



WestEd 
Western Educational
Equity Assistance Center

Increasing Attendance and Engagement for Black/African American Students

October 11, 2023



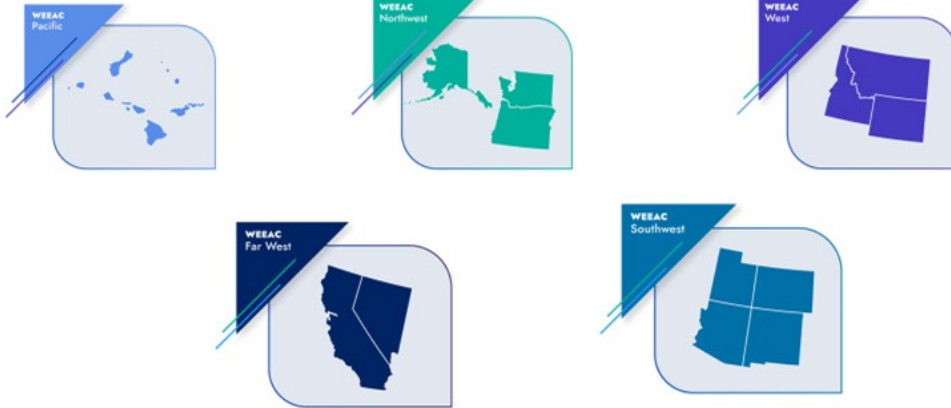
Technical Assistance

Professional Learning

- By request—school boards, governmental agencies
- Through equity-centered capacity-building to better serve students who have experienced ongoing inequities in our educational system because of their race, national origin, sex, or religion



WEEAC Sub-Regions



Pacific

American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Guam, and Hawai'i

Northwest

Alaska, Oregon, and Washington

West

Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming

Far West

California and Nevada

Southwest

Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, and Utah



Six Webinar Series

- Session 1 – Data to Identify Patterns of Inequity Friday, February 17
- Session 2 – Organizing a District Team to Address Chronic Absenteeism Monday, February 27
- Session 3 – Data-Driven School Attendance Teams Monday, April 3
- Session 4 – Increasing Attendance and Engagement for American Indian/Alaska Native Students Tuesday, September 12
- **Session 5 – Increasing Attendance and Engagement for Black/African American Students** **Wednesday, October 11**
- Session 6 – Increasing Attendance and Engagement for English Learners Wednesday, December 6

Learning Goals for Session 5



Participants will

- Understand what attendance and engagement look like at the national level
- Learn about the assets, barriers, and strategies that affect attendance for Black/African American students
- Identify culturally responsive, sustaining, and evidence-based strategies to increase engagement and attendance for Black/African American students

Audience Poll: Getting to Know You



What type of organization do you represent?

- State Education Agency
- Tribal Government
- District
- School
- Community Organization
- Other, please describe in chat box



Welcome!



Maria Casey
Associate Director
of Staff Development
Attendance Works



Gisela Ariza
Associate Director
of Programs
Attendance Works



Type in Chat

What strengths and assets of Black/African American students and families do you incorporate in your efforts to improve attendance and engagement?

Review of Chronic Absence

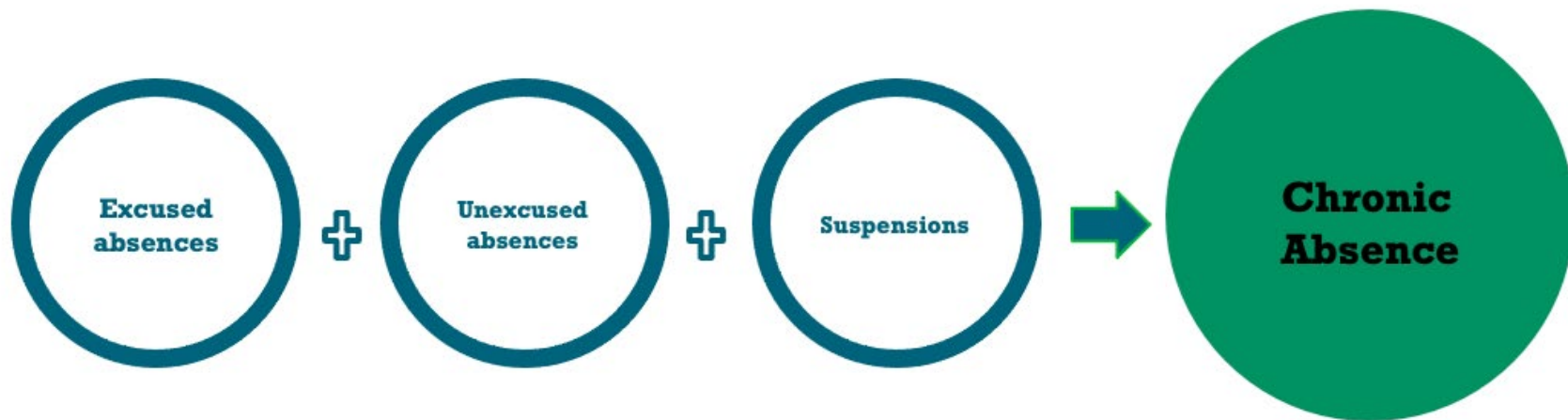




What is Chronic Absence?

Chronic absence is missing so much school for any reason that a student is academically at risk.

Chronic absence is defined missing 10 percent or more of school for any reason .



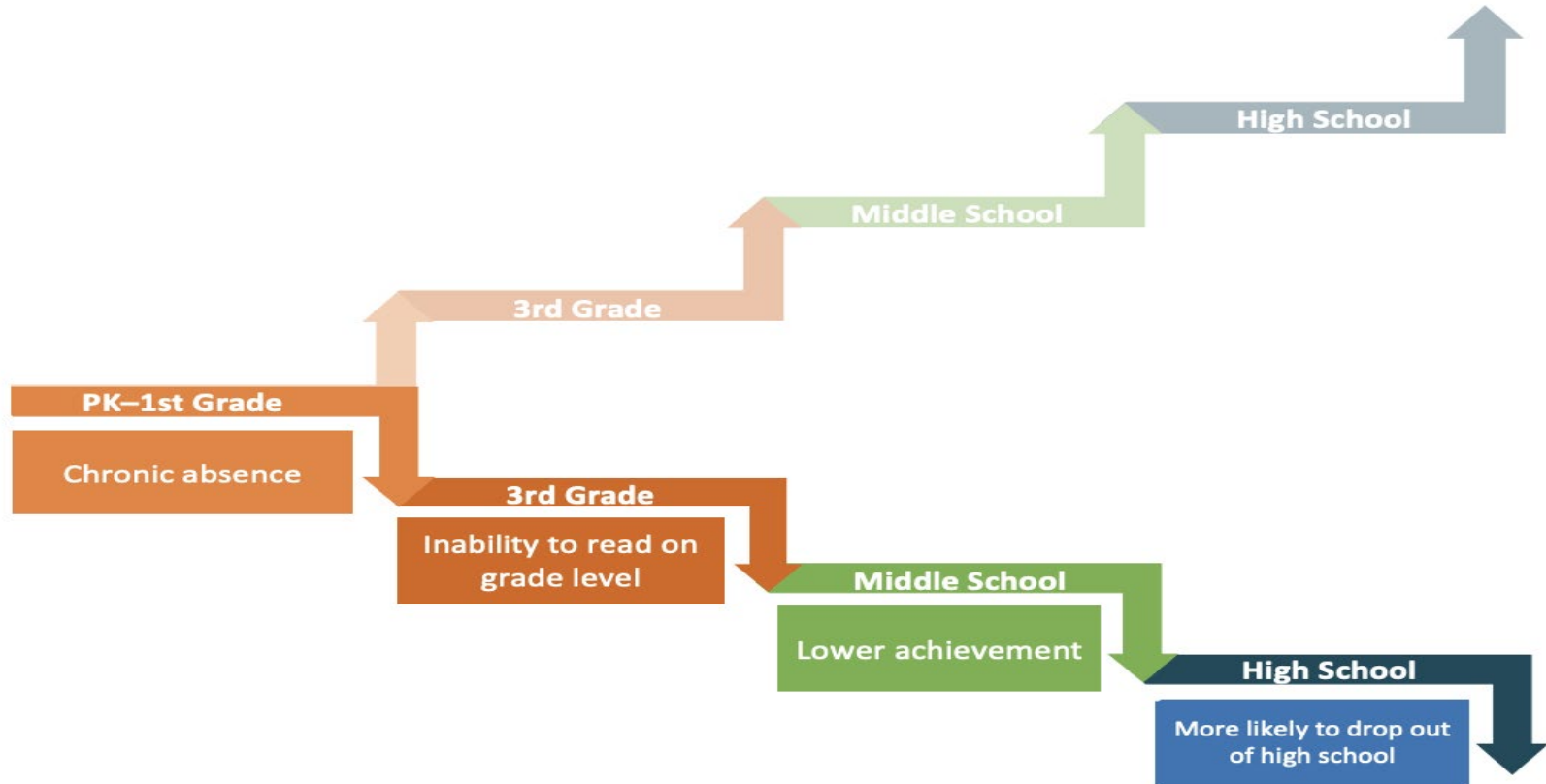
Chronic absence is different from truancy (unexcused absences only) average daily attendance (how many students show up to school each day).



Chronic Absence & Equity

Chronic absence reflects and exacerbates existing inequities.

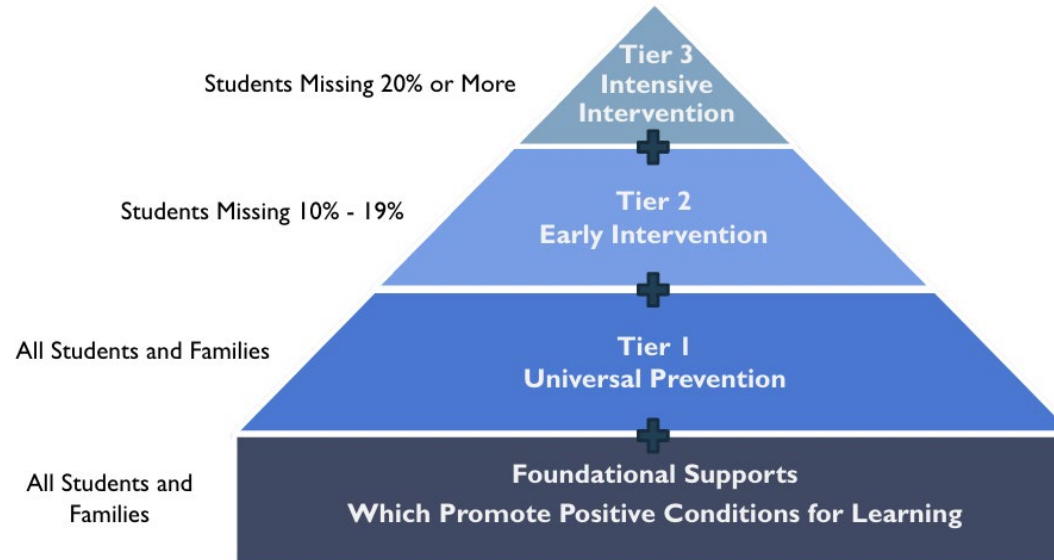
Improving Attendance Matters





We Must Redouble Our Investments in a Multi-Tiered Systems of Support Approach

Working across silos is essential!



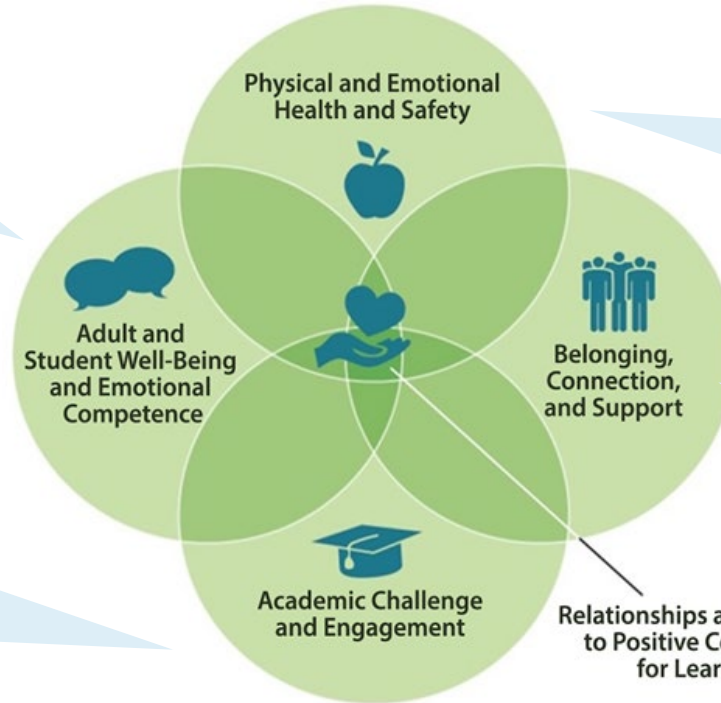
<https://www.attendanceworks.org/chronic-absence/addressing-chronic-absence/3-tiers-of-intervention/>

www.attendanceworks.org

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

- Restorative check-ins
- Access to health care and mental health supports
- Trauma-informed practice
- Staff self-care

- Access to tech and internet
- Learning supports
- Project-based learning
- Credit recovery opportunities
- Internships/community service
- Alternative scheduling options



- Healthy learning environments
- Welcoming, safe school climate
- Access to food and other basic needs
- Restorative circles

- Active student and family engagement
- Advisories/meetings to build community
- Enrichment and clubs
- Positive peer connections

What do we know about attendance and engagement of Black/African American students?



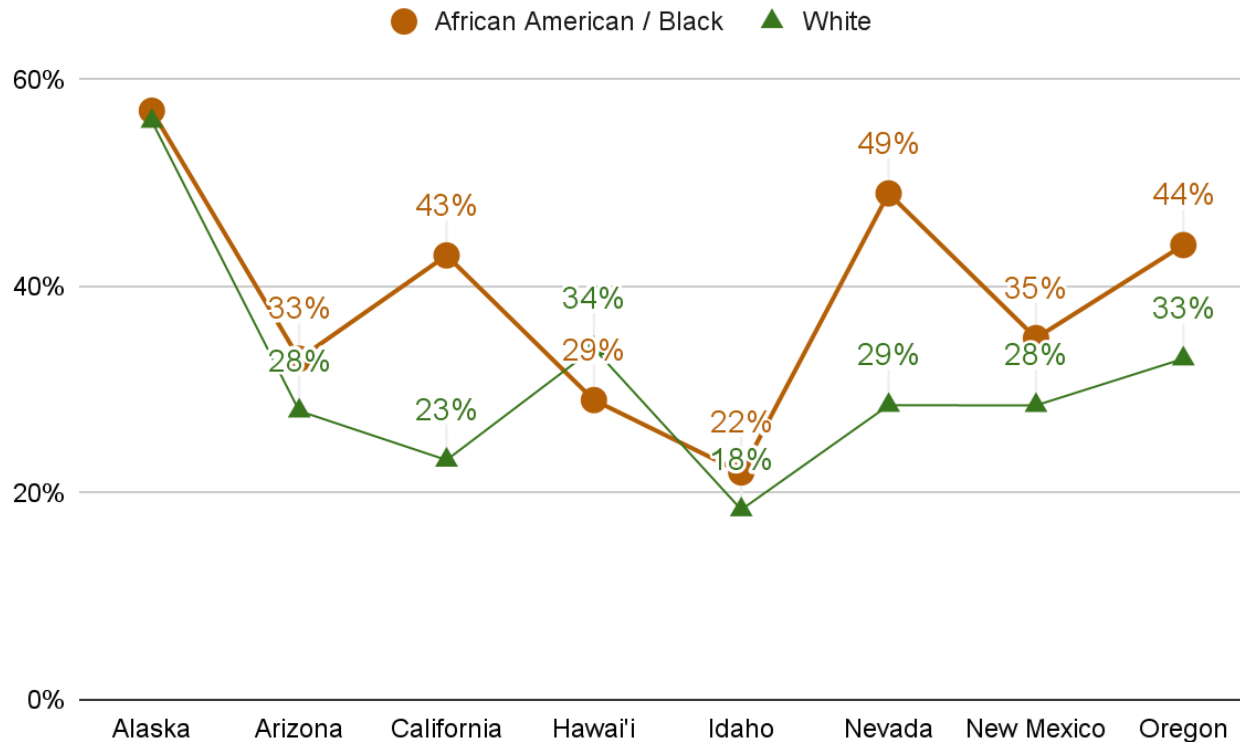
Chronic Absence Data

Audience Poll

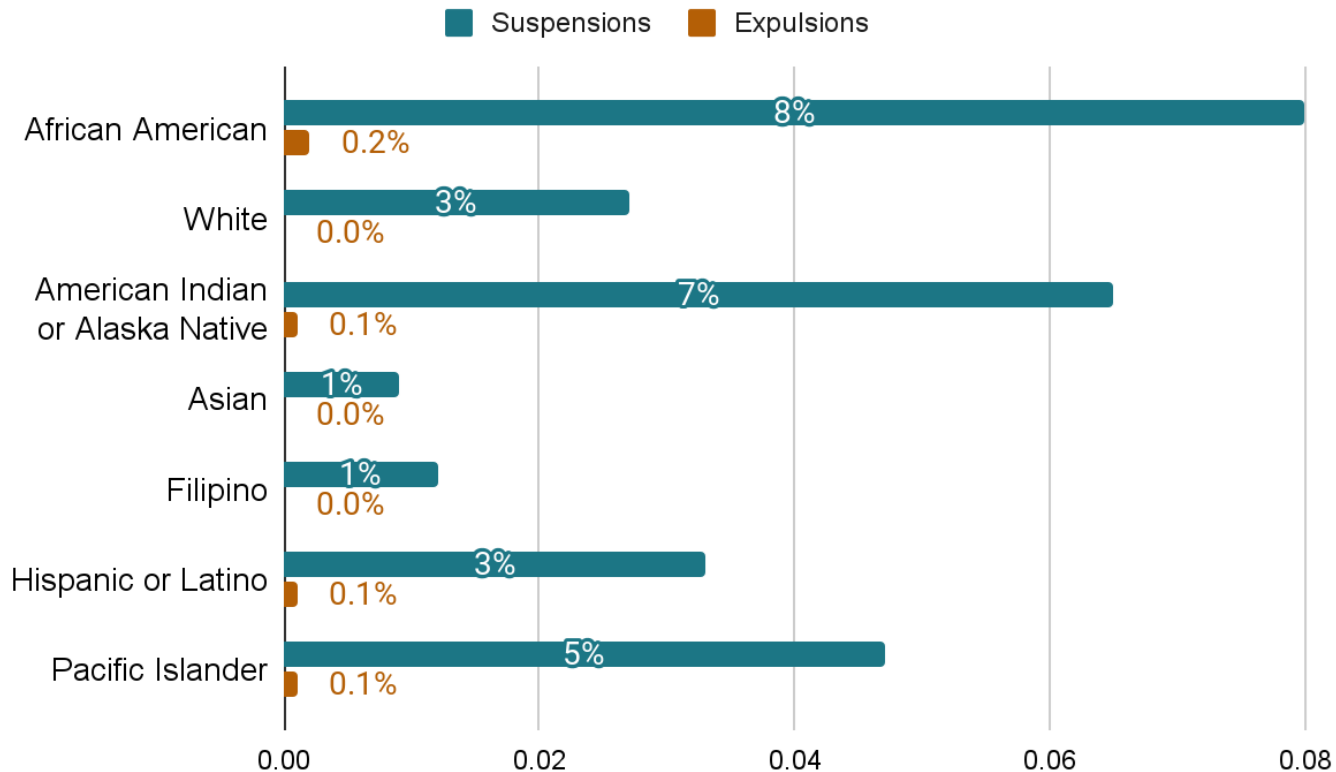
Do you know the chronic absence rate for Black/African American students in your community?

Western States

Racial Disparities of Chronic Absence in 2021–22



Black Students are Suspended/Expelled at Higher Rates



Truancy Versus Chronic Absence

Truancy

- ▲ Counts **ONLY** unexcused absences
- ▲ Emphasizes individual compliance with school rules
- ▲ Uses legal—typically more blaming and punitive solutions



Chronic Absence

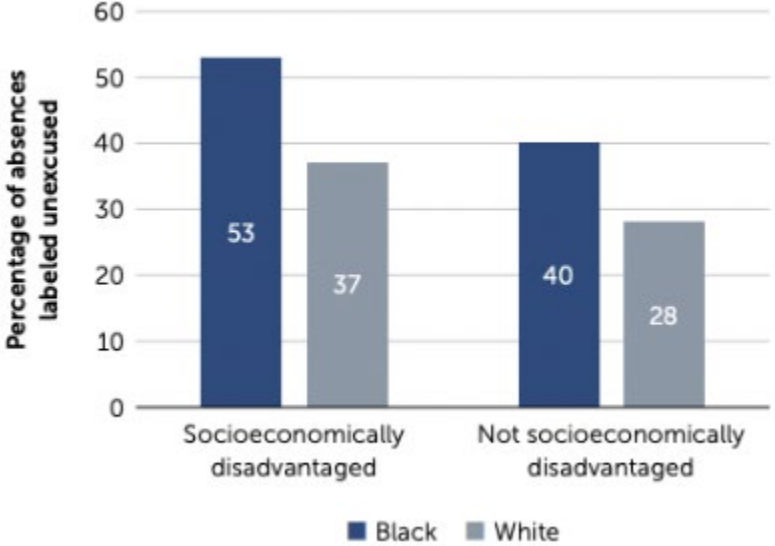
- Counts **ALL** absences (*excused, unexcused, and suspensions*)
- Emphasizes impact of missed days and benefits of being present
- Uses preventative, problem-solving, trauma-sensitive strategies
- Cultivates family and student engagement

<https://www.attendanceworks.org/whats-the-difference-between-chronic-absence-and-truancy/>

How the “Unexcused” Label Can Affect the Response

Response to “Excused”	Response to “Unexcused”
✓ Help with homework	✗ Denial of help or no credit for homework
✓ Make-up exams	✗ No make-up exams
✓ Home tutoring provided	✗ Denial of class credit
	✗ Removal from extracurricular activities
	✗ Send notices of truancy
	<i>* If unexcused absences accumulate despite earlier outreach from schools and districts, courts can do the following:</i>
	✗ Fine students and caregivers
	✗ Require community service program or parenting program
	✗ Charge caregivers with a misdemeanor

Unexcused absences are much higher among socioeconomically disadvantaged students and also from communities of color.



Percent of all student unexcused absences in regular K-12 California schools, by year and student socioeconomic disadvantage.

Large disparities in unexcused absenteeism persisted within each socioeconomic stratum in SY 2021-22 for **Black**, Pacific Islander, American Indian, and Hispanic students compared to White students.

McNeely, C., Chang, H., & Gee, K. (2023, March). *Disparities in Unexcused Absences Across California Schools*. [Report]. Policy Analysis for California Education



Barriers to Attendance

Type in Chat

What barriers are making attendance and engagement challenging for Black/African American students?

We must tailor our approaches to address underlying challenges

Barriers	Aversion	Disengagement	Misconceptions
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Chronic and acute illness• Family responsibilities or home situation• Trauma• Poor transportation• Housing and food insecurity• Inequitable access to needed services• System involvement• Lack of predictable schedules for learning• Lack of access to technology• Community violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Struggling academically and/or behaviorally• Unwelcoming school climate• Social and peer challenges• Anxiety• Biased disciplinary and suspension practices• Undiagnosed disability and/or disability accommodations• Caregivers had negative educational experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lack of challenging, culturally responsive instruction• Bored• No meaningful relationships with the adults in the school (especially given staff shortages)• Lack of enrichment opportunities• Lack of academic and behavioral support• Failure to earn credits• Student needs to work, earning money conflicts with being in high school	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Absences are only a problem if they are unexcused• Missing 2 days per month doesn't affect learning• School loses track and underestimates the TOTAL absences• Assume students must stay home for any symptom of illness• Attendance only matters in the older grades• Suspensions don't count as an absence

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

www.attendanceworks.org



Welcome!



Lavert Robertson
Director of Secondary Schools
Reynolds School District



Marcus L. Strother
President & CEO
Mentor California



James Fidler
Assistant Principal
Animo City of Champions
Green Dot Public Schools



Dr. Rose Owens -West
Equity Project Director
WestEd

Tell us about your district demographics.

**What are the biggest barriers to attendance
for Black/African American students?**



Reynolds School District, Oregon



Students we serve

- 44% Hispanic
- 28% White
- **10% Black/African American**
- 7% Asian
- 7% Multiracial
- 3% Pacific Islander
- 1% American Indian/Alaskan Native

Spoken Languages: 90

- English language learners: 46%
- Students receiving SPED services: 16%
- 16 of 16 schools: 100% Free/Reduced-Priced Meals

Barriers to Attendance



- Disengagement from school
- Unmet basic needs
- High mobility or housing instability
- Emotional trauma, depression, anxiety
- Safety concerns, bullying
- Caring for another family member
- Misconceptions about the impact of absences
- No one for students to identify with

Tell us about your school demographics.

**What are the biggest barriers to attendance
for Black/African American students?**





Using Data and Relationships to Reduce Chronic Absenteeism

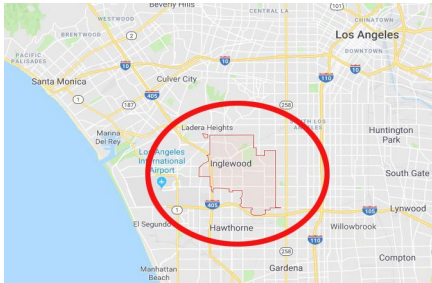
Lessons Learned From Animo City of Champions Charter High School

We are proud to serve students and families in the Inglewood community.

43.9%
Black/
African
American

51.2%
Latine

15%
Emergent
Bilinguals



22.3%
Students
With
Disabilities

57.5%
Free and
Reduced-
Price
Lunch



What strategies to improve attendance and engagement of Black/African American students have been the most successful in your school?



Our Work to Reduce Chronic Absence Operates in a Larger Organizational Context and Strategy

1 Anti-Racism and Anti-Bias

2 Strengthening Relationships and Cultivating Joy

3 MTSS, including HOW we use data strategically for intervention



Data Points That Anchor Our Reflection and Decision Making



Chronic Absenteeism Data

WHAT ARE OUR RATES?

HOW IS THE DATA
SIMILAR/DIFFERENT FOR
BLACK/AFRICAN AMERICAN
STUDENTS?




Student Attendance Survey Data

WHAT ARE THE REASONS WHY STUDENTS MISS SCHOOL? WHAT WOULD MAKE THEM WANT TO COME TO SCHOOL MORE?

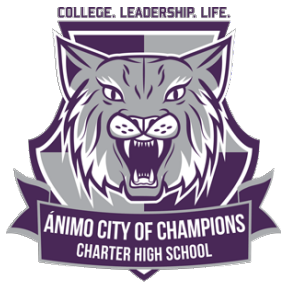


Universal SEL Screener Data

HOW ARE STUDENTS EXPERIENCING SCHOOL? HOW IS THE DATA SIMILAR/DIFFERENT FOR BLACK/AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS?



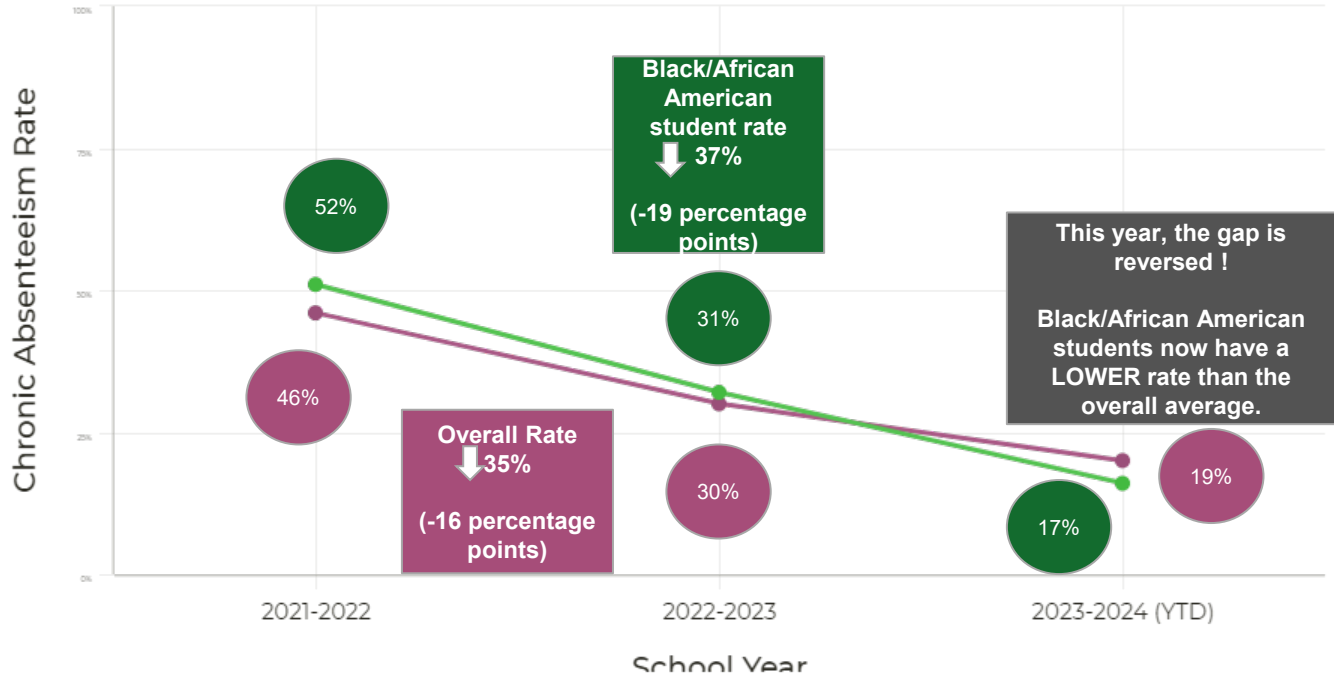
With every data point we asked, *“How are our Black/African American students being impacted?”*



Green Dot Public schools

Post-Pandemic Chronic Absenteeism Rates (Animo City of Champions)

- All Students
- African American Students



Organization-Wide Universal Supports Leveraged

Having the right data

- ❑ Develop a data report that puts chronic absenteeism (for the system and each school) data in your hands every day.
- ❑ Make sure it updates daily and allows for you to cut the data in ways that make sense for your system.

Implementing an “early warning indicator” routine for data analysis

- ❑ Build a cadence and routine with your team for analyzing the data and responding to it.
- ❑ Develop accountability for follow-up.
- ❑ Celebrate wins, no matter how big or small.

Implementing a universal SEL screener

- ❑ Get routine feedback from students on their experience 3x/year.
- ❑ Analyze that data and make changes.

School Specific Strategies That Worked For Us

Assemble and invest in a team

- ❑ Assemble a cross-functional team that will progress monitor and action plan off of the data.
- ❑ Set a meeting time when you will least likely to be disrupted by other school business.

Conduct rigorous follow-up

- ❑ Develop a routine for documentation, follow up, and accountability.
- ❑ Celebrate wins and continue striving for improvements.
- ❑ Invest and coordinate support and services with families.

Provide a “warm welcome” when students return to school

- ❑ Know who was absent yesterday and welcome them back when they return.
- ❑ Use phrases like “Welcome back.” and “We missed you.”

Triangulate attendance data with other data sources

- ❑ Use SEL data and academic data to uncover root causes.
- ❑ Action plan for how to attend to root causes.
- ❑ Progress monitor if efforts are leading to improvement.

What strategies to improve attendance and engagement of Black/African American students have been the most successful in your school?



Effective Strategies

Empathy Interviews

Dignity and
Respect

Relationships

Meaningful
Involvement

Culturally Specific
Community
Resources

Mentorship

Monitoring
Attendance Data

Purposeful Family
Engagement

What mentoring models have proven most effective in working with Black/African American students?



**“A person that feels
appreciated will
always do more than
expected!”**

Marcus L. Strother

President & CEO of MENTOR California



The Million Dollar Question...

What does your school look like if all structures, policies, and daily interactions have the goal of fostering or strengthening supportive relationships for **all** of the students in your communities?

MENTOR's Vision for Schools



All youth have access to a web of support from caring adults and peers across educational settings—before school, in-school, and after-school environments—and can form empowering relationships which

- promote their pursuit of their passions, skills, and interests;
- enable their access to and exploration of spaces where these can be pursued;
- help them overcome personal and/or institutional obstacles; and
- build their social capital and networks.

Promising Models of Success in Mentoring

- Fresno Unified School District—Peer Mentoring Model
- Sacramento County Office of Education—Peer Mentoring and Group Mentoring Models
- Relationship-Centered School Initiatives—lean into different promising practices of supporting, building, and implementing new mentoring programs. These practices include mentoring landscape analyses, youth and adult design labs, evaluations, and assessments of current community-based organizations and relationship mapping.

What is Relationship-Focused Asset Mapping?

A tool that relies on a core belief that every community has relationship assets and strengths that can support students in developing a web of support. They specifically include the following:

- **Existing relationship-centered programming in a school or available via the district**
- **Local mentoring programs (either currently leveraged or not)**
- **Community assets**
 - Parents, residents, faith-based organizations, local businesses, community centers, libraries, and youth development organizations
- **Interviews/storytelling**
 - There is school staff memory, community memory, and programming fatigue that would be important to elevate and understand. **What has happened in the past? What has been tried?** We would ask to speak to key people to get as many perspectives as possible.

What is important in terms of strategies and changes in practice that support Black/African American students and their families to show up at school?





Improving Practice to Support Black/African American Students' School Attendance

Improving practice requires some UN-doing:

1. Confront and dismantle the long-term acceptance of, and apathy about, the negative academic outcomes for Black/African American students.
2. Eradicate widespread ignorance about the perspectives and day-to-day lived experiences of Black/African American students and their families in the school setting.
3. Dismantle policies, programs, procedures, and practices that contribute to poor outcomes for Black/African American students.



Improving Practice to Support Black/African American Students' School Attendance (continued)

Improving practice requires committed intention to extensively transform schools and classrooms:

- Learn to understand the perspectives and experiences of Black/African American students: regularly observe, listen, and analyze qualitative data.
- Purposefully pursue students for participation and success in rigorous academic courses and programs and extracurricular offerings.



Resourcing and Sustaining Transformation

Intentionally re-thinking how funds are used to support Black/African American students, and all other students, is necessary for transformation.

Districts and schools have ample federal, state, philanthropic, and in some cases, local funds to support Black/African American students' academic and extracurricular successes.



Resourcing and Sustaining Transformation (continued)

Intentionally re-thinking these additional resources is also necessary for resourcing and sustaining the transformation.

- Human resources (*all staff and students*)
- Equipment, materials, and supplies for academic and extracurricular activities
- Instructional and non-instructional programs and services
- Community partnerships
- Time



Resources & Tools

- [Mentoring Boys and Young Men of Color in Schools](#)
- [Becoming a Better Mentor Guidebook](#)
- [Relationship-Centered Schools Initiative](#)



Questions?

Please type your
questions in the chat.



Maria Casey, Associate Director of Staff Development
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Thank you!

Please complete our [evaluation form](#).

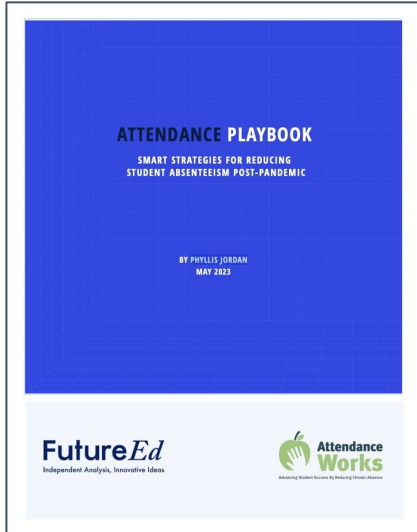
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WestEd is a nonpartisan, nonprofit agency that conducts and applies research, develops evidence-based solutions, and provides services and resources in the realms of education, human development, and related fields, with the end goal of improving outcomes and ensuring equity for individuals from infancy through adulthood. For more information, visit [WestEd.org](https://www.wested.org).

The contents of this presentation were developed under a grant from the Department of Education. However, the contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal government.



Interventions that can be found in the Attendance Playbook



TIER I: Foundational Support and Schoolwide Prevention

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

TIER II: Targeted Support

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

TIER III: Intensive Support

- Interagency Case Management
- Housing Insecurity
- Truancy

Attendance Playbook <https://www.futureed.org/attendanceplaybook/>

Implementation Guide <https://www.attendanceworks.org/resources/attendanceplaybook/>