

# State Policy Evaluation Framework

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*We used 11 criteria to assess state policies across three categories:*

## **Data and Accountability**

For states to make progress toward addressing chronic absenteeism, all stakeholders must have access to useful, accurate, and timely attendance data. As stewards of state data systems, state education agencies (SEAs) are best positioned to establish common definitions and collect and share this data, which should be publicly available and easily accessible so stakeholders can make targeted, strategic workforce decisions at the school, district, and state level.

## **Investments in Strategies to Reduce Chronic Absenteeism**

To improve chronic absenteeism rates, state leaders must prioritize sustained investments and implement evidence-based strategies that address the root causes especially for students of color, students from low-income backgrounds, and students with disabilities. SEAs, in partnership with districts and communities, are uniquely positioned to allocate resources toward high-impact interventions such as wraparound services, policy agenda, improved transportation, and family engagement. These investments should be driven by data and equity, aligned with state-level goals, and monitored for effectiveness.

## **Eliminating Harmful Practices and Adopting Evidence-based Policies and Practices**

To improve school climate, schools should eliminate discipline practices such as suspensions for disrespect, minor disruptions, dress-code violations, and other non-violent behaviors that harm the relationship between students and school. Success means removing these policies and replacing them with supportive, restorative approaches that keep students connected to learning and contribute to their social-emotional development.

Each question is accompanied by a detailed rubric that outlines criteria for evaluating state responses to reduce chronic absenteeism ranging most supportive, to somewhat to least supportive.

Additionally, for each criterion, we present a model policy that reflects the state's best practice in that category which provides a clear benchmark that all states should strive to achieve.

# Data & Accountability

**The state has strong data systems that assess daily attendance and sets a common definition of daily attendance.**

- The state requires attendance be taken daily and measures students' exposure to learning, including in-person and virtual learning options, which is defined as at least 0.5 of a day.
- The state meets one of the above requirements; a requirement of daily attendance or accurately measures students' exposure to learning, which is defined as at least 0.5 of a day.
- The state is unclear in what constitutes 0.5 day of attendance.

## STATE EXAMPLE: CALIFORNIA

California policy states that attendance must be taken daily. Requirements for a full day are as follows:

- Kindergarten: three hours (180 minutes)
- Grades 1-3: four hours (240 minutes)
- Grades 4-8: five hours (300 minutes)
- Grades 9-12: six hours (360 minutes)

## STATE EXAMPLE: WASHINGTON

Washington State requires attendance to be taken daily. Students are expected to attend for at least 50% of the day to be marked present for the full day. Secondary schools take attendance at each class period; elementary schools must take attendance at least twice per day.

**The state has strong data systems that collect, disaggregate, and cross-tabulate data on chronic absenteeism and attendance.**

- Chronic absenteeism data from the immediate past school year can be disaggregated by subgroups (race, ethnicity, gender, economic status, grade, special education status, IEP, homelessness status, English learner, and military connected).
- Data is disaggregated by subgroup but cannot be cross-tabulated.
- Data is not disaggregated by subgroup.

## STATE EXAMPLE: MARYLAND

Maryland's data can be disaggregated by race, ethnicity, gender, economic status, special education status, IEP, homelessness status, military connected, school level, English learner, and Title I designation. Data can be cross-tabulated.

**The state has a comprehensive attendance monitoring system in place that gives school-based staff and district professionals access to proactive identification of students at risk of becoming chronically absent. The system includes data-tracking ability to provide early warnings before a student becomes chronically absent.**

- The state has an Early Warning Indicator (EWI) tracker in their system and identifies types of absences (unexcused absences, excused absences, sickness; suspension/expulsion, state emergency). Allows for real-time alerts for students becoming chronically absent. Data is automatically disaggregated and cross-tabulated to routinely be used for intervention planning.
- The state has an EWI tracker in their system or tracks some of the absence categories (unexcused absences; excused absences; sickness; suspension/expulsion; other reasons) The state's system might not be automated, nor consistent across districts.
- The state has no clear EWI System, tracks some types of absences, but does not account for broader absences; and the state's EWI systems are not standardized across districts.

## STATE EXAMPLE: RHODE ISLAND

Rhode Island launched Learn365RI, a statewide policy agenda aimed at reducing chronic absenteeism. As part of this initiative, the state developed a student attendance leaderboard, a publicly accessible dashboard that tracks daily attendance rates across all Rhode Island public schools. The dashboard features a visual display showing the percentage of chronically absent students at each school and is updated nightly through a direct data link between district systems and the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE). The system disaggregates data by race, gender, and student characteristics, allowing stakeholders to monitor attendance trends in real time and identify root causes of absenteeism.

**The state has systems that collect data from school districts to identify patterns early, and intervene before absences become chronic, allowing strategies to be implemented in real time.**

- 2-3 times or more per year
- Once annually
- Not consistent

## STATE EXAMPLE: NEW MEXICO

This state collects chronic absenteeism data four times per year, allowing for timely, quarterly insights into student attendance trends across districts. This frequent data collection enables schools and the Public Education Department to identify patterns early, intervene before absences become chronic, and adjust support strategies in real time.

### **The state makes chronic absenteeism data publicly available and accessible.**

- Chronic absenteeism data from the immediate past school year is easily accessible on each state's website. Site is non-technical and reader friendly.
- Chronic absenteeism data is available but incomplete, or difficult to access.
- Chronic absenteeism data is unavailable and/or inaccessible.

## STATE EXAMPLE: MARYLAND

Maryland produces both an attendance report by year and a State Report Card, which provides state, district, and school attendance data. Information is presented in a non-technical manner and is reader friendly.

## *Investments in Strategies to Reduce Chronic Absenteeism*

### **The state invests in strategies to increase student engagement and lower rates of chronic absenteeism.**

- The state has allocated funding to invest in evidence-based practices or practices that are equity focused.
- The state has allocated some funding to address chronic absenteeism statewide, but is not investing in evidence-based practices, or if the state is investing in evidence-based practices but they're not targeted to the districts, school, or students most in need.
- The state does not allocate funding to reduce chronic absenteeism.

## STATE EXAMPLE: CALIFORNIA

California has implemented the following strategies to address root causes leading to chronic absenteeism: 1) local control funding formula; 2) school attendance review boards; 3) mental health and support services; 4) data-driven strategies. In addition, community schools (\$4.1 million investment) have been a strategy that helped California to reduce high rates of chronic absenteeism.

### **The state has a clear policy agenda that prioritizes the reduction of chronic absenteeism.**

- The state has a policy agenda that outlines a vision to reduce chronic absenteeism.
- The state has a policy agenda that mentions chronic absenteeism but does not have clear vision of how to reduce chronic absenteeism.
- The state does not have a policy that includes chronic absenteeism.

## STATE EXAMPLE: CONNECTICUT

This state's Learner Engagement and Attendance Program (LEAP) began in 2021 as a statewide strategy to reduce chronic absenteeism through home visits and student outreach. It has received sustained investment, including \$10.7 million at launch, \$7 million in 2023, and \$9 million in 2025 to expand its reach to 25 districts. With ongoing support and evaluation built into the program, LEAP remains a core component of the state's long-term plan to improve student attendance and engagement.

### **The state has made sustainable investments to reduce chronic absenteeism.**

- The state has included funding for chronic absenteeism in their state budget or funding formula indefinitely.
- The state has allocated temporary funding to the reduction of chronic absenteeism for three or more years.
- The state has no funding or plans to make a long-term investment in the reduction of chronic absenteeism.

## STATE EXAMPLE: MARYLAND

The Blueprint for Maryland's Future, passed by the Maryland legislature, is a comprehensive plan to transform public education in the state and includes significant increases in funding for community schools. Community schools address root causes that lead to chronic absenteeism by integrating academic supports, wraparound services and family engagement to create the condition for students to thrive. Community schools are funded by the Concentration of Poverty Grant, which targets schools with 55% or more of students from low-income backgrounds. In the 2024-2025 fiscal year, community schools received approximately \$369 million in state funding.

## *Eliminating Harmful Practices & Adopting Evidence-based Policies & Practices*

**The state has eliminated harmful practices that perpetuate chronic absenteeism.**

- The state has prohibited two or more policies proven to harm students.
- The state has prohibited one policy proven to harm students.
- The state has not changed any policies.

## STATE EXAMPLE: NEW MEXICO

This state outlawed corporal punishment for both early childhood and secondary students. The state also eliminated the use of restraint in schools, as well as the ability to rely on suspensions as a consequence for chronically absent students.

**The state has adopted and implemented evidence-based guidance and policies. These include Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS), alternative discipline practices, restorative practices, and professional development for educators. These approaches strengthen students' connection to school, improve their sense of safety and well-being, and increase consistent attendance and engagement.**

- The state has implemented evidence-based practices to reduce chronic absenteeism.
- The state has adopted some evidence-based practices to reduce chronic absenteeism.
- The state does not name the use of any evidence-based practices to reduce chronic absenteeism.

## STATE EXAMPLE: CONNECTICUT

The state has been building the capacity of educators in using trauma-informed practices and MTSS. The state also used climate specialists to develop improvement plans for school climate including detailed reporting on bullying incidents. Lastly, they raised the age by which a student can be arrested from age seven to 10 years old.

### *Key Findings*

- Strong models of prioritizing the reduction of chronic absenteeism include states like California, Connecticut, Maryland, and Rhode Island, which have made coordinated investments in evidence-based strategies and provide clear guidance and support to districts. Some of these states have also seen experienced improvements due to sustained investments geared toward students who are most chronically absent from school.
- States struggling to reduce chronic absenteeism often lack a consistent definition of full-day attendance across districts, have not made substantial investments in evidence-based practices, and fail to direct resources toward student groups most chronically absent (students of color, students from low-income backgrounds, and students with disabilities).

## Policy Recommendations

### *All states should:*

1. Have a clear definition of a full day of attendance
2. Should ensure data systems are aligned across districts to better provide states with capacity to analyze disaggregation and cross-tabulation and address discipline, attendance, and engagement
3. Pass legislation and/or policies to increase investments in evidence-based practices to reduce chronic absenteeism, such as alternative/restorative discipline practices, family and community engagement, community schools, and professional development
4. Invest in staffing to ensure schools are equipped to support a diverse student body (students of color, student with disabilities, English learners)
5. Invest in professional development to support with data monitoring and analysis, culturally responsive teaching, healing-centered engagement, family engagement, and alternative discipline measures
6. Assess, eliminate, and reform policies that may be contributing to chronic absenteeism
7. Develop a state funding formula designed support to student groups with high rates of chronic absenteeism to ensure resources are equitably distributed to the students and school communities most in need