



## Testimony Supporting Stay in the Game! Attendance Network in Governor DeWine's 2026-27 Budget for the State of Ohio

**To:** House Education Committee

**From:** Susan Bodary, Director, Stay in the Game! Attendance Network

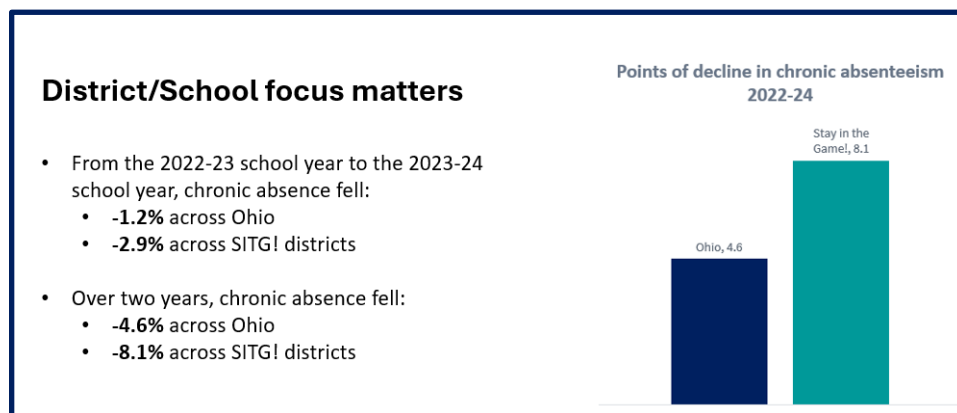
**Stay in the Game! Attendance Network (SITG!)** is a public/private partnership founded in 2019 committed to significantly lowering chronic absenteeism in Ohio. Ohio currently has 25.6% chronic absenteeism rate, meaning that more than one quarter of students are missing 10% or more of school for any reason – excused and unexcused - during the academic year. Time away from class is time away from learning.

- Partners include ODEW, Battelle, Cleveland Browns Foundation, Harvard's Proving Ground, Columbus Crew and FC Cincinnati.
- Currently, there are 161 districts representing 494,000 students participating in this opt-in program.
- The Network includes traditional public districts as well as private/independent and community schools in Ohio.
- Covers urban, suburban, rural and other districts and schools across the state.

### The Network is Producing Positive Outcomes

SITG! is an opt-in program critical to achieving Ohio's stated commitment to cut chronic absenteeism by 50% over five years.

- SITG! Network is outperforming the state, lowering chronic absenteeism by 8.1% over two years, nearly twice the rate of the state as a whole.



- A third-party evaluation indicated the SITG! campaign is working, with the greatest results seen within districts after Years 1 and between Years 3 & 4.
- There is a correlation between attending school and academic achievement. In the 2023-24 school year, ODEW reports students who were not chronically absent:
  - Are 3.9 times more likely to read on grade level by the end of third grade.



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- In grades 3-8 are 3.6 times more likely to score proficient in Math state tests each year.
- In Algebra 1 and Geometry are more than 4.6 times more likely to score proficient in Math state tests each year.
- Are three times more likely to graduate from high school on time.
- For Ohio to accomplish its workforce goals – and have a talent pipeline to meet the needs of in-demand jobs now and in the future – we must decrease chronic absenteeism and increase academic achievement and workforce preparation of our students.

### **What the Stay in the Game! Attendance Network Does**

SITG! helps districts by:

- Helping districts to create customized campaigns that fit their district context, focusing on prevention and early intervention, shifting mindsets to what students can accomplish when they regularly attend school.
- Building cross-sector partnerships regionally and across the state to help spread the message and support the work.
- Bringing districts into a learning community to help them accelerate their learning and build capacity on attendance.
- Promoting attendance practices and policies to support attendance across Ohio.

This work helps districts learn to use their data, identify challenges, conduct root cause analysis and identify interventions to respond to their district context. Districts build capacity on managing attendance work, and how to integrate it with their PBIS (Positive Behavior and Intervention Supports Ohio districts must implement).

### **SITG! is a Sustainable Public-Private Partnership**

From the beginning, SITG! was designed as a sustainable public-private partnership. The Network:

- Will continue to be funded by public *and* private funds. Existing funders including Battelle, Cleveland Browns Foundation, Columbus Foundation. Fundraising is underway now with many others as well.
- Is adapting its approach for supporting districts to include intentional partnerships with education service centers (ESCs), state support teams (SSTs) and others to increase network capacity.
- Because districts commit to a process of data collection, analysis and continuous improvement on attendance, SITG! also supports their work on issues that are related to attendance.
- Has created the Campaign Playbook online platform and other tools to support districts/schools have been built for scaling and require only small adaptations going forward.



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- An Extended Partnership Plan and campaign is in development to bring many others to the work who can support it across the state during the 2025/26 school year.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this written testimony in support of funding the Stay in the Game! Attendance Network in Ohio's budget. Success is lowering chronic absence translates to success in preparing young Ohioans for their futures, and to increase the vitality of our state's economy.

Thank you.