

COMMUNITY
PULSE
REPORT



Pulse Report for Children & Families

February 2022

Taking Our Pulse

The goal of the Community Pulse Report is to keep track of a consistent set of indicators as a way of taking the pulse of our community during these difficult times and to further inform policy makers, nonprofit leaders, reporters, and the public in general. The report is organized into five sections:



COVID-19 Impacts: Omicron Surge, Vaccination, Child Care Impacts, Family Supports



Mental Health: Anxiety, Youth Mental Health



Classroom Disruptions: School Closures, Disparities, Attendance

Our aim is to utilize data that will give us a snapshot of what is happening in the five-county region—Allegheny, Armstrong, Butler, Fayette and Westmoreland Counties. Important to the project will be finding data that deepens our understanding of the intersecting disparities in health care, society, and the economy and their impacts on Black and Latino/a/x children and families.

A Note on Disaggregated Data & Geographies

We are committed to utilizing data that can be disaggregated by race, gender, and age.

We continue to strive to identify proxy indicators where disaggregated data is not available, and advocate for the disaggregation of data by race, gender, and age.

Where such data is available, we note that throughout the report with this symbol:



Where it is not available, we note with this symbol:



Throughout this report, the geography of analyzed data is noted in the upper left-hand corner of each chart or graph:



United States



Pennsylvania



Five-County Region
(Allegheny, Armstrong, Butler, Fayette, Westmoreland)



Allegheny County
(Only used rarely – where regional data is not available)



COVID-19

Since the previous Pulse report was published in December 2021, COVID-19 case rates reached new highs locally and nationally during the Omicron surge.

While the variant has proven less likely to cause serious disease on an individual basis, it was far more contagious, and therefore led to spikes in hospitalization and deaths overall. It also was particularly contagious among children. That posed significant challenges for schools, child care centers, and other youth-serving organizations in the region, with staff shortages and outbreaks among participants and students.

In the meantime, vaccination rates among young people in the region are still low, especially in more rural areas.

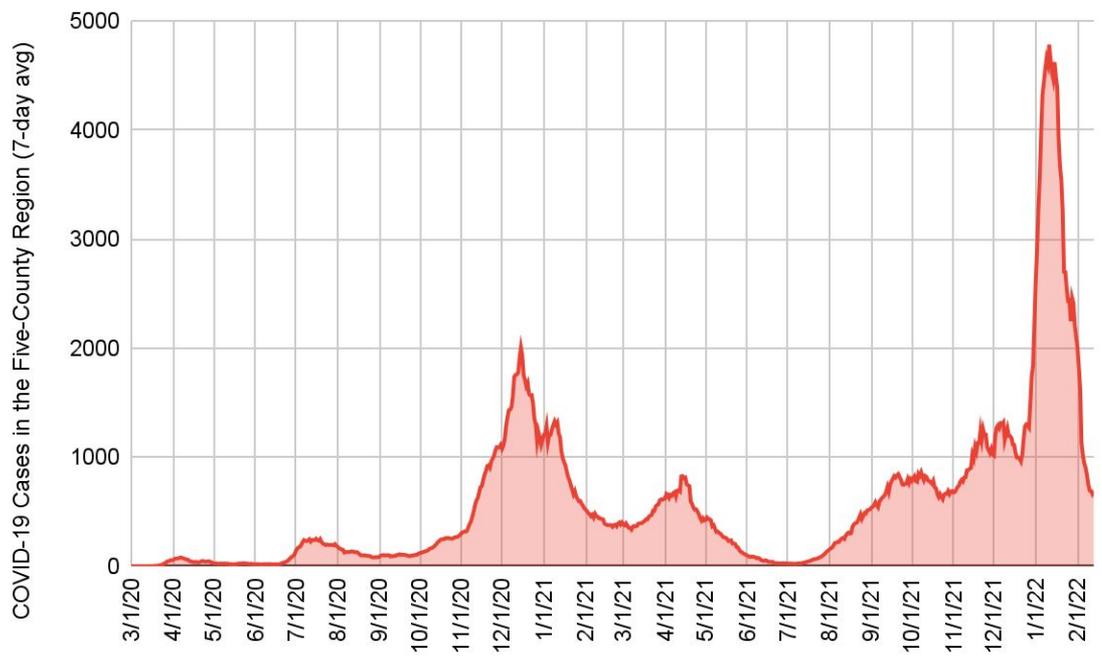




COVID-19 Impacts: Omicron Surge



COVID-19 cases spiked dramatically in the region in January.



During the last two months, our region and the country at large has faced a surge in COVID-19 cases as the Omicron Variant spread rapidly, becoming the dominant form of the virus. While the Omicron Variant seems to be less likely to cause severe disease in any given case, its extreme transmissibility led to surges in case rates that were much higher than any previous point in the pandemic, both locally and nationally.



Source: PA Department of Public Health

COVID-19 among Children



Five-County
Region

5,867
Cases

During the week of January 18th, there were 5,867 active COVID-19 cases reported among children in the five-county region.



United States

368 Deaths among Young
People in January

Although Omicron, and COVID-19 generally, is far less likely to lead to death for children and young adults than it is for older adults, it is still a risk. Tragically, **368 Americans under the age of 30 died from Covid-19 in January 2022.**

Omicron case rates have been particularly high among young people, with children's case rates and hospitalization rates spiking both locally and nationally.

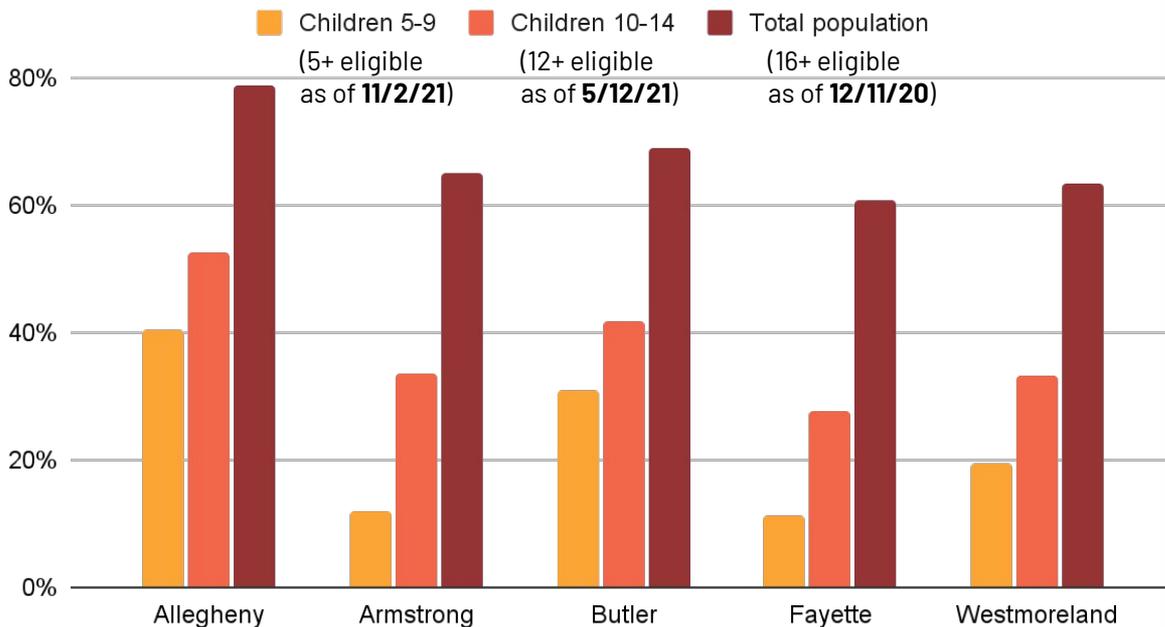




Vaccination Rates: Children 5-14, Five-County Region



Vaccination Rates by County (at least one dose)



Vaccination in the region continues to increase modestly for young people, but many children remain unvaccinated, which leaves them more susceptible to disease, hospitalization, and death.



Sources: PA Department of Health, as of Feb 11, 2022



COVID-19 Impacts at Child Care Centers



Child Care Centers have seen case surges, impacting not only those who have contracted the disease, but also those dependent on child care for work and daily life.

880
Youth Cases

Child care centers in the region reported 880 new youth cases between November 2021 and January 2022.

576
Staff Cases

Child care centers in the region reported 576 new staff cases between November 2021 and January 2022.

41%
Of All Cases

41% of all cases reported by child care centers in the region during the pandemic have occurred in the last two months.





From the Field: Impacts at Child Care Centers



“ Covid-19 has really caused a huge effect on business here at Learning to Learn and for our children and parents. Having to close single classrooms or the entire center on short notice due to positive Covid cases causes lack of consistency which young children need. We strive to do our best and work through this tough time and remain positive for our families and remain humble while providing the best child care possible. ”

Latisha Humphries, M.ED
Owner/Director of Learning to Learn





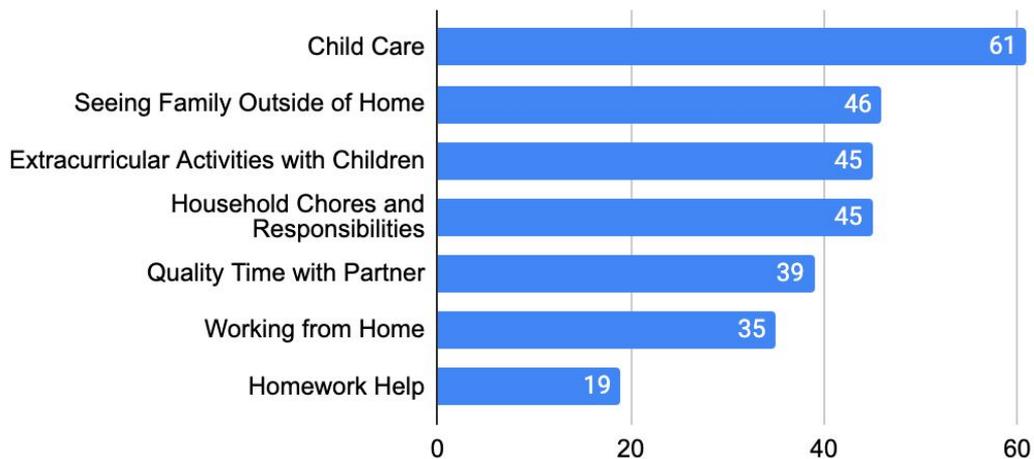
COVID-19 Challenges for Black Parents Locally



Black parents and families in the Pittsburgh area are facing a variety of challenges related to COVID-19, but respondents listed child care as the most critical area of support they need.



Areas of Support Needed

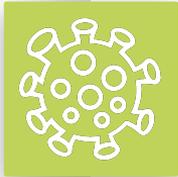


Respondents Identifying an Area of Support Needed (n=144)

The Healthy Start COVID-19 Perinatal Navigator program has been conducting surveys and focus groups to understand the challenges that Black parents are facing during the pandemic.



Source: Healthy Start COVID-19 Perinatal Navigator Survey – <https://healthystartpittsburgh.org/covid-19-perinatal-navigator/>



“ On New Year’s Eve I asked my son what he hoped for in 2022. He said, ‘Getting my shot. Seeing Gram.’ A week later, our child caught Covid at daycare.

As a family we have had to navigate daycare closures – sometimes for months, sometimes for days – work, and the constant need to make impossible calculations about the risks of this virus to our child who was too young to be vaccinated, while so many in our world were pretending that Covid was ‘over.’ I’m angry. I’m exhausted. I want better for my child.

”

- Heather S.



Mental Health

COVID-19 continues to impact the mental health of children and adults. In recent weeks, young adults and lower-income families in Pennsylvania reported experiencing more anxiety than average.

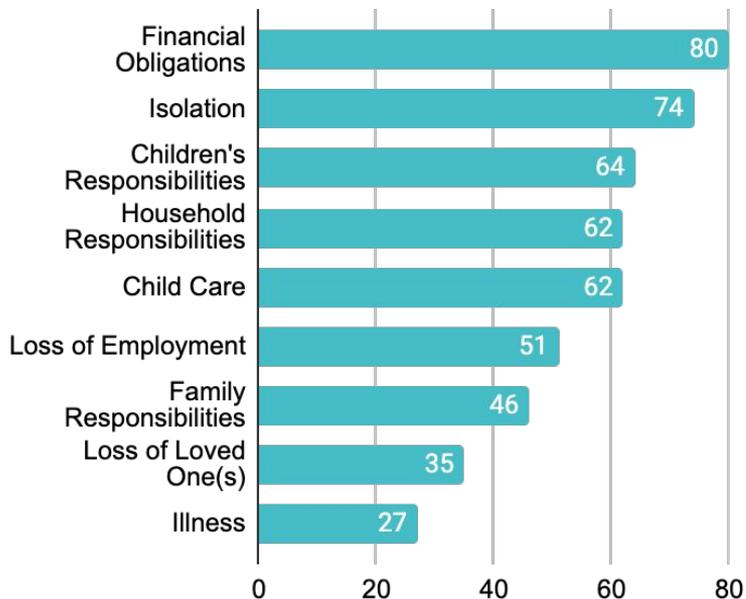
Between virtual learning and stress felt at home, students are struggling to concentrate on school. Nationally, students reported poorer emotional and mental health relative to school years before COVID-19. Students also expressed lack of confidence in how to manage stress.



Mental Health during COVID-19



Pandemic Stressors



Number of Respondents (n=144)

Survey respondents reported a variety of stressors, and focus group participants prioritized the following four **Primary Community Needs**:

- Mental Health
- Financial Support
- Child and Family Resources
- Resource and Knowledge Sharing



Another topic covered by the Healthy Start COVID-19 Perinatal Navigator program has been sources of stress during the pandemic faced by Black parents locally.

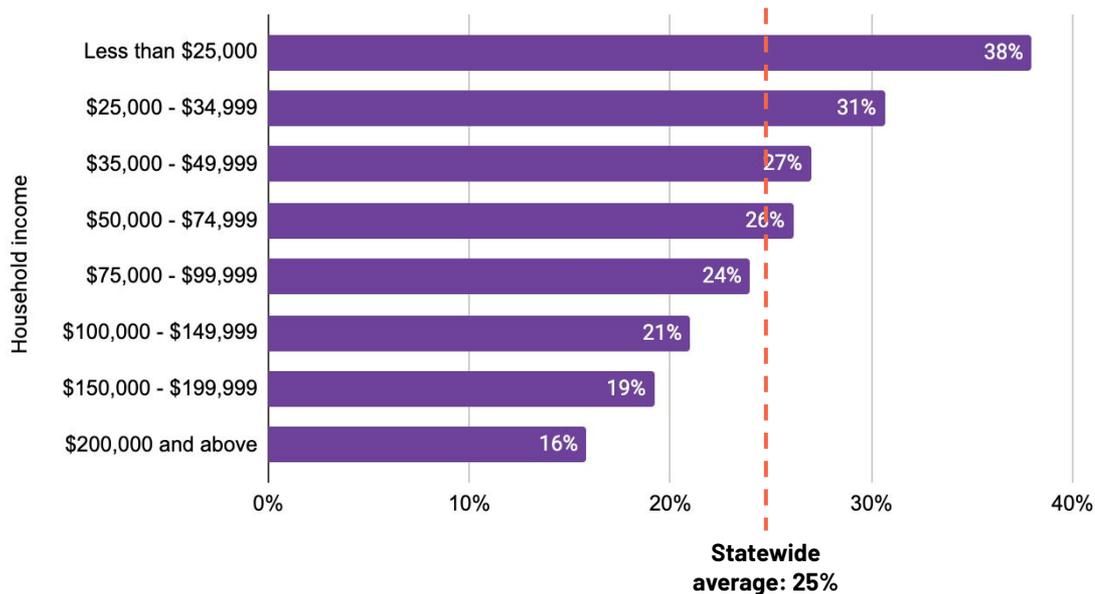


Anxiety in Low Income Households



Anxiety in PA Residents by Household Income

Percent of adults who felt anxious more days than not in the last two weeks



Anxiety rates are also highest among low-income households, with more than **30% of households earning under \$35,000** experiencing anxiety more days than not.



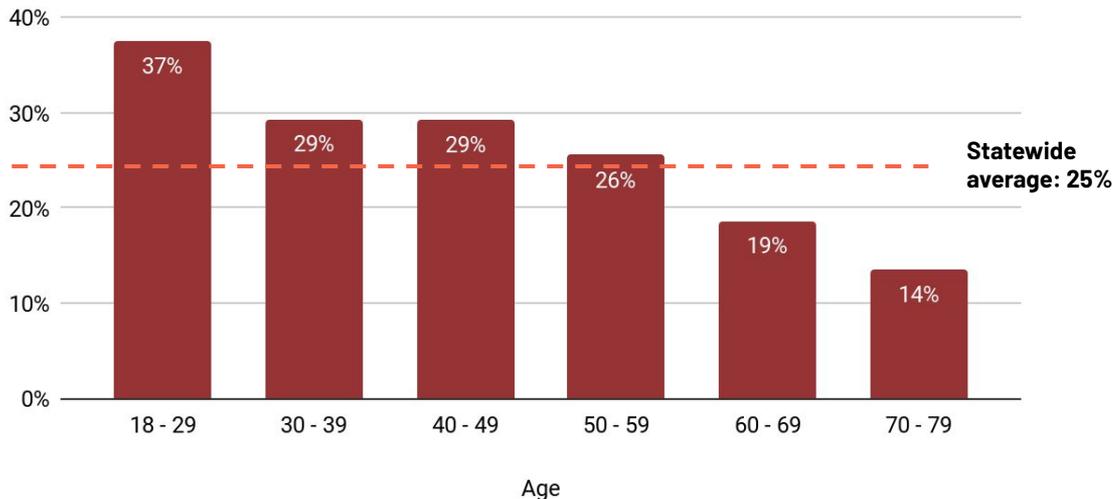
Source: Census Household Pulse Survey, January 2022

Anxiety rate is higher in younger adults



Anxiety in PA Residents by Age

Percent of adults who felt anxious more days than not in the last two weeks



In adults, anxiety is particularly pronounced among the youngest age groups, with **37% of 18-29 year olds experiencing anxiety more days than not.**

PA is in line with national numbers, and the survey does not show significant variation by race/ethnicity.



Source: Census Household Pulse Survey, January 2022



Mental Health: Children and Teens

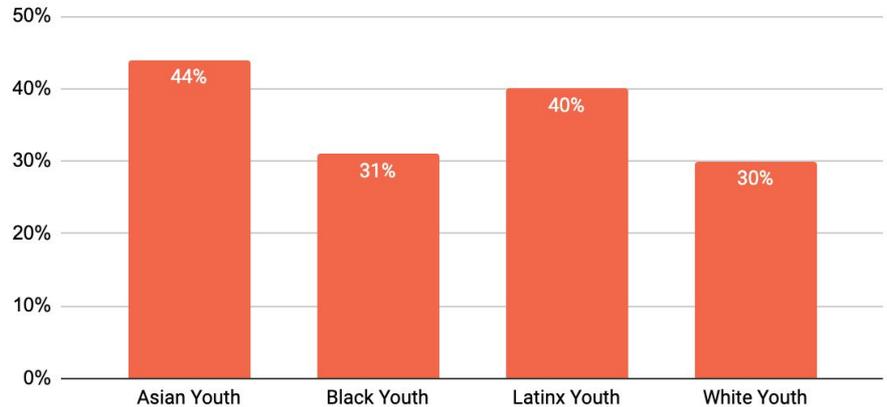


At the beginning of the pandemic, young people quickly began reporting **poorer emotional and cognitive health** compared to pre-pandemic times.

Students are also struggling to cope with stress: in [February 2021](#), **only 35% of students report they are quite confident or very confident in their ability to cope with stress**. This percentage is even lower for female students (24%) and Hispanic/Latinx students (31%).

Percent of Youth Reporting Poorer Emotional and Cognitive Health

June 2020



Source: [Center for Promise at America's Promise Alliance](#)





“ Virtual learning has caused a ripple effect in mental health with children and their parents. One student came to me and said that her mom seemed really stressed at home, and it was stressing her out. I reached out to the mom and she said she is very stressed because the unexpected virtual learning platform caused her to miss two weeks of work with no pay. ”

Behavioral Health Therapist from WPIC's Community and School Based Behavioral Health Program





Classroom Disruptions

While school year 2021-22 offered a return to in-person instruction in many districts, students are facing classroom disruptions. COVID-19 exposures among students and staff, teacher and bus driver shortages, as well as mental health or weather related days-off all contribute to classroom disruptions.

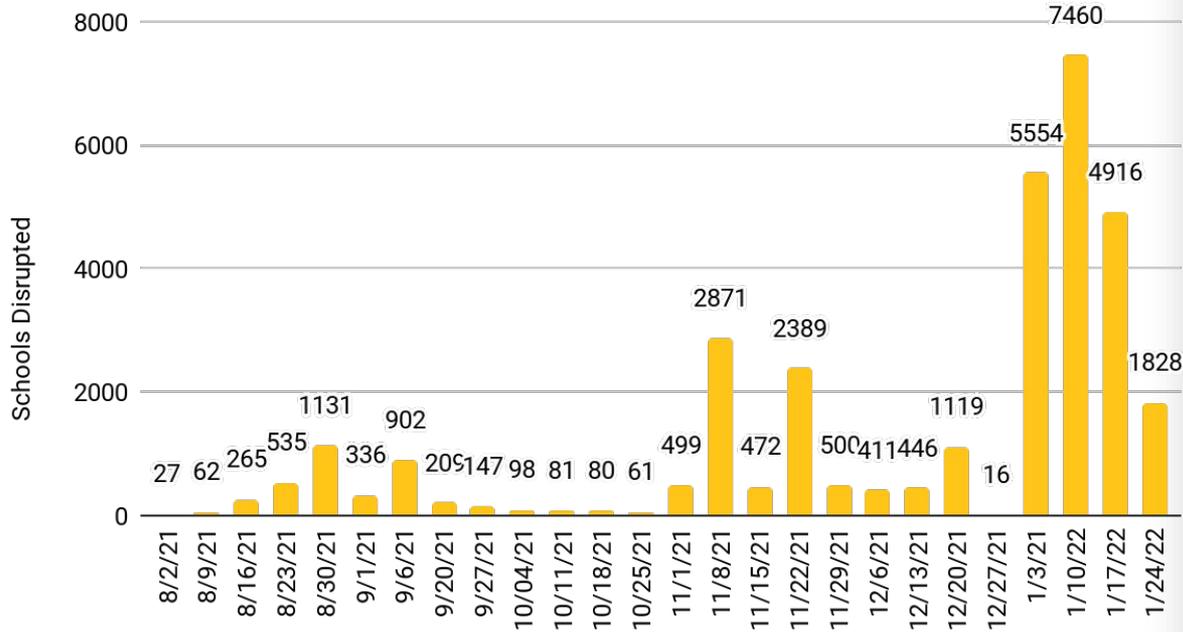
[Nationally](#), classroom disruptions are widening racial achievement gaps. [Locally](#), chronic absenteeism is up and disparately impacting Black and economically disadvantaged students at Pittsburgh Public Schools.



Classroom Disruptions



National School Disruptions by Week



Pandemic related school disruptions surged in January 2022. Though on a smaller scale, schools saw a similar trend at the start of the school year. A pattern of progressively larger peaks coinciding with new variants or holidays throughout the fall term.



Source: Burbio's K-12 School Opening Tracker



Vulnerable students face more disruptions



COVID-19 is disrupting classrooms nationally, though [disappropriate burden](#), from transportation barriers to health care cost, is often placed on students in less-resourced districts.

Meanwhile, the racial achievement gap grows: the math gap between majority Black and white schools is now [3 months wider](#) than before the pandemic.

17%

Of students attending school in-person have experienced disruptions in school year 2021-22.

5.5

Average number of days students experiencing disruptions are out of school.

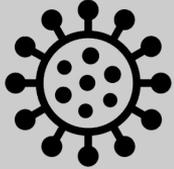
2.7x

Factor by which chronic absenteeism increased since before the pandemic.

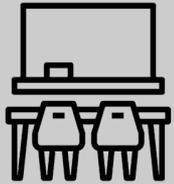




Classroom disruptions widen disparities



43.1% of PPS students have been **chronically absent** (missed 10+ days) in 2021-22 school year, compared to 24.4 in 2020-21 and 27.4 in 2019-2020.



During school year 2021-22, **½ of Black PPS students** have been chronically absent school year 2021-22, compared to **⅓ of white students**.



Economically disadvantaged students are **twice as likely** to be chronically absent this school year than those who are not.

Chronic absenteeism is a challenge nationally, raising further concerns of learning outcomes. [NWEA](#) found math achievement fell 8-12 percentile points and reading 3-6 percentile points in school year 2020-21.





School Attendance



Because data are not available across all school districts, it's unclear how attendance at school in 2021 compares to prior years. Focus on Attendance and CYF truancy referrals were down in 2021 from 2020, which could be a positive sign, but COVID-19 challenges at schools may be affecting reporting.

Focus on Attendance

1,479
Referrals

from Sep 1 2021 – Feb 7 2022
Down from 2,317 in the
same period from the prior year

CYF Truancy

163
Referrals

from Sep 1 2021 – Feb 7 2022
Down from 485 in the
same period from the prior year

[Attendance Works](#) offers [case studies on incentivizing attendance](#) but acknowledges that perfect attendance is not the goal, stressing the importance of staying home when sick.



More Information & Previous Reports

- Previous reports:
 - [Community Pulse Report: September '20](#)
 - [Community Pulse Report: October '20](#)
 - [Community Pulse Report: November/December '20](#)
 - [Community Pulse Report: January '21](#)
 - [Community Pulse Report: February '21](#)
 - [Community Pulse Report: April '21](#)
 - [Community Pulse Report: June '21](#)
 - [Community Pulse Report: August '21](#)
 - [Community Pulse Report: October '21](#)
 - [Community Pulse Report: December '21](#)