



Ohio Attendance Taskforce

Recommendations Report



October 2023



The Ohio Attendance Taskforce recommendations represent what we as Ohioans can and should do to support our students locally and across the state to help them get to school so they can learn, grow and thrive.

The recommendations in this report were developed by the **Ohio Attendance Taskforce members** - a group of current superintendents and building principals (representing traditional districts, community schools, career and technical education, educational service centers, and state support teams), business and foundation leaders, members of the Ohio juvenile court system and experts in attendance and engagement – **dedicated to improving attendance across Ohio.**

Taskforce members' experience working in and supporting schools and districts, combined with data, research and dialogue informed these recommendations. The voices of Ohio students and families coupled with [Ohio's Attendance Guide](#) and [Developing an Effective School Attendance Program](#) served as touchpoints. The Taskforce was facilitated by Education First, with support from the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce and technical assistance from Attendance Works.

Attendance is a national issue. **In Ohio, we have a crisis on our hands** that began well before – but was exacerbated by – the pandemic. Increasing attendance and decreasing chronic absenteeism is necessary for every school and district in our state. **Every school has work to do, because every single Ohio student matters. But schools can't do this alone.**

Ohio is committed to improving student attendance and decreasing chronic absenteeism.

Now is the time for all of us to work as a team to make that happen.

Join us!



The Ohio Attendance Taskforce included education leaders and supporters from across the state

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Background and context: The attendance challenge in Ohio

Attendance matters: It is a key lever for academic success

Students who have never been chronically absent are:



9 times more likely to graduate from high school on time



6.7 times more likely to read on grade level by the end of third grade

Source: [Stay in the Game!](#)

Chronic absenteeism was a growing issue before COVID-19, but the pandemic exacerbated the crisis

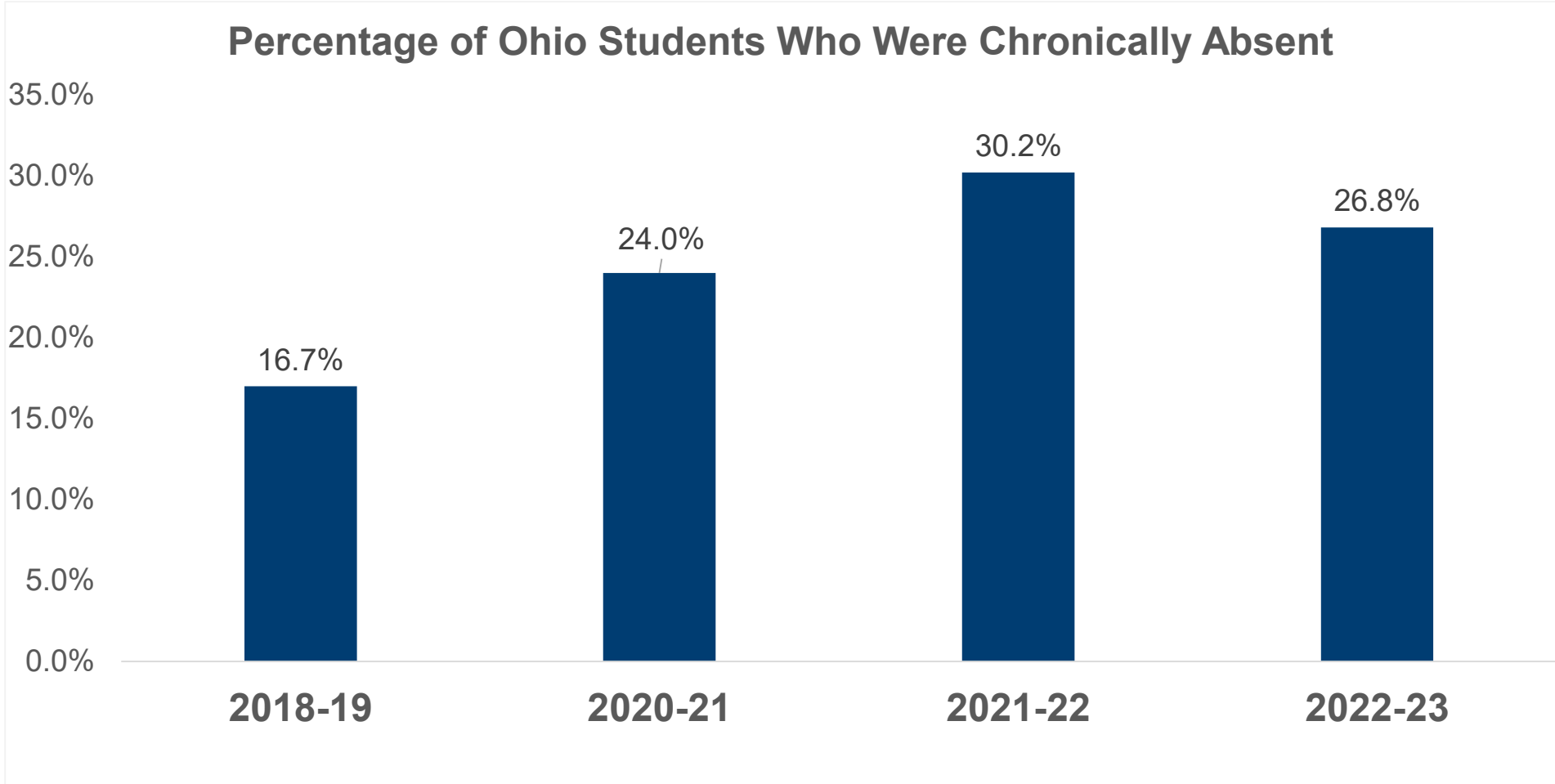
Students and families saw that schools could look different than the traditional model, and learning could be accomplished outside of the traditional school day, making it difficult to convince some of the importance of attendance.

"During the pandemic things shifted: we told kids to stay home if they didn't feel well. But that time is over. **We are trying to shift back to 'the sniffles are the sniffles.'** You can come to school, especially if you wear a mask."
– Superintendent

"When we returned to school after Covid, a third-grader said, **'I liked it when I could decide if I wanted to get out of bed or not.'**" I'm not surprised when I hear this from middle schoolers. [It's a] mental attitude, we had to shut down, school was very off and on...**Attitudes [about attendance] for kids and families changed a bit.**
– Superintendent

Source: [Where Are the Students? - The New York Times \(nytimes.com\)](https://www.nytimes.com)

Attendance is a crisis in Ohio. While the number of chronically absent students declined slightly last school year, there is much more urgent work to do



Chronic absenteeism =
missing 10% of school hours
for any reason

Sources: Ohio Department of Education; [Ohio Report Card School & District Results 2022-2023](#); [Chronic absenteeism rising in local schools, across Ohio \(daytondailynews.com\)](#)



The Ohio Attendance Taskforce was assembled to address chronic absenteeism and achieve the following objectives

Create a sense of urgency and call to action for districts to implement effective prevention and early intervention strategies to improve attendance and decrease chronic absenteeism

Promote a mindset shift from House Bill 410 of the 131st General Assembly compliance to prevention and early intervention

Encourage districts to leverage and utilize state attendance resources, including Graduation Alliance – Engage Ohio, the *Stay in the Game!* Attendance Network Campaign Playbook and prevention and early intervention supports, the Attendance Works attendance diagnostic and Regional Data Leads

Provide feedback and input on attendance guidance and tools developed by the Ohio Department of Education and partners

Identify barriers, solutions and best practices for implementing prevention and early intervention attendance strategies to be included in guidance documents

Timeline

June:

Subcommittee meetings to develop recommendations

July:

Subcommittee meetings to develop recommendations

August:

Subcommittee meetings to develop recommendations

May:

In-person meeting:
Kickoff

June 28:

In-person meeting:
Mindset Shift and Launch
Subcommittees

August 8:

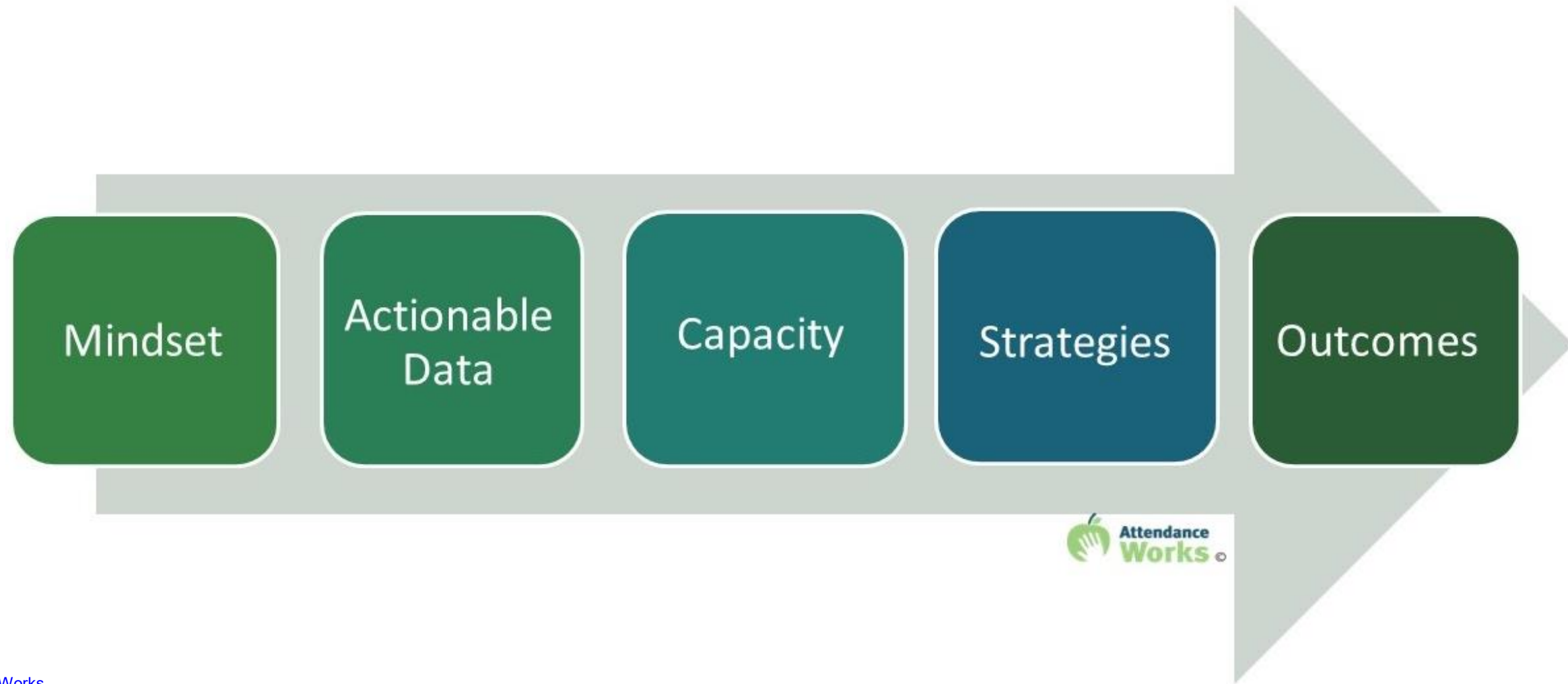
In-person meeting:
Addressing Multiple Levels
of Support

September 5:

In-person meeting:
Discuss
Recommendations

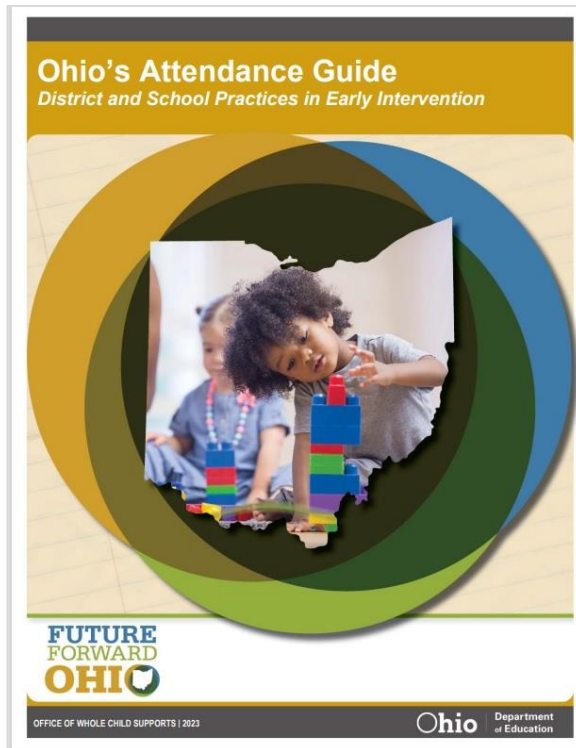
October 27: Ohio Attendance Event

The Taskforce's work was informed by Attendance Works' Effective Practice Pathway



Source: [Home - Attendance Works](#)

Foundational documents



The guide, developed for districts and schools, includes:

- Common terms and definitions
- Ohio laws, policies and data
- Best practices for district-level change
- Best practices for school-level change
- Tools and resources



The toolkit provides resources for Ohio juvenile courts and local school districts to:

- Develop an effective school attendance program to better engage with students and families
- Identify barriers
- Prevent youth from entering the juvenile justice system because of their failure to attend school

Sources: <https://education.ohio.gov/getattachment/Topics/Student-Supports/Attendance-Support/Ohio-s-Attendance-Guide.pdf.aspx?lang=en-US>;
<https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/docs/JCS/courtSvcs/resources/schoolAttendanceToolkit.pdf>

The Taskforce engaged in a three-step process to develop comprehensive recommendations

Full Group Discussions and Learning

- **Examined statewide and local data trends** on attendance and chronic absenteeism
- **Learned from presentations and experiences** of Taskforce members and state and national experts
- **Participated in open, honest discussions, shared best practices**
- **Identified priority challenges** to explore more deeply

Small Working Groups

Using a design brief and **human-centered design process**, **Small Groups**:

- **Identified necessary data, research and expert support** (including talking with people most proximate to the problem including students, parents, families, educators, etc.)
- **Identified problem statements**
- **Formulated potential solutions, then specific recommendations.**
- **Received support** from the Department of Education and some of its trusted partners

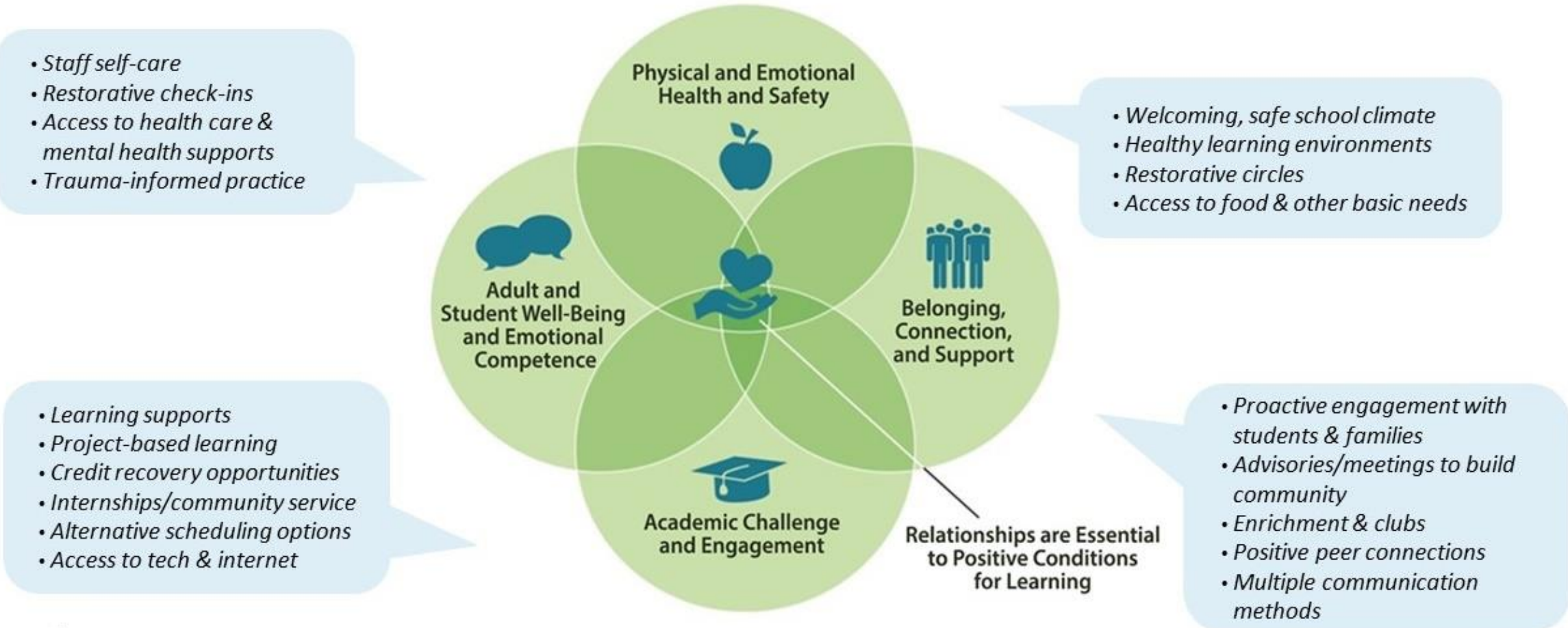
Recommendations Development

Staff **synthesized the recommendations for Taskforce members' review and comment.** At the final Taskforce meeting and over email, members:

- **Discussed and prioritized recommendations and discussed framing**
- **Shaped the penultimate draft and reviewed content** to ensure the document reflected the content, tone and intent of the Taskforce

**Attendance in Ohio today:
Combining research, best practice
and the voices of educators,
students and families**

Students are more likely to be engaged and attend school regularly when positive conditions for learning are present



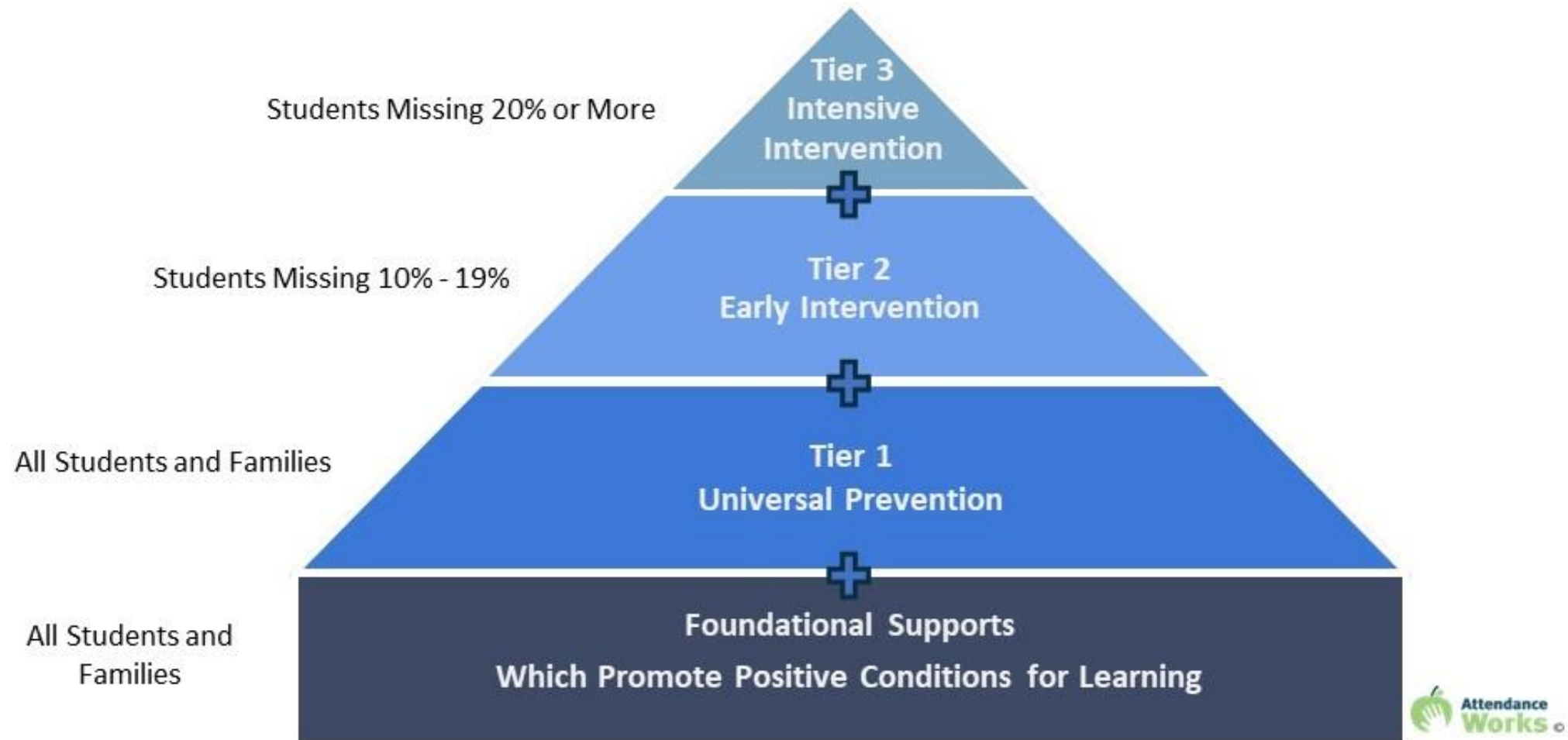
www.attendanceworks.org

Source: [Home - Attendance Works](#)

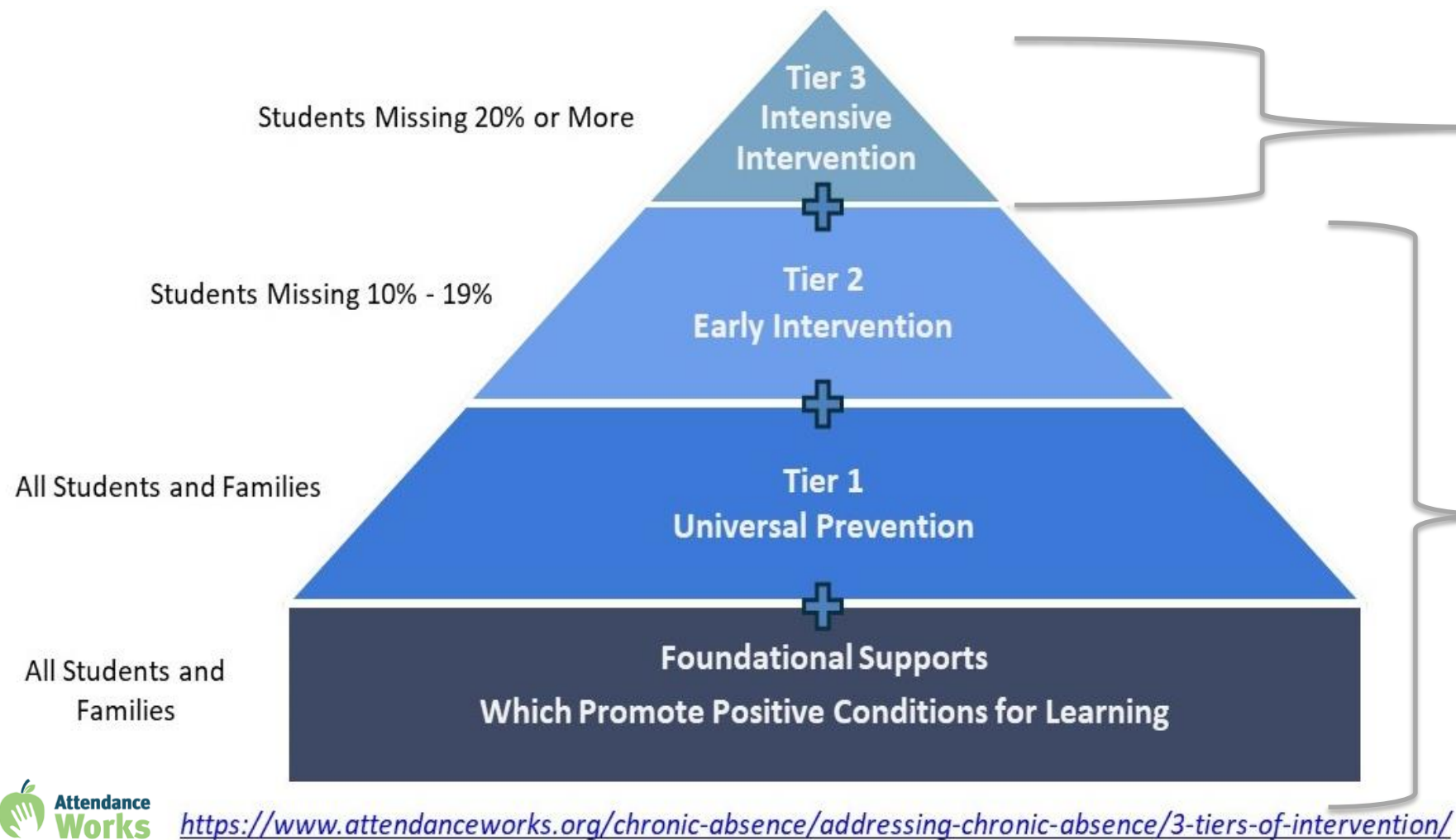


Multi-Tiered System of Support

Multi-Tiered System of Support for Attendance



HB410 requires significant resources dedicated to compliance



HB 410 sets a prescriptive, legalistic and **reactive response** to students missing school, requiring significant resources

Need to shift
some
resources to

Prevention and early intervention as a proactive and positive approach to attendance reach students at the Foundational, Tier 1 and Tier 2 levels before they become chronically absent



Educators, families and students shared their thoughts on engagement and improving attendance

“Teachers need to make a strong effort to connect. It helps us notice that we would be missed or knowing it matters if we’re not there.” – *Student*

“The issue across the board is the mindset of how important attendance is. We have expectations because our employers have those. To complete pathways, you need 90% attendance and to be drug-free. But we still see attendance issues.” – *Educator*

“Families often receive a letter that threatens truancy charges before a team approach to problem-solve is taken or a root cause is discovered. This puts families and schools against each other right out of the gate.” – *Parent*

“Our school gives us a 10-minute mental break every day. Sometimes there are games all the classrooms do at the same time and sometimes we just get to chill. **It really helps with my stress during the day.**” – *Student*

“[Attendance is] the responsibility of the community: parents, administration, school nurses, teachers, community organizations, health care organizations. The only answer is that **this is a collective response.** It’s too much of a burden to put on one.” – *Business Leader*

“School spirit is important. **When schools do fun things, it increases community and my desire to connect to the school.**” – *Student*

While Ohio's HB 410 has had a positive impact by creating a call to action for districts...

What is working well with HB 410 implementation?

- The law forces districts to look at attendance data they may not have looked at before
- It provides a standardized process and framework for districts to identify root causes of absenteeism

“Prior to HB 410, as a truancy officer, I would get referrals constantly for families who had never talked to the school. 410 helped to eliminate that — by the time they got to me, there had already been robust conversations with the school.”

- *Charter Network Leader*

“Our staff is getting more into the root causes of absenteeism. [HB 410] gave us a more systematic and standardized process.”

- *Superintendent*

...Districts have also experienced challenges implementing the law

What are the implementation challenges?

- There is a focus on compliance vs. prevention and intervention strategies that is overly resource intense
- The law prescribes both *what* and *how* districts should communicate with families, preventing districts from efficiently using more effective methods they have identified
- The decriminalization of truancy has resulted in districts and schools spending time and effort to locate truant students with no ability to enforce consequences

“With HB 410 if we are honest, a lot of it is compliance...behind the scenes, the reality is that things are just task-oriented.”
- *Superintendent*

“There are no consequences—we use a lot of resources locating students but then nothing ever happens. We need a resolution.”
- *Director of Attendance*

What does a positive approach to bolstering understanding and increasing attendance look like?

Some districts are already flipping the script on attendance and getting results



Tier 3 Student Attendance Support Specialists

- 15 staff serving 30-45 schools' Tier 2-3 students**
- Students are referred: Case managed Tier 2-3 students implement HB410 Plans
 - Provide intentional strategies and interventions to identify barriers, monitor progress and support consistent school attendance.
 - Responsible for addressing attendance concerns that may impact a student's academic success.

Tier 1 & Tier 2 EveryDay Labs

- Text Nudges every 2 weeks - Only a 4% opt-out rate
- Mail Nudges every 6 weeks - Restorative language
- Family Support Team - Live family and text support
 - **55% improved attendance**
 - **14% chronic to non-chronic**

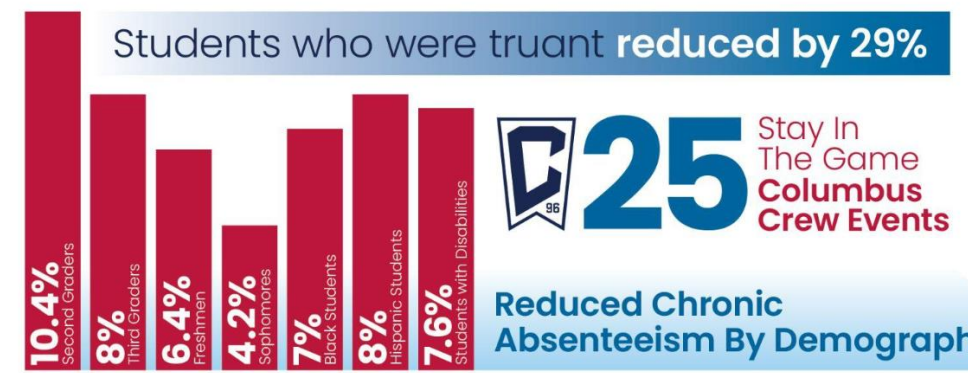
Tier 1 Stay in the Game! Attendance Partnership

- Updating district website and school pages
- Extensive internal and external mass messaging to all stakeholders
- Personalized communication crafted for specific audiences
- Engagement activities and incentives
 - September- Attendance Awareness Month
 - Pop-up Attendance Engagement -Selected Schools
 - Attendance Week

ATTENDANCE SY22-23 RESULTS

6 All Regions Improved Attendance **7,585** Students who have Satisfactory Attendance
19,470 Students who have Good Attendance

95%
Of CCS Schools Improved Their Chronic Absenteeism Rate

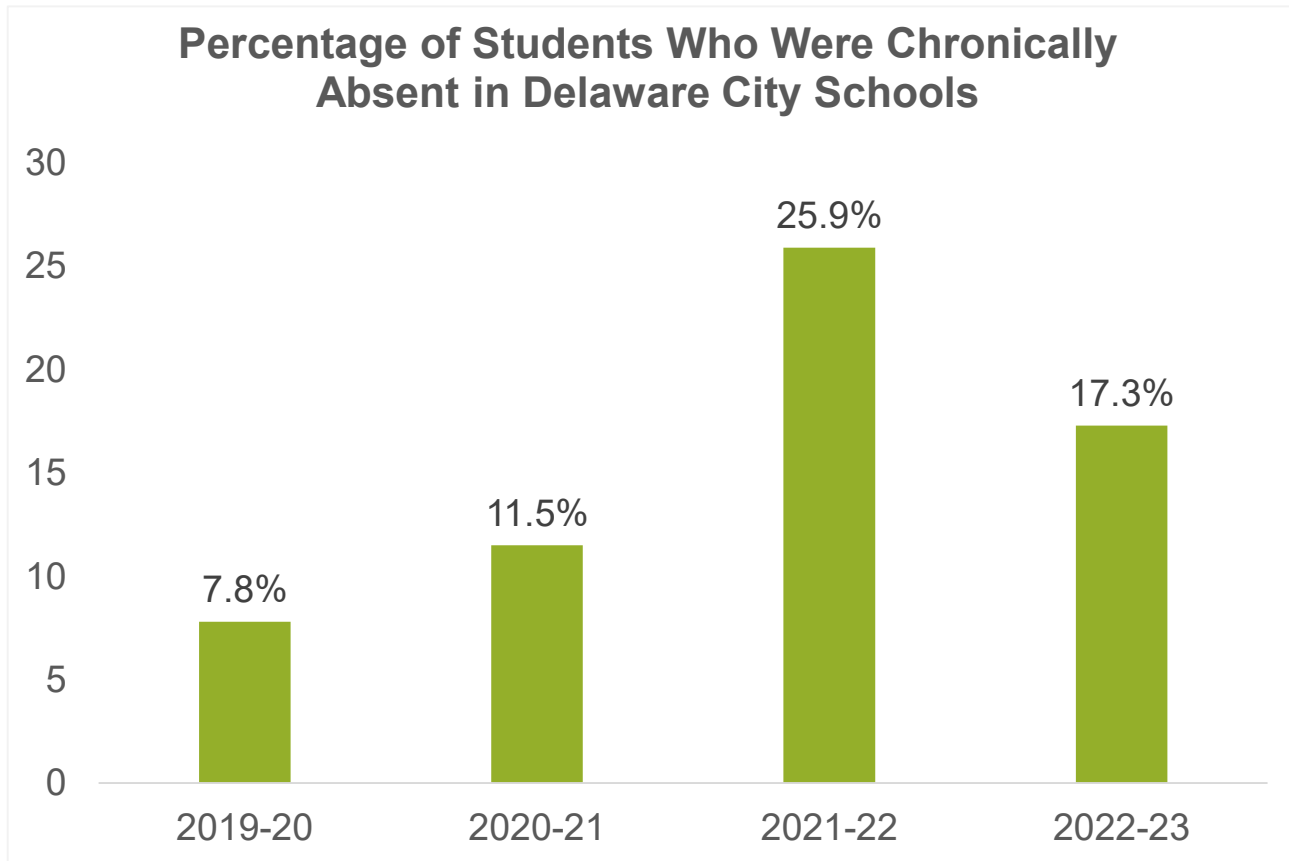


Reduced Chronic Absenteeism
7.2%

Source: Columbus City Schools presentation to the Attendance Taskforce



Chronic absenteeism in Delaware City Schools decreased by 8.6% from 2021-2022 to 2022-2023



Source: Ohio Department of Education

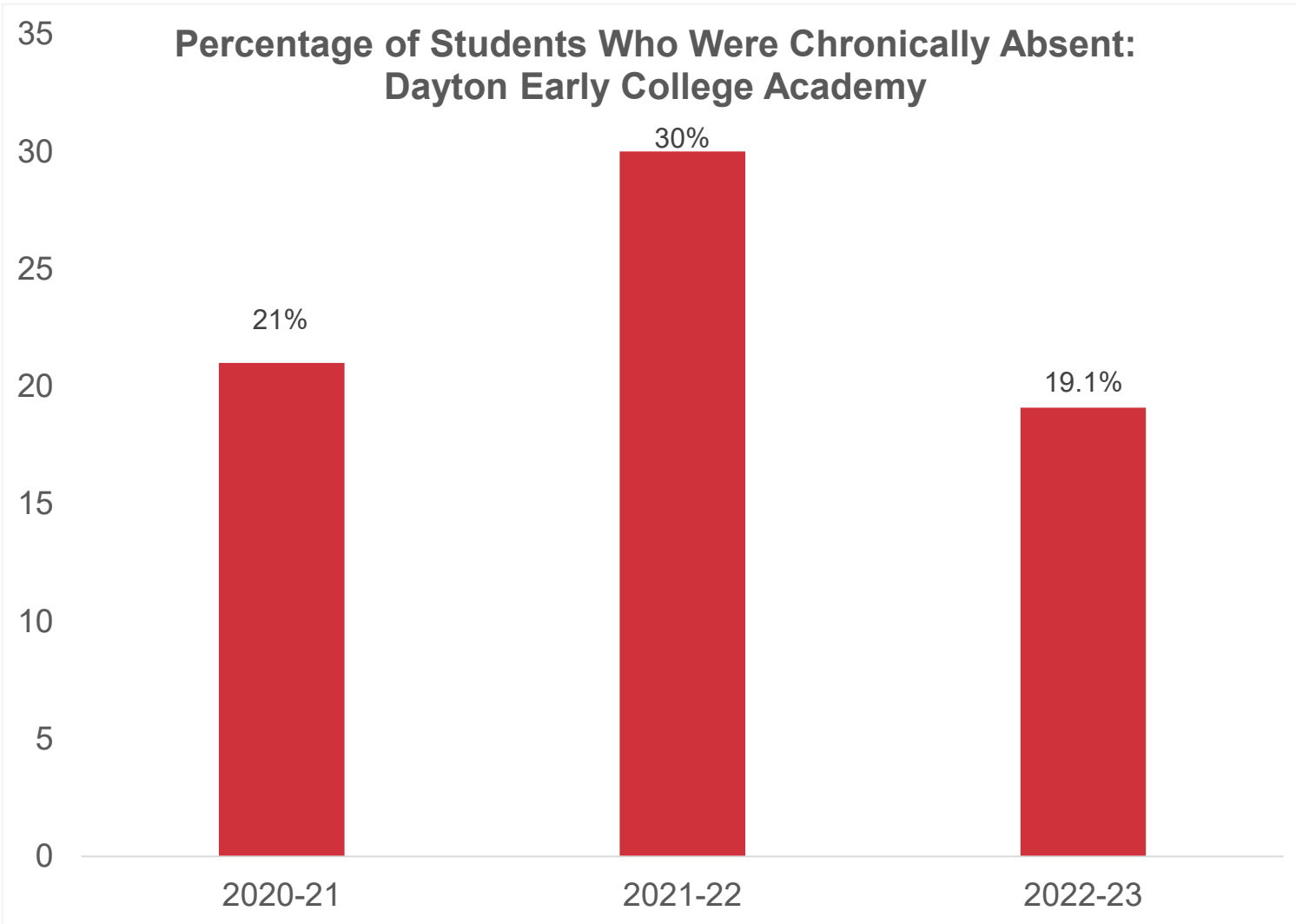
Tiers 2 & 3

- [Assessment Center](#), accessible outside of school hours
- School staff reaching out using a tiered approach, start at building level and increase supports from district as needed
- Good relationship with juvenile court liaisons
- All virtual meetings for attendance plans

Tier 1

- Help everyone understand that hours missed is important, not just days
- Elementary had HS athletic teams greet students each month
- Intervene before students reach thresholds
- Community supports – United Way, food pantry
- Everyone knows it's a team effort
- Send buses out to students who missed them

Dayton Early College Academy is focusing on positive relationships between staff and students

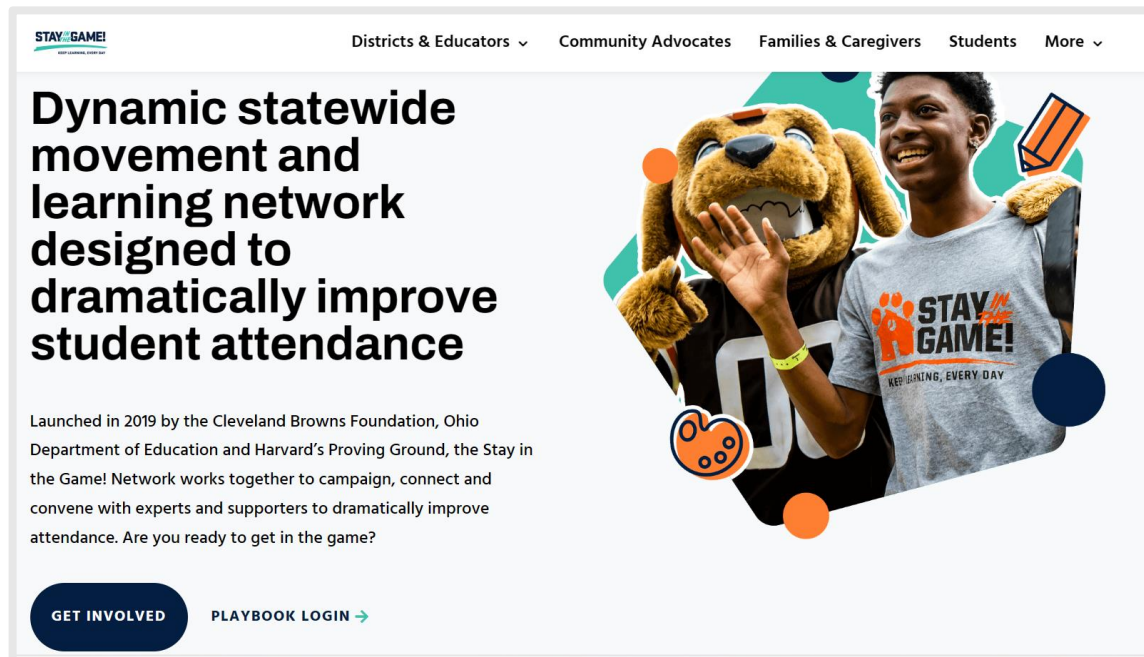


Source: Ohio Department of Education

Tiers 2 & 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual counseling provided through community partners • Interview students/families to determine barriers • Mentoring • Buddy system • Teachers go on home visits to meet parents • Check-in/Check-out
Tier 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New positive events for families (Grandparents Day, Winter Concert series) • Positive postcards sent home • Dayton Children’s Hospital and ADAMH board partnerships • Check-ins with advisors • Intentional relationship building with families • Communicate attendance issues with the community – even excused absences can be a problem • Educate families on impact of missed instruction • Host school spirit days • Community partnership with City Connects, which has a coordinator who works with teachers and support staff to tier every student in the building, plans enrichment and intermediate intervention, and brings in resources from the community



The *Stay in the Game!* Attendance Network helps some districts get results through use of data, goal setting and localized attendance campaigns



Source: [Stay in the Game!](#)

- In the 2022-2023 school year, Ohio saw a 3.4% decrease in chronic absenteeism. **The *Stay in the Game!* Attendance Network overall experienced a 5.2% decrease in chronic absenteeism with 70% of its districts decreasing their chronic absentee rates**
- **7 of the 17 *Stay in the Game!* Attendance Network school districts (41%) significantly outperformed the state, lowering chronic absenteeism between 8.5-10.9%:**
 - Ohio: -3.4%
 - Stay in the Game!: -5.2%
- Overall, ***Stay in the Game!* Attendance Network districts also saw categorical shifts** — from the “severe,” “moderate” and “at-risk” categories toward the “satisfactory” category — **indicating a positive overall trajectory for attendance**

Ohio Attendance Taskforce Message and Recommendations

Attendance matters for every single student in Ohio

We have a crisis on our hands – a crisis of attendance that is impacting student learning.

Great schools are part of the answer, but they can't be expected to solve this alone.

ALL of us, working together as a TEAM, will help our students attend and succeed.

**Ohio is committed to improving attendance.
Now is the time to integrate it in everything we do.**

Attendance matters for learning today and thriving for a lifetime

Attendance matters for every single student in our state

- All learning time matters. When students attend school regularly, they are also **6.7 times more likely to read on grade level** by third grade and **9 times more likely to graduate high school on time**.
- Given the **need for accelerating learning in literacy and math** and time away from in-person learning due to the pandemic, attendance is more important than ever.
- Being at school also **provides students** social interaction with friends, physical and mental health support, nutritious meals and exposure to potential careers and activities that keep them engaged like sports, band, the arts and clubs.
- School **sets students up for future success** as individuals, community members and Ohioans.

We have a crisis on our hands

- **In 2019, 16% of Ohio students were chronically absent** – meaning they missed 18 or more days of school each year.
- The number of Ohio students who were **chronically absent soared to 30%** during the pandemic and isn't coming down quickly enough.
- **Across the country, 29.7% of students** are chronically absent – *6.5 million more than pre-pandemic*.
- **Students and families are out of the habit** of attending school regularly and **may not see the full value of attendance and the impact** it has on long-term learning.

Source: <https://www.attendanceworks.org/rising-tide-of-chronic-absence-challenges-schools/>

Districts and schools need our support

Great schools are part of the answer

- It is the main responsibility of districts and schools to **create engaging, interesting and academically challenging learning environments** that keep students wanting to come to school.
- Districts and schools **must make a direct connection between school, learning and future careers** to make the daily experience relevant in a world where knowledge is as close as the nearest electronic device.
- So, helping students embrace what school offers them – and how it can be the difference between choosing their life's work or not being ready – is a **critical piece of the attendance puzzle**.
- **But schools can't be expected to solve this alone.**

ALL of us working together as a TEAM will help our students attend and succeed

- **What we've traditionally done simply isn't working.**
- **Time to shift our mindsets to work on prevention, early intervention** and chronic absenteeism; not just compliance with the law and focusing on truancy.
- **This team needs to be inclusive:** schools and families, teachers and students, businesses and civic organizations, educational service centers and Ohio Association of Court Judges/Ohio Judicial Conference, health and mental health providers, sports teams and so many more.
- **We all have a role to play**, and when we each do what we can do best and collaborate to support students, they are the ones who win.

Ohio is committed to shifting mindsets, behavior and policy to solve the attendance crisis

Ohio is committed to improving attendance. Now is the time to integrate it in everything we do

- We must deepen and integrate attendance work in **everything we do**; into the daily efforts of the state, districts and schools and with our community, agency and business partners.
- *Ohio's Attendance Guidance and Developing an Effective School Attendance Program* from the Supreme Court of Ohio are the foundation. **Resources** from Ohio Statewide Family Engagement Center, Attendance Works, *Stay in the Game!* Attendance Network, individual districts and others **can be harnessed for statewide use**.
- As we **identify what is working**, we can lift up these examples for others to learn from and adapt for their schools and local communities.

Schools and districts know how policy can more effectively support what they need and want to do

- In 2017, **House Bill 410** helped districts, schools, families and the courts work together on chronic absenteeism.
- Thoughtful refinement of the laws involving attendance can support the intent of the laws and **allow schools to adopt the interventions they know will work in their local context**.
- Policy change can allow for **more effective communication with families** to support increasing attendance and decreasing absenteeism and continue a **statewide mindset shift toward prevention and early intervention**. With prevention and early intervention, fewer students and families will need more serious intervention.

If we are successful in solving the attendance crisis...

Hundreds of thousands of Ohio young people will:

- Attend school regularly
- Acquire the knowledge and skills to become proficient readers
- Graduate high school on time
- Successfully participate in training, education and careers
- Have the skills to support their families in growing employment sectors
- Contribute to the economic vitality of our state

Ohio will become the best state to learn, grow and thrive.

The Taskforce recommends five big ideas to boost attendance and lower chronic absenteeism

1

Attendance is a Team Sport

Working together, build awareness and galvanize statewide support for role of attendance to student success in academics, careers and life

2

Strengthen the Team

Foster engagement, build trust and belonging, and address local challenges with students, families and educators

3

Create a Rewarding and Relevant Team Experience

Cultivate engaging and relevant learning environments so students want to attend at all Ohio schools

4

Support the Players and Coaches

Adjust systems and resources to support schools and districts in their attendance work

5

Adjust the Playbook

Work with policymakers to inform comprehensive policy changes to support student attendance

Recommendations at a glance

Attendance is a Team Sport	Strengthen the Team	Create a Rewarding and Relevant Team Experience	Support the Players and Coaches	Adjust the Playbook
<p>1A. Expand the <i>Stay in the Game!</i> Attendance Network to a comprehensive statewide messaging campaign for every district to be able to join and leverage.</p> <p>1B. Build partnerships to support local attendance efforts. Attendance is a team sport, worthy of being community-owned and a state priority.</p>	<p>2A. Position families as respected allies in student attendance and learning.</p> <p>2B. Create opportunities for students to add their voice and meaningfully participate at the district and school levels to identify challenges and contribute to solution building.</p> <p>2C. Communicate proactively and regularly about what is happening in schools and districts and how it connects to local challenges and strengths.</p>	<p>3. Cultivate engaging and relevant learning environments so students want to attend at all Ohio schools.</p>	<p>4A. Create a comprehensive Attendance Toolkit.</p> <p>4B. Create an Attendance Data Guide and enhance state data and access tools for district and school use.</p> <p>4C. Schools and districts should find the data routines that work for them.</p> <p>4D. Maximize Regional System of Support to help districts and schools.</p>	<p>5A. Refine attendance-related law and policy to reduce administrative requirements related to notification and truancy, to shift thinking, resource allocation and action toward prevention and early intervention.</p> <p>5B. Increase district and school flexibility in how they communicate with families and in definitions that allow for factoring in any exceptional circumstances educators are aware of with specific students.</p> <p>5C. Encourage districts and schools to reexamine and refine local policy using Ohio's Attendance Guide and input from students and families.</p>

1. Attendance is a team sport

Working together, build awareness and galvanize statewide support for the role attendance plays in student success in academics, careers and life.

Attendance is a team sport, and this team includes all of us – schools, districts, students, families, community members, business leaders and statewide agencies like the Department, executives and leaders, faith communities and more. Each of us has a role to play in supporting student attendance within our local school and district context and helping students achieve academic and life goals.

The first step: shift mindsets and behaviors from punitive and legalistic responses to missing school to prevention and early intervention that focuses on what students can and will accomplish when they regularly attend school. Encourage and support forming district and school and community partnerships that remove barriers. Provide support based on what students and families say they need, involving them in the effort from day one.

1. Attendance is a team sport

Working together, build awareness and galvanize statewide support for role of attendance to student success in academics, careers and life

Recommendations

A. Expand the *Stay in the Game!* Attendance Network to a comprehensive statewide messaging campaign for every district to be able to join and leverage

B. Build partnerships to support local attendance efforts. Attendance is a team sport, worthy of being community-owned and a state priority

Examples: Partners can support attendance in different ways

- ❑ **Pediatricians, dentists and other health professionals** can offer appointments before and after school hours so students don't have to miss class
- ❑ **School-based health and mental health partners** can deliver services where students learn, to support them staying in class
- ❑ **Printers and promotional items providers** can print related materials and signage to support local attendance efforts, including at-home posters for students/families
- ❑ **Juvenile courts** can be integrated as true partners, creating an ongoing relationship with the school(s) and a communication cadence to reach out to families proactively before there are challenges
- ❑ **Faith leaders** can share the importance of attendance with their communities and encourage congregant students/families to regularly attend school and recognize those who attend regularly
- ❑ **Local retailers and grocers** can not only post signage on the importance of attendance in their establishments, but be aware of student customers who need encouragement or support to get to school
- ❑ **Restaurants** can provide recognition for students who attend school each day for a month, and/or support and recognize their school-age employees who do

2. Strengthen the team

Foster engagement, build trust and belonging, and address local challenges with students, families and educators.

We know relationships matter. They bind us together in common purpose, provide support when we need it and help us celebrate our accomplishments. They help us know we belong. Schools and districts need all students and their families to have a sense of belonging at school and trust that they are accepted and valued. Schools and families need to build or renew those bonds to support their students. Implementing robust, authentic and frequent student and family engagement experiences are critical to building trust that all are working as a team.

2. Strengthen the team

Foster engagement, build trust and belonging, and address local challenges with students, families and educators

Recommendations
A. Position families as respected allies in student attendance and learning
B. Create opportunities for students to add their voice and meaningfully participate at the district and school levels to identify challenges and contribute to solutions
C. Communicate proactively and regularly about what is happening in schools and districts and how it connects to local challenges and strengths

Examples: Engaging families and students can look different

- Engage families from the beginning of the year with **positive messaging about their students** by text, note or email
- Create a student taskforce** to clarify a challenge or problem and propose a solution to the school or district. Have students present their solution and a plan to building administration or the school board
- Identify a Student Board Member** to participate as an ex-officio member of the board
- Hold student and family focus group sessions** to get information directly from students and families closest to the challenge to be solved
- Rethink engagement** and structuring surveys, discussions or conferences around student performances, exhibits or sporting events families naturally attend
- Establish an online newsletter that can be **distributed via text link** to families and interested businesses and civic organizations
- Let students know you miss them when they aren't at school**, providing a positive message that they matter and are valued

3. Create a rewarding and relevant team experience

Cultivate engaging and relevant learning environments at all Ohio schools so students want to attend.

This is the core work of each district and school every day and is more powerful when strong relationships, authentic engagement and trust are part of the equation. To bolster student attendance and foster academic success, create learning environments that provide opportunities for connection, ongoing participation, meaningful lessons and career readiness, paving the way for lifelong success. Over the past few years, we have seen schools experiment and do things differently. We encourage administrators and educators to continue what has worked and abandon what doesn't, striving to deeply engage students in their own learning. Dedicated educators and a collaborative community are essential partners in this endeavor, ensuring that every student can thrive academically and personally.

3. Create a rewarding and relevant team experience

Cultivate engaging and relevant learning environments so students want to attend at all Ohio schools

Recommendation

This core work of districts and schools was not the focus of this Taskforce. But getting teaching and learning right is a strong motivator for student engagement and attendance.

We encourage administrators and educators to continue what has worked, abandon what doesn't and continue striving to deeply engage students in their own learning by making school experiences relevant and worthy of our students.

Examples:

- ❑ Integrate **career-connected learning** into the school experience
- ❑ **Use interest assessments and career assessments** in class to give students a glimpse at where they might find career interests and connect it to their classwork
- ❑ **Differentiate pathways** to and through postsecondary training, providing options students can choose for themselves
- ❑ **Connect lessons to real-world problems** and help students see the relevance of their classroom work
- ❑ Explore **creative scheduling** for schools to meet the needs of the students and local community
- ❑ **Embed student enrichment activities and clubs into the school day** instead of outside of school time
- ❑ Consider project-based learning and other alternative instructional strategies to increase engagement and student ownership of success and learning
- ❑ Offer **professional development opportunities for educators in classroom engagement and management** to enhance student belonging and classroom climate
- ❑ Explore innovation in instructional practices such as **project-based learning and use of technology** in the classroom

4. Support the players and coaches

Adjust systems and resources to support schools and districts in their attendance work.

The Department will integrate attendance across its multiple efforts including, but not limited to: multi-tiered systems of support, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support, wraparound services, health and mental health supports, school improvement, academics and the One Plan. The Department also will continue to identify and disseminate – with the help of partners such as state support teams, educational service centers, the *Stay in the Game!* Attendance Network and others – best practices and bright spots in fully integrated attendance work at the district and school levels.

4. Support the players and coaches

Adjust systems and resources to support schools and districts in their attendance work

Recommendations
A. Create a comprehensive Attendance Toolkit
B. Create an Attendance Data Guide, and enhance state data and access tools for district and school use
C. Schools and districts should find the data routines that work for them
D. The Department will maximize the Regional System of Support to help districts and schools

Examples:

- ❑ Drive local policy and procedures using [Ohio's Attendance Guide](#) for attendance support recognized through data and voiced by district and school leaders
- ❑ Connect with regional educational service centers and state support teams for training and support from trained and certified **Regional Data Leads** for more support in data analysis and data-driven decision-making
- ❑ Contact Ohio's **Attendance Advisor** at the Department for technical assistance support in attendance
- ❑ Create a **school- or district-level data dashboard** that provides real-time information about student absence and opportunities for early intervention
- ❑ **Integrate an attendance data review routine** as part of existing team structures such as Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support and building and district leadership teams
- ❑ **Incorporate the *Stay in the Game!* Attendance Pledge and resources** in school-based initiatives promoting regular attendance

5. Adjust the playbook

Work with policymakers to inform comprehensive policy changes to support student attendance.

To be more effective and successful in the work of preventing and decreasing chronic absenteeism, elevate legal and policy components most important for local schools and districts. Schools and districts need to create their own actionable attendance plans based on their local context and understanding that all school missed impacts student outcomes. Missing learning time has critical implications for student success that is quantifiable. Schools and districts want to address students missing school before they become chronically absent and before they and their families deal with the consequences of truancy. Excused or not, absence has a real impact on learning, reading on grade level and graduating high school on time.

5. Adjust the playbook.

Work with policymakers to inform comprehensive policy changes to support student attendance

Recommendations
<p>A. Refine attendance-related law and policy to reduce administrative requirements related to notification and truancy and to shift thinking, resource allocation and action toward prevention and early intervention.</p>
<p>B. Increase district and school flexibility in how they communicate with families, and in definitions that allow for factoring in any exceptional circumstances educators are aware of with specific students.</p>
<p>C. Encourage districts and schools to reexamine and refine local policy using <u>Ohio's Attendance Guide</u> and input from students and families.</p>

Examples:

- ❑ Superintendents work with local school boards to **adopt updated model board policies** that emphasize the importance of regular attendance, allow for excused absences based on local context and support prevention and early intervention practices
- ❑ Education leaders work with state and local government leaders to **update policies and laws to highlight the importance of prevention and early intervention**

Appendix A – Executive Summary

The Ohio Attendance Taskforce recommendations represent what we as Ohioans can and should do to support our students locally and across the state to help them get to school so they can learn, grow and thrive.

The recommendations in this report were developed by the **Ohio Attendance Taskforce members** - a group of current superintendents and building principals (representing traditional districts, community schools, career and technical education, educational service centers, and state support teams), business and foundation leaders, members of the Ohio juvenile court system and experts in attendance and engagement – **dedicated to improving attendance across Ohio.**

Taskforce members' experience working in and supporting schools and districts, combined with data, research and dialogue informed these recommendations. The voices of Ohio students and families coupled with [Ohio's Attendance Guide](#) and [Developing an Effective School Attendance Program](#) served as touchpoints. The Taskforce was facilitated by Education First, with support from the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce and technical assistance from Attendance Works.

Attendance is a national issue. **In Ohio, we have a crisis on our hands** that began well before – but was exacerbated by – the pandemic. Increasing attendance and decreasing chronic absenteeism is necessary for every school and district in our state. **Every school has work to do, because every single Ohio student matters. But schools can't do this alone.**

Ohio is committed to improving student attendance and decreasing chronic absenteeism.

Now is the time for all of us to work as a team to make that happen.

Join us!



Chronic absenteeism was a growing issue before COVID-19, but the pandemic exacerbated the crisis

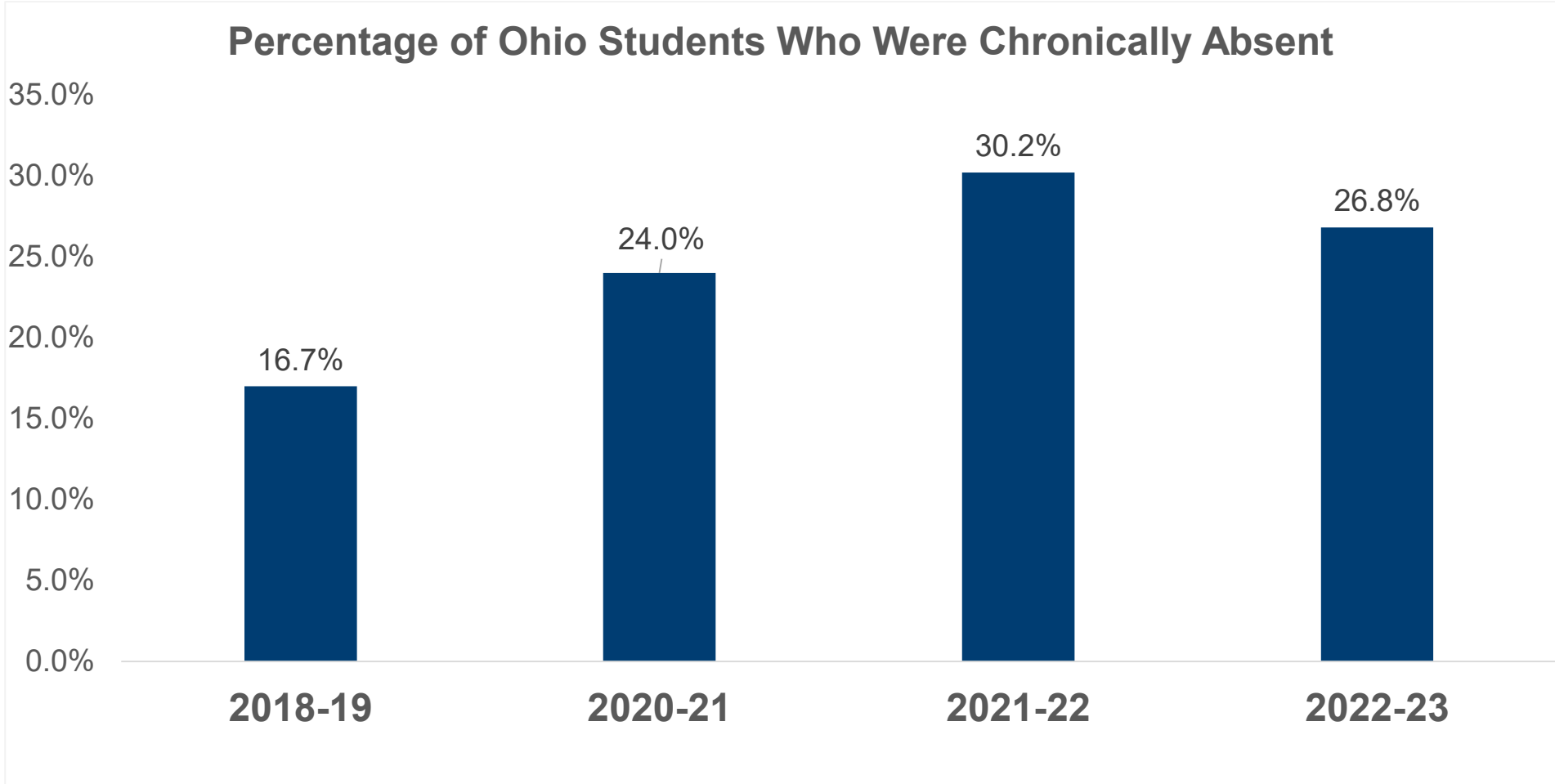
Students and families saw that schools could look different than the traditional model, and learning could be accomplished outside of the traditional school day, making it difficult to convince some of the importance of attendance.

“During the pandemic things shifted: we told kids to stay home if they didn't feel well. But that time is over. We are trying to shift back to 'the sniffles are the sniffles.' You can come to school, especially if you wear a mask.” – Superintendent

“When we returned to school after Covid, a third grader said, **“I liked it when I could decide if I wanted to get out of bed or not.”** I'm not surprised when I hear this from middle schoolers. [It's a] mental attitude, we had to shut down, school was very off and on...**Attitudes [about attendance] for kids and families changed a bit.**” – Superintendent

Source: [Where Are the Students? - The New York Times \(nytimes.com\)](https://www.nytimes.com)

Attendance is a crisis in Ohio. While the number of chronically absent students declined slightly last school year, there is much more urgent work to do



Chronic absenteeism = missing 10% of school hours for any reason

Sources: Ohio Department of Education; [Ohio Report Card School & District Results 2022-2023](#); [Chronic absenteeism rising in local schools, across Ohio \(daytondailynews.com\)](#)



Attendance matters for learning today and thriving for a lifetime

Attendance matters for every single student in our state.

We have a crisis on our hands – a crisis of attendance that is impacting student learning.

Great schools are part of the answer. But they can't be expected to solve this alone.

Schools and districts have learned how policy can more effectively support what they need and want to do boost attendance. Thoughtful changes could have a significant impact.

**ALL of us working together as a TEAM will help our students attend and succeed.
Ohio is committed to improving attendance.
Now is the time to integrate it in everything we do.**

If we are successful in solving the attendance crisis...

Hundreds of thousands of Ohio young people will:

- Attend school regularly
- Acquire the knowledge and skills to become proficient readers
- Graduate high school on time
- Successfully participate in training, education and careers
- Have the skills to support their families in growing employment sectors
- Contribute to the economic vitality of our state

Ohio will become the best state to learn, grow and thrive.

The Taskforce recommends five big ideas to boost attendance and lower chronic absenteeism

1

Attendance is a Team Sport

Working together, build awareness and galvanize statewide support for role of attendance to student success in academics, careers and life

2

Strengthen the Team

Foster engagement, build trust and belonging, and address local challenges with students, families and educators

3

Create a Rewarding and Relevant Team Experience

Cultivate engaging and relevant learning environments so students want to attend at all Ohio schools

4

Support the Players and Coaches

Adjust systems and resources to support schools and districts in their attendance work

5

Adjust the Playbook

Work with policymakers to inform comprehensive policy changes to support student attendance

Recommendations at a Glance

Attendance is a Team Sport	Strengthen the Team	Create a Rewarding and Relevant Team Experience	Support the Players and Coaches	Adjust the Playbook
<p>1A. Expand the Stay in the Game! Attendance Network to a comprehensive statewide messaging campaign for every district to be able to join and leverage.</p> <p>1B. Build partnerships to support local attendance efforts. Attendance is a team sport, worthy of being community-owned and a state priority.</p>	<p>2A. Position families as respected allies in student attendance and learning.</p> <p>2B. Create opportunities for students to add their voice and meaningfully participate at the district and school levels to identify challenges and contribute to solution building.</p> <p>2C. Communicate proactively and regularly about what is happening in schools and districts and how it connects to local challenges and strengths.</p>	<p>3. Cultivate engaging and relevant learning environments so students want to attend at all Ohio schools.</p>	<p>4A. Create a comprehensive Attendance Toolkit.</p> <p>4B. Create an Attendance Data Guide and enhance state data and access tools for district and school use.</p> <p>4C. Schools and districts should find the data routines that work for them.</p> <p>4D. Maximize the Regional System of Support to help districts and schools.</p>	<p>5A. Refine attendance related law and policy to reduce administrative requirements related to notification and truancy and to shift thinking, resource allocation and action toward prevention and early intervention.</p> <p>5B. Increase district and school flexibility in how they communicate with families, and in definitions that allow for factoring in any exceptional circumstances educators are aware of with specific students.</p> <p>5C. Encourage districts and schools to reexamine and refine local policy using Ohio's Attendance Guide and input from students and families.</p>

Appendix B – Additional Recommendation Details

Appendix: Detailed Recommendations

1. Attendance is a team sport

Working together, build awareness and galvanize statewide support for the role attendance plays in student success in academics, careers and life.

Attendance is a team sport, and this team includes all of us – schools, districts, students, families, community members, business leaders and statewide agencies like the Department, executives and leaders, faith communities and more. Each of us has a role to play in supporting student attendance within our local school and district context and helping students achieve academic and life goals.

The first step: shift mindsets and behaviors from punitive and legalistic responses to missing school to prevention and early intervention that focuses on what students can and will accomplish when they regularly attend school. Encourage and support forming district and school and community partnerships that remove barriers. Provide support based on what students and families say they need, involving them in the effort from day one.

Appendix: Detailed Recommendations

1. Attendance is a team sport

Recommendations

A. Expand the *Stay in the Game!* Attendance Network to a comprehensive statewide messaging campaign for every district to be able to join and leverage. Partners in *Stay in the Game!* Attendance Network currently include the Department, The Cleveland Browns Foundation, Columbus C Foundation and Harvard's Proving Ground with 45 districts members representing more than 250,000 students. The initiative will continue to:

- **Position attendance as a shared responsibility** among all stakeholders, including students, families, districts and the wider community.
- **Highlight the data, practices and stories** of districts improving attendance rates and lowering chronic absenteeism.
- **Identify the short- and long-term benefits** of attendance for individual students. No longer is school a place to learn academics alone; it is the place to collaborate, communicate and innovate. The place to prepare for future success, get exposure to careers and choose the path ahead.
- **Every district and school should leverage the campaign because every *Ohio student matters*.** While context matters to how campaigns are implemented, even districts and schools with good attendance have work they can do to improve individual students' attendance.

B. Build partnerships to support local attendance efforts. Attendance is a team sport, worthy of being community-owned and a state priority. Establishing or growing state and community partnerships designed to address the individual needs of students and families within a district can add critical capacity, remove attendance barriers and relieve schools of having to be everything to everyone. Schools alone cannot deliver all the services and wraparound supports students and families need. So, what will it take? What should districts and schools do?

- **Identify the root causes of attendance challenges** at the district, school and grade levels by analyzing data and listening to the needs of students and families.
- **Identify complementary partner organizations** with the skills to fill critical gaps or provide services the schools and districts need supported or who can offer resource support (time, treasure, technology) to allow that to happen.
- **Build and maintain long-term partnerships in non-academic areas with significant involvement designed to yield measurable impact on attendance.** Partners could include local nonprofits, civic organizations, faith-based organizations, business or sport organizations. Ask a partner organization to do what they can do well and determine how to integrate that support systemically for student benefit.

Appendix: Detailed Recommendations

2. Strengthen the team

Foster engagement, build trust and belonging, and address local challenges with students, families and educators.

We know relationships matter. They bind us together in common purpose, provide support when we need it and help us celebrate our accomplishments. They help us know we belong. Schools and districts need all students and their families to have a sense of belonging at school and trust that they are accepted and valued. Schools and families need to build or renew those bonds to support their students. Implementing robust, authentic and frequent student and family engagement experiences are critical to building trust that all are working as a team.

Appendix: Detailed Recommendations

2. Strengthen the team

Recommendations

A. Position families as respected allies in student attendance and learning.

Proactively and regularly communicate with all families what is happening in school and why every day matters.

- **Overtly indicate the district's/school's interest in building/renewing relationships**, establishing a foundation of trust and increasing connections between students, families and their school community on a regular basis. Families must feel that schools are working *with* them.
- **Create and maintain parent roles on leadership groups** (District and Building Level Leadership Teams, PBIS teams, etc.) and involve groups that center the student/family in district policy and practice. Be thoughtful to invite individuals beyond those who are already deeply involved with the school to include voices of parents that might be missing in the regular conversations.
- **Prioritize inclusivity**, involving parents/families both within and outside of the school building, in person and via video conference, phone and text communication. Some of the most involved parents/families may contribute most when schools reach out in ways that work best for their schedules, families and modes of communication.

B. Create opportunities for students to add their voice and meaningfully participate at the district and school levels to identify challenges and contribute to solution building.

- **Implement robust and authentic engagement opportunities to elevate the voices of students** in the development of solutions, district practices and policies. This could include a specific student role on the school board, a student taskforce to solve a specific challenge or an ongoing student advisory council that meets regularly with the superintendent and/or building leader. The more concrete and specific the role, the better.
- **Conduct focus groups with students** on issues – focusing on root cause and solutions – to factor their perspectives into the broader work of the district and schools at least once a year.

C. Communicate proactively and regularly about what is happening in schools and districts and how it connects to local challenges and strengths.

- Communication is always key to improving any type of initiative or program. This must be a concerted effort to reach all stakeholders and present them with all the information and options available to them.

Appendix: Detailed Recommendations

3. Create a rewarding and relevant team experience

Cultivate engaging and relevant learning environments at all Ohio schools so students want to attend.

This is the core work of each district and school every day and is more powerful when strong relationships, authentic engagement and trust are part of the equation. To bolster student attendance and foster academic success, create learning environments that provide opportunities for connection, ongoing participation, meaningful lessons and career readiness, paving the way for lifelong success.

Over the past few years, we have seen schools experiment and do things differently. We encourage administrators and educators to continue what has worked and abandon what doesn't, striving to deeply engage students in their own learning. Dedicated educators and a collaborative community are essential partners in this endeavor, ensuring that every student can thrive academically and personally.

Appendix: Detailed Recommendations

3. Create a rewarding and relevant team experience

Recommendations

3. Cultivate engaging and relevant learning environments so students want to attend at all Ohio schools

- **Enriching learning experiences:** Educators should craft learning experiences that captivate students' curiosity and imagination. Incorporating real-world applications, hands-on activities and interactive technologies into lessons can ignite a passion for learning.
- **Personalized learning:** Educators can create a more inclusive and motivating atmosphere by tailoring lessons to individual learning styles, interests and diverse learning needs.
- **Career alignment:** Connecting academic content to real-world job opportunities and careers through class activities, internships, mentorships and guest speakers can inspire students to stay committed to their education.
- **Ongoing student engagement:** Encouraging continuous student participation in class discussions, extracurricular activities and community projects fosters a sense of belonging and purpose. When students feel valued and involved, they are more likely to attend school regularly.
- **Building a positive climate and culture:** Dedicated educators, building leaders and district leaders play a pivotal role in building trust and facilitating operational changes that enhance the overall learning environment. They should prioritize inclusivity, respect and collaboration among students, staff and parents. This is reflected in everything from how individuals treat each other and students, to operational issues like how building schedules are built to accommodate learning, bus transportation reliability and responding to needs of students and their families.
- **Supportive resources:** Providing students with academic support resources such as tutoring, counseling and mentorship programs can help address individual challenges and barriers to success.
- **Parent and community involvement:** Engaging parents and the broader community in the educational process can create a support network that reinforces the importance of attendance and academic achievement.

Appendix: Detailed Recommendations

4. Support the players and coaches

Adjust systems and resources to support schools and districts in their attendance work.

The Department will integrate attendance across its multiple efforts including, but not limited to: multi-tiered systems of support, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support, wraparound services, health and mental health supports, school improvement, academics and the One Plan. The Department will also continue to identify and disseminate – with the help of partners such as state support teams, educational service centers, *Stay in the Game!* Attendance Network and others – best practices and bright spots in fully integrated attendance work at the district and school levels.

Appendix: Detailed Recommendations

4. Support the players and coaches

Recommendations

A. Create a comprehensive Attendance Toolkit - a practical, easy-to-implement set of resources as companions to Ohio's Attendance Guidance and Developing an Effective School Attendance Program – in collaboration with stakeholders such as the *Stay in the Game!* Attendance Network, Ohio Association of Court Judges/Ohio Judicial Conference, The Ohio State University's Statewide Center for Family Engagement, state agencies, educational service centers and others. Many resources already exist and should be elevated. Others require development, but all should be co-located in an easy-to-navigate online location. Items could address issues such as:

- How to use multi-tiered attendance supports.
- Attendance best practices.
- Relationship building focused on students and families, authentic engagement, elevating student voice and involvement, proactive communication and templates (such as letters, email, texts, social media).
- Linking school-based physical and mental health resources (how to partner) and available funding supports like Student Wellness and Success Funding, Disadvantaged Pupil Impact Aid and others.
- Building and maintaining meaningful partnerships including defining roles; choosing, initiating and maintaining partnerships; partnership agreement templates and more.

B. Create an Attendance Data Guide and enhance state data and access tools for district and school use The Attendance Data Guide could include:

- **Regional data supports that clarify options for working with state-supported intermediaries** on attendance, roles of Regional Data Leads with the Attendance Data Credential and trained educational service center staff.
- **Basic attendance diagnostic** that districts and schools can use to produce a high-level understanding of attendance needs and trends on an ongoing basis.
- **Predictors and explainers of attendance issues to illustrate** research-based indicators within student information systems and publicly available data sets to help inform attendance risks at the individual and group level.

The Department should explore providing enhanced state data and access tools that may include:

- **Current-year** attendance reporting.
- **Extending a tool** like the Future Forward Ohio Recovery Dashboard **to the individual school level and include all public school types.**
- **Collecting information** on absence reasons.
- **Best practices for student information system providers** to enable more flexibility and precision when districts and schools record absence time.

Appendix: Detailed Recommendations

4. Support the players and coaches

Recommendations

C. Schools and districts should find the data routines that work for them.

- Use a simple and timely method. Important considerations: a) the outputs should serve the varying informational needs of the district, building and teacher teams who are responsible for attendance; b) the information can be refreshed consistently, for embedding into regular team meetings and data discussions; c) students are identified for attendance supports as early as possible, with September being a key month; and d) all at-risk students are considered, not just those with pending HB 410 actions.
- **Leverage the Secure Data Center:** The Secure Data Center already incorporates several longitudinal trends and subgroup disaggregation related to attendance and absenteeism, as well as the ability to view student-level details (by Statewide Student Identifier (SSID)). Uploading attendance and absence hours into the Education Management Information System (EMIS) more frequently can allow for more timely reports.
- **Record and assess effectiveness of interventions.** Think about how attendance supports and interventions fit into your multi-tiered system of support. Record student-level intervention assignments to assess effectiveness across groups of students, as well as for the individual student.

D. The Department will maximize the Regional System of Support to help districts and schools.

- Train state support teams and educational service center staff members to support attendance initiatives at the school and district level (currently underway).

Appendix: Detailed Recommendations

5. Adjust the playbook

Work with policymakers to inform comprehensive policy changes to support student attendance.

To be more effective and successful in the work of preventing, decreasing and dealing with chronic absenteeism, elevate legal and policy components most important for local schools and districts.

Schools and districts need to create their own actionable attendance plans based on their local context and understanding that all school missed impacts student outcomes. Missing learning time has critical implications for student success that is quantifiable. Schools and districts want to address students missing school before they become chronically absent and before they and their families deal with the consequences of truancy. Excused or not, absence has a real impact on learning, reading on grade level and graduating high school on time.

Appendix: Detailed Recommendations

5. Adjust the playbook

Recommendations
<p>A. Refine attendance-related law and policy to reduce administrative requirements related to notification and truancy and to shift thinking, resource allocation and action toward prevention and early intervention</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Codify a common definition of hour of attendance that measures student exposure to instruction across all modes of learning.• Consider using minimum required number of hours for all schools as the baseline for determining higher levels of intervention thresholds.
<p>B. Increase district and school flexibility in how they communicate with families and in definitions that allow for factoring in any exceptional circumstances educators are aware of with specific students (for example, not having to send specific notifications when absence is known to be due to an extended illness).</p>
<p>C. Encourage districts and schools to reexamine and refine local policy using Ohio’s Attendance Guide and input from students and families.</p>