TO: Members of the State Board of Education

FROM: Carey M. Wright, Ed.D., State Superintendent of Schools

DATE: April 29, 2025

SUBJECT: Maryland's Efforts to Address Chronic Absenteeism

Purpose

The purpose of this item is to provide an update on Maryland's efforts to address chronic absenteeism.

Background

Chronic absenteeism has been identified as a significant barrier to student success. A student is chronically absent if the student has been in membership in a school for at least ten days and is absent 10% or more of the school days while enrolled in that school, for any reason, excused or unexcused. For example, a student who is enrolled in a school for 30 days, and who is absent three of those 30 days, is considered chronically absent. A student can be counted as chronically absent in multiple schools, within the state, in the same year. This issue has far-reaching effects on academic performance, emotional well-being, and long-term success, particularly for students in early grades and those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

To address this challenge, the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) has established an Attendance Task Force and has partnered with Attendance Works and key stakeholders to develop strategies and resources aimed at reducing chronic absenteeism across the state. The Attendance Task Force, made up of professionals from various sectors including education, mental health, and community services, is central to this effort.

Executive Summary

Maryland has made significant progress in addressing chronic absenteeism through targeted interventions, partnerships, and strategic initiatives. MSDE, in partnership with Attendance Works, has been working closely with local education agencies (LEAs) to identify students at the cusp of chronic absenteeism and implement early interventions to prevent further absences.

Two successful workshops were held this month to educate and support LEAs. Local Superintendents were encouraged to send teams of LEA staff including Directors and Coordinators within student services, LEA community school coordinators, representatives from data, family engagement, communication, and/or extended learning. The workshops addressed the following:

- Workshop One: Focused on reducing the spring attendance slide, addressing dips in attendance as the school year nears its end.

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- Workshop Two: Focused on identifying and intervening with students at the cusp of chronic absenteeism, providing strategies for targeted outreach and support.

Guest speakers from Baltimore City, Baltimore County, and Anne Arundel County shared their experiences and best practices during these workshops. Moving forward, MSDE will release a **Spring Attendance: Early Action Toolkit** to assist LEAs in taking action, as well as a **Beginning-of-the-Year Toolkit** to prepare for the next school year. Both toolkits will help LEAs build upon existing efforts and provide resources for both early and intensive interventions.

Action

No action is required; this information is for discussion only.

Attachments

Chronic Absence Power Point

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DIVISION OF STUDENT SUPPORT AND FEDERAL PROGRAMS

Addressing Chronic Absences in Maryland

April 29, 2025

Presented By | Mary Gable, Assistant State Superintendent

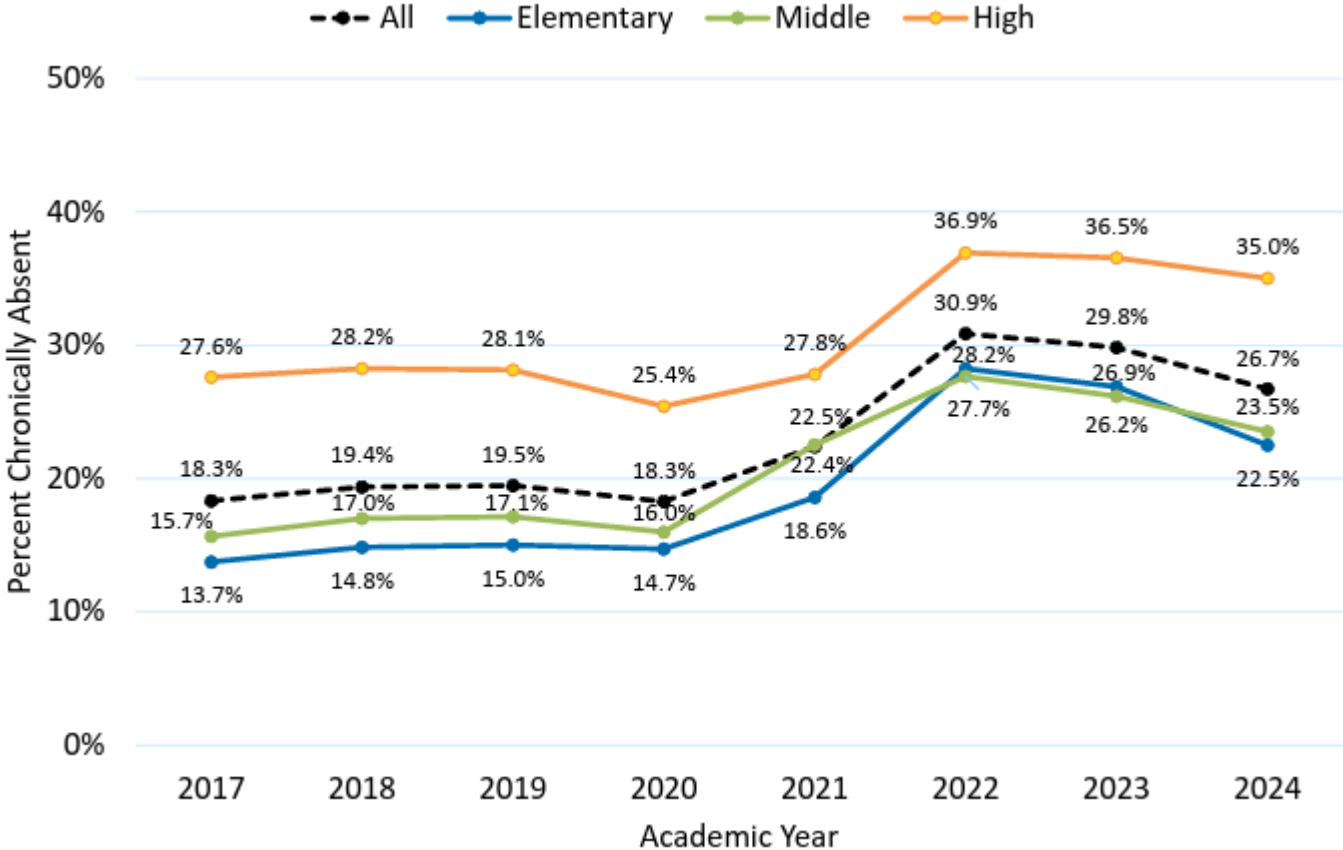**Maryland**
STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Presentation Outline

1. Trends in Chronic Absences in Maryland

2. Overview of MSDE's Efforts to Address Chronic Absences

3. Partnership with Attendance Works

4. Identifying Students at the Cusp

5. Insights from LEA and School Leaders

6. Next Steps

State Trends in Chronic Absences

Chronic absences have gradually declined since 2022 but have not yet returned to pre-pandemic levels.

Chronic absences at the high school level have seen fewer reductions since 2022 than at the elementary and middle school levels.

Alignment of Education Plan Metrics and Proposed Targets

Chronic Absence

Rate of Chronic Absence in All Schools

Baseline (2022-23)

30%

-15 percentage Points (pp) →

Target (2025-26)

15%

MSDE's Efforts to Address Chronic Absenteeism

The Maryland State Department of Education is committed to addressing chronic absenteeism. Efforts include:

- Establishing a **State Attendance Task Force**
- Establishing a partnership with **Attendance Works**
- Analyzing the **Maryland School Survey** to identify how **school climate** may impact attendance
- Utilizing the **Maryland School Mental Health Response Team**
- Identifying strategies that **Community Schools** are using to reduce chronic absences
- Offering two **Workshops**
  - *Working Together to Reduce the Spring Attendance Slide*
  - *Improving Attendance for Students at the Cusp of Chronic Absence*
- Developing two **Toolkits**
  - *Spring Attendance: Early Action Toolkit*
  - *Beginning of the School Year Toolkit*
- Exploring **updates to policy, guidance,** and **regulations** to modernize Maryland's approach to attendance and absenteeism

State Attendance Task Force

The goal of the Task Force is to:

- Share best practices and develop actionable strategies for LEAs;

- Analyze attendance data and trends statewide;

- Identify and evaluate strategies for addressing chronic absenteeism; and

- Develop comprehensive guidance and toolkits to help LEAs identify and prevent chronic absences.

Attendance Task Force Membership

- Attendance Works

- Baltimore Teachers Union Representative

- Behavioral Health Coordinator

- Community School Coordinator

- Director of Student Services

- Free State Parent Representative

- Higher Education

- LEA Assistant Superintendent for Student Services

- Local School Superintendents (2)

- Maryland State Department of Education Staff

- Maryland State Education Association

- Parent's Place of Maryland

- Principal (Maryland Association of Elementary School Principals - MAESP)

- Principal (Maryland Association of Secondary School Principals - MASSP)

- School Counselor

- School Pupil Personnel Worker

Partnership with Attendance Works

Attendance Works is a national and state initiative, and a nonprofit organization, that focuses on improving school attendance by promoting data-driven approaches, building partnerships, and advocating for policies that address chronic absence.

MSDE and Attendance Works partnership includes:

- Collaborating to strengthen Maryland's efforts to reduce chronic absenteeism

- Providing LEAs with evidence-based strategies and resources

- Ensuring access to the latest research and practical tools for effective intervention

- Working together to create a sustainable, statewide approach to improving student attendance

MSDE Partners with Attendance Works

Hedy Chang

Executive Director

Attendance Works

Identifying Students at the Cusp

Students with more than **12.5 absences** by early to mid-March 2024 were more likely than not to be chronically absent.

Students with less than **10 absences** were less than **20%** likely to be chronically absent by the end of the year, while students with **15 or more** absences were **more than 80%** likely to be chronically absent.

Based on 2023-2024 data
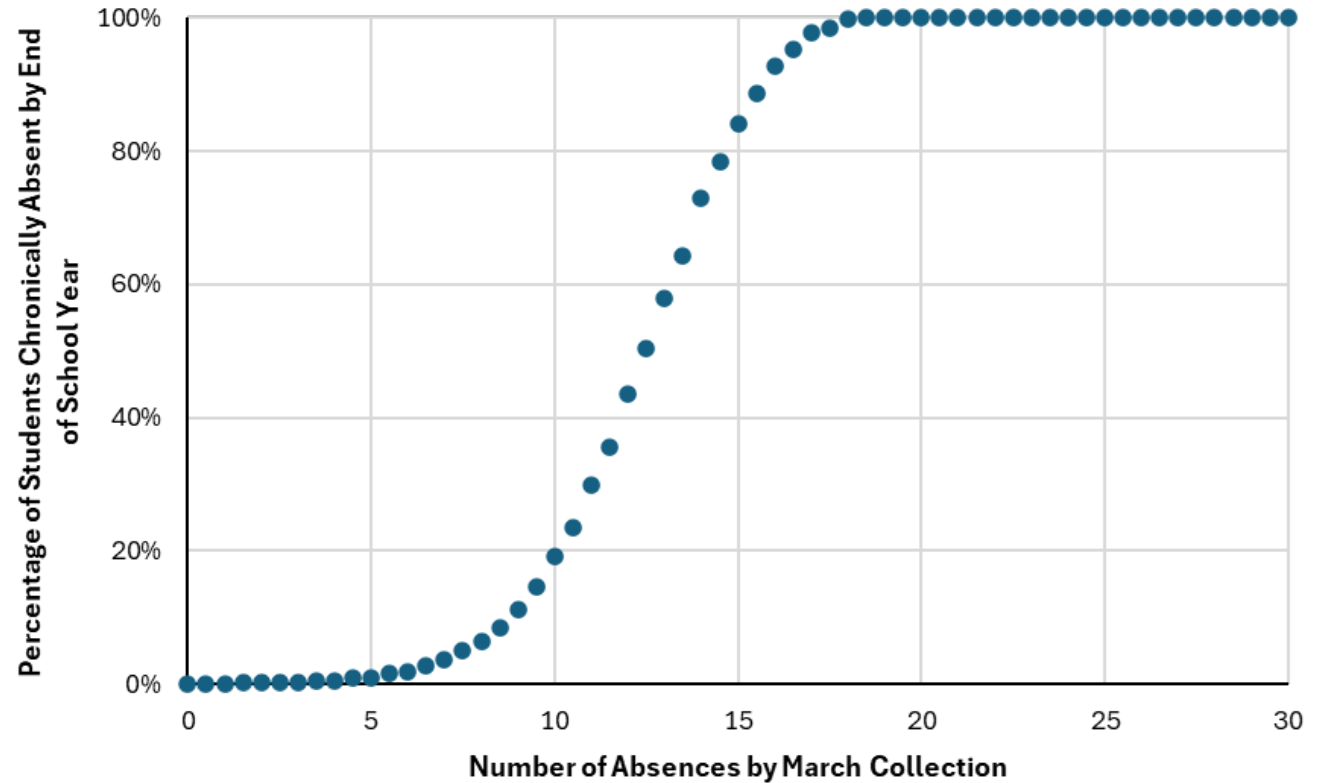
Workshop Overview: The Spring Slide and Students at the Cusp

Workshop 1: *Working Together to Reduce the Spring Attendance Slide*

- Strengthening teamwork within LEA teams to address the spring attendance slide. The session covered strategies to keep students engaged and reduce attendance dips during the critical spring months.

Workshop 2: *Identifying Students at the Cusp*

- Identifying students who are at risk of chronic absenteeism but haven't yet reached the threshold. The session focused on how to prevent these students from becoming chronically absent and strategies.

Toolkit Overview: Spring Action Toolkit

The toolkit covers four steps for tackling chronic absence in spring 2025

1. **Leverage and Strengthen Your Attendance Teams**

   Encourage LEAs to assess their existing attendance teams and consider adding cross-functional members to strengthen their efforts in tackling absenteeism.

2. **Address the Spring Attendance Slide**

   Offers strategies to address the dip in attendance typically seen around spring break and the end of the year, focusing on keeping students engaged and motivated.

3. **Reach Out to Students at the Cusp of Chronic Absence**

   Provides guidance for identifying and intervening with students who are at risk of becoming chronically absent, preventing them from reaching the 18-day threshold.

4. **Identify and Address Common Barriers to Attendance**

   Offers strategies to help LEAs identify and address the root causes of absenteeism, such as health issues, transportation challenges, and family support barriers.

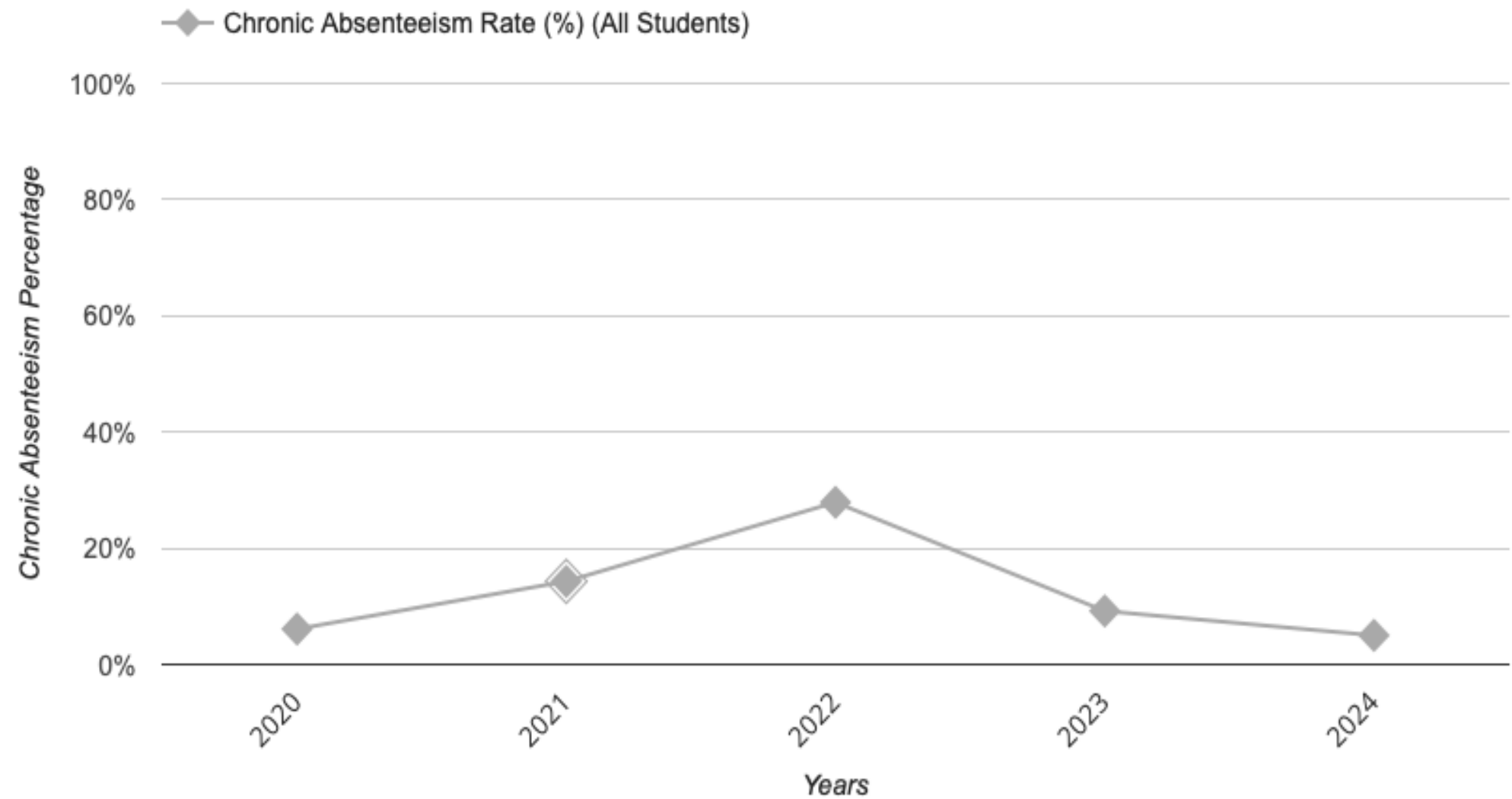# Role of an Elementary School Principal

Lori Phelps

Principal

Woodbridge Elementary School

Baltimore County Public Schools

Woodbridge Elementary School

Woodbridge Elementary School

ATTENDANCE SUMMARY

Grade	Absent	Since Last Meeting	Teacher Contact	Signing In	RPC	Other	Codes
3	37			X			
KG	27.5	19-Mar		X	X	PPW Ref P Attend	
1	25	2	X	X	X		3/24-3/25 Appendix
KG	20			X	X		
1	19			X	X		
2	17			X	X		
2	16.5	18-Mar	X	X	X		Overslept
KG	16			X	X		
2	15.5	25-Mar		X	X	PPW Ref	Wedding for wk; end chronic
KG	15			X	X	PPW Ref	
4	15	19-Mar		X	X		
5	14.5			X	X		
2	144			X	Attempt	PPW Ref	
5	14			X	26-Mar		
1	14			X	26-Mar		
KG	14			X	X		
KG	14			X	X	P Attend	
2	14			X	X	P Attend	
KG	14	4	X		X		3/20-3/25, Sick Hospital
KG	13.5			X	X		
KG	13			X	X	P Attend	
3	13			X	26-Mar		
4	13			X	Attempt	PPW Ref	
5	13	19-Mar	X	X			Allergies and Asthma
2	12.5				X		
4	12.5			X	X		
5	12	4	Left VM		X		3/18-3/21

Created by BCPS Office of Pupil Personnel Services: Tamesha Peterson, Howard Franklin, & Erika Hamlet

Woodbridge Elementary School

Identifying Patterns

Early Dismissals
- offer to keep in school until regular dismissal time
- attendance contests and prizes
- letters home and reminders the day before to the child
- PPW referrals for residency

Days Before/After Holiday
- attendance contests and prizes
- letters home and reminders the day before to the child

Mondays/Fridays
- often reflects shared custody
- insist BOTH parents attend meeting to discuss and hold BOTH accountable

Inclement Weather
- provide rain/snow gear
- attempt to connect to neighboring family with transportation

Late Arrival (2-hr delay) or expected snow early dismissals
- PPW referrals for residency

Anne Arundel County Public Schools

Ryan Voegtlin

Assistant Superintendent of Student Services

Anne Arundel County Public Schools

Anne Arundel County Public Schools

A Prevention-Oriented Approach

- Encouraging schools to change their meeting schedules to allow for meaningful discussion for Tiers 1, 2, and 3 of an attendance MTSS

- At the Tier 1 and 2 meeting, teams look at data to discuss what universal strategies the school can put in place to encourage daily attendance to educate families. Teams also fucus on students who are at the cusp of being chronically absent.

- The Tier III meeting focuses on those students who are around 15% or more of absences and need more intensive support.

- Use a technology platform called, "Analytics and Insights" to analyze attendance data. Schools have access to specific protocols to use to look at the data and make decisions to improve attendance.

- Use of focus group and surveys with parents and students to have qualitative data to drive decision–making in the schools.

Anne Arundel County Public Schools

Engaging Partners to Address Challenges

- AACPS partnered with Attendance Works for three years to create a "Community of Practice" that included administrators, student services staff, and Community Schools staff.

- AACPS is working to change how we partner with parents and attendance working together to overcome barriers to attendance.

- AACPS has partnered with Concentric to provide Tier II home visit and mentoring support for students in many AACPS schools.

- AACPS has partnered with a few local agencies around care coordination. Anne Arundel County has a lot of resources, which can be overwhelming for families. An increase in care coordination has helped families apply for services and provide support for following through on engaging with those services.

- AACPS has developed many mental health can care coordination partnerships through the Consortium grant funds.

Anne Arundel County Public Schools

How Districts Can Equip School Leaders

- Create guidance and consistent structures that encourage the use of data.

- Get all school stakeholders on board to educate students, parents, staff, and the community on the importance of regular school attendance.

- Provide a data system that allows school leaders to have access to good data quickly and train them on how to use the system.

- Provide school leaders with a system or structure that allows them to progress monitor attendance interventions.

- Provide school leaders with resources and interventions that they can use to support improved attendance. Allow them to share what's working for them with their colleagues.

- Leverage grant programs like resources like the consortium grant funds to help build a system of care .

- Provide district wide communication around the importance of school attendance.

Next Steps: Moving Forward with Chronic Absenteeism Efforts

- **Toolkit #2: Start of the School Year Toolkit**

    - Launch in August/September 2025
    - Focus on strategies for addressing chronic absenteeism at the beginning of the school year

- **Workshops on Taking Action: Start of the School Year**

    - Summer 2025
    - Practical workshops to support LEAs in implementing the start-of-year toolkit

- **Attendance Community of Practice**

    - Ongoing throughout 2025-2026 school year
    - Facilitating collaboration, sharing best practices, and supporting LEAs

- **Increasing the Collection of State Data on Chronic Absenteeism**
    - Strengthening data collection efforts to provide a clearer picture of chronic absenteeism statewide

- **Reviewing and Addressing Attendance Coding and Data Collection**
    - Ensuring consistency and accuracy in how attendance is tracked across LEAs

- **Increasing Membership in the Attendance Task Force**

    - Expanding membership to enhance the collaboration efforts of the House Bill 879 (*Task Force to Improve Attendance and Reduce Chronic Absenteeism in Schools*)
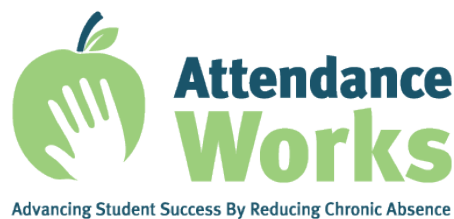
Discussion

Spring Attendance: Early Action Toolkit

Division of Student Support and Federal Programs

April 2025

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Contents

Attendance Works (www.attendanceworks.org) is a national nonprofit initiative that advances success in school and beyond for all students by inspiring and catalyzing policies and practices that prevent and reduce chronic absence. Its website offers a wide array of free materials, tools, research and success stories to help schools, districts and communities work together to reduce chronic absence.

Taking Action in the Spring

The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), in partnership with Attendance Works, has developed a Spring Action Toolkit to support local education agencies (LEAs) in taking immediate, focused action to reduce student absences before the end of the school year. As we face the challenges of chronic absenteeism across the state, it is critical to act swiftly, particularly as we approach the end of the academic year. Chronic absenteeism, defined as missing 10% or more of school days, has long-term negative effects on students' academic performance, emotional well-being, and long-term success. This toolkit is designed to help LEAs address these issues in a practical and effective way.

The goal of this toolkit is to provide LEAs with actionable strategies that can be implemented immediately to reduce chronic absences, specifically focusing on preventing the spring attendance slide and engaging students at the cusp of chronic absenteeism. It builds upon existing efforts in schools and LEAs, offering additional resources for early intervention during the last few months of the school year.

Recognizing that LEAs and the schools they support vary in terms of experience and infrastructure for addressing attendance, the toolkit includes guiding questions to help users assess where they are and determine next steps.

Why Tackling Chronic Absence Matters

Student attendance is highly associated with on-track indicators including grade level performance, connection to the school community, and the acquisition of social-emotional and executive functioning skills. When students attend regularly, by showing up to school at least 95% of the time, they are more likely to achieve academically and do well in school and life.

Research shows that when students become chronically absent, they are significantly more likely to fall off track.

- Early absences, starting in prekindergarten and kindergarten, correlate to poor attendance patterns in later years and reduce the likelihood of students reading proficiently by third grade.[1]

- By the secondary level, absenteeism becomes a predictor of high school dropout rates.[2]

- Poor attendance also adversely affects educational engagement, social-emotional development, and executive functioning.[3]

In Maryland, a student is chronically absent if the student has been in membership in a school for at least 10 days and is absent 10% or more of the school days while enrolled at that school.

Chronic absence can also indicate inequitable treatment or access to resources. Students who are eligible for services, students who are economically disadvantaged, multilingual, as well as Black, Indigenous, and Hispanic students disproportionately experience conditions in their community and in their schools that lead to higher levels of absences.

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[1] Chang andM. Romero, "Present, Engaged, and Accounted For: The Critical Importance of Addressing Chronic Absence in the Early Grades." (New York: National Center for Children inPoverty, September 2008.)

S. Ehrlich et al., "Preschool Attendance in Chicago Public Schools: Relationships withLearning Outcomes and Reasons for Absences." (Chicago: University of Chicago Consortium on School Research, May 2014.)

[2] Allensworth et. all, Looking Forward to High School and College: Middle School Indicators of Readiness in the Chicago Public Schools, University of Chicago, Consortium on School Research (November 2014)

[3] M. Gottfried, "Chronic Absenteeism and Its Effects on Students' Academic and Socioemotional Outcomes," Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk, 19(2) (2014): 53-75; M. Gottfried and A. Ansari, "Detailing New Dangers: Linking Kindergarten Chronic Absenteeism to Long-Term Declines in Executive Functioning," The Elementary School Journal, 121(3) (2021): 484-500; L. Santibañez and C. Guarino, "The Effects of

Absenteeism on Academic and Social-Emotional Outcomes: Lessons for COVID-19." (Stanford, CA: PACE policy brief, October 2020.)

Organizing a Spring Attendance Strategy

This toolkit is organized around the four steps below.

Step One. Leverage and strengthen your LEA attendance team

Most LEAs already have a team in place that oversees the systemwide strategy for attendance improvement. However, the team may benefit from adding additional members to fully leverage the resources that would allow it to have a greater impact. This toolkit helps LEAs to consider how to strengthen existing teams or put a team in place if one does not already exist.

Step Two. Address the spring attendance slide

To prevent the spring attendance slide, the LEA team can begin or reinforce positive messaging and targeted action to convey the valuable learning that is happening through to the end of the school year. The spring slide refers to the fact that during the weeks before and after a school's spring break as well as in the final weeks of school, drops in attendance often occur.

Step Three. Reach out to students at the cusp of chronic absence

These are students who have missed between 6% and 10% of their days on roll, or 10 - 14 days of school by April 1st. Steps can be taken to prevent these students from being chronically absent by the end of the school year. LEAs and schools can use this outreach to identify and provide support by learning what motivates students to attend school along with finding out what is getting in the way of attendance.

Step Four. Identify and address common barriers to attendance

Understanding common root causes of why students are missing too much school can help teams determine the best course of action. Identifying the right strategies, and steps for implementation require ensuring that teams take a problem-solving approach that meaningfully addresses the major barrier(s) and is implemented with fidelity. The team must also determine if the strategies adopted effectively reduce absences.

Step One: Leverage and Strengthen Your LEA Team

Ideally, every LEA in Maryland already has a team responsible for implementing the systemwide attendance strategy and supporting school attendance teams. These teams can utilize this toolkit to provide additional ideas and resources to enhance existing efforts.

Ideally teams at both the LEA and school levels are cross-functional and cross-departmental so they can advance a coordinated approach to improving student attendance. Cross-functional teams that unite departments and unique roles within the LEA or at the school level provide the teams additional capacity to strategize the best approaches to improve attendance and make available an array of resources across health, community schools, arts, or otherwise. If teams are already in place, consider using these LEA and school self-assessments found on the Attendance Works website to determine how they might be strengthened.

If teams are not already in place either at the LEA or school level, consider if there is another existing team, with a designated organizer, that can carry out this work or if a new one is needed. Consider these Attendance Works tips for organizing LEA and school teams. Your LEA can then use the work this spring to launch attendance teams that function all year long.

The LEA team is responsible for:

- identifying the school level contact and teams that will implement the strategies in this toolkit;

- providing data to school teams to inform action and provide capacity to monitor results;

- providing materials and support for implementation; and

- engaging community partners.

Each LEA should identify a point of contact charged with organizing the spring actions to reduce chronic absence. This person should have the knowledge, skills, and authority to guide the systemwide approach, with the support of a team.

Practice Questions

- **Does your LEA have a team responsible for organizing a systemwide approach to attendance improvement?**
  - If so, who on the team can serve as point of contact?
  - If not, is there an existing team that could take on this responsibility through the end of the school year? Or who could quickly be designated to assume this function?

- **Does your LEA support and monitor school teams responsible for improving attendance?**
  - Is the school team led by the school leader?
  - Is there training for the members of the team to put in place an attendance multi-tiered system of support?
  - Are the teams provided with protocols to guide decisions about when outreach, engagement, and interventions should happen? If you don't have a protocol, here's an example.
  - Is there school guidance for school leaders on team membership to ensure that teams are capable of a multidisciplinary approach?
  - Are school teams provided differentiated strategies for attendance improvement such as engaging families in elementary school and students in secondary school as part of the attendance improvement strategy?

- **Does the LEA examine attendance data and provide school leaders and members of the team with comprehensive, timely and actionable data?**
  - Does the LEA team regularly meet and review attendance data to examine trends across the LEA by school, student group, grade, geography, time of week?
  - Has the LEA determined which schools have the highest rates of chronic absence and what support might be necessary for those schools to meaningfully address the reasons that students are missing school?
  - Can schools examine data on attendance by day so they can identify when strategic actions might make the most difference given typical dips (e.g. worse attendance during particular days of the week, after or before vacations, at the end of the school year)?
  - Do schools have access to reports that give them information about students by attendance band including the percent and number of students who are at-risk of chronic absence? (missing 6% - 10% of their days on roll)?
  - Can that data be organized by grade, class, geography, and federally recognized student groups?

- **Could teams at the LEA or school level be strengthened by recruiting additional members?**
  - Could teams benefit from including additional school or LEA staff who can offer different perspectives and resources to reduce chronic absence?
  - Is this an opportunity to engage community partners at the school or LEA level in improving attendance?

Step Two: Address the Spring Attendance Slide

The spring attendance slide refers to the fact that drops in attendance are common toward the end of the school year and absences typically increase during the last few weeks of school. The shift to warmer temperatures, expanding time off during spring break, increases in asthma, allergies, or other health problems, half-days and anticipating summer vacation, can make attendance plummet.

Stop the spring slide through messaging and engagement that explicitly helps motivate students and their families to sustain or improve their attendance through the end of the school year with a particular emphasis on days where attendance typically declines. Get everyone (school staff, parents, caregivers, and community partners) involved in supporting these activities.

MESSAGING

Start by agreeing upon the key messages your LEA will use to communicate to the whole school community that regular student attendance matters through the end of the school year and is a major priority. A recent study by the Ad Council of 5,000 parents revealed the following insights about what messaging resonates. It found parents were more receptive if it:

- Is positive in tone.

- Communicates the opportunities associated with in-person learning, not just the consequences of missing school.

- Focuses on how school develops children holistically, beyond academic performance.

- Includes realistic goals for parents to work toward not being chronically absent, such as to attend as much as possible vs. citing a specific number of days or saying, "every day."

- Acknowledges their hesitations and avoids chastising or shaming parents by telling them what is acceptable or not.

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

MESSENGERS

LEA teams can identify who is well positioned to deliver the messages and then provide schools with resources to recruit and equip such messengers to spread the word about why showing up to school matters. For students of all ages, teachers are especially trusted messengers. For younger students, enlist messengers (e.g. school nurses, pediatricians, other parent leaders, faith-based leaders) who are well positioned to reach parents. For older youth, other trusted messengers can include after-school program providers, sports coaches, and peers.

MESSAGING MODES

LEAs can also make messaging easier by identifying multiple modes to disseminate the messages and then creating materials that make it easy for schools to utilize. Messages include:

- **Pre-Recorded Messages:**

  - Create engaging messages from local celebrities and community leaders emphasizing the importance of attendance through to the end of the school year.

  - Schedule these messages to be played on key dates known for lower attendance (e.g., after holidays, on Mondays).

- **Public Service Announcements (PSAs):**

  - Film/tape PSAs featuring the value and importance of attending school regularly.

  - Distribute PSAs on social media, public transportation, doctors' offices, barber shops, salons, local TV, public agencies, and during school events.

- **Social Media:**

  - Share infographics and short videos highlighting the impact of attendance on academic success.

- **Attendance Phone Banks:**

  - Organize a phone bank to call families of students with high levels of absences, leverage LEA personnel, and document the areas of needs and resources that will be provided. (This can also serve as a school-level activity.)

- **Community & Clergy Engagement:**

  - Create announcements for clergy and community partners to share with their networks.

- **Wake-Up Calls & Encouragement:**

  - Organize wake-up calls or encouraging messages to motivate students to attend school, especially on days that students are less likely to attend, or to remind students and families that certain days are in session like the return after spring break, or the last day of school.

- **Morning Messages:**

  - Feature daily and weekly messages about attendance, including shout-outs to students with excellent or improved attendance.

- **Handouts:**

  Provide information for family members. Here are possible resources available from Attendance Works.

  - [Handouts for Families](#)

  - [Health Handouts](#)

  - [Student Attendance Success plans](#)

  - [Sample chronic absence letter](#)

ENGAGEMENT

Scheduling engaging activities and personally connecting with students and their families who have struggled with attendance can encourage students to attend and help ensure that families feel supported. A clearly communicated calendar of activities can help families understand the value of sustaining attendance through to the end of the school year. Using daily attendance data from prior years can help LEAs and schools to anticipate when to intensify or offer school activities that promote attendance.

Consider these end of the year activities as you develop a plan:

- **Recognition and Incentive Programs:**

  - Acknowledge students with good, or improved attendance, through certificates and public recognition.

  - Highlight educators who make a difference.

  - Celebrate families that improve attendance and acknowledge their efforts.

  - [Go here](#) for more information and research on effective incentive programs.

- **Family Fun Days:** Host events such as broadcasting local sports games to reinforce positive attendance behavior.

- **Spirit Week:** Engage students through activities and themed days.

- **Spring Education Events:** Such as Read Across America Day, Million Word Challenge, Pi Day, or Earth Day.

- **Outdoor Field Day:** Get students and staff moving! Older students can be trained to lead movement or mindfulness activities.

- **Multicultural Day:** Create a world music dance party or potluck meal: Invite students and families to share from their own cultures or from an area of the world they are interested in.

- **Shows and Showcases:** Hold in-person performances, spotlight activities, or showcase upcoming summer or after-school expanded learning programs.

- **Field Trips:**

    o Organize opportunities for community connected learning by visiting planetariums or local farms.

    o Ensure policies are inclusive so that all students can participate.

- **Breakfast Bunch**: Arrange for a small group of students to have breakfast with the principal or select favorite administrators or teachers.

- **College and Career Spirit:**

    o Host a photo day for students and families for graduation.

    o Invite teachers to share with students about the colleges they attended and their career journeys.

    o Create an experiential career day that includes role-playing, guest speakers, and shadow days.

Appreciation Days: Everyone thanks a particular type of person, (parents/caregivers, teachers, custodial staff, students, etc.).

To create your Spring Sprint Week Calendar Use this sample worksheet to develop ideas

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Practice Questions:

- At what points during the last quarter of the school year and what days of the week are students most likely to have a higher risk of missing school? Are there differences between schools? Offer schools information about timing activities and messaging for those points in the calendar when there are higher rates of absenteeism.

- Given the strategies that will guide school level efforts, what resources do schools need to implement such as messaging materials, or resources for end of the year activities like track and field day?

- Are there grants or funding streams that can be provided to schools to support year end activities?

- Are there partners or strategies to encourage and help teachers to sustain an active learning environment through to the end of the year, such as partnering with out-of-school time providers?

- What communication resources will be provided to community partners to reinforce the messages?

- What is the plan and data to be collected to monitor implementation and effectiveness?

Step Three: Reach Out to Students at the Cusp of Chronic Absence

By the Spring, students who are on track to chronic absence are those who are missing 6% -10% of the school year. These are students who have missed between 10 days - 14 days of school by April 1st, which means that steps can be taken to prevent them from being chronically absent by the end of the school year. By working with families, school staff, and providers to address barriers to attendance, schools can help prevent students from ending the year chronically absent.

The focus of the outreach effort should be to encourage improved attendance, identify, and resolve barriers to attendance, and identify what motivates the students to show up.

IDENTIFY WHICH STUDENTS ARE MODERATELY CHRONICALLY ABSENT

To better understand who is missing and to focus your outreach efforts, use your student management system to organize student data by student group, grade level, school, and geography, to identify patterns and understand where the greatest needs are at a systemic level. Ensure that each school can similarly access the same breakdowns that provide them with information about which students to focus on for this effort. Equip schools with school level data reports and data inquiry prompts to assist school teams with data analysis.

ENGAGE IN OUTREACH

To ensure that schools have the resources they need to engage students at-risk for chronic absence, LEAs should help schools to carry out the following tasks.

- Ensure a team (ideally an existing attendance team) led by the school principal (or another administrator operating with the strong support of the principal) organizes this outreach;

- Identify and recruit staff who can take responsibility for reaching out to each student and possibly their families. (If possible, find a staff person who already knows the student and has a positive, trusting relationship with them and their family.);

- Provide scripts, with a timeline, for reaching out to families in a caring, engaging way;

- Document and capture reasons for absenteeism (see, for example, this worksheet), ideally in your student management systems so that the information can be aggregated;

- Share resources for students and families including, for example, student success plans (with help banks) and guidance for avoiding unnecessary health related absences.

- Assign and track interventions; and

- Examine whether attendance is improving or if the support needs to be adjusted.

Practice Questions:

- What resources will be dedicated at the systemic level in support of this outreach?

- What resources will be provided to schools to implement outreach efforts?

- What materials need to be developed? Who and/or what office will lead?

- How will the LEA monitor implementation and effectiveness?

Step Four: Identify and Address Common Barriers to Attendance

While educators may have a sense about why some students are missing school, often the full range of stories and barriers about the reasons behind the absences are not well understood or documented. In addition to identifying what gets in the way of student attendance, it is equally important to find out what motivates students to attend school or helps families support their child's regular attendance. Understanding motivations, and the families' support network can assist schools with developing approaches to attendance improvement that align with student interests and leverage family, school, and community assets.

IDENTIFYING COMMON BARRIERS

In order to more deeply understand common barriers to attendance, school staff need to go beyond staff perception or the most well-known acute cases of absences. Developing a comprehensive understanding of why students are missing and what makes a difference to help them to attend usually requires implementing an effort that deepens listening and expands who staff engage to learn more. Here are a few tools and strategies that LEAs can encourage schools to use to gain a deeper understanding of students and families' motivations and challenges.

- Review and utilize notes (e.g. included in case management, student information systems, etc.). Notice similarities and differences across students with different levels of absenteeism (e.g. students who are moderately chronically absent versus more severe levels of chronic absence - missing 20% or more of the school year).

- Empathy Interviews: These involve targeted, one-on-one conversations with a small sample of people (i.e. students or parents/caregivers) to learn from their lived experience. See this interview template from the High-Tech High Graduate School of Education.

- 2 X 10: This simple relationship and trust building strategy involves spending two minutes per day for 10 days in a row talking with a student about anything she or he wants to talk about. See this guidance from Turn Around for Children.

- Student Focus Groups: Focus groups are moderated discussions held with a small number of students that help to explore experiences and perspectives. See this Sample Attendance Focus Group Protocol doc.

- Attendance Café: This strategy involves using a welcoming café setting to engage parents in discussions about attendance. Participants can learn from each other as they share common experiences and successes. Find the guidance here.

- Student Surveys: Surveys can be used to ask a large number of students about the reasons behind their absences. See this survey for PreK Head Start Students and this survey for secondary students developed by the University of Florida.

- Shadow a Student: See school through your student's eyes, identify opportunities to improve, and take action to create change at your school site. Find the toolkit here.

Ensure that the information that is gathered can be disaggregated for different populations of students to allow for analysis of causes by student group or grade or otherwise the challenges and barriers associated with why different student populations (demographics, grades, as well as levels of absenteeism) miss school are not always the same.

Analyze the data to detect common themes. One approach is to review these **Root Causes for Absence**. Go through the list of Barriers, Aversion, Disengagement or Misconceptions and highlight the ones your team is finding affects the students and families in your school. Use insights gathered about barriers and motivators to inform what strategies will be put in place to reverse the Spring attendance decline.

Possible questions to offer the school team include:

1. What are the issues affecting a large number of students? How would you describe it?

2. How do you know?

3. How many students is a problem for?

4. What are the students' shared characteristics that contribute to why this issue is directly affecting them? (Such as grade level, homeroom, friend group, neighborhood, or otherwise)

5. Why is it a problem?

6. Who else is involved?

7. What else do we know about the issue and how it is affecting the students?

8. What are the root causes? Identify at least three.

ALIGNING STRATEGIES TO BARRIERS AND ASSETS

LEAs can then encourage school teams to use the insights about root causes of student absenteeism to identify supports and interventions to address the reasons why students are missing school. Schools can use the insights from students and families to consider adding new strategies or garnering additional resources in order to better address current realities.

Documenting the reasons for absenteeism provides LEAs and schools with the information they need to ensure the systems of support and interventions directly address the reasons for absence.

LEAs should also assist school teams with adopting a continuous improvement approach to reducing student absences. Through continuous improvement school teams develop a theory of action, put in place strategies to reduce student absences, study the result of their effort, and learn whether the interventions are making a difference. The use of a continuous improvement cycle or a plan, do, study, act, model equips schools to meaningfully address why students are missing and learn from their efforts.

Consider offering schools the following continuous improvement problem solving steps:

- Identify the reason(s) for the absences, preferably beginning with common causes of absence for a group of students. For the spring attendance slide consider focusing on students at the cusp of chronic absence for this initial effort. (refer to the root causes work done previously)

- Gather information about students and the attendance barriers and what motivates them to come to school.

- Understand the problem by learning as much as possible about it.

- Identify the root causes and determine the underlying conditions contributing to the root causes.

- Develop possible solutions. Endeavour to include students and families who are affected by the challenges to help co-create the solutions.

- Choose a solution or set of solutions, identify the steps for implementation and who will be responsible.

- Monitor implementation and results.

- Evaluate whether the interventions were effective in removing the barriers to attendance and/or effectively engaging the student in school.

Ideas for research-based approaches to reducing absenteeism can be found in the Attendance Play Book from Attendance Works and FutureEd that includes specific strategies for prevention and intervention. This resource is inclusive of more than two dozen

Feeling Ambitious?

Laying groundwork for longer-term approaches: While most effective if used starting at the beginning of the school year, teams could use this opportunity to begin using one or more of these strategies that can make a significant difference. The first two, Success Mentors and LEAP Home visits, could be used with students at the cusp while the third, SEAT, is a process aimed at supporting a more positive climate of attendance for everyone.

Success Mentors: This strategy involves connecting a student to a caring adult in the school who reaches out three times a week.

National Success Mentor Toolkit

Attendance Works Elementary Success Mentor Toolkit

LEAP Home visits: Developed in Connecticut, this relational home visit strategy used data to reach out to students and their families over time and yielded significant improvements in attendance. Online professional development to learn about the model is available for free. Learn more here.

SEAT: The Scan of Environment and Attendance Tool (SEAT) is designed for school leaders to engage school staff, students, parents and community members to identify strengths and opportunities to promote positive school culture and strong attendance. Using the SEAT, schools can identify strengths and opportunities to shape the underlying issues that contribute to student attendance, including climate, culture, and the physical environment. Equipped with

effective, readily scalable approaches covering topics ranging from family engagement to the value of attendance incentives, as well as students' social and emotional well-being, a high priority for educators post-pandemic. In the playbook, we explain each intervention, identify the problem it solves, summarize supporting research, and highlight schools or LEAs that have used the strategy successfully.
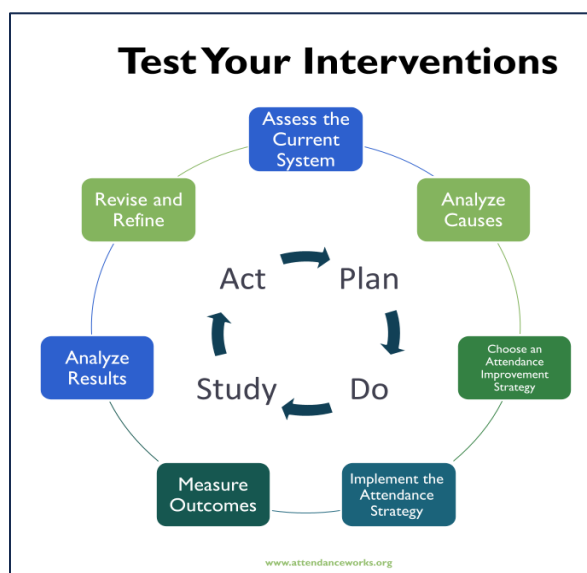
In conclusion, the Spring Action Toolkit provides LEAs with actionable strategies to reduce chronic absenteeism as the school year comes to a close. Focusing on addressing the spring attendance slide, engaging students at the cusp of chronic absenteeism, and tackling barriers to attendance, this toolkit offers resources to enhance and build upon existing efforts. By offering practical, focused solutions and guiding questions for assessment, the toolkit empowers LEAs to take immediate, effective action and make a meaningful impact on student attendance.

Attendance Task Force

ATTENDANCE WORKS

Sue Fothergill
Senior Fellow

MARYLAND STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Dr. Kyle Ashley
Senior Research and Data Specialist
Office of Research

Dr. Matthew Duque
Director
Office of Research

Mary Gable
Assistant State Superintendent
Division of Student Support and Federal Programs

Timothy Guy
Assistant State Superintendent
Division of Assessment, Accountability, and Performance Reporting

Lauren D. Holmes
Executive Director
Division of Student Support and Federal Programs

Dawn Hubbard
Director
Division of Assessment, Accountability, and Performance Reporting

Tianna Lanier
Manager
Office of School Review, Support and Improvement

Zoe Matthews
Education Support Specialist

Michael Muempfer
Director
Maryland School Mental Health Response Program

Walter Sallee
Director
Student Services and Strategic Planning

Geoffrey Sanderson
Deputy State Superintendent
Office of Accountability

LOCAL EDUCATION AGENCIES

Trinell Bowman
Associate Superintendent for Special Education
Prince George's County Public Schools

Diamonte Brown
President
Baltimore Teachers' Union

Cara Calloway
Mental Health Coordinator
Caroline County Public Schools

Dr. Tanya Crawford-Williams
Coordinator, Office of Student Conduct and Attendance
Baltimore City Public Schools

S. Matthew Evans
Director of Student Services
Queen Anne's County Public Schools

Joshua Fine
Principal
Montgomery County Public Schools

Hillary Garner
Community School Coordinator
Prince George's County Public Schools

Lori Hines
Director, Student Conduct and Attendance
Baltimore City Public Schools

Dr. Keena Howell
Coordinator, Division of Pupil Personnel and Attendance Services
Montgomery County Public Schools

Lori Phelps
Principal
Baltimore County Public Schools

Dr. Yetunde Reeves
Principal
Baltimore City Public Schools

Dr. Myriam Rogers
Superintendent
Baltimore County Public Schools

Dr. Derek Simmons
Superintendent
Caroline County Public Schools

Deborah Somerville
Director, Office of Health Services
Baltimore County

Traci Tatum
Teacher
Frederick County Public Schools
President-Elect
Free State PTA

Ryan Voegtlin
Assistant Superintendent of
Student Services
Anne Arundel County Public
Schools

**PUBLIC AGENCIES AND
ORGANIZATIONS**

Rene Averitt-Sanzone
Executive Director
Parents Place of Maryland

Paul Lemle
President
Maryland State Education
Association
Frank Skinner
Project Director
Montgomery College

Christopher Truffer
Executive Director
Maryland Association of
Secondary School Principals

Gerrod Tyler
President
Free State PTA

Christopher Wooleyhand
Executive Director
Maryland Association of
Elementary School Principals