Chronic Absenteeism skyrocketing in Nebraska

(KLZA)-- Across Nebraska, a troubling number of school desks have sat empty during the past few years, say experts, teachers and school leaders now trying to fix the issue.

Chronic absenteeism in Nebraska's public schools skyrocketed during COVID-19, according to the most recent statewide data.

Nearly one in five Nebraska students missed at least 10% of days during the 2020-2021 school year, chronic absences that caused many of those students to fall behind academically and socially.

The pandemic has sickened students. It has exacerbated mental health issues. It has also made life harder for many students already living below the poverty line – both things that in turn made missing school more likely.

Overall, Nebraska students missed 6.6% of school days during the school year that ended in May 2021, state data shows. That's up from 5.1% in 2015. Nebraska's chronic absenteeism rate jumped by nearly 60 percent during that six-year period.

According to a story in the Flatwater Free Press, among the Nebraska school districts with the biggest jump in chronic absenteeism include Pawnee City with 22.4 percent and Sterling with 18.7 percent.

These student absences affected rural, suburban and urban schools in every corner of the state. The trends look particularly bad for students from families of low-income as well as students of color.

Students also fall behind their peers socially when they regularly miss class, sometimes creating or worsening feelings of anxiety or isolation.

Chronic absenteeism can also affect the entire classroom. Teachers are forced to balance students who are grasping current material with those who are behind, sometimes sacrificing general instruction or planning time to individually reteach students.

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