



Session 1

Rising to the Challenge: Understanding the Scope of Chronic Absence and Actionable Strategies for Improvement



Professional Learning Series

August 13, 2024



Welcome!



Lori Masseur
Director of Early Learning
Read On Arizona



Welcome!



Cecelia Leong
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Development



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Welcome & Introductions

Use the Chat and share:

- ✓ Your role
- ✓ What is one creative strategy you've seen or used to encourage student attendance
- ✓ Why do you think it was effective?



Chronic Absence 2.0 Learning Series

This series is intended for school teams that have completed our introductory *E-Learning Series* and wish to deepen their understanding and practice. Participants will leave with a clear understanding of what is causing absenteeism and identify evidence-based strategies to increase attendance and engagement.

- ❖ **Session 1** — Rising to the Challenge: Understanding the Scope of Chronic Absence and Actionable Strategies for Improvement
- ❖ **Session 2** — Mapping Our System and Tier 1 Universal Strategies
- ❖ **Session 3** — Aligning Tier 2 Early Interventions to Address Reasons for Absence
- ❖ **Session 4** — Charting the Path: Your Attendance Improvement Roadmap



Series Objectives

- ✓ Deeper understanding of reasons for absenteeism by examining qualitative data about student and family experiences of school
- ✓ Identify evidence-based strategies to improve attendance, that can be incorporated into daily practices
- ✓ Increase individual and organizational knowledge of attendance improvement best practices

Agenda: Session 1

- I. Welcome / Agenda
- II. Overview of Learning Series Objectives
- III. Examining and Monitoring Quantitative Data
- IV. Rising to the 50% Challenge
- V. Practice Assignment: Qualitative Field Observations
- VI. Q&A / Closing

Review of Chronic Absence Key Concepts

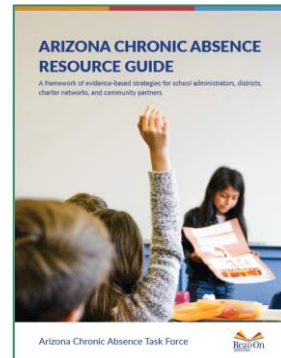




Review Question #1

According to the state of Arizona, a student is “chronically absent” if they are absent for at least _____% of days enrolled during the school year.

- a. 5%
- b. 10%
- c. 20%
- d. 30%

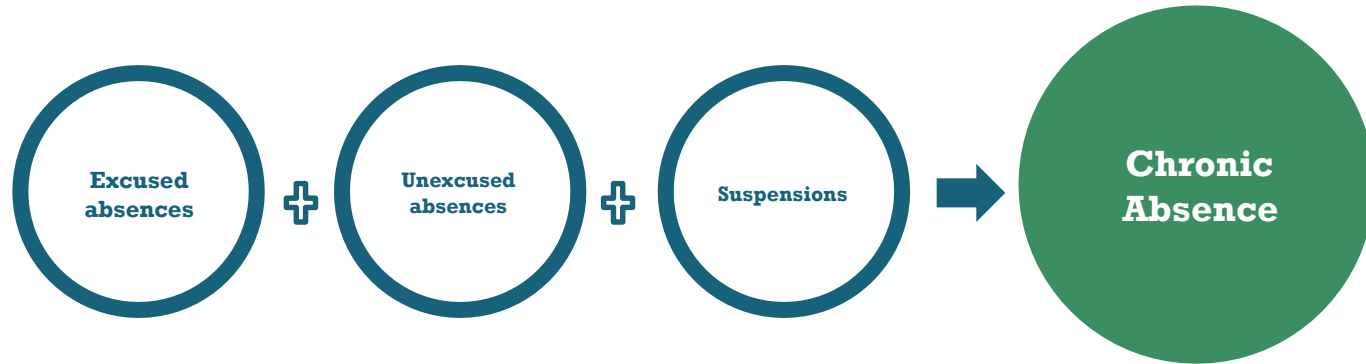


Note: The Arizona Chronic Absence Resource Guide is forthcoming. See also the Read On Arizona chronic absence page: <https://readonarizona.org/resources/chronic-absence/>



What is chronic absence?

Chronic absence is missing so much school for any reason that a student is academically at risk. Chronic absence is defined as **missing 10 percent or more of school for any reason.**



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

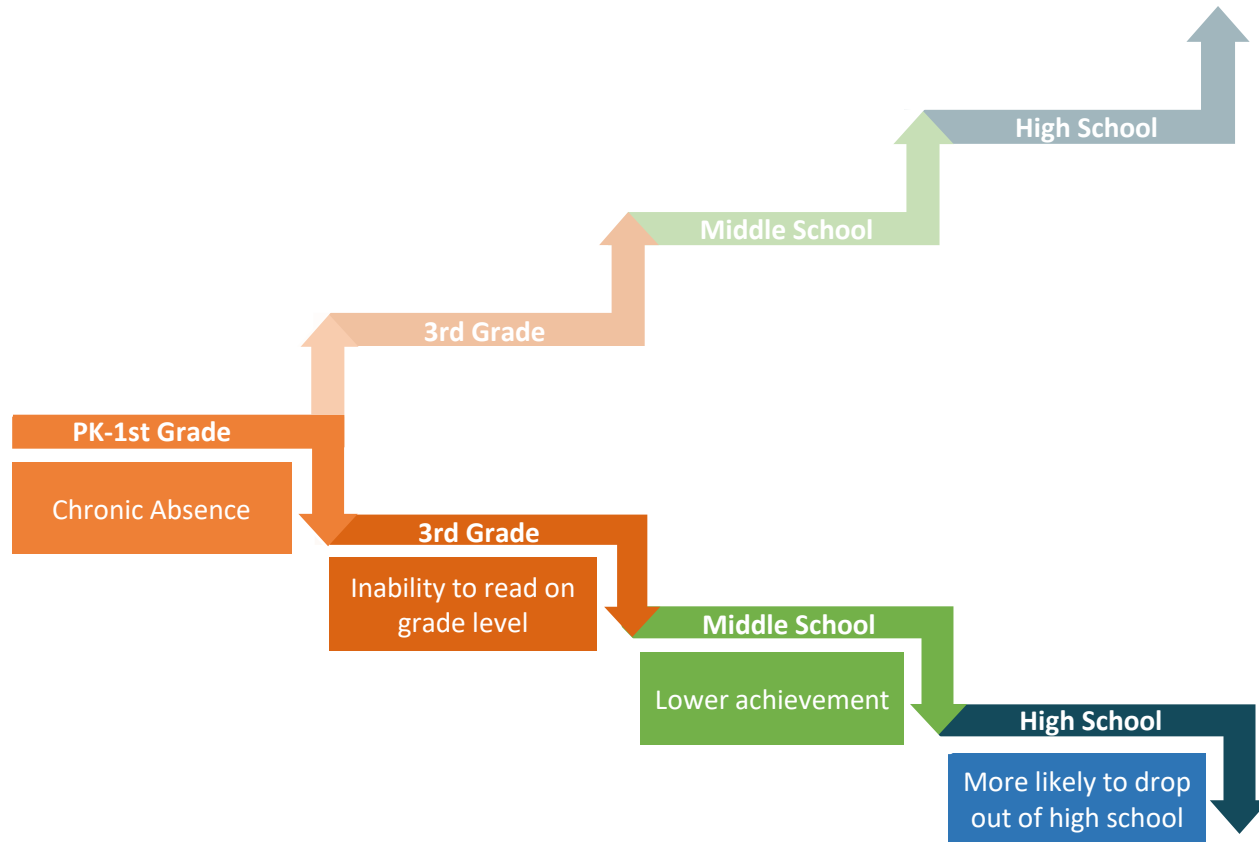


Review Question #2

Which of the following statements highlight the impact of attending school regularly? (*Select all that apply*)

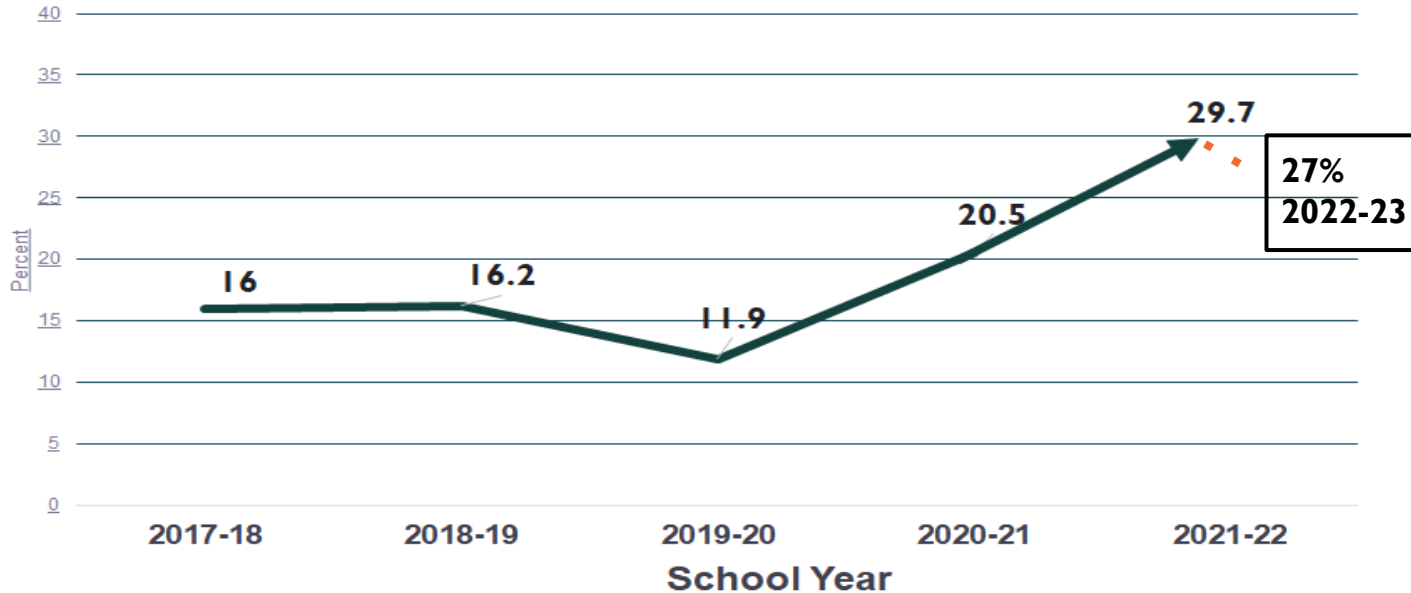
- PreK/1st graders who attend regularly perform better on measures of academic and social and emotional capacities
- Students who attend school regularly are more likely to read proficiently by the end of 3rd grade
- Students who attend school regularly are more likely to do better on standardized tests
- Students who attend school regularly are more likely to graduate high school and persist through college

Improving Attendance Matters



National Chronic Absence Crisis

Percentage of Students Chronically Absent Nearly Doubled Nationwide Between SY 2017-18 to SY 2021-22

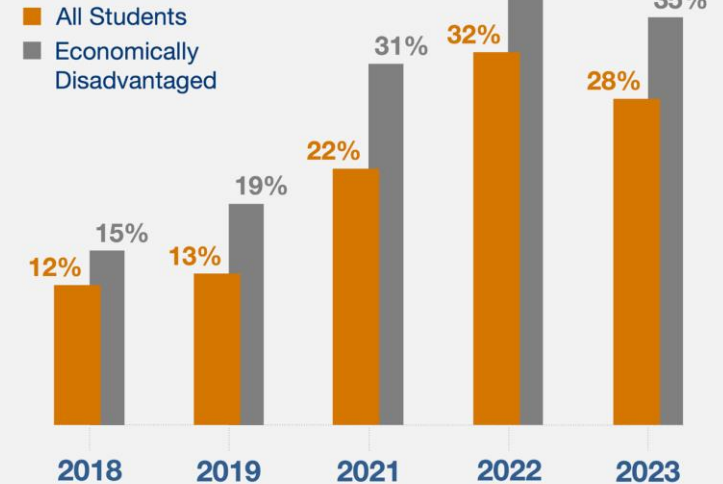


- ✓ The number of chronically absent students grew from 8,095,132 to 14,660,261.
- ✓ State data from 2022-23 indicate rates remain high.

Student-Level Chronic Absence Rate

ARIZONA CHRONIC ABSENCE RATE

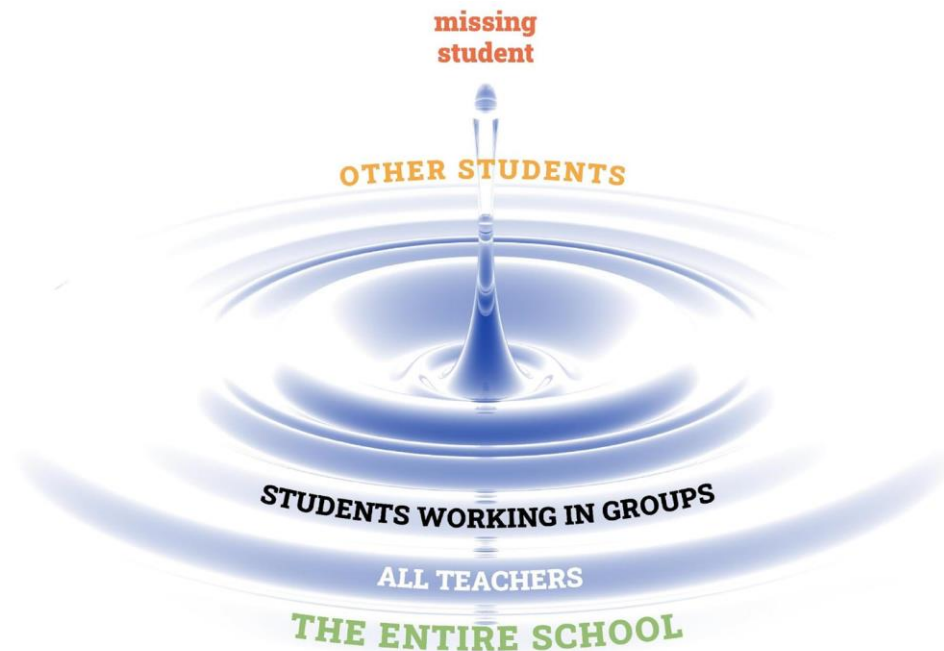
Statewide, Grades 1-8



Chronic absence rate is the percentage of students missing 10% or more of a school year for any reason.
Source: AZ School Report Cards/Arizona Department of Education

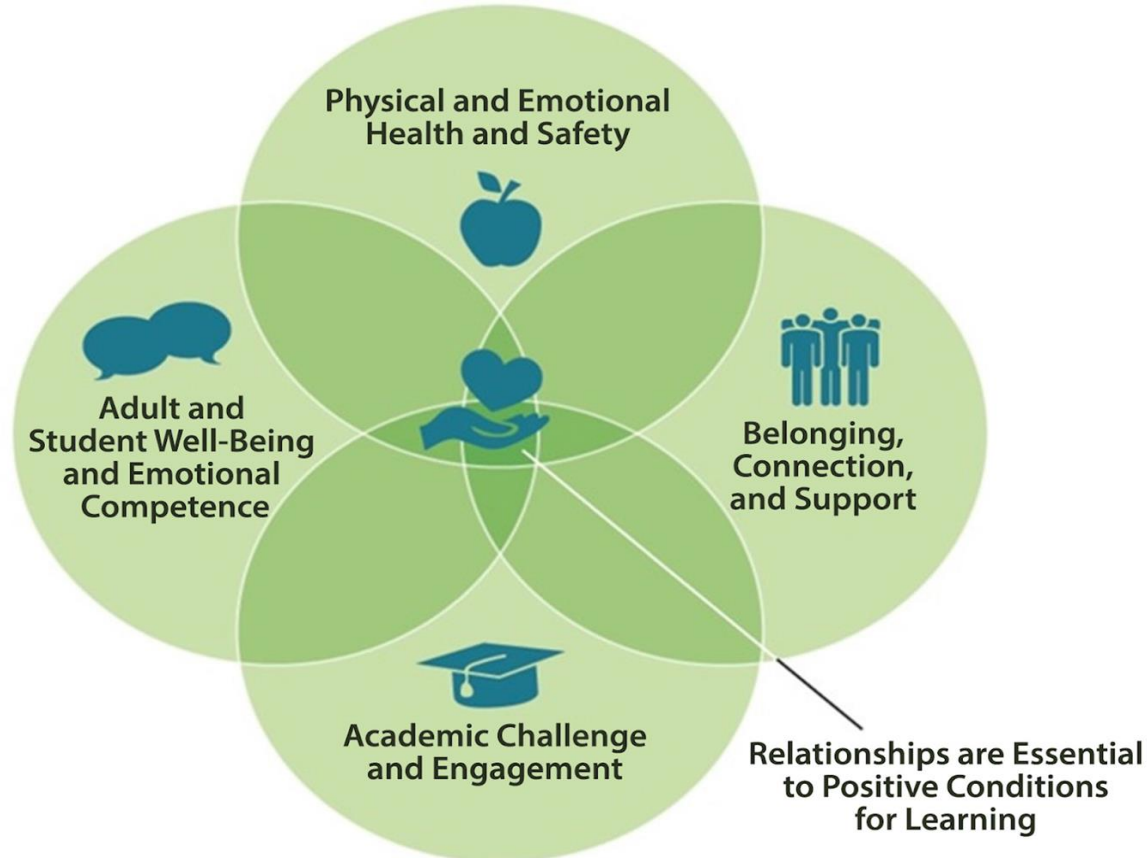


When a Student Misses School the Impact Ripples



2 out of 3 students attend a school with 20% or more chronic absenteeism (SY 2021-22)

High levels of absence reflect an erosion in positive conditions for learning



Relationship Building
Tanque Verde
Unified School
District

“You have to create a system and culture where the entire school community focuses on building relationships. This takes ongoing work.”

**- Superintendent Scott Hagerman,
Tanque Verde Unified School District,
Tucson, AZ**

The key to reducing chronic absence is finding out and addressing what causes students to miss too much school

Barriers

- Chronic and acute illness
- Family responsibilities or home situation
- Trauma
- Poor transportation
- Housing and food insecurity
- Inequitable access to needed services (including health)
- System involvement
- Lack of predictable schedules for learning
- Lack of access to technology
- Community violence

Aversion

- Struggling academically and/or behaviorally
- Unwelcoming school climate
- Social and peer challenges
- Anxiety
- Biased disciplinary and suspension practices
- Undiagnosed disability and/or lack of disability accommodations
- Caregivers had negative educational experiences

Disengagement

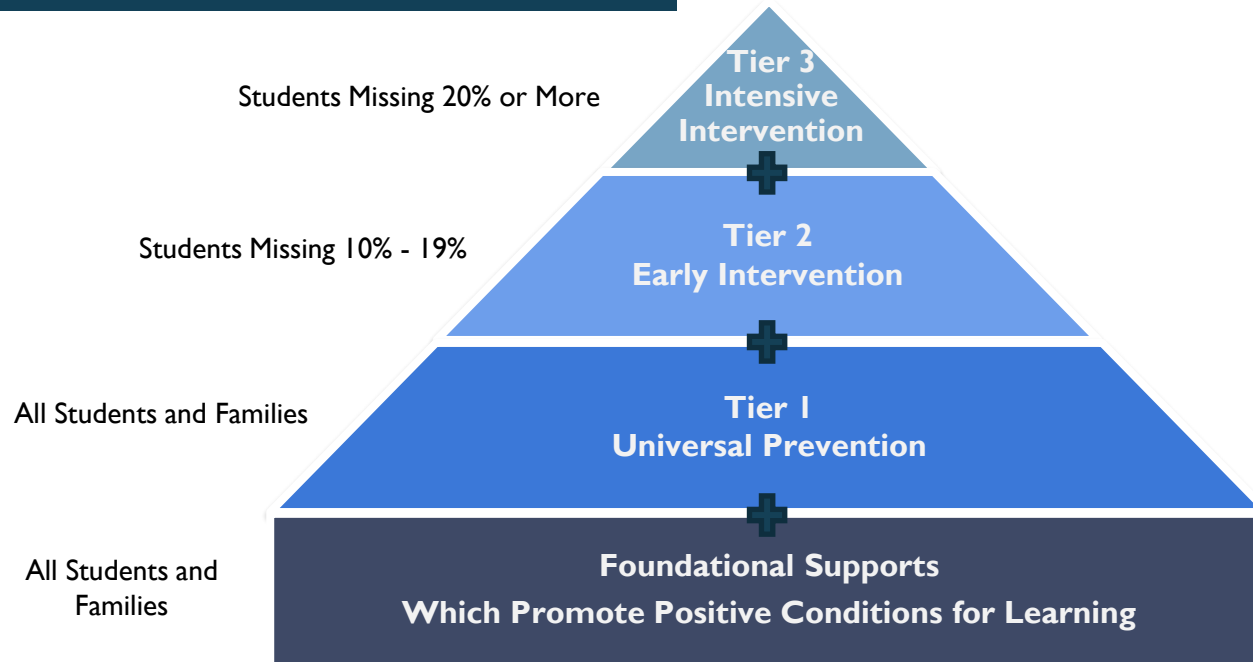
- Lack of challenging, culturally responsive instruction
- Bored
- No meaningful relationships to adults in the school (especially given staff shortages)
- Lack of enrichment opportunities
- Lack of academic and behavioral support
- Failure to earn credits
- Need to work conflicts with being in high school

Misconceptions

- Absences are only a problem if they are unexcused
- Missing 2 days per month doesn't affect learning
- Lose track and underestimate TOTAL absences
- Assume students must stay home for any symptom of illness
- Attendance only matters in the older grades
- Suspensions don't count as absence



Multi-tiered System of Support for Attendance



Actionable Data

Buckeye Elementary School District

By looking closely at data, the district and schools realized that students who lived within a one-mile radius of school—which is considered walking distance—had attendance issues. Upon talking to parents, they discovered that **not being on a bus route had become a barrier to attendance.**

They created attendance teams and produced plans outlining specific goals with incentives for students to come to school. Since the effort began, five schools in the district have successfully reduced their chronic absence rates.

Attendance Pyramid Worksheet (examples)

Sample form: <https://www.attendanceworks.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Pyramid-worksheet-with-EXAMPLES-revised-June-2023.pdf>

	Family Engagement	Positive Student Engagement	Behavioral and Mental Health	Physical Health	Academic Support	Extended Learning	Basic Needs
Tier 3: Intensive Intervention	Assign family advocate to coordinate supports	1:1 connection with adult advocate (e.g. social worker)	Individual plan developed with psychologist/social worker	Coordinated care plans with local health provider	Individualized learning and success plan leading to graduation	Accelerated credit recovery	Provision of targeted resources, e.g. housing assistance
Tier 2: Early Intervention	Targeted, positive family visits	Clubs Success Mentors Check-In / Check-Out	Small group counseling	Plans for students with chronic illnesses such as asthma and diabetes	Attendance strategies added to IEPs and 504 plans Tutoring and intensive classroom supports	Music or art program prioritized for students who have experienced trauma	Bus passes, walking school bus, bike program, or ride sharing services
Tier 1: Universal Prevention	Clear communications about attendance expectations Recognition of good and improved attendance	Connection to a caring adult (<i>Relationship Mapping</i>) Establish positive, caring, daily attendance practices and routines	Open-door policy for students, families, and staff to seek mental health services	Build time into routines for students and staff to wash hands Immunization clinic Health screenings	Learning objectives are clear and students can make up work after they are absent	Summer enrichment for every student	School-based clothing closet
Foundational Supports	Family resource centers Universal family visits	Grade-level advisories or morning meetings	Schoolwide mindfulness	Clean school campuses with good ventilation P.E. and recess	All students have access to challenging and engaging curriculum	Plentiful, high-quality afterschool programs exist in the community	Universal free meal program

Blank form: <https://www.attendanceworks.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Pyramid-worksheet-BLANK-revised-June-2023.docx>

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



Pathway for Change

Mindset

Actionable
Data

Capacity

Strategies

Outcomes

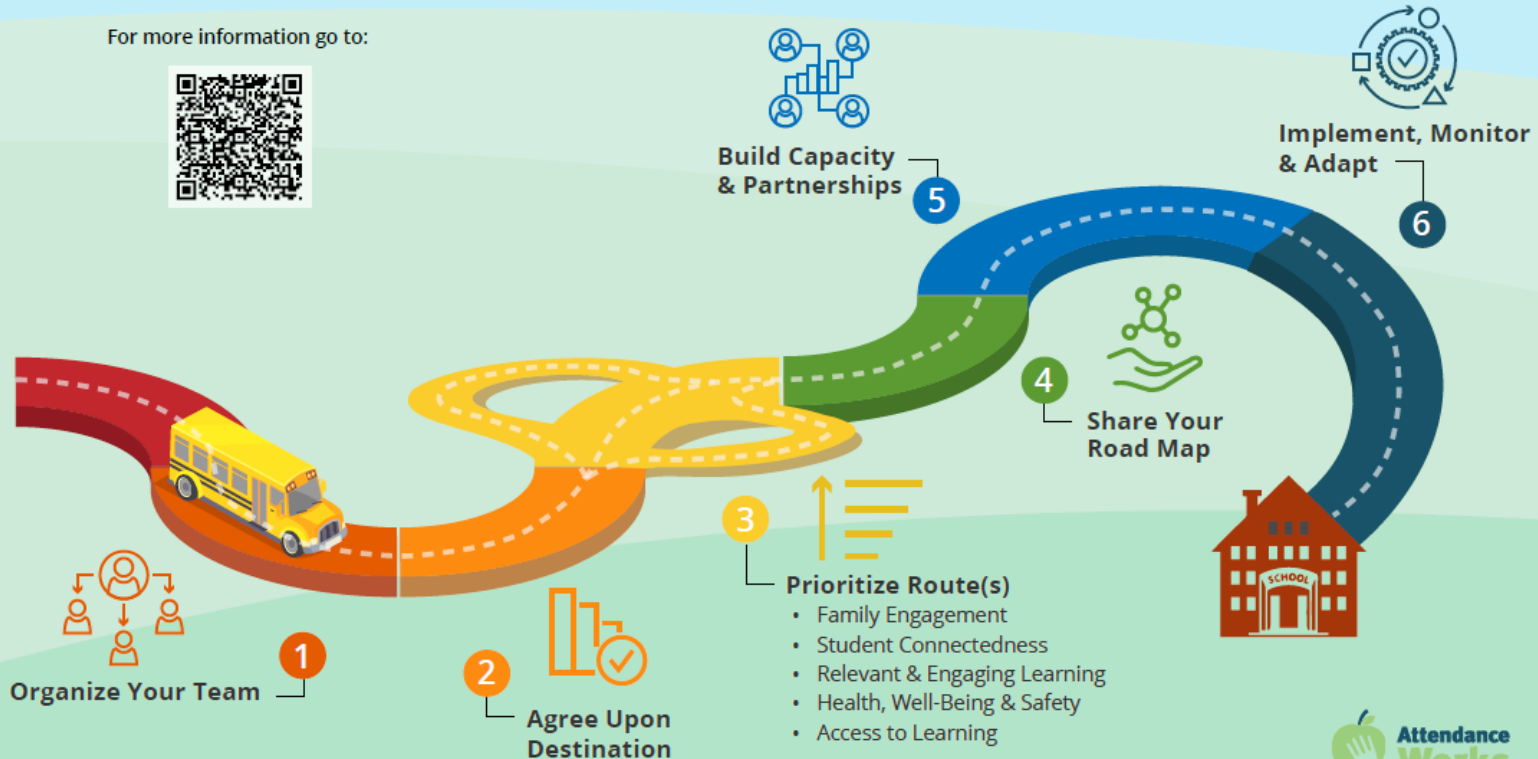


Rising to the 50% Challenge



Craft Your Engagement & Attendance State Road Map

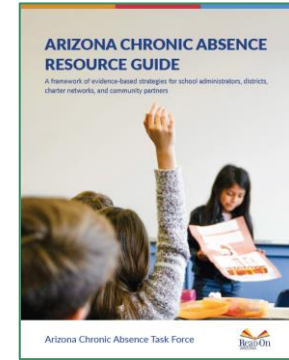
For more information go to:



In this group spreadsheet, type in your school's or district's chronic absence rate, number of chronically absent students, and the target reduction %.

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1iztEz5dFTpbgVWM2Lkf09LArchblLDGJlvWriHLJ2QXY/edit?usp=sharing>

SCHOOL DISTRICT	SCHOOL NAME	# of participants	Chronic absence rate (%) for SY 2023-24	Number of students chronically absent	Target Chronic Absence Rate (divide column D by 2)
Alhambra Elementary School District	Cordova Elementary School	1			
Alhambra Elementary School District	Mardid Neighborhood School	2			
Avondale Elementary School District	Lattie Coor School	1			
Cartwright School District	District	1			
Casa Grande Elementary School District	District	4			



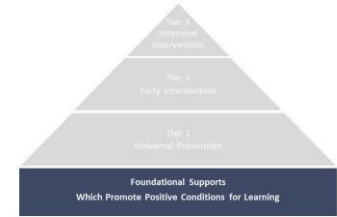
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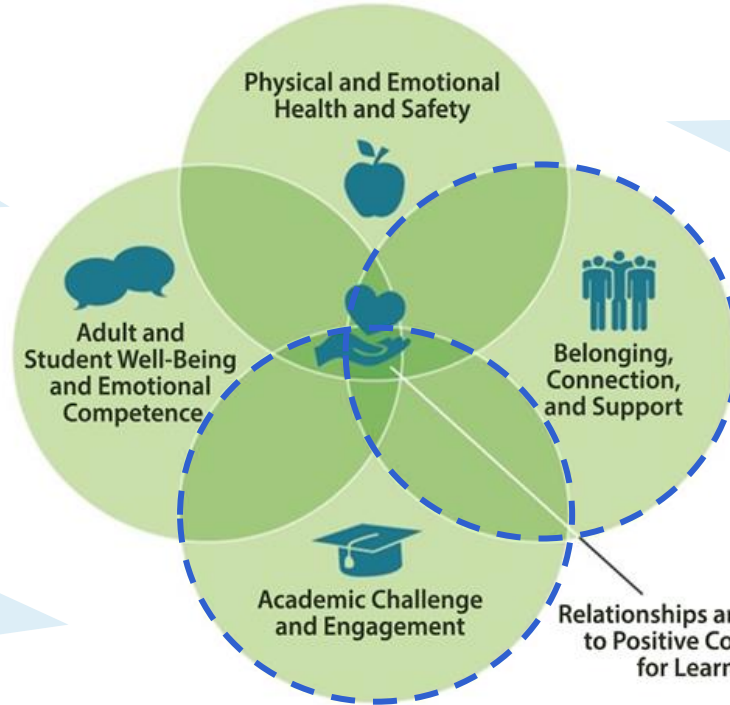
Building Strong Foundations



Examples of the Positive Conditions for Learning



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



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

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

- *Proactive engagement with students & families*
- *Advisories/meetings to build community*
- *Enrichment & clubs*
- *Positive peer connections*
- *Multiple communication methods*

Poll: How would you rate these conditions for your school?

Belonging, Connection & Support

Students have multiple opportunities to build positive relationships (through class circle time, advisories, mentorships or other activities) with adults and peers that develop confidence and leadership skills.

- Excelling
- Meeting
- Emerging
- Pressing Need

Academic Challenge & Engagement

Students engage in standards-based, collaborative projects where they apply conceptual understanding to address real challenges.

- Excelling
- Meeting
- Emerging
- Pressing Need



Let's Engage & Collaborate



Breakout #1

15
minutes

Based on your answers to the poll questions:

- How can you enhance belonging, connection and support?
- How can you increase academic challenge and engagement?

Record your answers in Padlet. Find the link to your group's Padlet bulletin board here:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1txxmQbw9be6TCEaCHEyoqBjRsA_ji5DeSixVMFFSYDM/edit?usp=sharing



Report Out

Gallery walk

Take a look at the main Padlet board (*link below*).

- ❖ What do you like?
- ❖ What do you have questions about?

Padlet (full board with all groups) <https://padlet.com/attendanceworks/conditions-for-learning-l-how-can-you-enhance-belonging-conn-mt9rpbvesj93ygv3>

Deepening Our Understanding:

Why are students chronically absent?



Reducing Chronic Absence Requires Understanding What Causes Students to Miss Too Much School

(Recognizing experiences can vary by student group)

Barriers

- Chronic and acute illness
- Trauma
- Poor transportation
- Housing and food insecurity
- Inequitable access to needed services (including health)
- System involvement
- Lack of predictable schedules for learning
- Lack of access to technology for parents
- Community violence

Aversion

- Struggling academically and/or behaviorally
- Unwelcoming school climate
- Social and peer challenges
- Anxiety
- Biased disciplinary and suspension practices
- Undiagnosed disability and/or lack of disability accommodations
- Caregivers had negative educational experiences

Disengagements

- Lack of challenging, culturally responsive instruction
- Bored
- No meaningful relationships to adults in the school (especially given staff shortages)
- Lack of enrichment opportunities
- Lack of academic and behavioral support

Misconceptions

- Absences are only a problem if they are unexcused
- Missing 2 days per month doesn't affect learning
- Lose track and underestimate TOTAL absences
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- Attendance only matters in the older grades
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<https://www.attendanceworks.org/chronic-absence/addressing-chronic-absence/3-tiers-of-intervention/root-causes/>



Reflect

Share in chat:

Why are so many students chronically absent in your school?

Worksheet: Understanding the root causes for student absenteeism

Use these questions to help identify the likely causes of absenteeism for a student who is chronically absent in your class. Understanding the root causes for missing too much school can help determine the best course of action. Is this something that you can help your student and his/her family overcome? Or is there an underlying issue that requires additional support, perhaps from the school social worker or guidance counselor?

Academic Conditions	
Is the student struggling academically? Consider what skills and content the student has missed as a result of his or her absences as well as other instructional needs.	Y / N
Does the student need accommodations to benefit from classroom instructions? (e.g. peer support, access to computer, breaks, material presented in different ways)	Y / N
Does the student have language or communication challenges?	Y / N
Does the student struggle with organizational tasks?	Y / N
Are there barriers to homework completion?	Y / N
Do you suspect that the student has an unidentified disability?	Y / N
Safety Concerns	
Have there been any reports of bullying?	Y / N
Is the student exposed to race, disability, cultural or LGBTQ biases?	Y / N
Social Dynamics	
Does the student get to avoid difficult social or academic situations by staying away from school?	Y / N
Are transitions difficult for the student? (e.g. entering the school building, moving from class to class)	Y / N
Home Situation	
Do the parents/guardians recognize the importance of and support regular school attendance?	Y / N
Are there problems in the home that contribute to frequent absences? (e.g., parental illness, homelessness, joblessness, child care, needed health or mental health services for parent/caregiver)	Y / N
Health Status	
Are there conditions in the classroom, cafeteria or other school areas that affect the student's health or safety? (e.g. mold or other asthma triggers, animal dander, food allergens)	Y / N
Does the student exhibit anxiety due to separation from parent / caregiver?	Y / N
Does the student require health or mental health-related treatment that interferes with attendance?	Y / N
School Culture	
Are there any clubs, programs or resources during the school day and after school that might help engage the student?	Y / N
Is there a caring adult at the school that could mentor the student?	Y / N
Student Voice	
Has the student identified the reasons for missing school?	Y / N
Parent Voice	
Have you met with the parent/caregiver to discuss attendance concerns?	Y / N
Has the parent/caregiver identified specific barriers to attendance?	Y / N
Are there cultural, language, or other types of barriers that require extra effort on the part of the school to work with the parent/caregiver?	Y / N
Attendance Barriers for Students with Identified Disabilities	
Has the IEP/504 team met recently to review and revise the student's educational plan?	Y / N
Are the instructional and behavioral supports the rights ones?	Y / N



Why Understanding the Perspectives of Students and Families Matter

- ❖ Students have untapped expertise and knowledge that can bring renewed relevance and authenticity.
- ❖ Addressing the challenges students experience requires considering their specific realities.
- ❖ Understanding when many students and families experience similar challenges allows for scalable solutions.
- ❖ It ensures that the engagement strategies you create are inclusive of students and families' cultural norms.

What barriers are Latino families identifying in Kindergarten?

- **Lack of clear communication** about what constitutes chronic absence - belief that absences related to illness are excused, therefore do not count towards chronic absence.
- **Transitioning children to Kindergarten is challenging** and families are struggling with morning routines - punitive tardy practices don't feel supportive.
- **Families are concerned about the social emotional well-being of their children** - specifically cited concerns with fractured teacher-student relationships that are creating stress for students.

Preliminary data from focus groups conducted in April 2024.



What Parents Say

83% of Arizona adolescents have an **adult mentor**.

33% of Arizona adolescents participate in **volunteer activities**.

64% of Arizona adolescents participate in **afterschool activities**.

83% of Arizona adolescents have **family resilience**.

46% of Arizona adolescents have **supportive neighborhoods**.

58% of Arizona adolescents have **safe neighborhoods**.

What Youths Say

40% of Arizona adolescents have a **caring adult**.

44% of Arizona adolescents have a **supportive friend**.

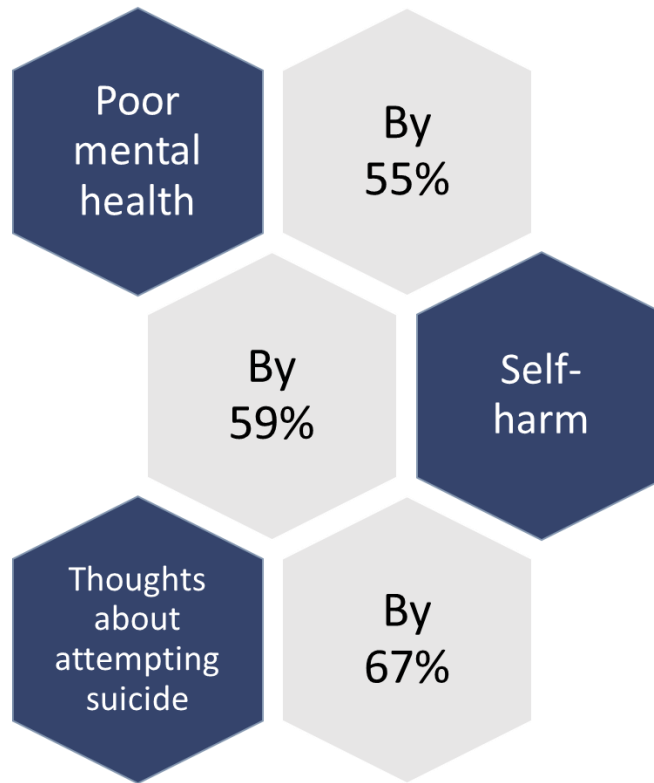
47% of Arizona adolescents **feel connected to people at school**.

72% of Arizona adolescents **feel safe at school**.



Females, LGBTQ+, and ethnic minority adolescents are less likely to have these support systems.

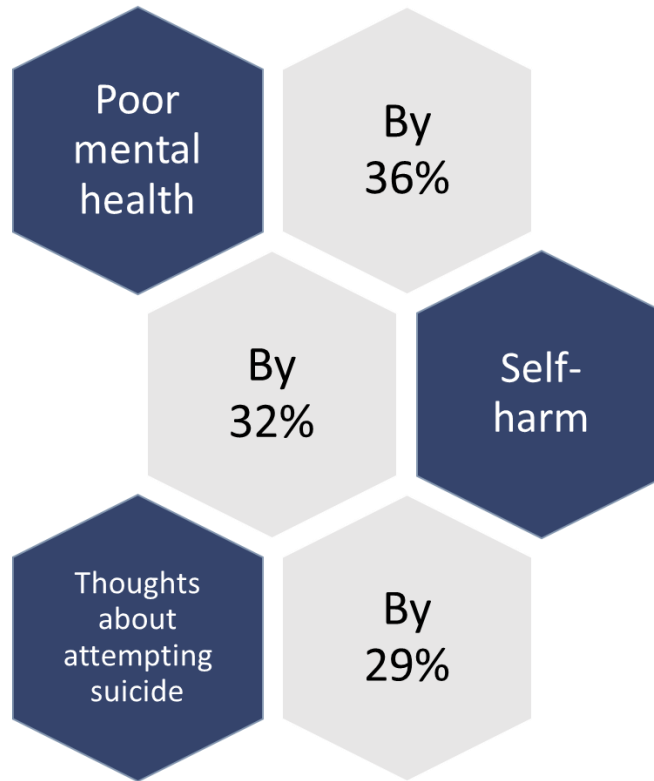
Having a caring adult to share feelings with can decrease*



2021 Youth Risk Behavior Survey

*Logistic regression models accounted for sex, race/ethnicity, and ACEs

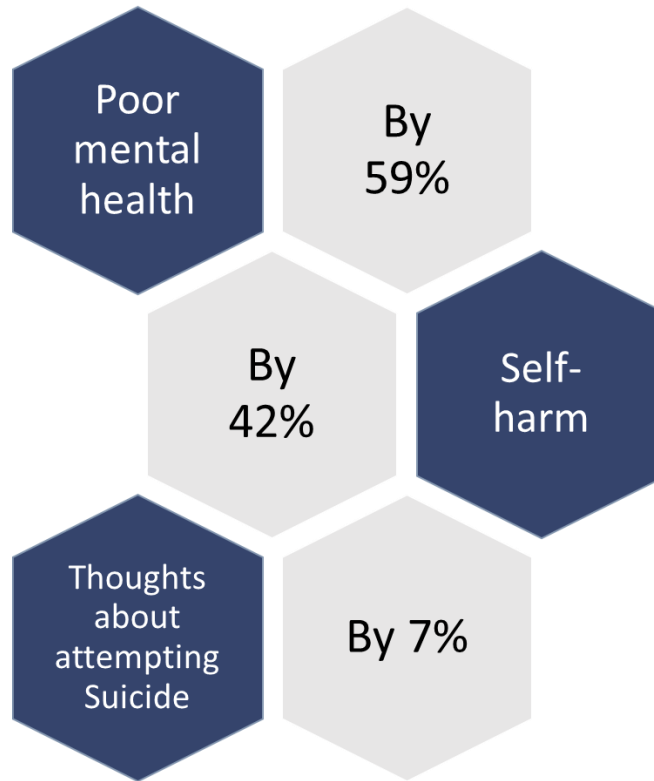
Having a friend to share feelings with can decrease*



2021 Youth Risk Behavior Survey

*Logistic regression models accounted for sex, race/ethnicity, and ACEs

Feel connected to people at school can decrease*



2021 Youth Risk Behavior Survey

*Logistic regression models accounted for sex, race/ethnicity, and ACEs

Numeral data
that outlines the
chronic absence
challenge (how
many, who, where)

**Quantitative
Data**

**Qualitative
Data**

Data revealing the
factors influencing
chronic absence.
What reasons are
contributing to
absences? ***Why?***

Qualitative Data Tools

Gather information about why students do or don't attend school

- ❑ **Empathy Interviews:** Targeted, one-on-one conversations with a small group of students
- ❑ **2x10:** Relationship and trust building strategy; spend two minutes per day for 10 days talking with a student
- ❑ **Student Focus Groups:** Moderated small group discussions to explore experiences and perspectives
- ❑ **Student and Parent Surveys:** Ask about reasons behind their absences



<https://www.attendanceworks.org/resources/qualitative-data/>



Let's Engage & Collaborate



Breakout #2



- Go through the list of Barriers, Aversion, Disengagement or Misconceptions and highlight the ones your team believes affect the students and families in your school.
- What type of qualitative data is your district or school gathering from students and families to learn about the reasons for absence or to validate your assumptions?
- How are you using those insights and data to inform your understanding of the main causes of absence?

Record your thoughts in the note taker document in your Box folder.

<https://app.box.com/s/xf1bynxl7kw9itjwyuxbt5x9cpq0tkqf>



Practice Assignment: Conducting Field Research

As a team, select **one** of the following field observation options to gather qualitative data about students and their experiences in your school:

- 1. Shadow 2-5 students during a transition or classroom period:**
 - a. What can you learn from walking in your student's shoes for a short period of time?
- 2. Use the [Scan of Environment and Attendance Tool \(SEAT\)](#) to identify strengths and opportunities to promote positive school culture and strong attendance in your school.**

Please document your learnings and be prepared to share in Session 2.



Questions from the Audience





Evaluation



Please let us know whether you benefited from the training and how we can improve.

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/AZ-fall-2024>

Thank you!



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About Us

Attendance Works advances student success and closes equity gaps by reducing chronic absence. Operating at the local, state, and national level, Attendance Works:

- ✓ Advances better **policy**
- ✓ Nurtures proven and promising **practice**
- ✓ Promotes meaningful and effective **communication**
- ✓ Catalyzes needed **research**

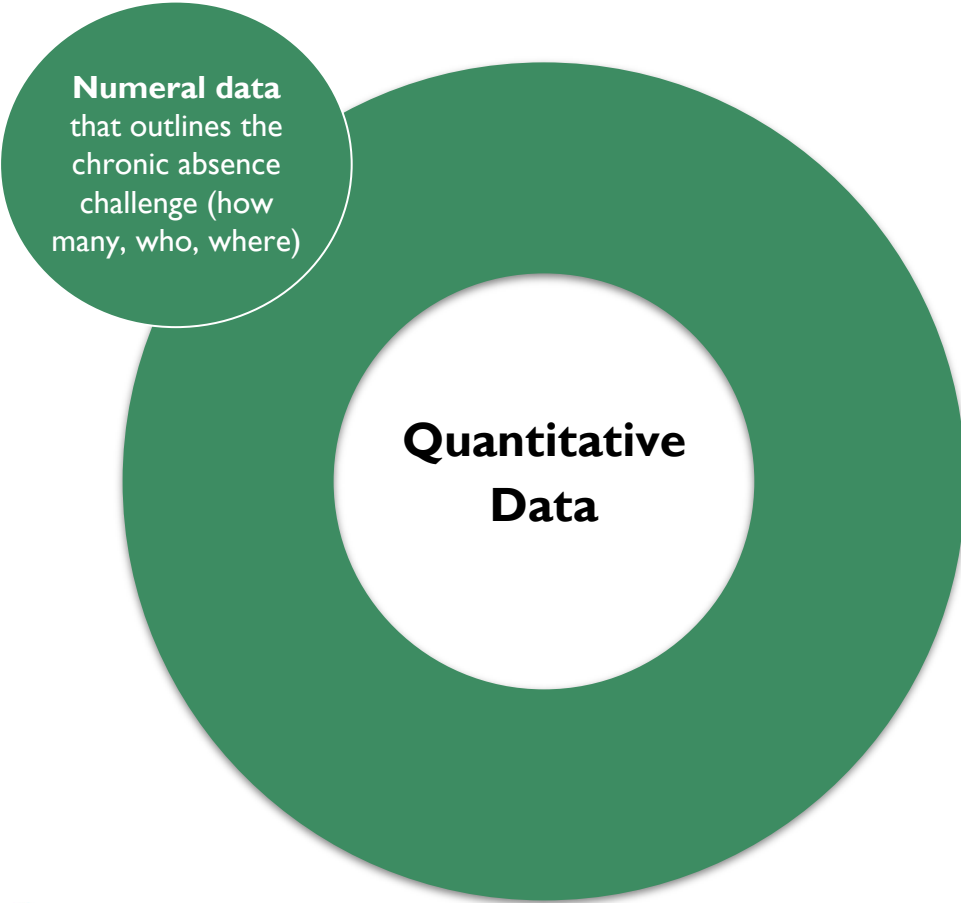
Since our launch in 2010, we have become the nation's “go-to” resource for improving student attendance. To learn more, visit our website: www.attendanceworks.org

Appendix



A Look at Arizona Attendance Data & Policies





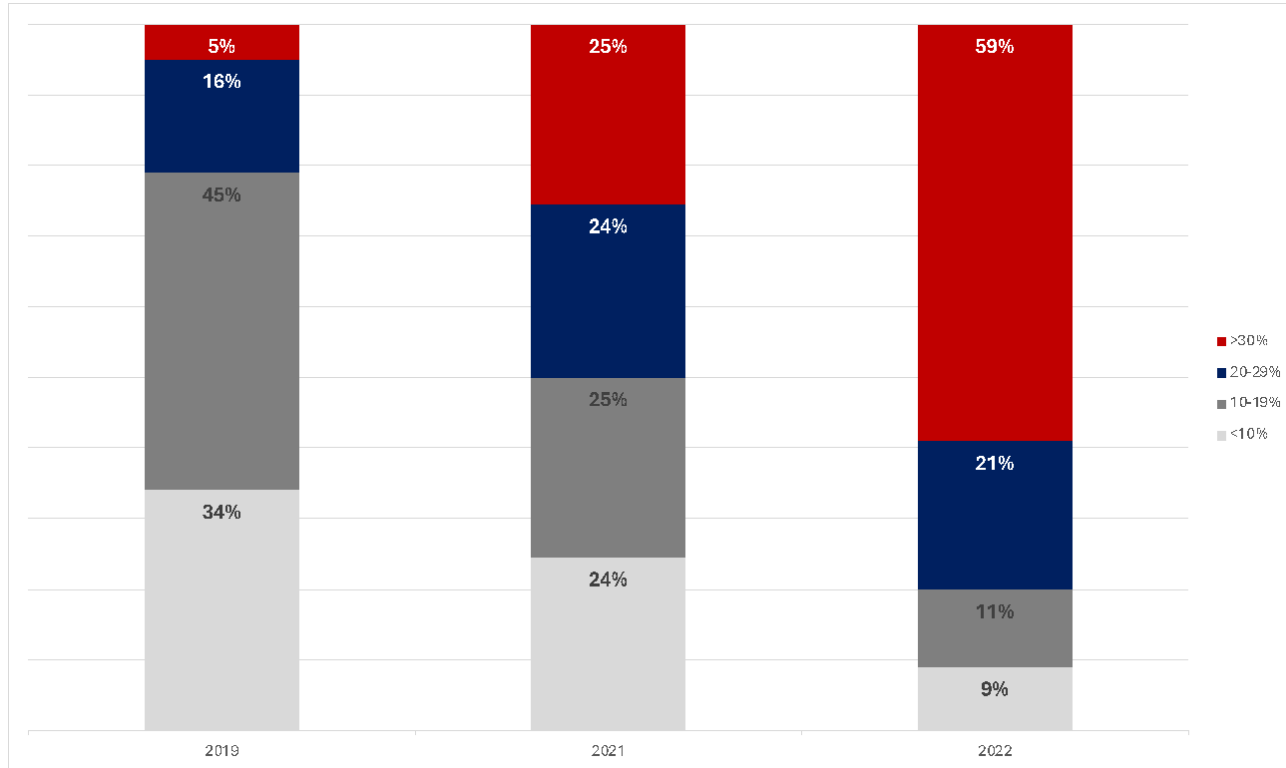
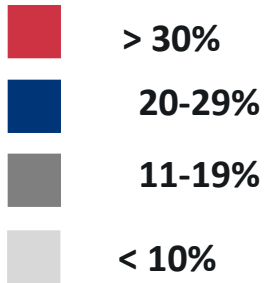
Numeral data
that outlines the
chronic absence
challenge (how
many, who, where)

Quantitative Data

Quantitative data helps us to answer the following questions:

- What is the extent of the chronic absence problem? Is it getting worse or better?
- How many students are chronically absent or at-risk of becoming chronically absent?
- Is chronic absence concentrated among particular grades or groups of students?

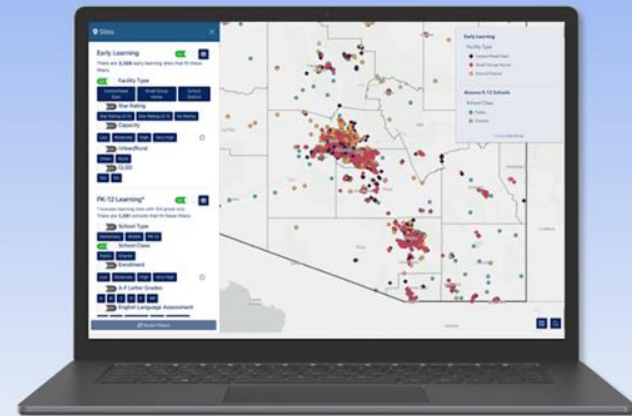
ARIZONA CHRONIC ABSENCE RATE SCHOOL - LEVEL



MapLIT: One source for key data sets that impact early literacy outcomes in Arizona

A powerful, interactive mapping tool to support data-driven strategies, policies and investments

Launch MapLIT



readonarizona.org/maplit

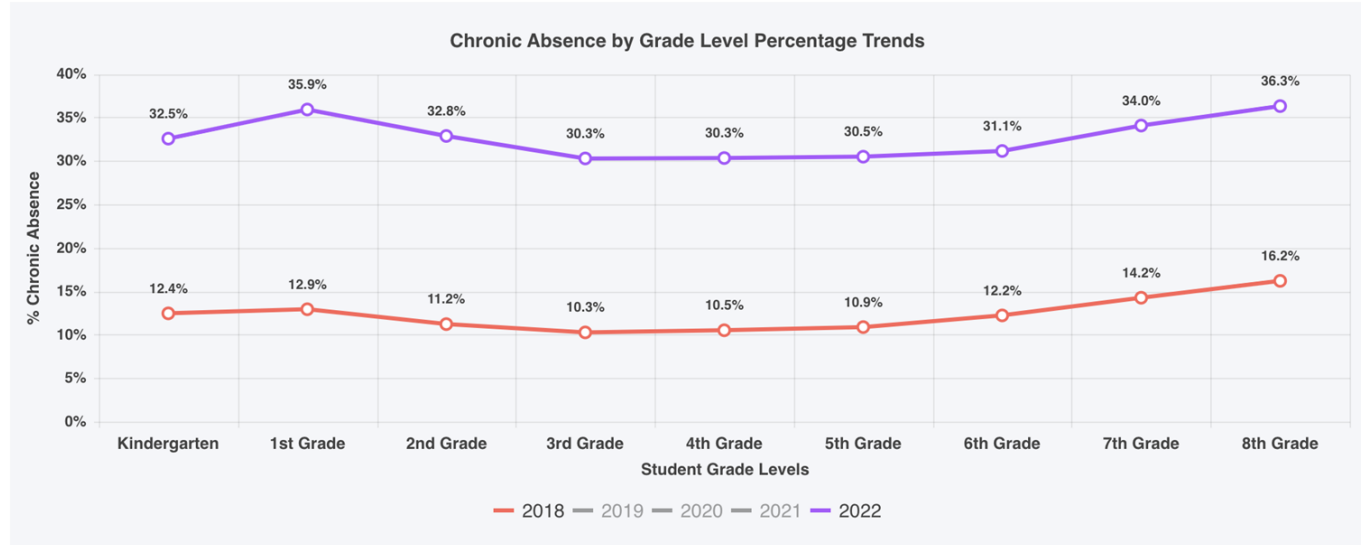
Arizona Chronic Absence Data by Grade Level: 2018 & 2022

Chronic Absence Data by Grade Level Arizona

CHART

TRENDS

DATA





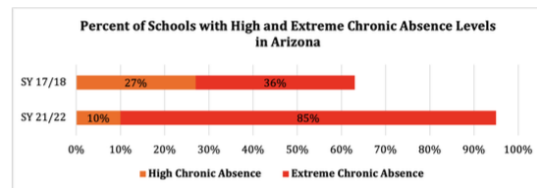
A Look at Attendance Data in Arizona

Data Highlights for Arizona in 2021-22 [here.](#)

Data Highlights for Arizona

These data highlights are based on charts for your state for school years 2017-18 through 2021-22. Finding 1 examines high (20-29%) and extreme (30%+) levels of chronic absence. Findings 2-4 focus on extreme levels of chronic absence. Finding 5 offers overall demographics. After each finding we indicate where to find the data on your data chart.

1. **Arizona Schools with High and Extreme Chronic Absence Increased from 63% to 95%.** (See school demographics, chart 2)



Why This Matters: When 20% of students are chronically absent, it affects all students and teachers, and schools need a systemic approach and plan for improvement.

2. **In 2021-22, 958 (84%) of elementary schools, 211 (93%) of middle schools and 374 (86%) of high schools had extreme chronic absence.** (See school demographics, charts 3a and b).



Why This Matters: Knowing which grade levels are affected by chronic absence is important because strategies should be tailored to student's varying realities. Efforts to improve attendance for younger students must have a strong family engagement component. At the secondary level, it is important to recognize and respect youth agency and voice.

Arizona Attendance Legislation

Guardian Responsibility:

- ARS § 15-802
 - Children ages 6-16
 - Exemptions

Truancy:

- ARS § 15-803
 - Excessive Absences
 - Unexcused Absences

Arizona Attendance Legislation

Definitions:

- ARS § 15-901
 - Average Daily Membership
 - Daily Attendance

Instructional Time Model:

- ARS § 15-901.08
 - Setting
 - Instruction Type

Student Mobility:

- Not currently addressed



Free Attendance Works Data Tools

The District Attendance Tracking Tools (DATT) and School Attendance Tracking Tools (SATT) are available in three modules:

- ✓ Grades K-5 or PK-5
- ✓ Grades 6-8
- ✓ Grades 9-12

We also offer a Tool to Combine the Modules for PK-12 reports

<https://www.attendanceworks.org/resources/data-tools/>