

Better Texts, Better Attendance: Family Insights on Attendance Communications

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Implications of Attendance Text Messaging and Communication

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Goals for Today

1. Understand the background and current context of chronic absenteeism.
2. Provide an overview of the brief.
3. Share actionable insights and recommendations from focus groups.
4. Discuss findings from the report in small groups.

The Challenge of Chronic Absenteeism

Impact on Student Success

Chronic absenteeism negatively affects student achievement and increases dropout rates, posing long-term risks.

Effect of COVID-19 Pandemic

Absenteeism rates nearly doubled nationally after the COVID-19 pandemic and, while slightly decreasing, remain persistently high.

Importance of Family Engagement

Strong family involvement correlates with lower absenteeism and supports attendance improvement strategies.

Strategies for Communication

Using texts, phone calls, newsletters, and apps promotes family engagement and encourages school attendance.

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Prior Research and Messaging Strategies

Effectiveness of Text Messaging

Studies have shown that text messaging reduces chronic absenteeism, especially in elementary students with high absence rates.

Adaptive Messaging Approach

Adaptive strategies start with basic messages and intensify communication for frequent absence rates, improving attendance overall.

Implementation Guidance

The 2021 how-to guide offers detailed instructions for districts to implement effective attendance messaging programs.

Personalized Messaging Benefits

Personalized and family-responsive messages enhance the scalability and impact of attendance improvement programs.

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What We Heard From Families

District Overview



Des Moines Public Schools (DMPS)

DMPS is Iowa’s largest district. It serves more than 30,000 students and has a diverse demographic, including English learners and special education students.

Ankeny Community School District (ACSD)

ACSD serves more than 12,600 students with a focus on rigorous academics, skilled staff, and supportive learning environments.



Family Communication Insights

Both districts offered valuable insights on family communication preferences, including effective use of text messaging for attendance promotion.



Family Preferences for General School Communication

Multiples Modes of Communication

Families prefer organized communication via email, text, phone, and school-specific platforms for effective engagement.

Unsubscribe and Contact Clarity

The option to unsubscribe from messages and clear contact info is essential for family communication preferences.

Tracking Academic Assignments

Families value platforms that provide updates on missed assignments, especially for absent students.

Consistency and Timeliness

Consistent communication and timely updates foster trust, while delays and inaccuracies harm relationships.

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Family Preferences for Text Messaging



Child-Specific Real-Time Messages

Families value immediate, personalized messages about their child's attendance for timely responses.



Clear and Actionable Content

Messages should be concise, clear, and actionable without redundant or irrelevant information.



Accurate and Respectful Communication

Accurate attendance data and respectful tone prevent frustration and foster positive relations.



Two-Way Communication

Families appreciate messages that include contact details and enable two-way communication.

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Spanish-Speaking Communication Needs and Preferences

Native Language Messaging

Families prefer to receive attendance and school updates in their native language for clarity and better understanding.

Friendly and Motivational Tone

A warm tone in communication encourages families and shows the school's care and support.

Access to Interpreters and Resources

Families need interpreters and academic resources, especially for challenging subjects like mathematics.

Community Resource Information

Providing information about transportation and low-cost medical providers helps families to maintain consistent attendance.

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How to Put This Into Action

Crafting Messages That Build Engagement

Attendance Works R.E.A.L. Framework Alignment	Personalized and Trustworthy Communication
Attendance messages should follow the Attendance Works R.E.A.L. framework focusing on routines, engagement, resources, and learning support.	Messages should include student names and contact points, and should come from trusted staff like teachers or counselors.
Inclusive Language and Reporting	Clear and Accessible Messaging
Report absences as days, avoid judgmental language, and use interpreters for non-native speakers to ensure understanding.	Use a professional, informative tone with factual content; keep messages short and at an 8th-grade reading level.





Launching a Text Messaging Campaign

Six Steps for Implementation

Effective campaigns require planning teams, system assessments, resource allocation, messaging blueprints, communication, and pilot tests.

Data-Informed Messaging

Attendance data guides messaging to address the root causes of absenteeism for targeted intervention.

Holistic Strategy Importance

Text messaging alone cannot solve absenteeism; professional development and community partnerships are essential.

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Breakout Room Discussion Questions

1. How can schools balance the need for timely, actionable attendance communication with families' desire for personalization and respect for their unique circumstances?
2. What strategies can districts use to build trust and ensure accuracy in attendance-related communications, especially when using automated systems?
3. How can schools better support non-native English speaking families through text messaging and other communication platforms?

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THANK YOU FOR JOINING US!

If you have additional questions, please reach out!
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