

How Can Districts Respond to Chronic Absenteeism?

A New Tool to Guide Understanding and Action

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Advancing Student
Success Systems

AASA
THE SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS ASSOCIATION



The GRAD Partnership for Student Success

The GRAD Partnership brings together nine organizations to partner with schools, districts, and local community organizations to create the conditions needed to enable all students to thrive.



Meeting the Chronic Absenteeism Challenge

What Do We Know?

Dr. Robert Balfanz, Everyone Graduates Center, Johns Hopkins University

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Success Systems

Scale & Intensity of Challenge

Requires a systemic approach



Improvement is Possible.

Know Your Challenge.

Organize Your Response.

Align Your Resources.

Know Your Challenge

It can vary by time, place, and grade level

Barriers

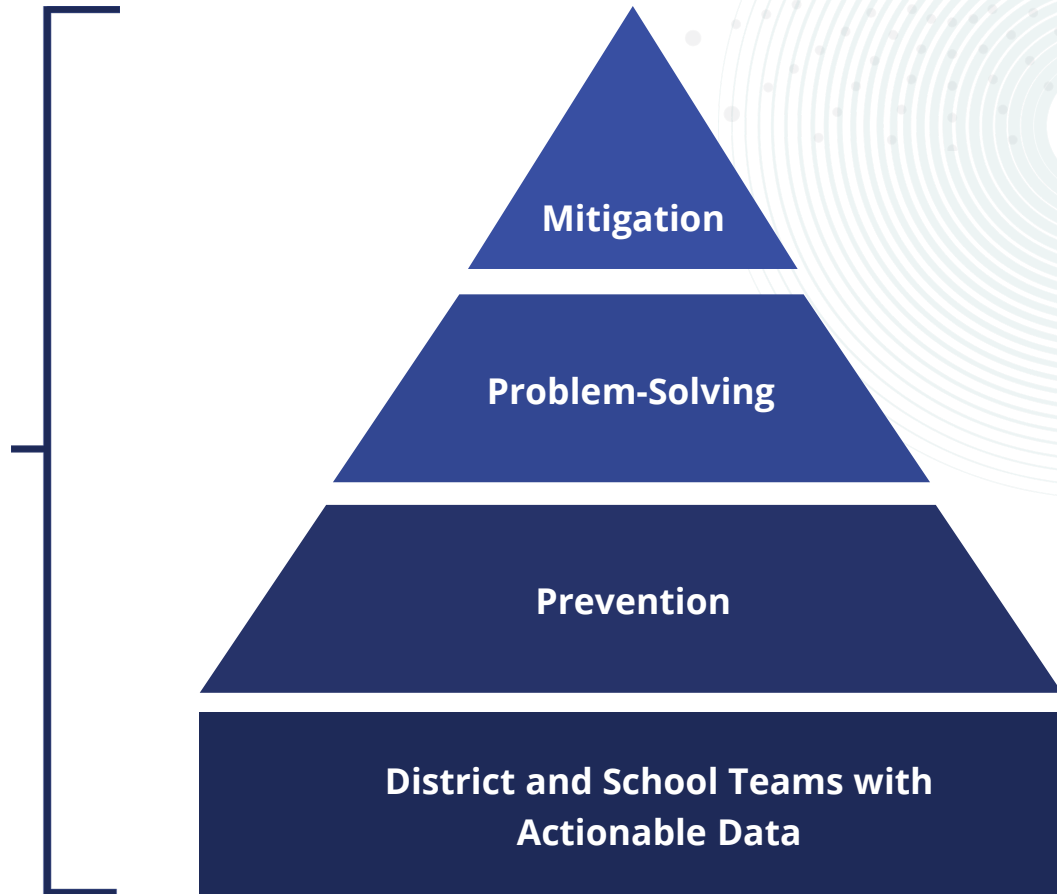
Aversion

Disengagement

Misconceptions

Organize Your Response

Need a Systemic
Approach



Gather & Align Resources

FORM STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

Collaborate with local non-profits, health providers, government agencies, and colleges that have resources which meet identified gaps in student supports.

TAKE STOCK

Know what resources already exist and whether they address current challenges.

INTEGRATE INTO EXISTING EFFORTS

Enhance attendance focus of your strongest student support effort. (E.g. MTSS, PBIS, early warning systems, etc.) Integrate attendance improvement into key initiatives. (E.g. Science of reading, high dosage tutoring, school improvement, CTE, etc.)

How to Improve Your School's Response to Chronic Absenteeism

Krys Payne, Network for College Success

Sonia Urban, Talent Development Secondary

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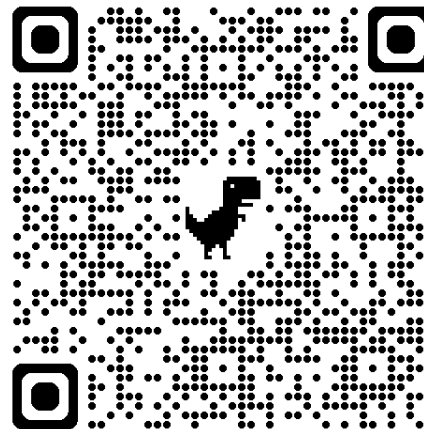
Something to consider...



As you read this quote, drop one word in the chat that describes what's coming up for you

Overview

- Description of the chronic absenteeism problem and tools to understand the data
- Discovery protocol
- Key questions
- Reflection and action planning



Discovery Protocol

Purpose: Disrupt our "customary and typical" responses to the chronic absenteeism problem

- Begin from a place of curiosity and empathy
- Slow down and create a space for perspective and innovation
- Recognize the complexity of the problem

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How to Improve Your School's Response to Chronic Absenteeism: Companion Discovery Tool

Priming Curiosity: Discovery Protocol

Summary: This Discovery Protocol is designed to engage a team's thinking beyond the first and usual explanations or ideas about the cause of chronic absence. Team members arrive to the process with their own experiences and may hold preconceived notions about attendance; this is an exercise of imagination, noticing, wonderings, and stretching our curiosity, understanding, and responses.

We begin by acknowledging and drafting our first several explanations, the "easy" answers that were top of mind when you arrived and then... dive deeper... persist... think again, more broadly, and take on a new perspective from a different

Time: 20-30 Minutes

Phase 1: Current Thinking (3 minutes)

- Write down the reasons you currently hold for why students are chronically absent. (use stickies, stop timer after 2 minutes)
- Now take 30 seconds to add others.
- Share with a shoulder partner.

Phase 2: Perspectives in a Hat - Five Sprints (20-30 minutes)

Facilitation Process: Each participant draws a perspective from the hat and spends 2 minutes jotting down how this person or element might impact or be related to attendance or chronic absence. At the end of each round, post your stickies and spend 2 minutes in a gallery walk: check mark items that resonate with you, exclamation points (!) to something that is a new idea, question marks (?) for any questions, and star items you would like to pursue further; finally, add any other ideas you would like to add.

Below are ideas for items that might be included in the hat, modify based on your specific context.

- 1. Persons:** student, friend, classmate, top of class, struggling student, second language learner, student with a disability, parent, neighbor, oldest child in family, guest teachers, substitutes.
- 2. Process:** absence reporting, school entry, parking lot traffic pattern, morning routine at home, school start routine, tardy, turning in assignments, re-entry after absence, re-entry after suspension, re-entry after illness, coming back to school after being absent yesterday, coming back after 2 days of absence, coming back after 1 week of absence; returning after 3 week absence.
- 3. Location:** front entrance, parking lot, back door, school address and neighborhood, bathroom, counseling office, community park close to school, cafeteria, gym, classrooms, mountains, city, country roads.
- 4. Time:** during class, lunch, morning arrival, all day, half day, full period, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, long weekends, before holidays, after holidays, late start, extended periods, assemblies, weather day, assemblies, special events.
- 5. How:** transportation to/from school; attendance procedures, virtual, in person, schedule, clubs, sports, class, field trip.

Discovery Reflections

Key Questions

Five major components for improving your school's response to chronic absenteeism

- Relationships
- Motivation
- Problem solving
- Data
- Student success team

How to Improve Your School's Response to Chronic Absenteeism: Key Questions to Ask

Data: Understanding Your Challenge

- **Access to Data:** Do we currently have access to chronic absence data and how will we ensure that staff, students, and families have access to this metric in a timely, simple, and accurate format?
- **Holistic Data Integration:** In what ways might we take a holistic view by including data for social emotional wellness, connectedness and belonging, classroom experience, attendance, behavior, course performance and career interests and post-secondary planning?
- **Data Analysis:** How will we ensure the data is analyzed and flagged for aligning supports? How might we schedule this activity and how often?
- **Inclusive and Equitable Engagement:** How might we include all perspectives and experiences within our community to broaden and strengthen our understanding and planning? Whose voice is not at the table and how might we invite and include everyone through surveys, focus groups, design sprints, community circles, problems of practice, etc.?
- **Building Data Knowledge and Resources:** How might we plan workshops and training to ensure that stakeholders have the tools, knowledge and skills to analyze the data and identify root cause and support needs?

Motivation: Leveraging Connections to Increase Engagement

- **Understanding Student Absence:** How might we understand what motivates or demotivates students to attend school regularly? What avenues for communication are offered to students and families to share concerns or issues?
- **Learning about Students and Families:** How are adults learning about the joys, interests and goals of students and others connected to the student and family?
- **Recognizing Attendance:** How are we recognizing students and families for improved attendance? How might we gather input on ways that students want to be celebrated and co-design recognition activities with students?
- **Extra-curricular Engagement:** How might we increase offerings and connect students to extra-curricular activities, and services, leadership and work-based learning opportunities? What structures or systems might be barriers to involvement and how can we mitigate these barriers?
- **Planning for a Student's Return:** How might we help students recover what they missed while they were absent, academically and socially?
- **Communicating the Impact of Attendance:** How might we share information about the importance and impact of attendance with students and families?

Relationships: Foundation For Success

- **Prioritizing Relationships:** Are there specific relationships (e.g. student/teacher, student/student, teacher/families) we want to prioritize for improvement?
- **Connecting through Shared Interests:** How might we invite, connect, and build relationships between those who share interests, career goals, or hobbies?
- **Connectedness and Belonging:** How might we measure and improve connectedness and belonging for students and staff in our school? Establish baseline and measure improvement.
- **Involving Students in Improving Relationships:** What surveys or other tools are we using to gather student input? How might we involve student voice and leadership to co-design strategies for improving relationships and attendance?
- **Supporting Students to Advocate for Attendance:** How will we train, prepare, and support students to advocate for good attendance?
- **Improving Communication:** In what ways can we leverage two-way dialogue, and other communication strategies to increase attendance supports?

Problem Solving: Designing Community Solutions

- **Identifying Common Barriers:** Are there challenges or barriers that are common across a number of students or classes? What is this trend across groups, ages, grade levels, demographics, groups of students, neighborhoods, etc.?
- **Examining Policies and Practices:** What policies or practices may be impacting attendance rates?
- **Collaborating with Community Partners:** How might we join efforts with our community partners and neighborhood to increase school attendance and mitigate barriers?
- **Recognizing our Biases:** In what ways might our preconceived ideas, bias, and experiences be impacting our understanding and curiosity?

Student Success Team: Organizing to Support Students

- **Schedule for Collaboration:** How might we create a schedule that includes consistent time for teachers who share common students to meet together?
- **Data and Protocol:** How do we ensure that teams have the timely, actionable data and a protocol to analyze the data and create an intervention to support each student?
- **Intervention Strategies:** How might we support all students through climate and culture strategies and universal/tier 1 interventions? What group interventions might also help?

Reflection Questions & Action Planning - What's Next

Purpose: Develop a Plan

- Focus your efforts - dive deep into the key questions by component
- Engage in robust team discussions
- Capture your conversation, ideas and planning
- Select a 1-2 highest leverage areas to create next steps and a follow-up plan

 **Data: Understanding Your Challenge**

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3. Data Analysis: How will we ensure the data is analyzed and flagged for aligning supports? How might we schedule this activity and how often?

4. Inclusive and Equitable Engagement: How might we include all perspectives and experiences within our community to broaden and strengthen our understanding and planning? Whose voice is not at the table and how might we invite and include everyone through surveys, focus groups, design sprints, community circles, problems of practice, etc.?

5. Building Data Knowledge and Resources: How might we plan workshops and training to ensure that stakeholders have the tools, knowledge and skills to analyze the data and identify root cause and support needs?

Data Reflections:
List 1-2 highest leverage activities to improve attendance with data strategies.
Who will lead the work?
How and when will we measure and monitor the impact?



Let's Talk Conditions for Success

Breakout

- Introduce yourselves:
Name, Role, District
- Individually review the tool and highlight questions that resonate with your context
- Share your initial reactions or thoughts
- Waterfall chat when we return to larger group



Resources

Filter by resource category:

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Amplifying Youth Voice: Strategies for Helping Youth have their Voices Heard

Student voice—the process of educators, school leaders, and other supportive adults gathering young people’s values and unique perspectives and implementing policy and practice changes based on these shared ideas—provides an opportunity for young people to be active participants in improving their schools. In this resource we explain how student voice increases student engagement, enhances education systems, and improves student outcomes. We also share three strategies to support schools and community organizations with gathering student voice data.

[RESEARCH](#)

The Inside Story of the National Graduation Campaign

A 20-year campaign to address America’s high school dropout crisis produced unprecedented gains in graduation rates nationwide. Can lessons from this campaign help the nation cross this

Featured Resources

Team Reflection & Action Planning Tools

These team reflection and action planning tools use a set of questions to guide inquiry, potential data sources, and related “look fors” that are focused on key attributes of effective student success systems.

[Download the tools](#)

Chronic Absenteeism Toolkit

A collection of GRAD Partnership resources for addressing chronic absenteeism in schools.

[Read more](#)

Agency, Belonging, and Connectedness

A collection of resources for understanding the dimensions of student agency, belonging, and connectedness, their relationship to student success, and steps schools can take to enhance each.

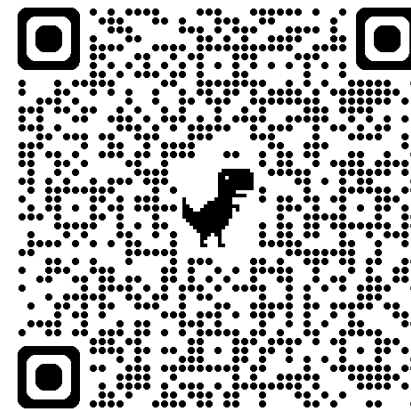


Attendance Solutions Network



NATIONAL PARTNERSHIP
FOR *Student Success*

- **Peer-to-peer learning community launching September 17**
- Access to a range of supports through a series of engagement events to address chronic absence and improve student engagement in their communities
 - District-to-district dialogue on key topics
- Ongoing consultation through the 2024-25 academic year
- District representatives are encouraged to build a plan and publicly share goals
- No cost



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info@gradpartnership.org
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- Please complete the feedback survey linked in the chat



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