# Maximising engagement and attendance
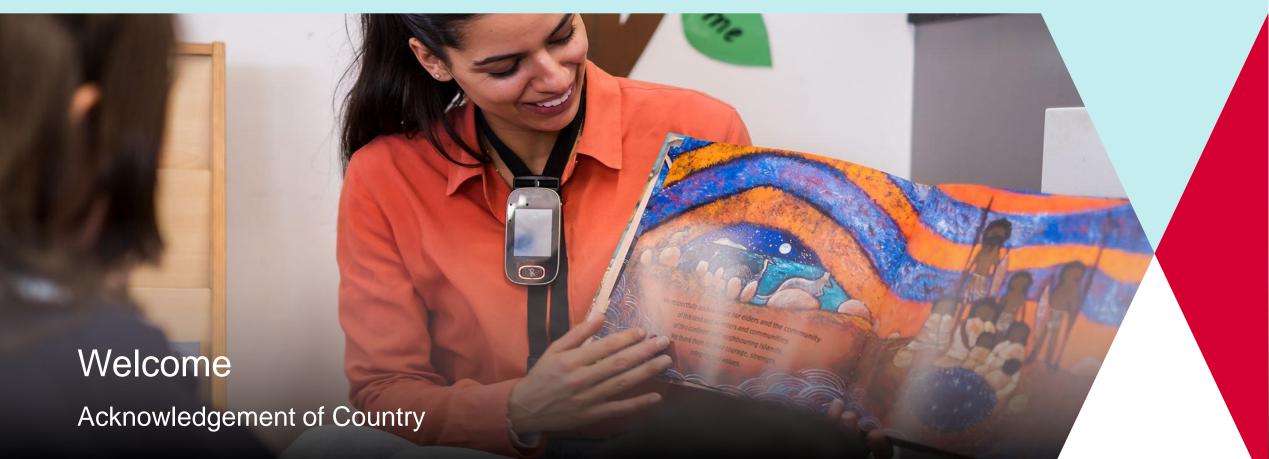## Strategies that are working in schools

**FACILITATORS:**

Melrose Primary School
**Ben Slocombe**
Principal
**Darren Clough**
Assistant Principal

North Eastern Victoria Region
**Stuart Edwards**
Executive Director, Student Wellbeing and Engagement

Welcome
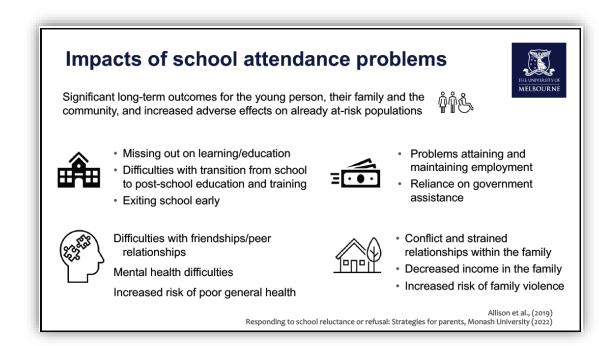
Acknowledgement of Country

# Student attendance

## How can we turn things around in 2025?

- 2023 and 2024 absence rates increased dramatically compared with pre-COVID

- Declining attendance rates are a national and international trend

- Schools are working really hard to reduce chronic absence, but…
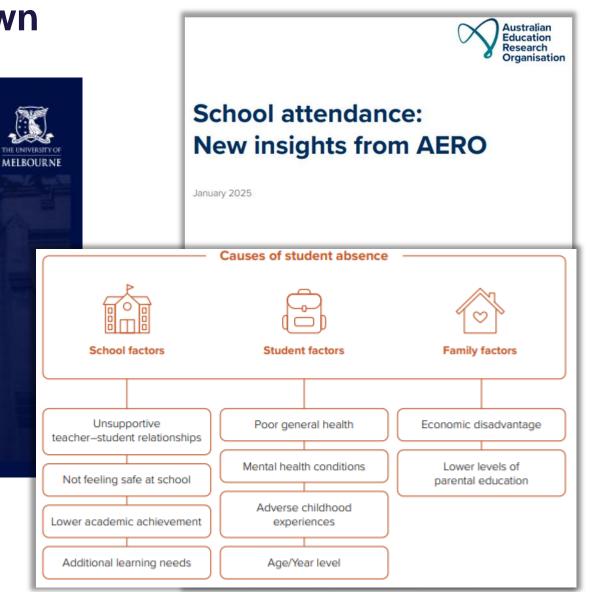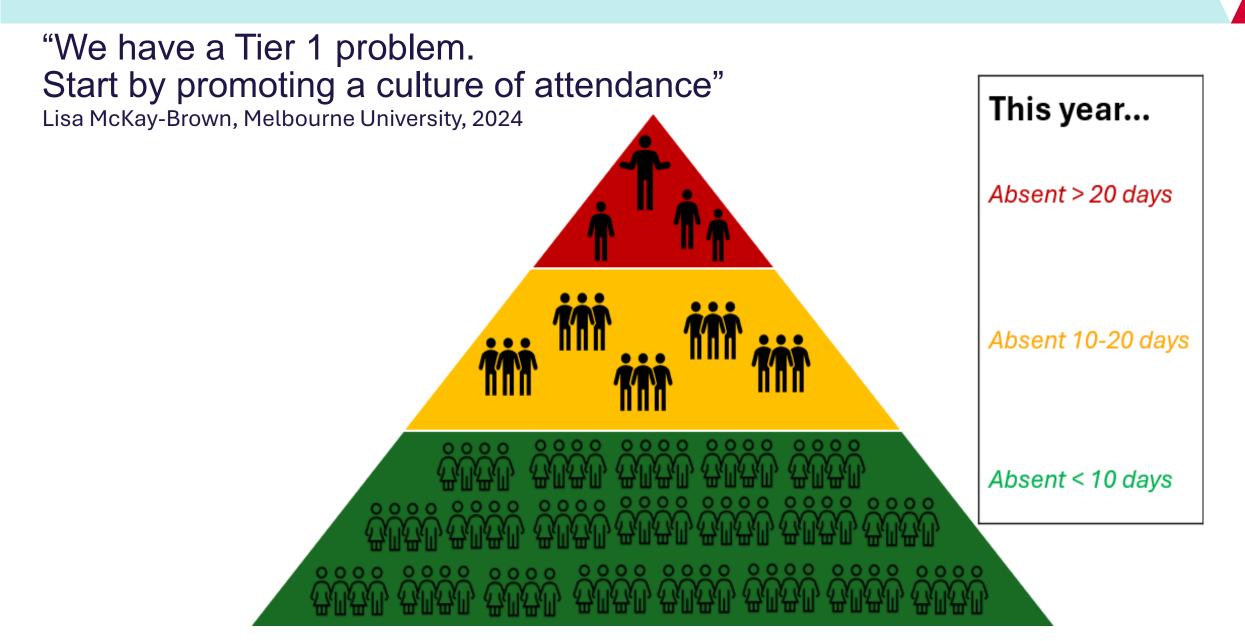
**Too many students missing too much school!**



### Impacts of school attendance problems

Significant long-term outcomes for the young person, their family and the community, and increased adverse effects on already at-risk populations

- Missing out on learning/education
- Difficulties with transition from school to post-school education and training
- Exiting school early

- Problems attaining and maintaining employment
- Reliance on government assistance

- Difficulties with friendships/peer relationships
- Mental health difficulties
- Increased risk of poor general health

- Conflict and strained relationships within the family
- Decreased income in the family
- Increased risk of family violence

Allison et al., (2019)
Responding to school reluctance or refusal: Strategies for parents, Monash University (2022)

Figure 5: National attendance rate over time by year group (two-yearly averages)

Pathways 2 Participation

**Partnerships**

UIC UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS CHICAGO

TRAVANCORE SCHOOL

DEAKIN UNIVERSITY

MACKILLOP EDUCATION
So much more than a school

The Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne

And thank you to the Victorian Department of Education schools who have participated in the research

Australian Education Research Organisation

**School attendance:
New insights from AERO**

January 2025

# Associate Professor Lisa McKay-Brown
## Melbourne University

# Grow the green

"We have a Tier 1 problem.
Start by promoting a culture of attendance"
Lisa McKay-Brown, Melbourne University, 2024



**This year…**

Absent > 20 days

Absent 10-20 days

Absent < 10 days

# How close is your school to having 80% of students missing ≤ 10 days this year?

58%

22%

20%

5%

15%

80%

# Many schools are improving **individual student** attendance...

## 2023

| |
|---|
| 30% |
| 40% |
| 30% |

## 2024

| |
|---|
| 40% |
| 35% |
| 25% |

# Planning for implementation

"For change to succeed, leaders need to focus as much, if not more, on understanding the practices they wish to change as on designing the alternatives they seek to introduce.
…the hardest part of change is not planning but its implementation because that involves the uncertain and complex process of integrating and aligning the new practices with hundreds of existing practices."

*Reduce change to increase improvement* (Corwin, 2018) Viviane Robinson
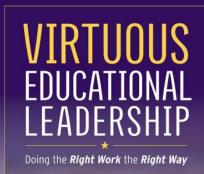
"Don't design the future until you deeply **understand** the present."

# Core work in 2025/26

1.  Establish a School Attendance Team

2.  Audit existing practices

3.  Review and strengthen data systems

4.  Develop and implement evidence-informed strategies
    *   School-wide, everyone
    *   Targeted, needs-based

# Examples of Tier 1
## positive behaviour support for attendance

**Data walls**
- Staff room – green and red actions documented
- Classroom accrual method with key milestones

**SWPBS**
- A school-wide focus on reinforcement of attendance behaviours

**Regular student surveys with a focus on**
- engagement in learning
- attitudes to attendance
- Wellbeing (eg bullying)

**Teach students**
- Weekly attendance home groups focus on the teaching of 'attendance behaviours'

**Positive Classroom Management Strategies (PCMS)**
- Adopt consistent attendance reinforcing teacher practices in every classroom

**Building relationships (HIWS)**
- School-wide agreed teaching practices
- Meet and greet every student by name

**Certificates/public or personal recognition**
- Attendance rate
- Attendance goals
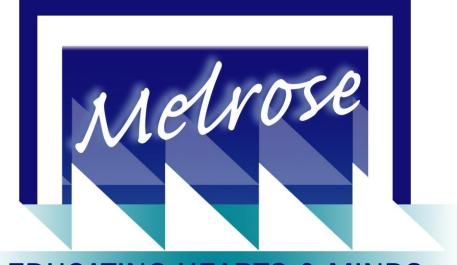- Attendance accrual method

# Melrose Primary School
Wodonga West

## Reduction in Student Absences
2023 – 2024

|  | 20+ days (chronic absence) | <10 days | Days missed on average |
|---|---|---|---|
| **2023** | 57% | 23% | 36 |
| **2024** | **45%** | **33%** | **30** |
|  | **40 less students** | **34 more students** | **6 more days of learning per student** |

# Melrose Primary School context

Current Enrolment - 337

SFOE – 0.5999

Koorie Students - 97

EAL Students - 9

PSD / DIP Funded Students - 45

Teaching Staff - 25

Education Support Staff – 47 (36 in class)

**From puppets to process!**

# What we have done in the past.

- Sugar Hits, whilst fun and engaging at times = zero impact for nonattenders.

- Un-Sustainable allocation of resources

- Band aide / reactive approaches

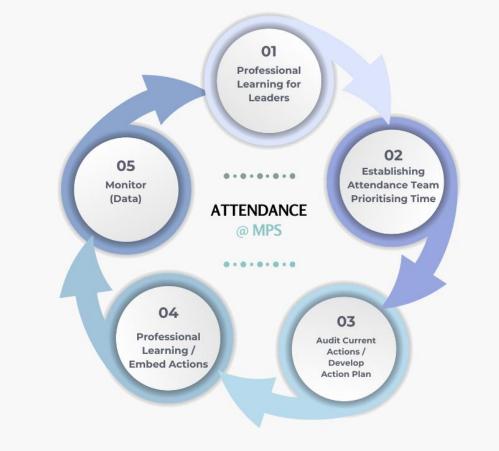- All lead to burnout and parent blaming (It's the parent's fault)!

100% ATTENDANCE AWARD

PRESENTED TO

FOR

SIGNED

DATE

# A different approach

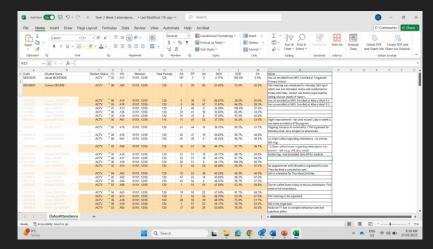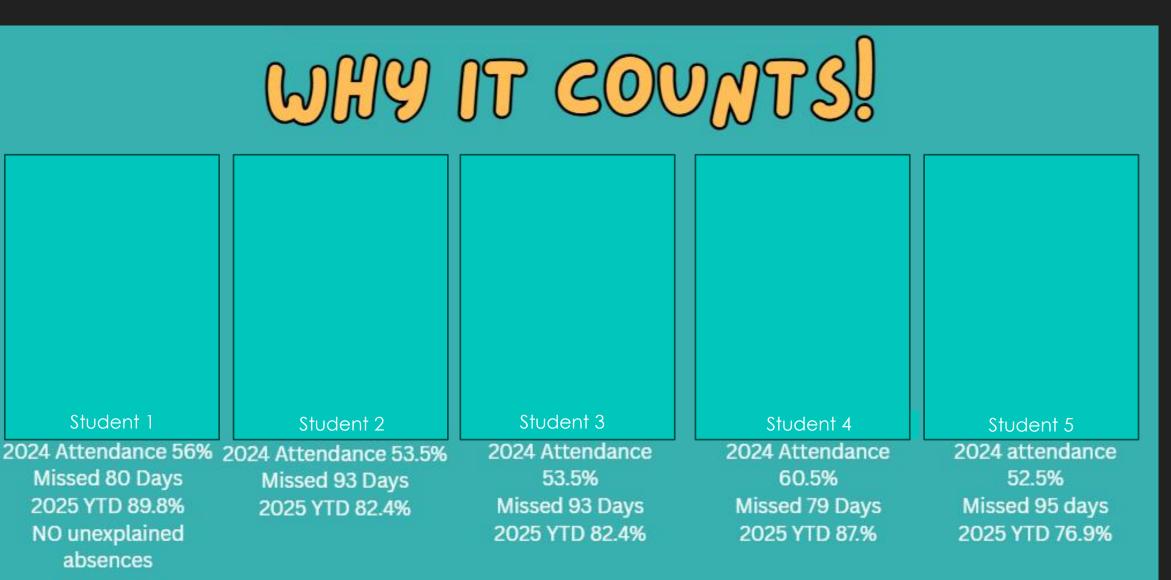Prioritising the work within the Professional Learning schedule

# A different approach

- Auditing our attendance codes and how they aligned with our student Information Management System e.g. we had 116 and 117 (late explained) (Left early from class) used in 7-12 environments!

- Setting up mechanisms where we can get regular YTD data

- Establishing an attendance team / Action Plan

- Having clear through lines from policy to procedure

- Focus on growth not attendance %

- Starting at the beginning of the Year / Term / Semester is important

# WHY IT COUNTS!

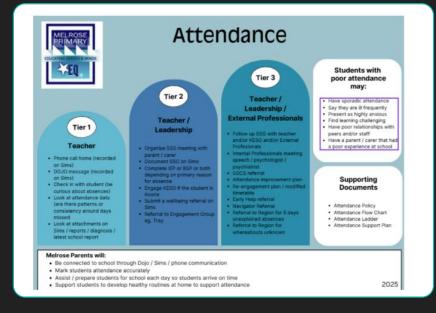| Student 1 | Student 2 | Student 3 | Student 4 | Student 5 |
|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| 2024 Attendance 56% Missed 80 Days 2025 YTD 89.8% NO unexplained absences | 2024 Attendance 53.5% Missed 93 Days 2025 YTD 82.4% | 2024 Attendance 53.5% Missed 93 Days 2025 YTD 82.4% | 2024 Attendance 60.5% Missed 79 Days 2025 YTD 87.% | 2024 attendance 52.5% Missed 95 days 2025 YTD 76.9% |

PCMS / Relationships  ⚭  Engagement / Connectedness  ⚭  Improved academic / life outcomes

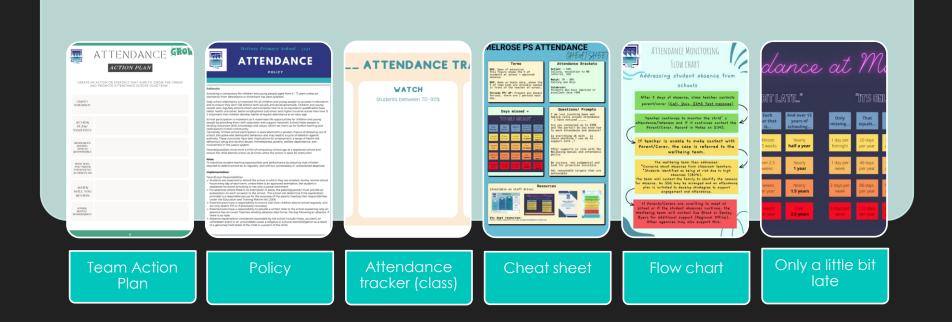# Growing the green
# (A culture of attendance)

- Streamlining procedures and expectations for staff (wellbeing manual) Having everything documented / creating consistency.

- Attendance PL (Whole school including ES) Designated time to look at research / best practice. How we monitor attendance / how we acknowledge attendance. How do we connect with families and instil the importance of coming every day.

- Embedding attendance as an agenda item in Team meetings.

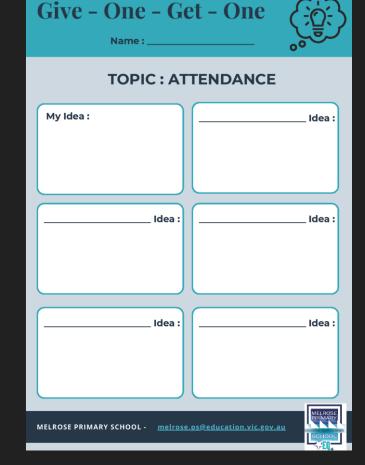- Continually looking at whole school data.

# Supporting documents



| Team Action Plan | Policy | Attendance tracker (class) | Cheat sheet | Flow chart | Only a little bit late |

# Give one get one!

## Protocol:

Take 2 Minutes (Individually) to think of and record something your school does well – A process – A strategy – An Initiative.

5 Minutes to Give-One-Get-One.

5 Minutes share back to the group / reflection.

# Any questions?

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