2018 National Convening

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Plenary Panel: Successful Strategies for Taking a Systemic Approach to Reducing Chronic Absence

Hedy Chang, Executive Director, Attendance Works

Panelists:
• Lorri Hobson, Director, Cleveland Public Schools
• Angelo Gonzales, Executive Director, Mission Graduate at the United Way of Central New Mexico
• Walter Sallee, Director, Student Services and Strategic Planning Branch, Maryland State Department of Education
Attendance Works advances student success and closes equity gaps by reducing chronic absence. Operating at the local, state, and national levels, Attendance Works:

- Advances better policy
- Nurtures proven and promising practice
- Promotes meaningful and effective communication
- Catalyzes needed research
What is chronic absence?

Chronic absence is missing so much school for any reason that a student is academically at risk. Attendance Works recommends defining it 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).
How does EDFacts define chronic absence?

The unduplicated number of students absent for 10 percent or more school days during the school year

- Include all students (K–12) who meet the definition of chronic absenteeism
- Include students who were enrolled for at least 10 school days at any time during the school year and who missed 10 percent of the school days in which they were enrolled in the school
- Students should be counted once at each school they attended
- Students are considered tardy if they are absent for less than 50 percent of the school day

Definition of Absenteeism: Students are absent if they are not physically on school grounds and are not participating in instruction or instruction-related activities at an approved off-ground location for the school day. Chronically absent students include students who are absent for any reason (e.g., illness, suspension, the need to care for a family member), regardless of whether absences are excused or unexcused.

Source: EDFacts Chronic Absenteeism File Specifications SY 2016-17:
https://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/edfacts/sy-16-17-nonxml.html
Reflects New Paradigm on Attendance

**Truancy**
- Counts unexcused absences
- Emphasizes individual compliance with school rules
- Uses legal, typically more punitive, solutions

**Chronic Absence**
- Counts all absences
- Emphasizes academic impact of missed days
- Uses preventive problem-solving strategies
No Child Left Behind

- Success determined by academic standards
- Federal targets and interventions for schools; punitive system of responses
- Accountability and data for student sub-groups
- Each state defines and addresses truancy, which typically emphasizes court-based, punitive interventions

Every Student Succeeds Act

- Success determined by academic and nonacademic standards
- States set goals; supportive framework
- Accountability and data for student sub-groups
- Chronic absence is a required reporting and optional school quality metric. It emphasizes prevention and early intervention.
36 states + DC adopted chronic absence as a metric in their ESSA plans. The vast majority adopted the definition recommended by Attendance Works.

Who's In: Chronic Absenteeism Under the Every Student Succeeds Act
Future Ed, Georgetown University, September 2017

States Using Chronic Absence as a School Quality and Student Success Indicator

How States Define Chronic Absenteeism in Their ESSA Plans

Legend
States Using Chronic Absence as an Indicator

SOURCE: FutureEd Analysis of State ESSA Plans
1 in 7 students misses 15 days or more

- **Highly concentrated:** Half of all chronically absent students in 4 percent of districts
- **Rural districts:** Many have high rates of chronic absence
- **Schools with high levels:** In 1 out of 5 schools, 20 percent or more of students are chronically absent

Source: U.S. Department of Education Civil Rights Data Collection SY 2013-14
https://www2.ed.gov/datastory/chronicabsenteeism.html
When a Student Misses School, the Impact Ripples
• Vulnerable children, especially those living in poverty, are 2–3 times more likely to experience chronic absence at earlier ages.

• Vulnerable children are much less likely to have the resources to make up for lost learning time in the classroom.

• Vulnerable children are more likely to experience multiple years of chronic absence.
Student Attendance Is Strongly Associated with Academic Success

- **K–1st Grade:** Students who attend regularly in the early grades perform better on measures of academic and social and emotional capacities.

- **3rd Grade:** Students who attend school regularly are more likely to be able to read proficiently by the end of 3rd grade.

- **Middle School Success:** Students who attend school regularly are more likely to have passing grades in middle school.

- **High School Completion:** Students who attend school regularly in high school are more likely to persist in college and graduate.

- **College Completion:** Students who attend school regularly in high school are more likely to persist in college and graduate.
How can we address chronic absence?
Invest in Prevention and Early Intervention

**TIER 1**
- Engaging school climate
- Positive relationships with students and families
- Impact of absences on achievement widely understood
- Chronic absence data monitored
- Good and improved attendance recognized
- Common barriers identified and addressed

**TIER 2**
- Personalized early outreach
- Action plan addresses barriers and increases engagement
- Caring mentors

**TIER 3**
- Coordinated school and interagency response
- Legal intervention (last resort)

- Students missing less than 5% (satisfactory)
- Students missing 5-9% (at risk)
- Students missing 10-19% (moderate chronic absence)
- Students missing 20% or more of school (severe chronic absence)
### Factors that Contribute to Chronic Absence

#### Barriers
- Illness, both chronic and acute
- Lack of health, mental health, vision, or dental care
- Trauma
- Unsafe path to/from school
- Poor transportation
- Frequent moves or school changes
- Involvement with child welfare or juvenile justice systems

#### Negative School Experiences
- Struggling academically or socially
- Bullying
- Suspensions and expulsions
- Negative attitudes of parents due to their own school experience
- Undiagnosed disability
- Lack of appropriate accommodations for disability

#### Lack of Engagement
- Lack of culturally relevant, engaging instruction
- No meaningful relationships with adults in school
- Stronger ties with peers out of school than in school
- Unwelcoming school climate
- Failure to earn credits/no future plans
- Many teacher absences or long-term substitutes

#### Misconceptions
- Absences are only a problem if they are unexcused
- Missing two days per month doesn’t affect learning
- Sporadic absences aren’t a problem
- Attendance only matters in the older grades
Positive Engagement: Uses caring relationships, effective messaging, and a positive school climate to motivate daily attendance.

Actionable Data: Is accurate, accessible, and regularly reported in an understandable format.

Shared Accountability: Ensures chronic absence is monitored and reinforced by policy.

Capacity Building: Expands ability to work together to interpret data, engage in problem solving, and adopt best practices to improve attendance.

Strategic partnerships: District and community partners address specific attendance barriers and mobilize support for all ingredients.
Create the conditions for change by cultivating peer learning to inform broader policy change and practice

**Advance practice through peer learning**

- Locality A
- Locality B
- Locality C
- Locality D: Early Innovator

**Inform actions w/ insights from local practice**

- Policymakers
- Education leaders & associations (K–12 & ECE)
- Associations of public health agencies (housing, health, social services, transportation)
- Unions
- Parent organizations
- Advocacy organizations
- Philanthropy
- Others

**Spread work through TA and policy**

- Policymakers
- Education leaders & associations (K–12 & ECE)
- Associations of public health agencies (housing, health, social services, transportation)
- Unions
- Parent organizations
- Advocacy organizations
- Philanthropy
- Others

Ongoing peer learning, technical assistance, administrative guidance, regulations, legislation, etc., promote best practices and systemic change

**Peer opportunities to:**

- Compare data
- Share, demonstrate, and learn about best practices
- Identify and problem-solve common challenges

www.attendanceworks.org
Panel Discussion

Hedy Chang, Executive Director, Attendance Works (moderator)

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Panel Discussion

- **Background:** Tell us about your district, community, or state and how you got involved in addressing chronic absence.

- **Local Innovation:** Tell us about the scale and scope of chronic absence in your school or community and where you’ve seen any reductions in chronic absence. Please share the top two or three most important strategies that you’ve used to build a local system for reducing chronic absence.

- **State Role:** What are the top strategies that Maryland has used to support local innovation?

- **ESSA Implementation:** How is your work influenced by ESSA implementation? What do you see as the greatest opportunities? What are the major challenges?

- **Local and State Collaboration:** What advice would you give to others about how to strengthen state/local collaboration to build systems that will dramatically reduce chronic absence?