

# Ohio's Attendance Guide



## District and School Practices in Early Intervention

May 2024



**Department of  
Education &  
Workforce**

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# Overview

[Future Forward Ohio](#), Ohio's strategic priorities to help students recover from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, has four key priority areas: Literacy, Accelerating Learning, Workforce Readiness and Student Wellness. The Student Wellness priority focuses on supporting students and removing barriers to learning, including attendance. During the 2022-2023 school year, more than 26% of Ohio's students were chronically absent, meaning they missed 10% or more of the school year for any reason. Through Future Forward Ohio, the Department invested \$15 million to support statewide attendance efforts.

Attendance is a critical concern. Students need to be present to engage with learning, so Ohio needs to address the obstacles that impede their ability to learn. This includes tackling issues like chronic absence, mental health and physical health. **Ohio, like the rest of the United States, has an attendance crisis.**

Attendance and engagement are key to success in school and beyond. It is crucial to support the needs of the whole child by using a multi-tiered system of support to remove barriers that prevent students from participating and engaging in learning, mitigate negative learning experiences, address lack of engagement and provide needed mental health and well-being support.

Attendance matters. Consistently attending school matters. Working together, schools, families and communities can encourage and support students to attend school each day by focusing on prevention and early intervention. Chronic absenteeism is a leading indicator that predicts success for both literacy and workforce outcomes of students. It is an early warning sign that students are at risk of not reading proficiently by the end of third grade, struggling academically in middle school and dropping out of high school. Research shows that Ohio students who are chronically absent are 65% less likely to read on grade level by the end of third grade and 89% less likely to graduate on time.

Part of today's high levels of chronic absence reflect the trauma and upset experienced by students and families due to significant economic and health challenges. Students who may not have experienced barriers to attendance in the past now are struggling to attend school consistently as a result of the pandemic. Chronic absence also exacerbates existing educational inequities among students living in poverty, for students from communities of color and for students with disabilities.

The Ohio Department of Education and Workforce's [Whole Child Framework](#) is a blueprint to meet the needs of the whole child, which is foundational to a child's intellectual and social development and necessary for students to fully engage in learning and school.

The Department, in partnership with [Attendance Works](#), developed this guidance document in response to the attendance declines across the state. **The document is designed to help districts and schools invest in a comprehensive tiered approach that starts with strengthening foundational whole school practices that promote positive conditions for**

**learning, expand their prevention and early intervention efforts and move beyond a focus on individual intervention plans for habitually truant students.**

This document provides a roadmap to put in place the districtwide systemic changes necessary to dramatically improve attendance and decrease chronic absenteeism including:

- Common terms and definitions.
- Ohio laws, policies and data.
- Best practices for district-level change.
- Best practices for school-level change.
- Tools and resources.

## Attendance and Chronic Absence

### Why Does Attendance and Chronic Absence Matter?

**Promoting daily attendance starts with effectively making the case that attendance matters.** [Research has found](#) that families have high hopes for their children yet did not always realize that showing up nearly every day to school was crucial to academic achievement. Many families thought absences were not a problem unless they were unexcused. Most often, they did not realize how many days their children had missed and did not recognize that missing just two days a month could cause their children to fall behind.

- Starting as early as kindergarten, chronic absence is a sign that children will be off track for reading by the end of third grade, achieving in middle school and graduating from high school.
- When students are chronically absent, they miss opportunities to learn, build relationships, develop their mental health and well-being, and access critical resources available at school campuses.

### What is Chronic Absence?

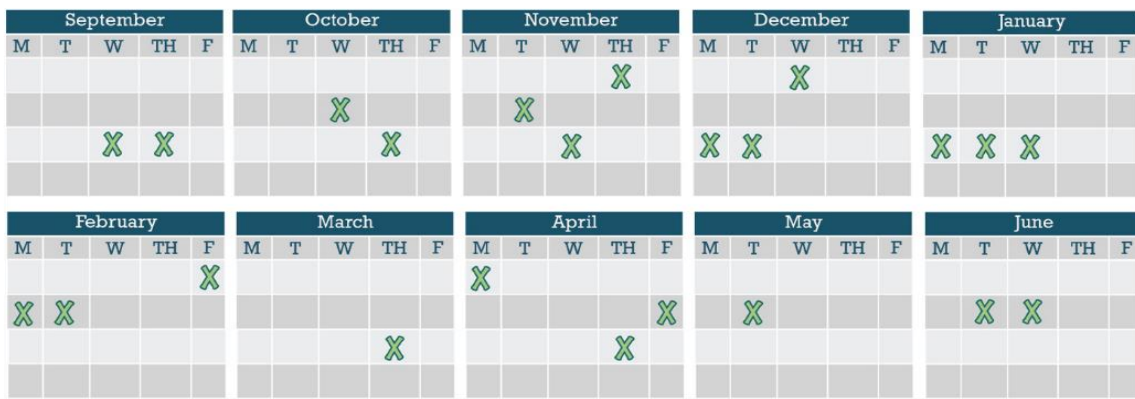
**Chronic absence operates as an early warning metric.** Identifying students who miss 10% of school at any point in the year is an effective early indicator that the students are headed off track academically. They have missed so much school it is affecting their opportunities to learn and thrive. The earlier attendance problems are identified, the sooner schools can reach out to identify and address barriers to getting to school before absences add up and before a student has lost out [academically](#).

**Students missing two to four days in September are five times more likely to be chronically absent throughout the school year.**

**A student's prior history of chronic absence is highly predictive of future chronic absence.** This means providing support even before the first day of a new school year is critical to change a student's attendance trajectory.

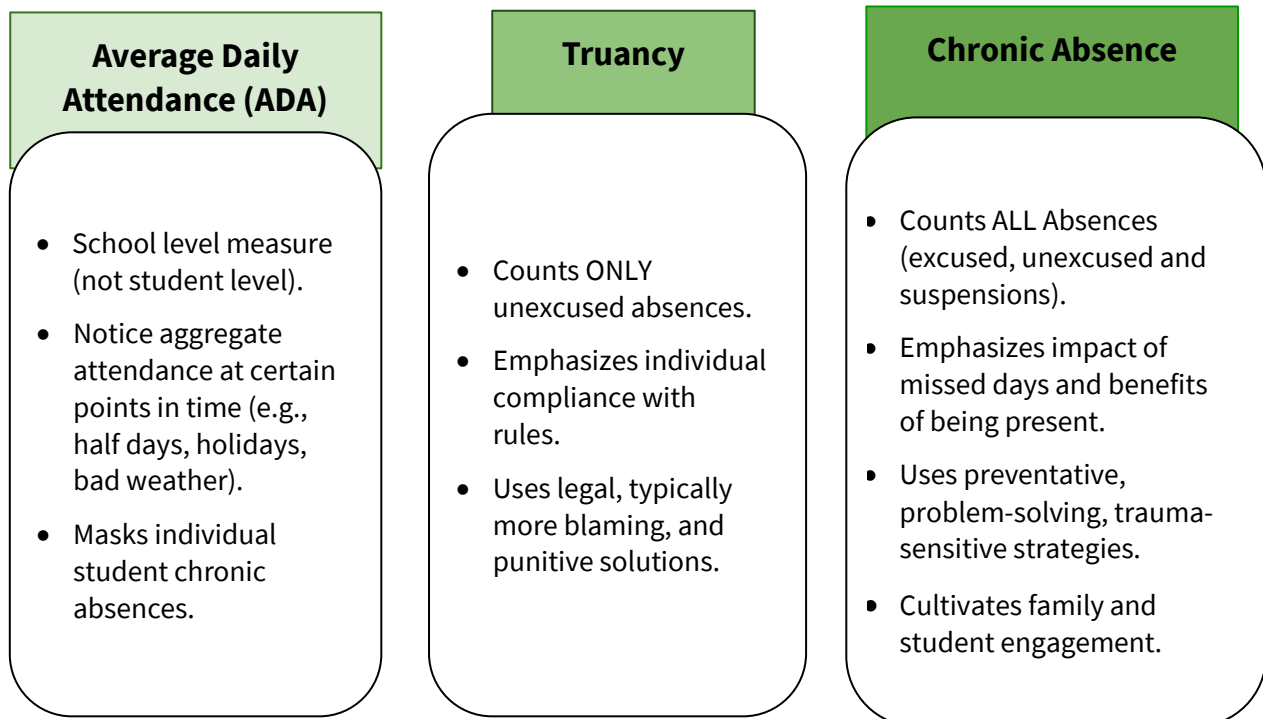
**Chronic absence often is overlooked** because it can be caused by sporadic absences rather than missing many consecutive days.

**Missing just two days a month can lead to chronic absence.  
10% of the school year = ~18 days of absence = almost one month of missed learning.**



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## How is Chronic Absence Different from Average Daily Attendance and Truancy?



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## Why Are Students Absent?

**Increasing attendance and reducing chronic absence requires partnering with students and families to understand and address the challenges that occur outside and inside school.** These challenges affect their ability to learn and, when left unaddressed, cause them to continue to miss more class. Better understanding the root cause of absences includes asking questions such as:

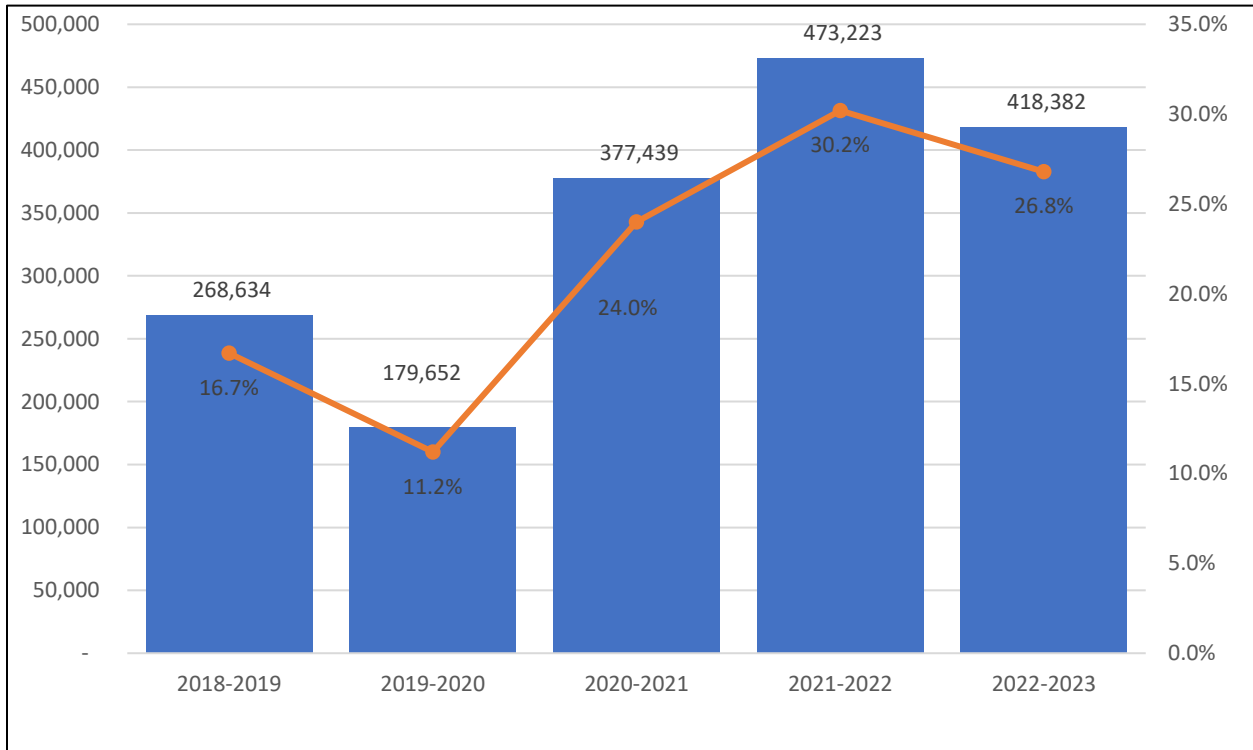
- Are there **barriers** that make it difficult for students to get to school such as unreliable transportation, housing instability, lack of medical care or lack of mental health supports for students experiencing trauma?
- Are students **averse** to attending school because they are struggling academically because of unwelcoming school climate, social and/or peer challenges or biased disciplinary practices?
- Are students **disengaged** due to the lack of engaging curriculum because of no meaningful relationships with school staff or a lack of academic and behavioral support?
- Do families have **misconceptions** about the importance of regular attendance?

# What Do We Know About Chronic Absence in Ohio?

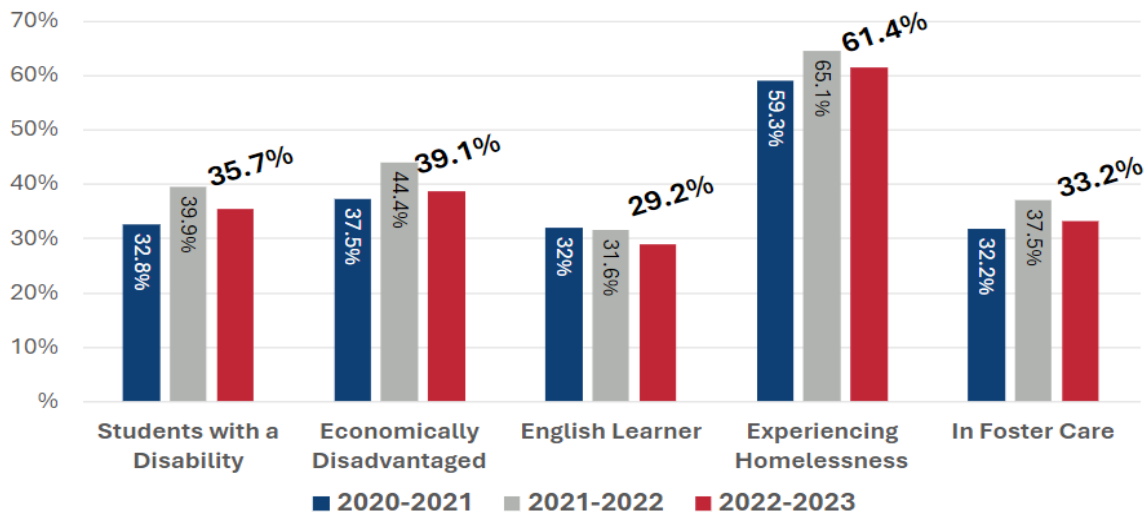
## Ohio Data

During the 2022-2023 school year, more than 26% of Ohio's students were chronically absent, meaning they missed 10% or more of the school year.

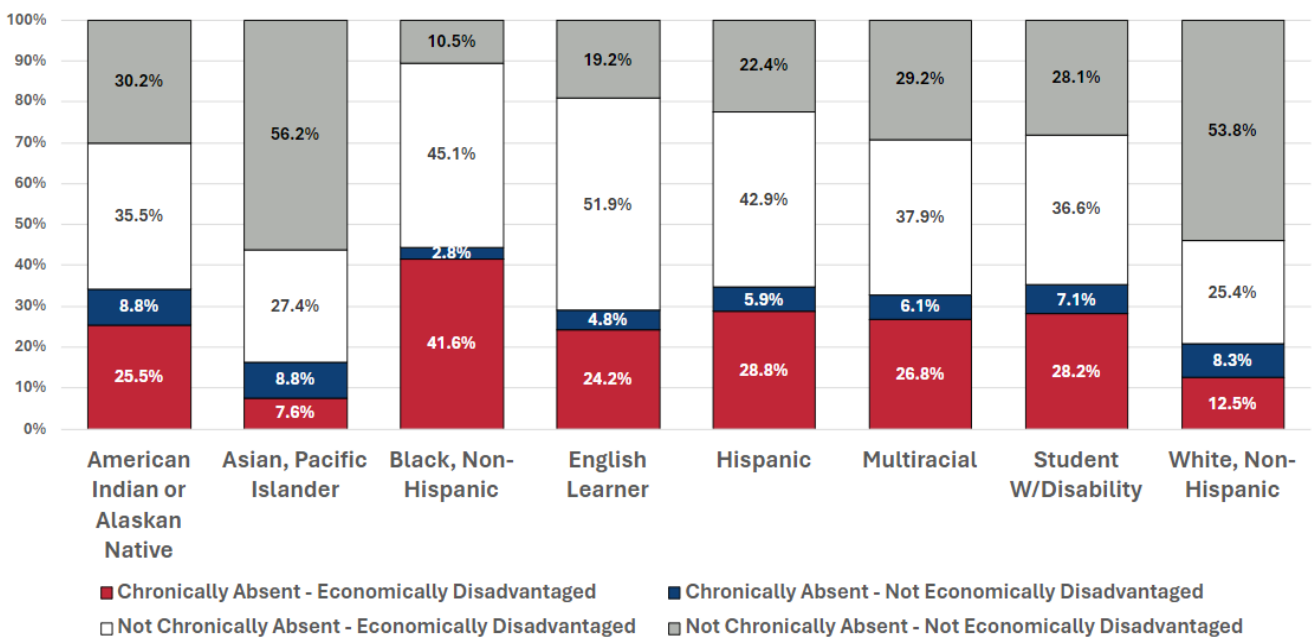
This chart shows the number and percentage of students who were chronically absent in Ohio during the given years. Note: Attendance reporting for 2019-2020 was severely disrupted by the start of the pandemic and is deemed less reliable than other school years.



This chart shows the percentage of chronically absent Ohio students by subgroup.

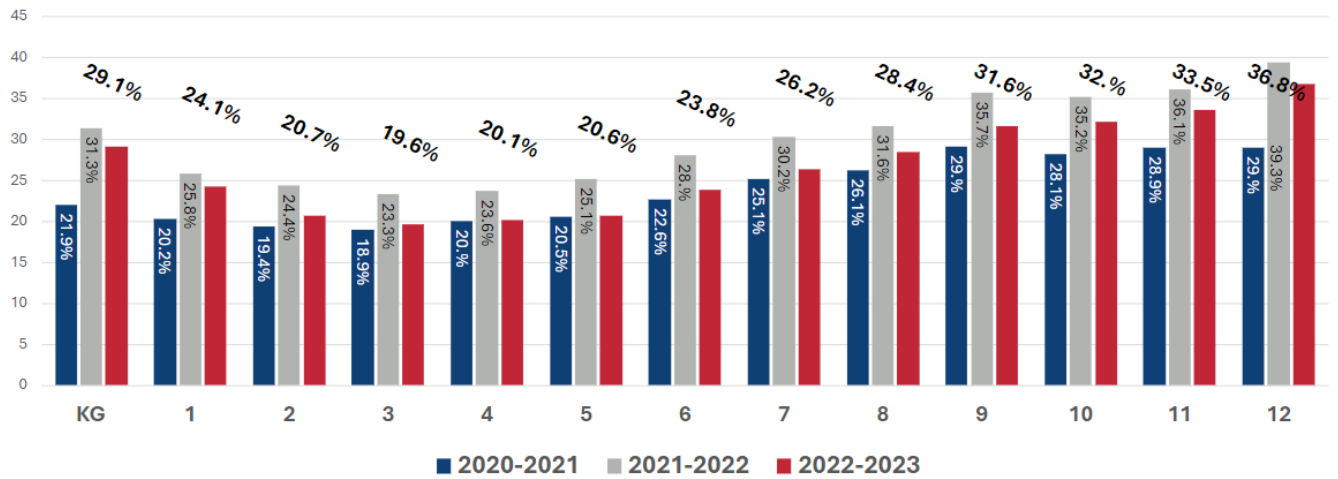


This chart shows the percentage of chronically absent students in Ohio by subgroups as well as economically.





This chart shows the percentage of chronically absent students in Ohio by grade level.



## Ohio's Attendance Laws

In 2017, the General Assembly revised Ohio's attendance laws, which:

- Required school districts to take a more preventative approach to address student attendance concerns before filing a complaint in juvenile court.
- Prevent a school from suspending, expelling, or removing a student from school based solely on absences.

Implementing prevention and early intervention efforts before absences add up, rather than only focusing on the truancy parameters set forth in Ohio law, could result in decreasing the number of students with significant learning loss or who are disengaged from school.

In 2018, the Department developed the [Every Student Succeeds Act](#) plan for Ohio that includes monitoring and addressing chronic absenteeism. That same year, the Department partnered with the Cleveland Browns Foundation and Harvard's Proving Ground to create the *Stay in the Game!* Network. This dynamic statewide movement and learning network to dramatically improve student attendance was launched in fall 2019.

**Prevention and early intervention are key.** While absence intervention teams and plans are an important piece of the puzzle, Ohio needs to provide supports to students and families earlier. It is best practice for schools and districts to have supportive interventions in place for excessively absent students as intervention support and to educate families on the importance of attendance.

**An increased focus on prevention and early intervention can decrease the number of absence intervention plans that schools will need to develop.** Fewer habitually truant students enable school staff to concentrate on students where Tier 1 and Tier 2 interventions were not effective.

[Ohio law](#) requires districts to track the hours that a student is not in attendance (including tardies and early dismissals) and [Ohio Administrative Code](#) provides definitions of allowable excused absences.

The chart below aligns the chronic absence tiers with Ohio’s attendance laws.

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Chronic Absence</b></li> </ul>         | Missing 10% for any reason (12 hours (two days) per month or 92 hours (18 days) per year)             |
| <b>Tier 3: Intensive Intervention</b>  | <b>Students missing 20% or more for any reason</b>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Extreme Chronic Absence</li> </ul>        | Absent 50% or more: 60+ hours (10 days+) per month of excused and/or unexcused absences               |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Habitually Truant (Ohio HB410)</li> </ul> | Missed 35%: 42 hours (seven days) per month of unexcused absences                                     |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Excessive Absence (Ohio HB410)</li> </ul> | Absent 30%+: 36 hours (nine days) or more per month for non-medical excuse or unexcused absence       |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Severe Chronic Absence</li> </ul>         | Absent 20-49%: 25-59 hours (five to nine days) per month, including excused and/or unexcused absences |
| <b>Tier 2: Early Intervention</b>  | <b>Students missing 10-19% for any reason</b>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Moderate Chronic Absence</li> </ul>       | Absent 10-19%: 12-24 hours (two to four days) per month   |
| <b>Tier 1: Universal Prevention</b>  | <b>All Students and Families</b>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>At-risk of Chronic Absence</li> </ul>     | Absent 5-9%: Seven to 11 hours per month  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Satisfactory Attendance</li> </ul>        | Absent 5% or less: Six hours (one day) per month  |

*Sample based on 20 days per month and 180-day school year.  
(20 school days in a month=20\*6 hours/day=120 hours each month)*

# How Can Districts in Ohio Improve Attendance?

Significantly increasing attendance and reducing chronic absence requires shifting mindsets, policies and practices. Transforming our approach to attendance is an opportunity to transform student outcomes. An effective practice pathway begins with:

- Changing attitudes and beliefs about attendance.
- Strategically using data for proactive solutions.
- Creating a capacity-building infrastructure.
- Implementing evidence-based strategies.

School districts need to take a systemic approach to increase attendance and reduce chronic absenteeism by integrating attendance into existing practices and not create a standalone initiative.

## **SHIFT THE SYSTEM TO PREVENTION AND EARLY INTERVENTION**

Isolated programmatic responses and an emphasis on unexcused absences will not significantly reduce a district's chronic absence rate nor will it lead to the realignment of staff and resources to support prevention and early intervention. Some of the system shifts include:

- Emphasizing the impact of missed days on learning and student wellness.
- Understanding that Engagement = Attendance.
- Taking a positive, problem-solving approach versus legalistic and punitive approaches.
- Seeing students and families as an important part of the solution instead of the problem or people in need of rescue.
- Using an [early warning system](#) before absences add up.

## ACKNOWLEDGE EVERYONE HAS A ROLE TO PLAY

**Districts, teachers, families and communities working together can get kids to school.** A districtwide approach leads to more sustainable outcomes. All too often, attendance is seen as the responsibility of social workers and student support staff, and it is siloed or not aligned with existing academic and behavioral improvement strategies. A districtwide systemic approach to reducing chronic absence includes [six key ingredients](#):

|                                      |  |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| <b>Actionable Data</b>               | Collect and report accurate quantitative and qualitative attendance and chronic absence data that are accurate, accessible, timely, comprehensive and understandable.  |
| <b>Capacity Building</b>             | Provide professional development to all staff and community partners so they have the skills and knowledge to take a data-driven and multi-tiered approach to supporting student attendance and engagement.      |
| <b>Positive Engagement</b>           | Create a culture of attendance by taking a positive, problem-solving, not punitive, approach to absenteeism that is centered on belonging and engagement. Help everyone understand why daily attendance matters. |
| <b>Strategic Partnerships</b>        | Strengthen and expand partnerships between the district, school, families and community to provide for a full range of resources and supports to address barriers to attendance.                                 |
| <b>Adequate, Equitable Resources</b> | Resources and funding are sufficient to ensure students, from all backgrounds and circumstances, receive a quality education and similar opportunities to thrive and achieve in school, career and college.      |
| <b>Shared Accountability</b>         | Absenteeism is a cross-cutting issue and cannot be solved by any one person, department or agency.   |

**Sustainable implementation requires an “all-hands on deck” approach** that crosses departmental boundaries (for example communications, data and accountability, teaching and learning, equity, family engagement, transportation, special education, health, and student supports).

Embedding attendance into all district-level practices can reduce overload on building leaders and staff.

## USE DATA STRATEGICALLY

Looking at chronic absence data on a biweekly basis can tell district leaders which schools or student groups need more resources. It can also be used in combination with other data to assess how well specific programs or interventions are working or to identify systemic issues and barriers. Academic, behavior and attendance dashboards allow decision-makers to use quantitative and qualitative data to:

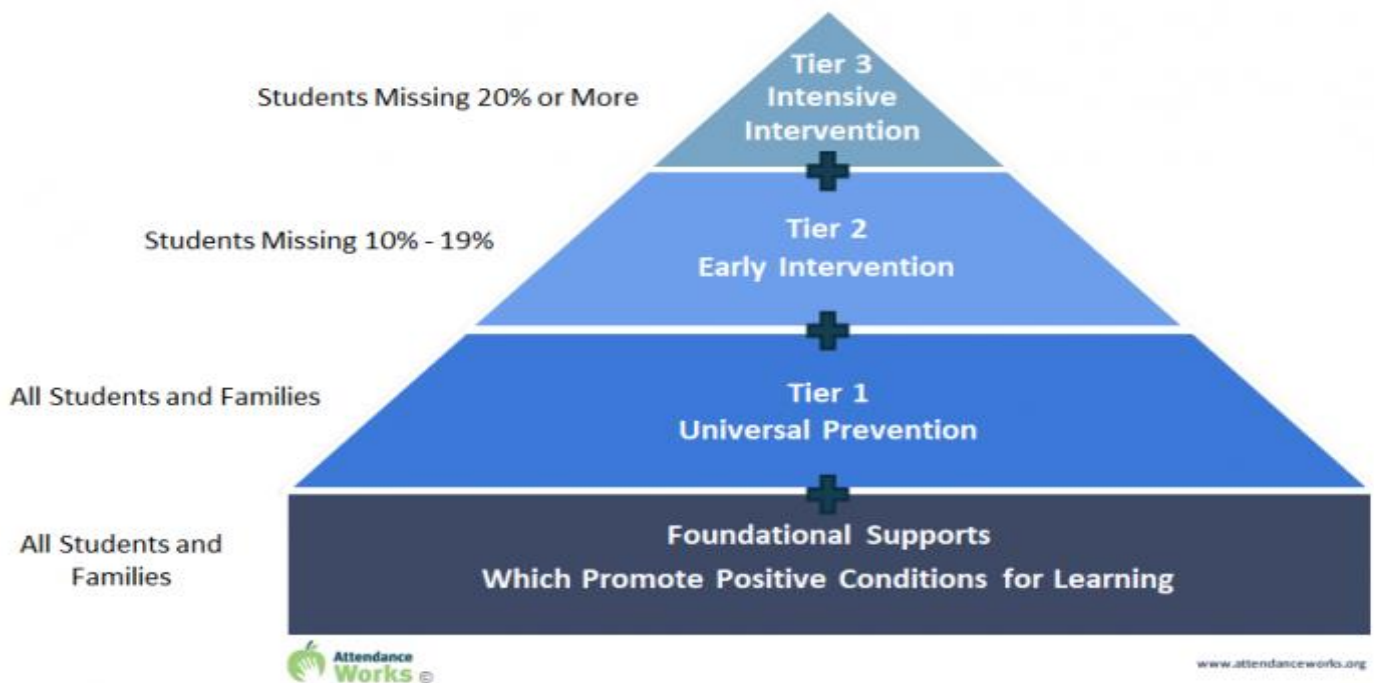
- Make decisions about the allocation of resources.

- Analyze the connections between attendance, academics and behavior.
- Address the systemic causes of absences for groups of students.

## ADOPT A MULTI-TIERED APPROACH TO SUPPORT STUDENT ATTENDANCE AND ENGAGEMENT

The idea behind a multi-tiered approach is that most students will respond to schoolwide strategies for improving attendance and engagement and that some students will require more personalized support and more intensive measures.

|                              |   |
|------------------------------|---|
| <b>Foundational Supports</b> | Whole school practices promote <a href="#">positive conditions for learning</a> . When positive conditions are in place, students are more likely to attend and be engaged. |
| <b>Tier 1</b>                | Universal strategies to encourage good attendance for all students.   |
| <b>Tier 2</b>                | Early interventions for students who need more support to avoid chronic absence.  |
| <b>Tier 3</b>                | Intensive interventions for students facing the greatest challenges to getting to school.   |



**A districtwide emphasis on prevention and early intervention will have a greater impact on the chronic absence rate versus sole compliance with Ohio’s attendance laws.** Districts should consider how attendance can be aligned with or integrated into existing collaborative efforts, such as Positive Behavioral Interventions & Support (PBIS) or Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS).

## What is the Role of District Administration?

If a school district has a chronic absence rate above 5%, there are dozens or hundreds of students who are at risk of falling behind academically.

While attendance improvements can begin in a single classroom or school building, the most effective and sustainable approaches are led by and supported at the central office level by the board of education, the superintendent, the executive leadership team and regional leadership.

Reducing districtwide rates of chronic absence and increasing attendance requires the district-level administration to utilize **existing teams** where possible. This ensures attendance teams, or the functions of an attendance team, are intentionally connected to existing collaborative team structures as part of a continuous improvement process. For example, districts and schools may already have a district leadership team (DLT), building leadership teams (BLT), teacher-based teams (TBT), Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support Team (PBIS) and Multi-Tiered System of Support Teams (MTSS) that are intended to meet the needs of the [Whole Child](#).

An integrated districtwide approach is necessary for the following reasons:

- Attendance is integrally linked to academic outcomes and reflects lost learning time.
- Chronic absence can only be decreased through internal and external partnerships.
- Attendance improvement efforts need to be aligned with existing mental health and well-being and behavioral support initiatives within a district.
- District personnel have different levels of authority and influence over school-level practices.
- Many causes for absence are systemic and require policy and practice solutions.

### ONE PLAN INTEGRATION

During a district's development of its One Plan, attendance and chronic absence can be integrated into the Needs Assessment process. Districts can use chronic absence data to identify areas for improvement. District leadership teams and building leadership teams can integrate chronic absence into each step of the plan: identify critical needs, prioritize student groups in need of support, select and monitor evidence-based strategies and select adult measures to monitor implementation of attendance interventions and student outcome measures such as reductions in chronic absence.

### ASSEMBLE A CROSS-DEPARTMENTAL DISTRICT TEAM

This cabinet-level, cross-departmental team is responsible for ensuring attendance is aligned with all existing initiatives to improve academic outcomes and includes central office and building-level staff. If a district has an existing district leadership team as part of its continuous improvement process, it does not need to create another team.

The district team functions include:

- Examine and monitor quantitative and qualitative data.
- Establish districtwide attendance messaging and positive engagement policies and practices.
- Build school-level capacity to address chronic absence and implement a tiered support system of support.
- Establish strategic and sustainable [community partnerships](#).
- Promote shared accountability and continuous improvement.
- Allocate resources equitably.

### **District Team Membership Considerations**

- Who is responsible for principal performance?
- Who can create and customize school-level data reports?
- Who supervises social work and guidance staff?
- Who is responsible for specific student populations (for example early learning, students with disabilities, English learners)?
- Who are the district’s ESSA liaisons responsible for ensuring educational stability and attendance for students in foster care, students involved in the justice system and students experiencing homelessness?
- Who oversees health and mental health services (for example school nurses, health centers)?
- Who is responsible for community partnerships and family engagement?
- Who oversees the MTSS and PBIS work?
- Who is responsible for the district’s attendance communication and messaging?

Each of the district team functions are further described below with a set of implementation questions that districts can use to guide their efforts.

#### *EXAMINE AND MONITOR DATA*

The district team should routinely review (ideally every two weeks) disaggregated student attendance data by school, grade and subgroups to understand districtwide attendance patterns and trends.

### **Areas for District Team Inquiry**

- Do the district data systems “talk to each other”?
- Does the district have accessible data dashboards that display student attendance, behavior and academic data?
- Have building administrators been trained to analyze data patterns and trends?
- Do schools routinely collect information from students and families to understand attendance barriers?
- Are the reasons for absence being systematically documented?

The team also should ensure that school leaders and teams have access to disaggregated data and are analyzing patterns and trends weekly to inform schoolwide strategies.

## *ESTABLISH ATTENDANCE AND POSITIVE ENGAGEMENT POLICIES AND PRACTICES*

A **comprehensive attendance improvement manual** should provide implementation guidance and protocols that specify consistent expectations and minimum protocols for all absences (excused and unexcused) and specify the attendance related roles and responsibilities of all district and school-based staff.

The attendance manual should minimally include:

- a. Definitions of regular attendance and chronic absence.
- b. A multi-tiered system of attendance supports framework that begins with prevention and early intervention.
- c. Attendance related roles and responsibilities for all central office and school-based staff.
- d. Protocols for integrating and aligning attendance into existing district and school teams.
- e. Data utilization requirements and metrics.
- f. Examples of best practices for tiered strategies and interventions.
- g. District's commitment and chosen approach to foundational and Tier 1 supports.
- h. Positive personalized early intervention protocols.
- i. Root cause analysis tools and resources.
- j. Hourly attendance taking and recording procedures.
- k. Details of Ohio's attendance laws and statutory requirements.

### **Areas for District Team Inquiry**

- Do we have clear definitions for excused and medically excused absences?
- Do we have early outreach protocols to families before absences add up?
- Do we provide guidance on attendance that can be aligned and integrated into school teams?
- Does our policy articulate a multi-tiered approach, including our approach to districtwide Foundational and Tier 1 supports?
- Do we promote a culture of attendance on a year-round basis?
- Do we provide attendance messaging resources to schools?
- Do we have a districtwide recognition system for promoting good and improved attendance?



## *BUILD SCHOOL-LEVEL CAPACITY TO ADDRESS CHRONIC ABSENCE USING A TIERED SYSTEM OF SUPPORT*

The district team needs to ensure there are systematic, cross-functional professional development opportunities to ensure principals, school staff and community partners have the knowledge, skills and capacity to reduce chronic absence.

They need to understand what chronic absence is, why it matters and have the tools to take a data driven, tiered approach to support student attendance, participation and engagement.

The professional development system would be inclusive of training, communities of practice, coaching and the regular sharing of best practices among all staff and schools.

### **Areas for District Team Inquiry**

- Have school leaders and teams been trained in the multi-tiered system of attendance support?
- Do we assist building leaders in the development and alignment of school-level teams?
- Is attendance embedded in the district's annual professional development plan?
- Do we systematically hear from school teams about their needs, resource gaps and common reasons for absence?
- Are all schools able to implement a restorative, positive school climate?

## *ESTABLISH STRATEGIC AND SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS*

Community partnerships are essential to the success of school attendance, engagement, prevention and intervention strategies. All community partners working in the district should be striving toward the same goal identified in the One Plan.

Community partners present valuable opportunities for input through their unique expertise and viewpoints. Community partners often have valuable information and data that can inform decisions and maximize the impact of selected strategies. Engaging community partners, such as business leaders, faith-based organizations, community-based organizations, philanthropic partners and neighbors, can help to connect the goals of the district to the goals of the community.

The district team should use data from schools about the factors affecting attendance to strengthen and expand partnerships between the district, schools and community partners to ensure there is a full range of strategies to address the barriers to attendance and engagement.

### **Areas for District Team Inquiry**

- Has our team mapped community-based resources that promote attendance and engagement by school?
- Do our community partners align their work with multi-tiered attendance and engagement strategies?
- Does our team have mechanisms to identify needs from school leaders that require the assistance of community partners?
- Is there a clear process for school teams to connect to external partners?

The [Ohio Local Stakeholder Engagement Toolkit](#) is designed to support districts in the local stakeholder engagement process.

## *PROMOTE SHARED SOLUTIONS, ACCOUNTABILITY AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT*

Improving attendance requires each person within the district and community partners to understand the shared goal and their roles in achieving it. For each group to be successful in doing their parts to improve attendance, they must have clear expectations, be equipped with the knowledge and skills to do the work and be held accountable for both adult measures and student outcomes.

The district team must create systems and cross-departmental infrastructure supports for attendance and remind all stakeholders (students, families, educators and community partners) of their responsibility to help boost attendance and reduce chronic absence. This may include providing additional support to school teams to help them identify effective, evidence-based attendance interventions to adopt and adapt.

### **Areas for District Team Inquiry**

- Is attendance data used for the One Needs Assessment?
- Is attendance a focus area in the district's One Plan?
- Do we ensure school leaders have a data-driven plan to improve attendance and reduce chronic absence?
- Do we have ways to identify and replicate effective practices across the district (for example Communities of Practice)?
- Do we have Memorandums of Understanding with community partners that specify roles, responsibilities and outcomes?
- Do we monitor the attendance improvement strategies across the district to determine the impact?

## *ALLOCATE RESOURCES EQUITABLY*

At the district level, chronic absence data can inform the budget process and be used to distribute staff and resources more efficiently and equitably. For example, by moving resources to prevention and early intervention, district teams can hopefully reduce the cost of more intensive interventions over time.

### **Areas for District Team Inquiry**

- Does our district prioritize the distribution of resources to schools with higher rates of chronic absence and large populations of vulnerable students?
- What percentage of the district budget supports prevention or early intervention in all schools?
- Does the way we compensate staff recognize the importance of building relationships with students and families (for example paid for home visits)?

# How Can Schools in Ohio Improve Attendance?

Chronic absence is defined as missing 10% or more of the total number of days enrolled during the school year for any reason. It includes excused and unexcused absences as well as suspensions.

**Chronic absence operates as an early warning metric.** Identifying students who miss 10% of the school year at any point in the school year is an effective early indicator that a student is headed off track. Schools can improve attendance when they:

- Prioritize attendance and engagement.
- Promote a schoolwide climate of attendance.
- Shift the focus to prevention and early intervention.
- Take a positive, problem-solving approach versus relying on legalistic and punitive actions.
- See students and families as an important part of the solution instead of the problem or people in need of rescue.
- Take a data-driven team approach led by the building administrator.
- Engage every person in the school building.

## What are the Characteristics of an Effective School-Level Team?

The primary purpose of a school team is to organize and facilitate a schoolwide attendance strategy and ensure it is an integral component of the school's plan to improve outcomes for all students. This can be accomplished by incorporating attendance team functions into existing collaborative teams that focus on academics and behavior.

The team is expected to review attendance data every other week (at a minimum) for every tier, not just students who have the most absences or students who are truant.

The team should reflect the demographics of the school and district community. If the team does not reflect the diversity of the school community, the school or district leadership may consider the following questions:

1. How can the school seek community input before creating policies?
2. Are there recruiting strategies to help the school team better reflect the community?
3. How can we incorporate teachers, parents, students or community members to participate on the team who reflect the demographics of the school community?

### Functions of a school team focused on attendance:

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

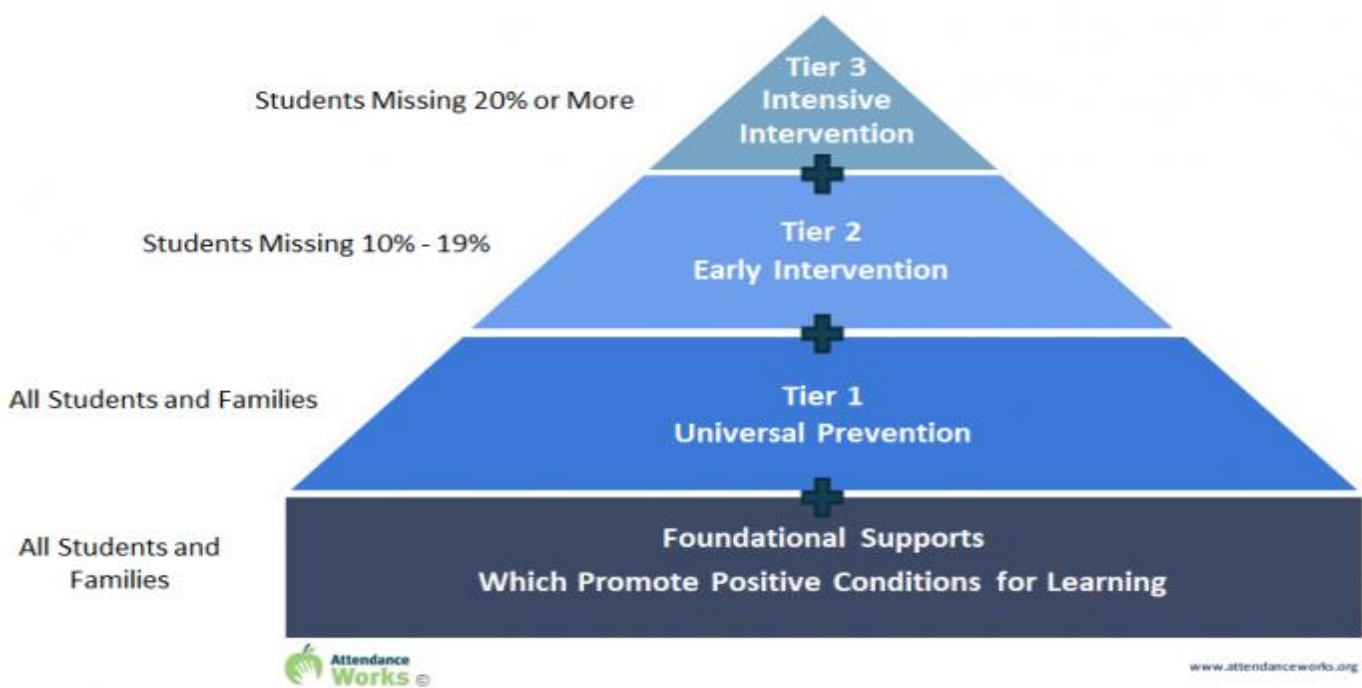
### Considerations for Establishing or Aligning Attendance in School Teams

- What teams already exist in the school? Is there overlapping membership?
- How well are the existing teams functioning?
- Can the work of facilitating a schoolwide attendance strategy be incorporated into the responsibilities of an existing team (for example, the building leadership team, MTSS team or PBIS team)?
- Can the attendance strategy functions be divided up with strong coordination across different teams?
- Does the school team reflect the school community demographics?

Each of the school team functions are further described below with a set of implementation questions that districts can use to guide their efforts.

## ORGANIZE A MULTI-TIERED ATTENDANCE STRATEGY THAT BEGINS WITH PREVENTION AND EARLY INTERVENTION

The idea behind a [multi-tiered approach](#) is that the majority of students and families will respond to schoolwide strategies for improving attendance and engagement (known as Tier 1 supports) but that these strategies won't be sufficient for all students. Some students require more personalized support (Tier 2) or intensive measures (Tier 3).



### Areas for School Team Inquiry

- Is our regular team agenda aligned to a multi-tiered system of support?
- Do we proactively promote an engaging school climate?
- Have we defined when Tier 2 or Tier 3 supports should be offered?
- Do we have a protocol for early personalized outreach to families?
- Do we align our attendance efforts with PBIS and MTSS?

## FOUNDATIONAL SUPPORTS

**Engagement and positive relationships are foundational supports** and need to be the primary focus of a systemic attendance improvement strategy. Students must be present and engaged to learn. The goal is to integrate attendance, engagement and belonging into existing practice.

- Harvard’s [Relationship Mapping Strategy](#) offers an intentional process to make sure every student in the school is connected to at least one caring adult in the building.
- Turnaround for Children has developed a [relationship building toolbox](#) that school staff can use in their everyday work. It includes the 2x10 Strategy where educators spend two minutes every day for 10 consecutive school days with a student in need of extra support.

## TIER 1 UNIVERSAL PREVENTION

Strategies are aimed at encouraging better attendance for all students and at preventing absenteeism before it affects achievement. Strategy examples include:

- Connection and relationship to a caring adult in the school.
- Personalized outreach and communication to families and students. See this [guidance for texting](#) or look at Proving Ground’s [How-to Guide for personalized postcards](#).
- [Recognition of good and improved attendance](#), not perfect attendance.
- Messaging about the benefits of attendance for the whole child – Attendance Works has developed the [Showing Up Matters for R.E.A.L. Toolkit](#) which is filled with free, ready-to-use messaging resources for families and students.
- The *Stay in the Game!* Network supports districts as they lead attendance campaigns across the state by sharing key resources and tools that can meaningfully improve attendance. Districts can learn from each other, use the campaign Playbook to customize their district campaign and measure the progress of their work. Included are a variety of [parent and community communication tools and resources](#) as well as exciting opportunities to engage with Ohio’s leading sports teams.

## TIER 2 EARLY INTERVENTION

Personalized supports for students who missed between 10-20% of school during the last school year as well as those who miss 10-20% of school during the current school year. Strategy examples include:

- **Mentoring:** Mentoring is a [proven strategy](#) for reducing absenteeism. The National Mentoring Partnership, in collaboration with partners, has released the [Virtual Mentoring Portal](#). This free tool provides safe and monitored mentoring platforms for mentors and mentees to continue their relationships when they need to be home for health reasons. [Peer Group Connections](#) is a peer mentoring strategy that is effective for secondary students.
- **Expanded learning programs:** Schools can help students by making sure they enroll and participate in expanded learning programs that are offered after school during the traditional school year or during the summer months. [Research](#) shows these significantly improve attendance during the school day, especially for English learners.

- **Mental health:** Many districts anticipate the need for greater levels of mental health supports given the stress and impacts on students and families since school closure. Kaiser Permanente’s [Planning for the Next Normal at School](#) playbook offers ideas to expand services.
- **Student success plans:** Schools should create opportunities to partner with students and families to craft proactive [success plans](#) as soon as absences (for any reason) start to add up. Success or early intervention plans are different from the absence intervention plans required under Ohio’s attendance laws. These plans outline what engages the student in learning, addresses barriers to getting to school or class and builds upon family strengths, supports and aspirations for their student. Ensuring students and families have a voice in crafting plans is critical to tailoring solutions to their realities and nurturing ownership.

## TIER 3 INTENSIVE INTERVENTION

Tier 3 supports may be needed to improve outcomes for students who are or were severely chronically absent (missing 20% or more of school) in the prior school year and those who did not show up during the first few weeks of school. According to Ohio’s attendance laws, chronic absenteeism includes absences that are both excused and unexcused therefore, not all students in Tier 3 will be considered truant or excessively absent.

**Habitual truancy interventions, as defined by [Ohio’s attendance laws](#),** are examples of Tier 3 interventions. Schools and districts can use the absence intervention plan as a tool for discussion and collaboration rather than a consequence or a means to a consequence. Families and the student can provide insight to identify barriers and find solutions to overcoming absenteeism.

Strategy examples include:

- **Interagency case management:** Students involved in the child welfare or justice system can attain their educational goals with the support of a team of champions working across schools, families and public agencies. District ESSA liaisons responsible for leading efforts to support educational stability for students involved in the justice system and foster care by coordinating with the local courts and child welfare agencies. For example, the [National Center for Youth Law’s Compassionate Systems Framework](#) provides a research-based model for agency collaboration and coordination to ensure that all young people involved in state systems are supported to attain their educational goals.
- **Housing stability supports:** Housing insecurity is a reality for many living in Ohio. Students experiencing hardship who lack a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence may need help with transportation or wrap-around services to attend school. Whether they have lost their primary nighttime residence, are living in a motel, shelter or campsite or are doubled up with another family, these students are eligible for support as students experiencing homelessness. District ESSA liaisons, or homeless education liaisons, are responsible for coordinating these supports. Schools and districts ensure students experiencing homelessness meaningfully participate in school by removing any barriers to regular attendance. Schools and districts can fund these supports using Title I funding, Title I set



aside, McKinney-Vento subgrants or COVID-19 relief funds in the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER) and American Rescue Plan (ARP) to provide support for students experiencing homelessness.

- **Court as the last resort:** Juvenile courts are required to consider using intervention strategies to divert youth from the court system before adjudication. The court shall consider the complaint only as a matter of last resort.

Court referral or intervention seldom results in behavior change and court involvement does little to solve the impediments to regularly attending school, especially those involving basic needs and mental health issues. Courts should offer a menu of intervention strategies including diversion interventions, mentoring programs, truancy mediation and court-school liaisons.

### *EXAMINE ATTENDANCE AND ABSENTEEISM DATA TO ASSESS WHICH GROUPS OF STUDENTS HAVE HIGHER OR LOWER LEVELS OF ABSENCE*

School team meetings should be data driven using real-time data, including:

- Attendance data.
- Chronic absence data disaggregated by grade, student subgroups and attendance bands (satisfactory, at-risk, moderate and severe chronic absence).
- Suspension and other behavior data.
- Truancy data.
- Average Daily Attendance (ADA).

The principal or another administrator should serve as the data lead for the team, review data in advance of team meetings and present an analysis of patterns and trends by tiers, grades and student groups.

Teams should use data to identify priority groups of at-risk and chronically absent students (for example, first-time kindergarteners, transition grades, students who were chronically absent the previous year, students with disabilities and English learners) and use qualitative data from their annual school climate survey.

#### **Areas for School Team Inquiry**

- Does our team look at attendance data on a biweekly basis?
- Is our data broken down by grade, race or ethnicity, home language, disability and zip code?
- Does our team monitor attendance and chronic absence data, trends and patterns every week?
- Does our team use chronic absence data to identify students in need of early intervention supports?

## IDENTIFY ASSETS, BARRIERS AND STRATEGIES THAT AFFECT ATTENDANCE

A key role of the school team is to identify attendance barriers and reasons for absence. The key to successful strategies lies in how well the interventions address the root causes of absences, remove the attendance barriers and motivate a family or student to change behaviors.

| Barriers  | Aversion  | Disengagement   | Misconceptions   |
|---|---|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Chronic and acute illness</li><li>• Family responsibilities or home situation</li><li>• Trauma</li><li>• Poor transportation</li><li>• Housing and food insecurity</li><li>• Inequitable access to needed services</li><li>• System involvement</li><li>• Lack of predictable schedules for learning</li><li>• Lack of access to tech</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Struggling academically and/or behaviorally</li><li>• Unwelcoming school climate</li><li>• Social and peer challenges</li><li>• Anxiety</li><li>• Biased disciplinary and suspension practices</li><li>• Undiagnosed disability and/or disability accommodations</li><li>• Parents had negative educational experiences</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Lack of challenging, culturally responsive instruction</li><li>• Bored</li><li>• No meaningful relationships to adults in the school (especially given staff shortages)</li><li>• Lack of enrichment opportunities</li><li>• Lack of academic and behavioral support</li><li>• Failure to earn credits</li><li>• Drawn to low-wage job vs. being in high school</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Absences are only a problem if they are unexcused</li><li>• Missing 2 days per month doesn't affect learning</li><li>• Lose track and underestimate TOTAL absences</li><li>• Sporadic absences aren't a problem</li><li>• Attendance only matters in the older grades</li><li>• Suspensions don't count as absence</li></ul> |



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School teams should ensure there is **positive personal outreach to students and families that begins as soon as a student misses two days of school** to:

- Determine why a student is absent.
- Explain how absences can result in lost learning time.
- Understand what motivates a student to learn and attend.
- Empower families to help their children be successful.
- Identify systems issues (such as transportation, homelessness).

### Areas for School Team Inquiry

- Does our team use qualitative information from students and families to understand both positive and negative factors affecting attendance?
- Does our team examine if school policies, procedures or practices contribute to poor attendance?
- Does our team align interventions to the reasons for absence?
- Does our team communicate attendance patterns and trends and systemic barriers to the district team?

## *MOBILIZE EVERYONE IN THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY TO ADDRESS ATTENDANCE*

Within the school building, everyone, including families and teachers, has a role to play in improving attendance. Addressing attendance is a team approach.

In the community, it means bringing in external partners, with district support as needed, to provide services to remove barriers and more caring adults to build connections with students and families.

## *DETERMINE IF YOU ARE MAKING A DIFFERENCE*

### **Areas for School Team Inquiry**

- Does our school have professional development that equips school staff and partners to address attendance?
- Do building leaders routinely communicate attendance expectations to staff and families?
- Does our school have a yearly school attendance plan that galvanizes the school community and partners?
- Do our building leaders use existing meetings to promote attendance (parent-teacher conferences or staff meetings for example)?

School teams periodically should assess if their interventions are making a difference and take stock of their efforts and whether they are helping students improve their attendance and become more engaged in school.

### **Sample Areas for School Team Inquiry**

- Do we track interventions and identify implementation challenges?
- Do we monitor the efficacy of interventions? How frequently?
- Do we adopt, adapt or abandon interventions based on evidence of their impact?

# What State Resources are Available to Support Addressing Chronic Absence?

## District Team Resources

- [How to Organize an Effective District Team Handout](#)
- [District Self-assessment Tool](#)
- [Stay in the Game! Network Resources](#)
- [Postcard Writing Campaign Guide](#)
- [Text Messaging Campaign Guide](#)
- [Turnaround USA Whole Child Design Guide](#)
- [Stakeholder Engagement Toolkit](#)

## School Team Resources

- [Team Self-assessment](#)
- [Reasons for Absence Chart](#)
- [Student and Family Engagement Guide](#)
- [Attendance Incentive Guide](#)
- [Relationship Mapping Guide](#)
- [Family Student Attendance Success Plan](#)
- [Peer Group Development Guide](#)
- [Research on Mentorship](#)
- [Virtual Mentorship Portal](#)

## Other Resources

### SYSTEMIC APPROACH AND TIERED INTERVENTIONS

- [Three Tiers of Absence Interventions](#)
- [Examples of Tiered Interventions](#)
- [Positive Conditions for Learning Using Chronic Absenteeism Data](#)
- [Systemic Approach to Addressing Chronic Absenteeism](#)

### OHIO LAWS AND POLICIES

- [OAC Rule 3301-69-02 Excuses from School Attendance](#)
- [Supreme Court of Ohio School Attendance](#)
- [Every Student Succeeds Act \(ESSA\)](#)

### OHIO RESOURCES

- [Ohio Department of Education and Workforce Attendance Supports](#)
- [Future Forward Ohio](#)

## WHOLE CHILD APPROACH

- [Whole Child Community Partnership Toolkit](#)
- [Ohio Department of Education and Workforce Whole Child Framework](#)
- [Student-Centered Engagement](#)
- [Physical and Mental Health Needs of Schools](#)
- [Whole Child Resources](#)

## STUDENT HEALTH AND WELLNESS

- [Student Wellness and Success](#)
- [Ohio School Based Health Center Toolkit](#)
- [National School Based Health Alliance](#)
- [Ohio Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports](#)
- [Ohio School Wellness Initiative](#)
- [U.S. Surgeon General Protecting Youth Mental Health](#)
- [Stress, Trauma and the Brain: Insights for Educators](#)
- [Find Treatment.gov](#)
- [National Association of School Nurses Course: A School Nurse-Led Initiative to Address Chronic Absenteeism](#)

## STUDENT NUTRITION

- [Ohio Child Nutrition Programs](#)
- [How to Become a School Meals Program Sponsor](#)
- [Child and Adult Care Food Program At-Risk Afterschool Meals Opportunities](#)
- [Breakfast After the Bell can reduce chronic absenteeism](#)
- [Kids are Stronger with School Breakfast](#)

## SUPPORTING FAMILIES AND STUDENTS IN VULNERABLE POPULATIONS

- [English Learners](#)
- [Students in Justice System](#)
- [Students in Foster Care](#)
- [Students Experiencing Homelessness](#)
- [Students in Military Families](#)

## EXTENDED LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

- [Research on Expanded Learning Opportunities](#)
- [Ideas for Innovation](#)
- [Statewide Family Engagement Center](#)