



A Comprehensive Toolkit: Improving School Attendance

Division of Student Support and Federal Programs
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MARYLAND STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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Introduction

Consistent school attendance is foundational to student success. Each day a student is present is a step toward a brighter future for themselves, their families, and their communities. According to [Maryland COMAR 13A.08.01.05 Student Attendance Policy](#), **chronic absence means a student has been enrolled in a school for at least 10 days and has missed 10% or more of the school days for any lawful or unlawful reason while enrolled at that school.** All absences contribute to chronic absences. Chronic absenteeism is more than a data point. It is a powerful indicator that a student may be disconnected from the opportunities, relationships, and support that fuel learning and development.

To truly address chronic absenteeism, educators must move beyond isolated interventions and adopt a bold, systemic approach—one that ensures every student is seen, supported, and engaged every day. This requires uniting students, families, educators, and community partners in a shared commitment to creating the conditions where attendance is not only possible, but inevitable. Together, we can build a culture of belonging and opportunity that transforms attendance into a gateway for lifelong success.

Working together, schools, families, and communities can encourage and support students to attend school each day by ensuring that each student experiences positive conditions for learning and focusing on prevention and early intervention to reduce absences. Attending school regularly is critical for success in school and eventually the workplace. When students are chronically absent it is an early warning sign that students are at-risk of not reading proficiently by the end of third grade, struggling academically in middle school, and dropping out of high school. A seminal research study documented the adverse effects of chronic absence in the early grades, *Chronic Absenteeism and Its Effects on Students' Academic and Socioemotional Outcomes*¹ showing that poor attendance also adversely affects educational engagement and hampers social-emotional development and executive functioning skills.

Additional research details the *New Dangers: Linking Kindergarten Chronic Absenteeism to Long-Term Declines in Executive Functioning*² and *The Importance of Being in School: A Report on Absenteeism in the Nation's Public Schools*.³ Chronic absence also exacerbates existing educational gaps among different student groups. Recent analysis of the impact of COVID-19 on student attendance by AEI, [Long COVID for Public Schools: Chronic Absenteeism Before and After the Pandemic](#) demonstrates the need for an amplified, systemic, and sustained approach to reducing absenteeism. Without such an effort, our schools and local education agencies (LEA) are unlikely to recover to pre-pandemic levels of attendance.

[Research](#) conducted by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) found that Maryland students chronically absent in SY 2023-24 were less likely to be proficient on state assessments compared to their non-chronically absent peers. In the 2022-23 school year, baseline data indicated a statewide chronic absenteeism rate of 30%. Recognizing that promoting student attendance is more important than ever for improving student outcomes in Maryland.

While schools are the front-line for action with students and families, LEAs are the key to a sustainable and systemic approach that equips all schools in a LEA to improve attendance and reduce chronic absence. LEAs can, for example, promote timely intervention across all schools by building out an

¹ M. Gottfried, "Chronic Absenteeism and Its Effects on Students' Academic and Socioemotional Outcomes," *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk*, 19(2) (2014): 53-75

² M. Gottfried and A. Ansari, "Detailing New Dangers: Linking Kindergarten Chronic Absenteeism to Long-Term Declines in Executive Functioning," *The Elementary School Journal*, 121(3) (2021): 484-500

³ R. Balfanz and V. Byrnes, "The Importance of Being in School: A Report on Absenteeism in the Nation's Public Schools." (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, Center for Social Organization of Schools, May 2012.)

attendance early warning system that operates on a year-round basis. Student attendance requires year-round engagement, attention, and problem-solving since absenteeism often spikes at critical points throughout the year, including school vacations, holidays, inclement weather, spring break and when there are increases in asthma or other health related problems such as the flu. LEAs can also equip all schools to ensure students feel a sense of belonging, are connected to a caring adult, and experience a positive school climate. Research conducted by Dr. Bob Balfanz as described in this article, “[Centering School Connectedness](#)” and similarly by the CDC⁴ show this type of engagement is essential to motivating daily attendance. LEAs can take a systemic approach by putting in place the key ingredients of change described below and used as the basis for organizing this toolkit.

HOW THIS TOOLKIT BUILDS ON PRIOR ATTENDANCE GUIDANCE

The *Comprehensive Toolkit: Improving School Attendance* builds on MSDE’s earlier attendance resources developed to support LEAs in preventing and reducing chronic absenteeism at key points in the school year. These prior toolkits focused on targeted time-bound strategies designed to address predictable attendance challenges during high-impact periods. Together, the toolkits provide important foundational practices that inform and complement the systems-building approach presented in this toolkit.

SPRING ATTENDANCE TOOLKIT

The [Spring Attendance Action Toolkit](#), released by MSDE in March 2025, was developed to support LEAs in addressing chronic absenteeism during a period of the school year when attendance challenges often intensify. The spring months are routinely associated with increased absenteeism due to academic fatigue, testing schedules, seasonal illness, family mobility, and student disengagement as summer approaches. This toolkit provides timely, actionable guidance to stabilize attendance, strengthen student engagement, and prevent marginal absenteeism from escalating into chronic absenteeism before the end of the school year.

The [Spring Attendance Action Toolkit](#) emphasizes prevention and early intervention through the use of attendance data, tiered strategies, and positive family engagement. The toolkit includes tools to help schools identify students approaching chronic absenteeism thresholds, implement Tier 1 and Tier 2 interventions, engage families in collaborative problem-solving, and in targeted spring attendance campaigns. By providing LEAs with practical resources aligned to best practices, the [Spring Attendance Action Toolkit](#) supported practices responses to attendance risks during a high-impact window.

To accompany the toolkit’s release, MSDE partnered with Attendance Works to deliver a [two-part statewide workshop series](#) in April 2025 focused on addressing the well-documented “spring attendance slide.” The first session, [Working Together to Reduce the Spring Attendance Slide](#), provided practical strategies for stabilizing attendance during the final months of the school year. The second session, [Improving Attendance for Students at the Cusp of Chronic Absence](#), focused on identifying root causes, and implementing targeted, research-based interventions to keep students below the 18-day threshold.

⁴ Wilkins NJ, Krause KH, Verlenden JV, et al. School Connectedness and Risk Behaviors and Experiences Among High School Students — Youth Risk Behavior Survey, United States, 2021. MMWR Suppl 2023;72(Suppl-1):13–21. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.su7201a2>

WELCOME BACK TO SCHOOL ATTENDANCE TOOLKIT

The [Welcome Back to School Attendance Toolkit](#), released by MSDE in August 2025, was developed to support LEAs in establishing strong attendance habits at the start of the academic year. Research consistently shows that early attendance patterns are highly predictive of student engagement, academic success, and the likelihood of chronic absenteeism later in the school year. Accordingly, this toolkit is designed to help LEAs set clear expectations, build strong relationships, and prevent attendance challenges from emerging during the first weeks of school.

The [Welcome Back to School Attendance Toolkit](#) focuses on proactive strategies that promote belonging, connection, and consistency, including early communication with families, first-month attendance monitoring, school climates practices, and early outreach for students missing instructional time. By emphasizing prevention, relationship-building, and early identification, the [Welcome Back to School Attendance Toolkit](#) supports LEAs in launching the school year with a strong foundation for regular attendance.

In conjunction with the toolkit's release, MSDE hosted a statewide *Welcome Back to School Attendance Workshop* to support LEAs in applying these strategies during the critical opening weeks of the school year. The workshop brought together Directors and Coordinators from student services, Community Schools, data, family engagement, communications, and extended learning to examine year-round attendance data, discuss common beginning-of-year barriers, and share actionable practices for strengthening routines, outreach, and student engagement.

While the [Spring Attendance Action Toolkit](#) and [Welcome Back to School Attendance Toolkit](#) focus on high-impact windows within the school year, the *Comprehensive Toolkit: Improving School Attendance* is designed to help LEAs integrate these strategies into a coordinated, continuous system using the six key ingredients for systems building. The prior toolkits remain valuable implementation resources and are referenced throughout this document.

NEW STUDENT ATTENDANCE POLICY REGULATION— COMAR 13A.08.01.05

An amendment to [COMAR 13A.08.01.05 Student Attendance Policy](#) was presented to the State Board at the December 9, 2025, State Board meeting. At this meeting, the State Board granted permission to publish. The amendment to [COMAR 13A.08.01.05 Student Attendance Policy](#) was posted in the Maryland Register from February 20, 2026, to March 23, 2026. [COMAR 13A.08.01.05 Student Attendance Policy](#) will be returned to the State Board on April 28, 2026, at the State Board meeting. Information on this regulation will be updated in this document.

The regulation was developed in response to the 2025 legislative action ch. 243 (House Bill 879), which established a Task Force to Improve Attendance and Reduce Chronic Absenteeism, and statewide priorities to strengthen attendance practices. This regulation requires every LEA to adopt a comprehensive student attendance policy that reflects evidence-based practices and common definitions for key attendance concepts.

The revised policy requires LEA attendance policies:

- Include clear definitions for terms such as *chronic absence*, *chronic absenteeism*, and *day of attendance*.
- Outline expectations and procedures for regular attendance, including verification of absences and standards for reporting.

- Include best practices to identify, prevent, and eliminate chronic absenteeism that are culturally responsive and non-punitive, such as data analysis, cross-system teams, targeted communication plans, and family engagement strategies.
- Require local systems to develop structures and teams that oversee school-wide and system-wide attendance improvement strategies.
- Promote continuous improvement processes and engagement of students and families using proactive supports.
- Ensure clear communication with stakeholders about attendance expectations and policies.

In practical terms, the regulation moves attendance policy beyond simply defining lawful and unlawful absences and sets expectations for structured, data-informed, and supportive attendance systems, aligning closely with the purpose and six key ingredients of the *Comprehensive Toolkit: Improving School Attendance*.

STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

The toolkit supports the goals of *Maryland Momentum: Strategic Plan 2025*, specifically Pillar 4: More Resources for Student Success, which emphasizes ensuring every student is matched with the resources they need to succeed. By promoting coordinated, data-informed, and supportive approach to attendance improvement, the *Comprehensive Toolkit: Improving School Attendance* advances Outcome 4.A: Decreasing the rate of chronic absenteeism through prevention, early intervention, and shared responsibility across schools, LEAs, families, and community partners.



MSDE Strategic Plan Goals

1

Every child has access to a high-quality early childhood program.

PILLAR 1: EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION



Every student is matched with the resources they need to ensure their success.

PILLAR 4: MORE RESOURCES FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

4

2

Every school has high-quality and diverse teachers and leaders.

PILLAR 2: HIGH-QUALITY & DIVERSE TEACHERS AND LEADERS



Every school and district receives a rating of ___ or higher.

PILLAR 5: GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

5

3

Every student graduates high school college and career ready.

PILLAR 3: COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS



Visit the Maryland State Department of Education website to learn more about the Strategic Plan!

strategicplan.marylandpublicschools.org



STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT



GOAL

4

Every student is matched with the resources they need to ensure their success.

4.A

Decrease the rate of chronic absenteeism.

Purpose of the Toolkit

The *Comprehensive Toolkit: Improving School Attendance* toolkit is designed to provide a roadmap for LEAs to implement the six key ingredients for systems building for attendance.

-  **Actionable Data:** Ensuring access to quantitative and qualitative data that is accurate, accessible, timely, comprehensive, and understandable, to inform the development of prevention and intervention strategies and the allocation of resources. This data should activate positive support.
-  **Capacity Building:** Providing professional development to LEA and school teams and staff, as well as community partners, to equip them with the skills and knowledge needed to take a data-driven, positive, problem-solving, and multi-tiered approach to supporting student attendance, participation, and engagement.
-  **Positive Engagement:** Creating a culture of attendance and engagement where school staff take positive non-punitive action to ensure students feel they belong in school; relationships and communications between staff and families are respectful, reciprocal and two-way; solutions are co-created with students, families, staff and community partners.
-  **Adequate and Equitable Resources:** Provide resources and funding at sufficient levels to ensure that students from all backgrounds and circumstances receive a quality education and similar opportunities to thrive and achieve.
-  **Strategic Partnerships:** Strengthening and expanding partnerships between the school and community to nurture relationships with students and families and engage them in identifying and co-creating solutions to attendance barriers.
-  **Shared Accountability:** Create opportunities for all stakeholders — students, families, educators, agencies, and community partners — to provide input into developing solutions for reducing student absenteeism. Co-construct a plan for reducing student absenteeism that provides guidance and defines roles and responsibilities that allows for accountability for everyone doing their part. Absenteeism is a cross-cutting issue requiring collaboration across departments and agencies.

For this toolkit, the key ingredients are presented in a deliberate order designed to support systems building and maximize impact. LEAs may follow this sequence or determine an alternative starting point based on local needs and priorities. The companion *Comprehensive Toolkit: Improving School Attendance Workbook* provides structured prompts and planning tools to support LEAs in assessing current practices and implementing the key ingredients in a coordinated, year-round approach.

Each key ingredient section includes:

- A description of the key ingredient

- Key LEA actions and activities
- Best practice highlight
- Resources and tools

An Appendix of relevant Maryland laws and regulations is also included.



Key Ingredient #1: Actionable Data

DESCRIPTION:

Ensuring access to quantitative and qualitative data that is accurate, accessible, timely, comprehensive, and understandable, to inform the development of prevention and intervention strategies and the allocation of resources. This data should activate positive support.

LEA KEY ACTIONS AND ACTIVITIES:

1. Provide on-going access to easy-to-understand data dashboards for school leaders that allow for the triangulation of attendance, behavior, and academic information. The attendance portions of the dashboard should allow school leaders to explore attendance data across attendance bands in the following categories: School, grade, student group (race/ethnicity, disability, economic status, multilingual learner, McKenny Vento, and zip code)

Satisfactory Attendance	Missed less than 5% (fewer than 9 days in a 180-day school year)
At-risk Attendance	Missed 5-9.99% (9-17 days in a 180-day school year)
Moderate Chronic Absence	Missed 10-19.99% (18-35 days in a 180-day school year)
Severe Chronic Absence	Missed 20-49.99% (36-89 days in a 180-day school year)
Extreme Chronic Absence	Missed 50% or more (90 or more days in a 180-day school year)

2. Establish and monitor protocols and processes for taking accurate daily attendance.
3. Ensure students and families have regular access and easy to understand attendance data, including an alert for chronic absenteeism, through their LEA's parent portal or student information system, interim and quarterly report cards.
4. Establish a protocol and process to create a systemic approach to collecting qualitative data from students and families to inform analysis of root causes for all absences and identify solutions.
5. Equip school leaders and administrative staff to understand and use data dashboards to interpret attendance and absenteeism patterns for Multi-tiered System of Supports (MTSS) planning.
6. Create data analysis tools for school principals and attendance teams to document and assess, and plan for addressing common barriers to attendance.
7. Conduct regular in-depth analysis of disaggregated quantitative patterns and trends by school, student group, and qualitative data to identify priorities for support and resource allocation.
8. Establish an on-going data monitoring system to track and monitor interventions and student outcomes.

BEST PRACTICE HIGHLIGHT: DATA DASHBOARDS

Using a data dashboard is useful to understand disaggregated attendance data over time across the LEA by student groups, grades, and schools. It will enable the LEA to determine where and how attendance improvement efforts and resources should be focused. The following questions should guide an LEAs examination of their attendance data:

- Do attendance patterns vary across grade levels?
- Are absenteeism patterns concentrated among student groups (e.g., ethnicity/race, gender, disability, multilingual learners, economic status)?
- Do higher levels of chronic absence vary by school, neighborhood, or zip code?
- How much do suspensions and expulsions contribute to chronic absence?
- Are absences increasing or decreasing when compared with past years? For which groups of students?

With this quantitative data in hand, the LEA should then examine if there are any policy or practice changes and, in partnership with building leaders, explore any trends or patterns in the reasons for absences that are impacting the changes in attendance. The following questions should guide this collective inquiry process:

- Were there LEA policy changes such as more or fewer professional development days, new suspension policies, and increased student travel time to school due to bus route or bus eligibility changes?
- Did particular schools experience a sudden change in student enrollment/membership, either up or down?
- Were effective programs ended due to budget cuts, loss of a community partner, or staff turnover? Are there new programs that seem to be contributing to increases?
- Were new policies and practices established which helped to decrease the trend?
- Was there a significant weather-related event or some other type of emergency in the community that could have affected attendance?
- What are the most likely causes for health (physical, mental, and behavioral) related absences? What do we understand about acute and chronic diseases in the LEA?
- Which reasons for absence impact the greatest number of students and does it differ by student group?
- Which reasons for absenteeism are disproportionate for different student groups?
- How much does transportation, commuting distances, chronic illness, school climate, and anxiety contribute to chronic absence?
- Do the reasons for absence differ by the time of year?

RESOURCES & TOOLS:

- [Attendance Works- Quantitative Data Tools](#)
- [Attendance Works- Qualitative Data Tools](#)
- [Attendance Works- Identify the Root Causes of Absence](#)
- Sample Data Dashboards:
 - [Connecticut Attendance Dashboard](#)
 - [Georgia Attendance Dashboard](#)
 - [California Attendance Dashboard](#)
- Articles:

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- a. *Why Students Miss School, and Why We Miss the Point: Lessons Learned from Concentric Educational Solutions' 17,000+ Home Visits in 2024-2025* - Dr. Ivory Toldson
 - b. *No One Size Fits All Solutions to Chronic Absenteeism* - Thomas S. Dee

Data Collection on Students At-Risk for Chronic Absence

As part of MSDE's ongoing commitment to reducing chronic absenteeism, the Division of Assessment and Accountability launched a new monthly data collection in September 2025: the At Risk for Chronic Absence Collection. This collection provides timely, aggregated LEA-level data throughout the school year to support early identification of students who may be on a trajectory toward chronic absenteeism.

A student is “at-risk for chronic absence” if they have been in membership in a school for at least one day and have already missed 10% or more of the school days while enrolled at that school.

The fundamental purpose of collecting this data is to help both LEAs and MSDE identify attendance challenges as early as possible in the school year. With regular monthly updates, MSDE can monitor attendance trends statewide, identify emerging patterns, and collaborate with LEAs to develop and implement evidence-based strategies to support students facing attendance barriers. Beginning in September 2025, MSDE committed to posting monthly statewide and LEA-level summaries by the middle of each month, creating a consistent and transparent reporting cycle.

Monthly At-Risk for Chronic Absence data is available on MSDE's website:

<https://marylandpublicschools.org/about/pages/dsfss/attendance.aspx>.



Key Ingredient #2: Capacity Building

DESCRIPTION:

Providing professional development to LEA and school teams and staff, as well as community partners, to equip them with the skills and knowledge needed to take a data-driven, positive, problem-solving, and multi-tiered approach to supporting student attendance, participation, and engagement.

LEA KEY ACTIONS AND ACTIVITIES:

1. Establish or designate a cabinet-level, cross-departmental LEA team to build school capacity to improve attendance (e.g. school-site leadership, academics, student support, family engagement, health, special education, data, and operations).
2. Ensure students, families, staff, and community partners have a common understanding of key attendance terms, what they mean, and why they matter.
3. Equip schools to have cross-functional teams responsible for implementing an integrated Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) to ensure coherent interventions across academic, behavior, and attendance challenges.
4. Curate a menu of tiered evidence-based practices and offer professional development to help staff implement practices that work to improve attendance.
5. Identify and share "bright spot" attendance interventions from schools as inspiration for improved practice across the LEA.
6. Create accountability for and provide additional coaching/technical assistance to schools with higher levels of chronic absence and/or student groups with disproportionately high levels of chronic absence.

BEST PRACTICE HIGHLIGHT: INTEGRATING ATTENDANCE WITH MTSS

Maryland's MTSS Framework is a proactive and preventative approach that ensures all students receive equitable academic, behavioral, and social-emotional support, using data to identify students needing intervention through three tiers of support.

The Maryland MTSS framework enhances student attendance by establishing supportive connections among staff and students as well as among the students themselves, thus creating an environment where students feel more motivated to attend school. Relationships are central to the Maryland MTSS framework as they are foundational elements that drive the interconnectedness of academics, behavior, and attendance.

The [Maryland Multi-Tiered-System-Supports \(MTSS\) Guidance Document](#) outlines a framework for implementing and sustaining MTSS across all LEAs that is inclusive of tiered attendance interventions.

RESOURCES & TOOLS:

- a. [The Maryland Multi-Tiered-System-Supports \(MTSS\) Guidance Document](#)
- b. [Attendance Works' District Self- Assessment Tool](#)
- c. [Attendance Playbook](#) and [Implementation Guide](#)
- d. [Attendance Works Year-Long Planning](#)
- e. [MSDE Spring Attendance: Early Action Toolkit](#)
- f. [MSDE Welcome Back-to-School Toolkit](#)
- g. [Attendance Works 3 Tiers of Intervention](#)



Key Ingredient #3: Positive Engagement

DESCRIPTION:

Creating a culture of attendance and engagement where school staff take positive non-punitive action to ensure students feel they belong in school; relationships and communications between staff and families are respectful, reciprocal, and two-way; solutions are co-created with students, families, staff, and community partners.

LEA KEY ACTIONS AND ACTIVITIES:

1. Provide professional development to shift staff mindsets from blame and punitive responses to partnering with students and families to improve attendance.
2. Develop and promote the utilization of a community-wide, positively framed year-round messaging campaign in families' home languages around the importance of attendance and engagement, in partnership with staff, families, students, and community partners.
3. Assess and revise school and LEA communication with families to ensure it is free of blame or alienation.
4. Develop and institute protocols for teachers, of personalized early outreach and engagement of students and families to keep absences from adding up. Ensure the protocols are inclusive of outreach when a student reaches 10% of their days on roll (2+ days a month)⁵, whether those absences are excused or unexcused. Best practice encourages that the initial outreach comes from the teacher that focuses on education and support and helps families understand the relationship between missing just a couple of days a month and academic and social outcomes.
5. Ensure student and family experiences and culture drive discussions about what works to improve attendance and engagement.
6. Facilitate the implementation of relationship building and belonging strategies found in [*Using Chronic Absence Data to Improve Conditions for Learning*](#).

BEST PRACTICE HIGHLIGHT: PERSONALIZED MESSAGING

Personalized messages—sent via email, text message, robocall, or letters by mail— are a low-effort, low-cost strategy designed to improve attendance by providing families and caregivers with transparent, timely information about their student's cumulative absences each month. This intervention draws on an extensive body of research that suggests that outreach to families and caregivers about their student's attendance patterns can help reduce absenteeism. Personalized messaging can be used in conjunction with other attendance improvement strategies or as a standalone intervention.

A school staff member sends personalized messages directly to families and caregivers. Personalized messaging aims to engage and empower families and caregivers as partners in their student's education by providing transparent, real-time information about attendance patterns. The personalized messages can be sent via automated phone calls, text messages, emails, or a combination of these options. The mode of communication can be selected based on the LEA's unique context and

⁵ For an analysis on Predictors of Chronic Absence from the MSDE Office of Research, See Appendix A

caregivers' preferred outreach method. Personalized messages should include the following core components:

- **Personalization:** some personalization, including the student's name, in the message to set the message apart from generic communications.
- **Attendance status:** a summary of the total number of days absent during a four-to-six-week period.
- **Goal setting:** a realistic attendance goal for students to work toward in the month ahead.
- **Importance of attendance:** a reminder about the importance and value of the student being present in school including information about what the student missed when they were absent.
- **Invitation to connect:** encouragement for caregivers to connect with school staff to strategize about how to best support student needs

Messages should be differentiated based on attendance patterns. Caregivers and families should receive one of two message versions based on their students' attendance: 1. focused on improvement for students with 2 or more days absent over the last 4-6 weeks or 2. celebrating consistent attendance for students with 0 to 1 day absent over the last 4-6 weeks.

RESOURCES & TOOLS:

- [Attendance Works' Student Attendance Success Plans with My Family's Help Banks](#)
- [Attendance Works' Scan of Environment and Attendance \(SEAT\)](#)
- [Harvard University: Relationship Mapping Resources](#)
- [Turnaround for Children- Relationship Strategy Bank](#)
- [Attendance Works' Letters for Families](#)
- [Attendance Works' Handouts and Messaging \(e.g., Holiday, Winter Weather, etc.\)](#)
- Toolkit: [How to Text Message to Parents to Reduce Absences Using an Evidence-Based Approach](#)
- Report and Toolkit: [Ad Council Research Institute: Back to the Classroom: How to Overcome Chronic Absenteeism and Encourage Parents to Send Kids to School Consistently](#)
- Toolkit: [Attendance Works' Count Us In!](#)
- Harvard University: Center for Education Policy Research- [Improve Attendance with Personalized Messages](#)
- [The Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family- School Partnerships](#)- Dr. Karen Mapp



Key Ingredient #4: Adequate and Equitable Resources

DESCRIPTION:

Provide resources and funding at sufficient levels to ensure students, from all backgrounds and circumstances, receive a quality education and similar opportunities to thrive and achieve.

LEA KEY ACTIONS AND ACTIVITIES:

1. Conduct LEA-level staff, program, and partner asset analysis to expand programming and resources for improving attendance and engagement.
2. Conduct a school-level staff and program analysis to expand staff capacity for early intervention and prevention strategies.
3. Ensure there is a system in place to hear from and respond to school teams about their needs and resource gaps.
4. Ensure schools have the resources necessary to take a year-round approach to promoting engagement and attendance as well as monitor effectiveness.
5. Provide additional funding and resources to schools with higher levels of chronic absence and/or student groups with disproportionately high levels of chronic absence.
6. Implement braided funding strategies drawing from federal, state, local, and grant resources to create a comprehensive multi-tiered system of support for attendance beginning with prevention.
7. Scale interventions and programs that work.

BEST PRACTICE HIGHLIGHT: COMMUNITY SCHOOLS STRATEGY

Community Schools serve as hubs that bring families, communities, and partners together to remove barriers to learning. Using an asset-based approach, community schools strive to strengthen connections to generate improved student outcomes.

Community Schools work in collaboration with community partners, local governments, and other stakeholders to identify and address structural and institutional barriers to achievement. Leveraging the power of the collective allows Community Schools to provide resources and other place-based supports to students and families where they are needed most, particularly in neighborhoods with high levels of poverty that have been historically underserved and underfunded. Community Schools provide a wide array of wraparound services that enhance students' ability to be successful. Examples of wraparound services include:

- Extended learning time
- Extended school year
- Safe transportation to and from school
- Vision and dental services
- Expanded school-based health center services
- Additional social workers, counselors, and psychologists
- Additional mentors and restorative practice coaches
- Healthy food in-school and out-of-school
- Access to mental health practitioners

RESOURCES & TOOLS:

- a. [Community School Implementation Plan](#)
- b. [MSDE: What is Educational Equity?](#)
- c. [Attendance Works' Scan of Environment and Attendance \(SEAT\)](#)
- d. Investing in Innovation (i3): [Scaling Up Evidence-Based Practices](#)



Key Ingredient #5: Strategic Partnerships

DESCRIPTION:

Strengthening and expanding partnerships between the school and community to nurture relationships with students and families and engage them in identifying and co-creating solutions to attendance barriers.

LEA KEY ACTIONS AND ACTIVITIES:

1. Map school, LEA, and community-based assets and resources.
2. Develop LEA partnerships that are informed by an understanding of the major reasons for student absences across all students and families.
3. Consider adding attendance goals or priorities to agreements where appropriate.
4. Engage community and faith-based partners as messengers for attendance campaigns.
5. Leverage the Community Schools strategy to connect external partners with schools.
6. Advocate for funding for community partners to address needs and gaps.

BEST PRACTICE HIGHLIGHT: ASSET MAPPING

Asset mapping is a systematic process where a community's assets are identified, described, and documented.⁶ When utilizing this asset mapping framework, school LEA leaders and administrators conduct this process to inventory and categorize resources based on how they holistically support student and family well-being. When doing so for the Community Schools strategy LEAs are asked to categorize existing partnerships by the services they provide, populations they engage, and frequency of engagement.

This approach identifies and organizes available community resources including local community-based organizations, businesses, public programming, and agencies, across a series of dimensions of life.⁷ This asset mapping framework focuses the activity on resources that provide specific types of support, categorized by dimensions such as:

- Intellectual Wellness: Supports for academics
- Physical Wellness: Supports for the body
- Mental/Emotional Wellness: Supports for the mind
- Social Wellness: Supports for belonging and engagement
- Occupational Wellness: Supports for careers
- Financial Wellness: Supports with money
- Spiritual/Personal Wellness: Supports for social, civic, and community building
- Base Wellness: Supports for daily living

⁶ California Department of Social Services. (n.d.-a). *CDSS programs*. Home. <https://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/cdss-programs/ffpsa-part-iv/asset-mapping-strength-and-needs-assessment-toolkit>

⁷ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (n.d.). *Whole School, whole community, Whole child (wscc)*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/whole-school-community-child/about/index.html>

Conducting and updating LEA and school assets help to generate a broad view of surrounding resources and strengthen the school community's understanding of local strengths and opportunities. This process is essential because it:

- **Documents Existing Resources:** The map serves as a clear record of assets available within the community or for the community.
- **Informs Strategic Planning:** It provides the necessary data and information to develop comprehensive prevention and intervention plans and action steps.
- **Expands Educator Knowledge:** It expands the knowledge of educators regarding students lived realities which can facilitate culturally responsive teaching.

The data collected through the asset mapping process is used to leverage community strengths and address the identified needs of students and families. Leaders can use this information to:

1. **Address School Community Needs and Goals:** Data is used to identify resources needed to meet specific needs, helping the LEA or school achieve strategic goals.
2. **Ensure Accessibility and Equity:** Leaders can analyze the data to determine if existing services and supports are accessible to vulnerable populations and those that are at greatest risk for entry into systems and develop strategies to improve accessibility.
3. **Facilitate Partnerships:** The maps help build and strengthen community partnerships. Leaders can identify key external organizations across different sectors (e.g., healthcare, social services, faith-based organizations) that align with the asset dimensions, such as organizations supporting Social Wellness or Mental/Emotional Wellness.
4. **Support Direct Connections:** By including specific examples and contact information for resources (e.g., food banks, community colleges), the resulting asset table or map becomes a user-friendly resource that reduces burden on families (e.g., kinship caregivers) and connects them with necessary support faster.
5. **Enhance Curriculum and Instruction:** The identified assets can be incorporated into educational practices, such as place-based learning or STEM lessons, by utilizing local resources to explore questions, problems, or challenges. For example, the map can show which Physical Space Resources (i.e., parks or recreation centers) or Health Resources (i.e., clinics) are available to enhance physical education or health awareness projects.

RESOURCES & TOOLS:

- a. [Community Schools Assets and Needs Assessment Tool](#)
- b. [Maryland Consortium on Coordinated Community Supports](#)
- c. [Asset Mapping Protocol](#)



Key Ingredient #6: Shared Accountability

DESCRIPTION:

Create opportunities for all stakeholders — students, families, educators, agencies, and community partners — to provide input into developing solutions for reducing student absenteeism. Co-construct a plan for reducing student absenteeism that provides guidance and defines roles and responsibilities that allows for accountability for everyone doing their part. Absenteeism is a cross-cutting issue requiring collaboration across departments and agencies.

LEA KEY ACTIONS AND ACTIVITIES:

1. Align, revise, disseminate board policy to reflect model policies for attendance and remove counterproductive policies.
2. Support principals as leaders of building-level attendance improvement teams and efforts to develop data-driven attendance goals and plans based on root cause analysis.
3. Ensure students and families understand expectations for attendance by providing clear and accessible handbooks.
4. Provide clear guidance for aligning interventions with academics, behavior, and attendance.
5. Add improvements in student attendance and engagement to LEA-wide monitoring dashboards and continuous improvement efforts.
6. Leverage the MTSS framework to include attendance roles and responsibilities for all and evidence-based and best practices.
7. Make chronic absence data publicly available to inspire collective action among educators and community partners.
8. Create opportunities for community partners to play a part in the LEA's improvement attendance efforts.
9. Regularly review student outcome data to assess whether strategies are making a difference and adapt as needed.

BEST PRACTICE HIGHLIGHT: DATA-INFORMED MONITORING

Data-informed monitoring involves the regular collection and analysis of multiple data sources – including universal screeners, diagnostic assessments, progress monitoring tools, and early warning indicators – to guide a LEA's decision making. Educator teams use these data to develop and/or assign tiered interventions and evaluate their effectiveness, adjusting supports based on updated data. This iterative cycle ensures that interventions are responsive to student needs, delivered with fidelity, and adjusted in a timely manner to promote equitable access to learning and improved outcomes for every student.

The LEAs may want to use the following questions aligned to the needs assessment and improvement plans:

- How much did we do? (*Quantity of strategies*)
- How well did we do it? (*Quality of strategies*)
- What difference did we make? (*Improvement in data indicators*)
- Who is better off? (*Impact on the whole school, groups of students or grade levels*)

- Are there differences in outcomes for students in different student groups? If yes, why? What can be done to address barriers to access and opportunity for student groups that are not improving? (*Equity in outcomes*)

RESOURCES & TOOLS:

- a. [Attendance Works' Why Attendance Matters: Making the Case](#)
- b. [Attendance Works' What Should Happen at Our School for Each Level of Absence?](#)
- c. [Attendance Works' Pathways to Engagement: COVID-19 Recovery Through Attendance](#)
- d. [Harvard University Graduate School of Education: Resource Mapping](#)
- e. Article: [Essentials of Social Innovation: Collective Impact](#) - John Kania & Mark Kramer

Summary: Advancing a Systemic, Year-Round Approach to Attendance

The *Comprehensive Toolkit: Improving School Attendance* reaffirms the critical roles LEAs play in shaping students' daily experiences and long-term outcomes. Attendance is not solely a measure of physical presence; it reflects the strength and coherence of the systems that surround students. Effective attendance systems that surround students. Effective attendance systems ensure students feel known and valued, families feel respected and supported, educators feel equipped and aligned, and communities are engaged as partners in shared success.

Reducing chronic absenteeism at scale requires sustained commitment and intentional systems building. Across Maryland and the nation, LEAs have demonstrated that meaningful progress is possible when attendance improvement is approached as a continuous, collaborative effort. This toolkit serves as a roadmap to support systems building, ongoing learning, shared problem-solving, and collective accountability over time.

As LEAs move from planning to implementation, several guiding principles remain central:

- **Start with current conditions and build forward.** Data should be used to identify priorities and inform action, without waiting for perfect systems to begin.
- **Center prevention and belonging.** The most effective strategies address barriers early and strengthen students' connection to school before absences accumulate.
- **Engage stakeholders as co-creators.** Solutions are strongest when school staff, families, students, and community partners contribute their perspectives and expertise.
- **Adopt a year-round mindset.** Attendance patterns shift throughout the calendar year, requiring systems that are proactive and responsive at all points.
- **Maintain a focus on equity.** Data should be disaggregated and practices adjusted to ensure improvement efforts close opportunity gaps rather than widen them.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

To sustain progress, LEAs are encouraged to:

- Convene or reaffirm a cross-departmental attendance leadership team with clear roles and decision-making authority.
- Establish regular data review and improvement cycles that integrate attendance with academic performance, behavior, and student well-being.
- Invest in professional learning and coaching to ensure staff have the tools, language, and confidence to respond early and positively to attendance concerns.
- Review policies, practices, and communications to ensure they promote engagement and support rather than punitive responses.
- Map, strengthen, and sustain strategic partnerships that reduce barriers and extend the reach of schools and reduce barriers for families.
- Communicate progress transparently and celebrate growth; understanding that incremental gains contribute to long-term success.

THE SIX KEY INGREDIENTS FOR SUSTAINABLE ATTENDANCE IMPROVEMENT

Sustainable attendance improvement occurs when all six key ingredients are present and mutually reinforced:

-  **Actionable Data:** Timely, transparent, and meaningful data used to activate support.
-  **Capacity Building:** Ongoing professional learning and structures that enable staff and partners to implement effective, tiered strategies with fidelity.
-  **Positive Engagement:** School cultures that prioritize belonging, respectful communication, and authentic relationships with students and families.
-  **Adequate and Equitable Resources:** Strategic investment of people, programs, and funding to meet varying levels of student need.
-  **Strategic Partnerships:** Strong, aligned collaborations with community organizations that address barriers and expand opportunity beyond the school walls.
-  **Shared Accountability:** Clear roles, aligned policies, and collective accountability across LEAs, schools, families, and community partners.

No single ingredient operates in isolation. Together, they create the conditions for consistency, coherence, and lasting impact.

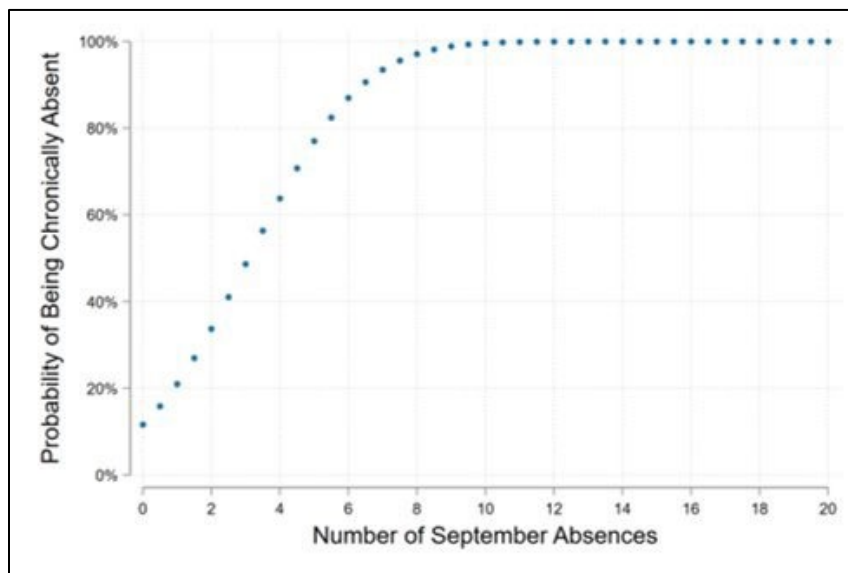
Every day a student attends school represents an opportunity for learning, connection, growth, and hope. By committing to a systemic, year-round approach to attendance, LEAs strengthen not only attendance outcomes but overall health and effectiveness of their educational systems, affirming that every student belongs, every day.

Appendix A: September Attendance as a Predictor of Chronic Absence

The MSDE Office of Research analyzed attendance data to determine to what extent the number of absences by the end of September can accurately predict a student's end-of-year chronic absence status. Results show that the number of September absences correctly predicts chronic absenteeism 80% of the time, or roughly four out of every five students:⁸

1. Overall, students who miss more than three days in the first month of school are more likely than not to become chronically absent by year's end. (Figure 1)⁹
2. Among students with two September absences, those who were chronically absent in the previous year were almost four times as likely to be chronically absent in the current year than students who were not chronically absent in the previous year (65% vs. 17%).
3. Results vary by grade level. Among students with two absences in September, kindergarten and high school students have the highest probabilities of becoming chronically absent (48% and 40–42%, respectively), while students in grades 3–5 have the lowest probabilities (as low as 27%).
4. On average, students with two absences in September have a likelihood of being chronically absent by the end of the year if they are in a district with a higher chronic absenteeism rate.

Figure 1. Probability of Chronic Absenteeism by September Absences



⁸ Analyses based on 2023-2024 attendance data collected from Maryland's local education agencies.

⁹ The indication of 'more likely than not' refers to a probability greater than 50%.

Appendix B: Maryland Student Records Manual

MARYLAND STUDENT RECORDS SYSTEM MANUAL

The [Maryland Student Records Manual](#) provides statewide guidance for LEAs on the accurate collection, maintenance, and reporting of student records in Maryland. The manual outlines requirements and procedures related to student enrollment, attendance, withdrawals, transfers, and data reporting to ensure consistency, accuracy, and compliance across school systems. It also includes standardized absence codes and definitions used by LEAs to record and report student attendance data.

COMPULSORY ATTENDANCE STATUTE REGULATION

Under Maryland's compulsory attendance law [Md. Code Education §7-301](#), **each child who resides in the State and is 5 years old or older and under 18 is required to attend school regularly during the school year.** The attendance statute also identifies circumstances in which the compulsory attendance requirement does not apply (i.e., exemptions), such as when a child has earned a diploma/GED, completed a home instruction program, or met other specified conditions.

LAWFUL (EXCUSED) CAUSE OF ABSENCE

When students are enrolled in public school, whether an absence is considered lawful (excused) is determined by the State attendance regulation [COMAR 13A.08.01.03](#) and the local attendance policy aligned to it. Absences that are considered lawful include:

Absence Code	Description
01	Death in the immediate family. The LEA shall determine what relationships constitute the immediate family.
02	Illness of the student. The principal shall require a physician's certificate from the parent or guardian of a student reported continuously absent for illness.
04	Court summons
07	Hazardous weather conditions. This means weather conditions which would endanger the health or safety of the student when in transit to and from school.
08	Work approved or sponsored by the school, the LEA, or the Maryland State Department of Education, accepted by the local superintendent of schools or the school principal, or their designees, as reason for excusing students.
09	Observance of a religious holiday.
10	State emergency
13	Other emergencies or set of circumstances which, in the judgment of the superintendent or designee, constitutes a good and sufficient cause for absence from school.
17	Health Exclusion includes immunizations and other health related communicable or contagious diseases.
18	Suspension
19	Lack of authorized transportation. This does not include students denied authorized transportation for disciplinary reasons.
22	Pregnancy and parenting related conditions.

UNLAWFUL (UNEXCUSED) ABSENCE

An absence, including absence for any portion of the day, for any reason other than those cited as lawful in [COMAR 13A.08.01.03](#), is presumed unlawful and may constitute truancy. Local education agencies may add specified criteria for unlawful absences to local board approved attendance policies.

Absence Code	Description
20	Truancy. A truant is a student who is absent without lawful cause, as defined in COMAR 13A.08.01.04 , for a school day or portion thereof.
21	Other unlawful absence.

DEFINING AND MEASURING ABSENCES

At Risk for Chronic Absence: A cumulative metric that identifies students within an Local Education Agency, enrolled for at least one day who have already missed 10% or more of their enrolled school days at the time of monthly reporting. Absences are counted when a student is absent for any reason (e.g., illness, suspension, the need to care for a family member), regardless of whether absences are excused or unexcused.

Chronically Absent: A student is chronically absent if the student has been in membership in a school for at least 10 days and is absent 10% or more of the school days while enrolled at that school. For example, a student who is enrolled in a school for 30 days, and who is absent three of those 30 days, is considered chronically absent. A student can be counted as chronically absent in multiple schools, within the State, in the same year.

Compulsory Attendance: Each child who resides in Maryland and is five years old or older, and under 18 years old, shall attend a public school regularly during the entire school year, except as otherwise provided in Annotated Code of Maryland, Education Article, §7–301.

Habitual Truant: A student is a habitual truant if the student has been in membership in a school for 91 or more days in a school year and is unlawfully absent from school for a number of days or portion of days in excess of 20% of the school days within any marking period, semester, or year. A local education agency has the prerogative of defining habitual truancy in a more, but not less, stringent manner.

Lawful Cause of Absence: Absence from school, including absence for any portion of the day, of students who are presently enrolled in public schools, shall be considered lawful only under the conditions listed in [COMAR 13A.08.01.03](#).

Reporting Attendance and Absences: Days attending and absent are reported to the MSDE to the nearest half-day. Days attending and absent are reported as 1.0 for a full-day of attendance, 0.5 for a half-day of attendance, or 0.0 for a day absent. Local education agencies have the option of recording and maintaining attendance and absences in smaller increments, but not in larger increments.

Reporting Attendance: A student is “present” or “attending” if the student is attending an instructional program approved by the State, local education agency, and/or school. This means a student is physically on school grounds or is participating in instruction or instruction-related activities

at an approved off-grounds location. A student is reported for a full-day of attendance if the student is attending an instructional program approved by the State, local education agency, and/or school for greater than half of the school day.

Reporting a Partial Day of Attendance: A student is “present” or “attending” for a partial day of attendance if the student is attending an instructional program approved by the State, local education agency, and/or school for 10% to 50% of the school day.

Reporting Absences: A student is “absent” or “not attending” if the student is not physically present on school grounds and not participating in instruction or instruction-related activities at an approved off-grounds location for less than 10% of the school day.

Lawful absences are set forth in [COMAR 13A.08.01.03](#). A local superintendent, school principal, or an individual authorized by the local superintendent or principal may excuse a student for a lawful absence. Unlawful absences are set forth in [COMAR 13A.08.01.04](#).