Count Me In  
Washington State’s School Attendance Initiative

**Long Term Goal:**
Decrease chronic absenteeism.

**Short Term Goal:**
- Create a shared communications plan for youth- and family-serving agencies addressing chronic absenteeism.
- Commit capacity building and collaboration to reduce chronic absenteeism.

**Chronic Absenteeism is an Equity Issue**
Chronic absenteeism is particularly prevalent among students who are low-income, students of color, students with disabilities, students who are highly mobile (i.e. move around a lot), and juvenile justice-involved youth. These students already face significant challenges. Discipline policies that confuse chronic absenteeism with truancy can lead to further barriers to education and more frequently impact these populations.

**Absenteeism is a Symptom**
Absences are key indicators that a student is facing challenges. These challenges may be related to transportation, health issues, lack of stable housing, mental health or drug abuse, lack of parent support or supervision as well as in school issues such as bullying, academic challenges, lack of perceived relevance or not feeling connected or valued.

**Addressing the Root Causes**
Students who are at risk to be chronically absent may benefit from supports and services best provided by third-party providers or agencies (e.g. public social and health service agencies, homeless service providers, nonprofit youth-serving organizations) in collaboration with their local school or school district.

**GATE Connection**
As we look at how youth and family serving agencies coordinate services, cross-sector system performance could be evaluated, at least in part, on progress toward eliminating chronic absenteeism.

Attendance is a primary early warning indicator for students at every grade level. Collectively developing activities that mutually support increasing attendance and reducing chronic absenteeism aligns with the first 2 foundational recommendations of the Building Bridges Work Group:
1. Set an educational goal for youth- and family-serving agencies and coordinate efforts to achieve it.
2. Build local dropout prevention and intervention systems and practices at every grade level.

**Short term goal for the initiative (April 1, 2016):**
1. Develop a shared communications plan for state youth and family serving agencies to:
   a. Raise awareness about the causes and effects of and potential solutions to chronic absenteeism, especially targeting youth and families.
   b. Share available support services to address absenteeism before any student misses so much school that it is nearly impossible to catch up

http://www.k12.wa.us/GATE/Attendance.aspx  
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Chronic absenteeism:
A student who misses at least 10 percent, or 18 days, in a year for any reason, excused or unexcused.

Truant: A student who has:
- 5 or more unexcused full day absences within 30-days, or
- 10 or more unexcused full day absences within a school year.

**Chronically Absent, High School 2013-14**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chronic Absenteeism</th>
<th>2013-14</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Students</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRL</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-FRL</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Ed</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Special Ed</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chronic absence:
A student who misses at least 10 percent, or 18 days, in a year for any reason, excused or unexcused.

Truant:
- 5 or more unexcused full day absences within 30-days, or
- 10 or more unexcused full day absences within a school year.
c. Communicate that chronic absenteeism is a problem that affects the entire community.
d. Work together as a community so that everyone feels responsible for successfully addressing underlying causes of chronic absenteeism.

Long term commitment

- Commit to building capacity across the Washington state government to support local communities in the work of addressing and eliminating chronic absenteeism.
- Commit to creating or enhancing coordinated, cross-sector systems for identifying and supporting students who are, or are at risk of becoming, chronically absent, with the goal of reducing chronic absenteeism.

Resources: