PANORAMA
EDUCATION

4 Evidence-Based Attendance Interventions

Understanding the causes of chronic absenteeism and improving attendance present huge challenges for building and district leaders.

The challenges have only grown as chronic absenteeism doubled from pre-pandemic rates to around 16 million students in 2022. Attendance matters because chronic absenteeism correlates with negative outcomes such as lower test scores or dropping out.

Evidence-Based Approaches

Educators, researchers, and policy makers are all in the struggle to address chronic absenteeism. Despite the attention, researchers have identified relatively few evidence-based approaches. Two of these approaches are:

- Notification-based interventions
- Mentoring-based interventions

Notification-based interventions are fairly simple to implement. They include both sharing with family members how many school days a student has been absent as well as underscoring the importance of regular attendance.

Mentoring-based interventions are more resource-intensive. They aim to increase engagement for students who don't feel as connected to school.

Understanding the root cause of chronic absenteeism is challenging but necessary for matching the correct support strategy to the student in need of support.

How to use these guides:

In this toolkit, you'll find four evidence-based strategies with proven effectiveness when it comes to authentically engaging families and their students to improve attendance. Each guide provides information about the strategy, recommended use in terms of MTSS tiers and developmental stages, and detailed implementation instructions.

- **District Leaders:** Incorporate these strategies into your district-wide intervention menu. Share these resources with your school teams and consider ways to consistently implement interventions districtwide.

- **School Leaders**: Bring these strategies to PLCs, staff meetings, or MTSS and Student Support team meetings to share with staff and support students at every tier.

- **Classroom Teachers and Support Staff:** Try these activities in class, small group, or individual settings to support the engagement and academic growth of every student.

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About Panorama Playbook:

Panorama provides the most comprehensive and informative library of evidence-based learning supports of any K-12 learning platform. The interventions in this toolkit have been selected from Playbook, Panorama's professional learning library for K-12 educators. Districts and schools that partner with Panorama have full access to the collection of 700+ lesson plans, instructional resources, and MTSS interventions across SEL, attendance, academics, and behavior. In addition to facilitation guides like the ones found in this toolkit, Playbook users can access in-depth implementation tips and differentiation ideas.
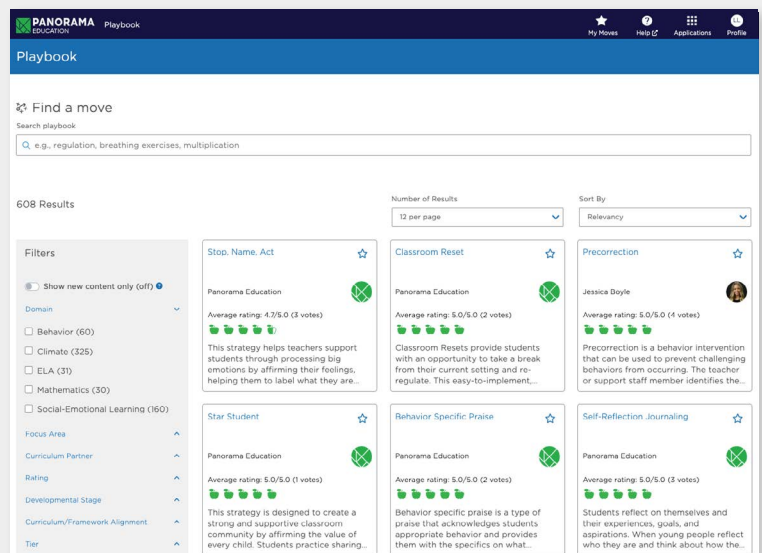
Panorama works with many evidence-based support programs to extend free access to their interventions, lesson plans, and activities to our partner districts and schools, including Attendance Works and Digital Promise. District and school partners can fully customize Playbook to align with state and local terminology and control which supports, partners, and topics are visible in the library.

Focus Area: Attendance • **MTSS Tier(s):** Tier 2, Tier 3
Developmental Stage: Lower Elementary, Upper Elementary, Middle School, High School

About This Strategy:

Nudge Letters is an intervention focused on communicating about a student's absenteeism with parents or guardians. Information about the child's attendance is provided to family members through brief postcards, letters, text messages, phone calls, or email. Nudging is an inexpensive and effective means of reducing chronic absenteeism.

The goals of this intervention include:
- Engaging parents or guardians in their child's school attendance.
- Reducing student absenteeism by providing actionable insights and encouragement through letters.

Preparation:
- Confirm that current attendance data is accurate.
- Determine family members' preferred means of contact.

Instructions:
1. Identify Target Students
   - Review attendance records to identify students who have missed more than the acceptable number of days according to your school's policy.
     - Different states and districts have different thresholds for what constitutes "chronic absence" but most define it as missing 10% or greater of the total number of days enrolled during the school year for any reason.

2. Determine a Communication Cadence
   - Decide when and how frequently parents will receive information about their student's absences. Follow this policy consistently.

3. Personalize the Nudge Letter
   - Using this pre-designed Nudge Letter template as a starting point, create a customized letter for a specific student.
   - Insert the student's specific attendance data in the designated areas of the template.
   - Add any additional resources available to students and families at your school that might be supportive for attendance purposes (e.g., home visits, afterschool programming, etc.).
   - Ensure that a brief message about the importance of regular school attendance is included. Provide one way that parents can contact the school in response to the message (for example, a phone number or an email address).

4. Send Letters
   - Nudge Letters can be sent home with a student, mailed to their family as a postcard, shared via email, or messaged via text.

5. Follow-Up
   - After the letters have been sent, mark a follow-up date on your calendar for two to three weeks later.
   - On the follow-up date, review the attendance records of the students who received the Nudge Letters.
   - If improvement is noted, consider sending a positive reinforcement note. If no improvement is noted, prepare for further intervention, such as a follow-up letter or phone call.

Attendance Postcard

Focus Area: Engagement, Family Engagement • **MTSS Tier(s):** Tier 2
Developmental Stage: High School, Lower Elementary, Middle School, Upper Elementary

About This Strategy:

This intervention focuses on sending Attendance Postcards to parents or guardians to increase their awareness of their child's absences and encourage proactive involvement.

Preparation:

Download or create an Attendance Postcard template that includes fields for the student's name, number of absences, and resources/suggestions for improvement.

Prepare a list of students who have been absent more than a certain number of days (e.g., 5 days in a semester).

Instructions:

1. Identify Target Students
   • Use attendance data to identify students who have been absent more than the predetermined number of days.

2. Personalize Attendance Postcard
   • Use the template to complete the Attendance Postcard for each identified student, filling in the specific details.
   • The message should be framed positively and include a gentle reminder about the importance of attendance, the number of days the student has missed, and additional resources to support the family.

Implementation Tips:

• Consider following up the postcards with a phone call or email to ensure that the message has been received and understood.
• Use positive language in the postcards to encourage rather than discourage parents and guardians.

Attendance Groups

Focus Area: Sense of Belonging, Engagement • **MTSS Tier(s):** Tier 2, Tier 3
Developmental Stage: Middle School, Upper Elementary, Lower Elementary, High School

About This Strategy:
This intervention aims to use Attendance Groups as a means of positively reinforcing students to increase their engagement and attendance in school. Attendance Groups operate on the idea that students who feel involved and inspired are more inclined to attend school regularly. These groups serve as a form of positive encouragement to boost students' active participation in school.

Preparation:
Identify students who are struggling to attend school consistently. Prepare a Reward Chart to track attendance and participation in the Attendance Groups.

Instructions:
1. Form Attendance Groups
    *   Divide the identified students into small groups of 4-6. These groups should meet weekly for at least four consecutive months.
    *   Educator Script: "Think of these groups as your 'Attendance Squad.' You'll be supporting each other to improve attendance and engagement."

2. Introduce the Reward Chart
    *   Discuss and set achievable goals for attendance and participation, along with corresponding rewards. Co-create these goals with students.
    *   Show students the Reward Chart and explain how it will be used to track attendance and participation.
    *   Educator Script: "This Reward Chart is like your scoreboard. The more you attend and participate, the more points your Attendance Squad earns."

3. Set Goals and Rewards
    *   Discuss and set achievable goals for attendance and participation, along with corresponding rewards. Co-create these goals with students.
    *   Educator Script: "Goals are your game plan, and rewards are your trophies. Let's set some achievable goals and exciting rewards to keep everyone motivated."

4. Weekly Group Check-ins
    - Conduct weekly check-ins to discuss progress, challenges, and strategies for improvement.
    - In the group sessions, students establish attendance objectives for the week and interact with their peers. The group takes part in diverse activities aimed at boosting both self-esteem and active involvement in school.
    - Activities can range from filling out worksheets centered on goals, engaging in games, activities that build self-confidence, earning rewards, filling out attendance records, self-monitoring of attendance, and exercises that focus on problem-solving.

5. Distribute Rewards
    - Give out rewards based on the Reward Chart during the weekly check-ins.
    - Educator Script: "It's trophy time! Let's celebrate your achievements and keep the momentum going."

Focus Area: Teacher-Student Relationships, Self-Efficacy,
Sense of Belonging, Engagement • **MTSS Tier(s):** Tier 2, Tier 3
Developmental Stage: Upper Elementary, Middle School, High School

About This Strategy:

Check and Connect is an intervention focused on building a trusting, supportive relationship with a mentor to help K-12 students who show signs of disengagement with school (such as poor attendance, behavioral issues, and/or low grades).

Instructions:

1. The Mentor
   - This is an individual assigned to a specific student for the purpose of building a strong relationship with them. This relationship is developed over time, with a focus on long-term success at school and with learning.

2. The "Check"
   - The process where a mentor monitors student performance across attendance, behavior, and academics

3. The "Connect"
   - This refers to mentors providing personalized and timely interventions for the student that are designed to support skill-building in specific areas. These interventions should be informed by "check" data that is readily available to school personnel.

4. Family Engagement
   - Mentors deliberately partner with the student's family and function as liaisons between home and school, striving to build authentic family-school partnerships and develop a two-way communication system.
   - Each week, the mentor spends approximately one hour performing the "Check" and "Connect" components of the intervention, along with other activities (engaging with family members, collaborating with school staff, or referring to resources) when appropriate.

In addition, there are three main principles to keep in mind when implementing the Check and Connect intervention:

1. Relationships
   - The relationships (between both the student and mentor as well as the mentor and family members) must be based in mutual trust and open communication. This is nurtured through the long-term commitment of the intervention and focus on promoting the student's success over the course of two years

2. Problem-Solving and Capacity-Building
    - In their work with the student, the mentor should strive to take a cognitive-behavioral approach to promote skill-building around resolving conflict constructively, proactively searching for solutions (vs. blaming others), developing coping skills, and – eventually – reducing dependency on the mentor.

3. Persistence Plus
    - This refers to persistence, continuity, and consistency. The mentor serves as a persistent source of motivation, grows to be familiar with the student and their family, and continually underscores the importance of education.

About Panorama Education

Panorama Education partners with K-12 schools and districts across the country to collect and analyze data about social-emotional learning, school climate, family engagement, and more. With research-backed surveys, actionable data reports, and intervention tracking tools, Panorama helps educators act on data and improve student outcomes. Panorama supports more than 15 million students in 25,000 schools across all 50 states, including those in the New York City Department of Education, Dallas Independent School District, Seattle Public Schools, and San Francisco Unified School District.
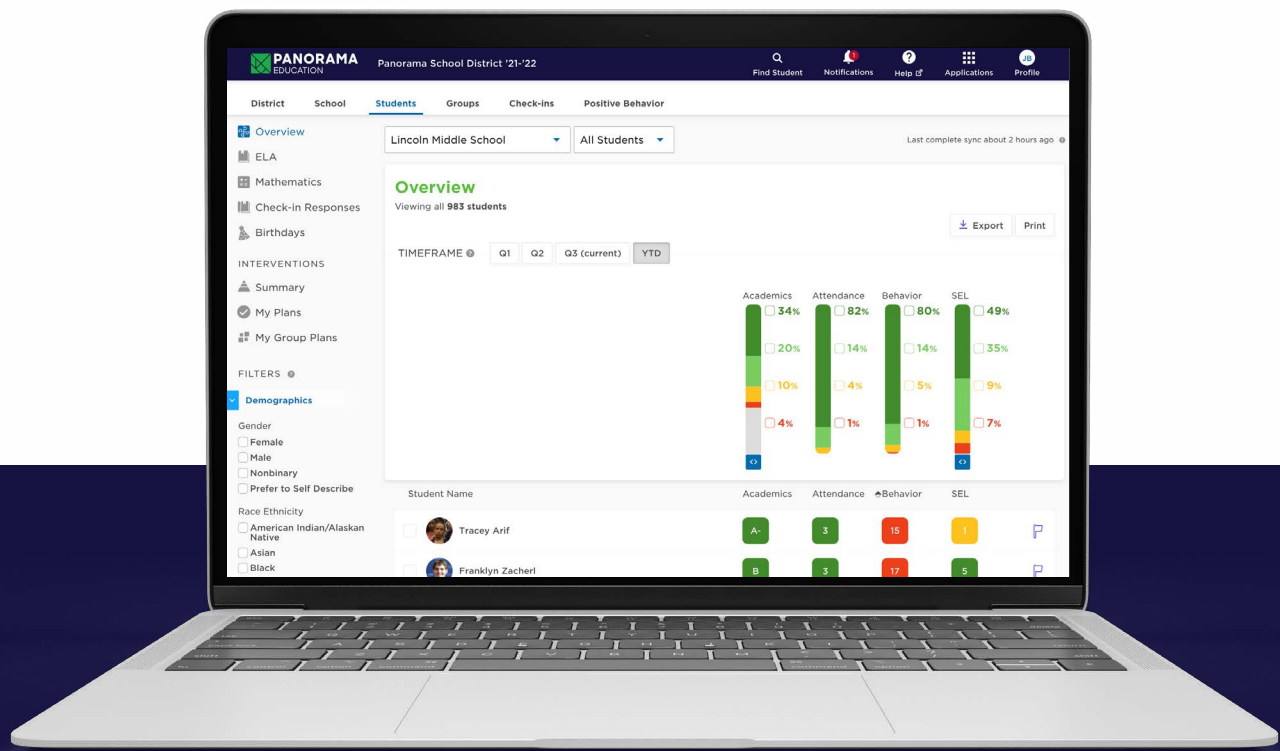
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