The Time is Now:
Leveraging the Power of Chronic Absence to Improve Achievement
About Us

**Attendance Works** is a non-profit initiative that advances student success and closes equity gaps by reducing chronic absence. Since our launch in 2010, we have become the nation’s “go to” resource for student attendance with more than a quarter million annual users of our website ([www.attendanceworks.org](http://www.attendanceworks.org)).

We work at the local, state and national level – with each level of practice informing and influencing the other. Our cross-cutting objectives are to:

a. Nurture proven and promising practice
b. Promote meaningful and effective communications
c. Advance better policy
d. Catalyze needed research

Our work began with a focus on elementary schools. We now offer support to K-12 schools, and are expanding to address chronic absence starting in preschool.
Multiple Measures of Attendance

How many students show up to school every day? The percent of enrolled students who attend school each day. It is used in some states for allocating funding.

Who is missing school without permission? Typically refers only to unexcused absences. Each state has the authority to define truancy and when it triggers legal intervention. In Alabama truancy = 7 unexcused absences.

Who is missing so much school they are academically at risk? Broadly means missing too much school for any reason -- excused, unexcused, etc. Researchers commonly define as missing 10% of school. OCR currently defines it as missing 15 days. Ed Facts and Alabama’s ESSA plan define it as missing 10% of school.
This Is a Watershed Moment

No Child Left Behind

- Success determined by academic standards.
- Federal targets and interventions for schools; punitive system of responses.
- Accountability and data for student sub-groups.
- Each state defines and addresses truancy which typically emphasizes court based, punitive, interventions.

Every Student Succeeds Act

- Success determined by academic & nonacademic standards.
- States set goals; supportive framework.
- Accountability and data for student sub-groups.
- Chronic absence is a required reporting & optional school quality metric. It emphasizes prevention and early intervention.
36 States and District of Columbia adopted chronic absence as a metric in their ESSA plan.

Who's In: Chronic Absenteeism Under the Every Student Succeeds Act
Future Ed, Georgetown University, September 2017.
**Defining Chronic Absence**

**Excused absences** + **Unexcused absences** + **Suspensions** → **Chronic Absence**

**Chronic absence** is missing so much school for any reason that a student is academically at risk. Chronic absence is different from **truancy** (unexcused absences only) or **average daily attendance** (how many students show up to school each day).

**ED Facts Definition**: The unduplicated number of students absent 10% or more school days during the school year. Include all students grade Kindergarten through grade 12 who meet the definition of chronic absenteeism. Include students who were enrolled in the school for at least 10 school days at any time during the school year, and who missed 10% of the school days in which they were enrolled in the school.
Average Daily Attendance (ADA) Can Mask Chronic Absence

98% ADA = little chronic absence
95% ADA = don’t know
93% ADA = significant chronic absence

90% and even 95% ≠ A

Chronic Absence For 6 Elementary Schools in Oakland, CA with 95% ADA in 2012

Chronic Absence for 6 Schools in New York City with 90% ADA in 2011-12

www.attendanceworks.org
Chronic Absence Vs. Truancy

Number of students missing 10% versus 10 unexcused absences (San Francisco Unified School District)

- # chronic absentees - 2010-2011
- # of students with 10 unexcused absences (as of May 16th 2011)
Chronic Absence Is Easily Masked If We Only Monitor Missing Consecutive days

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>September</th>
<th>October</th>
<th>November</th>
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Chronic Absence = 18 days of absence = As Few As 2 days a month

[www.attendanceworks.org](https://www.attendanceworks.org)
In 2017/18, more than 18% of students were chronically absent in Alabama. Chronic absence was defined as missing 15 days or more; will shift to 10% in future years.
Reflects New Paradigm on Attendance

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

Chronic Absence
- Counts all absences
- Emphasizes academic impact of missed days.
- Focuses on systems change: prevention, engagement, problem-solving
Why Does Attendance Matter for Achievement?

What we know from research around the country
Illustrating the Gap

Instructions found on Bringing Attendance Home Toolkit
Student Attendance is Strongly Associated with Academic Success

K-1st Grade: Students who attend regularly in the early grades perform better on measures of academic and social and emotional capacities.

3rd Grade: Students who attend school regularly are more likely to be able to read proficiently by the end of 3rd grade.

Middle School Success: Students who attend school regularly are more likely to have passing grades in middle school.

High School Completion: Students who attend school regularly in high school are more likely to persist in college and graduate.

College Completion: Students who attend school regularly in high school are more likely to persist in college and graduate.

www.attendanceworks.org
• 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.
When a Student Misses School the Impact Ripples
How Can We Address Chronic Absence?
Think about a child you know who struggles to get to school every day.

- What is a key barrier he or she faces?
- What helps him/her get to school even when it is difficult?
## Factors That Contribute to Chronic Absence

### Barrier
- 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

### 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

### 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

### 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

[www.attendanceworks.org](http://www.attendanceworks.org)
Recognize that Going to School Reflects When Families Have

**Hope**
for a better future

**Faith**
that school will help you or your child succeed

**Capacity**
Resources, skills, knowledge needed to get to school

www.attendanceworks.org
Recommended Site-Level Strategies

A. Recognize Good and Improved Attendance
B. Engage Students and Parents
C. Monitor Attendance Data and Practice
D. Provide Personalized Early Outreach
E. Develop Programmatic Response to Barriers
Invest in Prevention and Early Intervention

**Tier 1 (Prevention):**
- Engaging school climate
- Positive relationships with students and families
- Impact of absences on achievement widely understood
- Chronic absence data monitored
- Good and improved attendance recognized
- Common barriers identified and addressed

**Tier 2 (Early Intervention):**
- Personalized early outreach
- Action plan addresses barriers and increases engagement
- Caring mentors

**Tier 3 (Specialized Response):**
- Coordinated school and interagency response
- Legal intervention (last resort)

*Cost Levels:*
- Low Cost: Students missing less than 5% (satisfactory)
- Moderate Cost (at risk): Students missing 5-9%
- High Cost (severe chronic absence): Students missing 10-19%
- Very High Cost: Students missing 20% or more of school
Tier 1: Engagement and Prevention
Let’s watch a video that highlights the importance of a welcoming and engaging school environment.

https://vimeo.com/243704317

Turn to the person next to you and answer the following questions together:

• Do you agree with the video’s emphasis that a positive climate is critical to a student’s overall school performance and attendance?
• What makes it hard for schools to maintain a positive school climate?
Reflecting on your school climate

Put yourself in a student’s shoes. Imagine that you are entering your school...

- Who and what do you see?
- How and when are you greeted?
- Would you feel good entering this setting?
- How are you greeted when you enter the classroom?
- What do you notice about the learning environment?

1. Write down your reflections.
2. Share as a team.
3. Discuss your insights about the schools’ climate.
4. What are the opportunities to continue to build a nurturing and supportive school climate?
Use Incentives Strategically to Motivate Improved Attendance

Bringing Attendance Home Video (6 minutes)

- Facilitated conversation
- The consequences of chronic absence
- How to improve absenteeism
- Family practice
- Increase social capital
- Identify how school can help
- Community services

Help families make back-up plans

MY CHILD’S 
ATTENDANCE 
SUCCESS PLAN

POSSIBLE STRATEGIES TO REACH MY CHILD'S ATTENDANCE GOALS

1. I will talk to my child about how going to school every day will help them do well in school and achieve their goals and dreams.
2. I will keep an attendance chart at home. At the end of the week, I will encourage my child for attendance each day with:
   (a) a visit to the park, (b) a new book, (c) dinner from their favorite restaurant, (d) a special dessert.
3. If my child misses any day, I will call the school and give the reason. If the absences are not excused, the school will contact me.
4. If my child is absent due to illness, I will call the school to report the absence. If I don’t have a phone, I will send a note to school every day.
5. If my child has a cold but is not feverish and has not been diagnosed with a contagious illness, I will send him/her to school even if he/she has a cough.
6. If my child misses more than two days in a row without excused absences, I will contact the school to discuss the situation.
7. I will set up regular check-ins with my child’s teacher to discuss progress, goals, and attendance.
8. I will set up regular check-ins with my child’s teacher to discuss progress, goals, and attendance.

To improve my child’s attendance, I commit to the following:

1. 
2. 
3. 

We will review progress in one goal in two months.

Family Signature: ____________________ Date: __________

Teacher Signature: ____________________ Date: __________

MY FAMILY’S HELP BANK

2. Everyday Help: Identify who you can call on to help when your child is absent or who can pick him or her up when you cannot. These are people like family members, neighbors, and relatives who can help regularly.
3. Occasional Help: Identify people who may help occasionally, but are helpful in a pinch. Maybe they’re a neighbor, a relative, or a friend who lives in your neighborhood but can’t be there for short times.
4. Potential Help: Identify people who are part of your school community, church or neighborhood who are able to help— if you ask.

If I need help getting my child to and from school, I will ask the following people to be on call for:

Name: ____________________ Best Contact Number: ____________________
Name: ____________________ Best Contact Number: ____________________
Name: ____________________ Best Contact Number: ____________________

To learn more, please visit www.attendanceworks.org

2015-2016 ACADEMIC CALENDAR

*My child was present ______%.
*My child was absent ______%.
*My goal is to improve my child’s attendance. I will ensure my child misses no more than ______ for the rest of the year.
I. Help families understand that even when absences are excused, they can add up to a critical loss in learning time.

II. Encourage students and families to take steps to stay healthy and prevent health-related (physical, dental, behavioral) absences.

III. Build awareness about knowing when to keep students home or send them to school when they complain of illness.
✓ Share what students will be learning each week – through flyers, materials on the classroom wall, conversations.
✓ Showcase student work.
✓ Tell parents and students what their children missed the day that they return.
✓ Use parent teacher conference to share appreciation for good attendance and concerns about what is missed with poor attendance.
Strategies for help families keep children healthy

✓ Provide information about keeping children healthy through health-promoting practices at home and in school (e.g. encourage hand washing, sneezing into arm, making sure kids get enough sleep)

✓ Ensure no asthma triggers in classroom

✓ School nurse helps triage and connect students to health resources.

✓ Offer breakfast in the classroom
Communicate with Families to Reduce Unnecessary Absences

WHEN IS SICK TOO SICK FOR SCHOOL?

SEND ME TO SCHOOL IF...
- I have a runny nose or just a little cough, but no other symptoms.
- I haven’t taken any fever reducing medicine for 24 hours, and I haven’t had a fever during that time.
- I haven’t thrown up or had any diarrhea for 24 hours.

KEEP ME AT HOME IF...
- I have a temperature higher than 99.6 degrees even after taking medicine.
- I’m throwing up or have diarrhea.
- My eyes are pink and crusty.

CALL THE DOCTOR IF...
- I have a temperature higher than 99.6 degrees for more than two days.
- I’ve been throwing up or have diarrhea for more than two days.
- I’ve had the sniffles for more than a week, and they aren’t getting better.
- I still have asthma symptoms after using my asthma medicine (and call 911 if I’m having trouble breathing after using an inhaler).

IF YOUR CHILD WILL BE ABSENT DUE TO ILLNESS, PLEASE MAKE SURE TO CALL THE ADMIN OFFICE AT 410-896-9140 TO LET US KNOW AND TURN IN A WRITTEN NOTE THE FIRST DAY YOUR CHILD RETURNS TO SCHOOL.

Excerpts taken from BCPS January 2014 Family Menu
Putting in Place Your Tier 2 Intervention Strategies
Possible Tier 2 Interventions

- Assign caring mentors
- Partner with families/students to develop Student Attendance Success Plan
- Recruit for engaging before-or-after-school activities
- Connect to Walk-to-School Companion
- Offer plan or contacts for health support

Positive Linkages and Engagement for Students and Families
If student is missing 10% or a little more above
Meet with the parent to find out how their child is adjusting to preschool
Explore why their student is missing school and let them know that you’d like to find out what could help improve attendance

If student has severe chronic absent (e.g. >20%)
The type of challenges these families face may differ from those with more moderate absence problems. Be prepared to touch on difficult topics, be supportive, and be ready to connect to community resources.

Congratulate parents on helping make sure their child reaps the full benefits of the program and develops a habit of attendance starting in preschool.
We all need the help of others some time.

Help parents and caregivers anticipate likely needs and network with one another in advance of predictable difficulties.

Use the Help Bank as a problem-solving device in a one-on-one setting with families whose children are having attendance challenges due to transportation or scheduling.
Partners for Change

The greater the size of the challenge, the more partners are needed. Many different types of partners can be enlisted but local government and public agencies are especially important.

- Businesses
- Community Schools Initiatives
- Family Support Organizations
- Early Childhood Providers
- Faith Based Organizations.
- Health Providers
- Housing Agencies
- Hunger Relief Organizations
- Institutes of Higher Education
- Local Government
- National Service/Volunteers/Mentors
- Out of School Time providers
- Social Emotional Learning Providers
- Social Services
- Population-Specific Service or Civic Organizations
- Philanthropy (including foundations and United Ways)

Tap into existing initiatives and coalitions to engage potential partners.
Positive Engagement: Uses caring relationships, effective messaging and a positive school climate to motivate daily attendance.

Actionable Data: Is accurate, accessible, and regularly reported in an understandable format.

Capacity Building: Expands ability to work together to interpret data, engage in problem solving, and adopt best practices to improve attendance.

Shared Accountability: Ensures chronic absence is monitoring & reinforced by policy.

Strategic partnerships between district and community partners address specific attendance barriers and mobilize support for all ingredients.
In one out of five schools, 20 percent of students or more are chronically absent, while in slightly more than half of all schools it is < 10 percent.

Across the United States, chronic absence affects 7 million students. It is widespread and highly concentrated.

**Source:** Portraits of Change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percent of Students Chronically Absent</th>
<th>Number of Schools</th>
<th>Percent of Schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extreme Chronic Absence (30%+)</td>
<td>9,921</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Chronic Absence (20-29%)</td>
<td>10,330</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significant Chronic Absence (10-19%)</td>
<td>28,320</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modest Chronic Absence (5-9%)</td>
<td>21,190</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Chronic Absence (0-4%)</td>
<td>22,572</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Total</td>
<td>92,333</td>
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### Schools with More Students in Poverty Have Higher Chronic Absence Levels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poverty Level</th>
<th>Extreme Chronic Absence (30%+)</th>
<th>High Chronic Absence (20-29%)</th>
<th>Modest Chronic Absence (5-9%)</th>
<th>Significant Chronic Absence (10-19%)</th>
<th>Low Chronic Absence (0-4%)</th>
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<tr>
<td>&gt;=75%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>21%</td>
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<tr>
<td>50-74%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>6%</td>
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<tr>
<td>25-49%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<td>0-24%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>37%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

- **Extreme Chronic Absence (30%+)**: Students with 30% or more chronic absences.
- **High Chronic Absence (20-29%)**:
- **Modest Chronic Absence (5-9%)**:
- **Significant Chronic Absence (10-19%)**:
- **Low Chronic Absence (0-4%)**: Students with 0-4% chronic absences.

*Data source: www.attendanceworks.org*
What is the situation in Alabama?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chronic Absence Level Concentrationss</th>
<th>Number of Schools</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extreme Chronic Absence (30%+)</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Chronic Absence (20-29.9%)</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significant Chronic Absence (10-19.9%)</td>
<td>498</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modest Chronic Absence (5-9.9%)</td>
<td>264</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Chronic Absence (0-4.9%)</td>
<td>339</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grand Total (n)</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,348</strong></td>
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Distribution of Chronic Absence Levels Across Schools in Alabama

![Bar chart showing the distribution of chronic absence levels across schools in Alabama.](chart.png)
Schools with extreme and high as well as low levels of chronic absence are found at every grade level.

Chronic Absence Levels for Alabama Schools Vary By Grades Served

Chronic Absence Levels for Alabama Schools Vary by Grades Served

Elementary | Middle | High | Other | Total
---|---|---|---|---
Extreme Chronic Absence (30%+) | 52 | 193 | 265 | 498
Significant Chronic Absence (10-19.9%) | 27 | 62 | 81 | 182
Low Chronic Absence (0-4.9%) | 10 | 62 | 72 | 145

Elementary | Middle | High | Other
---|---|---|---
High Chronic Absence (20-29.9%) | 39% | 40% | 31% | 33%
Modest Chronic Absence (5-9.9%) | 28% | 24% | 24% | 25%
Low Chronic Absence (0-4.9%) | 1% | 2% | 10% | 11%
While higher levels of chronic absence are found in higher poverty schools, some high poverty schools have low chronic absence.
High and low levels of chronic absence are found in every setting (rural, suburban, town and city).

Distribution of Chronic Absence Levels for Alabama Schools Across Different Locales

- **City**:
  - Extreme Chronic Absence (30%+): 5%
  - High Chronic Absence (20-29.9%): 7%
  - Significant Chronic Absence (10-19.9%): 32%
  - Modest Chronic Absence (5-9.9%): 32%
  - Low Chronic Absence (0-4.9%): 24%

- **Suburb**:
  - Extreme Chronic Absence (30%+): 6%
  - High Chronic Absence (20-29.9%): 9%
  - Significant Chronic Absence (10-19.9%): 32%
  - Modest Chronic Absence (5-9.9%): 28%
  - Low Chronic Absence (0-4.9%): 25%

- **Town**:
  - Extreme Chronic Absence (30%+): 3%
  - High Chronic Absence (20-29.9%): 14%
  - Significant Chronic Absence (10-19.9%): 41%
  - Modest Chronic Absence (5-9.9%): 19%
  - Low Chronic Absence (0-4.9%): 23%

- **Rural**:
  - Extreme Chronic Absence (30%+): 5%
  - High Chronic Absence (20-29.9%): 18%
  - Significant Chronic Absence (10-19.9%): 40%
  - Modest Chronic Absence (5-9.9%): 14%
  - Low Chronic Absence (0-4.9%): 22%
Recommendations for Local Action

✓ Step 1: Form A Local Leadership Team.
✓ Step 2: Map Assets and Secure Additional Partners.
✓ Step 3: Unpack Causes (Myths, Barriers, Aversion, Disengagement).
✓ Step 4: Develop and Implement Solutions.
✓ Step 5: Assess Results.
Reflections

• What do you know about the levels of chronic absence in your schools? Which schools need help? Which schools might be bright spots? What might explain their results?

• Who are involved as partners with your schools?

• What could you do to expand needed partnerships?
Reducing Chronic Absence Requires a Team
They see the **BIG PICTURE:** Trends Over Time By Grade Sub-groups and they identify individual students who need targeted support.
Attendance Teams have 3 Key Functions

1. **Review** data to understand which groups of students are most affected

2. **Develop** your school wide strategy building upon existing assets and challenges

3. **Engage** in triage for tier 2 and 3 students (make sure chronically absent students are being assigned to someone who can help)
Work as a team to take stock of the situation

**Root Causes at My School**

This self-reflection exercise has two parts. First, consider the root causes you see at your school; check all that apply. Then, identify who can play a role in finding solutions to each root cause.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Root Causes</th>
<th>2. Who Can Play A Role?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>At My School</td>
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<tr>
<td>Abuse</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bullying</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chronic illness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Homelessness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parents failing to recognize the impact of missing only two days</td>
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<td>Poor school climate</td>
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<td>Social or academic struggles</td>
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<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other: Type your response here.</td>
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SUBMIT

BACK
Work as a team to fill out your pyramid so you can identify and fill in gaps.

Fill Out Your Pyramid

For each tier, fill in the activities/supports currently in place

School District/ School Name: ____________________________

How many students are in each tier?

Tier 3

Tier 2

Tier 1

Tier 1A: missing less than 5% of school ( < 1 day per month)

Tier 1B: missing between 5% but less than 10% of school (1+ days per month)

Tier 2: missing more than 10% but less than 20% of school (2-3 days per month)

Tier 3: missing more than 20% of school (4 + days per month)

High Cost

Low Cost

www.attendanceworks.org
Who Should Be on the Attendance Team?

✓ School social worker
✓ Nurse
✓ Guidance counselor
✓ Attendance clerk / School Secretary
✓ Teacher (engage on an as-needed basis, related to specific students, classrooms, or grades)
✓ District staff (engage as needed, to identify resources and partnerships)
✓ Parent liaison (engage as needed, focus on whole school and population strategies)
✓ Site-based community partners (engage as needed, focus on whole school and population strategies)

Attendance Team Meetings should be led by the Principal and include the following members:
Assessing your team

✓ Who serves on your attendance team now?

✓ If you don’t have a team, who could play this role. Is it an existing team? A new team? Who could be on it?

✓ If you have a team, is it functioning well? How might it be strengthened?
Join us for Attendance Awareness 2018

All Webinars start 2 ET

- **Leadership Matters (3/28)** will show the crucial role leaders play in mobilizing their communities to action.

- **Working Together Matters (5/8)** will focus on building and training teams in schools with robust participation from community partners.

- **Community Matters (8/15)** will focus on the role that a variety of key community partners can play in helping to reduce chronic absence.

- **Health Matters (9/12)** will showcase our brief highlighting bright spots where successful strategies to address health barriers have reduced chronic absenteeism.