Strategies to Reduce Chronic Absence:

A Multi-Tiered Approach

July 22, 2015  Mobile, Alabama
Attendance Works is a national, non-profit initiative that promotes awareness of the important role that school attendance plays in achieving academic success starting with school entry. We are an implementation partner for attendance with the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading.

We seek to:

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

www.attendanceworks.org
Who is in the room?

• Please raise your hand, if you are a:
  a) Teacher
  b) Social Worker
  c) School Nurse
  d) Attendance Officer
  e) Site Administrator
  f) District Administrator
  g) Community organization working in schools
  h) State Administrator
  i) Other?
One story about how you helped a student or a school improve attendance?
What did you learn from that experience about what works?
What was hard? What barriers did you face?
Learning Goals for Today

• Review what chronic absence is and why it matters for student success
• Plan tiered interventions for reducing chronic absence
• Have access to tools and resources to use with students and families to help improve attendance
• Identify priorities to move the work forward for your own school/community.
1. Overview Presentation
   - What is chronic absence and why does it matter for student success?
2. School Self-Assessment
   - Identifying strengths and gaps
3. Tier 1 Interventions – What Every Student and Family Needs to Know About Attendance
4. Tier 2 Interventions – Positive, Targeted, Early Outreach
5. Tier 3 Interventions - Intensive, Interagency Collaboration
6. Identifying Priorities for Next Steps
Attendance is An Essential Ingredient of Academic Success

Attainment Over Time
Achievement Every Year
Attendance Every Day

3 A School Success Framework

Developed by Annie E. Casey Foundation & America’s Promise Alliance
For more info go to www.americaspromise.org/parentengagement
What is Chronic Absence?

Attendance Works defines chronic absence as **missing 10% or more of school for any reason**. An estimated 7.5 million or one out of 10 students are chronically absent in the United States.
High Levels of Average Daily Attendance (ADA) Can Mask Chronic Absence

90% and even 95% ≠ A

Chronic Absence For 6 Elementary Schools in Oakland, CA with 95% ADA in 2012

Chronic Absence for 6 Schools in New York City with 90% ADA in 2011-12

98% ADA = little chronic absence
95% ADA = don’t know
93% ADA = significant chronic absence
Truancy (unexcused absences) Can Also Mask Chronic Absence

Number of Chronically Absent Versus Chronically Truant Students
San Francisco Unified School District

# chronic absentees - 2010-2011
# students missing 10 days unexcused (as of May 16th 2011)
Why We May Not Notice Chronic Absence

<table>
<thead>
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<th>September</th>
<th>October</th>
<th>November</th>
<th>December</th>
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Absences Add Up

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

What we know from research around the country
Exposure to language: Starting in Pre-K, attendance equals exposure to language-rich environments especially for low-income children.

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

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

College Readiness: Attendance patterns predict college enrollment and persistence.

Engagement: Attendance reflects engagement in learning.

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

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

A 10-point difference on the NAEP is equivalent to a year of learning.
http://www.attendanceworks.org/research/absences-add/
The Campaign for Grade-Level Reading is focusing on three challenges to reading success that are amenable to community solutions:

- **The Readiness Gap**: Too many children from low-income families begin school already far behind.
- **The Attendance Gap (Chronic Absence)**: Too many children from low-income families miss too many days of school.
- **The Summer Slide (Summer Learning Loss)**: Too many children lose ground over the summer months.
Starting in PreK, More Years of Chronic Absence = Need for Intensive Reading Support By 2nd Grade

* Indicates that scores are significantly different from scores of students who are never chronically absent, at p<.05 level; **p<.01; ***p<.001

Some risk

At risk
The Long-Term Impact of Chronic Kindergarten Absence is Most Troubling for Poor Children

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

Source: ECLS-K data analyzed by National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP)
Note: Average academic performance reflects results of direct cognitive assessments conducted for ECLS-K.
Chronic Early Absence Connected to 3rd Grade-Level Reading

A Rhode Island Data Hub analysis found that compared to kindergartners who attend regularly, those chronically absent:

- Scored 20% lower in reading and math in later grades and gap grows
- 2x as likely to be retained in grade.
- 2x likely to be suspended by the end of 7th grade.
- Likely to continue being chronically absent
Chronic Absence is Especially Challenging for Low-Income Children

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

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

(Romero & Lee, National Portrait of Chronic Absenteeism in the Early Grades, NCCP, 2007)
The Effects of Chronic Absence on Dropout Rates Are Cumulative

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

Attendance Is Even More Important for Graduation for Students In Poverty

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

- Eligible for Free Lunch:
  - SATISFACTORY: 85.5%
  - AT-RISK: 73.9%
  - CHRONICALLY ABSENT: 37.8%

- Not Eligible for Lunch Subsidies:
  - SATISFACTORY: 96.9%
  - AT-RISK: 91.6%
  - CHRONICALLY ABSENT: 67.1%

Presentation to: The Interagency Council for Ending the Achievement Gap
November 7, 2013, CT State Dept of Education.
Chronic Absence in High School Predicts Lower College Persistence

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

- Turn to the person next to you.
- Any insights gained or questions raised from what you heard so far?
How Can We Address Chronic Absence?
Find Out Why Students Are Chronically Absent

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

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

**Aversion**
- Child struggling academically
- Lack of engaging instruction
- Poor school climate and ineffective school discipline
- Parents had negative school experience
Going to School Every Day Reflects When Families Have ...

Hope
for a better future

Faith
that school will help you or your child succeed

Capacity
Resources, skills, knowledge needed to get to school
AW Recommended Site-Level Strategies

A. Recognize Good and Improved Attendance

B. Engage Students and Parents

D. Provide Personalized Early Outreach

C. Monitor Attendance Data and Practice

E. Develop Programmatic Response to Barriers (as needed)
Improving attendance requires a tiered approach that begins with prevention.

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

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

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

High Cost arrow points to Tier 3
Low Cost arrow points to Tier 1
Ingredients for System-wide Success & Sustainability

Community
- Use positive relationships to engage parents and understanding about why monitoring absence is essential to a better future.

District
- Is accurate, accessible, and regularly reported

Positive Engagement

Actionable Data

Shared Accountability
- Ensures monitoring & incentives to address chronic absence

Capacity Building
- Expands ability to interpret data and work together to adopt best practices

Schools

Students & Families

Strategic partnerships between district and community partners address specific attendance barriers and mobilize support for all ingredients
Self-Assessment

1. Fill out “Does Attendance Really Count for My School”
2. Share the results with a colleague
3. Use dots to share the results of the self-assessment on the large flip charts around the room.
4. Look at the charts, what do you notice?
Tier 1 Interventions
Improving attendance requires a tiered approach that begins with prevention

**TIER 1**
All students
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High Cost
Low Cost
Tier 1: Family Engagement Strategies

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

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

**For which Families is Tier 1 sufficient?**
- Families who partner with the school
- Families who have had good experiences with school in the past
Attendance is higher when schools:
- promote a sense of belonging and connection including noticing when students show up
- make learning so engaging students don’t want to miss class while creating understanding of how easily absences can add up
- engage in restorative practice not punishment
- help our most economically challenged families and students meet their basic needs so all have the opportunity to get to school.
- Build awareness about how absences can easily add up to too much time lost in the classroom.
Tier 1: Communication, Education, and Engagement
**Tools for Tier 1 Interventions**

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**My Child’s Attendance Goals**

To improve my child's attendance, I can commit to the following:

1. 
2. 
3. 

**Attendance Awareness Month**

SEPTEMBER 2014

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**MY CHILD’S ATTENDANCE GOALS**

- My child was present _______ days.
- My child was absent _______ days.
- My child’s current attendance rate is __________.
- My goal for next year is to improve my child’s attendance to __________.

**Possible Strategies to Reach Your Child’s Attendance Goals**

- I will keep an attendance chart at home. At the end of the week, I will reward my child for attending school every day with _______.
- I will set a routine and a schedule for my child to attend school.
- I will make sure my child is healthy and well-rested.
- If my child consistently complaints of stomachaches or headaches and medical concerns have been ruled out, I will send him/her to school sick and call the counselor _______ so that she/his can check in with him/her during the school day.
- If my child has a cold but no fever (less than 100 degrees), I will send him/her to school anyway.
- I will find a relative, friend, or neighbor who can take my child to school if I cannot make it or if the child misses the bus.
- I will set up medical and dental appointments for weekends after 3:00 pm.

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**ATTENDANCE AWARENESS MONTH**

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**Attendance Awareness Month**

September 2014

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- If my child has a cold but no fever (less than 100 degrees), I will send him/her to school anyway.
- I will find a relative, friend, or neighbor who can take my child to school if I cannot make it or if the child misses the bus.
- I will set up medical and dental appointments for weekends after 3:00 pm.
Vast majority of parents, even those of students with excessive absences, believe their child’s attendance is same as classmates, better than classmates, or just don’t know.
Harvard research study found comparison reduced absence by 5-10% for all students, regardless of severity of absenteeism.
Messages about absences are more motivating than messages about attendance.

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

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

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

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

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

d. **Utilize written commitments** to encourage good attendance such as a pledge or the attendance goal work sheet.
Discussion: When and where might you use these materials with a family or a group?
Make Creating Back Up Plans a Norm:
Student Attendance Success Plan

MY CHILD’S ATTENDANCE GOALS

To improve my child’s attendance, I can commit to the following:

1. _______________________________________________________________________
2. _______________________________________________________________________
3. _______________________________________________________________________

We will review progress to meet this goal at the next Parent Teacher Conference.

POSSIBLE STRATEGIES TO REACH YOUR CHILD’S ATTENDANCE GOALS

• I will keep an attendance chart at home. At the end of the week, I will reward my child for attending school every day with _____________________________.
  (i.e. A visit to the park, extra screen time, a special treat)
• I will make sure my child is in bed by _____ p.m. and the alarm clock is set for _____ a.m.
• If my child consistently complains of a stomachache or headache and medical concerns have been ruled out, I will send him/her to school anyway and call Counselor ___________________________ so that he/she can check in with him/her during the school day.
• If my child has a cold but no fever (less than 100 degrees), I will send him/her to school anyway. If I don’t have a thermometer, I will purchase or borrow one.
• I will find a relative, friend, or neighbor who can take my child to school if I can’t make it or if he/she missed the bus.
• I will set up medical and dental appointments for weekdays after 3:30 p.m.

To learn more, please visit www.attendanceworks.org or www.arglt.net

YOUR FAMILY’S HELP BANK

YOUR FAMILY

1. Your Family: List who lives in your house.
2. Everyday Helpers: Identify who you can call on to help drop your child off or who can pick him or her up when you cannot. These are people who live outside your neighborhood but can be there for short visits.
3. Occasional Helpers: Identify people who probably cannot help every day, but can help in a pinch. Maybe it’s a neighbor, a relative or a friend who lives outside your neighborhood but can be there for short visits.
4. Potential Helpers: Identify people who are part of your school community, church or neighborhood who are able to help—if you ask.

EVERYDAY HELPERS

1. _______________________________________________________________________
2. _______________________________________________________________________
3. _______________________________________________________________________

OCASIONAL HELPERS

4. _______________________________________________________________________

POTENTIAL HELPERS

If I need help getting my child to and from school, I will ask the following people to be our back-up:

Name:__________________________  Best Contact Number:__________________________

Name:__________________________  Best Contact Number:__________________________

Name:__________________________  Best Contact Number:__________________________

To learn more, please visit www.attendanceworks.org

Adapted with permission from materials created by Early Works at Early Works Elementary School in Norwalk, Ct. www.arglt.net/attendanceworks
Fill Out Your Pyramid

What is in place now for tier 1? Is it enough given the need? What might you add?

TIER 3
Students at risk of missing 20% or more of school (severe chronic absence)

How many students are tier 1?

TIER 2
Students at risk of missing 10-19% (moderate chronic absence)

TIER 1
All students

High Cost

Low Cost
Tier 2 Interventions
**Tier 2 Interventions**

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

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

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

The Power of Positive Connections

Reducing Chronic Absence through PEOPLE: Priority Early Outreach for Positive Linkages and Engagement

www.attendanceworks.org
Priority Early Outreach for Positive Linkages and Engagement (PEOPLE)

- **Priority:** Focuses on at-risk students in grades, schools and neighborhoods with high levels of chronic absence.
- **Early:** Begins with the start of school.
- **Outreach:** Connects to students and families.
- **Positive:** Promotes preventive, supportive approaches rather than punitive responses.
- **Linkages:** Taps the full community for support.
- **Engagement:** Motivates showing up to class & offers students & families a role in improving attendance.
Criteria for Identifying Priority Students for Tier 2 Supports

- Chronic absence (missed 10% or more of school) in the prior year, assuming data is available.
- And/or starting in the beginning of the school year, student has:

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<tr>
<th>Time Period</th>
<th>Absence Criteria</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In first 2 weeks</td>
<td>2 absences</td>
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<tr>
<td>In first month (4 weeks)</td>
<td>2-3 absences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In first 2 months (8 weeks)</td>
<td>4 absences</td>
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Missing 10% any time after
Students Who Miss 2 or More Days of School in The First Month of School Are Significantly More Likely to Be Chronically Absent by the End of the School Year

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

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

Positive Linkages and Engagement for Students and Families
Key Finding: Success Mentors & Supporting Infrastructure Substantially Improved Student Attendance

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

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

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

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

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<th>Activity</th>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Share</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Inform</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Discuss</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Arrive at a Plan</td>
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Learn about the student’s family and their experience in your school or classroom. Ask what their vision is for their child’s future. What are their hopes and dreams for them? Ask how the school year is going socially and academically.

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

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

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

Think through strategies with parents for addressing absences and help them develop an attendance improvement plan. Offer referrals to services as needed and ask if there are other ways you can help.
Teacher Perspective: It’s October and Alyssa has already missed 8 days of school and is frequently tardy. The teacher has noticed that Alyssa seems more reserved and less attentive than normal in class.

Mother’s Perspective: Alyssa has asthma and its causing her to miss school. Alyssa is not skipping school without permission so these absences aren’t a problem.
Where to Start or Expand: Implementing **PEOPLE**
(Priority Early Outreach for Positive Linkages and Engagement)

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

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

- Low Income Students and High Levels of Chronic Absence
- Supportive Community Partners
- School Leadership
What Can You Learn From Your Data?
A Typical District’s Chronic Absence Data By Grade

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Moderate Absence</th>
<th>Severe Absence</th>
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<tr>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
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<td>1st</td>
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<td>8.2%</td>
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<td>2nd</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
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<td>1.7%</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
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<td>5.6%</td>
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<tr>
<td>11th</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
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<tr>
<td>12th</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
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Who Can HelpAdvance a PEOPLE Approach?

PEOPLE

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

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

Community Partners
- Call for data & PEOPLE approach
- Link to community resources (health, afterschool, food, mentoring, family support, etc.)
See the **Power of Positive Connections**, plus other on-line resources to support implementation on our website: [www.attendanceworks.org](http://www.attendanceworks.org)

in the For Schools section of Tools and TA.
Adopting Tier 2 Interventions

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

2. Share with a partner:
Fill Out Your Pyramid

What is in place now for tier 2? Is it enough given the need?

**TIER 3**
Students at risk of missing 20% or more of school (severe chronic absence)

**TIER 2**
Students at risk of missing 10-19% (moderate chronic absence)

**TIER 1**
All students

How many are students are tier 2?
Tier 3 Interventions
Tier 3 provides intensive interventions, often from multiple agencies or specialists within a school district or community.

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

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

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

Who would you add to this list?
Filling Out Your Pyramid

What is in place now for Tier 3? Is it enough given the need?

**TIER 1**
All students

**TIER 2**
Students at risk of missing 10-19% (moderate chronic absence)

**TIER 3**
Students at risk of missing 20% or more of school (severe chronic absence)

How many students are tier 3?

High Cost

Low Cost
1. Given your school self assessment and what you learned from filling out your pyramid of attendance tiers, what are your top 1-3 priorities for action.

2. Who are the top stakeholders in your community who need to be on board with addressing chronic absence?
Developing your elevator speech.

• Think of an audience/person that you need to convince to work on chronic absence?
• Write down what your elevator speech. What would convince them that this matters for them? What are you “asking “ them to do.
• Practice with a partner, pretend they are your audience.
Reflections

Head – a thought inspired by today

Heart – a feeling evoked by today

Foot – an action you will take