

ARIZONA CHRONIC ABSENCE RESOURCE GUIDE

A framework of evidence-based strategies for school administrators, districts, charter networks, and community partners



Arizona Chronic Absence Task Force



ARIZONA CHRONIC ABSENCE RESOURCE GUIDE

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Introduction

Too many school absences can keep a student from learning and making academic progress. A student is considered chronically absent when they miss 10% or more of a school year (18 days or more in a typical school year) for any reason, excused or unexcused.

Across the nation, rates of chronic absence have nearly doubled from pre-pandemic levels, and Arizona is facing its own urgent challenge, with one of the highest chronic absence rates in the country. Nearly one in three of our students are missing this significant amount of instructional learning time, with certain negative impact on their success in school.

But chronic absence is a problem we can solve. There are proven, effective, and inexpensive, strategies to prevent school absences and increase attendance that involve schools, communities, and families working together. Research indicates that if students have strong and caring connections with at least one adult in the school community, and with their peers, they are more likely to come to school.

Read On Arizona convened a statewide chronic absence task force in May of 2023 to explore the problem and identify effective, proactive strategies to reduce rates of chronic absence in our state. Leaders from the Governor's office, school districts, state agencies, community partners, legislative staff, and education stakeholders have reviewed data, consulted with national experts from Attendance Works, and developed the recommendations and resources presented in this guide.

The Arizona Chronic Absence Resource Guide provides a framework for school administrators to strategically plan and implement evidence-based preventions and interventions to reduce chronic absence from pre-K through grade 12. It is intended to serve as a springboard for schools, districts, charter networks, and community partners to work together on effective solutions to reduce chronic absence in Arizona and ensure more students are attending school, reading at grade level, and making academic progress toward graduation.

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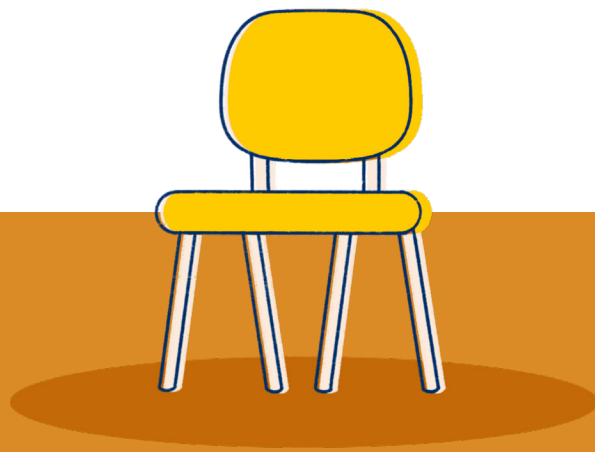
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UNDERSTANDING CHRONIC ABSENCE

What is Chronic Absence?

For school accountability purposes in Arizona, **chronic absence is defined as missing 10% or more of school for any reason.** In a typical school year of 180 days that meets five days per week, this means missing at least 18 days. Over the course of a full school year, missing just two days of school per month equates to being chronically absent.

Chronic absence counts all missed days of school, including unexcused absences, excused absences such as for illness, and suspensions. Chronic absence is missing so much school that a student is academically at risk.

$$\text{Excused Absences} + \text{Unexcused Absences} + \text{Disciplinary Suspensions} \\ = \text{Chronic Absence}$$

Chronic absence is a student-level attendance indicator. A student's attendance rate is calculated by dividing the student's total days of attendance by the student's total days of membership. If a student was enrolled in school for the first 60 days since the beginning of the school year and missed six days in those initial three months, that student would be on the path to being chronically absent ($54/60 = 90\%$ attendance rate = 10% missed instructional days).

Chronic Absence vs. Truancy

Chronic absence is different from truancy. Though both terms indicate problems with attendance, the terms are not interchangeable.

Truancy is a term that refers to unexcused absences only. Arizona legal statute defines truant as "an unexcused absence for a class period." Solutions to truancy often involve more punitive measures and may use legal avenues to try and mitigate truancy and get individual students and their legal guardians to comply with school rules.

- ✓ Arizona Statute [ARS § 15-802](#) charges guardians with the responsibility to ensure that their child attends school full-time and regularly. Guardians may be exempt from these obligations if the school principal/designee is satisfied that certain circumstances have been demonstrated, such as: the student has a physical/mental health condition that makes instruction impracticable, is enrolled in work training approved by ADE, is enrolled in an educational program provided by the state, is suspended or expelled, and for other reasons of nonattendance at public school are satisfactory to school principal/designee.
- ✓ Arizona Statute [ARS § 15-803](#) defines "truant" as an unexcused absence for at least one class period. A "Truant child" is a child (ages 6-16) who is not in attendance during hours of school unless excused. Students are considered "habitually truant" if they are truant at least five days in a school year. Absences may be considered excessive when the number of absent days exceeds 10% of the number of required attendance days. A child who is habitually truant or who has excessive absences may be adjudicated an "incurable child."
- ✓ Arizona Statute [ARS-15-346](#) directs governing boards to adopt policies and procedures concerning students with chronic health problems to continue student learning while they are absent.



Unlike truancy, chronic absence focuses on students who miss school regularly whether the absences are excused or unexcused. Chronic absence is an indicator that shows the level at which students are missing instructional time and their opportunity to learn.

Instead of punishment for missed days, solutions to chronic absence involve working to understand the specific barriers to attendance and creating working solutions so that students can and will attend school.



Resource

For more guidance on excused or unexcused absences, see [Arizona Department of Education's Defining Excused Absences](#).

Chronic Absence Can Go Unnoticed

Chronic absence can often go unnoticed unless it is intentionally tracked. It is not a simple calculation of how many total students attend school on a given day or for a whole year.

Understanding chronic absence involves looking at the attendance rates of individual students consistently and regularly over time. The measure involves examining who is absent and how much. If there is not consistent attention given to tracking chronic absence early in the school year, opportunities to identify and support students who are falling behind as a result of missing school may go unnoticed.

DID YOU KNOW

Definitions of Attendance

Definitions of attendance are important to be able to measure and look at chronic absence effectively. Arizona requires daily attendance for in-person learning and distance learning.

While other states have legal definitions of “days in attendance” and chronic absence, Arizona does not currently have a legal definition of chronic absence outside of [school accountability](#) measures, and [definitions](#) of a “day in attendance” for both in-person and distance learning are left to local district discretion.

In Arizona, a day of attendance is shaped according to districts’ instructional time model design ([ARS § 15-901.08](#)).



Resource

Connecticut is often cited as a model for working to reduce chronic absence. See [Connecticut's definition of “in attendance” and its definition of chronic absence](#).



Impact of Attendance on Achievement

School attendance is significantly related to school achievement. Districts and schools with high rates of chronic absence often have lower achievement scores. Too many absences can keep students from reading at grade level by the end of third grade, which is a strong predictor of future academic success. Research shows that chronic absence in kindergarten and first grade can severely impact reading achievement.



The good news is that the converse is also true: preventing absences produces increases in early literacy outcomes. Based on a study conducted by Read On Arizona and Arizona State University, data analysis showed that a 1% increase in school-level attendance was associated with a 1.5% increase in students passing Arizona's third grade English Language Arts assessment.



Chronic absence impacts a student's ability to perform academically, and students who fall behind early are much less likely to graduate on time. Chronic absence in sixth grade is an early predictor for dropping out of high school. Evidence suggests that students are seven times more likely to drop out if they are chronically absent even just one year between grades 8 and 12. And chronic absence has been found to reduce the likelihood of post-secondary enrollment.

Research also shows that when chronic absence is high, it can impact the entire class and school, not just those students who are missing 10% or more days in a school year. High levels of chronic absence add to the stress and strain on teachers who have to continually deal with helping students catch up and maintain a positive and thriving learning climate for all. Teachers must change their approach to keep everyone on track. In addition, when students are absent it can increase discipline problems and does not allow them to build lasting relationships with their peers.

In addition, when the number of absent students increases in a class, the likelihood that other students will be absent increases. According to recent research from the University of Pennsylvania, when 10% of a student's classmates are absent on a given day, that student is more likely to be absent the following day.



Reflect

How is truancy treated in your school, district, or charter network?

How is chronic absence addressed in your school, district, or charter network?

Resources:

- [Summary of Key Research](#) from Attendance Works
- [Everyone Graduates Center Brief](#) from Johns Hopkins University
- [Chronic Absence vs. Truancy](#) from Attendance Works
- Read On Arizona's [Factors Related to Early Childhood Literacy](#) study

Causes and Challenges

Students miss school for many different reasons. Every student and school community's circumstances are different and can be complex. We should not assume that chronically absent students and their guardians do not care about wanting to be successful in school.

According to Robert Balfanz at the Johns Hopkins University's Center for Everyone Graduates, "Most students want to be in school and their parents do care. Many students who are missing school have various issues that can range from having to care for younger siblings, working to help provide for their families, anxiety and mental health issues, and many more reasons."

The pandemic disrupted education in unprecedented ways, including the norm of attending school every day, creating a culture shift that made school seem optional. Recent data trends show that student attendance has not returned to pre-pandemic levels.

The norm for regular daily attendance has shifted in a variety of ways. School administrators are reporting that many parents have a lower threshold for keeping their children home from school for illness and health concerns. In addition, schools share that several students are staying home due to anxiety. Further, students who were in kindergarten and the early elementary grades during the pandemic did not have the opportunity to establish a norm of going to school regularly.

Challenges to attending school may include:

- » **Problems with access to basic necessities**, such as a lack of consistent transportation, stable housing, food, or healthcare.
- » **Community-specific circumstances**, such as neighborhood violence or not having a safe route to get to school, may also be at play.
- » **Family circumstances**, illness, chronic health or mental health issues, or trauma.
- » **Students may be disengaged while in school**. They may not have developed a sense of belonging and may not have any meaningful or caring relationships with adults in their school. In addition, students could be facing issues with bullying that make attending school difficult.
- » **Students may be struggling to learn**. Missing instruction and homework can put a student in a cycle of continually being behind, trying to catch up on what they missed, and not being able to access current instruction.



Student Subgroups Most At Risk

Research shows that certain subgroups of students are most at risk for being chronically absent from school.

- » Children living in poverty are two to three times more likely to be chronically absent.
- » Students from communities of color, as well as those with disabilities, are also disproportionately affected by chronic absence.
- » Children classified as economically disadvantaged face the most harm due to chronic absence because their communities are often under-served and lack the resources to make up for the lost opportunity to learn in school.

Root Causes

According to research and analysis from [Attendance Works](#), a national expert on chronic absence and key partner with the Arizona Chronic Absence Task Force, the root causes that contribute to students being chronically absent usually fall into four categories.

CHALLENGES THAT KEEP STUDENTS FROM GETTING TO SCHOOL

1 Barriers	2 Aversion	3 Disengagement	4 Misconceptions
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Chronic and acute illness• Family responsibilities or home situation• Trauma• Community violence• Poor transportation• Housing and food insecurity• Inequitable access to needed services• System involvement• Lack of predictable schedules for learning• Lack of access to tech• And others	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Struggling academically and/or behaviorally• Unwelcoming school climate• Social and peer challenges• Anxiety• Biased disciplinary and suspension practices• Undiagnosed disability and/or disability accommodations• Parents had negative educational experiences• And others	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lack of challenging culturally responsive instruction• Bored• No meaningful relationship to adults in the school (especially given staff shortages)• Lack of enrichment opportunities• Lack of academic and behavioral support• Failure to earn credits• Drawn to low-wage job vs. being in high school• And others	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Absences are only a problem if they are unexcused• Missing 2 days per month doesn't affect learning• Lose track and underestimate total absences• Sporadic absences aren't a problem• Attendance only matters in the older grades• Suspensions don't count as absences• And others

Source: Attendance Works



High levels of chronic absence can point to systemic issues such as negative school climates. Part of the process to achieve positive change involves becoming attuned to various causes that can contribute to chronic absence for students and families in your specific school, district, or charter network. Experts say that searching for the root cause is critical. Every district or school will need to unpack their data and work to understand the root causes so that they can problem-solve the issue correctly.



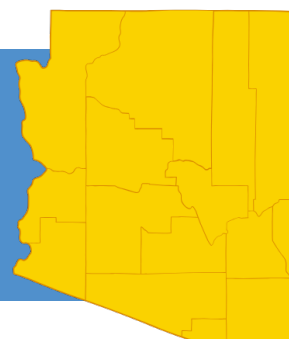
Reflect

What do you suspect are the root causes of chronic absence at your school or district?



ARIZONA SPOTLIGHT

Causes



According to teachers, school leaders, community partners, and parents working directly on chronic absence, the reasons why students across Arizona miss too much school range from simple to complex challenges. For many students who are chronically absent, it is connected to housing, transportation, basic need challenges, or medical/health issues for themselves or other family members. For example:

- A student from the Baboquivari District on the Tohono O'odham Nation shared that he missed a lot of school to care for his mother who was sick. She spoke O'odham and limited English, so he translated for her during the hospital stays.
- Another student shared that transportation was a barrier because their family lived an hour away from school and missing the bus meant missing school.
- A family from Head Start shared how they were struggling with housing insecurity. The family would sleep in their car, having to find a different place to park each night. It made getting to school every day hard.

When digging deep and speaking to families, school leaders across Arizona have shared that mental health, anxiety, and stress on students and families have also contributed to missing school. Leaders have also discovered that some families have shifting beliefs and motivation levels that are more flexible when it comes to the importance of having their child present in school every day.



[Read the full story in our online guide](#)

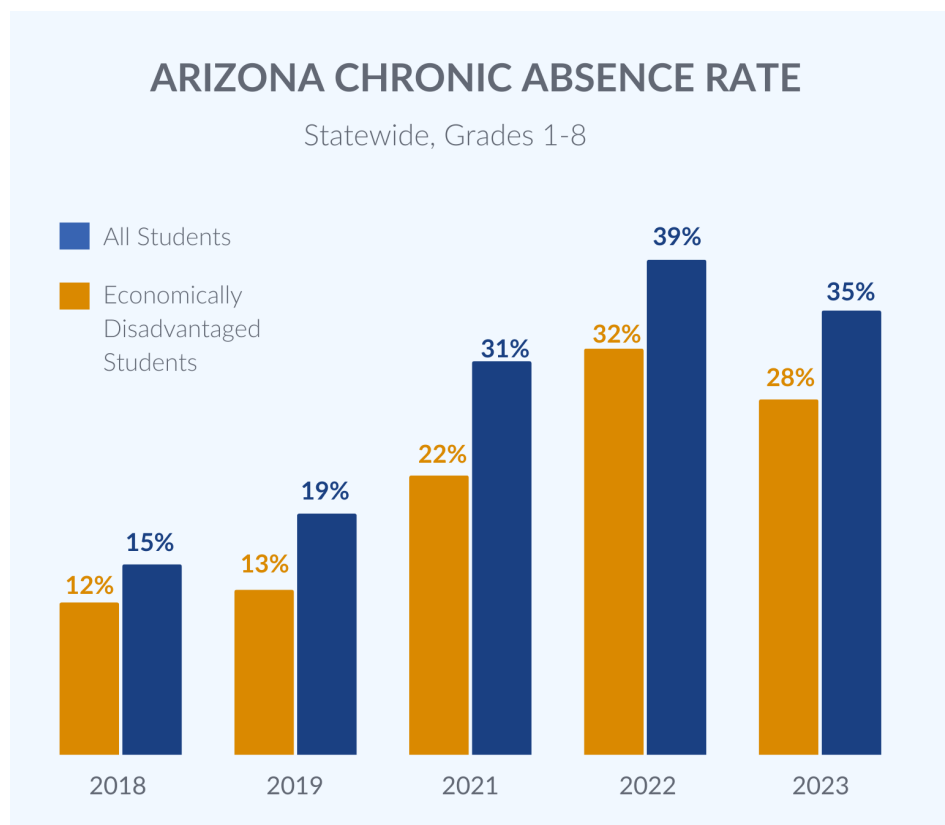
Resources:

- Attendance Works & Johns Hopkins Center for Everyone Graduates [series on chronic absence](#)
- [Root Causes](#) of Chronic Absence from Attendance Works
- [Breaking Barriers](#) to Attendance from Attendance Works

Chronic Absence in Arizona

While not a new phenomenon, the scale of the chronic absence problem has grown exponentially in recent years, reaching levels that can negatively impact the learning outcomes we want for students in Arizona. Chronic absence is linked to decreased academic achievement at all grade levels, including an inability to read at grade level, lower graduation rates, and an increased likelihood of dropping out of school.

In addition, when the number of absent students increases in a class, the likelihood that other students will be absent increases. According to recent research from the University of Pennsylvania, when 10% of a student's classmates are absent on a given day, that student is more likely to be absent the following day.



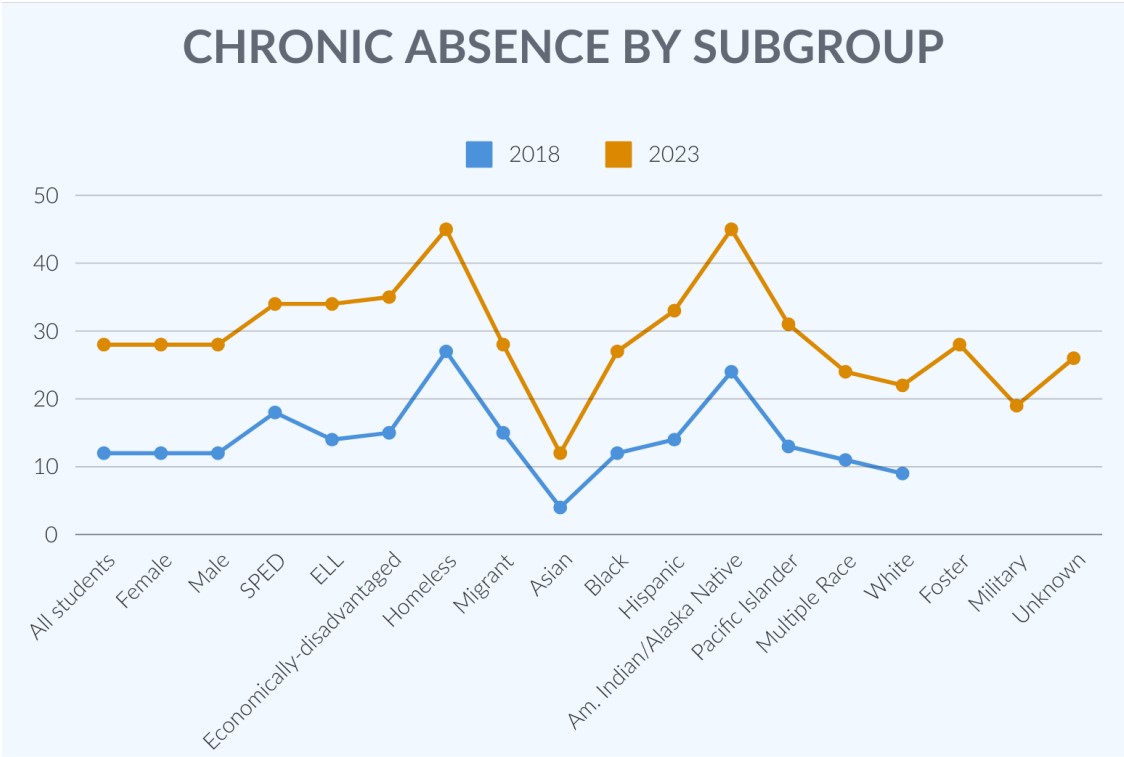
Chronic absence rate is the percentage of students missing 10% or more of a school year for any reason. Source: AZ School Report Cards/Arizona Department of Education.

- » In 2018-2019, Arizona had a steady rate of chronic absence at 13% for students in grades 1-8. Only one in twenty Arizona schools had severe chronic absence rates, with 30% or more of their students chronically absent.
- » In 2021, chronic absenteeism more than doubled. One in five enrolled students in grades 1-8 missed more than 10 percent of the school year. And, one in four of all Arizona public schools had 30% or more of their students chronically absent.
- » In 2022, chronic absenteeism continued to rise, with one in three students chronically absent in grades 1-8, and 59% of schools throughout Arizona had 30% or more of their students chronically absent.



Chronic Absence Among Student Subgroups

While chronic absence increased for all student groups from 2018 to 2023 in Arizona, the highest increases were seen for student populations classified as economically-disadvantaged, English Language Learners, homeless, and for students identifying as Native American, and Hispanic.



Source: AZ Schools Report Card Public Data Set, Arizona Department of Education

In 2023, chronic absence rates were higher among homeless (45%) and Native American students (45%) than the prior year. In addition, the chronic absence rate for Hispanic students was 33%. In Arizona, nearly half of the total K-12 student population enrolled is Hispanic. These levels of chronic absence work against our efforts to close opportunity gaps for various student populations.

Chronic Absence and Mobility

Arizona serves transient student populations including students who lack stable housing and move frequently, students receiving migrant educational services, or military population families. Mobility can impact attendance.

When a student leaves one school district and enrolls in another, their chronic absence data resets. For example, a student who was absent nine days in one district and then ten days in another, would be chronically absent when looking at their attendance collectively for a school year, but would not show up as chronically absent for either district separately. It is important to be aware that this is an issue for some students.



Chronic Absence and Early Childhood

In addition to a substantial increase in chronic absence for students in grades 1-8, Arizona also saw a major increase in chronic absence for students enrolled in pre-kindergarten programs. In 2022, the chronic absence rate for students enrolled in pre-kindergarten programs was significantly higher than for students enrolled in K-8 schools.

Missing valuable instructional time in the early childhood years negatively impacts a child’s ability to read at grade level by the end of third grade. In addition, chronic absence in the early childhood years predicts future absenteeism as children progress through school. Children who are chronically absent in the preschool years are five times more likely to be chronically absent in the primary grades.

DID YOU KNOW

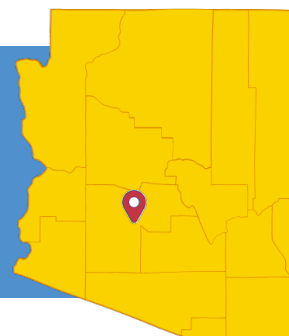
Suspension Policy

Some school districts have used out-of-school suspensions to discipline students for missing learning time. Looking at the efficacy and impact of policies that suspend students for missing class is an important part of the conversation to consider around chronic absence. Experts share that evidence shows that suspending students does little to alleviate the problem and can exacerbate underlying root causes of disengagement. Using suspensions in this way can increase the attendance problem the disciplinary action was intended to solve. The practice of using out-of-school suspensions for truancy is banned entirely or prohibited to some extent in several states now across the country.



ARIZONA SPOTLIGHT

City of Phoenix Head Start



Before the school year even begins, City of Phoenix Head Start kicks off efforts to raise awareness around the importance of attendance. Teachers provide orientations for parents about the expectations of daily attendance and highlight the connection between attendance, school readiness, and the achievement gap. Families are educated and engaged throughout the year.

“ **We know that starting the attendance habit in the birth to five years will set children up for success later in school.** ”

- Katie Perez, City of Phoenix Head Start

During the first 20 days of school, staff review data to identify children who are chronically absent and intervene early. Data is pulled daily to identify levels of absence. Teachers and caseworkers work with families and use resources from Attendance Works to create an individual success plan to address barriers to attendance and effectively address the problem. City of Phoenix Head Start has seen its chronic absence rate drop by 20% over the past two years.



[Read the full story in our online guide](#)



Reflect

What struck you most as you learned about chronic absence statewide? How do you think your school or district's experience compares to the statewide data discussed here?

Resources:

- [Ten Facts About School Attendance](#) from Attendance Works
- [Absent Peers Present Challenges](#) study
- [MapLIT](#) is Arizona's comprehensive data tool for interactive mapping and summary reports on key data including chronic absence

Using Data

Using data to monitor and identify chronic absence is key to understanding the extent of the problem in a school, district, or charter school network.

Annual, prior-year statewide, district, and school-level data on chronic absence is available through Read On Arizona's [MapLIT](#), an online data tool. Chronic absence data can be explored in multiple ways and disaggregated by grade level, race, gender, English learners, disability, and income status/eligibility.

While end-of-year aggregate data is key to noticing trends and progress by year, real-time student data is essential for understanding the current nature of the problem. Determining the degree to which chronic absence is a problem involves diving into your attendance data and calculating your current chronic absence rates.

Chronic Absence vs. Average Daily Attendance

Chronic absence is different from looking at a school or district's average daily attendance (ADA), which is how many students show up to school each day. Each school has an ADA percentage which is calculated by averaging the daily attendance of all students. Of course, this includes those students who attend every day and those who are chronically absent. Thus, as an average of low and high attendance combined, this calculation does not reveal any specifics related to the number/percent of actual students who are missing 10% or more of the school year. Normal to high average daily attendance rates can mask problems with chronic absence.

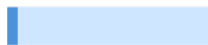
Focus on Data

STEP 1: Become Aware of Your Chronic Absence Rate.

To understand the extent of the issue in your school or district, it is useful to understand and differentiate between categories of satisfactory attendance to extreme chronic absence.

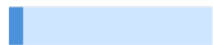
STUDENT ATTENDANCE CATEGORIES

Satisfactory Attendance



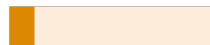
Student missing less than 5% of school

At-Risk Attendance



Student missing between 5-9% of school

Moderate Chronic Attendance



Student missing 10-19% of school year

Severe Chronic Attendance



Student missing 20-49% of school year

Chronically Absent



As it relates to school level chronic absence, a school is considered to have reached a severe level of chronic absenteeism if 20% to 29% of its student population is chronically absent. When 30% or more students are chronically absent, the school falls into the “extreme” category.

Having actionable data is key to being able to understand the scope of chronic absence in your school or district. To begin the work on prevention and intervention to reduce chronic absence, local, real-time data must be available, tracked, and analyzed consistently. Create processes and systems that allow for regular tracking to be able to notice trends, progress, and setbacks. Agree upon the regular cadence that data will be tracked. Ideally, data should be tracked every 10 days.

Actionable data is **accurate**.

- » Defined processes and procedures ensure that data is accurate and consistently collected for analyzing, problem-solving, and decision-making.
- » Data quality and integrity are monitored.
- » All legal and policy requirements are followed and maintained daily.

Actionable data is **accessible**.

- » Data is embedded into day-to-day work.
- » Data is easily obtained from user-friendly systems.
- » Staff are trained effectively on data systems so that they can overcome any learning curves.
- » Limitations of various data systems are recognized, and staff use them for what they are designed.
- » The number of data systems needed to get the necessary data is minimized.
- » If possible, a system with built-in visualization tools is used.

Actionable data is **usable**.

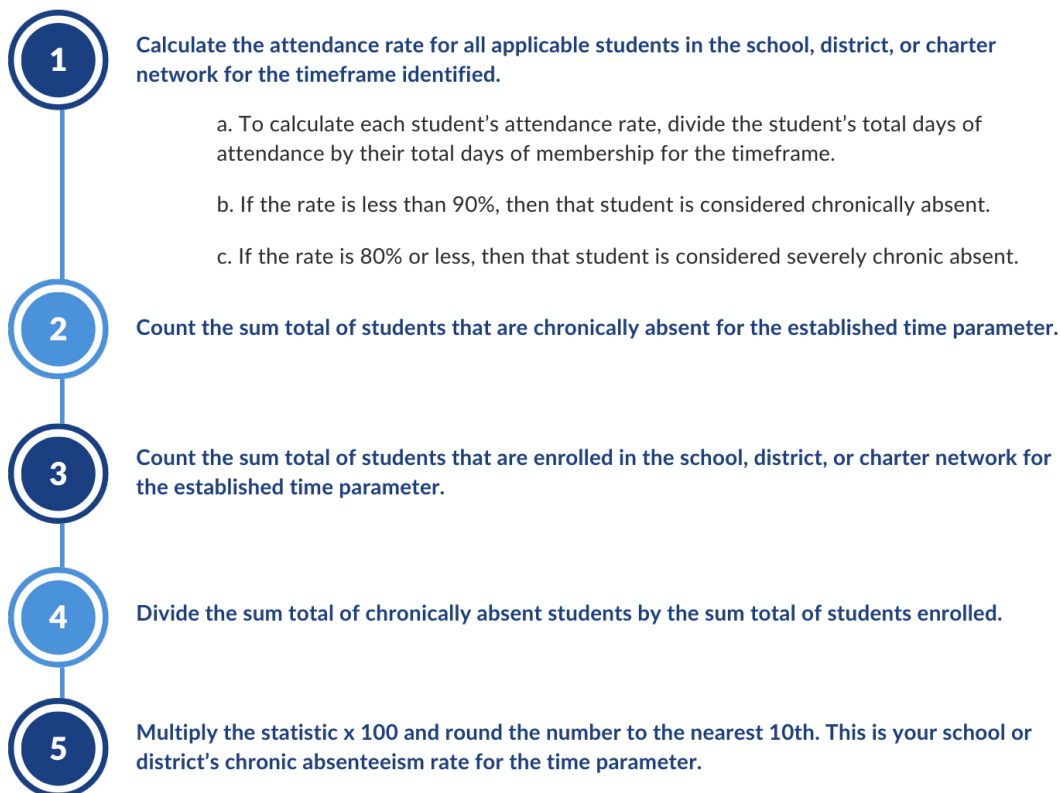
- » Reports are understandable, relevant, and designed for the specific stakeholders that will use them.
- » Reports answer relevant questions.
- » Reports are generated in a timely fashion on a consistent schedule.

Most Student Information Systems can be set up to calculate chronic absence rates. To calculate your chronic absence rate, you need:

- » To define the time parameters you are interested in calculating (e.g. school year, year-to-date, prior month, past ten days, etc.).
- » A full roster of students educated by your school, district, or charter network.
- » Days of Membership (the number of days each student was enrolled in your district or school for the identified time to be analyzed).
- » Days in Attendance (the number of days each student was considered “in attendance” for the identified time).



CALCULATING YOUR CHRONIC ABSENCE RATE



STEP 2: Disaggregate Data to Get a Full Understanding of the Nature of the Problem.

Disaggregate data by school, grade level, and subgroups such as race, ethnicity, gender, income eligibility, English learners, and students with disabilities. Using data visualization tools can be helpful to understand patterns. Data can be mapped by ZIP code or neighborhoods within a district to see if there are challenges in particular communities that may be contributing to high chronic absence.

STEP 3: Take a Team Approach to Analyze Trends and Patterns.

Research shows that taking a team approach to analyzing chronic absence data works well. Having multiple perspectives and key individuals with different backgrounds that relate to the issue can help get a clear and full understanding of what's going on in your school or district.

Effective teams usually include key individuals responsible for academic instruction, health-related issues, student support staff (attendance officers, parent liaisons, school counselors, etc.), staff responsible for attendance data reporting, school administrators, and relevant community partners (early childhood and youth service agencies, mental health, health, or family service providers associated with schools in the district, etc.).



SAMPLE GUIDING QUESTIONS TO LEARN FROM DATA

1

To what extent is chronic and severe chronic absence an issue throughout the district or charter network and where is it concentrated?

2

Is attendance getting worse or better over time?

3

How does satisfactory attendance and chronic and severe chronic absence vary across schools, grades, subgroups, or neighborhoods?

4

What does the concentration and scale of chronic absence suggest about likely causes of chronic absence?

5

What is the relationship between overall attendance patterns and academic performance?

6

What is the relationship between attendance patterns and disciplinary (e.g., suspensions) data?

7

Which schools stand out as needing extra support?

8

Which schools in the district seem to be recording higher attendance rates than other schools with similar student population demographics? Do we know why?

9

Are there schools that have a low level of chronic absence but have a high level of economically-disadvantaged or vulnerable student populations that are doing well? These schools can be examined and lifted up to serve as inspirational and best-practice examples for other schools with similar demographics and challenges.

DID YOU KNOW

School Accountability and Chronic Absence

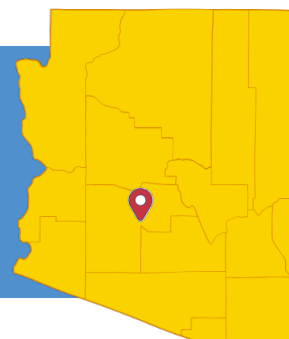
Through its [AZ School Report Cards](#), the Arizona Department of Education collects and presents data annually that includes school chronic absenteeism data. Through Arizona's A-F School Accountability System, K-8 schools are evaluated on chronic absence. Schools can earn two points for chronic absenteeism reduction if one of the following conditions are met:

- **4% Chronic Absenteeism:** The percentage of grade 1-8 students who are chronically absent in fiscal year 2023 is less than or equal to 4%.
- **Decreasing or maintaining percentage Chronically Absent:** The change in the percentage of grade 1-8 students who are chronically absent in a fiscal year when compared to the previous fiscal year is **less than or equal to zero**.



ARIZONA SPOTLIGHT

Project SAAM



Supporting Attendance Across Maricopa County (SAAM) is an initiative at Valley of the Sun United Way (VSUW) that is working to improve chronic absence across the educational pipeline within Maricopa County. This initiative includes several effective strategies, including training via a partnership with Attendance Works, participation in Peer Learning Networks, coaching, advocacy, and data-driven decision-making. The project helps districts learn how to take a team approach to develop a year-round attendance plan that will help them achieve at least a 2% decline in chronic absence rates year by year.

“Some big light bulbs occur in the process of learning how to get actionable with data. Data is only as good as what you tell the systems to pull. District teams are coached through the process to use their systems to get the right data that will allow them to start understanding the problem.”

- Dawn Gerundo, Valley of the Sun United Way

Through coaching, each district's team deepens its understanding of the root causes in their communities and learns how to overcome those barriers using evidence-based strategies and tiered interventions. District teams have realized that if they have effective tier 1 and tier 2 strategies, then the need for intensive tier 3 interventions lessens.



[Read the full story in our online guide](#)



Reflect

What patterns did you notice around your chronic absence data at your school or district?
Which student groups are affected most?

Resources:

- Attendance Works provides free quantitative tools that schools and districts can use to [calculate](#) and [track](#) chronic absence
- REL West [infographic](#) on how data visualization can illuminate attendance data
- [Using Chronic Absence Data to Improve Conditions for Learning](#) report
- National Forum on Education Statistics [Guide to Collecting and Using Attendance Data](#) and [Guide to Attendance, Participation, and Engagement Data in Virtual and Hybrid Learning Models](#)



STRATEGIES TO REDUCE CHRONIC ABSENCE

Menu of Targeted Strategies

Research shows that effective solutions to chronic absence use a positive, relationship-based approach with students, families, and the school community.

According to Hedy Chang, executive director of Attendance Works, “Effective approaches to chronic absence cultivate student and family engagement, so that families and students are not problems to be solved but are active in designing the solutions.” Evidence indicates that punishing students and families does not work to solve the problem.

Developing a Relationship-Based Effort

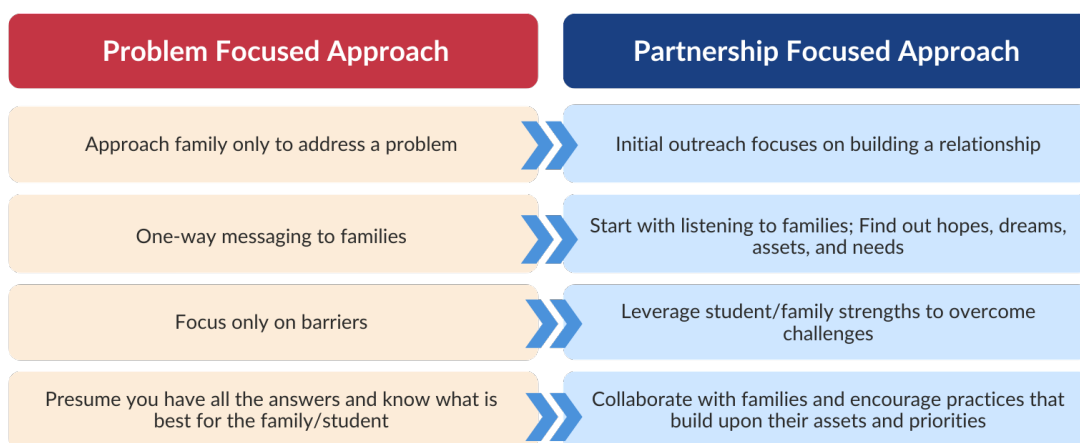
Success in reducing chronic absence requires building trust, listening to families, and engaging them in authentic ways that will support academic success and re-establish a norm of attendance every day.

“Relational trust is the glue that holds everything together,” according to Dr. Karen Mapp, senior researcher at Harvard Graduate School of Education. “If you skip over the step of building authentic and trusting relationships with your families and the community,” said Mapp, “then all of those wonderful initiatives that you attempt to put into place don’t have a strong foundation on which to sit.”

Building trust centers on active listening, engaging in two-way communication, and giving students and families the space and opportunity to share barriers to attendance and to collaborate on ideas for possible solutions.

Improving chronic absence requires creating positive behavior changes that will help students and families work through the issues that are causing them to miss school. Big success happens when schools shift from an approach that blames students and parents to an approach that seeks to become partners together. Family engagement, positive partnership, and communication are key to successfully reducing chronic absence.

SHIFTING FROM A PROBLEM TO PARTNERSHIP APPROACH



Concepts from Attendance Works and Search Institute.



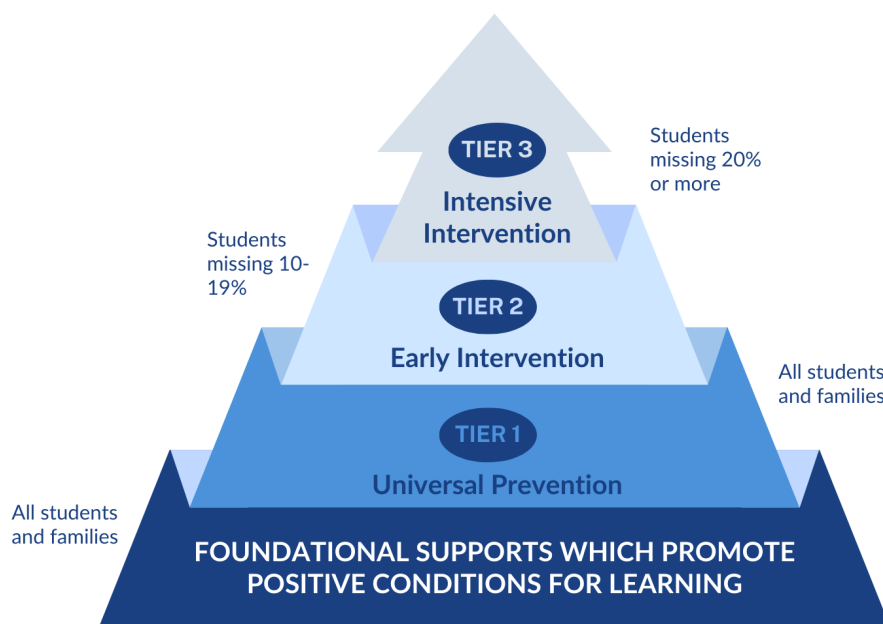
Reflect

Do you think your school takes a problem-focused or a partnership-focused approach to working with families? How do you know? What are other mindsets around attendance that you believe must shift to be successful at your school or district?

A Framework for Improving Attendance

In addition to strengthening relationships with students and families through a partnership approach, experts say that implementing a Menu of Targeted Strategies for Attendance is the most effective framework for improving attendance. In this approach, schools tailor responses and develop different prevention and intervention strategies based on the level and severity of chronic absence.

MENU OF TARGETED STRATEGIES FOR ATTENDANCE



Source: Attendance Works



Assessing School Climate

To begin with, this approach recognizes the importance of looking at the foundation of the school climate itself when starting to address chronic absence. This means taking an honest look at what is currently in place and how well a school has established a positive and engaging climate for learning. When there is a positive climate for learning, students are likely to attend school.

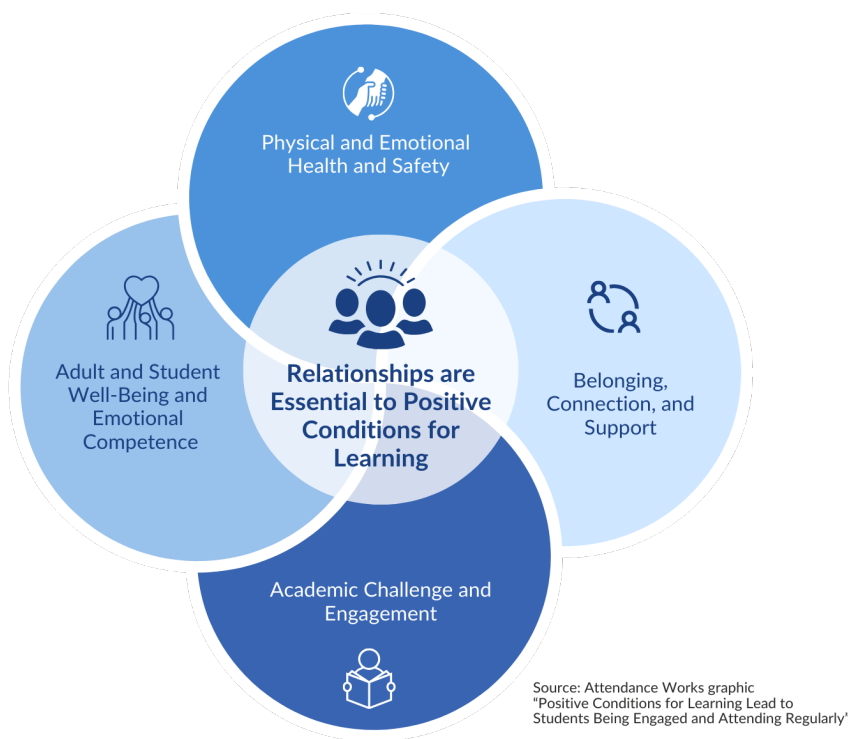
Signs of Negative School Climate/ Conditions for Learning	Signs of Positive School Climate/ Conditions for Learning
Lack of ability to build community and relationships with students and families.	Relationship building is intentional; school staff build positive relationships with students and families. Trust has been created.
Students and families feel disconnected from school. Students may experience negative peer relationships or weak relationships between students and staff. Students do not feel meaningfully connected to their teachers or any caring adult at school.	A sense of belonging is pervasive. Students and families feel personally connected to school, their peers, and their teachers. There is active student and family engagement. There may be advisory boards and meetings to build community.
Students may not feel physically, emotionally, or mentally safe at school. School is not a healthy and welcoming place to be or learn.	Students feel physically, mentally, and emotionally safe. School is a welcoming place to be and learn.
There is little intention or capacity to support student and teacher well-being.	Student and teacher well-being is actively supported; trauma-informed practice is evident and there is adult capacity to handle and support student well-being.
Students and/or teachers do not have a sense of agency, efficacy, or community in their school environments.	Students and teachers feel a sense of agency, community, and that they are listened to and respected.
Students are disengaged in learning; content is irrelevant, off-task behavior is regular. There is little evidence of meaningful or high expectations for students.	Students are engaged in learning; curriculum and content is relevant, challenging, interactive, and student-centered. Learning supports are available for students who need them.
High teacher and school leader turnover. Little sense of shared mission and purpose.	Normal to below-normal teacher and school leader turnover. Staff is collaborative and feel a sense of efficacy and shared purpose.



Foundational Supports

Research shows ensuring students, families, and teachers have positive relationships at school is central to having students and families value coming to school. If students have strong and caring connections to at least one adult and to their peers, they are more likely to come to school.

POSITIVE CONDITIONS FOR LEARNING LEAD TO STUDENTS BEING ENGAGED AND ATTENDING REGULARLY



When chronic absence is a problem, it can be an indication that two or more conditions of positive learning are missing for students.

There are many ways to build positive relationships and conditions for learning with students and families. These strategies range from classroom learning and management strategies to whole-school strategies for student and family engagement and student support opportunities.

For example, these strategies might include:

- » Ensuring teachers establish relationship-building as a priority before day one of the school year.
- » Looking at daily classroom routines and how they can be crafted to create a sense of belonging and to support well-being.
- » Examining the tone and content of school and teacher communications to ensure they are positive, respectful, and easy to understand for families.
- » Bringing in community partners to create positive learning opportunities and to provide services and resources for students and families at a school campus.



Tier 1: Prevention Supports for All Students and Families

In addition to looking at the foundation of school climate, schools can institute universal prevention practices and strategies that are geared to impact all students and families around establishing and incentivizing a norm of daily attendance.

Examples of Tier 1 universal attendance supports:

- » Impact of attendance is communicated to students and parents with clear, concise, and consistent messaging about attendance expectations.
- » Routines, rituals, and celebrations related to attendance and engagement are established, such as positive greetings at the door, etc.
- » Personalized, positive communication is made to families when students are absent, such as customized letters, emails, phone calls, and text messages.
- » Improved attendance is recognized with a reward system.
- » Connections to caring adults in the school are established and monitored.

Considerations Around Incentives

Incentives are often used by school systems as part of their approach to reduce chronic absence. Experts share that incentives for attendance are most effective when they focus on recognition and rewards for good and improved attendance. Research shows that using perfect attendance as a goal for reward can negatively impact students who are at-risk for chronic absence. Too much focus on perfect attendance for relatively long periods of time doesn't help to improve attendance because students lose the incentive to participate after they miss a day. Attendance Works has developed key [guidelines for developing incentives](#) to help schools create recognition and rewards for improving attendance that will work.



Tier 2 Strategies for Early Intervention

Tier 2 strategies can be implemented to support students missing 10%-19% of school. These strategies should focus on intervention as early as possible. When a student misses 10% of school in the prior year or in the current year (two days a month), it should signal the need for early outreach and a Tier 2 intervention. These strategies work to address specific barriers to attendance that students are experiencing.

Understanding specific school data and contributing factors to missing school is key to choosing appropriate Tier 2 strategies. Successful Tier 2 strategies also include adding positive support for students, such as mentoring, to help them want to come to school.

Examples of Tier 2 targeted supports for students missing 10%-19%:

- » Common community and school barriers are identified and addressed, such as transportation issues, safe route to school, etc.
- » Individualized student success plans include attention to attendance.
- » Home visits from teachers, counselors, or administrators to engage families.
- » Mentors/caring adults are matched with students on campus.
- » Daily check-ins with students with a regular school contact to establish close relationships, explore barriers, and provide positive connection and reinforcement.
- » Expanded learning opportunities and supports are provided, such as tutoring.

Tier 3 Intensive Intervention Strategies

Tier 3 intensive interventions are needed when students miss 20% or more of school. Intensive outreach is activated when it has been determined that:

- Student missed 20% or more of school in prior school year (severely chronically absent).
- Student has missed 20% or more of school during current year.
- Student already qualifies for McKinney-Vento services, is in foster care, or is involved in juvenile justice.
- Student's attendance has not improved with Tier 2 supports.

Tier 3 strategies involve individual student plans and coordination with a student's family. These strategies often involve partnering with other agencies and working at the case management level to help get students to school.

**Examples of Tier 3 supports:**

- » A teacher/mentor, counselor or other school staff member provides sustained, one-on-one attention and problem solving with the student.
- » School personnel do one or more home visits to further investigate and problem solve with the family.
- » Referrals are made to mental health, child welfare, or other support services as needed, using strategically-chosen interventions and community partners.
- » Intensive case management is implemented with coordination of public agency and legal response as needed.
- » Habitually truant students are referred to the appropriate intervention or protocol.

DID YOU KNOW**Early Intervention & Personal Communication**

Schools and districts that have effectively reduced chronic absence often point to early intervention as a key to their success. This approach involves reaching out to parents as soon as students have missed school. Successful districts and schools have developed strategies that target and address absences immediately and with care in the first 20 days of instruction in a school year. Based on a 2023 survey, 72% of parents say they want to hear about the importance of attending school, but just 42% reported hearing from any school staff member at all about the topic in the past six months.

Several studies have shown the effectiveness of targeted, personal early communication when students are absent. Phone calls or text messages to parents expressing concern and offering assistance on the day of absence is an effective way to build relationships and reduce absenteeism. In one study, teachers sent targeted messages to parents of kindergarten students on the day they missed school, expressing concern and offering assistance. Based on parents' responses, teachers linked families to resources, such as transportation, temporary housing, or clean clothes. These messages reduced chronic absenteeism rates by 11 percentage points.

Effective Strategies and Interventions

Successfully reducing chronic absenteeism and improving school attendance requires a team approach, engaging the whole school community in the effort, and persistence in continuous learning and improvement. Selecting the evidenced-based tiered supports and interventions to implement is also critically important.



Resource

[REL West's evidenced-based improvement framework](#) can be a helpful tool in considering the most appropriate strategies for your school/district/charter network.

The first step is to use the identified root causes to inform possible choices for interventions that will match specific needs. As discussed prior, knowing the root causes of students missing school in your local context is a key step in the data analysis that must happen to inform strategies implemented to improve attendance.

After doing a root cause analysis, the next step is to select interventions to address the specific and multiple needs identified.





Exploring Options: Tiered Strategies That Work

Tier 1 | Foundational Support and School-wide Strategies

Tier 1 strategies target ALL students regardless of attendance status. These efforts focus on prevention strategies and creating positive engagement for all students.

TIER 1 Strategy	Effective, positive, and regular communication and outreach to parents
Example Practices:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Educate families on the importance of attendance and its connection to achievement ▪ Text message from teacher ▪ Personalized postcards to families each quarter about attendance ▪ Phone calls ▪ Personalized attendance related messages to parents via text day of or day after students are absent
Evidence Level: Strong	Capacity Level Required to Implement: Light
Spotlight:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Window Rock Unified School District teachers reach out to parents on a regular basis to share only positive aspects about their student. ▪ Personalized outreach by phone call after two absences in the Washington Elementary School District reduced chronic absence significantly in one year. ▪ Several personalized text messaging strategies in districts across the country have shown strong evidence of reducing chronic absence; learn more.

TIER 1 Strategy	Intentional and strategic family engagement
Example Practices:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ New year orientations with attendance expectations ▪ Workshops for parents ▪ Home visits for all students to build trust and relationships with families ▪ Invite parents to school for projects, relevant events, etc. ▪ Engage parents in problem solving school challenges via committees, etc.
Evidence Level: Promising	Capacity Level Required to Implement: Medium to Heavy
Spotlight:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Parent education workshops provided by All In Education Parent Educator Academy in the Roosevelt School District educated and engaged parents. As a result, family engagement, authentic connection, and partnership between schools and families improved. ▪ Studies show that the Parent Teacher Home Visits model improves relationships between schools and parents resulting in better academic and behavior outcomes for students. The program was found to reduce chronic absence and increase math and ELA scores.



TIER 1 Strategy	Prioritizing teacher-student relationships, and connections to a caring adult in school
Example Practices:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Before school-year personalized connection from teacher to student ▪ Teacher mindset and practices prioritize relationships so that students feel respected and supported ▪ Build connection through friendly greetings and messages to students that lets them know you're glad they're here, ask about day, missed them when they were absent, etc. ▪ Positive classroom management strategies ▪ Relationship mapping to ensure every student has relationship with one caring adult ▪ Keeping students and teachers together for more than one year, known as "looping"
Evidence Level: Promising to Strong	
Capacity Level Required to Implement: Light to Medium	
Spotlight:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Tanque Verde School District mapped the existing relationships of individual students to ensure that there was at least one caring adult for every student. Chronic absence has decreased throughout the district. ▪ Evidence indicates that the BARR model used in high schools across the country has worked to improve attendance. High school freshmen are placed together in small groups for English, math, social studies, and science classes. Teachers receive professional development on using relationships with students to enhance achievement. ▪ Through "positive greetings at the door," engagement for Minnesota middle school students studied increased 20%.

TIER 1 Strategy	Restorative behavior and discipline practices
Example Practices:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Replace out-of-school suspensions with restorative practices ▪ Adopt a whole-school approach to restorative practices that center on communication, empathy, responsibility, restoration, and understanding how one's actions affect others
Evidence Level: Promising to Moderate	
Capacity Level Required to Implement: Medium	
Spotlight:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Tucson Unified School District uses a variety of restorative practices such as small group restorative circles, formal restorative conferences to resolve serious behavior problems, and de-escalation strategies. ▪ Arizona K12 Center provides "restorative 101" resources. ▪ Page Unified School District uses restorative discipline as a whole school, relational approach to building school climate and addressing student behavior that fosters belonging over exclusion, social engagement over control, and meaningful accountability over punishment. ▪ Safer-Saner Schools is a restorative whole school change model proven to reduce chronic absence. ▪ Second Step is a curriculum proven to improve attendance that teaches students empathy, impulse control, problem solving, and anger management.



TIER 1 Strategy	Expanded learning opportunities
Example Practices:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provide a variety of afterschool and enrichment activities that cater to diverse student interests ▪ Summer learning and youth programs
Evidence Level: Promising to Strong	Capacity Level Required to Implement: Medium
Spotlight:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Tanque Verde Unified School District has prioritized extracurricular activities and tracked student involvement, with the district successfully reducing chronic absence. ▪ Summer “social belonging orientations” for middle school students transitioning to high school had 46% fewer unexcused absences than students who only received a “business as usual” orientation to high school.

TIER 1 Strategy	Routines, rituals and celebrations related to attendance and engagement
Example Practices:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Recognition and rewards of good and improved attendance, evidence suggests that focusing on perfect attendance as an incentive can have negative effects. ▪ Create friendly competitions between classrooms, grade levels, schools, etc.
Evidence Level: Promising	Capacity Level Required to Implement: Light
Spotlight:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Buckeye Elementary School District has a district-wide competition to celebrate and reward classrooms and individual student attendance monthly, and teacher attendance by semester. Chronic absence rates have decreased at five schools.

TIER 1 Strategy	Relevant and engaging instruction and curriculum
Example Practices:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Instruction is challenging but not overwhelming ▪ Student work is displayed ▪ Student-centered and project-based learning ▪ Youth voice initiatives ▪ Teachers show students how learning is connected to their lives ▪ Provide STEM and career-focused opportunities
Evidence Level: Promising	Capacity Level Required to Implement: Medium
Spotlight:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Window Rock School District provided teacher training and support to make their instruction more engaging and relevant for students. Attendance has improved in elementary, middle, and high schools. ▪ School districts throughout Pima County have partnered with CommunityShare.org to provide student-centered instruction and project-based learning. As a result, 96% of educators reported significantly increased student engagement.



TIER 1 Strategy	Developing a community school model or strengthening services relevant for students and families provided on campus
Example Practices:	<p>Wrap-around services and supports provided at school:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Early childhood program ▪ Parenting classes ▪ Job training and employment services ▪ Financial and tax assistance ▪ Health and mental health services; access to telehealth ▪ Clothing, food, other emergency assistance ▪ Laundry ▪ Free meals ▪ Technology support for families
Evidence Level: Strong	Capacity Level Required to Implement: Medium to Heavy
Spotlight:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Vitalyst Foundation reported on Arizona's Community Schools which provide a range of services and supports. Flowing Wells Unified School District in Tucson provides a family resource center model with utility assistance programs, assistance with applying for college, bankruptcy assistance, tax assistance, mental health services, English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, job training programs, clothing and food programs. ▪ O.C. Johnson Elementary School in Yuma piloted a community school model with on-site preschool, family support and education programs, 5-day a week health clinic, food bank, and employment services.



Tier 2 | Targeted Support Strategies for Students at Greater Risk of Chronic Absence

Tier 2 interventions target students who are close to (7%-9% missed) or already missing 10% of the school year. Tier 2 interventions can be offered to individual students or students in small groups with similar circumstances.

TIER 2 Strategy	Personalized communication and outreach to students and families to address attendance
Example Practices: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Early outreach in first months of school, conversation with students and families from a parent representative, teacher, principal, school social worker or counselor to address attendance ▪ Targeted virtual or in-person family home visit to address attendance issues 	
Evidence Level: Strong	Capacity Level Required to Implement: Light to Medium
Spotlight: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Head Start programs throughout Arizona conduct home visits for children who are chronically absent and have worked to improve attendance for pre-k students. ▪ The LEAP home visiting program addresses student absence, builds relationships, and has reduced chronic absence in Connecticut. ▪ The Early Truancy Prevention Program was the first home visiting program to reduce chronic absenteeism by 10% in the primary grades for children in high-poverty districts. 	

TIER 2 Strategy	Individual student support
Example Practices: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Individualized success plan that addresses barriers to attendance with specific goals, incentivize improved attendance ▪ Individual behavioral and daily check-in support strategies, such as Check In/Check Out or having an attendance buddy ▪ Mental health services as needed ▪ Tutoring or mentoring as needed 	
Evidence Level: Strong	Capacity Level Required to Implement: Medium
Spotlight: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ City of Phoenix Head Start uses Attendance Works success plans to target students at risk for chronic absence and meets with families to discuss and create plans. Attendance improved for students. ▪ Check & Connect is a proven mentoring strategy to reduce chronic absence for at-risk students. ▪ Check In/Check Out (CICO) is a popular Tier 2 intervention that promotes positive behavior. 	



TIER 2 Strategy	Early warning and intervention systems
Example Practices:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifies students at-risk for not graduating high school and assigns interventions
Evidence Level: Strong	Capacity Level Required to Implement: Heavy
Spotlight:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Diplomas Now, developed at Johns Hopkins University, saw a 33 percent reduction in the number of chronically absent students across 32 struggling urban secondary schools in 11 school districts. The American Institutes for Research (AIR) Early Warning and Monitoring System was shown to significantly lower chronic absence after one year of implementation in grades 9 and 10.

TIER 2 Strategy	Common community and school barriers to attendance identified and supports provided
Example Practices:	<p>Troubleshooting issues with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transportation with new school bus routes, public transit passes, carpool/ridesharing app, a safer walk/route to school Food insecurity Clean school clothes Childcare for younger siblings Eldercare for older family members Relevant health supports such as addressing asthma and issues for students with disabilities Mental health services
Evidence Level: Strong	Capacity Level Required to Implement: Medium
Spotlight:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Avondale Elementary School District administrators realized there was a high rate of absences at one housing complex. They worked with the housing provider to take attendance at the bus stop and knock on doors of kids who weren't there. They created a display with flags for each family and tied ribbons to the flags if they had perfect attendance each week. Attendance improved significantly. Students in the Baboquivari School District can do laundry and shower at school if needed. Chicago Safe Passage program reduces chronic absence by providing a positive, trusted adult presence for students as they travel to and from school. The Walking School Bus is a method used across the country that has reduced chronic absence for students needing a safer route to school. The KIPP Harmony Academy charter school in Baltimore identified that asthma was a primary cause of absence for students. After providing health services at school, they saw a 23% drop in chronic absence.



TIER 2 Strategy	Small group interventions for students with similar circumstances
Example Practices:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Small group counseling for students with anxiety ▪ Small group mentoring around attendance and engagement ▪ Breakfast or lunch clubs to promote relationships ▪ Targeted supports for English language learners, immigrant and refugee populations ▪ Targeted youth engagement opportunities that promote problem solving, self-control, emotional regulation and stronger self-identification as a learner
Evidence Level: Promising to Strong	Capacity Level Required to Implement: Medium to Heavy
Spotlight:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Success Mentors is a national data-driven and evidenced-based mentor model proven to reduce chronic absence. ▪ Positive Action builds life skills and character education and has reduced chronic absence. Positive Action stresses a self-concept curriculum, getting along with others, and self-management.



Tier 3 | Intensive Interventions For Students Who Are Severely Chronically Absent

Tier 3 interventions target students who are close to or already missing 20% of the school year. Tier 3 interventions are intensive, individualized to specific student circumstances, and may take a case-management approach.

TIER 3 Strategy	Individualized supports
Example Practices:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Do one or more home visits to further investigate and understand the problem. ▪ Individualized learning and success plan that is developed with student and family ▪ Educational support champions/advocates ▪ Tailored physical and mental health supports ▪ 1:1 tutoring or mentoring
Evidence Level: Emerging to Promising Capacity Level Required to Implement: Medium to Heavy	
Spotlight:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ FosterEd identifies an “education champion” for students in Pima, Maricopa, and Yavapai counties who are in the child welfare and justice systems to coordinate work with students and families. Attendance improved significantly.

TIER 3 Strategy	Interagency case management and access to intensive services, resources, and supports
Example Practices:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Connect to social worker and other relevant support staff to provide needed resources for families ▪ Work with community partners to provide access to housing stability supports, and use McKinney-Vento services and Homeless Liaison to address chronic absence for homeless students ▪ Connect to school nurse and other health resources/services for students dealing with chronic illness
Evidence Level: Promising Capacity Level Required to Implement: Medium to Heavy	
Spotlight:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Roosevelt School District has started a “closed loop” referral system for breaking down barriers to needed services. ▪ Communities in Schools offers a model for encouraging interagency collaboration and has improved attendance for elementary school students. ▪ AZ Head Start caseworker model addresses coordination with services to address barriers to attendance. Maricopa County Head Start broke down barriers to housing for families which improved attendance by collaborating with local community action and housing agencies. ▪ The SchoolHouse Connection provides resources and support for schools to work effectively with homeless students.



TIER 3 Strategy		Legal intervention for truancy (as a last resort)
Example Practices:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Have appropriate school personnel refer the student and family to applicable legal intervention.	
Capacity Level Required to Implement: Heavy		
Spotlight:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Litchfield Elementary School District implemented the C.U.T.S. (Court Unified Truancy Suppression) Program in partnership with Maricopa County Juvenile Probation. If a student has five or more unexcused absences or over eighteen excessive absences (excused and/or unexcused), the student can be cited to the C.U.T.S. Program through the Juvenile Court which works with families to ensure students attend school regularly.	



Evidence-Based Attendance Programs

These specific programs for improving attendance and reducing chronic absence meet the rigorous national ESSA evidence standards. Programs listed in [Evidence for ESSA](#) include evidence rating, grade level appropriateness, and more information to help determine the fit given your local context, with key considerations such as staffing, technology, training, and cost requirements needed to implement the intervention.

Program	Description	Evidence Level	Grades Studied
Early Warning Intervention and Monitoring System (EWIMS)	The EWIMS model is intended to help schools efficiently use data to both identify the at-risk population and provide targeted support, strengthening student persistence and progress in school and ultimately improving on-time graduation rates. Learn more	Strong	9-10
EveryDay Intervention	After establishing a district partnership and securely receiving attendance data, EveryDay Intervention (formerly InClassToday) runs analyses to identify students who are at risk of being chronically absent and most likely to benefit from the program and delivers personalized absence reports to parents and guardians with actionable information about their student's attendance. Learn more	Strong	K-12
Positive Action - Attendance	Positive Action is a whole-school reform strategy designed to improve social-emotional, attendance, and achievement outcomes by building school climate, self-control, goal-setting, problem-solving, persistence, and other skills. Learn more	Strong	K-8
Future Forward Literacy - Attendance	Future Forward (formerly SPARK) is an early literacy intervention that provides a support system for kindergarten through third grade students struggling with reading that integrates one-on-one tutoring and family engagement. Students assigned to the program had significantly fewer absences. Learn more	Strong	K-3
PowerSchool Unified Operations Attendance Intervention Suite	PowerSchool Unified Operations Attendance Intervention Suite (formerly Kininvolved) gives educators the tools to improve attendance by identifying root causes and providing actionable attendance data and real-time family communication. Learn more	Promising	6-12



Program	Description	Evidence Level	Grades Studied
Parent Teacher Home Visits - Attendance	<p>The Parent Teacher Home Visits model was co-created by parents and educators and encourages relationship-building and ongoing communication. Participating teachers conduct short home visits in which they listen, ask questions, and make observations to improve instruction for the learner.</p> <p>Learn more</p>	Promising	1-5
Absenteeism and Truancy: Interventions and Universal Procedures	<p>ATI-UP is a preventive, school-wide intervention that has school teams following a multi-system framework to instill a positive social climate in which attendance expectations are directly taught to the students, consistently acknowledged, and actively monitored. These systems incorporate a problem-solving team, a parental/community engagement component, promotion of attendance in school, and motivation for improvements in behavior.</p> <p>Learn more</p>	Promising	K-6
Talent Development High School - Attendance	<p>The Talent Development High School is a program that provides schools with professional development to implement comprehensive approaches to improve achievement and attendance for 9th graders in high-poverty urban schools.</p> <p>Learn more</p>	Promising	9
SaferSaner Schools Whole-School Change	<p>SaferSanerSchools™ is a comprehensive restorative practices program for school staff to increase their understanding of how one's actions affect others and create a better school climate.</p> <p>Learn more</p>	Promising	K-12
Second Step - Attendance	<p>Second Step is a violence prevention curriculum designed to teach elementary students social skills and how to respond to others in nonviolent ways. Fear of victimization at school and poor school climate have negative impacts on school attendance, so such violence prevention programs are expected to have positive effects on attendance.</p> <p>Learn more</p>	Promising	1



Resource

Attendance Work's [Attendance Playbook](#) is another highly-recommended resource to use in your process of identifying attendance interventions that may be appropriate and effective for your school, district, or charter network. It includes evidenced-based interventions geared for post-pandemic school climates that address whole-school and all student solutions, as well as Tier 2 and 3 supports based on students' attendance status. Attendance Works also developed an [implementation guide](#) to assist users.

Further Considerations

After exploring options for tiered supports, determining the fit of interventions is key. You need to examine the alignment of the prior outcomes achieved by an intervention with the demographic and needs of your students and local context. Further, you must consider if capacity building is needed and what must be in place to be able to implement the strategy (staff, budget, resources).

Some questions to consider are:

- Does this strategy fit our specific needs and is it possible given our constraints?
- Can we implement with fidelity to get the intended outcomes?
- What do we need to have in place before we begin implementing the strategies to be successful?

You should also determine how you will analyze outcomes to see if the interventions are working. Gauging impact in measurable ways is essential. Consider what data you will need to collect to know if strategies are working to reduce chronic absence.



Resource

REL West's [Applicability of Evidenced-based Intervention](#) tool can be helpful in examining interventions for fit and feasibility.



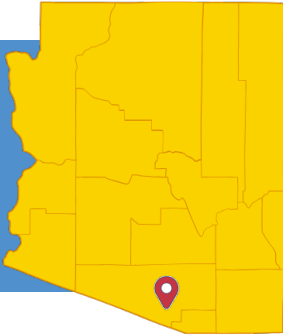
Reflect

Which Tier 1 and Tier 2 supports would you like to try at your school? What existing supports are working? What gaps need to be addressed with new strategies?



ARIZONA SPOTLIGHT

Tanque Verde Unified School District



Tanque Verde Unified School District (TVUSD) took a three-fold approach to create solutions to address the root causes of chronic absence. The first element they chose to focus on was building more academically engaging classrooms. Collaboration is key to their approach. Teachers meet regularly to share expertise, learning and working together to improve their own teaching skills and to improve outcomes for students.

“ You have to create a system and a culture where the entire school community focuses on building relationships. This takes ongoing work.

- Superintendent Scott Hagerman

The second element TVUSD zeroed in on was recognizing the importance of positive relationships and strengthening the connection of students and their families to their school. The district trained staff, sports participants, and clubs on how to ensure everyone is respected, affirmed, and included. Finally, the district prioritized extracurricular programs knowing that participation in clubs and afterschool activities can often draw students to come to school. The district tracks student involvement in extracurriculars, identifying which students are not involved.

The district has reduced chronic absence significantly, with one TVUSD elementary school's rate going from 13.5% down to 4.8% from 2018-2021, and attributes this as a key factor in the 20% average increase in their third grade ELA scores.



[Read the full story in our online guide](#)

Resources:

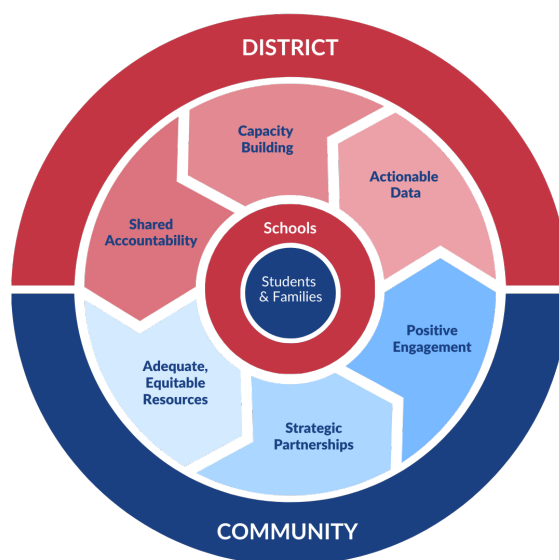
- [U.S. Department of Education Approaches to Root Cause Analysis](#) resources
- [Understanding Common Causes of Absence worksheet](#) from Attendance Works
- [Examples of Tiered Practices](#) from Attendance Works
- [Attendance Pyramid Worksheet](#) from Attendance Works
- IES REL [Tools to support selection of evidenced-based strategies](#)
- [A Multi-Tiered Approach to Reducing Chronic Absence in Elementary School](#)
- Strategies for Improving Attendance in Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten: [Toolkit for Districts, Schools, and Early Childhood Providers](#)
- [Research and Practices to reduce High School Chronic Absenteeism](#)

Implementation Process

Reducing chronic absence and improving attendance across a district or charter network is a long-term, ongoing commitment to taking a data-driven and positive, problem-solving approach to inform consistent and strategic action.

The district or charter network has the leadership responsibility for ensuring the district, as a whole, is systematically addressing chronic absence, promoting expectations of attendance, highlighting the connection between attendance and achievement, and ensuring that attendance policies, procedures, and goals are in place and implemented consistently in all schools within the district or network.

KEY INGREDIENTS FOR SYSTEMIC CHANGE TO REDUCING ABSENTEEISM



Source: Attendance Works graphic "Key Ingredients for Systemic Change to Reducing Absenteeism"

According to experts, successful efforts around tackling the issue of chronic absence include your district or charter network's ability to:

- » **Build capacity** of district and school staff around the issue of chronic absence.
- » **Work with actionable data** around attendance.
- » **Positively engage students, families, and staff** and create positive school climates.
- » **Message effectively and respectfully with parents and community members** to ensure that the community understands the connection between attendance and achievement.
- » **Engage strategic partners** and leverage resources in the community to assist in your efforts.
- » **Identify and manage existing resources** to address chronic absence.
- » **Establish shared accountability** with district and school-wide goals, have accountable school leaders and teams, and data-sharing with all stakeholders.



The superintendent can elevate the importance of this work by designating a cabinet-level administrator to lead and facilitate the district's attendance efforts in collaboration with other key leaders.

Every principal or site-level administrator is responsible for ensuring their school adopts and implements a comprehensive and tiered approach to improving attendance that is aligned with the district or network's goals.

The district's governing board can help to foster a commitment to continuous improvement and shared accountability by setting policy and also by looking at the data on a regular basis.

District office administrators and school principals can also spearhead connections with community service providers as partners in this work.

Key Action Steps to Reduce Chronic Absenteeism

STEP 1: TAKE A TEAM APPROACH AT THE DISTRICT AND SCHOOL LEVEL.

Research shows that a team approach works best to make traction on chronic absence. Therefore, it is essential to form effective district and school attendance teams.

At the district-level, it is essential to create policies, procedures, and conditions for working effectively with actionable attendance data. Carefully assess what your district or charter network needs to be able to monitor and act continually on the data with a team approach.

Consider the following questions when building a district/network team:

- » Do we have the right people at the table? Do we have diverse, cross-departmental representation and key people who can understand the various student subgroups affected by chronic absence?
- » What policies and processes need to be in place for us to succeed?
- » How do we build the capacity of current staff, principals, and other administrators to be able to understand and address the data and barriers to attendance?
- » What external partnerships might help as we unpack data, address patterns, and create a response?

At the school-level, the team works together to organize and facilitate a school-wide attendance strategy that improves outcomes for all students. Teams should be led by a school leader who has the authority to implement strategies determined by the team, such as the principal or assistant principal. Effective teams must have the right people for your unique school community to address chronic absence.

A team might include:

- Attendance support staff
- Teachers
- Special education staff
- School counselor
- Social worker
- School nurse
- Family engagement liaison or staff
- Early education staff
- Attendance officer
- Sports coaches and other staff with key knowledge of student populations
- Relevant community partners or other agencies such as preschool or Head Start providers
- Health centers, care teams, and/or outside agency staff working with school families
- Others who know the student populations well



It may be worth considering if different existing school teams can assume responsibility for each tier of attendance support/strategies that you choose to implement. And, if this is the case, decide how the efforts can be coordinated across teams.

At both the district and school level, teams need to have the right makeup to bring a comprehensive understanding and perspectives of the diverse student demographics impacted by chronic absence. Teams should incorporate input and feedback from families and students, especially when working to understand the causes of not attending school and coming up with solutions that will work for families.

Before the team begins its work, it may be helpful to take a self-assessment to gauge your district and schools' strengths and opportunities in reducing chronic absence.



Resource

Check out Attendance Works's best practices for [district-level](#) and [school-level](#) teams for more information on team functions, roles and responsibilities, and common pitfalls; find [self-assessments](#); and watch this [video](#) to see an effective team in action.

STEP 2: DRIVE WITH DATA. ANALYZE THE DATA REGULARLY USING A TEAM APPROACH.

Analyzing student-level attendance data by school, grade, and subgroup allows districts and schools to differentiate student supports and work with students before they become chronically absent. Looking at data regularly allows teams to see patterns of attendance problems and proactively align supports. Create a process for regularly reviewing data that meets district needs.

Using your district or network-level data, key questions to ask are:

- » To what extent is chronic and severe chronic absence an issue and where is it concentrated? Is it getting worse or getting better?
- » How does satisfactory attendance and chronic and severe chronic absence vary across schools, grades, subgroups, or neighborhoods?
- » What does the concentration and scale of chronic absence suggest about likely causes of chronic absence?
- » What is the relationship between attendance patterns and academic performance across the district?
- » What is the relationship between attendance patterns and behavior/disciplinary (e.g., suspensions) data across the district/network?
- » How do we know if/when our different interventions are effective?



School data is typically reviewed more frequently than district/network level data because it is at the school level where interventions must happen. Ideally, it is best to review the data every 10 days to see how many and which students are chronically absent and to what degree.

Unpacking the data to understand the varying levels of attendance allows the school team to figure out how many and which students need Tier 2 (missing 10%-19% of school) and Tier 3 (missing 20% or more) supports and interventions. It also helps the team notice which student subgroups or grades are most affected.

Looking at the data at the school-level should help answer these questions:

- » Is chronic absence getting better or worse?
- » Is chronic absence concentrated among particular students or student groups (race, free and reduced lunch, English language learners, chronically ill students, siblings, students from a similar neighborhood/community)?
- » Which grade levels are most affected in our school? Is it higher or lower for specific grades?

Then, start to explore the trends:

- » What might explain some of the differences among student groups or grade levels?
- » What additional information might be needed to identify barriers or to put effective strategies in place?
- » Who do we need to engage to understand the problem?

Qualitative Data Tools

To gather more information on why students are missing school, it is essential to use good qualitative data tools and processes at the district and school level. The best way to get qualitative data is through guided conversations with students and families. To engage students and families to understand why they are missing school:

- **Conduct focus groups** with students and parents/caregivers to identify barriers and ideas for solutions. A focus group is a moderated discussion with a set of questions prepared ahead of time that allows participants to share their experiences and perspectives. Focus groups work very well for older student populations in middle and high school.
- **Host a cafecito or coffee with the principal** for parents and caregivers. Ask families to share their strengths and challenges when it comes to attendance. A family who has had some success with attendance challenges might also be asked to speak and share what made a difference for them.
- **Send out surveys** to students and parents to understand their reasons for being absent. Share that their answers will be anonymous. Include questions that allow students to share about what makes them want to attend school in addition to barriers and why they cannot attend school.



STEP 3: IDENTIFY BARRIERS TO ATTENDANCE AND ROOT CAUSES BASED ON THE DATA ANALYSIS.

Look back to the [common root causes](#) associated with chronic absence.

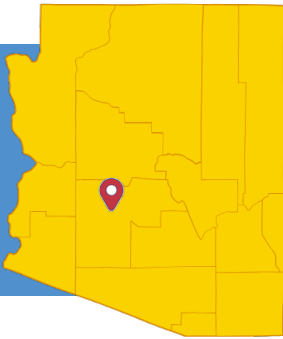
- » Does what you are hearing fall into one of these big categories of misconceptions, barriers, aversion, or disengagement?
- » Identify exactly which reason within the root causes is the reason why a student or group of students are chronically absent.
- » Do you notice any trends? What are the top root causes or specific reasons for students and families at your school?

Once you have identified the reason for not attending, the team will be able to generate ideas for possible interventions.



ARIZONA SPOTLIGHT

Buckeye Elementary School District



When Buckeye Elementary School District began its deep dive into addressing chronic absence, district leaders realized quickly that getting the right data can be a learning process. Issues arise when pulling student information from different systems and working out how best to synthesize it to get accurate, aligned data that drills down to the real-time student level and gives a sense of the overall attendance picture. Specifics such as being sure to count full academic year students and half academic year students can complicate the process initially. Buckeye broke down their data by school and student subgroups to start. Highlighting the people and programs that draw students to school and create a sense of belonging is part of the intentional effort. The district has prioritized extracurricular programs and tracks student involvement by running a list of students in after-school activities against the total enrollment, identifying which students are not involved in anything.

“ **It’s important to make the work public and to celebrate every victory no matter how small, recognizing that so many people are working hard to drive the work forward.**

- Kara McDivitt, Director of Student Services

For example, by looking closely at the data, the school team realized that students who lived within a one-mile radius of school—which is considered walking distance—had attendance issues. They talked to parents and discovered that not being on a bus route had become a barrier to attendance. The district used their baseline data to set a district-wide goal to reduce chronic absence by 10%. Then, schools created attendance teams and came up with plans outlining specific goals with incentives for students to come to school. Since the effort began, five schools in the district have successfully reduced their chronic absence rates.

The district reports progress regularly to the whole school community. For example, weekly district staff newsletters share which schools are in the lead for monthly school-wide attendance competitions. Winners are recognized each semester at a board meeting.

In addition to recognizing and rewarding students and schools, the district also rewards good teacher attendance knowing how important it is to set a good example for students. Teachers who have a 90% attendance rate for a semester receive a monetary bonus.



[Read the full story in our online guide](#)

**STEP 4: DEVELOP AND ORGANIZE A SYSTEMIC APPROACH.****» Build capacity, provide professional development as needed, and foster staff buy-in.**

- Ensure that staff have the appropriate skills, tools, and resources to work together to interpret data, engage in problem-solving, and adopt best practices to improve attendance.
- Educate staff and school communities about the problem and causes of chronic absence and how taking a strategic approach is key for success.
- Emphasize that this problem is solvable with an all-hands-on-deck approach to get students in school and engaged in learning.
- Work to establish ongoing professional peer learning communities and opportunities for staff to share challenges, what is working, and any new evidence-based practices that will be tried.

» Strategies that use ongoing positive family and community engagement, caring relationships, and working towards positive school climates are key to making this a successful effort.

- Identify key strategies and methods that will work for your district or network to build trust and relationships.

» Plan and organize a community-wide messaging and outreach campaign for parents, students, and community partners.

- Emphasize the positive aspects of attendance and the connection between attendance and achievement.
- Communicate the consequences of missing just two days per month.
- Highlight any efforts started and successes of individual schools.
- Plan year-round messaging and strategy to maximize opportunities before the school year starts, during parent-teacher conferences, periodically throughout the year, and prior to and during summer or extended breaks.

» Identify key strategic partners who can assist with your efforts.

- Community partners may provide student supports to address attendance barriers or provide information to inform the work.

» Use an intentional, year-round approach.

- Events promoting and celebrating attendance can be integrated into all aspects of the school environment.
- A [district/network yearly planning calendar](#) can assist in ensuring attendance is an integral part of school all year long.



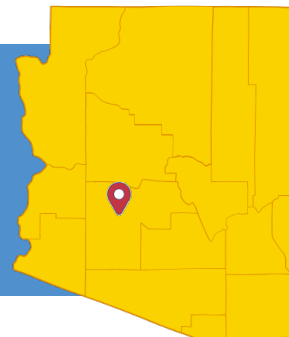
STEP 5: ADOPT AND SUPPORT A TIERED APPROACH TO REDUCING CHRONIC ABSENCE THROUGHOUT THE DISTRICT/NETWORK.

- » **Ensure that school leaders have the capacity needed to develop a [framework of targeted strategies](#)** and create a continuum of prevention and intervention strategies at the school level.
 - The model related to chronic absence uses a range of systemic and individual approaches to meet the needs of all students.
- » **Start with implementing Tier 1 universal support and prevention for all students.** Consider your approach in terms of the year-long calendar.
 - For Tier 1 supports, think about what activities make the most sense to implement in the summer, fall, winter, and spring. See this [planning calendar](#) from Attendance Works.
- » **Add Tier 2 and 3 supports for specific students or student groups based on real-time, school data.** Ensure staff can align interventions to the specific root causes for students not coming to school.
 - If large numbers of students are chronically absent, likely systemic barriers are contributing to students missing school.
 - Some barriers can be student-specific and ameliorated with specific support. For example, some families may struggle with transportation. This can be solved by coming up with a reliable way to get students to school. Some students may not have enough clean clothes. In several communities, schools have figured out ways so that parents or older students can do laundry at school. Once teams have figured out the nature of the barriers, then the problem-solving begins.
- » **Consider a scaffolded response to build your capacity to address the problem.**
 - A district or school may want to target specific grades or a specific student population first depending on the data and capacity at different schools.
- » **Incorporate an early warning system and routine** to be able to respond to student data and intervene early with an effective cadence.
- » **Address clarity of school attendance practices and processes.** Decide how and when the school attendance team or staff will act to improve attendance. Outline who should activate the process and exactly what should be done.
 - Attendance Works has a great example of a [visual tool](#) to show a school's appropriate response for each level of absence.



ARIZONA SPOTLIGHT

Avondale Elementary School District



Avondale Elementary School District has been tackling chronic absence since 2015 and has made significant improvements year after year. During the 2022-23 school year, there was a 20%-60% reduction in chronic absences across schools compared to the prior school year. According to Superintendent Dr. Betsy Hargrove, “After nine years, we are still learning and actively committed to the process of continuous improvement. It started by digging into our data and breaking down the large data set into grade-level information. It was eye-opening when we pulled K-1 attendance data and looked at it side-by-side with students’ Dibels scores.”

Drawing a connection between attendance data and achievement, the district created a tiered approach with different solutions to improve attendance that strategically addressed the reasons they discovered why students were missing school.

“ We built buy-in from everyone in our district, 100% committed to a vision that will help every child succeed, knowing that we can’t do that alone and without students being here every day to learn.

- Superintendent Dr. Betsy Hargrove

Dr. Hargrove also pursued various community partnerships to help in the effort— from local community-based organizations to support families to the National Center for School-University Partnerships to dive into improvement science and use it to empower school and teacher teams to design solutions that work. The approach zeroed in on building the capacity of school leaders and teachers ensuring they had what they needed to create success school by school and classroom by classroom.

The efforts in Avondale Elementary School District continue to pay off as students are outperforming their peers statewide in reading and math. Improved attendance is a critical factor to success in school and beyond.



[Read the full story in our online guide](#)



STEP 6: REGULARLY REVIEW THE DATA AND MONITOR PROGRESS OF INTERVENTIONS.

At the district or network level, determine an effective cadence of progress monitoring. Monitor data closely in the first quarter of the school year. Provide additional support to schools that are most in need.

At the school level, once strategies have been chosen for each tier of attendance, be sure to record attendance rates prior to implementing any change to accurately gauge impact. Monitor the progress of strategies at each school attendance team meeting. Invite team members to share challenges and ideas for improvements. Parents and students can be invited to weigh in and give feedback. Look at the big picture. Consider how well supports are working based on qualitative feedback and by looking at pre- and post-attendance rates. If necessary, revisit your year-long approach.

» Data should be organized so that the team can:

- Get a high-level picture of all students by tier and attendance categories.
- Notice changes since the last meeting.
- Understand if the problem is getting better or worse.
- Celebrate successes and reflect on strengths.
- Offer analysis, ideas, and ask any clarifying questions.

» Look at individual student progress for those in the Tier 2 and Tier 3 categories at every meeting.

- Review individual students.
- Determine who follows up with students and/or families; consider who is most trusted by families.
- Plan outreach to students and families to determine barriers and causes for absence.
- Assign new interventions as needed and offer resources for students requiring targeted intervention.
- Remind staff to document any attendance barriers identified, supports provided, or follow-up needed.



STEP 7: PROMOTE SHARED ACCOUNTABILITY AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT. CELEBRATE EVERY SUCCESS!

Addressing chronic absence is a process that involves continuous learning and improvement. Strategies and interventions will need to be adjusted and tweaked.

Shared accountability ensures that there is a common understanding of the goals at the district and school levels. It also involves sharing how progress will be measured and determined.

- Set realistic and achievable target goals for schools and the district as a whole.
- Aiming for a 2%-10% reduction in chronic absence in the first year of the targeted work is likely a good range. However, creating realistic goals depends on your specific data and circumstances.
- Make attendance data, goals, and targets publicly available.
- Share attendance data and updates on progress regularly via newsletters and at school board meetings.
- Regularly celebrate and publicly share the successes of individual schools as they work towards reducing chronic absence.
- Review staff attendance patterns to ensure that adults are modeling the behaviors that are expected of students, and consider celebrating and incentivizing teacher attendance as well.

To promote shared accountability, a **community-wide attendance plan**, including school- and district-level goals, strategies and action steps, can be developed before the beginning of a school year. The plan should be informed by the previous year's data and insights and could include:

- An overview of the extent of the chronic absence issue.
- An assessment of district/network and school capacity to address barriers students face and schoolwide strategies to address these barriers.
- Target goals for district and schools that can be measured; school attendance plans could be highlighted.
- A description of the tiered interventions and strategies.
- Key attendance practices and processes.
- A timeline for implementation and monitoring method for assessing success.



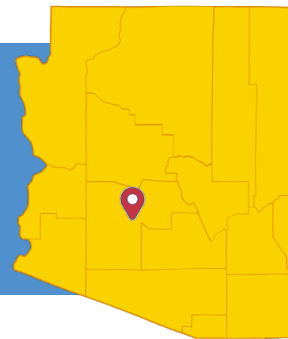
Reflect

How does your district, network, or school promote shared accountability and celebrate continuous improvement in addressing chronic absenteeism? Are there any new ideas or strategies needed?



ARIZONA SPOTLIGHT

Washington Elementary School District



Washington Elementary School District began its strategic and coordinated approach to improve attendance by using resources from Attendance Works.

“ Early on, we realized we didn’t have the right people on the district team to make headway. We added parents to get their perspectives and more cross-sector representation—from health and social services, safety and mentoring, to assistant superintendent and principals— to understand the problem fully and ensure the work was not being done in different silos.

- Richard Morris, Director of School Support

Strategies have revolved around building strong relationships with students so they don’t want to miss school, prioritizing early intervention, and staying true to their data-driven approach. Beginning in August, if students are absent two days, they are red-flagged within the system. Then, each school uses its own process to call parents at this early stage.

Within one year, the chronic absence rate was reduced by 11%. Data from the 2022-23 school year showed the biggest dips in attendance in December and May, so the district took another targeted approach to change this the next school year. The district team provided new messaging around health and mental health and worked with school nurses to provide parents an updated guide on when to keep students home. They also conducted focus groups with seventh and eighth grade students to determine what would make them want to come to school seeing that this age-group had higher absence rates.



[Read the full story in our online guide](#)

Resources:

- West Ed’s WEAC [Organizing a District Team to Address Chronic Absence](#)
- West Ed’s WEAC [Data-driven School Attendance Teams webinar](#)
- Attendance Works [Superintendent’s Call to Action](#)
- Attendance Works [Teaching Attendance 2.0](#)

Tips for Engaging Students, Families and Community Partners

As mentioned prior, building positive relationships with students, families, and community partners is essential to be able to reduce chronic absence.

Taking a partnership approach is key, as is using effective communication strategies with students and families. Successful efforts take an intentional and coordinated approach to inform and educate families on the connection between attendance and achievement. Help students and parents/caregivers understand that absences can add up quickly and contribute to significant lost learning time. Surveys indicate that parents want more information and regular communication on how their child is doing in school and would like to know about their attendance and achievement.



Resource

Check out [Attendance Works](#) parent handout and communication resources [here](#) and their interactive exercises for parents [here](#).

Messaging to Families

Schools share that many students are staying home due to anxiety. Creating messaging that helps parents understand how anxiety can be addressed with students coming to school has proven helpful for some districts.

Updating your school or district messaging on when to keep kids home and educating parents effectively on health and mental health information can help reduce chronic absence. In several school communities, the school nurse has been instrumental in troubleshooting some of these challenges. Think about how you might be able to engage the school nurse or other trusted health field partners to educate and address this issue with families in your community.

Keeping Messages Fresh

Several Arizona district leaders who have successfully reduced chronic absence shared the need to refresh messaging periodically around attendance. Messaging at the beginning of the year can focus on rebuilding the idea that if students are not in school, then they are not learning. During the pandemic, parents got the message that attending school was more flexible and that their child would be fine academically whether their child attended or not. Connect daily attendance and instruction to better ELA and math outcomes, for example. Campaigns should begin before the school year starts and be coupled with strategies to personally connect with students and families who are absent in the first twenty days of school.

In addition, successful messaging should address any current misconceptions that you are noticing around attendance in your community such as the need to keep students home at any sign of illness. Messaging can get stale and become irrelevant to parents. Refresh messaging during the academic year, sharing successes



and connecting attendance in school to positive learning outcomes and student wellbeing throughout the year. Incorporate student, teacher, and parent voices into your messaging throughout the year about the positive aspects of attending school.

Having Effective Conversations

The ability to have effective conversations with students and families is a crucial component in efforts to reduce chronic absence. According to school leaders in Arizona who have made traction on chronic absence, learning how to do this well is key. It is essential to train staff and to establish norms and expectations for these very important personal interactions. It can be helpful to identify which individuals a student or parent/family may trust and engage that specific school professional (teacher, school nurse, parent liaison, etc.) to have that initial conversation around a student's attendance issues and barriers to coming to school. According to research, most parents trust their child's teacher more than anyone in the school community.

An effective conversation is supportive. It does not focus on blame or have a tone of judgment. It can look like the following:

- Learn about the student and family. Ask open-ended questions that show you are interested. Ask questions such as: *What are your hopes and dreams for your child? What has been interesting or challenging about learning so far this year?*
- Share positive things observed about the student.
- Inform about the student's attendance. Share any patterns around missed days.
- Educate about the importance of being in school. Connect to hopes and dreams that either the student or the parent have expressed.
- Discuss what works and what are the challenges to get their student to school.
- Come up with a plan together that identifies strategies to address absences. List steps to achieve goals. Identify any opportunities to make up for lost learning time if possible.
- Identify a time to check in on progress.



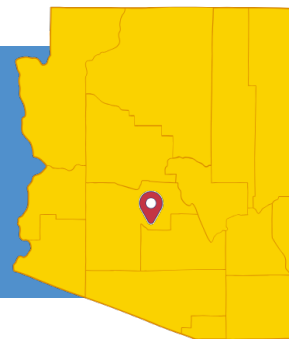
Resource

Attendance Works offers this downloadable [Caring Conversations Worksheet](#).



ARIZONA SPOTLIGHT

All In Education



After listening to parents during the pandemic who wanted more transparency and communication on how their children were doing in school, Arizona nonprofit All in Education partnered with school districts and launched their Parent Educator Academy (PEA). Over the course of a nine-week virtual session, parents learn how the education system works and ways they can be engaged. Parents gain confidence supporting their child's education, asking questions, understanding their child's proficiency levels, and see how chronic absence negatively impacts achievement. More than 560 alumni have graduated from PEA, which has a 90% retention and graduation rate.

“ **To reduce chronic absence, districts need to understand the power of authentic family engagement. Once parents are engaged, they are fully committed. You need to invest in them, hear them, and invite them to the table. They will come up with solutions that districts need.**

- Livier Delgadillo, Senior Director of Leadership

In the Roosevelt School District, PEA alumni parents are at that table working with district leadership through parent-led action teams on the issue of reducing chronic absenteeism. Parent action teams asked for specific data on chronic absence. As a result of diving into the data, the district found that half of all absences did not have reasons why students were absent recorded in the data set. Without this information, working to solve the problem effectively is difficult. As a result, the district decided to invest in their own data analysis team, and school leaders have started to implement the Attendance Works tiered approach to reduce chronic absenteeism. Parent action teams and district leaders are exploring the different ways that parents can be involved in these tiered interventions.

During the latest round of school letter grades, Roosevelt had no failing schools, with a school increasing to an A grade. And while many districts across the state have declining enrollment, Roosevelt has gained more than 600 students. All in Education demonstrates what is possible when districts shift their paradigm of family engagement to authentic partnership—when families voices are seen, heard, and honored in their children's education, students and schools can thrive.



[Read the full story in our online guide](#)



Working Effectively With Key Subgroups

Below are effective strategies to boost attendance among some student subgroups in Arizona most impacted by chronic absence.

NATIVE AMERICAN STUDENTS

According to Native American educators and school district partners with experience improving chronic absence for Native student populations, there are some key guiding principles and strategies that can increase attendance:

» Work to intentionally and authentically build bridges to families and students.

- Get to know your local tribal community and become respectfully engaged.
- Learn about Native American priorities and partner with local tribal leaders to learn, listen, and engage around providing better connections to tribal culture, and invite feedback and build partnership.
- Look for opportunities to attend events that are important to students and families, such as sports games or cultural events.
- Include Native American representation in attendance teams and workgroups.
- Ensure that families know who to contact if they are having difficulties getting to school or are confronting other barriers to attendance.
- Be flexible with time, understanding when families can connect, and be mindful that digital communication may not be the best way to connect.
- Use positive community outreach with ongoing feedback loops, taking an affirmative, rather than punitive, approach with caregivers and families that includes listening more than speaking and finding out what resources families really need and offering assistance.
- Consider classifying tribal cultural events as excused absences.
- Provide positive reinforcement and celebration around improved attendance

According to Native American educational expert Mona Halcomb, “Become a visible ally to families. Show up in the community. Consistent actions, not words, can go a long way to build trust.”

A Minnesota-based Native American attendance workgroup made up of Native members and agencies that have worked together to reduce chronic absence for more than nine years, suggests using an approach that supports individual students and lets students know “we all have their backs.”

According to one leader, “Sometimes if a kid knows that somebody here is really worried about them or cares for them, sometimes that’s all it takes... Other times, it’s offering programs... We want to draw kids in, we want kids to feel good when they’re here.”

» Monitor your communication and tone, ensuring it is positive, welcoming, and relevant to Native students and families.

- Translate greetings and communications into the home language of families as appropriate.



- Recognize cultural differences in communication and consider partnering with a local tribal member or group to vet communications for their effectiveness and tap into what matters to the Native community in your messaging.

One district’s messaging with a focus of “attend to achieve” did not resonate with its Native community, but messaging that emphasized attending school as a way to be better able to help their community was well received.

» **Focus on Native youth and family initiatives.**

- Consider bringing together Native youth during school and in summer learning and engagement activities that are relevant to their interests.
- Provide trainings and events that are specifically relevant to Native families with young children and students in the early grades.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

The Parent Institute for Quality Education conducted a needs assessment in 2023 with nearly 700 PK-12 parents of English language learners to understand various aspects impacting learning and student absenteeism. Based on this data, several key points emerge that may be helpful to consider when trying to address barriers to attendance for ELL students.

- Approximately 60% of parents surveyed indicated that they wanted to know what they can do to support their child’s learning and would like more regular communication from their child’s teacher. Only 39% of parents surveyed felt that the school communicated effectively to them about their child’s academics, and 45% of parents feel welcomed by school staff to ask questions.
- Families expressed having increased challenges with areas of basic need, such as the rising cost of food and housing and not having access to medical care or technology. Older ELL students may be working to help their families deal with rising housing and food costs.
- Half of the families surveyed indicated they had health concerns. Experts share that it is important to be cognizant that many families of ELL students had family members who were essential workers disproportionately impacted by illness and death during the pandemic. A trauma-informed response addressing concerns and educating families on when to send their children to school may prove useful in reducing chronic absence. Families need clarity on when students should be in school if they are not feeling well.

English language learners can face challenges in building relationships at school that may impact their attendance. They can experience bullying, have difficulty making friends, and may not have a strong relationship with at least one caring adult due to a lack of teacher capacity, an inability to express needs in English, and a fear of failure that can accompany the process of learning a new language. ELL students may have extra responsibilities to translate for adult family members in certain situations, such as medical appointments, that may require them to miss school. And students and parents who are new to the United States may have additional difficulty navigating the school system and may have different norms or expectations for the importance of daily attendance.



According to a 2024 West Ed and Attendance Works panel, the following are effective strategies to increase attendance for multilingual learners:

» **Communicate the expectation of good attendance and its connection to learning.**

- District-wide messaging on why good attendance matters in the home language of families is critical.
- Early intervention when students are absent with caring, personal communication is also key. This may include calls home or texts from a teacher with a caring message and offer of assistance.
- Celebrate improved attendance.

» **Monitor communications to ensure the tone is positive, welcoming, and understandable to students and families.**

- Use a family advisory group or parent liaison to vet district/school-wide communications looking for ease of understanding and tone.
- Be sure all staff understand the importance of creating a welcoming school campus experience for ELL families. Small things like smiling and welcoming at the building entrance make a difference.
- Provide consistent and personal two-way communication from teachers to parents in their home language, using translation technology if necessary, to share information on what is happening at school and something positive about their child. There are free two-way messaging apps, such as [Talking Points](#), that automatically translate text messages back and forth between English and 150 languages.
- Provide parent cafes in the language of families.
- Hire parent advocates and liaisons who can speak with families in their home languages about resources, answer questions families may have, and learn about difficulties families may be experiencing.

» **Engage in intentional relationship building so that families experience a sense of belonging and connection.**

- Provide needed resources to families, such as access to food and health care services.
- Create opportunities for out-of-school learning activities for students and parents.
- Conduct virtual or in-person home visits, sharing that bilingualism is an asset and how the school will support their child's English language learning.
- Ask parents to contribute their ideas for events that matter to them and would bring them to school.
- Evaluate your newcomer student process, and consider creating a newcomer support team to welcome students and families and provide services to ease their transition.
- Tap into trusted community-based organizations that are already working with ELL families to build trust with families.

» **Ensure that someone who understands ELL student needs is on the school attendance team.**



HOMELESS POPULATIONS

Students experiencing homelessness face significant challenges with attendance. Tracking chronic absence can lead to identifying students who may be newly experiencing homelessness but have slipped under the radar.

- Federal protections exist to protect and guarantee immediate enrollment and educational stability for homeless students. Funding from this legislation can be used to help address chronic absence and remove barriers to attendance.
- Funding under the [McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act](#) can be used to provide 16 authorized uses including outreach, transportation, staffing, food services, and supplies (clothing, shoes, backpacks, school supplies, hygiene kits).
- In addition, the [American Rescue Plan Homeless Children and Youth Act](#) can be used to provide outreach, awareness, transportation (rideshare, bicycles, car repair, school vehicle purchase), staffing and staff development, supplies, prepaid gas cards, prepaid store cards, limited motel stays, cell phones, hot spots, wireless plans, food assistance, stipends for mentors, counseling supports, and more.) It has [more flexibility for usage](#) than traditional Mc-Kinney-Vento allowances.

The Arizona Department of Education has [a sample McKinney-Vento attendance procedure](#) for working to address attendance and ensure that homeless students are not automatically dropped from enrollment after exceeding the 10-day threshold of unexcused absences. Steps outline how the LEA’s McKinney-Vento Homeless Liaison engages students and guardians to conduct research into the student/family situation, implementing strategies to support the student’s return to school, and provide updates to the school site before dropping a student from enrollment.

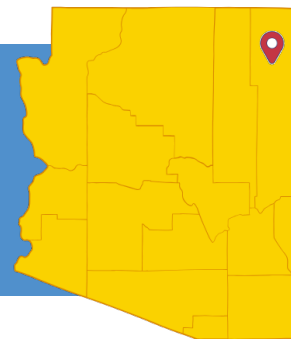
Serving homeless students effectively also involves developing community partnerships that can provide necessary resources and support.

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ARIZONA SPOTLIGHT

Window Rock Unified School District



Window Rock Unified School District (WRUSD) is a large, rural district in the Navajo Nation in northern Arizona where 100% of students qualify for free and reduced lunch.

WRUSD has worked to reduce chronic absence by focusing on the importance of student-teacher relationships connected to engaging instructional strategies. Principal Supervisor Dan Horsley shared, “We’ve changed our teaching methods so that high school teachers are required to have classrooms where students are highly engaged and participate in relevant, challenging, cooperative learning using interactive methods such as Socratic seminars, philosophical chairs, pinwheel discussions.”

“ Policy and incentives can have an impact when it comes to attendance, but if you really want to get kids to school, nothing matters more than having positive relationships at school.

- Superintendent Dr. Shannon Goodsell

The district also prioritized asset-based family and community engagement, basing their relationship-building approach on a highly effective family engagement model used in Hawaii public schools called AFFECT. According to Horsley, “Post Covid, we’ve done a lot of listening to parents and building relationships. Our teachers go to football games and look for opportunities to engage with the community. We build assets in the community and recruit families to be part of our schools. We also create school events that matter to them.” Further, Goodsell shared that engaging with parents is part of the teacher evaluation process. Teachers are expected to connect with parents throughout the year and share positive aspects about the student.

Attendance, behavior, and achievement have all improved across the district. Elementary, intermediate, middle, and high schools have all demonstrated improvement within the AZ School Report Card system, with some schools achieving a B rating in 2022-23.



[Read the full story in our online guide](#)



Community Partners

Reducing chronic absence is a complex challenge, and districts and schools cannot be successful working in isolation. In addition to working with families, community partnerships are another important component. Community partnerships are integral to providing resources to break down barriers students may be facing in getting to school. In addition, engaging partners in your efforts ensures shared accountability for improving attendance because it becomes a whole-community responsibility. Partners in the community can help increase the capacity to serve different groups of students who are chronically absent in your school or district.

Examples of community partners you may seek to engage include: child welfare agencies, local businesses, nonprofit organizations, afterschool programs, and more.

MATCHING PARTNERS TO INTERVENTIONS

- » Having determined the causes or barriers to attending school, choose relevant partners that can help to alleviate specific challenges facing students and families.
- » Local nonprofit organizations can plan and provide events, activities, and classes that are meaningful to parents which is a way to actively engage families and help them feel comfortable in the school community. In addition, there may be free after-school activities, youth enrichment programs, and other special learning programs that local community-based organizations can provide for students.
- » Partnerships can help give families access to a host of services that can address housing, health, food, transportation, and other basic resource issues that impact attendance. Having relationships and connections to local health and mental health providers is key. Families can be referred to local pediatricians, health clinics, and any community health initiatives and services that are relevant to their needs. Being able to troubleshoot barriers related to family and work responsibilities might mean partnering with job service organizations or agencies that can provide scholarships for free childcare.
- » Explore your gaps in resources and try thinking out of the box to help find partners that could assist with meeting that particular need. It is important to develop your own local resource network of partners and services in your area. Create your own school and district/network resource list that is relevant and up-to-date to help with everything from providing educational services and programs for children, families, and youth to nonprofit organizations and agencies providing access to basic necessities such as food, clothing, healthcare, and housing that can help address barriers to attendance in your community.
- » Some Arizona school districts and pre-kindergarten programs have created “closed-loop” referral systems with community partners to reduce the time it takes for families to get assistance. These partnerships can be formally recognized via MOU’s or written agreements stating the nature of the relationship, process for referral, and services provided.
- » Local businesses can be enlisted to serve in a variety of ways. For example, laundromats or appliance providers can help provide resources so that parents or older students can have access to washers and dryers installed at school or in their community to ensure clean clothes for school are available. Or, a local restaurant can provide gift cards or celebration events to reward students and families for improved attendance.



ALIGN PARTNERS AND INTERVENTIONS TO REASONS FOR ABSENCES

Reason for Absence	Possible Intervention	Potential Partner
Anxiety	Enlist trusted messengers to talk with families about health and safety Meet with school counselor, social worker, or psychologist Offer small groups to teach calming skills	Local pediatricians Promotoras (community health workers) NAMI - Online courses
Disengaged	Assign a peer group mentor Create an individualized learning plan Explore afterschool options (art, music, STEM, etc.) Offer alternatives for credit recovery	MENTOR Parks & Rec Program Boys & Girls Club
Family/Work Responsibilities	Identify alternate caregivers for elderly or children Provide a modified schedule Negotiate work schedules with local employers	Adult Day Care Child Care Referral Networks
Transportation Barriers	Walking School Bus Free municipal bus passes Carpools	Parents AmeriCorps program City government

Source: Attendance Works graphic "Align Partners and Interventions to Reasons for Absences"

DID YOU KNOW

Messaging the Importance of Attendance

Community partnerships can help reinforce community-wide messaging to students and families. Some approaches to engage community partners in spreading the word include:

- Enlisting faith-based and civic organizations in the community to message the importance of attending school.
- Asking health providers and family physicians in the school community to remind families of the importance of attendance school.
- Having relevant, local influencers remind kids to get to school via recording them for robocall or video text message.
- Ask community organizations to emphasize the importance of attendance in their work and programs with students and families, provide sample messaging so it is consistent with the school or district's message.



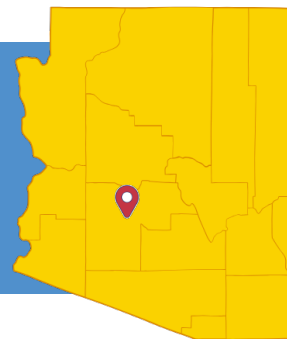
Reflect

Which community partners would be most effective in helping you address specific barriers for students at your school or district? What types of community partners have you not tried yet? What capacity do you need to engage more partners?



ARIZONA SPOTLIGHT

Maricopa County Head Start



At Maricopa County Head Start, data is the key that opens doors to understanding families' situations and connecting them to resources that can mitigate barriers to attendance. Weekly and monthly data cycles are run to identify children with multiple absences. If a child has missed two consecutive days, staff make direct, personal contact with families through phone calls and home visits.



By following the data and using a personal case-by-case approach, we get to know what our families are going through. We've discovered instances when families were experiencing a level of displacement that we were unaware of... We were able to help get families access to housing and hotel vouchers through a partnership network we developed with human service department agencies.

- Eve Del Real, Former Head Start Director

Maricopa County Head Start takes a multi-disciplinary approach that breaks down barriers and explores as many connections with local human service department and community action agencies as possible to help families expand their network of resources and gain access to everything from food and nutrition, to housing assistance, as well as many other supports.



[Read the full story in our online guide](#)

Resources:

- IES REL [Toolkit of Resources for Engaging Families and the Community as Partners](#)
- [Student Engagement and Attendance Center Planning Tool for Family Engagement](#)
- [Embracing a New Normal: Toward a More Liberatory Approach to Family Engagement report](#) from the Carnegie Foundation
- [Four Strategies to Increase Student Attendance Through Personalized Family Messaging](#)
- Attendance Works resources for communication with families:
 - [Showing Up Matters for REAL toolkit](#)
 - [Letters for Families](#)
 - [Student and Family Success Plans](#)



RESOURCES

Resources

Attendance and Chronic Absence

- » [AIR Chronic Absence Resources for Policymakers, Educators, and Researchers](#)
- » [Attendance Works](#)
- » [National Student Attendance, Engagement, and Success Center](#)
- » [Early Warning Systems Network](#)
- » [Everyone Graduates Center](#)
- » [National School Climate Center](#)
- » [National Center for School-University Partnerships](#)
- » [Relationship Centered Schools](#)
- » [Center on Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports](#)
- » [Coalition for Community Schools](#)
- » [Campaign for Grade-Level Reading](#)
- » [LitHubAZ](#)
- » [National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments](#)
- » [National Success Mentors Network](#)
- » [Read On Arizona](#)
- » [REL West Promoting Attendance](#)
- » [The Attendance Playbook](#)

Attendance Resources to Share With Families

- » [Attendance Works](#)
- » [What You Need to Know about Chronic Absence](#) from Understood.org
- » [Healthy Children](#) on chronic absence
- » [10 Tips to Reduce Chronic Absence](#) from the National PTA
- » [Read On Arizona](#) resources

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