

# Reducing Chronic Absence in Connecticut's Schools:

**A Prevention and Intervention Guide  
for Schools and Districts**

April 2017

CONNECTICUT STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



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- Office of Early Childhood
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## Introduction

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**In Connecticut, 50,376 students were chronically absent from school during the 2015-16 school year. This represents 9.6 percent of all students in Connecticut public schools, and the rates are significantly higher in many communities.**

On July 7, 2015, Governor Dannel P. Malloy signed Public Act 15-225, [An Act Concerning Chronic Absence](#). Section 3 of that act requires the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE), in consultation with the Interagency Council for Ending the Achievement Gap, to develop chronic absenteeism prevention and intervention guidance for use by local and regional boards of education. This guide is designed to meet and expand on the intent of the legislation. It provides a framework that local and regional school district administrators can use to strategically plan and implement preventions and interventions that will lead to the reduction of chronic absence in prekindergarten through Grade 12 within their districts. Although parents are key partners in reducing chronic absence, they are not the primary audience for this guide. This guide does provide messaging tools that school district administrators can use to educate and engage parents regarding the importance of good attendance.

The Connecticut State Department of Education has worked with [Attendance Works](#), a national expert on chronic absence, and consulted with key state and local stakeholders in the creation of this guidance. The guide offers links to national resources, tools, and strategies. All resources from Attendance Works are available for schools and districts to download and customize at no charge.

The guide provides answers to the following questions:

- What is chronic absence?
- Why are students chronically absent?
- Why is chronic absence an important issue for Connecticut?
- How do we know if chronic absence is affecting learning in our district?
- What can a district do to improve attendance?
- Who else can be involved with reducing chronic absence?

### **Absences Add Up!**

Chronic absence is defined as missing 10 percent or more of days of school for any reason, including all absences, excused, unexcused, and disciplinary. Being chronically absent has a significant impact on a student's ability to read at grade level, perform academically, and graduate on time.

## What is chronic absence?

Chronic absence is defined as missing 10 percent or greater of the total number of days enrolled during the school year for any reason. It includes both excused, unexcused, out-of-school suspensions, and in-school suspensions that last more than one-half of the school day. For example, a student who has been enrolled for the first 30 school days at the beginning of the school year and has been absent three of those days is chronically absent.

### Chronic Absence vs. Truancy

Chronic absence is different from truancy (missing too much school without permission) as well as average daily attendance (a school-level measure, not a student-level indicator, for how many students are typically in attendance at school each day).

Chronic absence and truancy are not interchangeable terms. They describe different aspects of the absenteeism problem and require different approaches. Truancy is a term that generally refers to unexcused absences. Connecticut General Statutes (C.G.S.) Section [10-198a \(b\)\(1\) and \(2\)](#) defines truancy as four unexcused absences in one month or 10 unexcused absences in a school year. Responses to truancy are usually about school rule compliance and can lead to court intervention.

For more detail on determining if an absence is excused or unexcused, download the [CSDE guidance document for excused and unexcused absences](#).

Chronic absence, on the other hand, incorporates all absences: excused, unexcused absences, and suspensions and expulsions served. By monitoring chronic absence, the focus is on the academic consequences of lost instructional time and on preventing absences before students fall behind in school. It is an early indicator that a student may fall behind in the classroom.

#### Student Attendance Rate =

Student's Total Days of Attendance

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Student's Total Days of Membership\*

## TRUANCY

Counts only unexcused absences.  
Emphasizes compliance with school rules.  
Relies on legal and administrative solutions.

VS.

## CHRONIC ABSENCE

Counts all absences: excused, unexcused, and suspensions.  
Emphasizes academic impact of missed days.  
Uses community-based, positive strategies.



### DID YOU KNOW?

Just two days per month can lead to chronic absence.

10% of a school year = 18 days of absence  
= two days per month.

\* *Student's Total Days of Membership* equals the number of instructional days a student has been enrolled in the current school for the current school year.



## Why are students chronically absent?

Research has shown that the reasons why students are chronically absent fall into four categories: (1) myths and misperceptions about attendance; (2) barriers to attendance; (3) aversion to school; and (4) disengagement from school (Attendance Works, 2014).

Districts and individual schools will need to “unpack” their data and work closely with families and students to determine why students are absent. Communicating in a culturally relevant manner with parents around the myths and perceptions about attendance is essential so that they can become partners with school district efforts to improve attendance.

Myths	Barriers	Aversion	Disengagement
Absences are only a problem if they are unexcused	Chronic disease (asthma) or lack of health/dental care	Academic or social struggles	Lack of engaging and relevant instruction
Okay to miss a day here or there	Caring for siblings or other family members	Being teased or bullied	Peer pressure to be with peers out of school vs. in school
Attendance only matters in the later grades	Unmet basic needs: transportation, housing, food, clothing, etc.	Poor school climate or unsafe school	No meaningful relations with adults in school
PK and K are seen as daycare, not learning	Trauma	Parents had negative school experience	High suspension rates and disproportionate school discipline
	Feeling unsafe getting to school		

(Attendance Works, 2014)

### Resources:

[Breaking Barriers to Attendance](#), Attendance Works

[In School and On Track](#): A toolkit on “How to talk to parents of elementary school students about their children’s absences,” California Attorney General and Ad Council

[The Attendance Imperative: How States Can Advance Achievement by Reducing Chronic Absence](#), Attendance Works

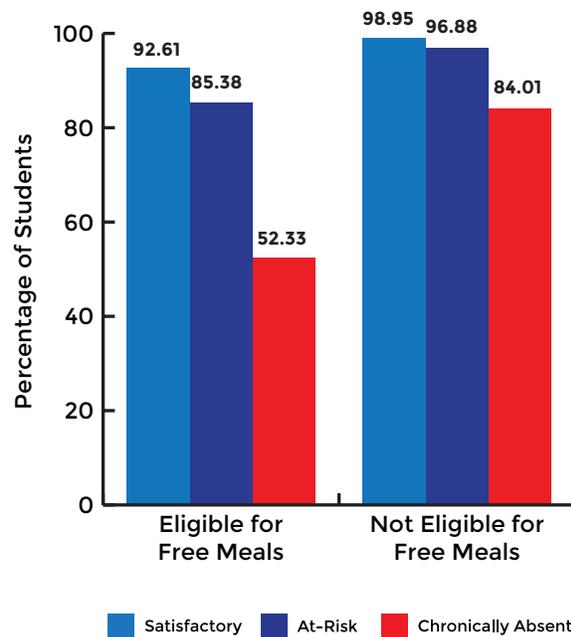
[Understanding the Factors Contributing to Chronic Absence in Your School](#), Attendance Works

## Why is chronic absence an important issue for Connecticut?

National research shows that at every age and every stage, chronic absenteeism erodes the academic and social skills needed to succeed in school. Children living in poverty are more likely to be chronically absent at a young age because of challenges such as a lack of access to health care, housing insecurity, and unreliable transportation. They are also more likely to suffer academically from those missed days because their families often lack the resources to make up for lost time (Ready, 2016).

Being chronically absent significantly affects a student's ability to read at grade level, perform academically, and graduate on time. Children who are chronically absent in both kindergarten and first grade are much less likely to read proficiently by the end of third grade (Campaign for Grade Level Reading and Attendance Works, 2014). By sixth grade, chronic absence is a key early indicator of dropout from high school (Baltimore Education Research Consortium, 2011). By ninth grade, attendance may be a better indicator of dropout than eighth-grade test scores (Allensworth, 2014). The following table displays attendance in grade 9 and graduation in four years by meal eligibility in 2014-15.

**Impact of Ninth-Grade Attendance on Four-Year Graduation Rates by Economic Status (Free Meal Eligibility) 2014-15 Cohort**



Source: Connecticut State Department of Education, Performance Office, 2014



### DID YOU KNOW?

According to CSDE data, 50,376 students were chronically absent from school during the 2015-16 school year. This is just under 1 out of 10 of all students in Connecticut public schools. Some other facts:

- Chronic absence rates are significantly higher in urban districts.
- Chronic absence rates for students eligible for free meals are **more than three times** that of those who are ineligible for lunch subsidies.
- Chronic absence rates for both Black/African American and Hispanic or Latino students are **more than two times** that of White students.
- English learners and Students with Disabilities\* continue to exhibit substantially higher chronic absenteeism rates when compared with their general education peers.

\* For the purposes of reporting, CSDE defines students with disabilities as any student receiving special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This subgroup does not include students receiving services under Section 504.

When chronic absence is widespread, it can affect teaching and learning for the whole class. Teachers must deal with classroom churn and continually play catch up for a different group of students and help students learn material covered during their absences. Research from Urban Education shows that chronic absenteeism has a damaging effect on students missing excessive school days, but also has the potential to reduce outcomes for others in the same educational setting (Attendance Works, 2014).

Finally, if chronic absence reaches high levels in a school, it can be an indication of systematic challenges within neighborhoods that create barriers to going to school. These can include unstable housing, unreliable transportation, community violence, environmental hazards, or a lack of access to health care. Other times, high absenteeism rates can point to problems with the school itself: ineffective instruction, high rates of teacher turnover, a poor school climate, and ineffective school discipline. (Attendance Works, 2014).

**Resources:**

- [EdSight](#), CSDE's online data portal
- [Next Generation Accountability System for Districts and Schools](#), CSDE Performance Office

## How do we know if chronic absence is affecting learning in our district?

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Determining the scope and scale of chronic absence in districts requires using attendance data to calculate chronic absence rates. Districts and schools should use real time local attendance data from their longitudinal student data system on a regular basis as an early indicator. The CSDE collects data annually and has developed systems to generate data and indicate progress by district and school.

In 2016, the CSDE launched the [Next Generation Accountability System for Districts and Schools](#). This new system contains a broad set of 12 indicators that help tell the story of how well a school is preparing its students for success in college, careers, and life. It moves beyond test scores and graduation rates and instead provides a more holistic, multifactor perspective of district and school performance and incorporates student growth over time. One of the 12 indicators measures chronic absenteeism. The system generates reports at the district and school level.

In addition, the CSDE has developed [EdSight](#), an online data portal that allows for chronic absence to be disaggregated by race, gender, grade, English learners, disability, and low-income statuses. This website provides aggregate trend data for schools and districts, including relevant information on students, educators, and instruction. Important links on this portal also include the [Next Generation Accountability Results](#) and school and district [Profile and Performance Reports](#).

Local school and district data systems should ensure accuracy of tracking attendance. The Public School Information System (PSIS) [Reference Guide](#) provides guidance for reporting attendance in appendix G. The CSDE [Guidelines for Excused and Unexcused Absences](#) provides definitions for “excused” and “unexcused” absences and guidance for determining truancy.

### Definitions

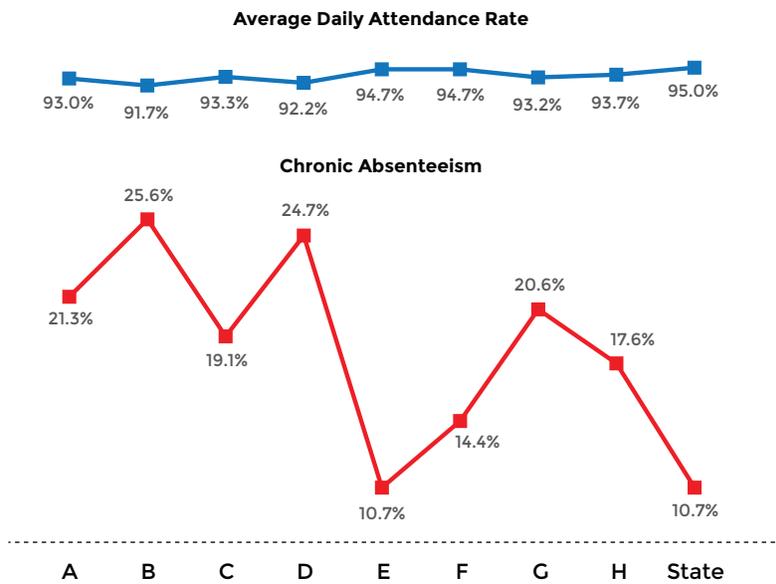
***District chronic absenteeism rate*** means the total number of chronically absent students (K-12) under the jurisdiction of a local or regional board of education in the previous school year divided by the total number of students under the jurisdiction of such board for such school year. All absences, whether excused, unexcused, or resulting from suspensions, count when determining a chronic absence rate.

***School chronic absenteeism rate*** means the total number of chronically absent students (K-12) for a school in the previous school year divided by the total number of students enrolled in such school for such school year. All absences, whether excused, unexcused, or resulting from suspensions, count when determining a chronic absence rate.

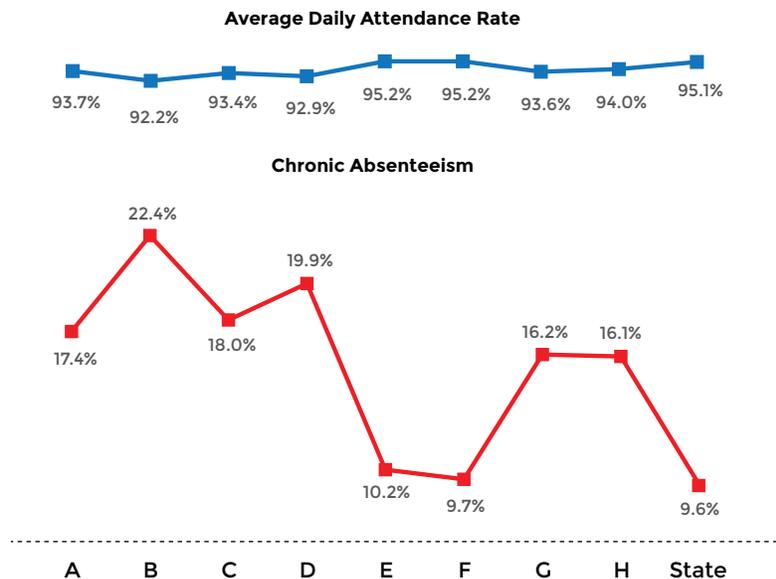
**Average Daily Attendance vs. Chronic Absence**

Average Daily Attendance (ADA) rates can easily mask chronic absence. ADA is a school-level measure not a student-level indicator that shows how many students were in school, not which specific students are at risk due to chronic poor attendance. It is problematic in the same way that an average third-grade reading score does not identify students who need additional intensive reading assistance. The following two graphs (Chang, Russell-Tucker, & Sullivan, 2016) depict eight Alliance Districts with Network Schools and visually demonstrate the masking effect that average daily attendance rates can have on chronic absence rates. The graphs together also show the impact state and local efforts have had in reducing chronic absenteeism rates.

**2013-14 Attendance Rate and Chronic Absenteeism (Eight Alliance Districts with Network Schools)**



**2015-16 Attendance Rate and Chronic Absenteeism (Eight Alliance Districts with Network Schools)**



## What can a district do to improve attendance?

Improving and sustaining good attendance requires the year-round (what happens over the summer matters), active engagement of district- and school-based leaders and administrators along with a clear articulation of roles and responsibilities.

### Boards of education

Boards of education have the leadership responsibility for adopting school attendance policies and procedures. Local boards of education should also foster continuous improvement and accountability by reviewing district data on chronic absence at least twice a year in conjunction with student performance and ensuring that both the District and School Improvement Plans include strategies and goals for addressing chronic absence, if necessary.

### Central Office Administration

Central office administration has the leadership responsibility for ensuring the district, as a whole, is systematically addressing chronic absence, promoting and supporting a districtwide culture of attendance, and ensuring that evidence-based attendance policies and procedures are in place and implemented consistently in all schools within the district, from prekindergarten to grade 12. Central office administrators can spearhead connections with community service providers as partners in this work. The superintendent can elevate the importance of this work by designating a cabinet-level administrator to lead and facilitate the district's attendance efforts.

### Principals

[Principals](#), as key leaders of individual schools, can work to ensure that their school adopts and implements a comprehensive, tiered approach to improving attendance in all grades, from prekindergarten to Grade 12. The principal should lead and facilitate the School Attendance Review Team.

### District Attendance Review Teams

District Attendance Review Teams bring together district-level administrators and community agencies to address chronic absence across the entire district.

*[Public Act 15-225](#), an Act Concerning Chronic Absenteeism, defines the criteria for when local and regional boards of education are required to establish attendance review teams both at the district and school level. Each local and regional board of education that (A) has a district chronic absenteeism rate of ten percent or higher shall establish an attendance review team for the school district, (B) has a school under the jurisdiction of the board with a school chronic absenteeism rate of fifteen percent or higher shall establish an attendance review team at such school, (C) has more than one school under the jurisdiction of the board with a school chronic absenteeism rate of fifteen percent or higher shall establish an attendance review team for the school district or at each such school, or (D) has a district chronic absenteeism rate of ten percent or higher and one or more schools under the jurisdiction of the board with a school chronic absenteeism rate of fifteen percent or higher shall establish an attendance review team for the school district or at each such school. However, best practice recommends that district attendance review teams be established when any school's chronic absence rate is 10 percent or higher.*



### BRIGHT SPOT!

#### Creating a culture that understands the link between attendance and academic achievement.

Administrators at Middletown Public Schools have made it a priority that all stakeholders, including administrators, teachers, students, support staff, parents, and community partners, understand chronic absence and its role in student academic achievement. To do this, they created a culture that links attendance and academic achievement by unpacking the data, providing professional development, engaging parents, and working with community providers to identify strategies to remove barriers to attendance.

The next section outlines the roles and responsibilities of the District and School Attendance Review Teams in reducing chronic absence.

The key functions of a District Attendance Review Team are to:

1. **Routinely unpack, analyze and utilize data to inform action.**
2. **Organize a systemic districtwide response and policy/practice improvement.**
3. **Promote shared accountability and continuous improvement.**

The District Attendance Review Team could be a new team created for this purpose or an explicit function of an existing districtwide group (e.g., [Scientific Research-Based Interventions](#), Student Assistance Team, Data Team, and School Climate Team) that has the capacity to add functions related to attendance to its responsibilities.

The District Attendance Review Team should be composed of key district individuals responsible for academic instruction, health (director of school health services or medical advisor), preschool, student supports (school counselors, social workers, pupil personnel staff, parent liaisons, attendance officers), and individuals responsible for attendance data reporting. Ideally, the team would also include school administrators and community partners (e.g., Youth Service Bureaus, Early Childhood Collaboratives, mental health or family service agencies) who can offer resources for addressing common and unique attendance barriers.

### 1. Routinely Unpack, Analyze, and Utilize Data

Districts need to produce accurate school-specific data reports (ideally every 10 days) that disaggregate student attendance data by school, grade, and subgroups such as race, ethnicity, gender, free or reduced priced meals, students with disabilities, and English learners.

Attendance Works has developed and shares, at no cost, the [K–5 District Attendance Tracking Tools \(K–5 DATTs\)](#) and the [School Attendance Tracker Tools \(SATTs\)](#). Districts and schools across the nation as well as here in Connecticut use this tool with PowerSchool to analyze their data. It is a self-calculating Excel spreadsheet that pulls data from the local student information system and generates a number of reports.

District-level data will be critical for the development of tiered intervention strategies and will allow the District Attendance Review Team to routinely monitor and understand attendance patterns and trends by addressing the following questions:

- a. To what extent is chronic and severe chronic absence an issue throughout the district and where is it concentrated?
- b. How does satisfactory attendance and chronic and severe chronic absence vary across schools, grades, subgroups, or neighborhoods?
- c. What does the concentration and scale of chronic absence suggest about likely causes of chronic absence?
- d. What is the relationship between overall attendance patterns and academic performance?
- e. What is the relationship between attendance patterns and disciplinary (e.g., suspensions) data?

An emerging practice in several school districts across the country is to map chronic absence data so they can unpack their data by neighborhood or zip code. The District Attendance Review Team could explore partnerships with local colleges and universities to help create this visual data display.

#### Early and often...

Tracking attendance and chronic absence on a regular basis throughout the school year allows districts and schools to identify students who need interventions and support services before absences add up. It is an *early indicator* for helping students achieve success in school!

Actionable data analysis allows District Attendance Review Teams to identify schools that need extra support as well as discover [bright spots](#) — schools with high levels of low-income students who still have low levels of chronic absence that serve as inspirational examples for others.

## 2. Organize a Systemic Districtwide Response

District Attendance Review Teams need to ensure that the district, as a whole, is systematically addressing chronic absence and that all staff have the appropriate skills, tools, and resources to cultivate a districtwide culture of attendance. Conducting a [district and community self-assessment](#) is the first step to determine the district's strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement. Attendance Works' [Tips for Developing a Community Action Plan](#) provides details on how to engage community in developing a districtwide response.

Ensure that student voices are part of the conversation. Facilitate surveys or conversations with students to understand from their perspective why students are not coming to school and what solutions may be used to increase attendance.

A systemic, districtwide response should minimally include the following intervention and prevention strategies:

- a. **Positive engagement** — Develop a districtwide messaging and outreach campaign for parents, students, and community partners (including preschool providers) that (1) is positive and culturally relevant; (2) reinforces the importance of attendance; and (3) communicates the academic consequences of missing as few as two days of school a month. A systemic approach to implementation includes, but is not limited to, developing districtwide protocols for (1) communicating at parent-teacher conferences; (2) beginning of school year messages; (3) end of the year events; and (4) summer learning opportunities.
- b. **Build capacity** — Ensure that strategies for addressing chronic absence in a culturally competent manner are included in professional learning for administrators and school staff. Establish peer-learning opportunities for staff to share what is working, what common challenges they are encountering, and new evidence-based practices.
- c. **Strategic Partnerships** — Improve attendance by engaging the support of the entire community. Analyzing districtwide data provides a platform for forming strategic community partnerships to support broad community messaging as well as addressing common barriers to attendance (e.g., transportation, health concerns) among a variety of potential partners, including social service and health and disability-related agencies, faith-based organizations, businesses, and families.

### Attendance categories

**Satisfactory attendance**  
(missing less than 5 percent of school)

**At-risk attendance** (missing between 5-9 percent of school)

**Chronic absence** (missing 10 percent or more of school)

**Severe chronic absence**  
(missing 20 percent or more of school)



### BRIGHT SPOT!

**“Everyone is on the same page. Attendance is a priority for everybody.”**

The community of Vernon (not just the school district!) considers attendance at school to be of the utmost importance. Beginning with the development and implementation of the *Vernon Community Plan for Children and Youth, Keeping Our Kids in Focus*, all stakeholders from town hall, the superintendent's office, childcare providers, youth services, the regional YMCA, and many others formed a partnership and a vision for a culture and expectation of attendance for every child, every day.

- Vernon Public Schools

### 3. Promote Shared Accountability and Continuous Improvement

Addressing chronic absenteeism is a continuous process that involves using data to target interventions and resources. An essential component of shared accountability is ensuring all stakeholders have a common understanding of the goals and how they will determine if they are making progress. Such goals and targets should be publicly available and broadly shared along with updates on progress to key stakeholders. Districts should:

- Ensure that the local or regional Professional Development and Evaluation Committee ([C.G.S. 10-220a\[b\]](#)) develops a district educator evaluation and support plan that aligns with the District Improvement Plan, School Improvement Plans, and accountability plans.
- Ensure that the educator evaluation and support plan prioritizes reducing chronic absenteeism through the processes of observation of teacher practice and performance and the development of student learning goals and objectives. Additional information can be found on the Educator Effectiveness and Professional Learning [webpage](#).
- Encourage and provide support for student and educator support specialists (SESS) to focus on reducing chronic absenteeism as they develop and implement their student learning goals and objectives. [A Guidebook for Student and Educator Support Specialists](#) as well as white papers and sample student learning goals and objectives for SESS can be found on the Educator Effectiveness and Professional Learning [webpage](#).
- Review staff attendance patterns to ensure that adults are modeling the behaviors that are expected of the students.
- Align school withdrawal policies to [C.G.S. Section 10-184](#), which states *that the person or persons having control of a child 17 years of age may consent to a child's withdrawal from school*. This law requires that a parent or guardian personally appear at the school district office to sign a withdrawal form. The withdrawal form must include an attestation from a guidance counselor or administrator that the district has provided information on education options available in the school system and community. Additional information can be found in the CSDE circular letter, [Mandatory Student Withdrawal Age from School](#).
- Set realistic and achievable target goals. Districts should consider setting targets based on what is realistic and achievable. Setting a goal of 10 to 20 percent reduction from baseline in the first year is recommended, based on the strength of the implementation efforts in place, and a 10 percent reduction each year thereafter. A school or district may decide to start with particular grades vs. the whole school depending on the data and their capacity.



#### BRIGHT SPOT!

##### Attendance Matters at All Levels

Middletown Public Schools identified raising parental awareness of the importance of attendance as a priority for reducing chronic absenteeism. Templates were created for administrators to customize for their schools to use with families. Scripts were produced that provided positive messaging at school events to help parents understand why attendance matters and how it is linked to student success. Messages included what parents can do to ensure students regularly attend school and why this is vitally important. Superintendent Patricia Charles explained, "We want all parents to understand that school attendance matters at all levels. Whether you are a preschool student or a high school student, if you are late to school or absent, you miss valuable instruction. We constantly reinforce the message to *be present and on time every day*."

- Middletown Public Schools

The District Attendance Review Team should also be prepared to tell the story behind the data if results are different — positive or negative — from the goals established for the time period.

### Next Generation Accountability System

The Connecticut State Department of Education launched the [Next Generation Accountability System](#), a new, broader set of performance measures to capture a more holistic, multifactor perspective of how schools and students are performing. Chronic absenteeism is Indicator 4 in this new system. The chronic absenteeism indicator is applicable to all districts and schools with at least one grade between kindergarten and grade 12, inclusive. Reports and guidance for districts and schools are available on the [School and District Accountability webpage](#). These reports can help schools and districts use data to target interventions and resources.

Guidance for addressing chronic absenteeism is provided in [Using Accountability Results to Guide Improvement](#). In addition, the CSDE Office of Student Supports has launched the [Reducing Chronic Absenteeism in Connecticut Schools webpage](#) to support this work in districts and schools.



### BRIGHT SPOT!

#### Building on the Success of Others!

The Consolidated School District of New Britain is nationally recognized for its work to address chronic absence.

Early on, district administrators learned from their data that there were very high levels of chronic absence in kindergarten and grade 1. In fact, almost half the chronically absent students in the district were attending elementary school. New Britain created strategies to address the issue that over time have led to significant reduction of chronic absenteeism in its elementary schools. In the 2012-13 school year, chronic absence rates in grades K-8 were reduced from 20 percent to 13 percent. The rate of chronic absence for kindergartners decreased from 30 percent to 18 percent (Chang, Russell-Tucker, & Sullivan, 2016).

Learn more about the strategies that New Britain implemented in Kappan magazine's October 2016 article, [Chronic early absence: What states can do](#), which also features the cross-sector collaboration and work that has been done at the state level in Connecticut to reduce chronic absence.

## What can schools do to improve attendance?

### School Attendance Review Teams

The key functions of a School Attendance Review Team are to:

1. **Understand and monitor attendance trends.**
2. **Organize the schoolwide attendance strategy.**

The School Attendance Review Team's charge is to ensure that the school adopts a comprehensive, actionable, tiered approach to improving attendance. These teams could be a new team or part of an existing site-based team (e.g., PBIS—Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, school climate).

The composition of the Student Attendance Review Team will vary based on the size of the district and its resources. Ideally, the Student Attendance Review Team should be composed of key school staff including the principal, assistant principal, school counselor, social worker, school nurse, school psychologist, family engagement liaison, Family Resource Center representative, attendance officer, and parents. The teams may also include community partners such as the Youth Service Bureaus, health centers, state agency staff (e.g., Department of Children and Families, Court Support Services Division), school resource officers, and others who could offer intervention and outreach support to address attendance barriers.

#### Organizing a School Attendance Review Team

1. Conduct a [school self-assessment](#).
2. Establish a weekly meeting schedule.
3. Define roles and responsibilities.
4. Establish group norms.
5. Develop a standard meeting agenda.
6. Fill-in a tiered pyramid of students and resources.

*[Tips for an effective attendance team](#)*

### Getting to School Matters for 3- and 4-Year-Olds: How Public Schools Can Help

#### Figure Out What Works!

- Collect and analyze attendance data for preschool students and their siblings in higher grades.
- Use the Attendance Works [Early and Often Toolkit](#): Showing Up in Preschool Matters

#### Inform and Collaborate!

- Engage families to develop and deliver positive and culturally relevant messages about the importance of attendance in preschool.
- Work with community-based preschool programs to implement a messaging and education campaign about the importance of attendance for our youngest learners.

#### Build and Expand!

- Include preschool representation on school and district attendance teams and in preschool district attendance plans. This should include parents!
- Work with community-based providers to gather attendance data when possible.
- Work with local [Campaign for Grade-Level Reading](#) to incorporate preschool in your community plans. If a campaign doesn't exist, start one!
- [Learn more](#) from the Connecticut Office of Early Childhood (Connecticut Office of Early Childhood, 2016).

## 1. Understand and Monitor Attendance Trends

The principal should secure the data for the school from central office and ensure that the School Attendance Review Team reviews the attendance data on a regular basis. The regular review of these reports (every 10 days) will allow school staff to know how many and which students are chronically absent. This will help determine the students who need Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions. The School Attendance Review Team is responsible for understanding the causes of absenteeism for individual students as well as common causes for groups of students. The School Attendance Review Team may not be responsible for the Tier 2 or Tier 3 interventions, but it can identify the students and refer them to the school counselor, Planning and Placement Team (PPT), child study team, or other resource.

A regular review of the data also helps to ensure data is accurately entered in a timely manner and allows teachers and staff to quickly notice how many or which students are identified as chronically absent.

The data should help answer the following questions:

- Is chronic absence a problem? Is it getting worse or better?
- Is chronic absence concentrated among particular students?
- Is it higher or lower among particular grades (including prekindergarten)?
- Are particular subgroups of students affected (e.g., students on free or reduced lunch, English learners, siblings, students with chronic health conditions or from a particular neighborhood)?
- What might explain some of these differences?
- What additional information do you need to identify barriers or to put effective strategies in place?

## 2. Organize the Schoolwide Attendance Strategy

School Attendance Review Teams need to ensure that the school, as a whole, is systematically cultivating a culture of attendance and addressing the needs of individual students, year round. A schoolwide attendance strategy, at a minimum, includes actions in the following core areas:

- a. **Engage students and families** — Students are more likely to show up when they have strong caring connections to peers and adults. To motivate student attendance, schools need to create a school community that is warm and welcoming, engages students and families in the life of the school, and offers culturally competent and enriched learning opportunities. Schools should reach out

### Use Team Time Wisely

Many times School Attendance Review Teams will spend most of their time working with students with the highest level of absences (Tier 3). This can be frustrating and time consuming.

A good use of a team's time is to plan and implement prevention measures to ensure that good Tier 1 and Tier 2 interventions are in place to reduce the number of students who are seriously chronically absent. An existing PBIS team or school climate team may add this to its agenda.

### Tardy does not mean absent!

A student is considered to be "in attendance" if present at school for at least half the regular school day. A student who is tardy should be marked as present if the tardy equals less than half the school day.

#### **What time of day marks your school's half-way point?**

On early dismissal days and days shortened due to inclement weather, the regular day is the number of hours of school for that day. For example, if a school is only open for four hours, a student must be present for at least two hours to be considered "in attendance."

to families to find out what might be preventing a student from coming to school; educate students and families about how absences can add up and result in lost learning time; empower families to help their children attend school, and offer trainings for school staff on engaging families and building productive partnerships to combat chronic absenteeism.

- b. **Address attendance barriers** — If large numbers of students are chronically absent, it is likely that systemic barriers are at play. There may be multiple [factors contributing to chronic absence](#). To figure out what the barriers to school attendance are and how they can be addressed, a school and its community partners need to be able to use attendance data, along with the insights of families, to understand what is getting in the way of students attending school. The School Attendance Review Team needs to put in place and/or modify existing policies, practices, and programs to ameliorate and address common barriers across student groups.
- c. **Set goals and develop an attendance plan** — A common saying is “what gets measured is what gets done.” This is particularly true with chronic absence and attendance. An essential ingredient for change is building in shared accountability for reducing chronic absence. Principals can ensure that the educator evaluation and support plan prioritizes reducing chronic absenteeism through the processes of observation of teacher practice and performance and the development of student learning goals and objectives. In preparation for the new school year, a schoolwide attendance plan should be developed at the end of the previous school year that includes the following elements:
  - an overview of the extent of the chronic absence issue;
  - an assessment of the school’s capacity to address the issue and implement schoolwide strategies;
  - target goals;
  - a description of the tiered intervention strategies; and
  - a performance accountability process and timeline.

### Mapping your Attendance Data

When unpacking your data, be sure to look at neighborhoods and different communities for high levels of chronic absence. Are there a lot of walkers from that community? Does it make sense to reroute a school bus to transport the students? Is it a safe walk to school? Is public transportation reliable?

### Parents as Partners in Academic Success

Parents are essential partners in promoting good attendance as they have the bottom-line responsibility for setting attendance expectations for making sure their children get to school every day. Parents need to be equipped with the right information so they understand that good attendance is really a matter of providing children more and better opportunities to learn. Schools need to respect and honor families’ knowledge and potential to contribute to their children’s education and create processes that draw on the hopes and dreams of parents for a better future for their children, as well as their insights into what will help families get their children to school. Schools and communities must deliberately build systems that support family engagement.

#### Suggested resources:

- Bringing Attendance Home: [Engaging Parents in Preventing Chronic Absence](#)
- Early and Often: [Early Education Toolkit](#)
- Parent Teacher Home Visit [Project](#)

### Implement a System of Tiered Supports

While a strong schoolwide culture of attendance is an essential basic ingredient of academic success that should exist in all schools, it may not always be sufficient. A subset of students who are chronically absent may need higher levels of intervention. The best predictor of chronic absence in the current year is poor attendance during the prior year and/or the first month of school. Research indicates that if a student misses two or more days during the first month of school, the pattern of absence can persist, and many of those students will end the school year chronically absent. The school data should reveal whether particular populations of students, for example, incoming kindergartners or ninth-graders, or students from the same neighborhood—are at high risk.

#### Track Chronic Absence Often and Early

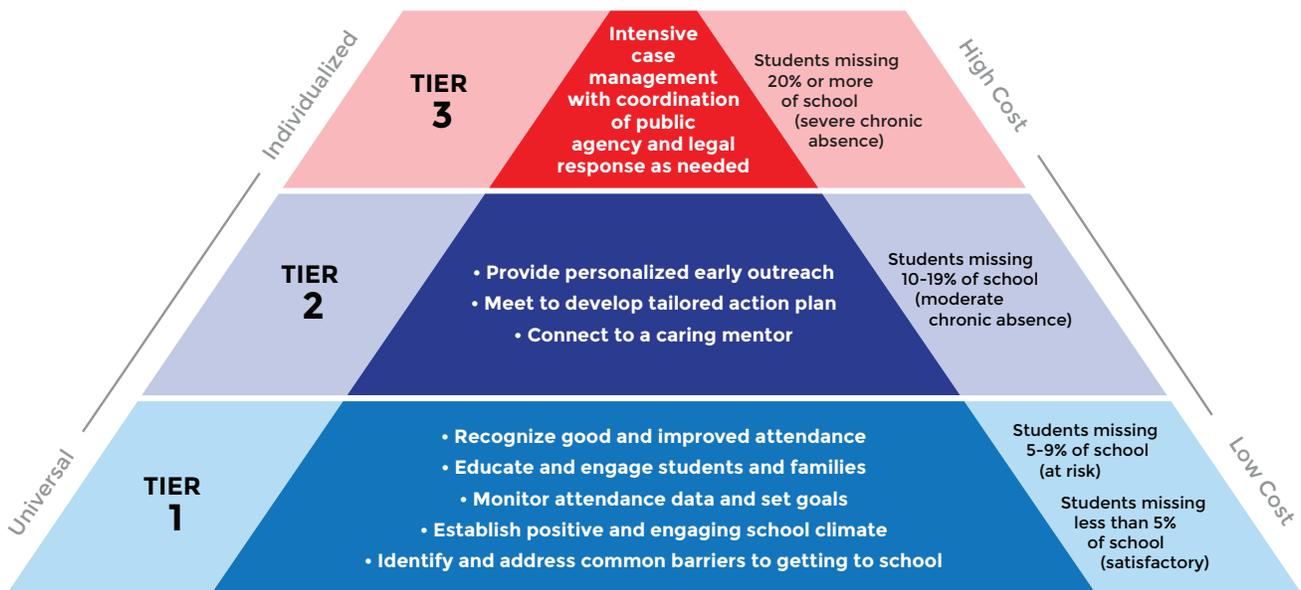
The best predictor of chronic absence in the current school year is poor attendance during the prior year and/or the first month of school. Research indicates that if a student misses two or more days during the first month of school, the pattern of absence can persist, and many of those students will end the school year chronically absent.

Once a school community has identified students at high risk for chronic absence, it should look more closely at students who have a history of severe chronic absence — missing 20 percent or more of the prior school year — and why. Such severe absenteeism suggests a family or community challenge that requires additional layers of support for such issues as physical, mental, or dental health problems; homelessness; domestic abuse; or community violence. The key is leveraging the opportunity to help students on the cusp of chronic absence with lower cost, less intensive interventions, while also recognizing the need to do more for those with needs that are more serious.

The following pyramid exemplifies a [multitiered approach](#) to reducing chronic absence that begins with prevention and early intervention and only turns to interventions that are more intensive as a last resort<sup>1</sup>. This tiered approach aligns with other approaches currently employed by school districts including Scientific Research-Based Interventions (SRBI) or Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS).

Interventions at each tier need to be customized and tailored to different subgroups and grade levels, including prekindergarten, elementary, middle school, and high school. One of the core functions of the School Attendance Review Team is to map their students and school resources across the tiers of the pyramid using a pyramid [worksheet](#). The following section provides some examples of strategies for each of the three tiers of intervention.

### Improving attendance requires a tiered approach that begins with prevention.



1. Students identified as having special education needs can receive at any time tiered interventions in addition to the supports delineated in their individualized education program.

**1. Tier 1 Interventions are universal schoolwide strategies that encourage good attendance for all students. Successful Tier 1 strategies may include:**

a. *Engaging Students and Parents*

Create a school climate that encourages students to come to school every day.

- Provide engaging curriculum that draws students to school.
- Conduct a school climate and attendance walk through the school. Learn how with the [Connecticut Welcoming Schools](#) program.
- Offer before- and after-school programs.
- Create visuals (bulletin boards, banners, posters) that reflect attendance messaging and modify during the year to sustain impact.
- Call students when they miss school and welcome them back when they return.
- Develop a communitywide vision to ensure that programs and interventions are culturally responsive.
- Consider specific attendance goals and strategies for students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), Section 504, or health care plans.
- Use the [Theory of Action](#) from CASEL, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, to implement social-emotional learning activities throughout the school day.
- Ensure your school has opportunities for parent engagement, such as regular conversations with teachers about curriculum and student learning.
- Host transition meetings for families with incoming kindergartners or any new family to the school.

**Is your school welcoming?**

The key to engaging parents is to make their schools “feel like family.” Schools that extend a genuine welcome and are inviting to families have strong partners in education. Learn more about the [Connecticut Welcoming Schools](#) program.

Recognize good and improved attendance in addition to perfect attendance.

- Create friendly competition among classrooms offering raffles, parties, and other [incentives](#).
- Celebrate individual progress through periodic public recognition.
- Recognize students and parents at special assemblies.
- Engage neighborhood businesses in promoting good attendance.

b. *Removing Barriers to Attendance*

- Provide a [school breakfast program](#) and/or food pantry to address hunger issues.
- Conduct a safe walk to school program (walking school bus) to address safety concerns.
- Conduct a clothing drive for winter coats or school uniform exchange.
- Organize health interventions such as flu and dental clinics.



**BRIGHT SPOT!**

**Connecticut Alliance of Boys & Girls Clubs**

In 2015, the Boys & Girls Clubs of Connecticut, in partnership with the Charter Oak Group and the Boys & Girls Clubs of America, compared chronic absenteeism and discipline data for students participating in their programs with the general population of Connecticut students. The preliminary data was reported in a technical paper, [Chronic Absenteeism and Discipline Data for Boys & Girls Club Members](#).

The study showed a 60 percent reduction in chronic absenteeism for youth attending Boys & Girls Club programs compared to students across the state. Among frequent club attenders, the rate of suspensions or expulsions was nearly 50 percent lower compared to their peers in Connecticut schools. (The Charter Oak Group, 2015)

**2. Tier 2 Interventions are individualized strategies responsive to the needs of frequently absent students. Successful Tier 2 strategies may include:**

a. *Engaging Students and Parents*

- Alert families to attendance concerns through personal phone calls.
- Implement a mentoring program. Assistance is available from the [Governor's Prevention Partnership](#).
- Ensure that professional development and training is provided to administrators and staff on how to communicate with families in a way that is culturally competent.
- Engage families in a relationship-building visit to seek solutions.
- Enlist the [Family Resource Center](#) and other community supports.
- Engage the school nurse or school-based health center staff to outreach to families around health issues, including students who are chronically ill or covered under [Section 504](#) of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, to ensure that needs are accommodated to encourage regular attendance.
- Engage the assistance of the PPT for students with disabilities.
- Recruit students as attendance ambassadors.
- Ensure priority placement in summer and after-school programs.

b. *Removing Barriers to Attendance*

- Provide parents with family-friendly information and assistance in accessing community resources and services.
- Implement Child Find protocols that require prompt referral to a Planning and Placement Team meeting of all children who have been suspended repeatedly or whose behavior, attendance, or progress in school has been considered unsatisfactory or at a marginal level of acceptance. This ensures compliance with Code of Federal Regulations ([C.F.R.](#)) [§ 300.111](#) that requires that all children with disabilities who are in need of special education and related services are identified, located, and evaluated.
- Use programs that support additional student engagement with the adult staff, e.g., [Check and Connect](#), [Creating Positive Behavioral Intervention Plans](#), and [Restorative Practices](#).
- Reinforce and target behavioral supports in classroom and small group settings, through evidence-based programs, e.g., [Second Step](#) and [Responsive Classroom](#).
- Develop [student attendance improvement plans](#) or incorporate attendance goals in [Student Success Plans](#) to help develop strategies to support improved attendance for all students.
- Replace out-of-school suspension policies and practices with positive behavioral supports and restorative justice programs.
- Identify social, emotional, and physical health; transportation; or housing barriers to attendance and work with community providers such as public housing authorities, departments of transportation, and community health centers or medical personnel.

### The Role of Teachers

As the first line of intervention and prevention, teachers are an especially important and trusted resource that can make attendance a normal topic in all interactions with students and parents.

- Emphasize attendance from day one.
- Greet students and families personally and ask about absences.
- Engage students in tracking their own attendance.
- Talk about attendance at back-to-school nights.
- Contact parents early. Don't wait for parent-teacher conferences.

Teaching Attendance: [Everyday Strategies to Help Teachers Improve Attendance and Raise Achievement](#)

### Why Mentoring is Important

To improve attendance, New York City schools assigned **success mentors** to chronically absent students in 100 schools. Students with mentors attended school an average of nine more days than similar students at other schools.

(Resource: *Relationships Matter: A Toolkit for An Elementary **Success Mentor** Attendance Initiative*)



### BRIGHT SPOT!

#### Mentoring can make a BIG difference!

When “Big Sister” Michelle was first matched in the **Nutmeg Big Brother/Big Sister Community-Based Mentoring Program**, her “Little” had a serious issue with chronic absenteeism. She was in eighth grade and just did not want to go to school. There was no way anyone was going to change her mind.

Even though Michelle experienced car troubles and was not able to see her “Little” for a period of time, this did not stop her from being a mentor and letting her “Little” know that she is a special person and encouraging her to go to school.

Michelle called her “Little” often providing encouragement to succeed in school and to believe in herself.

After only a few months of developing a relationship together, Michelle learned that her “Little” received a “perfect attendance” award for the grading period! *Perfect attendance!*

### Family Resource Centers Can Play an Important Role

Family Resource Centers in Connecticut are helping to reduce chronic absenteeism in their schools by:

- serving on their schools’ Student Attendance Review Teams;
- conducting home visits and phone calls with the school-parent liaisons or social workers;
- providing uniforms to students who need them;
- working with local businesses for donations that can be used as incentives for good attendance, e.g., gift cards, school supplies, movie tickets;
- acknowledging classrooms that have perfect attendance for the prior week with a Perfect Attendance sign;
- holding ceremonies to acknowledge perfect and improved attendance;
- arranging field trips for students with most improved attendance;
- coordinating a school-based mentoring program;
- partnering with the local **Youth Service Bureau** to provide workshops for families on the importance of good attendance;
- greeting parents in the morning, with the principal, before school starts and engaging in dialogue about issues related to school attendance; and
- working with after-school providers and community childcare providers to communicate consistent messaging about attendance with parents at pick-up time.

**3. Tier 3 Interventions are intense and individualized strategies for students who miss the most school. Typically, interagency collaboration and coordination is essential to helping students in Tier 3 overcome the serious challenges they face so they can be in school. Tier 3 interventions are often coordinated with other community-based service providers such as Youth Service Bureaus, Juvenile Review Boards, mental health clinics, and state agencies such as the Department of Children and Families or Court Support Services Division.**

Across the country and in Connecticut, there is growing recognition that Juvenile Court is not the appropriate venue for behavioral issues such as truancy. Research and best practice indicates that any involvement with the juvenile justice system has more negative than positive impacts. Local and regional school districts are encouraged to develop locally driven truancy alternatives in partnership with community-based organizations and local foundations. Successful Tier 3 strategies may include:

- Collaborating with a community organization, such as a [Youth Service Bureau](#), to develop and implement community truancy prevention and intervention models.
- Screening of students for childhood trauma and providing or connecting to effective, evidence-based treatments through [KidsMentalHealthInfo](#). Learn more about [trauma-informed initiatives](#).
- Implementing a dropout prevention program such as [Check and Connect](#) or [Success Mentors](#) that has strong evidence of positive effects on staying in school. Adult mentors consistently check in with students to facilitate improved engagement in both school and the community. The program focuses on re-engagement and active student participation.
- Referring to a Juvenile Review Board (JRB), a community-based diversion program for youths who otherwise would be referred to the Juvenile Court for minor violations of the law. The approach includes case management, a panel review meeting, and connections to appropriate services.
- Reviewing student discipline policies to ensure that students are suspended from school only when absolutely necessary and in a systematic and equitable way.
- Offering summer learning programs that re-engage students and parents throughout the summer months to reconnect and strengthen the relationship with school.
- Connecting pregnant and parenting teens to health, education, and social supports to enable them to complete their education, find employment, and access childcare.
- Referring students for support and evaluation as appropriate. For instance, if a student is struggling with anxiety or depression, the school social worker, counselor, or psychologist may be able to assist the student in addressing identified needs.
- Using local [Emergency Mobile Psychiatric Services](#) (EMPS) providers (211) for rapid access supports to schools in addressing students' behavioral and emotional needs.
- Providing students access to quality online credit recovery programs.
- Transferring to an alternative education setting that addresses the social, emotional, behavioral, and academic needs of the student.
- Referring to [System of Care Community Collaborative](#) or to [Connecticut's Medical Home Initiative for Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs](#) for family support and assistance.

Note: C.G.S. Section 10-198a requires filing a Family with Service Needs (FWSN) complaint with the Juvenile Matters Division of the Superior Court for truant students. This should only be done after attempting to hold a meeting with a parent and trying to coordinate services with community agencies providing child and family services. However, [Public Act 16-147](#), An Act Concerning the Recommendations of the Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight Committee, eliminates a child being a truant, habitual truant, or continuously and overtly defying school rules and regulations from permissible grounds for filing a FWSN, effective August 15, 2017. See section 3 for the definition of truant.

## Who else can be involved with reducing chronic absence?

Improving student attendance is the responsibility of an entire community, not just schools. Community partners (parents, neighborhood residents, civic organizations, businesses, city and county agencies, faith leaders, etc.) are instrumental to every level of a tiered approach.

Community partners can help send the message that missing just two days a month can hinder a child's success in school. Additionally, partners can provide recognition for good and improved attendance as well as address common barriers to getting to school such as poor health, unreliable transportation, or the lack of a safe path to school. If larger numbers of students are chronically absent, then it is a sign that you may need to cultivate additional adults who can help mentor and support students.

Attendance Works' toolkit, Count Us in! Working Together to Show That Every School Day Matters, provides ways to involve and enlist community stakeholders. It includes a variety of options for promoting good attendance, including a calendar of "What to Do When" and specific activities for different stakeholder groups.

The following is a working list of Connecticut and national resources.

### Resources

#### Connecticut Resources

- [Bullying, Character Education and Positive School Climate](#), CSDE
- [Connecticut Consortium on School Attendance](#), Office of Policy and Management
- [Connecticut's Medical Home Initiative](#)
- [Connecticut Welcoming Schools Initiative](#), Capitol Region Education Council
- [EdSight](#), CSDE data portal
- [Emergency Mobile Psychiatric Services \(EMPS\)](#), Connecticut Department of Children and Families
- [Ensuring Equity and Excellence for All Connecticut Students](#), Connecticut State Board of Education Five-year Comprehensive Plan, 2016-21
- [Family and Community Engagement Resources](#), CSDE
- [Family Resource Centers](#), CSDE
- [Getting to School Matters for 3 & 4 Year Olds: How Public Schools Can Help](#), Office of Early Childhood
- [Governor's Prevention Partnership](#)
- [Healthy ConneCTions](#), CSDE
- [KidsMentalHealthInfo.com](#), Child Health and Development Institute of Connecticut, Inc. (CHDI)
- [Managing Asthma in Connecticut Schools](#)
- [Next Generation Accountability System](#), CSDE
- [Public Act 15-225](#), An Act Concerning Chronic Absence
- Public School Information (PSIS) [Reference Guide](#)

#### In School and Engaged

*"Students, especially those at risk, will not be in school and engaged unless we work together to uncover and remove the barriers to good attendance. In Connecticut, we see this work as the responsibility of multiple community partners."*

- Charlene Russell-Tucker,  
Chief Operating Officer,  
Connecticut State Department  
of Education  
Co-Chair, Chronic Absence  
Strategic Action Group,  
Committee on Children:  
Results Based Accountability  
(RBA) Children's Report Card

- [School Health Services](#), CSDE
- [School-Based Diversion Initiative](#), Child Health Development Initiative (CHDI)
- [School-based Health Centers](#); Connecticut Association of School Based Health Centers
- Scientific Research-Based Interventions (SRBI) Addressing the Needs of the Whole Child: Social, Emotional, Behavioral, and Physical Health, [Topical Brief 3](#), CSDE
- [Scientific Research-Based Interventions](#), CSDE
- [Sexual Health Education Guidelines](#), CSDE
- [Supports for Pregnant and Parenting Teens](#), CSDE
- [System of Care Community Collaborative](#)
- [Trauma-Informed Initiatives](#), CHDI
- [Truancy Intervention — National Models and Connecticut Initiatives](#), 2015 Report, Center for Children's Advocacy
- [Youth Service Bureaus](#), Connecticut Youth Services Association

### National Resources

- [Attendance Works](#) has developed a range of resources specific to grades served (i.e., elementary, middle, secondary) and aligned to five important strategies designed to improve attendance: recognizing good and improved attendance; engaging students and parents; monitoring attendance data and practice; providing personalized early outreach; and developing programmatic responses to barriers. A few examples include:
  - Bringing Attendance Home: [Engaging Parents in Preventing Chronic Absence](#)
  - Count Us In! [Working Together to Show That Every School Day Matters](#)
  - Early and Often: [Early Education Toolkit](#)
  - Leading Attendance: [A Toolkit for Principals](#)
  - Relationships Matter: [A Toolkit for an Elementary Success Mentor Attendance Initiative](#)
  - Teaching Attendance: [Everyday Strategies to Help Teachers Improve Attendance and Raise Achievement](#)
- [Campaign for Grade-Level Reading](#)
- [Civil Rights Data Collection \(CRDC\) for the 2013-14 School Year](#), United States Department of Education
- [Every Student, Every Day: A National Initiative to Address and Eliminate Chronic Absenteeism](#), United States Departments of Education, Housing, Justice, and Health and Human Services
- [Get Schooled](#)
- [Mayor's Interagency Task Force on Truancy, Chronic Absenteeism & School Engagement, New York City](#)
- [Parent Teacher Home Visit Project](#)
- [Restorative Practices](#), International Institute for Restorative Practices
- [School Attendance, Chronic Health Conditions and Leveraging Data for Improvement](#), National Association of Chronic Disease Directors
- [School Climate](#), National School Climate Center
- [School Nurses' Role in Combating Chronic Absenteeism](#), National Association of School Nurses
- [Success Mentors](#), United States Department of Education
- [The National Mentoring Partnership](#)
- [Whole School, Whole Child Model](#), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

**For more information:****Resources, Strategies, and Best Practices**

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