

Building Jay County's Future

Attendance Improvement

Summary

Consistent attendance is important for school success. Yet a disturbing number of students – both in Jay County and across the State of Indiana – exhibit a high degree of unexcused absences and chronic absenteeism. Students are chronically absent when they miss more than 10 percent of school days. These absences interfere with achieving a successful educational outcome.

The data on absenteeism is troubling both in Jay County and across the state of Indiana. Statewide, nearly 20% of Indiana students are chronically absent. In Jay County, nearly 400 students had ten or more unexcused absences in the 2020-2021 school year. This is important because Indiana law considers students to be habitual truants when they have 10 or more unexcused absences in an academic year.¹

Further complicating the situation is the fact that there has been an alarming jump in this figure since the start of the pandemic – and there is little indication that those higher absentee rates will fall as the pandemic fades.

This plan is designed to significantly reduce the number of students who are chronically absent from the classroom. It will help to identify students at risk of becoming chronically absent and deliver a series of services intended to improve attendance rates.

Why Good Attendance is Important

At the core of an effective educational system is a fundamental truth: students have to be present and engaged in order to learn. Attending school regularly is important to ensuring children develop a sturdy foundation for subsequent learning.

During the early elementary years, children are gaining basic social and academic skills critical to ongoing academic success. Unless students attain these essential skills by third grade, they often require extra help to catch up and are at grave risk of eventually dropping out of school.

According to one study, low academic performance in the first-grade correlates strongly with chronic absenteeism in kindergarten.¹ Another study from Baltimore found a strong relationship between sixth-grade attendance and the percentage of students graduating on time or within a year of their expected high school graduation.²

Data from the State of Indiana affirm these conclusions. One study found that Indiana third graders who were chronically absent scored nearly 50 points lower in math and 40 points lower in reading on Indiana Statewide Testing for Educational Progress-Plus (ISTEP) tests. Students who were chronically absent through middle school scored 70 points lower in math and 35 points lower in English/language arts.³

But the negative effects of chronic absenteeism are not limited to the absent student. The educational experiences of children who attend school regularly can be diminished when teachers must divert their attention to meet the learning and social needs of children who miss substantial amounts of school.

¹ Chang, Hedy and Romero, Mariajose, *Present, Engaged and Accounted For: The Critical Importance of Addressing Chronic Absence in the Early Grades*, National Center for Children in Poverty, New York, NY, September 2008.

² Baltimore Education Research Consortium (BERC) 2011. *Destination Graduation: Sixth Grade Early Warning Indicators for Baltimore City Schools: Their Prevalence and Impact* BERC: Baltimore MD.

³ *Chronic absence hurts thousands of Indiana students' test scores, chances of graduation*, Center for Evaluation & Education Policy at Indiana University, July 2012

Chronic Absenteeism in Jay County

Rates of chronic absenteeism are tracked at the school building level, by school corporation, and for the entire state. The Indiana Department of Education defines “chronic absenteeism” as occurring when a student misses more than 10% of enrolled days during the school year (180 days).

Indiana law considers students to be habitual truants when they have 10 or more unexcused absences in an academic year - although local districts may lower that threshold when dealing with truants in their schools.

As noted in the adjacent chart, in the 2019-2020 school year, while 11.4% of students across the State were chronically absent, in Jay County the percentage was 14.2%.

As the pandemic worsened, the problem of chronic absenteeism grew more acute. On March 6, 2020, Governor Eric Holcomb issued an executive order declaring a public health emergency due to COVID-19, and on March 19 ordered all Indiana public schools to close through the end of May of 2020. While these restrictions have eased, student absenteeism has not declined to pre-pandemic levels.

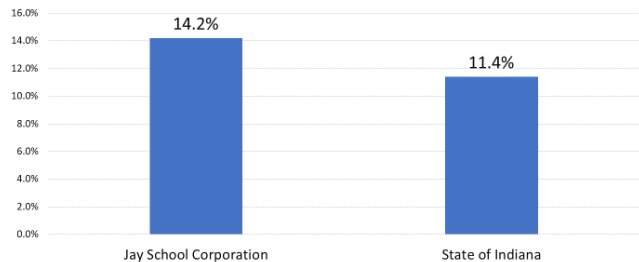
The spike in the number of children missing school came as districts switched back-and-forth between in-person and virtual instruction and families grappled with turmoil at home. According to a news story from WFYI⁴, more than 200,000 Indiana students missed 10 percent of school days (18 or more) in the 2020-2021 school year. That amounts to 19% of all Indiana students.

Jay County witnessed a similar spike in absenteeism. As shown in Figure 2, in March of 2019, a total 69 students at all grade levels had ten or more unexcused absences. By March of 2021, that figure had soared to 388 students – including 112 students at the elementary school level.

Figure 3 shows the numbers as a percentage of student enrollment. Regardless of grade level absenteeism spiked – to 6.7% of elementary school students, 17.5% of students in grades 7 and 8, and 22% of high school students.

A closer look at the elementary school grades gives further insight. Figure 4 shows elementary school attendance broken down by number of unexcused absences. Data is disaggregated for

Figure 1: Chronic Absenteeism
Jay School Corporation vs State of Indiana



⁴ *Chronic absenteeism spiked during COVID in Indiana schools*, October 17, 2021, WFYI website

each of the elementary schools – East, Bloomfield, West Jay, East Jay and Redkey. Data for each is as follows:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Enrollment</u>	<u>Grade</u>
Bloomfield Elementary School	269	KG-6
East Elementary School	415	KG-2
East Jay Elementary	526	3-6
Redkey Elementary School	226	KG-6
Westlawn Elementary School	238	KG-6

As noted in Figure 5, data on chronic absenteeism spiked at each of the elementary schools between March of 2019 and March of 2021. While a total of 47 elementary school students had 10 or more unexcused absences in 2019, by 2021 this number had jumped to 112 students.

Chronic Absenteeism in Jay County – Updated Data

Figure 2:
Number of Students with 10+ Chronic Absenteeism
2019 vs 2021

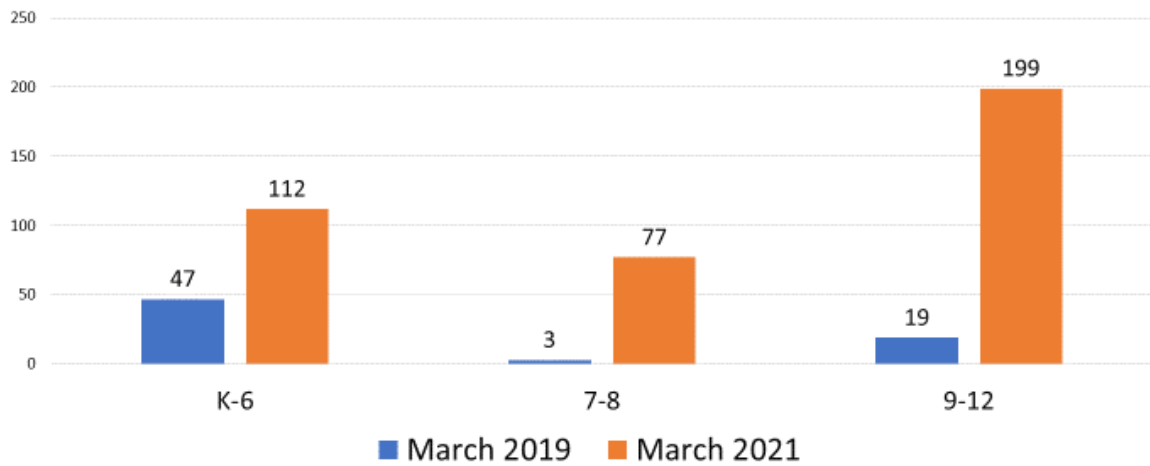
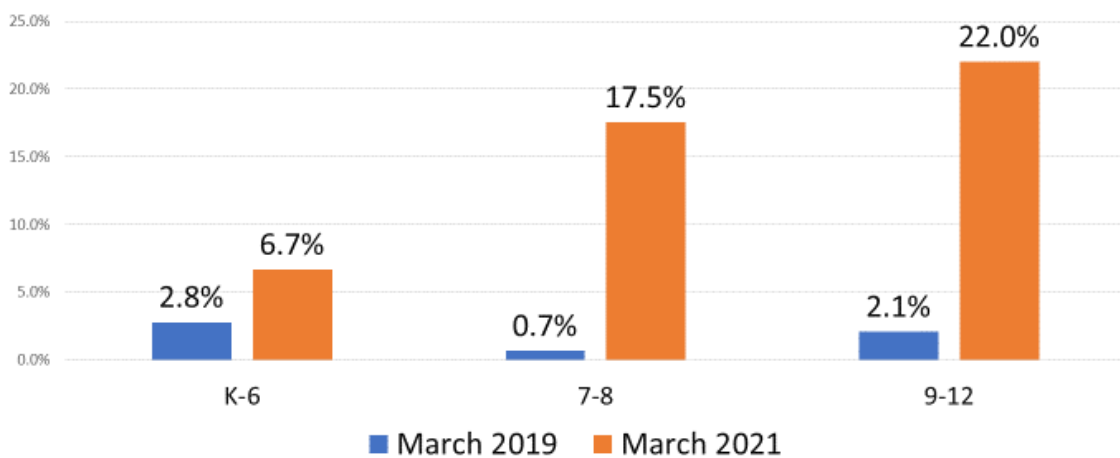


Figure 3:
Percent of Students with 10+ Chronic Absenteeism
2019 vs 2021



Chronic Absenteeism in Jay County – Data for Elementary Schools

Figure 4: Attendance Data
Jay County Elementary Schools - 2021

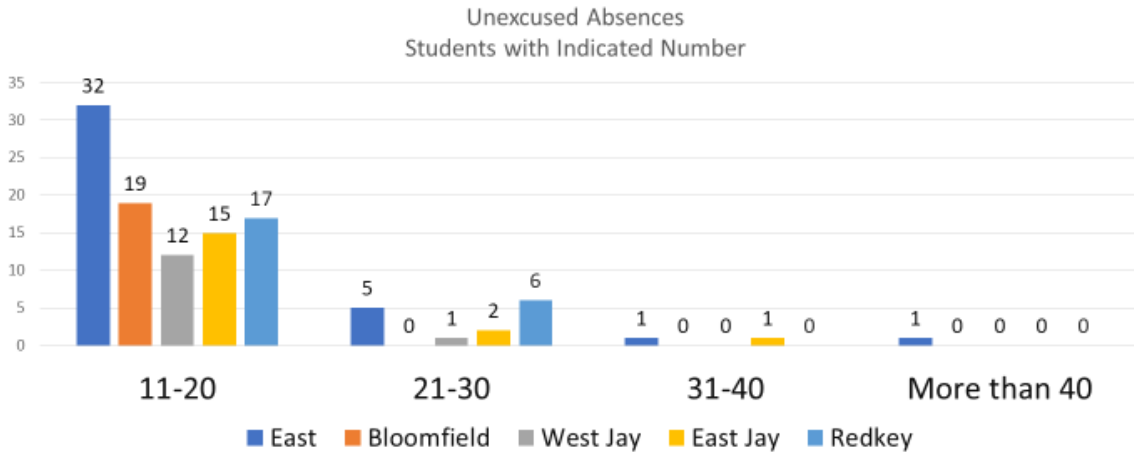
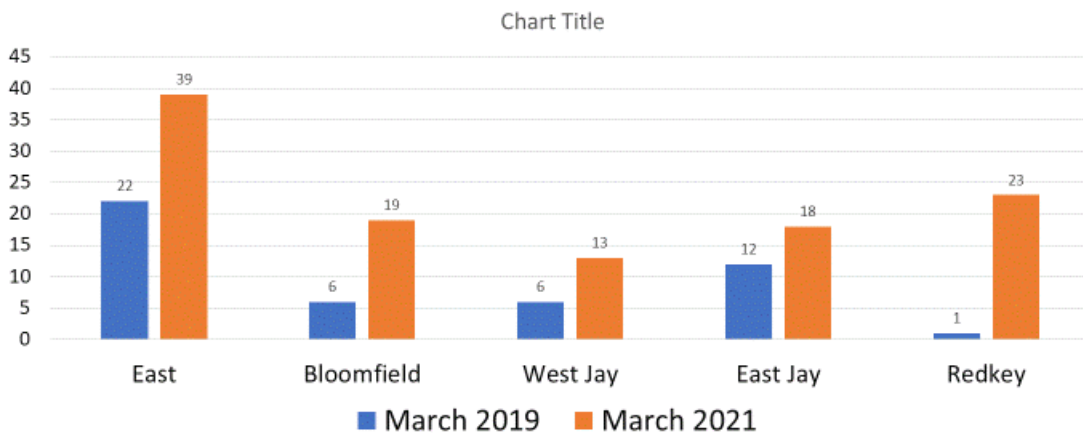
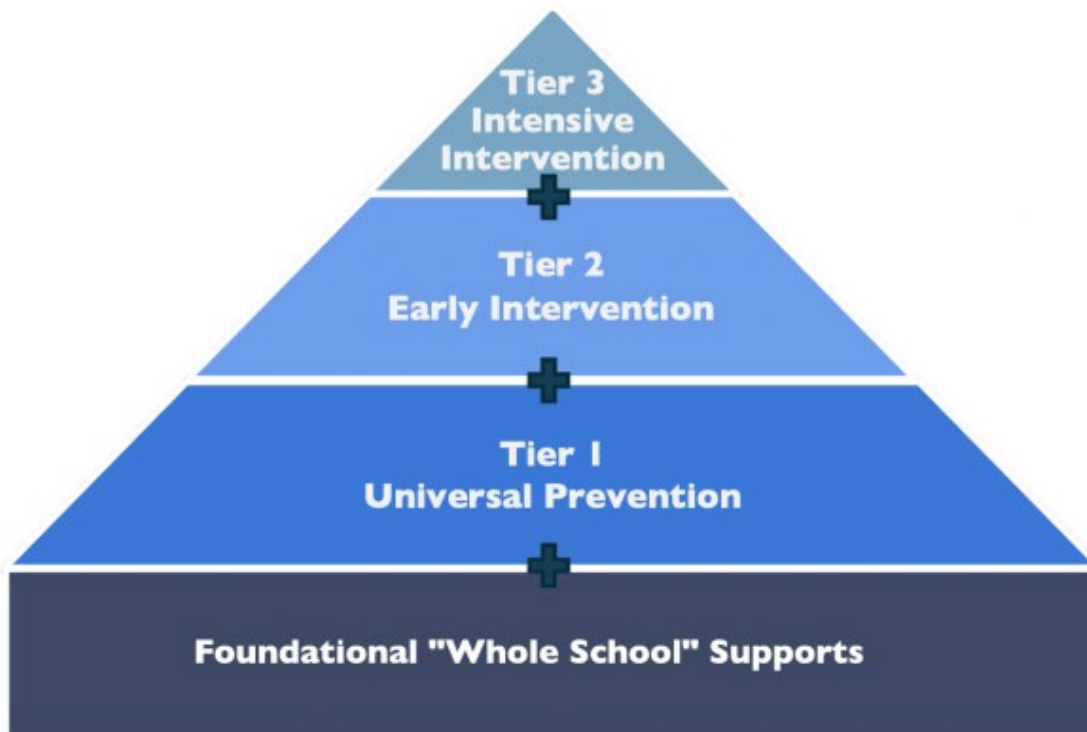


Figure 5: Total Chronic Absenteeism
Jay County Elementary Schools: 2019 vs 2021



A System for Dealing with Chronic Absenteeism

How can Jay County deal with this issue? A system recommended by Attendance Works could help provide a solution⁵.



In this recommended system, students at different levels, or “tiers”, would receive a different level of support. All students would receive services at the base of the pyramid – otherwise known as foundational “whole school” supports. As chronic absenteeism progresses, the level and intensity of services would increase as well.

⁵ <https://www.attendanceworks.org/chronic-absence/addressing-chronic-absence/>

Community Attendance Improvement Program

Jay County Schools

Tier 1 <i>Universal Supports</i>	Tier 2 - Early Intervention <i>Triggering Event = 5 Unexcused Absences</i>	Tier 3 - Intensive Intervention <i>Triggering Event = ???</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> System-Wide Messages Schedules and Expectations Personalized Communications to Absent Families Recognizing Good Attendance Careful Data Collection 	<p>Tier 2 Supports</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> After-school programs Meeting or home visit with student and family Mentoring (in-person and virtual) Tailored physical and mental health supports Individual attendance plan developed <p><u>Referral to Prosecutor's Office</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prosecutor Opens File on Family Summary of what Tier II interventions <i>Who, When and What Outcomes</i> 	<p>Tier 3 Supports</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Intensive outreach to locate student and family and assess situation Coordinated case management with multiple systems Intervention from DCS Intensive Mental Health/Addiction/Family Support Treatments <p><u>Juvenile Justice System</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Misdemeanor charges for violating Indiana's compulsory education laws Revocation of driving privileges

Tier 1 Universal Supports

- Clear, concise, and consistent communication about schedules and expectations
- Predictable daily/weekly routines related to attendance
- Taking attendance accurately with care
- Personalized communication to families when students are absent
- Recognition of good and improved attendance
- Access to wellness check and connectivity assessments
- Regular monitoring of attendance data

Tier 2 Early Intervention

- Using absenteeism data to activate targeted supports
- Meeting or home visit with student and family when absences add up (in person or virtual)
- Individual attendance plan developed with families and students
- Mentoring (in-person and virtual)
- Tailored physical and mental health supports
- Prioritizing participation in expanded learning
- Tech support and training to ensure access to virtual learning supports

Tier 3 Intensive Intervention

- Intensive outreach to locate student and family and assess situation
- Coordinated case management with multiple systems including child welfare, mental health, health, housing/homelessness, and juvenile justice (as a last resort)

Legal Intervention

While legal action may be avoided using Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions, the county prosecutor does have tools available to enforce state laws on truancy.

Penalties for Parents of Truant Students - Because parents are legally responsible for making sure their children go to school, they could face misdemeanor charges for violating Indiana's compulsory education laws. Convictions bring mandatory jail time (up to 180 days), along with potential fines (up to \$1,000) for each day of violation.

Legal Consequences for Truant Students - Indiana law considers students to be habitual truants when they have 10 or more unexcused absences in an academic year (although local districts may lower that threshold when dealing with truants in their schools). Schools must report habitual truants to the juvenile court, where the students could come under that court's supervision, with all the potential legal consequences that involves. Also, habitual truants who are 13 or 14 may not get a learner's permit or driver's license until they turn 18 or demonstrate that their attendance record has improved.

Jay Co Prosecutors Office

Zechariah Landers

zlanders@co.jay.in.us

- Recommends starting Tier II interventions at 5th day of unexcused absence.
- Needs a continuous flow of referrals (don't wait till the last minute and dump a stack of referrals).
- Focus on K-6 as a prioritization
- Ensure referral has a summary of what Tier II intervention were done, by whom and when and to what outcome.

Possible Process:

- Target Group of Students (Chronically absent school year 21-22)
- Define a flow chart of what actions occur, by whom, by when and for what reason.
- Monthly agenda item for the "County Child Protection Team"
- This portion of the monthly meeting will be to review the status of interventions in regard to the student target group and related data.
- What data do we need to inform us if we are "implementing our plan"? (Measures of Performance)
- What data do we need to show if it is making a difference? (Measures of Effect)

Miscellaneous

- Need an information flier with all partnering logos to send to parents of target groups on school year 22-23 expectations, programs, supports and process.
- Need an "information campaign" to inform parents of the "reset" as to attendance expectations.
- Student handbooks need updating as to when Dr. Notes are due.
- HIPAA and FERPA MOUs to share information.
- Jay County Prosecutor need to share data/status of cases referred to inform the system.
- JSC (Julie and James) will work on Tier I interventions and the formation of our "target group", what data we collect, how it is used, who gets it and the "flow chart" of Tier II actions from partners.
- We need to get probation involved. Especially now that there will be a change in leadership.
- We are concerned that much the target group of students will have parents who refuse to "consent" or cooperate with Tier II.

- JSC is considering contracting for two full time Social Workers / Mental Health Counselors that can also be a part of coordinating Tier I and Tier II functions.
- JSC Attendance Officer will be responsible for providing all required information for referrals to the prosecutor's office.

A Note of Appreciation

We wish to thank the following community leaders who served as members of our Steering Committee or on one of our task forces. Your contributions were greatly appreciated, and will help us to improve the quality of life for everyone in Jay County

- Chad Aker – President, Jay County Commissioners
- John Boggs – Mayor, City of Portland
- Carol Bradshaw - Forward STEPS Manager, Second Harvest Food Bank of East Central Indiana
- Michael Brewster – Jay County Coroner, Portland Police Department
- Amanda Bullion – Purdue Extension
- Ray Cooney – Editor, The Commercial Review
- PJ Corwin – Executive Director, Youth Service Bureau
- Jason Craig - Substance Misuse Prevention and Mental Health Promotion, Region 5 Regional Prevention Coordinator
- Gerry Cyranowski – Regional VP of Clinical Services, Meridian Health Services
- Randy Davis - Founder, A Better Life-Brianna’s Hope
- Chad Dodd - Principal, Jay County High School
- Dwane Ford – Sheriff, Jay County
- Julie Gregg – Principal, East Elementary School
- Jeremy Gulley – Superintendent, Jay County School Corporation
- Tammy Hanlin – Chair, The Portland Foundation
- Rusty Inman – Executive Director, John Jay Center for Learning
- Virgil Jones - Jay County Drug Prevention Coalition
- Rex Journey – Jay County Commissioner
- Allison Keen – Youth Educator, Purdue Extension
- Justin Littman – Family Case Manager Supervisor, Department of Child Services
- John Moore – Board Member, The Portland Foundation
- Krista Muhlenkamp – Board Member, The Portland Foundation
- Michele Owen – Executive Director, Family Alliance
- Chynna Ratliffe - Jay County Drug Prevention Coalition
- Kimbra Reynolds - Executive Director, Jay County Drug Prevention Coalition
- Travis Richards - Executive Director, Jay County Development Corporation
- Jane Ann Runyon – Executive Director, United Way of Jay County
- Christy Shauver – Director of Community Development, Jay County Development Corporation
- Mitch Sutton – Police Chief, City of Portland
- Annie Van Horn – Director of Special Education, Jay School Corporation
- Jenni VanSkyock – Program Manager, IU Health Jay Hospital Outpatient Behavioral Health
- Jon Vanator - President, IU Health Jay Hospital
- Tashia Weaver – Family Resource Center Coordinator, Strengthening Indiana Families

Appendix 1: Resources and Contact Information – Tier II

Purdue Extension

Keen, Allison K

keen12@purdue.edu

- After school programs
- Mentoring students grade 9-12

IU Health

Cassie Alexander

calexander5@iuhealth.org

- Mental Health - Addiction Counseling

Department of Child Services (DCS)

Justin Littman

justin.littman@dcs.in.gov

- Tier II and III Meetings with parents

Children's Bureau

Tashia Weaver

TWeaver@childrensbureau.org

- Transportation
- Currently serves 22 families
- Connects families to services that are obstacles to student attendance
- Consent-based program
- “Prevents families from being DCS cases”

Youth Services Bureau (YSB)

PJ Corwin

pj.corwin@ysbjc.com

- Home-based Services
- Provides chronic absence curriculum
- Will provide budget estimates for the program to JSC.
- “Prevents families from being DCS cases”

JCSO/PPD/SRO

Dwane Ford

dford@co.jay.in.us

Mike Brewster

mb715@thecityofportland.net

Cody Jesse SRO

sro@jayschools.k12.in.us,

- PPD - (East and EJE) can do home visits with partnering agencies if security concerns in Portland.
- Drug prevention.
- Home visits to locate truants.
- SRO will help with providing notice of service.

Jay County Probation Department

Contact information unavailable

ⁱ Indiana Code Title 20. Education § 20-33-2-11, <https://codes.findlaw.com/in/title-20-education/in-code-sect-20-33-2-11.html>