



Guidance for Leading Inclusive Special Education Programs:

**Supporting Attendance for
Students with Disabilities**



JANUARY 2023

Guidance for Leading Inclusive Special Education Programs

All students deserve equitable access to high quality instruction. Yet, school systems often face unique and complex challenges in improving outcomes for students with disabilities. Addressing these challenges is multifaceted and requires strong leaders who can effectively coordinate programming within and across departments and schools to increase equitable access to inclusive learning opportunities for students with disabilities.

To support the increased effectiveness of special education programming through effective and inclusive system-wide planning, the department will release guidance documents to school systems in 2023. The guidance will cover the highest impact areas of special education programming to most effectively improve outcomes for students with disabilities. Each guidance document will be accompanied by an hour long webinar to support implementation.

In partnership with and alongside school and school system leaders, special education leaders are encouraged to review the guidance documents and attend webinars. Please note: release dates and topics are subject to change.

TOPICS FOR 2022-2023 GUIDANCE FOR LEADING INCLUSIVE SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS	
Month	Topic
January	<u>Supporting Attendance for Students with Disabilities</u>



Supporting Attendance for Students with Disabilities

Current Attendance Requirements:

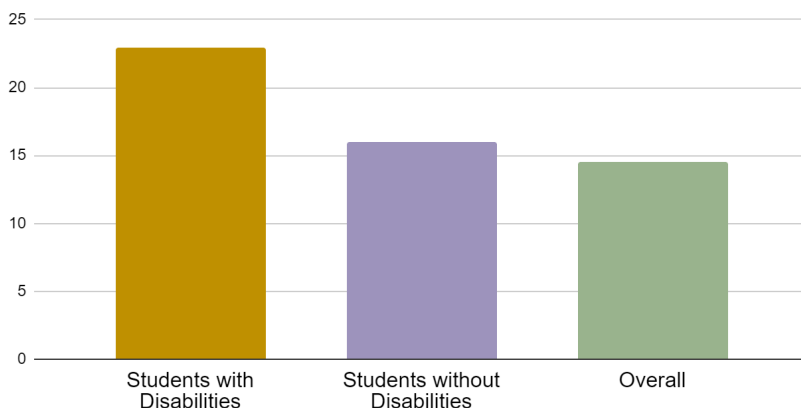
Louisiana students must attend 167 days of school to earn credit and be [eligible for promotion](#) to the next grade. Louisiana [legislation](#) on school attendance dictates that the parent or legal guardian of the child is responsible for the child's attendance in regularly assigned classes during regular school hours established by the school board and should ensure that the child is not habitually tardy from school. The legislation on [chronic absenteeism](#) explains that being habitually absent occurs after the fifth unexcused absence that involves school personnel attempting to locate the student.

Purpose

As we work diligently to remove barriers that are impacting students, we must ensure that all learners have an engaging, beneficial, and uplifting experience at school. We consistently strive to create an inclusive environment where all students feel a sense of belonging while closing learning gaps. Achieving a vision that ensures teachers, students, and parents feel supported during missed school days requires proper planning and the help of key personnel to ensure a student is not educationally penalized for missing a day of school. Missed school days can negatively impact a student's ability to move forward in the classroom. School systems should consider the following questions, regarding absenteeism:

- What does the [system level subgroup attendance data](#) reveal?
- How do discipline practices contribute to absences?
- Is the communication between the student and the parent sufficient?
- What reintegration plans are in place to ensure students do not fall behind?

2021 - 2022 Chronic Absenteeism Rate



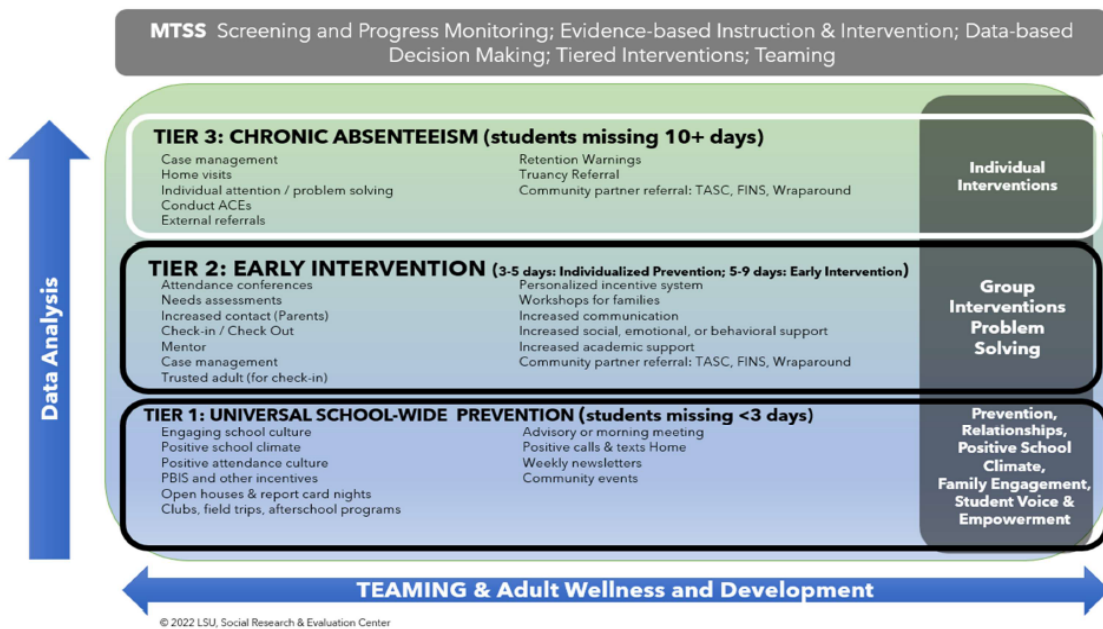
Students who are chronically absent for any school year between the eighth and twelfth grades are seven times more likely to drop out of high school. National data reflect students with disabilities who have Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) are 1.4 to 1.5 times more likely to be chronically absent than their peers without disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).



The 2021-2022 chronic absenteeism rate in Louisiana is 19.4 percent; however, the chronic absenteeism rate for students with disabilities is 23.4 percent, thus indicating that students with disabilities are more likely to miss instructional time due to absences. Further, the [Student Engagement and Attendance Center](#) explains that, using exclusionary discipline for non-violent offenses such as tardiness or absenteeism or subjective offenses such as defiance or disrespect should be eliminated from discipline practices. Reducing exclusionary discipline is associated with a positive school climate that fosters safety and promotes a supportive environment with respectful, trusting, and caring relationships.

Engaging Students

Appropriate engagement strategies can positively impact student experiences and encourage students to attend school regularly. Absenteeism is a leading indicator and a cause of educational inequity. A lack of engagement in the curriculum can affect attendance and the ability to thrive and learn in school.



Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) emphasizes prevention and early intervention while facilitating integration strategies connected to engagement and behavior. Utilizing a [MTSS screener](#) can help key school personnel create strategy and policy responses that encourage a proactive approach to understanding underlying barriers.

MTSS Team Pointers:

- Organize a multi-tiered attendance strategy that begins with prevention and early intervention
- Examine attendance and absenteeism data to assess which groups of students have higher or lower levels of absence
- Identify barriers, assets, and strategies that affect attendance



- Mobilize everyone in the school community to address attendance
- Determine if your plan is making a difference

Engaging Families

Family support programs and home visits can enhance student attendance. School systems are encouraged to provide information on monitoring family liaisons on campus. Students with disabilities and their parents must be allowed to create a plan to accommodate absent students due to physical and mental health concerns. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, [28 percent of children](#) with an IEP had a chronic physical or mental health condition that required regular treatment or medical care, compared with 10 percent of their peers. Schools are encouraged to initiate early and frequent communication with the student's parents about absences. Schools are encouraged to act quickly to address the issue of attendance with parents and to convene an IEP meeting to amend the IEP to add or revise attendance information.

Engaging a System Leadership Team

In order for school systems to prevent and respond to absenteeism, school systems are encouraged to use their system leadership team and their local Special Education Advisory Council (SEAC) to conduct attendance data reviews and action planning. This team can include diverse stakeholders but should consist of the following:

- at least one district or a school-level administrator.
- a social worker or counselor.
- a data manager.
- a special education representative.

At the school level, it is recommended that school leadership teams consider adding a family member or even a student to the team to discuss attendance and make recommendations. Creating a solid and diverse group can help promote ownership within the leadership team. This team is responsible for:

1. Setting attendance goals,
2. Developing MTSS systems and strategies,
3. Collecting and analyzing different types of data (attendance rates, observation, etc.) to determine needs and respond to attendance patterns
4. Training staff on providing interventions,
5. Monitoring interventions,
6. Connecting families with resources to meet their needs, and
7. Developing resources and additional interventions if needed.

Strategies to Avoid Behavior Related Absenteeism



Although there may be instances when a child's behavior, such as causing physical harm to self or others, warrants a change in educational placement determined by the **IEP team**, preventing the event from occurring can be a practical first step in most situations. For example, if a child is struggling academically, developmentally, or with behavioral support and is not provided with the appropriate interventions, disruptive behavior may occur as a signal that the child's needs are not being met. For some children whose behavioral needs are not satisfied with school- and program-wide strategies, the IEP team should determine what more targeted, individualized interventions and supports are necessary. Shifting schools and early childhood programs away from exclusionary and disproportionate disciplinary practices toward a more positive school and program climate requires building educator capacity.

To effectively support students and respond to behavior, school and program personnel should have knowledge, skills, and experience in topics such as:

- understanding the unique needs of each child with a disability and the rights afforded to children with disabilities under IDEA;
- being aware of potential signs of stress;
- being prepared to be the first contact and resource for children in need of support;
- implementing universal screening and understanding screening data to make informed decisions about child needs and appropriate instructional and behavioral strategies;
- implementing evidence-based prevention and intervention practices (such as positive behavioral interventions and supports, safe physical escort, conflict prevention, understanding antecedents, de-escalation, and conflict management) across all school or program settings to effectively support and respond to child behavior (e.g., classrooms, administrative office, hallways, playgrounds, cafeteria, school bus);
- conducting Functional Behavior Assessments (FBAs);
- effectively designing, implementing, and evaluating IEPs and Behavior Intervention Plans (BIPs), in collaboration with families and with support from specialized support personnel; and
- re-integrating children into the school or program after extended periods of other absences from school.

Self-Assessment

- What does the [system level subgroup attendance data](#) reveal?
- How do discipline practices contribute to absences?



- Is the communication between the student and the parent sufficient?
- What reintegration plans are in place to ensure students do not fall behind?

Resources

- [Centering Equity in Student Engagement and Attendance](#)
- [Positive, Proactive Approaches to Supporting Children With Disabilities: A Guide For Stakeholders](#)
- [Students with disabilities and chronic absenteeism](#)
- [Attendance Action Plan Workbook 2.0](#)
- [An examination of the association between MTSS implementation fidelity measures and student outcomes](#)
- [Chronic Absence Notice Sample Letter](#)
- [Attendance Success Plan](#)
- [Attendance Awards Guidance](#)
- [Chronic Absenteeism in the Nations Schools](#)
- [Strategies for Success: A Guidebook for Supporting Students With Disabilities](#)