Attendance
Strategy Guide 2.1

Strategy Vision and Description

In this guide, we define an Attendance Intervention System as a comprehensive, school-wide system that models and promotes school attendance while supporting students and families through a layered continuum of interventions. While the Attendance Intervention System is a subset of the Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS), this strategy guide focuses specifically on processes, data and interventions around attendance.

Research has shown that the following components support effective attendance intervention systems. It is important to note that while there is evidence to demonstrate the effectiveness of each component, these components are most effective when implemented together. The following components are derived from various articles and research that articulate what an Attendance Intervention System should include:

1. **Infrastructure to Collect and Analyze Data**
2. **Partnerships to Support Family and Community Involvement**
3. **Development and Implementation of Tiered Strategies**

Evidence Base

ESSA defines levels of research based on the quality of the study (Levels 1-4). CDE requires that schools and districts identify the research base for strategies that they select for their Unified Improvement Plans, and for applications for school improvement funds in the EASI application.

The research on **Attendance** that is cited here meets the threshold for **ESSA Level 1-3**.

Necessary Preconditions

The following systems, structures, or practices should be established at the site before implementing this strategy, as they serve as a foundation for the practices described in this guide.

- Foundational Practice: Leadership Team(s), Data Analysis
- Foundational System: Professional Learning

Additionally, the Attendance practices described in this guide are also a subset of practices from a Multi-Tiered Systems of Support strategy. Having an MTSS strategy in place will facilitate the enhancement of an Attendance strategy.

Contextual Fit

Possible Root Causes include inadequate, inconsistent or ineffective…

- Attendance and engagement systems
- Structures to address attendance
- Family engagement
- Interventions
- Understanding of student needs
- School culture

Is this strategy a good fit for your district/school?

- What is the history of the school's previous efforts around attendance? Has staff been involved in this work previously?
- Is there a wide range of stakeholders, including community partners, that are available to give input in the development of a comprehensive attendance system?
- Is there a wide range of stakeholders, including community partners, that will actively support the implementation of a comprehensive attendance system?
- Is accurate attendance data available on a regular basis?

Core Components, Elements & Activities

Components, and elements within each component, should be implemented sequentially in the following order to increase the likelihood of successful outcomes.

Core Component 1: Infrastructure to Collect and Analyze Data

Elements or Activities	Description
Attendance Leadership Team	An Attendance Leadership Team made up of diverse stakeholders devises and/or revises the school's attendance intervention system. The team participates in the elements below to create the system, and then meets regularly to analyze data, evaluate effectiveness of interventions, focus resources and develop additional interventions as needed. Ensure that the Attendance Leadership Team has access to information about best practices and evidence-based interventions.
Analyze Attendance Data	The Attendance Leadership Team evaluates the accuracy of attendance data, including absences, tardies and early departures from class/school, as well as the accuracy of the school's data collection systems. Using available data, the team analyzes year-long data as appropriate for school level (elementary, middle or high school) to identify patterns. Absences, tardies and early departures from class are analyzed by type including excused and unexcused, month, day of week, grade level, class period and course or subject in order to determine which students are more likely to miss class and when.

Elements or Activities	Description
	The team analyzes year-long data to identify students who had chronic absenteeism the previous year, as well as students at risk of chronic absenteeism. Chronic absenteeism is defined as missing 10% or more of a school year, or approximately 18 days of school or two days each month.
Unpack Causes	The Attendance Leadership Team unpacks causes to understand why students are absent. In addition to classifying absences as excused or unexcused, categories around physical illnesses, truancy, school refusal, school exclusion due to disciplinary measures, student abilities or disabilities, school culture concerns, and family concerns, such as beliefs around the importance of attendance and/or education or transportation, are added. Disaggregate the data to look for patterns using type, month, day of week, grade level, class period, course or subject, students with 0-5 absences vs. students with 6-10 absences, etc. Understand level of truancy as an underlying cause for absences, including which students this affects, and patterns around truancies.
Understand Current Practices	Perform an audit of your current attendance system by completing the Policies and Practices Module around attendance in order to understand which policies and practices the school currently has in place, and which policies and practices may need to be created to develop a comprehensive attendance intervention system. The Attendance Leadership Team ensures that attendance policies and procedures are clearly written and communicated regularly to all stakeholders. Policies and procedures include when and how attendance is taken, how absences are coded as excused or unexcused, what number of absences/tardies/leaving school early triggers an intervention, what interventions the school will take, expectations for communication between the school and families, and how community partners and agencies will be involved. Policies and procedures around exclusionary disciplinary practices, such as sending students home early due to behavior concerns, having students report to school late in an attempt to prevent behavioral issues, suspensions and expulsions, are evaluated to determine the impact on student attendance and subsequent academic achievement.
Core Component Deliverable	Completed analysis of attendance data, including understanding of causes and subsequent revision of school Attendance Policies and Practices

Core Component 2: Partnerships to Support Family and Community Involvement

As Attendance Systems are a school-wide approach, school stakeholders share a common understanding of what practices, policies and procedures are necessary to support high attendance rates. This shared understanding

extends to the creation or strengthening of community partnerships that support attendance at school. For additional guidance on establishing Family, School, and Community Partnerships, see CDE's [FSCP Strategy Guide](#).

Elements or Activities	Description
School-Wide Culture	The school has a positive school-wide culture around attendance. Teachers are supported around understanding the value of attendance and modeling, promoting and recognizing good attendance. There are clear expectation that attendance is taken daily at specific times, for example, within the first 5 minutes of each class period. A school-wide expectation around all staff communicating with students and families promotes strong attendance as well as acting as a personal contact for students and families who struggle with attendance. There is also a communication system between school staff and families. The communication system includes regular and consistent messages around the importance of attendance, consequences of poor attendance such as lower academic achievement as well as school consequences, and how the school defines a student being fully present as opposed to tardy or partially absent. A communication system is in place to report tardies and absences to families within a reasonable amount of time. **Element Deliverable:** Implementation of Communication System with families
Community Partnerships	After unpacking causes for student absences, determine which causes require community support in order to be met. These causes may include need for childcare, clothing, healthcare, transportation or mentoring. Community partners are sought out that can support students and families with these needs. **Element Deliverable:** Establishment of Community Partnerships that support attendance

Core Component 3: Development and Implementation of Tiered Strategies

Elements or Activities	Description
School-Wide Culture Prevention Strategies	Ensure that there are strategies school-wide for all students that support strong attendance. Strategies include ensuring that there is a welcoming, engaging and safe school environment as well as positive messaging that says that attending every day matters and emphasizes the need to avoid unnecessary absences. Schools constantly recognize, model and promote good attendance through positive incentives. Research- and evidence-based school-wide absence prevention strategies include anti-bullying programs, social-emotional learning practices, personalized settings, individual learning plans, access to physical and mental health supports, attendance incentives,

Elements or Activities	Description
	enhanced climate and safety, and reduced grade retention and exclusionary discipline practices. Student absences, tardies and early departures are monitored regularly at the teacher team level. Ensure that every absence brings a response from the school, such as emails, phone calls or personalized contact depending on the student and which tier of intervention the student is in.

Early Intervention: Tier Two Intervention Strategies	Students with two or more absences in a month trigger a referral to the school's Attendance Team. The Attendance Team, which includes a teacher(s), counselor, administrator, parent(s) and student, investigates (reviews data and determines causes) and problem solves around the student's attendance. In addition to student and family related causes, the attendance team recognizes the potential role of school factors in attendance problems.
	
	Once students have been identified as at risk of chronic absenteeism, appropriate interventions are implemented. The Attendance Team selects one or more interventions that are likely to resolve the barriers to increased attendance for each individual student. Research- and evidence-based intervention strategies for early intervention include the following:
	
	• Establish a contact person at school for parents to work with. Assign a specific adult, usually one of the student's main teachers, with the responsibility of supporting the family with the student's attendance. This is in the form of regular family check-ins and calling the family each day the student is absent. This intervention is more likely to be successful with younger students.
	• Establish a contact person at school to regularly check in with the student. This is in the form of building a closer, more personal relationship with the student; exploring the sources of the student's disengagement from school; and checking in daily with the student and giving that student immediate feedback. This also includes calling the student each day the student is absent to communicate that the student was missed and to ask the reason for nonattendance. This intervention is more likely to be successful with older students.
	• Intentionally develop a reward system for students with increased attendance. Incentives are intentionally selected to have an increased positive impact on each student's attendance. Selection of incentives considers whether the reward is for an entire class, an individual student, or the student and family together. The three categories of incentives include:
	    o encouragement (such as peer support or information)
	    o social recognition (such as displaying photos, lunch with the principal, pizza parties, extra recess time or recognition in social media)
	    o financial or tangible reward (such as cash rewards, gift certificates or books)

Elements or Activities	Description
	• Conduct workshops for families about attendance, including short-term and long-term consequences of lower attendance, such as lower academic achievement. Workshops also address parenting skills so parents have developmentally appropriate tools to support their child's school attendance. • Regularly and frequently communicate with families about their student's attendance, including absences, tardies and early departures from class or school. • Provide additional, regularly scheduled social-emotional support for the student. • Encourage students to participate in after-school programs.
Chronic Absenteeism: Tier Three Response Strategies	Students who have not improved their attendance as a result of early interventions or students who have missed approximately 10% of school should trigger a follow-up referral to the Attendance Team or the Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) Team to further investigate (review data and determine cause of) attendance concerns as well as academic and behavior concerns in order to problem solve. In addition to student and family related causes, the attendance team recognizes the potential role of school factors in attendance problems. Once students have been identified as having chronic absences, appropriate interventions are implemented. The Attendance Team selects one or more interventions that are likely to resolve the barriers to increased attendance for each individual student. Students with chronic absenteeism are regularly monitored. Research- and evidence-based intervention strategies for chronic absenteeism include the following: • Arrange for school personnel to do one or more home visits to further investigate and problem solve with the family. Select appropriate school personnel that will be more likely to address potential parent beliefs around attendance and school participation. • A teacher/mentor, counselor or other school staff member provides sustained one-on-one attention and problem solving with the student. • Ensure that the student is receiving appropriate social-emotional support. Consider the impact of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) on the student's school attendance. For additional guidance on supporting students experiencing ACEs, see CDE's Trauma-Informed Education Strategy Guide. • Encourage the student to participate in a mentoring program. • Bring in appropriate social service, community supports and/or community partners to help address the student's and family's needs, such as transportation barriers.
Core Component Deliverable	Written Attendance System

Guidance for Implementation

Implementation Element	Description
Staffing and Teams	An Attendance Leadership Team should be created that involves diverse stakeholders, including school leaders, teachers, support staff, family members and students.
Training & Resources	The Attendance Leadership Team should spend time reviewing the complete strategy and planning for implementation of strategies in Core Component 3. As these strategies may require partnerships and/or resources, the team should consider strategies that are more likely to be highly effective and successfully implemented in each particular school context.
Pacing	*Make sure these factors are in place before the year begins:* • The Attendance Leadership Team should meet before the school year begins in order to fully plan the implementation of the Attendance Strategy throughout the year.

Sample Implementation Plan

Context: The following Sample Implementation Plan assumes that a school does not currently have an Attendance Strategy in place and is installing this strategy for the first time. Note also that the dates given in the table below are suggested approximate ranges for the given activities. A true action plan should specify precise dates and date-ranges for each activity. Sample taken from Core Component 1.

Name	Description	Start/End Date	Key Personnel
Establish Attendance Leadership Team	Establish a leadership team to focus on attendance.	June	School Leadership Team (made up of Principal, Assistant Principal, Dean, School Counselor, Classroom Teacher, Elective Teacher, SpEd Teacher, Parent Liaison, Cafeteria Manager, Head Custodian)
Analyze Attendance Data	Analyze attendance data from the past three years, looking for trends in time and student subgroups.	June Attendance Retreat	Attendance Leadership Team, District Data Personnel
Unpack Causes	Look at students in various data subgroups to begin to unpack causes around attendance concerns	June Attendance Retreat	Attendance Leadership Team

Name	Description	Start/End Date	Key Personnel
Understand Current Practices	Complete Policies and Practices Module around attendance and determine which policies and practices need to be revised.	June Attendance Retreat	Attendance Leadership Team

Sources

Academic Studies Leading to ESSA Rating

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Epstein, J. L., & Sheldon, S. B. (2002). Present and accounted for: Improving student attendance through family and community involvement. The Journal of Educational Research, 95(5), 308-318.

Finning, K., Harvey, K., Moore, D., Ford, T., Davies, B., & Waite, P. (2018). Secondary school educational practitioners' experiences of school attendance problems and interventions to address them: a qualitative study. Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties, 23(2), 213-225.

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Additional Sources Supporting Implementation of the Strategy

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