

A primary goal of the Illinois MTSS Network is to provide research-based professional learning and coaching to assist school districts in building educators' capacity and confidence in implementing a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS). The purpose of this dialogue guide is to support conversations around best practices for increasing student attendance to improve equity in student outcomes.

Why Attendance Is Important

- Absences add up. Missing just 2 days a month means a student misses 10% of the school year. At every age, students who miss more school than their peers are more likely to have lower academic outcomes and delayed development of crucial social skills needed for success.
- Attendance is an issue of equity and access to learning and support. Economically disadvantaged students and families, racial/ethnic minority students and students with disabilities are disproportionately affected.
- Chronic absence (missing 10% of school or more for any reason, excused, unexcused or suspensions) is a red flag that students are at risk for a number of negative outcomes, even into adulthood.
- Students are more likely to attend school if they feel safe, connected and supported. Poor attendance can be an indicator of other issues in your system. A strong MTSS system helps schools tailor solutions to address the underlying challenges.

Best Practices

- Leverage your MTSS to include and support attendance by developing Early Warning Systems so problems can be prevented or minimized. e.g., What will the school provide to all students (Tier 1), those who struggle with attendance (Tier 2) and those in need of intensive support to improve/maintain attendance (Tier 3)?
- Include intentional steps during problem-solving to check for biases before assigning blame to the student and/or their families.
- Operate from a year-long attendance plan that includes regular data reviews (e.g., weekly, monthly, quarterly) and guarantees preventive and responsive action steps so

the work is timely, intentional and consistent. Your data could reflect certain times/places when attendance dips so be proactive!

- Promote and model a positive school culture around attendance. Recognize, celebrate and reward good (not perfect) and improved attendance. Perhaps, offer attendance recognition for short periods of time to improve a sense of success and progress. Students who struggle the most will soon be left out of perfect attendance awards.
- Attendance needs are often a result of mental health, social emotional or behavior needs, consider including it in the school's behavior infrastructure. This will ensure attendance processes are in place at all tiers.
- Use clear and consistent two-way communication and engagement - Share expectations and available school and community supports with students, families and staff.

Guiding Questions

- What process do you use to analyze attendance data? What is the frequency?
- What attendance data do you currently have available?
 - a. What other data might you need? e.g., Perception Data, Mobility Data, Stakeholder Voice, Data By Student groups/Equity & Access Analysis
- Who reviews/analyzes the data?
 - a. Who else might be important to participate in review/analysis?
- How could you include attendance as one component of a comprehensive approach to school improvement?

Resources:

- Attendance Works- <https://www.attendanceworks.org/>
- Attendance Playbook- <https://www.future-ed.org/attendance-playbook/>

For More Information:

- Dr. Markeda Newell videos on Culturally Responsive Problem Solving-
 - part 1 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Obox5XgAGw>
 - Part 2 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rAV014dQD68>