



# Reducing Chronic Absence: What Will It Take?

*An overview of why it matters and key ingredients for improving student attendance*

**Director: Hedy Chang**

# Unpacking Attendance Terms

## Average Daily Attendance

- The % of enrolled students who attend school each day. It is used in some states for allocating funding.

## Truancy

- Typically refers only to unexcused absences and is defined by each state under No Child Left Behind. It signals the potential need for legal intervention under state compulsory education laws.

## Chronic Absence

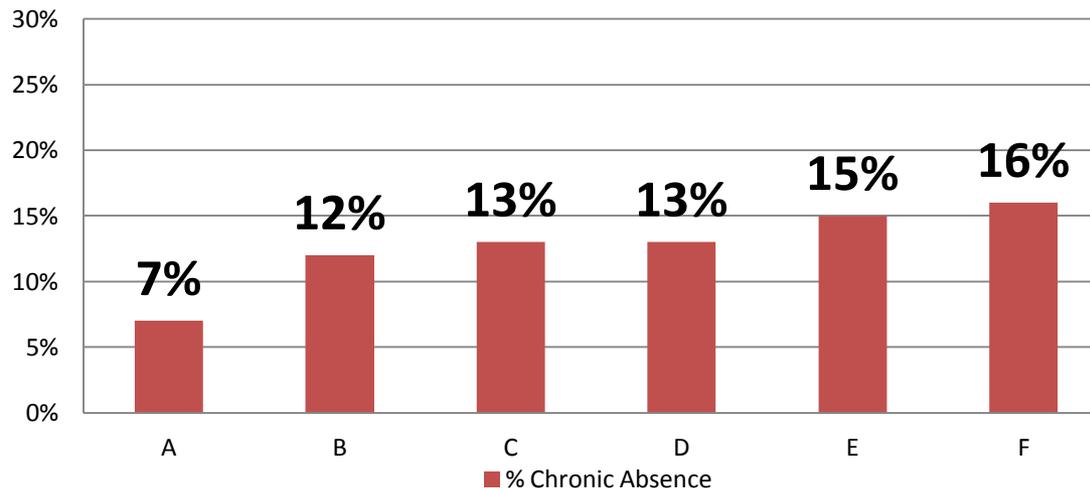
- Missing 10% or more of school for any reason – excuse, unexcused, etc. It is an indication that a student is academically at risk due to missing too much school starting in Kindergarten.



# Moving into Action Requires Knowing if Chronic Absence is a Problem

*Most Schools Only Track Average Daily Attendance and Truancy.  
Both Can Mask Chronic Absence.*

**Chronic Absence For 6 Elementary Schools in  
Oakland, CA with @ 95% ADA in 2012**

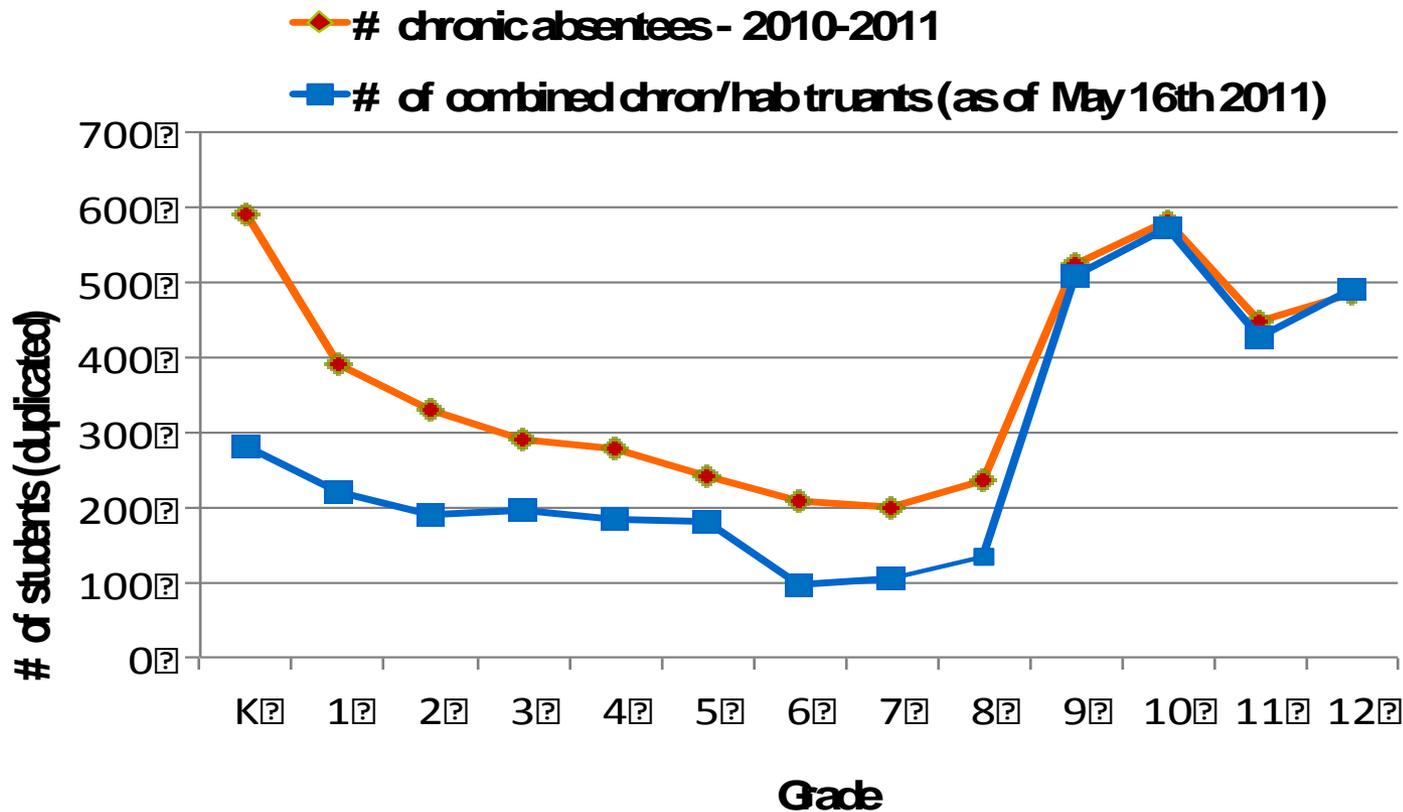


**98% ADA = little chronic absence**  
**95% ADA = don't know**  
**93% ADA = significant chronic absence**



# Chronic Absence Versus Truancy

## San Francisco Unified School District

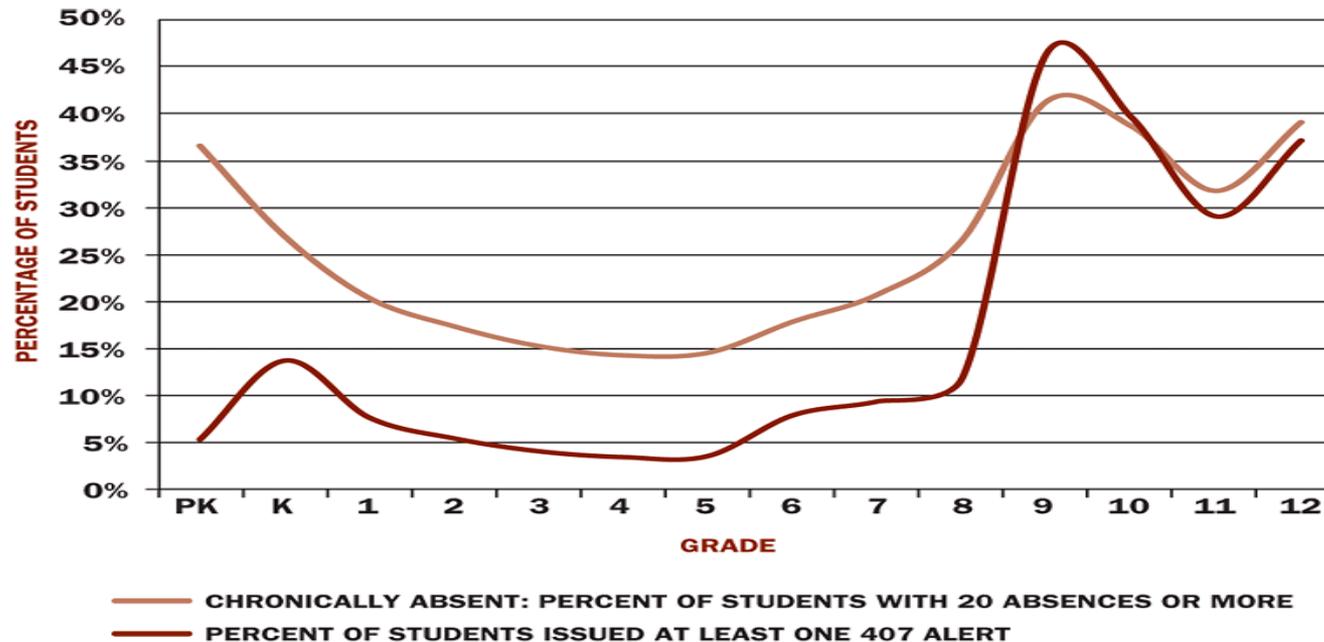


*(Note: SFUSD identified chronic truants as 10 unexcused absences)*



# Sporadic – Not Just Consecutive – Absences Matter

## New York City Schools (2008)



- A 407 alert is issued when a student misses 10 consecutive days or 20 days over a 40 day period. It misses more sporadic absence.
- 1 out of 5 elementary school children were chronically absent.

Source: Nauer K et al, *Strengthening Schools by Strengthening Families*, Center for New York City Affairs New School, Oct 2008



# Chronic Absence – A Hidden National Crisis

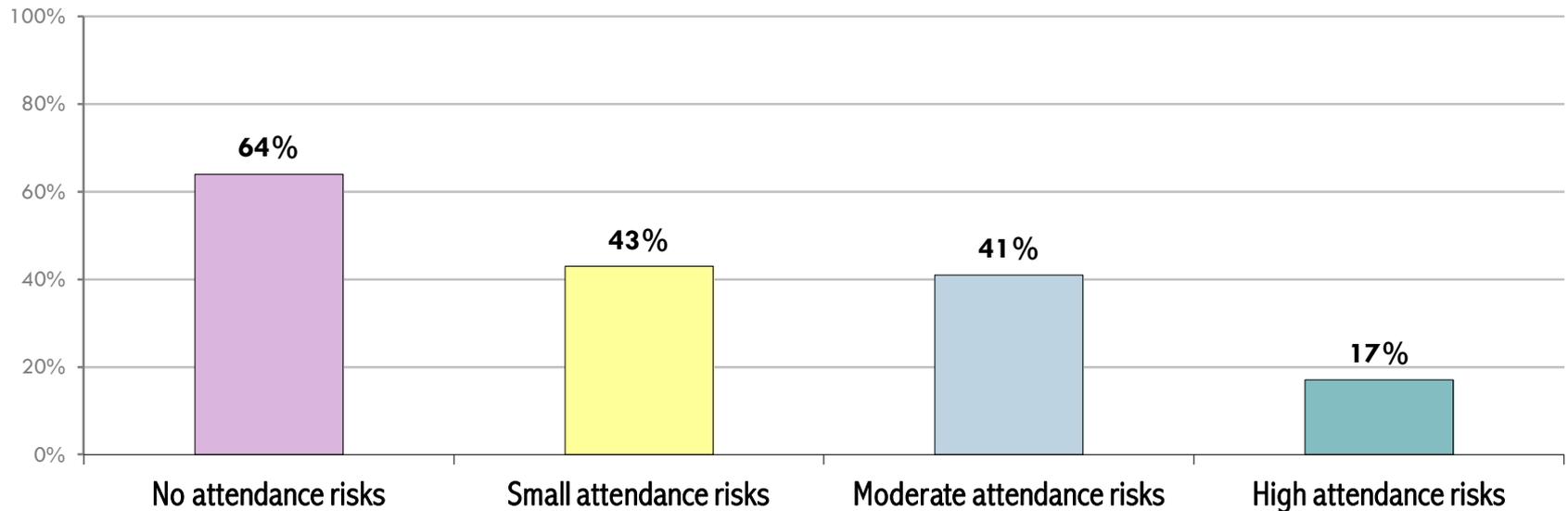
- ❑ Nationwide, as many as 10-15% of students (7.5 million) miss nearly a month of school every year. That's 135 million days of lost time in the classroom.
- ❑ In some cities, as many as one in four students are missing that much school.
- ❑ Chronic absenteeism is a red alert that students are headed for academic trouble and eventually for dropping out of high school.
- ❑ Poor attendance isn't just a problem in high school. It can start as early as kindergarten and pre-kindergarten.





# Students Chronically Absent in Kindergarten and 1<sup>st</sup> Grade are Much Less Likely to Read Proficiently in 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade

Percent Students Scoring Proficient or Advanced on 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade ELA Based on Attendance in Kindergarten and in 1<sup>st</sup> Grade



No risk	Missed less than 5% of school in K & 1 <sup>st</sup>
Small risk	Missed 5-9% of days in both K & 1 <sup>st</sup>
Moderate risk	Missed 5-9% of days in 1 year & 10% in 1 year
High risk	Missed 10% or more in K & 1 <sup>st</sup>

Source: Applied Survey Research & Attendance Works (April 2011)



# Chronic Absence in PreK + K = Significantly Worse Outcomes

For children chronically absent in PreK & K, the Baltimore Education Research Consortium found:

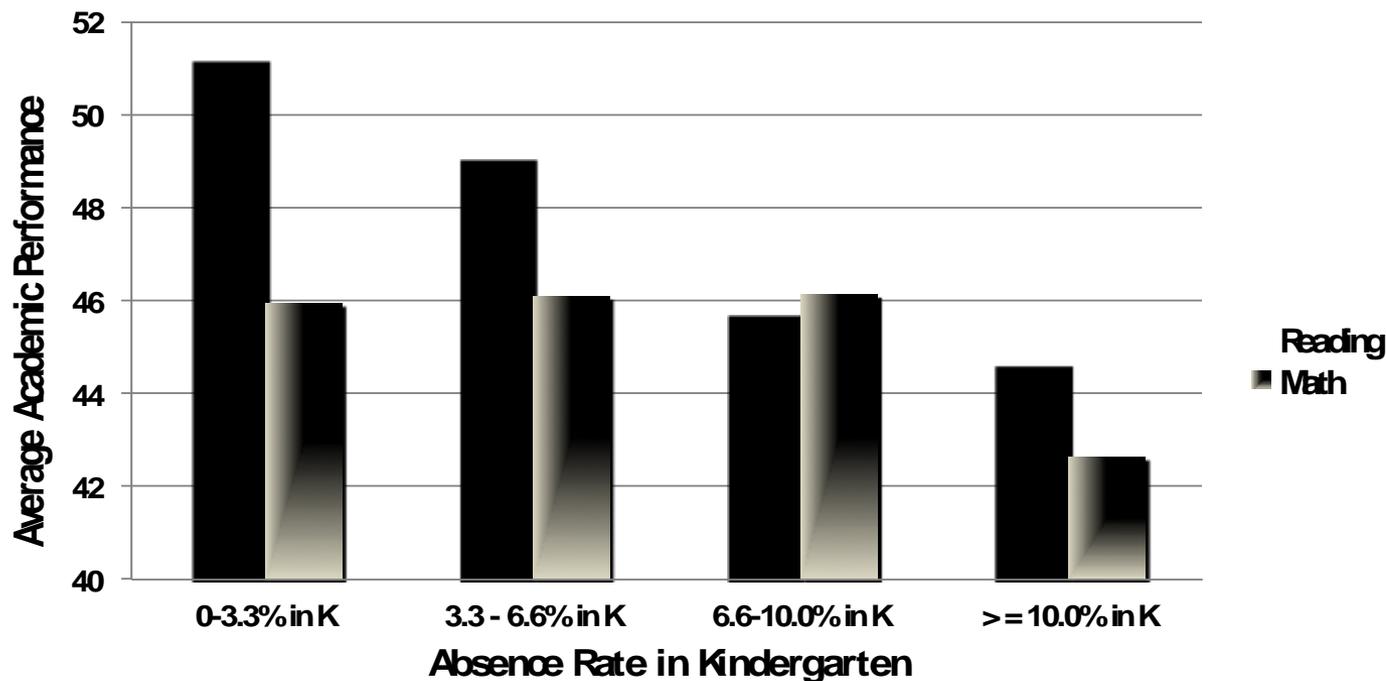
- ✓ Greater likelihood of continued poor attendance. 50% were chronically absent again in G1, 45% in G2.
- ✓ Lower outcomes in G1, G2 in reading and math, and math in G3
- ✓ More often retained (26% compared with 9% of students with no chronic absence)
- ✓ More likely to be identified as needing special education

By contrast, children who participated in Head Start had better attendance and higher 3<sup>rd</sup> grade test scores.



# The Long-Term Impact of Chronic Kindergarten Absence is Most Troubling for Poor Children

5<sup>th</sup> Grade Math and Reading Performance By K Attendance for Children Living In Poverty. Academic performance was lower even if attendance had improved in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade.



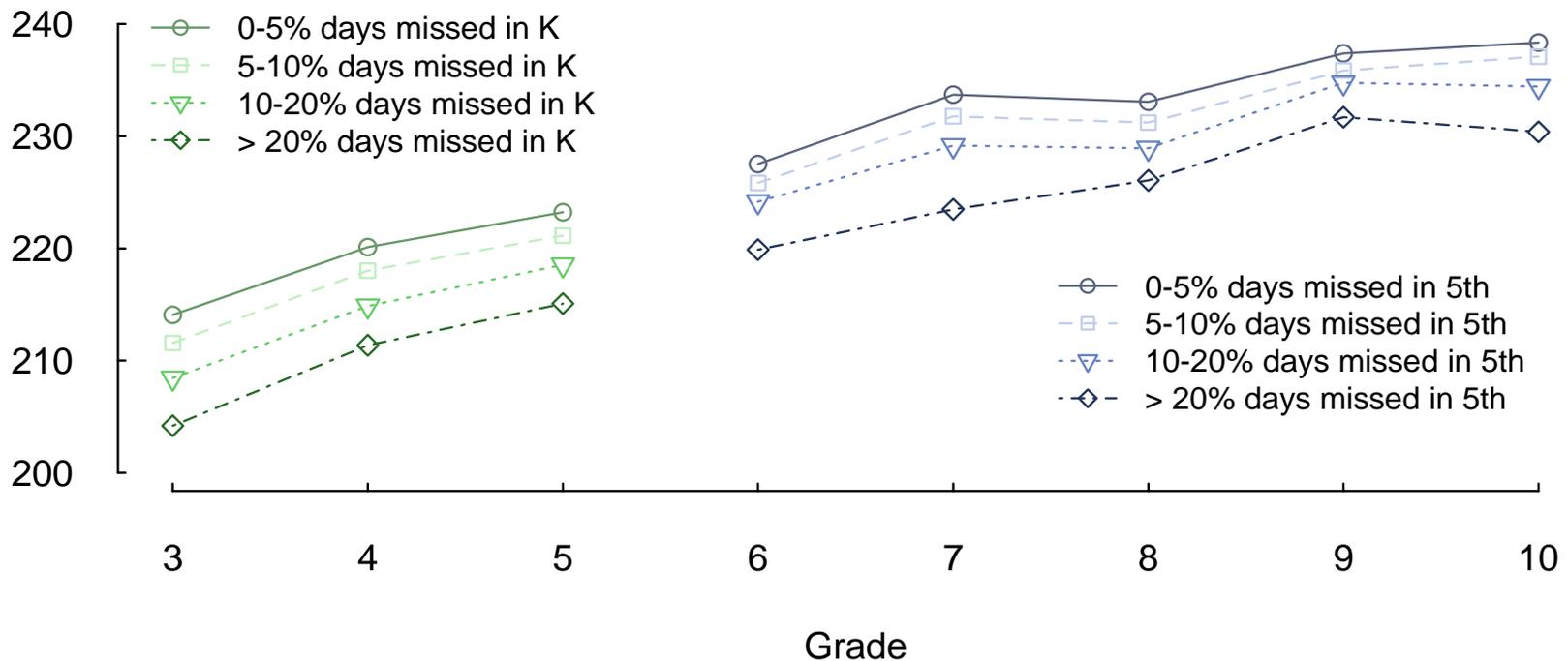
Source: ECLS-K data analyzed by National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP)

Note: Average academic performance reflects results of direct cognitive assessments conducted for ECLS-K.



# There Is a Clear and Consistent Relationship Between Early Attendance and Later Achievement

Average reading RIT scores for two cohorts of Oregon students, by absence rates in kindergarten and 5<sup>th</sup> grade



**(Note: 23% of students statewide in Oregon were chronically absent)**

Source: ECONorthwest analysis of Oregon Department of Education data, 2009-10.



# The Effects of Chronic Absence on Dropout Rates Are Cumulative

Proportion of Students Dropping Out by Number of Years the Student Was Chronically Absent from 8<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> Grades

Number of Years Chronically Absent	Percent Who Dropped Out
0	10.3%
1	36.4%
2	51.8%
3	58.7%
4	61.3%
5	Not Reported (<1% )

With every year of chronic absenteeism, a higher percentage of students dropped out of school



# Solutions Only Work if Grounded in Understanding of What Leads to Chronic Absence

## Discretion

Parents or students don't know attendance matters

School lacks a strong culture of attendance

## Aversion

Child is struggling academically

Lack of engaging instruction

Child is being bullied

## Barriers

Lack of access to health care

No safe path to school

Poor transportation

*Special thanks to Dr. Robert Balfanz, Everyone Graduates Center, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD for providing this framework.*



# Universal Strategies for School Communities

**Recognize Good and Improved Attendance**

**Engage Students and Parents**

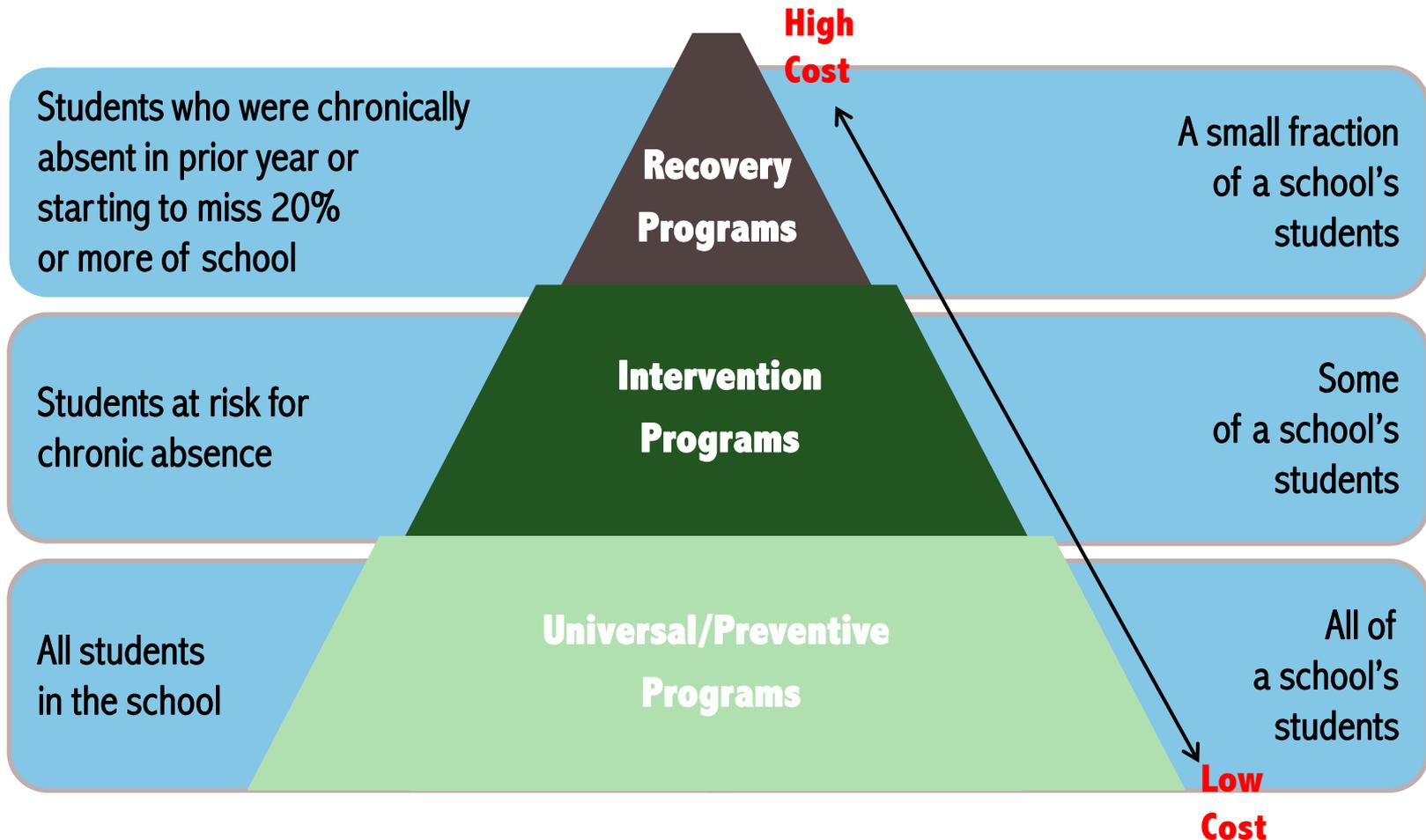
**Develop Programmatic Responses to Barriers**

**Provide Personalized Early Outreach**

**Monitor Attendance Data and Practice**



# Increased Attendance Involves a 3-Tiered Approach that Fits with Most Reform Efforts



# Variation Across Schools Helps Identify Good Practice and Need for Intervention

## Chronic Absence Levels Among Oakland Public Schools (2009-10)

	Elementary	Middle	High School
# Schools with 0%-5% Chronic Absence	9	0	0
# Schools with 5.1%-10% Chronic Absence	17	4	1
# Schools with 10.1%-20% Chronic Absence	25	8	6
# Schools with >20.1% Chronic Absence	9	4	9
Total No. Schools	60	16	16
Highest % of Chronic Absence	31.5%	32.8%	42.1%
Lowest % of Chronic Absence	0.3%	6.9%	7.9%
Median	12.7%	14.9%	21.0%
Mean	11.9%	15.6%	22.4%

# Examples of Successful Efforts



**Baltimore:** Fewer unnecessary suspensions, reduced middle school transitions, expanded monitoring of attendance data, and a citywide campaign have **helped cut middle school chronic absence in half.** Baltimore is now turning its attention to preschool and elementary school.



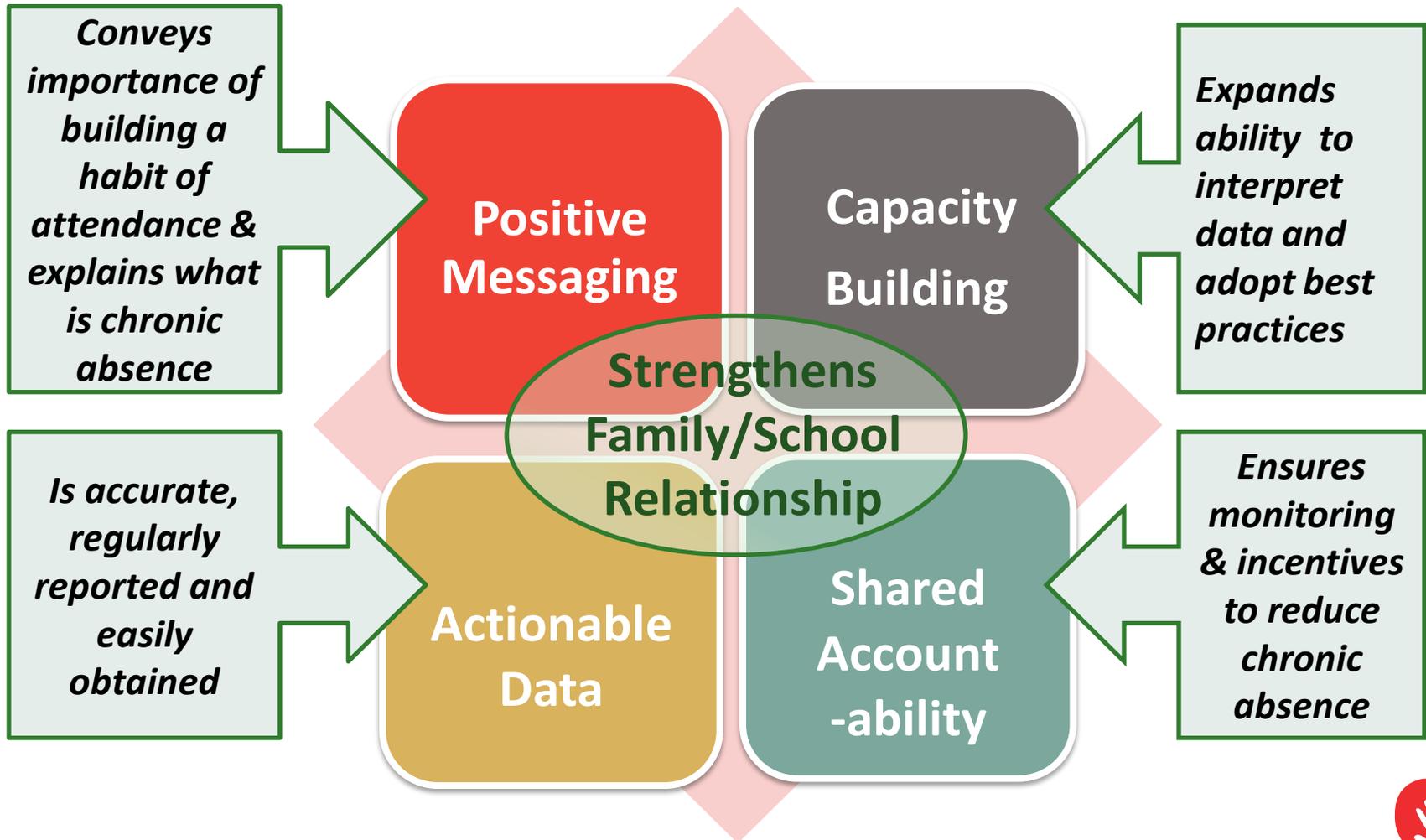
**New York City:** Schoolwide incentives, celebrity wakeup calls, data dashboards, and success mentors for at-risk students **have reduced chronic absence in pilot elementary, middle and high schools.** Students with success mentors gained **11,800 additional days of school.**

For additional examples:

<http://www.attendanceworks.org/what-works/>



# Ingredients for Success & Sustainability in a District



# The Superintendents Call to Action

**Own the  
Issue**

**Mobilize  
the  
Community**

**Drive With  
Data**

To sign-up for the Call to Action, or to learn more, please visit:  
[www.attendanceworks.org/superintendents-call-to-action](http://www.attendanceworks.org/superintendents-call-to-action)



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