Why Attendance Matters

By Hedy Chang
October 25, 2012

attendanceworks.org

Unpacking Attendance Terms

Average Daily Attendance

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

Truancy

- Typically refers only to unexcused absences and is defined by each state and sometimes by school district. It signals the potential need for legal intervention under state compulsory education laws.
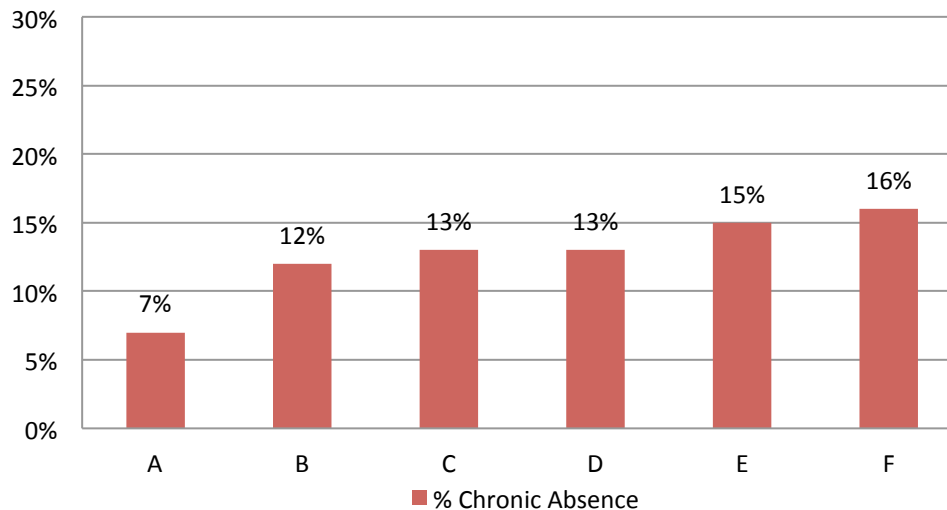
Chronic Absence

- Missing 10% or more of school for any reason – excuse, unexcused, etc. It should be (but is often not) used to trigger early intervention.

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

School	% Chronic Absence
A	7%
B	12%
C	13%
D	13%
E	15%
F	16%

■ % Chronic Absence

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

Chronic Absence Versus Truancy
(San Francisco Unified School District)
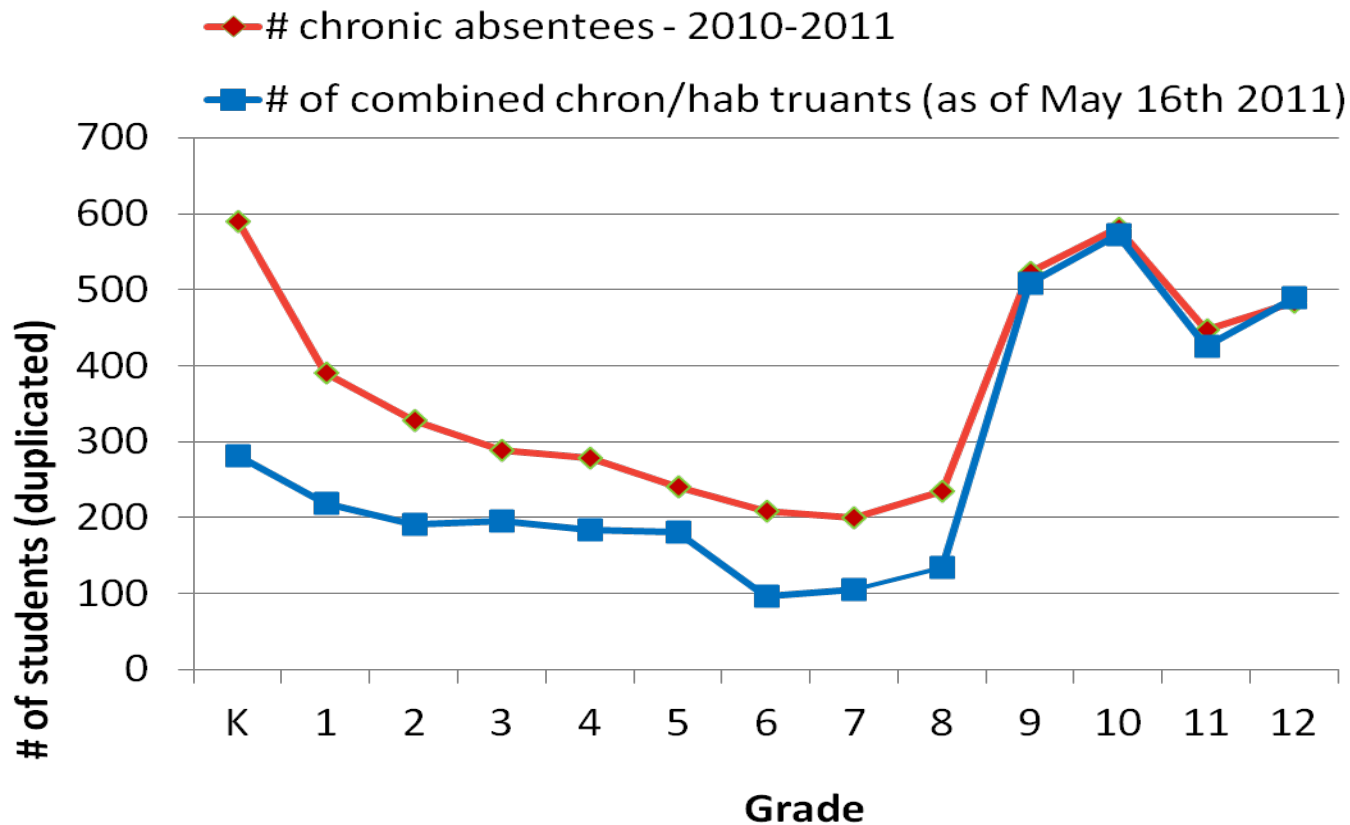
*(Note: SFUSD identified chron/hab truants as = 10 unexcused absences)*

Chronic Absence – A Hidden National Crisis

- ❑ Nationwide, as many as 7.5 million students 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 pre-kindergarten. Improving attendance is a critical part of a comprehensive approach to ensuring students can read proficiently by the end of 3rd grade.

Students Chronically Absent in Kindergarten & 1st Grade Less Likely to Read Proficiently in 3rd Grade

**Percent Students Scoring Proficient or Advanced on 3rd Grade ELA Based on Attendance in Kindergarten and 1st Grade**
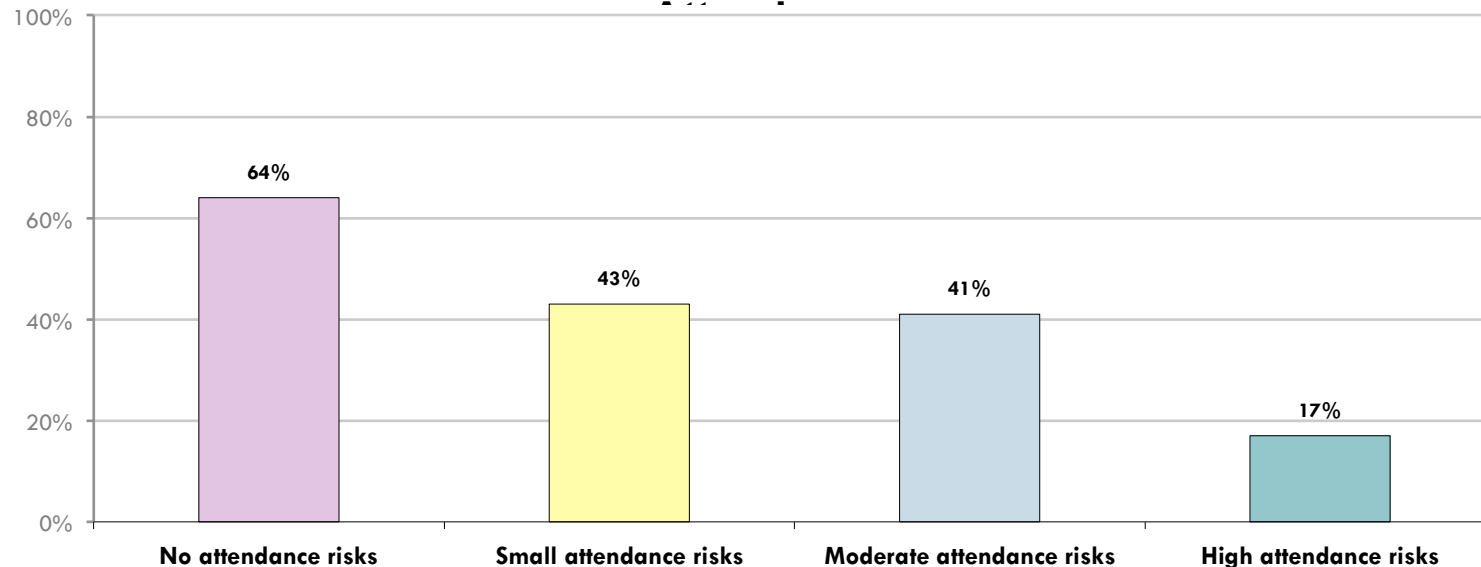
Risk Level	Description
No risk	Missed less than 5% of school in K & 1st t
Small risk	Missed 5-9% of days in both K & 1st
Moderate risk	5-9% of days absent in 1 year &10 % in 1 year
High risk	Missed 10% or more in K & 1st

Chart data:
- No attendance risks: 64%
- Small attendance risks: 43%
- Moderate attendance risks: 41%
- High attendance risks: 17%

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

# The Long-term impact of Chronic Kindergarten Absence Is Most Troubling for Poor Children

5th Grade Math and Reading Performance By K Attendance
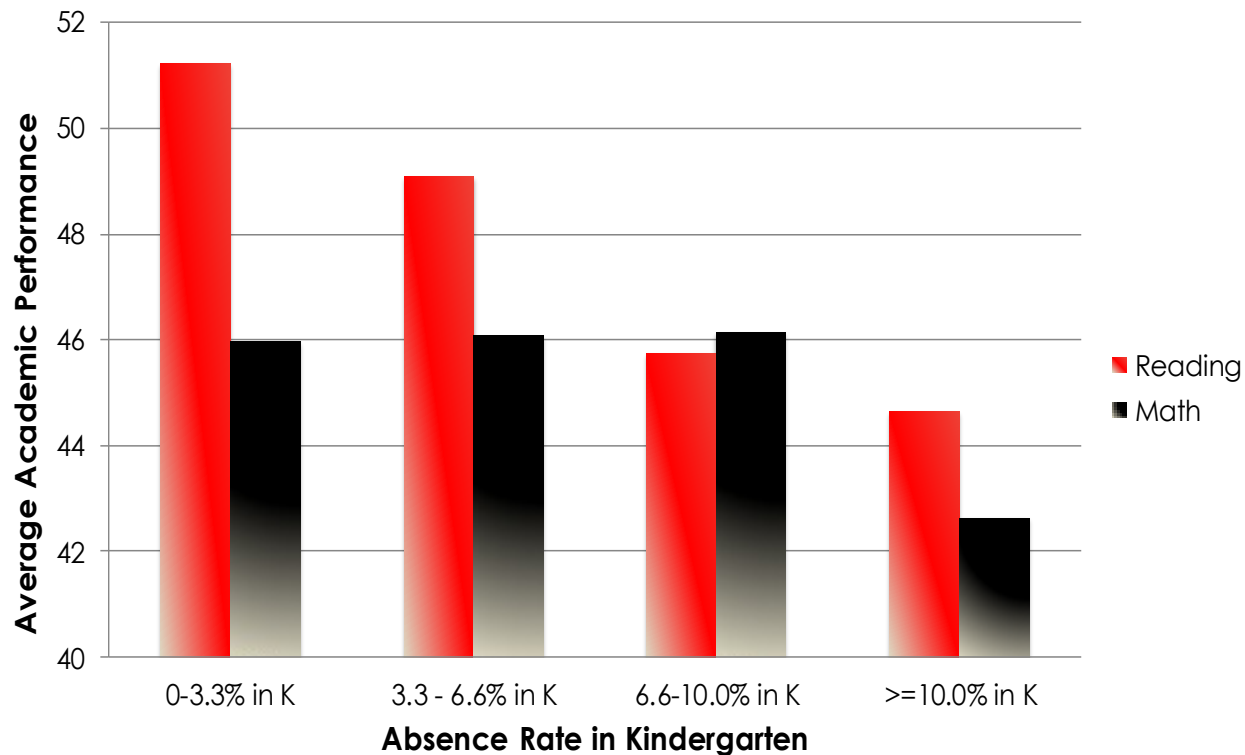
Source: ECLS-K data analyzed by National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP)
Note: Average academic performance reflects results of direct cognitive assessments conducted for ECLS-K.

9th Grade Attendance Predicts Graduation for Students of All Economic Backgrounds
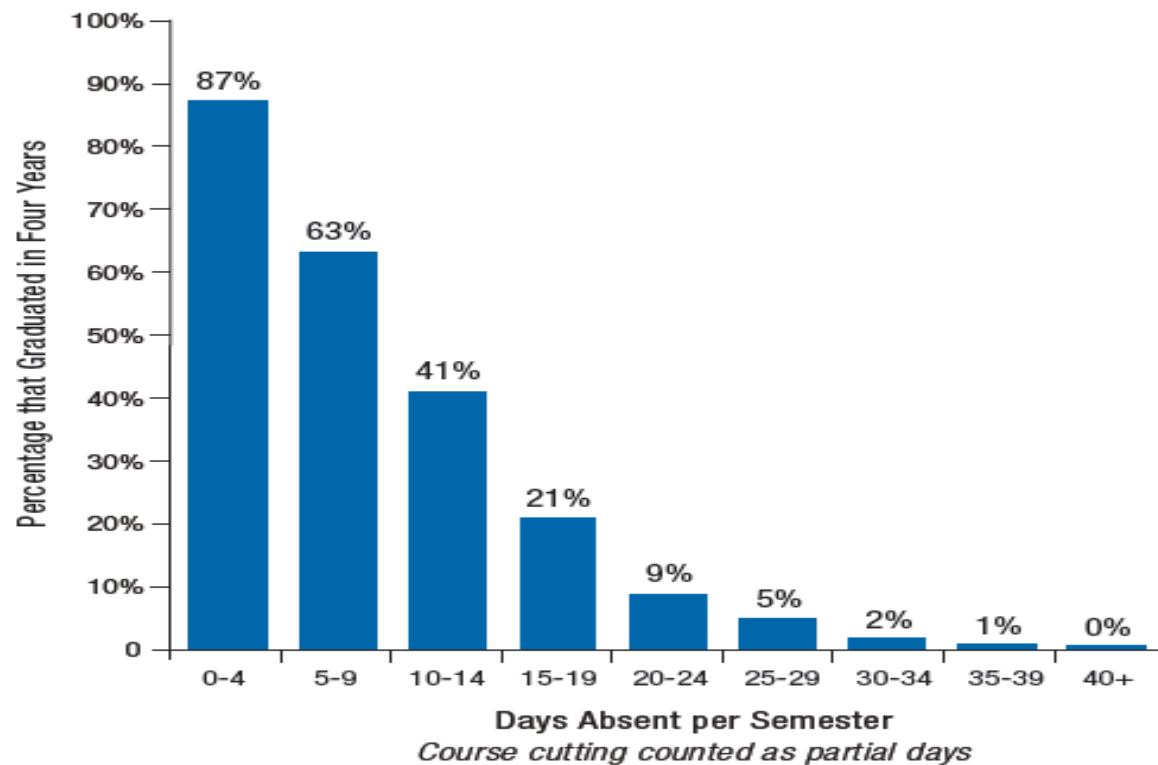
Note: This Chicago study found attendance was a stronger graduation predictor than 8th grade test scores.

Source: Allensworth & Easton, *What Matters for Staying On-Track and Graduating in Chicago Public Schools*, Consortium on Chicago School Research at U of C, July 2007
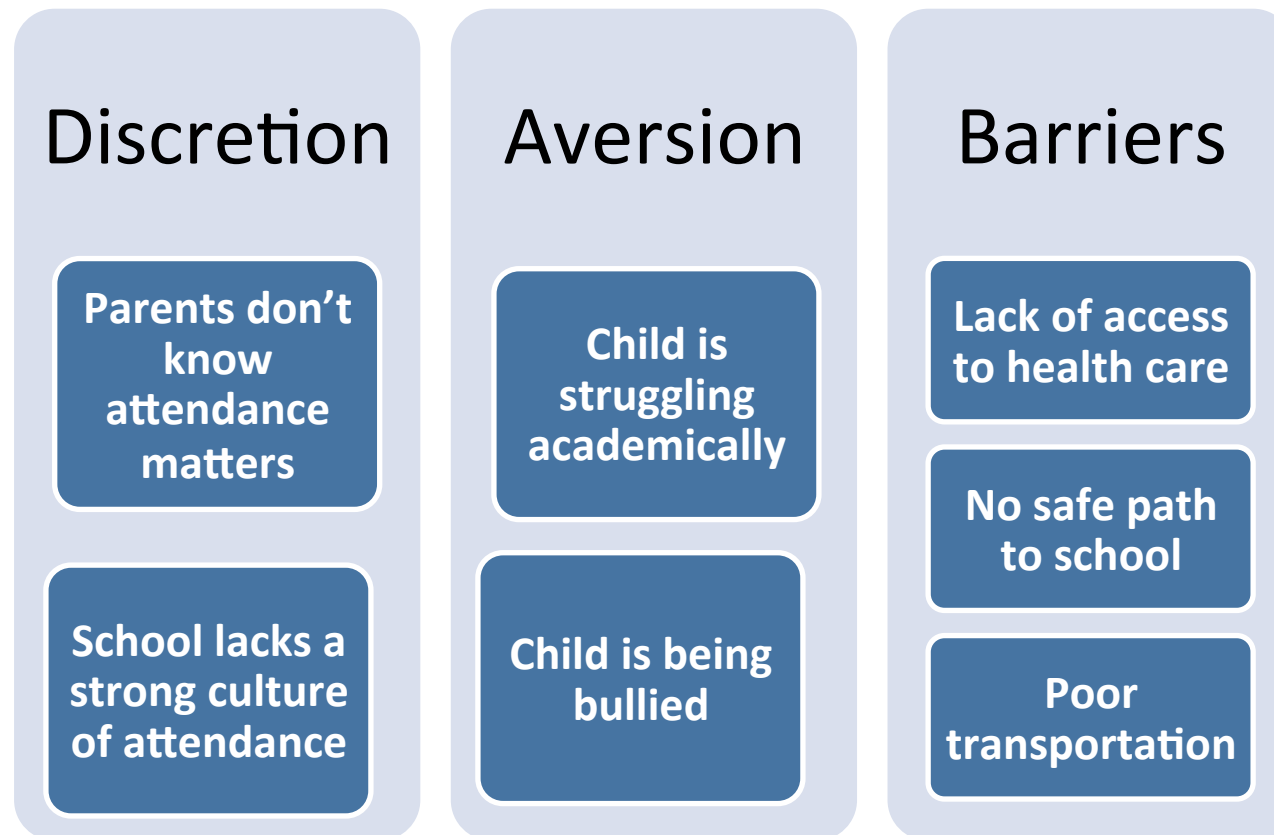
Data is Needed for Identifying Programmatic Solutions

❑ Chronic absence data (as well as other attendance measures) should be examined by classroom, grade, school, neighborhood or sub-population.

❑ If chronic absence is unusually high for a particular group of students, explore what might be common issues (unreliable transportation, community violence, asthma and other chronic diseases, poor access to health care, unnecessary suspension for non-violent offenses, lack of engaging curriculum, child care or afterschool programming, foreclosures, etc.)

❑ If chronic absence is unusually low for a high risk population, find out what they are doing that works.

Solutions Only Work If Grounded in Understanding Of What Leads to Chronic Absence

Discretion

Parents don't know attendance matters

School lacks a strong culture of attendance

Aversion

Child is struggling academically

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.

10

Proposed Universal Strategies For Influencing Discretion and Identifying Causes of Absence
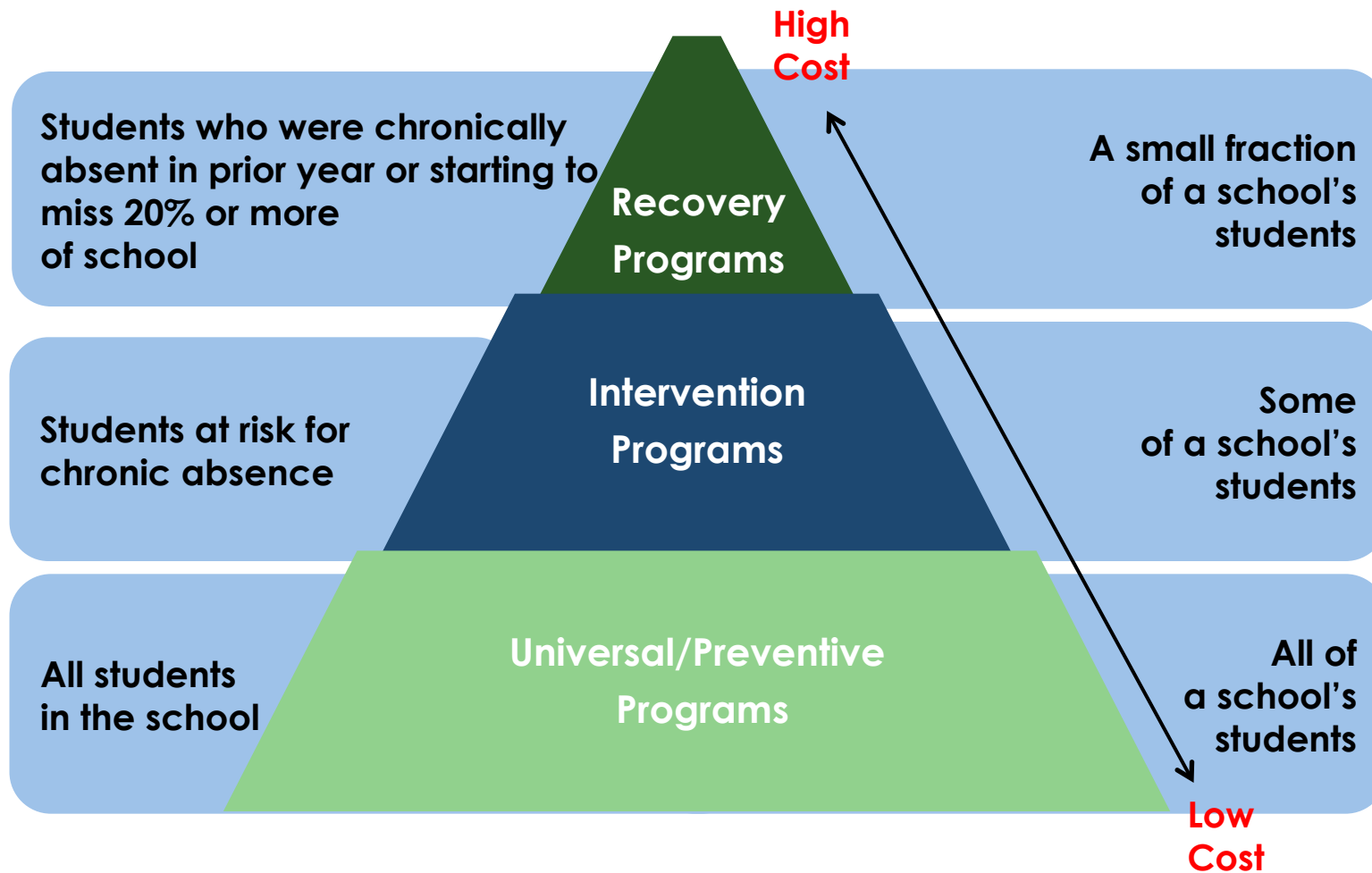
Recognize Good & Improved Attendance	Parent and Student Engagement
Personalized Early Outreach	**School Team Monitoring Attendance Data & Practice**

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

High Cost

Students who were chronically absent in prior year or starting to miss 20% or more of school

A small fraction of a school's students

Recovery Programs

Students at risk for chronic absence

Some of a school's students

Intervention Programs

All students in the school

All of a school's students

Universal/Preventive Programs

Low Cost

Afterschool:
An Untapped Opportunity

- Research and field experience show OST can help improve attendance in school.

- Focusing on attendance can improve collaboration with schools

- By increasing school day attendance, OST can improve the academic success and reduce drop-out.

Research Shows Impact of Quality Out of School Time

1. 7th and 8th graders attending afterschool programs at a Boys & Girls Club skipped school fewer times, increased school effort and gained academic confidence. (2009)

2. Afterschool participants attending Pathways to Progress in Minneapolis and St. Paul came to school an average 18.4 more days than their peers. (2004)

3. School-day attendance improved for students in California's Afterschool Learning and Safe Neighborhoods Partnerships Program. Students absent 10 % of the year came another 11 days. (2002).

What Can Afterschool Programs Do?

Step 1: Create Culture of Attendance

a. Take roll every day in a caring manner

b. Partner with schools to educate families and students about the importance of attendance

c. Reach out to students/families with poor attendance

d. Offer incentives for attendance

e. Use engaging program activities to motivate students to come to school.

f. Analyze program attendance data to identify areas in need of improvement.

What would you add?

Step 2: Get/Share Attendance Data on Program Participants

a. Seek parent waiver allowing A/S to see attendance and grades, ideally as standard part of enrollment.

b. Regularly get data on in-school attendance for program participants.

c. Find out if you are serving any students with problematic attendance.

d. Use poor attendance in afterschool to identify students who might begin to have trouble showing up to school day program.

e. Partner with school staff to find out what are the challenges facing students with poor attendance and what would help get them to school.

Step 3: Find Out About Attendance In Schools Served

a. Find out what the school is doing to reduce chronic absence and improve attendance. Identify if there is a role for the afterschool program.

b. Learn if your school has a team that monitors attendance data; Seek membership on the team or at least access to review school day attendance

c. Use the afterschool program as an opportunity to solicit insights from students and if possible parents about what are the barriers to attendance in the school day and what could help overcome them.