

Boston Public Schools

Chronic Absenteeism & District Improvement Strategies

Department of Opportunity Youth
Brian Marques, Senior Director





Chronic Absenteeism

- **Defined as students who missed 10% or more school days for any given time period**
- **Includes both excused and unexcused absences**
- **18 absences for a full school year in BPS**
- **Post-Pandemic Spike: A district, state, and national crisis**
 - *The latest [national data](#) available from the U.S. Department of Education shows at least 10.1 million students were chronically absent during the first full year of the Covid-19 pandemic. This data, collected for the 2020-21 school year, is a substantial increase from the approximately 8 million students chronically absent in the prior years.*

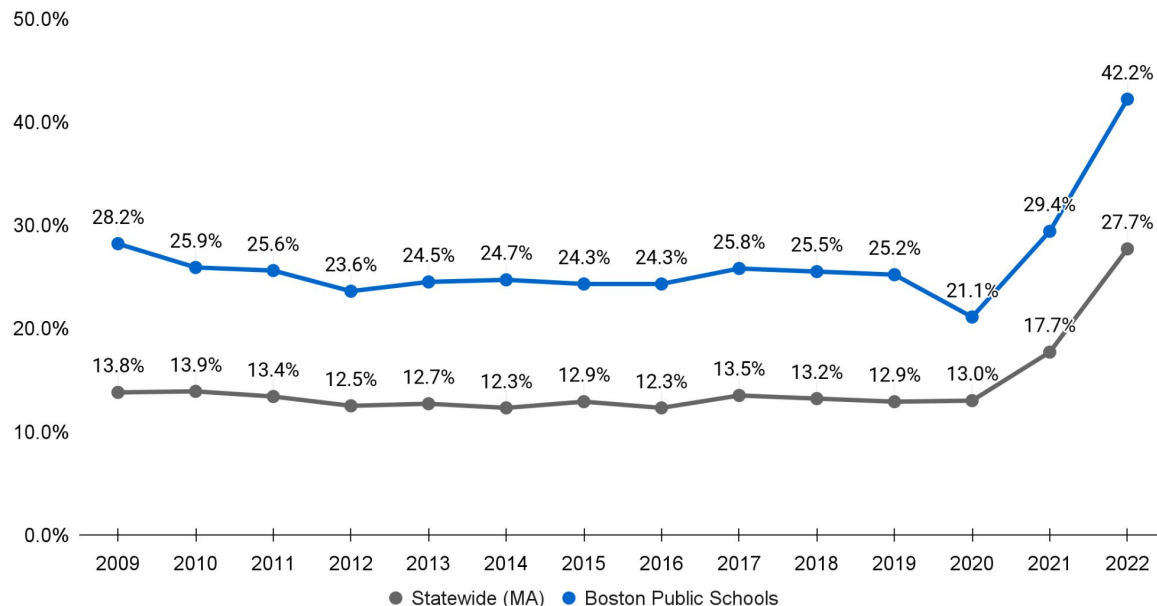


ATTEND TODAY,
ACHIEVE TOMORROW.

While chronic absenteeism rates within the Boston Public Schools remain higher than the state, **increased rates since 2020 are consistent nationwide.**

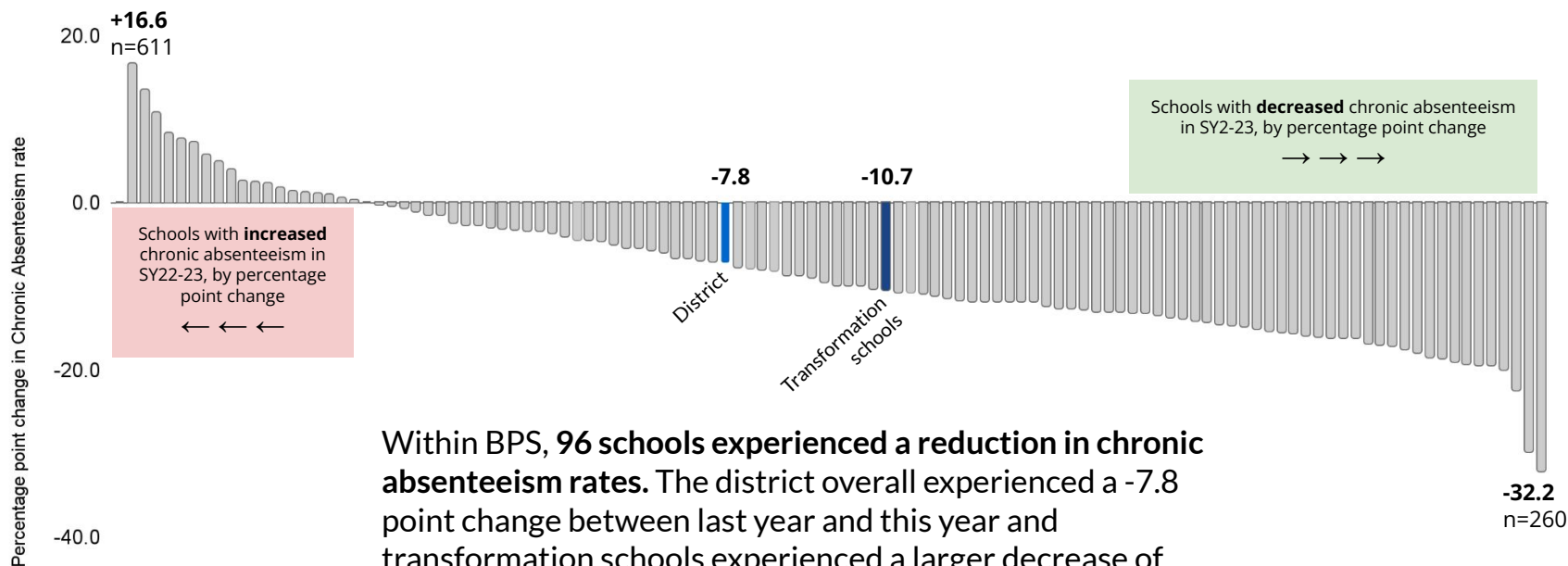
Chronic Absenteeism rates over time

According to AttendanceWorks research, there has been an increase of **nearly 2 million additional students who are chronically absent nationwide** since the Covid-19 pandemic.



Source: MA DESE. Boston Public Schools data excludes students enrolled at Horace Mann Charter Schools.

Compared to this time last year, chronic absenteeism rates have improved across the majority of schools and district overall.

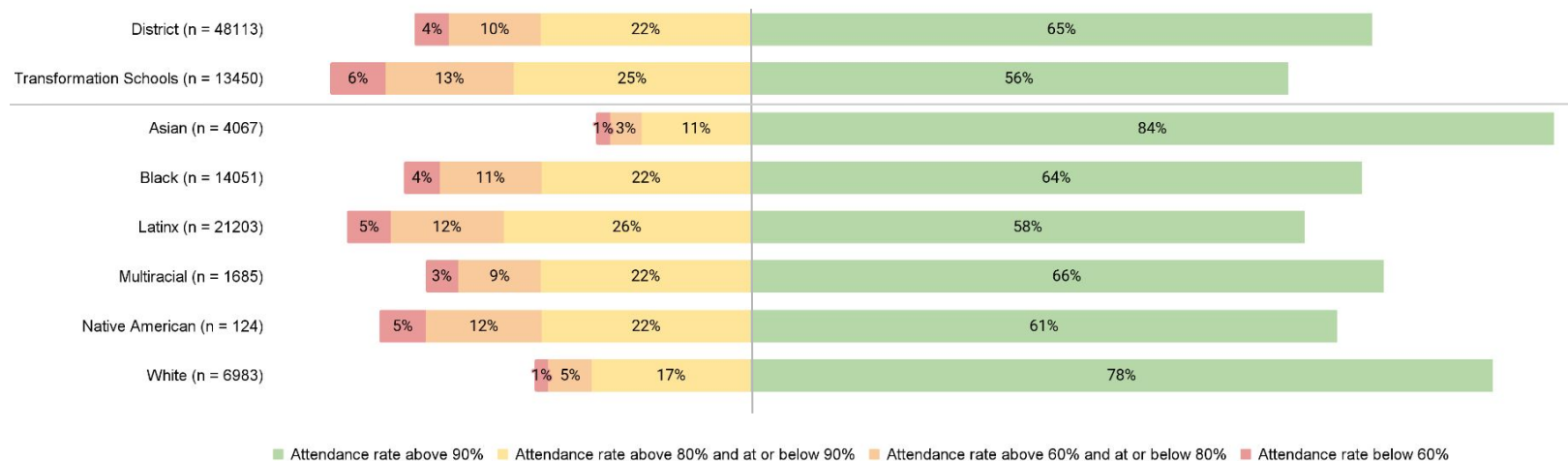


Within BPS, **96 schools experienced a reduction in chronic absenteeism rates.** The district overall experienced a -7.8 point change between last year and this year and transformation schools experienced a larger decrease of -10.7 points.

Source: Attendance rates as reported in Aspen, SY 2021-2022 and SY 2022-2023. **Annual change is displayed as the percentage point difference in chronic absenteeism rates, September-January of each school year.** Data includes Horace Mann Charter Schools. One school is excluded due to inconsistent data entry practices. N size of school represents the total number of students enrolled as of January 2023.

Chronic absenteeism rates in SY22-23 are higher for transformation schools compared to the district overall. Among racial/ethnic groups, Latinx and Native students have the highest rates of chronic absenteeism.

Percentage of enrolled students in each attendance band, district overall, by transformation status and by race/ethnicity

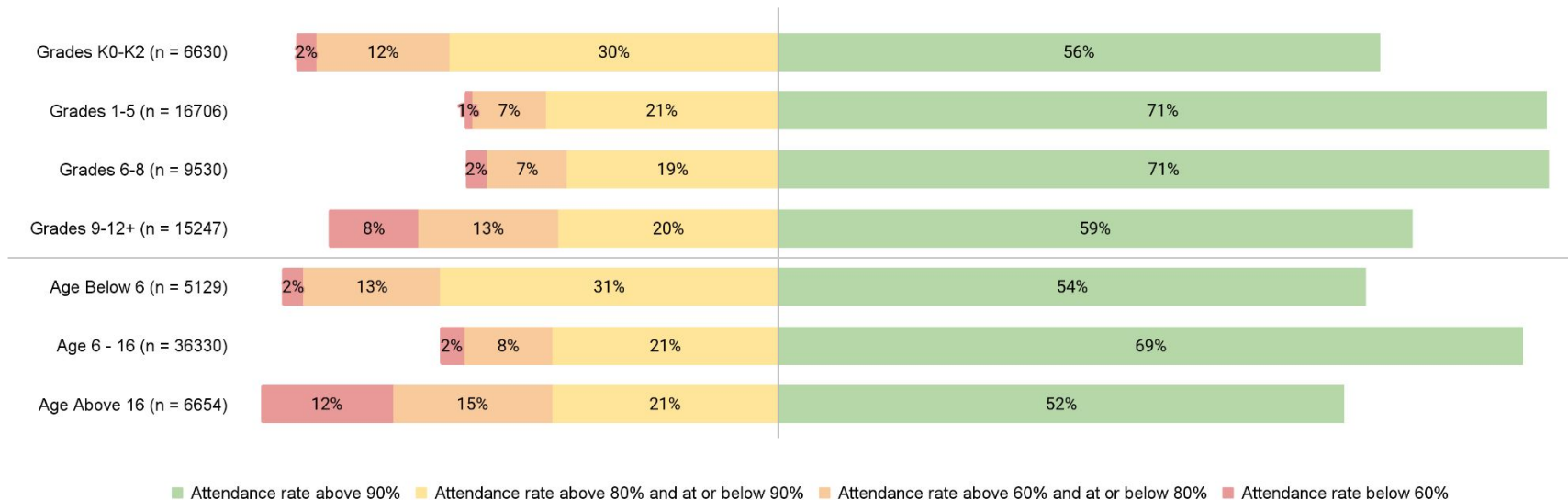


District-wide, 35% of students are experiencing chronic absenteeism this school year, compared to 44% of students enrolled at transformation schools. Rates of chronic absenteeism are highest for Latinx (42%) and Native (39%) students and lowest for White (22%) and Asian (16%) students.

Source: Attendance rates as reported in Aspen, SY 2022-2023, September-January only. Data includes Horace Mann Charter Schools. One school is excluded due to inconsistent data entry practices.

Chronic absenteeism rates are highest for our oldest and youngest students.

Percentage of enrolled students in each attendance band, by grade band and age

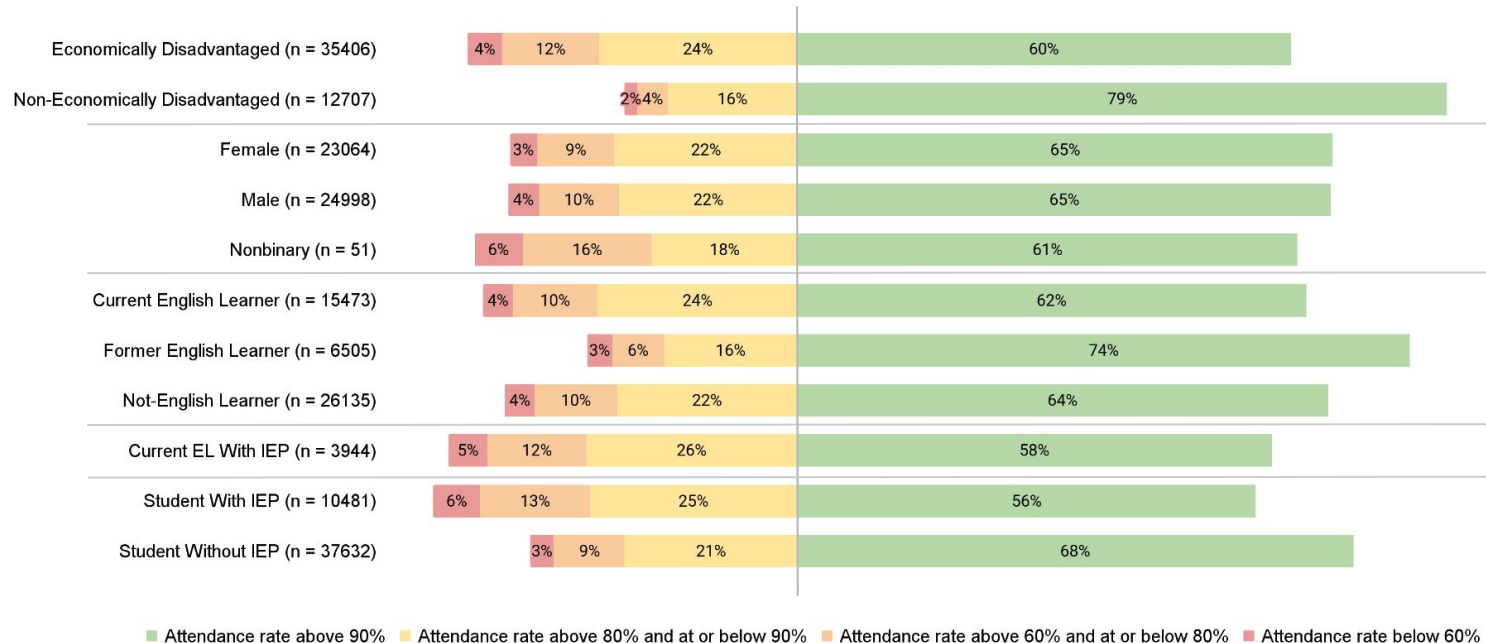


48% of students above age 16 are experiencing chronic absenteeism this year, compared to 31% of students ages 6-16. 12% of students above age 16 attend school less than 60% of the time.

Source: Attendance rates as reported in Aspen, SY 2022-2023, September-January only. Data includes Horace Mann Charter Schools. One school is excluded due to inconsistent data entry practices.

Chronic absenteeism rates are highest for economically disadvantaged students and students with IEPs.

Percentage of enrolled students in each attendance band, by student group



Source: Attendance rates as reported in Aspen, SY 2022-2023, September-January only. Data includes Horace Mann Charter Schools. One school is excluded due to inconsistent data entry practices.

Boston Public Schools

District Improvement Strategies

Department of Opportunity Youth



Improving School Attendance - Guiding Principles

- **School Attendance Structure**
 - Establishing effective school attendance teams
 - Building strong school-based prevention and intervention strategies by tier
 - Understanding the tiered systems that impact attendance beyond traditional interventions (Ex: culture and climate, health and wellbeing, attendance awareness)
- **Importance of consistent attendance outreach and intervention practices**
 - Relationship mapping - focus on student/family sense of belonging
 - Consistent follow-up creates a level of engagement *and* accountability (“nudge”)
- **Quality School Plan (QSP) Implementation**
 - Developing an action plan to achieve the school’s strategic vision

Regional Model: Central Office Exists to Support Schools

Maximizing our support to schools

The 9 regional teams have an average of 15 schools they support. The teams work collaboratively to support, remove barriers, and build capacity of school leaders and their teams.

We are adding a supervisor of attendance to each region to support, elevate and monitor school based attendance systems and structures to ensure they are meeting the needs of our students.

- School Superintendent
- Operational Leader
- Equity Specialists
- District Social Worker
- Special Education Assistant Director
- Human Capital Liaison
- Equitable Literacy Coach
- Accelerated Improvement & Inquiry Manager
- Budget Liaison
- **Supervisor of Attendance**
- Multilingual Compliance and Academic Supports

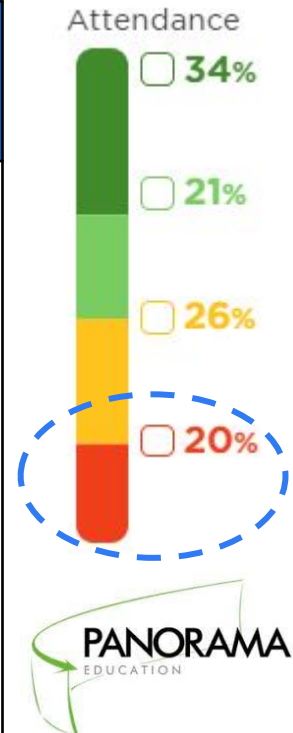


Panorama Student Success Platform

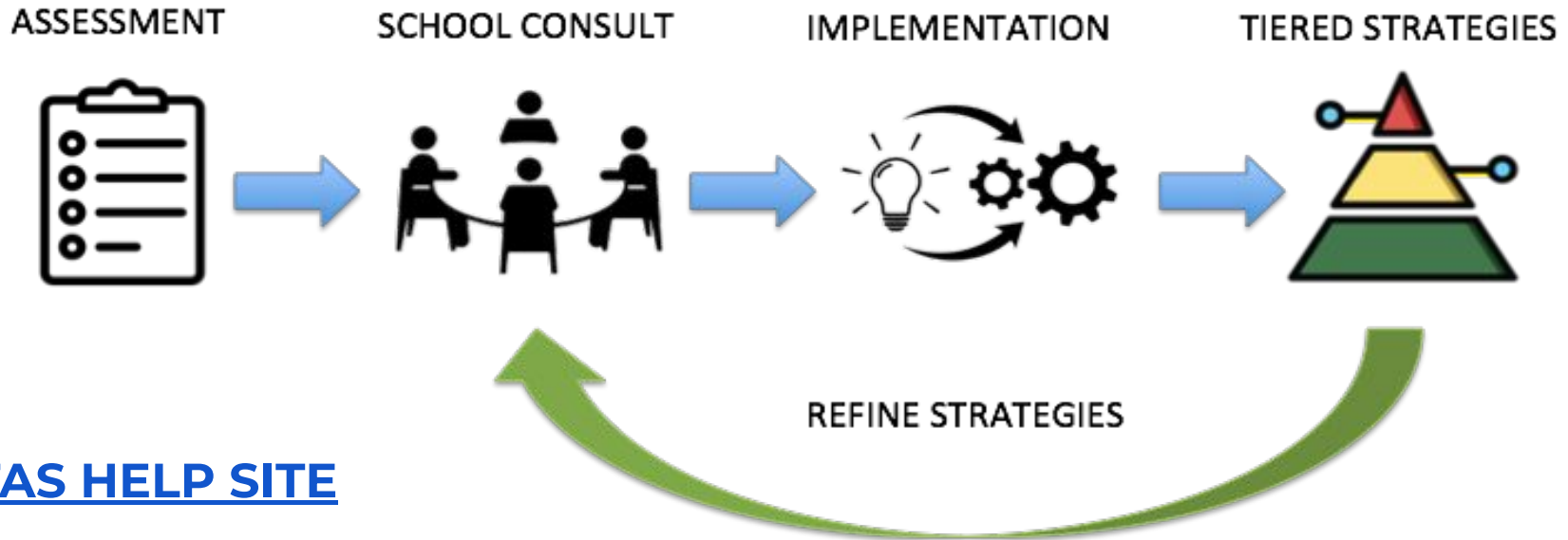
Attendance Plans

All Students at/Below 80% Attendance (YTD) Have a Tier 3 Plan in Panorama

- **At a baseline: any student with 80% or below attendance should have an intensive, collaborative plan with ongoing monitoring.**
- The emphasis is quality over quantity. Consider plan updatedness, staff collaboration and how best to support your students.
- Supports should be provided to all students who struggle with attendance, we suggest limiting plan creation to students that need a high touch, team based approach. Consider school capacity for ongoing work with Panorama.
- **Caveat: Any case filed in Truancy Court must have a detailed attendance success plan in Panorama for that student.**



Tiered Attendance System (TAS)



[TAS HELP SITE](#)

*Recommended for all priority schools
Consultative service to comprehensively assess and improve your attendance practices.*

Attendance Letters

[HelpDoc](#)

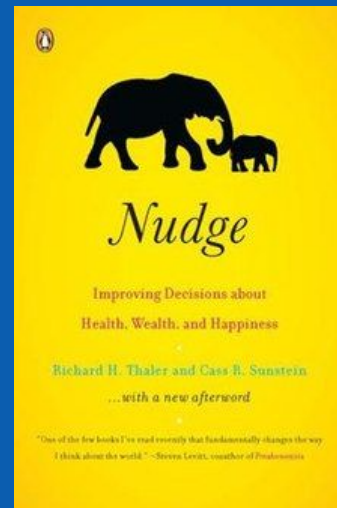
[Process Guide](#)

Reason for Shift

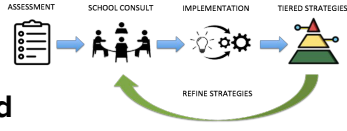
- Historically, BPS attendance letters have been punitive and ineffective in reducing chronic absenteeism.
- The new letters are student-centered and relationship-based; striving to share data transparently and establishing a partnership with the family.

Nudge Theory

- Rooted in behavioral science, nudge theory has been applied to attendance letters in a number of large, urban school districts to significantly reduce chronic absenteeism.
- The new BPS attendance letters have applied this evidence-based approach to improve student attendance as a Tier I and II intervention.
- This approach has been shown to “nudge” students/families toward the goal behavior of consistent attendance.



School Improvement & Implementation Resources

Resource	Description	Primary Audience	How to Access
Panorama Student Success 	<i>75 minute school consultation session with Panorama strategic advisor</i>	Schools needing additional training and support (SST, Attendance Team)	Sign up via this 1-minute survey
 Tiered Attendance System (TAS)	<i>Consultative service to comprehensively assess a school's attendance needs across tiers and then provide recommended improvement strategies</i>	Highly recommended for all schools to comprehensively improve attendance practices across tiers (Attendance team, school leader)	Complete Attendance Needs Assessment or contact Brian Marques (bmarques@bostonpublicschools.org)
Intensive Onsite Support 	<i>SOAs, w/ Regional Teams, works directly with school attendance teams onsite</i>	Transformation Schools & Priority Schools (as identified by School Supts.)	"No wrong door" through Regional Collaboration Structures

Attendance Mini-Grants

- ESSER funded
- Up to \$20,000 per school
- Guidelines
 - Priority Students
 - Focus Areas
- Implementation and budget management support
- Unique Schools: 55

	SY21-22	SY22-23
<i>Number of Schools</i>	33	35
<i>High Schools</i>	16	15
<i>Transformation Schools</i>	13	11
<i>Alt. Education Schools</i>	3	5
<i>New Awardees</i>	N/A	22
<i>Total Funding</i>	\$600,000	\$600,000

Of the 35 schools that were awarded an attendance mini-grant for SY22-23, 25 have seen a reduction in their chronic absenteeism rate from SY21-22 to SY22-23 (YTD). Of these, 19 had a reduction of at least 5% and 8 had a reduction of 10% or more.

Appendix





Revised District Attendance Policy

- Updated strategies and best practices with a focus on chronic absenteeism and establishing relationships with students and families
- Remove punitive practices
 - End policy of converting tardies to absences
 - Discontinue no credit (NC) policy
 - Tardies no longer lead to unexcused absences that convert to an “F”
 - Align with District’s shift to competency-based grading
- Student-centered, non-punitive language
- Remove procedures that are no longer relevant (attendance waivers)
- Elimination of Habitual School Offender (HSO) language to reflect state statute
- School leader decisions for CRA aligned with spirit and protocol of Code of Conduct (CoC)

We need to think differently about how we approach student attendance!

[ATTENDANCE POLICIES & PROCEDURES \(ACA-18\)](#)



ATTEND TODAY,
ACHIEVE TOMORROW.

Truancy Court Process and Considerations

- **Last resort when all other intervention strategies have been exhausted**
- **Schools must have documented interventions in a Panorama success plan**
- **BPS staff need to go through an SOA to file a truancy case**
- **Pre-Court Barriers Check**
- **Considerations for filing a 51A**
 - Mandatory Reporters
 - Educational Neglect
 - Consult with SOA



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ACHIEVE TOMORROW.

New "Nudge" Letter Uses Behavioral Science



ABSENCES MATTER AND YOU CAN HELP

September 23, 2021

Dear Parent/Guardian of _____,

In Boston Public Schools, we partner with students and their families to improve school attendance.

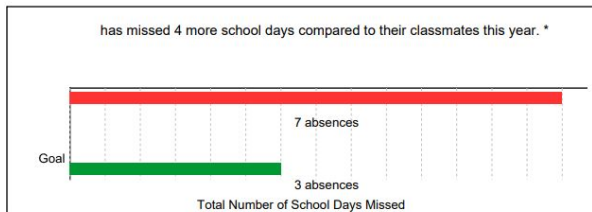
_____ has missed 7 days, which exceeds the district goal for absences.

Students fall behind when they miss school - whether students are absent for excused or unexcused reasons. We are worried that if _____ continues to miss school days, it will be difficult to stay on track in the classroom.

You can have a big effect on _____'s attendance moving forward - and we appreciate your help. If you need additional support, or have any questions, please contact the Main Office at (617) 635-_____. _____ School.

Sincerely,

Principal



* This card is part of the Boston Public Schools "I'm In" Attendance Campaign, which aims to increase awareness about the importance of attendance. The number of absences above includes excused and unexcused absences as of September 23, 2021.



Track your Progress

_____ 's most recent absences and tardies occurred on the following dates:

Excused (A-E), Unexcused (A), Tardy (T)

Did you know? Students who attend school regularly are more likely to achieve better results in school and graduate ready for college and career success.

Make Attendance a Priority

- Establish routines for bedtime, waking up and showing up for class. Identify a quiet place for your child to do school work. If you have multiple children, make a schedule. Or ask your school if there are nearby places available for students to do school work.
- Develop back-up plans for getting your child to school if you can't be there to help. Find a family member, neighbor or older child who can help over the phone or who can help while wearing a mask and maintaining physical distance. Community-based organizations might also be able to help.
- When school is in session, avoid extended family trips and non-urgent medical appointments.
- Ask your child's teacher about attendance and tell the teacher any concerns you have.

School Calendar and Report Card Schedule

Visit www.bostonpublicschools.org/calendar for the district calendar and report card schedule.

