

We always like to introduce all the staff who make these sessions possible, starting off with our program officers from the Department of Education, Dr. Tracey Scott, Bryan Keohane, and Elizabeth Lembo. Again, I'm Jarle Crocker. I'm the project director for the SEAC, and I'm also joined this afternoon by my co project director, Sarah Frazelle, from American Institutes for Research.

And we have about 20 staff from both Westat and AIR on to help facilitate because we have such great turnout for this particular session. Next slide.

With that, I'm going to turn it over to my colleague, Megan Gildin, to talk about what we'll be focusing on for today's session. Megan, take it away. Great. Thank you so much, Jarle, and welcome, everybody. My name is Megan Gildin. I will be facilitating and guiding the session today. We'll start off with the overview of the learning series.

This series will explore school wide strategies for supporting attendance and how SEAs can support LEAs with implementing these strategies. Throughout the series, we'll dive deeper into two sets of specific school wide strategies. So, in session one today, we will discuss adapting messaging to address emerging attendance challenges.

And in session two, we will cover fostering positive school climate. Then in session three, you'll have an opportunity to apply all the things that we've learned through our peer exchange. So, teams will have an opportunity to share a challenge or problem of practice and receive feedback from their peers related to messaging, positive school climate, or other proactive strategies for supporting attendance.

We'll provide a link to a sign-up sheet at the end of this session for teams to identify their challenge so that we can intentionally pair you with other groups. We ask that you complete this before the third session. So overall, we know our goal to support attendance for all students is understanding the needs of different student populations and wanting to ensure that all students are engaging in school. For our learning objectives for today, we'll focus on understanding the role of proactive school wide strategies and supporting attendance as well as identifying key messages that address emerging attendance misconceptions.

With that, our agenda for today includes a brief framing on proactive school wide strategies, followed by a presentation by Hedy and Cecilia from Attendance Works, who will take us through emerging attendance challenges and misconceptions, and how we can adapt messaging to address these

challenges. We will then have time in breakout groups where you all get to share your ideas and experiences with each other, and we will come back together to close out.

So to begin, what are proactive school wide strategies, and why might we want to focus on them? The proactive school wide strategies, or Tier 1 strategies, are foundational and universal approaches that can encourage positive student attendance behaviors. These strategies are designed to reach every student and family and establish a culture of good attendance behaviors.

Examples of these strategies include practices that promote a safe and welcoming school environment, clear communication around attendance expectations and goals, educating and engaging students and families about the impact of attendance on achievement, and ensuring accurate data collection for more examples.

We shared a link in the chat, which will give you a variety of tier 1 strategies. We know that this is very expansive and includes a variety of approaches. So, as we mentioned for this learning session, we will hit 2 of these strategies during today's session. Heading Cecilia will dive deeper into messaging.

And then next week, Greta Columbia, the director of the National Center on Safe, Supportive Learning Environments. will present on fostering positive school climate, and we included the link to the NCSSE website in the chat. This is another ED funded TA center similar to SEAC, which provides free of cost services to the field.

So when we talk about tier one strategies, one of the big components of this is supporting positive school climate. Now research has shown that positive school climate is tied to high or improving attendance rates. And when those positive conditions for learning are in place, we know that students are then more likely to attend and be engaged in school.

So, as we explore common misconceptions around attendance that messaging can address in this session, we'll find direct connections to these conditions for learning. For example, we'll look at belonging, connection, and support, that's physical, emotional health and safety, and student well-being. Now while LEAs are working to implement Tier 1 strategies that are locally meaningful and culturally relevant in their school communities, SEAs also play a vital role in offering a variety of supports to promote that Tier 1 implementation.

So we'll review a few ways that SEAs can support this Tier 1 implementation. First, SEAs can provide guidance for school wide strategies to support attendance through the information, policies, and procedures they make available. Guidance from SEAs can help clarify concepts such as defining a full day of attendance.

Additionally, an SEA may provide general guidance for attendance messaging that an LEA can then adapt to be responsive to the student populations and specific challenges in their school communities. Next, SEAs can standardize resources and materials to provide schools with the resources they need for implementation.

Resources such as training materials, implementation guides, examples of action plans, or training events can all expand LEA's access to necessary tools. This also includes supporting measurement. So, for example, a state may have a statewide school climate survey that LEAs can use in their own areas.

We also know that SEA coordination and alignment can help schools make the connection between policy and practices. For example, state coordination and clear communication of expectations can ensure aligned attendance policies and services are put in place. Those aligned systems are more likely to be implemented correctly, ensuring effective and efficient and sustainable practices over time. Finally, SEAs can also organize the supports that invest in LEA implementation capacity. So, investing in LEA capacity means that there are local functions for training, coaching, technical expertise, and leadership for guiding implementation.

And then local implementation capacity is really dependent on that interconnection of regional systems, school districts, and schools, which is where SEAs can play that key role in helping to coordinate these connections. So I want you to keep, if you are coming from an SEA I want you to keep this in mind as we're going through this session and thinking about what is the role that you all can play in helping to support this Tier 1 implementation.

So with that in mind, I will then pass it off to Hedy and Cecilia.

Great. Thank you so much, Megan. We really appreciate being here and joining this amazing audience. So, I want to start off with just a tiny little bit of level setting to make sure that we're all on the same page, given that there are a lot of attendance terms that get bandied about. We have been really looking at the issue of chronic absence, which is missing so much school for any reason that kids are academically at risk.

And largely that's been defined, particularly in state plans for the implementation of ESSA as missing 10 percent or more of school for any reason. That includes excused, unexcused and suspensions, sort of the theory that if kids aren't there in the classroom, they aren't there to benefit from all the opportunities that offers for students to learn, to develop socially.

It's different from truancy, which is just unexcused absences or average daily attendance. How many kids show up to school each day? And both of those metrics can actually mask high levels of chronic absence. And this is meant as a metric that you can use throughout the year. So, you're noticing kids missing two days in the first month, four days in the second month, six days in the third month.

So, you can use it as an early warning metric to intervene and change things before the situation gets much harder to modify or kids are learning, missed out on so much learning that they're falling behind. Next slide. And what we've seen is that this chronic absence situation has just risen extraordinarily.

It's nearly doubled since before the pandemic to almost 14.7 million kids. And state data shows that in 22-23, it remains extremely high, maybe dropped a couple percentage points. But even though we stopped quarantine we didn't have you know, COVID and Omicron running through our schools, 22.23, it remains high, suggesting we have some challenges that occurred during the pandemic that we're going to have to take a long-term approach to addressing.

Next slide.

In addition, the impact of this absence is more than just the one out of three kids who are chronically absent. It's the two out of three kids now who are in schools with 20 percent or more of their students who are chronically absent. And research, particularly by Michael Godfrey, suggests that once kids are in classrooms with 20 percent or more levels of chronic absence, the impact is affecting the ability of, affecting everyone in that classroom. It's affecting teachers' ability to teach because they might have to repeat lessons, their ability to set classroom norms, kids' ability to learn because sometimes they're thrown off by the churn that's happening in the classroom. And before the pandemic, we had only about a quarter of all kids in schools with this higher level of chronic absenteeism.

And now it's 66%. Next slide. These high levels really reflect an erosion in those positive conditions for learning that Megan mentioned that earlier before. The fact that kids might not feel physically, emotionally healthy and safe. We

closed down schools because we didn't think they were safe. And now we're trying to reopen them.

And we got to assure them that this is the case you know, when we were closed down and we haven't quite returned to all the normal ways of connecting, but that sense of belonging, connection, support. Academic challenge and engagement, having those adults and students who have the well-being to invest in those relationships.

All of these things were kind of deeply affected by the pandemic and reestablishing them is going to take time. Next slide.

It requires this multi-tiered system of support, and I would just say in contrast to the slide that Megan showed a little bit before, we pulled out, foundational supports below, because that's something that across the entire school, everyone, whether you're working on attendance, school climate, you're in your school leadership, all your teachers, everyone has to be working together to put in place.

And then you can think about, tiers of intervention that are more attendance specific. And I will say, though, that regardless of where you are in this pyramid, relationship building, making sure kids feel connected to an adult, feel they trust whoever's talking to them, feel that they have a safe person that they can speak with, and how you message about attendance matters.

But it has to begin universally. And then get reinforced in every tier. Next slide. And whatever we put in place in those tiers, including attendance messaging, has to reflect an understanding of the challenges that were worsened or created by the pandemic, including the misconceptions that may be happening as a result of the pandemic.

So, you can see these buckets of barriers, aversion, disengagement and misconceptions. I'm going to focus a little bit more on misconceptions. Because these are things that you can really think about how messaging affects. But, you know, the fact that missing two days per month doesn't affect learning, that was true before the pandemic, but might be even more so now.

The fact that during the pandemic, we got taught about how kids should stay home for any symptoms and illness. But that's not our reality right now. And Cecilia and I are going to work together with you to kind of unpack what are some of these misconceptions, how we think about messaging to address them,

and what are some of the tools that we might be able to leverage in order to address them.

And so let's go to the next slide. So, here's a couple possible misconceptions that we've heard about in the world, and we're going to encourage you to use your chat now. One misconception, my child doesn't need to be at school to learn. And, oh, these absences that are happening, they're not going to really affect a student's success or well being.

So, curious in chat, anyone hearing comments like these in your state? Any thoughts about what could be fueling them? So let's just stick with those first two comments. I hear a yep, thank you, Lindsay. And Cecilia, if you can monitor the chat with me. I, you're certainly yes, they were able to, like we told people when the pandemic, when we had to shut schools down, you're going to be okay, you can just learn virtually right, like, for lots of reasons we wanted to make sure people were assured on that. Now we're not so sure that in fact it's the case, but that's what we told families.

I will also say thank you, Mandy. This is a really key piece on the work of Learning Heroes is saying that most families currently think that their kids are at or on grade level, even though our test scores aren't showing that. And the false signals, which was one of the links in the chat showed that in a couple of districts where kids, even though they had a lower test scores, so we think they're not learning as much, and higher levels of chronic absence, they were still getting Bs and more kids were getting Bs in 21-22. So if my kid's getting a B and they're not showing up all the--

Hedy, I think Hedy. Sorry about that. I'm not sure what happened. So if my child still getting a B and they're not showing up regularly to school, what is that suggesting about the value of in person learning? Okay. You know, and now Cecilia, what else are you seeing in the chat? Well, I see some old favorites that were there pre pandemic that people are mentioning again.

For instance, it's just first grade, it doesn't matter, or it won't matter long term, that absences don't matter as much in early grades as in later grades. Yep. And there's interesting things about students telling parents you know, I don't need to show up to learn. I can just do it online. Just trust me, mom and dad.

By the way, I bet with immigrant families, that's really hard because a lot of times they're depending on their kids as their navigators. The issue of traveling. We are hearing a lot, you know, families sort of setting their own vacation schedule as opposed to thinking they have to abide by the school one.

Certainly, the anxiety and school avoidance are contributing to these issues where schools aren't as sure about you know, if my kid's feeling that anxious when actually, I mean, this gets into some of our importance of messaging, showing up to school regularly may be more important. But if families don't understand those things they may think keeping their kids' home is helping when in fact it might not be. The old favorite of its excused, so it's okay. Absolutely, that you can't address excused absences. I have a question. Well, I think one of the things we can do is we need to not only think about what are these misconceptions, but also who are people who can help change some of this messaging. And just curious, if we have the right messages, who are some of the people that families trust that if they say this, it can actually say these might not be the right ideas?

In fact, your kid does need to be at school to learn, and helping families understand there is an impact on a child's success. Community leaders, doctors, teachers, school nurse, faith leaders.

Absolutely. So, there are a number of people that we need to equip to have these messages, but I will also say finding a way so that we're all singing the same messages in a consistent way is going to be equally if not more important than ever before. And having community along with school district leaders is really important.

One of the things that I hear a lot, particularly in a place like California, where we're funded by average daily attendance that we need to have community leaders and doctors and people who aren't in schools, because sometimes people are suspicious of school because they're worried that the reason why they're saying you need to be in school is a funding issue.

I truly do not believe that is why the educators in California talk about it that way. But sometimes there's challenging perceptions. At the same time, I really want to say, I don't think we should ever understand, underestimate the role that teachers can play. Let's go to a couple more slides. And then Cecilia, I'm going to turn it to you for some of the health ones.

So, one tool for you to have is our Showing Up Matters for R.E.A.L. toolkit, which is trying to broaden our messaging about why attendance really matters. It's important for building routines, increasing engagement, providing access to resources, and supporting learning. And we have actually done some testing with focus groups and found that this both resonates with people who are working with families and folks who, families themselves as reasons why their kids should show up.

But it's key to have a trusted messenger talking about this. Next slide. We also think if one way we can really build this in is helping teachers really help families understand when your child was missing at these times, this is what they missed out on learning, and help them understand where kids have missed out on key concepts and how absences might have affected that and also using their data to figure out where they might have to have longer conversations, more in depth conversations, but really leveraging this opportunity that often exists already in schools, but making sure teachers are equipped to use attendance data and send messages that really help to debunk myths that showing up to school in person doesn't matter anymore.

Next slide. And there are state messaging campaigns that we've been really excited to see, and they kind of get at that issue of belonging connection. So this is Massachusetts where they have School is Where We Belong that they launched in 2024. And if you go to the next slide, you can also see Connecticut's campaign School is Better With You.

And how these states then create easy to use templates and resources so everyone doesn't have to create it all on their own is something that can be a really useful way of equipping everyone from teachers to community stakeholders to superintendents to medical, you know, doctors and physicians.

And with that, Cecilia, I'm going to turn to you to talk about some of the health challenges. Thanks, Hedy. And we've already seen some of it popping up in the chat. So, a lot of times what we hear in terms of the health-related misconceptions are things like parents believe they should keep their child at home for any sign of illness.

Well, we know where that came from because we worked really hard at sending kids home with any sign of illness during the pandemic, and that was appropriate. Things have shifted since then, but I don't think everybody else has shifted back. Also other things we hear is almost a sense of fatalism, that you can't reduce health related absences.

And so, I'm wondering if you're hearing comments like this in your state. And what might be fueling this, and we're going to keep this short because we want to get you to break out in a few moments, but love to hear what you're saying.

Great. Thanks, Marnie, for sharing what you've done to address that through guidance. Appreciate that. Okay. Let me go ahead and share, cause I want to make sure that we get to some of the resources that counter or correct these misconceptions. Let's go to the next slide, please.



So, one of the pieces that we've developed with the National Association of School Nurses and Kaiser Permanente talks about how we keep our kids healthy. So, this is the positive frame of, oh, we can't change those health related absences. You can keep your child healthy by paying attention to the things we know help, like nutrition, sleep, exercise, hygiene, safety, etc.

So, this kind of messaging is a positive and preventive way of correcting those misconceptions. Next slide. Similarly, and this was a huge struggle, but getting guidance about when to go to school, when to stay home, and when to call the doctor has been really key. And so this is an example of the kind of information that makes it easier for families to have understanding of when to send your child to school or not. Now, not everyone's going to adopt this one. They may want to do slightly different pieces, but the clarity of the messaging is what helps families not guess or keep their kids home because they're trying to be careful. Next slide. So, Hedy already talked a bit about anxiety, and this is a piece that is really helpful.

So that in plain everyday language, families can understand what are those signs of anxiety, what is anxiety, what should you look for, and what's the right response, right? Is it illness or is it anxiety? So, these are all resources that are helpful for consistent messaging. Next slide. So, I'm going to turn it over to Megan again.

She's going to get us into breakout groups because we've had a beginning of a discussion in the chat, but I think people really need to talk more deeply about what's happening in their states and what solutions there will be. So, Megan, back to you. Thank you so much, Cecilia. As she shared, now it's time for us to stop talking and for you all to get to talk with each other.

So in a moment, we will put you into breakout groups with folks from all different states. In these breakout groups, you'll have an opportunity to discuss the misconceptions you're hearing, messaging strategies, and any challenges and needs that you're facing. We'll share in the chat two different Padlets where we'll take some notes.

You'll see there's Padlet A for breakout groups One through 10, Padlet B for breakout groups 2 through 20, since we have such a large group today. So again, we'll have about 20 minutes in breakout rooms, and we'll come back together to share a promising practice and next step and close out for today.

So we'll see you all back here in about 20 minutes. As folks are coming back in, I think we're waiting for folks to come in, be thinking about one strategy or

promising practice you might want to share with the groups as everyone is madly trickling back into the main room.

Welcome back, everybody. I hope you had wonderful conversations. Want to take a few minutes now, because I know you had great conversations and breakouts. You put great things in Padlet, but what I'm hoping folks will share with the larger group is, one promising practice or next step that you think other folks may want to hear or was a great aha moment for you.

So feel free to share in the chat or raise your hand and you can come off mute. Karen, I see your hand up. Hi there. I think I was group 11. So I'm going to do my best to paraphrase what we spoke about. We had some school staff we had some state level staff so I think there was a nice cross section of folks in our group.

But what we talked about was like the importance of positive messaging and relationship building. That if your first communication with parents is, you know, a letter kind of slapping parents on the wrist for missing school you're missing an opportunity. We also spoke about how this varies state by state, but like a couple of us are in local control states, which means that districts interpret state statute and implement their own policy and procedures.

And that sometimes, unfortunately, those policies and procedures are pretty black and white sometimes, and it doesn't allow for really looking at case to case scenarios where perhaps, you know, there's legitimate reasons for absences, the student might be homeless, they might be struggling with pretty significant mental illness.

Like equal isn't always equitable is what we spoke about. And then also as state agencies, how can we educate and share best practices? Because I think sometimes people look at state statutes and use that as the, you know, the ultimate rule and use that as an explanation without really working with families.

I hope I did our group justice, but that's what I have. Sounds like a fabulous conversation that you hit a lot of ground. It looks like in the chat a lot of that is resonating. I see sharing that engaging messaging and not just punitive messaging, trying to be more proactive rather than reactive. Let's see, one group suggested as a next step putting together a list of federal resources.

And then states can add in their specific resources. Yeah, I saw on Padlet in the what do you need column. There was a lot of, you know, having common

language, having the resources, having, you know, a template would be super helpful. I see a lot of comments around engaging and making connections with families.

Absolutely. That relationship building piece is super important. I know in our group, we talked about working with the counselors to invite families in for one on one conversations. And really think that's the centering humanity piece into these conversations rather than that more punitive slap on the wrist type approach.

Yes, a lot of wonderful things in the chat and say, and the, oh, I see, Drew, you have your hand up, feel free to share. Hi. So from group 16, one of the things that we also talked about was when you want to be engaging with parents, you want to be proactive, but when there are attendance concerns, helping them understand the real meaning and the implication of it, rather than just saying like your student is on track to be chronically absent.

So like communications that say relative to your neighbors, kind of like power bills, like your kid has missed 30 percent more days of school that helps them realize, oh, this is not normal. I'm an outlier here. I mean, maybe I want to adjust that. So just like messaging that actually gets the message across and not just delivers the official,

you know, lines. Absolutely. Thank you so much. Can I make a comment? So Drew, I think it's really important to help parents understand what the, kind of go deeper into why it's challenging if they miss, like, what did they miss? How did that maybe lead to a core concept not being addressed? I worry a little about the comparison group messaging, which I know has

prior to covid works well, but my under, the challenges you, if you're in a school where most of the kids are having pretty extreme levels of chronic absence, if you if kids think they're doing better than normal, then I think it's fine. So you really have to use your data to know whether comparison group messaging works.

If your average absenteeism is pretty high. You actually don't even want to do that because it will it's like, Todd Rogers work actually found that when you told kids at the end of the month and gave them an attendance ticket for showing up every day that month, actually their attendance got worse.

Because then they thought that they were actually doing better, and it could, they could get worse. Does that make sense? So just let's really, we could be

really careful about that comparison group messaging. Thank you so much, Hedy. We can stay and chat, I think, forever, but I want to be mindful of our time.

So if you have other ideas that did not make it into Padlet, feel free to keep adding those in. And those will be open and available to you if you want to grab resources and whatnot that are also in there. So, I'll close out today. Sarah shared in the chat, a quick feedback survey. We want to make sure these sessions are meeting your needs.

So, if you can give us a quick 1-2 minute survey, so as we're closing out, please fill that in so that we can practice our continuous improvement and make sure sessions two and three are meeting your needs. So with that upcoming next week, same time, same place we have session two, which will be focused on positive school climate.

And then, as we mentioned before, in session 3, which is in 2 weeks, that will be our peer exchange where your team will bring a challenge that you'll get feedback from other groups. And how to address that challenge and some strategies. So there are a few things to help you with that in the chat. We have two tools.

One is the signup sheet. So before session three if you could fill in for your team, what your challenge will be so that we can intentionally pair some groups. And we also included an optional tool, which is a peer exchange guide. This is not a requirement to use, but if it is helpful to you all.

This link will invite you to make a copy of a Google Doc. It just has some guiding questions that may be useful as you're thinking about what challenge you might want to share. We'll also be offering an optional office hours on the 22nd, which is the Friday before the third session, if you want some additional insight or support as you are preparing your challenge for session three.

If you do not have a team, do not worry. We'll also have rooms in session three for folks who are solo to be able to converse with each other. So don't think I don't have a team, I can't attend. Please come. Please bring your ideas. There will be rooms for everybody. All right, so thank you all for participating today.

We sincerely appreciate you taking your time to join us. As a follow up, we'll email you a copy of the slides and resources. If you're interested in sessions with the center on a particular topic, you can email Taneco or Sarah, whose emails are on the screen. And then to learn more about the SEAC Center and all

of our tools and supports, you can visit our website, which we'll also share in the chat.

Again, thank you all for joining us. I know this is a very big topic on the top of folks minds, and so I'm happy that we have this space to be able to share ideas and experiences together. Alright. We'll see you next time.