

# School Attendance and the Pediatrician's Role in the Era of COVID-19



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Presentation for Maine Chapter of the AAP  
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American Academy of Pediatrics  
DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN®



# HOUSEKEEPING

- The webinar is being recorded.
- Please stay on mute if you are not speaking.
- After the webinar:
  - A copy of the recording and corresponding materials will be emailed.



# QUESTIONS?

- Use the chat feature for technical assistance and to send us your content questions throughout the webinar
  - Questions will be addressed at the conclusion of the presentation



# COUNCIL ON SCHOOL HEALTH

## Mission

The Council on School Health (COSH) is dedicated to maximizing the personal health, academic achievement and life-long success of children and adolescents. The COSH seeks to promote sound school health policies and practices that ensure the health and safety of school-aged children and adolescents through policy, education and advocacy.

## Interested in Joining the Council?

Visit <https://services.aap.org/en/community/aap-councils/council-on-school-health/>

- OR -

Contact [SchoolHealth@aap.org](mailto:SchoolHealth@aap.org)



# LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By participating in the webinar, attendees will be able to:

- Describe key aspects of chronic absenteeism and the status of school attendance tracking during COVID-19.
- Describe health-related (both physical and emotional) causes of chronic absenteeism.
- Identify evidence-based interventions to support families with distance learning and school attendance and engagement.



# FACULTY DISCLOSURE INFORMATION

In the past 12 months, the faculty have had no relevant financial relationships with the manufacturer(s) of any commercial product(s) and/or provider(s) of commercial service(s) discussed in this CME activity.

The faculty do not intend to discuss an unapproved/investigative use of a commercial product/device in my presentation.

*I am speaking in my role as a member of the Executive Committee of the American Academy of Pediatrics Council on School Health.*



# Framing the Discussion: Chronic Absence and the Pediatrician



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# Case Study



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# CASE STUDY

Jane is a 9yo F participating in hybrid learning. School reopened for limited in-person activities in February. Has missed 14 days of school (virtual and in-person) this year.

On history:

- Vomiting: Vomiting off and on x 2 months, weekdays > weekends. On days when vomits, Mom does not send Jane to school.
- School: Hx of bullying. Jane says school “fine” but clearly anxious discussing.
- Social history: Parents are separated, spends time with mother and grandparents
  - Mom recently back to work. On virtual days when Mom at work, Jane is home by herself for virtual school.
  - Mom expresses concern about transportation, especially now that school bus services is limited.
  - Spotty WiFi at mom’s and grandparents’



# CASE STUDY

- Asking about school attendance led to understanding key issues for Jane and her family
  - Bullying
  - Transportation
  - Child care
  - Digital connectivity
- Engaging health care team members made a difference
  - Family navigator
  - School nurse



# POLL

How frequently do you ask about school attendance as part of routine office visits?



# Chronic Absenteeism: What is it? Why does it matter?

For more resources, visit [www.attendanceworks.org](http://www.attendanceworks.org)  
and [www.healthychildren.org](http://www.healthychildren.org)

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# TRUANCY VS. CHRONIC ABSENCE

## TRUANCY

Counts only unexcused absences

Emphasizes compliance with compulsory school attendance law

Can result in legal and administrative action (e.g., truancy court)

VS

## CHRONIC ABSENCE

Counts all absences:

Excused, unexcused and suspensions

Uses community-based strategies as solutions



# TRUANCY IN MAINE

A public school student in Maine is considered truant if he/she/they:

Completed grade 6 and has the equivalent of 10 full days of unexcused absences or 7 consecutive school days of unexcused absences during a school year;

*OR*

Is at least 6 years of age and has not completed grade 6 and has the equivalent of 7 full days of unexcused absences or 5 consecutive school days of unexcused absences during a school year.



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# WHO IS MOST IMPACTED BY CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM?

**4X**

*more likely to be  
chronically absent*

- Youth from **low income backgrounds**
- **Youth of color**
- Youth who have experienced **trauma or Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)**
- Youth with **disabilities**
- Youth who **experience homelessness**
- Youth who have been in contact with the **juvenile justice system**

## ***Additionally:***

- *Students in extracurricular activities (e.g. athletics and band)*
- *Families that vacation during the school year*





# LONG TERM IMPACT OF CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM

→ Chronic absenteeism in early grades can lead to below grade-level reading in 3rd grade, which in turn impacts high school graduation rates



→ By high school, irregular attendance is a better predictor of school dropout than test scores



→ Not earning a high school diploma is associated with increased mortality risk or lower life expectancy





# Common Causes of Absence

## Barriers

- **Illness** (*chronic and acute, physical and mental*)
- **Lack of health, mental health, vision, or dental care**
- **Family responsibilities**
- **Trauma**
- **Depression or anxiety**
- **Poor transportation**
- **Housing and food insecurity**
- **Involvement with child welfare or juvenile justice systems**
- **Unsafe path to/from school**
- **Frequent school changes**
- **Inequitable access to resources due to bias & discrimination**

## Negative School Experiences

- **Struggling academically and behaviorally**
- **Ineffective or harmful interventions**
- **Bored**
- **Social challenges**
- **Bullying**
- **Suspensions and expulsions**
- **Harsh, biased disciplinary practices especially for students of color**
- **Negative attitudes of parents due to their own school experience**
- **Undiagnosed disability**
- **Lack of appropriate accommodations for disability**
- **Pressure for academic success**

## Lack of Engagement

- **Lack of access to high quality virtual instruction during school closures**
- **Lack of or inequitable access to challenging, culturally responsive, engaging instruction & enrichment**
- **Lack of or ineffective academic, emotional and behavioral support**
- **No meaningful or negative relationships to adults in the school**
- **Stronger ties with peers out of school than in school**
- **Unwelcoming school climate**
- **Failure to earn credits/ no future plans**
- **Many teacher absences or long-term substitutes**

## Misconceptions

- **Absences are only a problem if they are unexcused**
- **Missing 2 days per month doesn't affect learning**
- **Sporadic absences aren't a problem**
- **Attendance only matters in the older grades**
- **Suspensions are not relevant**

# HEALTH-RELATED CONDITIONS AND SOCIAL FACTORS ARE A LEADING CAUSE OF CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM

- Asthma
- Oral health and dental pain
- Influenza
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Parental physical or mental health issues
- Type I and II Diabetes Mellitus
- Seizure disorders
- Obesity



# HEALTH-RELATED CONDITIONS AND SOCIAL FACTORS ARE A LEADING CAUSE OF CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM

## Social factors:

- Exposure to trauma
- Safety concerns
- Housing instability
- Access to:
  - Food
  - Transportation
  - Healthcare

*Over 80% of health outcomes are driven by socioeconomic factors, behaviors, and the physical environment*



## CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM RATES

During the 2018-2019 school year, the following percentage of all **public school students** were chronically absent:

**16.8%**



of all students in Maine

**25.3%**



of economically disadvantaged students in Maine

**23.9%**



of students with disabilities in Maine



# Interventions to Support School Attendance and Engagement, Including During Distance Learning

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# SCHOOL YEAR 2020-21 & COVID-19

- Reopening Schools
  - Nationally
  - Locally
- AAP Role: [COVID-19 Planning Considerations: Guidance for School Re-entry](#)
- AAP State Chapters
- Role of Individual Pediatricians



# AAP POLICY STATEMENT ON SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

In February 2019 , AAP released a [policy statement](#) regarding the role of pediatric providers in addressing school attendance.



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## The Link Between School Attendance and Good Health

Mandy A. Allison, MD, MSPH, FAAP<sup>®</sup> Elliott Attisha, DO, FAAP<sup>®</sup> COUNCIL ON SCHOOL HEALTH

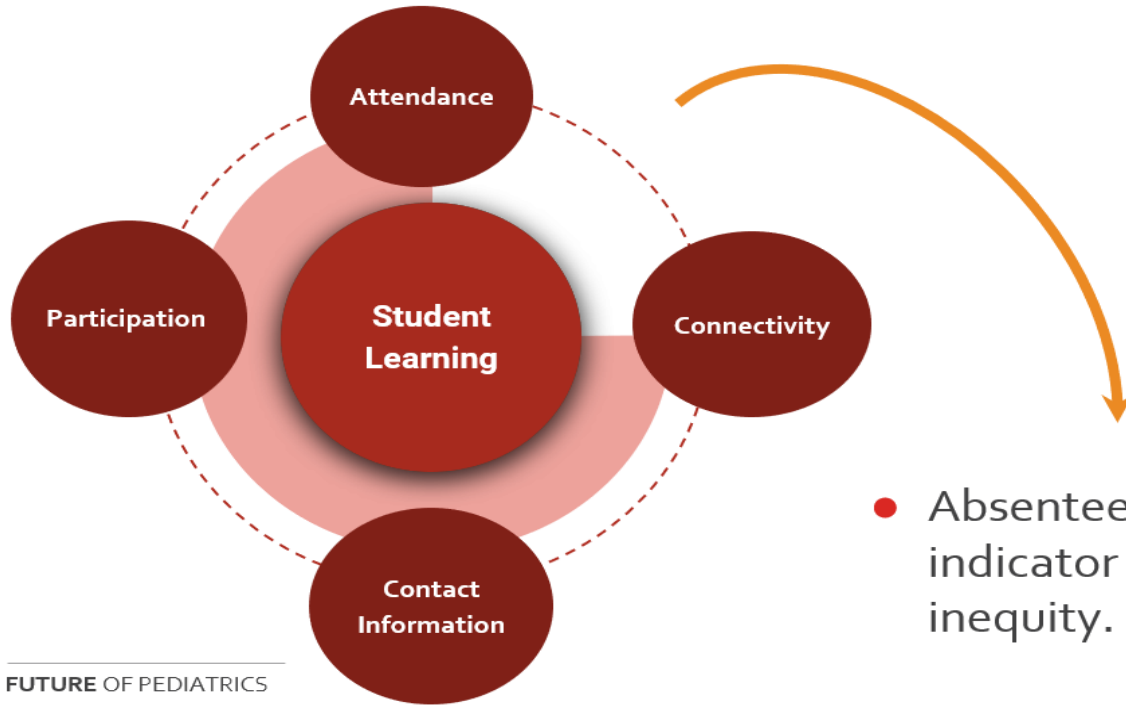
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# TRACKING ATTENDANCE DURING COVID-19



- Absenteeism is still a **leading** indicator of educational inequity.

# SCHOOL ACTIONS FOR SCHOOL ATTENDANCE AND ENGAGEMENT DURING COVID-19

- **Schools need to:**
  - Monitor lost learning time in school - participation in asynchronous or synchronous virtual or in-person learning opportunities
  - Adopt a holistic approach to collect attendance data and expanded measures of connectivity and participation
  - Promote a tiered approach to supporting students beginning with prevention



# SCHOOL ACTIONS FOR SCHOOL ATTENDANCE AND ENGAGEMENT DURING COVID-19

- **Schools need to:**
  - Strategically target investments that address the digital divide, lack of supports (health, economic, nutrition, housing, etc.) and other inequities
  - Provide IEP services, including mental health
  - Provide meal services



# PEDIATRICIAN ACTIONS FOR SCHOOL ATTENDANCE AND ENGAGEMENT DURING COVID-19

- Consider you may be the only (or primary) touch point for youth and families during this time



# STRAIGHT AS

## How Pediatricians Support School Attendance

### “ASK” ABOUT SCHOOL ATTENDANCE & ENGAGEMENT

- Routinely ask about the number of absences a student has experienced and if they are engaged in distance learning (as applicable).



### “AMPLIFY” THE IMPACT OF SCHOOL ATTENDANCE & ENGAGEMENT ON HEALTH AND ACADEMIC OUTCOMES

- Provide [guidance](#) on when a sick child should stay home, especially regarding high-risk COVID-19 symptoms, and when to return to school after a positive COVID-19 test in the household.
- Put up [posters](#) and [provide handouts](#) to convey the importance of attendance to caregivers/patients.



## “ADDRESS” BARRIERS TO SCHOOL ATTENDANCE & ENGAGEMENT

- Conduct comprehensive well-child exams that screen for:
  - ◆ Physical health
  - ◆ Mental health
  - ◆ Oral health
  - ◆ Social determinants of health, including access to internet and technology



## “ACTIVELY” PARTNER WITH SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES TO SUPPORT ATTENDANCE

- Help with or inform families about available school and community-based supports.
- Help address access issues by:
  - ◆ Extending office hours
  - ◆ Offering [telehealth](#)
  - ◆ Providing information for the family to connect with the school regarding IEPs and other essential services and programs



Adapted from resources by [American Academy of Pediatrics](#), [Healthy Schools Campaign](#), and [Attendance Works](#).

# SYSTEMS-LEVEL ACTIONS FOR AAP CHAPTERS AND PEDIATRICIANS

- **Advocate for evidence-based COVID-19 policies for school districts**
- **Advocate for policies and interventions** known to promote school attendance
- **Collaborate with community leaders** to promote school attendance
- Support school districts' efforts to **improve access to health insurance and medical services**
- **Encourage and support data sharing** to better understand patterns and causes of chronic absenteeism in your community



# RESOURCES

- [AAP Policy Statement on School Absenteeism](#)
- [AAP COVID-19 Planning Considerations: Guidance for School Re-entry](#)
- [HealthyChildren.org](#)
- Count ME In: <https://countmeinmaine.org/>
- AttendanceWorks: [www.attendanceworks.org](http://www.attendanceworks.org)
- Straight As visual





# QUESTIONS

Please use the chat box to submit your questions.



Additional questions? Contact [SchoolHealth@aap.org](mailto:SchoolHealth@aap.org).

# THANK YOU & NEXT STEPS

- Within the coming days, you will receive an email with presentation materials and a link to the recorded webinar.
- Consider acting as an ambassador to further promote school attendance in your clinical practice and community!

## *Examples:*

- Consider hosting a brown bag with your practice or health system colleagues, using the webinar recording or templated PPT deck.
- Consider engaging further within Maine AAP!
- Consider reaching out to your local school district or state education agency to discuss opportunities for partnership.



# THANK YOU & NEXT STEPS

- Want to continue the conversation? Additional questions?
  - Contact [SchoolHealth@aap.org](mailto:SchoolHealth@aap.org).
  - Consider joining AAP Council on School Health!  
<https://services.aap.org/en/community/aap-councils/council-on-school-health/>

