

Here Today, Ready for Tomorrow: Messaging Health and Attendance



Today's Presenters



Elizabeth Cook
Director 50% Challenge,
Attendance Works



Elliott Attisha
Senior Fellow,
Attendance Works



Sarah Clark
Co-Director,
C.S Mott Children's
Hospital National Poll on
Children's Health



Catherine Cooney
Director of
Communications,
Attendance Works



Kari Sullivan-Custer
Education Consultant,
Attendance & Engagement
Connecticut Department
of Education

Agenda

Part 1: Understanding the Challenge

1. Establishing a Common Language
2. Identify health related barriers to attendance and understand their impact on student health, wellness and achievement
3. Understand parent's perspectives on illness and school attendance

Part 2: Using Strategic Messaging as Part of the Solution

1. Best Practices in Proactive Attendance Messaging
2. Bright Spot: Connecticut's Health-Centered Attendance Strategy
3. Bright Spot: Philadelphia's Community-Wide Health Messaging Campaign

Establishing Common Language

Establishing a Common Language

Average Daily Attendance (ADA)

- School level measure (not student level)
- Notices aggregate attendance at certain point in time (e.g., half-days, holidays, bad weather)
- Masks individual student chronic absences

Truancy

- ▲ Counts **ONLY** unexcused absences
- ▲ Emphasizes individual compliance with school rules
- ▲ Uses legal, typically more blaming and punitive, solutions

Chronic Absence

- Missing 10% counts **ALL** absences (*excused, unexcused, & suspensions*)
- Emphasizes impact of missed days and the benefits of being present
- Uses preventative, problem-solving, trauma-sensitive strategies
- Cultivates family and student engagement

Proposed Immediate Actions

Health (Physical and Mental) Focused Actions to Improving Attendance

- ✓ **Prioritize Prevention:** Support relationships and healthy habits. Maximize access to school-linked and school-based health-related screenings and resources.
- ✓ **Engage in Messaging:** Highlight why showing up to school regularly matters for well-being and learning, while providing consistent and up-to-date messaging on when a child should stay home.
- ✓ **Promote Teaming:** Include school health team members (school nurse, social worker, counselor, etc.) in the attendance team.
- ✓ **Address Health Barriers:** Identify, document and address health needs and barriers to attendance.

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Health Related Barriers & their Impact

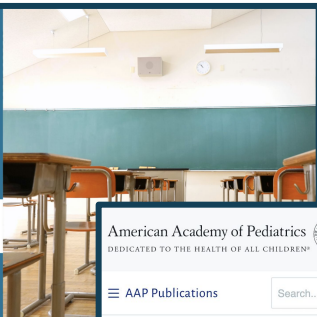


School Attendance as a Vital Sign!

Vital Signs for Pediatric Health: Chronic Absenteeism

A National Academy of Medicine
Discussion Paper

nam.edu/Perspectives



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COUNCIL ON SCHOOL HEALTH PROGRAM | MAY 01 2018

Making School Attendance a Vital Sign: A Cross-Sector Collaboration

Danielle Dooley, MD, MPH, FAAP; Heidi Schumacher, MD, FAAP; Julia DeAngelo, MPH;
Desiree de la Torre, MPH, MBA; Cynthia Adams, MPH, CHES; Megan Tschudy, MD, MPH;
Andrew Masters, M. Ed

Pediatrics (2018) 142 (1_MeetingAbstract): 735.
<https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.142.1.MA8.735>



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THRIVING SCHOOLS



Attendance as a Vital Sign

[Annie Reed, DrPh, MPP](#)

Annie Reed is the Executive Director of Thriving Schools. She has worked at the intersection of public health and public education for 15 years.

May 28, 2024



Health-Related Barriers to Learning



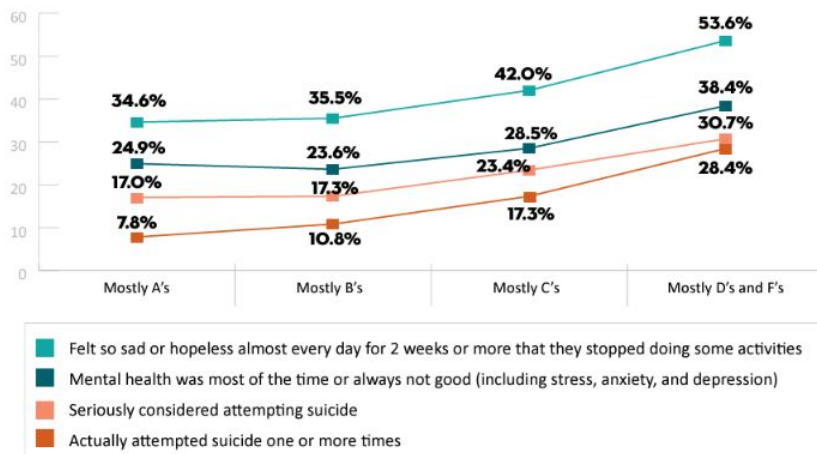
[APA Children's mental health is in crisis 2022 Trends Report](#)

[AAPD The State of Little Teeth Second Edition](#)

[CDC Data and Statistics on Children's Mental Health](#)

Youth Risk Behavior Survey

High school depressed mood and suicidality, by academic performance



High school students who receive mostly D's and F's are 3.6 times more likely to report attempting suicide as students receiving mostly A's.

2023	US
Did not go school because they felt unsafe at school or on their way to or from school	13%
Attempted suicide one or more times during 12 months prior to survey	9%
Felt sad or hopeless (almost every day for 2 weeks or more in a row so that they stopped doing some usual activities, during the 12 months before the survey).	40%
Agree or strongly agree, that they feel close to people at their school	55%

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Youth Risk Behavior Survey Data 2023

Reducing Chronic Absence Also Requires Implementing Evidence-based Health Interventions & Policy

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Infection Prevention and Screenings• School Nurses• School-Based Health Centers• Mental Health Services• Telemedicine• School Health Physicians | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Indoor Air Quality• School Breakfast• After School Programming• Regular Play and Recess• Community Schools• Home Visits• Community Health Workers• Employee Wellness |
|--|---|

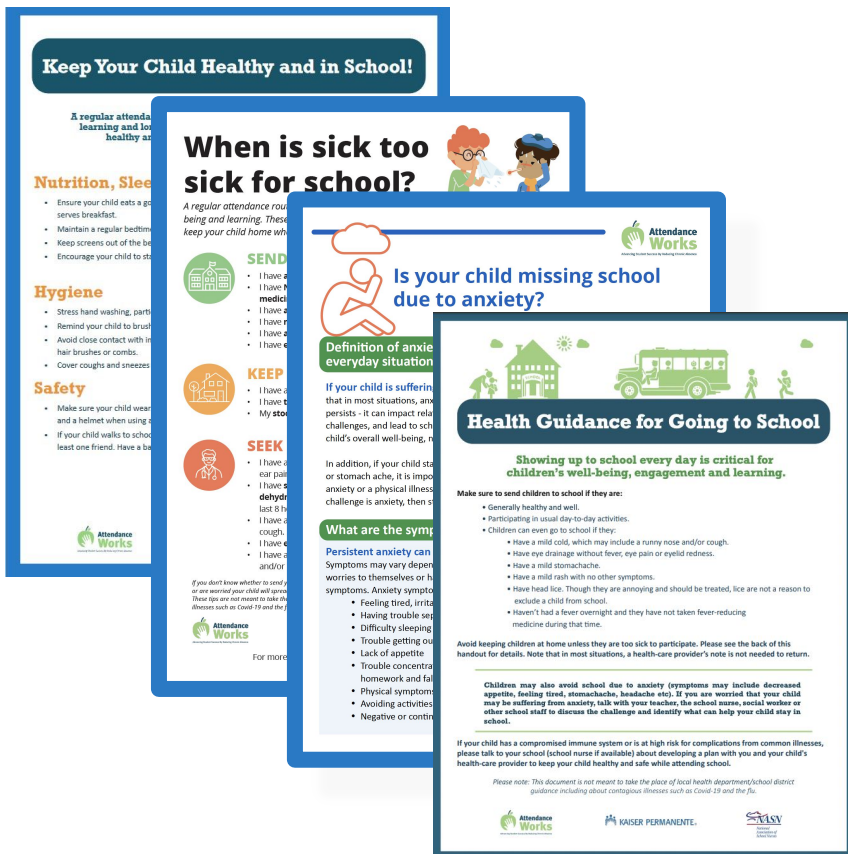


The story of the kids without
glasses and the frustrated school
health officer

Align Partners and Interventions to Reasons for Absences

Reason for Absence	Possible Interventions	Potential Partner
Anxiety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enlist trusted messengers to talk with families about health and safety • Meet with school counselor, social worker or psychologist • Offer small groups to teach calming skills 	Local pediatricians NAMI – online courses
Disengaged	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peer to peer program • Explore after school options (art, music, STEM, etc.) 	MENTOR Parks & Rec program Boys & Girls Club
Physical Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Messaging & resources for staying healthy and preventing illness spread • School nurse to coordinate health supports • Onsite screening & services (vision, hearing, dental and vaccines) 	School-based health center Local Clinic / Pediatrician
Social Determinants of Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assist with or provide resources for transportation to healthcare provider, food access and/or housing resources • Telemedicine 	Local health care providers Medicaid Plans United Way

Promoting Health Guidance



- Back-to-school packets
- Use technology and awareness campaigns
- Staff and parent meetings
- Peer to peer messaging
- Catalyze a conversation with the local health department



Thank you!

Elliott Attisha, DO FAAP
Senior Fellow for Health
elliott@attendanceworks.org



Parental Perspectives on School Attendance

Too Sick for School? Parent Perspectives on School Attendance

Sarah Clark

Co-Director, Mott Poll



What is the Mott Poll?

- Online surveys using a national panel that reflects the US Census, has demographic data on each panel member
- Multiple topics in each survey, respondents told it is a survey “about child health”
- School attendance explored in February 2024



Respondents

- 1,115 parents of a child 11-18 years attending middle school, junior high, or high school
 - Mothers 56%, Fathers 44%
 - Child age: 49% 11-14 years, 51% 15-18 years
 - Residential setting: 88% metro, 12% non-metro area
 - Education: 33% high school or less, 26% some college, 41% college degree,
 - Household income: 16% less than \$50K, 27% \$50-99K, 57% \$100K or more

Days of Missed School (as of Feb)

0 Days	19.2%
1 Day	13.8%
2-3 Days	30.6%
4-5 Days	21.4%
6-9 Days	10.1%
≥10 Days	5.0%



Parent mindset

“When it’s unclear whether your child is sick enough to miss school, what are you most likely to do?”

52.8% Keep child home just to be safe

24.7% Send child to school and hope for the best

18.5% Let child decide

3.9% Call healthcare provider for advice



Parent considerations, by child age

	11-14	15-18
If child can make it through the day	56.7%	62.0%
Risks to other kids/teachers	57.5%	50.2%
How child is behaving	45.2%	32.8%
If child has a test or presentation	28.7%	38.6%
If child needs a “mental health day”	17.3%	20.0%
If a parent can stay home	24.1%	10.1%
If child wants to attend activity	10.8%	13.2%
If there is a school nurse onsite	7.3%	6.7%

Perceived child concerns

How much does child worry about a negative impact on grades?

23.2% very much
42.1% some
30.2% not at all
4.4% unsure

How much does child worry about missing friends or activities?

13.1% very much
47.9% some
31.2% not at all
7.8% unsure

School attendance policies

- 90.6% say the school has an attendance policy
- Consequences of missing a certain # of days:
 - 63.0% Note/call home to parents
 - 48.8% Doctor's note required
 - 41.4% Possible truancy charge/violation
 - 35.2% Talk with principal/school staff
 - 21.3% Cannot participate in activities
 - 15.3% Child can get marked down on grades



Beliefs about attendance policies

“The attendance policy is needed to make sure children go to school.”

73.6% agree
14.9% disagree
11.5% unsure

“The attendance policy encourages parents to send children to school when they are sick.”

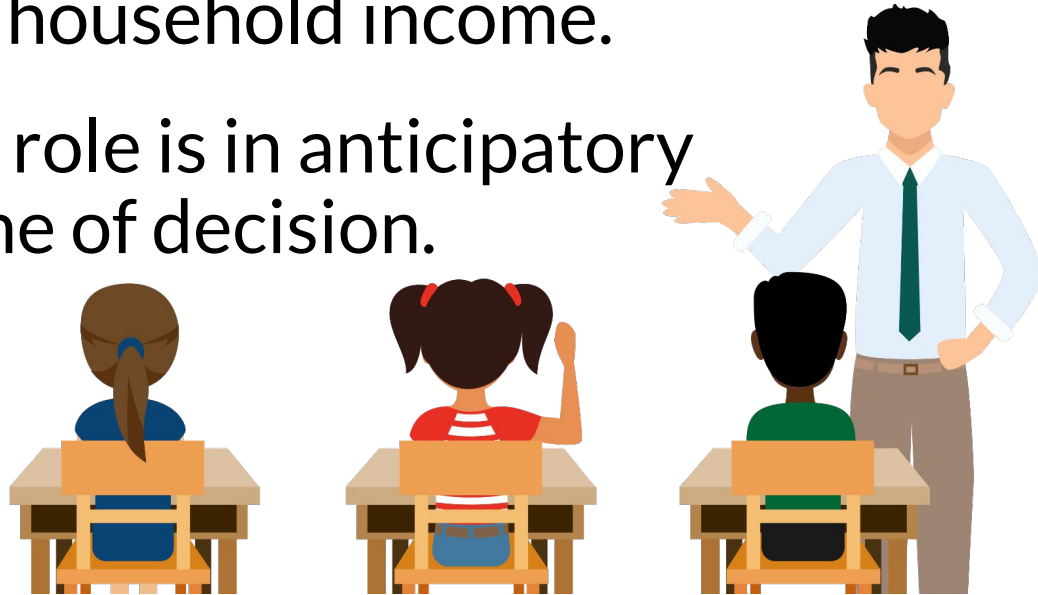
21.6% agree
62.9% disagree
15.5% unsure

“The attendance policy makes it difficult for children with a medical condition.”

25.0% agree
46.6% disagree
28.4% unsure

Key takeaways

- Half of parents have a “keep home just to be safe” mindset.
- Clear differences by household income.
- Healthcare provider role is in anticipatory guidance – not at time of decision.



Thank you!

Mott



Poll



Web: mottpoll.org

**Email:
NPCH@med.umich.edu**

X: [@csmottpoll](#)



Turn & Talk

At your tables, talk about:

- What resonated?
- What was surprising?
- What implications does this information have on effective messaging?

Best Practices in Messaging



Attendance Awareness Campaign 2025!

Here Today, Ready for Tomorrow!





Attendance Awareness Campaign Resources

- ✓ **Proclaim September Attendance Awareness Month** building off our sample proclamation
- ✓ **Find messaging** about health and chronic absence
- ✓ **Use and share** our free social media materials
- ✓ **Access Count Us In!** toolkit

PROMOTE THE CAMPAIGN

Attendance Awareness Campaign 2025

[Attendance Works](#) [About](#) [Resources](#) [Partners](#) [Sponsors](#)
[Blog](#) [Newroom](#) [Donate](#) [Contact](#) [Join the Campaign!](#)

Here Today, Ready for Tomorrow! Join the
campaign and receive regular updates.

Sign Up

Join 44,000+ listserv members and receive updates:
www.awareness.attendanceworks.org



Attendance Awareness Messaging



What is our goal?

The goal of a messaging campaign is to **shift the mindset so regular school attendance is seen as a family and community-owned priority.**

This is done using **positive messaging and an ongoing public campaign.**



Attendance Awareness Messaging



What should we consider when developing a messaging campaign?

- ➔ **Understand Your Audience:** Gather input from constituents to understand perceptions, attitudes and any gaps in knowledge
- ➔ **Develop Core Messages:** Apply constituent input in ways that provide increased understanding of impact of chronic absence and benefits of attending school on student engagement and achievement



Attendance Awareness Messaging



What should we consider when developing a messaging campaign?

- **Customize Core Messaging:** Tailor to multiple groups
- **Engage and equip strategic partners** to deliver message
- **Assess Effectiveness:** Determine if messages resonate and are effective



Thank you!

Catherine Cooney
Director, Communications
catherine@attendanceworks.org

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Bright Spot: Connecticut



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CONNECTICUT
Education

2024-2025

Showing Up Strong:
Connecticut's
Health-Focused
Approach to Reducing
Chronic Absence

Kari Sullivan-Custer
CT State Attendance
Lead

June 10, 2025

Connecticut State
Department of Education



A UNIVERSE OF
OPPORTUNITIES

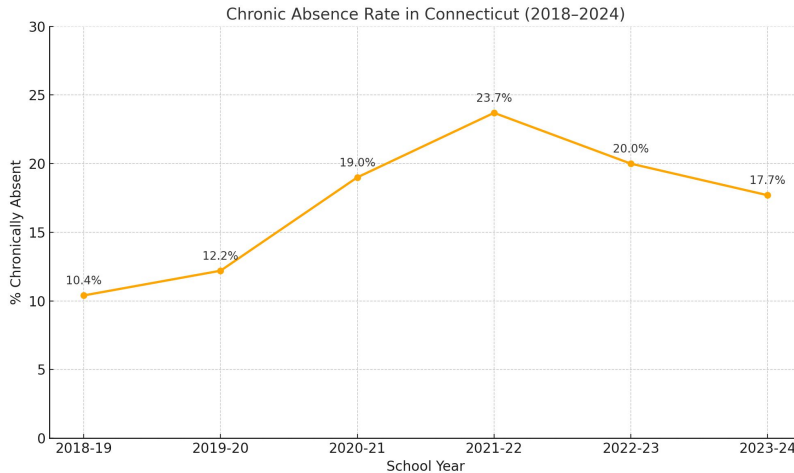
Highest Chronic Absence Ever A Wake-Up Call

2021–22: Chronic Absence > 23% statewide

Confusion about illness and quarantine policies drove up absences

Families unsure when it was safe to send children to school

Needed clear, consistent, statewide messaging





Reasons for Keeping Child(ren) Home

Major themes around why respondents are keeping children home

These themes were repeated in the open-ended questions

Family obligations.
Emergencies (e.g.,
death in the
family), vacation,
visitors, family time

Mental
health,
anxiety

Safety.
He doesn't want
to go, he feels
safer at home. I
don't feel safe
after school
violence has
happened

Illness, Chronic
illnesses,
Asthma,
COVID,
allergies

Needing breaks.
Taking a mental
health day –
Sometimes they
just need a break
or a breather,
burnout

Teachers'
insufficient
engagement
with Spanish-
speaking
students



A UNIVERSE OF
OPPORTUNITIES

Rebuilding Trust, Belonging, and Health Habits

Connecticut launched 'School is Better With You' in 2022

Partnered with a professional public relations firm

Campaign promoted belonging and the value of attendance

Messaging focused on health clarity, empathy, and consistency

Traditional (print, tv, radio), digital, and social impressions
= 60 million

Toolkits for all districts (banners, sticker, stress balls)



Being in school every day allows a student to:

- Be part of a community
- Learn and grow with friends
- Build connections with teachers and other trusted adults

Everyone misses school sometimes, but regular attendance should be the goal.

How many absences are too many?
Missing even two days of school a month disrupts routines and creates a habit of missing school—also called chronic absenteeism. Send your child to school every day so they get the full benefits of learning.

Visit ct.gov/betterwithyou to learn more about the importance of coming to school every day.

Quick Tip!
2 absences a month = too many



Home Visits Reveal the Real Barriers

September 2023



The LEAP Effect

Taking A Systemic Approach to
Improving Attendance & Engagement

*Lessons Learned from Connecticut's
Learner Engagement & Attendance Program (LEAP)*

Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) with contributions from
Attendance Works, CREC, and EdAdvance

LEAP: Learner Engagement and Attendance Program

70,000+ home visits provided critical insight through visit logs

Illness is the #1 reason families report for absences

Home visits build trust and support—not blame

*State Budget Line Item





A UNIVERSE OF
OPPORTUNITIES

Preparing for December–January: A Targeted Approach

Attendance dips every winter due to respiratory illness

Fall 2023 campaign anticipated this trend

Super Talk Tuesday engaged DPH, SBHCs, and community partners

When is Sick Too Sick for School?' flyer gave families clear guidance

Promote the important role of nurses and health clinics in schools



When is sick too sick for school?

School is better with you, even if you're a little under the weather!

Send me to school if:

- I have a runny nose or just a little cough, but no other symptoms.
- I haven't taken any fever reducing medicine for 24 hours, and I haven't had a fever during that time.
- I haven't thrown up or had any diarrhea for 24 hours.

Keep me at home if:

- I have a temperature higher than 100 degrees even after taking medicine; keep me home until I am fever-free for 24 hours without medicine.
- I'm throwing up or have diarrhea.
- My eyes are pink and crusty.

Call the doctor if:

- I have a temperature higher than 100 degrees for more than two days.
- I've been throwing up or have diarrhea for more than two days.
- I've had the sniffles for more than a week, and I'm not getting better.
- I still have asthma symptoms after using my asthma medicine (and call 911 if I'm having trouble breathing after using an inhaler).

REMINDER! If you think your child may have COVID-19, please test them prior to sending them to school.

CSDE thanks New London Public Schools in the development of this flier.



A UNIVERSE OF
OPPORTUNITIES

Health as a Statewide Priority



Supporting Your Child's Health and Well-being During the School Year

Virtual House Calls for Parents, Caregivers, and Families: A Three-Part Series

October 2024

Part 1: Supporting Child and Family Wellness

Join us for an engaging and informative discussion with Dr. Robert Keder, a Developmental Pediatrician from Connecticut Children's Hospital, as we explore ways to support children's well-being both at home and in school. In this family-friendly session, Dr. Keder will share insights into understanding challenging behaviors, child development, and how these factors influence learning. You'll gain valuable tips on recognizing risks and building resilience, and learn practical strategies to create a supportive environment for your child's growth and success.



Date: Thursday, October 10, 2024, 5:00 p.m.–6:00 p.m.

Register: Scan the QR code or visit <https://serc.info/vhccpart1>

Part 2: Preparing Your Family for Cold and Flu Season

Join us for an engaging and informative webinar presented by Dr. Sten Vermund, MD, PhD, from Yale School of Public Health and Global Virus Network, on the topic of Respiratory Health and Wellness.

Students experience fewer missed days from school when parents and schools work together to address risk factors and use prevention strategies to stop the spread of illnesses, including colds, influenza, RSV, and COVID-19. Dr. Vermund will share his expert advice and "pearls of wisdom" on best practices to participants.



Date: Thursday, October 24, 2024, 5:00 p.m.–6:00 p.m.

Register: Scan the QR code or visit <https://serc.info/vhccpart2>

Part 3: Protecting Our Youth: A Community Approach to Suicide Prevention

Connecticut experienced 10 teen suicides over this summer. While it can be difficult to discuss, it is important for parents and caregivers to talk to their children about suicide and mental health.

The CSDE invites you to join our panel of experts from the Department of Children and Families (DCF) and the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) for a conversation with parents and caregivers. We will discuss warning signs to look for, tips on how to talk to your child about their feelings, stressors and well-being, and where to turn to get help for you and your child.



Date: Thursday, November 7, 2024, 5:00 p.m.–6:00 p.m.

Register: Scan the QR code or visit <https://serc.info/vhccpart3>

The Governor appointed a pediatrician to serve on the CT State Board of Education

Health and wellness are part of Connecticut's Strategic Plan for Education

CSDE has identified health as a key strategy for improving attendance and reducing chronic absence

Hosted Health and Safety Tuesdays during the pandemic to support families and staff

Virtual House Calls launched during COVID and continue today as part of outreach and engagement

Reinforces our whole-child, cross-sector approach to student success



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The Connecticut State Department of Education is an affirmative action/equal opportunity employer.

www.attendanceworks.org

Bright Spot: Philadelphia



ELIZABETH COOK

ATTENDANCE WORKS

INTERVIEW

A Conversation on Health & Attendance



DR. KENDRA MCDOW



Thank you!

Elizabeth Cook, Ed.S

Director, 50% Challenge

elizabeth@attendanceworks.org

Elliott Attisha, DO FAAP

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elliott@attendanceworks.org

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catherine@attendanceworks.org

Sarah Clark, MPH

Research Scientist, C.S. Mott

saclark@umich.edu

Kari Sullivan-Custer

Education Consultant, CT Department of Ed.

Kari.Sullivan@ct.gov

Kendra McDow, MD, MPH, FAAP

Medical Officer

kmcdow@philasd.org