

Improving School Attendance in Fairfax County: A Multi-Sector Action Plan

PRESENTATION TO THE SCYPT

JUNE 1, 2016

BY THE ATTENDANCE TASK FORCE STEERING COMMITTEE:

CINDY DICKINSON AND CARRIE MENDELSON, FCPS

LAUREN MADIGAN, JDRDC

KRISTEN BRENNAN, CHRISSEY CUNNINGHAM, JESSE ELLIS, VICTORIA
KAIRYS, AND JONATHAN MELENDEZ, NCS

Overview

School Attendance and Absenteeism

- ▶ Truancy exists in the context of interaction among child, community, family, and school domains.
- ▶ Truancy can lead to multiple poor outcomes for youth, including dropping out of school, low financial security, relationship problems, poor health, and delinquency. Additional negative outcomes affect schools, families, and communities.
- ▶ Fairfax County has had limited and inconsistent responses to truancy, but has begun to implement promising practices in schools, juvenile justice, and other settings.

Our Mandate

- ▶ December 2014 SCYPT Endorsement:
 - ▶ Community Dialogue on School Attendance (September 2015)
 - ▶ Attendance Task Force (Winter/Spring 2015-2016)
 - ▶ Action Plan Development

Target Population

- ▶ The plan includes universal and targeted strategies.
- ▶ Because the root causes of absenteeism are complex, there is no “typical” student who is chronically absent.

COMPLEX ROOT CAUSES

School-Specific

- School climate issues
- Inconsistent attendance policies
- Suspensions and expulsions
- Inflexible teaching styles
- Inappropriate academic rigor
- Unengaging curriculum
- Fear of being bullied
- Teacher absenteeism

Student-Specific

- Mental health or substance use problems
- Poor self-esteem
- Learning disabilities
- Low reading and math levels
- Lack of positive peer relationships
- Language barriers
- Physical health

As the impacts of truancy extend beyond just the student, so do the causes.

Truancy is a complex behavior resulting from interacting student, school, family, and community-level factors.

Family-Specific

- Parental substance abuse
- Child abuse/neglect
- Lack of guidance or supervision
- Domestic violence
- Poverty
- Lack of knowledge about truancy
- Child stays home to care for family member

Community-Specific

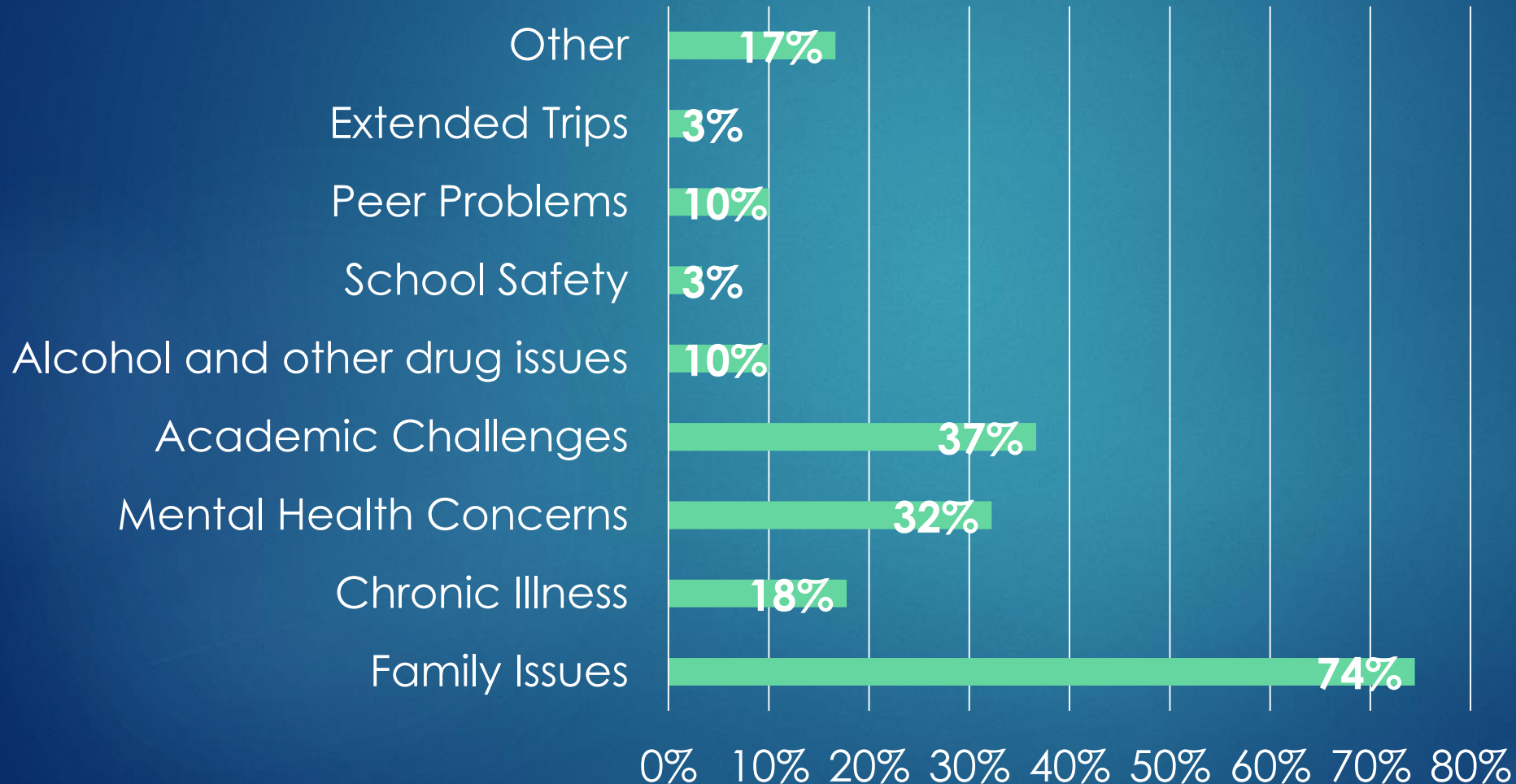
- Peer influence
- Lack of support for school
- Lack of responsive community services
- Community upheaval and social change
- High incidence of substance abuse
- Crime or gang activity
- Inadequate transportation

From "Tackling Truancy" by the Status Offense Reform Center

http://www.statusoffensereform.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/SORC_Tackling-Truancy-Infographic.pdf

Target Population

Reason for Absence (Total)



Based on a sample of 90 student cases being handled by Student Attendance Officers during School Year 2015-2016. Cases are evenly divided among elementary, middle, and high school students.

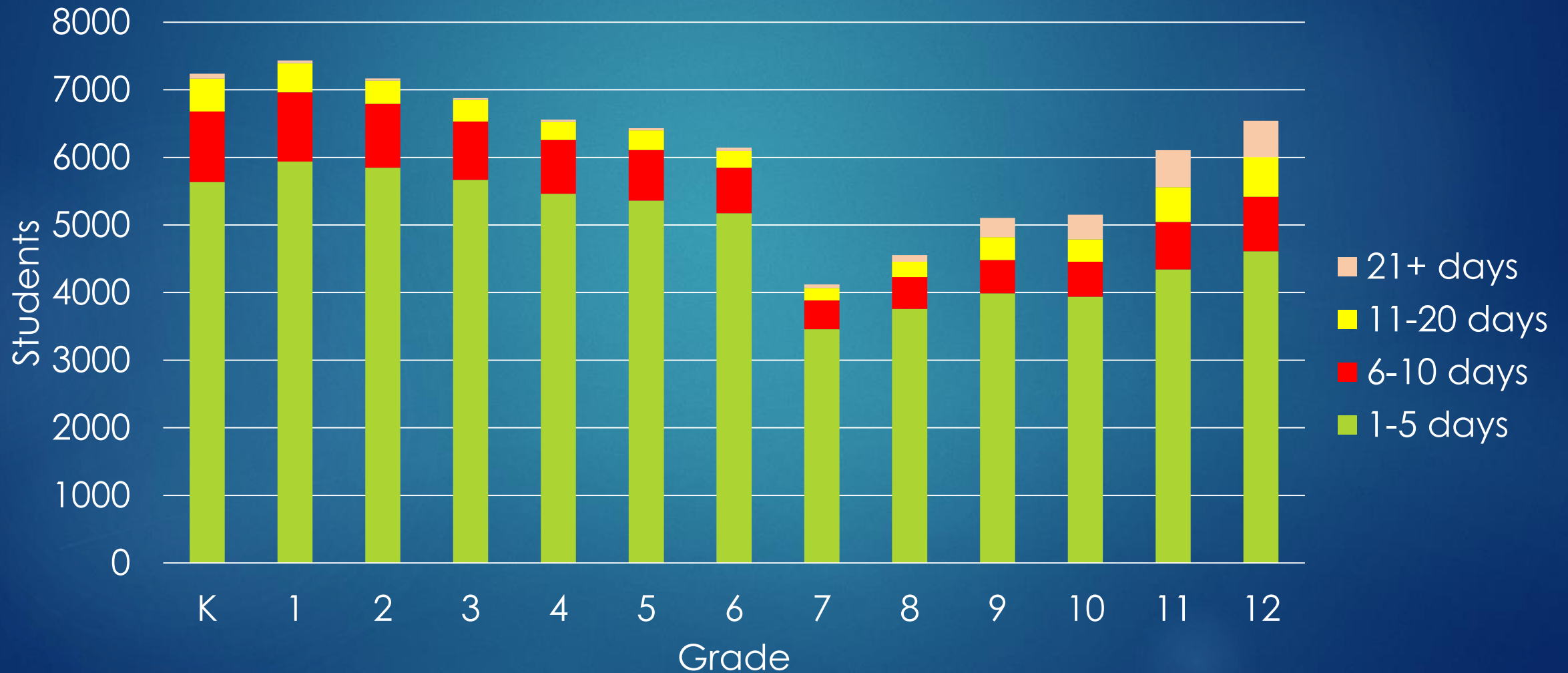
Outcomes and Indicators: How are our youth doing?

- ▶ Average daily attendance is very high
- ▶ Elementary-all subgroups 96% or better
- ▶ Percent of secondary students in attendance each day varies slightly by subgroup

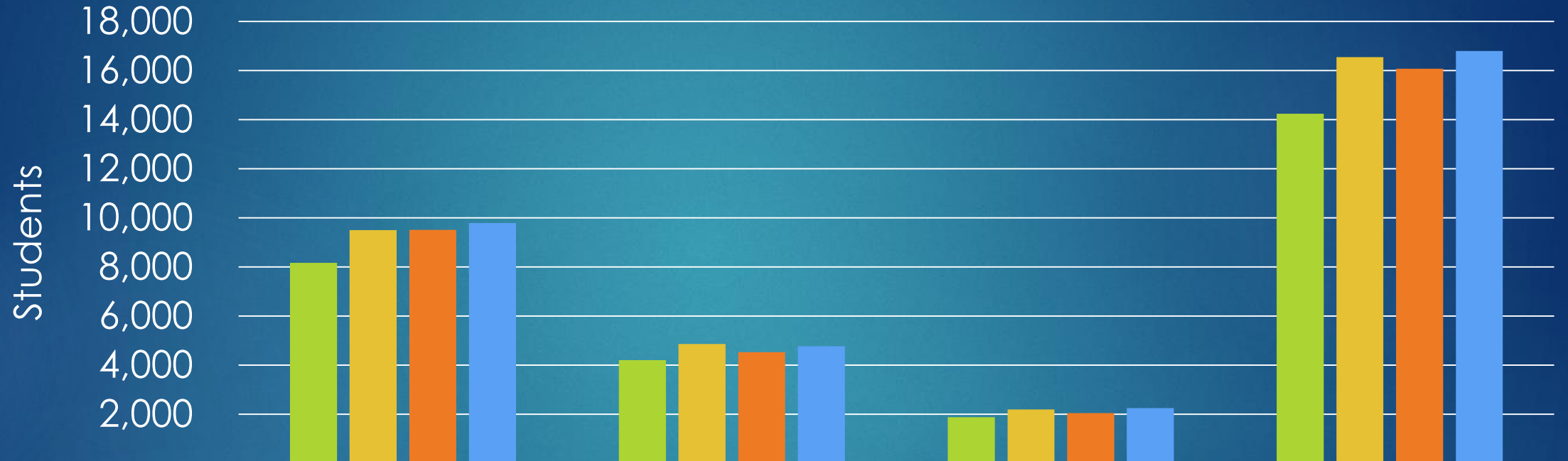
	Asian	Black	White	Hispanic	Free & Reduced Meals	Limited English Proficiency
Grade 8	97.4	96.5	95.7	95.3	95.5	95.4
Grade 12	93.3	93.2	92.5	91.8	91.9	90.7

2013-2014 School Year

Number of Students with Unexcused Absences by Grade, 2014-2015



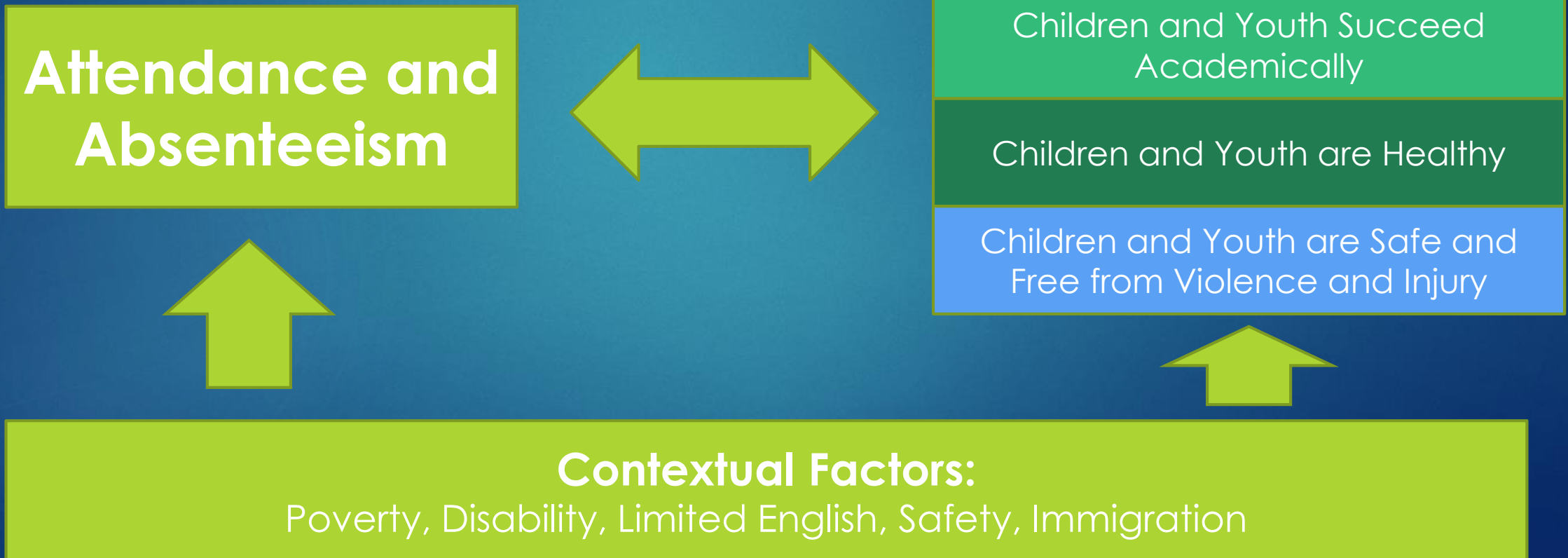
“Legal” Truancy: Absent more than 5 days



	6-10 days	11-20 days	21+ days	Total
2011-2012	8,168	4,198	1,874	14,240
2012-2013	9,500	4,862	2,188	16,550
2013-2014	9,505	4,521	2,046	16,072
2014-2015	9,782	4,767	2,243	16,792

Outcomes and Indicators: How are our youth doing?

11



Connections

- ▶ This plan complements and supports others the SCYPT has endorsed/addressed:
 - ▶ Behavioral Health System of Care
 - ▶ School Readiness
 - ▶ Equitable Growth Profile
 - ▶ Disconnected Youth
 - ▶ FCPS Strategic Plan and Portrait of a Graduate
 - ▶ Strategic Plan to Facilitate Economic Success

Connections

- ▶ Examples of Specific Goals and Strategies Addressed in the Attendance Plan:
 - ▶ BHSOC Blueprint: overall access to BH services, coordinated data systems, system navigation, trauma-informed practices, service networks
 - ▶ School Readiness: Neighborhood School Readiness Teams
 - ▶ Equitable Growth Profile: immigrant integration, education and career pathways for youth
 - ▶ FCPS Strategic Plan: ELL practices and programming, pre-K, parent engagement, multiple pathways to a diploma, cultural competency, caring culture/welcoming schools
 - ▶ Economic Success Plan: workforce training programs, STEAM programming

The Services Landscape

Primary Service Providers and Opportunities

- ▶ Attendance has mostly been treated as a schools and courts issue.
- ▶ Other initiatives have attempted to address attendance from a more comprehensive approach, notably Community School-Linked Services and regional change teams/multi-agency resource-sharing groups. But they have not consistently been implemented to scale.
- ▶ A consistent approach across schools was often noted at the Dialogue and among Task Force members as necessary for effectiveness and broader community engagement.

Planning for Improvement

Coordinating the Initiative

- ▶ Multiple initiatives and organizations have been working on attendance. Examples include:
 - ▶ Return to Learn
 - ▶ Neighborhood Networks
 - ▶ Juvenile Diversion
 - ▶ Tiered Systems of Support within Schools
- ▶ Strategies and lessons learned from these have been incorporated into the plan.

Strategies for Improvement

Three key principles of the plan:

- ▶ The focus is on serving individuals, not on addressing root causes broadly.
- ▶ A community-wide multi-sector approach is necessary. This requires a consistent approach across schools.
- ▶ All strategies must be planned and implemented through an equity lens.

The Attendance Action Plan

Goal 1: Ensure a positive school climate, flexible instructional approaches, and supportive services to encourage school attendance and engagement.

- ▶ Awareness campaigns and messaging to parents
- ▶ Responsive and welcoming school environments and opportunities
- ▶ Connections to the community, especially through out-of-school time opportunities and the business sector

The Attendance Action Plan

Goal 2. Closely monitor absenteeism and student behavior to enable early detection and intervention.

- ▶ Standard attendance monitoring at the school and division levels
- ▶ Revised position descriptions for School Probation Officers and School Attendance Officers

The Attendance Action Plan

Goal 3. Involve families, school staff, community service providers, and other key stakeholders in service planning and monitoring.

- ▶ Cross-agency collaboration, information sharing, and data sharing
- ▶ Family organization engagement

The Attendance Action Plan

22

Goal 4. Develop tiered school- and community-based responses that prioritize comprehensive supportive services and reduce punishments.

- ▶ Resource guides
- ▶ Tiered system of interventions

Tier 1: School Attendance Plan

- ▶ Target group: Students who have missed 0-9% of school days
- ▶ Plan components:
 - ▶ School Attendance Team to monitor data
 - ▶ Positive behavior approaches and other strategies to welcome and engage students and families
 - ▶ Incentives for *good and improved* attendance
 - ▶ Personalized outreach to students and families
 - ▶ Removal of barriers to attendance

Tier 2: Student Attendance Plan

- ▶ Target group: Students who have missed 10-19% of school days, with an impact on grades and/or behavior
- ▶ Plan components:
 - ▶ Individual responsibility
 - ▶ Attendance-focused monitoring and intervention
 - ▶ Incentives for improved attendance
 - ▶ Exploration of non-traditional school programs and flexible scheduling options
 - ▶ Identification of and referral to additional services
- ▶ Engage information-sharing teams to problem solve and identify services, if necessary

Tier 3: Wraparound Approach

- ▶ Target group: Students who have missed at least 20% of school days, with an impact on grades and/or behavior
- ▶ Required components:
 - ▶ Review and revise attendance plan and ensure all Tier 2 options have been exhausted
 - ▶ Wraparound intervention
 - ▶ Continued incentives for improved attendance
 - ▶ Court referral for diversion **only if all other options have been exhausted and shown to be ineffective**

Policy Needs

- ▶ FCPS leadership commitment to consistent approaches:
 - ▶ Implementing the tiered system of interventions
 - ▶ Defining excused and unexcused absences
 - ▶ Revising position descriptions for SPOs (with JDRDC) and SAOs
 - ▶ Implementing data systems to report on attendance
- ▶ Review gaps and identify opportunities to expand access to nontraditional school programs
- ▶ Common referral forms and data-sharing agreements and systems

Resource Needs

- ▶ At this time, no specific resources are being requested. Most strategies, excluding Tier 3 interventions, can begin to be implemented immediately.
 - ▶ Many can be implemented at no to little cost
 - ▶ Some may require additional funding:
 - ▶ Messaging materials
 - ▶ Position description revisions/reclassifications

Next Steps

- ▶ Implementation teams developed
 - ▶ Maintain and increase multi-sectoral participation
 - ▶ Return to SCYPT in fall with specific resource needs
- ▶ Tier 3 workgroup convened
 - ▶ Fully develop the wraparound and case management approaches
 - ▶ Return to SCYPT in fall for endorsement of strategies and specific resource needs
- ▶ Develop resource lists, implementation guides, and templates to support implementation

Recommendations

The Attendance Task Force recommends the SCYPT:

- ▶ Endorse the Action Plan, up through the Tier 2 interventions
- ▶ Direct implementation teams to return in the fall with specific resource needs to implement the Action Plan
- ▶ Endorse the general direction of the Tier 3 interventions and direct a work group to more fully define how they will be implemented before returning in the fall with specific plans and resource needs for implementation

Contact Information

- ▶ Cindy Dickinson, CEDickinson@fcps.edu
- ▶ Carrie Mendelsohn, cjmendelsohn@fcps.edu
- ▶ Lauren Madigan, lauren.madigan@fairfaxcounty.gov
- ▶ Jesse Ellis, jesse.ellis@fairfaxcounty.gov