Decreasing Chronic Absenteeism: It's a Partnership

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Today's Agenda

1. What is Chronic Absenteeism?
2. Why does it matter?
3. What can we do about it?
4. How can we start?

What is Chronic Absenteeism?

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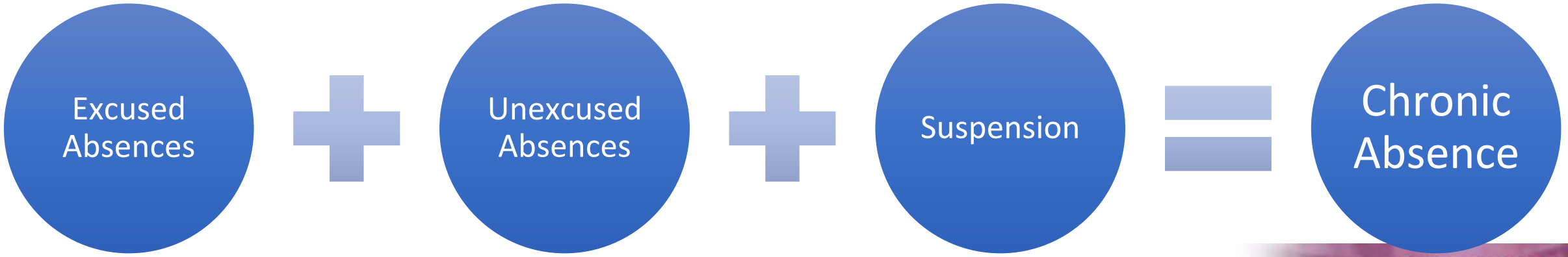
Chronic absence is missing so much school for any reason that a student is academically at risk. Attendance Works recommends defining it as **missing 10% or more of school for any reason.**



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Truancy vs Chronic Absence

Truancy

- Counts unexcused absences
- Emphasizes individual compliance with school rules
- Uses legal, typically more punitive, solutions

Chronic Absence

- Counts ALL absences
- Emphasizes academic impact of missed days
- Uses preventive, problem-solving, trauma-informed strategies

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Why Does it Matter?

Chronic Absenteeism in Kindergarten

Lower Levels of Literacy in 1st Grade

Lower Achievement as far out as 5th grade

A Rhode Island Data Hub analysis found that compared to kindergartners who attend regularly, those chronically absent:

- Scored **20% lower in reading and math** in later grades and the gap grows.
- **2X** as likely to be **retained** in grade.
- **2X** likely to be **suspended** by the end of 7th grade.
- Likely to continue being chronically absent.

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Chronic Absenteeism

- Chronically absent 3rd graders were less likely to be reading on grade level (Arkansas Campaign for Grade-Level Reading, 2016).
- Students who are chronically absent in middle school are more likely to drop out of high school (BERC, 2011).
- Frequent absences from school can shape adulthood (poverty, diminished health, and involvement in the criminal justice system)

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Reducing Chronic Absenteeism Can Help Close Equity Gap

- Vulnerable children, especially those living in poverty, are 2-3 times more likely to experience chronic absence at earlier ages.
- Vulnerable children are much less likely to have the resources to make up for lost learning time in the classroom.
- Vulnerable children are more likely to experience multiple years of chronic absence

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Emerging Research Suggests…

Chronic Absence can help educators anticipate what is needed to offer effective, engaging, trauma-informed instruction.

Chronic absence is a warning sign that a student, for example,

- lacks preschool experience
- has been exposed to trauma (higher ACEs)
- is struggling with challenges at home or in the community
- isn’t finding the classroom experience relevant, etc.

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Factors Contributing to Chronic Absenteeism

Barriers

- Illness, both chronic and acute
- Lack of health, mental health, vision, or dental care
- **Trauma**
- Unsafe path to/from school
- Poor Transportation
- Frequent moves or school changes
- Involvement with child welfare or juvenile justice systems

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Factors Contributing to Chronic Absenteeism

Negative School Experiences

- Struggling academically or socially
- Bullying
- Suspensions and expulsions
- Negative attitudes of parents due to their own school experience
- Undiagnosed disability
- Lack of appropriate accommodations for disability

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Factors Contributing to Chronic Absenteeism

Lack of Engagement

- Lack of culturally relevant, engaging instruction
- No meaningful relationships with adults in school
- Stronger ties with peers out of school than in school
- Unwelcoming school climate
- Failure to earn credits / no future plans
- Many teacher absences or long-term substitutes

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Factors Contributing to Chronic Absenteeism

Misconceptions

- Absences are only a problem if they are unexcused
- Missing 2 days per month doesn’t affect learning
- Sporadic absences aren’t a problem
- Attendance only matters in the older grades

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What can we do about Chronic Absenteeism?

Culture = shared set of beliefs, values and assumptions

- Basic assumptions (the unspoken, assumed group values) really drive an organization (Schein (1992), p . 16-27)
- Non-material organizational forces, “culture, values, vision, ethics” all interact in intangible and unseen spaces within a work environment (Wheatley (1999), p. 54)
- Messages (“mental maps”*) in these spaces exert control and create power and influence
- Any attempt to work within an organization without an analysis and understanding of these unseen motivators and controllers will fail or succeed only as a matter of chance

*Budge, K., and Parrett, W. (2018). Disrupting poverty: Five powerful classroom practices. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

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School Culture

"The bottom line for leaders is that if they do not become conscious of the cultures in which they are embedded, those cultures will manage them."

Schein, E. (2004). p. 23.

Schein, E. (2004). Organizational culture and leadership. 3rd ed. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

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What can we do?

- Know the research about how chronic absenteeism affects our students.
- Intentionally work on interconnections, relationships, engaging instruction that supports students in our daily practice.
- Regularly communicate with staff, students, and families the importance of daily attendance.
- Engage in community-wide efforts to eliminate chronic absence among students within the community by addressing its main causes.

Research is clear that **schools and districts can impact** students' absenteeism rates.

http://www.attendanceworks.org/research/evidence-based-solutions/

Connection Between Chronic Absence and SEL Capacity

If these school conditions are consistently present,

SCHOOL CONDITIONS FOR LEARNING & ENGAGEMENT

1. Safety
2. Connectedness & relationships
3. Academic & emotional support
4. Challenging & relevant instruction
5. SEL opportunities
6. Culturally responsive

The confluence of positive school climate, supportive school culture, and SEL opportunities embedded with culturally responsive practices

…because of…

EDUCATOR SOCIAL AND EMOTONAL CAPACITY

Conducive Conditions

Teacher leadership
School leadership
Shared goals & expectations
Professional Learning
Instructional Support
Community Involvement
Time
Facilities & Resources

Social and Emotional Competencies

Self awareness, self management/ stress management, social awareness, relationship skills, decision-making skills

Will

To understand different contexts
To make learning make sense
To orchestrate the conditions

then student attendance, and engagement will increase.

OUTCOMES

Student attendance
Student engagement
Teacher retention
Trust

School conditions affect student engagement and attendance –as mediated by educator social and emotional capacity.

Source: David Osher, American Institutes for Research

How can we start?

Cleveland, OH Example Video

Shoulder Partners

Turn and Talk to your neighbor

1. What resonated with you in the video?
2. What stood out as partnership opportunities?
3. What would work in your district/school?
4. What would/could you do differently?

Chronic Absenteeism Self-Assessment Tool for Districts

1. Actionable Data
2. Positive Engagement
3. Capacity Building
4. Shared Accountability
5. Strategic Partnerships

Chronic Absenteeism Self-Assessment Tool for Districts

Develop a cross-functional district office team to annually participate in the following steps:

1. Complete the assessment - complete individually prior to meeting
2. Debrief and set goals - tally individual results onto a single assessment. Determine strengths, gaps and difference of opinion. ID practices to continue and priority areas for improvement
3. Make a plan - assign responsibilities and establish a timeline for completion
4. Communicate the results - to district office staff, schools and community partners to engage them in implementing plan

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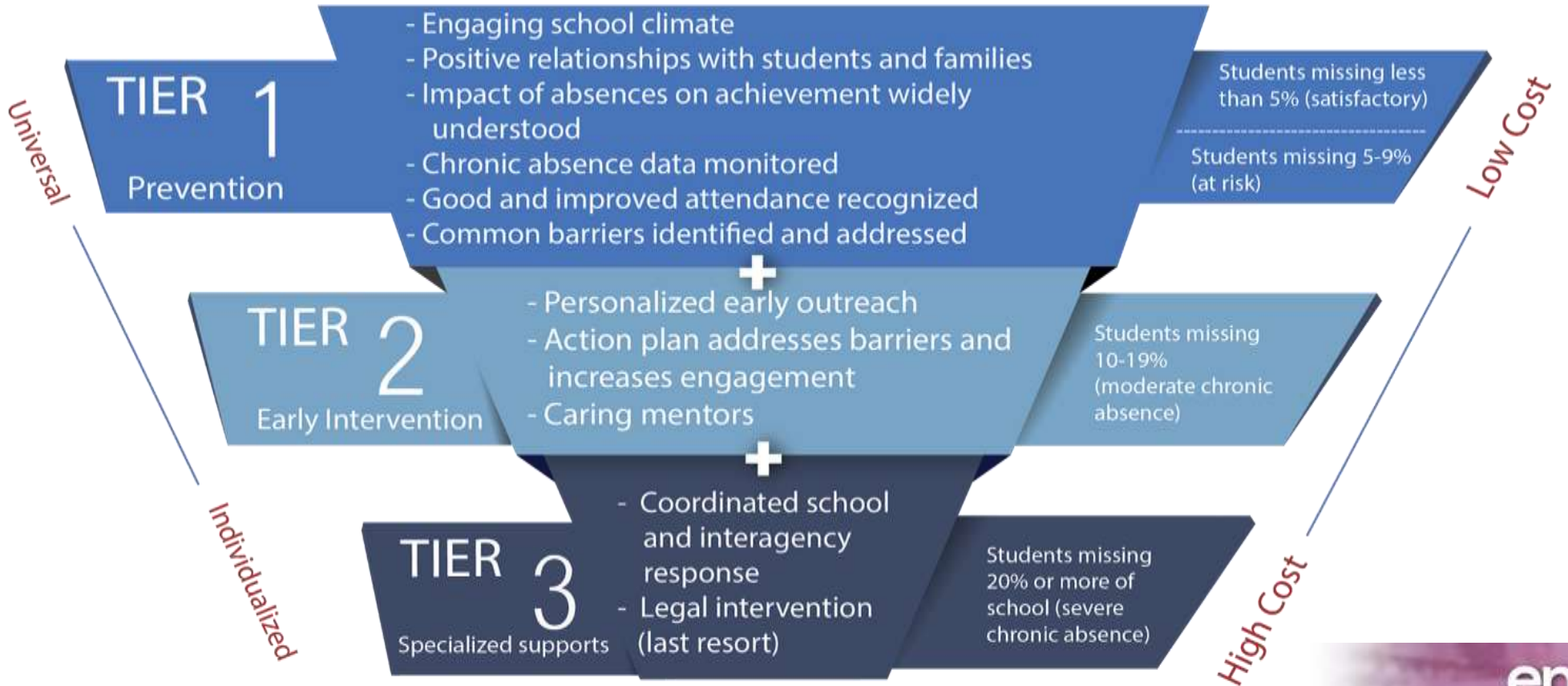
Use a Multi-Tiered Systems Approach



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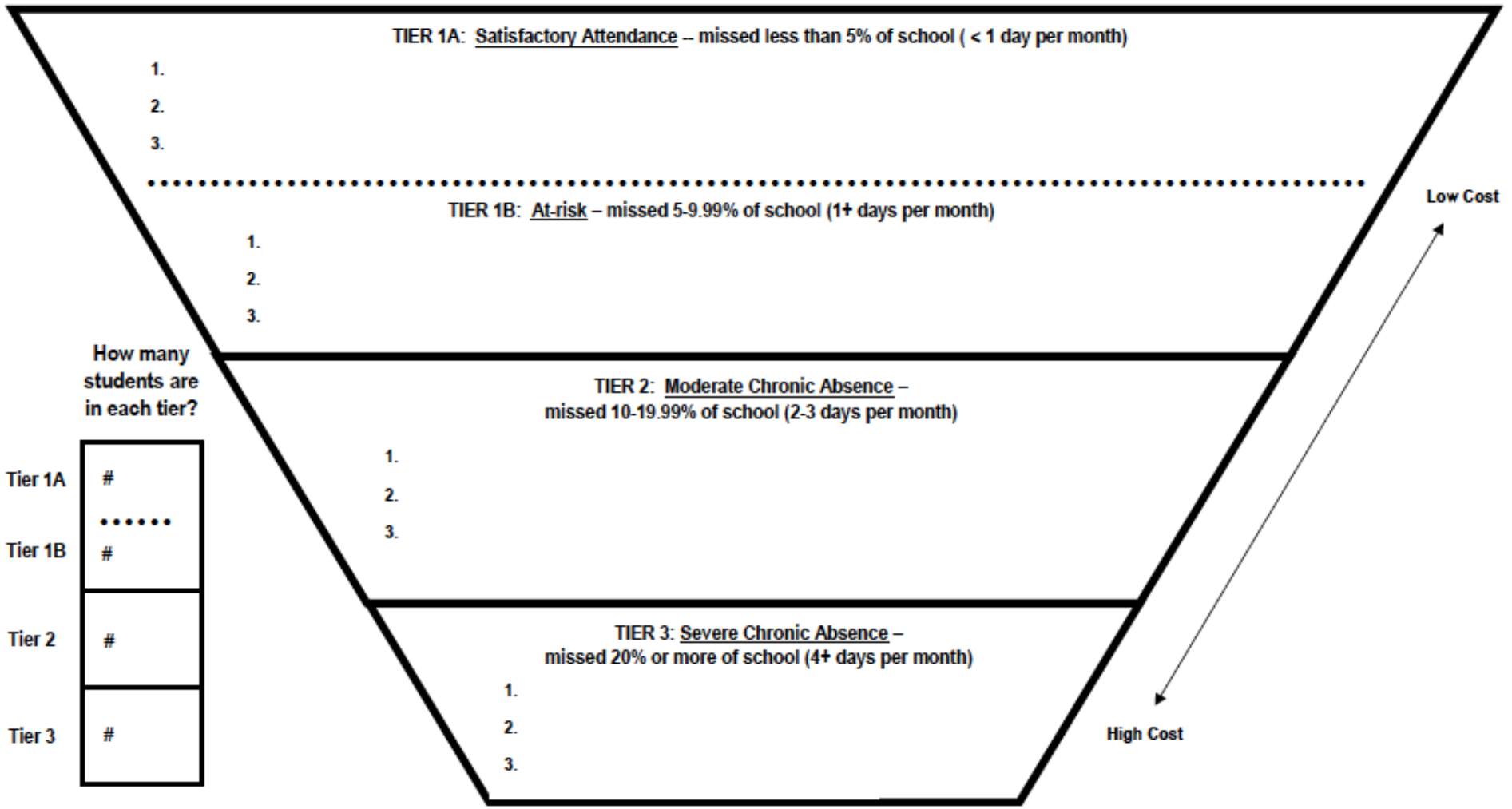
Fill Out Your Pyramid

For each tier, fill in the activities and supports currently in place.

Name of School or District _____



How many students are in each tier?

Tier 1A	#
Tier 1B	#
Tier 2	#
Tier 3	#

www.attendanceworks.org

rev 12-3-18

Reflections

Head – a thought inspired by today

Heart – a feeling evoked by today

Hand – an action you will take

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RESOURCES

Attendance Works

Oklahoma State Department of Education