

Chronic Absence/ Attendance Recommendation Report

Overview:

Over the past four months, the Chronic Absence Leadership Team of the Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren has completed a local and national landscape analysis on best practices to address Chronic Absence. Being present in school every day, all day is essential for student success. In fact, studies show that chronic absence (defined as missing 10% of school) is a better predictor of high school graduation than test scores. Through our recommendations, we have sought to apply other's lessons to the Detroit landscape, making both broad and very specific recommendations to impact student attendance moving forward.

Attendance Works, a nationally renowned attendance expert organization, cites five key factors to lowering Chronic Absence: 1) engage students and parents, 2) provide personalized early outreach, 3) recognize good and improving attendance, 4) monitor attendance data and practice and 5) develop programmatic response to barriers. Without a comprehensive multi-level plan of action, we will fail to reduce chronic absence. We believe an integrated and holistic solution must be embraced to truly move the needle. A combination of data solutions, culture/climate solutions, and service solutions will maximize our ability to affect change in Detroit school systems.

We want to emphasize the vital role of parents and parent choice in solving any absentee crisis! Parents are every child's first teacher. They must be engaged. Parent choice also disciplines any school to focus on meeting the needs of parents, and students. All of our recommendations must be rooted in a respect for the primary role of parents in a child's education and the responsibility of parents to seek what is best for their child. We deem it imperative that each of the recommendations we are providing be implemented with the advice and consent of parents at each level of authority of the multiple school systems operating within the boundaries of Detroit.

The below recommendations address the five critical factors that we believe will directly impact school attendance. These are further separated as those that can be done relatively inexpensively and simply, and those which are complicated and/or expensive (L = Low, M = Medium, H = High).

Summary of Recommendations:

1. **Strengthen and streamline data** and research to enable tiered prevention/intervention strategies:
 - a. Define and adopt chronic absence as the key metric
 - b. Create and/or implement a citywide data system across governance types in Detroit to create a single source of student data for all appropriate parties (policy makers, academics, attendance, health and other professionals, including parents and students)
 - c. Conduct Detroit specific research on chronic absence and persistent attendance
2. **Build and maintain a school-going culture and climate** that establishes appropriate norms, practices and expectations to engage students/families, build healthy relationships and enhance or maintain facilities to feel safe, clean and welcoming
3. Identify and implement best practices to **combat health-related absences**

1A. Data: Define and adopt chronic absence as the key metric Mandate that one definition for measuring Chronic Absence is used/enforced in the state of MI. Define as “being absent 10% of the time for any reason constitutes Chronic Absence”.	Cost	L
	Difficulty to Implement	L
	Potential Benefit	H

Problem Definition: <i>What’s the problem?</i>	Addressing the issue of attendance is impossible without common terminology and metric definition permitting information gathering, analysis, goal setting, management and evaluation. There are currently at least 5 different terms in use to describe attendance. The 10% chronic absence definition is most broadly accepted due to its proven relationship to negative student outcomes.
Strategy: <i>How can the community respond?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Formally requesting that policy makers (state board, state legislature, school boards - public and charter) adopt the 10% standard. ● State should align reporting requirements accordingly (to this definition). ● Educating the general public about the Chronic Absence definition. ● Make the definition of Chronic Absence a ubiquity campaign appearing everywhere like “got milk”.
Assumptions: <i>What conditions do we believe to be true?</i>	That decision makers are still using measures (average daily attendance, truancy), that mask the problem, and therefore don’t allow for timely and accurate interventions that will impact Chronic Absence.
Risks: <i>What could go wrong?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Because attendance is defined at many levels of use, (household, classroom, school, district, county, state, federal gov’t. general public), it can be time consuming getting everyone aligned. ● There is risk that naive, inaccurate or misleading definitions will be established if a clear strategy to create a shared definition is not articulated and executed, engaging subject matter experts as well as

	parents, students and community.
Success Measures: <i>How do we know it worked?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The state will mandate for every school to use the 10% metric definition of measuring chronic absence. • Parents, students, school personnel, all school districts and community stakeholders have a common definition of chronic absence. • Every school regardless of governance structure calculates and publicly reports their attendance data using this metric. • Chronic Absence will begin to decrease as policies clearly focus on addressing attendance utilizing the 10% definition as a planning, implementation and success metric.

1B. Data: Systems Create and/or implement a citywide data system across governance types in Detroit to enable tiered interventions/prevention strategies.	Cost	H
	Difficulty to Implement	H
	Potential Benefit	H

Problem Definition: <i>What's the problem?</i>	<p>This problem of data has multiple dimensions including attendance but extending far beyond attendance. We address the attendance issue:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Data capture, storage and analysis is impeded by lack of systematic policy and procedures. 2. Student data is in silos between several layers of governance structures. 3. Data germane to early intervention such as health related data is often not kept or poorly kept. 4. Access to data is haphazard and not available in a timely manner or not at all to relevant parties (parents for example). 5. Analytics, lacking accurate, timely data is speculative and subject to lead policy makers and practitioners to poor decisions and allocation of resources in addressing attendance. 6. Students who move between schools and between governance structures get ready access to necessary information.
Strategy: <i>How can the community respond?</i>	<p>Create a single source of student data for all appropriate parties (policy makers, academics, attendance, health and other professionals, including parents and students) by taking the following steps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assemble a coalition of appropriate and interested parties who focus on elevating the awareness of the public and policy makers to the costs both financial and educational of continuing the current dysfunctional situation. • Establish a “data mandate” via the Coalition, developed with subject matter experts and a variety of stakeholders. • Publicize those who participate and those who do not, specifying the benefits and costs of non-participation in a robust data strategy. • Tier and partition the creation of the system so that portions may be designed and implemented while other more difficult elements are being designed and implemented at a later date. • Promote the allocation of funds necessary to create the system.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advocate that immediate data policies and procedures be implemented to maximize the potential of current systems to make student data as accessible as possible; the state could simply mandate the collection and storage of reasons for student absence.
Assumptions: <i>What conditions do we believe to be true?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If people know better they will do better. Having a single valid data system will reduce chronic absence because decisions will be better informed. Such data systems are available, possible and operable in a cost efficient manner.
Risks: <i>What could go wrong?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A business strategy must be in place to manage the organization's data and will require changes in corporate business practices. This may create significant disruption of the system. Attempting to create a "too big" system all at once will inhibit the "less big" system that can inform attendance efforts. Poorly designed or implemented systems may violate privacy laws and regulations. All systems are subject to failure in one or many ways. Data may be embargoed from appropriate parties (i.e. parents and students).
Success Measures: <i>How do we know it worked?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The "Data Mandate" coalition is assembled. Thought leaders are publicly debating the financing and creation of the system at large. Once created policy is driven by valid data. This data system enables students to transition seamlessly between various school and school systems. Given the limits of current dispersed data stores, maximum timely access is made available within this year.

1C. Data: Research Conduct Detroit specific research on causes, consequences, and potential interventions to combat chronic absence and promote persistent attendance.	Cost	L
	Difficulty to Implement	L
	Potential Benefit	H

Problem Definition: <i>What's the problem?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Detroit specific research on chronic absence and attendance either does not exist or is unavailable. The absence of this definitive Detroit data requires making decisions on the assumption that Detroit is similar to other cities (NYC, Baltimore, etc.).
Strategy: <i>How can the community respond?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Funders, universities, and organizations can partner to design a study of causes, consequences, and potential interventions to combat chronic absence. Require that findings are made public in accordance with HIPAA laws and formal policies that researchers must adhere to. Community, including parents and students, should be involved in the design of the study.

Assumptions: <i>What conditions do we believe to be true?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is currently little to no valid research around these questions and therefore decision are not based upon the most accurate information.
Risks: <i>What could go wrong?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A poorly structured research yielding invalid data may become “common wisdom”. People unskilled in analyzing data may draw unsophisticated conclusions. Persons with preconceived ideas or agenda may “cherry pick” datum that appears to validate their preconceived opinions, which when properly interpreted does not.
Success Measures: <i>How do we know it worked?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Detroit interested parties will be able to speak with validated authority on the reasons Detroit students are chronically absent. Policy leaders will have the best data upon which to make decisions that direct the limited resources available. The characteristics of “persistently present” students will yield valuable insight in assisting chronically absent students.

2. Improve school culture and climate Build and maintain a school-going culture and climate that establishes appropriate norms, practices and expectations to engage students/families, build healthy relationships and enhance or maintain facilities to feel safe, clean and welcoming.	Cost	H
	Difficulty to Implement	H
	Potential Benefit	H

Problem Definition: <i>What's the problem?</i>	<p>Students and parents/guardians often feel pushed out or unwelcome at the school-level, and the environment, both physical and relational, is believed to be discouraging. “Zero tolerance” school discipline policies push kids out and cause them to miss more school. School employee morale is low and current wraparound services do not reflect a “whole child” commitment to our students. These factors greatly contribute to an extraordinary rate of chronic absence permeating throughout the city.</p>
Strategy: <i>How can the community respond?</i>	<p>To ensure a decrease in chronic absence, school climate and culture must be addressed in the following ways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide all school level leaders with training and ongoing PD to build and sustain a high-quality culture and climate that drives academic success and promotes attendance. This can include training in creating a restorative culture through restorative practices. Identify and implement best practices for family engagement. Increase awareness of the impact of chronic absence via a citywide messaging campaign, targeting parents of school-age children. Implement school advisories to develop and/or strengthen connections with caring adults and build healthy social skills, proven to diminish the

	<p>conditions that often lead to conflict, lack of trust and unhealthy school environments.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Make the physical structure of schools welcoming, motivating, safe and clean by establishing specific norms and standards of cleanliness and safety [See Excellent Schools Detroit’s School Measures] to which policy makers, admin, principals, teachers, students, parents and guests will adhere (i.e. Code of conduct). ● Increase school affiliation by building pride and positive relationships at the school-level and district-level (school level: athletics and arts programs, debate, mentoring, etc.; district level: nonprofit and corporate partnerships).
<p>Assumptions: <i>What conditions do we believe to be true?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A strong school culture and climate that builds healthy relationships and maintains a safe, clean and welcoming physical structure will decrease rates of chronic absence ● Knowledge is power and if parents understand the term and impact of chronic absence, they will do their best to encourage their children to go to school ● Engaged leaders, educators, parents/guardians, students and partners can together transform their school culture
<p>Risks: <i>What could go wrong?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Quality training and professional development opportunities for admin to sustain high quality culture and climate <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Failure to implement/scale with fidelity, creating pockets of excellence. ○ High mobility rates of staff will reduce the effectiveness of full implementation, particularly if combined with a failure to scale. ○ Failure to implement and evaluate a culture or support and continuous improvement. ● Identify and implement best practices for family engagement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Without effective and deep training on cultural appreciation and awareness, educators may inadvertently alienate parents even while training to engage them. ○ Parent mentor projects or parent universities can, if not executed thoughtfully, have the effect of treating parents like they do not have anything valuable to offer and that they need to be taught how to best support their children. ○ These programs can be expensive and taxing on schools and educators. ● Increase awareness <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Without the right messaging, a communications campaign could blame families and communities from a deficit model, treating them as if they are doing something wrong and need to be taught to align with school values. ○ Creating further inequality in outcomes if certain groups are more likely to receive, understand, and act on messages than others. ● Implement school advisories <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Lack of consistency. ● Make physical structure welcoming, motivating, safe and clean <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Definitions of safe and welcoming schools vary widely depending on a number of factors. ○ Misinterpretation that increasing police presence in schools will address school safety, a method with little evidence to show its effectiveness.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ School safety measures may not go far enough to protect students who have been marginalized (students who identify as LGBTQIA, students of color, students with disability). ○ High cost of repairs for school safety and cleanliness. ● School Affiliation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Focusing directly on strengthening school affiliation or connectedness may distract from other more vital reforms. ○ Increased school affiliation and school connectedness can be seen as a piggybacking effect of other positive school elements.
<p>Success Measures: <i>How do we know it worked?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Quality training and professional development to sustain high quality culture and climate <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ All Central Office staff (particularly those who supervise school level personnel), & school level staff (admin, instructional, non-instructional and security) are trained in selected BP models. ○ Selected BP models are used to conduct meetings, teach academic content and respond to conduct violations. ○ Admin, teachers, parents/guardians and school visitors report feeling valued, safe and engaged. ● Identify and implement best practices for family engagement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Teachers and parents have and utilize contact information to improve their students' academic performance and attendance. ○ Parent volunteers help engage parents of children who struggle academically or who struggle with behavioral issues. ○ Parents/guardians regularly access resources to improve their child's academic performance, attendance and behavior. ● Increase awareness <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ A high concentration of multiple (audio, visual and social) media messages communicating to students, parents and the broader community the importance of daily attendance, particularly focused at the start of school. ● Implement school advisory classes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ All middle and high school students are part of an advisory group, which meets minimally on a weekly basis to ensure students have a high quality relationship with at least one adult in their building and have a safe space to address challenges they may be facing in school/at home. ○ All Advisory teachers receive training and support to maximize the creation of effective relationships, students to teacher and student to student. ○ Decrease in student disruptions, conduct referrals and suspensions. ● Make physical structure welcoming, motivating, safe and clean <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Clean and well-lit hallways, bathrooms and classrooms. ○ Toilet paper, soap, paper towel and stall doors in restrooms. ○ Increase in student attendance & achievement. ● School Affiliation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ All students are involved in at least one non-academic school affiliated activity. ○ There is alignment between what is taught during normal school hours and extra-curricular activities provided by schools and school partners.

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3. Identify and Implement best practices for health-related absences.	Cost	H
	Ease to Implement	H
	Potential Benefit	H

Problem Definition: <i>What's the problem?</i>	One of the most common believed reasons students miss school has been due to health issues. The shortage of in-school health professionals causes students to be sent home instead of being seen by a nurse or not coming to school at all. It is reported that school nurses also send 95% of students back to class.
Strategy: <i>How can the community respond?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase access to school health services delivered by school nurses, school mental health providers, school-based health centers, and/or community providers. • Use proven programs around the most common health issues (asthma, behavioral health, vision, dental, food insecurity, acute illness, etc). • Engage in effective messaging with families/schools around reasons why students should or shouldn't stay home or go home from school. • Strengthen and build partnerships with parents, community, health institutions, health department, health plans, local health providers, local/state/national organizations, etc.
Assumptions: <i>What conditions do we believe to be true?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School health services, including dental, vision and mental health services, improve attendance and academic outcomes. • Students who are healthy are more likely to be in school all day, every day ready to learn.
Risks: <i>What could go wrong?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work may become overwhelming and require delegation to unlicensed professionals, creating potential liability for school health staff. • Parents and/or staff may request care that is inconsistent with scope of practice • Conflict between school code and public health code for complying with IDEA
Success Measures: <i>How do we know it worked?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students with chronic health conditions have equal attendance with students who do not. • Fewer students are sent home for health reasons. • Fewer students stay home for health reasons. • Increase in academic achievement

APPENDIX A

Resource	Source	Link
Christine Bell, UNI	Policy Recommendations for Detroit	https://docs.google.com/document/d/16Z7k8aknjeGy4q1kPprsuwCfHbv xv81OC PHbJZSvQJU/edit
MI School Data		https://www.mischooldata.org/DistrictSchoolProfiles/EntitySummary/Summary.aspx
Talent Development Secondary	Early Warning Indicator Systems	http://www.tdschools.org/about/early-warning-indicator-systems/
ITWC: The Content	6 big risks of big data for Boards to consider	http://www.itbusiness.ca/blog/6-big-risks-of-big-data-for-boards-to-consider/50295
Attendance Works	School Attendance Teams: Tips for Effectiveness	http://www.attendanceworks.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Attendance-Data-Teams-7-18-13.pdf
Healthy Schools Campaign	Taking Action: Addressing the Health-Related Reasons Students Are Absent	https://healthyschoolscampaign.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/3-Addressing_Health-Related_Reasons.pdf
Healthy Schools Campaign	National Collaborative on Education + Health	https://healthyschoolscampaign.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/School-Health-and-Attendance-Chart.pdf
AAP News & Journal Gateway	Role of the School Nurse in Providing School Health Services	http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/137/6/e20160852
School-Based Health Alliance	Students Do Not Learn When They Are Not in School	http://www.sbh4all.org/school-health-care/health-and-learning/chronic-absenteeism/
Education Law Center	Unlocking the Door to Learning: Trauma-Informed Classrooms & Transformational Schools	http://www.elc-pa.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Trauma-Informed-in-Schools-Classrooms-FINAL-December2014-2.pdf
GALLUP	School Leadership Linked to Engagement and Student	http://www.gallup.com/services/176711/school-leadership-linked-engagement-student-achievement.aspx/

	Achievement	
International Institute for Restorative Practices	Improving School Climate	https://www.iirp.edu/pdf/IIRP-Improving-School-Climate.pdf
Attendance Works	Bringing Attendance Home Toolkit	http://www.attendanceworks.org/tools/for-parents/bringing-attendance-home-toolkit/
Attendance Works	Grand Rapids: Progress with Challenge 5	http://www.attendanceworks.org/what-works/grand-rapids/
City Wide Steering Committee	Every School Day Counts Detroit Campaign	https://www.everyschooldaycounts.org/
Association for Middle Level Education	Creating a Culture of Connectedness through Middle School Advisory Programs	https://www.amle.org/BrowsebyTopic/W hatsNew/WNDet/TabId/270/ArtMID/888/ArticleID/279/Culture-of-Connectedness-through-Advisory.aspx

APPENDIX B

Committee Members:

- Co-Chair Larry L. Simmons Sr., Executive Director, Brightmoor Alliance
- Co-Chair Ines DeJesus, Consultant, Southwest Solutions Community Schools and Attendance Works
- Co-Chair Clark Durant, Co-Founder and Former CEO, Cornerstone Schools
- Project Manager: Alejandra Gomez, Urban Neighborhood Initiatives
- Jayme Danzig, Associates Project Manager, Rock Ventures
- Christine Bell, Executive Director, Urban Neighborhood Initiatives
- Henry McClendon, Michigan Regional Representative, International Institute for Restorative Practices
- Nadolyn Hoskins, Wayne County Detention and Blanche Kelso Bryce Academy
- Tammie Jones, Vice President of Education and Economic Prosperity, United Way of Southeast Michigan
- Edna Reaves, Retired Teacher
- Lex Zavala, Detroit Hispanic Development Corporation
- Andrew Stein, Executive Director, City Year Detroit
- Sonja Allen, Executive Director, Communities in Schools Metro Detroit
- Kumar Raj, Program Officer, Skillman Foundation
- Terry Whitfield, Program Officer, Skillman Foundation
- Roderick Brown, Executive Director, Department of Development and Partnerships; Detroit Public Schools Community District
- Sarah Lenhoff, Assistant Professor, Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, College of Education, Wayne State University
- Terrence Martin, Executive Vice President, Detroit Federation of Teachers
- Emma Herdean, Manager of Southwest Solutions Community Schools
- Elliott Attisha, Pediatrician, Michigan AAP Chapter School Health Representative
- Thomas Stallworth, Government Consultant
- Molly Sweeney, Co-Director 482Forward