0-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2022_07_27_07_47_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_077b986842-334a14f3f0-177251695

Commentary: Steps to address student mental health crisis

School districts are often told the solution to the student mental health crisis lies in hiring more counselors. But getting to a real solution requires a more nuanced understanding of the problem. The author recommends three steps districts can take: hire the right kind of counselors and make sure they spend their time doing the job they were brought in to do; engage the community; consider telehealth.

Laura Smith. "3 Steps School Districts Can Take to Address the Student Mental Health Crisis." *The 74 Million*. February 28, 2023 [3 Steps School Districts Can Take to Address the Student Mental Health Crisis – The 74 \(the74million.org\)](https://the74million.org/article/3-steps-school-districts-can-take-to-address-the-student-mental-health-crisis)

NEW YORK STATE

While governor seeks more charter schools, big charter chains lose enrollment

Governor Hochul wants to lift the cap on charter schools in NYC because she says children of color have experienced waitlists to enroll; but the big charter chains are losing enrollment. Experts say there are trade offs of opening new schools in an environment where school leaders are struggling to fill all their seats. Since public dollars follow students, more schools vying for the same or shrinking pool of children would lead to smaller budgets or could even prompt closures, possibly affecting existing charters and district schools alike.

Alex Zimmerman. "NYC's largest charter networks enrolled fewer students this year, complicating push to open new schools." *Chalkbeat/NY*. February 22, 2023, [Big charter networks shrank this year, complicating the NYC cap debate - Chalkbeat New York](https://www.chalkbeat.com/story/big-charter-networks-shrank-this-year-complicating-the-nyc-cap-debate-2023-02-22/)

NYS \$\$ for mental health support to schools still not available

NYS lawmakers included \$100 million in the state budget last year for schools to spend on mental health resources or after-school programs, but school districts haven't been able to apply for the money as yet. The idea was to let school districts apply for money, which would match whatever they planned to spend on such programs. Half of the

money was to be used during this school year and the other half for the 2023-24 school year. NYSED blames the delay on a lengthy process that involves getting approvals from the state's budget division, which has yet to give its final sign off. The money is now expected to be available for next school year, but it's not known if the funds will be available for two years as originally intended. It takes 9 - 10 months to issue a request for proposals that districts must respond to when applying for grant money. For grant programs, SED officials create the RFP, which other agencies, such as the state's budget division, must then approve. As of February 24, the NYSED was awaiting final approval to release the RFP to school districts.

Reema Amin. "NY's budget has \$100M for academic and mental health programs. Schools still don't have the money." *Chalkbeat/NY*. February 24, 2023 [NY promised \\$100M in pandemic recovery grants. Schools still don't have it. - Chalkbeat New York](#)

NYS lawmakers introduce bills to curb use of corporal punishment

State lawmakers recently introduced a series of bills intended to curb the use of corporal punishment in NYS schools after news reports revealed more than 1,600 incidents of physical force being used for discipline in recent years.

They included incidents of teachers and staff members spanking, slapping, choking and dragging students, threatening them with belts, forcing them to hold books, among other punishments. Lawmakers said their measures are intended to make it clear in state law that corporal punishment is illegal in all NYS schools, public and private.

Emilie Munson. "Legislators push bills to crack down on corporal punishment in schools." *Albany Times Union*. February 28, 2023

https://www.timesunion.com/news/article/lawmakers-push-bills-stop-corporal-punishment-new-17788609.php?oref=csny_firstreadtonight_nl

Comptroller: Many preschoolers with disabilities not receiving entitled services

A [new audit](#) from State Comptroller **Thomas DiNapoli's** office found that more than 50% of the state's youngest children with disabilities did not receive or faced delays in receiving the services like physical therapy, speech pathology and vision services they are legally entitled to...and Black and Hispanic children faced greater barriers. Of the 189,000 infants and toddlers referred to the Department of Health's Early Intervention Program between January 2018 and February 2022, 14% never received an evaluation, according to the audit. Of the 64% of children deemed eligible for the program, nearly 51% – 48,000 – didn't receive all of the therapeutic services they were entitled to and 28% didn't receive services within 30 days of when they were supposed to start. The data outlined in the audit, according to experts, is troubling since early intervention for children with a developmental delay or disability is vital. The audit urged the Department of Health to address the underlying reasons of why some children are not receiving services and others are experiencing delays.

"DiNapoli: Thousands of Young Children With Disabilities Not Receiving Early Intervention Services." *Office of NYS Comptroller*. February 28, 2023

[DiNapoli: Thousands of Young Children With Disabilities Not Receiving Early Intervention Services | Office of the New York State Comptroller](#)

State lawmakers consider allowing school psychologists to practice privately

With a need for more youth mental health services, the state legislature is considering giving permission to school psychologists to provide services in private practice without having to go through a lengthy licensing process. Under current rules, school psychologists must obtain a doctorate to practice outside of school. But some school psychologists and legislators say that process is overly cumbersome and limits school psychologists' ability to address a crisis in youth mental health. Counseling sessions during school hours feel too short, the volume of students is too great, and administrative responsibilities cut into time working directly with students. Referring students with the greatest needs to outside providers rarely feels satisfying either. A 2021 [report](#) from the American Psychological Association estimated that half of youth nationwide with mental health issues don't get the treatment they need. New York's Association of School Psychologists, the member organization for 4,000 school psychologists across the state, has been pushing for licensure for years. School psychologists in NYS are already [required](#) to have a master's degree and two years of experience in schools to get permanent certificate from SED.

Michael Elsen-Rooney. "To help address NYC's youth mental health crisis, school psychologists want to practice outside school."

Chalkbeat/NY. February 23, 2023. [New York bill would license school psychologists to practice outside school - Chalkbeat New York](#)

Adrian Hale appointed to NYS Board of Regents

Adrian Hale, a Rochester native and longtime proponent of education reform and career preparation, has been appointed NYS Board of Regents. He replaces Ruth Turner, who stepped down earlier this year to take a job as deputy superintendent in the Rochester City School District. Hale graduated from John Marshall HS, then served in the U.S. Marine before earning degrees at Monroe Community College and Yale University. Hale spent about 10 years with the Rochester Chamber of Commerce, working on the interrelated issues of workforce development and educational improvement. He is a supporter of business-minded education ventures and charter schools. Since 2021 he has been director of economic and community development at Foundry, a relatively new local company in the cryptocurrency and mining industry. He joins Wade Norwood as a Rochester delegate to the Board of Regents.

Justin Murphy. "Education reform proponent Hale selected as state Regent." *Democrat and Chronicle*. March 3, 2023

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