

LINC Commission Meeting

April 15, 2024



Lifelong impressions

Anita Gorman joined Topping Elementary (North Kansas City Schools) students for a recent visit to the conservation center that bears her name.

"It makes me proud," Gorman said. "It makes me feel very lucky to live in Missouri that we have a place like this for children."

LINC and Topping Elementary brought the fourth grade class for an adventure in Missouri wildlife.



Local Investment Commission (LINC) Vision

Our Shared Vision

A caring community that builds on its strengths to provide meaningful opportunities for children, families and individuals to achieve self-sufficiency, attain their highest potential, and contribute to the public good.

Our Mission

To provide leadership and influence to engage the Kansas City Community in creating the best service delivery system to support and strengthen children, families and individuals, holding that system accountable, and changing public attitudes towards the system.

Our Guiding Principles

1. **COMPREHENSIVENESS:** Provide ready access to a full array of effective services.
2. **PREVENTION:** Emphasize “front-end” services that enhance development and prevent problems, rather than “back-end” crisis intervention.
3. **OUTCOMES:** Measure system performance by improved outcomes for children and families, not simply by the number and kind of services delivered.
4. **INTENSITY:** Offering services to the needed degree and in the appropriate time.
5. **PARTICIPANT INVOLVEMENT:** Use the needs, concerns, and opinions of individuals who use the service delivery system to drive improvements in the operation of the system.
6. **NEIGHBORHOODS:** Decentralize services to the places where people live, wherever appropriate, and utilize services to strengthen neighborhood capacity.
7. **FLEXIBILITY AND RESPONSIVENESS:** Create a delivery system, including programs and reimbursement mechanisms, that are sufficiently flexible and adaptable to respond to the full spectrum of child, family and individual needs.
8. **COLLABORATION:** Connect public, private and community resources to create an integrated service delivery system.
9. **STRONG FAMILIES:** Work to strengthen families, especially the capacity of parents to support and nurture the development of their children.
10. **RESPECT AND DIGNITY:** Treat families, and the staff who work with them, in a respectful and dignified manner.
11. **INTERDEPENDENCE/MUTUAL RESPONSIBILITY:** Balance the need for individuals to be accountable and responsible with the obligation of community to enhance the welfare of all citizens.
12. **CULTURAL COMPETENCY:** Demonstrate the belief that diversity in the historical, cultural, religious and spiritual values of different groups is a source of great strength.
13. **CREATIVITY:** Encourage and allow participants and staff to think and act innovatively, to take risks, and to learn from their experiences and mistakes.
14. **COMPASSION:** Display an unconditional regard and a caring, non-judgmental attitude toward, participants that recognizes their strengths and empowers them to meet their own needs.
15. **HONESTY:** Encourage and allow honesty among all people in the system.



Monday, April 15, 2024 | 4 – 5:30 pm
Kauffman Foundation Conference Center

Agenda

- I. Welcome and announcements**
- II. February and March minutes**
 - a. Approval (motion)**
- III. Superintendent Reports**
- IV. Topping Elementary Visit to Anita B. Gorman Conservation Discovery Center**
- V. Data Sharing**
- VI. Brothers in Tech**
- VII. Family and Community Trust (FACT)**
- VIII. Local Food Purchase Assistance (LFPA)**
- IX. Other Reports**
- X. Adjournment**



THE LOCAL INVESTMENT COMMISSION – FEBRUARY 26, 2024

The Local Investment Commission met at the Kauffman Foundation, 4801 Rockhill Rd., Kansas City, Mo. Cochair **Ken Powell** presided. Commissioners attending were:

Aaron Deacon
David Disney
Shawn Foster
Rob Givens
Anita Gorman

Matt Haase
Marge Randle
David Ross
Marj Williams

Powell welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Superintendents Reports

- **Rick Chambers** (Director of Communications and Development) reported the Center School District has been selected to pilot a three-year school-based mental health project with Children’s Mercy Hospital and Blue Cross Blue Shield. Through the project starting this month, district staff will be trained on restorative practices to help students dealing with trauma.
- **Steve Morgan** (Assistant Superintendent) reported two Fort Osage School District students won first place at the state wrestling championships. The district is enforcing a crackdown on THC possession and fighting; on their first offense, students are required to go to virtual learning. Attendance has gone up and suspensions have gone down since introducing the policy. The district held a ribbon cutting last month for the Fort Connect real world learning center. LINC has reduced staff in the district but is still providing programs.
- **Casey Klappmeyer** (Deputy Superintendent) reported the Hickman Mills School District is highlighting alumni during Black History Month. The school board approved the administration’s plan to open a second middle school at the current Ervin Elementary. LINC and the district partnered for family STEAM Night at the middle school, which was attended by many vendors and families. LINC was one of many partners helping families at the Community Assistance Council’s Community Resource Fair on Feb. 17. The Ruskin theater program will perform “9 to 5” this spring.
- **Christy Harrison** (Assistant Superintendent) reported Kansas City Public Schools has expanded its partnership with Hazel Health to offer students same-day urgent care visits with a pediatric provider at school or at home. Kindergarten roundup will be held in March. The Paseo Academy theater program will perform “Dreamgirls” this spring. KCPS has a new partnership with the Royals and QuikTrip called Literacy Leagues to provide reading materials and activities to students.
- **Kevin Foster** (Executive Director) reported Genesis School held its annual Family Summit this month, in conjunction with parent-teacher conferences; 64% of parents attended the conferences and many received community resources at the summit. Genesis is one of seven school districts participating in a pre-parenting program offered to 7th-8th grade students; the program is funded by Mo. Dept. of Social Services.
- **Janelle Porter** (Executive Director of Student & Community Services) reported North Kansas City School District families at Topping Elementary are thankful for the LINC Caring Communities program and the district is eager to explore ways to expand the partnership.

A motion to approve the minutes of the Nov. 20, 2023, LINC Commission meeting was passed unanimously.

Students from the LINC Caring Communities after-school choir programs at ACCPA and Faxon Elementary performed under the direction of **Clarence Copperidge**. Faxon Caring Communities site coordinator **Yolanda Robinson** reported the students had a great experience practicing and performing the songs.

Doug Cowen reported on the effort of Community Services League to administer \$40 million in funding to address the homelessness crisis in Independence and eastern Jackson County. Families who have been evicted, or are in danger of eviction, face systemic barriers beyond mental health issues and drug addiction. The region's challenge in addressing homelessness is exacerbated by geography. CSL is partnering with the Good Shepherd Center and The Beehive to provide services including showers, laundry, and case management.

Kansas City (Mo.) Assistant Manager **Melissa Kozakiewicz** reported that homelessness is an urgent problem in the community, and efforts are underway to build a coalition to develop solutions. Kansas City (Mo.) Homeless Prevention Coordinator **Josh Henges** reported that Kansas City is at a crossroads in addressing homelessness – with an estimated 2,000 people rough-sleeping every night, the city is in last place for addressing homelessness according to the U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development. Henges outlined Zero KC, the city's strategic plan to end homelessness.

Discussion followed.

Mike Mansur of the Jackson County Prosecutor's Office reported that the office has been working on a violence reduction initiative since 2011 and is now collaborating intensively with government, nonprofit, and private partners. Because of the collaboration, counseling was made available to those affected by the Feb. 14 shooting at Union Station.

Melesa Johnson of the Kansas City Mayor's Office reported on recent collaborations to reduce violence including: Partners for Peace multi-organization collaboration which is the service arm of the city's focused deterrence effort; a multi-disciplinary collaborative task force which performs unannounced site visits at locations (such as a business) where violence occurs; drafting legislation for mental health diversion providing long-term mental health services; expanding Community Action Neighborhood centers to include CAN Youth Centers.

Discussion followed.

LINC Youth Services Director **Bryan Shepard** presented on the development of the Kansas City Black History project collaboration with the Kansas City Public Library and Black Archives of Mid-America. This year's edition includes a booklet and poster sets that will be distributed free in the community, and can be used in conjunction with online educational resources developed by the library. **Jeremy Drouin** of the Kansas City Public Library reported the project is to inspire young people by telling the stories of figures who are not usually recognized in local history.

LINC Caring Communities Administrator Sean Akridge reported on a collaboration between LINC, Kansas City Public Schools, Boys & Girls Clubs, and Della Lamb to develop a youth sports program serving area students. **Waymond King** of Boys & Girls Clubs reported the program will include a variety of sports, including basketball, football, and aquatics, and will include a strong youth development program. The purpose is not to develop elite athletes but to develop youth with the skills to have successful lives.

The meeting was adjourned.



THE LOCAL INVESTMENT COMMISSION – MARCH 18, 2024

The Local Investment Commission met online using Microsoft Teams. Cochair **Ken Powell** presided. Commissioners attending were:

Bert Berkley
Sharon Cheers
David Disney
Shawn Foster
SuEllen Fried

Rob Givens
Anita Gorman
Matt Haase
Marj Williams

Powell welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Powell reported that **Patricia Scaglia** has been nominated for a position on the LINC Commission. He shared information on Scaglia's career in the legal profession and her participation as a volunteer in many civic and community causes. Discussion followed, and a motion was requested.

A motion to approve the appointment of Patricia Scaglia to the LINC Commission was approved unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned.

'Lifelong impressions': Anita Gorman joins LINC/Topping students at conservation center

March 14, 2024

Joe Robertson, LINC Writer



Twenty-two years had passed since Anita Gorman and her three-year-old granddaughter stepped into the conservation center on its opening day. They were among the first visitors to the center, located in the heart of Kansas City, that bears her name.

Now she was back, on a recent late-winter morning, seeing her dream center in full educational mode, experiencing for the first time the best realization of what she worked for decades ago.

Exuberant children. Everywhere.

The fourth-grade class from Topping Elementary School in the North Kansas City Schools, collaborating with LINC's Caring Communities program, swarmed into the center's indoor and outdoor learning spaces.

Gorman, a LINC Commissioner and former Missouri Conservation Commissioner — among many other civic roles — watched the children as they eyed the flicking forked tongues of live snakes, pricked at the talons of raptors and walked the native woodland preserved on eight acres of land leased from the Kauffman Foundation at 48th and Troost Avenue.

"It makes me proud," Gorman said. "It makes me feel very lucky to live in Missouri that we have a place like this for children."

LINC invited Gorman to join in the visit so she could enjoy watching the children that Topping Elementary and LINC

gathered to take part in the center’s education programming.

The site was named the Anita B. Gorman Conservation Discovery Center in honor of Gorman’s life’s work for nature in many ways, including service on the Kansas City Board of Park and Recreation Commissioners, the Missouri Conservation Commission, and for championing the idea and leading the fundraising to put a conservation center in the heart of the city.

“I was a farm girl,” Gorman said. She grew up in rural Clay County surrounded by and enamored with nature — a love she carries with her today and wishes to share.

The dream was to create a conservation center for children and adults in the city who did not have many opportunities to experience nature, said Stacey Davis, the center’s manager.

“Her idea was to build an oasis right here in town,” Davis said. “It was all created with native plants and an environmentally friendly design — all things that were very important to Ms. Gorman.”

The center’s team of teaching conservationists took groups of Topping students through programs that engaged them with touchable animals, plants and artifacts in analyzing how native Missouri creatures survive in the wild.

“All of our programs are tied to the fish, forests and wildlife of Missouri,” said Steve Jacobsen, the center’s assistant manager. “Our mission . . . is helping kids and adults learn about those resources and how to enjoy them and manage them.”

Topping’s team of fourth-grade teachers said they and their students appreciated the way the lessons of the day blended well with their science curriculum back in school.

The Discovery Center provided a “fantastic” experience, Topping teacher Eric Chavez said.

“It was made for children,” he said. “It was made for curiosity and engagement. As my kids walked through, so many things were catching their eye. I’m sure they could spend a whole day there.”

Many of the kids wrote thank-you cards to LINC and are wondering what other kinds of adventures might be possible, said LINC Caring Communities Coordinator Connie Parker.

“This was a great collaboration for LINC and the school district,” she said.

Hosting school groups has been one of the Gorman Conservation Discovery Center’s primary outreach efforts over the years. The 57 children Topping and LINC brought to the center added to the more than 300,000 children in some 13,000 school programs that have visited here since 2002.

And Gorman was delighted to witness one of those visits first-hand.

The diversity in the group of Topping students was notable to her, as well as their widespread enthusiasm and engagement in the nature programming.

“The kids enjoyed it,” Gorman said. “This will make an impression on them for the rest of their lives, and that’s great for the state too.”



Brothers in Tech inspires teens to see their future selves unlimited

April 11, 2024

Joe Robertson, LINC Writer

If the crusade to get more young men of color into engineering careers was just a matter of dazzling them with gadgetry, the Brothers in Technology Conference lit up all those buttons.

Considering the virtual reality room at the University of Missouri-Kansas City and the 3D printing lab, the movie trailers, digital music-making and the robots (even a robotic dog), it was quite a hands-on show, agreed students like Grandview Middle School 8th Grader Stephon Moore.

But the heart of the B.I.T. Conference, judging from Moore's reaction, had something much bigger inside.

Because when the day was done, the student was thinking of that producer, and that creative entrepreneur, and that chief product officer and the other successful men — Black like Moore — who put on the conference's demonstrations.

"You heard them explain how they did it," Moore said, "and how they had to keep going at it." In put in his head the real idea that "I can be a movie producer, or a music producer."

This was the third edition of the conference, created by Urban TEC Executive Director Ina P. Montgomery, and this time LINC collaborated with Ruskin High School in the Hickman Mills School District and Grandview Middle School to send several dozen youth to the event.

LINC and Urban TEC have been partners for many years bringing STEAM programming — science, technology, engineering, arts and math — to the students in LINC's Caring Communities sites and their families. And the conference added an important layer, Montgomery said.

Montgomery, an entrepreneur in STEAM fields, had often been asked to participate in STEAM conferences for girls, she said.

"And I kept saying, What about the boys? Especially urban boys. They need a similar experience where they can get their hands on technology and plant that seed to pursue a STEAM career."

National statistics are alarming. Montgomery cites a report by the McKinsey Institute for Black Economic Mobility that found that Black professionals are severely underrepresented in tech jobs and college programs.

"To me that's an emergency," she said. "That's a crisis."

What's encouraging, she said, is that several Black Kansas City men, successful in the STEAM world, have



L. George Walker of the Black Family Technology Awareness Association watches as a student controls a robot.

committed to helping her in her quest, stepping in to be the motivational presenters at each of her conferences.

They do it for teenagers like Ruskin High School freshman J.J. Hardy, who came away from the day thrilled by the way the different workshops “let us use our imagination.”

“It opened my creative side,” he said. “I’m thinking I want to be an engineer and be in college doing engineering so I can learn to build stuff and break it down and build it back.”

And these speakers, he noted, were teaching them how to interact, how to do business, how to use “critical thinking.”

No doubt, that’s why Lenton Bailey, University Health’s Director of Public Safety, was here.

In his workshop, he put the students to work in teams imagining how they’d build and market wearable devices to help people enhance or improve their lives.

“It’s an opportunity to give back to the young men, especially those of color,” Bailey said. “Hopefully this will inspire them and let them know that their ceiling isn’t limited.”

What he saw in the youth was a lot of enthusiasm and creativity, and other presenters saw it too.

“I was one of those kids,” said music producer Joseph “Jo Blaq” Macklin. “I was looking in and trying to find a way to be in the arts I love.”

But the resources he felt he needed were in Los Angeles, and he found success there.

Then Kansas City called him back.

“It was on my heart,” he said. “I can’t keep giving my resources to LA when there are kids like me in Kansas City that want to do this as well.”

He had the students in his workshop stacking music tracks on beats and rap tracks on his array of audio-engineering equipment.

“I see a lot of creative kids,” he said. “Their imaginations are wild. I’m trying to give them the opportunity to say, ‘Hey, this is what I want to do and I have the resources and I have the mentors to help me get where I want to get.’”

Grandview Middle School 8th Grader Dixon Alvarado got the message from Macklin and many of the other presenters, like creative director Rich Chungong, Storytailor Chief Product Officer Herston Fails and the producer/writer team of Corey McCartney and Khalid Abdulqaadir.



A student experiences flying in virtual reality



A UMKC sandbox projects colored contour lines as students create mountains and valleys.

“What I learned is to never give up,” Alvarado said. “Because that’s one of the first things you have to have on your mind. That’s the mindset.”

Many of the presenters preached resilience and persistence, like Andrew Eanes, the Senior Client Solutions Manager at J.E. Dunn Construction Company, who told of his path among engineering companies as the only Black man he could see.

Chungong told the students how, when he was in school, he was not encouraged to go into engineering. He made his success as a creative director, and now he is constantly looking to hire people who can write computer code.

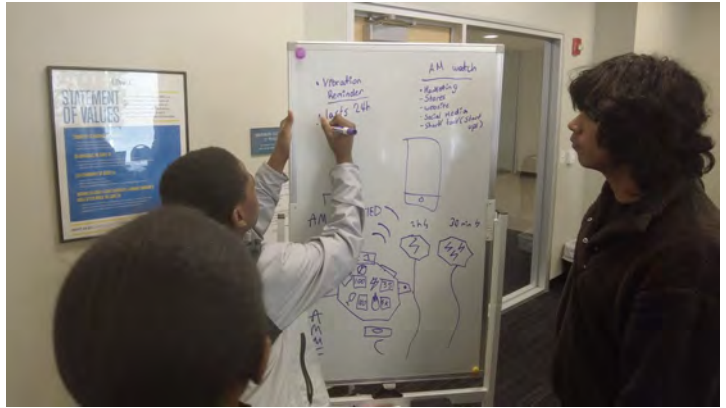
“Do you know what their starting salary is?” he asked the students. “*One-hundred-thousand dollars a year,*” he answered, and the teens gasped a collective “whoa!”

“But you guys are ahead on this,” he told them. “You have people here trying to get you the opportunity. Have a great time and get curious about this stuff.”

“It was honestly a surreal experience,” Ruskin classmate Alan Gomez said. He wants to be a professional baseball player, but the idea of being a “sports engineer” is enticing, creating sports gear and safety equipment.

Just being on UMKC’s expansive campus was inspiring, said Grandview Middle School 8th Grader Jaylen Johnson. That, combined with all the stories from the presenters telling of “how they do the things they do” has him thinking big.

“It’s made me feel like anything’s possible if you put time into it and keep doing it,” he said. “There is a lot for me in the future and I can accomplish things if I put my mind to it.”



Students work on their plans for a wearable device.



Students present their ideas for wearable devices in class with University Health’s Lenton Bailey.

'We do appreciate it!' LINC's food distributions in LFPA program reach 11 counties

April 5, 2024

Joe Robertson, LINC Writer



Mary Ann Slattery, right, leads a food distribution including food from the LFPA program for the Livingston County Food Pantry in Chillicothe, Mo., March 19

This is the way Mary Ann Slattery likes it to be.

She's looking across plenty of food set out on tables on the sidewalk outside the Chillicothe, Mo., church that gives the Livingston County Food Pantry a home base.

Friends and neighbors are all gathered here in sunshine. Many she knows, maybe some she doesn't. Some are helping package the food. Some are taking it home. Some doing both. It's a community event.

When this is the scene — with the help of LINC's collaboration with the local farmers that it has recruited for the federal LFPA food distribution program — "it's easier for everyone to get what they need," Slattery said.

Too often, she said, she's not able to keep the food pantry open. And then some of those friends and neighbors in this rural Missouri town have to call her for food help. She knows some who need help instead go without.

"To have to call for help is hard," she said. "I get calls all the time. There is such a need, such a need."

On this recent Tuesday morning, LINC and its distributors delivered some 3,000 pounds of eggs, hamburger and sausage across a network of more than 80 community sites that spans 11 counties from Livingston in the north to St. Clair in the south.

The LFPA program — Local Food Purchase Assistance — is a USDA-funded initiative to help get food from local farms into communities of need. In Missouri, the state Department of Social Services is managing the program and it turned to community partnerships in the state — including LINC in Kansas City — to build the network.

LINC has coordinated much of its distribution through its more than 50 Caring Communities sites, mostly in heavily populated neighborhoods of Jackson County, but the need is strong as well in the 11-county area under LINC’s LFPA mission.

“The goal is to help food networks grow in these rural areas,” said LINC Contract Manager Jennifer Gott, “so they can continue after the LFPA program.”

Through most of the year, when Missouri farmers’ fields are busy, the LFPA program focuses on purchasing and delivering fresh vegetables. Since the program began in May 2023, LINC has worked with some 60 local producers to deliver more than 435,000 pounds of food, reaching more than 35,000 people.

Tina Sims of Chillicothe was one of the visitors who took home sacks of food from the sidewalk tables of the Livingston County Food Pantry.

“The donations mean a lot to me and my family with the meat prices going up,” she said. “I appreciate every kindness. It means a lot to me and my grandbabies and my family to eat.”

“They remember a lot of us senior citizens,” said Chillicothe resident and pantry customer Nancy Ewing. “And that makes a lot of difference.”

The LFPA program targets areas of need, then makes it simple for community centers to put produce and protein in the hands of families and individuals. No one has to feel exposed to accept the food. It’s shared with the community, no questions asked, no income forms to fill out.

Both the social service workers and the people who receive the food appreciate it, said Shelly Harden, a community health worker in the HCC Network.

Harden, from the Lexington, Mo., clinic, was helping package food in HCC’s Carroll County Clinic in Carrollton.

“Today is food day,” Harden said. And the packaged food will be going out “without stipulations or requirements.”

“It’s meaningful,” Harden said, “because in our community many people are having to choose if they’ll pay for groceries or rent.”

In the town square of Carrollton, H.E.L.P. Services of Carroll County stacked cartons of eggs and meat at mid-morning at the front entry of its thrift store.

“The eggs and protein are very much needed,” said Denise Ferguson, director of H.E.L.P. — Harmonized Efforts to Lessen Poverty. “This stuff will be gone by two o’clock this afternoon.”

Carrollton resident Sheri Cardenas loaded a sack of food for her mother, happy to be able to assure “she has plenty of food in the freezer.”

“Most of the elderly around here live on limited incomes,” Cardenas said. “And groceries aren’t getting any cheaper.”

In Richmond, Mo., Director Pat Mills at the Ray County Senior and Nutrition Center took in the day’s shipment of eggs and protein to bolster the offerings of the town’s food pantry.

“The meat we’re getting today is going to be wonderful for them,” she said of her steady line of visitors. It’s not just senior citizens who need help, she said, but any of the residents in the county “who are having trouble making ends meet.”

It’s important that the food is available and easy to take home, she said, because she knows many people who need help are hesitant or shy to accept it.

“I have a lot of people who say, ‘No, I don’t want it because there are a lot of people who need it worse,’” Mills said. But she answers, “If you need it you need it. I don’t care who you are. Come get it. We’ll gladly give it to you.”



Health care workers with HCC Network, including Shelly Harden, center, package eggs and meat from the LFPA program on “food day” in Carrollton, Mo.

Why School Absences Have ‘Exploded’ Almost Everywhere

The pandemic changed families’ lives and the culture of education: “Our relationship with school became optional.”

By [Sarah Mervosh](#) and [Francesca Paris](#)

Sarah Mervosh reports on K-12 education, and Francesca Paris is a data reporter.

March 29, 2024

In Anchorage, affluent families set off on ski trips and other lengthy vacations, with the assumption that their children can keep up with schoolwork online.

In a working-class pocket of Michigan, school administrators have tried almost everything, including pajama day, to boost student attendance.

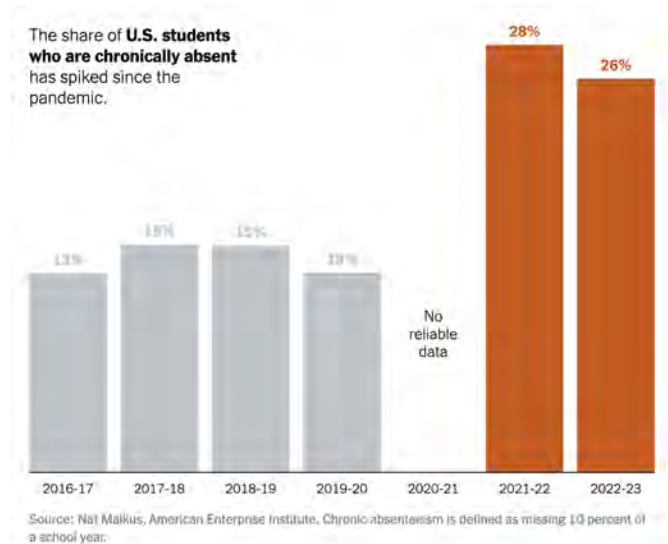
And across the country, students with heightened anxiety are opting to stay home rather than face the classroom.

In the four years since the pandemic closed schools, U.S. education has struggled to recover on a number of fronts, from [learning loss](#), to [enrollment](#), to [student behavior](#).

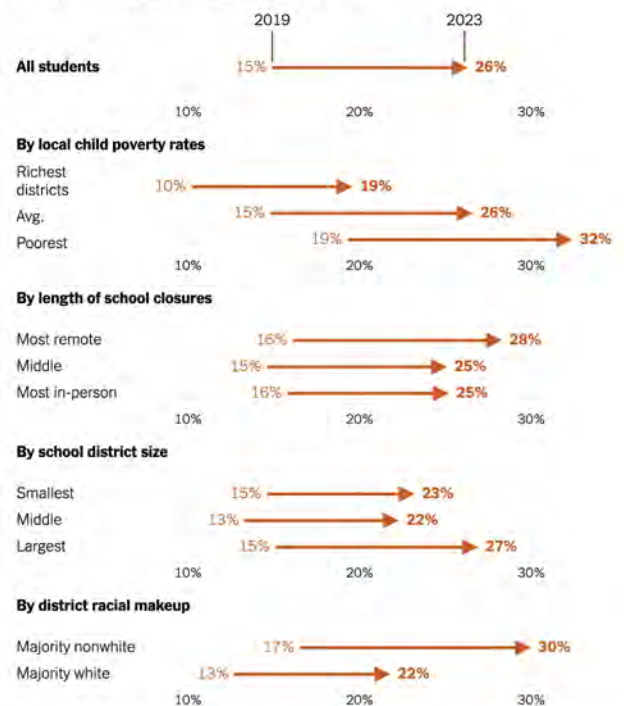
But perhaps no issue has been as stubborn and pervasive as a sharp increase in student absenteeism, a problem that cuts across demographics and has continued long after schools reopened.

Nationally, an estimated 26 percent of public school students were considered chronically absent last school year, up from 15 percent before the pandemic, according to the most recent data, from 40 states and Washington, D.C., compiled by the conservative-leaning [American Enterprise Institute](#). Chronic absence is typically defined as missing at least 10 percent of the school year, or about 18 days, for any reason.

The increases have occurred in districts big and small, and across income and race. For districts in wealthier areas, chronic absenteeism rates have about doubled, to 19 percent in the 2022-23 school year from 10 percent before the pandemic, a New York Times analysis of the data found.



Increase in chronic absenteeism, 2019–23



Source: Upshot analysis of data from Nat Malkus, American Enterprise Institute. Districts are grouped into highest, middle and lowest third.

Poor communities, which started with elevated rates of student absenteeism, are facing an even bigger crisis: Around 32 percent of students in the poorest districts were chronically absent in the 2022-23 school year, up from 19 percent before the pandemic.

Even districts that reopened quickly during the pandemic, in fall 2020, have seen vast increases.

“The problem got worse for everybody in the same proportional way,” said Nat Malkus, a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, who collected and studied the data.

The trends suggest that something fundamental has shifted in American childhood and the culture of school, in ways that may be long lasting. What was once a deeply ingrained habit — wake up, catch the bus, report to class — is now something far more tenuous.

“Our relationship with school became optional,” said Katie Rosanbalm, a psychologist and associate research professor with the Center for Child and Family Policy at Duke University.

The habit of daily attendance — and many families’ trust — was severed when schools shuttered in spring 2020. Even after schools reopened, things hardly snapped back to normal. Districts offered remote options, required Covid-19 quarantines and relaxed policies around attendance and [grading](#).

Today, student absenteeism is a leading factor [hindering the nation’s recovery from pandemic learning losses](#), educational experts say. Students can’t learn if they aren’t in school. And a rotating cast of absent classmates can [negatively affect the achievement](#) of even students who do show up, because teachers must slow down and adjust their approach to keep everyone on track.

“If we don’t address the absenteeism, then all is naught,” said Adam Clark, the superintendent of Mt. Diablo Unified, a socioeconomically and racially diverse district of 29,000 students in Northern California, where he said absenteeism has “exploded” to about 25 percent of students. That’s up from 12 percent before the pandemic.

Why Students Are Missing School

Schools everywhere are scrambling to improve attendance, but the new calculus among families is complex and multifaceted.

At South Anchorage High School in Anchorage, where students are largely white and middle-to-upper income, some families now go on ski trips during the school year, or take advantage of off-peak travel deals to vacation for two weeks in Hawaii, said Sara Miller, a counselor at the school.

For a smaller number of students at the school who qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, the reasons are different, and more intractable. They often have to stay home to care for younger siblings, Ms. Miller



Victoria, Texas reopened schools in August 2020, earlier than many other districts. Even so, student absenteeism in the district has doubled.

Kaylee Greenlee for The New York Times

said. On days they miss the bus, their parents are busy working or do not have a car to take them to school.

And because teachers are still expected to post class work online, often nothing more than a skeleton version of an assignment, families incorrectly think students are keeping up, Ms. Miller said.

Across the country, students are staying home [when sick](#), not only with Covid-19, but also with more routine colds and viruses.

And [more students](#) are struggling with their mental health, one reason for increased absenteeism in Mason, Ohio, an affluent suburb of Cincinnati, said Tracey Carson, a district spokeswoman. Because many parents can work remotely, their children can also stay home.

For Ashley Cooper, 31, of San Marcos, Texas, the pandemic fractured her trust in an education system that she said left her daughter to learn online, with little support, and then expected her to perform on grade level upon her return. Her daughter, who fell behind in math, has struggled with anxiety ever since, she said.

“There have been days where she’s been absolutely in tears — ‘Can’t do it. Mom, I don’t want to go,’” said Ms. Cooper, who has worked with the nonprofit Communities in Schools to improve her children’s school attendance. But she added, “as a mom, I feel like it’s OK to have a mental health day, to say, ‘I hear you and I listen. You are important.’”

Experts say missing school is both a symptom of pandemic-related challenges, and also a cause. Students who are behind academically may not want to attend, but being absent sets them further back. Anxious students may avoid school, but hiding out can fuel their anxiety.

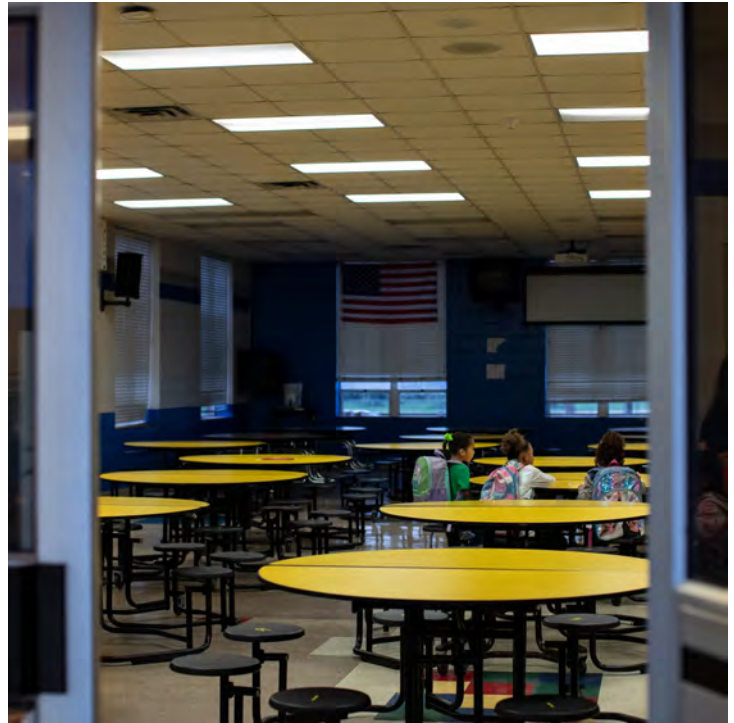
And schools have also seen [a rise in discipline problems](#) since the pandemic, an issue intertwined with absenteeism.

Dr. Rosanbalm, the Duke psychologist, said both absenteeism and behavioral outbursts are examples of the human stress response, now playing out en masse in schools: fight (verbal or physical aggression) or flight (absenteeism).

Quintin Shepherd, the superintendent in Victoria, Texas, first put his focus on student behavior, which he described as a “fire in the kitchen” after schools reopened in August 2020.

The district, which serves a mostly low-income and Hispanic student body of around 13,000, found success with a one-on-one coaching program that teaches coping strategies to the most disruptive students. In some cases, students went from having 20 classroom outbursts per year to fewer than five, Dr. Shepherd said.

But chronic absenteeism is yet to be conquered. About 30 percent of students are chronically absent



U.S. students, overall, are not caught up from their pandemic losses. Absenteeism is one key reason.

Kaylee Greenlee for The New York Times

this year, roughly double the rate before the pandemic.

Dr. Shepherd, who originally hoped student absenteeism would improve naturally with time, has begun to think that it is, in fact, at the root of many issues.

“If kids are not here, they are not forming relationships,” he said. “If they are not forming relationships, we should expect there will be behavior and discipline issues. If they are not here, they will not be academically learning and they will struggle. If they struggle with their coursework, you can expect violent behaviors.”

[Teacher absences have also increased](#) since the pandemic, and student absences mean less certainty about which friends and classmates will be there. That can lead to more absenteeism, said Michael A. Gottfried, a professor at the University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education.

His [research](#) has found that when 10 percent of a student’s classmates are absent on a given day, that student is more likely to be absent the following day.

Is This the New Normal?

In many ways, the challenge facing schools is one felt more broadly in American society: Have the cultural shifts from the pandemic become permanent?

In the work force, U.S. employees are still working from home at a rate that has remained [largely unchanged since late 2022](#). Companies have managed to “put the genie back in the bottle” to some extent by requiring a return to office a few days a week, said Nicholas Bloom, an economist at Stanford University who studies remote work. But hybrid office culture, he said, appears here to stay.

Some wonder whether it is time for schools to be more pragmatic.

Lakisha Young, the chief executive of the Oakland REACH, a parent advocacy group that works with low-income families in California, suggested a rigorous online option that students could use in emergencies, such as when a student misses the bus or has to care for a family member. “The goal should be, how do I ensure this kid is educated?” she said.

In the corporate world, companies have found some success appealing to a sense of social responsibility, where colleagues rely on each other to show up on the agreed-upon days.

A similar dynamic may be at play in schools, where experts say strong relationships are critical for attendance.

There is a sense of: “If I don’t show up, would people even miss the fact that I’m not there?” said Charlene M. Russell-Tucker, the commissioner of education in Connecticut.

In her state, a home visit program has yielded [positive results](#), in part by working with families to ad-



Sara Miller, a counselor at South Anchorage High School for 20 years, now sees more absences from students across the socioeconomic spectrum.

Ash Adams for The New York Times

dress the specific reasons a student is missing school, but also by establishing a relationship with a caring adult. Other efforts — such as [sending text messages](#) or postcards to parents informing them of the number of accumulated absences — can also be effective.

In Ypsilanti, Mich., outside of Ann Arbor, a home visit helped Regina Murff, 44, feel less alone when she was struggling to get her children to school each morning.

After working at a nursing home during the pandemic, and later losing her sister to Covid-19, she said, there were days she found it difficult to get out of bed. Ms. Murff was also more willing to keep her children home when they were sick, for fear of accidentally spreading the virus.

But after a visit from her school district, and starting therapy herself, she has settled into a new routine. She helps her sons, 6 and 12, set out their outfits at night and she wakes up at 6 a.m. to ensure they get on the bus. If they are sick, she said, she knows to call the absence into school. “I’ve done a huge turnaround in my life,” she said.

But bringing about meaningful change for large numbers of students remains [slow, difficult work](#).

The Ypsilanti school district has tried a bit of everything, said the superintendent, Alena Zachery-Ross. In addition to door knocks, officials are looking for ways to make school more appealing for the district’s 3,800 students, including more than 80 percent who qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. They held themed dress-up days — ’70s day, pajama day — and gave away warm clothes after noticing a dip in attendance during winter months.

“We wondered, is it because you don’t have a coat, you don’t have boots?” said Dr. Zachery-Ross.

Still, absenteeism overall remains higher than it was before the pandemic. “We haven’t seen an answer,” she said.



Absent classmates can have a negative impact on the achievement and attendance of even the students who do show up.
Ash Adams for The New York Times



2024 Summer Programs

District	Location	Before & After Summer School
Center	Boone Elem.	June 3–21, 7–8:30am & 1–6pm
Grandview	Belvidere Elem.	June 10–July 3, 7–9am & 4–6pm
	Martin City K-8	
Hickman Mills	Warford Elem.	June 3–28, 7–9am & 3–6pm
	Ruskin High	
	Santa Fe Elem.	June 3–28, 7–9am & 3–6pm July 8–19, 7–9am & 3–6pm
Kansas City	Banneker Elem.	June 5–28, 7–9am & 3:30–6pm
	Border Star Montessori	
	Carver Elem.	
	Faxon Elem.	
	Garcia Elem.	
	Hartman Elem.	
	Rogers Elem.	
	Wheatley Elem.	
	Phillips Elem.	Start date June 5. End date in July TBD.
North Kansas City	Topping Elem. (at Maplewood)	June 3–27 (Mon.-Thur.), 7–8:45am & 2:45–6pm
Charter	Lee A. Tolbert Academy	June 4–July 3, 7–8am & 3:30–6pm

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