

Key Insights on Attendance Text Messaging Communications



Chronic absenteeism is a widespread challenge in education, and the COVID-19 pandemic significantly altered attendance behaviors of students and introduced new barriers.

AIR held facilitated conversations with families to explore whether text messaging could still be a helpful way to support students and families in the changing post-pandemic environment. Below are key findings from the conversations with English- and Spanish-speaking families about their general communication preferences with schools and their responses to receiving text messages about student attendance. We also highlight specific considerations for engaging Spanish-speaking families in attendance outreach.

Family Communication Preferences



Intentional use of multiple communication

modalities. Families stressed the importance that schools have a specific purpose for each modality when using multiple methods to communicate. For example, emails are useful for detailed information and linked resources, and text messages are useful for notifications that require time-sensitive action.

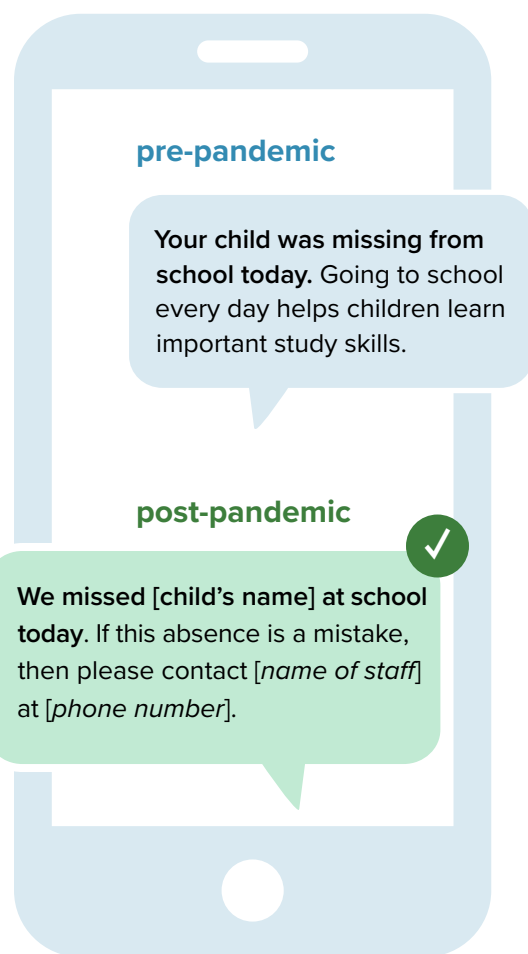


Using communication platforms for tracking missed academic assignments

following absences can help to improve school engagement by helping students stay aware of instructional content, even when they are absent. Families prefer consistency in how teachers communicate and update information about assignments.



Trust in communication. Trust is fostered through responsive and consistent updates by teachers and school representatives. Families appreciate receiving messages from familiar and trusted sources, such as teachers or counselors. Families expressed that delayed communication erodes trust and emphasized the need for timely and responsive updates.



Read the Brief

Ready to implement a text messaging strategy for your district or school?

[Read the full brief to learn more](#) about engaging families through text messaging.

Elements of Effective Attendance Text Messages

Real-time text messages. Families prefer real-time, child-specific texts, which can help them to act promptly on absences and tardiness.

Direct and relevant text messages. Families prefer messages that are clear, actionable, and specific to their children's needs, and they prefer to avoid receiving repetitive or redundant messages.

Accuracy of information. Families noted frustration with receiving inaccurate information. They also prefer messages to be tailored to specific situations and needs of their children; for example, families find it respectful when schools refrain from sending daily communication when they have already informed the school about an extended absence, such as for hospital stays or funerals.

Belonging and connectedness. Including contact information in texts helps families feel personally connected to the schools and makes it easy for them to follow up with specific staff. Unlike pre-pandemic sentiments, families now want the option to respond to texts to connect directly with a staff member.

A SHIFT FROM ONE-SIZE FITS ALL

Families considered generalized messages to be helpful before the COVID-19 pandemic. Since then, however, families often perceive such messages as being condescending, as they feel schools are implying to know more about their children than the families do.

Crafting Text Messages for Spanish-Speaking Families

Use text messages to increase awareness of attendance policies.



Text messages can be a great resource for introducing new attendance policies or reminding families of significant changes to existing policies, especially when initial notices are provided in formats that are challenging to translate.

Frame messages in a positive, friendly tone.



Families shared that messages with this framing foster trust, collaboration, and connection and serve as valuable reminders of the importance of school attendance.

Provide information in a native language.



Whenever possible, schools should send messages in families' native languages. When this is not possible, schools should connect families with translation services so that families can better understand the messages and support their children.

Link to academic resources. Families may face challenges in assisting children with missed work when their native language differs from the language of instruction. By linking to academic resources, families are better able to support their children with assignments when they are absent.



Identify community resources.



Schools can help to foster a sense of connection by identifying community resources, such as low-cost medical providers, that help families, especially those new to the area, support students in consistently attending school.

Contact Us: attendancelab@air.org