



Welcome Back-to-School Toolkit

Creating a Culture of Attendance: Strategies for Reducing Chronic Absenteeism

Division of Student Support and Federal Programs

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Executive Summary

The Welcome Back to School Toolkit is presented to support Maryland Local Education Agencies (LEAs) preparing for the new school year. This toolkit is designed to provide a comprehensive framework for organizing and implementing effective attendance strategies, with a focus on building strong connections during the summer and fostering a welcoming, supportive environment in the fall.

Addressing chronic absenteeism is a top priority for the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), with a steadfast commitment to ensuring every student has the opportunity to succeed. In line with this commitment, the Maryland State Board set an ambitious goal to reduce chronic absenteeism by 50% statewide, from a baseline of 30% in 2022-2023 to 15% by the 2025-2026 school year. To accomplish this, a monthly “at-risk” data collection process has been implemented to enable early identification and intervention. MSDE and LEAs will track progress and ensure that the interventions put in place are both effective and responsive. This approach will build on the Maryland Model for Multi-tiered System of Supports (MTSS), which aims to improve student outcomes across academic, behavioral, and social-emotional domains. The MTSS model is integral to addressing chronic absenteeism, offering a tiered system of support that helps schools intervene early, target at-risk students, and provide the right level of intervention for those who need it most.

This toolkit assumes the presence of a dedicated LEA team to guide LEA efforts. A successful team should be cross-functional, with members who bring diverse perspectives and expertise, ensuring a coordinated approach to tackling absenteeism. The team should be reflective of the unique needs and cultural realities of the students served. To assist in developing the team, the [Spring Action Toolkit](#) is referenced, providing valuable resources and guidance on structuring and strengthening LEA attendance teams.

This toolkit aims to help lay the groundwork for a successful school year by fostering a culture of attendance from the very start. As strategies within are implemented, any questions or suggestions on how MSDE can better support achieving this important goal should be directed to MSDE.

Thank you for the continued dedication to the success of Maryland’s students. Working together, this school year will be one of progress and achievement for all.

Introduction

Promoting student attendance is more important than ever for improving student outcomes in Maryland. Research conducted by the Maryland State Department of Education 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. For example, for students in grade 3, students who were chronically absent were approximately 12 percentage points less likely to be proficient in English Language Arts and 16 percentage points less likely to be proficient in math than their peers who were not chronically absent (49% vs. 36% for ELA and 43% vs. 26% for math, respectively). Moreover, what happens in the first month of school has a profound impact. State data shows that missing more than three days in the first month of school is highly predictive that a student would be chronically absent at the end of the year.¹

The purpose of this Welcome Back to School Toolkit is to help LEAs organize and implement effective welcome-to-school attendance strategies. It recognizes the critical importance of using the opening of school to lay the groundwork for effectively promoting excellent student attendance throughout the year.

This toolkit includes five steps:

Step One: Develop and Implement a Comprehensive Communication Plan

Step Two: Conduct an In-depth Analysis of Data to Identify Priorities for Support

Step Three: Equip Schools to Implement a Welcome to School Multi-tiered System of Support

Step Four: Launch Welcoming School Activities

Step Five: Engage in Continuous Improvement

¹ Note that the degree in which the likelihood is increased is dependent upon the student's circumstances, including grade, socioeconomic status, geography, and prior chronic absence status.

Step One: Develop and Implement a Comprehensive Communication Plan

The beginning of the year is crucial for attendance messaging because it is a prime opportunity to set expectations, build positive habits, and engage students and families in understanding the importance of regular school attendance. A well-crafted communication plan helps to ensure everyone in every school is equipped to underscore the value of showing up every day for learning, engagement and well-being.

By proactively communicating with families early on, schools and community partners can not only explain why it is important to avoid becoming chronically absent, but they can also address potential misconceptions about absences. Students and families, for example, may assume that missing a few days is not a problem because students can make up for the learning online, rather than recognizing the importance of being in person for socialization and relationship building with peers and adults, as well as hands-on project-based learning. In the aftermath of the pandemic, too many families may still mistakenly believe that students should stay home for any symptom of illness when this is no longer the case.

MESSAGING

Start by agreeing upon the key messages that the LEA will use to communicate to the whole school community that regular student attendance matters for student development and achievement and is a major priority from the first day of school forward. A [recent study](#) by the Ad Council of 5,000 parents revealed the following insights about what messaging resonates with families. It found parents were more receptive if messaging:

- Is positive in tone.
- Communicates the opportunities associated with in-person learning, not just the consequences of missing school.
- Focuses on how school helps children develop holistically, beyond academic performance.
- Includes realistic goals for parents to work toward not being chronically absent, such as to attend as much as possible vs. citing a specific number of days or saying, “every day.”
- Acknowledges their hesitations and avoids chastising or shaming parents by telling them what is acceptable or not.

Messaging should be tailored based on the age of the students. In elementary school, parents and other caregivers who often have responsibility for getting young children to school are an especially key audience. As students get older, invest in messaging that speaks directly to students and what can motivate them to show up to school.

MESSENGERS

LEA teams can identify who is well positioned to deliver the messages and then provide schools with resources to recruit and equip such messengers to spread the word about why showing up to school matters. Consider the following potential messengers:

- **Teachers are highly trusted messengers** for students of all ages. Equip them with scripts and resources to help reinforce the community-wide attendance message.
- For younger students, enlist school nurses, pediatricians, parent leaders, and faith-based leaders to reach families.

- For older youth, trusted messengers can include after-school program providers, sports coaches, and peers.
- Local government officials, public agencies, and respected community figures, such as clergy, imams, and rabbis can also play a vital role in sharing information.

MESSAGING MODES

LEAs can utilize a variety of channels to disseminate messages, ensuring materials are easily accessible and usable by schools translated into multiple languages. Consider the following:

- **Pre-recorded messages** from LEA and community leaders highlighting the importance of consistent attendance.
- **Public Service Announcements (PSAs)** are distributed via social media, public transportation, doctor's offices, barber shops, salons, local TV, and school events.
- **Social media campaigns** featuring infographics and short videos that illustrate the impact of attendance on academic success.
- **Attendance phone banks** organized to reach out to families of students with high levels of absences, utilizing LEA personnel.
- **Community engagement** through announcements to their networks.
- **Wake-up calls and encouraging messages** to motivate students to attend, particularly on days when attendance typically declines.
- **Morning messages** at school with daily and weekly shout-outs to students demonstrating excellent or improved attendance.
- **Handouts:** Provide information for family members. Here are possible resources available from Attendance Works:
 - [Handouts for Families](#)
 - [Health Handouts](#), especially [How Sick Is Too Sick](#)
 - [Student Attendance Success plans](#)
 - [Sample chronic absence letter](#)
- Other effective modes include **letters and postcards in families' home languages**, classroom or school e-newsletters, emails from school/LEA/partners/parents, texts from teachers/staff, school apps, and Facebook Live events.

Utilize Resource Available from Attendance Works National Campaign

Kick off the start of school by celebrating national Attendance Awareness Month. Find posters and social media materials for all age groups on the Attendance Awareness Campaign website: <https://awareness.attendanceworks.org/resources/promotional-materials/>

These materials and messages can be used all year long to highlight the importance of and benefits from regular attendance.

CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS FOR STEP ONE:

- Will the LEA leverage available communication resources through Attendance Works or create its own message?
- Who will lead the development and implementation of a back-to-school attendance messaging campaign for the LEA? Who else needs to be involved? Is there a budget for collateral?
- What type of messaging materials will be created for schools?
- How will messaging materials be shared with schools within the LEA?
- How will messages be shared with key audiences?
- Which community partners are able to help push out the back-to-school attendance messaging?

Step Two: Conduct an In-depth Analysis of Data to Identify Priorities for Support

A strategic approach to improving attendance begins with an in-depth analysis of data to identify which students require additional engagement and support to attend school and to understand their unique strengths and challenges. Students who ended the prior school year chronically absent are more likely to continue the pattern of behavior. Their risk for chronic absence is even higher if they miss 10% or more of their days on role in the first weeks of school.

Quantitatively assess who is missing and how many students are affected. Pinpoint schools with high numbers of students returning to school who were chronically absent in previous years, along with grade levels with a significant percentage of chronically absent students. Determine which student groups and schools to prioritize for support based on what is actionable and manageable.

1. Determine priority schools based on high percentages or large numbers of chronically absent students.
 - a) Provide targeted support designed to address known barriers to attendance at schools identified with high rates of chronic absence.
2. Identify priority groups of students and priority grades that need additional support.
 - a) Explore transition grades - students entering Pre-Kindergarten, Kindergarten, 6th, or 9th grade. (This may be different depending on the school structure at the local level.)
 - b) Disaggregate the gathered information by student population (e.g., school, geography, demographics, grade level, severity of absenteeism) to uncover unique challenges and barriers that affect different groups.
 - c) Identify specific priority student groups, which may include historically marginalized students: students living in poverty, Black students, Native American students, multilingual learners, Hispanic and Latino students, students with disabilities, students experiencing homelessness, students involved in foster care, and students involved in the juvenile justice system.
3. Create priority lists of chronically absent students and ensure schools have the list of students who they now serve.
 - a) Create a list of the students who ended the previous school year chronically absent (missing 10% or more of school days) and severely chronically absent (missing 20% or more). Chronic absence encompasses all types of absences, including excused, unexcused, and suspensions.
 - b) Further identify who is off-track by determining which students are beginning the school year with a continued pattern of chronic absence, by missing 10% or more of their first weeks of school (2+ days).
4. Identify Common Reason, Barriers and Solutions for Absence for the Priority Grades and Groups Identified.

Qualitatively assess why students are regularly missing school. Assess reasons for absences for each priority grade and group. Absenteeism often signals that [positive conditions for learning](#) are not in place. These conditions include physical and emotional health and safety; adult and student emotional competence; belonging, connection, and support; and academic challenge and engagement. Relationships are essential to these positive conditions, as well as ensuring students and families feel sufficient trust to share when they are experiencing barriers in the community that prevent them from getting to school regularly.

1. Actively [gather information](#) about attendance barriers as well as what helps students to show up. This can be carried out by LEA and school leaders. LEA staff can hear directly from families by organizing phone banks, calling families during the first several weeks of school, exploring barriers to attendance, and identifying what helps to address the barriers. LEAs can also invite school leaders of high chronic absence schools into a discussion about what they understand the barriers are for their students and what solutions they need support with implementing in order to improve student attendance.
2. Utilize available information to identify the [root causes](#) of why students are missing school. Generally, the reasons for student absenteeism can be organized by barriers to school, aversion to school, disengagement from school, and misconceptions about key concepts related to attendance. Understanding which root causes are the most common contributors to students missing school can help the LEA to organize and deploy resources systemically.

Barriers	Aversion	Disengagement	Misconceptions
• Chronic and acute illness • Family responsibilities or home situation • Trauma • Poor transportation • Housing and food insecurity • Lack of access to needed services • System involvement • Unpredictable schedules for learning • Lack of access to technology • Community violence	• Struggling academically and/or behaviorally • Unwelcoming school climate • Social and peer challenges • Anxiety • Unfair disciplinary and suspension practices • Undiagnosed disability and/or disability accommodations • Caregivers had negative educational experiences	• Lack of challenging, engaging 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	• 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

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1. Leverage existing data and explore the use of the excused, unexcused, and suspension attendance codes, and consider the following questions:
 - a) What percentage of absences are coded excused, and for what reasons?
 - b) What percentage of absences are coded absent due to suspension, and for what reasons, grade levels, and student groups?
 - c) What percentage of absences are coded as unexcused and require additional effort to understand the underlying causes?

2. Identify gaps in support, resources, and access within the LEA. It is important to acknowledge that ongoing economic and social disruption has intensified existing inequities, pushing more families into precarious financial, health, safety, and housing situations, which can directly lead to increased absenteeism.
 - a) What resources does the LEA have to directly mitigate barriers due to poverty and lack of access to health care?
 - b) How are those resources distributed? Is attendance data used as a variable for distribution?
 - c) How are schools, families, and students made aware of resources?

Insights gained from this process should be used to tailor the LEA and school Multi-tiered System of Support and plan for launching welcoming school activities to local realities, assets and strengths. These concepts are discussed in more depth below.

CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS FOR STEP TWO:

- Which schools have the highest percentage and number of students who begin the school year with a history of chronic absence?
- Which student groups are most likely to have a history of chronic absenteeism?
- Which grades are most likely to have high levels of chronic absence?
- How will the LEA approach identifying common barriers and solutions to attendance for the groups of students who ended the prior school year chronically absent?
- What opportunities exist for the LEA to connect with school leaders of struggling schools to hear from them about barriers to attendance and needed support?
- Will the LEA implement a plan to hear from students and families about barriers to attendance, such as a phone bank, focus group, survey, or other means? How will the LEA share this data with schools?
- What supports will the LEA make available to schools with high levels of chronic absence?

Step Three: Equip Schools to Implement a Welcome to School Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) for Attendance

Effective implementation of MTSS requires LEA leaders to provide guidance, resources, and training. LEA leaders can also leverage the beginning of the school year to ensure schools are using MTSS to advance attendance. Appendix A has an example of a LEA-level MTSS approach to welcome back to school activities. How might the LEA and schools think of the beginning of the school year and build on the plans and activities as an opportunity to create an intentional attendance MTSS strategy?

FOUNDATIONAL SUPPORTS: UNIVERSAL ENGAGEMENT FOR ALL STUDENTS

Support schools with the resources necessary to create a universally welcoming, safe, and engaging school environment, that fosters positive relationships and a culture where attendance is valued. Strategies include:

- **Facilitate Welcoming Programming:** LEAs should support schools in offering activities for all students and families that begin just before and into the first several weeks of school, such as meet-and-greets, picnics, and resource fairs. These activities are crucial for building relationships and community.
- **Provide Health and Safety Resources:** LEAs should develop and distribute clear, accessible materials for schools that demonstrate school protocols for healthy and safe classrooms, how to determine when to keep a student home due to illness, and guidance for how to access health resources through school.
- **Demonstrate the Value of Establishing Routines and Rituals:** LEAs can provide frameworks and professional development for schools to establish routines and rituals that create belonging, reduce stress, and foster an inclusive atmosphere. This professional development should cover how to:
 - Teach and reinforce attendance and behavior expectations in the classroom, including daily attendance taking, warmly welcoming students back after an absence, and conducting regular check-ins with students and their families.
 - Implement school-wide routines and rituals, such as daily morning messages, weekly principal "pop-ins" to offer positive words and publicly acknowledge good and improved attendance.

Tier 1: Universal Prevention for all Students - Building Bridges to School

- **Support Tailored Programming for Transition Grades:** LEAs can provide guidance to schools in developing specialized back-to-school programming for transition grades (traditionally PreK, K, 6th and 9th grades).
- **Incorporate Teaching about Attendance at Back-to-School Night:** LEAs can provide schools with resources to "teach" attendance at events hosted by schools to welcome students and families back to school, such as messaging and age-appropriate activities.

Tier 2: Early Intervention - Creating Community at School

- **Provide proactive and personalized outreach and support for students who are at the cusp of chronic absence** (missing 10%-19% of school, or 2-3 days per month on average)

- **Enable Personalized Outreach and Support:** LEAs should provide schools with the data, resources, and protocols to actively reach out to students and families who ended the prior school year chronically absent. This involves:
 - Establishing clear protocols for schools to ensure that each chronically absent student (and their family) is personally contacted by a member of school staff.
 - Providing professional development on how to conduct caring conversations and resources for school staff on common barriers to attendance and potential solutions.
 - Establishing a systematic process for documenting findings from these conversations.
 - Supporting schools in assigning caring mentors to students to provide consistent support.
- **Support Systematic Information Gathering:** LEAs should assist schools in creating and implementing a systematic plan for gathering information about attendance barriers and solutions directly from students and families.
- **Advance Tailored Interventions for Chronically Absent Students:** LEAs should ensure schools are equipped to assign interventions from the first day of school that provide a personalized relationship for students who concluded the prior school year chronically absent.
 - For secondary students, LEAs can provide guidance and resources on direct engagement ideas such as assigning caring mentors, providing small group supports, advisory programs, internships, and offering expanded learning opportunities tailored to individual needs and interests.

Tier 3: Intensive Intervention for Severely Chronically Absent Students

LEA leaders should establish comprehensive support plans and facilitate intensive collaboration with public and community partners to enable schools to address significant and complex barriers to attendance for students.

- **Support Home Visit Initiatives:** LEAs should support schools in their ability to conduct home visits to students who are consistently missing school and their families to encourage engagement.
- **Provide Individualized Plan Frameworks:** LEAs should provide frameworks and resources for schools to create and implement individualized plans to improve attendance for severely chronically absent students in collaboration with partners.
- **Establish Agency Partner Engagement:** LEAs should establish clear mechanisms and protocols for schools to include appropriate LEA and agency partner personnel in supporting students and families.
- **Connect Schools to Resources for Complex Barriers:** LEAs should empower schools with access to direct support for complex issues. This might involve creating and disseminating a directory of vetted community resources or establishing direct referral processes for schools to utilize.

CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS FOR STEP THREE:

- What is the LEA's model Welcome to School Attendance MTSS?
- What key strategies and programmatic responses and resources exist at the LEA and school level to establish a Welcome to School Attendance MTSS?
- Has the LEA used insights about attendance related assets and barriers to inform the Welcome to School MTSS?

- How will the LEA equip school leaders and their teams to implement an attendance MTSS focused on a successful beginning to the school year?
- *MTSS Questions*
 - Are there things in this MTSS attendance pyramid that build on the school's existing back-to-school strategies?
 - How can the LEA communicate with school leaders or train them to recognize that an attendance MTSS fits within the existing school-level framework?

Step Four: Launch Welcoming School Activities

Following the planning phase, it is critical to launch coordinated welcome to school activities. Crucially, a commitment to **continuous reflection, learning, and improvement** must underpin all efforts.

- **Back-to-School Professional Development:** Provide targeted professional development for principals and their school support teams. This training should cover a multi-tiered system of support focused on systemwide messaging, practical beginning-of-year activities, and age-differentiated and level of intensity engagement ideas.
- **Systemwide Messaging Reinforcement:** Continuously reinforce key messages about the importance of attendance and the welcoming nature of the school environment.
- **Beginning-of-Year Activities:** Plan and implement a variety of activities at the start of the school year that foster community and encourage engagement.
 - Activities can include essential services like **immunization clinics** and **backpack giveaways**, alongside social events such as **meet and greets**.
 - **Fall activities should particularly focus on creating community at school:** Re-establishing routines and rituals and strengthening and forging new relationships during the crucial first weeks back. This involves establishing structures that build and sustain connections between students, families, and educators through various means like advisories, mentoring programs, student ambassadors, student councils, and buddy systems.
 - **Leverage traditionally planned fall activities** to elevate attendance messaging and the availability of resources to support students and families who need help getting to school.

CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS FOR STEP FOUR:

- How will the LEA equip school leaders with the professional development and resources necessary to organize a robust welcome-to-school attendance MTSS?
- What additional support exists for schools with the highest percentage and number of students returning to school with a history of chronic absence?
- How will the LEA create cross-departmental support and engagement for this strategy, such as community schools, out-of-school time programs, and means to address health concerns?
- What resources do school leaders need to implement the proposed activities that support a successful attendance MTSS for welcome to school?

Step Five: Engage in Continuous Improvement

To ensure the LEA can engage in continuous improvement, make sure the LEA student information system (SIS) can produce real-time reports on chronic absences that are easy to interpret and can be accessed at the LEA and school level. These reports can then be used to regularly monitor where the LEA is seeing improvements or what are continuing challenges related to chronic absence by school, grade and student population.

Use qualitative and quantitative data to determine which strategies work and for whom. Since conditions affecting attendance vary by locality and can change over time, this should be an on-going practice.

- Continuous Improvement Cycle: Adopt a Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycle to systematically assess the current attendance system, analyze the root causes of absenteeism, choose an effective attendance improvement strategy, implement it, measure outcomes, analyze the results, and then revise and refine the approach for future efforts.
- Regular assessment of quantitative and qualitative data will inform the continuous improvement cycle.

Use the insights gathered to inform future work, identifying which improvements were most significant, understanding any short- or long-term unintended consequences (positive or negative), and determining which activities to continue or modify.

CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS FOR STEP FIVE:

- Key questions for reflection during this cycle include:
 - What actions were planned and carried out, and by whom?
 - How effectively were activities implemented, and were students, families, or community partners adequately engaged?
 - What measurable difference was made for students who received support?
 - What was the overall impact on the school regarding enrollment, attendance data, or chronic absence rates?

Appendix A: Attendance MTSS Example

Welcome to School District-Level Attendance MTSS

District leaders should provide guidance, resources, and training. This support can involve providing event planning templates, sample communication materials, and identifying potential funding streams or logistical support.

Tier 3: Intensive Intervention for Severely Chronically Absent Students

District leaders should establish comprehensive support plans and facilitate intensive collaboration with public and community partners to enable schools to address significant and complex barriers to attendance for students.

- **Support Home Visit Initiatives:** LEAs should support schools in their ability to conduct home visits to students who are consistently missing school and their families to encourage engagement.
- **Provide Individualized Plan Frameworks:** LEAs should provide frameworks and resources for schools to create and implement individualized plans for severely chronically absent students in collaboration with partners.
- **Establish Agency Partner Engagement:** LEAs should establish clear mechanisms and protocols for schools to include appropriate district and agency partner personnel in supporting students and families.
- **Connect Schools to Resources for Complex Barriers:** LEAs should empower schools with access to direct support for complex issues. This might involve creating and disseminating a directory of vetted community resources or establishing direct referral processes for schools to utilize.

Tier 2: Early Intervention - Creating Community at School

- **Provide proactive and personalized outreach and support for students who are at the cusp of chronic absence** (missing 10%-19% of school, or 2-3 days per month on average)
- **Enable Personalized Outreach and Support:** LEAs should provide schools with the data, means, and protocols to actively reach out to students and families who ended the prior school year chronically absent. This involves:
 - Establishing clear protocols for schools to ensure that each chronically absent student (and their family) is personally contacted by a member of school staff.
 - Providing professional development on how to conduct caring conversations and resources for school staff on common barriers to attendance and potential solutions.
 - Establishing a systematic process for documenting findings from these conversations.
 - Supporting schools in assigning caring mentors to students to provide consistent support.
- **Support Systematic Information Gathering:** LEAs should assist schools in creating and implementing a systematic plan for gathering information about attendance barriers and solutions directly from students and families.
- **Advance Tailored Interventions for Chronically Absent Students:** LEAs should ensure schools are equipped to assign interventions from the first day of school that provide a personalized relationship for students who concluded the prior school year chronically absent.
 - For secondary students, LEAs can provide guidance and resources on direct engagement ideas such as assigning caring mentors, providing small group supports, advisory programs, internships, and offering expanded learning opportunities tailored to individual needs and interests.

Tier 1: Prevention for all Students - Building Bridges to School

- **Support Tailored Programming for Transition Grades:** LEAs can provide guidance to schools in developing specialized welcome to school programming for transition grades. Activities should support community building, get-to-know-you activities, and access to information and resources specific to the transition. Traditionally these transitions occur at PreK, K, 6th and 9th grades.
- **Provide Messaging Materials and Resources:** The information provided should help to educate students and families about attendance. LEAs can provide schools with fliers, buttons, banners, messaging materials, and activities to “teach” attendance at events hosted by schools to welcome students and families back to school.

Foundational Supports: Universal Engagement for all Students

Support schools with the resources necessary to create a universally welcoming, safe, and engaging school environment, fostering positive relationships and a culture where attendance is valued. Strategies include:

- **Facilitate Welcoming Programming:** LEAs should support schools in offering activities for all students and families that begin just prior to and into the first several weeks of school such as meet and greets, picnics, and resource fairs, which are crucial for building relationships and community.
- **Provide Health and Safety Resources:** LEAs should develop and distribute clear, accessible materials for schools to demonstrate school protocols for healthy and safe classrooms, how to determine when to keep a student home due to illness and guidance for how to access health resources through school.
- **Demonstrate the Value of Establishing Routines and Rituals:** LEAs can provide frameworks and professional development for schools to establish routines and rituals that create belonging, reduce stress, and foster an inclusive atmosphere. This professional development should cover how to:
 - Teach and reinforce attendance and behavior expectations in the classroom, including daily attendance taking, warmly welcoming students back after an absence, and conducting regular check-ins with students and their families.
 - Implement school-wide routines and rituals, such as daily morning messages, weekly principal “pop-ins” to offer positive words, and publicly acknowledge good and improved attendance.