



Present, Connected, and Engaged

Prevention-Focused Attendance Practices for PreK–12

Presented by:

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Maine Engagement and Attendance Center (MEAC)

October 9, 2026

GSEA Summit

Maine Engagement and Attendance Center



Maine Engagement and Attendance Center Continues Bringing Statewide Partners Together to Strengthen Student Attendance



Back left to right – Ayesha Hall, Bryan Lescord, Julie Smyth, Marcy Whitcomb, Courtney Angelosante, Sue Gallant, Alexandra Cookson, Monique Sullivan, and Tamara Ranger. Front left to right – Shelley Chasse-Johndro, Intern Piper Hallen, Jennifer Belanger, Ann Hanna, and Sarah Nelson (arriving after the photo – Jess Anderson)



Julie Symth

Director, O3S



Sarah Nelson

Engagement and Attendance Specialist

Learning Goals

By the end of the session, participants will:

- Understand current **Maine attendance trends**
- Explore developmental attendance prevention across PreK–12
- Identify Tier 1 practices that support presence, connection, and engagement
- Apply the CEFAM/Building Bridges Family Engagement Framework
- Identify practical roles for counselors and social workers
- Leave with one action they can take in their school





Pathway for Change

Mindset

Actionable
Data

Capacity

Strategies

Outcomes

Attendance Is More Than a Number

Attendance can be a signal of:



Connection



Belonging



Safety



Relationships



Barriers



Relevance



Opportunity



Instead of:

“Why isn't this student attending?”



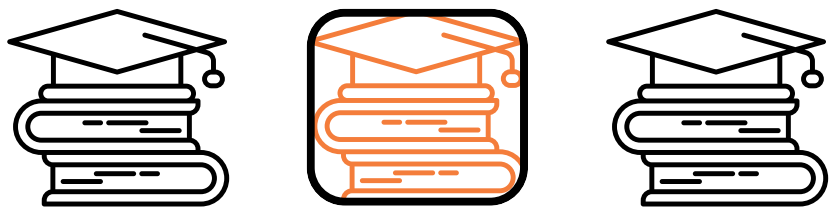
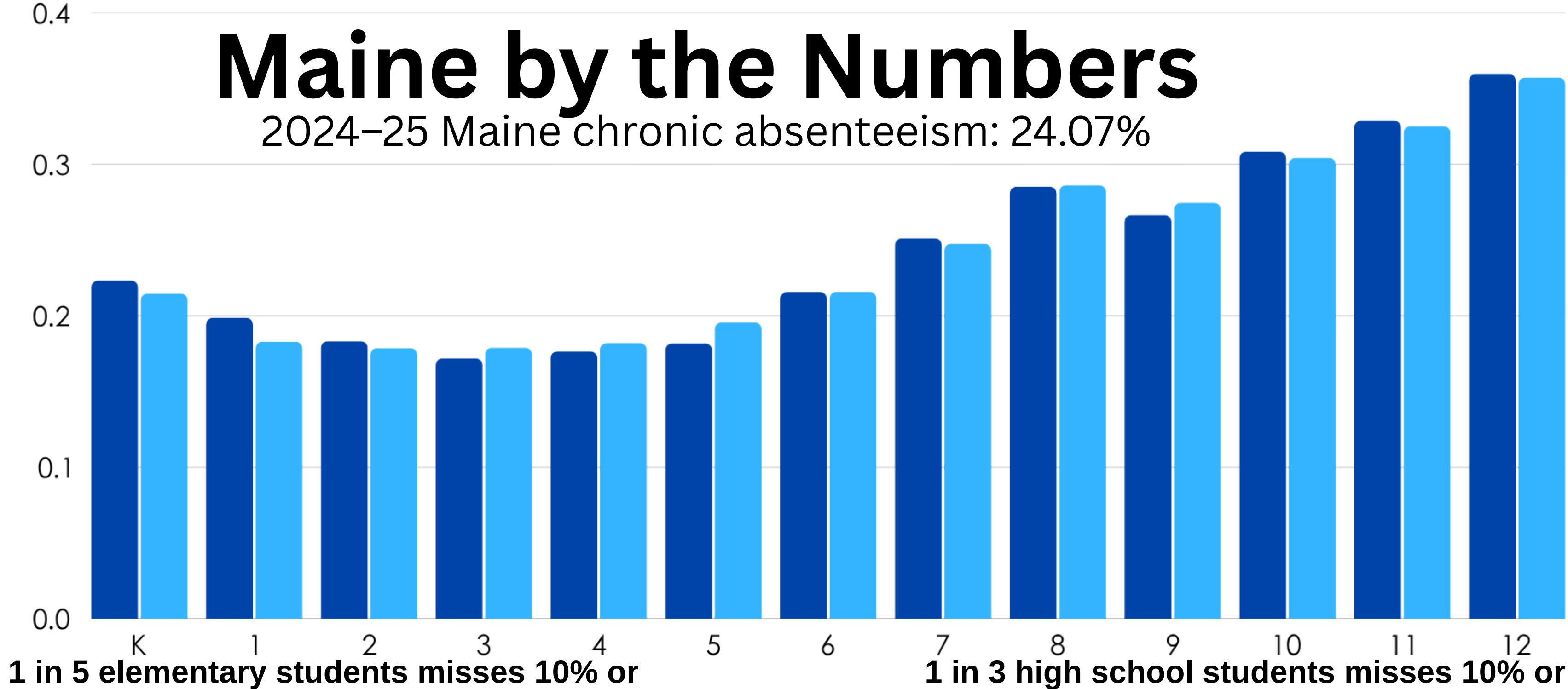
Ask:

“What is making attendance difficult and what can we change?”

2024 2025

Maine by the Numbers

2024–25 Maine chronic absenteeism: 24.07%



Prevention Starts Before Day 18

For a 180-day school year:



The question isn't:

“When does a student become chronically absent?”

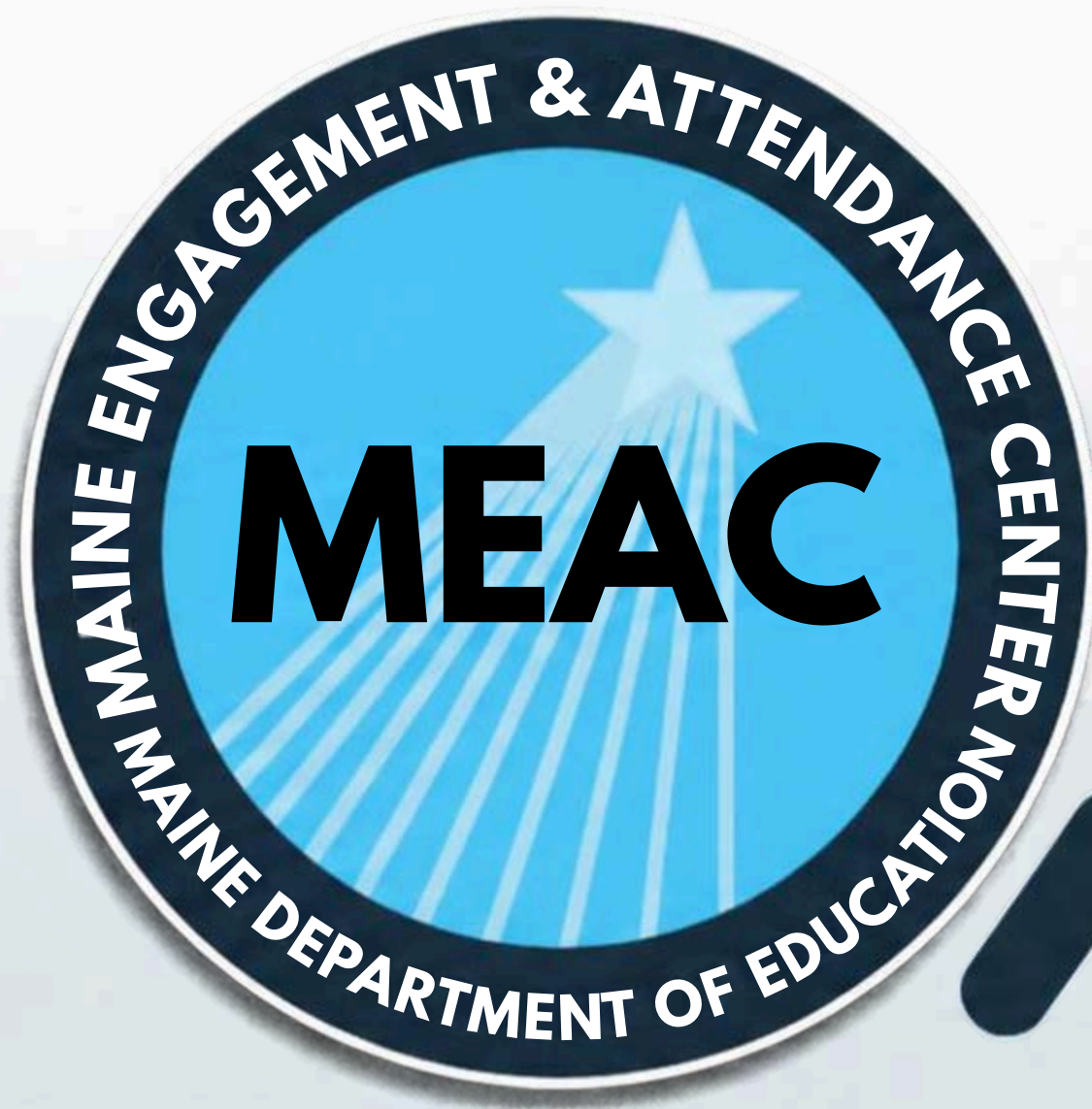


The question is:

“When can we **first notice** that **something is changing**?”



The MEAC Prevention Continuum



Focusing on Attendance



PRESENT

I can get here.



CONNECTED

I belong here.



ENGAGED

I want to be here.



Learning • Belonging • Success

PRESENT

Removing Barriers & Building Predictable Routines

The first question is:

What makes it possible for students to be present?



PRESENT

“ I can get here.
I know what to expect. ”



ACCESS



PREDICTABILITY



Prevention starts with access and predictability.

Attendance Is a Systems Issue



Students may experience barriers related to:

-  **Transportation**
-  **Housing**
-  **Family responsibilities**
-  **Health**
-  **Mental health**
-  **Child care**
-  **Work**
-  **School transitions**
-  **Morning routines**
-  **School avoidance**
-  **Safety**

Address the barrier, not the behavior.



ROUTINES: Make Showing Up Easier



Schoolwide

- Welcoming arrival
- Predictable routines
- Clear expectations
- Consistent transitions
- Accessible attendance information

Student-level

- Morning check-in
- Arrival plan
- Visual schedule
- First-period connection
- Transition support
- Transportation planning

Counselor/social worker question:
“Where is the friction point?”



PreK–Elementary: Build the Foundation

Family partnership + routines + belonging

- Approximately **1 in 5 elementary students** experience chronic absenteeism.

Key message:
**Attendance habits begin with a child's
experience of school.**



Focus on:

- **Successful transitions into school**
- **Predictable routines**
- **Family-school relationships**
- **Early identification of barriers**
- **Welcoming environments**
- **Positive attendance habits**

Middle School: Catch the Drift

- Approximately **1 in 4** middle school students experience chronic absenteeism.

Ask:

“What changed before attendance changed?”



Watch for:

- **Increasing tardiness**
- **Class-specific absences**
- **Withdrawal**
- **Academic frustration**
- **Peer challenges**
- **Reduced participation**
- **Changes in behavior**

High School: Keep the Pathway Open

- Approximately **1 in 3** high school students experience chronic absenteeism.

Key message:
Presence keeps pathways open.



Consider:

- **Credit attainment**
- **Graduation planning**
- **Work responsibilities**
- **Transportation**
- **Flexible pathways**
- **ELOs**
- **CTE/career connections**
- **Alternative education**
- **Postsecondary goals**

Counselor/Social Worker Practice

When attendance begins to change...
ASK:

- What changed?
- What barrier might be present?
- What support already works?
- Who needs to be involved?
- How can we better support the family?



Getting students through the door is only the beginning...

**“Once they're here, do they
feel like they belong?”**

CONNECTED

Relationships, Belonging & Family Partnership

Do students and families experience school as a place where they are known, valued, and welcomed?



CONNECTED

“I belong here. I know I matter.”

**MIYHS
and
Maine
CDC data**

**53% of Maine high school students feel
they matter in their community.**

(Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey, 2025).

How can we reach the other 47%?

**Maine high school students who felt they
matter in their community are less likely to
report depressive symptoms, suicide
ideation, current substance use, or 4+ ACEs.**

(Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention, Oct. 2025)

How can we develop a culture of mattering?

Belonging Is an Attendance Strategy

Students are more likely to engage when they experience:

Trusted adults

Positive peer relationships

Safety

Recognition

Voice

Respect

Identity affirmation

Meaningful participation

Ask:

“Who would notice if
this student weren't
here?”

Then...

Then:

“Does the student know that
person would notice?”

RELATIONSHIPS:

Students Attend Where They Feel Known

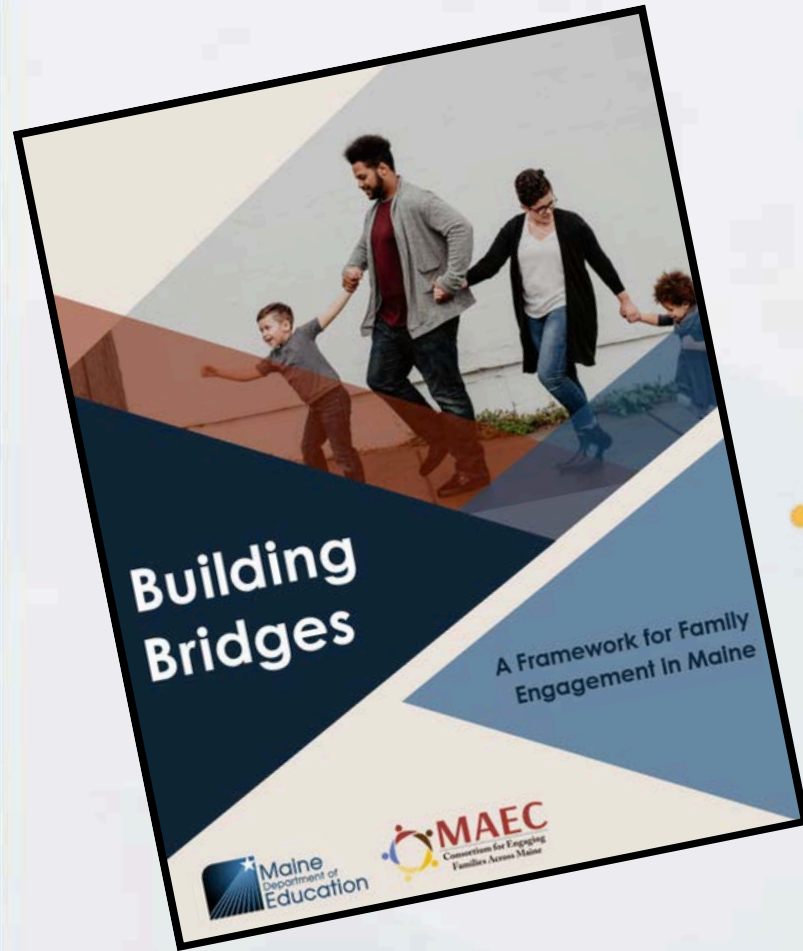
Tier 1 practices:
Greeting students by name
Trusted adult connections
Advisory
Check-ins
Mentoring
Positive outreach
Peer connection
Recognition of growth

Counselor/social worker contribution:
You are often the bridge between data and relationship.



Family Engagement Is Connection

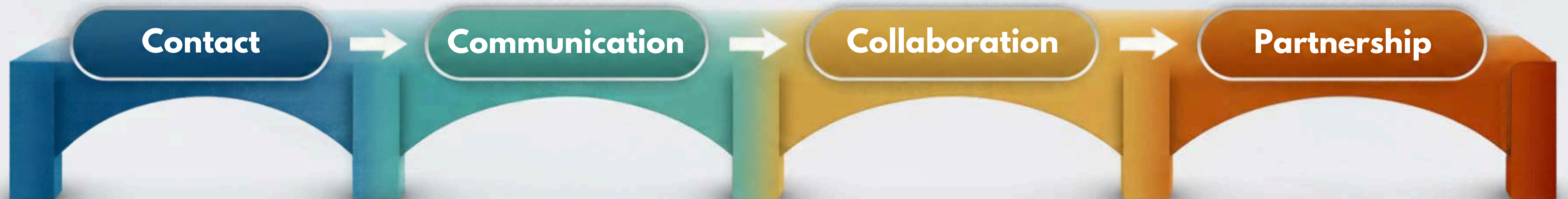
Building Bridges: A Framework for Family Engagement in Maine



Consortium *for* Engaging
Families Across Maine



CEFAM Family Engagement Framework



Families and schools are partners in supporting student success.

Family Engagement... Before There Is a Problem

What if the first family contact isn't about attendance?



Key message:
Trust is built before it is needed.





Instead of:



Why has your student/child missed so much school?



Try:



We've noticed a change in attendance and want to understand what you're experiencing.



What has been **getting in the way?**

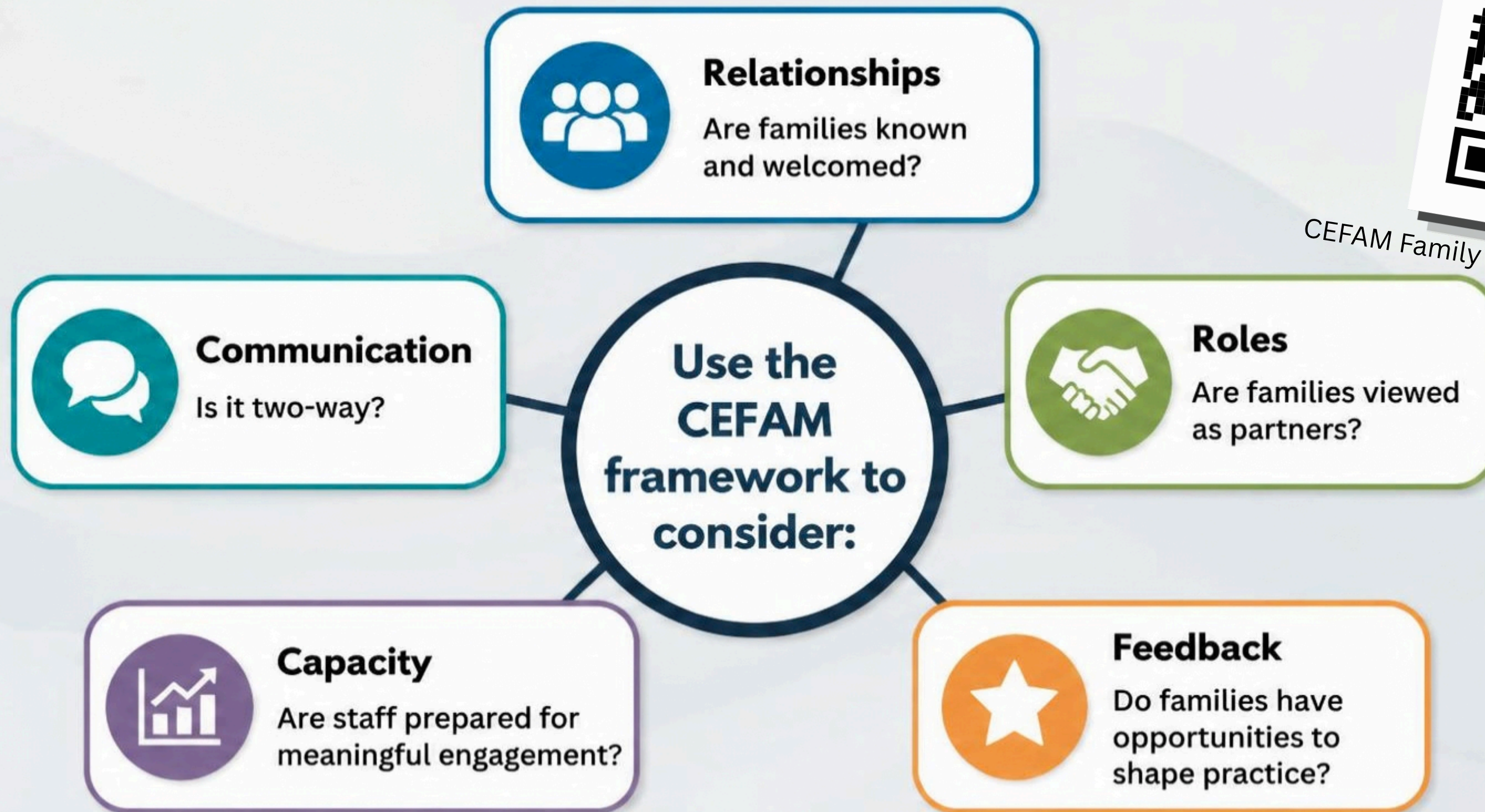


What has helped in the past?



What would make **getting to school easier?**

Building Bridges in Practice



3R's + Family Partnership



ROUTINES

"What would make mornings easier?"



RELATIONSHIPS

"Who does your student/child trust?"



RELEVANCE

"What matters to your student/child?"



FAMILY PARTNERSHIP

"What do you know that could help us understand?"



**Students can be present and connected and still wonder,
“Why does this matter?”**

**“Does school feel
meaningful to me?”**

ENGAGED

Relevance, Purpose & Student Voice

**Can students see themselves
and their future in school?**





ACADEMICALLY

“I can see myself in what I'm learning.”



SOCIALLY

“I have a voice, a role, and a reason to be here.”



FOR MY FUTURE

“I can see how today's learning connects to tomorrow's opportunities.”

88.5%

of Maine Career Exploration participants reported increased awareness of career opportunities in Maine.



Maine Career Exploration Evaluation Report

Relevance Is Developmental

Elementary

“This is interesting.”

Middle School

“This matters to me.”

High School

**“This connects to where
I'm going.”**

Engagement Evolves...

RELEVANCE:

Give Students a Reason to Return

Relevance can come from:

- **Interests**
- **Identity**
- **Voice and choice**
- **Relationships**
- **Career aspirations**
- **Community**
- **Leadership**
- **Authentic learning**
- **Future goals**

Counselor/social worker contribution:

Help students connect today's experience to tomorrow's possibilities.



PreK–Elementary: “I Want to Be Here”

Prevention question:

“What does this student look forward to at school?”



Focus on:

- Joy
- Curiosity
- Student interests
- Classroom belonging
- Celebration
- Successful experiences

Middle School:

“I Matter Here”

Prevention question:

“Where does this student experience belonging?”



Focus on:

- Voice
- Peer belonging
- Identity
- Advisory
- Leadership
- Interests
- Recognition

High School:

“This Leads Somewhere”

Prevention question:

“What future does this student want, and how does school help them get there?”



Connect attendance to:

- Graduation
- Career
- College/postsecondary
- CTE
- ELOs
- Employment
- Independence
- Student-defined goals

Re-Engagement Is Prevention

For students already experiencing
significant disengagement:

Reconnect → Rebuild → Reimagine

Key message:

It is never too late to make a plan.



Consider:

- **Trusted adults**
- **Flexible pathways**
- **ELOs**
- **Alternative education**
- **Credit recovery**
- **Career connections**
- **Community partnerships**
- **Student-designed goals**

The 3 R's



ROUTINES

I know what
to expect.



RELATIONSHIPS

I know
I matter.



RELEVANCE

I know why
this matters.

Connecting Together

PRESENT

CONNECTED

ENGAGED

Putting it All Together

Attendance Data → Curiosity



Instead of:



“Who is absent?”



Ask:

When?

Where?

How often?

What changed?

What patterns do we see?

What barriers might exist?

What strengths can we build on?

Data should start a conversation... not end one.

Case Study: Elementary

Maya, Grade 2: Increasing Monday absences.



PRESENT:



What could make the morning routine easier?



CONNECTED:



Who can greet Maya?



ENGAGED:



What does Maya look forward to?



FAMILY:

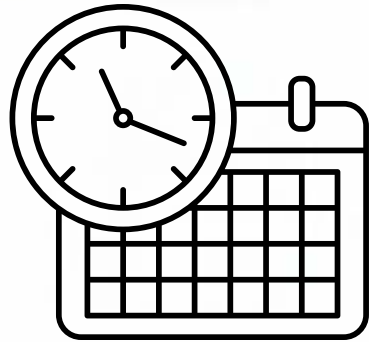
What does the family need from school?

Case Study: Middle School

Jordan, Grade 7: Increasing tardies and declining participation.



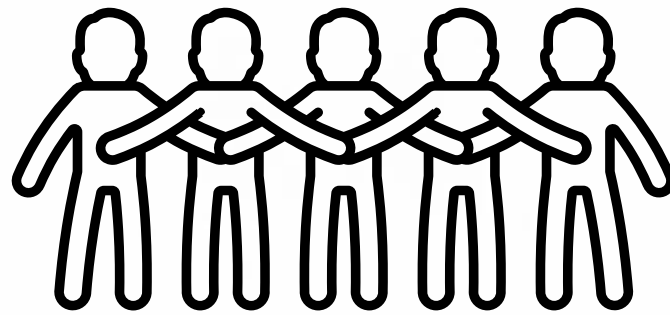
PRESENT:



What is happening during first period?



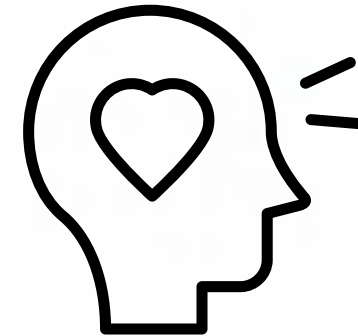
CONNECTED:



Where does Jordan feel a sense of belonging?



ENGAGED:



What interests Jordan?



DATA:

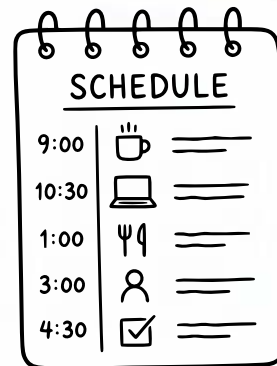
What changed before the attendance pattern?

Case Study: High School

Alex, Grade 11: Behind in credits, works after school, interested in automotive technology.



PRESENT:



What schedule is workable?



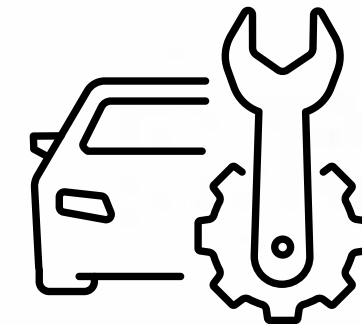
CONNECTED:



Who does Alex trust?



ENGAGED:



How can automotive interests connect to school?



FUTURE:

What does Alex want after school?

Reflect on your current TIER 1 environment

PRESENT

**How do students
know what to
expect?**

CONNECTED

**How do students
know they matter?**

ENGAGED

**How do students
know why school
matters?**

FAMILY PARTNERSHIP

**How do families
experience
partnership?**

Where is your greatest opportunity?

One Small Shift

Consider...

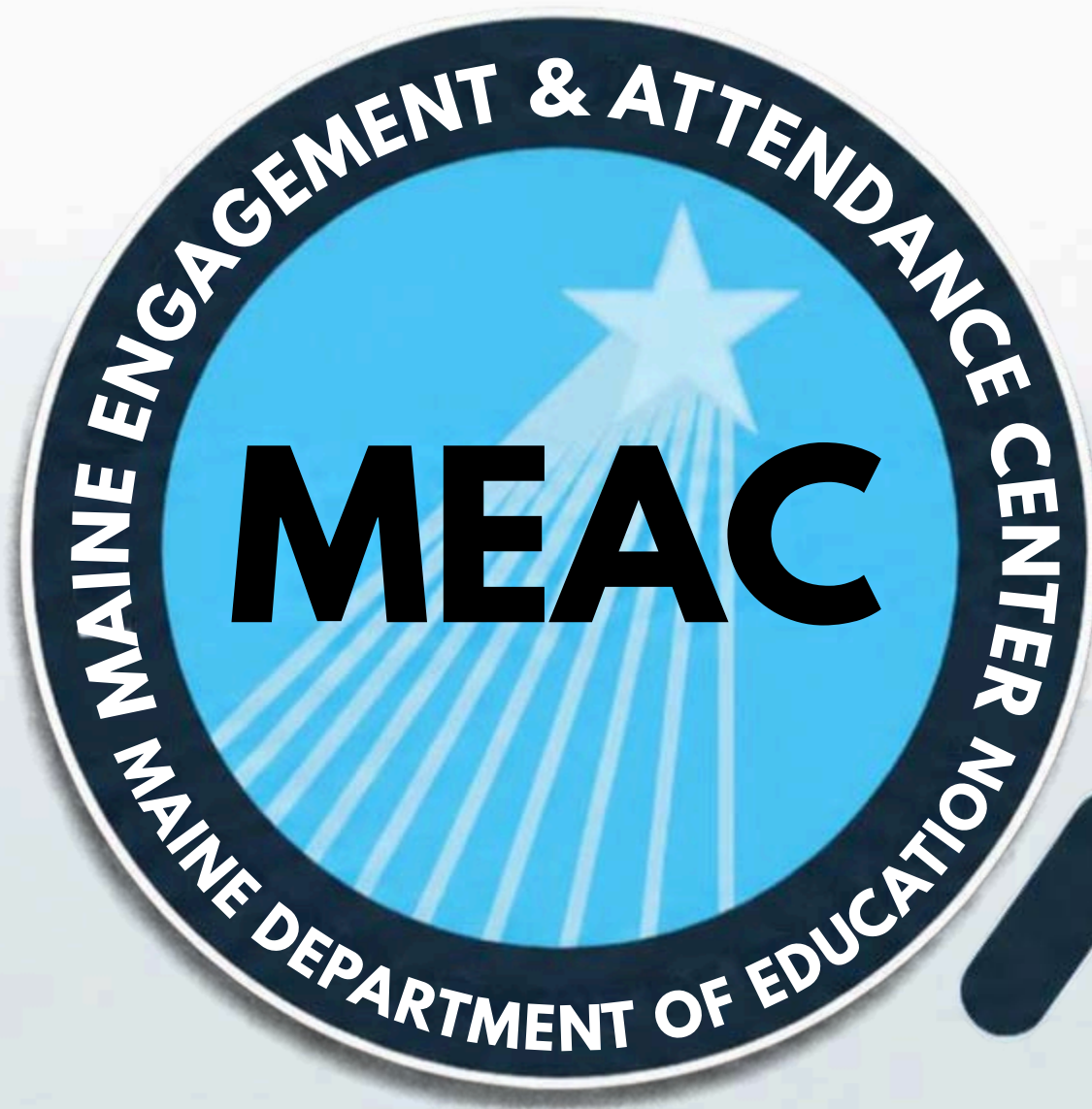
**One Tier 1
practice we can
strengthen is...**

**The
students/families
who may benefit
are...**

**Our first step will
be...**

**We will know it is
helping when...**

The MEAC Prevention Equation



Focusing on Attendance



PRESENT
Routines



CONNECTED
Relationships + Belonging



ENGAGED
Relevance + Purpose



ATTENDANCE • LEARNING • SUCCESS

Be Pine Tree Present!

Rooted in Learning, Growing Every Day.



Questions, Connections & Next Steps

**What are you
seeing?**

**What are
you trying?**

**What will you
take back to
your school?**



GSEA EXIT SURVEY Oct. 9, 2026



**Please take a moment to
answer this BRIEF survey
and receive a
Certificate of Completion
for 1.5 hours.**

Thank You!



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