MICHIGAN Department of Education

Student Attendance and Engagement Guidance

A Systemic Approach to Improving Attendance and Reducing Chronic Absenteeism in Michigan

July 2026

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Citation:
Michigan Department of Education (2026). *Michigan Department of Education Student Attendance and Engagement Guidance*, Lansing, Michigan.

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Purpose of the Guide

Attending school provides students with opportunities to develop the social, emotional, and academic skills needed for positive outcomes in their education, careers, and lives. Research suggests that students who attend school regularly are more likely to:

Engage in learning

Read at grade level by third grade

Develop healthy habits and show improved health

Be academically successful

Connect with their community

Graduate high school

Make healthy and responsible choices

Have enhanced quality of life[i]

In Michigan, compulsory school attendance requires that all children aged six to 18 attend school during the entire school year, except under limited circumstances.[ii] Based on the federal definition, students are marked as in attendance for the day if they attend class for at least half their scheduled hours or, for virtual students, participate in a scheduled check-in. In 2024-25, the statewide school attendance rate among Michigan students increased for the third year in a row to 91.3%, providing more students with essential opportunities for learning. In contrast, however, nearly 28% of all Michigan students were chronically absent, meaning that 387,934 students missed at least 10 percent of the school year. While there were 25,147 fewer chronically absent students than in the prior year, there is more work to be done to further reduce the number of chronically absent students in Michigan. Especially for student groups that have disproportionate chronic absenteeism rates, such as students who are homeless (57.4%) and economically disadvantaged (38.6%).[iii]

The *Michigan Department of Education's Student Attendance and Engagement Guidance* is designed to help educators, school and district leaders, and community partners use a systematic approach to prevent chronic absenteeism and improve student engagement by creating positive conditions for learning and proactively addressing potential barriers to attendance. This guidance provides tools and resources that can be used by a team to identify root causes that contribute to chronic absenteeism and select research-based prevention and intervention strategies to engage students and improve attendance, thereby positively affecting student academic, career, and life outcomes.

Increasing Attendance with a Systemic Team Approach

District and school communities have found success in improving student attendance and reducing chronic absenteeism when they take a systemic team approach that involves the community and centers around the needs of students and families/caregivers. Whenever possible, school communities are encouraged to integrate attendance strategies into pre-existing systems, such as a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) and an Early Warning Intervention and Monitoring System (EWIMS), to streamline support and reduce duplication of efforts. An existing MTSS and/or EWIMS team can assume the responsibility for reviewing attendance data on a regular basis to understand attendance trends and to determine the supports needed for students who are, or are at risk of being, chronically absent.[iv] Attendance Works offers best practices for how to organize effective district and school level teams to improve student attendance, as well as self-assessments to help educators identify strengths and opportunities to develop a systemic approach to reduce chronic absenteeism. Fully implemented MTSS teams addressing attendance are associated with improved attendance in Michigan.[v]

Everyone can help ensure students show up to class each day, so Attendance Works has developed a variety of approaches, strategies, and tools to help educators support attendance efforts based on their specific roles and responsibilities, including school district administrators, principals, teachers, and more. Research in Michigan has

found that school leader activity that frequently monitors the implementation of attendance initiatives is associated with improved attendance, and that having school level staff (e.g., Dean of Culture/Behavior, Family Engagement Coordinator, Community Schools Coordinator, AmeriCorps) that expand the school's capacity to implement attendance strategies, provide leadership support and student and family/caregiver focused support, is associated with better attendance than district-based attendance personnel. In addition, districts that provide attendance guidance that is perceived by staff as helpful to their schools are also associated with improved attendance.[vi]

The many factors that can lead students to miss school can vary across communities, schools, and groups of families/caregivers. Developing a more informed picture of the story behind the statistics is a critical step in developing effective interventions. Understanding the Factors Contributing to Chronic Absence in Your School from Attendance Works offers activities and a matrix of key questions to answer about factors that contribute to chronic absence, as well as what assets might be available to improve school attendance. For each key question, the matrix indicates potential sources of additional data that can be collected and used to further assess the relevance of possible contributing factors. It is important to note that some root causes of chronic absenteeism cannot be solved by schools and districts alone. In the long term, adequately addressing chronic absenteeism will also require involvement of lawmakers and leaders in other policy domains such as housing, healthcare, transportation, employment, and social services.[vii] In the meantime, however, schools benefit from bringing partners from across the community into the conversation regarding attendance to draw on diverse perspectives, resources, and expertise. Attendance Works has developed a set of tools and resources for community and agency partners, highlighting what each partner can do locally to help reduce chronic absenteeism. (See Figure 1 for examples of community partners in Michigan).

Figure 1. Considering Community Partners in Building Attendance Teams

- Twelve federally recognized Tribal Nations share geography with the State of Michigan and represent sovereign governmental entities with a long history of government-to-government relationships. Visit Tribal Consultation in Michigan to better understand best practices to develop consultative relationships with Tribal Nations on educational matters such as attendance.
- **Intermediate School District Attendance Officers** work to resolve chronic absenteeism, educational neglect, school refusal, and related matters at every level, from the individual student to the district, and engage the justice system as only a last resort.
- **Community Health Providers** can help ensure that students receive timely physical and/or mental health support, reducing barriers to attendance.
- Community Schools partner with community organizations and businesses to broaden the educational and experiential scope of learning making the school a hub of community activity.
- AmeriCorps volunteers help to improve attendance and engagement, increase high-school graduation rates and expand college enrollment. They offer a Superintendent's / Principal's toolkit for Leveraging National Service in Your Schools.

Considering Policy Implications for Attendance

District and school teams can support student attendance by evaluating their policies to determine if they reflect best practice, are misunderstood, have unintended consequences, or disproportionately impact specific groups of students. When a group of students is identified as having a high level of chronic absence, the root cause may be a systemic barrier such as a school policy or practice. In such cases, the solution is not a student intervention but rather a change in the school itself. For example, Attendance Works suggests that if suspensions for minor infractions (e.g., not abiding by the dress code or cursing in the classroom) are causing a disproportionate number of students to miss school and disengage, then a policy solution might be needed. In this case, the school could establish clear criteria for suspension and offer professional development to teach staff about alternative approaches to behavior management. Districts and schools can use the following list and example considerations provided in Table 1 to reflect on their policies and practices in relation to attendance. With a focus on clarity, communication, and equity, policies can be updated as needed to prevent unintended consequences for students and families/caregivers.

Attendance Policies

Local attendance policies often provide details about how much time can pass before a tardy becomes an absence, how many tardies equal an absence, and what is considered an excused or unexcused absence. Using these policies, schools may respond to excused absences by providing students with access to virtual lessons and helping students make up homework and exams. In contrast, unexcused absences may lead to punitive responses such as denying homework, exam, or course credit, Saturday school, forbidding extracurricular activity participation, and suspending students.[viii] Putting an emphasis on excused vs. unexcused absences muddies the waters when discussing attendance, because it conflicts with the message that there is a consequence for all absences, whether excused or not, which is the missed opportunity for learning. Not only can punitive responses to absence further exclude students from the learning environment, but they can also disproportionately impact students facing barriers. For example, due to family circumstances, a student may: not have a medical provider note for illness, lack clothing, be needed at home for sibling or elder care, be interpreting for parents, have unapproved employment, or have transportation issues. Several of these reasons, particularly those related to the logistical challenges of poverty, may be involuntary on the parent/caregiver's part.[ix] As an alternative, districts are encouraged to consider any absence a lost opportunity for learning and respond to all students and families/caregivers with the positive support they need to recoup missed lessons and address the root causes for a student's pattern of absence.

School Start Times

In 2023, more than 77% of high school students did not get the minimum recommended amount of sleep.[x] Insufficient adolescent sleep is a worsening problem[xi], driven in part by early school start times, alongside afterschool activities and late-night technology use.[xii] Starting school at 8:30 a.m. or later has been shown to improve students' sleep and attendance at the middle school and high school levels.[xiii] Evidence also indicates that elementary schools can start earlier to accommodate these shifts without negatively affecting student outcomes.[xiv]

School Calendar

In Michigan, intermediate school districts work with local districts to adopt common school calendars to identify the dates for each school year when schools will not be in session for a winter holiday break and a spring break. Calendars that do not recognize important religious, cultural, or local holidays may put some students at a disadvantage. If many students celebrate a particular holiday or local tradition, districts could advocate for including those days off in the common school calendar. Districts may also apply for a waiver to the common school calendar.

Dress Codes

"Dress codes are associated with statistically significant higher rates of discipline that removes students from the classroom (e.g., suspensions)". [xv] These policies also disproportionately impact students who identify as girls and students of color.[xvi] If a dress code policy exists, students not complying with the dress code should be "treated with consideration" and "offered an alternative so they can stay in school." [xvii]

Grading Procedures

Grading policies that allow students to make up work without penalty help accurately assess students' knowledge and skills, rather than penalizing them for barriers and/or circumstances impacting their attendance.[xviii]

Discipline

Exclusionary disciplinary measures have been found to increase students' risks of future classroom disruptions, peer exclusion, and truancy.[xix] The Michigan Department of Education's Alternatives to Suspensions and Expulsions Toolkit encourages districts to adopt policies and practices that allow educators to address disciplinary matters as opportunities for learning instead of punishment. This toolkit is meant to provide examples and ideas for alternatives to suspensions and expulsions that align with current legislation, to keep students in school and learning, while school staff provide or connect them with the support they may need to be successful. In the Improving Attendance by Reducing Suspensions: A Practice Guide, the National Dropout Prevention Center (NDPC) offers a practical process for school leaders to analyze local suspension practices and data to determine if discipline and suspension practices contribute to chronic absenteeism and determine the action steps needed.

Table 1. School and District Policy Considerations

School Considerations	District Considerations
• How do we communicate about our attendance policies with students and families/caregivers? Is our messaging positive and supportive or derogatory and punitive? • What patterns do we notice school-wide about who is late to or absent from school, and where do they live? Is there adequate transportation in those areas? Are bus stops and walking routes safe? • What is in the student handbook related to dress codes? Are students removed from class for dress code violations? Do dress codes impact some groups more than others? • What are the school disciplinary policies and practices? Who is most impacted by them? What alternatives to exclusionary discipline are used? • What are school and classroom-based grading procedures? Can students make up work without being penalized? Are families/caregivers aware of the differences between in-school learning and learning via make-up work?	• How can our attendance policies encourage inclusion and engagement rather than exclusion and disengagement? • Who is served by district-provided transportation? Who is not served? Why? Are bus stops convenient to where students live? Is it safe for students to walk to school? What do the data show? What might be dangerous? • What is the purpose of our district policies related to dress codes? How do the dress codes impact the culture and climate of our district and schools? • How do our districtwide disciplinary policies and practices allow educators to address disciplinary matters as opportunities for learning instead of punishment? • Are there local and/or religious holidays that members of the school community celebrate that are not represented on the district calendar? If so, what is attendance like on those days? • How do policies or practices differ across schools in our district, and what impact might those variances be having on attendance?

Selecting Strategies to Improve Attendance

As districts and schools identify the root causes for why their students are absent, it is recommended that they inventory what research-based practices, interventions, and supports are already being implemented within their district or school to address attendance related concerns. These strategies can be mapped across the tiers of an MTSS framework to help illustrate how support is differentiated to meet the needs of students.[xx] [xxi]

- **Tier 1 strategies** are "universal" strategies, meaning they address all students in the school. For example, schools may communicate a common message about attendance to all families, provide school buses that are available to all students, or carry out school climate initiatives that improve the experience of all students.
- **Tier 2 interventions** support smaller groups of students. For example, schools may strategically reach out to a subset of families to share additional information about their child's attendance, provide or refer additional transportation resources to certain families, or conduct a small-group intervention to strengthen student relationships and sense of belonging.
- **Tier 3 interventions** are more intensive for individual students. For example, schools may carry out regular communication with a family about their child's attendance, work closely with a family to develop a plan for reliable transportation to and from school, or develop an individual support plan to improve the student's experience in school.

These supports are intended to be layered, so that a student receiving Tier 3 attendance interventions may also benefit from approaches provided in Tiers 1 and 2. It is often the case that students who miss more school will need more intensive interventions (i.e., Tier 2 and Tier 3), but there is no standard solution for students who miss a certain amount of school. Rather, the right strategy for a given student's attendance issues will depend on the root cause of their attendance needs. In other words, the number of days students miss should not be used as the only basis for determining the appropriate strategies to support that student. By reviewing the current strategies being implemented across tiers, a district or school may identify gaps in strategies and services designed to address the identified root causes for why their students are absent.

Attendance Works finds that strategies to address common root causes for student absences typically fall into seven categories: student engagement, social-emotional-and behavioral health, academic support, expanded

learning, physical health, basic needs, and family engagement. Table 2 illustrates how common root causes of absence connect to the seven categories of strategies that a district or school may consider selecting from to address attendance concerns.

Table 2. Identifying Strategies to Address Common Root Causes of Student Absences (adapted with permission from Attendance Works)

Common Root Causes	Category of Strategies to Address the Root Cause
• Boredom • Lack of meaningful relationships with adults in school • Not seeing the relevance of school • School discipline and/or suspension	Student Engagement
• Anxiety and/or depression • Bullying • Community violence • Grief • Lack of access to mental health services • Trauma	Social, Emotional, Behavioral Health
• Boredom • Lack of challenging and culturally responsive instruction • Lack of enrichment opportunities • Lack of instructional support	Academic Support & Expanded Learning
• Assumption that students must stay home with any symptoms of illness • Chronic and acute illness • Lack of access to health care services • Poor dental health	Physical Health
• Childcare responsibilities in the absence of before and after care • Economic instability • Housing and food insecurity • Lack of access to clean clothing and hygiene products • Lack of transportation • Out of school employment	Basic Needs
• Misconceptions about attendance • Negative educational experiences of caregivers • Underestimated number of absences	Family Engagement

The following sections of this guide provide strategies designed to improve student experiences in school, remove barriers to attendance, and effectively communicate and collaborate with families in support of attendance. Organized by the seven categories illustrated above, each section highlights how the category connects to the needs of students in relation to attendance, resources to support districts and schools in their exploration, selection and implementation of strategies to address the category of need, followed by a chart of example strategies that a school might implement in Tier 1: Universal Support and Prevention, Tier 2: Targeted Intervention, and Tier 3: Intensive Intervention, within the MTSS framework. (See Table 3 through Table 17 for tiered strategies). When selecting strategies, schools and districts are encouraged to consider their own context and prioritize evidence-based strategies designed to meet the needs of their students, families/caregivers, and community. Research has found that no single strategy will solve chronic absenteeism. This suggests that, as with other aspects of education, the effectiveness of attendance initiatives is shaped by how they are implemented (e.g., quality, coherence, frequency). Findings in Michigan also highlight the likely importance of other aspects of schooling (e.g., school climate, relationships, instructional quality) along with attendance-specific initiatives. [xxii]

Student Engagement

Students who feel welcome at school and are actively involved in their learning environment are more motivated to attend. Schools can enhance student engagement through a variety of strategies. These range from building meaningful relationships to creating active learning opportunities for students that connect lessons to real-world applications and are relevant to their career goals. By fostering student engagement, educators positively impact attendance and contribute to the overall academic success of students. [xxiii] [xxiv]

- In the Improving Student Engagement: A Practice Guide, the National Dropout Prevention Center (NDPC) offers a practical working model for improving engagement and instruments that educators can use to assess engagement and select the best improvement strategies. The practice guide defines student engagement as interest in and satisfaction with a school that produces voluntary attendance, willing cooperation, active participation, and learning progress toward graduation. NDPC suggests that educators address student engagement in three domain areas: engagement with people, activities, and instruction.
- The Strengthening School Connectedness to Increase Student Success brief explores the factors that foster school connectedness, such as teacher-student relationships, supportive disciplinary policies, and extracurricular engagement. It offers evidence-based strategies for schools to build connectedness, from integrating culturally inclusive curricula to promoting student-led activities.
- According to Attendance Works' Establishing Schoolwide Attendance Recognition brief, school attendance is a simple, easily understood measure of student performance and engagement. One strategy for improving attendance is engaging students, parents, educators, and community members in a campaign that offers positive recognition for getting to school on time. The linked brief provides ideas of what to consider, what to avoid, ideas for incentives, and examples of some steps schools are taking.
- In Making Sense out of Incentives: A Framework for Considering the Design, Use, and Implementation of Incentives to Improve Attendance, a framework is provided to help school staff think about how-and when -to use incentives to improve student attendance by stepping back and considering if incentives are an appropriate intervention, and then how to design incentives in ways that address the specific attendance barriers. Educators should consider the problem the incentive was trying to solve, whether it was designed to match the nature of the problem, how each incentive is implemented, and if the incentive is designed to influence the behavior of the person(s) who, most likely, made decisions about school attendance.

Engagement with Educators & Peers

- As students head back to school, the Power of Positive Connections Toolkit calls for using absenteeism records from past years and from the first month of school to connect the most at-risk students to personal relationships and positive supports that motivate them to show up to class every day.
- Harvard's Guide to Relationship Mapping can be used to ensure all students have a meaningful connection to an adult in the school community.
- The Tip Sheet for Morning Announcements from the Connecticut State Department of Education provides a list of 30 affirming and encouraging messages educators can share with students.
- Relationships Matter: A Toolkit for Launching an Elementary Success Mentor Initiative is designed to help school districts, particularly the administrators charged with establishing an elementary success mentor program, leverage ideas and resources available from national partner organizations as well as the pioneering work of a growing number of local efforts. It is filled with strategies as well as materials you can take and tailor to the needs of your community.
- The Scan of Environment and Attendance Tool (SEAT) is designed for school leaders to engage school staff, students, parents, and community members in identifying strengths and opportunities to promote positive school culture and strong attendance. Using the SEAT, schools can identify strengths and opportunities to shape the underlying issues that contribute to student attendance, including climate, culture, and the physical environment. Equipped with information about building-level practices that influence attendance, schools can take actionable steps to address some of the causes, not just the symptoms, of chronic absence. Organized into two separate modules for grades K-5 (Elementary) and 6-12 (Middle and High School), the SEAT can be used in schools of any size.
- 10 Creative Ways to Better Engage Your Students provides techniques for teachers that help to enhance student engagement and motivation for learning in the classroom. Many of the strategies presented are from the book *Total Participation Techniques: Making Every Student an Active Learner* by Persida Himmele and William Himmele.

- While court-based referrals aim to address absenteeism, research indicates that traditional truancy court referrals and juvenile justice involvement do not reliably improve student attendance and can reduce engagement. A study of elementary students in Minnesota found that truancy court-diversion programs, which educate parents and create attendance contracts, did not significantly increase attendance compared to direct referrals to child protection or court, highlighting the limited effectiveness of punitive approaches.[xxv] Similarly, students involved in the juvenile justice system in South Carolina experienced worsened attendance, suggesting that court involvement can have counterproductive effects.[xxvi] Legal intervention should be a last resort. Effective engagement strategies should focus on prevention, support, and non-punitive interventions rather than punitive referrals. Attendance Works illustrates the key differences between chronic absenteeism and truancy in this article and graphic.

Engagement with Activities

- The Extracurricular Activities Statistics: 2026 Verified Report explores the extracurricular participation of children ages 6 through 17 from a statistical perspective using verified data from peer-reviewed studies, official statistics, industry reports, and longitudinal studies. These statistics provide schools and communities with a current snapshot of extracurricular activities, looking at academic, social, and behavioral impact, financial and logistics implications, participation trends, and time and commitment factors.
- Project Play's Sport for All, Play for Life: A Playbook to Develop Every Student Through Sports offers eight promising strategies that principals and local school leaders can use to give every student the opportunity to develop through sports. They advocate that students need more options for physical activity, whether through community partnerships, intramurals, student-led clubs, or other innovations that supplement the standard menu of interscholastic teams. The goal is to improve school sports for the four in ten who play and innovate to engage the six in ten who do not. It is a roadmap to making school sports more accessible, more equitable, and more student centered.
- Edutopia offers Unique School Club Ideas for Every Interest from blending up fresh smoothies to raising chickens, these clubs require commitment—and they deliver joy, connection, and community in return.

Engagement with Instruction

- The Making Learning Real: Design Principles and Evidence for Applied Learning in Schools research brief synthesizes decades of research to guide district and school leaders on how to design effective Applied Learning (AL) programs that make learning more engaging, relevant, and cognitively challenging. Applied Learning, an umbrella term for approaches such as project-based, inquiry-based, and experiential learning, helps students build and apply knowledge through authentic, real-world tasks supported by strategic instruction and performance-based assessment.

Progress Toward Graduation & Career Goals

- The Michigan Merit Curriculum (MMC) is not a curriculum in the traditional sense in that it doesn't describe instructional materials and approaches. Instead, it specifies that all students who earn a diploma, at a minimum, have demonstrated proficiency with the content outlined by the state academic standards or guidelines. The MMC can be modified using the personal curriculum to individualize the rigor and relevance of the state graduation requirements. All students are eligible for a personal curriculum, with different populations of students falling under different rules for modifications allowed.
- While traditional course-taking pathways are an option under the Michigan Merit Curriculum, schools may provide this curriculum by offering the credits specified using alternative instructional delivery methods such as alternative coursework, humanities course sequences, Career and Technical Education (CTE), industrial technology courses, vocational education, or by any combination of these. This flexibility within the MMC supports the need for personalization, acceleration, and innovation in an atmosphere of high expectations and high support for students earning a diploma in Michigan. This includes options like Leveraging Career and Technical Education (CTE) to Support Implementation of the Michigan Merit Curriculum, which can fulfill certain curriculum requirements and provide practical, career-focused learning opportunities.

- The Michigan Career Development Model (MCDM) is a framework that engages school communities, students, and their support networks in intentional and meaningful career awareness, exploration, and preparation for all students. The MCDM Reference Guide is a one-stop resource to assist districts in career development implementation.
- All students in Michigan are required to develop an Educational Development Plan (EDP) with guidance from school advisors. EDPs are "living" documents, updated as student interests and abilities become more obvious and focused. All students must be provided with the opportunity to develop an EDP during grade 7 and then have the time to review and revise every year through grade 12.
- The Michigan Department of Education's Graduation Rate Guidance, Supporting Students to and through Graduation: Engaging Students for Successful Middle Years, and Supporting Students to and through Graduation: Ensuring a Solid Foundation Begins in Elementary School serve as resources to encourage and support intentional efforts of intermediate school districts (ISDs) and local education agencies (LEAs), both traditional public school districts and public school academies (PSAs), in identifying efforts to assist students in graduation success. The guidance highlights research-based strategies that improve graduation rates.

Table 3. Student Engagement Strategies

Tier 1: Universal Prevention	Tier 2: Targeted Intervention	Tier 3: Intensive Intervention
• School staff use positive greetings at the door (or at login for remote learning). • School staff recognize good or improved attendance. • School staff involve students in decision-making processes related to attendance and provide students with opportunities to express their needs and preferences. • The school implements grade-level advisories or morning meetings. • The curriculum includes relevant and engaging coursework with real-world applications. • Teachers personalize learning experiences by considering individual student goals and interests. • The school community fosters positive relationships between students and caring adults (e.g., teachers, counselors, mentors). • The school board, district leadership, and school leadership revise disciplinary policies and practices to focus on prevention and developing the skills of both students and staff.	• The school offers small support groups where peers can encourage attendance and provide social-emotional support. • The school pairs at-risk students with mentors who can guide them academically, socially and emotionally. • The school implements a structured check-in/check-out system where students meet with a designated staff member daily, who helps monitor attendance and provides students with encouragement. • The school encourages participation in extracurricular clubs or activities that students may be interested in.	• Chronically absent students and families/caregivers receive an assigned family advocate or success coach to support their efforts to increase attendance. • The school has on-going personalized communication with the student and family/caregivers.

Social, Emotional, Behavioral Health (SEBH)

Creating an inclusive school climate where students have access to services is essential for supporting behavior and mental health. [xxvii] [xxviii] Recent data shows an increase in youth reporting mental health concerns, such as anxiety, with unequitable access to services being a barrier to attendance. [xxix] [xxx] According to the 2023 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), over 42% of high school students in Michigan felt sad and hopeless, and almost 22% seriously considered attempting suicide in the previous 12 months. Research confirms that a focus on social and emotional learning (SEL) improves the social, emotional, and academic skills that students need to successfully engage in school. [xxxi] [xxxii] [xxxiii]

- According to the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), social and emotional learning is the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions.
- The Michigan Department of Education's Social and Emotional Learning Competencies provide a framework to help educators and caregivers understand learners' developmental progression of social and emotional skills from birth through Grade 12, as well as skill-building strategies to support successful mastery of college and career readiness standards.
- Michigan educators are encouraged to complete the Social-Emotional Learning: Introduction to SEL online module hosted at Michigan Virtual. This introductory course provides insight into social-emotional learning (SEL) and a pathway to the initial steps of integrating SEL into your school or district environments. The course is free, self-paced, and offers state continuing education clock hours (SCECHs).
- Michigan's Guidance for a Comprehensive School Mental Health System of Supports provides a strategic overview and broad background context for school leaders, teachers, and other education professionals looking to promote well-being, improve academic outcomes, and reduce mental health issues for students by building a comprehensive school mental health system (CSMHS).
- The goal of health education is to develop an individual who is health-literate and engages in practices that lead to an overall healthy lifestyle throughout their life, including mental health. Best practice in K-12 education includes comprehensive health education in all grades, focusing heavily on skill development. The Michigan Health Education Standards Guidelines 2025 assist districts and schools in meeting this goal.
- Michigan's Multi-tiered System of Supports Technical Assistance Center (MiMTSS TA Center) helps intermediate and local school districts implement and sustain a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) in their schools to improve student outcomes in behavior and learning. MTSS focuses on providing high quality instruction and interventions matched to student needs. This is accomplished by focusing on evidence-based practices implemented with fidelity that are sustainable over time and utilizing data-based decision making at all levels of implementation support. The MiMTSS TA Center offers professional learning to support educators implementing SEBH strategies within an MTSS framework in Michigan K-12 and early childhood settings. To learn more about upcoming professional learning opportunities related to social, emotional, behavioral health, please visit the MiMTSS TA Center Online Registration System, view the SEBH Playlists on the MiMTSS TA Center YouTube Channel.
- Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports (PBIS) is an evidence-based, three-tiered framework for supporting students' behavioral, academic, and mental health. It is a way to create positive, predictable, and safe learning environments where everyone thrives. Specific PBIS practices include:
    - Defining school expectations with input from students and families.
    - Explicitly teaching school expectations and social, emotional, behavioral skills.
    - Acknowledging appropriate behavior through positive feedback. [xxxiv]
    - Responding instructionally to unwanted behaviors.
    - Using data to identify student needs, monitoring progress, and adjusting interventions and tiers of support and strategies utilized within the MTSS framework as needed. [xxxv]

- The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services Child and Adolescent Health Center Program is aimed at achieving the best possible physical, intellectual, and emotional status of children and adolescents by providing services that are high quality, accessible, and acceptable to youth. Included under the umbrella of Child and Adolescent Health Program are three models of service delivery: 1) clinical Child and Adolescent Health Centers, offering primary care and mental health services and health education; 2) School Wellness Programs, offering nursing and mental health services and health education; 3) Expanding, Enhancing Emotional Health, offering mental health services only. The CAHC Program administers more than 100 clinical Child and Adolescent health centers, over 50 School Wellness Programs, and over 100 Expanding, Enhancing Emotional Health programs throughout Michigan. While those with commercial insurance coverage can receive services, the CAHC Programs are especially targeted to provide care to uninsured, underinsured, and publicly insured youth. No child or adolescent is turned away for the inability to pay for services.
- The National Center for School Mental Health (NCSMH) promotes the importance of providing mental health services to children, adolescents, and families/caregivers directly in schools and communities. The center provides many resources including the Advancing Comprehensive School Mental Health Systems: Guidance From the Field which supports the implementation of the eight core features of a comprehensive school mental health system: Well-Trained Educators and Specialized Instructional Support Personnel, Family-School-Community Collaboration and Teaming, Needs Assessment and Resource Mapping, Multi-Tiered System of Support, Mental Health Screening, Evidence-Based and Emerging Best Practices, Data and Funding.
- The Promoting Mental Health and Well-Being in Schools action guide from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention describes six in-school strategies that have been proven to promote and support mental health and well-being. For each strategy, the guide describes approaches, or specific ways to put the strategy into action. It also provides examples of evidence-based policies, programs, and practices.
- The Michigan State Police - Office of School Safety offers a series of six, asynchronous training courses for School Resource Officers in mental health and school safety. Each professional development course is provided at no cost and is intended to be completed sequentially. School Resource Officers and other school personnel interested in promoting school safety and mental health are encouraged to enroll in the series.
- The Michigan Department of Education has identified bhworks as a care coordination platform that schools and their direct service providers can use to streamline the planning, delivering, and monitoring of behavioral health interventions and services. This web-based platform is Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) compliant and aligns with MDE's data protection standards. Schools can integrate bhworks into their school mental health system to:
    - Screen entire student populations using minimal resources.
    - Follow consistent best practices and standardized processes.
    - Allocate more time to providing student services.
    - Increase operational efficiency and reduce administrative burdens.
    - Gain insights into key drivers of outcomes with dashboards that aggregate data from multiple sites.
    - Offer telehealth services for anytime, anywhere access to care.
    - Facilitate coordinated care across traditional boundaries.
    - Access real-time data instantly.

  As of this publication, the bhworks platform is available to all Michigan ISDs and their State School Aid Section 388.1631n(6) funded providers at no cost, allowing schools to identify and deliver necessary interventions to support students' well-being. Other state funding, such as Section 31aa, may also be available for other providers to be added to the platform, or at the expense of the ISD or local district.
- The Michigan Department of Education's Supporting Attendance for Students with Disabilities document builds awareness and assists district identification of attendance factors impeding students with disabilities access to education.
- Child Find requires districts to refer a student when they have a reason to suspect or believe the student may have a disability and needs special education related services. Social, emotional, or behavioral concerns may be a reason to suspect a student has a disability.

Table 4. Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Support Strategies

Tier 1: Universal Prevention	Tier 2: Targeted Intervention	Tier 3: Intensive Intervention
• The school integrates the teaching of social and emotional learning competencies into instruction. • Teachers teach behavioral norms and reinforce positive behaviors. • Teachers encourage positive interactions among peers. • The school offers workshops for families/caregivers on strategies that support positive social-emotional development of children at home. • Students have open access to a mental health professional at school (e.g., counselor, social worker).	• The school counselor or mental health provider offers small group sessions that teach students effective coping skills and how to monitor and regulate their own behavior. • The school counselor or mental health provider offers small group sessions for students to practice social skills and develop relationships with other peers. • The school pairs at-risk students with mentors who can guide them academically, socially and emotionally. • The school implements a structured check-in, check-out system where students meet with a designated staff member daily, who helps monitor student behavior and provides students with support.	• The teacher, school counselor / social worker, and family/caregivers work together to develop, implement, and monitor personalized social-emotional success plans for chronically absent students needing support with self-regulation, empathy, or relationship-building. • A formal Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA) process is used to: (a) define and prioritize challenging behavior, (b) understand aspects of the environment that occasion and maintain the behavior, and (c) create an individualized multi-component behavior support plan (BSP) designed to address the function of student behavior.

Bullying Prevention

Nationally, nearly 1 in 5 students in grades 6-12 reported being bullied in the 2021-22 school year [xxxvi]. Of those students, 8% reported staying home from school because they thought someone would attack or harm them, and 18% reported avoiding a specific place at school. [xxxvii] According to the 2023 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), just over 23% of Michigan high school students reported being bullied at school in 2023. [xxxviii] A proactive approach to bullying prevention can create a greater sense of community and reduce absenteeism.

- The Michigan State Board of Education offers Policies on Bullying and a Model Anti-Bulling Policy to help districts define, prevent and intervene with bullying.
- Bullying is the leading concern shared with OK2SAY.[xxxix] OK2SAY is a student safety program that allows students to confidentially report tips on potential harm or criminal activities directed at students, school employees, and schools. The program is available statewide for public and nonpublic schools in Michigan. OK2SAY focuses on early intervention and prevention through awareness and education by offering free student safety programming for grades 4 through 12.
- SchoolSafety.gov was created by the federal government to provide schools and districts with actionable recommendations to create safe and supportive learning environments for students and educators. The Bullying and Cyberbullying webpage offers strategies to consider and additional resources to learn more about bullying, cyberbullying, and related best practices.

Table 5. Bullying Prevention Strategies

Tier 1: Universal Prevention	Tier 2: Targeted Intervention	Tier 3: Intensive Intervention
• School leaders and teachers regularly communicate anti-bullying messages.	• School staff conduct differentiated family visits to discuss bullying prevention.	• The teacher, school counselor / social worker, and family/caregivers work together to create personalized success plans to address bullying incidents for

Tier 1: Universal Prevention	Tier 2: Targeted Intervention	Tier 3: Intensive Intervention
• The school community works together to promote kindness and empathy. • Students, staff, and families/caregivers receive training on how to recognize and address bullying behaviors. • All students and families/caregivers can access a safety reporting system.	• The school provides adult mentors to students who are bullying or who are being bullied. • The school implements a check-in, check-out strategy with students who are bullying or who are being bullied.	chronically absent students.

Trauma-Informed Approaches

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, adverse childhood experiences, or ACEs, are potentially traumatic events that occur in childhood, such as experiencing violence or abuse, witnessing violence in the home or community, or having a family member attempt or die by suicide. Also included are aspects of the child's environment that can undermine their sense of safety, stability, and bonding, such as growing up in a household with substance misuse, mental health problems, and/or instability due to parental separation or household members being in jail or prison. Adverse childhood experiences are widespread in Michigan, with two-thirds (68%) of Michigan adults and more than half (58%) of Michigan youth reporting one or more. [xl] An analysis of the 2019 Youth Risk Behavior Survey data found that more than 6 out of 10 high school students in Michigan reported having adverse childhood experiences, and 15% of students had four or more ACEs. [xli] Students with multiple adverse childhood experiences are more likely to consider and attempt suicide, report being bullied in school, have failing grades, and engage in risky behaviors. [xlii] While ACEs can negatively impact the health and well-being of youth, the good news is that those negative impacts are preventable. Research shows there are protective factors – actions we can all take – that can protect against adverse outcomes. Schools can use trauma-informed approaches to help students feel safe at school by providing nurturing relationships and environments that increase the likelihood that students will want to attend school.

- The National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments supports systems in creating and bolstering trauma-informed environments, practices, policies, and programs that transform, uplift, and empower administrators, staff, and service recipients. They offer a range of trauma-informed services designed to transform systems and increase capacity to provide trauma-informed care, including resources such as Trauma-Sensitive Schools and Social and Emotional Learning: An Integration.
- Michigan's Multi-tiered System of Supports Technical Assistance Center (MiMTSS TA Center) offers professional learning to support educators implementing trauma-informed practices within an MTSS framework. To view upcoming offerings, please visit the MiMTSS TA Center Online Registration System for updates on coming events.
- Starr Commonwealth is a Michigan based organization that provides trauma-informed care training and coaching programs for childcare professionals, clinicians, educators, and parents on successful and innovative techniques aimed at bringing out the best in every child, parent, and community.

Table 6. Trauma-Informed Approaches Strategies

Tier 1: Universal Prevention	Tier 2: Targeted Intervention	Tier 3: Intensive Intervention
• Teachers receive training in trauma-informed practices and implement practices with success. • Schools use standard protocols for observing trauma signs, symptoms, and risk factors.	• Staff model and teach coping strategies to students who have experienced trauma. • The school connects students who have experienced trauma with counseling services.	• The teacher, school counselor / social worker, and family/caregivers work together to create personalized success plans for chronically absent students that have experienced trauma, including wraparound

Tier 1: Universal Prevention	Tier 2: Targeted Intervention	Tier 3: Intensive Intervention
• Community organizations offer trauma-informed workshops to teachers and other community members.	• The school implements restorative approaches to discipline and as an alternative to suspension.	services and support as needed.

Academic Support

Students who enjoy school and feel successful are more likely to attend. Those who are at risk, or who are chronically absent, may be experiencing difficulties in their learning process that impact their desire to attend school. Providing students with academic support can help them address learning challenges and increase their willingness to engage in learning. Examples of support may include strategies such as providing high-impact tutoring and intensive evidence-based intervention.

- The National Center on Intensive Intervention (NCII) provides tools and resources to support the implementation of Data-based individualization (DBI). DBI is a research-based process for individualizing and intensifying interventions through the systematic use of assessment data, validated interventions, and research-based adaptation strategies. DBI is a process, not a specific program or product. The process is driven by data, characterized by increased intensity and individualization, and considers the academic and behavioral needs of the student. In some schools, intensive intervention may be known as "Tier 3 intervention," and may be embedded within a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) framework.
- Intensifying Literacy Instruction: Essential Practices increases the capacity of practitioners and educational leaders to support a broad range of learners who need more literacy support to become skilled readers and writers by identifying a set of essential practices that are research-supported and should be the focus of professional development throughout the state. These practices for intensifying literacy instruction apply to those learners with significant and persistent reading and writing challenges who have not responded when provided with instruction.
- The Michigan Dyslexia Handbook: A Guide to Accelerating Learner Outcomes in Literacy is designed to help educators and district and school leaders develop a shared understanding of best practices to prevent reading difficulties associated with the primary consequences of dyslexia (word-level reading disability) and to implement assessment practices needed to inform the provision of instruction and intervention methods for learners with dyslexia characteristics.
- Michigan's Multi-tiered System of Supports Technical Assistance Center (MiMTSS TA Center) helps intermediate and local school districts implement and sustain a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) in their schools to improve student outcomes in behavior and learning. MTSS focuses on providing high quality instruction and interventions matched to student needs. This is accomplished by focusing on evidence-based practices implemented with fidelity that are sustainable over time and utilizing data-based decision making at all levels of implementation support. To learn more about upcoming professional learning opportunities related to literacy, please visit the MiMTSS TA Center Online Registration System and view the Literacy Playlists on the MiMTSS TA Center YouTube Channel.
- The Institute of Education Sciences' What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) offers practice guides that present recommendations for educators to address challenges in their classrooms and schools. They are based on reviews of research, the experiences of practitioners, and the expert opinions of a panel of nationally recognized experts.
- What Works in Math? According to What Works Clearinghouse, there's no single answer to that broad question. Instead, what works varies by grade, subject, and even delivery model. The WWC website allows educators to better understand what works in different contexts. WWC intervention reports show which tools increase mathematics achievement by grade, while WWC practice guides show effective practices for topics such as fractions.

- Accelerated learning keeps students moving forward on their intended grade-level trajectories by strategically preparing them for success in current grade-level content. It focuses on teaching only what must be learned, at a given level, instead of trying to teach everything that a student did not learn in a previous grade or grades. The Michigan Department of Education's Accelerated Learning webpage includes links to a variety of resources and tools on this topic designed to assist educators in their efforts to fill student learning gaps. Targeted Support with Tutoring: A Strategy for Accelerated Learning provides guidance for getting started with intensive tutoring for enriching learning.
- The National Student Support Accelerator provides multiple resources on high impact tutoring, a promising strategy that not only improves academic outcomes but also improves attendance on tutoring session days. The District Playbook is designed for school district staff interested in implementing high-impact tutoring programs. High-Impact Tutoring: Family & Caregiver Toolkit for School Districts provides guidance for district leaders in engaging families/caregivers in their high-impact tutoring programs.
- The Michigan Department of Education's Supporting Attendance for Students with Disabilities document builds awareness and assists district identification of attendance factors impeding students with disabilities access to education.
- Child Find requires districts to refer a student when they have a reason to suspect or believe a student may have a disability and needs special education related services. Academic challenges may be a reason to suspect a student has a disability.

Table 7. Academic Support Strategies

Tier 1: Universal Prevention	Tier 2: Targeted Intervention	Tier 3: Intensive Intervention
• The school provides a challenging and engaging curriculum. • Students access relevant and engaging coursework with real-world applications. • Teachers personalize learning experiences by considering individual student goals and interests. • Teachers differentiate instruction to accommodate different student learning styles. • Students can make up work after they are absent. • Students have access to virtual learning and alternate scheduling options. • School staff help middle school and high school students develop and implement meaningful Educational Development Plan (EDP).	• Teams add attendance strategies to IEPs and 504 plans. • The school provides supplemental, targeted interventions for academic skill development in small groups. • The school and/or community partners provide high-quality tutoring in small groups. • The school pairs struggling students with mentors who can guide them academically and emotionally. • The school implements a structured check-in/check-out system where students meet with a designated staff member daily, which helps monitor attendance and provides students with academic encouragement.	• Students have individualized learning and success plans. • Students receive 1:1 individual academic intervention. • Students can access credit recovery options.

Expanded Learning Opportunities

According to the Afterschool Alliance, "a solid and consistent evidence base exists demonstrating the relationship between participation in afterschool programs and decreased school-day absences. For example, a meta-analysis of 68 studies of afterschool programs found that students attending quality afterschool programs saw improvement in their school day attendance. Similarly, a national report from the U.S. Department of Education on 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) — a program that serves nearly 1.4 million students attending high-poverty, low-performing schools — found that during the 2022-2023 school year, approximately 3 in 5 21st CCLC participants (59%) who were chronically absent the previous year improved their school-day attendance in the current school year." [xliii] Afterschool programs in Michigan keep kids safe, inspire learning, and give working parents peace of mind. Kids discover who they are and what they love to do, make smart choices, and avoid risky behaviors. For every child in afterschool programming in Michigan, four are waiting for an available program. [xliv]

- Afterschool Alliance provides resources to help with starting, running, and sustaining an afterschool program.
- The National Institute on Out-of-School Time (NIOST) provides tools and training to build on the success of your out of school time program and to improve in areas that need help.
- The SEDL | Afterschool Training Toolkit, an affiliate of American Institutes for Research, provides research-based practices, sample lessons, video examples, and resources to support academic enrichment in literacy, math, science, arts, technology and homework through afterschool programs.
- Michigan After School Partnership and Michigan Afterschool Association offer resources and training to support development of meaningful afterschool programs.
- Michigan's Nita M. Lowey 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) program provides federal funds to support the creation of community learning centers that provide learning and enrichment opportunities during extended learning time hours, particularly for students who attend high-poverty and low-performing schools. The program helps students meet state and local academic standards in core academic subjects, such as reading and math; offers students a broad array of enrichment activities that can complement their regular academic programs; and offers literacy and other educational services to the families/caregivers of participating children.
- Michigan's Out-of-School Time Grants provide support for in-person before-school, after-school, before-and-after-school, and/or summer programming to children and youth in any grades K-12. Grants are awarded through a competitive application process.
- Attendance Works offers a 12 question Expanded Learning Program Self-Assessment to help answer the question, "Does our Expanded Learning Program help to reduce chronic absence and improve attendance?"
- The MiSTEM Network works to broaden access to science, technology, engineering, and mathematics experiences and expand learning beyond the physical classroom.

Table 8. Expanded Learning Strategies

Tier 1: Universal Prevention	Tier 2: Targeted Intervention	Tier 3: Intensive Intervention
• The district partners with local community-based arts and recreation organizations to embed enrichment opportunities during school and in out- of- school time programming. • The district designs its summer school programming as a learning and enrichment summer camp experience. • Students access all expanded learning for free or at low cost.	• School staff ensure that the families/caregivers of students who would benefit the most from additional enrichment opportunities have information about afterschool and summer programming.	• Summer programming includes intensive tutoring and/or accelerated credit recovery options for students who need them. • School staff communicate regularly with expanded learning staff about individual student needs.

Tier 1: Universal Prevention	Tier 2: Targeted Intervention	Tier 3: Intensive Intervention
• Summer and afterschool programming prioritize creating positive and caring climates that build strong relationships with students and families/caregivers.		

Physical Health

The connection between student health and chronic absenteeism is clear and direct. Both chronic and acute health conditions can prevent students from attending school. Research indicates that common health conditions resulting in missed school include asthma, influenza, diabetes, obesity and related illness, seizure disorders, mental health and anxiety and vision problems. This pattern may be either exacerbated or ameliorated by a variety of factors in the school environment. [xlv]

- Addressing the Health-Related Causes of Chronic Absenteeism: A toolkit for Action highlights key points from the Healthy Schools Campaign's toolkit for addressing this critical issue. It focuses on preparing educators—particularly school district decision-makers —with knowledge and practical guidance for creating meaningful change to address health-related chronic absenteeism.
- Attendance Works offers a 10 question school-based health self-assessment to help answer the question, "Does our School-Based Health Program help to reduce chronic absence and improve school attendance?"
- Attendance Works provides a series of health handouts for families: *Health Guidance for Going to School*, *Keeping Your Child Healthy and in School!, When is Sick Too Sick for School?,* and *Is your child missing school due to anxiety?*
- The Healthy School Action Tools (HSAT) provides comprehensive tools designed to help Michigan schools and districts create a culture that supports learning by first measuring the health of school environments and then planning and implementing improvements based on best practices.
- The goal of health education is to develop an individual who is health-literate and engages in practices that lead to an overall healthy lifestyle throughout their life. Best practice in K-12 education includes comprehensive health education in all grades, focusing heavily on skill development. The Michigan Health Education Standards Guidelines 2025 assist districts and schools in meeting this goal.
- The Michigan Model for Health is a nationally recognized, evidence-based health education curriculum focused on skills-based instruction. The curriculum teaches grades PreK to 12th grade students the knowledge and skills they need to build and maintain healthy behaviors and lifestyles. Age-appropriate and sequential lessons focus on the most serious health challenges school-aged children face.
- Each student with a chronic health condition is unique in their disease process, developmental and intellectual abilities, and levels of assistance required for disease management. The Consensus Statement on the Core Tenets of Chronic Condition Management in Schools and the Standards of Care for Supporting Students with Chronic Health Conditions in School allows students with chronic health conditions to be safe and supported by schools who are following current law and best practice.
- Asthma is one of the leading causes of school absenteeism, accounting for one-third of all days of missed instruction. Children with persistent asthma are 3.2 times as likely to have 10 or more absences as their peers. [xlvi] The American Lung Association's Asthma Friendly Schools Initiative provides resources to help local communities plan and implement asthma management programs within existing school structures.
- The Michigan Department of Education provides districts and schools with the following toolkits to assist them in supporting students with chronic illness: Adrenal Insufficiency Toolkit, Allergies and Anaphylaxis Toolkit, Asthma Toolkit, Cardiac Toolkit, Diabetes Toolkit, Epilepsy/Seizure Disorders Toolkit, and Sickle Cell Toolkit.

- Children don't always know if they can hear and see properly. An undiagnosed hearing and vision problem may interfere with physical, academic and social/emotional development. The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) offers FREE hearing and vision screenings for all Michigan children through your local health department. Screenings are conducted in public, private, and charter schools as well as in preschools, large childcare centers, Head Start programs, and by appointment at your local health department.
- How a school responds to students having nuisance conditions like head lice can have a direct impact on student attendance. Both the American Academy of Pediatrics and the National Association of School Nurses advocate to discontinue "no-nit" policies (a child being free of nits before returning to school) because the associated school absences are an unnecessary burden on students, families, and communities that far outweigh the risks associated with head lice.[xlvii] The Michigan Head Lice Manual includes considerations for developing a head lice treatment and prevention policy in school and childcare settings. The Michigan Manual for the Prevention and Control of Bed Bugs also provides specific guidelines for schools and childcare centers on the management and prevention of bed bug infestations.
- Medicaid and MIChild pay for qualifying children to get FREE health and dental check-ups, from birth to age 21 for Medicaid, or to age 19 for MIChild.

Table 9. Physical Health Strategies

Tier 1: Universal Prevention	Tier 2: Targeted Intervention	Tier 3: Intensive Intervention
• The district allocates resources to ensure all schools have access to a full-time nurse. • School routines build in time for staff and students to wash their hands. • The district invests in air purifiers to increase indoor air quality and help prevent asthma. • The district uses green cleaning products to decrease asthma attacks and prevent the spread of acute illnesses. • The district partners with the community to increase awareness of sick policies and to promote a vaccine awareness campaign. • Schools offer onsite immunization clinics for staff and students. • The school conducts regular health screenings (e.g., vision, hearing).	• The school partners with their local health department to host sessions to help families/caregivers apply for Medicaid or the MIChild health care program if they are eligible but not yet enrolled. • School staff include attendance considerations as part of transition plans for incoming kindergarteners with known chronic health conditions. • School staff develop plans for students with chronic illnesses like asthma and diabetes.	• The school nurse connects students with community health providers when they need access to healthcare. • The teacher allows the student to make up work and provides support as needed to ensure the child does not miss key learning following absence due to illness. • The school nurse, classroom teacher, and families/caregivers implement coordinated care plans with a local provider. • The school staff coordinate with families/caregivers and health professionals while a student is hospitalized and establishes a transition plan for when the student returns to school.

Dental Health

Dental problems can cause distracting pain and make it difficult for students to concentrate, can prevent them from eating and sleeping well, and can affect their socialization, sense of self-esteem, and behavior. Students with poor oral health are more likely to miss school because of dental pain. According to the 2023 Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 1.7% of high school students in Michigan report they have never seen a dentist. [xlviii] Students can benefit from having a dental assessment to help identify any issues requiring dental care.

- Through the Kindergarten Oral Health Assessment Program (KOHA) from the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, kindergarteners in Michigan are eligible to receive a FREE dental screening provided by

local health departments. Schools can facilitate KOHA dental assessments by working with your local health department to offer on-site screening events.

- Medicaid and MIChild pay for qualifying children to get FREE health and dental check-ups, from birth to age 21 for Medicaid, or to age 19 for MIChild.
- The Healthy Kids Dental Program (HKD) is available to Michigan children who have Medicaid and are under the age of 21. Finding dental care is easy with HKD, because eight out of 10 dentists across the state accept it.
- Tooth decay is the most common chronic childhood disease. Dental sealants are a thin, protective coating applied to the chewing surfaces of teeth to help prevent cavities. The SEAL! Michigan program provides no cost dental sealants to families, alongside offering oral health education and resources for establishing a dental home. The program increases access to dental sealants by providing sealants within a school setting and is supported by the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services and the Delta Dental Foundation.

Table 10. Dental Health Strategies

Tier 1: Universal Prevention	Tier 2: Targeted Intervention	Tier 3: Intensive Intervention
• The school partners with their local health department to offer on-site screening events to increase access to dental care. • The district enrolls in the SEAL! Michigan program to provide students with access to free sealants.	• The school partners with their local health department to host sessions to help families/caregivers apply for Medicaid or the MIChild health care program if they are eligible but not yet enrolled. The Healthy Kids Dental Program is available to Michigan children who have Medicaid and are under the age of 21.	• The school nurse coordinates with a local dentist to ensure students with chronic, or emergency dental health needs have access to services in a timely fashion.

Basic Needs

Family Economic Circumstances

Economically disadvantaged students are more likely to be chronically absent, because poverty and economic insecurity are at the root of many "basic need" concerns that create barriers to attendance.[xlix] In addition to directly addressing some of these needs (e.g., transportation, food, clothing, childcare) districts can pay attention and respond to the underlying economic disadvantages that makes attendance more difficult for some families.

- Families/caregivers that are able to work may be eligible for cash assistance through the Family Independence Program (FIP). The State Disability Assistance (SDA) program provides cash assistance to people who are disabled, caring for a disabled person, or age 65 or older. Families/caregivers can apply through MI Bridges.
- Michigan's Unemployment Benefits provide temporary financial assistance to workers who lost their job through no fault of their own until they find new employment.
- Michigan Works! helps individuals get more out of life by getting more out of work. Whether a person is searching for their first job, a new job or they've been working for years and are interested in trying something new — Michigan Works! can help them find what they're looking for.
- Take Control Of Your Money! No matter where someone is in life, Mi Money Matters can help make financial know-how easy and practical. You can help families/caregivers own their finances with free tools and courses they'll actually use.

Table 11. Family Economic Strategies

Tier 1: Universal Prevention	Tier 2: Targeted Intervention	Tier 3: Intensive Intervention
• The school makes information available for all families about local, regional, and state resources for financial assistance (e.g., cash assistance, supplemental food assistance) and employment (e.g., job training, career counseling) • The school provides information about the 211 Michigan resource hub for all families to contact. • The school adopts a community schools approach, starting with a community schools coordinator.	• The school partners with a community partner to host informational events for families to share useful information about financial assistance and employment. • The school refers families to financial assistance and employment resources.	• A family advocate works with individual families to understand their financial needs and appropriately refer them for additional support.

Childcare & Preschool

Family care responsibilities can create barriers to regular school attendance, particularly for families with young children or older students who serve as caregivers for siblings or elderly relatives. When parents or guardians lack access to affordable and reliable childcare, they may struggle to coordinate drop-off and pick-up schedules or may need to keep school-aged children home to care for younger siblings. In some cases, older students themselves become responsible for caregiving duties, leading to absences.[i] Districts can support families by helping them to identify childcare resources and providing onsite preschool programs and before-and-after-care programs. Research has found that Michigan's Great Start Readiness Program has a positive and significant effect on kindergarten attendance too![ii]

- Families looking for quality childcare can visit Great Start to Quality for information and resources to assist them.
- Michigan's Child Development and Care (CDC) program provides supplemental childcare payments allowing low-income parents to work. The subsidy can be used for regulated childcare in a licensed center, group childcare home, family childcare home or license exempt care in the home of a relative or by an adult in the child's home.
- The Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP) is Michigan's free state-funded preschool program serving at-risk and low-income four-year-olds. Ranked #1 in the U.S., it's a safe place where children learn how to get along with others, share, take turns, and make friends. Math, reading, and thinking skills are taught every day through fun, hands-on activities. GSRP helps make sure children are ready for kindergarten and beyond.
- Early Head Start is a free federal program that provides support to low-income families of infants and toddlers under the age of 3 and pregnant women. The program provides a wide range of high-quality education, health, nutrition, family support, and social services to enrolled infants and toddlers, pregnant women and their families.
- Head Start programs promote the school readiness of preschool-aged children from low-income families. Services are provided in a variety of settings including centers, family childcare, and children's own home. Head Start programs also engage parents or other key family members in positive relationships, with a focus on family wellbeing. Parents participate in leadership roles, including having a say in program operations.

Table 12. Childcare & Preschool Strategies

Tier 1: Universal Prevention	Tier 2: Targeted Intervention	Tier 3: Intensive Intervention
• The district offers early childhood education programs (e.g., Great Start Readiness Program, Head Start) for all families. • The elementary school offers on-site before and after-school care for students. • The district and school provide families/caregivers with information about local childcare providers and resources.	• The school helps groups of families with similar needs identify options for local childcare.	• A family advocate works with individual families to understand their childcare needs and appropriately refer them for additional support.

Clothing & Hygiene

Students may miss school to avoid the embarrassment of wearing dirty clothing, tattered clothes, outfits that don't fit properly, and/or having poor hygiene. By one estimate, 1 in 5 students do not have access to clean clothes, making them more likely to miss school. [lii] While the use of school uniforms can be controversial, research finds that there is some indication that low-income students between first and fifth grade in schools that require uniforms demonstrate better school attendance than low-income students in schools that do not. Menstrual hygiene is a necessary aspect of hygiene for women and girls for a significant portion of their lives. Nearly 1 in 4 teens struggle to afford menstrual (or period) products. A 2.4% increase in attendance was reported among New York City schools following a passage of law requiring free period products for students. [liii] According to a 2024 poll from Alliance for Period Supplies, more than 75% of people surveyed agree that period supplies should be available free of charge at public schools. Still, less than half of all U.S. states have passed legislation to fund or require free period products in bathrooms.[liv]

- The Care Counts™ Laundry Program by Whirlpool is committed to helping create educational equality by donating and installing washers and dryers in schools to help remove one small but important barrier to attendance—access to clean clothes.
- 211 Michigan can help connect Michigan children and families/caregivers to the clothing, grooming and school supplies that they need.
- I Support the Girls – Detroit collects and distributes bras, underwear, and menstrual products to organizations including food banks, homeless shelters, transitional housing centers, schools, and community centers primarily in Wayne County, with additional outreach in Washtenaw, Oakland, Macomb, Monroe, and surrounding counties.

Table 13. Clothing and Hygiene Strategies

Tier 1: Universal Prevention	Tier 2: Targeted Intervention	Tier 3: Intensive Intervention
• The school offers a clothing and care closet with basic hygiene products. • The school installs washers and dryers that all students and families/caregivers can access. • The community offers uniform swaps.	• School staff discuss personal hygiene concerns with students privately and respectfully. They choose a setting where the conversation can't be overheard and use empathetic language that focuses on offering support rather than highlighting inadequacies.	• A family advocate coordinates with a community partner to help ensure students and families/caregivers have access to clothing and hygiene products at home.

Tier 1: Universal Prevention	Tier 2: Targeted Intervention	Tier 3: Intensive Intervention
• The school provides free menstrual products in girls' and gender-neutral bathrooms. • The school provides information about 211 Michigan to help connect families/caregivers to clothing, grooming and school supplies.	• The school collaborates with parents/caregivers when implementing solutions for hygiene problems among students. The school offers suggestions and provides resources but avoids placing blame or making accusations. • The school offers student access to shower facilities if needed. • The school provides students with essential supplies like soap, shampoo, toothpaste, deodorant, brushes, combs, and sanitary products if they do not have access to hygiene products at home.	

Food

Research shows benefits when students participate in school meal programs. The students consume more whole grains, milk, fruits, and vegetables during mealtimes—and have better overall diet quality—than nonparticipants. Eating breakfast at school is associated with better attendance rates, fewer missed school days, and better test scores. [lv] Students who eat breakfast at school attend an average of 1.5 more days of school every year.[lvi]

- Michigan School Meals provides reimbursement for all breakfast and lunches served to students who receive meals through their school's participation in the U.S. Department of Agriculture National School Lunch Program and the School Breakfast program. Districts participating in the National School Lunch Program and/or School Breakfast Program are required to develop a local school wellness policy that promotes the health of students. Wellness policies are tailored to the unique needs of each district and present an opportunity to improve the health of each community. The Michigan Department of Education webpage for schools, provides schools with many communication resources, including materials to encourage families to eat Michigan School Meals.
- The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) was created to ensure that children in lower-income areas could continue to receive nutritious meals during long school vacations when they do not have access to the National School Lunch or School Breakfast Programs. The SFSP, nationally known as SUN Meals, is Meet Up and Eat Up in Michigan. It is operated at the local level by program sponsors and is administered in Michigan by the Michigan Department of Education. To find a Meet Up and Eat Up Site, please call 2-1-1 or visit the Meet Up and Eat Up Site Locator Map or Meals for Kids Site Finder Map.
- Food advisory boards are recommended for all sponsors but required for sponsors with a Food Service Management Company (FSMC) contract. Involving parents and students in meal planning can be done in a multitude of activities, including, but not limited to electronic or paper surveys, suggestion boxes, focus groups, tasting panels, menu development activities, wellness activities, and advisory boards. Please see Michigan Department of Education's Requirements for Advisory Boards and Student/Parent Input in School Nutrition Programs memo for additional information.
- Adding additional time to meal service can ensure students have enough time to eat. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends at least 10 minutes of seat time with a meal for breakfast and at least 20 minutes of seat time for lunch. Seat-time is different from the total time for the lunch period. The distinction between seat time and the length of the meal period overall is important, as any non-seat-time activities can shorten the time to eat (e.g., using the restroom, walking to where the meal is served, waiting in line, waiting to pay). About half of school districts nationwide do not require or recommend that schools give students at least 20 minutes to eat once they receive their meal.

- Organizations that operate a federally funded Child Nutrition Program (CNP) must make reasonable substitutions for meals and/or snacks for participants who are considered to have a disability or medical need that restricts their diet. The Michigan Department of Education Special Diet Accommodations Guide provides more information about how this is done on a case-by-case basis.
- Michigan's food assistance program, also known as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or SNAP, provides benefits to low-income families/caregivers to supplement their grocery budget so they can afford the nutritious food essential to health and well-being.
- Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) is a federally funded Special Supplemental Nutrition Program serving low and moderate income pregnant, breastfeeding, and postpartum women, infants, and children up to age five who are found to be at nutritional risk.
- Michigan has many food assistance programs to help increase student and family/caregiver access to healthy and consistent meals. 211 Michigan can help connect Michigan residents to the food assistance they need.

Table 14. Nutritious Meals Strategies

Tier 1: Universal Prevention	Tier 2: Targeted Intervention	Tier 3: Intensive Intervention
• The district opts into Michigan School Meals making breakfast and lunch available to all students. • The school provides meals that are nutritious and appealing. • The school gets input from students and parents about items they would like to see served in the school meals. • The school ensures students have enough time to eat their meals. • The school schedules recess before lunch, when possible, or requires a specific amount of time for sitting and eating before students go out to play. • The school offers an on-site food pantry. • The district conducts yearly outreach to families/caregivers on the availability of the School Breakfast Program and Summer Food Service Program. • The district ensures all eligible students are certified for free and reduced-price meals via direct certification or paper application to ensure access to the Summer EBT program. • The district and school provide families/caregivers with a map of local food banks and information about 211 Michigan so families/caregivers know where they can go if they need food.	• The district uses alternative breakfast models beyond the cafeteria that work best for each site, such as breakfast in the classroom, grab-and-go stations throughout schools, and/or second chance breakfast (serving breakfast between first and second period). • Before weekends and school breaks, community members send backpacks of food home with students who are food insecure.	• The school provides snacks and dinner at after-school tutoring sessions so that chronically absent students who are food insecure can catch up on missed learning. • If eligible, the school offers the Summer Food Service Program during the summer to ensure students have access to meals at school year-round. • A family advocate coordinates with a community partner to help ensure students and families/caregivers with food insecurity have access to food.

Housing

Two trends that have contributed to the rise in family and youth homelessness over the past several decades are persistent poverty and a shortage of affordable housing. [lvii] According to the National Center for Homeless Education, 2.42% of students enrolled in public school nationwide, pre-kindergarten through grade 12, were homeless in 2022. [lviii] Students who experience homelessness transfer schools more frequently and are chronically absent more often than their peers. In 2024-25, 57.4% of students experiencing homelessness in Michigan were chronically absent. [lix] Recent research in Michigan found that schools that frequently referred students for homelessness services and helped arrange transportation were associated with modestly improving attendance.[lx]

- Homeless education programs are intended to support students experiencing homelessness by removing barriers to help them be successful in all aspects of school participation. Under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, the term "homeless children and youth" means individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. In lieu of "homeless children and youth," the Michigan Department of Education uses "children and youth experiencing homelessness" to refer to this group of eligible children.
- Title I, Part A of the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015 Section 1113(c)(3) requires all LEAs to reserve funds to ensure comparable services for children and youth experiencing homelessness as determined by a needs assessment and provide children and youth experiencing homelessness with services not ordinarily provided to other students.
- The Michigan Department of Education's McKinney-Vento Homeless education webpage contains resources and links to support the implementation of homeless education programs.
- According to federal requirements, districts must designate an LEA Homeless Liaison. The National Center for Homeless Education's Homeless Liaison Toolkit provides explanations of the provisions of the McKinney-Vento Act and includes practices, procedures, and tools gathered from effective local homeless education programs. It serves as both an orientation manual for news local liaisons and as ready reference for both new and experienced liaisons. The Assessing the Capacity of LEA Homeless Liaisons tool from SchoolHouse Connection is designed to help districts quickly identify and prioritize areas where greater capacity is needed for liaisons to be "able to carry out" ten specific duties in the law that have the potential to have the greatest impact on children and youth who are experiencing homelessness.
- Students experiencing homelessness are eligible for certain rights and protections. The Supporting the Success of Homeless Children and Youths fact sheet from the U.S. Department of Education provides tips for school administrators, LEA Homeless Liaisons, teachers, counselors, and other school staff as they work to ensure these rights and protections are supported by local policies and procedures.
- The Enrolling Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness in School brief from the National Center for Homeless Education, explains the key provisions in the McKinney-Vento Act related to the school enrollment of students in homeless situations, including sections on enrollment barriers, immediate enrollment, school selection, and full participation in school. Each section also offers strategies for State Coordinators for Homeless Education, local homeless education liaisons, and school personnel to ensure the successful implementation of key provisions, so that students experiencing homelessness are enrolled in school immediately and connected to needed services.
- Attendance Works offers examples of how housing organizations, such as housing authorities and affordable housing developers, can help address chronic absenteeism.
- Safe and affordable housing continues to be the top need in Michigan and throughout the country. No matter if a student and their family/caregivers are renters, homeowners or unhoused, 211 Michigan can help connect Michigan residents to the local housing assistance they need.
- The Affordable Housing Locator can help families find rental housing to fit their location and their income. A Housing Authority, also called a Housing Agency or Public Housing Authority (PHA), supports access to

affordable housing in your community. They oversee assistance programs, applications, and resources that help renters find stable housing.

Table 15. Housing Insecurity Strategies

Tier 1: Universal Prevention	Tier 2: Targeted Intervention	Tier 3: Intensive Intervention
• All school staff receive training on how to look for signs of homelessness and housing insecurity and learn about how this can impact student learning and behavior. • The district appoints a liaison to ensure the identification of students experiencing homelessness in coordination with other school personnel and community agencies. • The district reviews its policies to ensure that they do not create or perpetuate barriers for students who are homeless to participate in school. • The district and school provide families/caregivers with a map of local food banks and information about 211 Michigan so families/caregivers know where they can go if they need food.	• School staff connect families/caregivers who are homeless with community partners to provide housing stability support. • The school uses allowable funding sources to provide van transportation to students who are homeless. • Staff help connect families/caregivers with transportation when their housing situation changes.	• The school partners with a homeless shelter to find a space for a student to complete their homework. • The school uses allowable funding sources to provide tutoring to students who are homeless and chronically absent so that they catch up on missed learning.

Transportation

Reliable transportation to and from school is essential for regular attendance. Most families have a primary way that they get their children to and from school (e.g., parent/guardian drives them, they carpool with a family member or friend, they ride the school bus, they walk). In addition, many families have a backup option if their primary plan is disrupted (e.g., they get help from a family member or friend). When a family's primary means of transportation are unreliable, especially if they lack a reliable back-up option, then a lack of transportation can cause chronic absenteeism.[lxi] Transportation challenges may include:

- lack of a car
- lack of access to school-based transportation (e.g., school bus) or public transportation (e.g., public bus system)
- conflicting work and school schedules for parents/guardians
- inability to afford gas, car insurance, or necessary car maintenance
- inability to afford a taxi or ride-share service as a backup option
- unsafe or dangerous conditions that limit transportation options (e.g., walking, taking the bus)
- lack of family members or friends that can provide a back-up option

Increasing student access to transportation options and/or safe walking and bike routes to school can help.

- Safe Routes to School is an international movement and a federal program to make it safe, convenient, and fun for students to walk, roll, and bike to school. Whether you live in a small, rural community, a sprawling, suburban neighborhood, or a lively, urban center in Michigan, Safe Routes to School grants can benefit your students. These grants are available to all schools with at least one grade in the K-12 range.
- The Transporting Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness brief from the National Center for Homeless Education summarizes the key provisions related to the transportation of children and youth experiencing homelessness included in the McKinney-Vento Act, suggests transportation implementation strategies at the

state and local levels, and recommends resources for funding transportation costs.

- Transportation is a critical need in Michigan. Whether a ride is needed or assistance for a vehicle, 211 Michigan can help connect Michigan families/caregivers to the transportation that they need.

Table 16. Transportation Strategies

Tier 1: Universal Prevention	Tier 2: Targeted Intervention	Tier 3: Intensive Intervention
• The district provides all students with safe and accessible school-based transportation (e.g., school bus). • The district reduces the minimum distance from school a student must live to be eligible to receive bus transportation. • The district creates "Safe Routes to School" for students to walk or bike to school. • The district coordinates with public transportation authorities in the local area (if available) to provide access to public transportation, including stops that are aligned with school locations and schedules.	• The school coordinates a walking school bus and/or ride-sharing network among families in the school. • The school collaborates with community partners to provide families with transportation resources (e.g., gas cards, bus passes, taxi or ride-share fare).	• A family advocate works with individual families to develop a primary and back-up transportation plan for each student in the family. • The school coordinates with community partners that can help support the transportation needs of the family (e.g., car maintenance).

Family Engagement

The MiFamily: Michigan's Family Engagement Framework defines family engagement as "a collaborative relationship between families/caregivers, educators, providers, and partners to support and improve the learning, development, and health of every learner." Regional Educational Laboratory Program (REL) Pacific expands upon this notion by adding that family engagement is "an ongoing process of meaningful interaction between schools and families/caregivers that involves two-way communication and a purposeful focus on supporting student learning."[lxii] Strong family engagement is linked to better attendance. A recent study found that "schools with stronger family engagement prior to the pandemic had better-than-expected attendance, achievement, and school climate outcomes post-pandemic." [xviii]

- The MiFamily: Michigan's Family Engagement Framework includes five family engagement principles and examples of high-impact family engagement at the early childhood, elementary, middle/high school, and after school levels.
- What does it mean to teach attendance? Teaching attendance involves building awareness about how many absences are too many, encouraging students to come to school every day even when it is hard, and engaging them once they are in the school building. Attendance Works and Parent Teacher Home Visits collaborated on the Teaching Attendance 2.0 Toolkit to identify cutting edge concepts and tools to help educators work with families/caregivers, students, and community partners to make school attendance a priority.
- REL Pacific offers a *Toolkit of Resources for Engaging Families and the Community as Partners in Education*: Part I: Building an Understanding of Family and Community Engagement; Part 2: Building a cultural bridge; Part 3: Building trusting relationships with families and the community through communication; Part 4: Engaging all in data conversations.
- Michigan's Multi-tiered System of Supports Technical Assistance Center (MiMTSS TA Center) helps intermediate and local school districts implement and sustain a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) in

their schools to improve student outcomes in behavior and learning. Engaging families/caregivers as partners is a guiding principle of MTSS. To learn more about a variety of professional learning opportunities related to partnering with families/caregivers, please visit the MiMTSS TA Center Online Registration System.

Table 17. Family Engagement Strategies

Tier 1: Universal Prevention	Tier 2: Targeted Intervention	Tier 3: Intensive Intervention
• District and school staff, as well as community partners, communicate why attendance is important and share clear attendance expectations. • The district uses an app to create systematized communication with families/caregivers regarding attendance. • Staff members go on neighborhood walks to meet prospective families/caregivers and share essential information, including details to frame the importance of attendance. • Staff members conduct universal family visits. • The district staffs a family resource center and regularly offers family workshops. • School staff and community members recognize good and improved attendance. • Family/caregiver representation is included on teams addressing attendance.	• Teachers send personalized messages to families/caregivers about their student's attendance. • The school reaches out to families/caregivers to express concern and support problem solving when a student meets an identified attendance threshold. • Staff members conduct additional targeted, positive family visits. • Staff host family workshops for families/caregivers that have a similar need. • Staff tailor conversations to address student attendance during parent-teacher conferences and student-led conferences. • Key messages about attendance are translated into various languages. • Staff purposefully welcome new English-language learners and their families/caregivers by securing a translator and giving them a tour of the building.	• Chronically absent students and families/caregivers receive an assigned family advocate to support their efforts to increase attendance. • The school has on-going personalized communication with the family/caregivers.

Communication Strategies and Methods for Talking about Attendance

How school communities engage families/caregivers and talk about attendance and absenteeism makes a difference. One-way communication focuses on encouraging families to maintain good attendance and informing parents or students about their attendance. Districts may send these messages to families through phone calls, newsletters, text messages, letters home, or community-wide communication campaigns. Research has shown that positive and concise one-way communication can slightly improve student attendance and is affordable for districts to implement.[lxiii] [lxiv] [lxv] Two-way communication includes sustained contact with families/caregivers. It may involve a combination of calls, personalized text messages, family-school meetings, and home visits. Two-way communication is central to broader efforts to understand and address the specific barriers to attendance that families face. Research has shown that these two-way communication efforts can be very effective in improving attendance, though they are also more costly and time-intensive for districts.[lxvi] [lxvii] Recent research in Michigan found that schools that reported family engagement initiatives, frequent home visits, and making attendance plans with families improved attendance.[lxviii]

Information Sharing - General information handouts, flyers, letters to families/caregivers, postcards, videos or text messages can help build awareness of the importance of regular school attendance. [xix] Districts and schools are encouraged to share information often, leveraging community partners to support communication efforts, and connecting with families/caregivers before the school year even begins.

Communication when students are absent - Positive, personalized communication with families/caregivers when students are absent help the family/caregiver and child know that in-person attendance matters. It can also help families/caregivers consider the school as a partner and lead to more dialogue around potential barriers to attendance.

Nudges – Families/caregivers tend to underestimate their child's total number of absences and their child's number of absences relative to other students. [xx] Nudge messages can be sent via letter, flier, postcard, text, or app-based communication. [xxi] A largescale, randomized study found that "nudge letters" can reduce chronic absenteeism by 10-15%. Nudge letters work best when they are easy to read, written in the language spoken in the home, mailed regularly, and inform a family of precisely how many days their child has missed so far that year. Letters, as tangible items, were more effective than texts or emails, the study found.[lxix]

Recognition of good and improved student attendance - Perfect attendance is unattainable for many students, and encouraging students to strive for perfect attendance may be contradictory to current health guidance. However, recognition of good or improved student attendance can help foster a strong school-wide and community culture that values attendance. Teachers, administrators, and community members can work together to offer meaningful recognition and incentives. [xxii]

Messaging related to attendance is most effective when it:

- Is positive in tone and communicates the opportunities associated with in-person learning, not the consequences of missing school.
- Focuses on how school develops children holistically, beyond academic performance.
- Includes realistic goals for parents to work toward not being chronically absent, such as to attend as much as possible vs. citing a specific number of days or saying, "every day."
- Avoids chastising or shaming parents by telling them what's acceptable or not."

The executive summary from Ad Council Research Institute includes a link to a full report and toolkit for districts, schools, and educators on how to overcome chronic absenteeism and encourage parents to send kids to school consistently.

Sample Communications About Attendance

The following messages are examples that district leaders, school leaders, and teachers can use to encourage attendance. Research suggests parents and caregivers most value messaging from their child's teacher, followed by the principal and guidance/school counselor.[lxx]

Awareness Building

"We all want to give our children the best possible chance at a happy future. Regular school attendance helps students be ready for what comes next." [lxxi]

"Regular school attendance is one of the biggest factors that can help your child succeed in life. For more information about the importance of attendance and district attendance policies, go to [link]." [lxxii]

"When children go to school, they learn more. Sometimes children miss the bus. Have a back-up plan to get your child to school. For ideas, go to [link]." [lxxiii]

"This is [person] from [school]. This year, we will be working with [teacher's name] to do all that we can to help [student name] have a great kindergarten year. Save this number to text us with questions!" [lxxiv]

"When children and teens regularly attend school in person, they're more likely to develop their whole selves – personally, socially, academically, and emotionally. They're routinely able to connect with friends and adults, collaborate and problem-solve, make decisions, think critically, be creative, and engage in hands-on learning. In other words, showing up matters!" [lxxv]

Key Resources

Back to the Classroom: How to Overcome Chronic Absenteeism and Encourage Parents to Send Kids to School Consistently
This report and toolkit share key messages and phrases that have resonated more with families/caregivers in recent research.

How to Text Message Parents to Reduce Chronic Absence Using an Evidence-Based Approach
This toolkit from the Institute of Education Sciences outlines a step-by-step process to implement a text messaging strategy and includes sample text messages that districts can use.

Caring Conversations Professional Development Resources – This slide deck from Attendance Works includes a five-step process and protocol to support crucial conversations around attendance.

Absence Notifications

"We missed [child's name] in school the past two days. Please let me know if there are things we can do to support [child's name]'s return to school."

"Hi, [family member or caregiver name]! We really missed [child's name] today! Hope [pronoun] feels better tomorrow. The field trip to the zoo this week will be great; I know [child's name] will love it!" [lxxvi]

Nudge

"[Child's name] is a contributing member of our classroom, and we have missed seeing him/her at school! I am not sure if you are aware that [Child's name] has [# of] absences so far this school year. We would love to have [Child's name] in school every day learning with us. You can have a big effect on [child's name] attendance and we appreciate your help."

Addressing Common Misconceptions About Attendance

Excused absences do not impact a student's learning.
Any absence can have an impact on a student's learning! When a student is not in class, they miss key opportunities to learn and interact with their peers. While it is expected that students will need to be out occasionally due to illness or other extenuating circumstances, absences add up. Students can be considered chronically absent even if all their absences were excused. New research finds that "when a school has very high levels of absenteeism, it creates high levels of churn, and it disrupts the learning for students who are regularly in school, because teachers are almost constantly reteaching content missed by the students who are absent." [lxxvii] When sharing local policy,

districts and schools are encouraged to be clear that any absence—excused or unexcused—can impact student learning. Even if students are able to make up their work, it's not the same experience as being in a class where they can engage with other students.

Missing two days per month doesn't affect learning.

Students who on average miss two days of school per month miss out on valuable opportunities and are considered chronically absent. Attendance Works has developed a variety of interactive exercises to help educators communicate to families/caregivers the importance of daily attendance to student achievement. Simply emphasizing the impact of days missed on learning, however, does not adequately recognize the overwhelming stresses many students and families/caregivers face. The Showing Up Matters for R.E.A.L.: A Toolkit for Communicating with Students and Families recommends highlighting that showing up matters for R.E.A.L. because it offers an opportunity to: Build **R**outines, Increase **E**ngagement, Provide **A**ccess to Resources, and Support **L**earning. This toolkit is designed to help educators, and their community partners, integrate attention to attendance and engagement into daily school operations. The goal is not to add more work for school staff who are stretched thin, but to enhance the effectiveness of what they already do. The resource is full of free, ready-to-use messaging for everyone who understands that helping children and youth get to school every day provides opportunities for students to achieve academically, develop socially and reach their dreams.

My child has not been absent much this year.

Families/caregivers tend to underestimate the total number of absences for their student(s) within any given year. The Student Attendance Success Plan from Attendance Works is designed to help parents track their children's attendance and work with teachers to set appropriate goals. Each Student Attendance Success Plan includes a calendar for the current school year, and a Help Bank to encourage families/caregivers to think about their back up plan for getting to school even when challenges come up. Among middle and high school students, it is important to empower students to develop their own strategies for getting to school and to monitor when absences add up. The Secondary Student Success Plan is specifically designed for this purpose.

Absences only really matter in secondary grades.

Kindergarteners often have the worst attendance rates among elementary school children. In Michigan, almost a third of kindergarteners were chronically absent in 2024-25. When compared to their peers, students who are frequently absent in kindergarten do not perform as well in reading and mathematics, have weaker social skills, and have lower executive function. [lxxviii] Preschool is the ideal time to introduce children and families/caregivers to the importance of consistent on-time attendance and to encourage strong attendance habits. The Early and Often: Showing up in Preschool Matters 2.0 toolkit is designed to provide ideas and materials to help children and families/caregivers develop strong attendance routines from the outset of schooling. The Early Matters: Cultivating Engagement and Attendance in Kindergarten toolkit from Attendance Works is a guide for integrating attendance into key district, school and community practices designed to smooth the transition into and through kindergarten. It includes ideas and resources to help schools, preschools and community agencies reach families/caregivers with young children to promote kindergarten attendance. It offers strategies for welcoming and actively partnering with families/caregivers with the goal of making attendance and learning a priority during this important school year and ultimately influencing school success.

Students with any signs of illness need to stay home.

During COVID-19, school guidance asked families/caregivers to keep students home if there was any sign of illness. Guidance has since relaxed, but families/caregivers may be unaware of current recommendations. It can be challenging to communicate about school health policies. While schools and districts want students who are very sick to stay home so that they do not spread illness to others, it is important that students with minor symptoms still attend school when possible. Districts and schools can use multiple methods to communicate sick policies and make sure guidance is consistent across messengers and leaders. Attendance Works provides a series of health handouts that can help raise awareness of strategies and policies to keep students healthy, when students can attend school with minor symptoms, when anxiety might be an issue, and when they really need to stay home.

Closing

Despite Michigan's progress in improving attendance rates, far too many students are chronically absent. Let's work together to redouble our efforts to address attendance. By collaborating with our community partners and agencies, we can tackle the root causes of chronic absenteeism and ensure that all students have access to the resources they need to overcome barriers to attendance and fully engage in learning.

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