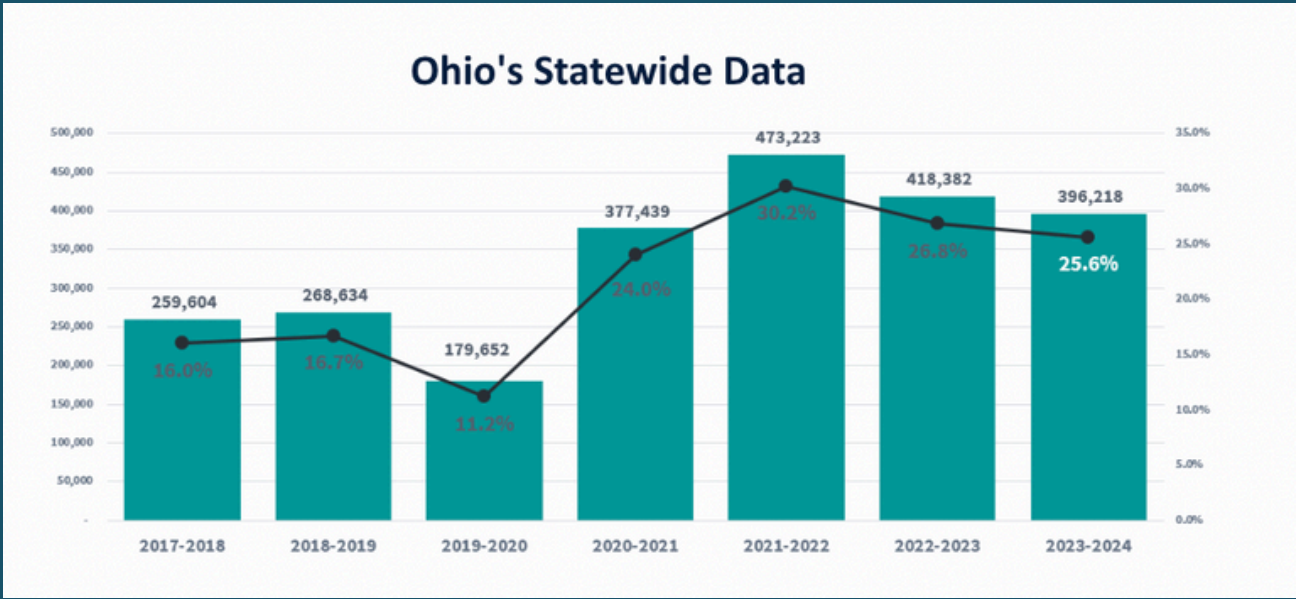


# Ohio's Blueprint for Beating Chronic Absence: A Whole-System, Whole-Community Approach



## At a glance

The Ohio Department of Education and Workforce is committed to **reducing chronic absence by 50%**. Ohio has embraced a comprehensive strategy rooted in prevention, partnership and purpose. Similar to other states across the country, Ohio experienced a surge of chronic absence during the pandemic, with **rates over 30%**, impacting student learning, well-being and future success. Under the leadership of Governor Mike DeWine and Director of Education and Workforce Stephen D. Dackin, Ohio has invested in a range of coordinated, statewide strategies to address the root causes of chronic absence. A key collaboration is **Stay in the Game! attendance network (SITG)**, a fast-growing public-private initiative supported by the Cleveland Browns Foundation, Battelle, Proving Ground and the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce (ODEW). With support from Attendance Works, ODEW developed and released the **Ohio's Attendance Guide** and a yearlong professional development series for Educational Service Centers (ESCs) and State Support Teams (SSTs) to build the capacity of local districts and schools to reduce chronic absence.



In just two years, Ohio has made meaningful progress. Statewide chronic absence dropped from 30.2% (2021-22 school year) to 25.6% (2023-24). That means over 100,000 more students are regularly attending school compared to the height of the pandemic's disruption.



"We want to make sure every child has the tools to be successful in any path they choose. Regular school attendance is key to academic success, from early reading proficiency to on-time graduation. That's why tackling chronic absenteeism remains a top priority. We're making real progress, thanks to the commitment of educators, families and community partners working together to keep students engaged and in school."

**Mike DeWine**, Governor

# Key strategies to combat chronic absence

- Strategic funding and alignment: Through [Future Forward Ohio](#), a statewide framework to coordinate state practices and systems to facilitate student success, the state allocated \$15 million in ESSER and wellness funding to address barriers that prevent students from engaging in learning, such as attendance, physical health and mental health. Districts also leverage Title I-A, II-A, IV-A and Student Wellness & Success Funds to expand outreach teams and intervention systems.
- Training, tools and technical assistance: ODEW led a multipronged approach to improve student attendance and learning. This approach included the [Ohio's Attendance Guide](#), a resource outlining tiered interventions for schools and districts; a yearlong professional development series to build capacity among SSTs and ESCs staff; and a school leader's guide with ready-to-use training materials on chronic absence and early intervention. Additionally, [attendance data leads at ESCs](#) provide coaching and data analysis to help schools embed attendance into broader student support systems. Members of SITG also received data support and individualized technical assistance as well as monthly peer-to-peer learning experiences.
- Public engagement and messaging: SITG supports over 200 districts and 500,000 students. The campaign provides toolkits, pledge posters, yard signs and branding materials. Participating districts using a multi-tiered approach saw up to a 10.3% decrease in chronic absence. The campaign serves as the state's unifying brand to engage families and communities in building a culture of showing up.
- Statewide leadership and cross-sector collaboration: Ohio launched the [Ohio Attendance Taskforce](#), bringing together state leaders, educators, courts, ESCs and national partners like Attendance Works to design a statewide plan focused on prevention, family engagement and ensuring resources for all students. This group developed a unified blueprint that now guides local implementation and aligns education, health and justice sectors to remove barriers to attendance. In summer 2025, the Taskforce's recommendations led to improvements in state law that will go into effect by next school year.



"Our collective statewide efforts to reduce chronic absenteeism reflect our deep and sustained focus on every student across the state. School is about making connections with students. From instructional connections in the classroom to a community's applause for students on stage to a local employer sharing on-the-job insights, it all starts with children being in school and ready to learn. There's challenging work ahead, and Ohio is poised to continue this progress on behalf of every learner."

**[Stephen D. Dackin](#)**, Director, Ohio Department of Education and Workforce

## **London City Schools (2,200 students)**

- In 2023-24, London City Schools reduced chronic absence by more than 5 percentage points through targeted messaging campaigns, student attendance celebrations and stronger family engagement.
- The district used real-time attendance data to drive timely interventions and emphasized building trust through consistent school-home communication.
- School leaders embedded attendance goals into school improvement plans and trained staff to monitor early warning signs.
- London used SITG branding and community messaging to foster a culture of daily attendance across buildings.

## **Columbus City Schools (47,000 students)**

- Columbus saw a 7% drop in chronic absence in a single year by implementing a series of multi-tiered systemic changes based on recommendations from a district diagnostic conducted by Attendance Works that included shifting practices from compliance to prevention and early intervention.
- The district developed a real-time data dashboard so district administrators, school leaders and attendance teams could access disaggregated data to identify students for early intervention. Targeted training was provided on strategies to address attendance root causes and barriers.
- The district launched a districtwide campaign in partnership with SITG and local community organizations. This included a multilingual outreach effort using campaign materials and neighborhood-focused events to reconnect families to school.
- Columbus built school-level capacity to reduce chronic absence by aligning attendance with Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), designating staff for attendance coordination and linking students to wraparound supports.

## **Caldwell Exempted Village Schools (729 students)**

- Caldwell achieved a 10.3% reduction in chronic absence in the SITG network districts.
- The district used student pledge initiatives and in-school awards to boost attendance at the classroom level.
- In collaboration with ESC coaches, Caldwell implemented monthly data reviews and early intervention plans to respond quickly to emerging attendance issues.
- Their success illustrates how deeply rural and small districts can achieve strong outcomes with focused systems and family-centered strategies.

## **Oak Hills Local School District (7,800 students)**

- In 2024-25 Oak Hills reduced chronic absence by more than 5% by implementing recommendations from a district diagnostic conducted by Attendance Works and funded by ODEW using part of its ESSER dollars. Some schools decreased chronic absence by almost 10%.
- The district expanded their data dashboards to include disaggregated attendance, behavior and academic data.

- Attendance was embedded into both the district and building leadership teams and school improvement plans to ensure a whole-child focus.
- Updated the Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) handbook to include an attendance multi-tiered approach.
- Developed an early intervention system for attendance and engagement that includes early warning triggers and protocols for personalized outreach.
- Created a community-wide messaging campaign.

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***Attendance Works*** is a nonprofit, national and state initiative. Our mission is to advance success in school and beyond for all students by reducing chronic absence. Find free downloadable resources, research, consulting services and more on our website: [www.attendanceworks.org](http://www.attendanceworks.org)