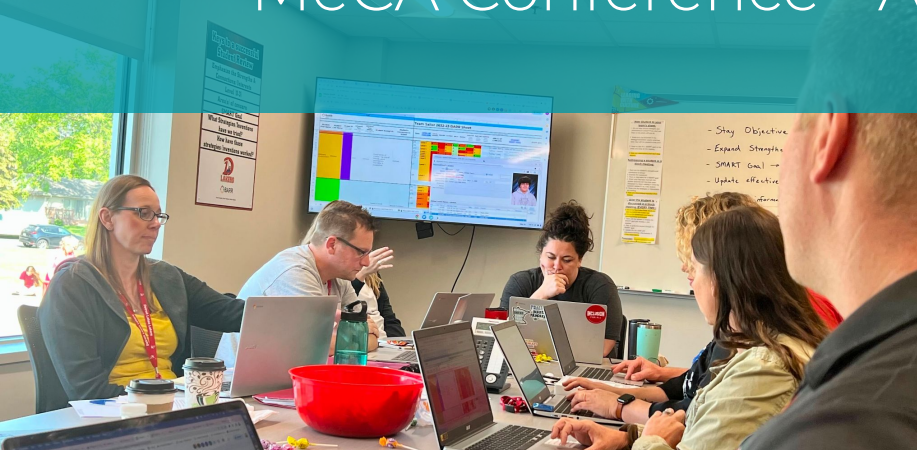# Reducing Chronic Absenteeism Through the Power of Relationships and Data

Rachel Olinger Steeves, Ph.D.
MeCA Conference - April 9, 2024

Intellectual Property Rights

All content delivered and/or materials distributed during our sessions are subject to the intellectual property rights of our sponsors and speakers presenting at the conference.

You may not record sessions, or use or reproduce any materials distributed at or in connection with the event for any reason without the prior written permission of MECA and the presenting speaker.

MECA

MAINE COUNSELING ASSOCIATION

A State Branch of the American Counseling Association

APPROVED CONTINUING EDUCATION PROVIDER
NBCC

Chronic Absenteeism & Student Engagement

Chronic Absenteeism and Student Engagement:

Consider the following:

- What is the connection between chronic absenteeism and student engagement?
- What are the obstacles that exist for addressing chronic absenteeism?

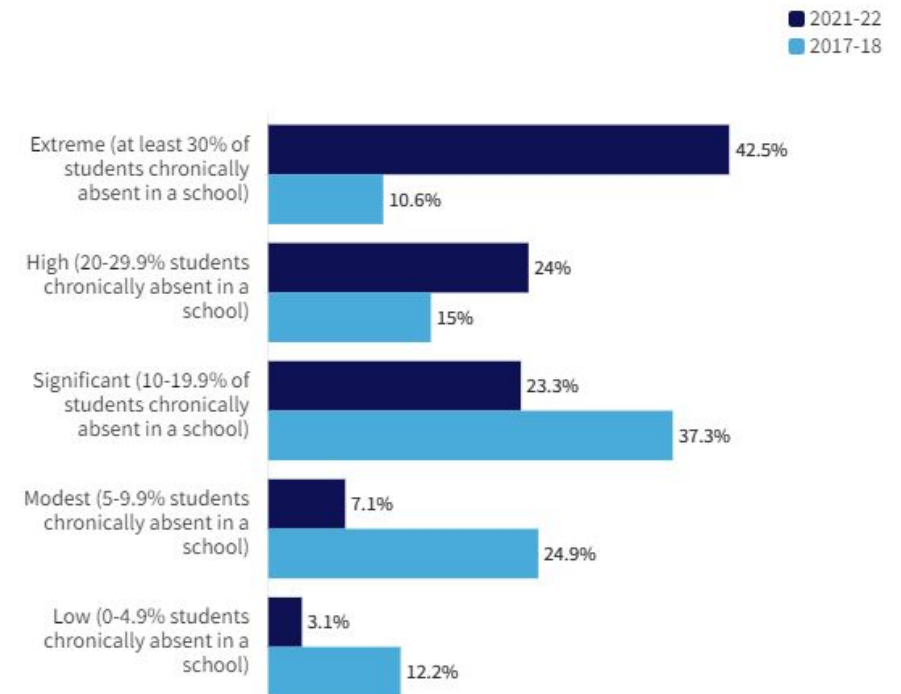# Maine's definition of chronic absenteeism

A student is considered chronically absent when they miss **10 percent or more school days**.

The National Problem

- The proportion of students attending schools that had high or extreme rates of chronic absenteeism more than doubled from 26 percent during the 2017-18 school year to 66 percent during the 2021-22 school year.*

- Researchers at Johns Hopkins University found that the number of chronically absent students jumped about 80 percent — to 14.7 million in 2021-2022

- Early data from 2022-23 school year show modest improvements in a small sample of states.

* Everyone Graduates Center and Attendance Works, 2023

Percentage of Students Who Attended Schools With High Rates of Chronic Absenteeism

■ 2021-22
■ 2017-18

Category	2021-22	2017-18
Extreme (at least 30% of students chronically absent in a school)	42.5%	10.6%
High (20-29.9% students chronically absent in a school)	24%	15%
Significant (10-19.9% of students chronically absent in a school)	23.3%	37.3%
Modest (5-9.9% students chronically absent in a school)	7.1%	24.9%
Low (0-4.9% students chronically absent in a school)	3.1%	12.2%

SOURCE: Attendance Works, Everyone Graduates Center

EdW

BARR

Drivers of Chronic Absenteeism

- **Out of School Factors:** Illness, physical/mental health, home/life barriers, family/sibling care, working, transportation

- **Disengagement:** School doesn't seem relevant, bored, no meaningful connections, not connected to school activity or group, struggling without appropriate support, see more value in work vs. school

- **Avoidance/Aversion:** Feel unconnected or have no sense of belonging in school, teacher and peer challenges, academic and social challenges (could be related to learning disability), previous negative experiences of family and friends, struggling

- **Misconceptions/Misinformation:** Student/family doesn't fully understand what being chronically absent means, lack of communication around consequences of absenteeism - both in the now and future; little to no communication to parents about attendance status

Key Difference from prior years:
No demographic group avoids increased rates of absenteeism (EAB, 2023)

BARR

Why Chronic Absenteeism Matters: What the Research Says

STUDENTS

Early Learning Milestones:

- Chronic absenteeism may prevent children from reaching early learning milestones.

- Children who are chronically absent in pre-K through 1st grade are much less likely to read at grade level by the third grade.

High School Graduation:

- Irregular attendance can be a better predictor of whether students will drop out before graduation than test scores.

Beyond High School:

- Chronically absent students are more likely to experience, has been linked to poor outcomes later in life (poverty, health)
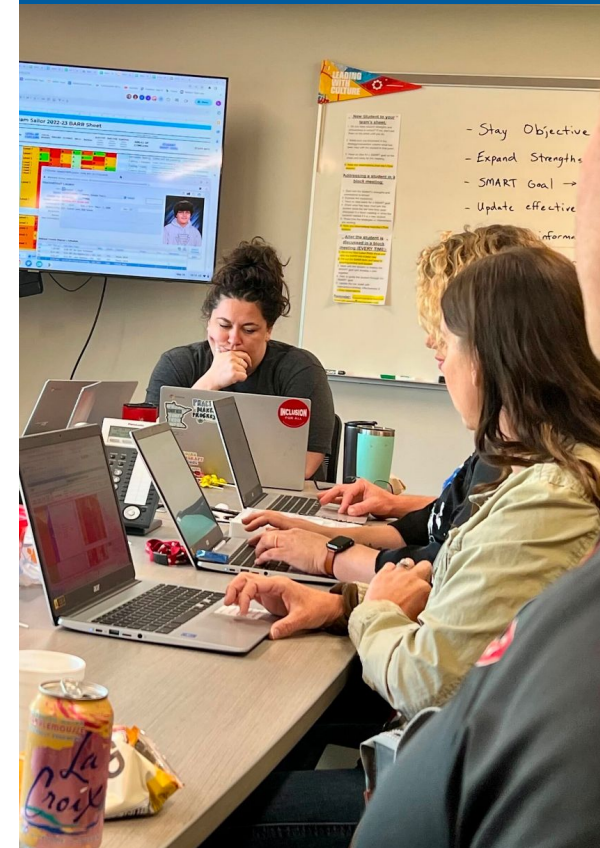
STAFF/SCHOOL

Time/Expertise:

- "Catching up" chronically absent students can be extremely difficult

Funding:

- In select states, chronic absenteeism impacts district and school finances with ties to Average Daily Attendance

BARR

Response is complex, multifaceted, and a great opportunity

Addressing Absenteeism with Student-Centered Mindsets Holistically and Systemically

Build Stronger Relationships and Foster Belonging in Schools

- Intentional relationships for staff to staff, staff to student, student to student
- Students want to attend schools where they feel safe and a sense of belonging

Use of Teacher Teams and Real-Time Actionable Data - Qualitative and Quantitative

- A positive, problem-solving approach driven by data will improve attendance.
- Identify when something may have changed in students' lives or schooling experience that could lead to absenteeism and act before it becomes chronic.
- Teachers understand and embrace their influence over student attendance

Understanding the importance of family and community engagement

- The pandemic shifted mindsets for many families about the value of school - in person or online.
- According to EAB, 86% of district leaders agree that parent belief in the importance of daily attendance is lower now than in previous years

BARR

What is BARR?

- BARR stands for Building Assets, Reducing Risks.

- Two pillars: Relationships & Data

- The BARR System empowers schools to lean into their strengths, and look for opportunities to make their work more efficient and effective.

- BARR structures help schools create a community of support to enhance outcomes

RELATIONSHIPS & DATA

BARR
Same Students. Same Teachers.
Better Results.

BARR IS BASED ON TWO PILLARS
RELATIONSHIPS & DATA

20 years
of research and development

78 schools
Involved in randomized control trial research (most rigorous possible)

20 areas
of statistically significant outcomes

Student impacts:

1. Increase in Math achievement scores
2. Increase in English achievement scores
3. More credits earned
4. More courses passed
5. Higher GPA
6. Reduced chronic absenteeism
7. Greater rigor and expectations
8. More supportive relationships
9. Increased engagement
10. Stronger impacts on students of color
11. Stronger impacts on students in poverty
12. Stronger impacts on males
13. Stronger impact on struggling students
14. Closes achievement gap

Teacher impacts:

15. Increase in self-efficacy
16. View of school support
17. Use of data
18. Collaboration with colleagues
19. View of students' observed behavior
20. Perception of students' behavior

BARR increases academic achievement and engagement for all students, with largest impacts demonstrated for students farthest from opportunity including Black, Hispanic, and students in poverty.

BARR reduces failure rates by an average of 35%

BARR reduces the achievement gap

CASEL DESIGNATED SELect Program

i3 investing in innovation

EVIDENCE for ESSA

SAMHSA — Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

ies WHAT WORKS CLEARINGHOUSE

ACT®

How BARR Works

**Building relationships**. Getting to know the whole student story, strengthening staff-to-staff connections boosts trust; communication is enhanced

Sharing data and ideas through collaborating with fellow educators to each students succeed and develop new skills professionally

Engaging community partners and families to ensure students receive the support necessary to be successful
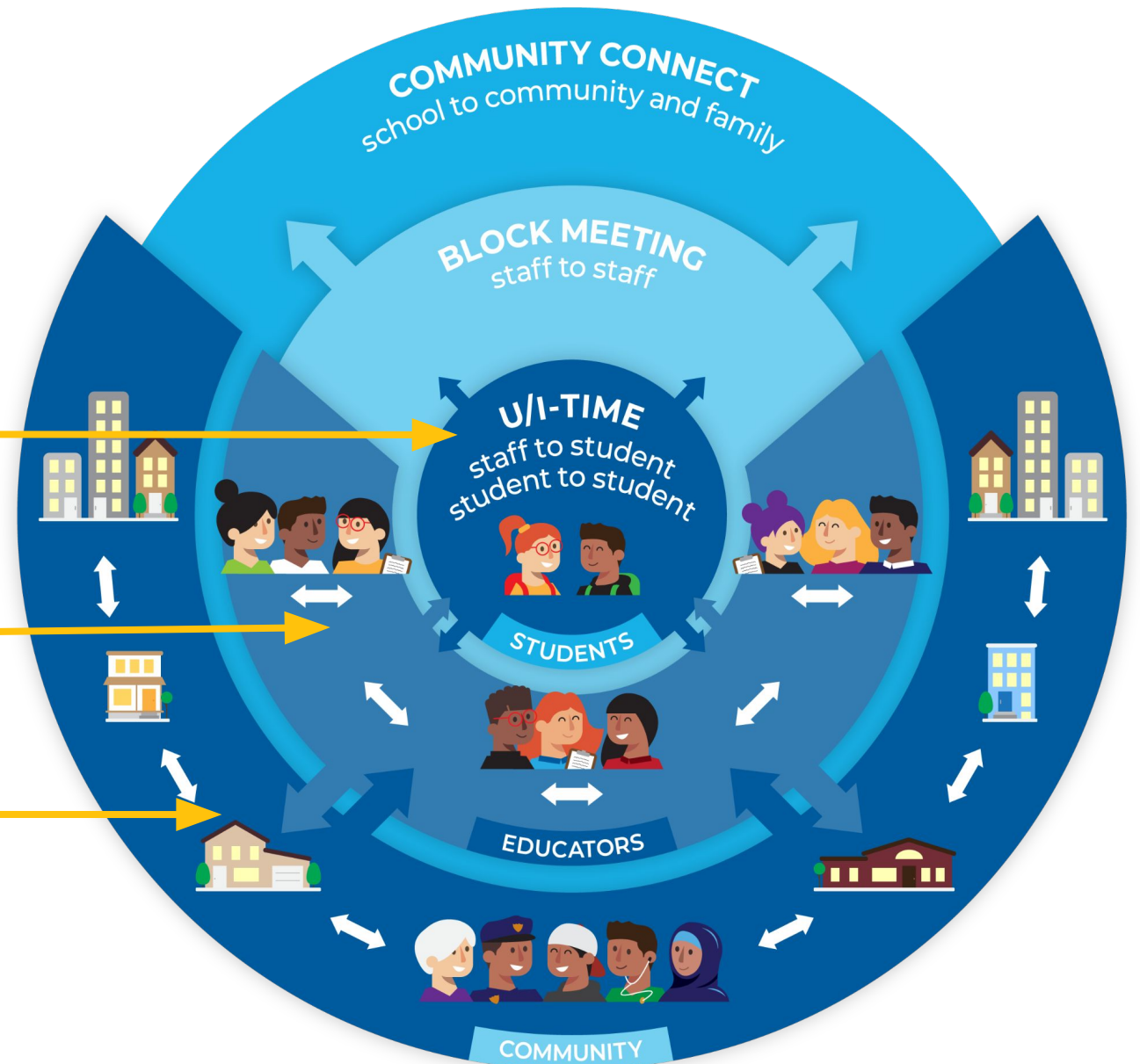
Community Connect
Level 3
BARR Coordinator, counselors, admin, and community partners

Big Block
Level 2
Teacher teams, BARR Coordinator, counselors, administrators

Small Block
Level 0-1
Teacher teams, BARR Coordinator

BARR

Level 3 — Community Connect

Tier 3

Level 2 — Engage Families and Communities

RTI   PBIS

Tier 2 — Block Team Meeting

Level 0+1 — I-Times / U-Times

Tier 1

Restructuring Course Schedules
Professional Development
Engaged Administrator
Contextual Support

WHOLE STUDENT APPROACH
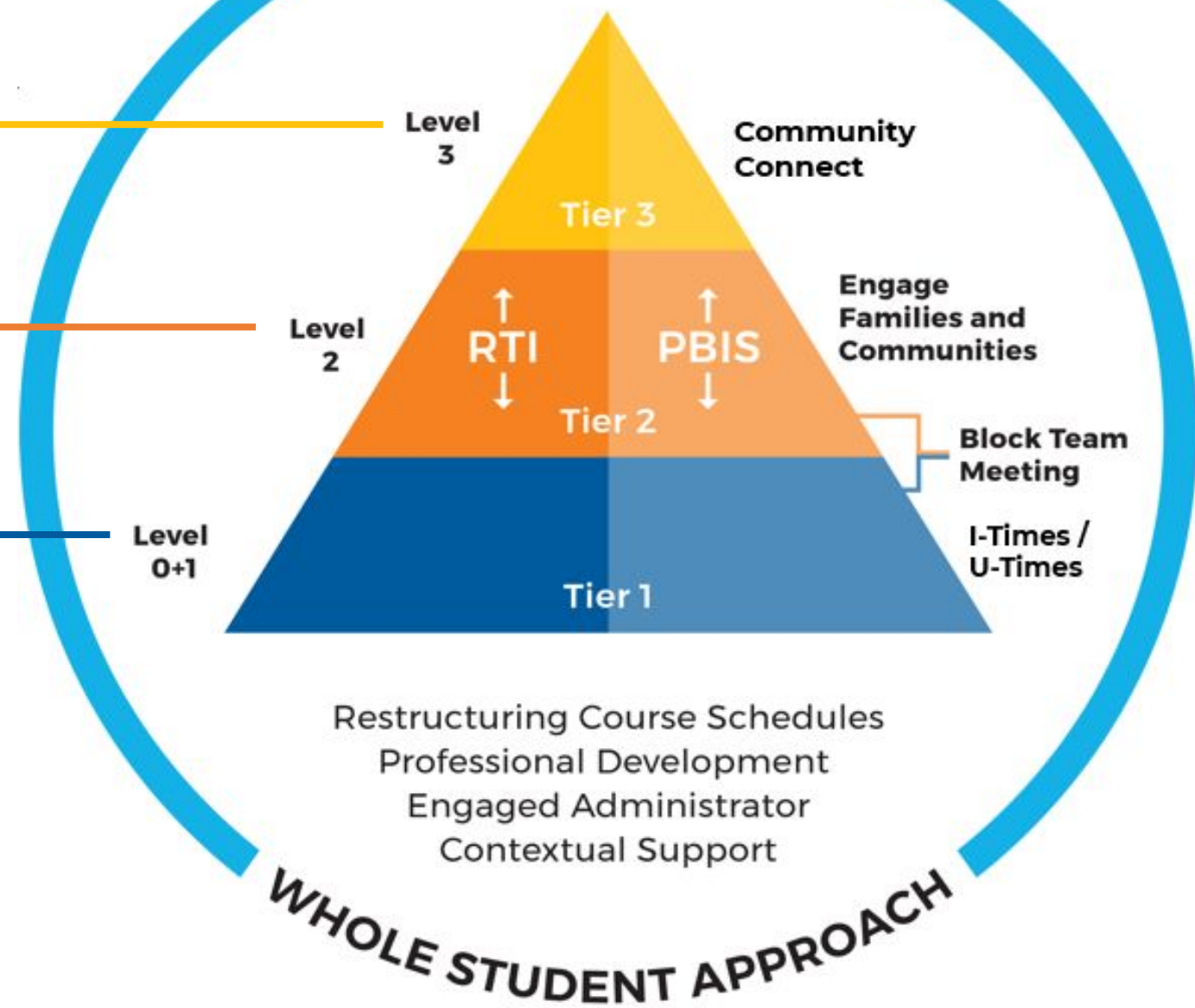
BARR: Whole Student Focused
MTSS Designed for Everyone

Community Connect (Level 3)

Specialized team of school professionals collaborate to implement individualized strategies and evidence-based interventions with and for students/families.

Connections also made to community resources, or evaluation personnel as needed.

Big Block (Level 2)

Team is expanded to include specialists, teachers, administrators, counselors, and additional support staff.

Team-level strategies are put in place and documentation continues using the Block Meeting spreadsheet

Small Block (Level 0-1)

Teams celebrate thriving students, collaborate on universal support, and work to implement early strategies with struggling students.

Teachers' efforts, student progress, and learnings are documented in Block Meeting spreadsheet.

Data from multiple sources is used regularly to determine which students are discussed at Small or Big Block, whether progress is being made, and which students are brought to the Community Connect team.
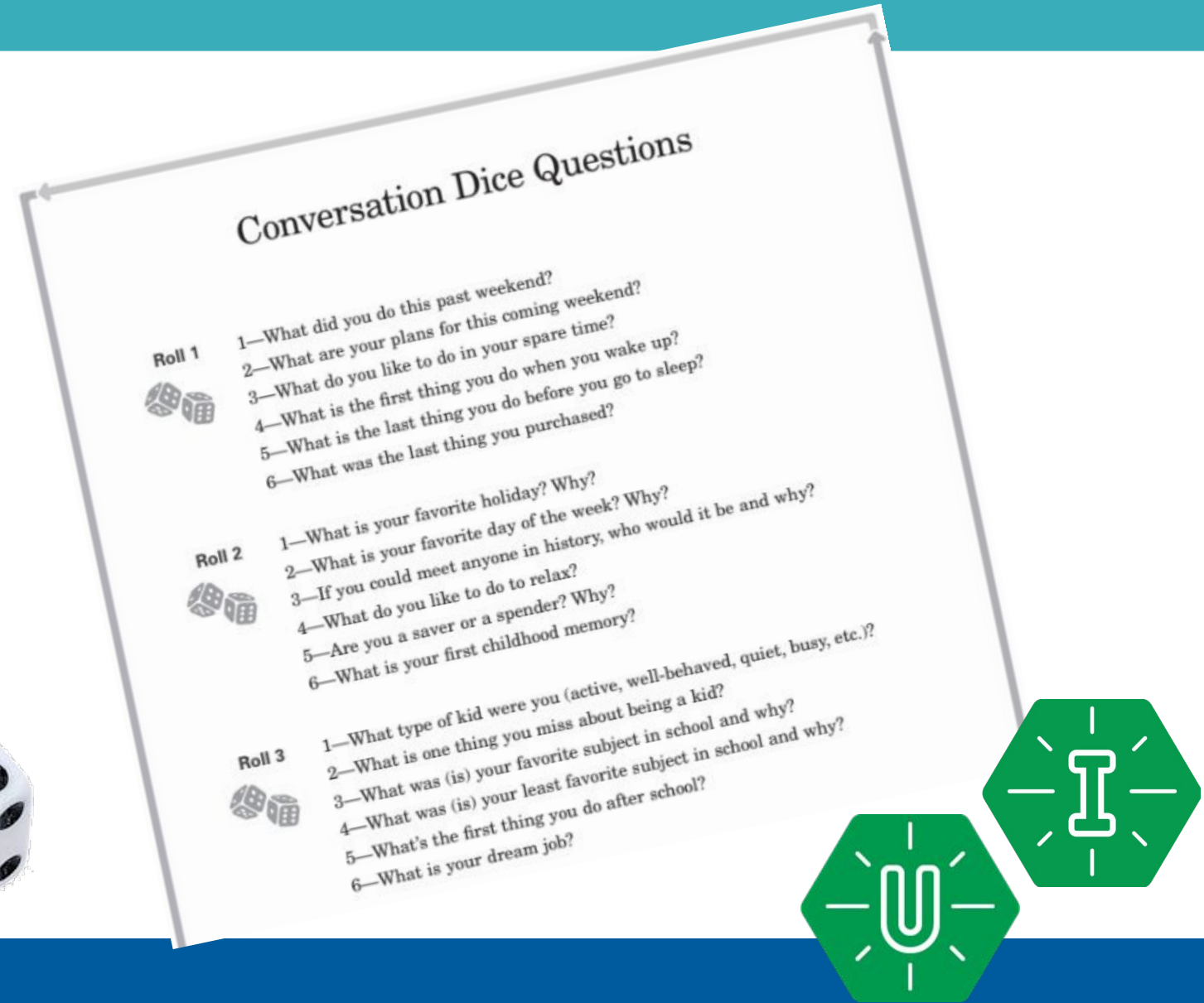
BARR

U-Times and I-Times

- Weekly lesson to help build strong relationships

- Focus on the whole student

- Promotes healthy choices and equity

- Data is also what we observe and learn during U-Times/I-Times!

I-Time Activity: Conversation Dice

Purpose:
- To provide opportunities to develop relationships
- To build conversation skills

Conversation Dice Questions

Roll 1
1—What did you do this past weekend?
2—What are your plans for this coming weekend?
3—What do you like to do in your spare time?
4—What is the first thing you do when you wake up?
5—What is the last thing you do before you go to sleep?
6—What was the last thing you purchased?

Roll 2
1—What is your favorite holiday? Why?
2—What is your favorite day of the week? Why?
3—If you could meet anyone in history, who would it be and why?
4—What do you like to do to relax?
5—Are you a saver or a spender? Why?
6—What is your first childhood memory?

Roll 3
1—What type of kid were you (active, well-behaved, quiet, busy, etc.)?
2—What is one thing you miss about being a kid?
3—What was (is) your favorite subject in school and why?
4—What was (is) your least favorite subject in school and why?
5—What's the first thing you do after school?
6—What is your dream job?

I-Time Activity: Conversation Dice

Consider the Following:

- What information did you find out about your partner(s)? Did you have anything in common?

- What benefit did you experience from having a set list of questions to choose from as you were getting started?

- How could you see this being beneficial for students and/or teachers at the beginning of a new school transition?

BARR
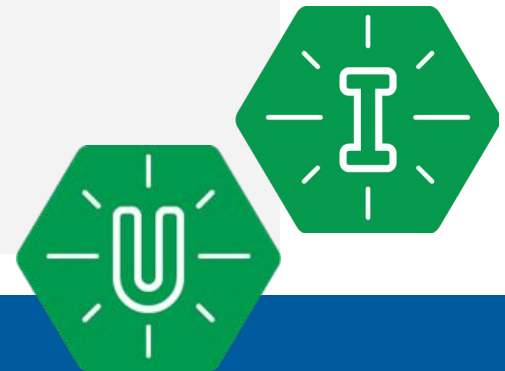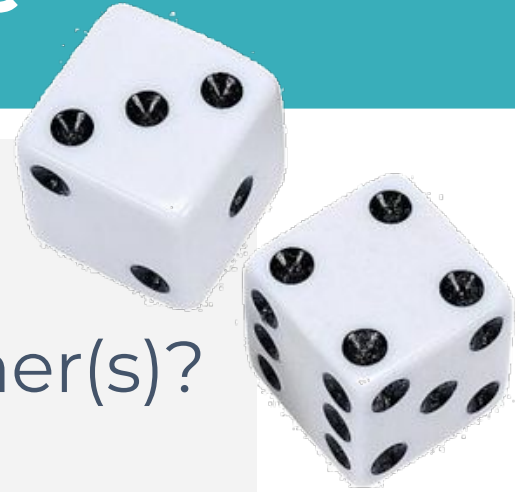
Key Tips for Success

- Make the system accessible
  - Streamline communication channels
  - Be intentional with scheduling, teaming, and family partnership
- Focus on success
  - Decide what success means and have a way to measure it.
  - Provide structure in meetings and stick to it!
- Find room for positivity
  - Prioritize relationships and connection
  - Celebrate success and growth
  - Empower creativity - think outside the box!

BARR

Questions?

Thank you!

Contact us:
RachelOlingerSteeves@barrcenter.org
(207) 423-5818

BARR | www.BARRCenter.org | /BARR Center