

# NEWSLETTER

Director Updates | Featured Projects | Chronic Absenteeism | Out and About

## Director Updates



The U.S. Department of Education recently [named increasing attendance](#) as one of the top three evidence-based strategies that states, districts, and schools can take to accelerate academic performance. The focus on attendance is motivated by the recognition that rates of chronic absenteeism exploded in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and have remained stubbornly, unacceptably high across the country. Schools in the Mid-Atlantic region have not been exempt from the epidemic of chronic absenteeism. The reasons for chronic absenteeism are varied, but they include poor mental health. Some measures suggest a continued decline in mental well-being among children and youth over the past decade, making this another priority concern that schools across the country are trying to address.

It should come as no surprise, then, that many of the REL's partnerships are seeking to improve social-emotional wellness and reduce chronic absenteeism. In the segments below, you can read about our work with the Pennsylvania Department of Education to improve social-emotional wellness; our collaboration on the improvement of a multi-tiered system of support in District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS); the development of a new performance framework for DC charter schools that includes a shift from measuring average attendance to measuring chronic absenteeism; and a creative proposal to use the remote-learning tools now available to educators to keep students engaged and learning even when they are stuck at home for health reasons.

In short, educators and policymakers around the Mid-Atlantic region have clearly recognized the need to engage students, to support their mental well-being, and to make sure they show up to learn. We're honored to be playing a small role in those efforts.

**Brian Gill**  
Director, REL Mid-Atlantic

## Featured Projects

### [ASPIRE to improve your agency's school performance measures!](#)

This blog post details several suggestions we offered the DC Public Charter School Board on how to build a fair and useful school performance framework that is centered around valid, reliable, and robust measures. If you take a close look at the framework, you'll see that one of its innovations is switching from a measure of average attendance to a measure of chronic absenteeism, which better captures the magnitude of the problem at the school level.



### [Using a multi-tiered system of supports to advance educational equity.](#)

Learn about the multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) that DCPS is implementing to address the diverse needs of all students, and about how our team is supporting the district along the way. Like other MTSS, MTSS@DCPS aims to illuminate the needs of the students at greatest risk of academic failure and dropout, who are often identifiable based on chronic absenteeism.

## Using remote learning to take on chronic absenteeism



The remote learning that schools were forced to employ early in the COVID-19 pandemic is almost universally recognized as inferior to in-person schooling. Even so, the technology of remote learning allowed instruction to occur and created a connection between schools and families that would have been impossible if the pandemic had occurred only a few years earlier. Students typically learned less than they learned in person—but at least they learned something. It is worth keeping that in mind, now that students are (understandably) much more likely than in the past to be kept home if they show

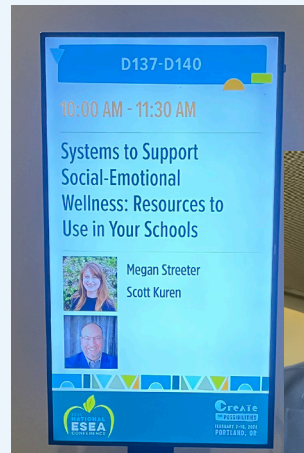
any sign of having an infectious illness. Recognizing that many students kept home from school are well enough to engage in learning, [our recent blog post](#) adds to the attendance conversation by exploring remote learning as a way to maintain learning momentum for students who need to stay home due to health-related concerns. Absence from the school building shouldn't automatically shut down a student's learning opportunities.

## Out and About

**Sharing how the REL and Pennsylvania Department of Education are using data to foster supportive learning environments and social-emotional wellness.**

The REL's Megan Streeter joined Scott Kuren, director of the Office for Safe Schools at the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE), at the National ESEA Conference on February 7–10. They hosted an interactive workshop that helped participants learn about our research-practice partnership's approach to supporting social-emotional wellness in Pennsylvania schools. They also walked participants through using resources and tools from this work. Check out their [blog post](#) for more information on the social-emotional wellness planning guide and tools found within.

Megan and Scott also teamed up again at the PDE Data Summit, March 11-13. Alyson Burnett joined them to share an [overview](#) of this work and our other active projects that are helping PDE use data to foster the kinds of supportive learning environments that keep students engaged and eager to come to school.



### At the 2024 PDE Data Summit!



◀ From left to right, Becky Wallace, Alyson Burnett, Megan Streeter, Jay Wasser, and Scott Kuren at the 2024 PDE Data Summit.

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