Student attendance data can help you unlock early warning signs and maintain a watchful eye on student absence over the entire school year. The data universe can be overwhelming. To help break it down, we’ve created this guide, divided into three sections:

1. **Attendance and Chronic Absenteeism: Two Perspectives**
   It is easy to confuse attendance and chronic absenteeism, but these measures tell us two different things. Learn more about the difference and why it is important to look at both measures.

2. **Are You Ready? Preparing for the Work**
   When it comes to number crunching, schools and districts have varied levels of capacity. Take a few moments to think about your readiness and the steps and resources you need to get a handle on your data.

3. **Crunch Your Numbers: Where to Start**
   There are many ways to look at the data. This resource highlights several specific steps you and your team can take to start crunching numbers to clearly understand the problem.
It can be easy to confuse attendance measures with chronic absenteeism measures. If your school or district has a high attendance rate, it can be easy to think it is not necessary to prioritize student attendance.

But attendance and chronic absenteeism rates give you two different perspectives. When you look at the two measures together, you get a more complete picture of your students’ experiences.

Attendance rates are aggregate comparisons of the number of enrolled students in attendance each day to the number of enrolled students for the school year. The percentage rate is calculated by dividing students’ total number of attendance hours by students’ total possible attendance hours.

Chronic absenteeism looks deeper into student attendance rates to understand what is happening among specific students. It is defined by students who missed 10 percent or more of the school year for any reason—excused or unexcused.

Let’s look at Ohio’s attendance and chronic absenteeism rates in 2018 as an example:

### Ohio’s Attendance Rate

- **Rate**: 94%

### Ohio’s Chronic Absenteeism Rate

- **Rate**: 16%

If the state only considered its attendance rate, we would overlook the fact that 16 percent of our students—more than 260,000 students—missed at least 18 days of school in one year. Shining light on the 16 percent of students who are chronically absent means we can target supports that help get them on track for good attendance.

Let’s look a little closer at the difference. An elementary school has 10 students and serves those students 180 days a year.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Name</th>
<th>Total Days Attended</th>
<th>Total Days in School Year</th>
<th>Number of Absences</th>
<th>Was the Student Chronically Absent?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alisha</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sadiq</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joshua</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amani</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norah</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isla</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shen</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaheela</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pradeep</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adnan</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>1703</strong></td>
<td><strong>1800</strong></td>
<td><strong>97</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students at this elementary school attended 1,703 days out of 1,800 total possible days, for an attendance rate of 95 percent. At the same time, we see that three students missed 18 or more days, for a chronic absenteeism rate of 30 percent.

Except for Norah and Kaheela, this school can work on improving its attendance for every one of its students. Every day is an opportunity to learn.
Districts are in different places when it comes to capacity to use data. Some are engaged in the Ohio Improvement Process (OIP) and receive support through the state support teams. Others build capacity by partnering with outside organizations like educational service centers, local universities and colleges, or programs such as Proving Ground.

Wherever you are starting, there are always opportunities to increase the use of data for understanding attendance.

As you begin, consider these tips:

**Tip #1: Start by assessing your capacity.**

Depending on your district’s capacity to carry out data analyses, you may need to do a little prep work before you start making sense of your attendance and chronic absenteeism data.

As a quick self-assessment, ask yourself if you have:

**The data.** What data is available to inform the discussion and what additional data is needed? Who has access to the data? Do your data systems and software allow your staff to generate basic statistical analyses (for example, percentages disaggregated by building, grade level or student subgroup)?

**The people.** Who is responsible for collecting, maintaining and reporting your district and school attendance data to Ohio’s Education Management Information System (EMIS)? Do you need to identify additional staff with the skills and time to engage in data analytics? How will staff across roles or buildings communicate with each other about the data?

**The partnerships.** Does your information technology center or educational service center offer resources and supports to supplement your internal data analytics capacity? Are there local universities, colleges or research organizations that could serve as research partners to help you with your data analytics needs?

**Tip #2: It’s okay to start small and build up.**

If your district is just starting to use data to understand attendance, give yourself permission to start small, learn the process and improve over time.

Prioritize your efforts. You do not have to tackle every possible analysis at once. Choose analyses that you can complete in a timely manner with the staff and resources that are available. Prototype the process through which you will run the analyses and share out with your staff for discussion.

Use what is available. Sometimes we do not need new data to gain insights on students’ experiences; instead, we can look at data in new ways. Consider the following:

- You can use the Ohio Department of Education’s resources to get started on this work.
- Attendance and chronic absenteeism data are both publicly reported at the district and school levels on the Ohio Department of Education’s website.
- Through the Secure Data Center, district staff, using the appropriate secured access, can review student-level attendance and absenteeism data, as well as disaggregate attendance and chronic absenteeism by grade or student subgroup.

Talk to your staff, including EMIS coordinators and teachers. You may learn that your district, building and staff already generate attendance data you can review, learn from and expand upon.
The exact makeup of effective data review teams may vary by district. Consider the following questions as you assemble your data team:

**Stakeholders.** Who are your key stakeholders? How will you learn more about their perspectives on your district’s and schools’ attendance and absenteeism data? How will you share the results of your data review with your stakeholders?

**Team roles.** Who are the key internal staff who will serve on your needs assessment team? Who will lead the team? Who will be responsible for data analyses? Who will lead discussions about root causes, prioritization and possible solutions?

**Time and process.** How will you ensure your internal team has sufficient time to review and dig into the data? How will the team communicate with each other about progress on and outcomes of the data analyses?

The [Ohio Improvement Process (OIP)](https://www.ohiostate.edu/ohiostate/ohio-education) encourages districts to use district leadership teams, building leadership teams and teacher-based teams throughout the cycle of continuous improvement. Engaging teams like these at the appropriate times ensure alignment of efforts across classrooms, buildings and the district.

### Crunch Your Numbers: Where to Start

Following are several data analyses that can serve as starting points to help you use data to understand more about your students’ attendance and chronic absenteeism rates. Keep the following in mind to make the most of these examples.

**Tailor these analyses to meet your needs.**

These analyses are examples. You may want to tailor them to focus on a district’s or building’s specific needs. For example, perhaps your district is committed to prioritizing supports for your growing English learner population. Instead of looking at absenteeism by gender, as suggested below, you may want to look at absenteeism by English learner status—or, better yet, look at absenteeism by gender and English learner status.

Further, your lens on attendance will vary depending on your role.
For **district administrators**, it will be important to understand differences in attendance across buildings, grade levels and student subgroups.

**Building administrators** may be most interested in differences in attendance across grade levels, student subgroups and classrooms. As a building administrator, looking at differences across buildings may help you identify peers who have tried a different approach that is working. This can spark important conversations.

**Classroom teachers** have the closest connection to individual students and will know if their students are coming to class each day. Teachers can help support student attendance by offering strong instruction, establishing positive culture in their classrooms and working with their building leadership and peers to identify a need for buildingwide interventions.

**Understand root causes before jumping to solutions.**

When data help identify a challenge, well-intentioned people often want to jump straight to fixing the problem. Before doing so, take time to fully understand the challenges students face in getting to school each and every day. As your data review teams discuss potential root causes, consider causes that fall into each of the following categories:

**District and building factors**
- Is there leadership buy-in for prioritizing attendance—across the district and buildings?
- How are students being engaged in their learning? What are the strong instructional practices that will engage students in the classroom and make them want to come to school?
- Does the structure of your school calendar and school days affect attendance?

**Family**
- How do families view the importance of attendance?
- Are families able to support their students’ abilities to get to school?

**Community**
- Are there safety factors in the community that affect students’ abilities to get to school?

You may have more control over root causes within your district and buildings. Identifying and acknowledging the family and community factors affecting attendance will help you fully understand your students’ experiences so you can develop creative, targeted solutions.

**Data is a starting point and a conversation starter.**

Data alone will never tell the whole story; use it to generate conversations with administrative staff, teachers, families and community leaders.

Once you and your data review teams are ready to go, you might consider the following analyses to begin looking for trends in your attendance and chronic absenteeism data. Examining these data at the local level and asking the right questions about what you are seeing can set you on the path of identifying potential solutions.
1. Who are your absent students?

The following analyses in this resource use aggregate data—attendance and absenteeism rates by district, building, grade and/or student subgroup—to help you see trends in attendance and chronic absenteeism. Identifying trends can help you develop classroom-level, grade-level, buildingwide or districtwide interventions.

At the same time, it is important not to lose sight of the individual students within your classrooms and buildings. To that end,

- Work with your data team to help track students’ attendance throughout the year. Check it frequently, encourage your building teams to check it frequently and talk to students frequently throughout the year about the supports they need to get to school.

- Identify the students who were chronically absent during the prior school year. These are the students most likely to be chronically absent in the current school year. Knowing who they are at the start of the school year can help you identify appropriate supports early on, before chronic absenteeism becomes an issue again.

2. How many days of school are your students missing?

What to Look At: Number of students by number of days absent.

Questions to Ask Your Data Review Teams:

- How many total instructional days did students miss in your district in the prior school year? How much lost learning does this represent?

- How many of your students are chronically absent? How many of your students are on the cusp of being chronically absent?

Example: During the 2017-2018 school year, Ohio students lost a total of 17,596,136 days of instruction. More than 260,000 students missed at least 18 days.
3. How is absenteeism affecting your students’ learning?

What to Look At: Test performance for chronically absent students and non-chronically absent students.

Questions to Ask Your Data Review Teams:
- Do you see a difference in the performance of your chronically absent and non-chronically absent students?
- What share of your lowest-performing students are chronically absent? How do the proportions shift as you look at higher levels of performance?

Example: In 2018, chronically absent students made up 28 percent of the state’s population of students scoring in the Limited range on the grades 3-8 English language arts assessments. At the other end of the spectrum, only 5 percent of Ohio’s students scoring Advanced were chronically absent.

This difference in representation of chronically absent students among our lowest and highest performance categories suggests a relationship between attendance and student achievement—a relationship that is verified in the research through more complex analytical methods. In third grade, for example, chronically absent students are 65 percent less likely to meet the Third Grade Reading Guarantee than their peers.
4. Are there differences in absenteeism at different grade levels?

**What to Look At:** Percent of students who are chronically absent by grade

**Questions to Ask Your Data Review Teams:**
- Are absenteeism rates higher in certain grades?
- What do you think is leading to the rates in the grade with your highest rate of chronic absenteeism?
  - Are there school factors? What are they? Why are they leading to absences?
  - Are there student factors? What are they? Why are they leading to absences?
  - Are there family factors? What are they? Why are they leading to absences?

Are there community factors? What are they? Why are they leading to absences?

**Example:** During the 2017-2018 school year, Ohio’s seniors had the highest chronic absenteeism rates. Kindergartners also have high rates of absenteeism. What are some of the reasons seniors may have high rates of absenteeism? What are some of the reasons kindergartners may have high rates of absenteeism?
5. Are there differences in absenteeism for girls and boys in different grade levels?

**What to Look At:** Percent absenteeism by grade and gender.

**Questions to Ask Your Team:**
- Are absenteeism rates higher for males or females? Does this vary by grade level?
- What do you think is leading to differences in girls’ and boys’ absenteeism rates?
  - Are there school factors? What are they? Why are they leading to absences?
  - Are there student factors? What are they? Why are they leading to absences?
  - Are there family factors? What are they? Why are they leading to absences?
  - Are there community factors? What are they? Why are they leading to absences?

**Example:** In 2017-2018, Ohio’s male students had higher rates of chronic absenteeism than female students until 10th grade. Something about students’ experiences—in school, in the family or in the community—may be affecting girls and boys differently at different grade levels and may be changing as students get older. As a next step, we can start to learn more about those school, family and community factors—and then target supports accordingly.
6. Percent Chronically Absent Students by School

**What to Look At:** Percent of students who are chronically absent by school.

**Questions to Ask Your Data Review Teams:**
- Which schools are you seeing the highest rates of chronic absenteeism? Is this consistent over time?
  - Is there a particular grade level in this school that has the highest rate of absenteeism and may be driving the school's overall rate? Why?
- Which schools are you seeing the lowest rates of chronic absenteeism? Is this consistent over time? What might be happening at the school that is driving a low rate of chronic absenteeism?

**Example:** During the 2017-2018 school year, chronic absenteeism rates across Ohio’s districts ranged from less than 1 percent to 46 percent. Even among like districts, there is variability in absenteeism rates. If you are a district administrator, looking at your buildings’ data in this way will help you see where to target supports—and where there may be best practices to share across the district. You can look at these kinds of comparison analyses across classrooms to look for patterns and differences.
7. Are there certain times of the year when your students are more likely to be absent?

**What to Look At:** Percent chronically absent every day of every month.

**Questions to Ask Your Data Review Teams:**
- Are there certain days of the week where you see absences spike?
- What do absences look like around holidays? Before and after long weekends?
- What do absences look like on half-days?
- Are there policies or practices related to your school calendar that may be affecting attendance on certain days throughout the year?

**Example:** The charts below show students’ absenteeism rates on every day of the school year. You can quickly see that there are spikes in absenteeism on, for example, Sept. 4—the day after Labor Day weekend. When you can anticipate high rates of absence on a particular day, you can proactively communicate with families and students about the importance of attending school each and every day.