Session 1:

Whole School Engagement Strategies for Reducing Student Absenteeism

Professional Learning Series

January 25, 2022

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Welcome!

Hedy Chang
Executive Director

Maria Casey
Deputy Director of Programs

Three E-Learning Sessions

During these sessions, participants will learn how to work as a team to take a multi-tiered approach to improve attendance in their schools:

- **Session 1** — Whole School Engagement Strategies for Reducing Student Absenteeism
- **Session 2** — Early Intervention Strategies: Using Teams to Monitor and Identify Students in Need of Support
- **Session 3** — Partnering to Make a Difference

Learning Goals for Session 1

Participants will:

- Draw on high leverage, whole school strategies to create
  - positive conditions for learning and
  - strong relationships with students and families that prevent absenteeism
- Learn about a framework of multi-tiered attendance strategies that moves schools towards prevention and early intervention
- Explore a restorative approach to communicating with families about attendance

Welcome & Introductions

Use the Chat and share:

- ✓ Your name and role
- ✓ Your school and district
- ✓ Who motivated you to attend school every day?

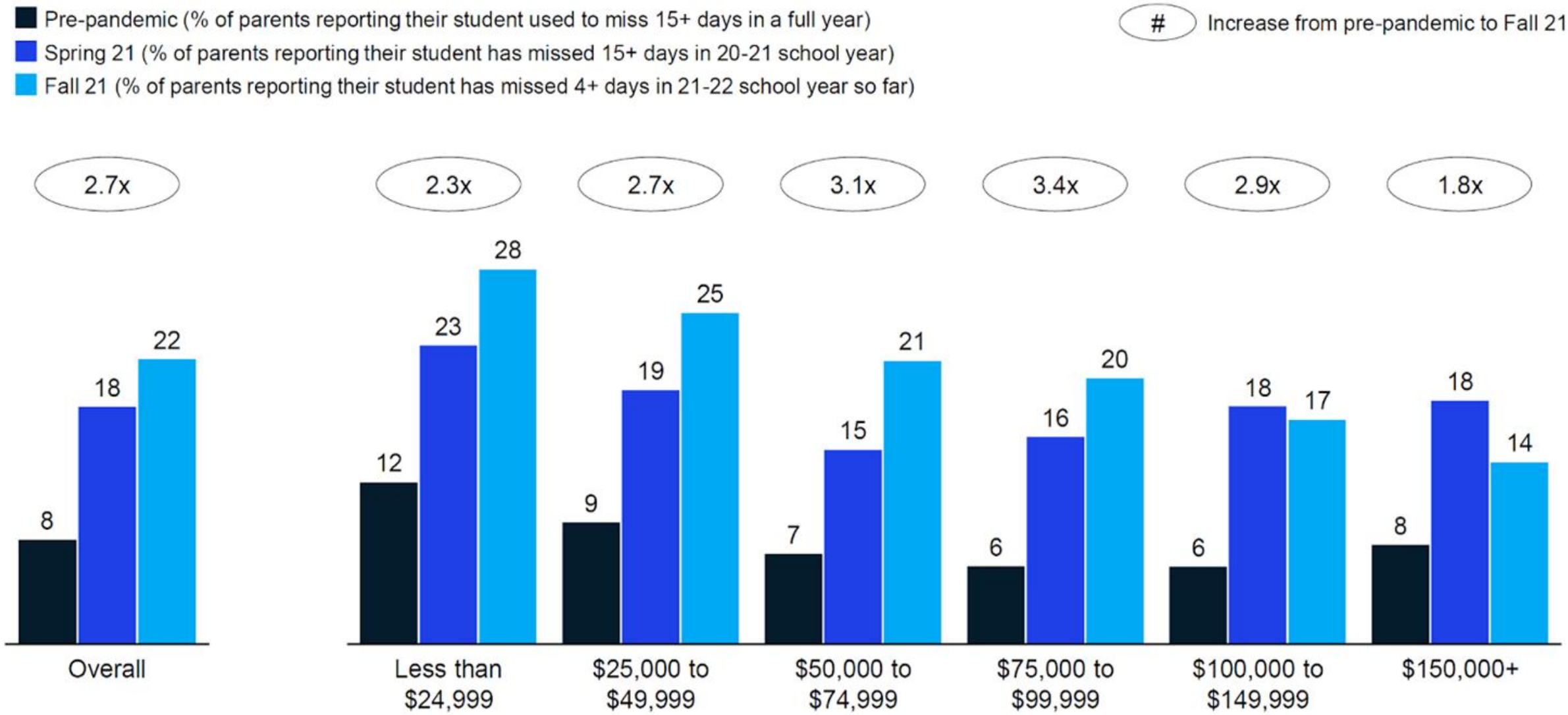
Overview of Chronic Absence

What is the relationship between absences and equity?

Chronic absence is a *leading* indicator and a *cause* of educational inequity

Attendance by income

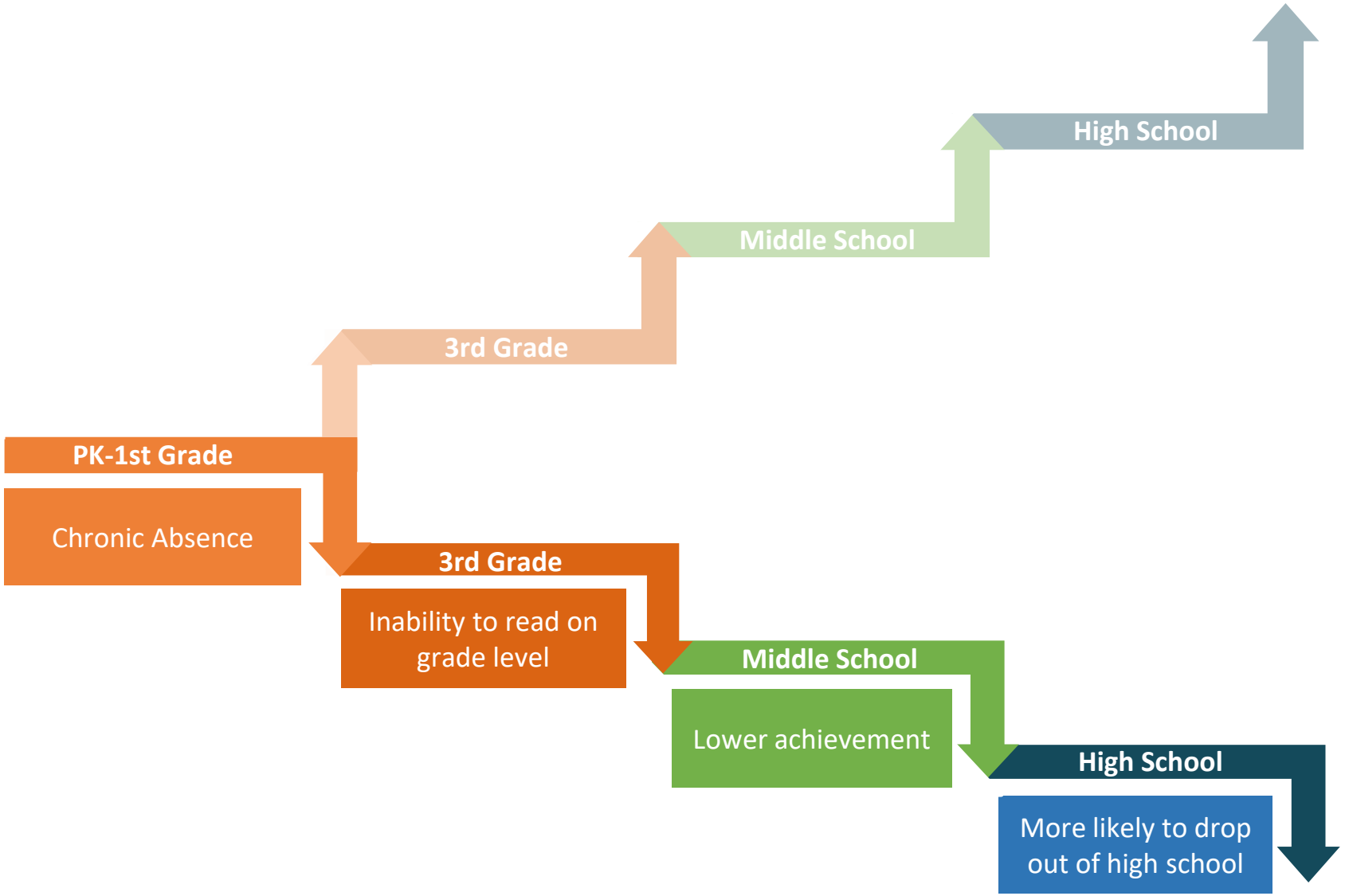
% of parents with children in grades K-12 indicating their child could be chronically absent



Source: McKinsey Parent Survey June 2021 (n = 16,370) and November 2021 (n = 14,498)

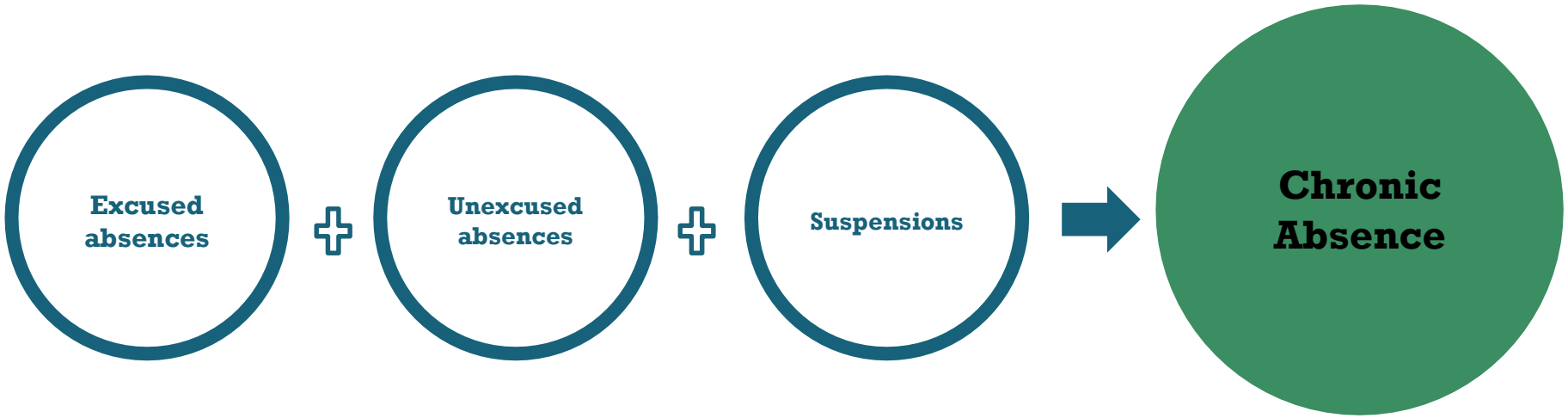
https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/education/our-insights/covid-19-and-education-an-emerging-k-shaped-recovery

Improving Attendance Matters



Chronic Absence Measures Lost Opportunity to Learn

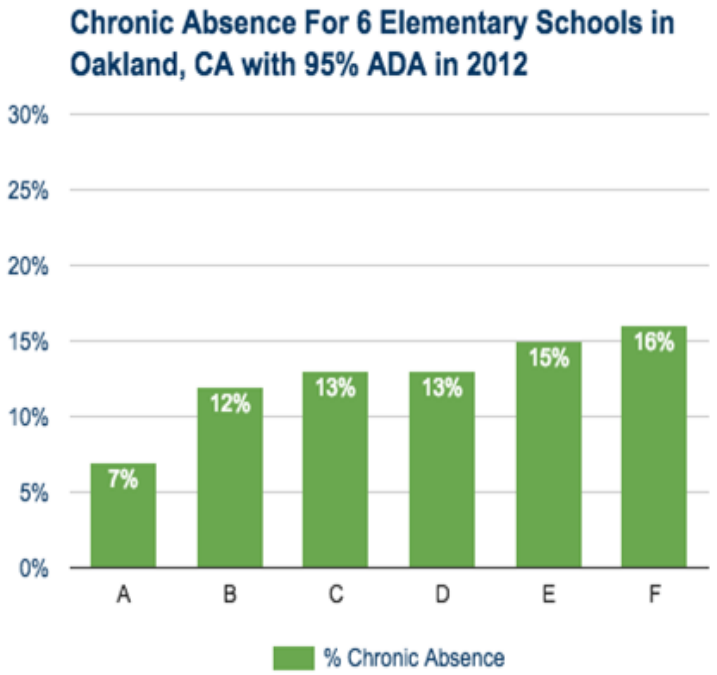
Chronic absence is missing so much school for any reason that a student is academically at risk. Chronic absence is defined as **missing 10 percent or more of school for any reason.**

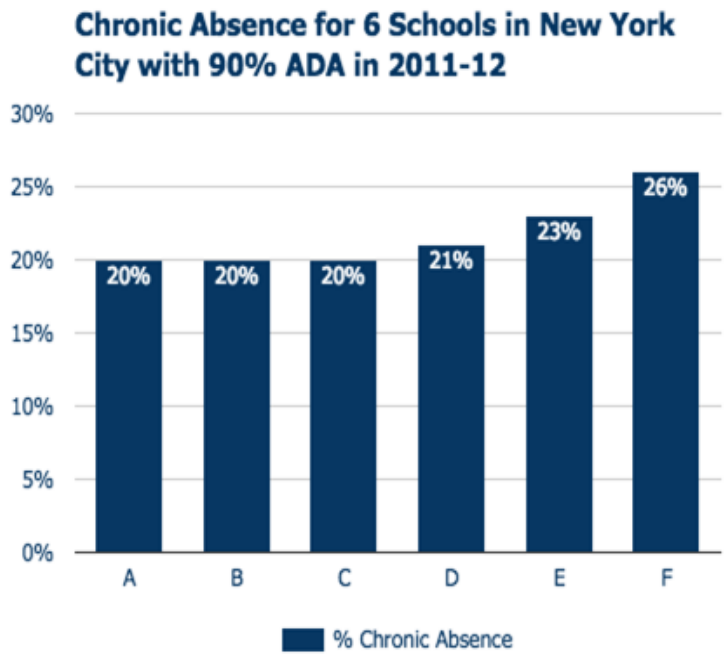


Chronic absence is different from **truancy** (unexcused absences only) or **average daily attendance** (how many students show up to school each day).

Average Daily Attendance (ADA) Can Mask Chronic Absence

90% and even 95% ≠ A



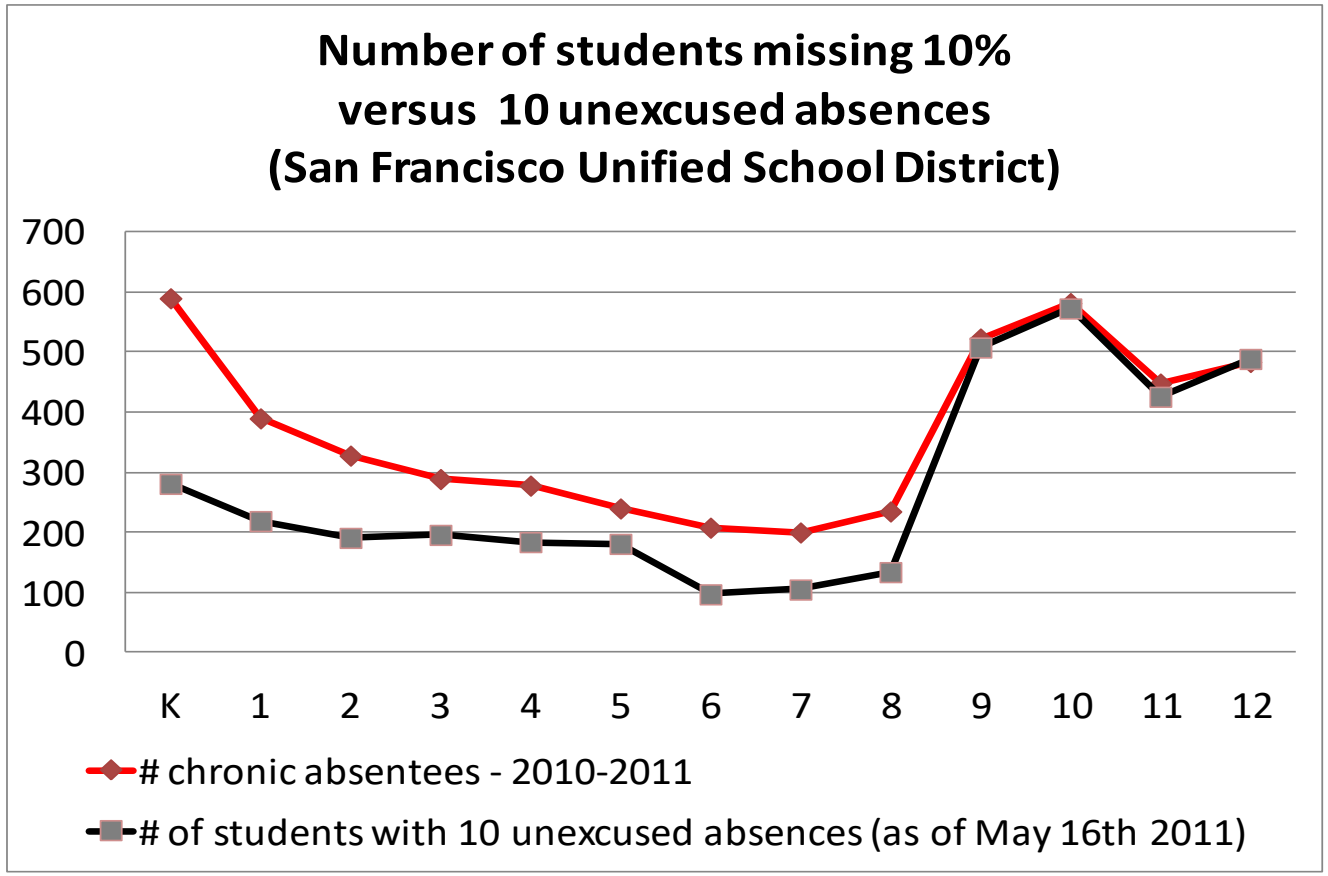


98% ADA = little chronic absence

95% ADA = don't know

93% ADA = significant chronic absence

Chronic Absence vs. Truancy



What's the Difference Between Chronic Absence vs. Truancy?

Truancy

- Counts ONLY unexcused absences
- Emphasizes individual compliance with school rules
- Uses legal, typically more blaming and punitive, solutions

Chronic Absence

- Counts ALL absences *(excused, unexcused & suspensions)*
- Emphasizes impact of missed days
- Uses preventative, problem-solving, trauma-sensitive strategies
- Cultivates family & student engagement

https://www.attendanceworks.org/whats-the-difference-between-chronic-absence-and-truancy/

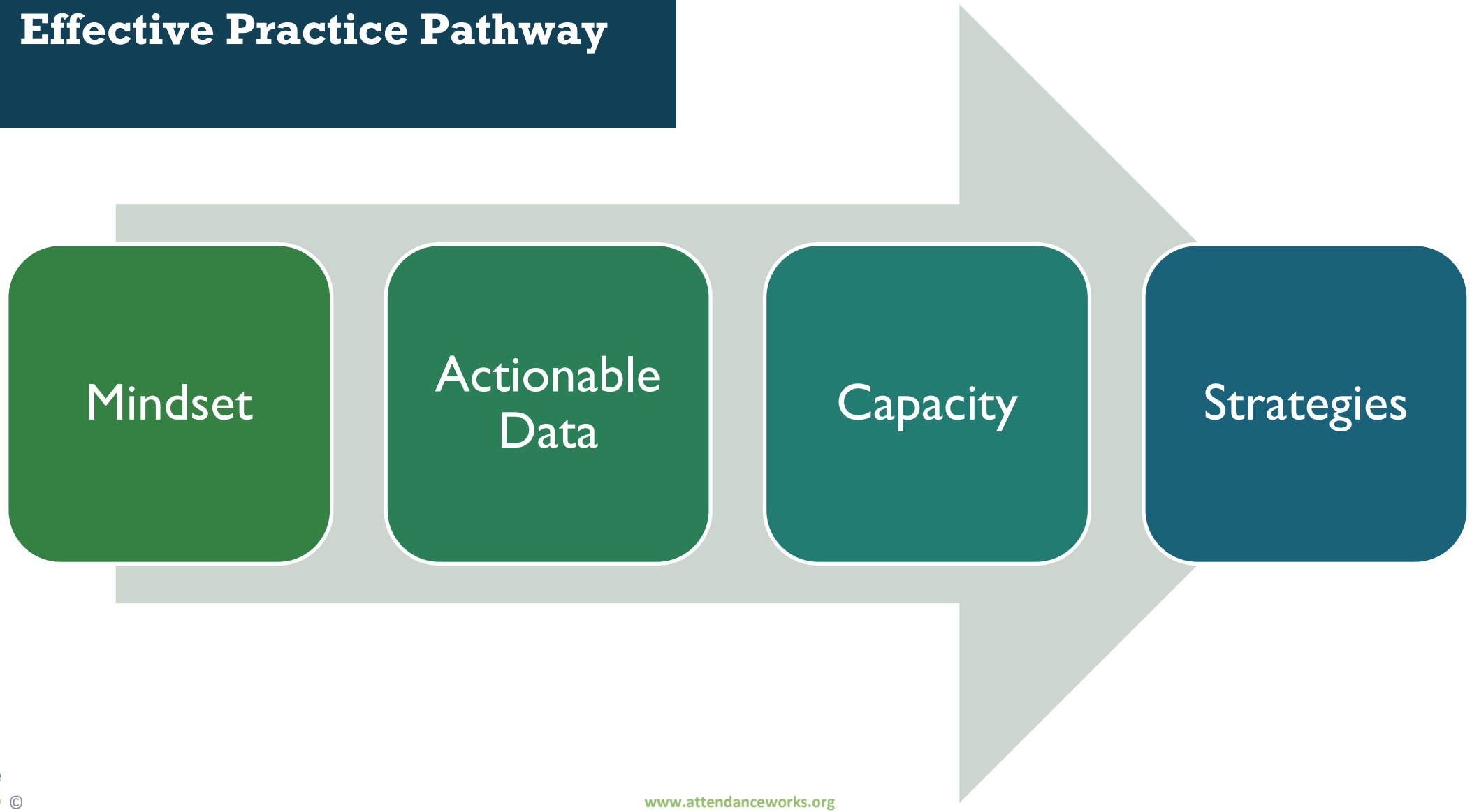
Reflection

Reflect on your practice:

What approach does your school or school system take to improving attendance?

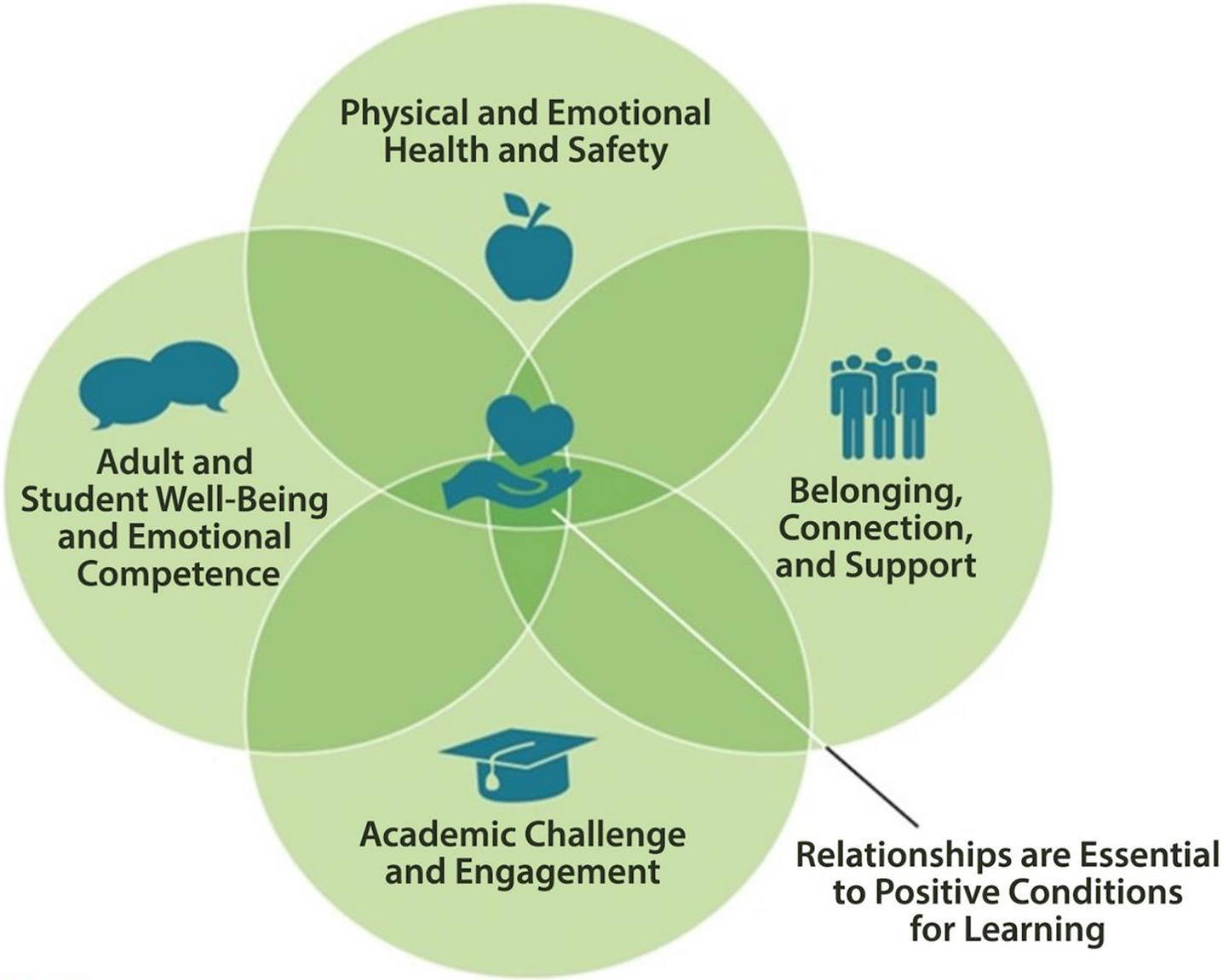
Is it more punitive or prevention oriented?

Effective Practice Pathway



Positive Relationships with Students & Families

Positive Conditions for Learning Lead to Students Being Engaged and Attending Regularly



The Push and Pull of Conditions for Learning

Please Write in the Chat:

1. **What is pushing students out of school?**
2. **What is pulling them in?**

Examples of Push-Out Factors

Feeling:

Ignored
Unsafe
That you do not belong

Experiencing:

Bullying
Boredom
Harsh and Exclusionary Discipline

Examples of Pull Factors

Feeling:

Cared for
Safe
That you belong

Experiencing:

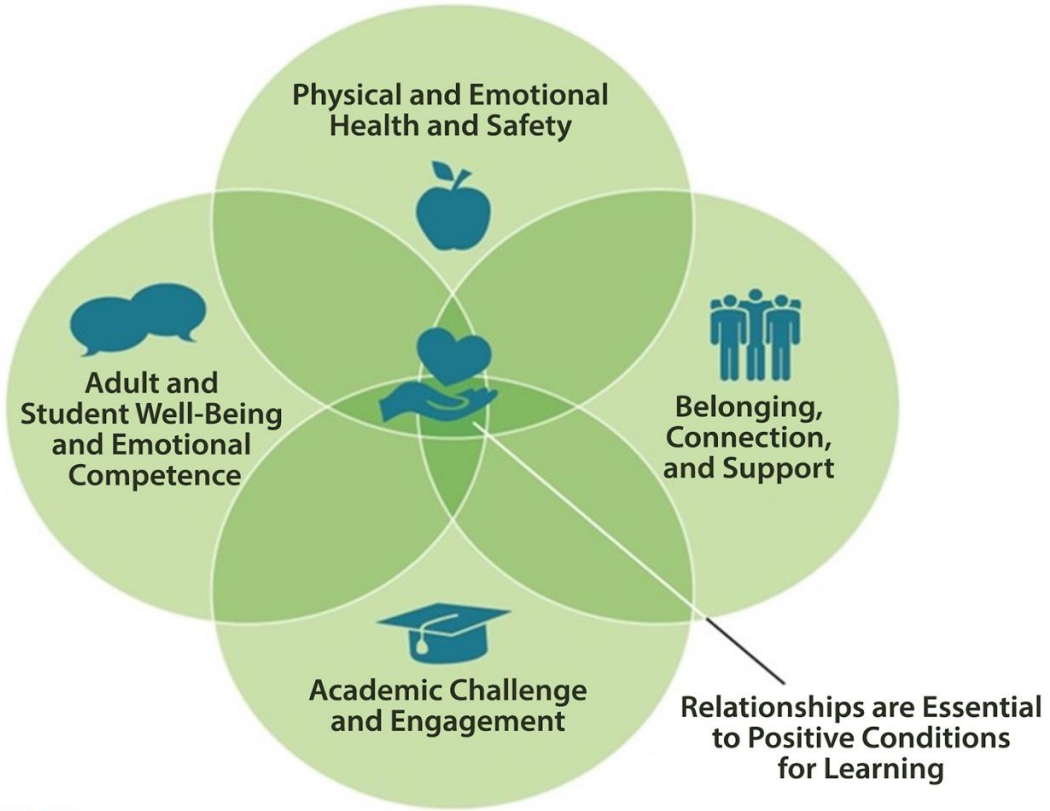
Engagement
Support for students and their families

Every Opportunity

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VxyxywShewI

Please share in chat

How did the video illustrate positive conditions for learning?



Small Group Discussion

About Your School:

- What strategies work to forge positive relationships with students? What works for families?
- Share how you reach students & families who aren't connected to school because of a history of disconnection, who are experiencing poverty, discrimination, language barriers, etc.

Ground Rules

- Turn on your video camera
- Briefly introduce yourself
- Raise your hand to speak
- Ask clarifying questions
- Explore differences of opinion
- Create space for everyone to speak *(and use the chat to express ideas)*
- The person whose first name is closest to the letter "A" should facilitate.

Report Out

Share in Chat:

What are some successful strategies for building relationships, especially those with the greatest attendance challenges?

Focus on High Leverage Relationship Activities

What is a high leverage activity?

- ❑ Lays a foundation for caring and positive relationships
- ❑ Can be used with staff and with students and families
- ❑ Offered universally with extra attention and tailoring to ensure it reaches chronically absent students

  (Examples: Greeting By the Door, Giving Thanks, Individual Learning Plans, Restorative Circles, etc.)

Greetings by the Door

1. Positive greeting by name
2. Smile, offer an affirming comment
3. Give students a choice,
   low / no contact options:
   - Wave
   - Thumbs up
   - Bow
   - Elbow bump

https://www.edutopia.org/video/making-connections-greetings-door

Evidence-Based Programs

Relational Home Visits

- ✔ Goal is to create positive relationship between educators and parents *before* any issues arise.
- ✔ Example of model program: Parent Teacher Home Visits http://www.pthvp.org/what-we-do/pthv-model/
- ✔ Offers in-person and online training
- ✔ Offers in-person and online visiting options

Mentoring

- ✔ Goal is to create positive connection between mentor and student(s) to support student success in school
- ✔ Example of programs: MENTOR, Peer Group Connections, Success Mentor
- ✔ Virtual options for different age groups, https://www.mentoring.org/virtual-mentoring-portals/

Additional Resources

- Pathways to Engagement: A Toolkit for Covid-19 Recovery Through Attendance https://www.attendanceworks.org/resources/toolkits/pathways-to-engagement-a-toolkit-for-covid-19-recovery-through-attendance/

- How to Guide Relationship Mapping: Download in-person and virtual versions of this guide at https://mcc.gse.harvard.edu/resources-for-educators/relationship-mapping-strategy

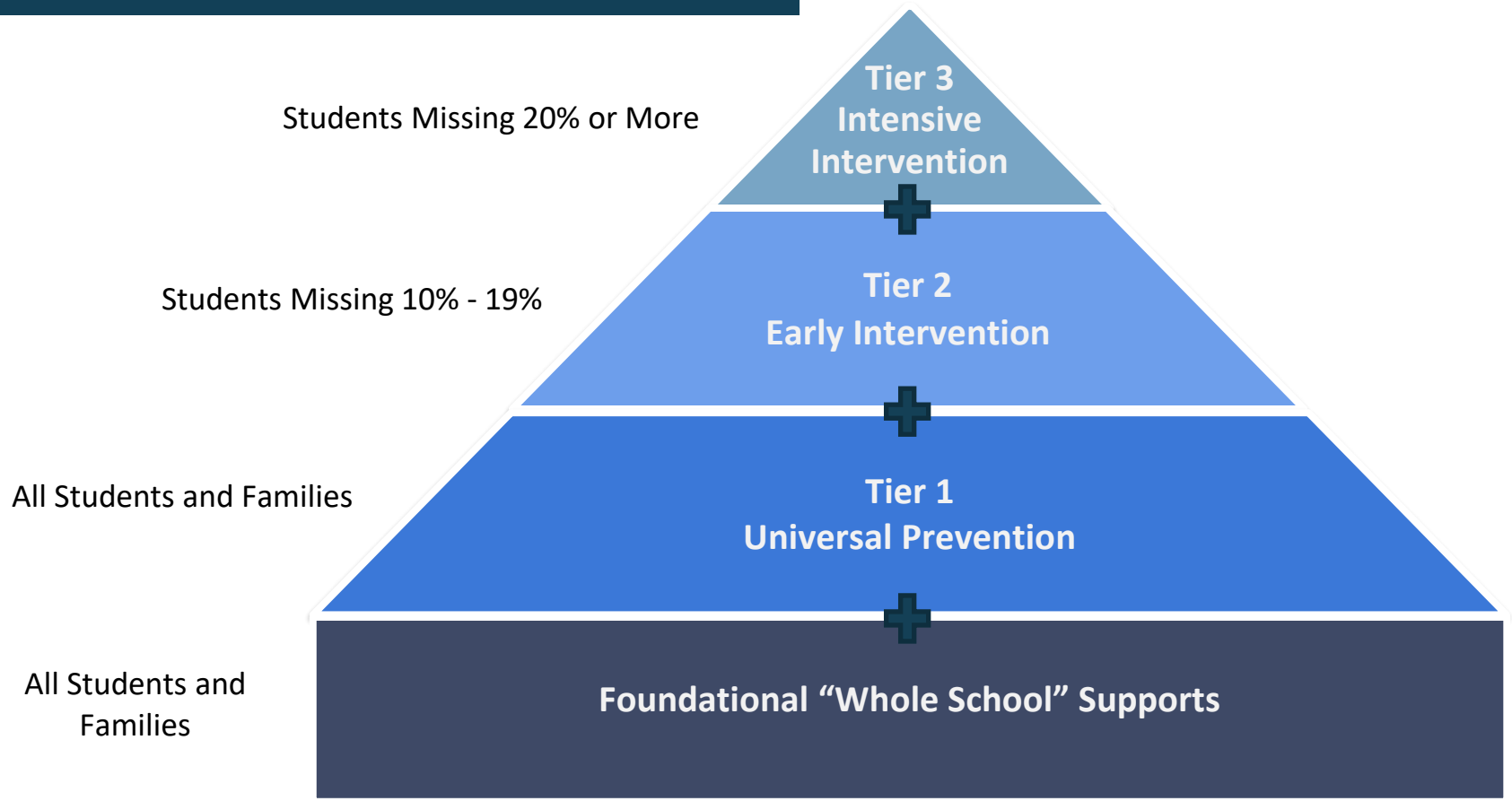
- 2x10 Relationship Strategy Bank https://www.scoe.net/media/e4olyyjr/sesion_2_relationship_strategy_bank.pdf

- America's Promise – resources to work with teens https://www.americaspromise.org/voices-of-young-people

- Attendance Playbook, https://www.attendanceworks.org/resources/attendance-playbook/

Relationships are Essential at Every Level of Intervention

An Integrated Multi-tiered System of Support



https://www.attendanceworks.org/chronic-absence/addressing-chronic-absence/3-tiers-of-intervention/

Foundational Supports are Building Blocks of Schools that Promote Engagement

Share in Chat: In your experience, which foundational supports are most essential right now?

Healthy learning environments	Enrichment activities and clubs	Positive relationships	Active family and student engagement
Access to tech equipment and connectivity	Challenging and Engaging Curriculum	Traditions and celebrations	Support for families to facilitate learning at home
Welcoming, safe school climate	Advisories or Morning Meetings to Build Community	Learning Supports	Access to Food and Other Basic Needs

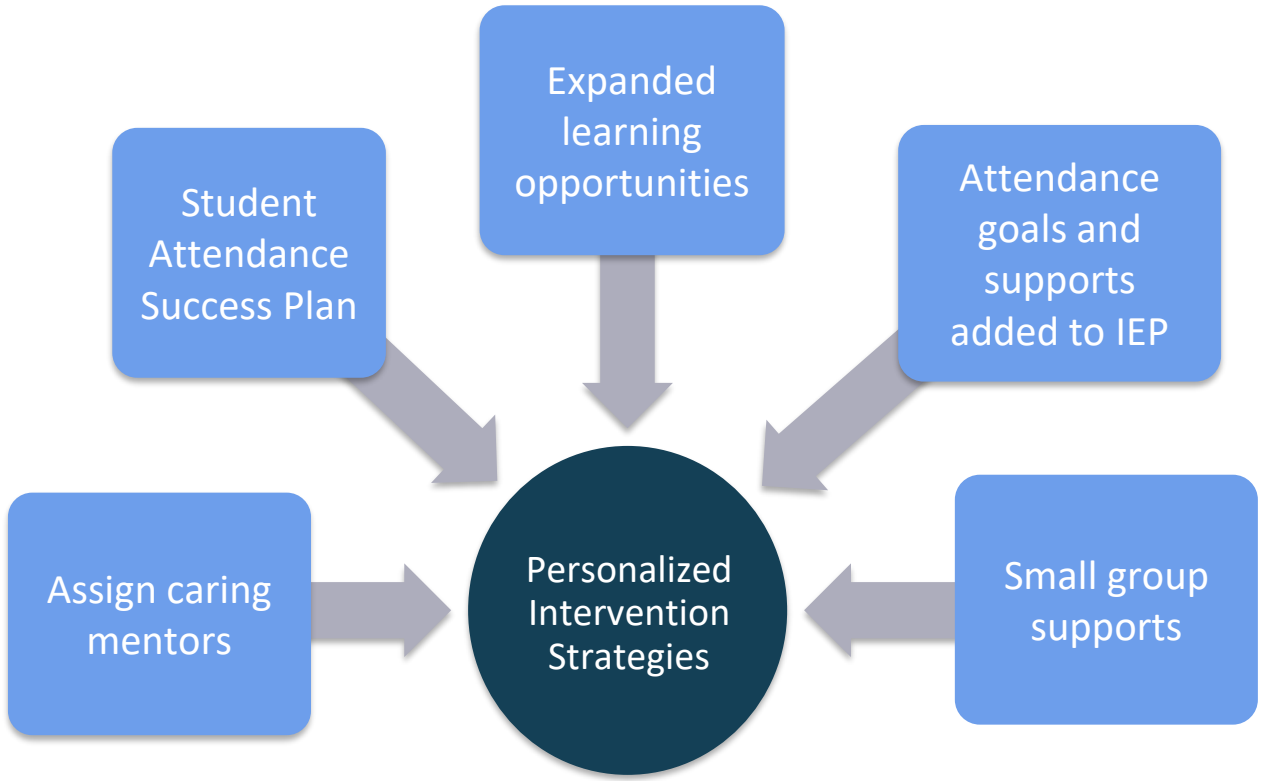
Foundational "Whole School" Supports

Tier 1: Universal Attendance Supports

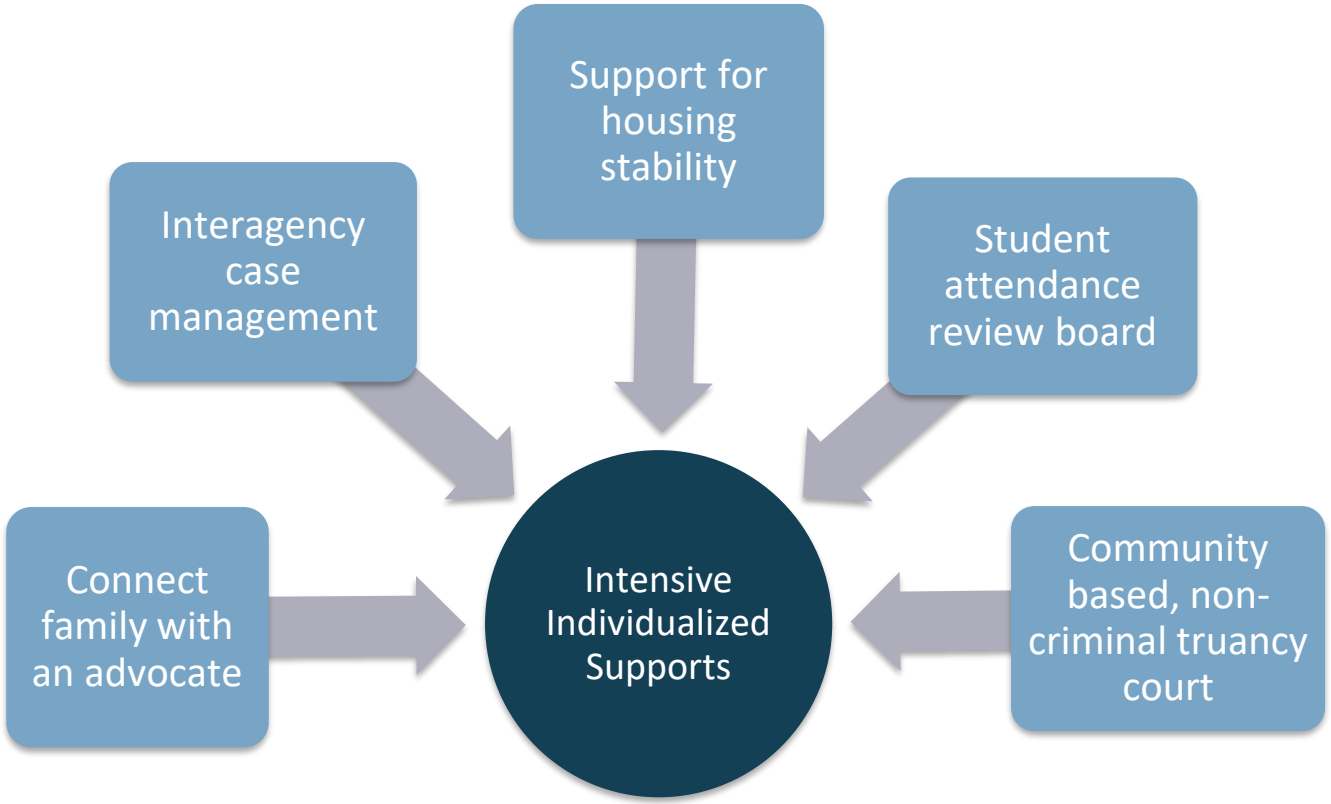
In the Chat: Which Tier 1 attendance supports have you successfully used?

- Clear, concise and consistent communication about schedules and expectations
- Predictable daily/weekly routines related to attendance
- Take daily attendance accurately with care
- Personalized communication to families when students are absent
- Recognition of good and improved attendance
- Access to wellness checks and connectivity assessments
- Regular monitoring of attendance data

Tier 2: Strategies layer in support, strengthen relationships, and take a problem-solving approach



Tier 3: Strategies involve public and community partners and integrated case management



Effective Communications with Students and Families

Centering Communication on Restorative Practices

Engagement — involving individuals in decisions that affect them by listening to their views and genuinely taking their opinions into account

Explanation — explaining the reasoning behind a decision to everyone who has been involved or who is affected by it

Expectation clarity — making sure that everyone clearly understands a decision and what is expected of them in the future

(Kim & Mauborgne, 1997)
https://www.iirp.edu/restorative-practices/defining-restorative/

Ineffective Communications from Schools

Impersonal, Auto-generated, Negative Truancy Letters:

- Easy to disregard
- Many parents felt many of the absences were legitimate and didn't understand why they received a letter.
- Many parents felt that the school didn't understand their attendance challenges
- Aren't as effective as clearly written, supportive letters

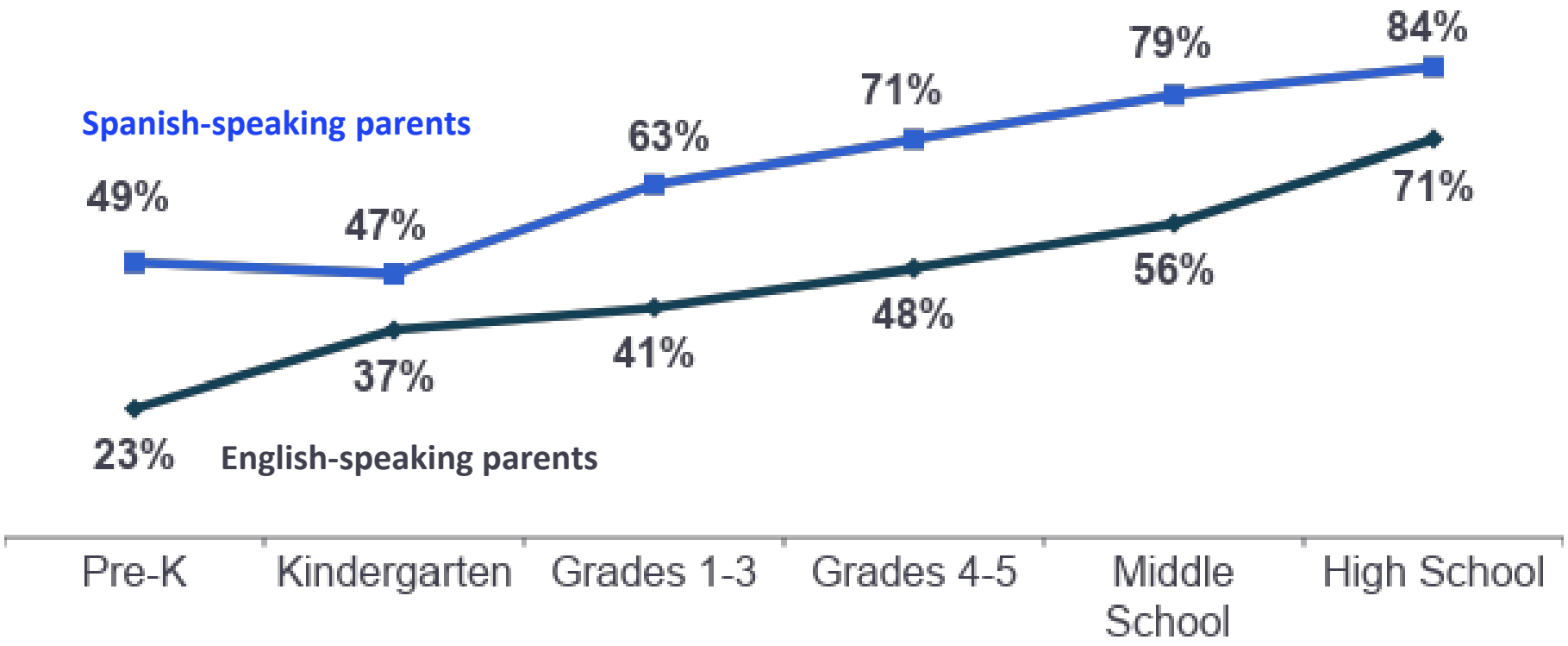
Teachers Not Addressing Absenteeism:

- Most parents reported that they regularly communicate with their children's teacher, but never about absences

https://oag.ca.gov/truancy/toolkit

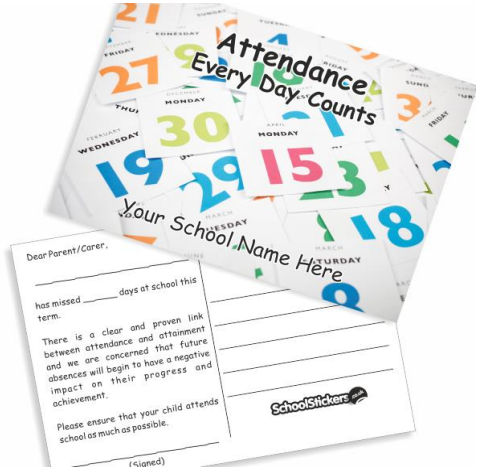
Effective Messaging Must Address Misperceptions

Percent of chronically absent families who say "It's a big deal to miss at this grade level"



Source: Ad Council & Calif. Attorney General – Parent Ethnographies 2015
https://oag.ca.gov/truancy/toolkit
https://oag.ca.gov/sites/all/files/agweb/pdfs/tr/toolkit/QuantitativeResearchReport.pdf

Research on Effective Messaging for Families



- Keep it Straightforward
- Make it Skimmable
- Share Relevant Information on a Timely Basis
- Personalize Messages

- **bullet**
- **point**
- **lists**

Let's Practice.
Which of these fliers aligns with research? Why?

HOW TO TALK TO CHILDREN

With the widespread news coverage about the coronavirus, known as "COVID-19", children may develop fears about the risk to their own health and safety. It is important for parents to listen to these fears, and learn some of the basic facts themselves.

Be aware of your own behavior
It can impact how your child may feel. If you're anxious, they could take their cues from you.

Stay up-to-date with information
This can help you understand and share the facts about COVID-19 with your children.

Know whether or not to talk about COVID-19 with them
It is important to know what children have heard about COVID-19 already. It is likely that they are talking about it in school, so just because your child doesn't bring it up, doesn't mean they aren't thinking about it.

Explain what is currently being done to contain COVID-19
Reassure children that the measures put in place are the best ways to keep them safe. The U.S. is carefully monitoring the situation and currently the risk in Chester County remains low. Health Departments, such as the Chester County Health Department, are encouraging personal preparedness and prevention tips to keep the community healthy.

Know what information your children are exposed to
Be mindful about where your children are being exposed to information about COVID-19. For example, they may overhear conversations, or pick up on the continuous news headlines that adults have on as background.

For teenagers and tweens who have access to news online and via social media, ask them what they are seeing and hearing about COVID-19. Help correct misinformation, and if you don't know the answer, be honest. You can research the answers together.

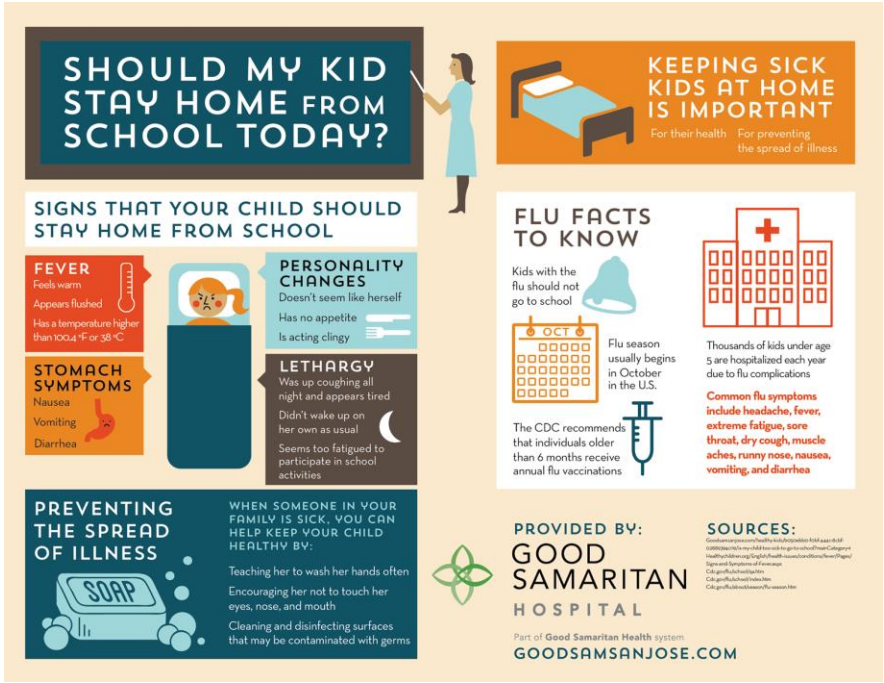
Validate their feelings and reassure them
Parents should listen to their child's fears and try to understand what they are feeling. Avoid saying things like "you'll be fine" or "don't worry about it."

Give them action items
Remind them of the importance of washing hands often (for at least 20 seconds), avoid touching their eyes, mouth, and nose, and keeping their areas clean by wiping down things that are used often. If your preparedness plans include stocking up on groceries and toiletries, like you would before a big snowstorm, ask your child to help. Invite them to go the store with you. Having a stash of their favorite snacks in the pantry may help them feel more prepared.

For more information, please visit the Chester County Health Department's website
Chesco.org/Health

If you are active on social media, we recommend following these sources:
@ChesterCountyHealthDepartment
@ChescoHealth
@CDC
@CDCgov

Example A



SHOULD MY KID STAY HOME FROM SCHOOL TODAY?

SIGNS THAT YOUR CHILD SHOULD STAY HOME FROM SCHOOL

FEVER
Feels warm
Appears flushed
Has a temperature higher than 100.4 °F or 38 °C

STOMACH SYMPTOMS
Nausea
Vomiting
Diarrhea

PERSONALITY CHANGES
Doesn't seem like herself
Has no appetite
Is acting clingy

LETHARGY
Was up coughing all night and appears tired
Didn't wake up on her own as usual
Seems too fatigued to participate in school activities

PREVENTING THE SPREAD OF ILLNESS

WHEN SOMEONE IN YOUR FAMILY IS SICK, YOU CAN HELP KEEP YOUR CHILD HEALTHY BY:

Teaching her to wash her hands often
Encouraging her not to touch her eyes, nose, and mouth
Cleaning and disinfecting surfaces that may be contaminated with germs

SOAP

KEEPING SICK KIDS AT HOME IS IMPORTANT

For their health For preventing the spread of illness

FLU FACTS TO KNOW

Kids with the flu should not go to school

OCT

Flu season usually begins in October in the U.S.

The CDC recommends that individuals older than 6 months receive annual flu vaccinations

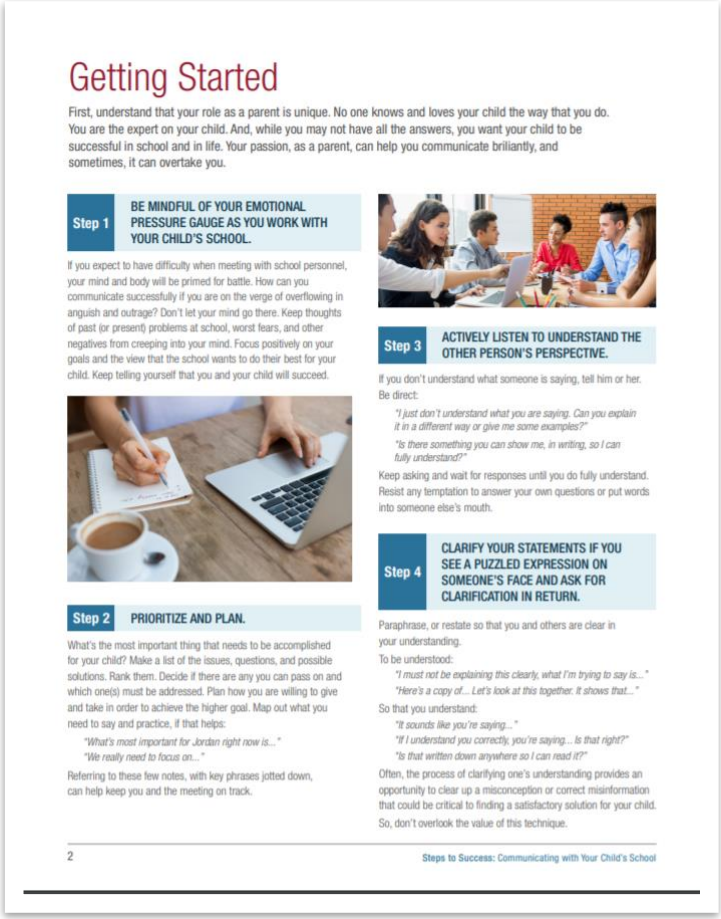
Thousands of kids under age 5 are hospitalized each year due to flu complications

Common flu symptoms include headache, fever, extreme fatigue, sore throat, dry cough, muscle aches, runny nose, nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea

PROVIDED BY:
GOOD SAMARITAN HOSPITAL
Part of Good Samaritan Health system
GOODSAMSANJOSE.COM

SOURCES:

Example B



Getting Started

First, understand that your role as a parent is unique. No one knows and loves your child the way that you do. You are the expert on your child. And, while you may not have all the answers, you want your child to be successful in school and in life. Your passion, as a parent, can help you communicate brilliantly, and sometimes, it can overtake you.

Step 1 BE MINDFUL OF YOUR EMOTIONAL PRESSURE GAUGE AS YOU WORK WITH YOUR CHILD'S SCHOOL.

If you expect to have difficulty when meeting with school personnel, your mind and body will be primed for battle. How can you communicate successfully if you are on the verge of overflowing in anguish and outrage? Don't let your mind go there. Keep thoughts of past (or present) problems at school, worst fears, and other negatives from creeping into your mind. Focus positively on your goals and the view that the school wants to do their best for your child. Keep telling yourself that you and your child will succeed.

Step 2 PRIORITIZE AND PLAN.

What's the most important thing that needs to be accomplished for your child? Make a list of the issues, questions, and possible solutions. Rank them. Decide if there are any you can pass on and which one(s) must be addressed. Plan how you are willing to give and take in order to achieve the higher goal. Map out what you need to say and practice, if that helps:

"What's most important for Jordan right now is..."
"We really need to focus on..."

Referring to these few notes, with key phrases jotted down, can help keep you and the meeting on track.

Step 3 ACTIVELY LISTEN TO UNDERSTAND THE OTHER PERSON'S PERSPECTIVE.

If you don't understand what someone is saying, tell him or her. Be direct:

"I just don't understand what you are saying. Can you explain it in a different way or give me some examples?"
"Is there something you can show me, in writing, so I can fully understand?"

Keep asking and wait for responses until you do fully understand. Resist any temptation to answer your own questions or put words into someone else's mouth.

Step 4 CLARIFY YOUR STATEMENTS IF YOU SEE A PUZZLED EXPRESSION ON SOMEONE'S FACE AND ASK FOR CLARIFICATION IN RETURN.

Paraphrase, or restate so that you and others are clear in your understanding.

To be understood:
"I must not be explaining this clearly, what I'm trying to say is..."
"Here's a copy of... Let's look at this together. It shows that..."

So that you understand:
"It sounds like you're saying..."
"If I understand you correctly, you're saying... Is that right?"
"Is that written down anywhere so I can read it?"

Often, the process of clarifying one's understanding provides an opportunity to clear up a misconception or correct misinformation that could be critical to finding a satisfactory solution for your child. So, don't overlook the value of this technique.

2 Steps to Success: Communicating with Your Child's School

Example C

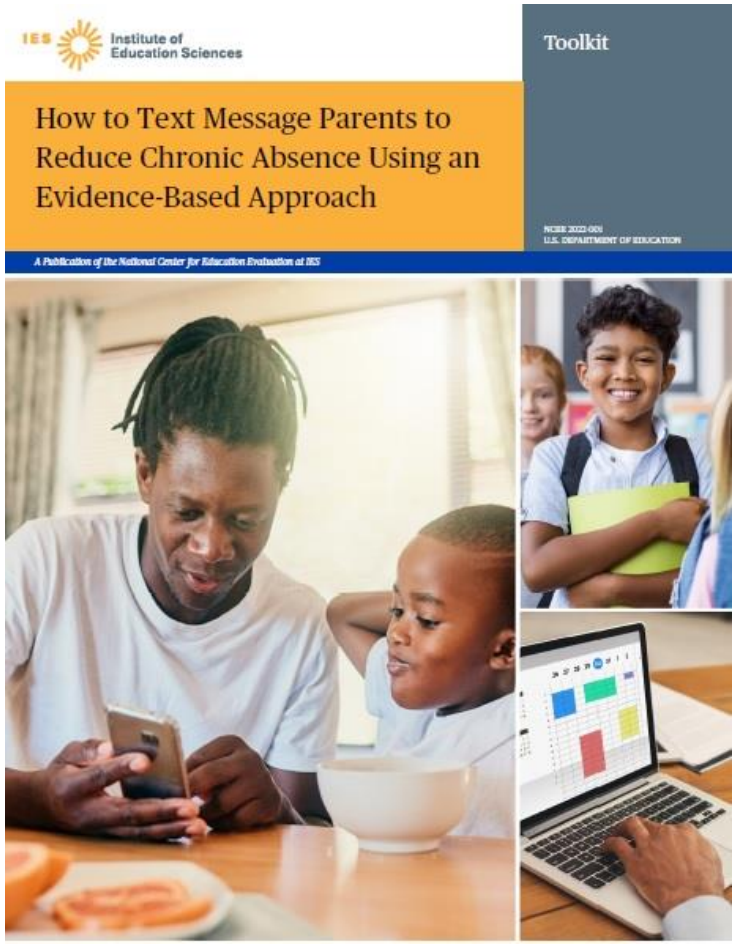
Forging Partnerships with Families to Support Engagement and Attendance

- Communicate supportive messages (Stay Safe, Stay Healthy, Keep Connected and Keep Learning) throughout the school year
- Provide tailored, personalized and caring messages to students and families who are chronically absent
- Offer actionable steps to improve attendance
- Make sure families know what resources are available for basic needs as well as learning at home.

Communicating with Families

Use these resources to help your communications with families be clear and supportive:

- Chronic Absence letter Updated for Covid-19
  https://www.attendanceworks.org/resources/welcome-students-to-school/
- Stay the Course: A Winter Messaging Toolkit
  https://www.attendanceworks.org/resources/messaging/stay-the-course-a-winter-messaging-toolkit/
- How to Text Message Parents to Reduce Chronic Absence Using an Evidence-Based Approach
  https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/pubs/2022001/pdf/2022001.pdf



Additional Resources from Attendance Works

Handouts for Families

- ✓ Preschool, Elementary & Secondary Grades
- ✓ Available in English, Spanish, Chinese, Vietnamese, Tagalog and Creole
  https://www.attendanceworks.org/resources/handouts-for-families/

Attendance Works

Help Your Child Succeed in School:
Build the Habit of Good Attendance Early

DID YOU KNOW?

- Starting in preschool and kindergarten, too many absences can cause children to fall behind in school.
- Missing 10%, or about 2 days each month over the course of a school year, can make it harder to learn to read.
- Students can still fall behind if they miss just one or two days every few weeks.
- Being late to school may lead to poor attendance.
- Absences and tardiness can affect the whole classroom if the teacher has to slow down learning to help children catch up.

Attending school regularly helps children feel better about school—and themselves. Start building this habit in preschool so they learn right away that going to school on time, every day is important. Eventually good attendance will be a skill that will help them succeed in high school and college.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Set a regular bedtime and morning routine.
- Lay out clothes and pack backpacks the night before.
- Find out what day school starts and make sure your child has the required shots.
- Introduce your children to their teachers and classmates before school starts.
- Develop backup plans for getting to school if something comes up. Call on a family member, a neighbor, or another parent.
- Avoid medical appointments and extended trips when school is in session.
- Keep in mind that complaints of a stomach ache or headache can be a sign of anxiety and not a reason to stay home. If your child seems anxious about going to school, talk to teachers, school counselors and other parents for advice on how to make your child feel comfortable and excited about learning.
- If your child must stay home due to illness, ask the teacher for resources and ideas to continue learning at home

When Do Absences Become a Problem?

CHRONIC ABSENCE
18 or more days

WARNING SIGNS
10 to 17 days

SATISFACTORY
9 or fewer absences

Note: These numbers assume a 180-day school year.

Visit Attendance Works at **www.attendanceworks.org** for free downloadable resources and tools!

Sign up for the 2022 Attendance Awareness Campaign

https://awareness.attendanceworks.org/contact/aam-updates/

Questions from the Audience

Learning Goals for Session 1

Participants will:

- Draw on high leverage, whole school strategies to create
  - positive conditions for learning and
  - strong relationships with students and families that prevent absenteeism
- Learn about a framework of multi-tiered attendance strategies that moves schools towards prevention and early intervention
- Explore a restorative approach to communicating with families about attendance

Evaluation Survey

Please let us know how we can improve:

https://app.upmetrics.com/data_collector/ckf2oltbqlt8k0759tfdbfybj

Thank you!

Attendance Works

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About Us

Attendance Works advances student success and closes equity gaps by reducing chronic absence. Operating at the local, state, and national level, Attendance Works:

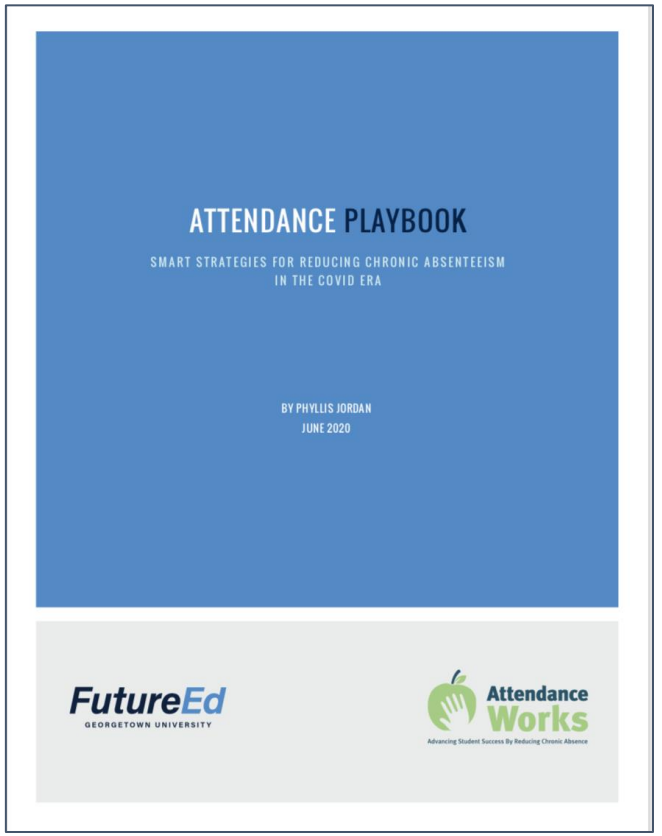
- ✓ Advances better **policy**
- ✓ Nurtures proven and promising **practice**
- ✓ Promotes meaningful and effective **communication**
- ✓ Catalyzes needed **research**

Since our launch in 2010, we have become the nation's "go-to" resource for improving student attendance. To learn more, visit our website: www.attendanceworks.org

Appendix:
Additional Resources

Attendance Playbook: Covid Edition

- Evidence-based interventions to improve attendance
- Links to effective programs and resources
- Listed by tiers for use
- A section on monitoring attendance in distance learning
- Covid-19 modifications for interventions
- Added guidance on clean environment



Attendance Playbook: https://www.future-ed.org/attendance-playbook/

Implementation Guide: https://www.attendanceworks.org/resources/attendance-playbook/

How to Use the Attendance Playbook

The Guide to the Attendance Playbook offers practical tips for:

- Forming a team
- Using attendance data to determine the number of strategies
- Analyzing why students are absent and selecting strategies that address those reasons
- Realistically assessing your team's capacity to implement each strategy
- Selecting strategies that are likely to have the greatest impact for the lowest effort
- Making an implementation plan
- Assessing how well the strategies worked

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