

# ESSER Attendance and Reengagement Project

## Building Capacity to Reengage Students and Keep them Engaged

### Why attendance and reengagement?

Our state and country continue to see unprecedented levels of student absences. In 2020-21 and 2022-23, 33% and 30% of Washington students were chronically absent<sup>1</sup> respectively<sup>2</sup>. When students are absent from instruction, they cannot benefit from instruction and the supports of the school community. Research is clear that absences are a key early warning indicator. For example, when a student is chronically absent any two years between 8<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade, they have a 50% chance of **not graduating**<sup>3</sup>.

### What is the ESSER Attendance & Reengagement Project?

Through this project, OSPI invested \$19.3 million of its discretionary ESSER dollars into supporting the following bodies of work:

- Regional supports (through Educational Service Districts) to district and schools to build early warning systems that focused on attendance. This includes building teams for attendance, accessing actionable data, building a continuum of tiered supports, integrating with other initiatives, partnering with community organizations and centering student voice to understand barriers to attendance and engagement.
- Direct outreach and reengagement support for students at-risk of disengaging or who have already disengaged. This includes working with individual students to support them to reengage with school and remain engaged through barrier reduction, wrap around supports and being a safe and supportive adult.

### Districts Served & Implementation Partners

This project selected the districts and schools with the highest historical absence and dropout rates. The students of focus were the students with the highest absences and course failures (if relevant). The intended purpose of the pandemic funds was to support students and communities with the highest needs.

This state-wide initiative involved a wide range of partners, schools and districts, including:

- 9 ESDs
- 63 school districts and 6 of 7 State Tribal Education Compact schools (STEC)
- OSPI Office of Native Education
- Puget Sound ESD Strategy, Learning and Evaluation Team
- Attendance Works
- Everyone Graduates Center (Johns Hopkins University)

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<sup>1</sup> Chronic absence is when a student misses 10% or more of their school day for any reason, excused or unexcused.

<sup>2</sup> <https://washingtonstatereportcard.ospi.k12.wa.us/>

<sup>3</sup> [Utah Data Alliance – Chronic Absenteeism Research Brief](#)



# Project Impacts & Learning from Year 1

## Outputs

- Over 8,200 students served
- Average number of students served by reengagement specialists throughout the year: 128 students
- 4 state-wide trainings & 36 regional peer learning sessions

## What We Learned from Students

Reasons Students Disengaged	Barriers to Reengagement	Positive Experiences in School
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physical illness or dealing with mental health issue (56%)</li> <li>• Do not have support they needed with schoolwork (53%)</li> <li>• Didn't feel comfortable or welcome at school (45%)</li> <li>• Their home situation made it difficult (45%)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School doesn't feel relevant or helpful (36%)</li> <li>• Do not have access to support for physical or mental health (32%)</li> <li>• Do not have what they need to get caught up in academics (23%)</li> <li>• Do not feel anyone at school cares for them or their success (21%)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being with friends (69%)</li> <li>• My classes (33%)</li> </ul>

## Attendance Rates Increased in Schools and Districts

The districts and schools supported through this project showed increases in their attendance rates specifically in schools and districts that focused on building their attendance systems (teaming, data, and tier 1 school or district wide attendance strategies).



**77%** (34 of 44) of schools and **79%** (22 of 28) of districts had increases in attendance rates that were greater than the state increase<sup>1</sup>.

## Outcomes for Students Receiving Tier 2 & 3

### Support

- 56% of unenrolled students re-enrolled in school<sup>4</sup>.
- Seventy-five percent (75%) of reenrolled students were still enrolled after three months.
- 94% of students that were enrolled at the beginning of the program were still enrolled at the end of the school year<sup>5</sup>.

## Testimonials from Students

Students who worked with reengagement specialists in one ESD had the following to say about their specialists:

- they felt supported
- that someone cared about them

<sup>4</sup> ~40% of all students served were not enrolled at the time service began.

<sup>5</sup> This is an underestimate because this doesn't account for students that enrolled elsewhere in Washington state.

- they were motivated by their specialist
- their specialist helped them when they were upset
- their specialist helped them get caught up in their classes
- their specialists helped them with mental health barriers
- helped them with setting and meeting goals
- helped them to think about life after graduation

## Contact

For questions related to the current project, please contact Krissy Johnson, Assistant Director of Attendance & Engagement at [krissy.johnson@k12.wa.us](mailto:krissy.johnson@k12.wa.us)