Strategies to Reduce Chronic Absence: A Multi-Tiered Approach
Sue Fothergill

Attendance Works

Attendance Works is a national, non-profit initiative that promotes awareness of the important role that school attendance plays in achieving academic success starting with school entry. We are an implementation partner for attendance with the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading.

We seek to:
• Build public awareness and political will for reducing chronic absence
• Foster state innovation and leadership
• Nurture effective local practice to improve attendance

www.attendanceworks.org
Who is on the webinar?

Poll:
- Teacher
- Social Worker
- School Nurse
- Attendance Officer
- Principal
- District Administrator
- Community organization working in schools
- State Administrator
- Other?

Warm-Up Exercise ~ Quick Reflection

Reflect on one story about how you helped a student or a school improve attendance.

Write your response:
- What did you learn from that experience about what works?
- What was hard? What barriers did you face?
- Please write in the chat box one example of what worked or one example of a barrier that you experienced.
Learning Goals for Today

- Know what chronic absence is and why it matters for student achievement
- Understand the key steps principals can take to rally their school to take action on attendance
  - Draw from the five proven site-based strategies to reduce chronic absenteeism to strengthen your school plan
  - Learn the main functions of an effective attendance team
  - Learn how to analyze chronic absence data to understand which students are most affected by absenteeism
  - Plan tiered interventions for reducing chronic absence
  - Identify effective messages to communicate with families about the impact of absences
- Have access to tools and resources to use with students and families to help improve attendance

Attendance is An Essential Ingredient of Academic Success

[Diagram showing the relationship between Attainment, Achievement, Attendance, and Advocacy]

4 A School Success Framework

Developed by Annie E. Casey Foundation & America’s Promise Alliance
For more info go to http://www.americaspromise.org/parent-engagement-toolkit
What is Chronic Absence?

Attendance Works defines chronic absence as **missing 10% or more of school for any reason**. An estimated 7.5 million or one out of 10 students are chronically absent in the United States.

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

High Levels of Average Daily Attendance (ADA) Can Mask Chronic Absence

90% and even 95% ≠ A

- Chronic Absence For 6 Elementary Schools in Oakland, CA with 95% ADA in 2012
- Chronic Absence for 6 Schools in New York City with 90% ADA in 2011-12

98% ADA = little chronic absence
95% ADA = don’t know
93% ADA = significant chronic absence
Chronic Absence Versus Truancy

Number of students missing 10% versus 10 unexcused absences (San Francisco Unified School District)

Why We May Not Notice Chronic Absence

Absences Add Up
Chronic Absence = 18 days of absence = 2 days a month
Why Does Attendance Matter for Achievement?

What we know from research around the country

Exposure to language:
Starting in Pre-K, attendance equals exposure to language-rich environments especially for low-income children.

Time on Task in Class:
Students only benefit from classroom instruction if they are in class.

On Track for Success:
Chronic absence is a proven early warning sign that a student is behind in reading by 3rd grade, failing courses middle and high school, and likely to drop-out.

College Readiness:
Attendance patterns predicts college enrollment and persistence.

Engagement:
Attendance reflects engagement in learning.

Effective Practice:
Schools, communities and families can improve attendance when they work together.

(For research, see: http://www.attendanceworks.org/research/)
Absences Add Up:  
Less School = Lower Scores

A 10-point difference on the NAEP is equivalent to a year of learning.  
http://www.attendanceworks.org/research/absences-add/

Starting in PreK, More Years of Chronic Absence = Need for Intensive Reading Support By 2nd Grade

* Indicates that scores are significantly different from scores of students who are never chronically absent, at p<.05 level. **p<.01; ***p<.001
The Long-Term Impact of Chronic Kindergarten Absence Is Most Troubling for Poor Children

5th Grade Math and Reading performance by K attendance for children living in poverty. Academic performance was lower even if attendance had improved in 3rd grade.

Chronic Early Absence Connected to 3rd Grade-Level Reading

A Rhode Island Data Hub analysis found that compared to kindergartners who attend regularly, those chronically absent:
- Scored 20% lower in reading and math in later grades and gap grows
- 2x as likely to be retained in grade.
- 2x likely to be suspended by the end of 7th grade.
- Likely to continue being chronically absent

Source: ECLS-K data analyzed by National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP)
Note: Average academic performance reflects results of direct cognitive assessments conducted for ECLS-K.
Chronic Absence is Especially Challenging for Low-Income Children

- Poor children are 4 X more likely to be chronically absent in K than their highest income peers.

- Children in poverty are more likely to face systemic barriers to school:
  - Unstable Housing
  - Poor Transportation
  - Inadequate Food and Clothing,
  - Lack of Safe Paths to School Due to Neighborhood Violence
  - Chaotic Schools with Poor Quality Programs, etc.

(Romero & Lee, National Portrait of Chronic Absenteeism in the Early Grades, NCCP, 2007)

The Effects of Chronic Absence on Dropout Rates Are Cumulative

With every year of chronic absenteeism, a higher percentage of students dropped out of school.

Attendance Is Even More Important for Graduation for Students In Poverty

Attendance in 9th Grade and Graduation in 4 Years by Lunch Eligibility

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Eligible for Free Lunch</th>
<th>Not Eligible for Lunch Subsidies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SATISFACTORY</td>
<td>CRONICALLY ABSENT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85.5</td>
<td>96.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>73.9</td>
<td>91.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37.8</td>
<td>67.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Presentation to: The Interagency Council for Ending the Achievement Gap November 7, 2013, CT State Dept of Education.

Chronic Absence in High School Predicts Lower College Persistence

In Rhode Island, only 11% of chronically absent high school students persisted into a 2nd year of college vs. 51% of those with low absences.

Rhode Island Data Hub: May 2014
Reflection?

Any insights gained or questions raised from what you heard so far?
Please write your insights or questions in the chat box.

Frameworks and Strategies for Reducing Chronic Absence
Principals make a difference when they:

- Cultivate a School Wide Culture of Attendance
- Use Chronic Absence Data to Determine Need for Additional Supports
- Develop Staff Capacity to Adopt Effective Attendance Practice
- Advocate for Resources and Policies to Improve Attendance

### School Strategies to Create a Culture of Attendance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A. Recognize Good and Improved Attendance</th>
<th>B. Engage Students and Parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>D. Provide Personalized Early Outreach</td>
<td>C. Monitor Attendance Data and Practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Develop Programmatic Response to Barriers (as needed)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Improving attendance requires a tiered approach that begins with prevention

TIER 3
Students at risk of missing 20% or more of school (severe chronic absence)
- Intensive education case management with coordination of public agency and legal response as needed

TIER 2
Students at risk of missing 10-19% (moderate chronic absence)
- Provide personalized early outreach
- Meet with student/family to develop plan
- Outreach to students with health challenges
  - Offer attendance Mentor/Buddy

TIER 1
All students
- Recognize good and improved attendance
- Educate & engage students and families
- Monitor whether absences are adding up
- Clarify attendance expectations and goals
- Establish positive and engaging school climate

Establishing and Supporting Successful Attendance Data and Practice Teams
Attendance Teams...

• Should be action-oriented
• Use school data and gather information on individual students from multiple partners and stakeholders
• Connect needs to resources
• Review outcomes of prior interventions and incentives

Attendance Teams best practices sources: Attendance Works, Children’s Aid Society, the Children’s Initiative, the Baltimore Education Research Consortium and the Baltimore Student Attendance Campaign

Attendance Teams: Action Oriented

Example Goals:
• Identify and address barriers to regular attendance through school-wide action
• Identify and implement best practices in attendance improvement
• Establish school based procedures for responding to absenteeism
• Reduce chronic absence by 10% through a tiered strategy of prevention and intervention
Attendance Teams: Using Data

Historical
• What are the trends of individual students over time?
  Grades over time? Student sub-populations over-time?
  The school over time?
Discuss the story behind the data
• What are the drivers behind the chronic absence?
• Who knows families/the community well?
• Focus group and climate survey data
Quantitative
• Excused and unexcused absences
• Lateness and early dismissals
• Suspension

Find Out Why Students Are Chronically Absent

Myths
- Absences are only a problem if they are unexcused
- Sporadic versus consecutive absences aren’t a problem
- Attendance only matters in the older grades

Barriers
- Chronic disease
- Lack of access to health or dental care
- Poor Transportation
- Trauma
- No safe path to school

Aversion
- Child struggling academically
- Lack of engaging instruction
- Poor school climate and ineffective school discipline
- Parents had negative school experience
Attendance Teams: Lessons Learned

**Leadership** - Principals are key
**Frequency** - ideally weekly
**Membership May include:**
- school secretary,
- nurse,
- social worker,
- guidance counselor,
- program providers and community partners
- teachers,
- after-school partner,
- district staff

Lessons learned sources: Children’s Aide Society, Attendance Works, the Baltimore Education Research Consortium and the Baltimore Student Attendance Campaign

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Attendance Data Team Exercise

Does your school have a team that uses attendance data (qualitative and quantitative) to develop tiered strategies of support to address and reduce chronic absence?

People to recruit:
1. 
2. 
3. 

Implications for action?
Warm Up

What attendance data do you regularly review?

USE CHRONIC ABSENCE DATA TO DETERMINE NEED FOR ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

1. Secure and review your school’s chronic absence data
2. Identify individuals and groups of students who are missing 10% of their days on roll
3. Use data, both quantitative and qualitative, to provide additional supports for chronically absent students
4. Set goals and monitor progress
What is Actionable Data?

For decision-makers to use data, the data must be:

• Accurate
• Accessible
• Timely/Regularly reported

Uses of Actionable Data

• Allocate resources more efficiently (staff or funds)
• Signal need for prompt corrective actions
• Address inequitable outcomes
• Identify positive outliers and best practices

How Can Chronic Absence Data Be Used?

To determine the size and scope of the issue.

District A has a 19% chronic absence rate.

In contrast, District B has a problem half the size with a 10% Chronic absence rate.

How Can Chronic Absence Data Be Used?

To identify the right points for interventions

What percentage of students in each grade level were MODERATELY or SEVERELY chronically absent?

Looking at this data where would you start?
How Can Chronic Absence Data Be Used?  
*To Find Positive Outliers and Schools Needing Greater Support*

### Chronic Absence Levels Among Oakland Public Schools (2009-10)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Elementary</th>
<th>Middle</th>
<th>High School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td># Schools with 0%-5% Absence</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Schools with 5.1%-10% Absence</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Schools with 10.1%-20% Absence</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Schools with &gt;20.1% Absence</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total No. Schools</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metric</th>
<th>Elementary</th>
<th>Middle</th>
<th>High School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Highest % of Absence</td>
<td>31.5%</td>
<td>32.8%</td>
<td>42.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lowest % of Absence</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
<td>14.9%</td>
<td>21.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>11.9%</td>
<td>15.6%</td>
<td>22.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Geographically, where are students with high levels of absences concentrated?
How Can Chronic Absence Data Be Used?
To identify sub-groups of students disproportionately chronically absent

The Chronic Absence By Special Needs report is in all four tools. Other sub-group Reports include Chronic Absence by: Race/ethnicity, Gender, English Learner status, Free and Reduced Lunch status plus several new reports.

How can Chronic Absence Data be Used?
To identify sub-groups of students disproportionately chronically absent

[Graphs showing attendance patterns and data distributions]
How Can Chronic Absence Data Be Used?
*Monitoring Each Student Allows for Personalized Interventions*

### Which students at this school are at risk?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Name</th>
<th>Middle Name/Initial</th>
<th>Last Name</th>
<th>Absence Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>STUDENT A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>satisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STUDENT B</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>satisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STUDENT C</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>chronic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STUDENT D</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>at risk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STUDENT E</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>satisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STUDENT F</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>satisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STUDENT G</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>at risk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STUDENT H</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>satisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STUDENT I</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>satisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STUDENT J</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>satisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STUDENT K</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>satisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STUDENT L</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>at risk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STUDENT M</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>at risk</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All three DATTs are designed so a simple cut-and-paste of student data into the School Attendance Tracking Tool generates Student Lists for that can be sorted by level of absence.

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Sample: Data Analysis Questions

1. Does the data look accurate to you? If not, what might be causing problems with attendance data entry? What improvements might be needed to increase data accuracy?
2. Is chronic absence a problem? Is it getting worse or better?
3. Is chronic absence concentrated among particular students?
4. Is it higher or lower among particular grades?
5. Do some student populations have higher or lower levels of chronic absence?
6. What might explain some of these differences? What additional information do you need to identify barriers or effective strategies in place?
7. Does the level of need (reflected in the severity of absences) compare to availability of supports to improve attendance in your school and district?
Reflection

To what extent does your district or school have data that helps you make management decisions to reduce absenteeism?

Can you currently identify which schools, grades, subgroups and individual students have high levels of absenteeism?

What is your most urgent need as far as actionable data?

Tier 1 Interventions
1. Leverage existing activities to communicate the importance of good attendance and offer support
2. Nurture a school-wide system of attendance incentives
3. Get involved in Attendance Awareness Month

Tier 1: Family Engagement Strategies

**Tier 1:** Family engagement strategies powerful enough to enable families to successfully partner with the school for academic success without any further intervention.

**Who are the Families in Tier 1?**
- Families of all students enrolled in your school

**For which Families is Tier 1 sufficient?**
- Families who partner with the school
- Families who have had good experiences with school in the past
Attendance is higher when schools:
- promote a sense of belonging and connection including noticing when students show up
- make learning engaging for all students
- institute restorative practice not punishment
- help our most economically challenged families and students address unmet needs so all have the opportunity to get to school
- build awareness about how absences can easily add up to too much time lost in the classroom

Tier 1: Creating a positive, engaging school climate that explicitly supports attendance

Tier 1: Communication, Education, and Engagement
Pilot Survey by Todd Rogers
(Harvard University)

Vast majority of parents, even those of students with excessive absences, believe their child’s attendance is same as classmates, better than classmates, or just don’t know.

% of parents who think their child’s attendance is...
- ...better than classmates
- ...same as classmates
- ...don’t know

Harvard research study found comparison reduced absence by 5-10% for all students, regardless of severity of absenteeism.
Messages about absences are more motivating than messages about attendance.

Parents easily associate ‘absence’ with what child is missing when not in school. But the word ‘attendance’ is associated with what kids are normally doing (90% of the time) – it does not appear to prompt parents to think differently about their child missing school.

Ad Council, CA School Attendance Research Project Preliminary Findings: California Office of the Attorney General; Contact: Ben Chida (Ben.Chida@doj.ca.gov)

Build Awareness of How Absences Add Up

a. **Send home handouts** with information and tips about attendance.

b. **Talk with parents early and often** to share the value of good attendance and let them know that you are there to help.

c. **Consider using an activity at a parent event** to demonstrate the importance of avoiding absences. (e.g. Illustrating the Gap or BAH Video)

d. **Utilize written commitments** to encourage good attendance such as a pledge or the attendance goal work sheet.
Tools for Tier 1 Interventions

Parent Video & Discussion Guide

- **SETTING THE STAGE**
- **VIDEO** (6 minutes)
- **FACILITATED CONVERSATION**
  - THE CONSEQUENCES OF CHRONIC ABSENCE
  - HOW TO IMPROVE ABSENTEEISM
    - FAMILY PRACTICE
    - INCREASE SOCIAL CAPITAL
    - IDENTIFY HOW SCHOOL CAN HELP
    - COMMUNITY SERVICES

Discussion: When and where might you use these materials with a family or a group?
Make Creating Back Up Plans a Norm: Student Attendance Success Plan

- Leverage existing activities to communicate the importance of good attendance and offer support

Think about how schools could reach families to convey key attendance messages.

- **School District to Parents**
- **School with Parents**
- **Teacher with Parents**

Write down one idea for each type of interaction.
Tier 2 Interventions

Tier 2: Targeted interventions that remove identified barriers and increase positive connections that motivate improved attendance.

Who are the families in Tier 2?
• Missing 10% or more of the prior or current school year for any reason.
• Families experiencing some challenge e.g. chronic disease, job loss, divorce, etc.

For which families is Tier 2 sufficient?
• Families with barriers to school attendance who may not understand how to access support.
• Families who see school as “the deliverer of bad news”.
• Families who are more successful when there is a positive relationship with someone at the school.
Tools for Tier 2: The Power of Positive Connections

Priority Early Outreach for Positive Linkages and Engagement (PEOPLE)

- **Priority:** Focuses on at-risk students in grades, schools and neighborhoods with high levels of chronic absence
- **Early:** Begins with the start of school.
- **Outreach:** Connects to students and families
- **Positive:** Promotes preventive, supportive approaches rather than punitive responses
- **Linkages** Taps the full community for support
- **Engagement:** Motivates showing up to class & offers students & families a role in improving attendance
Chronic absence (missed 10% or more of school) in the prior year, assuming data is available. And/or starting in the beginning of the school year, student has:

- In first 2 weeks: 2 absences
- In first month (4 weeks): 2-3 absences
- In first 2 months (8 weeks): 4 absences

Students Who Miss 2 or More Days of School in The First Month of School Are Significantly More Likely to Be Chronically Absent by the End of the School Year

- Baltimore students who missed 2-4 days of school in September were 5 times as likely to be chronically absent.
- Students who missed 5 or more days of school in September were 16 times as likely to be chronically absent.
Possible Tier 2 Interventions

- Assign Attendance Buddies
- Partner with families/students to develop Student Attendance Success Plan
- Recruit for engaging Before-or After-School Activities
- Connect to Walk-to-School Companion
- Offer plan or contacts for Health Support

Key Finding: Success Mentors & Supporting Infrastructure Substantially Improved Student Attendance

- Students with prior histories of chronic absenteeism with a Success Mentor gained nearly two additional weeks of school (9 days), which is educationally significant.

- In the top 25% of schools, students with Success Mentors gained one additional month of school.

- High School students with Success Mentors (including those overage for their grade) were 52% more likely to remain in school the following year.

- Mentees reported they liked having a mentor and the mentor helped improve their attendance, schoolwork, motivation, and confidence.
Framing the Conversation to Build a Relationship of Trust

1. **Learn**
   - Learn about the student’s family and their experience in your school or classroom. Ask what their vision is for their child’s future. What are their hopes and dreams for them? Ask how the school year is going socially and academically.

2. **Share**
   - Share positive things you’ve observed about the student. Share your own vision for student learning & development, including helping put students on a pathway to success by encouraging a habit of good attendance.

3. **Inform**
   - Review attendance report with parents. Tailor your conversation to student’s level of absenteeism and inform parents of possible impacts of missing school. Connect attendance back to parents’ hopes and dreams for their child.

4. **Discuss**
   - Discuss the challenges parents face in getting their children to school, as well as strengths they can build upon. For chronically absent students, try to understand the barriers that are keeping their children from school.

5. **Arrive at a Plan**
   - Think through strategies with parents for addressing absences and help them develop an attendance improvement plan. Offer referrals to services as needed and ask if there are other ways you can help.

Talking to Families about Absences: Reflection

**Teacher Perspective:** It’s October and Alyssa has already missed 8 days of school and is frequently tardy. The teacher has noticed that Alyssa seems more reserved and less attentive than normal in class.

**Mother’s Perspective:** Alyssa has asthma and its causing her to miss school. Alyssa is not skipping school without permission so these absences aren’t a problem.
Framing the Conversation to Build a Relationship of Trust

1. Learn
2. Share
3. Inform
4. Discuss
5. Arrive at a Plan

Where to Start or Expand: Implementing PEOPLE (Priority Early Outreach for Positive Linkages and Engagement)

1. Determine where to begin PEOPLE using a data-driven approach
2. Establish a team to implement PEOPLE
3. Examine which students need PEOPLE
4. Connect students and families to positive supports
5. Reflect and celebrate
Identifying Where To Begin Implementation

Identifies Priority Schools, Neighborhoods or Grades within School to Begin Implementation

Who Can Help Advance a PEOPLE Approach?

- **District Leaders**
  - Offer district support and data
  - Identify and engage priority schools

- **School Leaders**
  - Make attendance a priority
  - Ensure implementation team and plan

- **Community Partners**
  - Call for data & PEOPLE approach
  - Link to community resources (health, afterschool, food, mentoring, family support, etc.)
For more information

See the Power of Positive Connections, plus other on-line resources to support implementation on our website: www.attendanceworks.org in the For Schools section of Tools and TA.

Adopting Tier 2 Interventions

1. Write down:
   • Where do you think you might pilot Tier 2 interventions in your school or district?
   • Who could you partner with to implement tier 2 interventions?
   • What first steps could you take to explore this possibility?

Please write in the chat box one partner you are thinking about recruiting to help implement tier 2 interventions.
Tier 3 Interventions

Tier 3 provides intensive interventions, often from multiple agencies or specialists within a school district or community.

Who are families in Tier 3?
- Missing 20% or more of the prior or current school year for any reason.
- Already involved in the system (child welfare, juvenile or criminal justices)

For which families is Tier 3 necessary?
- Families who feel hopeless because of the barriers they face.
- Families who are unable to experience success without intervention.
- Families who have a negative relationship with school.
- Families who require ongoing support for sustained success.
Who Can Help Families at Tier 3?

- Community schools
- Head Start family liaisons
- School integrated service teams
- Family resource centers
- McKinney Vento representatives

Who would you add to this list?

Ingredients for System-wide Success & Sustainability

- Use positive relationships to engage parents and understanding about why monitoring absence is essential to a better future.
- Ensures monitoring & incentives to address chronic absence.
- Strategic partnerships between district and community partners address specific attendance barriers and mobilize support for all ingredients.
- Is accurate, accessible, and regularly reported.
- Expands ability to interpret data and work together to adopt best practices.
Reflections

Smiley Face
Head – a thought inspired by today

Heart
Heart – a feeling evoked by today

Foot
Foot – an action you will take

Homework: Fill Out Your Pyramid
What is in place now for tier 1, 2, and 3? Is it enough given the need? What might you add?