Ohio's Attendance Guide

District and School Practices in Early Intervention

April 2026

Ohio Department of Education & Workforce

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Overview

Attendance matters, and Ohio, like the rest of the United States, continues to experience an attendance crisis. During the 2024-2025 school year, more than 25% of Ohio's students were chronically absent, meaning they missed 10% or more of the school year for any reason.

Chronic absenteeism is a leading predictor of outcomes in student literacy and workforce readiness. Students who are chronically absent are at risk of not reading proficiently by the end of third grade, struggling academically in middle school, and dropping out of high school. Students must be present to engage in learning, meaning Ohio must address any obstacles that impede learning. Schools and districts, families, and communities play a critical role in supporting consistent student attendance.

The Department, in partnership with Attendance Works and the Stay in the Game! Attendance Network, developed this guidance to support districts and schools in implementing a comprehensive approach to attendance. The guidance emphasizes districtwide practices and prevention and early intervention, rather than focusing only on individual interventions for habitually truant students.

Attendance and Chronic Absence

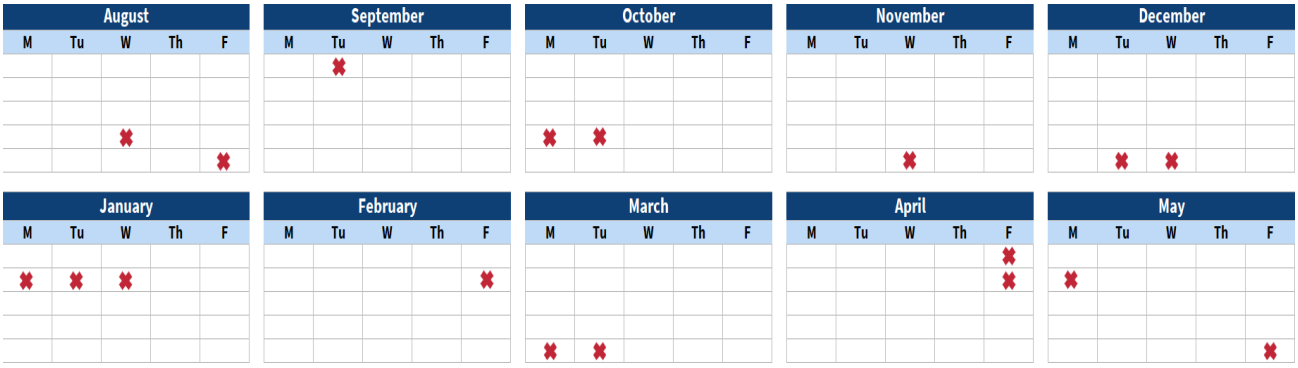
Why Does Chronic Absence Matter?

- **Students are more likely to attend school when it feels valuable to them**. For many students who are considered chronically absent, the perceived value of school may not outweigh the barriers to attendance they face daily. Shifting this perception requires intentional, incremental efforts to ensure school is a place worth showing up to every day.
- **For Ohio families, 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 health and well-being, and access critical resources available at schools.

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 of possible academic challenges. The earlier schools identify attendance problems, the sooner they can work with students and families to identify and address barriers to attendance.
- **A student's prior history of chronic absence is a strong predictor of future chronic absence,** meaning early support, even before the school year begins, is critical to changing attendance outcomes.
- **Chronic absence is overlooked** because it can result from sporadic, often excused absences, rather than consecutive missed days.

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



The image above illustrates an example of a student who is chronically absent, having missed 18 days of school (based on a 1,200-hour school calendar with 6.5-hour instructional days).

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How is Chronic Absence Different from Truancy?

Truancy	• Considers only unexcused absences • Frames attendance as a compliance issue • Uses legal responses that are often punitive in nature
Chronic Absence	• Considers all types of absence (excused, unexcused, medically excused, and suspensions) • Emphasizes attendance outcomes rather than compliance • Encourages strong partnerships with students and families

Ohio's Attendance Laws

In 2025, the General Assembly revised Ohio's attendance laws to:

- Codify and define chronic absenteeism as missing 10% or more of the school year.
- Require school districts to adopt an **even more preventative approach** to addressing student attendance concerns than under the previous law, "House Bill 410."
- Prioritize the work of Absence Intervention Teams to support students at risk of becoming chronically absent, rather than focusing solely on those who are habitually truant.

Prevention and early intervention are key. While schools and districts continue monitoring unexcused hours to identify and address habitual truancy, the updated law emphasizes the importance of engaging with students and families at an earlier stage. It is best practice for schools and districts to implement supportive interventions for students who are missing school, **regardless of the reason**.

The law also requires schools to communicate with families regarding attendance concerns no later than the point at which a student has missed 5% of the minimum required instructional hours for any reason. **The Department recommends that schools and districts take a proactive approach rather than waiting until a student reaches this 5% threshold**. Delaying communication may result in families not being notified until a student has missed approximately 45-50 hours, or 7.5-8.5 school days, of school. If these absences are sporadic, this threshold may not be reached for several months.

Schools and districts should provide strong attendance messaging across their entire school communities and then increase support and communication for students who miss as few as two to three days per month. Without early and ongoing intervention, those students are at risk of becoming chronically absent by the end of the school year.

Improving Attendance

Improving attendance and reducing chronic absence often involve adjustments to mindsets, policies, and practices. Schools that work to refine their approaches to attendance can support stronger, more positive student outcomes. Key components of effective practice pathways include:

- Examining attitudes and beliefs about attendance,
- Using data strategically to inform proactive solutions,
- Developing infrastructure that supports staff capacity, and
- Implementing evidence-based strategies.

Schools and districts can work to align these systemic approaches with current practices, using Ohio's Integrated Multi-Tiered System of Supports (I-MTSS) framework as a resource.

School-Level Team Roles

The primary role of a school team is to develop and lead a schoolwide attendance strategy, ensuring it is a core part of the school's overall plan to improve outcomes for all students. This can be achieved by **including an attendance lens into existing collaborative teams focused on academics, behavior, and wellness by using an integrated MTSS framework**. The team should review attendance data at least every other week and examine all tiers of students, not only those with the highest absence rates or those who are habitually truant.

Considerations for Aligning Attendance Within 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?
- Can the attendance strategy functions be divided up with strong coordination across different teams?
- Does the school team reflect the school community demographics?

Implementation of the IMTSS Framework

SHIFT TO UNIVERSAL APPROACHES FOR ATTENDANCE

Focusing only on isolated programmatic responses and unexcused absences rarely reduces chronic absence rates. Instead, proactive, systematic approaches can identify needs early, support prevention efforts, and allow for early interventions before challenges escalate. Some of the system shifts include:

- Emphasizing the impact of missed days, for any reason, on learning and student wellness.
- Understanding that more engagement = higher attendance.
- Taking a positive, problem-solving approach versus legal or punitive approaches.
- Seeing students and families as key collaborators.
- Using an early warning system before absences accumulate.

USE DATA STRATEGICALLY

Reviewing chronic absence data regularly can identify students or student groups that may need additional support. When combined with other data sources, attendance data can also be used to evaluate the effectiveness of specific programs or interventions or to identify systemic issues and barriers to attendance.

Academic, behavior, and attendance dashboards support informed decision-making by allowing schools to:

- Allocate resources strategically.
- Analyze the connections between attendance, academics, and behavior.
- Identify and address systemic causes of absenteeism for groups of students.

ORGANIZE A CONTINUUM OF SUPPORTS

Evidence-based attendance supports can be organized into three tiers to meet diverse student needs, prevent chronic absence, and support learning:

- **Core:** Schoolwide strategies to encourage daily attendance for all students.
- **Targeted:** Early outreach for students missing 5–19% of instructional time.
- **Intensive:** Individualized support for students missing 20% or more of instructional time.

CORE SUPPORT

Core support 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 access 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! Attendance Network (SITG!) can support schools and districts as they lead customized attendance campaigns. Schools and districts can join the Network as a Playmaker at any time, use the Attendance Pledge with their staff, students, and communities, and have access to a variety of materials to spread the word about the importance of regular attendance. SITG! All-Star schools and districts also have access to the online Campaign Playbook to customize local campaigns, set goals, measure the progress of their work, and engage with Ohio's leading sports teams to recognize and reward attendance gains.

TARGETED SUPPORT

Targeted support strategies are meant for students who have 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. 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.
- **Out of School Time 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.
- **Health and Wellness:** Schools can provide services for students identified through needs assessments, screening, referral, or other collaborative processes such as experiencing early signs of distress functional impairment, or risk factors that may affect their overall health and well-being. When school staff identify these needs early and appropriate supports are put in place, they can promote positive youth development and help prevent concerns from becoming more frequent or severe. Examples include small group interventions for students identified with similar needs, brief individualized interventions (e.g., motivational interviewing, problem solving), mentoring, and/or low-intensity classroom-based supports such as a daily teacher check-ins or home-to-school note systems.

INTENSIVE SUPPORT

Intensive supports may be needed to improve outcomes for students who missed 20% or more of school in the previous year or those who did not attend the first few weeks of the current school year. Under Ohio's attendance laws, chronic absenteeism includes both excused and unexcused absences, meaning not all students who require intensive supports meet the definition of habitually truant.

Interventions for habitual truancy under Ohio law are examples of intensive supports. One such intervention includes the Department's Attendance Conversation Guides, which can help schools and districts engage students and families in structured, meaningful conversations, rather than focusing solely on consequences. Families and students can provide insight into personal barriers and find solutions to overcome absenteeism.

Other examples include:

- **Interagency case management:** Students involved in the child welfare or justice system can meet their educational goals when schools, families, and public agencies work together to provide coordinated support. All public schools are required to designate liaisons responsible for leading efforts to support educational stability for students involved in the justice system and foster care, and these liaisons can coordinate with the local courts and child welfare agencies.
- **Housing stability supports:** Students experiencing homelessness are eligible for supports to ensure they can attend school. District homeless education liaisons are responsible for coordinating these supports.
- **Court as the last resort:** Juvenile courts are required to consider intervention strategies that divert youth from formal court involvement, using court action only as a last resort. Because formal court involvement rarely leads to lasting behavior change or addresses underlying barriers to regular school attendance, such as unmet basic needs or health concerns, courts should offer a range of intervention strategies, including diversion programs, mentoring, truancy mediation, and court-school liaisons.

A districtwide focus on prevention, early intervention, and regular progress monitoring, supported by a continuum of strategies, will create the greatest impact on attendance and student success.

IMPLEMENT A TEAM-BASED APPROACH TO PROBLEM SOLVING

Getting kids to school requires districts, teachers, families, and communities to work together. It's easy for attendance work to get siloed with school social workers or student support staff, when a districtwide, "all-hands-on-deck" approach is more sustainable and effective at reducing overload on all staff. This collaborative, systematic approach includes

personalized outreach to students and families, intentional engagement strategies, and ongoing progress monitoring to address the complex factors affecting attendance.

Effective attendance strategies rely on shared leadership, strong professional capacity, and ongoing communication and collaboration. Together, these elements ensure staff are equipped, aligned, and supported to deliver coordinated, strengths-based interventions across the full continuum of supports. Teams focused on improving attendance and facilitating strategies can exist at both the district and school levels.

District-Level Team Roles

Attendance improvements may begin in individual classrooms or buildings, but sustainable progress depends on district-level leadership and cross-departmental coordination. The central office, school board, superintendent, and regional leaders play a critical role in setting priorities, aligning efforts, and ensuring consistency. For Ohio's community schools and other school choice options, leadership structures may differ, but system-wide alignment is still critical. For maximum effectiveness, attendance work should be embedded into ongoing, collaborative team structures, such as district leadership teams (DLT), building leadership teams (BLT), and any other team supporting students using an integrated MTSS.

A coordinated, districtwide approach is essential because:

- Attendance is a core indicator of student learning and engagement.
- Meaningful reductions in chronic absence **are only feasible** through internal and external partnerships.
- Attendance strategies must be integrated with districtwide health and well-being initiatives and supports.
- District personnel have different levels of authority and influence over school-level practices.
- Many attendance challenges stem from systemic conditions that require policy and practice changes.

District Team Membership Considerations

- **Who is responsible for:**
  - Principal coaching and performance?
  - School-level data reporting and customization?
  - Supervision of social work and guidance staff?
  - Oversight of specific student populations (e.g. early learning, students with disabilities, English Learners)?
  - Serving as district liaisons to ensure educational stability for students in foster care, students experiencing homelessness, and justice-involved students?
  - School-based health and wellness services?
  - Transportation and helping students get to and from school?
  - Community partnerships and family engagement?
  - Districtwide attendance communication and messaging?

Each district team function is described below, along with implementation questions to help guide district efforts.

EXAMINE AND MONITOR QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE DATA

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

Areas for District Team Inquiry

- Do district data systems "talk to each other?"
- Does the district have and use 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

District teams 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. Minimally, district guidance and protocols should include:

a. An overview of the district's commitment to prevention and early intervention, as well as descriptions of their core, targeted, and intensive support strategies.
b. Attendance-related roles and responsibilities for all staff.
c. Protocols for integrating attendance into existing district and school teams.
d. Data utilization requirements and metrics.
e. Root cause analysis tools and resources.
f. Hourly attendance taking and recording procedures.
g. The district's local board policy

Areas for District Team Inquiry

- Do we have clear definitions for excused and medically excused absences?
- Have we outlined our early outreach protocols?
- Do we provide guidance on attendance that can be aligned and integrated into school teams?
- Does our policy articulate our core, targeted, and intensive approaches to attendance?
- 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 IMTSS

The district team ensures principals, school staff, and community partners have access to systematic, cross-functional professional development opportunities to ensure they have the knowledge, skills, and capacity to reduce chronic absence. This includes building a shared understanding of the definition of chronic absence, why it matters, and how to use data and the iMTSS framework to support student attendance, participation, and engagement.

Professional learning opportunities should include training, communities of practice, coaching, and regular sharing of best practices across schools and roles.

Areas for District Team Inquiry

- Have school leaders and teams been trained in integrating attendance into an iMTSS framework?
- Do we assist building leaders in the development and alignment of school-level teams?
- Is attendance embedded into the district's 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 positive school climate where everyone feels they belong?
- Do we ensure our school teams gather feedback directly from students and families about attendance barriers?

ESTABLISH STRATEGIC AND SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Community partnerships are essential to supporting student attendance, engagement, and prevention and intervention strategies. Community partners bring unique expertise, perspectives, and data that can inform district decisions and maximize the impact of intervention strategies. Engaging business leaders, faith- and community-based organizations, philanthropic partners, and neighbors helps align the goals of the district to the goals of the community.

The district team should use school-level data on attendance barriers to guide and strengthen these partnerships, ensuring there is a full range of strategies to support students. Ohio's Attendance Dashboard is a tool that can be used to bring the whole school community together to collectively identify and solve problems.

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 attendance and engagement strategies?
- Does our team have mechanisms to identify needs from school leaders who require the assistance of community partners?
- Is there a clear process for school teams to connect to external partners?

PROMOTE SHARED SOLUTIONS AND ACCOUNTABILITY

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

- 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?
- 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 EFFECTIVELY

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 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?

Key Takeaways

Improving attendance is essential to improving student outcomes in Ohio. Addressing chronic absence requires a comprehensive, prevention-focused approach that strengthens schoolwide practices, uses data strategically, and provides timely, tiered supports for students and families. By leveraging the iMTSS framework and engaging district- and school-level teams, schools can remove barriers to learning, promote student wellness, and create conditions where students are consistently present and able to succeed. Through shared responsibility among schools, families, and communities, Ohio can make meaningful progress in reducing chronic absenteeism and supporting long-term literacy, learning, and workforce readiness outcomes.

Resources

District Team Resources

- Stay in the Game! Attendance Network
- Ohio's Attendance Dashboard
- District Self-Assessment Tool
- How to Organize an Effective District Team Handout
- Postcard Writing Campaign Guide
- Text Messaging Campaign Guide

School Team Resources

- Attendance Incentive Guide
- Peer Group Development Guide
- Reasons for Absence Chart

- Relationship Mapping Guide
- Research on Mentorship
- Student and Family Conversation Guides
- Student and Family Engagement Guide
- Team Self-Assessment
- Virtual Mentorship Portal

Other Resources

OHIO RESOURCES

- Ohio Department of Education and Workforce Attendance Supports
- Ohio Department of Education and Workforce iMTSS Framework

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

- Ohio Department of Education and Workforce Family Engagement Page
- Supreme Court of Ohio School Attendance

STUDENT HEALTH AND WELLNESS

- National Association of School Nurses Course: A School Nurse-Led Initiative to Address Chronic Absenteeism
- Ohio School-Based Health Centers
- Ohio's School-Based Mental Health
- Student Wellness and Success Funds

SUPPORTING HIGHLY MOBILE YOUTH AND FAMILIES

- Military-Connected Students
- Students Experiencing Homelessness
- Students in Foster Care
- Students in Residential Treatment Facilities
- Students in the Justice System

EXTENDED LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

- Ohio Department of Education and Workforce 21st Century Community Learning Centers Page
- Research on Expanded Learning Opportunities
- Statewide Family Engagement Center