5 Ways Innovative School Districts Are Reducing Chronic Absenteeism
1. Promote stronger relationships between teachers and students

**Key insight:** When educators focus on promoting relationships and social-emotional learning (SEL) skills, students attend school more often, feel more connected to their learning, and succeed academically.
1. Promote stronger relationships between teachers and students

Teachers and staff at Cold Spring Middle School hang posters on a wall with the names of all 980 students during staff meetings.

To note how well they know each student, educators add checkmarks next to students’ names under the columns “Name/Face,” “Something Personal,” “Personal/Family Story,” and “Academic Standing.”

Because research shows that students who lack meaningful social connections are at risk for attendance and behavior problems, dropping out, and even committing suicide, school leaders prioritized teacher-student relationships.

Washoe County School District administers annual school climate and social-emotional learning surveys using Panorama to measure students’ perceptions of safety, engagement, and social-emotional skills.

Cold Spring Middle School has seen higher attendance and graduation rates since focusing on teacher-student relationships and social-emotional learning.

“We can now look at our subpopulations’ responses to our climate survey and see that the gaps in students’ perceptions about their school climate perfectly mirror the gaps we see in chronic absenteeism.”

Dr. Laura Davidson
Director of Research and Evaluation
Washoe County School District
Send letters home to families with attendance “nudges” that reduce absenteeism by 10% or more

Key insight: Families will help get their child to school when they’re aware of their child’s attendance figures, how they compare to those of other students, and the impact of absenteeism on student learning.
The School District of Philadelphia partnered with researchers at Harvard University to test whether sending letters that use behavioral "nudges" to families of students facing chronic absenteeism could improve attendance. These letters were designed to raise families' awareness of their child's absenteeism figures, how they compare to those of other students, and the impact these missed days have on student learning. The district reduced chronic absenteeism by up to 10% for students whose families received the attendance letters. Districts nationwide—from Chicago Public Schools (IL) to Tacoma Public Schools (WA)—are now using this cost-effective messaging technique with similar results.
3. Build community awareness around a district-wide attendance goal

**Key insight:** Engage families and community members around a specific attendance goal to reduce chronic absenteeism by up to 25%.

- **Grand Rapids Public Schools**
- **Located in Grand Rapids, MI**
- **Serves 17,000 students**
District leaders at Grand Rapids Public Schools discovered that over 7,000 students had missed a month or more of school. Administrators launched a community awareness campaign called Challenge 5 and started direct outreach to families, including home visits and monthly parent meetings. The campaign encouraged students and families to “strive for fewer than five absences in a school year” and spread the message using posters, social media, video, and events. The district partnered with families, community organizations, police, and local businesses to get the word out. Today, after three years of work, the district has reduced chronic absenteeism rates by 25%—with 3,600 fewer chronically absent students.
Let students earn points for high attendance

Key insight: When students track their own attendance in a fun and interactive way, they feel more engaged and invested in their success in school.
Let students earn points for high attendance

Fresno Unified developed “Strides,” an app where students can track their recent attendance and academic trends.

Inspired by Fitbit, the app lets students track their progress and receive points for positive attendance, behaviors, grades, and participation in extracurricular activities.

The app displays a “streak” of days attended so that students are encouraged to maintain healthy attendance patterns over time.

Over 30,000 students have logged into the app to check their stats—and students report using the app on a regular basis to monitor their daily progress.
5. **Implement an early warning system**

**Key insight:** By monitoring early warning indicators every day, educators can spend more time supporting students before they become chronically absent or fail courses.

- **Community High School District 117**
- **Located in Lake Villa, IL**
- **Serves 2,800 students**
District leaders at Community High School District 117 started using Panorama Student Success as an early warning system to monitor each student’s daily progress. School counselors, teachers, and administrators log into the platform daily to see how students are progressing across attendance, academics, behavior, and social-emotional learning (SEL). The platform flags individual students and groups of students that are at risk for chronic absenteeism based on recent attendance patterns, allowing educators to focus on prevention instead of reaction. Today, school leaders at Lakes Community High School use these indicators to inform a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) and to ensure that students graduate with college and career-ready skills.
Learn more about improving attendance with Panorama

Panorama Education helps educators act on data to improve student outcomes. Panorama has supported more than 5 million students in 6,500 schools across 40 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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