Reducing Chronic Absenteeism

With Jessica Sprick
Safe & Civil Schools

Welcome! Session begins at:
1:00 Pacific
2:00 Mountain
3:00 Central
4:00 Eastern

Details

• Questions
• Recording and slides
Goals of Webinar

Participants understand how to:

◦ Effectively monitor attendance data
◦ Shift from reactive, punitive models to proactive and positive models
◦ Create tiered systems to address absenteeism

Goals of Webinar

Participants utilize practical strategies for:

◦ Schoolwide and classroom prevention
◦ Early intervention for early-stage problems
◦ Function-based plans for resistant problems

Note: strong focus on schoolwide and classroom prevention
Attendance Measures

Commonly-used metric

• Truancy
  ◦ Unexcused absence
  ◦ Primarily triggers intervention at middle and high school

Attendance Measures

Commonly-used metric

• Average Daily Attendance
  ◦ Whole school measure of percentage of enrolled students in attendance
  ◦ Doesn’t look at individuals
  ◦ Can mask a problem
Emerging metric

- Chronic absence = missing 10% or more of the school year for ANY reason
  - Unexcused
  - Excused
  - Suspension

- If the student is frequently not in school, regardless of reason, there are negative effects

A student is chronically absent if he/she misses:

- 2 days in the first 20 days of school
- 10 days in the first 100 days of school
- 18 days in a 180-day school year
If a student averages 2 days or more a month, he/she is chronically absent.

Poll

What percentage of your student body is chronically absent?

◦ Estimate if you don’t know

a) 0–5%
b) 5–10%
c) 11–20%
d) 21–30%
e) 31% or more
Negative Effects on Academic Achievement

Third-grade reading proficiency

A recent study in California found:
- Regular attendance in K and 1 = 64%

~ Bruner, Discher, & Chang, 2011
Conservative estimates:

- Every year, about 10% of Kindergarten and first-grade students miss a month or more of school
- In some schools, up to 50% of students are chronically absent

~ Chang & Romero, 2008

Negative Effects on Graduation

- By sixth grade, chronic absenteeism is one of three signs that a student may drop out of high school
  - Chronic absenteeism
  - Poor behavior
  - Failing grades in math and/or English

~ Attendance Works
Negative Effects on Graduation

- Students in Utah who were chronically absent any year between 8th and 12th grade were 7.4 times more likely to drop out

~ Utah Education Policy Center, 2012

Note: Increasing frequency of absenteeism in high school is a warning sign of dropout

Negative Life Effects

- Students miss developing important life skills
  - Social and friendship skills
  - Resilience
  - Dependability
Negative Life/Community Effects

- Increased involvement in criminal justice system
  - One study found three-quarters of students in juvenile justice system had histories of chronic absence
    ~ RI Data Hub
  - Truant students have been found to be far more likely to be arrested, engage in a serious property crime, or commit assault
    ~ Bell, Rosen, & Dynlacht, 1994
    ~ Dryfoos, 1990; Garry, 1996

The Extent of the Problem

An estimated 5 million to 7.5 million students are chronically absent each year

~ Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012

In some schools, up to 50% of students are chronically absent

~ Chang & Romero, 2008

Chronic absenteeism is most prevalent for students who are economically disadvantaged
Goal: Regular Attendance

- Every student will regularly attend school
- Regular or satisfactory attendance = missing 5% or less of school in an academic year
  - 9 days or less in 180-day year
  - No more than one day per month on average

How Do We Reach the Goal?

Implement what we already know works with changing behavior

- Move away from systems that rely primarily on reactive, punitive measures
  - Warning letters and meetings
  - Truancy court
  - Suspension for excessive tardies and absences
How Do We Reach the Goal?

Implement a proactive, preventative model

• Regularly monitor data and set priorities
• Implement preventive schoolwide measures
• Implement function-based approaches and research-based interventions for small groups and individuals

Collect Data

Calculate and analyze schoolwide absenteeism rates on a regular basis

• Regular: 5% or less
• At risk: 5.1–9.9%
• Chronic absence: 10% or more
• Severe chronic absence: 20% or more**
Collect Data

CHRONIC ABSENCE

1. Print a list of all students who have been absent 10% or more of days in the current school year
2. Count the number of students on this list
3. Divide the number of students chronically absent by the number of enrolled students

Note: Does not account for arrivals after Day 1

Use same procedure for each of the attendance categories—appropriate percentage

Example: Schoolwide %

I work in a school with 1,500 students.

1. It’s Day 60 in the school year.
   I print a list of all students who have missed 6 or more days (10% of days).
2. I count 217 students.
3. I divide the number of chronically absent students (217) by the number of enrolled students (1,500).

14.5% of the student body is chronically absent.
When to Focus on Universal

Use collected data to determine when and how much emphasis to place on universal prevention

~5% (Tier 3)

~15% (Tier 2)

~80% (Tier 1)

Any time your triangle becomes too top/middle heavy, increase focus on universal prevention

Amount and intensity of efforts depends on severity of the problem

Power of Universal Prevention

![Bar graph showing percentage of chronically absent students before and after universal training with Safe & Civil Schools](image)
What Does Universal Prevention Look Like for Absenteeism?

Efforts with staff, students, families, and community include:
- Awareness-building
- Motivational strategies
- Tailored strategies to address concerns prevalent for large numbers of students
- Policy work (not addressed here)

Awareness Building Examples

Increase staff awareness
- Have staff brainstorm negative effects on:
  - Students inside and outside of school
  - Classroom and teacher
  - Parents
  - Community
- Share national data on outcomes
- Share your school’s data
Example: Barnes Bears

- Kelso, WA
- 82% of students on Free and Reduced Lunch
- In one year:
  - Reduced chronic absenteeism by 10%
  - Increased regular attendance by 16%
  - Increased ADA by 2%
- See November issue of Educational Leadership for article

Dear families,

We are looking forward to a great year, with students in classes and ready to learn every day. We have learned that students who miss even a few days of school each month are at far greater risk of academic failure and dropout than students who attend regularly. We have set a goal that every student in our school attends regularly (has nine or fewer absences in a year).

Because attendance is so important, please send your child to school every day unless he or she has a contagious illness or is running a fever.

We have included a chart with this letter that will help you keep track of your student's absences. If your child is at risk for missing too much school, please feel free to contact Joan Ndogo at 555-1234 for assistance. We will also monitor each student’s attendance across the year so we can work with families when the number of absences puts a student at risk.

We will be happy to work with you to help your student attend regularly and have greater opportunities for success.

Sincerely,

Aaron Chan, Principal

Loganville Middle School
Home of the Trojans

Increase Family Awareness

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Increase Family Awareness

• Negative outcomes
• Regular updates on school goals, school data, and their student(s)’ data
  ◦ Quarterly letters
  ◦ Conference letters
• Tips on improving attendance
  ◦ Creating routine
  ◦ Sleep tips
  ◦ Helping students manage anxiety, homework, conflict, etc.
Increase Student Awareness

- Teach importance of school
  - What would you do with $250,000? What would you do with $1,000,000? (Students brainstorm, share, discuss.)
  - A high school graduate makes, on average, $250,000 more than a dropout over a lifetime.
  - A college graduate makes, on average, $1,000,000 more than a high school graduate over a lifetime.
  - Students who are chronically absent are 7 to 8 times more likely to drop out than students who attend regularly.
  - Missing even 2 days of school each month can make it much more difficult for you to graduate.
  - What things make it more difficult for you to attend? What can you/we do to overcome those difficulties?

Increase Community Awareness

- Share goals and information through PSAs, local media
- Connect with businesses
  - To address concerns
  - For incentive opportunities
- Connect with community partners
  - DHS, CPS, Juvenile Justice
  - Community leaders and organizers
Motivational Strategies

Tailored Strategies

- Collect additional data to determine trends in causes of absenteeism
  - Survey
  - Focus groups
  - Anecdotal notes collected by teachers or attendance staff

- Implement strategies to address common causes of absenteeism
Example: Tailored Strategies

- Hawaii school
- Many students missing month before school due to missing immunizations
- School nurse and counselors began contacting families over the summer and facilitating getting immunizations before start of school

Example: Tailored Strategies

- Schools found many students were missing significant amounts of school during hunting season
  - One school tried increased messaging and reduced the problem fairly significantly
  - Another school took data then recommended a fall break with their board and slightly shorter summer
Consider Other Contributing Universal Factors

- Climate and safety concerns in school
- Overuse of exclusionary discipline
- Barriers and challenges that affect many families
  - Transportation
  - Illness
- Other causes

Consider Causes of Absenteeism

Schoolwide
Individual

- What is preventing attendance?
- Why does the student or parent feel it is necessary to miss school?
- What is the student or parent “getting” from being absent?

Prevention and intervention must address these causes.
Common Causes of Absenteeism

- Barriers
- Lack of understanding or lack of importance
- To escape or avoid something
  - Deficits
  - Climate
- To obtain something

Early-Stage Intervention

- Intervene at the earliest stages of a problem with welcoming, supportive contacts
  - Express caring and concern
  - Approach contacts with a problem-solving mindset
Early Stage Intervention

- Consider some additional motivational approaches or intensification of universal strategies that might help the student improve attendance

- Example: Group Contingency Intervention

Function-Based Plans for Resistant Problems

- If the student exhibits a more resistant problem, take a function-based approach
  - Gather data to determine possible function(s) of absenteeism
  - Design an intervention plan that seeks to address the function(s)
    - Consider short-term accommodations
    - Consider long-term solutions
Additional Tools/Strategies

- Visit www.pacificnwpublish.com

- Visit www.attendanceworks.org

Upcoming Webinar

- FIRST STEP Next!
  - Classroom intervention for Pre-K, K, 1, and 2 students
  - For students who struggle with following directions, working independently, cooperating with others, and emotional self-regulation

- Tuesday, December 1
  - 1 pm Pacific, 4 pm Eastern

- Sign up at www.pacificnwpublish.com
For information on training support, contact Safe & Civil Schools (800-323-8819)

- Universal Prevention
- Function-Based Intervention
- Intensive FBA
- Technical Assistance

Thank you for your time and willingness to address this critical issue!