

How Do We Adapt? The Mental Health Crisis and Student Engagement Post-Pandemic



Meet Your Presenters



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Results

- Understand the mental health crisis and student engagement post-pandemic
- Identify strategies and resources to help districts positively impact student connections to their teachers and re-engage in school.
- Illustrate how the Peer Learning Network can support your district/campus

The challenge

Youth mental health—the crisis is real

More young people are increasingly struggling with anxiety, depression, thoughts of suicide, and other serious mental health issues.

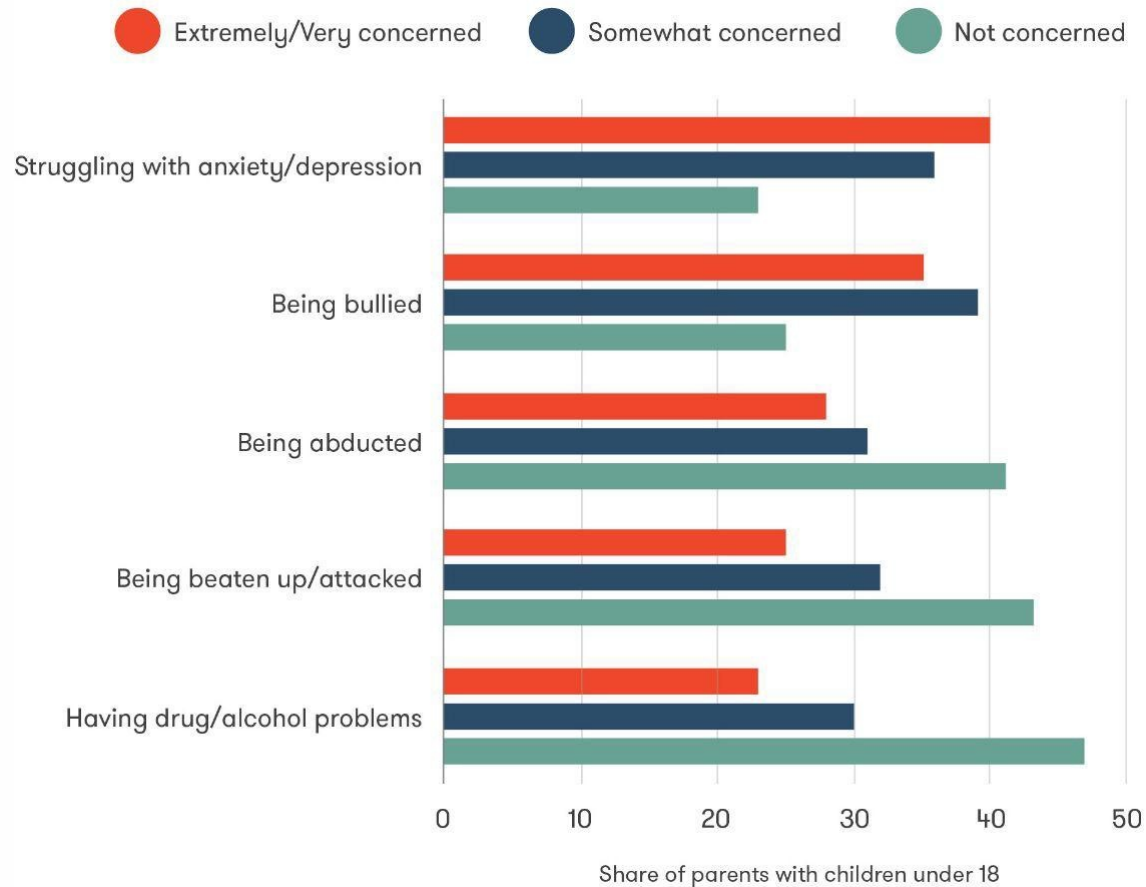
Among high schoolers nationwide in 2021

- 1 in 3 reported feeling sad or hopeless (↑ 40% since 2009)
 - Rates higher among female students (50%)
- 1 in 6 reported they made a suicide plan in the past year (↑ 44% since 2009)
 - Rates higher among Black students and lesbian, gay, and bisexual students

In Texas

- 22% of high schoolers seriously considered attempting suicide in 2021
- 350,000+ youth experienced a major depressive episode in the last year
 - Among those, 73%—the worst rate in the country—did not receive mental health services.
- 500,000+ kids ages 3-17 experienced depression or anxiety in 2020 (↑ 23% from 2016)
 - Black and Latino children experienced the largest increases

Parents say their child's mental health is a top concern



76% are worried about their child struggling with anxiety or depression

59% are more worried about their child's emotional well-being today than they were before the pandemic

Reports from OST providers

Afterschool providers report observing youth in their programs experience:

- Increased rates of anxiety and depression
- Suicide and emergency department visits
- Grief and bereavement
- Loneliness and social isolation
- Poor sleep habits, increased screen time, social media usage
- Toxic stress and trauma

We are part of the solution!

Understanding key terms

Mental Health Promotion

attempts to encourage and increase protective factors and healthy behaviors that can prevent the onset of a diagnosable mental disorder and reduce risk factors that can lead to the development of a mental disorder.

Prevention of Illnesses

focuses on the causes of risk factors to avoid illness. There are 3 categories of prevention:

- Primary prevention focuses on various determinants in the whole population or in the high risk group
- Secondary prevention comprises early detection and intervention
- Tertiary prevention targets for advanced recovery and reduction of relapse risk

Understanding key terms

Positive Youth Development

an approach that promotes the positive development of young people by supporting their strengths and potential, building positive relationships with adults and peers, cultivating a sense of belonging, and providing opportunities for growth and leadership.

The Positive Youth Development movement is rooted in prevention and supports the development of mental health through its focus on:

- the role of resiliency
- the protective factors in a youth's environment
- the role those factors play in a youth's ability to deal with adversity

Putting it all together

Mental health promotion and prevention strategies align with positive youth development and high-quality OST practices by focusing on:

- promoting strengths
- building positive relationships
- engaging communities
- taking a holistic approach
- emphasizing prevention and early intervention

Working together, these approaches support young people's healthy development and well-being.

What the research shows

Decades of research show how OST supports kids' mental well-being.

Afterschool programs provide developmental supports



Caring and
supportive mentors



Safe spaces where students
build confidence and feel a
sense of belonging



Opportunities to work
collaboratively, problem
solve, and think critically

In turn, these supports help kids:⁵



Gain self-control
and confidence



Improve work habits
and grades



Develop strong
social skills



Improve school day
attendance and behavior



Build healthy relationships
with their peers and adults



Reduce risky behaviors,
such as tobacco, marijuana,
and alcohol use

Relationships are key

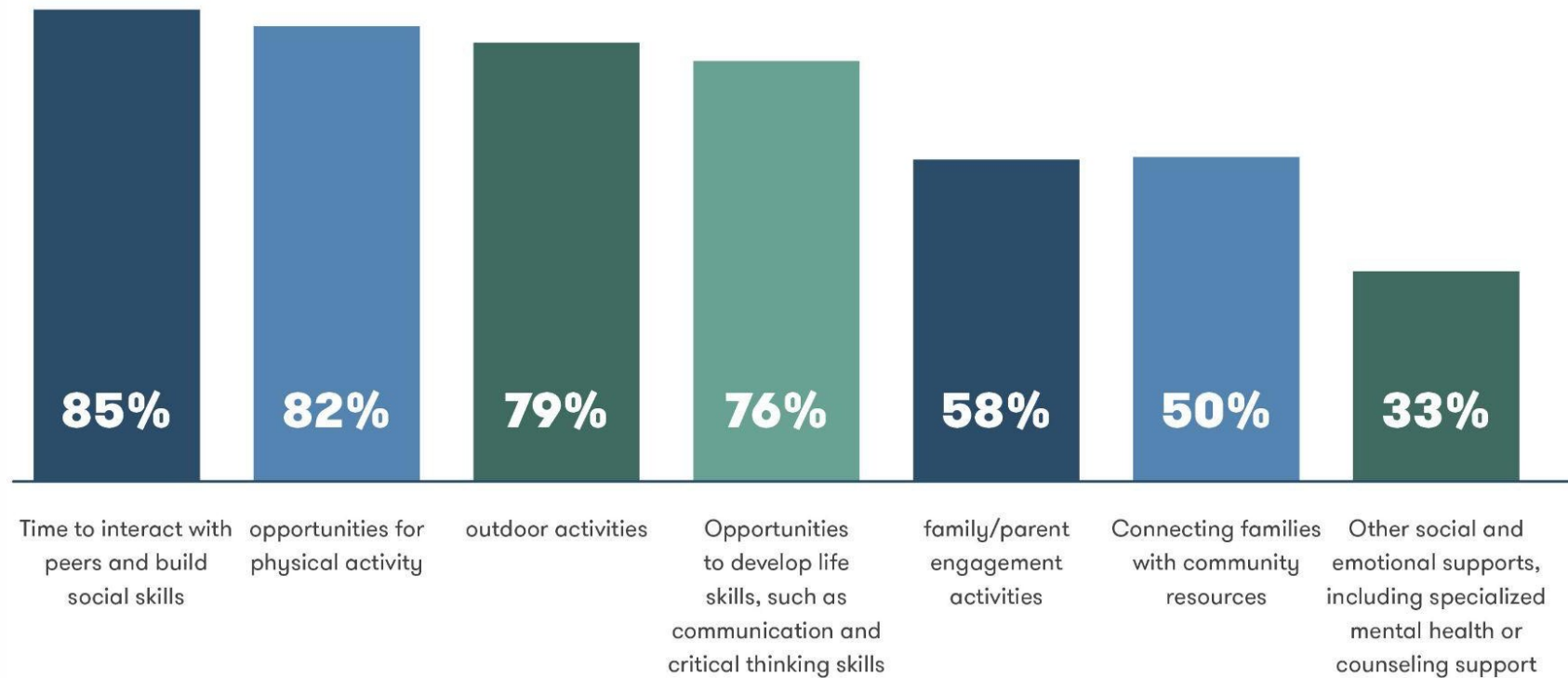
Research shows strong relationships between adults and youth have a positive impact on youth development.

Young people in OST settings who reported strong developmental relationships had higher self-rated mental well-being competencies, including:

- Self-awareness
- Self-management
- Responsible decision-making
- Social awareness
- Relationship skills



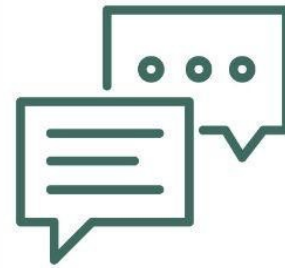
How OST programs are responding today



Our role in supporting
kids' well-being is more
important than ever

Texas parents value OST for their kids' well-being

94% of Texas parents say opportunities to interact with peers and build social skills are important factors when selecting their OST program



85%

Engage with
their peers



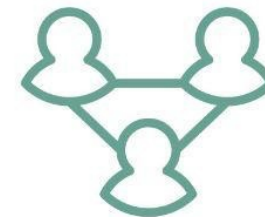
82%

Learn life skills



81%

Build confidence



77%

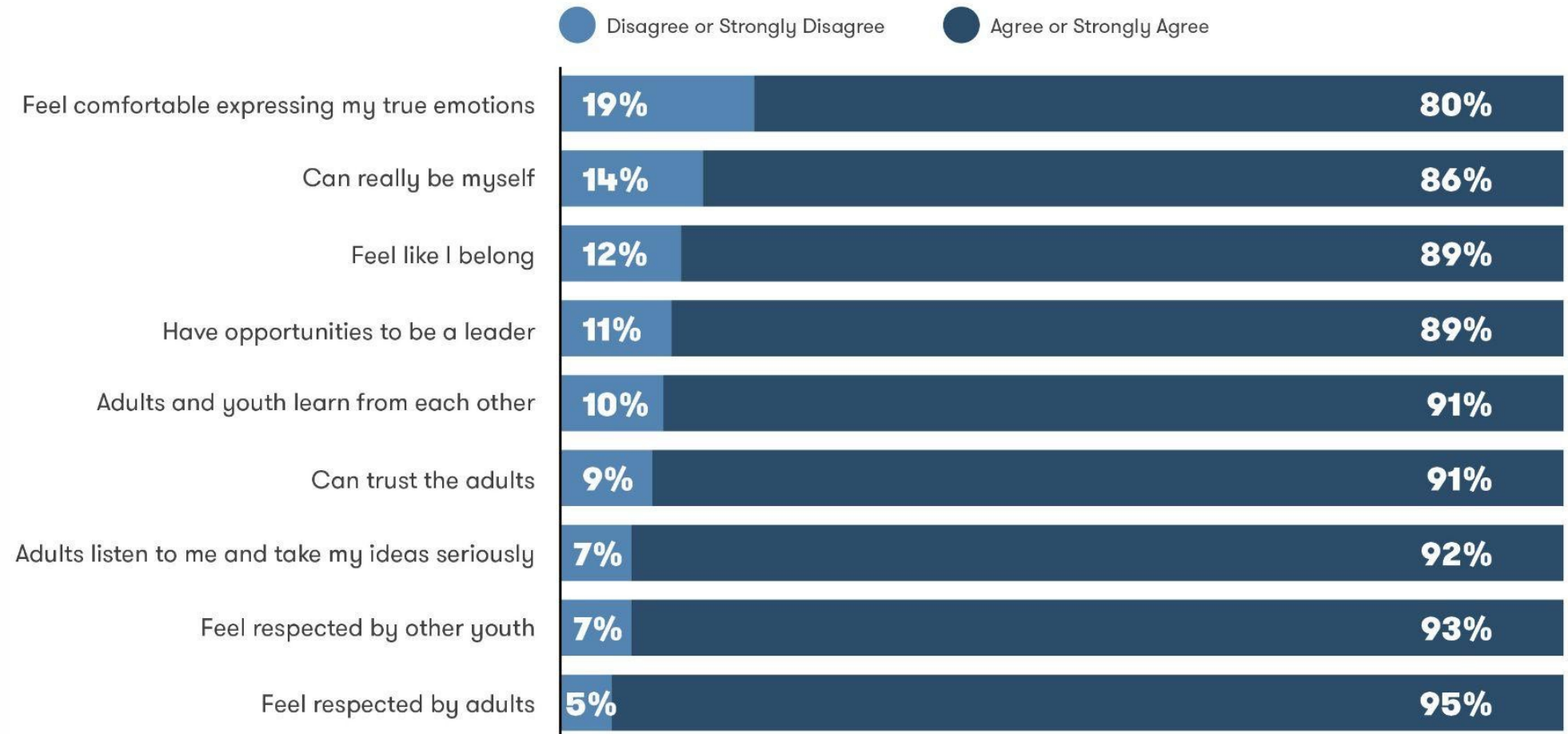
Build positive relationships
with caring adults and mentors



79%

Learn responsible
decision-making

How kids feel in their OST program



Reflection:

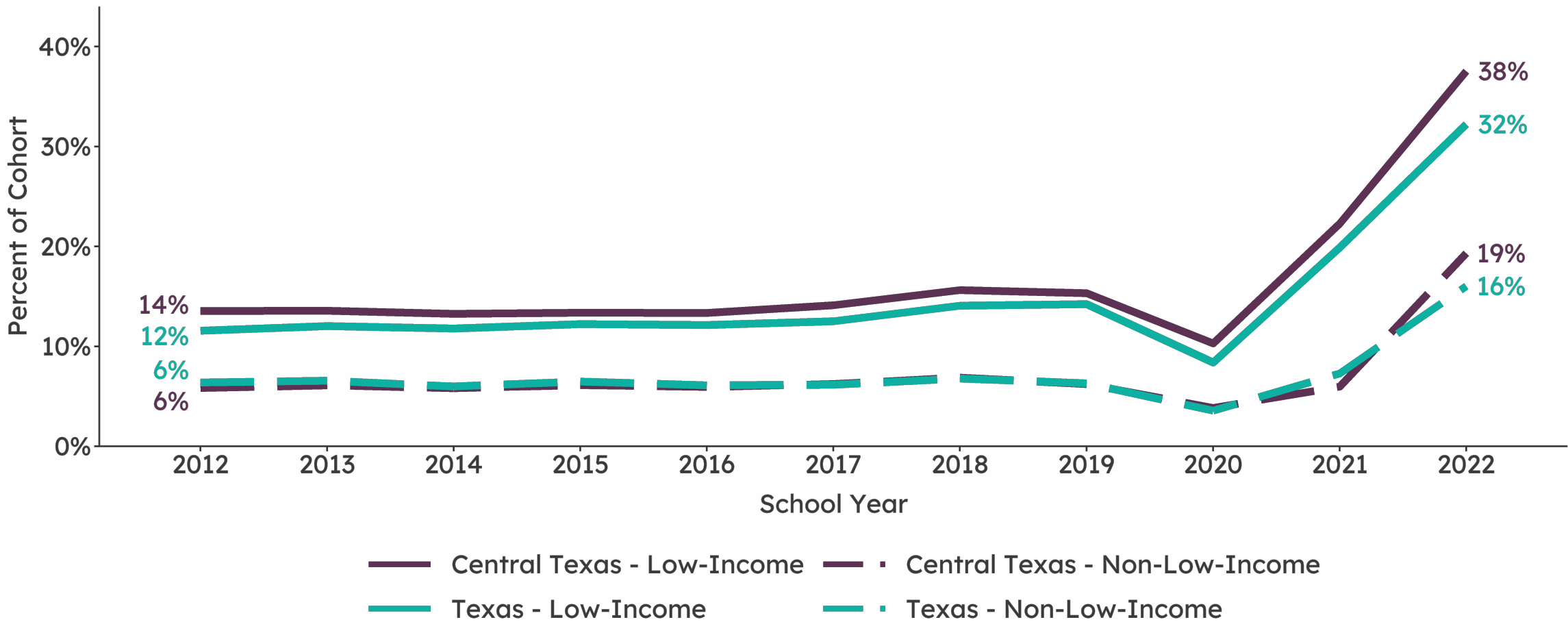
**How do you see mental health,
student engagement, and
attendance being connected?**

Attendance

How does it translate?

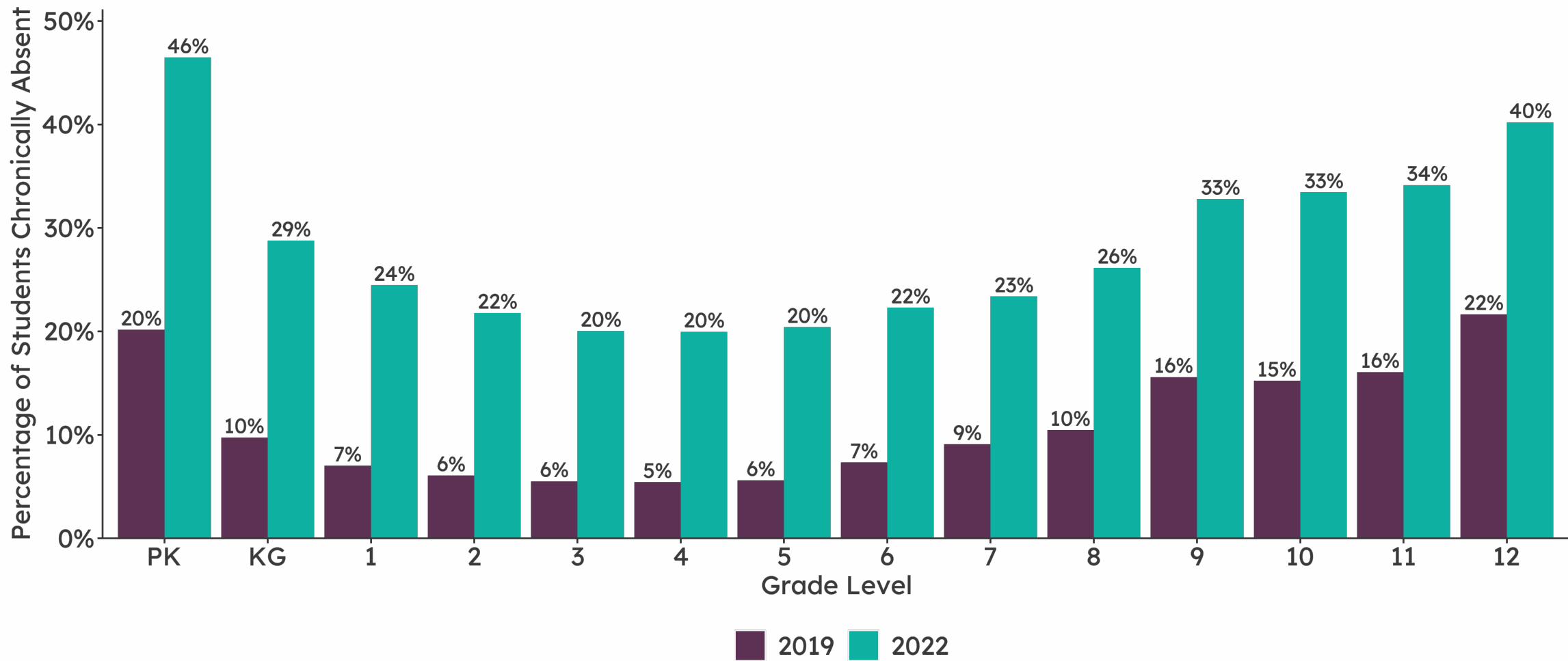
Large Disparities in Chronic Absence Rates by Household Income Persist

Chronic Absence* Rate Over Time by Economic Status,
Central Texas and Texas, 2012-2022



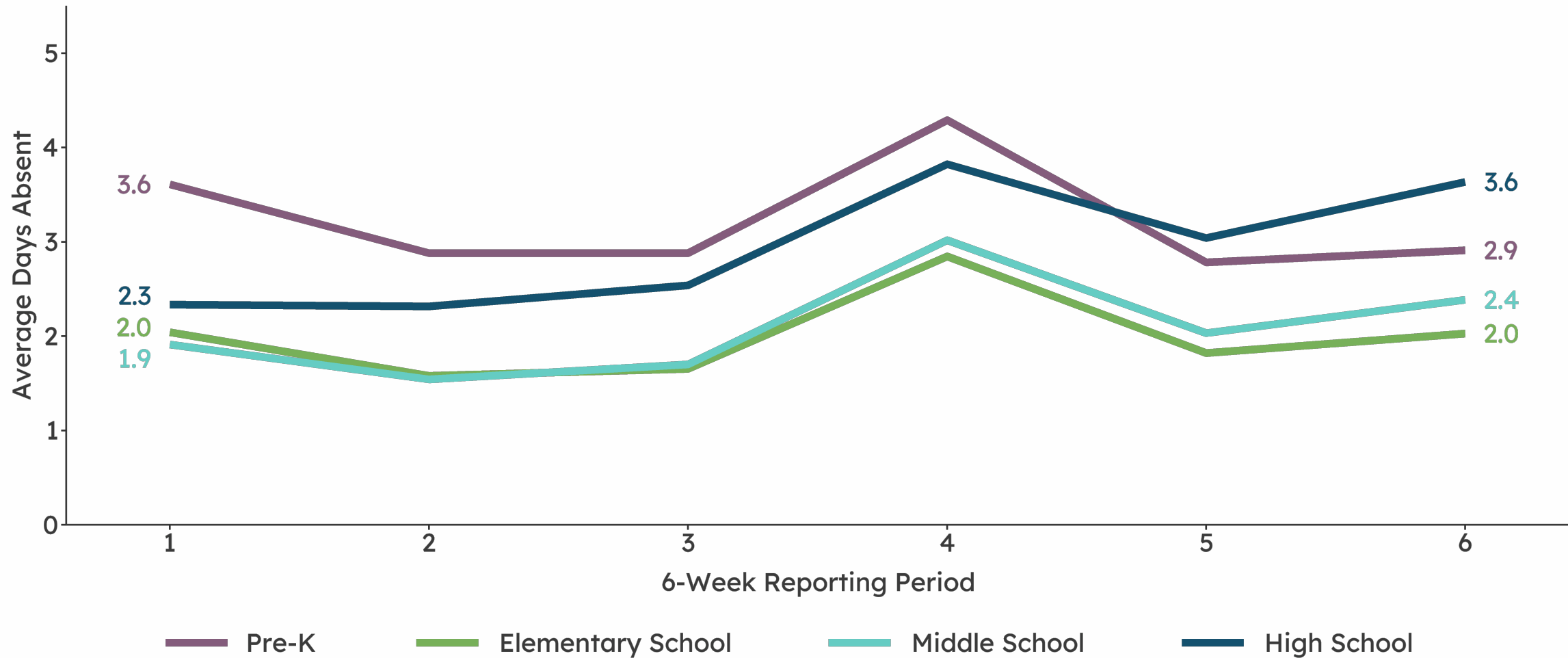
Chronic Absence Rates in all Grades Higher Than Pre-Pandemic

Percent of Students Chronically Absent* by Grade, Central Texas



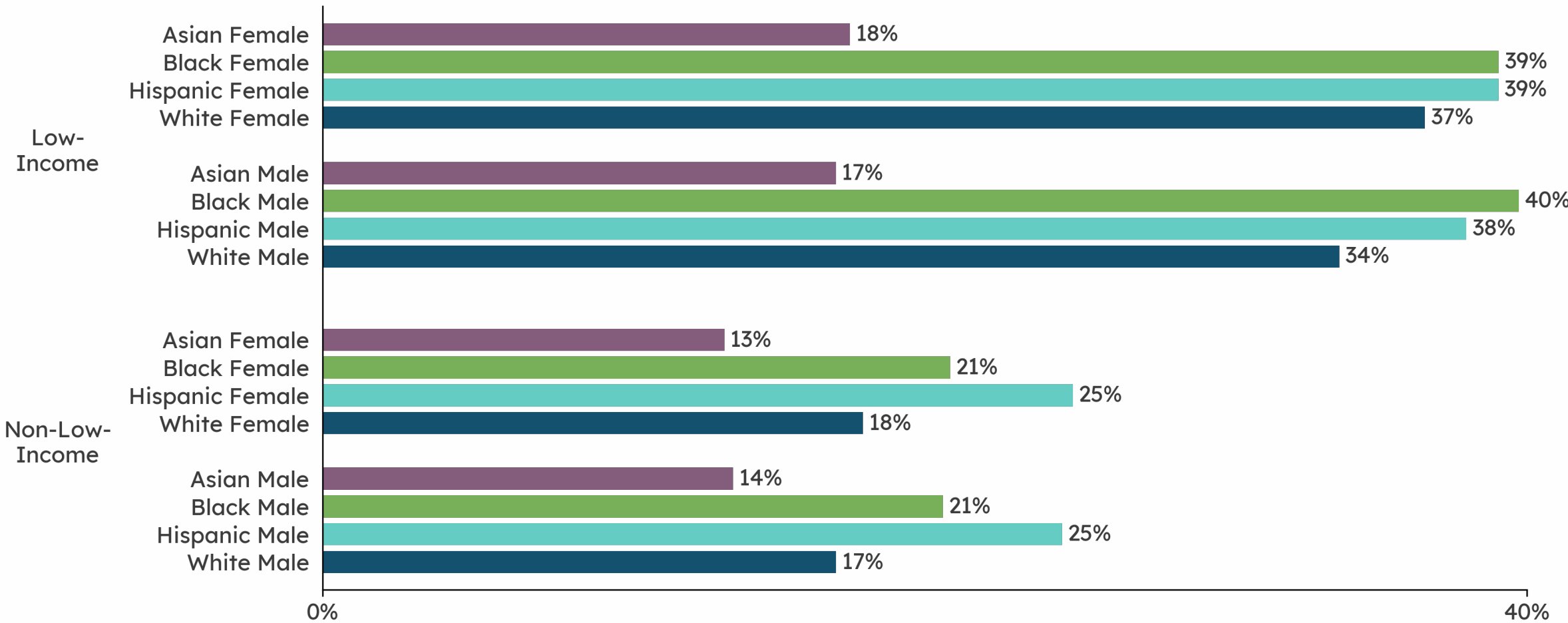
Absence Rates Spiked During Fourth 6-Week Period at Elementary, Middle, and High School Levels

Number of Days Missed Per 6-Week Period by Grade Group, Central Texas, 2021-22



Chronic Absence Rate Varies by Gender, Household Income, and Race

Chronic Absence*, Central Texas, 2021-22



Reflection

- How does this data align with your experience and your district?
- Do you believe this trend continued into the 22-23 school year?
- What do you think is the main contributing factor to this data?

Peer Learning Network

Peer Learning Network (PLN)

Addressing Chronic Absence in Schools

Through an Attendance Peer Learning Network, teams are provided resources and technical assistance including evidence-based prevention and intervention strategies aimed at reducing chronic absence and connecting and engaging students and their families.

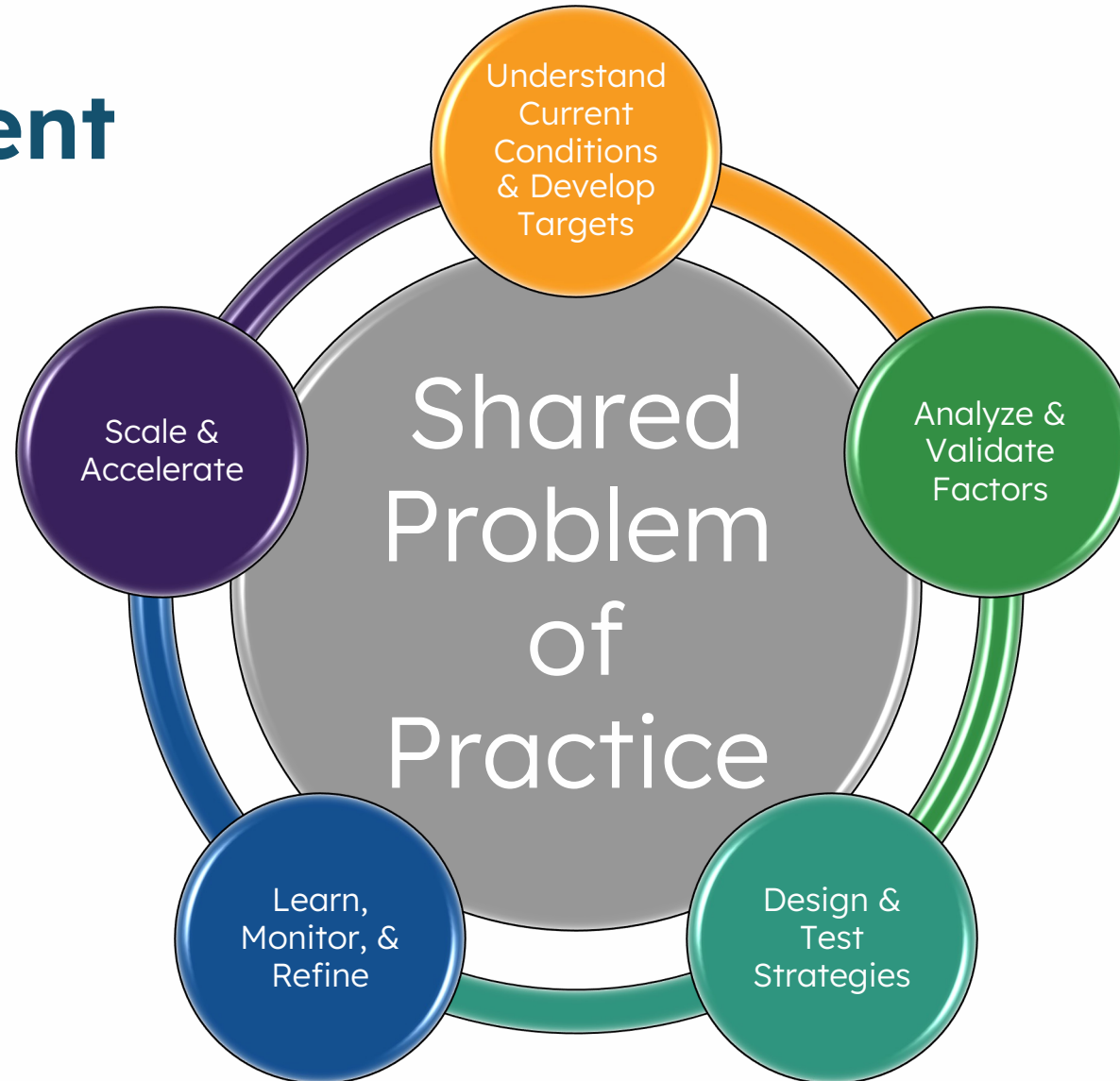
Attendance PLN Objectives

School teams address chronic absence by:

1. Monitoring data
2. Building a culture of attendance
3. Identifying and reducing barriers to school attendance
4. Exploring strategies for incorporating student and family voices
5. Identifying mental health supports



Continuous Improvement



Expectations

- Commit to 2-years in district or campus team
 - Workshop, webinar, or virtual conference approximately every other month with coaching opportunities in between
- Collaborate with peers across the region
- Reflect on timely quantitative & qualitative data
- Innovate practices & implement small tests



How will the Attendance PLN support your work?

PLNs Get Results

+ 10%

Elementary schools achieved, on average, a 10% increase in early literacy or math benchmark skills after one year in the Kindergarten Readiness PLN.

+ 23%

One university exceeded their 15% goal to increase new transfer enrollment from CTX community colleges after one year and enrolled more students of color than in past five years.

Discussion

What are some ways you can see the Attendance PLN supporting your district goals?

- **Shifting educator mindsets**
- **Identifying strategies and resources to help positively impact student connections and re-engagement in school.**
- **Developing more mental health supports for students**

Questions?



Session Survey

**Please complete this survey to receive
your Professional Development credit.**



Thank you.

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