

# Does Our School District Have a Systemic Approach to Reducing Chronic Absence?

## *A Tool for Self-Assessment*

The goal of this self-assessment is to help district office leaders identify strengths and opportunities to develop a systemic approach to reducing chronic absence. The tool is built around five key ingredients for reducing chronic absence: **actionable data, positive engagement, capacity building, shared accountability, and strategic partnerships** -- all of which play an integral role in reducing chronic absence in your district. While assessing your district across all five ingredients, think about the actions your district takes on its own, as well as whether you are making strategic use of community partnerships to advance your strategies.

A cross-functional district office team should undertake following steps at least annually:

- 1) **Complete the assessment:** Each person on the cross-functional team should complete the assessment separately to reflect on strengths and opportunities for improvement.
- 2) **Debrief and set goals:** The group should convene to tally their individual results onto a single assessment and collectively review what the combined data reveals about strengths, gaps and differences of opinion. Use the results to identify practices that should be continued as well as priority areas for improvement. See ["Instructions for Using the Self-Assessment Tool"](#) for additional guidance including how to use wall charts to tally collective results.
- 3) **Make a plan:** Once members have agreed on priorities, the cross-functional team should assign responsibility and establish timelines for completion. See the companion document ["District and Community Planning Tool"](#).
- 4) **Communicate the results:** The cross-functional team should communicate the results of the assessment with district office staff, and in some cases, schools and community partners, and engage them in executing the improvement plan.

ACTIONABLE DATA	Strength	OK for Now	Could Be Better	Urgent Gap	Don't Know	How Do You Know?
1. At least every two weeks (ideally in real time), attendance data reports (with satisfactory, at risk, moderate and severe chronic absence) are produced and reviewed by a cross-functional district team that also ensures schools accurately enter daily attendance into the district student information system.						
2. At least every two weeks (ideally in real time), the district office distributes attendance data to individual schools broken down by grades, student sub-groups and categorized by satisfactory, at-risk, moderate, and severe chronic absence.						
3. The district office ensures that students and parents have access to attendance data that is easy to understand and alerts them to when a student is academically at risk due to poor attendance.						
4. The district office publicly reports on an annual basis aggregate and disaggregated attendance and chronic absence data by school, grade level and ESSA sub-groups.						

POSITIVE ENGAGEMENT	Strength	OK for Now	Could Be Better	Urgent Gap	Don't Know	How Do You Know?
1. District leaders consistently and clearly promote public awareness about chronic absence, why it matters, and the need for a comprehensive approach in communications to parents, the general public and key stakeholders via flyers, handbooks, back-to-school letters, and other communications.						
2. The district office ensures that schools offer trainings and workshops throughout the year in families' home languages to help them understand the importance of attendance and to engage them in developing solutions to reduce chronic absence.						
3. The district office has explicit attendance protocols for outreach to families when students begin to miss too much school. Implementation of protocols is routinely tracked and monitored.						
4. The district office publicly recognizes schools and community partners that demonstrate best practice strategies and achieve measurable reductions in chronic absences. These examples are used to inspire action and duplicate best practices.						

CAPACITY BUILDING	Strength	OK for Now	Could Be Better	Urgent Gap	Don't Know	How Do You Know?
1. The district office has a widely disseminated, comprehensive attendance policy and practice manual that clearly lays out why attendance matters, describes what schools can do to build a positive culture of attendance and outlines strategies for reducing chronic absence.						
2. A cross-functional district level team is in place to implement a systemic, tiered support system, with schools as the unit of analysis, to reduce chronic absence that aligns with existing district initiatives.						
3. The district office makes professional development on chronic absence widely available and integrated with resources to support improved student behavior.						
4. The district office ensures that district-level attendance staff understands the national, state and local regulations related to attendance and are equipped to support schools in implementing best practices to improve attendance.						

SHARED ACCOUNTABILITY	Strength	OK for Now	Could Be Better	Urgent Gap	Don't Know	How Do You Know?
1. The Superintendent and School Board set and publicize district-wide goals for attendance (including chronic absence) and report on progress.						
2. The district office ensures that school leaders are held accountable for having a data-driven plan to address chronic absence, for setting measurable targets for improvement and for outlining a process for monitoring and recognizing progress when chronic absence reaches a certain threshold.						
3. The district office has contracts or MOUs with community organizations that outline how they will share data and provide support to schools and the district in improving school attendance and how they will assess the effectiveness of their efforts.						
4. The district office prioritizes distribution of resources to help schools with high rates of chronic absence (e.g. physical and behavioral health services, transportation, early childhood education, afterschool, economic supports, etc.).						

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS	Strength	OK for Now	Could Be Better	Urgent Gap	Don't Know	How Do You Know?
1. The district office builds cross-sector partnerships by creating opportunities for community partners to review data on chronic absence, learn about the district attendance efforts, and identify opportunities to address common attendance barriers district-wide or in particular schools.						
2. The district office creates materials, resources and opportunities to help public agencies, non-profit organizations and civic groups work together with schools and districts to promote Tier 1 positive messaging and engagement about the importance of daily attendance for academic supports and the availability of supports to help families overcome common attendance barriers.						
3. The district office facilitates community and agency partners working with districts to implement Tier 2 early intervention that uses personalized outreach to motivate attendance, identify barriers to attendance, and connects students and families to needed supports.						
4. The district office facilitates community and agency partners working with districts to implement Tier 3 intensive intervention that prioritizes and coordinates provision of case management and service delivery to students who are severely chronically absent.						