



Connecting Career and Technical Education to Persistence to Graduation

Division of Student Success
Persistence to Graduation Team

July 22nd, 2026



Kentucky Department of
E D U C A T I O N

Our Time Together

- Explore how CTE strengthens student connectedness and persistence.
- Identify early signals of disengagement using the Infinite Campus Early Warning Tool & Insights Dashboard.
- Examine how relationships, relevance and meaningful learning impact student engagement.
- Apply strategies through real-world scenarios and reflection.

Why Engagement Matters

Engagement is a critical driver of student persistence, well-being and success.

- 25% of Kentucky students are chronically absent -- a clear signal of disconnection.
- Chronic absenteeism is linked to lower academic achievement, higher dropout risk, and long-term disengagement.
- Improving attendance requires more than incentives or compliance. Improving attendance requires *stronger connections to school*.

What is School Connectedness?

A student's belief that adults and peers in school care about their learning, well-being and success.

- Built through trust, relationships and meaningful participation in school life.
- Strengthened through both daily interactions and intentional systems.
- Increased when students experience relevance, belonging and purpose.
- A research-backed protective factor against disengagement and dropout.

The Protective Power of Connection

Connectedness is one of the strongest protective factors for youth well-being.

- Students who feel connected report 40% fewer mental health challenges.
- Strong relationships improve attendance, achievement and graduation outcomes.
- Connection buffers the impact of trauma and adversity.

Four Pillars of Connection

Students feel connected when:

Adult-Student Relationships

They know at least one teacher or staff member cares about them as an individual.

Example: They have at least one relationship with a trusted adult.

Peer Belonging

They belong to a supportive peer group.

Example: They feel included and valued by a group of classmates or teammates.

Meaningful Engagement

They are engaged in meaningful learning experiences.

Example: Project based learning, service projects, peer mentoring.

Safe and Inclusive Environment

They feel a sense of belonging and acceptance within their school community.

Example: Their identity, culture and experiences are respected and valued in school.

How Career and Technical Education (CTE) Strengthens Connectedness

CTE supports connectedness when students:

- See relevance between school and future goals
- Build meaningful relationships with instructors and peers
- Experience hands-on and authentic learning
- Develop confidence through skill mastery
- Feel seen for strengths beyond test scores
- Connect identity, interests, and career pathways

Core Components of CTE Connectedness

Trusted Adult Relationships

- Mentorship from pathway instructor
- Career coaching
- Industry partnerships
- Consistent adult support

Belonging & Skill Development

- Career & Technical Student Organizations (CTSOs) and peer collaboration
- Communication/teamwork skills
- Leadership opportunities
- Confidence through mastery

Meaningful Learning

- Hands-on experiences
- Real-world application
- Career relevance
- Student voice and choice

Identity & Purpose

- Exploration of strengths and interests
- Future-focused goal setting
- Career pathway alignment
- Increased student motivation



Tiered System of Connectedness

TIER III

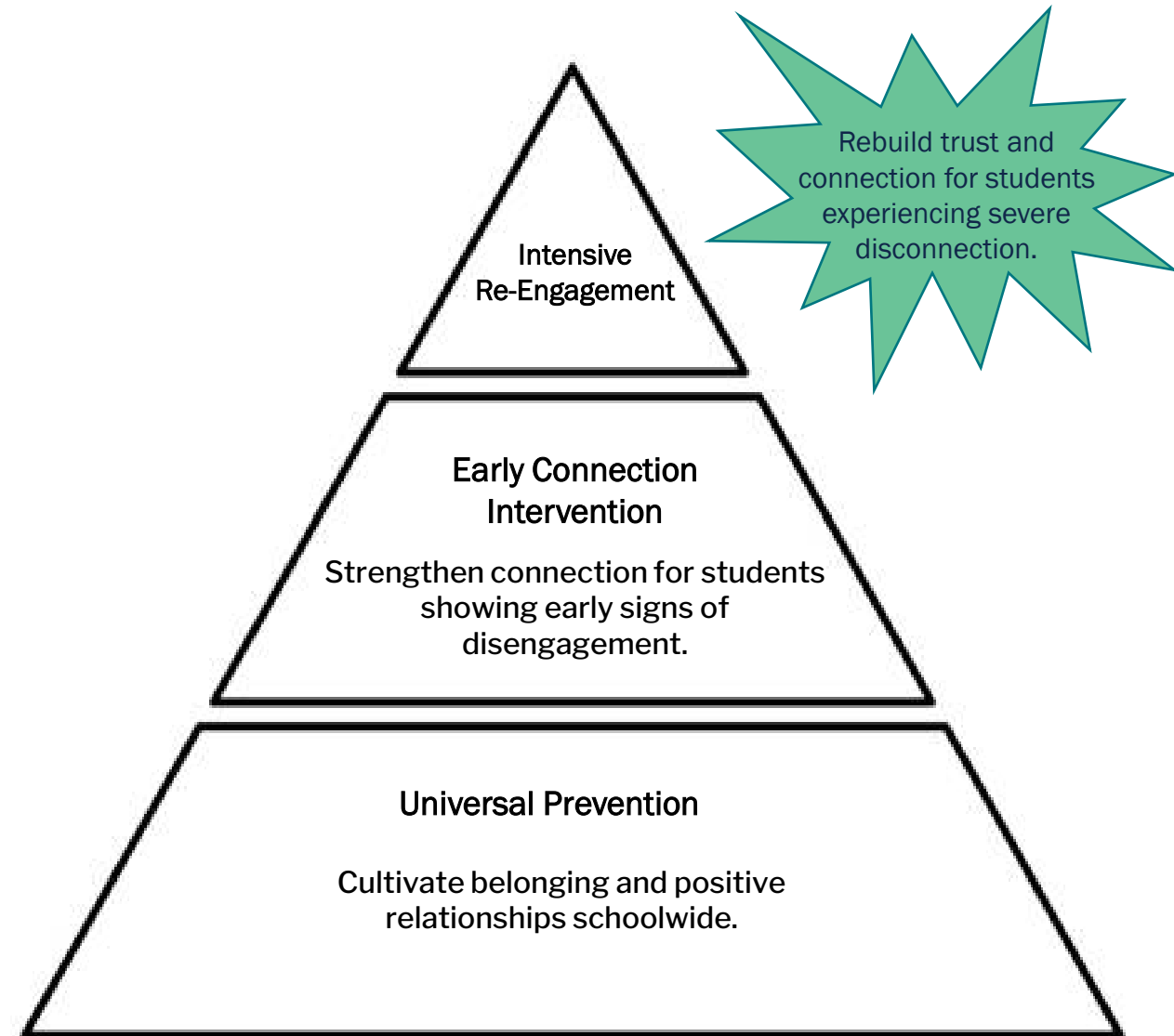
Rebuild connection for **FEW** students with intensive, individualized support and re-engagement strategies.

TIER II

Provide targeted supports to strengthen connection for **SOME** students who show signs of disengagement.

TIER I

Foster a culture of belonging, safety, and connection for **ALL** students, staff, and families.



Tier I: Universal Strategies

Build connection into everyday schoolwide routines for all students.

- Use tools like Connection Cards or “Staff Connect” challenges so every student feels seen;
- Leverage advisory/homeroom time for relationship-building and identity-affirming check-ins;
- Signal belonging through inclusive visuals, welcome rituals, and climate survey;
- Embed connection in daily interactions, not as an “add-on.”

How Can We Measure School Connectedness?

Student voice helps us measure school connectedness. The Kentucky Quality of School Climate & Safety Survey offers one way to understand how students experience these four conditions.

Connectedness Pillar	Example Student Voice Indicators
Adult-Student Relationship	• <i>If I have a problem, there is an adult from school I can talk to.</i> • <i>There is at least one adult from my school who listens to me when I have something to say.</i> • <i>Adults from my school care about me.</i>
Peer Belonging	• <i>I feel like I am part of my school.</i> • <i>Students from this school respect each other's differences.</i> • <i>(MS/HS) Students treat each other with respect.</i>
Meaningful Engagement	• <i>When I need help with schoolwork, I can ask a teacher.</i> • <i>My teachers expect me to do my best all the time.</i> • <i>Adults from my school make sure all students get what they need to be successful.</i>
Safe & Inclusive Environment	• <i>I feel safe in my classes.</i> • <i>Students from this school respect each other's differences.</i> • <i>Adults from my school handle safety concerns quickly.</i>

Tier II: Targeted Group Support

Provide small-group support for students showing early signs of disengagement.

- Restorative circles, lunch bunches or group mentoring to nurture peer support;
- Enrichment groups that integrate academic help with relationship-building;
- Track connections intentionally through staff-student logs and consistent follow-up;
- Strengthen peer and adult bonds before students slip into chronic absence.

Tier III: Intensive Support (Re-engagement)

Rebuild trust and belonging for students experiencing severe disconnection.

- Weekly check-ins with a trusted adult (champion/advisory model);
- Student-led re-engagement plans or success contracts reflecting student voice;
- Wraparound supports through multidisciplinary teams and family engagement;
- Focus on rebuilding safety, trust and connection before academics.

CTE Tiered System of Connectedness

TIER III

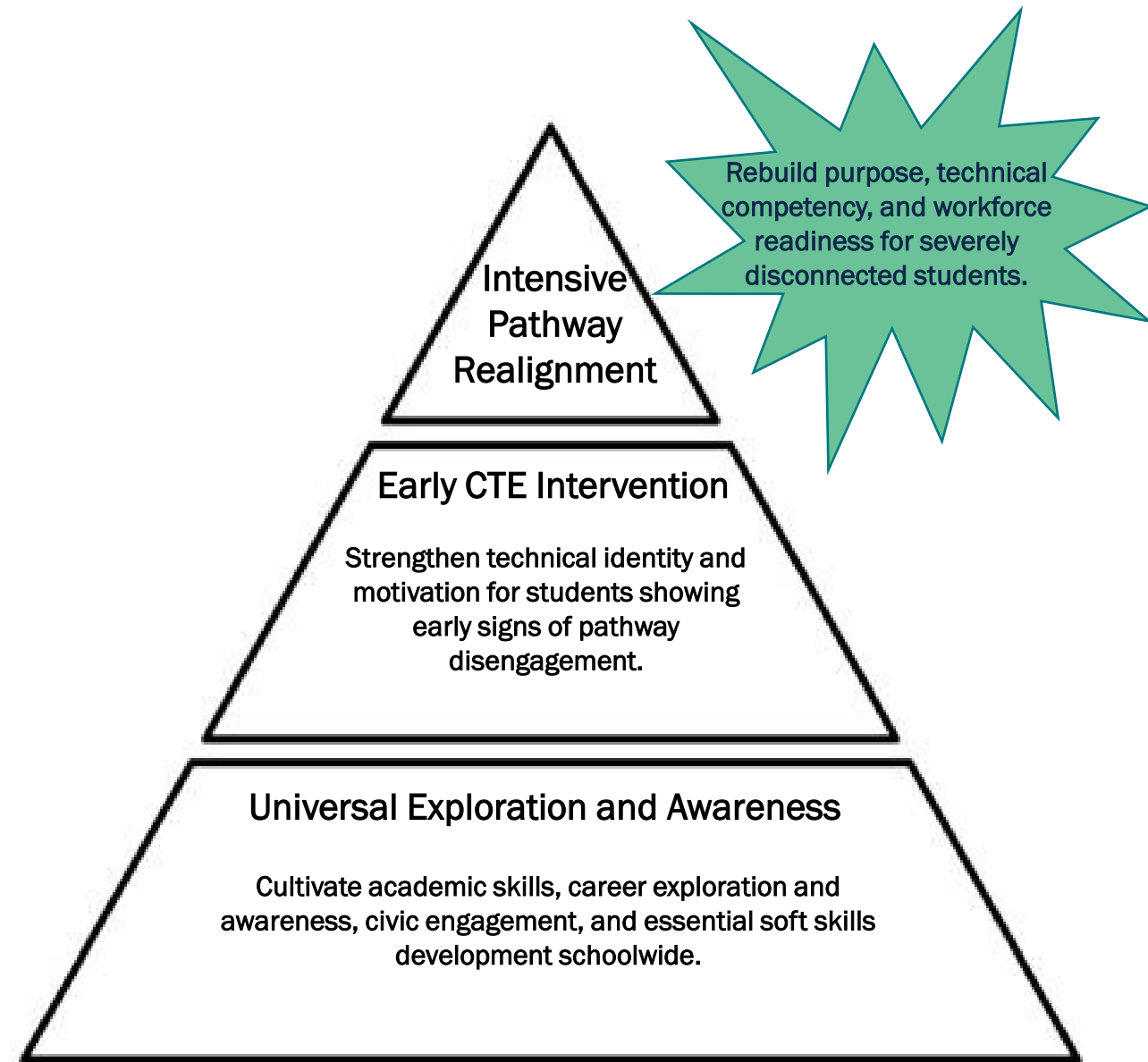
Secure professional pathway connections for **FEW** students with intensive, individualized workplace readiness and re-engagement strategies.

TIER II

Provide targeted supports to strengthen career alignment and skill acquisition for **SOME** students who show signs of academic or pathway disengagement.

TIER I

Build a culture of purpose, career relevance, and future readiness for **ALL** students through high-quality technical exposure.

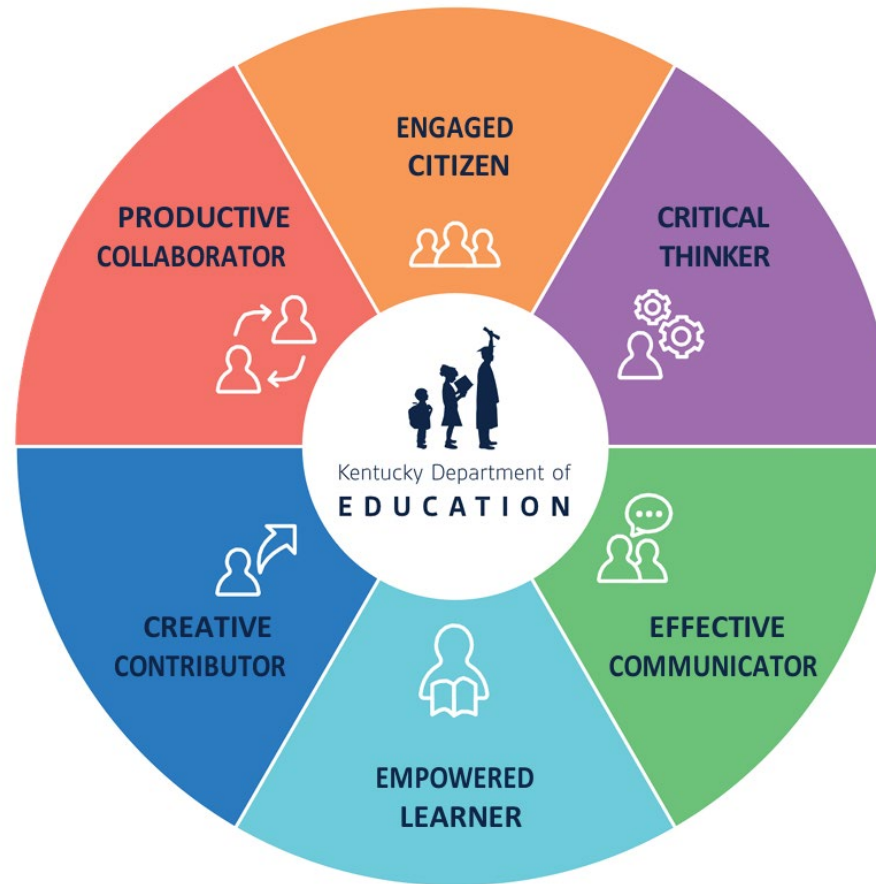


Tier I: Universal Exploration and Awareness Examples

Build a robust schoolwide, CTE-infused foundation to protect students from academic disengagement.

- High-quality CTE instruction for all students;
- Career-enriched core curriculum;
- Individual Learning Plans (ILPs);
- Portrait of a Learner connections;
- Academic and career readiness advising;
- Soft skills instruction;
- Civic engagement instruction and opportunities;
- Intentional scheduling based on student interests, skills, ILP goals.

Kentucky Portrait of a Learner



Kentucky Portrait of a Learner Defined:

ENGAGED CITIZEN:

Shows respect and empathy across differences, embraces diversity of opinion, seeks cultural understanding, participates in the democratic process to challenge the status quo and makes a positive impact on their community and the world.

CRITICAL THINKER:

Thinks deeply and makes informed decisions to create solutions or new understanding supported by relevant and reliable evidence.

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATOR:

Engages diverse audiences respectfully by exchanging ideas and information responsibly, listening actively, speaking and writing clearly, and using print and digital media appropriately.

EMPOWERED LEARNER:

Demonstrates mastery and application of academic competencies. Develops the skills and dispositions to persist through difficulties and plan for a future of self-improvement.

CREATIVE CONTRIBUTOR:

Interprets experiences, imagines and plays with new possibilities with curiosity, and creates approaches that are novel, useful and valued by the world around them.

PRODUCTIVE COLLABORATOR:

Engages with others to achieve a common goal through building positive relationships, actively listening, showing empathy and making individual contributions to a larger group.

Tier II: Early CTE Intervention Examples

Provide strategic, targeted supports to students who show early signs of disengagement, motivating them to stay on track.

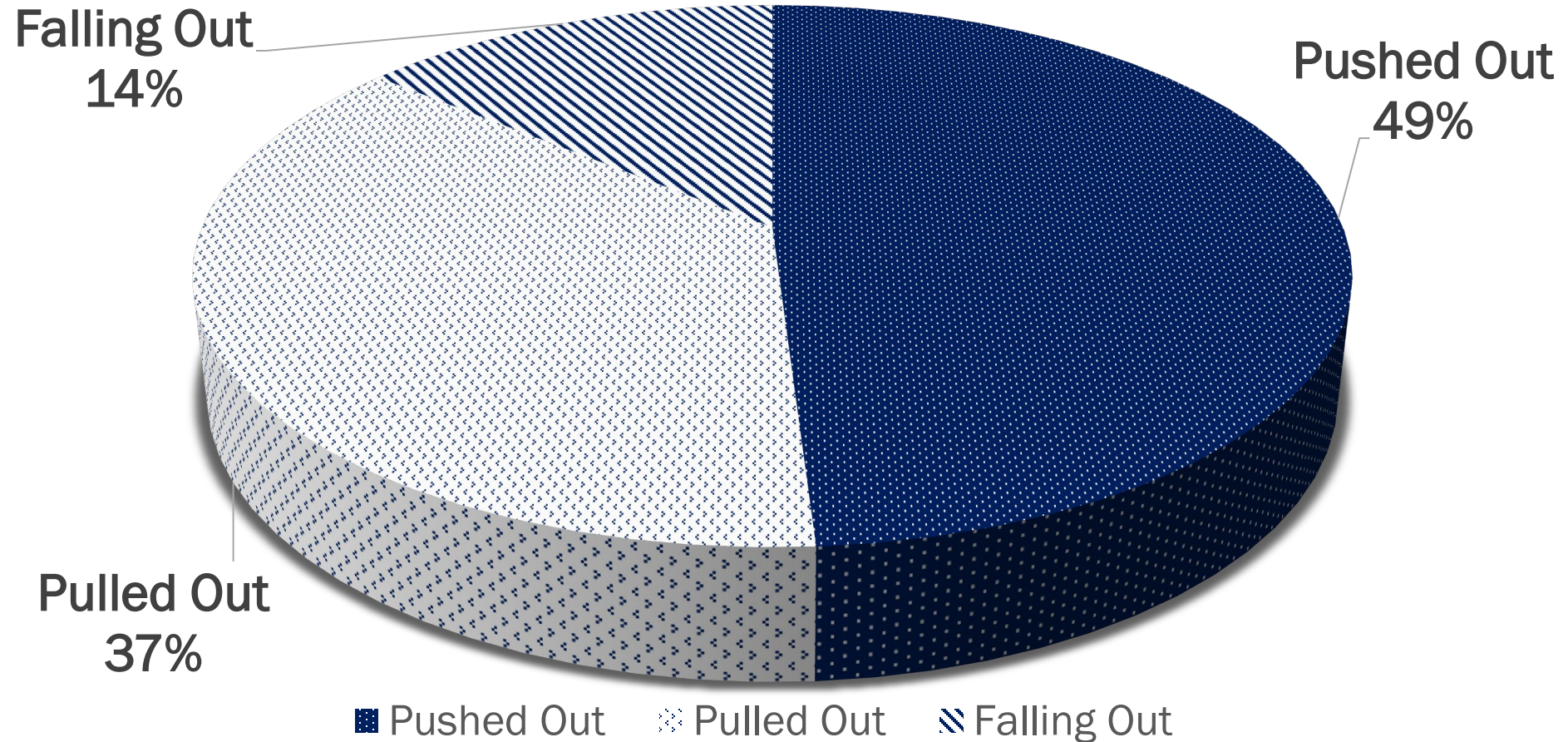
- Targeted small group instruction and tutoring to strengthen career alignment and skill acquisition;
- Soft skills labs and counseling;
- CTE specific mentoring and connection to trusted adults;
- Connecting struggling students to Career and Technical Student Organizations (CTSO) leadership curriculum;
- Individualized career counseling and exploration;
- Modifying schedules for struggling students to group with trusted adults or mentors;
- Explore credit recovery options connected to interests and skills.

Tier III: Intensive Pathway Realignment Examples

Secure highly individualized, intensive partnerships that remove critical barriers and rebuild successful pathways for students experiencing severe disconnection.

- Intensive academic support mapped to career pathways and expectations;
- Individualized soft skills training;
- Connection to community resources such as Vocational Rehabilitation;
- Differentiated or adaptive learning strategies;
- Targeted behavior modifications.

Students Disengage Long Before They Drop Out



Source: [Doll et. al, 2013](#)

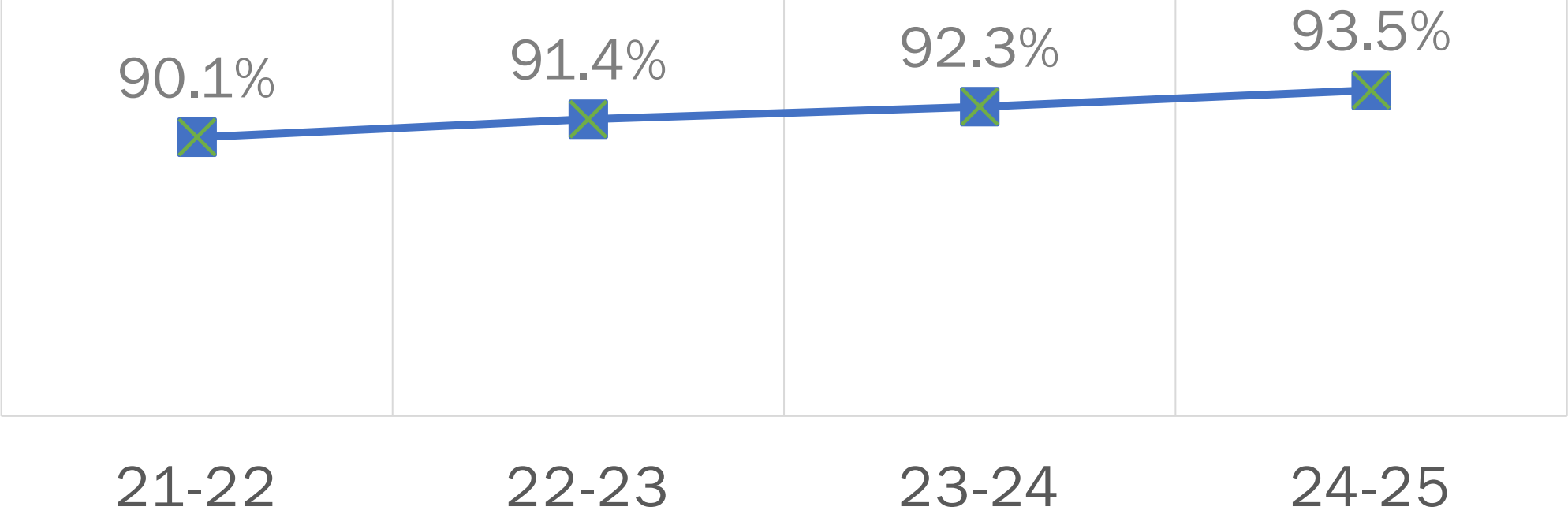
Disengagement is a process, not a moment.

	School Related	Family Related
Pushed Out (49%)	Failing grades; Cannot keep up	
	Missed too many days	
	Suspended	
	Interpersonal conflict with teachers	
Pulled Out (37%)		Had to support and care for family member(s)
		Had to get a job (financial/basic needs)
		Was pregnant
Falling Out (14%)	Did not like school/not engaged	
	Did not feel a sense of belonging	
	Changed schools and did not feel welcomed/supported	

From Outcomes to Early Signals

- Outcomes such as graduation rates and chronic absenteeism reflect long-term patterns of engagement.
- By the time outcomes are visible, disengagement has often been present for some time.
- Attendance shifts, behavior changes, and connection gaps are *early signals*.
- Early response changes trajectories.

Kentucky Graduation Rate



Source: KY School Report Card Data (2024-2025)

2024-2025 Kentucky Graduation Rate

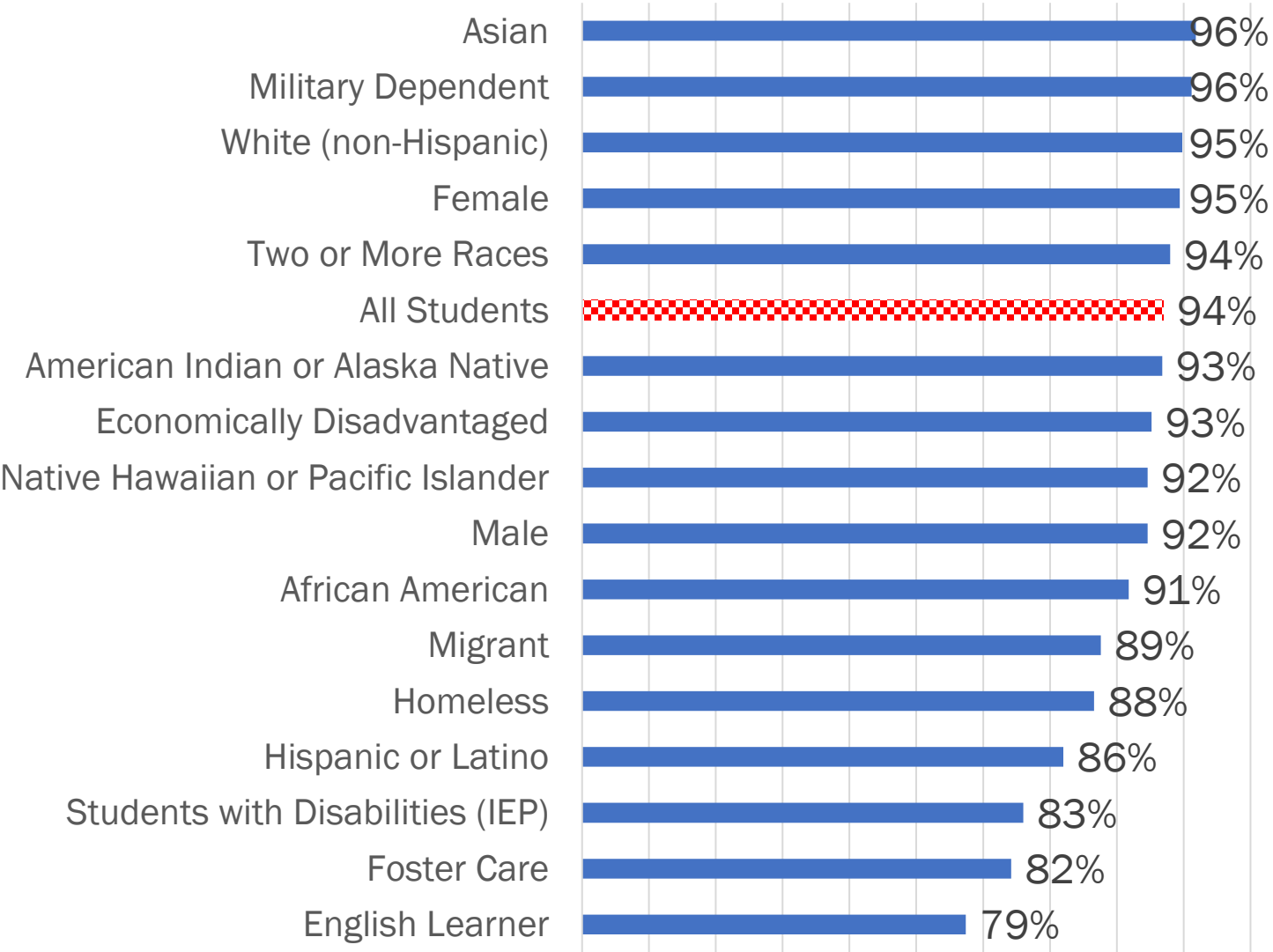


Chart Key:

 = Graduation rates of various student population groups

 = Graduation rate of all students in Kentucky

Infinite Campus Early Warning Tool

What Works Clearinghouse Educator's Practice Guide for Preventing Dropout In Secondary Schools

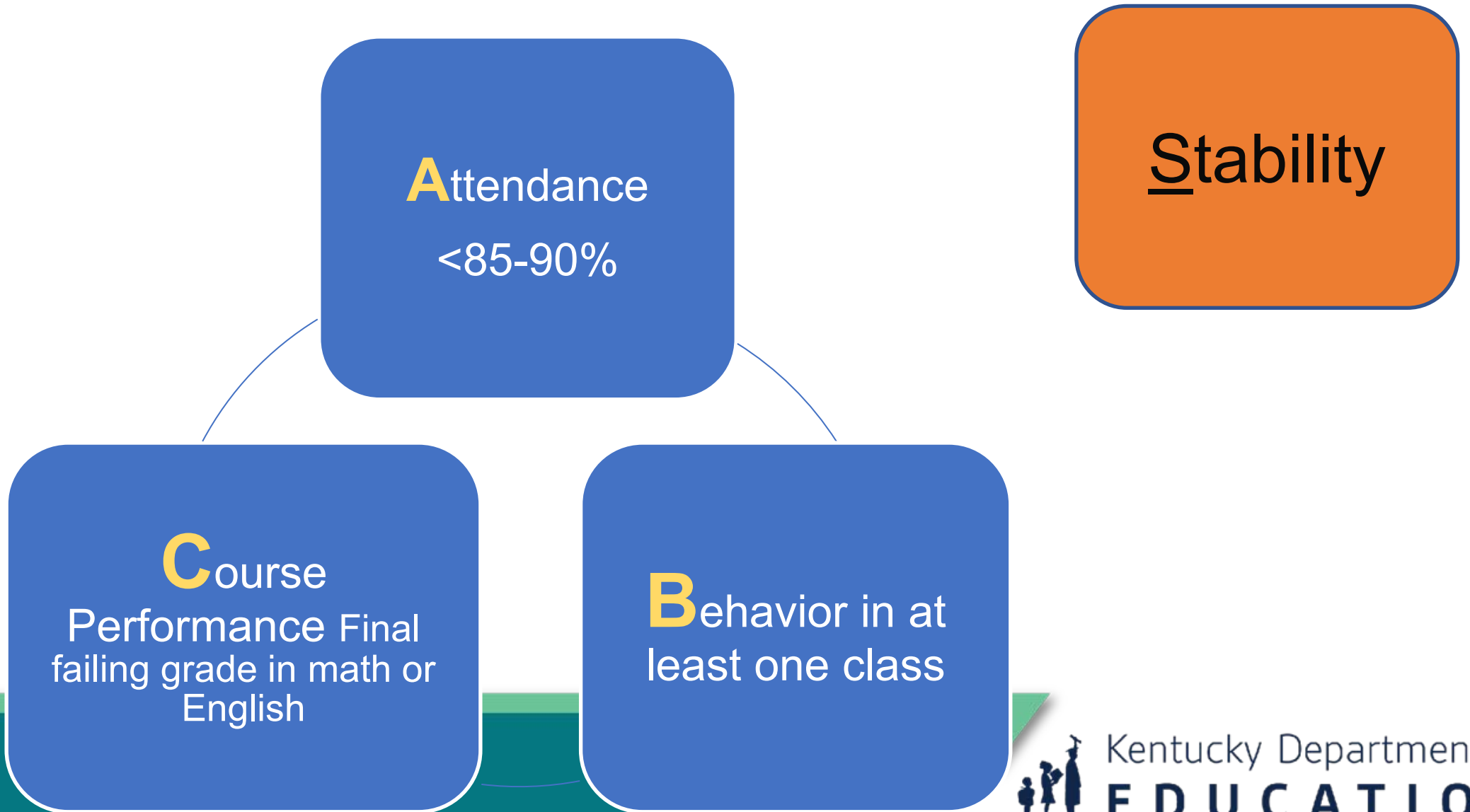
1. Monitor the progress of all students and proactively intervene when students show early signs of attendance, behavior or academic problems.
2. Provide intensive, individualized support to students who have fallen off track and face significant challenges to success.
3. Engage students by offering curricula and programs that connect schoolwork with college and career success and that improve students' capacity to manage challenges in and out of school.
4. For schools with many at-risk students, create small, personalized communities to facilitate monitoring and support.

Steps to Carry Out What Works Clearinghouse Recommendation 1

Monitor the progress of all students and proactively intervene when students show early signs of attendance, behavior or academic problems.

1. **Organize and analyze data** to identify students who miss school, have behavior problems or are struggling in their courses.
2. Intervene with students who show early signs of falling off track.
3. If data show high rates of absenteeism, take steps to help students, parents and school staff understand the importance of attending school daily.
4. Monitor progress and adjust interventions as needed.

The ABC & S of the Early Warning Tool



Stability

- Demographics of the student (foster, homeless, lunch status, migrant, etc.)
- Zip code
- The student's overall number of addresses
- # of years the student has been at the selected school
- How long the student has been enrolled in the district
- How long the student has lived at the current address
- School type (Title I, alternative)
- Number of portal logins
- Phone number changes

....and **this kid was not even on our radar.**”

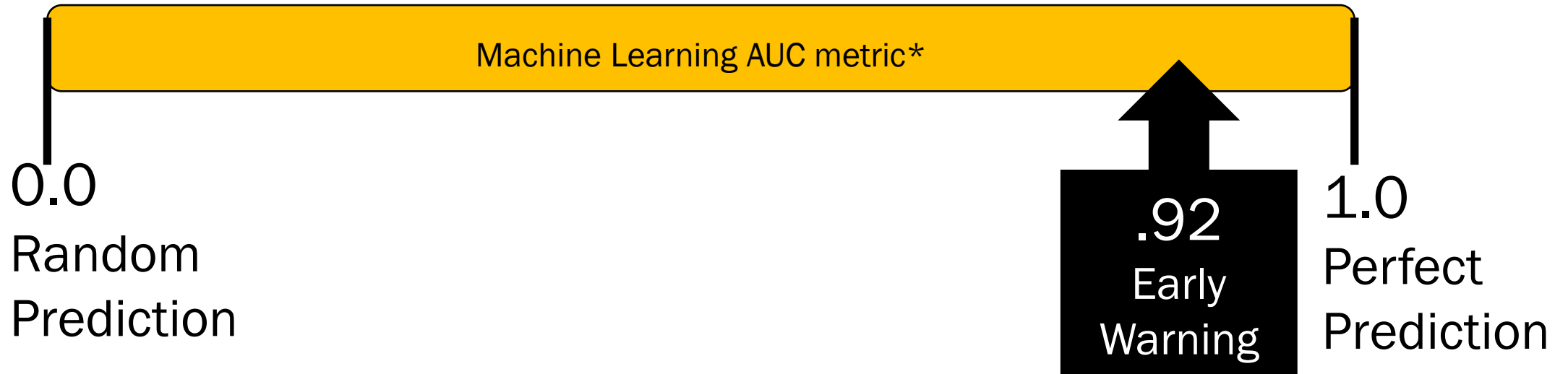
Early Warning Tool Overview

- Provides a list of students and an Early Warning “GRAD Score” based on attendance, behavior, curriculum and stability.
- GRAD Score ranges from 50-150; higher GRAD Score related to higher probability of graduating.
- Data from the Early Warning Tool can answer questions like:
 - Who are the students most at-risk for dropping out?
 - Which students are being most impacted by attendance issues?
 - I want to implement a mentoring program for 6th graders. Who are the 20 highest risk 6th graders?

Live Demonstration of the Early Warning Tool



Early Warning is Highly Predictive, Not Perfect



*The AUC metric measures whether students' predictions are ordered in terms of actual risk.

- Some students can have a perfect GRAD Score and dropout due to a situation.
- Some students can have a low GRAD Score and stay in school due to intervention.
- Overall, the GRAD Score is a powerful prediction to act upon

Common Question



How much data is required for students to have a GRAD Score? What about Kindergarten students?

- Early Warning starts predicting with as little as enrollment and household information for stability.
- Scores change as more data is entered in the system for the student and the nightly calculation occurs.

Infinite Campus Insights Dashboards

Insights Data Visualization Reports

- The Insights module contains data visualization reports for better understanding and disseminating information surrounding:
 - Student Assessments
 - Attendance
 - Classroom Performance
 - Stability
 - Behavior
- Default Early Warning (EW) Score Range: 50-100, with a filter option to disable that default setting and pull data for all students.

Infinite Campus: *Insights Dashboards*

Insights

Aggregation	Assessments	Attendance	Behavior	Classroom Performance
Insights Dashboard	Assessments by Proficiency Students by Assessment Proficiency	Absenteeism Tier Reason by Period Reason by Weekday Status by Period Status by Weekday	Detentions by Event Type Detentions by Student Events by Grade Events by Resolution Events by Role Events by Staff Suspensions by Event Type Suspensions by Student	Flagged Assignments Percent Tier by Course Percent Tier by Student Percent Tier by Teacher Posted by Course Posted by Student Posted by Teacher Progress by Course Progress by Student Progress by Teacher

Stability
Active RTI Plans
Enrolled by Status
RTI Participation



Live Demonstration of Insights



From Data to Dialogue: What Would You Do?



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Refusal to Follow Instructions

Scenario: A student consistently refuses to follow instructions or complete assignments, often resulting in confrontational exchanges.

You look at the student's Early Warning report to gain a better understanding of the student. You look at the student's Curriculum and Attendance cards.

- How can we use workplace soft skills and Portrait of a Learner expectations to support this student given the scenario and data points?
- How might specific conversations about career interests serve this student?

Curriculum	55	—
Current In Progress Failing Grades	4	
Total Posted Failing Grades	0	
Missing Assignments	9	
Cumulative GPA	.000	

Attendance	82	—
	CURRENT YEAR	LAST YEAR
Total Unexcused Periods	16	32
Total Tardy Periods	0	0
Percent In Attendance	98.62	80.85
Total Absent Periods	23	134

Ghost with a Backpack

Scenario: You spot a student who's been absent a lot lately. Today they show up – hood up, eyes down, no materials, and no clue what day it is.

You look at the student's Early Warning report to gain a better understanding of the student. You look at the student's Attendance, Curriculum and Stability cards.

- How can we use workplace soft skills and Portrait of a Learner expectations to support this student given the scenario and data points?
- How might specific conversations about career interests serve this student?

Attendance 54 —		
	CURRENT YEAR	LAST YEAR
Total Unexcused Periods	254	332
Total Tardy Periods	1	0
Percent In Attendance	78.96	20
Total Absent Periods	273	366
Curriculum 69 —		
Current In Progress Failing Grades		12
Total Posted Failing Grades		0
Missing Assignments		88

Stability 55 —	
Student Portal Logins	0
Guardian Portal Logins	0
Consecutive Years in School	3
Overall Years in District	11
Consecutive Years in District	11
Home Primary Language	No Data
Enrollment Start Status	(E01) First enrollment of the year
Consecutive Years at Address Location	10
Total Address Locations	7

Chaos Magnet

Scenario: Every hallway transition, this kid is in the center of the storm. Loud voice. Big reactions. Other students feed off their energy.

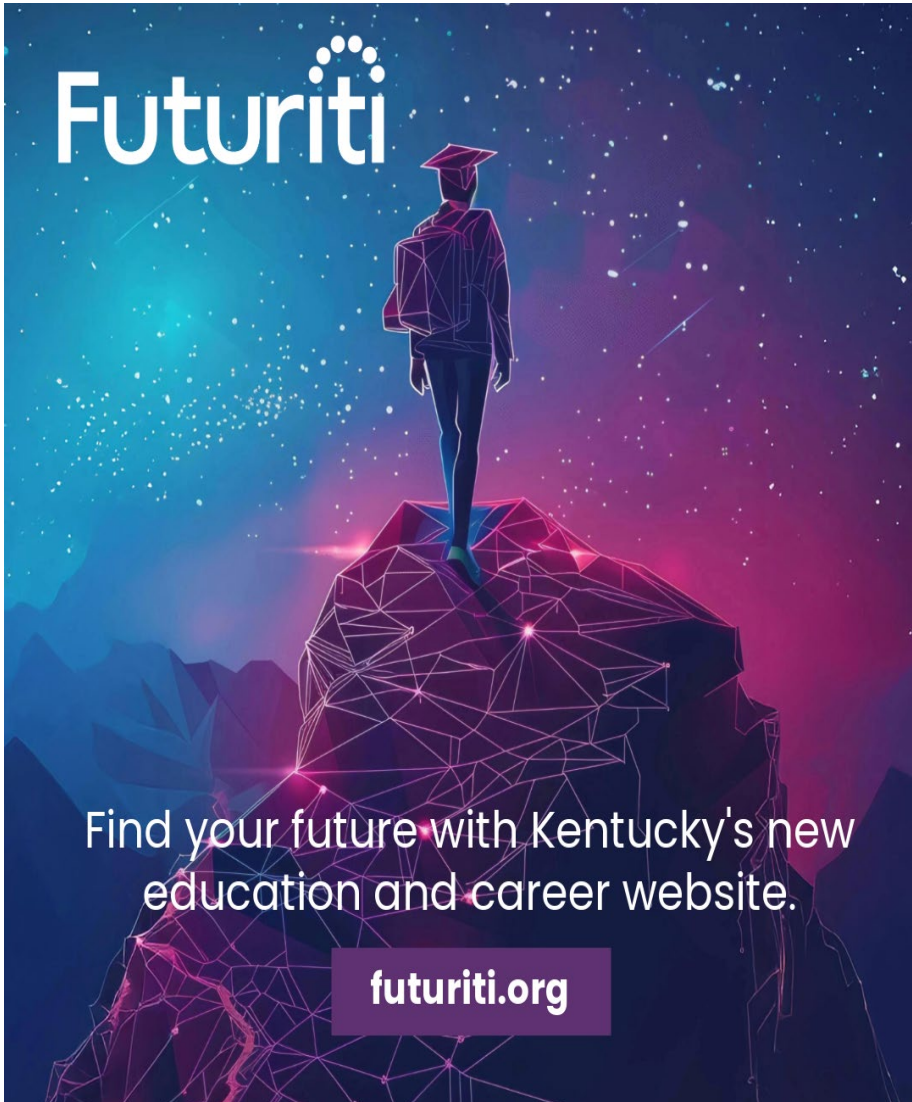
You look at the student's Early Warning report to gain a better understanding of the student. You look at the Behavior, Stability and Curriculum cards.

- How can we use workplace soft skills and Portrait of a Learner expectations to support this student given the scenario and data points?
- How might specific conversations about career interests serve this student?

Stability	74	—
Student Portal Logins	0	
Guardian Portal Logins	0	
Consecutive Years in School	4	
Overall Years in District	6	
Consecutive Years in District	6	
Home Primary Language	(0400) English	
Enrollment Start Status	(E01) First enrollment of the year	
Consecutive Years at Address Location	2	
Total Address Locations	5	

Behavior	62	—
	CURRENT YEAR	LAST YEAR
Total Suspensions	1	0
Total Suspension Days	1.13	0.00
Total Incident Count	3	4

Curriculum	59	—
Current In Progress Failing Grades		3
Total Posted Failing Grades		0
Missing Assignments		6
Cumulative GPA		.000



Kentucky specific career counseling resources

- Middle School – Adult Learner Future Finder
- Interest and skills inventories
- Education and training by occupation
- Where to earn credentials in Kentucky
- Wage ranges and labor market information
- Career and Technical Education program areas
- Paying for postsecondary education
- Lesson plans and educator resources

Contact: jessica.fletcher@ky.gov

[Futuriti.org](https://www.futuriti.org)

Project of the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education

Supporting Victims of Human Trafficking

- In accordance with [KRS 156.095](#), ensure all schools display the national trafficking hotline. [Human Trafficking Prevention Posters](#) are available in English and Spanish from KDE.
- Ensure all adults in your buildings receive a copy of the [one-page protocol](#) to understand warning signs and action steps.
- Consider incorporating education and prevention training into your district or school's professional development plan.
- Explore options for prevention education for students in both labor and sex trafficking.



Connect with the Persistence to Graduation Team

We offer consultation services and trainings on the following topics and more:

- Addressing Chronic Absenteeism
- Establishing School Connectedness
- Infinite Campus Early Warning Tool
- IC Insights Data Visualization Dashboards
- Implementation of Data Tools to Support Student Success
- Supporting Transient Students
- Using a School and District-Level Dropout Prevention Needs Assessment

Email a member of the Persistence to Graduation Team.

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Schedule time using [Microsoft Bookings](#).