

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 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. 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. Consider adding district leaders from departments not represented on the team such as curriculum and instruction, special education, and operations who can offer valuable perspectives and suggestions.
- 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 reveal 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.

Throughout this document, we refer to the importance of ensuring resources and strategies address the needs of **vulnerable student populations** and their families. Vulnerable populations are those which national and state data show are more likely to be chronically absent such as students with disabilities, living in poverty, from communities of color, facing high mobility or homelessness, involved in foster care or juvenile justice systems, and experiencing the stress of immigration. We particularly call out students with disabilities since they are found in every district and student population and experience disproportionately high levels of chronic absence.

ACTIONABLE DATA	Strength	OK for Now	Could Be Better	Urgent Gap	Don't Know	How Do You Know?
<p>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.</p>						
<p>2. At least every two weeks (ideally in real time), the district office distributes attendance data to individual schools and their attendance teams categorized by satisfactory (absent < 5%), at-risk (absent 5-9.99%), moderate (absent 10-19.99%), and severe chronic absence (absent 20% or more).</p>						
<p>3. The district office ensures that students and parents/caregivers have access to attendance data that is easy to understand and alerts them when a student is academically at risk due to poor attendance.</p>						
<p>4. The district office reports aggregate and disaggregated attendance and chronic absence data by school, grade level, and ESSA sub-groups to the School Board at least once a year.</p>						
<p>5. The District creates chronic absence reports that are broken down by grades, schools, teacher; and by student sub-groups IEP, 504 plans, Free and Reduced Price Lunch, Ethnicity, ELL, Homelessness, foster care, and neighborhood.</p>						

POSITIVE ENGAGEMENT	Strength	OK for Now	Could Be Better	Urgent Gap	Don't Know	How Do You Know?
<p>1. District leaders consistently and clearly promote awareness among district staff, parents, key stakeholders and the general public about chronic absence, why it matters, and how it can be addressed through a comprehensive approach via flyers, handbooks, back-to-school letters, and other communications.</p>						
<p>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 assist them with identifying attendance barriers they face.</p>						
<p>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.</p>						
<p>4. The district office publicly recognizes schools and community partners that demonstrate best practice strategies and achieve measurable reductions in chronic absences, including those that demonstrate how to improve attendance of different vulnerable student populations.</p>						
<p>5. The district office ensures that school staff receive professional development and resources to ensure sensitivity to cultural differences and challenges that vulnerable students and their families may experience when seeking to reduce absenteeism.</p>						

CAPACITY BUILDING	Strength	OK for Now	Could Be Better	Urgent Gap	Don't Know	How Do You Know?
<p>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 that align with the needs of their different student populations.</p>						
<p>2. A cross-functional district level team is in place to implement a systemic, tiered approach to improving attendance that aligns with existing initiatives.</p>						
<p>3. The district office builds site level capacity to take a multi-tiered and systemic approach to reducing chronic absenteeism including equipping schools to have functioning attendance teams by providing guidance, resources, and materials to support implementation tailored to the realities of each school and their students and families.</p>						
<p>4. The district office ensures that district-level attendance staff understand the national, state and local laws, policies and regulations related to attendance.</p>						
<p>5. The district office provides professional development to ensure school staff are equipped to tailor attendance improvement strategies with special attention to students with disabilities, and other vulnerable populations.</p>						

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, for identifying and removing structural attendance barriers, and for outlining a process for monitoring and recognizing progress.						
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 and student sub-groups with high rates of chronic absence (e.g. physical and behavioral health services, transportation, early childhood education, and after-school programs and activities, and economic supports to families.)						
5. The district office ensures school leaders use their data to identify which students are most likely to miss school and place attendance improvement strategies tailored to address the needs of vulnerable populations.						

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS	Strength	OK for Now	Could Be Better	Urgent Gap	Don't Know	How Do You Know?
<p>1. The Superintendent and School Board ensure that cross-sector partnerships are established by creating opportunities for community partners to review data on chronic absence, learn about the district attendance efforts, and identify opportunities to address attendance barriers.</p>						
<p>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.</p>						
<p>3. The district office facilitates community and agency partners working with districts to implement Tier 2 early intervention that use personalized outreach to motivate attendance, identify barriers to attendance, and connects students and families to needed supports and resources.</p>						
<p>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. Resources are tailored to address the strengths and needs of vulnerable student populations.</p>						
<p>5. The district office identifies and recruits partners to help improve attendance. These partners have the skills and capacity to address the needs of students with disabilities and other vulnerable populations.</p>						