

NEBRASKA STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETING NOTIFICATION AND AGENDA

- Meeting Date:** Thursday, March 5, 2026 12:45 PM
- Meeting Title:** State Board of Education Work Session Meeting and Notification and Agenda
- Location:** NDE Office Building
Board Room
500 South 84th Street
Lincoln, NE 68510
- Agenda:** Except for emergency items added at the time of the meeting, the agenda will not be changed less than 24 hours prior to the start of the meeting and any changes will be immediately posted on the website. The Board will attempt to adhere to the sequence of the published agenda, but reserves the right to adjust the order of items if necessary and may elect to take action on any of the items listed.
- Interpreter:** If you need interpreter services or other reasonable accommodations, please contact the Nebraska Department of Education at (402) 471-5059 five (5) days prior to the meeting to coordinate arrangements.
- Website:** An electronic version of the agenda and support materials are available on the State Board of Education's Agenda page: www.education.ne.gov/stateboard/state-board-agendas/
- Lunch:** On Thursday, March 5, 2026, the State Board of Education may also take a recess for lunch. The Board may resume work on the agenda at approximately 1:00 p.m.

1. CALL TO ORDER (The Board may take a recess)
President Tegtmeier
 - 1.1. Roll Call
President Tegtmeier
 - 1.2. Pledge of Allegiance
President Tegtmeier
 - 1.3. Announcement of the placement of the Open Meetings Act information
President Tegtmeier
2. BUSINESS
President Tegtmeier
 - 2.1. Chronic Absenteeism
Shirley Vargas
SO 1.2: Reduced Chronic Absenteeism

3. ADJOURNMENT
President Tegtmeier



NEBRASKA
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Addressing Chronic Absenteeism

March 5, 2026



Objectives

- Define chronic absenteeism
- Outline reasons for chronic absenteeism
- Describe the scope of the problem in Nebraska
- Share strategies the NDE is implementing to support schools
- Highlight district examples of success

Chronic Absenteeism vs. Truancy

Chronic Absenteeism	vs.	Truancy
Absent for 10% of their time in membership	Definition	Absent for more than 20 days per year
Excused and Unexcused absences, and Suspensions	What Counts	Unexcused absences
Academic impact of missed days	Emphasis	Compliance with school rules
Community-based, positive strategies	Relies Upon	Legal and administrative solutions

Examples:

Blake is enrolled in his school 50 days and misses 5.

He is **chronically absent**, but not truant.

Mona misses 18 days out of her district's 175-day school year.

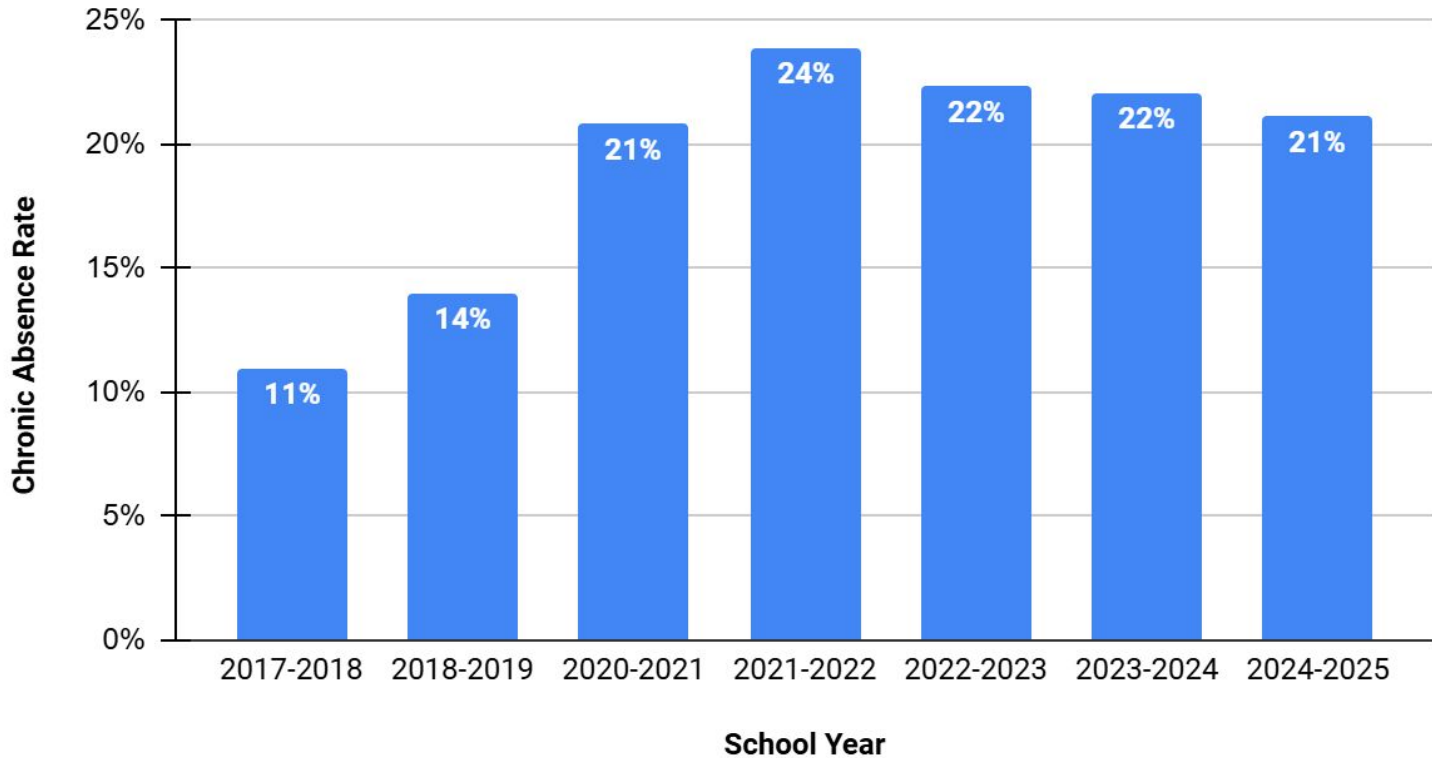
She is **chronically absent**, but not truant.

Cora misses 3 days of her 130 enrolled days.

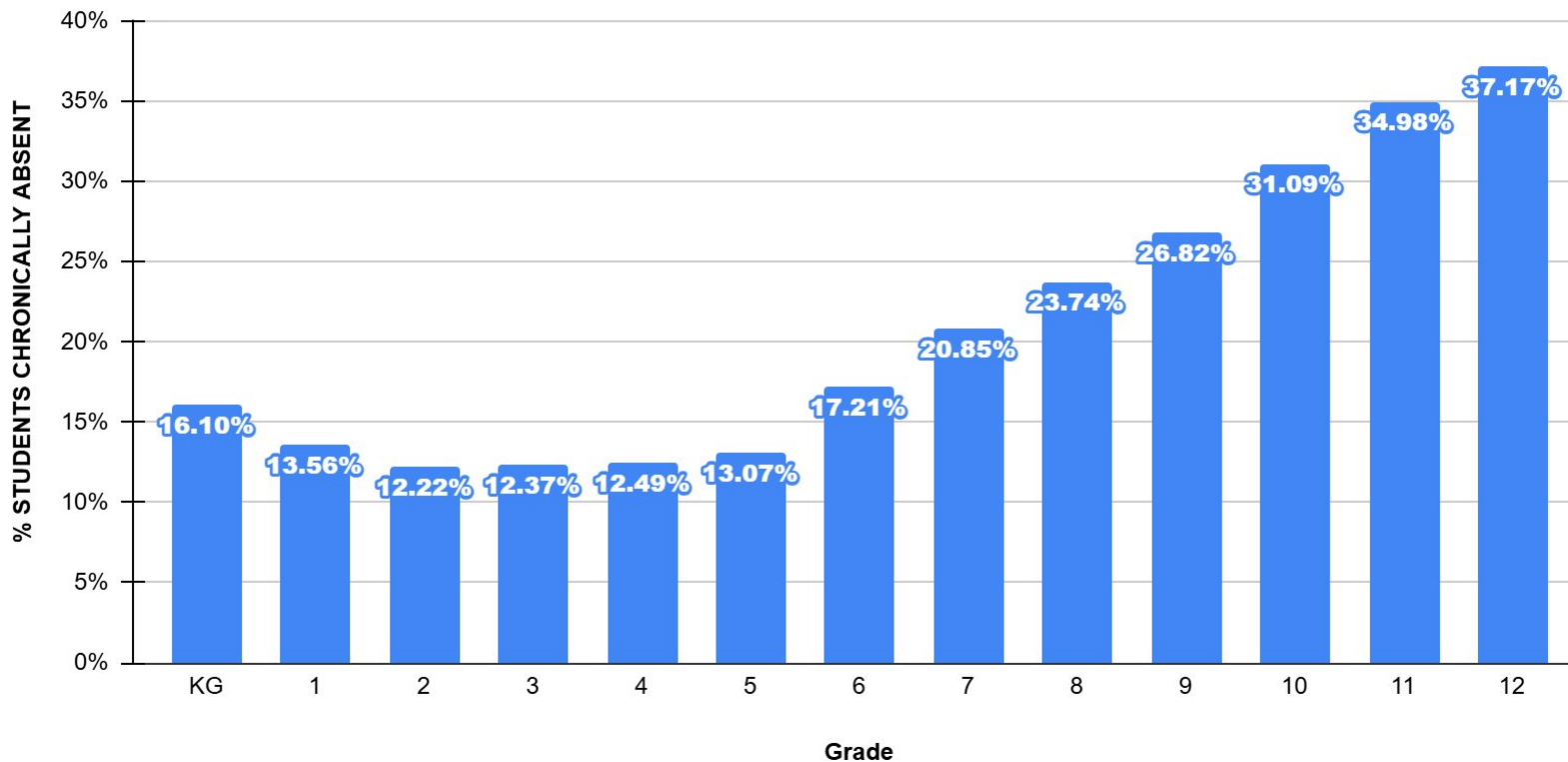
She is **NOT** chronically absent or truant.



Statewide Chronic Absence Rate by School Year

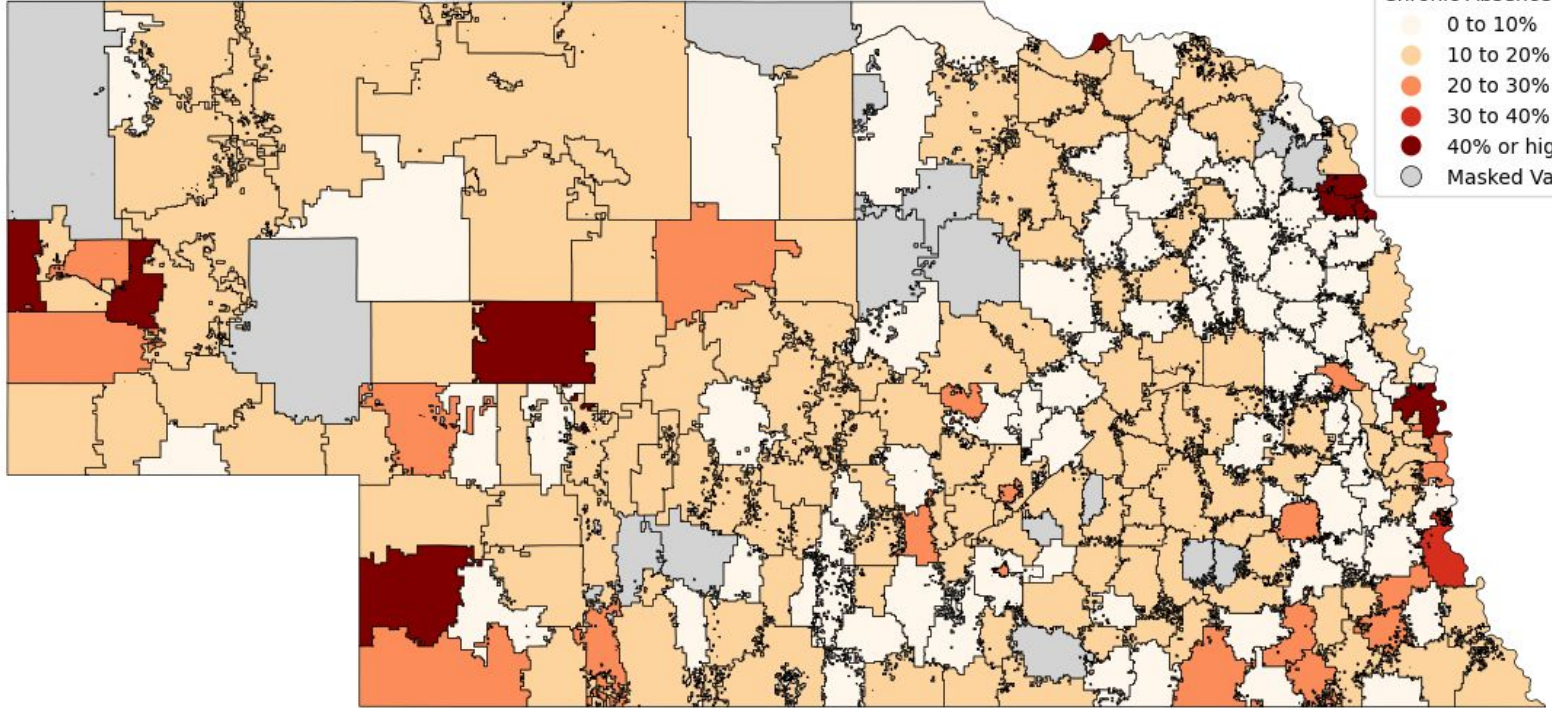
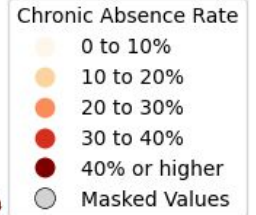


Percent of Chronically Absent Students by Grade, 2024-2025



Nebraska Districts Chronic Absenteeism

In 2024-2025, 21.15% of Nebraska students were chronically absent.



Strategic Plan

Strategic Priority 1: Accelerate Student Achievement

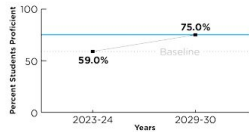
Students and clients thrive when they are met with high expectations and gain the knowledge, skills, and mindsets to engage and contribute to their communities. While all content areas are important to prepare students, the NDE will focus this plan on English language arts (ELA) and mathematics, recognizing the immediate achievement needs of students in these two areas.

Achieving this priority and outcomes will only be possible when the NDE focuses specific attention on improvement within student groups. The identified student groups are those reported in the ESSA plan. More information on performance of student groups across metrics is found on pages 13 through 14.

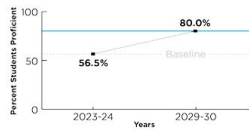
Strategic Outcome 1.1: Improved Student Achievement

Metric:

- 1.1.1. 75% of 3rd grade students will score proficient in ELA as measured by the NSCAS statewide assessment by 2030.



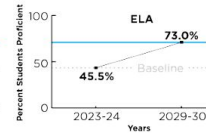
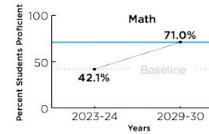
- 1.1.2. 80% of 8th grade students will score proficient in mathematics as measured by the NSCAS statewide assessment by 2030.



There is a strong call for better support for students with disabilities, English learners, and those in poverty. Respondents of the survey emphasized the importance of early intervention and access to resources.

Students noted concerns with a focus on college entrance exams, and called for deeper engagement with course content "rather than test prep."

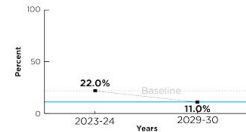
- 1.1.3. 71% of 11th grade students will score proficient in mathematics and 73% will score proficient in ELA as measured by the ACT assessment by 2030.



Strategic Outcome 1.2: Reduced Chronic Absenteeism

Metric:

- 1.2.1. Reduce chronic absenteeism by 50% by 2030.



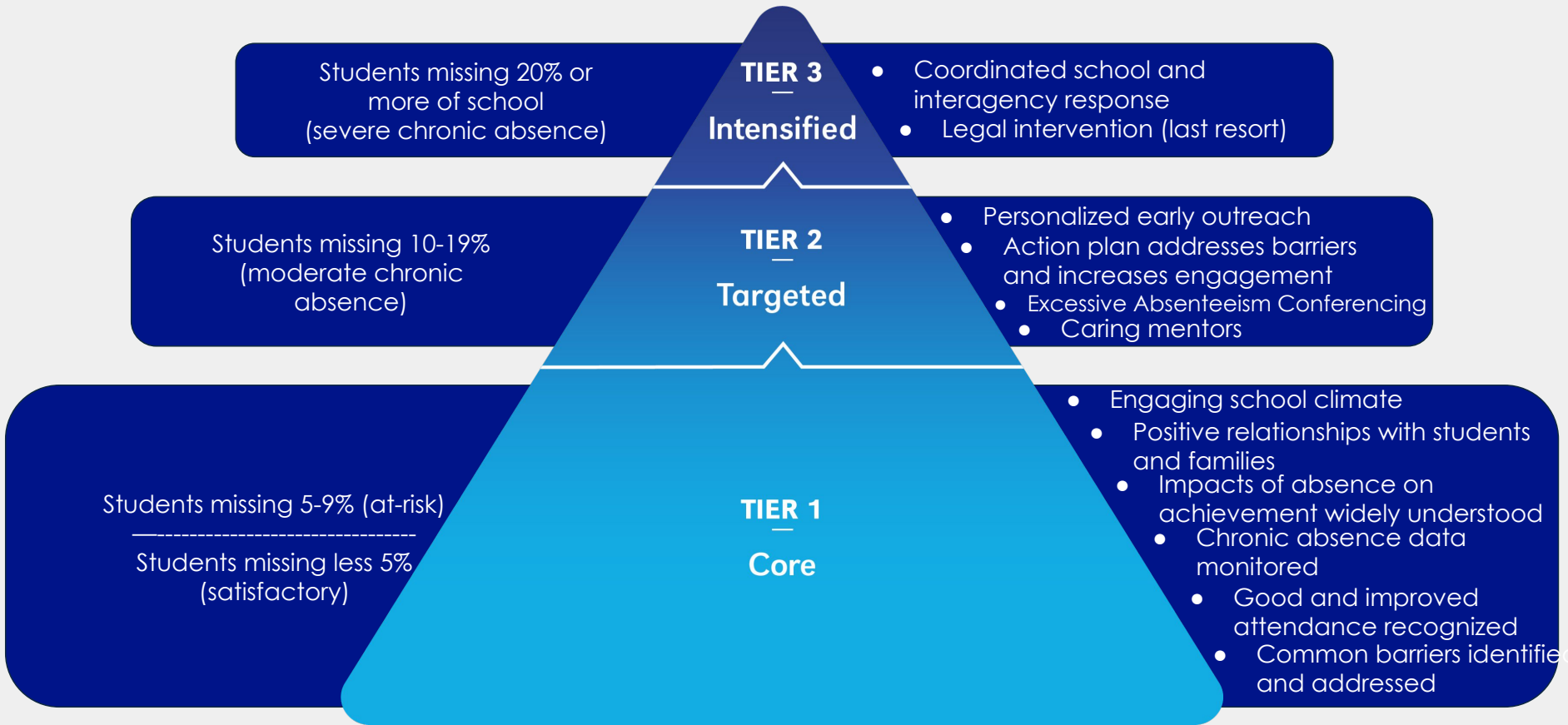
Chronic absenteeism is seen as a growing issue, especially post-COVID. Survey respondents and public focus groups linked attendance to broader social issues like poverty, mental health, and family engagement.

Potential Strategies:

- Focus discretionary or unrestricted funds to ELA and mathematics achievement, and chronic absenteeism efforts.
- Support schools through targeted school improvement and continuous improvement activities leading to increased student achievement.
- Provide statewide resources supporting ELA and mathematics achievement, and student engagement strategies.
- Partner with community organizations, healthcare providers, families, and students to identify and address non-academic barriers to attendance.
- Deepen and expand summer and afterschool programming.
- Promote safe and welcoming school environments.

Barriers	Aversion	Disengagement	Misconceptions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● chronic and acute illness ● family responsibilities or home situation ● trauma ● poor transportation ● housing and food insecurity ● inequitable access to needed services ● system involvement ● lack of predictable schedules for learning ● lack of access to tech 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● struggling academically and/or behaviorally ● unwelcoming school climate ● social and peer challenges ● anxiety ● biased disciplinary and suspension practices ● undiagnosed disability and/or disability accommodations ● parents had negative educational experiences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 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 ● drawn to low-wage job vs. being in high school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● absences are only a problem if they are unexcused ● missing 2 days per month doesn't affect learning ● lose track and underestimate TOTAL absences ● sporadic absences aren't a problem ● attendance only matters in the older grades ● suspensions don't count as absence

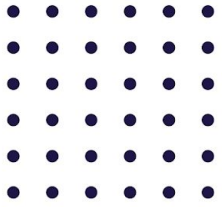
Tiered Approach to Chronic Absence





Policy Alignment

- Incorporated into AQuESTT system
- Included in the Federal accountability system since 2018
- CLSD funds could be used for strategies to reduce chronic absenteeism
- 21st Century Community Learning Center priority for districts addressing chronic absenteeism



Student Attendance Workgroup

- Cross-sector participation
 - Roles included: Social Worker, County Attorney, Student Services Director, Superintendent, Probation, Child Protective Services
- Clarify attendance terminology
- Discuss various perspectives on truancy
- Provide input and feedback on the NDE Attendance Playbook

Attendance Playbook

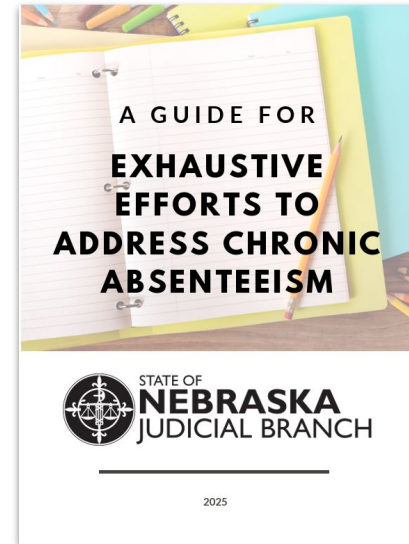
Topics include:

- Strategies for Schools and Districts
- Strategies for Parents and Families
- Focus on reducing Chronic Absenteeism for School and District Leaders
- Additional Readings and Resources

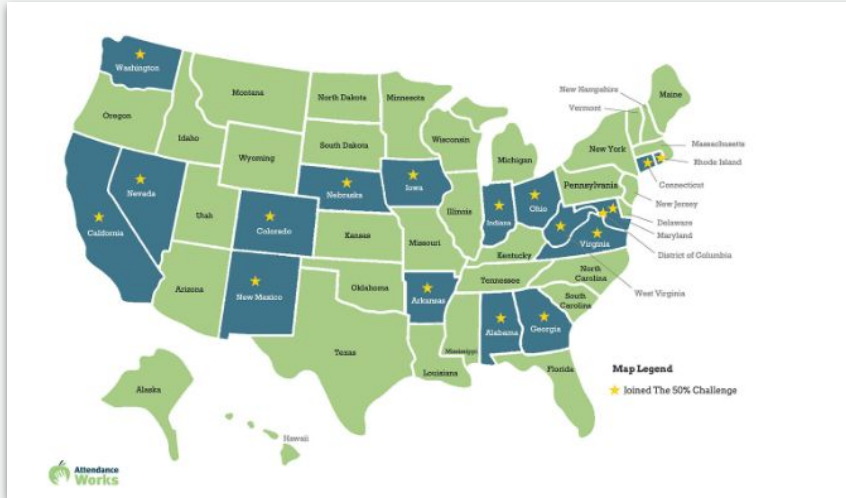


A Guide for Exhaustive Efforts to Address Chronic Absenteeism

- Provides clear processes and forms for Nebraska Public Schools to utilize when supporting students in reducing chronic absenteeism.
- Support schools in exhaustive efforts prior to court involvement by utilizing best practice supervision, programs, and services, to ensure students and families receive relevant programming.




50 Percent Reduction Network



- 17 states joined network
- Focused technical assistance
- Opportunity to network with other states

Goal: Reduce chronic absenteeism by 50% from 24% in the 2021-22 school year to 12% in the 2029-30 school year.


Partnership with the Metropolitan Omaha Educational Consortium (MOEC): Attendance Improvement Cohorts



**MOEC Attendance
Improvement Cohorts**

**MOEC Attendance
Improvement Cohorts**

Two MOEC Attendance Improvement Cohorts (**Elementary School Attendance Improvement** and **Middle School Attendance Improvement**) bring together school teams from multiple districts to work together to improve school attendance in their own building, with the goal of decreasing the chronic absence rate in the metro.



2023-2024 TENTATIVE MEETING DATES AND TIMES

September 27, 2023	2:00 to 4:00 p.m. (All Team Leaders)
October 24, 2023	12:00 to 5:00 p.m. (Full Team/Middle Only)-
October 25, 2023	12:00 to 5:00 p.m. (Full Team/Elementary Only)
November - January*	1-hour coaching appointment (Full Team)
January 30, 2024	12:00 to 5:00 p.m. (Full Team/Elementary Only)
February 1, 2024	12:00 to 5:00 p.m. (Full Team/Middle Only)
February - April*	1-hour coaching appointment (Full Team)
April 23, 2024	12:00 to 5:00 p.m. (Full Team/Elementary Only)
April 25, 2024	12:00 to 5:00 p.m. (Full Team/Middle Only)

*Team leaders will schedule virtual appointments for **IBEE** dates from the range of dates listed.
**All large-group cohort meetings will be in person on the UNO campus except October 24 which will be at Papillon La Vista Central Office.
Session Dates and Times are subject to change.

PROGRAM DETAILS

- o The plan is designed to include a total of 40 schools in two separate but parallel cohorts, one for 25 elementary schools and one for 15 middle schools, over a two-year period, beginning in fall 2023 and extending through spring 2025.
- o Each cohort is a two-year commitment.
- o To “apply” (volunteer) to participate, a school must have a chronic absence rate for 2022-23 above 10%. Selected schools will be representative of all districts that apply.
- o Each team’s involvement supports the creation of a metro-Omaha community of practice around this important work and fosters peer-to-peer connection with other Omaha-Council Bluffs educators.

Schools that choose to apply must agree to:

- identify a 2–3-person school team dedicated to improving school attendance (and data) from the 22-23 year to the 23-24 year, and then from the 23-24 year to the 24-25 year,
- meet with representatives of other school attendance teams four to six times in year one and two or three times in year two in order to share strategies, sources of support, communication outreach, etc.,
- track and share data,
- develop, share, and revise as needed the school’s plan for the 2023-24 school year and the 2024-25 school year to improve results related to school attendance, including identification of Tier I, II, and III strategies,
- develop and share ideas about strategies for improvement,
- partner with at least one outside community group/agency for support and evaluate the partnership.

ELIGIBLE SCHOOLS:

7 MOEC districts (84 schools) are eligible to apply to participate in the **Elementary Attendance Improvement Cohort**:
[MOEC Attendance Data by Elementary Above 10% 2022-2023](#)


8 MOEC districts (25 schools) eligible to apply to participate in the **Middle School Attendance Improvement Cohort**:
[MOEC Attendance Data by Middle School Above 10% 2022-2023](#)

Partnership with MOEC Attendance Improvement Cohorts

- **100% of participating schools** reported their teams were **more effective, informed, organized, and better at using data** by the end of the two years.
- **98% of respondents agreed** the cohort helped **prioritize attendance** within their schools.
- **89% of respondents** rated **collaboration with peer schools as a valuable** component of the program, helping fulfill the objective of creating a community of practice.
- **Chronic absenteeism**, as reported by individual schools by the end of the school, **was reduced by more than 5% in multiple schools, with some even reporting a reduction of more than 20%.**

NDE, DHHS, Alliance Public Schools Partnership

- NDE & DHHS partnership with Alliance Public Schools to understand how **health-related factors have a significant impact on educational outcomes.**
- **Community conversations with various stakeholders** (students, families, community members) to identify barriers to attendance, and explore and develop potential solutions (e.g., meaningful learning experiences, partnership with local public health department, school schedule)
- **Decrease in chronic absenteeism** since 2021-2022, over a 20%.



School Connectedness and Chronic Absenteeism Training for ESU Staff

- Partnership between NDE-Project AWARE and UNMC (Fall 2025)
- Promote a tiered approach to addressing chronic absenteeism
- Create draft action plans to support member districts which include evidence-based strategies to increase attendance

Promising Practices from Local Districts

Contributing factors to chronic absenteeism reduction

- **Build and maintain relationships with local sheriff and county attorney**
 - Understand district policy and get to know students/staff
- **Relationships before compliance**
 - Advisory period
 - Mentoring opportunities
- **Engaging learning environments**
 - Positive teacher and student interactions
 - Meaningful, standards-aligned learning experiences

Promising Practices from Local Districts

Contributing factors to chronic absenteeism reduction

- **Removing transportation barriers**
 - Partnership with Tribal Transit Services
 - Walking bus, gas cards, student pick-up
- **Family and community engagement**
 - Reframe “illness” and “loss of instructional time”
 - Local school board support
 - Clear/consistent messaging
- **Early intervention and monitoring**
 - Personalized outreach
 - Attendance Officer/Monitor
 - Seat time recovery

Promising Practices from ESUs

STRONGER ATTENDANCE THROUGH SMARTER SCHEDULING



OVERVIEW

To help reduce missed class time, school calendars from all 21 ESU 13 school districts were compiled into one easy-to-access tool. Families, healthcare providers, and community agencies can use QR codes to quickly view district calendars and schedule appointments on days when school is not in session.

HOW IT WORKS

Each district has its own QR code that links directly to an [easy-to-read](#) calendar page. Parents can scan the QR code for their child's district to view start times, early release days, and days off and plan appointments accordingly.

IMPLEMENTATION

Laminated copies of the QR code page were delivered across the ESU 13 region to providers who schedule student appointments, including doctors, dentists/orthodontists, eye care, mental health, and healthcare clinics.

Project Links

- [QR Code Document](#)
- [Master Calendar pages from all 21 ESU 13 Districts](#)

FOR QUESTIONS AND SUPPORT:

Email Dave Griess ESU 13
dgriess@esu13.org



CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM

WHO DO WE HELP?

- ✓ **PREVENTION FOR ALL STUDENTS MISSING 5% OF SCHOOL**
Warm Welcomes at the door.
Clear communication of attendance expectations.
School-wide recognition (e.g., "Strive for 9").
- ✓ **EARLY INTERVENTION STUDENTS MISSING 10-19% OF SCHOOL**
Check-In / Check-Out (CICO) systems.
Staff mentoring for connection.
Personalized positive "nudges" home.
- ✓ **INDIVIDUALIZED SUPPORT STUDENTS MISSING 20%+ OF SCHOOL**
Individualized attendance success plans with the family.
Compassionate home visits.
Referrals for wraparound services (health, housing, etc.).

WHAT IS CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM?
missing 10% or more of the school year (approx. 2 days per month) for ANY reason —excused, unexcused, or suspensions
Why is this different from Truancy?
Truancy focuses only on unexcused absences. Chronic absenteeism counts all lost instructional time, which is a proven early warning indicator of academic risk and dropout potential.

KEY ACTION ITEMS

- 💡 **INTERVENE EARLY.**
Don't wait for 10 absences. Start reaching out after 2 or 3.
- USE DATA:**
Look for patterns (e.g., missing every Monday) rather than just the total count.
- PARTNER WITH FAMILIES:**
Ask "How can we support?" instead of "Why aren't they here?" This does not care how much you know until they know how much you care."

THE E.M.R. FRAMEWORK "RELATIONSHIPS ARE THE ANTIDOTE TO ABSENCE."

ESTABLISH

(The "2x20" Strategy)
Spend 2 minutes a day for 10 consecutive days talking to a student about anything except school. You must "bank time" and build trust before you can ask for academic effort.

MAINTAIN

(The 5:1 Ratio) Healthy relationships require 5 positive interactions for every 1 corrective interaction.
Contingent Attention" — acknowledge students just for being there, not just for their behavior or grades.

RESTORE

(The "Welcome Back" Protocol)
When a student who is chronically absent returns, your first **NON-RESPONSE** determines if they come back tomorrow.
REPLACE "Where were you?" (Accusatory)
WITH "It is so good to see you!" (Welcoming)
ACTION: Prioritize connection first. Do not bombard them with missing assignments immediately.

BE THE ONE

Created by: Jamie Mapp, Ed.S., MSCP & Jen McNelly, MA, LIMHP
Educational Service Unit 5 Wellness 4ALL Mental Health Team



NEBRASKA
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Thank you!

Questions?



Every Day Counts!

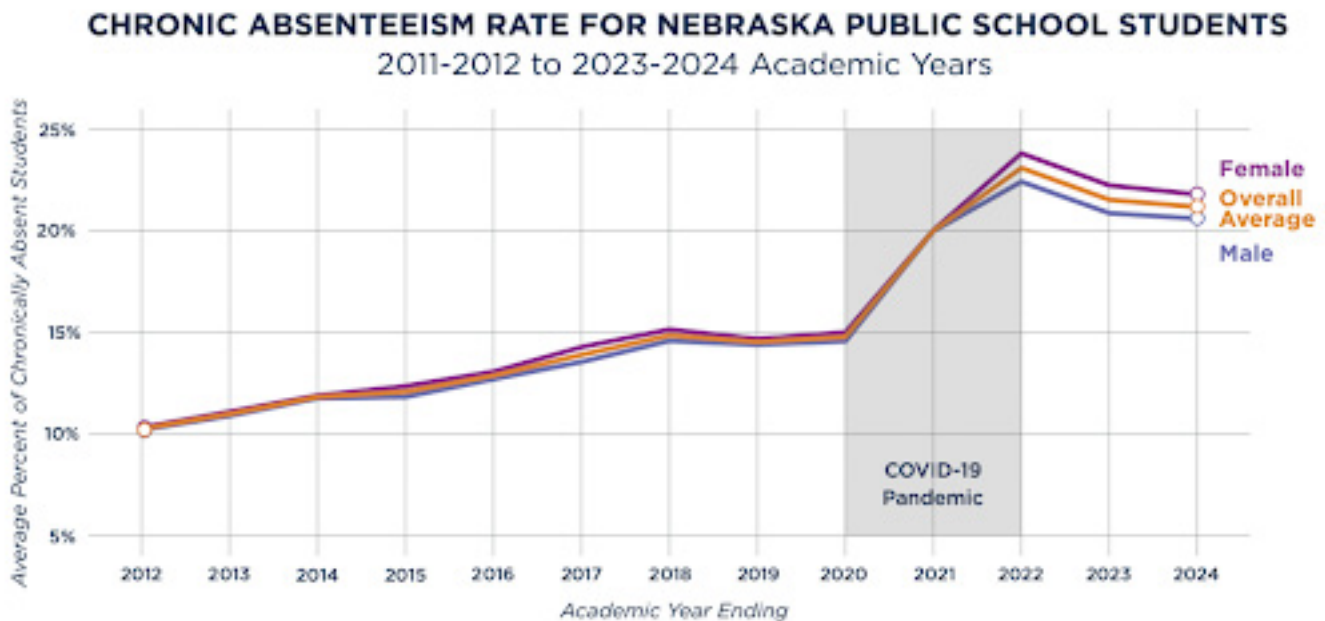
Nebraska's Attendance Playbook

PURPOSE

The purpose of this playbook is to provide an organized, coherent set of resources for school and district leaders designed to help them drive reductions in chronic absenteeism. Rather than reinventing the wheel, we've assembled the best strategies, tactics, messages, and guidance from other states and from Attendance Works. We've also integrated Nebraska-specific data, our state's model policy, and the NeMTSS framework so that schools and districts can access and utilize existing tools and processes more effectively. There are effective strategies that are already in place in districts across the state. Our hope is that the playbook will help you assess what is working, identify gaps, and make more progress on reducing chronic absenteeism.

WHAT IS THE CHALLENGE AND WHY DOES IT MATTER?

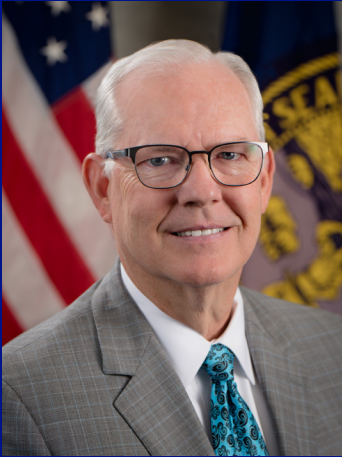
During the pandemic, chronic absenteeism soared throughout the United States. As shown in the chart below, chronic absence has been increasing in Nebraska since the 2011-2012 school year, but increased dramatically during the pandemic, from 14.78% to 23.10%. For some student groups, chronic absence was even higher.



[NSWERS Brief on the Impact of Chronic Absenteeism on Academic Outcomes in Nebraska](#), Jay Jeffries, Ph.D., p. 2

Students who are chronically absent *significantly under perform on state assessments* compared to their peers, and a [recent analysis from NSWERS](#) highlights the longer lasting impact of chronic absence including *reduced high school graduation and college going*. To address the issue, Nebraska has joined 17 other states in an effort led by Attendance Works, American Enterprise Institute, and Education Trust called the [50% Challenge](#). The purpose is to learn and share with other states that face similar challenges. We are already beginning to see bright spots and signs of progress across the state. For example, seven counties have achieved substantial double-digit reductions in the past four years. Using proven strategies and with concentrated focus, it is possible to make a big difference.

MESSAGE FROM COMMISSIONER OF EDUCATION, DR. BRIAN MAHER



Addressing chronic absenteeism takes a whole village. From school and district staff, to parents, caregivers and community support, to the students themselves, our state must focus its collective attention to solving this complex problem. Unlike other educational issues, the reasons a student misses school are myriad and not as clear. That's why we're putting together this guide, which offers a variety of ways a variety of partners can help address chronic absenteeism, and help us reach our goal of cutting chronic absenteeism in half by 2030. If you're reading this, that means you're here to help, and we appreciate you for that.

WHY ARE SO MANY OF OUR KIDS CHRONICALLY ABSENT?

In a state where one in five youth are chronically absent, we should all be asking this question. We need to approach the problem with curiosity about root causes and a genuine desire to understand how we can best support more students and their families in making everyday attendance – wherever they chose to attend school - a major priority.

Schools and districts using a proactive, preventative, and partnership-driven process to get students to school have experienced some great results. Schools, families, and communities share the responsibility of ensuring that all kids show up for school every day. By working together and playing each of our respective roles well, we can help more kids succeed.

We can start by getting curious.

- Do we know the root causes of chronic absence?
- What barriers exist to regular attendance?
- Are there simple first steps we can take to help improve attendance?
- Do we see trends of lower attendance at certain schools? At certain grade levels?
- How do we quickly address trends so that we can deepen support for our students struggling the most?

Outlined on the subsequent pages are steps school and district leaders, parents, and community members can take to improve student attendance. There are series of resources, links, and vignettes from local school districts describing their approaches.

TOP TEN LIST What Can Schools and Districts Do?

1. Make attendance a big priority – establish school teams and district support

Make attendance a big priority by [“Cultivating a Schoolwide Culture of Attendance”](#). This toolkit from Attendance Works outlines four simple ideas to achieve this including:

- Start Outreach Before School Begins
- Leverage Existing Activities to Communicate the Importance of Good Attendance
- Nurture a Schoolwide System of Attendance Incentives
- Participate in the Attendance Awareness Campaign every September. Here are resources from the [2025 Attendance Awareness Campaign](#).



At Bancroft-Rosalie Community Schools, chronic absence is part of their Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) system, and the school team meets regularly **to identify root causes of chronic absence**. The district also offers **flexible opportunities** for students who miss more than seven (7) days of school to make up the lost instructional time and complete work after being absent. **To remove transportation barriers and support higher attendance among Native American students**, the district partnered with Tribal Transit to provide rides to and from schools for those who live on the Omaha Reservation.

2. Take a comprehensive, all-hands on deck, preventative approach

Schools that are successful in addressing chronic absence take an all-hands-on-deck approach and work to address attendance issues before they become more severe and unmanageable. Every adult in the school building can be a part of encouraging children to attend school every day, noticing when students’ attendance is slipping or improving, etc. Make sure all staff, not just a child’s classroom teacher, know how they can play a part and are able to support children and families they have relationships with.

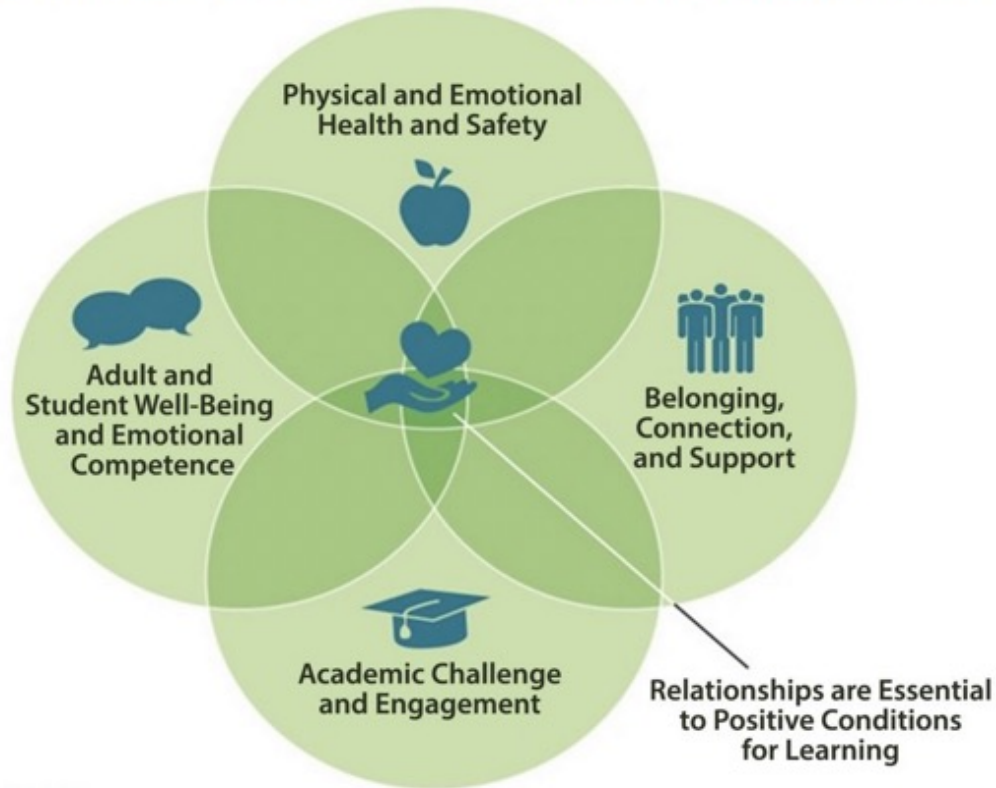
3. Focus on positive conditions for learning

When schools are a place where students feel they “get to go” instead of “have to go” they have a sense of belonging and ownership which makes them more likely to want to attend. Consider the [positive conditions for learning](#) graphic below to address underlying factors that may be preventing kids from coming to school.

At Millard Public Schools, school teams **review data and participate in building-level MTSS meetings** for the purpose **of developing positive, personalized solutions to chronic absenteeism**. The district also has a dedicated group of 13 **social workers** that focus on helping schools drive improvement in chronic absenteeism using systemic practices. District staff participate in a School Attendance Task Force convened by the Metro Omaha Education Consortium (MOEC). The Taskforce leads a **community-wide Attendance Awareness Campaign** providing consistent, informative messaging and **engages local businesses and health care providers** in efforts to improve attendance.



Absenteeism is a Sign that Positive Conditions for Learning are Missing, Whether Classes are In Person, Distance or Blended



www.attendanceworks.org



At Alliance Public Schools, three years ago, the district's high school had a chronic absenteeism rate of 59%. The assistant principal recognized that there was a problem and made it her **personal responsibility to improve positive relationships** between students and faculty and create a greater sense of belonging. As a result, the rate of chronic absence declined to 25% in the last school year. In addition, the high school created a program **where every student would have at least one trusted adult** in the building who met with them in small groups once a week. They also launched a positive messaging initiative to build awareness about the importance of attendance.

4. Utilize data and a tiered response system

Attendance Works has developed a tiered approach to chronic absence. The tiered approach helps to target the right strategies to the right students and families based on how much school a child is missing. When we can catch issues early on, they are less likely to worsen. See **Appendix A** for a Nebraska-adapted version of a tiered approach. Learn more about the three tiers of intervention [here](#).

5. Strengthen communication and awareness. Use regular reminders to families about what they can do to support good attendance.

Whether families' lives are busy or turbulent, they can benefit from multiple reminders about the school schedule, activities and important events as well as strategies for getting their children to school. See **Appendix B** for a [one-pager from Attendance Works](#) that outlines the importance of the family' role. [This one-pager from Philadelphia](#) is another great example of a simple way to communicate with families about what they can do.

At Arapahoe-Holbrook Public Schools, district leadership identified reducing chronic absenteeism as a top priority and began an effort to more **consistently and clearly communicate expectations** for everyday attendance. School staff made a commitment to having more frequent, personal conversations with students, parents, and guardians about attendance and how much they wanted to see students every day.



6. Invest in student relationships

Developing relationships with students and helping them have successful relationships with their peers is at the core of ensuring that they want to come to school every day. To learn more about helping students feel connected, see [Step 3 of Attendance Works' 50% Challenge focuses on Student Connectedness](#) and the additional resources section.

7. Engage partners who can help with messaging and removing barriers

Schools don't have to do this work alone. Many communities have rallied behind their schools to help with solving the issue of chronic absence. Libraries, business partners, community organizations, etc. can all contribute to spreading the word about the importance of every day attendance and support families who have barriers to attendance such as transportation, health issues or basic needs such as clean clothes for school.

One example is Learn to Earn Dayton's [Every Day in School Matters Campaign](#), which included [visits and PSAs](#) from local college sports figures who spoke about the importance of everyday school attendance.

8. Engage partners who can help with messaging and removing barriers

Connecting with families can help them better understand why school attendance is important. Once they understand, there are often simple steps they can take to help their children improve their attendance. Read by 4th in Philadelphia has created a [Family Attendance Toolkit](#) that includes an overview of the district's attendance policy, handouts focused on morning routines, links to resources, etc.



At Sidney Public Schools, school leaders focus on strengthening parent engagement and partnership. Guidance counselors and teachers communicate regularly with parents and look for ways to **make connections between the learning that takes place at home and at school**. At Sidney Public Schools, the district takes a student-centered and solutions-based approach to reducing chronic absenteeism that begins with creating a positive, welcoming school culture. There are **pep rallies, spirit clubs, and small group advisory sessions** designed to build personalized relationships and provide care and support.

9. Engage partners who can help with messaging and removing barriers

Although they don't take the place of investing in relationships with students and families, incentives and recognition can be an important way to motivate students to improve their attendance. Similarly, some districts have found success with incentives for families too. It is important to recognize and reward the right behaviors. For example, perfect attendance awards often recognize students who are already doing well rather than those who have improved and can demotivate students when they miss a day or two of school. Plan to offer incentives and provide recognition for good attendance with these [strategies and ideas curated by Attendance Works](#).

The Suncoast Campaign for Grade-Level Reading, provides a fun opportunity for students to participate in an [Attendance Awareness Poster Contest](#) with prizes for the winners.

10. Engage partners who can help with messaging and removing barriers

Look for opportunities to connect with others who are also doing this work. For example, Attendance Works hosts a six-month [Professional Leadership Attendance Network](#) for administrators. They also host [regular webinars](#) highlighting the work in states, districts and schools. The Campaign for Grade-Level Reading also hosts a variety of webinars focused on chronic absence such as [“Chronic Absence: Promising Signals From Colorado and Virginia”](#). Search their [archives](#) for others.

TOP TEN LIST What Can Parents and Families Do?

It's important to ensure that parents understand how attendance impacts their children's school success and how they can help support their children in getting to school on time every day. Here are ten ways to encourage parents:

1. Make everyday school attendance a priority.

These [Attendance Works handouts](#) (in English and Spanish) have tips and strategies such as building everyday routines that can help you help your children get to school every day.



Attendance Works

Help Your Child Do Well in School:
Build the Habit of Good Attendance

Did you know?

- Too many absences in preschool and elementary school can cause children to struggle socially and academically.
- Being late to school may lead to poor attendance.
- Missing 10% of school (2 days each month) can make it harder to learn to read and do basic math.

Attending school regularly helps children feel better about school — and themselves. Start building this habit in preschool and through elementary school so they learn right away that going to school on time, every day, is important.

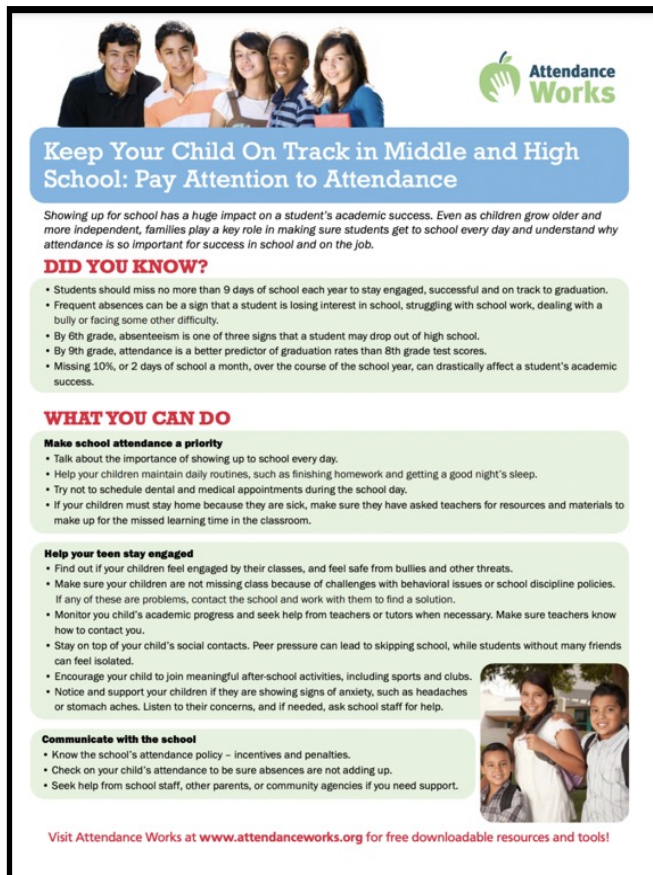
What you can do

- Set a regular bedtime and morning routine.
- Lay out clothes and pack backpacks the night before.
- Keep your child healthy and make sure your child has the required shots.
- Develop backup plans for getting to school if something comes up.
- Monitor your child's absences.
- Try to schedule nonurgent medical appointments and extended trips when school isn't in session.
- If your child seems anxious about going to school, talk to teachers, school counselors and other parents for advice on how to make your child feel comfortable and excited about learning.
- If you are concerned that your child may have a contagious illness, call your school nurse or health-care provider for advice. Ask the teacher for ideas to support missed learning time.

Chronic absence is missing 2+ days every month over the course of a school year.

September	October	November	December	January
M T W Th F S S	M T W Th F S S	M T W Th F S S	M T W Th F S S	M T W Th F S S
February <th>March</th> <th>April</th> <th>May</th> <th>June</th>	March	April	May	June
M T W Th F S S	M T W Th F S S	M T W Th F S S	M T W Th F S S	M T W Th F S S

Visit Attendance Works at www.attendanceworks.org for free downloadable resources and tools!



Attendance Works

Keep Your Child On Track in Middle and High School: Pay Attention to Attendance

Showing up for school has a huge impact on a student's academic success. Even as children grow older and more independent, families play a key role in making sure students get to school every day and understand why attendance is so important for success in school and on the job.

DID YOU KNOW?

- Students should miss no more than 9 days of school each year to stay engaged, successful and on track to graduation.
- Frequent absences can be a sign that a student is losing interest in school, struggling with school work, dealing with a bully or facing some other difficulty.
- By 6th grade, absenteeism is one of three signs that a student may drop out of high school.
- By 9th grade, attendance is a better predictor of graduation rates than 8th grade test scores.
- Missing 10%, or 2 days of school a month, over the course of the school year, can drastically affect a student's academic success.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Make school attendance a priority

- Talk about the importance of showing up to school every day.
- Help your children maintain daily routines, such as finishing homework and getting a good night's sleep.
- Try not to schedule dental and medical appointments during the school day.
- If your children must stay home because they are sick, make sure they have asked teachers for resources and materials to make up for the missed learning time in the classroom.

Help your teen stay engaged

- Find out if your children feel engaged by their classes, and feel safe from bullies and other threats.
- Make sure your children are not missing class because of challenges with behavioral issues or school discipline policies. If any of these are problems, contact the school and work with them to find a solution.
- Monitor your child's academic progress and seek help from teachers or tutors when necessary. Make sure teachers know how to contact you.
- Stay on top of your child's social contacts. Peer pressure can lead to skipping school, while students without many friends can feel isolated.
- Encourage your child to join meaningful after-school activities, including sports and clubs.
- Notice and support your children if they are showing signs of anxiety, such as headaches or stomach aches. Listen to their concerns, and if needed, ask school staff for help.

Communicate with the school

- Know the school's attendance policy – incentives and penalties.
- Check on your child's attendance to be sure absences are not adding up.
- Seek help from school staff, other parents, or community agencies if you need support.

Visit Attendance Works at www.attendanceworks.org for free downloadable resources and tools!

2. Use medical guidance on when to send children to school if they are sick.

Parents sometimes struggle with the decision about when they should send their children to school. The [Health Handouts](#) from Attendance Works provide clear and specific guidance to help parents make the decision about when to send children to school and when to keep them home.

3. Work in partnership with the school and teachers.

Start the school year by introducing yourself to your child's teacher or other school staff. Try to prioritize parent-teacher conferences, PTA meetings and other ways to learn about how you can be involved with the school. Make sure you are receiving emails, newsletters, etc. If your child is having issues with attendance, approach the school about what is going on so they can help you problem-solve.

4. Reinforce the value of showing up in other contexts and places.

When you emphasize showing up for other activities, appointments, family events, etc., on time, children better understand the importance of good attendance whether in school or other events and activities. Similarly, modeling this behavior as an adult (“Let’s hurry, I have to get to work on time too!”), helps children see that good attendance reflects responsibility and accountability and is an important lifelong skill.

5. Communicate with your child about how they are doing in school.

Communicating with your child is an important part of supporting success and understanding the best ways to help your child look forward to school every day. What are they enjoying? What worries them. How can they prepare to have a good day with their teachers and other students? The more you know, the more you can help them problem-solve if they have concerns.

6. Engage in learning with your child at home and in the community.

Planning for and participating in fun learning activities with your child at home and in the community is another way to send a message to your child that learning is important. This time can also build confidence and provide background knowledge that will help your child in school.

7. Build your network and relationships with other families.

Every family benefits from having an extended network of people they can rely on for support. Whether it’s a ride when plans fall through, help with childcare, or other kinds of assistance, connecting with other families, neighbors, and community members can make a big difference. Building these relationships helps families manage their busy lives, and it’s okay to reach out for help—strong connections make everyone stronger.

8. Support extracurricular activities and other connections to the school.

When students are excited about extracurricular activities, etc., it gives them one more positive reason to look forward to school. Activities such as sports, music, theater, clubs, or volunteer work give them something meaningful and enjoyable to anticipate each day, beyond just academic classes. As a result, they often feel more motivated to attend school, maintain better attitudes toward learning, and build friendships through shared interests.

9. Offer incentives and encouragement for regular attendance.

Families can support students by using simple, consistent recognition and incentives to reinforce that showing up to school every day matters. Use regular praise in the mornings or before bed to encourage children and teens. Notice improvement (“You made it on time to school every day this week!”) and celebrate streaks with fun activities, special attention, etc. Share success with other family members so they can support the student too.

10. Help others in your community who might be struggling with school attendance.

Think about ways you can support others in your neighborhood. Some communities have found success with implementing a [Walking School Bus program](#), a fun, supportive way for communities to help all children get to school safely and on time. In areas where families depend on transportation to get to school, consider creating car pools and networks with central drop-off/pick-up points. In some places, parents have even gotten commercial driver’s licenses (CDLs) to help with getting groups of children to school.

WHAT CAN MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITY DO?

Everyone can play a role in ensuring students get to school. Reaching out to different constituencies in your communities with compelling reasons for them to be a part of the solution and concrete ideas about how they can help will encourage communities and partners to take action.

- When convening a group or task force on student attendance, bring together leaders from across a range of organizations such as, social services, public safety, faith-based, etc. This will ensure addressing attendance needs is a priority across the community.
- Use attendance data to create a common understanding of needs and engage multiple stakeholders to help determine root causes, and possible solutions, collaboratively.
- City and county resources, from social service agencies to transit authorities, can help break down barriers that are keeping children from coming to school ([Attendance Works](#)).
- [The U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation](#) identified a need to double down on career-connected learning for all students. When students feel like their learning is relevant to their future, they are more likely to attend. Business and industry leaders can support attendance efforts by creating or expanding opportunities for students to make connections between learning and their postsecondary goals.

The Attendance Works one-pagers below outline successful, actionable information and ideas that a range of community partners can use to support the work of schools and families.

- [Business Leaders](#)
- [City and County Officials](#)
- [Faith Communities](#)
- [Family and Family Organizations](#)
- [Housing Organizations](#)
- [Volunteers and National Service](#)
- [Health Care Providers](#)
- [Philanthropists and Foundations](#)

WHAT STEPS CAN SCHOOL AND DISTRICT LEADERS TAKE TO REDUCE CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM?

School and district leaders can leverage the Nebraska Multi-Tiered System of Support (NeMTSS) framework, resources, and tools to assess current practices and identify possible next steps.

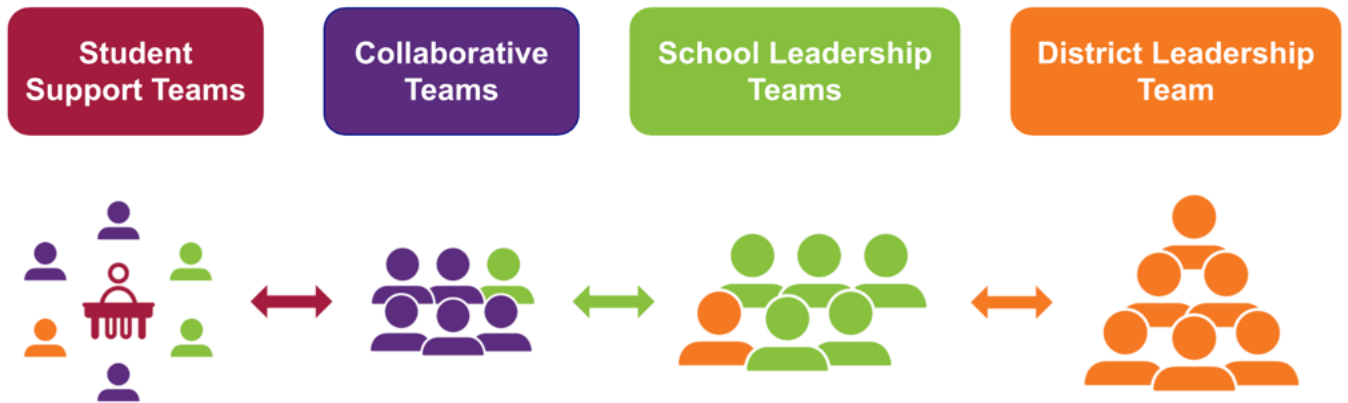
NEMTSS FRAMEWORK

Rather than siloing attendance work, schools and districts can maximize efficiency and effectiveness by leveraging existing systems to deliver social, emotional, behavioral, mental health, and academic supports. NeMTSS provides a coherent framework to systemize these efforts and reduce redundancy. For more information about the NeMTSS essential elements and related tools, visit the [NeMTSS website](#) and [Framework document](#). Regional Support Teams are available to provide free, collaborative support to all Nebraska public school systems in implementing these essential elements and considerations. Find your team contact information [here](#).



INFRASTRUCTURE & SHARED LEADERSHIP

- Confirm that the existing teams (District Leadership Team, School Leadership Teams) have the right representation to address attendance (i.e., academics, SEBL, SPED, family engagement, transportation, health, counseling, community partners). Add representation as needed.



- Clarify roles and responsibilities for attendance-related tasks within existing teams (e.g., data pulls, contacting families, progress monitoring, intervention follow-up, etc.).
- Align core beliefs, values, norms, school-wide expectations, and district policy to foster a positive attendance culture. Engage stakeholders (e.g., students, caregivers, staff, community members, etc.) in adopting and revising these.
- How will this be communicated to new staff members? Families moving into the district? New students? Multilingual learners?
- Embed attendance functions into existing district and school leadership team agendas (e.g., DLT, SLTs, SSTs) so attendance is examined alongside academics, behavior, and SEBL.

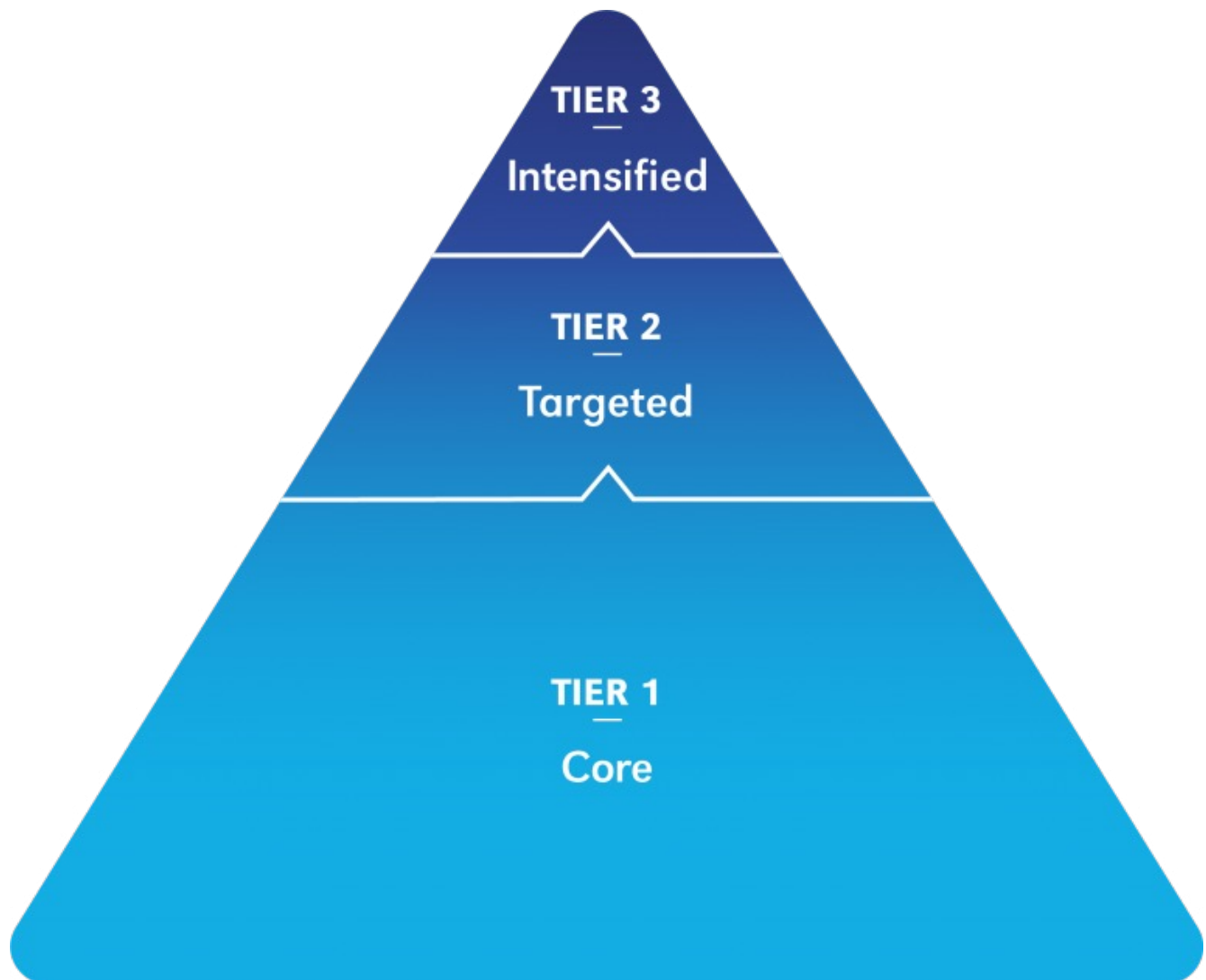
TEAMS	FUNCTIONS	ROUTINES
Student Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Involve students, their families, and caregivers in problem-solving. Analyze individual student attendance on a case-by-case basis alongside academic, social, emotional, and behavioral data. Connect with outside community agencies or supports for individual students. Provide recommendations and monitor students' response to Tier 3 Intensified interventions on a weekly basis. 	Weekly
Collaborative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analyze Tier 1 Core supports from the classroom, grade, and grade-band attendance data to adjust teaching and learning. Use attendance data to identify students in need of Tier 2 Targeted interventions and determine support plans. Provide recommendations and monitor students' response to Tier 2 Targeted interventions on at least a biweekly basis. 	Biweekly (weekly is optimal)
School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Annually set and revise goals and plans for the year. Ensure fidelity of implementation of evidence-based practices across the layered continuum of support. Monitor school-level attendance data and continuously improve school-level implementation. Share data related to attendance with stakeholders in an understandable format, at minimum, biannually. Ensure resource allocation (i.e., monies, staff, scheduling) is considered and decided based on data. 	Monthly

District	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annually set and revise goals and plans for the year. • Develop a unified attendance message aligned with school-wide expectations, values, and/or core beliefs. • Connect with community partners to address systemic attendance barriers. • Ensure fidelity of implementation of evidence-based practices across the layered continuum of support. • Monitor district-level attendance data and continuously improve district-level implementation. • Share data related to attendance with stakeholders in an understandable format, at minimum, annually. • Ensure resource allocation (i.e., monies, staff, scheduling) is considered and decided based on data. 	1-3 times per quarter
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- Integrate attendance priorities into existing improvement plans, rather than creating a separate attendance plan.
 - » *Examples:*
 - ◇ By spring 2028, the percentage of students meeting or exceeding grade-level benchmarks on NSCAS math will increase from 47% to 55% as a result of increased engagement practices and a reduction in chronic absenteeism.
 - ◇ By the end of the 2025–26 school year, at least 65% of students will meet their projected MAP Reading growth targets, increasing from 54% last year. To achieve this, the school will reduce the number of students missing 10 or more days from 18% to 12% and monitor attendance as part of monthly school leadership team data reviews.
 - ◇ By spring 2030, the percentage of multilingual learners meeting or exceeding NSCAS ELA proficiency will increase from 22% to 35%. To support this, the school will decrease chronic absenteeism among ML students from 21% to 12% through targeted Tier 2 Targeted supports related to relationships, connections, and family engagement routines.
 - » *Guiding Questions:*
 - ◇ How does improving attendance directly support the priority goal(s) or outcome(s) we’ve already identified?
 - ◇ What attendance pattern (e.g., chronic absence, risk group) most impacts our academic data?
 - ◇ Which grade levels or student demographic groups show the greatest overlap between low attendance and low performance?
 - ◇ What is a realistic, yet meaningful, attendance improvement target that aligns with our existing priority goal(s) and outcome(s)?
- Provide professional development directly related to attendance priorities and improvement plans, including how to address the root causes identified leading to concerns.

LAYERED CONTINUUM OF SUPPORT

- Take inventory of Tier 1 Core, Tier 2 Targeted, and Tier 3 Intensified academic and non-academic supports that are available to increase student engagement and attendance.
- Identify evidence-based strategies that can be implemented to improve attendance across the tiers of support.
- Confirm that Tier 1 core includes intentional, relationship-centered practices that build a positive culture of belonging, using restorative approaches with both adults and students to support engagement and attendance.
- Ensure evidence-based, Tier 1 Core academic instruction is occurring. Collect data on levels of engagement and effectiveness of instruction.
 - » Instructional webinars and resources available:
 - ◇ [Foundational Literacy Instructional Routines Webinars](#)
 - ◇ [Academic Language](#)
 - ◇ [Evidence-Based Strategies Series: Guiding the Targeted Improvement Plan Process](#)
 - ◇ [Program Comparison Tool](#)



DATA-BASED DECISION-MAKING

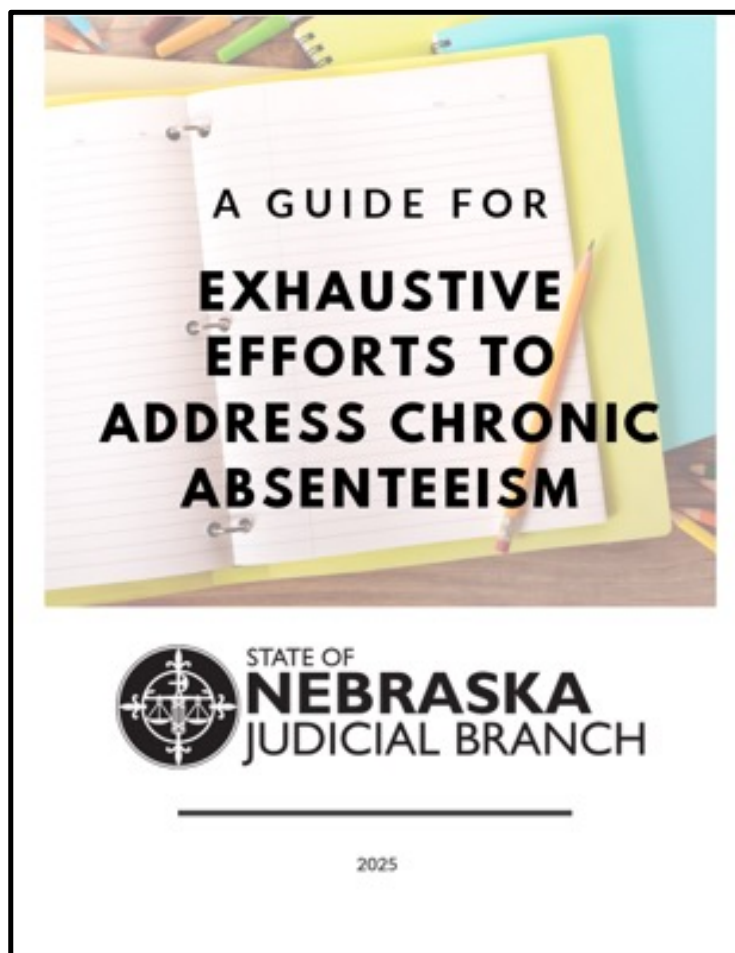
- Revisit your data within a balanced assessment system and identify what data you have available to address attendance concerns (e.g. student learning and wellbeing data, demographic data, perceptual data, etc.). It's important to recognize that attendance issues go deeper than students not coming to school and are often the result of a systems problem.
 - » Ensure you are eliciting student voice and perspectives on barriers to attendance.
 - » Consider using the [School Refusal Assessment Scale](#).
 - ◇ [Administering the Assessment](#) resource.
- Engage in a self-assessment to identify needs related to attendance.
 - » [School Leadership Team](#) (*Attendance Works*)
- Establish agreed upon attendance thresholds that initiate data decision-making rules.
 - » *Note:* These thresholds should be based on your unique local-context and your district's data.
 - » *How to Find Local Thresholds:* Run an attendance report from last year for all students in the district and sort by their number of days missed. Identify the 75-80% mark (e.g., 800 of 1,000 students have 4 or less days missed in one year). This becomes your Tier 1 Core threshold. Use the guiding questions below to further build your data decision-making rules.
 - ◇ *Tier 1 Core:* For 75–80% of our students, how many days are typically missed, and does this reflect a level of attendance that would not require additional support?
 - ◇ *Tier 2 Targeted:* For roughly 10–25% of our students, at what number of days missed does attendance begin to signal a need for Tier 2 Targeted support?
 - ◇ *Tier 3 Intensified:* For the 1–10% of students with the highest absences, what threshold of days missed indicates a need for intensive, Tier 3 Individualized support?
 - » Utilize the NeMSS Problem-Solving Model or other district-adopted model when analyzing attendance data. See **Appendix C** for the enlarged model from the [NeMTSS Framework Document](#).
- Engage in root cause analysis for groups of students, as well as on an individual basis, to surface underlying barriers (e.g., transportation, health, climate/belonging, family circumstances).
 - » [Identify the Root Causes of Absence](#) (*Attendance Works*)
 - » [Understanding the Root Causes of Student Absence](#) (*Attendance Works*)
 - » [Student Absenteeism Worksheet](#) (*Attendance Works*)
 - » See **Appendix D** for an Attendance Works graphic depicting four categories related to root causes: barriers, aversion, disengagement and misconceptions.
- Review process data (i.e., implementation data, fidelity data) not just attendance outcomes, to determine which supports were delivered with fidelity and monitor their impact.

COMMUNICATION & COLLABORATION

- Develop a unified attendance message aligned with school-wide expectations, values, and/or core beliefs.
- Elevate student voice and engagement, as they are the primary stakeholder in their education. Consider adding student representation to existing teaming structures where appropriate.
 - » Check for recent Coffee Connects in the [NeMTSS Media Library](#) related to student voice, engagement, etc.
- Coordinate with community partners (e.g., transportation, public health, mental-health providers, after-school programs) to address systemic barriers that cause absences.
- Celebrate improvements within recognition systems (e.g., positive postcards home, classroom celebrations, staff shout-outs), emphasizing progress, not perfect attendance.
- Gather student testimonials about attendance supports that worked for them and what made a difference.

EXHAUSTIVE EFFORTS

After exhaustive efforts to address chronic absenteeism through a tiered approach have been made, school districts may need court involvement. The Juvenile Probation Services Division of the Nebraska Judicial Branch created a [Guide for Exhaustive Efforts to Address Chronic Absenteeism](#), which includes necessary partners, engagement activities, forms, and draft collaborative planning requirements prior to court involvement.



WHAT TERMINOLOGY DO WE NEED TO UNDERSTAND AND USE?

Nebraska absenteeism data is collected via K-12 attendance records, which classifies absences into one of nine categories: tardy, early departure, disciplinary action, illness or medical leave, a recognized noninstructional activity, unavailable transportation, any other excused absence, skipping school, and any other unexcused absence. Chronic absence, defined as missing 10% of in-class time per academic year (including all absences; excused, unexcused, and suspensions), equates to missing 17.5 of 175 learning days in Nebraska, in a typical school year. Differently, truancy only accounts for unexcused absences (Attendance Works, 2016).

Attendance Expectations: Students must be counted in attendance when they are present or participating in remote learning on days when school is in session. A student must be counted present only when he or she is at the school, is present at a school-sponsored activity, or is participating in remote learning, which is supervised or coordinated by a member or members of the school staff. This may include authorized independent study, work-study programs, field trips, athletic contests, music festivals, student conventions, instruction for homebound students, summer school instructional programs, or similar activities when officially authorized under policies of the local school board. It does not include “making up” schoolwork at home or activities supervised or sponsored by private individuals or groups. [NDE Rule 2](#)

Attendance Data: Records maintained by the school to monitor and analyze attendance patterns, used to guide decision-making and interventions.

Chronic Absenteeism: A student is chronically absent if they miss 10% or more of the school year for any reason, **excused and unexcused**. [AQuESTT Business Rules](#)

Early Intervention: Proactive actions taken to identify and support students at risk of attendance problems before patterns become severe.

Educational Neglect: The failure of the parent or caregiver to access an appropriate educational program and assure regular attendance for a child age 6 or older, but younger than age 13, unless the parent or caregiver has complied with one of the exceptions listed in [Neb. Rev. Stat. § 79-201](#).

Excessive Absence: A student is excessively absent if they miss 20% or more of the school year for any reason, excused or unexcused. [Nebraska Revised Statute 79-209](#) and [79-2121](#)

Excused Absence: An absence documented for legitimate reasons such as illness, medical appointments, family emergencies, religious observances, or school-approved activities.

Unexcused Absence: An absence without a valid reason or appropriate documentation. This includes absences acknowledged by a parent/guardian that do not meet excused criteria. See more [here](#).

Tardy: A student is considered tardy when arriving late to school or class beyond the designated start time without an approved excuse.

Tiered Support: A framework that provides increasing levels of intervention based on individual student needs.

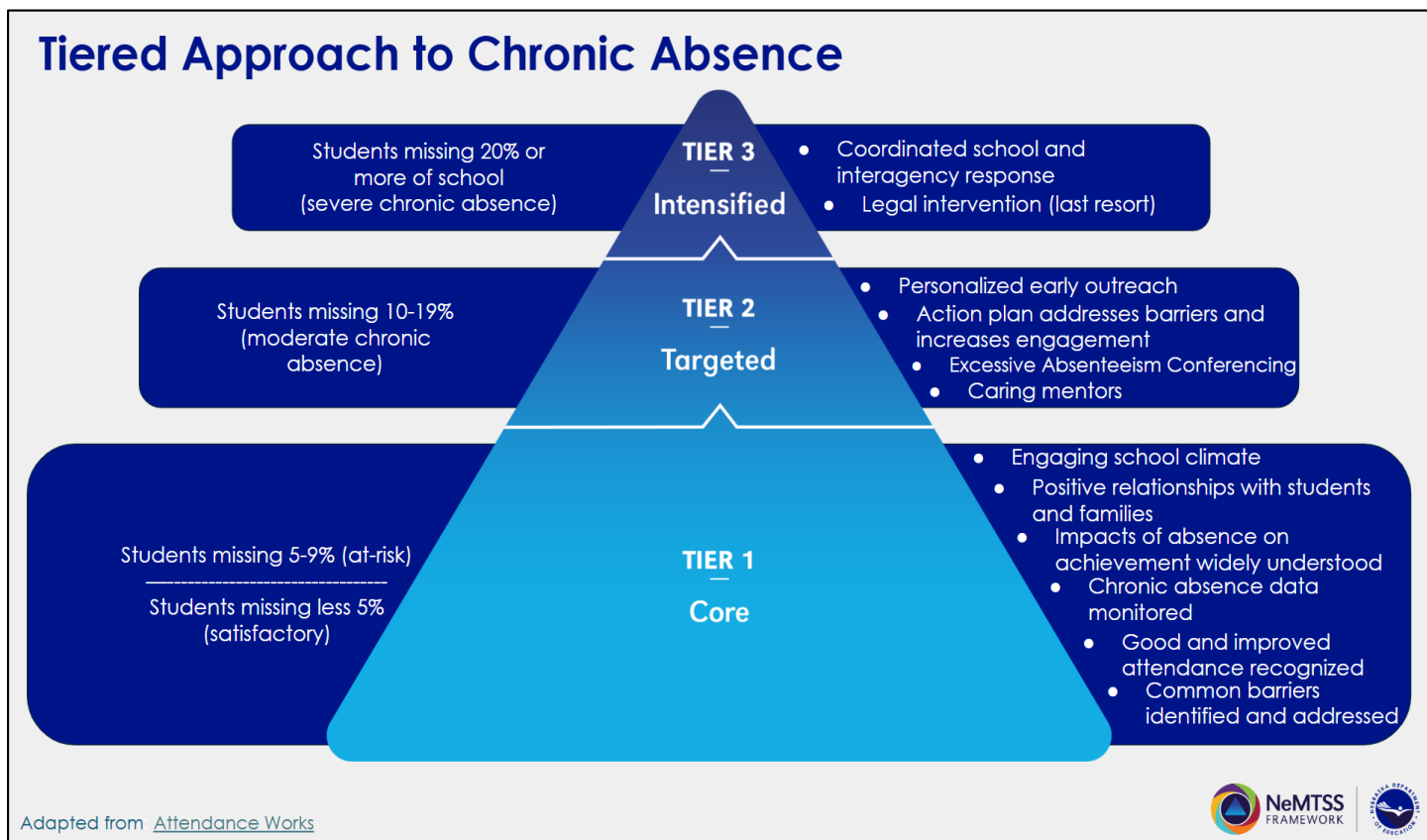
Truancy: A student is truant when a student is absent from school without a valid excuse as defined by law and district policy.

ADDITIONAL READINGS AND RESOURCES

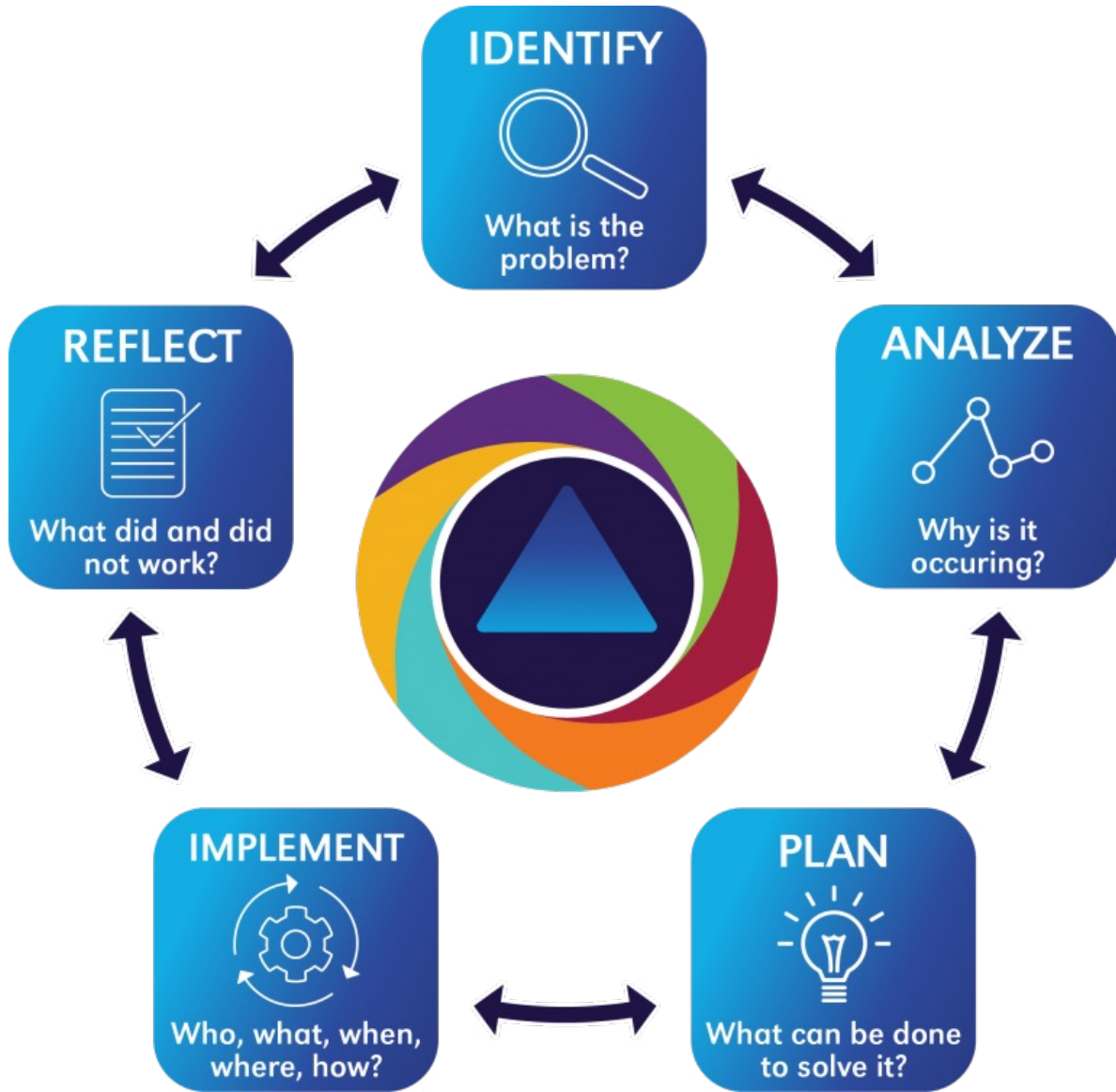
- [Nebraska Legislature](#), Compulsory Attendance Statutes: N.R.S. §79-201 through §79-210
- NDE, [Family And Community Engagement Framework](#)
- NDE, [Chronic Absenteeism Resources](#)
- Future Ed, [Attendance Playbook: Smart Strategies for Reducing Student Absenteeism Post-Pandemic](#)
- [Nebraska Resource and Referral System](#)
- [Find Help Resources](#) and [Community Collaboratives](#)
- Check and Connect: [Readiness Tool for Exploring Check & Connect](#)
- Institute of Education Sciences, [Evidence-Based Practices to Address Chronic Absenteeism](#)

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Tiered Approach to Chronic Absence



Appendix C: NeMTSS Problem Solving Model



For more information, see [the NeMTSS Framework Document, Appendix C.](#)

Appendix D: Root Causes to Attendance

Barriers

- Chronic and acute illness
- Family responsibilities or home situation
- Poor transportation
- Housing and food insecurity
- Lack of access to needed services
- System involvement
- Unpredictable schedules for learning
- Lack of access to tech
- Impact of trauma
- Violence in the community

Aversion

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

Disengagement

- Lack of challenging, engaging instruction
- Bored
- No meaningful relationships to adults or peers in school
- 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 two 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



www.attendanceworks.org September 8, 2025