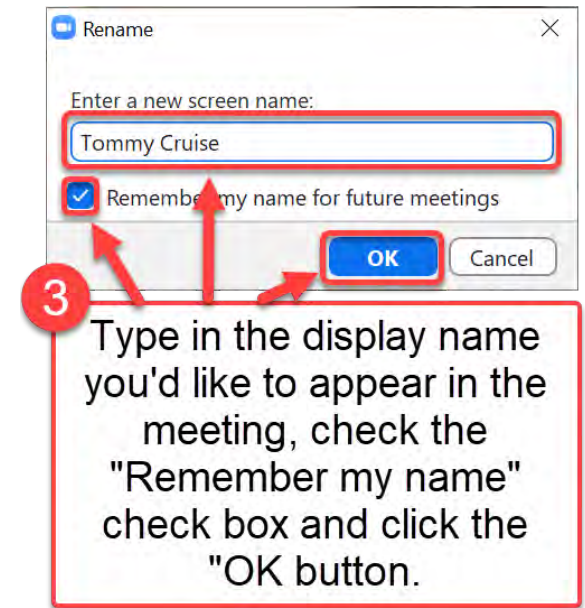
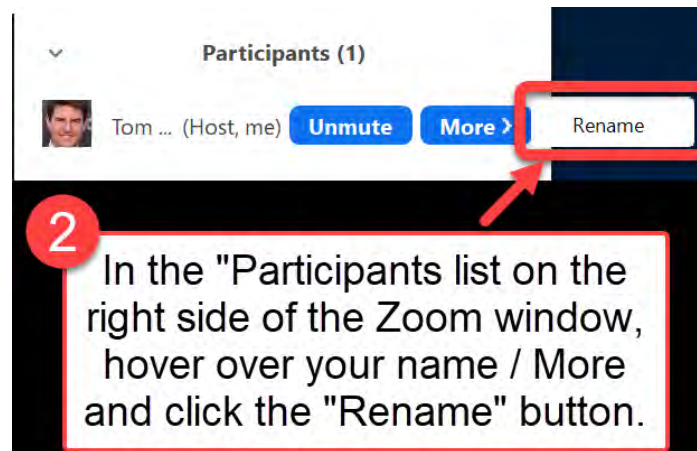


ECHO Session Reminder





Growing Healthy Minds Project ECHO®

Chronic Absenteeism

March 14, 2024 | 5:30-6:30pm



Acknowledgements & Disclosures

This Project ECHO® is made possible through a grant from the New Jersey Department of Children and Families.

Today's speakers have NO disclosures or conflicts of interest in relation to this presentation.





Continuing Education Credits

Requirements:

1. Participation in each complete Growing Healthy Minds ECHO session
 - **For social work credits:** Your camera must be turned on for the full duration of the session
2. Completion of each ECHO session evaluation, which will be sent to the email you used to register following each session

No one with the ability to control content of this activity has a relevant financial relationship with an ineligible company.

This continuing education activity was approved by the Ohio Nurses Association, an Ohio Board of Nursing approver. (OBN-001-91)

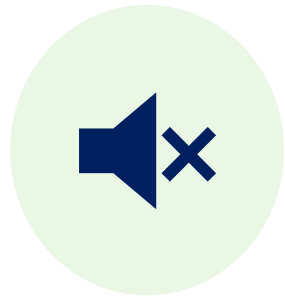
Expiration date: 11/16/2025 for all recorded sessions



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To protect privacy, please do not provide any identifiable information.



Use the chat function to engage in discussion with our hub team and fellow participants.



Growing Healthy Minds:

An ECHO on Strategies to Support Student Mental Health

Bert Mandelbaum, MD
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Chair, Department of Pediatrics, Penn Medicine Princeton Health
Chair, NJAAP Task Force on Adolescent Health and School Start Times



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Pediatrics Residency Program Director
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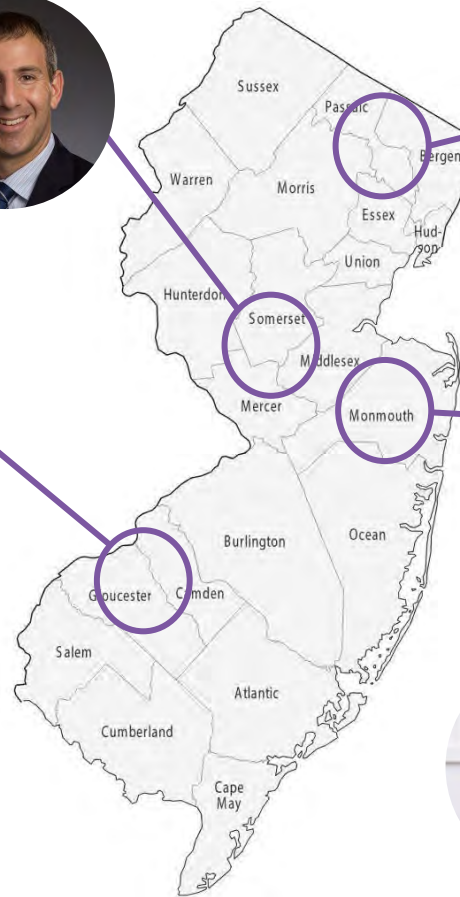
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*Law, **E**thics and **G**overnance for **A**ll **L**eaders, including an
Overview of **N**ew and **E**merging Issues*

Chronic Absenteeism

NJAAP Growing Healthy Minds ECHO Session 5

March 14, 2024

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Presenters

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DISCLAIMER

This presentation is intended as a summary of law and mental health information only and is not meant as legal or medical advice. Please consult your attorney to obtain legal advice and medical professional for medical advice.

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Significant Increase in Chronic Absenteeism

The national average rate of chronic absenteeism in K-12 schools has significantly increased in recent years. According to data from the U.S. Department of Education, nearly 14.7 million students, or 29.7 percent of the student population, were chronically absent in the 2021-22 school year.

Early data from the 2022-23 school year indicates minor improvement, with 27.85 percent of the student population being chronically absent. These data reveal a substantial increase from the pre-pandemic rate of 16 percent in 2019.

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Causes for Chronic Absenteeism

- Students may be frequently absent from school for a wide variety of reasons. In the publication, “The Importance of Being in School: A Report on Absenteeism in the Nation’s Public Schools,” Balfanz and Byrnes describe 3 broad categories of causes:
 - “(1) students who cannot attend school due to illness, family responsibilities, housing instability, the need to work or involvement with the juvenile justice system;
 - (2) students who will not attend school to avoid bullying, unsafe conditions, harassment and embarrassment; and
 - (3) students who do not attend school because they, or their parents, do not see the value in attending school, they have something else they would rather do, or nothing stops them from skipping school.”
 - An additional category (ie, “myths”) is also thought to cause problem absenteeism. Myths include when students and their families do not realize that missing just 2 days a month can be a problem, think that it is a problem only if absences are unexcused, or do not think absences are a problem for younger children in preschool through grade school.
 - Finally, school suspension and expulsion, as early as preschool, have increasingly been identified as causes of chronic absenteeism that disproportionately affect African American students and students with emotional and behavioral disorders and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder.

See **The Link Between School Attendance and Good Health** FROM THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS | POLICY STATEMENT | FEBRUARY 01 2019, Mandy A. Allison, MD; Elliott Attisha, DO; COUNCIL ON SCHOOL HEALTH; Marc Lerner, MD; Cheryl Duncan De Pinto, MD; Nathaniel Savio Beers, MD; Erica J. Gibson, MD; Peter Gorski, MD; Chris Kjolhede, MD; Sonja C. O’Leary, MD; Heidi Schumacher, MD; Adrienne Weiss-Harrison, MD

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Chronic Absenteeism

Broadly defined as “missing 10% or more of school days”

School Refusal is only one aspect of chronic absenteeism. A student only needs to miss 2-3 school days a month to be chronically absent.

Characteristics of School Refusal

- Anxiety
 - Separation anxiety
 - Social / performance
 - Generalized anxiety disorder
- Depression
- Physical complaints
- Tangible award for staying home (ie gets to play video games all day).

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Continuum of Behaviors

- School attendance with stress
- Behaviors outside of school to delay morning arrival
- Repeated tardiness
- Periodic skipping of classes (inclusive of class avoidance using nurses office or school counseling / CST)
- Complete absence from school
- Complete absence from school for extended period of time

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Proactive Measures

Tier One

- Positive School Climate and Culture
 - Restorative Practices
 - Positive Behavior Interventions
 - Morning Meeting / Advisory
- Promote attendance
 - Certificates
 - Attendance Breakfasts
- Make attendance an item for discussion at events
 - Orientation
 - Back to School Night
 - Parent Teacher Conferences
- Create a team who are able to research and assess barriers to attendance
 - I&RS
 - SCIP
- Seek resources for support such as a mentorship program
- Gather data related to needs to lower absenteeism (family, student, and community)

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Interventions In-School

In School

- Identify at-risk students and assign a point person to develop personal connections (teacher, counselor, coach)
- Make personal calls when absent with positive messaging - I was really looking forward to seeing you today
- Weekly check ins with family / guardians
- Identify possible barriers (transportation for example) and work with school based resources to minimize
- Assessment - example given in resources
- Exposure plan in school
- Adjusted schedule
- Re-entry plans to school

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Interventions Out-of-School

Out-of-School

- Home visits or wellness checks
- Make personalized messages in addition to phone calls
- Develop attendance plans
- Identify possible mental health concerns and make appropriate referrals
- Exposure plan out of school
- Mandatory mentoring program including parents/guardians

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References

New Jersey Department of Education. (2022). Data based decision making for addressing chronic absenteeism. Retrieved from

<https://www.nj.gov/education/safety/sandp/attendance/docs/DataBasedDecisionMakingChronicAbsenteeism.pdf>

School Avoidance Alliance. (2024). School avoidance 101. Retrieved from

<https://schoolavoidance.org/school-avoidance-101/>

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Required Action in Response to Unexcused Absence

- Up to 4 cumulative unexcused absences
 - School District must notify student's parents prior to the start of the next school day (reasonable attempt);
 - Identify needed action to encourage attendance.
- Between 5 and 9 cumulative unexcused absences
 - School District must notify student's parents prior to start of next school day (reasonable attempt)
 - Learn the cause; and
 - Develop an action plan to address patterns of unexcused absences

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Truancy

Truancy occurs when a student between the ages of 6 and 16 has 10 or more cumulative unexcused absences

- Parent/guardian may be charged with a disorderly persons offense
 - 1st Offense – up to \$25 fine
 - Subsequent Offenses – up to \$100 fine
 - Each day of unexcused absence is a separate offense
- Student may be referred to Family Part of Superior Court
 - District must do case by case review of reasons for absences to determine if referral is necessary
- Truant student may be found to be a juvenile delinquent if the parent is unable to get the student to attend school

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Excused Absences – School Register

<https://www.nj.gov/education/finance/register/register.pdf>

Five allowable reasons for absence: A school may have a day in session that would not be counted as a day in membership for a particular student for the following reasons (New Jersey School Register, Ch.3):

1. Religious observance (N.J.A.C. 6A:32-8.3(h));
2. A college visit (up to 3 days per school year, only for students in grades 11 and 12);
3. “Take Our Children to Work Day” (pursuant to the memo issued by the Commissioner to all districts on April 25, 2017) or other rule issued by the Commissioner;
4. Participation in observance of Veterans Day (N.J.S.A. 18A: 36-13.2) or district board of election membership activities (N.J.S.A. 18A: 36-33); or
5. The closure of a busing district that prevents a student from having transportation to the receiving school.
6. **NEW CATEGORY – Attendance at a civic event – See P.L. 2023, c. 274**

◦ [See April 2018 Memo](#)

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Civic Event Defined

“As used in this act, ‘civic event’ means an event sponsored by a government entity, a community-based organization , or a nonprofit organization that incorporates elements of service learning whereby students learn and develop through organized service. A civic event shall address an issue of public concern such as community health and safety or environmental, economic, or community well-being.”

NOTE: At least 5 schools advance written notice required.



Local Discretion: Defining Excused Absences

Other than for these enumerated absences, there is no distinction between “excused” and “unexcused” absences in the school register for State and Federal reporting purposes.

How a School District defines “excused” or “unexcused” absence for purposes of truancy, student conduct, promotion, retention and the award of course credit is a local decision.

School Districts can take any and all action authorized by their policies and procedures when categorizing these absences.

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Action Plan for Chronic Absenteeism

NJ requires any school district where more than 10% of students are chronically absent to develop an action plan

School Avoidance Alliance. (2024). School avoidance 101. Retrieved from <https://schoolavoidance.org/school-avoidance-101/>

See NJDOE Website – [Student Attendance](#)

See New Jersey Department of Education. (2022). Data based decision making for addressing chronic absenteeism. Retrieved from <https://www.nj.gov/education/safety/sandp/attendance/docs/DataBasedDecisionMakingChronicAbsenteeism.pdf>

See [Appendix A: Sample School Corrective Action Plan Template for Addressing Chronic Absenteeism](#) (PDF)

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Action Plan Elements

Must include survey of parents to assess their perceived reasons for absenteeism

The NJDOE encourages districts to establish a Chronic Absenteeism Early Warning System (CA EWS), which is a system to detect patterns, trends, and perception data that could indicate increased risks of a student becoming chronically absent. Data collected for the CA EWS should reflect attendance at multiple levels (school-wide, grade-level, classroom, individual students) to identify target populations and measure the appropriateness and effectiveness of current or proposed interventions.

Should include inventory and assessment of existing strategies being used at Tiers 1, 2, and 3

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School Climate Survey

See NJDOE website - [NJ School Climate Platform and Survey](#)

Includes comprehensive surveys for students, parents, staff members, targeted to various grade levels

Revised student survey law (P.L. 2021, c. 156) allows administration of survey to students UNLESS parents opt out (must have 2 weeks advance notice, opportunity to review in advance)

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Home Instruction

Students on home instruction are not to be marked “absent” - NJAC 6A:32-8.1e

Home instruction for a student with a *temporary or chronic health condition* must be for the number of days and length of time *sufficient to continue the student’s academic progress*

Home instruction time *for reasons other than a temporary or chronic health condition*, must be no less than 10 hours, or as required by NJAC 6A:14-4.8 and 4.9

Homeschooling:

- See NJDOE website for FAQs - https://www.state.nj.us/education/genfo/faq/faq_homeschool.htm



NJDOE Q & A on Student Attendance

Question: How many days must I keep a student on the register when the student does not attend?

Answer:

- It is the school's responsibility to account for the student within ten days of the student's first day of absence.
- The school must determine that the student is absent for a specific reason, has transferred, is receiving an approved alternate form of instruction or has dropped out of the school system.
- Unless the student is absent and plans to return to school, the appropriate transfer, dropout, or ceasing to attend code must be entered in the register.
- The school must make a good faith effort to determine the reasons for the absence or the student's school status before recording the student as a dropout.
- If the student's school status is unknown after the investigation period, the student must be recorded as a dropout (D8) "reason unknown."

See NJDOE School Register – Common Questions and Answers -
<https://www.nj.gov/education/finance/register/faq.shtml>

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FERPA — Q & A on doctor notes

- Q. If a school wants to contact a child's doctor about an inaccuracy on an excuse note, do we need any special permission or may we contact the doctor directly?
- A. Under FERPA, the 2008 regulations changed the definition of "disclosure" to permit a school to contact the stated source of a record (such as a doctor's note) for verification purposes. This is not considered a disclosure and, therefore, does not violate FERPA. In other words, FERPA permits a targeted release of records back to the stated source for verification purposes.

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Handle with Care

- October 6, 2020 NJ Attorney General Law Enforcement Directive No. 2020-09
- All law enforcement and prosecuting agencies in NJ had to adopt a Handle with Care policy by 12/31/20 as part a statewide Handle with Care program
- Goal – Give a school notice when a student has been identified at the scene of a recent traumatic event so the school may handle the child with care, while respecting privacy rights

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Examples of traumatic events

- Arrest in the child's home
- Search warrant executed at home
- Drug/alcohol overdose in home
- Suicide or attempted suicide
- Domestic violence, physical/sexual abuse, community violence
- Forced displacement from home
- DCP&P
- House fire
- Child exposed to trauma (e.g., crime/drug activity)
- Sudden death of a family member

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DCPP – Educational Neglect

NJDCPP v. S.D., 453 N.J. Super. 511 (App. Div. March 8, 2018)

DCPP was upheld in its finding that mother engaged in gross negligence due to educational neglect of her six-year-old daughter.

- Mother was upset that her youngest child could not attend kindergarten in neighborhood school (PS38) in Jersey City and instead would have to be bused to another school.
- Refused to send student to school. Said she was concerned would not be able to get to her daughter in case of an emergency.

Student missed more than 100 days of school.

Children ordered to be placed in care of grandparents.

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Connecting with Outside Supports

- NJ Statewide Student Support Services (NJ4S) – [NJ4S Homepage](#)
- NJPPC - [New Jersey Pediatric Psychiatry Collaborative – Transforming Access to Children's Mental Health Care \(nj-ppc.org\)](#)

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Housing Instability/Homelessness

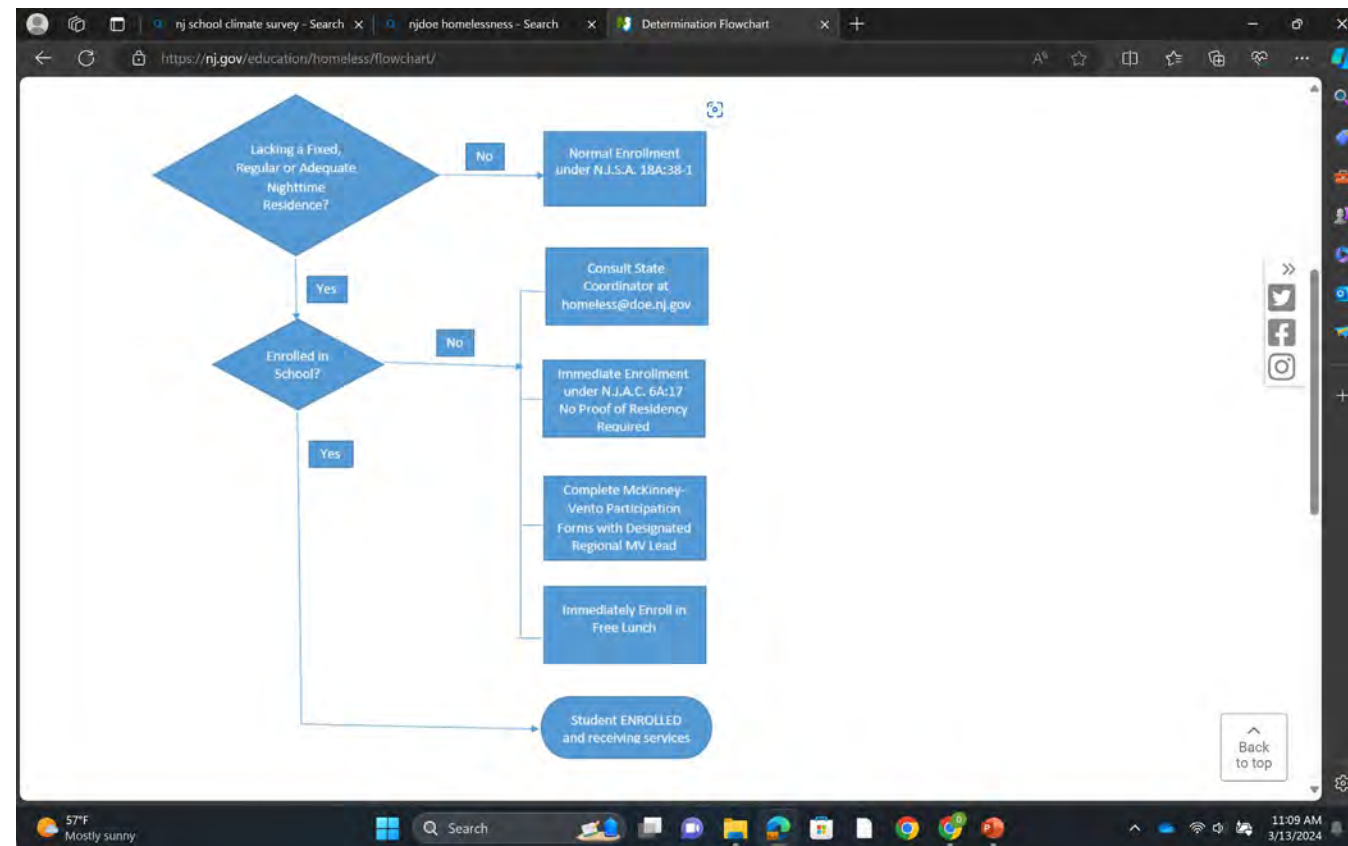
Is student lacking fixed, regular adequate nighttime residence?

- Children and youths who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason; are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; or are abandoned in hospitals;
- Children and youths who have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings;
- Children and youths who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings; and
- Migratory children who qualify as homeless because the children are living in circumstances described above.
- See [New Jersey McKinney-Vento Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program \(nj.gov\)](https://www.nj.gov/education/programs/homeless-children-youth/)

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Homelessness Flowchart



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Out of School Suspension and the Need to Consider Unintended Consequences

- Out of School Suspension common response for substance use
- Youth who are vaping, using other CDS may be acting out due to other issues.
- Often times, sending students home to an unsupervised or dangerous environment may have unintended negative consequences.
- See [NJ State Bar Foundation List of Restorative Justice resources](#)



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Section 504

- See [OCR Parent and Educator Resource Guide to Section 504](#)
- Need to work with families to provide reasonable accommodations for students
- If student is able to be in school with supports other than a medical doctor, student is entitled to attend

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Return to School/Reentry Plans

- Critical to proactively plan with family
- Have ongoing communication during period of extended absence
- Coordinate key aspects of return
 - Educational, Social/Emotional, Reengagement in school activities
 - Be open to flexible approach

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NJDOE Concussion Protocol Guidance

- NJDOE [Broadcast Email – September 24, 2023](#)
- Outlines requirements in law
- Minimum Board policy requirements
- 6 step concussion protocol

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The Adolescent Brain

IT GROWS UNTIL
THE AGE OF THE
EARLY 20'S

CONCUSSION
PROTOCOLS AND
CARE PROMOTES
BETTER OUTCOMES

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Chronic Absenteeism Scenario

It is March 1st, and Isabella has been absent from school for the past 3 weeks. Isabella is a 4th grade student who enrolled in the school district in September. She is a multilingual learner whose family came to the U.S. from Venezuela.

The school nurse received a note from a family doctor indicating that Isabella should be excused from attending school for the “foreseeable future” due to anxiety.

The day before Isabella was first out of school in early February, the District received a Handle with Care notice, with of course no details.

The family has moved three times during the school year to new addresses within the school district, with each move requiring the student to enroll in a new elementary school. The Family has declined to discuss with school officials the reasons for the moves.

Isabella’s fourth grade teacher has reported suspicion that Isabella may have a disability. The family has refused to consent to have their child evaluated.

The family may also be undocumented. The primary language spoken at home is Spanish. The parents have indicated in the past they don’t want to “make any trouble” and are rarely seen at school events.

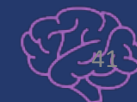
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Key Legal Issues – Elementary Scenario

- FERPA, HIPAA and vague, open-ended doctor's notes
- Potential disability
- MLL status, communication with family
- Citizenship status
- Chronic absenteeism
- Handle with Care notice
- Housing instability

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Chronic Absenteeism Resources

- NJDOE Website – [Student Attendance](#)
- [Appendix A: Sample School Corrective Action Plan Template for Addressing Chronic Absenteeism](#) (PDF)
- [Appendix A: Sample School Corrective Action Plan Template for Addressing Chronic Absenteeism](#) (Word)

Resources for Educators

- [Alternatives to Suspension](#)
- [Strategies to Reduce Chronic Absence](#)
- [Tackling Chronic Absenteeism](#) You-Tube Video

Toolkits

- Addressing the Health-Related Causes of Chronic Absenteeism: [A Toolkit for Action](#)
- Every Student, Every Day: [A Community Toolkit](#) to Address and Eliminate Chronic Absenteeism

Reports

- Showing Up Matters: [The State of Chronic Absenteeism in New Jersey](#)
- [The Importance of Being in School](#): A Report on Absenteeism in the Nation's Public Schools

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NJDOE Mental Health Guide

- NJDOE Memo February 9, 2022:
<https://www.nj.gov/education/broadcasts/2022/feb/09/NewJerseyComprehensiveSchool-BasedMentalHealthResourceGuideRelease.pdf>
- 200+ page guide, uses MTSS approach as framework
- Includes chapters addressing suicide prevention, risk assessment and response, substance use, reentry planning
- Wrote chapter, in collaboration with NJPN, addressing substance use and mental health
- Guide establishes expectations for best practice, **which raises potential legal liability if districts fail to consider those best practices**

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Evaluation

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you must complete a webinar evaluation at:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/SD38NJD>



Join us again in April

Speakers:



Kathy McCutcheon MSN, RN, NCSN
School Nurse
Executive Board, New Jersey State School Nurses Association



Stefanie Lachenauer, EdM
Middle School Teacher
Certified Trauma and Resilience Practitioner



Ilana Nankin, Ph.D.
Founder & CEO
Breathe For Change

Topic: Support for School Staff

When: Thursday, April 18 from 5:30-6:30pm

Where: All sessions are hosted virtually via Zoom.

Cost: FREE! There is no cost to participate in this series.

For more information, please contact Tizana Hoggs, MPA at thoggs@njaap.org.



Share a Case for Discussion

The submission of cases for presentation and discussion is a key component of the Project ECHO model and critically important for knowledge building and sharing.

We are seeking cases for discussion related to upcoming ECHO session topics noted below. Please complete our Case Presentation Form if you would like to submit a case for consideration:



April 18: Support for school staff

Please note that to maintain anonymity of districts, staff, and students, our hub faculty will present cases to the group for discussion. No identifiable information will be shared.

