

# Building Bridges for Student Success: Student Engagement Strategies

*Session 2*  
*Spring 2026 Zoom Series*

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# Spring 2026 Zoom Series

## Chronic Absenteeism: Best Practices and Spotlights of Innovation Across Vermont



*All Wednesdays, 12 – 1pm*

- March 25: Chronic Absence 101: A foundational conversation investigating root causes and best practices
- April 8: Building Bridges for Student Success: Student Engagement Strategies
- April 29: Stronger Together: Leveraging Health Personnel and Partnerships to Improve Attendance
- May 6: Building Belonging: How the Community Schools Approach Reduces Chronic Absenteeism

*Recordings of all sessions will be archived at <https://www.uvm.edu/lernermed/vchip/every-day-counts>*

# Every Day Counts



University  
of Vermont

Leahy Institute  
for Rural Partnerships



# Building Bridges for Student Success: Student Engagement Strategies



Vermont Every Day Counts Spring Zoom Series

April 8, 2026



**Welcome!**

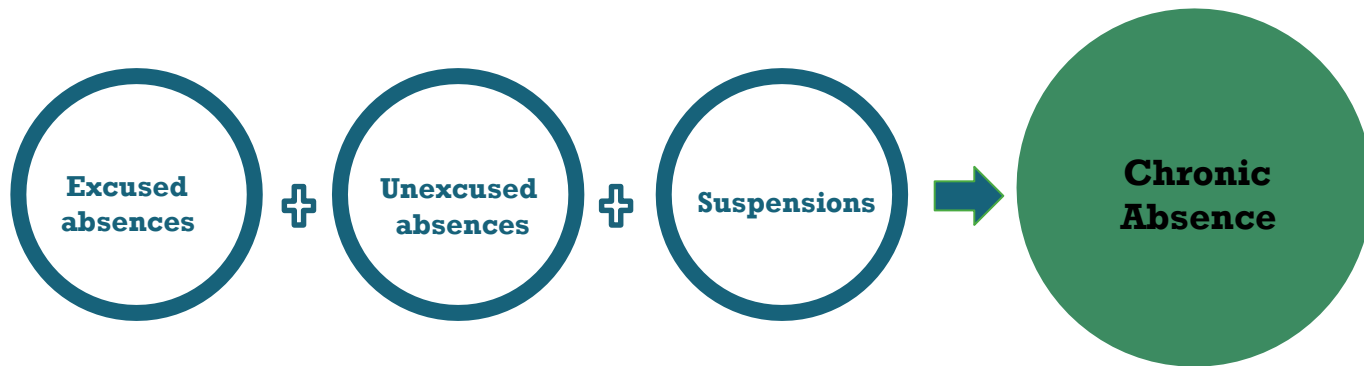
**Share in chat, your name,  
school or organization, and  
role!**

# **Overview of Chronic Absence**



## Chronic Absence Measures Lost Opportunity To Learn

Chronic absence is missing so much school for any reason that a student is academically at risk. Chronic absence is defined as **missing 10 percent or more of school for any reason.**



Chronic absence is different from **truancy** (unexcused absences only) or **average daily attendance** (how many students show up to school each day).



## Sporadic Absences are More Likely to go Unnoticed

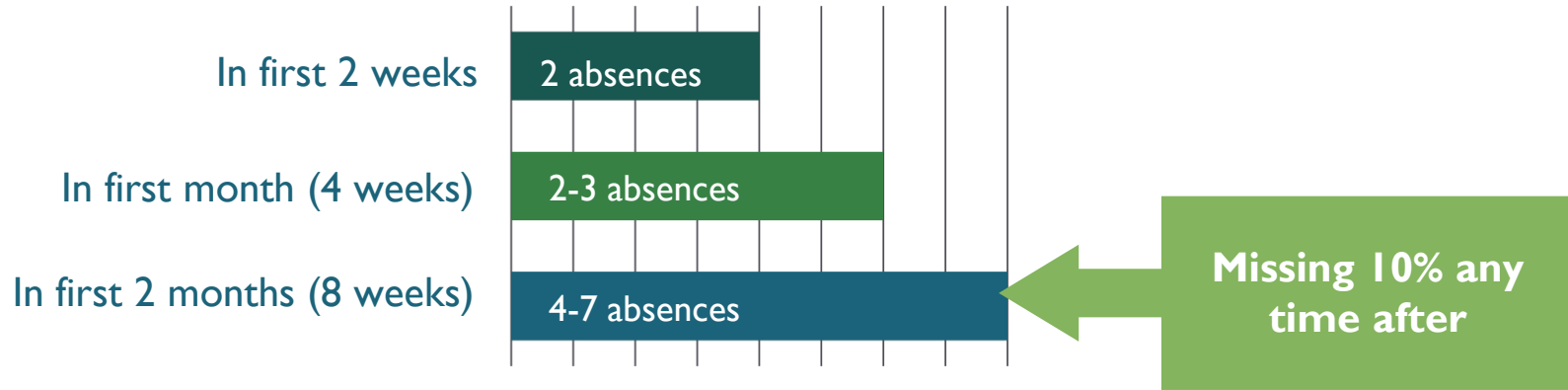
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Chronic Absence = 18 days of absence = **As Few As 2 days a month**



## Use Data to Identify Students Early in the School Year

- ✓ Chronic absence (missed 10-19.9% of school) in the prior year
- ✓ And/or starting in the beginning of the school year, student has:





## Poll

**Do *you* know the chronic absence rate in your school or community?**



## Reflection

- Do **key people** in your building and district know the chronic absence rate for the students you serve?
- How do you **access** the data?

# Pathway for Change





## Pathway for Change

Mindset





Actionable  
Data

Capacity

Strategies

Outcomes

# Shifting to a Positive Problem-Solving Approach

Typical	To	Problem-Solving Approach
<b>Blame Families</b>		<b>Focus on building asset-based relationships among schools, students and families</b>
<b>Use letters to communicate about poor attendance</b>		<b>Promote early positive early outreach to students and families to understand and address attendance barriers</b>
<b>Focus on students who are Tier 3</b>		<b>Promote a prevention and early intervention multi-tiered approach using data</b>
<b>Assign one person in each school to address attendance</b>		<b>Create a district and school wide approach that acknowledges everyone has a role to play.</b>

# Shifting Approach Large Group Discussion

## Some common phrases or practices we hear:

- *It's someone else's job.*
- *The parents don't care.*
- *The student is only absent a few days each month.*
- *Every year we talk about it, but nothing ever changes.*

**These are comments you may hear from colleagues.**

**In the chat share a response you can use to shift to a positive problem-solving approach**

# Schoolwide Call To Action for “All Hands On Deck” Approach

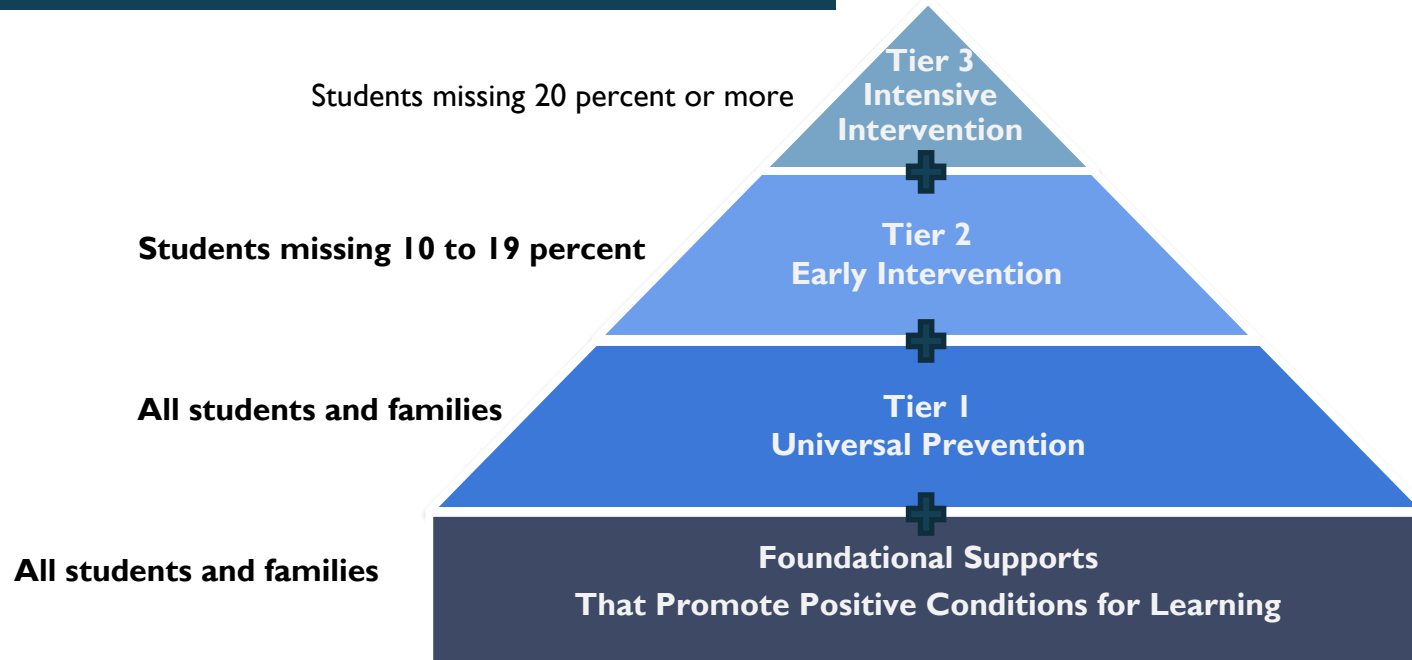
- Made it a priority
- Administration commitment through actions
  - Ongoing professional learning time
  - Meeting with families
- Shared conversations about building trust and elevating teacher voice
  - Follow through with actions based on discussions
- Honoring teacher’s voice to problem solve barriers
- Celebrate efforts

# Key to Improving Attendance Is a Tiered Approach

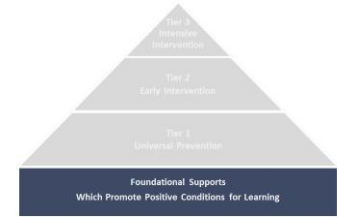




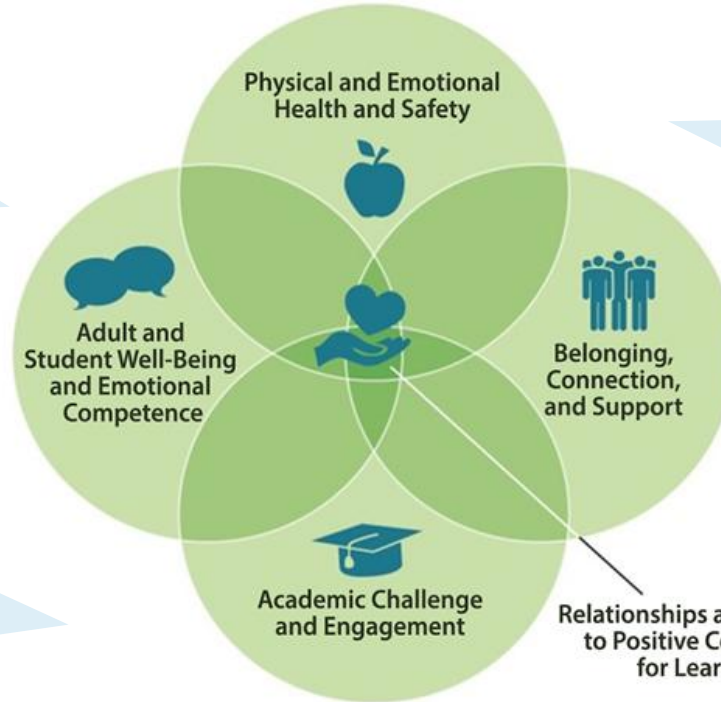
## Schools/Communities Struggle to Adopt/Sustain Multi-tiered Support Systems



# Positive Conditions for Learning Lead to Students Being Engaged and Attending Regularly



- Restorative check-ins
- Access to health care & mental health supports
- Trauma-informed practice
- Staff self-care



- Healthy learning environments
- Welcoming, safe school climate
- Access to food & other basic needs
- Restorative circles

- Access to tech & internet
- Learning supports
- Project-based learning
- Internships/community service
- Alternative scheduling options

- Build connection to the school
- Understand student's connection to a caring adult
- Connection to their peers

Relationships are Essential to Positive Conditions for Learning



## Four Factors that Contribute to Student Connectedness

Students are connected to schools when they:

- Believe there is an adult at school who knows and cares about them
- Have a supportive peer group
- Engage, at least some of the time, in activities they find meaningful and which help others
- Feel seen, heard and welcome in school



## Building Intentional Engagement: Guiding Questions

- Can you name three strengths and interests the student has?
- Can you name three things about the student's life outside of school?
- If the student has a problem, do you know if the student will share their concerns with you or another adult?
- In the past week, have you expressed gratitude or a positive message to the student?

## Intentional Engagement in Middle School

- Student engagement
- Connection to teachers
- Intentional outreach
- Tangible
- Representation that someone noticed



# COUGAR KUDOS!



TO:

- WE SEE YOUR COMMITMENT TO OUR SCHOOL COMMUNITY
- WE'RE PROUD OF YOU
- WE MISS SEEING YOU
- WE'RE THINKING OF YOU
- JUST 'CUZ YOU'RE AWESOME

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

FROM:



# Roadmap: Vision to Implementation

-  Meetings with administration
-  Reviewing data
-  Discussing strategies
-  Building trust
-  Attendance committee formed
-  Trusted adult vision
-  Presentation to all staff and faculty
-  Volunteer participants
-  Trusted adult pilot

## **Colchester High School Attendance Committee**

Administrators

Athletic coaches

District school engagement clinician

Public health specialist

School counselors

School nurses

School social workers

Special education case managers

Teachers

Union members



# Trusted Adult Pilot Project at Colchester High School

**Goal:** To build relationships between students, their families and the school through a trusted teacher relationship to improve school attendance



Participating staff will receive:



**Training** in crafting messages to reduce tension and increase trust with students and families

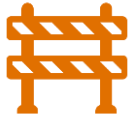


**Support** on how to identify students that need a trusted adult and resources on student engagement.

# Intentional Engagement!



Staff will connect with one or two attendance-challenged students and their families



Staff will discuss barriers faced by students with a designated student support team.



Staff are not expected to solve challenges to attendance.



# Colchester Trusted Adult Participant Data

## 2024-2025

**17** “trusted adults” chose  
**28** chronically absent students  
for the pilot

**35** days, from April 7th to June  
3rd

**50%** of students were **no  
longer chronically absent**  
during the pilot period.

## 2025-2026

**Schoolwide** “trusted adults” chose 2-3  
chronically absent students.

**146** Students

**Year long pilot**

- **46%** of students saw improvement in attendance throughout the year!
- **9%** of students did not have an increase in chronic absence throughout the year, they stayed the same.

# No Hungry Weekends

- Districtwide
- School support teams refer families
- Weekly collaboration with families in multiple languages
- Intentional food selection
- Bags sent home every Friday
- Survey families frequently



## Fresh Rescue

- Community partnership
- Goal to reduce stigma
- Food for all HS students and staff
- Every Thursday

# Tier I - Messaging





## Key Messaging from the AdCouncil 2024 Report

1. **Positive** in tone
2. **Communicate positive opportunities** associated with in-person learning, not the consequences of missing school
3. **Focus on the whole child** (*personally, socially, academically, and emotionally*)
4. **Acknowledge parent's hesitations** and avoid chastising or shaming
5. **Message is first delivered by child's teacher**



# Research about Effective Attendance Messaging

## 1. Readable

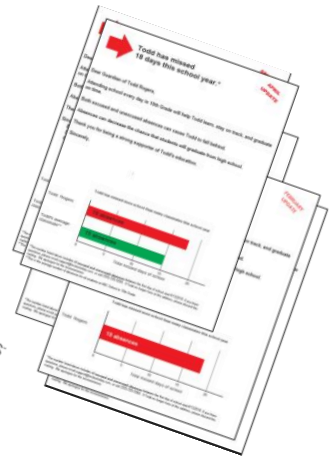
- Fewer words
- Accessibility: [Flesch-Kincaid readability test](#)
- Skimmability: bullets, format reinforces message

## 2. Programmatic

- Planned (*personalized to audience*)
- Timely
- Routinized

## 3. Available in family's native language

EveryDay Labs



# Letters and Texts Can Help Build Connections

Insert School [logo](#)

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

I am writing to check in on **[NAME OF STUDENT]** and offer support.

**[NAME OF STUDENT]** has missed [Insert number of days absent] days of school this year.

Does this seem correct to you?

Getting back into the habit of daily attendance matters more than ever. Going to school is an opportunity for your student to:

- Build routines that help reduce stress.
- Connect to their friends and teachers.
- Engage in learning.

When students attend regularly, they are much more likely to read proficiently by third grade, do well in middle school and graduate.

We would like to partner with you to improve **[NAME OF STUDENT]**'s attendance.

Please call me at **[PHONE NUMBER]**.

Sincerely,

**[PRINCIPAL'S OR OTHER STAFF PERSON'S NAME]**

We missed (student) in school today. (Student) has missed (X) days of school this month/year. We love when (student) is here to join us, engage in learning and connect with friends and teachers.

# Colchester District Universal Notifications: Multi-Step Process

- Reviewed accuracy of system for coding attendance
- Met with administrators and registrars district wide
- Worked with IT Support
- Engaged teachers
  - Chronic absenteeism
  - Vision for the district wide notifications
- Monthly attendance notifications to caregivers and students grades K-12.
- Notifications have a resource embedded in the message, such as:
  - podcasts
  - articles on routine setting
  - upcoming local learning opportunities
  - information on chronic absenteeism and missed learning

# Colchester School District Universal Notification

**Universal Attendance Summary** sent monthly to primary caregivers of all K-12 students in the district.

- Text message
- Email
- App Push Notification

Union Memorial School

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This is the automated monthly K-8 Attendance Summary Report for Ja [REDACTED] [REDACTED]. This report includes *both* excused and unexcused absences, tardies (less than 30 minutes after the bell), late arrivals (more than 30 minutes after the bell), and early dismissals.

**Jacoby has missed 0 day(s) of school this year and has been tardy, late, or dismissed early a combined 1 time(s).**

#### Monthly Resource

Is your child struggling with school attendance, fears, or getting to class on time? All are welcome to join a virtual panel discussion hosted by Timber Lane Pediatrics, featuring parents, school administrators, and therapists, to gain **practical ideas and renewed optimism** for increasing attendance this school year. The event is happening on Wednesday, November 12, from 6:30 to 7:30 p.m., [and can be accessed using this Microsoft Teams link.](#)

If you have questions about the information listed or your family is experiencing difficulties that are affecting your child's attendance, please reach out to your school's front office, counselor, or administrator for support.

Colchester School District

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This email was sent from a notification-only address that cannot accept incoming email. Please do not reply to this message. Contact the school directly if you have any questions.

# Key Takeaways and Action Steps

- Shift to a positive problem solving approach
- Pilot a foundational strategy to promote positive conditions for learning for all students
- Review attendance and chronic absence data
- Pilot trusting adult/success mentor strategy with targeted group of students who have moderate chronic absences

# Large Group Discussion

**Share one action you can take to support students to connect with school and promote attending school every day?**



## Resources

- [Attendance Works Website](#)
- Attendance Works: [Toolkit on Transition to Kindergarten](#)
- Attendance Works: [Recommended Strategies for Schools](#)
- Attendance Works: [Sign up for the Attendance Works Newsletter](#)

# Presenters

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Questions? [EveryDayCounts@med.uvm.edu](mailto:EveryDayCounts@med.uvm.edu)





**SHOWING UP FOR COLCHESTER**



## About Attendance Works

**Attendance Works** advances student success and closes equity gaps by reducing chronic absence. Operating at the local, state, and national level, Attendance Works:

- ✓ Advances better **policy**
- ✓ Nurtures proven and promising **practice**
- ✓ Promotes meaningful and effective **communication**
- ✓ Catalyzes needed **research**

Since our launch in 2010, we have become the nation's “go-to” resource for improving student attendance. To learn more, visit our website: [www.attendanceworks.org](http://www.attendanceworks.org)