



Welcome!
Introduce Yourself in the Chat!



Share your name,
district, and your role

SUPERINTENDENT RESEARCH BRIEFING

District-Wide Strategies for Reducing Chronic Student Absenteeism

Presented by the District Leadership Forum





Events for District Leaders

Superintendent Research Briefings

We summarize the latest research on K-12's biggest challenges to help district leaders *get smart* and *make progress*.

“

EAB's research and information are some of the best I've seen...**simple, concise, easy to understand.**

”

*Superintendent,
Missouri School District*



A Unique Approach to Tackling Education's Most Complex Challenges



We Harness a Network of Progressive Education Leaders

Our college, university, and public school district partners are committed to working together to improve performance and elevate student success

2,500+

institutional partners
nationwide

28,000+

education leaders engaging
with EAB every year



We Provide Research- Driven Solutions and Access to Expertise

Our proprietary research model and deep bench of subject matter experts provide innovative and practical solutions to our partners most pressing problems

30+

years researching strategic
challenges for students and schools

500+

subject matter experts
available to partner organizations



We Have a Relentless Focus on Turning Research into Results

Through expert consultations, diagnostic audits, implementation tools, and leadership training, we work closely with each partner to drive tangible results.

95%

of partners choose to continue
our work together each year

The District Leadership Forum

Helping Superintendents and Their Teams Make
Faster Progress on Today's Most Complex Challenges



Set our research
agenda



Share ideas, support each other



Advise EAB and pressure test our model

Our Commitment to Forum Partners



Research current challenges to
find innovative, practical solutions



Equip superintendents to
make the case for change



Partner with leadership teams to
build capacity for leading change



Engage teachers and staff to
tailor solutions to ensure progress sticks

Our Work Together Over the Last Five Years

Finding, Forging, and Implementing Best Practice Solutions to Pressing K-12 Challenges

Research Addressing Myriad Complex and Often Nitty-Gritty Challenges Confronting Districts Nationwide

Focal Issues for Our First Five Years



Raising Early Literacy Scores



Reducing Disruptive Behavior



Closing College Access Gaps



Minimizing Chronic Absenteeism



Preventing Mental Health Crises



Developing Effective Principals



Responding to District Flashpoints



Optimizing Crisis Communications



Winning the Public Vote

Still Just Scratching the Surface



Becoming an Employer of Choice



Rethinking Special Ed. Service Delivery



Managing Your District's Brand



Strategic Staffing Models



Navigating Opportunities and Pitfalls of AI



Characteristics of High Performing Leadership Teams

Meet Your Presenters



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Connect with EAB



What Is the Cost of Chronic Absenteeism?

Most Research Emphasizes Impact on Chronically Absent Students...



Less likely to read at grade level by the end of 3rd grade

4x

more likely to drop out of high school than their peers

...But Chronic Absenteeism Harms All Students



The percentage of chronically absent classmates predicts low reading and math achievement for all students

Steep Funding Cuts Threaten District Resources

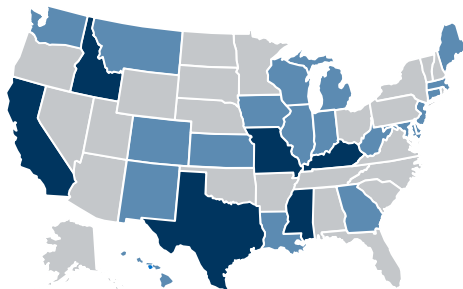
- States that fund schools based on Average Daily Attendance
- Non-ADA state where absenteeism may still impact funding¹

-\$1M

funding due to 2% chronic absenteeism growth, TX district

31%

of K-12 students live in ADA states, 2022



Funding Streams Tied to ADA in Various States:

- Special education
- Meal reimbursement
- Textbook purchases
- Transportation
- Summer programs

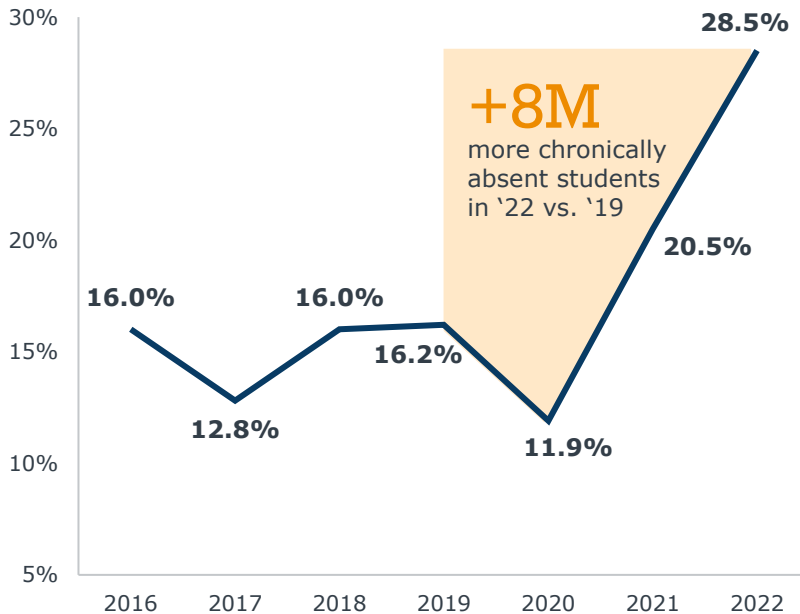
1) Funding calculated based on Seat Count(s): Students in seats on a given "count day."

School Is Back in Session, But Students Are Not



Chronic Absenteeism Rate Spikes Following Pre-Pandemic Plateau

Chronic Absenteeism Rate of U.S. Public K-12 Students¹



Leaders Apprehensive for SY 2023

2023 Voice of the Superintendent Survey
n=195

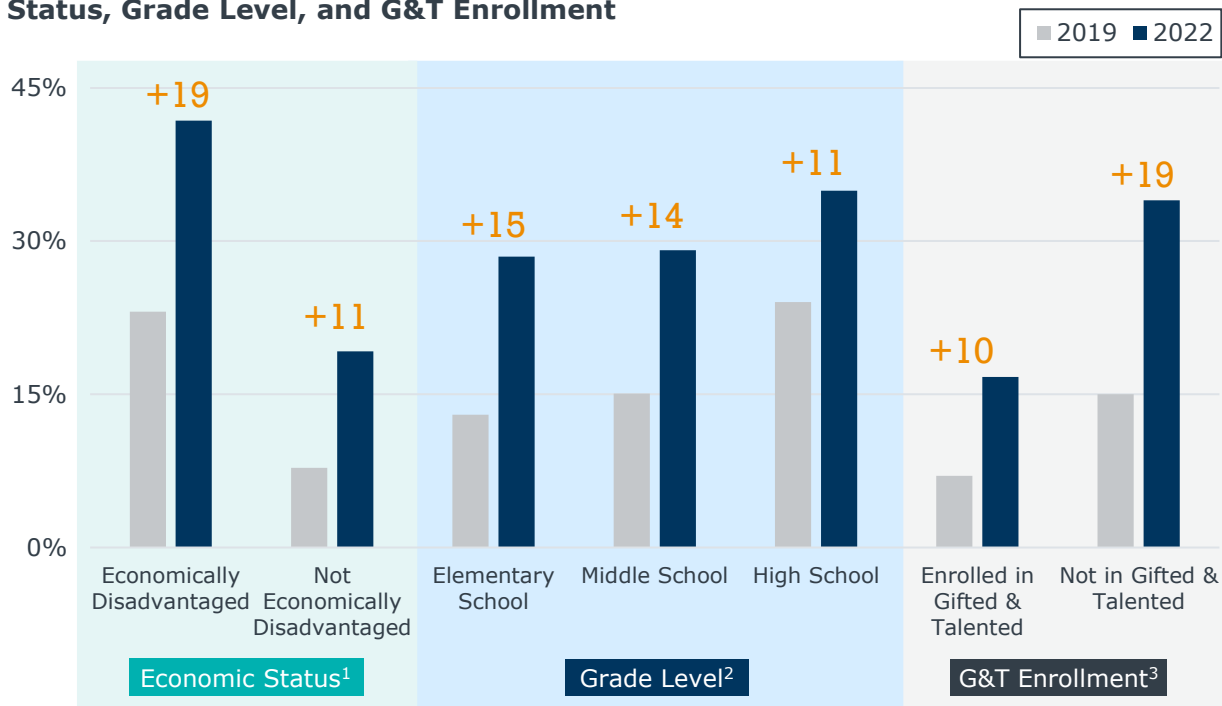
76%

of superintendents report "moderate" or "major" concern about chronic absenteeism in 2022-23

1) Years correspond to the end of each school year (e.g., 2016 = 2015-16 school year)

Despite Disparities, Absenteeism Rises Across All Groups

Increases in Chronic Absenteeism Rates Across Economic Status, Grade Level, and G&T Enrollment



1) n=4 states (CT, MI, ND, OH, and WA)

2) n=8 states (CT, DE, DC, MD, MI, UT, VA, and WA)

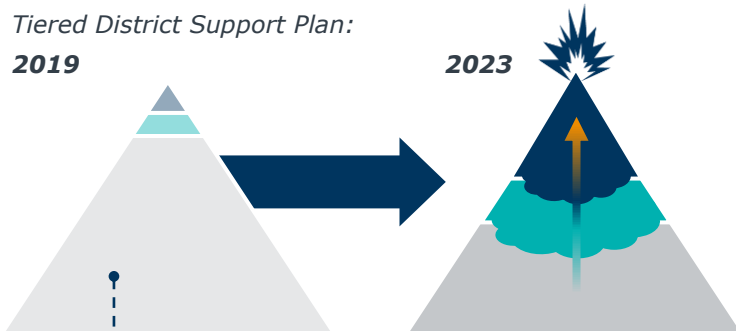
3) n=1 state (WA). Washington uses the term "Highly Capable" and "Non-Highly Capable" to differentiate these groups of students in data.

Chronic Absence Surge Exceeds Support Plan Capacity

Tiered District Support Plan:

2019

2023



- **Tier 1:** Students with <10% absence rate
 - *Incentivizing/recognizing good attendance*
 - *Monitoring attendance data regularly*
- **Tier 2:** Students with 10-19% absence rate
 - *Meeting students 1:1*
 - *Conducting home visits*
- **Tier 3:** Students with 20%+ absence rate
 - *Interagency case management*
 - *Truancy court*

Districts Already Short-Staffed,
So Practices Must Change

53%

of districts still have support
staff shortages (counselors,
case managers, etc.)



ESSER funds for additional labor
costs run dry in Sept. 2024



Districts funded by ADA may
already be looking at cuts

Parents More Likely to Rationalize Absence Since Pandemic

11

A New Variable Increases the Impact of Traditional Causes for Absence



Widespread Risk Factors for Chronic Absenteeism

+



Parents' Lower Threshold for Missing School

=



Increased Likelihood of Absence Due to Each Growing Risk Factor

- *Physical illness*
- *Lack of transportation*
- *Housing mobility*
- *Threats to safety*
- *Loneliness & isolation*
- *Mental illness*
- *Academic struggles*
- *Distrust in schools*

Reasons for Lower Threshold:

- District messaging wavering on importance of in-person attendance
- Parents today becoming more
 - protective
 - transactional
 - disillusioned
 - resigned

“*In parents' minds, the **benefits of absence** are beginning to **outweigh** the benefits of attendance.”*

- California School Attendance Research Project

Students' New Reasons for Absence Go Unaddressed

12

Districts' Most Common Strategies...

Positive/Negative Incentives



- Attendance recognition programs
- Detention or suspension

Basic Needs Accommodations



- Free breakfast or laundry services
- "Late bus" pick-up

...Won't Address Students' Newest Reasons for Skipping School

Today's Students Feel...

...Unsupported

2/3

aren't comfortable telling an adult in the building about bullying

...Disconnected

1/2

say they don't belong at school

...Unsure

1/2

fear going to a teacher for academic help

...Skeptical

2/3

don't think classes connect to future



*We can remove every basic needs barrier to getting a student to come to school, but at the end of the day, **they need to believe that school is worth it.***

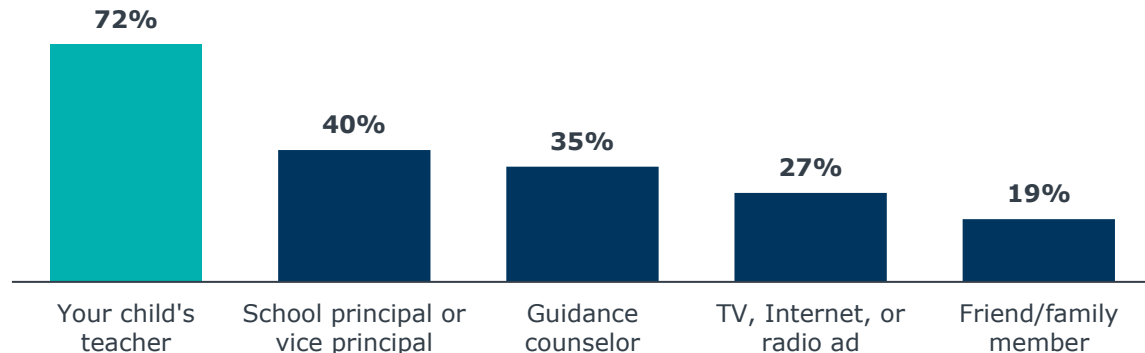
– Director of Student Services, Southwest School District

Teachers Underutilized in Fight Against Absenteeism

13

Parents Overwhelmingly Prefer to Discuss Attendance with Teachers¹

"Which of the following ways would you prefer to hear about the importance of school attendance?"



...Yet Most Teachers Don't Talk to Parents about Attendance...

42%

of parents reported that any school employee, including teachers, contacted them personally about attendance in the past 6 months

...And Few Have the Tools to Succeed

“When I get on the phone with a parent, **I don't know what to say.** I'm new this year, and I want parents to trust me.”

First-Year Teacher, Ohio

1) n=823

Engaging 3 Essential Groups to Reduce Absenteeism

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Elementary Schools

High Schools

Middle Schools

Parents

Know Why and When to Bring Their Kids to School

1. "How Can We Help" Self-Service Messages
2. Attendance Checklist "Nudges"

Teachers

Understand and Embrace Their Roles in Impacting Attendance

3. District-Wide Teacher Expectations for Combatting Chronic Absenteeism
4. Best-Practice Guide for Talking About Absenteeism

Students

Can and Want to Show Up to School

5. District Leader Checklist for Equitable Grading
6. Positive Relationship Mapping
7. Student Interest Conversations
8. Career Relevancy Root Causing
9. Group-Model Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

Nudging Parents

Teacher's Role

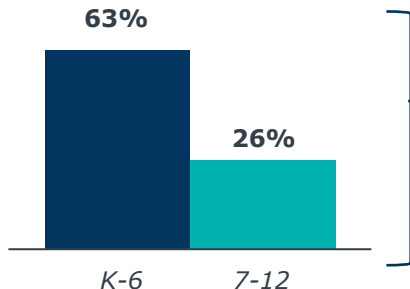
Connecting with Students

More Parents Doubt Value of In-Person Education



Leaders Say Parents' Misconceptions Are Top New Cause for Chronic Absence

% District Leaders Ranking Parent Misconceptions as #1 Cause, Feb-Mar 2023



Despite Grade Level Split, Almost All Agree Parents Value Attendance Less

86%

of district leaders "Agree" or "Strongly Agree" parent value of attendance is lower today than in previous years

91% of leaders that ranked a different cause as #1 still agreed with this statement

“

Coming off the pandemic, the perception of parents is, 'Well, my kid made it. They're okay. **They can miss – it's probably not as critical that they're there.**'

Superintendent,
Midwestern School District

”

Bringing Families Back Requires Partnership, Not Punishment

“ Preaching and prosecuting typically backfire;
**what doesn't sway people may actually
strengthen their beliefs.**”

*Dr. Adam Grant,
Organizational Psychologist*



Source: New York Times, [The Science of Reasoning With Unreasonable People](#), 2021. EAB interviews and analysis.

The Science of Motivating a Behavior Change



Clinical Practitioners Rely on Four Key Actions



Express Empathy

Show understanding
without placing blame



Support Self-Efficacy

Empower others to
ask for help



Avoid Confusion

Remove room
for interpretation



Develop Discrepancy

Clarify the costs
of current mindset

Practice #1:



**“How Can We Help”
Self-Service Texts**

Practice #2:



**Attendance
Checklist “Nudges”**

Traditional Absence Letters May Push Parents Further Away

18

The Journey of the Traditional Absence Letter:



Student
absent
5 days

Dear Parent/Guardian:

The following notice is to **inform you of the number of absences** from school involving your child. Some of these identified absences may be excused and/or unexcused. This letter is a **review of our process for addressing attendance**.

Your child has 5 absences.

State statute section 39.9 through 40.5 states all students 5-18 shall attend school daily. **Non-compliance will lead to disciplinary action** by the principal and/or the School Board it's designee.

- If attendance does not improve, a referral may be made to School Social Work Services. Social worker(s) will work with the family to address continuing challenges. Social worker(s) **may refer the case for court involvement through the county truancy court.**

Support staff are available to help if students encounter barriers to attendance. **Please contact school** staff before significant attendance difficulties develop.

Parent receives
**state-mandated
warning letter**

- *Informative, not actionable*
- *Punitive focus*
- *Riddled with legal jargon*



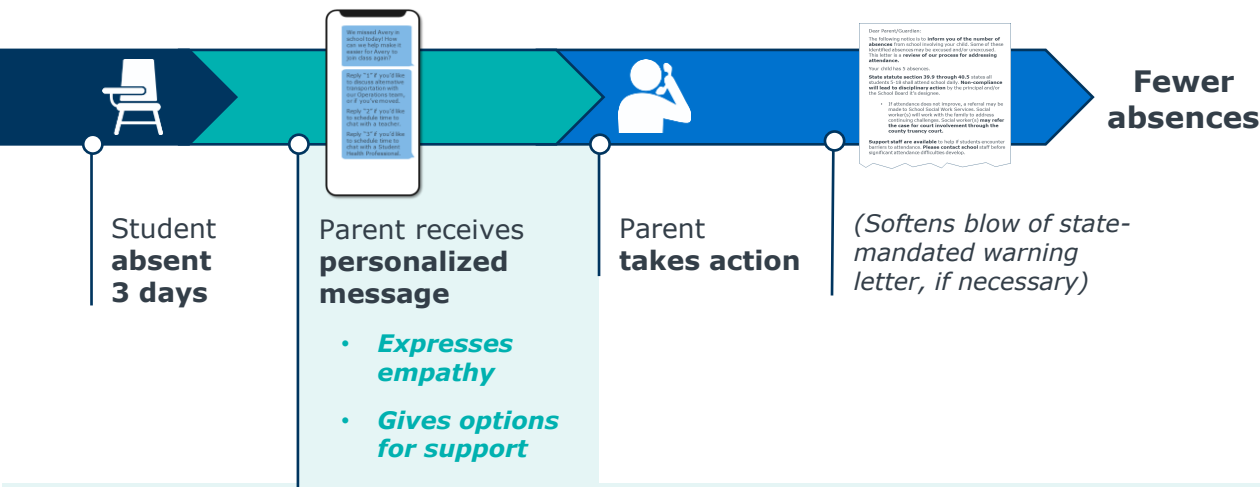
Parent
reacts

- *Fear*
- *Denial*
- *Misunderstanding*
- *Silence*

**No change
in behavior**

Insert Moment of Empathy & Action Before Warning Letters

The Journey of the Trust-Building Buffer:



What Districts Need to Make This Happen:



System for prompting parents to take action from list of available support options





Faster, more direct line to parents and guardians

Multiple-Choice Texts Help Parents Choose Partnership

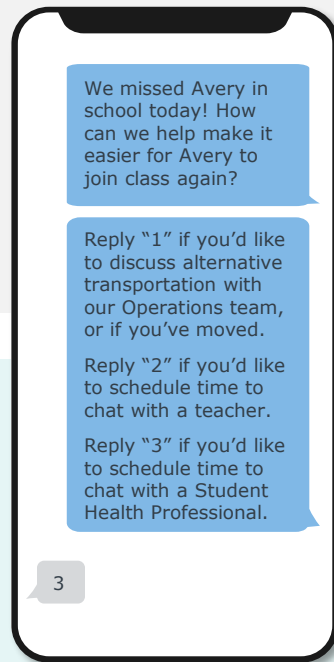
How This Works:

- 1 Source service ideas from district staff with stake in absenteeism
- 2 Identify number of consecutive absences to trigger text message (e.g., >3 unexcused days)
- 3 Triage replies and follow-up to appropriate staff

Why This Works:

-  Predetermined list of options prompts immediate action and self-efficacy
-  Text messages more reliable and accepted than mail/email

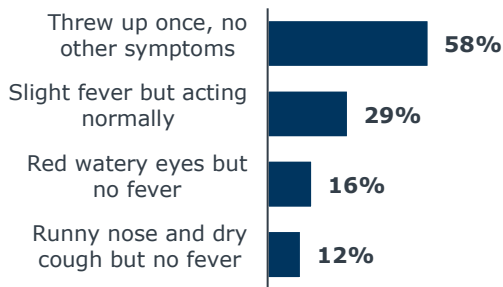
Example text message:



Parents Even More Uncertain of When to Keep Child Home

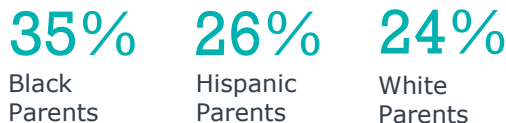
Even Before Pandemic, Parents Split on Which Symptoms Warrant Absence

% Who Say They're Likely to Keep Child Home with Each Symptom¹, 2017



As Late as Nov 2021, Many Parents Still Cautious About In-Person Learning

% "Not That Comfortable," "Not at All Comfortable," or "Don't Know"



Spikes in student illness throughout Winter 2022 exacerbated parent uncertainties

Sudden Shift in Messaging Fails to Address Parent Concerns

"Last year, we were still saying, 'if you're sick, stay home.' This year our messaging is different, yet parents are still keeping their kids home more than before."

Assistant Superintendent, Southern School District

What Districts Need:



Clear and simple attendance policies for parents



Just-in-time communication of attendance policies



A cohesive narrative about the costs of absence



See You in Class!

- ✓ Have a runny nose or a little cough, but **no other symptoms**
- ✓ No fever-reducing medicine for 24 hours, and no fever during that time (temp. of 100.4 or higher)
- ✓ No throwing up or diarrhea for 24 hours

Heading to school! What should I know?

A day of missed school is a lost opportunity for social development. By coming to school **every day they're not sick**, your child is gaining social skills that will land them their first job as an adult.

- ✓ *Time Management*
- ✓ *Collaboration*
- ✓ *Problem Solving*



Best to Stay Home.

- ✓ Temperature higher than 100.4 (with or without medicine)
- ✓ Persistent cough
- ✓ Throwing up or diarrhea
- ✓ Eyes are pink and crusty
- ✓ Instructed by doctor to isolate from others

My student is staying home. What should I do next?

- 1 Notify the school by phone (555-7483) or email (health@district.org).

*If possible, let us know **before 9am** on the day of the absence.*

- 2 Repeat this checklist every morning. We hope to see your student back soon!

“Nudge” Parents with the Right Info at the Right Time

How This Works:

- 1 Partner with district health professionals to translate attendance policy health guidelines into simple checklist
- 2 “Nudge” parents to reread the checklist once per month via email or text
- 3 Each month, embed a different cost of absence to build a district narrative around attendance

Examples from EAB:

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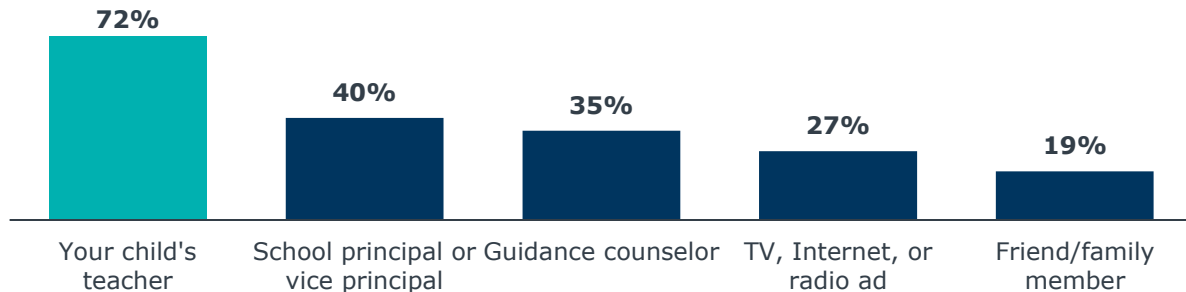
Why This Works:

- ✓ Short checklists are proven to incite action and improve consistency
- 👆 Repeated nudges are proven to change behavior toward intended goal
- 🗣️ Consistent messaging builds a cohesive narrative

Teachers Hold Untapped Opportunity to Improve Attendance

Parents Overwhelmingly Prefer to Discuss Attendance with Teachers¹

"Which of the following ways would you prefer to hear about the importance of school attendance?"



...But Despite Leaders Recognizing Their Potential, Many Teachers Have a Limited View of their Role in Improving Absenteeism

"Teachers play a vital role. When I was in school, my attendance only improved when my teacher didn't want me to be absent anymore."

VS.

"Teachers have felt that **attendance is not their responsibility beyond taking roll in the morning.** After that, it's up to administrators."

- *Midwestern District Leader*

1) n=823

Clarify How Teachers Should Prioritize Attendance

Amid Myriad Responsibilities...



...Teachers Need Clarity on **What** to Do and **How**

"Should I be contacting absent students? Should I be contacting their parents?"

"When is the best time to talk to students and parents about attendance?"

"What do I say to absent students or their parents that won't make things worse?"

Practice 1

Clear and Consistent What:

District-Wide Expectations for Promoting Consistent Attendance

Clarify the roles all teachers play in
reducing chronic absenteeism

Clarify Teacher Expectations for Promoting Attendance

Example of Expectations:

Sundale Heights¹ School District

Teacher Tasks for Combatting Absenteeism

Every Day:

- Log attendance in PowerSchool
- Personally welcome back students returning from absence

Every Week:

- Call parents of students absent more than 2 days
 - Use language from *Absenteeism Conversations* resource

Every Quarter:

How This Works:

- 1 Define 1-2 teacher actions every day, every week, and every grading period that impact attendance
- 2 Have teachers post list in a visible place (i.e., desk)
- 3 Encourage instructional coaches to discuss expectations in coaching sessions

Why This Works:



Short, simple directives improve likelihood of teacher fidelity to expectations



Consistent discussions with coaches reinforces importance of reducing absenteeism

Consider including what teachers are **not** expected to do (e.g., host punitive conversations with parents of truant students)

1) Anonymized district name.

Practice 2

Support for How:

Best-Practice Guide for Talking About Absenteeism

Provide teachers precise language to use when
discussing attendance with parents

What We Heard From Partners: Teachers Need Better Tools

29

“ ***If we could just give teachers the right words to say, they’d be much more likely to contact parents of absent students.***”

- Superintendent,
Western School District

“ ***You know what would be helpful? A communication guide for teachers.***

- Superintendent,
East Coast School District

What Districts Need:



Research-based teacher talking points that build trust with parents



Consistent district narrative around costs of absence



Easy-to-access materials for when teachers need them most

Help Teachers Become Experts on Student Absenteeism

Clarify expectations



Take out the guesswork



How This Works:

- 1 Disseminate teacher guide during a faculty meeting or PLC
- 2 At least once a grading period during faculty meetings or PLCs, host a discussion about these conversations:
 - *How many times did teachers reference the guide this grading period?*
 - *What can be revised in the guide according to new student or parent needs?*
 - *How did students or parents respond?*

Why This Works:



Prepared guide reduces teacher cognitive load



Consistent use across grade levels creates a district-wide expectations around attendance



Team discussions ensure consistent use and revision of teacher guide

Pandemic Exacerbates Students' Low Motivation to Attend

31

To **Want** to Attend School, Students Need to Feel:



Competent and that success is possible



Connected to peers and adults in the school building



Engaged in their school community and activities



That school connects to their future aspirations



Support is available when needed

Pandemic, Remote Learning, and Limited Progress

After 3 Years of Limited Progress, Districts Worse Off in All Areas

71% of 13-19 year olds now say schoolwork makes them feel anxious or depressed

4 in 10 students feel less connected to peers or adults in their school

Only 39% of students have taken classes or participated in programs to explore careers

Supportive Relationships Integral to Student Success

Why Focus on In-School Relationships?

Controlling for all background characteristics, children with a caring adult outside of the home are:



10%

more likely to **show interest in learning**



21%

less likely to **bully another student** in the past month



28%

less likely to **feel sad or depressed**

Connections with Trusted Adults Keep Kids in School

“Two big reasons students leave school: they have no meaningful connection to an adult in the building, and no one knows their name or how to pronounce it. This work isn’t just feel-good: **We know through research that relationships and connections keep kids in school.**”

Administrator, Washoe County Public Schools

A School-Wide Review of Gaps in Positive Support

Excerpt from Relationship Mapping Exercise:

Indicate quality and depth of knowledge about each student, even if staff doesn't mark "trusted adult"

Mark staff as "Trusted Adult" if they have positively bonded with the student and believe student would come to them with a personal problem or concern

Student Name	Name/ Face	Academic Standing	Regular Positive Feedback	2 Non- Academic Facts	Family Story	Trusted Adult Initials	Absence Level
Dante B.	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓	MS JN TB	Trending
Jenny D.	✓ ✓ ✓	✓	✓		✓ ✓	JN	Trending
Sara S.	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	✓		✓			Chronic
Peter L.	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	TB	-
Maria G.	✓ ✓	✓		✓	✓ ✓	MS TB	-

Show students at risk for chronic absenteeism according to attendance data (i.e., students trending toward chronic absence or students already chronic)

Make Sure Every Student Has a Connection



How It's Done



1 Convene School Staff

Most districts meet 6 weeks into the school year



2 Map Student/Staff Relationships

Have staff self-identify as trusted adults and depth of knowledge about each student



3 Review Results

Identify gaps in support for students at-risk for chronic absence



4 Discuss and Follow Up

Make a plan for filling gaps and deepening existing relationships

Results in Washoe County



Fewer in-school suspensions

2X

Students with identified relationships twice as likely to stay in school

+18%

Growth in district graduation rate from 2012 to 2017

Take the Next Step: Student Interest Conversations

Complete *Relationship Mapping Exercise*

Connect Student with Trusted Adult

Connect Student with School Activity

Why Focus on Extracurriculars?

Students participating in an extracurricular activity are:

↓ 28%

less likely to have an **unexcused absence**

↓ 16%

less likely to **skip a class**

Ask Directly About Student Interests to Guide Students Toward an Activity:

--- Do you have any hobbies?

--- What do you do in your free time?

--- Did you know we have a student club for that?



Keep a central **accountability report** to track which chronically absent students are participating in a club or extracurricular



In Summary: What Are We Trying to Change?

Problem 1

- Parents think value of some absences outweighs value of attendance
- Parents unsure of fluctuating attendance protocols post-pandemic



1

Parents

**Know Why and
When to Bring Their
Kids to School**

Problem 2

- Teachers unsure of role in combatting chronic absenteeism
- Teachers feel unprepared to discuss absenteeism with parents



2

Teachers

**Understand and
Embrace Their Roles in
Impacting Attendance**

Problem 3

- Students don't feel:
- Competent
 - Connected
 - Engaged
 - Supported



3

Students

**Can and Want to
Show Up to School**

Next Steps for Superintendents

Six Questions To Ask Before Kicking Off Your Absenteeism Reduction Efforts

- 1 Have you drilled into your data to understand where you have spikes?
- 2 Are you considering a districtwide approach or something more targeted?
- 3 Have you quantified the number of students and costs involved?
- 4 Have you established ownership and goals at a building level?
- 5 Are you able to provide real-time absenteeism data at a building level?
- 6 Is your central office prepared to support districtwide and building-level efforts?

Making the Hard Work of Reducing Absenteeism Possible for Busy District Leaders and Teachers



Reducing absenteeism is not an intractable problem. But it is hard work.

EAB resources and support are designed to make best practice possible for those with little time.



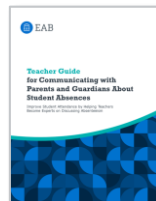
Template for **Attendance Policy "Nudge"**

Design clear and simple attendance policy "nudges"



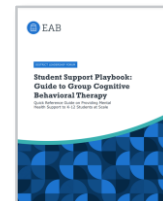
Checklist for **Staff Roles in Combatting Absenteeism**

Clarify expectations for staff in combatting absenteeism through simple, actionable checklists



Teacher Guide for Communicating About Absences

Launch a district policy for school-based relationship mapping



District Guide to **Group Cognitive Behavioral Therapy**

Launch a district policy for group cognitive behavior therapy

"The materials provided were amazing. There's no way we could have done this alone."

District Leadership Forum Partner

Make Real Progress on Strategic Priorities in 2023-24

Fall-Winter 2023 District Leadership Forum New Partner Roadmap

1

Fall 2023

New Partner Success Planning Call to introduce the District Leadership Forum team and start building your success plan for the 2023-24 school year

2

December 11th

New District Leadership Forum Partner Orientation
Orientation for new District Leadership Forum members to meet peers and plan their priorities.

3

Across 2023-24

Advance your Strategic Priorities with District Leadership Forum Team through research-driven presentations, workshops, implementation guides, and tools

New Partner Focus: Success Planning for your Priority Issues



What Are Your Top 2-3 Initiatives?

- Reducing absenteeism
- Raise teacher morale
- Reduce teacher turnover



What Are Your Key Upcoming Milestones?

- Strategic plan deadlines
- Bond election
- Legislative compliance deadlines

Helping Every Step of the Way: District Partner Success Team



- Dedicated Advisors
- Research Subject Matter Experts

Our Research in Action

Upcoming Events from EAB

Webinars, Events, and Conferences

October 26, 2023 (2pm ET)

Hallmarks of a High-Performance District
Virtual, Exclusive for Superintendents

November 7, 2023 (3pm ET)

* **Developing Effective Principal Leaders**
Presented with AASA, Virtual Webinar

November 17-19, 2023

IASA/IASB/IASBO Joint Annual Conference
Chicago, IL

November 29 – December 1, 2023

Association of Education Service Agencies (AESA) National Conference
Anaheim, CA

December 7, 2023 (2pm ET)

A District-Wide Approach to Teacher Morale
Presented with NJASA, Virtual Webinar

January 28-31, 2024

Texas TASA Midwinter Conference
Austin, TX

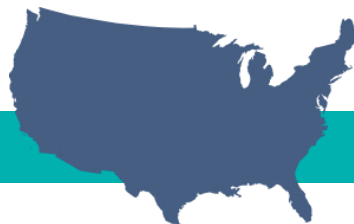
February 15-17, 2024

* **AASA National Conference on Education**
San Diego, CA

March 3-5, 2024

New York NYSCOSS Winter Institute
Albany, NY

Visit us at <http://www.eab.com/k12> to learn more.



How Else Can We Help?



I'd like to speak with someone further about...

- 1 Bringing EAB's absenteeism research and resources to my district
- 2 Joining the District Leadership Forum
- 3 EAB's other research areas, including improving student behavior
- 4 Registering for an upcoming EAB research briefing event
- 5 Something else? Choose this option and we will follow up with you

A Quick Ask



We value your feedback.

Please take a few minutes to **complete the short survey** in your web browser.

Thank you!