

Baltimore City's Student Attendance Work Group

Graduating Great Kids Summit

Ensure Robust and Transparent
Data Systems to Improve Student
Success
March 3, 2010



The Baltimore City Student Attendance Work Group



The Work Group's charge is to investigate reasons for the high rates of student absence from school and identify policies, practices and public, private and community resources necessary to dramatically increase the number of children who attend school every day.

Student Attendance Work Group: A Collaborative Effort

Work Group Co-Chairs:

Jonathan Brice, Executive Director of Student Support -
Baltimore City Public Schools,
Sabrina Sutton, Special Assistant to the Mayor, and
Jane Sundius, Director of Education and Youth – OSI Baltimore

Key Partners:

Over 100 representatives of public schools, city agencies, state agencies, universities, foundations, public interest groups, program providers and student organizations.

Why Focus on Student Attendance?

- Children's attendance levels decline, on average, as students progress through school
- Chronic absence as early as kindergarten is predictive of future chronic absence and lower academic achievement without interventions
- Poor student attendance predicts high school dropout rates

What is Chronic Absence?

- Students who are chronically absent miss many days of school. Unlike truancy which refers only to unexcused absences, chronic absence includes both excused and unexcused absences.
- Chronic Absence can be broken into two levels:
 - *Chronic Absence*: missing 20 or more days, or one month of school. These students have attendance rates of between 79% and 88%.
 - *Severe Chronic Absence*: missing 40 or more days, or two months of school. These students have attendance rates of less than 79%.

Why are Measures of Attendance and Chronic Absence so Powerful?

Attendance Measures Are:

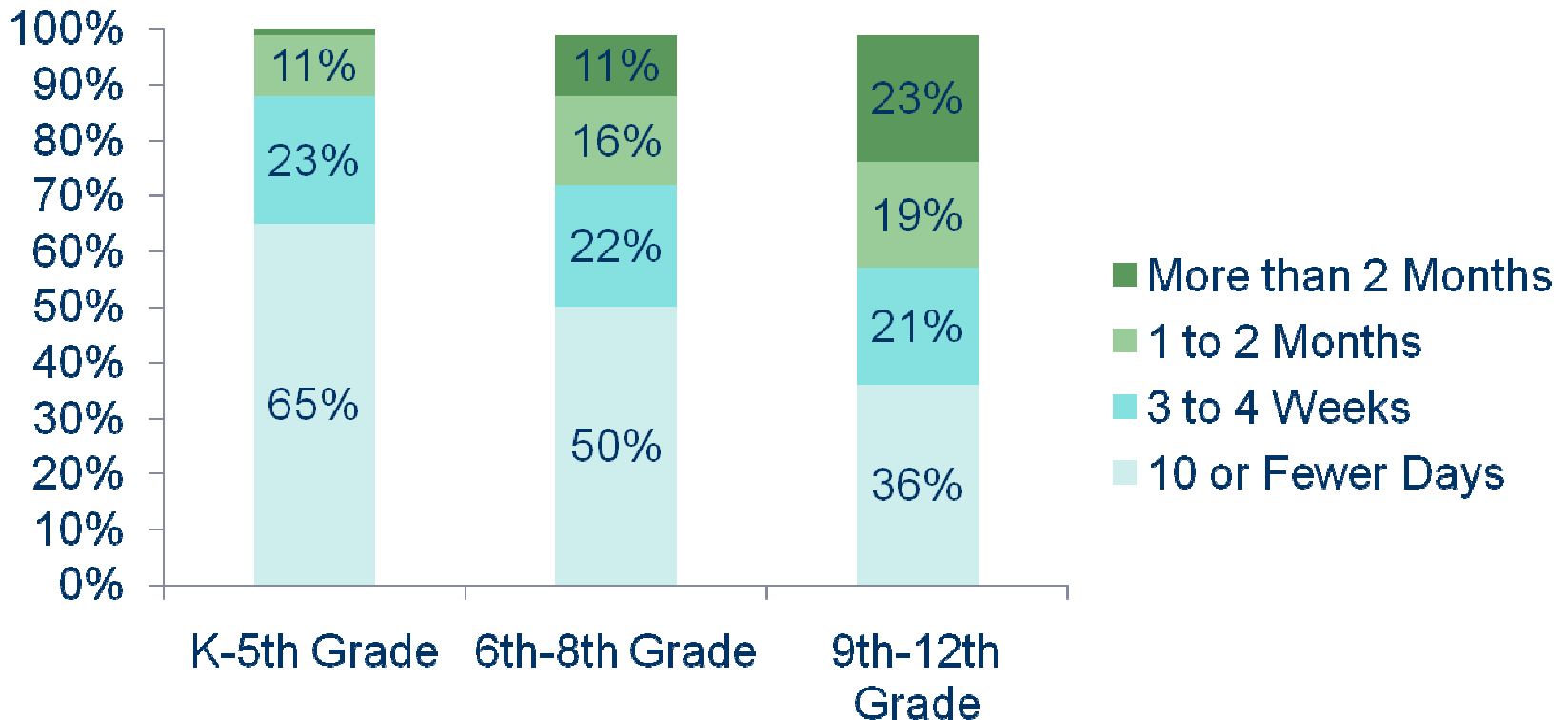
- **Up-to-date**, recorded daily, sometimes more than once per day
- **Easily Understood**, not complex or abstract
- **Universally Accepted as Important** – better attendance leads to higher achievement
- **Best Available Indicators of Student Persistence and Engagement**
- **Powerful Predictors** of later poor attendance, school failure and dropout
- **Early Warning Signs** of student challenges

Chronic Absence Rises as Children Progress Through School

- In Baltimore during the 2008-2009 school year, 11.3% of elementary school students, 18.6% of middle school students and 42% of high school students missed 20 or more school days – a full month of school.

Chronic Absence Rises as Children Progress Through School

School Days Missed by Grade Span: 2007-08

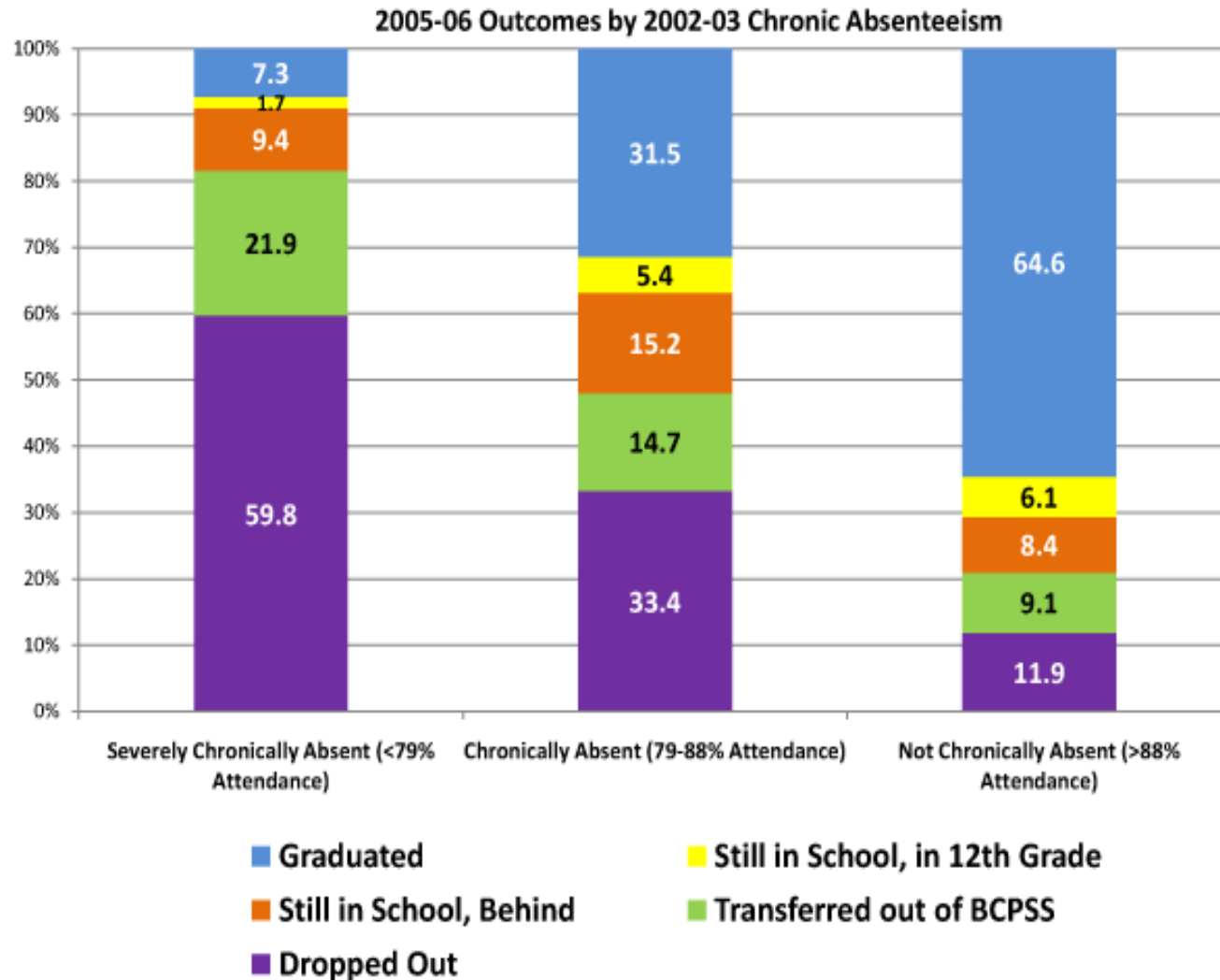


Chronic Absence in Sixth Grade is Linked to Very Low Graduation Rates for Baltimore Students

Students who were chronically absent in sixth grade had on-time graduation rates of only 18-26%; severely chronically absent 6th graders had on-time graduation rates of only 5-13%. [i]

[i] Balfanz, R., & Boccanfuso, C. (2007). Falling off the path to graduation: Early indicators research brief. Baltimore, MD: Center for Social Organization of Schools.

Students starting sixth grade in 1999-00 would be on-time 12th graders in 2005-06. Based on their rates of chronic absence in 2002-03 (on-time 9th grade), what were their final outcomes in 2005-06?



Student Attendance Work Group: District-level Initiatives

- Enhancing attendance page on Principals' Dashboard to provide better data on chronic absence and attendance
- Training for principals and network staff about attendance and chronic absence
- Increasing district, school and classroom incentives for improved attendance
- Involving students to develop attendance messaging
- Engaging partners to support a city-wide student attendance campaign

Student Attendance Work Group Recommendations: Research-based Priorities for School Attendance Efforts

- Focus on all measures of attendance especially chronic absence and high attenders rather than just the attendance rate.
- Make attendance the 1st priority in high chronic absence schools
- Increase the use of attendance incentives
- Measure, publicize and address excused and unexcused absences
- Pay special attention to students with poor attendance in prior years
- Focus on attendance in transition grades
- Start each school year with an intense, positive attendance campaign and follow-up on every absence in the first two weeks of school
- Talk with parents, students and teachers to learn more about what would engage students in school and improve attendance

Diagnosing School Attendance Best Practices

Start with all of a school's attendance measures.

- Attendance Rate
- Chronic Absence Rate
- Truancy Rate
- High Attender's Rate

Designing a Comprehensive Approach to Chronic Absence Using an Intervention Model

This level targets:

Students who are chronically absent & habitually truant

Students at-risk for poor attendance and/or with rising absence rates

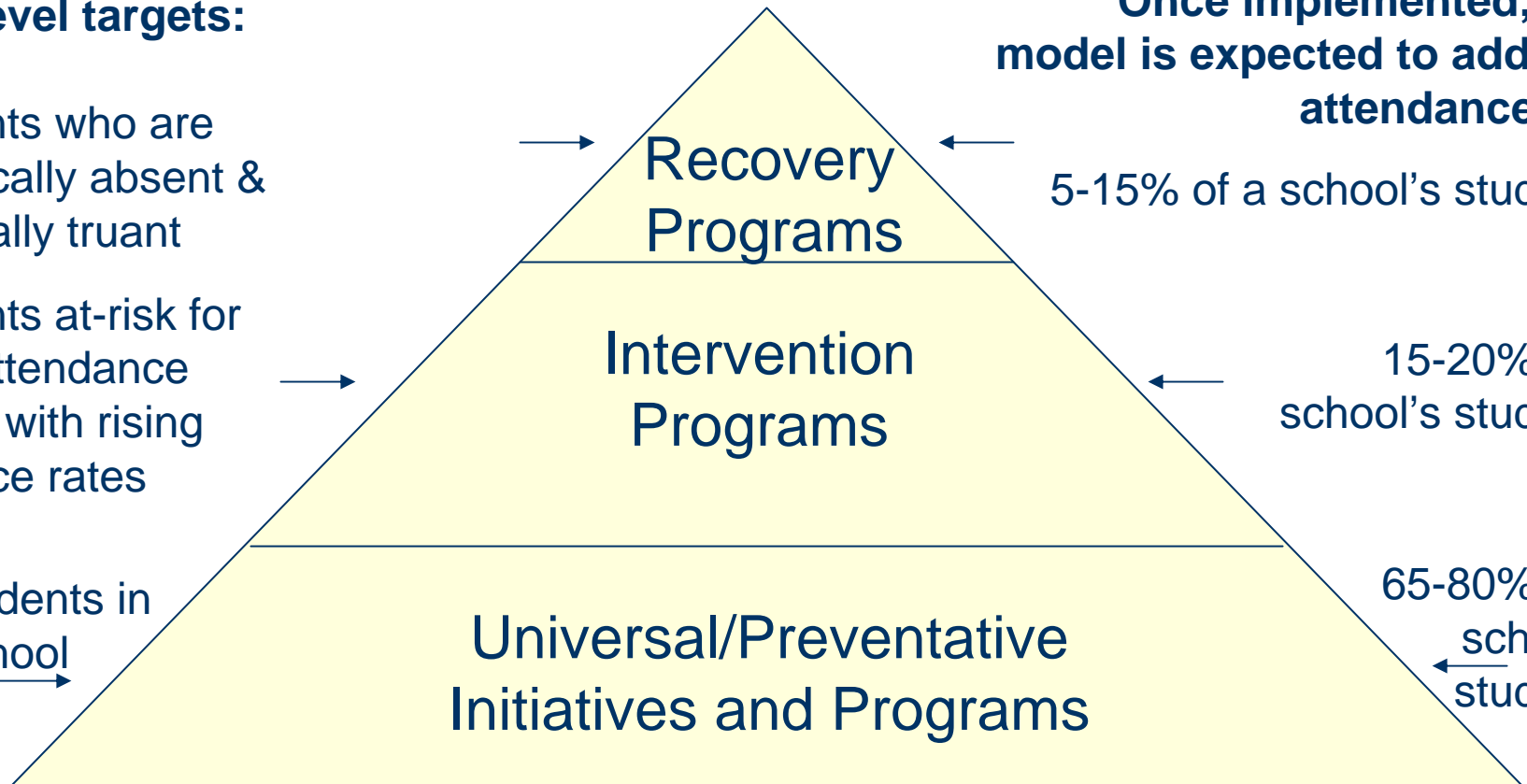
All Students in the school

Once implemented, this model is expected to address attendance for:

5-15% of a school's students

15-20% of a school's students

65-80% of a school's students



Tiered Strategies to Improve Attendance

Tier 1 – Universal Strategies (for all students)

- Establishing a school going culture including responding to each absence, welcoming a child back who has been absent, making clear in communication home the importance of regular attendance
- Utilize Global Connect or make phone calls home after each absence
- Utilize classroom attendance incentives such as certificates, movie passes, and other types of rewards for good attendance
- Utilize school attendance incentives such as attendance ceremonies, special trips for high attenders and rewarding parents whose children regularly attend

Tier 2 – Intervention Strategies (for students who miss 5 or more days of school)

- Refer a student with attendance problems to the SST be sure to include all of the adults who touch the child's life and support staff such as the school nurse/aid, after school providers, and the community schools coordinator
- Assign special activities to an at-risk student to increase their feeling of belonging
- Develop a plan with the student and their parents to improve their attendance
- Provide the family with an alarm clock
- Refer the family to a program like Truancy Court or B-SMART

Tier 3 – Recovery Strategies (for students who are missing at least 10% of their days on role)

- Involve external partners in the provision of needed services such as mental health providers
- Conduct a home visit
- Refer the student to the Attendance Office

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Contact:

Sue Fothergill

Student Attendance Work Group

Coordinator

443-414-0236

attendancewg@gmail.com