

CASE STUDY

# Bringing Students Back

*Increasing Middle School Attendance at Bibb County  
School District (GA)*

*by Sarah Brem*

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*With the Breakthrough Results approach, BCSD teams were able to reduce the percentage of targeted students labeled chronically absent by 56% in just ten weeks.*











## Andrew's Story

Andrew (not his real name), a sixth-grade student, was one of the target students included in the BCSD Attendance Challenge. By Week 2, Andrew already had missed four days. If he missed even one more day of school in the next eight weeks, he would be categorized as chronically absent.



Andrew's situation jumped out to the team during the weekly meeting. The team engaged in a discussion about what to do, and concentrated their efforts on making sure Andrew stayed in school. Andrew's teacher had a one-on-one conversation with him, emphasizing why it was so important to come to school each day. The teacher and the whole team deepened their relationship with Andrew, acknowledging his presence and encouraging him to keep up the good work. The team also encouraged him by offering him incentives for perfect attendance; for example, if he made it to school every day that week, he would get to pick out a special snack for snack time.

While these strategies seem simple, the attention and focus made a difference to Andrew. A virtuous cycle was created with Andrew starting to truly internalize the importance of being in class. Over the course of those last eight weeks in the challenge, he didn't miss a single day of school.

*"My grades have started to improve since I've been coming to school each day. I'm still working to improve my grades even more. I'm very proud of myself!"*

### Building Capacity That Endures

Supported by the Sponsorship Team and their DMGroup performance coach, BTR team members felt empowered in their work—they knew that achieving their goals was important district work and that the Sponsorship Team and performance coaches were invested in their success. The DMGroup dashboards provided immediate feedback on their efforts; it helped them to build the skills to examine data and use it to innovate and allowed for tremendous focus on the goal. The teams developed their skills to collaborate and to lead—skills that endure and will continue to benefit their schools. Finally, the success they achieved has proven to be a substantial motivating factor for teams to continue their attendance work far beyond the Breakthrough Results challenge. One team member expressed their satisfaction with the approach: "Participating in this challenge has given us tools to target our chronically absent students. We definitely will follow this model as we begin the new year. In addition, we discovered an unintended positive—students enjoyed checking in and that gave us an opportunity to engage more with the students."

The Breakthrough Results approach is founded on the premise that successful change programs begin with results. For the BCSD teams, this rang true. The teams have been energized by their success and want to continue the work. They enhanced their skills of working together, examining data, and using real-time information to take action, innovate, and achieve results. Having entered their professional lives to make a difference for students, the team members felt satisfaction in their work and were proud to be celebrating their accomplishments. ♦

Courtney Van Huvel contributed to this article.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Report Card, Governor's Office of Student Achievement, State of Georgia (2020-2021), <https://gosa.georgia.gov/dashboards-data-report-card/report-card>.

<sup>2</sup> In the state of Georgia, "chronically absent students" are defined as students with 10 or more marked absences during the course of a school year.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Woods, "Student Attendance: Changing the Conversation," Georgia Department of Education (2016), <https://www.gadoe.org/wholechild/Documents/-Student%20Attendance%20and%20Student%20Achievement%20Updated%20March%202016.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> "Student Attendance Improvement," Office of Whole Child Supports, Georgia Department of Education (2022), <https://www.gadoe.org/wholechild/Pages/Student-Attendance-Improvement.aspx>.