

## Does Our State Have a Systemic Approach to Reducing Chronic Absence? A Tool for Self-Assessment

The goal of this self-assessment is to help State Education Agency (SEA) leaders identify strengths and opportunities to develop a systemic approach to reducing chronic absence. The tool is built around six key ingredients for reducing chronic absence: **actionable data, positive engagement, capacity building, shared accountability, strategic partnerships, and adequate and equitable resources** – all of which play an integral role in reducing chronic absence in your state. While assessing your state approach across all six ingredients, think about the actions the state education agency takes on its own, and whether there is an opportunity to leverage agency and community partnerships to advance attendance improvement strategies.

A cross-departmental state education agency team should undertake following steps at least annually:

- 1) **Determine Participants:** Start by deciding who should take this self-assessment. Is it just members of the team responsible for attendance? Is it members of a broader leadership group in your SEA? Alternatively, the assessment could be used to gather perspectives from a broader array of stakeholders across the state education agency and even from some external partners.
- 2) **Complete the assessment:** Each person on the team should complete the assessment separately to reflect on strengths and opportunities for improvement.
- 3) **Debrief and set goals:** The group should convene to tally their individual results and review what the data reveals about strengths, gaps and differences of opinion. Use the results to identify practices that should be continued as well as priority areas for improvement. [See instructions](#) for additional guidance including how to use wall charts to tally collective results.
- 4) **Make a plan:** Once members have agreed on priorities, the team should assign responsibility and establish timelines for completion.
- 5) **Communicate the results:** The team should communicate the results of the assessment with state education agency staff in various departments, and in some cases, the state board and agency and community partners, and engage them in executing the improvement plan.

<b>ACTIONABLE DATA</b>	<b>Solidly in Place</b>	<b>Measurable Progress</b>	<b>Needs Improvement</b>	<b>Urgent Gap</b>	<b>Don't Know</b>	<b>Comments</b>
1. Our SEA requires Local Education Agencies (LEAs) to maintain and submit accurate attendance data which is included in our state longitudinal student database.						
2. Our SEA ensures data can be compared across LEAs through a standard definition for a day of attendance and chronic absence (ideally missing 10% or more of school for any reason, including excused and unexcused absences along with suspensions).						
3. Our SEA publicly reports chronic absence data from the prior school year for the state as a whole and disaggregated by district, school, grade and student groups.						
4. Our SEA helps LEAs produce real-time, early warning dashboards that include chronic absence rates by school, grade and student group.						
5. Our SEA publicly reports on types of absence – excused, unexcused, and suspensions – by district, school, grade, and student groups in order to examine who is affected by current truancy and disciplinary practices.						

<b>POSITIVE ENGAGEMENT</b>	<b>Solidly in Place</b>	<b>Measurable Progress</b>	<b>Needs Improvement</b>	<b>Urgent Gap</b>	<b>Don't Know</b>	<b>Comments</b>
1. Our SEA consistently and clearly promotes public awareness about chronic absence and how it can be addressed by a variety of interested parties (i.e., district and school leaders, parents, businesses, state agencies, non-profits, and the legislature.)						
2. Our SEA provides LEAs, schools, and community partners with materials (i.e., fliers, handbooks, back-to-school letters, text messages, phone scripts, etc.) that convey the importance of daily attendance for well-being, engagement, and learning.						
3. Our SEA helps LEAs leverage relevant investments (e.g., early and expanded learning, community schools, health services, etc.) to take a year-long, PreK-12 approach to supporting and engaging students experiencing chronic absence.						
4. Our SEA publicizes bright spot schools, community partners and LEAs that achieve measurable reductions in chronic absence and uses these examples to inspire action and document best practices.						
5. Our SEA supports a positive, problem-solving multi-tiered approach to attendance informed by families and students that emphasizes prevention and early intervention, with legal action as a last resort.						

CAPACITY BUILDING	Solidly in Place	Measurable Progress	Needs Improvement	Urgent Gap	Don't Know	Comments
1. Our SEA has assessed the extent to which LEAs across the state have the capacity to interpret chronic absence data, identify and remove barriers to attendance, and adopt a multi-tiered approach.						
2. Our SEA offers and broadly disseminates comprehensive attendance policy and practice guidance.						
3. Our SEA offers professional development on how to reduce chronic absence and improve attendance.						
4. Our SEA ensures LEAs are aware they can use federal and state funds, including Title I and Title II dollars, to provide principals and educators with training on attendance improvement strategies.						
5. Our SEA provides LEAs, which have high levels of chronic absence, with intensive support either directly or via intermediaries (e.g., educational service centers).						

SHARED ACCOUNTABILITY	Solidly in Place	Measurable Progress	Needs Improvement	Urgent Gap	Don't Know	Comments
1. Our SEA requires that schools identified for improvement utilize chronic absence data as part of the needs assessment process.						
2. Our state policy requires LEAs to have a data-driven plan to address chronic absence, measurable targets for improvement, and a process for monitoring and recognizing progress.						
3. Our SEA works with LEAs to monitor and support educational opportunities for students experiencing extreme levels of absenteeism.						
4. Our SEA creates internal structures and opportunities for staff across departments to review data and align agency resources for improving attendance.						
5. Our SEA regularly meets with representatives from other public and community agencies (e.g., physical and behavioral health, transportation, human services, law-enforcement, etc.) to: (1) review chronic absence data and (2) align resources to improve attendance.						

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS	Solidly in Place	Measurable Progress	Needs Improvement	Urgent Gap	Don't Know	Comments
1. Our SEA supports LEAs in engaging students and families as partners in identifying attendance barriers and generating solutions.						
2. Our SEA creates materials, resources, and opportunities to help public agencies, non-profit organizations and civic groups work together with schools and LEAs to promote <u>Tier 1</u> positive messaging and engagement about the importance of daily attendance.						
3. Our SEA encourages LEAs to collaborate with community and agency partners to implement <u>Tier 2</u> early interventions.						
4. Our SEA encourages LEAs to collaborate with community and agency partners to implement <u>Tier 3</u> intensive interventions.						
5. Our SEA provides examples of contracts or MOUs for LEAs to use with community organizations and public agencies that outline how to share data and support LEAs and schools in improving school attendance and assess impact.						

<b>ADEQUATE &amp; EQUITABLE RESOURCES</b>	<b>Solidly in Place</b>	<b>Measurable Progress</b>	<b>Needs Improvement</b>	<b>Urgent Gap</b>	<b>Don't know</b>	<b>Comments</b>
1. Our SEA has mapped resources that can support attendance and engagement including specific departments within the SEA, intermediaries, technical assistance centers, and initiatives.						
2. Our SEA has identified gaps in resources for improving attendance and engagement including for particular grades, student groups, or geographic locations.						
3. Our SEA advocates for adequate funding to address systemic barriers to attendance.						
4. Our SEA promotes using chronic absence data as a criteria for allocating resources.						
5. Our SEA assesses whether schools and LEAs with high chronic absence rates receive and benefit from resources allocated to support attendance, engagement, and well-being.						

## Overall Reflections & Next Steps

1. What are your SEA's greatest strengths across the six ingredients?
2. What are the biggest challenges your state faces across the six ingredients?
3. What are the three or four most important steps that could be taken over the course of the next year to lay the foundation for reducing chronic absence?
4. If you are conducting this assessment with others, share all of your ideas for the three or four most important steps. Identify if any of the steps are more important to achieve first to lay the foundation for others. Agree upon the top three to five shared priorities for action.
5. For each priority, identify the following: what are the resources that could be leveraged; who are the key groups that should be involved; who could take the lead in moving it forward; and what is your timeline for action.
6. Determine how to monitor impact and engage in continuous improvement.