

MEETING THE CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM CHALLENGE: WHAT DO WE KNOW?

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The Magnitude of the Challenge

- The number of chronically absent students doubled post-pandemic
- 2021-22 school year was the all time high for chronic absenteeism. It reached many places that had not had challenges before, and overwhelmed existing response strategies in places where it existed pre-pandemic.
- When it peaked, two thirds of students in the US attended schools with chronic absenteeism rates of 20% or more. At this level, the whole school is impacted, including students who attend everyday
- In 40 states 25% of chronically absent students are concentrated in fewer than 9 school districts-across the US 50% can be found in about 1,000 districts
- Some districts improved in 2022-23, some staid the same, some say their rates of chronic absenteeism increase. This indicates that improvements where the result of state, district, and school actions, not broad national shifts.
- Improving districts still had higher rates than before the pandemic

SCALE & INTENSITY OF CHALLENGE

REQUIRES A SYSTEMIC APPROACH

1

Im p r o v e m e n t
is P o s s i b l e .

2

K n o w Y o u r
C h a l l e n g e .

3

O r g a n i z e Y o u r
R e s p o n s e .

4

A l i g n Y o u r
R e s o u r c e s .

KNOW YOUR CHALLENGE

IT CAN VARY BY TIME, PLACE & GRADE LEVEL

Barriers

Aversion

Disengagement

Misconceptions

BARRIERS:

KEEPING YOU OUT OF SCHOOL

Increased by the Pandemic:

- Family responsibilities—sibling, eldercare, etc.
- High school students with jobs to support themselves and family.
- Trauma and mental health.

Continuing Factors:

- Chronic and acute illness.
- Poor transportation.
- Housing and food insecurity.
- Lack of access to health care, eyeglasses, dentistry.
- System involvement.
- Community violence.

AVERSION:

I DO NOT WANT TO GO TO SCHOOL

Increased by the Pandemic:

- Social anxiety.
- Peer challenges, including drama, teasing, or bullying.
- Struggling academically and/or behaviorally.
- Unwelcoming school climate. (E.g. unpredictable or feel excluded.)

Continuing Factors:

- Biased disciplinary and suspension practices.
- Undiagnosed disability and/or lack of disability accommodations.
- Caregivers had negative educational experiences.

DISENGAGEMENT:

WHAT IS THE POINT?

Increased by the Pandemic:

- Lack school connectedness—no meaningful relationships to adult and peers in the school.
- Don't see connection between regular school attendance and important outcomes.

Continuing Factors:

- Lack of challenging, culturally responsive instruction and enrichment opportunities. (E.g.. bored.)
- Doing poorly in classes. (E.g. lack of academic and behavioral support.)

MISCONCEPTION: I DID NOT REALIZE

Increased by the Pandemic:

- Assume students must stay home for any symptom of illness.
- Don't have to be in school to succeed in school.
(Can do assignments online.)

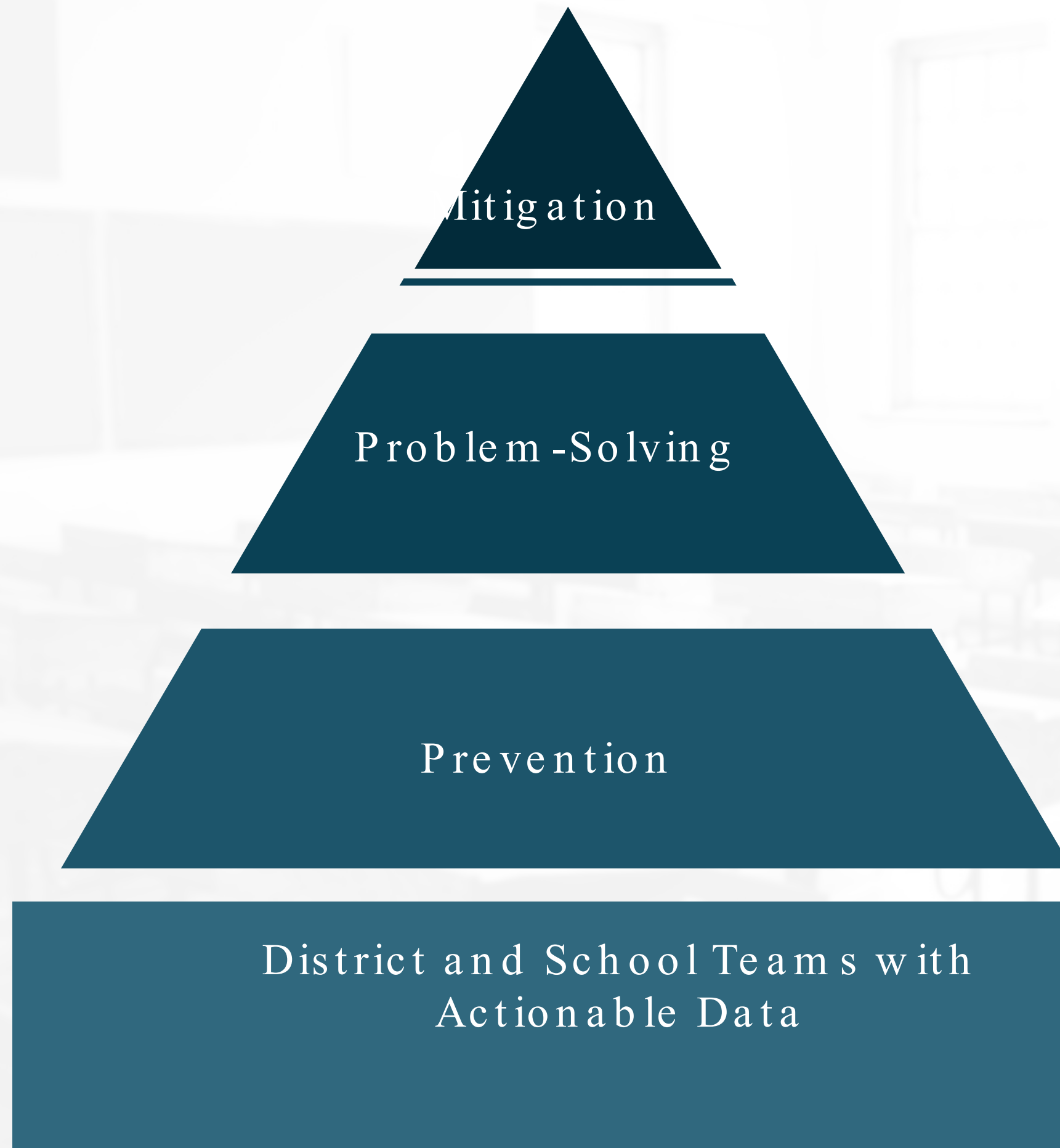
Continuing Factors:

- Absences are only a problem if they are unexcused.
- Lose track and underestimate **total** absences.
- Attendance only matters in the older grades.
- Suspensions don't count as absence.



ORGANIZE YOUR RESPONSE

Need a
Systematic
Approach



PREVENTION:

POSITIVE CONDITIONS FOR LEARNING

Effective Practices:

- Increase school connectedness.
- Family engagement.
- Messaging campaigns. (E.g. “School is a good place to be.”)
- Nudge letters.

District/School Actions:

- Take supportive—not punitive—response to absenteeism.
- Improve school climate, access to extra-curriculars, show how schooling connects to locally meaningful outcomes and opportunities.
- Anti-bullying efforts. (In-person and social media.)

DEEPER DIVE ON SCHOOL CONNECTEDNESS:

When students are connected to school, they attend more often, do better in school, and have better mental and physical health.

Students are connected to school when they:

- Have an **adult at school who knows and cares about them as a person.**
- Have a **supportive peer group.**
- Engage at least some of the time in **meaningful pro-social activities.**
- Feel **welcome in school** as they are.

Schools can influence, improve, and measure all of these .

PROBLEM-SOLVING:

ADDRESSING ROOT CAUSE

Effective Practices:

- Engaging students and families in identifying root cause and solutions.
- Early warning, MTSS, and student success systems.
- Success coaches and mentors.

District/School Actions:

- Form strategic partnerships to provide student supports at scale required. (E.g. mentors, tutors, wraparound supports, etc.)
- Create or expand community schools.
- Partners with mayor to create inter-agency task force to bring health, transportation, housing, workforce agencies, etc. assets to bear.

MITIGATION:

RECOVERING LEARNING & SOCIAL CONNECTION

Effective Practices:

- High-dosage tutoring.
- Highly engaging summer learning.
- Meaningful high school credit recovery opportunities.
- Peer mentoring to support social re-integration.
- Success coaches or mentors.

District/School Actions:

- Not having policies which prevent recovery. (E.g. cannot make up work if absence is unexcused, must fail a class if missed too many days.)

TEAMS WITH DATA

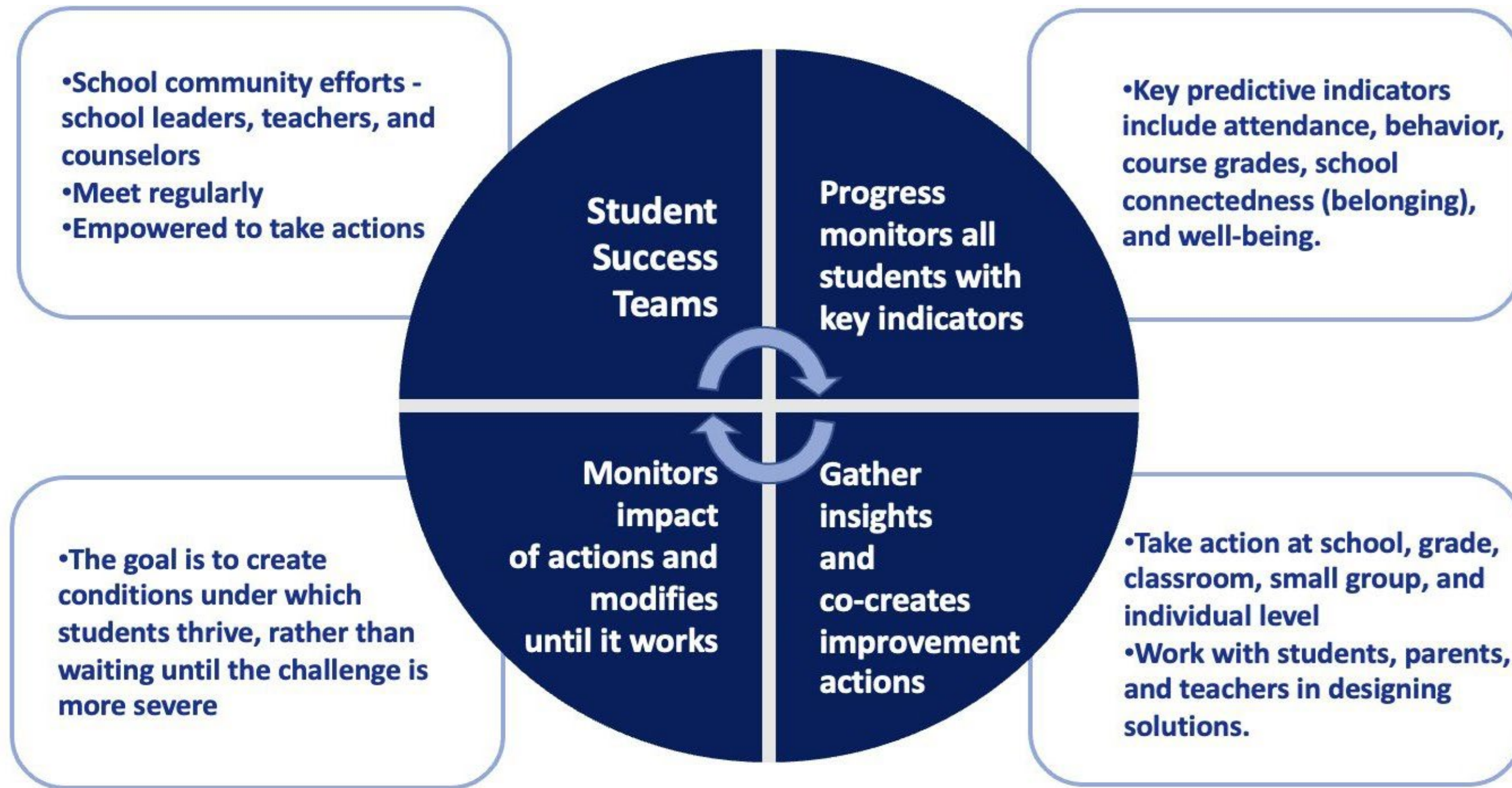
SCHOOL & DISTRICT ATTENDANCE TEAMS

- School teams should include everyone with key perspective on student attendance.
- District teams should include all offices that can have impact on attendance.
- Need consistent regularly scheduled time to work together, bi-weekly ideal, protocols to focus work, leadership endorsement and support.
- Use data to shape and refine actions.

ACTIONABLE ATTENDANCE DATA

- Real time as possible—weekly at school level, monthly at district.
- Disaggregated by sub-groups and grade.
- Shows trends over time, from start of year and compared to prior years.
- Track and monitors effectiveness of interventions.

How Student Success Systems Work



GATHER & ALIGN RESOURCES

FORM STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

Collaborate with local non-profits, health providers, government agencies, and colleges that have resources which meet identified gaps in student supports.

TAKE STOCK

Know what resources already exist and whether they address current challenges.

INTEGRATE INTO EXISTING EFFORTS

Enhance attendance focus of your strongest student support effort. (E.g. MTSS, PBIS, early warning systems, etc.) Integrate attendance improvement into key initiatives. (E.g. Science of reading, high dosage tutoring, school improvement, CTE, etc.)



NATIONAL PARTNERSHIP
FOR *Student Success*

TOOLS & RESOURCES

- Attendance Works [Website](#) and [Playbook](#)
- GRAD Partnership [Chronic Absenteeism Toolkit](#)
- Everyone Graduates Center, GRAD Partnership, and NPSS Hub Brief: [Meeting the Chronic Absenteeism Challenge – What Do We Know?](#) *(released yesterday)*
- [White House Fact Sheet](#)
- [Slides from Every Day Counts Summit](#)
- [Student Engagement and Attendance Center](#) (SEAC)
- National Partnership for Student Success [Digital Backpack of Chronic Absenteeism Resources](#) *(contains all the above resources)*