SHIELD — School Health Institute for Education and Leadership Development

SALEM PUBLIC SCHOOLS — Where belonging leads to opportunity.

BOSTON UNIVERSITY — School of Public Health, Chobanian & Avedisian School of Medicine, Wheelock College of Education & Human Development

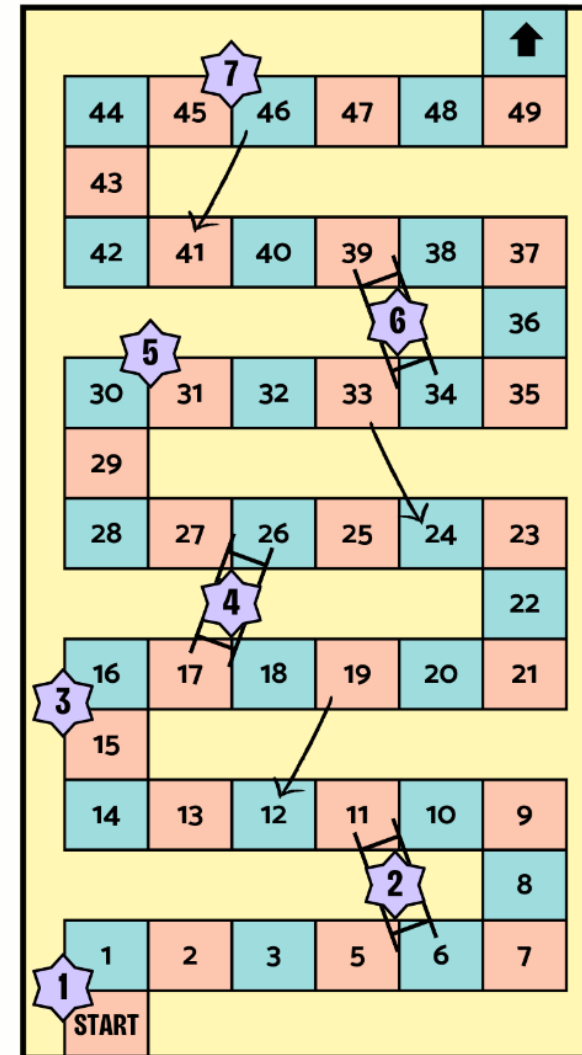# Addressing Chronic Absenteeism: School Nurses Leading for Change

CSHS Session 2 – Application of Policy Development Process at Salem Public Schools

POLICY DEVELOPMENT PROCESS:
A CHUTES AND LADDERS APPROACH TO IMPROVED ATTENDANCE

THE CLIMB TO IMPROVED ATTENDANCE

1. **Identify the Problem:** Roll the dice. Clearly define the issue of chronic absenteeism and its impact.
   - **Potential Pitfall:** Lack of accurate data or ineffective data analysis.
2. **Form a Team:** Climb the ladder. Assemble a diverse team of stakeholders, including educators, parents, community members, and healthcare providers.
3. **Gather Data:** Roll the dice. Collect data on attendance rates, identify patterns, and analyze root causes.
   - **Potential Pitfall:** Data privacy concerns or resistance to data-driven decision-making.
4. **Develop Goals and Objectives:** Climb the ladder. Set specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) goals.
5. **Create Action Plans:** Roll the dice. Develop strategies and interventions to address the identified issues, including housing instability, providing financial support, and promoting mental health.
6. **Implement the Plan:** Climb the ladder. Roll out the plan, monitor progress, and make necessary adjustments.
   - **Potential Pitfall:** Lack of adequate funding or resources.
7. **Evaluate the Impact:** Roll the dice. Assess the effectiveness of the policies and interventions.
   - **Potential Pitfall:** Ineffective evaluation methods or failure to use data to inform future decisions.

Overview of the 7-step policy development process.

Summary Table: Addressing Chronic Absenteeism at Salem Public Schools Through Policy Development

7-Step Process	Application at Salem Public Schools
1. Identify the Problem	The work to address absenteeism in Salem began as part of a wider initiative. To better identify the problems that youth face, the mayor and other city officials understood that they needed more information and adopted a multilayered approach.
2. Form a Team	The mayor and other city officials tapped into their extended networks within and outside of their city: value-driven, like-minded leaders – HGSE; children's cabinet of leaders in Salem; other non-governmental organizations, such as the YMCA. Over time, with input from the school superintendent and school administrators, the school system connected with City Connects – a university-run program.
3. Gather Data	Drawing on research in child development, and with help from City Connects, the team administered surveys and interviews to understand barriers and opportunity gaps that students and their families were facing. The team identified that poverty was a major determinant of the health and well-being of the students in the city. They also identified other major issues, including an ever-increasing population of students with housing instability (homelessness), family instability, food insecurity, substance use or adult mental health issues, cognitive issues, transportation, etc.
4. Develop Goals and Objectives	Their goals were focused on disrupting inequities, developing wraparound services, ensuring every child had a team, and helping families to surmount the barriers they faced.
5. Create Action Plans	They set out to pair every child in the school district with a student coordinator and ensure school nurses were included at the decision-making table.
6. Implement the Plan	All children were paired with student coordinators, who became a key resource for securing home/school connections. Additional staff were hired to work with support coordinators and school nurses. The need to organizationally synthesize student support services required that school nurses become involved in the decision-making processes. The Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child (WSCC) model also influenced this collective mindset. Because the challenges were typically beyond the scope of the school, the team also applied for grant funding and partnered with non-governmental organizations. • For example, they partnered with Cartwheel Care and Catholic Charities to address housing instability. They hired a homelessness coordinator who found adequate clothing and other basic supplies for families. • When looking for funding or organizations to partner with, they sought out the following key elements and characteristics: a relationship-based model – above all else, a primary focus on universal and tier 1 supports (i.e., prevention-first strategies), and collaborative, multidisciplinary approaches.
7. Evaluate the Impact	**Successes:** established school culture, dedicated time for planning built into the school day, collaboration with the school and between school staff and families, plans/procedures recorded on organizational chart and online. **Recommendations:** create centralized expectations for how people are engaged in collaboration, write down protocols and procedures, establish a strong system of triage, use data to get buy-in from administration, and tap into both formal and informal systems of support. Challenges remain that require creativity and support from others to resolve. The Salem team continues to reflect on the following questions: • What are the most effective ways to build and maintain strong partnerships between schools, community organizations, and government agencies? • How can we leverage the strengths and resources of different organizations to address these issues? • What are the challenges and opportunities for collaboration? • How can we ensure that partnerships are sustainable and impactful?