

**The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on
High School Attendance from 2020-2024
with a focus on
Special Education Students
at James Hillhouse High School in New Haven, CT**

Aspiring Leaders in Special Education Cohort 2
UConn Center for Excellence in Developmental
Disabilities
June 1, 2024

James Hillhouse High School

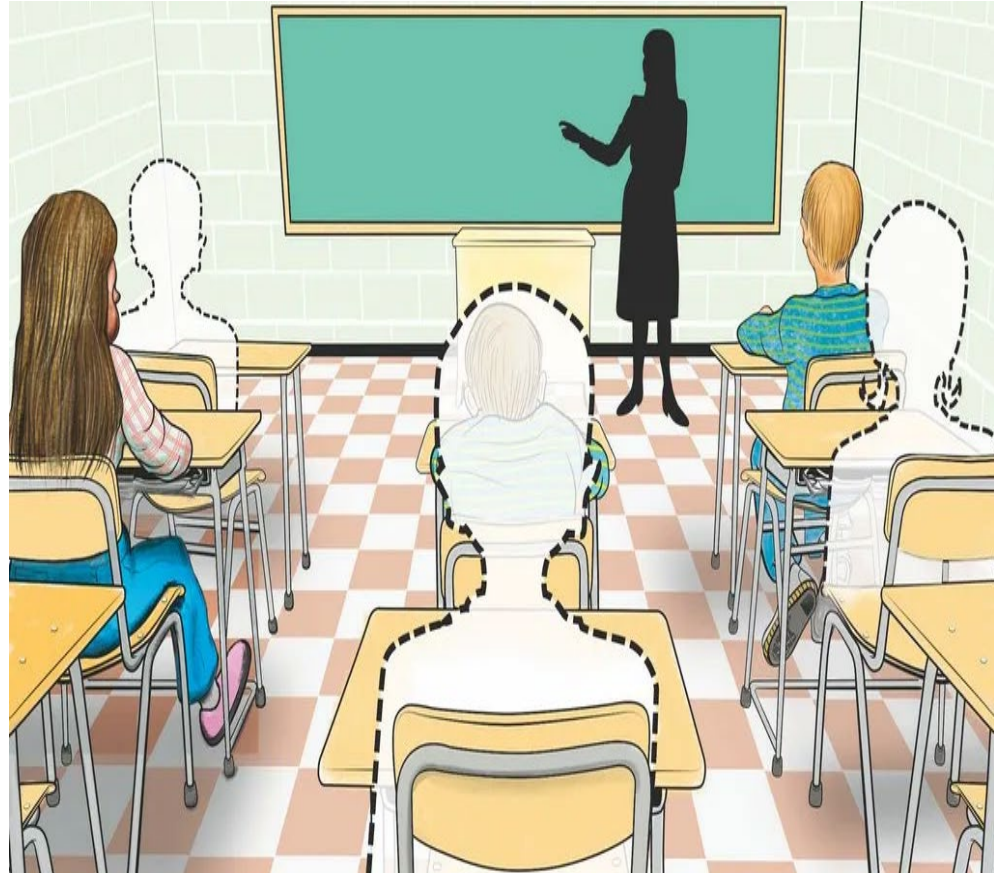
- Sherman Parkway, New Haven
- Established in 1869
- Oldest high school in New Haven with a storied and prestigious history, hence the name the 'Academics'
- 1,139 students currently enrolled.
- 94.7% Minority enrollment
- Chronic absenteeism has been a serious problem since the abandonment of an absence policy.



****Chronic absenteeism is defined as missing 10 percent or more of a school year.**

- According to a March 29, 2023, article, *Why School Absences Have Exploded Almost Everywhere*, from the New York Times, “The share of U.S. students who are chronically absent has spiked since the pandemic.”
- The pandemic changed families’ lives and the culture of education: “Our relationship with school became optional.”

Mervosh, S., & Paris, F. (2024, March 29). Why school absences have “Exploded” almost everywhere. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from www.nytimes.com.



'Absence' Definitions as Defined by EdSight

- A student is **in attendance** if they spend at least half the day participating in school activities.
- A student is **chronically absent** if they are absent for any reason for 10% or more school days.
- A student is **truant** if they have four unexcused absences in a month or ten unexcused absences in a school year.

TRUANCY

Counts only unexcused absences.

Emphasizes compliance with school rules.

Relies on legal and administrative solutions.

VS.

CHRONIC ABSENCE

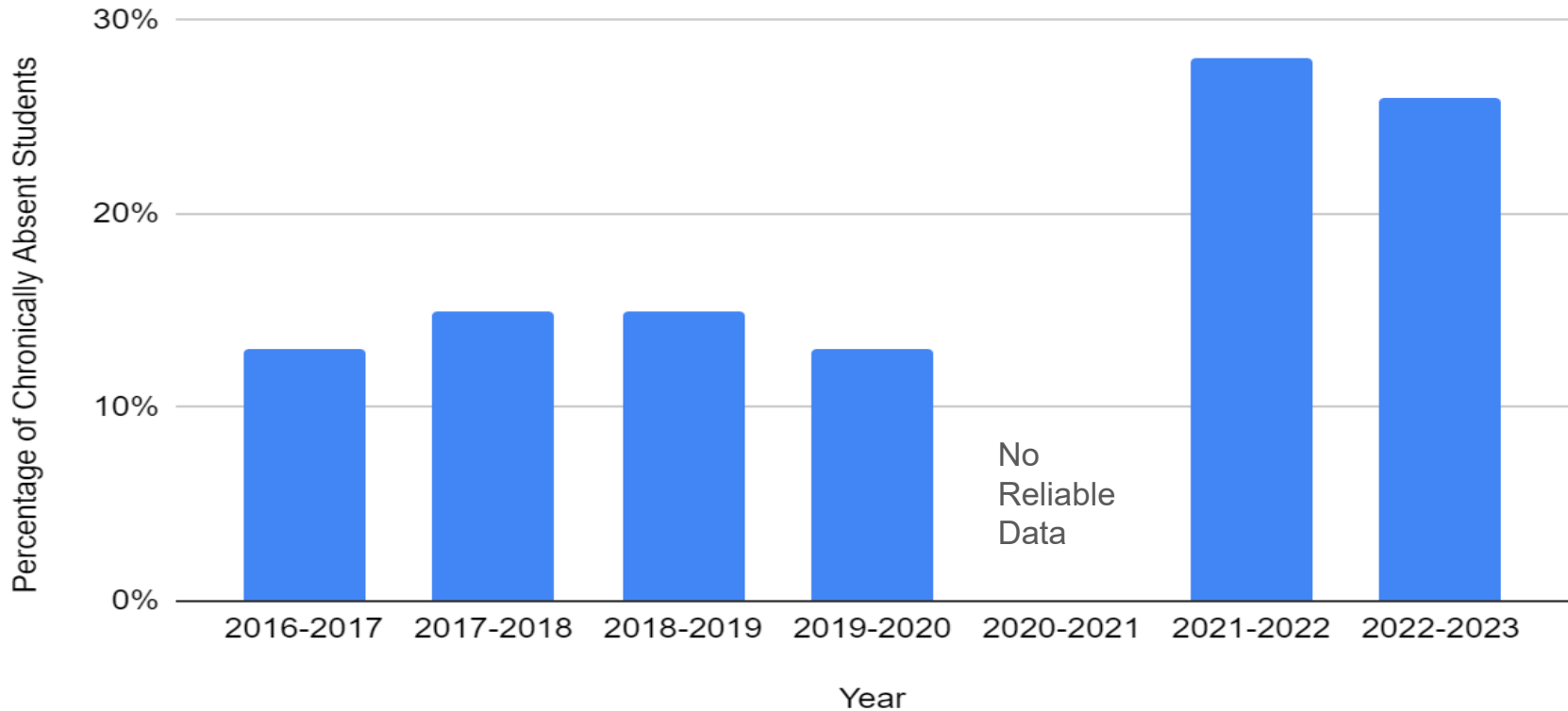
Counts all absences: excused, unexcused, and suspensions.

Emphasizes academic impact of missed days.

Uses community-based, positive strategies.

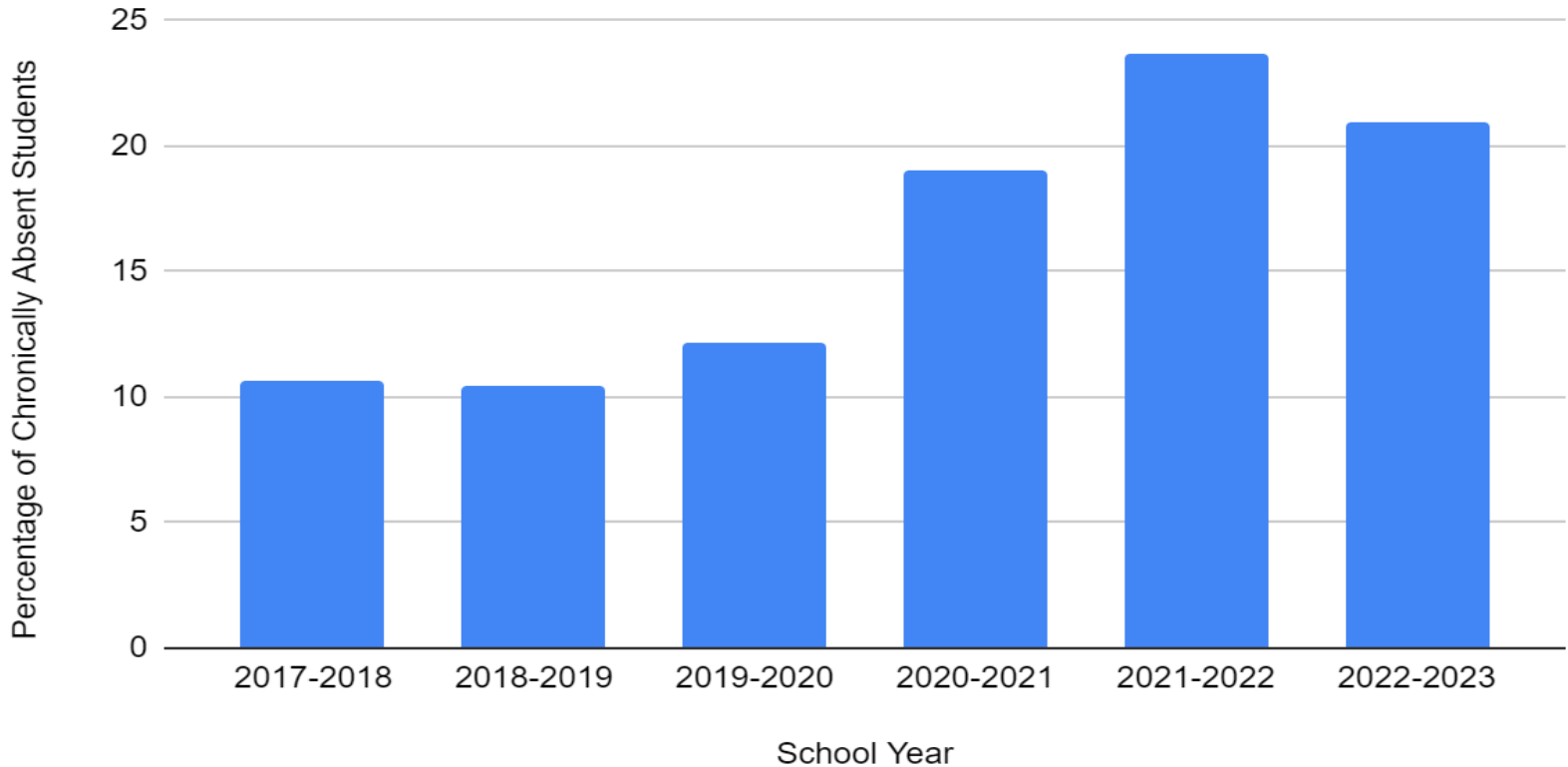
National Absence Data (2016 - 2023)

Percentage of Chronically Absent Students vs. Year

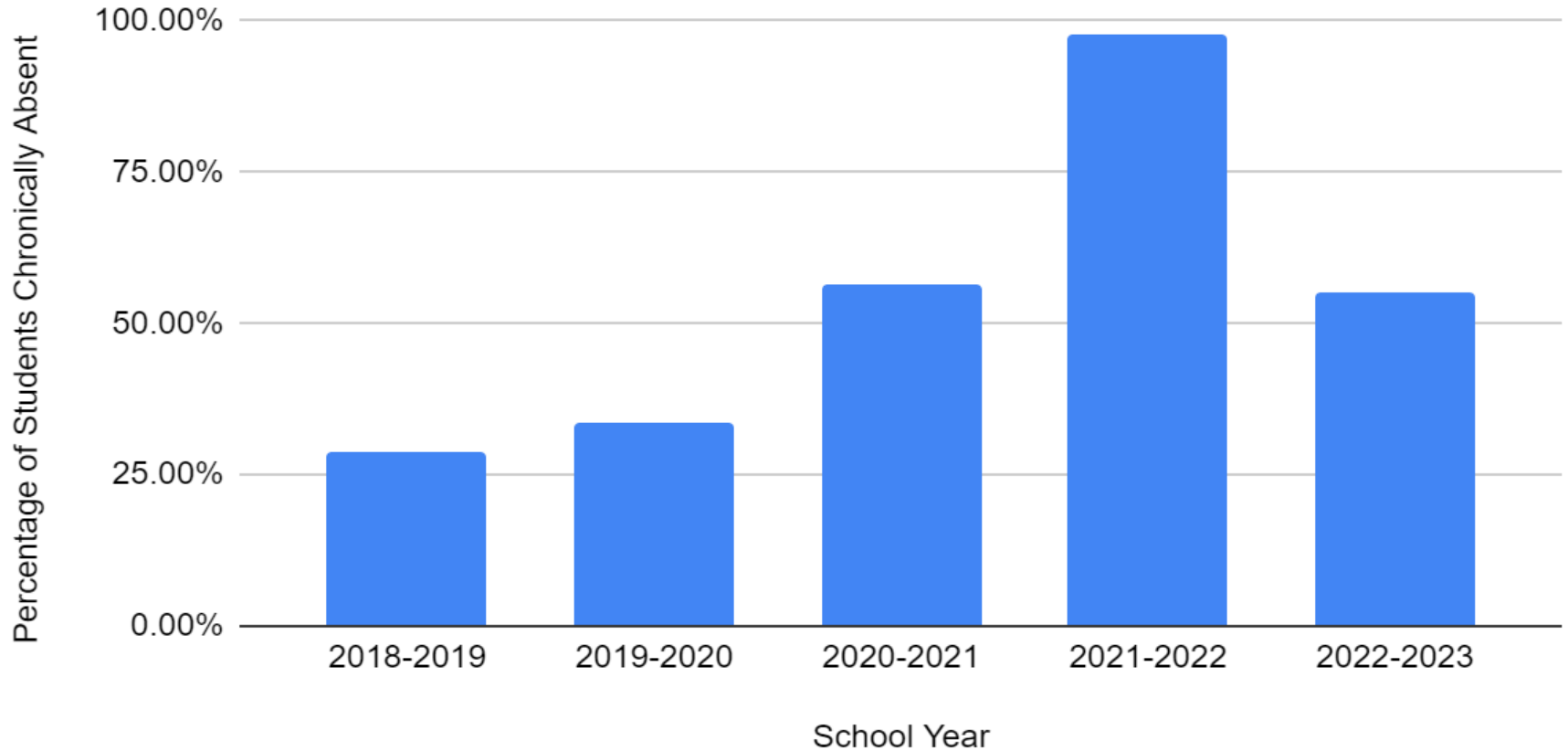


Connecticut Absence Data (2017-2023)

Percentage of Chronically Absent Students vs. School Year

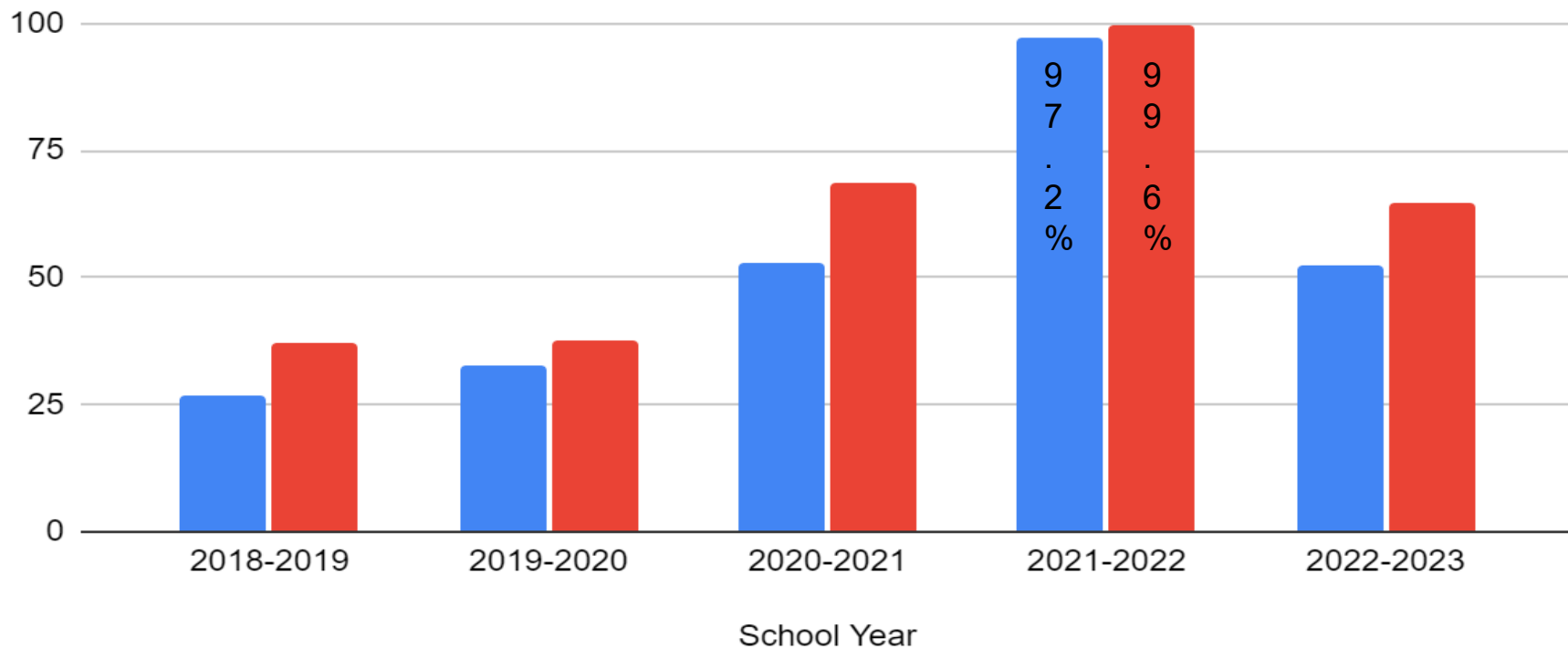


Percentage of Students Chronically Absent at James Hillhouse High School (2018-2023)



Chronic Absenteeism Non-Special Education versus Special Education (2018-2023)

■ Non-Special Education ■ Special Education



Recent Special Education Students with Chronic Absenteeism Reasons for Missing School

- 16- year-old male.
- 9th grade due to credits.
- Went to visit family in the Dominican Republic the week before Christmas and did not return until the end of March.
- Failed 3rd Marking Period (0%).

- 17-year old female.
- 10th grade due to credits.
- Rarely attends school because she is working.
- Passed 3rd Marking Period (D-range).

The Effects of Missing School on Special Education Students

“The negative consequences of missing school are well documented for general education students — and are especially detrimental to students with special needs” (Gonen, 2023)

- Special education students who are chronically absent aren't receiving the modifications and accommodations they need in order to complete assignments to the best of their ability.
- Many students report that they can just 'make up the work' and do not have to be present in class, however, they are missing essential instruction.
- IEP goals cannot be met if the student is not present in school.

What Needs to Change:

- ❖ Students see value in school.
- ❖ Students are engaged in school.
- ❖ Students have at least one adult who they can confide in within the school setting.
- ❖ Students have what their home needs met in order to get to school.
- ❖ Students have reliable transportation to and from school.
- ❖ Students have the resources they need in order to succeed.

****This list was brainstormed via 4 members the Academic Leadership Team with guidance from Data Wise Project with Harvard Graduate School of Education.

So, Now What.....

- We termed the students who are chronically absent as *disengaged*.
- We developed a survey for students to take to determine the most significant reason(s) for their chronic absenteeism/disengagement with school.
- [Hillhouse Student Engagement Survey](#)
- We felt the areas covered in the survey would elicit their level of engagement with school.
- Piloting will be during Language Arts classes, as all students, even seniors are enrolled.

Then.....

- The data will be analyzed for statistically significant answers.
- Focus groups will be created to discuss strategies to tackle strategies to combat the areas that are affecting student disengagement/chronic absenteeism.
- My role will be to focus on the 'disengagement/chronic absenteeism' of special education students or 504 students.



- ✓ Right now, there are more questions than answers.
- ✓ Baseline data is the goal.

Strategies to Engage Reluctant Learners

www.thepathway2success.com



Focus on the Relationship



Create a Safe Learning Space



Use Student Strengths



Use Interests in Content



Daily Emotions Check-In



Give Meaningful Responsibilities



Consider Physical Needs



Provide Accommodations



Celebrate Small Wins



Give Choice



Meet Privately



Use Peer Tutoring

don't

poor

poverty

insecurity

transportation

classes

siblings

attending

food

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References

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