STRONGER

Attendance

STARTS WITH

Three District Priorities

Move from isolated interventions to coordinated action.

Districts have made important progress in reducing chronic absenteeism since its post-pandemic peak, yet attendance remains below pre-pandemic levels in many communities. Emerging research also shows that districts with higher rates of chronic absenteeism are recovering more slowly academically, reinforcing the need for a coordinated, district-wide approach to attendance.[1]

Learn about three research-backed priorities that help districts build a coordinated attendance strategy, along with one example practice that supports each area. These practices are most effective as part of a comprehensive district-wide approach to improving attendance.



1

☐ PRIORITY FOR *FAMILIES:*

Help families make informed attendance decisions

WHY IT MATTERS:

Many parents now weigh the benefits of their children staying home against the benefits of sending them to school, particularly when students have minor illnesses, anxiety, or other challenges.[2] At the same time, evolving health policies have left many families less certain about when students should stay home and when they should attend class.[3]

EXAMPLE PRACTICE:

Attendance policy nudges

Provide simple, timely attendance guidance that helps families know when students should attend school, when they should stay home, and where to find support. Clear expectations reduce uncertainty and make it easier for families to make informed attendance decisions before absences accumulate.

2

☐ PRIORITY FOR *STUDENTS:*

Strengthen students' connection to school

WHY IT MATTERS:

Today's students are more likely to miss school because they feel disconnected from adults and peers, are unsure where to turn for help, or are unconvinced that school connects to their future.[4,5] Traditional attendance incentives and supports for basic needs remain important, but they don't fully address these newer drivers of absenteeism.[6]

EXAMPLE PRACTICE:

Positive relationship mapping

Systematically identify students who may lack meaningful connections with trusted adults, and intentionally strengthen those relationships. Relationship mapping helps schools move beyond assumptions and focus support where it's needed most.



3

☐ PRIORITY FOR *TEACHERS:*

Clarify the teacher's role in supporting attendance

WHY IT MATTERS:

Families prefer hearing from teachers about attendance, yet many teachers don't see attendance as part of their role or don't feel prepared to discuss it with families.[2] As a result, districts may be overlooking one of their strongest opportunities to encourage attendance and build trust with families.[7]

EXAMPLE PRACTICE:

Teacher attendance expectations and communication guides

Define clear attendance expectations and provide teachers with practical communication tools they can use with families. Consistent expectations and ready-to-use language reduce guesswork and help teachers become confident partners in district-wide attendance efforts.

These practices are designed to work together within a broader district attendance strategy that includes universal family communication, targeted outreach, and ongoing monitoring for students with the greatest attendance needs.





EAB

Sources:
[1]NWEA; [2]Ad Council; [3]University of Michigan Health System; [4]Qualtrics; [5]Edutopia; [6]ECMC Group; [7]Brown University; EAB interviews and analysis.

Ready to strengthen attendance district-wide?
Explore EAB's research and implementation resources at
eab.com/k12

© 2026 by EAB. All Rights Reserved. 40151