



## 10 Surprising Reasons Students Don't Go To School

[https://www.communitiesinschools.org/media/filer\\_public/91/17/9117110a-fcda-458e-8066-1726e2f48b25/obstacles\\_infographic\\_interactive.pdf](https://www.communitiesinschools.org/media/filer_public/91/17/9117110a-fcda-458e-8066-1726e2f48b25/obstacles_infographic_interactive.pdf)

Chronic school absenteeism, starting as early as preschool and kindergarten, puts students at risk for poor school performance and school dropout, which in turn, puts them at risk for unhealthy behaviors as adolescents and young adults as well as poor long-term health outcomes. American Academy of Pediatrics. (2019). The Link Between School Attendance and Good Health. *Pediatrics*, 143(2), e20183648.

<https://publications.aap.org/pediatrics/article/143/2/e20183648/37326/The-Link-Between-School-Attendance-and-Good-Health?autologonchecked=redirected>

Communities in Schools Organization has identified 10 surprising reasons why students are missing school. Here is the list and what APS is doing to remove barriers to learning.

### 1. They are Hungry

According to the 2019 Feeding America Data, 24.1% of New Mexico Children struggle with Food Insecurity. This equates to 1,325 school age children in Alamogordo, based on current enrollment. Children struggling with food insecurity may be at greater risk for stunted development, anemia and asthma, oral health problems and hospitalization. Overall, food insecurity is linked with poorer physical quality of life, which may prevent children from fully engaging in daily activities. At school, food-insecure children are at increased risk of falling behind their food-secure peers both academically and socially; food insecurity is linked to lower reading and mathematics test scores, and they may be more likely to exhibit behavioral problems, including hyperactivity, aggression and anxiety. [Feeding America. \(n.d.\). 2017 Map the Meal Gap: Child Food Insecurity.](#)

[https://www.feedingamerica.org/sites/default/files/2019-05/2017-map-the-meal-gap-child-food-insecurity\\_0.pdf](https://www.feedingamerica.org/sites/default/files/2019-05/2017-map-the-meal-gap-child-food-insecurity_0.pdf)

- Alamogordo Public Schools supports the Roadrunner Food banks. Parents can come once a month and get groceries free of charge.
- Our Tiger Care Center has food that can be given out based on referral from the school for families with identified need

- The Backpack program sponsored by Love Inc. and APS provides weekend food items for students with identified needs
- Our students eligible for McKinney Vento Resources ( Homeless) also get a bag of goodies once a month.
- After school dinners for anyone attending a supervised afterschool program to include athletic practices. The meal consists of 5 component snack like items, to include a fruit, vegetable, protein, grain and a milk.
- Holiday Meals during Thanksgiving delivered to several at risk students.
- Holiday Meals available for all children to include 10 breakfast and 10 lunch for the Christmas break.

## 2. **They Can't See The Blackboard**

The Health Services team completes vision and hearing on designated classes every year. Last year, we had over 330 referrals for vision. Regular exams had been postponed for years due to Covid. Optometrists and Ophthalmologists were booked a year out and students were at risk for having their education impacted.

- Alamogordo Public Schools works closely with the Lion's Club to assist with appointments and with the costs of the exam and glasses
- The Lion's Club also assisted with getting a spare pair for those students that qualified for an extra pair of glasses for school.
- When available with parent permission, APS partners with a vision company(s) that provide services at the school site to provide exams and glasses during the school day.
- APS also has a social worker that can assist with helping eligible children qualify for Medicaid

### 3. They Don't Have Shoes or Clothes



One of the most visible signs of a child in poverty is a pair of worn-out, ill-fitting shoes. No one likes to be left out, mocked, or in pain. Kids who can't afford proper athletic shoes face that every day at school, leading to lifelong challenges. Old shoes hinder kids from fully participating and engaging in childhood experiences at school and at play. And with 1 in 3 U.S. children living in a low-income family, there are millions of kids across the country in need of new shoes.

Shoes That Fit. (n.d.). Home. <https://www.shoesthatfit.org/>

- APS Tiger Care Center has purchased shoes through the McKinney Vento Funding for students that are homeless. We have also received funding from businesses and private donors to help keep the shelves stocked.
- APS continues to look for grants and resources to meet the needs of students and shoes has been an ongoing challenge to assure new shoes in every size. We are committed to providing new shoes to prevent spreading infections and odor.

Clothes are also available at the new APS Tiger Care Center. A child can come and take a shower, get new clothes ( 3 outfits, shoes, coat and underclothes) as needed per semester. Students are eligible if they meet the definition of homeless or by school referral.

- APS accepts donations of new and gently used clothing at the HUB on the admin complex. McKinney Vento Grant Funding is also used to fill in the gaps of needed items.

#### 4. They are Homeless

The McKinney-Vento Act defines homeless children as “individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence.” This definition includes (but is not limited to) children who are:

- sharing housing due to economic hardship or loss of housing (e.g. doubled-up)
- living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or campgrounds
- living in emergency or transitional shelters
- sleeping in places unfit for human habitation (e.g. park benches)
- living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, etc.

Institute for Children, Poverty & Homelessness. (n.d.). Home.  
<https://www.icphusa.org/mkv/>

Last year, APS had approximately 180 students that were identified as meeting the above criteria and were assisted through outreach programs. Although APS cannot directly change housing opportunities, APS provides the following:

- refer to agencies that had hotel vouchers
- provide information on housing applications
- give out sleeping bags for students
- provide food
- provide clothes
- provide toiletries
- provide school site laundry assistance (FreshStart Program)
- Assist with Medicaid Enrollment for those that are eligible
- New this year: Provide a place to shower at the Tiger Care Center

## 5. They Can't Get There

If students must walk through a dangerous or unsafe neighborhood or if they do not have adequate transportation, they may miss school.

*“Having to travel through dangerous streets is leading kids to miss school,” says lead author Johns Hopkins sociologist Julia Burdick-Will, PhD. “Not showing up for school has important academic consequences and students who must prioritize their own personal safety over attendance have a clear disadvantage.” Social Work Today. (n.d.). Dangerous School Commutes Lead to Student Absenteeism. [https://www.socialworktoday.com/news/dn\\_022119.shtml](https://www.socialworktoday.com/news/dn_022119.shtml)*

- APS has looked closely into this issue and are developing a plan for a **2nd Chance bus route**. This program will assist students with transportation issues that may not be addressed with the usual bus route. If a child misses the bus or is afraid to walk to school, we do not want them to miss a full day of school. Students must have extenuating circumstances and be eligible for this assistance.

## 6. They are in Poor Health

In the United States, more than 40% of school-aged children and adolescents have at least one chronic health condition,<sup>1</sup> such as asthma, obesity, other physical conditions, and behavior/learning problems. The healthcare needs of children with chronic illness can be complex and continuous and includes both daily management and addressing potential emergencies.

- APS has committed to assuring every student has access to a registered nurse in their school.
- Emergency Medications are available in schools. Epinephrine to treat anaphylaxis ( life-threatening allergies) occurrence on campus and Narcan to reverse an opioid overdose.
- Automatic Emergency Defibrillators are also onsite of every school and athletic facility to use in the event of a cardiac arrest on campus.
- Dental Screenings
- Medicaid Services
- **New this year:** Telehealth units available in each health office for quick access to urgent care. Parents must be present onsite or on the phone. Appointment is done in the health office and a child may return to class if not contagious and feeling well. The

parent is able to stay at work and access medical care for their child. Strep, Flu, RSV and Covid tests may be done during the appointment.

### **7. They Need School Supplies**

In disadvantaged communities, many children lack basic school supplies, hindering their ability to engage in their studies fully. Items such as notebooks, pencils, erasers, and rulers may seem small, but they profoundly impact a child's educational journey.

- The Tiger Care Center provides school supplies and backpacks for students in need. These supplies can be picked up at the center or delivered to the school by request. These supplies are often obtained from community outreach that sends them to the school district.
- The Back to School Block Party is also a venue for our students to get services and school supplies before the start of school. This event occurs on the last Friday of July and provides school supplies, free sports physicals, vaccinations and community resources. .

### **8. They Need To Support Their Family.**

Nationally, the average welfare check for one parent and two children is \$478 per month. Twenty years ago, it was \$408. The national average added for a baby born to a family already on welfare is \$60. U.S. Department of Education. (n.d.). . Educating Students Who Live In Poverty.<https://www2.ed.gov/programs/slcp/2012thematicmtg/studentpovty.pdf>.

At times, teens need to work to make ends meet or stay home as a caretaker for younger siblings or their elders

- The Alamogordo Public School District has been working on bridging the gap between school and the workforce by partnering with local businesses to create unique learning opportunities that offer real-life work experience and the opportunity to use skills learned in the classroom. The Work Based Learning program provides a structured internship program for students in grades 11 or 12 and offers students both high school credit and competitive compensation. This is a win-win scenario for students and local businesses. This unique program was launched this school year with in-district work opportunities and will roll out in the 24/25 school year with community and business partnerships.

## 9. They Feel Like They Don't Fit In

When students feel a sense of belonging in the classroom, it can increase their educational success and motivational outcomes in multiple ways, and teachers can help create this feeling of belonging by building connections between classroom and community, according to DeLeon Gray, Ph.D. NC State College of Education. (2021, October 21). Why is it important for students to feel a sense of belonging at school? "Students choose to be in environments that make them feel a sense of fit," says Associate Professor DeLeon Gra.

<https://ced.ncsu.edu/news/2021/10/21/why-is-it-important-for-students-to-feel-a-sense-of-belonging-at-school-students-choose-to-be-in-environments-that-make-them-feel-a-sense-of-fit-says-associate-professor-deleon-gra/>

- APS provides counselors at each school. Many of which are independently licensed therapists. Elementary counselors provide classes in the classroom to support healthy relationships and bully prevention. Middle/High School counselors support students in the development of career planning and provide education on suicide prevention and intervention.
- The APS HOPE Team (consisting of licensed therapists and social workers) addresses specific concerns at schools that arise as well as parenting classes to inform parents of issues and concerns that are facing our youth
- The HOPE team also provides a Kindness Campaign in the month of February. This anti bullying initiative encourages all students to be kind to one another through positive messages and positive encouragement.
- The HOPE team monitors a 24 hour phone line to support students/families in crisis and makes appropriate referrals for ongoing therapy support or or crisis treatment as needed.
- When a student has been in a psychiatric hospital and is returning to school, the HOPE team develops a plan with parents and teachers to set them up for success and ease back into the school setting while addressing potential triggers and coping strategies .
- If a student would benefit by ongoing therapy and the parent cannot take off work for ongoing appointments, APS offers Telehealth appointments or onsite treatment with an outside therapist as coordinated by the parent with appropriate MOU's in place for the school district.

## 10. They Need A Caring Adult In Their Life

Children and adolescents who have a formal or informal “mentor-like” relationship with someone outside their home are less likely to have externalizing behavior problems (bullying) and internalizing problems (depression). This group is also more likely to complete tasks they start, remain calm in the face of challenges, show interest in learning new things, volunteer in the community, engage in physical activities, participate in out-of-school time activities, and be engaged in school. Additionally, those who have a caring adult outside the home are more likely to talk with their parents about “things that really matter.” These results suggest that mentor-like adults outside the home can be a resource in promoting positive well-being for children and adolescents. Child Trends. (2013). Caring Adults.

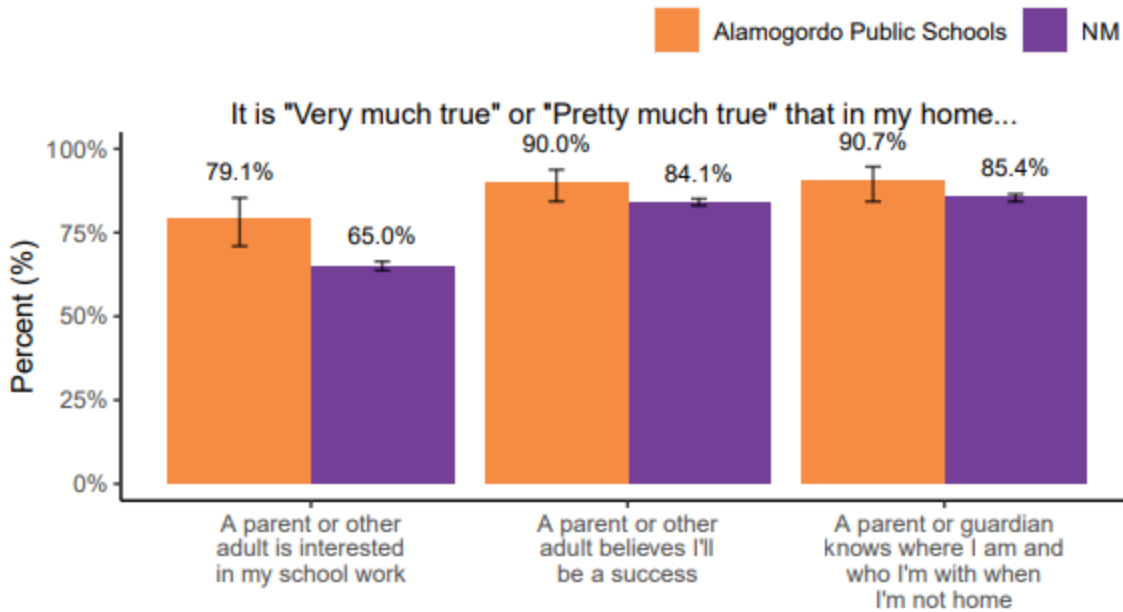
<https://cms.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/2013-54CaringAdults.pdf>

Mentoring programs, such as Big Brothers/Big Sisters are valuable resources for our students. Although teachers often mentor students, having mentors outside of the school setting that extends beyond the classroom can be the difference between a student succeeding and making self-destructive choices.

- APS supports over 160 students who have lost a parent/guardian. In an effort to offer support, APS hosts the Healing Heart Grief Camp for students K-12 each summer. Students are able to get together with other students their age that have experienced the loss of parent/guardian to share and heal. This is done under the guidance of a licensed counselor that specializes in grief therapy for children.



*Resiliency/Protective Factors in the Home  
New Mexico & Alamogordo Public Schools  
Grades 9–12, 2021*



*Resiliency/Protective Factors in the School  
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