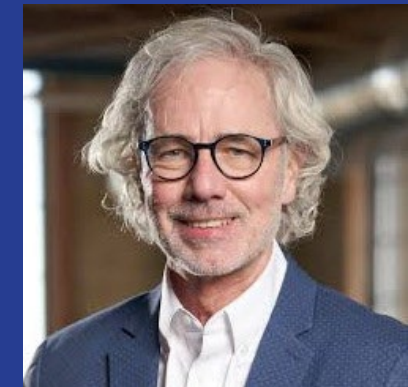


FORUM FRIDAY



Seeking Solutions: Wisconsin's Stubbornly High Rate of Chronic Absenteeism



October 30, 2026
12:30 – 1:30 p.m.

FORUM FRIDAY



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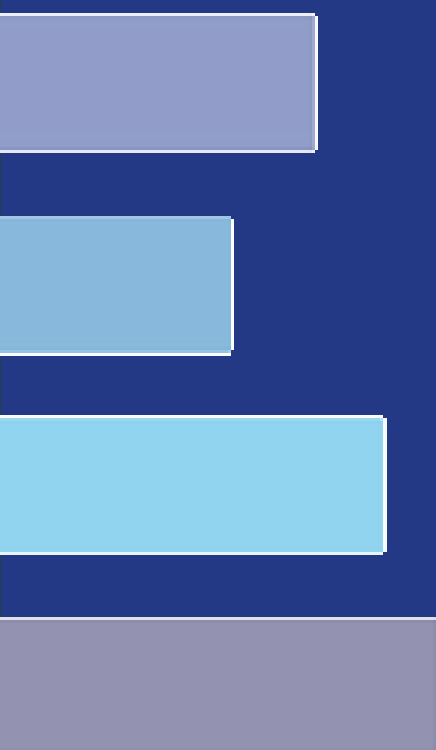
JERE MCGAFFEY

**Former Board Chairman
Wisconsin Taxpayers Alliance**

Learn More About Our Membership!

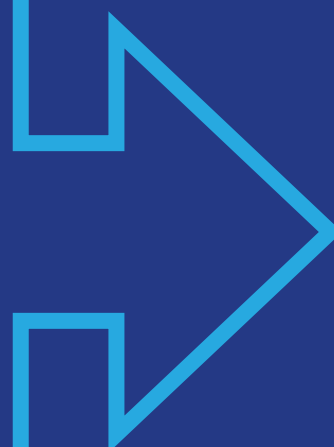


What Chronic Absenteeism Is, and Why It Matters

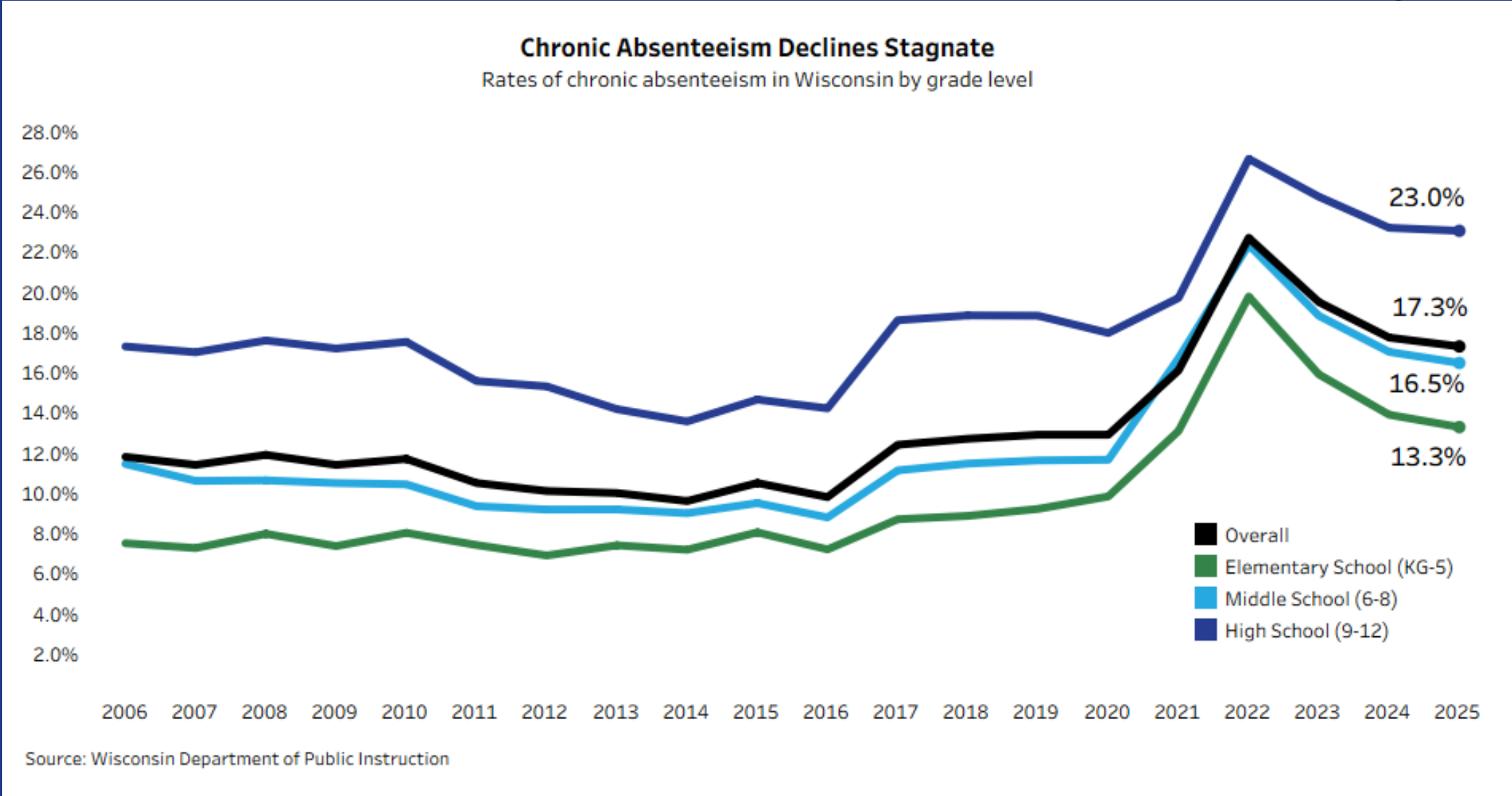


Missing (excused or unexcused) at least 10% of school days in a year

- ~18 days per year
- ~2 days per month

- 
- Lower student achievement
 - Decreased student mental health
 - Higher dropout rates
 - More challenges in adulthood

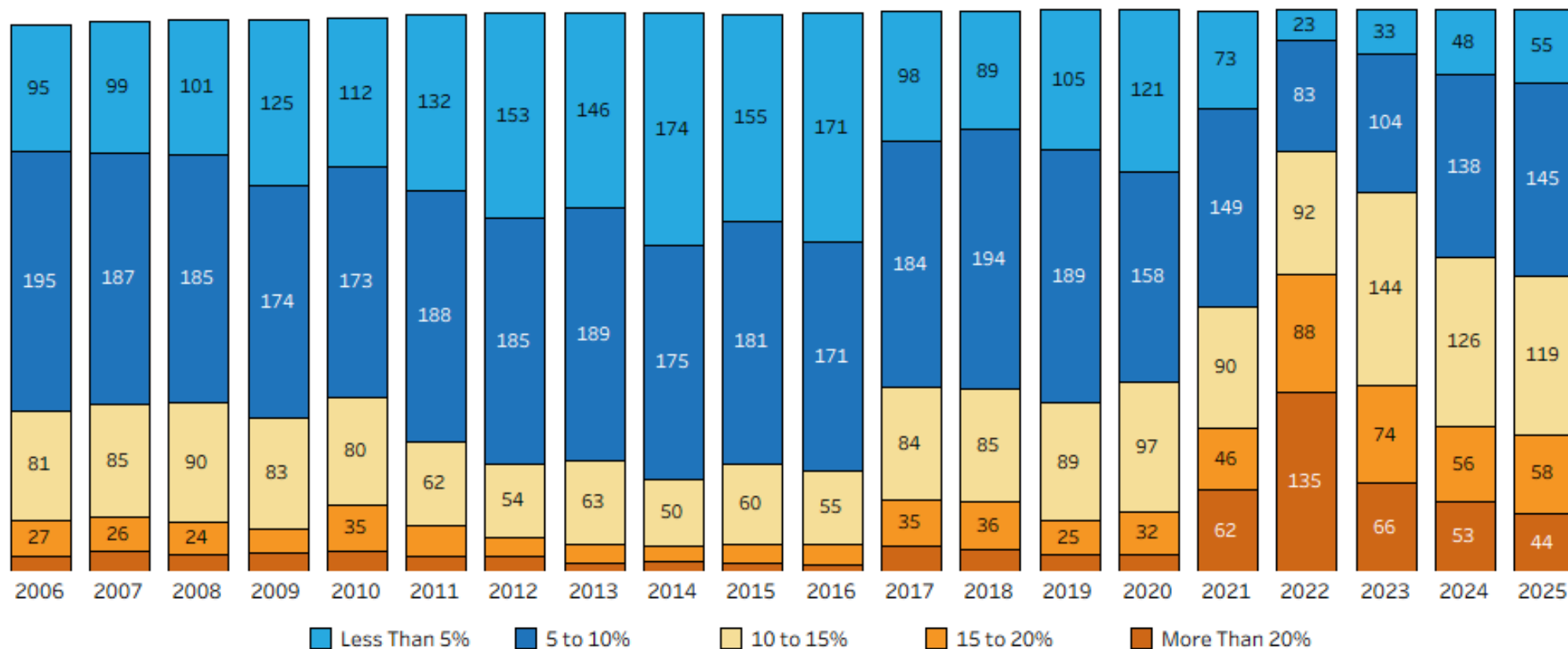
Absenteeism Statewide Has Not Recovered



A Problem for Whole State (and Country)

Chronic Absenteeism Remains An Issue In Majority of Districts

Number of public, non-charter districts by percentage of students chronically absent and school year



Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

Attendance Works Framework of Causes

Barriers

- Chronic and acute illness
- Family responsibilities or home situation
- Poor transportation
- Housing and food insecurity
- Lack of access to needed services
- System involvement
- Unpredictable schedules for learning
- Lack of access to tech
- Impact of trauma
- Violence in the community

Aversion

- Struggling academically and/or behaviorally
- Unwelcoming school climate
- Social and peer challenges
- Anxiety
- Unfair disciplinary and suspension practices
- Undiagnosed disability and/or disability accommodations
- Caregivers had negative educational experiences

Disengagement

- Lack of challenging, engaging instruction
- Bored
- No meaningful relationships to adults or peers in school
- Lack of enrichment opportunities
- Lack of academic and behavioral support
- Failure to earn credits
- Need to work conflicts with being in high school

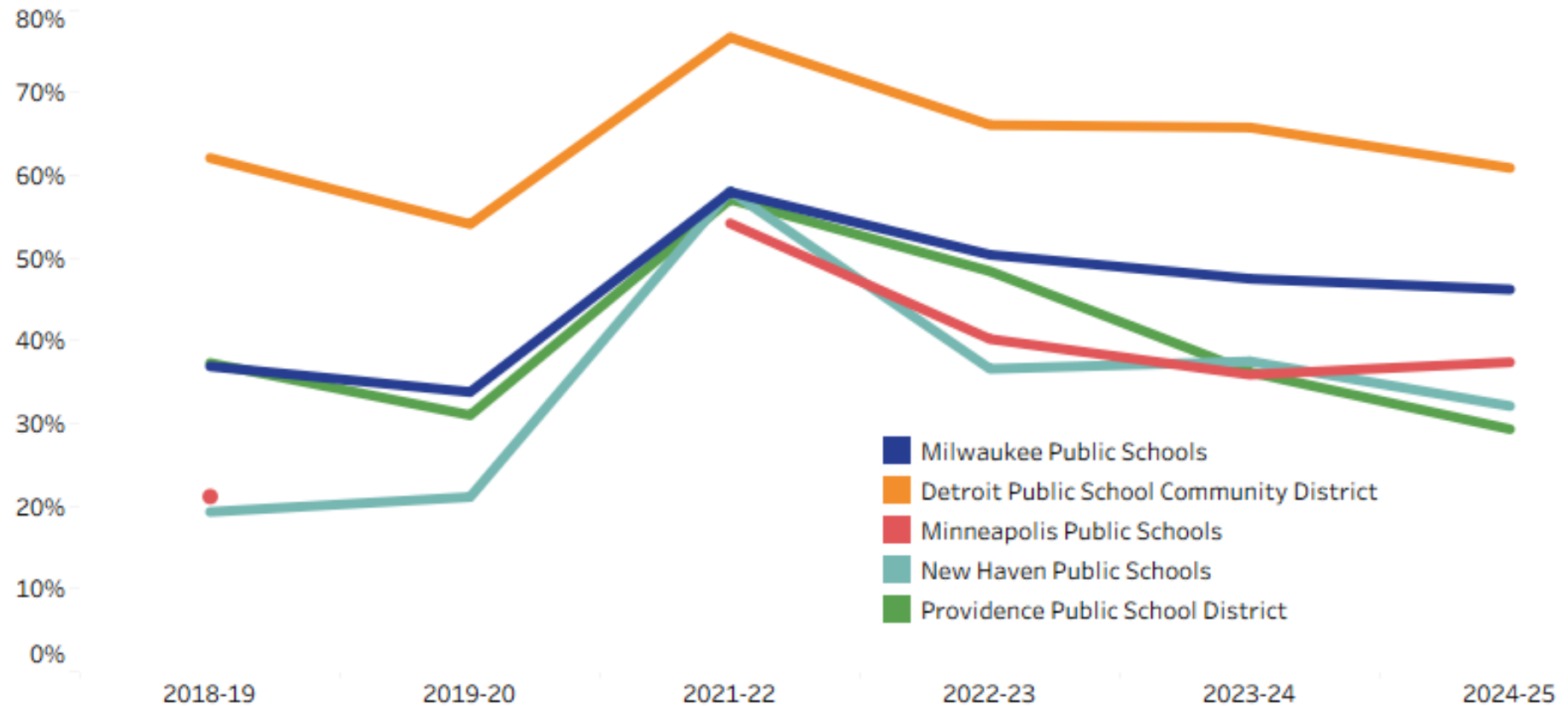
Misconceptions

- Absences are only a problem if they are unexcused
- Missing two days per month doesn't affect learning
- Lose track and underestimate TOTAL absences
- Assume students must stay home for any symptom of illness
- Attendance only matters in the older grades
- Suspensions don't count as absence

Inspiration from National Outliers

Some Urban Districts Hit Similar Absenteeism Peaks as Milwaukee but Recovered More

Chronic absenteeism rates, by district*



Sources: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, MI School Data, Minnesota Department of Education, Connecticut State Department of Education, Rhode Island Department of Education. *All district figures except Detroit's include district-authorized charter schools. Data for 2020-21 are excluded for all districts due to lack of standardized attendance-taking during disrupted learning. Minnesota also did not report 2019-20 data.

Case Study Solution Themes

Call to Attention

Ownership of the
Work

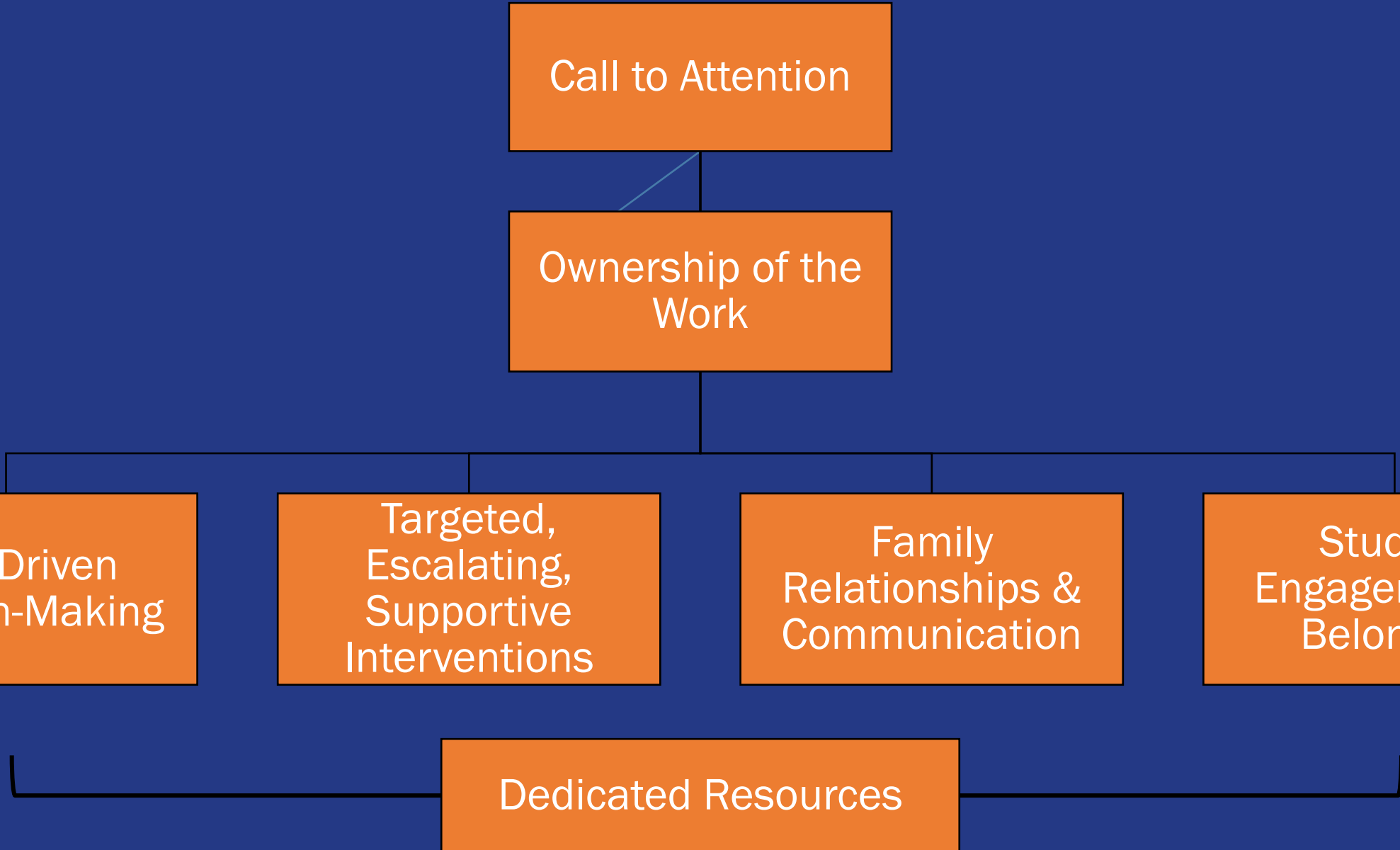
Data-Driven
Decision-Making

Targeted,
Escalating,
Supportive
Interventions

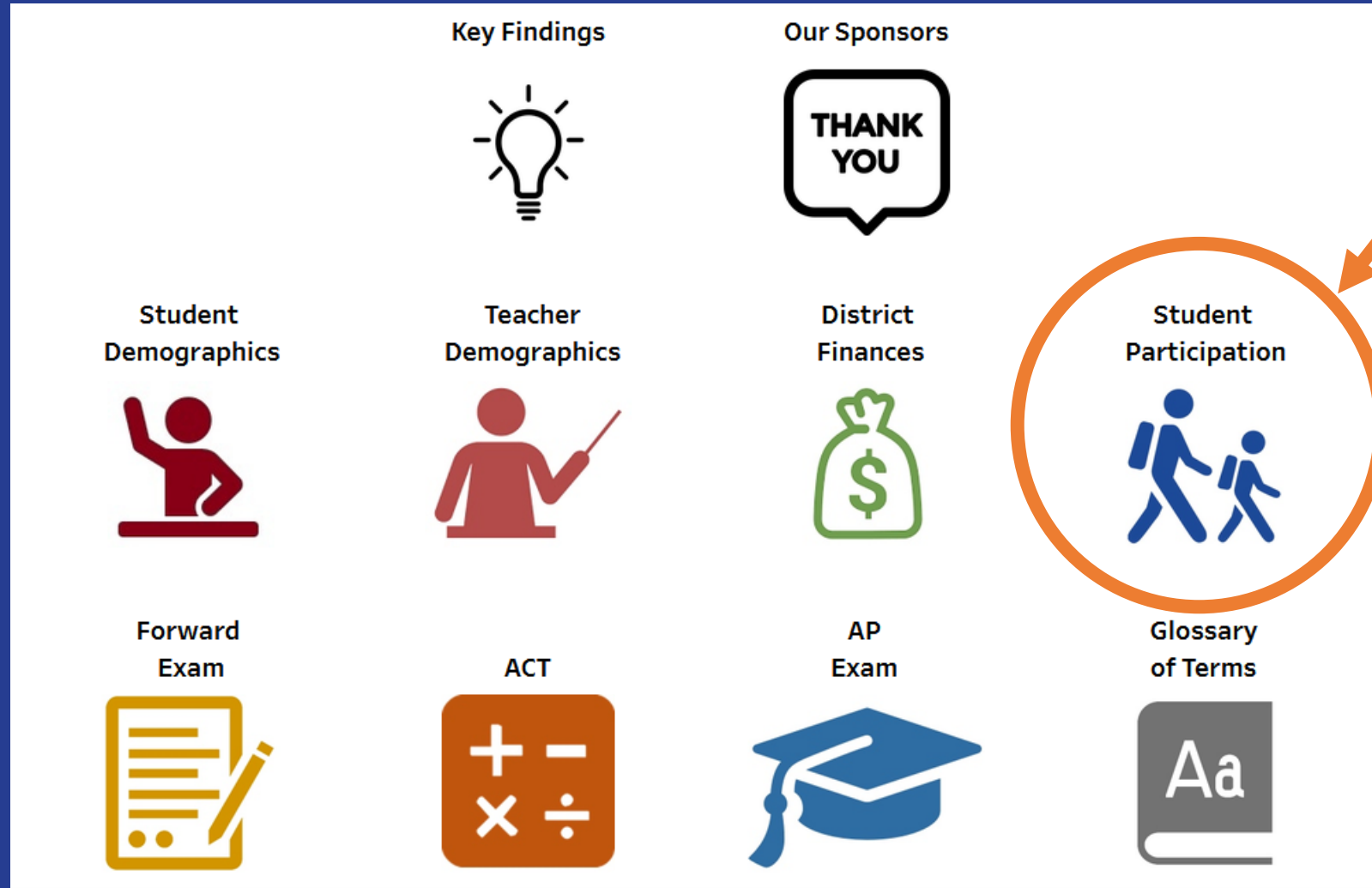
Family
Relationships &
Communication

Student
Engagement &
Belonging

Dedicated Resources



Is absenteeism an issue in your community?



<https://wispolicyforum.org/research/school-datatool/>

Attendance

Absenteeism

Dropouts

Graduation

Select a School District

State of Wisconsin



Student Group

All Students

Race/Ethnicity

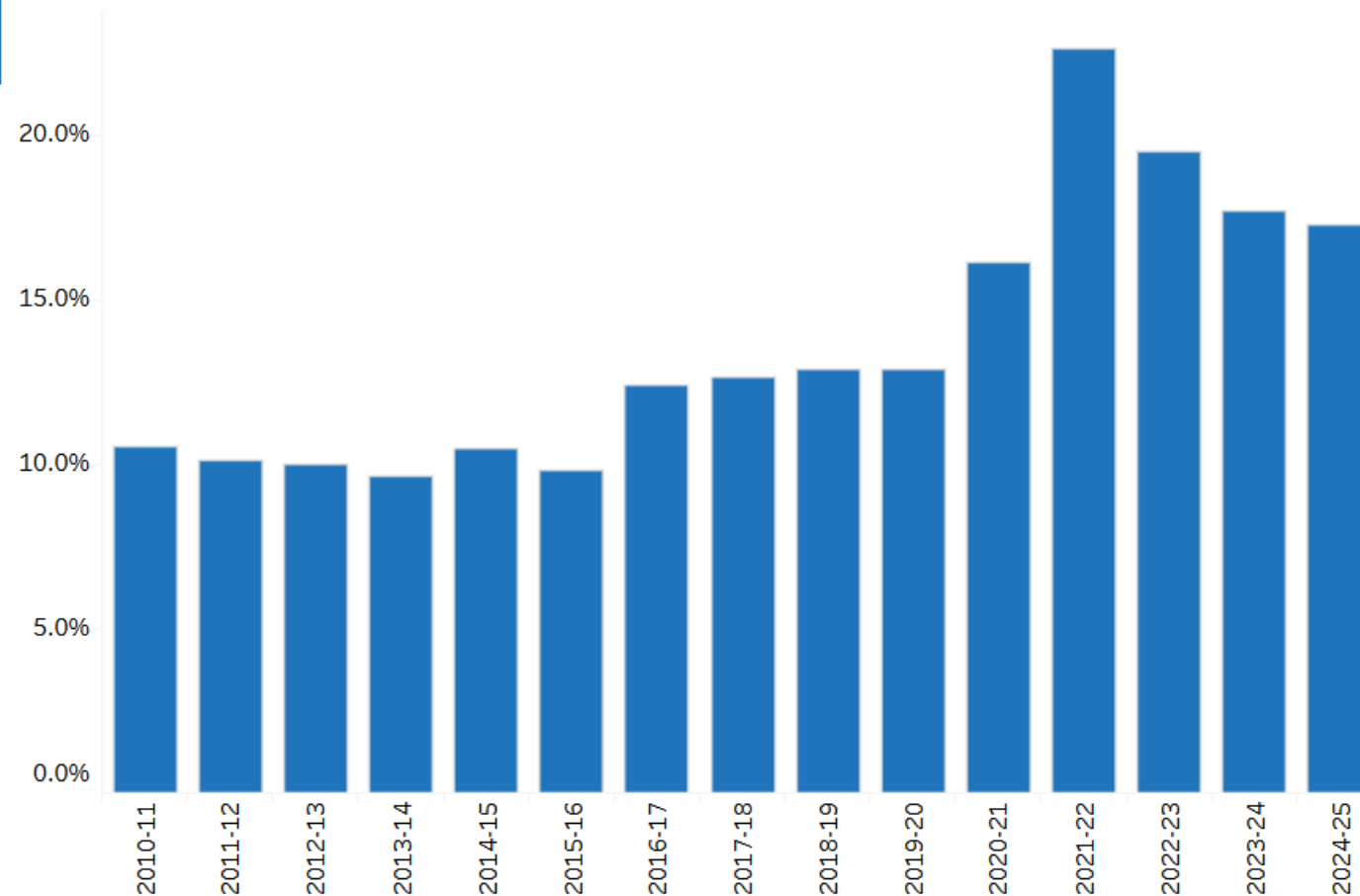
Economic Status

English Proficiency

Disability Status

State of Wisconsin Chronic Absenteeism Rate

All Students



For more details on absenteeism and other critical school data points



Upcoming Event

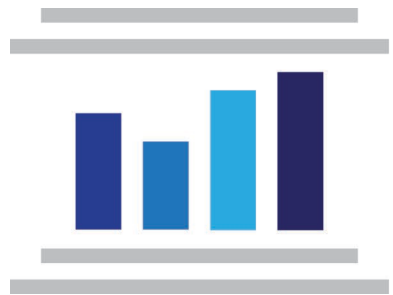
Salute to Local Government

Italian Community Center
November 18 | 11:30 a.m. – 1:30 p.m.



Learn More About Our Membership!





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