



STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING STUDENT ATTENDANCE: POLICIES AND PRACTICES

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INTRODUCTION

Across the country, districts struggle with attendance rates; what was already a concern for many schools became exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.¹ In Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), for example, the district's chronic absenteeism rate skyrocketed to 46%, compared to the average 19% in the three years preceding the pandemic.² High absenteeism rates concern districts because students who regularly miss school would simultaneously miss instruction and become disengaged, contributing to lower literacy rates and higher dropout rates.³ While monitoring attendance provides crucial insights for districts to understand student health and wellness dynamics among other reasons influencing student attendance, it has grown in importance ever since the pandemic. Moreover, COVID-19's impact on student attendance inevitably challenges districts to reassess pre-pandemic attendance policies and practices.

A Hanover Research (Hanover) member district is reviewing district-wide attendance policies and practices to identify a proactive approach to mitigating challenging attendance dynamics posed by COVID-19 through nonpunitive, evidence-based attendance practices and policies that incorporate positive behavior supports and incentives to improve student attendance. To support these efforts, the district has partnered with Hanover to conduct a literature review that will inform district leaders of research-based practices that promote student attendance. This report will help the district understand how it can best approach reforming its current attendance practices and policies to better address the current context of attendance challenges and contains two sections:

- **Section I: Improving Student Attendance** reviews secondary research regarding attendance policies and implementation practices that encourage students to attend school and remain engaged, focusing on COVID-19 pandemic research that addresses specific pandemic-related attendance concerns; and
- **Section II: Attendance Policy Case Studies** reviews attendance policies districts and states have implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic as they adjust to various forms of instruction following the reopening of schools.

METHODOLOGY

Hanover reviewed secondary literature and case studies that address best practices and policies for improving attendance using nonpunitive methods. Hanover includes data and strategies in this report that have been cited across the literature regarding attendance practices. For the case studies, Hanover searched for districts with attendance policies that included multiple interventions prior to involving each district's respective child welfare departments or juvenile court systems.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on our findings, Hanover suggests that districts consider the following recommendations:



Utilize a data-driven approach in implementing tiered supports to assist students who may need additional interventions to improve attendance and engagement. Leverage attendance data to build capacity, equitably distribute resources, share accountability, and strengthen strategic partnerships to transform schools into environments of positive engagement. Hanover can support initiating this effort in providing an analysis of student demographic data through creating a dashboard that identifies current and longitudinal attendance trends.

¹ Esquivel, P. "Nearly Half of LAUSD Students Have Been Chronically Absent This Year, Data Show." *Los Angeles Times*, March 2022. <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2022-03-31/lausd-students-chronic-absent-amid-covid-pandemic>

² Ibid.

³ "Attendance Policy During the COVID-19 Pandemic | Policy." Attendance Works. <https://www.attendanceworks.org/policy/>



Gauge students' and families' perceptions of attendance barriers and practices as well as the current state of school climate. Understanding perceptions of attendance barriers and practices impacting specific school communities can help inform initiatives towards fostering positive school environments that promote a culture of attendance. Hanover can support districts in conducting a school climate and culture survey of students and families to identify priorities and next steps in attendance and school climate initiatives.



Implement initiatives that can help guide school leaders and teachers to form supportive relationships with students geared towards helping students feel valued and encouraged to attend school. Examples of outreach initiatives educators can implement include taking on mentorship roles, conferencing with students individually and asking students to share their hopes and expectations for the year.

KEY FINDINGS



When students are absent for 10% or more of the school year, districts consider them chronically absent and at risk of negative academic and behavioral outcomes, such as lower literacy rates and higher dropout rates. Various barriers – health conditions, lack of safe and reliable transportation, and food and housing insecurity - keep children out of school and these barriers disproportionately affect marginalized student populations, such as those with disabilities and students of color. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated these issues for many, with students facing school closures that separated them from their peers and severely impacted crucial connections, incurring illness at home, and having family members who experience job instability.



Positive school environments that include tiered supports that effectively target students in need of help as well as foster meaningful and supportive relationships between students, their peers, and educators can create a foundation upon which students can feel valued and feel encouraged to attend school. Trusted, caring relationships and mentorships between students and educators are especially valuable for marginalized students and can contribute to higher levels of engagement.

- At the school level, school leaders can promote attendance by implementing schoolwide support structures that encourage proactively identifying barriers that impact attendance, recognizing good and improved attendance (without focusing on perfect attendance), monitoring attendance data efficiently to detect early signs of students' attendance-related challenges, and providing personalized outreach that involves mentors and access to services that may alleviate issues causing students to stay out of school.
- In the classroom, teachers can prioritize fostering trusted relationships with their students by implementing practices that reassure students their presence is valued and was missed while absent. During the first few weeks of school, teachers can lead students in activities where they share information about their backgrounds with each other. Individual conferences give teachers the opportunity to update students on their progress which can help students take ownership of their learning. Smaller gestures, such as greeting each student by name as they enter the classroom and ensuring students' names are pronounced correctly, can communicate to students that they matter and they are valued.



While perfect attendance awards have been a long-standing practice used to promote attendance, perfect attendance awards may send unintended signals to students that may result in dissuading good attendance. In a well-cited study, students who received perfect attendance awards either showed no change in their attendance habits or increased their absences during the

next attendance cycle.⁴ Perfect attendance awards may also isolate struggling students who have little control over the circumstances keeping them out of school. Instead, districts have started to develop attendance policies that encourage students to stay home while they are ill and recognize good attendance efforts in more equitable ways.



All districts included in this report as case studies share similar criteria for excused absences, such as illness, religious observations, legal proceedings, family emergencies, and school or district approved activities. Parents or guardians must verify the reason for a student's absence for the absence to be considered excused. However, North Kitsap School District and Pasadena Unified School District include clauses in their attendance policies that protect students' confidentiality in case of certain medical procedures or healthcare, which parents do not have to approve these reasons. North Kitsap School District also includes additional reasons for excused absences not seen in other policies, such as state-recognized search and rescue activities, absences related to housing insecurity, or absences related to a student's migrant status.



All districts' attendance policies that show an interest in using more holistic approaches, such as tiered interventions, address attendance issues and barriers keeping students out of school. For example, Bridgeport Public Schools, North Kitsap School District, and Pasadena Unified School District, include referring students to attendance boards or panels to identify resources that will help students and parents address attendance concerns. Bridgeport Public Schools has the highest threshold for referring students to the juvenile court system at 20 unexcused absences in one month; before that, schools must attempt multiple interventions, such as phone calls, parent conferences, home visits, and referring students to intervention panels before involving the juvenile court system.

⁴ Robinson, C.D. et al. "The Demotivating Effect (and Unintended Message) of Awards." *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 163, March 2021.

SECTION I: IMPROVING STUDENT ATTENDANCE

In this section, Hanover reviews literature regarding district and school level attendance practices that consider pandemic concerns and address absenteeism issues in nonpunitive ways.

ABSENTEEISM AND SCHOOL CLIMATE

DEFINING CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM

Districts consider students chronically absent when students miss 10% or more of the total number of days enrolled during the school year.⁵ In a 180-day school year, 18 days of absence averages to nearly two days a month.⁶ Chronic absenteeism, a student-level indicator, differs from average daily attendance, a school-level indicator for how many students are in attendance each day on average, and more effectively shows individual student attendance patterns.⁷ Chronic absenteeism measures when students miss so much school they are at risk of negative academic and social-emotional outcomes, such as lower academic achievement and higher dropout rates.⁸ The Rennie Center, one of the leading education policy and research organizations in Massachusetts, lists statistics related to the negative effects of chronic absenteeism, presented in Figure 1.1.

Figure 1.1: Why Attendance Matters

Students who are chronically absent in the early grades are less likely to read proficiently by Grade 3.

Students who are chronically absent in a single year between Grades 8 and 12 are seven times more likely to drop out of high school.

Students who live in communities with high levels of poverty are four times more likely to be chronically absent than those from more affluent areas. Often this is due to unstable housing, unreliable transportation, and a range of other systemic barriers.

Source: The Rennie Center⁹

Various barriers keep children from attending school regularly, but these barriers disproportionately affect vulnerable and marginalized students, such as students living in poverty, those with disabilities, and students of color.¹⁰ Health issues, such as asthma and oral health, lack of safe and reliable transportation, and food and housing insecurity prevent many students from attending school.¹¹ The pandemic has exacerbated these issues for many. COVID-19 disrupted structured routines across the country, closing

⁵ "What Is Chronic Absence?" Connecticut State Department of Education. <https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Publications/Reducing-Chronic-Absence-in-Connecticuts-Schools/What-is-chronic-absence>

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ "Key Concepts for Leveraging Chronic Absence During the Coronavirus Pandemic | Chronic Absence." Attendance Works. <https://www.attendanceworks.org/chronic-absence/addressing-chronic-absence/key-concepts-for-leveraging-chronic-absence-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic/>






⁹ Figure text taken verbatim with modifications from "Reengaging Students - Prioritize Attendance | Rise 360." Rennie Center. <https://rise.articulate.com/share/DQalNd6lclpMzF7aAVDcZGkUA8q2Q60b#/lessons/MbC2GP8R-KhAnHh0AedxmPNYFXBkZF7a>

¹⁰ "The Problem | Chronic Absence." Attendance Works. <https://www.attendanceworks.org/chronic-absence/the-problem/>

¹¹ Ibid. [2] "Reengaging Students - Prioritize Attendance | Rise 360," Op. cit.

schools and forcing students to separate from educational supports and one another.¹² Losing parents and family members to COVID-19, economic upheaval due to job instability, and lack of connections caused many students to feel disconnected and disengaged from their school environments.¹³ Figure 1.2 lists some of the barriers that may prevent students from attending school and briefly introduces ways for schools to approach addressing these barriers.

Figure 1.2: Barriers to Attendance

ISSUE	DESCRIPTION	PROACTIVE MEASURES
 <p>LACK OF CONNECTION</p>	<p>Students are more likely to miss school when they:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lack trusting relationships with teachers; ▪ Are bullied; ▪ Are socially isolated; or ▪ Lack peer friendships. 	<p>By prioritizing warm, authentic relationships, schools can increase attendance rates.</p>
 <p>BASIC NEEDS</p>	<p>Students who are hungry or tired are more likely to miss school – and are less engaged when they do attend. Food and housing insecurity serve as significant attendance barriers for many children.</p>	<p>Educators can address these barriers by connecting families with essential services in the community. The Rennie Center’s Accessing Essential Services action guide provides information on strategies to implement in addressing students’ basic needs.</p>
 <p>SAFETY CONCERNS</p>	<p>Low-income students and students of color are more likely to live in communities where disinvestment has limited the creation of safe sidewalks, bike paths, and bridges over busy intersections. While 90% of high-income communities have sidewalks, only 49% of low-income communities have this resource. Students from marginalized communities are also more likely to be exposed to neighborhood violence.</p>	<p>To address safety barriers, schools may form a “walking school bus” where trusted adults and children walk to and from school together. Educators can also work with local elected officials and community-based organizations to support violence prevention efforts and lobby for improved infrastructure, such as safe sidewalks.</p>
 <p>HEALTH CONDITIONS</p>	<p>Students suffering from physical or mental health conditions are more likely to miss school, particularly if they lack access to adequate medical care. Many schools in low-income communities do not have a full-time nurse, creating a barrier for children with chronic conditions such as asthma, diabetes, or epilepsy.</p>	<p>Educators can improve attendance by working with a child’s doctor or school nurse to develop an individualized action plan, such as a 504 Plan. A 504 Plan provides children with disabilities, such as physical or mental health conditions, the legal right to accessible educational opportunities.</p>
 <p>FAMILY FACTORS</p>	<p>Caretaking responsibilities for younger family members, elderly family members, or family members with disabilities can cause students to miss school. During school closures, many older students faced difficult choices between prioritizing their own schoolwork and caring for younger siblings while parents worked. Students whose families lack access to appropriate childcare or eldercare services face similar difficulties when schools are open.</p>	<p>Educators can support students by providing referrals to local childcare and disability resources.</p>

Source: The Rennie Center¹⁴

¹² “Dropout Prevention in the Time of COVID-19.” Indexes; Offices. Regional Educational Laboratory: Appalachia, Regional Educational Laboratory Program (REL): Appalachia, May 2020.

https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/appalachia/blogs/blog29_dropout-prevention-in-covid-19.asp

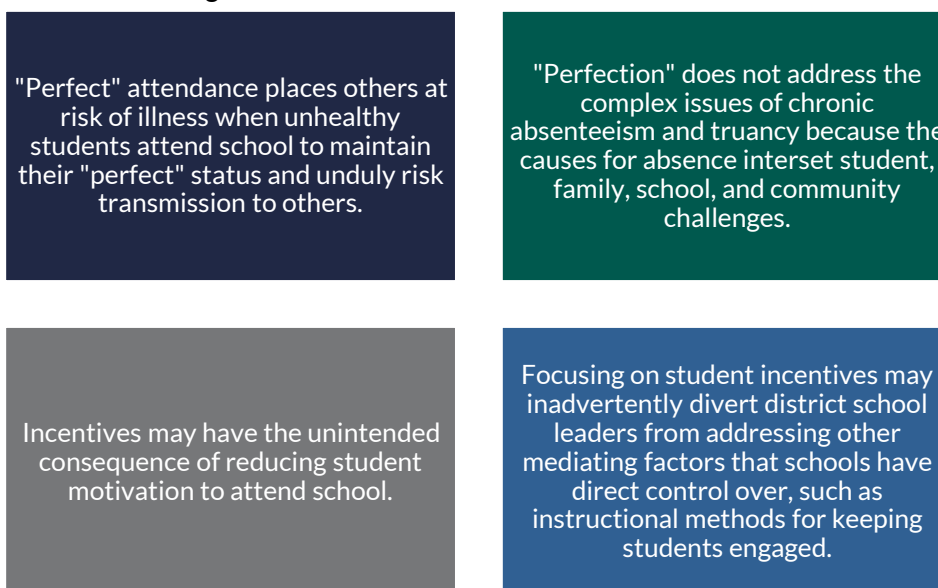
¹³ Esquivel, Op. cit.

¹⁴ Figure text taken verbatim with modifications from “Reengaging Students - Prioritize Attendance | Rise 360,” Op. cit.

PERFECT ATTENDANCE AWARDS MAY DEMOTIVATE STUDENTS

“Perfect attendance” has been ingrained in school culture and districts have traditionally incentivized students to attend school through rewards.¹⁵ However, the “all or nothing” aspect of perfect attendance rewards can be demoralizing and may even send unintended signals to students, disincentivizing them from attending school.¹⁶ For example, in a study published in 2021 by Robinson, Gallus, Lee, and Rogers, researchers found students who received perfect attendance awards to have attended fewer days of school after the attendance period was over, showing counterproductive effects.¹⁷ Students who earned these rewards thought they were attending school more than their classmates and more than their school expected them too, leading to a lapse in absences over the next attendance period.¹⁸ These awards can also further marginalize students already likely to miss school, such as those with health conditions or those from low-income families.¹⁹ Figure 1.3 lists four inherent flaws in rewarding perfect attendance.

Figure 1.3: Flaws in Perfect Attendance Standards



Source: Journal of School Administration Research and Development²⁰

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, incentivizing students to attend school through perfect attendance awards has become an outdated practice.²¹ School attendance policies “must reflect our understanding of pandemic hygiene,” such as establishing reasonable standards that encourage children to stay home when they feel ill.²² One practice that helps districts combat barriers keeping students out of school is upholding synchronous learning between the absent student and their teacher.²³ However, such a strategy requires schools to review their infrastructure to determine if they have the human and

¹⁵ Conrad, D. “Reexamining ‘Perfect’ Attendance in Schools.” *Journal of School Administration Research and Development*, 5:S1, October 2020. p. 2.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 2–3.

¹⁷ Robinson et al., *Op. cit.*, pp. 11–12.

¹⁸ “How Attendance Awards Backfire.” Harvard Graduate School of Education, July 2019.

<https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/uk/19/07/limits-perfect-attendance-awards>

¹⁹ “Opinion | Perfect Attendance Awards No Longer Belong in U.S. Schools.” *Washington Post*.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/03/30/why-perfect-attendance-awards-should-be-next-pandemic-victim/>

²⁰ Figure taken verbatim with modifications from Conrad, *Op. cit.*

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

²² *Ibid.*




²³ Conrad, *Op. cit.*

technological capacity to provide equitable access to all students.²⁴ Schools may expand community partnerships to eliminate technology gaps and equitably provide resources to students.²⁵

BUILDING A CULTURE THAT PROMOTES ATTENDANCE

To encourage students to attend school and enjoy being present within a learning environment, research suggests a systemic, data-driven approach to create welcoming school environments that promote a culture of attendance and use tiered supports to effectively target students in need of additional intervention.²⁶ Students are more likely to attend school when they have positive, supportive relationships.²⁷ Hence, the presence of a caring and trusted adult in a student’s life can contribute to higher school engagement levels and resilience when enduring adversity, especially for marginalized students.²⁸ For students with a high level of social-emotional needs, peer and community mentoring opportunities may help them build on the connections students already have with teachers and other adults at school.²⁹ Attendance Works, one of the most widely cited organizations providing research and solutions related to student attendance, presents strategies for building and implementing a data-driven systemic approach supported by district, school, and community leadership, presented in **Error! Reference source not found.**

Figure 1.4: Key Ingredients for Systemic Change

 CAPACITY BUILDING	 ACTIONABLE DATA	 POSITIVE ENGAGEMENT
<p>Provide professional development to district and school staff and community partners so they have the skills and knowledge they need to take a data-driven, positive, problem-solving and multi-tiered approach to supporting student attendance, participation and engagement. During the school year, capacity building requires a leadership team that ensures staff have the skills to manage blended learning environments and multiple school transitions, promotes digital literacy, and responds to the social-emotional and physical needs of the school community.</p>	<p>Collect and report accurate, accessible, timely, comprehensive and understandable quantitative attendance and chronic absence data along with qualitative analysis to explore the reasons that contribute to students missing school. These data will inform the development of prevention and intervention strategies and allocation of resources that support student attendance. During the school year, actionable data requires monitoring multiple metrics including chronic absence, contact, connectivity, relationships and participation. The data collection is used to activate positive supports, not punitive action.</p>	<p>Create a culture of attendance by taking a positive, not punitive, approach to absenteeism that is centered on belonging and engagement and help education partners to understand why daily attendance matters in PreK to Grade12. Positive engagement for the school year should ensure that blended and distance learning environments incorporate relationship and community building strategies that engage students and families when developing key decisions.</p>

²⁴ Ibid., p. 4.




²⁵ “Attendance Policy During the COVID-19 Pandemic | Policy,” Op. cit.

²⁶ “Reducing Chronic Absence in Connecticut’s Schools: A Prevention and Intervention Guide for Schools and Districts.” Connecticut State Department of Education. <https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Publications/Reducing-Chronic-Absence-in-Connecticuts-Schools/What-can-a-district-do-to-improve-attendance> [2] “How to Improve School Attendance Using 7 Simple Strategies.” Positive Action Network, October 2021. <https://www.positiveaction.net/blog/improve-school-attendance> [2] “Key Ingredients for Systemic Change.” Attendance Works. <https://www.attendanceworks.org/chronic-absence/addressing-chronic-absence/key-ingredients-systemic-change/>

²⁷ Blad, E. “Students Need Help to Rebuild Attendance Habits. Here Are 3 Things Schools Can Do Now.” *Education Week*, April 2022. <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/students-need-help-to-rebuild-attendance-habits-here-are-3-things-schools-can-do-now/2022/04>

²⁸ “Regional Educational Laboratory Program (REL),” Op. cit.

²⁹ Blad, E. “Chronic Absenteeism Spiked During COVID. Here’s What Schools Can Do About It.” *Education Week*, April 2022. <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/chronic-absenteeism-spiked-during-covid-heres-what-schools-can-do-about-it/2022/04>

 <p style="text-align: center;">STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS</p> <p>Strengthen and expand partnerships between the district, school, and community to inform development of a range of resources and supports to address barriers to attendance. Engage outside partners that can support building relationships and engaging students and families in identifying and addressing attendance barriers. For the school year, strategic partnerships should expand site-level capacity to address basic needs (i.e. food, physical and behavioral health services, economic support and housing), ensure access to the internet and technology, and provide additional opportunities for engagement and enrichment.</p>	 <p style="text-align: center;">ADEQUATE, EQUITABLE RESOURCES</p> <p>Ascertain that resources and funding are sufficient to ensure students, from all backgrounds and circumstances, receive a quality education and similar opportunities to thrive and achieve in school, career and college.</p>	 <p style="text-align: center;">SHARED ACCOUNTABILITY</p> <p>Create systems and cross-departmental and infrastructure support for attendance, and hold education partners – students, families, educators, agencies and community partners – responsible for joining efforts to reduce chronic absences. Shared accountability for the school year should guarantee the regular collection, monitoring, and sharing of attendance metrics to support problem solving and resource allocation.</p>
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Source: Attendance Works³⁰

When students feel known and supported by their educators, mentors, and peers, they are more engaged in school and therefore more likely to attend.³¹ At the school site level, Attendance Works recommends evidence-based strategies for transforming schools that involve engaging parents, monitoring attendance data effectively, and developing responses to barriers that keep students out of school.³² Figure 1.5 summarizes the recommended strategies for promoting attendance.

Figure 1.5: School Strategies for Promoting Attendance

<p style="text-align: center;">ENGAGE STUDENTS AND PARENTS</p>	<p>The key to improving attendance is developing a school culture that promotes a sense of safety, respect, and personal responsibility, where students feel connected and are aware that someone notices, in a caring manner, when they missed school. A key component of the engagement is helping families understand what their children are learning when they are in school and the negative effects of chronic absenteeism on realizing their hopes and dreams for their children.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">RECOGNIZE GOOD AND IMPROVED ATTENDANCE</p>	<p>School communities can send a clear message that going to school every day is a priority by providing regular recognition and incentives to students and families who have good and improved attendance. Keep in mind that the goal is not to focus on perfect attendance since the children who struggle the most will soon be left out of such activities. Mindfully implementing rewards with discretion—recognition from peers and the school through certificates or assemblies, extra recess time, homework passes or even dancing in the hallways—can support motivating students.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">MONITOR ATTENDANCE DATA AND PRACTICES</p>	<p>Schools can leverage attendance data already collected to examine which and how many students are missing 10% or more of the school year and to monitor trends by grade and subgroup. Moreover, these data can be examined longitudinally to assess trends over time.</p>

³⁰ Figure text taken verbatim with modifications from “Key Ingredients for Systemic Change,” Op. cit.

³¹ “Reengaging Students - Build Relationships | Rise 360.” Rennie Center.

https://rise.articulate.com/share/DQalNd6lclpMzF7aAVDcZGkUA8q2Q60b#/lessons/yykXmD61T_whB_Li6s9JumFQ9uMSZ6tU




³² “Strategies For School Sites | Chronic Absence.” Attendance Works. <https://www.attendanceworks.org/chronic-absence/addressing-chronic-absence/strategies-for-school-sites/>

PROVIDE PERSONALIZED EARLY OUTREACH	An actionable strategy in using attendance data is initiating early and caring outreach to families of students who are missing many days of school. Such outreach is essential for identifying barriers to attendance, such as hunger, access to health care, homelessness, transportation, or other challenges, and the supports or resources that would help improve attendance. For example, New York City’s Success Mentor Corps has been especially successful in combating chronic absence through its mentorship model and this outreach strategy is being replicated in at least 30 cities across the country.
DEVELOP PROGRAMMATIC RESPONSE TO BARRIERS	Barriers may be present if large numbers of students are affected by chronic absence. Hence, if chronic absence is identified as a problem within a school and for specific groups of children, using qualitative and quantitative data can examine what factors might be affecting attendance. Moreover, these data can inform and help facilitate engagement with agencies and families in collaborating and developing solutions. Identifying the barriers to attendance can indicate the appropriate solutions, such as improving access to health care, launching walking school buses, providing tutoring, offering mentoring, developing morning or afterschool care, among others.



Source: Attendance Works³³

Engaging students through meaningful relationships can take many forms and has become even more important throughout the pandemic. Teachers and administrators can take on mentorship roles with students to encourage them to attend school, providing accountability through attendance monitoring and following-up with students when they miss school.³⁴ Peer support programs and lunch discussion groups for students can also help students form more supportive relationships with their peers.³⁵ Through encouraging communication efforts, teachers can also let students know they matter through personalized messages that show an interest in understanding their circumstances and ensure a warm reentry process to welcome and reassure students their presence was missed.³⁶ Figure 1.6 lists specific practices teachers and other educators can integrate to build trusted, supportive relationships with students.

Figure 1.6: Building Student-Staff Relationships

METHOD	DESCRIPTION
 FIRST WEEK OF SCHOOL	<p>Relationships should be a priority throughout the entire school year. Educators set this expectation by prioritizing team-building activities the first few weeks of school. This can include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Asking students about their hopes and fears for the year ahead; ▪ Asking students about their expectations from teachers; or ▪ Providing opportunities for students to explore their identity, share it with classmates, and cultivate sense of belonging.
 INDIVIDUALIZED CONFERCING	<p>Individualized instruction strengthens student-teacher relationships and increases engagement. By conferencing with each student about their work, educators can embed individualized instruction in regular class periods. In addition to strengthening relationships, conferences help students take ownership of their learning.</p>
 	<p>Students and educators share a desire to connect. Embedding storytelling in academic instruction can strengthen their relationships. Students form bonds by sharing their life experiences and learning about others' experiences. In many cultures, oral storytelling serves as</p>

³³ Figure text taken verbatim with modifications from Ibid.
³⁴ “In School Every Day: Addressing Chronic Absenteeism Among Students Experiencing Homelessness.” National Center for Homeless Education, September 2017. p. 4.
³⁵ Blad, “Chronic Absenteeism Spiked During COVID. Here’s What Schools Can Do About It,” Op. cit.
³⁶ “Regional Educational Laboratory Program (REL),” Op. cit. [2] “How to Improve School Attendance Using 7 Simple Strategies,” Op. cit.

METHOD	DESCRIPTION
STORYTELLING	a primary method of teaching. Educators can make instruction more culturally relevant by making space for storytelling in the classroom.
 BODY LANGUAGE	<p>Most communication is nonverbal, expressed through tone and body language. Studies show that "teachers unconsciously exhibit more favorable body language towards students that remind them of themselves." In Massachusetts, the educator workforce is 90% white, while students are increasingly diverse. In order to educate all students well, educators must be mindful of their body language around each child.</p> <p>Many individuals experience difficulty recognizing their own body language. Teachers can address this challenge by asking a trusted colleague to observe their instruction and provide feedback. This is an important step in making sure all students see that their presence, questions, and ideas are valued.</p>
 CLASSROOM GREETINGS	<p>Welcoming students by name when they enter the classroom is a simple and effective method to show students that they matter. When greeting students, it is critical to pronounce their names correctly. It is important to ask students during the beginning of the school year for clarifications to correctly pronounce their names.</p>

Source: The Rennie Center³⁷

³⁷ Figure text taken verbatim with modifications from "Reengaging Students - Build Relationships | Rise 360," Op. cit.

SECTION II: ATTENDANCE POLICY CASE STUDIES

In this section, Hanover reviews attendance policies and practices from districts and states that adapted their attendance standards to account for the COVID- 19 pandemic.

BRIDGEPORT PUBLIC SCHOOLS (CT)

EXCUSED ABSENCES

Bridgeport Public Schools (BPS) considers a student’s absence excused as long as written documentation is submitted within ten days of the student’s return to school and meets the criteria outlined in Figure 2.1.³⁸

Figure 2.1: Excused Absences Policy

Absences one through nine are considered excused when the student’s parent/guardian approves such absence and submits appropriate documentation:

- Emailing a scanned image of an absence note is acceptable;
- An absence in the parent’s proficient language must be accepted; and
- A verbal report of an absence from a parent not proficient in writing in any language must be accepted.

Current email and text messaging do not meet the level of security need and are not acceptable forms of absence notes.

For the tenth absence and all absences thereafter, a student’s absences from school are considered excused for the following reasons:

- A student’s illness (Note: all student absences due to illness must be verified by an appropriately licensed medical professional to be deemed excused regardless of the length of absence);
- A student’s observance of a religious holiday;
- A death in the student’s family or other emergency beyond the control of the student’s family;
- A mandated court appearance (additional documentation required);
- The lack of transportation that is normally provided by a district other than one the student attends (no parental documentation is required for this reason); or
- Extraordinary educational opportunities pre-approved by the district administrators and in accordance with Connecticut State Department of Education guidance.

Source: Bridgeport Public Schools³⁹

UNEXCUSED ABSENCES

Absences are considered unexcused unless they meet the criteria for an excused absence or a disciplinary absence.⁴⁰ Disciplinary absences are when students are absent from school because of school or district disciplinary action.⁴¹ BPS considers students truant when they accumulate four unexcused absences in one month or ten unexcused absences within a school year; a habitual truant is a student with 20 unexcused absences within a school year.⁴² BPS’s attendance policy requires schools to utilize several interventions, such as home visits, parent conferences, and a referral to higher tiers of Connecticut’s Scientific Research-Based Intervention (SRBI) system, which uses a Response to Intervention (rtI) framework.⁴³ SRBI includes comprehensive core educational curricula that address a range of crucial competencies in each academic

³⁸ “Attendance Policy / Attendance Policy.” Multicultural Magnet School | Bridgeport Public Schools.

<https://www.bridgeportedu.net/Page/http%3A%2F%2Fwww.bridgeportedu.net%2Fsite%2Fdefault.aspx%3FPageID%3D1696>

³⁹ Figure text taken verbatim with modifications from Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

domain, that are culturally relevant, and that are research-based.⁴⁴ At the districtwide and school site levels, comprehensive academic, social-emotional learning, and behavioral systems should use common assessments to identify when students are experiencing difficulty and implement strategies that foster student engagement and feelings of safety at school.⁴⁵ Other SRBI elements include:⁴⁶

- The use of research-based, effective instructional strategies both within and across a variety of academic domains;
- Differentiation of instruction for all learners, including students performing above and below grade level expectations and English language learners (ELLs);
- Early intervention for students experiencing academic and/or behavioral difficulties to prevent the development of more serious educational issues later on;
- Educational decision-making driven by data involving students' growth and performance relative to peers, which are carefully and collaboratively analyzed by teams of educators (e.g., data teams, early intervention teams) and the results of which are applied not only to inform instruction for individual students, but also to evaluate and improve core general education practices and the overall efficacy of interventions; and
- A continuum of support that is part of the general education system, with increasing intensity and/or individualization across multiple tiers.

Schools cannot refer students to the Family with Service Needs (FWSN) department until after students accumulate 20 unexcused absences and reach habitually truant status or after parents fail to cooperate with school attempts to solve truancy issues.⁴⁷ Figure 2.2 lists all interventions BPS schools will use before resorting to legal or administrative efforts, bolding those responsible for each intervention.

Figure 2.2: Procedural Benchmarks and Truancy Interventions Chart

BENCHMARK	INTERVENTION
2 Unexcused Absences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Letter will be sent home. The administrator will designate home school coordinators, office staff or high school attendance officers to send letters and enter their mailing dates in PowerSchool.
4 Unexcused Absences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Phone call. Teachers will call parents. The purpose is to review and evaluate the reasons for the child being absent and to encourage the parent to schedule a conference with administration. Teachers will be required to enter the date and indicate to whom they spoke. ■ Parent conference will be held by the administrator or support services staff, as designated by the administrator.
6 Unexcused Absences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Home Visit. The administrator will authorize home school coordinators, clerical personnel, school counselors, or designated attendance officers to provide truant officers with a referral for a home visit. Home visit results must be entered into PowerSchool by the person making the visit. ■ Parent conference will be held by the administrator or support services staff, as designated by the administrator.

⁴⁴ "Using Scientific Research-Based Interventions: Improving Education for All Students | Connecticut's Framework for RTI." Connecticut State Department of Education, February 2008. p. 2. https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/SRBI/SRBI_Executive_Summary.pdf

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 2–3.

⁴⁶ Bulleted text taken verbatim with modifications from Ibid.

⁴⁷ "Attendance Policy / Attendance Policy," Op. cit.

BENCHMARK	INTERVENTION
8 Unexcused Absences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Phone call. Teachers will call parents. The purpose is to review and evaluate the reasons for the child being absent and to encourage the parent to schedule a conference with administration. Teachers will be required to enter the date and indicate to whom they spoke. ▪ Letter will be sent home. The administrator will designate home school coordinators, office staff, or high school attendance officers to send letters and enter their mailing dates in PowerSchool.
10 Unexcused Absences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Parent conference. Parent conference will be held by the administrator or support services staff, as designated by the administrator. ▪ Referral to SRBI. SRBI referrals will be made by the teacher. The date of the SRBI referral must be entered into PowerSchool.
12 Unexcused Absences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Home Visit - Principals will authorize home school coordinators, clerical personnel, school counselors, or designated attendance officers to provide truant officers with a referral for students who require home visits. Home visit results must be entered into PowerSchool by the person making the visit.
15 Unexcused Absences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Referral to Planning and Placement Team (PPT) for truancy. PPT referral will be made by the school counselor indicating truancy concerns by the SRBI team.
20 Unexcused Absences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Referral to Juvenile Court (FWSN) will be filed by the school counselor for students between ages 12 and 17 and a referral to the Department of Children and Families (DCF) for educational neglect for students between ages 7 and 15 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ FWSN must be filed no later than 15 calendar days after failure of parent to cooperate with attempts to solve truancy issues or for any child defined as habitually truant FWSN/DCF referrals will be filed after fifteen (15) unexcused absences by attendance officers. Submission date of the FWSN/DCF will be entered into PowerSchool by the administrative office personnel.

Source: Bridgeport Public Schools⁴⁸

FAIRFAX COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS (VA)

Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS)'s attendance policy is not as detailed as other districts included in this report, but it also mentions using interventions to help students and their parents address attendance concerns.⁴⁹ Students are considered excused when they are absent because of:⁵⁰

- Medical procedures that cannot be scheduled at a time outside of school hours;
- Religious and cultural observances;
- Civic engagement (secondary students only);
- Funerals; or
- Illness, including COVID-19 illness and/or related testing or contact tracing.

Parents must report student absences by calling the school attendance line, emailing the school-designated attendance address, or using a web-based form, if available.⁵¹ When parents do not report student absences, school personnel will call home to inquire after the student on the same day of the absence from class or full-

⁴⁸ Figure text taken verbatim with modifications from Ibid.

⁴⁹ "Excused and Unexcused Absences | Policy 3122." North Kitsap School District. <https://www.fcps.edu/about-fcps/policies-regulations-and-notices/attendance-policies>

⁵⁰ Bulleted text taken verbatim with modifications from Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

day absence.⁵² If parents do not provide a reason or the reason is unapproved or unverifiable, the absence is considered unexcused.⁵³ Once a student accumulates five full days of unexcused absences, the student, parents, and school must come together to develop an attendance plan that documents the reasons for the absences and potential supports to mitigate attendance issues.⁵⁴

NORTH KITSAP SCHOOL DISTRICT (WA)

EXCUSED ABSENCES

North Kitsap School District (NKSD) informs parents and students of attendance expectations upon enrollment and of resources available to assist in correcting attendance issues.⁵⁵ Like other districts, NKSD considers an absence excused when students are ill, family emergency, religious observations, and activities approved by the school or district.⁵⁶ NKSD includes additional approved reasons not common in other attendance policies, such as⁵⁷

- Court, judicial proceeding, court ordered activity, or serving on a jury;
- Postsecondary, technical school, or apprenticeship program visitation, or scholarship interview;
- State-recognized search and rescue activities consistent with state law;
- Absence directly related to the student's homeless or foster care/dependency status;
- Absence related to deployment activities of a parent or legal guardian who is an active duty member consistent with state law;
- Absence due to student safety concerns, including absence related to threats, assaults, or bullying; and
- Absence due to a student' migrant status.

Excused absences must be verified by parents, guardians, or the school authority responsible for the absence. The attendance policy also considers students going through family planning-related or sexually transmitted disease-related healthcare, drug, alcohol, or mental health treatment and assures them they have the right to request their information to be kept confidential.⁵⁸

UNEXCUSED ABSENCES

Unexcused absences are those that do not meet the above criteria; NKSD makes reasonable efforts to notify a student's parents or guardians in writing or by telephone of the student's absence in a language the parent understands.⁵⁹ NKSD utilizes several interventions to identify student's needs and resolve attendance issues before resorting to legal or administrative action, such as student conferences. After three unexcused absences within a month, the school hosts a conference with the student and student's parents.⁶⁰ The purpose of the conference is to analyze the causes of the student's absences and develop a plan that addresses these causes and develop a collective commitment to reducing absences in the future.⁶¹ If parents do not attend the conference, the school will still hold a conference with the student and notify the parents of the steps agreed upon in the conference.⁶² Figure 2.3 presents the steps schools take after students accumulate between two

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 2.

⁵⁷ Bulleted text taken verbatim with modifications from Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 3.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 4.

⁶² Ibid.

and five unexcused absences, including the administration of the Washington Assessment of the Risks and Needs of Students (WARNS).⁶³ WARNS assesses student’s individual risks and needs that may lead to truancy or school failure through using a survey developed by Washington State University.⁶⁴ The assessment measures past and current experiences in several areas, including social, emotional, and educational development.⁶⁵ Schools, courts, and youth services providers can use WARNS data to identify proper targeted interventions.⁶⁶

Figure 2.3: Unexcused Absences Policy

Between the student’s **second and fifth unexcused absence**, the school must take the following data-informed steps:

- Middle and high school students will be administered the Washington Assessment of the Risks and Needs of Students (WARNS) or other assessment.
- These steps must include, where appropriate, providing an available approved best practice or research-based intervention, or both, consistent with the WARNS profile or other assessment, if an assessment was applied, adjusting the child’s school program or school or course assignment, providing more individualized or remedial instruction, providing appropriate vocational courses or work experience, referring the child to a community truancy board, requiring the child to attend an alternative school or program, or assisting the parent or child to obtain supplementary services that might eliminate or ameliorate the causes for absence from school.
- For any child with an existing individualized education plan or 504 plan, these steps must include the convening of the child’s 504 team, including a behavior specialist or mental health specialist where appropriate, to consider the reasons for the absences. If necessary, and if consent from the parent is given, a functional behavior assessment to explore the function of the absence behavior shall be conducted and a detailed behavior plan completed. Time should be allowed for the behavior plan to be initiated and data tracked to determine progress.

Not later than the student’s fifth unexcused absence in a month, the district will enter into an agreement with the student and parents that establishes school attendance requirements, refer the student to a community truancy board or file a petition and affidavit with the juvenile court alleging a violation of state law.

- If such action is not successful, the district will file a petition and affidavit with the juvenile court alleging a violation of state law by the parent, student, or parent and student no later than the seventh unexcused absence within any month during the current school year or upon the tenth unexcused absence during the current school year.

Source: North Kitsap School District⁶⁷

PASADENA UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT (CA)

EXCUSED ABSENCES

Pasadena Unified School District’s (PUSD) attendance policy excuses students for “health reasons, family emergencies, and justifiable personal reasons” according to the law, Board policy, and administrative regulation.⁶⁸ Students absent due to religious observation are also considered excused.⁶⁹ Like NKSD, PUSD explicitly includes a student’s right to confidentiality if they cannot attend school because of medical services they receive without the consent of their parent or guardian; otherwise, students’ absences must be verified by their parents.⁷⁰

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ “WARNS Overview.” Washington State University. <https://warns.wsu.edu/overview/>

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Figure text taken verbatim with modifications from “Excused and Unexcused Absences | Policy 3122,” Op. cit., p. 4.

⁶⁸ “Absences and Excuses.” Pasadena Unified School District, December 2013. p. 1.
<https://www.pusd.us/cms/lib/CA01901115/Centricity/domain/48/policies/5000-5125/BP%205113%20rev%2012192013.pdf>

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

UNEXCUSED ABSENCES

The majority of PUSD’s attendance policy focuses on unexcused absences and truancy.⁷¹ PUSD does not provide a definition for chronic absence, but defines truancy:⁷²

A student becomes truant when she has missed any combination of 3 or more full-days of school, class periods, or is 30-minutes late to class without a valid excuse. If a student becomes habitually truant, she may be referred to the School Attendance Review Board (SARB).

At the beginning of the school year, schools initiate Positive Attendance Behavior Support (PABS) plans that encourage student attendance and a positive school climate.⁷³ After being absent or more than 30 minutes late to school on more than four occasions without a valid excuse, schools refer students to a School Attendance Review Team (SART) on the school’s campus.⁷⁴ SART meetings invite parents to discuss the source of the student’s attendance issues, provide resources for the family as needed, and “build personal responsibility for the student to attend school.”⁷⁵ Once students become “chronically truant,” or reach a truancy rate of ten percent or more, schools will refer them to a School Attendance Review Board (SARB), “a multi-agency panel that meets with the purpose of helping students who are not going to school, and keeping students and parents out of the juvenile court system.”⁷⁶ County and local SARBs are convened by county superintendents or district governing boards at the beginning of each school year and coordinate the State SARB on policy and personnel training.⁷⁷ Figure 2.4 presents PUSD’s policy regarding accumulated unexcused absences.

Figure 2.4: Truancy Procedure

STAGE	MEASURES
PUSD Parent-Student Handbook and Attendance Policy Letter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Beginning of the school year ▪ Initiate Schoolwide PABS plan
Truancy Letter 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identify students with three truanancies ▪ Send Truancy Letter 1 ▪ Monitor truant students’ attendance
Truancy Letter 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Monitor truant students’ attendance ▪ Parent meeting ▪ Identify students with four truanancies and have received Truancy Letter 1 ▪ Send Truancy Letter 2
SART Meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Conduct SART meetings including student and parents ▪ Apply Tier 2 interventions ▪ Refer to resources (mental health, mentorships, etc.)

⁷¹ “Child Welfare & Attendance / Attendance.” Pasadena Unified School District.

<https://www.pusd.us/Page/http%3A%2F%2Fwww.pusd.us%2Fsite%2Fdefault.aspx%3FPageID%3D6553>

⁷² Quoted text taken verbatim from Ibid.

⁷³ “PUSD Truancy Flowchart: A Truancy Prevention Program.” Pasadena Unified School District.

<https://docs.google.com/viewerng/viewer?url=http://pasadena.schoolwires.net//cms/lib/CA01901115/Centricity/Domain/1189/cwas+documents/Truancy+Flow+Chart.pdf>

⁷⁴ “Child Welfare & Attendance / Attendance,” Op. cit.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ “School Attendance Review Boards - Attendance Improvement.” California Department of Education, February 2022.

<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/ai/sb/>

STAGE	MEASURES
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Document interventions and referrals ▪ Sign Attendance Contract
<p>Truancy Letter 3</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identify Habitually Truant students with six truanancies and who have received Truancy Letters 1 and 2 ▪ Follow-up with referrals ▪ Progress monitor Tier 2 interventions ▪ Send Truancy Letter 3
<p>SARB Hearing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identify Chronically Truant students (truancy rate of 10% or more) and who have received Truancy Letters 1, 2, and 3 ▪ Document interventions, such as SART ▪ Complete and submit SARB referral to Child Welfare, Attendance, and Safety (CWAS) department
<p>District Attorney Mediation Hearing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Monitor truant students' attendance ▪ Apply Tier 3 interventions ▪ Apply further resources/interventions recommended by SARB committee ▪ No improvement: complete and submit District Attorney Mediation referral and submit to CWAS department

Source: Pasadena Unified School District⁷⁸

⁷⁸ Figure text taken verbatim with modifications from "PUSD Truancy Flowchart: A Truancy Prevention Program," Op. cit.

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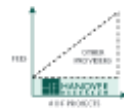
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