

# Reducing Chronic Absenteeism

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**Joint Committee on Public Schools**

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# Chronic Absenteeism Defined

- **CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM** measures students who miss **10% of enrolled school days**, including excused/unexcused and suspensions
- **Average daily attendance** counts the average number of students who show up to school
- **Truancy** counts only unexcused absences



# What does this mean?

- Based on a 180-day school year:
  - Any student who misses 18 days or more per year
  - That means about 2 days every month is considered....

**CHRONICALLY ABSENT**

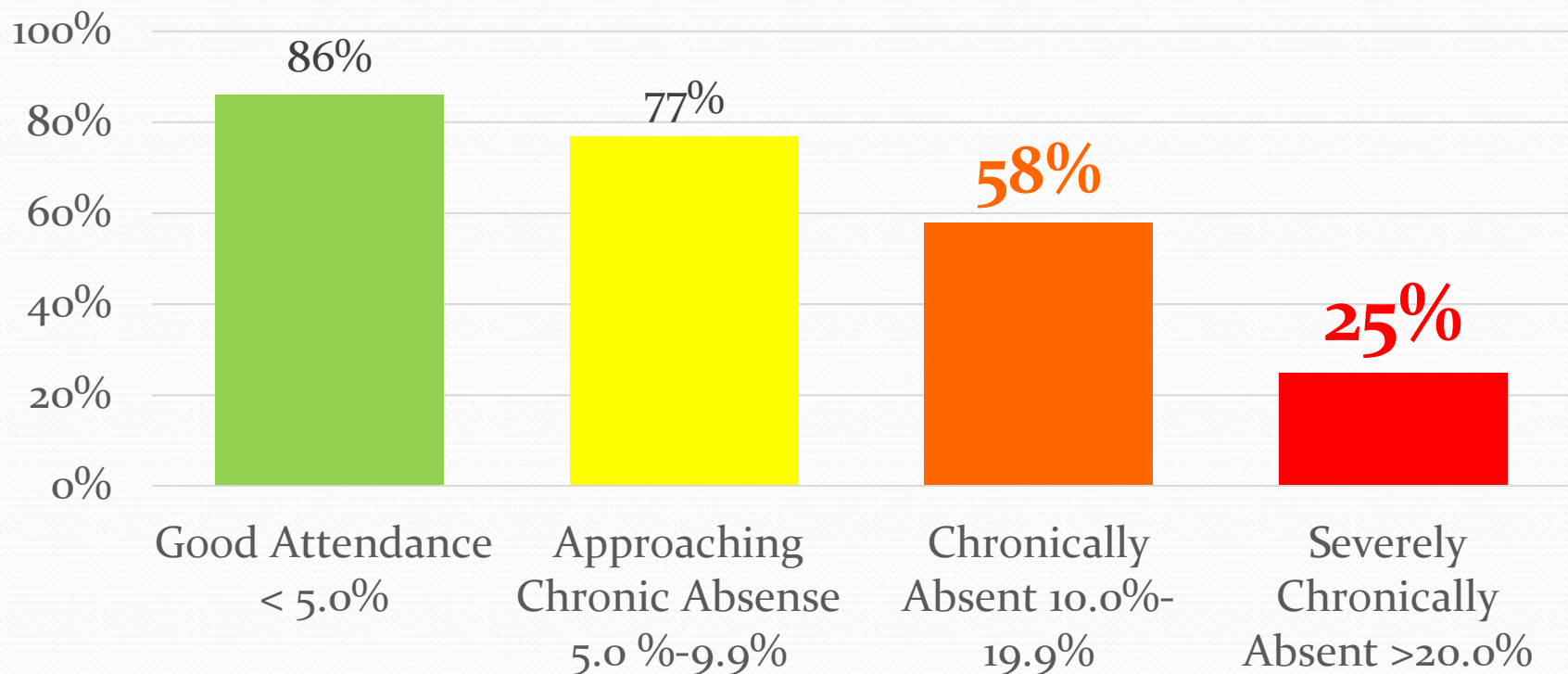


## Every absence hurts a student's opportunity for success

- *Early years (PK-3) absenteeism leads to:*
  - Long-term reading problems
  - Higher absenteeism rates in later grades
  - Higher rates of retention
- Absenteeism in the later school years correlates with:
  - Higher rates of suspension
  - Lower academic achievement
  - Lower odds of reaching second year of college

# The more school students miss, the more likely they are to drop out

Newark Graduation Rate in 4 years, 2015 cohort, grouped by 9th grade absenteeism status



# Truancy Vs. Chronic Absence

## TRUANCY

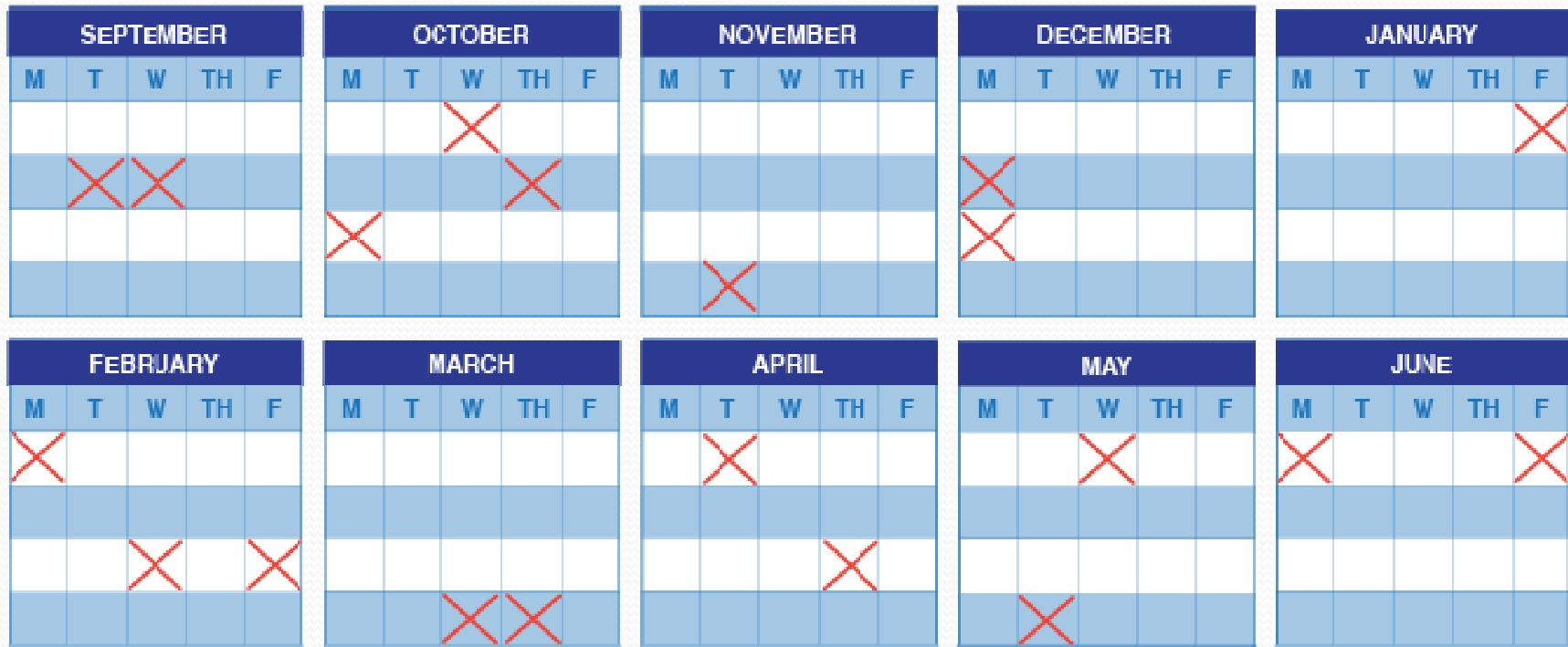
- Counts only unexcused absences
- Emphasizes compliance with school rules
- Relies on legal & administrative solutions

Vs.

## CHRONIC ABSENCE

- Counts all absences: excused, unexcused & suspensions
- Emphasizes academic impact of missed days
- Uses community-based, positive strategies

## Why We May Not Notice Chronic Absence



**Absences Add up**  
**Chronic Absence = 18 days of absence = 2 days a month**



# What the Data Tells Us



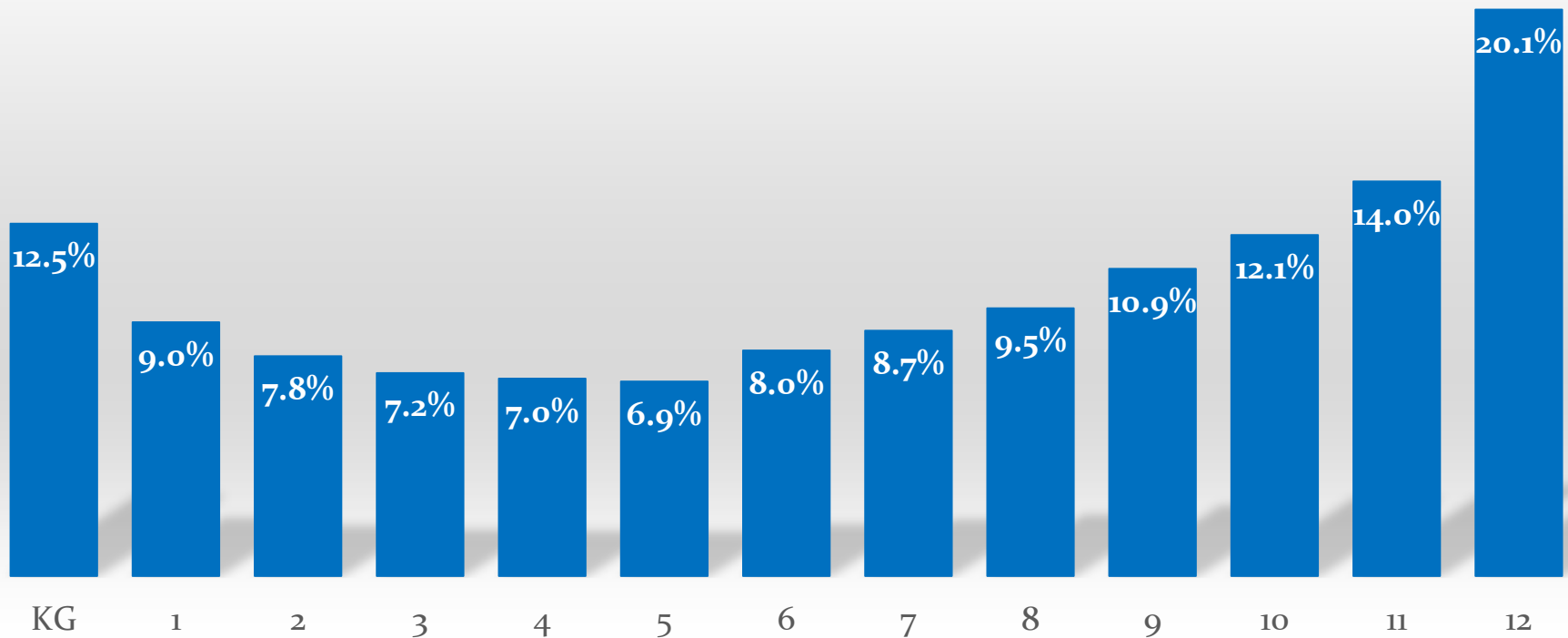


# Chronic Absenteeism in NJ: A Snapshot (2016-17)

- About 136,000 K-12 students in New Jersey were considered “chronically absent
  - That was **10 percent** of the total student population
- More than 20,000 NJ preschool students were considered “chronically absent
  - That was **31 percent** of the total preschool student population

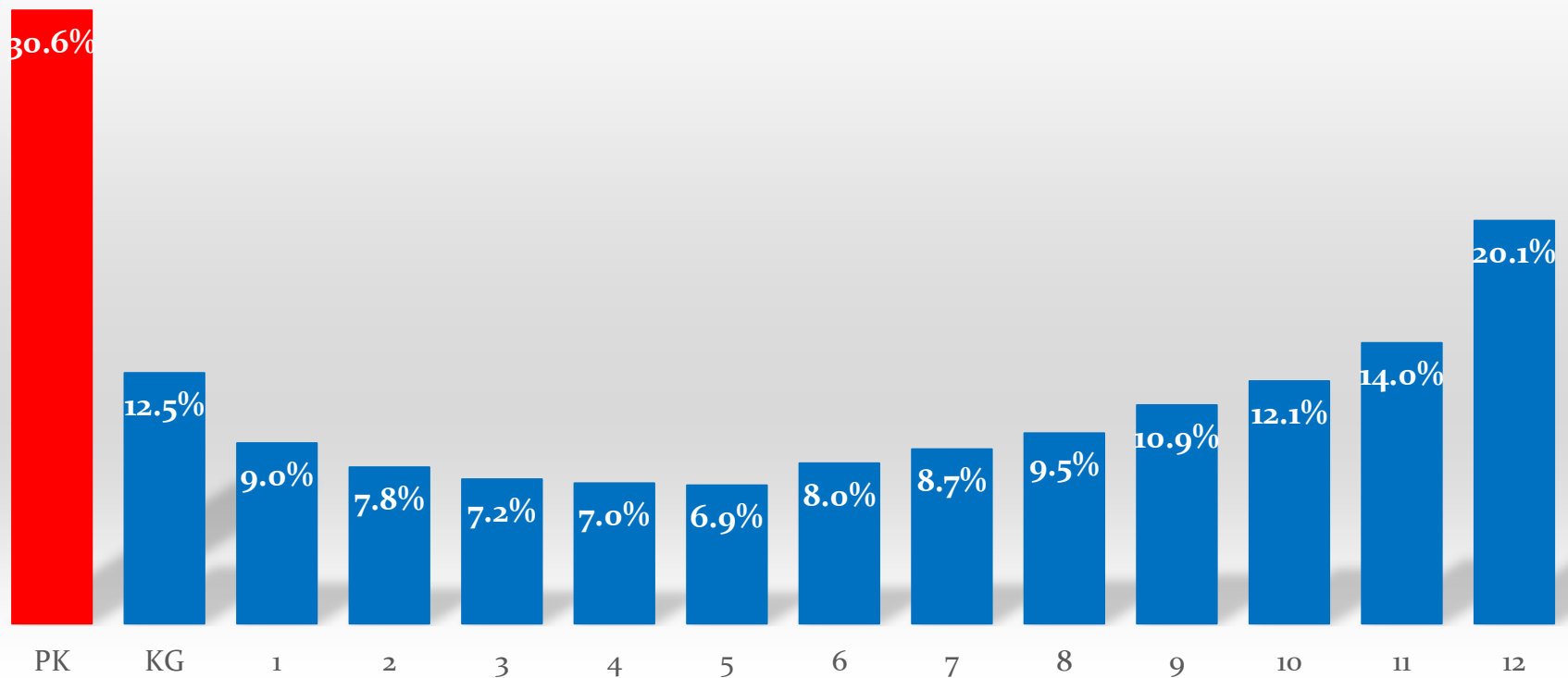
# Chronic Absenteeism, by grade (K-12)

Percentage of students chronically absent by grade K-12, 2016-17

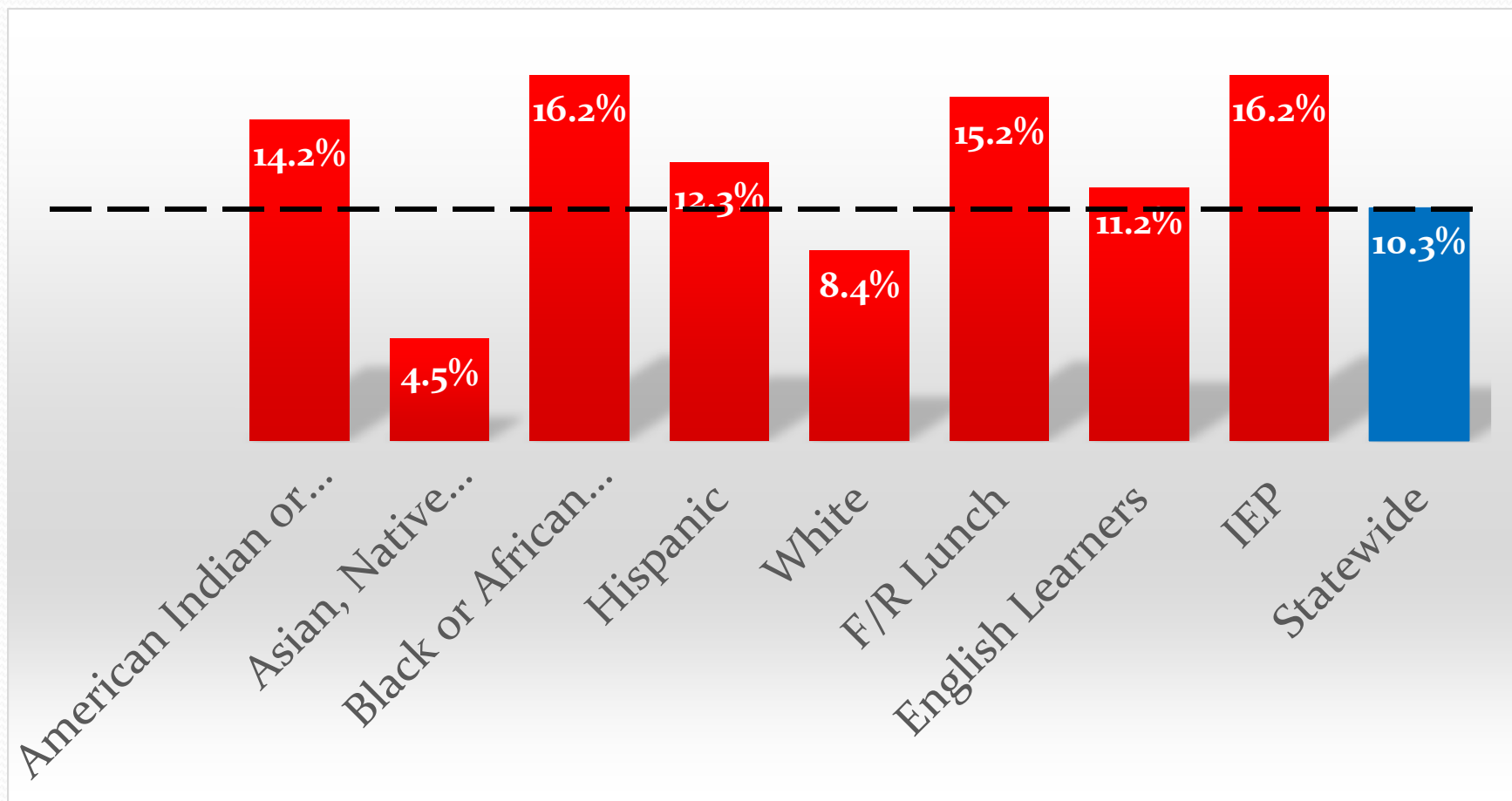


# Now Add Preschool...

Percentage of students chronically absent by grade PK-12, 2016-17



# Absenteeism in Demographic Categories (K-12)



Source: NJ Dep't of Education. Categories may overlap.

# Special Populations

## Chronic Absenteeism Rate by Special Population

	Total	Economically Disadvantaged Students	Students with Special Needs	English Language Learners
District A	8%	6%	<u>22%</u>	8%
District B	8%	12%	11%	<u>16%</u>
District C	8%	<u>20%</u>	12%	<u>16%</u>



# Digging Deeper: Reasons for absences

- **For Young Students:**

- Health issues
- Unreliable transportation
- Housing Instability
- School discipline
- Parent work schedules
- PK and K viewed as less important
- Safety in school and in neighborhoods
- Student/parent choice
  - Family issues



# Digging Deeper: Reasons for absences

## For Older Students:

- Health issues (physical and mental)
- Student responsibilities
- Transportation/distance from school
- Personal safety
- Suspensions
- School curriculum: relevance and rigor
- Parent disengagement
- School policies
- Lack of link to a trusted adult

# No one-size-fits-all solution, but there are common themes

- Need to be **intentional** about attendance strategy
  - Deliberate planning
  - Consistent, persistent implementation (can't stop messaging in November!)
- **Use data** continuously
  - Target high-absenteeism and at-risk students
  - Identify problems affecting **your specific** student population
- **Build relationships** with parents and families
  - Start outreach early
  - Messaging on importance of school
  - Be **specific** about impact of absences and action steps



# How State policy can support better attendance

- New NJ law (P.L. 2018, c.23):
  - NJDOE reporting (no new regs yet)
  - If school has 10% or more chronically absent, must develop **action plan**:
    - Identifying problems/barriers
    - Develop recommendations
    - Outline communications strategies to parents
    - Establish protocols for informing parents re absences
    - Review school policies to ensure support



## State policy (cont.)

- Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)
  - Chronic absenteeism as performance measure

# Resources

- ACNJ attendance page: <https://acnj.org/issues/school-attendance/>
- Attendance Works' Tool Kits: <http://www.attendanceworks.org/tools/>
- Every Student, Every Day: A Community Toolkit to Address and Eliminate Chronic Absenteeism:  
<https://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/chronicabsenteeism/toolkit.pdf>



**Any Questions???**

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