# LINC Commission Meeting

November 19, 2018



Students from Johnson Elementary in the Hickman Mills School District take a field trip to Faulkner's Ranch in Kansas City, Missouri. *(Photo: Augustus Zuo, LINC Site Coordinator)*

**LINC**℠
Local Investment Commission

@kclinc    /kclinc    kclinc.org

# Local Investment Commission (LINC) Vision

## Our Shared Vision

A caring community that builds on its strengths to provide meaningful opportunities for children, families and individuals to achieve self-sufficiency, attain their highest potential, and contribute to the public good.

## Our Mission

To provide leadership and influence to engage the Kansas City Community in creating the best service delivery system to support and strengthen children, families and individuals, holding that system accountable, and changing public attitudes towards the system.

## Our Guiding Principles

1. COMPREHENSIVENESS: Provide ready access to a full array of effective services.

2. PREVENTION: Emphasize "front-end" services that enhance development and prevent problems, rather than "back-end" crisis intervention.

3. OUTCOMES: Measure system performance by improved outcomes for children and families, not simply by the number and kind of services delivered.

4. INTENSITY: Offering services to the needed degree and in the appropriate time.

5. PARTICIPANT INVOLVEMENT: Use the needs, concerns, and opinions of individuals who use the service delivery system to drive improvements in the operation of the system.

6. NEIGHBORHOODS: Decentralize services to the places where people live, wherever appropriate, and utilize services to strengthen neighborhood capacity.

7. FLEXIBILITY AND RESPONSIVENESS: Create a delivery system, including programs and reimbursement mechanisms, that are sufficiently flexible and adaptable to respond to the full spectrum of child, family and individual needs.

8. COLLABORATION: Connect public, private and community resources to create an integrated service delivery system.

9. STRONG FAMILIES: Work to strengthen families, especially the capacity of parents to support and nurture the development of their children.

10. RESPECT AND DIGNITY: Treat families, and the staff who work with them, in a respectful and dignified manner.

11. INTERDEPENDENCE/MUTUAL RESPONSIBILITY: Balance the need for individuals to be accountable and responsible with the obligation of community to enhance the welfare of all citizens.

12. CULTURAL COMPETENCY: Demonstrate the belief that diversity in the historical, cultural, religious and spiritual values of different groups is a source of great strength.

13. CREATIVITY: Encourage and allow participants and staff to think and act innovatively, to take risks, and to learn from their experiences and mistakes.

14. COMPASSION: Display an unconditional regard and a caring, non-judgmental attitude toward, participants that recognizes their strengths and empowers them to meet their own needs.

15. HONESTY: Encourage and allow honesty among all people in the system.

**Monday, Nov. 19, 2018 | 4 – 6 pm**
**Kauffman Foundation**
**4801 Rockhill Rd.**
**Kansas City, Mo. 64110**

## Agenda

   I.   **Welcome and Announcements**

  II.   **Approvals**
      <span style="color:red">**a. Approval October minutes (motion)**</span>

 III.   **LINC Finances**
      **a. Independent Audit**
      **b. IRS Form 990**

 IV.   **Superintendent Reports**

  V.   **Community Financial Initiatives**
      *a. Small Dollar Loans*
      *Onward Financial, Ronnie Washington*
      *b. Tax Preparation*
      *Connecting for Good, Tom Esselman*

 VI.   **Chronic Absenteeism**

VII.   **Report Out**
      **a. Lights on After School (video)**
      **b. LINC Open House (Monday, Dec. 17)**

VIII.   **Adjournment**

The Local Investment Commission met at the Kauffman Foundation, 4801 Rockhill Rd., Kansas City, Mo. Co-chair **Bailus Tate** presided. Commissioners attending were:

| | |
|---|---|
| Bert Berkley | Rob Givens |
| Jack Craft | Anita Gorman |
| Tom Davis | Rosemary Lowe |
| Aaron Deacon | Ken Powell |
| David Disney | David Rock |
| Mark Flaherty | David Ross |
| Herb Freeman | |

Tate introduced **Jim MacDonald**, United Way of Greater Kansas City, who reported on the upcoming "Every Student, Every Day" summit to strengthen the connection between school attendance and academic achievement through research-based practices and strategies. The Nov. 5 event is organized by United Way of Greater Kansas City, Turn the Page KC, and School Smart KC and area education and business leaders. **Hedy Chang** of Attendance Works is the keynote speaker.

*Minutes of the Sept. 17, 2018, LINC Commission meeting were approved.*

## Superintendent Reports

- **Steve Morgan**, Asst. Superintendent (Fort Osage School District), reported **Emily Cross** of Indian Trails Elementary represented Missouri as a distinguished principal at the National Association of Elementary School Principals conference this month. The district Career and Technology Center celebrated its 50th anniversary this month. Construction of the new Early Childhood Center is progressing; a ribbon-cutting is scheduled for Jan. 2, 2019. The district will host a regional Student Council Leadership summit this Friday.

- **Christina Medina,** Director of Public Relations (Center School District), reported on Home Fest, a Sept. 30 held by Colonial Presbyterian Church to raise money to provide the Center district with resources to address student homelessness. A video of news coverage of the event was shown. The district is planning to issue a survey to patrons to determine the possibility of a bond issue to fund the initiative. The district's new Breakfast in the Classroom initiative, a Purdue University research study to serve middle school students more protein in the morning, is showing positive effects on attendance.

- **Joana King,** Asst. Superintendent (Grandview School District), reported the district is partnering with LINC to hold several Trunk or Treat events this Halloween. Grandview communications manager Elena Olmstead won an award for the district's monthly newsletter. The district is proceeding with its cultural competency initiative and training staff on trauma-informed practices.

- **Christy Harrison**, Director of Extended Learning Opportunities (Kansas City Public Schools), reported on Knock and Talk, an initiative for school administrators and staff to visit households to meet and engage parents/guardians. Superintendent **Mark Bedell** will be hosting student and teacher Town Halls to garner feedback. The district will continue to focus on attendance and enrollment.

- **Kevin Foster**, Executive Director (Genesis School), reported Genesis will partner with LINC to provide Family and Schools Together (FAST) training for Genesis families beginning in February 2019. Genesis and other charter schools, unlike district schools, lack capacity to access Title I funds; schools are working to figure out how to gain access for their children. Genesis will host

its annual Thanksgiving dinner on Nov. 14. UMKC has announced it will no longer sponsor charter schools; other organizations including Kansas City Public Schools and Central Missouri State University have expressed interest in becoming sponsors.

- **Terry Ward,** Board Member (North Kansas City Schools), reported the district is seeking to meet new challenging state attendance standards. Area districts are working with Kansas City Mayor Sly James on a new plan for a pre-K ready-for-school initiative. The district is providing staff with diversity and inclusion professional development to reduce student performance gaps. The district is studying an unexpected high rate of student population growth. Bond-financed construction at North Kansas City High School is under way. Twenty students are currently enrolled in the Construction Career Academy sponsored by J.E. Dunn – the initiative gives students the opportunity to earn a diploma, Associate of Arts degree, and enrollment in an apprenticeship program.

LINC Human Resources Director **Trent DeVreugd** reported that Mid-America Regional Council (MARC) will take on LINC's early childhood efforts. He introduced MARC Director of Early Learning **Jovanna Rohs**, who gave a presentation on MARC's efforts to work collaboratively to strengthen the region's early learning system. Discussion followed.

LINC Caring Communities Administrator **Janet Miles-Bartee** reported the new school year is off to a strong start for LINC's Before & After School program sites. She gave an overview of the program including licensed capacity, average daily attendance, enrollment, and staffing at the programs in LINC's five partner school districts.

LINC Caring Communities Administrator **Sean Akridge** gave an overview of services, partners, and family engagement opportunities available at LINC Before & After School locations. He gave a report on upcoming events planned at LINC sites for Lights On Afterschool, the annual national celebration of afterschool programs organized by the Afterschool Alliance. He also reported on the LINC Site Coordinator Appreciation Luncheon held Sept. 27 at Southeast Community Center – part of the national site coordinator appreciation week organized by Coalition for Community Schools. A slide show of the event was shown.

LINC staff **Renee Asher** invited attendees to the LINC Open House to view the remodeled office. The event is scheduled for Dec. 17.

Akridge reported LINC and City of Independence collaborated on the Independence Heritage Festival held Oct. 20 at the New Uptown Market. Photos of the event were shown.

Tate reminded the attendees of the importance of voting in the Nov. 6 general election. **Jack Craft** reported on the ballot initiative for funding to increase computer availability for patrons of the Kansas City Public Library.

The meeting was adjourned.

# Onward Financial Inc

During our Interviews with users before launch, we asked questions about how they defined financial security for themselves and their families. The most common takeaway was that people wanted to have a "cushion", an amount separate from the funds earmarked for expenses to personally rely on in case of emergencies. While products such as car title loans, payday loans, and high interest credit can provide instant liquidity, they often lead to cycles of debt and higher expenses. That's why we created Onward as a separate option.

With our pilot population, we have measured savings rates for over a year and a half and have seen tremendous progress in the ability for low-to-moderate income workers to save consistently. Within our pilot company, we achieved a 98% participation rate, with 71 people saving over $127K as of Aug 3rd. This equates to an average emergency savings rate of $1,788 for all workers. Out of the total workforce, 54 are classified as low-to-moderate income and have saved a total of $57.7K for an average balance of $1,068 per account. The CFSI states that nearly 61% of Americans say they couldn't cover a $1,000 expense while nearly half of Americans don't have just $400 in savings. Our pilot has demonstrated that if provided with the appropriate tools and incentives to save, low to moderate income workers can in fact build a financial cushion for themselves.

If selected as a winner of the Communities Thrive Challenge, we desire to run more formal evaluations to as we expand our work to new employers in Kansas City, MO. One option is to engage Ideas42, the behavioral science consulting firm, to conduct a structured evaluation program to measure not only the financial impact of those using Onward, but also the longer term behavioral change. Internally, we are also implementing analytics within the mobile app to automatically capture trends and perform queries for more detailed reports.

Help us identify local, community solutions that can scale.

Why the Communities Thrive Challenge

At The Rockefeller Foundation and the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative, we believe in an America where all people can earn enough to support their families, achieve financial security, and provide their children with more opportunities. Every day, local governments, businesses, and nonprofit leaders across the country are working to make this dream possible in their communities.

Yet all too often, these community-driven approaches are missed by those who could invest in them and help them reach more people. This is especially true for efforts in small cities, rural America, and places with high rates of poverty.

That's why The Rockefeller Foundation and the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative - with guidance from community leaders across the country - have created the Communities Thrive Challenge, a $10-million funding opportunity open to organizations that are working to expand economic opportunity for low-income and financially insecure people and communities in the United States.

*"We have to build a future where people don't have to depend on luck to succeed.**Prlla Chan, co-founder of Chan Zuckerberg Initiative***

After two rounds of review, including **peer-to-peer** evaluation and review by an **expert panel**, as many as 10 organizations will receive a $1 million grant, as well as best-in-class technical assistance and an opportunity to share their stories on a national stage. At least 80 applicants will advance to the second round as semi-finalists, and 20 will be chosen as finalists. Each finalist that does not become a grantee will receive $5,000 in recognition of their great work.

Through the Communities Thrive Challenge, we hope to:

- Fund, strengthen and scale community-driven approaches across the country that help low-income and financially insecure people find and retain well-paid and meaningful work, achieve financial security, or build economically vibrant neighborhoods. Ultimately, we hope to uncover strategies that could narrow the opportunity gap in the U.S.

- Lift up the stories of successful community efforts and share them with other funders, leaders, and the broader country. Strategies from small-to-midsize cities, rural communities, in both thriving and distressed areas are of particular interest; we also seek organizations led by people who represent the communities they serve.

- Learn directly from community leaders across the country about the ideas and needs that should influence long-term, larger-scale strategies to increase opportunity.

*"This Challenge is about ensuring more people in America have access to a good job and a secure future."*

What We're Looking For

We are looking for nonprofit programs; businesses; organizing or advocacy models; technologies; economic development strategies, or other approaches that deliver significant and consistent results in any of the following areas:

- **Better Work:** Improving job quality, pay, and worker benefits, and creating new, well-paying jobs for low-income or otherwise marginalized workers in a rapidly changing economy and labor market. Indicators of success might include: income and number of jobs that pay a living wage and provide benefits.

- **Skills Development and Opportunity Matching:** Connecting low-income people with work and the skills necessary to succeed in a changing labor market, possibly through additional skill development, building career pathways from low-wage to higher-paying jobs, or identifying financing solutions to support the development of new skills and job transitions. Indicators of success might include: job placement, retention and promotion, or training program accessibility and completion.

- **Financial Security:** Enabling underserved and financially insecure workers and their families to better manage unanticipated changes in their income and expenses without experiencing periods of deeper poverty or being forced to rely on predatory debt. This could involve a range of approaches, including improving the design or delivery of social services. Indicators of success might include: financial stability, wealth building, decreased and manageable debt, improved credit scores, access to safety nets or emergency cash.

- **Economically Vibrant Communities:** Building neighborhoods, cities, or towns that foster economic stability and mobility for residents who have historically been excluded or marginalized, and ensuring that their neighborhoods benefit from a region's economic growth and vibrancy. Indicators of success might include: access to core services, such as child care and responsible financial institutions, a reasonable, affordable commute to gainful employment, as well as an increase in total jobs and/or small businesses owned by people of color, women, LGBTQ individuals, and others who have historically faced extra barriers to business ownership.

To gain better insight into community-driven approaches that are already being implemented across the country, we are teaming up with local United Way chapters across the Country to meet with leaders in roughly a dozen communities, such as Ypsilanti, Michigan; Louisville, Kentucky; and Brownsville, Texas. These will include visits with local government officials, community leaders, organizers, employers, and families in urban, rural, and suburban areas. These conversations, together with the organizations we learn about through the Challenge, will help inform both institutions' long-term economic opportunity strategies and improve our ability to support work at the local level.

Ultimately, we hope to help funders, policymakers, and other leaders identify and learn about standout approaches that are already making a difference in communities across the U.S. To that end, we will publish a searchable database of all eligible applicants, share the stories of finalists and grantees of the Communities Thrive Challenge, and widely share key themes and lessons learned.

Announcing Onward Financial as the Winner of Inclusion Plus United States

October 9, 2018

Onward Financial seeks to provide the tools for every worker to build a financial cushion. Onward's mobile-first platform allows employees to save effortlessly, build financial literacy, and access responsible credit.

nward Financial

$100,000.00

# MetLife Foundation and Verb Announce Winner of Financial Innovation Competition

## Onward Financial Receives $100,000 Grant to Expand Full-Service Employee Financial Wellness Program

October 22, 2018 10:00 AM Eastern Daylight Time

NEW YORK--(BUSINESS WIRE)--MetLife Foundation and Verb announced **Onward Financial** as the first place winner of the Inclusion Plus competition in the United States. The competition was open to entrepreneurs, non-profits and other social impact organizations focused on addressing the financial health needs of low- to moderate-income Americans. Standing out among more than 150 entries, Onward Financial received a $100,000 grant from MetLife Foundation.

@GetOnward wins @MetLife Foundation financial innovation competition, powered by @GoVerb #inclusionplus #financialhealth
Tweet this

Onward Financial is offered as an employee benefit, and provides an app for workers to save effortlessly, build financial literacy and access responsible credit when emergencies strike, such as a car repair bill or unexpected medical expenses. Similar to how a 401(k) program assists with saving for long-term financial stability, Onward's savings programs help low- to moderate-income workers build short-term savings and create better financial habits.

"Our team is beyond grateful for this opportunity," said Onward Founder and CEO Ronnie Washington, Jr. "It's been wonderful getting to know the other finalists, working with MetLife mentors and engaging with the judges during the final pitches. We're thrilled to have the support of MetLife Foundation behind us as we seek to expand our financial wellness program to more employees across the U.S. We'll do that by integrating with a broader set of payroll providers to make offering the app easy and seamless for employers of all sizes."

"MetLife Foundation sees the competition model as an effective mechanism to identify and elevate innovations that are helping people improve their financial lives," said Dennis White, president and CEO of MetLife Foundation. "Through this work, we support organizations like Onward Financial at the forefront of financial health in the United States, and around the world."

Additional grant recipients in the U.S. competition include:

- Second place: **Oxygen** offers freelancers and independent contractors who have uneven cash flow access to credit, working capital loans and free mobile banking.
- Third place: **EARN**, whose flagship platform, **SaverLife**, combines financial rewards for saving with motivational digital financial coaching to encourage a regular savings habit and help families build a financial cushion.
- Runner up: **Benefit Kitchen's** new program, **Censerio**, uses data analytics tools to help ensure working poor Americans can participate fully in the economy and unlock benefits they need to promote greater health and build financial security.
- Runner up: **PYT Funds** connects families and banks to provide new solutions to fund higher education.

The U.S.-based competition represents the culmination of a three-year program that included nine prior competitions. Inclusion Plus engaged nearly 500 organizations across Ireland, China, India, Mexico, Egypt, Lebanon, Bangladesh, Spain, Portugal, Australia, South Korea and the U.S.; MetLife employee volunteers dedicated over 8,000 hours as judges and mentors; and MetLife Foundation provided nearly $1 million in grant funding to accelerate the impact that 50 entrepreneurial organizations have on building a more financially inclusive world.

To learn more about the competitions, visit inclusionplus.com.

# ONE CHILD,
# ONE TEACHER,
# ONE BOOK,
# ONE PEN
## CAN CHANGE
## THE WORLD.

– MALALA YOUSAFZAI,
2014 Nobel Prize Laureate

## INTRODUCTION

Schools today have a great number of responsibilities. In addition to providing a good education and keeping students safe, they are expected to instill character, promote health and teach skills that prepare students for the workplace. Many schools have the added challenge of helping students overcome the effects of poverty, trauma and other social challenges.

Critical to meeting these challenges and academic benchmarks is showing up. There is little a school can do to support a student's success when they are not consistently in attendance. And there is an increasing understanding among educators and advocates nationwide about the impact of missing too many school days and the importance of intervening on behalf of the students with the highest rates of absenteeism.

## Poor attendance is correlated with a host of negative outcomes across the K-12 trajectory and beyond: Chronic absence in preschool
and kindergarten is associated with greater likelihood of being held back in the third grade; students who are chronically absent in middle school are more likely to drop out of high school; and chronically absent high schoolers who do graduate are less likely to make it to their second year of college.[1]

Nationwide, more than 7 million students (15 percent of the total K-12 population) were chronically absent during the 2015-16 school year, meaning they missed more than 10 percent of school days.[2] While chronic absenteeism affects students from all backgrounds and schools in all geographies, it disproportionately affects underserved groups, including low-income students, students of color, those with special education needs, and those facing disruptive life circumstances, such as homelessness.[3]

The long-term consequences of chronic absenteeism spread far beyond just education. Stakeholders exist in all sectors of the community, including employers who rely on a pipeline of qualified workers, public and private organizations working to establish strong local economies, and the agencies that serve families and children. Because the effects of chronic absenteeism are so far-reaching, solutions must include the engagement of educators, families, students, local businesses, and the community.
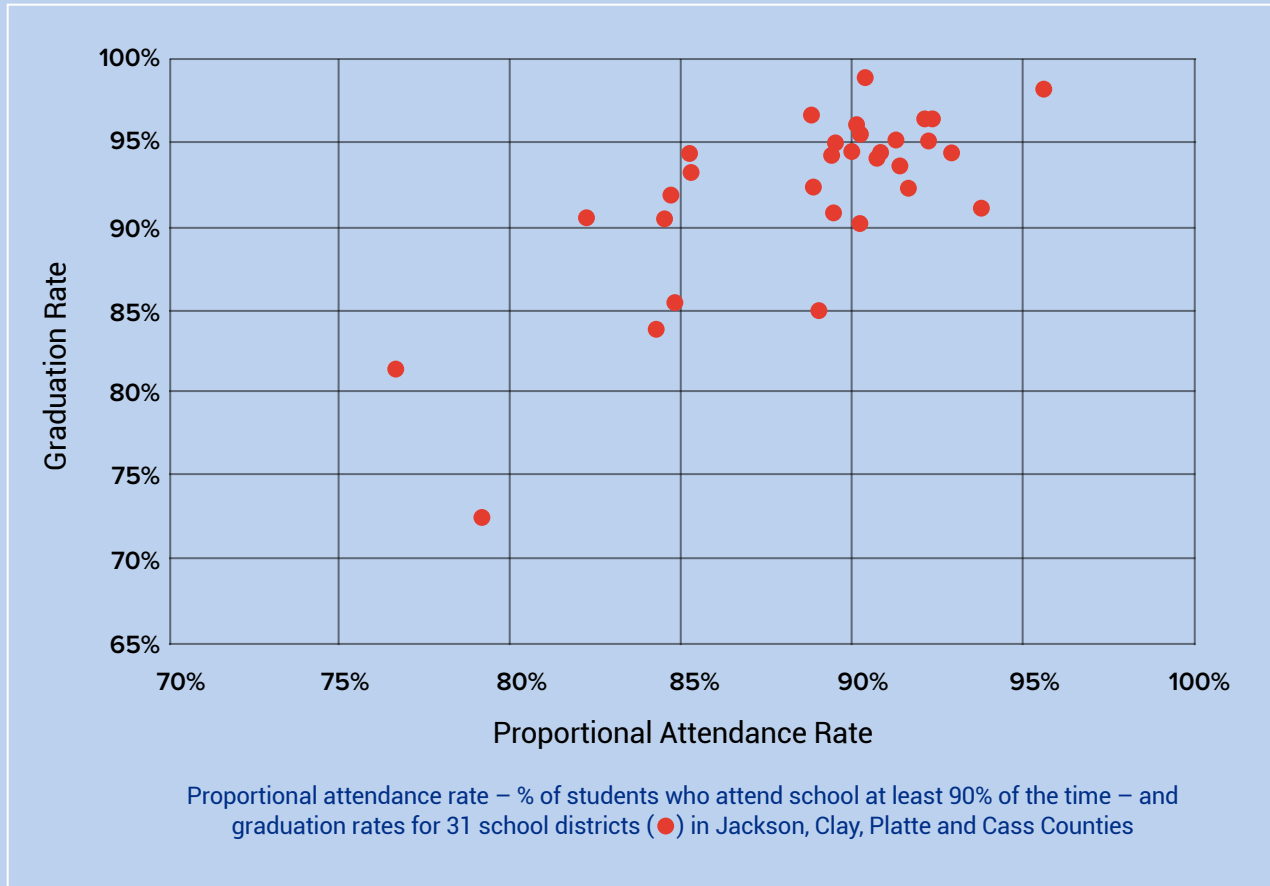
The United Way of Greater Kansas City is uniquely positioned to partner with a variety of stakeholders in the community to address the issue of chronic absenteeism in the Kansas City region. This report is one piece of that effort. It begins by defining chronic absenteeism and exploring its causes and consequences. It then presents data on the issue of chronic absenteeism in the Kansas City region, exploring where the issue is most pronounced. The paper concludes with a discussion of existing research on national and local solutions to the problem of chronic absenteeism.

## DEFINING CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM

While there is no consistent definition of chronic absenteeism, either in scholarly writing or in education circles, it is commonly defined as missing 10 percent or more of school days for any reason — excused or not. In most states, this is the equivalent of missing two days of school per month or 18 days throughout the academic year.[4]

Chronic absenteeism is distinct from other commonly used measures of attendance and absence, such as average daily attendance (ADA) and truancy. ADA measures the number of students who are in school on a given day, averaged over a set period of time. In most schools, ADA tends to be high (above 90 percent). While this calculation can give a general sense of how many students are typically present, it is an average and therefore does not identify or focus schools' attention on individual students who are repeatedly absent and who may need additional support services.

## DISTRICTS WITH BETTER ATTENDANCE RATES
## HAVE HIGHER GRADUATION RATES



Proportional attendance rate — % of students who attend school at least 90% of the time — and graduation rates for 31 school districts (●) in Jackson, Clay, Platte and Cass Counties

Source: Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education 2017 District Report Card

Schools also commonly report truancy rates, which measure only unexcused absences, so students who miss school frequently for "excused" reasons, like illness or out-of-school suspension, are not captured in this calculation.

Chronic absenteeism rates, on the other hand, track student-level attendance data and do not distinguish between excused and unexcused absences. Missing school, regardless of the cause, has negative effects on students' academic outcomes, and students who are absent frequently — whether they are sick or simply choosing not to attend — likely need additional attention and support. In recent years, states have begun to capture chronic absenteeism data more rigorously. The U.S.

Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights required schools to report the data for the first time beginning with the 2013-14 school year. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), passed in 2015, also requires states to track and report chronic absence data and allows districts to use federal dollars to train staff to address the problem.

ESSA also requires states to create accountability systems that track and report five indicators of school performance. The first three indicators measure math and reading achievement, the fourth holds states accountable for improving the English proficiency of English language learners, and the fifth is a state-chosen measure of school quality or student success.[5] Thirty-six states (including Missouri) and Washington, D.C. have adopted

measures of chronic absenteeism as their fifth indicator in their accountability plans.[6]

Definitions and measures of chronic absenteeism vary across these states. Twenty-seven states are using the most common definition — students who miss more than 10 percent of school days. Four states and Washington, D.C. are using the equivalent inverse: students who attend less than 90 percent of school days. Three states define chronic absence as missing a set number of school days, and two are using other measures of attendance as their definitions.[7]

The Kansas City metro area comprises districts in two states that have taken different approaches to their ESSA plans. Missouri is one of the 36 states and Washington, D.C. using a measure of chronic absenteeism as its fifth indicator. It falls into the second group outlined above, defining chronic absenteeism as being present less than 90 percent of the school year. Missouri's ESSA plan sets a goal of having at least 90 percent of students present at least 90 percent of the time (the 90/90 principle).[8]

Kansas, on the other hand, is not among the states using chronic absenteeism as its fifth indicator in its ESSA plan; it uses an additional measure of students' academic progress instead. However, the Kansas Department of Education has begun collecting chronic absenteeism data from districts to support teachers and schools in reducing the problem. The Department also plans to publicly release this data before the end of 2018.

Regardless of how states define chronic absenteeism and whether reducing it is an explicit goal in their ESSA plans,

## Defining Student Attendance and Absence in Missouri and Kansas

Both Kansas and Missouri track two sets of attendance and absenteeism data: daily attendance and chronic absenteeism.

To collect student attendance data for the purposes of receiving state per-pupil funding, both Missouri and Kansas track students' attendance in school in increments smaller than full school days. The Missouri Department of Education requires districts to report student attendance and absence data by the hour. Schools may do so by either collecting the data by the minute or by the hour.[9] Both full-day absences and early departures/late arrivals count toward a student's overall accumulated absent minutes. Students serving out-of-school suspensions are counted as absent and do not generate daily attendance for state aid purposes.[10] Kansas schools must also report the number of minutes students attend school to the Kansas Department of Education. These data are used to calculate full-time equivalency (FTE) for the purposes of receiving state funding, as determined on an annual "count day", on or around September 20th, in which state funding for the year is based on the number of enrolled and attending students on that day, with some exceptions.[11]

The states use slightly different methods for defining chronic absenteeism and collecting relevant data. In Missouri, students who are chronically absent are those who attend school less than 90 percent of the time.[12] In Kansas, chronically absent students are those who miss 10 percent or more of the days that school has been in session at any point in the school year, for any reason.[13] In Missouri, districts are required to offer a school year that is at least 174 days or 1,044 hours of instruction. In Kansas the school year is generally at least 186 days. As a result, the calculation of ten percent of school days can vary slightly by state and by district.

it remains a challenge facing students and schools in every state across the country.

## WHO IS AFFECTED?

In the 2015-16 school year, 7.3 million students nationwide were chronically absent.[14] The problem is widespread, affecting schools in every state and students from all backgrounds and geographies. It does not affect all groups of students equally, however. Students of color and those from low-income families are more likely to miss school than their more affluent white and Asian classmates.[15] English language learners are somewhat less likely to be chronically absent than their peers, while students receiving special education are more likely than their peers to be chronically absent.[16] Moreover, students facing significant disruptive events, like foster care placement or homelessness, are more likely to be chronically absent than their peers. One study of children ages 5-8 in Philadelphia's foster care system found that they missed, on average, 25 days of school per year (approximately 14 percent of school days).[19] In Sacramento, 27 percent of students in foster care were chronically absent during the 2012-13 school year.[20]

Students who experience homelessness are also more likely to miss school; one study estimates that they are 80 percent more likely to be chronically absent than their stably housed peers.[21] Even students in families who are able to avoid homelessness are vulnerable, as housing

## Chronic Absenteeism is an Equity Issue

School attendance is connected to physical, social, and environmental factors. Many of the physical, social, and environmental barriers that contribute to poor attendance (like illness, suspension, or transportation) disproportionately affect low-income students of color, leading them to be absent more frequently, which can exacerbate the problems these communities already face.[17]

Although chronic absenteeism is widespread, the majority of cases are highly concentrated; more than half of all chronic absenteeism takes place in just 4 percent of the nation's districts and 12 percent of schools.[18] In the Kansas City region, more than one-quarter of all chronically absent students (26 percent) attend the region's four large urban districts, while those district serve only 15% of total students.

Funding formulas that base school funding on average daily attendance also have a disproportionately negative impact on districts serving high numbers of low-income students of color. In Missouri's funding formula, "weighting" for factors such as poverty, limited English proficiency, and special education needs is offset by factoring into the funding calculation average daily attendance, which is typically lower in high-poverty districts.

Because chronic absenteeism disproportionately affects already-underserved groups of students, improving school attendance is critical to closing achievement gaps and improving educational equity. Strategies focused on tackling the challenge of chronic absenteeism must incorporate approaches to closing equity and achievement gaps.

instability due to poverty can result in frequent moves for a variety of reasons — for example, to avoid eviction, to take advantage of "first month free" offers, or to "double up" by necessity or by choice to reduce expenses. Often, these moves cross school building attendance boundaries and even district boundaries, resulting in delays as families settle and complete a new school's enrollment process. Students who are transient for other reasons, including those in military families, migrant families, or those displaced by natural disasters, are also more likely to be chronically absent.[22]

Chronic absenteeism is a problem across all grade levels, beginning as early as pre-k, but rates of chronic absenteeism vary by grade. National trends show that chronic absenteeism tends to be high in preschool and in the early elementary grades — one in 10 kindergarten and first-graders misses 18 or more days of school per year[23] — before dropping in the middle elementary years (grades 3-5) and then ticking up again in middle school and into high school, which tends to have the highest rates of chronic absenteeism (see Figure 1 below). Nationwide, about one in five high school students is chronically absent, compared to 13 percent of middle schoolers and 11 percent of elementary-aged students.[24]

## WHY CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM MATTERS

Chronic absenteeism is concerning because it correlates with negative future educational outcomes for students and it can also be a warning sign of other problems. High rates of chronic absenteeism may also affect school-level

culture and finances in ways that undermine learning even for children who are not chronically absent.

### Effects of chronic absenteeism on students

Most directly, chronic absenteeism has negative effects on students' academic achievement and social skills development. It is associated with reduced math and reading achievement outcomes and reduced school and social engagement.[25] As early as pre-k, chronic absenteeism is associated with weaker reading skills, greater likelihood of being retained in at least one grade level, and lagging development of the social skills needed to persist in school.[26]

Chronic absenteeism is also a warning sign that a student will drop out of or be off track to graduate from high school, affecting both test scores in the near term and students' longer-term outcomes. One study found that chronically absent students are more than seven times as likely to drop out of high school than their peers with better attendance.[27] Chronically absent middle schoolers are also more likely to be off track for high school graduation. In one district, 81 percent of 9th graders who missed 20 percent or more of school days during their 8th-grade year were not on track to graduate.[28]

## The effects of missing school and not graduating compound over the longer term.

Better-educated people are more likely to live longer, be healthier, be stably employed, and earn higher wages. The opposite is also true: Less-educated people are more likely to be un- or underemployed, earn less, and be less healthy, resulting in greater costs to society.[29]

## FIGURE 1. CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM RATES BY GRADE

### Chronic Absenteeism Occurs at a Greater Rate in Kindergarten, Middle and High School
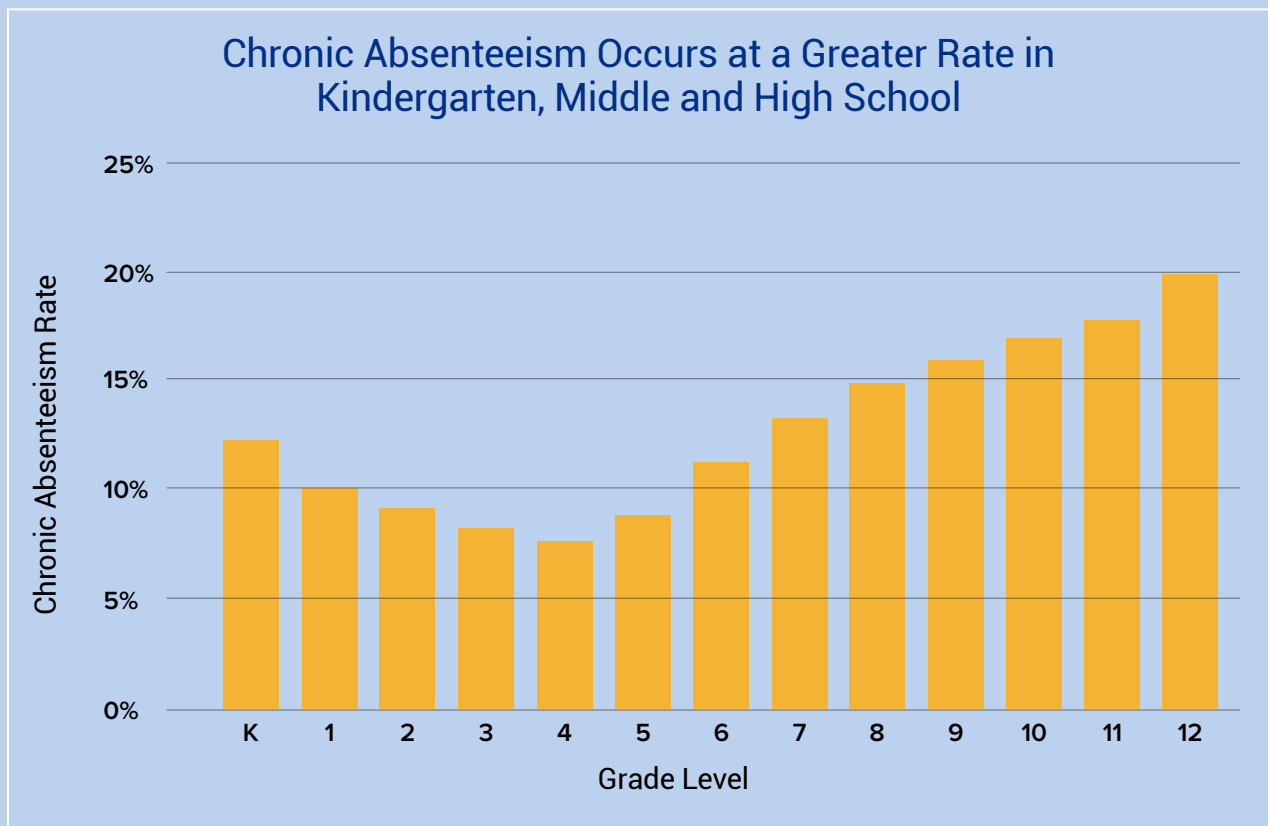


Source: Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education 2017 Proportional Attendance Report for schools in Jackson, Clay, Platte and Cass Counties

And chronic absenteeism affects the larger school community, not just those students who miss school. High rates of absence can disrupt the pace of classroom instruction and make it challenging for teachers to adjust to having different groups of students present in the classroom each day. This can negatively impact the education of the students who attend school regularly.[30]

***Effects of chronic absenteeism on schools***
In addition to the negative effects on students, student absences can have fiscal costs for schools. Many states base school funding levels on the number of students who attend that school, providing a set amount of funding per pupil. Methods that states use to count students vary, however (see below).

When states use student-count methods, like ADA, that rely on students being in attendance on a specific day (or set of days), student absences can create a funding disadvantage for school districts with higher rates of absenteeism, a factor over which schools have limited control.[32] Under ADA systems, schools must budget and

plan to serve 100 percent of enrolled students but receive funding based on a smaller percentage of those students.

This discrepancy is particularly damaging for schools with high rates of chronic absenteeism, which likely also serve populations of high-need students experiencing other barriers to learning, such as poverty. Several national studies have demonstrated that schools with high percentages of low-income students have higher rates of chronic absenteeism than schools serving fewer low-income students.[33] And educating high-need student populations costs more.[34] In other words, schools serving disadvantaged populations that tend to be more expensive to educate receive even less funding because of school funding formulas that do not appropriately account for student absences.[35]

This is the case in Missouri, one of seven states nationwide using the ADA method to calculate school funding. To adjust for the gap between high-poverty and low-poverty schools that results from ADA funding formulas, the Missouri legislature adopted a weighted

## How States Count Students to Determine School Funding

States send money to schools based on how many students attend each school. However, there are many methods for counting how many students attend a given school. The following six methods are the most common:[31]

1. **Fall enrollment count:** the number of students enrolled or in attendance on a given day in the fall of the school year (usually on or around October 1)

2. **Multiple count dates:** a count of the number of students enrolled or in attendance on two or more nonconsecutive dates (typically one in the fall and one in the spring)

3. **Average daily attendance (ADA):** the number of children actually in attendance each day, typically averaged on a bi-monthly or quarterly basis. Absent students are excluded from this count.

4. **Average daily membership (ADM):** the number of children enrolled to attend a specific district throughout the year. Absent students are included in this count.

5. **Single count period:** an average of a daily count during an established period of time, typically at the beginning of the year

6. **Multiple count periods:** an average of a daily count during two or more periods of time during the year

average daily attendance (WADA) formula in 2005. This formula adjusts a district's attendance number if it serves a higher-than-average concentration of students in any of the following three subgroups: students who are eligible for free or reduced-price lunches, students who have an individual education plan (IEP), or students who are learning English. This adjustment, or weighting, allows Missouri districts that serve high concentrations of these student populations to receive additional funds. However, the use of average daily attendance as an additional factor in calculating funding reduces the benefit of need-based weighting because high-need districts tend to have lower rates of average daily attendance.

Kansas, on the other hand, is one of 12 states nationwide that use a single count date method, counting the number of students "enrolled or attending" on a single day (typically September 20).[36]  According to the Kansas State Department of Education handbook, students can be counted as enrolled even if absent on September 20 if they both attend at least once prior to September 20 and at least once after September 20 but before October 4.[37]

Kansas' per-pupil funding calculation, which allows districts to account for some student absences, helps address some of the inequality inherent in Missouri's ADA system by ensuring that districts are not unfairly penalized for high rates of student absence.

Ultimately, chronic absenteeism is a problem for both students and schools. Understanding the root causes and identifying solutions is imperative for improving the education outcomes of all young people.

## EXAMINING ROOT CAUSES

Children miss school for a lot of reasons. While many of them overlap and intertwine, these reasons can be broadly classified into the four categories in the diagram below.
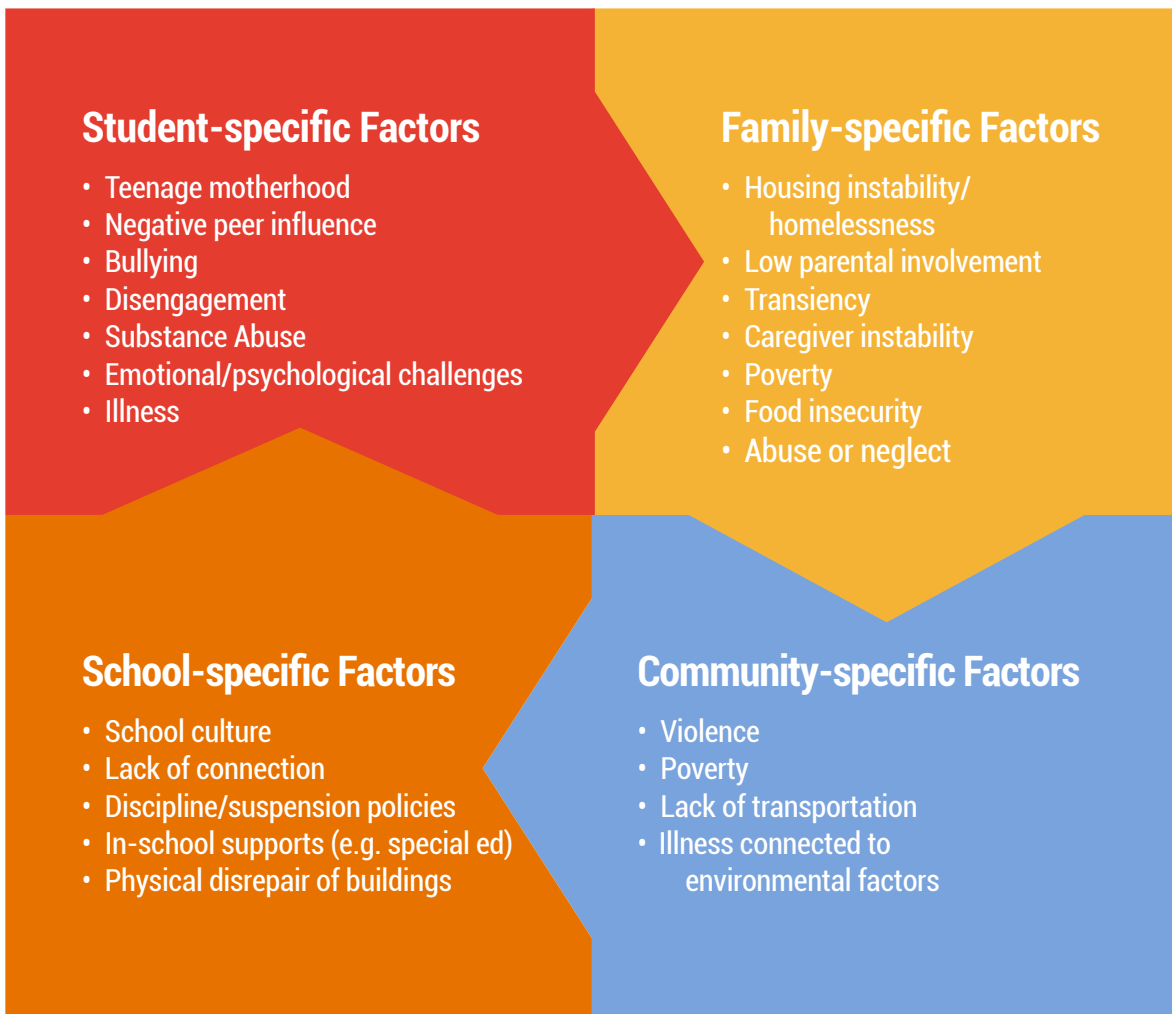
### Student-specific factors

Health-related absences are among the most common reasons that students miss school, particularly in the early grades. Fifty-four percent of absences in preschool are due to illness.[39] Many of these absences can be linked to chronic health conditions, like allergies, asthma, diabetes, or obesity, or to those, like dental problems, associated with limited access to routine care.[40] Asthma alone accounts for about 14 million absences each school year.[41] In 2015, the four Missouri counties serving the Kansas City region saw 3,016 child asthma emergency room visits.[42] Untreated dental problems account for nearly 2 million lost school days each year.[43]

A lack of access to health insurance may exacerbate illness-related absences. Families without medical insurance may not seek medical care early, leading to illness progression and resulting in additional absences from school.[44]

Beyond illness, students — particularly in older grades — may decide for themselves not to go to school.

**FIGURE 2. FOUR CATEGORIES OF ROOT CAUSES FOR STUDENT ABSENCES**[38]

### Student-specific Factors
- Teenage motherhood
- Negative peer influence
- Bullying
- Disengagement
- Substance Abuse
- Emotional/psychological challenges
- Illness

### Family-specific Factors
- Housing instability/ homelessness
- Low parental involvement
- Transiency
- Caregiver instability
- Poverty
- Food insecurity
- Abuse or neglect

### School-specific Factors
- School culture
- Lack of connection
- Discipline/suspension policies
- In-school supports (e.g. special ed)
- Physical disrepair of buildings

### Community-specific Factors
- Violence
- Poverty
- Lack of transportation
- Illness connected to environmental factors

## The Unique Challenges of a Highly Mobile Student Body

The impact of student mobility is perhaps best illustrated by its impact on a particular second-grade classroom in a high-mobility school, as described in The Goodbye Kids, a reporting project by journalists Barbara Shelly and Elle Moxley for KCUR 89.3, Kansas City's public radio outlet.

A class that began the school year with 18 students saw 13 additional students join the class through late or mid-year enrollments, with a peak enrollment of 28 students. Ten students left the class before the end of the school year. Only 8 students stayed with the class through the entire school year.

Chronic absenteeism caused by student mobility underscores one of the most vexing aspects of the issue: the burden on teachers who must provide instruction to a group of students that does not remain consistent through the course of a school year. The negative impact of absenteeism is experienced by students with good attendance, as teachers work to catch up students who have missed a lot of days or who have arrived late in the school year—even as they work to keep pace with the introduction of new content.

Research finds that in middle and high school, "didn't feel like going" is one of the top three reasons students miss school.[45] Teenagers may not feel like going to school for a variety of reasons, ranging from bullying to disengagement. Nineteen percent of students report being bullied at school,[46] and 160,000 high schoolers skip school each day to avoid being bullied.[47] Challenges like pregnancy, substance abuse, and emotional or psychological problems all contribute to absenteeism in the upper grades.[48] And when students are disengaged, lacking connection to either the school community or to what they are learning in the classroom, they are less likely to attend school.[49]

### Family-specific factors
At a family level, factors like poverty, transiency, and caregiver instability can all lead to increased student absences. Family poverty and poor attendance are closely correlated, as families struggling to access basic necessities, like food and shelter, may place less emphasis on regular school attendance. One study found that children living in poverty are 25 percent more likely

to miss at least three days of school per month than their non-poor peers.[50] Food insecurity — when families do not have reliable access to a sufficient amount of nutritious food — is also strongly correlated with absenteeism.[51] This means that children who miss school also miss the benefits of free and reduced-price meals when they are absent, exacerbating the impacts of food insecurity.

Housing instability also contributes to chronic absenteeism. Frequent moves can disrupt schooling routines and potentially require students to un-enroll and re-enroll in multiple schools throughout the year. While school districts in the metro area that serve high numbers of homeless students have become adept at expediting the transition and minimizing the number of "missed days" due to homelessness, at times administrative delays in new-school enrollment — particularly those involving moves across district boundaries — can cause children to miss school. In addition, the mental and emotional stress caused by needing to adjust to new academic and social environments can lead to students not wanting to attend school.

In the Kansas City metro area, 7,816 students qualified as homeless under criteria established by the McKinney-Vento Act in the 2015-16 school year. While this group of students faces some of the greatest barriers to school success, it represents only a portion of students experiencing housing instability. A study by the Kansas City Area Research Consortium found that in school districts serving Jackson, Clay, and Platte counties, 36,799 students — out of a total enrollment of 161,610 — had transferred schools at least once. While some of these moves were planned and supported, many were the result of housing instability and other factors associated with poverty. The highest rates of mobility were seen among the highest-need districts. "Mobile students" had a 4.5 percent lower attendance rate, on average, than students who did not switch schools. On average, these students missed four days with each transfer. Ten percent of students who transferred missed an average of 12 days.[52]

The availability and ability of adult caregivers to emphasize regular school attendance can also impact absenteeism rates. For young children who rely on adults to wake them up and help them get ready for school,

caregiver instability can negatively impact attendance. If the adults in a family work hours incompatible with assisting children in getting ready for school at home, or if they struggle with challenges like psychological problems or substance abuse, children may lack the adult support and supervision they need to attend school regularly.

Children may also miss school frequently when they are exposed to violence, abuse, or neglect at home. Students experiencing this kind of trauma tend to be less engaged in school and have lower school performance, both of which are correlated with higher rates of absenteeism.[53]

Even children removed from a home where they have experienced abuse or neglect often experience higher rates of absenteeism than their peers. Despite protections in federal law designed to ensure educational stability of youth in foster care — including the right to remain in the school they attend when taken into care, if it is in their best interest — children in foster care miss more days than their peers not in foster care.

One 2017 analysis of statewide data in California showed that children in foster care had a 25.1 percent chronic

absenteeism rate — more than twice that of the statewide average.[54] A study of chronic absenteeism among young children in foster care showed that absenteeism rates increased with the degree of "instability" of placements — meaning the more placements/moves foster children experience, the higher their rate of absenteeism — suggesting that placement transfers often come with missed days of school.[55]

*School-specific factors*
School culture plays an important role in student attendance. Positive school cultures can increase student engagement, which encourages attendance. Students are more likely to attend school when they do so in an environment where they feel respected and cared for.[56] On the other hand, a negative school culture or lack of connection to peers and teachers can lead to increased school absences.[57]

In addition, schools' responses to behavior problems, appropriate diagnoses of special education needs, and availability of support all contribute to school absenteeism. Disciplinary methods like out-of-school suspension contribute to chronic absenteeism, as these policies require students to not attend school for a set number of days. If schools cannot correctly diagnose students' special needs, students may become frustrated, leading to disengagement and lower attendance.

In addition to the human aspects of schools, the physical appearance of the school building may also contribute to student absenteeism. One study found that absenteeism rates are higher in schools that are in disrepair, use temporary buildings or portable structures to address overcrowding, or have understaffed janitorial services.[58]

*Community-specific factors*
The characteristics of the communities and

## CHRONIC ABSENCE IN HIGHER-POVERTY DISTRICTS IS NEARLY TWICE AS HIGH AS IN LOWER-POVERTY DISTRICTS

### Higher Poverty Districts

17.4%

82.6%

### Lower Poverty Districts

8.8%

91.2%

■ Chronically Absent Students
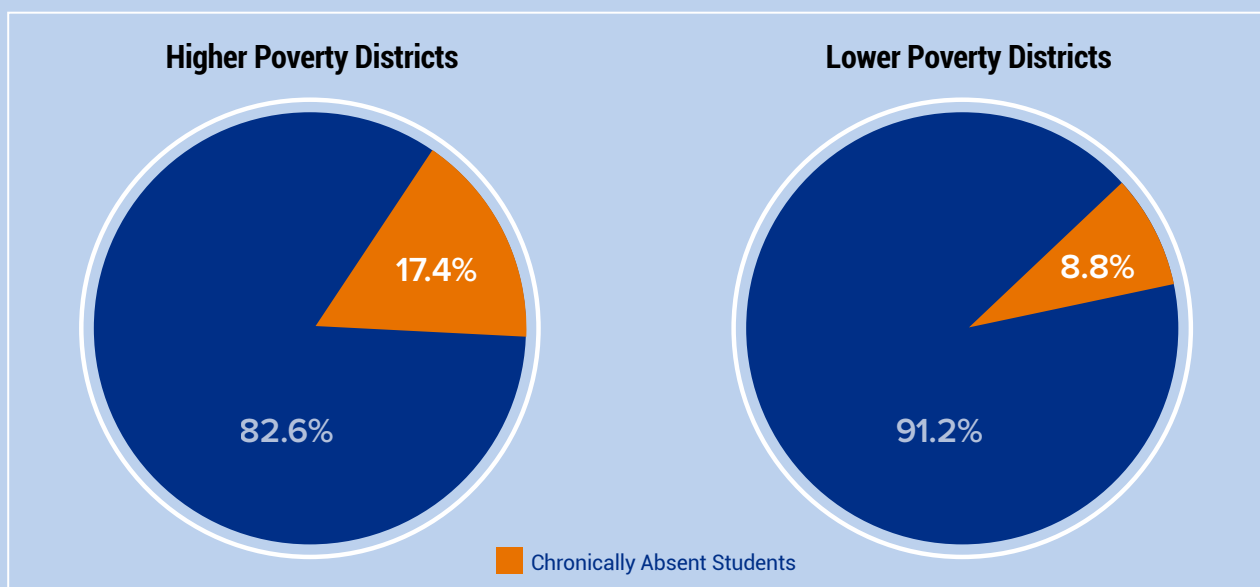
Six KC metro area school districts that have greater than 60% Free and Reduced Lunch population (with a total of 59,000 students) in 2017 - Source: MO Dept. of Elementary and Secondary Education

Fifteen KC metro area school districts that have less than 30% Free and Reduced Lunch population (with a total of 82,000 students) in 2017 - Source: MO Dept. of Elementary and Secondary Education

neighborhoods in which children live can also affect attendance rates. Witnessing or experiencing community violence is associated with chronic absenteeism.[59] Students who live in high-poverty areas and who walk to school may need to do so through neighborhoods that pose real threats to their safety, which may cause them to avoid going to school.

And illnesses that keep students home may be closely tied to environmental factors. For example, asthma — which is a leading illness keeping young students out of school — is linked to poor air quality and high levels of mold.[60]

# The reasons that students miss school are complex and varied.
Often, students are facing multiple barriers and challenging circumstances simultaneously. Possible solutions for the challenge of chronic absenteeism locally must be informed by analyzing existing data to understand how the issue is manifesting itself in the local community.

## CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM IN THE KANSAS CITY METRO AREA

Chronic absenteeism affects communities nationwide, and Kansas City is no exception. The Kansas City metro area encompasses communities on both the Kansas and Missouri sides of the Missouri River. This includes more than 302,000 K-12 public school students attending school in 41 school districts and 21 charter schools. According to data (on Kansas Schools) from the Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights and the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education,[61] in 2015-16, 11.5 percent, or nearly 35,000 of those students were chronically absent.[62] Table 1 below compares the demographics of the region's student population overall to those of its chronically absent students.

## TABLE 1. DEMOGRAPHICS OF KANSAS CITY METRO AREA K-12 STUDENTS[63]

| | All Kansas City Metro School District Students | Chronically Absent Students in Kansas City |
|---|---|---|
| MALE | 51% | 50% |
| FEMALE | 49% | 50% |
| WHITE | 61% | 47% |
| BLACK | 16% | 25% |
| HISPANIC | 15% | 17% |
| ASIAN | 3% | 1% |
| SPECIAL EDUCATION | 11% | 14% |
| ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS | 9% | 9% |

The demographics of Kansas City's chronically absent students are largely similar to its demographics overall. However, these data demonstrate that a higher percentage of chronically absent students are black or Hispanic, and receive special education services compared to those populations region-wide. The differences in rates of white and black chronically absent students compared to the student population overall are particularly noteworthy. While 61 percent of the Kansas City metro region's students are white, only 47 percent of its chronically absent students are white. Sixteen percent of the metro region's students are black, but one-quarter of chronically absent students are black. By the same token, districts serving high populations of black students tend to have the highest rates of chronic absenteeism in the region.

At a district level, chronic absenteeism rates range from a low of 2 percent to a high of 23 percent. Sixteen districts have chronic absenteeism rates below 10 percent; 20 between 10 and 20 percent; and five at or above 20 percent.[64]
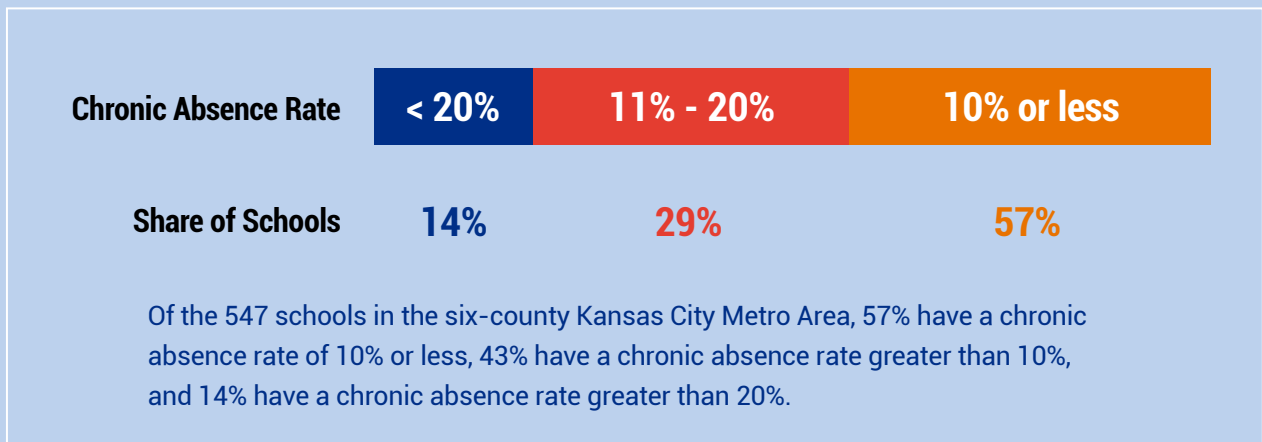
The four large urban districts serving the Kansas City region together account for more than one-quarter (26 percent) of all chronically absent students in the metro area. All four have large populations of low-income students, which, as discussed previously, is a factor strongly correlated with chronic absenteeism. Even so, chronic absenteeism is a challenge across the region, in all districts and in all geographies.

Within districts, variation in school-level rates of chronic absenteeism is even greater than variation between districts. Of the 547 school buildings for which data was considered in this review, 236 (43 percent) have chronic absenteeism rates greater than 10 percent. Seventy-seven schools (14 percent) have chronic absenteeism rates above 20 percent. And 25 schools (5 percent) have chronic absenteeism rates above 30 percent.[65]

These student-, district-, and school-level data offer a picture of Kansas City metro's chronic absenteeism problem that is broadly consistent with national trends: Chronically absent students tend to be students of color and/or students with special needs and the districts serving high-need student populations tend to have higher rates of chronic absenteeism.

## 43% OF METRO AREA SCHOOLS FALL SHORT OF NATIONALLY RECOGNIZED GOAL OF AT LEAST 90% OF STUDENTS IN ATTENDANCE 90% OF THE TIME

| Chronic Absence Rate | < 20% | 11% - 20% | 10% or less |
|---|---|---|---|
| Share of Schools | 14% | 29% | 57% |

Of the 547 schools in the six-county Kansas City Metro Area, 57% have a chronic absence rate of 10% or less, 43% have a chronic absence rate greater than 10%, and 14% have a chronic absence rate greater than 20%.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights (KS data); Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MO DATA)

## ADDRESSING CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM

As states, districts, and schools increase their focus on addressing chronic absenteeism, there is a growing body of research about what works. Researchers have identified a set of general best practices for schools, while some national programs and local initiatives have proven successful in reducing chronic absenteeism.

Attendance Works, a national and state initiative to address chronic absenteeism, recommends a three-tiered intervention and support system to help reduce chronic absenteeism. The graphic below summarizes these tiers.

Tier 1 interventions represent strategies that are prevention-oriented and can help support schoolwide attendance for all students. The following five best practices are examples of Tier 1 supports to address chronic absenteeism in schools.[67]
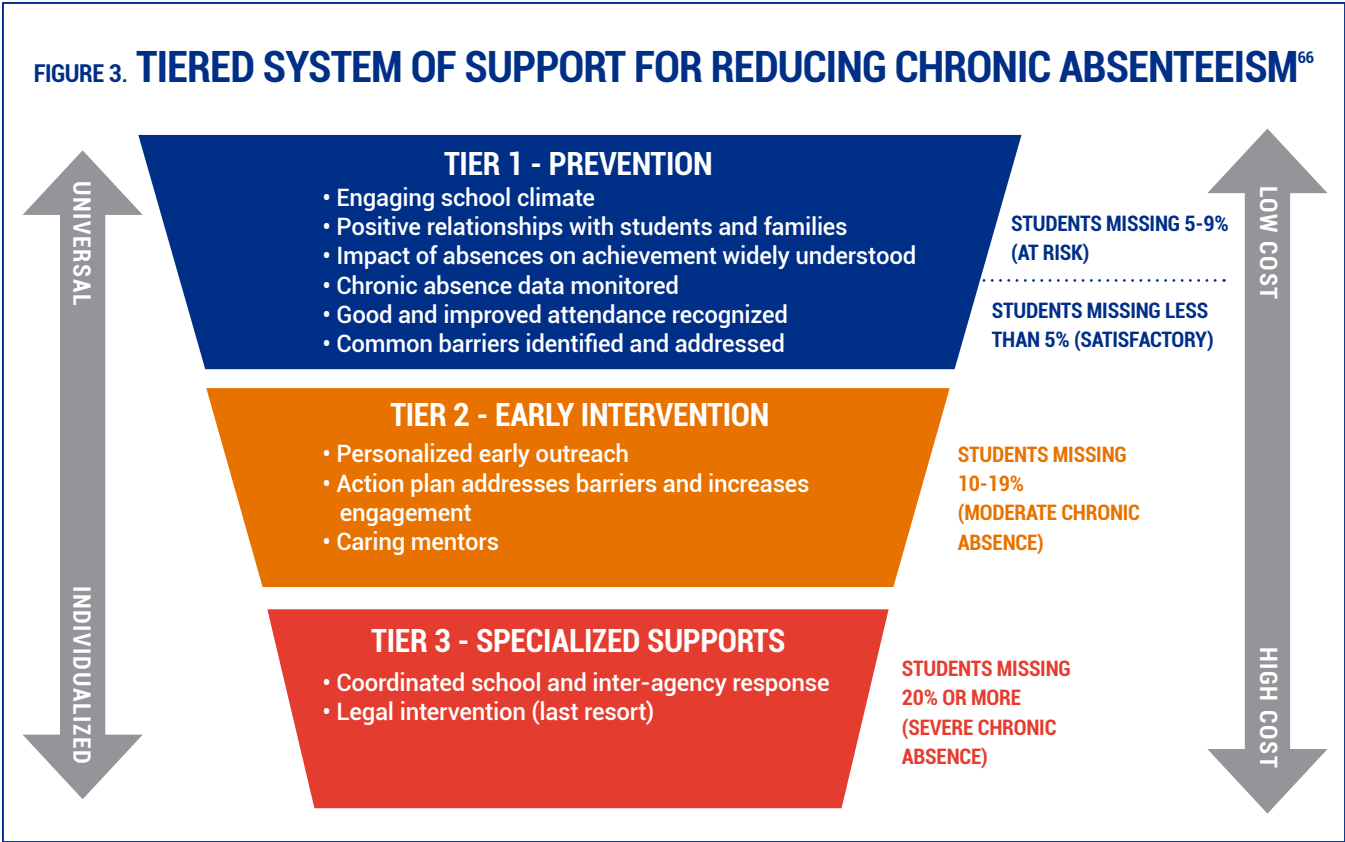
**1. Engage Students and Parents:** Schools must develop a positive culture that ensures that students know they are cared for and that parents know they are welcome.

And schools must engage families and caregivers in the education process, helping them understand what their children are learning and why it is important to be present every day.

**2. Recognize Good and Improved Attendance:** Schools should develop incentive systems to encourage students to attend school regularly. Simple recognition of good and improved attendance through school awards ceremonies or certificates can be enough to motivate students to have good attendance.

**3. Monitor Attendance Data and Practice:** Schools should collect and analyze student attendance data regularly by grade level and by subgroup. Early identification of schoolwide or grade-level trends or of particular students who struggle can help the school intervene early with the necessary support structures and resources.

**4. Provide Personalized Early Outreach:** When schools use data effectively, they can more quickly identify students whose attendance is a problem or who are at risk of developing an attendance problem. Quick outreach to these families, in the form of a postcard

**FIGURE 3. TIERED SYSTEM OF SUPPORT FOR REDUCING CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM**[66]



UNIVERSAL

INDIVIDUALIZED

**TIER 1 - PREVENTION**
- Engaging school climate
- Positive relationships with students and families
- Impact of absences on achievement widely understood
- Chronic absence data monitored
- Good and improved attendance recognized
- Common barriers identified and addressed

STUDENTS MISSING 5-9% (AT RISK)

STUDENTS MISSING LESS THAN 5% (SATISFACTORY)

**TIER 2 - EARLY INTERVENTION**
- Personalized early outreach
- Action plan addresses barriers and increases engagement
- Caring mentors

STUDENTS MISSING 10-19% (MODERATE CHRONIC ABSENCE)

**TIER 3 - SPECIALIZED SUPPORTS**
- Coordinated school and inter-agency response
- Legal intervention (last resort)

STUDENTS MISSING 20% OR MORE (SEVERE CHRONIC ABSENCE)

LOW COST

HIGH COST

## Targeted Parental Outreach Can Reduce Student Absences

A recent study by researchers at Harvard University and the University of California demonstrated that making parents aware of their child's absences — both the total number and the number relative to the student's classmates — can improve the attendance rates of chronically absent students.[68]

The study randomly assigned more than 40,000 high-absence students in the School District of Philadelphia to one of four groups:

1. Reminder: Parents received general communication about the importance of attendance.
2. Total Absences: Parents received communication about their child's total number of absences.
3. Relative Absences: Parents received information about their child's absences relative to the total number of absences among the student's classmates.
4. Control: Parents received no additional communication about the importance of attendance or about their child's absences.

Over the course of the school year, parents in each of the first three groups received up to five letters mailed to their homes, with a reminder about the importance of attendance and additional student-specific information, depending on their group. The study found that students in the Reminder group were 8 percent less likely to be chronically absent than students in the Control group; students in the Total Absences group were 10 percent less likely; and students in the Relative Absences group were 11 percent less likely to be chronically absent.

Interventions like this are significantly less costly than others, demonstrating that schools can take straightforward and relatively inexpensive steps toward addressing chronic absenteeism and improving student attendance.

or phone call, for example, can help correct the issue (see sidebar below).

**5. Develop Programmatic Responses to Barriers:** When families are engaged in the education process and early outreach processes are in place, school administrators are better positioned to understand the barriers to attendance that students and families may face. If barriers are community-wide, teachers, school administrators, and the larger community can work together to identify and implement solutions.

Tier 2 supports provide early interventions for students who are struggling to attend school regularly, who have a history of moderate chronic absence, and/or who are facing a risk factor (like a chronic illness) that could make regular attendance challenging. Tier 2 interventions include strategies like creating personalized action plans for individual students, pairing students with a mentor or attendance buddy, or connecting families with resources to help address barriers (e.g., food pantry, clothing assistance).[69]

Tier 3 supports are designed for students with severe chronic absence (typically defined as missing 20 percent or more of school time) or those who face significant barriers to school attendance, like homelessness or involvement in the juvenile justice system. Tier 3 interventions include intensified outreach to family members, enhanced coordination with social and/or medical service providers as needed, and, as a last resort, legal intervention.[70]

In addition to these general best practices, there are some specific programs that have demonstrated success nationally. Check & Connect is a mentorship program developed in collaboration by researchers at the Institute on Community Integration, the University of Minnesota, and school-based professionals in Minneapolis Public Schools. It is an intervention program designed to match K-12 students who show signs of disengagement with a trained, community-based mentor. Mentors monitor student data, including absences, tardies, and grades, while simultaneously building trusting relationships with students to help them meet their needs in and out of school.

## The Importance of Data in Addressing Chronic Absenteeism

Accurate, consistent and timely data collection and analysis play an important role in systemic efforts to reduce chronic absenteeism. While school districts have collected average daily attendance rates for decades, chronic absenteeism rates are a relatively new way of looking at the problem.

Most states are now asking districts to report chronic absenteeism data—the percentage of students missing more than a certain number of days (usually 10 percent)—since the passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015 and many states have included the measure in their ESSA plans.

In Missouri, chronic absenteeism data is gathered in the form of "proportional attendance" rates and reported in terms of the percentage of student present 90% or more of the time. Missouri's annual proportional attendance rates are available for districts, schools and grade levels as far back as the 2008-09 school year.

In Kansas, while districts in the state have been reporting chronic absenteeism for several years as part of the Office of Civil Rights school survey, a new set of chronic absenteeism data that will allow for more in-depth analysis will become publicly available for the first time in the fall of 2018. This data set will allow for analysis of the problem similar to what is

Since the 1990s, schools in 27 states nationwide have implemented Check & Connect. Student participants in the program demonstrate an increase in attendance, persistence in school, accrual of credits, and school completion rates while showing a decrease in truancy

shown for Missouri schools in this report. Many schools in the Kansas City metro area and around the country are using attendance data effectively in addressing the problem of chronic absenteeism. Some schools post updated daily attendance data prominently inside the school's entrance as part of a campaign to raise student and staff awareness of the issue and to mobilize action to improve it. Strategies within a school building that make use of data focus on the three tiers of chronic absenteeism—school-wide efforts that incent improved attendance across the student body, focused efforts that target those at risk of becoming chronically absent, and intensive interventions for those with the highest rates of absenteeism. Often, cross-functional staff "attendance teams" monitor attendance data to identify and conduct outreach to students most at risk.

Average daily attendance data and chronic absenteeism data can also be used to identify patterns, trends and causes. For example, by identifying specific dates and date ranges when attendance is lower or by segmenting absence rates by subgroup, district and school leaders can gain greater insights into the factors contributing to higher absenteeism rates.

Another important form of attendance data collection captures the reasons for a student's absence from school to help schools shape their response to absenteeism. Generally, school districts utilize a system for categorizing absences as they are recorded (whether in their student information system or a more low-tech form, such as on paper or in spreadsheets). These tracking systems typically code absences for

purposes related to funding formulas, monitoring of truancy, and inclusion on report cards. Whether or not an absence is excused, whether it is in-school or out-of-school, and whether it is tied to a suspension are examples of the way absences may be coded in a school.

Many schools' absence coding protocols do not include reasons for an absence or fall short of the full continuum of reasons. The National Forum on Education Statistics, an entity within the U.S. Department of Education, has developed an attendance taxonomy that provides a set of 16 mutually exclusive attendance categories that are divided into two groups—5 categories for "present" and 11 categories for "absent". Every individual absence is assigned one code. An "unknown" category is intended as a placeholder until the reason is identified. The Forum offers resources to support incorporating the voluntary taxonomy into a school's existing system for tracking absences.[†].

There is an opportunity for district and school leaders interested in using data to improve attendance and willing to commit to the added effort involved in doing so. Because the reasons for absences are often unknown at the time they are recorded, implementing the taxonomy is not a small undertaking, but one which requires added staff time and oversight. However, effective implementation of the taxonomy offers school leaders an opportunity to gain actionable insights into the root causes of school absences.

[†] National Forum on Education Statistics. (2018). Forum Guide to Collecting and Using Attendance Data (NFES 2017-007). U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.

rates, tardies, behavioral referrals, and dropout rates.[71] One study demonstrated that 24 percent more Check & Connect students stayed in high school and 20 percent more graduated from high school than students who were not part of Check & Connect.[72]

Early Warning Intervention and Monitoring Systems (EWIMS) help states, districts, and schools track student data and identify at-risk students, provide them with interventions, and monitor their progress over time. School districts can implement EWIMS on their own

or in conjunction with a state initiative or the support of a research institute, like the American Institutes for Research. These systems typically track student attendance, behavior, and academic data to identify those most at risk of disengagement or dropping out.

Though reducing chronic absenteeism is not the sole purpose of EWIMS — rather, they include attendance as part of a larger initiative to support students through high school graduation — some research demonstrates a positive impact on student attendance. Specifically, one study found that schools using EWIMS had lower percentages of chronically absent students than schools that did not use EWIMS.[73]

Some jurisdictions have taken it upon themselves to implement strategies aimed at reducing chronic absenteeism. New York City School District, for example, used Race to the Top grant funds to purchase new data software that allowed schools to track chronic absenteeism. The district required each school to track and report chronic absenteeism rates. At the same time, the mayor's office, in conjunction with the NYC



Department of Education, launched a task force on truancy and chronic absenteeism. This initiative, called Every Student, Every Day, included a citywide public awareness campaign and a coordinated strategy at a handful of pilot schools. The school-based initiative included five components:

1. Matching Success Mentors to target students: Students whose attendance data suggested they needed additional support were matched with a Success Mentor who monitored that student's data, called home when students missed school, and participated in weekly meetings with school staff to identify and address areas of challenge.
2. Implementing schoolwide strategies to promote good attendance.
3. Holding weekly student success meetings that include the school leadership team and success mentors.
4. Increasing parental engagement.
5. Improving data collection, monitoring, and action through a new dashboard that allows staff to track student demographic information, attendance data, suspension information, and any interventions that a student receives.[74]

Students who received the support of a Success Mentor through this program gained, on average, a full month of school days.[75]

Kansas City Public Schools, one of the larger districts in the metro area—and one with significant socioeconomic needs—has a robust Success Mentors program in place and implemented many aspects of the attendance team approach. The district has seen significant impacts on attendance rates as a result of these efforts in a number of buildings across the district.

In California, the Allentown School District requires each school to form an attendance team that meets regularly to review attendance data, identify at-risk students, and devise interventions to improve attendance. Interventions range from establishing incentives to improve attendance, to pairing students with a community mentor, to having school staff conduct a home visit. With this system in place, one of Allentown's schools saw a drop in chronic

absenteeism of 11 percentage points, and another school saw a drop of six percentage points between the 2012-13 and 2013-14 school years.[76]

Also here in the Kansas City region, Winnwood Elementary in the North Kansas City School District has seen success in combating chronic absenteeism. School leaders implemented a four-pronged approach that includes a school attendance team, personalized contracts with concrete action steps to help students improve attendance, additional parent outreach and engagement, and a rigorous focus on data.[77]

The school attendance team, which includes staff members like the principal, nurse, and social worker, meets monthly to discuss the needs of individual students who are struggling with attendance. They develop personalized contracts for each student, with varying incentives and goals depending on that student's unique needs. Assigning children special duties that require them to be in school, such as leading morning announcements, has proven successful.

School staff have also increased communication with parents, including interventions like morning wake-up calls as needed. Finally, Winnwood staff members are rigorously examining the school's attendance and absence data to identify trends on daily, weekly, and monthly bases. So far, this effort has had a positive impact on the school's attendance rates. Winnwood has increased its average daily attendance by 10 percentage points (from 82 percent to 92.8 percent) and reduced the number of chronically absent students from 98 to 14.

There are many other success stories of effective practices to improve attendance and reduce chronic absenteeism at work in schools in the Kansas City metro. In the coming months, United Way of Greater Kansas City and its partners will explore ways to help other schools and districts learn more about these approaches and consider ways to scale up the most effective strategies. This work will also involve choosing promising strategies from other parts of the country and bringing them to Kansas City.

## CONCLUSION

Chronic absenteeism affects schools and districts nationwide. However, it disproportionately affects already-underserved student populations, including low-income, minority, and special education students, as well as those facing challenging life circumstances, like homelessness.

**In the Kansas City region, nearly 35,000 students were chronically absent during the 2015-16 school year, or almost 12 percent of total students.** And these students' chronic absence has adverse consequences for their educational and long-term success, for schools they attend, and for other students in those schools. Fortunately, there are several research-based, practical, and low-cost steps that school and district leaders can take to reduce rates of chronic absenteeism and their consequences for schools and students. In districts with the highest rates of chronic absenteeism, these steps may more than pay for themselves by boosting districts' average daily attendance and resulting state funding levels.

More broadly, because the effects of chronic absenteeism hurt students' academics and ultimately their ability to be successful, productive members of society, stakeholders from all sectors of the Kansas City region must work together to address the root causes of chronic absenteeism, and develop and implement solutions that benefit the entire community. An addendum to this report, "Beyond the Classroom—Community Supports that Contribute to School Success" summarizes the work of organizations who partner with area school districts in meeting a range of challenges—and whose work plays a key role in addressing many of the root causes of chronic absenteeism.

# These Lessons From Fort Leonard Wood Could Help Kansas City Transfer Students Succeed

By BARBARA SHELLY & ELLE MOXLEY

Once a week, Waynesville High School in south-central Missouri resounds with the celebratory air of a football game. The marching band has just completed a lap of the hallways, blaring the school's theme song, "Eye of the Tiger."

This school rocks with spirit, even though most of its 1,500 students didn't grow up in Waynesville, and most of them won't be staying long.



*Junior Riley Wright has gone to 10 different schools because his dad is in the U.S. Army. This is actually his family's second time in the Waynesville School District, which he attended in third and fourth grade.*CREDIT ELLE MOXLEY / KCUR 89.3

"As someone who's spent half of their high school years at another place, it's honestly like, great. I love it here," said Riley Wright, an eleventh-grader.

Waynesville High School sits just a few miles from Fort Leonard Wood, a military training base on the edge of the Missouri Ozarks. Three-fourths of the students in the Waynesville School District come from military families. For them, moving is a way of life.

Student transiency is increasingly recognized as a disruptive factor in urban schools around Kansas City. But the Waynesville district, which serves 6,000 students, has organized its work around making new arrivals welcome and successful.

**Hard to fail**

Riley, whose father is a U.S. Army police officer, has attended 10 schools in five states. When he arrived in Waynesville at the start of this school year, he quickly found a spot on the soccer team. Scheduling classes went well, too. Riley, who aspires to be a teacher, says math is his weak spot. He'd passed Algebra I at his old school, but he was worried he wasn't prepared for Algebra II. So he was relieved when he learned Waynesville had just the class for him – algebra one and a half.

"It's kind of hard to even fail a class here because everyone's just very involved and is there for you," Riley said.

New students are assigned to teacher Denise Taylor's homeroom for what Waynesville calls "Tiger Time." She gets about 20 new students a month, and they stay with her for a few weeks until they feel comfortable at the school.

"We do some presentations, talk about policies in the school," Taylor said. "One day we would talk about what kinds of ideas are out there for our career center. Another day they may be just playing cards, getting to know each other and making friends."

When students feel ready to leave Taylor's homeroom, school counselors ask if they have a friend whose homeroom they'd like to join to make that transition easier.

**Students helping students**

Every school in the Waynesville district has a "student-to-student' program. Students take newcomers on building tours, give them the inside scoop about policies such as cell phone use and stick with them during that most perilous time of the day – the lunch hour.

*Sixth graders Alondra Castilla, left, and Gabriela Hoag are student ambassadors, in charge of taking new classmates on tours of the school.* CREDIT ELLE MOXLEY / KCUR 89.3

"What made me feel welcome was how they showed us around the school and brought us to our classes," said sixth-grader Krista McDonald, who has already attended schools in Texas, Germany and Japan. She wanted to become a student ambassador so she could take new students on the same tour.

Newcomers also get a supportive reception from teachers, who are trained to assess their academic levels and get them into the flow of class work. And students have ready access to counselors, including one at each school who is paid by the military to support military families.

Waynesville Middle School Principal Michele Sumter is married to an Army lieutenant colonel. Her family has moved nine times in 20 years.

"My own three children have probably been in more than 10 schools, and I understand how resilient military kids are in general," she said. "But I also understand how painful it can be to move around and not be able to have a connection to someone, whether it be a teacher or another student."

*Students teach Waynesville Middle School Principal Michele Sumter a song they learned in science class.* CREDIT BARBARA SHELLY / KCUR 89.3

Sometimes that connection is Sumter herself.

"We have a new student today," she said. "She's from Texas. I met her this morning walking through the hall with her guidance aide, and we got a chance to talk a little. I told her 'I'm military, and I know what it's like to move.' And we instantly smiled at each other, and we understood one another."

Sumter tells new parents to expect children to struggle academically the first month or so.

"One thing about Waynesville is our coursework is harder than most places the kids have been," she said.

But Sumter says parents appreciate Waynesville's rigorous standards.

"You will often find that with military families, we are very particular about the schools we place our students, our children in. And so we go out of our way to live in certain locations to ensure that our kids get a quality education."

**Look to the military?**

About a third of Waynesville's students come or go every school year. While some districts in and around Kansas City see even more transience, that's still a lot of change taking place. Yet Waynesville's students perform well on assessment tests – the district is usually right around the state average and well ahead of neighboring rural districts.

Waynesville's success seems to counteract the narrative that frequent student moves are destructive to achievement. But while urban districts are often told to "look to the military" for tips on how to handle disruptions caused by students switching schools mid-year, the two sectors are worlds apart.

*Superintendent Brian Henry said his district gets help from the military to support students who move a lot because of their parents' jobs.*

"One of the advantages that I think we clearly have over more of the urban areas would be that while our kids are mobile, our parents are engaged," said Waynesville School District Superintendent Brian Henry.

That's not meant as a slam on parents elsewhere. Henry worked in the Park Hill School District before taking the top spot in Waynesville, so he is familiar with the Kansas City area. He knows how hard it is for children to learn when their families are on the verge of homelessness because they can't pay their rent or find a stable place to live.

The achievement gaps Henry deals with in Waynesville have more to do with different learning standards and schedules in all the states and countries where kids have lived. While Waynesville students bring a fascinating range of experiences to rural Missouri, their schools must still meet state assessment standards.

"When kids come to us, they have a multitude of different experiences that may not align to Missouri standards," Henry said. "Our classroom teachers, in my humble opinion, are the best in the entire state because they're able to work with that range of learners."

While educators in urban districts often feel like they're on their own, Waynesville gets lots of help. At Fort Leonard Wood, military units work with every school in the district. They're called Partners in Education – or, as they're known around the schools, "PIE Partners."

"I use my PIE partners for health screenings," Sumter said. "The nurse teaches them how to administer the hearing screening, the vision screening and so forth. They help us manage dances, they can come in and tutor. Their partnership is vital to the success of the activities in our buildings."

The program was conceived by a general at Fort Leonard Wood, who recognized that the success of the base was linked to a thriving nearby school district. More than a third of respondents in a recent [Military Times survey](#) said unhappiness over their children's schooling was a significant factor in their decision to leave active duty.

 "Soldiers want a good education for their kids. They deserve that," Henry said. "They're giving their lives in some cases to protect our freedoms. So we see ourselves as  a key piece of overall readiness."

**The language of resilience**

Military-connected schools hold another advantage over places where students move around a lot because of poverty – the luxury of planning. The average length of stay for a military student in Waynesville is two to three years. And when families depart, they usually have weeks, if not months, to prepare to relocate.

But when Robert Bartman was superintendent of the Center School District in south Kansas City, kids would be in class one day and gone the next, forced from their homes by crises like evictions or domestic violence. Bartman, a former Missouri education commissioner and also a retired Marine captain, said those abrupt moves are much harder for students and schools.

"The kids are traumatized," he said. "Some of them change schools two or three or even four times in a year. They throw their hands up and they don't feel connected to any one school. And when they don't feel connected, that creates not only a learning problem, but it can in some instances creates discipline problems."

School counselors can help kids process those emotions, but most schools aren't able to hire as many counselors as Waynesville.

Ruth Ponce-Batts is a military spouse and the counselor at Partridge, one of three Waynesville elementary schools on the Fort Leonard Wood base. She says she and her students share a common language: resilience.

"We talk about how to take on challenges and how to adapt when challenges are presented throughout their lives," she said. "I really try to teach them those types of social skills, that while we don't have control over everything, we do have control over ourselves."

Ponce-Batts used to work in a school where kids moved frequently because their families were poor. She thinks resiliency training works in that setting as well.

"I tell them, 'Look at all the challenges you've already overcome,'" she said. "Yes, your parent got evicted, but we found another place and now we've just got to get more resources for you and try to find food for you.'"

But even if urban schools teach resilience – which many already do – someone has to provide those extra resources. The military has enabled Waynesville to build a sturdy infrastructure to support students as they come and go.

That infrastructure is lacking in urban schools where the moves are more sudden, more frequent and more challenging. To build it, Kansas City schools are going to need a lot of outside help.

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# LINC Chess

## 2018-19 TOURNAMENT SEASON

# Saturday, Dec. 8
## William Chrisman High School



Pre-register at **kclinc.org/chess** by Wednesday, noon, prior to each tournament. Any player who is not pre-registered and not checked in by 9 a.m. will not be able to play in the first round!

**Participants must play for the school they attend.**

## Lunch:
A **FREE** lunch will be provided to players and families.

## Schedule:
Check in from 8 - 9:00 a.m.
First round begins at 9:30 a.m.
Last round ends by 4:30 p.m.
Players who pre-register and are on time will participate in all five rounds.

## Divisions:
K-2, K-5, K-8, and K-12
All Kansas City area K-12 players are welcome to participate. All players must know how the pieces move and how to make a checkmate.

## More information:
Ken Lingelbach, LINC Chess Coordinator
klingelbach@kclinc.org, (816) 650-7525



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