



TRANSCRIPT

Webinar:

Using Attendance Data for Decisionmaking: Strategies for State and Local Education Agencies

KENWYN DERBY

Alright. So let us dive into what we're covering today. We're going to go over the agenda, introduce our speakers, and provide an overview of a great new resource from the U.S. Department of Ed that is focused on leveraging attendance data, and that is called the "Forum Guide to Collecting and Using Attendance Data."

[Slide: Goals for today's webinar]

So our goals here today are to learn about how attendance data can really drive effective decisionmaking to support chronically absent students. We're going to delve into an inquiry process for examining attendance data so that we can uncover the needs and the trends to inform our decisionmaking and problem solving. And then we're going to hear from one district who has developed a really successful system of collecting, understanding, and acting on attendance data with the goal of supporting students to succeed academically and, and beyond in their life. And we're going to really think about the challenge and importance of achieving data reliability. So, what data do we need for what purpose, and how to really make that happen. And then we're going to think about, really, the value of digging deep into why students are missing school so we can provide the appropriate interventions. And then putting that in a, a broad system of support, where you engage multiple stakeholders and data review and the decisionmaking.

[Slide: Agenda]

Just as a reminder, this is an hour-long webinar, and we've split most of the time between our two presenters, leaving a little time at the end for questions.

[Slide: About REL West]

Let's introduce you to who we are—us disembodied voices speaking through the ether. My name is Kenwyn Derby. I'm a senior research associate with the Regional Educational Laboratory West, or REL West at WestEd. And you'll see here there's a map of the United States split into 10 regions. There are 10 RELs all funded by the Institute of Education Sciences at the U.S. Department of Ed, and each REL serves a specific region. While REL West supports stakeholders in that light-green, four-state region in the southwest corner of the map, the content of this webinar is really applicable to all states and all school systems.

And just a little bit about me in terms of my experience with chronic absence issues. I've worked mostly with educators in Utah on student attendance issues and one of the things we've done at REL West is host a couple statewide events featuring Attendance Works.

[Slide: Speakers]

We have a speaker from today. And currently I'm partnering with the United Way of Salt Lake to facilitate a new Chronic Absence Network along with the Utah State Board of Education and with seven school districts right now and a range of other community partners coming together to look at attendance data in new ways and share lessons across districts so that we can improve our supports to students more quickly.

I will now introduce Sue, who cannot turn on her video. She is from Attendance Works, which is really the go-to organization nationwide for all things chronic absence. They provide theoretical frameworks, to webinars, to tools, to connecting people across the country in a national community of people really concerned about maximizing students' opportunities to learn.

And then she will hand it over to Laura Hansen who is the director of information management and decision support at Metro Nashville Public Schools. If you want to turn your video on now, Laura, and wave at the crowd, I'll just say that Nashville was an early adopter of Attendance Works' approach and practical recommendations, so there's going to be a lot of alignment across the presentations and with the guide that I'll talk about.

[Slide: Chronic Absence: A brief introduction]

Just to set the table for this discussion in case you're not quite clear on what we mean by chronic absence, or chronic absenteeism as a lot of people say, it encompasses a student's missing class for any reason at all. So that's excused or unexcused absences. I'll leave most of the details to Sue to cover, especially given their instrumental role in raising the national awareness about this, of the pervasiveness and the consequences of missing too much school. But for now, suffice it to say, that chronic absence is defined at an individual student level. The concern is about how many days a given student is absent from school, as research shows that students who have higher rates of absenteeism also run higher risks of academic difficulties and failure, dropout, and, and other negative consequences. And while different organizations and states set different thresholds at which a student is considered chronically absent, especially for purposes of providing interventions, the most common measure of chronic absence is missing 10% of class time, or school days. And I'll just note that in the special report a couple years ago from the U.S. Department of Education, based on 2013/14 Office of Civil Rights data collection, they operationalize chronic absence in that report as students missing 15 days of school.

And with that measure they illuminated how widespread this problem is with about one in seven students at the time nationwide being chronically absent.

[Slide: The Forum Guide to Collecting and Using Attendance Data (1 of 3)]

Before we hear from our presenters, it's my pleasure to introduce you to a new resource published in February of this year that you can add to your toolbox. It's informed by and geared to policymakers and practitioners from all levels of the education system—from the school to the state. And it's really a tool for action, and it will reinforce what you hear today. It's called the "Forum Guide to Collecting and Using Attendance Data." There's a link there in the chat, and we'll also send this out after the webinar. And it so happens that Laura, our second presenter, is one of the contributors to this guide.

The U.S. Department of Ed hosts what is called the National Forum on Education Statistics. Their aim is to provide support and advice to states and school districts to develop local data systems and improve the collection and use of elementary and secondary data. So what Forum members come from a range of federal, state, and local education agencies and they are a volunteer group that works collaboratively to identify best practices and consider new approaches to using data in the most effective ways possible.

And the publications are based both on research and on the collective experience of the working group members, so it's really a combination of research and practice. And if you've seen any of their publications, you should check back frequently because they update their publications periodically so that they're more relevant for the current state of, of the data.

[Slide: The Forum Guide to Collecting and Using Attendance Data (2 of 3)]

We'll post The Forum website and you can see dozens of guides that they have produced. But the one we're going to just quickly talk about today is the one looking at attendance data. The working group that put this together was split evenly between State Department of Ed and school district administrators, and the purpose was to help education agencies collect, report, and use attendance data to improve student and school outcomes. So that's really what this whole webinar is about.

The guide recognizes the importance of engaging a range of stakeholders and community members since schools cannot do this alone. (laughs) That is, that is a fact. So the, the guide overall covers why attendance matters. It starts, really, from the beginning and its research-based relationship with student achievement. And then it delves really deeply into the quality of attendance data and why that's important. And it suggests using an attendance taxonomy. So, districts across the country collect and code their data in many different ways. They provide a, a suggested taxonomy that is an exhaustive and mutually exclusive taxonomy with 16 categories. And that would help—if more folks sign on to that particular taxonomy then it would be easier to compare across schools and districts and states. But it is flexible and can map onto what you're already doing and the codes you're using. And then it really gets into some common challenges, effective practices, and provides lots of examples and tips and tricks. So I, I think it's a really useful guide and I think that our presenters may also make connections between what they're doing to what's in the guide.

[Slide: The Forum Guide to Collecting and Using Attendance Data (3 of 3)]

And here I just included on this slide, just a screenshot of one of the tip sheets. So in addition to the overall information, they have specific tips and questions based on your role. So for teachers or data teams, superintendents and it goes through things to think about; why you and your role would find benefits from using these questions and these data.

[Slide: Reducing Chronic Absence: Why does it matter? What can we do?]

So now I'm going to hand it off to Sue to share all about chronic absence. Thanks so much. Sue?

[Slide: About Us]

SUE FOTHERGILL

Thank you, Kenwyn. Just to introduce Attendance Works briefly, we're a national, nonprofit organization that has been working since 2010 to advance student success and close equity gaps by helping to move forward policies and practices that reduce chronic absence. We also promote effective communication and we help to catalyze needed research in relationship to chronic absence.

[Slide: What is Chronic Absence?]

As Kenwyn mentioned earlier, chronic absence is examining all lost instructional time, and it's when students are missing so much school that they're academically at risk. The common definition is 10% or more of a student's day on role, including excused absences, unexcused, and suspension. We also would like to point out that it's different from truancy, which generally measures unexcused absences or average daily attendance, which measures the average number of students that show up on a daily basis.

[Slide: ED Facts Definition for Chronic Absence]

The adapted definition by ED Facts—they'll start collecting chronic absence data for the 16-17 school year—aligns with the commonly used definition of 10% of a student's days on roll for any reason. And ED Facts has further defined that schools should report data for any student who has been on roll for 10 or more days. And they count a student as having missed school if they miss more than 50% of the school day.

[Slide: Average Daily Attendance (ADA) Can Mask Chronic Absence]

As I mentioned earlier, chronic absence is different than average daily attendance, which actually can mask chronic absence. So if you notice these schools with average daily attendance rate levels of 90% or above, even though all of the schools had an average daily attendance rate of 90% or above, they also had a significant number of students who were chronically absent. And the difference being that average daily attendance measures the

average number of students that show up each day, and it's a, a population measure and not an individual student measure.

[Slide: Truancy (unexcused absences) Can Underestimate Chronic Absence]

The next slide shows us that while truancy only measures unexcused absences, whereas a chronic absence is capturing all students who are missing enough instructional time to, to be at risk academically. And you'll also notice that in Baltimore, Maryland, when they switched and shifted from monitoring only truancy data for identifying which students they were going to focus on for attendance intervention, you can see the critical difference that it made when using the chronic absence data, especially for students in the early grades for the purposes of early warning. Since oftentimes children in early grades may miss a significant number of days generally though they, they're, those days are not unexcused and would go unnoticed using a truancy measure.

[Slide: Student Attendance is Strongly Associated with Academic Success]

So, as we all know, highly associated with students meeting major milestones including kindergarten readiness, third-grade reading, matriculating with their peers, high-school graduation, and we have evidence to demonstrate that students who are chronically absent are less likely to complete college. And so it... at the... The, the behavior of good attendance persists through college and students who attend regularly are more likely to complete with a two- or a four-year degree.

[Slide: When a Student Misses School the Impact Ripples]

The other thing we learned, we've learned through research is that when a significant number of students are chronically absent the impact of absenteeism extends beyond the chronically absent students and can impact the instruction for the entire classroom, as teachers reteach content that students have missed, or slow down learning for students who are frequently absent, causing some classrooms or schools to be as much as four months behind on delivering instruction.

[Slide: Chronic Absence is Easily Masked if We Only Monitor Missing Consecutive Days]

Part of the challenge with monitoring chronic absence is that it is oftentimes sporadic. A day here or there, rather than consecutive absences. Without the right system to monitor absences it can be easy not to notice which students are missing just two or more days a month and how those absences are adding up. In fact, those chronically absent students and parents of chronically absent students often underreport the number of days they have missed.

[Slide: Over 7 million students were reported chronically absent in the 2013-14 school year]

As Kenwyn mentioned earlier, a chronic absence is a significant challenge across the country. The Office of Civil Rights collected chronic absence data for the... both the 13-14 school year and the 15-16 school year. And the most recent analysis is showing that chronic absence has

increased across the country, with one million more students being reported as chronically absent, or 16% of all the children in the nation.

[Slide: Chronic Absence Checks All of the Boxes as a Measure of School Quality and Student Success]

And chronic absence is a proven early warning indicator. It has been found to meas... it has been found to be a measure that is valid and reliable. And it allows for meaningful differentiation across students, schools, and districts, and so the data can be analyzed at an individual student level, for student sub-populations, comparing schools to schools and districts to districts or communities to communities, allowing a better analysis and identification of students or schools or districts that have the highest rates of absenteeism and may need additional supports or services.

[36 states adopted some measure of absenteeism as their 5th indicator of student success under ESSA]

Currently, we stand with 36 states having adopted chronic absence as part of their school accountability rubric. The promise is the opportunity to use the data to drive resources and interventions to students and schools most in need of the additional support.

[Slide: Take a Data Driven Systemic Approach]

The key to turning this around is adopting systemic strategies to reduce absenteeism. Attendance Works has developed this framework with five key ingredients to sustain a systemic approach: positive engagement, actionable data, capacity building, strategic partnerships, and shared accountability. My colleague, Laura Hansen, is going to discuss this more in-depth during her presentation.

[Slide: Invest in Prevention and Early Intervention]

We also know from research and evidence that taking a multi-tiered approach, beginning with prevention is necessary to working on reducing absenteeism. In the past, because we've taken a punitive response to absenteeism, only focusing on truancy, we have spent far too much time trying to resolve issues of attendance by overwhelming our Tier 3 strategies including involving public agencies in the court. Our approach is to really flip the pyramid on its head and make the case that we have to first heavily, first heavily invest in prevention, creating warm and welcoming, engaging school climates and environments, educating students and families about the impact of absenteeism, identifying common causes to absenteeism, and building in strategies that help to reduce common barriers. Once we have effective prevention strategies in place, we then add layers of additional support as needed. Using both our qualitative and quantitative data to understand which students or schools are still missing so much school, and then what are the causes of those absenteeism? What do we understand about why students are missing school in a particular school or community?

[Slide: Criteria for Identifying Priority Students for Tier 2 Supports]

When seeking to identify which students are at risk in your schools and districts, remember that being chronically absent is missing, on average, just two days a month. Schools can use prior year data, or data at the beginning of the year for early intervention to identify which, which students are more likely to be chronically absent by the end of the year.

[Slide: Factors that Contribute to Chronic Absence]

Identifying common causes to absenteeism can help your school or district to develop more comprehensive and meaningful strategies for reducing absenteeism. Attendance Works recommends using your quali, qualitative data, talking to parents and students, checking in with support service providers to better understand whether students are dealing with barriers to attendance or challenges associated with school climate, halter engagement or support. Different challenges require different interventions and represent different, different strategic opportunities. When schools or districts face challenges that cut across all of these elements, it may require a different, different level of support from the district or the school or even the state to ensure that they have the appropriate level of interagency and public collaboration and resources.

[Slide: Possible Tier 2 Interventions]

Attendance Works offers free resources and tools for initiating intervention strategies, and we encourage you to visit our website for more information.

[Slide: Where to start in your District or School?]

And if you're just getting started, we remem...we recommend pulling together a cross-departmental attendance team or a collective impact team with public agencies and partners and, or even begi...leveraging an existing coalition or team and begin to look at the data, starting with understanding the scope and the scale of, of the chronic absenteeism challenge, whether you're at a school level or a community or a district level. And then using that data to figure out who do you need to talk to, to understand what the challenges are.

[Slide: What Tools are Available to Calculate Chronic Absence?]

To help you get started, Attendance Works has three data tools available for schools or districts if you do not have the...currently have the ability to analyze your chronic absence data with your district student management system.

[Slide: Attendance Works' School Attendance Tracking Tools (SATT)]

The data tools allow you to produce charts that help you to distinguish patterns including grade level, subgroup, and geographic data along with producing a list of students who are chronically absent.

[Slide: Do students with special needs have higher rates of chronic or severe chronic absence?]

The data tools produce both numerical analysis and bar charts to help make, to help make pattern analysis easier. As you can see from this chart for a particular school, students who had an IEP were more, significantly more likely to be chronically absent. Data like, data like this can help a school or a district develop a plan based on what they understand about who are the students who are missing too much school. I want to close out by really encouraging you, if you're new to this work, to visit our website and check out the resources and materials we have.

[Slide: Attendance Works]

And also sign up for a Attendance Works' September Attendance Awareness Month Campaign where we will proactively reach out to you and let you know about webinars and mail you resources and materials to help, to help you get started. And with that I'm, I have the great pleasure of introducing my colleague, Laura Hansen.

[Slide: Metro Nashville Public Schools (1 of 2)]

LAURA HANSEN

Great. Thanks, Sue. So as Kenwyn was saying in the beginning and Sue kind of laid the foundation for a lot of what I'm going to talk about today. As you can see, I've got her, got to give credit to Attendance Works for the, the data-driven systematic approach for how to look at this. This actually works with a lot of different things. I love this, this graphic and this framework for any sort of, you know, topics that you're, you're doing with a group, a different, you know, across departmental or across, across stakeholders. This really is a great systematic approach to, to, to start with, so I've chosen to use this. So there is no single right way to tackle this problem. I mean, if there was it would have already been solved and we all wouldn't be here on this webinar, 158 of us it looks like. Great turnout.

So I've chosen to take the foundations of this data-driven systematic approach and provide you with some information on some ways that our district has chosen to approach the challenges of chronic absence and truancy. The topics I'm going to cover in each of these sections are not exhaustive, and simply represent some of the things we are doing in order to get systemwide change and improvement as well as some personal insight that I've accumulated over the years on effective practices based on my own experiences with systems and coalition-building work. And so here are just some basic facts about our district: we have 168 schools; we're the 42nd largest school system in the U.S. with about—as you can see, this was last year's end-of-the-year data—85,000; we're at about 87,000 students now.

We cover about 500 square miles of geography and go from urban to rural in the students that we serve. And we have an extremely diverse student population which we are very, very proud of with over 130 languages being spoken by our families. And you can see that we are at 19% English learners right now. And so we, we have a lot of different approaches that we need to take in the classroom for this. Economically disadvantaged student percent here, so its 50%. We do have a lot of undocumented students, and this is based simply on direct cert, certification data. When we were doing free and reduced lunch and looking at that as a measure of economically disadvantaged status, we were about at 76%. So, using direct cert under, understates a little bit about our students in poverty.

[Slide: Take a Data Driven Systemic Approach: Accurate, Accessible, Useable]

So as we take a data-driven systematic approach to addressing our chronic absence, ensuring we have actionable data is a very important first step. Three key things to think about on the topic of actionable data are, what needs to be done in order to ensure that data are accurate, accessible, and usable. So when we look at accuracy, we need to have accurate data to be the foundation for good decisionmaking, strategizing, and problem solving. Ensuring that data is collected consistently and reliably so it reflects what is really going on in the organization is key. And I'm very, very lucky I...in my office, I've got a data quality and integrity department that I'll be mentioning hopefully a little bit throughout these things. I do have to give them credit, though, for the accuracy of our data. And we're actually some...the State Department of Ed—despite our size—has recognized us as having some of the most accurate data in the state, so I'm very proud; a shout-out to my folks on that.

So for accuracy, there is policy at the federal, state, and local level that determine what data we collect, when we collect it, and how that data will be used for various purposes. These legal and policy requirements determine the processes and procedures that districts need to define for the staff who collect, enter, and maintain attendance data on a daily basis, making sure that these processes and procedures for the collection and the maintenance of the data are clearly understood by those who work with it, as well as the definition of things like chronic absence, which in our case is 10% of instructional days missed. But it also includes instructional days missed due to suspension. So it isn't simply excused and unexcused absence, but also suspensions, because they are missing instructional time, count against us for our chronic absence rate. And there's a bigger picture on how atten, attendance data is used at all levels of our organization and the education system, which creates the foundation for the data that we use later. So monitoring data quality and integrity is also key to establishing a continuous improvement cycle that allows for the improvement of data over time. Like I said, I've got a data quality and integrity department, and we work directly with school staff to ensure accuracy and completeness of the data on a daily basis.

So the next theory we want to talk about is accessible data. Using data shouldn't be difficult, and it should be embedded into existing day-to-day work, rather than being something additionally to be done. Ensuring data is easily accessible, so that just obtaining what is needed isn't a barrier to using information, is very important. Ensuring our systems are easy to

navigate can help. At MNPS we work very hard—Metro Nashville Public Schools—we work very hard to set up our data systems to be user-friendly. We have a focus on providing training and support to help staff overcome that learning curve. And bringing data together keeps people from having to go to multiple sites to obtain information, and then put it together on their own like in Excel and, and some things you see folks do outside of those systems. Recognizing the limitation of various types of data systems based on their purpose, operational management of attendance versus analyzing data to obtain insight—those two functions are very different, and oftentimes you’ll have different data systems to, to meet each one of those needs.

The ways to meet these two needs are very different and they require different data systems or reporting approaches. At MNPS we have a data warehouse. We’ve had one for many years and it takes data and bounces it up against each other from various systems and domains, like taking attendance data and bumping it up against the discipline data. And we have a priority of ensuring interoperability between our data systems to make sure the right data are available at the right time for the right people.

So my last theory on this slide is around usable data. The determination of whether data is usable depends on which stakeholder perspective we are looking from. Different people with different roles require different data to answer various questions they have that are relevant to them. Parents care about what is going on with their students, or trends in their schools. Usable data for them may be daily attendance data reported with notifications in certain circumstances...certain circumstances such as via a portal or call-out. Or perhaps a yearly report card that shows how their school is faring against others.

Interventionist requires student-level reporting on the most at-risk students in their areas of responsibility. For us in our district this is around like cluster and quadrant-based reporting. Other leaders may need more aggregate-level trend data broken down by school, grade, and classrooms. Whatever type of reporting is needed, it should be timely and actionable based on the needs of that particular stakeholder, and should, and, should answer the questions that allow the person to take action in their various roles. So next slide.

[Slide: Metro Nashville Public Schools (2 of 2)]

So I thought...so I’ve got a lot of content-heavy slides. I thought I’d show you some fun data; for me this is fun. And so what you see here—hopefully you all can see this if you make sure your screen’s on max. So we have our little district summary up here and one of Sue’s points where we look at our overall attendance is 94%, which is great, but when you look at our chronic absence rates we’re at about 17%. Also, when we look at satisfactory attendance, which we say is 95% or better, only 55% of our students actually met that mark. So, in the next box to the right there we’ve got chronic absence broken down by grade level. We look at the number of students in those different grade levels, and then...something that’s really important is to look at chronic absence repeaters. So, for example, we have folks, a lot of folks will look at 12th graders and go, “Oh, 12th graders, you know, that just happens in 12th grade.” Well, if you look at that 12th grade line, you’ll see that 55% of our 12th graders, amongst 1,000 kids,

were chronically absent the year before. And perhaps even before that. So it didn't just happen in 12th grade; half of those students had a problem in 11th.

So, in the next area, in the next area we've got absence distribution, with unexcused, excused—and I should also note, this, this screenshot was taken prior to us adding the suspensions—we got a new data system. But you can tell which...the percentage of suspensions that also contributes to that. And chronic absence categories—again by grade level but broken down by gender, ethnicity, economically disadvantaged status, English language learner proficiency, and students with disabilities. And, also there, we've got our trend data there to the right which shows that this is a very hard thing to break. I do want to take one moment and talk about a state role in looking at this year over year. One of the reasons why this looks so flat is because there is a state rule in Tennessee that we withdraw students with 10 consecutive, unexcused, or...10 consecutive absences. Withdraw them as a dropout and then we re-enroll them in school when they show up as of the...you know, so basically the 10 days that, that prompted us to drop them out are wiped away, and they are enrolled like, you know, that, that new day. So, that...they're withdrawn as of the first day of that 10, 10, run of 10 ex-, unexcused absences.

So what it does is it wipes out that number. And that is because, you know, they don't want to pay us on for students that aren't there, and we totally get that. But it also...states really need to look at some of their policies that may diminish our ability to evaluate attendance data, especially when we're starting to look at chronic absence.

[Slide: Take a Data Driven Systematic Approach: Roles and Responsibilities, Established Approaches and Methods, Collaborative Protocols]

The next section we need to think about in our data-driven systematic approach is our capacity building. This includes fostering and supporting strategic partnerships that increase the district's capacity to implement activities and interventions designed to improve student attendance. Here are some things to think about related to this area.

Roles and responsibilities. We like to think broadly about our stakeholders. Everyone has a role in this, and attendance is not just something that can be impacted if we take an, a (quote) "interventionist" approach. The problem is too big and the reasons for chronic absence are so diverse that everyone needs to be looking for opportunities to positively impact the problem. And that is how our capacity is expanded.

State, districts, city government, community, parents, and students can all be leveraged in this effort, and should also be thought about as being stakeholders on the receiving end of the benefits of improved attendance. The Forum Guide, that, that we, Kenwyn did a little overview of earlier, does a great job in helping to lay out the various roles for folks at the state and local level and can be a starting point to think about who can or should be doing what.

Leveraging existing, established approaches and methods, using existing structures for working together and intervention models to incorporate practices designed to improve attendance. Here at MNPS we utilize multi-tiered systems of support and RTI models, which are approaches to addressing student need put forward by our state department of education. So for us this is the intervention framework that supporting activities for attendance improvement initiatives should be linked to. Incorporating attendance interventions into existing improvement or intervention frameworks acknowledges that chronic attendance isn't a separate problem, but rather a contributing factor to barriers of student attendance.

And so another important area for focus, for capacity building is related to collaborative protocols. Different people with different roles will see different things and come up with different solutions or actions. There isn't just one way to impact this problem; we need to give people a chance. So we should seek to engage the different stakeholders to obtain the various perspectives, which can lead to a variety of solutions and expand partnerships that extend our capacity. For us, collaborative inquiry is a protocol that can make the process of working together yield more productive results. The key to establishing this capacity-building step is to ensure that there is a goal to work together across departments and partners and intentionally make time and space to focus on understanding the problem and solutions together. I know that sounds all very fluffy, but I'm going to, we're going to talk a little bit more about collaborative inquiry in a moment.

[Slide: 3 Tier Approach to Attendance Intervention]

Here we go. So in the previous slide I mentioned using existing structures as intervention models. What you see here is our MNPS MTSS, or multi-tiered systems of support approach, applied to attendance. MTSS is a statewide framework, and we have leveraged resources established by the state to assist in putting together our localized resources. I actually included the link to the state department of ed. resources at the bottom of this slide, so you guys can see, kind of, what the state has provided and how we as a district have built on top of it. Our state department of ed. website has some wonderful resources on MTSS, and also for chronic absenteeism that, again, I would encourage you to access if you wish to learn more about the comprehensive framework for intervention that we utilize. I've included that link below.

[Slide: Tier 1 – Prevention]

So our Tier 1 prevention. These are just some recommendations for basic Tier 1 prevention strategies that, that we provide our schools. And many of these have come from the structure that the state provided us. There are many more than this. The schools are encouraged to develop their own based on the needs of their population and innovative strategies that they would, that they feel would be effective after reviewing their own data. There are a multitude of actions that are easy to do and cost little if anything in the area of creating a warm and welcoming environment. For example, having teachers stand by their doors welcoming students with a smile, and letting them know that they were missed when they were absent, or perhaps ask to chat after class to find out why they've been missing school and engaging in a caring

conversation. So read and monitor attendance data and practice. Read, which is one of the first ones, or... I'm sorry, yes. The first one there. We make attendance data available in multiple ways and on multiple reports that are utilized by different staff that would provide interventions and supports for our students such as social workers, attendance workers, family engagement specialists, behavior specialists, etc.

[Slide: Tier II – Early Intervention]

Once a student has triggered a certain number of absences, an assessment of the root causes for excessive absence is needed to determine what kind of assistance is required to address the student barriers to attending regularly. If schools were keeping track of absence reasons ongoing, then those are-, and those are tracked, some of this data can be readily available. The Forum document mentioned earlier has a recommendation that a more detailed taxonomy be used to log absences in an ongoing way. It makes, it may take some work on the front-end to adopt a more detailed and descriptive set of absence codes, but this information is invaluable, and when we get to the point of having to intervene, we can save valuable time, leading to more timely and targeted Tier 2 intervention efforts. We are looking at going and ramping up our taxonomy, because right now this is an excessive absence screening form that once the student gets from that Tier 1 and needs to kind of get into the Tier 2 for the early intervention, this data then has to be collected. So, again, that taxonomy could help us collect this data upfront and folks would be informed way in advance of trends and what types of absences were contributing, were contributing to that individual student's challenges.

[Slide: Collaborative Inquiry (1 of 2)]

So one of my favorite topics, collaborative inquiry. This is one of the ways that we at MNPS sponsor collaboration. And we put data at the center of these protocols. Collaborative inquiry is a data-based team approach that consciously uses collaborative learning cycles, which is comprised of a series of stages that include activating and engaging, exploring and discovering, and organizing and integrating as well as the qualities of effective teams, mainly, fostering a culture of trust, maintaining a clear focus, taking collective responsibility, and data-informed decisionmaking. This process is one that MNPS used, is using to bring diverse teams together to look at data, record the observations of that data from those perspectives, and then together identify root causes and a plan for actions that can improve outcomes for students.

[Slide: Collaborative Inquiry (2 of 2)]

So here's a little more detail taken from a session where we had a number of metro agencies in one room. We have a regular meeting with data coordinators from Metro Nashville government agencies and departments that is convened by our chief data officer for Metro Nashville government. And our office was asked to provide a training on the collaborative inquiry process. So to demonstrate that process, we engaged staff in a realistic session. We used the MNPS challenge with chronic absence as the case for this group to work with. The first step is exploring and discovering, and the paper you see there contains the observations made by

various data coordinators of various types of government departments. We were extremely impressed with their interest and desire to understand the data that we showed them, and to offer their observations. And as you can see there, it's pretty insightful for folks who aren't even education folks. The second step is organizing and integrating, to process the root causes of the observations and offer recommendation. We did this by asking the question and reporting their answers. And you can see that, that question under number two there. Again, I was struck with the level of thought and innovative recommendations brought forward by those in jobs where they're nowhere near related to our business of education.

And the third step we took, in a very diverse group, was to ask them to reflect on their role, and what actions they would take to contribute to the solution to our chronic attendance problem. The answers range from personal action for some, and for others they thought that their departments might be able to participate in and promote some of our solutions.

[Slide: Take a Data Driven Systematic Aligned Policy, Structure for Monitoring, Continuous Improvement Supported]

So the next area in our systematic approach is the important component of shared accountability. As a public education entity, we are not strangers to the concept of accountability, but many of us may be strangers to the concept that accountability can actually be shared. Accountability is often high stakes. And in that environment, humans naturally want to find someone to blame when things go sideways. I can only offer some suggestions from my own experience on how to create this culture of shared accountability. Having aligned policy across various levels of the education system and with local agencies, if possible, brings the overlap in responsibility and accountability to the forefront. And those shared areas can be highlighted. Sometimes actions can be coordinated, and funding aligned to maximize resources. A great example of this is how ESSA at the federal level, our state report card measures for here in Tennessee, and our district's strategic plan all have similar areas of focus and accountability measures. Chronic absence is one of these areas, and while our district has been focused on this problem for a number of years, the resources and focus brought, brought to bear due to the shared accountability being established leaves us really hopeful that we will see improvement in an area that has historically been one of our hardest to improve.

Establishing structures for monitoring things we are accountable for will usually contribute to better outcomes. It's just another way of being intentional and making room for things that are important. For us at MNPS, we have milestone meetings that are done at the school level and include a variety of staff and stakeholders. Data is at the center of these meetings, and attendance is one of the areas that is monitored regularly. And trends are evaluated to see if changes in practice are needed, and for what students. A shared accountability can't be achieved without having regular, regular reporting to the stakeholders with whom we wish to share accountability. Sharing the good and the bad establishes trust between partners and true shared accountability, not just what's on paper, can't develop until that happens.

Accountability is a scary word for many, and especially in this pass-fail culture we have in education. Shared accountability is embraced where continuous improvement is the core of it and people are given the opportunity to share what is really happening. Accountability is embraced where continuous improvement is supported, and people are also able to get authentic, actionable, and compassionate feedback opportunities and support to improve and are empowered to change and abandon the status quo. So, and I, I do think this is an area where the state can help set the tone. And while we're looking at chronic absence—and it is an accountability measure for many—how that accountability is put down and the supports that are given to districts, and the community supports that are given to districts, and how districts are supporting students, all makes a difference here. So when our students win, we all win, and when they fail, all parts of the system need to be...need to evaluate where we let them down. Shared accountability leads to shared action, strong partnership, and increased impact.

[Slide: Take a Data Driven Systematic Approach: Proactive Approach, Opportunities for All Stakeholders, Positive Impact]

So the last theory to address in this systematic approach model is positive engagement. If we can use positive engagement to motivate daily attendance and have it make a positive impact, then why wouldn't we do it? Why aren't we already doing it? Perhaps because waiting for a problem to develop, and then trying to beat it down with a punitive approach, is the old school way of doing things and plays into the crisis management approach that many of us in districts find ourselves in often. However, this old school way of dealing with student attendance issues has been well tested, and as we see in the data, the problem still has a hold on most of us. The good news is that positive engagement is now a strate-, strategy that shows up regularly as a way to improve student outcomes. Proactive approaches such as a focus on school climate and social-emotional learning are becoming more common, and these are areas where MNPS is prioritizing our time and resources. Engaging a variety of stakeholders is a key strategy, and these various stakeholders all have opportunities to offer positive engagement and motivate students that they have con-, that they have regular contact with or can influence.

This is such a high-yield strategy, and the great thing about it is that it doesn't require a degree in a specific field. Positive engagement is also a potential component of all interactions and doesn't need a special "intervention period" in order to expose students to it. One of the best things about this component of the systematic approach to addressing the problem is that it's basically guaranteed to have a positive impact on students that extend beyond just their attendance to school. The next best thing is that the positive engagement benefits both the giver and the receiver and the positive impact will be experienced by the staff and stakeholders as well as students.

[Slide: Thank You!]

So thanks for listening to my perspective on this issue. I wish each of you boundless energy and positive outcomes as you battle this problem in your own cities, states, and districts. Thank you so much.

[Slide: Q&A]

KENWYN DERBY

Thanks, Laura. This is Kenwyn again. So, we have had a number of questions typed into the chat, and we had some questions submitted ahead of time. So I'll start with a data question, and then I'm going to move into a couple other kind of intervention response questions.

But a number of people were thinking about, you know, at a local level, what specific data people should be looking at. And we did go through a number of examples from both of our presenters. But also what live, frequent data do people think they should be actively monitoring so people can respond quickly.

But I'll just start with an example from my work that I, I've been really fascinated with how creative you can get with all these data, and as both Sue and Laura mentioned, disaggregating your data by a student group and all different ways gives you a lot more insight into who needs the most help. So then you can move to the, you know, what type of help, and what are the root causes behind students' chronic absence? But a couple interesting changes I've seen this year with districts that I'm working with is that one secondary, set of secondary schools were looking at their attendance data based on just first period absences. And they realized that at a high school level, it really matters to look at every class period, so they've changed to separating their data into eight, the eight periods, and chronic absences calculated by using the denominator of eight class periods.

But they found really interesting patterns at different schools about which periods kids are missing. And so then they could do the detective work about, "Why is that?" Is it because they're missing the last period because of sports? Transportation issues? Is it right after lunch? So this sort of kind of digging deeper can give you really interesting clues. And then another district put all of their chronically absent students on a map and realized that there were a couple neighborhoods that were experiencing really high rates of chronic absence. And they found that there were issues with the bus. And so they could...that's a pretty simple solution to what is often a much more complex problem. But I'm just bringing that up as kind of examples of new and different ways to think about your data. Sue or Laura...

SUE FOTHERGILL

So, Kenwyn, this is Sue, and I just wanted to add that the other thing when thinking about data in addition to sort of mapping your chronic absence data, looking at it by subgroup or looking at it by school, or even looking at it by, like, block level data. The other thing is that I often wonder about is, is the role of the person who's looking at the data, and what relationship do they have to students? And so, for example, if you, you're at a school level then really getting down into...and I love that you said detective work, Kenwyn; I think that's perfect. So at a school level you're looking at student data. You want to know which kids are chronically absent in which groups. But then at a community level you may want geographic data and better

understand which communities are most affected. And so I think that there are lots of ways to slice it, and part of the decisionmaking about how to slice it is linking it to what opportunity you have to address chronic absence and where you sit within the reach of a student or a family.

KENWYN DERBY

Mm-hmm (affirmative). That's a great point and that, that relates to another question that we received about what the differences between what data states should collect versus districts and schools, and then how they would want to look at their data differently. And, Sue, do you want to address that a bit as well? Including the report that you, that Attendance Works, produced on that?

SUE FOTHERGILL

I'd be happy to share. Attendance Works created "Portraits of Change." It's research that's available on our website. And working with Johns Hopkins' Everyone Graduates Center, we analyzed the Office of Civil Rights data at the state level, disaggregated state-level data in ways in which we thought would be useful to state education agencies and other state partners looking at community-level data, and by district we also looked at different populations of students to understand who was most affected. And I think that the relationship to a state education agency then links to the school improvement process, and also, really thinking about all the different resources, whether they're hunger programs or early pre-K programs. But there are resources that state education agencies have access to, and using chronic absence data can help potentially identify where you might want to target some of the, the great programs and resources that you have to support schools or school districts that really struggle.

LAURA HANSEN

For us...in fact, I just got out of a meeting today with a group and we were talking about chronic absence data—some leaders and some principals in schools—and we were talking about where to find data on chronic absence. The discussion came up about the state accountability measure. Well, the state is going to only count chronic absence students, like, against a school's rate... I hate to use that, you know, "count, students counting against us," but that is the way that accountability works sometimes. And the, they're only responsible for the students who were enrolled in their schools 50% of the time. So the question was posed to us, "Well, then, on our chronic absence reporting, shouldn't we just be showing those students that count?" And I was like, no, and a bunch of folks agreed, you know, because...and they want to know where they are with accountability, but we need to be responsible for every student. So while accountability...the state will be looking at our chronic absence rates for schools as those that are, for the students that were enrolled 50% of the time. We, as the district, that student came into a school already chronically absent; that's a student that needs intervention whether he's going to count or not for accountability.



So our numbers that we are giving our schools are higher than what will count for their accountability. And what we told them was, “You know, you’re, you’ll realize that if you make a dent in this, your accountability will, will figure itself out in a positive way. But we need to do what’s right for kids and then the accountability will work itself out if we are doing that.” So, but the numbers are very different from what we are looking at actionable data versus what the state is using for accountability.

KENWYN DERBY

Mm-hmm (affirmative). I’d love to think about one type of intervention. So one of the questions we got was from a, a K-1 school. And, and when you’re dealing with kids that young, it’s really the parents who are in control of whether or not the kids can attend school. And while this is not a specific data question, it’s a, it’s a topic that comes up over and over. So I’d love to ask our presenters about really effective interventions to try to get parents of young kids to value attendance.

SUE FOTHERGILL

Right. So, so Attendance Works has materials and resources on our website that are focused on parent engagement. And what I’ll share with you, especially with kindergarten and first grade is, what we’ve learned is, we’ve learned a couple of things about what paren-, parents understand about the importance of attendance in the early grades. And they undervalue the role of attendance in their child’s academic success because early grades, kindergarten and first grade, can be misconstrued as places of learning that students can stay caught up even if they miss quite a few days, and parents will often report that once kids get to high school it’s much more important to be there every day to be able to, to learn all the content. And, so one of the lessons learned is that we just, as educators, have to do a better job of really clearly communicating that absences add up. When we say good attendance matters, that’s not instructive enough because we all have different perceptions about what good attendance is, especially in the early grades.

The other thing we want to do is work in the transition. So when families are first entering kindergarten and first grade we can use that as an opportunity to engage parents, have direct conversations about attendance, and really talk about the academic learning that’s happening in kindergarten and first grade. And then, when we do better effective and prevention strategies, that allows us to hone in on maybe a subgroup of kids who continue to persist and be absent that may need additional support. But we really have to put in place that effective messaging to help us to reduce chronic absence so that we can get to the kids who may need additional support beyond the messaging.

KENWYN DERBY

Thank you.