

Healthy School Environments, Healthy Hoosiers

An investment in healthy K-12 facilities yields long-term economic advantages including reduced healthcare costs, enhanced educational outcomes leading to viable economic stability, reduction of aggressive student behavior, and higher teacher retention. A whitepaper highlights how improving Indiana's school building quality can lead to positive outcomes for students, educators, and communities.

Report Highlights:

Environmental Challenges



In Indiana, 2 in 5 people will develop cancer during their life.¹ Throughout the state, radon levels are high, putting students and faculty at risk. Unhealthy levels of radon can be addressed with improved ventilation in schools.



Like most states, Indiana has an older building portfolio, which limits access and inclusion of nearly 146,000 students with physical disabilities.



Teachers are more than twice as likely to have a voice disorder than the general population.² Improving classroom acoustics may save Indiana \$5.5- \$9.1 million in educator vocal strain.



In 2019, the Indiana Finance Authority found 62% of Indiana schools had high lead levels in drinking water. The average cost to replace a contaminated fixture is about \$550.³



It is cheaper to improve air quality for every student in Indiana, than buying everyone a movie ticket. That's not including popcorn!^{4,5}

Positive Outcomes



A research study of 5 million students in a large, urban district found investment in school facilities, on average, was associated with a 10% increase in math scores, and a 5% increase in English Language arts.⁶



New school buildings improve property values. Studies show property values increase by 6% in communities that received new school buildings.⁷



Investing in facilities can reduce educator shortages and turnover. This can save small and rural districts up to \$10,000 per teacher and up to \$20,000 per teacher for urban districts.⁸



Funding exists: Federal dollars are allocated to address school building needs, such as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the Inflation Reduction Act.⁹ After the COVID-19 pandemic, Indiana received \$2.8 billion in ESSER funds.¹⁰



For more information and state guidance, please check out our full report at healthyk12.perkinswill.com

Hoosier Students and Chronic Absenteeism

Indiana code defines chronic absenteeism as being absent for 10% or more of a school year for any reason.¹ For the 2022-2023 school year, the Indiana Department of Education reported nearly one in five Hoosier students were absent at least 18 days, making approximately 221,000 Hoosier students chronically absent.^{2,3} There is a growing movement among schools and the state and federal government to address chronic absenteeism. Addressing the issue requires understanding the leading causes, complexity, and resulting impacts.

Leading Causes



Childhood asthma is a leading cause of school absenteeism. As of 2021, 6.3% of Hoosier children were diagnosed.⁴ As Indiana ranks 46th for “most polluted air”, respiratory illnesses are a major health concern.⁵ Children with persistent asthma are three times more likely to be absent than peers.⁶ Addressing indoor air quality may reduce absences.⁷



Students who experience bullying are at higher risk of being chronically absent. These students are more likely to experience anxiety and depression and stay home.⁸ Students of two or more races are more likely to be bullied compared to white students.⁹ These disparities persist in chronic absenteeism. Black and American Indian students reported high rates, compared to Asian and White students.²



Nearly half of Indiana districts have school bus driver shortages.¹⁰ Transportation is a frequent barrier to school attendance. A 2021 study of Detroit schools found transportation issues arise as a combination of unreliable or inconsistent transportation schedules, weak social networks, parents’ work schedules, and unsafe conditions.¹¹ Transportation instability is a large factor in absenteeism.



Chronic absenteeism is high among vulnerable populations.¹² A study showed low-income kindergartners were four times more likely to be chronically absent.¹³ Students who are homeless or in foster care are also likely to be absent.¹⁴ In 2019, 34.6% of homeless Hoosier students were chronically absent.¹⁵

Impacts on Education and Beyond



Attendance impacts grades and standardized test scores. In 2023, 18.1% of third graders did not pass the Indiana Reading Evaluation and Determination (IREAD-3) test.¹⁶ Students who missed less than 5 days had higher ISTEP scores than chronically absent students.^{17,18} Targeting absenteeism of low performing students could narrow the gap.



Chronic absenteeism is a predictor of high school graduation. A student who is chronically absent in any year between 8th and 12th grade is 7.4 times more likely to drop out.¹⁹ Hoosier high schoolers have some of the highest rates of chronic absenteeism.²⁰ Addressing attendance would maintain high graduation rates, as 2023 saw the highest numbers since 2016.²¹



Education level impacts adulthood. High school dropouts were four times more likely to experience negative outcomes, including being arrested, fired, using illicit substances, and having poor health.²² Students who are chronically absent are at higher risk for these outcomes. Conversely people with higher education secure higher paying jobs, report better health outcomes, and live longer.²³

Addressing chronic absenteeism requires a multi-faceted approach. Targeted interventions, such as parental outreach and the Indiana Early Warning Dashboard can help at-risk students.^{24,25} Implementing the EPA's IAQ Tools for Schools can reduce absences related to respiratory illnesses.²⁶

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Available online at healthyk12.perkinswill.com/school-guidance

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