



Family Engagement Strategies

Truancy Prevention Learning Communities | Spring 2024

The most effective approaches to address chronic absenteeism include families, schools, and communities working together to set and consistently enforce rules for attendance. There is a relationship between family engagement and academic outcomes for students. Stronger engagement corresponds with lower rates of chronic absenteeism ([Learning Heroes & TNTP, 2023](#)).

Evidence-Informed Strategies

Lay a foundation

- Expand the definition of family
- Work to change exclusionary historical practices & improve trustworthiness of system
- Involve families to understand root causes & solutions
- Orient caregivers to school policies & expectations
- Communicate early & often about the importance of absences
- Target absenteeism in elementary school
- Teach caregivers to track attendance
- Relationship first, problem solving second
- Establish [resource maps](#) and [referral pathways](#)
- Support educational stability

Provide ongoing support

- Communicate in primary language
- Use multiple modes and/or styles of communication
 - Personal calls home—don't just make contact, connect!
 - Texting or “nudging”
 - Proactive family meetings in comfortable location
 - Proactive home visits
 - Mailings home
- Leverage meetings that are already scheduled
- Focus on caregiver hopes for student
- Involve families in student success plans



This resource was developed with information provided during the Spring 2024 Truancy Prevention Learning Communities. [A recording of the full webinar is available on YouTube.](#)

For more information or to share a strategy your community is using to address chronic absence, contact Julie.Incitti@dpi.wi.gov or DCFYJ@wisconsin.gov.



Strategies from Wisconsin Counties and Schools



La Crosse County

Youth System of Care (SOC) | [Bridget Todd-Robbins](#)

The La Crosse County Youth System of Care (SOC) is an early intervention program designed to ensure youth remain in school and ready to learn through the provision of interventions and support. SOC has demonstrated tremendous success, primarily through positive youth and family engagement. SOC strategies to build effective family engagement include the importance of flexibility, responsiveness, and removing barriers.

- SOC is a partnership between La Crosse County Human Services and the School District of La Crosse. Funding for this programming is evenly split between human services and the school district.
- SOC primarily serves secondary students and handles all truancy referrals for the community. Shifting to this approach enabled human services to move two positions to this program.
- SOC has 5 team members (1 administrator, 2 social workers and 2 social service specialists). On average, SOC receives around 70-80 referrals per year and see a 75% success rate. The team is considered “outside” staff, but are embedded in the community in locations like the YMCA and work in schools on a daily basis.
- Positive family engagement is central to SOC’s model. Staff are trained to approach their work with flexibility—connection is made within families within a day of receiving a referral and initial contact is made at a time/location where the family feels most comfortable. The tone of this conversation is pleasant and it is emphasized the purpose of this connection is to offer the family support.
- Compassionate listening is also a key component of the SOC. Staff validate the love and connection they see in families 100% of the time and build off of existing bonds.
- Services are provided to families with a sense of urgency. Moving as quickly as families when they are stressed is a great strategy to meet students and their caregivers where they are at. SOC has a budget for client care services and all staff are equipped with a credit card to address basic needs immediately. A direct connection to both county human services and school administrators also positions SOC to advocate and support families as they navigate the complexities of one or both systems.
- SOC is very conscious about building and maintaining their reputation in the community. Acknowledging that every interaction matters, they frequently provide supports beyond what is required and find opportunities in the community to build connection and show families how valued they are.

School District of Waukesha

School Engagement and Attendance Specialist | [Mary Green](#)

The School District of Waukesha created a [Student Engagement & Attendance Specialist](#) position to address and improve attendance and engagement at a large high school with significant needs.

- Determined a new position was necessary after attendance was identified as a concern, but the school’s existing social worker was kept very busy responding to crises.
- Position is funded for 2 years by the United Way. Focus expanded from serving only grade 9 to include grade 10 in second year of grant.
- When tackling chronic absence, mindset shifts are critical for *everyone*—not just the school social worker or counselor.
- Partnering with families is key and is often the missing link to student success. Waukesha uses a wide variety of [strategies throughout the year](#) to welcome families to the school, build trust, and foster belonging.

School District of Janesville

Promoting Attendance in Children and Teens (PACT) | [Meghan Everhart](#)

The PACT program focuses on proactively identifying and supporting students at risk of attendance concerns and building relationships with them and their families. PACT targets chronically absent students in grades K-12. The program reports days attended have improved by as much as 62% for some students.

- School staff determined waiting until a student was truant to do a home visit [was not effective](#). The PACT program refocused existing efforts with school resource officer to check-in daily with students who are chronically absent. This new approach has positively impacted the school's report card.
- Positive connections are central to the PACT program.
 - **Daily check-ins:** School social worker quickly checks in with students daily (current caseload is 78 K-5 students) and tracks absences (not tardies) in a daily check-in sheet. Takes an estimated 20 minutes to complete this task during breakfast each day.
 - **End of year home visits:** At the end of each school year, the principal, school social worker, and school resource officer make home visits to families of students who missed 10% of the school year for *any* reason. Families are identified using data from Infinite Campus and WiseDash.
- PACT has grown over time from one elementary school in the district to include PACT Advocates in district middle and high schools.
- The district has also worked to identify and address common barriers to attendance by strengthening community partnerships with organizations like Janesville Transit System.

Additional Tools & Resources

- [Youth justice issue brief #2—Family engagement](#), Wisconsin Department of Children and Families
- [Bringing attendance home: Engaging parents in preventing chronic absence](#), Attendance Works
 - [Bringing attendance home: Video for parents](#)
- [Teaching attendance 2.0 toolkit—Strategy 4: connect with families](#), Attendance Works
- [Mentoring: Elementary success mentors toolkit—A whole school approach to family engagement and attendance messaging](#), Attendance Works
- [Truancy toolkit](#), California Department of Justice
 - [Top 10 things to consider when talking to parents about attendance](#)
- [Supporting tribal youth attendance achievement: A resource to support community-based truancy prevention programs](#), Tribal Youth Resource Center
- [Full, equal, and equitable partnerships with families—Chart 5: What does high-impact family engagement look like in reducing chronic absence?](#), Connecticut Department of Education
- [Diagnostic tool for addressing the root causes of chronic absenteeism](#), Oregon Department of Education
- [Handouts for Families](#), Attendance Works
- [Teens and their Families](#), Attendance Works
- [Attendance Playbook: Smart Solutions for Reducing Student Absenteeism Post Pandemic](#), Phyllis Jordan