

Education in Connecticut Packet

Topics covered:

1. Education access in Connecticut
2. Youth opportunities in Connecticut

Important vocabulary:

- Education
- School
- School suspension
- Youth Opportunities
- Chronic absenteeism

Grade level(s):

- 7-8
- 9-10
- 11-12

Description of activities:

- Reading and activity on what builds a “good” school; group/class activity to build a “best” school for their community
- Reading and data analysis on disproportionate use of suspensions and expulsions in schools
- Youth Opportunities reading and infographic creation
- Impact of COVID-19 on chronic absenteeism in schools analysis

Teacher tips:

- This topic and the activities pair well with the reading in the Racial Justice packet (“What is Systemic Racism?”) and the reading in the Intersectionality packet (“Understanding Intersectionality”)

Authored by:

Sarah Wiederecht

Social Studies Teacher

sarah.wiederecht@gmail.com

With support from:

Dylan Bober

Victor Cazabal

Emilie Waters

Activities

What Makes a “Good” School?

What makes a school “good”? What makes it effective, or that it is doing its job of educating the young people in a community? What does a school have to have, or lack, in order for it to be considered a quality school?

There are so many parts to the school system.

Directions: As you read the following article, annotate by underlining what you agree with, and crossing out what you disagree with. Below each section, write your own ideas of what would be considered “good” for each category in the blank space. For example, under the section about teachers, write what you think a “good” teacher is.

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1. **Teachers:** At the heart of a good school are caring and passionate teachers. They are like guiding stars, always ready to help and support their students. These teachers listen, encourage, and believe in their students' abilities. They create a safe space where everyone feels respected, valued, and excited to learn. With their enthusiasm and dedication, they inspire a love for knowledge that lasts a lifetime.
 2. **Activities and Lots of Learning:** Learning should be exciting and enjoyable! In a good school, teachers use creative and interactive methods to make lessons engaging. Whether through hands-on experiments, group activities, or educational games, learning becomes an adventure that sparks imagination and encourages critical thinking. A great school offers a wide range of subjects and activities, allowing students to explore their interests and talents. Besides core subjects like math, science, and language arts, they may have art, music, physical education, and even clubs or sports teams. This helps students discover their passions, develop skills, and find joy in new things.
 3. **Support:** In a good school, everyone feels safe and supported. Students should feel comfortable expressing themselves and know that their voices are heard. Kindness, respect, and empathy are fostered, creating a community where bullying is not tolerated. Teachers, staff, and students work together to create a positive and inclusive environment that celebrates diversity and appreciates each person's unique qualities.

4. **Resources and Technology:** A great school provides the necessary resources and technology to help support learning. This could include libraries with a wide variety of books, classrooms with materials they need, and computers. These tools help students access information, conduct research, and develop essential digital skills that prepare them for the future.

5. **Community involvement:** Families and the community play a vital role in a good school. They collaborate with teachers and staff to create a supportive network. Regular communication between school and home keeps families informed about their child's progress and encourages involvement in school activities. The community may also contribute by providing resources, guest speakers, or mentorship programs, enriching the educational experience.

Final Reflection

Compare your notes with a partner. As you discuss, write down your plan for a “good” school system. This plan can include lists, drawings, paragraphs, or however your ideas are best expressed.

The Divide in School Punishments

Directions: Read and annotate the following background information about suspension trends in schools and analyze the graphs to answer the thoughts questions.

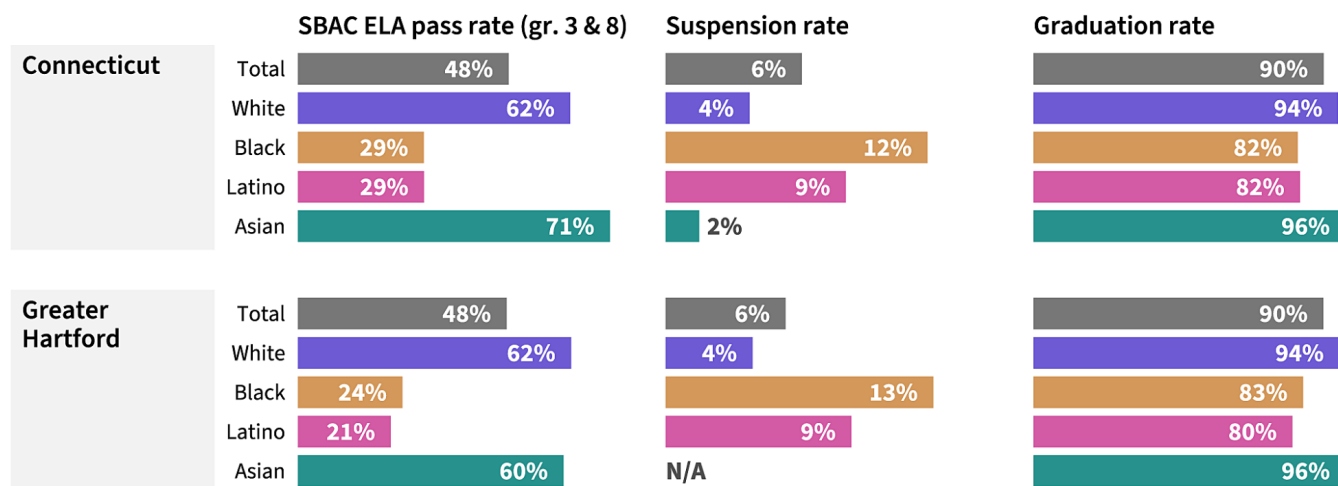
Background: Not every student experiences the same opportunity, treatment, or success in schools. For example, academic disadvantages can be a result of in-school or out-of-school suspensions. Suspension from school generally happens after a student has been deemed as having done something harmful or not allowed. However, suspensions can be *disproportionate*. This means that some students are more likely to get this punishment; more students from a certain group may get this punishment, even if they don't make up a large portion of the student body. Students who are suspended or expelled from school are more likely to have negative perceptions of school and to have lower GPAs. This can impact their ability to attend a college or trade program after high school, limiting their options for employment and opportunity in life. They are also more likely to be involved with the juvenile justice system. Black and Latinx students—boys especially—are expelled or suspended far more frequently than white students, even as early as preschool. Further, students who are labeled as receiving special education (SPED) services are also more likely to be suspended or expelled from schools. A Black student who is receiving special education services is at an even higher risk due to the *intersectionality* of their identity. While some schools are making efforts to reevaluate discipline, taking a more restorative approach, the issue of inequitable suspensions still persists. Further, there is not an agreement on how to best reform the system. How can you balance accountability, education, restorative justice, all while combating racism in the school system?

Reading Check

1. Why do you think these inequities in punishment in schools exist? What is the impact on students and the broader community?
2. What can be done to help reform or change these inequalities? How can we balance accountability, education, restorative justice, all while combating racism in the school system?
3. What could your school do about inequities in punishment? Come up with a plan for administrators, teachers, other staff and students to follow.

Using the Data

Selected academic and disciplinary outcomes by student race/ethnicity, 2020-21 and 2021-22 school years



Above is data from the Greater Hartford area, ranging from the 2020 to the 2022 school years. What are the percentages of students, by demographic, that were suspended or expelled in Greater Hartford?

- Black:
- Latino:
- White:
- SPED:
- NON SPED:
- ELL (English Language Learners):
- NON ELL:

Conclusion: Take a look at your answers to the reading check questions. Use this data to rework your answers, basing them on data and citing your analysis of this graph. Then, share your answers with a partner.

Youth Opportunities

Directions: Read the summary below. Using what you learned, create an infographic that shows the data that was collected via DataHaven's survey on youth opportunities in Connecticut.

While growing up in a relatively high-income state like Connecticut affords children many opportunities, access to them is not evenly distributed. To measure youth opportunity, the DataHaven Community Wellbeing Survey includes a series of questions asking adults to rate the odds that children in their neighborhood will succeed in different aspects of life.

Generally, **Fairfield County** adults see good prospects for children: 97 percent rate it almost certain or very likely that young people will graduate high school, and 74 percent expect young people to be able to get jobs with opportunities for advancement. On the other end of the spectrum, 83 percent find it unlikely that young people will be in a gang, and 77 percent find it unlikely they will be arrested for a felony. **Greater Hartford** adults see good prospects for children: 96 percent rate it almost certain or very likely that young people will graduate high school. On the other end of the spectrum, 87 percent find it unlikely that young people will be in a gang, and 79 percent find it unlikely they will be arrested for a felony. **Greater New Haven** adults see good prospects for children: 93 percent rate it almost certain or very likely that young people will graduate high school. On the other end of the spectrum, 81 percent find it unlikely that young people will be in a gang, and 73 percent find it unlikely they will be arrested for a felony.

The majority of students in 11th and 12th grades throughout Connecticut are enrolled in at least one college and career readiness (CCR) course, including Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate courses, technical education, enrollment in local colleges, and internships.

Some of this optimism fades depending on race and ethnicity, education, and income, with lower-income adults less certain young people will find jobs with opportunities for advancement, and Black and lower-income adults less certain about young people avoiding gangs or felony arrests. The survey finds that young adults who live in advantaged neighborhoods and are not in debt are more likely to be optimistic about economic and educational opportunities and less likely to have experienced cost-related barriers to completing college.

Compared to older adults, younger adults are more likely to experience underemployment, defined as either being unemployed and looking for work or being employed part-time but saying that they would like to work full-time. Young adults are less optimistic about job opportunities; as of summer 2022 in Connecticut, only 50 percent of adults between the age of 18 and 25 reported that the ability of residents to obtain suitable employment in their area was excellent or good, compared to 67 percent of other adults. Additionally, when asked about reasons why they did not go to college or persist in completing a college degree, many young adults without college degrees reported barriers related to cost, childcare responsibilities, and the need to work and earn money.

However, on one measure, adults are split: 38 percent of **Fairfield County** adults and 43 percent statewide rate the chances of young people abusing drugs or alcohol as a tossup. 42 percent of **Greater Hartford** adults and 52 percent of **Greater New Haven** adults rate the chances of young people abusing drugs or alcohol as a tossup. This uncertainty persists across demographic groups, illustrating just how deeply risks of substance abuse permeate communities.

COVID-19 and Chronic Absenteeism

FIGURE 5A

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, chronic absenteeism has skyrocketed
SHARE OF STUDENTS CHRONICALLY ABSENT BY RACE/ETHNICITY AND ELIGIBILITY FOR FREE/REDUCED PRICE MEALS, FAIRFIELD COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS, 2015-16 TO 2020-23 SCHOOL YEARS

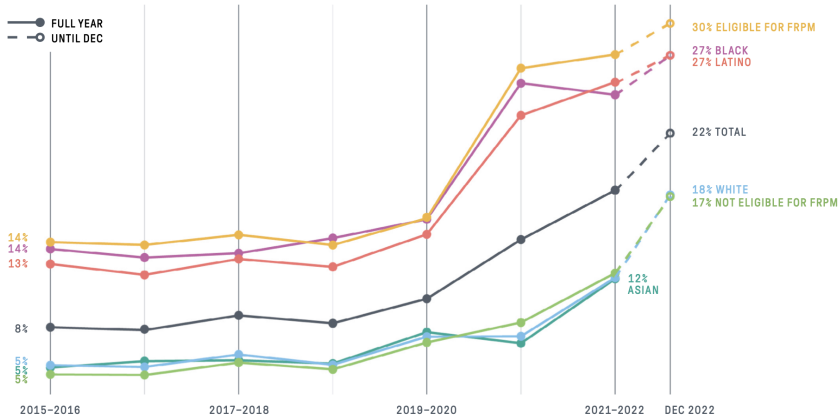


FIGURE 5A

Since the start of the COVID pandemic, chronic absenteeism has skyrocketed
SHARE OF STUDENTS CHRONICALLY ABSENT BY RACE/ETHNICITY AND ELIGIBILITY FOR FREE/REDUCED PRICE MEALS, GREATER HARTFORD PUBLIC SCHOOLS, 2015-16 TO 2022-23 SCHOOL YEARS

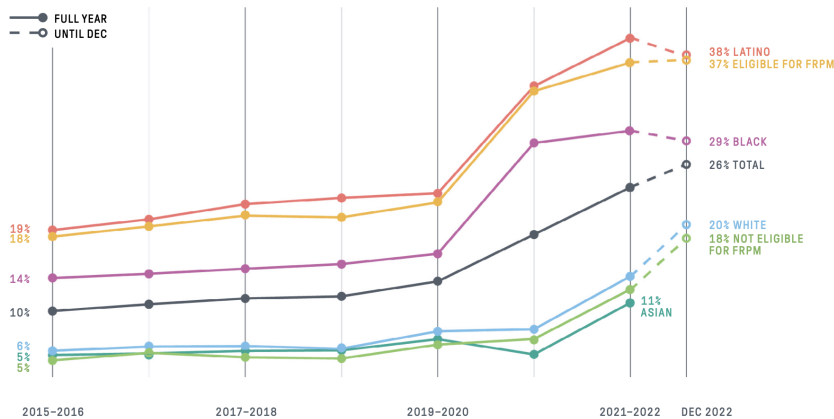
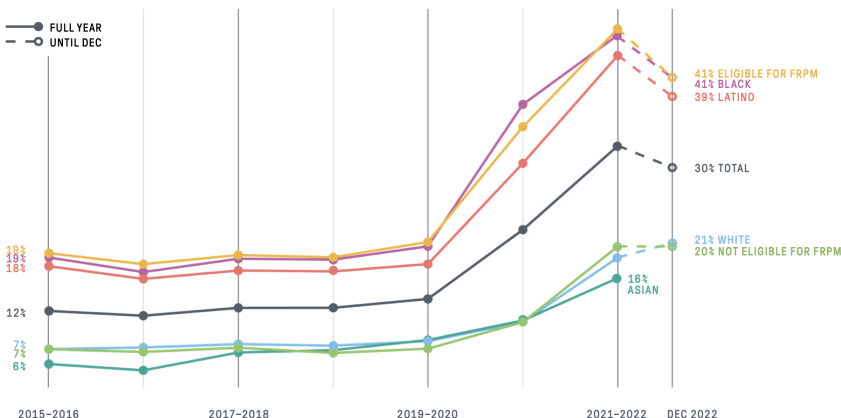


FIGURE 5A

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, chronic absenteeism has skyrocketed
SHARE OF STUDENTS CHRONICALLY ABSENT BY RACE/ETHNICITY AND ELIGIBILITY FOR FREE/REDUCED PRICE MEALS, GREATER NEW HAVEN PUBLIC SCHOOLS, 2015-16 TO 2022-23 SCHOOL YEARS



Key Words

Chronic Absentee: A student whose total number of absences is equal to or greater than 10 percent of the total numbers of days of a school year.

FRPM: Students eligible for free or reduced-price meals

1. Before you analyze the data, make a prediction on how COVID-19 impacted chronic absentee rates in CT schools.

2. Take notes as you analyze the charts. These notes should include numerical data, reactions, and questions. Be prepared to share these notes with a partner.