

APPENDIX



**Testimony of Steve Beatty
NJEA Secretary-Treasurer
On Chronic Absenteeism; School Climate and Culture
Joint Committee on the Public Schools
Tuesday, February 5, 2019**

Good morning and thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I'm Steve Beatty, a high school social studies teacher in the Bridgewater-Raritan school district, and secretary-treasurer of the New Jersey Education Association.

As an educator, I understand the importance of creating a classroom and school climate that gives my students the greatest opportunity for success. Central to that is ensuring that students are in school, where they can learn and grow. In cases where students are chronically absent, it is critical to act quickly. We must understand the cause of those absences and intervene before students are harmed academically or socially. We believe that a proactive approach focused on student support and positive reinforcement is the best way to deal with excessive absences. Punitive approaches that punish schools or students are unlikely to deal with the underlying causes of absenteeism or lead to better outcomes for those students.

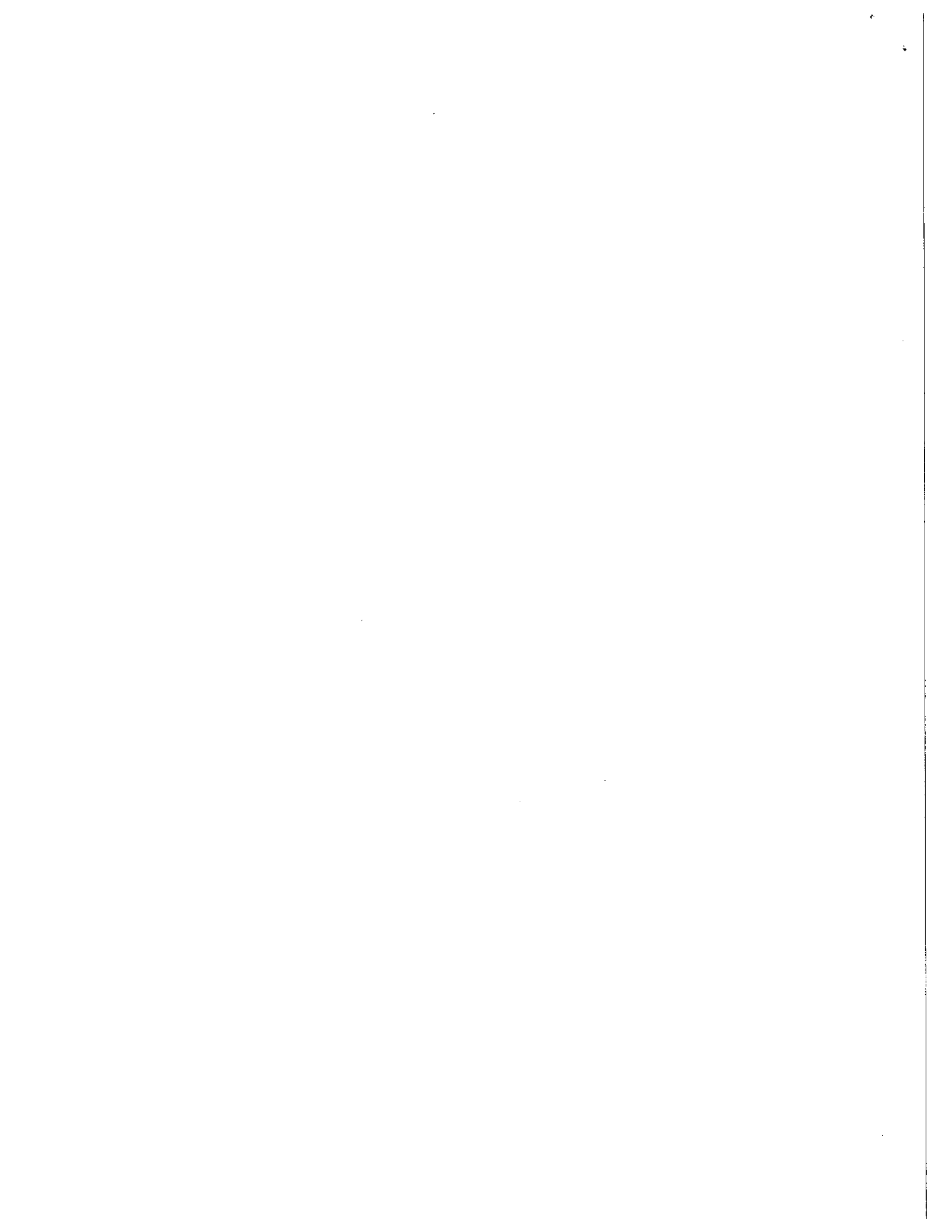
The term "chronic absenteeism" is very broad. It can cover everything from students who are too ill to attend school, to those who are bullied and afraid to come to school, to those whose families face economic hardships that keep students from attending school to those who simply choose not to attend for other reasons. Each of those requires a different response from the school and a different type of support for the students involved.

But while each specific case is different, they all have one thing in common: a student who is not in school, for whatever reason, misses out on valuable educational opportunities. When that happens too often, students can suffer long-term negative effects. Research shows that chronic absenteeism is correlated to lower academic achievement later in school, lower graduation rates and poorer socioeconomic outcomes later in life.

We believe that the New Jersey Student Success Index, which outlines the key elements of successful schools, provides good areas of focus as schools develop strategies to deal with chronic absenteeism. Among the most important areas of focus are:

Quality staff

The staff in New Jersey's public schools help create the learning environment that greets students each day. Those professionals build important relationships with students and are often best positioned to recognize which students are at risk for chronic absenteeism, as well as know what supports are most appropriate for those students. It is critical that the staff in New Jersey's public schools be recognized, rewarded and respected for the important work they do, to ensure a stable school environment where



students know they will find caring, committed adults that they know and trust each day. That includes the entire school community: teachers, counselors and librarians, but also Educational Support Professionals including secretaries, bus drivers, food service workers, classroom paraprofessionals, custodial staff and all others who help create safe, healthy schools with outstanding learning environments.

Safe and healthy schools

On the issue of safe and healthy schools, the quality of school facilities sends an important message to students about the value that adults place on their education. Students should be able to come to clean, safe, comfortable schools that are conducive to learning. When school buildings themselves threaten the health of students and staff (for example, through mold outbreaks, unsafe water supplies or inadequate temperature control) even students who want to attend school may be unable to do so regularly due to health reasons. There is no excuse not to ensure that every public school is a safe and healthy place for students and staff alike.

Materials and resources

Schools should have adequate resources to provide students with a positive learning environment. When students arrive at school and find well-supplied classrooms and libraries, up-to-date curriculum and appropriate technology resources, it sends an important message that school is important. We ask students to invest their time and energy in learning. We must model that behavior by investing the resources necessary to optimize that learning. In that regard, we commend Gov. Murphy and the Legislature for their efforts to move New Jersey back toward school funding beginning with the budget adopted last year. We urge them to continue to that progress in the budget being developed now.

Supports and engagements

Schools are more than a collection of classrooms. They are communities that are often called on to meet many other student needs. Every school should have a certified nurse available always to deal with health needs, certified counselors to deal with emotional and behavioral issues and librarians and media specialists to expand students' access to information. Schools should also adapt as needed to meet other student needs, from nutrition to language supports to special education support, and to address other issues that can impede learning or drive absenteeism, from substance abuse to bullying to any other factor that stands in the way of successful learning.

There are no easy answers to handling chronic absenteeism. But the direction is clear: we must provide safe, healthy, welcoming, engaging schools where students want to come and learn, and we must recognize and deal appropriately with the many different factors that can prevent that from happening in some cases.

NJEA members are proud to be part of creating that environment in schools across our state and we are eager to work with all other stakeholders who share our commitment to providing a great public school for every child and every school day.

Thank you.



**TESTIMONY OF CAROLYN J. MARANO
ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER
DIVISION OF STUDENT SERVICES
NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
JOINT COMMITTEE ON THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS
TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 5, 2019**

Good morning Senator Rice, Assemblywoman Jasey, and members of this distinguished Committee. My name is Carolyn Marano; I am the Assistant Commissioner of Education responsible for leading the Division of Student Services. It is an honor to appear before you today. I am joined by leaders from my Division:

Kelly Williams, *Director of the Office of Student Support Services;*

Kathy Ehling, *Director of the Office of Fiscal and Data Services;* and

Dominic Rota, *Director of the Office of Special Education Policy and Dispute Resolution.*

This morning, I will provide an overview of the efforts undertaken by the Department of Education to help schools identify, prevent, and combat chronic student absenteeism. I will also discuss the Department's work around school culture and climate.

Chronic Absenteeism

I begin with this undisputed principle: being in school leads to succeeding in school. National studies, academic research, and school-level data confirm that school attendance affects grades, standardized test scores, graduation, and high-school drop-out rates. A recent national study concluded that children who are chronically absent in Kindergarten and 1st grade are much less likely to be reading at grade level when they reach grade 3. In high school, not coming to school is an indication that you are more likely to drop out of school.



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In our state, a student is considered chronically absent if she is not present for 10 percent or more of the total enrolled school days. Generally, this means a student who misses 18 days or more is considered chronically absent.

During the 2016-2017 school year, 10% of our more than 1.3 million public-school students that year were chronically absent.

As a result of legislation signed into law last spring by Governor Murphy, schools with a chronic absenteeism rate of 10% or more are required to develop a corrective action plan to improve attendance rates.

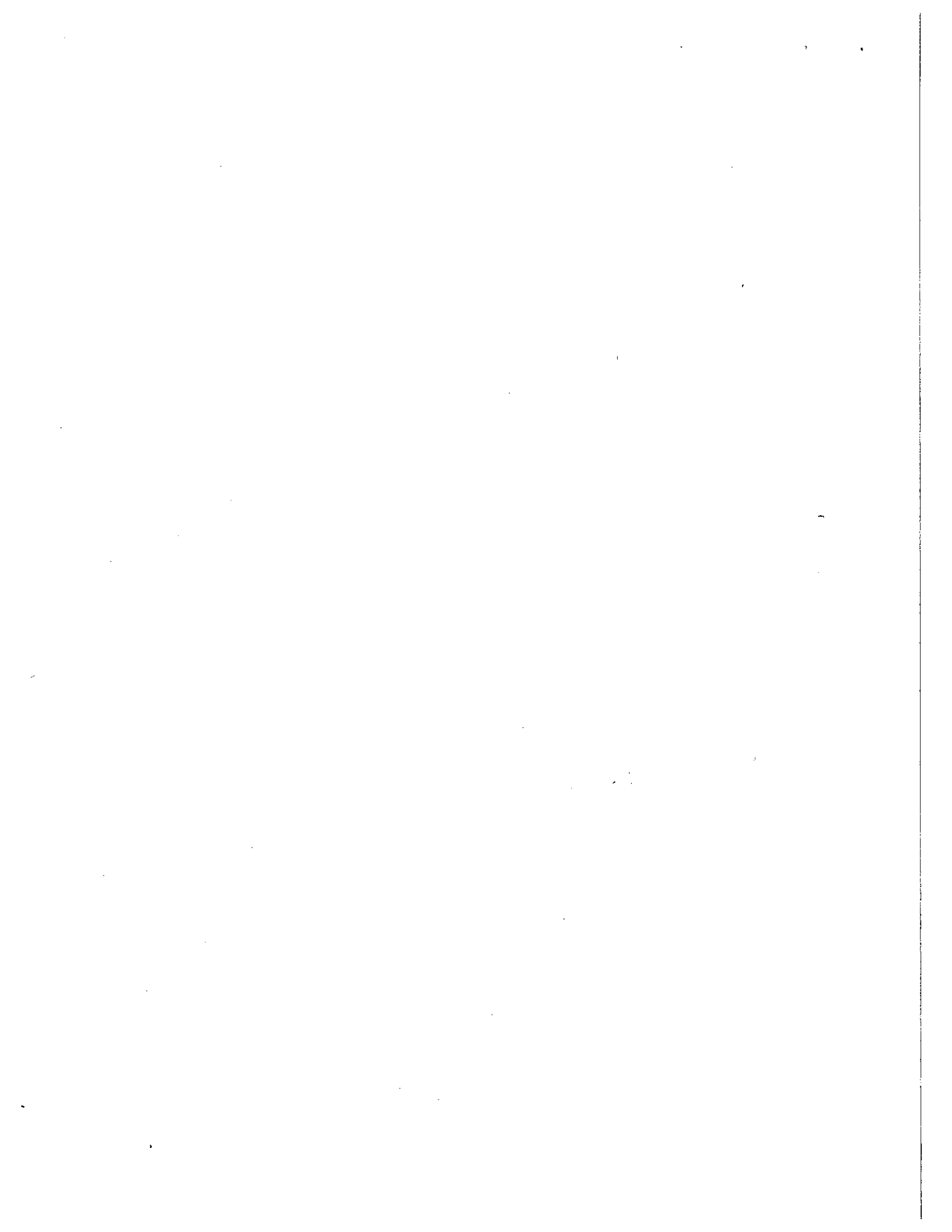
The Department's Efforts to Support Districts

Under Commissioner Repollet's leadership, in our efforts to become a model organization, we continue to identify ways to support school districts in addressing chronic student absenteeism.

For example, we work directly with schools and districts to implement New Jersey's Tiered System of Supports (NJTSS).

We also issued guidance documents that provide schools with strategies that include engaging families and communities on how to improve student attendance.

Further, we provide schools with technical assistance to ensure they accurately collect and report student attendance data.



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School Climate and Culture

I would like to discuss school culture and climate given the direct correlation between chronic absenteeism and school climate. Research demonstrates that a positive school climate, among other things, reduces bullying and violence, and improves academic achievement.

The Department continues to assist schools in providing safe and supportive environments for students and staff.

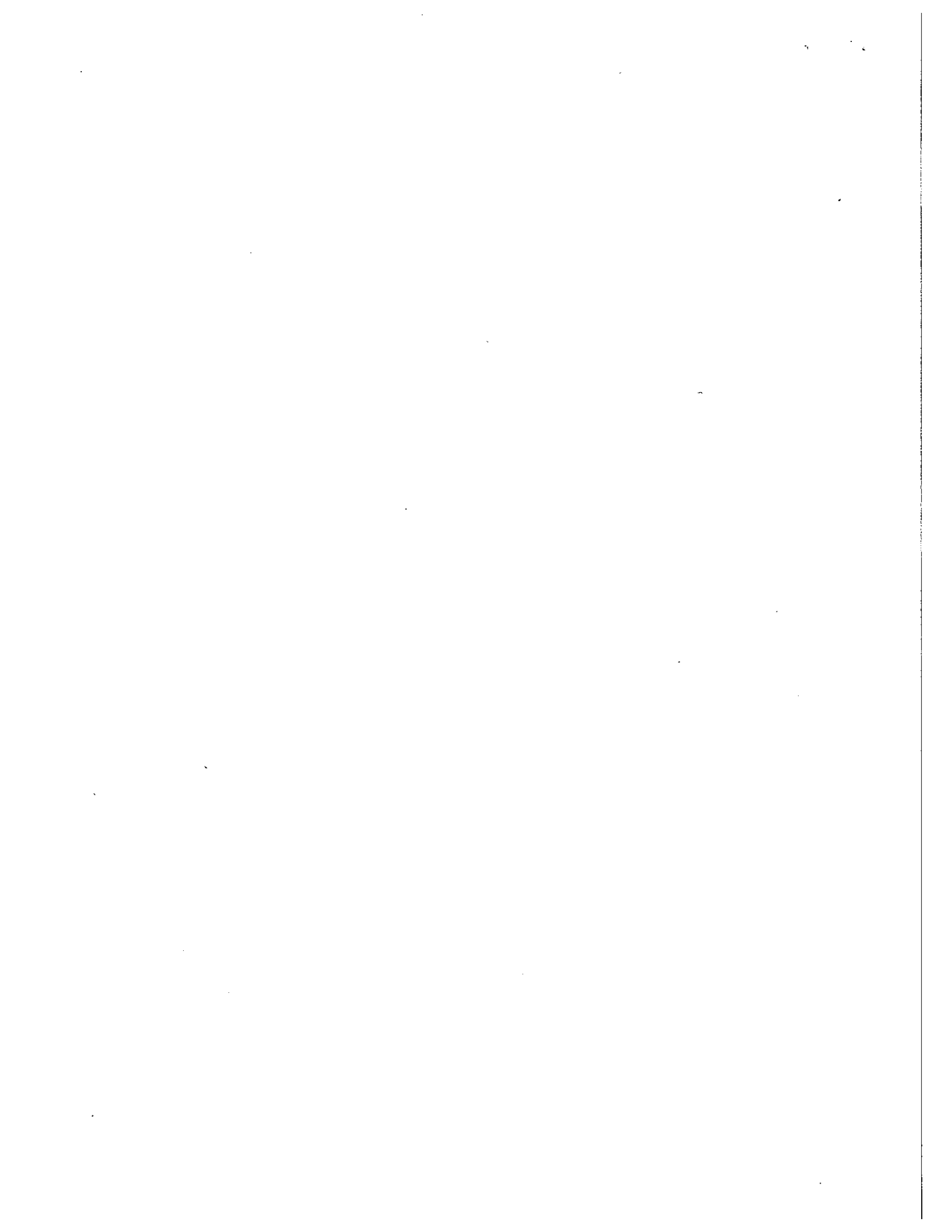
Social and Emotional Learning

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is a priority for Commissioner Repollet, and as such, he has made clear his commitment to, and support of (SEL).

Students in SEL programs are more likely to attend school and receive better grades. These students are less likely to violate their student codes of conduct.

The Department's SEL Competencies and Sub-Competencies are a framework designed to provide students with the skills they need for success in postsecondary education, careers, and adult life.

The Department continues to support districts in the development and implementation of SEL programs. We are also planning the Department's first statewide Social and Emotional Learning conference for teachers and administrators.



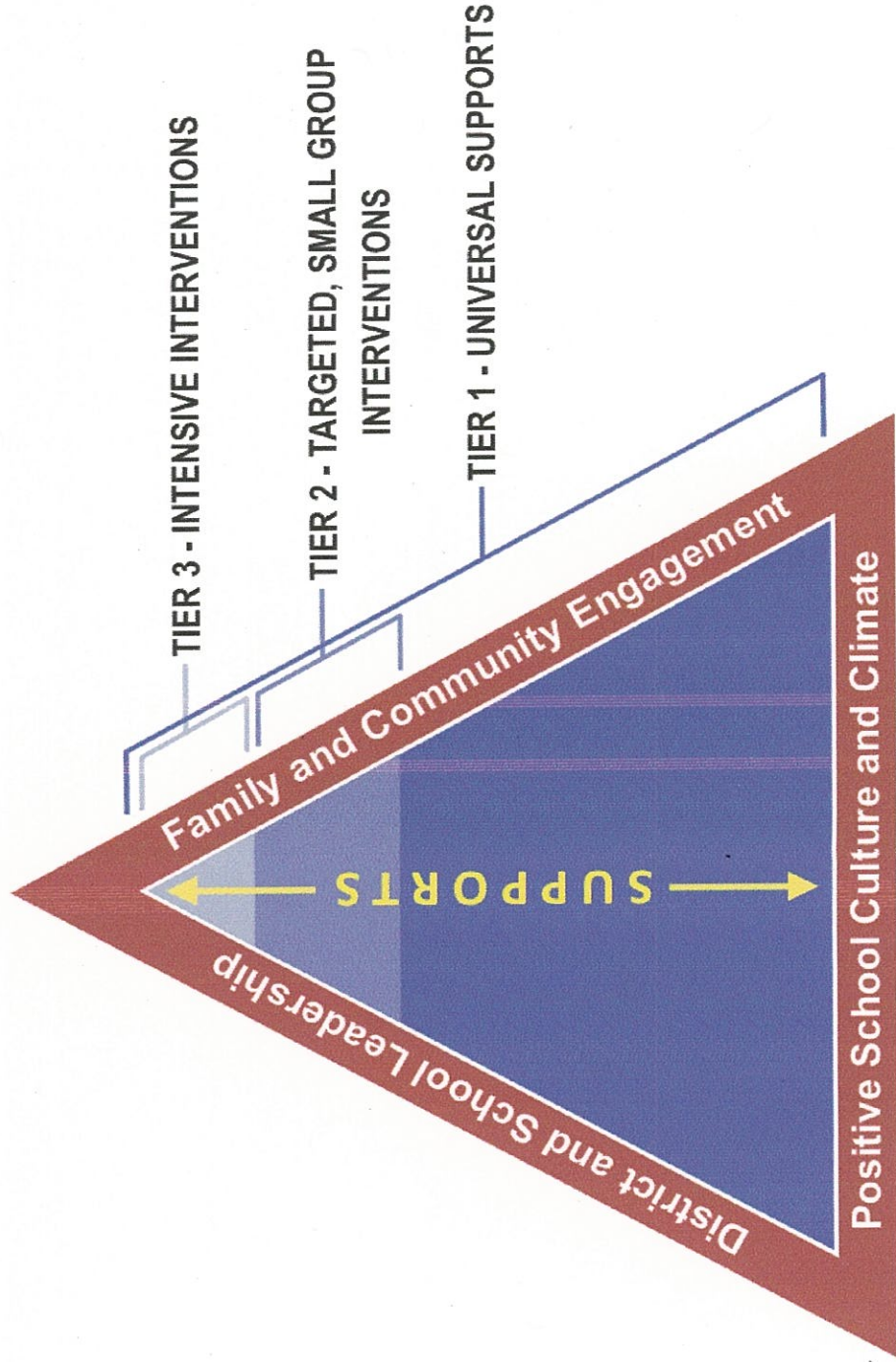
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Conclusion

In closing, we recognize there is more work to be done to reduce chronic student absenteeism, and to improve the culture and climate in our schools. Thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you. I am happy to address your questions.

SEL is for Everyone

New Jersey Tiered System of Supports (NJTSS)



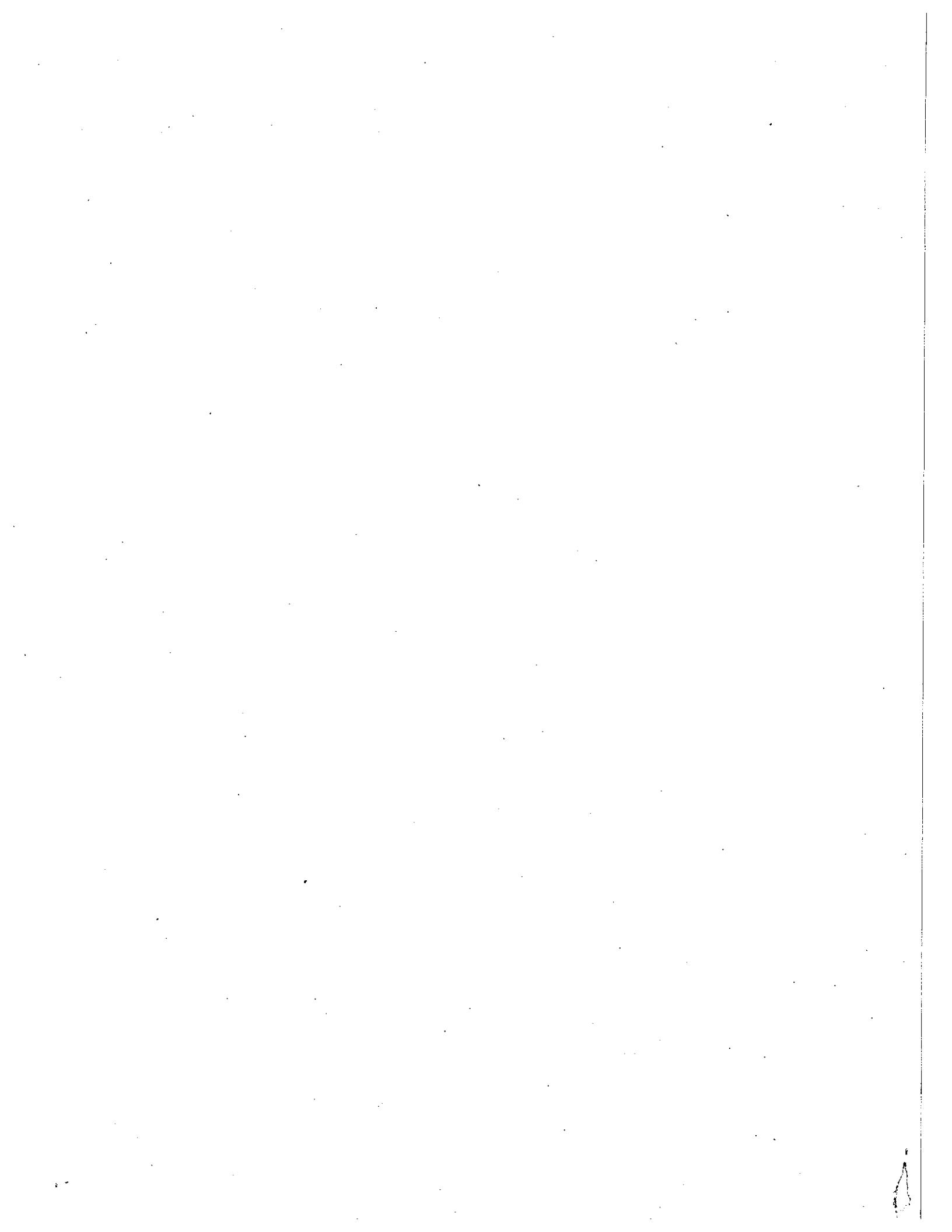
Source: New Jersey Department of Education, 2018



New Jersey
DEPARTMENT
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Center for
GREAT TEACHERS
& LEADERS
At Rutgers University, The Board of





SEL is Important for Life Outcomes

Teachers' positive ratings of student social and emotional competencies at kindergarten is correlated with...



- On-time high school graduation
- Graduation from college
- Full-time job by age 25



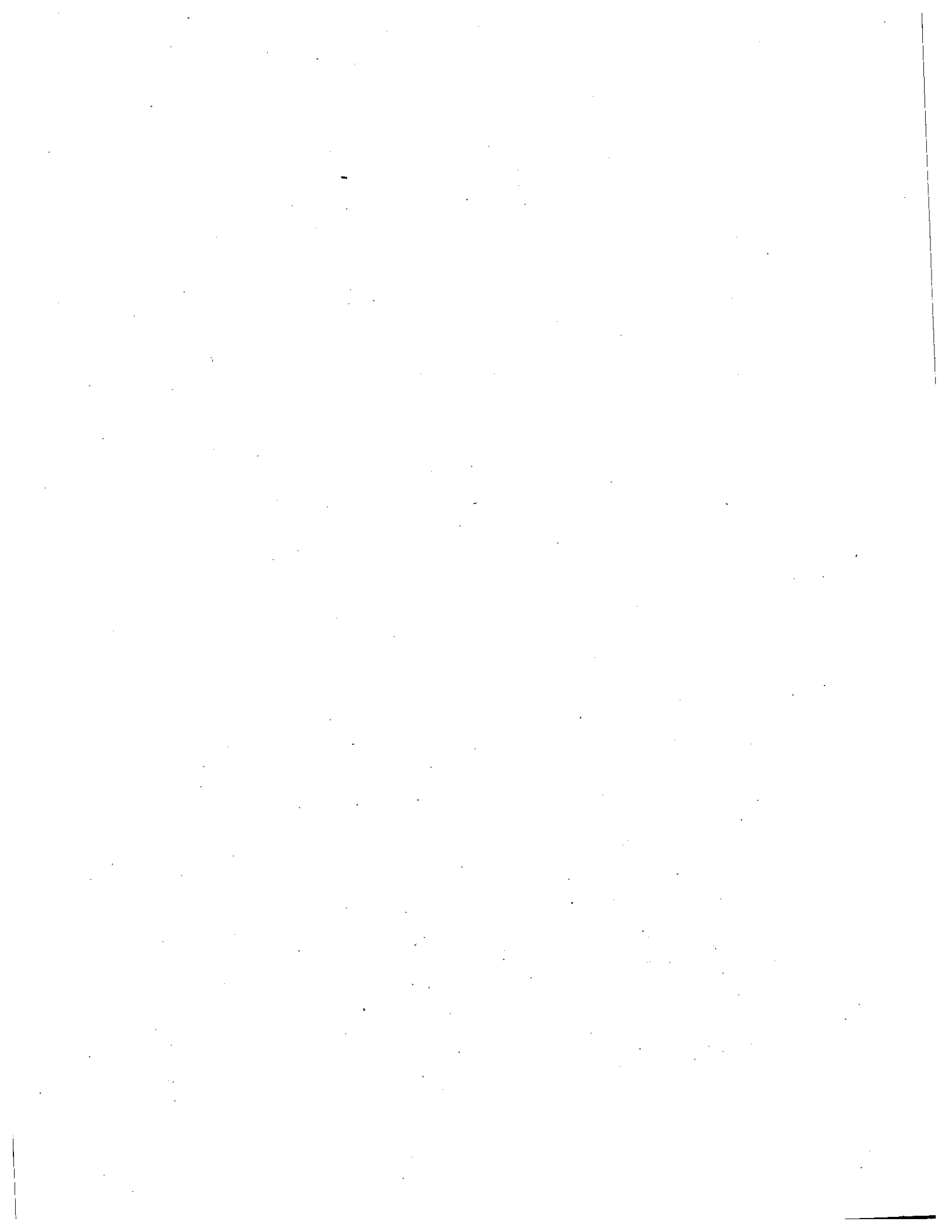
- Involvement with police before adulthood
- Being arrested
- Need for government assistance

Source: Jones, Greenberg, & Crowley, 2015



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Advancing the Future for Research







New Jersey Social and Emotional Learning Competencies and Sub-Competencies



SELF-AWARENESS

- Recognize one's feelings and thoughts
- Recognize the impact of one's feelings and thoughts on one's own behavior
- Recognize one's personal traits, strengths and limitations
- Recognize the importance of self-confidence in handling daily tasks and challenges



SELF-MANAGEMENT

- Understand and practice strategies for managing one's own emotions, thoughts and behaviors
- Recognize the skills needed to establish and achieve personal and educational goals
- Identify and apply ways to persevere or overcome barriers through alternative methods to achieve one's goals



SOCIAL AWARENESS

- Recognize and identify the thoughts, feelings and perspectives of others
- Demonstrate and awareness of the differences among individuals, groups and others' cultural backgrounds
- Demonstrate an understanding of the need for mutual respect when viewpoints differ
- Demonstrate an awareness of the expectations for social interactions in a variety of settings



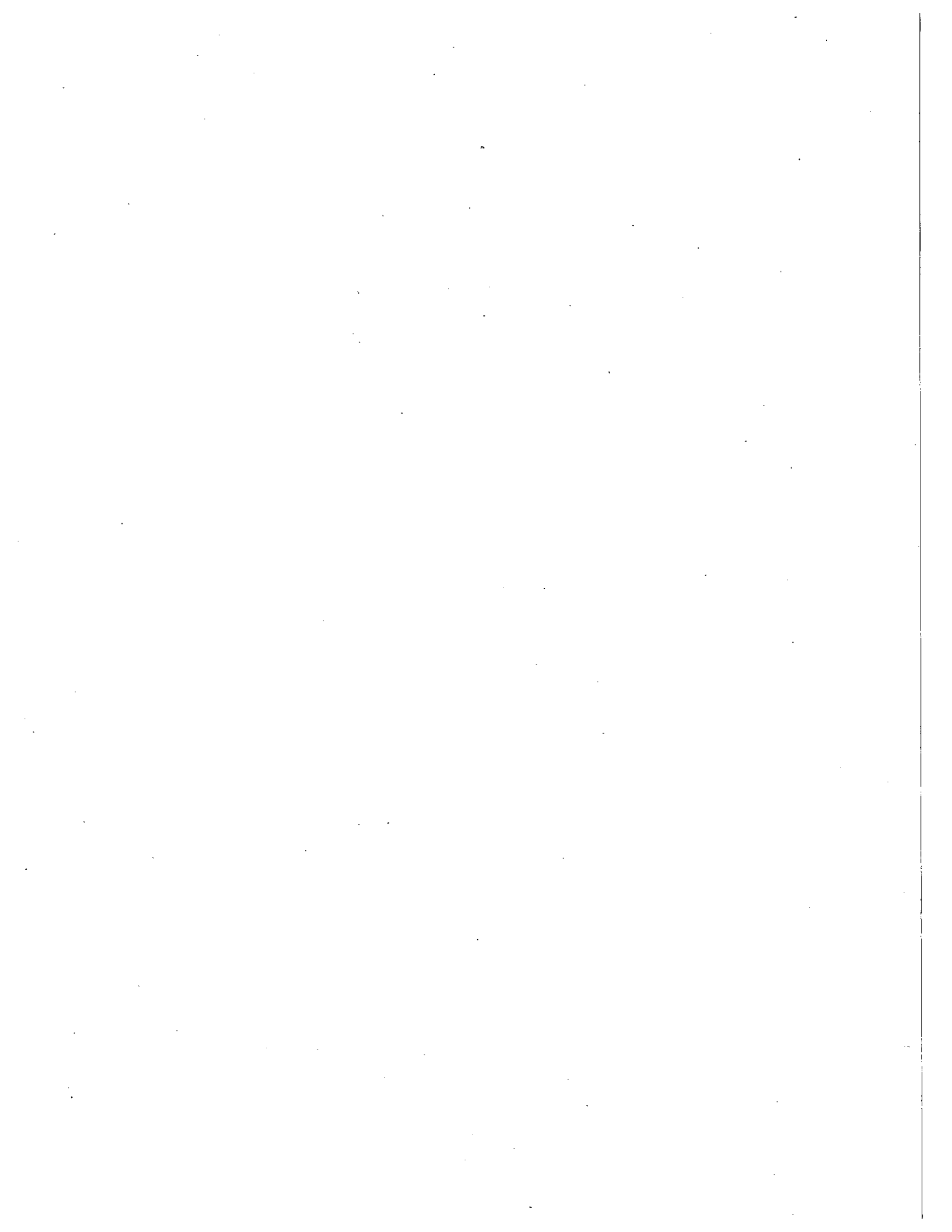
RESPONSIBLE DECISION-MAKING

- Develop and implement and model effective problem solving and critical thinking skills
- Identify the consequences associated with one's actions in order to make constructive choices
- Evaluate personal, ethical, safety and civic impact of decisions



RELATIONSHIP SKILLS

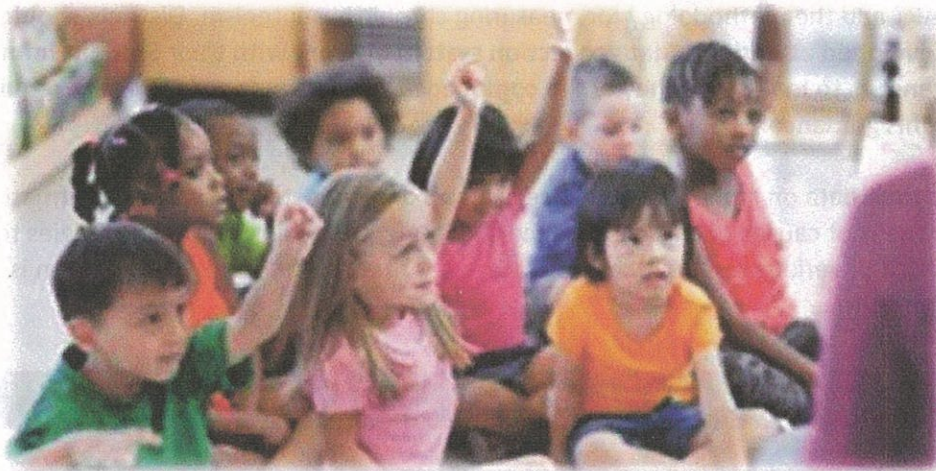
- Establish and maintain healthy relationships
- Utilize positive communication and social skills to interact effectively with others
- Identify ways to resist inappropriate social pressure
- Demonstrate the ability to prevent and resolve interpersonal conflicts in constructive ways
- Identify who, when, where, or how to seek help for oneself or others when needed





STATE OF NEW JERSEY
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Guidance for Reporting Student Absences and Calculating Chronic Absenteeism



Version 2: May 2018

Guidance for Reporting Student Absences and Calculating Chronic Absenteeism

Version 2: May 2018

In order for students to learn and achieve their fullest potential, it is critical that they are in school and engaged in the learning process. Research shows that student absences impact a child's ability to succeed in school. In addition, research shows that chronic absenteeism from school is a primary cause of low academic achievement and a powerful predictor of a student's risk of dropping out of school.¹

With the *Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)*, the latest reauthorization of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* on December 10, 2015, the New Jersey Department of Education has identified chronic absenteeism as its indicator of school quality and student success for accountability ([see approved ESSA State Plan](#)). Chronic absenteeism is factored into the summative rating used to identify schools in need of comprehensive and targeted support and improvement. Additionally, school-level chronic absenteeism is included in each district's annual School Performance Reports for kindergarten through grade 12, per *ESSA* Sec.1111.

This guidance clarifies policies and expectations for reporting student membership and attendance data in NJ SMART and the methodology for measuring chronic absenteeism. **Districts should review their locally-developed attendance data collection system or work with their Student Information System (SIS) vendors to make sure they are in compliance with attendance reporting requirements as outlined in this guidance.**

With more accurate data on student attendance, schools and districts can use this information to better identify the root causes of chronic absence and implement improvement strategies to address these issues. A list of various research-based strategies for reducing chronic absenteeism is available on the [NJDOE website](#).

Definitions

"Chronic Absenteeism" is defined in New Jersey's *ESSA* State Plan as the percentage of a school's students who are not present for 10 percent or more of the days that they were "in membership" at a school.

"Cumulative Days in Membership" is an element in NJ SMART defined as the number of *school days in session* in which a student is enrolled/registered during the annual reporting period from July 1 through June 30. The count will commence the first day the student is expected to start, even if they do not actually attend that day.

- ❖ **School Day in Session** is a day on which the school is open and students are under the guidance and direction of a teacher(s); and the day must be 4 hours or more to be considered a full day (or at least 2½ hours for kindergarten) (*N.J.A.C. 6A:32-8.3(a) and (b)*).

¹ Balfanz, R. and Byrnes, V. (2012). *The Importance of Being in School: A Report on Absenteeism in the Nation's Public Schools*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Center for Social Organization of Schools.

- The number of possible days in session for a student on *home instruction* is the same as for other students in the program in which the student is enrolled (N.J.A.C. 6A:32-8.1(f)).
 - Schools must be in session a minimum of 180 days.
 - The number of school days in session does not include summer school.
 - The extended school year is included in the calculation up to June 30 and only when it is **required** for **all** students.
- ❖ **Five allowable reasons for absence:** A school may have a *day in session* that would not be counted as a *day in membership* for a particular student for the following reasons (*New Jersey School Register*, Ch.3):
- Religious observance (N.J.A.C. 6A:32-8.3(h));
 - A college visit (up to 3 days per school year, only for students in grades 11 and 12);
 - “Take Our Children to Work Day” (pursuant to the memo issued by the Commissioner to all districts on April 25, 2017) or other rule issued by the Commissioner;
 - Participation in observance of Veterans Day (N.J.S.A. 18A: 36-13.2) or district board of election membership activities (N.J.S.A. 18A: 36-33); or
 - The closure of a busing district that prevents a student from having transportation to the receiving school.

“**Cumulative Days Present**” is an element in NJ SMART defined as the number of school days a student is present (not absent) when the school is in session during the annual reporting period (July 1 through June 30) and the student is recorded under the guidance and direction of a teacher in the teaching process (N.J.A.C. 6A:32-8.3). Whether a student absence is due to illness, disciplinary action, or other reason, the student may not be considered present at school unless home instruction is received. A student with an “excused” absence per district board of education policy can NEVER be considered as present.

- ❖ **Time present – Full Day:** For a school in session during morning and afternoon, the student must be *present for at least one hour in the morning and at least one hour in the afternoon* to be considered as present for a full day; for a school in session during either morning or afternoon, the student must be present at least two hours to be recorded as present for the full day (N.J.A.C. 6A:32-8.3(k)), for example, twilight programs. For a half day preschool or kindergarten session, the student must be present for at least one hour to be considered present for a full day.
- ❖ **Time present – Half Day:** A student must be present at least one hour during any morning, afternoon, or evening session to be recorded as present one-half day (*New Jersey School Register*, Ch.3).
- ❖ **Home instruction:** A student receiving home instruction is considered present and in membership under the following circumstances:
 - A student with a *temporary or chronic health condition* receives home instruction by a certified teacher for the number of days and length of time sufficient to continue the student’s academic progress. A student with a disability must receive home instruction consistent with the student’s individualized education program (N.J.A.C. 6A:16-10.1).
 - A general education student, *for reasons other than a temporary or chronic health condition*, receives 10 or more hours of home instruction per week by a certified teacher

- on at least three separate days and no fewer than 10 hours per week additional guided-learning experiences (*N.J.A.C. 6A:16-10.2*).
 - A student, *when placed on home instruction through an IEP*, receives 10 or more hours of instruction per week on at least three separate days by an appropriately certified teacher or teachers (*N.J.A.C. 6A:14-4.8*).
 - NOTE: When instruction is provided for less than the minimum number of hours and/or days required per week, the student must not be recorded as present for more than four days when school was in session for a full five-day week. School districts are able to develop their own policy for determining the exact number of days to record the student present based on these circumstances.

- ❖ **School-sponsored education programs:** A student participating in a school-sponsored educational program under the guidance and direction of a teacher, pursuant to *N.J.A.C. 6A:32-8.3*, even if not located in the school, is considered present and in membership (e.g., field trip, structured learning experience, community-based instruction).

- ❖ **In-school suspensions:** A student temporarily removed from his or her regular classroom to in-school suspension is considered present and in membership, provided the student is afforded the opportunity to continue to:
 - Appropriately participate in the general curriculum; and
 - For students with disabilities, receive the services specified on the child's IEP, and participate with nondisabled children to the extent they would have in their current placement.

- ❖ **Out-of-school suspensions:** A student on out-of-school suspension is considered in membership and not present unless he or she receives home instruction as defined above. Students receiving short-term suspension must be provided with academic instruction that addresses the New Jersey Student Learning Standards within five days of the suspension (*N.J.A.C. 6A:16-7.2(a)5*). Students receiving long-term suspension must be provided with educational services (academic instruction and support services) within five days of the suspension (*N.J.A.C. 6A:16-7.3(a)9*).

- ❖ **Extended non-illness absences:** School districts should develop a policy that determines when to record a student who is not in school for an extended period of time for reasons other than illness (e.g., travel with family) as a dropout. A student may be considered a transfer during the extended leave when the student is re-enrolled in and attending another school (in the U.S. or abroad).
 - It is recommended that "each school should have a policy that a student must attend a specified number of days out of the 180 required days in order to be considered for promotion to the next grade or for graduation" (*New Jersey School Register*, Section 2.7.3).
 - NOTE: Schools should consider the potential implications of dis-enrolling a student for the purposes of reporting student attendance data with regard to its potential impact on other accountability measures and any possible financial consequences.

How is Chronic Absenteeism Measured in New Jersey?

Student-level absentee rate: Each student's absentee rate is calculated based on the fields of *Cumulative Days Present* and *Cumulative Days in Membership* collected in NJ SMART. *Cumulative Days Present* (P) is subtracted from the *Cumulative Days in Membership* (M), and this number is divided by the *Cumulative Days in Membership* (M).

$$\frac{M - P}{M}$$

If the student-level absentee rate is equal to or greater than 10%, the student is chronically absent.

School-level chronic absenteeism: The school-level chronic absenteeism rate is calculated by dividing the number of chronically absent students during the school year by the total number of students enrolled in the school.

What is Important to Know When Implementing this Guidance?

Beginning with School Year 2017-18, the following changes will be made:

- ❖ Attendance data for active and inactive students will be collected in SID Management. Previously, attendance data for active students was collected in the State Data Submission and attendance data for inactive students was collected in the SID Data Submission.
- ❖ The inclusion of attendance data for inactive students is required under ESSA. Therefore, both active **and** inactive student records for *all* students enrolled/registered in a school during the annual reporting period from July 1 through June 30 will be included in the calculation of chronic absenteeism. This will apply for EdFacts reporting requirements, the New Jersey School Performance Reports, and for ESSA accountability.

Districts must verify that data related to **attendance and student subgroup information** fields in the final NJ SMART submission are accurate as these are the source variables used for all chronic absenteeism calculations. (Please note: NJQSAC, Operations Indicator 1, verifies that school districts certify and provide complete data to NJ SMART on schedule and with a low error rate.)

School-level chronic absenteeism rates will be calculated using student records as submitted to SID Management by **June 29, 2018**. **Districts will not have an opportunity to change their data after their final SID Management submission.** Questions regarding management of student records may be directed to NJSMART@pcgus.com.

How Does this Work in Practice?

Example 1: David is in 11th grade and his school has 181 days in session during the school year. He was absent 3 days due to college visits and 2 days due to illness; arrived to school 30 minutes late in the morning 2 times; and left an hour early for a soccer game on 5 occasions. Notes: The days that he was tardy or left school early would not be factored into the equation, as he attended school for at least one hour in the morning and one hour in the afternoon on those days; and his college visits would not be considered *days in membership* because he is in grade 11.

David's absentee rate: $\frac{178 - 176}{178} = 1\%$

David has 178 cumulative *days in membership* (181 school days in session minus 3 days for his college visits) and 176 *cumulative days present* (181 school days in session minus 5 days absent, including 2 days sick and 3 days college visit). **He would not be considered chronically absent.**

- ❖ What if, *in addition to the days missed above*, David's family takes him on a two-week vacation during the school year?

David's absentee rate: $\frac{178 - 166}{178} = 7\%$

David's *cumulative days present* are now 166 (181 school days in session minus 15 days absent, including 2 days sick, 3 days college visit and 10 vacation days). **He would not be considered chronically absent.**

- ❖ What if, *in addition to the days missed above*, David skips school for 4 days and the next month receives a 2-day out-of-school suspension for repeatedly using a cell phone in class against school policy? Note, when suspended, David was *not* present in school or able to participate in the general curriculum for that day.

David's absentee rate: $\frac{178 - 160}{178} = 10\%$

David's *cumulative days present* are now 160 (181 school days in session – 21 days absent, including 2 days sick, 3 days college visit, 10 vacation days, 4 days skipped, and 2 days suspended). **David would be considered chronically absent with a rate of 10%.**

Example 2: Sarah is in 12th grade and her school has 181 days in session during the school year. Sarah is the nighttime assistant manager at a fast-food restaurant to help support her family and the restaurant scheduled her to cover a day shift 11 times.

Sarah's absentee rate: $\frac{181 - 170}{181} = 6\%$

Sarah would not be considered chronically absent.

What if, *in addition to the days missed above*, Sarah is absent for two weeks due to illness, but receives home instruction during the *second* week, by a certified teacher, sufficient to continue academic progress based upon her ability to participate? Note: Sarah is considered absent for only 5 of those 10 days since she received home instruction in accordance with N.J.A.C 6A:16-10.1 during one of the two weeks.

Sarah's absentee rate: $\frac{181 - 165}{181} = 9\%$

Sarah would not be considered chronically absent.

What About Truancy?

Truancy is defined as 10 or more cumulative unexcused absences (N.J.A.C. 6A:16-1.3). All school districts are required to have a policy and procedure that include a definition of unexcused absences that count toward truancy; thus, how “excused” and “unexcused” absences are defined for purposes of expectations and consequences regarding truancy, student conduct, promotion, retention and award of credit is a local decision (N.J.A.C. 6A:16-7.6(a)3). The NJ SMART *Cumulative Days Towards Truancy* field is not considered in the calculation of chronic absenteeism.

General Considerations Regarding Chronic Absenteeism

What school is responsible for the student’s attendance?

The school a student attends is always responsible for properly documenting a student’s daily attendance and following this guidance. It is the accountable school district’s responsibility to submit the final student attendance data from the attending school into the *days in membership* and *days present* fields in NJ SMART. In about 95% of cases, a student’s accountable school and attending school are identical, but there are rare instances where the accountable school may not be the attending school. For example, a student attending an approved private school for students with disabilities will have his or her attendance reported by the public school he or she would otherwise attend. Districts should pay careful attention to entering the proper CDS (county, district, school) codes for a student’s resident, receiving and attending school in NJ SMART so that the student is assigned the proper accountable school.

Are preschool students included in the calculations for chronic absenteeism?

This guidance should be followed in the recording of attendance for all preschool students enrolled in New Jersey public schools. However, preschool students are **not** included in the calculation of school and district accountability scores for chronic absenteeism. Preschool chronic absenteeism rates will be displayed in the school performance reports but they will not factor into any accountability measure.

If a district excuses an absence for a reason that is not one of the five allowable reasons defined above, does that absence count in the calculation of the school’s chronic absenteeism rate?

A student who is absent for a full day with an excused absence pursuant to the school district’s definition of “excused” (see [What about Truancy?](#)) must be recorded as having a day in membership and day absent for that day. An “excused” absence that is not one of the five allowable reasons above, does count as an absence in the determination of whether the student was chronically absent for the year.

Can schools continue to record “excused” absences for local purposes?

It is important to note that schools can determine how “excused” and “unexcused” absences are defined for the purposes of expectations and consequences regarding truancy, student conduct, promotion, retention, and the award of course credit, pursuant to N.J.A.C. 6A:16-7.6. School districts can take any and all action authorized by their policies and procedures when categorizing these absences.

However, a school must report student attendance to the NJDOE in accordance with the guidelines in this document. For State reporting purposes, a student can only be recorded as present or absent. Therefore, a student with an "excused" absence per local decision must be marked absent when reported to NJDOE. The only exception is that a school may have a day in session that would not be counted as a day in membership for a particular student based on the five allowable reasons defined above.

If a student registered with my school at the beginning of the year but never attended, will that impact the school's chronic absenteeism rate?

No. As of the 10th consecutive day of non-attendance, assuming district/school investigations have been performed (pursuant to *N.J.A.C. 6A:16-7.6*) and the results are conclusive, the appropriate dropout code can be recorded in the New Jersey School Register. As per NJ SMART rules, the School Exit date is to be recorded as: "The year, month, and day of the first day after the date of a student's last attendance in a school." For students who were enrolled at the beginning of a school year but never attended the school during the year, the exit date is the first day of the school year, regardless of the actual date the district determines the student is no longer in the district. Consequently, the days the student was not at school before being dropped should not be considered *days in membership* and students who were enrolled but **never** attended should be recorded as having 0 days in membership and 0 days present.

If a school is advised by a family that a student is going to be taking a lengthy time off for vacation, should the school dis-enroll the student and then re-enroll her when she returns?

Schools should review "extended non-illness absences" above. Given that one student's absence should not significantly impact your chronic absence rate, schools should consider the possible implications of dis-enrolling a student for the purposes of reporting student attendance data with regard to its potential impact on other accountability measures as well as any possible financial consequences.

How should attendance be reported for shared-time vocational students?

Shared-time students are those who attend two different schools in one day for a half day each. For example, students who spend a half school day in an academic high school and a half day in a county vocational school are enrolled in the high school and also in the appropriate county vocational school. For shared-time students, each day is counted as a $\frac{1}{2}$ *day in membership* for each school. Shared-time students are either counted each day as $\frac{1}{2}$ *day present* or $\frac{1}{2}$ *day absent* at each school. (A shared-time student must attend at least one hour to be counted present.) Therefore, if a school has 180 days in session for the school year, a shared-time student would have 90 *days in membership* at his or her academic high school and 90 *days in membership* at the county vocational school. The academic high school is responsible for submitting shared-time student attendance data to the SID submission based on half day attendance at the academic school. The vocational school must submit shared-time student attendance data separately in the CTE submission based on half day attendance at the vocational school.

Can a student's schedule be modified? If a schedule is modified, how should attendance be reported?

The definitions for days in membership, day in session, and days present are provided on pages 2 to 4 of this document.

For students with disabilities, pursuant to N.J.A.C. 6A:14-4.1(c), the length of the school day and the academic year of programs must be at least as long as that established for nondisabled students. However, the IEP team may, in its discretion, **in rare cases**, alter the length of the school day based on the needs of the student. The IEP team may also make a decision, based on the individual needs of the student, that the student is unable to attend school and should receive special education and related services in a different setting or manner, such as through home instruction, all or part of the time. If the IEP team makes this decision, and the information is included in the student's IEP, then for attendance purposes, the student should be marked as "present" in your SIS when he or she is educated in the educational placement(s) set forth in his or her IEP.

For any student, pursuant to N.J.S.A. 18A:38-26, regular attendance must be during all the days and hours that the public schools are in session in the district, unless it is shown to the satisfaction of the board of education of the district that the mental health of the child is such that he or she cannot benefit from instruction in the school or that the bodily condition of the child is such as to prevent his or her attendance at school. A student with a modified schedule under either of these conditions should be marked as "present" for the full day in your SIS when he or she only attends school for the modified time.

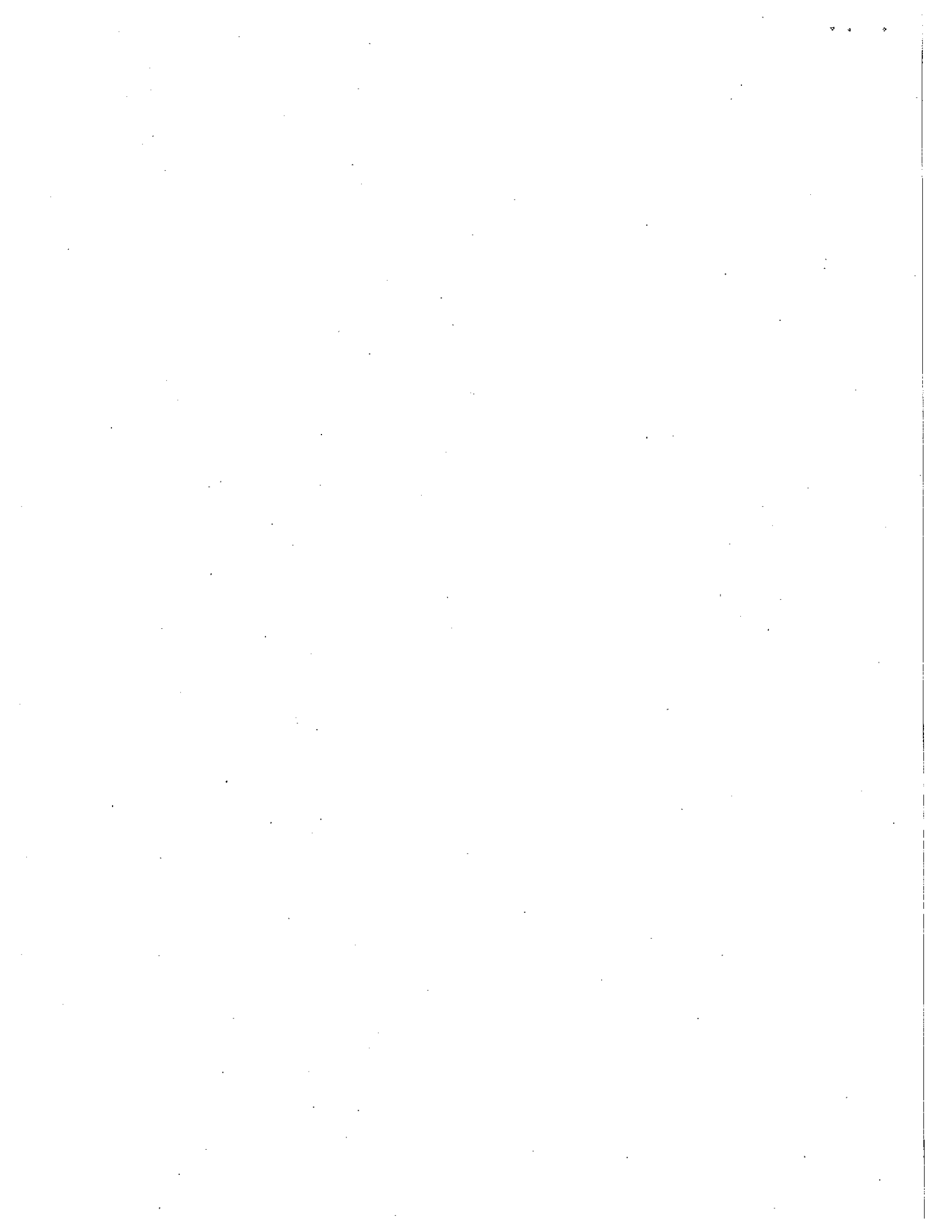
For general education students, apart from those circumstances described above, a student's schedule may not be modified.

What Funds Can Be Used to Support Student Attendance Initiatives?

Under *ESSA*, when chronic absenteeism is identified and documented as an issue through a comprehensive needs assessment, funding for initiatives to improve student attendance may come from Title I, Part A and Title IV, Part A. Likewise, local education agencies (LEAs) may use Title II funds to provide training for school personnel to address issues related to school conditions for student learning, including chronic absenteeism. Additionally, if the attendance issue relates to English language learners, Title III funds may be used. (Schoolwide programs may use funds from any Title.)

Resources for Implementing Guidance and Using Data to Improve Attendance

- ❖ Review *New Jersey School Register* (note Chapter 3, The Attendance Record)
- ❖ Review *N.J.A.C. 6A:16-7* and *N.J.A.C. 6A:32-8*
- ❖ Review *NJ SMART SID Management Student Handbook*
- ❖ Review *Supplemental Guidance: NJ SMART SID Management FAQs*
- ❖ Review a list of various resources to improve student attendance on the New Jersey Department of Education's *Attendance, Truancy & Chronic Absenteeism* website, including NJDOE's Strategies for Addressing Chronic Absenteeism
- ❖ Contact the Office of Student Support Services at attendance@doe.nj.gov





STATE OF NEW JERSEY
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Getting Students to School: Strategies for Improving Attendance and Reducing Chronic Absenteeism



May 2018

New Jersey Department of Education

Strategies for Addressing Chronic Absenteeism

Introduction

In order for students to learn and achieve their fullest potential, it is critical that they are in school and engaged in the learning process. Research shows that student absences impact a child's ability to succeed in school.¹ In addition, there is evidence that chronic absenteeism from school is a primary cause of low academic achievement and a powerful predictor of a student's risk of dropping out of school.²

To support schools' efforts to combat chronic absenteeism the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) has developed this document to provide schools and districts with proactive ideas and strategies to engage educators, families and the community in an effort to improve student attendance. Extensive resources regarding attendance are also available on the [NJDOE website](#).

Tiered System of Supports to Improve Daily Attendance

[Attendance Works](#), a leading national organization providing tools and resources for schools to reduce chronic absenteeism, recommends a tiered approach to improve student attendance. The [New Jersey Tiered System of Supports \(NJTSS\)](#) is New Jersey's own model of a tiered framework of supports based on Response to Intervention (RTI) and multi-tiered systems of supports (MTSS) (see the NJTSS graphic and organization of supports in Appendix A). NJTSS, similar to both RTI and MTSS promotes the organization of academic, behavioral, and health supports and interventions into three levels offered to ALL students based on their individual needs. This framework will be used to present both proactive and reactive strategies to prevent chronic absenteeism and intervene when a student is at risk of being chronically absent. Key links to ideas and toolkits are included throughout the document and additional links are provided at the end of the document for school leadership teams, intervention and referral service teams, collaborative planning teams and/or school safety teams to use to address schoolwide patterns of absenteeism as well as the needs of individual students and families who need support.

¹ "10 Facts About School Attendance," [Attendance Works](#)

² Balfanz, R. and Byrnes, V. (2012). *The Importance of Being in School: A Report on Absenteeism in the Nation's Public Schools*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Center for Social Organization of Schools.

Foundational Elements

Engaging families and creating a positive school climate are two key strategies for improving attendance. These elements are part of most tiered frameworks and serve as foundational components in the NJTSS model (see Appendix). Ideas for improving family relationships and school climate that can lead to improved attendance are provided below.

❖ **Establish Positive Relationships with Students and Families** ([from Attendance Works](#))

- Take attendance in a caring manner. Personalize taking attendance by greeting students by name and welcoming a student back after an absence. This practice both ensures accurate attendance data is collected and helps strengthen a student's positive sense of connectedness to the school community.
- Welcome each family and child at the beginning of the year. There are many good examples: a smile and a high five as students board the school bus, staff ready to greet families and students at drop-off points and offer directions, a friendly greeting to each family and student at the classroom door, a postcard or note welcoming the student to your classroom or a phone call before school begins. If your school has a web-based parent portal, add a warm message to your classroom's page. Choose a personal and positive way that says, "I'm glad you are here. I look forward to being your teacher and seeing you in school every day."
- When possible, start your relationship with your families on their home turf by offering a home visit. When educators invest upfront in relational home visits, attendance improves and schools can reap many other positive benefits. Ideally, school staff will get trained and then conduct voluntary home visits to families during summer or early fall. This helps open lines of communication and establish a positive home-school relationship before problems arise.
- With home visits, families are more likely to feel that educators really care about their children and often gain a deeper understanding of what their children are learning and expectations for their child's academic achievement. Educators gain insights into the hopes and dreams that families have for their children as well as the challenges a student faces in getting to school every day. In short, relational home visits help bridge the gaps that often exist especially when educators don't live in neighborhoods served by their schools or share the ethnic or class backgrounds of their students.

❖ **Establish Positive, Supportive and Engaging School Climate**

- Conduct an annual [school climate survey](#) to measure your school's conditions for learning, and develop and implement a school climate improvement plan to reinforce areas found to need additional attention.
- Ensure that the [materials and curricula](#) in your school reflect your students and their interests.

- Promote culturally responsive teaching and social and emotional learning.
- Advertise on the school calendar events focused on student engagement and school spirit (e.g., 50 Ideas to Build School Spirit and A Year of Special School Events).
- Provide a safe, clean environment and asthma-friendly schools.
- Use the Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child framework to identify and share core health strategies.
- Provide incentives for teachers who attend school regularly and model good attendance.
- Implement Positive Behavioral Supports in Schools Universal Strategies to improve school climate and prevent student behavior that can negatively impact attendance.

Tier I: Universal Attendance Strategies

Tier 1 of any tiered support system includes schoolwide, universal strategies that support and encourage daily attendance for *all* students. The following strategies are meant to proactively promote good attendance for all students.

❖ Clarify Attendance Expectations and Goals

- Ensure that attendance expectations are clearly presented in your school and district code of student conduct.
- Use multiple media to publicize attendance goals in ways that are accessible to all students, families and the community (e.g., posters, district and school web pages, morning announcements, parent-teacher organization meetings and email and school newsletters).
- Make attendance an item for discussion in all school events including back-to-school night, parent conferences and other opportunities to share goals with various stakeholders.

❖ Educate and Engage Students and Families About the Impact of Attendance on Achievement

- Launch a schoolwide Attendance Campaign for all families during the first 30 days of school. Include a kickoff event with a parent speaker, a catchy slogan, and branded items distributed to students and caregivers (pencils, pens, notepads, noisemakers, etc.)
- Host events to celebrate great attendance and improved attendance for parents and students.

- Participate in [Attendance Awareness Month](#) activities throughout the month of September.
- Use social networking tools to inform stakeholders of the impact of missing school throughout the school year.
- Post daily student attendance percentages conspicuously (e.g., in the cafeteria, in a major hallway, on the website).

❖ **Ensure Accurate Data Collection and Reporting and Monitor Attendance Data Regularly**

- Develop a system and use data to monitor chronic absences (e.g., [Every School Day Counts](#)).
- Collect accurate attendance data and follow the [Guidance for Reporting Student Absences](#) provided by NJDOE.
- Use either your SIS or an electronic system to monitor and track student attendance. If your SIS does not provide a means of monitoring student attendance, [NJ SMART](#) provides tools on how report attendance data as well as including a feature in the [At-Risk Report](#) to identify students who are chronically absent and monitor the school's chronic absenteeism rate.
- Include attendance records on report cards and progress reports.
- Provide parents with a comparative analysis of their student's attendance with the average student attendance in the building (e.g., [Tacoma Public School's "Nudge" letter](#)).

❖ **Recognize Good and Improved Attendance**

- Provide [recognition](#) to individual students, rewards for students with excellent attendance, or improvement on attendance that reversed an at-risk trajectory and groups (i.e., classes with excellent monthly attendance.)
- On three to five occasions per semester, provide unannounced door prizes to randomly selected students entering the building in the morning (e.g., [Trenton Public Schools Student Attendance Improvement Guide](#)).
- Conduct major yearly pro-attendance events.

Tier II Intervention Strategies for Students At-risk for Chronic Absenteeism

Tier 2 strategies are for students and families who need additional support beyond what is provided for all students. Tier 2 supports supplement high quality Tier 1 strategies already in place. While it is critical in Tier 1 to build strong, positive relationships between school staff, students and families to create an overall positive school climate, Tier 2 strategies involve building caring supportive relationships through programs and practices targeted to some students whose attendance after a month or two of school puts them at risk for chronic absenteeism. For example, the school team monitoring attendance data may determine that a student is missing more than two days of school in a month. Discussion with his or her teacher and the principal might reveal that the student has been bullied or is struggling with academics. Small group counseling or a small group academic intervention might be needed to address the root cause of the absences. Tier 2 supports address other barriers to strong attendance including unreliable or no transportation, unsafe paths to school and unmanaged chronic health conditions.

If a school is using a tiered system like NJTSS for prevention, intervention and enrichment, the collaborative problem-solving team, or the team that reviews student-level data and makes decisions about interventions, can be utilized to review attendance data and make determinations about supports. Criteria can be established with regard to absences that the team can use to determine which students are in need of Tier 2 or Tier 3 supports. Administrators, teachers and paraprofessionals representative of all student subgroups are essential to implementing Tier 1 and Tier 2 strategies; creating a welcoming environment that makes students and families feel connected to school; and taking positive and early action when a student is absent. While a welcoming first impression helps all students, it is vital for helping the most vulnerable students feel safe and supported, especially if they are in an unfamiliar school setting.

❖ **Develop Personal Connections with Students Who Are in Danger of, or Are Currently Chronically Absent**

- Make personal calls to families of at-risk students if a student is absent 2 or more days in a month.
- Make home visits for students who have excessive absences.
- Create and send personalized “We missed you!” postcards home when a student is absent.

❖ **Support Families Facing Additional Barriers to Daily School Attendance**

- Share and connect families with community resources to fill a pressing need that may be hampering school attendance; e.g., need to find transitional housing, need to combat food insecurity, need to get counseling referrals for parent and/or student(s), need to provide interpretation for limited English proficient family members.
- Connect students with appropriate medical care and/or homebound services when needed.

❖ Develop a Mentoring Program in Your School

- Place students with mentors (e.g., Success Mentors) based on attendance records from prior year(s). Assign mentors at a ratio of 4:1, students to mentors.
- Review the What Works Clearinghouse for evidence-based interventions such as “check and connect.”

❖ Identify Resources Available to Improve Chronic Absenteeism Rates Among Various Student Populations

- Utilize your Intervention and Referral Services or collaborative problem solving (NJTSS) team for individualized strategies and interventions for responding to absences due to learning, behavior or health difficulties.
- Connect with community organizations that may help with creating a more culturally responsive school environment.
- Institute school programs that promote daily attendance. For example, you may consider instituting school breakfast programs and safe walk to school programs.
- Provide students with resources to launder clothes or uniforms, or exchange clothes or uniforms when necessary.
- Offer access to health care through a school nurse or other health and dental providers who can come to the school.
- Engage community partners and/or connect to existing coalitions to see if they can aid in filling noted gaps in resources.
- Train teachers with the most effective, research-based practices for English language learners.
- Allow non-English speaking parents/guardians to submit necessary school documentation in their native language, if possible.

Tier III Intervention Strategies for Chronically Absent Students

Tier 3 offers more *intensive, individualized interventions and supports for students and families* determined by the school data, intervention and referral services or collaborative problem solving (NJTSS) team. Tier 3 strategies complement tier 1 and 2 strategies and complete the continuum. These strategies should be necessary for only a few students who are already chronically absent or have a history of chronic absence. The school team can develop an inventory of school and community resources for supporting individual students and their families. These may include

family counseling agencies, afterschool programs, recreation programs, social service agencies and the court system. Tier 3 interventions often require a coordinated response among agencies (e.g., the school, Department of Children and Families, law enforcement, and Department of Human Services) and/or [wraparound services](#). If a disability is suspected, the child should be referred to the school's child study team. If the student has an IEP, an IEP meeting may be needed to discuss and identify supports and services to improve attendance. Specific tier 3 strategies are listed below.

❖ **Utilize Student Support Staff to Identify Individual Barriers to Satisfactory Attendance**

- If permitted by the district, screen students for childhood trauma and make evidence-based treatment available to them.
- Refer students for additional support and evaluation as needed. For instance, if a student is dealing with anxiety, a school support person such as a social worker, mentor, counselor or psychologist may be able to assist the student or suggest outside resources to parents that they may utilize.

❖ **Utilize a "[check-in check-out](#)" system or other interventions to prevent behavior that may lead to extended absence or suspension.**

❖ **Refer the Student and Parent/Guardian to Outside Agencies and Legal Intervention**

- Have the school counselor, social worker or appropriate school personnel refer the student and family for additional services, such as through the Department of Children and Families' [Children's System of Care](#), [The Children's Home Society of New Jersey](#), and other community organizations.
- Have appropriate school personnel refer the student and family to applicable legal intervention. As a last resort, districts are required to have policies related to truancy regarding legal intervention for families having students with excessive, unexcused absences.

Additional Resources

- NJDOE's [Attendance, Truancy & Chronic Absenteeism](#) webpage. This site features additional resources schools can utilize to prevent address chronic absenteeism.
- [Absences Add Up](#)
 - Helps increase a student's chances of success in school through mentorship and out-of-school time programs.
- [Attendance Works](#)
 - Provides resources, research and technical assistance to schools for monitoring, understanding and addressing chronic absenteeism.

2/20

- Every Student, Every Day: A Community Toolkit to Address and Eliminate Chronic Absenteeism
 - Provides community stakeholders with information, resources and action steps to help ensure that students are in school every day and reduce chronic absenteeism.

- Health Schools Campaign: Chronic Absenteeism
 - Offers resources regarding the impact of student health on chronic absenteeism, the importance of addressing chronic absenteeism in the early grades and other related reports and briefs.

- What Works Clearinghouse
 - Offers evidence-based practices to prevent behavior that may lead to extended absences and address other root causes of chronic absenteeism.

- You may also contact the Office of Student Support Services at attendance@doe.state.nj.us with any questions.

New Jersey Tiered System of Supports to Improve Attendance

Tier 2: Intervention Strategies for Students At-risk for Chronic Absenteeism (Students missing 5-10%)

Tier 1 plus:

- Develop personal connections with students who are currently, or in danger of being chronically absent;
- Support families facing additional barriers to daily school attendance and increase engagement;
- Develop a mentoring program in your school; and
- Identify resources available to improve chronic absenteeism rates among various student populations.

Tier 3: Intervention Strategies for Chronically Absent Students (Students missing 10% or more of school)

Tiers 1 and 2 plus:

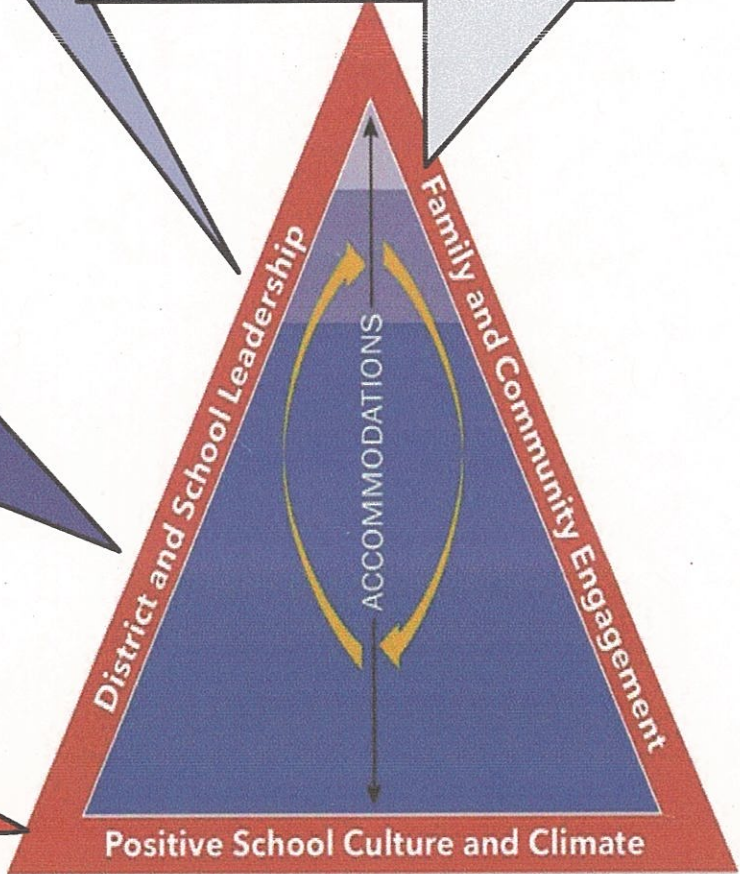
- Utilize student support staff to identify individual barriers to satisfactory attendance;
- Offer students opportunities to reengage with the school community and reconcile credits and curricular content they may have missed due to missed classes;
- Offer students and families alternative educational structures to best accommodate barriers to school attendance; and
- Refer the student and parent/guardian to outside agencies and legal

Tier 1: Universal Attendance Strategies (All students)

- Clarify attendance expectations and goals;
- Educate and engage students and families about the impact of attendance on achievement;
- Ensure accurate data collection and reporting and monitor attendance data; and
- Recognize good and improved attendance.

Foundational Elements

- Establish positive relationships with students and families; and
- Establish positive, supportive and engaging school climate.





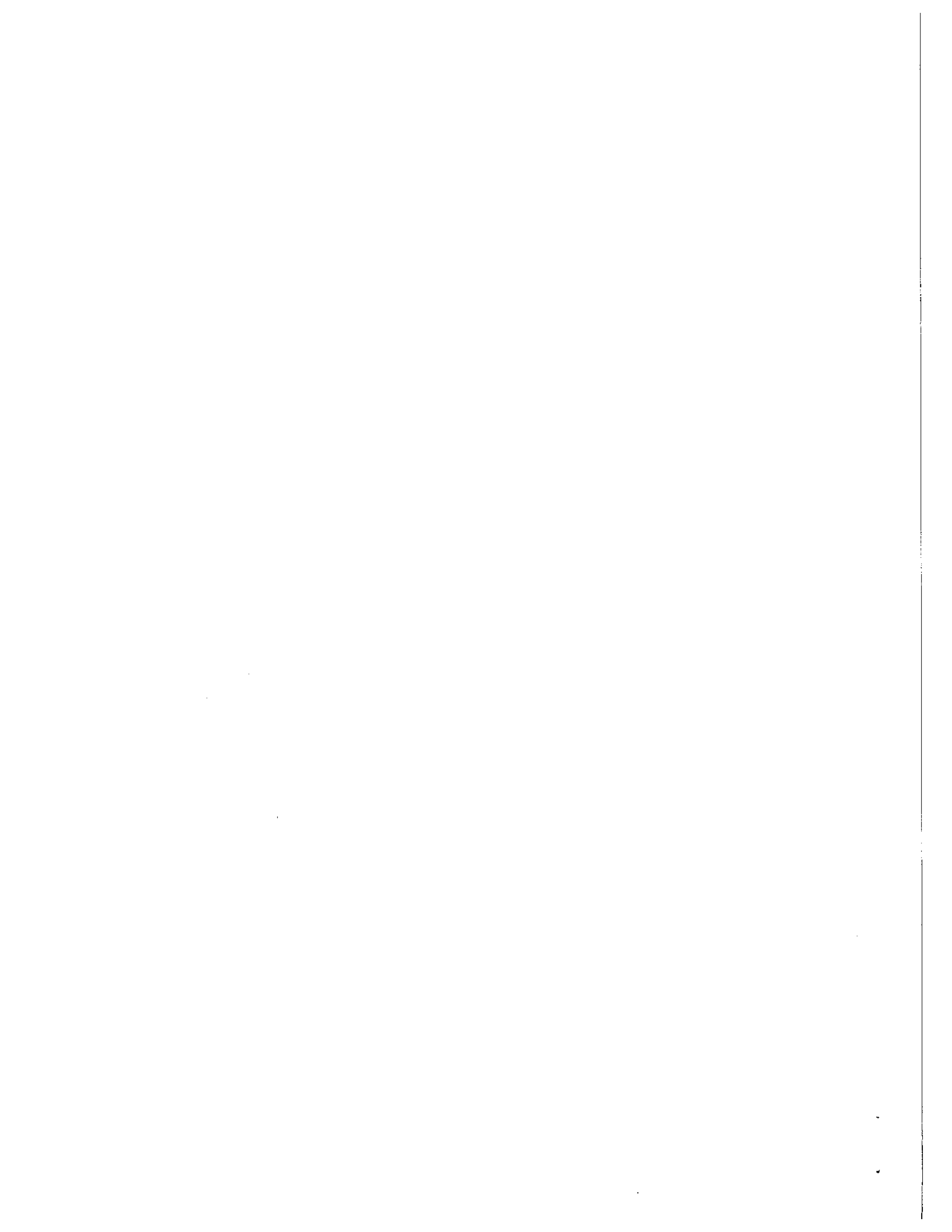
Reducing Chronic Absenteeism

Peter Chen, Esq. & Cynthia Rice, Esq.

Advocates for Children of New Jersey

Joint Committee on Public Schools

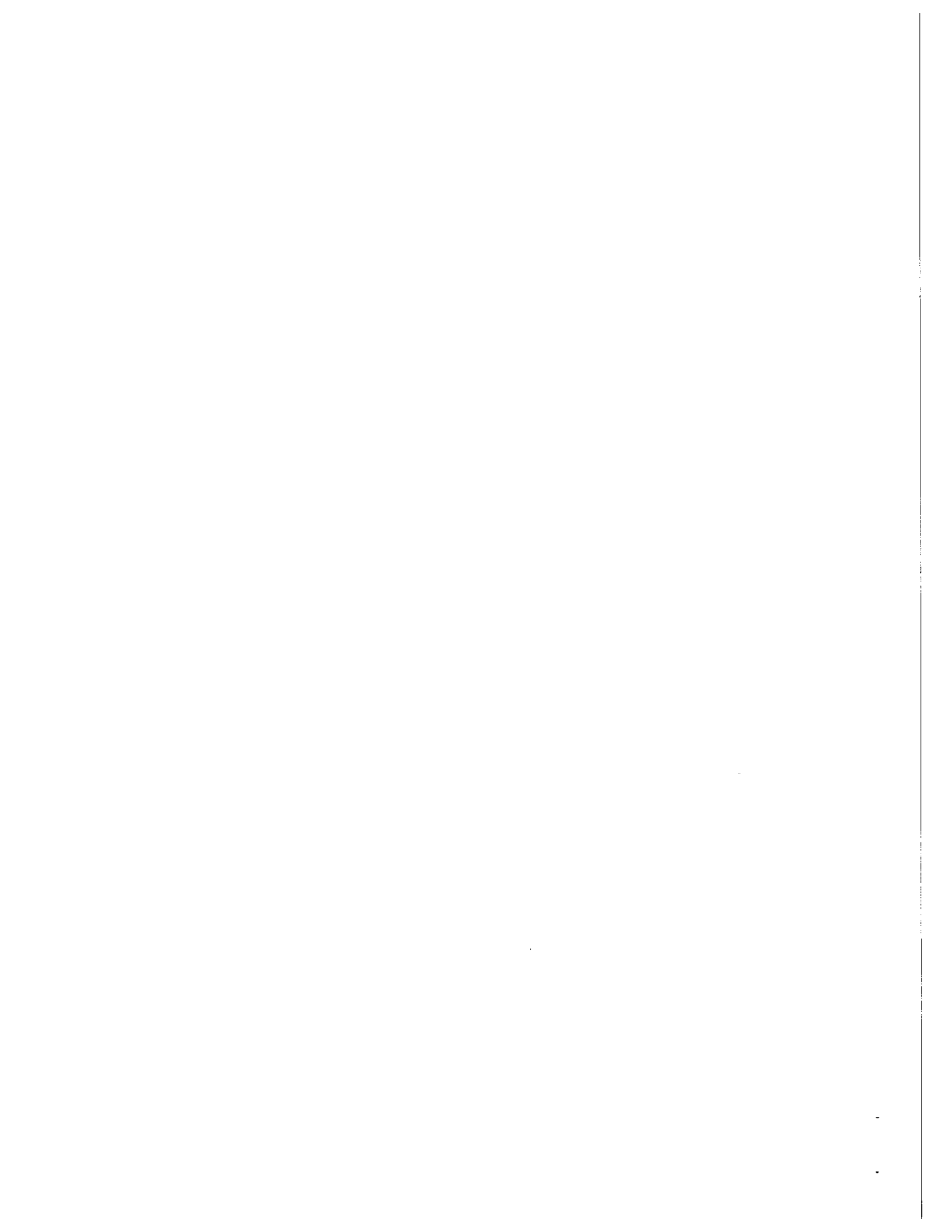
February 5, 2019





Chronic Absenteeism Defined

- **CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM** measures students who miss **10% of enrolled school days**, including excused/unexcused and suspensions
- **Average daily attendance** counts the average number of students who show up to school
- **Truancy** counts only unexcused absences

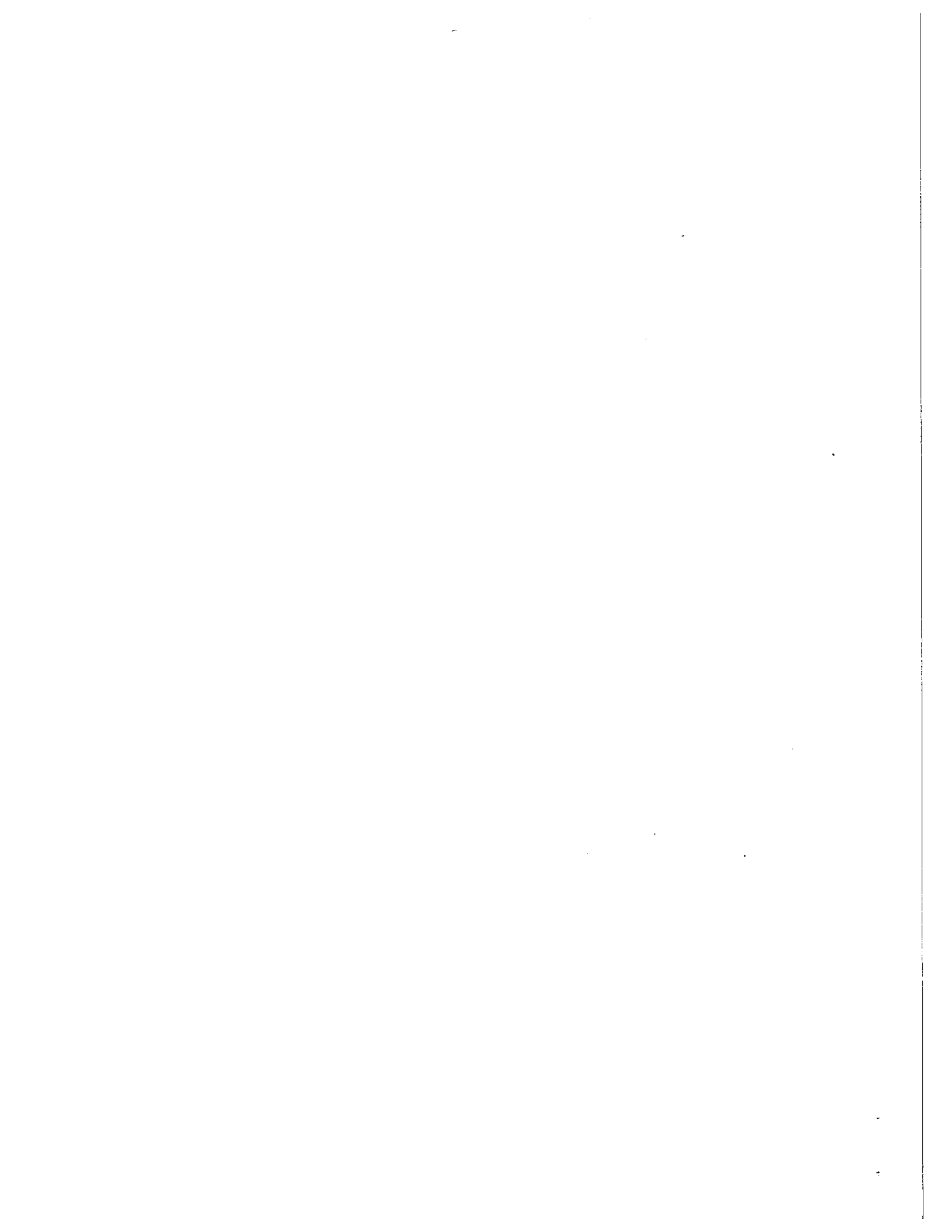




What does this mean?

- Based on a 180-day school year:
- Any student who misses 18 days or more per year
- That means about 2 days every month is considered....

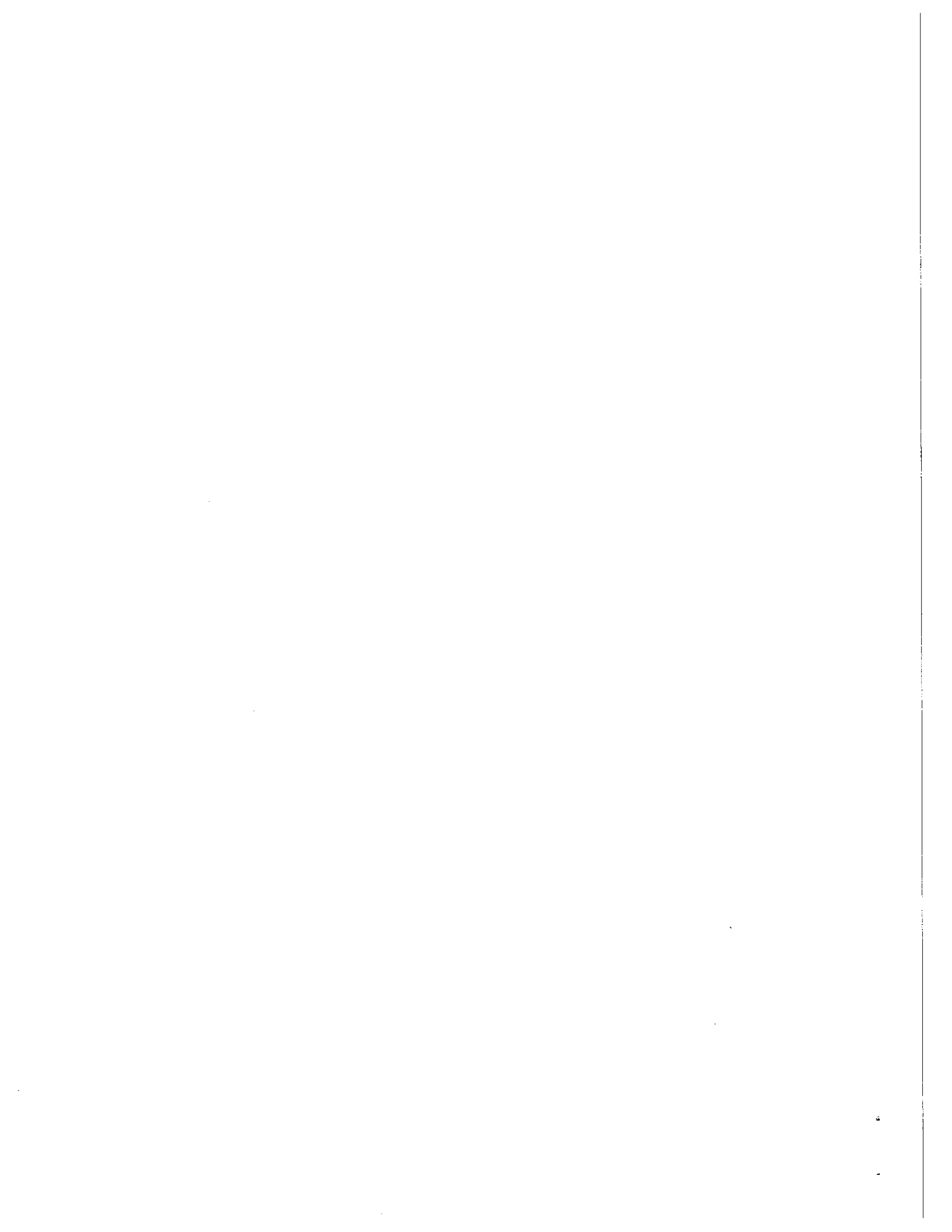
CHRONICALLY ABSENT





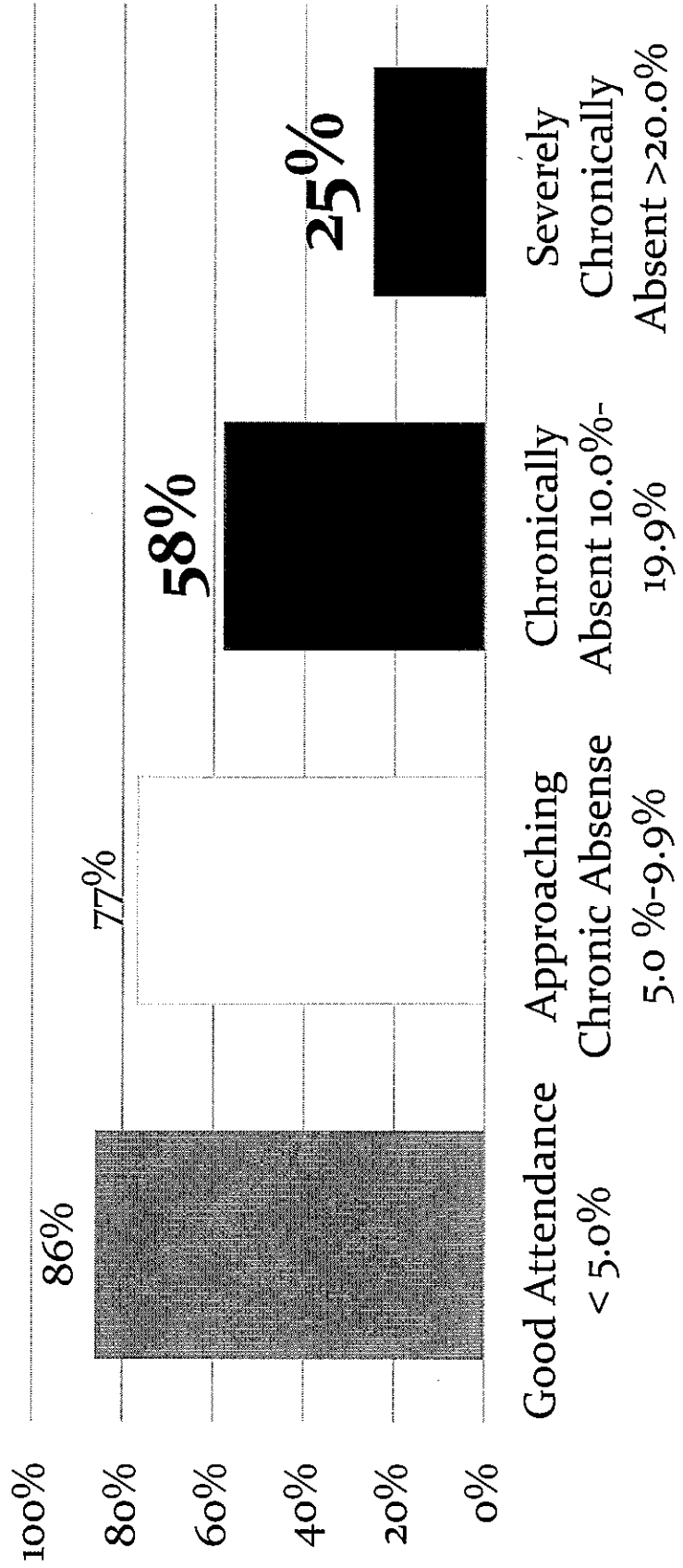
Every absence hurts a student's opportunity for success

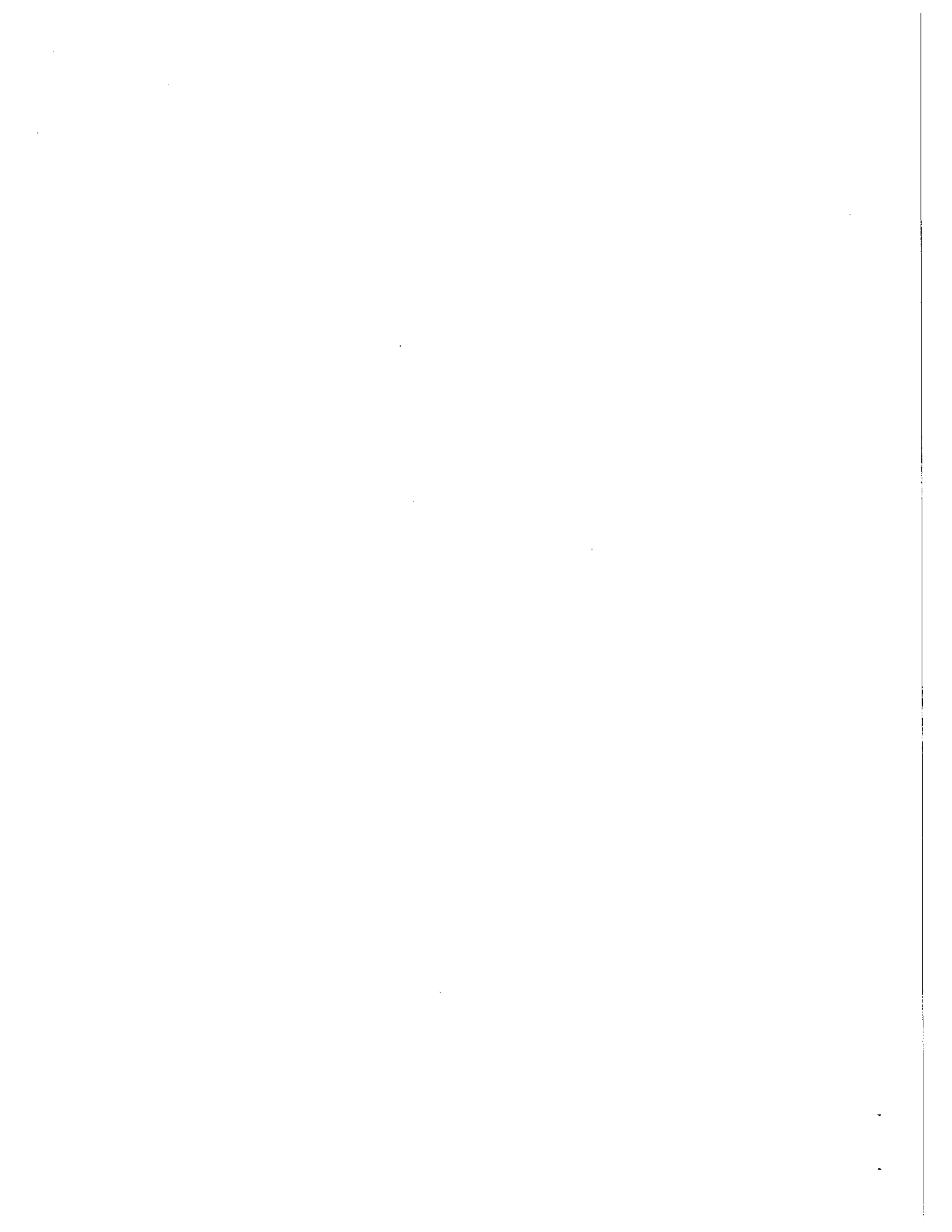
- *Early years (PK-3) absenteeism leads to:*
 - Long-term reading problems
 - Higher absenteeism rates in later grades
 - Higher rates of retention
- Absenteeism in the later school years correlates with:
 - Higher rates of suspension
 - Lower academic achievement
 - Lower odds of reaching second year of college



The more school students miss, the more likely they are to drop out

Newark Graduation Rate in 4 years, 2015 cohort, grouped by 9th grade absenteeism status





Truancy Vs. Chronic Absence

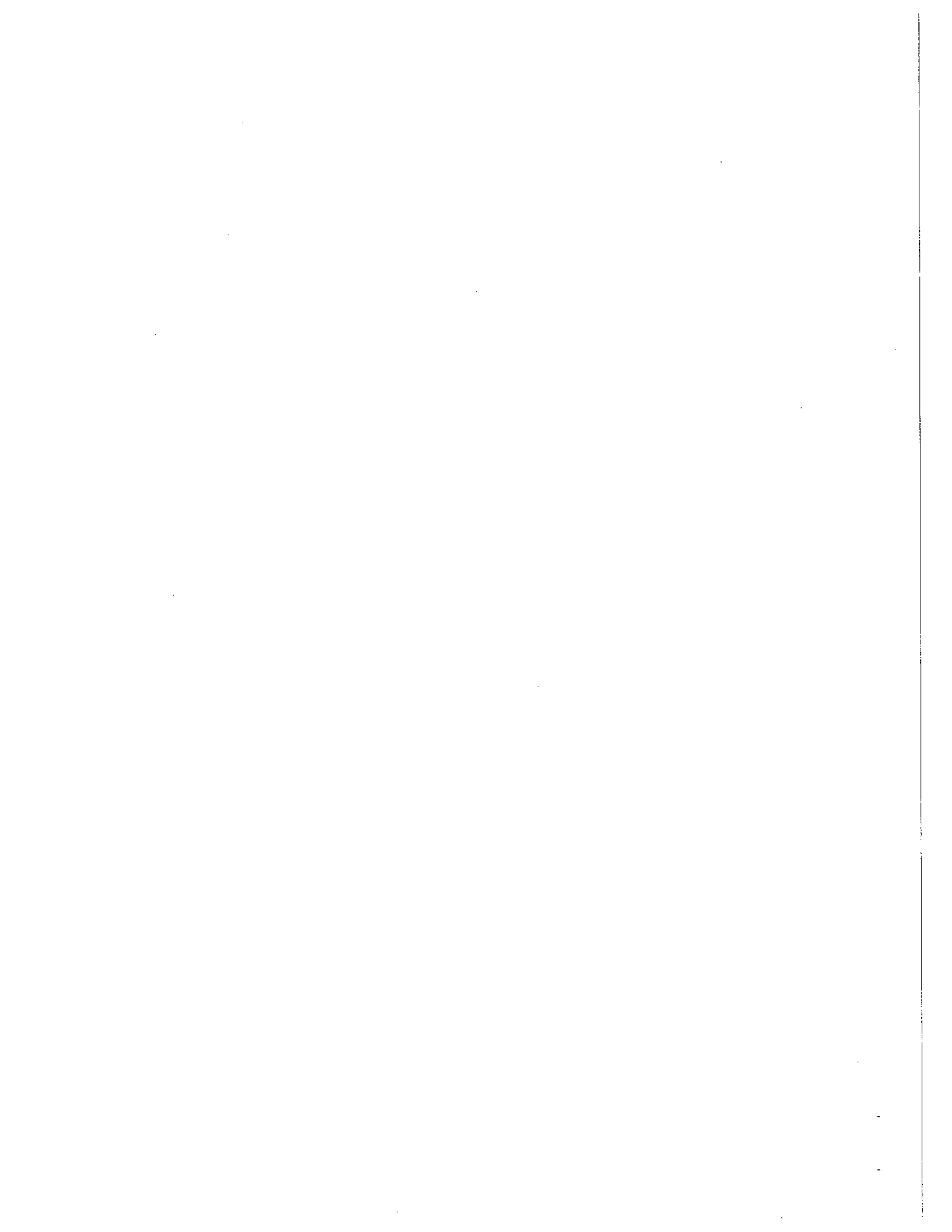
TRUANCY

- Counts only unexcused absences
- Emphasizes compliance with school rules
- Relies on legal & administrative solutions

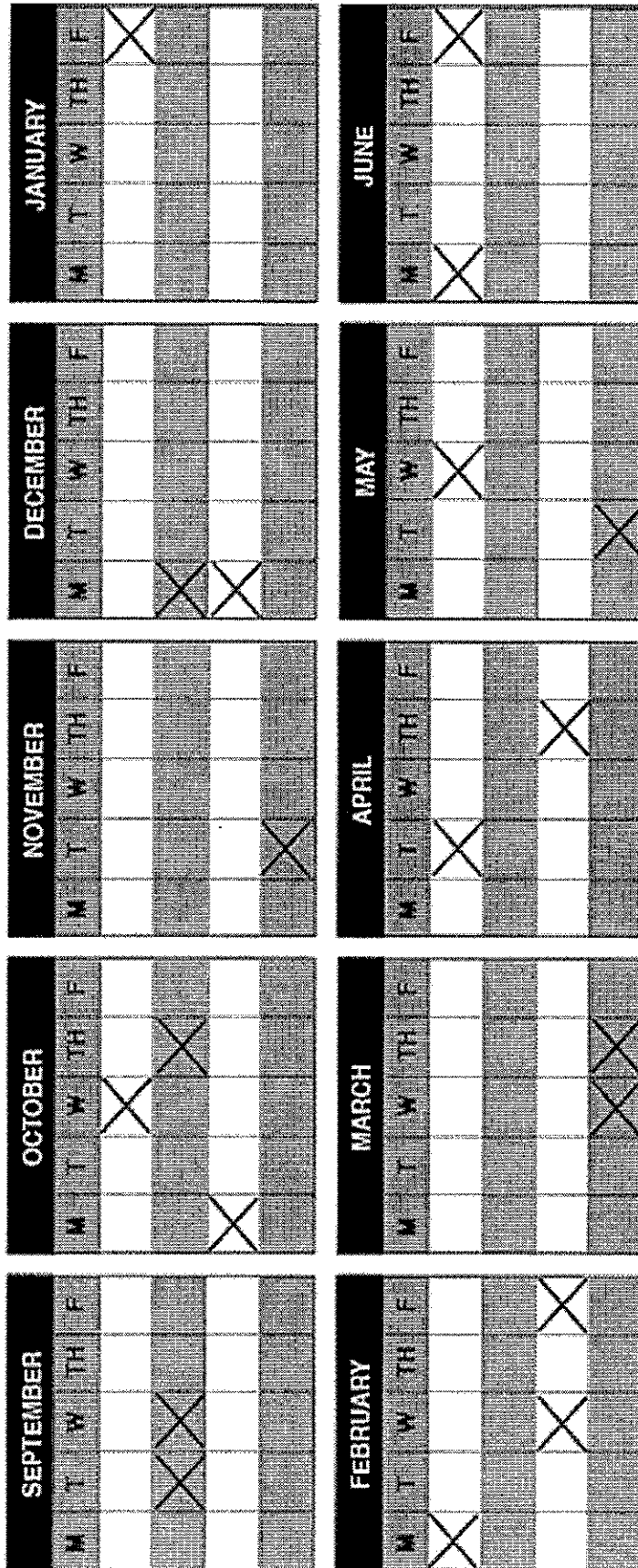
Vs.

CHRONIC ABSENCE

- Counts all absences: excused, unexcused & suspensions
- Emphasizes academic impact of missed days
- Uses community-based, positive strategies



Why We May Not Notice Chronic Absence



Absences Add up

Chronic Absence = 18 days of absence = 2 days a month





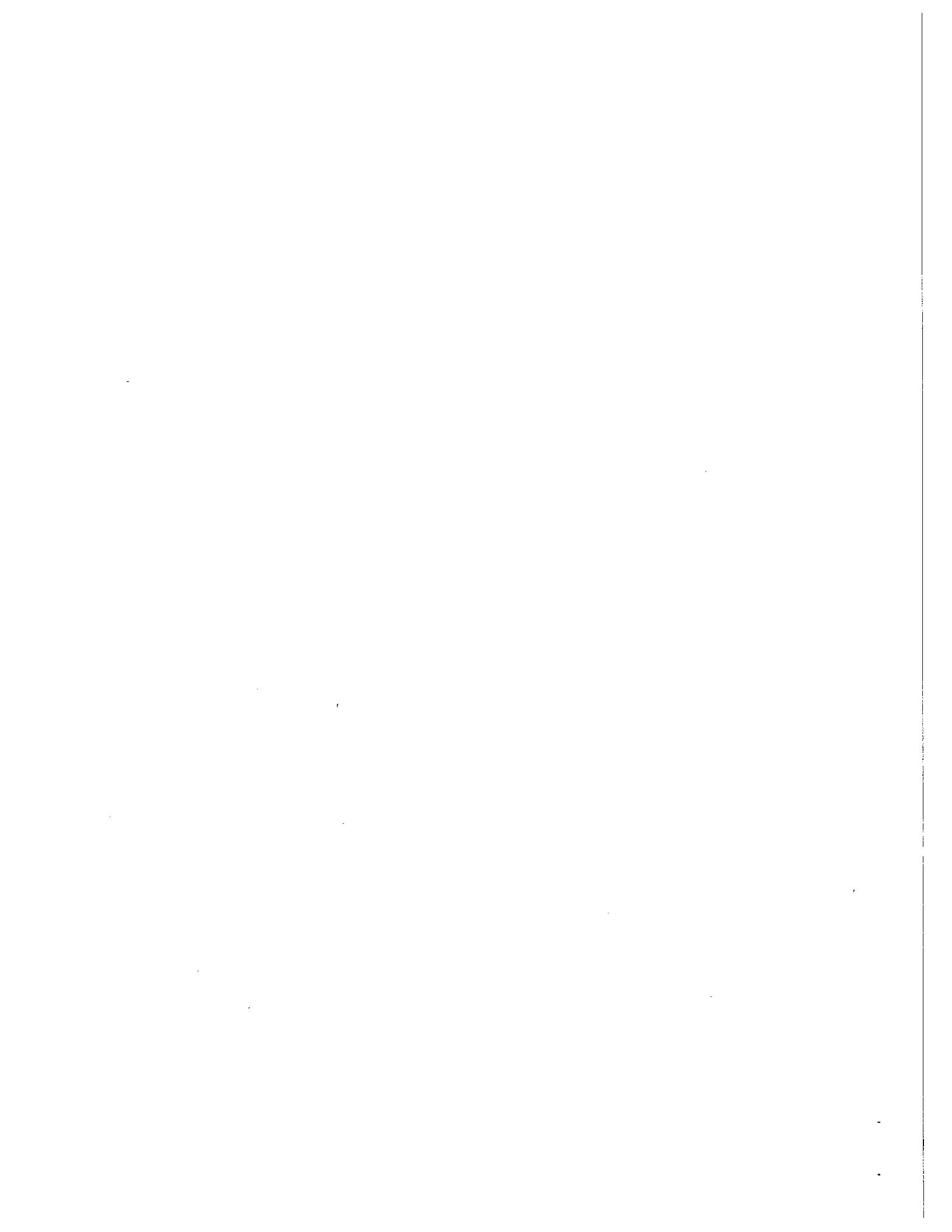
What the Data Tells Us





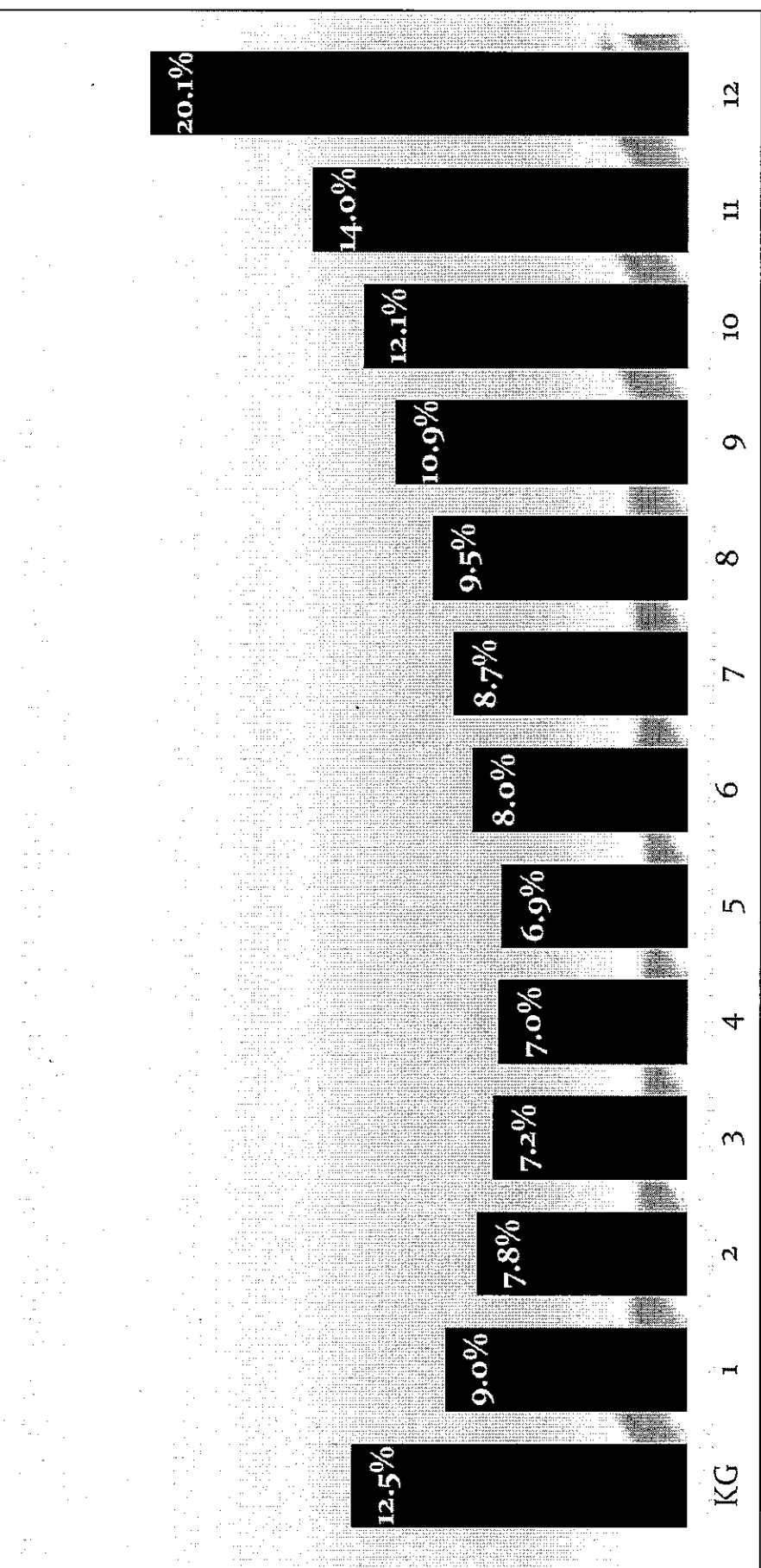
Chronic Absenteeism in NJ: A Snapshot (2016-17)

- About 136,000 K-12 students in New Jersey were considered “chronically absent
- That was 10 percent of the total student population
- More than 20,000 NJ preschool students were considered “chronically absent
- That was 31 percent of the total preschool student population

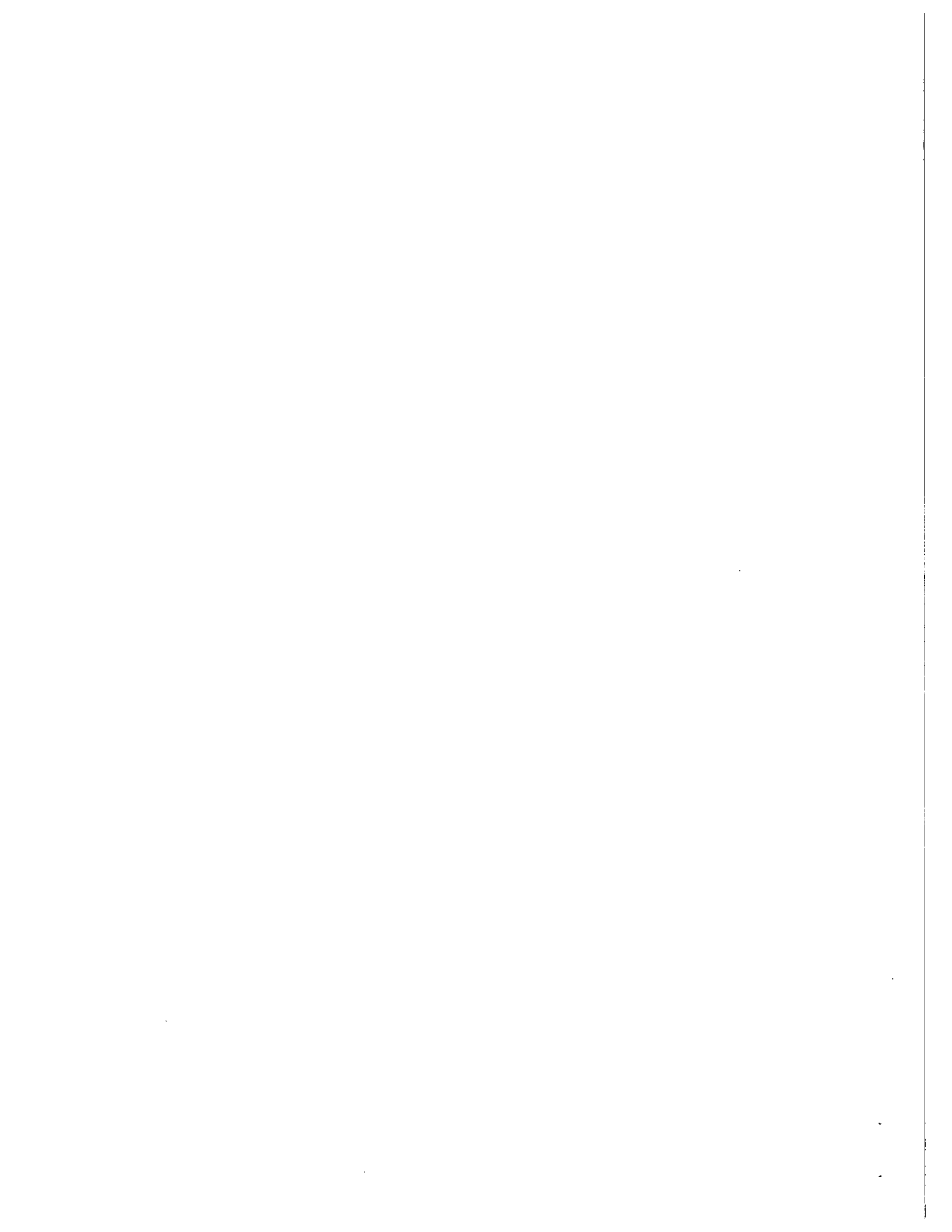


Chronic Absenteeism, by grade (K-12)

Percentage of students chronically absent by grade K-12, 2016-17

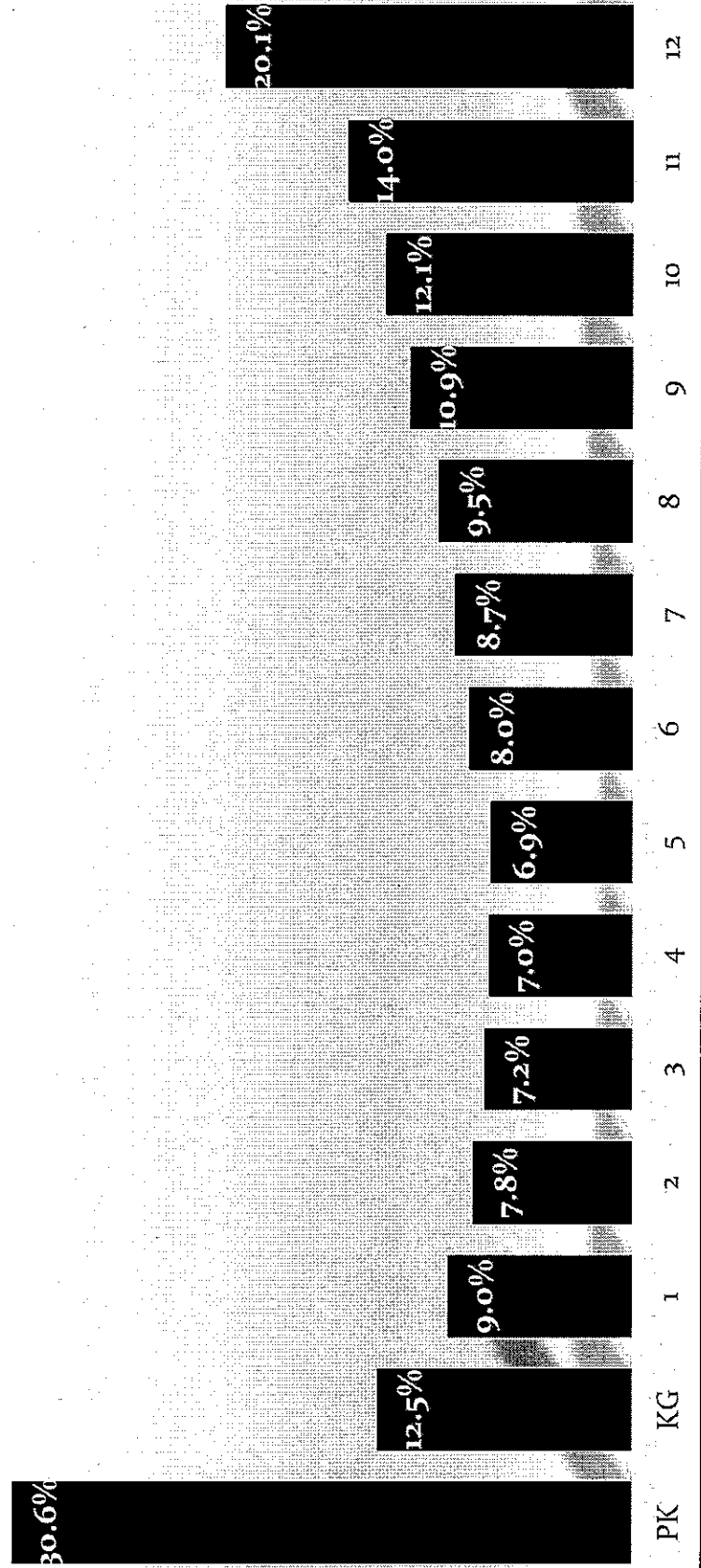


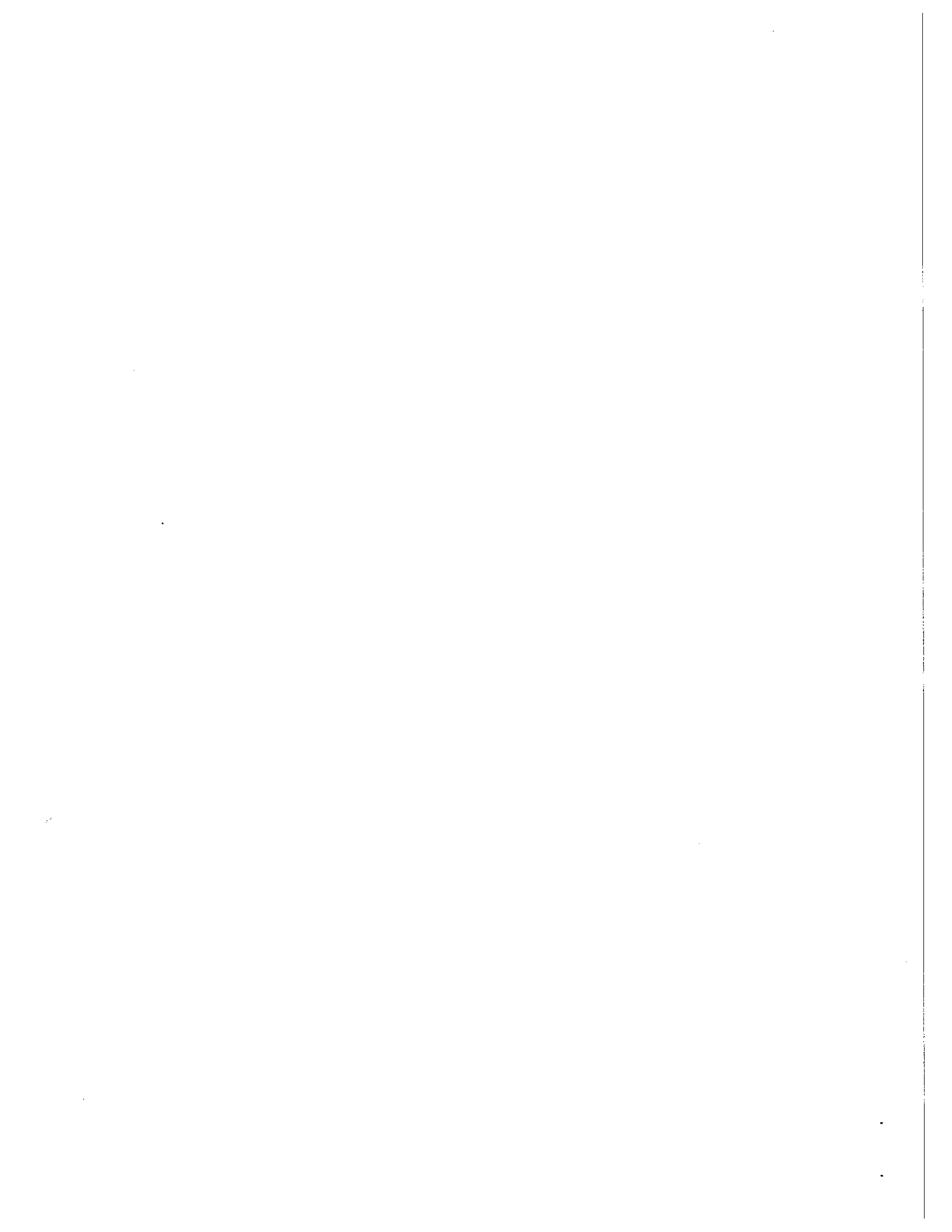
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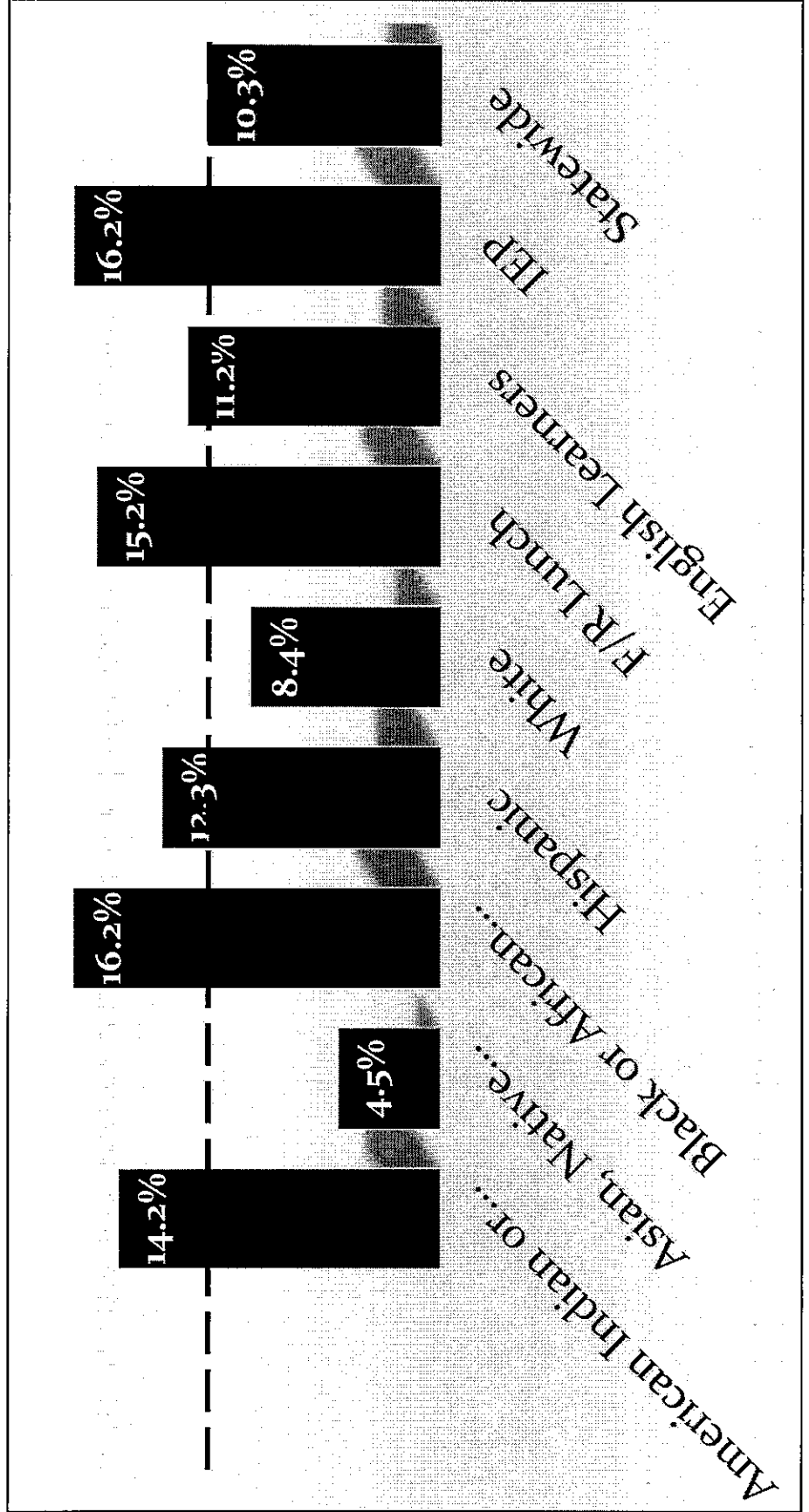
Now Add Preschool...

Percentage of students chronically absent by grade PK-12, 2016-17

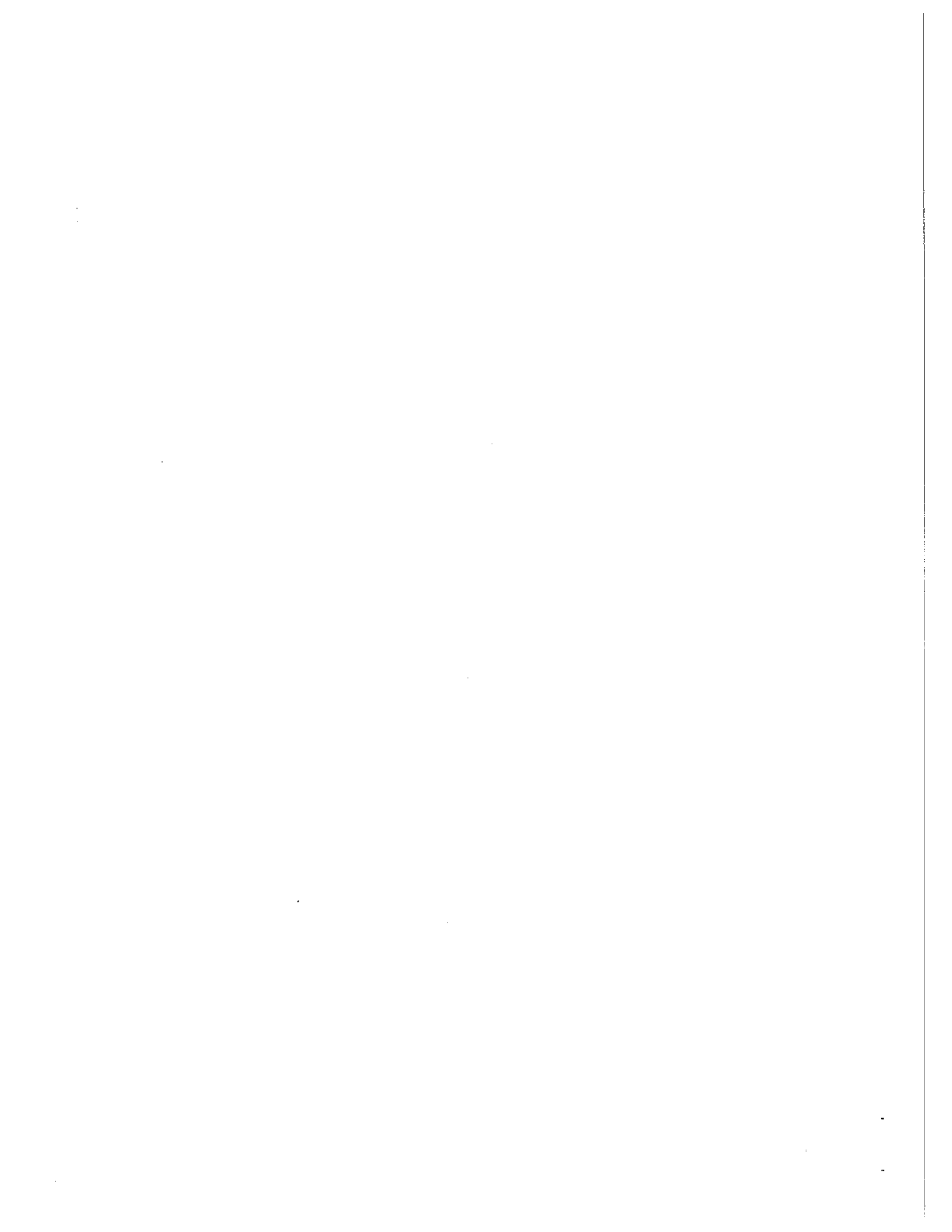




Absenteeism in Demographic Categories (K-12)



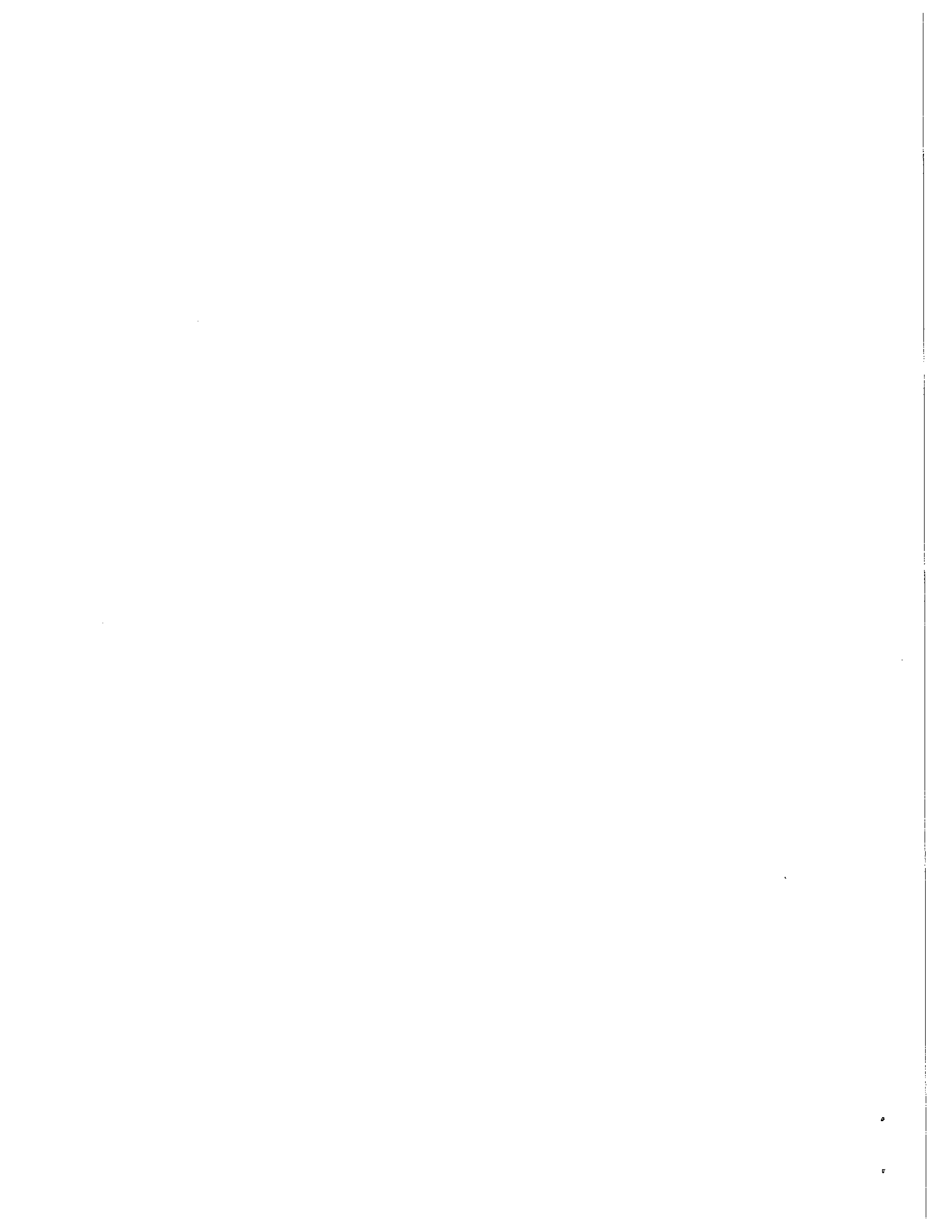
Source: NJ Dep't of Education. Categories may overlap.

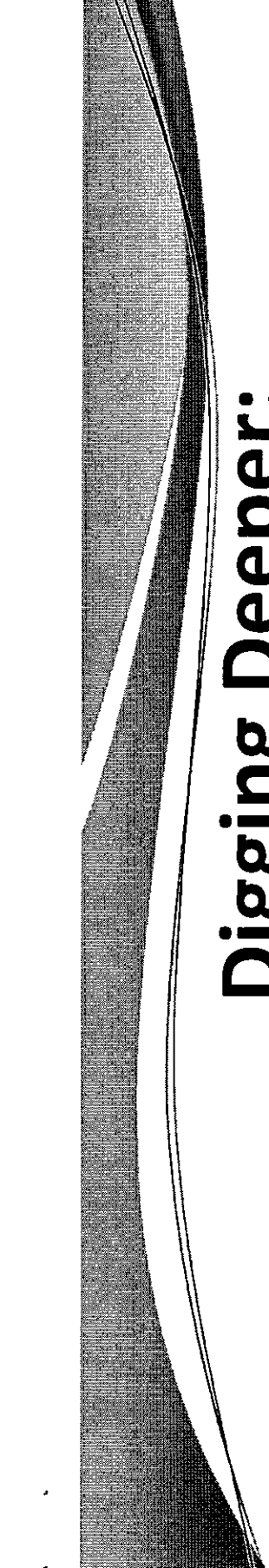


Special Populations

Chronic Absenteeism Rate by Special Population

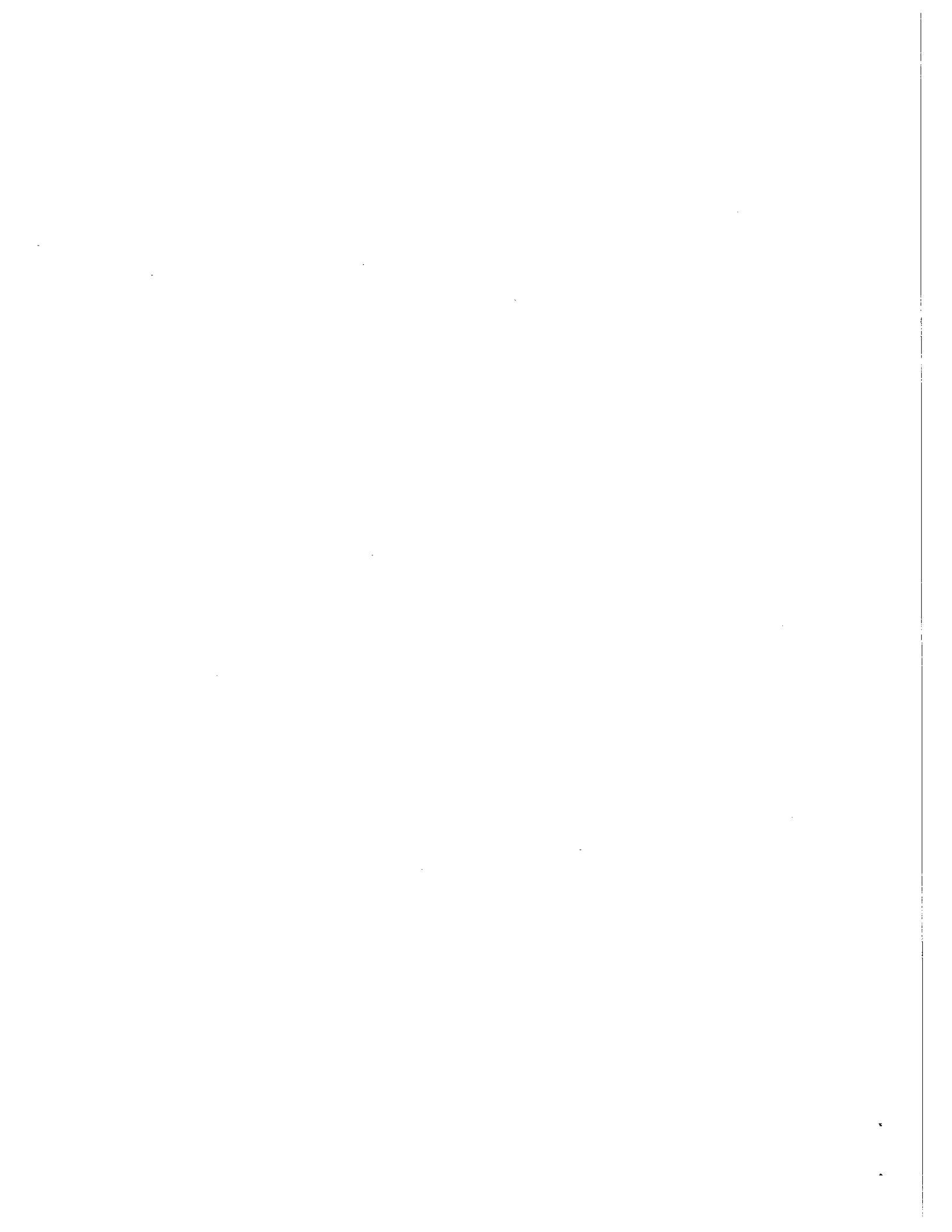
	Total	Economically Disadvantaged Students	Students with Special Needs	English Language Learners
District A	8%	6%	<u>22%</u>	8%
District B	8%	12%	11%	<u>16%</u>
District C	8%	<u>20%</u>	12%	<u>16%</u>





Digging Deeper: Reasons for absences

- For Young Students:
 - Health issues
 - Unreliable transportation
 - Housing Instability
 - School discipline
 - Parent work schedules
 - PK and K viewed as less important
 - Safety in school and in neighborhoods
 - Student/parent choice
 - Family issues

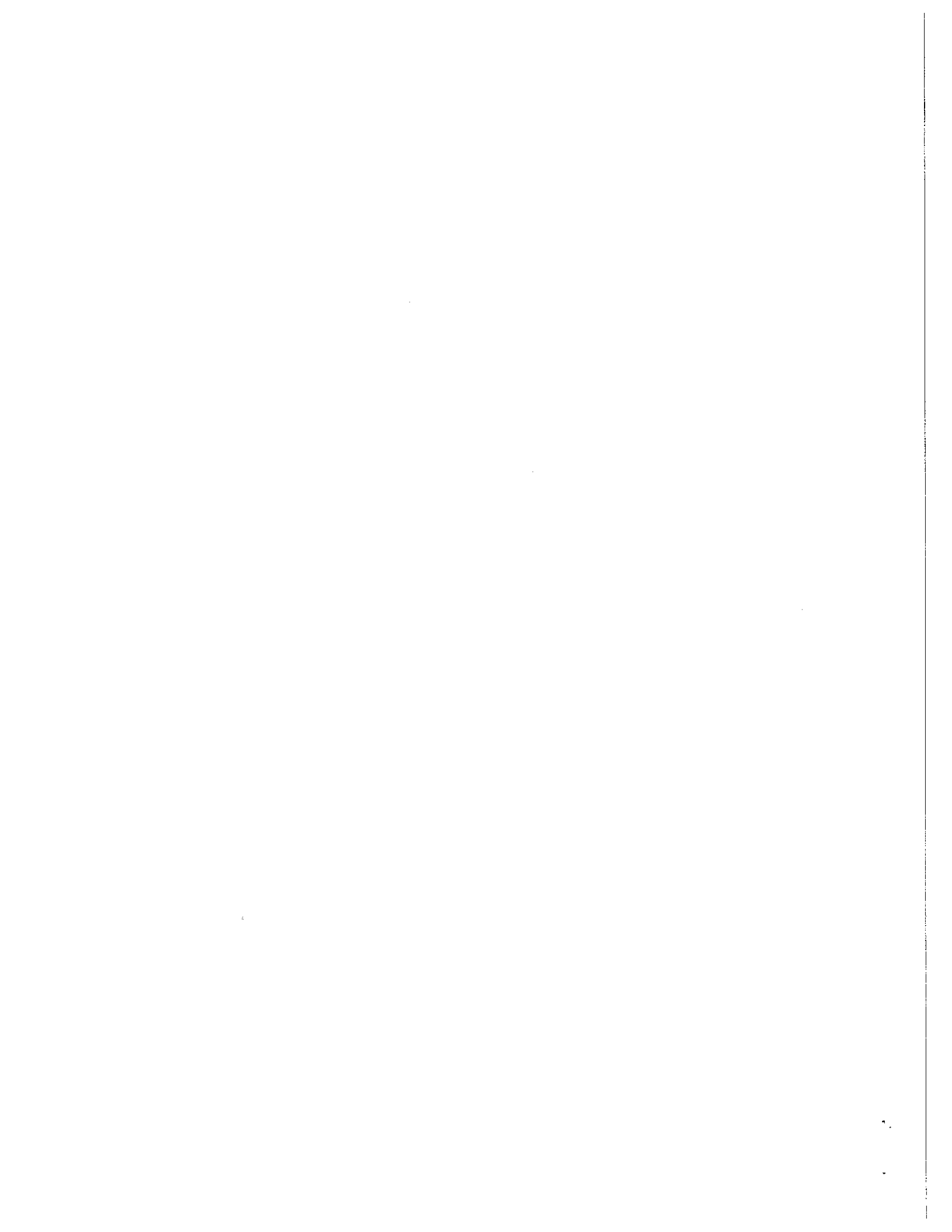




Digging Deeper: Reasons for absences

For Older Students:

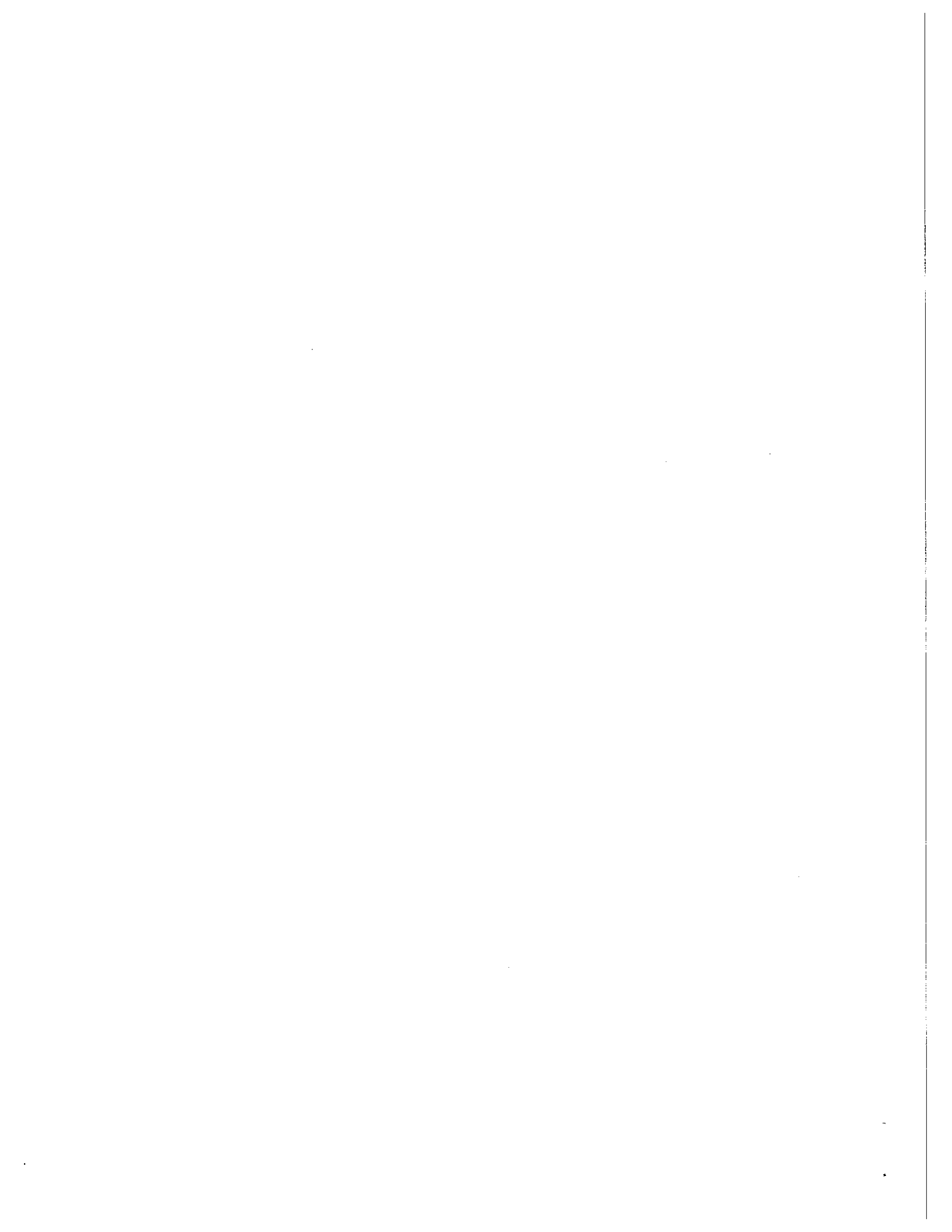
- Health issues (physical and mental)
- Student responsibilities
- Transportation/distance from school
- Personal safety
- Suspensions
- School curriculum: relevance and rigor
- Parent disengagement
- School policies
- Lack of link to a trusted adult





No one-size-fits-all solution, but there are common themes

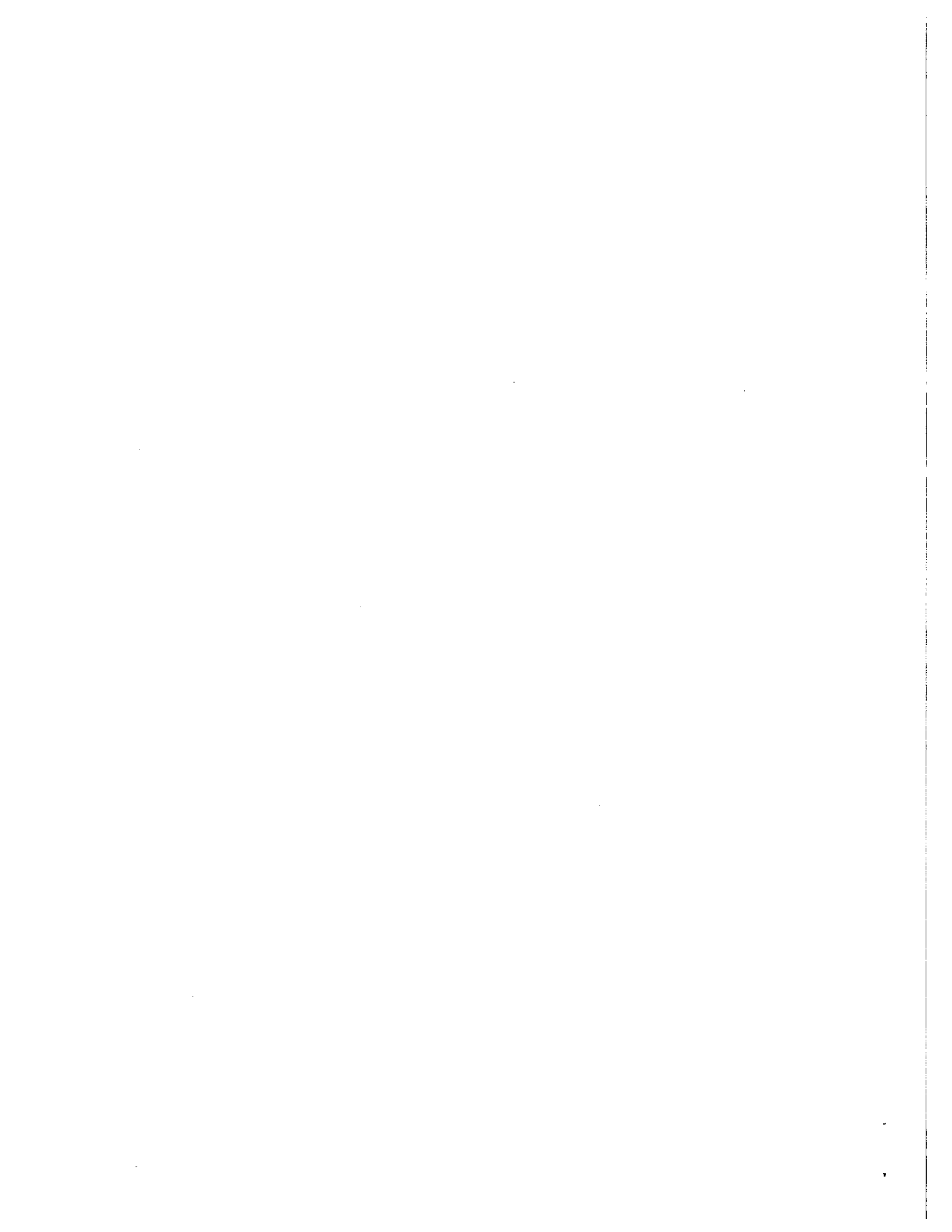
- Need to be **intentional** about attendance strategy
- Deliberate planning
- Consistent, persistent implementation (can't stop messaging in November!)
- **Use data** continuously
- Target high-absenteeism and at-risk students
- Identify problems affecting **your specific** student population
- **Build relationships** with parents and families
- Start outreach early
- Messaging on importance of school
- Be **specific** about impact of absences and action steps





How State policy can support better attendance

- New NJ law (P.L. 2018, c.23):
- NJDOE reporting (no new regs yet)
- If school has 10% or more chronically absent, must develop **action plan**:
 - Identifying problems/barriers
 - Develop recommendations
 - Outline communications strategies to parents
 - Establish protocols for informing parents re absences
 - Review school policies to ensure support

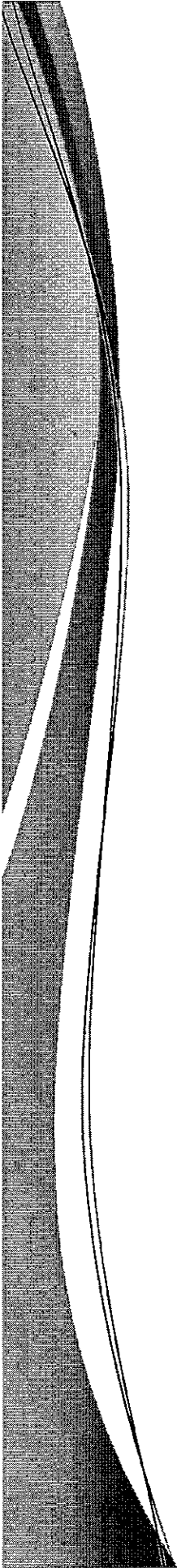




State policy (cont.)

- Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)
- Chronic absenteeism as performance measure





Resources

ACNJ attendance page: [https://acnj.org/issues/school-attendance/Attendance Works' Tool Kits: http://www.attendanceworks.org/tools/Every Student, Every Day: A Community Toolkit to Address and Eliminate Chronic Absenteeism: https://www2.ed.gov/about/initiatives/ed/chronicabsenteeism/toolkit.pdf](https://acnj.org/issues/school-attendance/Attendance%20Works%20Kits)



Any Questions???

Peter Chen: pchen@acnj.org

Cynthia Rice: crice@acnj.org



To: The Honorable Ronald Rice, Co-Chair
The Honorable Mila Jasey, Co-Chair
Members, Joint Committee on the Public Schools
From: Cynthia Rice, Senior Policy Analyst, Advocates for Children of New Jersey
Peter Chen, Legal Counsel, Advocates for Children of New Jersey
Date: February 5, 2019
RE: **Chronic Absenteeism**

For nearly five years, ACNJ has had the unique experience of both reviewing absentee data at the state, district and school level as well as talking to the people most affected by it: school administrators, teachers, school nurses, school social workers, community members, parents and teens about why too many students are missing too much school. Those rich conversations have provided us with important information about this issue. During this time, we have published several statewide reports as well as two reports focused on chronic absenteeism in Newark, in an attempt to bring attention to the issue and highlight how schools, families and communities are working together to improve attendance. We have learned that there are challenges and opportunities in battling chronic absenteeism, but during this time period, two things have become clear:

1. **No education reform initiative or quality learning experiences will ever be successful if students aren't attending school.** Although state funding for public education is consistently the largest piece of New Jersey's annual budget, the effectiveness of that funding, however significant, will be diluted because too many kids continue to miss too much school. In the 2016-2017 school year, approximately 136,000 or 10 percent of all K-12 students in New Jersey were identified as being chronically absent. During the same school year, more than 20,000 or 31 percent of 3- and 4-year-olds participating in state-funded preschool were chronically absent. While we know that school administrators and teachers are working diligently to provide a quality education to their students, the chronic absenteeism data throughout the state is alarming. While a major mission for our schools is to improve student outcomes, those outcomes are inextricably linked with student attendance. Schools can only prepare students adequately after they address why they are not coming to school. Focusing solely on the academic side will never get the student results necessary for them to be college and career ready.
2. **What schools do to address chronic absenteeism makes a difference.** While schools are only part of the equation to improve attendance, what they do matters immensely. ACNJ's statewide reports provide examples of how schools are working to improve attendance, and consequently make it easier for students to succeed. In Pemberton, the

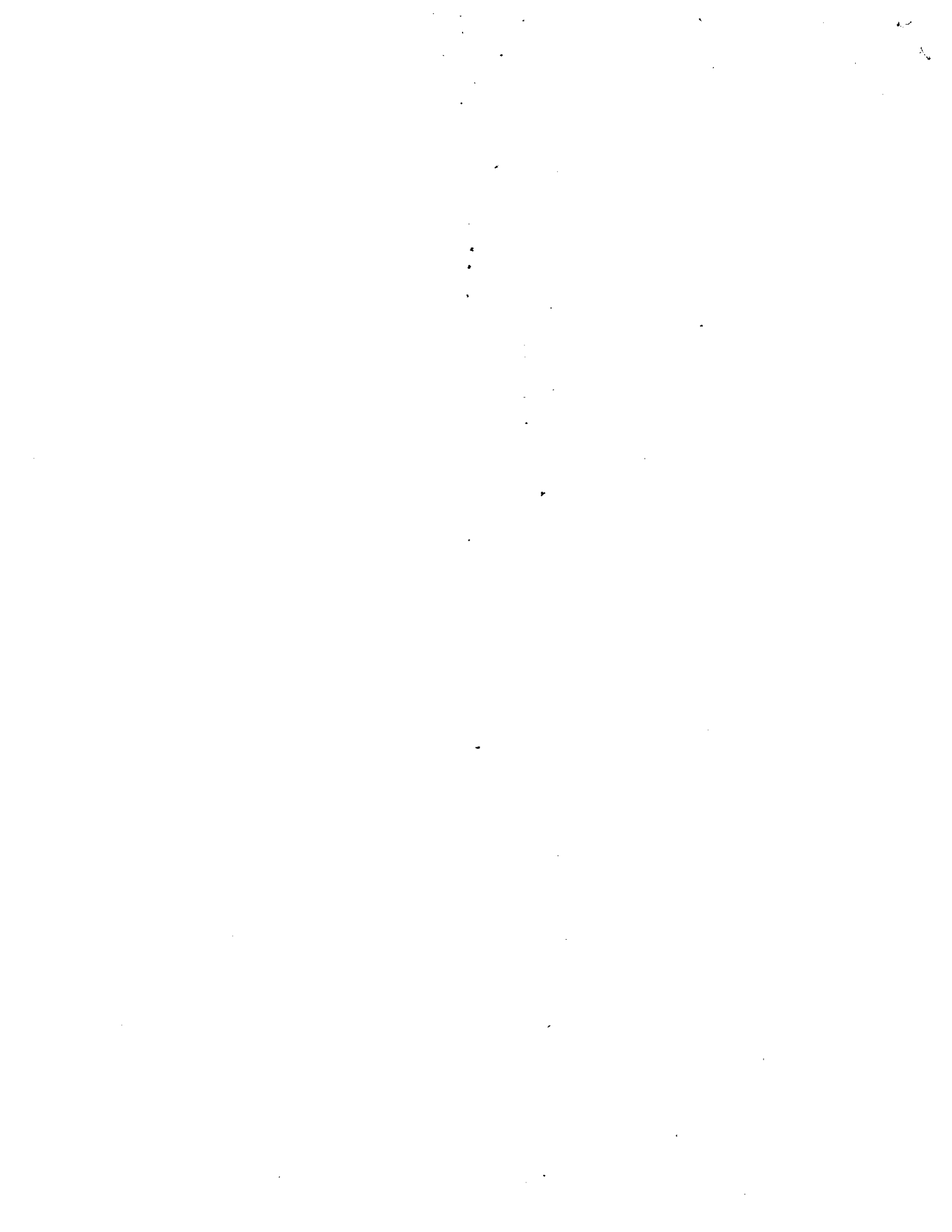


district made a commitment to improve its attendance rate and began addressing the problem on multiple fronts, including strengthening parent outreach and communication, developing school-specific strategies and targeting interventions at root causes of student absences. In North Brunswick, the elementary school nurses have taken the lead and began an initiative to provide supports for first graders with chronic absences. District preschool administrators throughout the state have recognized the link between preschool attendance and a strong educational and social/emotional foundation and are implementing innovative approaches to ensure that our youngest students are obtaining that critical foundation. Here in Trenton, two remarkable school administrators have turned the curve on chronic absenteeism by creating an environment in which students want to come to school. In September 2015, when Adrienne Hill and Gregory Green became the principal and vice-principal of Hedgepeth/Williams Middle School, their chronic absenteeism rate was 23 percent. The administrators made improving attendance a school priority and strategically set into play changes that made students accountable, but helped them and their families when help was needed. Through a rebranding of the school, working with students and families struggling with high absences, providing incentives to classes with improved attendance, promoting student activities and sending "We Miss You" cards to students who were beginning to miss too much school, the administrators and staff turned attendance around. In November and December 2016, the chronic absenteeism rate at Hedgepeth/Williams was just 8 percent, 2 percent lower than the state average. The actions of both the school's administrators and staff made the difference in the lives of those students lucky enough to attend.

In all of these cases, and many more throughout our state, all of the effective strategies include reviewing the data "early and often", finding out the reasons why students are missing school and then developing solutions that address the problems identified both for individual students and for specific student subgroups, such as special education or low-income students. What these examples have in common is a level of intentionality that has been the framework of their successes. In the years that we have worked on this issue, we have seen first-hand that many schools, while well-intentioned, often lack that intentionality necessary to address chronic absenteeism and have placed too much of an emphasis on compliance. While compliance is a critical piece to improving attendance, when it is the primary or only strategy, the absentee rate will most probably remain high.

Once fully implemented, the new chronic absenteeism law will require schools with 10 percent or more of their student population identified as being chronically absent to develop a corrective action plan that includes parent input. This requirement forces schools struggling with attendance to be more intentional in developing strategies to improve attendance.

While schools cannot control all of the reasons why students miss too much school, when 10 percent or more of students fall into that category, it is critically important that those schools work with their families and students to think, plan and do things differently.



Reducing Chronic Absenteeism

Peter Chen, Esq. & Cynthia Rice, Esq.
Advocates for Children of New Jersey

Joint Committee on Public Schools
February 5, 2019



Chronic Absenteeism Defined

- **CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM** measures students who miss **10% of enrolled school days**, including excused/unexcused and suspensions
- **Average daily attendance** counts the average number of students who show up to school
- **Truancy** counts only unexcused absences

What does this mean?

- Based on a 180-day school year:
 - Any student who misses 18 days or more per year
 - That means about 2 days every month is considered....

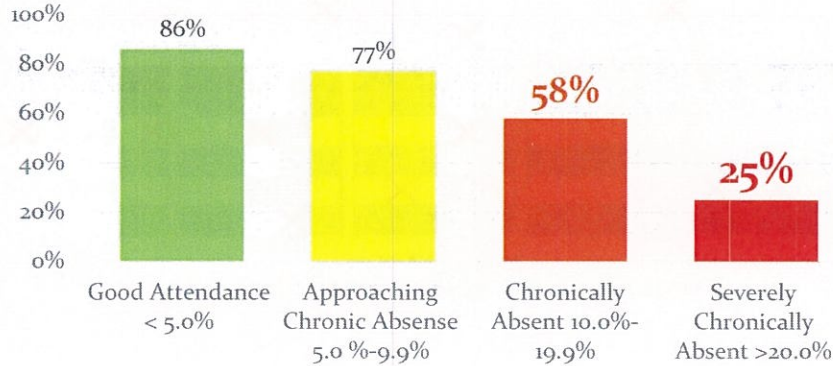
CHRONICALLY ABSENT

Every absence hurts a student's opportunity for success

- *Early years (PK-3) absenteeism leads to:*
 - Long-term reading problems
 - Higher absenteeism rates in later grades
 - Higher rates of retention
- Absenteeism in the later school years correlates with:
 - Higher rates of suspension
 - Lower academic achievement
 - Lower odds of reaching second year of college

The more school students miss, the more likely they are to drop out

Newark Graduation Rate in 4 years, 2015 cohort, grouped by 9th grade absenteeism status



Truancy Vs. Chronic Absence

TRUANCY

- Counts only unexcused absences
- Emphasizes compliance with school rules
- Relies on legal & administrative solutions

Vs.

CHRONIC ABSENCE

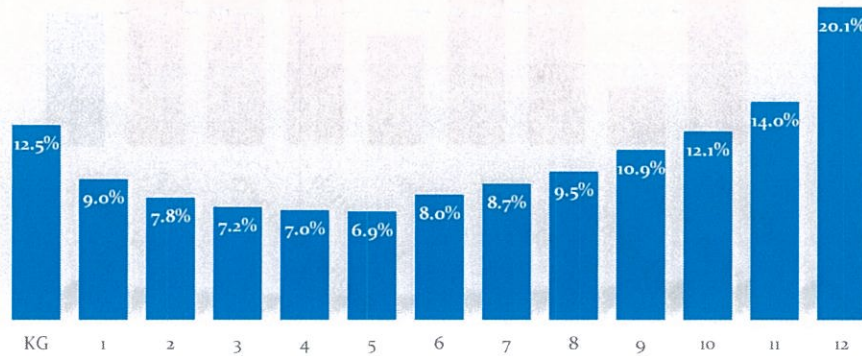
- Counts all absences: excused, unexcused & suspensions
- Emphasizes academic impact of missed days
- Uses community-based, positive strategies

Chronic Absenteeism in NJ: A Snapshot (2016-17)

- About 136,000 K-12 students in New Jersey were considered “chronically absent”
 - That was **10 percent** of the total student population
- More than 20,000 NJ preschool students were considered “chronically absent”
 - That was **31 percent** of the total preschool student population

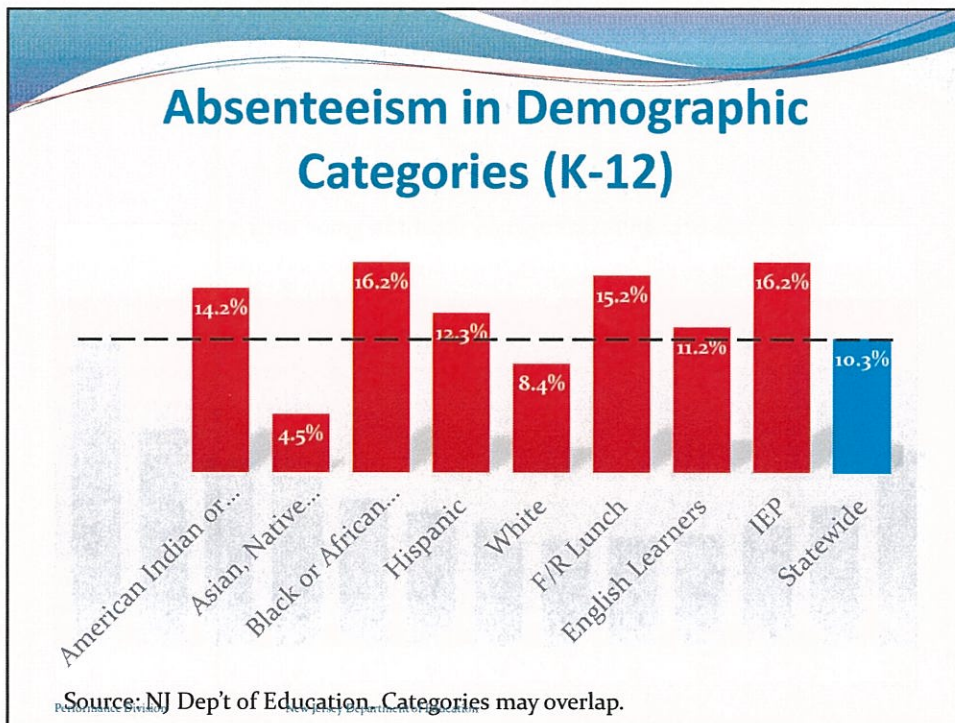
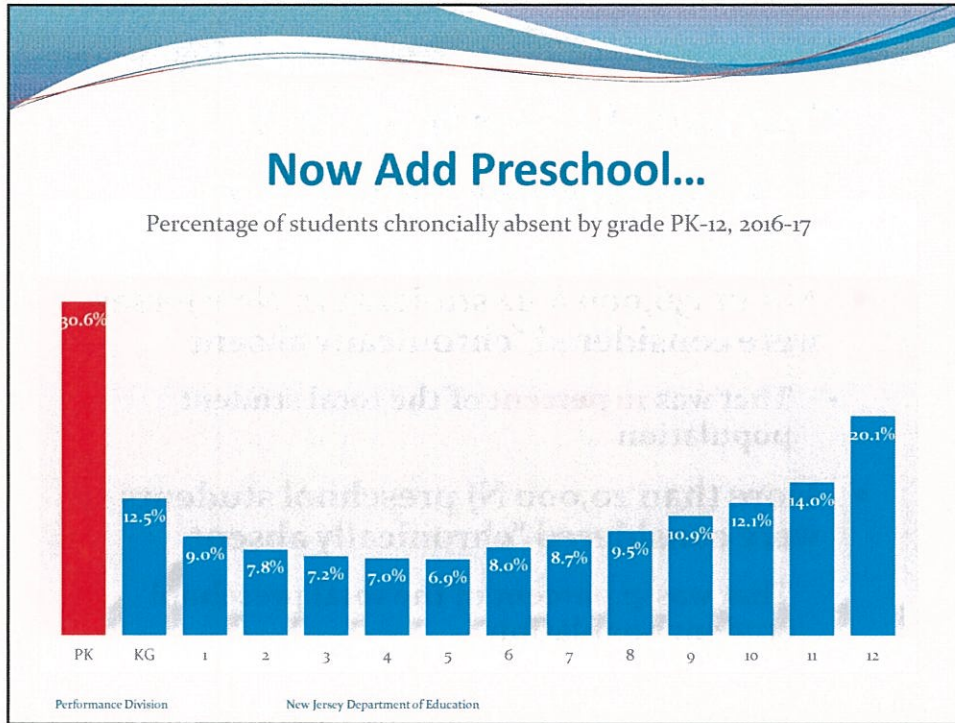
Chronic Absenteeism, by grade (K-12)

Percentage of students chronically absent by grade K-12, 2016-17



Performance Division

New Jersey Department of Education



570x

Special Populations

Chronic Absenteeism Rate by Special Population				
	Total	Economically Disadvantaged Students	Students with Special Needs	English Language Learners
District A	8%	6%	<u>22%</u>	8%
District B	8%	12%	11%	<u>16%</u>
District C	8%	<u>20%</u>	12%	<u>16%</u>

Digging Deeper: Reasons for absences

- **For Young Students:**
 - Health issues
 - Unreliable transportation
 - Housing Instability
 - School discipline
 - Parent work schedules
 - PK and K viewed as less important
 - Safety in school and in neighborhoods
 - Student/parent choice
 - Family issues

Digging Deeper: Reasons for absences

For Older Students:

- Health issues (physical and mental)
- Student responsibilities
- Transportation/distance from school
- Personal safety
- Suspensions
- School curriculum: relevance and rigor
- Parent disengagement
- School policies
- Lack of link to a trusted adult

No one-size-fits-all solution, but there are common themes

- Need to be **intentional** about attendance strategy
 - Deliberate planning
 - Consistent, persistent implementation (can't stop messaging in November!)
- **Use data** continuously
 - Target high-absenteeism and at-risk students
 - Identify problems affecting **your specific** student population
- **Build relationships** with parents and families
 - Start outreach early
 - Messaging on importance of school
 - Be **specific** about impact of absences and action steps

How State policy can support better attendance

- New NJ law (P.L. 2018, c.23):
 - NJDOE reporting (no new regs yet)
 - If school has 10% or more chronically absent, must develop **action plan**:
 - Identifying problems/barriers
 - Develop recommendations
 - Outline communications strategies to parents
 - Establish protocols for informing parents re absences
 - Review school policies to ensure support

State policy (cont.)

- Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)
 - Chronic absenteeism as performance measure

Resources

- ACNJ attendance page: <https://acnj.org/issues/school-attendance/>
- Attendance Works' Tool Kits: <http://www.attendanceworks.org/tools/>
- Every Student, Every Day: A Community Toolkit to Address and Eliminate Chronic Absenteeism: <https://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/chronicabsenteeism/toolkit.pdf>

Any Questions???

Peter Chen: pchen@acnj.org

Cynthia Rice: crice@acnj.org



**Testimony of Patricia Wright
Before the Joint Committee on the Public Schools
February 5, 2019**

Good morning Chairman Rice, Chairwoman Jasey and members of the Joint Committee on the Public Schools. I am Pat Wright the Executive Director of the NJ Principals and Supervisors Association. I also served on former Governor Corzine's Commission on Bullying in Our Schools and more recently presided as the Chair of the Anti-Bullying Task Force. In addition, I have provided professional learning sessions for hundreds of educators on the issue of school climate. I passionately believe in the importance of this work in every school.

School climate is the umbrella concept that significantly affects bullying, chronic absenteeism, dropout rates, poor academic performance and the social and emotional well-being of students. School climate also affects the ability of the school's professional staff to work collaboratively to attain the highest levels of student learning. In short, a positive school climate is a basic foundational structure of any effective school.

The Commission on Bullying in Our Schools and the Anti-Bullying Task Force were both established to tackle the issue of harassment, intimidation and bullying (HIB) in our schools and to make recommendations related to legislation and regulation in this area. Both entities held multiple public hearings, focus groups and group discussions over multiple years. The one thing we certainly agreed upon through all of our deliberations is a conclusion that the research has been telling us for years – that the single best way to reduce instances of bullying is to build the type of school climate where it is least likely to occur.

That is why it is important today to reflect on the spirit of the Anti-bullying Bill of Rights. When this law was first implemented schools focused on the compliance issues related to implementation – the ten day investigation, the filling of roles like the Anti-bullying Specialist and the establishment of a School Safety Team that was to meet at least twice a year to review reports of a HIB.



In our eagerness to comply with the due process aspects of the law, we sometimes overlooked a key part of this legislation related to the proactive role of the school safety team. In the law, the school safety team is established to,

“develop, foster and maintain a positive school climate by focusing on the on-going, systemic process and practices in the school and to address school climate issues such as harassment, intimidation and bullying.”

The key words here are “such as.” School climate encompasses more than just HIB. It includes components related to the physical environment, the social and emotional environment, the affective environment, the academic environment and a collaborative culture for the professionals who work with our students every day.

After seven years of work in our schools, I am happy to report that we have good news and significant progress to celebrate.

- We have certainly raised awareness about HIB in our schools and communities;
- We have established school safety teams in every school which are now appropriately called School Climate Teams thanks to a Task Force recommendation for a change in regulations;
- We also have mandated that schools teach an anti-bullying curriculum to support the development of the social and emotional learning skills related to positive peer relationships;
- Through the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), we are also putting a spotlight on chronic absenteeism. The first step in addressing that issue – is to create the type of school environment where students want to come to school each day; and
- Finally, we now recognize the necessity of preparing our students for life by equipping them not only with the academic skills, but also with the social and emotional learning skills (SEL) they need to be productive and happy adults. The DOE has even created a set of SEL competencies to drive this work, which have been embedded into the instruction in our schools and classrooms.

Now the challenge is that we do not look at each of these things in isolation. HIB, chronic absenteeism, and SEL are all, in fact, tightly connected under the umbrella of



school climate. Legislators, the DOE, educational organizations and our members in the field need to embrace a coherent message.

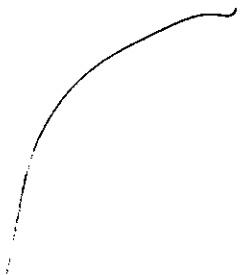
We need to ensure that School Climate Teams in every school are provided with the professional learning they need to do their job effectively. Their job is to utilize their schools' data to develop coherent plans for school climate improvement. I truly believe that if these teams embrace this role and are provided with the resources they need, cases of HIB will continue to decline, students will be more motivated to attend school and social-emotional learning will be an integrated component of instruction in every NJ school.

To make this happen, we all need to work together with the same focus - creating a positive school climate in every school. The State Board and DOE have led the way by adopting the SEL competencies. School leaders are working collaboratively with their staffs and School Climate Teams.

This Legislature also has an important role to play in supporting this ongoing work financially as districts face economic challenges and capped budgets. The Anti-bullying Bill of Rights recognized this need by creating the Bullying Prevention Fund to support districts in this work. Unfortunately, funding has been limited, but the needs have been significant across our state. In closing, I ask for the Joint Committee's expertise and assistance in seeking renewed funding for the Bullying Prevention Fund in the upcoming state budget process. These funds will ignite the work of our School Climate Teams through much-needed professional learning opportunities.

Let's do what works - build the capacity for school climate improvement in every school in New Jersey.

Thank you.





NEW-ARK LEADERS OF HEALTH: NEXT GENERATION COMMUNITY LEADERS

February 5, 2019

Presentation to the Joint Committee on Public Schools





“Based on a 180 day school year, any student who misses 18 days or more per year- or about two days per month- is considered chronically absent.”

**Advocates for Children of New
Jersey Report,
“Showing Up Matters”**

Slide 2

KB1

Kutorkor
Kaleena Berryman, 2/4/2019

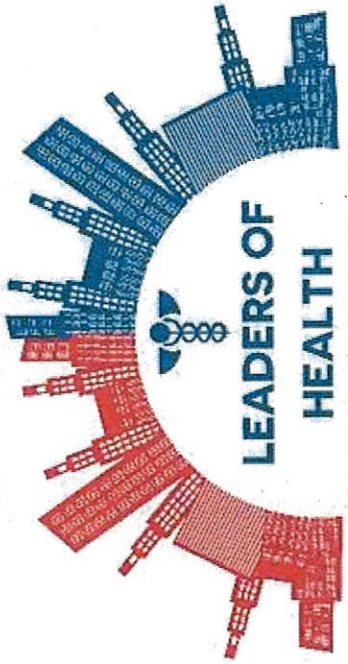
66x

**45% OF STUDENT RESPONDENTS WERE CHRONICALLY
ABSENT.**

**71% OF STUDENT RESPONDENTS DID NOT BELIEVE THEY
WERE CHRONICALLY ABSENT.**

**KUTORKOR KOTEY, BARD EARLY COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOL
NEW-ARK LEADERS OF HEALTH ABSENTEEISM SURVEY, 2018
PRELIMINARY RESULTS**

NEW-ARK



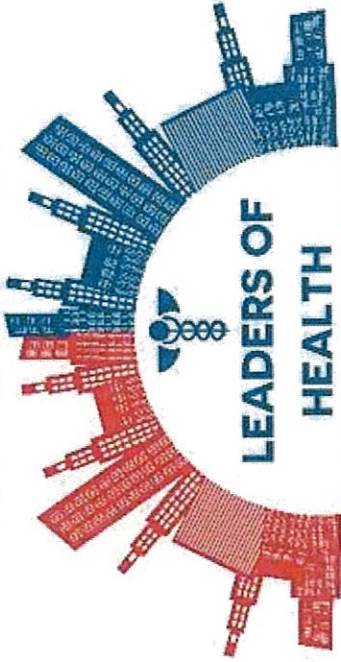
**LEADERS OF
HEALTH**

NEXT GENERATION COMMUNITY LEADERS

**THE TOP
MOTIVATION
FOR ATTENDING
SCHOOL WAS
CAREER, THEN
COLLEGE.**

**KENTON HALL, GRADUATE,
LEADERS FOR LIFE**

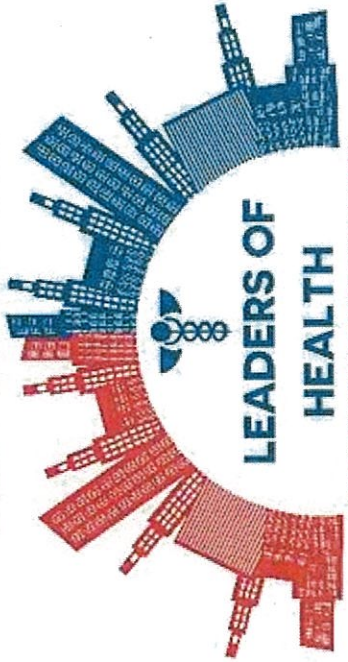
NEW-ARK



**47.5% OF
STUDENT
RESPONDENTS
REPORTED THAT
STRESS OR
DEPRESSION
CAUSED
ABSENCE.**

**KENTON HALL, GRADUATE,
LEADERS FOR LIFE**

NEW-ARK

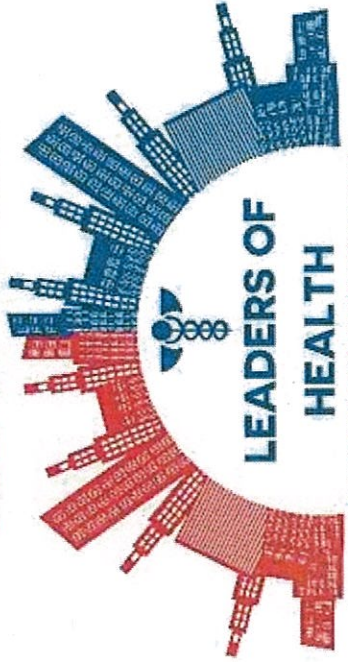


NEXT GENERATION COMMUNITY LEADERS

**60% OF STUDENT
RESPONDENTS
REPORTED THAT
“THEY HAD NO
ROLE MODEL IN
COMMUNITY OR
SCHOOL.”**

**MANUEL MEJIA,
SOPHOMORE, RUTGERS NEWARK**

NEW-ARK



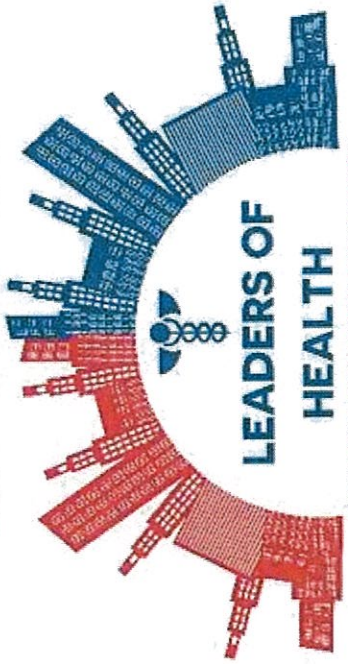
**33.3% OF
STUDENT
RESPONDENTS
REPORTED THAT
PERSONAL/FAMILY
RESPONSIBILITIES
MADE THEM MISS
SCHOOL.**

**AMALY GARCIA
SENIOR, RUTGERS NEWARK**

**15% OF STUDENT
RESPONDENTS
REPORTED THAT
BEING OUT OF
UNIFORM/DRESS
CODE MADE THEM
MISS SCHOOL.**

**ERIC BELLAMY
MALCOLM X SHABAZZ**

NEW-ARK



NEXT GENERATION COMMUNITY LEADERS

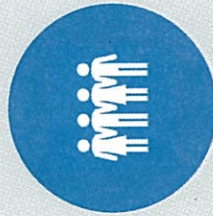
WHY ATTENDANCE MATTERS?

HANSIER RODRIGUEZ, RUTGERS NEWARK

Students who are chronically absent are more likely to drop out of school, be unemployed, and as a result, experience more stress and health issues due to a lack of health insurance.

GOALS OF OUR PROJECT

HANSIER RODRIGUEZ, RUTGERS NEWARK



Raise awareness about chronic absenteeism and add Student Voice to the cause



Take the focus off of students and place it on systems



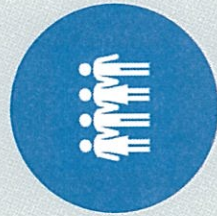
Shift the framing of chronic absenteeism from just an educational issue to a public health issue



Change policies and practices that inadequately address the hardships students face obtaining their education

OUR PROCESS

AMALY GARCIA, RUTGERS NEWARK



Research



Administer survey



Design Research Study
and obtain IRB approval



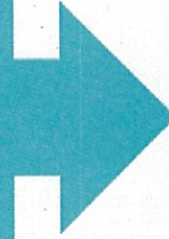
Analyze data



- 56% FEMALE, 43% MALE.
- Majority of the respondents from the SOUTH WARD (35%) and NORTH WARD (30%).
- 75% of respondents were juniors or seniors in high school.
- Of the students who reported that they were chronically absent, 27% began being chronically absent in middle school.


FINDINGS –HEALTH MATTERS
KAYLA KILLIBREW, NORTH STAR ACADEMY

45% of respondents were chronically absent. An additional 24% were on the verge of being chronically absent.



The top reasons for not attending school:

52.46% Personal health issues	22.95% Stress	24.59% No motivation	18.03% Depression	29.5% Family obligations
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WHAT
IMPACTS
STUDENT
ATTENDANCE

- On a scale of 1 – 5 when asked how much support student respondents felt they received from school educators, staff, and administrators, the average was 3.
- Only 23% of student respondents reported that their guidance counselor would notice if they missed school.

HIGHEST MOTIVATORS FOR ATTENDING SCHOOL (SCALE OF 1-5)

Career Goals –
average rating of 5

Going to College
– average rating of
4

Family – average
rating 4

Classes – average
rating of 4

Friends – average
rating of 4

School
staff/teachers –
average rating of 3

Clubs/After
School Activities –
average rating of 3

Sports - average
rating of 3

RECOMMENDATIONS: CREATE LEGISLATION THAT

- Mandates that schools have mental health professionals , i.e. school psychologists, at a ratio of 250 students per one professional. Mandate that 20% of staff be trained in trauma informed care to respond appropriately to student needs.
- Requires schools to provide a plethora of college and career exposure opportunities for students in order to help them overcome the effects of generational poverty. Career and college readiness is mandated by ESSA.
- Changes the way absences are calculated. Count absence and lateness separately.
- Require all schools develop a chronic absence warning system. Let students and parents know how this is being measured and that is being measured.
- Reform policies that discourage students from coming to school. Remove harsh consequences for lateness or absence, such as locking students out.
- Mandate that each student create a college and/or career plan by the 1th grade.
- Creates opportunities for mentorships, internships and other people who can serve as mentors/role models. Create relationships between corporations and schools.

SR

NEXT STEPS...

Obtain

Obtain approval from Newark Public schools to attain research from high school students

Continue

Continue to distribute surveys to 500 Newark Students once we receive approval from NPS

Conduct

Conduct 3 more focus groups of 10 students, each containing students from multiple Newark Public Schools

Analyze

Analyze results from all surveys and focus groups

Report

Release our report on chronic absenteeism by April 2019

We're doing it to help all of us': In Newark, student-researchers ask their peers why they miss school

BY PATRICK WALL - DECEMBER 18, 2018



PHOTO: Chalkbeat/Patrick Wall

Members of the New-Ark Leaders of Health research team. From left: Hansier Rodriguez, Kutorkor Kotey, KryJuan Roberson, Eric Bellamy, Israel Alford, Kayla Killiebrew, Simone Richardson, and Asiyah Marti.

With one in three Newark students considered chronically absent last year, a team of researchers has set out to discover why so many students are missing so much school. To solve that riddle, the team has held focus groups and surveyed high school students at summer school programs, churches, and supermarkets. Many researchers have conducted similar studies, but this team is different — it includes students interviewing their peers about their shared struggles with attendance.

“We’re speaking in a language they understand,” said Manuel Mejia, a sophomore at Rutgers University-Newark who attended Newark’s Arts High School. “We’re not here to research them as a separate group — we’re doing it to help all of us.”

The research team includes students from Newark’s traditional, charter, and county-run high schools, alongside students from Rutgers University-Newark. They are part of a Rutgers-based program, called New-Ark Leaders of Health, where students aged 14 to 21 research public-health challenges and propose solutions.

Earlier this year, the 17-member team decided to focus on absenteeism. They considered it a matter of public health because of the dire consequences for chronically absent students, who tend to have lower grades and higher dropout rates, and are at greater risk of entering the criminal-justice system and facing poverty as an adult.

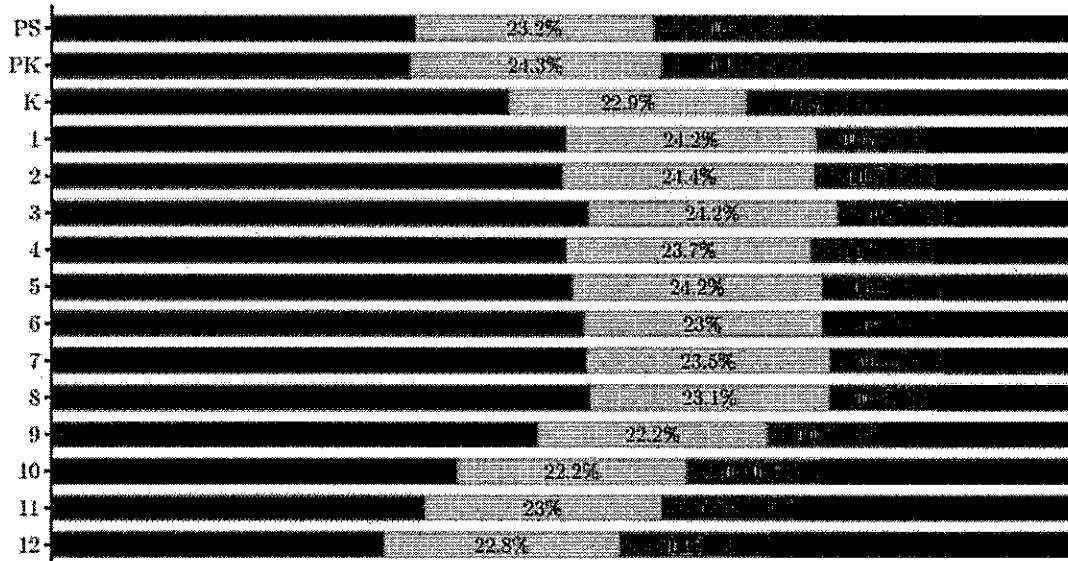
Newark suffers from unusually high rates of chronic absenteeism, which is defined as missing 10 percent or more of days in a school year — the equivalent of about a month of class. Unlike truancy, which refers to unexcused absences, this category includes anytime a student misses school — whether because of illness, a suspension, transportation difficulties, or other causes.

Last year, 33 percent of students were chronically absent. In the first three months of this school year, about 22 percent of students already are, with more likely to join them as attendance typically dips as the year wears on. And yet, because absences can accumulate gradually as students miss a few days one week then another day weeks later, many never realize the academic danger they’re in.

“I was basically chronically absent and I did not know,” said student-researcher Kutorkor Kotey, an 11th-grader at Bard High School Early College Newark, who said she missed several days one month. “Our main focus is to bring awareness to people.”

The research project was funded through a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to the Abbott Leadership Institute, a Rutgers-based group that provides leadership training to Newark families and students, in partnership with the mayor’s youth and college-affairs office. The students who were selected to participate earn a small stipend.

Absenteeism by Grade by Category



Attendance in Nov. 2018 | Green = rarely absent | Yellow = frequently absent | Orange = chronically absent | Red = severely chronically absent | Credit: Newark Public Schools

In the spring, the team submitted a research plan to an institutional review board at Rutgers. After they tweaked a consent form to make it easier for high schoolers to read, the board approved it. By then it was summer, so the team targeted students in summer school and out in the community. They administered about 100 surveys and held two focus groups.

The student-researchers focused on high schoolers partly because those are their peers. But that is also the age also when chronic absenteeism spikes. Last year, nearly 40 percent of ninth-graders were chronically absent — a risk factor that greatly diminishes their odds of graduating on time.

To the average adult, that might sound like lots of students playing hooky. But the researchers knew from personal experience that many absent students would like to attend school — yet an array of obstacles often stand in their way.

“There’s always this narrative that people from Newark are perceived to be, from an outside perspective, lazy, poor, drug-ridden, and that’s why people are chronically absent,” said Simone Richardson, a Rutgers senior who helped lead the research team. “But what we’ve seen is that a lot of it is because of these oppressive structures.” The researchers uncovered a heap of reasons why high schoolers miss school, from dentist appointments to unreliable city buses and concerns about gang violence on the path to school — or once they arrive. Often they are grappling with adult responsibilities, such as getting younger siblings to class or working after-school jobs, that make it hard to show up to school on time or at all.



One of the researchers, Eric Bellamy, who is in the 12th grade at Malcolm X Shabazz High School, described his own struggle to balance school and work. After classes end at 2:40, he rushes to a downtown seafood restaurant where he works as a cook and server from 3 to 9 o'clock, he said. It's often 10 p.m. before he's taken the bus home and can even think about homework. As one of nine siblings, he said, he cannot rely on his mother to help pay for school-related expenses like a tuxedo and photos for prom. "I'm not going to depend on my mom," he said. "So I just have to thug it out and continue with the job."

In some cases, schools themselves deter students from attending. Bellamy said school can sometimes feel like jail — "a cell that has more freedom," as he put it. Other students mentioned strict uniform policies, unappetizing lunches, or ineffectual teachers that make them want to say away. Still others cited school policies that mark students absent after they have been late several times, and that block students with multiple absences from participating in extracurricular activities or even lead to suspensions, perversely adding to the days away.

"Schools don't really get down to why that student is late," said Israel Alford, a Rutgers senior who coordinates the research project. "Rather, they jump to, 'Hey, let's just punish this kid, maybe that will motivate them to come on time.'"

One of the main factors that the team heard time and again was mental health. Many students said they were coping with trauma or battling anxiety or depression. School guidance counselors are often overworked and under-qualified to address students' mental-health needs, they said. Meanwhile, the schoolwork they must manage alongside their other responsibilities just adds to the stress.

Kayla Killiebrew, a 12th-grader at a charter high school run by North Star Academy, said she sometimes babysits her younger nephew on the weekends, which prevents her from completing her homework. "Then I wake up in the morning stressed and I don't want to go to school," she said, explaining that she dreads having to tell her teachers she didn't do her work. "There's just so many factors in school that will add onto the stress I'm already having. So I'd rather just stay home and deal with it."

The team is planning to conduct another round of surveys in high schools early next year, but first the group needs the district's permission. They are hoping the new superintendent, Roger León, will sign off since he has said improving attendance will be cornerstone of his agenda. Once the student researchers have finished gathering and analyzing their data, they intend to publish their findings along with policy recommendations. Their mission is to make sure that student voices inform any plan to improve attendance in Newark. "Students know why they're chronically absent," Alford said. "The problem is that no one's asking them."

The NJ Joint Committee on Public Education - Senate and Assembly

Theme: Climate and Culture

February 5, 2019

My name is Dr. Nhan Truong and I am a Senior Research Associate at GLSEN, a national education organization that works to ensure that every member of every school community is valued and respected regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, and/or expression. I am speaking today to share recent findings that demonstrate New Jersey schools are not safe for most lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or questioning (LGBTQ) secondary school students.

The data from GLSEN's 2017 New Jersey State Snapshot, which is based on data from the GLSEN 2017 National School Climate Survey, provide a glimpse into the challenges faced by some of the most marginalized students in New Jersey's secondary schools. Most LGBTQ students in New Jersey heard anti-LGBTQ remarks from peers, and experienced anti-LGBTQ victimization at school. For instance, 90% of LGBTQ students sometimes, often, or frequently heard the word "gay" used in a negative way, such as "that's so gay": 60% of LGBTQ students experienced verbal harassment based on sexual orientation, and 56% of LGBTQ students experienced verbal harassment based on their gender expression.

Furthermore, many LGBTQ students in New Jersey experienced anti-LGBTQ discrimination at school, such as being disciplined for expressing public displays of affection, using the locker room and bathroom that align with their gender, and using their chosen names or gender pronouns. 55% experienced at least one form of anti-LGBTQ discrimination at their school. We also found that for transgender students specifically, 48% were unable to use the school restroom aligned with their gender and 39% were prevented from using their chosen name or pronouns at school. Although the New Jersey State Snapshot does not provide data on absenteeism in school due to feeling unsafe, the 2017 National School Climate Survey indicated that on a national level 35% of LGBTQ students missed at least one day of school in the past month because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable.

Our research shows that students who feel safe and supported at school have better educational outcomes. According to findings from GLSEN's 2017 National School Climate Survey, LGBTQ students who have LGBTQ-related school resources, such as comprehensive anti-bullying/harassment policies, supportive school staff, GSAs, and LGBTQ inclusive curriculum report better school experiences and academic success. Compared to LGBTQ students who do not have LGBTQ supportive resources, LGBTQ secondary school students who have such resources were less likely to miss school because of safety concerns, were less likely to hear anti-LGBTQ remarks from peers, experienced less anti-LGBTQ victimization, were less depressed, had higher self-esteem, felt greater belonging to their school community, and had more accepting peers.

SLM

Even though New Jersey has strong state laws that protect students from harassment and discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity, many LGBTQ students in New Jersey do not have access to these school resources and supports. For instance, only 23% of LGBTQ students in New Jersey reported having a comprehensive anti-bullying/harassment policy that specify protections for sexual orientation and gender identity/expression, and only 16% had a policy or official guidelines to support transgender or gender nonconforming students. There is much that we can do to provide safe learning environments for LGBTQ students in New Jersey, such as implementing and funding supportive and inclusive school policies like the comprehensive anti-bullying/harassment and supportive transgender/gender nonconforming student policies in every school district in the state.

I thank the Joint Committee on Public Education for the opportunity to share these data and the concrete solutions to improve the learning environments for LGBTQ youth.

Testimony from Marcy Peterson

The NJ Joint Committee on Public Education - Senate and Assembly

Invited by: Assemblywoman Mila Jasey, Co-Chair

Theme: Climate and Culture

Good morning. My name is Marcy Peterson, I'm from originally from Bridgeton, NJ and a supporter of GLSEN Southern NJ. Thank you to the Joint Committee for listening to my story today. I am here today as a parent who has seen firsthand the need for the state to continue to act to protect LGBTQ students. Although we have inclusive policy to protect students, they are not being implemented in many schools and that has dire consequences for students and school environments. My family's story is one I hope not one more mother ever has to share.

When I think back over my life, I'm most proud of being a mother to my daughter and my son. Today, it is still hard to find the words to describe the profound loss of losing my son, Tristan, my 12-year-old ... to suicide fourteen months ago.

I'm still in disbelief. I feel like my heart was set on fire. That the searing hot embers of what remains of my heart are now hidden away, but the pain, no less, continues.

Time stopped there, last December. Disbelief and denial are a part of my every waking moment.

There is a constant struggle in attempting to have a relationship with Tristan's memory and having that memory eclipsed by the pain and darkness of his death. The struggle is in bringing his twelve brilliant years of his beautiful memory into the light while honoring a future that includes his legacy.

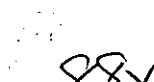
Tristan, my son, my moonlight, a piece of my heart will never grow up. In my mind, he remains still a twelve-year-old. Sometimes he is a newborn grasping my hand against his cheek with all ten of those little tiny fingers. Sometimes he's an elementary schooler pointing his fingers like The Fonz, adding those kissy lips and moving his hips to a beat of his own. Much of the time he is the 11-year-old and he's almost always smiling or laughing.

He was always asking questions. He wanted to know so much. I hope his curiousness is satisfied and he is getting answers to the ending string of questions he would concoct and pose.

But, Tristan will never graduate high school, or college, he will never have any more than peach fuzz on his upper lip. He won't know the joys and sorrows of dating girls or boys, or ever having children of his own. He adored children and I think he would've been an awesome father.

We, his loved ones, will never hear him laugh and sing again. We will never receive his infamous bear hugs or his heartfelt words of encouragement and support again.

I'd like to share more about Tristan and how his memory and story compels me to work towards bringing LGB kids together in a supported and safe environment.



Tristan's death was labeled a suicide. From my perspective, he died of being bullied as a result of his sexual orientation or as he liked to say "his gayness." He died because he did not have the support of a community or his school.

Tristan wanted to be part of something and he could not find his place, his space. He wasn't much for participating in organized sports, despite enjoying kayaking and tennis. He tried so many things to fit in.

We know that for children his age it can be an exciting and a terrifying time of transition. There was no path for Tristan to find his way, as he tried to find a sense of belonging. I, along with others that cared for Tristan, supported him as he desperately looked for his place.

When the bullying about his sexuality came, he was scared of the threat of physical violence. I know my son and he was scared, so afraid.

On the last day of his life, Tristan and I had had a lovely evening of Christmas shopping together. On the ride home the mere mention of the other children, his tormentors, flipped a switch in him. The evening of holiday cheer vanished. It was like an icy chill of darkness came over the entire car and I couldn't lift it. I couldn't understand what was happening or why he was so angry so suddenly. He went to his room where I told him that when he calmed down we would talk.

A bit later when I opened his door, I had the intention to spend the night in his room because he was so distraught. I had a game plan. We would talk it out. But it was too late. He was gone.

Tristan's physical life came to an end, but, his story will go on. There needs to be a "safe space" for growing adolescent children like Tristan and we all can help create a community of safety, of love and of acceptance.

I share this story of my life, the worst thing that has ever happened, something so gut-wrenching and tragic because I want this to stop, because I want people to realize our children are suffering and because there are clear solutions that organizations like GLSEN have evidenced to work in our schools..

There are so many statistics on tween and teen suicides, it's staggering. Simply Google teen causes of death." Results will include words like, "troubling" and "alarming rise." You'll find a report titled "Suicide Replaces Homicide as Second-Leading Cause of Death." In June the CDC's National Vital Statistics Report stated that "Suicide for persons aged 10–19 years ... rose by 56% between 2007 and 2016."

The percentage of younger children and teens hospitalized for suicidal thoughts or actions in the United States also doubled over nearly a decade, according to research presented at the 2017 Pediatric Societies Meeting. (it was an 8-year study)

In Tristan's name, I have to hope. I have to hope everyone will come together and stop this wholesale, widespread, indiscriminate negativity. It is killing our children.



**Testimony to the New Jersey Joint Committee on the Public Schools
Jan Oosting Kaminsky, PhD, RN – Director of Education, Rainbow Health Consulting; Assistant Professor, CUNY
February 5, 2019**

Good day and thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Jan Kaminsky. I am an Assistant Professor of Nursing at the City University of New York and the Director of Education at Rainbow Health Consulting, which educates health care professionals on issues impacting the LGBTQ+ community. A major focus of our work is the health and welfare of LGBTQ+ youth, including their interactions with the public schools in the State of New Jersey.

Rainbow Health Consulting welcomes the focus on climate and culture in our schools at this meeting of the Joint Committee on the Public Schools. I would like to take this opportunity to further call the Committee's attention to some of the challenges facing LGBTQ+ students in the public schools and offer suggestions for the Committee's consideration.

LGBTQ+ youth comprise a significant portion of our student population and remain an especially vulnerable group in terms of their health, safety, and welfare both inside and outside of their school environment. According to the CDC, approximately 2% of high school students are transgender, and approximately 8% identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual. There are additional higher numbers of students who are unsure of their identity, do not identify precisely with one of the above terms, or are not ready to disclose their identity. In New Jersey, this conservatively represents well over one hundred thousand students who are impacted by significant concerns of climate and culture each school day.

Research has demonstrated that bullying of sexual minority youth has been found to begin as early as fifth grade. We know that bullying, harassment, and intimidation set vulnerable students up for higher risk of substance use, mental health concerns, and self-harm including suicide risk. For example, the Centers for Disease Control recently reported that for transgender high school students, 34.6% of students had attempted suicide in the past 12 months. LGBTQ+ students also expressed high rates of sexual risk-taking behavior; rape and other victimization; absenteeism

from school to avoid violence or threats of violence either en route to/from school or during the school day; feelings of depression or hopelessness; and increased use of hard drugs.

We are gravely concerned for the health and well-being of these vulnerable New Jersey students, who face real concerns throughout their school career - from incorrect gender marker and name on electronic enrollment management programs in kindergarten (parent report of district failing to update child's legal name in PowerSchool/Genesis, thereby resulting in school personnel calling student by incorrect gender and name causing great pain and humiliation to student), to lack of resources and support at all school levels. Many New Jersey students benefit from resources in their schools such as student activities and events relating to the LGBTQ+ community, but many students do not have any exposure/access to these important resources.

It is critical that all New Jersey school districts comply with the new legislation mandating student education on LGBTQ+ history and culture. This will help to ensure that students understand the complex background of LGBTQ+ history and contributions to the state, nation, and world. Based on the recent CDC findings noted above, an important recommendation for decreasing the risk behaviors of LGBTQ+ students is for schools to offer "access to culturally competent physical and mental health care" in the school setting.

From the faculty and staff perspective, Rainbow Health Consulting has observed a significant lack of consistent professional development for teachers, administrators, support staff, and school nurses around LGBTQ+ student issues in many school districts. Rigorous, professionally-run, culturally competent training on LGBTQ+ issues must be a statewide requirement for those who work with youth in schools. This training must also not fail to take into consideration the intersectionality of identities such as race, ethnicity, national origin, ability, religion, and other parts of each of our complex selves. This should include vocabulary and definitions; the importance of using a student's correct name and pronouns (both in person and in electronic and paper school records and enrollment management systems); using LGBTQ+-inclusive language in classes, clubs, and the school nurse's office; showing representation of LGBTQ+ history and stories around the school; the creation of supportive and inclusive district policies around such concerns as inclusive restrooms, locker rooms, athletic policies, and dress codes; including lessons that center the experiences of LGBTQ+ students or exemplars in curricula; the promotion of student clubs and activities formed around LGBTQ+

identities; and maintaining connections to outside resources to whom students and families can be referred, such as support groups, health care professionals, or social organizations.

For health providers in schools, such as school nurses, health teachers, and physical education teachers who also plan content around health, that curriculum should be inclusive of LGBTQ+ themes around mental and physical health. Health classes should not be divided by sex, for example, but should teach all students about many different types of bodies and sexualities, so that they may be informed. Programs must be developed and utilized that help all students to understand sexual orientation and gender identity in an age-appropriate and accurate way. These programs should use examples of positive LGBTQ+ relationships and should include the need for safer sex practices no matter the partner or identity. Additionally, they should actively work to dispel harmful stereotypes and myths about sexual orientation and gender identity.

In addition to providing further support for LGBTQ+ students, it is of course essential to provide non-LGBTQ+ students with resources to increase their knowledge and understanding of LGBTQ+ issues. Recent research found that even non-LGBTQ+ students benefited from having an LGBTQ+ student-run club or activity in their school. They most certainly would also benefit from inclusive health education and a more generally inclusive environment.

We are confident that districts within the state strive to provide support and resources to all students to ensure a climate and culture of safety, health, and well-being. Rainbow Health Consulting is ready to work with the Committee in strengthening and enforcing the rights of LGBTQ+ students as they progress through our school districts. Thank you for the opportunity to share these comments and suggestions with the Joint Committee on the Public Schools today. I would be happy to answer questions from the Committee or submit additional information on this important topic.

Sincerely,
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HETRICK-MARTIN INSTITUTE

EMPOWERMENT, EDUCATION & ADVOCACY FOR LGBTQ YOUTH

NEW JERSEY

Testimony submitted to the New Jersey Joint Committee on the Impact of Climate and Culture on Chronic Absenteeism

February 4, 2019

Good morning and thank you for the opportunity to address the New Jersey Joint Committee on Public Education. My name is Lillian Rivera; I am the Executive Director of Hetrick-Martin Institute: New Jersey, the nation's oldest and largest youth serving agency delivering programs to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Questioning young people. We have been in New Jersey for the last 6 years and have worked with hundreds of young people. Climate and culture in public schools can be the catalyst for success or the impetus for disengagement. For LGBTQ youth culture and climate is often the main contributor to chronic absenteeism. From your perspective, it may be a problem but from a youth development perspective, this is actually an asset. For a young person to know that their safety comes before their participation in school is a protective factor for their well-being. I know a young transgender woman that would never go to school before 2nd period because she was astute enough to avoid the young people that would torment her during 1st period. She knew to take care of herself because the adult in the room would not take care of her by ensuring that the targeted behavior she would endure was unacceptable. While she was able to leverage her survival skills to maintain her sense of self the adults in the school were ignoring her humanity to the point where her education was compromised. This is unacceptable that young people have to make these concessions with their schooling. This is not their problem, it is ours. New Jersey deserves to provide all young people a



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NEW JERSEY

safe and affirming environment in which to learn. New Jersey's children deserve an environment where all children are safe to be themselves, where they will not hear their identity or the identity of their parents used as a put down, where their gender is not interrogated based on their clothes or mannerism and they are free to learn without the fear of something being hurled at them with injurious intent. Let us stand Jersey Strong for LGBTQ in our state, in our schools and most importantly in our hearts.

Testimony to the New Jersey Joint Committee on Public Schools
Phoebe Hill and Olivia Hirsh
SOMa Action Student Leadership Committee

Growing up in public schools in New Jersey, I've watched as minor sexist comments morphed into the sexualization and harassment of girls and their bodies. I was always a vocal proponent of equality on the basis of gender, from my elementary school days to now.

My first true experience with dress code occurred when I was 12. It was a warm day and I decided to wear a striped tank top from my favorite store. I was in science when my teacher asked me to cover up with a sweatshirt, saying I was too bare. My face flushed and I quickly pulled a sweatshirt on as the boys sitting next to me watched. I became so self-conscious about my choice of clothing and my body. This feeling of embarrassment was one I never wanted to feel again.

Of all the memories throughout middle school, this experience stayed with me. I watched as girls around me were "dress coded" by school administrators and judged silently or even vocally by their peers. This culture of judgment and fear is perpetuated by school administrators who choose to enforce an oftentimes sexist dress code.

As I navigated the difficult waters that is middle school, I became aware of my outfit choices. I facetimed by friends late at night and early in the morning asking "do you think I'll get dress coded for this outfit"? I tried to be careful while still expressing myself.

However, one day in the early spring days of eighth grade, another incident occurred that would stay with me. I was 14 and the school was filling out for a fire drill. I stood quietly on the sidewalk, waiting for my name to be called out for attendance. All of a sudden, I heard the boys behind me muttering, I listened closely and could hear them commenting about my body. I knew

these comments were wrong but I did nothing about it.

Why would I, a vocal teen activist, make the decision not to act? I believe it is because our society has normalized harassment and the sexualization of the bodies of girls and women. Although this occurs on city streets and corners, it also happens every day within our schools and through this, the students who attend our public schools begin to accept this as normal.

These comments and attitudes just continue and worsen as a young girl enters high school. Once the weather gets warm I spend at least fifteen minutes every morning rotating through outfits that I like but also hopefully will not get me weird glances in the hallways for “exposing too much”. Whenever I buy a new tank top my mind automatically goes to, “will I be able to wear this to school?” When your every move is scrutinized on a microscopic level in high school, the clothes you wear get examined harshly and when trying to keep up with fashion and your peers risks you getting snickers behind your back from guys who think you are just asking for it, it becomes an all consuming dilemma, where many times we do not act.

Almost every girl can recount a time when her body was looked at or commented about. These small acts of aggression wear down on a person and impact girls’ ability to learn. This experience is universal among students throughout my district, state, and country. The argument is often made that dress codes enhance the learning experience and make it easier for boys to concentrate, however our public schools have a responsibility to empower young women and girls like me and educate and stop the young boys who are engaging in this harassment behavior.

We have to do better. We need a comprehensive curriculum about consent and harassment. We need for teachers to be aware of the damaging impacts of publicly dress coding a young person. Health classes should begin discussing the proper ways to speak to romantic interests in the beginning of middle school.

Alou

We cannot assume that all people understand how to treat each other and rather should teach everyone to be respectful and responsible. Dress codes need to be updated from the archaic, sexist forms that the exist in today. Every single law maker in this room should feel a responsibility to the young students throughout New Jersey who deal with these comments every time they walk through the halls or their high school, middle, or even elementary school. Thank you so much for taking the time to listen to us today.

Olivia Hirsch and Phoebe Hill- SOMa Action Student Leadership Committee - Maplewood and South Orange -
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Testimony to The New Jersey Joint Committee on the Public Schools

Laila Gold, Claire Lipkin

SOMa Action Student Leadership Committee

February 5, 2019

Good afternoon. Our names are Laila Gold and Claire Lipkin, and we are very appreciative of this opportunity to speak our minds. We are both co-leaders of the SOMa Action Student Leadership Committee (SASLC). SASLC is a student activist group based in South Orange and Maplewood, New Jersey. We have hosted events and worked on projects such as March For Our Lives rallies, a Town Hall for Our Lives event in Newark, and local voter registration. We all go to Columbia High School. As students at an American public school, we have to be prepared for potential safety issues, including active shooter situations. We are concerned about about the way schools communicate to students and parents concerning school safety. More transparent and efficient communication, specifically involving security drills, would create a better atmosphere in public schools on our state, and around the country.

Ever since kindergarten, security drills have been a common occurrence to us. Code Red drills, specifically, take place twice a year in every school in our district. These drills are a procedure intended to prepare students and faculty for a lockdown situation (like a shooting). Any student in a public school can remember the first time they learned about these drills. For a young child, this experience can be scary and confusing. We can each remember thinking, *why is this happening?*

Throughout our elementary and middle school years, confusion did not cease among our peers. In many classes, we did not know what procedures to follow or where to hide in our classroom. We were unaware if what was happening was a drill or if it was a real,

life-threatening event. It is troubling to think that this lack of communication could lead to students not acting appropriately in an actual Code Red situation. Recently, our school had several drills in one month. Being used to only two per month, we were very concerned with the lack of information we were given. A majority of the student body were in a frenzied state of confusion. Everything was very unorganized.

Just the other day, our school conducted a fire drill. Many students were in bathrooms and locker rooms and had no idea where to go. Others were confused about what kind of drill it was. If someone had thought the drill was a lockdown emergency and had stayed in the locker rooms and bathrooms, no one would have known where they were. This is even more dangerous. The whole situation was intense and scary for the students in the school, who had no knowledge of the procedures in place.

According to South Orange Maplewood School District's FAQs on school safety, "We conduct regular security drills so that students and staff know what to do to protect themselves in various situations." In our experiences, this has not always been true. When we hear alarms signifying a lockdown whether it is a drill or not, we rarely know what the reason behind it is. For all we know, it could be a highly dangerous situation. Especially in light of the Parkland shooting (and the many other school shootings that have become more of a focus among students), it is fair to expect anything. Any school can be affected. We never know if ours will be next.

Another issue is the amount of information that teachers are given. They often don't know how to respond to an emergency situation at all because of inconsistent communication. Teachers are often just as susceptible to the influence of rumors as their pupils are. If a teacher gives out false information, even more harm can be caused because of the authority the adults in a school hold.

Lack of transparency from a school district can be very harmful. Especially with a school as big as ours, false rumors are spread by students more easily and more often than the truth. We believe that it is the responsibility of the administration to notify students during a real emergency and to explain afterwards, the cause of the lockdown or crisis situation. This is because Code Reds can create an uneasy and confused school population. Students go to school every day knowing that anything could happen. Their parents and guardians have to deal with this knowledge as well. This ongoing fear often leads to conflict between families and school administration.

To improve the relations between public schools and the communities that constitute them, we propose holding school districts to a higher standard of transparency and communication. Our own local school district has been discussing using an application that would allow administrators to send direct messages to teachers on their cell phones. Other schools around the country have implemented similar systems. This would prevent mass confusion within the schools. Additionally, we recommend that more training sessions are held for faculty to learn about the school safety procedures. The school should be responding to dangerous situations in the most informed and efficient way possible. Students should be made aware of what is going on within their schools, what they can do to get involved and informed, and what safety measures they should be ready to take. We should not have to face a school environment full of fear and confusion. Serious actions need to be taken to prevent the current policies from being too vague and leading to dangerous situations.

These plans could save the lives of students like us. New Jersey has a history of pushing for progressive policies. We hope that the state will keep these ideals in mind while continuing to make our schools a safer and better place. Thank you for this opportunity to give

Laila Gold, Claire Lipkin - SOMa Action Student Leadership Committee - Maplewood & South Orange, NJ - somaactionstudents@gmail.com

100x

testimony on the topic of school climate. This issue is very important to us, our peers, our teachers, and our families. Hopefully, it is just as important to you.

Laila Gold, Claire Lipkin - SOMa Action Student Leadership Committee - Maplewood & South Orange, NJ - somaactionstudents@gmail.com

10/12

Testimony to The New Jersey Joint Committee on the Public Schools

Lily Forman, Zoe Newman

SOMa Action Student Leadership Committee

February 5, 2018

Good morning, and thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Lily Forman, beside me is Zoë Newman, and we're so honored to be here today. We are in 10th grade at Columbia High School in Maplewood.

Two years ago, when I was in eighth grade, I walked into the girls bathroom at South Orange Middle School and saw a message scratched on a stall wall. It used the N-word and told my black classmates to "get lynched."

I was shocked. I couldn't believe that such a violent, racist message was on the walls of my school. I always figured our school was above that, that we all held the same beliefs about basic human dignity. I had been raised with the belief that inclusion was a core value of our community and our state. I went directly to the main office and reported the graffiti to the school secretary. Afterwords, I went back to my science class and tried – unsuccessfully – to focus on my work. I thought about whether or not to tell my classmates, but I was still trying to process what I'd seen.

After another racist message was found the next day, school officials reported the acts of aggression to the police.



This wasn't our school's first run-in with hate speech. Just a few months earlier students found swastikas and other anti-semitic messages in the bathrooms. During the prior school year, two students in my grade posted anti-Semitic messages on Instagram.

These previous events had led to our school joining the Anti-Defamation League's "No Place for Hate" anti-bias program. The program was well-intentioned, but its effectiveness was limited. Acts of racist and anti-semitic bias have continued in our schools in the years since.

School administrators responded to this latest incident by holding grade-wide assemblies followed by smaller discussions in our classrooms. While these steps were helpful, they were fleeting. Our regular classes went on without much consideration for the toll that bias incidents had taken on us and our classmates.

We go to school to learn about the world, to learn about ourselves, and to learn how to be part of a larger community. These things become much more difficult in an environment that feels unsafe.

When students feel supported and respected by their peers and teachers, education becomes more meaningful. A healthy school environment fosters curiosity and a passion for learning.

We understand that it's almost impossible to eliminate hate speech. But we must do more to address its causes and its aftermath, especially when the hate is expressed in school.

We urge the committee to prioritize bias incidents and hate speech. Students need to feel safe in order to learn. No child should have to feel in danger or threatened at their school. Creating inclusive, welcoming school environments is crucial to effective education.

Lily Forman, Zoe Newman - SOMa Action Student Leadership Committee
Maplewood & South Orange, NJ - somaactionstudents@gmail.com



SEL4NJ

Social and Emotional Learning for New Jersey

OVERVIEW

SEL4NJ is an affiliate of SEL4US, a national network of state alliances promoting awareness of the importance of social-emotional learning and related approaches (SEL) to be systematically and intentionally integrated in schools and other organizations, as well as fostering implementation support for those efforts. SEL4NJ replaces NJSHACC (**New Jersey School Health and Climate Coalition**) as the state-wide organization that brings together a wide variety of educational and professional organizations to promote awareness for SEL and provide support for those working toward that end.

WHAT IS SEL?

SEL4NJ defines "SEL" as an umbrella term that includes systematic efforts to promote any or all of the following areas: social and emotional development, character education, mental and physical health, bullying prevention, positive youth development, substance use prevention, moral and performance values, caring schools and communities, positive school climate and culture, whole child/whole school approaches, educational equity, and an appropriately challenging academic experience.

MISSION

It is the mission of Social and Emotional Learning for New Jersey (SEL4NJ) to promote high-quality SEL integrated into all schools across the state by building a network of like-minded organizations in New Jersey and providing support to those organizations with knowledge, tools, and resources to optimize their impact.

VISION

It is the vision of SEL4NJ that all students in New Jersey have access to schools that provide a culture and climate that is respectful, caring, challenging, inspirational, safe and healthy, civic-minded, and culturally responsive. These schools promote educational equity and help students and adults alike build social-emotional competencies and develop positive relationships that help connect them to the school and each other.

WHY SEL?

In Schools

SEL represents an essential set of life skills. Students who do not have these skills will not perform to their potential no matter how smart they are. It is essential to define student achievement as a balance between academic skills, social-emotional, and ethical skills in order for students to be adequately prepared for the tests of life. Research shows that schools that embrace social-emotional learning, character development, and a positive culture and climate accrue at least the following benefits: build explicit social-emotional skills

in students and staff; improve attitudes about self, others, and the school; encourage positive classroom behavior and civic engagement; achieve gains of up to 11 percentile-points on standardized tests; reduce conduct problems, aggressive behavior, and emotional distress; improve staff morale, and decrease turnover.¹ It is important for sustainability and greater impact that SEL is implemented in a school with a positive climate and culture, where staff and students are physically and mentally healthy, and the school has the capacity to implement the above in a coordinated fashion.

In Business

Likewise, businesses and corporations now understand the importance of SEL for their workforce. Managers are looking for employees with good emotional and interpersonal skills. More than 1,400 employees from a large global corporation recently took part in a 183 question multi-rater survey that measured a variety of competencies associated with leadership performance including those commonly referred to as Emotional Intelligence. Results showed that the highest performing managers have significantly more “emotional competence” than other managers. The World Economic Forum, in 2016, redefined global workforce preparation to include SEL as integral with any technical skills.²

WHY SEL4NJ?

To successfully accomplish the goal of promoting SEL in all children, collaboration is required within schools, across schools, and among child-serving organizations and agencies. Schools in particular benefit from networking so that they can capitalize on others’ learning and not have to reinvent the wheel, as well as become contributors to others’ learning. A partnership between schools, health and mental health organizations, professional associations, higher education, and corporate/business organizations is necessary. **SEL4NJ** provides a means to coordinate this work in schools by bringing together all of these institutions and organizations to better use available resources and to avoid duplication of effort. **SEL4NJ** provides a single voice representing the interests of the member institutions.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES OF SEL4NJ

- To build statewide awareness for SEL and related approaches and appropriate policies and funding.
- To provide opportunities for SEL stakeholders (including educators, administrators, education preparation programs, policymakers, professional organizations, community groups, youth, parents, businesses, funders, and SEL providers) to learn about and share SEL research, theory, evidence-based programs and best practice.
- To provide resources and implementation support to schools and other institutions.

¹ **Source:** Durlak, J.A., Weissberg, R.P., Dymnicki, A.B., Taylor, R.D., & Schellinger, K. (2011). The Impact of Enhancing Students’ Social and Emotional Learning: A Meta-Analysis of School-Based Universal Interventions. *Child Development*. (available at www.casei.org) and M. Berkowitz & M. Bier, *What works in character education*. (Washington, DC: Character Education Partnership, 2006) (available at www.characterandcitizenship.org.)

² Cavallo, K. & Brienza, D. (2018). *Emotional competence and leadership excellence at Johnson & Johnson. The emotional intelligence and leadership study*. New Brunswick, NJ: Consortium for Research on Emotional Intelligence in Organizations, Rutgers University.

STRATEGIES

- **Convening** – Hosting regular meetings of member organizations, serving as a clearinghouse for SEL-related events held throughout the state and region, and providing learning opportunities on topics of mutual interest (Healthy Students, Healthy Schools, for example).
- **Shared awareness resources** – Serve as a vehicle to connect schools with other state and local organizations and provide resources to promote SEL awareness and support efforts.
- **Shared capacity-building resources** – Help develop corporate support for SEL and determine what a volunteer workforce is able and willing to do to support the effort of **SEL4NJ**.
- **Technical assistance** – Utilize the resources of the member organizations and the volunteer workforce to provide direct technical assistance to schools through consultation and other methods.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

The organizational structure of **SEL4NJ** shall consist of the following:

- **Steering Committee** – this committee shall be responsible for guiding the work of **SEL4NJ**. This may become a Board of Trustees, should the organization seek not-for-profit status.
- **Leader/Representative** – selected from and by the members of the steering committee to be the voice of the organization and represent **SEL4NJ** at the national level as part of **SEL4US**.
- **Task Forces/Interest Groups** – these groups will do the work of the organization and will be made up of volunteers from supporting institutions and individuals. These task forces may include but not be limited to:
 - Policy
 - School Culture and Climate
 - Mental and Physical Health
 - Educational Equity
 - School Implementation and Support
 - Higher Education and Career Readiness
 - Corporate Funding and Outreach
 - Research and Assessment
 - Event Coordination
- **Supporting Institutions** – **SEL4NJ** is an alliance of educational and professional organizations which support the work.

PROJECTED OUTCOMES

New Jersey is fortunate to have many organizations that believe in SEL, as broadly defined above, as an important ingredient for building a positive school culture and climate. **SEL4NJ** provides a means for these organizations to participate in a network of like-minded SEL advocates and build capacity together. This networking and collaboration will lead to a greater impact on New Jersey's schools and students than individual efforts alone. **SEL4NJ** aims to be inclusive by inviting those organizations that represent a wide range of related approaches to come to the table and focus on similarities of approach rather than differences.

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New Jersey Culture and Climate Coalition (NJCCC)

Creating a School Culture and Climate for College and Career Success: A Perspective and Guidelines for NJ Schools

This set of **Successful School Guidelines** is drawn from the National School Climate Council Standards and related work in social-emotional and character development (SECD) and best practices. Schools should be inspiring, challenging, supportive, safe, healthy, engaging, respectful places, comprised of communities of learners, in which all individuals are supported and protected, and the specific needs of vulnerable populations are addressed. Part of being inspiring, challenging, etc. involves organizing and coordinating programs, activities, strategies, and curricula so that they are connected and well-articulated throughout all aspects of school life. It is important to create coherence among the many existing efforts in order to systematically and continuously promote children's social-emotional and character development. One part of being a responsible community of learners is to collect and use academic data, data about school culture and climate, and data about their students' social, emotional and character development. When schools work to develop the features described in these standards, their students are more likely to go on to success in life. These schools are also committed to steadily increasing the number of students who are college and career ready.

SUCCESSFUL SCHOOL GUIDELINES

Successful School Guideline #1 [Inspiring]

The school community has a shared vision and plan for promoting, enhancing and sustaining a positive school climate.

Suggested Actions that address the Guideline:

- Commit to working together to develop a shared vision and plan to create a safe and productive learning community that stands for and can articulate particular focal themes, values, priorities.
 - Do a "Visioning Exercise" with the School Safety Team or "Culture and Climate Team" and then with the faculty/staff and the rest of the school community to identify a vision of what the school should stand for.
- Develop and implement policies and practices to support above
 - Do a "Core Values" exercise to decide, as a total school community what core values are important to instill and model for everyone in the school and formally adopt and propagate those values throughout the entire community.
- Gather and use data from a school climate assessment of students, staff, parents, and community
 - Administer an assessment of school culture and climate with students, faculty, staff, parents, and community members as respondents. Review the data from the assessment and identify strengths and opportunities for improvement from the data. Share this as trend data with the larger community and discuss those trends, brainstorming ideas for improvement.

- Develop and implement strategies for school climate improvement
 - Engage the Culture and Climate Team (SST) in action planning based on the assessment results and the ensuing discussions with various focus groups to identify specific actions to be taken to address opportunities for improvement.
- Use the findings to develop and implement goals and action-plans to achieve those goals
 - See above.
- Communicate results of assessments and improvement efforts to the wider school community
 - Create a method or protocol for sharing the trend data from the assessment as well as action planning ideas and steps for improvement.
- Build the capacity of the school improvement effort to engage all members of the school community
 - Determine who else should be included in the committee and how to best share the work of the committee in analyzing data and creating action plans.

Successful School Guideline #2 [Challenging]

The school community sets policies specifically **promoting (a) the development and sustainability of social, emotional, ethical, civic and intellectual skills, knowledge and dispositions and (b) a comprehensive system to address barriers to learning and teaching and reengage students who have become disengaged.**

Suggested Actions that address the Guideline:

- Integrate standards for SECD into the classroom and the school environment in alignment with Core Content Standards.
 - Provide (design) a set of age appropriate SECD experiences that are articulated from grade level to grade level.
 - Crosswalk the Core Content Standards with the above-mentioned SECD learning experiences such that they are mutually supportive.
- Provide meaningful learning experiences that appropriately challenge all students regardless of prevailing cultures, circumstances, and languages,
 - Look at curricular offerings at each grade level to ensure that they are appropriately challenging for all students.
 - Be sure to account for differences in cultural bias, language barriers, and other differentiating factors in order to meet the needs of all students.
- Provide educational experiences that are personally challenging and relevant to each individual student.
 - Provide students with voice and choice by giving them a say in determining their own educational learning goals and program of studies.
 - Create multiple levels of courses (from special needs to honors and AP levels) in order to appropriately accommodate a wide range of student interests and needs.
 - Consider offering an independent study option to allow students to pursue an area of personal interest that is educationally sound, but not able to be offered to the general student population.

- Provide educational experiences that foster mutual respect, caring, and psychological wellbeing.
 - Train teachers in the basics of Social Emotional Learning and provide them with the tools to provide a respectful and caring environment in their classrooms.
 - Integrate SEL into lessons in all subjects and all levels of instruction.
 - Encourage students to pursue the “most challenging program” based on their individual abilities and aspirations.
- Systematically address barriers to learning through programs such as R.T.I. and other learning supports.
 - Maintain a multi-tiered system of supports to assist students in overcoming barriers to learning through classroom supports as well as small-group and individualized interventions.
 - Within a full slate of educational offerings, place students in their “least restrictive” educational environment. (For some students, this may involve an out-of-district placement.)
- Encourage students to explore areas of personal interest and ability through curricular and extra-curricular programs.
 - Provide a full slate of curricular, co-curricular, and extra-curricular activities to meet a wide range of student interests and needs.
 - Encourage students to explore a range of activities to help them discover what they might wish to pursue in further study or on a lifelong basis.
 - With the current interest on raising schools’ profiles, be aware and respond to the need to maintain course offerings that would interest, engage, and challenge all groups of students in the school.
- Periodically assess efforts associated with this standard for full integration and effectiveness.
 - Engage in a regular and periodic curriculum review cycle which includes input from the faculty, students, and parents to ensure that course offerings and scheduling options are meeting the needs of the students.

Successful School Guideline #3 [Supportive]

The school community’s practices are identified, prioritized and supported to (a) promote the learning and positive social, emotional, ethical and civic development of students, (b) enhance engagement in teaching, learning and school-wide activities; (c) address barriers to learning and teaching and reengage those who have become disengaged; and (d) develop and sustain an appropriate operational infrastructure and capacity building mechanisms for meeting this standard.

Suggested Actions that address the Guideline:

- Design engaging Instructional practices that focus on cognitive and behavioral learning as well as social, emotional, ethical and civic engagement.
 - Develop a classroom focus on integrating SECD skills in all subject areas in a developmentally appropriate manner.
 - Provide training to faculty and staff personnel on SEL as it pertains to regular classroom instruction.

- Provide Service Learning opportunities to engage students in projects connected with the curriculum and the community that make a difference.
- Provide opportunities for students to share their perceptions and opinions with their peers as well as with positive adult role models.
 - Promote opportunities for “student-centered” learning where students have voice and choice as well as the opportunity to reflect on their learning.
 - Encourage faculty members to become “guides on the side” in facilitating this active learning by students.
- Provide an integrated system of interventions designed to promote healthy development and prevent negative problems. (RTI)
 - Differentiate instruction to meet the needs of a diverse range of student abilities.
- Provide early intervention programs and strategies that address negative problems
 - Empower staff members to engage in dialogue to assist individual students in need as well as groups of students with similar needs using a multi-tiered system of assistance.
- Provide a comprehensive system of learning supports that address a wide spectrum of student needs.
 - Engage higher levels of support as necessary to meet individual needs. These supports could come from inside and outside of the school.
- Facilitate student and family access to effective services and special assistance as needed
 - Serve as a “clearinghouse” of services to help families understand what is available and how to apply for those services.

Successful School Guideline #4 [Safe and Healthy]

The school community promotes health and wellness and creates an environment where all members are welcomed, supported, and feel safe in school: socially, emotionally, intellectually and physically.

Suggested Actions that address the Guideline:

- Engage the School Safety Team in promoting practices to improve the safety of the school environment and develop a positive school climate and culture.
 - Carry out an audit of where and when accidents occur; survey students and staff about where they feel most and least safe, and why, and use this information for intervention planning and action
- Engage the school nurse and health educators in designing and providing resources that encourage health and wellness.
 - Create an ongoing, multi-grade, developmental focus on what students eat, what the nutritional value is, what options they have; integrate this with lunch, biology, and parents
- Design and implement prevention efforts to address risky behaviors including all forms of violence, harassment, intimidation and bullying, unhealthy relationships, underage drinking, drug use, and destructive decision-making.

- Do an audit of where and when HIB incidents take place, share with students, and solicit their ideas for prevention.; engage in parallel, student-centered strategies for data gathering and action planning for other problem behaviors.
- Survey students, their families, school staff and community stakeholders to discover what the school should do to further enhance a welcoming, supportive, healthy and safe environment.
 - With the leadership of the Culture and Climate Committee, Implement a systematic climate survey from grades 3 and higher that includes elements of engagement, morale, safety, support, belonging, and health, create a plan for data analysis, disaggregation, summary, feedback, and discussion, and involve those affected by issues in planning relevant actions
- Provide multiple opportunities for students and staff to engage in healthy behaviors, such as physical activity and healthy eating, on a daily basis.
 - Institute journals for recording eating and exercise and create incentives and recognition for improvement
- Monitor and evaluate the prevention and intervention strategies designed to support people feeling welcomed, supported and safe and use that data to improve relevant policies, practices, facilities, staff competencies, and accountability. – overlaps with the above
 - Create a Safety Patrol of students, with tasks appropriate for every grade level, to instruct and support health behavior among peers

Successful School Guideline #5 [Engaged]

The school community develops meaningful and engaging practices, activities and norms that promote social and civic responsibilities and a commitment to social justice.

Suggested Actions that address the Guideline:

- Provide opportunities for students to exercise voice and choice and to explore individual interests and needs and take a meaningful role in developing personal learning goals.
 - Promote student-centered learning in the school, where the students themselves have an opportunity to create their own learning experiences within the context of the curriculum.
 - Provide students with the opportunity to have a say in school issues and implement those ideas while learning the protocols necessary to work within a complex organizational system.
 - Provide students with the opportunity to lead traditional parent conferences.
- Design practices to remove barriers to learning and reengage students who have become disengaged.
 - Provide alternative educational programs for disaffected students.
 - Create a variable system of supports and practices to transition students back into the school. These may include part-day schedules, special accommodations, and responsible adult contact, among other supports.
- Provide multiple opportunities for students to have leadership roles that enhance their commitment to school and to the development of themselves and others.

- Recognize that there are different kinds of leadership in the school population. This includes “social leaders” who can have a tremendous impact on their peers, but who may not represent the “ideal student” who usually gets the benefit of leadership opportunities (Student Council, Peer Leaders, etc.)
- Promote Student Government that involves more than just elected leaders and maintains an active and ongoing role in solving school-wide problems
 - Promote a system where student government representatives regularly communicate information about school issues to their constituents and the whole student body, (This is often done through Social Studies or English classes so that every student can be reached.)
- Create opportunities for students to engage in moral action through academic service learning projects and civic engagement.
 - Make sure Service Learning opportunities are connected to the curriculum and strike a balance between Learning and Service.
 - Provide students with the opportunity to evaluate and reflect on their service learning projects that are personally relevant to them.
- Assure that every student has opportunities to make a strong connection to a caring and responsible adult. (Mentors/Advisory)
 - Encourage faculty members to work with students as mentors on independent study projects, service learning projects, and the like.
 - Consider an advisory program where all adults work with small, multi-graded groups of students.

Successful School Guideline #6 [Respectful]

The school community is a place where relationships among and between staff and students are mutually respectful, supportive, ethical and civil.

Suggested Actions that address the Guideline:

- Develop mutually respectful, supportive, ethical and civil relationships among and between staff and students
 - Provide opportunities for students and staff to dialogue on a regular basis about classroom experiences. Solicit student input when classroom norms are developed. Encourage ongoing, open communication from all students.
 - School administration openly promotes staff members’ to be role models of respectful, supportive, ethical, and civil relationships in all interactions, and ensures that every student has at least one adult in school with whom she or he may have honest dialogue.
- Work to build social norms in the school that support responsible and positive peer relationships; there is an articulate positive code of student conduct
 - Provide opportunities for all students to have input on development or modification of core ethical values.
- Align discipline procedures and practices with the goals of supporting students in their learning and being respectful of all individuals. (Code of Conduct based on Core Values)
 - Review discipline procedures and records to determine if actions are being applied equally amongst all students, paying particular attention to

all racial, ethnic, religious, and “ability” groups. The review of procedures should also answer the question whether or not all groups have equal access to reporting of incidents.

- Encourage students and staff to model culturally responsive and ethical behavior based on accepted core values.
 - Identify various cultures, ethnicities, or religions, represented in the school community (students and staff). Invite members of these groups to share their customs and beliefs in various forums, such as a multi-cultural or multi-ethnic lunch for students and staff (or breakfast or dinner to include parents).
- Help students and staff build the capacity to identify, understand, and respect the unique beliefs, values, customs, languages, and traditions of all members of the school community
 - In concert with reviewing school climate assessment data, the SST identifies the groups of students and staff who are under-represented, have minority status, or less “power” or perceived “power” (these may be based on racial, ethnic, sexual orientation, disability, or other group memberships) and engages in discussion about the experiences of these groups in the school setting. Specific questions might include: 1) Do members of these groups have friendships/relationships with members of other groups; 2) Are members of these groups targeted disproportionately by teasing or bullying behavior? 3) Are members of these groups largely ignored? 4) Do students from all groups have at least one adult with whom they can speak with in a trusting way? Etc. The purpose of these discussions is to further understand experiences of all members of the school, especially experiences that may not emerge through school climate survey data. Collection of these data may require additional methods such as interview, focus groups, review of student records, etc.
- Develop curriculum and instruction practices to promote curiosity about, inquiry into, and celebration of diverse cultures.
 - Link discussions in Social Studies classes on experiences of various cultures to actual students attending school. Pair students of different cultures to work on classroom projects together focusing on learning about the partner’s culture and then share in the whole class.
- Handle behavioral issues with dignity, providing a learning opportunity for students as well as an opportunity for reconciliation when appropriate.
 - Address discipline from a skill-building standpoint where needed skills are identified and then taught, reinforced, and practiced in a positive way.

Successful School Guideline #7 [Communities of Learners]

An effective operational infrastructure is in place for weaving school and community resources together into a larger community of learners who take responsibility for ongoing planning, implementation, and evaluation of school climate improvement efforts.

Suggested Actions that address the Guideline:

- Provide leadership and staff with continuous professional development in order to develop and sustain practices related to school improvement efforts. (PLCs)



- Determine and provide leadership and staff with a set of brief, common, and accessible reading materials that will establish a common language and serve as the basis for planning ongoing PD. Examples include the Laminated SECD and School Climate Resource Cards from www.nprinc.com.
- Engage school staff in collaboratively setting and meeting ongoing learning goals
 - Arrange for PLC or other Common Planning Time meetings to have ongoing goals related to social-emotional and character development and/or school culture and climate
- Provide opportunities and support for all students to participate in and contribute to the well-being of their classmates and the positive culture and climate of the school
 - Set up school problem solving subgroups in conjunction with existing staff committees (HIB, discipline, safety, morale, substance abuse prevention, school health and wellness promotion) and/or as parallel efforts that have ongoing communication with staff committees. Ensure students on these committees have their own ongoing PD via videos, readings, etc.
- Involve students in peer and cross-aged learning groups in areas of their interest
 - Encourage lunchtime and after school groups of mixed-aged students meeting around common interests, such as robotics, performing, crafts, service, environmental concerns, gardening; involve all adults in a supervisory role, including security, custodial, secretarial and paraprofessional staff
- Give teachers and staff members a voice in school-based decision-making. (Distributed leadership)
 - In all committees, PLC's, and related groups, give many members explicit roles, including having learning buddies with whom to share and discuss new learning and ongoing questions.
- Increase home and school connections;
 - Create a newsletter or online blog site to share ongoing informal learning accomplishments of staff and students with parents and guardians;
 - Create a forum for family members to express areas in which they would like their own "PD" and arrange to create a mutual self-help group format to foster sustainable support among families in the community
- Engage the wider community to respond to and, where feasible, prevent crises;
 - Create and communicate clear crisis response procedures
- Increase community involvement and support (e.g., outreach to develop greater community involvement and support, including enhanced use of volunteers and community resources to enhance the educational program).
 - Have a member of the SCC Team serve the role of volunteer coordinator, to have a single point of contact between potential volunteers and the school, both to organize and manage offers of help from the community so that they do not jumble the schoolhouse, and to make requests of the community for needed volunteer resources.
- Celebrate milestones and accomplishments as staff, students, and community work to achieve meaningful school climate improvement.

- Create bulletin boards or announcement boards inside and/or outside of schools that mention any birthdays or other significant milestones (with appropriate permission to do so);
- Develop a procedure for individuals to self-nominate/self-explain efforts to improve the school culture and climate, as well as nominate others, and then publicize these monthly via a bulletin or announcement board inside and/or outside of school and/or via existing newsletters or web postings
- Recognize learning accomplishments, such as completing a unit of PD, participating in a book discussion, attending and sharing information from significant conferences



GETTING SERIOUS ABOUT SECD

Tips for developing policy, teacher training and instructional practices around social-emotional character development.

"THIS IS OUR TIME," asserts Tim Shriver, an educator, advocate and [Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning](#) board chairman. "When you look at what's going to make the country stronger, restore or rebuild the fabric of citizenship and service, reduce anxiety and fear, and promote competition and creativity and the entrepreneurial spirit — it's not politics or business or entertainment. It's education."

Social and emotional learning and character development have been on the education priority list for decades but are getting a new attention thanks to:

1 Increasing business demand for interpersonal skills. Employers want people who can communicate and interact well with others, but many US workers lack these skills, according

to [research from LinkedIn](#). "Communications is the No. 1 skills gap across those major cities in the United States," says LinkedIn CEO Jeff Weiner in an interview with CNBC's "SquawkBox."

2 Mounting scientific evidence that suggests success in school and life is dependent on healthy social and emotional development, including the ability to understand and manage emotions, according a report by [The Aspen Institute](#).

3 Growing realization that this is not a minority or low socioeconomic status issue. "Today, the most elite independent private schools are looking for social and emotional learning programs in the same way most challenged urban high schools are," Shriver says. SEL is not relegated to class or status; it impacts students from all walks of life.

All of these points support a broader, real-world realization: Strong SEL skills start in K-12 classrooms but they have implications beyond those years.

"SEL competencies and other performance character strengths predict success in college and career," notes Marvin Berkowitz, Sanford N. McDonnell Professor of Character Education at the University of Missouri-St. Louis [Center for Character and Citizenship](#). "SEL is the development of a moral GPS that guides one in the direction of morality and motivates one to apply the SEL competencies to doing good in the world."

A [unified SECD approach](#) addresses five core competencies while also recognizing that schools should provide a moral compass for the development of students' positive character:

1. SELF-AWARENESS
2. SELF-MANAGEMENT
3. RESPONSIBLE DECISION-MAKING
4. RELATIONSHIP SKILLS
5. SOCIAL AWARENESS

It's clear that social-emotional competencies and character development are crucial for success and integrity in life. They help address widespread school concerns such as harassment and bullying, substance abuse and student mental health. Educators have embraced these truths.

But crucial gaps remain in policy and teacher training/credentialing standards. Neither has kept up with the SECD evolution. This must change before real impact can happen in our schools.

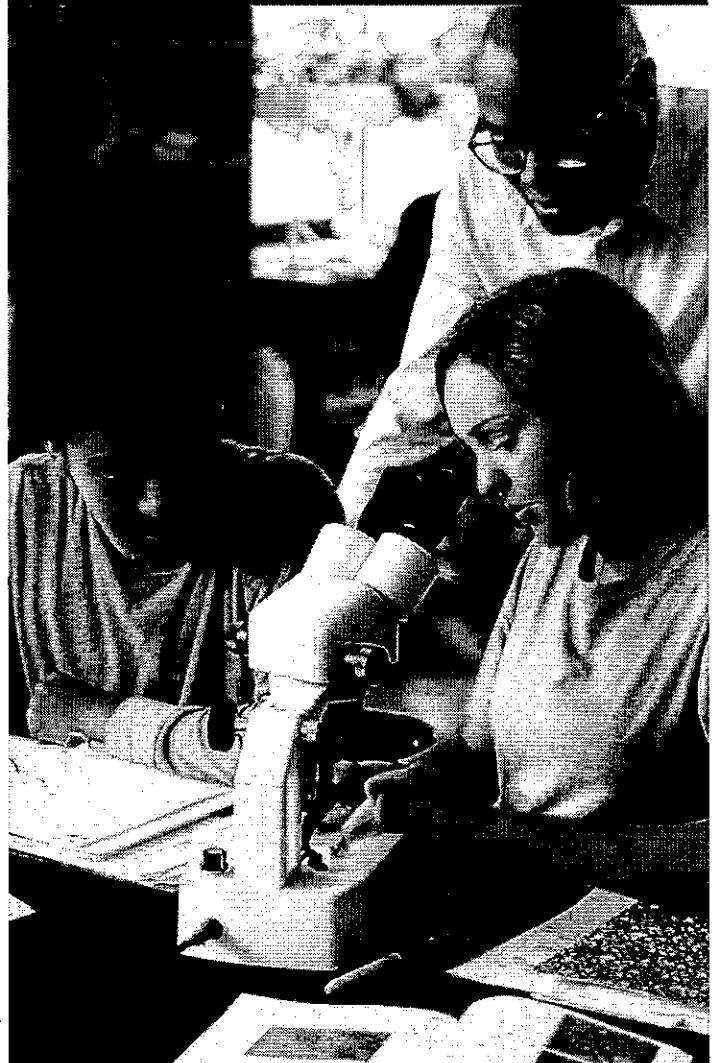
PRIORITIZING SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL AND CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT IN SCHOOLS

Where do we begin? The experts offer these starting points:

FIND OUT WHAT OTHERS ARE DOING.

Developing policy is a tricky, complicated process and it's a good idea to investigate how other countries are doing this, says Kimberly Schonert-Reichl, professor and director of the [Human Early Learning Partnership](#) at The University of British Columbia - Vancouver.

“When you look at what’s going to make the country stronger, restore or rebuild the fabric of citizenship and service, reduce anxiety and fear, and promote competition and creativity and the entrepreneurial spirit — it’s not politics or business or entertainment. **It’s education.**”



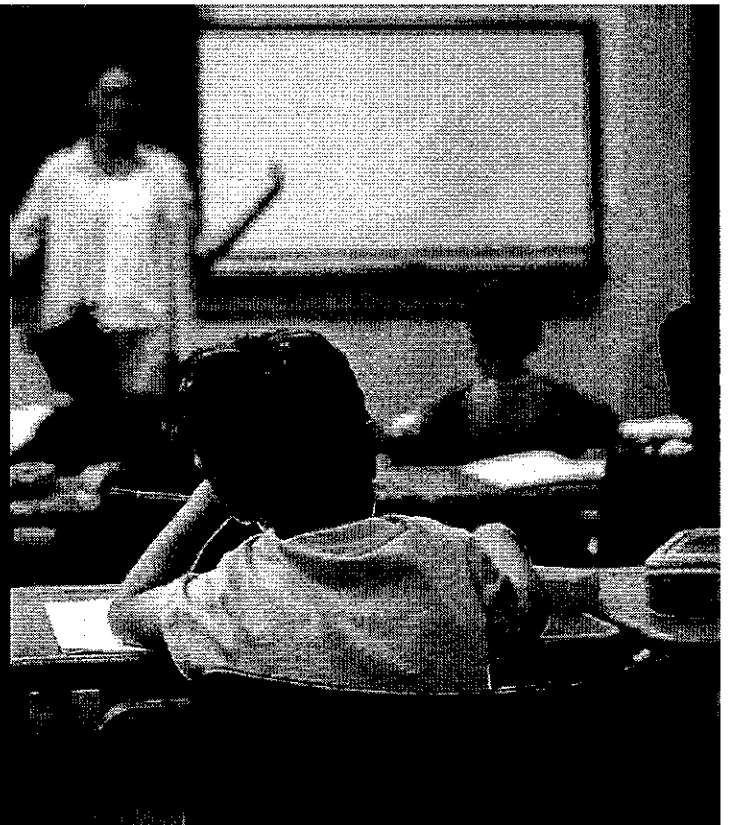
“It’s a complex issue and there are so many different aspects that need to be addressed — from changing what’s required to be a teacher, to broadening curriculum at colleges of education and enlisting experts who can teach courses on social and emotional learning,” Schonert-Reichl explains.

She suggests US education advocates and policymakers look at the approach used by the British Columbia provincial Ministry of Education, one of the first jurisdictions in the world to embed social and emotional learning into the K-12 curriculum. Since 2016, there has been one K-12 curriculum across the province. Superintendents and principals all support SEL training for teachers, each of whom is charged with promoting social and emotional learning in the classroom. “Every one of our districts has at least one administrative-level person who is focused on promoting social and emotional learning,” she continues. “Policy is embedded in all dimensions of the system — from teacher preparation to parent and community engagement, with a common language of understanding SEL and direct and intentional efforts to promote it within the larger system.”

INVEST IN ONGOING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT. Experience has shown that teaching SECD skills isn’t intuitive. Many schools have implemented programs that have not been successful because teachers received limited training and did not know how these skills fit into existing curriculum and standards protocols. “We need to develop ongoing high-quality professional development that is not costly and is readily accessible — but it has to have depth and substance,” Berkowitz notes.

Continuous training reinforces that teaching SECD skills is part of every teacher’s job and that it empowers each educator to be more effective with increased influence on students’ lives in and after school. Schonert-Reichl concurs. “We know that teachers who are well-trained and prepared to teach SEL programs are more likely to implement those programs with fidelity to yield positive outcomes for students,” she says, making it imperative to train administrators and instructional leaders in the benefits of SECD and how to implement it (see sidebar).

“Many schools have implemented programs that have not been successful because teachers received limited training and did not know how these skills fit into existing curriculum and standards protocols.”







Implementing SEL

TIPS FOR IMPLEMENTING SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL AND CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT IN YOUR DISTRICT OR SCHOOL:

BUILD AN INFRASTRUCTURE.

Create a group responsible for long-term implementation. Members set attainable goals, articulate values and create a schedule and action plan to accomplish each one. They also design activities for learning, assessment and accountability.

PRO TIP: Consolidate existing groups focused on SEL, character, climate, discipline, morale and anti-bullying into one "school culture" ensemble.

ALIGN SECD INSTRUCTION WITH STANDARDS.

The key to implementing a sustained SECD initiative is to integrate it into required standards, rubrics and mandates.

PRO TIP: Charge your school culture group with aligning SECD with Core Academic Curriculum Standards, teacher evaluations and other programs.

ASSESS SCHOOL CULTURE AND CLIMATE.

Understanding where we're starting from and how we're progressing toward the goal requires regular assessments with students, staff and parents through surveys, drop-ins, focus groups and analysis of student work. Reports are used by the SEL team to set priorities and then shared with stakeholders.

PRO TIP: Collect data by gender and ethnicity, grade level and staff position.

ARTICULATE AND PRACTICE VALUES AND ESSENTIAL LIFE HABITS.

When SECD programs are presented to children without coherent articulation, the impact is muted and learning is impeded. Successful schools clearly spell out a core set of beliefs and actions beyond catchy slogans and give students ample opportunities to solve real-life problems in real time.

PRO TIP: Embed values reinforcement and skills practice time in daily lessons across the curriculum and in after-school activities and enrichment programs.

ASSURE FACULTY READINESS.

Traditional training using manuals and one-day professional development workshops isn't sufficient. Educators need specific instructions on how to integrate SECD into their teaching, including a deeper understanding of the research base and proven practices from experienced colleagues.

PRO TIP: Spend more time on conceptual understanding and building a commitment to your vision.

Get more advice on to *[How to Implement Social and Emotional Learning at Your School.](#)*

ACADEMY FOR SEL IN SCHOOLS CERTIFICATION PROGRAMS

“Those now educating our children — teachers, school support professionals, educational leaders — need support and preparation for building students’ social-emotional competencies and character,” explains Kimberly Schonert-Reichl, professor and director of the Human Early Learning Partnership at The University of British Columbia – Vancouver. In response, the Academy for Social-Emotional Learning in Schools has created two certification programs, an SEL/SECD instructional certificate for educators working directly with students and an SEL/SECD leadership certificate for administrator and other school leaders. In addition to earning these credentials, participants gain membership to the Virtual Professional Learning Community of the academy, which gives ongoing consultation and support.

BUILD A FIELD OF RESEARCH AND PRACTICE. Educators are constantly asked to support new curricula, often without much research on how it drives outcomes. “A lot of teachers aren’t even aware of the recent research findings or feel that it’s just one more thing they’re asked to do,” says Schonert-Reichl. “That’s why it’s important to change their mindsets about how social and emotional competencies develop and to move away from a sole myopic focus on academic achievement.”

To that end, Shriver and others are working to professionalize SECD instruction with an accessible research base, proven practices and teacher and administrator certification (see sidebar). “We’ve never had a discipline around this,” he says. “So we’re creating a field that delivers value by improving head and heart in outcomes of kids.”

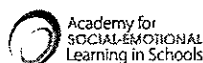
Though SECD has been on the agenda for years, now is the time to move ahead with policy, practice and professionalization.

“This is the moment for educators to step up and recognize their unique opportunity to serve children in their classrooms or schools, but to serve the country,” Shriver says. “We can help children grow and develop in ways that are positive, affirmative and helpful even in challenging times. This is the opportunity to claim their rightful place as the architects of the future of the country.” ■

ABOUT ACADEMY FOR SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING IN SCHOOLS

The Academy for Social-Emotional Learning in Schools is a collaboration between Rutgers University and the College of Saint Elizabeth. Our mission is to offer online Certificate Programs to educators and administrators to foster effective implementation of social-emotional learning (SEL), character development, and school culture and climate initiatives in schools and out-of-school programs, supported by an ongoing virtual professional learning community.

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Opt-In and the Scarcity of Bullying Data: The Need for an Opt-Out Survey Law

The Law

New Jersey law currently requires “prior written informed consent from a student's parent or legal guardian” in order to administer surveys to students concerning certain sensitive subjects. N.J. STAT. ANN. § 18A:36-34(a). Sensitive topics triggering the “opt-in” requirement of prior written consent include questions concerning “mental and psychological problems” and/or “illegal, anti-social, self-incriminating and demeaning behavior.” N.J. STAT. ANN. § 18A:36-34(a)(2-4). Many surveys attempting to gather meaningful data about the prevalence of bullying in New Jersey schools and its associated harms fall under these categories, as would other topics often asked about in comprehensive surveys that include bullying questions, such as drug use or sexual behaviors.

The Issue

This opt-in requirement has been a huge hindrance to the collection of meaningful data about bullying in New Jersey. One obvious consequence is that lower response rates on surveys make data less reliable and less valuable. But the issue is especially relevant for some particular surveys that could otherwise provide a plethora of valuable insights about bullying in our state. For example, the New Jersey Student Health Survey—which is currently the only survey making state-level bullying inquiries—requires a 60% response rate in order to be considered representative of all New Jersey high school students. Because that survey contains questions pooled from the Youth Risk Behavior Survey, developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the 60% threshold is mandatory. Simply put, if the threshold is not met, the data is not published. As a result, the opt-in requirement has combined with that threshold to create a situation in which New Jersey has had **no state-specific data available since 2013** on a variety of crucial topics, including school-based violence, bullying, suicide ideation, student health, and other behaviors that serve as risk-factors for our students. The New Jersey Department of Education conducts these surveys because they ask well-constructed and meaningful questions that matter, yet we cannot use the information that they would provide us because of the opt-in requirement. Given the emphasis that we as a state have placed on eliminating bullying and harassment in the last twenty years, it is imperative that we not continue to hinder our own efforts by placing unnecessary barriers in the way of meaningful data collection.

Suggested Change

This opt-in requirement leaves New Jersey out of step with the vast majority of U.S. states. The Legislature should make a simple change to require written notice and an opt-out option for all student surveys on sensitive subjects. This will maintain parental and family choice without allowing apathy and inaction to cripple participation rates. Legislation proposed during the 2018-19 legislative session (Senate Bill 1936) would take us one step in the right direction by changing the opt-in requirement to an opt-out one for voluntary surveys, but would also maintain the opt-in requirement for mandatory surveys on sensitive topics. This distinction would unfortunately still leave many important surveys, such as the New Jersey Student Health Survey, vulnerable to falling through the cracks. When inaction effectively serves as a veto, simple inertia from busy parents and families ends up preventing us from collecting vitally important data about our students. Because of that, we should amend the proposed legislation and change the requirement to opt-out for all surveys, including mandatory ones.

Learning about the challenges our students face is crucial. For us to be able to study those issues so that we can collaborate to combat bullying, New Jersey must change our survey consent law to require opt-out procedures, rather than opt-in.

Dated: October 2018

Prepared by: Rich Frost, Harvard Public Service Venture Fund Fellow at Education Law Center on behalf of the New Jersey Coalition for Bullying Awareness and Prevention

Contact: Rich Frost (973) 624-1815, ext. 19 or Stuart Green, Coalition Director, (973) 270-6503.

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School Anti-Bullying Checklist, Stuart Green, v4, 3-15, rev. 6-18/NJ Coalition

Climate Assessment Process

- Assessment process obtains information from multiple stakeholders eg, (students, parents, visitors, advocacy groups, etc.)
- Assessment using multiple means (surveys, focus groups, interviews, data reporting, etc.)
- Assessment data is analyzed by school team and leaders
- Assessment data is shared with all stakeholder groups

Adult Mentorship

- Every child can identify at least one adult in the school whom the child knows has a special interest in them (cares), and has knowledge of the student as a person
- For isolated or 'disengaged' children, a specific staff member is designated to engage with the child, become aware of his or her situation, preferences and needs and actively work to increase the child's involvement with the school

Children Engaged

- Every child, especially those isolated, is engaged in school activities (adult mentorship)
- Staff identify children new to the school and have a plan to specifically engage them
- A child's isolation is always noticed and addressed (e.g., sitting alone at lunch, ongoing tensions between the child and other children, having few friends, not engaged in school social activities, sitting alone in classes with small group activity such as art)

Social/Emotional Character Development

- SE learning and CD activities are provided for all students
- Collaborative learning and teamwork are the predominant teaching modes

Staff Relations

- Positive relations between staff

Supportive Peers

- Every child has peers who are supportive; if friendships are not 'naturally' present, staff uses various means to create peer support
- Peers are 'negatively' present ('upstanders') when children are bullied
- Peers actively engage isolated children
- Peer leaders model positive attitudes and behavior
- Peer mentorship programs for all children but especially those with special needs

Minority Support

- All minorities in the school have staff mentorship, support, advocacy
- Staff activity aggressively increases when staff composition does not reflect the community
- Diverse clubs and activities exist (e.g., for lgbtq+ children, gay-straight alliance or similar)

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(page 2, School Anti-Bullying Checklist, S. Green, v4, 3-15, rev. 6-18/NJ Coalition)
 (Minority Support, continued)

- Positive diverse educational activities are in place for all children (e.g., if Muslim children are a minority, there is education about Islam)
- School administrators and staff are actively involved in minority-focused community organizations and activities
- Staff helps create and sustain parent/family support programs for minority populations
- Staff identifies and actively addresses gaps in school-community involvement, which provides the infrastructure for student service, and for minority advocacy
- The school consults with appropriate professionals if targeted children have special needs, or with community-based resources if a bias-pattern is observed
- Children with neuroatypical conditions (mild autism ('Aspergers'), ADHD, Tourette Syndrome or other easily misunderstood conditions) are *not* referred to law enforcement for 'provocative' statements/behavior; the IEP is reviewed when behavioral problems occur
- Reports to parents take into consideration the possibility that parents may be informed of a child's gender identify or sexual orientation, which may place the child at risk
- When patterns of bias-based bullying are identified, parents are informed of legal and supportive options (eg, SPAN, NJ Division on Civil Rights, GSE, CAIR, etc.)

Parent Engagement and Support

- Every parent or guardian has at least one staff member who especially knows them
- and whom the parent knows has a special interest in them (cares)
- A parent coordinator makes active, ongoing efforts to maximize parent involvement and connectedness
- Most parents attend PTC and similar meetings
- Parent support groups (especially for minorities, including for special needs) exist, are created as/if needed, are robust, or growth efforts are actively underway
- *Again*, when patterns of bias-based bullying are identified, parents are informed of legal and supportive options (eg, SPAN, NJ Division on Civil Rights, GSE, CAIR, etc.)

Parent Communication

- The school actively and fully communicates with parents when bullying occurs, not primarily or only by form letters
- The school *doesn't* use confidentiality as an excuse to limit communication with parents
- The school initiates contacts so that parents do not hear about problems first from their child or others (e.g., friends, other parents)
- Regular, scheduled, structured appointments with the parents of bullied children, and/or with the child, to address continuing issues
- *Again*, when patterns of bias-based bullying are identified, parents are informed of legal and supportive options (eg, SPAN, NJ Division on Civil Rights, GSE, CAIR, etc.)

(continued next page)

(page 3, School Anti-Bullying Checklist, S. Green, v4, 3-15, rev. 6-18/NJ Coalition)

Staff Responds to Mean Behavior

- Staff always respond to mean behavior (response can be creative or just observation)
- When bullying occurs, there is an urgent, appropriate adult response
- Staff do not wait to react to incidents but proactively identify incidents and patterns, anticipate problems, systematically identify vulnerabilities, assume patterns may exist when incidents are noted, especially those targeting minority children
- Teachers and administrators increase support and protection for the targeted child

School Climate (or Safety) Team

- A school safety (or climate) team focuses on bullying and other violence issues
- The team meets at least bi-monthly, more often as/if needed, and is expected to repeatedly make changes, improvements, impact
- The anti-bullying specialist (per the ABR) leads the school safety team and has ongoing responsibilities for school culture and climate beyond investigating incidents
- There is a written description of ABS duties, of which the ABS is aware
- The ABS takes primary responsibility for convening processes to assess and address the continuing experience of the bullied child and his family in the school

When There Are Programs Introduced or in Place

- The school ensures adequate training and 'buy-in'
- The school community (primarily teachers) understands and supports the program
- The school follows program guidelines, using/distributing materials, carrying out all steps, but content is also adjusted to reflect specific setting (e.g., types of bullying prevalent)
- The school integrates the anti-bullying program with other programs in use ("unjumbled schoolhouse")
- The school actively assesses program impact, collects data about program effects

Teacher Behavior

- Teachers notice most bullying
- Negative teacher behavior is identified as a problem, with remedial approaches in place
- The school ensures that teachers and other school staff (such as school nurses, coaches, aides) adequately understand and address bullying through training and support

Engage the School Nurse (and other allied professionals)

- The school assumes children who visit the school nurse multiple times, especially for diffuse complaints (headache, stomach ache), or for incidents involving being hit, even accidentally, by other children, may be targeted children
- The school ensures that school nurses are informed of the child's social/emotional status, including history of incidents

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(page 4, School Anti-Bullying Checklist, S. Green, v4, 3-15, rev. 6-18/NJ Coalition)

Disciplinary Practices

- Suspension and expulsion rarely used, no Zero Tolerance approaches
- Mental health consultation program in school and the home to address behavioral issues in young children
- Consequences invariably, fairly applied – reasonable and appropriate to the situation and the child’s development/capacity
- Consequences change/escalate for repeated behaviors, responses to each incident varies
- Consequences always accompanied by facilitated reflection, usually by restorative behavior.
- Rubrics describe to the school community (children as well as parents) the school's response when incidents occur and when patterns of bullying behavior are identified
- The school response is not primarily driven by child/parent preferences and demands

Children Who Bully

- Children who bully invariably receive consequences
- Consequences are reasonable and appropriate to the behavior and the child’s development
- Children who both bully and are bullied (repeatedly) get additional individual attention
- Children who bully receive help to reflect and engage in restorative acts
- Suspensions are uncommon, short and children actively engaged if away from school

Increased Supervision When Bullying Occurs

- Staff increase observation, especially of high-risk areas
- Once incidents have occurred, staff observation/monitoring is proactive
- There is both direct observation and obtaining of collateral information

Reporting

- Children (or parents) are not required to write a report about a bullying incident
- Incidents and patterns reported to the district ABC, Board of Education, NJ DOE, as required

Bullied Children

- Children are not asked to ignore or minimize incidents, to be less sensitive or reactive, to stay away from the bullying child or to befriend those who hurt them
- Targeted children are not brought together in interventions
- Targeted children and children who bully are not brought together to discuss the aggression
- Targeted children are not expected to discuss their victimization experience in front of the aggressor, or publicly (in front of an authority figure or other children)

Correct Understanding of Bullying

- Understood that bullying primarily arises in institutional settings that have inadequate cultures and climates, not because of bad families, communities or children
- Understood that the usual direction of causality is from school out to home and community

(continued next page)

(page 5, School Anti-Bullying Checklist, S. Green, v4, 3-15, rev. 6-18/NJ Coalition)

School Seeks History and Context

- The school seeks to identify other children who have been hurt (by the same child), and to identify and address patterns of harm by groups of children
- The school seeks information about a child's social and emotional experiences and status

Overreliance on Counseling

- The school recognizes that counseling (the bullied child or the child who hurts others) is not a sufficient response
- When counseling is offered to the targeted child, it should be made clear to the child and family that the counseling is supportive because of what the child has experienced, not because the school feels the child needs to change
- Children should be aware that counseling is provided to children who hurt other children, to help them behave differently

Change of School Setting

- The school offers parents the option of transfer of bullied children as a "last resort" in order to protect children from further harm, and facilitates the arrangement
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SEL4NJ Supporting Organizations – January 2019

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| Advocates for Children of New Jersey (ACNJ) | NJ Association of Supervisors and Administrators |
| Arts Ed NJ | NJ Association Student Assistant Professionals |
| ASAH (Private Special Ed Schools) | NJ Center for Tourette Syndrome & Associated Disorders |
| ASCD NJ | NJ Chapter American Academy of Pediatrics |
| Atlantic Healthy Schools | NJ Coalition for Bullying Awareness and Prevention |
| Bergen Promise | NJ Coalition for Inclusive Education |
| Catholic Charities | NJ Commission on Holocaust Education |
| Center for Supportive Schools | NJ Community Schools |
| College of Saint Elizabeth | NJ Council for Exceptional Children |
| Education Law Center | NJ Department of Agriculture |
| Empowerment Institute | NJ Department of Education |
| Fountain Woods Elementary School | NJ Department of Health |
| Garden State Coalition of Schools | NJ Department of Health & Human Services |
| Garden State Equality | NJ Division on Civil Rights |
| Healthy Adolescent Partnership | NJ Joint Committee on the Public Schools |
| Healthy Schools Now | NJ Junior Achievement |
| Junior Achievement of New Jersey | NJ Parents Caucus |
| Kidsbridge Children's Museum | NJ Partnership for Healthy Kids |
| Living YES/Asbury Park School District | NJ Principals and Supervisors Association |
| Morris County Council for Young Children | NJ School Age Child Care |
| National School Climate Center | NJ School Board Association |
| New Jersey Law & Education Empowerment Project | NJ State School Nurse Association |
| New Jersey State School Nurse Association | NJ Sustainability for Schools |
| New York Jets | NJASECD |
| Newark Chess Club | NJEA |
| NJ ACLU | NJISAA |
| NJ AMHAA | NJPSA |
| NJ Association of School Social Workers | NJPTA |
| NJ Association of School Business Officials | NORWESCAP INC |
| NJ Association for Colleges for Teacher Education | NVRHSD Region III |
| NJ Association of School Administrators | Rider University |
| NJ Association of School Psychologists | Rutgers University |



Supporting Organizations Cont...

Rutgers-School Climate Transformation Project
Save our Schools
School Culture and Climate Initiative
SEL4NJ
SEL4US
Senate Education Committee
SPAN
Special Olympics
Stockton University
The Graduate Center CUNY
The Newark Trust for Education
The Whole Child Center
Westbridge Academy
Yoga Peace Kula

Testimony in Regard to GLSEN Climate Survey New Jersey State Snapshot

My name is Gordon Sauer and I am the professional development coordinator for GLSEN Central New Jersey. I also have 40 years of teaching experience in New Jersey Public Schools.

As a gay man, I am thrilled by and honored to be a part of the changes I have seen in our schools since I began my career. To come into my school and see bulletin boards with posters about the GSA and LGBT events and to have the opportunity to present to and support LGBTQ students is something I couldn't imagine 40 years ago.

That said, the statistics provided in the most recent New Jersey State Snapshot on School Climate are of concern to me. These statistics show a 9% increase since the previous survey in the number of students who experienced at least one form of anti-LGBTQ discrimination. They also show decreases in availability of LGBTQ-related resources in 4 out of 5 areas.

There are many possible reasons for this, but I still find it disturbing, especially given the LGBT non-discrimination and the anti-bullying laws we have in NJ. These statistics make me ask the question, "What should we be doing to ensure these laws are adequate and that they are adequately enforced?"

One area that I feel needs to be addressed is an unintended consequence of the NJ Anti-Bullying Law. For more information about this, I've included a copy of an article by Paula Rodriguez Rust of Spectrum Diversity (www.spectrumdiversity.org).

Recently, I read testimony to this committee on behalf of the inclusive curriculum bill which was signed by the governor last week. As a gay man and an educator, I cannot thank you enough for your support in passing this legislation.

In that spirit, I ask you to consider and support what needs to be done to ensure that all New Jersey schools are safe for all students. You've done it in the past. Please continue to do so in the future.

Sincerely,
Gordon Sauer
Professional Development Coordinator
GLSEN Central NJ
Cell/Text: 973-342-2360



Contrary to the Spirit: Concern #2

The Impact of the ABR on Targets of Anti-LGBT Bullying: Increased Risk and Compromised Support for Some Students with Suggestions for Protecting LGBT Students & Targets of Anti-LGBT HIB

This paper is one in a series of papers examining a wide range of implementation issues with regard to the ABR

Summary: For some students, the current requirements of the Anti-Bullying Act, commonly known as the “Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights” or “ABR,” have made it more difficult for them to seek help when they are bullied or know someone who is bullied; the impact is particularly profound on students who are targets of anti-LGBT bullying, because they fear that the reporting and investigation process will “out” them to peers, school personnel, and their parents, and that their situation both in school and at home will be worsened rather than improved as a result. These students, therefore, have been placed at greater risk; whereas before the ABR, they could seek private support from a trusted adult in school, under the ABR many choose not to seek support at all. Specific and detailed school guidance will help schools implement the law in ways that promote, rather than endanger, the safety and welfare of these students.

Part I: Details of the Concern for the Safety of LGBT students, and others targeted by anti-LGBT bullying, under the ABR:

- **General Suppression of Reporting among Some Students Can be Addressed through Careful ABR Implementation.** Although the ABR requires school personnel to report cases of known or suspected HIB, in some cases the ABR has had the counterproductive effect of causing some students to be less willing to report incidents to school personnel. In the past, some students would tell adults about bullying incidents because they were looking for support or quiet resolutions. Under the ABR, they know that if they tell, the incident will become a matter of record involving an investigation, notifications, and possible discipline, so they hesitate to seek support or help if they do not want to “get someone in trouble,” “make a big deal out of” a minor incident, want to keep the matter quiet, or fear retaliation. The unintended negative consequence is that incidents go un-reported that would otherwise have been brought to the attention of at least one adult, thus pre-empting the provisions of the ABR that are designed to protect students. In large part, the general suppression of student reporting can be avoided through careful implementation of ABR requirements.¹
- **However, ABR reporting and notification requirements have had a unique, additional, and particularly damaging, impact on one particular group of students—LGBT students and others who are targets of anti-LGBT bullying.** Students who experience anti-LGBT bullying have a unique fear, i.e., that the process of reporting and investigating incidents of anti-LGBT bullying will “out” them, not only to their peers and school personnel, but also to their parents. This fear exists whether or not the victimized student is actually LGBT; if s/he is LGBT, then the fear is that peers, school personnel and their parents will find out that they are LGBT, and if they are not LGBT, then the fear is that the rumor that they are LGBT will spread throughout the school and to their parents. The fear is that prejudices among their peers and other adults will make their environment more, not less, hostile than it was before the incidents were reported.
- **Many LGBT and Questioning students are not “out” to their parents, and this is often for reasons of psychological, emotional, and physical safety.** Students who are LGBT might not be out to their parents for a number of reasons, including lack of psychological readiness, and fear of emotional or physical violence from parents who would not be accepting of this information. Rates of homelessness, suicidality, and drug use are higher among LGBT youth than non-LGBT youth, and these differences are highly correlated with parental rejection; the decision by a youth to withhold this information from a parent is a critical and personal decision involving safety concerns.

by Dr. Paula C. Rodriguez Rust, www.SpectrumDiversity.org, DrPaula@SpectrumDiversity.org

Originally written March 21, 2013; Revised, April, 2014

Distribution permitted, and comments welcome

Concern #2 – Page 1

BRX

- **Parental notification poses difficulties and possible dangers for students targeted by anti-LGBT bullying, thereby reducing rather than enhancing student safety.** Under the ABR, a school must notify the parents of a student involved in a suspected incident of HIB. Targets of anti-LGBT bullying fear that this notice will either inform their parents of the distinguishing characteristic (being LGBT, or perceived to be LGBT) that qualifies their experience as an incident of HIB or, if the notice does not contain this information, they fear that questions from their parents will force them to reveal this information. Therefore, for LGBT students who are not already out to their parents, parental notification of an HIB incident based on perceived or actual LGBT status carries the high probability that the student will be forced to choose between lying to their parents about the details of the incident, or coming out to their parents before they are psychologically ready to do so or before it is safe for them to do so. In other words, the parental notification requirement of the ABR carries the strong potential that the impact will be to *endanger*, rather than *protect*, students who are targets of anti-LGBT bullying.
- **The ABR has compromised the “safety net” used in the past by many targets of anti-LGBT bullying.** In the past, students who were targets of anti-LGBT bullying often survived school by finding an adult in school—often a teacher or SAC—with whom they could talk privately for support. Under the ABR, many hesitate to seek private support for fear that the legal requirements on the adult (to report the incident) will cause their victimization at school to intensify, and out them to their parents before they or their parents are ready to handle this information.
- **The ABR has placed GSA advisors in a difficult position, and curtailed the potential for GSAs to serve as sources of support for LGBT students.** The purpose of GSAs (Gay-Straight Alliances) are multiple. One purpose is to provide an arena in which students can support each other in a school environment that might or might not be hostile to them. A GSA advisor who is present during GSA meetings might be required to report some of the incidents that students mention in an effort to seek support and ideas from each other; knowing that the adult is required to report such things can severely inhibit student discussion during GSA meetings, and limit students’ ability to benefit from membership in the GSA, compromising one of the few sources of support that LGBT students have in a high school environment.
- **General procedures for protecting targets of HIB might be inadequate; the specific impact on LGBT students must be considered in the development of ABR implementations. For example, standard HIB reporting forms might compromise LGBT student safety because of parental rights of access under FERPA.** School personnel are becoming increasingly educated about issues of sexual orientation and gender identity diversity, and in many schools in New Jersey, the general climate among school personnel with regard to LGBT students is very positive. However, even in these schools, unless the specific impact of HIB procedures on LGBT students is considered, general procedures put into place to protect students who are HIB targets might not succeed in protecting LGBT students. For example, standard HIB-reporting forms collect information that can be used to assess whether or not the incident meets the criteria for legal HIB; in the case of anti-LGBT bullying, the form would therefore document the fact that the distinguishing characteristic was perceived or actual sexual orientation. Under FERPA, a parent is entitled to access to student records pertaining to their own child; this might include HIB documents, in which information about other students, but not about their own child, would be redacted. If a student is targeted for racial or religious reasons, informing a parent about the motivation for the harassment does not reveal confidential information that the parent does not already have—e.g., the parent is typically already aware of their child’s racial, religious, or ethnic identities; unlike LGBT identity, these identities do not usually involve a “coming out” process. Unless school personnel have considered the specific impact of their reporting, documentation, and notification procedures on students who are targets of anti-LGBT bullying, these procedures might not provide the safeguards needed by these students.
- **Even in schools in which school personnel are well educated about LGBT issues, and procedures have been developed to safeguard students who are targets of anti-HIB bullying, students will still fear that reporting anti-LGBT bullying will out them to their parents, and make them less, rather than more, safe in the school environment, unless they *know* how school personnel plan to protect them if they report.** Therefore, it is important that schools not only develop procedures to protect targets of anti-LGBT bullying, but that they also inform students of the safeguards they have put into place, and of their sensitivity to the concerns of students regarding the protection of information about

those who are targets of anti-LGBT bullying. This reassurance must be provided to all students, not only those who are already known to the school as targets of anti-LGBT bullying, because it must reach those students who have kept their victimization a secret from school personnel.

Part II: Suggestions for Protecting Students Targeted by Anti-LGBT Bullying under The ABR

Dr. Rodríguez Rust is not an attorney, and these suggestions do not constitute legal advice. Consult an attorney to ensure that efforts to protect students are also compliant with state and federal laws.

- Professional development training for all school personnel on LGBTQI issues, so that school personnel understand the issues, are comfortable with and responsive to the concerns of LGBTQI students, recognize the sensitive nature of information about a student's actual or perceived LGBTQI status, and able to recognize and respond appropriately to anti-LGBT HIB.
- The student who was the target of an incident of possible HIB involving actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression, should have an opportunity to meet with the ABS so that the ABS can explain to the student exactly what the process of reporting and investigating the incident will entail, including the procedures that will be used to safeguard information about the motivating characteristic involved in the incident. This meeting should take place prior to any other interviews that might be conducted as part of the HIB investigation into the incident.
- Notification letters to parents should not disclose the distinguishing characteristic upon which an incident of possible or affirmed HIB was based.
- Prior to parental notification, the student should be told exactly when their parents will be notified, and exactly what information will be given to their parents. For example, any letter that will be sent home to the parents should be shown to the student first, so that the student will know exactly what information is to be shared with the parents and can prepare for the parents' responses to that information.
- The student should meet with a qualified counselor to discuss the possible responses their parents might have upon notification, so that the student can prepare to handle each possible response. For example, if the parental notification letter does not name the distinguishing characteristic, the parents might ask "why did they pick on you?" or "what did they say to you?" and the student needs to plan a response to this question. The student might have to choose between lying to their parents in order to remain physically safe, vs. revealing their sexual orientation or gender identity to their parents at the risk of not only their physical safety, but also their psychological well-being if they were not ready to share that information with their parents. The student needs guidance to think through the range of possible responses a parent might have if the student's sexual orientation or gender identity is revealed to or surmised by the parents, including acceptance, fear, denial, religious condemnation, shaming, and physical violence. The student might need to think about whether or not there is a safe home s/he can go to, at least temporarily, if their parents react violently.
- Information about a student's perceived or actual sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression should be considered confidential information belonging to the student, to the extent allowed by law. No assumption should be made that a parent is already aware of this information, and this information should not be disclosed to the parent without the consent of the student or, if disclosure is legally unavoidable, without the prior knowledge and preparation of the student.
- When an investigation is conducted into an incident of anti-LGBT HIB, information about a student's actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity should not be shared with students and staff who are interviewed as part of the investigation.
- To avoid the active implication that a student who is victimized by anti-LGBT HIB is *actually* LGBT, in documents requiring the specification of the motivating characteristic, the distinguishing characteristic can be described as "actual or perceived," or as simply "perceived," even in cases where it is known that the student's LGBT status is *actual*. In cases in which the targeted student is actually LGBT, it is nevertheless the offender's *perception* of the target's LGBT status that is the motivation for the HIB, so in all cases, the descriptor "perceived" would be accurate.
- Guidance should be developed to help schools protect students when parents request copies of HIB documents pertaining to their child. Under FERPA, a parent might be entitled to access to HIB reporting

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Concern #2 – Page 3

and investigation documents, in which information about other students, but not about their own child, would be redacted. Guidance is needed to help schools protect students in situations in which the release of these documents to a student's parent would reveal to the parent the nature of the distinguishing characteristic (i.e., perceived or actual LGBT status) for which their child was targeted.

- The State of Massachusetts has a law similar to New Jersey's ABR, which requires parental notification when an instance of bullying occurs. In January 2011, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education issued the document *Guidance on Notifying Parents when a Student Has Been Bullied Based on Sexual Orientation or Gender Identity/Expression*. This guidance document cites concerns similar to those described above, and recommends:ⁱⁱ
 - Designation of a staff person "proficient" in LGBT issues
 - "Design an appropriate parental notification process for these situations"
 - "The notification process should include development of a notification plan in consultation with the student, guidance staff, and the above-mentioned designated person. . . . The plan should include a discussion of the content and process for notifying the student's parents, informed by an assessment of the student's safety, along with relevant research and resources that may be offered to support the student and his or her family. As much as possible, if a parent is unaware of an LGBT student's sexual orientation or gender identity/expression, the student should be supported in his or her decision to disclose his or her sexual orientation or gender identity/expression to family members on his or her own terms. . . . As in any case when particularly sensitive information is shared, the Department strongly recommends that school officials discuss details of the bullying incident with parents in person. School officials should use their discretion in discussing the incident and avoid sharing information that might endanger the mental or physical health and safety of the student. Where the student has not disclosed his or her sexual orientation or gender identity/expression to his or her parents and the student believes he or she may be at risk if it is disclosed, to the extent possible, discussion should focus on facts regarding the student's involvement as a target or aggressor and on safety planning, not on information that reveals the actual or perceived gender identity or sexual orientation of the student."
 - "Sexual orientation and homophobic bullying can have distinct cultural meanings for different racial/ethnic/immigrant groups. For example, in some cultures, the concept of identifying as LGBT or experiencing homophobic victimization may be difficult to translate or describe. Attitudes toward sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression are heavily influenced by cultural and social norms. In situations involving these issues, it is even more important that the notification process be conducted with forethought and discretion." "School officials should not ask students to serve in the role of interpreter with their parents or in situations involving family members such as siblings and cousins. Schools and districts should identify school employees and independent interpreters as needed, who may be trained in all aspects of this guidance and confidentiality requirements, to provide this service."

ⁱ Implementation designed to reduce hesitance on the part of students to report HIB incidents includes: strategies for maintaining the anonymity of student reporters; utilizing remedial responses when appropriate and avoiding the excessive use of discipline; handling reporting/investigation/response procedures as a process of guidance and learning rather than a punitive process; appropriate coordination of code of conduct vs. HIB consequences (see "Contrary to the Spirit" Concern #5); active rather than passive follow-up; communication procedures that involve notification of all school personnel with supervisory responsibilities over the students involved in a reported incident to increase vigilance and reduce repetition and retaliation; etc.

ⁱⁱ The guidance issued on this point by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education can be found at: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/bullying/PNGuidance.html>



ADDITIONAL APPENDIX MATERIALS
SUBMITTED TO THE
JOINT COMMITTEE ON THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

for the

February 5, 2019 Meeting

Submitted by Stuart Green, Associate Director, Overlook Family Medicine Residency Program, Overlook Medical Center; and Leadership Team Member SEL4NJ; and Founder and Director, New Jersey Coalition for Bullying Awareness and Prevention:

Stuart Green, "Educators' minds, not N.J.'s bullying law, need to change," New Jersey Opinion, *The Star-Ledger*, April 5, 2016.