

Meeting the Chronic Absenteeism Challenge: What Do We Know?



Attendance Solutions Network, Webinar Series Part 1
Dr. Robert Balfanz, Everyone Graduates Center, Johns Hopkins University
July 23, 2024

Agenda:

- **Welcome & Introductions**
- **About NPSS & the Attendance Solutions Network**
- **Building a Plan: A Comprehensive Approach**
 - **Understanding the Challenge**
 - **Organizing Your Response**
 - **How Student Success Systems Work**
 - **Gathering & Aligning Resources**
- **Districts in Action**
- **Additional Tools & Resources**
- **Small Group Introductions**
- **Next Steps**

National Partnership for Student Success

The NPSS is a public private partnership led by the U.S. Department of Education, AmeriCorps, and the Johns Hopkins Everyone Graduates Center that seeks to provide the leadership, organizational structures, and connective tissue to bring additional evidence-based person-powered student supports to schools and districts based on locally determined needs.

Attendance Solutions Network

An opportunity for districts to work together and with the US Department of Education, AmeriCorps, and Johns Hopkins University to reduce chronic absence and increase student engagement.

District Supports Include:

- A solutions-focused webinar series
- Opportunities to learn from experts and peers
- Opportunities and strategies for building connections with local, state, and federal agencies
- Support implementing new models and developing community partnerships

Attendance Solutions Network

Starting the School Year Strong: A Four-part Webinar Series

- Today!
- July 25: Creating a Culture of Regular Attendance
- August 6: Organizing for Success
- August 13: Aligning Existing Resources & Forming Strategic Partnerships

All sessions 3:00-4:15pm ET/12:00-1:15pm PT

Small Group Problem Solving Discussions (optional) - *Continue the conversation, get your questions answered*

- Week of July 29
- Week of August 19

Peer-to-Peer Learning Community (90 minutes each): Once monthly, beginning in September (dates TBD)

Attendance Solutions Network

District Voluntary Commitments:

- Designate at least one relevant senior district representative to actively engage in the network.
 - We welcome additional team members to join!
- Incorporate best practices to address student chronic absence and increase student engagement.
- Build on district ESEA goals by setting interim goals*, publicly report on interim goals*, and share progress with network colleagues.

**These goals would be supplemental to any reporting and accountability requirements under ESEA and would not be used for any federal accountability purposes but instead at the district's discretion to inform district efforts and support family engagement.*



- Dr. Robert Balfanz, Director Everyone Graduates Center, School of Education, Johns Hopkins University (JHU)



The Magnitude of the Attendance Challenge:

- The number of chronically absent students doubled post-pandemic.
- Post-pandemic two thirds of students in the US attended schools with chronic absenteeism rates of 20% or more. At this level, the whole school is impacted, including students who attend everyday.
- Some districts improved in 2022-23 , some stayed the same, some saw their rates of chronic absenteeism increase. This indicates that improvements were the result of state, district, and school actions, not broad national shifts.
- Improving districts still had higher rates than before the pandemic.

Scale & Intensity Of Attendance Challenge

REQUIRES A SYSTEMIC APPROACH

1

**Improvement
is Possible.**

2

**Know Your
Challenge.**

3

**Organize Your
Response.**

4

**Align Your
Resources.**

Know Your Challenge

IT CAN VARY BY TIME, PLACE & GRADE LEVEL

Barriers

Aversion

Disengagement

Misconceptions

Barriers:

KEEPING YOU OUT OF SCHOOL

Increased by the Pandemic:

- Family responsibilities—sibling, eldercare, etc.
- High school students with jobs to support themselves and family.
- Trauma and mental health.

Continuing Factors:

- Chronic and acute illness.
- Poor transportation.
- Housing and food insecurity.
- Lack of access to health care, eyeglasses, dentistry.
- System involvement.
- Community violence.

Aversion:

I DO NOT WANT TO GO TO SCHOOL

Increased by the Pandemic:

- Social anxiety.
- Peer challenges, including drama, teasing, or bullying.
- Struggling academically and/or behaviorally.
- Unwelcoming school climate. (E.g. unpredictable or feel excluded.)

Continuing Factors:

- Biased disciplinary and suspension practices.
- Undiagnosed disability and/or lack of disability accommodations.
- Caregivers had negative educational experiences.

Disengagement:

WHAT IS THE POINT?

Increased by the Pandemic:

- Lack school connectedness—no meaningful relationships to adult and peers in the school.
- Don't see connection between regular school attendance and important outcomes.

Continuing Factors:

- Lack of challenging, culturally responsive instruction and enrichment opportunities. (I.g. bored.)
- Doing poorly in classes. (E.g. lack of academic and behavioral support.)

Misconception:

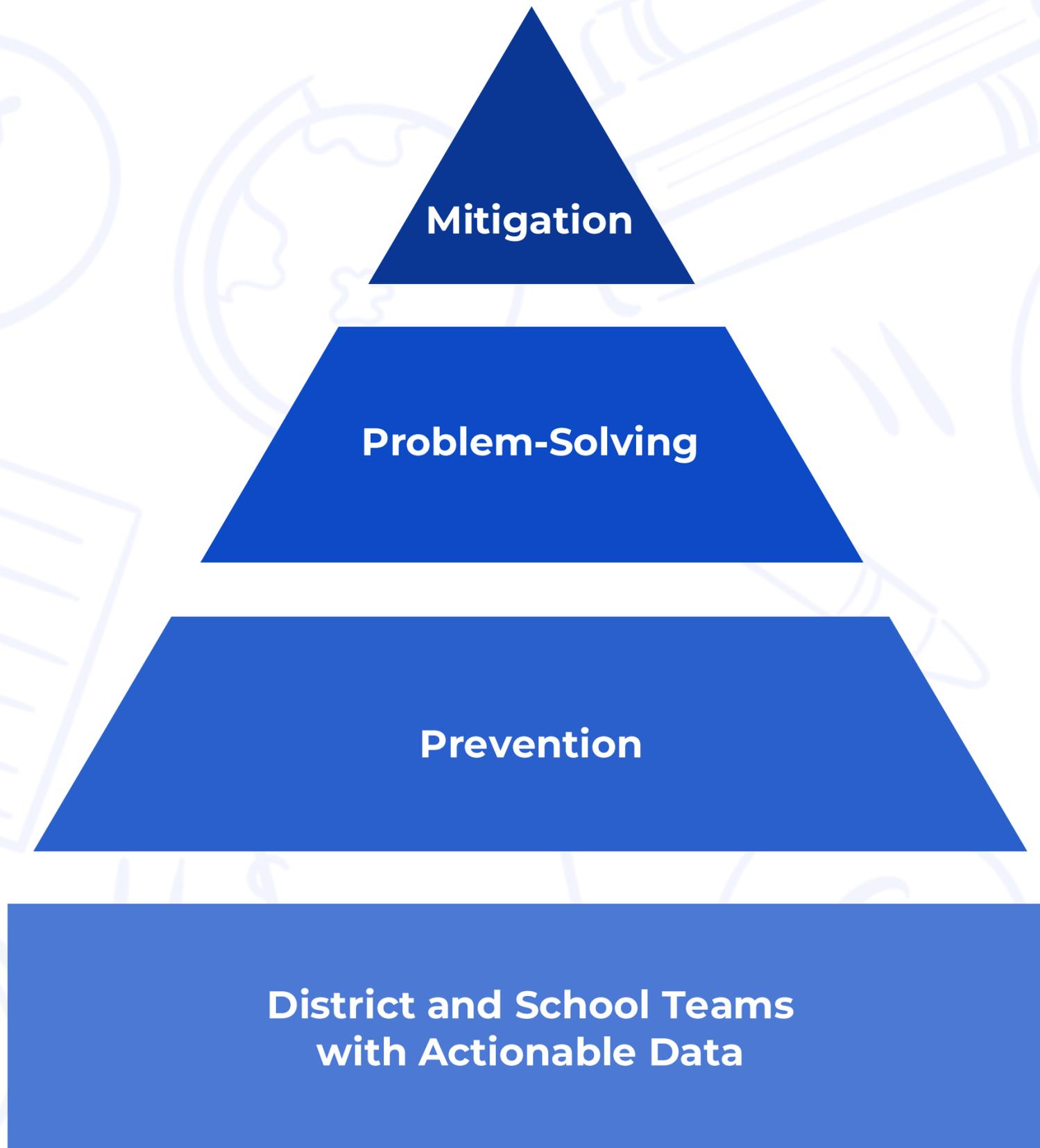
I DID NOT REALIZE

Increased by the Pandemic:

- Assume students must stay home for any symptom of illness.
- Don't have to be in school to succeed in school.
(Can do assignments online.)

Continuing Factors:

- Absences are only a problem if they are unexcused.
- Lose track and underestimate total absences.
- Attendance only matters in the older grades.
- Suspensions don't count as absence.



ORGANIZE YOUR RESPONSE

**Need a
Systematic
Approach**

Prevention:

POSITIVE CONDITIONS FOR LEARNING

Effective Practices:

- Increase school connectedness.
- Family engagement.
- Messaging campaigns. (E.g. “School is a good place to be.”)
- Nudge letters.

District/School Actions:

- Take supportive—not punitive—response to absenteeism.
- Improve school climate, access to extra-curriculars, show how schooling connects to locally meaningful outcomes and opportunities.
- Anti-bullying efforts. (In-person and social media.)

Deeper Dive On School Connectedness:

When students are connected to school, they attend more often, do better in school, and have better mental and physical health.

Students are connected to school when they:

- Have an adult at school who knows and cares about them as a person.
- Have a supportive peer group.
- Engage at least some of the time in meaningful pro-social activities.
- Feel welcome in school as they are.

Schools can influence, improve, and measure all of these.

Problem-Solving:

ADDRESSING ROOT CAUSE

Effective Practices:

- Engaging students and families in identifying root cause and solutions.
- Early warning, MTSS, and student success systems.
- Success coaches and mentors.

District/School Actions:

- Form strategic partnerships to provide student supports at scale required. (E.g. mentors, tutors, wraparound supports, etc.)
- Create or expand community schools.
- Partners with mayor to create inter-agency task force to bring health, transportation, housing, workforce agencies, etc. assets to bear.

Mitigation:

RECOVERING LEARNING & SOCIAL CONNECTION

EFFECTIVE PRACTICES:

- High-dosage tutoring.
- Highly engaging summer learning.
- Meaningful high school credit recovery opportunities.
- Peer mentoring to support social re-integration.
- Success coaches or mentors.

DISTRICT/SCHOOL ACTIONS:

- Not having policies which prevent recovery. (E.g. cannot make up work if absence is unexcused, must fail a class if missed too many days.)

Teams with Data:

SCHOOL & DISTRICT ATTENDANCE TEAMS

- School teams should include everyone with key perspective on student attendance.
- District teams should include all offices that can have impact on attendance.
- Need consistent regularly scheduled time to work together, bi-weekly ideal, protocols to focus work, leadership endorsement and support.
- Use data to shape and refine actions.

ACTIONABLE ATTENDANCE DATA

- Real time as possible—weekly at school level, monthly at district.
- Disaggregated by sub-groups and grade.
- Shows trends over time, from start of year and compared to prior years.
- Track and monitors effectiveness of interventions.

How Student Success Teams Work:

- School community efforts— school leaders, teachers, and counselors
- Meet regularly
- Empowered to take action

Key predictive indicators include attendance, behavior, course grades, school connectedness (belonging), and well-being.

**CREATE
STUDENT
SUCCESS
TEAMS**

**PROGRESS
MONITORS ALL
STUDENTS WITH
KEY INDICATORS**

**MONITORS IMPACT
OF ACTIONS &
MODIFIES UNTIL
IT WORKS**

**GATHER INSIGHTS
& CO-CREATES
IMPROVEMENT
ACTIONS**

The goal is to create conditions under which students thrive, rather than waiting until the challenge is more severe.

- Take action at school, grade, classroom, small group, and individual level
- Work with students, parents, and teachers in designing solutions

Gather & Align Resources:

FORM STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

Collaborate with local non-profits, health providers, government agencies, and colleges that have resources which meet identified gaps in student supports.

TAKE STOCK

Know what resources already exist and whether they address current challenges.

INTEGRATE INTO EXISTING EFFORTS

Enhance attendance focus of your strongest student support effort. (E.g. MTSS, PBIS, early warning systems, etc.) Integrate attendance improvement into key initiatives. (E.g. Science of reading, high dosage tutoring, school improvement, CTE, etc.)

NPSS Can Help Form Strategic Partnerships

Higher Education

- Supported a partnership with a school district in New York City and CUNY campuses to engage more college students in P-12 mentoring roles, through Federal Work Study jobs and credit-bearing service learning coursework with the institution's School of Education

AmeriCorps/AmeriCorps Seniors RSVP

- AmeriCorps student leaders in Iowa provide guidance and modeling to their peers who are preparing for next steps in their college and career pathway as part of Iowa's College Access and Success AmeriCorps Initiative.

District Technical Assistance

- A technical assistance request led to a series of expert consultation between NPSS nonprofit technical assistance lead and a CA school district to support the creation of a home-grown success coaching program.

Good Strategies at Work

Guilford County Public Schools

- *Strategic Partnerships:* [Tele-health in school](#) managed by School Nurses, prevents students from being sent home sick

Arlington K-8, Pittsburg Public Schools

- *Using Community Partners:* [Nana's and Van's program](#), focused on students who have to walk a long distance to school, target families receive daily call from a Nana, who can provide free Van transportation

Good Strategies at Work

Manzano High School, Albuquerque Public School (APS)

- *Creating Student Success Teams-* [Integrating](#) Community School and Early Warning Efforts

Southeast Lauderdale HS, Meridian MS

- *Addressing Disengagement and Increasing School Belonging-* Creatively [Expanding extra-curricular participation](#) to boost attendance

Tools & Resources:

- Attendance Works [Website](#) and [Playbook](#)
- GRAD Partnership [Chronic Absenteeism Toolkit](#)
- Everyone Graduates Center, GRAD Partnership, and NPSS Hub Brief: [Meeting the Chronic Absenteeism Challenge - What Do We Know?](#)
- [White House Fact Sheet](#)
- [Student Engagement and Attendance Center \(SEAC\)](#)
- National Partnership for Student Success [Digital Backpack of Chronic Absenteeism Resources](#) (contains all the above resources)

- Every Day Counts Summit Slides:
- [Slides from Every Day Counts Summit \(full deck\)](#)
- [Albuquerque Public Schools](#)
- [Columbus City Schools](#)
- [Greater Johnston School District](#)
- [Richmond Public Schools](#)

Breakout Groups

- In small groups, please:
 - **Introduce yourself:** your name, role, district, and share something you want to learn more about.
 - IF someone has already said what you were going to share, let us know yours has been said (or reference the person by name who said yours) when it is your turn.
 - With the time remaining for breakout groups, we'll open the floor and invite anyone to come off mute and share a success—big or small—your district is seeing that has helped to address engagement and attendance.

Group Norms

- What's said here, stays here.
- What's learned here, leaves here.

Next Steps

- Reminders:
 - Help spread the word!
 - Mark your calendars: July 25, August 6, August 13
 - Targeted internal outreach: look ahead to topics - who else from your team should join?
 - District Examples - email jenlopiccolo@jhu.edu to share a strategy
 - Today's webinar will be posted within the week - encourage district/school teams to watch
- Help us shape this network and take this short survey about today's session: <https://forms.gle/JvF3QTjzyS3br1U69>

Thank you!

<https://www.partnershipstudentsuccess.org/>



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