

Chronic Absenteeism: A Resource Guide for Delaware Districts and Charter Schools 2019-2020

What is Chronic Absenteeism?

Chronic absenteeism from school, because of both excused and unexcused absences as well as out of school suspensions, represents instructional hours lost and is a predictor of lower levels of literacy by third grade, class failure in middle school, and higher numbers of high school dropouts (from Preventing Missed Opportunity: Taking Collective Action to Confront Chronic Absence, 2016). Students must be engaged and "present and ready to learn" to succeed academically. An indication of high K-12 chronic absence rates can help drive improvement discussions and encourage schools and communities to work together to address the factors that lead to poor student attendance.

Chronic absenteeism should not be confused with truancy, which focuses only on unexcused absences and is based on compliance with the law. Truancy is defined in <u>Title 14</u> of Delaware Code as a student absence from school without a valid excuse for more than 3 school days during a school year.

For the purposes of calculating and reporting chronic absenteeism for federal accountability and federal Office of Civil Rights reporting, chronic absenteeism includes unduplicated students who were enrolled in the school for at least 10 school days at any time during the school year and who were absent 10 percent of the school days in the school in which they were enrolled. In accordance with the Office for Civil Rights' guidance, a student was absent, for federal reporting purposes, when not physically on school grounds and when not participating in instruction or instruction-related activities at an approved off-grounds location for at least half the school day.

For the purpose of calculating the On Track Attendance measure of Delaware's statewide accountability system (Delaware School Success Framework, or DSSF), chronically absent students include students who are absent *for any reason* (e.g., illness, out-of-school suspension, the need to care for a family member, extended family vacations or trips), for 10 percent of a student's total membership *between September 30 and May 31*, regardless of whether absences are excused or unexcused. On Track Attendance measures the percentage of students *not* chronically absent, which is the inverse of the percentage of students chronically absent, to represent school performance data in a positive manner.

Why Does it Matter?

Did you know that just missing two full days of school per month can lead to chronic absenteeism? Even missing half a day each week adds up to 20 days, or a full month, missed per year.

Nationwide, one in 10 kindergarten students misses nearly a month of school every year. For many low-income students, chronic absence in kindergarten can translate into poor academic performance throughout elementary school (Chang & Romero, 2008). By sixth grade, poor attendance is a proven indicator of whether a child will drop out of high school, regardless of economic background (Balfanz, Herzog, & MacIver, 2007). By ninth grade, missing excessive amounts of school can predict the likelihood of dropping out with more accuracy than past test scores (Allensworth & Easton, 2007).

Moreover, Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) exposure has been associated with chronic school absenteeism in school-age children. To improve school attendance, along with improving future graduation rates and long-term health, these findings highlight the need for an interdisciplinary approach to address child adversity that involves pediatricians, mental health providers, schools, and public health partners (Allison et al, 2017).

Chronically absent students are not only missing out on school days and opportunities to learn, but they are at the greatest risk of falling behind. Chronic absenteeism has been linked to reduced student achievement, social disengagement, and feelings of alienation (Gottfried, 2014; Gottfried, 2015; Johnson, 2005). Over the long term, it is correlated to increased rates of high school dropout, adverse health outcomes and poverty in adulthood, and an increased likelihood of interacting with the criminal justice system (Schoeneberger, 2012; U.S. Department of Education, 2016). All of these negative outcomes limit the long-term success of students in school and into adulthood (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

What Can Schools Do?

There are multiple ways that schools can monitor attendance and put systems in place to intervene early to identify and address the root causes for student absences. By identifying root causes, schools can provide more personalized supports to prevent or dramatically reduce absences from school, thereby reducing lost academic learning time. Following is a list of strategies schools can utilize to identify, monitor and address student attendance patterns. Please note that this list of resources is not exhaustive.

Utilize Early Warning Systems

School attendance/absence data are a critical means by which teams of administrators, educators, school nurses, school counselors, school psychologists, school social workers, and other pupil support personnel can take action to address chronic absenteeism. The EdInsight Dashboard application within the Identity Management System (IMS) is an effective tool for monitoring student attendance, especially for those students who may be at risk for becoming chronically absent. As evidenced by a strong research base, chronic absenteeism is highly correlated with low student achievement and is a strong predictor of whether a student will graduate. The Early Warning System tab within the EdInsight Dashboard has been refined to assist districts and charter schools in identifying students who are at risk of being chronically absent so that schools can intervene quickly, before small problems become big problems. A presentation on the Early Warning System may be found here.

Many times, simply developing personal relationships between school personnel and children and taking time to understand why a student is absent can have a dramatic effect on improving attendance. By taking an interest in a student who is absent from school and letting them know that they were missed, asking why they weren't in school, and asking how they can help shows students that an adult cares about them and about their education. An example of an evidence-based dropout prevention model connecting mentors to students in K-12 is the Check and Connect model developed at the University of Minnesota. Schools should identify personnel such as secretaries, office aides, or other support personnel such as psychologists, counselors, school nurses, or student advisors to make individual contact with students who are absent from school, even if only for two consecutive days, on a routine basis.

Work with the school's counselors and homeless and foster-care care liaisons to identify the specific school attendance barriers faced by children in poverty, foster youth, homeless youth, and any other significant student population with high chronic absenteeism rates. By examining and evaluating the barriers, schools can identify the solutions.

Engage Families through Building Positive Relationships

Monitoring a student's attendance at the school level is an important first step, but working directly with the student's family (see support resource here) and collaborating with community agencies is strongly encouraged. Examples include, but are not limited to:

- Raising awareness of the importance of attending school, communicating expectations
 for school attendance, building supportive relationships with parents and caregivers to
 facilitate regular attendance and school success (face-to-face meetings, phone calls,
 text messages, and emails).
- Making home visits to strengthen school engagement and reduce student absences if parents/guardians/caregivers cannot be reached by phone or other modes of communication.
- Engaging bilingual staff to contact parents/guardians/caregivers with limited Englishspeaking ability by phone or via home visits, and send out school attendance notification emails or letters in the language spoken at home.

Create Community Partnerships

Chronic absenteeism is not just a school's concern, but a community-wide concern as well. Teachers, administrators and school staff cannot solve attendance issues alone. Schools can collaborate with community agencies, organizations, businesses and local citizens to provide supports that can help reduce absences (Hanover Research, 2016). Examples of community partners include, but are not limited to:

- Civic organizations
- Faith-based organizations
- Healthcare providers
- Local government
- Mentors
- Non-profit organizations such as United Way, Boys and Girls Clubs, and Communities in Schools
- Social Services

Become aware of the community resources that are available to you. Examples include:

<u>Delaware 2-1-1</u> (Provides one central resource for access to the health and human service organizations that offer the support in Delaware.)

Nemours KidsCope (Provides crisis resources, outpatient services and parent resources for Delaware families.)

<u>Delaware Health and Social Services</u>, <u>Directory of Human Services</u> (Offers a comprehensive listing of the many human service programs within Delaware.)

<u>LanguageLine Solutions</u> (A fee-based service that offers instant access to interpreters by phone for real-time translation assistance 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.)

<u>Delaware Interpretation and Translation Services - Foreign Languages</u> (Provides a full list of state approved translation/interpretation vendors.)

Create and Implement Extended Learning Time/Summer Programs

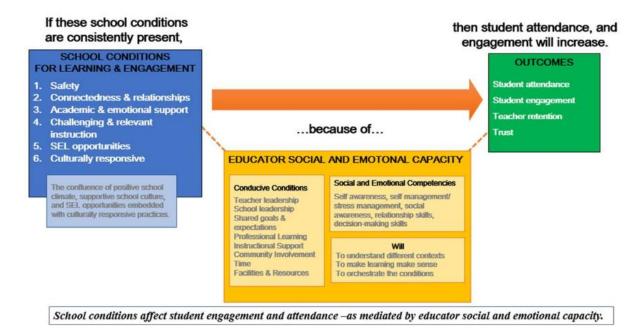
Extracurricular activities and clubs, before and after school programs, and summer learning are examples of extended learning that can aid in reducing chronic absenteeism by creating a sense of belonging, expanding connections to caring adults and offering engaging academic enrichment (Chang & Jordan, 2012). Extended learning opportunities offered by schools and community agencies can be supported through the following funding sources:

- <u>Title I. Part A</u> is the U.S. Department of Education's largest K-12 grant program. Title I provides supplemental resources to help low-income schools expand opportunities for educationally disadvantaged students. Schools that receive Title I funds have flexibility in designing and implementing programs to support students beyond the school day and beyond the school year.
- 21st Century Community Learning Centers (Title IV, Part B) competitive subgrants are intended to help districts, schools and community agencies:
 - Increase school attendance and increase academic achievement of participating students in one or more academic areas
 - Increase school connectedness of participants, including families, caregivers, and school teachers and staff
 - Increase the capacity of participants to become productive adults.

The application process opens annually around mid-January. Examples of activities that Title IV, Part B funds can support can be found here.

Consider a Trauma-Informed Approach

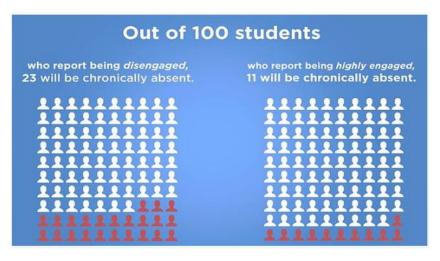
Safe, positive, engaging learning environments motivate daily attendance even when it isn't easy to get to school. A trauma-informed approach means that adults in the educational setting seek to understand with compassion and empathy the "why" behind student behaviors and action, and then create conditions for learning and engagement. Students and families are more likely to show up to school if they know that they can turn to the adults in the building for help and support, especially during times of times of need (Attendance Works, 2018). The graphic below, developed by Dr. David Osher, vice president and Institute Fellow at the American Institutes for Research, illustrates how a trauma-informed approach can have an impact on student attendance, even when students enter school challenged and upset by their experiences outside of school.



Source: David Osher, American Institutes for Research

https://www.attendanceworks.org/reducing-chronic-absence-with-a-trauma-informed-approach/

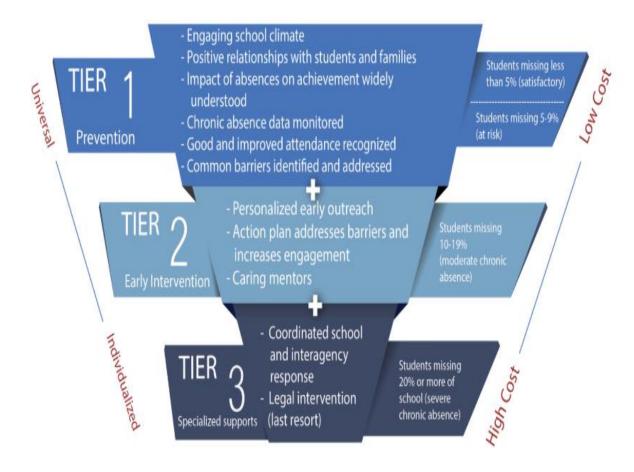
Connection and engagement make the difference for students who have experienced trauma and toxic stress.



Source: www.panoramaed.com

Structure and routine are healing to the brain. Therefore, it is imperative that students who have experienced trauma and adversity, or who have known family and community stressors, are in school. School and classroom engagement and social and emotional learning skills, like self-management, have been found to be the huge determinants of classroom success aside from cognitive ability. For that reason, it is vital that schools use an integrated, tiered student support model (see graphic below) that incorporates multi-disciplinary collaboration and problem solving. This process relies on the strength of the student support team to balance processes for thorough

problem assessment of the needs of individual students while: 1) monitoring school policies and processes that promote universal connection and relationship building, 2) serving as mediators for stress and adversity, and 3) targeting opportunities to build trust-based relationships and develop self-regulation skills for classroom attunement. Monitoring and supports should be intensified through the tiered system with the goal of interrupting any progression to more restrictive needs.



Source: www.attendanceworks.org

Universal support strategies (tier 1) should focus on creating welcoming school environments and normative practices for transitioning and acclimating new students and families. Many schools conduct home visits or host summer academies for new students in preparation for the new school year. In addition to meeting and greeting, these strategies allow students and families to get a jump on building support systems in anticipation of the questions that may come up as the year progresses. It also gives school staff to share resources and convey their desire to partner with students and families to achieve common goals. If families are struggling or have specific needs, they are more likely to reach out to someone who has already demonstrated a willingness to help and problem solve.

Targeted supports (tier 2) are typically group-based interventions that focus on skill-building for youth development. With integrated student supports, teams can monitor data on school climate

and culture to identify opportunities to intervene for maximum benefit. Strategies generally focus on reducing barriers to attendance and creating action plans with students and families to address these barriers. Many schools offer bus tickets, maintain food pantries and uniform closets, and provide access to laundering equipment if these are identified as barriers to school attendance. Sample interventions for tiered supports can be found at AttendanceWorks.

At tier 3, focus on strategies to build resilience with self-management skills. Often, students affected by adversity experience overwhelmed coping capacities when faced with daily challenges. The amygdala is constantly activated with no period of recovery. For that reason, they function in survival states with limited reserves available to focus on thinking and reasoning. This threatens their academic functioning and poses challenges for the immune system that can impact long-term health and longevity. Tier 3 attendance strategies may include Check-In/Check-Out or assignment to a mentor. Psychoeducation about how the brain works and creating a personalized plan of strategies for calming and energizing the amygdala and when to use them can be useful for building self-regulation. Students must be supported in recognizing when to implement the identified strategies and encouraged to evaluate their usefulness often. Specialized supports should also be accessed at tier 3 in hopes of strengthening collaborations and wraparound supports to increase youth development and independence while reducing barriers to school attendance.

Additional Resources

<u>Attendance Works Resources, Toolkits, Handouts for Families and more</u> (a wide variety of free, downloadable resources for use at the school, district and state levels)

<u>Attendance Works Strategies for School Sites</u> (five steps recommended to address chronic absenteeism)

Attendance Playbook: Smart Solutions for Reducing Chronic Absenteeism (publication by FutureEd and Attendance Works that features nearly two dozen practical strategies for improving attendance)

<u>Self-Assessments for Districts, Schools and Other School Programs</u> (tools to help states, districts, schools and other school programs identify what could help improve attendance)

<u>Portraits of Change: Aligning School and Community Resources to Reduce Chronic</u>
<u>Absenteeism (a nationwide analysis of chronic absenteeism trends, research and case studies)</u>

<u>Best Practices in Improving Student Attendance</u> (literature review of research-based best practices for improving student attendance)

<u>Toolkit: Success for Delaware Learners</u> - Provides districts and charter schools with a list of resources designed to improve outcomes for all students. Resources listed are considered either evidence-based or promising practices.

Getting Students to School: Strategies for Improving Attendance and Reducing chronic

Absenteeism - State of New Jersey Department of Education (a New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE)-developed document to provide schools and districts with proactive ideas and strategies to engage educators, families and the community in an effort to improve student attendance.)

<u>Examples of strategies used in other states</u> (Attendance Works review of case studies across the country)

<u>Chronic School Absenteeism and the Role of Adverse Childhood Experiences</u> (peer-reviewed journal article that examines the association between chronic absenteeism and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) among school-age children)

<u>Everyone Graduates Center – Analytics, Tools and Capacity Building Ideas</u> (a wide variety of resources and tools to support state, districts and schools address chronic absenteeism in secondary schools)

<u>Chronic Absenteeism in the Nation's Schools 2013-2014 – U.S. Department of Education (an interactive tool that highlights national trends and statewide chronic absenteeism data)</u>

<u>Chronic Absenteeism and Its Impact on Achievement - University of Delaware Center for Research in Education & Social Policy</u> (a locally-developed research brief on the impact of chromic absenteeism on student achievement)

<u>Chronic Absenteeism – NEA Research Brief NBI No. 57 (2018)</u> (a research brief that identifies and highlights best practices aimed at reducing the problem of chronic absenteeism)

Reducing Chronic Absence with a Trauma Informed Approach (2018) (multi-agency collaboration to provide resources and highlight case studies where the focus is on improving conditions for learning)

<u>IES What Works Clearinghouse Practice Guides</u> (publications that present recommendations for educators to address challenges in their classrooms and schools. They are based on reviews of research, the experiences of practitioners, and the expert opinions of a panel of nationally recognized experts.)

<u>Success Stories in Other States</u> (Attendance Works review of successful strategies use to reduce chronic absenteeism in states across the country)

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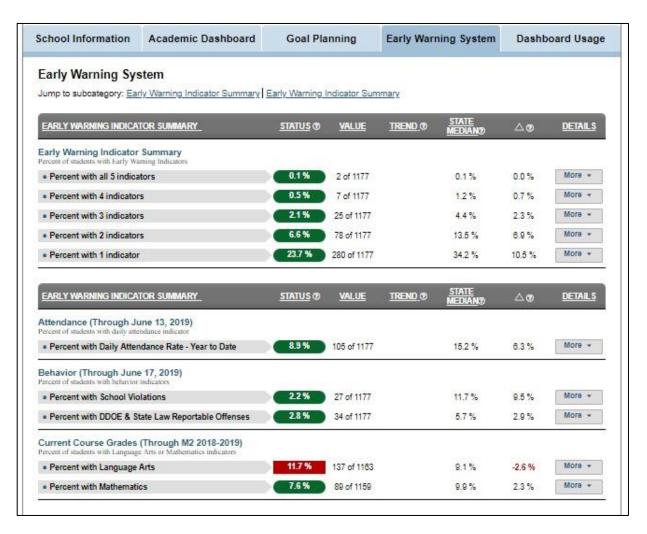
Early Warning System

The new Early Warning System (EWS) replaced the former Delaware Early Warning System (DEWS). The indicators used in EWS are those specifically identified by the research of Dr. Robert Balfanz. There are four areas that focus on critical indicators in the early identification of potential dropouts: Attendance, Behavior, and Course Grades in Language Arts and Mathematics.

The EWS includes district, school, and student level data and includes grades KN-12.

District level

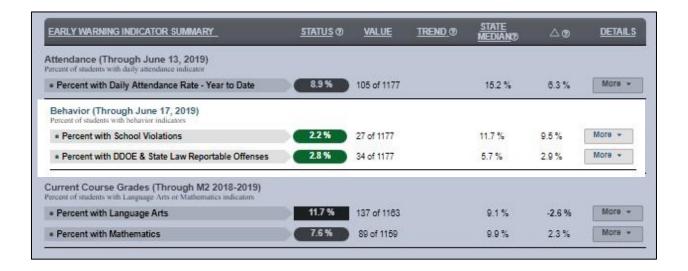
Early Warning Indicator Summary—The "More" drop down menu allows you to populate a "Student List" that will show you the list of schools in the district and indicate whether or not they have students with 1, 2, 3, 4 or 5 Early Warning Indicators and what percent of students have 1, 2, 3, 4 or 5 indicators.



Attendance— The Attendance metric shows Daily Attendance Rate – Year to Date. The "More" drop down in the Attendance section populates a list of schools in the district and shows the percent of students in each school that have a daily attendance indicator.



Behavior— The Behavior metrics include Percent of Students with School Violations and DDOE & State Reportable Offenses. The "More" drop down in the Behavior section populates a list of schools in the district and shows the percent of students in each school that have a school violation and/or DDOE & State Reportable Offense.



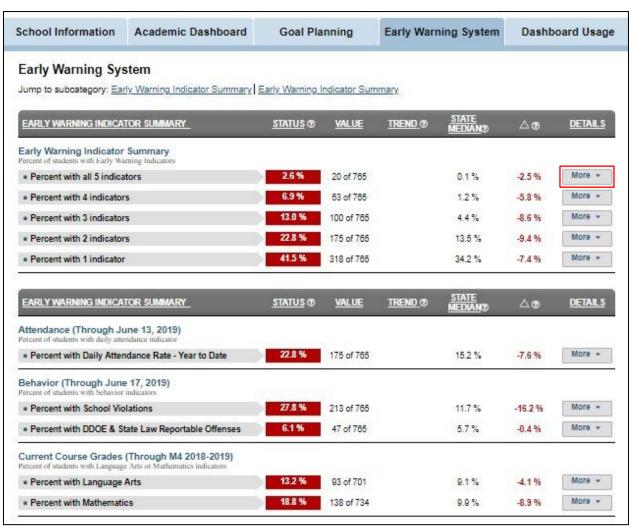
Current Course Grades— The Current Course Grades show Early Warning Indicators for Language Arts and Mathematics. The "More" drop down in the Current Course Grades section populates a list of schools in the district and shows the percent of students in each school with a Language Arts or Mathematics indicator.



School Level

The Early Warning Indicator Summary includes 5 metrics indicating students with 1, 2, 3, 4 or 5 indicators.

The "More" drop down option has a Grade Level Chart and a Student List. The Grade Level Chart will populate a chart that separates each grade level (respective to your school) and show the percentage of students with an Early Warning Indicator for the given metric. The Student List will show you a list of students that have an Early Warning Indicator for the given metric.



Attendance— The Grade Level Chart separates each grade level (respective to your school) and shows the percentage of students in each grade level that are below the Daily Attendance rate Threshold of 90%.

The Student List populates the students that are below the Daily Attendance Rate Threshold and shows the student's currently Daily Attendance Rate.



Behavior— The Behavior metrics for School Violations & DDOE & State Law Reportable Offenses show students that are exceeding the threshold for either of these metrics.

The Grade Level Chart separates each grade level and shows the percent of students for each grade level that have 2 or more School Violations and/or 1 or more DDOE & State Law Reportable Offenses.

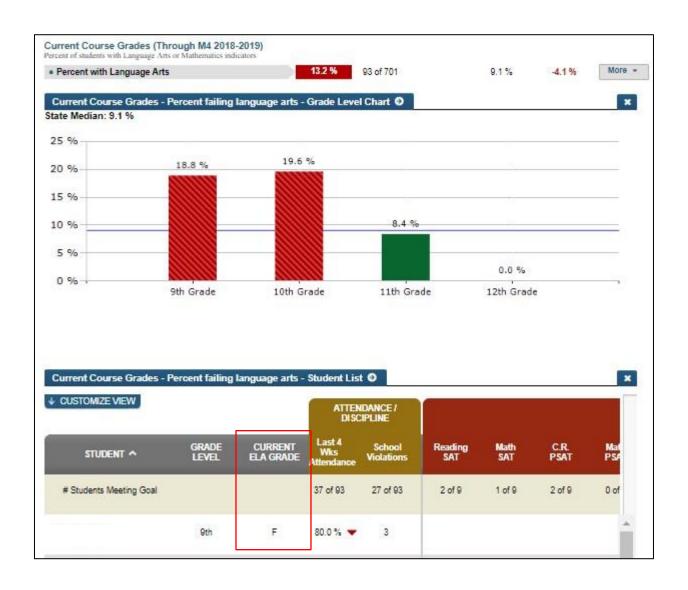
The Student List populates the students that are exceeding the thresholds for School Code of Conduct and/or State Reportable Offences. The list supplies the number state reportable offenses.



Current Course Grades—The Current Course Grades show the percentage of students that have an Early Warning Indicator in Language Arts and/or Mathematics.

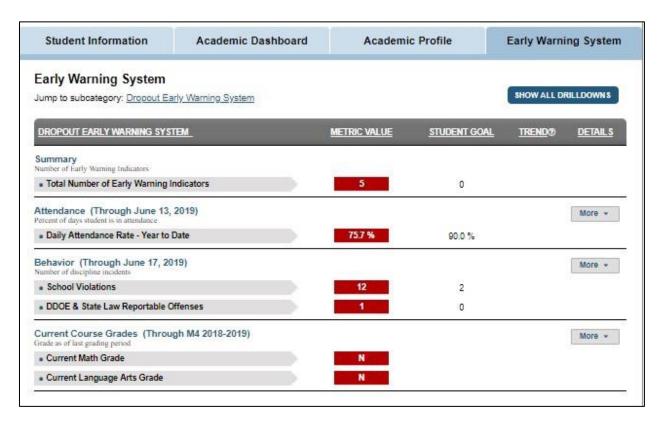
The Grade Level Chart separates each grade level (respective to your school). The graph indicates the percentage of student for each grade that have a failing grade for Language Arts and/or Mathematics.

The Student List populates the students that have a failing grade in Language Arts and/or Mathematics, and shows the current grade for each subject that they have an Early Warning Indicator.

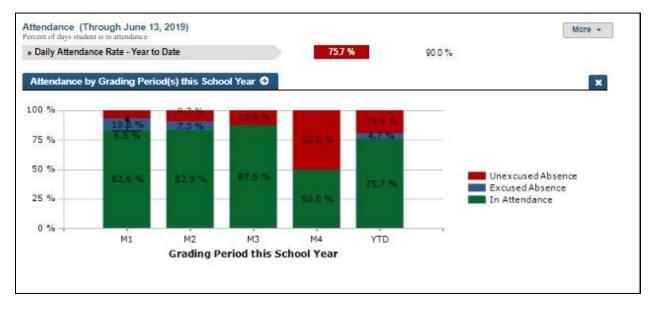


Student Level

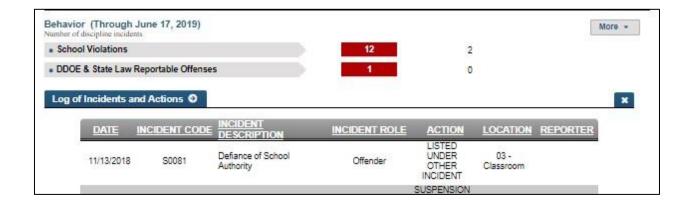
Summary—Shows the number of indicators that a student has out the 5 possible indicators.



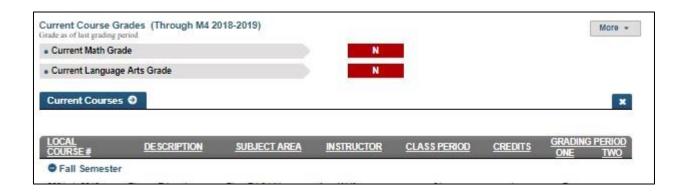
Attendance—The "More" drop down option has an Attendance Rate Chart which breaks down the student's attendance record by marking period and year to date as well as by category; unexcused, excused and in attendance.



Behavior—The "More" drop down option has an Incident Log detailing the School Violations and/or DDOE & State Reportable Offenses including Date, Incident Code, Incident Description, Incident Role, Action, Location and Reporter.



Current Course Grades—The "More" drop down option has the Current Courses for the student detailing the grade from the last grading period.



Training or data coach services are available for The EdInsight Dashboard and Reports Portal. Please contact DDOE Tech Ops at (302)735-4140 to schedule a training session for your district.