

# Identifying Root Causes Worksheet

**Understanding why students are absent as well as what motivates them to attend is key to creating a comprehensive multi-tiered system of support for attendance and engagement.**

**Use this worksheet to assess what your district or school team knows about the root causes of chronic absence in your community.**

## **Directions**

1. Each team member should have their own worksheet (see page 2). Without discussion, have each person go through the list and mark all the reasons that students in your district or school are absent.
2. Add any major reasons that are not on the list.
3. Then, tally the answers on one worksheet. (e.g. How many team members checked illness?)
4. Once you have listed all of the reasons for absence on one sheet and noted how many team members checked each reason, discuss:
  - a. Which ones affect all students?
  - b. Which ones affect some students? Are particular student groups affected?
  - c. Which ones affect a few students?
5. Then, confirm that you've correctly identified the main reasons for absence by talking with students and families. Are there any reasons for absence that the team missed? Consider using one of these [Qualitative Tools](#) to ask students and families about their perspectives.

*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: <https://www.attendanceworks.org/>. Revised September 2025.*

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## Barriers

- ☐ Chronic and acute illness
- ☐ Family responsibilities or home situation
- ☐ Poor transportation
- ☐ Housing and food insecurity
- ☐ Lack of access to needed services
- ☐ System involvement
- ☐ Unpredictable schedules for learning
- ☐ Lack of access to technology
- ☐ Impact of trauma
- ☐ Violence in the community
- ☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_

## Aversion

- ☐ Struggling academically and/or behaviorally
- ☐ Unwelcoming school climate
- ☐ Social and peer challenges
- ☐ Anxiety
- ☐ Unfair disciplinary and suspension practices
- ☐ Undiagnosed disability and/or disability accommodations
- ☐ Caregivers had negative educational experiences
- ☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_

## Disengagement

- ☐ Lack of challenging, engaging instruction
- ☐ Bored
- ☐ No meaningful relationships to adults or peers in school
- ☐ Lack of enrichment opportunities
- ☐ Lack of academic and behavioral support
- ☐ Failure to earn credits
- ☐ Need to work conflicts with being in high school
- ☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_

## Misconceptions

- ☐ Absences are only a problem if they are unexcused
- ☐ Missing two days per month doesn't affect learning
- ☐ Lose track and underestimate TOTAL absences
- ☐ Assume students must stay home for any symptom of illness
- ☐ Attendance only matters in the older grades
- ☐ Suspensions don't count as absence
- ☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_