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Going All In On Attendance:

Strategies and Policies to Address Chronic Absenteeism
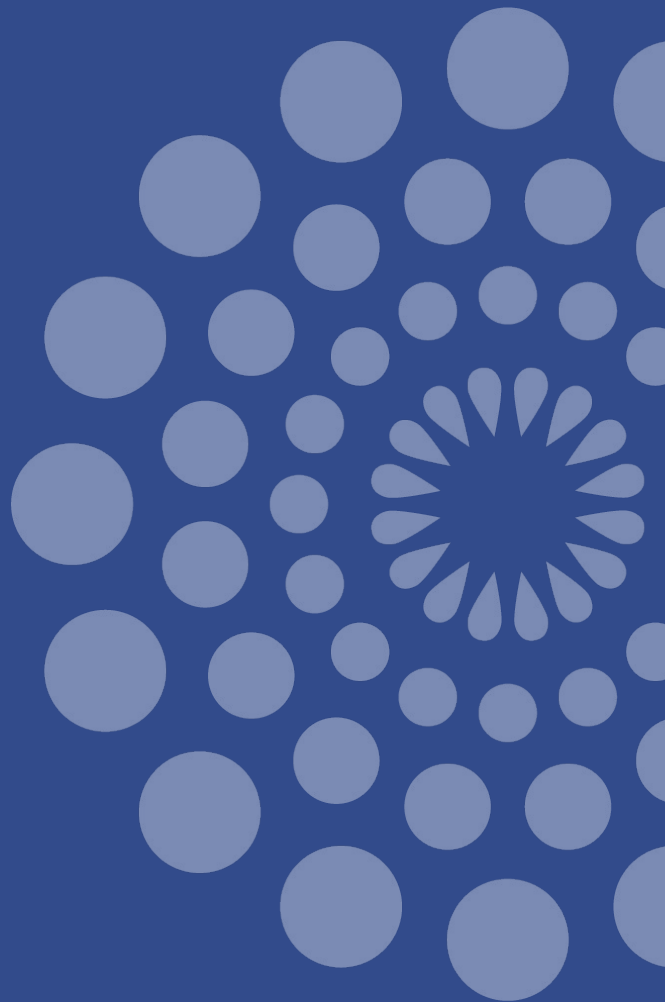
December 2025

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To support district and school leaders in addressing the urgent challenge of chronic absenteeism, this landscape scan synthesizes critical research to guide the development of equitable and proactive attendance strategies. The analysis explores an ecosystem approach to attendance, specifically categorizing root causes into four distinct areas: **barriers to access, misconceptions regarding expectations, aversion arising from school climate, and academic or social disengagement**. Learnings suggest that fostering environments where students consistently attend and thrive requires **moving beyond isolated interventions to implement targeted strategies that address these specific drivers**. This resource equips district and school leaders with a overview of field-tested practices and policies that can effectively promote attendance within their unique local contexts. By leveraging these insights, leaders can refine their approaches to better address the complex ecosystem of influences shaping student engagement. Ultimately, this work serves as a foundational tool for transforming fragmented data into coherent, high-impact solutions for all students.

Who we are
Education First is a seasoned team of trusted advisors to the leaders responsible for delivering what many Americans want most: public education that effectively prepares all students for success in college, careers and a world of constant change. We devote our energy and expertise to improving opportunities for all children, especially students experiencing poverty and students of color.

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1| **Why chronic absenteeism matters:**
Understanding the scope and implications of the problem
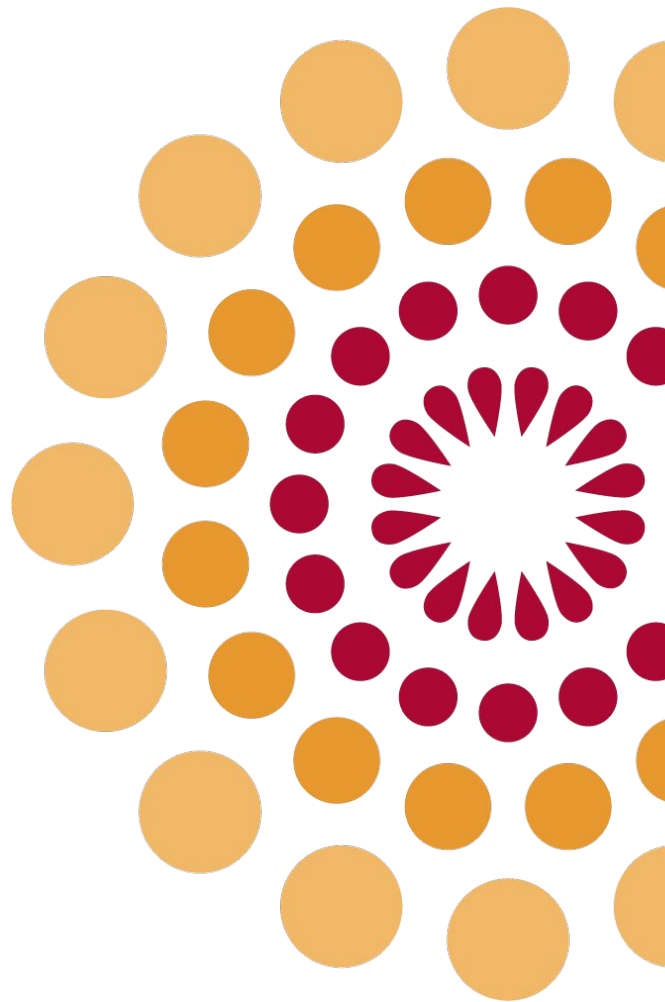
Chronic absenteeism affects one-third of all K12 students and has almost doubled since before the pandemic, making it a critical challenge for K12 systems

Chronic absenteeism is generally defined as **missing 10 percent or more of school days—regardless of whether the absence is excused (e.g., for illness)**

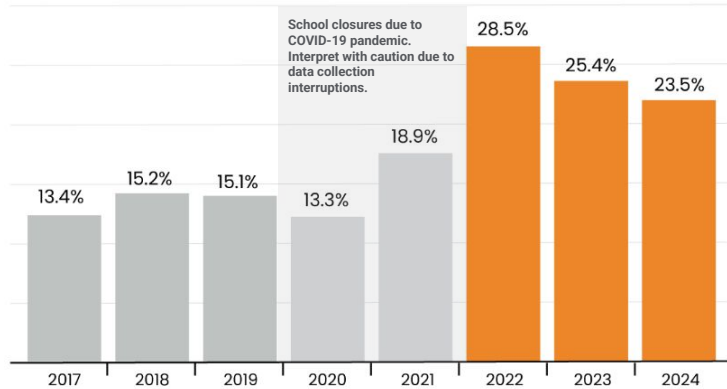|			
28%	**32%**	**7x**	**9x**
Students chronically absent in 2022-2023, compared to 16% of students in 2019	Students in the lowest-income districts chronically absent in 2022-2023	A student who is not chronically absent is seven times more likely to read on grade level by fourth grade compared to a chronically absent student.	A student who is not chronically absent is nine times more likely to graduate high school on time compared to a chronically absent student.

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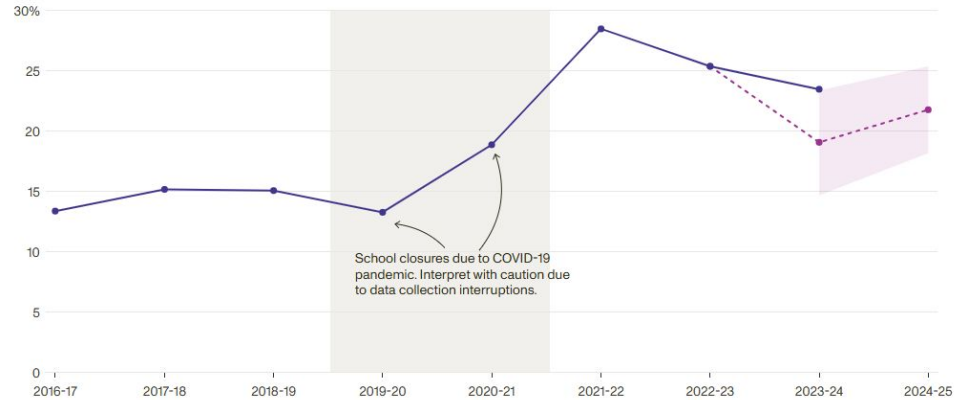# Data from multiple sources indicate that absenteeism is still well above pre-pandemic levels

Rand Survey

Chronic Absenteeism 2017-2024

School closures due to COVID-19 pandemic. Interpret with caution due to data collection interruptions.

- 2017: 13.4%
- 2018: 15.2%
- 2019: 15.1%
- 2020: 13.3%
- 2021: 18.9%
- 2022: 28.5%
- 2023: 25.4%
- 2024: 23.5%

American Enterprise Institute Survey

— Data from Malkus (2025) - - Estimate from RAND surveys

School closures due to COVID-19 pandemic. Interpret with caution due to data collection interruptions.

Years: 2016-17, 2017-18, 2018-19, 2019-20, 2020-21, 2021-22, 2022-23, 2023-24, 2024-25

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Chronic absenteeism can significantly affect students' academic, social and emotional learning outcomes and disrupts learning–particularly for marginalized students

Critical Challenges of Chronic Absenteeism

Consistent school attendance is the foundation for student success.

Chronic absenteeism can isolate students and increase feelings of disconnection from teachers and peers.

Schools serving greater proportions of marginalized students (nonwhite, poor) are more likely to experience high levels of chronic absenteeism.

Sources: Everyday Labs (2023); Hayes (2024)

The policies and priorities of the current federal administration are also impacting chronic absenteeism, primarily through changes to federal education funding

Key areas of impact:

Federal Funding and Grants	Immigration Enforcement	School Choice	Diminished Federal Oversight

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These policies, priorities and the ensuing actions have ensured attendance nationwide is in greater jeopardy

Federal Funding and Grants

There is a diminished federal role in public education, including withholding billions of dollars in congressionally approved funding for schools. This **funding often supports programs that directly address factors contributing to chronic absenteeism, such as after-school and summer programs,** mental health services, and support for students who are English learners.

Immigration Enforcement

Intensified immigration enforcement activities have been linked to **increased anxiety and fear among migrant families with school-age children. This can lead to students missing school out** of fear of family separation or deportation. Some studies have found a negative effect on the attendance of English learner students, with daily absences increasing in certain areas.

School Choice

The administration has expressed strong support for expanding private school voucher programs. Critics argue that **this focus on school choice could lead to funding cuts for public schools, which would further strain their ability to provide the resources and support needed to address chronic absenteeism.**

Diminished Federal Oversight

The administration has also reduced the workforce at the Department of Education, which means **fewer staff to ensure robust upkeep of accountability systems under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). This includes timely data reporting and oversight** of efforts to improve academic outcomes and close achievement gaps, which are closely tied to chronic absenteeism.

Sources: DiMeo & James (2025); Mass.gov (2025); United States Department of Education (2025); Sattin-Bajaj & Kirksey (2022); Balinjit (2025); Pittalwala (2025); Binkley & Miller (2025)

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2| **Through the eyes of students:**
Exploring root causes and the ecosystem that shapes student attendance
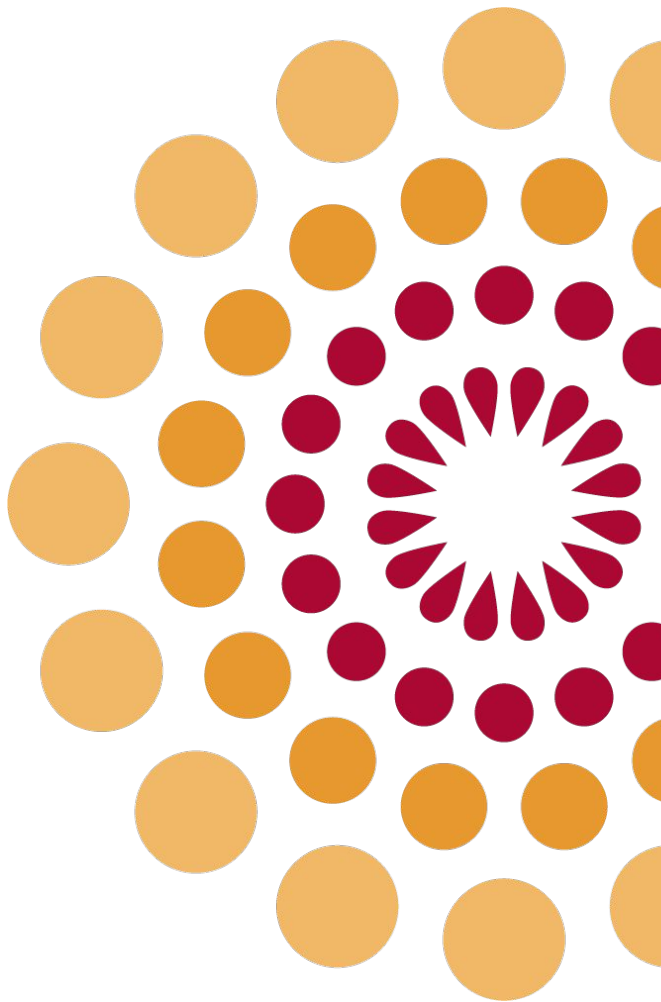
To fully grasp the factors at play in absenteeism, we must strive to understand students within their contexts—as individuals and parts of an ecosystem

Self-actualization
Esteem
Love and belonging
Safety needs
Psychological needs

As individuals, students have needs that must be met, from bottom to top, for them to thrive within their ecosystem.
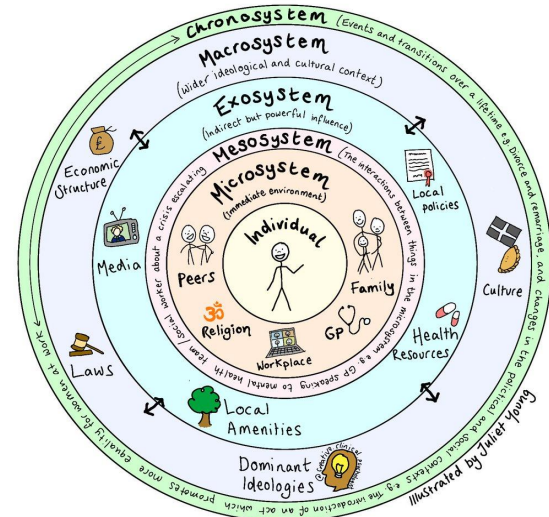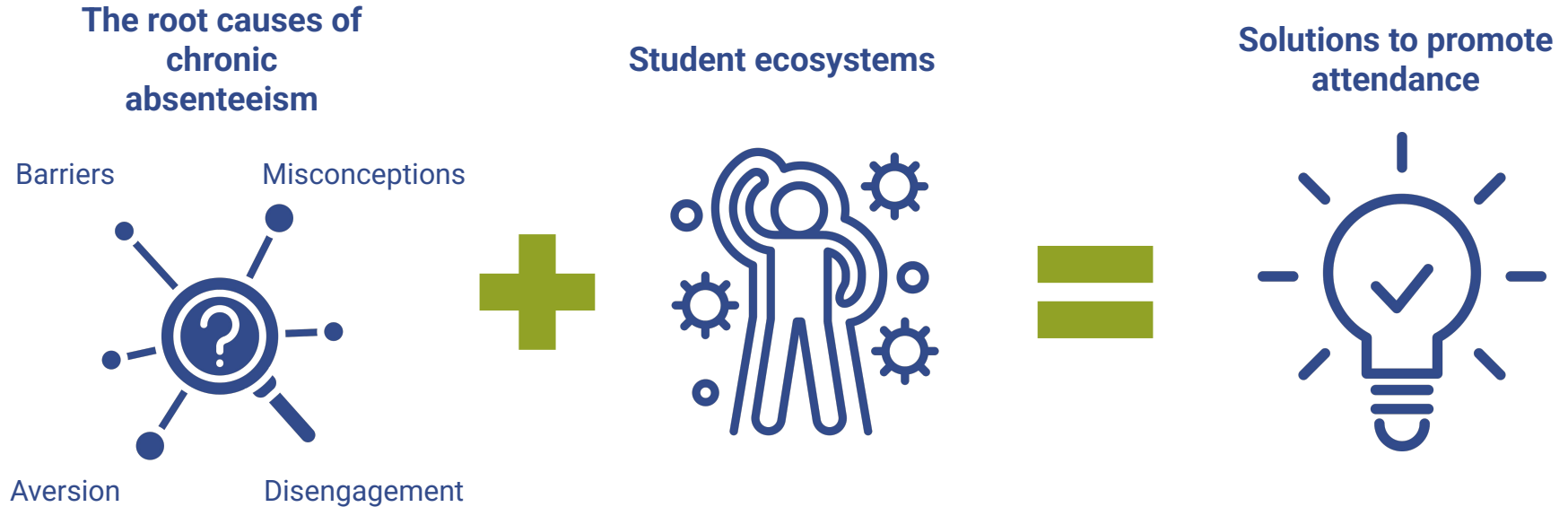

As individuals acting within an ecosystem, students are shaped and influenced by a variety of proximal and distal factors; districts must consider the role they play within this ecosystem of influence.

Source(s): Sources: Bronfenbrenner (1994); Simply Psychology (2024); Young (2021)

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While highly contextual, district and school-specific root causes reveal a fuller picture of the student attendance ecosystem

Barriers	Barriers to student attendance encompass the myriad of factors that can play a role in whether a student is able to attend school regularly.	■ Poor transportation ■ Housing/Food insecurity ■ Inequitable access to services & tech ■ Family responsibilities
Misconceptions	Misconceptions happen when students, caregivers and school and district personnel do not set clear and rigorous expectations for attendance.	■ Suspensions do not count as absences ■ Assuming attendance only matters for students in older grades
Aversions	Aversion can prevent students from coming to school due to more proximal factors.	■ Biased disciplinary practices ■ Unwelcoming school climate (e.g. bullying) ■ Academic or behavior struggles ■ Anxiety and stress
Disengagement	Disengagement influences whether attending school is an additive or subtractive part of their lives.	■ No meaningful relationships with adults in school ■ Lack of enrichment opportunities ■ Lack of challenging, culturally responsive instruction

Integrating student ecosystem insights into an understanding of context-specific root causes can direct you toward targeted strategies to promote attendance

The root causes of chronic absenteeism

Barriers

Misconceptions

Aversion

Disengagement

Student ecosystems

Solutions to promote attendance

Tackling absenteeism requires a comprehensive strategy that addresses the interconnected factors and root causes within the student ecosystem

Later on, we will dive into a framework that can help you make sense of how to approach the root causes of chronic absenteeism that are specific to your context.

?

For now, to help start/continue thinking about root causes, ask yourself…
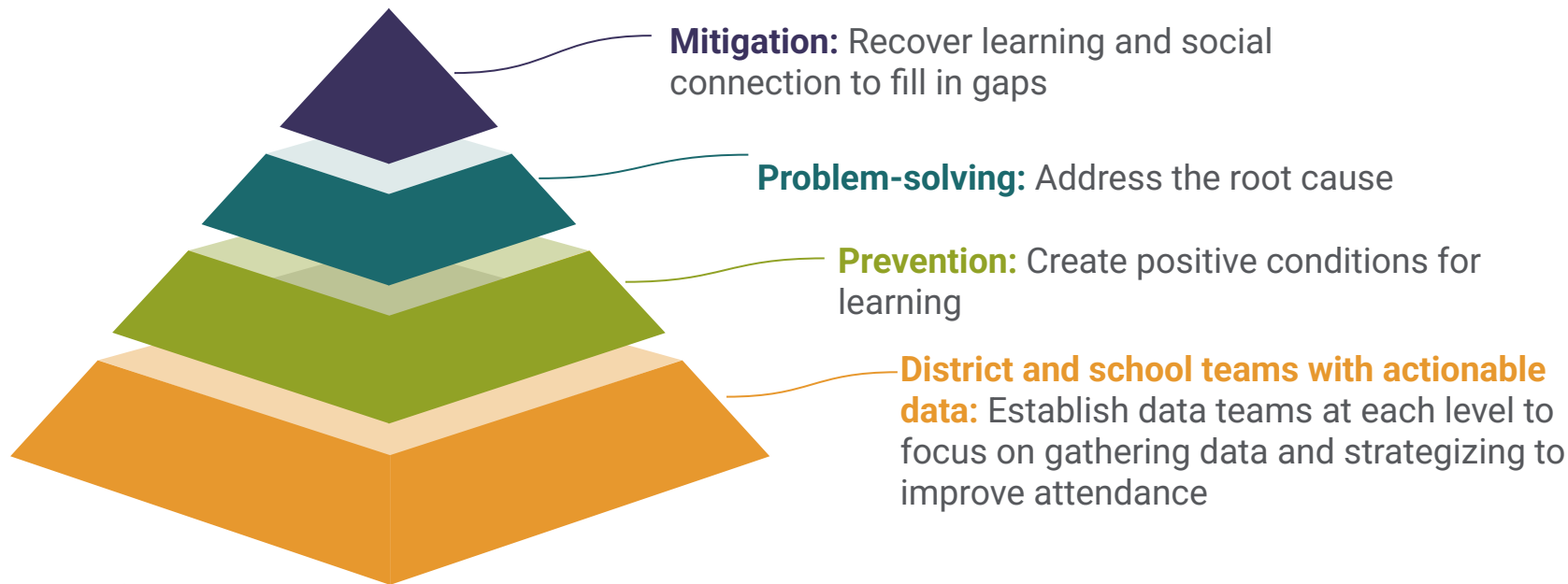
- What do I already know about:
  + The attendance **barriers** students in my district or school face?
  + Their **aversions**?
  + The **misconceptions** students face?
  + The reasons why students might **disengage** from school?
- How can I fill the gaps in my knowledge?

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3| **Unlocking solutions:**
Taking a strategic approach
to improving attendance
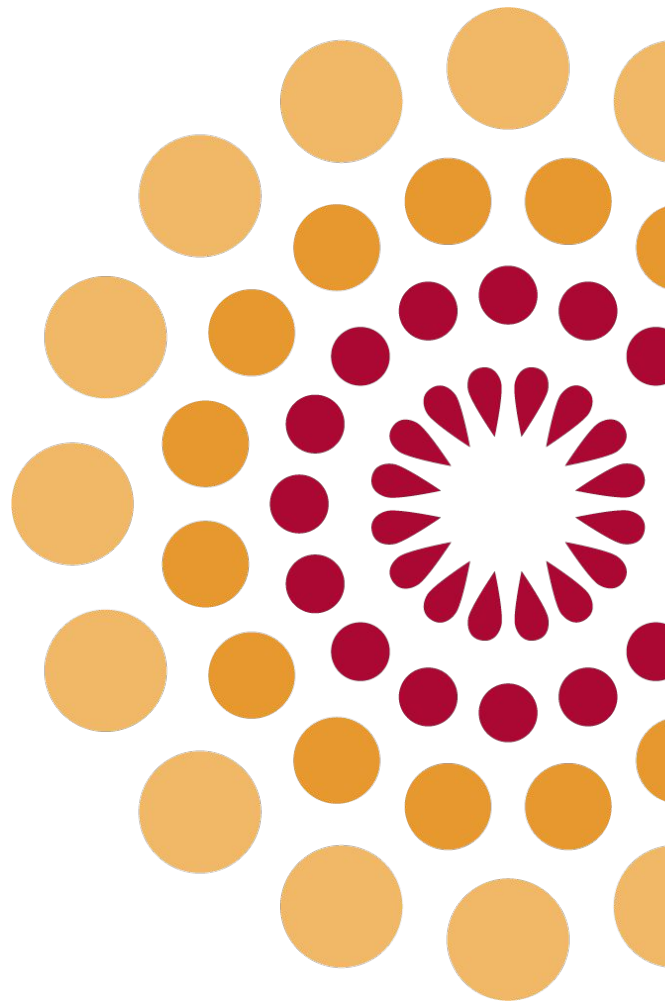
Effectively improving student attendance requires moving beyond individual interventions into a system of support

Strategy Buckets for a Systematic Approach to Promote Attendance:

Mitigation: Recover learning and social connection to fill in gaps

Problem-solving: Address the root cause

Prevention: Create positive conditions for learning

District and school teams with actionable data: Establish data teams at each level to focus on gathering data and strategizing to improve attendance

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Source: Balfanz & Chang (2024)

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Each strategy bucket serves different purposes based on your school or district's attendance needs

Strategy Bucket	So What?
Data Teams	▪ With actionable data, and teams to interpret that data, district and school teams can gain a comprehensive view of student attendance patterns and develop targeted strategies.
Prevention	▪ Prevention-focused school and district-level policies can ensure students, caregivers and community members feel valued, welcome and safe. Prevention is the cornerstone of this work.
Problem-solving	▪ This work can take a village, large or small. Problem-solving strategies consider a holistic view of student attendance, and should be planned with students, caregivers and community
Mitigation	▪ Improving attendance is a long-term, scaleable goal. Mitigation strategies are what you put in place to fill the gaps that arise as you scale the work.

Even focusing your attendance efforts on one strategy bucket can have a powerful impact!

Examples range from integrating SEL skill-building into course content to creating attendance data dashboards

Strategy Bucket

How?*

Data Teams
- Conduct surveys for different grade levels to identify factors influencing chronic absenteeism
- Create real-time data dashboards for schools and districts to monitor attendance and identify opportunities for early intervention

Prevention
- Integrate SEL skill-building within core subjects
- Implement curricula that reflect the diverse experiences of students and offer real-life applications (e.g., CTE, PBL, culturally relevant texts and curricula)

Problem-solving
- Implement home visits and provide additional support services to families to address barriers to attendance
- Develop a diverse, student-led attendance taskforce

Mitigation
- Implement peer mentoring groups
- Start or continue before/after school clubs focused on both academic and non-academic interests
- Assign designated attendance support mentors (adults and students)

Source: Balfanz & Chang (2024)

*For more, see the Appendix

A special note on prevention…

The absolute best indicator we have for whether or not a student will attend school is **connectedness**
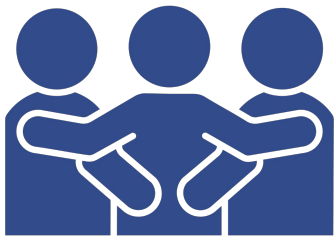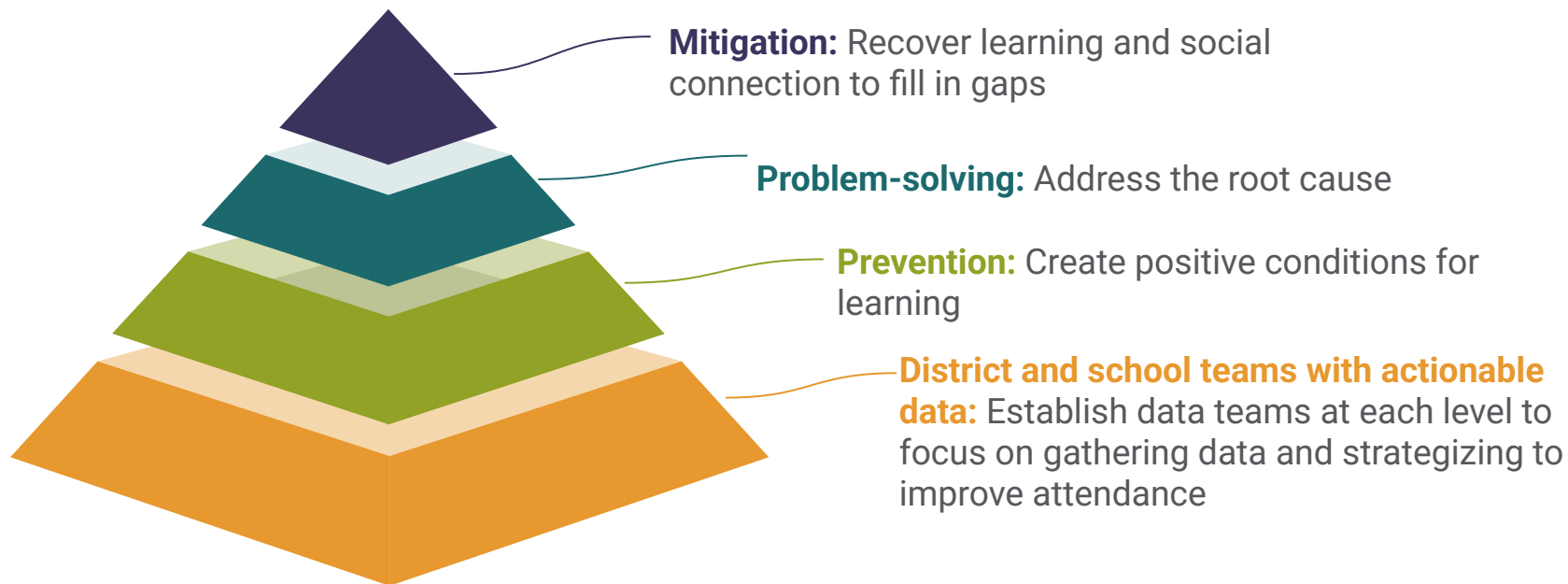
Students feel connected to school when they:

- Have an adult at school who knows and cares about them as a person
- Have a supportive peer group
- Engage at least some of the time in meaningful pro-social activities
- Feel welcome in school as they are

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4| **Lessons from success:**
Insights from schools and
districts making progress
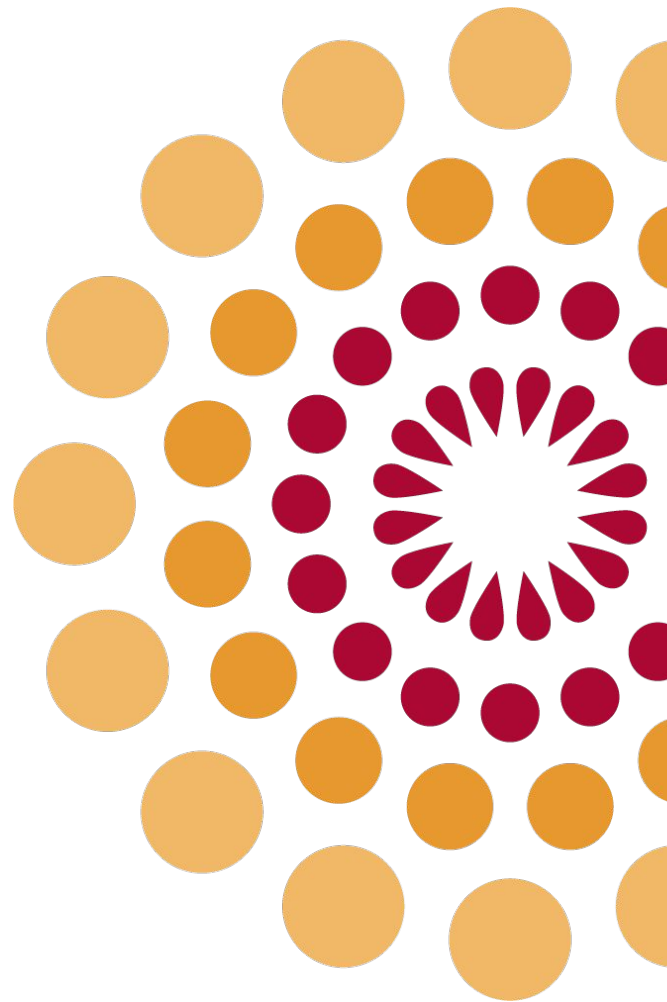
The following slides showcase bright spots where leaders in the field are actively addressing chronic absenteeism

We use color-coding to categorize the strategies each organization used across the four strategy buckets:

Mitigation: Recover learning and social connection to fill in gaps

Problem-solving: Address the root cause

Prevention: Create positive conditions for learning

District and school teams with actionable data: Establish data teams at each level to focus on gathering data and strategizing to improve attendance

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These organizations have focused their strategies on problem solving and data teams

Stay in the Game! Attendance Network:

- **Built awareness and statewide support** for the impact of attendance on academic and career success
- **Refined attendance laws and policies** to reduce administrative burdens and shift focus to prevention and early intervention
- **Developed an Attendance Data Guide** and improve state data tools for district use

The BARR Network: Detroit Lakes High School (MN):

- **Established a streamlined system** for staff to communicate with caregivers:
  - Google forms allow staff to quickly fill out and send updates to caregivers, focusing on positives and concerns in just 1-2 minutes

NYC Mayor's Interagency Task Force:

- **NYC Success Mentor Corps:** Matched 9,000 chronically absent students with in-school Success Mentors—the nation's largest program of its kind
- **Data & Early Warning Tools:** Created a real-time Electronic Data Dashboard tracking attendance, behavior, and coursework (ABC data)

*for more detail, please see the Appendix

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These organizations have focused their strategies on prevention and mitigation

Ramona High school (Riverside, CA):
- **Offered 45-minute weekly sessions for students to take mental breaks**, catch up on work or engage in activities supporting SEL skill-building
- **Created an Attendance Team that adopted a caring and curious approach** in interactions with absent students and caregivers, coordinating efforts with teachers and counselors

THE GRAD PARTNERSHIP
Advancing Student Success Systems

The GRAD Partnership:
Improving student outcomes through a focus on Strong, Supportive Relationships & Student-Centered Mindsets:
- **Students have opportunities to collaborate in class and join extracurriculars**
- **Classroom time is dedicated-to and structured-around** building teacher-student relationship
- **Build coherence between student and adult perspective** of school connectedness for all
- **Utilize strength/asset-based language** use when speaking about families and students

Sanger High School (Sanger, TX):
- **Formed student groups** focused on SEL skill-building and AVID-like programs
- **Established community-based opportunities for real-life skill-building** and CTE
- **Used restorative justice practices** and professional learning (PL) for staff on SEL

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*for more detail, please see the Appendix

5| **Bright spot interviews:** Layering our understanding of solutions
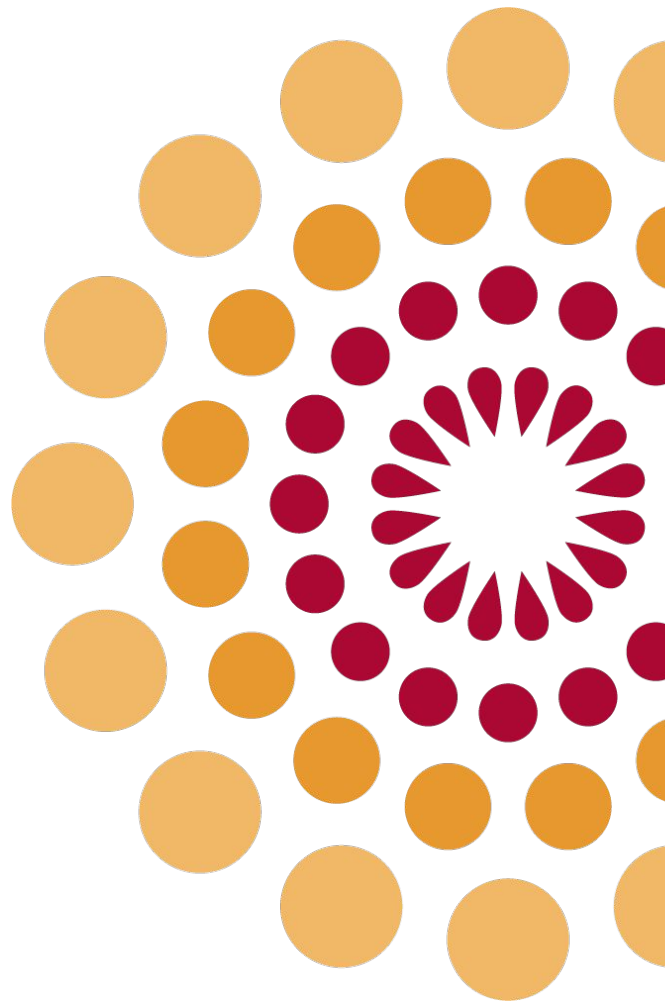
Josh Omang, Principal of Detroit Lakes High School

The BARR model helped DLHS focus on taking an ecosystem approach to improving attendance. Their three areas of focus for this particular issue were:

- Building stronger relationships and fostering belonging in schools
- Use of teacher teams and real-time actionable data - quantitative and qualitative
- Understanding the importance of family and community engagement

DLHS has decreased its chronic absenteeism rate from 40% at the start of the 2021-22 school year to 13% at the start of the 2024-25 school year.
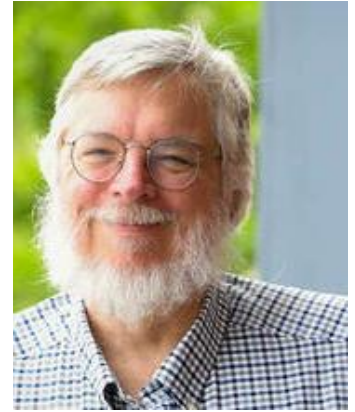
Mr. Omang highlighted several strategies for decreasing chronic absenteeism, including:

- Establish a team of people who are responsible for talking about student attendance and problem-solving for solutions
- View chronic absenteeism as a dilemma rather than a problem
- Know that improvement is not a straight line
- Identify the current strategies you have in place that are and are not working

*"Problems have a solution. Dilemmas don't always have a clear solution. **Attendance is a dilemma because there's a million reasons why a kid doesn't come to school.** It could truly be a doctor appointment, or it could be that you're being told it's a doctor appointment, but it's not. And so I just think that's good for people to remember because otherwise you just get frustrated."*

Robert Balfanz, Director, the Everyone Graduates Center, Johns Hopkins University

Robert Balfanz is a researcher and professor at Johns Hopkins University School of Education, Center for Social Organization of Schools, and Director of the Everyone Graduates Center. He currently leads the GRAD Partnership, which brings together nine organizations to partner with schools, districts, LEAs and SEAs in service of improved outcomes for students.

Dr. Balfanz highlighted several strategies for decreasing chronic absenteeism, including:
- Improvement is possible if you know your specific challenge and root causes.
- Organizing your response requires taking stock of work you're already doing to increase attendance and figuring out how to do that work at scale.
- Form strategic partnerships after determining your challenges, root causes and plans to bolster your existing attendance work.
- Data teams must be the air traffic controllers of chronic absenteeism prevention efforts.
- Seeking caregiver and student feedback on your efforts to improve attendance is critical; they will tell you if something is a nonstarter.

*If your school or district has historically had chronically absent students, Dr. Balfanz notes, "you don't have to wait for the data to tell you you're going to have chronically absent kids." **Building prevention plans from the start of the year is essential in increasing attendance**, and you do not need data to take this step.*

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6| Taking action together:
Clear next steps to move forward
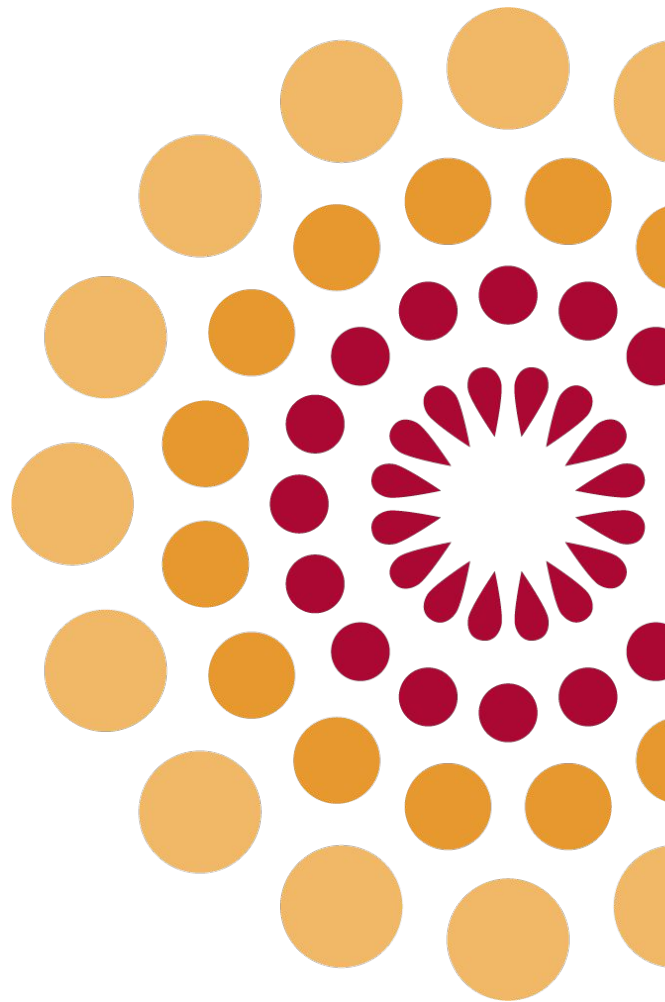
There are many approaches to tackling the problem of chronic absenteeism—from board mandated policies around hiring practices to strategies for data gathering. To build a coherent, strategic plan to improve student attendance, district-level leaders can begin by taking an inventory of what's already happening.

- In my district, what strategies and policies are currently working to:
  + **Mitigate** to fill in the gaps in long-term solutions?
  + Collaboratively **problem-solve** for attendance solutions?
  + **Foster connectedness** and belonging?
  + Support systems and teams for **gathering real-time attendance data** and strategizing accordingly?
- Conversely, what strategies and policies are not working, and how can we stop implementing them?

One helpful structure for strategic planning to promote student attendance is "Do Now, Build Towards"

Do now

Build towards

Do now	Build towards
Make school and district level inventories of current mitigation strategies	Each school in a district has at least two mitigation strategies formally in place
Reach out to caregivers, local government and community members to hear what they think about chronic absenteeism	An Attendance Task Force composed of caregivers, government officials, and influential community members that meets monthly to learn and strategize
Bring grade levels of teachers together to map out adult-student connections. Teachers place stickers next to students who they 1) Can identify by name; and 2) Know something personal about	Every student in the school has an adult in school who knows them and cares about their wellbeing—and this is tracked
Put together an Attendance Team and the school and district levels comprised of at least 5 representative people	Attendance Teams will maintain a districtwide attendance dashboard with data that can be disaggregated at a school and demographic level

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To take this ecosystem approach to promoting attendance, we need to gather and align resources

Take Stock

Know what resources already exist and whether they address current challenges

Form Strategic Partnerships

Collaborate with local non-profits, health providers, government agencies and college that have resources which meet identified gaps in student supports

Integrate into Existing Efforts

Enhance attendance focus of your strongest student support effort (e.g. MTSS); integrate attendance improvement into key initiatives (e.g. science of reading)

While tackling chronic absenteeism and working to improve attendance may seem overwhelming to take on, keeping things simple is the best way to begin the work

Focus on one strategy bucket (e.g. Prevention) and 1-2 strategies

- Take stock:
  + What is my school/district already doing that is focused on prevention?
  + What systems exist to facilitate this work (e.g. MTSS)?
- Integrate into existing efforts:
  + What are 1-2 new strategies we can integrate into this existing work to enhance our prevention efforts?
- Form strategic partnerships:
  + Who, outside of our school/district, could we ask to help our prevention efforts?

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Thinking about tackling chronic absenteeism can be overwhelming, so as you're intentionally moving into this work, keep this in mind:

Improvement is possible, especially when you already **know your specific challenges and root causes.**

Thank you!
www.education-first.com

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7| **Appendix**
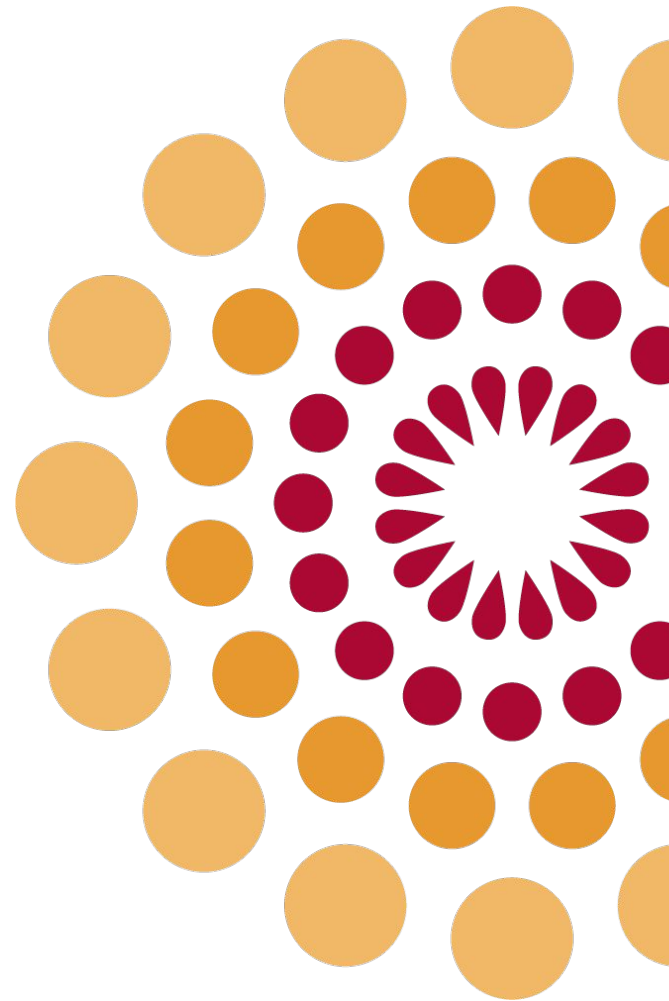
To develop this landscape scan we reviewed and analyzed a total of 30 sources

Research Methodology

Desk research

- Reviewed 30 external sources and analyzed findings

- Leveraged insights from Education First's white paper Chronic Absenteeism: How Philanthropy can Support "Everything, Everywhere, All at Once" Solutions

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With actionable data, district and school teams can gain a comprehensive view of student attendance patterns and develop targeted strategies

School & District Strategies

Gather

- Gather attendance data
- Utilize data from state education agencies
- Conduct surveys for different grade levels to identify factors influencing chronic absenteeism
- Design data gathering systems that are adaptable to different contexts

Analyze

- Use attendance data to identify specific subgroups or grade levels struggling with engagement and attendance
- Analyze what the data means and ideating on solutions

Present

- Create real-time data dashboards for schools and districts to monitor attendance and identify opportunities for early intervention
- Disseminate data in a digestible manner via reports for different audiences (e.g., students, caregivers, community members)

Plan & Monitor

- Make plans to carry out those solutions, with deadlines, and following up
- Establish a monthly meeting cadence to review progress, adjust strategies and ensure accountability

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Source: Balfanz & Chang (2024)

Policies, both formal and informal, that support data gathering and teaming are foundational to understanding the scope of chronic absenteeism

School & District Policies

Data Policies

- Mandate daily attendance data gathering
- Pass board policy to establish a district-level attendance data dashboard where data can be disaggregated by school and demographic features (e.g., racial identity, gender, FRPL)
- Pass policy that mandates districts and schools analyze, quarterly if not more often, attendance data to identify trends and root causes of absenteeism, ensuring they use this information for continuous improvement

Staffing Policies

- Form school and district level attendance teams that are staffed according to school/district size
  + e.g. a large high school with ~2,000 students may require an attendance team of 8-10 school personnel
- Pass board policy to employ an attendance officer for each school (or groups of schools, depending on school size)

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With effective prevention strategies, schools and districts can focus targeted support on fewer students

School & District Strategies

Connection & Belonging

- Design peer mentoring groups
- Ensure every student has a positive connection with at least one caring adult in school
- Implement student check-ins, predictable routines and calming strategies in classrooms

Holistic Supports

- Provide support for students at all levels of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (e.g., free meals, bullying prevention, transportation, adult mentoring programs, opportunities to make up class work, counseling)
- Integrate SEL skill-building within core subjects

Family & Community

- Set up regular communication pathways with parents to deliver good news about students
- Develop a school/district vision that centers the school as a community school, rather than a school within a community

Inclusive Practices

- Implement curricula that reflect the diverse experiences of students and offer real-life applications (e.g., CTE, PBL, culturally relevant texts and curricula)
- Engage teachers in training focused on self-reflection and understanding their perceptions of absenteeism

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Source: Balfanz & Chang (2024) 41

Prevention-focused school and district-level policies can ensure students, caregivers and community members feel valued, welcome and safe

School & District Policies

School Climate & Safety

- Mandate bullying prevention programming district-wide
- Pass policy to ensure students' basic physiological needs are met when it comes to building structure (e.g., AC, heat, plumbing, desks, chairs, lighting, technology, and general school cleanliness)
- Pass board policy to ensure schools are utilizing culturally relevant HQIM

Staffing

- Pass school board policy requiring at least one school counselor in each building to support student mental health and well-being
- Pass policy that mandates asset-based PL and training for teachers, administrators and school staff that also integrates work on examining bias

Family & Community

- Mandate a required number of annual family/caregiver-centered activities (informed and led by families/caregivers themselves) hosted by schools
- Pass policy to implement home visit programs and wraparound services to address familial and social barriers that contribute to absenteeism
- Establish a standardized process for how districts communicate consistently with families about attendance

Source: Balfanz & Chang (2024)

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Problem-solving strategies consider a holistic view of student attendance, and should be planned with students, caregivers, and community

School & District Strategies

Student Feedback

- Develop a diverse, student-led attendance taskforce
- Actively listen to students to identify barriers, misconceptions, points of aversion and reasons for disengagement

Family Engagement

- Implement home visits and provide additional support services to families to address barriers to attendance

Communication

- Social media and communication campaigns to increase community knowledge of why attendance matters
- Encourage schools and communities to adopt attendance pledges

Local Partnerships

- Create local attendance task forces that strategize how community entities can support increased attendance
- Foster short- and long-term partnerships with community organizations, health services, and local governments to address broader barriers

Source: Balfanz & Chang (2021)

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Policies can facilitate problem-solving strategies through mandated opportunities for collaboration

School & District Policies

Improve Structures

- Integrate attendance strategies with multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) that include behavioral and mental health resources
- Consider looping students so they share the same peers, and potentially teachers, multiple years in a row (i.e., a cohort model)
- Decriminalize truancy

Collaborate

- Create interagency task forces at the local and state levels to coordinate efforts among schools, juvenile courts and community organizations to tackle absenteeism
- Develop community schools
- Incorporate caregivers and community organizations into attendance improvement efforts

Identify & Support Students

- Update and implement early warning systems that track student attendance and engagement metrics to identify students at-risk of becoming chronically absent
- Incorporate community and caregiver organizations into MTSS structures

Empower Stakeholders

- Provide PL for teachers and administrators on effective attendance strategies and communication with families
- Ensure teacher training and PL are asset-based and examine bias
- Establish systems for gathering feedback from students, families and educators on attendance policies

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Mitigation entails identifying the gaps in ongoing, long-term attendance strategies and filling them with tried and true methods of fostering engagement

School & District Strategies

Connection & Belonging

- Implement peer mentoring groups
- Start or continue before/after school clubs focused on both academic and non-academic interests
- Assign designated attendance support mentors (adults and students)
- Increase during- and after-school activities (e.g., dances, fall festivals, pep rallies, movie nights with caregivers)
- Make individual and group counseling available for any student who needs it

Academics

- Make high-dose tutoring available for students who need it
- Develop highly engaging summer learning
- Implement high school credit recovery opportunities
- Start formal book clubs
- Increase opportunities for CTE
- Utilize PBL in classrooms
- Develop teacher supports for differentiating instruction

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As pandemic-era funding streams dry up, policies can help establish mitigation strategies that have proved to work, like credit recovery opportunities

School & District Policies

Academic Support & Recovery

- Implement districtwide high-dose tutoring programs
- Mandate credit recovery opportunities
- Pass policy that ensures all students have the opportunity to make up missed work or submit work for a different grade

Enrichment Opportunities

- Utilize engaging and relevant curricula for summer programming
- Pass policy that ensures each school has before and after school club offerings

Comprehensive Supports

- Direct funding streams toward strategies that support mitigation
- Hire counselors for individual and group counseling

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CONTEXT

The attendance crisis in Ohio worsened after the pandemic, reaching a high of 30% chronic absenteeism throughout the state in SY 2021/22. The Stay in the Game! (SITG!) Attendance Network, founded in 2019, set three goals: 1) more than 90% of Ohio's students will attend school more than 90% of the time; 2) the SITG! Network represents over half of Ohio students with more than 50% of those consistently attending school more than 90% of the time and more than 30% attending 95% of the time; and 3) Make improving attendance a sustained statewide movement.

STRATEGIES

- **Built awareness and statewide support** for the impact of attendance on academic and career success
- **Worked with policymakers** on policies that support student attendance
- **Refined attendance laws and policies** to reduce administrative burdens and shift focus to prevention and early intervention
- **Fostered engagement, trust, and belonging** by addressing local challenges with students, families and educators
- **Empowered students to add their voice** in identifying challenges and solutions at district and school levels
- **Cultivated engaging and relevant learning** at all Ohio schools to encourage attendance
- **Developed an Attendance Data Guide** and improve state data tools for district use
- **Aligned systems and resources** to support school and district attendance work

OUTCOMES

- The SITG! Attendance Network experienced a 5.2% decrease in chronic absenteeism with 70% of its districts decreasing their chronic absentee rates
- 7 of the 17 SITG! Attendance Network school districts (41%) significantly outperformed the state, lowering chronic absenteeism between 8.5-10.9%
  + Ohio: -3.4%
  + Stay in the Game!: -5.2%
- SITG! Attendance Network districts also saw categorical shifts—from the "severe," "moderate" and "at risk" categories toward the "satisfactory" category

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CONTEXT

Detroit Lakes High School (DLHS) was one of 18 Minnesota schools that partnered with the BARR Center. The BARR model helped DLHS focus on taking an ecosystem approach to improving attendance. Their three areas of focus for this particular issue were:

1. Building stronger relationships and fostering belonging in schools
2. Use of teacher teams and real-time actionable data - quantitative and qualitative
3. Understanding the importance of family and community engagement

STRATEGIES

- **Partnered with county officials and schools to prioritize non-punitive measures,** making truancy court a last resort after involving teachers, social workers, administrators and caregivers
- **Established a streamlined system** for staff to communicate with caregivers:
  + Google forms allow staff to quickly fill out and send updates to caregivers, focusing on positives and concerns in just 1-2 minutes
- **Sent automatic notifications to caregivers when absences became concerning,** with copies sent to relevant staff, including the BARR committee, teacher and student
- **Created positive attendance incentives:**
  + Open lunch and periods for students with good attendance; five or more tardies restricted these privileges
- **Developed a "Dots and Have Nots" system:**
  + Attendance meetings include a list where teachers indicate personal connections with students; if a student lacks three connections, a plan is created to ensure they are supported by an adult in a non-academic role

OUTCOMES

- In the three plus years since partnering with BARR and focusing on how the model can support improved attendance, chronic absenteeism has decreased at DLHS, steadily, from over 40% total students chronically absent, to 13%
- DLHS has a higher number of American Indian students, and has seen the the number of chronically absent students among this population decrease from 94 students in SY 21-22 to 34 in SY 24-25

Source(s): Gifford (2023); BARR Center (2023); The Education Trust (2024)

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CONTEXT

In 2010, Mayor Bloomberg launched NYC's first Interagency Task Force on Truancy, Chronic Absenteeism, and School Engagement to reduce absenteeism in public schools. The Task Force introduced the Every Student, Every Day campaign, a comprehensive, multi-sector approach to address chronic absenteeism. Key agencies involved include NYC Service, Department of Homeless Services, Department for the Aging, Administration for Children's Services, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, NYPD, Department of Youth and Community Development, NYC Housing Authority, Human Resources Administration and NYC Health and Hospitals Corporation.

STRATEGIES

- **NYC Success Mentor Corps:** Matched 9,000 chronically absent students with in-school Success Mentors—the nation's largest program of its kind
- **Ad Council Awareness Campaign:** Launched a national public ad campaign on the dangers of chronic absenteeism
- **Operation Start Strong:** Coordinated early outreach to establish positive attendance patterns in the first months of school
- **Parent Engagement:** Introduced new parent engagement methods, including "Alert" letters, positive calls and Parent Summits in schools and shelters
- **Public-Private Partnerships:** Established incentive programs with corporate partners, offering rewards like shopping sprees, free backpacks, tickets and an Attendance Hall of Fame with the NY Yankees
- **Community Resource Connections:** Developed interagency systems to link schools with community services for students and families facing absenteeism-related challenges
- **Data & Early Warning Tools:** Created a real-time Electronic Data Dashboard tracking attendance, behavior, and coursework (ABC data)

OUTCOMES

- The Task Force had a "statistically significant and educationally meaningful impact on chronic absenteeism levels at task force pilot schools and even greater improvements on the attendance rates of individually mentored students, using practical and cost-efficient methods that any school district can replicate."
- Task force schools significantly and consistently outperformed comparison schools in reducing chronic absenteeism.
- High-poverty minority students were 15% less likely to be chronically absent and students in temporary shelters were 31% less likely to be chronically absent.

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Source(s): Balfanz & Byrnes (2017); NYC.gov

Ramona High school (Riverside, CA)

CONTEXT

Ramona High School, part of Riverside Unified School District in California, serves 2,078 students. The school motto "Academics, Plus Two," encourages students to get involved in clubs and activities to promote school connectedness. To support this motto, the school has a Wellness Center, offers more than 100 wide-ranging clubs and activities, and leaders who strive to make sure students feel respected, heard and validated in all aspects of their schooling experience. For SY 21-22, the chronic absenteeism rate was at 19.6%, and decreased to 14.6% for the 22-23 SY.

STRATEGIES

- **Hired two additional staff members** and paid two teachers to use planning periods to identify and reach out to absent students and caregivers, forming the "A-Team" (Attendance Team)
  - **+ Adopted a caring and curious approach** in A-Team interactions with absent students and caregivers, coordinating efforts with teachers and counselors
- **Provided additional funding** to schools to improve attendance through hiring additional staff or counselors
- **Established a Wellness Center** with counselors and coordinators to support students, including homeless and foster youth, providing essentials like clothes, toiletries, counseling and assistance program support
- **Offered 45-minute weekly sessions for students to take mental breaks**, catch up on work, or engage in activities supporting SEL skill-building
- **District-held monthly district attendance meetings** to review data and address attendance challenges

OUTCOMES

- Developed a team charged with examining data and targeting students who might need additional support for attendance.
  - + Teams prioritize reaching out to students first to problem-solve and then involving caregivers
- Shifted mindsets around communication home from one that feels more accusatory (i.e. that the student is in trouble) to one that feels more supportive
- Incoming ninth graders are encouraged to participate in clubs, sports and extracurriculars so they feel more connected to school
- Incorporation of mental breaks for students into the school day

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Sanger High School (Sanger, TX)

CONTEXT

Sanger High School (part of Sanger ISD) is a large, comprehensive high school in California serving 3,579 students. Its student population is diverse, and the school prides itself on being a family- and community-centered school. The rate of chronic absenteeism at Sanger is high at 21.8%, that is lower than the California state average of 30%. The school's strategies for improving attendance focus on their strengths: valuing caregiver and community involvement, and student decision-making when it comes to relevant and meaningful coursework.

STRATEGIES

- **Formed student groups** focused on SEL skill-building and AVID-like programs
- **Established community-based opportunities** for real-life skill-building and CTE
- **Made automated and personal calls** to families of absent students, along with regular communication about attendance expectations
- **Hired counselors trained in SEL** who led small group sessions
- **District invested in SEL-based services**
- **District mandated decentralized funding** for schools to direct resources as needed
- **Used restorative justice practices** and professional learning (PL) for staff on SEL
- **A team of staff regularly reviewed student data** and discusses attendance challenges. Counselors and administrators meet with families of students with high absenteeism to identify barriers and offer resources.
- **District established a Child Welfare and Attendance Department** using an interdisciplinary approach to improve attendance
- **District established a Student Attendance Review Board**

OUTCOMES

- Staff team, comprised of different school-level members, that meets regularly to look at data, identify students who are struggling with attendance, and strategizes to find solutions
- Consistent messaging regarding Student Attendance Review Board practices and policy from the district and school
- Development of on-ramps into and through ninth grade for transitioning students

Source(s): Attendance Works (2024)

The GRAD Partnership

CONTEXT

The GRAD Partnership brings together nine organizations to partner with schools, districts, LEAs and SEAs in service of improved outcomes for students. The framework for their work is the Four Essential Elements of High-Quality Student Success Systems, and many of the education agencies that the partnership works with utilize their detailed framework for improving attendance. The listed strategies are paired with a corresponding element of the framework.

THE GRAD PARTNERSHIP

Advancing Student
Success Systems

SUGGESTED STRATEGIES

1. Strong, Supportive Relationships
   - **Students have opportunities to collaborate in class and join extracurriculars**
   - **Classroom time is dedicated-to and structured-around** building teacher-student relationship
2. Real Time, Actionable, Holistic Data
   - **Regularly collect quantitative and qualitative data** on attendance, grades, extracurricular participation and perceptions of school climate through focus groups and surveys
3. Strategic Improvement Actions
   - **Engage the resources of the greater school community** (i.e., parents, caregivers, community organizations) in understanding needs and crafting solutions
   - **Have a process** to record what action is going to be taken, follow up on the proposed action, review the impact of the action, and modify or change, if needed
4. Student-Centered Mindsets
   - **Build coherence between student and adult perspective** of school connectedness for all
   - **Utilize strength/asset-based language** use when speaking about families and students

OUTCOMES

As the GRAD Partnership is a collaborative that has partnered with many entities, we have selected one school partner to highlight, Demopolis High School (MS):

- Demopolis launched a mentorship program driven by a shared set of student-centered mindsets. At the end of their first year of implementation, Demopolis High saw significant improvements in attendance (an 8% drop in chronic absenteeism), academic achievement and growth.