



COUNT ME IN!

Attending School, Preparing for Life

OUR MISSION

Inspiring student learning and aspirations by reducing chronic absenteeism in Maine

Count ME In believes deeply in the transformative power of attendance on the future success of Maine’s youth. Chronic absence is a significant challenge but is solvable when schools, families and communities work together to identify and address barriers to getting children to school. Count ME In works to ensure all students have an equal opportunity to learn and prepare for their future roles as employees, leaders, and citizens in vibrant, healthy, economically viable communities.

482 Congress St, Suite 303
Portland, ME 04101

207.747.9059
sliberman@
countmeinmaine.org

Like us on Facebook
@CountMEInMaine

Countmeinmaine.org

COUNT ME IN Impact Report

2020

The Attendance Challenge In Our State

Over **30,300** Maine K-12 students are chronically absent each year.¹ Chronic absence, defined as missing 10% (18+ days) or more of school for any reason, is a nationally recognized problem adversely **affecting academic achievement as early as preschool**, and creating gaps in learning that decrease the likelihood of high school graduation. **Absenteeism is both a leading indicator and cause of educational inequity.**

¹ME DOE, 2019.

REMOTE, HYBRID OR IN-PERSON Access to Learning During a Global Pandemic

The arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020 presented historic challenges for Maine’s schools, families, and communities. The unprecedented closure of **schools**, and **immediate** shift to remote or hybrid learning, **triggered national conversations** about **students’ access** to critical resources and supports previously available by simply attending school.

Attendance Ensures Continued Access To:

- school meals** school-based food pantries and deliveries
- individualized goals** school health services
- regular communication between school/family**
- clothing closets and drives** peer relationships
- tutoring and coaching** after school activities
- community resource referrals** caring mentors

As students, teachers, and families felt the enormous and wide-ranging impacts of the pandemic, Count ME In supported schools and districts in adapting to changes and continuing to provide the personalized supports and connections that families needed more than ever. Count ME In strategies, including a whole school approach, a school team that meets regularly, positive contact with families, and data-driven intervention, became even more relevant during the pandemic. These strategies have led to substantial, continuing decreases in chronic absence.

REGULAR TEAM MEETINGS

A WHOLE SCHOOL APPROACH

REGULAR POSITIVE CONTACT WITH FAMILIES

DATA-DRIVEN INTERVENTIONS

OUR REACH

Tens of thousands of Maine students have benefited from the Count ME In program.

Over the past seven years, schools that fully implemented the program have decreased their rates of chronic absence by an average of **23%**. More than **1,300** Maine students who were chronically absent now attend school regularly.

During the 2019–2020 school year:

Count ME In reached **12,311** students in **47** participating schools within **13** school districts.

OUR WINNING FORMULA FOR SUCCESS

The Count ME In program supports partnerships of schools, families, and communities working together to effectively address the broad range of barriers to attendance.

Through ongoing evaluation of data and case studies, Count ME In has identified five key strategies for increasing attendance and engagement:

- Create a culture of attendance as early as preschool and kindergarten
- Create a positive school culture and climate
- Monitor attendance data and practices using a whole school approach
- Identify and address barriers to getting to school
- Promote shared accountability among stakeholders using real-time data

BUILDING CAPACITY FOR CONNECTION

In a survey, staff who participated in our program during the 2019–2020 school year reported on the value of the Count ME In strategies they had implemented to build better connections with students and their families.

Staff who had more frequent contact with families before the pandemic were **three times more likely** to find contact easy during remote learning.

THIS SHOWS: Building relationships with families supported student engagement even while experiencing unprecedented remote learning!

70% felt more comfortable contacting families and had a better understanding of student life outside of school.

THIS CONFIRMS: Building positive relationships with families is critical to helping staff address the causes and functions of individual student behaviors and absences.

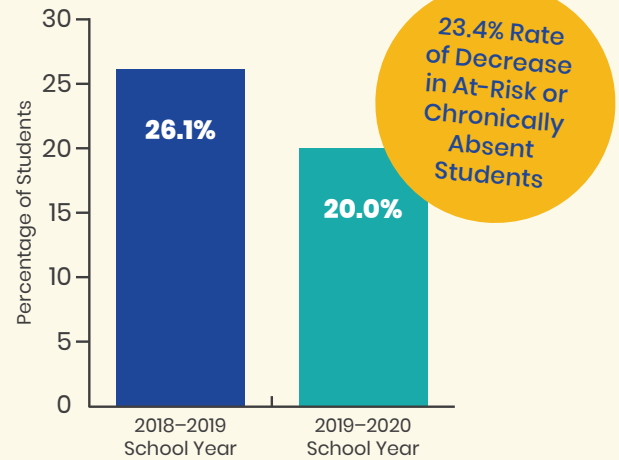
And **53%** reported learning about their students' lack of access to opportunities and resources.

THE RESULT: Knowing the whole student, including their responsibilities outside of school, helps staff better understand student behavior and the challenges their students are facing.

2019-2020 SCHOOL YEAR RESULTS

Maine schools fully implementing Count ME In for the first time in the 2019-2020 school year **decreased their chronic absenteeism rates by 23.4%** resulting in **157 fewer students** at-risk or chronically absent. Across all participating schools, a total of 304 students who were at-risk or chronically absent are now attending school regularly.

Decrease in Chronic Absence After First Year



2020 HIGHLIGHTS: EXPANDING ATTENDANCE AWARENESS THROUGHOUT THE STATE

- Welcomed over 1,300 participants from across the state to Count ME In professional development sessions including:
 - » *Surviving the Whirlwind*, a program developed in response to staff concerns about the pandemic and in partnership with two mental health agencies
 - » *Transforming School Climate and Culture*, a program to build positive climate, improve school culture, and refine staff-to-staff, staff-to-student, and staff-to-family relationships, whether learning remote or in-person
- Expanded to serve schools as far south as York County and as far north as Aroostook County, including five school districts and seventeen schools who participated in Count ME In for the first time
- Expanded to early childhood programs to help foster consistent attendance starting in PreK and Head Start
- Broadened work with districts to include remote academies for students learning remotely, increasing connections and communication between remote teachers and community schools
- Expanded pilot promoting greater coordination between schools and medical providers to serve six districts and medical practices in Oxford, York and Cumberland counties



A STORY OF SUCCESS

SANFORD elementary schools underwent major changes in 2019–2020, consolidating four elementary schools into three while also transitioning to remote learning in response to COVID-19. In August 2019, Sanford partnered with Count ME In to implement a whole-school approach to attendance. They monitored student attendance, supported positive contacts between staff and families, and shifted responsibility for student attendance from one person to the entire staff, building stronger connections with students and families. When remote instruction became necessary, these connections, a key component

of the CMI program, were already in place.

Students like Evan continue to benefit. Evan had missed 45 school days in kindergarten and first grade. By mid-October 2019, Evan was on-track to miss 45 days again in second grade. His teacher and the school counselor reached out to his mother. She confided that she kept Evan home because he often cried before school. Together, they developed a plan to help Evan in the morning. Within two months, he was getting out of the car independently and walking with his school counselor to his classroom.

OUR CALL TO ACTION IN 2021

Count ME In will continue to help school districts develop capacity to compile and regularly review their attendance data; expand professional development and learning opportunities for educators and community leaders to support transitions back to school; and grow our network of collaboration with state and local agencies to reach more schools and students across Maine.

During 2020–2021, Count ME In continued to support schools and districts as they navigated COVID-19 restrictions. Most schools continued to use a hybrid model, combining remote and in-person learning, in response to positive cases or families choosing to continue remote learning. There is much work ahead of us in 2021; families and communities have only begun to understand the impact of the pandemic on our students, their families, and our schools.

ASSESS chronic absentee data to help identify who has been significantly impacted by the pandemic while implementing whole school and individualized strategies so all students have access to learning opportunities

ENGAGE in and support student attendance, physical health, and mental health as students transition back to full-time, in-person or hybrid learning

CONTINUE to focus on professional development and strategies for strengthening connections with families realizing that the impacts of the pandemic may be severe, complex, and directly related to student health and future success

TAKE ACTION IN YOUR COMMUNITY

VOLUNTEER

your time and professional skills.

DONATE

to Count ME In to help ensure that every child has the support they need to attend school.

SPONSOR

our programs and services for a school in your community.

PARTNER

with us to activate permanent, positive change for at-risk students across Maine.

To explore how you can get involved, email slieberman@countmeinmaine.org or call 207.747.9059.

Count ME In was funded in 2020 through the generous support of Betterment Foundation, Bingham Fund, Catherine Burnham Charitable Foundation, Davis Family Foundation, Faye Y. Gmeiner, Francis X. Langlois Trust, Maine Community Foundation, 100+ Women of Southern Maine Who Care, Paul Herman, United Way of Greater Portland, United Way of York County, and Virginia Hodgkins Somers Foundation.