

Attendance Study Guide

From: Keeping Ohio Students Present, Engaged and Supported (ODE)

From 2020-2021 to 2021-2022, the statewide rate of students missing at least 10% of their instructional time due to absences increased by six percentage points to 30.2%.

Chronic absenteeism has risen across nearly all grade levels, district types and student subgroups. In 2021-2022, the largest increases were in kindergarten and 12th grade.

The scale of the current attendance crisis means that schools, districts, and their community partners must expand their focus on prevention and early intervention.

Addressing such high levels of chronic absence requires moving beyond a focus on individual absence intervention plans for habitually truant students to investing in a more comprehensive tiered approach that starts with robust investments in positive conditions of learning and universal attendance supports.

Here are four key steps for schools and districts to consider:

1. Take a team approach to attendance and engagement.

Schools and districts may want to consider establishing attendance teams to address all absences. These functions can be added to the Absence Intervention Teams already required. Schools may also consider incorporating these attendance team functions into existing teams that address academics and/or behavior such as Multi-tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) or Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS). Team functions include:

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

2. Recognize that students are more likely to attend when positive conditions for learning are in place.

Relationships are essential to the positive conditions for learning which lead to students being engaged and attending regularly. Attendance is higher when schools:

- Are organized to promote students' physical and emotional health and safety
- Promote a sense of belonging, connection and support
- Make learning challenging and engaging so students don't want to miss class
- Invest in adult and student well-being and emotional competence.

3. Use a multi-tiered approach to support student attendance and engagement.

The idea behind a multi-tiered approach is that the majority of students will respond to school-wide strategies for improving attendance and engagement (known as Tier 1 supports) but that these strategies won't be sufficient for all students. Some students require more personalized support (Tier 2) and an even smaller number may need more intensive measures (Tier 3) to reengage them with school. Schools and districts may also want to consider how their tiered approach to attendance is aligned with or integrated into existing teams such as PBIS and MTSS.

TIER 1 UNIVERSAL PREVENTION

Strategies aimed at encouraging better attendance for all students and at preventing absenteeism before it affects achievement. Strategy examples include:

- Connection to a caring adult in the school such as a mentor.
- Personalized outreach and communication to families and students.
- Recognition of good and improved attendance.
- Messaging about the benefits of attendance for the whole child – Attendance Works has developed the Showing Up Matters for R.E.A.L. Toolkit which is filled with free, ready-to-use messaging resources for families and students.

TIER 2 EARLY INTERVENTION

Personalized supports for students who missed between 10–20 percent of school during the last school year as well as those who miss 10–20 percent of school during the current school year. Research-based strategies for supporting these students include:

- **Mentoring:** Mentoring is a proven strategy for reducing absenteeism.
- **Expanded learning programs:** Schools can help students by making sure they enroll and participate in an expanded learning program—which, research shows, significantly improves attendance during the school day, especially for English language learners.
- **Mental health:** Many LEAs anticipate the need for greater levels of mental health supports given the stress and impacts on students and families since school closure
- **Student success plans:** Schools should create opportunities to partner with students and families to craft plans that outline what engages the student in learning, addresses barriers to getting to class, builds upon family strengths and supports ongoing monitoring of attendance data. Ensuring students and families have a voice in crafting plans is critical to tailoring solutions to their realities and nurturing ownership.

TIER 3 INTENSIVE INTERVENTION

Tier 3 supports may be needed to improve outcomes for students who were severely chronically absent (missing 20 percent or more of school) in the prior school year, for those who did not show up during the first few weeks of school, or for those experiencing homelessness. Schools and districts often collaborate with agencies that might have current or past contact with a family and secure the resources of community partners to address identified gaps. Ideally, support would begin as soon as possible to ensure the year starts on a positive note. Examples include:

- **Interagency case management:** Students involved in the child welfare or juvenile justice system can attain their educational goals with the support of a team of champions working across schools, families, and public agencies.
- **Housing stability supports:** Nearly 21,000 students were identified as being homeless in Ohio during the 2020-2021 school year. These students may need help with transportation or wrap-around services to attend school. Schools and districts can use ESSER and ARP funds to help provide supports for students experiencing homelessness, whether they have lost their primary nighttime residence, are living in a motel, shelter or campsite or are doubled up with another family. Supports can also be found from the Coalition on Homelessness and Housing in Ohio.

4. Work with partners to provide additional support for students and families.

Addressing high levels of chronic absence requires an all-hands-on-deck approach. Community partners can be the extra set of hands to support school staff that have been stretched thin during the pandemic. Examples include:

- Expanded Learning providers that provide another set of caring adults as well as engaging enrichment activities that stimulate excitement in learning.
- Business Leaders who can help provide meaningful work opportunities during non-school hours as well as funding for supports most needed by students and families and attendance recognition resources.

Consultation Summary

1. Take a team approach to attendance and engagement.

Successes/Strengths:

Gaps/Needs:

Thoughts/Comments:

2. Recognize that students are more likely to attend when positive conditions for learning are in place.

Successes/Strengths:

Gaps/Needs:

Thoughts/Comments:

3. Use a multi-tiered approach to support student attendance and engagement.

TIER 1 UNIVERSAL PREVENTION

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TIER 2 EARLY INTERVENTION

Successes/Strengths:

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TIER 3 INTENSIVE INTERVENTION

Successes/Strengths:

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Successes/Strengths:

Gaps/Needs:

Thoughts/Comments: