



# Spark Innovation



CONNECTICUT STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



# **FOCUSING ON ATTENDANCE & ENGAGEMENT IN THE NEW NORMAL**

*Ways to reimagine school to engage **all** students*

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# Overview

- **Begin with the Data**

*Chronic Absence Patterns and Predictions During COVID-19: Insights from Connecticut, June 2021*

- **Align Strategic Plans**

*AccelerateCT and Reimagining Schools to Transform Student's Lives*

- **Build Systems to Support ALL Students – Call to Action**

*Reducing Chronic Absence in Connecticut's Schools: A Prevention & Intervention Guide*

- **Stay Connect & Learn Together as Partners**



# Begin with the Data

*Chronic Absence Patterns and Predictions  
During COVID-19: Insights from Connecticut, June 2021*

Attendance Works and Connecticut State Department of Education



# Chronic Absence Patterns and Predictions During COVID-19: *Insights from Connecticut*

## Chronic Absence Patterns and Prediction During Covid-19: Insights from Connecticut

By Hedy N. Chang, Kevin Gee, Briana Hennessy, David Alexandre and Ajit Gopalakrishnan



### Overview

Monitoring chronic absence is widely recognized as an essential tool for reducing educational inequity. The recent shift to distance and/or hybrid learning during the Covid-19 pandemic disrupted the collection and utilization of attendance data across the country. Putting in place consistent, reliable and actionable data has been a major challenge for states and school districts.

This report describes how Connecticut took steps to collect consistent attendance data by learning mode (or modes), and publicly released data in a timely manner during the pandemic. For example, the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) agreed upon a standard definition of attendance — showing up to school for half of a day — to ensure consistency with prior year data and across learning modes. CSDE also invested in frequent collection and public reporting of attendance and chronic absence data throughout the 2020-21 school year. As a result, Connecticut is uniquely positioned to analyze how patterns of chronic absence differ across learning modes, grades and student groups.

The report offers key insights from the analysis of Connecticut's chronic absence data that can inform Covid-19 educational recovery efforts and attendance initiatives. It shares lessons learned from Connecticut and recommends steps that other states can take to improve their data systems and ensure actionable data for the next school year.

### I. Why Monitoring Chronic Absence Matters for Reducing Educational Inequity

Prior to the pandemic, 8 million students were chronically absent (missing 10% of school) in the 2017-18 school year. Chronic absence rates in 2017-18 were higher for groups hardest hit during the pandemic by poor health, economic hardship and unequal access to schooling.

Research on in-person learning shows that chronic absence has a wide ranging impact on student outcomes including lower academic achievement,<sup>1,2,3,4</sup> a higher probability of high school dropout,<sup>5,6</sup> and worse social-emotional outcomes.<sup>7</sup> The adverse impact was greatest for students living in poverty who are less likely to have the resources to make up for lost learning time in the classroom and more likely to experience multiple systemic barriers to getting to school.<sup>8</sup>

Studies conducted prior to the pandemic also reveal the importance of noticing and addressing, as early as possible, when absences are adding up. Missing more than two days in September predicts higher levels of chronic absence for that school year.<sup>9</sup> Mounting evidence finds that each additional day of missed school contributes to worse educational outcomes.<sup>10,11,12</sup>

Chronic absence, calculated throughout the school year, can serve as an early warning sign that particular or groups of students and families need additional engagement and support. It can be used to indicate when a school, district or community is struggling to put in place positive conditions for learning, such as physical and emotional health and safety; a sense of belonging, connection and support; academic challenge and engagement; and adults and peers with social-emotional competence.<sup>13</sup>

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1. **Most prevalent among predominantly remote students** and least prevalent among in-person students, with rates for hybrid students falling in between.
2. Declined between September-November and January-March across all three learning modes.
3. Rates between in-person and hybrid students were less pronounced for high school students relative to elementary or middle school students.
4. **Rates were higher for students who were receiving free or reduced-price lunch, Black or Hispanic, English learners, identified as having a disability and male.** These gaps persisted between Fall and Winter.
5. Patterns and grades most affected by absenteeism differed by learning model.
6. Patterns of chronic absence by learning mode and grade were not the same across racial and ethnic groups.
7. Students were predicted to have a higher chance of winter chronic absence if, in the fall, they were chronically absent, compared to peers with satisfactory attendance (i.e., missed less than 5% of total school days).

[Chronic Absence Patterns and Prediction During Covid-19: Insights from Connecticut - Attendance Works](#)



# Align to Strategic Plans

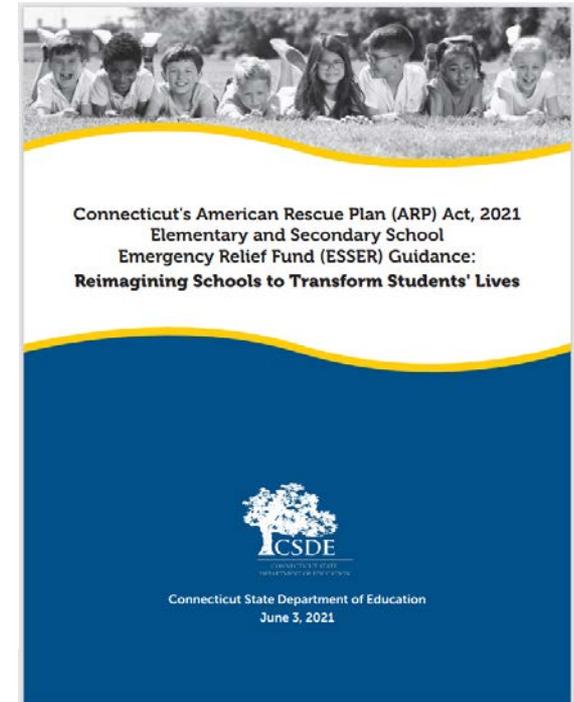
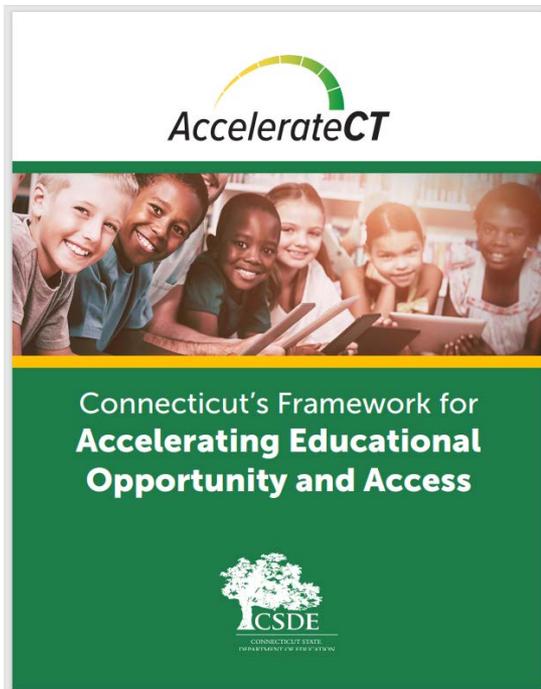
*AccelerateCT*

&

*Reimagining Schools to Transform Students' Lives*



# An Asset-Based Mindset



# Strategic Acceleration Habits



# Building Systems to Support *All* Students



# MOBILIZE Attendance Teams

## **District Leadership Team –**

- ensures the district, as a whole, is systematically addressing chronic absence and is promoting and supporting a districtwide culture of attendance.
- ensures evidence-based attendance policies and procedures are implemented consistently in all schools.
- spearheads connections with community service providers as partners in this work.
- elevates the importance of this work by designating a cabinet-level administrator to lead and facilitate the district's attendance efforts.

## **District Attendance Team –**

- brings together district-level administrators and community agencies to address chronic absence across the entire district.
- Key functions:
  - Routinely unpack, analyze, and utilize data to inform action.
  - Organize a systemic districtwide response and policy/practice improvement.
  - Promote shared accountability and continuous improvement.



# MOBILIZE Attendance Teams

**School Attendance Team** – ensures that the school adopts a comprehensive, actionable tiered approach to improving attendance that is based on data and outcomes.

Organizing a School Attendance Review Team:

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

**Include families in planning and decision-making** – Reach out to families to find out what might be preventing their children 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 prevent chronic absenteeism.



# DIVE into the Data

## Locate your 2020-21 data

- [EdSight Student Participation Data](#), 2020-21

## Examine your data and ask strategic questions using a [protocol](#).

- What does the data tell you? Problems of Practice?
- Key conclusions and recommendations for addressing the problems of practice?



# BUILD a Plan of Action

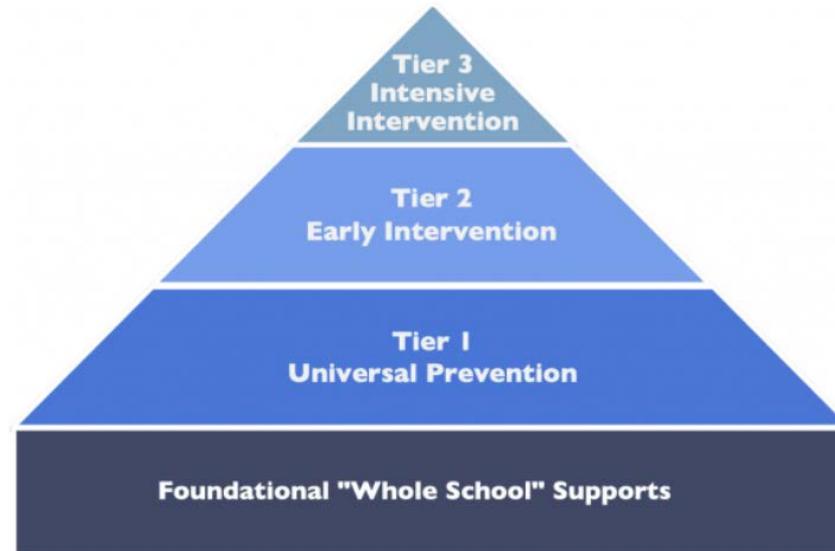
**Attendance Playbook:** Smart Solutions for Reducing Chronic Absenteeism in the COVID Era

## **Attendance Playbook Implementation Guide**

- Start with a team.
- Analyze your data before selecting strategies.
- Consider the reasons for the absences.
- Explore possible interventions with your team considering, time, effort, potential impact, and cost. (questionnaire tool).
- Select the strategies.
- Determine the steps to implement strategy.
- Assess success of strategy.



# BUILD a Plan of Action



Physically healthy learning environment	Enrichment activities and clubs (with virtual options)	Positive relationships between school staff, students and families	Support for all families to facilitate learning at home
Access to tech equipment and connectivity	Access to Learning Supports	Predictable daily/weekly routines, rituals and celebrations	A culture of continuous improvement
Welcoming, socially-emotionally safe, trauma-informed school climate	Home rooms and/or Advisory (with virtual options)	A schedule of classes and where/how they are held	Active engagement of parents and students in planning and problem solving
<b>Foundational "Whole School" Supports</b>			



[www.attendanceworks.org](http://www.attendanceworks.org)



# Tier 1 Strategies

## *Call to Action: Partner with Families*

### **Parent Teacher Home Visits (PTHV)**

- Visits are always voluntary for educators and families, and arranged in advance.
- Teachers are trained and compensated for visits outside their school day.
- Focus of the first visit is relationship-building; we discuss hopes and dreams.
- No targeting – visit all or a cross-section of students so there is no stigma.
- Educators conduct visits in pairs, and after the visit, reflect with their partner.

### **Studies found that:**

- PTHV interrupts the assumptions and implicit biases that educators and family members have about each other.
- Most study participants agreed that PTHV's five core practices ensured that home visits result in positive relationships between educators and families.
- Schools that systematically implemented PTHV experienced decreased rates of student chronic absenteeism and increased rates of student English Language Arts and math proficiency.



# LEAP Home Visits

## **Learner Engagement and Attendance Program (LEAP)**

- Voluntary, scheduled opportunities for a school district member or community partner to go, in pairs, to the home of a student with prior chronic absence (or other location) to meet with a parent or guardian.
- Purpose is to strengthen the school-family relationship in a positive and relational manner.
- Conversation is focused on families' strengths and capabilities, as well as their aspirations for their child. The visitors are there to learn from families, not to enforce attendance policies or sanctions.
- Ideally, families receive multiple home visits that support building relationships over time.
- 15 districts/coordinated by RESC Alliance.



# Tier 2 Strategies

## *Call to Action: Intentional Relationships*

### **National Success Mentors**

*VISION: Every chronically absent student in the country has a supporting, caring adult to help them navigate their school experience and become college and career ready.*

- Conduct a needs assessment to understand how students who are chronically absent are distributed throughout a district's schools.
- Provide consistent and continuous school-based mentoring.
- Draw on multiple sources (e.g., non-profit partners, college work-study students, school staff, trained peer mentors, etc.) to amass sufficient school-based mentors.
- Principals lead/support weekly meetings in which school-wide trend data on attendance, behavior, and course performance is analyzed and used to craft school-wide targeted interventions.

<https://sites.ed.gov/nsaesc/national-success-mentors/>



# Tier 2 Strategies

## *Call to Action: Intentional Relationships*

### Check & Connect

- **Mentor:** builds strong relationship with student based on mutual trust and open communication, nurtured through a long-term commitment focused on success at school and with learning.
- **“Check”:** monitoring of student performance variables (warning signs of disengagement such as attendance, grades, and behavior referrals) using data readily available to school personnel.
- **“Connect”:** timely, personalized, data-based interventions designed to provide support tailored to individual student needs, based on the student's level of engagement with school (“check” data), associated influences of home and school, and leveraging of local resources.
- **Parent/Family Engagement:** mentors partner with parents/families.

Mentors work with caseloads of students and families for at least two years, functioning as liaisons between home and school and striving to build constructive family-school relationships.

<http://www.checkandconnect.umn.edu/model/default.html>



# Tier 3 Interventions

## *Call to Action: Interagency Case Management*

### **Interagency Case Management**

Students facing more complex problems—such as homelessness, pregnancy, and/or mental illness—require coordination and case management with agencies beyond the school yard.

### **Community Schools New York City**

- Establish partnerships between community school directors and community-based organizations.
- Allow students expanded learning time by lengthening the traditional school day and/or offering afterschool and summer enrichment programs.
- Integrate a tiered system of wellness and student supports to address mental health, reproductive health, vision, mentoring for students at risk of chronic absenteeism, and services for vulnerable youth, such as those who are homeless or victims of domestic violence.
- [New York City schools using the model saw reductions in chronic absenteeism in all grades and across all years of the study.](#)



# EVALUATE and ADJUST to Ensure Success

Monitoring and evaluating effectiveness of strategies and actions are critical components to ensure the plan is on track so that adjustments can be made as needed along the way.

## District Team Self-Assessment Tool:

- Complete the assessment,
- Tabulate results,
- Discuss and set goals/benchmarks, and
- Create an action plan, and communicate the results to all stakeholders.

## Six Key Ingredients

- Capacity Building
- Actionable Data
- Positive Engagement
- Strategic Partnerships
- Adequate & Equitable Resources
- Shared Accountability



Source: Attendance Works

# EVALUATE and ADJUST to Ensure Success

ADEQUATE & EQUITABLE RESOURCES	Solidly in Place	Measurable Progress	Needs Improvement	Urgent Gap	Comments
1. Our district has mapped school, district and community-based resources that promote attendance.					
2. Our district has identified gaps in funding and resources that affect attendance.					
3. Our district team has a system in place to hear from and respond to school attendance teams about their needs, service gaps for underserved student groups, and resource implications.					
4. Our district prioritizes the distribution of financial, staffing and community resources to schools with higher rates of chronic absence and large populations of vulnerable students.					
5. Our district promotes equity by hiring staff and procuring services from community-based partners that reflect the diversity of our student and family population.					
6. Our district advocates for funding and resources from government entities at the local, state and national level to address identified gaps.					

**Example**



# Stay Connected & Learn Together



# Stay Connected & Learn Together

- **State Partnerships to Support Improved Attendance for ALL Students**
  - SERC – Professional Learning Opportunities
  - Attendance Works – Capacity-building, state, regional and local districts
  - RESC Alliance – LEAP and local district support
- **Stay Up-to-Date with the District Attendance Leads Contact List**
- **Join our Virtual Communities**
  - Student Attendance *Community of Practice for District Attendance Leads* – ALL School Districts (third Thursday of each month)
  - *Talk Tuesdays* – Alliance Districts and NetSTAT Schools (every other Tuesday)





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