



R.E.A.D.®

ON!

Continuing Education for R.E.A.D. Teams

VOL. XI ~ No. 4

May 2026

The Dog Aging Project

We received this message recently from the Dog Aging Project, which is seeking more dogs throughout the U.S. to enroll in their clinical trial. They have no testing locations in Utah or Montana, so our regular ITA teams will not be able to be included, unfortunately. But we thought we would share with all of you, in case any of you might be close to a testing site and would be interested in participating.

[From: "Nixon, Betsy J." <bnixon64@exchange.tamu.edu>](mailto:bnixon64@exchange.tamu.edu)

[Subject: Dog Aging Project and TRIAD clinical trial](#)

Hello,

I am with the Dog Aging Project, a research collaboration studying canine aging with over 51,000 dogs enrolled in the observational study. We were recently featured on 60 Minutes with Anderson Cooper, where they talked about the work we are doing, including the Test of Rapamycin in Aging Dogs (TRIAD), a clinical trial to evaluate the impact of the drug, rapamycin, on healthspan and lifespan in aging dogs.

TRIAD has specific eligibility criteria including that a dog must be 7 years or older, weigh between 44 and 120 pounds, be spayed or neutered, and in overall good health. Participants are required to bring their dog to a clinical trial site for an exam seven times over three years. Clinical trial sites are located throughout the U.S. (see map), including Middletown, CT.

As of today, TRIAD has 266 dogs enrolled in the clinical trial, with a goal of 580. To date, 52 have completed their three-year participation, providing valuable data for researchers. To reach our enrollment goal, we need help getting the word out to more potential participants, and we wanted to ask if you could help us do that.

Would you be willing to share information with your volunteers, supporters, and communities? To make it easier, we have downloadable resources, including social media posts, flyers, and templates for newsletter articles, blog, and email blasts. You can also share the Dog Aging Project's posts on any social media platform. If you have shared in the past, thank you! We hope you will share again to help us continue to find new participants in your area.

Let me know if you have any questions or would like to talk further. Thanks in advance for supporting this study so we can better understand how to help our furry family members live healthier, longer lives!

Betsy

Betsy Nixon | Partnerships and Recruitment | Dog Aging Project

School of Veterinary Medicine & Biomedical Science

Texas A&M University, College Station, TX

bnixon64@tamu.edu | Main (979) 845-2844 | Ofc (979) 458-2764

dogagingproject.org

INTERMOUNTAIN THERAPY ANIMALS / R.E.A.D. ~ www.therapyanimals.org

4050 South 2700 East, Salt Lake City, UT 84124 (or) PO Box 17201, Salt Lake City, UT 84117 • 801.272.3439

Empty Classrooms

We have brushed on the topic of increased chronic absenteeism in American schools. What is happening in your own communities? Do teachers and administrators have explanations and/or solutions? We have found consistently over the years that children who participate in R.E.A.D.® programs are super motivated to attend on the days they will be with a dog. This was another unanticipated benefit of the program. Have you found that to be true in your programs? Do you have any stories to share with all of us? Email kathy@therapyanimals.org! Stories are always inspiring to all of us, so don't be shy!

By Sarah Mervosh

A few years ago, a troubling phenomenon began to spread in U.S. education: Students were not showing up to school.

This was not particularly surprising. Schools had shut down in the spring of 2020, at the start of the pandemic, and some did not fully reopen until fall 2021. Quarantines for Covid symptoms and exposures were still common. It would take time, many thought, to re-establish daily routines.

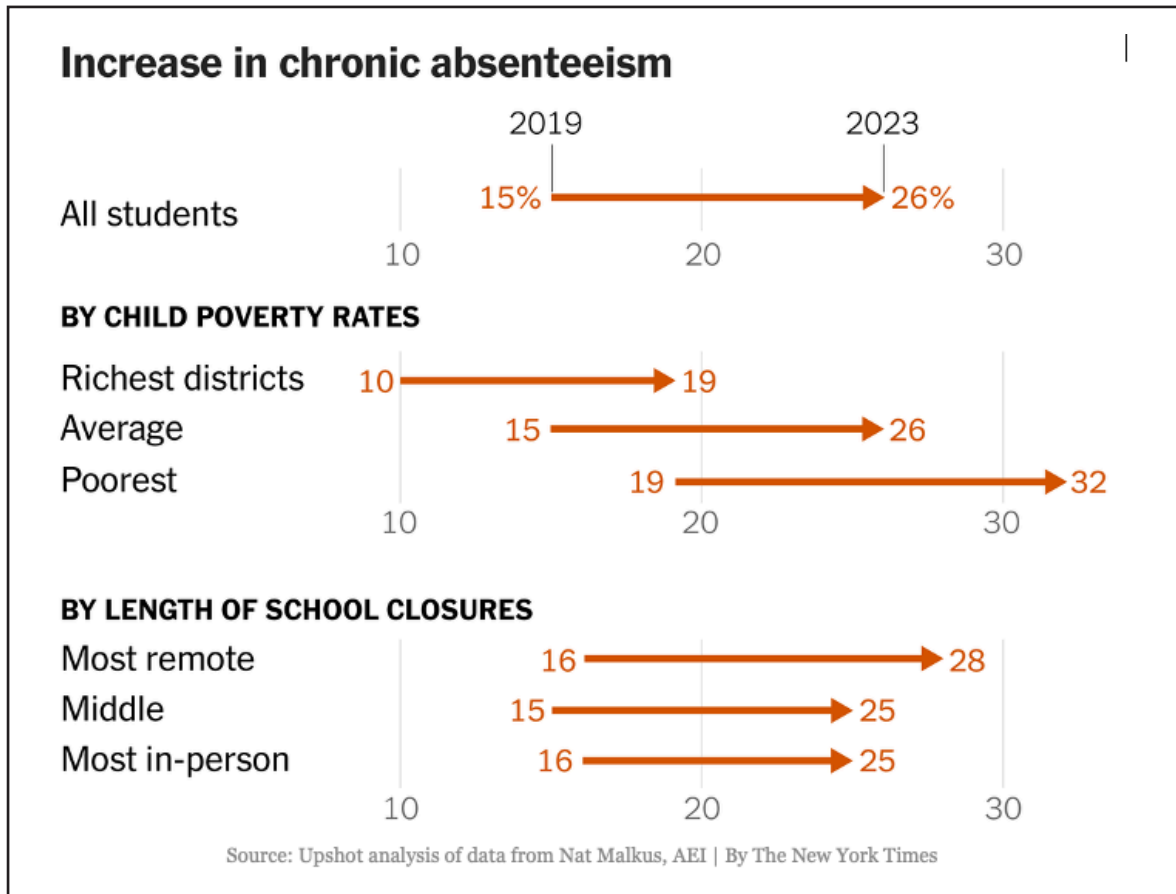
What is surprising is how little the numbers have budged.

Before the pandemic, about 15 percent of U.S. students

were chronically absent, which typically means missing 18 days of the school year, for any reason. By the 2021-22 school year, that number had skyrocketed to 28 percent of students. Last school year, the most recent for which national estimates are available, it held stubbornly at 26 percent.

In interviews, many educators say the problem is continuing this school year.

Perhaps most strikingly, absenteeism has increased across demographic groups, according to research by Nat Malkus, a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute. Students are missing more school in districts rich and poor, big and small.



(continued on page 3)

Even the length of school closures during the pandemic was not a particularly useful predictor of absenteeism. On average, districts that were closed longest have experienced similar increases as those that opened sooner.

What is going on here?

I spoke with school leaders, counselors, researchers and parents. They offered many reasons for the absences: illness, mental health, transportation problems. But underlying it all is a fundamental shift in the value that families place on school, and in the culture of education during the pandemic.

“Our relationship with school became optional,” said Katie Rosanbalm, a psychologist and associate research professor at Duke University.

A cultural shift

To some degree, this is a problem facing society at large since the pandemic. Anyone who works in an office with a flexible remote-work policy will be familiar with the feeling: You diligently show up, but your co-workers aren't there. What's the point?

Something similar may be going on in schools.

Though school buildings are open, classes are in person and sports and other extracurricular activities are back in full, the stability of school seems to have shifted.

For one thing, teachers are also missing more school, often because of professional burnout or child care challenges — or because, since the pandemic, more people are actually staying home when they're sick.

Some schools have kept their pandemic policies around online class work, giving the illusion that in-person attendance is not necessary.

And widespread absenteeism means less stability about which friends and classmates will be there. This can beget more absenteeism. For example, research has found that when 10 percent of a student's classmates are absent on a given day, that student is nearly 20 percent more likely to be absent the following day. “We are seeing disengagement spreading,” said Michael A. Gottfried, a professor at the University of Pennsylvania who has studied this issue.

Sign of other problems

This cultural shift is not simply a hit to perfect attendance records.

The share of students missing many days of school helps explain why U.S. students, overall, are nowhere close to making up their learning losses from the pandemic. Students who are behind academically may resist going to school, but missing school also sets them further back. These effects are especially pernicious for low-income students, who lost more ground during the pandemic and who are more negatively affected by chronic absence.

Absenteeism is also closely linked to other challenges schools have faced since the pandemic, including a rise in student anxiety and behavioral problems.

“The pandemic increased stress in every way in our lives, but it really embedded ourselves in our stress response system — fight, flight or freeze,” Dr. Rosanbalm, the Duke psychologist, said.

An increase in behavioral problems in schools is an example of the “fight” response, she said. On the other hand, she added, “flight is absenteeism.”