



Reducing Chronic Absence: A Springboard for Academic Success

Implications for practice and policy

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Unpacking Attendance Terms

Average Daily Attendance

- The % of enrolled students who attend school each day. It is used in some states for allocating funding.

Truancy

- Typically refers only to unexcused absences and is defined by each state under No Child Left Behind. It signals the potential need for legal intervention under state compulsory education laws.

Chronic Absence

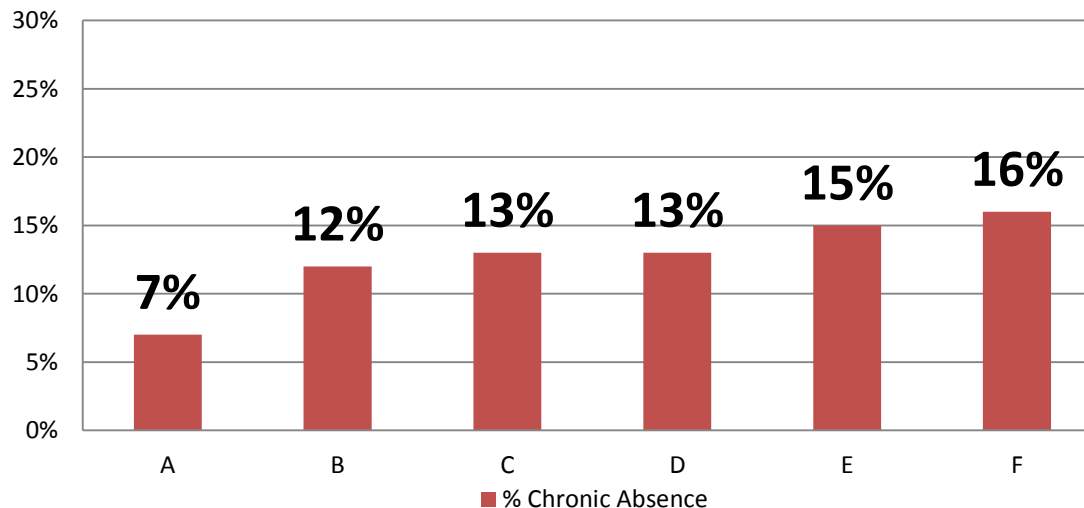
- Missing 10% or more of school for any reason – excused, unexcused, etc. It is an indication that a student is academically at risk due to missing too much school starting in Kindergarten.



Moving into Action Requires Knowing if Chronic Absence is a Problem

Most Schools Only Track Average Daily Attendance and Truancy. Both Can Mask Chronic Absence.

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

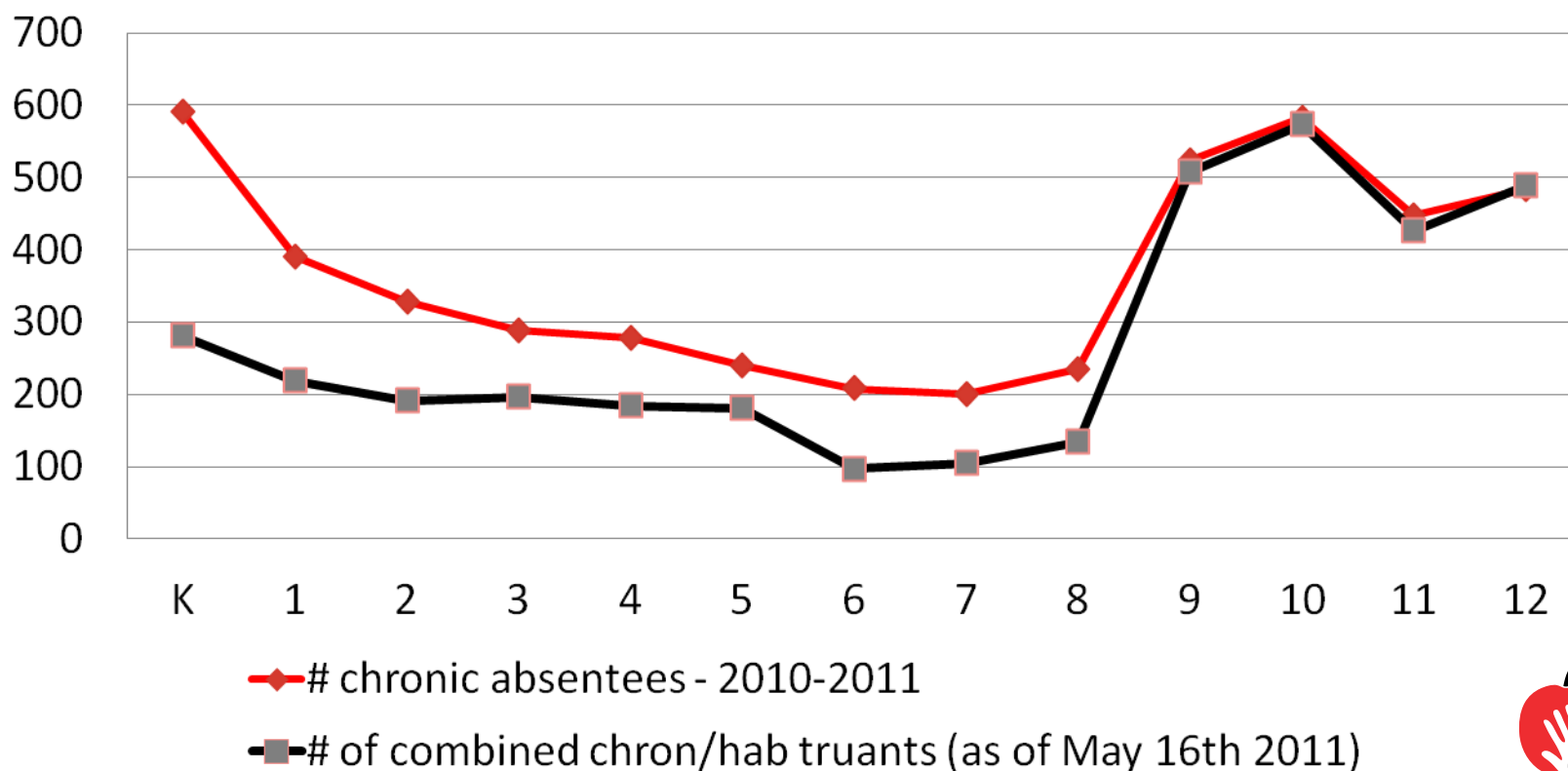


98% ADA = little chronic absence
95% ADA = don't know
93% ADA = significant chronic absence



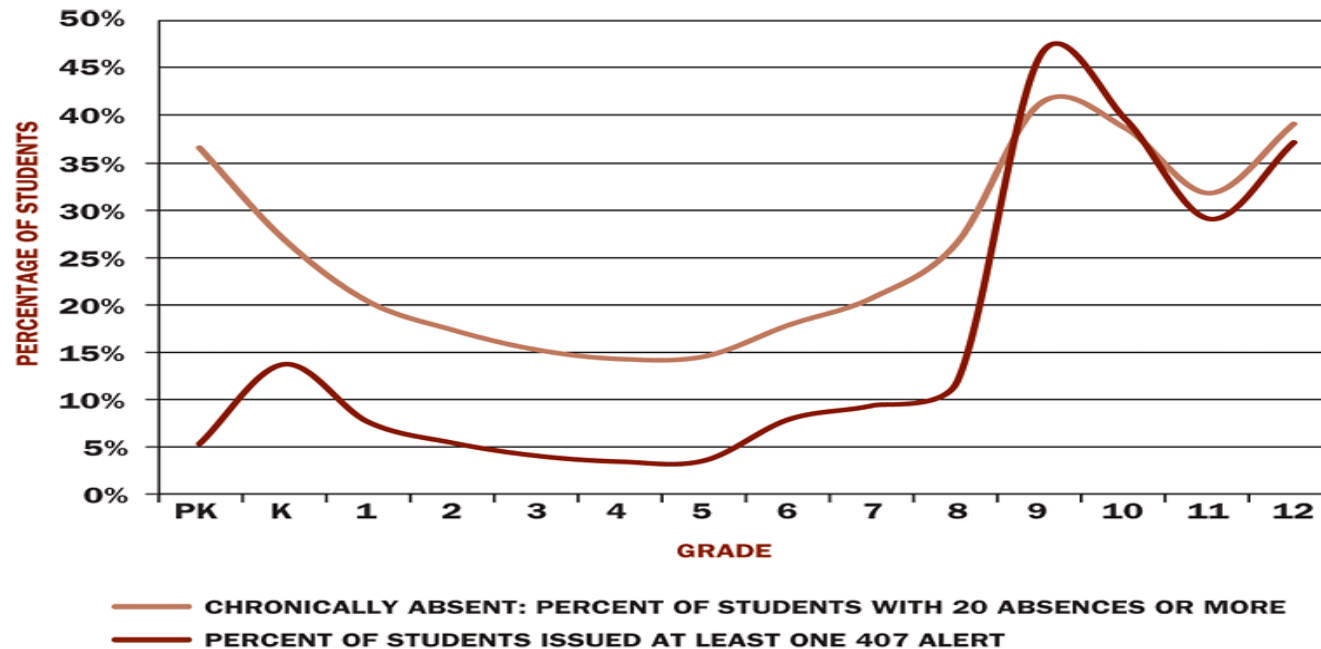
Chronic Absence vs. Truancy

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



Sporadic – Not Just Consecutive – Absences Matter

New York City Schools (2008)



- A 407 alert is issued when a student misses 10 consecutive days or 20 days over a 40 day period. It misses more sporadic absence.
- 1 out of 5 elementary school children were chronically absent.

Source: Nauer, K et al, Strengthening Schools by Strengthening Families, Center for New York City Affairs New School, Oct 2008

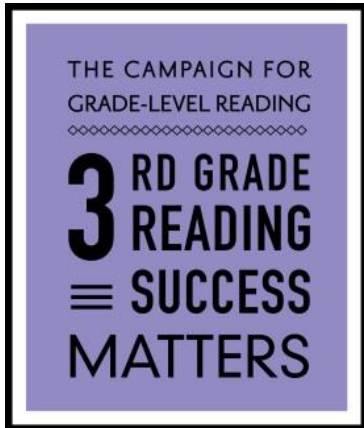


Chronic Absence: A Hidden National Crisis

- ❑ Nationwide, as many as 10-15% of students (7.5 million) miss nearly a month of school every year. That's 135 million days of lost time in the classroom.
- ❑ In some cities, as many as one in four students are missing that much school.
- ❑ Chronic absenteeism is a red alert that students are headed for academic trouble and eventually for dropping out of high school.
- ❑ Poor attendance isn't just a problem in high school. It can start as early as kindergarten and pre-kindergarten.



The Campaign for Grade-Level Reading



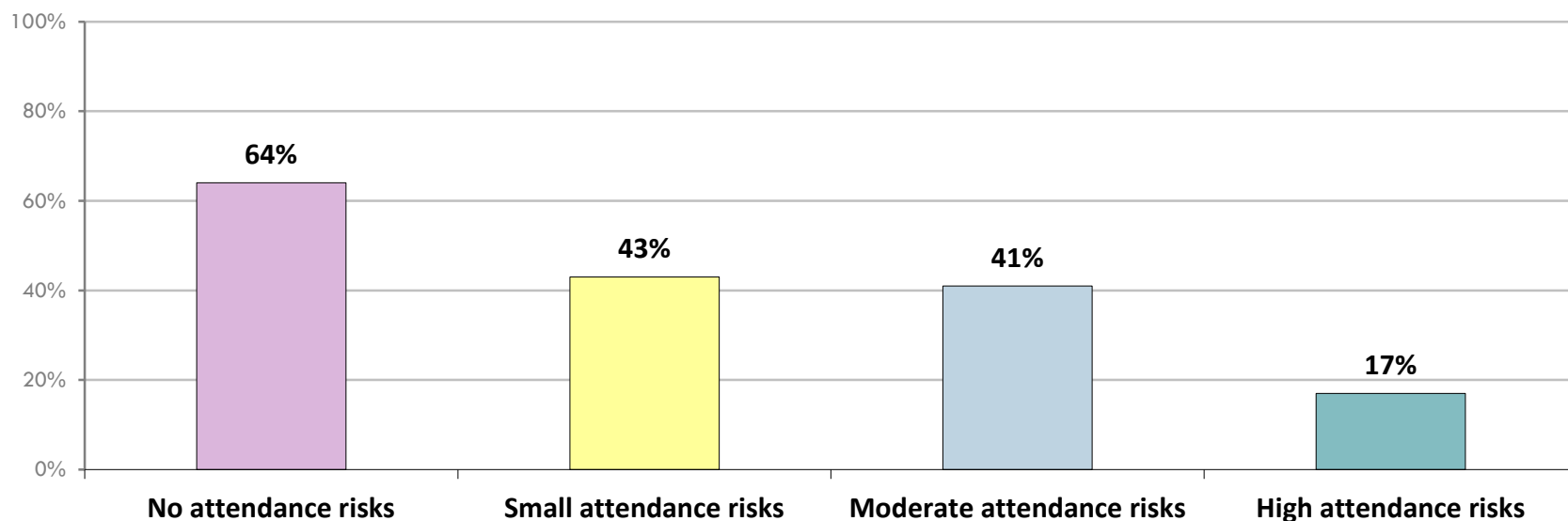
The Campaign for Grade-Level Reading is focusing on three challenges to reading success that are amenable to community solutions:

- **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.



Students Chronically Absent in Kindergarten and 1st Grade are Much Less Likely to Read Proficiently in 3rd Grade

**Percent Students Scoring Proficient or Advanced on 3rd Grade ELA
Based on Attendance in Kindergarten and in 1st Grade**



No risk	Missed less than 5% of school in K & 1 st
Small risk	Missed 5-9% of days in both K & 1 st
Moderate risk	Missed 5-9% of days in 1 year & 10 % in 1 year
High risk	Missed 10% or more in K & 1 st

Source: Applied Survey Research & Attendance Works (April 2011)



Chronic Absence in PreK + K = Significantly Worse Outcomes

For children chronically absent in PreK & K, the Baltimore Education Research Consortium found:

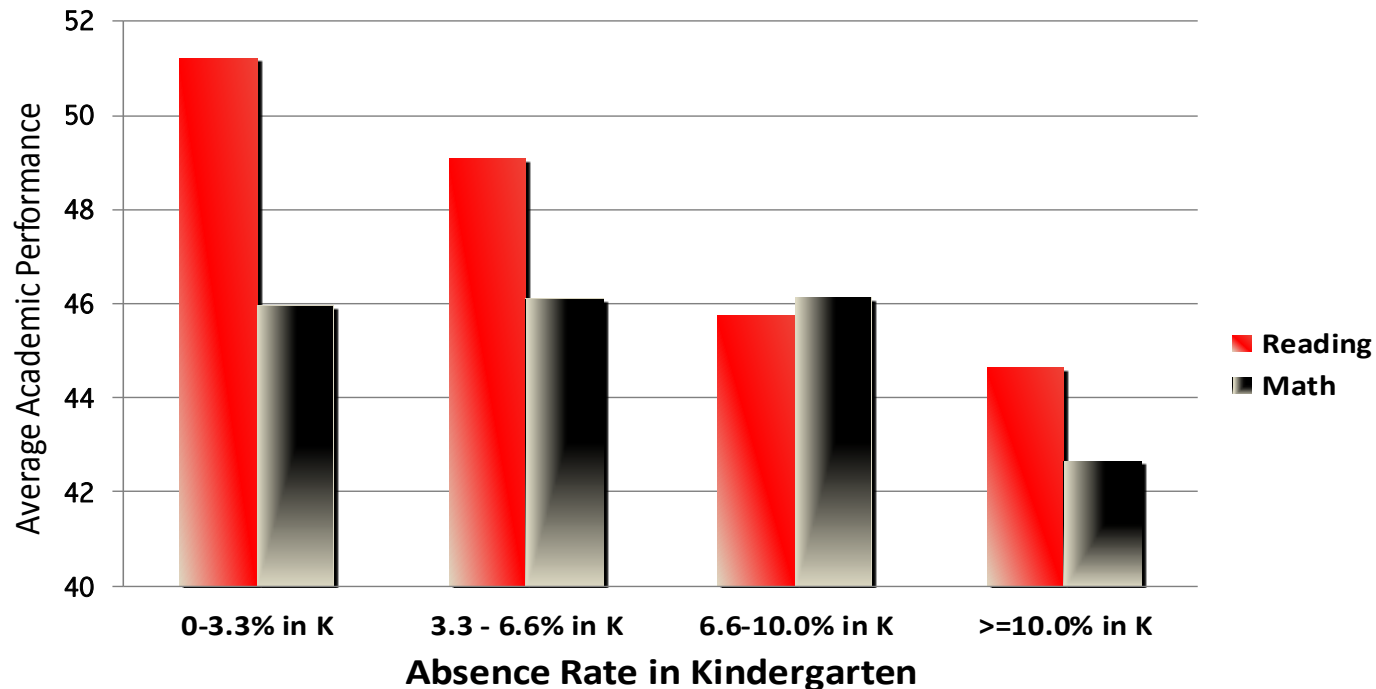
- ✓ Greater likelihood of continued poor attendance. 50% were chronically absent again in G1, 45% in G2.
- ✓ Lower outcomes in G1, G2 in reading and math, and math in G3
- ✓ More often retained (26% compared with 9% of students with no chronic absence)
- ✓ More likely to be identified as needing special education

By contrast, children who participated in Head Start had better attendance and higher 3rd grade test scores.



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.



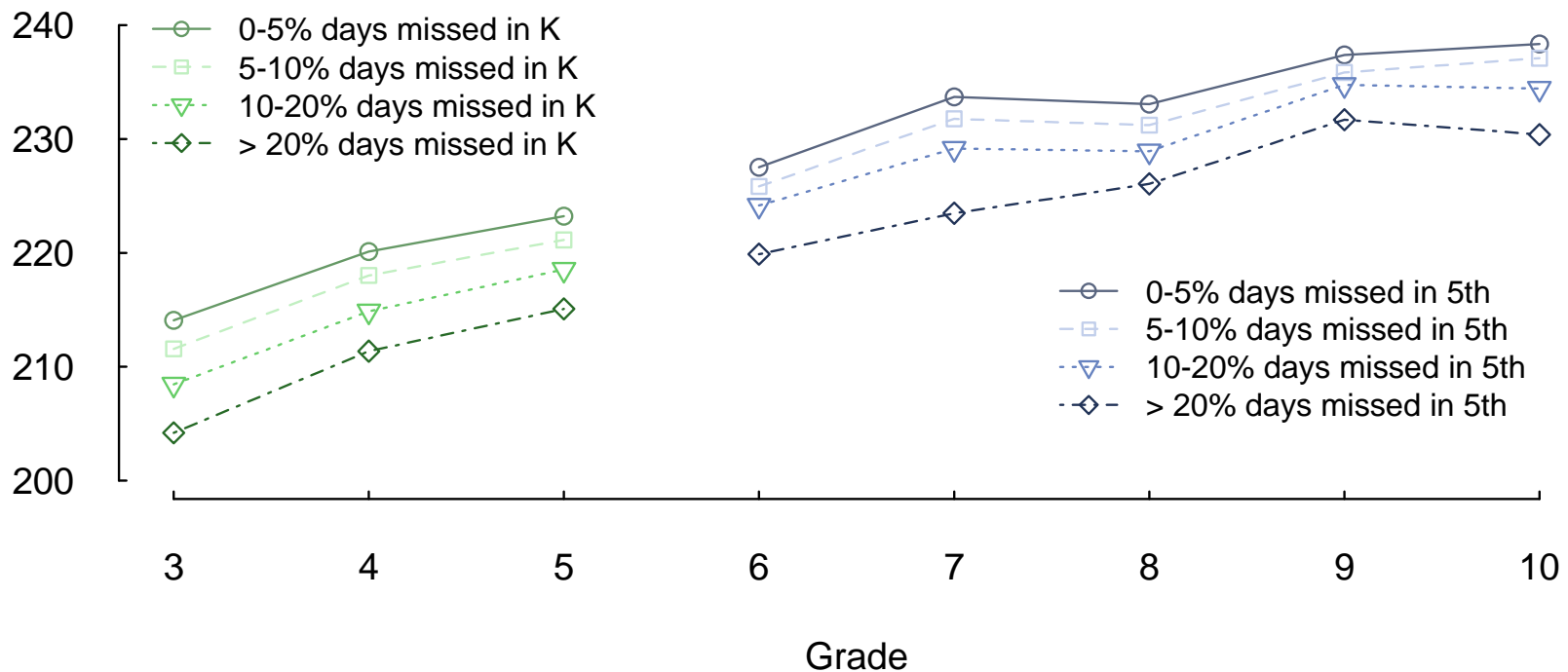
Source: ECLS-K data analyzed by National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP)

Note: Average academic performance reflects results of direct cognitive assessments conducted for ECLS-K.



There Is a Clear and Consistent Relationship Between Early Attendance and Later Achievement

Average reading RIT scores for two cohorts of Oregon students, by absence rates in kindergarten and 5th grade

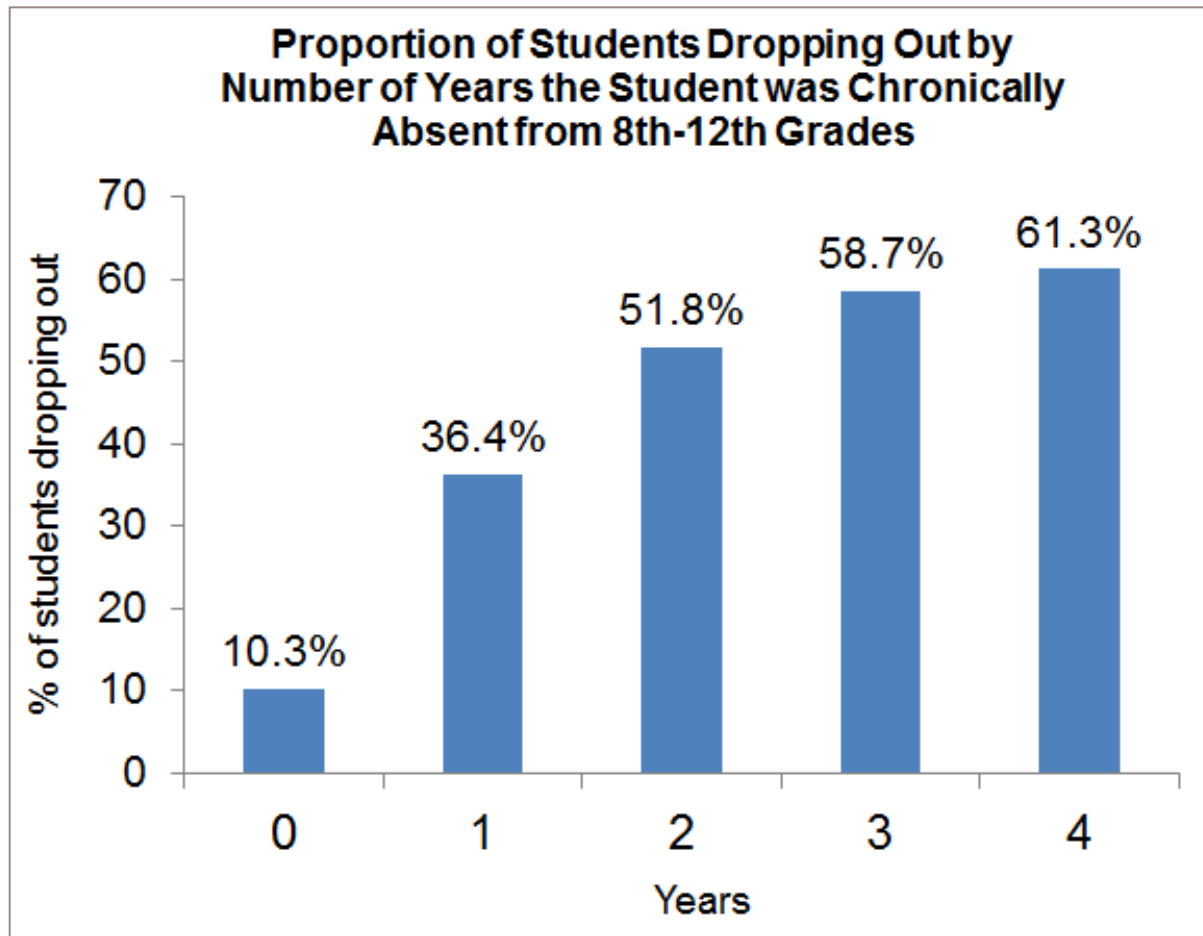


(Note: 23% of students statewide in Oregon were chronically absent)

Source: ECONorthwest analysis of Oregon Department of Education data, 2009-10.



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.

Solutions Only Work if Grounded in Understanding of What Leads to Chronic Absence

Lack of Awareness

Parents or students don't realize absences are adding up to academic risk

School lacks a strong culture of attendance

Aversion

Child is struggling academically

Lack of engaging instruction

Child is being bullied

Barriers

Lack of access to health care

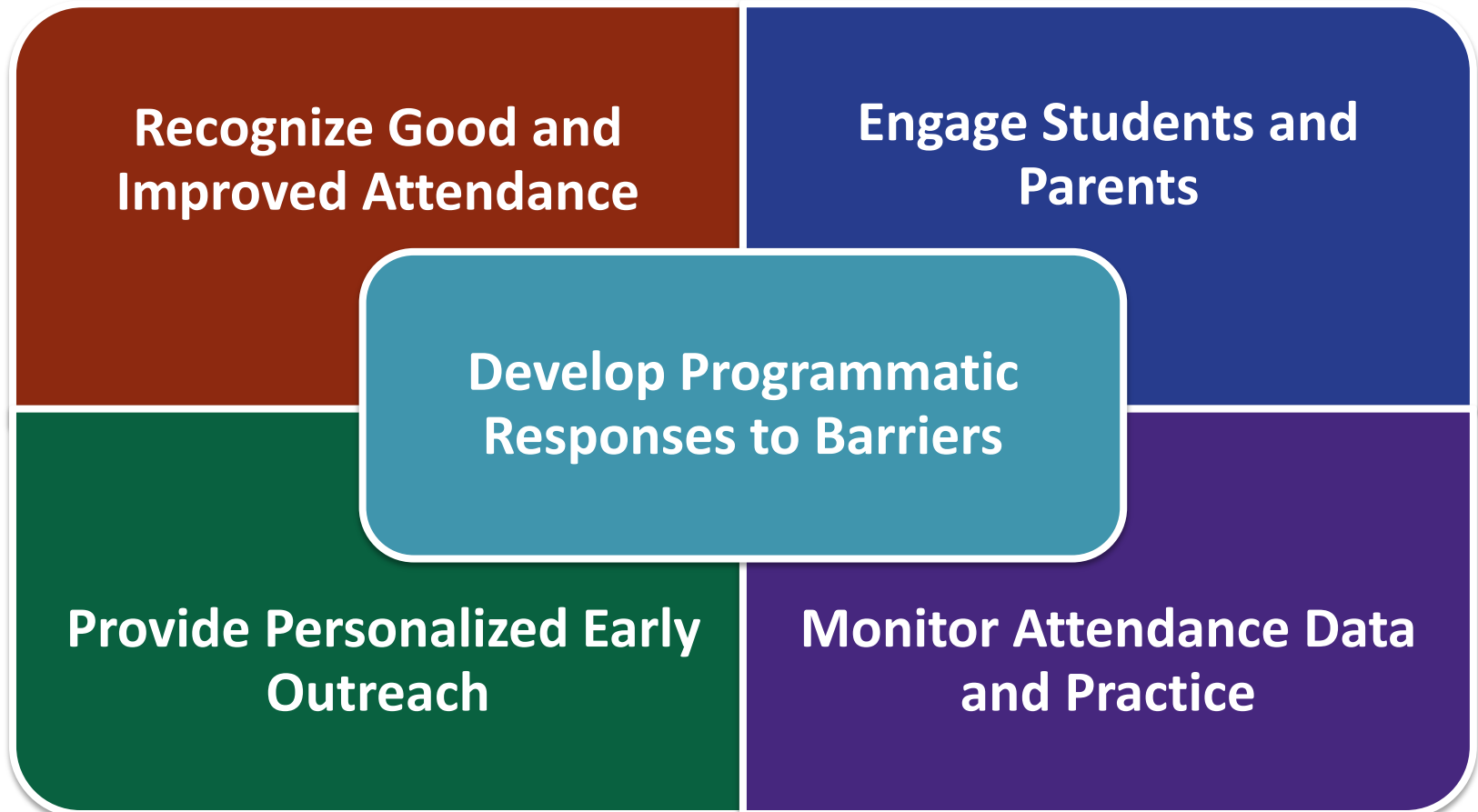
No safe path to school

Poor transportation

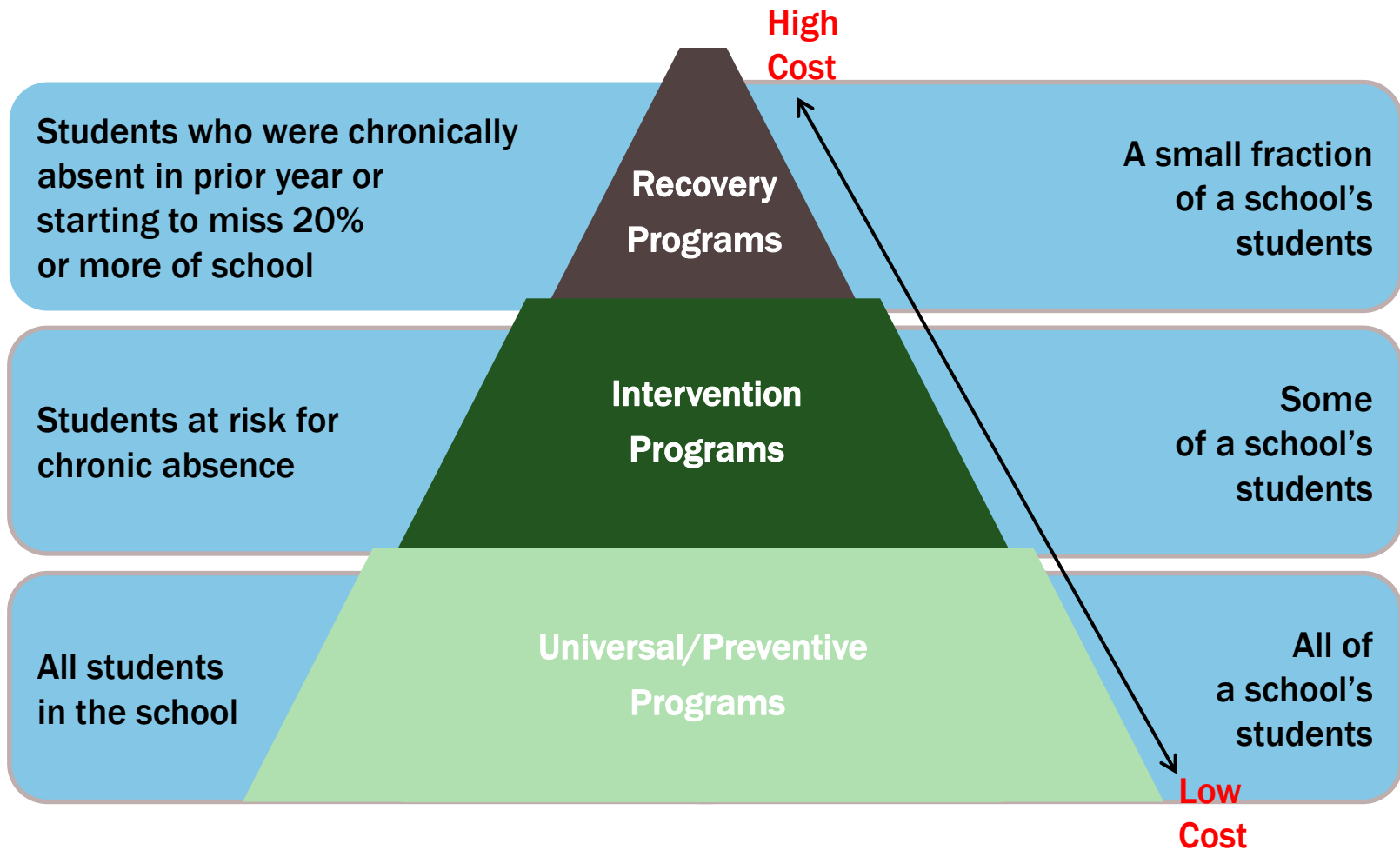
Special thanks to Dr. Robert Balfanz, Everyone Graduates Center, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD for providing this framework.



Universal Strategies for School Communities



Increased Attendance Involves a 3-Tiered Approach that Fits with Most Reform Efforts



Variation Across Schools Helps Identify Good Practice and Need for Intervention

Chronic Absence Levels Among Oakland Public Schools (2009-10)

	Elementary	Middle	High School
# Schools with 0%-5% Chronic Absence	9	0	0
# Schools with 5.1%-10% Chronic Absence	17	4	1
# Schools with 10.1%-20% Chronic Absence	25	8	6
# Schools with >20.1% Chronic Absence	9	4	9
Total No. Schools	60	16	16
Highest % of Chronic Absence	31.5%	32.8%	42.1%
Lowest % of Chronic Absence	0.3%	6.9%	7.9%
Median	12.7%	14.9%	21.0%
Mean	11.9%	15.6%	22.4%

Examples of Successful Efforts



Baltimore: Fewer unnecessary suspensions, reduced middle school transitions, expanded monitoring of attendance data, and a citywide campaign have **helped cut middle school chronic absence in half.** Baltimore is now turning its attention to preschool and elementary school.



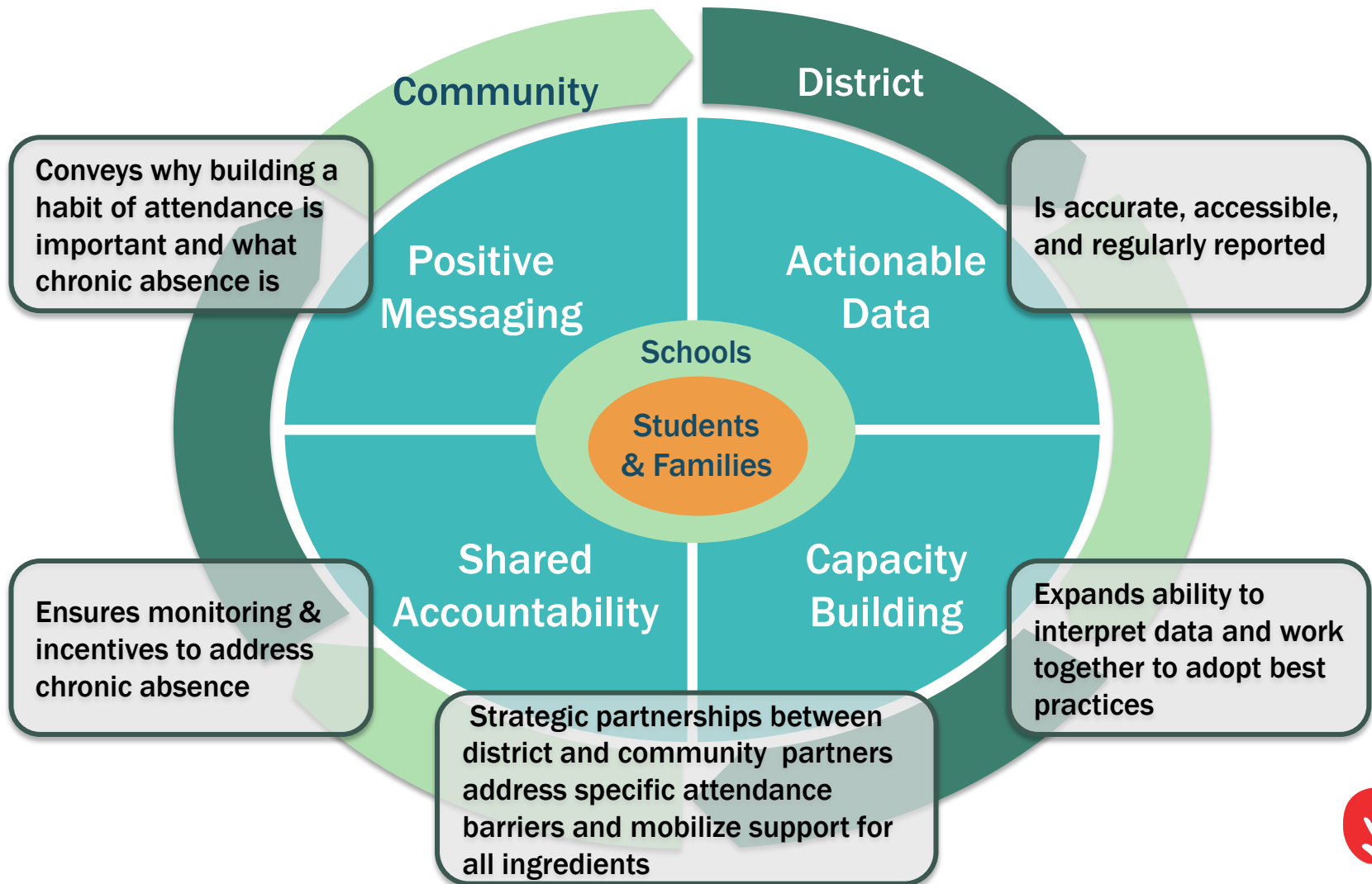
New York City: School-wide incentives, celebrity wake-up calls, data dashboards, and success mentors for at-risk students **have reduced chronic absence in pilot elementary, middle and high schools. Students with success mentors gained 11,800 additional days of school.**

For additional examples:

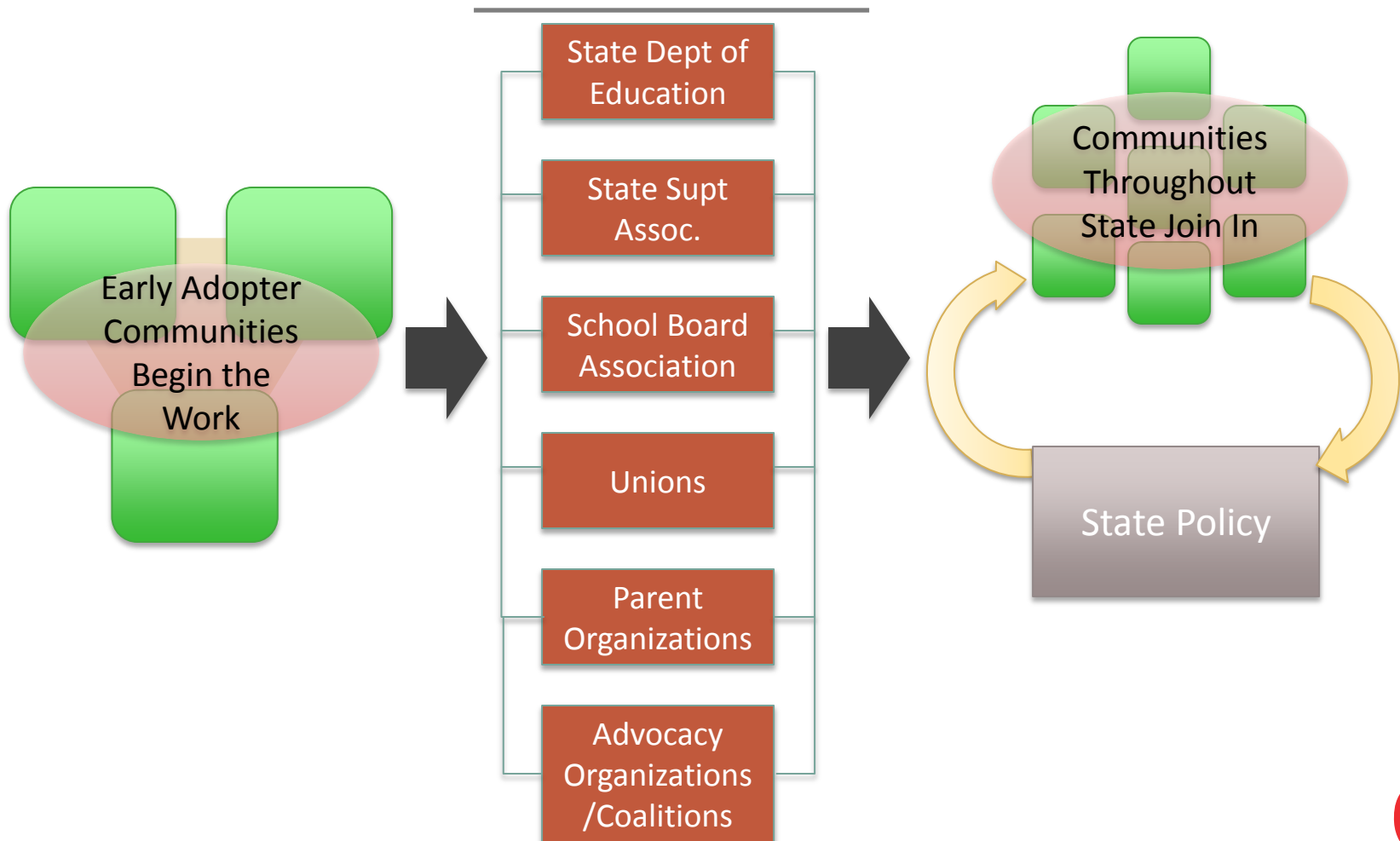
<http://www.attendanceworks.org/what-works/>



Ingredients for System-wide Success & Sustainability



Local → State Level Strategy



Why State Action Matters

- ❑ **Student Mobility.** Chronically absent students are often highly mobile. The state can help provide a fuller history and develop support strategies for vulnerable children.
- ❑ **Equity and Efficiency.** States can provide dropout early warning systems based on attendance far cheaper and more equitably.
- ❑ **Accountability.** States can hold districts and schools accountable for monitoring and addressing high levels of chronic absence.
- ❑ **New Year Roll Over.** District information systems may “roll over” attendance data each summer and, as a result, longitudinal attendance data would not be accessible.



What States Can Do

- 1. Data Collection.** Collect total days enrolled and total days absent, ideally through 180 daily attendance records, and include in data bases.
- 2. Definition.** Establish chronic absence as missing 10% or more of school. Make sure it is distinct from truancy. Ensure all absences including suspensions are included.
- 3. Accountability.** Build chronic absence into measures to be addressed in school improvement plans.
- 4. Reporting.** Publish reports that feature multiple attendance measures (chronic absence, ADA and truancy) and show rates by district, school, grade and student sub-populations.

What States Can Do

5. **Support for Districts.** Strengthen capacity of districts to track and calculate multiple measures of attendance, and to support chronically absent students, ideally in partnership with other community agencies.
6. **Information to Parents:** Ensure parents regularly receive information about the % of days their child has missed along with information about when they are at risk due to poor attendance
7. **Resource Allocation.** Use levels of chronic absence in a school to guide the allocations of programs or community resources (for example, health supports, free breakfast in the classroom, early education programs, afterschool programs, or mentoring) that could help improve school attendance.

How Federal Government Could Help

- 1. Common Data Definition.** Establish common definition of chronic absence as missing 10% or more of school including all absences.
- 2. Data Systems.** Ensure state longitudinal student databases capture multiple measures of attendance, including chronic absence, satisfactory attendance and suspensions starting in pre-K.
- 3. Funding.** Use federal grant programs to encourage schools to track and address chronic absence and to develop a research base for what works.
- 4. Accountability.** Promote addressing attendance in school improvement plans. Include chronic absence rates in school report cards & and EDFacts reporting.



Attendance Works

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