

Reducing Chronic Absence: Insights from Principals

October 27, 2021

Panelists

- **Hedy Chang**, Executive Director, Attendance Works
- **Armando Dueñas**, Principal, Addams Elementary School, Long Beach Unified School District, California
- **Andrea Walley**, School Leader/Principal, Cesar Chavez Academy Intermediate, Detroit, Michigan



Background



Hedy Chang
Executive Director
Attendance Works



About Attendance Works

Attendance Works advances student success and closes equity gaps by reducing chronic absence. Operating at the local, state, and national level, Attendance Works:

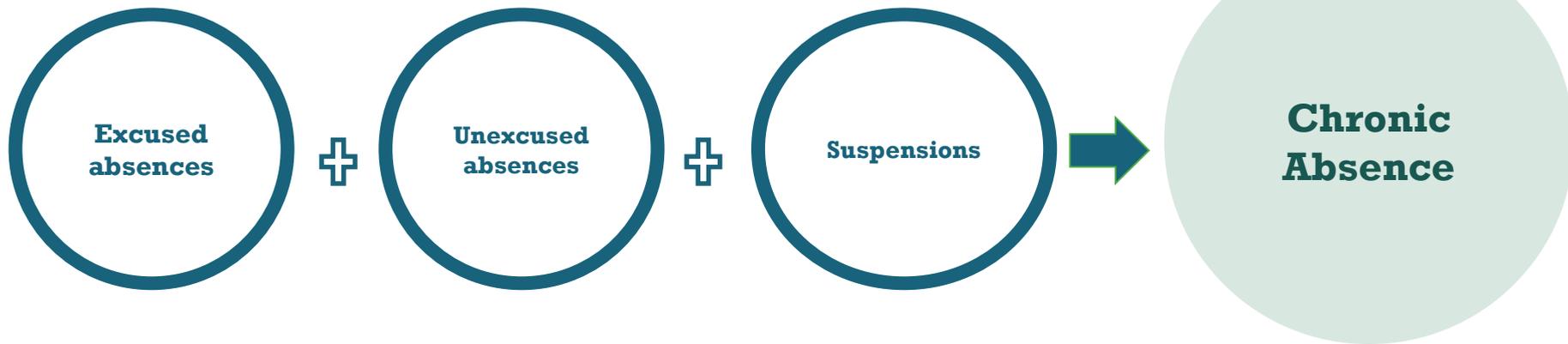
- Advances better **policy**
- Nurtures proven and promising **practice**
- Promotes meaningful and effective **communication**
- Catalyzes needed **research**

Since our launch in 2010, we have become the nation's "go-to" resource for improving student attendance. To learn more, visit our website: www.attendanceworks.org



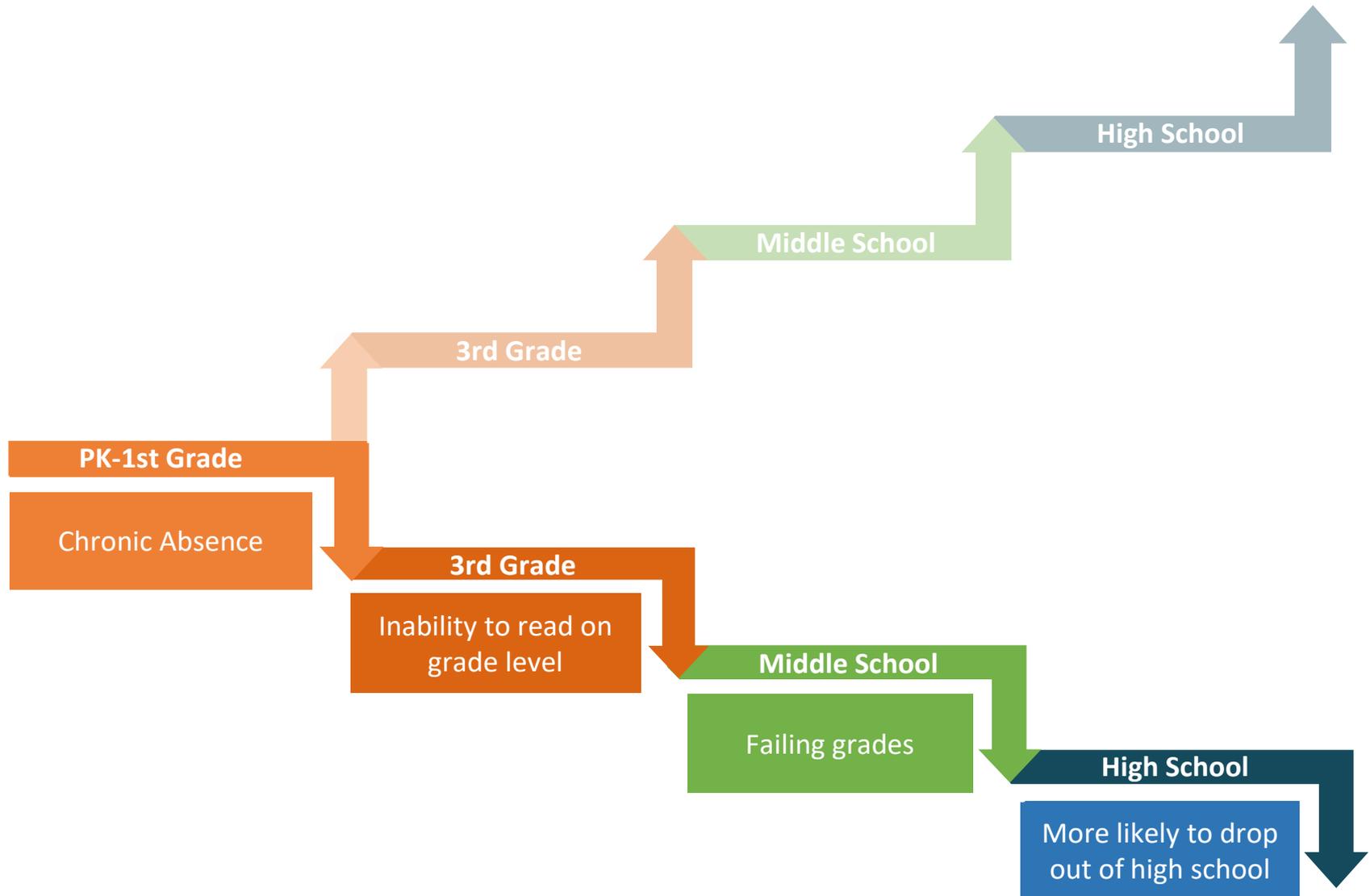
What is Chronic Absence?

Chronic absence is missing so much school for any reason that a student is academically at risk. To ensure it acts as an early warning sign, it has been defined as **missing 10% or more of school for any reason.**



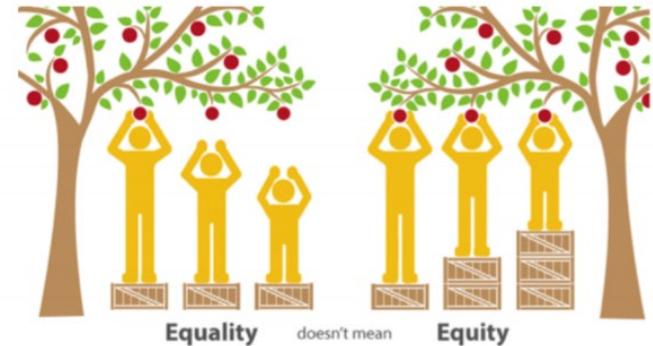
Chronic absence is different from **truancy** (unexcused absences only) or **average daily attendance** (how many students show up to school each day).

Why Chronic Absence Data Can Help: It signifies that students are academically at risk and need support





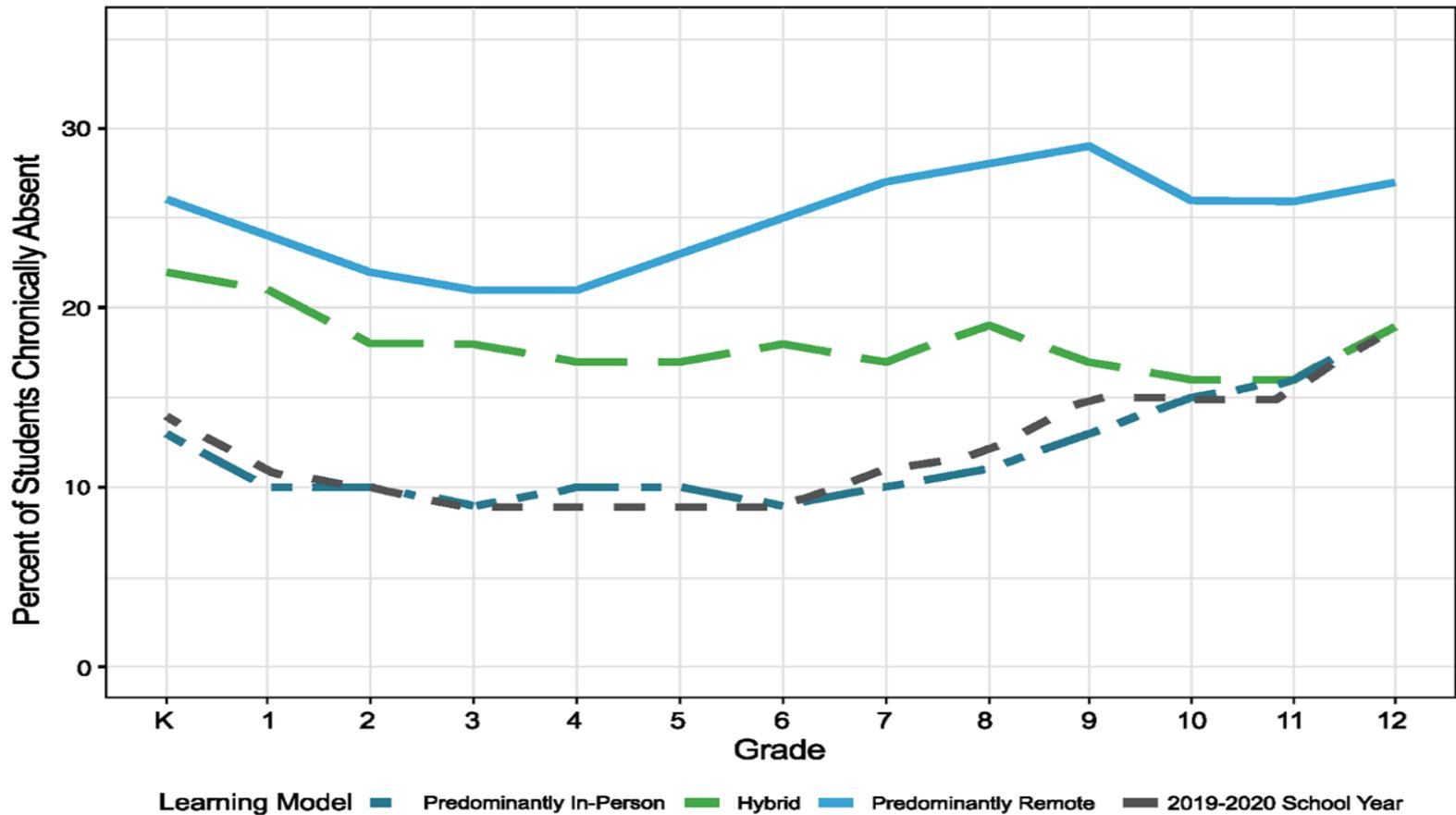
Chronic Absence Reflects Existing Equity Gaps



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

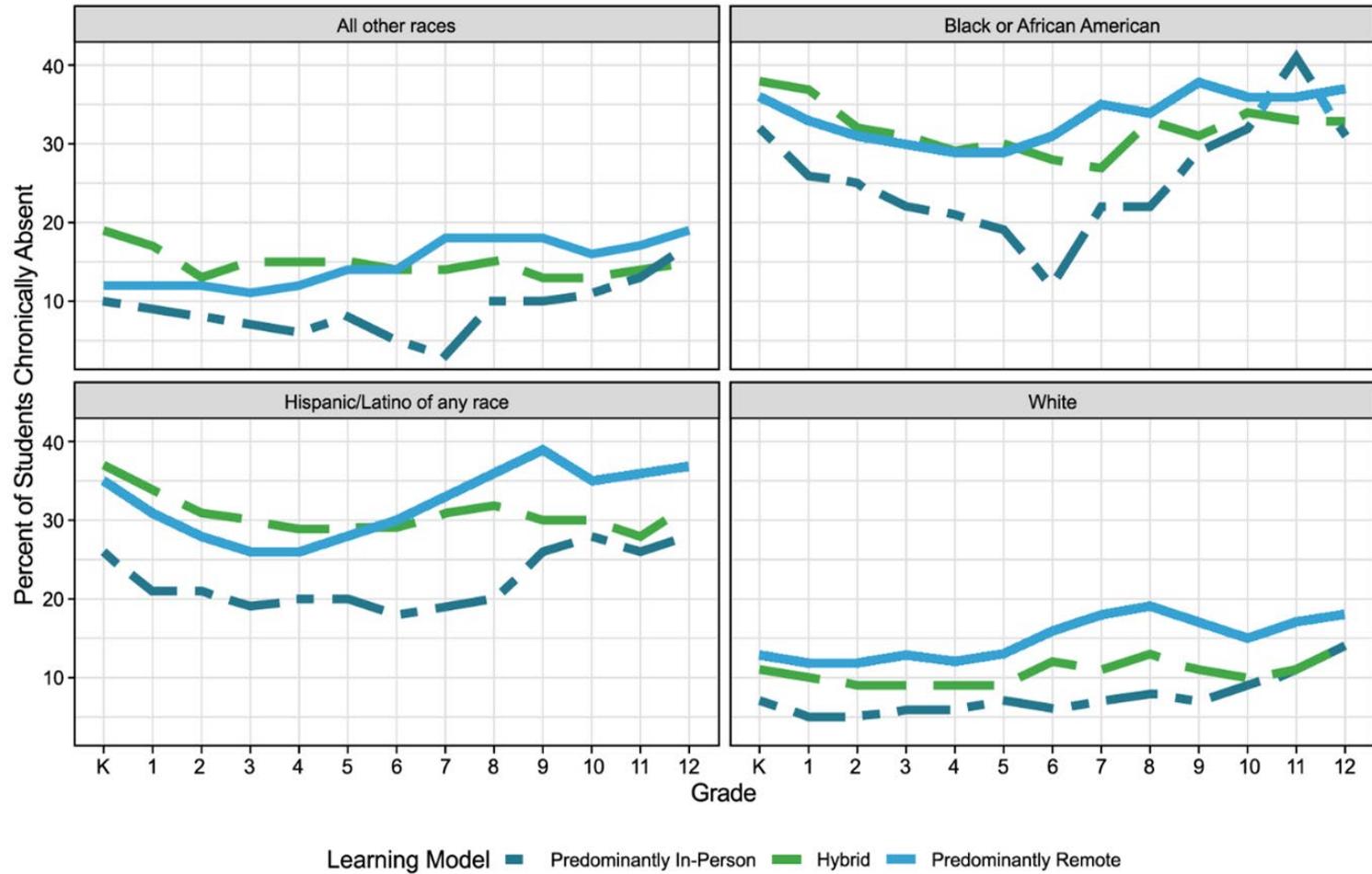
Data from CT shows chronic absence rose significantly last school year

Chronic absence by learning mode across grades in Connecticut for SY 2020-21



See: <https://www.attendanceworks.org/chronic-absence-patterns-and-prediction-during-covid-19-insights-from-connecticut/>

Racial Inequities Exacerbated by Covid-19



Attendance Challenges are Greater Than Ever

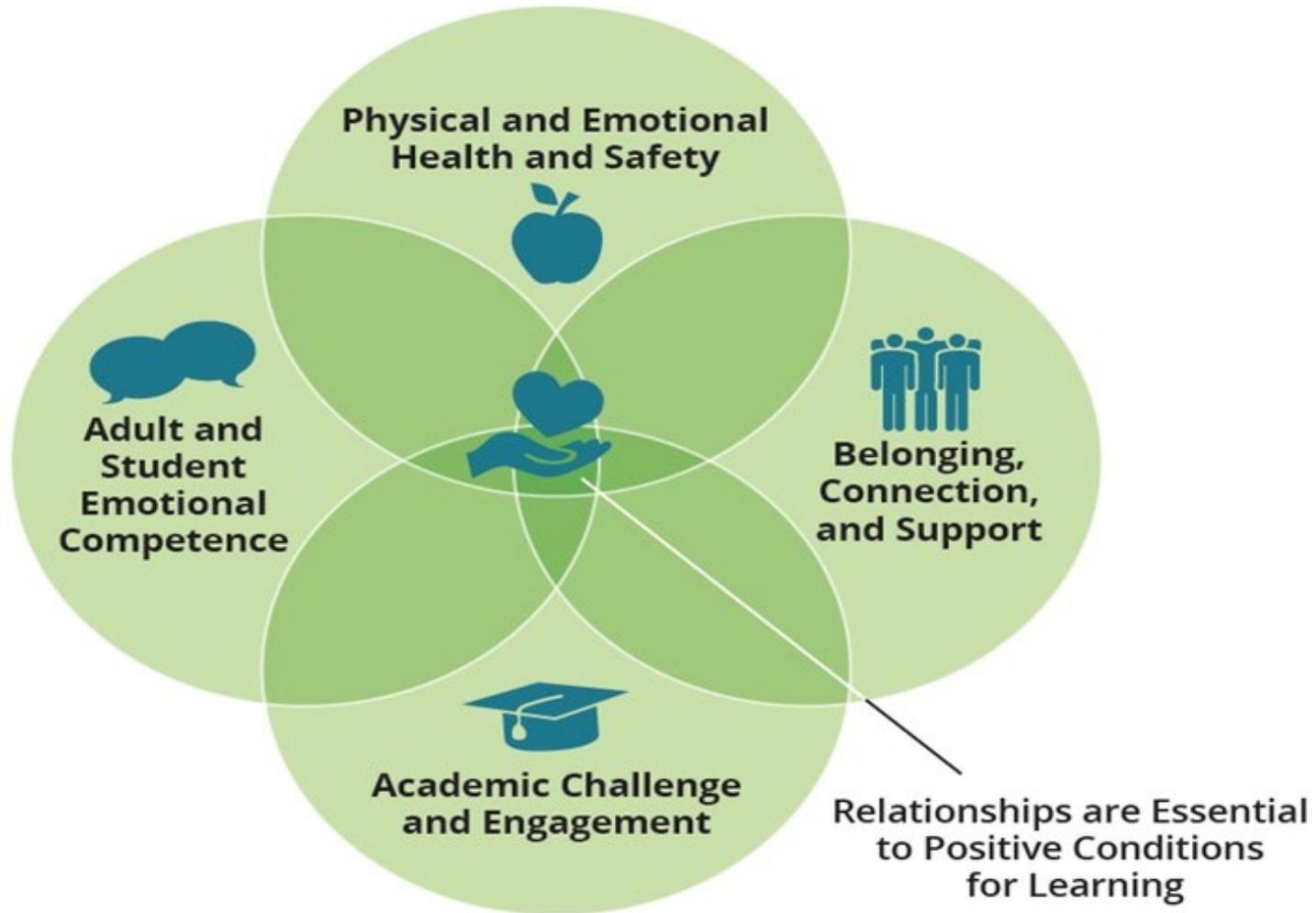
Chronic absence is higher this fall. The surge in Covid-19 cases, plus challenges related to returning to in-person school, is increasing the number of students who are absent.

Many young children have not participated in a formal in-person schooling experience whether preschool or kindergarten during the Covid -19 pandemic. Some did not enroll during the past year. Others have been chronically absent in preschool or K. Many students have primarily been participating in distance learning from their homes.

Getting into a regular routine of going to formal schooling can be challenging under normal circumstances and is more difficult given Covid-19. Families and children are feeling even more anxiety about the return to in person school given the health concerns, lack of vaccines for young children, as well as limited experiences with children spending time in the care of non-family members. The need to quarantine can easily disrupt routines.

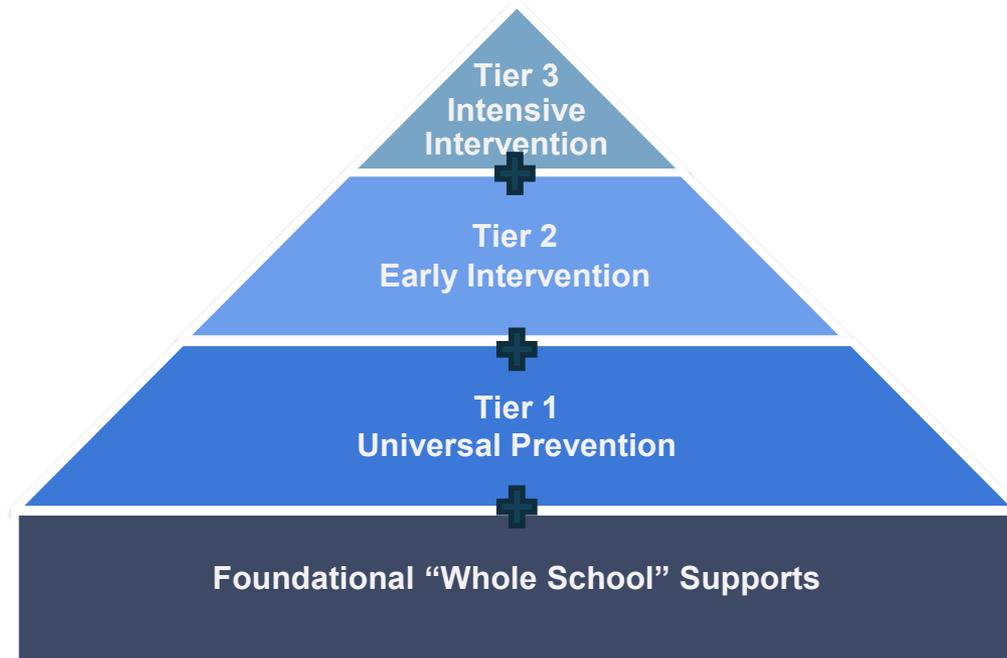
Many formal and informal support systems for families have been disrupted by Covid-19. Public transportation, for example, has been seriously reduced. Families may no longer have easy access to extended family members or neighbors who, prior to Covid, would have been willing to help with drop-off and pick up.

Reducing the Adverse Impact of Covid-19 Requires Ensuring Positive Conditions for Learning





When Tackling Absenteeism, Begin with Whole School and Prevention Strategies



<https://www.attendanceworks.org/chronic-absence/addressing-chronic-absence/3-tiers-of-intervention/>



Foundational Supports are Building Blocks of Schools that Promote Engagement

Healthy learning environments	Enrichment activities and clubs	Positive relationships	Active family and student engagement
Access to tech equipment and connectivity	Challenging and Engaging Curriculum	Traditions and celebrations	Support for families to facilitate learning at home
Welcoming, safe school climate	Advisories or Morning Meetings to Build Community	Learning Supports	Access to Food and Other Basic Needs

Foundational “Whole School” Supports



Principal Leadership Is Essential

Principals can:

1. **Cultivate** a schoolwide approach that supports prevention and early intervention
2. **Take a team approach** that draws upon the skills and assets of all school staff
3. **Develop staff capacity** to adopt effective practices
4. **Utilize data** in communications and decision-making on an on-going basis

Principal Panel



Armando Dueñas
Addams Elementary School,
Long Beach Unified School District, CA



Andrea Walley
Cesar Chavez Academy Intermediate,
Detroit, Michigan

About Addams Elementary School

students: 791

Grades Served: Tk-5

Ethnicity: 76% Hisp., 14% AA, 10% other

Homeless: 11%

Special Ed: 18%

ELL: 29%

FRPL: 23%

Chronic absence over time: 2018-2019: 11.70%;
2019-2020: 13.70 %; 2020-2021: 19.70%

About Cesar Chavez Intermediate

students: 432

Grades Served: 3-5

Ethnicity: 91% Hispanic; 2% African American,
2.5% White; 4% unidentified

English Language Learners: 73%

Special Education: 21%

Free and reduced meals: 98%

Chronic Absence Rate over time: 2018-2019:
25.5%; 2019-2020: 21.4%; 2020-2021: 38%

Questions

A) What have been your key strategies for addressing chronic absence? How have you had to adapt them to the pandemic?

Audience: What strategies have worked for you?
(Please share in the chat box.)

Questions

B) Which groups of students in your school have struggled the most with chronic absence? How have you had to adapt your approach to address their barriers and draw upon their strengths?

Audience: Who are the students/families struggling with chronic absence in your schools? Is it the same or different from Addams and Cesar Chavez?

(Please share in the chat box.)

Questions

C) How have you strengthened staff capacity to support attendance and engagement? Who's on your team? What helps you to lead this work?

Audience: Who works with the principal to address attendance in your schools?

(Please share in the chat box.)

Contact information

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Andrea Walley

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Resources

Getting Students to Show Up During Covid-19 with help from Attendance Works (includes profile of Cesar Chavez)

- <https://www.attendanceworks.org/getting-students-to-show-up-during-covid-19-with-help-from-attendance-works/>

All In Campaign / Long Beach Unified School District

- https://www.lbschools.net/Departments/Student_Support_Services/all-in.cfm

Pathways to Engagement: A Toolkit for Covid-19

- <https://www.attendanceworks.org/resources/toolkits/pathways-to-engagement-a-toolkit-for-covid-19-recovery-through-attendance/>

Attendance Works website

- <https://www.attendanceworks.org/>