

## TRANSCRIPT

## Keynote Address – Reducing Chronic Absence: Why Does It Matter? What Can We Do?

SPEAKER

Hedy Chang  
Director  
Attendance Works

EVENT TITLE

*Every Day Counts Policy Forum: Developing Utah Solutions to Increase Attendance and Improve Student Outcomes*

EVENT DATE

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So now I'm very pleased to introduce to you Dr. Hedy Chang, the Director of Attendance Works. And many of you remember Dr. Chang's remarkable remarks last year, and her dedicated work in the attendance for students in Utah, including that address last September. She is the go-to person when it comes to absenteeism around the country. People know of Hedy; they look to her, they look for Attendance [Works], and for all of the tools and available messages that they have on their website for communities, for parents, for schools, for districts; they have a lot of information there. She was named as White House Champion of Change—can you believe, she's named as the White House Champion of Change. She is also the mother of two school-aged sons who attend public school, and I can guarantee they attend regularly. And so I would like to thank Hedy for taking the time to join us today. Thank you so much.

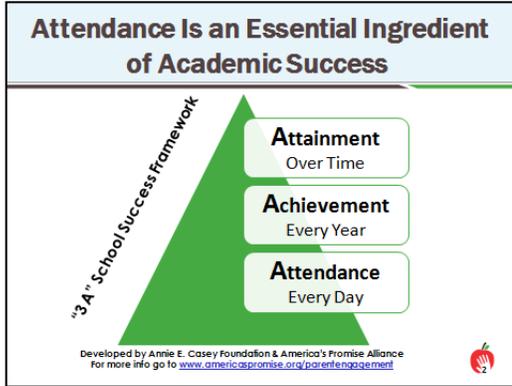
**[Applause]**

HEDY CHANG

It is such a pleasure to be here. You know, this work started a number of years ago, before I even created Attendance Works. But Utah has been a part of that journey with me. Both learning from Utah—I think the first one was when I came out for...with your UAN—Utah Afterschool Network. And so, one, it's such a pleasure to be able to work with a community over time, your state over time, because that is so essential to moving this. This is one of those pieces of work that, it may start off, not seem so fast, but if you keep at it, you'll see the momentum building, and I see the momentum building here.

I will say, I got into this work because Ralph Smith, who will be your lunch speaker, asked me to do a little consulting gig. And I had no idea that he was going to just be kind of making me the “excitable little shit” around attendance for the rest of my life. I'll have to give him a whole new level of credit for having impact on my life.

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Anyways, let me start with why this issue matters so much. And one of the things that we found is, it is funny how on one hand, this is so common sense. If kids aren't there, they can't benefit what's being taught in the classroom. On the other hand, I find over and over...my favorite was being on a call with a district where we were trying to say that we needed to have principals in the room to talk about the issue of attendance. And the person who was with the chief academic officer said to me, "Well, I don't know. We're prioritizing our principals' time for things that are really connected to teaching and learning." And I said, "Okay." And what I realized is, because people have been so kept accountable for test scores, because they've been seeing themselves so accountable for academic achievement, it's almost that we've lost sight of what gets us there over time. And we know that you have to have attendance every day, to get to achievement every year, in order to get attainment over time. And all of the research, including your own, demonstrates this fact. But somehow we have to reel it back, so people actually get this concept, because when they just go from the top they don't see it's relevant to teaching and learning.

**Improving Attendance Matters Because It Reflects:**

- Exposure to Language:** Starting in Pre-K, attendance equals exposure to language-rich environments, especially for low-income children.
- Time on Task in Class:** Students only benefit from classroom instruction if they are in class.
- On Track for Success:** Chronic absence is a proven early warning sign that a student is more likely to be behind in reading by 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, fail courses middle and high school, and ultimately drop out.
- College Readiness:** Attendance patterns predicts college enrollment and persistence.
- Engagement:** Attendance reflects engagement in learning.
- Effective Practice:** Schools, communities and families can improve attendance when they work together.

(For research, see: <http://www.attendanceworks.org/research/>)

So we know this matters for a whole bunch of things—exposure to language, time on task in the class, on track for success, college readiness, engagement, and effective practice. And I know Ralph will be coming, and you'll hear more from him, but I want to do a little exercise, so bear with me, and hopefully this will work. I think my voice is loud enough. I need three volunteers; okay. Don't jump all at once. And I need you to come up on the stage here. And I think we are good; I don't have to draft anyone. Thank you. So, Allen?

[Allen responds]

HEDY CHANG

If you want to stand over here. And then we have Scott, and then we have Dion. So Dion, Scott, and Allen are all in kindergarten. This is their first day of school. Yay!

**[Applause]**

HEDY CHANG

But Dion here...I'm going to ask Dion to do this very carefully. She never got to any kind of high-quality preschool or anything like that, so Dion, I need you to take eight small steps so you don't fall back off the stage, representing eight/nine months of learning, that she would have gotten had she gone to preschool. Scott, he went to preschool, but stuff happened—a little ways in, the car kind of had challenges; you know, things got unstable. So about after four months in, he stopped showing up regularly, and they said, "You know, we don't have enough preschool for all the kids, so we're going to give your preschool slot away to someone else." So, Scott, can you take four steps back, because you only got like partial benefit of preschool. But Allen, he's here, he is ready to learn, and they all got—because you guys have been investing in instruction and learning—great high-quality kindergarten teachers. So eight steps forward, and Allen gets to set the pace of equally high-quality kindergarten for everyone. We're cruising! But then what happened was, Dion here, she never got into the habit of going to school regularly. She didn't go to preschool; she actually missed two months altogether of kindergarten, which actually equated to about four months of lost learning time. Because it wasn't just the day she wasn't there; the next day she was actually kind of lost about what they were doing, because she missed out on the instruction. Four steps back, please.

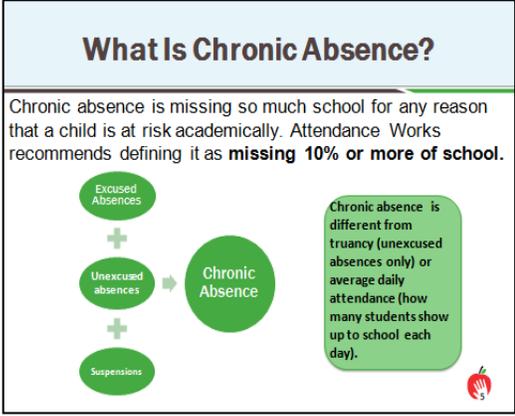
Scott here, he was a little better off, but he still missed about a month of school— two steps back. But Allen, he is doing great. And then we get to the summer months. And in the summer months, poor Dion. Her family didn't have much, they didn't have access to anything; she was just kind of hanging out, sometimes watching television. There was no language, couldn't even find in your community. Dion, can you take two steps back, because, you know, by the time you got back to first grade, you're actually farther behind than when she left kindergarten. Not quite as bad in Scott's case; with the little things he was doing, one step back. Allen here, he got into this great program at the library. So Allen actually arrived in school even farther ahead than when he left; one step further.

Now—and Allen's going to move this way, so he is aimed at the steps here—we all got into a great first-grade teacher; eight steps forward. All right, but then Dion was chronically absent *again*; two steps backwards. All right. Who's going to be reading at third grade? Allen. Thank you very much.

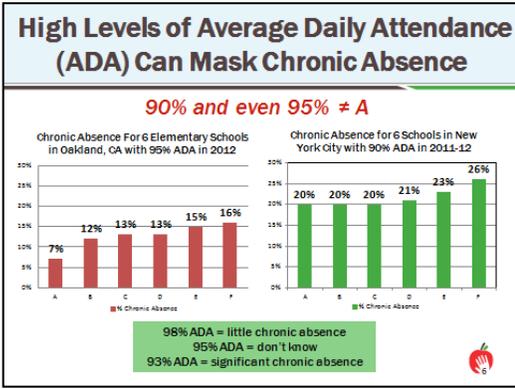
**[Applause]**

HEDY CHANG

When we think about our achievement gaps, this is a huge contributor to the kind of achievement gap that we see. So what do I mean by chronic absence?



What I mean by chronic absence, at least it's...broadly defined, it's missing too much school for any reason, whether it's excused absence, unexcused absence, or suspension. And this is different from truancy, which usually refers only to unexcused absences. And what we've been defining it, is missing 10% or more of the school year. We've been suggesting 10% because you can look at it any time during the school year. I don't want to...so in Maryland—Sue [Fothergill] is from Maryland—they look at chronic absence as missing 20 days. My worry is that people will think, if we're looking at it at 20 days, at 20 days then that's when we should take action. When if you're taking action at 20 days, we're in trouble already. Ten percent is just two days in the first month.

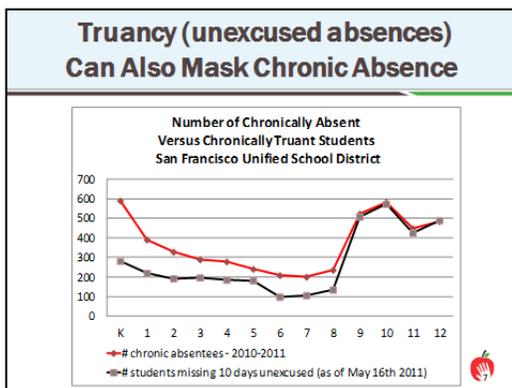


And this is different than average daily attendance, which can easily mask chronic absence. So most places have looked at average daily attendance. It's kind of how many kids are showing up every day to school. And by the way, I'm not suggesting that you should not still look at these attendance measures. I am suggesting you have to have multiple attendance measures. So if you have average daily attendance, what it tells you is how many kids are in that school that day; it gives you a sense of, well, how many desks do I need, given how many kids are typically going to show up. It can also tell you things like, hmm, that Tuesday before Thanksgiving break is really not...maybe we should just take the whole week off of Thanksgiving, because kids are kind of walking. Or if we're going to do incentives, we should do them on Fridays. Or we should do incentives in the morning so like, the kids don't go off to the coffee shop and hang out instead of coming to class, because they'll be recognized if they come to class. But what we know, though, about average daily attendance ...and how many of

you guys have picked this up on your way in? [holding up a copy of *Attendance and the Early Grades: A Two Generation Issue*] This is something Karen [Crompton]—Karen, stand up. Karen, you have an incredible resource here, and Voices for Utah Children did this. She actually has, for districts, average daily attendance and chronic absence rates. And you can see that, you know, you can have 93, 94% in a district, and have still a fair amount of kids who are chronically absent. And when you bring that down to the school level, I’ve seen—and this is what this school-level data—schools with 95% attendance and still 16% of their kids chronically absent.

Think about it this way: Assume you have a school of 200 kids, right? There are 10 empty seats; that’s 95% attendance. It is not typically the same 10 kids who are in those empty seats all year long, because then they would’ve never ever made it to school, right? The question is, who’s typically sitting in those 10 empty seats? One option is all 200 kids each miss nine days apiece, all year long. Has anyone been in a school where every kid in the school misses exactly the same number of days? I haven’t. Usually, you have some kids who miss none, some kids who miss a little, some kids who miss a lot. The question is, how big is the group of kids who miss a lot? You could have 50 kids, each who’ve missed 20 days; you still have absences left over for the rest of the kids. This is why we have to be using our data differently. I’m convinced that the reason we did average daily attendance was, in the beginning with average daily attendance we were taking...we were using paper-and-pencil ways of recording things.

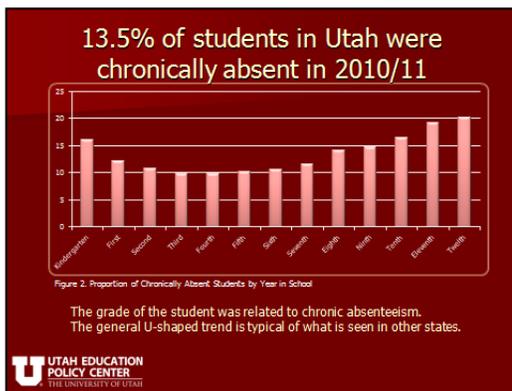
So, of course, the attendance clerk would say, “This is how many kids who showed up to my school this day.” But now we have student information systems. We can log this in for every kid; we can actually use our data in a different way. But I think student information systems are like my iPhone. We have a lot of capacity, and most of us haven’t a clue how to actually use the capacity on the iPhone. We haven’t even downloaded the app that allows us to crunch chronic absence data. We’ve got to get better at using our student information systems. We have the technology; we’re just not using it.



Truancy can also mask chronic absence, particularly among young kids. Look at the difference between the red line—this is in my own school district. This was when they first calculated chronic absence. The red line’s the kids who are chronically absent at that point in the school year. The black line were the kids who had missed 10 unexcused absences, which if I’m remembering right is how you guys calculate truancy here. Truancy is calculated different in

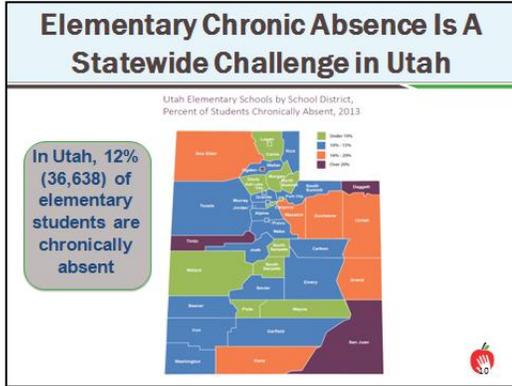
every single state in the country, so sometimes I have a hard time remembering. But 10 unexcused absences—look at the kindergarteners. Twice as many kids are at risk due to poor attendance when you look at chronic absence than if you looked at truancy. Because I guarantee you, five-year-olds are not sitting there thinking, “Hmm, I think I’ll skip school and not tell mom.”

There’s lots of reasons five-year-olds miss school. It can be health reasons, it can be transportation reasons, it can be family challenge issues, it can be that they are anxious about kindergarten, and they decide and they say they have a stomachache. But they’re not captured by unexcused absences. But if absences add up to too much time lost in classroom instruction, it’s a problem. So we know nationwide, it’s about 1 out of 10 kids; it’s about 1 out of 4 in some places. And we know that it’s a red flag for lots of academic challenges.



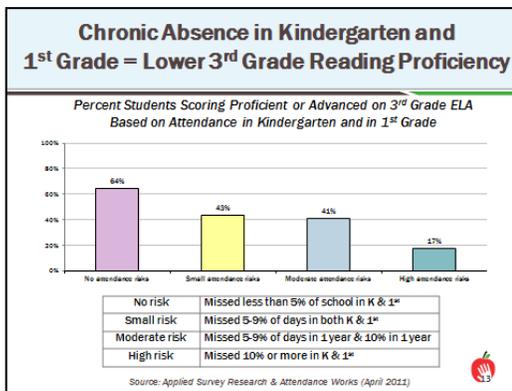
This is your own data. You are in Utah when you calculated it. Turn to the person next to you. What do you see when you look at this data? What do you notice? What surprises you—anything?

All right, we’re doing this as a quick dive. What do you see—someone, anyone? Okay, what’d you see, when you saw this? You can tell I’m a kind of audience participation girl. You guys got to help me out. Kindergarten rates, yeah, and people don’t notice it, right? Gets better, and then it gets worse. By the way, sometimes in district data—not state data—I see the top part go down, because the kids who are chronically absent get removed. But when you’re in state data, I think because you’re capturing the mobile kids, and you are still capturing kids going to alternative ed, I see it happen...go up more. This is one of the differences I see between looking at local, district, and state data, which is why there’s a real value in state data.



Here’s another, this is...again, if you guys want to look at it—this is Karen’s publication. And by the way, if you wanted to look at the high school, the other data, [holding up a copy of *Research Brief: Chronic Absenteeism*] Kristin put a...this is all the research that’s out there. A summary of the research that University of Utah did. What do you guys...turn to the person next to you again. What do you notice when you look at your state, and levels of chronic absence? This is elementary school.

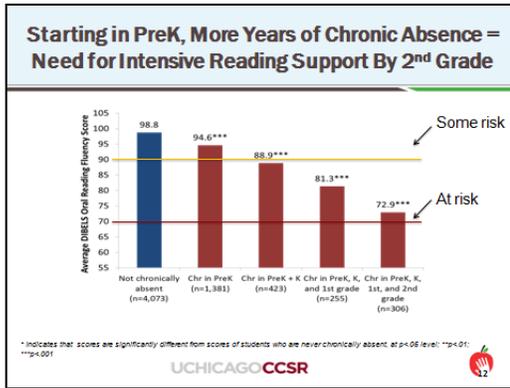
All right, so what do you see, when you notice this? What do you know about your state from this? [Audience comment] Rural. It’s all over the state, too, though. And I want to also just mention, this is elementary absences. It’s masking that you’re probably concentrated in kindergarten. I just want to make that point. Because by the time, you know, you get into third and fourth, it’s getting better. What’s making it a little higher is probably your kindergarten absenteeism. But this is really powerful information. And it *could* be...this is not in numbers, this is percentages...and this is something I know we’ve seen when we’ve looked and thought about both. In Maryland, for example, and in other places, which is that sometimes the percentages are really high in rural areas, but the numbers are small. The good thing about that is, is it’s a doable problem because, you know—it’s not too many kids. Sometimes you may have to think about the collaboration to get the resources and the agencies to be able to support schools around doing this. But knowing where this is, I think will help you then think about, how do I figure out what’s going on.



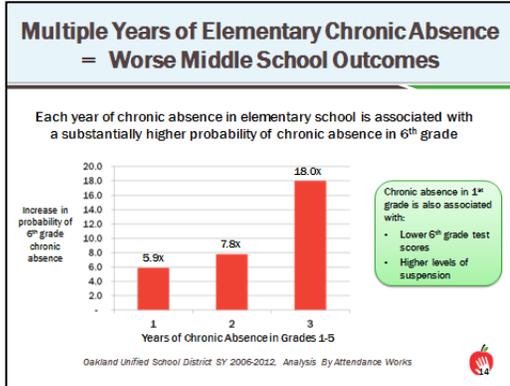
So why does this matter? So this is...Sydnee [Dickson] mentioned that Chicago has done some of the first research looking at chronic absence. This is, in my view, almost the chart version of

the walking exercise that we just did here. So this is kids who were chronically absent in pre-K. And for every year of chronic absence, it decreased their DIBELS score. If you are chronically absent in pre-K, K, 1, and second, by the time you're in second grade, you are in need of intensive intervention around reading scores. And by the way, kids who were chronically absent in pre-K were five times more likely to be chronically absent in K.

Baltimore research—because there's really only two places that have done this research so far—found that the one, the only thing that was a greater risk than being chronically absent in pre-K for being chronically absent in K, is if you didn't go to any kind of pre-K at all. And we know from—and this is all stuff that you have to track over time.



This is California data, where when we looked at 600-something kids, if they were chronically absent, both kindergarten and first, only 17% of them actually read at grade-level proficiency by the end of third grade. By contrast, kids who showed up 95% of the time, two-thirds of them were reading at grade level. I do want to point out, this shows attendance is sufficient, but not...is essential, but not sufficient. There is a third of the kids who showed up all the time who still weren't reading at grade level, so I'm not pretending that just getting there is all that there is; absolutely you need to do more. On the other hand, if they're not there in the first place, you know they're at risk, and we often don't have any other assessments that identify risk. But we do have attendance being taken from kindergarten and often even in pre-K that could help us know that kids are at risk.



This is data from Oakland, and we looked at first grade chronic absence, and we tracked what happened to those kids by the time they got to sixth grade. If they were chronically absent in first grade, they were six times more likely to be chronically absent in sixth grade; they had lower test scores and higher suspensions.

So one thing that we see is, sometimes it's almost an insidious impact. You are chronically absent in K and 1. By third grade, your attendance might have improved. But if your attendance was so bad in K and 1 that you're not reading in third grade, you can show up physically, and mentally you're not there because you can't actually read and follow what's going on in the classroom. By the time you're in middle school, you're now walking to school by yourself. But school may not be where you want to be, because you weren't very successful, or you're acting out to cover up the fact that you actually don't want to look like you're stupid in the classroom, right?

So, it's like, because we didn't intervene early enough, we end up with significant challenges. And our middle schools and our high schools now are having to do serious remediation to bring kids back up, and we lost the opportunity for more costly early preventive intervention.

### Student Achievement as Predicted by Chronic Absenteeism

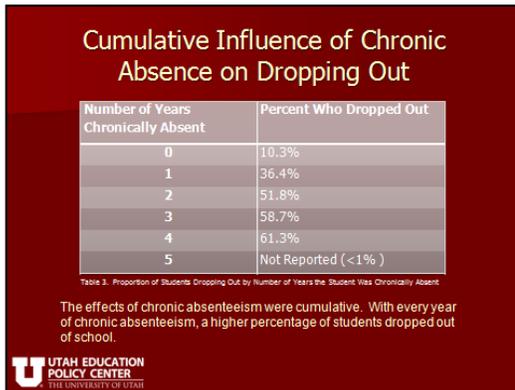
Outcome	Effect of Chronic Absence
Reading on grade level	Odds of being below grade level were 1.7 times higher
CRT Language	Decreased 3,798 points, on average
CRT Math	Decreased 5,861 points, on average
CRT Science	Decreased 4,850 points, on average
Cumulative GPA	Decreased .854 points, on average
Dropout	Odds of dropping out were 7.4 times higher

Table 1. Relationship between Chronic Absenteeism and Academic Outcome Variables

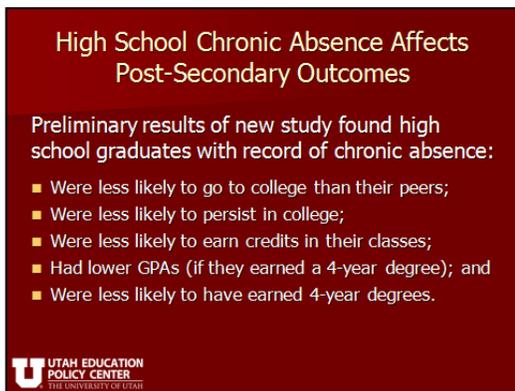
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What you all know from your own data in Utah is that chronic absence really predicts achievement. It predicts this in your reading level, it includes...it's in your science, it increases in your dropout. And I will say, the impacts—I think particularly on math and science—as you get older are greater, because these are scaffolded subjects. I can't tell you how happy I was as a parent when I realized in middle school, the key to my child doing well in algebra was not

me tutoring him in algebra, right? I...or my husband tutoring my child in algebra. None of that seem to work very well. What was key was that he would show up and have good classroom instruction. Now I will say, the other challenge of these scaffolded subjects is, if kids start to miss, it's harder and harder for them to catch up, because if you miss out on some of the basic principles, you're lost by the middle of the semester. So these are really key for these scaffolded subjects, for which we count on teachers to instruct our children.

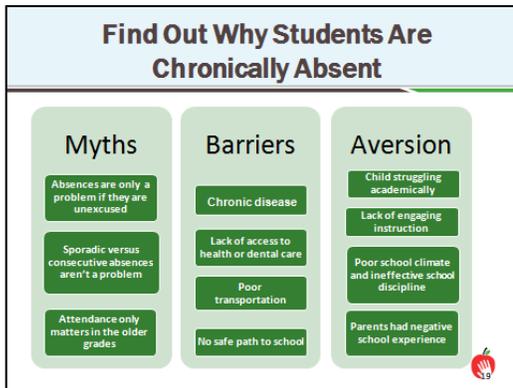


And we know that every year of chronic absence is a higher likelihood of dropout. Again, this is your own state's data. If kids had two years of chronic absence any time between 8th and 12th grade, 50% of them were dropping out. This is a really early warning sign. And it's not, by the way, that there aren't some kids who do okay in elementary or even in middle school, but they lose it in 9th grade. The transition to 9th was too hard. So this is one of those things you've got to monitor early and often and continuously, so that you can always prevent kids from missing too much school as soon as chronic absence starts to occur.



And you now have data, so you're the second state that I know of, because you have a more robust longitudinal student data system, and a willing researcher to take the numbers. So this...you guys are previewing not-yet-released data—I keep looking at Kristin [Swenson]; Kristin, wave so everyone knows who you are—that shows chronic absence. So, you know, this is one of those things. This is why businesses should care about this. This is why, actually, all of us who need a workforce should care. Because showing up—attendance—is actually a soft skill that we all need.

First of all, no one ever guarantees you great, exciting—I wish they could—instruction all the way through your college career. So, at some point, you need to learn to just show up and stick it out, right? And then later on, when you get to a job, you got to show up even if you don't like the job assignment you got that day. It doesn't mean you don't get to show up. But we also know this connects to all these college and career readiness goals that we have, because kids who were chronically absent were less likely to go on to college, less likely to persist, less likely to earn credits, have lower GPAs, and less likely to earn four-year degrees.



It all makes common sense; we just haven't been paying attention to what's before our very eyes, and that's not just Utah; that's this country as a whole. So the big question is, so what do we do about this? And the good news is, this is a solvable problem, especially when you have forums like this that bring schools, educators, and lots of different kinds of community partners together to solve this challenge. The key, though, to solving it is, first, not assuming we know why kids miss school, but taking the time at every level to unpack why might a child be missing so much school? Is it because absences are only a problem if they're unexcused?

There are a lot of absences that are happening or excused. So sometimes we think about...I think we have been thinking about attendance as a matter of compliance, both compliance with the law—are you complying with state compulsory ed? But as a parent, sometimes I think about it as an issue of permission. So I have a son, he's 16, he plays on the baseball team, and sometimes he has late games. If I said to my son, "Hey, you know, you were out late for a baseball game last night. It's okay; you're tired...school's really early. Just sleep in for your first class and then get to school later. I'm worried about you, honey." Is that okay? If it's from a permission perspective, because he didn't get off the bus, and then—okay, I'm picking on Joel [Coleman] now—and then go to this coffee shop and not tell me. But I know he's home; but that's not the issue. The issue is, he lost instructional time that I, as a parent, and particularly if I'm a low-income parent, don't have the resources to make up for.

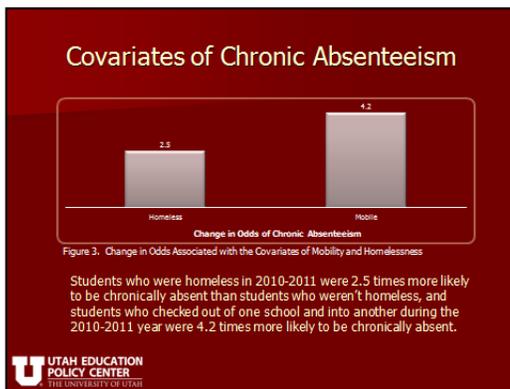
Or is it that we think it's only the consecutive absences, not the sporadic ones, that matter? Or we think—and we know this from...the Ad Council's done great research, you know, where parents will say, "Yeah, I know it matters in middle and high school, but elementary school?" And yes, it does matter in elementary school.

Or it is these barriers of chronic disease, lack of access to health or dental care, poor transportation, a lack of safe path? Or is it aversion, because kids are struggling academically?

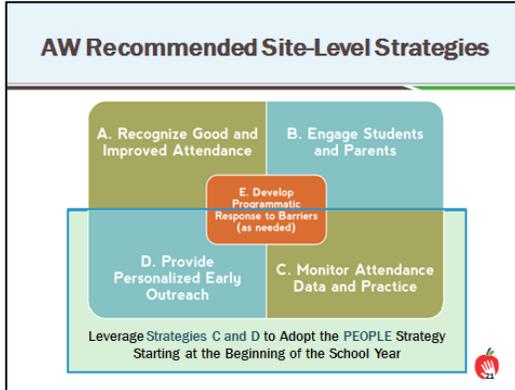
Or, in fact—and I’ve seen this happen, too—there’s such poor instruction, the kids don’t want to show up to class. Or you have such screwed-up school discipline practices that...and, you know, this is what I think particularly...I’ve seen it happen both ways. Among older kids, if they get suspended and they don’t think it was fair, guess what? The day they are supposed to come back, they don’t come back. “I’ll show you.”

And then I hear, and this is where...I was hearing a recent story of someone who was telling me—this is where the collusion is, around...sometimes where these connect. So with parents who have kids who are sort of acting out, and there is not an understanding of what’s going on, if they think that’s going to happen they’ll keep their kid home, rather than their kid...be called so that their kid...they’re asked to come to the school to bring them home. And I was actually talking to someone who was saying that she was seeing some parents whose kids, after they were giving them asthma meds, were kind of wiggled out by the asthma meds, so then they didn’t send them to school the day that they had to take the asthma med, and then the day after, because they were waiting till their kid calmed down. But now we’ve got two days missed of instruction, and then you wonder about their access to health care, the access to supports in the school, so that the kid doesn’t miss so much time.

We can, by the way, use data. Once we know where the chronic absence is, once you know which districts, once you know which schools, once you know what kids, you can talk to kids and families to figure out what’s going on. And you have to talk to them, because your solutions to these different issues—I’m going to pick the issue of asthma again—aren’t the same. You know, if my kid has asthma, even though if I know absences can add up, unless I know I’m comfortable with what’s going to happen around addressing my kid’s asthma issue, I won’t take him to school. So we have to really unpack these reasons to come up with good solutions.



We do know that homelessness, mobility, are key issues; these are particularly here in Utah, but we know that this is true elsewhere. The good news, though, is we feel like this is a role that Attendance Works has been able to play, which is, we get to go across the country and find out, “Well, what is really working to turn chronic absence around?”



And what we have seen is, when at the school-site level you put in place these ingredients, we've seen chronic absence turn around. Often you'll see the indicators within a first semester, and usually the indicators are then proven by the end of the year. I have to say, I don't know very many educational indicators that you can turn around and start to see evidence of success within a semester and within a year. But you take attendance—you actually can see some success within a day, because the question is, did the kids show up the next day? You'll know whether that's working or not, and you can use it for self-correction.

But here are the things that we support, or we found that works: you've got to recognize good and improved attendance. And by the way, this is *not* perfect attendance, though it's fine to recognize perfect attendance. The problem is the kids you most want to improve, if you just recognize perfect attendance for the semester, they're out of the game within the first two weeks. So you can do perfect attendance for every week. And I will tell you my other hidden agenda around the attendance incentives: not only does it build a culture of attendance, not only does it get kids excited about this, but it helps to improve data accuracy. Because my belief is that the kids will help keep the teachers honest. Because, you know, it's hard. You've got all these kids coming in, kids comes in late; but, you know what, if...I'm now going to pick on McKell. If McKell gets the perfect attendance award and Lori, who's sitting next to him, knows that McKell actually missed a day and she was actually there, I bet Lori would call on me as a teacher to say, "Hey, why is he getting the reward? I should be getting the reward," right? And I have faith in kids in making sure that we as adults stay honest in tracking this data.

We also need to engage kids and families, because kids and families have to play a role in improving this; they have to understand that absences add up. By the way, one of the things—there's a high school survey, and in the high school survey, this was...Get Schooled did. They said one of the things is that kids in high school said their parents didn't know their attendance. Parents sometimes, by the time kids are in high school, I think we feel like we can't control them, when we actually still have a lot of influence. They still are noticing, even if they're not acknowledging very much, that we are noticing whether they are showing up, whether we're following up.

But at the same time, you can use students themselves to help each other. I know someone who was an afterschool provider, who has this texting club. So she texts one kid, the kid texts—it's like a texting phone tree—another kid, and then the whole group of the 15 kids meet at the

corner store and walk to school together, and they make sure they get up on time. I mean, by the time you're in middle and high school, you need your kids, they have to...this is adult behavior. They've got to get up and going. We can help involve them in moving this; or walking school buses, where families are helping each other.

They can help to support this, and in San Francisco where we have a walking school bus, they used that as the opportunity in saying, "We have to have a walking school bus, because parents in our community...do you know that one of the reasons why kids aren't in school? Why we need to do this? It's because it matters so much whether kids are in school every day."

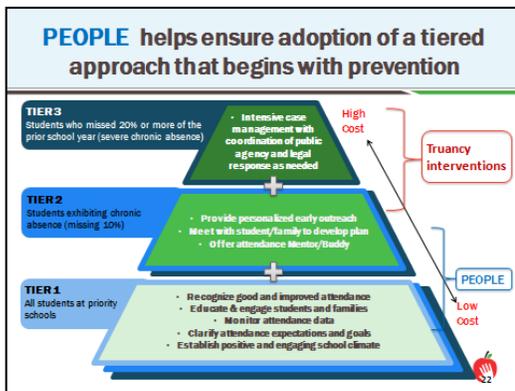
We have to have personalized early outreach, where we use data, starting with the first month of school or even sooner, to figure out who's on track for chronic absence, so that we can reach out before they miss too much time in the classroom. We have to be looking at our attendance data and practice, both at an individual level, but also because sometimes it's not just an individual problem; it actually requires a programmatic solution. So if you find, for example, that kids...there was one, just a school that we know of, when they interviewed all the parents, they found that the problem was the parents were working the night shift, so parents were falling asleep before they could get their kids to school the next morning. So what they did was create a before-school breakfast program, where parents could—timed with the night shift—so parents could drop their kids off to school before they went back exhausted and fell to sleep. That solution works for like 15 kids then. Much easier than trying to do an individual solution for each one of the kids whose parents has a night shift, right?

I don't know what the issues are, but when you...and you can also detect, by the way...in Oakland, California, they started looking at chronic absence by classroom. And one time when I looked at the data—a couple different times—one time we looked at the data, and I talked to the principal, and she said, "Oh, I think that's a classroom where I think we have mold in the classroom." And I'm like, "Well there's...I think you know what to do." Another time a parent said, "You know, this is the classroom where—and it was a second grade classroom—where there's all this bullying happening, and all the other kids in the classroom are calling in sick." Clearly, something was going on beyond—and might have been even normally a good teacher—but something was going on, and she needed some support. Another time the parent liaisons told me—the classroom was a kindergarten one—"That's the one all the parents dread their kids ending up in." So when you get the data, whether it's by school, by classroom, by neighborhood, it allows you to figure out what are the...talk to people about what are the issues, and figure out what your solutions are.

### Priority Early Outreach for Positive Linkages and Engagement (PEOPLE)

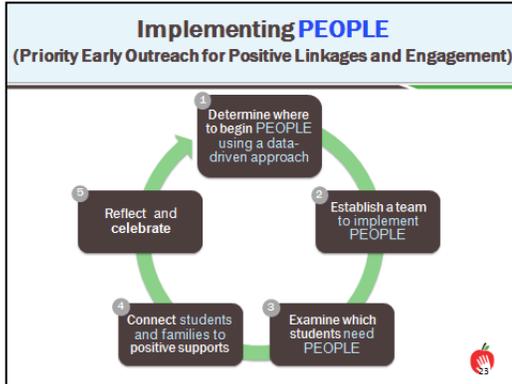
- **Priority:** Focuses on at-risk students in grades, schools and neighborhoods with high levels of chronic absence.
- **Early:** Begins with the start of school.
- **Outreach:** Connects to students and families.
- **Positive:** Promotes preventive, supportive approaches rather than punitive responses.
- **Linkages:** Taps the full community for support.
- **Engagement:** Motivates showing up to class & offers students & families a role in improving attendance.

So we also have a proposal of what we’re seeing, based on looking at best practice across the country and what we think works. And it’s reducing chronic absence through PEOPLE. And we do mean *people*, and we mean people in this way: **People = ...Priority:** focus on at-risk students in grades, schools, and neighborhoods with high levels of chronic absence. **Early:** begins with the start of school, whether we’re talking the start of a school career or the start of the school year. It’s **outreach:** it connects to students and families; you’re not waiting for them, or for the issue to come up before reaching out to them. It’s **positive:** it’s prevention and supportive approaches, rather than punitive responses. It’s **linkages**, because we’re tapping the whole community, like that we have here, to help get this in place. And it’s **engagement**; we want to motivate kids to show up, and also help them play a role themselves in improving attendance.



This is about...are you guys doing any kind of tiered intervention supports here? PBIS, RTI, your public health model, your favorite model of tiered intervention? This all works with this; I’m not asking you to do something new. I’m asking you to add this into these tiered supports that you’re already thinking. We need to have a Tier 1, which is just the education of recognizing good and improved attendance, monitoring, clarifying your expectations. If that does not work, then you might need to have more personalized early outreach—creating plans, having an attendance buddy. We should only be using courts as a very last resort, because anything that involves lawyers is really expensive. And if the courts get overwhelmed, they actually can’t do a good job of the intensive cases that they do have and we need them to take care of. But the problem in this country is we have not been investing in the bottom two tiers. We wait till it

gets so bad, partly because you're using truancy, which is now only identifying kids after they have entrenched habits of poor attendance in place.



So this is just a system for doing it. You've got to figure out where you want to do this; you don't have to start everywhere. You want to create a team, because you need a team to implement this. You've got to figure out which kids; you've got to figure out which supports; you've got to reflect, learn, and celebrate so that you can do this better the next time.

**Use Data to Identify Where to Begin Implementation Within a District or School**

**Proposed Criteria:**

- Significant number of low-income students
- Elevated chronic absence rates especially in transitional grades (e.g., K/1, 6<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> grades)
- School leadership committed to making attendance a priority and adopting recommended practices and working with priority outreach list
- Community partners that can help support the work

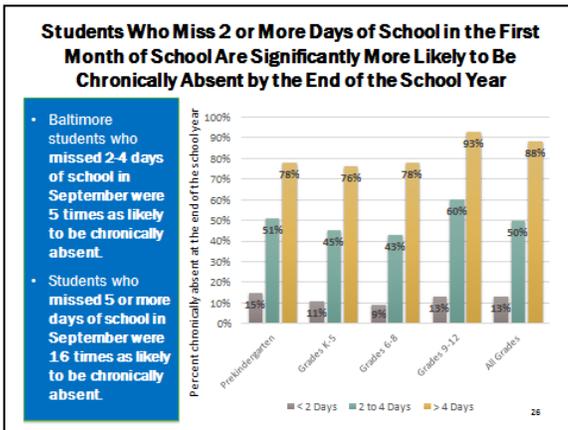
You can use data; you can look at, where do I have low-income kids? Chronic absence is almost always higher in low-income areas. You might not start everywhere; you might start with the key grades, like kindergarten or ninth grade, where there are elevated rates. You need school leadership. I know, Ann [White], that you're thinking about a convening later in the year; I can't tell you how important. I've never been to a school with lower levels of chronic absence, without a school site administrator who really got this and supported this. To do a whole—that kind of pyramid—means you have a school site administrator who is letting everyone know—every teacher, every classified staff person, everyone there—know, this is all our business. If you bring in a social worker, and everyone thinks the social worker is going to take care of the attendance issue, you're done, because the problems are too many. A single person cannot do this; it's a team approach. And you need community partners. Because this is not just what schools alone do; it's what schools do in partnership with community.

### Criteria for Identifying Priority Students for Tier 2 Supports

- Chronic absence (missed 10% or more of school) in the prior year, assuming data is available.
- And/or during the beginning of the school year, student has:
  - In first 2 weeks: 2 absences
  - In first month (4 weeks): 2-3 absences
  - In first 2 months (8 weeks): 4 absences



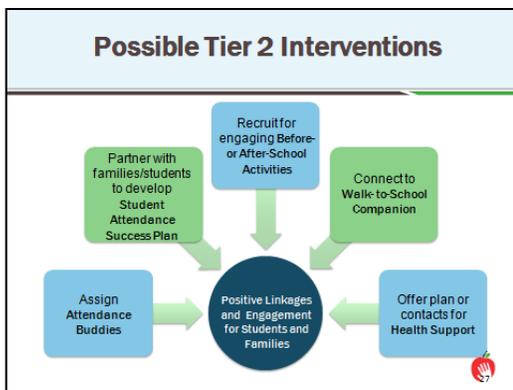
But what we now also know is, that as you think about that next tier, you can use your data. This is the epitome of data-driven school reform. Because we know, one, that prior-year chronic absence is a huge predictor of next-year chronic absence. Maybe there are a few kids who escape it on their own, but it's a pretty high risk factor. In fact, it's a bigger risk than ethnicity, than income, than any other demographic factor, because there are kids of every demographic who get themselves to school. The biggest risk of not getting to school is that you didn't get to school in the past. But what is really interesting, I think that gives a new way of thinking about this, is that we now have research that shows the attendance you have in the very first month of school puts you at risk for the entire year.



So in Baltimore—and Sue [Fothergill] helped advocate for this with the Baltimore Education Research Consortium—this is why it's wonderful to have universities in your mix. They took a look, and they found 90% of the kids who missed over four days went on to be chronically absent for the remainder of the year. They missed, on average, 70 days of school. Kids who missed between two and four days missed on average 45 days of school.

Half the kids—not all of them, but half the kids who missed two or more days of school in September went on to be chronically absent for the remainder of the year. There may be other kids who show up later in the year, but we can know who we need to get by the first month of school data. And the kids who missed less than two days, by and large, were okay. If you don't have enough resources to talk to every single kid, use your data to figure out which kids.

And what we believe is, this is *the* moment to do the most positive engagement you can think of. Can you assign an attendance buddy? In New York City, they have these success mentors. Success mentors were either folks who were experienced Corps volunteers, City Year volunteers; they were also high school seniors being success mentors for freshmen; they were also school staff who took on a handful of kids. And what a success mentor would do is, every day, would say, “Michael, I’m so glad you’re here in the school.” And if Michael wasn’t there, I would call his mom; say, “What’s going on, can I help you?” And then I would connect Michael and his family to resources. I don’t have to do the resources; I just have to connect them to resources. I would also help to celebrate; make sure that everyone was celebrating. That simple intervention got kids in New York City to attend nine more days of school, on average. Those kids were more likely to be retained three years later. Those same kids were more likely to stay at C’s and not go to D’s. I will say, they were part of a school attendance team, where there was principal leadership and buy-in supporting them. Because sometimes when you detect an issue, it’s beyond, you know, what a City Year Corps member can help with. But that intervention is not that expensive; these are volunteers, whether they were the in-school or the seniors. This is all volunteer work. It’s within a comprehensive approach; but, boy, does it help.



You can have student attendance success plans; this is something we have, where we have this whole thing where you can set goals. And we have this thing on our student attendance—you’d benefit from our website—has these circles where you try to get everyone to figure out who’s their help bank for getting your kid to school, so everyone has a back-up plan. You don’t come up with a back-up plan the day your car has a problem. You have a back-up plan before your car has a problem, so that you know who to call when it does, so your kid still gets to school.

You guys have such a rich history, and a rich network of afterschool providers in the state; it is one of your phenomenal strengths. Where is Lisa [Wisham]? Lisa, where are you? Over there; you know, and your afterschool providers have been thinking about this issue of attendance for several years now. But afterschool programs, in Utah like other places, they don’t serve all the kids. The question is, are they serving the kids who are most at risk? You could be using your attendance data to figure out afterschool, out-of-school time, even your summer programs—who most needs extra time on task? Are we making...and the problem is that sometimes the kids who are chronically absent are the families whose challenges in their family are so that

they don't actually become the first to sign up for a program. So to get them to sign up means you have to do extra outreach.

You can have walk-to-school companions if that makes sense. Or maybe it's carpool companions, if you're in a rural area and you gotta figure out rural distance issues. And if kids come in, and you look at that kid who's chronically, or starting, just having one or two days, and you realize they have a health issue, make sure that the family isn't wondering what happens when their kid comes to school, but the school's reached out and said, "This is our plan for making sure your kid can be healthy, be safe, and learn at the same time."



We see these ingredients as the things that make success possible at a systems level. You have positive messaging. We're not telling them, "Get your kid to school or we're going to arrest you." I just don't think that motivates anyone. We have actionable data, and you do have data in your state data system that you're starting to use. That idea of a governor's report card, and that you guys are going to include that; that is phenomenal. That actually is a model for the country. So I can't wait till you guys have it. I think it's, for me, the first time I've heard of a governor calling for that. So, you know, we'll be exporting that idea as soon as we can. Capacity building—the thing though is, once you have the data out there, you gotta get people to understand how to use it. Because one of the problems is, often when they see kids are not showing up to school, the immediate reaction is to blame parents; that is the knee-jerk reaction. When at...this is the moment at which we have to engage parents, and not push them away from school, but bring them and draw them into school. People have to be trained to be able to do that, so that they don't just go into a blame game. Because blaming folks is not going to get us anywhere. This is about all of us taking collective responsibility, and it is shared responsibility about how we get kids to school.

It has to start with districts, because the districts are taking the data, tracking it. And then you have to have your community partners there. And when you bring your community partners there, that's when you can form the partnerships that allow you to address whether it's transportation, health, homelessness—those issues that, in fact, do require community partnerships to address.

**Potential Implications for Policy and Action**

5. **Ensure Chronic Absence Is Addressed and Engaged as Part of School Improvement.**
6. **Support Capacity Building to Ensure Everyone Understands Data and Best Practices.**
7. **Use For Interagency Resource Allocation and Coordination: Encourage Joint Review of Chronic Absence Data to Inform Resources Allocation and Policy Development.**



So here’s just some thoughts that we have about our...what are implications for action. You can build public awareness about chronic absence and why it matters. You can ensure a standard approach to reporting on absences, making sure that everyone has the same way, so that if I’m comparing chronic absence in Ogden versus Salt Lake City, at least I know that I’m kind of comparing apples and apples, right? You want to calculate it in a similar way across districts, and I think that’s starting to happen, but you know, this is a place where...lots of places don’t have—especially with local control—don’t always have...you can bubble this up, but I think having some common consensus, so that you can compare what happens. You want to publicly report it, which sounds like you guys are already moving. You want to encourage real-time data reports to families. And by the way, when you do those real-time data reports, you’re going to have to educate families, too. Families don’t understand just missing two days the first month of school could be a problem, right? It doesn’t sound like very much. So this is why the awareness building and the education have to go hand in hand, along with engagement of families, and talking about what could be going on.

**Potential Implications for Policy and Action**

1. **Build Public Awareness About Chronic Absence and Why It Matters.**
2. **Ensure Standard Approach to Reporting Absences and Calculating Chronic Absence Across Districts.**
3. **Publically Report Chronic Absence by District, School, Grade and Subgroup.**
4. **Encourage Real-Time Data Reports to Families and Engagement When Absences Add Up.**



I’m always struck by the fact we don’t as a country require schools to look at chronic absence as part of school improvement. It is not part of...many places don’t have this. But I have to say, to me, if you’re going to improve the educational outcomes for kids in schools, don’t you want to know whether the problem is kids are showing up but they’re not learning, or kids are *not* showing up, so they can’t even benefit from what you’re offering in the classroom? Because those seem to me to involve different kinds of solutions. And it’s hard to get to better outcomes unless we know why kids aren’t learning.

So, that capacity building is something I know there's commitment to; it takes time, it's going to take...you know, there is so much confusion about attendance. But it's really worth doing, because it's when that capacity is in place that folks implement with fidelity the kinds of ideas that I talked about before. And this is the moment for interagency coordination. As you have preschool expansion, where do you put preschool? If you have afterschool expansion, if you have healthcare, where do you put these? You can use chronic absence as a data point to think about, where can you maximize opportunities for learning and make sure that education truly is the kind of pathway out of poverty that we all need and want it to be. Thank you.