

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: SELECTED FINDINGS FROM THE FINAL EVALUATION REPORT (2020)**

# Learning from the Kaiser Permanente Northwest *Reducing Barriers to School Attendance* Initiative

The Kaiser Permanente Northwest (KPNW) *Reducing Barriers to School Attendance* initiative is part of Kaiser Permanente’s Thriving Schools initiative. Beginning in spring 2018, the *Reducing Barriers to School Attendance* initiative supported seven community-based organizations and their partners as they developed and tested innovative approaches to reducing chronic absenteeism in Oregon and southwest Washington. Chronic absenteeism occurs when a student misses 15 days of school or more in a year (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). It is a critical issue with wide-ranging consequences for student success both in school and in later life. Supports for grantees included funding over three years and technical assistance from Attendance Works, a national and state initiative that works to improve policy and practice to reduce barriers to consistent school attendance. At the request of KPNW, Education Northwest provided an external evaluation of the *Reducing Barriers to School Attendance* initiative and introduced a framework for organizing community partners’ diverse approaches for achieving shared goals.

**Framework for organizing grantees’ approaches for reducing chronic absenteeism**

Group	Grantees	Approach
1. Systems Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clackamas Education Service District</li> <li>• Educational Service District 112</li> </ul>	Grantee teams work with multiple districts to raise awareness of chronic absenteeism, establish shared objectives across districts, and influence policy
2. Prevention Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adelante Mujeres</li> <li>• Salem/Keizer Coalition for Equality</li> </ul>	Grantee teams use curriculum-based programs to educate groups of students or families (regardless of current attendance status)
3. Cross-Sector Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Latino Network</li> <li>• Oregon School-Based Health Alliance</li> <li>• Self Enhancement Inc.</li> </ul>	Grantee teams work on cross-sector interventions and/or case management, and/or they hire a coordinator to direct supports to students with higher levels of attendance-related need

This executive summary gives an overview of the findings of the implementation of grantee and partner activities in the final year of the grant. This summary is organized by changes in three key areas:



**Making changes in awareness, goals, and approaches to chronic absenteeism**



**Developing strategic partnerships to address chronic absenteeism**



**Building capacity to address chronic absenteeism**



## Making changes in awareness, goals, and approaches to chronic absenteeism

Each fall and spring, grantees convened to reflect on progress and participate in shared learning. The goal: Gain resources, connections and perspectives on how to reduce chronic absenteeism. Kaiser Permanente and their partners, such as Attendance Works, provided training, tools, and technical assistance during these semiannual convenings. By the end of Year 2, in interviews, grantees indicated that they had learned more about the root causes of chronic absenteeism.

### Key Finding: All grantee modified their organizational goals and approaches to better address chronic absenteeism

- All grantees adjusted their goals to include a focus on chronic absenteeism
  - *Systems change grantees* and their partners said their goals shifted to incorporate more of a focus on training; a broader focus on attendance (not just truancy); and a focus on connecting with schools to provide training, resources, and data tools.
  - *Prevention focus grantees* and their partners said their goals shifted to focus more on being intentional in promoting attendance and explaining its importance to families.
  - *Cross-sector grantees* said their goals shifted to include a stronger focus on communication, addressing trauma, equity, and taking a more preventive approach.
- Grantees either expanded on or created approaches to reduce chronic absenteeism
  - *Systems change grantees* created supports for tiered interventions and data tools, and supported state education agencies in their efforts to address chronic absenteeism.
  - *Prevention focus grantees* built on existing programming to increase capacity to address chronic absenteeism through school partnerships and family engagement.
  - *Cross-sector grantees* expanded or built networks to address chronic absenteeism by improving communication and collaboration with school, health, and/or family partners.



*I have had to adapt and learn throughout the grant experience ... Each year, I have had to learn new strategies to connect with the districts. I do appreciate the guidance and support I have had with [the state education agency], Attendance Works, and the convenings on how to deal with these challenges.*

– Systems change grantee

### Overall, grantees and partners have modified their definition of attendance, as well as their strategies and supports, during the COVID-19 pandemic

*Grantees differed in the extent to which organizational goals changed due to the move to distance learning. For example, some grantees shifted to providing basic needs and supports to families. Others increased the amount of support and/or broadened the kinds of supports they provide.*



## Developing strategic partnerships to address chronic absenteeism

KPNW grantees formed or expanded partnerships to reduce chronic absenteeism during the course of the grant. *Systems change grantees* primarily focused on convening district and school personnel, as well as community members, to build capacity to address chronic absenteeism. *Prevention focus grantees* concentrated on deepening partnerships in local school districts and community groups receiving services. *Cross-sector grantees* focused on creating partnerships across school and health communities, as well as strengthening collaboration with staff members and administrators at target schools receiving services.

### Key Finding: Grantees strengthened and increased communication among partners and families during the grant period

- **Grantees increased the frequency and/or changed the nature of communication with their partners to reduce chronic absenteeism.** For example, one *prevention focus grantee* now has regular contact with school staff members to gain information about attendance. While *system change grantees* increased their frequency of communication, and two *cross-sector grantees* increased consistent contact with key staff partners.
- **Several grantees increased their contact and communication with families.** *Cross-sector grantees* emphasized the importance of increasing regular contact with families, as well as maintaining a visible presence in schools. Only one *prevention focus grantee* and one *system change grantee* reported changes to existing outreach to students or families.
- **Most *prevention focus grantees* and *cross-sector grantees* experienced at least some challenges in establishing buy-in from school partners.** Specifically, the *prevention focus grantees* and some *cross-sector grantees* experienced challenges in getting buy-in from schools for the KPNW attendance grant goals and processes.



*Knowing who is out there to connect with, how they can offer supports. Being [able] to have broader conversations and then more specific ones to get at needs. If the grant had not happened, there would have been a lot more disconnect ... I do think that there would be kids falling through the cracks in larger numbers, but we have systems in place because of the work that is happening.*

– Cross-Sector grantee

### Prior collaboration helped grantees and their partners respond to student and family needs at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic

*Several grantees shifted from holding regular partner meetings to delivering or coordinating supports. Further, grantees' partnerships helped provide a strong foundation for responding to challenges related to COVID-19. For example, trainings and shared data helped facilitate collaboration. In addition, ongoing partnerships continued to gain momentum during this time.*



## Building capacity to address chronic absenteeism

From 2018 to 2020, Attendance Works provided a series of six coaching calls with grantees to give them space for reflection and opportunities to discuss and problem solve challenges. They also offered tools, models and examples that could help grantees advance their work, particularly around using student attendance data.

### Key Finding: Grantees built organizational capacity to address chronic absenteeism through new hires and new ways of using attendance data

- Grantees built organizational capacity from the resources provided through the *Reducing Barriers to School Attendance* initiative. Grantees expanded their services to new locations, hired employees to coordinate efforts, and regularly convened stakeholders and partners to build capacity and partnerships to reduce chronic absenteeism.
- Grantees found new ways to use attendance data to identify students in need of support, monitor attendance, and engage in a cycle of inquiry. *Systems change* grantees were able to use data hubs to monitor student attendance and the progress of interventions. Two *cross-sector grantees* reported increasing the frequency with which they review and discuss data to improve services. *Prevention focus grantees* reported having access to data, as well as using data to inform outreach and interventions for students and families.
- Grantees faced multiple capacity-related challenges during the grant period. Several programs experienced staff turnover and competing priorities in schools. Access to data was a common challenge among some grantees at some point during the grant period. One grantee continued to experience issues with access to data, despite having established an agreement to share data early in the grant.



*We've taken a look not only at our school data but also at the [partner organization] data to see not only how we're tracking the data ... but how we're using that data to inform Plan Do Study Act cycles.*

– Cross-Sector grantee



*People just have so much going on [so] it does not become a priority to collaborate with others who are doing the work.*

– Prevention Focus grantee

### During the shift to distance learning, grantees are using additional factors (besides attendance) as evidence of student engagement

*In interviews, grantees described using various means to track attendance data and identify student needs. These methods included making phone calls, conducting home visits, sending surveys, tracking student login information, reaching out to their partners to identify needs, and engaging additional staff members to help.*