



# Improving Attendance and Engagement in Illinois Schools



Professional Learning Session

April 7, 2026



# Welcome!



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Development



## Session Goals

### Participants will:

- Build a shared understanding of chronic absence is and why it matters.
- Understand and incorporate early intervention and targeted supports into the multi-tiered framework to reduce and prevent chronic absence.
- Using teams to monitor and support students and families in need of additional support.
- Leveraging positive relationships is key to building partnerships with families.



# Welcome & Introductions

## Use the chat to share:

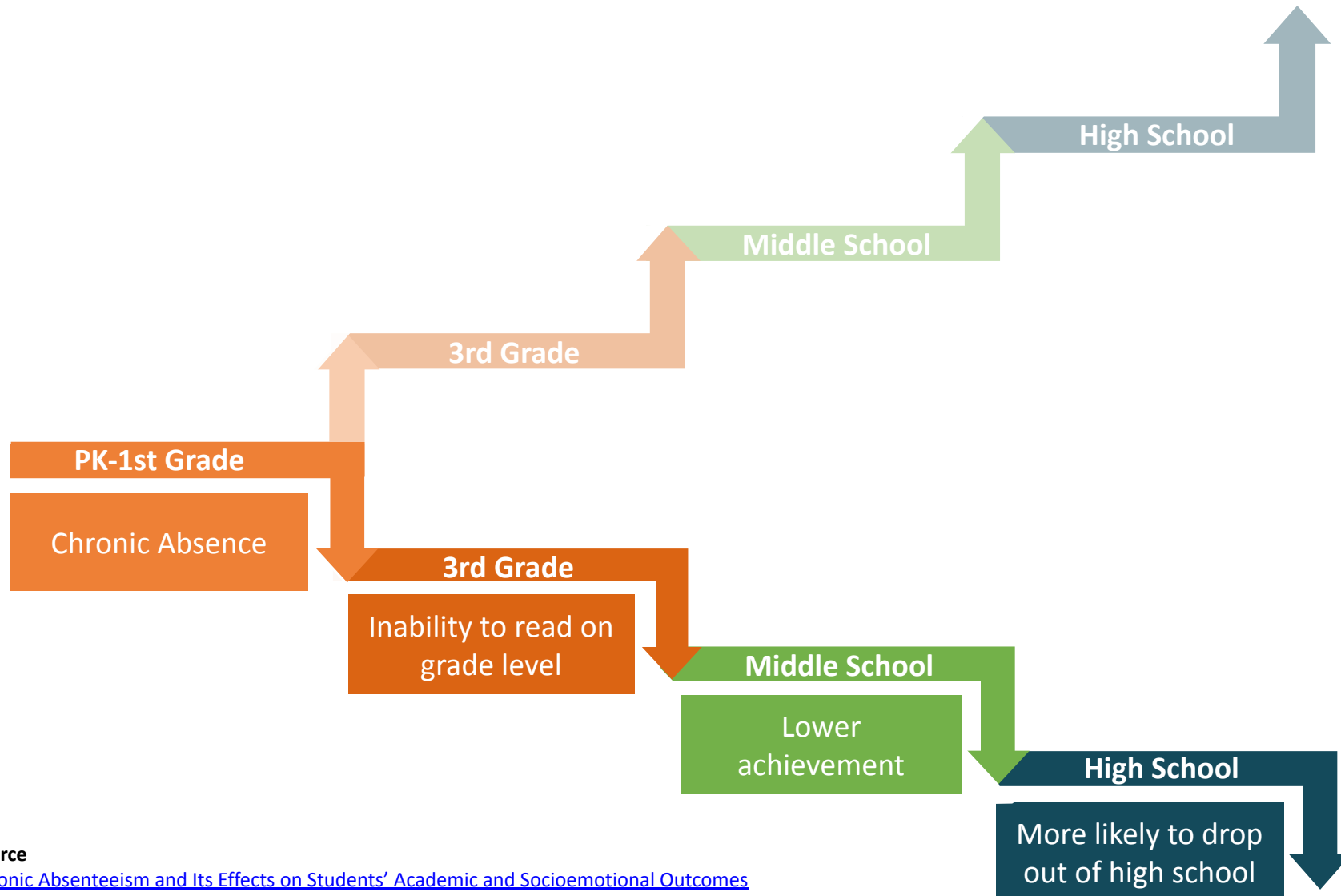
- ✓ Your name and role
- ✓ Your school and district
- ✓ ***Who or what*** motivates your students to attend school?

# **Overview of Chronic Absence**

# Poll: The Impact of Regular Attendance

1. PreK & 1st graders perform better on academic and social/emotional measures
2. Regular attendance means higher reading proficiency by 3rd grade
3. Regular attendance increases standardized test scores
4. Regular attendance boosts high school graduation rates
5. Good attendance builds engagement, social-emotional skills, and strong thinking abilities

# Improving Attendance Matters in K-12



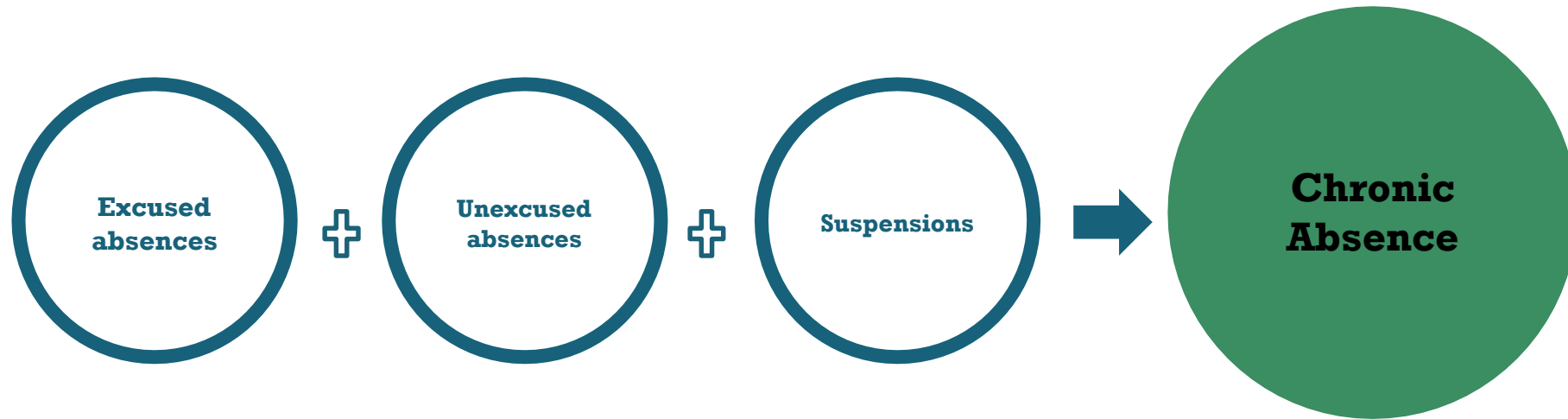
Source

[Chronic Absenteeism and Its Effects on Students' Academic and Socioemotional Outcomes](#)  
[Chronic Absenteeism and Preschool Children's Executive Functioning Skills Development](#)



# What is chronic absence?

Chronic absence is missing so much school for any reason that a student is academically at risk. Chronic absence is defined as **missing 10 percent or more of school for any reason.**



Chronic absence is different from **truancy** (unexcused absences only) or **average daily attendance** (how many students show up to school each day).

# What's the difference between ADA, truancy & chronic absence?

## Average Daily Attendance (ADA)

- School level measure (not student level)
- Notices aggregate attendance at certain point in time (e.g., half-days, holidays, bad weather)
- Masks individual student chronic absences

## Truancy

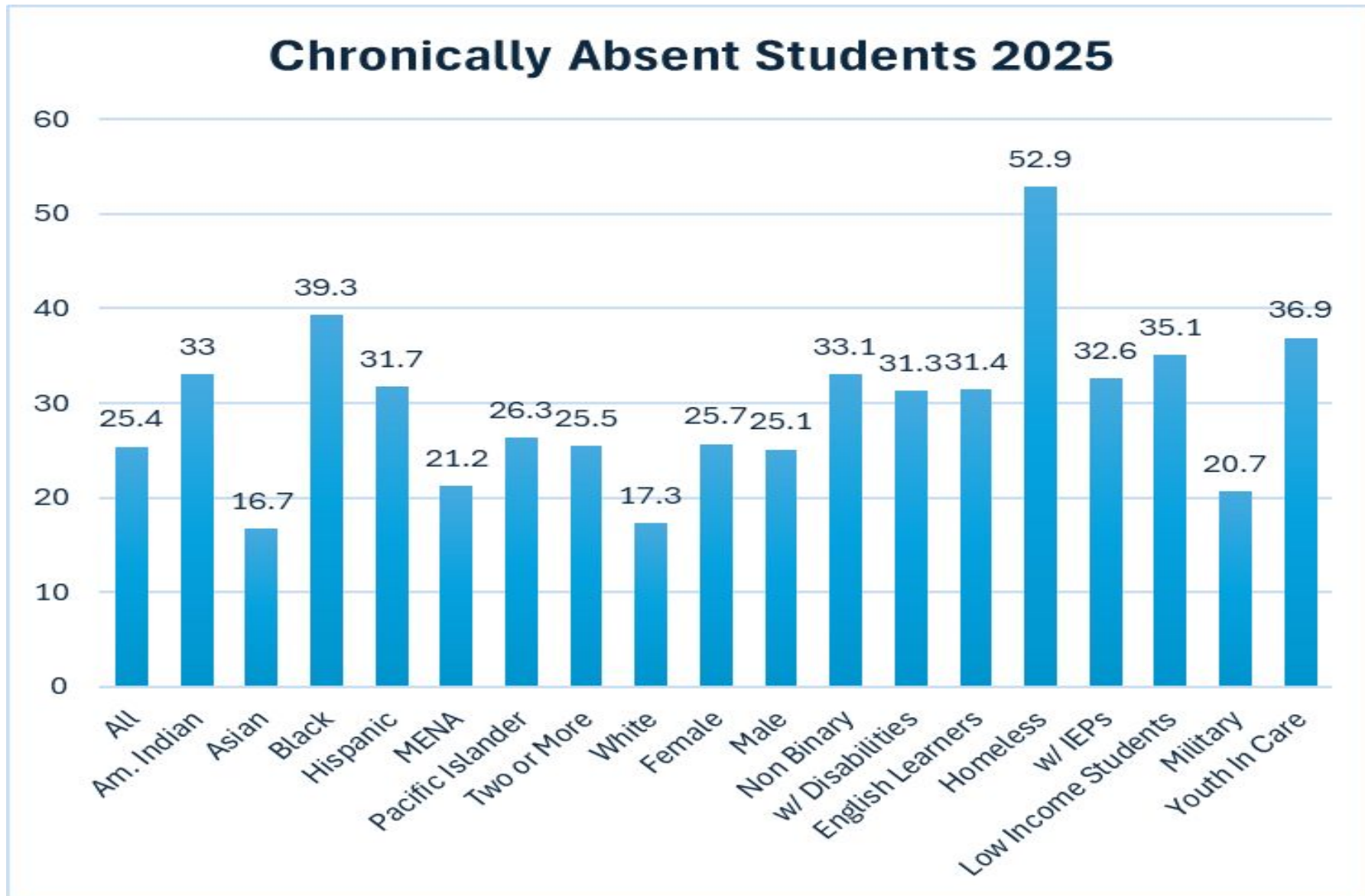
- ▲ Counts **ONLY** unexcused absences
- ▲ Emphasizes individual compliance with school rules
- ▲ Uses legal, typically more blaming and punitive, solutions

## Chronic Absence

- Counts **ALL** absences (*excused, unexcused, and suspensions*)
- Emphasizes impact of missed days and the benefits of being present
- Uses preventative, problem-solving, trauma-sensitive strategies
- Cultivates family and student engagement

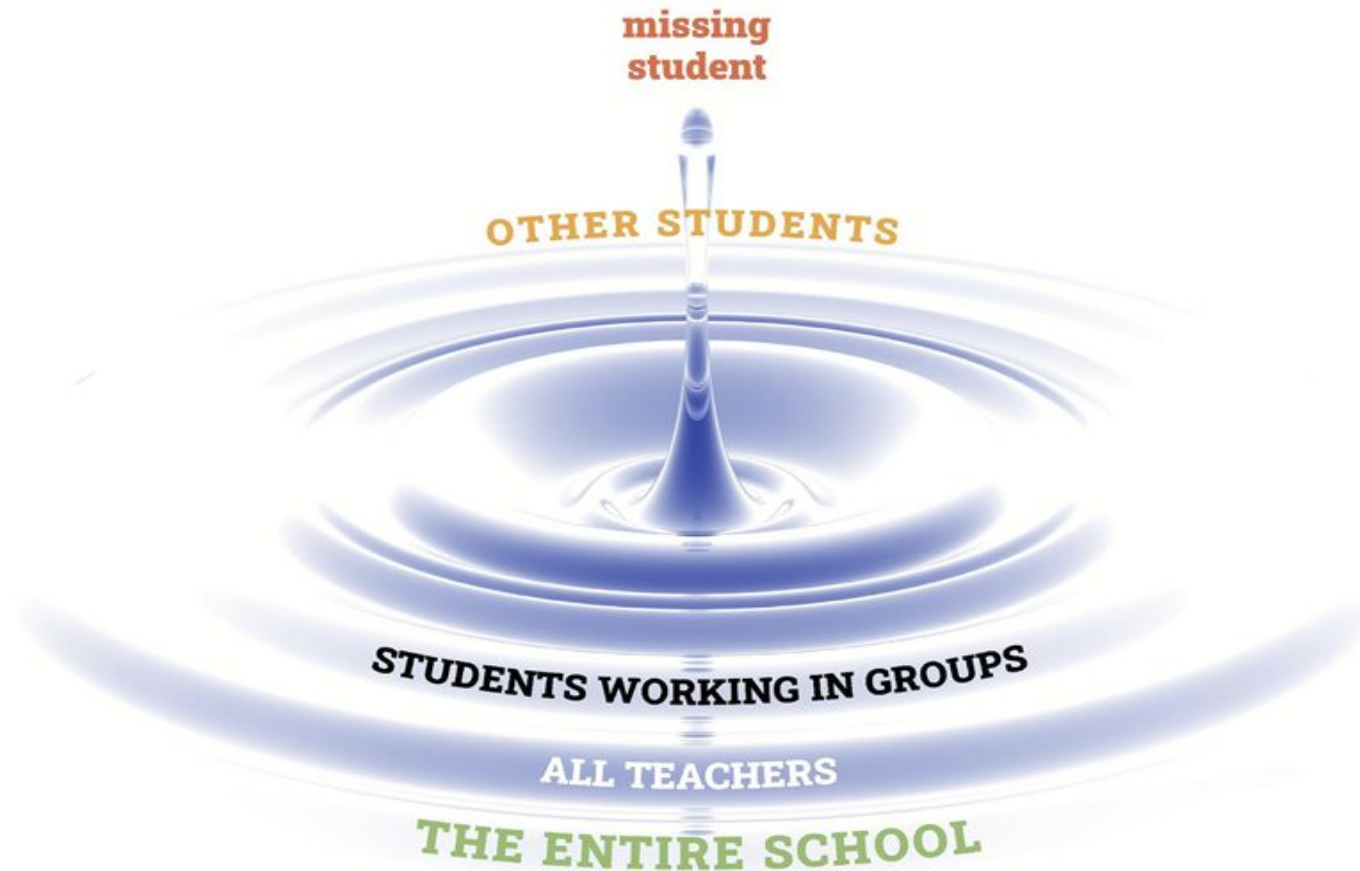
<https://www.attendanceworks.org/whats-the-difference-between-chronic-absence-and-truancy/>

# Illinois Chronic Absence Rates



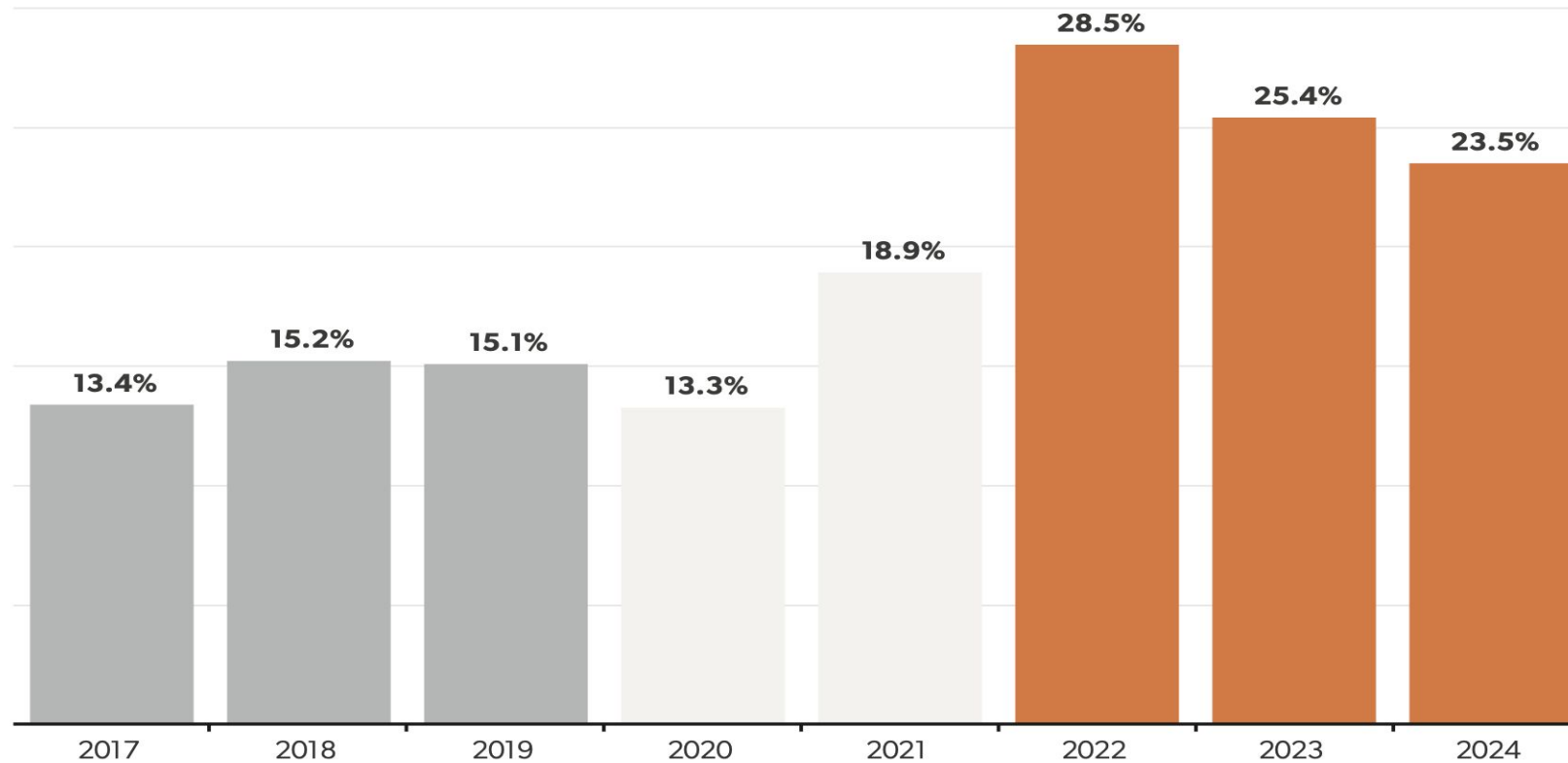


# When a Student Misses School, the Impact Ripples



# Chronic Absence Nearly Doubled and Remains Too High

Figure 1. US Chronic Absenteeism Rates: School Years 2017–24

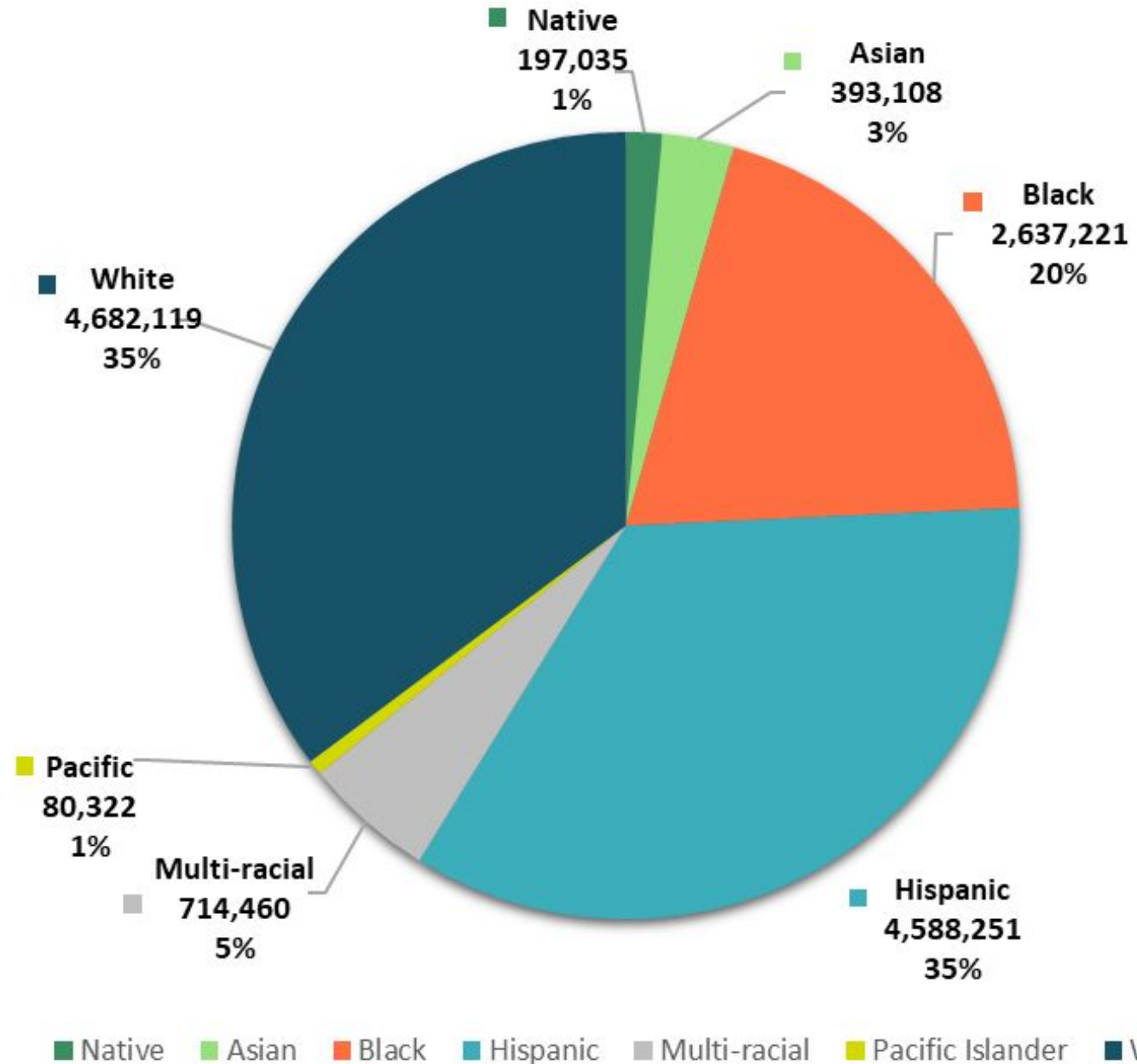


Source: Return to Learn Tracker, "Chronic Absenteeism: 2017–2024," American Enterprise Institute, <https://www.returntolearntacker.net>.

Note: Pre-pandemic years are in grey, pandemic years that had potentially unreliable attendance data are in light grey, and post-pandemic years with reliable data are in orange. School years are referred to by the spring year.

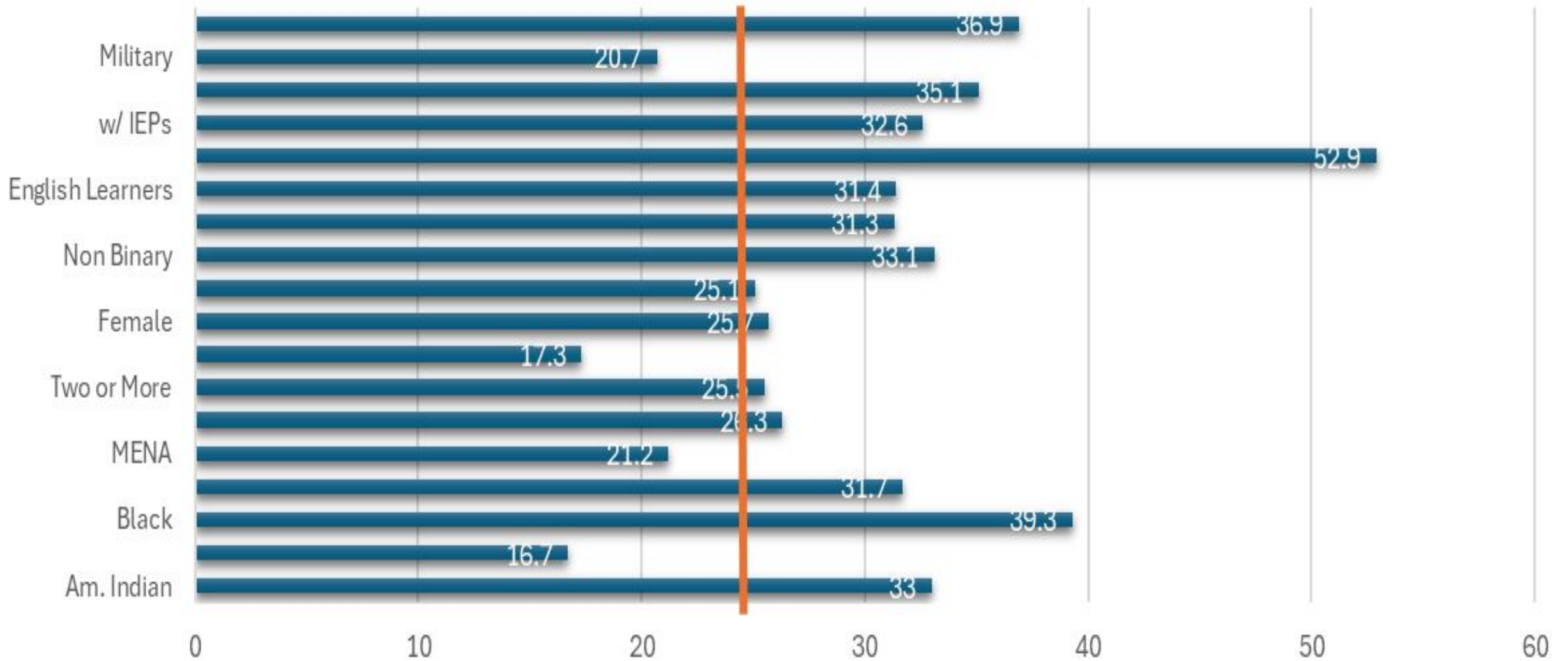
# Chronically Absent Student Demographics

## Chronically Absent Students by Demographic Background SY 2022-23

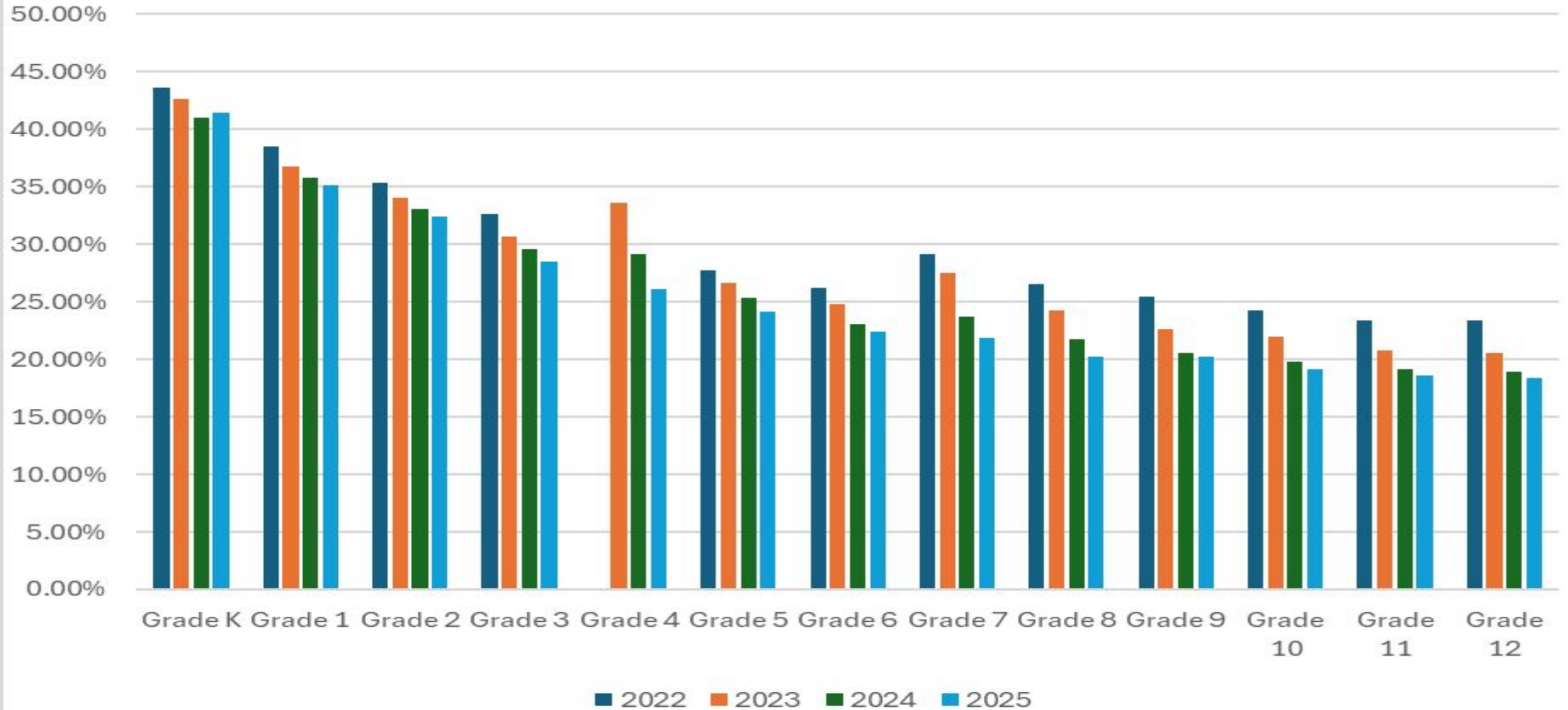


Source: US Department of Education

# Illinois Chronic Absence Demographic 2024-2025



# Illinois Chronic Absence by Grades SY 2022-2025





## Share in the Chat

- What did you notice about Illinois state data?
- What surprised you?



**What is the relationship  
between absences &  
achievement?**

**Chronic absenteeism is a *leading*  
indicator and a *cause* of  
educational disparities**

# How “Unexcused” Label Can Affect Response

Response to “Excused”	Response to “Unexcused”
✓ Help with homework	✗ Denial of help or no credit for homework
✓ Make-up exams	✗ No make-up exams
✓ Home tutoring provided	✗ Denial of class credit
	✗ Removal from extracurricular activities
	✗ Send notices of truancy
	<i>*If unexcused absences accumulate despite earlier outreach from schools and districts, courts can:</i>
	➤ Fine students and parents
	➤ Require a community service program or parenting program
	➤ Charge parents with a misdemeanor



## Audience Poll

**What attendance data are you tracking in your district or school? *(select all that apply)***

- a) Average daily attendance
- b) Chronic absence *(all absences)*
- c) Truancy *(unexcused absences)*
- d) Don't know

# **Keys to Improving Attendance**



# Pathway for Change

Mindset

Actionable  
Data

Capacity

Strategies

Outcomes

# Change the Power Dynamics with Students and Families

## Problem-focused

Approach family *only* to address a problem



One-way messaging to families



Focus *only* on barriers



Presume you have all the answers and know what is best for the family/student



## Partnership-focused

Initial outreach focuses on building a relationship

Start with listening to families; Find out hopes, dreams, assets and needs

Leverage student/family strengths to overcome challenges

Collaborate with families and encourage practices that build upon their assets and priorities



# Research Spotlight: Family Engagement

The Engagement Advantage: Findings from a Mixed-Methods Study on Family Schools Partnerships

## Schools with high family engagement saw reductions

In a typical school with ~500 students:

**31 fewer chronically absent students  
(6.2% less)**

**800 fewer absences**

*Compared to a similar school with weak family engagement*



## Distinguishing features of “Bright Spot” schools

**Mindsets**  
(Families as Equal Partners)

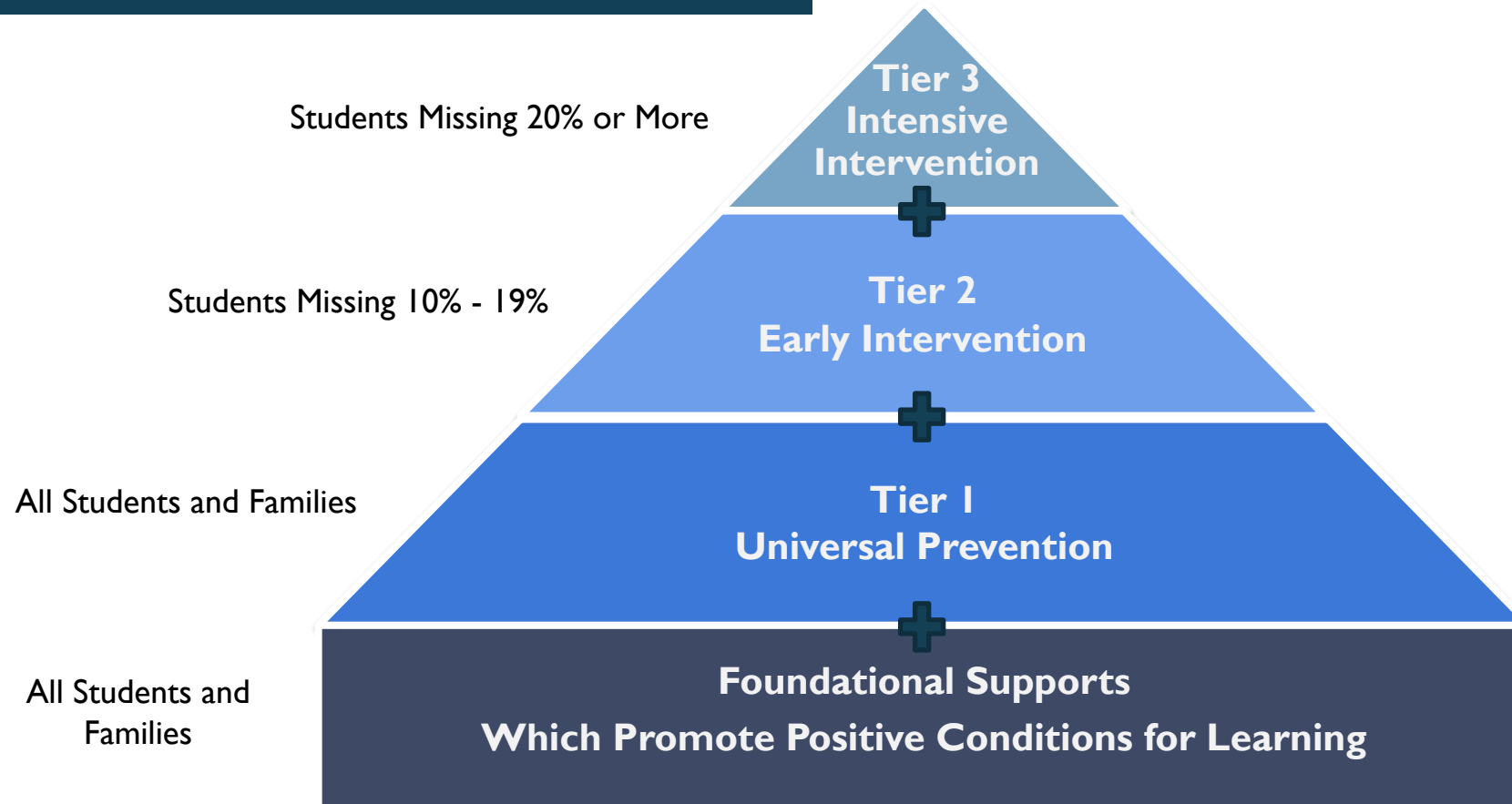
**Leadership**  
(Clear Vision, Inspiration, Expectation & Infrastructure)

**Communications**  
(1 on 1; Academically Focused, Unwavering)

**Relationships**  
(Personal and Enduring)

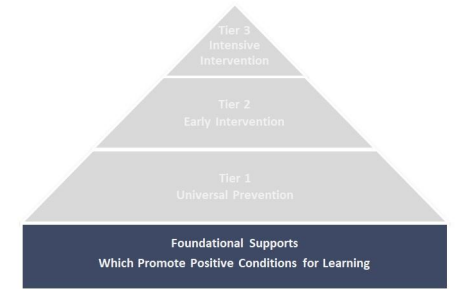
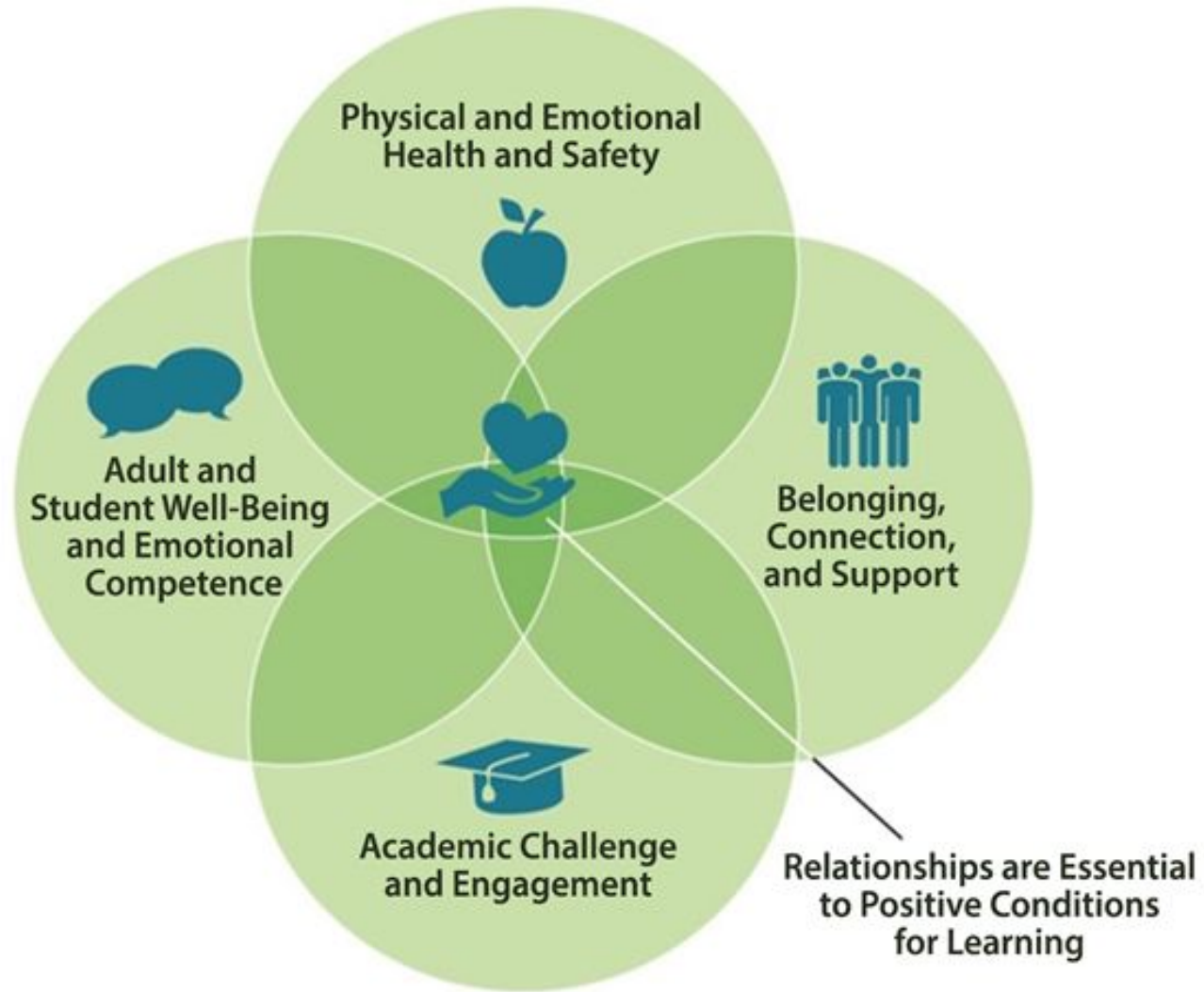


# Multi-tiered System of Support for Attendance



<https://www.attendanceworks.org/chronic-absence/addressing-chronic-absence/3-tiers-of-intervention/>

# Positive Conditions for Learning Lead to Students Being Engaged and Attending Regularly



<https://www.attendanceworks.org/using-chronic-absence-data-to-improve-conditions-for-learning/>

# What promotes positive conditions for learning?



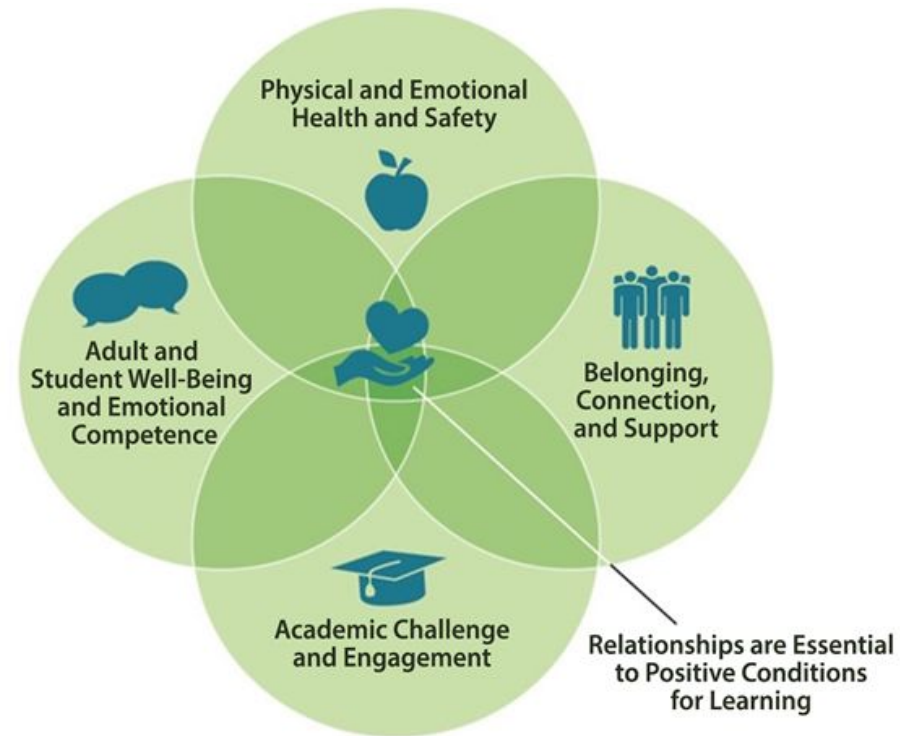
<https://youtu.be/oeC2pNcwyIQ>

[www.attendanceworks.org](http://www.attendanceworks.org)



# Reflection

How did the video illustrate positive conditions for learning?





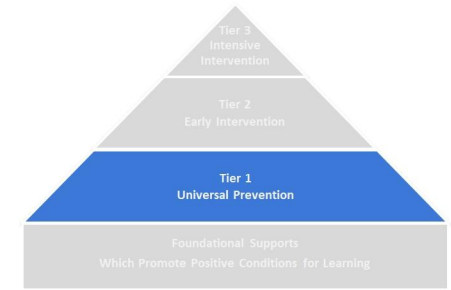
## Reflection

### Share in chat:

What positive conditions exist in your school and how can you build on those assets?

# Tier 1: Universal Attendance Supports

- ❖ **Clear, concise and consistent communication about schedules and expectations**
- ❖ Routines, rituals and celebrations related to attendance and engagement
- ❖ Adoption of Breakfast After the Bell
- ❖ **Personalized, positive communication to families when students are absent**
- ❖ Recognition of good and improved attendance
- ❖ Impact of attendance on whole child widely understood
- ❖ **Connection to a caring adult in the school**
- ❖ Every child and their family encouraged to develop a success plan that includes attention to attendance





## Back to the Classroom Key Messaging from the Ad Council 2024 Report



1. **Positive** in tone
2. **Communicate positive opportunities** associated with in-person learning, not the consequences of missing school
3. **Focus on the whole child** (*personally, socially, academically, and emotionally*)
4. **Acknowledge parent's hesitations** and avoid chastising or shaming
5. **Message is first delivered by child's teacher**

# Share in Chat!

What Tier I attendance strategies are you using in your school?



# Health Handout

Tip sheet to help families/caregivers decide when a child can go to school or should stay home.

## When is sick too sick for school?



A regular attendance routine is important for your child's well-being and learning. These tips can help you decide when to keep your child home when they don't feel well.



### SEND ME TO SCHOOL IF...

- I have a **runny nose** or just a **little cough**, but no other symptoms.
- I have **NOT had a fever overnight** and have **NOT taken fever reducing medicine** during that time.
- I have a **mild stomach ache**.
- I have **not thrown up** overnight and can drink liquids without throwing up.
- I have a **mild rash** and no other symptoms.
- I have **eye drainage WITHOUT fever**, eye pain or eyelid redness.



### KEEP ME AT HOME IF...

- I have a **temperature higher than 100.4**
- I have **thrown up two or more times** in the past 24 hours.
- My **stool is watery** and I may not make it to the bathroom in time.



### SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF...

- I have a **temperature higher than 100.4 AND any of the following:** ear pain, sore throat, rash, stomachache, headache or tooth pain.
- I have **stomach pain and fever**, I have **bloody or black stool**, or I am **dehydrated** (tired and sleepy, dry mouth) and/or I have **not urinated** in the last 8 hours.
- I have a **persistent cough** or **trouble breathing**, or have a fever with the cough.
- I have **eye swelling**, **eye pain** or an **eye injury**.
- I have a **rash that has blisters**, is draining, is painful, looks like bruises, and/or I have a fever with the rash.

*If you don't know whether to send your child to school, have specific concerns regarding your child's physical or mental health, or are worried your child will spread illness, contact your child's health care provider, a local urgent care or the school nurse. These tips are not meant to take the place of local health department/school district health guidance including about contagious illnesses such as Covid-19 and the flu.*



For more information visit [attendanceworks.org/resources](https://www.attendanceworks.org/resources)

<https://www.attendanceworks.org/resources/health-handouts-for-families/>

# Help Kids Stay Healthy!

## Keep Your Child Healthy and in School!

A regular attendance routine is important for your child's well-being, learning and long-term success. Below are tips to keep your child healthy and avoid unnecessary absences from school.

### Nutrition, Sleep and Exercise

- Ensure your child eats a good breakfast every morning or check if your school serves breakfast.
- Maintain a regular bedtime and morning routine.
- Keep screens out of the bedroom and limit use prior to bedtime.
- Encourage your child to stay active for at least 60 minutes a day.



### Hygiene

- Stress hand washing, particularly before eating, and after using the restroom.
- Remind your child to brush their teeth twice a day.
- Avoid close contact with individuals who are sick. Don't share cups, utensils, hair brushes or combs.
- Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue, or cough/sneeze into an elbow.



### Safety

- Make sure your child wears a seatbelt and/or appropriate car seats during car rides, and a helmet when using a bike, skateboard or scooter.
- If your child walks to school, help them find a safe route to school and to travel with at least one friend. Have a backup plan in case of bad weather.



## Keep Your Child Healthy and in School!

### Wellness

- Ensure your child visits their health care provider for:
  - A physical once a year.
  - All recommended Immunizations, including Flu and COVID-19.
  - Chronic health issues such as asthma or diabetes.
- Visit the dentist twice a year.
- Try to schedule non-urgent medical appointments outside of school hours.
- If your child doesn't have health or dental insurance, reach out to your school's nurse or social worker or other staff member to help connect you with resources.
- Complete your school's annual health form.
- Agree to allow your child to participate in health and vision screenings offered at school.
- If your child has a chronic health issue such as asthma, make sure that your child's health care provider completes appropriate school forms that allow your child to keep/carry any necessary medications at school.
- If your child has a disability, work closely with the school and your child's health care provider to ensure appropriate supports and services.
- If you are concerned that your child may have a contagious illness (including COVID-19), call your child's health care provider or school nurse for advice.
- If your child needs to stay home for a prolonged period due to illness, talk to your child's teacher to find out about resources they can use at home to keep learning once they feel well enough.



### Engagement

- Make sure your child feels safe and connected at school. Involve them in afterschool activities.
- If you are worried that your child may be suffering from anxiety, talk with your teacher, the school nurse, social worker or other school staff to discuss the challenge and identify what can help your child. If your child is missing class because of challenges with behavioral issues, contact the school and/or your child's health care provider for support and resources.
- Ask the school about health-related policies including about COVID-19.
- Monitor your child's attendance and academic progress and seek support when needed.



<https://www.attendanceworks.org/resources/health-handouts-for-families/>

# Addressing Mental Health-Related Absences

## Understand Signs & Symptoms

- ✓ Provide professional learning to staff, youth and families on typical development and mental health literacy.
- ✓ Recognize that mental health challenges can present as physical ailments or behavioral challenges.

## Examine School Culture & Connections

- ✓ Regularly engage students and families to assess your school culture.
- ✓ Ensure all students are connected to both adults and students.
- ✓ Implement bullying prevention programs, hot spot mapping and other preventative safety measures

## Connect Resources & Supports

- ✓ Provide universal instruction to build social emotional skills
- ✓ Ensure adequate staffing to provide evidence-based school mental health interventions
- ✓ Create resource maps and referral pathways to connect families and community providers.

<https://www.attendanceworks.org/resources/health-handouts-for-families/>  
<https://childmind.org/article/should-kids-take-mental-health-days/>

# Breakfast After the Bell Options

**Breakfast in the Classroom**

**Grab and Go Breakfast**

**Second Chance Breakfast**



Watch: Breakfast After the Bell (<https://youtu.be/iR7FaKVX33s>) from the Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction

# Letters and Texts Can Help Build Connections

Insert School [logo](#)

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

I am writing to check in on **[NAME OF STUDENT]** and offer support.

**[NAME OF STUDENT]** has missed [Insert number of days absent] days of school this year.

Does this seem correct to you?

Getting back into the habit of daily attendance matters more than ever. Going to school is an opportunity for your student to:

- Build routines that help reduce stress.
- Connect to their friends and teachers.
- Engage in learning.

When students attend regularly, they are much more likely to read proficiently by third grade, do well in middle school and graduate.

We would like to partner with you to improve **[NAME OF STUDENT]**'s attendance.

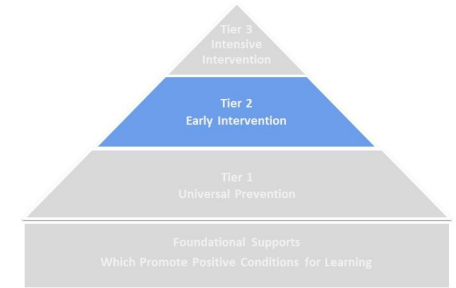
Please call me at **[PHONE NUMBER]**.

Sincerely,

**[PRINCIPAL'S OR OTHER STAFF PERSON'S NAME]**

We missed (Student) in school today. (Student) has missed a total of (X) days of this school this year. Going to school every day will help (Student) learn important reading and math skills.

# Tier 2: Early Interventions Layer in Support and Remove Barriers to Attendance

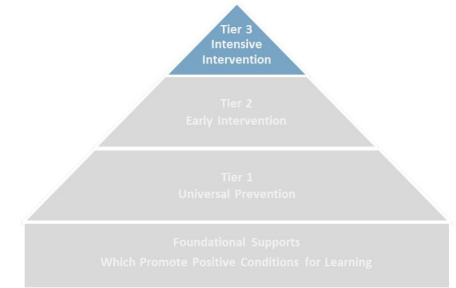


- ❖ Common community and school barriers identified and addressed
- ❖ Individualized student success plan that includes attention to attendance
- ❖ Attendance strategies added to IEP
- ❖ Family visit
- ❖ Mentors (e.g., Success Mentors, Peer Group Connections)
- ❖ Intensive tutoring
- ❖ Check-In/Check-Out (CICO)
- ❖ Expanded learning opportunities
- ❖ Small group interventions and supports for students
- ❖ Restorative alternatives to discipline and suspension



Watch: [Better Together: Integrating Attendance and Behavior](#) from AW and the Center on PBIS

## Tier 3: Intensive Interventions



- ❖ Educational support champions / advocates
- ❖ Interagency case management
- ❖ Housing stability supports
- ❖ Student attendance review board
- ❖ Community-based, non-criminal truancy court
- ❖ Individualized learning and success plan leading to graduation
- ❖ Legal Intervention (*as a last resort*)

# Reducing Chronic Absence Requires a Team Approach





## What makes a team effective?

**Type in chat:**

Describe one value that is essential to an effective team.

# District and School Teams Have Distinct Functions

## District Team

- Organize a systemic, districtwide response for policy and practice improvements
- Routinely unpack data, analyze and utilize data to inform district-wide action
- Equip site leaders in the implementation of effective school attendance teams
- Promote shared accountability and continuous improvement

## School Team

- Coordinate the whole school's multi-tiered strategy to reduce chronic absence by implementing evidence-informed prevention & early intervention
- Match strategies with root causes that address the needs of individual & groups of chronically absent students using qualitative and quantitative data
- Ensure students receive needed supports

# Responsibilities of a School Team

- 1. Organize a multi-tiered attendance strategy that begins with prevention and early intervention.**
- 2. Examine attendance and absenteeism data to assess which groups of students have higher or lower levels of absence.**
- 3. Identify assets, barriers and strategies that affect attendance.**
- 4. Mobilize everyone in the school community to address attendance.**
- 5. Determine if you are making a difference.**

# Ensuring Attendance Requires a Team

*The Attendance Strategy should be led by the school principal and the leadership team.*

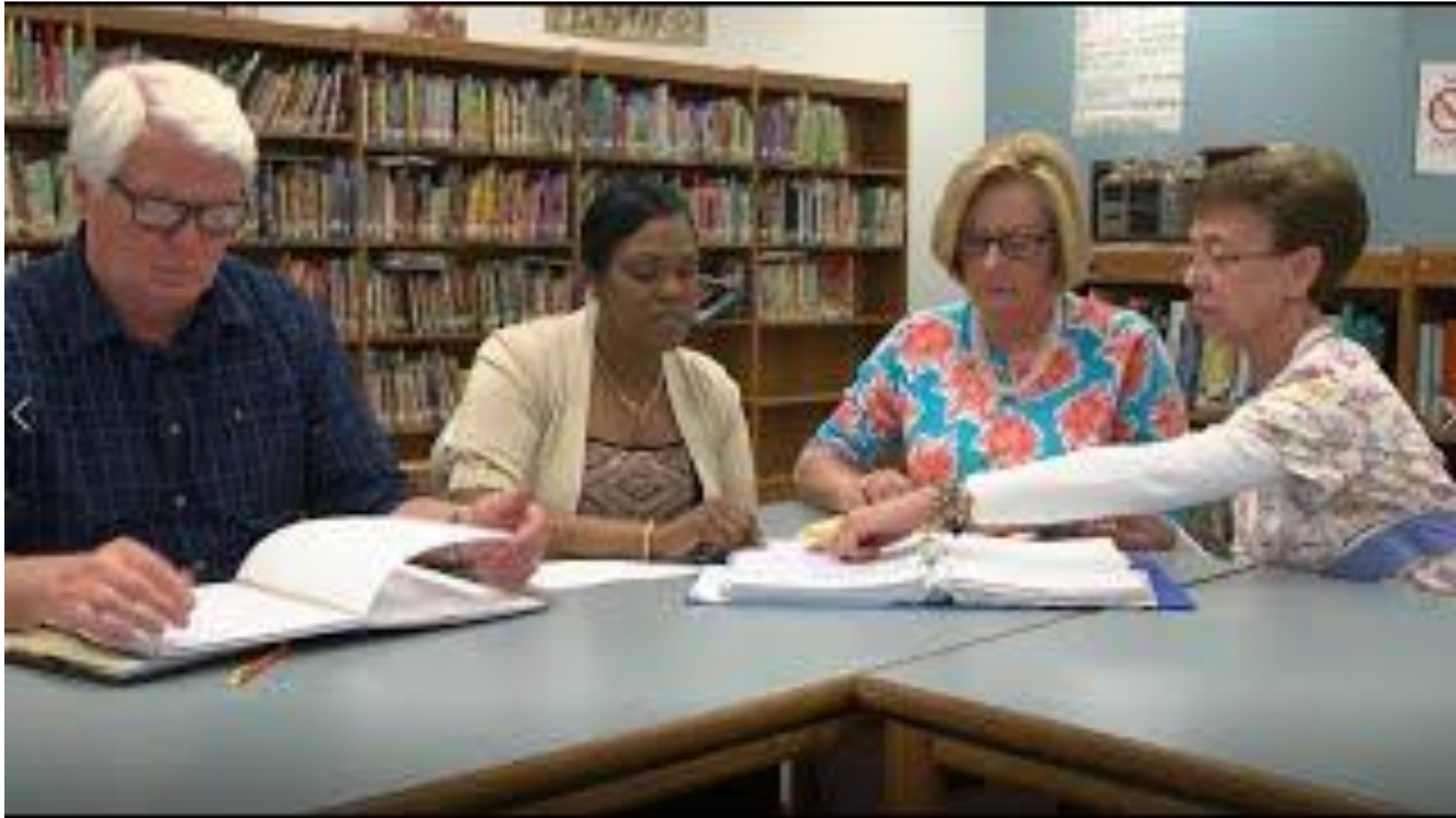
**Teams working on improving student attendance could include people with the following roles:**

- \* Nurse
- \* Counselor
- \* Social Worker
- \* Administrative support staff
- \* Special education staff
- \* Teachers
- \* Sports coaches
- \* Expanded Learning program staff



Members should be able to bring the perspectives of the student demographics. Teams should incorporate input from families and students along with the community.

# Attendance Team in Action





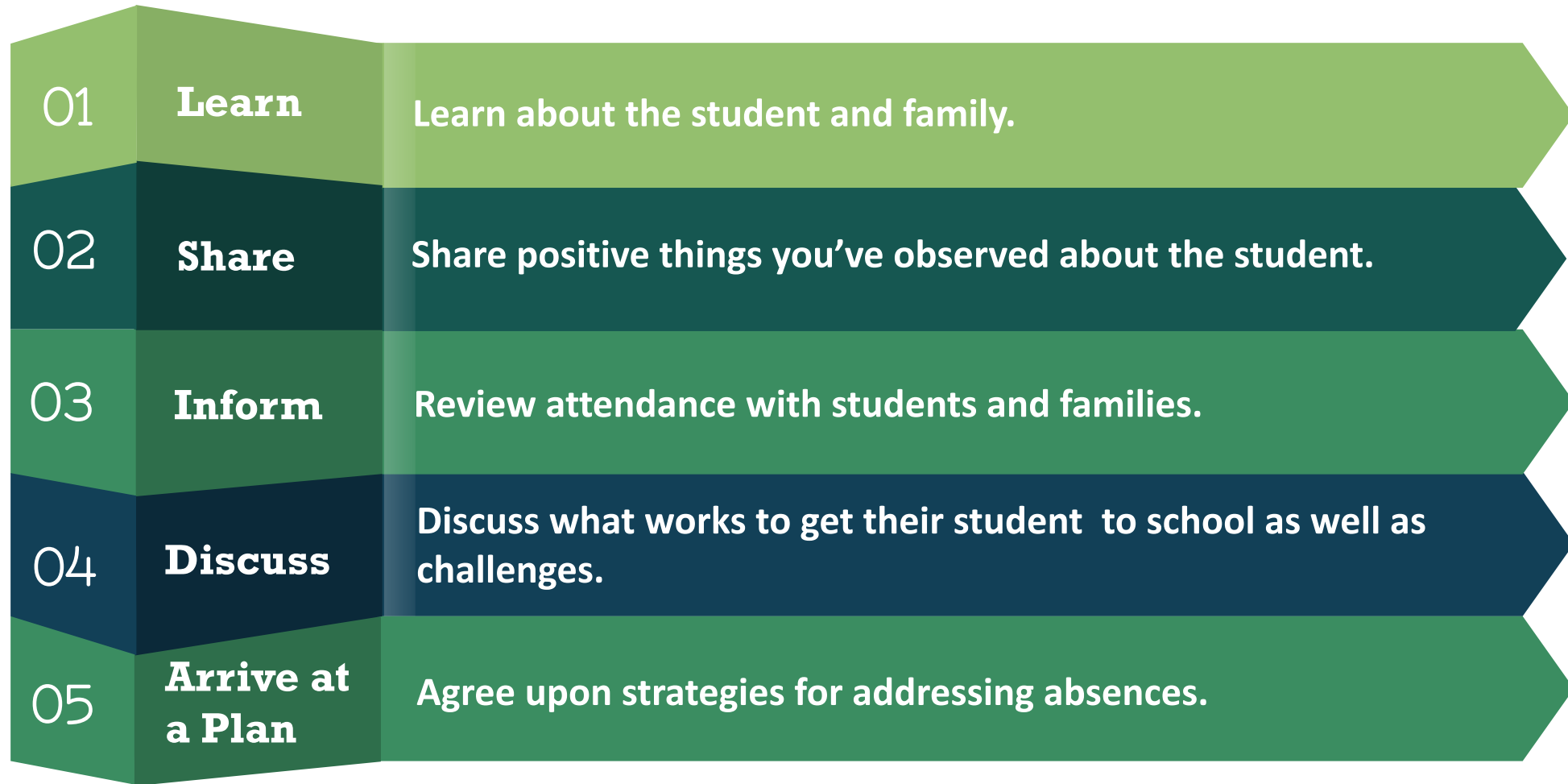
## Share in Chat

### What team in your school address attendance?

- Stand-alone attendance team
- Positive Behavioral Intervention Supports (PBIS) team  
(attendance and behavior)
- Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) team
- Response to Intervention (RTI) team
- Early Warning Indicator System (EWIS) team
- Case Management Team
- Student Success Team
- Other (type in chat)
- No team addresses attendance

# **Designing Solutions Require Partnership with Families**

# The “Caring Conversations for Attendance” Process



Adapted with permission from materials created by © High Expectations Parental Service, 2011



## Before Selecting Interventions, Be Informed by Students and Families

- ❖ Students and families have untapped expertise and knowledge that can bring renewed relevance and authenticity to classrooms and school reform efforts.
- ❖ Addressing the challenges students and families experience requires considering their specific realities.
- ❖ Understanding when many students and families experience similar challenges allows you to create scalable solutions.
- ❖ It ensures that the engagement strategies you create are inclusive of students and families' cultural norms.

# The key to reducing chronic absence is addressing what causes students to miss too much school

## Barriers

- Chronic and acute illness
- Family responsibilities or home situation
- Trauma
- Poor transportation
- Housing and food insecurity
- Inequitable access to needed services
- System involvement
- Lack of predictable schedules for learning
- Lack of access to tech
- Community violence

## Aversion

- Struggling academically and/or behaviorally
- Unwelcoming school climate
- Social and peer challenges
- Anxiety
- Biased disciplinary and suspension practices
- Undiagnosed disability and/or disability accommodations
- Caregivers had negative educational experiences

## Disengagement

- Lack of challenging, culturally responsive instruction
- Bored
- No meaningful relationships to adults in the school (especially given staff shortages)
- Lack of enrichment opportunities
- Lack of academic and behavioral support
- Failure to earn credits
- Need to work conflicts with being in high school

## Misconceptions

- Absences are only a problem if they are unexcused
- Missing 2 days per month doesn't affect learning
- Lose track and underestimate TOTAL absences
- Assume students must stay home for any symptom of illness
- Attendance only matters in the older grades
- Suspensions don't count as absence

<https://www.attendanceworks.org/chronic-absence/addressing-chronic-absence/3-tiers-of-intervention/root-causes/>



## The Transformative Story of One Parent

How do we establish  
authentic partnerships  
with our families and  
communities?

Let's hear from a parent.



[A Parent Reflects on Building Relationships with Teachers](#)



## Share in Chat

Why did the parent become a partner?

# Building Relational Trust: Where are You?

## Involvement

## Engagement

## Partnership

### Educators:

- Invite families to events
- Material in family's native language

### Families:

- Attend events
- Listen to teacher's feedback on learning goals

### Educators:

- Ask families to volunteer
- Solicit family's advice

### Families

- Volunteer at school
- Provide feedback about student's educational plan

### Educators:

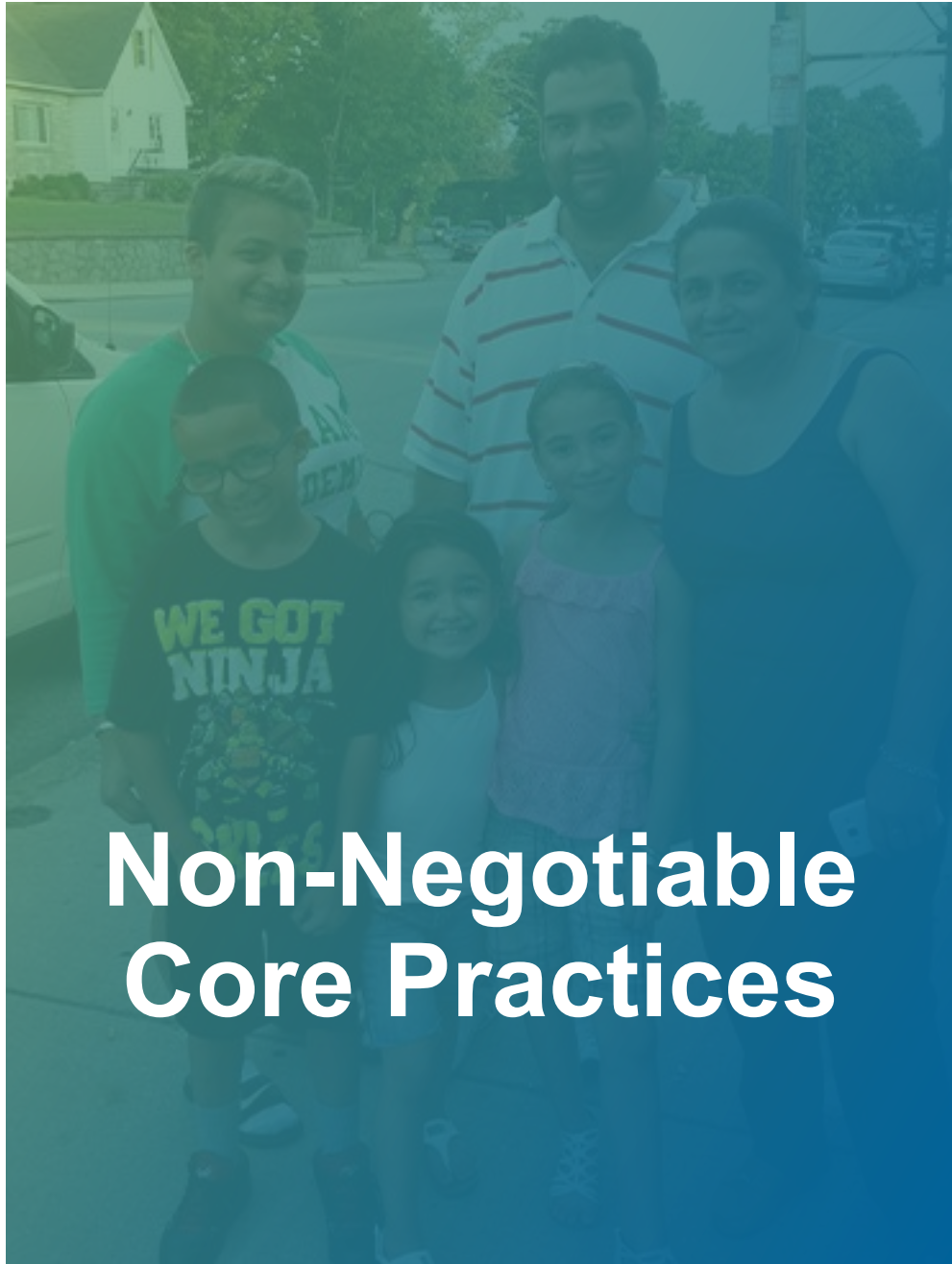
- Ask families to serve on committees with decision-making capacity

### Families

- Co-lead volunteer opportunities
- Co-develop student learning goals

# Parent Teacher Home Visits

How Family Engagement Can Improve Student Engagement and Attendance



# Learner Engagement Attendance Program (LEAP) Home Visit Model for Tier 2



**Leap Home Visit # 1**

Goals:

- Begin building a positive relationship
- Learn about family and student
- Offer resources and supports if needed

**Follow-Up Calls**

Goals:

- Connect
- Check in on how student and family is doing
- Follow up with requests for information

**Leap Home Visit # 2**

Goals:

- Build relationship
- Connect student to teacher and school
- Provide helpful attendance and school resources

**Leap Home Visit # 3 and 4, and 5...**

Goals:

- Deepen relationship
- Check in on well-being, esp. students who continue to be chronically absent
- Ask family if they want to continue visits

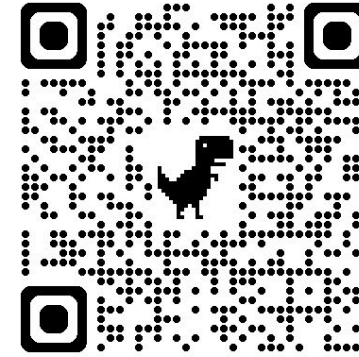


## Share in Chat

Based on this webinar, what will you do differently to improve attendance?



# Evaluation Survey



Please let us know how we can improve:

[https://app.upmetrics.com/data\\_collector/ckf2oltbqlt8k0759tfdbfybj](https://app.upmetrics.com/data_collector/ckf2oltbqlt8k0759tfdbfybj)

**Thank you!**



# Questions from the Audience





## About Us

**Attendance Works** advances student success and closes equity gaps by reducing chronic absence. Operating at the local, state, and national level, Attendance Works:

- ✓ Advances better **policy**
- ✓ Nurtures proven and promising **practice**
- ✓ Promotes meaningful and effective **communication**
- ✓ Catalyzes needed **research**

Since our launch in 2010, we have become the nation's “go-to” resource for improving student attendance. To learn more, visit our website: [www.attendanceworks.org](http://www.attendanceworks.org)


# Appendix

# **Strategies and Tools to Communicate About Attendance**

# Year-Round Planning

Plan activities and events that keep a focus on improving attendance all year long.

- ❖ See sample activities for PreK, K-12 and district teams
- ❖ Use blank calendars to customize the plan for your community
- ❖ Remember to specify who is responsible for leading and how to measure the results



SAMPLE ACTIVITIES for K-12: rev. 3-28-23

**Attendance Activities School Year Plan (K-12)**

School Name								School Year
<p><i>Activities in the grid are examples. You can customize the plan for your school or program. For each activity, specify who is responsible for leading and how to measure the results. You can also recreate this chart in a larger format and use post-it notes to add activities as a group exercise. See the 3 Tiers of Intervention (<a href="http://www.attendanceworks.org/chronic-absence/addressing-chronic-absence/3-tiers-of-intervention/">http://www.attendanceworks.org/chronic-absence/addressing-chronic-absence/3-tiers-of-intervention/</a>)</i></p>								
Timing	Summer (July/August)	Welcome Back (August/September)	Ongoing (Weekly)	Fall Semester (October – November)	Winter Semester (December – February)	Spring Semester (March-April)	End-of-Year (May/June)	
School Team	Establish school team to address attendance. Develop a yearly attendance plan and goals. Agree on metrics to monitor for in-person and distance learning. Utilize start of school year PD days for teachers and school staff to discuss yearly plan and whole school strategies.	Conduct team meeting by the second week of school.	Hold team meetings.	Review <u>early warning data</u> . Ensure staff are prepared to discuss attendance in a caring manner in parent-teacher conferences, attendance improvement meetings, outreach calls and home visits.	Revisit data to measure progress and revise school-wide strategies as needed. Expand team as needed to address reasons for absence.	Ensure staff are prepared to discuss attendance in parent-teacher conferences. Assess strategies and write school improvement plan.	Review data. Share data with student's next teacher for smooth transitions and trouble shooting.	
Foundational Whole School Supports	Plan welcoming traditions for incoming early grades, transition grades and new students and their families. Ensure there is attention paid to students with disabilities and other student groups with historically high levels of absenteeism.	Disseminate in-person health and safety protocols. Promote immunization activities. Establish good and improved attendance recognition schedule/process. Conduct welcoming traditions for students and families.	Coordinate with other school leaders to promote and maintain a positive school climate.	Provide a warm welcome for students who start later in the school year. Offer afterschool programs with engaging and culturally responsive curricula.	Create opportunities for students, families and staff to recharge physically and emotionally. Increase the sense of belonging for specific student groups through clubs, history months and celebrations.	Boost excitement in learning – celebrate and event such as Earth Day.	Plan end-of-year traditions including opportunities for service, e.g. students in upper grades lead tours for students entering the school next fall.	
Tier 1 (Universal)	Promote <u>attendance messaging</u> during registration/enrollment. Have home visits/phone calls to build relationship and remind families about the first day of school.	Share back-to-school messaging about the importance of attendance for in-person and distance learning.	Ask staff to establish daily, weekly and monthly routines to build relationships in the classroom and welcome students back after absences. Hold weekly/monthly recognition. Ensure positive, regular communication with	During <u>parent-teacher conference</u> , recognize good attendance and express concerns in a supportive manner if needed. Anticipate and plan activities/supports to minimize dips in attendance during holidays. Conduct a resource fair for students and their families.	Share messaging and engaging activities around <u>winter holidays</u> . Use data to identify attendance dips and align events to mitigate low attendance days. Schedule mid-year activities to remind school community about attendance.	Hold parent-teacher conference student attendance check-in. Plan engaging activities and messaging to avoid the spring slump.	Communicate the importance of student attendance in last weeks of school. Acknowledge attendance successes.	

<https://www.attendanceworks.org/resources/year-long-planning/>

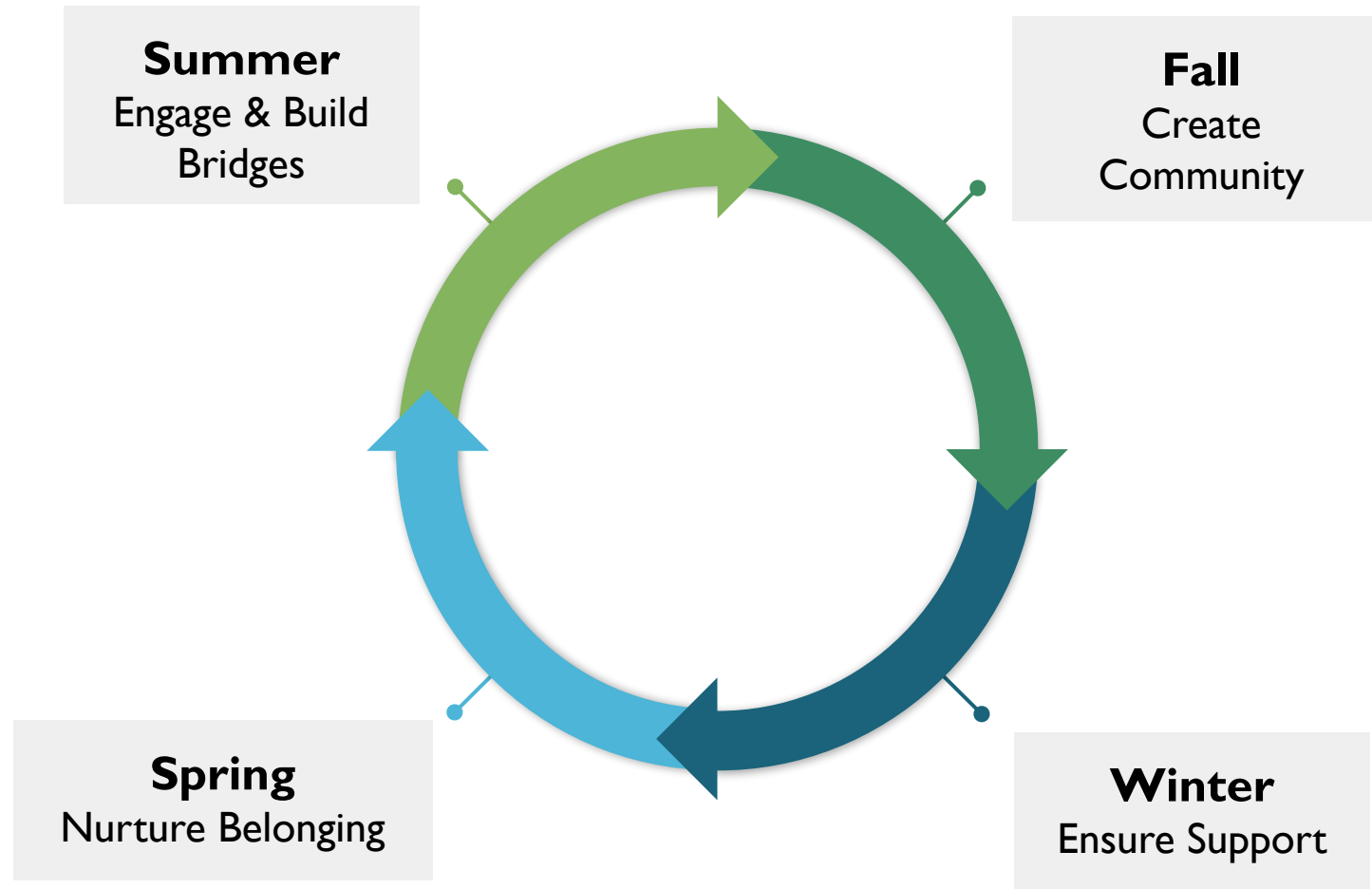
# Insights From “*Back to the Classroom*” (9/10/2024)

## Ad Council Research Institute

### Attendance messaging that most resonated with 5,000 parents:

- ✓ Is positive in tone.
- ✓ Communicates the opportunities associated with in-person learning, not just the consequences of missing school.
- ✓ Focuses on how school develops children holistically, beyond academic performance.
- ✓ Includes realistic goals for parents to work toward not being chronically absent, such as to attend as much as possible vs. citing a specific number of days or saying “every day.”
- ✓ Acknowledges their hesitations and avoids chastising or shaming parents by telling them what’s acceptable or not.
- ✓ Is delivered by a child’s teacher, whom parents say they trust the most.

# Taking A Year-Long Approach



# Toolkit: Showing Up Matters for R.E.A.L.

*It is an opportunity to...*

✓ **Build Routines**

*Daily attendance routines can reduce stress and create a sense of safety and security especially after chaotic transitions.*

✓ **Increase Engagement**

*Being in school helps build relationships with peers and school staff that nurture engagement.*

✓ **Provide Access to Resources**

*Schools provide access to meals, health and mental health services, tutoring, mentoring, technology, extracurriculars (sports, clubs, music, etc.), afterschool and summer programs.*

✓ **Support Learning**

*Showing up to school regularly helps students become proficient in reading and math and graduate from high school.*

<https://www.attendanceworks.org/resources/toolkits/showing-up-matters-for-real/>



## Why Understanding the Perspectives of Students and Families Matter

- ❖ Addressing the challenges students experience requires considering their specific realities.
- ❖ Understanding when many students and families experience similar challenges allows for scalable solutions.
- ❖ What effective strategies to improve attendance have been suggested by students and families at your school? (Write in chat.)



# Utilize Research about Effective Attendance Messaging to Improve Your Communications

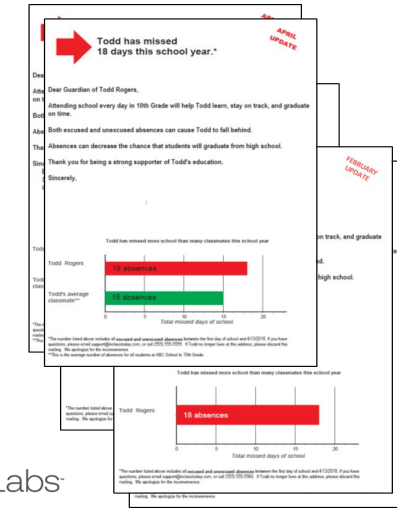
## 1. Readable

- Fewer words
- Accessibility: [Flesch-Kincaid readability test](#)
- Skimmability: bullets, format reinforces message

## 2. Programmatic

- Planned (*personalized to audience*)
- Timely
- Routinized

## 3. Easy to locate and multiple modes





# Kindergarten Transition Toolkit



## Schools and Districts

- ♪ Reach out before kindergarten
- ♪ Start with a warm welcome & engagement
- ♪ Partner with families all year long
- ♪ Offer supports to reduce health-related absences
- ♪ Establish data-informed teams

## Communities

- ★ Engage community partners
- ★ Organize attendance campaigns that reach families with young children

<https://www.attendanceworks.org/resources/toolkits/integrating-attendance-into-kindergarten-transition-2/>

# Health Guidance for Going to School



## Health Guidance for Going to School

Showing up to school every day is critical for children's well-being, engagement and learning.

Make sure to send children to school if they are:

- Generally healthy and well.
- Participating in usual day-to-day activities.
- Children can even go to school if they:
  - Have a mild cold, which may include a runny nose and/or cough.
  - Have eye drainage without fever, eye pain or eyelid redness.
  - Have a mild stomachache.
  - Have a mild rash with no other symptoms.
  - Have head lice. Though they are annoying and should be treated, lice are not a reason to exclude a child from school.
  - Haven't had a fever overnight and they have not taken fever-reducing medicine during that time.

Avoid keeping children at home unless they are too sick to participate. Please see the back of this handout for details. Note that in most situations, a health-care provider's note is not needed to return.

Children may also avoid school due to anxiety (symptoms may include decreased appetite, feeling tired, stomachache, headache etc). If you are worried that your child may be suffering from anxiety, talk with your teacher, the school nurse, social worker or other school staff to discuss the challenge and identify what can help your child stay in school.

If your child has a compromised immune system or is at high risk for complications from common illnesses, please talk to your school (school nurse if available) about developing a plan with you and your child's health-care provider to keep your child healthy and safe while attending school.

Please note: This document is not meant to take the place of local health department/school district guidance including about contagious illnesses such as Covid-19 and the flu.



## Reasons to keep me home from school and what needs to happen before I can return

What is my symptom?	When should I stay home and when to seek medical care?	When can I return to school?
<b>Fever</b>	I have a fever of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher. <b>Seek medical care</b> if I have fever and any of the following: ear pain, sore throat, rash, stomachache, headache or tooth pain.	If I have not had a fever overnight without the use of fever-reducing medication and I am feeling better.
<b>Vomiting and/or diarrhea</b>	If I have vomited 2 or more times in the last 24 hours. If my stool is watery and I may not make it to the toilet in time. <b>Seek medical care</b> if I have stomach cramping and fever, I have bloody or black stool, or I am showing signs of dehydration (tired and sleepy, dry mouth and not urinating at least once in the last 8 hours).	If I did not vomit overnight and I am able to drink liquids without throwing up. If my diarrhea has improved.
<b>Persistent cough or trouble breathing</b>	<b>Seek medical care</b> if I have a persistent cough, difficulty breathing or trouble catching my breath or if I develop a fever with the cough. These symptoms may be signs of Covid-19 or flu and should be evaluated by a health-care provider.	Once I am feeling better and I have been cleared for return by my health-care provider. If my symptoms were due to asthma, please make sure that I have permission to use breathing medication at school.
<b>Rash</b>	<b>Seek medical care</b> if the rash has blisters, is draining, is painful, looks like bruises and/or if I develop a fever.	Rash has healed or I have been cleared for return by my health-care provider.
<b>Eye irritation</b>	<b>Seek medical care</b> if I have eye swelling, eye pain, trouble seeing or an eye injury.	Once I am feeling better.
<b>Sore throat</b>	<b>Seek medical care</b> if I have drooling, trouble swallowing or a fever and/or rash.	Once I am feeling better. If I was prescribed an antibiotic by my health-care provider, then I can return 12 hours after the first dose, if I am without fever and I am feeling better.

If you don't know whether to send your child to school or have specific concerns regarding your child's health, contact your child's health-care provider, a local urgent care or the school nurse.



<https://www.attendanceworks.org/resources/health-handouts-for-families/>

# How Can Local Businesses Help Nurture a Culture of Attendance?



- ♪ Work with a local school to provide [incentives](#) for good or improved attendance, such as gift certificates, books, healthy snacks or backpacks.
- ♪ Host a community forum to discuss the need for good attendance and build support for solutions.
- ♪ Educate your own employees about the importance of good school attendance. Share these [handouts](#).
- ♪ Put up a poster promoting good attendance in your store or office window. See [these examples](#).
- ♪ Join a local coalition taking a community-wide approach to improving attendance. See if your community is involved with the [Campaign for Grade-Level Reading](#).





# Handouts for Families

- ✓ **Preschool, Elementary & Secondary Grades**
- ✓ **Available in English, Spanish, Chinese, Vietnamese, Tagalog and Creole**  
<https://www.attendanceworks.org/resources/handouts-for-families/>



### Help Your Child Succeed in School: Build the Habit of Good Attendance Early

**DID YOU KNOW?**




- Starting in preschool and kindergarten, too many absences can cause children to fall behind in school.
- Missing 10%, or about 2 days each month over the course of a school year, can make it harder to learn to read.
- Students can still fall behind if they miss just one or two days every few weeks.
- Being late to school may lead to poor attendance.
- Absences and tardiness can affect the whole classroom if the teacher has to slow down learning to help children catch up.

Attending school regularly helps children feel better about school—and themselves. Start building this habit in preschool so they learn right away that going to school on time, every day is important. Eventually good attendance will be a skill that will help them succeed in high school and college.

**WHAT YOU CAN DO**

- Set a regular bedtime and morning routine.
- Lay out clothes and pack backpacks the night before.
- Find out what day school starts and make sure your child has the required shots.
- Introduce your children to their teachers and classmates before school starts.
- Develop backup plans for getting to school if something comes up. Call on a family member, a neighbor, or another parent.
- Avoid medical appointments and extended trips when school is in session.
- Keep in mind that complaints of a stomach ache or headache can be a sign of anxiety and not a reason to stay home. If your child seems anxious about going to school, talk to teachers, school counselors and other parents for advice on how to make your child feel comfortable and excited about learning.
- If your child must stay home due to illness, ask the teacher for resources and ideas to continue learning at home.

**When Do Absences Become a Problem?**

	<b>CHRONIC ABSENCE</b> 18 or more days
	<b>WARNING SIGNS</b> 10 to 17 days
	<b>SATISFACTORY</b> 9 or fewer absences

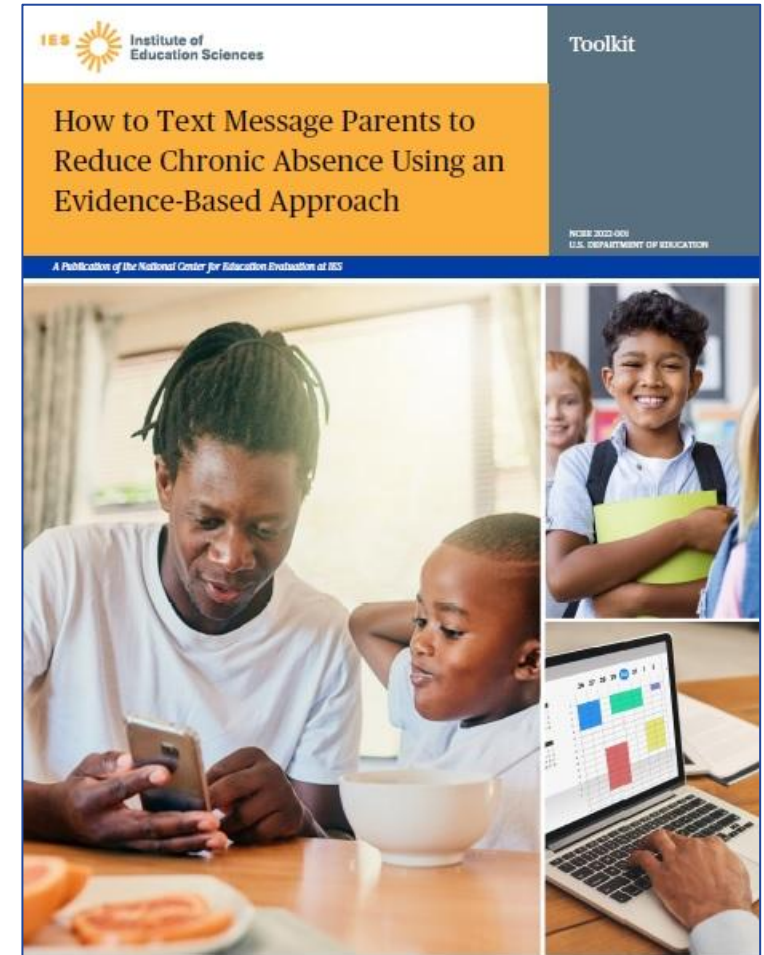
Note: These numbers assume a 180-day school year.

Visit Attendance Works at [www.attendanceworks.org](http://www.attendanceworks.org) for free downloadable resources and tools!

# Communicating with Families

Use these resources to help your communications with families be clear and supportive.

- ★ Letters for Families  
<https://www.attendanceworks.org/resources/welcome-students-to-school/>
- ★ Spring Attendance Dips  
<https://www.attendanceworks.org/resources/spring-attendance-slump/>
- ★ Strengthen Summer Learning  
<https://www.attendanceworks.org/resources/toolkits/showing-up-matters-for-real/using-r-e-a-l-to-strengthen-summer-learning/>
- ★ Stay the Course: Winter Messaging  
<https://www.attendanceworks.org/resources/messaging/stay-the-course-a-winter-messaging-toolkit/>
- ★ Holiday Messaging  
<https://www.attendanceworks.org/resources/messaging/holiday-messaging/>
- ★ How to Text Message Parents to Reduce Chronic Absence Using an Evidence-Based Approach  
<https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/pubs/2022001/pdf/2022001.pdf>





## Developing a Communications Plan

### Identify Your Audience:

- Students
- Families/caregivers
- Teachers
- Community partners

- ✓ What does each group need to know?
- ✓ What do you want them to do?
- ✓ How will you communicate it?

Communications Tips:

<https://www.attendanceworks.org/resources/transition-guide/communication-tips-for-your-transition-attendance-plan/>

Strategies for Connecting with Students & Families:

<https://www.attendanceworks.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Strategies-for-Connecting-with-Students-and-Families-rev-8-27-20.pdf>



## Key Resource: Attendance Awareness Website



- ✓ Download our free social media materials and share with local districts
- ✓ Proclaim September Attendance Awareness Month building off our sample proclamation
- ✓ Sign-up for our newsletter and join 44,000+ members!

Connect with us



Sign-up for updates:

[www.awareness.attendanceworks.org](http://www.awareness.attendanceworks.org)



# Learning Goals for Session 1 (review)

## Participants will:

- Draw on whole school strategies to create
  - positive conditions for learning and
  - strong relationships with students and families that prevent absenteeism
- Understand what chronic absence is and why it matters
- Be introduced to the framework of multi-tiered attendance strategies that moves schools towards prevention and early intervention
- Learn effective strategies to communicate with families about attendance

# Better Truancy Notifications

- ✓ Started with positive language and moved punitive language to the end
- ✓ Fewer words
- ✓ Written at 5<sup>th</sup> grade reading level
- ✓ Formatted to help readers skim
- ✓ Makes connection between absences and achievement

We need your help. [STUDENT NAME]'s absences from school are concerning, and your partnership is critical. Students who miss just one or two days of school each month can fall seriously behind.

[STUDENT NAME] is now “truant” because [SHE/HE] missed school (or was more than 30 minutes late) without a valid excuse on:

*Thursday, September 12, 2023*

*Thursday, September 19, 2023*

*Thursday, September 25, 2023*

Being absent can lead to doing poorly in school. Students who miss many days of school are more likely to:

- Fail their classes
- Drop out from high school
- Have poor relationships with parents and teachers

We are required by [STATE] law to send you this letter and to warn you of the consequences of additional unexcused absences (see sidebar).

Please remember that every absence matters and just a couple days each month adds up. **You are key** to improving [STUDENT NAME]'s attendance.

Sincerely,  
Principal X

[Writing Truancy Notices That Can Improve Attendance](#)

[Using Behavioral Insights to Improve School Administrative Communications: The Case of Truancy Notifications](#)



MAKING  
CARING  
COMMON  
PROJECT

# Implementation Plan and Tool

## Adult-to-Student Relationship Mapping

Grades K - 12

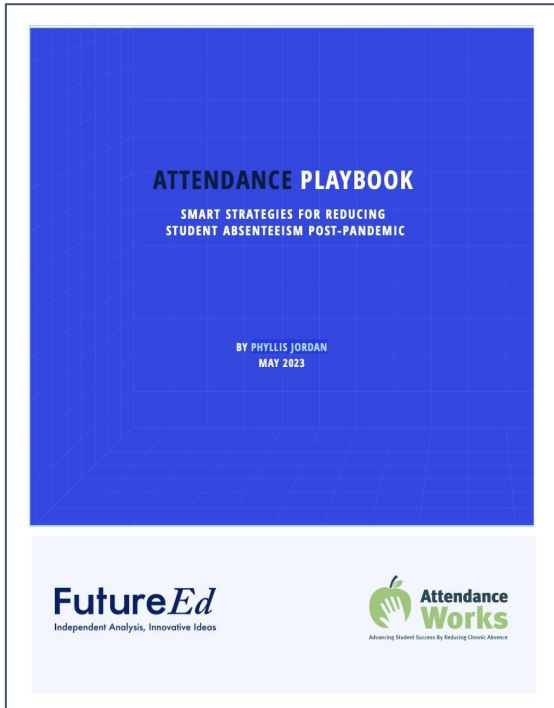
### KEY ELEMENTS

- ✓ See all students at-a-glance
- ✓ See who is well supported and who need supports by adults.
- ✓ Connect all students to at least one school adult

<https://mcc.gse.harvard.edu/educators-relationship-mapping>



# Interventions that can be found in the Attendance Playbook



## **TIER I: Foundational Support and Schoolwide Prevention**

- Community Schools
- Engaging with Families
- Student-Teacher Relationships
- Relevant—and Culturally Relevant—Instruction
- Restorative Discipline Practices
- Summer Learning and Afterschool Strategies
- Positive Greetings at the Door
- Incentives
- Rethinking Recess
- Healthy School Buildings
- School-based Health Services
- Telehealth
- Free Meals for All
- School Buses and Public Transit
- A Safer Walk to School
- Laundry at School

## **TIER II: Targeted Support**

- Early Warning Systems
- Targeted Home Visits
- Mentors and Tutors
- Targeted Youth Engagement
- Addressing Asthma
- Mental Health Support and School Refusal
- Students with Disabilities
- Immigrant Students

## **TIER III: Intensive Support**

- Interagency Case Management
- Housing Insecurity
- Truancy

Attendance Playbook: <https://www.future-ed.org/attendance-playbook/>

Implementation Guide: <https://www.attendanceworks.org/resources/attendance-playbook/>

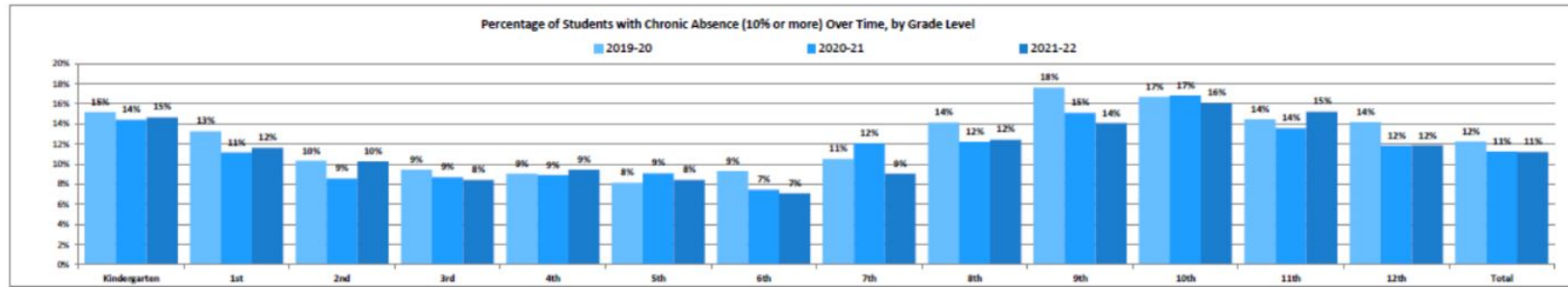


## How to Use the Attendance Playbook

**The Guide to the Attendance Playbook offers practical tips for:**

- Forming a team
- Using attendance data to determine the number of strategies
- Analyzing why students are absent and selecting strategies that address those reasons
- Realistically assessing your team's capacity to implement each strategy
- Selecting strategies that are likely to have the greatest impact for the lowest effort
- Making an implementation plan
- Assessing how well the strategies worked

<https://www.attendanceworks.org/resources/attendance-playbook/>



## Data Tracking Tools

**What?** Attendance Works District and School Attendance Tracking tools

**Why?** These tools will help you analyze your local data.

**When?** Before the new school year begins is an excellent time to examine who was chronically absent last year.

Find it here: <https://www.attendanceworks.org/resources/data-tools/calculating-chronic-absence/>

# Strategies to Address School & Community Safety

- Developmental relationships with adults, near peers, and peers through mentoring and youth programs, including civic action and service
- Partner with community-based dispute resolution organizations to create peer resolution program on campus

Positive Conditions	
Physical Safety	Emotional Safety
Psychological Safety	Identity Safety
Cultural Respect and Responsiveness	
Low-risk Learning Environment	

<https://schoolguide.casel.org/uploads/sites/2/2018/12/SEL-3-Signature-Practices-Playbook-7.5.22.pdf>

# Resources to Address School & Community Safety

## **Safe transit to and from school**

- [The Walking School Bus: Combining Safety, Fun and the Walk to School](#)

## **Implementing a trauma-informed, tiered approach**

- [National Child Traumatic Stress Network](#)

## **Focus on School Safety**

- [National Association of School Psychologists](#)

## **Additional resources**

- [Making caring common project: Relationship Mapping Strategy](#)
- [Collaborative for Academic and Social Emotional Learning \(CASEL\)](#)
- [The SEARCH Institute](#)
- [Building Assets, Reducing Risk \(BARR\)](#)
- [National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments](#)
- [ROCA](#)



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