



GROWING HEALTHY MINDS

A VIRTUAL LEARNING COLLABORATIVE

Supporting Student Mental Health

**Chronic Absenteeism & School Refusal:
Examining patterns and developing
action plans**

November 21, 2024

Acknowledgements & Disclosures

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



New Jersey State
School Nurses Association
Leading, Teaching, Caring.



St. Joseph's Health
ST. JOSEPH'S CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL



All identified relevant financial relationships have been mitigated and the educational content thoroughly evaluated by the New Jersey Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics for fair, balanced, and safe, effective patient care.





NJAAP Accreditation Statement

Accreditation Statement:

This activity has been planned and implemented in accordance with the accreditation requirements and policies of the Medical Society of New Jersey. New Jersey Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics is accredited by the Medical Society of New Jersey to provide continuing medical education for physicians.

AMA Designation Statement:

New Jersey Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics designates this live internet activity for a maximum of 1.25 AMA PRA Category 1 Credits™. Physicians should claim only the credit commensurate with the extent of their participation in the activity.

ABP MOC Part II:

Successful completion of this CME activity, which includes participation in the evaluation component, enables the learner to earn up to 1.25 MOC points in the American Board of Pediatrics' (ABP) Maintenance of Certification (MOC) program. It is the CME activity provider's responsibility to submit learner completion information to ACCME for the purpose of granting ABP MOC credit.

Continuing Nursing Education Credits

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

Requirements:

- Participation in the full duration of each Growing Healthy Minds session for which you are seeking contact hours
- Completion of a Growing Healthy Minds session evaluation for each session for which you are seeking contact hours, which will be sent to the email you used to register following each session

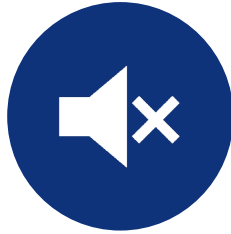
This continuing education activity was approved by the Ohio Nurses Association, an Ohio Board of Nursing approver. (OBN-001-91) Expiration date: 10/1/2026



Housekeeping



We encourage you to turn on your camera while engaging in the session.



Kindly remain on mute to reduce background noise when you are not speaking.



By participating in these ECHO sessions, you are consenting to being recorded.



To protect student privacy, please refrain from sharing any information that could identify your students.



Please unmute or use the chat function to engage in discussion with fellow participants and hub faculty.

Share your full name, role, and district in the chat!

Meet our Hub Faculty Members

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Required Action for Unexcused Absences

- 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

Required Action for Truancy

- Truancy occurs when a student between the ages of 6 and 16 has 10 or more cumulative unexcused absences based on what is excused under local district policy
- 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

Excused Absences - School Register

- Six 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):
 - Religious observance (N.J.A.C. 6A:32-8.3(h));
 - A college visit (up to 3 days per school year, only for students in grades 11 and 12);
 - “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;
 - 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
 - The closure of a busing district that prevents a student from having transportation to the receiving school.
 - Attendance at 1 civic event per year for students in grades 6 – 12
- See P.L. 2023, c, 274 (1/16/2024) - These State-excused absences can only be applied to an event sponsored by a government entity, a community-based organization, or a nonprofit. The civic event is required to incorporate an element of service learning and address a public issue or concern

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.

Home Instruction

- Students on home instruction are not to be marked “absent” - See N.J.A.C. 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 N.J.A.C. 6A:14-4.8 and 4.9

What Is Chronic Absenteeism?

- Missing 10% or more of school days for any reason (other than those excused under School Register):
 - Illness
 - Suspension
 - School Refusal
 - Vacations
 - Family Responsibilities
 - Other
- In New Jersey-18+ days of school
- School District must develop an action plan if more than 10% of students are chronically absent
- See NJDOE Website – [Student Attendance](#)

The principal of Amazing High School has requested that the school counselors begin gathering data for new school counseling groups aimed at reducing chronic absenteeism. Once students with 18 or more absences are identified, school counselor Mrs. Ramirez begins gathering data to place students into groups. The counselor learns that most of the students fall into 1 of 4 categories. They are:

Chronic Absenteeism

Missing **10% or more** of school days for any reason
In New Jersey, that is 18 days or more

	Chronic Illness	School Refusal	Suspensions	Family Responsibilities

**As Mrs. Ramirez gets to know
the students in her first group,
she learns that.....**

Chronic Illness

Anthony is a 14 year freshman in high school. His past medical history is only remarkable for asthma. He does not have an asthma action plan on file. He was an average student in middle school, but his report card for the first marking period is all Cs and a F in math. His attendance in middle school fair; he was out 10 days in 6th grade, 17 days 7th grade and 20 days in 8th grade. He is pleasant, well dressed and has not had any disciplinary referrals. He appears to have friends with whom he eats lunch and talks to in his classes. It is November and the end of the first marking period and he has 10 absences. He has been called out by his mother with no doctor's notes and there is no pattern to absences. An I & RS has been initiated because he is failing math. His nurse completes the I&RS form; his screenings are within normal, he notes he sometimes takes a nebulizer treatment at home due to his asthma symptoms and has been to Urgent Care a few times. Anthony notes that when he misses the bus he's unable to get to school because he lives far and roads on the 1 hour walk that do not have sidewalks. His parent is a single mom who leaves for work before Anthony goes to school.

School Refusal

Isabella is a newly enrolled, multi-language 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 her first absence the district received a Handle with Care notice, with no details. The family has moved three times during the past year to new addresses within the school district, with each move requiring the student to enroll in a new school. The family has declined to discuss with school officials the reasons for the moves. Isabella's 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 parents have indicated in the past "they don't want to make any trouble" and are rarely at school events.

Suspensions

Sophomore Jordan has accumulated multiple suspensions for repeated disruptive behaviors and minor altercations with classmates. As per school policy, each suspension leads to days out of school. The pattern of suspension and resulting absenteeism has made it difficult to form positive relationships with adults at school. Jordan's suspensions usually begin with minor infractions like disruptive outbursts or disagreements in class. Over time, these disruptions become arguments with teachers and peers. Jordan's school initially issued warnings, but as the behaviors persist, in school suspensions are implemented. One incident involving a confrontation during lunch, where a verbal disagreement quickly escalated to physical pushing, leads to an out of school suspension. As the suspensions accumulated, Jordan is increasingly disconnected from school, missing instructional time. Each return to school becomes more isolating, as Jordan faces catching up on assignments with limited support and a growing sense of resentment toward the school environment.

Family Responsibilities and Other

Emily is a high school senior who has been struggling with consistent attendance due to family responsibilities. Emily's father and mother both two jobs to support the family, leaving Emily responsible for her three younger siblings before and after school. Because the younger siblings need to be supervised until their bus comes (after Emily's bus time) she is almost always late for school. When one of the younger children is ill, her parents rely on her to stay home and care for them, as they work non-salaried jobs where if they don't work, they don't get paid. The cost of daycare for three younger siblings is not sustainable for the family's budget, and there is no other family support available. As a result, Emily frequently misses school, especially on days when her siblings have early dismissals or unexpected needs arise.

Educate
Collaborate
Activate
Remediate....
Advocate



Chronic Illness

- Educate yourself about your students' medical condition
- Control What You Can Control!
- Collaborate! - Involve school nurse in action planning
 - 504 Planning
 - Health Planning
- Educate with Empathy
 - Use technology if necessary!
- ***Advocate as needed**
 - **Ex- homebound instruction**

School Refusal

- Control what you can control!
- Recommendations for action
 - Educate: What is the root cause of the refusal?
 - Social Problems?
 - Anxiety?
 - Academic Confidence?
 - Is anxiety being addressed with a professional?
 - Involve your school counselor
 - Does the child have a trusting relationship with at least 1 adult at school?

****Advocate for shortened day with gradual return to classes, core classes FIRST.***

How Does School Avoidance Develop?

Can often start for benign reasons

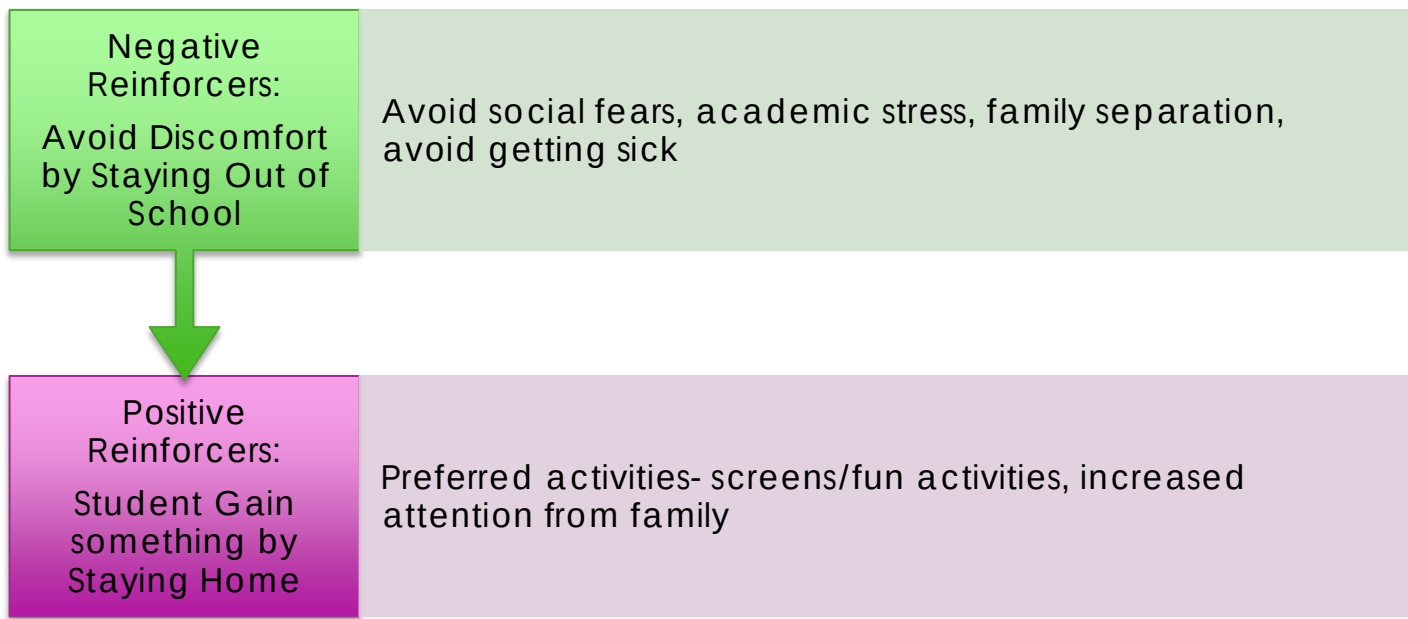
Student could be out for medical illness, learning difference, injury, life event

Develops difficulty going back

Home becomes a place of comfort

What Causes School Avoidance?

Positive and negative reinforcers



What Can Schools Do Better? - A Pediatrician's View

EARLIER RECOGNITION

USE THE HOME INSTRUCTION PROCESS
TO YOUR ADVANTAGE

IMPROVE COMMUNICATION AND
COLLABORATION WITH **FAMILY**

IMPROVE COMMUNICATION AND
COLLABORATION WITH **PHYSICIANS**

Casserole problem

If there's an allergic reaction, you have to dig deeper into the ingredients

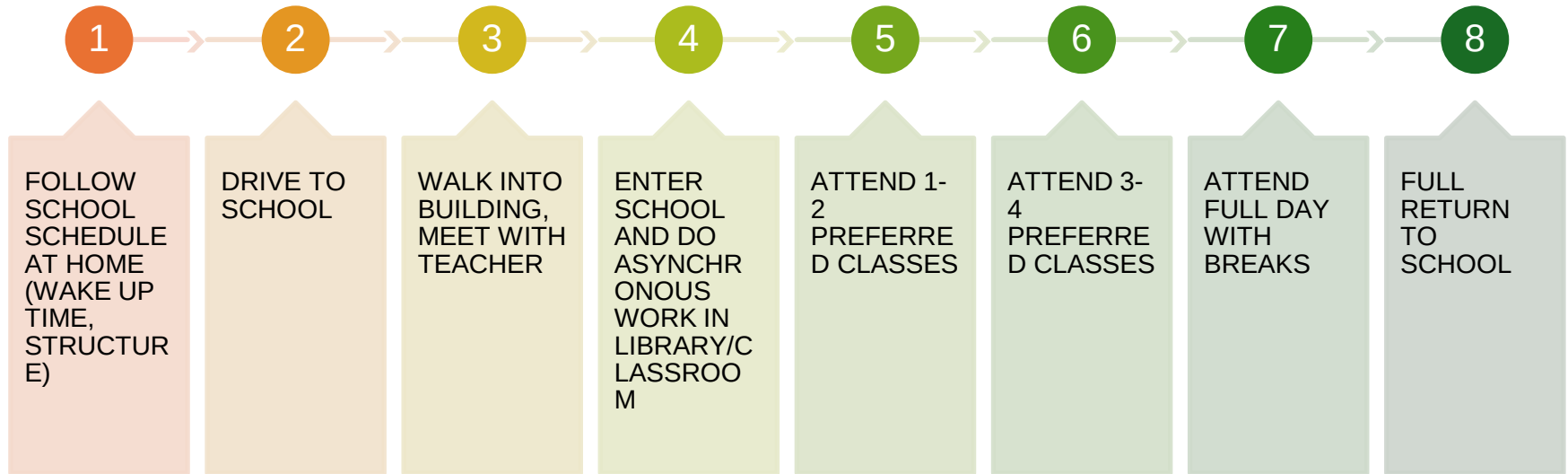


Get to the root cause

Multiple things can trigger anxiety about school

Much easier to address when you understand what they are

Create a School Re-entry Plan



Suspensions

- Participant poll
 - **Have you ever worked with students who missed large amounts of class time due to in school or out of school suspensions?**
- Collaborations with community organizations (mentoring programs, community mental health supports, etc.) can help address broader socioeconomic factors, such as trauma or home instability.
- ***Advocate for in school suspension programs to include academic supports***
- ***Advocate for a shift from punitive action to restorative action***
 - Schools that use restorative justice practices see improved attendance!

Family Responsibilities

- Participant poll
 - **How do you currently support students whose absence you know are the result of circumstances beyond their control?**
- Collaborations with community resources for childcare, or financial assistance, can relieve some of the pressures contributing to absenteeism
- Assigning a mentor who understands the student's challenges can provide emotional support
- Extended deadlines or access to online assignments.

Despite school personnel's best efforts, due to school policy some students' attendance does not improve and they are referred first to the Truancy officer, and then to adjudication with the court system.

Chronic Absenteeism

Missing **10% or more** of school days for any reason
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	Chronic Illness	School Refusal	Suspensions	Family Responsibilities
1. Educate	What is the illness? Educate with empathy	Learn the root cause of the refusal (anxiety, academic confidence, social problems)	Learn the root cause of the decisions that led to the suspension(s)	Learn what responsibilities are keeping the student from coming to school
2. Collaborate and Activate	Involve school nurse, school counselor Create Health Plan or 504 Plan Use technology if necessary	Attack root cause with best practices: Therapy, school counseling groups,	Restorative practices Targeted interventions for at risk students Cross-sector partnerships & policy change mentoring	Connect with caregivers and community supports
3. Remediate	Basic Skills Tutoring Summer Programs Peer Tutoring	Recess or study hall academic help Basic Skills <i>*Recommend time at home be as boring as possible</i>	Recess or study hall academic help Basic Skills Tutoring Peer Tutoring	Basic Skills Tutoring Summer Programs Peer Tutoring

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](#)
- Youtube Video - [Tackling Chronic Absenteeism](#)
- 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
- Pushed Out: [Trends and Disparities in Out-of-School Suspension](#)
- School refusal: [When a child won't go to school](#)

Evaluation

Reminder:

If you are seeking educational credit for your participation in this webinar,

Please be sure to complete the session evaluation at:
<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/TLQH66H6>



Join us again in the new year!

Topic: Supporting the mental health of students with chronic conditions

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

When: Thursday, January 30th from 5:30-6:45pm

Where: All sessions are hosted virtually via Zoom.

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