

Attendance Peer-to-Peer Network: District Needs-Sensing Addendum

In November and December 2020, the National Student Attendance, Engagement, and Success Center (the Center) requested needs-sensing information via an online form from districts participating in the Center's Attendance Peer-to-Peer (P2P) Network. Respondents included five administrators from four districts out of the 14 districts participating in the P2P Network.¹ Respondents included Penns Grove Carneys Point (New Jersey, two respondents), Milwaukee Public Schools (Wisconsin, one respondent), New Britain School District (Connecticut, one respondent), and Plainfield Public Schools (New Jersey, one respondent).

This memo serves as an addendum to the Center's base year comprehensive needs assessment report. It provides additional needs-sensing data at the district level and informs additional technical assistance supports during option year 1. The memo summarizes common challenges and strategies the four respondent districts shared and proposes action steps for providing technical assistance through the P2P Network. The appendix following this summary contains the complete set of response data.

Common Challenges

- ▶ **Collecting high-quality attendance data.** Districts face challenges collecting data on student attendance in remote and hybrid learning environments. Various factors influence the timeliness and quality of attendance data, such as variations in the definition of attendance (e.g., counting attendance in one virtual session as full-day attendance versus requiring attendance for the entire school day), delays in reporting attendance for asynchronous course participation, and separately collecting data for remote and hybrid students. Districts and schools also have difficulty reaching some student groups, such as those without adequate access to devices and the internet and students with special needs.
- ▶ **Encouraging attendance among remote and hybrid learners.** Several districts noted they would be unable to meet state attendance targets for the fall 2020 semester. While districts acknowledged the challenges of engaging chronically absent students during a typical school year, the pandemic has exacerbated these challenges. For example, research indicates that strong relationships with caring adults and educators are paramount for keeping students engaged in school. With limited or no in-person activities, building and maintaining these relationships has been difficult during the pandemic. Other strategies for mitigating absenteeism used prior to the pandemic, such as alternative learning plans and course schedules, are also less effective in remote learning environments.
- ▶ **Addressing fatigue among students, parents, and teachers with remote learning.** Districts reported that teachers, students, and parents are struggling with the idiosyncrasies of remote learning. Some parents must manage remote instruction for multiple children of different ages. Students, parents, and teachers may also struggle to understand unfamiliar learning platforms, software, and technology. Critically, students without reliable access to technology have difficulty accessing remote instruction. The combination of synchronous and asynchronous

¹ Response rates were low because of limited district availability during the COVID-19 pandemic.

learning has also created challenges for districts, schools, and parents in creating a structured atmosphere for remote learners.

- ▶ **Supporting students and families.** The pandemic has exposed additional barriers to student engagement and attendance. Factors related to the effects of COVID-19 upon social and economic structures, such as financial hardships or population mobility, may cause difficulty in understanding the root causes of absenteeism. Additionally, in some instances, older children may assist or even provide primary care for younger siblings, further limiting engagement and school attendance.

Common Strategies

- ▶ **Using teams of staff to engage chronically absent students.** Districts have used diverse teams of staff—including social workers, counselors, teacher leaders, school safety staff, and parent coordinators—to engage absent students via email, phone calls, and socially distant home visits. Frequent engagement with students helps schools and districts triage issues and encourage attendance.
- ▶ **Offering additional supports to engage students and families.** Districts reported offering alternative learning schedules and opportunities for students to earn course credits. For example, one district offers remote learning opportunities at night, while other districts blend synchronous and asynchronous instruction. The alternative learning opportunities offer flexibility for students who struggle to attend class during normal school hours.
- ▶ **Providing expanded supports to facilitate remote learning.** Districts reported expanding supports during the pandemic to help students and families overcome barriers to online attendance. For example, afterschool technical support sessions and virtual town hall meetings help districts and schools mitigate information technology barriers and communicate directly with parents and families.

Potential Follow-Up Steps

Based on the findings from this online needs-sensing activity, the Center proposes several ideas for addressing needs and elevating promising practices through the existing Attendance P2P Network. These ideas would require confirmation and approval by the Office of Program and Grantee Support Services and the participating districts:

- ▶ **Facilitate a P2P Network session on “alternative learning options” to highlight practices from two participating districts.** The P2P Network will benefit from presentations on alternative learning options from districts that have reduced absenteeism during the pandemic. For example, Penns Grove Carneys Point Regional could present on its facilitation of online evening school, or New Britain School District could provide insight into establishing supervised remote learning sites. We propose connecting with these districts to identify potential interest in sharing these best practices during one of the P2P sessions that has not yet confirmed a topic.
- ▶ **Pair Plainfield Public Schools with New Britain School District or Milwaukee Public Schools for a facilitated P2P discussion on strategies for reducing absenteeism.** Plainfield School District is “looking for creative ways to improve student attendance.” In the survey, New Britain and Milwaukee public schools identified specific strategies with demonstrated effectiveness. Should these districts be interested, we propose using one of the nonspecified P2P sessions for this

purpose or offering this support to these districts through “just-in-time” technical assistance under Task 3.2.

- ▶ **Facilitate a P2P session on ensuring the accuracy of data for use in root cause analysis.** The observations from this needs assessment confirm the need for the currently planned P2P session in the attendance data strand, focused on root cause analysis. The Center will give attention to the topic of data accuracy during this session.
- ▶ **Facilitate connections between districts to share effective strategies.** Aligning with the observations in the needs assessment , the Center can facilitate virtual events for districts to share challenges and promising practices. The Center could leverage existing subject-matter expertise and connections to other technical assistance providers.

Appendix. Complete Dataset of Responses From Local Education Agencies

District Name	Milwaukee Public Schools (WI)	Penns Grove Carneys Point Regional School District (NJ)	Penns Grove Carneys Point Regional School District (NJ)	New Britain School District (CT)	Plainfield Public Schools (NJ)
What is your job title?	Director Research, Assessment and Data	Director of Curriculum and Instruction	District Supervisor	Coordinator of Partnership	Director
How are data on chronic absenteeism used for decisionmaking and reporting in your district?	This is used all the time and has been for years. We have had a district early warning metric for at least 8 years. We are now transitioning to the Regularly attending (based on the ESSA 90%) on our dashboards. We are working on informational materials for people to understand the different modules.	Chronic absenteeism data are a major component of our Annual School Planning processes in each building. Most buildings do not reach state standards with Chronic Absenteeism as reported in the annual performance reports (NJ). Developing a Smart goal (and through a root cause analysis), with routine data review and discussion quarterly has prompted varying strategies to mitigate the issues.	(HS) - We construct alternative learning plans based on chronic absenteeism data and information gained from the students and families as well. We operate a night school entitled, Achieve Beyond, which is funded and driven by our annual school plan and smart goal based on chronic absenteeism data.	We use data for internal analysis to determine root cause of chronic absenteeism. We use that data to develop programs to support families and students in need.	We report chronic absenteeism to NJDOE for state performance reports. As a district we use the chronic absenteeism report to assess which schools have an absent rate of 10% or higher. Each school is required to monitor its students absenteeism rate monthly and provide supports to those students at 10% or greater.
Can you please describe any successes your district has experienced when collecting, analyzing, and reporting chronic absence data?	Data is not an issue as all. We have multiple metrics and methods to get at this data.	Because we have established routines and procedures within the Annual School Planning process and the expectation of the state to have quarterly benchmarks set for each goal, Chronic Absenteeism data is routinely evaluated and programs are developed.	(HS) We have reduced our chronic absenteeism from 33% to 15% by facilitating our night school for attendance recovery and credit recovery	N/A	This data is pulled from the districts SIS (Genesis) and submitted to the NJDOE NJSMART data warehouse. My district is using the social workers and guidance counselors to assist with contacting students who are not reporting to school regularly during this hybrid or remote learning model.

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<p>Can you please describe any challenges your district has experienced when collecting, analyzing, and reporting chronic absence data?</p>	<p>The barrier has nothing to do with the data....the barrier is making significant impact to change the data. I am currently working with a region that wants quick wins....I can chat with someone about this if you want more details.</p>	<p>Collecting, analyzing and reporting CA data has not been a great challenge. Having a well functioning student information system helps.</p>	<p>(HS) Analyzing data can be difficult with some families that are difficult to reach, may be homeless and/or experiencing socio-economic hardships, or traveling to another country.</p>	<p>In order to meet the needs of our families while understanding the stressors of this pandemic, students and families have the option to stay home if not feeling well. From an internal aspect, it is important to us to ensure the student is still connecting, whether in person or at home. Trying to determine the accuracy of whether students are hybrid or full remote, due to the ability to change so quickly, is time consuming. Our energy should be spent on student outcomes and student success rather than whether they are hybrid A or B. Unless of course, we can hire statisticians to dive into data on a regular basis. This data point is specifically for reporting but not used for analysis.</p>	<p>The challenge is getting the students to log into class each day to collect their attendance.</p>

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What are the implications for collecting and reporting attendance and chronic absence data in the 2000–2021 school year during hybrid or remote learning models?	The issue is data quality from the buildings. We have set definitions, but some of these are very gracious, such as I can show up for one session and that counts for a full day attendance. The other issues is having asynchronous updates done in a timely manner.	We have developed degrees of attendance such as "present" and "present-virtual." The collecting and reporting can be successful in staff are accurately inputting the data in homerooms and class sessions.	The implications of collecting and reporting chronic absenteeism data this year may be that we are below state averages due to most students and families electing to be virtual. With less daily and in-person contact with students, it is more challenging than usual to follow up and coordinate student plans and facilitate improvement.	Attendance data is extremely important. We should be able to dive into to the data, internally, to determine root cause or strategies for the individual students/families. However, the breakdown for state reporting may not be consistent across the state, causing it to be a non value data point.	Reporting attendance and chronic absences in the 20-21 school year during hybrid or remote learning models can really hurt a district due to the fact that students are facing many challenges that are out of the controls of the schools.
Have you identified any specific, effective strategies for improving student attendance, engagement or lowering chronic absence in schools within your district? If yes, please describe in the space below.	We are working on this....parent contacts, meeting technology needs, engaging instruction seem to help the most.	Over the years, we have been able to chip away. The first strategy was ensuring accuracy of the data. We also have implemented alternative programs (2pm - 6pm for example) that provide students varying learning opportunities, whether due to their life conflicts or even for disciplinary reasons. This year, with the pandemic, we are seeing very poor numbers.	Sending home letters and mailings about days absent and how to recover attendance; Facilitating our evening school; contacting DCP; filing court complaints; devising alternative learning plans for specific needs of students.	Increasing the number of Family School Liaisons, creating collaborative programs with our community partners; "Supervised Remote Learning sites" allowing families to bring students to sites on remote learning days, Partnership Office creating a CSDNB Community Directory Guide, food deliveries to keep students and families in need, and extending the 2 day option for subgroups to attend school four days.	No, we are looking for creative ways to improve student attendance.

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<p>Have you identified any specific challenges to improving student attendance, engagement, or lowering chronic absence in schools within your district? If yes, please describe in the space below.</p>	<p>We hear back that managing remote learning for multiple children is very difficult and there is a fatigue setting in on the adult side. We are constantly working with staff to develop their skills as online instructors. Our staff was not prepared skill wise to be in 100% remote learning, so the learning curve has been difficult.</p>	<p>We still have a hard time reaching certain families and students. Outside of this school year, which is a problem of its own, in a normal year, it takes a village.</p>	<p>Students who are fully virtual and/or lacking chromebooks have specific challenges to logging in and being considered present.</p>	<p>Yes, we have a variety of specific challenges, but here are a few. Families are nervous to bring students to either school or SRL's. It has been difficult reframing and messaging what remote learning expectations are this year, moving away from the school/student expectations that occurred on the first onset of this pandemic, from March-June. The reframing includes a more structured school day has been challenging. Dynamics of student and family struggles during this time prevent positive remote learning experience.</p>	<p>No.</p>

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<p>Can you describe the district's current strategies for engaging parents, families, and the community to address chronic absence?</p>	<p>Various communications from teachers, messenger tools, etc. We also have other staff members that cannot do their current job (e.g. safety staff) that are calling parents routinely to triage issues and encourage attendance. Paras, counselors, social workers, parent coordinators, etc. are also contacting children and families. In some cases, home visits are occurring.</p>	<p>Each school has an ASP team (counselors, principal, teacher leaders) who review data. The counselors connect with the families and work with students to motivate improvement.</p>	<p>Idea(s): Title I family engagement and explaining smart goal about chronic absenteeism; PBIS rewards and incentives for students</p>	<p>CSDNB is providing Supervised Remote Learning Sites for students to attend during remote learning days. Identified staff are conducting home visits as well as resource drop-off's following COVID guidelines. Teachers are offering classes after the school day so students, that may be watching their siblings during the day, have an opportunity to engage in a synchronous learning environment. SEL activities to support students and families. Evening hours for families and students to connect with teachers for tech support and content. Virtual town hall meetings with Superintendent. Increasing the number of opportunities by adding additional before and after school programs.</p>	<p>Currently we have have posted the district's hybrid and remote learning model on the webpage for parents, students and the community. We have our truant officer visiting homes of those students who do not report but show up on our rolls. The social workers and guidance counselors are working closely with students to ascertain their reason for not reporting to class regularly. We also have our Student, Intervention Family Support Services department providing services to families that need it.</p>

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From your perspective, what type of technical assistance would help address chronic absence/attendance issues in your district this school year? Select all that apply.	Webinars Universal resources or tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Virtual intensive TA ▪ Webinars ▪ Virtual session with other districts on a specific topic ▪ Universal resources or tools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Virtual intensive TA ▪ Webinars ▪ Virtual session with other districts on a specific topic ▪ Virtual session with a SME ▪ Virtual session with my SEA ▪ Universal resources or tools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Webinars ▪ Virtual session with a SME ▪ Universal resources or tools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Virtual intensive TA ▪ Webinars ▪ Virtual session with other districts on a specific topic ▪ Virtual session with a SME ▪ Virtual session with my SEA ▪ Universal resources or tools
During a future P2P Network session, would you be interested in sharing any resources you've created or used related to attendance data or attendance supports? If so, please provide a little information here, and someone from the Center will follow up with you.	Maybe....What exactly would be pertinent?	Sure. However, our best resource is our Annual School Planning tool which the SEA has access to.	N/A	Collaboration with our community partners to provide Supervised Remote Learning Sites.	N/A

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We are working on the Center's next promising practices brief, featuring the Attendance Plan Reflection Tool you saw in P2P Data Session 1. Would you be interested in speaking with us to potentially feature a "vignette" that describes some aspects of your district's attendance policies (tied to the checklist) during COVID-19? If so, please indicate YES below and we'll follow up.	N/A	Maybe	Maybe	Maybe	No
Is there anything else related to chronic absenteeism you want to share?	The suggestions you offered are all good and we have done most. We are engaged with the Council of Great City Schools, our SEA is terrific, our Rtl Center is great. The knowledge and the planning is there, the execution and find the what works for us is important.	N/A	N/A	N/A	No, thank you.

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Is there anything else related to participating in our peer-to-peer (P2P) Network you want to share?	I wish we did this months and months ago. This would have been a HUGE resource last May.	We unfortunately were not provided a link to session 1 as we were advised it was just for the SEAs. If there are recordings of the session, that may prove helpful.	N/A	n/a	No, thank you.
Notes	<p>Summary</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Challenges with data quality, whether definitions of attendance are rigorous enough -Challenges with "moving the needle" on the data via supports or other approaches Working with a region that is hoping to have some "quick wins" - open to sharing about this work with the Center or the P2P network Focused on providing supports for teachers to strengthen virtual instruction Drawing on additional staff to support family engagement 	<p>Summary</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Challenge meeting state standards related to absenteeism. Identify and implement interventions at the school level, resulting in variation in strategies across schools. Challenge collecting data separately for in-person and remote students. Use alternative school schedules to mitigate difficulty attending school during normal school hours Rely on a team, including counselors, teacher leaders, and administrators, to maintain contact with students. 	<p>Summary</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gives students opportunity for credit recovery via night courses. Observed success reducing chronic absenteeism, but COVID-19 has made mitigating absenteeism a challenge, as most students are remote and can be difficult to reach. Using Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, alternative learning plans, letters to parents, and the court system to mitigate absenteeism 	<p>Summary</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offering hybrid and remote learning options during the pandemic. Collecting data on student attendance has created burden on the district, in part, because of difficulty determining whether a student is hybrid or remote. Creating remote learning sites with support from community partners, online night courses, and additional opportunities for in-person instruction has helped reduce absenteeism during the pandemic. Adjusting student and family expectations of remote learning has been a challenge; unlike in spring 2020, students and families must treat remote learning in the fall the same as they would in-person instruction. 	<p>Summary</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reporting absenteeism data to the state monthly. Students with an absence rate above 10 percent receive intervention. Contacting absent students regularly using school counselors and social workers. Providing support to families through Student, Intervention Family Support Services to mitigate barriers to attendance. Challenge collecting attendance data during the pandemic; factors outside of the district's control might influence students' ability to attend remote courses.