

Chronic Absenteeism in Schools:

Text Messaging Parents as a Solution

Your Student:

12 Absences

Typical Classmate:

4 Absences



Athena's Workshop
Helping You Build Successful Students



PeerPower

THE PROBLEM: Chronically Absent Students Have Harder Lives

The cold, hard truth is that chronically absent children end up leading harder lives. Students that miss just two or three days each month in Kindergarten and 1st grade never catch up¹. They become chronically absent, defined as missing 10 percent or more of the school year. About 83 percent of the chronically absent students in Kindergarten and 1st grade are not reading at grade level at the end of 3rd grade. Not being able to read well means that everything gets harder and that a student is four times more likely to drop out before graduation. Without a high school diploma, getting any job or advancing beyond the lowest, entry level job is almost impossible, and that person is now eight times more likely to end up in jail.²

Teachers and administrators know these facts, but parents often do not understand how small absences add up. Parents that do not visit the school or district website do not get the message about the importance of daily attendance. They have not calculated that being absent two days a month, every month for nine months of school equals 18 days or 10 percent of the typical 180 day school year and that chronic absenteeism translates into a long list of negative outcomes.

Lost Funding: How Much does Absenteeism Cost?

10,000 Students
x 180 Days
x 3% absenteeism
x \$40 Avg. Daily Attendance
\$2,160,000 in lost funding !

THE OPPORTUNITY: How can we change this dynamic?

Many traditional ways of informing parents that their children are absent are often ineffective. Mailing letters through the US Post Office requires having the same address in the middle of the year as at the beginning. If it arrives at the right address, some people are uncomfortable opening mail from government agencies as they fear they are long and written in legalese. Organizing meetings and home visits to discuss the issues behind chronic absenteeism are often difficult with parents that have jobs with odd hours, a long commute, language issues, health problems or are in transitional housing. Notes sent home to parents often end up at the bottom of the backpack and are depend on the child giving the note to the parent.

Research reports demonstrate that engaging parents in their child's education leads to a significant improvement in attendance, better academic performance and that texting can be a key to winning that parental engagement.

¹ <https://oag.ca.gov/truancy/2015>

² <https://oag.ca.gov/truancy/2015>

Parents were offered the option of receiving messages via phone, email or text message and **79 percent of parents requested text messages.**

1. Peter Bergman of Columbia University studied 242 low-income, middle and high school students at a Los Angeles Unified School District with the goal of finding out how more information about tests, homework, etc. given to parent could affect school outcomes. Parents were offered the option of receiving messages via phone, email or text message and 79 percent of parents requested text messages. With frequent text messages, class skipping was reduced 28 percent, after school tutoring attendance increased 42%, attendance at parent-teacher conferences increased 53% and students grades improved by .19 standard deviation, or about 7 points on a 100 point scale.³

2. The Ad Council, California Endowment and the California Office of the Attorney General conducted research on how to help parents understand the importance of daily attendance. They conducted online surveys of 573 low-income English speaking parents and telephone surveys of 250 low-income Spanish speaking parents. Their children all had 10 more absences in the previous year. The research showed that parents did not accurately track their child's absences and that messages that resonated best with parents were both believable and persuasive. Among the parents, 78 percent of English speaking parents and 80 percent of Spanish speaking parents sent or received a text message and more than 50 percent of parents did not have a land line phone, only a cell phone. Their child's teacher has greatest influence in delivering the message of daily attendance with 72 percent of parents being open to hearing it from the teacher. The Top 10 Things to Consider When Talking with Parents About Attendance recommended referring to absences by month rather than annually, connecting parents to the class curriculum to help them understand how absences add up and using text messages to communicate with parents about absences.⁴

3. Matthew Kraft of Brown University and Todd Rogers of Harvard University conducted a double blind study of 435 at risk, minority, low-income students participating in a summer credit recovery program to pass and get credit for a previously failed high school course in order to graduate. During the school year, the average attendance rate was 88.89% for these students. Over the five week program, parents received one weekly message of 10 words or less on average. "Messages decreased the percentage of students who failed to earn course credit from 15.8% to 9.3% - a 41% reduction" in failure, and the students that received messages about areas of improvement had an increase of attendance of 3.2% over the control group. The increased number of students passing the course "is almost entirely explained by a decrease in dropouts." The authors note that "reduced student absenteeism appears to be a key student behavior affected by messages."⁵

[S]tudents that received messages about areas of improvement had an increase in attendance of 3.2% over the control group.

³ <http://www.columbia.edu/~psb2101/BergmanSubmission.pdf>

⁴ <http://oag.ca.gov/truancy/toolkit>

⁵ https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/mkraft/files/kraft_rogers_teacher-parent_communication_hks_working_paper.pdf

Attendance Solution Package

Weekly Text Messages

Research shows weekly text messages make a difference

- Messages about importance of attendance (25% of messages) – Many parents do not understand how important daily attendance is
- Individualized messages about each child's attendance (25% of messages) – Make attendance goals relevant for each parent
- Individualized messages about each child's academic performance (25% of messages) – Show parents how attendance affects academic performance
- Individualized messages about how each child can improve (25% of messages) – Emphasize to parents opportunities for students to advance in school.

Features and Benefits

Making it work for everyone: parents, teachers, and administrators

- Privacy for students, parents, and teachers (all phone numbers are masked, everyone is identified by their full name) – Protection for all
- English to Spanish and Spanish to English translation of messages – Engage parents in the language most comfortable for them
- Unlimited, two-way texting - Communication is all about being two-way; therefore parents can reply to messages, for clarification, to ask questions, and teachers can respond.
- Parents can reply to in-school attendance secretary directly – More convenient and easier for parents
- Training – Three webinar trainings on the mechanics of how to use the texting platform, how best to communicate with parents about attendance and academic performance
- Before and after analysis of attendance – Using Attendance Works tool, establish metrics to judge efficacy of texting solution
- Advanced scheduling of messages – Can be used to remind parents of forms due, field trips, schedule changes, etc
- Easy data uploading - from SIS system
- Phone numbers scrubbed – Athena's Workshop will provide the district with names and phone numbers of disconnected phones, landlines, and typos. If the district provides new numbers, we will reload them for free

Contact



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