



District  
Management  
Group

FEATURE

# Tackling Attendance with Connection-Based Strategies

*by Phyllis W. Jordan*

Originally published in the *District Management Journal*, v.32, Winter 2023

*Educators are embracing a different approach to attendance, one that emphasizes connecting with students and families and creating schools where everyone feels safe, welcome, and respected.*











## TAKE ACTION

### Community Engagement Strategies

- 1 Community Schools:** Research shows this collaborative approach can reduce chronic absenteeism. Each community school hires a coordinator, who pulls together government agencies and nonprofit organizations that can turn the campus into a hub for community. That can include offering health care, employment services, even haircuts.

“Community Collaborations,” FutureEd’s Covid Relief Playbook, [https://www.future-ed.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Community-Collaborations\\_Final.pdf](https://www.future-ed.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Community-Collaborations_Final.pdf).
- 2 National Partnership for Student Success:** This new public-private partnership seeks to enlist 250,000 adults to work with students. While the focus is on academic recovery, the partnership can bring in the mentors and tutors who can help students reconnect with school.

National Partnership for Student Success, <https://www.partnershipstudentsuccess.org>.

### Taking a Data-Driven Team Approach

The best efforts to reduce chronic absenteeism involve teamwork among school staff and, at times, community partners. Many school districts encourage schools to establish attendance teams to review student attendance weekly or biweekly. Using data that is regularly updated, the team can identify students who are missing too much school and then brainstorm solutions. The teams often include school nurses and counselors, in addition to teachers and administrators. A community schools coordinator, as well as key nonprofit or government agency representatives, often join the team.

Data is an important aspect of this approach. In the Austin Independent School District in Texas, an integrated data dashboard can show school officials a student’s chronic absenteeism rate, grades, and, importantly, the last time someone from the school or district had reached out to the student. That sort of actionable data can help districts turn around poor attendance throughout the year.



## Data and Team Tools

**1 Data Tools:** Actionable data that is regularly updated can help schools identify students who are missing too much school and then brainstorm solutions. Attendance Works provides a calculator that teams can use to track student attendance.

Attendance Works, "Resources: Data Tools," <https://www.attendanceworks.org/resources/data-tools/>.

**2 Attendance Team Guidance:** Many schools have established teams that meet weekly or biweekly to review absenteeism trends. The teams often include school nurses and counselors. Team efforts can bring more resources to bear on reducing chronic absenteeism.

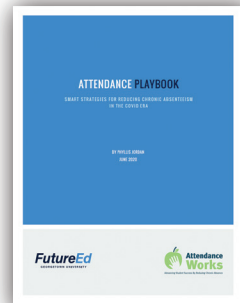
"A Principal-Led Team Overseeing Attendance," Attendance Works, 2018, <https://www.attendanceworks.org/resources/toolkits/mentoring-elementary-success-mentors/what-support-is-needed-from-schools/a-principal-led-team-overseeing-attendance/>.

These efforts to improve attendance are essential to closing the learning gaps that grew worse during the pandemic. Too often, the students who miss too much school are the ones who can ill afford to, including children living in poverty and those dealing with disabilities. Bringing these students back to school is essential not only for academic recovery, but for ensuring that every child has equal access to a good education. ♦

To learn more about the strategies outlined here, please refer to

## The Attendance Playbook

Smart Strategies for Reducing Chronic Absenteeism in the Covid Era



<https://www.future-ed.org/attendance-playbook>



**Phyllis W. Jordan**, guest contributor to *DMJ*, is the associate director of FutureEd, an independent, solution-oriented think tank at Georgetown University's McCourt School of Public Policy. Previously, she held senior editing positions at the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Washington Post*. Phyllis has also served as the communications director at Attendance Works and as vice president of the Hatcher Group. She holds an M.A. in journalism from the University of Missouri and is a Phi Beta Kappa graduate from Sweet Briar College.

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Phyllis W. Jordan, "Present Danger: Solving the Deepening Student Absenteeism Crisis," *FutureEd*, May 24, 2021, <https://www.future-ed.org/present-danger-solving-the-deepening-student-absenteeism-crisis/>.

<sup>2</sup> "How Local Educators Plan to Spend Billions in Federal Covid Aid," *FutureEd*, June 7, 2022, <https://www.future-ed.org/local-covid-relief-spending/>. Data from this report is used throughout this article.

<sup>3</sup> Alan Ginsburg, Hedy Chang, and Phyllis Jordan, "Absences Add Up: How School Attendance Influences Student Success," *Attendance Works*, August 2014, <https://www.attendanceworks.org/absences-add-up/>.

<sup>4</sup> "Pandemic Causes Alarming Increase in Chronic Absence and Reveals Need for Better Data," *Attendance Works* blog, September 27, 2022, <https://www.attendanceworks.org/pandemic-causes-alarming-increase-in-chronic-absence-and-reveals-need-for-better-data/>.

<sup>5</sup> State of Ohio, "Chronic Absenteeism: Overview (State)," Ohio Department of State Education, accessed October 11, 2022, <https://reports.education.ohio.gov/report-report-card-data-state-attendance-rate-with-student-disagg>.

<sup>6</sup> Brandy R. Maynard et al., "Truancy in the United States: Examining Temporal Trends and Correlates by Race, Age, and Gender," *Child Youth Services Rev.* 81 (2017): 188–196, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5733793/>.

<sup>7</sup> "When Students Refuse to Go to School," *FutureEd* interview, *FutureEd*, April 21, 2021, <https://www.future-ed.org/when-students-refuse-to-go-to-school/>.

<sup>8</sup> Phyllis W. Jordan, "Visiting Families at Home Leads to Better Attendance at School," *FutureEd*, January 22, 2019, <https://www.future-ed.org/visiting-families-at-home-leads-to-better-attendance-at-school/>.

<sup>9</sup> Phyllis W. Jordan, "Nudging Students and Families to Better Attendance," *FutureEd*, December 22, 2018, <https://www.future-ed.org/nudging-students-and-families-to-better-attendance/>.

<sup>10</sup> "Mentoring," *FutureEd's Covid Relief Playbook*, June 2021, [https://www.future-ed.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Mentoring\\_Final.pdf](https://www.future-ed.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Mentoring_Final.pdf).

<sup>11</sup> "Equitable School Discipline," *FutureEd's Covid Relief Playbook*, [https://www.future-ed.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Equitable-School-Discipline\\_Final.pdf](https://www.future-ed.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Equitable-School-Discipline_Final.pdf).

<sup>12</sup> "Community Collaborations," *FutureEd's Covid Relief Playbook*, [https://www.future-ed.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Community-Collaborations\\_Final.pdf](https://www.future-ed.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Community-Collaborations_Final.pdf).

<sup>13</sup> Tony Thurmond, "California State Board of Education and State Superintendent Thurmond Announce First Round of Grants for \$3 Billion Community Schools Partnership Program," California Department of Education press release, May 19, 2022, <https://www.cde.ca.gov/nr/ne/yr22/yr22rel30.asp>.

<sup>14</sup> Dan Sleva, "Mellon Foundation Bolsters Effort to Address Chronic Absenteeism in Region's Schools," *TribLive* (PA), September 25, 2022, <https://triblive.com/local/west-moreland/mellon-foundation-bolsters-effort-to-address-chronic-absenteeism-in-regions-schools/>.

<sup>15</sup> William R. Johnston, John Engberg, Isaac M. Opper, Lisa Sontag-Padilla, and Lea Xenakis, *Illustrating the Promise of Community Schools: An Assessment of the Impact of the New York City Community Schools Initiative* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2020), [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR3245.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR3245.html).

<sup>16</sup> "Combining National Service and Covid Tutoring Corps," *FutureEd* interview, *FutureEd*, September 9, 2021, <https://www.future-ed.org/combining-national-service-and-covid-tutoring-corps/>.

<sup>17</sup> "Tutoring," *FutureEd's Covid Relief Playbook*, [https://www.future-ed.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Tutoring\\_Final.pdf](https://www.future-ed.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Tutoring_Final.pdf).

<sup>18</sup> National Partnership for Student Success, accessed October 11, 2022, <https://www.partnershipstudentsuccess.org/>.