

Student Attendance in Tennessee

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09.22.21

TENNESSEE COMPTROLLER OF THE TREASURY



What is OREA?

- Our purpose is to provide the General Assembly with objective and accurate research, evaluation, and analysis.
- Recent topics include evaluations of the Tennessee Promise program and Tennessee Textbook Commission, opioid prescribing patterns, and salaries for teachers and school nurses.
- The student attendance report was published in March of 2021.

Disclaimer

The following research is based on attendance procedures and policies in place *prior* to the COVID-19 pandemic. OREA administered surveys in December 2019 and January 2020; consequently, all resulting data is based upon the respondents' pre-pandemic experiences.

Attendance data for the 2019-20 school year was unavailable due to the pandemic.

Key definitions

- **Chronic absenteeism** includes all absences, *excused* and *unexcused*.
 - A Tennessee student is chronically absent if he or she misses 10 percent or more of instructional days (typically 18 days absent).
- **Truancy** includes *unexcused* absences only.
 - A Tennessee student is truant if he or she accrues five unexcused absences.

Methodology

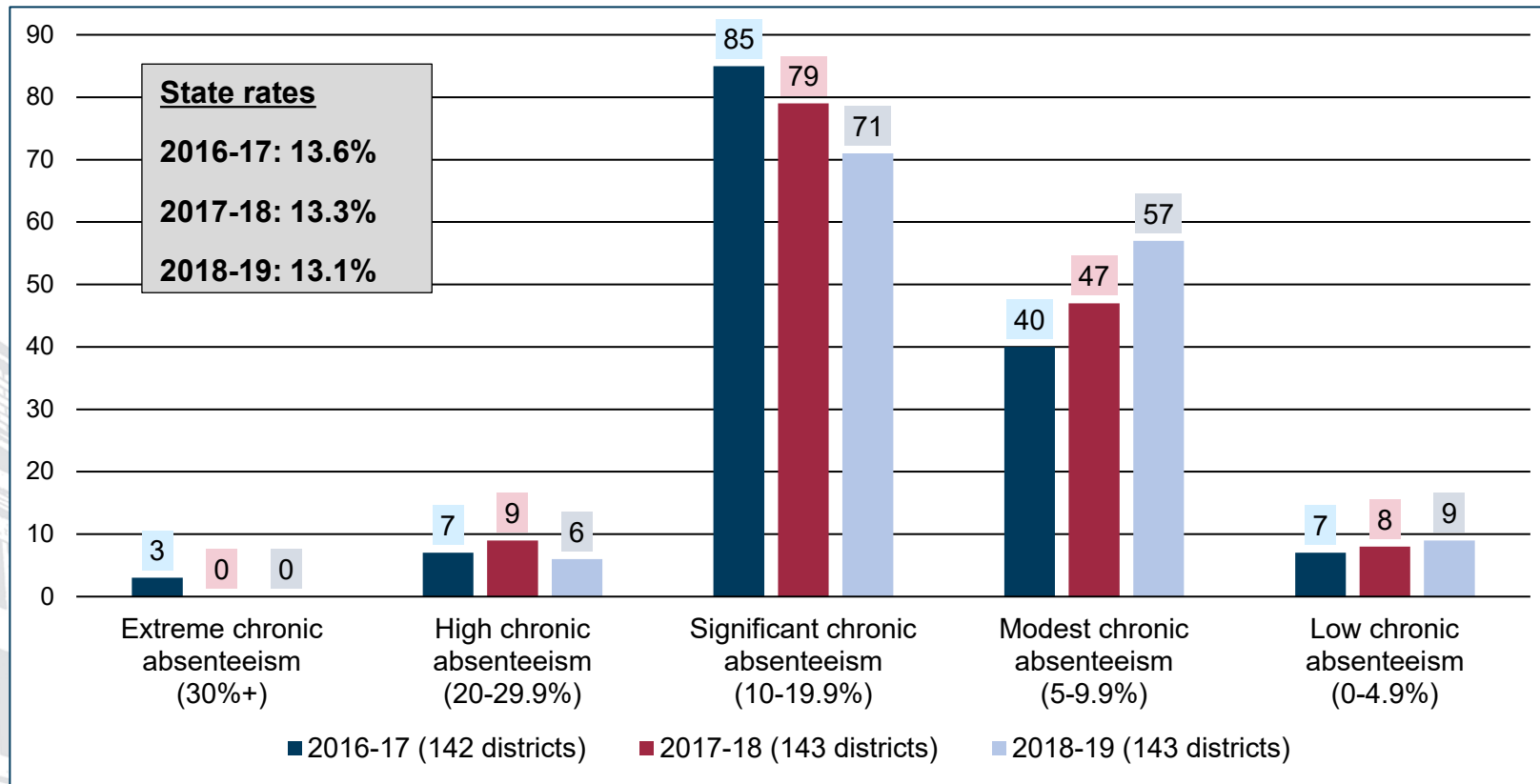
Quantitative analysis

- Chronic absenteeism data analysis for the 2016-17, 2017-18, and 2018-19 school years
 - State, district, & school-level data
 - Grade
 - Student groups
 - Race
- No truancy data available

Qualitative analysis

- Online surveys
- Total of 52 interviews
 - 27 school districts
 - 6 juvenile courts
 - 9 state agencies
 - 2 nonprofit agencies

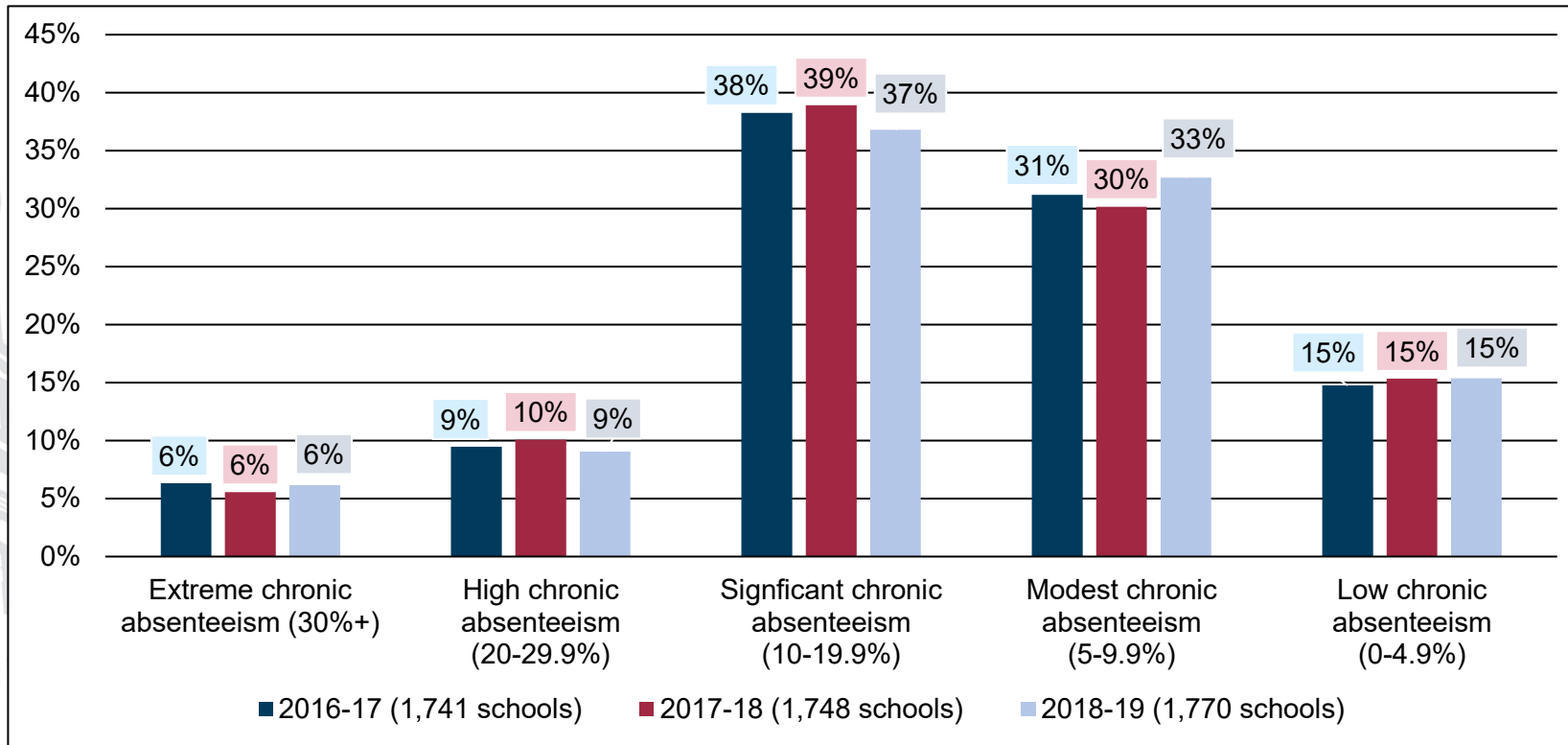
State chronic absenteeism rates have remained steady since chronic absenteeism was first included as an accountability measure on the State Report Card in 2018.



Note: OREA used level breaks and terminology found in the Data Matters report published by Attendance Works in 2018.

Source: OREA analysis of TDOE data.

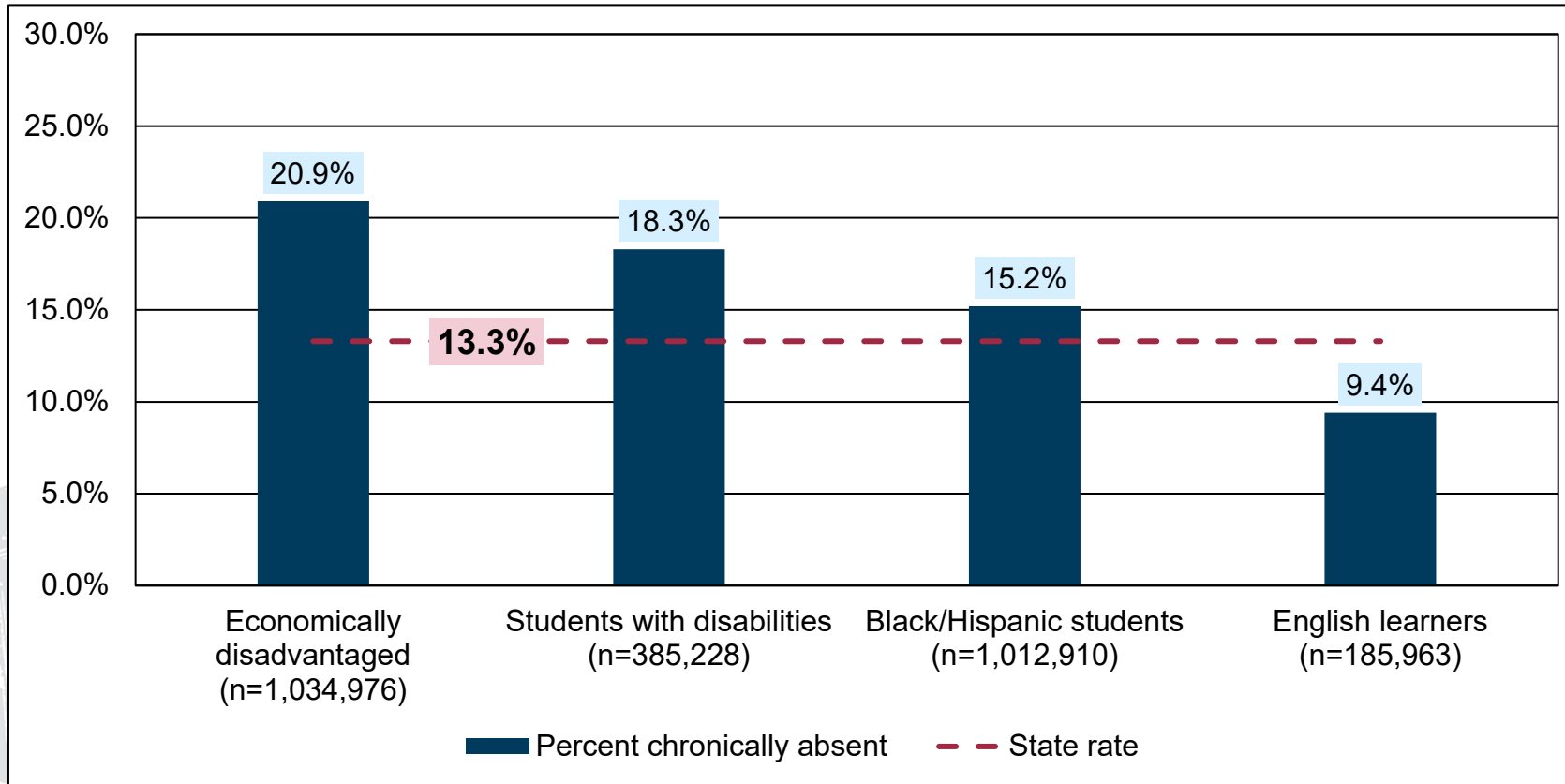
Most TN schools fall into the *modest to significant* levels of chronic absenteeism.



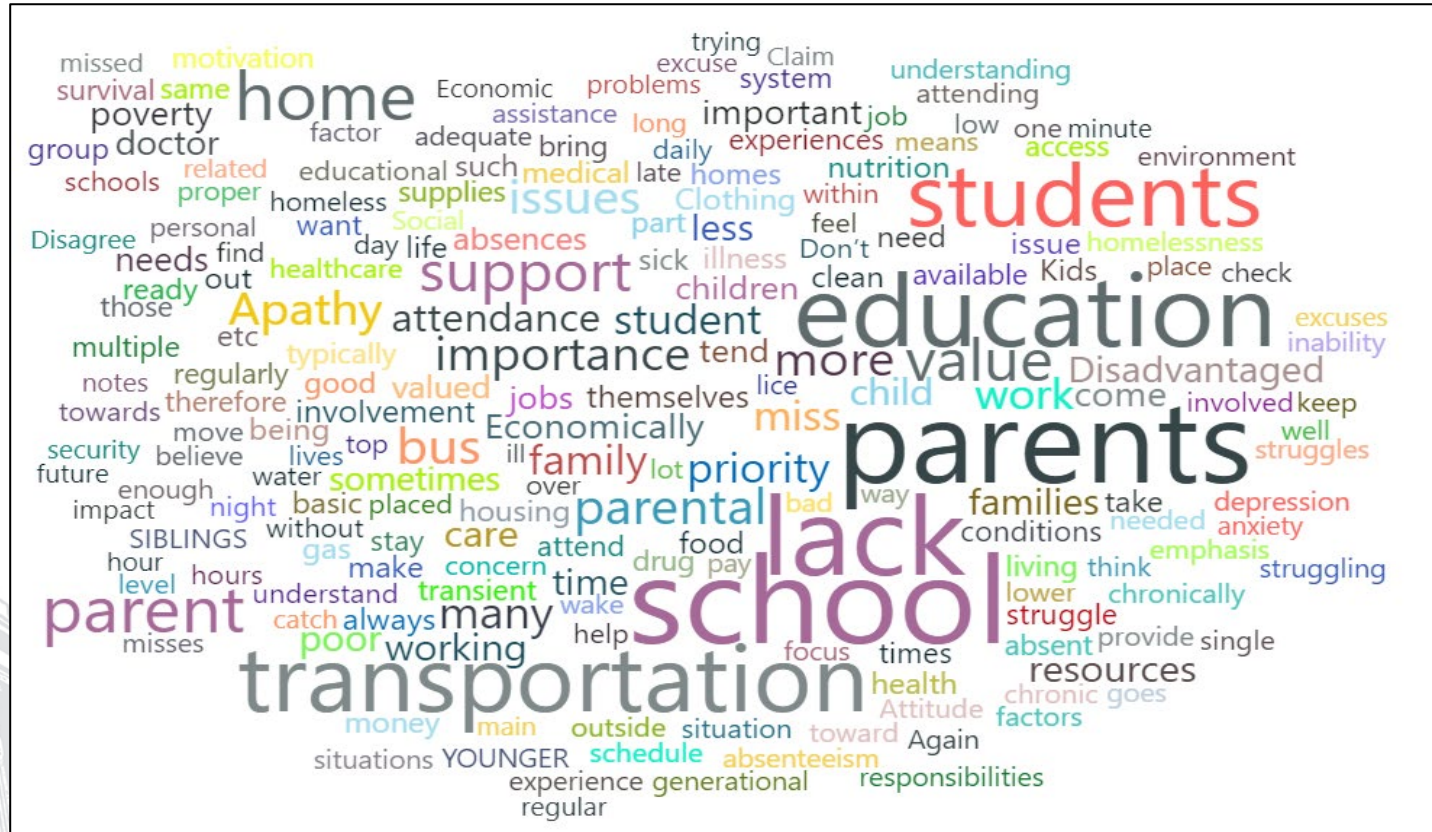
Note: OREA used level breaks and terminology found in the Data Matters report published by Attendance Works in 2018.

Source: OREA analysis of TDOE data.

Certain student groups, including **economically disadvantaged students** and **students with disabilities**, are more likely to be chronically absent than their peers.



Perceived reasons for the high chronic absenteeism of economically disadvantaged students, according to principals



Source: OREA survey of principals, December 2019.

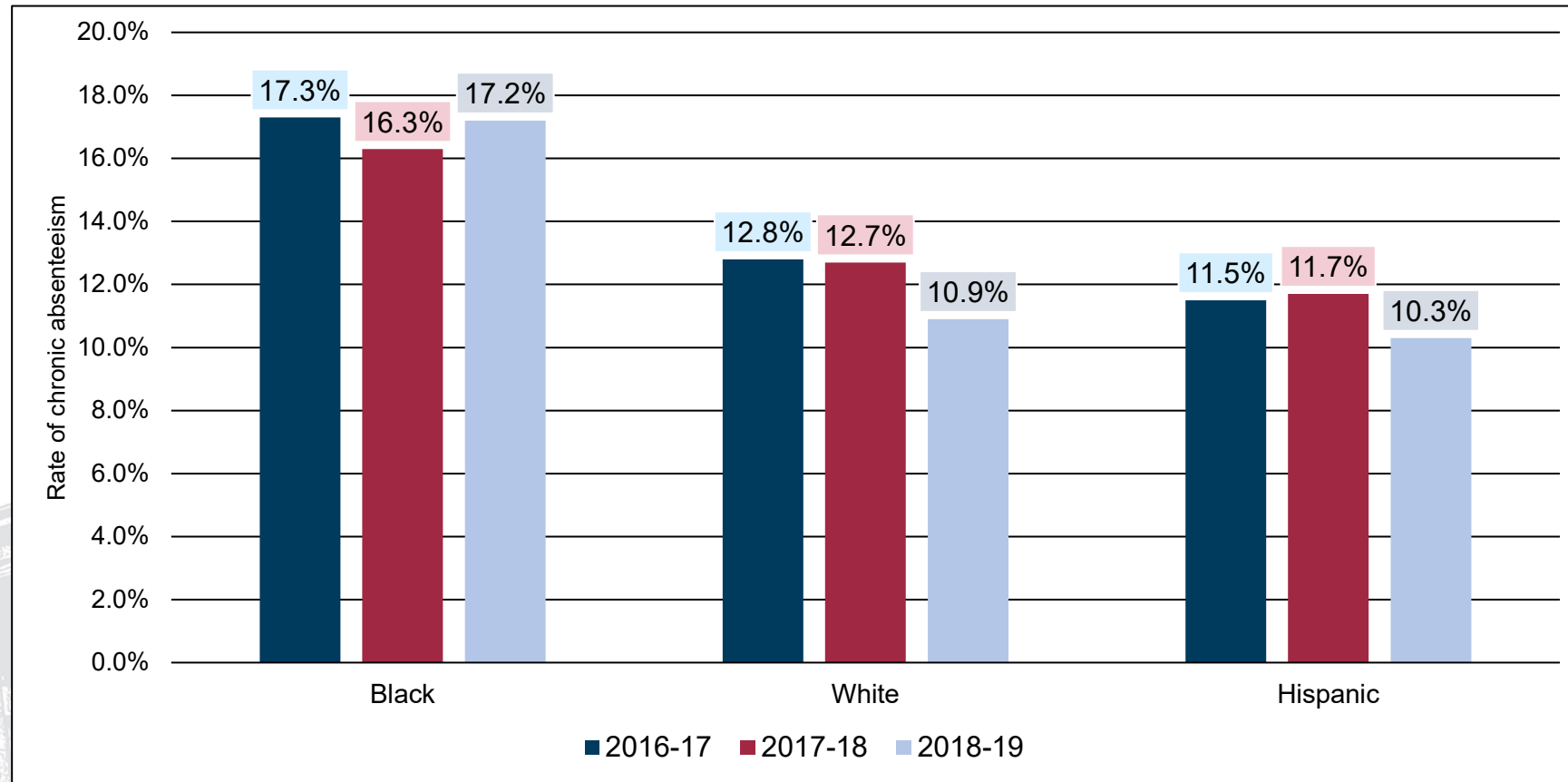


Reduced public assistance

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
January	297	74	62	59	103
February	33	73	72	83	62
March	52	96	71	65	83
April	48	75	65	78	102
May	53	80	60	57	81
June	67	74	62	84	90
July	47	45	57	77	109
August	26	58	69	121	118
September	47	106	60	126	104
October	73	64	86	141	116
November	156	99	69	106	108
December	86	97	79	82	83
Total	985	941	812	1,079	1,159

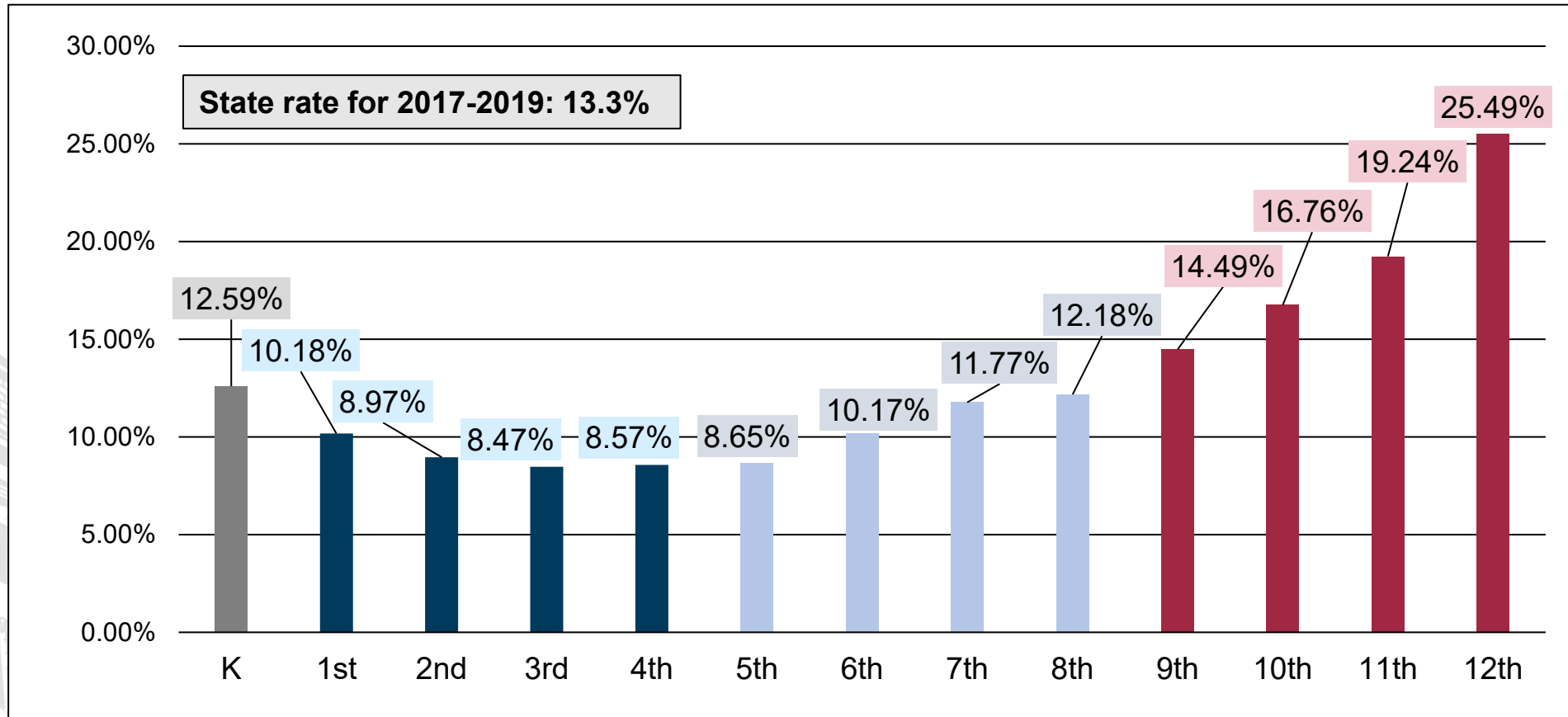
Source: Tennessee Department of Human Resources.

Chronic absenteeism by racial group



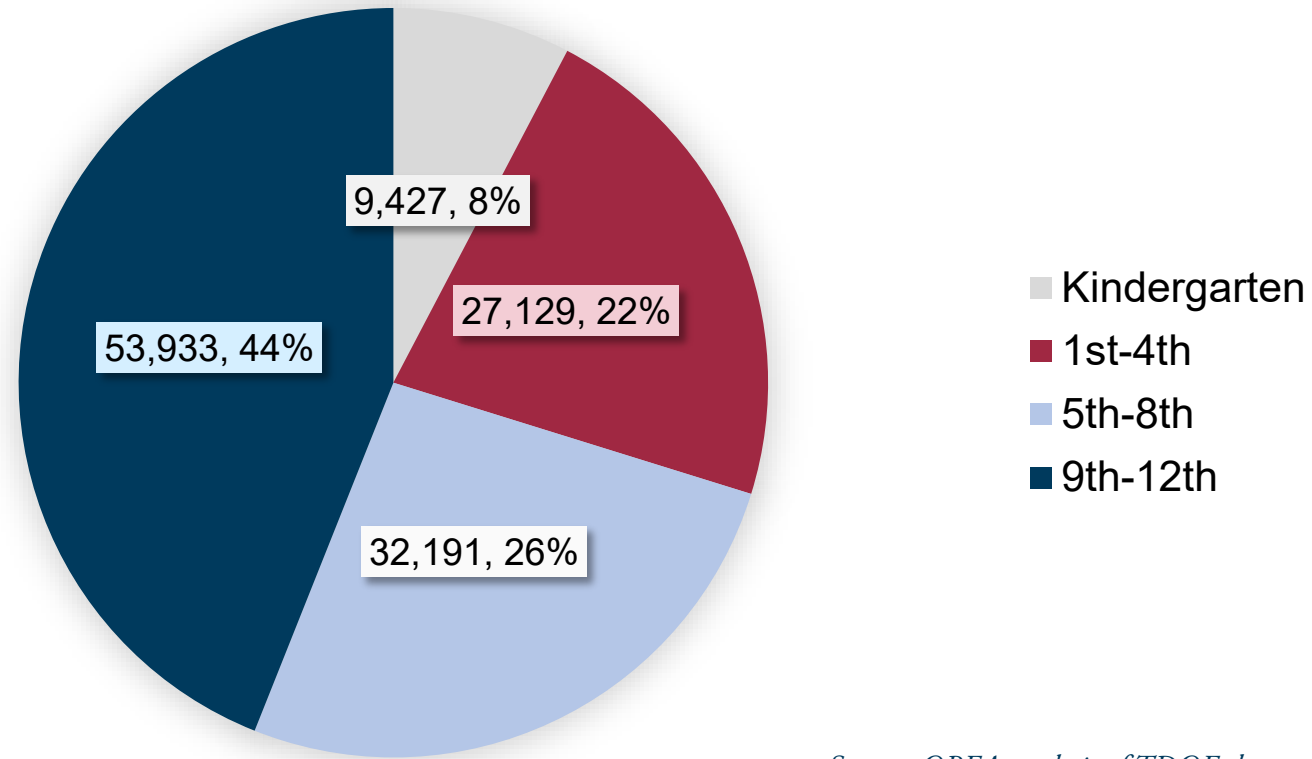
Source: OREA analysis of TDOE data.

Chronic absenteeism by grade level



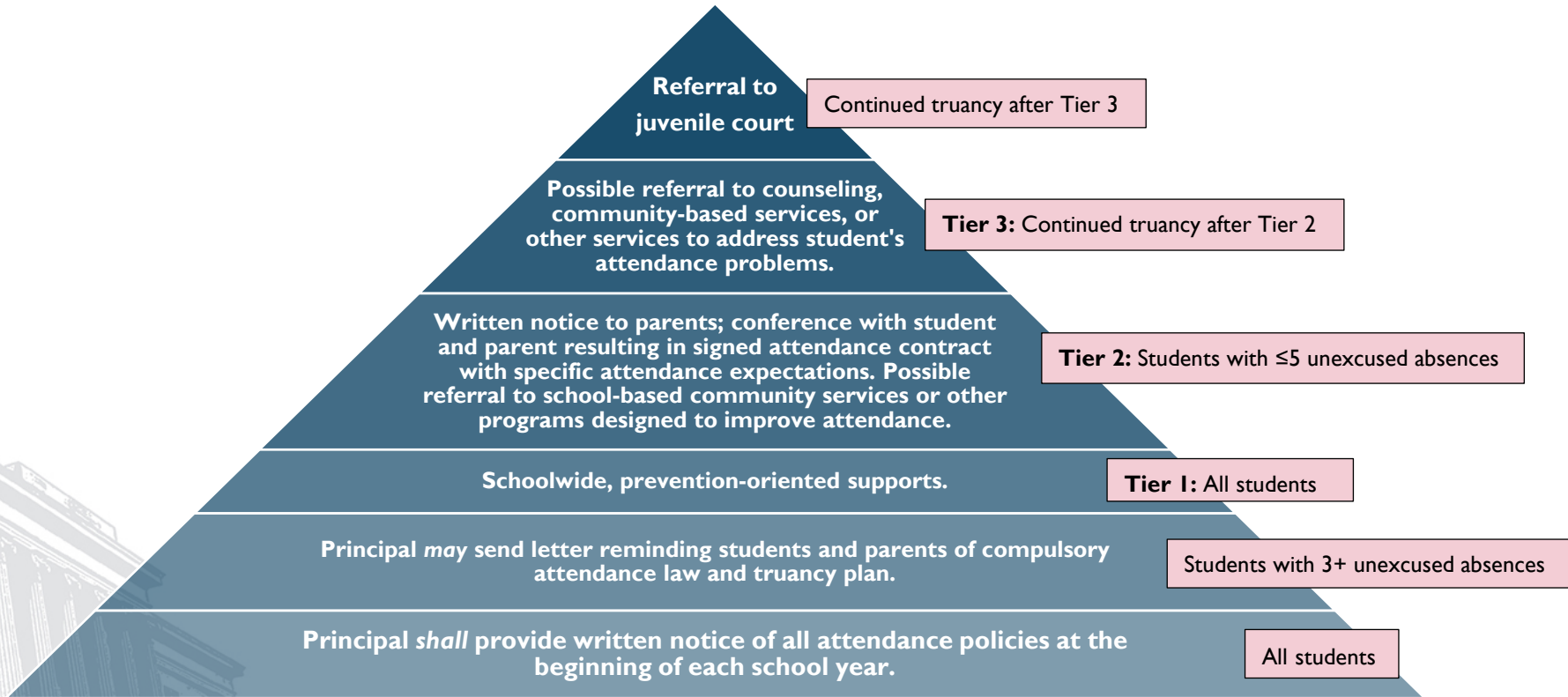
Source: OREA analysis of TDOE data.

Chronic absenteeism by grade level



Source: OREA analysis of TDOE data.

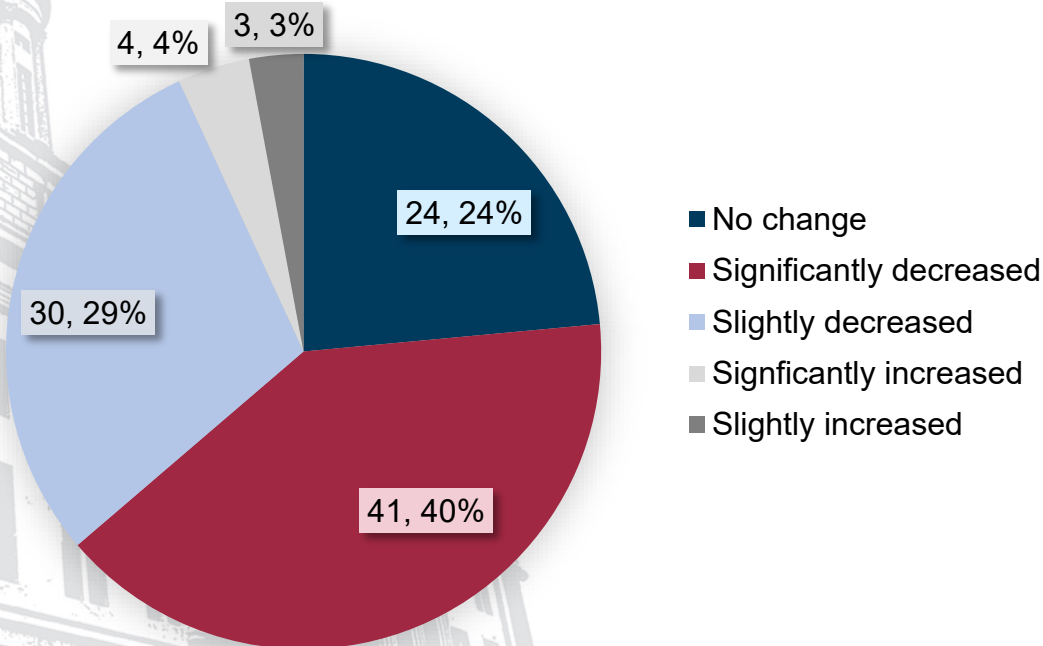
Progressive truancy intervention plan (PTIP)



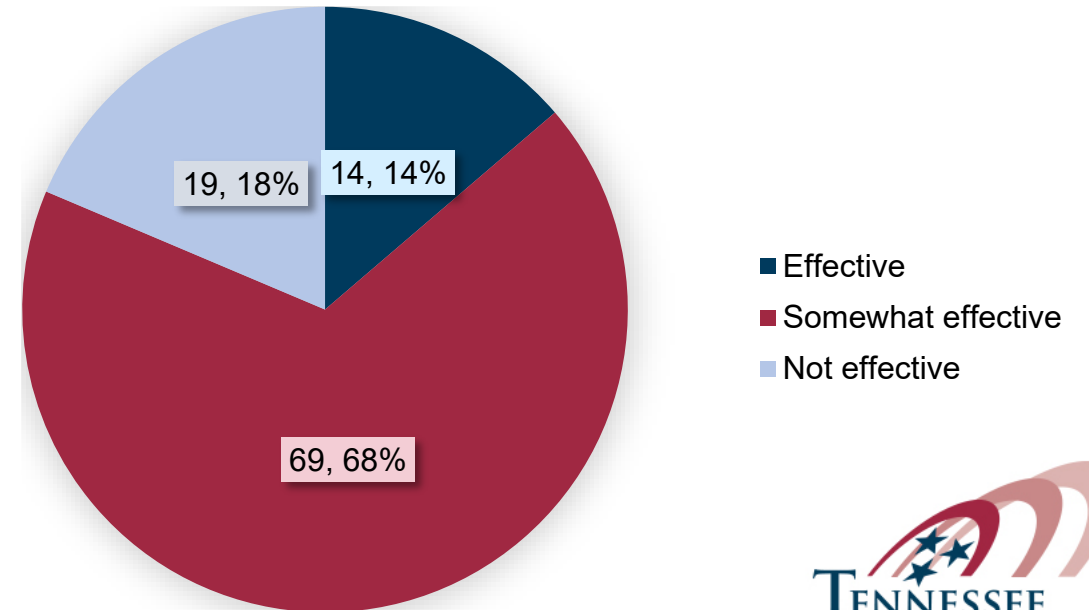
Source: OREA analysis of TCA 49-6-3007 & 3009.

Perceived effectiveness of the PTIP

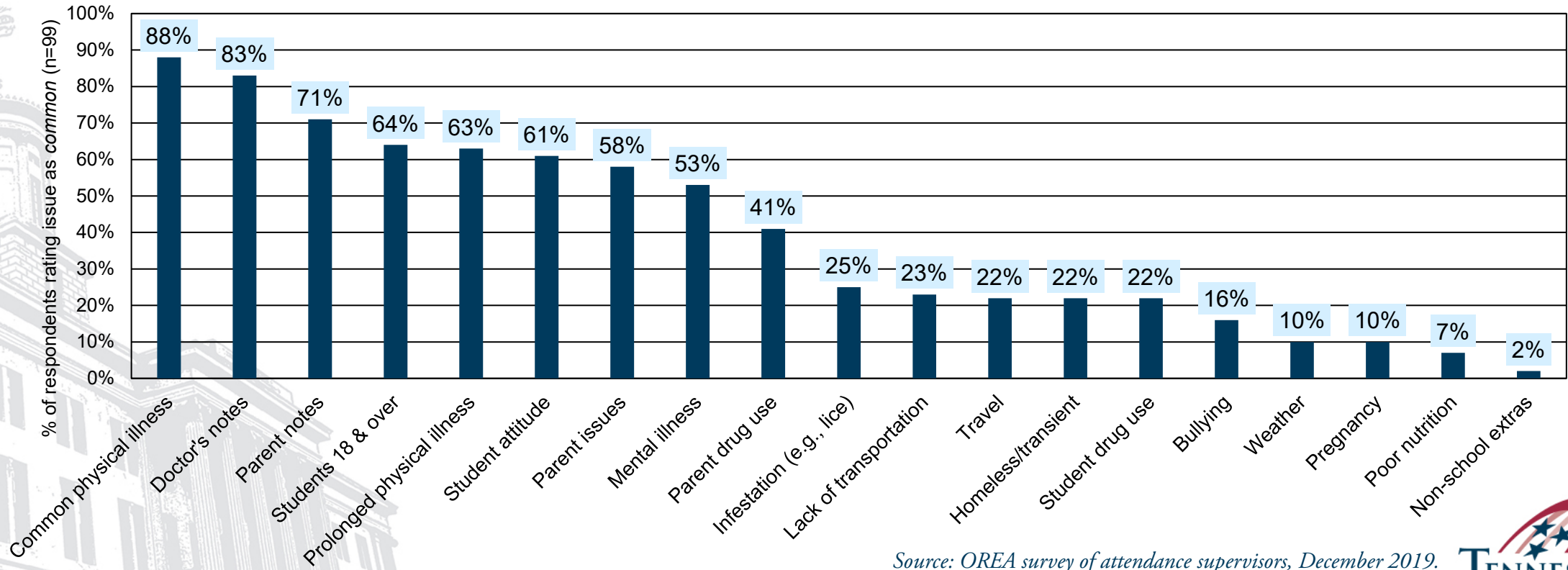
Based on your observation, how have court referrals for truant students changed in your district since the PTIP went into effect?



Based on your observation, how *effective* is the PTIP in preventing future unexcused absences?



Common contributors to attendance issues

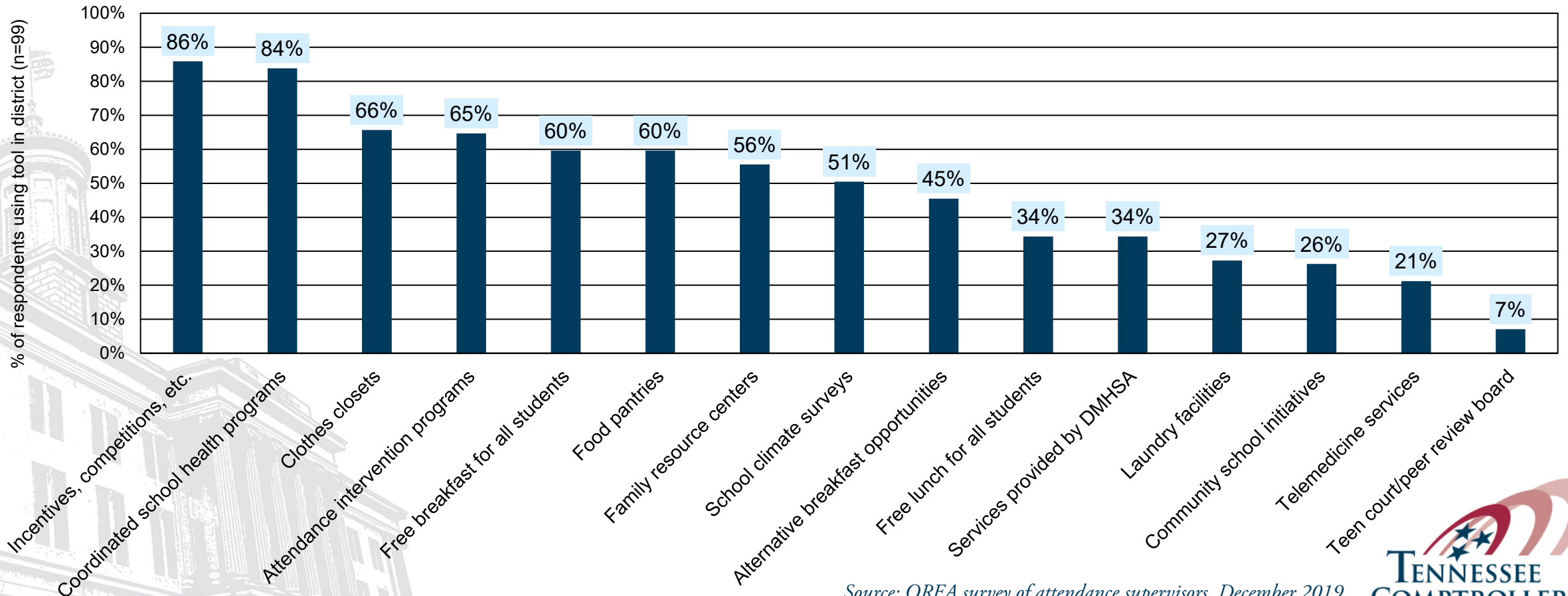


Source: OREA survey of attendance supervisors, December 2019.

**All survey information is subjective.*



Tools used by districts



Source: OREA survey of attendance supervisors, December 2019.

*All survey information is subjective.

Conclusions

- Local variation leads to inconsistent classification of absences as *excused* or *unexcused*.
- Local variation makes analyzing and comparing district truancy data problematic.
- Districts and schools are held accountable for chronic absenteeism rates, while students and parents are held accountable for truancy rates.

Policy options

- The General Assembly may wish to:
 - require additional reporting by districts and schools of PTIP data and other attendance-related data;
 - clarify certain aspects of the PTIP given confusion on the part of some districts, schools, and juvenile courts; and
 - make certain attendance-related policies more uniform for all districts and schools.

Policy options, cont.

- The Tennessee Department of Education may wish to begin calculating truancy rates for districts and schools, taking into account local policy and practice variations.
- Juvenile courts may wish to adopt a uniform definition of *truancy case* and a more uniform method for tracking truancy cases and actions taken.
- School districts may wish to share best practices for addressing student attendance issues.

Conclusion

- Check out the full OREA Student Attendance report for:
 - Explanation of attendance laws
 - More survey information
 - Analysis of chronic absenteeism data
 - Conclusions
 - Policy options

More questions or comments?
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