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FINAL REPORT OF THE SENATE STUDY COMMITTEE ON COMBATTING CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM IN SCHOOLS (SR 217)

Committee Members

Senator John F. Kennedy, Chairman

District 18

Senator Billy Hickman

District 4

Senator Freddie Powell Sims

District 12

Senator RaShaun Kemp

District 38

Senator Clint Dixon

District 45

Senator Shawn Still

District 48

TABLE OF CONTENTS

STUDY COMMITTEE CREATION, FOCUS, AND DUTIES	3
BACKGROUND	4
SUMMARY OF TESTIMONY AND DISCUSSION	10
MEETING ONE	10
MEETING TWO.....	15
MEETING THREE	24
MEETING FOUR	30
RECOMMENDATIONS FROM TESTIMONY	31
FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	33
APPENDICES	36

STUDY COMMITTEE CREATION, FOCUS, AND DUTIES

The Senate Study Committee on Combatting Chronic Absenteeism in Schools was created by Senate Resolution 217 during the 2025 Legislative Session of the Georgia General Assembly.¹ The Study Committee was tasked with communicating with school administrators, educators, parents, policymakers, and community organizations to help Georgia develop the best solution to chronic absenteeism. The Study Committee built upon the framework of Senate Bill 123, passed during the 2025 Legislative Session, which made various changes to Georgia's compulsory education laws.²

Senator John F. Kennedy of the 18th served as Chair of the Study Committee. Additional Senate members included Senator Billy Hickman of the 4th, Senator Freddie Powell Sims of the 12th, Senator RaShaun Kemp of the 38th, Senator Clint Dixon of the 45th, and Senator Shawn Still of the 48th.

The following legislative staff members were assigned to the Study Committee: Olivia Davis, Office of Policy and Legislative Analysis; Emily Leonard, Senate Press Office; Lindsay McVicar, Senate Budget and Evaluation Office; Kayleigh Bell, Office of the President Pro Tempore; and Michael Walker, Office of Legislative Counsel.

¹ [S.R. 217, 158th Gen. Assemb., Reg. Sess. \(Ga 2025\)](#).

² [S.B. 123, 158th Gen. Assemb., Reg. Sess. \(Ga 2025\)](#).

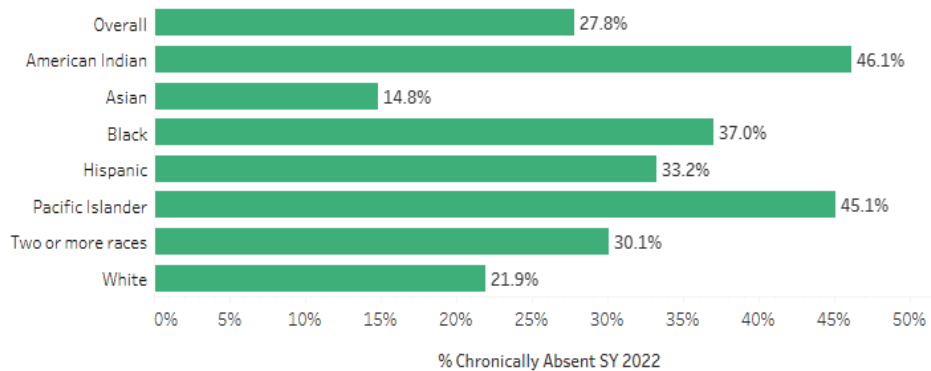
BACKGROUND

I. Background of the Issue

Georgia's compulsory education laws are codified in **Code Section 20-2-690.1**. Broadly speaking, the laws require children ages six to 16 to attend school for 180 days, or 900 hours, of instruction each year. The burden of school enrollment is placed on the parent, guardian, or other person having control of any child.

When children miss school, it is not merely missed time in the classroom. [Absenteeism has long term, devastating effects impacting education.](#) For example, missing out on classroom instruction creates gaps in foundational knowledge and hinders academic progress. Students who are chronically absent struggle to keep up with the curriculum, leading to frustration, disengagement, and lower grades. Additionally, studies show a strong correlation between chronic absenteeism and failing to graduate high school. Without a diploma, students face limited opportunities for higher education and employment, perpetuating a cycle of poverty and inequality. Chronic absenteeism can also impact a school's funding, which in turn affects resources available for all students. This is a critical issue affecting various education measures and children's ability to succeed inside and outside of the classroom.

The [U.S. Department of Education publishes annual national data](#) on chronic absenteeism. During the [2022-2023 school year](#), 20 states reported **more than 30 percent** of students missing at least three weeks of school. While chronic absenteeism is prevalent across the country, it affects different demographics at different rates.



Additionally, students with disabilities were around **36 percent more likely** to experience chronic absenteeism than students without disabilities in the 2022-2023 school year. During the same school year, English learners were **20 percent more likely** than non-English learners to experience chronic absenteeism.

A. Important Terminology

When regulating school attendance, specific terminology is often used. Some [key terms cited when discussing this issue](#) are listed below.

- Truancy – any child who is subject to the compulsory attendance law who has more than **5 days of unexcused absences** during the school year.
- Chronic Absenteeism – a school measure of the percentage of enrolled students who miss **10 percent or more school days** for any reason³.
- Average Daily Attendance – a school measure of the number of enrolled students who attend school each day divided by the total number of enrolled students⁴.

³ For students enrolled for the entire year in a school, chronically absent students miss [18 or more days per year](#).

⁴ In Georgia, Average Daily Attendance averages for most schools are in the [mid- to high nineties](#).

In Georgia, the types of excused absences are set by the Georgia Department of Education (GaDoE) and individual school boards. The [following circumstances are typically considered excused absences](#):

- Illness or symptoms that endanger the student's health;
- Serious illness or death in the immediate family;
- Observance of religious holidays;
- Compliance with a court order or governmental agency mandate;
- Military-related absences (up to five days per school year);
- Voting or registering to vote (limited to one day); and
- Conditions rendering attendance dangerous or impossible.

Some [exceptions exist](#) as to the mandatory attendance laws. Completion of high school requirements, even if under the age of 16; attendance at home study programs and private schools that meet state requirements; and certain qualifying physical or mental conditions effectively disqualify children from compulsory attendance.

B. Chronic Absenteeism in Georgia

Georgia's [2024 chronic absenteeism rate is 21.3 percent](#). A driving force behind chronic absenteeism is effects of the [COVID-19 pandemic](#), with rates remaining significantly higher than pre-pandemic school years. For example, in [2019, the chronic absenteeism rate state-wide was 12.1 percent](#), almost *doubling in just five years*.

Regarding notice, [schools must notify parents after a child has five unexcused absences](#) in the same academic year, which constitutes **truancy**. The notice must include information about the possible consequences of truancy. The notice also requires signatures from parents and children to confirm receipt.⁵ If the child receives an additional unexcused absence after notice is received, parents are subject to criminal charges for violating the compulsory education laws. *Every unexcused absence following the notice is a separate offense*. The consequences for truancy can be quite serious for both the parents and the students.

For parents/guardians:

- Misdemeanor charges in violation of compulsory education laws;
- Fines ranging from \$25 to \$100;
- Imprisonment for up to 30 days;
- Community service; or
- Any combination of the above penalties.

For students:

- Loss of driver's license;
- Inability to obtain a work permit;
- Potential involvement with the juvenile justice system; or
- Possible assignment to a probation officer or legal advocate.

To track attendance data, GaDoE launched the [Attendance Dashboard](#). This online tool provides specific data for the state, districts, and schools relative to chronic absenteeism and average daily attendance. The purpose of the dashboard is to increase awareness of attendance concerns, to support educators in

⁵ Children must be [at least 10-years-old](#) to effectively sign the truancy notice.

identifying and responding to those concerns, and to facilitate data-driven decision-making when developing solutions.

II. Key Players Addressing the Issue

Several legislative, judicial, and private entities are actively working to address chronic absenteeism in Georgia to mitigate the harmful outcomes from missing school. Detailed information describing the role of these key players is listed below.

A. Juvenile Courts

Georgia law [does not impose direct fines or other penalties on truant students](#); however, parents are subject to disciplinary measures in violation of compulsory education laws. When a student accrues an additional unexcused absence, after notice of truancy has been sent to their parents, the school will report the child to the [corresponding Juvenile Court](#). Any student with 10 or more unexcused absences in the school year could ultimately come under the court's supervision and potentially end up in foster care or an institution.

The majority of the cases that come before the Georgia Juvenile Courts are either [delinquency cases or dependency cases](#).

- Delinquency cases – a child is charged with an act that would be a crime, if committed by an adult.
- Dependency cases – involve allegations of child abuse or neglect.

In the Georgia Juvenile Courts, there also exists a hybrid of the two cases, known as [“Child In Need Of Services \(CHINS\)” cases](#). These cases may also be referred to as “status” offenses, because an individual's “status” as a child is what brings them under the court's jurisdiction. The Georgia General Assembly's stated purpose in drafting the CHINS code is to acknowledge that children can engage in problematic behaviors that do not rise to the level of a criminal offense. To address these unique cases, Juvenile Courts have the authority to design a “program of treatment, care, guidance, counseling, structure, supervision, and rehabilitation that [a child] needs to assist him or her in becoming a responsible and productive member of society.” These programs also provide a level of family accountability, as parents may be ordered to ensure their child's participation in services or to receive services themselves, or risk being held in contempt of court.

The [three significant CHINS](#) offenses include:

- Unruly/Ungovernable – a child's failure to abide by the lawful commands of one's custodian.
- Runaway – a child who has been away from their home or place of abode for at least 24 hours, without the consent of their parent or guardian and without just cause.
- Truancy – a child who has accrued 10 or more days of unexcused absences from school in the current academic year.

A [CHINS case is initiated when a complaint is filed](#). The complaint may be filed by “any person” who has knowledge of the facts and has reason to believe the facts are true; however, most truancy complaints are filed by schools. When a CHINS case comes before the Juvenile Court, the child must be represented by an attorney. If the child's family does not hire an attorney to represent the child, the Juvenile Court must appoint an attorney. The Juvenile Court may also appoint a Guardian Ad Litem (GAL) to represent the child. An attorney for the child represents the **child's stated wishes**, whereas a GAL is charged with informing the court of what is in the **child's best interests**.

Once a complaint has been filed in a CHINS case, a [petition must then be filed](#) by a parent, guardian, legal custodian, law enforcement officer, GAL, or a prosecuting attorney. The petition must contain:

- The facts which bring a child before the jurisdiction of the court, with a statement that it is in the best interests of the child and the public that the proceedings be brought;
- The name, date of birth, and residence address of the child alleged to be a child in need of services;
- The name and residence address of the parent, guardian, or legal custodian of the child named in the petition;
- Whether all available and appropriate attempts to encourage voluntary use of community services by such child's family have been exhausted; and
- Any unknown information required for the petition.

Truancy petitions filed by school systems must contain additional information, including whether the school system has attempted to resolve the child's truancy through other means before filing the complaint and whether the child is eligible or currently receiving special needs services.

After a petition is filed, the Juvenile Court must hold an [adjudicatory hearing](#). The Juvenile Court must find that the child is in need of services **by clear and convincing evidence**. If the Juvenile Court finds the child in need of services, the Court may then hold a disposition hearing. At this hearing, the Court hears testimony and examines evidence to determine which services are available and appropriate for that particular child.

B. [Student Attendance and School Climate Committees](#)

To address truancy and chronic absenteeism, Georgia state law requires that communities and schools work together to address school climate and truancy through the recommendations of their local [Student Attendance and School Climate Committees](#) (SASCC)⁶. [These committees review](#) attendance and discipline data, identify common barriers to student engagement, adjust local strategies to better support students, and coordinate across agencies to avoid duplication and delay. *SASCCs are entirely localized*, existing under the guidance of the respective Superior Court.

The Chief Judge of the Superior Court of each county must establish a SASCC for that county. The purpose of each committee is to:

- Ensure coordination and cooperation among officials, agencies, and programs involved in compulsory attendance issues;
- Reduce the number of unexcused absences from school;
- Increase the percentage of students present to take tests which are required to be administered under the laws of this state; and
- Improve the school climate in each school.

The Chief Judge is responsible for ensuring that all members of the SASCC are notified of their responsibility to the committee. Each local board of education must also participate in, consider, and make publicly available its decision regarding recommendations of the SASCC. Independent school systems may participate in the SASCC in the county where the system is located.

⁶ See O.C.G.A. § Code Section 20-2-690.2.

The following entities⁷ must designate a representative to serve on the SASCC:

- Chief Judge of the Superior Court;
- Juvenile Court judge or judges of the county;
- District Attorney for the county;
- Solicitor-general of State Court, if the county has a State Court;
- Department of Juvenile Justice, which may include representatives from area juvenile detention facilities;
- Superintendent, certificated school employee, and local school board member from each public school system in the county and certificated school social worker from each public school system, if any are employed by the school system;
- Sheriff of the county;
- Chief of Police of the county police department;
- Chief of Police of each municipal police department in the county;
- County Department of Family and Children Services;
- County board of health;
- County mental health organization;
- County Family Connection commission, board, or authority, or other county agency, board, authority, or commission having the duty and authority to study problems of families, children, and youth and provide services to families, children, and youth; and
- Court approved community-based risk reduction program, if such a program has been established.

C. Truancy Intervention Efforts

The [Truancy Intervention Project \(TIP\)](#) has existed for over 30 years to reduce school absenteeism. The organization's strategy involves collaboration with community partners throughout Georgia. TIP deploys targeted interventions across various sectors, including courts, schools, and communities. These interventions tackle pivotal issues such as food insecurity, mental health challenges, housing insecurity, parental underemployment, and other issues which are fundamental contributors to truancy and chronic absenteeism.

Under an [early intervention](#) approach, TIP proactively identifies students at risk of truancy by analyzing attendance patterns and engaging with school staff. For example, the Fulton and Atlanta Public School districts, TIP provides direct services, including one-on-one counseling, mentoring, and family engagement initiatives. Individualized intervention services, such as counseling, academic support, or family engagement initiatives, are tailored to meet the unique needs of each student. TIP also offers resources, training, and guidance to educators and administrators across the state, equipping them with the tools to identify early signs of truancy and implement effective preventative measures. The program fosters partnerships with local organizations, agencies, and volunteers to create a supportive network for students and their families.

In Fulton County, TIP also offers [legal representation](#) to students in truancy proceedings, partnering with entities such as the Georgia Bar Foundation, the Atlanta Bar Association, and law firms such as Alston & Bird, King & Spalding, and Troutman Pepper.

⁷ The Committee may include additional members as necessary.

Atlanta Public Schools' [Truancy Prevention & Intervention Services \(TPIS\)](#) provides additional support to students. Services include a whole child approach to addressing truancy. The Truancy Social Worker, who is tasked with cultivating a school-wide culture and climate for daily attendance, works to create, develop, implement, and coordinate supports to prevent truancy and address the issues that cause it. These efforts are collaborative and include students, parents, educators, community members, social service agencies and law enforcement representatives.

TPIS prevention measures include District Monthly Attendance Campaigns and the National Attendance Awareness Month. Intervention services include Student Attendance Support Services (SASS), School-Wide Attendance Supports (SWAS), and Truancy Collaborative Supports:

- SASS – referral-based service for School Social Workers to request individual student attendance support or a Truancy Officer well check.
- SWAS – schools with an attendance rate of 90 percent or below may participate in a school attendance procedure review facilitated by the Truancy Social Worker.
- Truancy Collaborative Supports – Atlanta Public Schools Truancy Social Worker, Atlanta Police Truancy Officers, and MARTA JCPT Officers collaborate to prevent and address violations of the Atlanta City Ordinance (Sec. 106-229)⁸.

The most well-known collaborative support is the Truancy Sweep, which occurs when a mobile team responds to community concerns involving school aged youth in violation of Atlanta City Ordinance 106-229. The team canvases an area of concern to identify students, verify enrollment with Truancy Social Worker, makes an assessment of the situation, and determines appropriate next steps. Based on their findings, the student is transported to school, home, local At Promise Center, or juvenile detention.

⁸ The ordinance states, “any minor age six through 15 years old who loiters, wanders, strolls or plays in or upon the public streets, highways, roads, alleys, parks, playgrounds or other public grounds, public places, public buildings, places of amusement, eating places, vacant lots, unsupervised by an adult having the lawful authority to be at such places, between the hours of 8:30 a.m. and 2:30 p.m. on any school day shall be considered a child in need of supervision.”

SUMMARY OF TESTIMONY AND DISCUSSION

Date: August 7, 2025 (Meeting 1)

Location: Mercer University – Macon, GA

Topic: Introductory Meeting

Attendees and Speakers

Members: J. Kennedy (Chair); S. Still; F. Powell Sims; C. Dixon; R. Kemp

Speakers: P. Elkins (Mercer University); H. Chang (AttendanceWorks); J. Hill & R. Woods (GaDoE); T. Reinagel (CSG South); G. McGiboney (Get Georgia Reading Cabinet’s Subcommittee on Student Attendance); D. Sims (Macon Bibb Cty. Schools)

Summary of Testimony

1. AttendanceWorks (Hedy Chang, Founder & Executive Director)

Ms. Chang discussed the national trends regarding absenteeism and presented data on U.S. absenteeism rates. Additionally, she spoke on the implications of chronic absenteeism, including negative impacts on classroom dynamics, graduation rates, and reading proficiency. The COVID-19 pandemic significantly affected school absenteeism. Ms. Chang displayed pre-pandemic and post-pandemic data. She also defined the term “chronically absent” and the importance of advocating for a percentage-based model rather than a set number of days to qualify as chronically absent. Absenteeism is important to recognize and monitor early on in education in order to effectively intervene and improve attendance.

Ms. Chang also discussed some barriers impacting absenteeism, including poor mental health support, undiagnosed conditions, bullying in schools, school climate, peer and educator relationships, and others. She further broke down the barriers, aversions, disengagement, and misconceptions related to school absenteeism. She emphasized the importance of healthy relationships as foundational, positive conditions to address the issue. She also touted the significance of states passing legislation to address this issue, including Georgia, and the political diversity of the states that have legislated absenteeism thus far.

Senator Kemp asked if studies show specific trends for school districts to recognize early signs of absenteeism. Ms. Chang said there are two big predictors for children who are at risk for chronic absenteeism: 1) a child was chronically absent during the prior school year, and 2) a child was chronically absent in first month of the same school year. Chairman Kennedy asked whether there is one innovative method used by a state to identify and address absenteeism that has proven successful. Ms. Chang said strategic partnerships with health providers is a very impactful method, including health services within schools and having representation from school nurses on school climate committees.

Senator Powell Sims discussed parent coordinators/facilitators in Georgia and asked if providing schools with such professionals would be beneficial to bridge the gap in addressing absenteeism. Ms. Chang said the first step should be to evaluate the professionals already on the ground and interacting with students and parents to see what resources they need to fill the gaps and be more successful. She also stated parent engagement is critical, but separate from health resources.

2. Georgia Department of Education (GaDoE) (Justin Hill, Deputy Superintendent for Whole Child Supports; Richard Woods, State Superintendent)

Superintendent Woods stated that past efforts to address absenteeism focused on the “hammer” of consequences—largely encompassing force and punishment. He stated this approach has not reduced absenteeism numbers, and properly improving statistics will require innovate methods and strategic partnerships to prevent, recognize, and address chronic absenteeism. He also emphasized the importance of establishing the value of attendance before kindergarten.

Mr. Hill divided his presentation into three sections: 1) state trends and data, 2) school success stories, and 3) agency-focused areas of impact. He first broke down the impact of missing school on education overall (e.g., a student who misses consistently two days of school a month will miss one year of school by high school graduation). He also showed the newly-launched Attendance Dashboard, which provides school attendance data by county and over different school years. The Dashboard also shows a “heat map,” which can be broken down by school and show data specific to various demographics and grade levels. He specifically highlighted the troubling rates affecting high schools, Title I schools, and urban schools.

Mr. Hill listed several successful strategies to improve absenteeism—including removing barriers, improving the student experience in schools, and a tiered approach focused on prevention and early intervention. He further divided these strategies into high and low cost and high and low effect. Moving to various success stories, Mr. Hill discussed several innovative methods implemented successfully by Georgia school districts. Overall, successful methods focus on shifting away from a truancy-based approach to personalized messaging.

GaDoE’s efforts include: partnering with AttendanceWorks, hosting the attendance summit and working with governmental leaders, education bulletins publishing interviews with principals and superintendents, receiving grant funding from the U.S. Department of Education, and more. Absenteeism is an issue of focus at the agency. Mr. Hill closed his presentation by listing ways for committee attendees to help GaDoE’s mission to improve absenteeism.

Senator Still asked what state is addressing absenteeism most effectively and what Georgia can do to emulate those practices. Mr. Hill stated that Ms. Chang’s research found Maine and Ohio as promising states for inspiration. Senator Powell Sims asked about implementing peer-to-peer workshops for parents as opposed to teacher-based communication. Mr. Hill said the grant funding received from the U.S. Department of Education has allowed GaDoE to create better research methods and focus groups to better understand how to best communicate with parents on a state-wide level.

3. Council of State Governments Southern Region (CSG South) (Tyler Reinagel, Director of Policy and Research)

Mr. Reinagel listed five key focus areas in state efforts to combat absenteeism:

1. Post-pandemic absenteeism surge;
2. Understanding truancy v. chronic absence;
3. Policy shifts from punishment to support;
4. Team-based and community responses; and
5. Real-time data for decision-making.

He further discussed three key factors impacting the crisis, including the sharp increases in absenteeism since 2018. Absenteeism rates nearly doubled nationwide between 2018 and 2023, climbing from 14 percent to 26 percent overall. Southern states saw a similar or even steeper rise. Additionally, the pandemic accelerated disengagement in schools, and there exists limited and delayed data on the issue. For example, by late 2023, only 12 states had published full absenteeism data for the previous academic year.

He further explained the difference between truancy and chronic absenteeism. Truancy refers to unexcused absences and triggers legal or disciplinary action. Chronic absenteeism includes all absences—excused, unexcused, and suspensions—that exceed 10 percent of the school year. Distinguishing these two terms and responses to them is crucial. He further focused on successful policy shifts, including suspension restrictions, intervention before punishment, and supported learning during suspension. He highlighted Alabama, Tennessee, Florida, and Arkansas as similar states to look at for successful methods to implement in Georgia.

Overall, collaborative approaches prove to be most successful. The south has fallen behind significantly in the availability of real-time data publications, which is also an area to improve upon. He emphasized the importance of quality, accurate data as the foundation for providing appropriate remedies to address chronic absenteeism for specific populations.

Senator Still asked how bullying fits into absenteeism. Mr. Reinagel explained that their work looked at data and policy effects, but not the “why” affecting absences. Chairman Kennedy asked if there are any programs operating similar to a “buddy-system” to give peer-to-peer accountability for students. Mr. Reinagel also stated that was not something reviewed in this study but their team would be happy to review the issue in the future to see if there are any successful models. Senator Kemp asked about other states’ attendance teams and if they are required programs. Mr. Reinagel said a challenge in the south is the dynamics of the state: sharp differences between urban and rural areas. Georgia is so diverse that state-wide strategies can prove difficult to implement.

4. Get Georgia Reading Cabinet’s Subcommittee on Student Attendance (Dr. Garry McGiboney, Chair)
Dr. McGiboney, Chief Operations Officer for Health Security Dynamics and Executive Director of Government and Education Programs at Sharecare, presented on a six-month study conducted by the Get Georgia Reading Cabinet Subcommittee on Student Attendance (Subcommittee) after school absences continuously impacted reading levels. The study began in April 2024 and looked into the factors affecting absenteeism and successful methods to improve the issue. The Subcommittee published a 94-page report, two-thirds of which list practical, reliable improvement methods. In 2024, over 20 percent of students missed more than three weeks of school. He also listed performance data and how students who regularly attend school perform better in various school subjects than chronically absent students.

The Subcommittee sought to answer the question “what would be the impact on 3rd grade English Language Arts (ELA) assessment outcomes if student attendance improved by 5 percent?” Their findings showed that a 5 percent decrease in absenteeism would lead to a 6.6 percent increase in ELA proficiency, raising Georgia in national rankings and allowing thousands more students to read proficiently by the end of third grade. Dr. McGiboney also highlighted the important role of parent and family engagement to increase student success. An Illinois study finding that schools with the highest level of family engagement

experienced six percentage points less absenteeism post-pandemic than schools with the least family engagement.

The Technical College system of Georgia surveyed over 100 parents of school-aged kids based on surveys published by AttendanceWorks. The survey indicated parents weigh several factors, including the child's ability to manage the day, whether their physical health poses a risk to others, and a child's overall behavior and attitude toward school. Overall, parents prefer keeping their child home when unsure about their child's health.

Dr. McGiboney also discussed a national survey by RAND, which showed 23 percent of school leaders reported none of the strategies they implemented were effective to address absenteeism. However, those same school leaders agreed on some improvement methods, including:

- It is essential to identify and address the root causes of chronic absenteeism;
- Collaborate with many partners;
- Develop a wide range of strategies rather than focusing on only one or two; and
- Schools cannot do this alone.

Dr. McGiboney broke down some of the most prevalent issues impacting absenteeism, including Early Identification and Intervention, Parent-School Partnership and Problem Solving, Mental and Physical Health Support, Community and Social Supports, and Improving School Climate and Safety. He further proposed several recommendations to tackle these issues. He urged the committee to require a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) process for the School Attendance Teams and encourage schools to use the MTSS process to address attendance. He concluded his presentation by emphasizing two points: 1) everyone has underestimated importance of attendance, and 2) people have also underestimated the complexity of this issue.

Senator Powell Sims stated she is interested in hearing about how teachers will play a role in addressing absenteeism, assuming that teachers and parents will have the greatest impact on the issue. She also stated the importance of financial discipline to limit administrative costs and grant professionals additional funding to help fill the gaps in education and support.

5. Macon Bibb County Schools (Dr. Dan Sims, Superintendent)

Dr. Sims began his presentation by stating the mission of Bibb County schools and the learner outcomes. He highlighted how school attendance directly impacts these goals. The district has begun looking at different percentage ranges of absences to identify trends early and track data. He listed some of the most beneficial programs, including breakthrough teams, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), Leader In Me, Truancy Task Force, School-Level Attendance Teams, and Attendance Post Cards. He stated the programs are most effective when schools are able to partner with local organizations and attendance teams.

Dr. Sims stated the needs of schools extend beyond what they are currently able to provide. He stated that an important factor is showing data indicating the higher performances in students who are regularly in class, and using that information to show parents how important it is for kids to be in school. However, he also mentioned parental engagement is a pressing issue and parents routinely do not show up to meetings regarding school attendance. Similarly, engaging families when students are disengaged is difficult.

Dr. Sims discussed several additional interventions that do not address barriers, including:

- Access to mental health supports;
- Transiency and homelessness;
- Health-related issues;
- Academic struggles/fear of failure;
- Bullying; and
- Lack of reliable transportation.

He further stated the impact of absenteeism on staff is monumental. Compassion fatigue, disruptions in the learning process, increased workloads, expanded scope of responsibilities, and decreased morale has negatively affected teachers. He concluded his presentation by looking towards next steps. He suggested including implementing intensive school-level approaches, identifying students who are borderline and chronically absent in previous years for early intervention, increasing support for transportation with walk zone families, extending mental health support, enlisting Truancy Intervention Specialists, and developing Community Attendance Action Teams.

Senator Kemp stated the significance of having educators in the audience and the importance to spread the impact. He asked who makes up the attendance review teams and if childcare is an issue that comes up as a cause for absenteeism. Dr. Sims said social workers, nurses, teachers, principals, and others make up the team. He stated an issue they have seen recently is an older child taking care of younger siblings, meaning that a ripple effect occurs when one child is sick and unable to attend school, especially for households with a single parent.

Date: September 22, 2025 (Meeting 2)

Location: 341 State Capitol – Atlanta, GA

Topic: Joint Meeting with the House Study Committee on Student Attendance in Prek-12 Education

Attendees and Speakers

Members: Sen. J. Kennedy (Senate Chair), Rep. C. Erwin (House Chair), Sen. B. Hickman, Sen. S. Still, Sen. F. Sims, Sen. C. Dixon, Sen. R. Kemp, Rep. C. Rice, Rep. M. Dubnik, Rep. S. Donatucci, Rep. L. Glaize

Speakers: A. Harris (Cobb Cty. Superior Crt.); M. Kim (GOSA); C. Doyle (GA Apex); D. Lynch (GA Appleseed); M. Bales & L. Meadows (School Nursing Association); P. McKinney & D. Desai (Voices for Georgia’s Children); U. Azhar (GSAN); K. Steinmann (GA Alliance of Boys & Girls Club); K. Nelson (YMCA of Metro Atlanta); K. Johnson & P. Gaither (Big Brothers Big Sisters of Metro Atlanta); D. Chambers (Lithonia Middle School); B. Fitzgerald (Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Heart of Georgia)

Summary of Testimony

1. Cobb County Superior Court (Ann B. Harris, Chief Judge)

Judge Harris began her presentation emphasizing that absenteeism is the most important topic on which she can speak due to its effect on children. However, she also stated superior courts do not often see youth offenders in the courtroom unless they are accused of serious offenses. More than 4,000 students drop out of high school every day, and she further highlighted data showing the negative impact of dropping out on such students and the community. On average, the life expectancy of an individual who has dropped out of high school is *eight* years less than one who does complete their high school education. Judge Harris also highlighted the correlation between not completing high school and involvement with the criminal justice system and incarceration. She concluded the introduction to her presentation by stating dropping out of school is directly correlated to chronic absenteeism, among other factors.

Judge Harris stated a local grassroots approach to addressing absenteeism is the most effective way to mitigate the issue. She also stated wraparound services are crucial. The Cobb County SASCC developed a protocol to improve educational outcomes in January 2025. The committee collaborated with key stakeholders, consulted to refine protocols and ensure alignment with the statute, and adopted written protocol. The committee created two subcommittees: 1) the Subcommittee to Identify an Address Barriers to Attendance and to improving School Climate, and 2) the Subcommittee to Identify Community Resources and Responses Available to Combat Chronic Absenteeism and Improve School Climate. As of July 2025, **16 judicial circuits** in the state developed educational protocols—encompassing around **37 counties**.

Cobb County SASCC outlined key takeaways from its two meetings in January and July 2025, including:

- Identifying authoritative positions from each agency required by statute;
- Identifying key staff within participating agencies with operational knowledge;
- Identifying staff members responsible for coordinating development of SASCC protocol; and
- Leveraging assistance of Superior and Juvenile Courts in convening stakeholders.

Cobb County utilizes a proactive approach to identify absenteeism early and prioritizes intervention services. Further, Cobb County SASCC is engaged in ongoing grant proposals for funding to enact planned projects to tackle this issue. Future areas of study include:

- Identifying schools within Cobb that meet the 15 percent local school attendance team threshold;
- Reviewing coordination strategies of local student attendance teams;

- Exploring how to incorporate students and families in SASCC Subcommittees;
- Discussing plans for updating Protocol to reflect SB 123 changes and update local plans; and
- Establishing “Project Pivot:” a multiagency community-based risk reduction panel involving Juvenile Court staff, schools, social services, parents, and community agencies to collaboratively address the root causes of truancy.

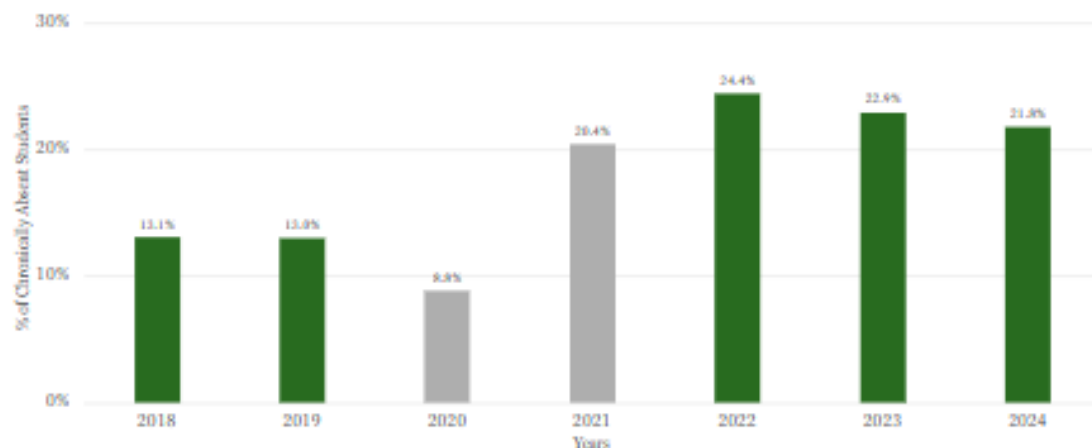
Representative Rice asked if the Cobb County Student Handbook was updated to reflect the changes adopted by SASCC. She also asked if there is information regarding the truancy disciplinary protocol outlined in the handbook. Judge Wayne Grannis, a Cobb County Juvenile Court judge in the audience, answered the questions, stating the handbook was updated to reflect changes proposed by SASCC and schools were involved in crafting the updated protocol. He confirmed the disciplinary procedure is also outlined in the handbook for parents’ awareness.

Senator Hickman asked about the role of supporting teachers and addressing school climate to encourage attendance. Judge Harris stated this is a particularly important issue to address for young teachers to reduce turnover.

2. Governor’s Office of Student Achievement (GOSA) (MJ Kim, Director of Policy, Research, and Evaluation)

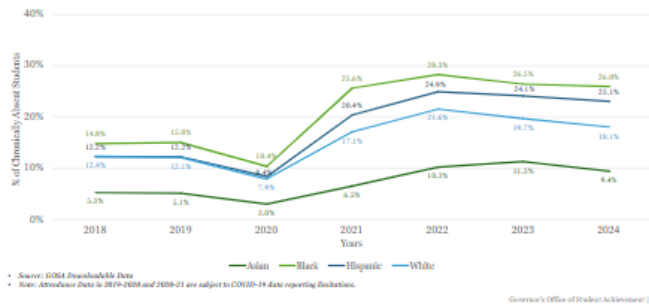
Dr. Kim presented data on the various outcomes seen in chronically absent students. She began by showcasing national data, by school year, for chronically absent students in the U.S. In 2024, **23.5 percent** of students nationally were chronically absent. The numbers have decreased since the COVID-19 pandemic; however, they have yet to return to pre-pandemic numbers, showing that states are still grappling with this issue. Absenteeism rapidly spread across the southern region. She also presented data specific to Georgia, emphasizing that the pandemic did not create absenteeism, but it absolutely exacerbated the issue.

Chronically Absent Students in Georgia

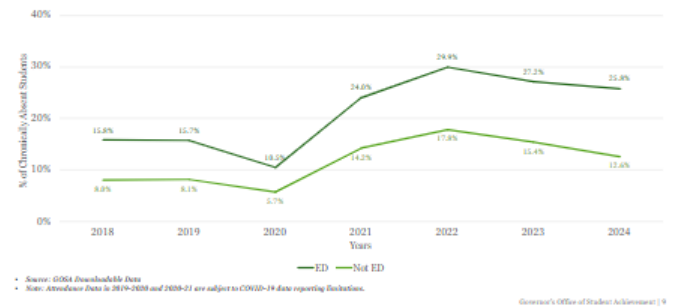


• Source: GOSA Downloadable Data
 • Note: Attendance Data in 2019-2020 and 2020-21 are subject to COVID-19 data reporting limitations.

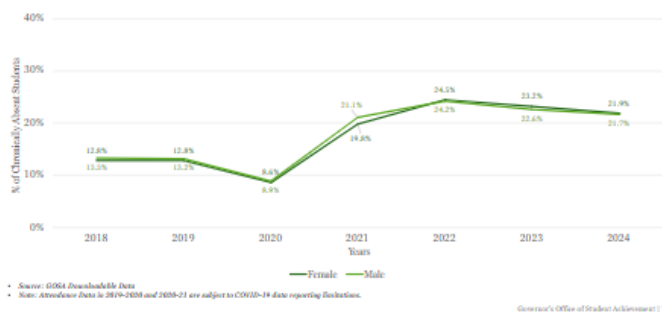
Chronically Absent Students by Race



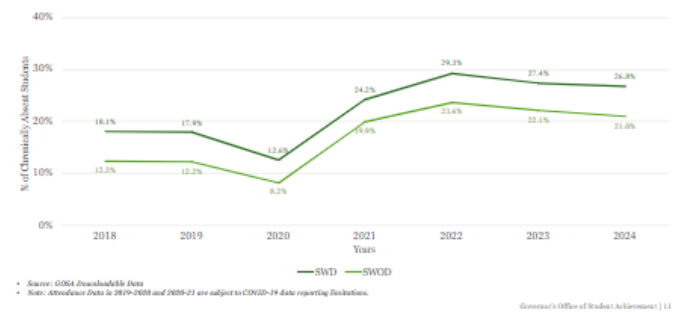
Chronically Absent Students by Economic Status



Chronically Absent Students by Gender



Chronically Absent Students by Disability Status



Dr. Kim proposed tackling absenteeism by addressing two distinct groups: 1) demographic groups already greatly impacted by chronic absenteeism, and 2) demographic groups with increasing rates of absenteeism. She also stated that, at this time, there is no need for gender-specific intervention services. There is a negative correlation between chronic absenteeism and a school's ELA and Math proficiency. Dr. Kim concluded her presentation with some key takeaways:

- The pandemic exacerbated existing challenges;
- Disparities are real but actionable;
- Attendance drives achievement; and
- A dual approach is essential.

Representative Erwin asked if Georgia can anticipate continuing to decrease chronic absenteeism rates by **1 percent** each year. Dr. Kim said she foresees the rates continuing to decline each year. Senator Still asked if there are certain hotspots in Georgia experiencing absenteeism at greater rates. Dr. Kim said GOSA created a heat map showing rates by county, and there are some standout regions, but she is presently unable to point to specific factors impacting rates the most.

3. Georgia Apex - Office of Children, Young Adults, and Families (Christy Doyle, Senior Director of Child and Adolescent Division) and Voices for Georgia's Children (Dimple Desai, Senior Policy Analyst)

Ms. Desai stated absenteeism is a health issue as much of an education issue. When schools support students' physical, mental, and emotional health, they remove barriers and reduce chronic absenteeism. She divided programs into three categories: 1) School-based Health Centers (SBHC), 2) School-based Behavioral Health programs, and 3) School Social Workers. Currently, **129 SBHCs** and **808 schools have**

implemented Georgia Apex—a program that strives to build capacity and increase access to mental health services for school-aged youth throughout the state.

Ms. Desai presented several recommendations, including:

- Increase funding for school social workers;
- Continue to expand and fund the Georgia Apex Program, including telebehavioral health initiatives;
- Continue to innovate and modernize Georgia’s licensure processes and pathways for health clinicians; and
- Expand funding for Tier 1 services, including evidence-based or -informed School-based health/School-based behavioral health trainings, and formal and informal peer supports.

Ms. Doyle spoke on School-based Mental Health and the Georgia Apex program. The Apex program supports students, identifies needs early, connects students to support, and opens doors to care. The program has existed for over **ten years**. Ms. Doyle highlighted their collaborative approach and partnerships. The program emphasizes detection, access, and coordination.

For the 2024-2025 school year, Apex delivered **264,940 behavioral health services**, reached **15,617 students**, and expanded its impact to **868 schools**. She discussed the improved access to care, including those **7,243 students** who received mental health services from an Apex therapist for the **first** time during the 2024-2025 school year. **71 percent** of parents reported their child was better able to handle daily life after Apex services. Additionally, **83 percent** of parents reported improved access to care.

The Apex Tiered Support Model includes:

- Tier I – Universal Prevention: Schoolwide activities to promote mental health awareness (e.g., info sessions, outreach at events).
- Tier II – Targeted Early Intervention: Support for at-risk students with emerging needs (e.g., psychoeducation groups).
- Tier III – Intensive Intervention: Focused support for students with mental health disorders (e.g., crisis intervention, individual/family therapy).

Senator Hickman asked why some school districts do not utilize Georgia Apex services. Ms. Doyle stated some districts have localized programs, so some superintendents choose to not participate in state-provided services. She also emphasized that the lack of clinical partners in some communities is an issue the Georgia Department of Behavioral Health & Development seeks to address for underserved regions unable to presently participate.

4. Georgia Appleseed (Darlene Lynch, Legal & Policy Director)

Ms. Lynch discussed Georgia Appleseed’s holistic approach to addressing absenteeism, particularly representation provided for disciplinary proceedings. Last year, the organization saved students from missing **17,000 days of school** through their advocacy. Georgia Appleseed has been involved with SASCCs across the state since 2018 and works to raise awareness statewide. She presented various concerns for addressing this issue, including:

- Lack of awareness of SASCCs;
- Competing committees (e.g., truancy, CHINS);
- Superior courts disconnected from juvenile issues;
- No dedicated funding or staffing;

- No sample documents or governing body for guidance;
- Poor school climates (**13 percent** of GA schools have poor climates);
- Exclusionary discipline contributing to chronic absenteeism;
- OSS rates exceeding state average in many areas, with some districts having a rate of over **50 percent**; and
- Access to behavioral health and other school supports still limited and varies widely.

Ms. Lynch emphasized that SASCCs are incredibly successful when implemented and utilized by districts. She also highlighted how exclusionary disciplinary practices negatively impact school attendance. Some causes for school absences proposed in the presentation include:

- Enrollment denials and disputes;
- Out of school suspensions;
- Recommended “pick-ups” (i.e., teachers or administrators requesting parents to pick up children from school);
- Transportation barriers (including student homelessness); and
- Lack of clarity regarding remote learning.

She also showed the harmful effects of absenteeism on students’ outcomes, including learning loss, lower graduation rates, harm to students who do not graduate, and a negative impact on the Georgia economy. Ms. Lynch completed her presentation by listing several recommendations from Georgia Appleseed, including:

- SASCCs: Provide dedicated funding to Council of Juvenile Court Judges or other guiding body for SASSC technical assistance;
- School Climate: Invest in positive school climates in 1–2-star schools, including greater support for Regional Education Service Agencies (RESAs);
- Discipline: Restrict zero tolerance policies in favor of PBIS, Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management and other evidence-based practices that keep kids in school;
- Absenteeism: Amend O.C.G.A. § 20-2-690.1 to ensure absence is never a reason for exclusionary discipline;
- School Supports: Continue to invest in Apex programs and improving ratios of school support personnel to students;
- Transportation: Expand funding for transportation, including for alternative schools and McKinney-Vento eligible students;
- Alternative Schools: Launch study committee to address absenteeism and other learning barriers at alternative schools; and
- Record Sharing / Remote Learning: Clarify requirements in HB 268 to reduce enrollment delays.

Senator Sims referenced the barriers on which Judge Harris presented, particularly school climate. She stated school administration and leadership are the best people to address school climate and reduce barriers within individual schools. Representative Glaize asked for further information regarding exclusionary disciplinary practices. Ms. Lynch said schools are increasingly using out of school suspension (particularly for first-time infractions) rather than detention or progressive discipline services. Particularly, when students are not accompanied to a disciplinary hearing with a parent or other advocate, those students receive much more significant punishments.

Chairman Kennedy asked why the Georgia Assembly should study alternative schools. Mr. Lynch stated a large number of children are sent to alternative schools in Georgia, but they do not have access to the total current number due to differing reporting standards. There is a particular issue with transporting students in foster care to alternative schools. There is also an issue regarding the individualization of educational services for students with special needs.

5. School Nursing Association (Melanie K. Bales, State Director; Lynne P. Meadows, State Data Coordinator)

Ms. Bales discussed school nurses' role in addressing absenteeism. Common issues she sees affecting absenteeism include illness (acute/chronic), mental health issues, family or social issues, and lack of access to healthcare. Nurses fit into the larger student support system and are often the first school staffers to recognize patterns perpetuating chronic absenteeism.

Health-related causes of absenteeism include chronic illnesses (e.g., asthma, diabetes, etc.), poorly managed health conditions, lack of immunizations, and mental health challenges. School nurses identify at-risk students by tracking attendance and health data, providing screenings and referrals, and communicating with families and teachers. Intervention strategies include:

- Health education (e.g., hygiene, nutrition, disease prevention);
- Individualized healthcare plans;
- Case management and care coordination;
- Immunization clinics; and
- Medication administration at school.

Ms. Meadows stated school nurses collaborate with various networks to provide tailored care to students; however, barriers still exist affecting their ability to provide proper care. One primary issue is the limited licensed nursing staff. Frequently, one school nurse covers multiple schools and cannot provide the necessary care for all students under their care. Additionally, lack of resources and funding, communication gaps with families, and privacy and consent issues prevent school nurses from working to mitigate absenteeism.

Representative Erwin asked for the number of school nurse vacancies in Georgia. Ms. Bales stated the only legal mandate for school health services is a statewide Board of Nursing, and each district determines what health services look like in its schools. Presently, only **37 percent** of schools in Georgia have a full-time nurse in the school on a daily basis. Representative Erwin asked about vacancies, specifically. Ms. Bales stated she does not have access to that particular data but emphasized that nurses often stay in a clinical or hospital settings because compensation is better than school nurses receive.

6. Voices for Georgia's Children (Polly McKinney, Advocacy Director), Georgia Statewide Afterschool Network (GSAN) (Uzma Azhar, Senior Policy Analyst), Georgia Alliance of Boys & Girls Club (Kristine Steinmann, Executive Director), and YMCA of Metro Atlanta (Kim Nelson, Chief Program Officer)

Ms. McKinney introduced the speakers to discuss out-of-school time programs and their impact in addressing absenteeism. Ms. Azhar defined out-of-school time (OST) to include afterschool, summer learning, and weekend youth development programs. OST programs receive millions of dollars in funding each year and work to address chronic absenteeism in several ways, in addition to other positive impacts.

Afterschool Combats Chronic Absenteeism



Promote School
Connectedness



Promote Student
Engagement in
Learning



Promote Safety



Opportunities to
Explore Passions
and Interests



Promote Youth
Voice and
Connection



Supportive
Adults and
Mentors



Source: Afterschool Alliance. Addressing Chronic Absenteeism: [How Afterschool Programs are Building School-Day Engagement and Improving Attendance](#) (Jan 2025).

Afterschool programs work with parents, offer youth incentives, and partner with school districts to improve attendance. Similarly, summer learning programs help students avoid the summer slide and increase achievement in reading and math, improve school engagement, and reduce risky behaviors. She further highlighted that **68 percent** of students with a school day attendance rate at or below 90 percent in the prior school year improved their attendance rate in the current school year while participating in Georgia's 21st Century Community Learning Centers program.

Unfortunately, despite significant funding for successful OST programs, Georgia leads the country in unmet demand for both afterschool and tutoring programs—**22 percent** in unmet afterschool demand and **23 percent** in unmet tutoring demand.

Ms. Steinmann discussed the Boys & Girls Clubs role in combating absenteeism. The organization serves **62,510 youth** across Georgia through **170 clubs and sites**. Involvement in Clubs boosts school attendance and effort. A 2024 longitudinal study found that **61 percent** of Club attendees ages nine to 12 did not skip school. Additionally, **70 percent** of teen Club attendees did not skip school. Only **seven percent** of Club youth are chronically absent, versus 11 percent statewide. Clubs increase engagement and attendance through year-round learning, college and career readiness, and emphasizing graduation. **97 percent** of Club teens expect to graduate high school—compared to the 87 percent national rate—and over half plan to pursue a bachelor's or higher. Ms. Steinmann also presented data for additional states and studies showing the positive impact of OST programs.

Ms. Nelson discussed Georgia YMCA's role in addressing absenteeism, including the strong partnerships developed with local schools and districts, daily attendance tracking and engagement strategies, providing meaningful financial assistance, fostering positive relationships with students and families, and providing wraparound service such as meals and mentoring. The Georgia YMCA Boost Program serves **12,000 K-12 students** annually. **77 percent of parents** report the program helps their children learn and prepare for school, and **75 percent of youth** report authentic engagement and satisfaction.

Georgia YMCA also provides school support services, such as employing certified teachers and paraprofessionals in OST programs, offering tutoring aligned to school curriculum, offering on-site programming and transportation support, and providing data-sharing agreements and family engagement events.

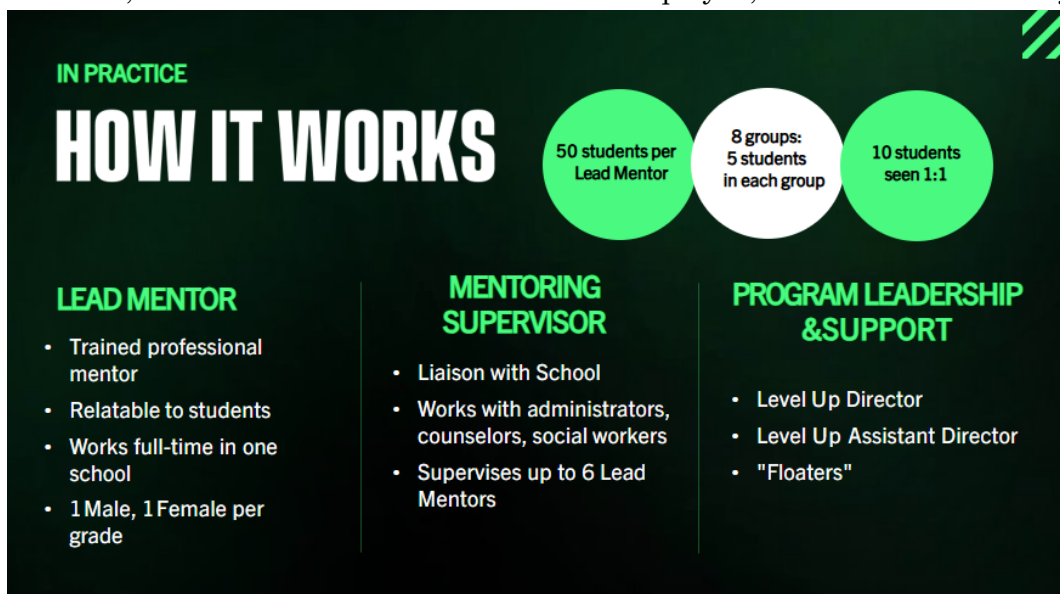
The various speakers comprising the OST coalition offered the following recommendations:

- **BOOST 2.0:** Build on the state's annual investment in community-based out-of-school time programs to \$20 million;
- Expand funding for school-based health and social services;
- Support transportation and attendance incentive programs;
- Increase access to mental health services; and
- Encourage school districts to agree to share attendance data.

Representative Glaize asked Ms. Nelson to connect the dots between early learning services provided by the YMCA and the outcome on K-12 attendance. Ms. Nelson emphasized the importance of educating families on expectations for K-12 education settings and providing resources to get families and students ready for the transitions between education levels. The YMCA also provides health services, such as eye exams, to ensure children are able to engage in the classroom fully.

7. Big Brothers Big Sisters of Metro Atlanta (Kwame Johnson, Sr., President & CEO; Pierre Gaither, Chief Operating Officer), Lithonia Middle School (Dewonda Chambers, Assistant Principal), and Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Heart of Georgia (Betsy Fitzgerald, President & CEO)

Mr. Johnson explained the history and purpose of the Big Brothers Big Sisters Program. He focused on the 'Level Up' program, which Mr. Gaither explained in more depth. The program's mentorship model provides a single mentor for groups of students, adding 1:1 mentorship when necessary. Mr. Gaither gave various data points showcasing how mentorship keeps children in schools. Particularly, the Level Up program reduced chronic absenteeism by a rate of **27-58 percent**. Ms. Chambers, an assistant principle at Lithonia Middle School, discussed anecdotes of students involved in the Level Up program. Ms. Fitzgerald discussed the issue of chronic absenteeism in her home of Macon. She further discussed the difficulties in recruiting mentors in rural areas, but when mentors are retained and deployed, the model is extremely successful.



Senator Still asked how the organization identifies schools most in need and tailors services to meet those needs. Mr. Johnson said schools reach out to Big Brothers Big Sisters for assistance and the organization provides services as resources allow. Representative Glaize asked how the organization recruits mentors and trains them properly. Mr. Johnson stated the program works successfully in suburban, urban, and rural areas because it addresses poverty in every form and mentors are professionally trained.

Date: October 16, 2025 (Meeting 3)

Location: 450 State Capitol – Atlanta, GA

Topic: Juvenile Justice System

Attendees and Speakers

Members: Sen. J. Kennedy (Chairman), Sen. B. Hickman, Sen. S. Still, Sen. F. Powell Sims, Sen. R. Kemp (virtual)

Speakers: J. Heard (Tifton Cty. Juv. Cr.), J. Diaz (GSCA), T. Ferguson (TIP), M. Schweizer (Fulton Cty. SASCC), J. Taylor (Dougherty Cty. Schools), M. Taylor (Alice Coachman Elementary Schools)

Summary of Testimony

1. Tifton County Juvenile Court (Render Heard, Judge)

Judge Heard discussed his background overseeing Truancy and CHINS programs and emphasized that Juvenile Court judges are leading experts on the legal landscape in this field. He defined CHINS cases and explained the types of situations that fall under this provision. Children found to be truant are the largest population of children under CHINS. Truant is defined as having ten or more days of unexcused absences in a school year.

He briefly went through the process of a CHINS case, including who can file a complaint and petition, the adjudication timeline, the disposition hearing, and mandated reviews. Juvenile Court judges who find a child to be truant and in need of services may issue several rulings, including:

- Permit the child to remain with a caregiver with or without limitations or conditions;
- Place on probation;
- Order community service;
- Order to pay restitution;
- Impose Fines;
- Require attendance at structured afternoon/evening programs;
- Require supervision during certain times of day;
- Any order authorized for disposition of a dependent child;
- Any order authorized for the disposition of a delinquent child *except* detention;
- Issue a protective order requiring the child or parents to do/not to do things; and
- Any combination of those things above which are in the best interests of the child.

Judge Heard explained two distinct differences within the Georgia Code leading to ambiguity. First, while the Code defines truancy as missing ten or more days in a school year, the State Board of Education defines the same term as missing five or more days. Second, the way courts interpret the language surrounding contempt proceedings when a parent or child is found in violation of a disposition differs throughout the state. He further explained how these ambiguities lead to different processes throughout the state for Juvenile Courts to address truancy.

Judge Heard also explained how Tifton County operates its truancy efforts. After five absences, a student is referred to a CHINS or TIP program and parents are notified to attend a truancy intervention meeting. The meeting is held off campus to convey to parents that judicial intervention may become necessary. A multidisciplinary team attempts to identify the root cause of absenteeism. He also stated that trials rarely occur for truancy cases; rather, parties stipulate to the case.

The court may make referrals to the Georgia Division of Family & Children Services (DFCS) or other agencies for assistance with mental health, parenting, and other services. Initial orders often include a protective order requiring the child and the parent(s) to do or refrain from doing a number of things. Failure to abide by the terms of the court order may result in a contempt hearing.

Judge Heard discussed key challenges to addressing truancy through court intervention, including:

- Lack of services;
- Confusion regarding proper referrals and judicial authority to mandate services be provided by agencies;
- Calculating absences, including virtual learning;
- Homeschool issues, including judicial authority to prohibit homeschooling;
- Enforcement issues;
- Timeliness of reviews and modifications;
- Ambiguity in the CHINS Article;
- Lack of timely assessments to determine mental health and behavioral problems;
- Different disciplinary options depending on socio-economic status of families; and
- Slow court processes.

Senator Hickman asked for a definition of excused versus unexcused absences and application of the Tifton County model across the state. Judge Heard stated the differences in application across the state stems from differences in funding and interpretations of ambiguous code sections across judicial circuits. He also stated excused and unexcused absences are defined by the State Board of Education; however, each school district makes its own determination, which also differs across districts.

Senator Still asked what the cost per child would be to implement the Tifton County model across the state from early intervention throughout the program. Judge Heard said he was unaware of the specific number but the model proves to be effective. He emphasized that criminalizing truancy is not ideal; however, a process for accountability must be in place to ensure enforcement. Senator Kemp asked about the discrepancy between five days and ten days for the definition of truancy. Judge Heard was unaware of a specific reason for the difference, but assumed it was an administrative error that has yet to be corrected after implementation of new policies.

2. Georgia School Counselor's Association (GSCA) (Dr. Jennifer Diaz, Past President)

Dr. Diaz stated school counselors are the primary individuals interacting with truant students within the school system. She sent a survey to counselors across the state and presented the responses she received from her peers. Since COVID-19, absenteeism has been on the rise, and it is both a student and parent issue.

Referring to Senator's Hickman question regarding excused versus unexcused absences, she defined excused absences as for illness, religious holidays, and visiting deployed family members. She also stated schools have some flexibility in determining whether an absence is excused. While illness is the largest category of absences, that number is calculated solely from "sick notes" submitted to schools. The most common reasons for absences include:

- Illness and Chronic Health Challenges;
- Anxiety;
- Mental Health Challenges;

- Homelessness;
- Family Support Issues (e.g., unstable housing, family responsibilities placed on youth, transportation, etc.);
- Academic Disengagement; and
- School Climate (e.g., bullying issues, perceived lack of belonging).

Dr. Diaz discussed the role of school counselors to support attendance, including academic planning and course selection, college and career readiness, teacher and parent consultation, and assessments. Counselors offer two levels of support, including:

- Classroom lessons;
- Individual and small group counseling support for social emotional needs;
- Designing, implementing, and coordinating schoolwide activities that support school climate; and
- Crisis response and referral to community support classroom lessons.

She stated staffing ratios are a major issue affecting the services counselors are able to provide to students. The national recommended ratio is 250:1, with a national average of 376:1. Georgia’s current ratio is 450:1.

Dr. Diaz concluded her presentation with various solutions, including:

- Using data to offer targeted support (e.g., wrap around services, individualized interventions, etc.);
- Increased community supports; and
- Improved school climate.

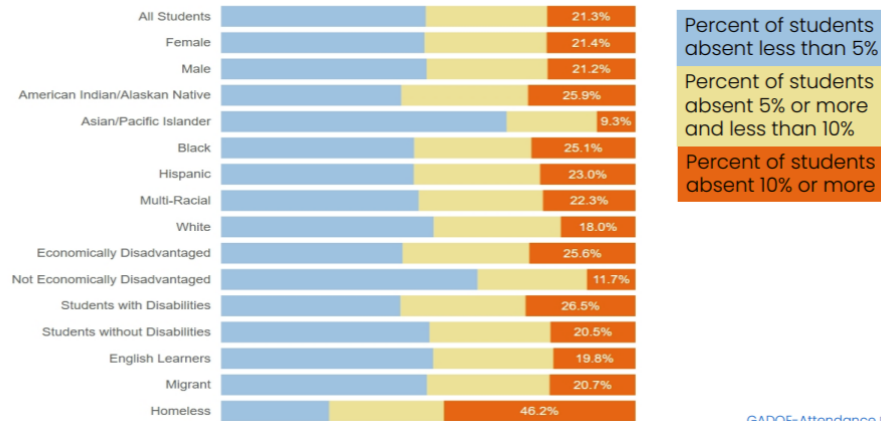
Senator Still asked about distracting devices in the classroom and efforts the General Assembly made to limit device usage through middle school. He asked if similar limitations should be put in place for high school students. Dr. Diaz stated—in her personal opinion—device usage and social media, specifically, should be heavily limited until at least the age of 16 to mitigate some of the mental health issues seen in today’s youth.

Senator Sims asked how to hold parents accountable for their children attending school. Dr. Diaz stated the counselors’ efforts are rooted in intervention, and they are only able to work internally with families. They are able to make referrals to DFCS and Juvenile Courts. However, she stated court intervention takes a significant amount of time and often is not resolved until it is too late. She stated that counselors believe there should be more authority within the compulsory education law to ensure judicial intervention happens swiftly to limit absenteeism.

3. Truancy Intervention Project Georgia (TIP) (Dr. Tonya Malone Ferguson, Executive Director)

Dr. Ferguson gave a brief history of TIP. She discussed absenteeism rates, including disparities in chronic absenteeism.

Disparities in Chronic Absenteeism



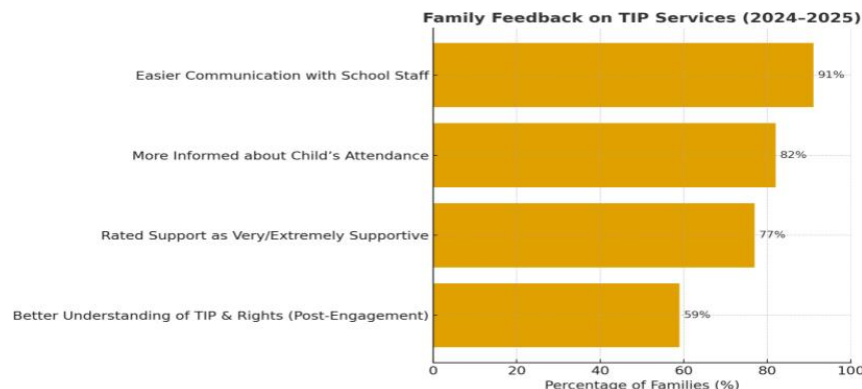
She also discussed the various issues TIP regularly sees in practice. TIP works to address absenteeism through two programs: the Early Intervention Program (cases caught before going to Juvenile Court) and the Juvenile Court Program (truancy cases for children 12-16 years of age).

In the 2024-2025 school year, TIP reported the following data for their two programs:

1. Juvenile Court Program (i.e., truancy cases): **52 cases**
 - a. Average number of absences: 39
 - b. Average age: 15 years old
 - c. Average grade 8th grade
2. Early Intervention Program: **107 cases**
 - a. Average number of absences: 16
 - b. Average age: eight years old
 - c. Average grade 2nd grade

She also explained how TIP works with Juvenile Courts to limit punitive resolutions. Additionally, parents reported increased understanding and engagement when working with TIP to navigate truancy.

2024-2025 TIP Impact



Dr. Ferguson listed several lessons learned through TIP's work, including:

- Early intervention works;
- A wraparound approach is necessary;
- Collaboration is key;
- Community engagement is critical; and
- Punitive approaches fail.

She concluded with several policy recommendations, including:

- Invest in prevention: more funding for early intervention and case management programs like TIP;
- Strengthen school-based supports: social workers, counselors, family liaisons trained to identify and respond to attendance barriers;
- Improve data sharing: between schools, courts, and agencies to intervene earlier;
- Transportation solutions: Expanded bus routes, safe walking paths, or ride-share partnerships;
- Address root causes: more mental health resources, affordable housing, family support services; and
- Expand legal advocacy models: replication or scaling of TIP's attorney-volunteer model in other jurisdictions.

4. Fulton County SASCC (Margaret Schweizer, Executive Committee Member)

Ms. Schweizer is a Pro Temp Judge in Fulton County Juvenile Court, an Executive Committee Member of the Fulton County SASCC, a Child Welfare Law Specialist, and has previous experience creating and running a high-risk delinquent youth program in Fulton County Juvenile Court. She discussed a hypothetical a case study of a student named Jasmine, who is based on several students with which she has interacted during her career.

She emphasized that chronic absenteeism is an indicator of need, whereas truancy is a legal status. Briefly, Ms. Schweizer discussed the school to prison pipeline from the context of chronic absenteeism. Using Jasmine as an example, she demonstrated how quickly situations escalate for chronically absent students. Additionally, she emphasized the connection between absenteeism, discipline, disconnection from school, increased law enforcement contact, court involvement, complete unenrollment in school, and eventual detention. Additionally, she stated the vast majority of students falling under the definition of chronically absent often need comprehensive support services rather than involvement with the juvenile justice system.

Ms. Schweizer concluded her presentation with examples of factors that could have changed Jasmine's story and recommendations to improve similar situations for other children. These recommendations include:

- Due process protections from an Individualized Education Program;
- System coordination for early intervention;
- Tiered attendance supports (i.e., including an enforcement piece SASCC Protocol);
- Trauma-informed approaches focused on re-engagement;
- Treating absenteeism as a symptom of struggle, not defiance;
- Building opportunity to disrupt the pipeline;
- Cross-system collaboration and information and data sharing;
- Funding early intervention teams; and
- Asking "why" before "what consequence."

5. Dougherty County Schools (Dr. JoAnn Taylor, Student Discipline Tribunal) and Alice Coachman Elementary Schools (Dr. Merlong Taylor, Assistant Principal)

Dr. M. Taylor discussed the epidemic of vaping, both nicotine and THC, in elementary schools. She discussed the disciplinary process required to respond to vaping, which often calls for suspension. Not only do suspensions lead to significant absences from school, but vaping at a young age causes a plethora of health issues. She emphasized that this system is punishing children for adult issues, and a concern is how children get access to vaping devices.

Dr. J. Taylor serves on the student discipline tribunal for middle and high school students. She has seen a rise in disciplinary hearings due to chronic vaping in schools. She stated many children purchase vaping devices on their own, without store owners asking for age identification. When students are caught with a vape, they are automatically suspended for ten days (unexcused absences) awaiting a hearing before the tribunal. If children are later referred to alternative school, they often decide to drop out rather than attend an alternative education program. She further discussed that there are significant environmental factors impacting vape usage and the need for stronger laws to address the issue.

Senator Still asked for the age of the youngest student found with a vape. Dr. M. Taylor said the youngest she has seen thus far in the school year is around eight years of age. She also stated vape usage is significantly increasing in all schools.

Date: November 20, 2025 (Meeting 4)

Location: 450 State Capitol – Atlanta, GA

Topic: Final Meeting

Attendees and Speakers

Members: Sen. J. Kennedy (Chairman), Sen. B. Hickman, Sen. S. Still, Sen. F. Powell Sims, Sen. R. Kemp

Speakers: C. Lewis (CIS), J. Chen and J. Kelton (Cartwheel), S. Quinn Mathew (CharacterStrong)

Summary of Testimony

The committee heard presentations from Communities in Schools (CIS), Cartwheel, and CharacterStrong. The presentations are attached as appendices to this report.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM TESTIMONY

The Senate Study Committee on Combatting Chronic Absenteeism in Schools heard several recommendations from testimony over the course of four meetings. These recommendations, divided into seven overarching categories, are recorded in this report for potential future study.

I. Legislative Recommendations

- Address ambiguities and inconsistencies in the Code pertaining to truancy definitions, contempt processes, and CHINS; and
- Clarify requirements in HB 268 to reduce enrollment delays.

II. Regulatory Recommendations

- Provide guidance on when to refer children to additional services, the authority of courts to mandate agency action, how to properly calculate absences, and judicial authority over homeschooling;
- Improve the timeliness of court proceedings, reviews, modifications, and assessments to determine mental health and behavioral problems;
- Create mechanisms for strict enforcement of court orders; and
- Ensure that the SASCC Code Section is implemented with an enforcement provision and establish technical assistance.

III. Improve School Climate

- Increase funding for school climate specialists at the RESAs based on the number of school districts in the RESA regional area;
- Offer small implementation grants to establish SASCCs;
- Provide dedicated funding to Council of Juvenile Court Judges or other guiding body for SASCC technical assistance; and
- Invest in positive school climates in 1–2-star schools, including greater support for RESAs.

IV. Improve School Health Services

- Improve partnerships with health providers and ensure representation of school nurses on SASCCs;
- Compile and evaluate gaps in care from existing health professionals in schools;
- Increase the number of school social workers by phasing in state funding to move toward the nationally recommended school social worker-to-student ratio;
- Expand funding for school nursing services by adding a Medicaid and insurance billing FTE for school districts based on FTE count;
- Provide grants earmarked for school-based telehealth and continue to expand the Georgia Apex Program, including telebehavioral health initiatives; and
- Expand funding for Tier 1 services, including evidence-based or -informed School-based health/School-based behavioral health trainings, and formal and informal peer supports.

V. Improve Available Data

- Independently address two distinct groups of students through protocol: 1) demographic groups already greatly impacted by chronic absenteeism, and 2) demographic groups with increasing rates of absenteeism.

VI. Provide Wraparound Services

- Offer state-level grants for districts that effectively engage local businesses and/or nonprofits in attendance initiatives;
- Promote models structured similar to the CIS attendance model through state-supported licensing, training, or matching grants, enabling schools to tap into community volunteer and support networks to reduce absenteeism;
- Develop Community Attendance Action Teams;
- Expand transportation funds for alternative schools and McKinney-Vento eligible students;
- Build the state's annual investment in community-based out-of-school time programs to \$20 million; and
- Increase mentoring services in schools, particularly highlighting rural regions.

VII. Shift to a Tiered Approach Focused on Prevention and Early Intervention

- Restrict zero tolerance policies in favor of the PBIS attendance model, or other evidence-based practices, and continue to provide relevant training; and
- Enlist the help of Truancy Intervention Specialists.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Members of the Senate Study Committee on Combatting Chronic Absenteeism in Schools offer the following recommendations.

1. Direct the State Board of Education to review, revise, and modernize existing truancy-related notification requirements to ensure that communications to parents and guardians are clear, accessible, and focused on early engagement and intervention⁹;
2. Upon a student reaching a designated threshold of chronic absenteeism as defined by state law or regulation, such student be deemed ineligible to participate in school-sponsored athletic programs or extracurricular activities until the student and their parent or guardian have appeared before the local attendance review team for the purpose of developing and entering into an approved attendance improvement plan;
3. Statutory authority be granted to local attendance review teams to impose remedial measures, including the temporary suspension of a student's instructional permit or driver's license, upon a determination that the student has become chronically absent and has failed to comply with an established attendance improvement plan;
4. Establish a clear statutory definition of chronic absenteeism and align a "day of attendance" definition statewide, as well as address ambiguities regarding the oversight of CHINS cases;
5. Amend O.C.G.A. § 20-2-690.1 to ensure absence is never a reason for exclusionary discipline;
6. Focus on real-time data publications and encourage school districts to share attendance data for all students moving districts under the requirements of HB 268;
7. Provide vision and hearing screening at multiple grade levels;
8. Review and revise Georgia's therapist licensure requirements to reduce unnecessary administrative steps;
9. Emphasize the importance of attendance as students enter kindergarten, rather than targeting only school-aged youth;
10. Require public, disaggregated reporting of chronic-absence rates by school, grade, and subgroup;
11. Require all districts and charter schools to adopt a three-tier attendance model: universal prevention (Tier 1), targeted supports (Tier 2), and individualized/intensive interventions (Tier 3);
12. Ensure documentation that supports were attempted (especially at Tiers 1 & 2) *before* any referral to court or broader consequences;
13. Mandate school or district-level attendance teams in schools exceeding a certain threshold with monthly reviews and home-community outreach;
14. Develop a statewide real-time attendance dashboard and early-warning system so districts can act when concerns first appear rather than wait until late in the year;
15. Fund wraparound services directly tied to attendance outcomes (e.g., school nurses, counselors, social workers, mental-health telehealth, reliable transportation, after-school and mentorship programs);
16. Establish a branded campaign as attendance-improvement investments and polices (e.g., a "Everyday Counts Act" initiative, similar to the Georgia Early Literacy Act);
17. Implement structured communication thresholds and require parent-signed attendance-improvement plans when thresholds are met;

⁹ The revised notification should adopt best-practice language and formatting consistent with models utilized in other states, including, but not limited to, the sample chronic absence notification letter promulgated by the [Louisiana Department of Education](#).

18. Before court-referral, require documented home visits/case management, an attendance plan, and offer of supports, reserving court or civil sanctions after those supports are implemented or a parent refuses to engage;
19. Create a standing cross-agency task force (education, juvenile justice, health, housing, transportation) to share data, coordinate supports, and jointly set a five-year goal similar to the Georgia Literacy Council (e.g., reduce chronic absenteeism by 50 percent and sunset after rates are back to pre-pandemic levels);
20. Improve school climate;
21. Expand teacher preparedness; and
22. Prohibit cellphones in high schools.

Respectfully Submitted,

**FINAL REPORT OF THE SENATE STUDY COMMITTEE ON
COMBATING CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM IN SCHOOLS (SR 217)**



Senator John F Kennedy – Committee Chairman
District 18

APPENDIX A: CIS PRESENTATION

Being Present Matters

Addressing Chronic Absenteeism in Georgia Communities In Schools of Georgia

Carol F. Lewis, President/CEO

November 20, 2025



Georgia

BEING PRESENT MATTERS



OUR MISSION

Communities In Schools surrounds students with a community of support, *empowering* them to stay in school and achieve in life.

About Communities In Schools (CIS)

At Communities In Schools, we believe that every student, regardless of their background or circumstances should have what they need to realize their full potential in school and beyond.

We work directly inside 3,460 schools and community sites across the country (245 schools in Georgia), hand-in-hand with parents, families and caregivers, helping them access important resources and support their children's success.

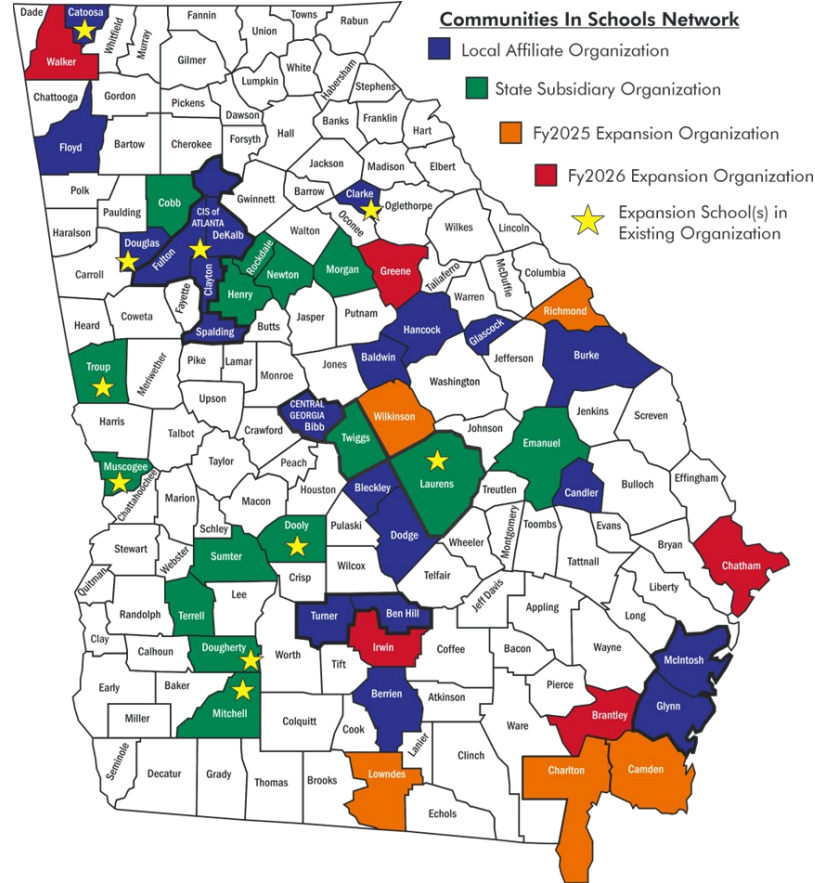


WHAT WE DO



Communities In Schools is a national organization that **ensures every student**, regardless of who they are, their ability, zip code or socioeconomic background, **has what they need to realize their potential in school and beyond.**

Statewide Network and Reach



Network 2024-2025

- 16 Local Affiliate Organizations (*independent 501 C 3*)
- 19 Subsidiary Organizations

Serve in

- 41 Counties
- 46 School Districts
- 214 Schools and 2 community-based sites

Our evidence-based model connects students to caring adults and community resources so they show up prepared and ready to learn.

The Challenge in Georgia

- Over 350,000 students miss >10% of school days each year.
- Rural and low-income districts have the highest rates.
- Absenteeism correlates with lower graduation, test scores, and workforce readiness

BEING PRESENT MATTERS

15 Million students are chronically absent in the U.S.

Georgia faces a chronic absenteeism crisis, with over 20% of students missing 10% or more of the school year. (2024)

This is an urgent problem.

ROOT CAUSES OF ABSENTEEISM

Why our presence matters

- Lack of basic needs like clean clothes and shoes
- No transportation
- Trauma
- Housing and food insecurity
- Lack of access to technology
- No access to mental or physical healthcare
- Having household responsibilities such as childcare or needing to work



[Watch our TV PSA](#)



OUR SOLUTION

- **Based on evidence best practice**
- **Our differentiator** — a **site coordinator** embedded in schools is more valuable than ever as an effective strategy to keep kids engaged in school.
 - Tiered supports from prevention to intervention
 - Customized student support plans
 - Community resource partnerships
 - Data-driven monitoring

“It’s not programs that are transforming young people's lives, it’s relationships.”

– Bill Milliken, Founder



We believe in the power of community.



“Every day a student misses school, opportunity slips further away. Communities In Schools of Georgia stands ready to partner with the State to ensure every student is present, supported, and future-ready.”

HOW WE DO IT

The CISGA Model: Integrated Student Supports

Tier 1

Coordination of **school-wide services and resources**. → attendance campaigns, incentives

Tier 2

Targeted programs and interventions for small groups of students. → mentoring, family contact.

Tier 3

Intensive, one-on-one support for case-managed students. → wraparound services.



FY2025 Key Outcomes for students served by the Communities In Schools of Georgia Network

We deliver **Integrated Student Supports (ISS)** or wrap around support services to **nearly 119,000 students annually**, including **over 8,950 high-risk, case-managed students**.

- **72.4% of chronically absent students improved attendance**
- **77.5% improved academic performance**
- **88% showed better behavior**
- **98.6% of high school students stayed in school**
- **95%+ promotion in elementary/middle grades**

Lessons and Leverage Points

Translate results into policy-relevant insight.

- **Chronic absenteeism** decreases when interventions address *root causes*, not symptoms.
- Integrated Student Supports can be embedded within **Attendance Review Teams** mandated by SB 123.
- Leveraging CISGA statewide ensures **continuity, data tracking, and equity in service delivery.**





The CIS Network in Georgia continues to make a positive impact on student outcomes

- 96.6% of seniors graduated.
- Approximately 99% of CIS students were promoted /stayed in school
- 72.4% of students who were chronically absent improved their attendance.

• *Results from fiscal year 2025*

Thank you for being present!



Communities
In Schools®

BEING PRESENT MATTERS



APPENDIX B: CARTWHEEL PRESENTATION



Tackling School Avoidance: Getting our students back in the classroom

**Georgia Senate Combating
Chronic Absenteeism Study
Committee**

November 20, 2025

**Juliana Chen, M.D.
Jillian Kelton, M.Ed.**

www.cartwheel.org





Juliana Chen, MD



Jillian Kelton, M.Ed

Georgia is investing billions in education innovation

- 27% growth in annual education budget since 2023 (\$13.6b total)
- \$50m for literacy initiatives
- \$20m in career & technical education innovation
- \$500m in transportation and facility improvements

**To maximize impact,
*we need our students
to attend school***

“We can invest all we want in new textbooks, professional development, facilities ... It will fall flat if our neediest students don't come to school or struggle to sit through class.”



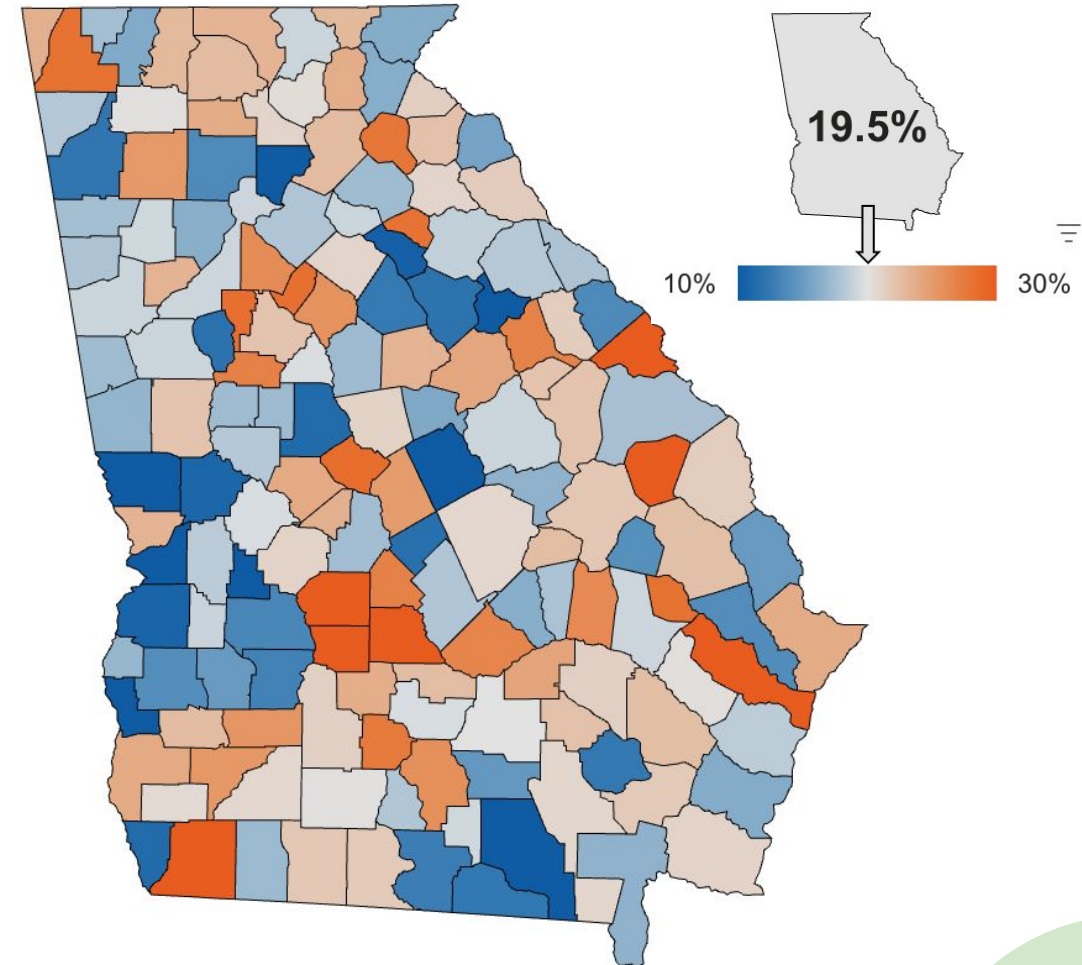
Layton R.
Former superintendent

360,000 students in Georgia are chronically absent from school

- **20% of all students statewide** (7 points higher than pre-COVID levels)
- Progress significantly lags behind **Alabama** (15% absenteeism rate)
- Up to 40% in **rural** counties and **urban** systems like Atlanta
- **Low-income** students miss 3x more school days than their peers

Chronic absenteeism rate by county, 2025

Source: [Georgia Department of Education](#)



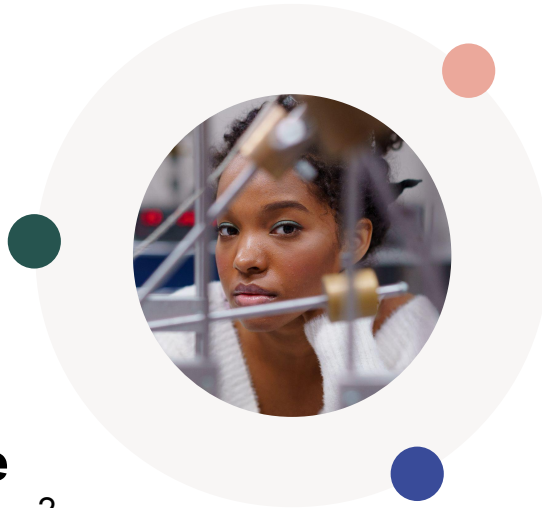
Note: Chronically absent is defined as missing 1 in 10 school days

Mental health is one of the top causes of school avoidance

Absenteeism

Students with a mental health disorder miss **twice** as many school days²

Anxiety is the leading cause of absenteeism^{3,4}



Behavior

Unaddressed mental health issues lead to more suspensions, missing more days⁵

Graduation

Students with a mental health disorder are **44% more likely** to dropout of school¹

To reduce absenteeism, we need to improve student mental health

1. [Society for Research in Childhood Development](#) 2. [ACER](#) 3. [EdWeek survey](#) of 57 of 781 high school students, 4. [Los Angeles Trust for Children's Health](#) 5. [Columbia University](#)



School-based, in-person staff are essential, but they can't tackle this crisis alone

● Strengths

- ✓ Trusted in the community
- ✓ Can knock on doors, meet with parents, de-escalate in person
- ✓ Spot early warning signs in the hallways and classroom

☪ Challenges

- ☐ Staffing shortages – especially in rural areas that have big needs
- ☐ Can't always reach kids where they are (at home, after hours)
- ☐ Limited training to address specialized needs like anxiety, trauma, depression
- ☐ Privacy concerns from some families



OUR MISSION

Cartwheel's
school-community
partnership model
tackles root causes
of school avoidance

330+

District and statewide partners



92%

Our students improve in
mental health outcomes

44%

Decline in absenteeism for
students served in key studies

School Avoidance Program treats *root causes* of school avoidance

- ✓ 1-1 weekly therapy with a specialty trained clinician
- ✓ 1-1 parent guidance from a licensed clinician
- ✓ Optional educational groups for parents
- ✓ Psychiatric evals and medication management for more intensive needs
- ✓ Reach students where they are (8am-8pm + weekend hours, available from home)

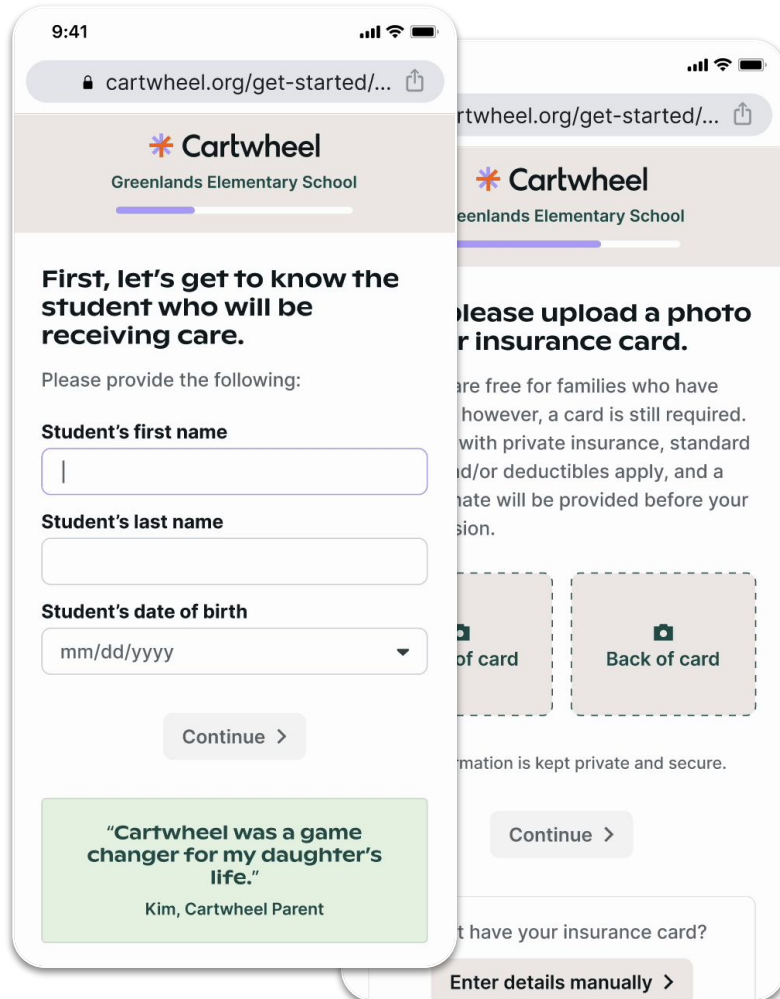


*Designed in partnership with
the Arizona Dept of Education*

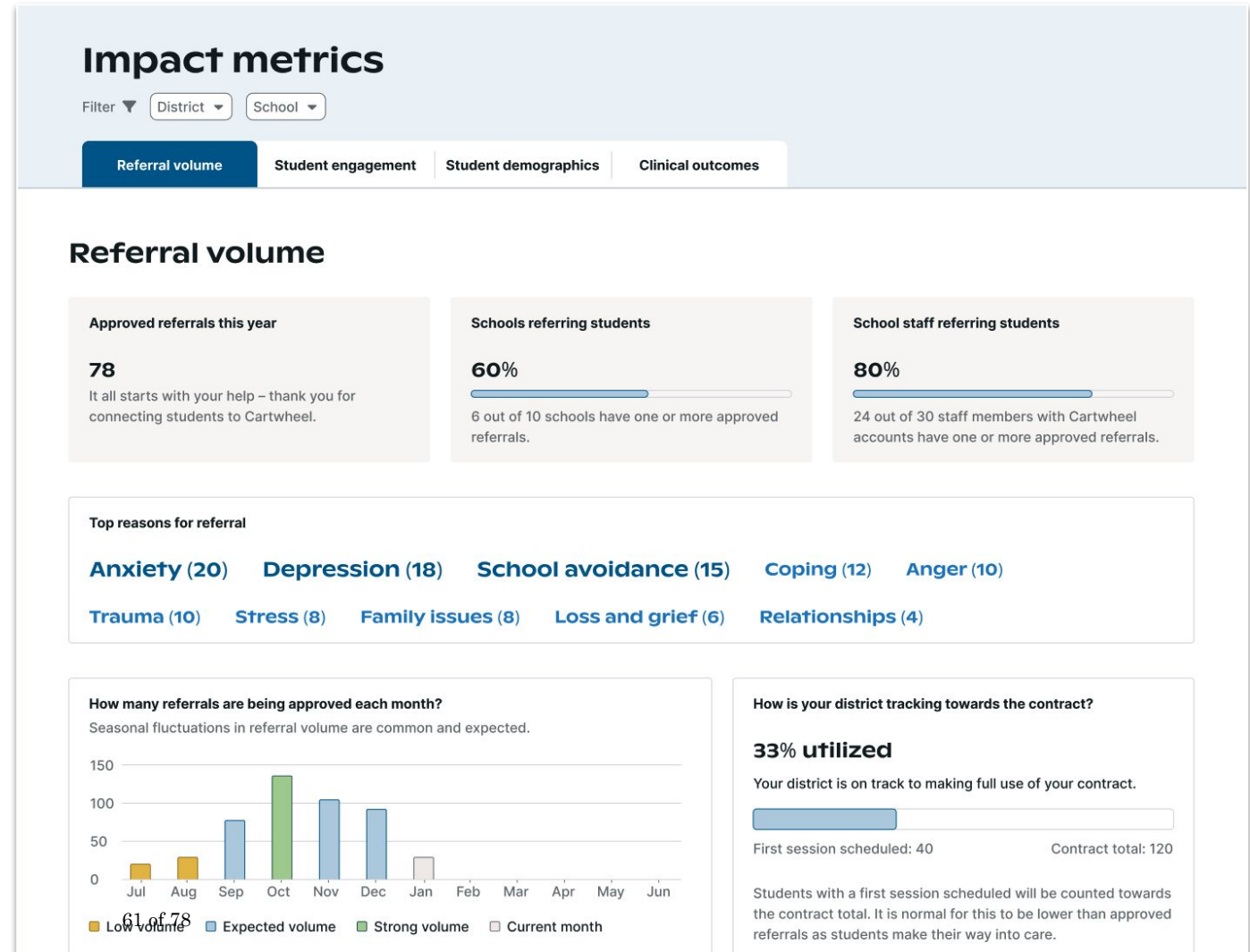
Schools and families need care that is **specifically tailored to school avoidance** – social anxiety, depression, trauma



Technology increases speed for families and reduces burden on school staff



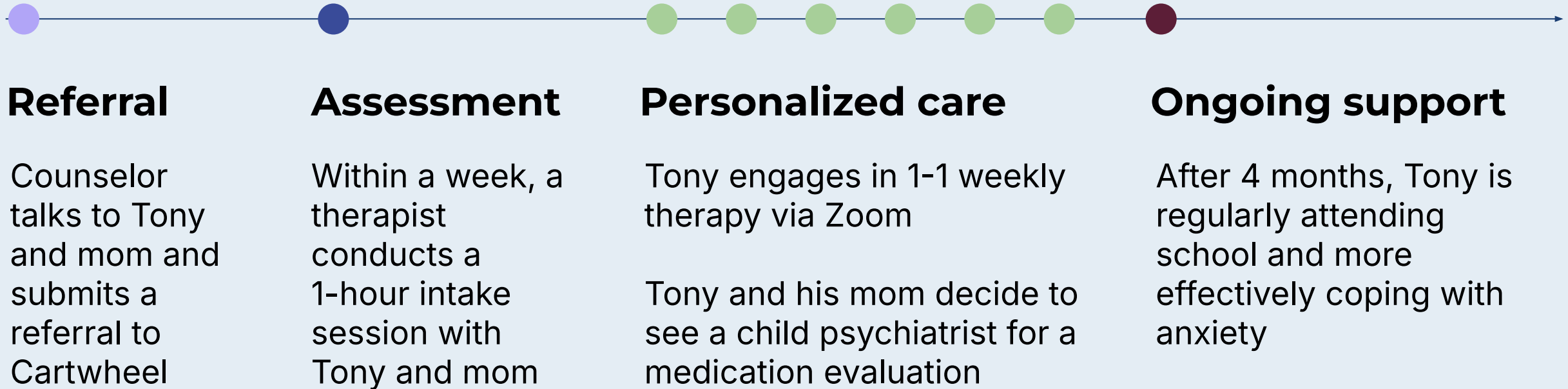
Fully automated reporting for the state to track impact and return on investment



Anonymized student: Tony, grade 10



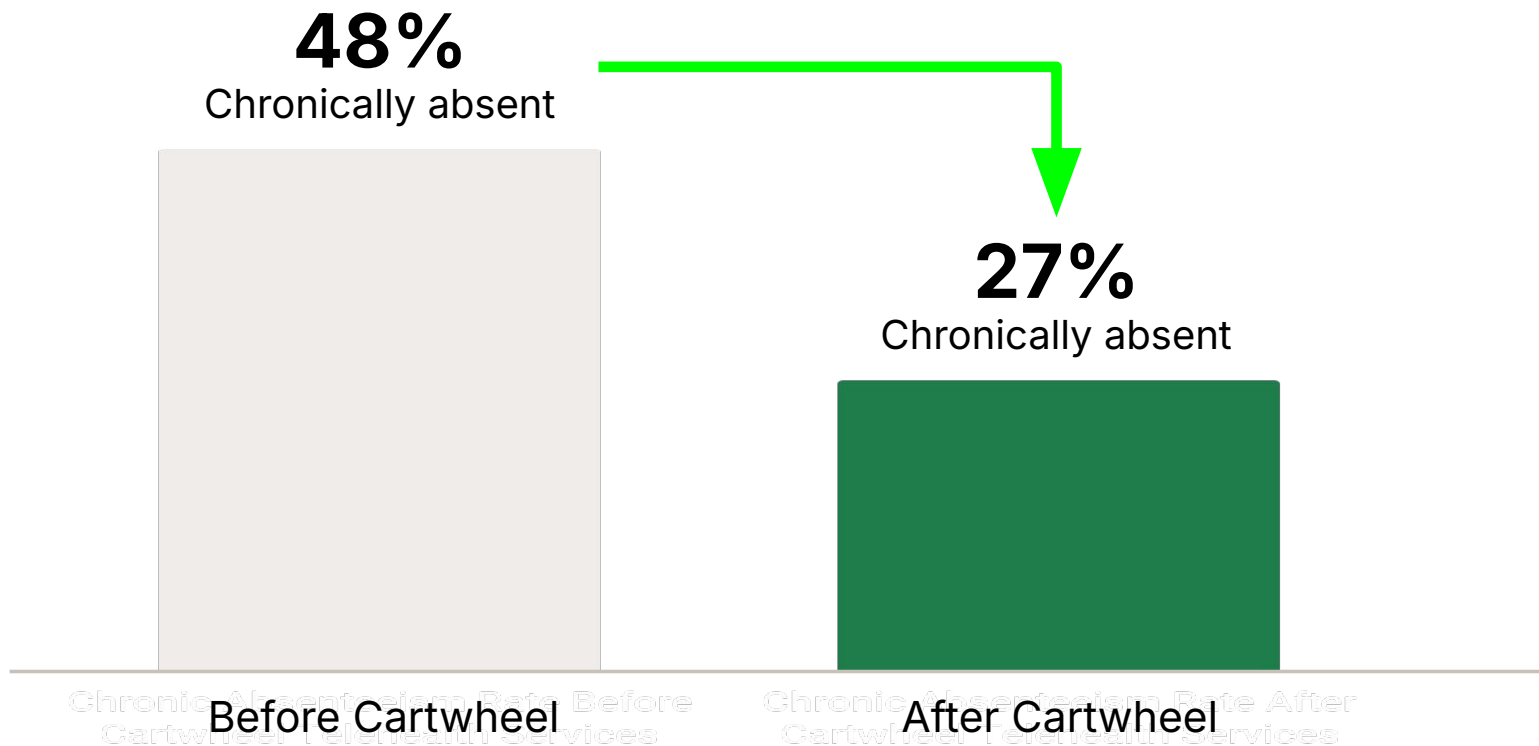
Tony missed 25 days of school. He's been struggling to adjust to the new school since moving from out-of-state and feels anxious about entering the school building. He is coping with some alcohol use.



With parent consent, Cartwheel collaborates with the school throughout care

Case Study: 44% reduction in chronic absenteeism for students receiving Cartwheel telehealth

Chronic absenteeism rate before and after Cartwheel



Sample size: n=141 students who engaged in Cartwheel telehealth services in a 13,000 student urban district (75% free/reduced lunch) during the 2022-23, 2023-24, and 2024-25 school years. First bar shows the % of students receiving Cartwheel who were chronically absent in the year they were referred for services. For the same cohort, the second bar shows the % who were chronically absent the following school year. Chronic absenteeism is defined as missing 10 percent of school days within an academic year.

44%

reduction in chronic absenteeism for students receiving Cartwheel (21 percentage points)

62%

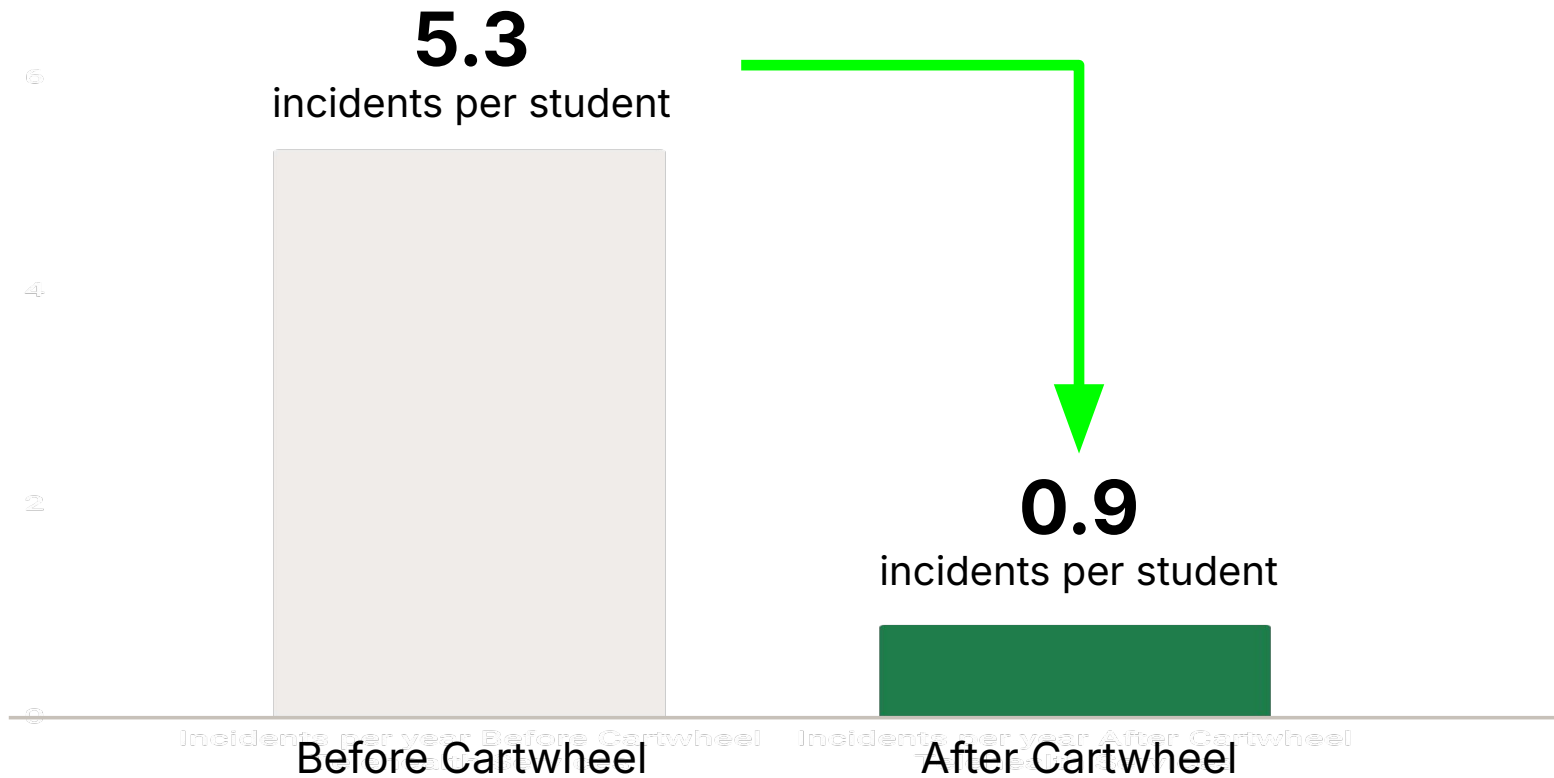
reduction in absences per student (6 absences after care vs. 16 absences before care)

Comparison group:

Students who did not receive Cartwheel services did **not** see improved attendance

Case Study: 84% reduction in behavioral incidents for students receiving Cartwheel telehealth

Behavioral incidents per student per year before/after Cartwheel



84%

reduction in incidents per student after receiving Cartwheel services

4.4

fewer incidents per student per year

Comparison group:

Students who did **not** receive Cartwheel services did not see fewer incidents per year

Sample size: n=594 students who were referred to Cartwheel telehealth services in a 5,000 student suburban district (12% low income) during the 2022-23, 2023-24, 2024-25, and 2025-26 school years. Of these students, 72 committed behavioral incidents and attended sessions with Cartwheel. First bar shows the average # of incidents per year before starting treatment with Cartwheel for the 72 students. For the same cohort, the second bar shows the average # of incidents per year after starting services with Cartwheel. Incident defined a code of conduct violation requiring documented administrative response, such as bullying or physical aggression.

Offset up to 75% of service costs with health insurance billing

Health insurance

\$0 copay for families with Medicaid plans

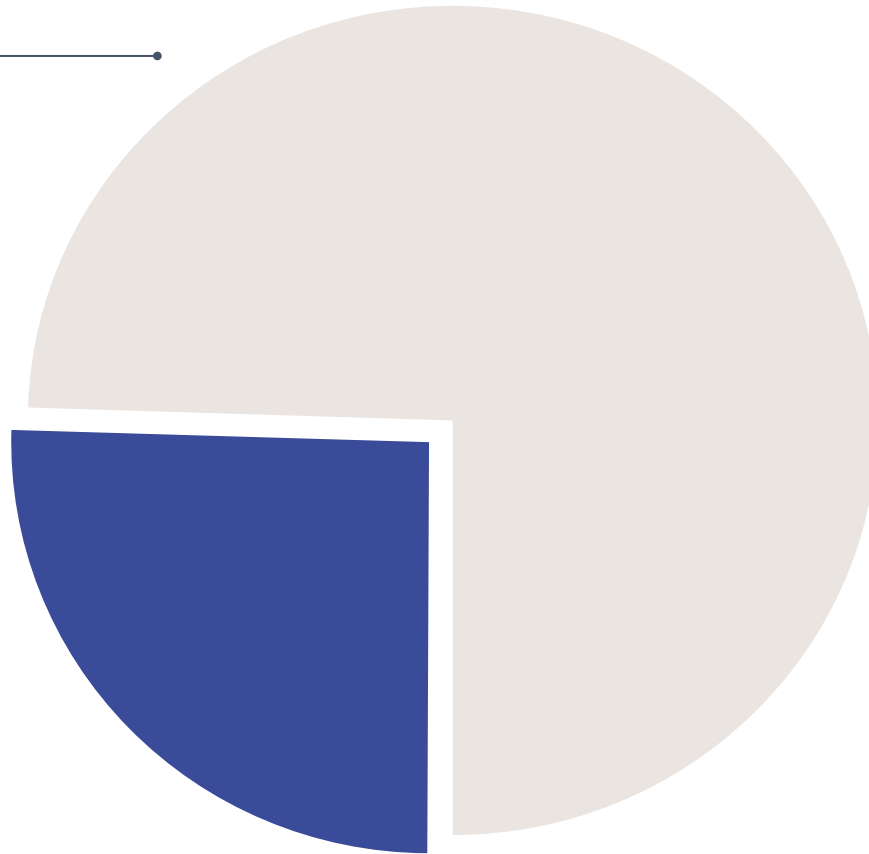
In-network for families with any other insurance

School district

Technology platform

Family supports

Financial aid fund



Insurance-only solutions have long waitlists, high turnover, limited data, and no time for collaboration.

Solutions that rely entirely on **school funding** are unsustainable.

Braided funding models deliver the best of both:

- ✓ 4x cheaper for schools
- ✓ Higher quality care
- ✓ Financial aid for students who need it

Takeaways

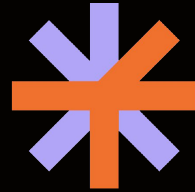
Mental health is a key to student success, starting with attendance

School-community partnerships can bring kids back to school – *when done right*

- ✓ Telehealth reduces barriers (staffing, transportation, privacy)
- ✓ All telehealth isn't the same – specialized care can produce better impact
- ✓ Parent involvement improves outcomes
- ✓ Insurance billing ensures sustainability

Request for this Committee:

1. Maintain \$20,000 per public middle and high school for direct mental health services
2. Echoing the call of the GADOE to expand \$20,000 per school to elementary schools



Cartwheel

www.cartwheel.org

Juliana Chen, MD
Chief Medical Officer
juliana@cartwheelcare.org



APPENDIX C: CHARACTERSTRONG PRESENTATION

Beyond the Empty Desk

**Addressing the Root Causes of
School Absenteeism**



“Chronic absenteeism /
attendance **is behavior.**”

Root Cause: Lack of Connection

A yellow brushstroke underline is located below the title, consisting of two horizontal, slightly wavy lines.

A student who feels invisible, disconnected, or unsafe at school has no incentive to show up.

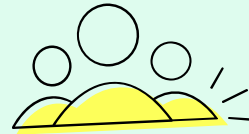
Connection is a foundational human need. When it's unmet, disengagement is the logical next step. We must first build a culture of connection where students feel welcomed and connected to.

Root Cause: Gaps in Support Systems



Tier 1: All Students

A failure to build a proactive, school-wide culture of belonging and safety for *all students*.



Tier 2: Some Students

Inability to identify and provide targeted interventions (e.g., mentorship) for at-risk groups.



Tier 3: Few Students

Lack of intensive, individualized support systems for students with the highest level of need.

Root Cause: Low Engagement

A yellow brushstroke underline is located below the title, consisting of two horizontal, slightly wavy lines.

When academics feel irrelevant, unachievable, or disconnected from a student's future, disengagement becomes a habit.

- Are students connecting what they learn to their personal goals?
- Do they see the value in the work?
- Are they relationally engaged with their peers and teachers?

Root Cause: Unmet Family Needs

A yellow brushstroke underline is located below the title, consisting of two horizontal, slightly wavy lines.

School does not happen in a vacuum. Issues like transportation, health, housing instability, unemployment or family challenges are real, external barriers to attendance.



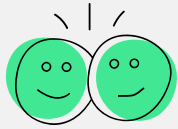
Our Approach:



You cannot solve a multi-faceted problem with a single-point solution. You need a systemic, evidence-based approach that addresses multiple root causes simultaneously.

CharacterStrong provides evidence based, comprehensive curricula and frameworks to build supportive, engaging, and resilient school communities from Tier 1 to Tier 3.

How CharacterStrong Solves the Root Causes



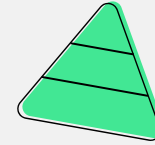
Builds Belonging

Character, connection, and competencies to create a consistent, school-wide culture of connection.



Boost Engagement

The SERVE Model (Start, Engage, Respond, Value, Exit) gives teachers a relational and instruction framework to cultivate engagement in learning.



Multi-Tiered Systems

A continuum of supports that can be matched to the intensity of student & family need (Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3)



Partners with Families

Equips schools with resources to build positive, proactive school-home-community partnerships.

Beyond Attendance: A Whole-School Win



Academic & Life Success

When you solve for belonging and engagement, you also get higher academic success, resilience, and competence in key life skills.



Positive School Climate

This approach creates a positive feedback loop: improved well-being, a greater sense of safety, and better student-teacher relationships.

Thank You

Let's build schools where every student *wants* to be.



@characterstrong