

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 leaders identify strengths and opportunities to develop a systemic approach to reducing chronic absence. The tool is built around five key ingredients for reducing chronic absence: **actionable data, positive engagement, capacity building, shared accountability, and strategic partnerships** all of which play an integral role in reducing chronic absence in your state. While assessing your state across all five ingredients, think about the actions the state education agency takes on its own, as well as whether there is an opportunity to leverage agency and community partnerships to advance attendance improvement strategies.

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

- 1) **Complete the assessment:** Each person on the cross-functional team should complete the assessment separately to reflect on strengths and opportunities for improvement.
- 2) **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.
- 3) **Make a plan:** Once members have agreed on priorities, the cross-functional team should assign responsibility and establish timelines for completion.
- 4) **Communicate the results:** The cross-functional team should communicate the results of the assessment with state education agency staff, and in some cases, the state board along with agency and community partners, and engage them in executing the improvement plan.

ACTIONABLE DATA	Strength	OK for Now	Could Be Better	Urgent Gap	Not SEA Role	Don't Know	Explain your response. Provide examples if possible.
1. Our state requires districts to maintain and submit accurate attendance data which is included in our state longitudinal student data base.							
2. Our state has a standard definition for chronic absence and what counts as a day of attendance. (ideally missing 10% or more of school for any reason including excused and unexcused absences along with suspension)							
3. The SEA publicly reports chronic absence on an annual basis aggregate and disaggregated attendance and chronic absence data by school and grade level and ESSA sub-groups.							
4. The SEA ensures LEAs can produce real time reports on rates of chronic absence (along with other measures of student attendance including ADA, truancy and satisfactory attendance) by school, grade and student sub-population.							
5. LEAs have early warning systems in place that ensure school staff are alerted as soon as a student becomes academically at-risk including due to poor attendance even when they enroll from another district.							

POSITIVE ENGAGEMENT	Strength	OK for Now	Could Be Better	Urgent Gap	Not SEA Role	Don't Know	Explain your response. Provide examples if possible.
1. The state superintendent consistently and clearly promotes public awareness about chronic absence, why it matters, and the need for a comprehensive approach in communications with District and school leaders, parents, the business community, legislature, and the general public, as well as other key stakeholders.							
2. Materials that convey messages about the importance of daily attendance and reducing absences (fliers, handbook, back to school letters etc.) are made available to LEAs, schools and community partners to leverage.							
3. The state leverages its investments in high quality early education, school wrap around services, and out of school time programming by integrating attention to attendance and monitoring for chronic absence into the program design.							
4. The state recognizes bright spot schools, community partners and LEAs that achieve measurable reduction in chronic absence and use these examples to inspire action and document best practices.							
5. State policy and practice support a positive, problem solving approach to attendance that emphasizes family engagement and early intervention and ensures legal action is only used as a last resort.							

CAPACITY BUILDING	Strength	OK for Now	Could Be Better	Urgent Gap	Not SEA Role	Don't Know	Explain your response. Provide examples if possible.
1. Our State has a widely disseminated, comprehensive attendance policy and practice manual that clearly lays out why attendance matters, describes what LEAs and schools can do to build a positive culture of attendance, and outlines strategies for reducing chronic absence.							
2. LEAs across the state have the capacity to interpret chronic absence data and use it to identify and solve barriers to attendance as well as put in place a multi-tiered system of support in collaboration with community partners and public agencies.							
3. The SEA makes professional development on chronic absence widely available and integrated with resources to support improved student behavior.							
4. Our state ensures LEAs are aware they can use federal and state funds including Title 1 and Title 2 dollars to equip principals and educators to provide training and put in place an attendance improvement strategy.							
5. Our state prioritizes distribution of resources to help schools and districts with high rates of chronic absence. (e.g. physical and behavioral health services, transportation, early childhood education, afterschool, economic supports, etc.)							

SHARED ACCOUNTABILITY	Strength	OK for Now	Could Be Better	Urgent Gap	Don't Know	Not SEA Role	Explain your response. Provide examples if possible.
1. Our State ESSA plan requires that schools identified for improvement utilize chronic absence data as part of the needs assessment process.							
2. Our state policy requires LEAs be held accountable for having a data driven plan to address chronic absence, measurable targets for improvement, and a process for monitoring and recognizing progress when chronic absence reaches a certain threshold.							
3. Our State has a state taskforce that includes key community stakeholders and public agency representatives (physical and behavioral health, transportation, law-enforcement, etc.) that meets regularly to review district and school chronic absence data put together a plan for attendance improvement.							
4. Our State can monitor and address chronic absenteeism among highly mobile students. Vulnerable populations include students from immigrant communities, in poverty or otherwise experience frequent moves.							
5. Public data on chronic absence data is accessible, visible, understandable and can be viewed by school, district, grade and sub-population.							

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP	Strength	OK for Now	Could Be Better	Urgent Gap	Don't Know	Not SEA Role	Explain your response. Provide examples if possible.
1. Data on chronic absence are used to target and allocate public and community resources (e.g. physical and behavioral health services, transportation, early childhood education, afterschool, economic supports, etc.							
2. Our state creates materials, resources and opportunities to help public agencies, non-profit organizations and civic groups work together with schools and districts to promote Tier 1 positive messaging and engagement about the importance of daily attendance for academic supports and the availability of supports to help families overcome common attendance barriers.							
3. The SEA facilitates community and agency partners partnering with districts to implement Tier 2 early intervention that uses personalized outreach to motivate attendance, identify barriers to attendance, and connects students and families to needed supports.							
4. The SEA facilitates community and agency partners working with districts to implement Tier 3 intensive intervention that prioritizes and coordinates provision of case management and service delivery to students who are severely chronically absent.							
5. Our State provides examples of contracts or MOUs for LEAs to use with community organizations and public agencies to outline how they will share data, support LEAs and schools in improving school attendance and how they will assess their impact.							

Overall Reflections & Next Steps

1. What are your state's greatest strengths across the five ingredients?
2. What are the biggest challenges your state faces across the five 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. What is already going on in your state that could be leveraged to help take these steps?
5. 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.
6. 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.