



Colorado Department of Education

Attendance Guidebook

July 2026



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“We are committed to joining with schools, districts, and communities from around Colorado and with other states that have committed to reducing chronic absenteeism by 50% from its pandemic high.”

Susana Córdova, Commissioner of Education



Colorado Department of Education (CDE) Strategic Plan

Launched in 2024 through Commissioner Susana Cordova’s leadership, [CDE’s Strategic Plan](#), Start Strong, Stay Engaged, Leave Ready, identifies Student Engagement as one of four strategic priorities. The plan includes a comprehensive approach to improving attendance and engagement in learning.

Every School Day Matters and 50% challenge

In summer of 2024, Attendance Works, American Enterprise Institute, and Ed Trust launched a challenge to state leaders to commit to reducing chronic absenteeism by 50% from its pandemic high. This challenge was driven by a recognition that attendance impacts a wide range of other student outcomes. Colorado has joined with [14 other states](#) and incorporated aligned strategies into CDE’s Strategic Plan. In addition to making a state commitment to work towards this goal, CDE has asked schools and districts to join this challenge. At the end of the 2025-26 school year, representatives from 54 Colorado districts and 87 individual schools signed up to be a part of the attendance challenge.

CDE launched the [Every School Day Matters campaign](#) which provides schools with tools and templates to help schools communicate with families about the importance of attendance, resources about effective practices, and highlights of school districts improving attendance.

Purpose of the Guidebook

CDE created this guidebook to support schools and districts’ implementation of attendance programs. It includes summary information about state rules for implementation of attendance processes, data collection, and information on effective practices to support improved attendance.

Thank you for your work to improve student attendance, connection, and engagement at school! Please reach out to CDE’s Dropout Prevention Team with questions.

Martha Fischhoff, Fischhoff_m@cde.state.co.us

2026-27 Professional learning

CDE offers professional learning for school and district educators to support awareness and effective implementation of practices.

- **Attendance Challenge Webinars:** Join the 50% Reduction Attendance Challenge for webinars with other participants to learn, celebrate, and collaborate — featuring school and district presenters and time to connect and problem-solve. Quarterly webinars – join as many as you'd like! [Sign up to join the challenge and get invitations to our webinars](#)
- **CDE Attendance Learning Modules:** A self-paced, asynchronous course covering foundational concepts on the importance of attendance and recommended strategies to reduce absences. [LINK](#)
- **Chronic Absenteeism Leadership Learning Cohort (in collaboration with District Improvement Strategy Offices-DISO):** For school and district teams seeking in-depth support. Teams identify root causes, explore proven strategies, and build sustainable plans to improve attendance through collaboration and shared learning from districts seeing results. Four in-person meetings at schools across the state. [Sign Up: Learning Cohorts – Chronic Absenteeism Leadership](#)
- **Peer Learning Network:** For leaders and teams who've already completed a Chronic Absenteeism Learning Cohort. Sessions create space to hear new research and resources from CDE and work collaboratively with peers on attendance challenges. Quarterly virtual meetings. [Sign Up: Peer Learning Network Registration Form](#)
- **The Denver Broncos Attendance Network:** By invitation only, a network of 8-10 districts who participate in a two-year program featuring training, networking, and ongoing coaching support. This project is a partnership of the Denver Broncos Community Foundation, CDE and Attendance Works.

Why Attendance Matters

Consistent attendance in school and engagement in learning provides students the opportunity to develop crucial skills and to thrive academically. [Extensive research](#) demonstrates how patterns of strong attendance contribute to positive outcomes in school and later in life. In contrast, chronic absenteeism, defined as missing 10% or more of school days for any reason, is associated with a variety of negative outcomes.



ACADEMIC

Missing school is associated with lower academic outcomes throughout K-12. Students who miss a large number of days in preschool have weaker literacy and numeracy skills when they enter kindergarten. In first grade, missing school is associated with greater absenteeism in subsequent years and lower achievement in reading, math, and general knowledge. Missing school in the early years is associated with lowered reading proficiency in 3rd grade and difficulties with coursework in 6th grade. Lastly, chronic absenteeism in middle and high school is one of the main early indicators for failing courses, dropping out and not graduating.



SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL SKILLS

[Children who are frequently absent often](#) have worse interpersonal skills, experience more school-related stress and lower motivation and feelings of belonging at school than children who attend regularly.

Missing 10% or more can have a negative impact on students' learning. This might mean just 2 or 3 days per month that add up over the course of the year.

Current challenge

After the pandemic, rates of chronic absenteeism rose in Colorado and across the country and impacted almost every school and district. At its peak in 2021-22, more than 1 of every 3 Colorado students was chronically absent. High levels of chronic absenteeism impacts students who are absent and high attending students within the same schools and classrooms. While rates of chronic absenteeism have improved, more students are chronically absent than prior to the pandemic.

Role of Parents and Families

Patterns for attendance start early. Absenteeism in the first month of school is associated with [absenteeism throughout the year](#) – it's important to begin the year strong!

Despite the importance of pre-k and kindergarten for academic success, [a recent study](#) found that chronic absenteeism was highest in kindergarten across the United States, setting children up for an academic career marked by absence. Often, [parents are not aware](#) that their child is at risk of becoming chronically absent. Discussions about the importance of attendance and keeping families updated of their own child's attendance record can help them set their children up for success.

Parents and families play an enormous role in balancing a child's emotional, social, physical, and academic needs and are an important part of establishing patterns of attendance.

[Things Every Parent Can Do:](#)

- **Make School a Priority** – Parents help to build healthy habits and routines that include attending school unless the student is truly sick. This routine helps build consistency and can help to identify potential stresses or issues as they arise. When routine is disrupted, it is important to understand why a student is missing (avoiding school, sickness, family obligations, etc.)
- **Communicate with the School** – Parents are a key advocate for their student. If an issue does arise or a pattern is noticed regarding attendance, contact the school. If a student is missing school for specific reasons, there might be ways to help. For example – if a student gets sick every day at lunch time, there might be something happening at lunch or in the class before lunch. The partnership between home and school will help identify any barriers and find solutions to help the student be successful.
- **Build a Community** – It is important to build relationships with other families at the school, working together to form partnerships that can connect to positive school activities and helping each other in times of need or emergencies. Attendance can be impacted due to circumstances outside the students' control, for example lack of transportation or emergency childcare. By having a support network, priority to attend school is maintained by utilizing others to help navigate the barriers that might be preventing the student from attending school.

How Sick Is Too Sick?

The [Colorado Department of Public Health and the Environment \(CDPHE\)](#) continues to create guidance to help school districts and families navigate sickness. Many districts share this directly or work locally to ensure there is common agreement on when sickness should lead to non-attendance.

CDPHE guidance suggests that there are four main reasons for a student to stay home:

1. The child or staff member could infect others with a contagious illness, either because of symptoms, a diagnosis, or recent exposure to a contagious illness.
2. The child or staff member does not feel well enough to take part in usual activities.
3. A child needs more care than teachers and staff can give while still caring for the other children.
4. The child or staff member has symptoms or an illness on the list below, and staying home is required.

Keep your child home or seek care if they:	Send your child to school even if they:
Have a fever of 100.4° F (38° C) or higher	Haven't had a fever overnight and they have not taken fever-reducing medicine during that time.
Have vomited two or more times in the last 24 hours	Have a mild stomachache.
Have a persistent cough, difficulty breathing or trouble catching their breath or if they develop a fever with the cough.	Have a mild cold, which may include a runny nose and/or cough
Have a rash with blisters that are draining, are painful, look like bruises and/or if a fever develops.	Have a mild rash with no other symptoms
Have eye swelling, eye pain, trouble seeing or an eye injury.	Have eye drainage without fever, eye pain or eyelid redness
Have a sore throat causing drooling, trouble swallowing, or a fever and/or rash.	Have head lice. Though they are annoying and should be treated, lice are not a reason to exclude a child from school.

Talking Points

The Importance of Going to School

Regular school attendance is fundamental for a student's academic success, social development and connections, and future opportunities. Missing school can lead to gaps in learning, reduced academic performance, and isolation from peers, teachers and activities. Teachers, parents, community members, and activity sponsors play a crucial role in emphasizing the importance of going to school and supporting students in overcoming any barriers to attendance. Here are key talking points and guidance to help convey this message effectively.

One day off won't hurt – or will it?

If a student in a typical calendar misses 2 days a month, starting in kindergarten:

- They will have missed 10% of school or almost one month of school by the end of the year, and;
- The equivalent of one year of school by 8th grade.

On the flip side, a student improving their attendance from missing 3 days per month to 1 day per month:

- Improves their average daily attendance from 85% to 95% attendance, and;
- Increases by almost one month the number of school days attending school.

Teachers to Students

Quote: "Attending school every day is essential for your learning and success. Each day you miss is a lost opportunity to engage with new material and participate in classroom activities that help you grow academically and personally."

Guidance: Emphasize the connection between attendance and success. Highlight specific examples of how missing school can

impact their grades, understanding of subjects, and connection to peers.

Importance of Regular Attendance

Quote: "If you're facing challenges that make it difficult to come to school, please talk to us. We are here to help you, whether the issues are related to school, home, or personal struggles. Together, we can find solutions to ensure you can attend regularly."

Guidance: Create an open and trusting environment where students feel safe to share their issues. Offer reassurance that seeking help is a positive step.

Open Communication

Positive School Environment

Quote: "Our school is a community where your presence matters. We strive to create a welcoming and engaging environment where you can feel valued and supported. Your contributions are important, and we miss your voice and ideas when you're not here."

Guidance: Encourage students by highlighting their importance to the school community. Share stories of how their participation has made a difference.

Parents to Students

Long-Term Impact

Quote: "Your education is a foundation for your future success. Attending school regularly helps you stay on track with your studies and develop important life skills like responsibility, time management, and perseverance."

Long-Term Impact

Guidance: Discuss future goals, how regular attendance is a steppingstone towards achieving them, and the range of skills that students develop at school. Relate school attendance to real-life examples and career aspirations.

Supportive Partnership

Supportive Partnership:

Quote: "We're here to support you in your educational journey. Let's work together to overcome any obstacles that might prevent you from attending school. We believe in you and are committed to helping you succeed."

Guidance: Offer consistent support and be proactive in addressing potential barriers. Foster a team approach to problem-solving, emphasizing that the student is not alone.

Building Habits:

Quote: "Developing the habit of going to school every day is important. It builds strong connections to others, sets a foundation for good habits in adulthood, helping you become a reliable and committed individual. Starting now will benefit you in the long run."
Guidance: Reinforce the value of good habits early in life. Share examples of how consistency and reliability are valued in the adult world.

Building Habits

Community Members to Students

Community Support:

Quote: "Our community believes in you and your potential. We offer various programs and resources designed to support you and make it easier for you to attend school regularly. You are not alone, and we are here to help."



Guidance: Inform students about available community resources. Encourage participation in community programs that provide additional support and enrichment.

Role of Education in the Community:

Quote: "As members of this community, your education and well-being are important to us. When you succeed in school, it benefits not just you but also the entire community. Education is a key to building a better future for all of us."

Role of Education in the Community

Guidance: Highlight the broader impact of their education. Explain how their success contributes to community improvement and collective well-being.

Encouragement And Mentorship

Encouragement and Mentorship:

Quote: "We are here to encourage you and provide connections. Engaging with community programs can help you find additional support and motivation to attend school regularly. We believe in your potential and are here to guide you."

Guidance: Provide examples of successful community members who benefited from regular school attendance and found connections to meaningful work. Offer mentorship opportunities and emphasize the availability of role models.

Community involvement programs help students be more successful and engaged in their school life, leading to higher achievement both for the student as well as the school. Connections outside of the classroom extends far beyond academic success, shaping character, and fostering personal growth, it provides a sense of belonging, overcome challenges, embrace uniqueness, and future plans.

Athletic Coaches and Activity Sponsors to Students

Commitment and Responsibility:

Quote: "Being part of a team or activity requires commitment and responsibility, just like attending school regularly. Your dedication to both your education and your activities will help you succeed in all areas of your life."

Guidance: Draw parallels between the discipline required for sports and activities and the discipline needed for consistent school attendance. Emphasize the value of being reliable and responsible.

Commitment
And
Responsibility

Team and Group Success:

Team and
Group Success

Quote: "Your presence matters not just for your personal growth but for the success of the entire team or group. When you attend school regularly, you're better prepared and contribute more effectively to our collective goals."

Guidance: Highlight the importance of each member's role in the success of the team or group. Use examples of how regular attendance leads to better performance and outcomes.

Balancing Academics and Extracurriculars:

Quote: "Balancing academics and extracurricular activities is key to your overall development. Excelling in both areas will open up more opportunities for you in the future, whether in sports, the arts, or academics."

Guidance: Encourage students to see school attendance and extracurricular participation as complementary. Provide strategies for managing time effectively to ensure success in both areas.

Balancing Academics
and
Extracurriculars

Attending school regularly is crucial for a student's overall development and future success. By working together, teachers, parents, community members, and activity sponsors can create a supportive environment that encourages consistent school attendance and addresses any barriers that may arise. Let's continue to emphasize the importance of education and provide the necessary support to help our students thrive.

State and district rules for attendance and truancy

Regular and punctual attendance is a key aspect to students’ academic success. Frequent absences may lead to poor academic work, lack of social development, and possible academic failure.

Every child, who is six years old, as of Aug 1, and under the age of 17, is required to have access to and attend school except in situations provided by law. Parent/guardians’, schools, and districts all have a responsibility to ensure consistent attendance.

Colorado Attendance Laws

Colorado law directly connected to attendance focuses on compulsory school attendance, truancy and school finance.

Colorado, similar to other states, uses a few key definitions to help track student attendance.

Average Daily Attendance Rate: The Attendance rate is calculated using the number of days in attendance divided by the number of days enrolled. It gives a general measure of attendance and can be calculated at the individual, school, district, or state level.

Truancy: Truancy is defined as an unexcused absence. The rate is calculated by dividing the reported total student days unexcused absences by the total student days possible.

Habitually Truant (Student Count): A student is counted as habitually truant if the student has four unexcused absences in one month and/or 10 absences in one school year.

Chronically Absent: A student absent 10 percent or more of the days enrolled during the school year is chronically absent. All absences are included – unexcused, excused and suspensions. The rate is the percentage of students enrolled who are chronically absent. This gives a measure of how many students may be impacted by inconsistent attendance.

Colorado Attendance Law and Board Rule

School Attendance Act – Residence of child ([§22-1-102, C.R.S.](#))

- Every public school shall be open for the admission of all children, between the ages of five and twenty-one years, residing in that district without the payment of tuition.

School Attendance Act – Compulsory School Attendance ([§22-33-104, C.R.S.](#))

- Requires that each child between the ages of six and 17 shall attend public school unless otherwise excused.
- Encourages districts to establish attendance procedures to identify students who are chronically absent.
- States that parents and guardians are required to have their student enrolled and attending school.

Truancy enforcement ([§22-33-107, C.R.S.](#))

- Requires school district to have policy for a truancy plan with the goal of assisting the child to remain in school.

Local School Board Policies

State law (C.R.S. 22-33-104) states that the local board of education should have a written school board policy outlining attendance requirements, reasons for excused absences (that include, at a minimum, reasons in state law) and may include appropriate penalties for non-attendance due to unexcused absences. State law also encourages each district to include procedures for identifying students who are chronically absent and “to implement best practices and research-based strategies” to improve attendance.

Each district may have unique board policies, but there are common board policy coding and language utilized by many districts in the state. Some of the language within these policies is required and some may be determined by the local board.

Common board policies related to attendance include:

JEa – Compulsory Attendance Ages – This section will provide information on attendance age. Every child who has attained the age of six years on or before August 1 of each year and is under the age of 17 is required to attend public school with such exceptions as provided by law. It is the parents’ responsibility to ensure attendance. The courts may issue orders for the child to attend school.

JF – School Admissions – This section covers rules for admission. All people between the ages of six and 17 who live in the school district may attend school without paying tuition. Some districts extend these ages from age 5 to 21. This policy will also include required documentation the parent/guardian will need to provide for enrollment.

JH – School Absences and Excuses - This section will include definitions on the different types of absences. It may also include policies for what occurs for attendance tracking, requirements for schools to build pro-active plans for attendance, the process for intervention and outreach and what occurs if a student misses a day of school.

JHB – Truancy – This section covers truancy processes and rules. If a student is absent without an excuse signed by the parent/guardian or if the student leaves school or class without permission of the teacher or administrator in charge, the student is considered truant. A student who has ten or more unexcused absences is considered “habitually truant.” The district and/or school must monitor the student’s attendance and notify the parents if there is a concern regarding the student’s attendance. A plan will be developed for a student who is at risk of being declared habitually truant with the goal of assisting the child to remain in school.

JHD – Denial of Admission and Exclusion from School Attendance – This section covers rules for when denial of admission is permitted and may include information about transferring information. There are specific reasons, stated in the policy and state statute, that a student may be denied admission. If a student is denied admission, and they reside in the district, the student may be eligible to participate in the district’s program for expelled students or other transitional programming as space is available.

JH-R – Student Absences - It is the parent/guardian’s responsibility to notify the school regarding an absence on the day of or prior to the absence. It is the school’s responsibility to communicate with the home regarding unexcused student absences or excessive excused absences.

In addition to board policies and formal attendance processes—such as those on tardiness and late work—other policies may intersect with attendance in meaningful ways. Reviewing these policies through an attendance lens can promote consistency across practices and help ensure they support student engagement and regular attendance.

A Comprehensive Approach to Attendance

Improving attendance requires a comprehensive approach. Key components of this approach and recommended areas for planning are included below.

School and District Teams

Attendance is not a challenge that can be tackled alone. As absences increase in a school or district, there is often a need for more individuals to address attendance concerns and coordinate to prevent additional absences. In addition, research and practice has pointed to the value of a comprehensive approach to attendance, and recruiting individuals with varying roles can help build a more impactful approach. Attendance teams can support a consistent and comprehensive strategy for schools and districts.

District and School Teams: Roles and Structure

Clear team structures at both the district and school level can provide a foundation for a district’s attendance strategy. While both levels share the same goal of reducing absences, their functions are different, and understanding that difference helps districts build a more effective system.

The Role of the District Team

District office leadership is responsible for creating the policies and systems that allow school staff to do their work well and can play a role in coordinating or leading support. An effective district team focuses on five core functions:

- Building the capacity through training and coaching of school staff to carry out an evidence-based , multi-level attendance approach.
- Providing accurate, timely, and actionable attendance data to schools.
- Centralizing the most intensive supports for students in addition to the systems built by individual schools.
- Ensuring resources are adequate and distributed equitably to the schools with the greatest need.
- Establishing shared accountability across the district and school levels.

District teams work best when they are cross-departmental, meet on a regular schedule, and include people with positional authority, subject-matter expertise (such as special education, homelessness, or data), and community representation.

The Role of the School Team

The school team is where a tiered attendance strategy takes shape day to day. The school team is responsible for four core functions:

- Building a multi-tiered attendance strategy grounded in prevention and early intervention, not just response to absences that have already happened.
 - This might look like:
 - Creating a resource map listing all attendance strategies.
 - Building a strategy for school-wide culture and climate.
 - Identifying 2-3 intervention strategies to prioritize.
- Reviewing and responding to attendance data. This might look like:
 - A weekly review of data as part of a student support meeting or a leadership team meeting. This review can identify student groups that have higher or lower rates of absence and which students are missing days.
 - A process for posting and sharing attendance rates.
 - Determining interventions for students based on the data.
- Digging into the assets and barriers behind attendance patterns, drawing on both quantitative data and direct conversations with students and families.
 - This might look like:
 - Conducting interviews or focus groups with families or a more in depth look at reasons for absence.
 - Evaluating whether individual strategies are successfully improving outcomes for students.
- Communicate with students and families about attendance
 - This might look like:
 - Sending pro-active communication about attendance goals and expectations.
 - Developing a two-way communication strategy to respond to individual student absences.

School teams typically include staff such as the nurse, counselor, social worker, and teachers, and should reflect the demographics of the student population they serve. A well-functioning team has clear roles (ie a team leader, facilitator, data coordinator, and note taker), agreed-upon norms for communication and follow-through, and a shared tracking system that all members can access.

Getting Started

Districts and schools do not necessarily need to build a new team from scratch. It may make sense to add attendance as a standing focus area within an existing team, such as an MTSS, school climate, or PBIS team, rather than creating a separate structure. If the work is split across multiple existing teams, it is important to have a clear system for communication between them

Reflection on Approach

[Attendance Works](#), a national nonprofit organization working to improve attendance has created a number of self-assessment tools that provide a valuable reflection tool for planning, and concrete areas to help frame initiatives. These are available at the school and district level.

- [Attendance Works Self Assessments](#)

School Team Self-Assessment

Lead A Whole School Approach to Attendance	Solidly in Place	Measurable Progress	Needs Improvement	Urgent Gap	Evidence
1. The principal makes attendance a top priority for the entire school.					
2. The group responsible for organizing the school's attendance strategy is aligned with other school teams to ensure attendance is an integral component of the school's plan to improve outcomes for all children.					
3. Our team members reflect the demographics of our school community and/or are able to bring the perspectives of the student demographics.					
4. Collectively, team members have the authority, will and skill to remove barriers and address inequities.					

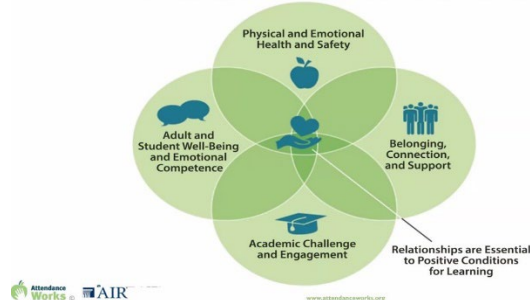
Example of 1 of the 5 categories in Attendanceworks Self-Assessment

Tiered responses and foundations for learning

There are two main concepts that CDE recommends schools and districts examine as they organize attendance efforts. These concepts are taken from research, recommended processes in state statute, and national experts.

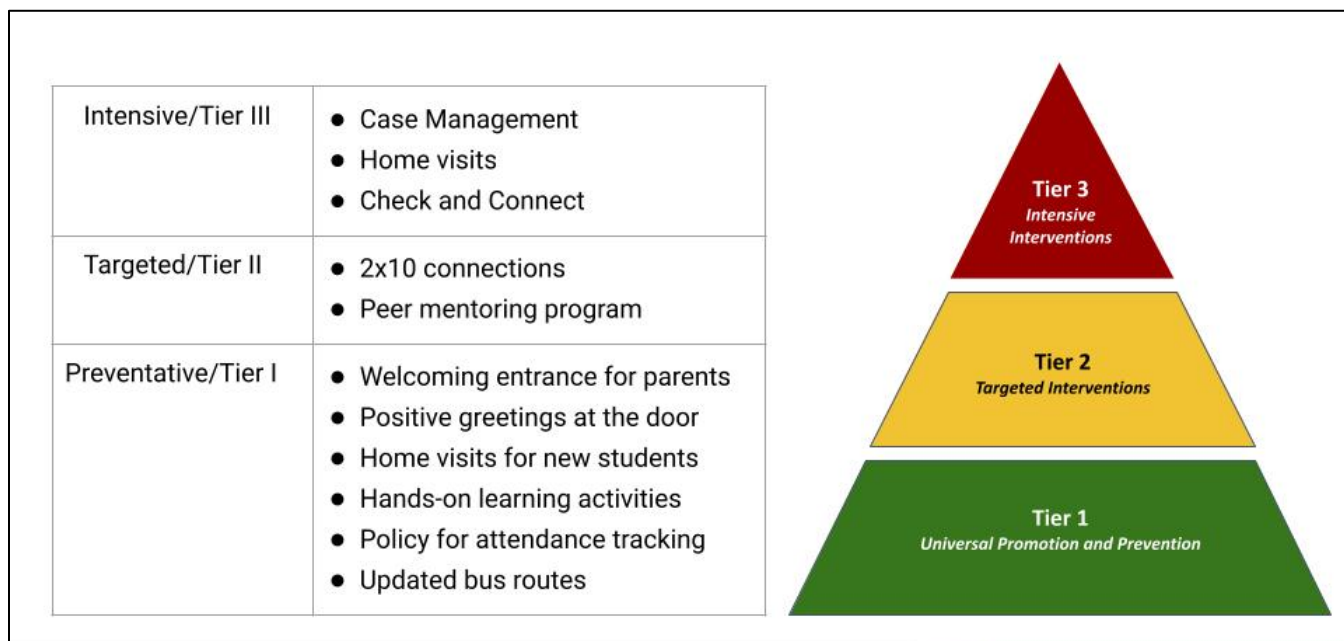
- Strong Foundations for Learning:** While attendance systems are often focused on interventions and how to best respond when students are absent, a strong foundation is essential and must be a part of any improvement efforts. The strong relationships that students make with staff, the challenge, interest and engagement in learning, and their connections to school are the best preventative work that can be done to keep kids attending, connected, and engaged. More details on this approach are outlined in a [report released in 2019](#).

Rather than taking a punitive approach, we must understand that the continued high levels of chronic absence reflect that positive conditions for learning are missing for too many students.



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- **Tiered Response Systems:** Even with the best prevention work, schools and districts need systems to respond and intervene when students begin to miss school. These tiered systems must mix preventative and responsive approaches to ensuring that students and families see the importance of attendance and that schools and districts can organize to intervene and support as soon as students miss school.



Root causes/reasons for absence

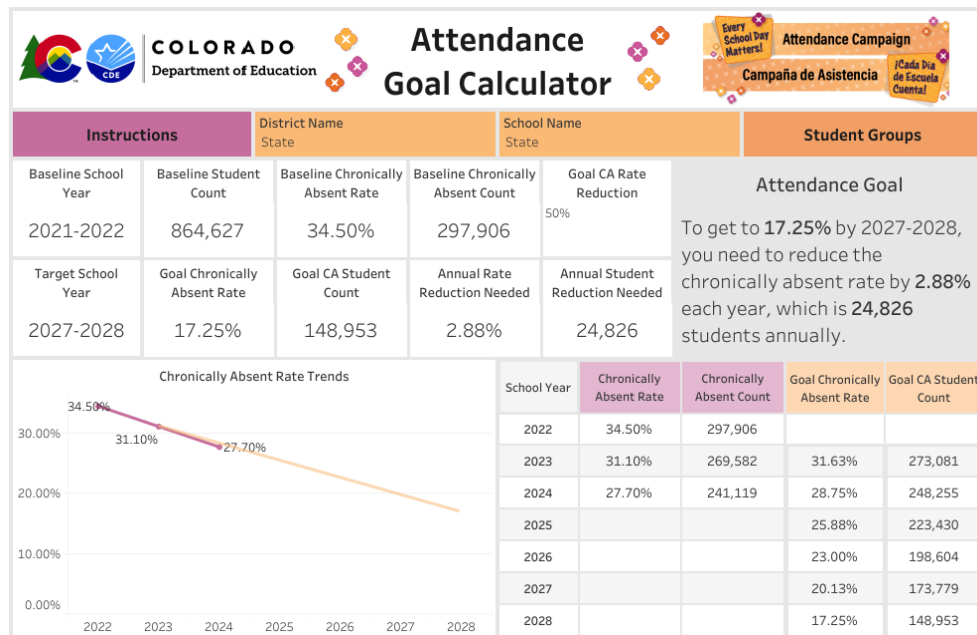
There are a wide range of reasons why students might be absent and identification of the root causes or most common reasons is a valuable process for any school. While there are a variety of [tools to examine root causes](#), CDE staff have recently seen these two additional processes as valuable to understand from students why they are absent and how they reconnect to school after absences. Both tools were originally created for other focus areas but have distinct connections to attendance.

- **Empathy Interviews:** A process for conducting interviews of students (or others) to better understand their perspective.
- **Shadow a Student:** A process to better understand how a student interacts with the school, staff, and others throughout their day.
 - [PBS News Hour video](#) overview of a school piloting the process.
 - [Shadow a Student guidebook](#)

Attendance Goal Calculator Dashboard

Data can be a powerful tool to understand and address challenges with attendance. CDE created this dashboard as part of efforts within the Attendance campaign to help better map the progress needed to reduce chronic absenteeism by 50% as a state to reach this goal. With this dashboard, districts can see attendance data at both the state and district level, adjust the goal, and see progress across years.

- [Attendance Goal Calculator Dashboard](#)



Colorado, along with other states across the country saw huge increases in student absences during the pandemic. In 2024, Colorado joined 14 other states who are working to reduce chronic absenteeism rates by 50% in 5 years from pandemic highs. Districts who are interested in joining this challenge in Colorado can sign up here: <https://www.cde.state.co.us/dropoutprevention/attendancecampaign>. This dashboard is intended to help school and district staff set goals and more easily look at progress over time. While much of the dashboard is pre-populated, the goal can be adjusted to help with school or district planning.

To use this dashboard, please follow the steps below.

1. Select a district.
2. Select a school if you want to narrow focus. If you want to look at the district level, select the district name in the School Name dropdown.
3. Select your Baseline School Year, which is the year that your goal started.
4. Select your Target School Year, when you hope to complete your goal.
5. Choose the Goal Reduction Rate by toggling the slider to the percentage you want to reduce your chronically absent rate by 2026-27 (i.e. if you want to reduce your chronically absent rate by 50% over the next 5 years, toggle the slider to 50%).

6. The tables and charts will auto-fill with your school or district's current and previous rates as well as the goal rate based on the reduction rate that you set.

Another feature of the dashboard is the ability to type in your own data. If you are a smaller district and your data was suppressed, or you want to look at school-level information for student groups, please click the Fill In Calculator button to navigate to the dashboard to enter your own data.

Role of School Nurses

School Nurses are an integral member of school and district teams, promoting regular school attendance and addressing chronic absenteeism by supporting students' physical and emotional health and well-being. In fact, many indicate that the school nursing profession was created to support improved attendance in the early 1900s when infectious diseases were keeping children from school. There are a few key areas to consider:

- **Proactive strategies to reduce sickness:** Development of initiatives that promote health and wellness, reduce the spread of illness in the community, and pro-active screening tools all help reduce student absences.
- **Support for chronic conditions:** Students with chronic conditions may need access to school health services and modifications to support attendance, including regular medications, emergency response planning, and access to resources.
- **Managing acute illness and the spread of infectious disease:** In individual or group cases, implementation of plans to address needs, reduce the spread of illness, and ensure that students and staff can safely return to learning.

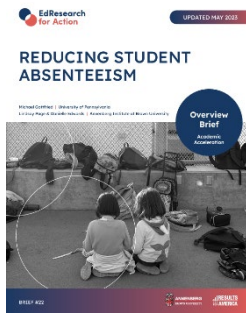
For more information on the role of school health offices and processes for school nurses, visit the [CDE school health office manual](#).

Strategies and Best Practices

Impacting attendance and engagement should include strategies from across a school and district. This section provides a brief summary of key takeaways about attendance interventions or responses. There are a variety of research backed programs that have a strong impact on improving attendance. CDE recommends two valuable guidebooks to help inform selection and refinement of strategies.



FutureEd Attendance
playbook: This playbook
provides summary
information about a number
of tier 1, 2, and 3 strategies.



Reducing Chronic Absenteeism: This brief summarizes research on strategies to reduce chronic absenteeism and may be helpful in adjusting and targeting current attendance strategies.

In addition, while strategies will differ by location, there are a few key ideas that are commonly found in research on effective strategies and examples below each.

Relationship based strategies: Many effective interventions rely on strong, trust-based relationships. This includes formal mentoring programs and staff-led efforts to help solve challenges students or families are facing and preventative efforts to help students engage in learning. In these strategies, student and family trust often leads to better outcomes and connections to needed services or support.

- [Check and Connect](#)
- [New York City Success Mentors](#)

Programs that match students with caring adults—whether staff members, community mentors, or older peers—can help increase motivation and foster a sense of belonging. Relationship-based strategies are especially effective for students who feel disconnected from school or who have experienced trauma, and they often provide the foundation for more targeted support.

Family connections: Strong relationships and communication between school and family can lead to problem solving and higher levels of engagement in daily activities. This is especially true in the early grades, where families have increased responsibility in supporting their children to get to school.

- [Home Visit models](#)
- [Nudge letters and awareness](#)

When schools view families as partners in the learning process, attendance interventions are more likely to succeed. Home visits and personalized outreach can help build trust, surface barriers to attendance, and open lines of communication. Involving families in creating attendance goals or recognition strategies can further support student success and ownership.

Communication and awareness: While there is growing awareness of the importance of attendance, communication is essential in a comprehensive approach. This includes larger-scale awareness initiatives as well as strategies to improve ongoing two-way communication with families.

- [Two-way Text Messaging](#)

Studies show that families care about attendance but often underestimate how many days their child has missed. Clear, frequent, and positive messaging helps families stay informed and engaged. Two-way tools, such as texting platforms, allow for faster problem-solving when barriers arise and are especially effective

when messages are personalized and focus on support rather than punishment. District-wide messaging campaigns, when done well, can also shift community norms and expectations around attendance.

Incentives and Recognition: Recognition and incentives can be a helpful tool for promoting and encouraging better attendance when used thoughtfully. However, they should be approached thoughtfully as they have shown mixed results in changing behavior, especially at the secondary level. They should be used as part of a comprehensive strategy and focus on change and shorter time periods. For instance, rather than focusing on perfect attendance over a long period of time—which can exclude students with legitimate challenges—schools should recognize both good and improved attendance over shorter time frames. Weekly raffles, monthly celebrations, and most-improved awards offer students more frequent opportunities for success, support a growth mindset, and recognize changes in behavior.

- [Framework for building effective incentives programs](#)

Effective programs prioritize growth, inclusivity and equity, ensuring students with needs such as chronic health or family barriers can still be acknowledged for improvement. Low-cost options—like notes home, classroom privileges, or extra recess—are often just as meaningful as material rewards. Class-based competitions, positive greetings at the door, and team certificates can further build a shared sense of accountability and belonging.

Engaging Community Partners in Attendance Efforts

Improving attendance is not a job schools can do alone. Many of the barriers that keep students from attending, such as unstable housing, lack of transportation, or unmet health needs, sit outside what a school can address by itself. Building strong community partnerships gives schools and districts access to resources and relationships that make a real difference.

Steps for Building Community Partnerships

- **Map community assets.** Identify which local agencies, nonprofits, faith communities, and businesses have resources, such as health services, transportation, or food access, that could help address attendance barriers.
- **Offer simple ways to participate.** Partners do not need to take on a large commitment to make a difference. A health clinic might send staff to a school event, a local business might sponsor an attendance incentive, or a faith-based group might help coordinate rides to school.
- **Coordinate messaging.** When schools and community partners share consistent messages about the importance of attendance, families are more likely to hear and act on them.
- **Find a convenor.** Look for a superintendent, mayor, or respected local leader who can help champion attendance as a community-wide priority and bring other partners into the effort.

Where to Find Support

Office of Family, School, and Community Partnerships

CDE's Office of Family, School, and Community Partnerships maintains a growing library of Promising Partnership Practices, submitted by Colorado schools and districts, that includes examples of attendance-focused community partnerships. [Districts looking for ideas or wanting to submit their own practice can visit the CDE Family, School, and Community Partnerships website.](#)

Colorado's Collaborative Management Program (CMP)

For students whose attendance barriers involve multiple systems at once, such as child welfare, behavioral health, or the courts, Colorado's Collaborative Management Program (CMP) offers a formal structure for coordination and districts are required partners. Authorized under C.R.S. § 24-1.9-102, CMP brings together county human services, school districts, courts, health departments, and community-based providers to reduce duplication and deliver coordinated services to children and families with complex needs. CMP currently operates in participating counties across the state. [Districts can learn more, including how to make a referral, through the Colorado Department of Human Services.](#)