

# 5 Ways Innovative School Districts Are Reducing Chronic Absenteeism



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# 1. Promote stronger relationships between teachers and students

**Key insight:** When educators focus on promoting relationships and social-emotional learning (SEL) skills, students attend school more often, feel more connected to their learning, and succeed academically.



***Washoe County School District***  
Every Child, By Name And Face, To Graduation



**Washoe County  
School District**



**Located in metro  
Reno/Sparks, NV**



**Serves 64,000  
students**

# 1. Promote stronger relationships between teachers and students



Teachers and staff at Cold Spring Middle School **hang posters** on a wall with the names of all 980 students during staff meetings



To note how well they know each student, educators add checkmarks next to students' names under the columns **"Name/Face," "Something Personal," "Personal/Family Story,"** and **"Academic Standing"**



Research shows that students who don't have meaningful social connections are **at risk** for attendance and behavior problems, dropping out, and **committing suicide**



Washoe County School District administers annual **school climate** and **social-emotional learning surveys** using Panorama to measure students' perceptions of safety, engagement, and social-emotional skills



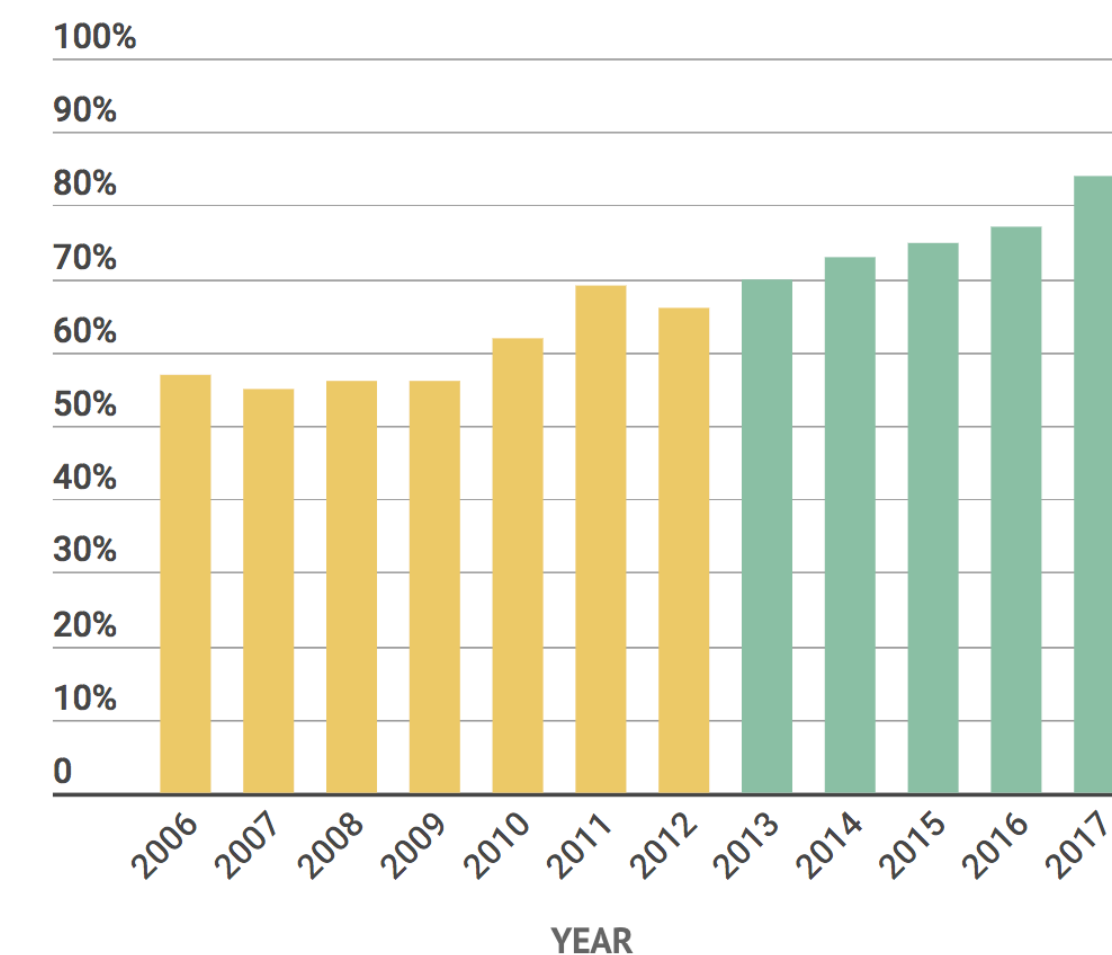
Cold Spring Middle School has seen **higher attendance and graduation rates** since focusing on teacher-student relationships and social-emotional learning

*"We can now look at our subpopulations' responses to our climate survey and see that the gaps in students' perceptions about their school climate perfectly mirror the gaps we see in chronic absenteeism."*

**Dr. Laura Davidson**

Director of Research and Evaluation  
Washoe County School District

## District Graduation Rates



The Washoe district implemented an SEL program in the 2012-2013 school year.



## 2. Send letters home to families with attendance “nudges” that reduce absenteeism by 10% or more

**Key insight:** Families will help get their child to school when they’re aware of their child’s attendance figures, how they compare to those of other students, and the impact of absenteeism on student learning.



**The School District  
of Philadelphia**



**Located in  
Philadelphia, PA**



**Serves 134,000  
students**



# 2 ■ Send letters home to families with attendance “nudges” that reduce absenteeism by 10% or more



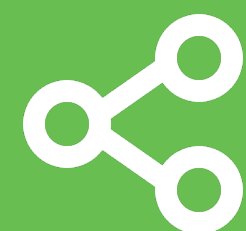
The School District of Philadelphia partnered with researchers at Harvard University to test whether **sending letters that use behavioral “nudges”** to families of students facing chronic absenteeism could improve attendance



These letters were designed to **raise families’ awareness of their child’s absenteeism figures**, how they compare to those of other students, and the impact these missed days have on student learning



The district **reduced chronic absenteeism by up to 10%** for students whose families received the attendance letters



Districts nationwide—from Chicago Public Schools (IL) to Tacoma Public Schools (WA)—are now using this cost-effective messaging technique with **similar results**

The School District of Philadelphia  
Office of Research and Evaluation  
440 N. Broad St.  
2nd Floor, Portal A  
Philadelphia, PA 19130



To the Parent/Guardian of:  
[Student First Name] [Student Last Name]  
[Address]  
[City], [State] [Zip]  
[Unique Code]

## ATTENDANCE INFORMATION

Dear Parent/Guardian of [Student Full Name]:

Attendance matters and we need your help this year. [Student First Name] missed [Student Absences] day(s) of school last year [Multiplier Text]. A few absences every month can add up to weeks of lost learning over the year. Missing school, whether for excused or unexcused reasons, disrupts a student’s education.

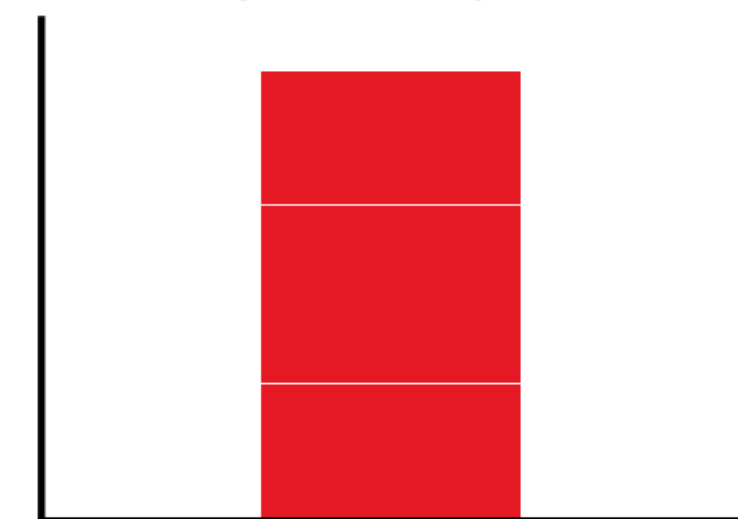
You can play a big role in improving [Student First Name]’s attendance. If you have questions, please call (267)-282-1155 or email SDPattendanceproject.2@gmail.com.

Sincerely,

Dr. William Hite  
Superintendent  
The School District of Philadelphia

## [STUDENT FIRST NAME]’S ABSENCE RECORD

[Student Absences] day(s)



[Student Full Name]  
TOTAL ABSENCES LAST SCHOOL YEAR



# 3. Build community awareness around a district-wide attendance goal

**Key insight:** Engage families and community members around a specific attendance goal to reduce chronic absenteeism by up to 25%.



**Grand Rapids  
Public Schools**



**Located in Grand  
Rapids, MI**



**Serves 17,000  
students**



# 3 ■ Build community awareness around a district-wide attendance goal



District leaders at Grand Rapids Public Schools discovered that **over 7,000 students** had **missed a month or more** of school



Administrators launched a community awareness campaign called **Challenge 5** and started direct outreach to families, including home visits and monthly parent meetings



The campaign encouraged students and families to “strive for **fewer than five absences** in a school year” and spread the message using posters, social media, video, and events



The district partnered with **families, community organizations, police, and local businesses** to get the word out



Today, after three years of work, the district has **reduced chronic absenteeism rates by 25%**—with 3,600 fewer chronically absent students





# 4. Let students earn points for high attendance

**Key insight:** When students track their own attendance in a fun and interactive way, they feel more engaged and invested in their success in school.



**Fresno Unified  
School District**



**Located in  
Fresno, CA**



**Serves 74,000  
students**



# 4 Let students earn points for high attendance



Fresno Unified developed “**Strides**,” an app where students can track their recent attendance and academic trends



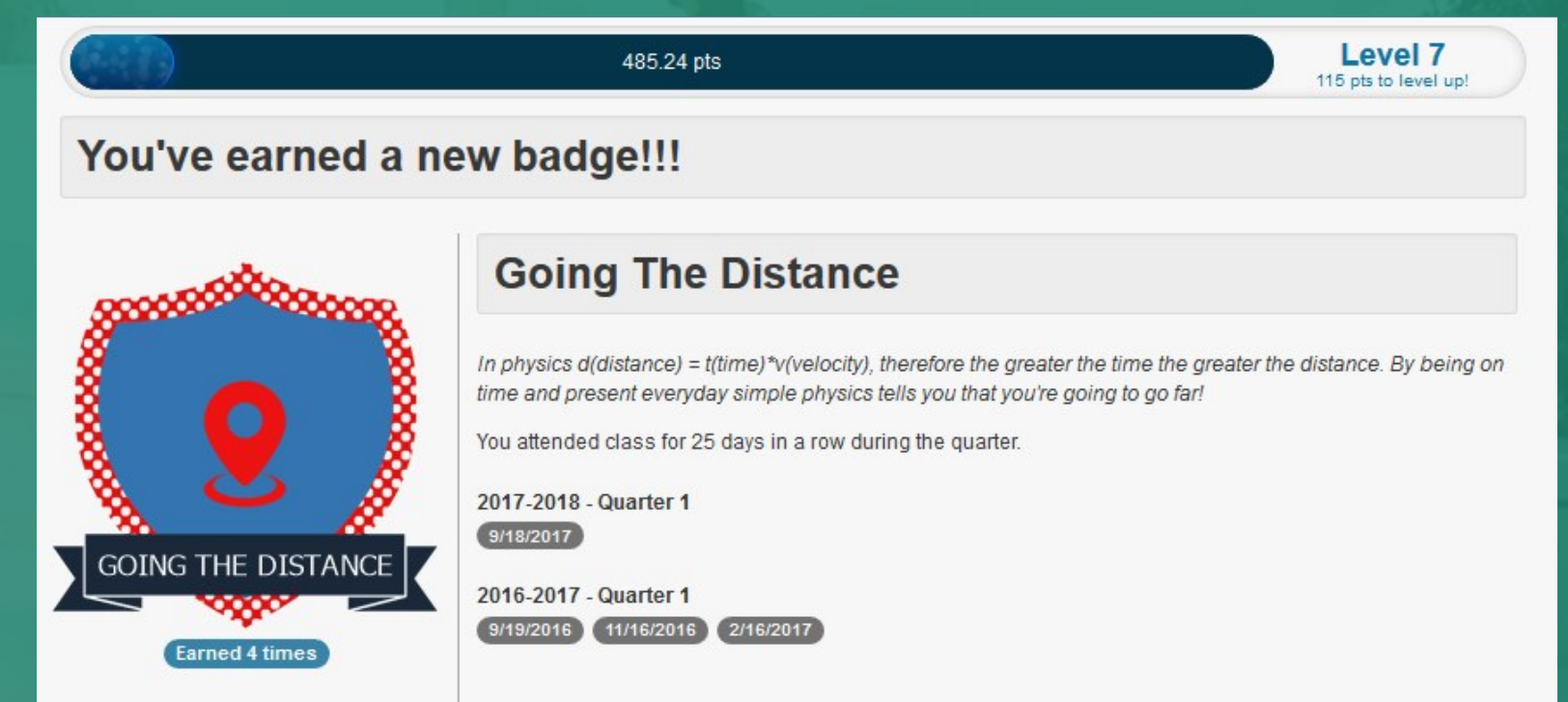
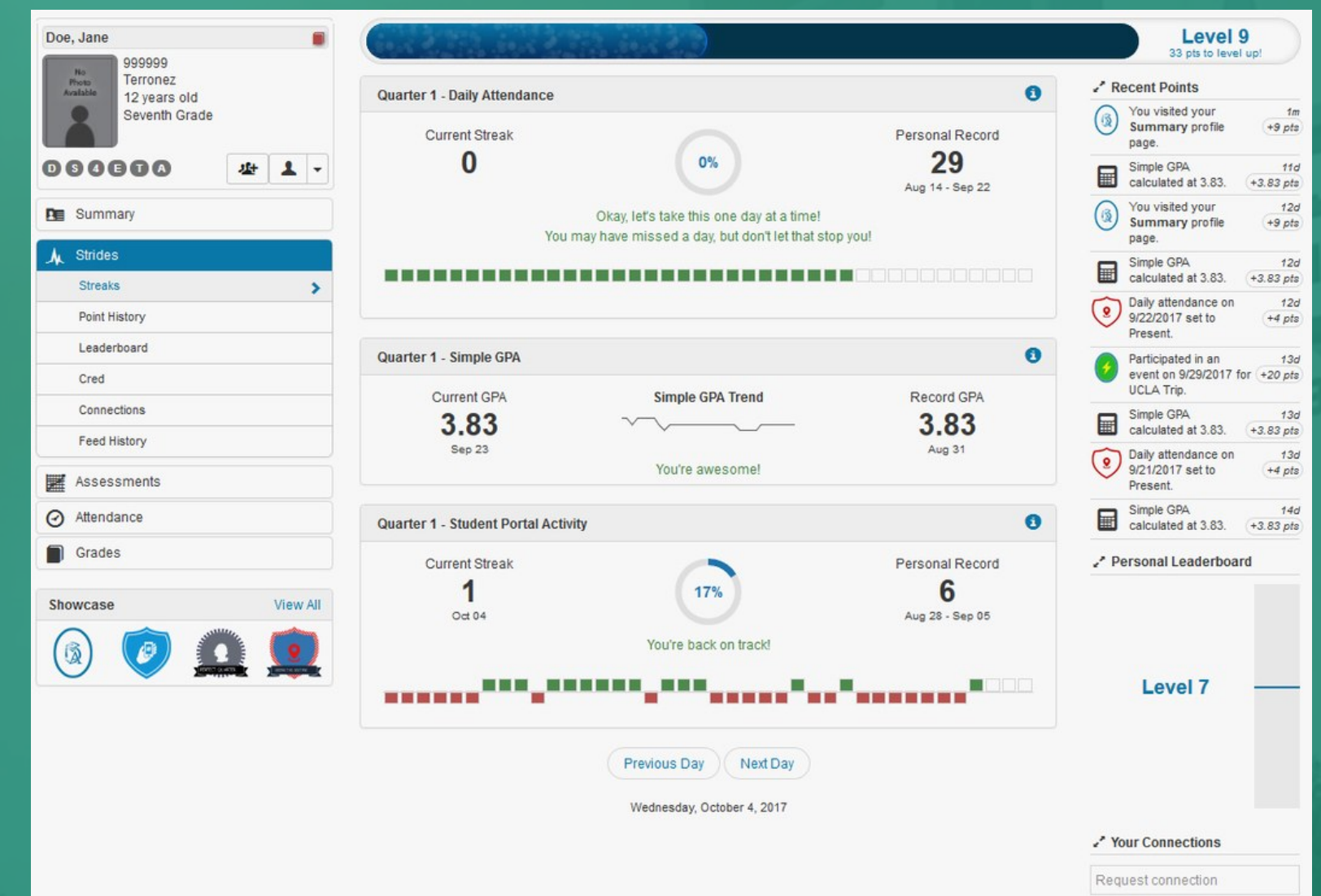
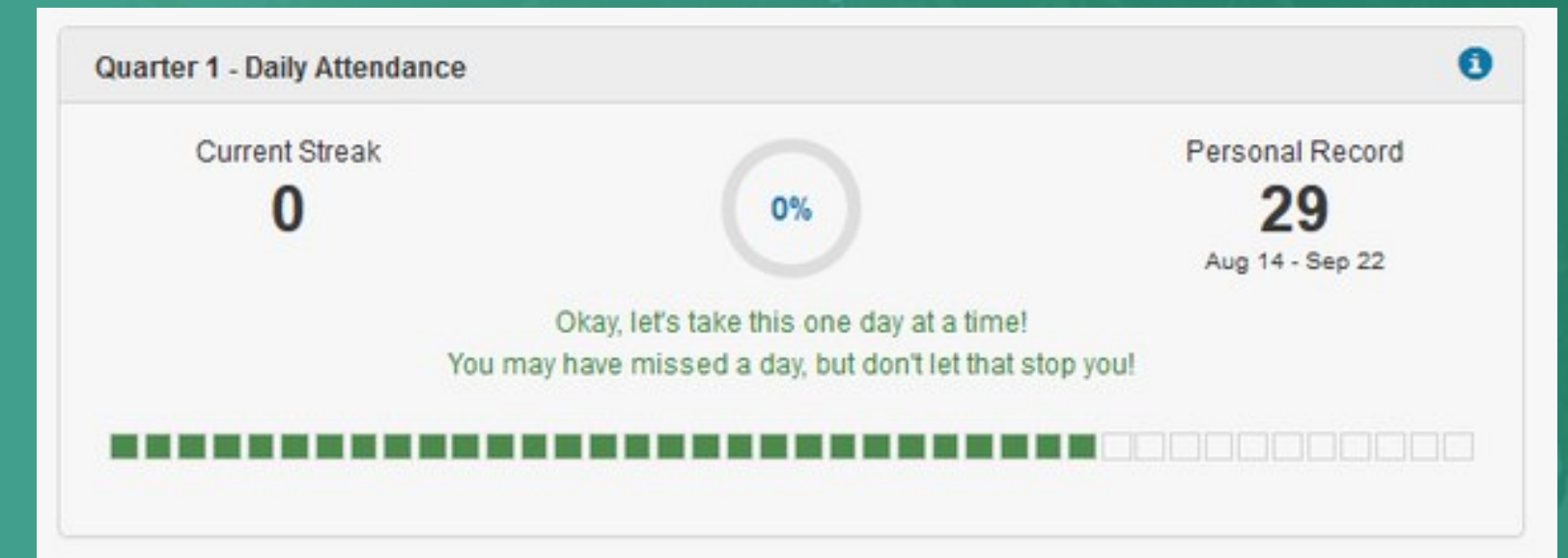
Inspired by Fitbit, the app lets students **track their progress** and **receive points** for positive attendance, behaviors, grades, and participation in extracurricular activities



The app displays a “**streak**” of **days attended** so that students are encouraged to maintain healthy attendance patterns over time



Over **30,000 students** have logged into the app to check their stats—and students report using the app on a regular basis to monitor their daily progress





# 5. Implement an early warning system

**Key insight:** By monitoring early warning indicators every day, educators can spend more time supporting students before they become chronically absent or fail courses.



Community High  
School District 117



Located in Lake  
Villa, IL



Serves 2,800  
students



# 5 Implement an early warning system



District leaders at Community High School District 117 started using **Panorama Student Success** as an early warning system to monitor each student's daily progress



School counselors, teachers, and administrators log into the platform daily to see how students are progressing across **attendance**, **academics**, **behavior**, and **social-emotional learning (SEL)**



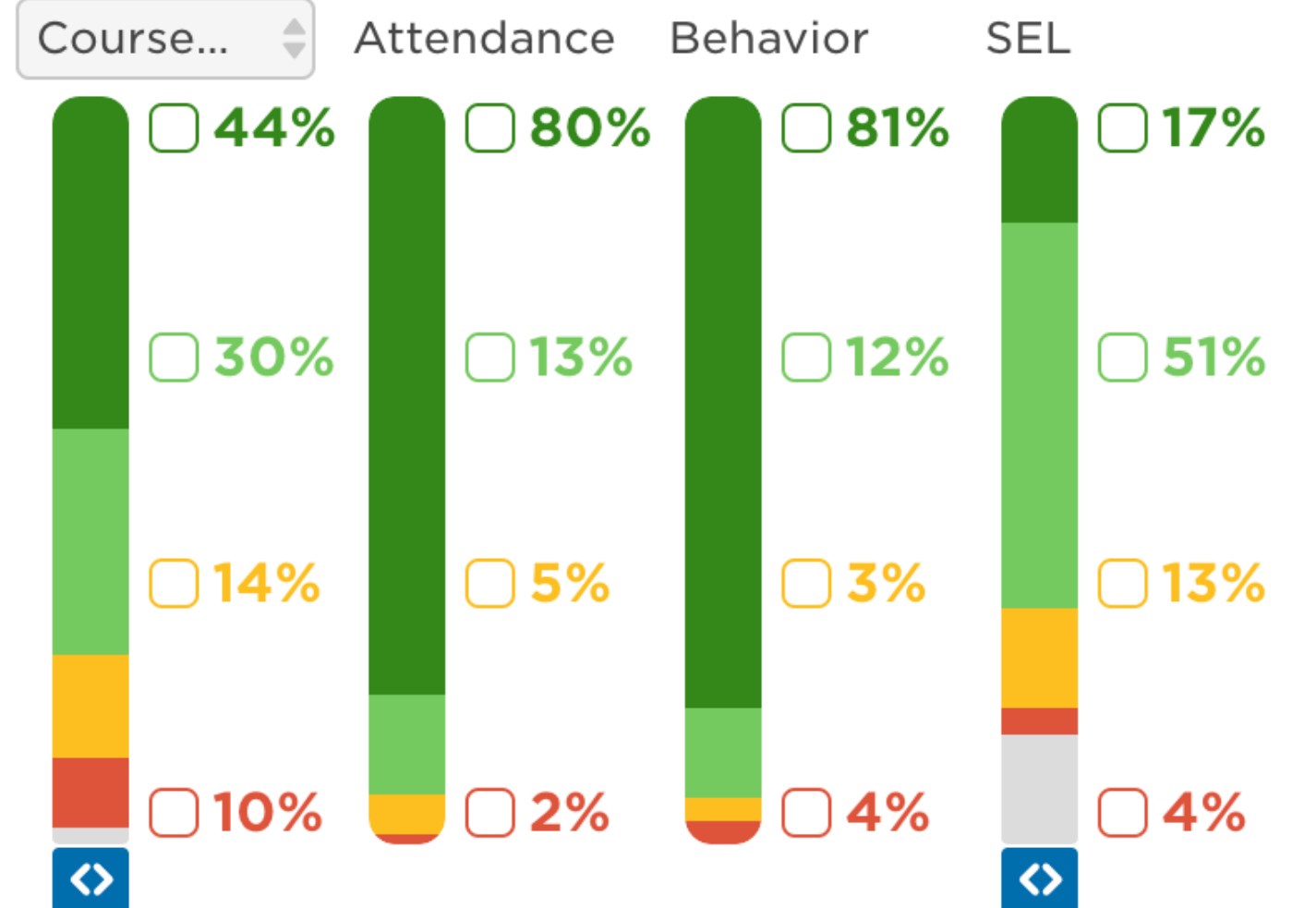
The platform flags individual students and groups of students that are at risk for chronic absenteeism based on recent attendance patterns, allowing educators to **focus on prevention** instead of reaction



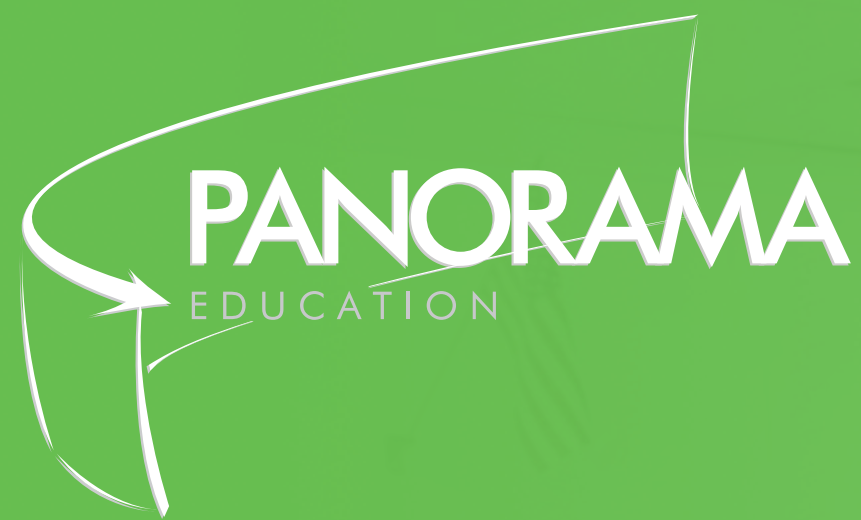
Today, school leaders at Lakes Community High School use these indicators to inform a **multi-tiered system of support (MTSS)** and to ensure that students graduate with college and career-ready skills

## ⚠ At Risk

**72 students** have attended between 80% and 90% of school days in Semester 1 (current).







# Learn more about improving attendance with Panorama

**Panorama Education** helps educators act on data to improve student outcomes. Panorama has supported more than 5 million students in 6,500 schools across 40 states, including those in the New York City Department of Education, Dallas Independent School District, Seattle Public Schools, and San Francisco Unified School District.

## Get in Touch:

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