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

A Planning Tool for Districts and Communities

Actionable data, positive engagement, capacity building, shared accountability, and strategic partnerships all play an integral role in reducing chronic absence in your district. After assessing where you are across all five ingredients, think about the actions your district will take on its own and with the help of community partners. What are your next steps? Who is responsible for each task? When will each task be completed?

ACTIONABLE DATA	What are Key Next Steps?	Individuals or Groups Responsible	Target Date	Resources to Leverage
1. At least every two weeks (ideally in real time), data on levels of 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, the district office distributes data on the current levels of chronic absence 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 a regular basis aggregate attendance and chronic absence data by school and grade level.				

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POSITIVE ENGAGEMENT	What are Key Next Steps?	Individuals or Groups Responsible	Target Date	Resources to Leverage
1. District leaders clearly and consistently convey messages about the importance of daily attendance and reducing absences 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 with effective student and family engagement and attendance supports and strategies.				

CAPACITY BUILDING	What are Key Next Steps?	Individuals or Groups Responsible	Target Date	Resources to Leverage
1. The district office has a widely disseminated, comprehensive attendance policy and practice manual which specifies the roles of district and school-based staff and outlines when and how to respond to student absences.				
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 provides professional development opportunities to ensure principals, school staff and community partners understand what chronic absence is, why it matters, and have the skills and tools to implement a tiered approach to reducing absenteeism.				
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.				

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SHARED ACCOUNTABILITY	What are Key Next Steps?	Individuals or Groups Responsible	Target Date	Resources to Leverage
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, measurable targets for improvement, and a process for monitoring and recognizing progress.				
3. The district office has contracts or MOUs with community organizations which 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 is accountable for ensuring that schools have access to resources and/or services that schools need to address chronic absence.				

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS	What are Key Next Steps?	Individuals or Groups Responsible	Target Date	Resources to Leverage
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 facilitates partnerships on behalf of schools to implement Tier 1 comprehensive prevention that nurtures a positive culture of attendance through student and family engagement.				
3. The district office facilitates partnerships with community organizations on behalf of schools 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 agreements with community partners on behalf of schools to implement Tier 3 intensive intervention that prioritizes and coordinates provision of case management and service delivery to students who are severely chronically absent.				

Overall Reflections & Next Steps

1. What are your district's **greatest strengths** across the five ingredients? (Review the results from your self-assessment.)

2. What are the **biggest challenges** your district faces across the five ingredients? (Review the results from your self-assessment.)

3. What are the three or four **most important steps** that could be taken over the course of the next year to lay the foundation for reducing chronic absence?

4. **What is already going on** in your community and school district that could be leveraged to help take these steps?

5. If you are creating this action plan with others, **share all of your ideas** for the three or four most important steps. Identify if any of the steps are more important to achieve first to lay the foundation for others. Agree upon the top three to five shared priorities for action.

6. For each priority, **identify the following**: what are the resources that could be leveraged; who are the key groups that should be involved; who could take the lead in moving it forward; and what is your timeline for action.

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