



# **The Current Context of Chronic Absence**

## Alaska Task Force on Education Funding

# Defining Terms

## Average Daily Attendance (ADA)

- School level measure (not student level)
- Notices aggregate attendance at certain point in time (e.g., half-days, holidays, bad weather)
- Masks individual student chronic absences

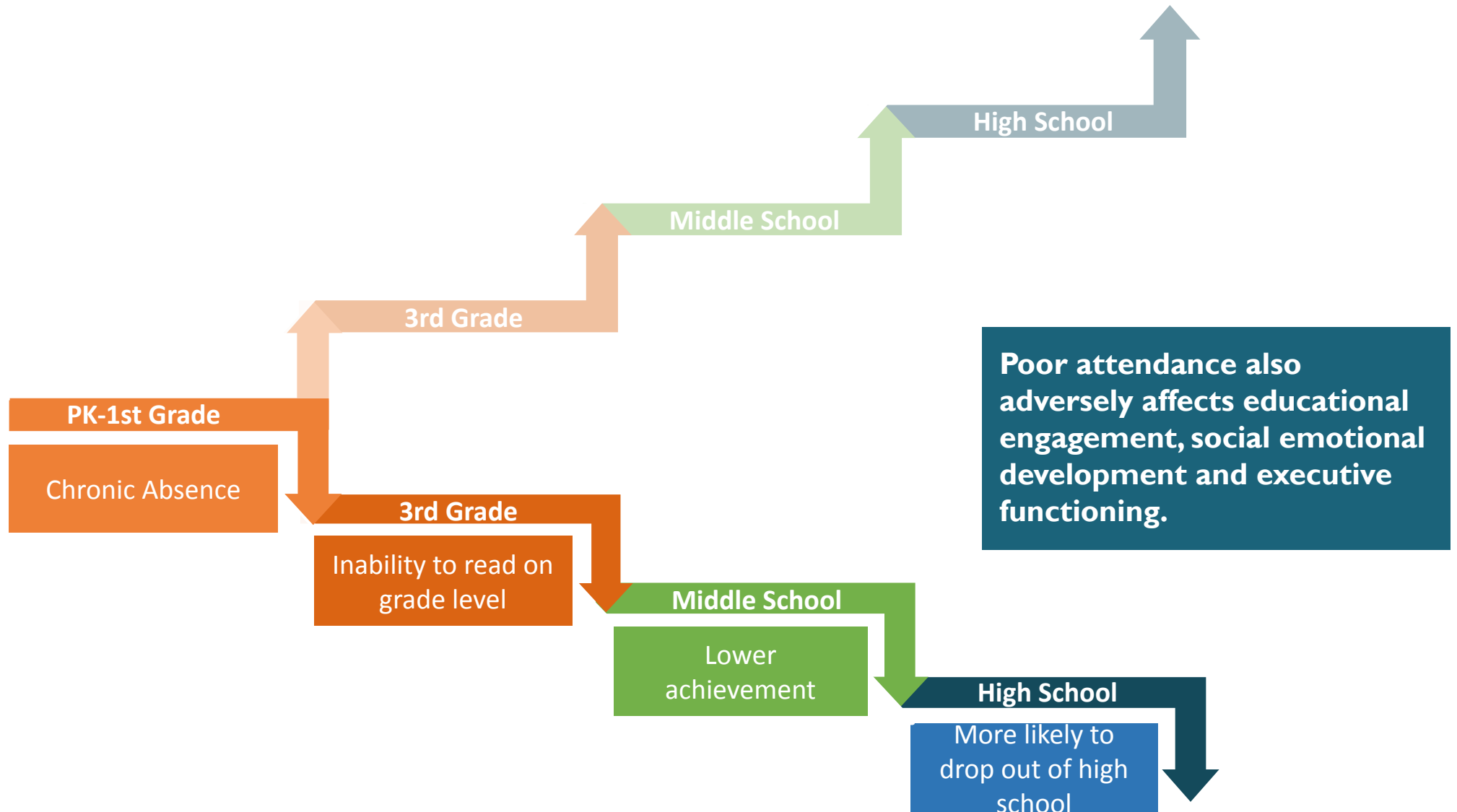
## Truancy

- ▲ Counts ONLY unexcused absences
- ▲ Emphasizes individual compliance with school rules
- ▲ Uses legal, typically more blaming and punitive, solutions

## Chronic Absence

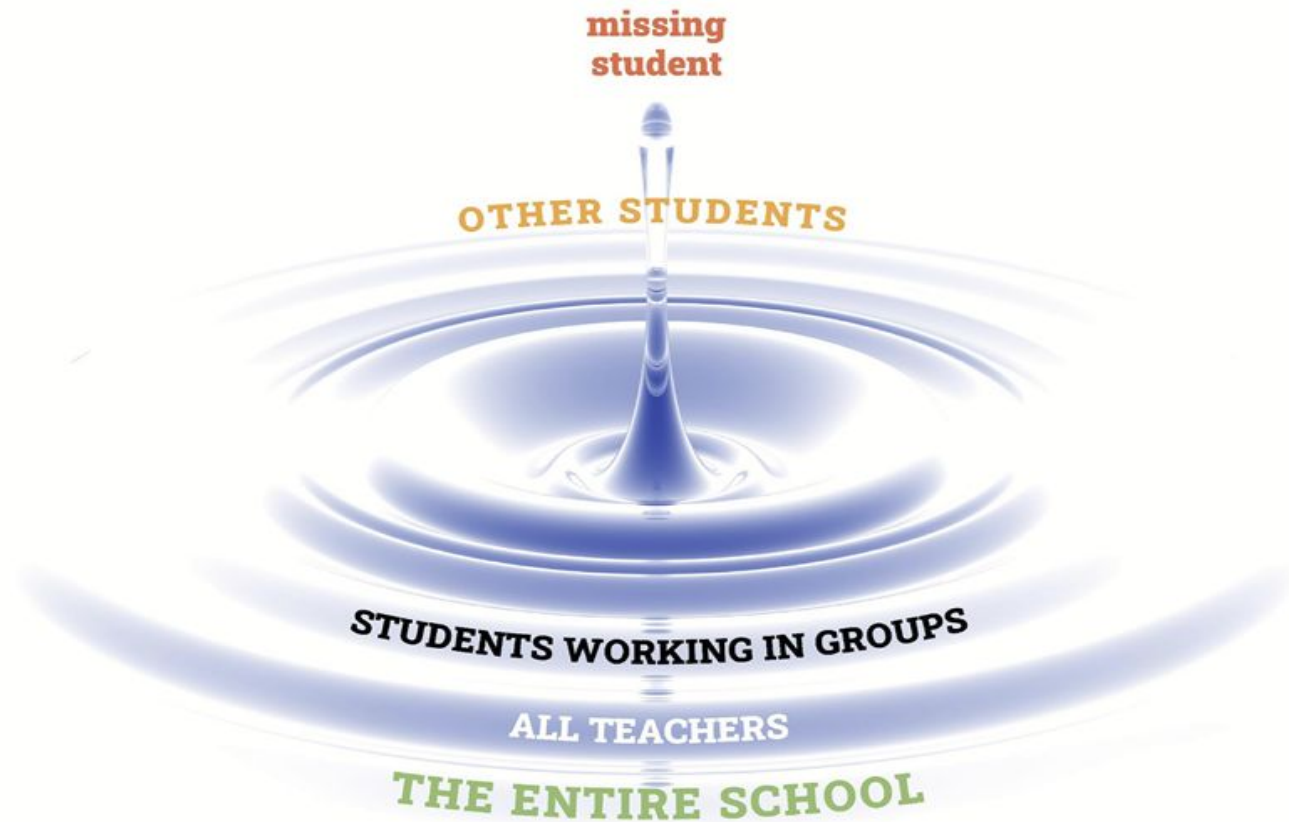
- Missing 10% counts ALL absences (*excused, unexcused, & suspensions*)
- Emphasizes impact of missed days and the benefits of being present
- Uses preventative, problem-solving, trauma-sensitive strategies
- Cultivates family and student engagement

# Improving Attendance Matters K-12



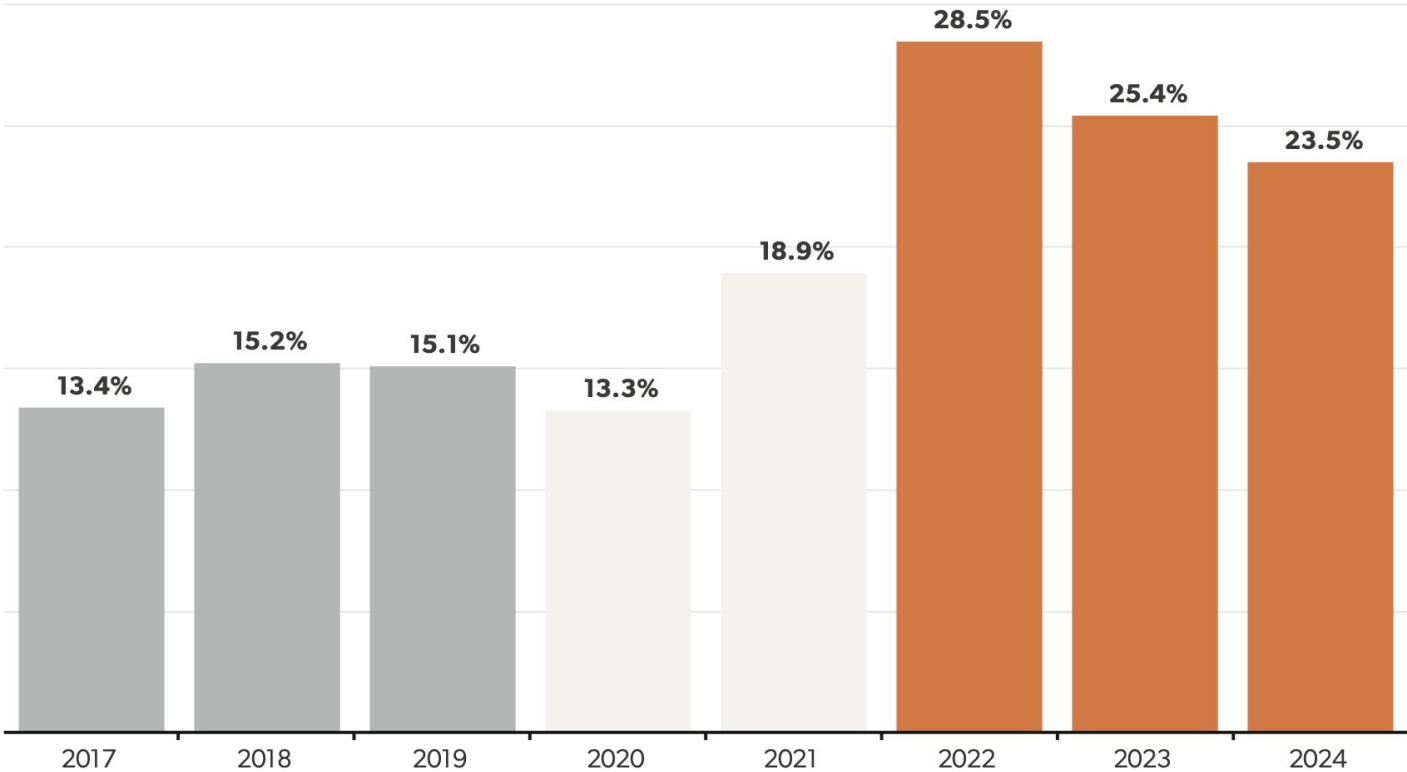


## When Multiple Students Miss School, the Impact Ripples



# Nationwide Chronic Absence Nearly Doubled and Remains Too High

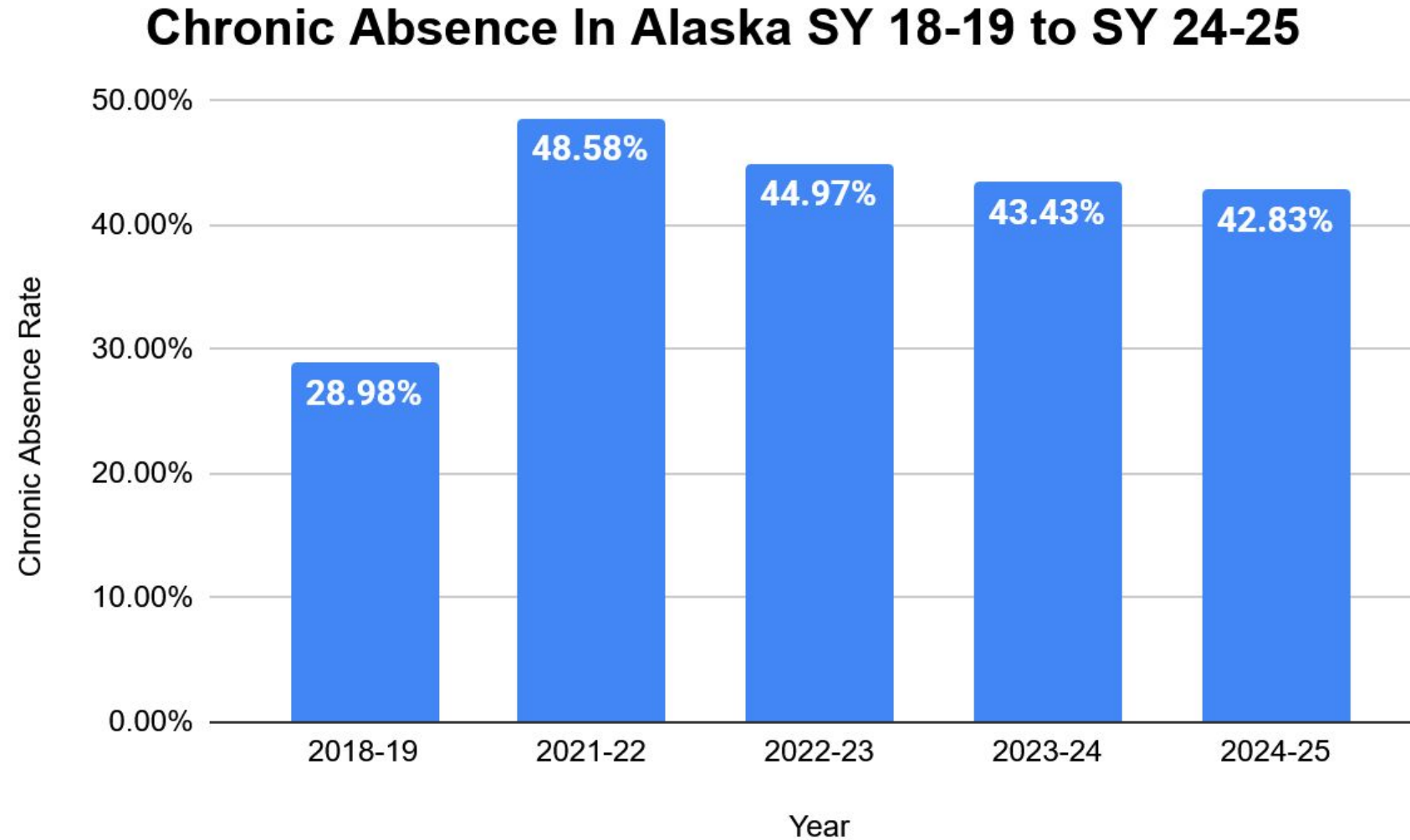
Figure 1. US Chronic Absenteeism Rates: School Years 2017–24



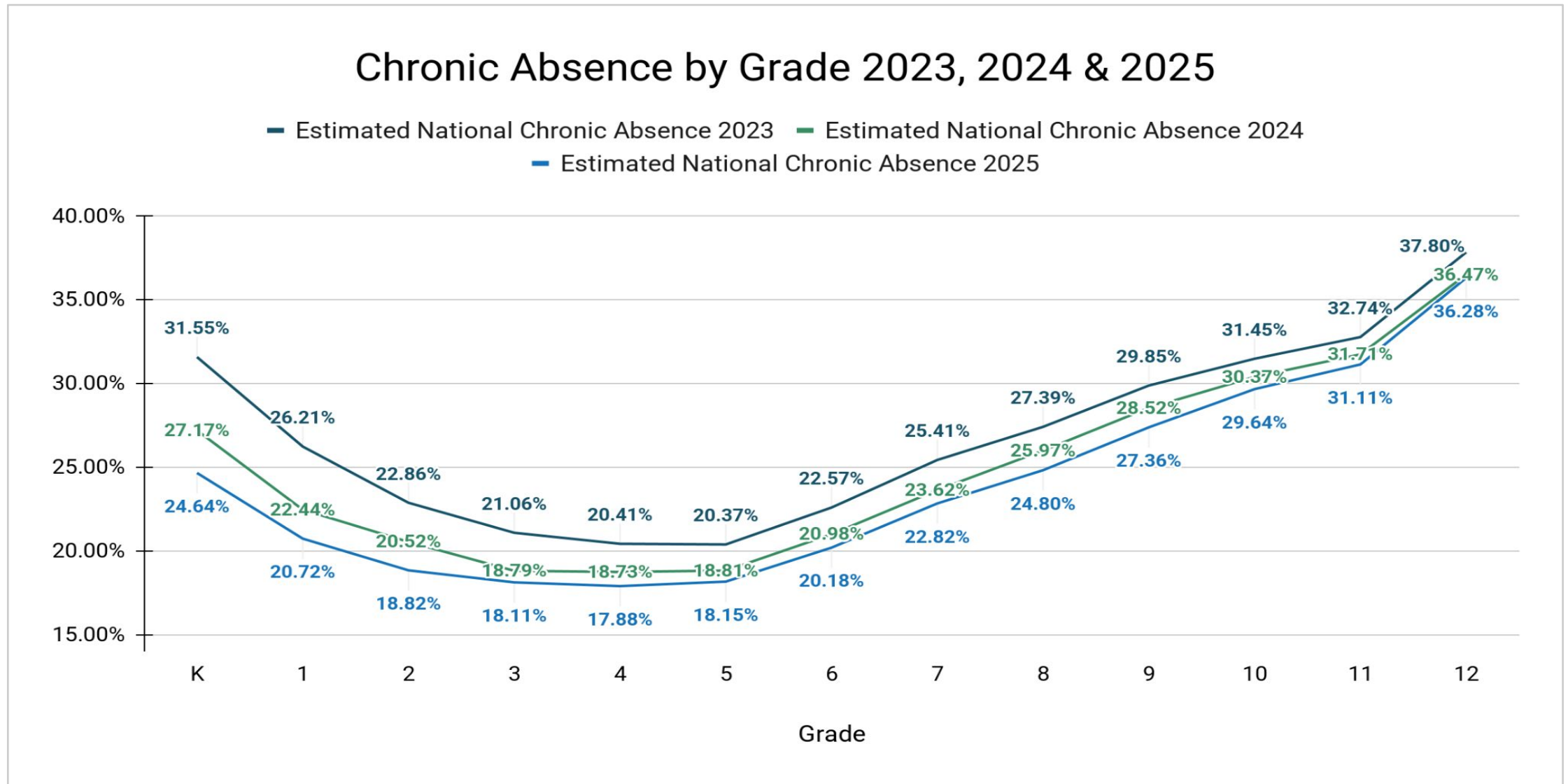
Source: Return to Learn Tracker, “Chronic Absenteeism: 2017–2024,” American Enterprise Institute, <https://www.returntolearntracker.net>.

Note: Pre-pandemic years are in grey, pandemic years that had potentially unreliable attendance data are in light grey, and post-pandemic years with reliable data are in orange. School years are referred to by the spring year.

# Chronic absence is higher in Alaska



# Reducing chronic absence must begin in kindergarten (ideally preschool)



Note: These estimates are based upon data from 11 states (CO, CT, DE, GA, HI, IL, IN, MI, NE, OR, WA).

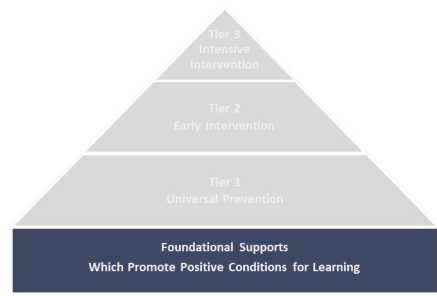
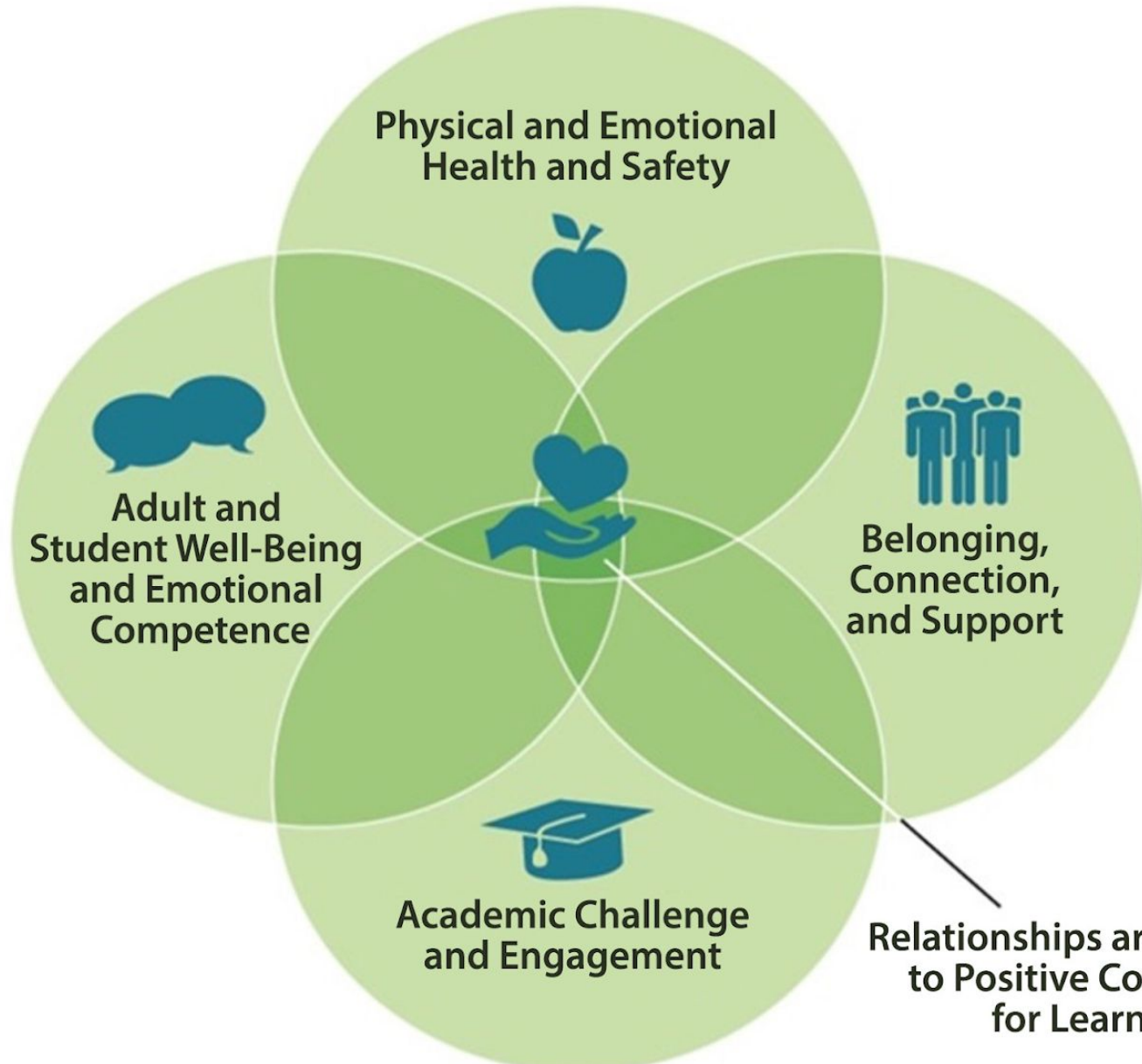
# The key to reducing chronic absence is addressing what causes students to miss too much school

Barriers	Aversion	Disengagement	Misconceptions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Chronic and acute illness</li><li>• Family responsibilities or home situation</li><li>• Poor transportation</li><li>• Housing and food insecurity</li><li>• Lack of access to needed services</li><li>• System involvement</li><li>• Unpredictable schedules for learning</li><li>• Lack of access to tech</li><li>• Impact of trauma</li><li>• Violence in the community</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Struggling academically and/or behaviorally</li><li>• Unwelcoming school climate</li><li>• Social and peer challenges</li><li>• Anxiety</li><li>• Unfair disciplinary and suspension practices</li><li>• Undiagnosed disability and/or disability accommodations</li><li>• Caregivers had negative educational experiences</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Lack of challenging, engaging instruction</li><li>• Bored</li><li>• No meaningful relationships to adults or peers in school</li><li>• Lack of enrichment opportunities</li><li>• Lack of academic and behavioral support</li><li>• Failure to earn credits</li><li>• Need to work conflicts with being in high school</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Absences are only a problem if they are unexcused</li><li>• Missing two days per month doesn't affect learning</li><li>• Lose track and underestimate TOTAL absences</li><li>• Assume students must stay home for any symptom of illness</li><li>• Attendance only matters in the older grades</li><li>• Suspensions don't count as absence</li></ul>

<https://www.attendanceworks.org/chronic-absence/addressing-chronic-absence/3-tiers-of-intervention/root-cause/s/>



# High levels of absence reflect an erosion in positive conditions for learning



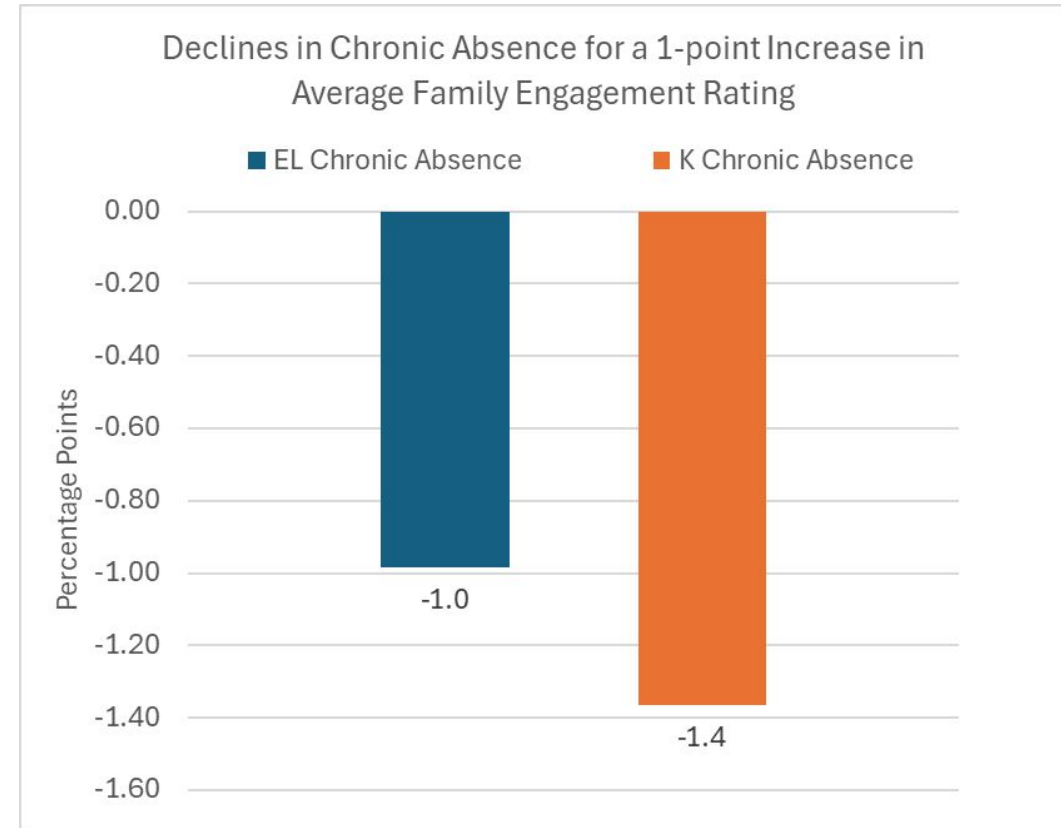
# Family Engagement in California Correlated With Lower Chronic Absence

California requires districts to annually report and rate their efforts to engage families as part of its local control accountability framework.

Districts that increased their capacity to partner with parents and incorporate family input into decision-making have seen meaningful reductions in absenteeism.

A one point increase in a district's average *rating of family engagement practices* predicts a:

- **1 percentage point decline** in the chronic absence rate of English learners
- **1.4 point decline** for kindergarteners

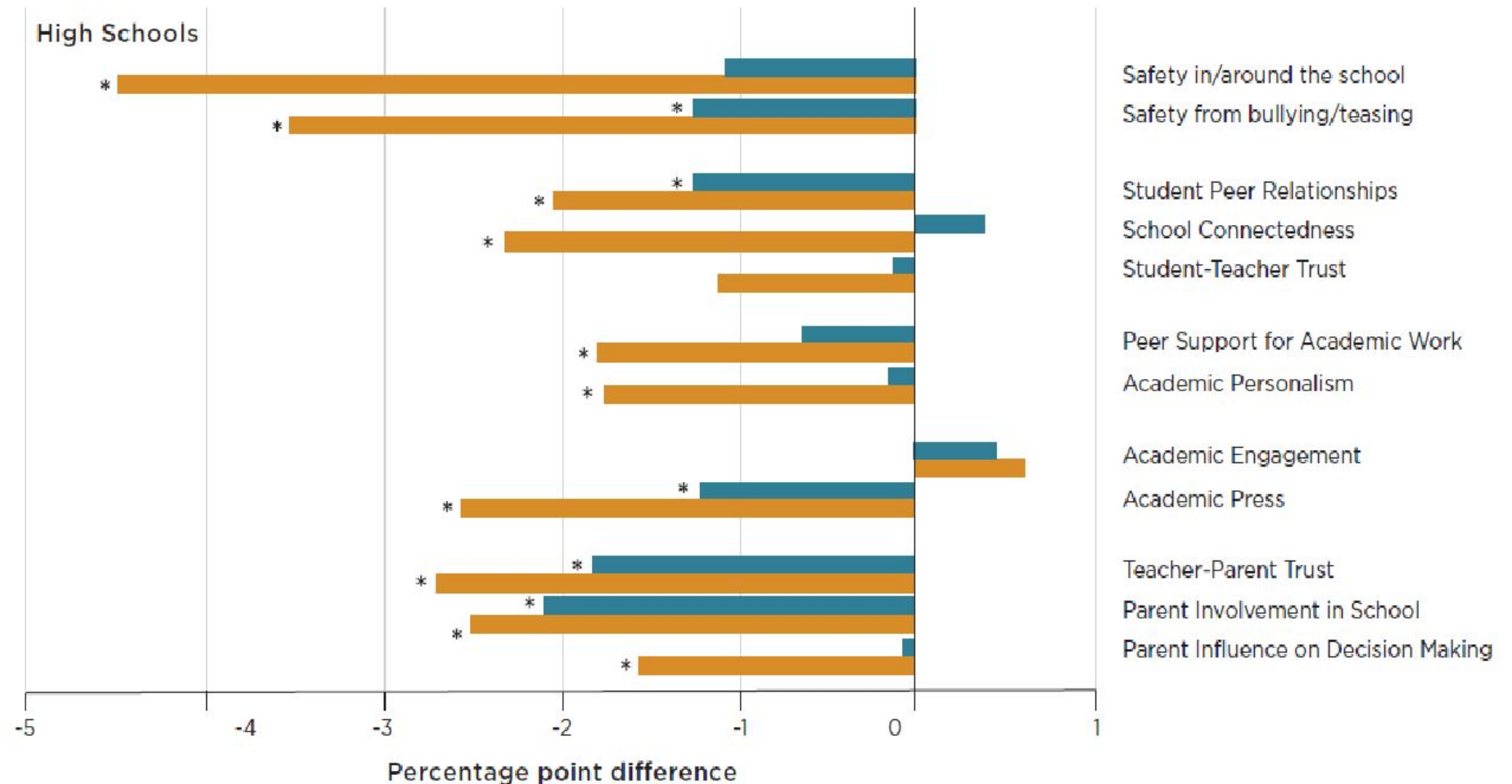


**UC DAVIS**  
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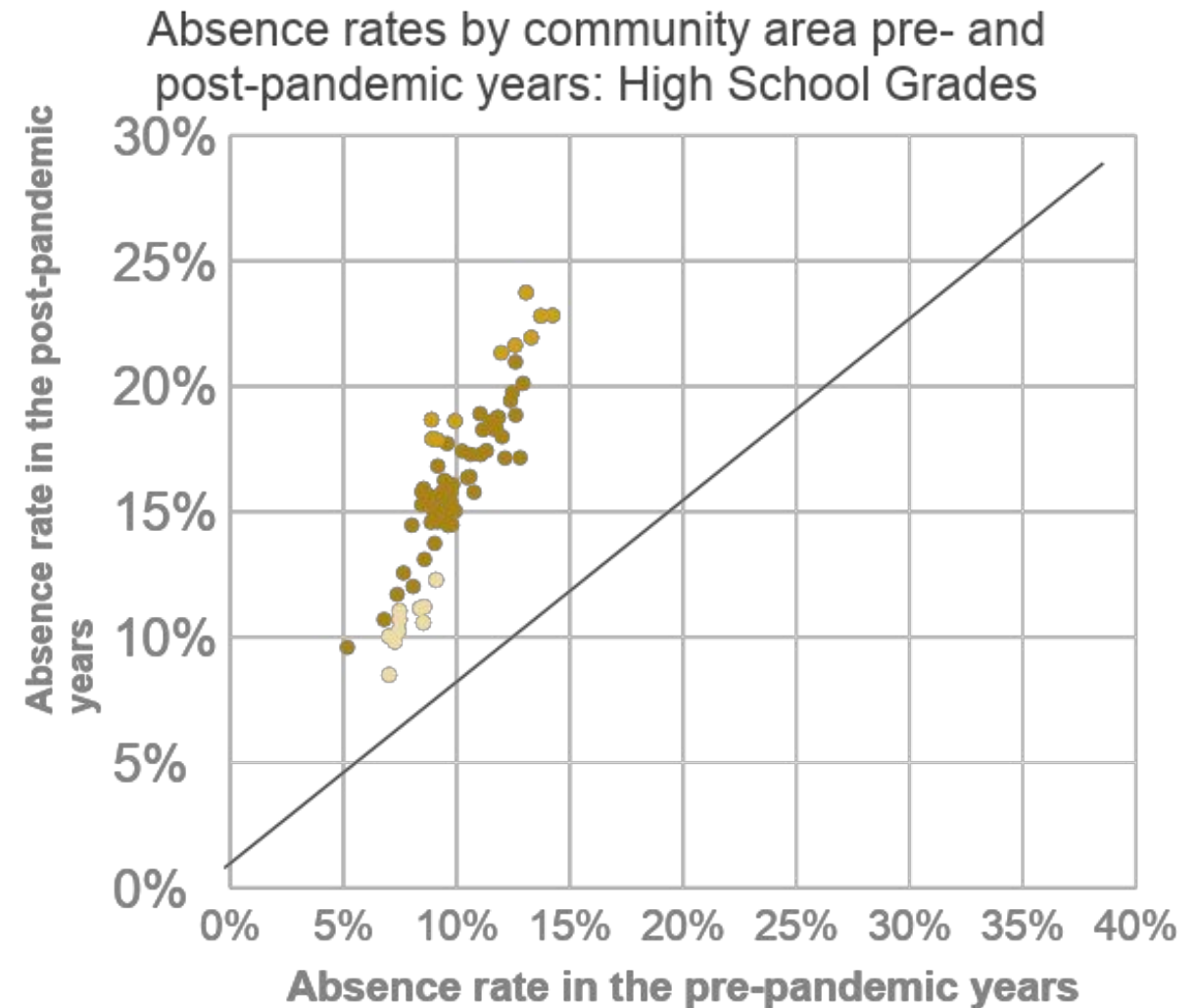
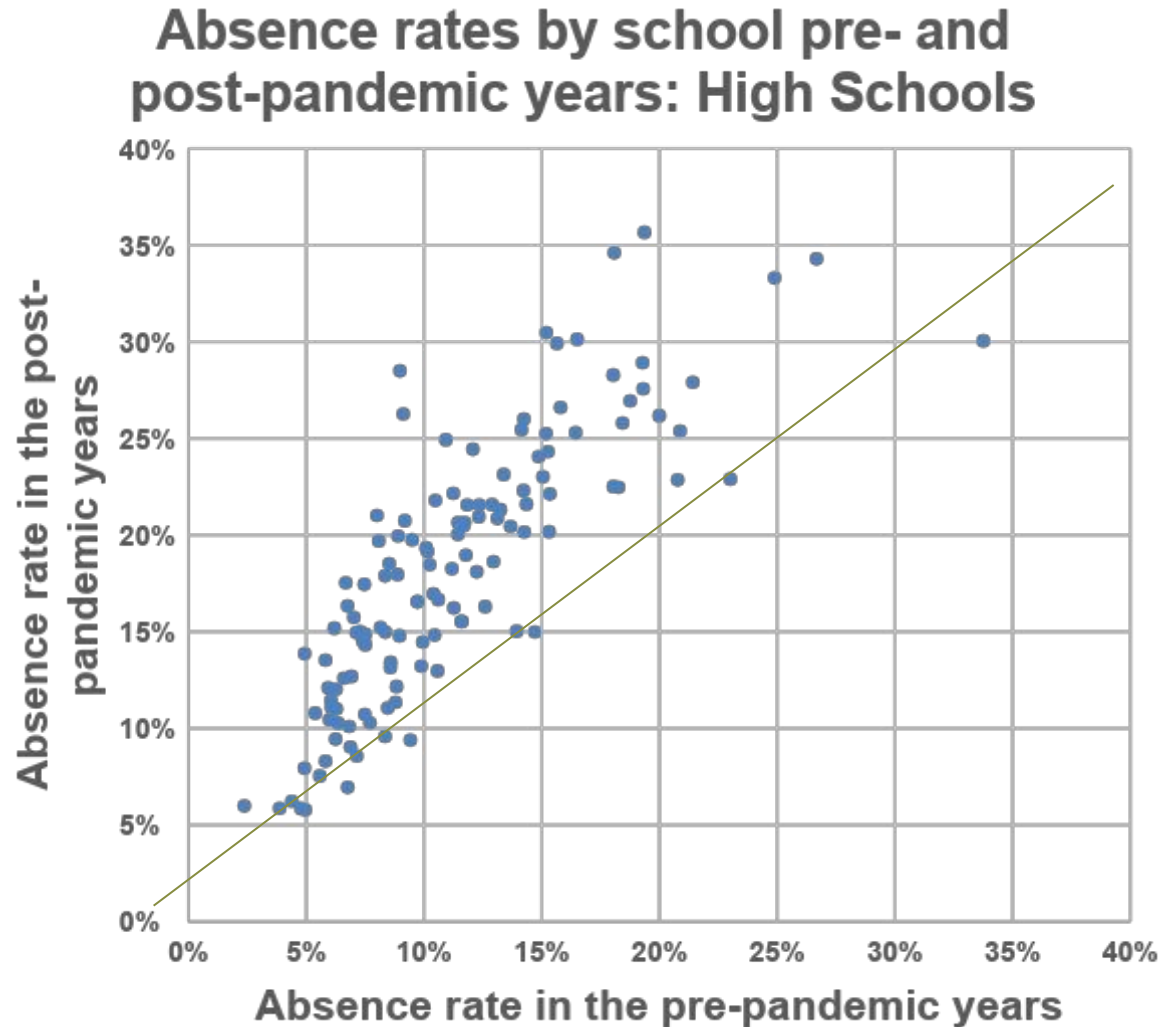
School Policy, Action,  
and Research Center

## Research in Chicago shows that school climate became an even stronger predictor of attendance post-pandemic.

*Difference in average absence rates for schools high vs. low on school climate measures, adjusted for students' prior absences and backgrounds*

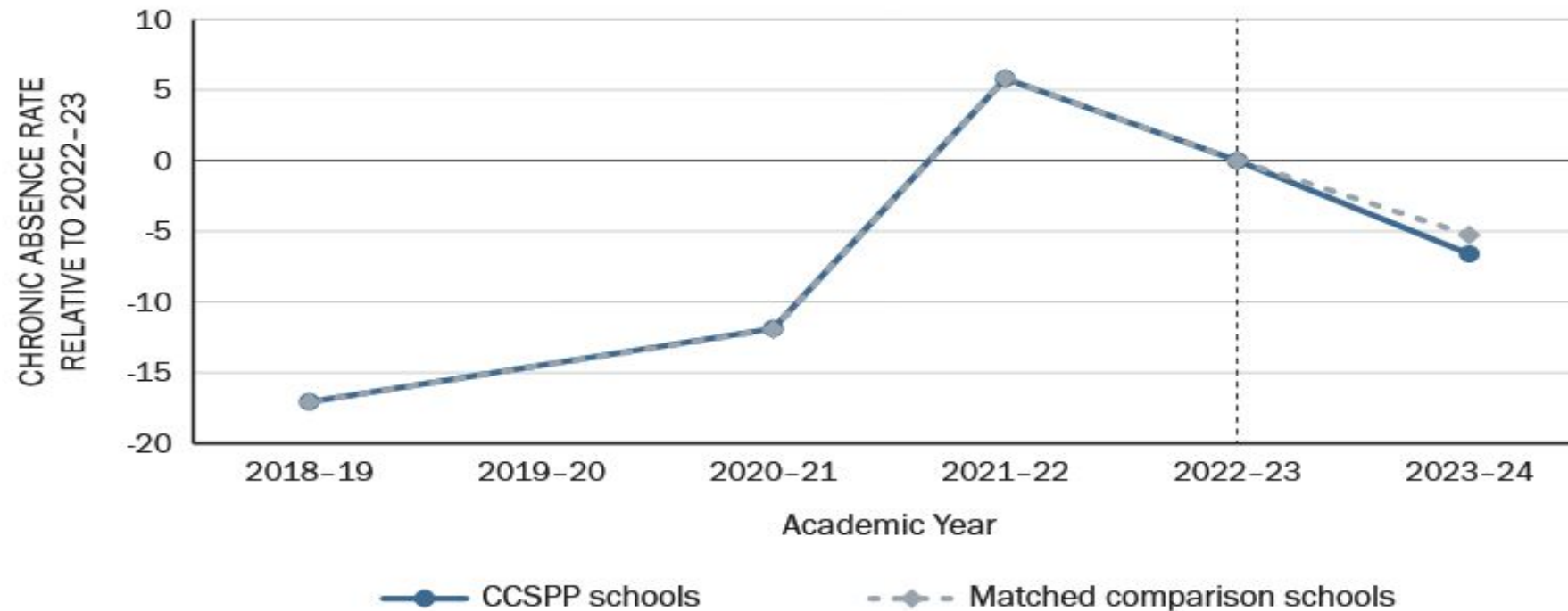


The magnitude of change in absence rates post-pandemic **was larger by high school than student's residential neighborhoods.**



# Community Schools Make a Difference

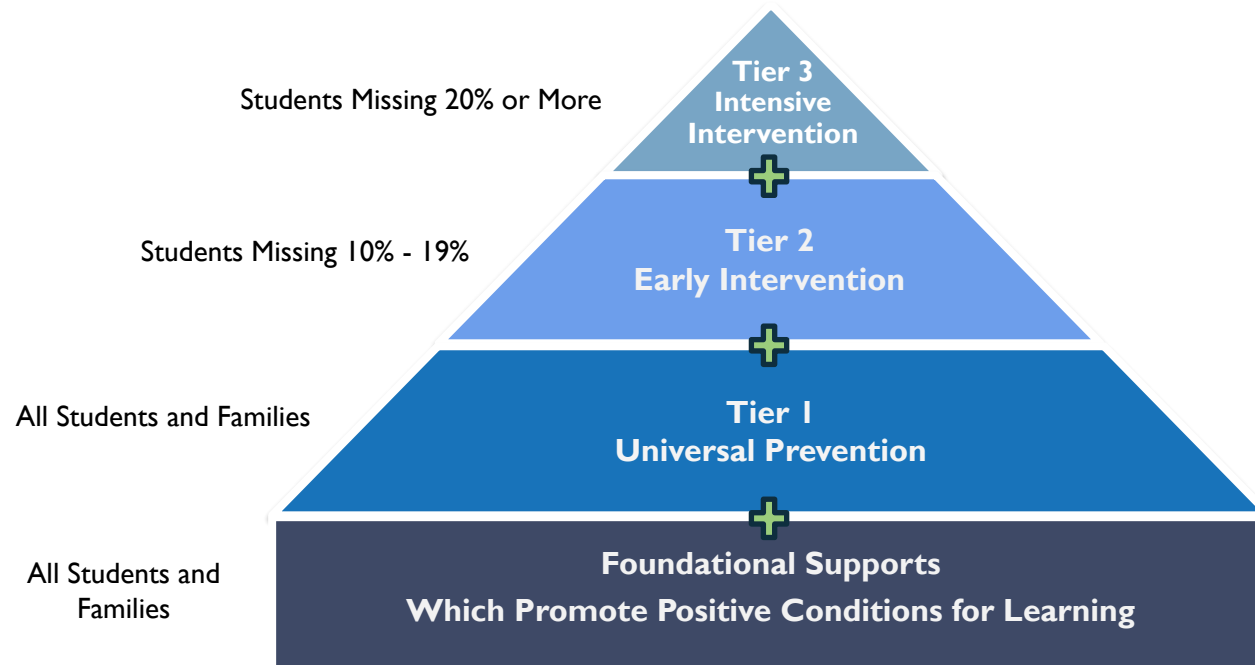
**Figure 1. Trends in Chronic Absence Rates for Community Schools and Comparison Schools**



Swain, W., Leung-Gagné, M., Maier, A., & Rubinstein, C. (2025). Community schools impact on student outcomes: Evidence from California. Learning Policy Institute. <https://doi.org/10.54300/541.498>



# Multi-tiered System of Support for Attendance

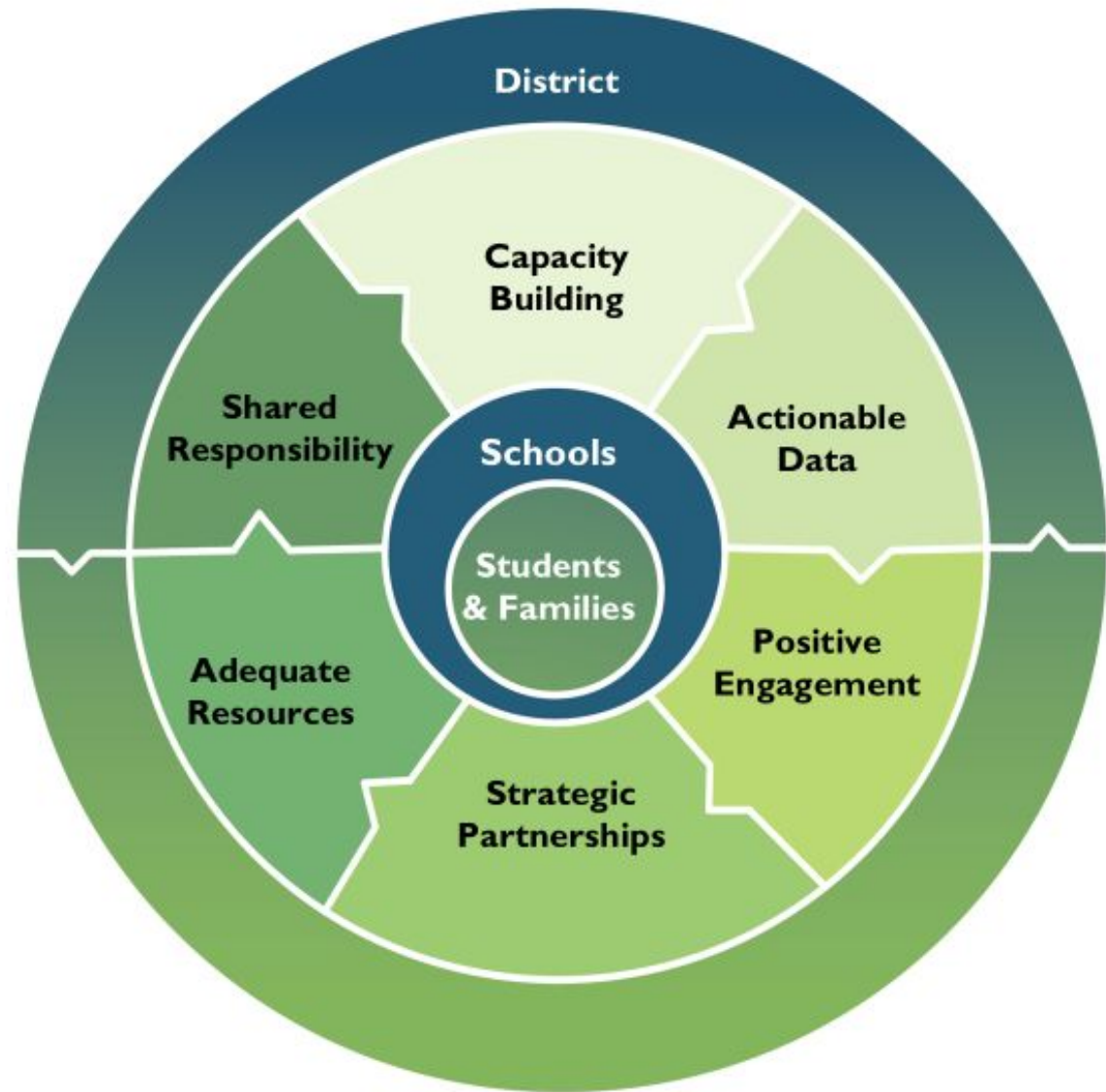


Visit: 3 Tiers of Intervention

<https://www.attendanceworks.org/chronic-absence/addressing-chronic-absence/3-tiers-of-intervention/>



Positive change builds up from local champions, with **districts as the units of change** that support action in schools and **states as the vehicles for scale.**





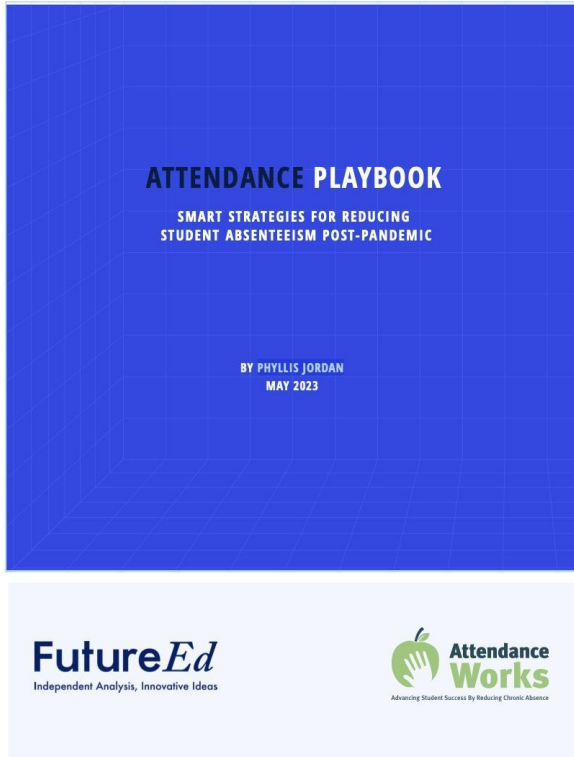
## **Policy Recommendations**

1. Ensure consistent, accurate and comparable data at the school, district and state level.
2. Created shared accountability and alignment of community resources through more disaggregated public reporting of data
3. Require attendance/chronic absence data to be shared when students move
4. Require outreach to students before they can be disenrolled
5. Advance tiered systems of support that begin with prevention
6. Promote creation of district and school teams to address attendance
7. Support technical assistance, guidance and resources that build district capacity to produce real-time data dashboards, adopt effective strategies for improving attendance as part of school improvement and engage in continuous improvement.





# Interventions that can be found in the Attendance Playbook



## TIER I Interventions

- Nudging Parents and Students
- Home Visits
- Positive Messaging
- Incentives
- Healthy School Buildings
- School-based Health Services
- Telehealth
- School Buses and Public Transit
- A Safer Walk to School
- Breakfast for All
- Laundry at School
- Relevant—and Culturally Relevant—Curriculum
- Threshold Greetings
- Rethinking Recess
- Restorative Discipline Practices

## TIER II Interventions

- Early Warning Systems
- Mentors
- Youth Engagement
- Addressing Asthma
- Targeted Transportation
- Students with Disabilities
- School Refusal
- Immigration Enforcement

## TIER III Interventions

- Truancy Courts
- Interagency Case Management
- Housing Challenges

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

Implementation Guide: <https://www.attendanceworks.org/resources/attendance-playbook/>