

# Reducing Chronic Absence: What Will It Take?

*An overview of why it matters  
and key ingredients for improving  
student attendance*

**Director: Hedy Chang**

# 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

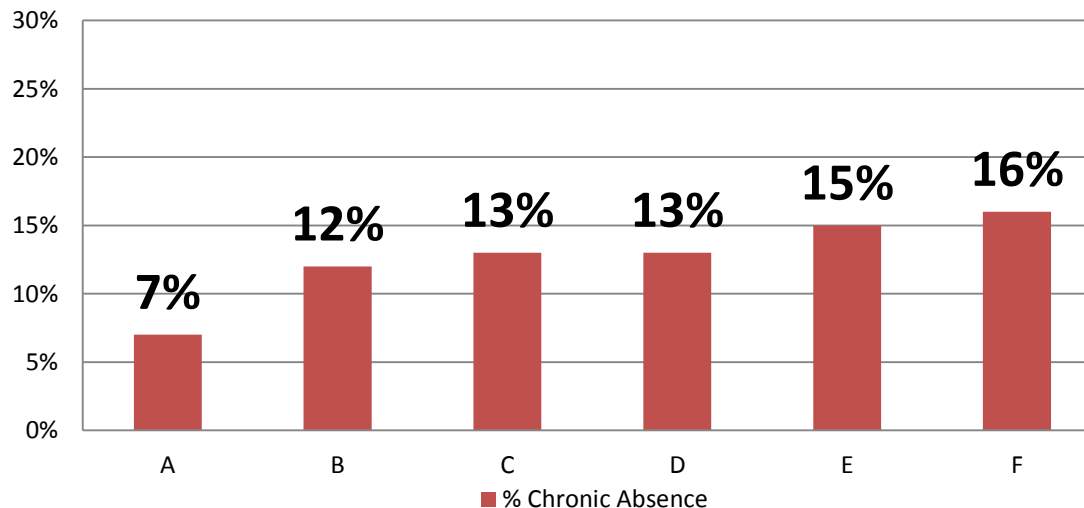
- Missing 10% or more of school for any reason – excused, unexcused, etc. It is an indication that a student is academically at risk due to missing too much school starting in Kindergarten.



# 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

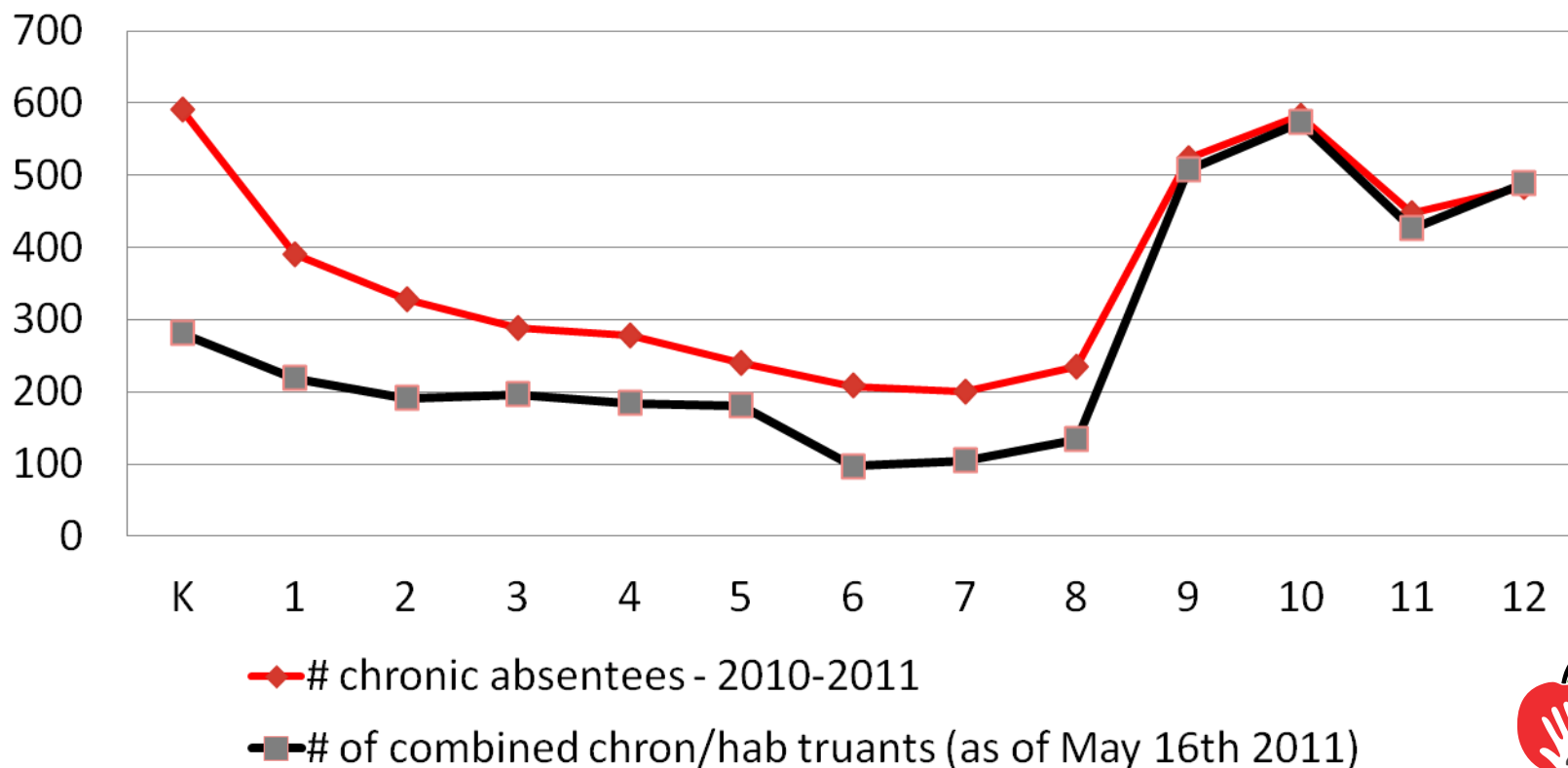


**98% ADA = little chronic absence**  
**95% ADA = don't know**  
**93% ADA = significant chronic absence**



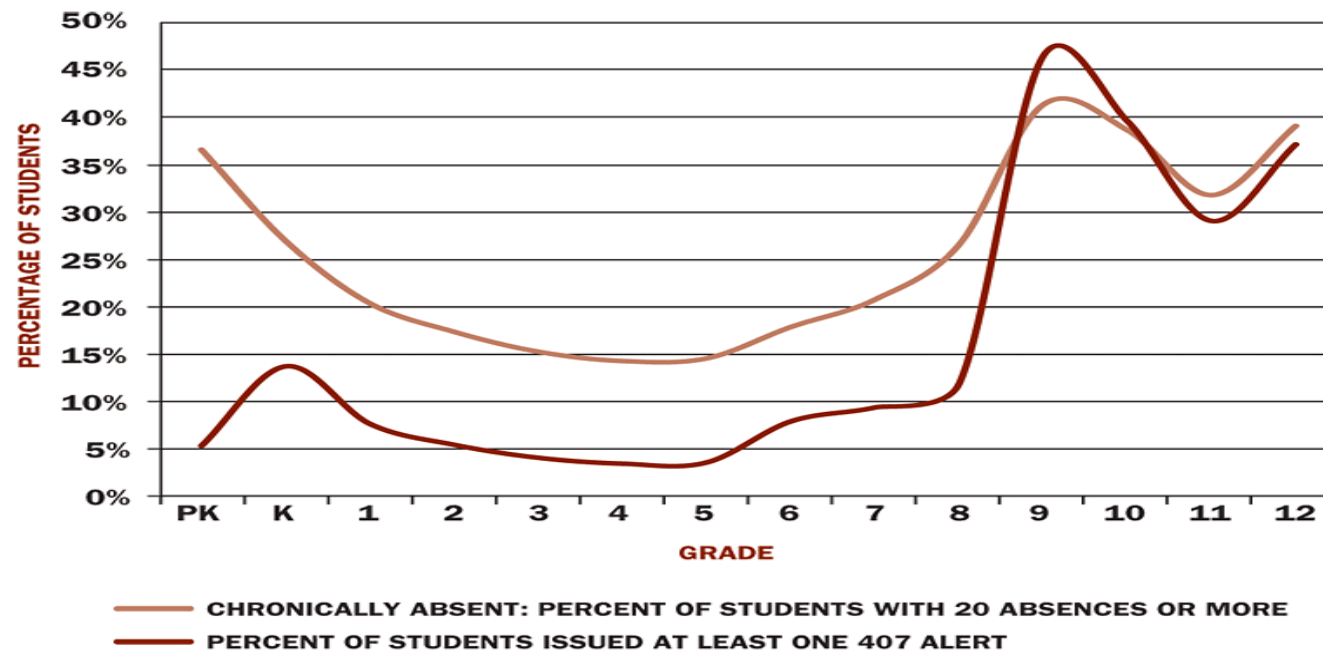
# Chronic Absence vs. Truancy

**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*

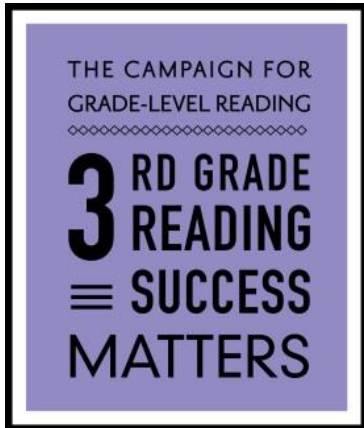


# Chronic Absence: A Hidden National Crisis

- ❑ 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



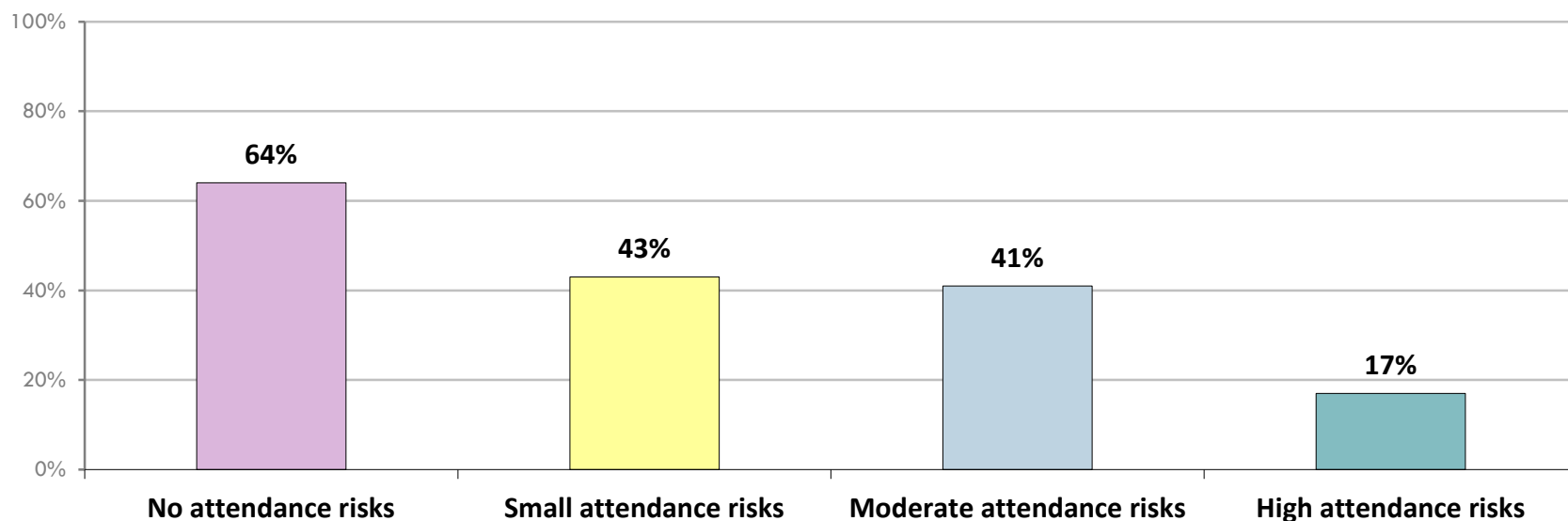
The Campaign for Grade-Level Reading is focusing on three challenges to reading success that are amenable to community solutions:

- **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 1<sup>st</sup> Grade are Much Less Likely to Read Proficiently in 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade

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



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

*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:

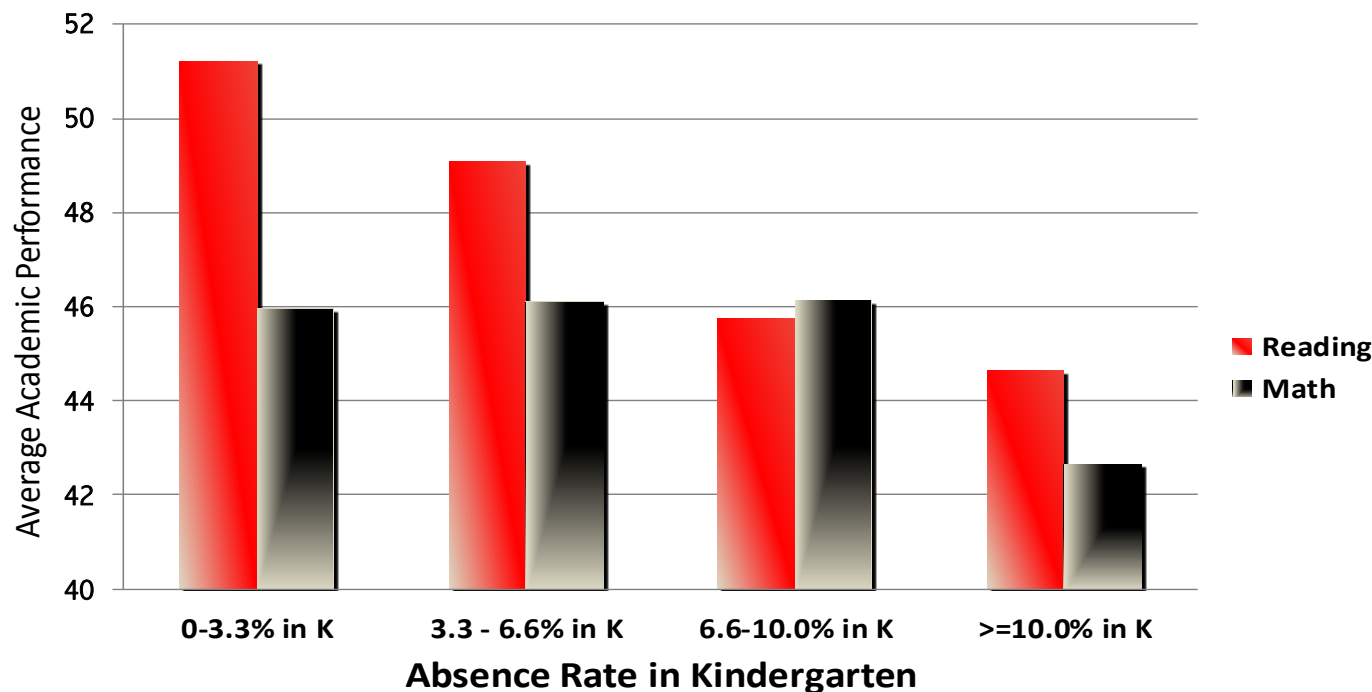
- ✓ Greater likelihood of continued poor attendance. 50% were chronically absent again in G1, 45% in G2.
- ✓ Lower outcomes in G1, G2 in reading and math, and math in G3
- ✓ More often retained (26% compared with 9% of students with no chronic absence)
- ✓ More likely to be identified as needing special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

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



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

**5<sup>th</sup> Grade Math and Reading Performance by K Attendance for Children Living in Poverty.** Academic performance was lower even if attendance had improved in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade.



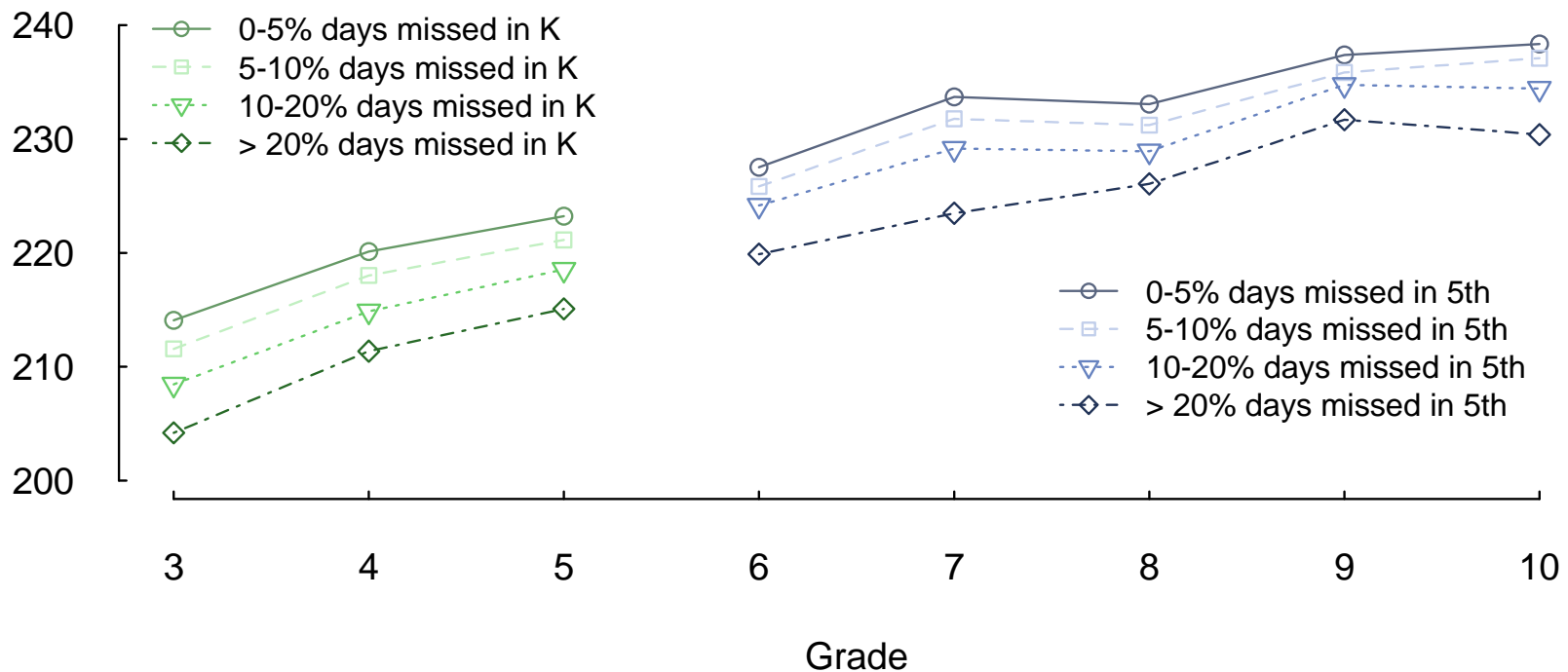
Source: ECLS-K data analyzed by National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP)

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 5<sup>th</sup> grade

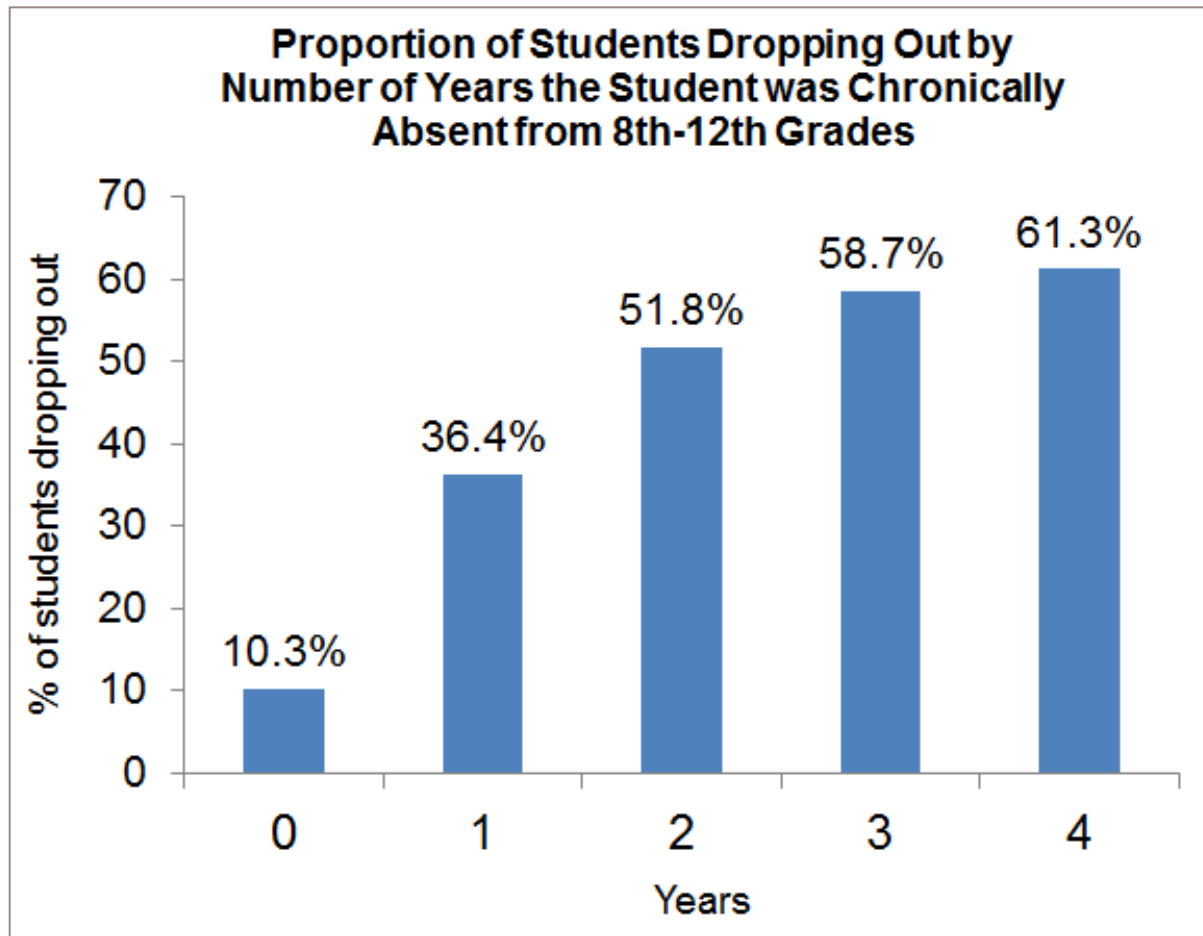


**(Note: 23% of students statewide in Oregon were chronically absent)**

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

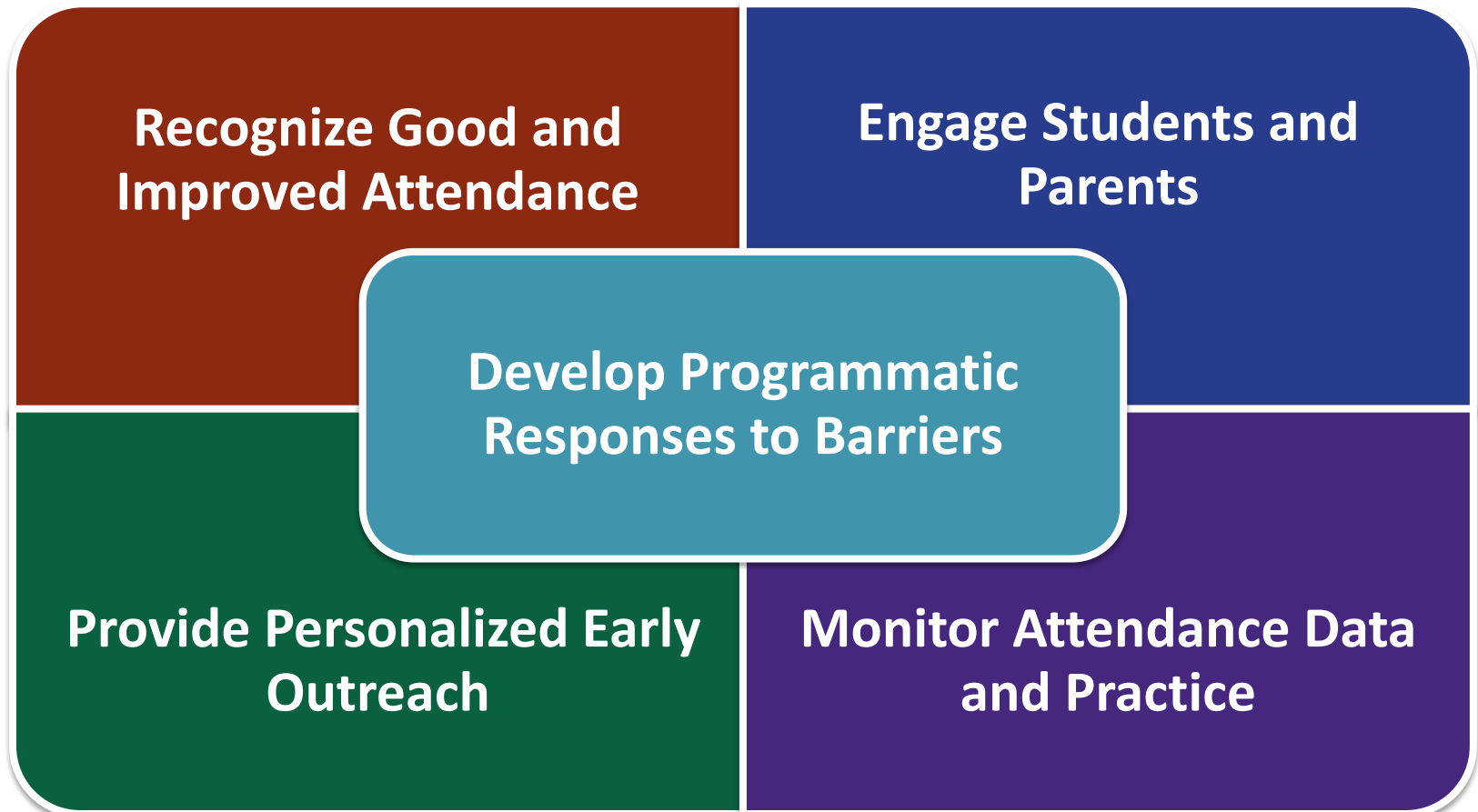
No safe path to school

Poor transportation

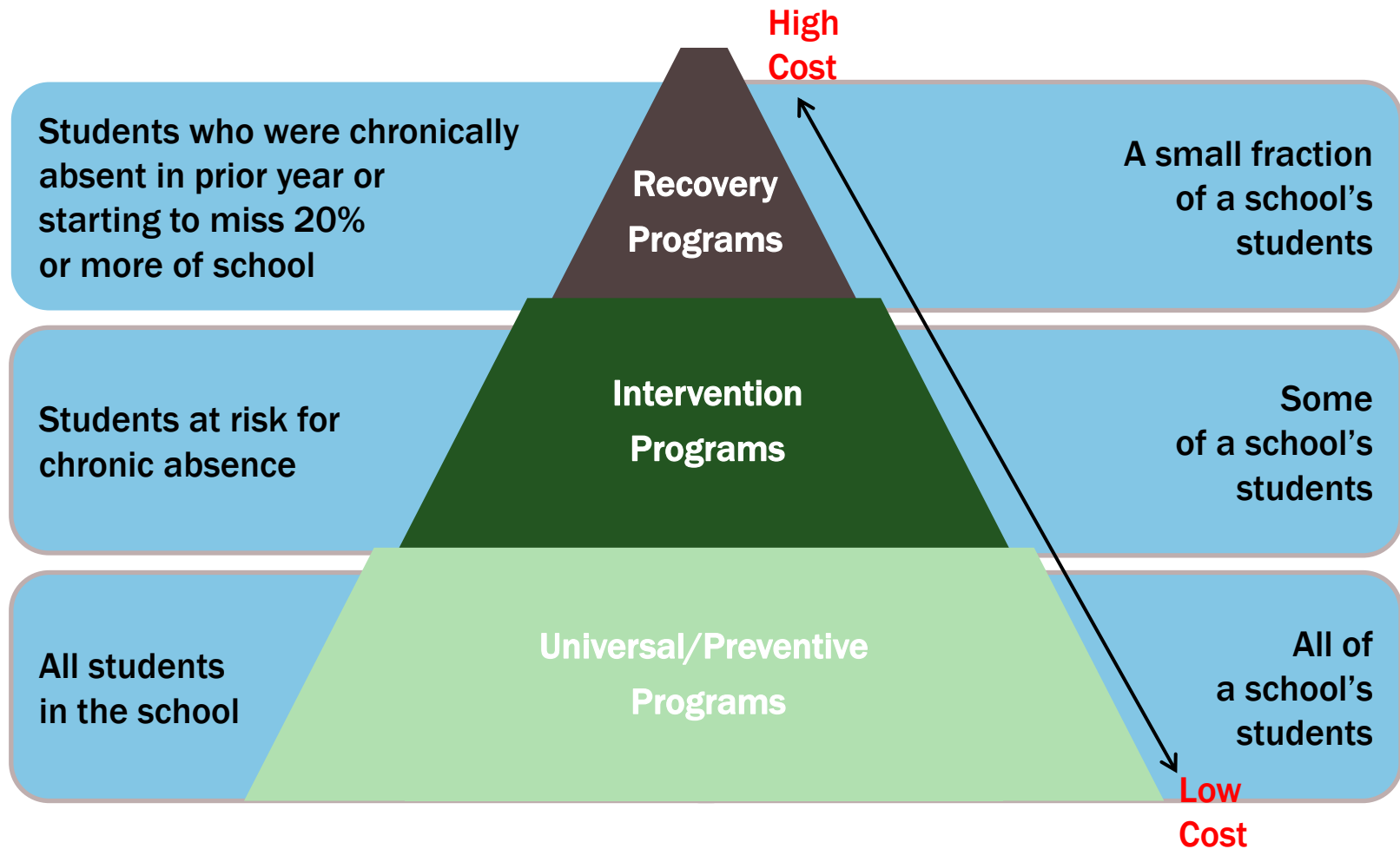
*Special thanks to Dr. Robert Balfanz, Everyone Graduates Center, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD for providing this framework.*



# 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.

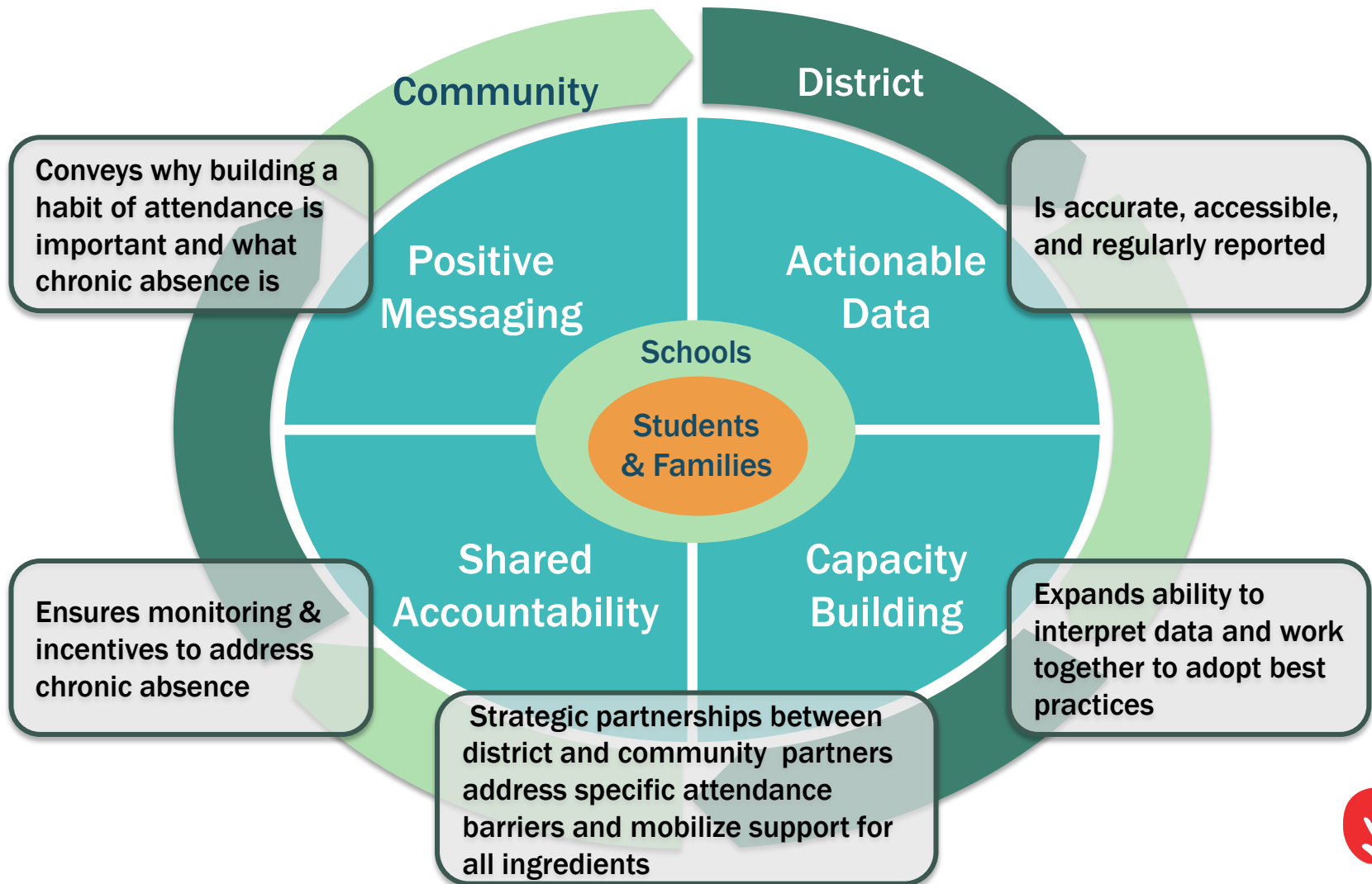


**New York City:** School-wide incentives, celebrity wake-up calls, data dashboards, and success mentors for at-risk students **have reduced chronic absence in pilot elementary, middle and high schools. Students with success mentors gained 11,800 additional days of school.**

*For additional examples:*

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

# Ingredients for System-wide Success & Sustainability



# The Superintendents Call to Action

**Own the  
Issue**

**Mobilize  
the  
Community**

**Drive With  
Data**

*To sign-up for the Call to Action, or to learn more, please visit:  
[www.attendanceworks.org/superintendents-call-to-action](http://www.attendanceworks.org/superintendents-call-to-action)*



# Use September to Launch Attendance Awareness Month in Your Community!!



<http://www.attendanceworks.org/attendancemonth/>



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