

REDUCING CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM REPORT

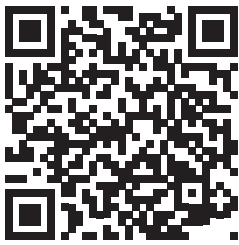
FEBRUARY 2025

PRESENTED BY  The Mind Trust



IN PARTNERSHIP
WITH THESE
INDIANAPOLIS
PUBLIC CHARTER
SCHOOLS





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summary, visit [themindtrust.
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“Students go home and say things like, ‘I want to go to school tomorrow, we have one more tally mark before our life work party. If I’m not there, we’re not going to earn it.’”

—ALLEGiant PREP ACADEMY, SCHOOL LEADER



“I feel like there’s not a science to reducing chronic absenteeism for us. There really isn’t. It’s relationship building, knowing your families, and looking at the data.”

—ENLACE ACADEMY, SCHOOL LEADER

**FROM THE DESK
OF THE CEO**

Friends,

At The Mind Trust, our mission to ensure every Indianapolis student has access to an excellent education depends on students being present in classrooms where great teaching happens every day. Without consistent attendance, the progress we seek in literacy and math simply isn't possible.

To understand how schools are tackling the challenge of chronic absenteeism, we explored the strategies of five charter and innovation schools across Marion County. These schools are working intentionally to create environments where students feel valued and excited to show up.

In this report, we also spotlight Christel House Indianapolis as a "School on the Move," highlighting its commitment to addressing attendance barriers head-on, even as it navigates ongoing absenteeism challenges.

I'm proud to share the stories of these schools and their relentless efforts to build cultures of belonging and high expectations. By regularly analyzing attendance data and responding with purposeful action, they are making a meaningful impact and improving student academic outcomes.

We hope this report inspires more schools to take a closer look at their attendance practices and adopt innovative strategies that foster strong connections and consistent student engagement.

Together, we can ensure that every student not only shows up but thrives.



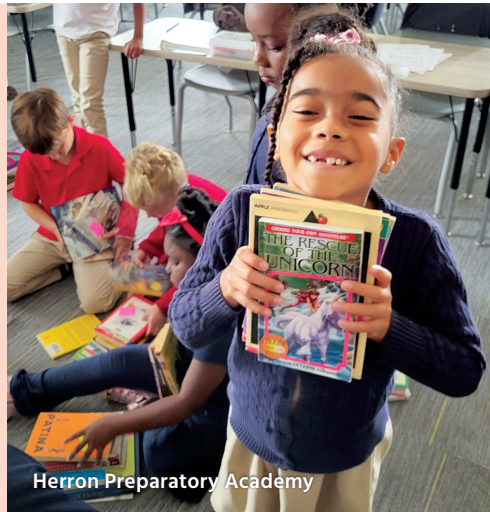
With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of the letters 'B' and 'B' followed by a horizontal line.

Brandon Brown
CEO, The Mind Trust



Christel House Indianapolis



Herron Preparatory Academy



Monarca Academy

Research Design

THIS REPORT EMPLOYED A QUALITATIVE RESEARCH design to gain a deeper understanding of the practices implemented by six charter and innovation schools in Center Township to reduce chronic absenteeism rates. The primary data collection method involved conducting virtual, in-depth interviews with school leadership teams, each lasting between 45 minutes to one hour. These interviews focused on gathering insights into the specific strategies and interventions these schools have adopted to address chronic absenteeism, with an emphasis on their approaches to improving student attendance.

The interviews briefly addressed the unique challenges schools face but were primarily centered on the schools current practices aimed at improving student attendance. All interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis. A reflexive thematic analysis was applied to the transcriptions, allowing for the identification of key themes and practices within each

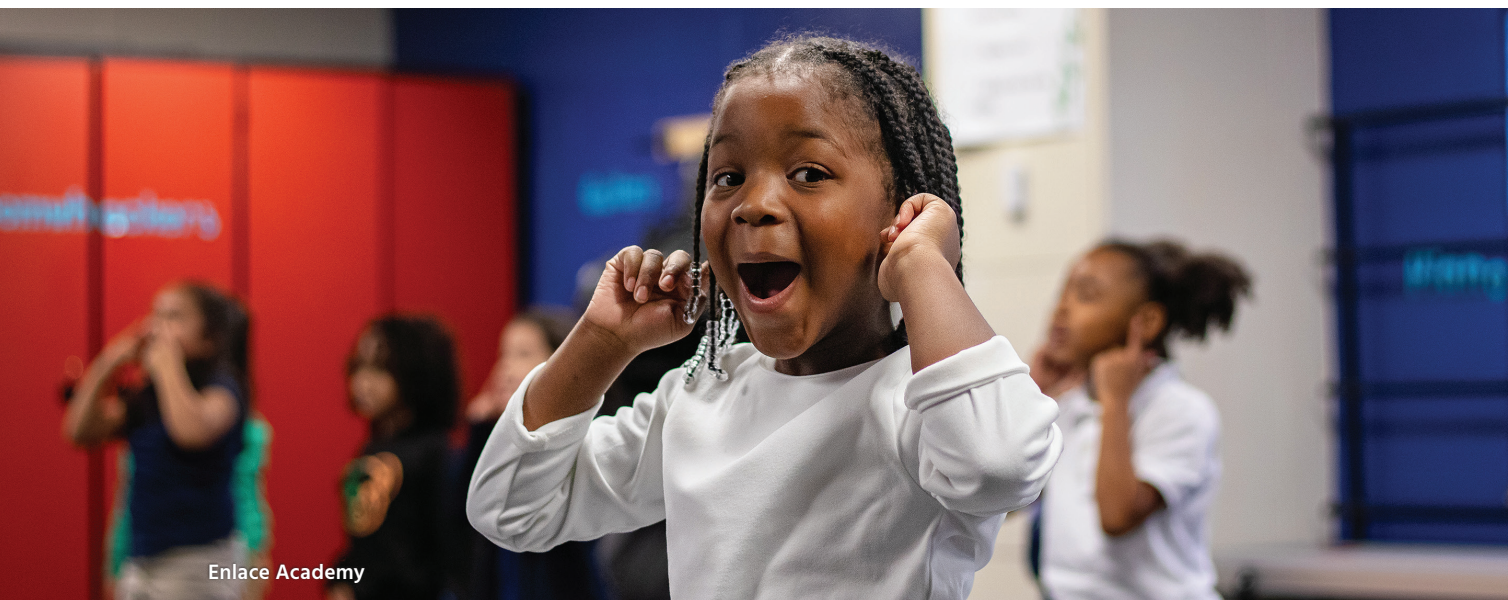
individual school's report. These themes were then summarized and presented as a draft report to each school for their feedback and approval.

In addition to the qualitative data, quantitative data from the Indiana Department of Education was utilized to inform the selection of schools for the study. Schools were chosen based on their chronic absenteeism rates, with a focus on those that demonstrated lower absenteeism rates or significant reductions in absenteeism in comparison to the state average. This combination of qualitative and quantitative methods allowed for a comprehensive examination of the factors contributing to lower chronic absenteeism rates in the selected schools.

Finally, overarching themes from individual school reports were analyzed to identify common practices and strategies that could serve as effective models for other schools aiming to reduce chronic absenteeism.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This report would not have been possible without the generous time, effort, and insights shared by Allegiant Prep, Christel House Academy, Enlace Academy, Herron Preparatory Academy, Indiana Math and Science Academy West (IMSA), and Monarca Academy. We are deeply grateful to the schools that graciously participated in the interview process. It is a privilege to highlight your successes and to amplify the exceptional work of your school leadership teams, teachers, and support staff. Thank you for your unwavering commitment and for going above and beyond to serve your students. We are truly honored to partner with you in your important work.



Introduction

CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM, defined as missing 10 percent or more of school days in an academic year, has become a significant challenge for schools across the nation.¹ Rates of chronic absenteeism surged during the COVID-19 pandemic and have yet to fully recover. In Indiana, chronic absenteeism peaked at 21.1% in 2022, gradually declining over the past two years, with 17.8% of students chronically absent in 2024. While this represents some improvement, the rates remain alarmingly high, particularly among low-income students and students of color. For example, 23.7% of students receiving free or reduced lunch were chronically absent, compared to just 13% of their peers with paid lunch status. Black students, in particular, experience the highest rates of chronic absenteeism at 28.5%.

The academic consequences of chronic absenteeism are profound. Students who are chronically absent are less likely to meet academic benchmarks, such as passing the state's IREAD assessment, compared to their regularly attending peers. The impact of these absences compounds over time, contributing to academic struggles and, in some cases, long-term disengagement from education.

This report sought to explore the practices of charter and innovation schools in Center Township, Indianapolis, that are successfully preventing and reducing chronic absenteeism in their schools, as indicated by attendance data from the Indiana Department of Education. By examining the strategies employed by schools with lower absenteeism rates, this report hoped to identify effective practices that can be shared more broadly across the city. By learning from one another's successes and challenges, we hope to contribute to the collective effort of improving student attendance and supporting academic achievement throughout Indianapolis. The schools featured in this report represent a small selection of learning institutions actively working to strategically address student attendance and family engagement within their areas of influence.

¹ U.S. Department of Education - Chronic Absenteeism data and spreadsheets <https://www.ed.gov/chronic-absenteeism>



Shared Barriers to School Attendance

Several common challenges were identified by all schools:

- Inconsistent student transportation and the financial responsibility of providing transportation for students experiencing special circumstances
- Shifting student demographics, especially an influx of students immigrating to the United States.
- Affordable housing shortages.
- Limited access to healthcare.
- Mental health barriers.

Schools are proactively addressing attendance barriers within their control by addressing four key areas:

1. Cultivating environments where students and families feel a sense of belonging.

- a. They are relentless about relationships and ensuring every student knows they have a caring adult in the building.
- b. They prioritize recruiting and retaining a diverse staff.

2. Consistently tracking attendance and building attendance expectations into school culture.

- a. Teachers often take the lead in the initial monitoring and relationship building.

- b. School leadership teams and support staff regularly review attendance trends and identify resources to address barriers.
- c. Attendance goals are built into board goals and reports, and in one case, are part of staff evaluation metrics.

3. Responding swiftly to issues.

- a. When data is tracked effectively, staff are able to identify problems sooner.
- b. Schools have a clear process and identified resources in place to react quickly when attendance concerns surface.

4. Collaborating with their community and external partners to address obstacles to consistent attendance.

- a. Schools emphasize the importance of viewing parents and families as genuine partners in student learning and attendance.
- b. Family communication tools and systems are in place used consistently.
- c. Leveraging their autonomy and benefits in size and structure, schools can more easily learn individual family needs and respond accordingly.



Allegiant Prep Academy

GRADE LEVELS SERVED: K-5



BACKGROUND

ALLEGIAN'T PREP ACADEMY LAUNCHED in the 2018–2019 school year as a public, tuition-free, college-preparatory charter school, serving just 39 students in a small schoolhouse model. Situated on Indianapolis’s west side in the Haughville neighborhood, the school has grown significantly, now serving 165 students across grades K–5.

Dedicated to academic excellence and holistic development, Allegiant Prep empowers students by cultivating the skills, mindsets, and habits necessary for success in both school and life. The school fosters a consistent and predictable learning environment, reducing barriers to learning and creating opportunities for students and staff to thrive.

“Everything that we do is rooted in a deep determination to foster a community that embodies operational effectiveness, a strong academic culture, and a commitment to ensure scholars are prepared for success in school and life.” —Allegiant Prep Academy’s website, 2024

REDUCING CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM AT ALLEGIAN'T PREP ACADEMY

During the 2022–2023 school year, Allegiant Prep Academy faced a chronic absenteeism rate of 25.9%, exceeding the state average of 19.2%. By setting high expectations for students and families from the outset and consistently reinforcing those expectations, the school successfully reduced absenteeism to 19.8% during the 2023–2024 school year. While still above the state average, this reduction signals progress. As Rick Anderson, Founder, Executive Director, and Head of School, states, “We acknowledge there is still much work to be done, but we are encouraged by the strides we’ve made.”

WHAT WE HEARD

When asked about their success in reducing chronic absenteeism, Allegiant Prep’s leadership highlighted a few key practices driving increased student attendance, even in the face of challenges beyond their control. The school **intentionally builds a**

school culture of student agency and belonging, consistently monitors attendance as part of its commitment to continuous improvement, and actively collaborates with families to overcome barriers to regular school attendance.

INTENTIONALLY BUILDING A SCHOOL CULTURE OF STUDENT AGENCY AND BELONGING

At Allegiant Prep, school leaders, teachers, and support staff view families as essential partners in their children’s academic success. However, they also prioritize helping students recognize their own agency and responsibility, even at the elementary level, to ensure there is consistent attendance and, ultimately, academic success. Before a new student and family join the school, the Allegiant Prep team meets individually with each family or in a very small group to discuss school culture, attendance expectations, and to hear the family’s goals and expectations for their child’s education.

The school fosters a safe, consistent, and predictable environment where students know what to expect. Allegiant Prep empowers students to take ownership of their learning journey through a “Warm Strict” culture—celebrating student achievements while upholding a high standard of excellence.

“One of the things we really focus on is meeting with each family to go over school culture expectations, talk about Life Work and Community Circle, and to really try to ensure that parents have all their questions answered and that we’re all invested on the front end, even before their student starts at the school.”—School Leader

“All of our students receive a Life Work tracker. What other schools call homework, we call Life Work. When a student gets their Life Work done, they receive a tally mark in their tracker. They earn incentives as a class, which builds a sense of positive pressure for the class to be a community.”—School Leader

and actively monitors attendance as a key measure of success. The school recognizes that attendance metrics reflect the quality of the environment it creates for students and families. When students are absent, Allegiant Prep views this as an indicator of one of two potential challenges: external barriers preventing students from attending, which the school seeks to address and resolve, or issues within the school’s culture that require improvement to foster a welcoming and engaging environment where students are motivated to attend regularly.

“I think sometimes when we think about attendance we think just about outputs. As a community, we have to start thinking about the inputs. I think attendance starts with the ethos of the school and students feeling safe and the best version of themselves, not just physically but socially and emotionally. That makes kids want to come to school. Then they go home talking about school differently which often activates parents’ engagement.”

“Students go home and say things like, ‘I want to go to school tomorrow, we have one more tally mark before our life work party. If I’m not there, we’re not going to earn it.’”

—SCHOOL LEADER



“In prior years, we weren’t sophisticated with our attendance tracking. This year, our Director of Finance and Operations created an Excel tracker that’s sent to our Office Manager who updates the tracker each week with who was tardy, absent, excused, unexcused, etc. I receive the data from that tracker, it also goes to our Dean of Students and Family Supports.”

“Our students end up being advocates for themselves even in situations where there may be some apathy toward attendance in their home.”—School Leader

“Our students feel like our school is safe, consistent, and predictable. They also feel like they can be held to high expectations but supported.”—School Leader

“Our students want to be at school everyday. We have clear expectations but also a ton of incentives that students can learn. For example, being the Scholar of the Month, going to the treasure chest [for rewards], or becoming a bronze, silver, or gold community member.”

“Since we’re now really intentional with tracking attendance, we’re having constant touchmarks with families before they reach the attendance benchmark indicators that would cause us to take action.”

ATTENDANCE TRACKING AS A COMMITMENT TO CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Allegiant Prep is dedicated to continuous improvement

COLLABORATING WITH FAMILIES TO OVERCOME BARRIERS

Recognizing parents and families as their most essential partners in supporting student success, Allegiant Prep collaborates closely with families to quickly identify and address barriers to attendance. By analyzing attendance and tardiness trends, Allegiant Prep has enhanced its communication with families and provides targeted support whenever possible.

“We assume the best about our families. It’s not typical that our families are just being lazy. We found out that some parents thought that arrival started at 8:00 when actually, arrival starts at 7:30 and you’re tardy at 8. We’ve had to work on getting better in consistently communicating with our families, not just on the front end but sending reminders about our attendance expectations and our policies.” —School Leader

“We’ve had situations where a parent’s work schedule is earlier than our arrival time so we’ve made adjustments to be able to allow that specific student into the building to help in a classroom in order for them to be here. We do what we have to do whenever we can.” —School Leader

“We have some students who are chronically sick. That’s been a barrier. We ask that after three days there’s a letter from a doctor but we’ve found out that some of our families don’t have a doctor.” —School Leader

“We reach out to families when we notice an attendance trend to see if there are any barriers that we are not aware of. Sometimes families have a housing situation or fall into hard times so we can provide support like bus passes. We don’t want to slap parents on the wrist, we try to mitigate barriers.” —School Leader

SUMMARY

“If I had a magic wand, our students would have more comprehensive access to health care, every school would have access to public transportation, and affordable, reliable, and consistent housing. I’ve seen schools that have a food bank in their school. I would love to have something like that!” —School Leader

Although Allegiant Prep’s chronic absenteeism rate remains above the statewide average, the school achieved a significant improvement from 2023 to 2024, reducing the rate by over six percentage points. This progress reflects Allegiant Prep’s efforts to foster a culture of belonging and student agency, diligently track attendance metrics as part of its commitment to continuous improvement, and work collaboratively with parents and families to identify and overcome barriers to attendance.





Enlace Academy

GRADE LEVELS SERVED: K–8



BACKGROUND

ENLACE ACADEMY, founded in 2013 with an initial enrollment of just 65 students, has experienced remarkable growth, reaching over 650 students by October 2024. This rapid expansion reflects the school’s deep commitment to community engagement, which lies at the heart of its success. The school’s mascot, the jaguar, is a symbol of the Mayan protector of the community, embodying Enlace’s mission to foster strong connections with the diverse neighborhood it serves. Located in the International Marketplace, Enlace Academy supports a predominantly immigrant population and provides a high-quality education for students in grades K–8.

Approximately 80% of Enlace’s student body identifies as Latinx, including students who also identify with another race. Through its intentional focus on cultural representation and community collaboration, Enlace Academy continues to be a vital resource for the families it serves.

“Enlace Academy cultivates the intellect, fosters the character, and ignites the imagination of our students so they can become leaders who choose their own futures in high school, college, and beyond!”

CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM RATES

Chronic absenteeism in Indiana has more than doubled over the past decade, rising from 8.1% in 2013 to 17.8% in 2024. Enlace Academy experienced its highest chronic absenteeism rates during the COVID-19 pandemic, with levels peaking between 32% and 34% from 2020 to 2022.

In response, the school’s leadership and teaching staff implemented targeted interventions to address attendance barriers and reduce chronic absenteeism. By 2024, these efforts proved successful, with Enlace Academy achieving a chronic absenteeism rate of 16.1%, much lower than the state average.

ADDRESSING CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM

When we asked Enlace Academy how they address chronic absenteeism, the answer was clear:

“We have very close relationships with the majority of our families.”
—School Leader

Enlace Academy was founded on the belief that all children can learn. This principle is brought to life through the school’s core value of Lead with Love, which emphasizes cultivating authentic relationships while pairing high expectations with high levels of support. Since its founding in 2013, Enlace has woven relationship-building into its culture, consistently reaping the benefits of its unwavering dedication to students and their families.

“Our staff members entrust their own children to our school, embodying the mindset that we want to lead schools that are best for all kids—including our own. This perspective fosters a genuine connection with parents. In conversations, we can honestly say, ‘My

child is in a classroom alongside yours. Every decision we make is one I hold myself accountable to, not just as a school leader but also as a parent.’ This shared experience creates a powerful sense of responsibility and trust.”—School Leader

At Enlace Academy, low rates of chronic absenteeism are achieved through an emphasis on a **positive school culture and loving relationships, shared responsibility for identifying and addressing barriers swiftly, and creating supportive external partnerships** to alleviate student and family barriers.

“Our parents see themselves in us. They confide in us. They trust us.”—SCHOOL LEADER



WHAT WE HEARD

Positive School Culture and Loving Relationships

Enlace Academy is dedicated to fostering a strong school culture and meaningful relationships with students and their families. This commitment is reflected through intentional efforts in staff representation, consistent communication, and active community engagement. To ensure racial and cultural representation, Enlace prioritizes hiring staff—including administrators, leaders, and teachers—who reflect the diversity of their student body. With a majority of students identifying as Latinx or Hispanic, the school has deliberately recruited Latinx and Hispanic staff to create a more inclusive and relatable environment. The quotes below are from Enlace Academy School Leaders:

“We know what’s going on with each family so we’re able to support them with any specific problems or issues that they may be encountering. The attendance report will come out and Stephanie (School Leader) can look at it and she can tell you, specifically for every student, the reason why they’re not in the building.”—Managing Director of Operations

“I’ve worked in many schools where the parent events are all about academics and we don’t really think about the negative experiences some of our families may have had with school. Sometimes that’s why parents don’t come to school. We host family events every month that are all about bringing our community together. We don’t force families to come sit down and be lectured at about the next big thing. We celebrate and honor our families, we bring them into the school. Our families lead events in our school. When we do need to talk to them about something serious, they come because we’ve already established this sense of community. They know we’ve got their backs.”

“School culture and establishing standard protocols for attendance goes a long way. We take attendance seriously and tie that into our evaluation rubric for all of our staff. Everyone in the building is responsible for student attendance.”

“Representation in our school really matters. We intentionally sought after Latinx leadership to be the face of the school and build strong relationships with parents. We sometimes think that the teachers need to be representative of the kids. For the parents, it’s our school leadership. Our parents need to see themselves as well. That’s important and we don’t minimize that.”

Shared Responsibility for Identifying and Addressing Barriers Swiftly

Enlace Academy tackles chronic absenteeism through a shared responsibility approach and a well-defined attendance protocol, updated in 2020 to address challenges stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic. Like many schools, Enlace saw a significant rise in chronic absenteeism during this period and responded by forming a comprehensive, cross-departmental committee to address the issue.

The committee includes representatives from key roles such as the School Leader, Managing Director of Operations, Office Manager, McKinney-Vento Liaison, Family Engagement Coordinator, Social Workers, and School Counselors. Teachers also play a critical role by promptly identifying and flagging student attendance concerns, ensuring early intervention and support. This collaborative effort underscores the school's commitment to reducing absenteeism and supporting student success. The following quotes are from Enlace Academy's Leadership Team:

"We meet every Wednesday as a committee. We keep all attendance data in a tracker, so it's easy to see which students are having attendance issues. Everyone knows what their role is, from the teachers to the Attendance Committee. For example, a teacher calls after two days of absences. Following those calls, the teacher sends student information to the Attendance Committee." —School Leader

"A couple of years ago, after COVID, the Operations Team was the only one really pursuing the goal of reducing absenteeism. We realized we all need to be on the same page. If you see a student that's not showing up to your classroom two days in a row, you should wonder where your student is at." —Managing Director of Operations

"When I came over in 2022, we shifted our evaluation framework. We broke everyone's evaluation down into three different components. Everyone has the school-wide component on their dashboard. Everybody has the ten percent evaluation weight of student attendance and parent-teacher conferences. Everyone's held accountable for meeting that goal. If we get our 95% attendance rate and we meet our parent teacher conference goal, you get highly effective in that domain."
—School Leader

Creating Supportive External Partnerships

In order to better support the families facing attendance barriers, Enlace Academy relies on their partnerships with external organizations. While the most important partnership is with students' families, some additional external partnerships and programs include: Project One Love (the afterschool partner); Hop, Skip, Drive (a transportation partner); and the Boys and Girls Club.

"We started a partnership with Hop, Skip, Drive, which is like an Uber for schools. This is a safe transportation service for our families, specifically for McKinney-Vento families that are struggling to get to school because of transportation, financial or living situation issues. They pick students up at their home, regardless of where the home is located. They drop them off after school as well." —School Leader



“We have Project One Love, which is a before and after school program. The school is open starting at 6:30am. They also stay after school until 5:30pm. In addition to before and after care, they also provide preschool for younger siblings which is being hosted here in our school.” —School Leader

“While we have Project One Love, we have some families who need care until 6:30pm. That’s where the Boys and Girls Club came in. They were the only partner that could stay open until 6:30 pm. What we noticed was, parents were getting off work at 6 pm. It takes them 30 min to get to the school from work. There are families that literally get here every evening at 6:30 pm so we’ve intentionally placed the students who need that service in the club.” —School Leader

SUMMARY

*“I feel like there’s not a science to reducing chronic absenteeism for us. There really isn’t. It’s relationship building, knowing your families, and looking at the data.”
—School Leader*

Enlace Academy is deeply committed to meeting the needs of its students and families. Open to all students living in Indianapolis, the school operates with the guiding principle: *“We strive to build a school that’s great for our own kids.”*

While Enlace works tirelessly to provide essential resources, they envision expanding offerings in critical areas such as transportation and health services. Partnerships and resources often come with significant costs, but the school recognizes the transformative impact additional funding could have—particularly in supporting McKinney-Vento students and ensuring they can attend school consistently. Through their unwavering commitment to *Leading with Love*, Enlace Academy continues to serve as a trusted partner and advocate for the students and families in their community.





Herron Preparatory Academy

GRADE LEVELS SERVED: K-8



BACKGROUND

HERRON PREPARATORY ACADEMY, ESTABLISHED IN AUGUST 2021, provides education for students from kindergarten through 2nd grade, with plans to expand annually until it becomes a K-8 institution. It is part of the Herron Classical Schools network, which offers a classical liberal arts curriculum aimed at preparing students for high school and future academic success.

Founded in response to the demand for high-quality K-8 education in Indianapolis' urban core, Herron Preparatory Academy holds a charter from the City of Indianapolis Mayor's Office of Education Innovation, awarded unanimously by the Indianapolis Charter School Board in 2019.

The school is committed to fostering a supportive learning environment for its diverse student body, a mission rooted in the broader vision of Herron High School, which has its origins in 2003 under the leadership of Joanna Beatty Taft. The founders aimed to create accessible, quality education in urban neighborhoods, emphasizing best practices and inclusive educational approaches.

CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM RATES

While Indiana's statewide chronic absenteeism rate stands at 17.8%, schools within the Indianapolis Public Schools (IPS) boundary face an average rate exceeding 30%. In contrast, Herron Preparatory Academy has achieved a significantly lower rate of just 12%, well below both the state and IPS averages.

When asked about the strategies behind their consistently high attendance rates, school leaders highlighted their focus on **cultivating strong relationships with students and families, establishing clear attendance expectations to foster a culture of success, and addressing barriers through targeted, strategic interventions**. This holistic approach has been key to their success in promoting regular attendance

WHAT WE HEARD

Building Bridges: Cultivating Strong Relationships with Students and Families

At Herron Preparatory Academy, fostering solid relationships between students, families, and the school community is at the heart of its approach to minimizing chronic absenteeism. Educators prioritize creating a welcoming environment where students feel valued and connected. Regular communication with families ensures that they are engaged in their children's education and aware of attendance expectations. Teachers and staff actively acknowledge students' presence and achievements, making them aware that they are missed when absent. This supportive network not only encourages students to attend school consistently but also helps to establish a sense of belonging, motivating them to prioritize their education.

“Effective communication is paramount for fostering partnerships with our families, emphasizing our intentionality in partnering with them in their students’ success.”
—School Leader

“Cultural dynamics play a significant role in student motivation. The strength of relationships profoundly influences students’ desire to attend school, as they feel valued and missed by both their teachers and peers.”—School Leader

“Creating an enriching educational culture and climate involves intentional efforts to cultivate environments where students are eager to engage, thrive, and collaborate with both their peers and dedicated staff members.”—School Leader

“This year, we have implemented a school-wide recitation, referred to as ‘daily commencement,’ which offers students a consistent opportunity to see themselves as integral members of the classroom and school community. This practice aims to foster a sense of belonging through repeated affirmations and inclusive actions.”—School Leader

Culture of Success: Instilling Clear Attendance Expectations

Herron Preparatory Academy thrives on a robust school culture that centers around clear attendance expectations. From the moment students and families

enroll, they receive a comprehensive handbook that outlines the importance of regular attendance and the routines associated with it. The school holds discussions and workshops to review these expectations, reinforcing a culture of accountability. Regular follow-ups with students who miss 5, 10, and more days promote awareness and support, allowing students to understand the significance of consistent attendance. This structured environment fosters a sense of responsibility and encourages students to develop positive attendance habits, contributing to one of the lowest chronic absenteeism rates in the area. The quotes below are from Herron Prep Academy’s School Leader:

“Establishing clear expectations regarding attendance is fundamental. Our Family Handbook, accessible online, articulates a precise definition of attendance and underscores its significance. We emphasize that consistent attendance is crucial for student learning; if students are not present, they cannot fully engage in the educational experience.”

“We set our expectations early in the academic year and reinforce them through a systematic approach. For instance, at five, 10, and 15 absences, families receive notifications via our student information system. These correspondences, accompanied by daily attendance alerts, inform parents about their children’s tardiness or absence from school.”



“Today, I engaged in a conversation with a parent who expressed that she had never encountered a school that prioritizes discussions on culture to the extent we do.”

offer families insights into their students’ grades, behavior, and attendance. This initiative fosters engagement and provides a platform for parents to ask questions and seek clarification.”

“Each week, our leadership team convenes to review attendance data, allowing us to allocate outreach responsibilities based on the specific contexts surrounding students’ absences.” —SCHOOL LEADER



SUMMARY

Herron Preparatory Academy has effectively reduced chronic absenteeism and boosted student outcomes by fostering a supportive educational environment centered on strong relationships with students and their families. The school emphasizes cultural dialogue, making families feel valued and engaged, while clearly defined attendance expectations in their Family Handbook reinforce the significance of regular attendance. Their proactive approach includes systematic notifications about absences and weekly reviews of attendance data by the leadership team, promoting collaborative problem-solving tailored to individual student needs. This commitment to a community-oriented culture of high expectations enables Herron to create an inclusive atmosphere where every child can thrive and feel a sense of belonging.

Collaborative Solutions: Addressing Attendance Barriers through Intervention

To further enhance student attendance, Herron Preparatory Academy implements a proactive Attendance Intervention Plan. This includes identifying key staff members responsible for monitoring attendance and organizing weekly meetings to discuss any barriers students may face in attending school. Through collaborative problem-solving, the team develops tailored interventions to assist students and families in overcoming obstacles that may hinder attendance. A clear system for follow-up ensures that students receive the necessary support and that the effectiveness of interventions is continuously evaluated. This dedicated approach allows Herron Prep to address attendance issues promptly and effectively, fostering an environment where students feel encouraged to attend school regularly. The quotes below are from Herron Prep Academy’s School Leader:

“Through these team meetings, we can effectively triage various reasons for student absences and assign the most appropriate team member to provide targeted support to families.”

“This year, we have leveraged PowerSchool to automate our weekly scholar updates, which are concise one-page reports that



Indiana Math and Science Academy - West

GRADE LEVELS SERVED: K-8



THE INDIANA MATH AND SCIENCE ACADEMY (IMSA) WEST, located on the west side of Indianapolis, opened its doors in 2007. It is part of Concept Schools, a network of charter schools founded in Ohio in 1999. **Concept Schools** operates 34 school campuses across seven states, with a core focus on STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) education. IMSA West currently serves more than 550 students in grades K-8. For the past three years, the school has held the distinction of being a **certified STEM school** by the Indiana Department of Education. This certification is awarded through a rigorous process that recognizes schools for offering a comprehensive, high-quality STEM curriculum and for seamlessly integrating STEM principles across all subjects and grade levels.

When IMSA West first opened its doors, many families chose to enroll in search of a positive alternative to the schools their children were assigned based on their residential locations. Parents were hopeful for better educational options. Today, however, the majority of IMSA West's enrollment is driven by word of mouth, a testament to the school's success in fulfilling the promises it made to families when it first opened in 2007.

"When I was doing orientations back then, people were coming from the standpoint of logistics or they were disgruntled about their experiences at another school. Now, they're coming because of what they've heard about our school. Family members, community members, friends, whatever the case, they've heard about how we've helped someone else, and they're wanting to be a part of that." —Assistant Principal

CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM RATES

During the 2022-2023 school year, IMSA West reported an absenteeism rate of 22.6%, higher than the state average of 19.2%. However, the school made significant improvements in the following year, reducing its chronic absenteeism rate to just 15.1%, well below the state average and surpassing the performance of many schools statewide. This notable reduction demonstrates the school's ongoing commitment to improving student engagement and attendance.

ADDRESSING CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM

IMSA tackles chronic absenteeism by **proactively**

monitoring attendance and responding swiftly, fostering a school culture of care and support, and balancing both rigor and fun making school a place students want to be every day.

WHAT WE HEARD

Proactive Attendance Monitoring and Swift Response

IMSA addresses chronic absenteeism by implementing robust attendance policies, tracking systems, and responding quickly to attendance issues. This proactive approach ensures early intervention and support for students facing attendance challenges.

“Every week I pull a report of who missed within the past week of school. I maintain a spreadsheet of our entire student body and I’m tracking the number of days that they’ve been absent both excused and unexcused, it doesn’t matter.” —Assistant Principal

“We have a system set up for communication. First, they’re getting an automatic call when their student is absent. At three days, they get an email from me that just reiterates what our attendance policy is. Once a student hits six days of absence, they’ll be contacted by Mr. Terrell’s office for a parent conference.”
—Assistant Principal

“Our goal is to have an attendance rate of at least 95 percent or better. So, if we fall below the 95 percent then we’re definitely looking to see what’s going on to try to get back to that point or higher. So, I think the eyes on the data every week is critical.”
—Assistant Principal

“We have a dashboard for our Board of Directors and we track attendance even on our board dashboard.”

—SCHOOL LEADER



“We have families who are laborers. For example, one family, the mother and the father were both working as laborers and doing some things with flooring. Their job took them out of the state, and their children weren’t in the building. So that’s just one example of us finding out reasons behind the attendance issue so we can find solutions, not excuses.” —Assistant Principal

A School Culture of Care and Support

At IMSA, a strong culture of care fosters meaningful relationships between students, families, and staff. This supportive environment helps students and teachers feel valued, connected, and motivated to attend school regularly.

“It comes down to the details and it starts with caring about our students and our staff.” —School Leader

“We noticed lunch duty was a burden to our teachers so we took away their lunch duties. It’s all the little things we do in our building. Our students come into the school with a smile on their face because our teachers want to be here. All of those little things matter. We want students to be happy that they’re here.”

“Our teachers are just making the effort with the students. They will contact their parents. They reach out. So many of our teachers have their parents’ phone numbers right in their phones. They’ll stop and call them right away if they notice something unusual or different with attendance.”

“In general, our teachers can schedule any field trips they want. If there’s a point to them, we want them to participate. We’ve had teachers who come here and say they’ve never been able to do that before. This is just a different place. Our teachers feel that and they want to be here.”
—Assistant Principal

“In our school we’ve had a lot of students who are coming from Nigeria. We’ve started hiring staff members who speak the language and know the culture and can help with the translations. I think that helps with the attendance as well because sometimes there may be cultural things that affect attendance. We’ve had families fly back to their home countries and stay there for a couple of weeks and it’s easier to address those things when you have someone who knows the culture.” —School Principal

Fostering a Balance of Academic Rigor and Fun

IMSA creates an engaging school experience by combining academic rigor with enjoyable, interactive

afterschool activities and community exposure. This balance encourages students to stay engaged and motivated, reducing absenteeism by making school an environment where students want to be.

“We’re very mindful about making sure that the learning environment is constantly conducive to learning, so we remove distractions, but the goal is to keep our students in the building, not to put our students out and we work very hard to do that.” —Assistant Principal

“Exposure matters to us. We try to show our students that life is bigger than the two mile radius that they’re used to.”
—Assistant Principal

“I think offering our students so many extracurriculars helps. That out-of-school time piece is so important. We have so many students who want to be involved in so many things that there’s just not enough days in the week for them to do it all. They have to choose sometimes between Rocketry, science club, robotics... the list goes on and on. We regularly have over 100 students after school.”
—Assistant Principal

“We rarely give out certificates for perfect attendance. It’s more just an atmosphere and students knowing that they need to be here and they want to be here.”
—Assistant Principal

“We run a program called Concept Young Scholars Program (CYSP). We do Saturday activities and a lot of field trips. It’s a year-long program for fifth through eighth grade students. We have 89 students in that program.” —Assistant Principal

SUMMARY

Indiana Math and Science Academy West combats chronic absenteeism by cultivating a school culture that supports their teachers and students. They aim to create a learning environment that is academically rigorous, supportive, and fun. The school’s leadership team tracks academic data consistently to identify and mitigate attendance concerns as they occur.

“At IMSA West, students and teachers are actually excited to be here.”
—School Leader

“If I had a magic wand there would be more people to support with addressing attendance barriers, we’d be able to offer even more programming for our students, and transportation issues wouldn’t exist.”
—School Leadership Team





Monarca Academy

GRADE LEVELS SERVED: 6–8



BACKGROUND

FOUNDED IN 2020 under the visionary leadership of Francisco Valdiosera, Felicia Sears, and Jay Castillo-Jimenez, Monarca Academy’s goal is to eliminate barriers to success for all students. Inspired by the Latino and immigrant experience, Monarca upholds three key pillars of success: *Ganas* (Perseverance), *Orgullo* (Pride), and *Comunidad* (Community).

Students at Monarca Academy benefit from a college and career preparatory program that emphasizes inquiry-based learning and a high-quality curriculum. This approach ensures that students are equipped to succeed in accelerated high school courses. Monarca opened in 2020 with 40 students and has grown to serve over 220 students in grades 6 through 8, representing more than 12 countries. In addition to academic preparation, students engage in identity development and cultivate a strong sense of agency, empowering them to create positive change within their communities.

*“We knew we wanted a school where the foundational values were *Ganas*, representing tenacity, *Guio*, which stands for pride, and *Comunidad* to represent the importance of community. And so we built our charter around those three foundational values, encapsulating our academic model.” —Executive Director*

REDUCING CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM AT MONARCA ACADEMY

In the 2023–2024 school year, Monarca Academy achieved a chronic absenteeism rate of just 13.2 percent, significantly lower than the state average of 17.8 percent for Indiana. This achievement is particularly notable given that the school opened in 2020, during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Monarca’s leadership team attributes their success to a few key factors: **creating a culturally relevant and supportive school community, implementing targeted and individualized outreach efforts, and teaching student agency and responsibility.** These strategies have played a crucial role in keeping absenteeism rates well below the state average.

WHAT WE HEARD

Creating a Culturally Relevant Community

Monarca Academy strives to create a welcoming community that values and embraces the diverse cultural backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives of its students and families. By fostering an environment where individuals feel seen, heard, and respected, the school encourages greater student engagement and attendance.

To promote cultural awareness, Monarca’s leaders and educators implement strategies that include education, training, and open dialogue on diversity. The school celebrates a variety of cultural traditions, holidays, and languages, enriching the learning environment and helping students appreciate one another’s differences. By providing platforms for students to share their unique cultural experiences, they foster mutual respect, belonging, and understanding.

“I believe the biggest reason students want to come here is because they love their teachers. We have an environment where the students feel safe and welcome and where identity is something they talk about constantly, not separate from academics but as a part of academics.” —Executive Director

“There are some students who speak Spanish and are still struggling to navigate the English speaking world. So, all of those worlds are represented here in our staff and in our school. We have diversity within our teaching staff... We have English speaking teachers who don't speak Spanish. We have bilingual teachers and staff members who are not fully bilingual. We have that representation at our school and I do believe it matters.”
—Executive Director



To ensure effective engagement, Monarca uses data and feedback to understand how individuals prefer to communicate—whether through email, face-to-face conversations, or formal versus informal settings. This personalized communication helps reinforce the importance of attendance while making interactions more inviting. Addressing individuals by name and recognizing their specific needs or contributions fosters a sense of connection with their parents and families.

“The data shows that representation matters. So, I do think that representation has a lot to do with our success. We try to make sure that our teachers and our leaders are a reflection of our students.”
—EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Frequent Targeted and Individualized Outreach

Monarca Academy believes that effective communication is most impactful when it is tailored to the unique needs, preferences, and circumstances of each individual. By treating parents and students as individuals rather than just members of a group, the school builds strong rapport and sets the expectation for clear, meaningful communication. This personalized approach enables their school team to provide targeted support where it's needed most.

“One of the things that I try to do is communicate with parents all of the time. I have a WhatsApp group because a lot of our parents use WhatsApp. Our parents and families receive communication in multiple forms. They receive emails but they also receive the generated text that they get through PowerSchool.”
—Executive Director



“Power School has an automated system, but I know that a lot of parents just ignore automated phone calls and so when I start to worry about a student, I will make a personal phone call or text.” —Executive Director

“Every time I remind parents about the importance of attendance, the next day, we always have better attendance. So, I have to remind them when I start to see a slip in our attendance percentage. I check attendance every day.”
—Executive Director

“So, about 95% of our student population is Hispanic. About 98% are Latino. The term, ‘Hispanic’ only refers to our Spanish-speaking families. ‘Latino’ refers to families that speak other languages that have the Latin root, which Haitian, Creole being French comes from Latin. Then Brazil, we have a Brazilian student, they speak Portuguese which also comes from the Latin root. We work hard to be inclusive even in our language within our school.” —Executive Director

“My goal is to make students more independent, especially as they begin approaching high school.”
—EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Teaching Students Agency and Responsibility

Monarca Academy is committed to fostering student agency and responsibility, teaching students that their attendance and learning are personal responsibilities. As part of their long-term goal to expand to serve grades 6 through 12, the school has already begun guiding middle school students toward greater independence. By encouraging students to take ownership of their actions, particularly in relation to school attendance, Monarca aims to empower them to be proactive in their education, rather than relying solely on their parents. This focus on student

accountability lays the foundation for their future academic success and growth.

“It’s important that they start having their own agency and their own independence.”
—Executive Director

“I tell parents if they’re having issues around transportation their students have the skills to help track their own bus. If they can make TikTok videos, they can get on an app and track their own bus. I tell parents to put some of the responsibility onto the students.”
—Executive Director

SUMMARY

Monarca Academy significantly reduced its chronic absenteeism rate from 27.7% to 13.2% from the 2022–2023 to the 2023–2024 school year. They credit their success to their school culture where students feel seen, valued, and supported. The dedicated team of teachers and staff, who reflect the cultural diversity of the student body, play a key role in creating this environment. Monarca monitors attendance daily and maintains regular, personalized communication with parents to ensure relationships are maintained and parents and families remain engaged in their child’s schooling experience. The school promotes student agency and responsibility in an effort to prepare students not only for high school but for lifelong success.



Christel House Indianapolis

GRADE LEVELS SERVED: K-12

BACKGROUND

CHRISTEL HOUSE INDIANAPOLIS is one of Indiana’s oldest operating charter schools, with over 20 years of experience serving the Indianapolis community. The network serves more than 2,000 students across seven schools and three campuses. Christel House South and Watanabe share a campus on the south side of Indianapolis, offering a comprehensive range of services, including a Day Early Learning program, a K-12 school, and a Dropout Recovery School adult high school, to support individuals from birth through age 70.

Christel House is dedicated to delivering a rigorous, high-quality education, exemplified by an outstanding achievement: for the past five years, 100% of Watanabe graduates have been accepted into four-year universities. The school has also established a unique partnership with the University of Indianapolis, providing graduates who earn an Academic Honors Diploma with full tuition scholarships. This partnership helps eliminate the financial barriers that often hinder college access for students from low-income households.

Despite expanding from a smaller facility that served approximately 175 high school students to a larger campus now accommodating approximately 500 high schoolers, Christel House remains dedicated to fostering a close-knit, “small school” atmosphere where every student feels like they belong.

ADDRESSING CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM

Chronic absenteeism is a statewide challenge affecting nearly all grade levels, with high schools experiencing the highest rates. Data from the Indiana Department of Education reveals that 21% of 9th-grade students, 24% of 10th graders, 26% of 11th graders, and 33% of seniors are chronically absent. Recognizing the severity of this issue, Christel House Watanabe has identified chronic absenteeism as a key area of focus moving forward and is committed to implementing more intentional strategies to address and reduce student absenteeism.

WHAT WE HEARD

Christel House outlined three key initiatives aimed at reducing absenteeism across their schools: being **relentless at fostering relationships and providing Whole-Child support, implementing restorative**

practices in place of suspension, and **solving for barriers and providing ongoing support to students five years post graduation.**

Relentless about Relationships and Supporting the Whole Child

The Christel House team is committed to building strong, positive relationships with students and providing holistic support to meet their academic, social, and emotional needs. Beginning in 9th grade, students participate in a daily advisory program, remaining with the same trusted adult mentor throughout their four years of high school. This continuity fosters meaningful connections between teachers and students, ensuring that every student has a dedicated advocate they can turn to for guidance and support at any time. The following quotes are from the Christel House Indianapolis leadership team.

"It makes a difference when you have an adult that you want to see, an adult that you have trust with, an adult you don't want to let down ... there's a lot of value in that relationship."

"We use a student-centered coaching model when it comes to coaching and evaluating our teachers. We're looking at the student experience, not just teacher actions. We want to see how teacher actions are impacting student outcomes. We ask, 'What are you learning today and how do you know you've mastered it?' We don't just focus on what the teacher is doing, but how students are experiencing what the teacher is doing."

"We've maintained a pretty solid advisory structure with our students. We strive to keep each advisory under twenty students. Advisors have relationships with their students and serve as the main point of contact from freshman to senior year. Last year we had a 98% teacher retention rate which makes it possible to keep this loop going when we're able to retain our staff."

"We use a software called Talking Points which is an amazing app for schools. You can text directly from the app and it comes across on the family's phone in their home language. Teachers can essentially text home very easily in any language which is really important since 52% of the families we serve are Hispanic."

"We went through our Panorama data and made sure every student could name a trusted adult. We also made sure each of our teachers knew which students named them as their trusted adult in the building."

"We really push our teachers to be Whole-Child Teachers. Relationships are key. Relationships come first."

Restorative Approaches to Student Success

Christel House has embraced restorative practices as a key strategy to keep students engaged in school and learning. This approach to student discipline prioritizes resolving conflicts and addressing behavior in ways that allow students to remain in the classroom whenever their actions do not pose a danger or significant disruption to the learning environment. Since implementing these practices, the school has achieved a substantial reduction in the number of instructional days lost to disciplinary infractions.

"We really believe in restorative practices. We try to avoid reactive and exclusionary discipline at all costs. At some of my previous schools I've had a lot of negative experiences with students having long suspensions and just not coming back."

"The youth violence in our city is ridiculous and I think so much of that could be solved if we solve for attendance. This is why we've resorted to restorative practices."



“We try to think about what is the behavior and is the suspension really going to correct that behavior. We try to get to the root cause behind the behavior and give a consequence that fits the infraction. For instance, if a student gets caught vaping, their first consequence is probably taking a tobacco succession course. We really try to be targeted with the offenses and the consequences.”

“If they’re not causing a danger or a distraction to the learning environment, then they should be here. We want them here.”

“One of our goals this year is to better implement restorative practices to reduce missed class time due to discipline. Last year, we averaged a missed 42 days per month due to discipline. This year we’re averaging just 15 days per month and we’re working on lowering that!”

Solving for Barriers and Providing Ongoing College and Career Support for Students Post Graduation

Christel House’s unwavering commitment to building strong, positive relationships with students and their families enables continuous, open communication about the challenges and concerns families face. This proactive approach allows the school to address and often alleviate barriers to student success. For example, Christel House provides discounted IndyGo bus passes to mitigate transportation challenges, offers families access to their onsite food pantry, provides opportunities for adults aged 18 and older to re-engage through their Dropout Recovery programming, and even supports students with their college and career goals five years post graduation.

“Our Social Worker and a school administrator will do a home visit if students are missing from school for too long.”

“We have social workers on staff K–12 who help connect families to the resources they need in order to get here. We’ve caught things through our advisory time like families not having enough gas money to drive their

kid to school for the week. We’ve been able to offer resources like gas gift cards.”

“Having our Dropout Recovery (DORS) program and the flexibility in that allows us to offer a resource within our network that some students need. We can tell when students are struggling to re-engage, and we can offer that resource.”

“We have our College and Careers Program which has a dedicated College and Careers Administrator whose job it is to follow students for five years after graduation. They form relationships with students during high school to determine their goals and next steps, then match them to experiences that reflect their goals. We do industry tours and students self-select into the tours that align with their future career goals. They know they’re going to have someone there to walk them through the transition process when they graduate from our schools.”

“We’re lucky enough to be an IPS innovation school so we get the discounted IndyGo passes for our students.”

SUMMARY

“I don’t know that there’s any magic getting done. I think it’s just being intentional and relentless about relationships.”

Christel House is dedicated to addressing chronic absenteeism through a holistic approach that includes building strong relationships, providing whole-child supports, implementing restorative practices as alternatives to suspension, and collaboratively addressing barriers to attendance. These efforts include offering a free high school option for students and adults aged 18 and older, ensuring access to education for all.

When reflecting on the future of attendance support, the school leader shared, “I wish there was a learning community focused on schools working together to address attendance challenges. We have so much work ahead of us, and collaborating to share best practices could help us all create a more successful future for our city.”



Advancing the Work: Insights and Strategies for the Future

WHILE THE SCHOOLS FEATURED IN THIS REPORT were excited to be recognized, many emphasized that their work is ongoing and perpetually advancing. With each new cohort of students and families comes fresh challenges, particularly in maintaining consistent and effective communication. The schools acknowledged that they are not perfect and regularly adapt their practices to meet the evolving needs of their communities.

Although the report highlights best practices for addressing chronic absenteeism, several common challenges were identified by all schools. These include **inconsistent student transportation** and the financial burden of providing transportation for students experiencing special circumstances (including those who are McKinney-Vento eligible).

“I tell parents if they’re having issues around transportation their students have the skills to help track their own bus. ...Transportation can be a problem at times.” —Monarca Academy, Executive Director

“We started a partnership with Hop, Skip, Drive, which is like an Uber for schools. This is a safe transportation service for our families, specifically for McKinney-Vento families that are struggling to get to school because of

transportation, financial or living situation issues. They pick students up at their home, regardless of where the home is located. They drop them off after school as well. We could use more of these sorts of services but they’re so expensive.” —Enlace Academy, School Leader

“I tell parents if they’re having issues around transportation their students have the skills to help track their own bus. ...Transportation can be a problem at times.” —Monarca Academy, Executive Director

“If I could wave a magic wand, we would have access to transportation. That’s just such a huge component of it, especially when I think about some of the kiddos who were chronically absent last year. ... Whether that’s the reliability of a family car or door to door bus service, which we don’t offer. We have our own transportation with satellite stops but the students who would benefit the most would need additional access to transportation.” —Herron Preparatory Academy, School Leader

Additionally, **shifting student demographics**, especially an **influx of students immigrating to the**

United States from a variety of countries, present challenges related to varying school attendance requirements and family expectations, including prolonged absences for international travel due to extended family obligations.

“In our school we’ve had a lot of students who are coming from Nigeria. We’ve started hiring staff members who speak the language and know the culture and can help with the translations. I think that helps with the attendance as well because sometimes there may be cultural things that affect attendance. We’ve had families fly back to their home countries and stay there for a couple of weeks and it’s easier to address those things when you have someone who knows the culture.” —Indiana Math and Science Academy West, School Principal

“We have a lot of families who have families outside of this country and are not from here. They will say to us, ‘I need to go to Mexico for two weeks. My grandma is dying’. Because their families are so far away, there tends to be longer absences for those reasons.” —Christel House Watanabe, School Leader

Schools also cited **affordable housing shortages, limited access to healthcare, and mental health barriers** as recurring issues that impact attendance.

“We have some students who are chronically sick. That’s been a barrier. We ask that after three days there’s a letter from a doctor but we’ve found out that some of our families don’t have a doctor.” —Allegiant Prep Academy, School Leader

“We’re seeing significantly more mental health challenges at our school after COVID.” —Christel House Watanabe, School Leader

Schools are proactively addressing attendance barriers within their control by **cultivating environments where students and families feel a sense of belonging, consistently tracking attendance, responding swiftly to issues, and collaborating with their community and external partners to address barriers to consistent attendance.**



CULTIVATING ENVIRONMENTS OF BELONGING

The schools featured in the report underscored the pivotal role of school culture in fostering a sense of belonging for students. They emphasized the importance of being relentless about relationships and ensuring every student knows they have a caring adult in the building. They highlighted the value of teachers and staff building strong, supportive relationships with both students and their families. These relationships create an environment where students feel comfortable sharing their successes as well as any challenges they face, including barriers to attendance. The schools stressed the importance of recruiting and retaining a diverse staff that reflects the student demographics, wherever possible, to strengthen connections and representation. Through these efforts, these schools have created environments where students and families feel welcomed and motivated to engage.

“I believe the biggest reason students want to come here is because they love their teachers. We have an environment where the students feel safe and welcome and



Enlace Academy



Herron Preparatory Academy

where identity is something they talk about constantly, not separate from academics but as a part of academics.” —Monarca Academy, Executive Director

“Our students feel like our school is safe, consistent, and predictable. They also feel like they can be held to high expectations but supported.” —Allegiant Prep Academy, School Leader

TRACKING ATTENDANCE CONSISTENTLY AND RESPONDING SWIFTLY

Schools emphasized the importance of tracking attendance data daily and implementing systems that assign clear responsibility for tracking, reporting, and addressing attendance concerns across the team. Teachers often take the lead in the initial monitoring and relationship building. Meanwhile, school leadership teams and support staff play a crucial role in regularly reviewing attendance trends and identifying resources to address barriers swiftly as part of their continuous improvement efforts. One school has integrated school-wide attendance goals into its staff evaluation process, while another tracks

and reports attendance progress to its Board of Directors, underscoring the significance of attendance in achieving overall school success.

“We have a dashboard for our Board of Directors and we track attendance even on our board dashboard.” —Indiana Math and Science Academy West, School Leader

“School culture and establishing standard protocols for attendance goes a long way. We take attendance seriously and tie that into our evaluation rubric for all of our staff. Everyone in the building is responsible for student attendance.” —Enlace Academy, School Leader

COLLABORATING WITH COMMUNITY AND EXTERNAL PARTNERS

The schools highlighted in the report emphasized the importance of viewing parents and families as genuine partners, recognizing them as essential contributors to the shared mission of providing an excellent education for every child. When families feel valued, deeply connected to the school, and trusted as co-owners

in their child’s success, meaningful collaboration emerges, enabling schools to address student needs more effectively. This trust allows schools to work closely with families to overcome challenges and secure additional resources when necessary. Whether addressing transportation barriers, housing instability, or food insecurity, these schools actively identify and utilize local resources to ensure students and families have the support they need to thrive.

“While we have Project One Love, we have some families who need care until 6:30pm. That’s where the Boys and Girls Club came in. They were the only partner that could stay open until 6:30 pm. What we noticed was, parents were getting off work at 6 pm. It takes them 30 min to get to the school from work. There are families that literally get here every evening at 6:30 pm so we’ve intentionally placed the students who need that service in the club.”—Enlace Academy, School Leader

“We reach out to families when we notice an attendance trend to see if there are any barriers that we are not aware of. Sometimes families have a housing situation or fall into hard times so we can provide support like bus passes. We don’t want to slap parents on the wrist, we try to mitigate barriers.”—Allegiant Prep Academy, School Leader

SUMMARY

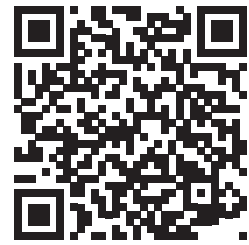
Moving forward, continued efforts to reduce chronic absenteeism will require innovative strategies, partnerships, and supportive policy changes to address the multifaceted challenges identified in this report. Schools should continue refining their approaches to communication, ensuring that families are well-informed and committed to daily school attendance. To make a lasting impact, though, policymakers and advocates must prioritize making school attendance more easily accessible for all families. This could include expanding access to free and reliable transportation for all students and alleviating the financial burden associated with the transportation needs of students experiencing vulnerable circumstances.

Considering the need for quality healthcare and the growing need for mental health support, resources to increase access to school-based counselors, community mental health services, and quality healthcare could help address one of the key barriers to regular attendance. Policies aimed at alleviating housing instability, such as increasing affordable housing options and providing rental assistance, could directly support families facing these challenges.

Finally, schools should be supported in their ongoing efforts to adapt to shifting demographics by implementing more flexible options, potentially outside of brick and mortar attendance policies, that account for the cultural and familial obligations of diverse student populations at least in rare emergency situations. By fostering a collective ecosystem of support through targeted policies and partnerships, the community can partner with schools in mitigating barriers to regular attendance ensuring every student in Indianapolis has the consistent opportunity to thrive.

Indiana Math and Science Academy – West





To read the executive summary, visit themindtrust.org/absenteeismreport or scan the QR code.



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