

Reducing Chronic Absenteeism

Peter Chen, Esq. & Cynthia Rice, Esq.

Advocates for Children of New Jersey

Chris Bruzios, Ph.D.

New Jersey Department of Education

Gregory Green & Sherri Allen

Hedgepeth Williams Middle School

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Objectives

- By the end of this presentation, you will be able to:
 1. Define “**chronic absenteeism**”
 2. **Explain** why understanding and addressing chronic absenteeism at all grade levels is critical
 3. **Understand** chronic absenteeism in the context of ESSA
 4. **Analyze** local attendance data to identify subgroups of chronically absent students and investigate causes of absence
 5. **Acquire** a set of best practices skills that will help improve student attendance in your district

Every absence hurts a student's opportunity for success

- **Absenteeism in *the early years* correlates with:**
 - **Weaker readiness skills**
 - **Long-term reading problems**
 - **Higher absenteeism rates in later grades**
 - **Higher rates of retention**
 - **Weaker social/emotional skills**

Every absence hurts a student's opportunity for success

- **Absenteeism in the later school years correlates with:**
 - **Less learning time in school**
 - **Higher rates of suspension**
 - **Higher rates of school failure**
 - **Lower GPA**
 - **Lower test proficiency**
 - **Lower graduation rate**
 - **Lower odds of reaching second year of college**

Chronic Absenteeism Defined

- **CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM** measures students who miss **10% of enrolled school days**, including excused/unexcused and suspensions
- **Average daily attendance** counts the average number of students who show up to school
- **Truancy** counts only unexcused absences

Truancy Vs. Chronic Absence

TRUANCY

- Counts only unexcused absences
- Emphasizes compliance with school rules
- Relies on legal & administrative solutions

Vs.

CHRONIC ABSENCE

- Counts all absences: excused, unexcused & suspensions
- Emphasizes academic impact of missed days
- Uses community-based, positive strategies

What does this mean?

- Based on a 180-day school year:
 - Any student who misses 18 days or more per year
 - That means about 2 days every month is considered....

CHRONICALLY ABSENT



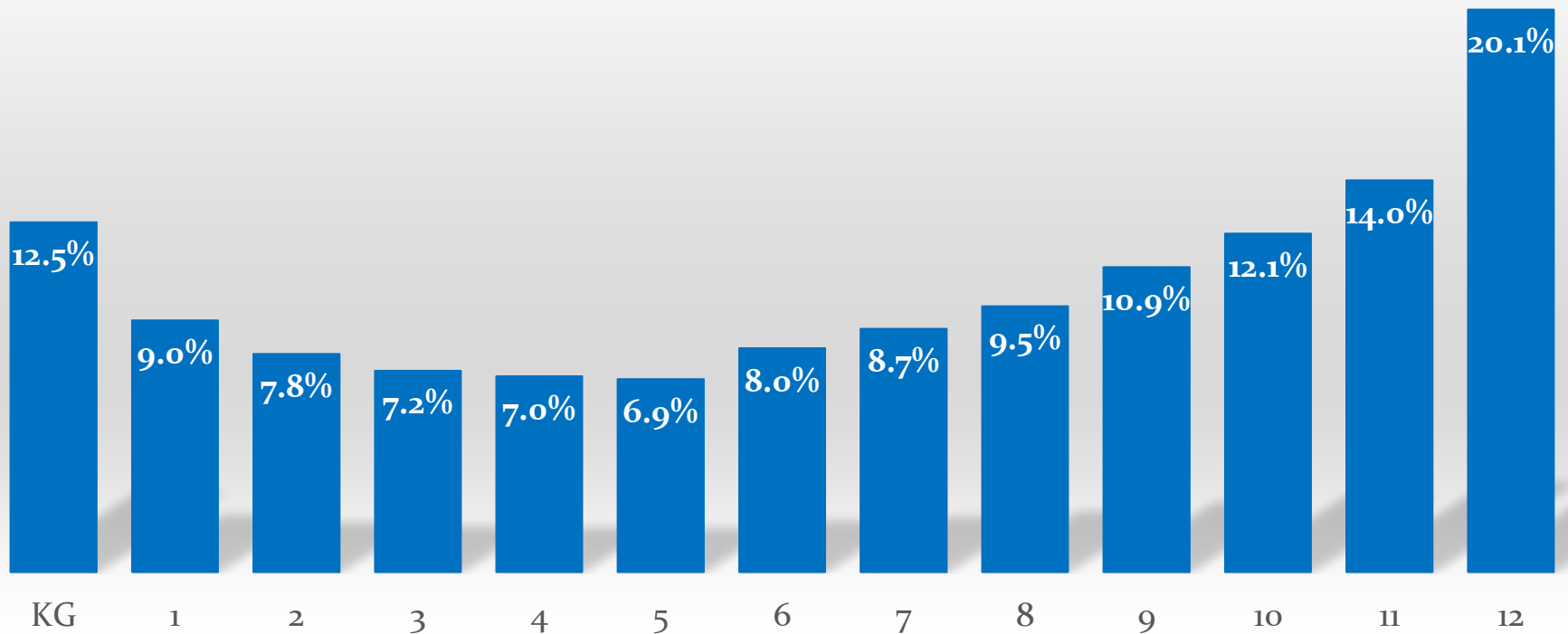
What the Data Tells Us

Chronic Absenteeism in NJ: A Snapshot (2015-16)

- About 130,000 K-12 students in New Jersey were considered “chronically absent
 - That was **10 percent** of the total student population
- More than 19,000 NJ preschool students were considered “chronically absent
 - That was **30 percent** of the total preschool student population

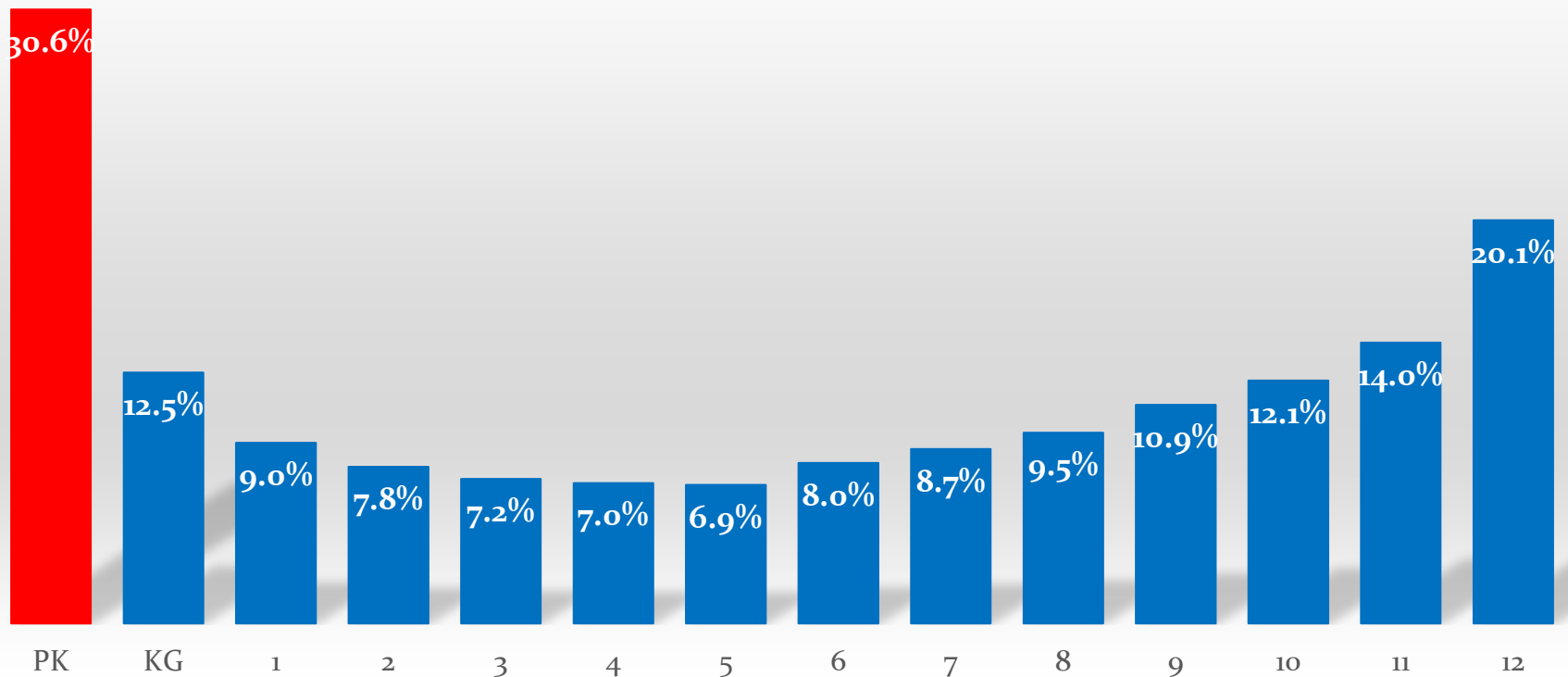
Chronic Absenteeism, by grade (K-12)

Percentage of students chronically absent by grade K-12, 2016-17

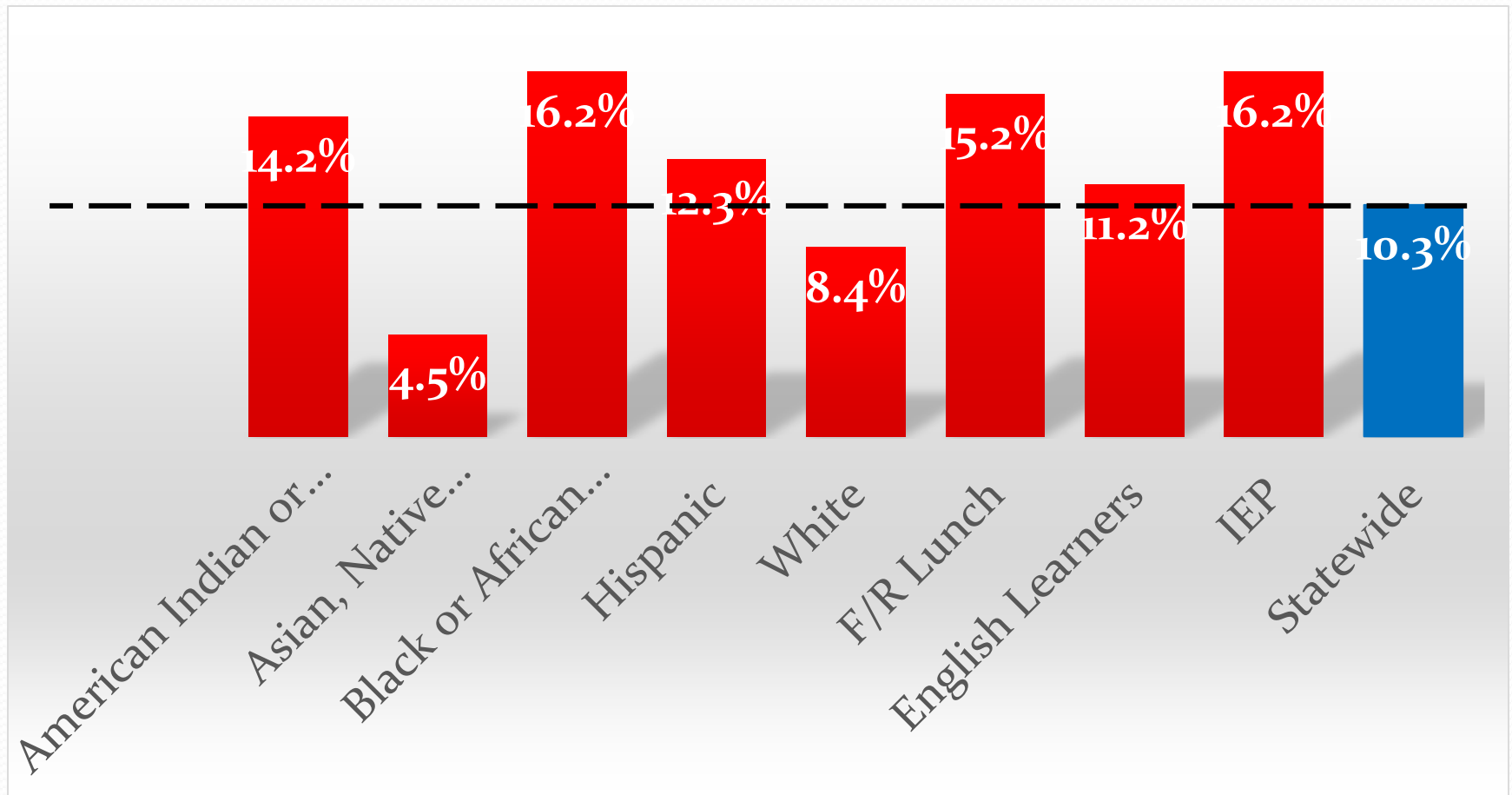


Now Add Preschool...

Percentage of students chronically absent by grade PK-12, 2016-17



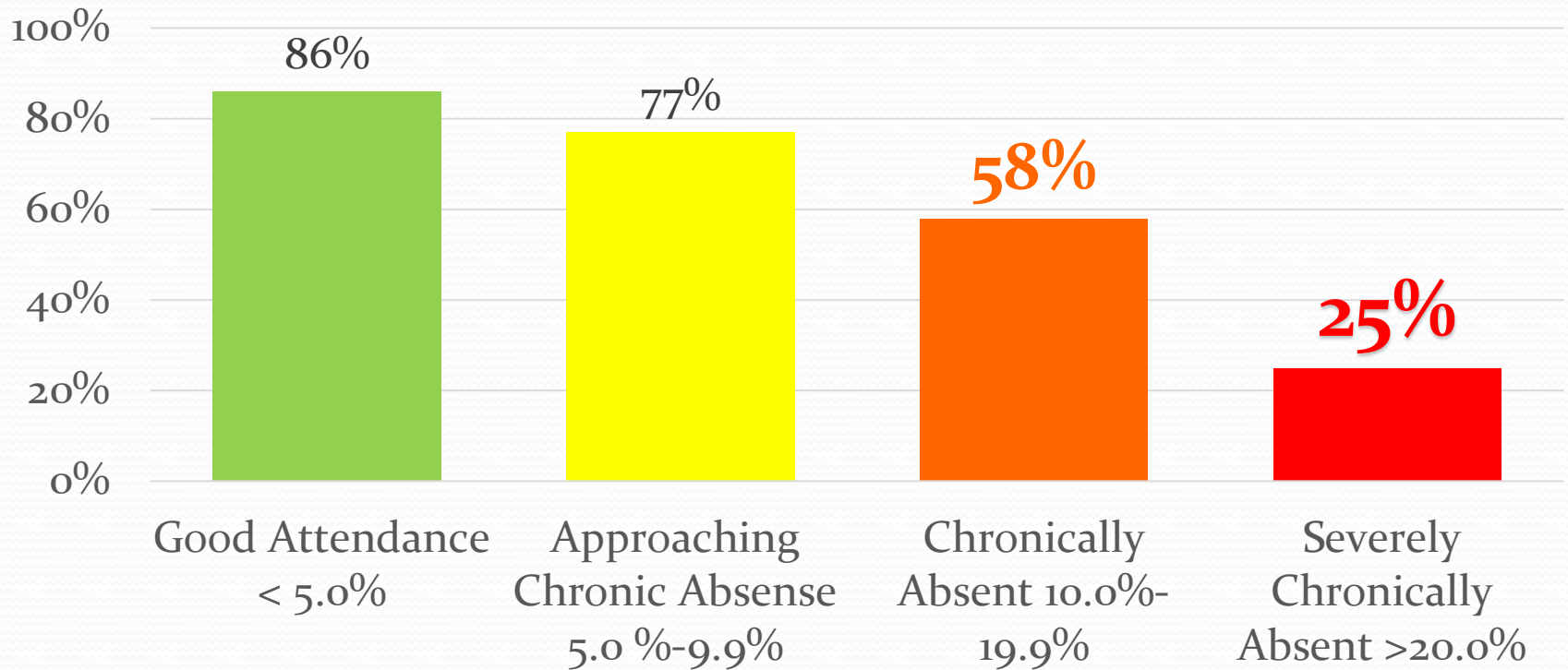
Absenteeism in Demographic Categories (K-12)



Source: NJ Dep't of Education. Categories may overlap.

The more school students miss, the more likely they are to drop out

NPS Graduation Rate in 4 years, 2015 cohort, grouped by 9th grade absenteeism status





Reactions to this data?

Special Populations

Chronic Absenteeism Rate by Special Population

	Total	Economically Disadvantaged Students	Students with Special Needs	English Language Learners
District A	8%	6%	<u>22%</u>	8%
District B	8%	12%	11%	<u>16%</u>
District C	8%	<u>20%</u>	12%	<u>16%</u>

Digging Deeper: Reasons for absences

- **For Young Students:**

- Health issues
- Unreliable transportation
- Housing Instability
- School discipline
- Parent work schedules
- PK and K: Not so important
- Safety in school and in neighborhoods
- Student/parent choice
 - Family issues

Digging Deeper: Reasons for absences

For Older Students:

- Health issues (physical and mental)**
- Student responsibilities**
- Transportation/distance from school**
- Personal safety**
- Suspensions**
- School curriculum: relevance and rigor**
- Parent disengagement**
- School policies**
- Lack of link to a trusted adult**

What motivates older students to come to school?

- **Parents**
- **Adults in school**
 - **Not just teachers! Security guards, counselors, nurses, librarians, administrators, cleaning staff, mentors**
- **Peers in school**
- **Boyfriend/girlfriend (not a small factor!)**
- **Activities/sports**
- **Engaging lessons in class**
- **Having long-term goals**

Looking at the data...

- Early and often
- Student characteristics
 - Special needs, ELL, free-reduced lunch, etc.
 - Chronic health conditions (asthma, etc.)
- What's last year's data?
- Ask "why?"
 - Health? Weather? Before/after care?
- Surveying parents/families
- Integrate into regular practice
 - Who is in charge of data?



What does your data tell you?

How do you turn your data results into action?

1. Why is the data the way it is? **Dig deeper.**
2. Now you know some of the reasons. Where does our school already provide supports for these groups of students?
3. What is your team's current response?
4. What kind of interventions could reduce those absences?
 - On School wide
 - High risk students.
5. Review—did your intervention work? What do you need to modify? Improvement cycle is key.

No one-size-fits-all solution, but there are common themes

- Need to be **intentional** about attendance strategy
 - Deliberate planning
 - Consistent, persistent implementation (can't stop messaging in November!)
- Use **data** continuously
 - Target high-absenteeism and at-risk students
 - Identify problems affecting **your specific** student population
- **Build relationships** with parents and families
 - Start outreach early
 - Messaging on importance of school
 - Be **specific** about impact of absences and action steps

Sample attendance plan

1. **School-wide** (for all students/ families)
 - a. Messaging on importance of regular attendance and the impact in missing days
 - b. Rewards for regularly attending students
 - c. Have students and parents track attendance in classroom
 - d. “We missed you; are you OK?” for all students returning from absence
 - e. Schedule of messaging on attendance through newsletters, child pickup, and text messaging/email
 - f. Include attendance goals/plan in IEP team meetings
2. **High-absence students** (>10% days absent)
 - a. Phone call check-in with parent
 - b. Comparison of student’s absence with average student
 - c. Link to services where appropriate
 - d. Home visit

Trenton and Paterson presentations

Take out your self-assessment and your data...

- What are your identified strengths?
- Where is there alignment between your strengths and attendance
- Where are there gaps?
- Where does your school need to build capacity?



Developing your team's next steps....



Whip-Around: Next Steps

What is one step you will take when you go back to your staff to address attendance issues?

Revisiting Our Objectives

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Resources

- ACNJ attendance page: <https://acnj.org/issues/school-attendance/>
- Attendance Works' Tool Kits: <http://www.attendanceworks.org/tools/>
- Every Student, Every Day: A Community Toolkit to Address and Eliminate Chronic Absenteeism:
<https://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/chronicabsenteeism/toolkit.pdf>

Any Questions???

Sherrri Allen: sallen@Trenton.k12.nj.us

Chris Bruzios: cbruzios@doe.state.nj.jus

Peter Chen: pchen@acnj.org

Gregory Green: ggreen@Trenton.k12.nj.us

Cynthia Rice: crice@acnj.org