

From Compliance to Invitation:

Lessons in Improving Attendance in Eleven Oregon School Districts

*An Interim
Report for the
Coalition of
Oregon School
Administrators
(COSA) and
AASA, the
School
Superintendents
Association*



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This report is dedicated to the students, families and educators across Oregon who remind us that every day in schools is an opportunity for connection, growth, and belonging.

The following pages recognize the leaders and districts whose partnership and commitment made these lessons possible.

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Executive Summary

Transforming School Attendance Through Evidence-Based Practice

Study Overview

This report examines chronic absenteeism through dual lenses: research identifying root causes and evidence-based solutions, and the practical implementation experiences of eleven diverse Oregon school districts during 2023-2024 and 2024-25. These districts—ranging from rural communities of 37 students to urban systems serving nearly 37,000—achieved meaningful attendance improvements of 4.2% to 10.6% reductions in chronic absenteeism despite operating within significant budget constraints that prevented adding specialized staff positions.

Research Foundation: Root Causes and Solutions

The research identifies four primary root causes underlying chronic absenteeism, each representing complex challenges that frequently intersect in students' lived experiences. Family health and economic circumstances create persistent barriers through housing instability, transportation challenges, and limited healthcare access. The lack of belonging and safety in school environments undermines student motivation to attend, particularly when students experience bullying, harassment, or cultural disconnection. Feelings of academic failure generate negative cycles where students avoid school to escape repeated experiences of inadequacy and frustration. Insufficient academic engagement and challenge leads to disengagement when instruction fails to connect meaningfully with students' interests, abilities, and cultural backgrounds.

Evidence-based solutions address each root cause through professional student and family advocates,

school social workers and nurses, comprehensive health centers, social-emotional learning programs, mentoring initiatives, universal design for learning, authentic instruction, and extracurricular activities. Central to all effective interventions is the fundamental shift from compliance-based enforcement to invitational approaches that prioritize understanding and relationship-building.

District Implementation Strategies: From Research to Practice

The eleven districts implemented twelve distinct strategies that reveal both common principles and innovative adaptations to local contexts and constraints. Their approaches demonstrate that meaningful attendance improvement is achievable even within significant resource limitations when districts commit to systematic cultural change.

Data-Driven Decision Making formed the operational foundation for all district efforts. Rather than relying on periodic attendance reviews, every district established attendance data teams and upgraded monitoring systems to enable real-time identification of attendance problems and targeted interventions. For example, Hillsboro created a sophisticated system providing year-to-date rates and growth indicators over time, while Gladstone built custom dashboards for early warning systems. These data systems transformed attendance from periodic review to continuous monitoring that enabled proactive responses.

MTSS Integration represented a critical advancement, with districts systematically incorporating attendance data into multi-tiered support frameworks. Lincoln County established clear tier criteria with specific attendance thresholds, while Gresham-Barlow used MTSS integration to create collective consciousness about attendance importance across all staff members. Phoenix-Talent utilized intensive individual tracking within MTSS team data reviews, and Silver Falls used attendance integration into the MTSS process as expanding their intervention capacity. These approaches recognized attendance problems as interconnected with academic, behavioral, and social-emotional challenges requiring coordinated responses.

Communication Transformation involved fundamental shifts from punitive to supportive messaging. Districts recognized that traditional deficit-based messaging—warning letters, truancy citations, threatening language—often damaged relationships and worsened attendance problems. Winston-Dillard developed comprehensive guidance emphasizing empathy and relationship-building, while Gresham-Barlow shifted from deficit-based letters highlighting absences to strengths-based communications celebrating attendance. Silver Falls adopted and began piloting the highly effective attendance handbook originally developed at Winston-Dillard, bringing consistency to a district-wide positive communication approach. Lincoln County adopted the simple but powerful “We miss you” message, demonstrating how communication transformation can strengthen rather than damage school-family relationships.

Community Engagement expanded attendance improvement beyond school boundaries, acknowledging that attendance challenges often reflect broader community attitudes and circumstances. Gladstone’s “Gladstone Shows Up” campaign engaged businesses, civic leaders, and community organizations in delivering consistent attendance messages through yard signs, window posters, and community events. Lincoln County developed branded campaigns with pro-

motional materials, while Phoenix-Talent combined community outreach with student service projects that built belonging through civic engagement.

Strategic Integration positioned attendance as central to district educational missions rather than peripheral compliance issues. Beaverton embedded attendance within their “Belong. Believe. Achieve.” strategic framework, establishing attendance as the primary metric for measuring success in student safety and well-being goals. Hillsboro created comprehensive five-initiative action plans with specific measurable targets, while Phoenix-Talent required every school to set attendance goals and identify specific strategies. These approaches ensured sustained organizational commitment.

Relationship Building emerged as the most consistently emphasized strategy across all districts, reflecting research findings that students attend school when they feel known, valued, and supported by caring adults. Winston-Dillard’s “You are the strategy” philosophy recognized that individual staff approaches to students fundamentally impact school experience and students’ sense of belonging. Umatilla implemented relationship audits and “2x10” interventions where faculty connected with identified students for two minutes over ten consecutive days. Banks prioritized student voice through interviews and focus groups, designing responses based on student perceptions and recommendations. Burnt River leveraged their small size to create highly personalized approaches, with the superintendent taking an active role in building relationships with families and faculty discussing individual students at monthly meetings.

Social-Emotional Learning provided universal support systems addressing students’ need for belonging and emotional connection. Nearly all districts implemented SEL programming. Hillsboro integrated SEL with equity efforts over three years, using morning meetings and Character Strong programming. Lincoln County and Silver Falls adopted Caring School Community programs focusing on classroom

and school community building. Banks took the distinctive approach of focusing on adult SEL competencies first, conducting staff book studies on transformative social-emotional learning before implementing student programming. Burnt River implemented character traits approaches with monthly themes alongside elementary morning meetings, while Phoenix-Talent adopted the comprehensive K-12 Wayfinder program.

Professional Development built staff capacity for attendance improvement across all roles. Winston-Dillard established expectations for trauma-informed and culturally responsive practices. Umatilla utilized half-day Fridays for professional development addressing both interventions and instructional engagement strategies. Banks employed video analysis to help teachers shift from teacher-centered to student-centered approaches, while Hillsboro focused on instructional practices that promote engagement and belonging.

Collective Efficacy engaged every staff member in attendance improvement rather than delegating responsibility to specialists or individual departments. Hillsboro explicitly designated collective efficacy as their primary strategy, partnering with multiple departments to leverage all staff efforts. Lincoln County implemented “all hands on deck” approaches with five percent improvement targets for every school, creating shared accountability for attendance outcomes. Beaverton embedded attendance across all staff roles through comprehensive communication campaigns and public accountability systems.

Family Partnerships moved beyond traditional parent involvement to address underlying family circumstances affecting attendance. Districts developed authentic partnerships recognizing families as essential collaborators. Umatilla emphasized increased communication resulting in longer problem-solving conversations that avoided blame and shame. Gresham-Barlow implemented home visits by kindergarten teachers and provided specific training for school sec-

retaries in positive family communication. Hillsboro administered targeted surveys to parents experiencing attendance difficulties to understand barriers and design appropriate responses.

Student Support Services addressed complex attendance barriers through coordination of existing personnel rather than additional hires. Beaverton leveraged 49 social workers and 52 bilingual facilitators across 55 schools. Phoenix-Talent maximized their single district nurse and three family liaisons while utilizing school-based health centers at all five schools. Banks employed a multilingual family liaison working primarily with Latino populations while coordinating with community agencies for comprehensive family support.

Leadership Commitment at superintendent and central office levels proved essential for sustained implementation. Successful districts had leaders who personally championed attendance improvement, allocated necessary resources, and maintained consistent focus on district attendance strategies. Beaverton’s superintendent positioned attendance as fundamental to district mission through strategic planning and public communication. Gladstone’s superintendent led community-wide campaigns engaged entire communities. Winston-Dillard’s superintendent promoted cultural transformation focused on understanding and caring rather than punitive approaches.

Key Findings and Implications

Several essential insights emerge from this comprehensive analysis that have significant implications for attendance improvement. Though additional staffing could have benefited district efforts, districts achieved meaningful improvements without additional staffing through systematic cultural change and strategic resource alignment. The most impactful strategies—relationship building, communication transformation, and collective efficacy—required commitment and cultural change rather than additional funding.

Successful districts positioned attendance as central to their educational mission rather than treating it as a compliance issue handled by specialists. Integration with comprehensive support systems like MTSS enabled holistic approaches addressing multiple student needs simultaneously. Leadership at all levels proved essential, with superintendents personally championing initiatives and sustaining focus across multiple years.

The relationship between attendance and belonging emerged as reciprocal and mutually reinforcing. Students attend more regularly when they feel known and valued, while consistent attendance creates opportunities for deeper relationships and stronger school connection. This finding underscores the importance of addressing attendance as both a symptom of disconnection and a prerequisite for belonging.

Community engagement proved valuable in addressing attendance as a broader social issue requiring collective

rather than solely school-based solutions. The districts' community campaigns recognized that students and families exist within broader contexts that either support or undermine school attendance, requiring community-level interventions that address community attitudes about education's importance.

These findings suggest that sustainable attendance improvement moving beyond compliance-based enforcement toward creating schools where students genuinely want to be present. This transformation requires systematic approaches combining universal supports with targeted interventions, authentic family partnerships, and organizational commitment at all levels.

The success of these eleven districts demonstrates that meaningful attendance improvement is achievable when communities commit to understanding and addressing the complex factors influencing school attendance, providing a framework for creating schools where every student wants to be present and engaged in learning.

Introduction



In the post-COVID years, districts across the country have seen their attendance rates plummet and with them the performance of students. Absenteeism not only compromises the performance of students who are chronically absent but also affects the performance of all students, as it disrupts classroom instruction when teachers must reteach concepts and skills and devote additional time to working with those who have missed instruction. Although there have been some improvements since the pandemic, the rates of chronic absenteeism have been far too high. For the 2023-24 school year, Oregon's chronic absenteeism rate was 34.1%, that is, one in every three students in Oregon were chronically absent.

Intervening to improve attendance is in the interest of every district in Oregon, not only to enhance the well-being and academic success of children but to meet the statewide improvement targets. K-12 attendance is already one of common metrics upon which districts are assessed. With the passage of SB 141, the Education Accountability Act of 2025, K-2 regular attendance rates will become a second attendance metric in the state-wide system with each district expected to make targeted improvement gains. It is evident that without making gains in attendance it will be difficult to make gains in many of the other metrics.

In January 2024, with assistance from AASA, Oregon was able to launch a cohort of districts that were will-

ing to work together to try to address the attendance problem. Thirteen districts joined the collaborative, varying in size from under 50 to 37,000. The districts met monthly online and several times in person to discuss strategies and share initiatives with each other. Each district formed attendance data teams, enhanced their attendance monitoring systems, pursued a variety of communication strategies, promoted the building of strong teacher-student relationships, and engaged in collective efficacy efforts focused on attendance among faculty and staff. The majority of districts made modest gains based on their initial efforts during the 2023-24 school year. However, because the major efforts of the districts took place during the 2024-25 school year, we will not know the extent of the gains the districts made, or which strategies ended up being most productive until the state releases the attendance data for that year in November 2025.

However, as a cohort studying the attendance issue deeply, we can offer an interim report that details what we learned from the research on attendance and describe the variety of strategies that districts chose to use to attempt to improve their attendance rates. In this report, we offer a summary of our understanding of root causes of chronic absenteeism and the strategies that others have found successful. We also offer a synthesis of the strategies our cohort chose to pursue. Finally, this report includes short case studies of eleven of the participating districts. We hope that this will enable other districts to gain from our insights and initiatives.

Chapter One

Root Causes of Student Chronic Absence and the Solutions to Address Them

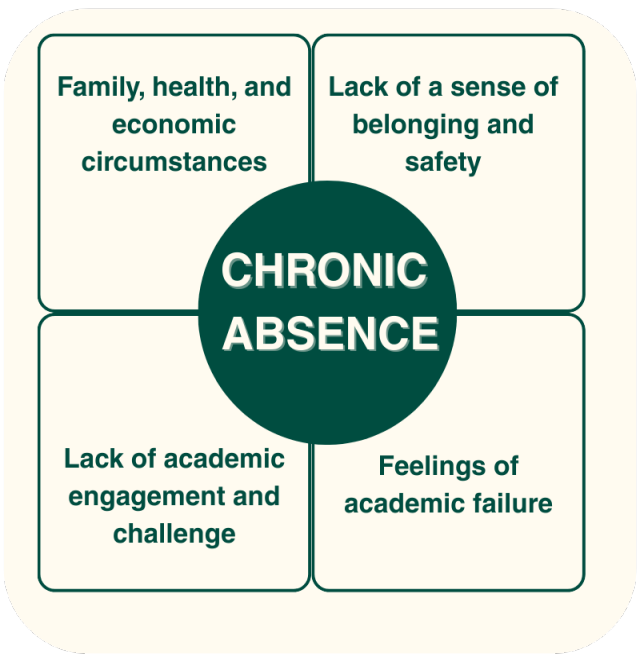
Chronic school absence represents one of the most pressing challenges facing educational leaders today. The research evidence reveals that its impacts extend far beyond missed instructional time, creating immediate and long-term consequences that ripple through students’ academic performance, social functioning, graduation rates, and life trajectories (Cattan et al., 2023; Jacob & Lovett, 2017; Ginsburg et al., 2014; Schoenberger, 2012; Gottfried, 2010; Allensworth & Easton, 2007).

Even at early grades it can have a long-term impact. Chronic absenteeism in kindergarten has been associated with lower achievement in reading and math in later grades (Chang & Romero, 2008). Yet the challenge extends beyond individual students. High rates of schoolwide chronic absence compromise learning conditions for all students in the building, not just those who are frequently absent (Attendance Works, 2025; May et al., 2024).

Understanding chronic absenteeism requires recognizing its multifaceted nature. Students miss school due to overlapping medical, individual, family, social, and school-related factors that often intersect in complex ways. Students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds frequently encounter barriers that extend well beyond the school’s direct influence—housing instability, family health challenges, transportation difficulties, and caregiving responsibilities for younger siblings at home.

Therefore, understanding the root causes that drive chronic absence is essential for developing effective interventions. The evidence points to four primary root causes of student chronic absence: family health and economic circumstances; lack of a sense of belonging and safety in school; feelings of academic failure; and insufficient academic engagement and challenge. While these causes present significant complexity, research

ROOT CAUSES OF CHRONIC ABSENCE



has identified evidence-based solutions that schools and districts can implement to address the underlying issues.

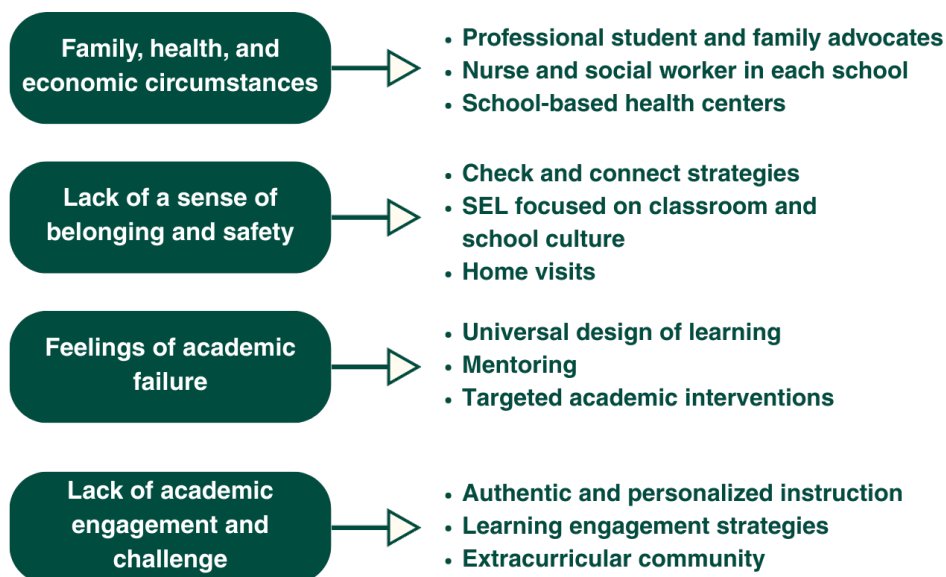
Central to these solutions is a fundamental shift from punitive compliance models to supportive, invitational approaches. Rather than blaming students or their families for truancy and absenteeism and using threats and consequences to force compliance, effective interventions focus on understanding the circumstances and needs of the student and the family and finding solutions that address those needs. At times this takes the form of providing specific personal supports. At other times it involves creating systemic programming solutions that can address the needs of many students. At the core of these solutions is a shift to creating environments that are inviting and supportive, making it more likely students will attend and families will make the extra effort to get their children to school. This approach becomes even more critical in states like Oregon, where legislative changes have eliminated many traditional compliance measures.

1. Family Health and Economic Circumstances

The most pervasive barrier to consistent school attendance lies at the intersection of family health challenges and economic hardship. Chronic absenteeism occurs disproportionately among students from low-income families, with homelessness, transitions between foster care placements, and residential instability being among the primary drivers of chronic absenteeism (Garcia & Weiss, 2018). These families are more likely to experience food insecurity, unstable housing, unreliable transportation and limited access to quality healthcare (Lim et al., 2019).

However, economic disadvantage represents only part of the picture. Students with disabilities, English language learners, and Native American students also experience significantly lower attendance rates (Lim et al., 2019). Health-related barriers play a particularly significant role, with children who have disabilities being approximately three times more likely to experience chronic school absenteeism than their peers without disabilities (Black & Elgaddal, 2024). Conditions

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such as asthma, diabetes, allergies, and mental health issues create ongoing attendance challenges (Attendance Works, 2024; Lim et al., 2019).

These circumstances reflect systemic inequities rather than individual failings. Structural factors including segregation, poverty, unpredictable work schedules, and interactions with the justice system have historically contributed to disproportionately higher chronic absenteeism rates among racial and ethnic minoritized students (Vierse, 2024).

Evidence-Based Solutions

Several interventions have demonstrated effectiveness in addressing family and health-related attendance barriers.

Professional Student and Family Advocates:

School districts have found success in hiring professional student and family advocates or liaisons can help address family circumstances (American Institutes for Research, 2024; Naff et al., 2023). The advocates or liaisons build relationships with families and address complex challenges through home visits and ongoing support. These individuals differ from truant officers, although some may have backgrounds in law enforcement. Their goal centers on relationship building with families and helping them find solutions to school attendance problems. These staff members play a pivotal role in bridging the gap between home and school. By establishing positive relationships with families and pursuing community and school resources to address issues preventing school attendance, they can serve as a key element in addressing attendance issues. For more information, see: <https://nafsce.org/>.

School Social Workers: School social workers have emerged as essential members of the school attendance, intervention, and mental health teams. They are uniquely positioned them to be able to address the multifaceted barriers that contribute to student absenteeism (Attendance Works, 2024).

Attendance problems rarely exist in isolation and are often symptoms of broader challenges in a student's life. The training that school social workers receive enables them to recognize early warning signs and address the social, emotional, and environmental factors that contribute to attendance and school avoidance problems before these become entrenched patterns. At the same time, they assist students in improving their coping skills, resiliency, and ability to regulate emotions to help them manage challenging school and home situations.

Social workers are particularly skilled at building trust with families and connecting them with community resources. Having the credentials to provide mental health services and family supports, they can effectively engage families and provide holistic supports that enable students to improve attendance. For more information, see: <https://www.sswaa.org/>.

School Nursing Services: School nurses occupy a unique position to address health-related attendance barriers through their understanding of both the medical and educational needs of students. Their impact on student attendance occurs through systematic case management, health condition management for particular students, early intervention and illness prevention, and family and community connections (Ordway, 2024; Rankine et al., 2023; Jacobsen et al., 2016).

School nurses are able to manage chronic health conditions that commonly cause absences. By helping students manage conditions, nurses prevent the health crises that can lead to multiple and extended absences. School nurses also impact attendance through early intervention and prevention that address attendance problems before they become chronic. Through participation in school attendance teams, school nurses can provide valuable insights to help address chronic tardiness and early dismissals related to health or social concerns. In addition, school nurses serve as vital links between families, healthcare providers, and schools. Through their clinical expertise, nurses can help families understand the importance of regular attendance, serve as a health resource assisting in securing com-

munity medical services for students and their families, and address underlying health issues that may be creating attendance barriers. The presence of a nurse in each building provides immediate health support, which can reduce health-related absences and address the medical barriers to attendance. For more information, see: <https://www.nasn.org/home>.

Comprehensive Health Services: School-based health and wellness centers represent an integrated approach to addressing complex health-related attendance barriers. Located on or adjacent to school campuses, these centers provide accessible and comprehensive health services within the school environment and have demonstrated effectiveness in improving attendance (Kjohlhede et al., 2025).

These centers prove particularly effective in managing chronic conditions, such as asthma and diabetes, that frequently cause school absences. Similar to nursing services in schools, school-based health centers can identify and address health issues before they become severe and cause significant absences. By eliminating barriers to health care access, they have been effective at addressing health disparities for students experiencing poverty and for minoritized students that contribute to attendance gaps.

Through routine screenings, primary care services, chronic disease management and care coordination, mental health programming, and medication management, health center staff can identify and support students with unmet health needs, enabling them to re-engage with school. They also address one of the common reasons for leaving school during the day—travel to medical and mental health appointments. For more information, see: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK232686/>.

Positive Communication Strategies: Traditional school communication about attendance has relied heavily on punitive messaging and threatening language. Research demonstrates that shifting from enforcement-oriented messaging to positive, partnership-focused communication significantly improves family engagement and measurably increases student

attendance (Rogers et al., 2017).

Families consistently underestimate how much school their child has missed and lack understanding of how their child's attendance compares to others or impacts overall school success. To address this, school districts are using “nudge” letters that provide families with important attendance information utilizing support-oriented messaging (McArdle, 2024; Barone & Hunter, 2024; Mac Iver et al., 2022).

What emerges from this research is that tone and language matter (Rogers et al, 2017). Rather than using a scolding tone that creates an adversarial relationship, the messages that make a difference are those that offer compassion and partnership. These communications provide accurate, specific information about a child's attendance while explaining the importance of attendance to school and life success. They frame attendance as a shared responsibility between the school and the family and include information about available resources and support services. This positive communication goes beyond the tone of the “nudge” letters and needs to be reflected in the text, email, and phone communication with the family from attendance staff, teachers, and administration, which may require staff training. The power of positive communication extends beyond attendance improvements to encompass broader goals of family engagement and community building. For more information, see: <https://www.attendanceworks.org/resources/welcome-students-to-school/>.

2. Lack of Belonging and Safety in School

School safety and belonging serve as fundamental predictors of student attendance. Chronic absence decreases significantly in schools where educators create and maintain a safe, supportive, culturally responsive, and engaging environments (American Institutes for Research, 2024; Germain et al., 2024; Cipriano et al. 2023). A strong sense of school belonging correlates with increased student motivation, reduced absenteeism, and improved academic achievement (Korper-

shoek et al., 2020).

When students perceive their school environment as unsafe—whether physically, emotionally, or socially—their sense of belonging is severely compromised, leading directly to attendance problems. This is particularly pronounced for vulnerable student populations. School culture and climate create profound impacts on attendance (Daily et al., 2020; Hendron & Kearney, 2016). Students who perceive the school as unsafe and experience bullying, harassment, and embarrassment often refuse to attend (Balfanz and Byrnes, 2012).

The relationship between safety and mental health further compounds attendance issues. Significant associations exist between mental health difficulties and a sense of safety at school (Panorama Education, 2024). When students feel unsafe, this negatively impacts their mental health, attendance, tardiness rates, and academic performance. Conversely, when students feel they belong, they show up. By creating environments where students feel safe, valued, and connected, schools can tap into intrinsic motivation that draws students to school rather than pushing them away.

Strong teacher-student relationships represent an essential element in creating safety and belonging. The research confirms that teacher support serves as one of the strongest predictors of school belonging and student engagement (Allen et al., 2018; Vargas-Madriz et al., 2024; Nix et al., 2022). John Hattie's Visible Learning research affirms the finding that teacher-student relationships, school climate, and sense of belonging all meaningfully contribute to accelerating academic success (Hattie, 2009).

Evidence-Based Solutions

Check and Connect Strategies: Check & Connect is an intervention model in which teachers and other school staff or trained mentors engage marginalized students and keep them on track (Check & Connect Student Engagement Intervention Model, n.d.). At its core lies a trusting relationship between the student

and a caring adult who both advocates for and supports the student (Attendance Works, 2024).

A caring adult “checks” a student’s attendance, grades, and behavior while supporting the student’s engagement with the goal of increasing the student’s connection with school. The documented outcomes have been include increased attendance, school persistence, credit accrual, and school completion rates; and decreased truancy, tardies, behavioral referrals, and dropout rates. For more information, see <https://checkandconnect.umn.edu/>.

Social-Emotional Learning: One of the most significant supports for creating a positive and safe environment in which students experience a sense of belonging is social-emotional learning (SEL). The goal of social-emotional learning is to ensure that every student, regardless of cultural, racial or socio-economic differences, develops a sense of personal belonging, safety, and respect that promotes learning. In general, SEL programs focus on teaching skills in self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making. However, effective SEL programs also enhance strong teacher-student relationships.

In addition to helping students develop social and emotional skills, SEL efforts can contribute to a school climate where all students and adults feel respected, supported, and engaged (CASEL, 2023; Cipriano et al., 2023; Cipriano et al., 2024). Research shows that numerous SEL programs have positive impacts on students social, emotional, and academic development, particularly programs that focus on creating caring and inclusive classroom environments (Berman, 2023). Creating community through such strategies as morning meetings, class meetings, and closing meetings profoundly impacts student sense of belonging as well as their academic performance. For more information see www.casel.org.

Home Visits: Home visits by teachers and school staff focus on building trust with families, removing attendance barriers, and re-engaging students in school (Learning Policy Institute, 2025). This approach recog-

nizes that many barriers to effective school-family communication can be addressed by creating opportunities for more authentic and culturally responsive relationships. Home visits, structured around positive and asset-based interactions, are effective because they build trusting relationships with families, provide teachers with direct insights into the family's circumstances, respect the family's cultural background, and establish ongoing communication with the family. They have the potential of identifying and addressing barriers to attendance. Families increased confidence that they can communicate about their students' needs with the school leads to more proactive communication when attendance challenges arise.

Research on the Parent Teacher Home Visits (PTHV) program demonstrates the positive impact of teacher home visits on school attendance and student academic performance (Sheldon & Jung, 2015; Sheldon & Jung, 2018). The Sheldon and Jung 2018 study found that students whose families participated in teacher home visits as part of the PTHV model were 21 percent less likely to be chronically absent, compared with students whose families did not participate. Students attending schools where teachers visited 10 percent or more families had 22 percent lower odds of being chronically absent. Home visits are most effective when implemented as part of comprehensive family engagement strategies and at sufficient scale to influence school culture and climate. Information on the model can be found at <https://pthvp.org/>.

3. Feelings of Academic Failure

Academic difficulties contribute significantly to chronic absenteeism as students disengage from learning environments where they experience failure (Gottfried, 2010; Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Schanfield et al., 2019). Repeated failure makes attendance less rewarding and more anxiety provoking, which can lead to chronic absenteeism and eventually to school dropout. When students consistently struggle academically without appropriate support, attendance becomes increasingly irregular as they attempt to escape feelings of inadequacy

and frustration (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2022). The relationship between academic performance and attendance creates a negative cycle, as chronic absenteeism further compromises learning and students' connections with their peers and caring adults.

The impact begins early in students' academic careers. Research suggests that children who are chronically absent between preschool and second grade are much more likely to have lower reading and math achievement, with effects persisting into middle school (Chang & Romero, 2008; Morrissey et al., 2014). This relationship is particularly pronounced among students from disadvantaged backgrounds (Ready, 2010).

Evidence-Based Solutions

Universal Design for Learning (UDL): Just as universal design revolutionized architectural design by providing accessibility to individuals with disabilities as well as the general public, universal design for learning (UDL) has revolutionized curricular design and instructional planning by providing the academic curb cuts and other pathways that facilitate access to core concepts and skills development by all students. UDL's core concept recognizes that inadequate mastery often results not from the learner's disability but from a text- and print-dominated curriculum that fails to support learners' diversity (Berman, 2015). UDL's principles were first articulated in the 1990's by a Massachusetts non-profit known as CAST (www.cast.org), which today serves as the national center for UDL policy, research and professional development.

Central to UDL's effectiveness is a proactive approach to designing curriculum and instruction to include flexible options that address the natural and predictable variability among students and the learning barriers they encounter. UDL offers all students access to the curriculum by accommodating three dimensions of variability: How students understand information, how they engage in learning, and how they express their learning. To address the variability among students, the UDL framework (Meyer et al., 2024; CAST, n.d.a.)

focuses on multiple means of representation, engagement, and expression. Because these dimensions are predictable, teachers can plan for them in advance and provide students with multiple ways to encounter new knowledge, participate in the learning experience, and demonstrate their understanding and growth (Berman, 2015).

UDL reframes the thinking about diversity in the classroom and enables teachers and schools to effectively reach and engage a far broader range of learners. Meta-analyses of UDL research in school settings provide strong evidence for UDL's effectiveness in improving academic engagement and achievement for a wide range of students, particularly students with disabilities (King-Sears et al., 2023; CAST, n.d.b.). UDL helps prevent academic failure by ensuring instruction is accessible to diverse learning needs. UDL directly addresses engagement challenges that contribute to both academic failure and attendance problems. For more information, see: www.cast.org.

Mentoring Programs: Mentoring involves structured and trusting relationships between young people and caring adults who offer guidance, support, and encouragement to assist with school and life success. Quality mentoring programs provide personalized support for struggling students through well-structured training, progress monitoring, and case management. Mentors can recognize barriers to attendance and help address them with parents or guardians and school personnel. Examples of mentoring programs include Check & Connect, My Brother's Keeper, City Year, Peer Group Connection, and Big Brothers/Big Sisters. Quality mentoring can have a significant impact on improving school attendance and student success (Bruce & Bridgeland, 2014; Attendance Works, 2024; Lyons & Chan, 2021; Jekielek et al., 2002).

However, the effectiveness of mentoring for attendance depends heavily on implementation quality and program features (Bruce & Bridgeland, 2014). Mentoring can be an effective intervention for addressing absenteeism, particularly when implemented with sufficient intensity, duration, and fidelity. For more information,

see: <https://www.mentoring.org/>.

There is an effective approach to mentoring that every adult in a school could utilize. David Yeager's research on engagement in learning for young people between the ages of 10 and 25 reframes the concept of mentoring as an approach that is available to every educator. Noting the young people are particularly sensitive to issues of status and respect, he found that when instructors take a "mentor mindset" approach, students are more responsive, engaged, and successful. This approach involves setting high expectations and providing a high level of support in helping individuals achieve those expectations. Jon Saphier encourages teachers to use a similar approach by expressing three messages to students: 1) This work is important; 2) I have confidence that you can do it; and 3) I won't give up on you (Saphier et al., 2025). Yeager's research demonstrates that adopting this approach can significantly reduce behavior problems among young people, such as school dropout, unhealthy eating, stress, purposelessness, and mental health issues, all of which impact attendance (Yeager, 2024).

Targeted Academic Interventions: Addressing attendance is most successful when using a multi-tiered approach (Attendance Works, 2024, January). Much like Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) used by schools to support academic, social, and behavioral supports for students, Attendance Works outlines three tiers of support for attendance. Tier 1 involves universal prevention strategies that create positive conditions for learning for all students. This includes providing a safe and supportive environment, engaging instruction, and positive family-school relationships. Tier 2 interventions are designed to remove barriers to attendance for students at greater risk of chronic absenteeism by providing personalized attention and support. In Tier 2, teachers provide targeted academic interventions to assist students who are struggling and address learning gaps before they lead to disengagement (Institute of Education Sciences, n.d.). Tier 3 involves intensive supports to students who are chronically absent. This entails case management customized to the individual student with services such as home visits, mentoring,

and involvement of community agencies to address issues related to health, housing and social services. (Attendance Works, 2024 January).

Attendance Works advocates for including attendance as one element integrated into a school's MTSS programming, with data on attendance included in MTSS data team meetings. For more information, see: <https://www.attendanceworks.org/chronic-absence/addressing-chronic-absence/3-tiers-of-intervention/>.

4. Lack of Academic Engagement and Challenge

While research in this area remains limited, studies indicate that disengagement and underachievement among academically talented students due to lack of challenge impact student attendance (Davidson & Davidson, 2007; Gallagher et al., 1997). Students report that disengagement results from the slow pace of instruction, excessive repetition of already mastered information, inability to advance after mastering the regular curriculum, few opportunities to study topics of interest, and an emphasis on fact mastery rather than thinking skills (Gallagher et al., 1997). The evidence suggests that boredom and lack of appropriate challenge contribute to a pattern of school disengagement that includes attendance problems.

A RAND Corporation study found that approximately one-quarter of students did not consider chronically absence problematic (Diliberti et al, 2025). These students reported feeling disinterested in what content they missed in the classroom and believed they could easily keep up from home. In essence, these students may not perceive the classroom experience as sufficiently engaging or valuable.

Evidence-Based Solutions

Authentic and Personalized Instruction: Authentic learning connects classroom instruction to real-world contexts, problems, and applications, making

learning meaningful and relevant to students' lives. Examples include project-based learning, place-based education, service learning, and internships and work-based learning. By connecting learning to genuine problems and real-world applications, authentic learning enhances engagement, improves attendance, and develops the skills, knowledge, and dispositions needed for success.

Personalized learning tailors instruction, content, pace, and learning experiences to meet individual student needs, interests, abilities, and goals (Walkington & Bernacki, 2020). It can involve the use of learner profiles, personal learning pathways, competency-based progress monitoring, and flexible learning environments, allowing learning to be personally relevant, engaging, and appropriate to the learners' interests and capabilities (Shemshack et al., 2021). As a result, it can enhance student engagement, motivation, and achievement. Personalized learning is a fundamental shift from traditional approaches to learner-centered approaches that recognize and respond to individual differences (Pane et al., 2017).

Both authentic and personalized learning promote engagement by making instruction relevant and interesting to the learner (Kong, 2021). For more information on authentic learning, see the Experiential Learning Depot: <https://www.experientiallearningdepot.com/>

Learning Engagement Strategies: Learning engagement strategies actively involve students in the educational process, making learning more meaningful, interactive, and engaging. They emphasize active learning that often involves collaboration with other students around questions and problems that encourage critical and creative thinking. These strategies range from group projects to hands-on experiments to simulations to technology-enhanced experiences, with teachers serving as facilitators rather than directors.

Learning engagement strategies improve student performance (Freeman et al., 2014) while also having a direct impact on attendance (Sahito et al., 2025) and on student well-being (Wong et al., 2024). When students participate more actively in class activities, they attend

class more frequently.

Extracurricular Activities: Students participating in expanded learning and extracurricular programs have better attendance. After-school programs create opportunities to connect students to peers, adults, and engaging activities, thereby fostering connection and belonging. Studies of the impact of extracurricular activities have found that students who participated in extracurricular activities have a higher school attendance rate, a greater sense of belonging to school, and stronger academic performance than non-participants (Dick, 2010; Feldman & Matjasko, 2005; O'Donnell, 2024; NCES, 1995).

Participation in extracurricular activities serves as a protective factor that enhances school engagement, fosters positive peer relationships, and ultimately supports regular school attendance among students across various demographic groups and educational settings. Schools that provide a wide range of extracurricular activities are better able to engage students and build community.

Using Attendance Data and Attendance Teams to Improve Attendance

The strategic use of attendance data and school-based and district attendance teams has proven effective for improving student attendance. Data-driven approaches and collaborative teams serve as an early warning system to identify students whose pattern of attendance could lead to chronic absence. Based on that information, the attendance teams can develop and implement targeted interventions and supports. Studies funded by the Institute of Education Sciences demonstrate that using data and data teams as early warning systems can help schools improve attendance (IES, n.d.; Falconer, 2025). Early absenteeism patterns serve as strong predictors of chronic absence.

Effective implementation requires districts develop data systems that provide just-in-time attendance re-

ports to school data teams on the attendance of their students. When integrated with MTSS processes, the multiple indicators of attendance, behavior, and academic performance create comprehensive pictures of student risk and enable differentiated interventions based on student needs.

It is also important for districts to convene a multi-departmental attendance team that aligns resources across departments to support attendance initiatives. Attendance isn't the responsibility of any single department, but the collective responsibility of all departments. Multi-departmental teams better enable partnerships with community organizations and access to social services supporting students and their families.

Central to successful data-driven attendance initiatives are collaborative school-based teams that meet regularly to analyze attendance data and coordinate intervention efforts. These teams facilitate cross-disciplinary collaboration at a school level, bringing together teachers, administrators, counselors, and support staff to develop comprehensive intervention plans while ensuring that data-driven insights translate into actionable interventions. In addition, the teams can look beyond the attendance issues of particular students to cultural and systemic issues in the school's environment that may be contributing to attendance problems.

A critical component of the attendance-team process involves listening to students for their perspectives on what encourages school attendance and what barriers prevent them from consistent attendance. Each attendance case differs, and while differentiated interventions may support particular students by addressing the underlying reasons for absence, changes in teacher approaches to students and in school climate, culture, and norms can improve attendance for a broad range of students.

The tendency among school staff is often to view the student as possessing the attendance problem and then attempt to fix the student, when the school environment or the nature of adult-student relationships that may contribute to attendance issues. Therefore, in addition to examining the attendance pattern of

particular students, effective attendance teams assess what universal supports, changes in adult-student relationships, and adjustments in school culture could positively impact attendance. As discussed previously, there is a strong relationship between school culture and attendance and a welcoming, supportive learning environment improves attendance in general (Daily et al., 2020). When students feel connected to their school community and find learning engaging and relevant, they are more likely to attend regularly regardless of external barriers they may face.

Additionally, data systems must be designed to promote equity rather than perpetuate existing disparities. This requires careful attention to how data is collected, analyzed, and acted upon, with a focus on ensuring that interventions are culturally responsive and address the needs of different student populations. When implemented with equity in mind, systematic, data-driven approaches supported by collaborative teams can make a meaningful difference in improving attendance.

Conclusion: Shifting from Compliance to Invitation

The research supports a fundamental shift from compliance-based attendance enforcement to invitational approaches that address root causes. This means moving away from punitive approaches toward invitational strategies that build relationships, address barriers, and create engaging learning environments.

By implementing comprehensive interventions targeting family health and economic circumstances, school belonging and safety, academic support, and student engagement, schools can significantly reduce chronic absenteeism and improve outcomes for all students. Building trusting relationships with students and families and partnering with them to problem-solve attendance barriers works.

Success requires sustained commitment from educators, families, and communities working together to ensure every student receives the support needed to attend school regularly and thrive academically. As belonging, connection, and support represent crucial elements for positive learning conditions, addressing chronic absence creates opportunities to strengthen the entire educational system.

Two valuable online resources on improving attendance:

AIR Attendance Lab: <https://www.air.org/resource/spotlight/how-tackle-chronic-absenteeism-resources-policymakers-educators-and-researchers>

Attendance Works: <https://www.attendance-works.org/>

Chapter Two

Attendance Improvement Strategies: Evidence from Oregon School Districts

No district can implement all the evidence-based solutions discussed in the previous chapter. Each of the eleven districts whose experiences inform this chapter prioritized strategies they felt would most effectively and efficiently advance their attendance efforts. Due to the challenging economic circumstance facing school districts in Oregon, none of the districts had the resources to invest in additional staffing of nurses, social workers, family liaisons or mentors, although some strategically realigned existing personnel to support attendance teams and district-wide initiatives. During the 2024-25 school year, these eleven districts focused on one or more of twelve strategies. The analysis of the strategies they used reveals both common approaches and innovative adaptations tailored to local contexts and student populations.

These eleven districts—ranging from very small rural communities with 37 students to Oregon’s second-largest district serving nearly 37,000—demonstrate that

meaningful attendance improvement is possible even within significant resource limitations. Their diversity extends beyond enrollment numbers to encompass varying levels of student poverty, cultural backgrounds, and racial demographics. Below is a table identifying the eleven districts, their enrollment, the percent of regular attenders, and the changes in regular attendees from 2022-23 to 2023-24.

The twelve primary strategies represent different pathways toward the fundamental goal of creating schools where students want to be present. Their experiences illuminate both the promise and the complexity of attendance improvement, revealing that sustainable change requires more than program implementation—it demands systemic transformation rooted in authentic relationships and shared responsibility.

District	Students Included 2022-23	Students Included 2023-24	Percent regular attenders 2022-23	Percent regular attenders 2023-24	Change from 2022-23 to 2023-24
Banks SD 13	1,042	1,061	62.3	68.4	6.1
Beaverton SD 48J	37,044	36,729	66.9	71.7	4.8
Burnt River SD 30J	24	37	66.7	64.9	-1.8
Gladstone SD 115	1,597	1,509	64.7	71.0	6.3
Gresham-Barlow SD 10J	10,774	10,791	55.0	59.5	4.5
Hillsboro SD 1J	18,077	17,945	64.6	69.6	5.0
Lincoln County SD	4,897	4,740	55.0	59.3	4.3
Phoenix-Talent SD 4	2,131	2,134	66.3	65.1	-1.2
Silver Falls SD 4J	3,588	3,620	65.7	71.8	6.1
Umatilla SD 6R	1,337	1,354	61.6	65.8	4.2
Winston-Dillard SD 116	1,220	1,164	57.0	67.6	10.6
State	525,208	522,029	61.9	65.7	3.8

Strategy 1: Data Teams and Monitoring Systems

The foundation of effective attendance improvement lies in the systematic collection, analysis, and response to attendance information. All the districts convened attendance data teams and upgraded their attendance monitoring and reporting systems. Attendance data teams and monitoring systems enable schools to identify attendance problems early and respond with targeted interventions before patterns become entrenched.

This strategy moves beyond traditional approaches of reviewing attendance data periodically or at the end of grading periods, instead creating systems for continuous, just-in-time monitoring that enable proactive rather than reactive responses. These systems typically involve dashboard technologies for data analysis and visualization, structured team processes for regular data review, protocols for translating data insights into specific interventions, and mechanisms for monitoring the effectiveness of implemented strategies.

The data strategy encompasses multiple components: establishment of early warning systems that flag students showing concerning attendance patterns, creation of data dashboards that make attendance information easily accessible to relevant staff, formation of dedicated teams responsible for regular data review and intervention planning, development of protocols for responding to different types of attendance concerns, and implementation of systems for tracking intervention effectiveness over time. These approaches recognize that effective attendance improvement requires identifying which students need support, determining what interventions will prove most effective, and adjusting strategies based on results. The strategy emphasizes the importance of making data accessible and actionable for school staff, transforming raw attendance information into insights that can guide daily practice and intervention decisions.

For example, the **Gladstone School District** developed a data dashboard to provide early warning of students' attendance problems. The district convened data teams

at each school that meet every two weeks and a district team that meets monthly. The teams focus on understanding the underlying reasons students miss school and then personally connecting with those students and their parents to provide support.

The **Hillsboro School District** created a particularly sophisticated data monitoring and reporting system that aggregates and provides current attendance data to school-based teams. Beyond displaying year-to-date attendance rates, the system provides growth indicators over time and enables teams to monitor individual interventions. The dynamic monitoring capabilities facilitate just-in-time interventions as well as celebrations of individual student progress—recognizing that positive reinforcement matters as much as problem identification.

The **Umatilla School District** organizes teams by grade levels with each grade from kindergarten through 8th grade having a data team that meets monthly. The teams focus on students' attendance, behavior, and academics and determine appropriate interventions to support student success. To support the teams, the district provides attendance information to each data team through Power School.

The **Beaverton School District** makes systematic use of data for attendance improvement through multiple approaches. The district's behavioral health and wellness teams, composed of counselors, administration, teachers, and other school-wide staff who support students, look at attendance as one data point in their assessment of what is happening for the student. These teams use data to identify students in need and work collaboratively to provide wraparound support where it is necessary. Additionally, the teams focus on trend data for various demographic groups and grade levels and tailor their efforts to support improvement among those groups. The district created comprehensive public accountability through a comprehensive data dashboard that makes attendance information available on its website to parents, staff, and the public to ensure this remains a clear focus for all. This transparency ensures that attendance data is not just collected internally but becomes a tool for communi-

ty-wide accountability and engagement in attendance improvement efforts.

Strategy 2: MTSS (Multi-Tiered Systems of Support) Integration

Many of the districts advanced beyond basic data teams by integrating attendance data into their Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) process. MTSS integration represents the systematic incorporation of attendance data and interventions into existing systems of support, creating comprehensive frameworks for identifying, monitoring, and supporting students with attendance challenges. This strategy recognizes that attendance problems are often interconnected with academic, behavioral, social, and emotional challenges, requiring coordinated, holistic responses rather than isolated interventions. MTSS frameworks provide structured approaches to delivering increasingly intensive supports based on student needs, typically organized into three tiers: universal supports for all students, targeted interventions for students showing early signs of difficulty, and intensive individualized supports for students with significant challenges.

In the context of attendance, MTSS integration involves incorporating attendance data into regular team meetings and decision-making processes, developing protocols for escalating interventions based on attendance patterns, creating systems for monitoring intervention effectiveness, and ensuring that attendance supports coordinate with academic and behavioral interventions. The approach emphasizes data-driven decision making, regular progress monitoring, and systematic approaches to identifying students who need support before attendance problems become severe. MTSS integration also involves building school capacity for intervention delivery, establishing clear roles and responsibilities for team members, and creating sustainable systems that can function consistently over time. This approach transforms attendance from a compliance issue handled by individual staff members into a systematic school priority addressed through coordinated team efforts.

For example, the **Lincoln County School District** brought attendance data into the MTSS process so that school teams could review academic, behavioral, and attendance data as a holistic picture of whether a student was at risk and what interventions may be appropriate. They established clear tier criteria: 90% and above attendance for Tier 1 strategies, 80% to 89.9% for Tier 2, and below 80% for Tier 3. This systematic approach enables teams to provide differentiated support based on student needs while maintaining consistency across schools. The district refined its data management to provide monthly information on individual, grade, and school attendance trends, supporting the MTSS process with actionable information.

The **Phoenix-Talent School District** utilizes intensive individual tracking within their MTSS team data review. When teams identify students needing support, interventions are designed specifically for each student with team members monitoring daily progress.

The **Silver Falls School District** views MTSS integration as expanding their intervention capacity. MTSS teams at each school have a greater capacity to provide the diagnostic analysis of issues and barriers facing students and to design interventions to better support students.

The **Gresham-Barlow School District** emphasizes that the inclusion of attendance data in the MTSS process is a central element in bringing consistency across MTSS teams. In doing so, it has created a collective consciousness about the importance of attendance among all staff members, transforming it from an individual concern into a shared organizational priority.

Strategy 3: Positive Communication Strategies

The transformation of family communication represents one of the most critical shifts these districts undertook, shifting from traditional compliance-focused, punitive messaging to relationship-building, supportive communication that treats families as partners in

addressing attendance challenges. This strategy recognizes that traditional attendance communication—warning letters, truancy citations, and deficit-focused messaging—often damages relationships between schools and families, creating adversarial dynamics that worsen attendance problems. Positive communication approaches emphasize empathy, understanding, support, and collaborative problem-solving, fundamentally reframing the school-family relationship around shared goals rather than competing interests.

The strategy encompasses multiple communication elements: rewriting standard attendance letters and phone scripts to eliminate punitive language and emphasize support; training all staff members who interact with families in empathetic communication techniques; developing protocols for check-in conversations that focus on understanding barriers rather than enforcing compliance; implementing strengths-based messaging that celebrates attendance successes rather than highlighting failures; and creating systematic approaches to building trust and partnership with families. The communication transformation often includes changing the fundamental tone from “your child is in trouble” to “we miss your child and want to help,” shifting focus from consequences to support, and ensuring that every interaction communicates care and value for the student and family. This strategy recognizes that effective attendance improvement requires authentic partnerships with families built on mutual respect and shared goals for student success.

For example, the **Winston-Dillard School District** developed detailed guidance for staff conducting check-ins with students who have been absent. Their messaging emphasizes empathy and relationship building between teacher, counselor or child development specialist and the family. Their attendance handbook frames attendance as a collaboration between parents and the school with the school ready to assist in supporting students. They believe communication tone directly impacts family engagement and student outcomes.

The **Gresham-Barlow School District** reframed the

language of the letters and calls home from a deficit-based to a strengths-based approach. In the past, letters home emphasized student absence; now, district communications focus on how often students attend school, while highlighting the academic, social, and mental health benefits of increased engagement.

The **Lincoln County School District** adopted the simple but powerful message “We miss you” as their essential communication strategy. This phrase embodies their fundamental shift from punitive language that could be interpreted as threatening toward welcoming messages that promote belonging. In alignment with that message, the district revised letters and phone scripts to reflect this approach, demonstrating that small changes in language can create significant improvements in relationships.

Strategy 4: Community-Wide Campaigns

Several districts have taken their communications efforts out to the entire community. Community-wide campaigns represent comprehensive efforts to engage entire communities in supporting student attendance, recognizing that attendance challenges often reflect broader social and community issues that extend beyond what schools can address independently. These campaigns operate on the premise that when entire communities value and support attendance, students and families receive consistent messages about the importance of attendance from multiple sources, creating cultural norms that reinforce regular school participation. This is particularly important given the attitudes that have emerged after COVID, where attendance did not appear to be vital to student success.

Community campaigns typically involve partnerships with local businesses, civic organizations, religious institutions, community groups, and informal community leaders to create unified messaging and coordinated support for attendance improvement. The strategy encompasses multiple community engagement elements: development of consistent messaging and branding that

can be used across community settings; engagement of local businesses to display attendance promotional materials and potentially offer incentives; partnership with civic organizations and community groups to reinforce attendance messages; coordination with media outlets to highlight attendance successes and community support; creation of visible community symbols (such as yard signs, banners, and promotional materials) that demonstrate community-wide commitment to attendance; and development of community-based recognition programs that celebrate attendance achievements. Community campaigns recognize that students and families exist within broader community contexts that either support or undermine school attendance, and that effective attendance improvement often requires addressing community-level attitudes and beliefs about attendance and the importance of education. These approaches aim to create community cultures where school attendance is universally valued and supported.

The **Gladstone School District** exemplifies this comprehensive community approach. Based on the belief that attendance represents larger social problems involving the entire community, the Gladstone School District launched a ‘Gladstone Shows Up’ community campaign. The district engaged community businesses, civic leaders, houses of worship, community organizations, out-of-school time providers, and recreational organizations in joining the school district in delivering a message to students and families about the importance of attendance. The campaign delivered their message through yard signs, store window posters, t-shirts, and banners. The district wanted the message that showing up at school is important to student success permeating the community.

The **Lincoln County School District** developed their own branded community-wide campaign with the theme of “Lincoln County Shows Up: Presence Empowers Progress.” The campaign featured graphics, promotional items (t-shirts, cups, etc.), and incentives to engage parents and the community around the importance of attendance.

The **Phoenix-Talent School District** engaged in a

community outreach campaign to highlight the importance of attendance with window signs and banners at local businesses and community organizations. Some businesses and community organizations offer attendance incentives as part of the campaign. In addition, the district engaged students in community service projects in the community to help them feel they belong while building supportive relationships with community members. These experiences give students a greater sense of meaning and purpose, while encouraging them to attend school.

Strategy 5: Integrating Attendance into District Strategic Plans

Recognizing that sustainable attendance improvement requires organizational commitment, several districts integrated attendance goals into their strategic plan. This approach positions attendance as an essential organizational priority rather than a peripheral concern. This strategy moves beyond treating attendance as an issue handled by individual schools or departments, instead setting it as essential to achieving the district’s fundamental educational mission. Strategic integration creates organizational accountability structures that ensure sustained focus and resource allocation for attendance improvement efforts across multiple years and leadership changes.

Strategic integration encompasses multiple components: positioning attendance as essential to broader educational goals such as belonging, safety, and achievement; establishing specific, measurable attendance targets at the district level; creating accountability systems that make attendance a metric for evaluating overall district success; connecting attendance outcomes to fundamental educational outcomes; and embedding attendance improvement in resource allocation decisions and professional development priorities. This strategy recognizes that attendance improvement requires more than program implementation—it

requires organizational commitment that influences all aspects of district operations, from hiring and training to curriculum and culture development.

Integration in the district's strategic plan involves aligning attendance goals with district messaging and communication, ensuring that families, staff, and community members understand attendance as central to the district's vision. This approach creates conditions for systematic implementation by establishing clear expectations, providing necessary resources, and maintaining focus across multiple school years.

The **Beaverton School District** made attendance central to their strategic plan with the motto “Belong. Believe. Achieve.” Their first strategic goal, entitled “safe and thriving,” explicitly positioned attendance as fundamental to student belonging, stating that “to belong, students need to be here.” The district embedded attendance measurement throughout their strategic framework, establishing goals for improvement in the percent of regular attenders for each demographic group and each grade level as the primary metric for measuring success. The strategic plan went beyond overall improvement to explicitly target equity, with the goal being “not just to improve overall attendance but to also close the gap between groups.” To emphasize the strategic importance of attendance, the district embedded a direct link to their attendance webpage within the superintendent's opening message to parents, making attendance central to district communications and family and community engagement.

The **Hillsboro School District** embedded attendance as Goal 2 of their comprehensive strategic plan launched in 2023, focusing on “safe and supported learners.” Within this framework, the district established a specific, measurable performance target: “by 2026-27 school year, 80% of students will attend more than 90% of their enrolled school days.” To support this strategic commitment, Hillsboro developed a comprehensive five-initiative action plan specifically designed to address attendance systematically, including building collective efficacy, family engagement, attendance teams, targeted interventions, and communication

systems. The strategic plan positioned attendance improvement as central to the district's overall educational vision.

The **Phoenix-Talent School District** created building-level accountability within a coordinated district framework by requiring every school to set attendance goals and identify specific tier-one and tier-two strategies to achieve that goal. This approach ensured that attendance improvement becomes embedded in each school's improvement planning process while maintaining district-level coordination and support. The superintendent positioned this as a district-wide strategic priority where the entire district is working together to reduce chronic absenteeism.

The **Banks School District** positioned attendance strategically through their collaboration with Studer Education in developing their “happy and proud” student motto. Within their strategic planning process, the district identified attendance as an important metric of students' sense of feeling happy and proud and a clear sign of whether students feel a sense of belonging in their classrooms and school. This strategic positioning connected attendance to their broader vision of student well-being, with the district believing that when students feel a sense of belonging, they will show up at school. The strategic framework made attendance both an indicator of success and an outcome of their comprehensive approach to student engagement and belonging.

Strategy 6: Strengthening Teacher-Student Relationships

Beyond the organizational strategies of data teams, reframing communication, community campaigns, and strategic planning, all districts understood that attendance improvement depends on personal connection between school staff and students. Strengthening teacher-student relationships involves systematic efforts to build positive, caring connections that address attendance as a symptom of disconnection rather than

a compliance problem. This relationship-centered approach creates environments where students feel connected to caring adults and want to attend rather than feel compelled to attend.

The strategy encompasses multiple components: systematic approaches ensuring every student has meaningful connections with school adults; training staff to understand and address student needs with empathy and cultural responsiveness; implementation of specific relationship-building practices and interventions; transformation of communication approaches from punitive to supportive; and creation of school cultures that prioritize knowing and valuing each student as an individual. The relationship-centered approach requires both individual staff development and systematic organizational changes that supports and sustains positive interactions between adults and students.

Relationship building also involves understanding and addressing barriers that prevent positive connections, including cultural misunderstandings, implicit bias, and structural factors that limit opportunities for meaningful interaction. Effective implementation requires training, time, and organizational support that enables staff to develop the skills and capacity necessary for building authentic relationships with diverse student populations.

The **Winston-Dillard School District** emphasized understanding and compassion in all staff interactions with students and families, focusing on understanding the reasons for the student's absence and what the student is going through in and out of school. The superintendent's message to staff—"You are the strategy—recognizes that positive and supportive staff relationships with students is the key to students wanting to be present at school. In cases of poor attendance, staff were trained to avoid speculating about the student's or family's situation or bring personal biases to the conversation, but to find out what the reason is that the student is not attending. Positioning every staff interaction as an opportunity to strengthen relationships and support student success, the district emphasized that the focus is on what adults can do to help students

feel safe and welcome when they come to school.

The **Umatilla School District** made relationship building central to their attendance improvement efforts, implementing comprehensive relationship audits where faculty were asked whether they knew each student, had spoken to the student's parents, and understood the student's story. When gaps were identified, faculty planned specific strategies to better connect with students. They implemented a "2x10" intervention for relationship development, which involves a faculty member connecting with an identified student for at least two minutes for ten days. The conversations are simply focused on developing a relationship rather than discussing specific academic or attendance issues. The district created a collective shift in staff mindset around attendance, where each faculty member became deeply invested in improving both student and parent connections. This collective approach was supported through systematic professional development.

The **Banks School District** took a distinctive approach by prioritizing student voice in relationship building, conducting individual interviews and focus groups about attendance with students and organizing pizza lunches with the ten percent of students with the lowest attendance. This inquiry process genuinely listened to their reasons for attending and not attending while seeking student recommendations for how the district could improve attendance. Student feedback revealed that relationships with teachers and peers matter and that students didn't feel engaged in the academic work or in learning. Based on these insights, the district focused professional development on helping teachers build stronger relationships with students and more engaging instruction.

The **Burnt River School District** leveraged their small size (65 students) to create highly personalized relationship-building approaches. The superintendent took an active role in meeting and speaking with families on a regular basis to build trust and get at the root causes of attendance issues. At monthly faculty meetings, teachers discussed the attendance of individual students, how they could intervene when attendance is a prob-

lem, and how they could better pursue collaborative relationship-building approaches. The district found that providing engaging instruction through project-based learning is its own incentive for coming to school and for strengthening teacher-student relationships.

Strategy 7: Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Implementation

Taking one more step to enhance a sense of belonging and connection, social-emotional learning emerged as the most widespread strategy, implemented by almost all of the eleven districts. SEL programs represent comprehensive approaches to developing students' emotional intelligence, social skills, and sense of belonging within the school community. These initiatives operate on the premise that students who feel emotionally connected to their school environment, understand their own emotions, and possess strong social skills are more likely to attend school regularly. SEL strategies encompass structured programming (such as specific curricula), daily practices (like morning meetings and community circles), character development initiatives, and systematic efforts to create caring, supportive school cultures.

The strategy recognizes that attendance is fundamentally connected to students' emotional and social well-being. When students feel safe, valued, and emotionally supported at school, they develop intrinsic motivation to be present. SEL programs address attendance barriers by building resilience, teaching coping strategies, fostering positive relationships, and creating school environments where students want to be present. These programs typically include explicit instruction in emotional regulation, relationship building, responsible decision-making, and self-awareness, while simultaneously creating school cultures and a sense of community that consistently reinforce these skills through daily practices and interactions.

Both the **Lincoln County School District** and the **Silver Fall School District** have adopted the Caring School Community social-emotional learning program

at the elementary level, which focuses on building caring classroom and school communities that foster belonging among students. The program builds positive relationships and a strong sense of community among students through such strategies as morning meetings, class meetings, and lessons in social skill development. At the secondary level, Lincoln County has reinvested in the Character Strong program to support student's social and emotional needs.

The **Burnt River School District** implemented a character traits approach with traits such as perseverance, honesty, etc., featured monthly alongside social-emotional learning programming. At the elementary level, teachers use morning meetings to build community in classrooms in order to create environments where students feel known and cared about.

The **Hillsboro School District** has systematically integrated SEL across the district as a significant element in the providing universal supports. In fact, SEL has been integrated with the district's equity efforts for the past three years to build a sense of community and belonging among the diversity of cultures and backgrounds represented in the student body. Elementary teachers use morning meetings built into schools' schedules to create community and belonging in their classrooms. In addition, teachers use the community building elements of the Harmony program, such as buddy systems, partner sharing, and other interactive activities, to support connections among students. Character Strong is used at the middle and high schools during advisory time. The district's efforts align with the state's approach to transformative social-emotional learning and present a key vehicle for building collective efficacy across the district in support of attendance.

The **Banks School District** took a unique approach to launching SEL by focusing on adult competencies first. Instead of implementing a program for students, the district worked with adults on the meaning of transformative SEL and adults own social-emotional competencies. In 2024-25, the district conducted monthly staff meetings where faculty, paraprofessionals and other staff met on early release days to discuss lessons

learned from a book study of *Teaching with the Heart in Mind*.

The **Phoenix-Talent School District** is implementing the Wayfinder program, which is a K-12 program that enhances students' sense of well-being and purpose. It enables teachers and administrators to build stronger relationships with students and demonstrate that students are cared about and valued as members of the school community.

Strategy 8: Professional Capacity Building to Improve Attendance

Districts in the cohort worked systemically to build staff capacity for addressing attendance issues. This strategy recognizes that effective attendance improvement requires all staff members—not just attendance clerks or administrators—understand why attendance matters and develop practical skills for building strong relationships with students and creating engaging learning environments. The approach encompasses education about the critical importance of attendance to student success, training in relationship-building strategies that help students feel known and valued, development of specific techniques for connecting with students such as personal greetings and positive communication, and instruction in student engagement practices that make learning compelling and relevant. The professional development experiences help all staff understand that everyone can play a role in improving attendance and that doing so makes teaching and learning easier and more effective.

The strategy operates on dual fronts: building foundational understanding of attendance's impact on student success while simultaneously developing daily practices that strengthen teacher-student relationships and classroom engagement. This includes professional development on the connection between attendance and academic achievement; systematic training in

relationship-building techniques such as the “2x10” strategy, greeting students personally at classroom doors, and making positive calls home; development of student engagement strategies including active learning, project-based learning, and instructional methods that shift from teacher-centered to student-centered approaches; and sustained, job-embedded learning through coaching, peer observation, video analysis, and collaborative planning. Districts implementing these strategies recognize that changing attendance outcomes requires transforming both staff understanding of attendance's importance and their daily instructional and relational practices to create learning environments where students feel valued, connected, and eager to participate.

The Winston-Dillard School District established expectations that staff understand trauma-informed and culturally responsive practices as well as how poverty may impact student participation and provided the professional development to support that understanding.

The Umatilla School District utilized the district's half-day Fridays for data teams and professional development related to attendance issues. Many of these days were used to address attendance through discussions of interventions as well as discussions of instructional strategies focused on student engagement. Instructional coaches also provide embedded professional development to faculty as they integrated engagement strategies into their instruction.

Based on the feedback from student interviews and discussion groups, the Banks School District employed a variety of strategies to address student feedback about disengagement. In addition to professional development on student engagement strategies, teachers volunteered to be videotaped and have those videos reviewed from the perspective of engagement. The effort was focused on teachers shifting from teacher talk to student talk and to students building on each other's thinking. In addition, the district involved all staff in a book study of *Teaching with the Heart in*

Mind to support their professional development in SEL.

The Hillsboro School District pursued attendance as a focus for teacher professional development by identifying instructional practices that support attendance. This centered on setting conditions for learning in the classroom that promote engagement and belonging and foster a desire to attend. In addition, engagement and belonging are monitored through a student survey as part of the district's internal accountability system.

Strategy 9: Engaging All Staff in Collective Efficacy

Engaging all staff in collective efficacy involves creating organization-wide responsibility for attendance improvement, ensuring that every staff member understands their role in supporting student attendance rather than delegating responsibility to attendance specialists or individual departments. This strategy recognizes that sustainable improvement requires systematic cultural change where attendance becomes embedded in daily operations and shared across all staff roles, from teachers and administrators to custodians and food service workers. Collective efficacy approaches create conditions where attendance improvement is sustained through leadership changes and remains consistent across all school and classroom environments.

The strategy encompasses multiple components: universal staff training and engagement in attendance improvement efforts; development of cross-departmental collaboration and shared accountability systems; creation of systematic communication and coordination processes that involve all staff roles; establishment of protocols that ensure consistent approaches across all staff interactions; and cultural transformation where attendance becomes "everyone's job." This approach builds capacity across all staff positions while providing the support, training, and systems necessary for effective implementation.

Collective efficacy also involves creating sustainable systems that function consistently over time, regardless

of changes in specific personnel. This requires developing organizational cultures and operational procedures that maintain focus on attendance improvement as an ongoing priority, ensuring that attendance support becomes embedded in the fundamental operations of schools and districts.

The **Hillsboro School District** explicitly designated collective efficacy as their primary attendance improvement strategy, emphasizing that everyone has to be engaged in attendance work to meet district goals. The district's attendance team engaged the collaboration and partnership of the leaders of other departments so that the district could leverage the efforts of all staff. This comprehensive approach involved partnerships with district and school administrators, school counselors, student services staff, student success coaches, elementary and secondary leadership teams, the family engagement team, the English language learning department, and many more. By making attendance a collective effort of everyone, the district created a culture of attendance that serves as a universal support for all students. Without collective and universal supports that involve all staff, it's difficult to provide effective interventions for chronically absent students.

The **Lincoln County School District** implemented an "all hands on deck" approach, with every school having a five percent attendance improvement target as part of their school improvement plans. The district provided professional development to all staff on promoting positive attendance improvement and shared PowerPoint presentations with all principals for faculty meeting follow up. This systematic approach became a recurring theme in each school's weekly staff meetings. The district also refined its data management and reporting systems to provide monthly data on individual, grade, and school attendance trends while revisiting with staff the attendance process and the importance of accuracy in reporting, ensuring that attendance is entered and coded correctly. Lincoln County also created training for all attendance clerks and others dealing with attendance, including a revised enrollment and attendance handbook that outlines specific procedures for reaching out to families when students are absent.

The **Winston-Dillard School District** implemented the philosophy that “you are the strategy,” emphasizing that each staff person’s approach to students impacts how students experience school and their sense of belonging to the school community. Attendance improvement was not about implementing specific programs but about how every individual staff member engaged with students and families. The district developed a comprehensive attendance handbook that outlined the specific attendance protocols for teachers, attendance monitors and secretaries, and administrators, ensuring that all staff roles had clear guidance for supporting attendance. The handbook included draft phone message and follow up letters that can be sent to parents and offered numerous proactive tier-one strategies staff can use to encourage students to attend. This served to create consistency across staff interactions. Winston-Dillard made attendance a recurring theme in weekly school staff meetings and a non-negotiable priority for every school, reinforcing the collective responsibility of everyone for attendance improvement.

The **Beaverton School District** pursued collective efficacy by embedding attendance improvement as a central element in their strategic plan and ensuring all staff roles contribute to attendance goals. Attendance improvement is a core element of every school’s improvement plan, with the strategic goal requiring improvement in the percent of regular attenders for each demographic group and each grade level rather than just overall attendance improvement. This approach ensured that attendance became embedded across all staff roles through their district-wide “Belonging Begins Here” communications campaign, where the Communications and Community Involvement Department provided communications materials to schools to individually tailored to the school’s parent population. Schools then integrated these materials into their newsletters, social media posts, and other communications. Additionally, the district created an extensive data dashboard that makes attendance information available on its website to parents, staff, and the public. This systemic approach created conditions where attendance messaging and support became consistent across all school environments and staff

interactions, transforming attendance from an individual responsibility to a shared organizational commitment that involved teachers, administrators, support staff, and community engagement specialists working together toward common attendance goals.

Strategy 10: Enhancing Family Engagement

In addition to building strong teacher-student relationship, all of the districts acknowledged the importance of improving family engagement, recognizing that sustainable attendance improvement requires authentic partnerships with families rather than schools working in isolation. Families are students’ primary influencers and effective attendance improvement must involve understanding and addressing family-level factors affecting school participation. Family circumstances such as housing instability, family health challenges, transportation issues, and responsibilities for younger siblings at home have a direct impact on attendance. Family engagement approaches must move beyond traditional parent involvement activities to address the needs of the family and create meaningful partnerships where families feel heard, valued, and empowered to support their children’s education.

This strategy typically includes multiple family engagement components: development of programs and events that bring families into the school in positive, non-threatening ways; creation of communication systems that keep families informed about their children’s attendance patterns and school support resources; implementation of family education initiatives that help parents understand the connection between attendance and academic success; establishment of collaborative problem-solving processes that involve families in developing solutions to attendance barriers; and development of support systems that help families address the underlying challenges that affect their children’s ability to attend school regularly. Family engagement requires cultural responsiveness, recognizing that different families may have varying perspectives on education, different communication preferences, and diverse chal-

lenges that affect school participation. It also requires listening to families, understanding their perspectives and constraints, and working collaboratively to develop solutions that respect family circumstances while prioritizing student educational success.

The Gladstone School District engaged families through their community-wide “Gladstone Shows Up” campaign, positioning families as central partners in a collective community effort. The district recognized that attendance is not just a school problem but rather represents larger social problems involving the entire community. This led them to engage community businesses, civic leaders, houses of worship, community organizations, out-of-school time providers, and recreational organizations in joining with the school district to deliver a message to everyone in the community about the importance of attendance. This approach transformed family engagement from individual school-parent relationships to community-wide partnership where attendance became a matter of community pride and community health rather than just a problem to be solved by the school district. The campaign created conditions where families experienced support not just from schools but from the entire community with attendance messages reinforced through yard signs, store window posters, t-shirts, and banners, making family engagement in attendance a shared community value and expectation.

The Umatilla School District made family engagement central to attendance improvement through systematic relationship building and enhanced communication. The district pursued increased communication with parents that resulted in a greater sense of connection between parents and their children’s schools and longer, problem-solving conversations so that both the parent and the school can better support the student. These communications deliberately avoided blame, shame, and threat in order to create positive relationships built on understanding and support. Schools also systematically tracked parent communication to ensure that they reached all parents. The conversations have helped parents understand how quickly absences add up and impact a student’s success. As a result, parents have become more proactive in their

children attendance.

The Gresham-Barlow School District employs eight classified employees dedicated to serving as student engagement liaisons, with two at the elementary level and one at each of the middle and high schools. These liaisons are cultural brokers who foster connection and belonging with families. The district also made a fundamental shift in its family communications, moving from a deficit-based to a strengths-based approach. Letters that previously emphasized student absence were replaced with communication that highlighted how often they are at school and emphasized the benefits of attendance. To ensure consistent positive family interactions, the district provided specific training for school secretaries in talking with families and students about attendance in positive and supportive ways, recognizing that every staff interaction contributes to family relationships. The district also implemented home visits, with kindergarten teachers visiting homes to build stronger connections with families, resulting in significant improvement in attendance in the early grades. These home visits enabled authentic relationship building and demonstrated the school’s commitment to understanding and supporting families within their own contexts. The district recognized that all the touch points with families need to be vehicles to build stronger family-school relationships.

The Hillsboro School District transformed family engagement by fundamentally changing how they communicate with families about attendance. During the 2023-24 school year, the district adjusted attendance and other letters home so that they embodied compassionate invitation to attend and encouraged parental efficacy. The shift from enforcement-oriented to partnership-focused communication was accompanied by systematic data collection to understand family perspectives. The district began administering a targeted survey to parents of students who were having difficulty with attendance so that district and school leaders could learn more about the barriers families and students were experiencing. This dual approach of positive communication combined with genuine inquiry into family circumstances created a

foundation for authentic partnership between schools and families.

The **Phoenix-Talent School District** implemented comprehensive family engagement through personalized outreach and community connection strategies. The district reached out to parents through individual and small group conferencing. They ensured that every student gets a call when they are absent to check in on how they are doing, creating consistent family communication that demonstrated care and concern. At the elementary level, the district organized “Love of Learning” nights to bring parents into the school to view student work and receive attendance reports. This created positive opportunities for family engagement centered on student achievement rather than compliance. The district’s philosophy emphasized letting parents and students know they are seen and valued, communicating that all families belong in the school community.

Strategy 11: Student and Family Support Services

Schools have recognized that addressing chronic absenteeism requires comprehensive support systems to tackle the complex intersection of family health, economic hardship, and systemic barriers that prevent consistent attendance. This strategy involves deploying specialized professionals who can address the root causes of attendance problems through direct service provision, family advocacy, and community resource coordination. The approach encompasses professional student and family advocates who build relationships with families and connect them to resources; school social workers who provide emotional and mental health services; school nurses who manage chronic health conditions and provide immediate medical support; and comprehensive school-based health centers that offer accessible healthcare services within the school environment.

These wraparound services operate on the principle that attendance problems are often symptoms of broader challenges requiring holistic, coordinated re-

sponses rather than punitive enforcement. Professional advocates and liaisons meet with families in their homes and at school to understand complex circumstances and serve as bridges between school and community resources. School social workers identify early warning signs of absenteeism and address underlying social, emotional, and environmental factors while building family trust and connecting them to community supports. School nurses reduce absences through systematic case management of chronic conditions like asthma and diabetes, early intervention to prevent health crises, and serving as vital links between families, healthcare providers, and schools. School-based health centers eliminate barriers to healthcare access by providing routine screenings, chronic disease management, mental health programming, and medical appointments on-site, thereby addressing both health disparities and the need to leave school for medical care. This strategy transforms schools from places that simply monitor attendance into community hubs that actively support family stability and student health, recognizing that sustainable attendance improvement requires addressing the fundamental barriers that prevent families from getting their children to school consistently.

Due to budget constraints, many school districts in Oregon have not been able to invest in social workers, nurses, family liaisons, or school-based health centers. Given the current economic constraints, none of the eleven school districts added personnel in this area during the 2022 to 2024 school years. However, several school districts among the group have existing support services that they have aligned to support their attendance initiative.

The **Beaverton School District** has 49 social workers, 24.5 nurses, 52 bilingual facilitators, and four social support liaisons across its 55 schools. The majority of schools have at least one social worker with some having two. However, the nurse to student ratio is over 1:1500 students and the four liaisons cover a student population of 37,000. Despite that, social workers work alongside counselors to help address attendance concerns with students and families. Social support liaisons also work alongside our social workers and

counselors, especially if a family needs support around navigating schools or needs support in their native language. Nurses can be involved if the reason a student is not coming is a medical reason.

The **Gresham-Barlow School District** has a small number of social workers who largely serve the high schools and eight nurses who are split between its seventeen schools. However, the district has intentionally invested in family liaisons. With seventeen family liaisons, all middle and high schools have an engagement liaison and about half of the elementary schools have engagement liaison support. The family engagement liaisons meet regularly and are a part of the MTSS system of regular attendance meetings, direct work with students and families, and connections to resources. The district views the family liaisons as an important component of the overall attendance plan and is working to create stronger systems around the work they do.

The **Hillsboro School District** has invested heavily in student and family support services. All schools have access to family outreach liaisons with varying levels from two hours to full-time positions. These liaisons are integral members of attendance teams, addressing basic needs or family concerns that create attendance barriers and connecting families with appropriate resources. The district also employs graduation coaches integral to student engagement work including family outreach, home visits, and academic support, with four coaches in middle schools and 14 in high schools. The district also employs ten student support and wellness counselors, seven of whom are licensed social workers and four who are clinical social work associates dedicated to dropout prevention efforts, focusing primarily on social, emotional, and mental health concerns that lead to risk factors such as chronic absenteeism. The district has 13 district nurses, a nursing supervisor, and 13 licensed practical nurses serving its 36 schools. They provide support when illness becomes a barrier to regular attendance. Additionally, 17 schools have on-site school-based mental health providers to support access for students and families facing financial or transportation barriers to community-based mental health services.

The **Phoenix-Talent School District** has one school nurse working in a district-wide role who, while not having direct attendance responsibilities, works extensively one-on-one with families to reduce health barriers that facilitate students' ability to attend school. The district has three family liaisons who are heavily involved in improving attendance by working with the district's migrant, refugee, and immigrant population as well as other families facing various barriers getting their children to school. The district views these family liaisons as playing a critical role in achieving attendance goals. Additionally, all five schools have school-based health centers that eliminate barriers to healthcare access by providing routine screenings, chronic disease management, mental health programming, and medical appointments on-site, thereby addressing both health disparities and the need to leave school for medical care.

The **Banks School District** has a family liaison who works primarily with the district's Latino population, leveraging her fluency in multiple languages to build strong, trusting relationships with Spanish-speaking families and those who may be reluctant to come into the school. She plays a key role in connecting families with resources and identifying challenges that may be preventing students from attending school. The district's social worker serves in two important roles, supporting students in a counselor-like capacity while also collaborating with outside agencies to provide resources for families, including facilitating a backpack program that sends food home with families in need. The district nurse works closely with families of students experiencing health conditions that may be keeping them home. Together, these roles strengthen students' sense of belonging and well-being, which directly supports improved attendance.

Strategy 12: Superintendent and Central Office Leadership Commitment

Superintendent and central office leadership represents the critical organizational foundation for

successful attendance improvement initiatives. Superintendent leadership has been involved in setting vision, allocating resources, maintaining focus, designating internal leadership for the initiative, and creating accountability systems that sustain attendance improvement efforts across multiple years and organizational changes. This strategy recognizes that sustainable improvement requires more than programmatic interventions—it demands organizational commitment at the highest level that positions attendance as central to the district’s educational mission rather than as a peripheral issue. Superintendent and central office leadership creates the conditions for systematic implementation that enables comprehensive change.

The leadership strategy encompasses multiple components: Establishing attendance improvement as a district strategic priority with specific, measurable goals; creating organizational structures and resource allocation that support attendance initiatives across all schools and departments; developing comprehensive communication strategies that engage staff, families, and community members around attendance goals; implementing accountability systems that monitor progress and maintain focus on attendance outcomes; establishing a leadership structure to organize the plan and ensure progress; and providing ongoing support and professional development that builds district capacity for attendance improvement. Superintendent and central office leadership also advocates for the importance of attendance through personal engagement, public communication, and decision-making that consistently reinforces attendance as fundamental to student success and district effectiveness.

Effective leadership in attendance improvement requires sustained commitment that goes beyond initial program implementation to include ongoing monitoring, adjustment, and resource provision that enables districts to maintain focus and effectiveness over time. This leadership transforms attendance from an issue managed by individual schools or departments to a district-wide priority that influences all aspects of organizational operations, from strategic planning and resource allocation to professional development and community engagement.

The Beaverton School District superintendent Gustavo Balderas made attendance a clear district priority by embedding it centrally within the district’s strategic plan and community messaging. Balderas positioned attendance as fundamental to the district’s “Belong. Believe. Achieve.” motto, emphasizing that belonging doesn’t happen if students are not here to develop critical relationships with their teachers and fellow students. The superintendent’s leadership created organizational alignment by making attendance the primary metric for measuring success in the district’s strategic goal focused on student safety and well-being, with specific targets for improvement in the percent of regular attenders for each demographic group and each grade level. To reinforce the strategic importance, Balderas had the district develop an attendance page on the district’s website that documented attendance not only for the district and schools, but for subgroups in the student population, demonstrating his personal commitment to attendance improvement through public communication and organizational accountability.

The Hillsboro School District’s leadership created a comprehensive five-initiative action plan that included building collective efficacy, family engagement, attendance teams, targeted interventions, and communication systems. The attendance initiative is led by Jenny Cary, the district’s coordinator for mental and behavioral health. Her leadership ensured that attendance became integrated across all district operations, with the philosophy that everyone has to be engaged in attendance work to meet the district’s overall goals. This organizational approach involved creating partnerships with district and school administrators, school counselors, student services staff, student success coaches, elementary and secondary leadership teams, the family engagement team, the English language learning department, and many more, demonstrating the district’s leadership commitment to systematic, district-wide engagement.

The Gladstone School District superintendent Jeremiah Patterson provided leadership by engaging the entire community in attendance improvement through the “Gladstone Shows Up” campaign. Patter-

son transformed attendance from just another problem to be solved by the school district into a matter of community pride and community health. He engaged community businesses, civic leaders, houses of worship, community organizations, out-of-school time providers, and recreational organizations in delivering a message to students and families about the importance of attendance. The superintendent recognized that attendance is not just a school problem but rather a problem involving the entire community, leading to comprehensive community partnership. His leadership positioned the district as a community partner rather than an isolated institution.

The Umatilla School District superintendent Heidi Sipe has been personally engaged in transforming district culture and communication approaches. Sipe's leadership involved moving the district away from the old citation process and threatening communication toward a strategy of invitation focused on building positive relationships with families and students. The superintendent's approach emphasized understanding individual student needs and what the district and support agencies can do to address those needs. Sipe's leadership created systematic professional development support through half-day Fridays used for data teams and staff development, using many of these days to address attendance interventions and student engagement.

The Winston-Dillard School District superintendent Kevin Wilson promoted a cultural transformation focused on care for students and families. Wilson's leadership philosophy emphasized that "you are the strategy," meaning that the way each staff person approaches students impacts how students experience school and their sense of belonging to the school community. The superintendent focused on ensuring that attendance improvement came from a culture of understanding and caring. Wilson's leadership also provided systematic implementation through a comprehensive attendance handbook that outlined the specific attendance protocols and made attendance a recurring theme in weekly staff meetings at each school where attendance is a non-negotiable priority for every school.

The Phoenix-Talent School District superintendent Brent Barry provided leadership by requiring every school to set an attendance goal and identify specific tier-one and tier-two strategies to achieve that goal and ensure the entire district is working together to reduce chronic absenteeism. Barry's leadership created systematic coordination through quarterly districtwide attendance team meetings that brought all the schools together to discuss strategies, share successes, and address issues, making sure that school-level initiatives remained connected to district-wide goals and coordination. The superintendent's approach balanced school-level autonomy with district-wide accountability, allowing variation among schools in how they pursue their attendance goal while maintaining a strong sense of collective effort.

Conclusion: A Framework for Sustainable Attendance Improvement

The experiences of these eleven Oregon school districts reveal that effective attendance improvement requires a fundamental shift from compliance-based enforcement to relationship-centered, community-wide engagement. Rather than treating chronic absenteeism as a problem to be solved through monitoring and consequences, these districts have demonstrated that sustainable attendance improvement emerges from creating schools and communities where students want to be present.

Several critical insights emerge from their implementation experiences. First, attendance improvement is fundamentally an organizational challenge that requires systematic cultural change rather than simply programmatic solutions. The districts that achieved the most significant gains positioned attendance as central to their educational mission, embedded it within their strategic planning, and engaged every staff member in collective responsibility for student engagement. This approach transforms attendance from an administrative compliance issue handled by specialists into a shared commitment that influences

all aspects of school operations.

Second, the relationship between attendance and belonging is reciprocal and mutually reinforcing. Students attend more regularly when they feel known, valued, and connected to caring adults and peers. Simultaneously, consistent attendance creates opportunities for deeper relationships and stronger school connection. The districts' emphasis on social-emotional learning, teacher-student relationship building, and positive communication strategies recognizes that attendance improvement must address the fundamental human need for belonging and community.

Third, sustainable change requires addressing the complex intersection of individual, family, and community factors influencing school participation. The most effective approaches combine universal supports that benefit all students with targeted interventions that address specific barriers. This comprehensive strategy acknowledges that attendance challenges often reflect broader social and economic circumstances that extend beyond what schools can address independently, requiring authentic partnerships with families and community organizations.

Fourth, leadership plays a critical role in creating and sustaining attendance improvement efforts. These eleven districts had leaders who personally championed attendance improvement, allocated necessary resources, maintained consistent focus across mul-

tiple years, and modeled the collaborative, relationship-centered approaches they expected from others.

Finally, these districts demonstrate that meaningful attendance improvement is possible even within significant resource constraints. While comprehensive support services including nurses, social workers, and family liaisons clearly benefit students and families, some of the most impactful strategies—building positive relationships, creating engaging learning environments, communicating with compassion, and fostering collective efficacy—require commitment and cultural change rather than additional funding.

The path forward for districts seeking to improve attendance lies not in implementing isolated interventions but in creating coherent, sustained efforts that address attendance as both a symptom of disconnection and a prerequisite for belonging. When schools become places where students feel truly welcomed, valued, and engaged, attendance improvement becomes a natural outcome of authentic educational community rather than an imposed requirement. These eleven districts have demonstrated that such transformation is both necessary and achievable, providing a framework for districts throughout Oregon and beyond to create schools where every student wants to be present and engaged in learning.

Chapter Three

Burnt River School District: Building Trusting Relationships in a Small District



District Context & Demographics

The Burnt River School District is a sparsely populated rural district of 65 students, located approximately 80 miles west of Oregon's eastern border, halfway between John Day and Baker City. About half of Burnt River's students attend school in person and half attend online. For students attending in person, the school has one K-4 classroom of ten students, a grades 5-7 classroom of seven students, and a couple of classrooms for the fifteen grade 8-12 students. The student population is 77% white, 9% Hispanic, 7% multiracial, and 5% Asian. Approximately 45% of the student body is experiencing poverty and student mobility is high at 47%.

The district draws students from three different counties and in-person students may have to travel 20 or more miles just to get to school. In spite of the distances traveled by in-person students, attendance for online students is more problematic and relationships are more challenging to develop. Having a four-day school week helps given the distances for in-person students

as well as the responsibilities both in-person and online students may have on their ranches and farms. Chronic absenteeism across the 2022-23 and 2023-24 school years remained relatively stable at 33.1% and 35.1% respectively. Given the high mobility, the distance students have to travel to school, and the changing student population, this stability in attendance is an accomplishment.

Attendance Strategy

The district's current superintendent/principal, Cassie Moore, arrived in the district for the 2023-24 school year. One of her major goals has been to build ownership among local families and reclaim trust within the community while building a caring and engaging instructional program. Her two primary strategies for improving attendance are building stronger relationships with families and students and providing more engaging instruction through project-based learning. In addition, the district has begun providing extracurricular activities to encourage students to attend and to build a stronger connection with the school.

Attendance efforts in a district that small are mostly personal. The district tracks attendance data. At the monthly faculty meeting there is a discussion of individual students and how teachers can help to intervene when attendance is a problem. One of the elementary teachers serves as a counselor and instructional coach and helps reach out to families. The superintendent takes an active role in meeting and speaking with families to build relationships and get at the root causes of attendance issues. In some cases, the district provides incentives for students who are struggling with attendance. In more serious cases, the district may involve community or ESD resources to support their efforts.

The district also takes a number of systemic steps to enhance attendance. Providing engaging instruction through project-based learning is its own incentive for coming to school. For example, one class is designing

and building an outdoor learning space and students don't want to miss participating.

A second systemic effort is to provide a caring environment through social-emotional learning programming. At the elementary level, teachers use morning meetings to build community in classrooms. The district as a whole uses a character traits approach with particular traits such as perseverance, honesty, etc., featured monthly. Finally, the district has found that offering after-school clubs and other extracurricular activities has helped their attendance efforts.

As a result of the personal work done by the superintendent and staff to build relationships, enrollment has grown over the past two years. The district anticipates that these efforts will reduce chronic absenteeism as well.

Chapter Four

Winston-Dillard School District: You Are the Strategy



District Context & Demographics

The Winston-Dillard School District is a small district of approximately 1,300 students located south of Roseburg. Winston-Dillard's student population is 81% white, 10% Hispanic, and 6% multiracial. Approximately 45% of the student body is experiencing poverty. For the 2022-23 school year 43.0% of the district's students were chronically absent. The district was successful in significantly improving attendance during the 2023-24 school year, reducing the percent of chronically absent students by 10.6% to 32.4%. This was the greatest gain among all the Oregon Attendance Cohort districts and particularly significant given that the district has one of the highest poverty rates in the cohort.

The Attendance Handbook

The district is employing two strategies for reducing chronic absenteeism. The first strategy began with assembling an attendance handbook that outlined the specific attendance protocols for parents, teachers,

attendance monitors and secretaries, administrators, and students. Developed by the prior superintendent, Kim Kellison, the handbook framed attendance as a positive collaboration between parents and the schools with the schools ready to assist in supporting students. The tone of the handbook and the actions to be taken largely emphasize the positive and the support the district is willing to offer. The closing paragraphs of the handbook's introduction offer a clear statement of that intent: "We are committed to increasing student attendance and achievement, but we need your help... We understand that at times you face challenges and may need our help. We are here for you and stand ready to lend a hand."

The handbook not only provides draft phone message and follow up letters that can be sent to parents but offers numerous proactive tier-one strategies staff can use to encourage students to attend. These begin with a script for positive phone calls home unrelated to attendance. The guidance from the handbook reads, "This script is to be used as a check in on a student who has been absent and should be **empathetic**, building the relationship between teacher, counselor or child devel-

opment specialist and the family.” Other strategies include steps for teachers to teach students about the importance of attendance, group and individual rewards for both good attendance and improvements in attendance, class and grade attendance challenges, positive greetings and farewells at the beginning and end of the day, and various social and emotional learning strategies teachers can draw upon. The handbook is not just centered on remediation strategies when students are not attending but on recognizing and acknowledging when their students are attending.

Attendance is not only given attention in the handbook but is a recurring theme in weekly staff meetings at each school where it is emphasized as a non-negotiable priority for every school. The overarching impact of the handbook and of all staff training for its implementation is consistency across schools and classrooms and depth in implementation. It has provided a solid attendance system for the district.

Ways of Being and Doing

The second strategy, as the new superintendent Kevin Wilson frames it, is about ways of being and doing that emphasize compassion and engagement. The approach to attendance can’t be punitive and must come from a culture of understanding and caring. In fact, Wilson believes that “you are the strategy,” meaning that the way each staff person approaches students impacts how students experience school and their sense of belonging to the school community.

The focus of dialogue with students and parents about attendance is on understanding the reasons for the student’s absence and what the student is going through in and out of school. As guidance for these conversations,

adults are to avoid speculating about the student’s or family’s situation or bring personal biases to the conversation, but to actually find out what the reason is that the student is not attending. Building on that understanding, the dialogue focuses on how the student’s and family’s needs can be addressed, how the school can address the barriers that are getting in the way of the student attending, and how the school can offer support to the student. The focus is on what adults in the school can do to help students feel safe and welcome when they come to school. In some circumstances, the district’s two resource officers can visit homes to try to help. In circumstances where the challenges require resources beyond the school, the ESD’s Parent Engagement Team can be of assistance.

A Systemic Approach

At a systemic level, there is an expectation that staff will understand trauma-informed and culturally responsive practices as well as how poverty may impact student participation. The staff can draw from several district provided social and emotional learning programs to create a more positive classroom and school culture and foster the development of social and emotional skills that support students’ resilience and well-being. In addition, the district has provided a variety of CTE experiences at the secondary level that enable students to pursue their interests and that engage and motivate them to come to school.

The consistency in approach created by the handbook combined with a highly personal and caring approach to students and parents has built trust and support. The result is that students and parents feel a greater sense of belonging to the school community and a desire to be present at school.

Chapter Five

Banks School District: Valuing Student and Parent Voice



District Context & Demographics

The Banks School District is located 24 miles northwest of Portland. Banks has a student population of 1,100 that is 82% white, 11% Hispanic, and 4% multiracial. Approximately one in five students (20%) are experiencing poverty and 6% have ever been English language learners. For the 2022-23 school year, 37.7% of the district's students were chronically absent. The district made significant improvement during the 2023-24 school year, reducing the percent of chronically absent students by 6.1% to 31.6%. Efforts during the 2023-2024 including many of the traditional methods for improving attendance as well as the introduction

of action planning related to the Banks School District Strategic Plan. These efforts were beginning to make a shift, but the district felt that the voice of those closest to the challenge needed to be elevated.

Listening to Student Voices

Banks has taken a unique approach to improving attendance. The administration knew that truancy and other punitive efforts had been tried before and hadn't been successful. Instead of developing a list of initiatives for administration and faculty to pursue, the district decided to focus on one action and go deep. That action was to step back from solutions and enter a process of inquiry, that is, to ask students why they weren't attend-

ing, listen genuinely to their reasons and recommendations, and come back to them with what the district had learned and how it was going to respond. The district also wanted to take it further and engage parents in the same process. Therefore, the entire focus of the 2024-25 school year has been to learn from students and parents and design responses based on their perceptions and recommendations.

Student and Family Support Services

The Banks School District has a family liaison who works primarily with the district's Latino population, leveraging her fluency in multiple languages to build strong, trusting relationships with Spanish-speaking families and those who may be reluctant to come into the school. She plays a key role in connecting families with resources and identifying challenges that may be preventing students from attending school. The district's social worker serves in two important roles, supporting students in a counselor-like capacity while also collaborating with outside agencies to provide resources for families, including facilitating a backpack program that sends food home with families in need and coordinating with the Salvation Army to bring a food truck to Banks once a week. The district nurse works closely with families of students experiencing health conditions that may be keeping them home. Together, these roles strengthen students' sense of belonging and well-being, which directly supports improved attendance.

A District Goal of Happy and Proud Students

Since the 2022-2023 school year, the district has worked with Studer Education on a strategic planning process. As a result of the process, the district adopted a motto that students should be happy and proud. That led to a deep dive into what happy and proud means and what it looks and feels like. They realized that attendance is an important metric of students' sense of feeling happy

and proud and one clear sign of whether students feel a sense of belonging in their classrooms and school. The district believes that if students feel a sense of belonging, they will show up at school because they want to be there.

To better assess students' perspective on attendance and belonging, the district's leadership and staff, led by the district's Director of Student Performance Darla Waite-Larkin, began individual interviews and focus groups with students. The intent has been to talk with students and to ask them whether they feel happy and proud, whether attendance is important to them, and whether there are obstacles to attending. The venues for these discussions varied from individual interviews to focus group discussions to pizza lunches with the ten percent of students who had the lowest attendance. The administration's belief is that the district can learn a great deal by elevating student voice and learning from students' perceptions. The administration also surveyed parents to get their perceptions of whether their children are happy and proud, feel a sense of belonging, and feel attendance is important to them.

The process, in itself, is designed to communicate to students and parents that their views are valued and that the school wants them to be there. The response on the part of both students and parents has been very positive and revealing. The major themes that emerged from students are the importance of creating a sense of belonging in schools, that it matters if they are there and that someone cares. Relationships with teachers and other students matter. In addition, students didn't feel engaged in the academic work or in learning. Parents and students reported that they didn't feel teachers were engaging the students in active participation.

Student Engagement and Well-Being

The result has been two initiatives on the part of the district. The first has been to focus faculty professional development on student engagement. Each school has

included engagement in their vision and their improvement plan. Teachers have volunteered to be videotaped and have those videos reviewed from the perspective of engagement. The focus of the professional development has been to help teachers shift from teacher talk to student talk and to students building on each other's thinking with such strategies as turn-and-talk and partner talk.

The second initiative has been to work on building a sense of belonging through social-emotional learning. However, instead of implementing a program for students, the focus has been on working with adults on the meaning of transformative SEL and the adults own social-emotional competencies. The faculty did a book

study using *Teaching with the Heart in Mind* by Lorea Martinez Perea. Once a month faculty, paraprofessionals and other staff met on early release days to discuss lessons learned in the chapters of focus for the month. Involving the entire staff has been valuable in helping staff reflect on their own social-emotional well-being and ways they could carry their understandings into providing a healthy and positive classroom and school culture for students.

Although the inquiry process will remain core to the district's pursuit of answers, the grounding that the district has established for its initiatives bode well for improvements in attendance well into the future.

Chapter Six

Phoenix-Talent School District: We See You



District Context & Demographics

The Phoenix-Talent School District extends from the southern area of Medford to the California border. The district enrolls approximately 2,300 students. The student body is 51% white, 41% Hispanic, and 5% multiracial. With 53% of the student body experiencing poverty and 24% having ever been English language learners, the district is the most diverse and has the highest poverty rate of any of the Oregon Attendance Cohort districts. Chronic absenteeism across the 2022-23 and 2023-24 school years remained relatively stable at 33.7% and 34.9% respectively.

A Multi-Dimensional Strategy

Phoenix-Talent's attendance improvement strategy is multi-dimensional. As a base, Brent Barry, the district's superintendent, has asked every school to set an attendance goal and identify specific tier-one and tier-two strategies to achieve that goal. Although there is variation among schools in how they pursue their attendance goal, the entire district is working together to reduce chronic absenteeism.

The primary emphasis of their tier-one strategy has fo-

cused on family and student engagement, with a particular attention to students whose attendance is in the 80% to 89% range. With messaging that highlights belonging, the district reaches out to parents through individual and small group conferencing. Every student gets a call when they are absent to check in on how they are doing. Attendance certificates for positive attendance and improved attendance are sent home via email. Students at the high school receive "good job" notes for improved attendance. At the middle school, eighth graders are partnered as peer mentors with sixth graders who need support with attendance, staying in touch with them and encouraging good attendance and active participation in school activities. At the elementary level, there are "Love of Learning" nights to bring parents into the school to view student work and receive attendance reports for their student. The purpose of these efforts is to let parents and students know they are seen and valued. In fact, the notes to students at the high school are titled, "We see you!" School assemblies and classroom celebrations affirm that message.

Community Outreach Campaign

The district has also pursued a community outreach campaign to highlight the importance of attendance with window signs and banners at local businesses and community organizations. Some businesses and

community organizations offer attendance incentives as part of the campaign. At the same time, the district has engaged students in community service projects to get students out into the community, feel that they belong in the community, and build relationships with community members. The district believes that being a responsible participant in society means knowing where you live and serving where you live. Not only do these community learning opportunities give students a greater sense of meaning and purpose, they encourage attendance because they are active and engaging.

Strengthening the MTSS Process

The district also has strengthened its MTSS process and brings attendance into the discussion of academic and behavioral concerns as part of its tier-two strategy. Each school has an MTSS team that reviews data. At the elementary level, the teams meet every six to eight weeks. When the team identifies a particular student in need of support, individuals on the team monitor the student daily. The high school's MTSS team meets monthly but there is also a smaller attendance team that meets weekly. The teams identify particular interventions for individual students, which sometimes means that a teacher is identified to work with a particular student and build a stronger relationship with that student. Quarterly, there is a districtwide attendance team meeting that brings all the schools together to discuss strategies, share successes, and address issues. What is consistent across all schools is that attendance for individual students is tracked and interventions are designed to support each student in attending school consistently.

Providing Student and Family Support Services

The Phoenix-Talent School District has one school nurse working in a district-wide role who, while not having direct attendance responsibilities, works extensively one-on-one with families to reduce health

barriers that facilitate students' ability to attend school. The district has three family liaisons who are heavily involved in improving attendance by working with the district's migrant, refugee, and immigrant population as well as other families facing various barriers to getting their children to school. The district views these family liaisons as playing a critical role in achieving attendance goals. Additionally, all five schools have school-based health centers that eliminate barriers to healthcare access by providing routine screenings, chronic disease management, mental health programming, and medical appointments on-site, thereby addressing both health disparities and the common need to leave school for medical care while offering indirect support for attendance.

Emphasizing Social and Emotional Learning

In addition, the district is strengthening its social-emotional learning program. The elementary schools had been using the RULER program that focuses on recognizing and dealing with emotions. Although teachers still use aspects of the RULER program when appropriate, the district has recently adopted the Wayfinder SEL program, which is a K-12 program. The district is anticipating that this program will enhance students' sense of well-being and further develop their social skills. They anticipate that it will better enable teachers and administrators to build stronger relationships with students and demonstrate to students that they are cared about and valued as a member of the school community. By feeling valued and known, students are more likely to be excited about being in school every day.

The unified direction has brought coherence, collaboration, and consistency to the district's efforts. Although there are differences in approaches among the schools, there is a strong sense of collective effort that is making a difference for students.

Chapter Seven

Lincoln County School District: All Hands on Deck



District Context & Demographics

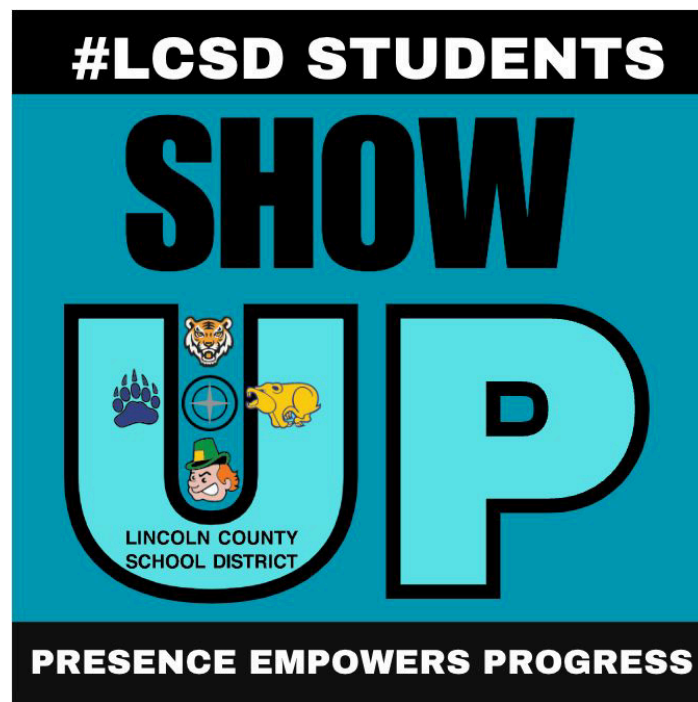
The Lincoln County School District is a coastal district of approximately 4,800 students that stretches from Lincoln City in the north to Yachats in the south. Lincoln County's student population is 60% white, 25% Hispanic, and 9% multiracial. The district faces some particular challenges given that approximately 43% of the student body is experiencing poverty and 15% have ever been English language learners. For the 2022-23 school year 45.0% of the district's students were chronically absent. Given its challenges, the district made significant improvements during the 2023-24 school year, reducing the percent of chronically absent students by 4.3% to 40.7% through a multi-dimensional approach to attendance.

Every Day Matters

Lincoln County built its attendance initiatives on the attendance tools provided by the Oregon Department of Education in its "Every Day Matters" campaign. Strengthening attendance management and moni-

toring, utilizing the campaign's social media kit, and forming attendance teams to intervene with individual students helped move the district forward. Majalisse Tolan, Lincoln County's superintendent, has taken an "all hands on deck" approach to attendance with every school having a five percent attendance improvement target as part of its school improvement plan. The district also provided professional development to all staff on ways to promote positive improvement in student attendance and shared a PowerPoint presentation with all principals so that they could follow up at faculty meetings.

One of the most significant parts of the initiatives was to bring attendance data into the MTSS process so that school teams could review academic, behavioral, and attendance data as a holistic picture of whether a student was at risk and what interventions may be appropriate. To establish tiers for different types of intervention, the district set 90% and above attendance for tier 1 strategies, 80% to 89.9% for tier 2 strategies, and below 80% for tier 3 strategies. When part of the MTSS process, attendance serves as an important flag and early warning of issues that need to be addressed.



To better support the MTSS process, the district refined its data management and reporting to provide monthly data on individual, grade, and school attendance trends. The district also revisited with staff the attendance process and the importance of accuracy and diligence in reporting, ensuring that attendance is entered and coded correctly. A revised enrollment and attendance handbook was created and training provided to all the attendance clerks and others dealing with attendance. The handbook outlines specific procedures for reaching out to families when students are absent. For example, there is an expectation that either the teacher or the attendance clerk will contact a parent after an absence of two days to check in on the student.

LCSD Students Show Up Communication Campaign

The district also revisited its communication with families, shifting the language in letters and phone scripts from messages that could be interpreted as punitive and blaming to messages that are welcoming and promote a sense of belonging. “We miss you” is the essential message that the district seeks to deliver, while making the case that being absent from school means missing

important learning and vital social development with peers.

The district launched a community-wide “Lincoln County Shows Up: Presence Empowers Progress” campaign with graphics, promotional items (t-shirts, cups, etc.), and incentives to engage parents and change attitudes around the importance of attendance. At a school level, it involves classroom competitions, assemblies, “brag tags,” and rewards for positive attendance.

Changing parent attitudes to give school attendance priority over family vacations or hunting trips during school days has been particularly challenging. However, the greater focus has been on addressing significant barriers students are experiencing in getting to school, whether those involve families in crisis, or students confronting specific academic, social or emotional challenges.

Caring School Communities

In addition, the district is providing greater support to students and families. Faculty pursue check and connect mentoring with individual students who are struggling with attendance. The district recently adopted the

Caring School Community social-emotional learning program at the elementary level, which focuses on building caring classroom and school communities that foster a sense of belonging among students. At the secondary level, there is a reinvestment in the Character Strong program to support student's social and emotional needs. The district's social workers reach out to families to identify the root causes of attendance problems and visit homes to support students and families. Weekly meetings of the district's four area teams—composed of a nurse, a social worker, a health services advocate, the attendance advisor, and the Hispanic family liaison—focus on requests for support for issues particular students are facing that may be beyond the capacity of the school to address. The teams identify ways to address that particular student's needs through district or community resources.

Family and Student Support Services

The Lincoln County School District has developed a comprehensive support infrastructure that directly addresses attendance barriers through coordinated family services and community partnerships. The district employs a diverse team of 20 specialized support professionals, including three school nurses, four service coordinators (social workers), four health service advocates who are also trained community health workers, two Hispanic family liaisons, one McKinney-Vento liaison, five homeless education and literacy project advocates, and one attendance and engagement advi-

sor. This multidisciplinary approach recognizes that chronic absenteeism often stems from complex family circumstances that extend beyond what traditional school personnel can address independently.

The cornerstone of Lincoln County's approach is their Area Team system, which responds to requests for support by mobilizing resources to help families navigate community services and address foundational needs such as housing instability, food insecurity, medical care, and transportation challenges. These teams operate on the principle that by dismantling basic survival barriers, families will be better positioned to prioritize their children's school attendance. The support staff also serve as active members of school-based MTSS teams, where they build family connections, create welcoming environments, support attendance communication and interventions, and analyze data to identify patterns and trends. The health service advocates strengthen this comprehensive approach by partnering closely with the district's four school-based health centers, spending two days per week physically present in these facilities to ensure seamless coordination between health services and attendance support, creating a holistic network that addresses both immediate health needs and longer-term attendance improvement goals.

For a high-poverty district, these strategies have proven effective in moving the attendance rate in a positive direction.

Chapter Eight

Gladstone School District: Gladstone Shows Up



District Context & Demographics

The Gladstone School District is a small district of less than 1,600 students, located 12 miles south of Portland at the convergence of the Willamette and Clackamas Rivers. Gladstone's student population is 70% white, 18% Hispanic, and 9% multiracial. Approximately one-quarter of the student body is experiencing poverty and 10% have ever been English language learners. For the 2022-23 school year 35.3% of the district's students were chronically absent. The district made significant improvement during the 2023-24 school year, reducing the percentage of chronically absent students by 6.3% to 29.0%, as they implemented a broad community communications campaign along with data teams focused on attendance.

Gladstone Shows Up

Gladstone's attendance campaign was inspired by the "[Challenge 5—Strive for Less Than Five](#)" campaign in Grand Rapids, Michigan, that engaged the entire community in a campaign for students to miss less than five

days of school in a year. Built on the belief that attendance is not just a school problem but rather represents larger social problems involving the entire community, the Gladstone School District launched its "Gladstone Shows Up" community campaign. Led by Jeremiah Patterson, the district's superintendent, the district engaged community businesses, civic leaders, houses of worship, community organizations, out-of-school time providers, and recreational organizations in joining the school district in delivering a message to students and families about the importance of attendance. From yard signs to store window posters to t-shirts to banners, the message that showing up at school is important to student success resonated throughout the community. The campaign made attendance a matter of community pride and community health rather than just another problem to be solved by the school district.

Posters also decorate each school and staff regularly wear their Gladstone Shows Up t-shirts. Schools hold attendance challenges and celebrations for classroom and grade level successes. Students have gotten involved in making the posters and printing the t-shirts. The administration and staff have made attendance a

primary school improvement goal, highlighting the importance of attendance as they work with students.

Promoting Community Pride

Although it was the responsibility of the school to participate enthusiastically in the campaign, monitor attendance, connect with students who are trending toward chronic absenteeism, and reach out to parents of those students, the message to schools has been that attendance was not simply a school problem but a public and community issue. It was not about staff failing to serve students but about community attitudes and social problems that needed collective action rather than solely school intervention. The core turnaround strategy has been to promote community pride through the entire community's effort to address a problem.

In addition, much like the work in Grand Rapids, the district built its own data dashboard to provide early warning of students' attendance problems. The district convened data teams at each school that meet every two weeks and a district team that meets monthly. The teams focus on understanding why students may be missing school and personally connecting with those students and checking in with them and their parents to support them getting to school. The teams are made

up of the vice-principal, school counselor, and attendance clerk and they provide information back to the faculty.

Engaging Local Media

The district also lets the community know about its successes as celebrations of success are highlighted in local TV and print news media. Dr. Charlene Williams, the Director of the Oregon Department of Education, came to the district to acknowledge the district's gains in attendance. Her visit received a good deal of publicity, which instilled greater pride in the community and inspired school and community members to further enhance the campaign.

One of the advantages of Gladstone's strategy is the large-scale engagement of individuals throughout the community delivering a common message to children and families. At the same time, the strategy has been a less costly one, not one that involved adding staff or expensive interventions. As the district faces significant budget reductions for the 2025-26 school year -- and beyond -- there is concern about sustaining momentum for the initiative, but the hope is that given its relative efficiency, the district can continue to see improvement in attendance.

Chapter Nine

Umatilla School District: Positive Communication and Connection



District Context & Demographics

Umatilla is a small school district located just south of the Columbia River about half-way between Portland and the border with Idaho. The student population of 1,474 is primarily of Hispanic descent, representing 72% of the district's students. Approximately 55% of students are or have been English language learners and 47% of students are experiencing poverty. In 2022-2023 school year, 38.4% of students were chronically absent. The district was able to reduce chronic absenteeism by 4.2% in 2023-24 to 34.2%.

Elevating Communication and Connection

The core attendance improvement strategy that Umatilla has pursued is to elevate communications and connections. Heidi Sipe, the district's long-term superintendent has insisted that the district move away from the old, and now prohibited, citation process and

threatening communication to enforce attendance. The district has shifted its communication to focus on the positive importance of attendance. The district has adopted a strategy of invitation focused on building positive relationships with families and students. Rather than using the threat of fines, the district now assesses what each individual student needs in order to get to school and what the district or other support agencies can do to address those needs.

A first step has been to change the tone and content of phone and personal messages home to remove punitive language and provide encouragement and opportunities for support. That change is embodied in the communications from teachers and principals and the communication from school secretaries and other staff members. The change is not embodied in the letters sent home, feeling that it is important to maintain high expectations and accountability.

A second step has been to examine and expand connec-

tions between faculty and students. The district did a relationship audit to better understand where the gaps were in connecting with particular students. Using a list of all the students at a grade level, faculty were asked whether they knew who each student was, whether they had spoken to the student's parents, and whether they knew the student's story. The audit served to identify the extent of connection each student had with faculty members. In cases where faculty found that they did not know a student well enough, they planned ways to better connect with that student. One strategy, in particular, has proven important—the “2x10” intervention. The “2x10” involves a faculty member connecting with the identified student and conversing with that student for at least two minutes for ten days. The conversations are simply focused on developing a relationship rather than discussing specific academic or attendance issues.

A Collective Effort

Supporting these strategies, the district provides attendance information to each school's data teams through Power School. On a monthly basis, these teams review attendance data and plan strategies for supporting students. Each grade level from kindergarten through 8th grade has a data team that focuses on students' attendance, behavior, and academics to determine appropriate interventions to support the student's success. The high school has a cross-grade team that reviews the same data and pursues individualized interventions for students.

There has been a collective shift in staff mindset around attendance. The Umatilla faculty have become deeply invested in improving both student and parent connections. They have invested in attendance strategies in part because students' regular attendance makes their work so much easier, and in part because they can see how attendance supports their goal of student success. The staff has come to see improving attendance as a collective effort of all in the district. This sense of collective effort has been supported through the district's half-day Fridays, which are used for data teams and

professional development. Many of these days over the past year have been used to address attendance through discussion of interventions as well as discussion of instructional strategies that focus on student engagement.

Communication with Parents

Schools have paid particular attention to increasing communication with parents, which has resulted not only in a greater sense of connection between parents and their children's schools, but also in longer, problem-solving conversations so that both the parent and the school can better support the student. These non-judgmental conversations avoid blame, shame, and threat in order to create positive relationships built on understanding and support. Schools also track parent communication to ensure that they are reaching all parents.

Through these contacts, parents have come to understand how quickly absences add up and can impact a student's success. What might seem to a parent as not much of a problem, for example, only two absences a month, they come to realize actually adds up to missing almost a month of school. As a result of these conversations, parents are more proactive in getting their children to school.

In addition, student to student communication is also part of improving attendance. At the middle school for example, students call or text each other in the morning if someone is late or absent. Faculty have also been interviewing students to hear their perspective on attendance and the reasons students may not be showing up. As a result, the faculty has been able to make changes that create school environments where students feel they are welcomed and want to be present.

Student Engagement

There is also a strong focus in the district's professional development on student engagement, coming from a desire for students to feel valued as a contributing

member of the school community. The district has administered student attitude surveys and has provided the results to the faculty and to data teams so they can assess how students are perceiving their relationship to school and to adults and other students in the school. Instructional coaches also provide embedded professional development to faculty as they integrate engagement strategies into their instruction. The professional development has provided faculty and paraprofessionals with strategies that encourage student dialogue and contribution.

There are early indications that the combination of the investment in deeper connections with students and parents and regular data analysis to identify students in need is having a positive impact on student attendance as well as a higher degree of confidence among staff that they can make a difference in their students' lives.

Chapter Ten

Silver Falls School District: Launching a Multi-Dimensional Approach



District Context & Demographics

The Silver Falls School District office is located in Silverton just east of Salem. The district encompasses numerous small rural communities that stretch from Monitor in the north, Scotts Mills in the west, and Silver Falls State Park in the south. The district is more affluent than others in the Oregon Attendance Cohort with only 22% of its 3,700 students experiencing poverty and 11% being ever English language learners. The student population is 78% white, 17% Hispanic, and 4% multiracial. During the 2022-23 school year 34.3% of the district's students were chronically absent. The district made significant improvement in attendance during the 2023-24 school year, reducing the percent of chronically absent students by 6.1% to 28.2%, as they implemented a broad community communications campaign along with data teams focused on attendance.

A Multi-Dimensional Approach

Silver Falls is gifted with an engaged and active parent community that provides significant support to the

district's attendance efforts in 2023-24. The administration used the attendance tools provided by the Oregon Department of Education in its "Every Day Matters" campaign and the support for that campaign by the Willamette ESD. Strengthening attendance management and monitoring, utilizing the campaign's social media kit, and forming attendance teams to intervene with individual students helped move the district forward. The district has also implemented a social-emotional learning program at the elementary level entitled Caring School Community that focuses on building positive relationships and a strong sense of community among students through such strategies as morning meetings and class meetings. That sense of community encourages students to want to be present on a daily basis.

Attendance Protocols and Restorative Approaches

The 2024-25 school year began with a new superintendent, Kim Kellison, who came from Winston-Dillard, where she had launched an attendance initiative that resulted in a 10% drop in chronic absenteeism. Kelli-

son brought with her the highly effective attendance handbook she had developed in Winston-Dillard. It is now being piloted at Silverton High School.

As a new superintendent, Kellison has outlined a number of priorities to further reduce chronic absenteeism. The first of those priorities is to tighten attendance protocols and procedures through scaling the attendance handbook to other schools in the district. The handbook not only provides a systemic approach to attendance but also encourages and supports a positive approach to students and families. It includes proactive tier-one strategies the staff can pursue to encourage attendance and provide recognition and acknowledgement when students are attending. The handbook emphasizes understanding and compassion as schools partner with parents to best address student needs.

The second priority is revising the behavior and discipline framework to emphasize restorative practices rather exclusionary consequences. Restorative practices seek to heal harm done and repair and restore relationships so that the student can return to the school community with the feeling of acceptance rather than feeling alienated and demeaned. The student may have made a mistake, but the restorative process involves taking responsibility, addressing the harm done, and learning from the mistake. In this way, the process

builds a stronger community that enhances rather than diminishes the student's connection to the school community. Along with the revision of the behavior and discipline framework, the district plans to rejuvenate and strengthen its social-emotional learning program to further build that sense of community.

The third priority is to strengthen the district's MTSS process and add attendance data to that process. With MTSS teams at each school that can focus on attendance, the schools have a greater capacity to provide the diagnostic analysis of issues and barriers facing students and to design interventions to better support students.

Finally, the superintendent plans to launch a communications campaign next year to encourage parents to take on the goal of improving attendance. Given the receptivity and responsiveness of parents and the community, this is likely to enhance the impact of the other initiatives.

These initiatives are in their early stages but could have a long-term positive impact on reducing chronic absenteeism and improving attendance.

Chapter Eleven

Gresham-Barlow School District: A Holistic Approach



District Context & Demographics

The Gresham-Barlow School District, located 15 miles east of Portland, has a diverse student body whose families speak 91 languages. Fourteen percent of its 11,464 students are English language learners and 38% are students experiencing poverty. For the 2022-23 school year 45% of the district's students were chronically absent, representing one of the most challenged districts in the Oregon Attendance Cohort. The district made significant improvement during the 2023-24 school year, reducing the percent of chronically absent students by 4.5% to 40.5% as they began to implement a number of significant and coordinated strategies to address the attendance issue.

A Holistic Approach

Tracy Klinger, then deputy superintendent and now

district superintendent, has led the district's work on attendance. The district has taken a systemic, district-wide approach to attendance. The central element in that strategy is making attendance a core element of their MTSS process so that it is addressed consistently by the MTSS team in each school. Every team has access to data through a data dashboard. They meet each month to plan universal, additional, and intensified supports for students. Using Panorama's data application, the district tracks school-wide and individual attendance patterns, determines interventions for particular students, and tracks results over time. Making attendance an integral part of the MTSS process has created a collective consciousness about the importance of attendance among staff members. The faculty has become more aware of the kinds of specific interventions that can address attendance issues as well as other behavioral, academic, social, and emotional needs. Attendance has become part of the holistic approach to addressing student needs.

At the same time, the district has rolled out a comprehensive communication plan to educate all members of Gresham-Barlow community about the importance of attendance. The district has put attendance front and center for faculty, parents, and students. “Be Here” posters adorn classrooms and halls. Attendance is a frequent topic of social media posts and newsletters. Celebrations honor successes in student and faculty attendance. It has become a collective emphasis of all faculty and staff in their discussions with students and families.

Student and Family Support Services

The district has a small number of social workers who largely serve the high schools and eight nurses who are split between its seventeen schools and are limited in their ability to work on attendance issues. However, the district has intentionally invested in family liaisons. With eight family liaisons, all middle and high schools have an engagement liaison and about half of the elementary schools have engagement liaison support. The family liaisons meet regularly and are a part of the MTSS system in terms of regular attendance meetings, direct work with students and families, and connections to resources. The district views the family liaisons as an important component of the overall attendance plan and is working to create stronger systems around the work that they do.

Strengthening Personal Connections

The district has also emphasized strengthening personal connections and faculty-student relationships to help all students feel that they have an adult they can turn to and that they feel that school is a caring and welcoming place. With that emphasis, little things matter. A few schools have adopted a “2x10” strategy when they identify a student in need through their MTSS process. The “2x10” strategy involves a faculty member

connecting with the identified student and conversing with that student for at least two minutes for ten days. The conversations focus on developing a relationship rather than discussing specific academic or attendance issues.

The language of the letters and calls home have shifted from a deficit-based to a strengths-based approach. In the past, letters home to families emphasized how often students were not at school. Now, the district communicates how often they are at school and highlights the academic, social, and mental health benefits of increased engagement. School secretaries have received training in talking with families and students about attendance in positive and supportive ways. Kindergarten teachers are visiting homes to get to know and make stronger connections with families, which has improved attendance significantly at the early grades.

Student Engagement Liaisons

The district has eight classified employees who serve as student engagement liaisons, with two at the elementary level and one at each of the middle and high schools. Liaisons are cultural brokers who foster connection and belonging, which is essential to supporting attendance as part of Tier 1 universal strategies. When students are not attending school, liaisons use feedback from families, students, and staff to develop solutions that reduce barriers and provide increased support.

All of the touch points with families are seen as vehicles to build strong relationships and positive perspectives, while encouraging attendance so that students can do their best at school.

The district has implemented a number of SEL efforts as part of their morning circle time at the elementary level and advisory time at the secondary level. Elementary efforts have been more accepted than secondary advisory time. In order to better support the effectiveness of their SEL efforts, the district has placed an em-

phasis on the development of adult SEL skills prior to adopting particular programs. At this point the district has begun examining programs for adoption next year.

The combination of attendance data analysis integrated into the MTSS process, a strong communications campaign, and building positive relationships between faculty and students has led to a collective effort on the part of the adults in the Gresham-Barlow School District in support of student attendance. As these initiatives have grown, administrators and faculty members are getting better at interventions and strategies that support improved attendance.

Chapter Twelve

Hillsboro School District: Building Collective Efficacy



District Context & Demographics

The Hillsboro School District, located just west of Portland, has a diverse student body whose families speak 165 languages. Thirty-five percent of its approximately 18,600 students are English language learners and 28% are students experiencing poverty. The student population is 39% White, 42% Hispanic, 8% Multiracial, 7% Asian, and 3% Black. For the 2022-23 school year 35.4% of the district's students were chronically absent. The district made significant improvement during the 2023-24 school year, as they began to implement a number of significant and coordinated strategies to address the attendance issue. The district reduced the percent of chronically absent students by 5% to 30.4%.

Attendance is Core to the Strategic Plan

Attendance is at the heart of the strategic plan Hillsboro launched in 2023. Goal 2 of the plan focuses on safe and supported learners with the aim that “every student will develop the habits and skills necessary to

confidently demonstrate self and social awareness, and access available resources and supports.” Attendance rates and favorable student survey feedback are the metrics for assessing progress toward this goal. The performance target is, “by 2026-27 school year, 80% of students will attend more than 90% of their enrolled school days.” The specific action plan to address attendance involves five initiatives: 1) Building collective efficacy and increasing attendance awareness by embedding a focus on attendance within other instructional focus areas; 2) Family engagement through positive family outreach and relationship building; 3) Attendance teams meeting and monitoring data regularly; 4) Targeted interventions and monitoring to address root causes of chronic absenteeism; and 5) Communication systems involving developing a broad communication campaign.

The attendance initiative is led by Jenny Cary, the district's coordinator for mental and behavioral health. The district began implementation of its attendance plan in 2023 with changes in communication home and a campaign focused on positive relationship with families. During the 2023-24 school year, the district adjusted attendance and other letters home so that they embodied compassionate invitation to attend and

encouraged parental efficacy rather than possessing an administrative and punitive tone. The district also began administering a targeted survey to parents of students who were having difficulty with attendance so that district and school leaders could learn more about the barriers families and students were experiencing.

Attendance Teams Supported by a Highly Effective Data System

In 2023, the district formed attendance teams in each school. Then, in the fall of 2024, the district focused more attention on supporting each school's attendance team. The district expectation is that attendance teams will meet weekly, potentially alternating with their care and support team. The teams not only examine the supports for students who are chronically absent but also review school trends to explore what universal supports may help improve overall attendance for all students.

The district created and made available to attendance

teams a highly effective data monitoring and reporting system that aggregates and provides current attendance data and allows teams to monitor individual interventions. Not only does it show year-to-date attendance rates but it also provides indicators of growth in attendance rates over a set period of time. This creates a new pathway for just-in-time interventions and celebrations. In addition, the data system enables interventions and their results to be documented and monitored. At present, attendance is integrated into the MTSS process, but the district is currently planning for closer integration of the attendance team with the MTSS process.

Student and Family Support Infrastructure

The district has established a comprehensive support network to address the various barriers that can impact student attendance. Thirteen district nurses, a nursing supervisor, and 13 licensed practical nurses

Hillsboro School District Attendance Action Plan

1. Build collective efficacy
2. Increase family engagement through positive relationships, targeted interventions, data-driven communication, and collaboration opportunities
3. Increase school-level ownership
4. Implement wraparound support to identify root causes
5. Develop communication systems

serve the district's 36 schools, with the nursing team playing a role in attendance by sharing messaging and outreach regarding "too sick for school" guidelines and raising awareness in the community about health-related attendance issues.

All schools have access to Family Outreach Liaisons, with varying levels of support ranging from two hours to full-time positions depending on school needs. These liaisons often serve as integral members of attendance teams, working collaboratively to address basic needs or family concerns that may be creating barriers to regular attendance. When families face challenges such as transportation difficulties, housing instability, or other basic needs, the outreach liaisons connect them with appropriate resources and support.

The district also employs graduation coaches who are integral to student engagement work including family outreach, home visits, and academic support that often addresses root causes of attendance struggles. Four graduation coaches work in middle schools, where they also serve as family outreach liaisons, while 14 graduation coaches serve the high schools. Although this position was reduced during recent budget constraints, the remaining team continues to be essential in engagement efforts.

To enhance the effectiveness of these support efforts, a Mental Health Care Coordinator has joined the monthly meetings of outreach liaisons to improve awareness and connection to community resources. Additionally, the district has partnered with Washington County Oregon Department of Health and Human Services through a pilot project that places a family coach at one elementary school. This family coach attends liaison meetings and supports efforts to link families with basic needs support and resources through the self-sufficiency team.

The district employs ten Student Support and Wellness Counselors across its schools, seven of whom are licensed social workers and four who are clinical social work associates working toward clinical licensure. These specialized counseling department professionals are dedicated to dropout prevention efforts and, while supporting all risk factors for school engage-

ment and success, spend most of their time addressing social, emotional, and mental health concerns that lead to other risk factors such as substance use, behavior challenges, and chronic absenteeism. While these professionals do not provide formal comprehensive therapeutic services due to liability coverage limitations, they offer crucial screening, intervention, and support for a variety of student needs. When students require formal mental health care and are positioned to access such services, the district's mental health care coordination team provides support to students and families in connecting with community-based services.

Recognizing that financial and transportation barriers can limit access to mental health care in the community, the district has established on-site school-based mental health providers at 17 schools: nine elementary schools, four middle schools, and four high schools. These providers offer critical access to mental health support for students and families who might otherwise struggle to obtain such services.

Collective Efficacy

Building on the base of compassionate attendance communication to parents and effective monitoring of attendance at each school, the primary focus for the 2024-25 school year has been on building collective efficacy through promoting an attendance focus across district departments and initiatives. The district attendance team is partnering with district and school administrators, school counselors, student services staff, the English language learning department, the student success coaches, the elementary and secondary leadership team, the family engagement team, and many more. In essence, the district expects that everyone is and has to be engaged in attendance work to meet the overall goals of the district. The work of the district's attendance team is to engage the collaboration and partnership of the leaders of the multiplicity of departments so that the district can leverage the collective efforts of all staff to improve attendance.

Until the launch of the attendance action plan, the

major effort to improve attendance had rested on such tier 3 interventions as home visits and wraparound services for those students who were struggling the most with attendance. Although the action plan is intent on improving this approach through more effective use of data and empathy interviews, the district realized that it's impossible to provide interventions even for chronically absent students if universal supports are not in place.

Therefore, by the end of the 2024-25 school year, the intention of the district attendance team was to have everyone recognize the connection between their work and the attendance goal and build strategies into their work that improve attendance. By making attendance a collective effort of everyone in the district, the district hopes to create a culture of attendance that serves as a universal support to improve the attendance of all students. The district attendance team is committed to creating a culture in which attendance is an accepted expectation. To do that everyone in the district has a role to play in creating that culture. Providing universal supports creates the foundation upon which to construct the pyramid of tier 2 and 3 supports.

Engagement as an Essential Condition for Learning

As part of the effort to provide foundational universal supports, attendance has been a focus for teacher professional development to identify instructional practices that support attendance. In particular, this professional development focuses on setting conditions for learning in the classroom that promote engagement and belonging and foster a desire to attend on the part of students. Engagement and sense of belonging are monitored through a student survey and part of the district's internal accountability system. Therefore, partnering with the teaching and learning team to improve instruction is a key vehicle for enhancing student engagement and creating that culture of attending.

Rather than outsourcing attendance work to the at-

tendance clerks and the attendance teams, this professional development effort involves helping faculty see that they are teammates in the work of improving attendance by promoting engagement and belonging in their classrooms. The attendance team is working with the teaching and learning team to align their messages so that teachers and other staff see the connection between their teaching and learning efforts and improved attendance. For example, teachers can integrate community building activities into elementary-level morning meetings and secondary-level advisory meetings. They can communicate that students are missed when they are not there and acknowledge them when they are. Teachers can connect with families by making calls home, hosting Google meets with parents, or sending emails or texts a few times a week, even if just to share positive messages about a student's learning or engagement. The goal is to have students feel affirmed in their identity, visible and represented in the curricular content, and celebrated for who they are so that they feel welcomed, valued, and at home at school.

Social-Emotional Learning

A significant element in the providing a system of universal supports has been the district's social and emotional learning (SEL) efforts. In fact, SEL has been integrated with the district's equity efforts for the past three years in order to build a sense of community and belonging among the diversity of cultures and backgrounds represented in the student body.

At the elementary level, teachers have been using morning meetings to build community and a sense of belonging in their classrooms. The time for morning meetings has been built into the elementary schedule since 2017. Teachers have focused on the community building elements of the Harmony program, such as buddy systems, partner sharing, and other interactive activities, to support connections among students. Character Strong is used at the middle and high schools during weekly advisory time. Across all levels of instruction, the district has focused on the CASEL playbook strategy of integrating three sig-

nature practices---an inclusive welcome, engaging teaching strategies, and an intentional close. These are considered a framework for universal integration into classroom instruction as well as for establishing a connected classroom community. The district believes its efforts align well with the focal constructs in the state's approach to transformative social-emotional learning and present a key vehicle for building collective efficacy across the district in support of attendance.

Targeted Interventions

The district has also strengthened its work on targeted interventions to address root causes of chronic absenteeism by identifying five meaningful interventions. These interventions include daily attendance tracking and recognition, check-in and check-out monitoring, Stuart Ablon's collaborative problem-solving plan B conversations focused on attendance, structured problem solving with students and families, and small group counseling. All of these interventions and their results can be documented and monitored in the enhanced attendance data system implemented by the district.

Communication Campaign

In the fall of 2025, the district plans to launch the fifth element of its action plan---a renewed communications campaign with new materials and a tag line that will engage everyone. The campaign will involve principals presenting information to staff and parents. The district's family liaisons will present to parent advisory councils. In addition, there will be a focus on the community as a whole. The theme of the campaign will focus on the importance of coming to schools.

The district credits the improvements made over the past year to school administrators who are effectively using the data systems, communications home, and instructional focus on engagement and belonging. Given the emphasis on collective efficacy, universal supports, and enhanced data monitoring and intervention, the district expects even greater gains moving forward.

Hillsboro School District Attendance Action Plan

Build **collective efficacy**---Integrate attendance improvement initiatives into the district's overall educational framework by fostering robust interdepartmental collaboration and ensuring attendance is a key focus across all relevant teams and programs.

Increase **family engagement** in improving student attendance through the implementation of a multi-tiered outreach strategy that include: 1) **Building positive relationships**: Develop and implement communication strategies that foster trust and open communication with families. 2) **Targeted interventions**: Identify families of chronically absent students and offer targeted support and resources to address attendance barriers. 3) **Data-driven communication**: Provide families with clear and regular communication about their child's attendance data and available resources. 4) **Collaboration opportunities**: Create opportunities for families to participate in attendance improvement efforts, such as school events or workshops.

Increase **school-level ownership** of attendance improvement by building and facilitating effective and consistent **Attendance Teams**. These teams will develop and implement data-driven attendance improvement plans that include specific goals, regular data review, and consistent team meetings.

Develop and implement a wraparound support program in collaboration with community partners and families that identifies **root causes** of chronic absenteeism and provides targeted interventions (e.g., health services, academic support, transportation assistance) for at-risk students.

Develop **Communication systems** and materials consistent with our best practice approach to attendance improvement.

Chapter Thirteen

Beaverton School District: Belong. Believe. Achieve.

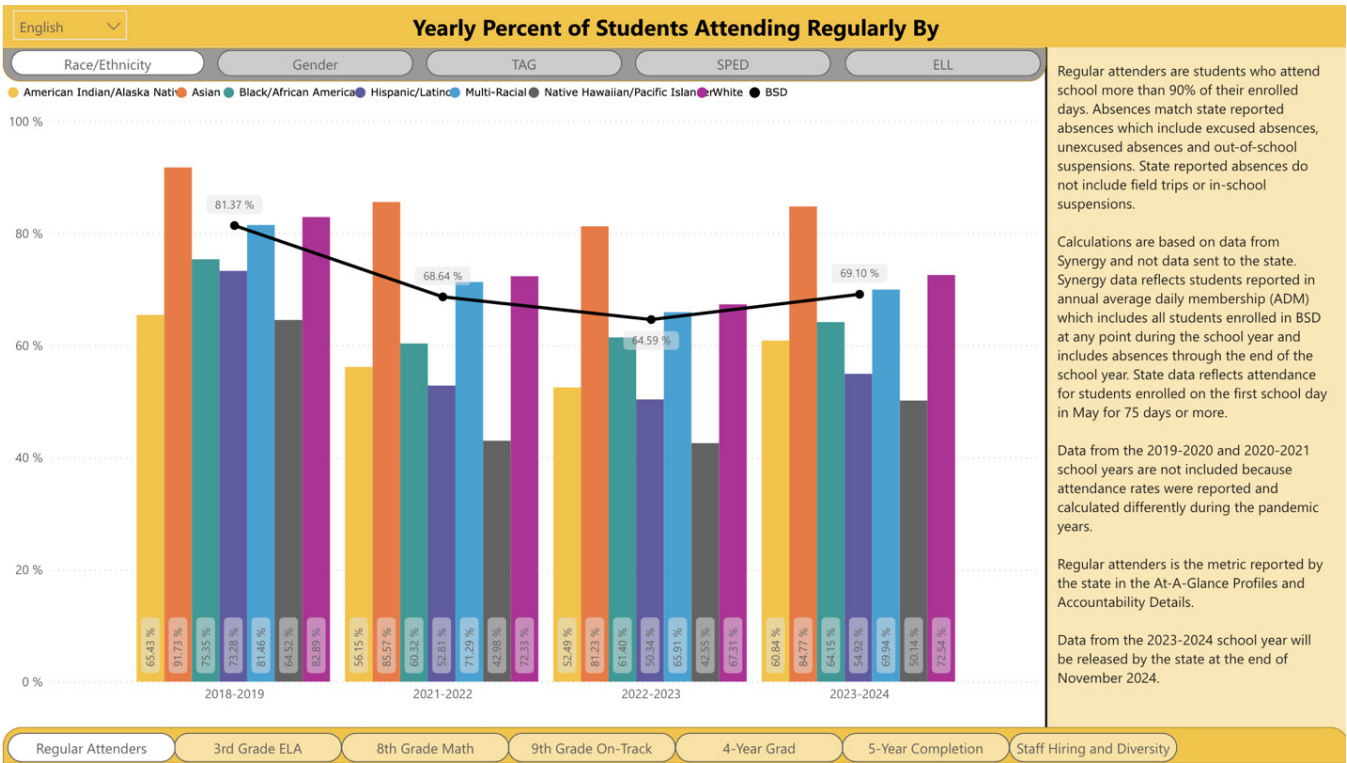
District Context & Demographics

The Beaverton School District, located just west of Portland, has a diverse student body whose families speak 98 different languages. Twenty-eight percent of its 38,000 students are or have been English language learner and 22% are students experiencing poverty. The student population is 41% white, 28% Hispanic, 18% Asian, and 9% multiracial. For the 2022-23 school year, 33.1% of the district's students were chronically absent. The district made significant improvement during the 2023-24 school year, as they began to implement a number of strategies to address the attendance issue. As a result, the district reduced the percent of chronically absent students by 4.8% to 28.3%.

Attendance as Central to Beaverton's Strategic Plan

Beaverton's superintendent, Gustavo Balderas, has made attendance a clear district priority and the district's strategic plan places attendance as central to its improvement efforts. The plan offers a promise to parents of students encapsulated in the statement "Belong. Believe. Achieve." In his opening of the year message to parents, he made it clear that attendance is central to belonging.

Belonging is at the heart of our mission. Our schools are not merely buildings; they are communities where each student, family and staff member is an essential part of our BSD tapestry. Within our walls, we celebrate



diverse backgrounds, cultures and abilities. We demand inclusivity, and we foster an atmosphere of respect and understanding. Here, everyone is seen, heard and supported.

But to belong, students need to be here. We are placing extra emphasis on attendance this year. Please help and encourage your child to be at school every day. Belonging doesn't happen if students are not here to develop critical relationships with their teachers and fellow students.

To emphasize the importance of attendance, the district has embedded in the superintendent's message a direct link to the attendance site on the district's webpage.

The first goal of the strategic plan is entitled "safe and thriving" and focuses on student safety and well-being. The plan specifies that to achieve the outcome that "every student feels safe, every student thrives socially and emotionally, all identities are valued, and every student is included," the district will perform these actions:

Create school and district systems, structures and practices that build **safe and inclusive learning environments**.

Implement strong **multi-tiered systems of support** for students' social-emotional, behavioral and academic needs.

Provide robust, relevant, meaningful and differentiated **professional development** for all staff.

This goal is part of every school's improvement plan. The primary metric for measuring success is improvement in the percent of regular attenders for each demographic group and each grade level. Therefore, the goal isn't just to improve overall attendance but to also close the gap between groups. The district makes this information available on its website to parents, staff, and the public to ensure that this remains a clear

focus for all.

Belonging Begins Here

One of Beaverton's initial attendance efforts has been a districtwide attendance campaign with the theme of "Belonging Begins Here." The Communications and Community Involvement Department launched an [attendance webpage](#) that speaks to the importance of attendance and identifies the problematic impact of poor attendance. It provides a guidance document entitled "Too Sick for School" that outlines when parents should send their child to school and when they should keep them home. It also offers information on how parents can help improve their children's attendance, videos and tip sheets in English and Spanish encouraging positive attendance, and parent and student survey results on attendance questions from the district's Engage BSD survey. Attendance information is also distributed to all parents via email. In addition, the Communications and Community Involvement Department provides communications materials to schools that can be individually tailored to the school's parent population. The schools have then put these materials in their newsletters, social media posts, and other communications and speak about it at parent association meetings, back to school nights, and parent conferences.



Attendance as an Essential Element of the MTSS Process

In addition to the communications campaign, the district has focused on building attendance into its MTSS process. Each building has a behavioral health and wellness team composed of counselors, administration, teachers, and other school-wide staff who support students. The team looks at attendance as one data point in their assessment of what is happening for the student. Their focus is on intervening and supporting the student. When they have identified a problem, the team finds ways to work with the family to help get the student to school and provides wraparound support where it is necessary. The teams also focus on trend data for various demographic groups and grade levels and tailor their efforts to support improvement among those groups.

Student and Family Support Services

The Beaverton School District has 49 social workers, 24.5 nurses, 52 bilingual facilitators, and four social support liaisons in the district across its 55 schools. The majority of schools have at least one social worker with some having two. However, the nurse to student ratio is over 1:1500 students and the four liaisons cover a stu-

dent population of 37,000. Despite that, social workers work alongside counselors to help address attendance concerns with students and families. Social support liaisons also work alongside our social workers and counselors, especially if a family needs support around navigating schools or needs support in their native language. Nurses can be involved if the reason a student is not coming is a medical reason.

Social-Emotional Learning

The district's social-emotional learning programs are also an element in their attendance efforts, creating caring and supportive environments where students feel welcomed, safe, and valued. The district uses Kindness in the Classroom at the elementary level and Character Strong at the secondary level to support their SEL programming. Through these programs, teachers listen to children, particularly children who are missing school more often, to better understand what they are saying and experiencing and provide additional support and encouragement to those students.

Beaverton's communication campaign and its behavioral health and wellness teams are propelling its attendance improvement. Most important is the focus on looking at the individual students behind the numbers.

Chapter Fourteen

Conclusion: From Research to Practice - Lessons Learned and the Path Forward



This examination of chronic absenteeism across eleven diverse Oregon districts reveals how research-based understanding of root causes can be translated into practical implementation strategies that produce meaningful results. The convergence of evidence and real-world practice offers insights for educators, policymakers, and communities committed to ensuring every student has consistent access to learning opportunities.

Building on a Research Foundation

The identification of four primary root causes—family health and economic circumstances, lack of school belonging and safety, feelings of academic failure, and insufficient academic engagement—provides a critical framework for understanding chronic absenteeism as a complex, multifaceted challenge. These findings reveal that attendance problems are rarely isolated issues but rather symptoms of broader systemic challenges that require coordinated responses across multiple domains.

The research on evidence-based solutions demonstrates that effective interventions exist to address

root causes. From professional family advocates and comprehensive health services to social-emotional learning programs and authentic instruction, schools have access to proven strategies. However, the research also confirms that these solutions achieve their greatest impact when implemented as part of comprehensive, relationship-centered approaches rather than as isolated programs.

The deeper insight that emerges from both research and practice is that students are more inclined to attend school when they feel known, valued, and supported by caring adults within engaging learning environments. This understanding shifts the focus from compliance-based interventions to the fundamental work of creating classroom and school cultures that welcome and strengthen every student.

Implementation Realities and Creative Adaptations

The eleven districts' experiences illuminate both the possibilities and constraints of implementing evidence-based solutions in real-world contexts. Operating within significant budget limitations, these districts could not simply add the comprehensive support

services—additional social workers, nurses, or family liaisons—that research identifies as beneficial. Instead, they demonstrated remarkable creativity in maximizing existing resources while developing creative adaptations that achieved meaningful results.

Their collective work illustrates that successful implementation requires adaptation to local contexts while maintaining fidelity to core principles. Districts serving different populations—from rural communities of 65 students to urban districts of 37,000—found distinct ways to operationalize the same fundamental insight about the power of relationships and belonging in fostering regular attendance. What emerges from these diverse implementations is evidence that the principles underlying effective attendance improvement are broadly applicable, even as the specific strategies must be tailored to local contexts.

Critical Elements of Success

Analysis across districts reveals several critical success factors that transcend specific strategies or demographic contexts. Superintendent and central office leadership proved essential, with successful districts having leaders who personally championed attendance improvement and sustained focus across multiple years. The integration of attendance improvement into comprehensive support systems, particularly MTSS frameworks, enabled schools to address attendance holistically rather than as an isolated compliance issue. This systematic approach created coherence across interventions and ensured that attendance became embedded in the school's overall approach to supporting student success.

Data systems and collaborative team structures provided the foundation for identifying students in need and monitoring intervention effectiveness. Professional development that built capacity across all staff roles—not just attendance specialists—created the collective efficacy necessary for sustainable change. Perhaps most importantly, the transformation of communication approaches from punitive to supportive fundamentally

altered the relationship between schools and families, creating conditions for partnership rather than adversarial interactions.

Impact and the Promise of Sustainability

The districts' attendance improvements, ranging from 4.2% to 10.6% reductions in chronic absenteeism, demonstrate that meaningful change is achievable within relatively short timeframes. These gains occurred across diverse contexts and demographic groups, suggesting that the core principles underlying effective attendance improvement are broadly applicable.

The emphasis on cultural change and systematic approaches suggests greater potential for sustainability than program-based interventions typically achieve. Districts that positioned attendance as central to their educational mission and embedded improvement strategies into their organizational fabric created conditions for lasting change that can withstand leadership transitions and budget constraints.

However, the true test of these initiatives will be their sustainability over time and their impact on broader educational outcomes. Sustainability requires that districts have the capacity to evolve and adapt to changing student and community needs while maintaining their fundamental commitment to creating schools where every student feels valued and engaged.

Implications for Policy and Practice

These findings carry significant implications for both education policy and practice. For districts beginning attendance improvement efforts, the evidence suggests starting with relationship-building, communication transformation, and attendance data analysis rather than complex programmatic interventions. The foundation of effective attendance improvement lies in creating schools where students feel welcomed and

valued, which requires cultural change more than additional resources.

For policymakers, the study highlights the importance of supporting comprehensive approaches rather than mandating specific interventions. Districts need flexibility to adapt strategies to their local contexts while maintaining focus on evidence-based practices. Investment in professional development, data systems, and collaborative structures may yield significant returns.

The experiences of these districts also underscore the importance of viewing attendance improvement as part of broader efforts to create equitable, inclusive, and engaging learning environments. When attendance becomes isolated from these larger goals, interventions risk becoming compliance-focused rather than student-centered.

Emerging Challenges and Future Considerations

As these districts worked to improve attendance, federal immigration policies created new challenges that illuminate the complex relationship between community context and school attendance. Fear within immigrant communities has led some families to keep children home from school, demonstrating how external factors can quickly impact attendance patterns despite effective school-based interventions.

Dee (2025) studied the impact of immigration enforcement on attendance in school district in five counties in California's Central Valley in the early months of 2025. He found a 22% increase in absenteeism among Hispanic students, with particularly sharp increases occurring among younger students. The study not only points to the impact on these students but also on may serve as a leading indicator of developmentally harmful stress for students and families and disruptive impact on the pacing and coherence of instruction for all students.

This development reinforces the understanding that attendance improvement is not simply an internal school matter but requires ongoing attention to the

broader social, economic, and political factors that influence families' decisions about school participation. The upcoming data on enrollment and attendance patterns for 2024-2025 will examine the particular impact immigration enforcement has had in the eleven districts and provide important insights into how external pressures interact with school-based improvement efforts.

The Continuing Work

While this study demonstrates that significant attendance improvements are achievable, the persistence of concerning chronic absenteeism rates—even in districts with substantial gains—underscores that this work requires sustained commitment and continuous effort. Creating schools where every student wants to attend regularly is not a destination but an ongoing process of responding to evolving student needs and community contexts.

The work of these eleven districts provides a foundation for this ongoing effort, demonstrating that transformation is possible when communities commit to understanding and addressing the complex factors that influence school attendance. Their experiences offer evidence that chronic absenteeism need not be viewed as an intractable problem but rather as an opportunity to strengthen the fundamental relationships and systems that support student success.

This perspective shift—from viewing attendance as a compliance issue to understanding it as an indicator of school climate and student engagement—has the potential to transform how educators approach not only attendance but the broader work of creating learning environments where all students can thrive.

Ultimately, the path forward requires recognizing that attendance improvement is not an end in itself but a means toward creating educational environments where all students can thrive. When schools become places of genuine belonging, meaningful learning, and caring relationships, regular attendance becomes the natural expression of students' engagement with their educational community. This transformation, as

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