



Best Practice Guide



Showing up for Success: Family Engagement Strategies for Chronic Absenteeism

September 2024

Introduction



Today, one in four students is chronically absent from school, meaning they miss at least 10% of the school year or approximately 18 days in most districts.

While 18 days may not seem alarming, new data from the 2023-2024 school year reveals that an estimated 9.4 million students, or 19% of all students, were chronically absent last year—putting them at higher risk for academic failure, poverty, and dropping out of high school.¹

These numbers represent a staggering increase in just a few short years. According to the nonprofit organization Attendance Works, the pandemic intensified the problem of chronic absenteeism in U.S. schools and districts, which has reached new highs at schools that previously had challenges with attendance and now affects schools that never experienced this level of chronic absence before.²

While there's no easy solution to chronic absenteeism, **family engagement** is one of the most effective ways to address the problem. Research shows that strong partnerships between home and school support better academic outcomes, and the U.S. Department of Education encourages schools to improve family engagement in order to improve student engagement and attendance.³

In this guide, we'll explore the impact of family engagement on chronic absence—and strategies you can use to ensure that you're working together with families to encourage healthy attendance.





Fast Facts About Chronic Absenteeism

(Source: *Attendance Works*⁴)

- Attendance early in the year is a predictor of attendance for the entire year. In Baltimore County, Maryland, leaders found that students who missed two to four days in September were five times more likely to be chronically absent for the year.
- Students who live in low-income communities with high levels of poverty are four times more likely to be chronically absent—often for reasons beyond their control, like unstable housing, unreliable transportation, and lack of healthcare access.
- By third grade, poor attendance can negatively influence reading proficiency to the degree that students are held back.
- In sixth grade, chronic absence becomes a leading indicator that a student will drop out of high school.
- When students improve their attendance, they also improve their academic outcomes and likelihood of graduation.

What the Research Says



The impact of chronic absenteeism on a student's academics, personal relationships, social-emotional health, risk of poverty, and graduation rate can't be emphasized enough. While these effects have been widely documented, research shows that family engagement is a critical piece to solving the chronic absenteeism puzzle.⁵

When families are more engaged, students benefit. Family involvement fosters academic success, bridges the achievement gap, contributes to overall development, and is linked to a number of other positive outcomes—including better attendance.

For districts looking to address chronic absenteeism, the first step is building trust between school and home. It's critical to create a welcoming environment where families feel comfortable and empowered to engage, and studies have shown that sharing advocacy and power using a dual-capacity framework for family-school partnerships equates to higher rates of attendance.^{6,3}



Family Engagement Strategies for Reducing Chronic Absenteeism

To prevent and manage chronic absenteeism, schools and districts can implement family engagement strategies to encourage and support student attendance at every level.

Preventing Chronic Absenteeism

Engage in regular communication with parents and guardians

Research shows that families often don't understand the cumulative impact of student absences and may not monitor or prioritize attendance as a result.⁷ **Proactive communication** can help explain the importance of good attendance, as well as inform families of the school's attendance policy and the consequences of excessive absences.

One strategy is to ask parents, guardians, and families to pledge their commitment to regular attendance at the beginning of the school year. On ParentSquare, [using digital forms](#) makes this an easy task.

Two-way communication can also help schools build relationships with families and encourage regular attendance. Teachers and administrators can use ParentSquare to [send and receive direct messages](#) from parents and guardians. To ensure equitable communication, real-time translation—like [automatic two-way translation into 130+ languages](#)—is crucial for making sure information is available and accessible to families in their preferred language.


Finally, ongoing communication gives schools the opportunity to address some of the most common barriers to regular attendance, including health, transportation, food and housing insecurity, and misinformation.⁸ Along with building trust, regular communications and conversations can make families aware of resources and services that may help them support student attendance.



Reduce information overload

With the ever-growing amount of information sent to families, time-sensitive or critical communications can get lost in the weeds. Sometimes, parents and guardians are too inundated with information and modalities to be able to engage effectively—a problem that’s compounded when they have multiple students in multiple grade levels.

To find the balance between too little and too much information, consider implementing an **integrated communications plan** that outlines your target audiences, communication cadence, and priorities.



Best practices for planning effective communications

Download Part 2 of ParentSquare’s free [Complete District Communications Playbook](#) to get practical resources for forming a communications strategic plan, from identifying your audience and determining your goals to developing a tactical communications strategy.

The platform you use can also help manage the flow of your communications. ParentSquare enables families to receive a daily digest summary of non-critical information, reducing message fatigue and streamlining communication while still providing a channel for urgent alerts.

Notify families of absence or tardiness in real time

Early notification of absences and tardiness is critical in resolving some attendance issues. **Timely alerts** can help families become aware of attendance issues before they progress, and they also give schools and staff a way to identify patterns quickly and work with parents and caregivers to find solutions.

ParentSquare’s [Auto Notices feature](#) allows schools to send home automated notices that can be customized with student-specific details, including attendance information. These notices can be delivered via text, app, voice notification, and email to reach families where they are and notify them promptly before attendance issues become recurrent.

Create a positive school culture

Creating a positive school culture where students feel connected is critical to managing chronic absenteeism.⁹ Research links strong student connections to better student attendance and grades, less disruptive behavior, lower dropout rates, and other positive impacts like safety and mental health—findings supported by a recent survey of ParentSquare customers as well.^{10,11}

Did You Know?

Schools that created more posts on ParentSquare reported:

- Families being more caring towards administrators
- Families being friendlier towards teachers

Schools that sent out more direct messages on ParentSquare reported:

- Greater trust that parents at their school treated administrators fairly
- Greater respect from parents towards administrators
- Families being friendlier towards their teachers

Schools can foster stronger connections by making communications more engaging, from adding photos and videos to creating **visually appealing messages**. ParentSquare allows administrators, teachers, and staff to create **newsletters directly within the platform** that can also be **pushed to connected social media platforms** in one easy click—so there are no email lists to keep track of or update or coding to figure out.

Managing Chronic Absenteeism

Meet families where they are to provide more intensive support and get back on track

Communication with family members is essential for reducing the rate of chronic absenteeism. Equipping school leaders and educators to contact and engage directly with families of chronically absent students can help schools and districts provide more intensive support in a meaningful way.¹²



Two-way communication via **mobile-first modalities** can help engage families that may be more likely to respond to a text than an email. Similarly, **online appointment scheduling** can remove some of the friction of setting up conferences. To make sure all families can engage effectively, **automatic two-way translation** allows parents and caregivers to not only receive messages but reply directly in their home languages as well.

Phone calls may also be necessary to discuss sensitive topics or communicate with families more comfortable having verbal conversations. ParentSquare's **Virtual Phone** allows administrators, staff, and teachers to call any user or 10-digit US number from within the platform, with automatic call logging and the ability to generate transcripts.

Use data to assess the contactability of students' families

The **right data and analytics** can help schools and districts identify areas where they need to focus their efforts and develop targeted strategies to improve attendance. This includes making sure that your team has the ability to contact and engage with the families of students who are chronically absent.

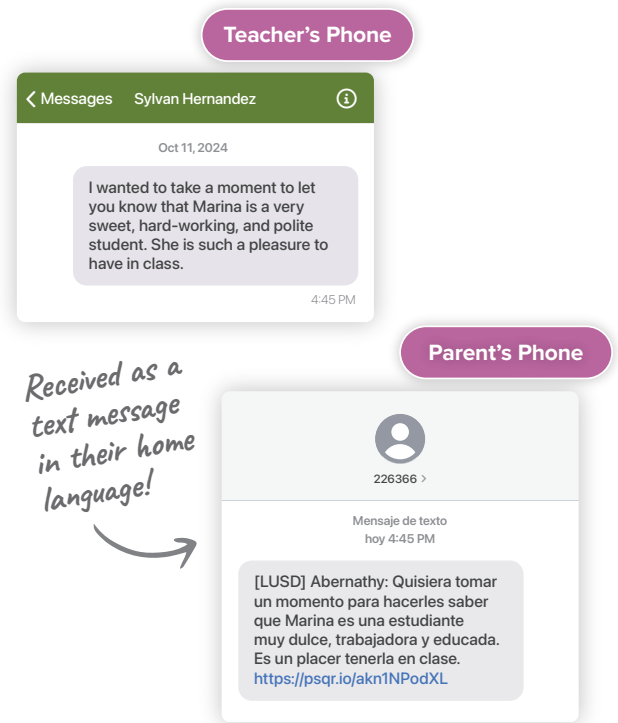
The ParentSquare 2023 annual benchmark survey, *What's Working for School Communication and Engagement*, found that only 39% of schools and districts report being able to reach 90% to 100% of their families—meaning hundreds of parents and guardians are missing every text, email, and voicemail they're sent.

ParentSquare syncs directly with student information systems (SIS) to provide schools and districts with a report of emails and phone numbers that may need to be updated to ensure that you're able to reach families in order to address chronic absenteeism.

Build partnerships with the community

By partnering with community organizations, schools can leverage their resources to support families and provide them with **additional services and help**. Partnerships with local public libraries, chambers of commerce, police and fire departments are among some of the most effective ways to strengthen community engagement.

ParentSquare's Community Groups allow districts and schools to send out communications to interested community members. With this feature, family and community members who may not be parents, guardians, students, or staff can sign up for communications—saving staff time by having all contacts and messages in one place.



Conclusion: Reducing Chronic Absenteeism With ParentSquare

As a unified communication platform, ParentSquare helps schools and districts reach families to power the school-home initiatives that support student success—including strategies to prevent and manage chronic absenteeism. With ParentSquare, your community has access to a powerful suite of features that help:

★ Improve family engagement

Research consistently shows that the active involvement of families in a child's education is the number one predictor of their academic achievement and long-term success. Whether it's parents, guardians, siblings, grandparents, or aunts and uncles, ParentSquare is set up to keep primary caregivers connected and up to date with their student's learning.

★ Facilitate meaningful communication

An open line of communication between school and home fosters strong relationships and a positive school culture. ParentSquare enables communication at every level of a district community, from school-wide announcements and automated attendance notifications to two-way texting and voice calling for personal follow-ups and interventions.

★ Identify and support at-risk students

By leveraging data within ParentSquare, schools can identify students who are at risk of chronic absenteeism and provide them with targeted support. This support can include mentoring, tutoring, and counseling. Schools can also work with community partners to provide resources and services to support these students and their families.

Chronic absenteeism may be more of a challenge than ever, but strong family engagement is directly tied to better student outcomes—including attendance. To learn how ParentSquare can help you create a proactive, responsive, and positive environment for supporting student attendance, visit parentsquare.com/demo-signup.



“[Using ParentSquare] is a huge win because we really need to be able to reach families immediately to let them know that their children are missing school.”

Tara White, Director of Testing and Technology at Pearl River County School District, on sending attendance notifications to families

About ParentSquare



ParentSquare is the leading provider of digital family and community engagement solutions for K-12 institutions, serving over 20 million students across all 50 states. Districts rely on ParentSquare's unified platform for mass notifications, classroom communications, school websites, translation in 130+ languages, and other everyday parent interactions. Seamless integrations with existing school information systems (SIS) easily connect schools with families to advance communication equity and impact student success.

Founded in 2011, ParentSquare has experienced over 500% growth in the last three years. Explore how it is shaping the future of school-home communications at parentsquare.com.

Sources

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Family Engagement Strategies for Chronic Absenteeism

1 in 4

students is chronically absent

What is chronic absenteeism?

Students are considered chronically absent when they miss **10 percent** of the school year, or approximately **18 days**.

Prevent chronic absenteeism

Engaging with families can help you communicate the importance of attendance before students reach the level of chronic absence.

Communicate regularly with families

Reduce information overload



Notify families about absences in real time



Create a positive school culture

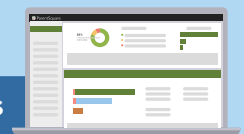
Manage chronic absenteeism

To get chronic absenteeism back on track, attendance interventions need to be targeted, personalized, and accessible to families.



Meet families where they are to provide more intensive support

Use data to assess the contactability of students' families



Build partnerships with the community

Reduce chronic absenteeism with ParentSquare

As a **unified communication platform**, ParentSquare helps schools and districts reach families to power the school-home initiatives that support student success—including strategies to prevent and manage chronic absenteeism.

Improve family engagement | Facilitate meaningful communication | Identify and support at-risk students

To learn more, visit

parentsquare.com/demo-signup



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