

Supporting the Whole Child: Connecting Brain Health, Systems, and Practice

Cultivating a School-Wide Culture of Attendance

September 24th, 2026
Session #12



What This Series Is

- An ongoing, twice-monthly learning series
- Grounded in the Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child (WSCC) framework
- Interactive and case-based (not just presentations)
- Designed for multiple disciplines and perspectives
- Focused on real-world practice and collaboration

A space to learn, share, and problem-solve together in support of the whole child



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Today's Session

- Explore why attendance matters for student success, confidence, and belonging
- Examine the shift from punitive responses to supportive, relationship-centered approaches
- Identify common barriers and root causes of chronic absenteeism
- Explore school-wide strategies for building relationships, engaging families, and supporting attendance
- Learn how MTSS and proactive outreach can help identify and support students early
- WSCC component(s):
 - Family Engagement



Learning Objectives

- Understand how regular attendance directly impacts student success, confidence, and belonging
- Move the conversation from "punishing absences" to "celebrating presence and community"
- Learn to recognize the hidden challenges—like transportation, health, or anxiety—that keep students away
- Create warm, non-blaming communication strategies to partner with parents and caregivers
- Learn how to look at attendance numbers early so you can offer support before a student falls behind



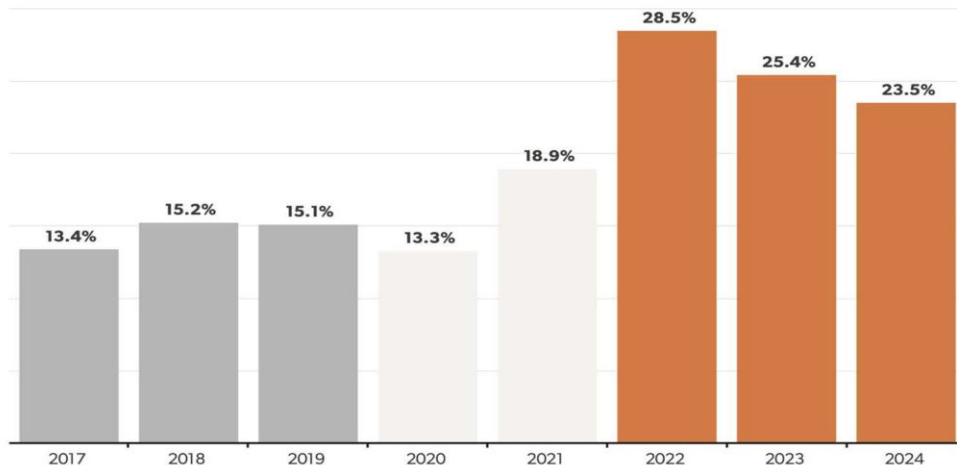
School Culture Matters

“Cultivate a School-Wide Culture of Attendance” means attendance is actively encouraged and considered a key part of the community creating an environment where consistent and punctual presence is highly valued.



Chronic absence nearly doubled and remains too high

Figure 1. US Chronic Absenteeism Rates: School Years 2017–24



Source: Return to Learn Tracker, "Chronic Absenteeism: 2017–2024," American Enterprise Institute, <https://www.returntolearntacker.net>.

Note: Pre-pandemic years are in grey, pandemic years that had potentially unreliable attendance data are in light grey, and post-pandemic years with reliable data are in orange. School years are referred to by the spring year.



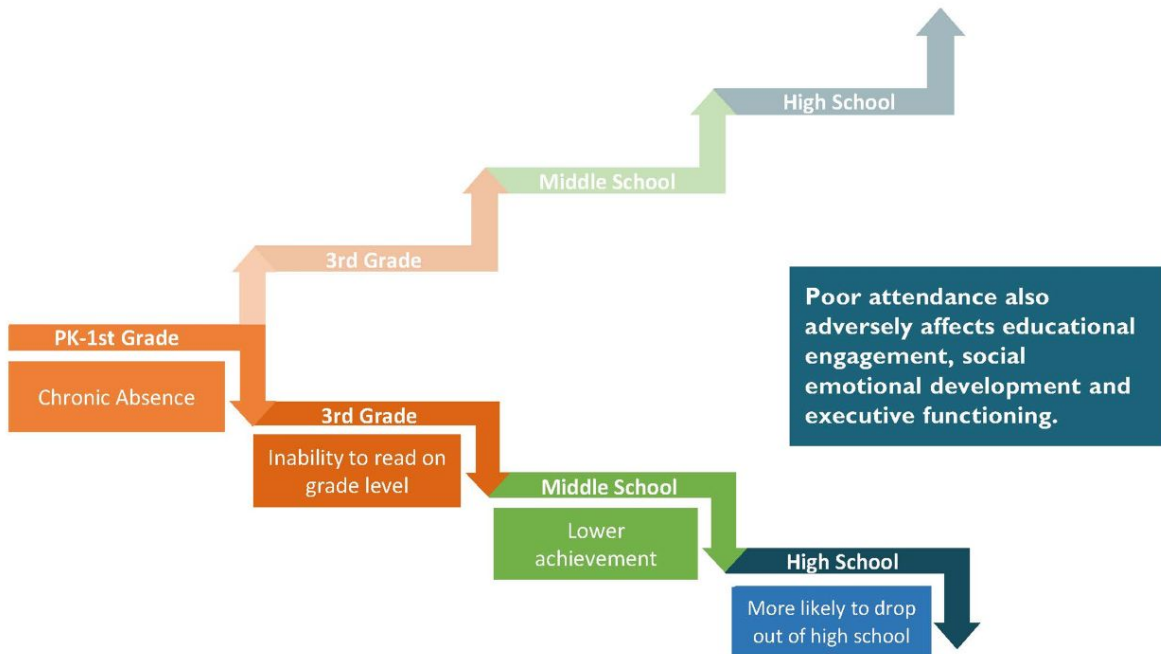
Kansas Chronic Absenteeism

Chronic Absenteeism

- 2018 - 13.2%
- 2019 - 13.9%
- 2020 - 13.9%
- 2021 - 17.5%
- 2022 - 25.7%
- 2023 - 21.8%
- 2024 - 19.8%
- 2025 - 19.5%



Improving Attendance Matters K-12



One Principal's Story



Attendance Matters

Every student. Every day.



For the Fridge

- Distribute to Families
- Post on Website
- Include in Newsletters
- Back to School Night
- Parent/Teacher Conferences

IF YOUR STUDENT...

...HAS AN EXCUSED ABSENCE

Please EMAIL
SEattendance@usd231.com
or CALL the absence line at
913-856-3749.

...WILL BE ABSENT BECAUSE YOU'RE GOING ON VACATION

Please EMAIL Dr. Jones at
jonesja@usd231.com ahead of
time to request approval of
absences. Otherwise, these
will be UNEXCUSED.

...WILL BE LATE FOR SCHOOL

Come to the office first to get a
pass. CALL the office at
913-876-3700 ahead of time
if your student will be late
for an appointment.

...HAS DIFFERENT DISMISSAL INSTRUCTIONS

Please CALL the office at
913-856-3700 before 3 pm.
We will notify the teacher.



Attendance matters!

Sunflower Attendance Chart

Attendance matters to your school success. Good attendance is missing not more than one day of school a month.

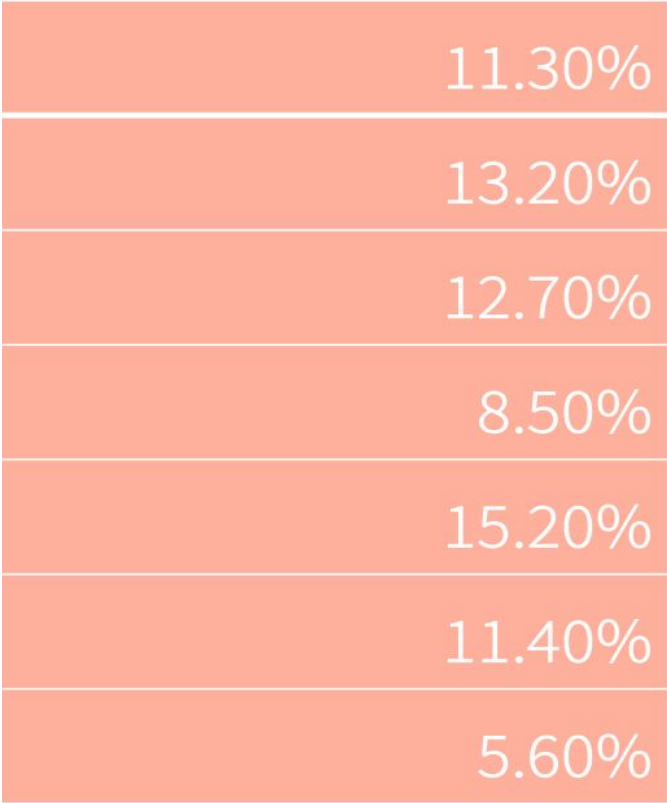
	Date	Date	Date	Date	Date	Date	Date	Date	Date	Absence 10+
Student Name	Absence 1 Reason	Absence 2 Reason	Absence 3 Reason	Absence 4 Reason	Absence 5 Reason	Absence 6 Reason	Absence 7 Reason	Absence 8 Reason	Absence 9 Reason	Your student is at increased risk for academic difficulties with each absence beyond this point.
Student Name										
Student Name										





Attendance Matters

Elementary Schools in the the District
(Chronic Absenteeism Rate)



5 Key Elements of Cultivating a School-Wide Culture of Attendance

1. Open Communication:
2. Parents who feel informed and valued become active partners in their child's education.



The Importance of Attendance



School Definitions

- Attendance - to be present at or to go to school
- Absence - not present or at a usual expected place; missing school
- Tardy - being late to school
- Excused Absence - missing school with an allowable excuse
- Unexcused Absence - missing school without an allowable excuse
- Chronic Absenteeism - missing too much school, two days a month or more than 10% of school year both excused and unexcused

www.attendanceworks.org/toolkits/early-education-toolkit/



Urgent Need to Avoid Punitive Responses to Poor Attendance

Punitive practices have not shown to improve attendance

When absences start to add up, often the initial reaction to missing school is to blame the child or their family for not caring enough to make school a priority.

This response can make it even more difficult to find a solution because it causes the student and family to feel alienated, distrustful and angry.

What improves attendance is partnering with students and families to identify and address the “root causes” that lead students to miss in the first place, whether absences are connected to barriers to showing up for school, negative experiences in school, or a lack of engagement.



Key Elements of Cultivating a School-Wide Culture of Attendance

2. Building Relationships with Students and Families:

Actively engaging with students and families, establishing personal connections, and showing genuine interest in their well-being.



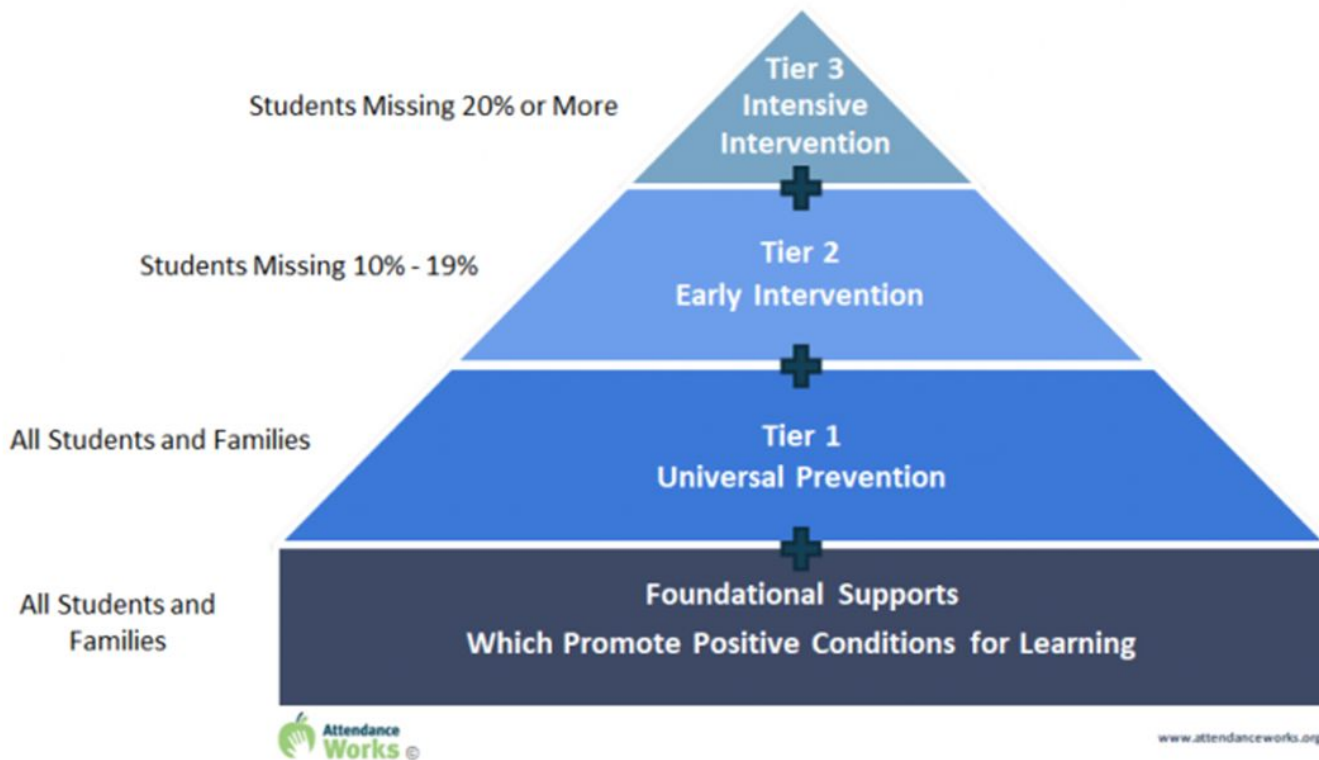
Key Elements of Cultivating a School-Wide Culture of Attendance

3. Proactive Outreach:

Identifying at risk individuals and providing targeted support to address potential barriers to attendance.



MTSS and Attendance



3 Tiers of Intervention

- **Tier 1** strategies are aimed at encouraging better attendance for all students and at preventing absenteeism before it affects achievement
- **Tier 2** interventions are designed to remove barriers to attendance for students at greater risk of chronic absenteeism, such as those who missed 10% of the school year, the standard definition of chronic absenteeism. These students and families should receive personalized attention as part of the engagement strategy
- **Tier 3** interventions provide intensive support to students missing the most school, often involving not just schools but other agencies such as health, housing and social services, and typically requiring case management customized to individual students' challenges. Students missing 20% or more of the school year benefit from the addition of this intensive level of support



Key Elements of Cultivating a School-Wide Culture of Attendance

4. Engaging Curriculum and Work:

Designing relevant and stimulating activities that motivate individuals to actively participate and attend.



Key Elements of Cultivating a School-Wide Culture of Attendance

5. Address Underlying Issues:

Investigating and addressing potential root causes of absenteeism like personal challenges or scheduling conflicts.



Barriers

- Illness, both chronic and acute –physical and mental
- Lack of health, mental health, vision, or dental care
- Family responsibilities
- Trauma
- Depression or anxiety
- Unsafe path to/from school
- Poor transportation
- Housing/food insecurity
- Frequent school changes
- Child welfare or juvenile justice system involvement

Negative School Experiences

- Struggling academically and behaviorally
- Ineffective or harmful interventions
- Bored or social challenges
- Bullying
- Suspensions and expulsions
- Negative attitudes of parents due to their own school experience
- Undiagnosed or lack of accommodations for disability
- Pressure for academic success

Lack of Engagement

- Lack of or ineffective academic, emotional or behavioral support
- No meaningful or negative relationships to adults in the school
- Unwelcoming school climate
- Failure to earn credits/no future plans
- Many teacher absences or long-term substitutes

Misconceptions

- Absences are only a problem if they are unexcused
- Missing two days per month doesn't affect learning
- Sporadic absences aren't a problem
- Attendance only matters in older grades
- Suspensions are not relevant



Case Discussion

Context & Background During the first semester, Maya missed 22 out of 90 school days (24% total absence rate), crossing the threshold for chronic absenteeism. Her academic performance dropped from mostly B's to failing grades in math and science, primarily due to missed instructional time and unsubmitted coursework.

Root Causes

- **Caregiving Responsibilities:** Maya's mother works night shifts at a healthcare facility. Maya often stayed home to care for two younger siblings when they were sick or when childcare fell through.
- **Transportation Barriers:** On days she missed the school bus, her family lacked reliable alternative transportation.
- **Academic Disengagement:** As absences accumulated, Maya felt overwhelmed by overdue assignments, leading to anxiety about returning and further avoiding school



Discussion Questions

Using the topics below as a guide for an Empathy Interview, what questions might you ask Maya?

- School Experience:
- Daily Routine:
- Belonging & Connections:
- Academic Support:
- Personal Goals:



Attendance Works Resources

www.attendanceworks.org

www.attendanceworks.org/resources/toolkits/early-education-toolkit/

www.attendanceworks.org/resource/toolkits/bringing-attendance-home/

www.ksdetasn.org/kpirc/kpirc-resources



Today's Ripple



Attendance work is **not just about monitoring**—it's about **problem-solving**

Strong attendance culture requires **systems that identify patterns early**

Solutions should be **personalized, empathetic, and collaborative** with families

Addressing root causes builds **trust** and **long-term engagement**

What is one thing you plan to implement from today's learning?



Share Your Thoughts!



What's Next

ECHO SERIES

CONNECTING BRAIN HEALTH, SYSTEMS, AND PRACTICE

Supporting the Whole Child

Join us October 14th at 9 AM CST!

