

# Overcoming Chronic Absenteeism: Solutions for School Leaders



February 27, 2024

# Welcome!



**Lauran Waters-Cherry**  
Executive Vice President,  
American Federation of School  
Administrators

## Code of Conduct

AFSA is committed to providing an environment free from discrimination and harassment. We ask all meeting participants to embrace our values of equity and equality and conduct themselves in this meeting consistent with those values.

For anyone who thinks they have experienced discriminatory, harassing, or otherwise unacceptable behavior, we urge you to contact today's designee:

Nick Spina, AFSA Chief of Staff:  
[nspina@AFSAadmin.org](mailto:nspina@AFSAadmin.org)



# Agenda

## I. Welcome and Overview

*Lauran Waters-Cherry, AFSA*

## I. Opening Remarks on Chronic Absenteeism

*Adam Schott, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education*

## I. What Works to Re-Engage Students in School

*Cecelia Leong, Attendance Works*

## I. Effective School Strategies: Panel Discussion

*Hedy Chang, Attendance Works*

*Victoria Simon, Grand Rapids Public Schools*

*Ryan Broderick, Bristol Public Schools*

## I. Questions & Answers

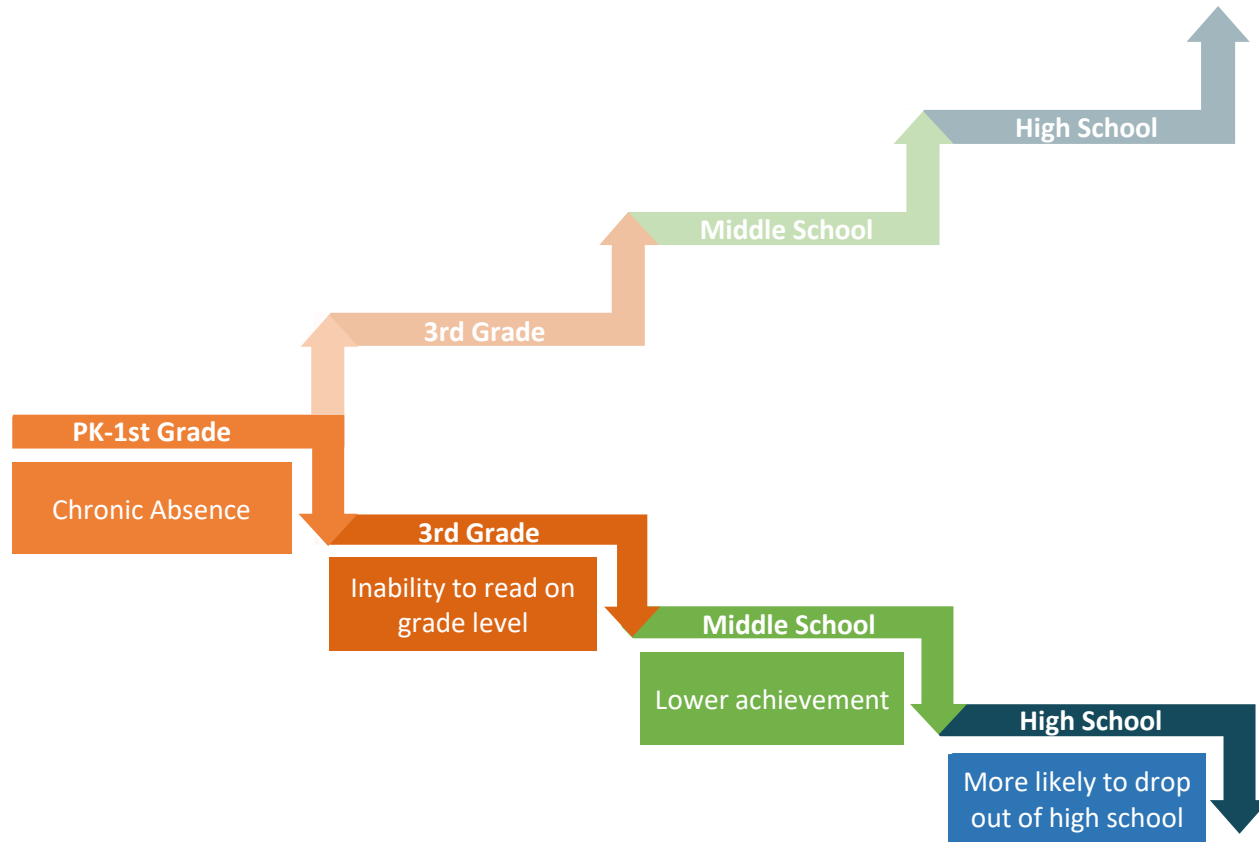
## 2. Resources



## Audience Poll

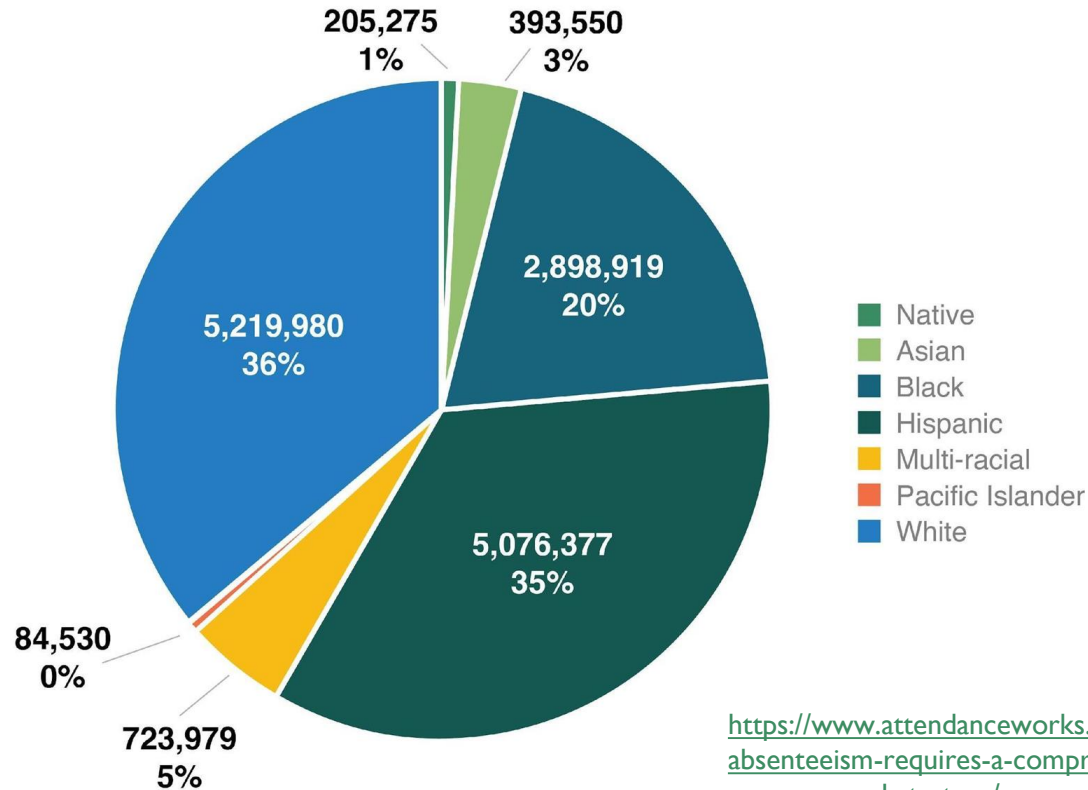
*What is your role?*

# Improving Attendance Matters



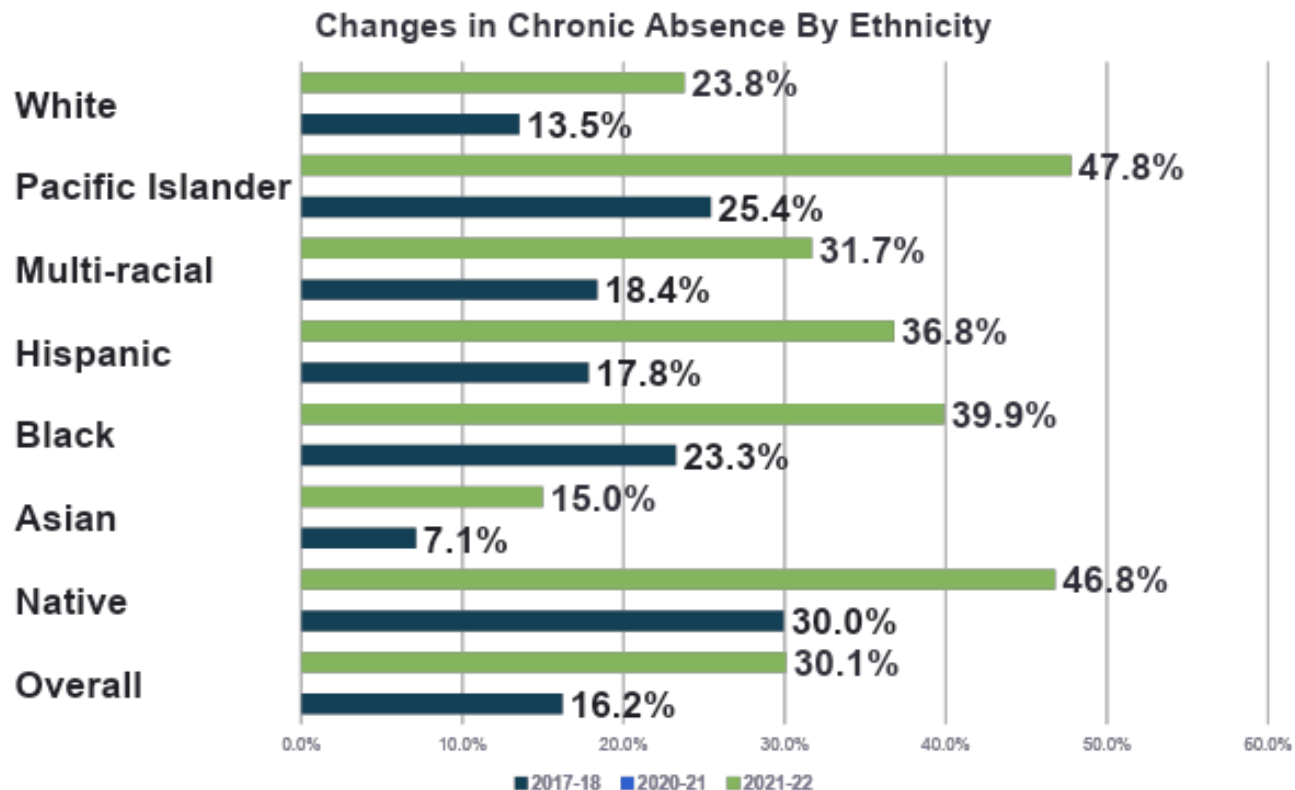
# Who are chronically absent students?

2021-22 Chronically Absent Students by Demographic Background



<https://www.attendanceworks.org/todays-chronic-absenteeism-requires-a-comprehensive-district-response-and-strategy/>

# Chronically absent students are from all ethnic backgrounds. But some groups are more affected.





# Opening Remarks



**Adam Schott**  
Principal Deputy Secretary,  
Office of Elementary and Secondary  
Education, USDOE

# Presenter



**Cecelia Leong**  
Vice President of Programs  
Attendance Works



**The Key to Improving  
Attendance is a Tiered Approach**





## Pathway for Change

Mindset





Actionable  
Data

Capacity

Strategies

Outcomes

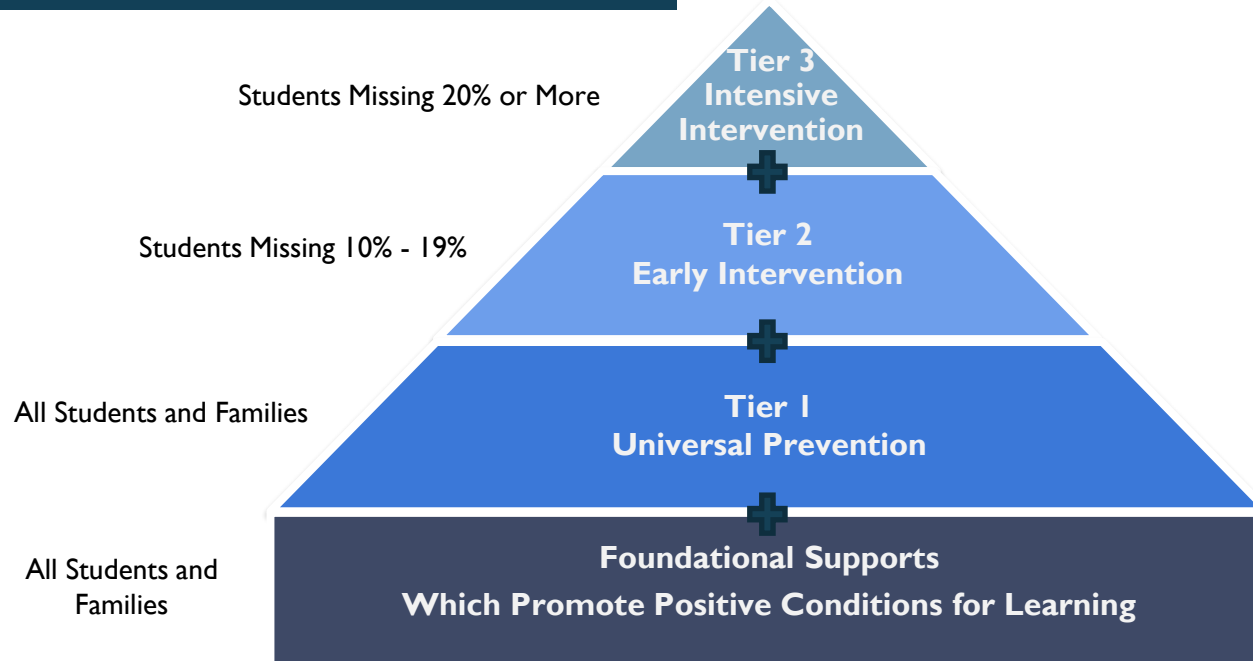
# Changing the Power Dynamics with Students and Families

Problem Focused	to	Partnership Focused
Approach family <i>only</i> to address a problem		Initial outreach focuses on building a relationship
One-way messaging to families		Start with listening to families; Find out hopes, dreams, assets, and needs
Focus <i>only</i> on barriers		Leverage student/family strengths to overcome challenges
Presume you have all the answers and know what is best for the family/student		Collaborate with families and encourage practices that build upon their assets and priorities

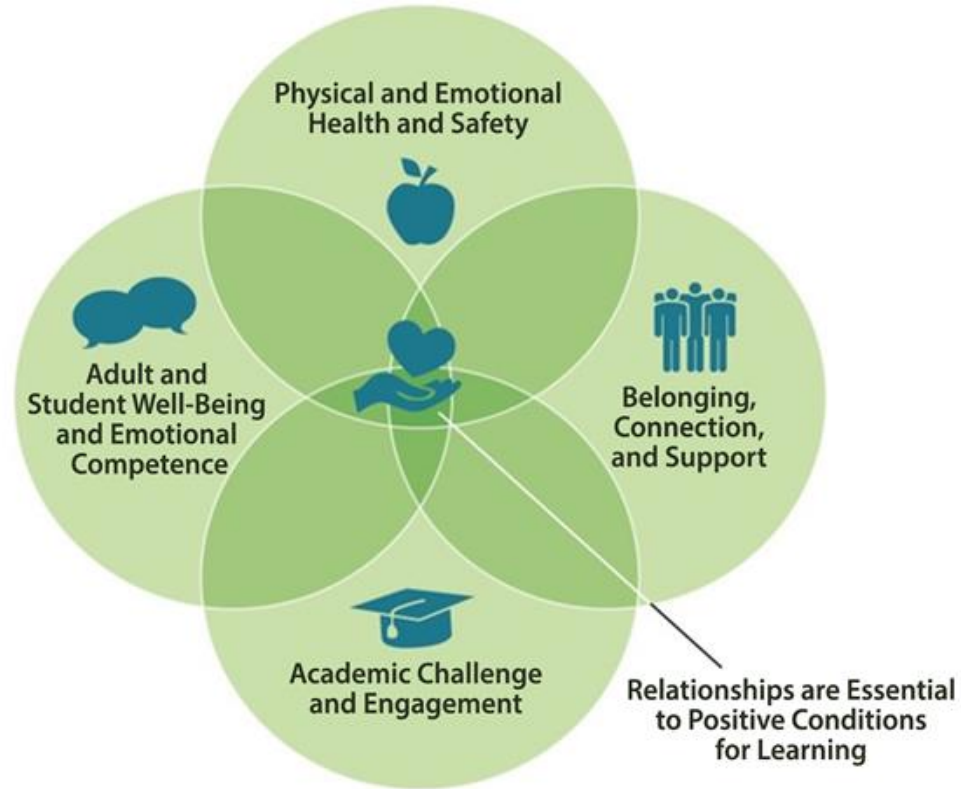
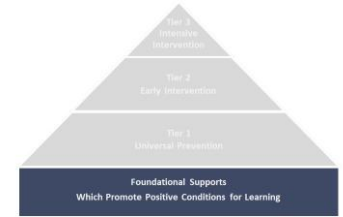
These concepts were adapted from this blog by the Search Institute: <https://blog.searchinstitute.org/six-shifts-better-family-engagement>



## Multi-tiered System of Support for Attendance

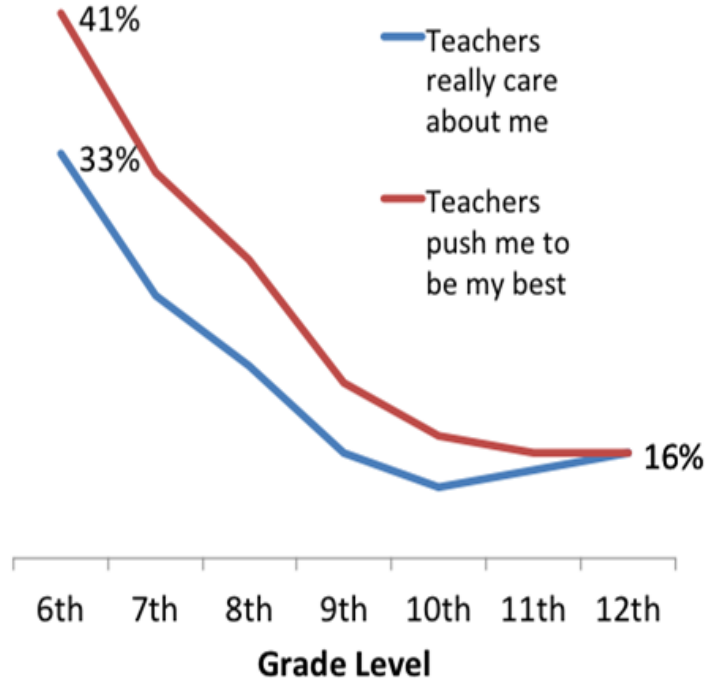


# Positive Conditions for Learning Lead to Students Being Engaged and Attending Regularly



## Relationships with Teachers Decline

Younger students are more likely to report that their teachers care and challenge them compared to older students.



**What do students say about their relationships with adults?**

Search Institute: [What We're Learning about Developmental Relationships](#)



# Reducing chronic absence requires addressing underlying causes of chronic absence including challenges worsened or created by the pandemic

## Barriers

- Chronic and acute illness
- Family responsibilities or home situation
- Trauma
- Poor transportation
- Housing and food insecurity
- Inequitable access to needed services
- System involvement
- Lack of predictable schedules for learning
- Lack of access to tech
- Community violence

## Aversion

- Struggling academically and/or behaviorally
- Unwelcoming school climate
- Social and peer challenges
- Anxiety
- Biased disciplinary and suspension practices
- Undiagnosed disability and/or disability accommodations
- Caregivers had negative educational experiences

## Disengagement

- Lack of challenging, culturally responsive instruction
- Bored
- No meaningful relationships to adults in the school (especially given staff shortages)
- Lack of enrichment opportunities
- Lack of academic and behavioral support
- Failure to earn credits
- Need to work conflicts with being in high school

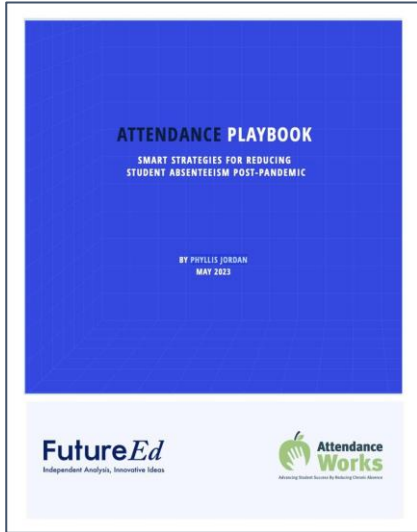
## Misconceptions

- Absences are only a problem if they are unexcused
- Missing 2 days per month doesn't affect learning
- Lose track and underestimate TOTAL absences
- Assume students must stay home for any symptom of illness
- Attendance only matters in the older grades
- Suspensions don't count as absence

<https://www.attendanceworks.org/chronic-absence/addressing-chronic-absence/3-tiers-of-intervention/root-causes/>



# Interventions that can be found in the Attendance Playbook



## **TIER I: Foundational Support and Schoolwide Prevention**

- Community Schools
- Engaging with Families
- Student-Teacher Relationships
- Relevant—and Culturally Relevant—Instruction
- Restorative Discipline Practices
- Summer Learning and Afterschool Strategies
- Positive Greetings at the Door
- Incentives
- Rethinking Recess
- Healthy School Buildings
- School-based Health Services
- Telehealth
- Free Meals for All
- School Buses and Public Transit
- A Safer Walk to School
- Laundry at School

## **TIER II: Targeted Support**

- Early Warning Systems
- Targeted Home Visits
- Mentors and Tutors
- Targeted Youth Engagement
- Addressing Asthma
- Mental Health Support and School Refusal
- Students with Disabilities
- Immigrant Students

## **TIER III: Intensive Support**

- Interagency Case Management
- Housing Insecurity
- Truancy

Attendance Playbook: <https://www.future-ed.org/attendance-playbook/>

Implementation Guide: <https://www.attendanceworks.org/resources/attendance-playbook/>

# Taking a Team Approach





## Primary Purpose of a Team Approach

Organize and facilitate a schoolwide attendance strategy and ensure it is an integral component of the school's plan to improve outcomes for all students.



# Attendance Functions of a School Team



- 1. Organize a multi-tiered attendance strategy that begins with prevention and early intervention.**
- 2. Examine attendance and absenteeism data to assess which groups of students have higher or lower levels of absence.**
- 3. Identify assets, barriers and strategies that affect attendance.**
- 4. Mobilize everyone in the school community to address attendance.**
- 5. Determine if you are making a difference.**

# **Effective School Strategies**

# Panelists



**Victoria Simon**  
Principal, Aberdeen Academy  
Grand Rapids Public Schools, Michigan



**Ryan Broderick**  
Assistant Principal  
Bristol Central High School  
Bristol Public Schools, Connecticut



**Hedy Chang**  
Executive Director  
Attendance Works



## Lessons from the Field

- ❖ Tell us a bit about your school.
- ❖ Please share your chronic absence data. What are the major causes of chronic absence in your school now in the aftermath of the pandemic?
- ❖ What are the strategies you using?



# Aberdeen Academy



Grand Rapids, Michigan

37% White, 30% African-American, 19% Hispanic,  
13% two or more, 1% Asian, 1% Native American

10% English Learners

87% Economically Disadvantaged

32% Have an IEP (about 13% ASD)





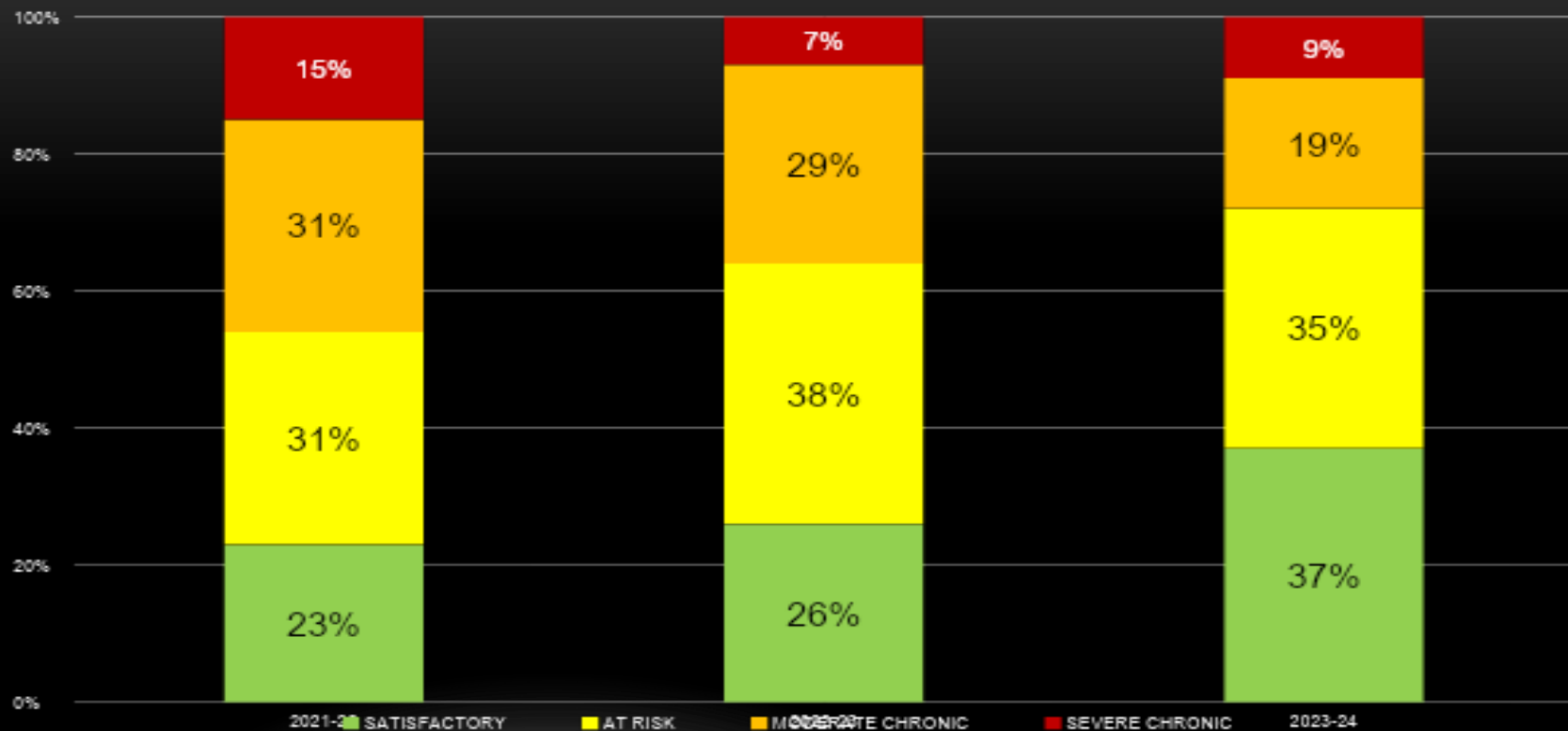
Bristol Central High School, Bristol, CT

Total Students	Asian	Black or African American	White	Hispanic/Latino	Two or More Races	Free/Reduced Lunch	SPED	ML
1216	2.1%	8.1%	43.5%	41.7%	4.6%	>50%	23%	8%

Certified Staff: 92



### Aberdeen Academy Attendance 3 years





## Chronic Absence Data

Bristol Central High School: Historical Data			
20-21	21-22	22-23	23-24 (through 2/16/24)
30.9%	19.97%	22.55%	21.62%

### Attendance: Chronic by cumulative

Chronic by Cumulative	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	March	April	May	June
<b>Historical 22-23 #</b>	258	324	326	318	307	293	298	310		
<b>Historical 22-23 %</b>	20.66%	25.76%	25.77%	25.04%	23.84%	22.54%	22.84%	23.72%		
<b>Goal by % for 23-24</b>	Less than 238 students who have 3 or more absences	Less than 289 students who have 4 or more absences	Less than 245 students who have 5 or more absences	Less than 235 (19%) students who have 6 or more absences	Less than 270 (22%) students who have 8 or more absences	Less than 265 (18.1%) students who have 11 or more absences		216 students who have no more than 13		
<b>Actual #</b>	310	267	246	314	301					
<b>Actual %</b>	25.39%	21.69%	20.57%	25.28%	24.22%					





Both individual and group relationships and recognition



- Individual Relationships
  - Tier I: Monthly 0-1 absence
  - Tier I: Strive less than Five
  - Tier I and III: Attendance Club
  - Tier II: Removing barriers
  - Tier II and III: Personal connections – family support, office, teachers
- Group recognition
  - Tier I: AAA Awesome Attendance Award
  - Tier I: Welcoming environment



# Tier 1 Attendance Improvement Strategies

## 1. Relationship Building

- a. Knowing students by name, strength, need, and story

## 1. Community Building

- a. School-wide celebrations

## 1. Advisory

- a. Rambassadors
- b. Weekly/Daily





# Tier 2 Attendance Improvement Strategies

## 1. Accurate, Robust, Up-to-date Data

Student Information										Chronic Absenteeism Data (YTD) - Data will update with each monthly upload						Intervention #1			Intervention #2				
Name	Grade	Student Number	Counselor /Teacher	Special Program	Has Student Been Chronic This Year?	Is Student Currently Chronic?	Chronic 22-23 Abs #	SpEd	ML	High Needs	Days Present (Total YTD)	Days Absent (Total YTD)	September Chronic Rate (YTD)	October Chronic Rate (YTD)	November Chronic Rate (YTD)	December Chronic Rate (YTD)	January Chronic Rate (YTD)	Intervention	Date Initiated	Person Responsible	Intervention	Date Initiated	Person Responsible
	10	1306603	MIRMINA		Yes	No					85	7	5%	10%	8%	9%	8%						
	10	1317412	AMARA		No	No		Yes		Yes	85	7	5%	7%	8%	7%	8%						
	11	1308034	AMARA		No	No				Yes	89	3	0%	0%	0%	1%	3%						
	10	1308035	REICHLER		No	No					92	0	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%						
	12	1315784	HIGGINS		No	No			Yes	Yes	91	1	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%						
	11	1313543	REICHLER		Yes	Yes	37			Yes	79	13	20%	12%	15%	14%	14%	Letter 2	12/8/23	Mr. Broderick	Letter 9	1/9/24	Jana R-P

## 1. Targeted Populations

Chronic by Month/Grade	9	10	11	12	SpEd	Non-SpEd	ML	Non-ML
Historical 22-23 #	92	83	102	90	79	207	23	343
Historical 22-23 %	25.14%	22.66%	27.07%	24.32%	21.55%	70.42%	6.28%	93.72%
Goal by # for 23-24	85	77	90	80	75	253	20	295
Goal by % for 23-24								
Actual #	85.00	85.00	66.00	65.00	81.00	220	21.00	280
Actual %	28.24%	28.24%	21.93%	21.59%	26.91%	73.09%	6.98%	93.02%

### Student Check-ins (2/12-3/8)

Name	Grade	Student ID	Counselor	SPED	EL	High Needs	Total Absences
	10	1317704	DORNFRIED				8
	9	1317710	DORNFRIED				8
	10	1310594	AMARA				8
	10	1305141	REICHLER	Yes			8
	10	1305453	MIRMINA				8
	10	1315978	MIRMINA	Yes			8
	9	1306318	BRODERICK	Yes			8
	10	1305147	REICHLER	Yes	Yes	Yes	8

n = 58

## 1. Diverse Interventions

- Letters, meetings, check-ins, home-visits, groups, goal-setting, self-tracking, positive reinforcement

## 1. Monthly Improvement Cycles

- Scheduled, sacred meetings
- Identifying target students
- Goal-setting and progress monitoring

Intervention In

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Attendance Success Plan

Home Visit

SRA's

Group

Letter 1

Letter 2

Check In/Check Out

Check and Connect

Refer to outside agency

Contact Parent

Mentor

Letter 9

withdrew





## Questions from the Audience







## Discussion

- ★ Why did you make attendance the top priority in your school?
- ★ What advice would you give other school leaders?
- ★ How can unions support student attendance?

# Resources

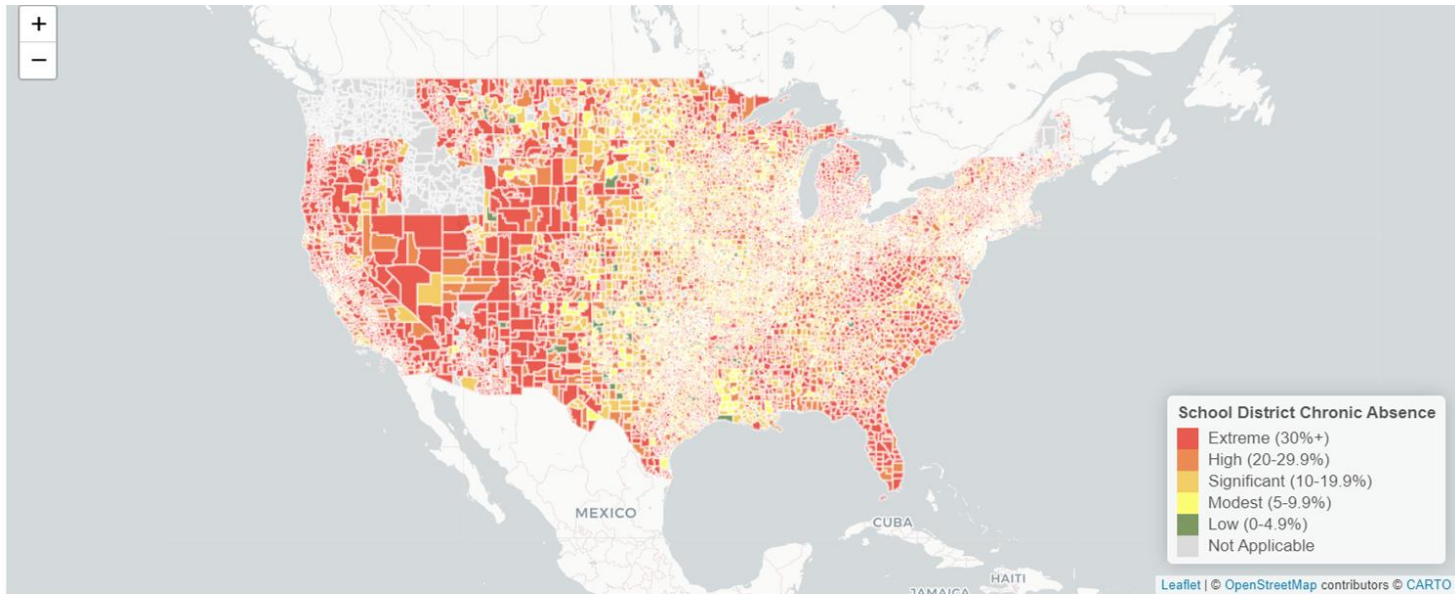


## National Data Analysis

### Attendance Works' and Johns Hopkins University's analyses of the 2021-22 chronic absence data:

1. [Rising tide of chronic absence challenges schools](#) released October 12, 2023.  
(Focus: Chronic absence affects  $\frac{2}{3}$ rds of students and schools)
1. [All Hands On Deck, Today's Chronic Absenteeism Requires a Comprehensive District Response and Strategy](#), released November 17, 2023.  
(Focus: Demographics and Inequity)
1. [Turning Back the Tide: The Critical Role of States In Reducing Chronic Absenteeism](#) released January 31, 2024. (Focus: Critical Role of States)

# Interactive Map of Chronic Absence in U.S. School Districts: SY 2021-22



SOURCE: [Everyone Graduates Center](#) and [Attendance Works](#) analysis of data from the [U.S. Department of Education](#) and [U.S. Census Bureau](#).

[Interactive Map](#)

[https://edu-dsi.shinyapps.io/chronic\\_absence/](https://edu-dsi.shinyapps.io/chronic_absence/)



## Attendance Awareness Campaign 2024

# Join the 2024 Attendance Awareness Campaign!

<https://awareness.attendanceworks.org/contact/aam-updates/>



# Remarks



**David Griffith**  
Associate Executive Director  
Policy and Advocacy  
NAESP

# Remarks



**Ronn Nozoe**  
Chief Executive Officer  
NASSP

# Remarks



**Leonard Pugliese**

President

AFSA





## Evaluation Survey

Please complete the webinar evaluation.

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/absenteeimpresentation>

**Thank you for  
joining us today!**