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Using Chronic Absence Data
to Improve Conditions for Learning

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Attendance Works
Advancing Student Success By Reducing Chronic Absence

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Acknowledgements

Attendance Works

(www.attendanceworks.org) is a national initiative dedicated to improving attendance policy, practice and research. It offers a rich array of free materials, tools, research and success stories to help schools and communities work together to advance student success and help close equity gaps by reducing chronic absence.

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Introduction

Reducing chronic absence goes hand in hand with cultivating positive conditions for learning. When schools provide engaging, supportive, welcoming and culturally responsive environments, families are inclined to help their children get to school, and students are motivated to attend, even when there are hurdles to getting there. Likewise, when students attend class consistently, positive conditions for learning — from supportive relationships with teachers to substantive, meaningful educational experiences — are more likely to occur.

This brief discusses how education leaders, community partners and policymakers can use chronic absence data to address inequities and improve student outcomes. It encourages efforts aimed at strengthening conditions for learning to fully leverage increasingly available chronic absence data. It reminds those who implement attendance improvement initiatives to take into account the underlying conditions for learning.

Chronic absence data provide an invaluable tool to identify when students, especially the most underserved, lack the opportunities and support they need to thrive and succeed in school. Chronic absence is typically defined as missing 10 percent or more of school for any reason: excused absences, unexcused absences and suspensions.[1] Data on chronic absence are well-documented and serve as a warning sign that a student may be off-track academically, including reading proficiently by third grade, graduating from high school and pursuing postsecondary education.[2]

This brief draws upon research[3] and addresses four components of conditions for learning:

A. **Physical and emotional health and safety**

B. **Belonging, connectedness and support**

C. **Academic challenge and engagement**

D. **Adult and student social and emotional competence**

Although a problematic learning environment contributes to higher levels of chronic absence, positive conditions for learning do not guarantee excellent student attendance.

Examine Your Data!

A new interactive map, available online, provides data on community and school factors that affect learning and chronic absence for every school and ZIP code in the United States. Data are from the 2015-16 school year and are the most recent national data available. (Find the map online at **https://www.brookings.edu/chronicabsence**.)

Produced by The Hamilton Project at the Brookings Institution, the map lets viewers check any school's chronic absence rate. Other factors such as exclusionary discipline, student-teacher and student-support staff ratios, teacher attendance, and percentage of students proficient in English/language arts and math appear when one clicks on a school.

These school factors overlay an index of community factors, including the poverty level and local air quality, that can influence conditions for learning.

The data come from the American Community Survey, county health index, Civil Rights Data Collection, EDFacts and state school report cards. Schools that are shown as red have the highest rates of chronic absence in the country; schools shown as yellow have a lower rate.

Chronic Absence Becomes A National Metric

The availability of chronic absence data has expanded dramatically in recent years. In 2013-14, the Civil Rights Data Collection began tracking chronic absence — defined as missing 15 or more days of school. Passed in 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requires all states to report on chronic absence data annually. Additionally, 36 states and the District of Columbia adopted chronic absence as a school accountability metric in their ESSA state implementation plans. Most states defined chronic absence as missing 10 percent of the school year, which is also the definition now used by EDFacts, which collects data annually from states. The increased use of chronic absence as part of reporting and accountability is motivating the development of real-time local- level reports.

However, strong conducive conditions for learning are important both for reducing absenteeism and maximizing engagement when students are in school. When teachers provide relevant and challenging curriculum — along with individualized support — students are more likely to feel that school is worth their time and effort. When schools and community partners address equity by ensuring that underserved students gain access to opportunities along with appropriate resources and supports, students are more likely to see that their needs are being met. And when schools respond to absences, incomplete schoolwork and other challenges with problem-solving as well as positive and restorative approaches — rather than punitive actions — students are more likely to feel cared about and to stay in school.

A high level of chronic absence in a school, or for a particular student population, alerts education leaders that they need to diagnose and address both school and community factors contributing to that absenteeism and affecting conditions for learning. Community and family engagement are essential to addressing many of the factors, both within and outside school, driving student absences. Chronic absence data help policy-makers and community partners identify where to allocate funding and services so that schools have adequate resources to put in place positive conditions of learning and provide the supports needed to address the family and community factors contributing to chronic absenteeism.

Nearly 8 million students were chronically absent in the 2015-16 school year, according to the most recent data available from the U.S. Department of Education. This challenge affects some schools and students more than others. In about one fourth of the 94,553 schools surveyed, 20 percent or more of students were chronically absent. Children living in poverty are two to three times more likely to be chronically absent.[4] Students from communities of color (African American, Native American, Pacific Islander, Latinx) and those with disabilities are also disproportionately affected.[5]

The power of chronic absence as a metric is that attendance data are actionable and malleable. When accurately and consistently collected and analyzed at a building, grade, subgroup and individual level, real-time attendance data help educators and community partners identify which schools and students need support. Ideally, schools identify students who are chronically absent as early as possible, during the first month of school, when challenges are easier to resolve. In addition, monitoring data throughout the school year allows for timely identification of problematic trends and consideration of promising practices that may require programmatic or policy solutions. Because chronic absence data are more frequently available than measures of emotional health or academic performance, they can serve as an indicator that early intervention is needed to prevent attendance problems from becoming entrenched.

Leaders from educational institutions at all levels of the system, as well as from advocacy organizations, public agencies and community organizations, are invited to use this brief to inform their efforts to improve attendance, conditions for learning and student outcomes. The brief:

- Describes conditions for learning and their relationship to chronic absence, plus shares a model for understanding their impact on student outcomes.

- Offers case studies in Georgia and Cleveland, Ohio — providing a state and local example of how educators can work together with other key stakeholders to improve conditions for learning and reduce chronic absence.

- Provides a five-step school action framework for using chronic absence data to identify and address school and community factors that affect attendance and conditions for learning.

- Links to interactive data maps, produced by the Hamilton Project at the Brookings Institution, that can identify where action is needed by showing levels of chronic absence at every public school in the United States and offering information about relevant community and school characteristics.

Too often, attendance has been treated as a minor concern handled by support staff or a matter for the court system. Chronic absence data have power and promise — but only when used to inform and guide state, district, community and school strategies for improving outcomes for students. Our hope is that stakeholders with a wide array of interests — whole child and whole school support,[6] social emotional learning, school improvement, community schools, equity, reducing educational disparities, increasing high school graduation rates and college access — recognize that they can leverage chronic absence data to inform their efforts to create positive conditions for learning and to reduce educational inequity.

Conditions for Learning and Their Connection to Chronic Absence

Certain conditions for learning open the school door for students, literally and figuratively, helping pull in and engage students and families.[7] The four conditions identified in this brief help create a conducive learning environment and positively affect attendance, motivation, engagement, achievement and student well-being.[8] Moreover, they can boost teacher satisfaction, attendance and retention.[9] The four conditions also affect each other: When one condition is in place, the others are more likely to take root as well.

School leaders can support the creation of conducive learning environments. Ensuring that all four conditions for learning are in place requires supportive school leadership as well as meaningful relationships between and among students and the adults at school. Although educators and schools can address poor classroom and school conditions for learning, as well as buffer the effects of nonschool factors, others also have important roles. Families play an important part in children's learning and act as their most important advocates across school settings, while community agencies and leaders can provide safe environments and necessary supports.[10]

The four conditions for learning are shown in Figure 1, and detailed below.

Figure 1.

Physical and Emotional Health and Safety

Adult and Student Social and Emotional Competence

Belonging, Connectedness and Support

Academic Challenge and Engagement

Relationships are Essential to Positive Conditions for Learning

A. Physical and Emotional Health and Safety

Students are much more likely to be in class every day if they feel physically and emotionally healthy and safe. Safety is not only important for children's well-being while in school, it is critical to ensuring that families feel comfortable sending their children *to* school.

Physical health includes factors such as access to health care services; physical safety means a child does not fear or experience bullying or physical violence from students or educators. Safe environments support student wellness (e.g., access to safe and clean lavatories, drinking water and food) and eliminate health risks such as high levels of stress or access to drugs.

Emotional safety is as essential as physical safety in fostering a positive learning environment. This includes identity safety[11] as well as feeling understood and
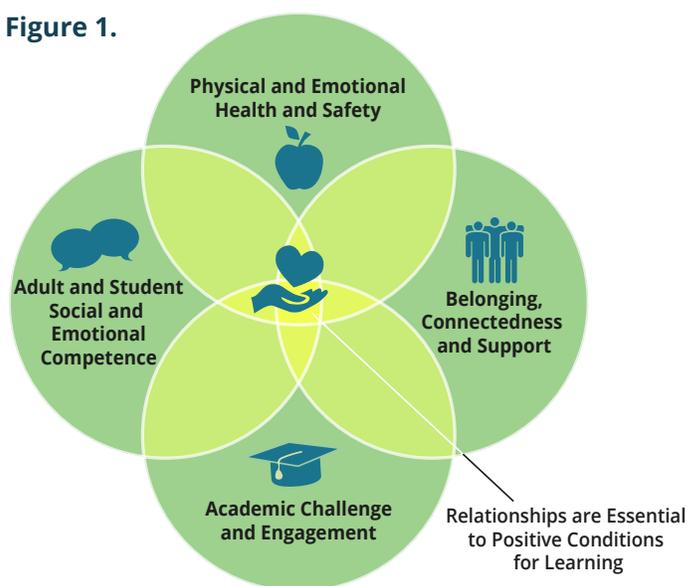
supported as learners. Students and their families need to feel that school discipline and safety policies are caring, fair and appropriate. While all students need emotional safety, it is especially important for students with disabilities, students of color and students from any marginalized groups who struggle with culturally unresponsive environments that do not permit them to fully express and develop their identity.

When students feel safe, they are more likely to be at ease at school; to concentrate and engage in analytical, creative and reflective work; and respond to others responsibly. Safety also includes creating environments where students are able to take productive academic risks, such as raising their hand in class, challenging groupthink or thinking outside the box. Alternatively, when students feel vulnerable, unsafe or under attack, they may react by shutting down or acting out.

The Impact of Stress, Anxiety and Fear: What the Science Shows

Stress and fear can undermine engagement, learning and connectedness, which contributes to chronic absenteeism. Students and educators may respond to unsafe and stressful school environments with avoidance behaviors such as not going to a school that feels unsafe. They might develop unhealthy coping mechanisms such as self-medication, or take dangerous steps to protect themselves. All of these behaviors can contribute to absenteeism. Some students, particularly those who have been traumatized, may respond through mood disorders (e.g., depression and anxiety), reactive aggression and even suicide. Not surprisingly, experiencing trauma is also associated with higher rates of chronic absence.[12]

Although a modest amount of temporary stress may encourage productivity, higher levels are harmful, particularly when the stress is persistent and unbuffered by social support. When we experience stress, our body responds in predictable ways that are part of our neurobiological makeup. We secrete hormones such as cortisol that can interfere with memory, self-regulation and cognitive performance. At the same time, our heart rate, blood pressure, inflammatory reactivity and blood sugar levels increase, which can contribute to chronic health problems. We respond to fear and stress by moving into a fight-or-flight mode. We become hypervigilant and narrowly focus on responding to a perceived threat.[13]

Our responses to fear and stress can sometimes escalate an existing conflict and undermine access to the emotional support that can help buffer the effects of fear and stress. For example, we may respond with counter-aggression; to feel safe or in control, we may make others unsafe or we may reinforce people doing what makes us feel unsafe. Paradoxically, these responses may undermine the connection to others that can help buffer the negative effect of fear and stress.

B. Belonging, Connectedness and Support

Like safety, a sense of belonging and the experience of reliable, caring relationships are basic human needs. Students who feel that they belong are more likely to show up to school regularly[14] and engage academically. Caring support can buffer the effects of adversity and stress. Students who feel connected and supported are less likely to engage in substance abuse and other behaviors that can undermine attendance and learning.

Schools and educators can create opportunities for students to develop positive relationships with each other and experience belonging. This can be done through cultural references (e.g., what is or is not displayed on classroom walls) and rituals such as morning meetings, as well as through smaller class size and access to higher-level courses. School policies regarding extracurricular activities, discipline and student participation opportunities can be designed to ensure that all students feel included.

Educators and staff should offer students the care and support they need to handle challenges and adversities that can undermine academic success. Students more often ask for help, persist and achieve when they are taught by and receive support from adults who demonstrate they care about them and are culturally competent and responsive. Support needs to be both instrumental (e.g., "Let me help you understand the text") and affective (e.g., "I am here with you" or "I have your back").

To provide effective support, educators must be attuned to students' needs and have relationship skills that enable them to provide help in a respectful manner. Educators need to create an environment where students feel heard and understood. Student learning is best supported when district and school leaders recognize the value of providing time and space for adults working in schools to refine their social-emotional skills.

Families also need to feel a strong sense of connection, belonging and support. Academic outcomes improve when schools engage parents in their children's learning through social networks, encourage parents to assume leadership roles and provide parents with classes that further their education and/or their child's.[15]

What Is Cultural and Linguistic Competence?

Cultural and linguistic competence can help address the challenges created by the disconnect between an educator's ethnicity and an increasingly diverse student population. The vast majority of today's educators (about 80 percent) are white[16] and English speaking, while over half of all public school children are students of color, and nearly one in four speaks a language other than English at home.[17] Cultural and linguistic competence involves the capacity to: (1) value diversity, (2) conduct self-assessment, (3) manage and address the dynamics and institutionalization of differences in privilege, (4) acquire and institutionalize cultural and linguistic knowledge to improve teaching and support, (5) adapt teaching and family outreach to the cultural and linguistic contexts of the communities served, (6) be culturally responsive[18] and (7) be respectful of all cultures.

Individual outreach can make a difference, especially when chronic absence is a significant challenge. Students whose families were visited by a teacher as part of a relational home visiting model developed by the non-profit Parent Teacher Home Visits (PTHV) were 21 percent less likely to be chronically absent, a program evaluation conducted by Johns Hopkins University found. Skillfully conducted relational home visits support daily attendance by enabling family members to share their personal challenges, provide information about their child's unique needs and/or disabilities, and forge a meaningful partnership with the teacher.

C. Academic Challenge and Engagement

Academic challenge includes providing opportunities for students to engage in personally relevant learning that stretches them. Sometimes confused with rigor alone, challenge means more than high standards and expectations — it also means support from teachers to meet those high standards and expectations.

Academic challenge occurs when curricula are learner-centered, support active learning and nurture creative problem-solving. High-quality lessons engage students' interests, promote deep learning and are both culturally responsive and linguistically appropriate. This applies to learners' interaction with teachers, staff and other students as well as with instructional media, materials and activities. Learning is most productive when students view themselves as learners.

Families with young children, in particular, need to feel that their child's school is engaging, meets their child's developmental needs and supports their child's long-term success. If families understand the value of school lessons, they are more likely to make sure their children attend. Chronic absence is typically higher in preschool and kindergarten than in any other elementary grade. A survey by the Ad Council found that this pattern of missing school corresponds to students' ages; parents of young children are less likely to believe that absences are a problem for their children's educational success.[19]

D. Adult and Student Social and Emotional Competence

Social and emotional competence includes skills, beliefs and dispositions. Social and emotional skills include the ability to understand and manage oneself and one's relationships, as well as to respect differences among people and cultures.[20] Beliefs and dispositions include attitudes such as whether teachers and students value learning and believe that all students can learn. They also include ways of being that are empathetic, kind and curious. Educators, students and families can work to improve social and emotional competencies, while school, district, state and federal policies can be designed to promote social emotional learning for students and adults.

Social and emotional skills include the ability to understand and manage oneself and one's relationships, as well as to respect differences among people and cultures.

Adult social and emotional competence is particularly important to the conditions for learning. Teaching and other school-related jobs are stressful; stress can contribute to negative encounters with students and parents. These negative encounters can include subtle, unconscious behavior during class, such as calling on some students less or giving them less time to respond to a question. Or it can mean adults expressing anger through their behavior or language. Negative encounters between teachers and students can result in punitive and exclusionary approaches to discipline, which diminish opportunities to learn and contribute to students being held back a grade and/or dropping out. Educators may be unaware of how stereotypes affect their perceptions and how bias affects their decisions about individual students, for example, by over-referring students to special education and by disciplining certain students more harshly and frequently than others.
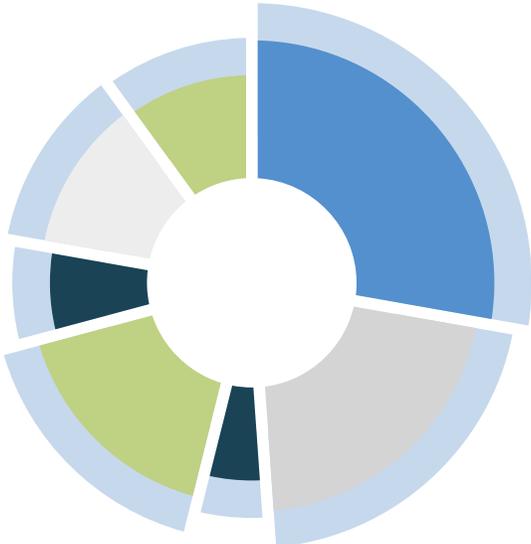
How Does This All Fit Together?

Conditions for learning are affected by school practices and policies as well as by what is happening in the communities where students and families live. When communities are challenged by high levels of poverty and violence, inadequate public services and environmental injustices, creating positive conditions for learning in school is more essential and can be more challenging.

Positive conditions are particularly important for underserved groups such as students of color, students living in poverty and those diagnosed with a disability. For example, a study of the relationship between school climate and low-income children's literacy and math skills during the transition to kindergarten found that low adult support within the school was significantly associated with children's lower literacy and math skills in kindergarten. Similarly, children who were in schools with high levels of adult support showed stronger literacy and math skills.[21]

Unfortunately for students who face challenges in the community, inequities often intensify when students encounter negative conditions in school, which may undermine their motivation to attend class and learn.[22] For example, a student may be subjected to harsh school discipline policies that lead to suspension over a behavior that could be triggered by stress at home or past trauma. At the same time, these students also are more likely than others to attend schools with disengaging conditions for learning.[23]

What happens in school can help buffer against or reduce the impact of adversity students and their families may face in the community.[24] When school is engaging and welcoming, students are more compelled to show up. A welcoming and supportive school also helps ensure that students and their families gain access to needed community supports such as medical professionals, mental health services and housing assistance. In these situations, educators can acknowledge the adverse circumstances beyond their control while also addressing the stumbling blocks in school that inadvertently cause students to miss class.[25]

The diagram on the right (Figure 2) offers a way to envision the relationships between communities and schools, school and community factors, conditions for learning in schools, chronic absence and student outcomes. The school, nested within a community,

is affected by the community's economic, social, environmental, health and demographic factors. Although these factors impact the school, they do not have to determine the school's conditions for learning or predict chronic absence levels. For example, while higher levels of chronic absence often follow the contours of poverty, there are bright spots, such as schools in communities facing hardship that create positive conditions for learning and consequently experience lower levels of chronic absence.

Figure 2.
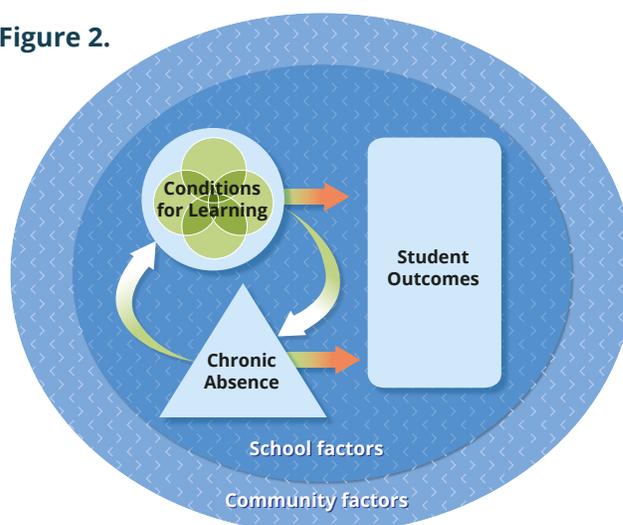
Conditions for learning and chronic absence, embedded within school and community factors, affect each other.

The diagram also shows how conditions for learning and chronic absence are interrelated: Both school and community factors have an impact on student outcomes. Insufficient conditions for learning at school are associated with higher levels of chronic absence, and it follows that higher levels of chronic absence are associated with insufficient conditions for learning in a school. On the bright side, positive conditions for learning and high attendance rates can boost student outcomes in any school or community.

Case Studies: Georgia and Cleveland

Case studies from the state of Georgia and the city of Cleveland, Ohio, help to illustrate how chronic absence and conditions of learning are interrelated. High levels of chronic absence reflect poor conditions of learning, while investments in school climate and conditions for learning help to reduce chronic absence. Data-informed action, relationship building and positive problem-solving are essential ingredients for success.

Efforts to Promote a Positive Learning Climate for Young Students Help Reduce Absences in Georgia

Using research and data as their guide, Georgia education leaders are creating a new system and approach designed to improve student attendance and educational outcomes. Beginning with the simple question of how schools and communities could create the conditions where children *want* to attend school, leaders across the state have been taking concrete steps to promote positive learning climates, ensuring that students feel welcome, safe, connected, and engaged in all aspects of school.

Two major developments combined to bring attention to the need to ensure positive conditions for learning, starting with the entry to school. First, state and community leaders came together in 2013 to improve third-grade reading, forming the Get Georgia Reading (GGR) Campaign. A positive learning climate was adopted as one of the four pillars of the campaign's framework for action — along with language and nutrition, access, and teacher preparation and effectiveness.

Second, in 2014, the initial results of Georgia's groundbreaking School Climate Star Rating system revealed significant challenges with school climate in elementary schools. This insight motivated two early leaders in the GGR Campaign — the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) and the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL), working together — to develop training to help K-3 teachers foster a positive learning climate by applying classroom practices that promote student social and emotional development.

In addition, state legislators passed a law in 2018 that prohibits students in PreK – 3 from being suspended from school for more than five days without first receiving a multi-tiered system of supports that constitute a framework for identifying and addressing students' academic and behavioral needs.

The efforts to improve the early learning climate have already yielded a 10 percent reduction in out-of-school suspensions (OSS) in K-3, from 14,292 suspensions in 2017-18 to 12,831 in the following year. This drop in OSS helps decrease student absences in the earliest grades.

While the expectation is to see attendance increase and suspensions decrease each year as a result of improved school climate, GGR Campaign partners also recognize the need to address external dynamics, such as health and housing, that affect chronic absence. State leaders are leveraging Medicaid reimbursement to significantly increase the number of school nurses. Affordable housing developers are being incentivized to build properties that include supports addressing barriers to educational attainment, such as on-site early learning centers and preventive health screenings. Also, a state law passed in 2019 includes provisions for supporting tenants' concerns regarding health and safety issues such as mold and other environmental triggers for asthma.

In summary, Georgia leaders recognize that improving outcomes for our youngest children requires a comprehensive approach addressing factors inside and outside of school that affect learning.

(For more details, see in-depth case study in Appendix A.)

Get 2 School. You Can Make It!
A Cleveland Success Story

The Get 2 School. You Can Make It! attendance campaign of the Cleveland Metropolitan School District is a comprehensive positive, problem-solving approach that engages families and students and leverages the power of engaging the entire community. Since the campaign's launch in school year 2015-16, the percentage of students with on-track attendance (missing 10 or fewer days) increased from 43 percent to 58.6 percent, and chronic absence fell from 44 percent to 30 percent. The PBS NewsHour segment "Empty Chairs" showcased CMSD's Get 2 School. You Can Make It! campaign in March 2018.

The attendance gains also reflect and build upon a prior investment in conditions for learning which began in 2008 in response to a shooting tragedy in the fall of 2007. A student on suspension returned to his high school and opened fire, wounding two teachers and two classmates before killing himself. The incident spurred CMSD administrators to ask the American Institutes for Research (AIR) to assess gaps and offer recommendations for how schools could improve connectedness and enhance students' mental wellness and safety.

The analysis led to the multi-tiered Humanware initiative, aimed at building the social and emotional capacity of adults and students. Universal components (Tier 1) include PATHS (a PreK - 5 curriculum that helps children understand and manage their emotions), and assessing and improving conditions for learning, which are monitored by a conditions for learning survey. Tier 2 and Tier 3 approaches include Planning Centers, as alternatives to in-school suspension, and student support teams.

The shooting had a powerful impact on Lorri Hobson, who leads the attendance campaign with the help of a district committee and the staunch support of CMSD CEO Eric Gordon. The incident inspired Hobson to shift Cleveland's approach to truancy away from referring students to courts to engaging families and offering early intervention. Hobson talks about this shift in a video interview.

With significant support from key community partners such as the Cleveland Browns Foundation, CMSD's campaign has adopted a robust array of strategies, including a phone bank, incentives for good as well as perfect attendance, using celebrities and athletes to send a strong message of attendance, and providing students with clothing and uniforms. Read this story to learn more about the partnership with the Cleveland Browns Foundation.

The Attendance Campaign Committee — comprising CEO Eric Gordon, representatives from departments within the district and community partners — meets monthly, and makes recommendations designed to bring about behavioral change in the schools, district and community. CMSD also added staff in its attendance office to help build the capacity of principals and their leadership teams. Equally important, CMSD uses a data dashboard to monitor progress.

"If anything helps you take a pulse and measure your effectiveness in improving conditions of learning, it is your attendance," Hobson says.

(For more details, see in-depth case study in Appendix B.)

With significant support from key community partners such as the Cleveland Browns Foundation, CMSD's campaign has adopted a robust array of strategies, including a phone bank, incentives for good as well as perfect attendance, using celebrities and athletes to send a strong message of attendance, and providing students with clothing and uniforms.

School Action Framework

This action framework outlines how chronic absence data can be used to diagnose and address factors in a school and community that affect attendance and conditions for learning. To determine what is needed, the framework focuses on analysis at the school level because assets, opportunities and conditions can vary widely across schools. It also encourages action at the school level.

Stakeholders in the community, district and state should keep in mind, however, that they also play a key role in supporting implementation of the action framework. They can equip schools with knowledge, skills and resources to foster positive conditions for learning and reduce absenteeism. They can use chronic absence data to inform how to allocate technical assistance, funding or other supports.

STEP 1: Determine chronic absence levels

How big a challenge is chronic absence in your school and for whom? To find out, ask these key questions:

- Does it affect students across the board? Consistently high levels across the board are a sign of systemic challenges and barriers.

- Are some student populations, grades or neighborhoods more affected than others? If so, resources should be targeted to better understand and address the challenges for students who face higher levels of chronic absence.

- Are the chronic absence levels for your school or particular student populations better or worse than those in other schools or districtwide? High levels for multiple schools suggest challenges related to policy barriers in the school or community. A more systemic response, one that is broader than a single school, may be needed.

Chronic absence data can be obtained from several sources:

- Ask your school district for a report of chronic absence by school, grade and student subpopulations.

Figure 3.

STEP 1: Determine chronic absence levels.

STEP 2: Examine overlap with other data.

STEP 3: Identify school and community factors affecting attendance and conditions for learning.

STEP 4: Use insights to strengthen prevention and early intervention.

STEP 5: Take coordinated action and engage in continuous improvement.
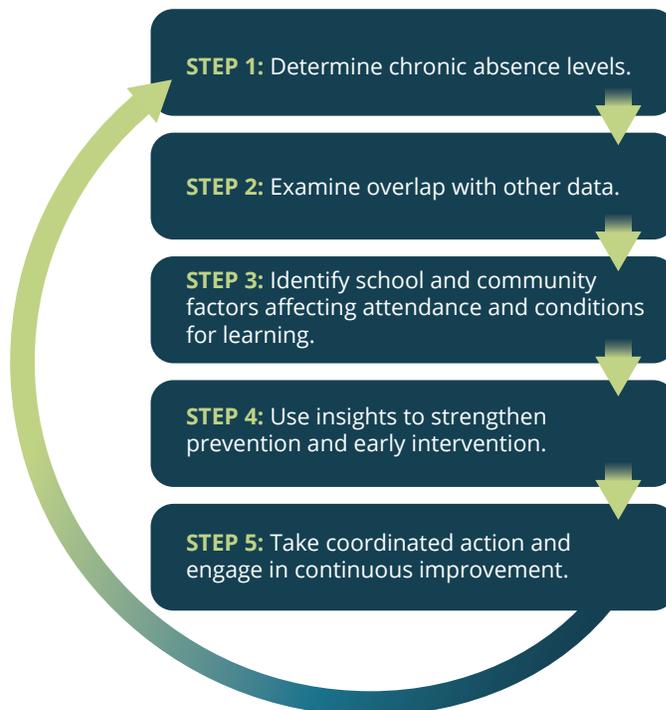
- Check the website of your state department of education for chronic absence data. (The majority post chronic absence data annually although the information is not always easy to find.)

- Obtain an initial picture by using the Chronic Absence Across the US Map developed in 2018 by the Hamilton Project at the Brookings Institution, based on school year 2015-16 data from the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights. The map shows the chronic absence problem at multiple levels: school, district, state and national, as well as for student subpopulations. Look for more current and in-depth information from state and local sources. Data collected nationally do not include information on community assets that can be leveraged to address risk factors.

STEP 2: **Examine chronic absence data in the context of other school and community factors**

Chronic absence and attendance patterns are best understood within the broader context of school and community factors that support a positive learning environment. Accompanying this brief is a new interactive map by the Hamilton Project at the Brookings Institution, entitled *Chronic Absence: School and Community Factors*. (The map can be found at https://www.brookings.edu/chronicabsence.) When users click on a school, several measurable and universally available data points that relate to conditions for learning are displayed, including rates of chronic absence, exclusionary discipline, student-teacher and student-support staff ratios, teacher attendance and student achievement.

For each ZIP code, the map shows an index of data points representing community factors that can influence conditions for learning. These metrics include the share of the adult population who did not graduate from high school; the adult employment-to-population ratio; the share of children living in poverty, without health insurance or living in the same home as the previous year; and household median income. The data are from the U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2013-17 five-year file, accessed through IPUMS. Three data points — the extent of residential racial segregation, life expectancy and average daily air quality — are applied to all ZIP codes within a county and are from the County Health Rankings. These metrics, combined using confirmatory factor analysis to create a single numerical value for each ZIP code, were selected because they are measurable representations of community factors that affect conditions for learning and because the data are available nationally.

Looking at chronic absence data alongside school and community factors that affect conditions for learning can help guide a deeper inquiry. Schools with high chronic absence levels located in communities with challenging characteristics need to address the impacts of what is happening in both settings. If chronic absence is high but the community index suggests the community is relatively well-resourced, it might be worth examining how school practices or policies may be affecting conditions for learning. If chronic absence

is low and the community index shows significant challenges, this could mean that a school has adjusted its practices to ameliorate the negative impact of community difficulties.

Keep in mind, however, that this map offers only a preliminary sense of the school and community factors, as there are many conditions for learning detailed above for which data are not universally available. The map is meant to describe some community and school factors nationally and to inspire deeper analysis locally using much more recent data — ideally available from your school district and other local or state sources — that may provide additional information about community assets that can avert or buffer the effects of community risk factors. Some community assets can be difficult to define using commonly available measures. To be properly communicated, community assets may need to be explored and captured through asset mapping.[26]

STEP 3: **Identify school and community factors affecting attendance and conditions for learning**

The factors that drive absences and conditions for learning vary by school, community and student population. Consider using a combination of qualitative and quantitative data to examine the extent to which students and their families experience the four conditions for learning. Data should be examined overall as well as broken down by classroom, grade, student population and, if possible, neighborhood.

Surveys of students and families, plus well-designed focus groups that employ an intentional sampling process, can reveal whether students feel emotionally safe, are connected to an adult in the school building, frequently miss school due to illness, find the curriculum meaningful and engaging, and/or are experiencing bullying or receiving social support.[27] Surveys or focus groups of teachers can offer additional insights. School district data (e.g., on suspensions, presence of chronic health conditions, or availability and placement of students in academically challenging classes) can be used to verify and expand analysis. Data from community or public agencies (e.g., regarding the prevalence of chronic health conditions, access to health care, housing stability, availability of public transportation and/or crime) also can shed light on community factors affecting how students and families experience school.

If chronic absence is concentrated among particular student populations (such as ethnicity, gender or students with disabilities), pay special attention to those populations to understand their school experience, and work with those students and their families to improve their school experience. Given the long and unfortunate history of biased and overly harsh school discipline practices that have affected students of color and those with disabilities, it is especially important to examine whether these populations are overrepresented among the students being referred to the office for disciplinary action or being suspended or expelled.

Regarding students with disabilities, it is often helpful to examine how well their educational needs are being met, whether they have access to rich and engaging learning opportunities and are learning in the least restrictive environment possible, and whether attendance and engagement patterns are taken into account during the development of their educational plans and supports.[28] High levels of chronic absence for a particular group of students may indicate that the universal efforts to strengthen conditions for learning for all students are insufficient. You can address this by enhancing universal interventions and/or by strengthening and targeting early and intensive interventions.

Schools also can use data to find out what is working to engage students. For example, if attendance is particularly high in one classroom, find out why. Is the teacher using particular practices that could be shared and replicated, such as greeting students at the door or providing engaging classroom instruction? Is attendance higher for students attending after-school programs? If so, could their most engaging activities be incorporated into the normal school day, or could more space be set aside in the after-school programs for students at risk for chronic absence.

Schools can and should combine research with action to improve conditions for learning. By establishing a phone bank to contact the families of chronically absent students, the Cleveland Metropolitan School District (CMSD) learned what its biggest attendance barriers were and increased those families' sense of connection and support. For example, after learning that a lack of clothes was keeping students from school, the district and its partner, the Cleveland Browns Foundation, created a "Special Teams Package" program that now provides clothes and supplies to thousands of students each year with the help of its nonprofit partner, Shoes and Clothes for Kids. See a more detailed case study in Appendix B.

Once schools and communities detect challenges affecting conditions for learning and chronic absence, they can identify who has the assets and resources to address them. It may be families, faith-based organizations, nonprofits, public agencies, businesses, etc. For example, if students do not feel connected to an adult outside of school who can support their academic success, civic organizations might be able to contribute mentors. Or if food and nutrition sources are lacking for some in the community, faith-based organizations and food banks may be able to expand the availability of healthy foods at school. Asset mapping can help schools, districts and community partners assess what actions are doable, high priority and offer promise for short- or long-term change.

Surveys of students and families, plus well-designed focus groups that employ an intentional sampling process, can reveal whether students feel emotionally safe, are connected to an adult in the school building, [or] frequently miss school due to illness.

Assess if the situation can be improved by modifying current practices or policies. For example, if bullying is identified as a challenge for some or all students, educators can investigate their school's typical responses. Does the school engage in restorative practices that help students learn new behaviors without being pushed out of school? Are staff equipped to implement a restorative-practices approach? For example, when Georgia data showed that school climate was worse in the elementary grades, it led to the implementation of new practices to promote a positive learning environment for young children and their families.

If poor health is a major problem affecting students and families, find out how the school responds when families call in to report that their child is sick and will be absent. Does the school simply accept the excused absence? Could school staff express concern, offer information about available health services and provide families with tips about preventing students from getting ill or avoiding absences due to anxiety?

STEP 4: Use insights to strengthen prevention and early intervention

Research and experience show that virtually all students, including the most underserved, can attain strong academic outcomes if provided with appropriate supports that ensure they experience positive conditions for learning.[29] The key is taking an approach that begins with universal supports that promote positive conditions for learning and prevent chronic absence, as well as offering early interventions supplemented, when necessary, by intensive supports.[30] Insights gained by a school about its key challenges help the school tailor its prevention and early intervention supports to address specific challenges (such as trauma, bullying, lack of access to health care, unstable housing, etc.) faced by students and families in the school and/or community.

When effective universal supports are in place, it is easier to identify students who need early intervention. For example, all students benefit from the universal adoption of trauma-sensitive practices aimed at preventing the repeat traumatization of children. (See more about trauma-sensitive schools from the National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments.) These practices also can reduce the incidence of problem behavior in schools, including behaviors that lead to disciplinary actions, academic disconnection and missed school.

At the same time, an increase in students' pro-social and academically engaging behavior reduces teacher stress. This, in turn, makes it less likely that teachers will respond to students in an alienating manner that contributes to discipline disparities. It also increases the likelihood that teachers have the time and energy to understand student interests, personalize learning, differentiate instruction and provide emotional support.

Given the strong connection between conditions for learning and chronic absence, schools should adopt a comprehensive, tiered system of supports that spurs improvements in attendance, behavior and academics.

STEP 5: Take coordinated action and engage in continuous improvement

Implementation of these steps requires coordinated action by schools, districts and their community partners. They also need to monitor data and adjust strategies over time, as necessary.

At the school site level, a leadership team is needed to:

1. Examine data trends. Determine who is most affected and whether the trend is getting better or worse. The data should be reviewed at least twice a month, if not weekly.

2. Use both qualitative and quantitative data to understand what factors are eroding conditions for learning and increasing chronic absenteeism, as well as to determine what assets can be leveraged to improve the learning environment and promote attendance.

3. Develop, implement and galvanize support for a multi-tiered strategy that begins with prevention and early intervention.

4. Monitor whether interventions are working as planned and/or yielding new insights about barriers and challenges that require a programmatic intervention.

Principals and school staff should determine, based upon local conditions, if existing teams — such as Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), school climate, Response to Intervention (RTI), Instructional Leadership Team — can oversee these functions or if a new group should be formed. It is best practice to utilize a small number of teams to avoid

fragmentation and duplication of efforts.[31] Given the high levels of chronic absence typically experienced by students with an Individualized Education Program (IEP), schools should ensure that their leadership team includes staff with special education expertise.

As schools engage in planning, they should find ways to include and build on the insights of community partners, parents and students, who can offer invaluable information about the challenges and opportunities to improve conditions for learning and attendance. As long as the data being shared and monitored offer appropriate protection so that individual students are not identifiable, stakeholders who are not school staff should be allowed to view and help interpret the information.

In addition, each school should have in place a student support team that assesses individual student needs, connects students and their families to appropriate supports, and harnesses the resources of pupil service personnel such as counselors, school social workers, school psychologists, special educators and nurses. Care needs to be taken when determining who participates in these meetings as confidentiality is an important consideration in student-specific discussions. As student support teams help individual students, they should also be on the lookout to see if large numbers of students face the same challenge, which may necessitate programmatic or policy changes.

Principals and school staff should determine, based upon local conditions, if existing teams can oversee these functions or if a new group should be formed.

At the school district and community level, teams should be in place to:

- Ensure the availability of actionable and meaningful data reports.

- Routinely unpack, analyze and utilize data to inform district-wide action. Data trends would be reviewed on at least a quarterly or, ideally, monthly basis.

- Engage relevant community partners and public agencies.

- Determine where there is a need for new or improved district-wide policy or programmatic responses.

- Support the implementation of effective school teams that support attendance and positive conditions for learning.

- Promote shared accountability and continuous improvement.

Also, regional, state and national organizations are a critical source of technical assistance, guidance and support to ensure that district and site-level practices are in place.

Conclusion

Efforts to reduce chronic absence and improve conditions for learning are interrelated and essential to improving educational outcomes, particularly for our most underserved students. When education leaders, community partners and policymakers work in tandem, they are well-positioned and well-equipped to implement strategies that encourage children to attend school regularly and, in turn, help them thrive academically.

While educators cannot control all of the factors that affect student learning, they can create positive conditions for learning that provide a buffer against or reduce the impact of challenges that students experience away from school. Positive conditions for learning are even more crucial when students, families and communities face crises, either from policies that result in less access to health care, subsidized housing and other supports, or natural disasters such as fires, hurricanes or earthquakes.

Case studies of work in Georgia and Cleveland illustrate how communities, schools, families and students benefit from concerted effort to address factors that contribute to poor conditions for learning and absenteeism. Chronic absence data can be used to identify where additional resources are needed to improve conditions for learning. Monitored regularly, chronic absence data can also help reform efforts to assess early in the process whether the work is on track for success, allowing time for a mid-course correction if it is not having the anticipated impact.

We hope that stakeholders from many quarters, with many interests, will view this brief as a call to action to deploy increasingly available chronic absence data in aid of their work to provide all students with the conducive learning environment they need to thrive in school and beyond.

APPENDIX A

CASE STUDY: Efforts to Promote a Positive Learning Climate for Young Students Help Reduce Absences in Georgia

Overview

Using research and data as their guide, Georgia leaders are creating a new system and approach designed to improve student attendance and educational outcomes. Beginning with the simple question of how schools and communities could create the conditions where children *want* to attend school, leaders across the state have been taking concrete steps to promote positive learning climates in schools, ensuring that students feel welcome, safe, connected and engaged in all aspects of school.

Two major developments combined to bring attention to the need to ensure positive conditions for learning, starting with the entry to school. First, state and community leaders came together in 2013 to improve third-grade reading, forming the Get Georgia Reading (GGR) Campaign. A positive learning climate was adopted as one of the four pillars of the campaign's framework for action — along with language nutrition, access, and teacher preparation and effectiveness.

Second, in 2014, the initial results of Georgia's School Climate Star Rating system revealed significant challenges with school climate in elementary schools. This insight motivated two early leaders in the GGR Campaign — the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) and the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL), working together to develop training to help K-3 teachers foster a positive learning climate by applying classroom practices that promote student social and emotional development.

The efforts to improve the early learning climate have already yielded a 10 percent reduction in out-of-school suspensions (OSS) in K-3 , from 14,292 in 2017-18 to 12,831 in 2018-19. This drop in OSS helps decrease student absences in the earliest grades.

While the focus on school climate is essential, GGR Campaign partners also recognize the need to address external dynamics, such as health and housing, that affect chronic absence. State leaders are leveraging Medicaid reimbursement to significantly increase the number of school nurses. The Georgia Department of Community Affairs is incentivizing affordable housing

developers to build properties that include supports addressing barriers to educational attainment, such as on-site early learning centers, on-site preventive health screenings, and health education. Also, a state law passed in 2019 includes provisions for supporting tenants' concerns regarding health and safety issues such as mold and other environmental triggers for asthma. In summary, Georgia leaders recognize that improving outcomes for our youngest children requires a comprehensive approach addressing factors inside and outside of school that affect learning.

Building a School Climate Rating System

Responding to the compelling and growing body of research about the importance of school climate for improving educational outcomes, Georgia was the first state in the nation to adopt school climate as an indicator in its accountability system. Legislation was passed in 2011, and by 2013, the state had launched its groundbreaking School Climate Star Rating System.

Designed to serve as a diagnostic tool, the rating system incorporates anonymous surveys of students, teachers and parents; student discipline data; attendance records of students, teachers, staff, and administrators; and school safety factors. These data are analyzed and used to award each school a rating of between one and five stars, with five stars representing an excellent school climate.

Reflecting changes in understanding how best to use attendance data to support student achievement, Georgia's attendance metrics have shifted in recent years. When the rating system was launched, the attendance measure was based on average daily attendance. When GaDOE analysis found that student learning is negatively impacted after just six absences, the rating system shifted in 2015 to track the percentage of students missing five or fewer days. In order to align with the metrics adopted in the state's plan under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), Georgia began tracking chronic absence in 2018, capturing the percentage of students missing more than 10 percent of school days, including excused, unexcused or disciplinary absences.

The state's hypothesis that school climate is a significant factor influencing third-grade reading outcomes has been affirmed. Analysis of 2018 data showed that schools receiving a five-star rating outperformed schools with one star by 34 percentage points in third-grade reading proficiency.

Investing in School Climate K-3

For several years, both GaDOE and DECAL have promoted implementation of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), an evidence-based, data-driven framework for creating positive learning climates. GaDOE promotes the school-wide model designed for K-12, while DECAL promotes the Pyramid Model designed for infants and young children. The Georgia legislature has committed funding to establish a statewide infrastructure to support PBIS expansion, including school climate specialists in each of the 16 Regional Education Service Agencies (RESA), and PBIS specialists based at GaDOE.

When the School Climate Rating System was first administered in 2014, it revealed significant challenges in elementary schools, which represented 60 percent of schools receiving a one-star rating. In addition, longitudinal analysis of the impact of the Georgia Pre-K Program found that the quality of teacher-child instructional interactions was higher in Pre-K than in kindergarten and first grade, contributing to lower rates of academic progress in first grade.

In response, the GaDOE and DECAL, in collaboration with the Metro RESA, created groundbreaking training tools designed to help K-3 teachers integrate strategies from the PBIS Pyramid Model into the school-wide model in order to promote student social and emotional development. With support from the David, Helen and Marian Woodward Fund, the partners constructed the Early Learning Climate toolkit, which includes developmentally appropriate strategies that build the capacity of educators to structure positive learning environments that promote engagement.

After measuring the impact of these developmentally appropriate practices in a set of Atlanta metro area elementary schools, GaDOE has embedded them into its statewide training programs and systems, facilitating the expansion of this approach. In 2019, two early learning PBIS specialists are supporting that scaling, with one being funded jointly by GaDOE and DECAL.

Brookview Elementary School in Fulton County was one of those demonstration schools and provides an example of the benefits of these developmentally appropriate practices. Despite having one of the highest student mobility rates in the state — 58 percent in 2016 and 2018 — and one of the highest rates of emergency room visits for asthma, Brookview's score on the state accountability system increased by 17 points to reach 64.5 in 2019. The school also received a three-star school climate rating and was recognized for achieving the "Distinguished" level of PBIS implementation, the highest level possible. By nurturing responsive relationships and implementing developmentally appropriate classroom practices, the school experienced significant decreases in disciplinary action, including a 60 percent drop in office referrals and a 74 percent drop in out-of-school suspensions (OSS).

Already, 244 educators and staff from 42 schools in five Georgia school districts have received training in using the developmentally appropriate classroom practices from the Early Learning Climate model of PBIS. And demand for the well-received training is increasing.

Increasing Attendance Through Improved Disciplinary Practices

The importance of reducing disciplinary action has been affirmed by a groundbreaking 2018 report by the Georgia's Governor's Office of Student Achievement. It found that higher rates of K-3 OSS significantly correlated with lower rates of reading and math proficiency. This impact carried into high school, where only 10 percent of ninth-grade students suspended three or more times while in K-3 were reading proficiently or higher, compared with 45 percent of students never suspended. The report also concluded that children who received OSS in the early grades were more likely to be suspended in the higher grades. In ninth grade, when OSS numbers reached their peak, students who were suspended three or more times in K-3 were nearly six times more likely to be suspended than their peers.

With nearly three-fourths of incidents resulting in a K-3 OSS classified as "other" — rather than drugs/alcohol, sexual offenses, harm to property or person, weapons or disorderly conduct — the report suggests that the infractions were due to relatively minor behaviors. Helping Georgia educators respond appropriately to student behavior in the early grades — inconsolable crying, tantrums, etc. — can dramatically improve the trajectory for their children.

In recent years, an average of 15,000 K-3 students received OSS each year in Georgia; of those, 2,600 students received more than five suspensions in a year. Legislators passed a law in 2018 that prohibits students in preschool through third grade from being suspended from school for more than five days without first receiving a multi-tiered system of supports that constitute a framework for identifying and addressing students' academic and behavioral needs.

To help educators respond to challenging behaviors and avoid assigning OSS, Georgia leaders are providing a number of training opportunities. Launched in 2018, the Signals online interactive learning modules are designed to help educators recognize and appropriately respond to signals of skill deficits related to social-emotional and mental health development. With research showing that fundamental attribution error — the tendency to emphasize internal characteristics in others instead of external factors in explaining their behaviors — contributes to disparities in disciplinary action, the Signals training helps educators reflect on the external issues that might be influencing a child's behavior.

In addition, Social Emotional Engagement – Knowledge & Skills (SEE-KS) helps preschool and K-12 educators increase student engagement by fostering initiation, independence and investment within classroom instruction. This approach blends easily with the effort to promote developmentally appropriate strategies in the early grades by fundamentally changing teacher behavior through peer coaching.

Georgia's efforts to improve school climate in the early grades continue, and K-3 OSS has begun to decrease, falling by 10 percent in 2018-19, from 14,292 in 2017-18 to 12,831 in 2018-19.

Addressing External Challenges

While the expectation is to see attendance increase and suspensions decrease each year as a result of improved school climate, Georgia leaders recognize that external dynamics also impact attendance, and they are working to address these issues as well. Georgia has a growing number of students with chronic health conditions (e.g., asthma and diabetes) that, without adequate care, reduce student attendance. In many parts of the state, access to medical care for children is lacking or becoming worse with the closure of hospitals and medical facilities in rural areas. State leaders are leveraging Medicaid reimbursement to significantly increase the number of school nurses. Also, a state law passed in 2019 includes provisions for supporting tenants' concerns regarding health and safety issues such as mold and other environmental triggers for asthma.

Georgia ranks eighth nationally for the number of homeless students. This housing instability contributes to the state's student mobility — or "churn" — rate of 15 percent, with 40 percent of students changing schools during the school year in some districts. Affordable housing developers are being incentivized to build properties that include supports addressing barriers to educational attainment, such as on-site early learning centers and preventive health screenings.

In addition, between 2010 and 2016, the number of children in foster care in Georgia increased by 80 percent. In partnership with the state's child welfare agency, the Division of Family and Children Services, GaDOE is working to provide increased supports and upstream prevention resources for Georgia's children in care. These efforts include specific training for educators on the impact of traumatic events, how to foster student resiliency, and the importance of nurturing positive relationships.

Despite these challenges, Georgia has the second-lowest chronic absenteeism rate in the South, behind only South Carolina, and is tied with Iowa for 13th nationwide.

In summary, Georgia leaders recognize that improving outcomes for our children requires a comprehensive approach addressing factors inside and outside of school that affect learning.

While the expectation is to see attendance increase and suspensions decrease each year as a result of improved school climate, Georgia leaders recognize that external dynamics also impact attendance, and they are working to address these issues as well.

Recognizing That It Takes All of Us

Georgia leaders recognize that ensuring that all children are on a path to reading proficiently by the end of third grade takes more than good schools, more than great teachers, and more than loving parents. It takes all of us working together. Since the launch of the Get Georgia Reading Campaign, thousands of state and community leaders — representing early learning, education, public health, community health, child welfare, behavioral health, juvenile justice, corrections, foundations and nonprofits — have been applying the campaign's four-pillar framework in innovative ways and creating strategic cross-sector collaborations to promote third-grade reading proficiency.

The use of data on school climate, suspensions and attendance to support systems changes designed to improve child outcomes is just one of many innovations that are taking place in Georgia. The collaborations emerging from the Get Georgia Reading Campaign, as public, private, nonprofit and philanthropic leaders come together, are changing the way they look at data and the ways in which they work.

This case study was written by:

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Appendix B

CASE STUDY: Get 2 School. You Can Make It! A Cleveland Success Story

Aired In March 2018, The PBS NewsHour segment "Empty Chairs" showcased the Get 2 School. You Can Make It! attendance campaign of the Cleveland Metropolitan School District (CMSD) – a comprehensive positive, problem-solving approach that engages families and students and leverages the power of engaging the entire community. Since the campaign was launched in school year 2015-16, CMSD has seen the percentage of students with on-track attendance (missing 10 or fewer days) increase from 43 percent to 58.6 percent, and chronic absence fall from 44 to 30 percent.

But the PBS segment does not paint the entire picture. The attendance gains seen in CMSD also reflect and build upon a prior investment in conditions for learning, school climate and social emotional learning which began much earlier in 2008, in response to a local tragedy. In the fall of 2007, a student on suspension returned to his CMSD high school, SuccessTech Academy, and opened fire, wounding two teachers and two classmates before killing himself. The incident spurred CMSD administrators to ask the American Institutes for Research (AIR) to conduct a comprehensive audit. AIR researchers analyzed gaps in CMSD's education approach and offered recommendations for how schools could improve connectedness and enhance students' mental wellness and safety. Find the AIR audit and recommendations for CMSD.

This analysis led to the district Humanware initiative aimed at building the social and emotional capacity of adults and students, rather than just installing the "hardware" of security guards and metal detectors typically deployed after shootings. Humanware is multi-tiered. Universal components (Tier 1) include PATHS (a PreK - 5 curriculum that helps children understand and manage their emotions) as well as assessing and improving conditions for learning, which are monitored by a conditions for learning survey. Tier 2 and Tier 3 approaches include planning centers, as an alternative to in-school suspension, and student support teams.

The school shooting and involvement in the Humanware initiative had a profound impact on Lorri Hobson, the head of attendance for CMSD, who leads the attendance campaign with the help of a district committee and the staunch support of CMSD CEO Eric Gordon. Hobson was in the school building addressing about 40 parents about their children's truancy, when the shootings occurred. This horrific experience was transformative. As she shares in this powerful video interview with Hedy N. Chang, executive director of Attendance Works, Hobson decided that "referring cases to court without understanding our families' 'why' is irresponsible."

Hobson committed to shifting CMSD's truancy strategy away from referring students to courts to engaging families and offering early intervention. "If anything helps you take a pulse and measure your effectiveness in improving conditions for learning, it is your attendance," Hobson says.

Analyzing Chronic Absence Data

Cleveland's "Get 2 School. You Can Make It!" campaign has especially focused on the critical importance of making sure students miss no more than 10 days of school (and hopefully fewer)   over an entire school year. The campaign was based upon analyses of attendance data. CMSD found that students who missed more than 10 days in a year — just one day per month —scored an average of 12 points lower on state reading tests and 15 points lower on math tests. These students were 9 percent less likely to meet Ohio's Third Grade Reading Guarantee and earn promotion to fourth grade. High school students who missed more than 10 days in a year were 34 percent less likely to graduate.

With significant support from key community partners such as the Cleveland Browns Foundation, CMSD's campaign has been able to adopt a robust array of strategies, including:

- Rewards for good attendance, not just perfect attendance.

- Phone banks designed to find out why students are missing school and how the district can help overcome barriers.

- Browns players visiting schools to talk about the importance of good attendance.

- Providing students with clean uniforms and school supplies through a partnership with Shoes and Clothes for Kids.

- Pizza and pop-up dance parties, featuring FM 107.9 and deejays, at schools that improve attendance.

- Tickets to the Cedar Point amusement park and major events and school-wide lunches from Arby's.

- Contests on "You Can Make It Days," when families might be inclined to extend long weekends or use other reasons to keep children home.

Read this story to learn more about the particularly special partnership with the Cleveland Browns Foundation.

The Get 2 School. You can Make It! initiative is supported by an Attendance Campaign Committee comprising representatives from departments within the district and community partners such as the Cleveland Browns Foundation.

The committee meets monthly to review the district's attendance data and makes recommendations to immediately intervene when the data suggests an increase in off-track behavior. The committee focuses on recommendations to bring about behavioral change at three levels: in the schools, in the district and in the community. Each recommended strategy is measured for pre- and post-effectiveness.

CMSD also redesigned its attendance office to advance effective practices. The redesign included adding several professional team members, who do much more than sit in an administrative office. Through regular communication and site visits, team members are responsible for supporting principals, including the school leadership teams, and building the schools' capacity to reduce off-track attendance. When visiting schools, they coach, reinforce positive messaging, interpret attendance data and make best practice

recommendations that are not punitive. The district attendance team leads through the lens of "How can we support you?" rather than pointing out what's wrong.

The team offers professional development workshops on a variety of topics, such as:

- Using an assessment tool as a proactive strategy before school starts, to identify gaps in daily attendance practice where students can potentially fall between the cracks and not count as present.

- Cultivating a positive climate for school attendance.

- Using attendance incentives to encourage families to understand the intrinsic value of daily attendance.

- Learning the difference between intervention and punitive approaches.

- Aligning chronic absenteeism data to support a school's academic achievement plan.

- Learning the difference between Average Daily Membership and Chronic Absenteeism.

Sessions are selected by principals and their leadership teams based on conversations that organically surface while reviewing attendance data and using the attendance assessment tool.

Equally important, CMSD uses its attendance data dashboard to monitor attendance progress. The dashboard displays the percentage of students "on track," who are expected to miss 10 or fewer days in a given school year (the Y-axis) for each week of the year (the X-axis). To be on track, a student must have missed 2 or fewer days for the year through the first quarter (Q1), 5 or fewer through Q2, 8 or fewer through Q3, and 10 or fewer through Q4. Users can filter the data displayed by specific networks, schools, grade levels or any combination thereof.

Through regular communication and site visits, team members are responsible for supporting principals, including the school leadership teams, and building the schools' capacity to reduce off-track attendance.

Serving over 400 students in grades 9-12, Cleveland's Glenville High School provides a concrete example of how schools have begun to transform their practice. Jackie Bell, Glenville's principal, is a longtime administrator with a deep understanding of and commitment to the community that she serves. After hearing about the concept of chronic absence and the idea of using mentoring relationships to support improved attendance, Bell created the Fight for Five program. Every faculty member was assigned five students and instructed to connect with each student at least once a day. The faculty responded to the challenge.

By engaging in simple acts of caring — whether it was a text, a phone call or a visit to the home — these educators created a connection between the school and family and encouraged chronically absent students to return to the high school.

This case study was written by:

Lorri Hobson, director of attendance, CMSD

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