Engaging in Data-Based Problem-Solving to Address Chronic Absenteeism Among PreK-12 Students

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Advance Organizer & Objectives

- Chronic Absenteeism Overview
- Problem-Solving for Chronic Absenteeism
- RCA & RCA-P
- Implications for Practice
- Questions

- Participants will:
  - Understand chronic absenteeism
    - How it is measured and contributors
  - Increase knowledge of how to engage in data-based problem-solving for chronic absenteeism among PreK-12 students
  - Increased knowledge of how to use RCA and RCA-P in data-based problem-solving

Chronic Absenteeism (CA)

- No standard definition
  - Often based on total number of days missed
    - Does not differentiate reasons for absences
    - Includes: excused, unexcused and suspensions
  - Frequently defined as:
    - Missing 10% or more of instructional days
    - Missing 15 or more days of school per year

- Important Differences
  - Truancy = unexcused absences (s. 1003.26(b), F.S.)
  - Average Daily Attendance = how many students show up each day
  - Chronic Absence = missing so much school for any reason that a student is academically at-risk - missing 10% or more of school
Average Daily Attendance and CA

- Based on national research, conservative estimates:
  - 10% of US students miss 21+ days of school per year
  - 14-15% of US students miss 18+ days of school per year

5-7.5 million students each year!!

- 13/14 OCR data found roughly 7 million students missed 15+ days of school


Easy to Overlook Patterns of Chronic Absence

Patterns in Chronic Absence Across Grade Levels

- Rates typically drop after Kindergarten through 4th
- Rise significantly in middle and high school

Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012
Chronic Absenteeism by Demographics

National OCR Data from 13/14

What are the Implications?

Missing 10 percent or more of instructional days has significant impact on student outcomes. Chronic absenteeism is associated with:

- Decreased reading levels and overall academic performance
- Decreased on-time graduation rates and post-secondary enrollment
- Increased dropout rates

Proposed Reasons for Chronic Absenteeism

Barriers/Can’t

- Something prevents them from attending (illness, transportation, child care or family obligations)

Aversions/Won’t

- Avoidance of interactions or events at school (affective or perceptions physical/psychological safety issues, school climate, stress)

Disengagement/Don’t

- Would rather be somewhere else, do not make the effort to attend school and/or do not see the value in school

(Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Chang & Romer, 2008)
Data-Based Problem-Solving

• The use of a structured, process to improve outcomes for ALL students.

• Four-step problem-solving approach:
  1. Defining the goals and objectives to be attained
  2. Identifying possible reasons why the desired goals are not being attained
  3. Developing a plan for and implementing evidence-based strategies to attain the goals
  4. Evaluating the effectiveness of the plan
Problem Identification Elements

Determine the Goal
- Percentage of students with (5%) 9 or fewer absences
- Percentage with (10%) 18 or more absences

Identify Scope and Magnitude
- Percentage and number of students with 9 or fewer absences
- Percentage and number of students overall missing 10% or more of school
  - Currently
  - Historically

Identify Comparable Subpopulations
- State
- District
- Grade level
- Gender
- Race/Ethnicity
- SWD
- ELL
- Economically Disadvantaged

Determine the Gap
- Determine gap between goal and current performance
  - Overall
  - Subgroup

Guiding Questions

- Use guiding questions to identify patterns and priorities

What is the prevalence of students missing 10% or more days?
What is the prevalence of students with 95% or better attendance?

Where is chronic absenteeism occurring?
- Feeder pattern, region, school, grade-level, class

Who is most likely to be chronically absent?
- Subgroups: Gender, Race/Ethnicity, SWD, ED, ELL

Why are they chronically absent?

MCSD EXAMPLE

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MCSD Chronic Absenteeism Rates

![MCSD Absenteeism Chart]

- 14.2% in 2015/2016
- 10.8% in 2016/2017

1,233 Students
935 Students

2015/2016
2016/2017
Define the Problem/Goal: MCSD

**Goal**
- All MCSD schools will achieve an Average Daily Attendance (ADA) rate of 97% or greater in the 2017-2018 school year.
- Reduce Chronic Absenteeism (C.A.) rates to 3% or less district wide.
- At least 85% of a school’s population will attend 95% of the school days during the 2017-18 school year (9 or fewer absences).

**Current Performance**
- **ADA:** 94.20% - 96.47% in 2016-17
- **Chronic Absenteeism:** 10.81% 2016-2017.
- **95% Attendance:** 71% of the students attend school 95% or greater during the 2017-18 school year.

**Comparison Group**
- **State:** 10.10% chronic absenteeism in 2015-2016

**GAP**
- **ADA:** 2.8-.53 percentage points
- **Chronic Absenteeism:** 5.8 percentage points
- **95% Attendance:** 14 percentage points.

Reflection

- To what extent does MCSD’s goal apply to your setting?
- What questions do you have about defining the problem?
  - Establishing goals
  - Determining current performance
  - Comparison group
  - Gap analysis

Problem Analysis

- In order to solve the problem, you have to first understand why it is occurring.
  - Interviews*
  - Focus Groups
  - Surveys
  - Reasons for Chronic Absenteeism (RCAs)

“Every problem has in it the seeds of its own solution” - Norman Vincent Peale
Problem Analysis Steps

1. Generate Evidence-Based Hypotheses (e.g. reasons or root causes for absences)

2. Confirm/Reject Hypotheses
   - Collect data to determine the reasons for absences:
     - Surveys
     - Self-Assessments
     - Interviews
     - Policy/practice analysis

High Probability Root Causes

Student-Based Reasons for Absences
- Barriers (Can’t)
- Aversions (Won’t)
- Disengagement (Don’t)
- Lack of Awareness
- Myths

District/School Policy & Practice-Based Reasons for Absences
- Culture of attendance
- Expectations
- Recognitions
- Tardy policies
- Discipline practices related to attendance
  - Suspension
  - Fines
- Culture & climate
- Course performance
  - Make-up work policies
  - Credit refusal

Tools to Unpack Chronic Absenteeism: RCA & RCA-P

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons for Chronic Absenteeism (RCA)</th>
<th>Reasons for Chronic Absenteeism-Parent (RCA-P)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Self-report survey for chronically absent 6th-12th</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Completed online</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Measures the reasons for chronic absenteeism</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Designed for use:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Aggregate or individual level</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- To inform data-based</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- problem solving and</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- intervention development</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Self-report survey for parents* of chronically absent PreK-12 students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Completed online</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Measures reasons for chronic absenteeism</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Parent &amp; student focused items</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Designed for use:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Aggregate or individual level</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- To inform data-based problem solving and intervention development</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Why These Instruments?

- To develop interventions aimed at reducing absences:
  - Accurate understanding of why students are not coming to school
  - Need comprehensive and efficient tools
    - PreK Parents
    - K-12 Parent
    - 6th-12th Students
Content Domains

Barriers
• Health
• Transportation
• Housing/ Material Instability
• Adult Responsibilities
• Suspensions
• Court/DJJ

Aversions
• Bullying/ Harassment
• Personal Stress
• School Stress
• School Climate
• Safety/Conflict

Disengagement
• Value of School

Scoring Rubric
For each survey item, students or parents rate the item as:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>0</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Rarely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Usually</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This is *never* a reason you/your student have/has missed school.

This is *not very often* a reason you/your student have/has missed school.

This is a *reason* you/your student have/has missed school *more than 3 times.*

This is *often* the reason you/your student have/has missed school.

Student/Parent Response Data

Quantitative Responses
• Within each category (Health Related, etc.), the percentage of students/parents who endorsed items as “Sometimes” or “Usually” was totaled:
  - Overall
  - By State
  - By District
  - By School

Qualitative Responses
• For each open-ended item, student/parent responses were coded into themes and the instances of a theme were totaled

RCA & RCA-P Samples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RCA Sample</th>
<th>RCA-P Sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8 states</td>
<td>2 states</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 districts</td>
<td>5 Grantees &amp; 1 district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>91 schools</td>
<td>67 schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5,790 students</td>
<td>1,124 Parents</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Reasons by Category: Student and Parent

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Student Percentage</th>
<th>Parent Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Health Related</td>
<td>92.6</td>
<td>94.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>53.0</td>
<td>39.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preferred Activity Outside of School</td>
<td>41.0</td>
<td>38.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult Responsibility</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>23.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Stress</td>
<td>41.8</td>
<td>22.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Climate</td>
<td>32.2</td>
<td>9.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value of School</td>
<td>38.8</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Stress</td>
<td>34.8</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety/Conflict</td>
<td>21.2</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing/Material Instability</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal System Involvement</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suspension</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Accurately Recalled/Reported Absences

Perceptions of Absences: Compared to Peers

Perception of Typical Numbers of Absences Per Year

69% of parents perceived average absence rates to be consistent with “good” attendance.
Parent Level of Concern Related to Absence

Not Concerned | Somewhat | Very
---|---|---
49.6 | 35 | 15.5

Supports to Improve Attendance - Students 4525 Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Top Responses</th>
<th>Supports</th>
<th>Instances Mentioned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level of Difficulty/Strictness (Less homework, more fair rules, lenient dress code)</td>
<td>501</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illness Prevention</td>
<td></td>
<td>467</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaging Environment (More interesting/fun, more hands-on)</td>
<td>462</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved Climate/Relationships (Niccer peers/adults, less drama, less bullying)</td>
<td>400</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School schedule (Later start time, shorter classes, more time to pass between classes)</td>
<td>359</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Support (Tutoring, better teachers, help from teachers)</td>
<td>289</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure (I don’t know, not sure)</td>
<td></td>
<td>288</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Supports to Improve Attendance - Parents 457 Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Top Responses</th>
<th>Supports</th>
<th>Instances Mentioned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Illness Prevention</td>
<td></td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation (Rides, not having to walk, more reliable transportation in bad weather)</td>
<td>88</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent/Family Support (Parent persistence in bringing child to school, parent utilizing after-school hours for children's medical appointments, etc)</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School schedule (Provide before- or after-school care, start school later)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure (I don’t know, not sure)</td>
<td></td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

MCSD EXAMPLE
MCSD Reasons for Absence Summary

Results

Overall Summary

The data provided are based on 260 student middle and high school responses. The table below provides an overview of the percentage of all students who responded that cited each category as a “reason” for usually the reason(s) they missed school. Health, Personal Illness, and Value of School. On the following pages more detailed information is provided for each of the categories.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General Reason</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal Illness</td>
<td>41.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Conflict</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Climate</td>
<td>12.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Other</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult Responsibility</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Related</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal/Social Insecurity</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal Status</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suspension</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavioral Activity/Classroom/Behavior</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value of School</td>
<td>41.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

MCSD Student Perception of Absences

Perceptions of Absences

In order to be eligible to participate in the survey, students had to have missed 18 or more (10%) days of school during the 2015/2016 school year. The Absences Last Year table provides a summary of student perceptions of the number of school days they missed during the 2015/2016 school year. A little less than half (46.4%) of students accurately recalled and/or reported absences consistent with chronic absenteeism. This may suggest an intervention opportunity to increase student awareness of absences and implications associated with chronic absenteeism.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reported Number of Absences</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-4 days</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-10 days</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-14 days</td>
<td>22.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-20 days</td>
<td>15.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-30 days</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

MCSD Student Ideas for Attendance Supports

Supports

Students were asked to provide ideas for what they thought would help them attend school more regularly. The top reported support to improve attendance was Illness Prevention, closely followed by School Schedule (later start time, shorter classes, more time to pass between classes).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Top 5 Responses</th>
<th>Instances Mentioned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Illness Prevention</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Schedule</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Support</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More Time to Pass Between Classes</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Later Start Time, Shorter Classes</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Reflection

- What questions do you have about analyzing the problem?
  - Determining root causes
    - Tools/methods

Develop Action Plans

- Establish goal
  - E.g. Students will improve attendance to XX% by the end of school year
  - E.g. Students will reduce chronic absenteeism by X% or to X% by ____________
  - E.g. Students will reduce number of absences to X per quarter or X per semester/year

- Determine strategies based on identified reasons. Specify:
  - What will be done,
  - When will it happen
  - Who will be doing the “what”
  - How often will the “what” happen
  - How long will the “what” happen

- Determine any necessary resources
  - Materials, PD, Personnel

- Determine methods to check implementation
  - What are the “look fors” to know if the “what” is happening as intended

- Monitor progress
  - How often will you monitor
  - How will you know if it is working
MCSD EXAMPLE

MCSD: Intervention Design and Implementation

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**District Action Plan**

- Build capacity of all administrators related to attendance/chronic absenteeism
- Establish district-wide attendance/chronic absenteeism goal
- Establish consistent messaging/awareness procedures for students and parents
- Use attendance/chronic absenteeism data as accountability metric
- Build community partnerships to support attendance

**School Action Plans**

- Establish teams to monitor and address attendance
- Implement messaging/awareness procedures
- Develop interventions matched to student needs

---

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action Step</th>
<th>Assigned To</th>
<th>Starting Date</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
<th>Remarks/Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>District Leadership Team, Director of Attendance and Truancy</td>
<td>May 2017</td>
<td>May 2017</td>
<td>Establish District-wide attendance/chronic absenteeism goal and change district-wide attendance/chronic absenteeism standards to match school policies and procedures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>District Leadership Team, Director of Attendance and Truancy</td>
<td>May 2017</td>
<td>May 2017</td>
<td>Using data collected in the report to directly measure student attendance is a key component of improving accountability and reducing chronic absenteeism across the school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>District Leadership Team, Director of Attendance and Truancy</td>
<td>May 2017</td>
<td>May 2017</td>
<td>Establish and ensure that attendance intervention to maintain and improve attendance is low and consistent with districtwide goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>District Leadership Team, Director of Attendance and Truancy</td>
<td>May 2017</td>
<td>May 2017</td>
<td>Implement a social emotional intervention and support district-wide and school-wide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>District Leadership Team, Director of Attendance and Truancy</td>
<td>May 2017</td>
<td>May 2017</td>
<td>District-wide attendance/chronic absenteeism goals</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action Step</th>
<th>Assigned To</th>
<th>Starting Date</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
<th>Remarks/Recommendations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Superintendent, Associate Director of Attendance and Truancy</td>
<td>Sept. 2017</td>
<td>Sept. 2017</td>
<td>Based on the MCSD/REA survey results regarding the effectiveness of attendance interventions, multiple ways to improve attendance of students were identified.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Public Service Announcements will be used via social media, community newsletters, and websites to ensure creating awareness of the importance of school attendance and interventions associated with chronic absenteeism.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Superintendent, Principal, and District Attendance Team</td>
<td>Sept. 2017</td>
<td>Sept. 2017</td>
<td>Based on the MCSD/REA survey results regarding the effectiveness of attendance interventions, multiple ways to improve attendance of students were identified.</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>May 2017</td>
<td>Implement a social emotional intervention and support district-wide and school-wide</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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2/20/2018
Reflection

• Reactions to MCSD action plans?
  — Buy-in
  — Feasibility

• What questions do you have about developing intervention/action plans?

RESPONSE TO INSTRUCTION/INTERVENTION

Monitoring for Intervention Effectiveness

Monitoring of aggregate, groups and individuals is essential to determine intervention effectiveness*:

• Individual/group level
  — Reduction in number of absences
  — Reduction in severity of absences
    • Fewer days absent at a time
  — Presence of protective factors
    • Grades, GPA, credits, affiliations, etc.

• School/district level
  — Numbers and percentage of chronically absent students
    • Overall
    • Feeder pattern
    • Grade level
    • Sub-group
  — Intervention grouping
    • Changes from time period to time period in numbers and percentage of chronically absent
      • Monthly
      • Quarterly
      • Annually

*Assuming fidelity of intervention implementation

MCSD EXAMPLE
Data Monitoring

- What reaction do you have to the data?
- What hypotheses do you have (i.e. what questions would you like answered)?
- What might be next steps?

Reflection

Questions

RESOURCES
Tools for Self-Reflection

School-Level

District-Level

Tools for Analyzing Your Data


Tools for Analyzing Your Data

RCA Survey
http://www.floridarti.usf.edu/resources/topic/chronic_absenteeism/index.html

RCA Report

Tools for Messaging: Attendance Works & Nudge Letters

## Strategies to Support Students - By Reason

### Health
- Mobile medical/dental
- Collaboration with health department
- School nurses
  - Flu shots
  - Hand-washing
  - Health support plans
- Collaboration with local physicians/dentists
- Parent and student education
  - [http://absencesaddup.org/reasons](http://absencesaddup.org/reasons)
- Self Assessments

### Transportation
- Sweeper buses
- Bus passes
- Car pools
  - If miss bus or car problems
- Umbrellas/rain/cold weather gear
- Partnerships with community supports (Housing Authority, Faith-Based Partners)
- Attendance plans/contracts

### Affective/Personal Stress
- Mentors
  - Check & Connect
    - [http://www.mentoring.org/program/mentoring :-) ://www.mentoring.org/program](http://www.mentoring.org/program)
  - [http://www.mentoring.org/program](http://www.mentoring.org/program)
  - [http://www.mentoring.org/program](http://www.mentoring.org/program)
- Counseling/support groups
  - Anxiety
    - Coping Cat (ages 7-13)
  - GAN Project (ages 14-17)

### School Climate/School Stress
- Strong PBIS implementation
- Social-emotional curriculum
  - [https://casel.org/guide/](https://casel.org/guide/)
- Anti-bullying curriculums
- Club/Sport participation
- Tutoring/academic interventions
- Partnership with community mental health providers

### Preferred Activity Outside of School: On-Time Wake Up
- Automated/Robo-calls
- Remind App
- Alarm on cell phone/alarm clocks
- Buddy calls
- Bed-time routines/curfew

### Value of School
- Family engagement and education around attendance
- Engaging instructional practices
  - ESR's

### Housing/Material Instability
- Laundromat vouchers/cards
- Washer/dryers at school
- Clothes closet
- Extra materials
- Connection with outside agencies
  - Boys and Girls Club
  - Food Pantries
  - Communities in Schools
    - [http://www.cisfl.org/](http://www.cisfl.org/)

### Adult Responsibilities
- Connection with outside agencies
- Family support plans
- District/school child care facilities
- Nurse Family Partnership
  - [http://www.nursefamilypartnership.org/locations/Florida/find-a-local-agency](http://www.nursefamilypartnership.org/locations/Florida/find-a-local-agency)
Presentation Materials

http://www.floridarti.usf.edu/resources/presentations/index.html

RCA Survey & RCA(s) Reports
• http://www.floridarti.usf.edu/resources/topic/chronic_absenteeism/index.html

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Additional Readings & Resources

Attendance Works: http://www.attendanceworks.org/
California Ad Council: https://oag.ca.gov/truancy/toolkit
National Student Success Center: http://www.nationalstudentsuccesscenter.org/