



**SOWN**  
TO GROW

**DA** District  
Administration®

## **Every Day Matters**

*Improving Attendance by Centering Belonging in MTSS*

**September 17, 2025**

# Goals For Today

---



**Understand Attendance Drivers:** Explore research & data on what has the biggest impact on attendance

---



**Proactive Support & Belonging:** Examine systems for building belonging and proactively supporting needs to increase attendance

---



**Impact in Action:** Dive into two districts thoughtfully designing student support initiatives to boost attendance

---

# Today's Leaders



**OAKLAND UNIFIED  
SCHOOL DISTRICT**  
*Community Schools, Thriving Students*



**METRO  
NASHVILLE  
PUBLIC  
SCHOOLS**



**Cliff Hong**  
Network Superintendent  
Middle School Network  
Oakland Unified School District



**Soo Jin Kim**  
MTSS Partner  
Middle School Network  
Oakland Unified School District



**Dr. Carol L. Brown**  
Director of  
Attendance Services  
Metro Nashville Public Schools



**Dr. Stephen Sheaffer**  
Executive Principal  
James Lawson High School  
Metro Nashville Public Schools

# Every Day Matters

## For Budgets

**5 states** have average daily attendance factored into their funding formulas: California, Idaho, Kentucky, Missouri, and Texas.

**11 additional states** use single count attendance days

[Education Commission of the States](#)

## For Learning

**Students who are chronically absent in preschool, kindergarten, and first grade are much less likely to read at grade level by third grade—which would make them**

**4 times**

**more likely to drop out of high school than proficient readers.**

[Robert Wood Johnson Foundation](#)

## For Graduation

**A student who is chronically absent any year between grades 8 and 12 is more than**

**7 times**

**more likely to drop out.**

# Root Causes of Truancy & Chronic Absenteeism

## Barriers

- Chronic and acute illness
- Family responsibilities or home situation
- Trauma
- Poor transportation
- Housing and food insecurity
- Lack of access to needed services
- System involvement
- Unpredictable schedules for learning
- Lack of access to technology
- Community violence

## Aversion

- Struggling academically and/or behaviorally
- Unwelcoming school climate
- Social and peer challenges
- Anxiety
- Unfair disciplinary and suspension practices
- Undiagnosed disability and/or disability accommodations
- Caregivers had negative educational experiences

## Disengagement

- Lack of challenging, engaging instruction
- Bored
- No meaningful relationships to adults in the school (especially given staff shortages)
- Lack of enrichment opportunities
- Lack of academic and behavioral support
- Failure to earn credits
- Need to work conflicts with being in high school

## Misconceptions

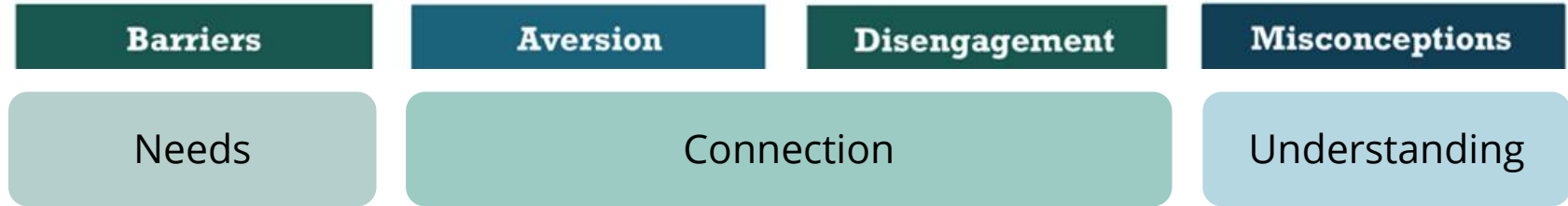
- Absences are only a problem if they are unexcused
- Missing 2 days per month doesn't affect learning
- Lose track and underestimate TOTAL absences
- Assume students must stay home for any symptom of illness
- Attendance only matters in the older grades
- Suspensions don't count as absence

# POLL

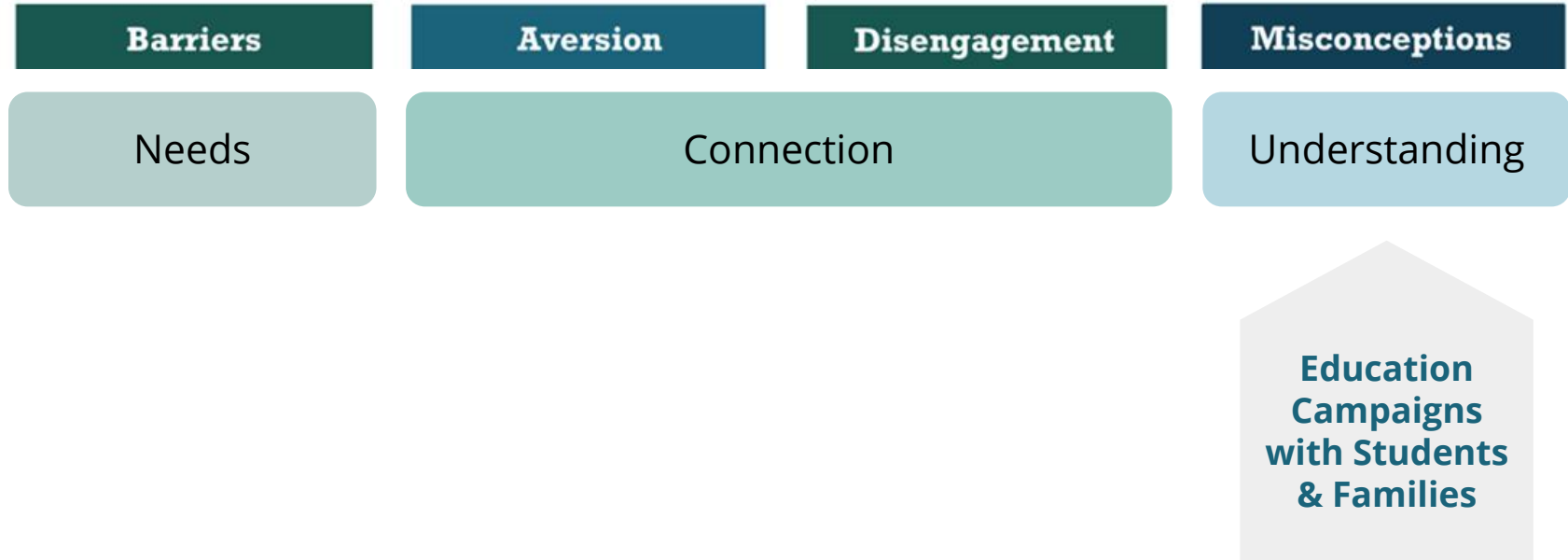
What does attendance support look like in your district?

1. SARB panels or other student-centered meetings 🎯
2. School-wide attendance incentives ★
3. Student & family engagement campaigns 💡
4. Home visits & meetings 🏠
5. Universal transportation options 🚌
6. Tiered support based on early signs of attendance slippage ▲
7. Many of the above and more! 🚀

# How We Address Root Causes

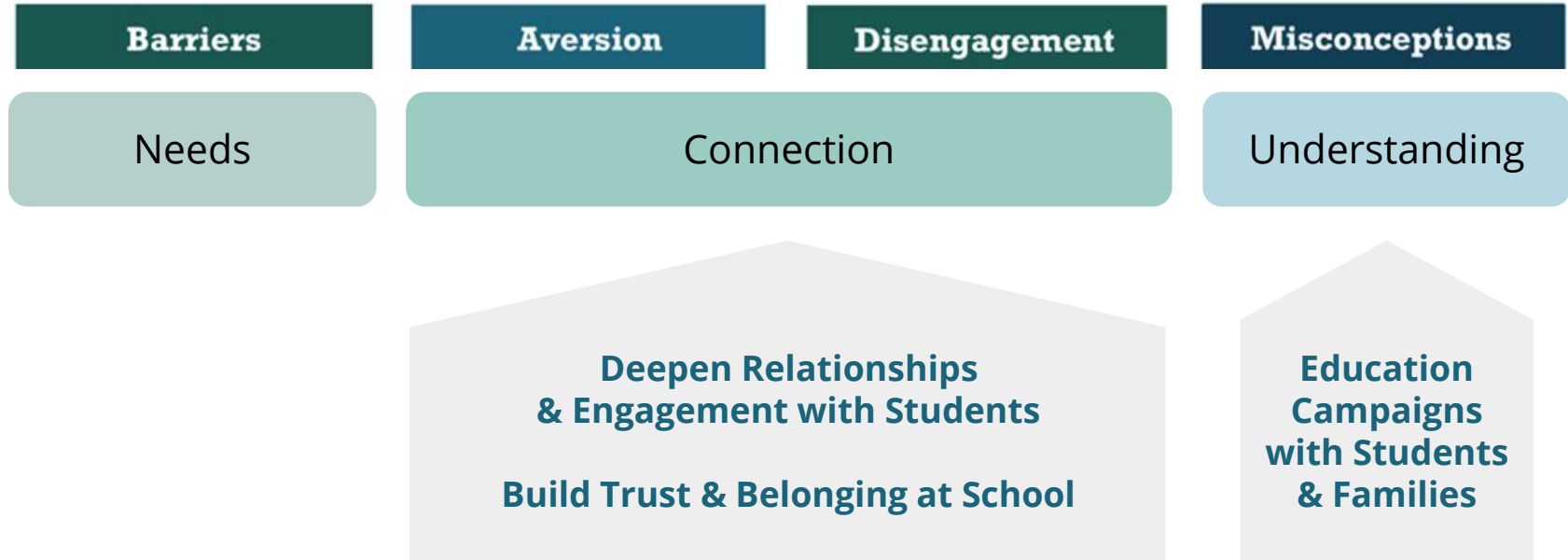


# How We Address Root Causes

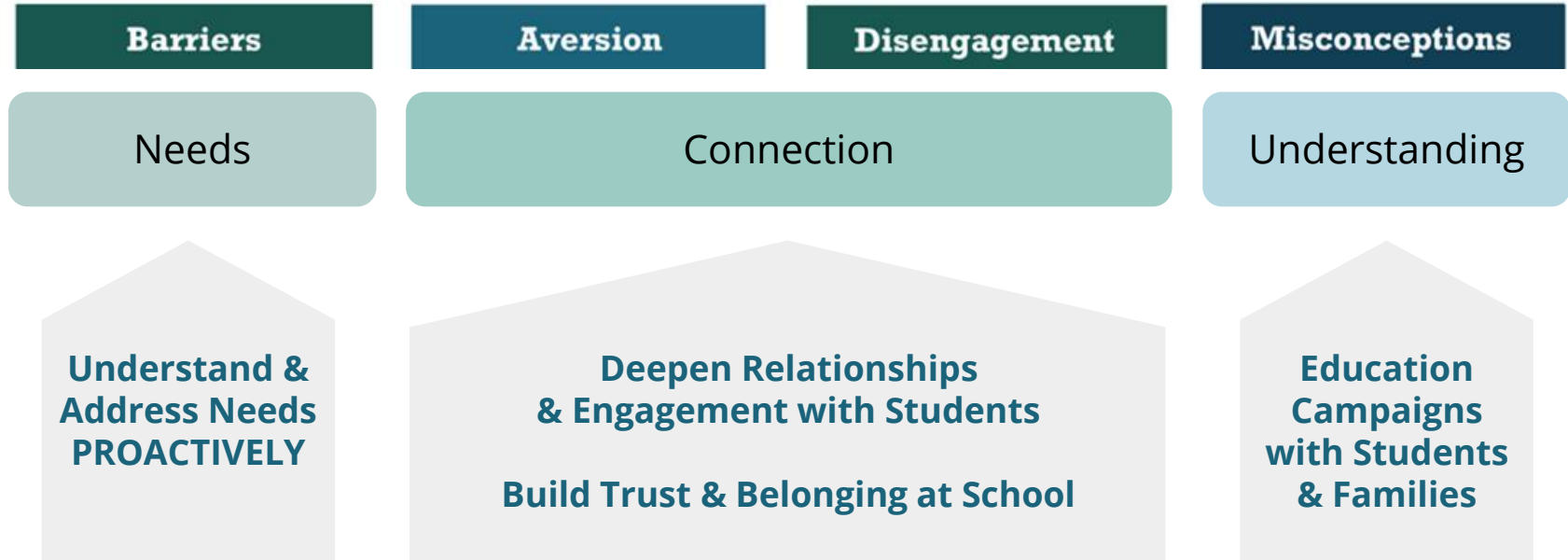




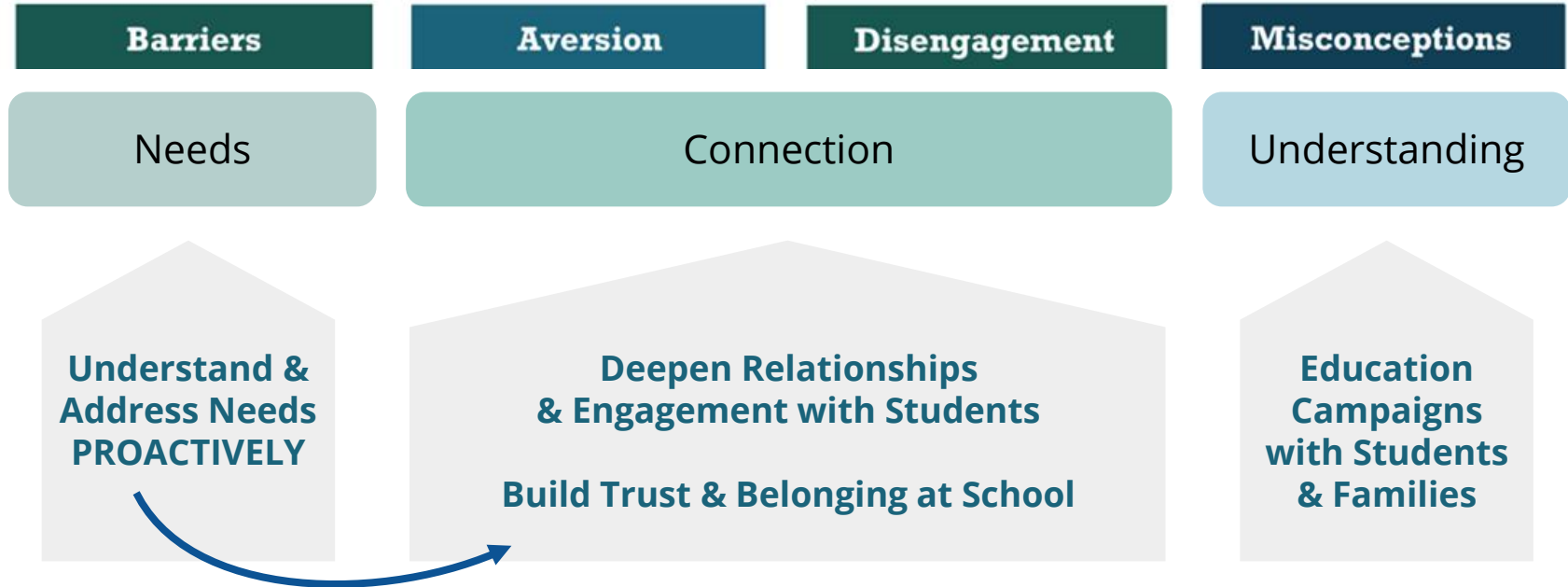
# How We Address Root Causes



# How We Address Root Causes



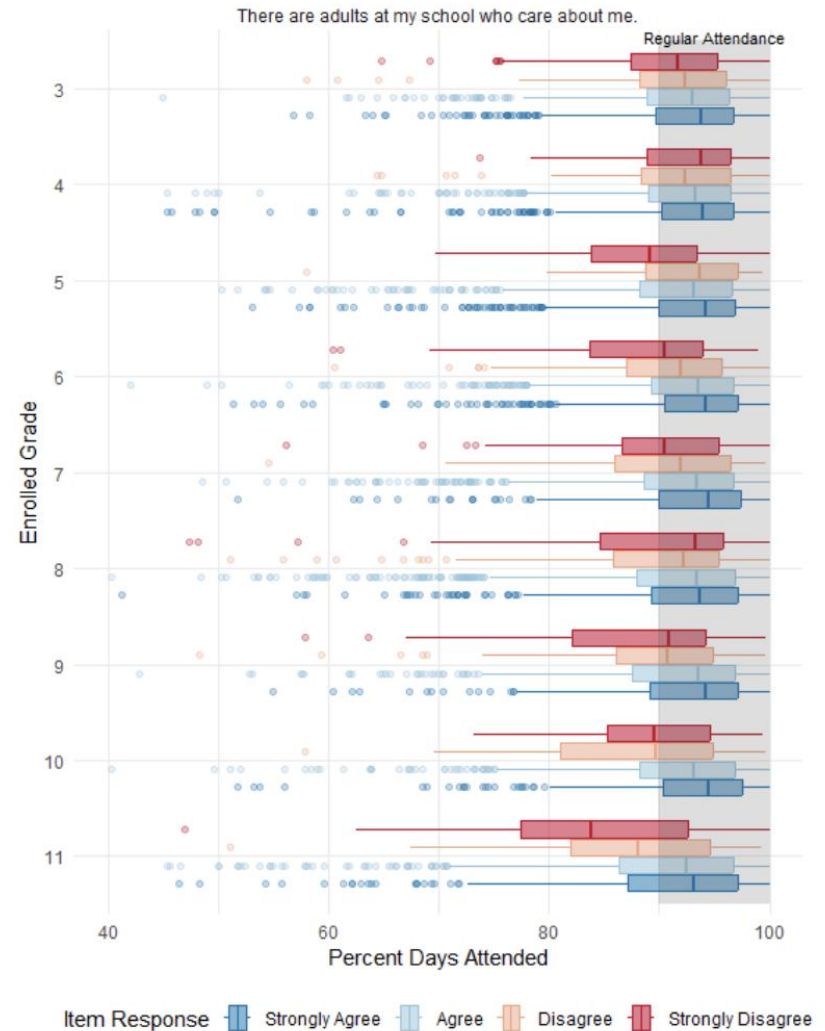
# How We Address Root Causes



*Understanding needs early requires trusting relationships*

Student connection to a caring, trusted adult is correlated with a **19 percentage point increase** in regular attendance across K-12.

[Jacoby, I. \(2023\). Student Sense of Belonging in Schools: Connection to Outcomes. Oregon Department of Education.](#)



# Systems of Support that Center Trust & Belonging

Reactive

**Observable**  
(Treating Symptoms)

Attendance  
Behavior  
Performance

*Trusting Relationships Help Break Though the Surface*

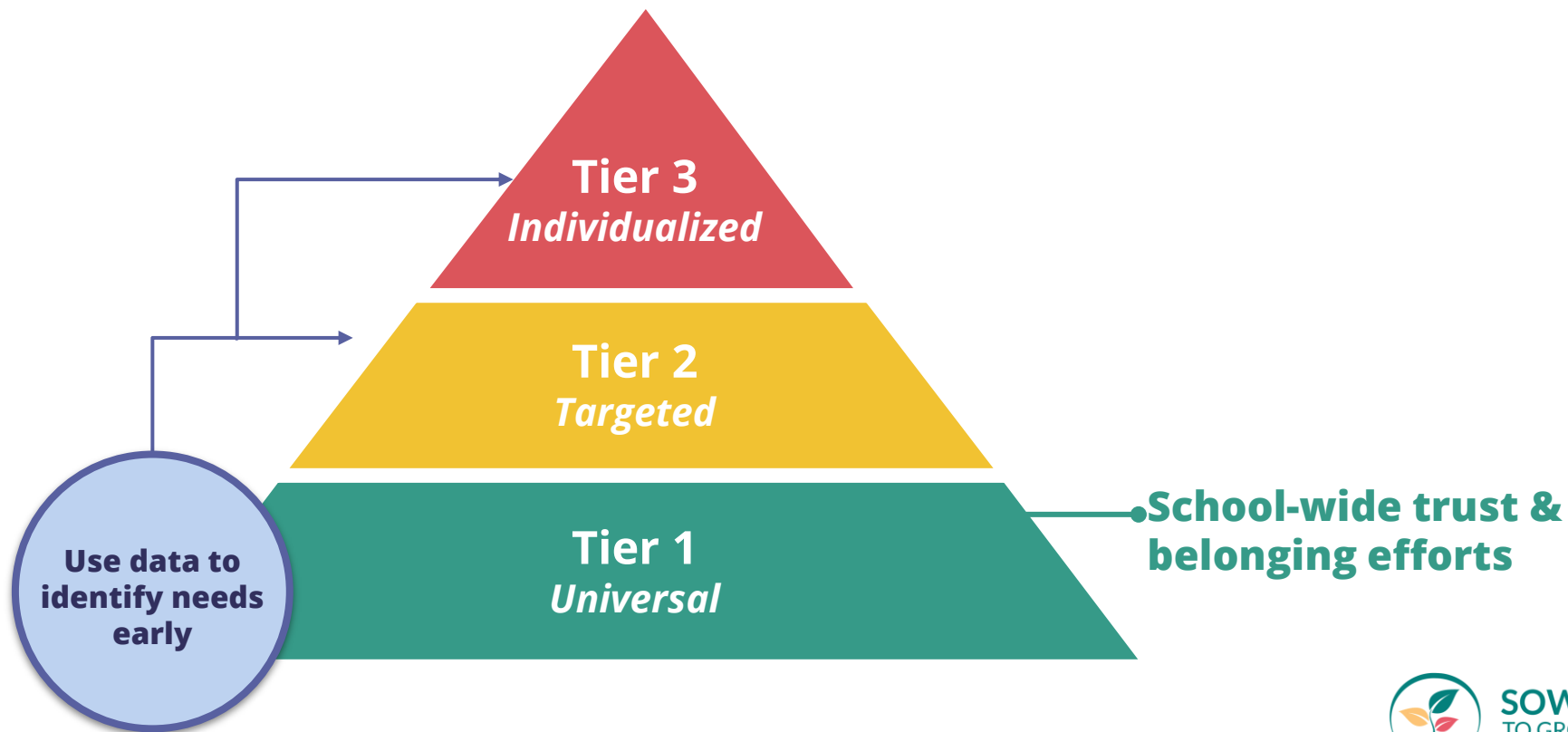
Proactive + Preventative

**Under the Surface**  
(Addressing Root Causes)

Needs & Experiences  
Emotional & Mental Well-being  
Sense of Self & Belonging



# Systems of Support that Center Trust & Belonging



# POLL

How do you support trust & belonging?

1. Connection time built into advisory or community time




2. School wide events, spirit days & assemblies 

3. Educators joining clubs, lunch-bunches, & activities 

4. Mentorship or buddy systems 

5. Many of the above and more! 

# Proactive MTSS Rooted in Belonging & Relationships



**Tier 3**

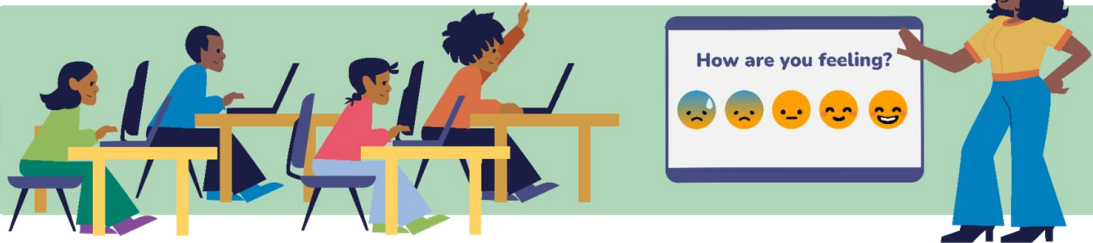
Individual & Intensive  
Flagged Alerts & Insights



**Tier 2**

Targeted  
Identification +  
Tier 2 Resources

Real-time,  
weekly data  
identifies needs  
early on!



**Tier 1**

**Universal:** Belonging screener, Emotional Check-In + Tier 1 SEL Lessons

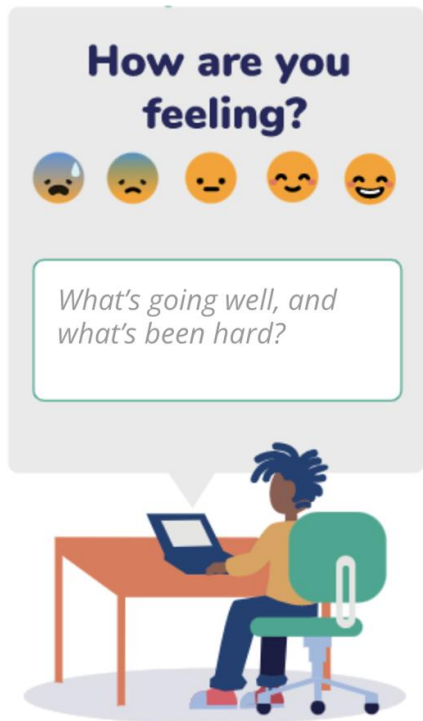


# Impact Results:

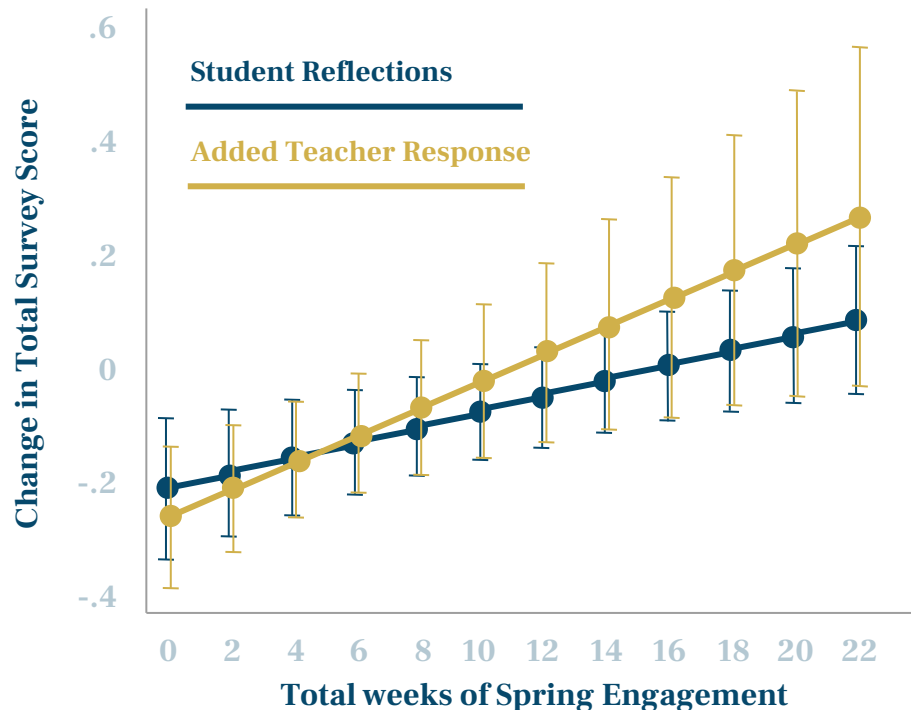
## Increased student-reported sense of belonging



### Weekly Student Check-In



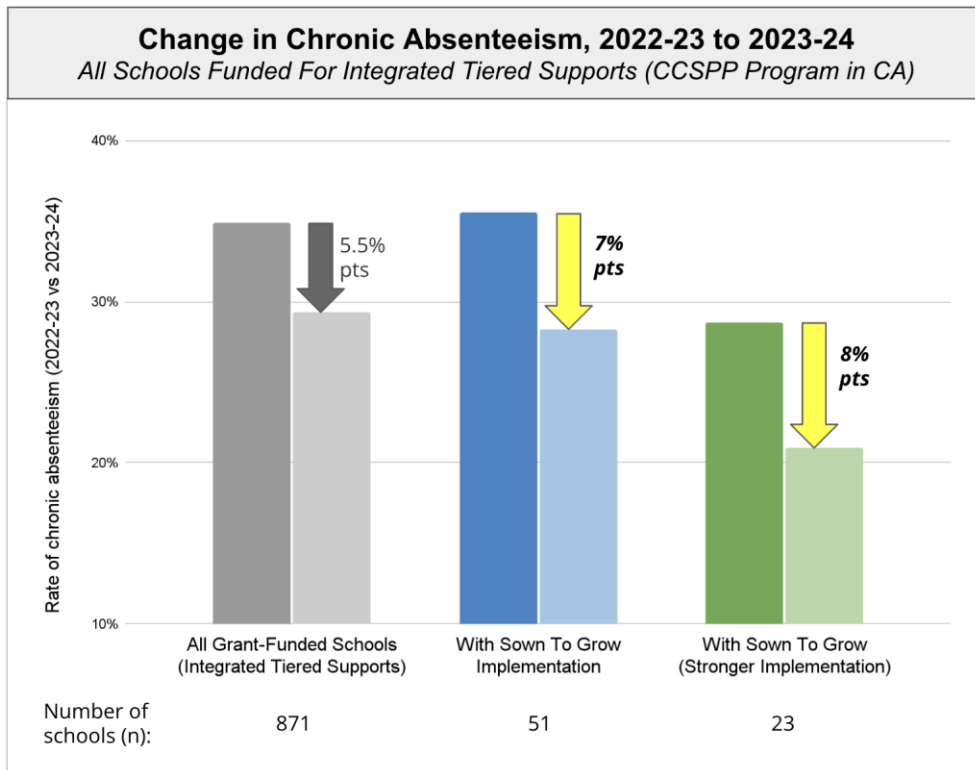
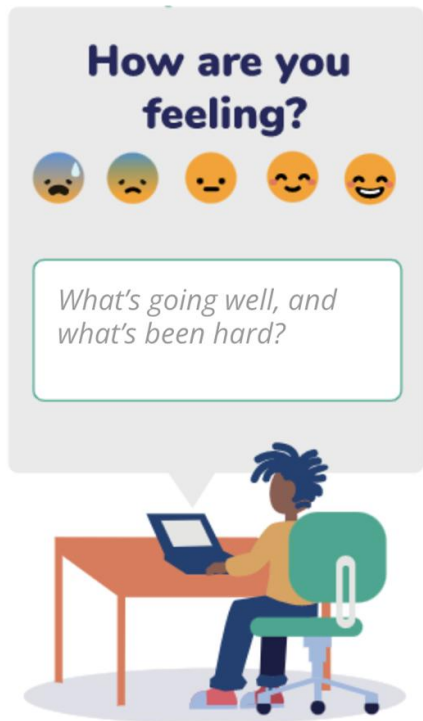
### *Improved Sense of Belonging*



# Impact Results:

## Accelerated reduction in chronic absenteeism

### Weekly Student Check-In



\*Analysis excludes Oakland Unified, due to a 7-day teacher strike in May 2023 that widely distorted absenteeism rates districtwide.



# OAKLAND UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

*Community Schools, Thriving Students*



**Cliff Hong**

Network Superintendent  
Middle School Network  
Oakland Unified School District



**Soo Jin Kim**

MTSS Partner  
Middle School Network  
Oakland Unified School District



# OAKLAND UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

Community Schools, Thriving Students

*Every Student Thrives*

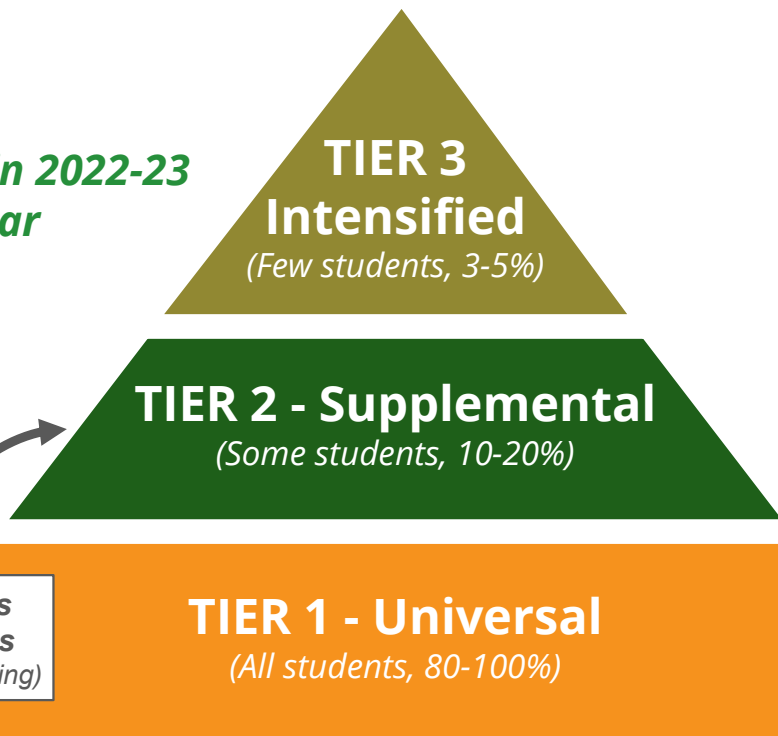
*With Holistic Support*

*And Equitable, District-Wide  
Implementation.*



# Proactive MTSS in OUSD

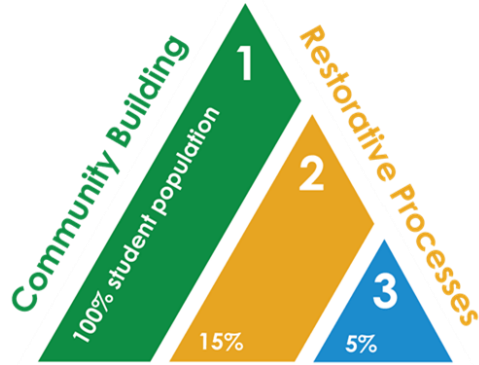
*Adopted in 2022-23  
School Year*



*Data informs  
interventions  
(Leading & Lagging)*

Data informs interventions		
	LEADING INDICATORS (Formative Progress Monitoring)	LAGGING INDICATORS (Summative Growth Reporting)
Academics	iReady ELA & Math Curriculum-Embeds Marking Period	SBAC ELA & Math Grades EL Reclassification
Behavior	PBIS/RJ COST	Attendance Suspensions
T-SEL	Sown To Grow	CHKS Wellness Survey Attend. & Susp.

# PBIS, Community Schools & Restorative Justice



## Leadership Through Partnership & Work On The Ground

- 5 MTSS Partners (one for each OUSD network of schools)
- 77 Community School Managers (All TK-12 schools)
- Restorative Justice Workshops & Site Facilitators (Some Schools)
- Office of Equity Programs: AAMA, AAFE, APISA, LSA, AASA

## Goals & Expectations:

- ★ Cultivate a Positive & Joyful School Culture
- ★ Strengthen COST (Coordination of Services Team) & MTSS
- ★ Foster and Strengthen Family and Community Partnerships
- ★ Increase School Attendance
- ★ Create innovative systems and strategies to address goals of SPSA (School Plan for Student Achievement)



# What Does Attendance Work Look Like in OUSD

**District Goal: Reduce CA by 3%, increase ADA by 1%**

Every OUSD network has an MTSS partner responsible for attendance:

- Coaches & supports school site attendance leads
- Participates in school site attendance meetings
- Collaborative, consistent attendance data reviews
- Annual district attendance summit
- Facilitates collaborative reflection on attendance rubric and goals with school sites



Academic

Behavioral

Social Emotional

Attendance

Added by OUSD

# Universal Mental Health Screener (Sown To Grow)

**2020-21**  
**Mental Health Board**  
**Policy**

**2021-22**  
**MTSS Director Established**

**2022-23**  
**MTSS Partner Roles**  
**Expanded & Universal**  
**Screener Aligned to CA**  
**MTSS**

**2023-24**  
**District wide**  
**implementation of the**  
**Universal Screener**



## Supplement CHKS & other screeners with:

- Consistent, weekly student data
- Quantitative AND qualitative insights
- Students see their own data & trends
- Instant alerts for urgent student concerns

## Using Screener Data:

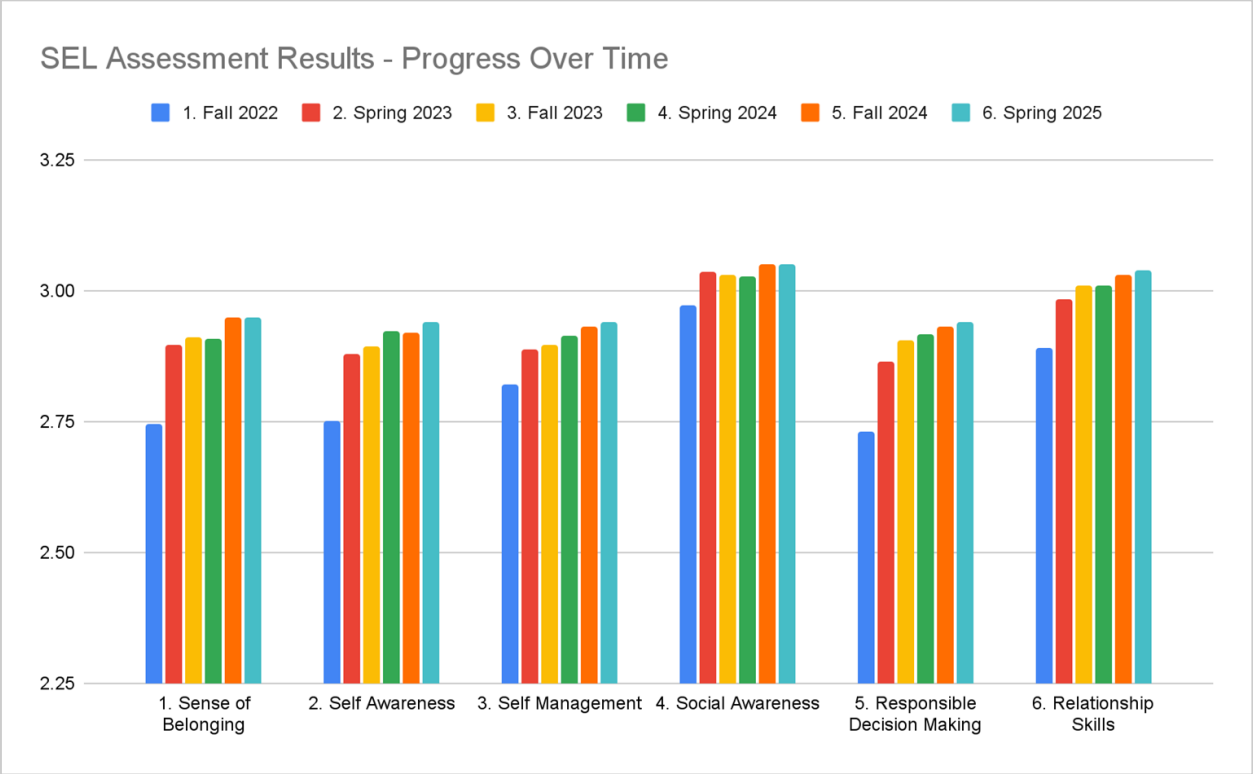
- Coaching C/C teams use data in their meetings
- Address Alerts in COST Team meetings
- GOAL: 100% of alerts addressed & cleared weekly

**1,136 Alerts**  
**in 2024-25**



# LCAP Alignment: Increasing Belonging

Aligned the STG weekly check-in questions with LCAP goals around sense of belonging to see and measure growth over time. **GOAL: Increase by 5%**



Individual items with  
most significant  
growth:

I feel connected to the  
adults at my school.  
*(Sense of Belonging)*

I know what my  
strengths are.  
*(Self Awareness)*

I can do well on all my  
tests, even when they  
are difficult.  
*(Responsible Decision  
Making)*



METRO  
NASHVILLE  
PUBLIC  
SCHOOLS



**Dr. Carol L. Brown**

Director of  
Attendance Services  
Metro Nashville Public Schools



**Dr. Stephen Sheaffer**

Executive Principal  
James Lawson High School  
Metro Nashville Public Schools



METRO  
NASHVILLE  
PUBLIC  
SCHOOLS

Every *Student* Known



# Navigators - Who & Why?

Mentors and advocates for students to help them “navigate” a path of success through personalized support



*“We talk from day one about how Navigators develop these relationships [with students]. Having those conversations is a lot easier if they’ve built a relationship.”*

**–Dr. Celia Jolly,  
Principal & Navigator Lead**

- Navigators come from various roles across schools
- Navigator-student relationship is consistent during a student’s tenure at a school
- **School social workers & counselors oversee / support Navigators at sites**

# MTSS & Navigator

Weekly

As Needed

Quarterly

**TIER 1**

**WEEKLY  
JOURNAL**

**TIER 2**

**SMALL  
GROUP  
WORK**

**TIER 1**

**NAVIGATOR  
CHECK-INS**

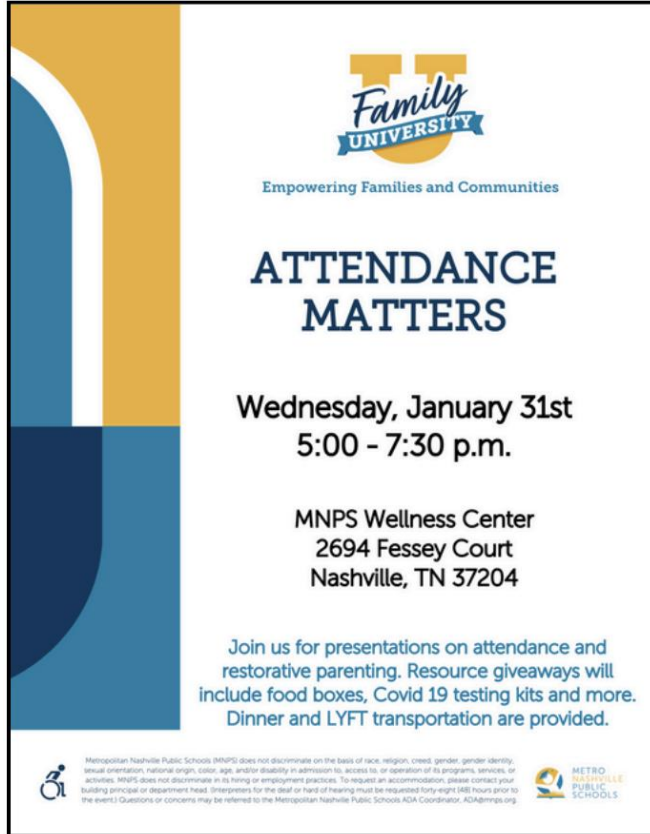
**Admins,  
Navigator  
Leads & MTSS-  
B Team** review  
data and  
provide direct  
support as  
needs are  
identified

Create consistent space for  
every student to be known

**School counselors, social  
workers or other school-based  
mental health providers** offer  
targeted support to identify needs

Build relationships  
& identify needs

# Attendance Matters Task Force

A vertical poster with a white background and a decorative left border consisting of a yellow vertical bar and a blue curved shape. At the top is the Family University logo, which features a stylized 'U' and the text 'Family UNIVERSITY' on a banner. Below the logo is the tagline 'Empowering Families and Communities'. The main title 'ATTENDANCE MATTERS' is in large, bold, blue capital letters. Below the title is the date and time 'Wednesday, January 31st 5:00 - 7:30 p.m.' in black. The location 'MNPS Wellness Center 2694 Fessey Court Nashville, TN 37204' is listed in black. A paragraph in blue text says 'Join us for presentations on attendance and restorative parenting. Resource giveaways will include food boxes, Covid 19 testing kits and more. Dinner and LYFT transportation are provided.' At the bottom left is a small accessibility icon and a disclaimer. At the bottom right is the Metro Nashville Public Schools logo.

**Family UNIVERSITY**  
Empowering Families and Communities

## ATTENDANCE MATTERS

Wednesday, January 31st  
5:00 - 7:30 p.m.

MNPS Wellness Center  
2694 Fessey Court  
Nashville, TN 37204

Join us for presentations on attendance and restorative parenting. Resource giveaways will include food boxes, Covid 19 testing kits and more. Dinner and LYFT transportation are provided.

Metro Nashville Public Schools (MNPS) does not discriminate on the basis of race, religion, creed, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, national origin, color, age, and/or disability in admission to, access to, or operation of its programs, services, or activities. MNPS does not discriminate in its hiring or employment practices. To request an accommodation, please contact your building principal or department head. Interpreters for the deaf or hard of hearing must be requested forty-eight (48) hours prior to the event(s). Questions or concerns may be referred to the Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools ADA Coordinator, ADA@mnps.org.

METRO NASHVILLE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Recommendation 1: A Family University collaboration with immigrant/refugee focused agencies to strengthen bi-directional communication between EL families and MNPS

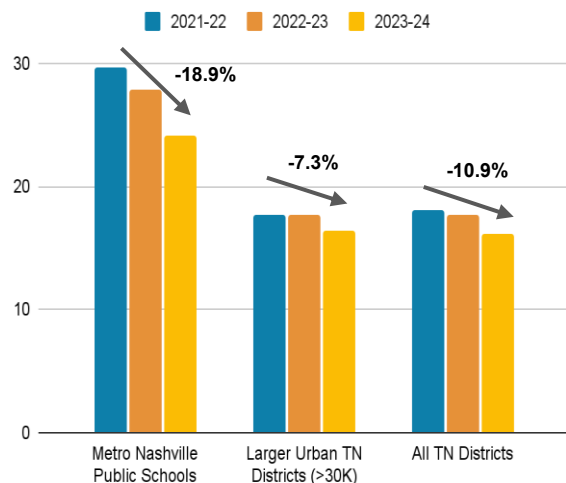
Recommendation 2: Work with Principals to appoint Family Attendance Ambassadors at each school for a train-the-trainer class & toolkit

Recommendation 3: Community organization-based mentoring support

# Chronic Absenteeism Declining More Quickly in MNPS, Driven by Schools with Strong Navigator Implementations

## State of Tennessee

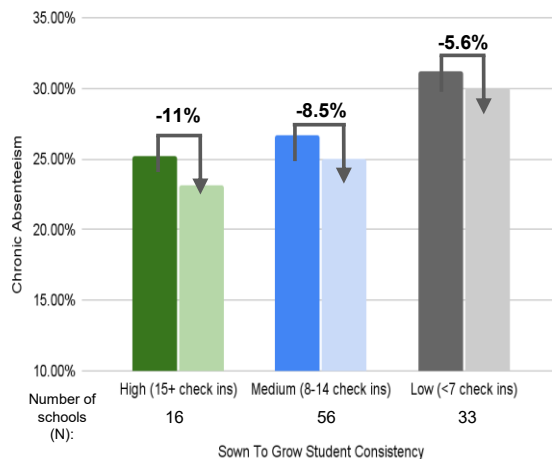
Change in Chronic Absenteeism in TN Districts



## Metro Nashville Public Schools

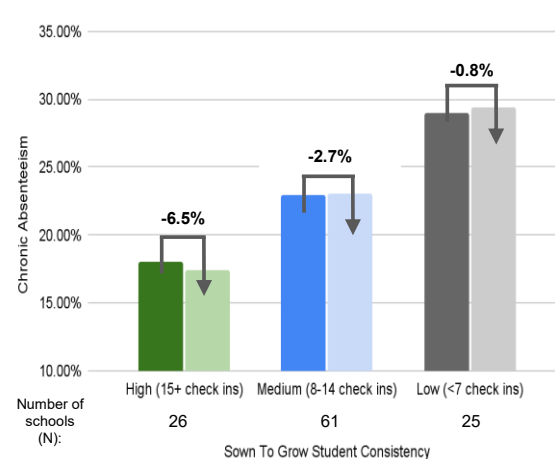
### 2022-23

22-23 Change in Chronic Absenteeism



### 2023-24

23-24 Change in Chronic Absenteeism



# Q&A



**OAKLAND UNIFIED  
SCHOOL DISTRICT**  
*Community Schools, Thriving Students*



**METRO  
NASHVILLE  
PUBLIC  
SCHOOLS**



**Cliff Hong**



**Soo Jin Kim**



**Dr. Carol L. Brown**



**Dr. Stephen Sheaffer**



# THANK YOU!

*Additional questions or want to connect on MTSS?*

**mtss@sowntogrow.com**