

Tracking Success: Evaluating Attendance Systems in Oregon School Districts

by

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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Title: Tracking Success: Evaluating Attendance Systems in Oregon School Districts

This study explored solutions to the chronic absenteeism problem faced by schools across the state of Oregon, particularly in small school districts. This mixed methods explanatory study This explanatory mixed methods study involved reviewing extant data on absenteeism across school districts in the state for the past five years and then surveying school district leaders on their attendance systems. Next, leaders from districts that have demonstrated strong regular attender rates within the past five years were interviewed to dig deeper into the components of their attendance systems that might contribute to the growth, and to find out whether they are implementing a truancy-like ordinance and the reasons behind that decision. Key findings point to the importance of meaningful connections and building relationships, personalized interventions such as home visits and phone calls, removing barriers unique to students and families to address attendance, and a need for more personnel to address the issues at hand.

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DEDICATION

This research is dedicated to my children, Rosie (age 4) and Tyler (age 2), may you always understand the importance of education and value the opportunities you are provided because of your education. May you find lifelong learning in whatever you chose to pursue and always seek out excellence within that learning. You two are my motivation for all I do, and I hope that my educational accomplishments can inspire you to accomplish your goals and look to who you can impact in the process. You both attended nearly every zoom associated with obtaining this degree, and I couldn't have been happier to accomplish this with you two on my lap. Your future will always be bright as you two shine with your unique talents and skills, and no matter what I will always be so proud of you. You encourage me more than you know.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

As a teacher, I recall starting every first day of class with a plea to students to attend school regularly. I would tell them, “When you simply show-up, you’re far more likely to pass. In fact, once you’re here it’s my job to keep you engaged and help you learn, so please do your part by showing up to class.” As a teacher, I had no idea what barriers some students must overcome just to get to class regularly. As an administrator tasked with leading attendance in our district, I often feel that making improvements in chronic absenteeism is one of the most challenging parts of my role, and while I see the whole students better today than when I was in the classroom, the challenge to address the issue is still overwhelming. How does one help the students who don’t show up? How does one connect with families that dodge phone calls and no-show meetings? How does one shift the culture to recognize the importance of attending school and create a climate that is inviting, inclusive, and encouraging to every student and their families so we can be a team? This challenge has sparked my passion to dive deep into the literature of absenteeism and study the problem from a systems-level perspective.

This is a present problem in schools across the state and nation. In many districts, school attendance has always been a challenge, but following the COVID-19 pandemic, rates of chronic absenteeism have skyrocketed, and systems have changed (Attendance Works, 2023). In the 2021-2022 school year, nationwide “at least 14.7 million students [were] marked as chronically absent,” nearly double pre-pandemic levels of chronic absenteeism (Chun & Grosso, 2024, p, 1). Swiderski et al. (2024) focused their study on students who are chronically absent year-over-year and found prevalence of this behavior has increased substantially post-pandemic, with students accumulating exceptionally high total absence counts. They noted that the number

of chronically absent students nearly doubled between 2018-19 and 2021-22 school years, with only marginal declines in the 2022-23 school year, holding chronic absentee levels well above pre-pandemic levels (Swiderski et al., 2024).

Schools opened their doors after the pandemic expecting students to attend as usual, only to discover that much about the value of being in the classroom and student barriers to attendance have significantly changed. Classrooms have changed how they do business; teachers perceive use of platforms such as Google Classroom and Blackboard positively, as useful classroom tools (Padohinog et al., 2022). Digital platforms allow learning materials to be accessible anywhere, which can create the misunderstanding that in-person learning is not required in a traditional school setting.

More significantly, the pandemic spurred an increase in mental illness, lost learning for families with fewer resources, and created a dynamic in our schools that leads to students feeling disconnected and dealing with increased anxieties (Leeb et al., 2020). Leeb et al. (2020) report that between 2019 and 2020 the rate of students admitted to the emergency department for mental illness-related events jumped significantly, “for children aged 5–11 and 12–17 years [emergency department visits related to mental illness] increased approximately 24% and 31%, respectively” (p. 1). Mental illness is a key barrier to attendance and one that should be taken very seriously. The National Center for Education Statistics shared in a 2022 study that over 80% of public schools reported negative impacts on both student emotional and behavioral development, alongside declines in student attendance. When we think of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, student wellbeing is at the foundation, for students to make academic progress, they must first address and overcome mental health barriers (Kurt, 2020).

Even before the pandemic, achieving high rates of regular attenders was already a challenge for schools. The Oregon state regular attender rate in 2018-2019 was around 80% (ODE, 2019). Fast forward to 2023, and the state regular attender rate had dropped by nearly 20%, to a devastating 62% (Pate, 2024). The National Center for Education Statistics (2009) notes that “A missed school day is a lost opportunity for students to learn.” In Oregon, students are missing school more than national averages (Pate, 2024). Nationally it is estimated that 26% of students are chronically absent, versus Oregon where 38% of students were chronically absent in the 2022-23 school year (Pate, 2024). When attendance patterns are compared to the pre-and-post pandemic, Hollon et al. (2025) found that although absences are much more frequent now, they still follow the pre-pandemic patterns; meaning the same problems exist but amplification of those pre-existing issues is keeping even more students from school.

The impacts of missing school are significant across grade levels, and schools must seek interventions to successfully reverse the current attendance crisis many schools face.

Absenteeism has been linked to increased dropout rates and achievement gaps, specifically negatively impacting reading skills at early grade levels (Ginsburg, Jordan, & Chang, 2014). A state-by-state study revealed that “students who miss more school than their peers score lower on the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP). This is true at every age, in every racial and ethnic group and in every state and city examined” (Ginsburg et al., 2014, p. 2). The Ginsburg et al. (2014) study further discussed that students with more absences are often one to two years below their peers. Pile on our current climate of students being placed in remote learning settings at critical ages due to the Covid-19 pandemic with the increases in absenteeism, and it’s obvious that students are facing significant learning loss that will negatively impact their futures if left unaddressed. Beyond the academic component of the classroom, truancy is a

predictor of delinquent behavior patterns (Zang et al., 2007). Keeping kids in school is of the utmost importance.

The Oregon legislature has recognized the struggles faced by school districts, and in the 2024-25 legislative session, four bills sought to motivate change on attendance reporting and accountability (Oregon Legislative Information, 2025). Senate Bill 141, which updated the school accountability metrics to include K-2 regular attender rates as a key indicator of school success, and Senate Bill 315, which provides best practices for absenteeism coding, both passed (Oregon Legislative Information, 2025). Additionally, the legislature called for further research on attendance, set an advisory committee, and requested a data publication that aligns well with the scope of this research (Oregon Legislative Information, 2025).

My dissertation study answers this call, examining the policies and practices used by Oregon school districts that have demonstrated improvement in regular attender rates in general, as well as those that have demonstrated improvement in regular attender rates among special populations. My intention was to use localized data to yield unique perspectives on Oregon attendance systems and identify targeted solutions that districts – my own as well as others – might adopt.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE SYNTHESIS

In the literature synthesis that follows, I will discuss the variety of barriers that lead to poor attendance as well as the strategies used to address chronic absenteeism and the evidence of their effectiveness. The key areas addressed by the literature review include impacts of absenteeism on academic performance, barriers to attending school, effective interventions including response to intervention tiers and incentives to boost attendance. By further exploring the issues currently present and systems of supporting growth, we can seek solutions.

A few important definitions that classify absenteeism are defined by Hanover Research (2016). *Chronic absenteeism* is defined as missing 10% or more of the school year (excused or unexcused), which in most school districts equates to around 18 days (Gottfried, 2019). In Oregon, due to slightly fewer school days in the calendar, students who are defined as chronically absent miss around 14 days per year, depending on the number of school days within a district. *Severely chronic absenteeism* is defined as missing more than 20% of the school year and often corresponds with truancy. *Truancy* involves absences without permission, typically unexcused absences, while *chronic truancy* is defined as unlawful absences where the student and family are not responding to severe interventions (Hanover Research, 2016).

Impacts of Attendance and Absenteeism

It seems rather obvious that when students are present in class, they are more likely to be successful in school. A variety of research supports this assertion. Balfanz and Byrnes (2012) compare *chronic absenteeism* to a “bacteria in a hospital – an unseen force that wreaks havoc on efforts to improve life outcomes” (p. 6). They share that chronic absenteeism impacts achievement on standardized tests and graduation, and at all grade levels, missing school

increases learning gaps. Similarly, Hanover Research (2016) found youth who are truant are more likely to have lower grades, need to repeat grades or classes, and have higher severe disciplinary rates and lower rates of graduation (p. 8). Research by Ginsburg et al. (2014) states that “poor attendance contributes to the achievement gap for students struggling with poverty and from communities of color” and explains that students on free and reduced lunch are far more likely to miss school (p. 4).

Attending school regularly is the foundation for academic achievement, social engagement, and college and career readiness. Poor attendance in the first month of school can be a predictor of chronic absenteeism for that school year (Ginsburg et al., 2014). Balfanz and Byrnes (2012) assert that “One of the most effective strategies for providing pathways out of poverty is to do what it takes to get students who live in high-poverty neighborhoods to attend school every day” (p. 6). Attending school every day, they state, can improve achievement, raise the rate of school and college graduation, and through this can provide a pathway out of poverty. This finding is particularly relevant because research shows that chronic absenteeism is more prevalent in low-income communities. Across Oregon schools, those with larger populations of economically disadvantaged families tend to have higher rates of chronic absenteeism; in fact, students in such schools are twice as likely to be chronically absent (Buehler et al., 2012).

Schools are a gateway into opportunity, a projection that begins as early as first grade (Chang & Romero, 2008). In elementary grades, reading scores are most severely impacted by chronic absences, specifically for traditionally underserved populations (Buehler et al., 2012). Additionally, qualities such as grit and perseverance can be impacted by absenteeism starting in kindergarten (Ginsburg et al., 2014). “Going to school regularly in the early years is especially critical for children from families living in poverty, who are less likely to have the resources to

help children make up for lost time in the classroom” (Chang & Romero, 2008, p. 3).

Absenteeism in preschool and kindergarten can be an influential factor in students being held back in the third grade (Ginsburg et al., 2014). Children who were chronically absent in kindergarten also had the lowest state assessment scores in 5th grade (Chang & Romero, 2008). “In Oregon, chronic absence in one early grade is linked with lower test scores throughout elementary school, but being chronically absent in both kindergarten and first grade is linked to the lowest scores” (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012, p. 23). Hanover Research (2016) indicates that interventions for improving attendance at the elementary level are more effective than those at the secondary level; therefore, this is a critical time for effective intervention.

Improving attendance has the potential to have a positive impact on the school’s learning environment. Not only does chronic absenteeism impact the individual missing school, it also impacts their peers (Gottfried, 2019). The impact of slowing learning to accommodate absent students and behavioral issues of students frequently absent have a spillover effect on the class, yielding lower reading and math scores (Gottfried, 2019). The fundamentals of reading, writing, and math learned in elementary schools are critical contributors to academic success. When students are absent, they risk gaps in these fundamental skills with potential life-long negative impact.

Balfanz et al. (2007) explain that disengagement in middle school predicts dropout rates in high school. Compounding the problem is the fact that attendance issues increase, overall, for students in middle school. Balfanz et al. (2007) tracked students from 6th grade to high school graduation and found that “attending school less than 90% of the time in sixth grade increases the chance that students will not graduate [from high school]” (p. 227). Rosenkranz et al. (2014) explain that attendance is a major factor in course performance freshman year, and freshman

GPA is a key indicator of whether a student will graduate from high school. This study further explained that 9th graders, on average, missed almost three times as many days in 9th grade as they did in 8th (p. 4). This finding suggests that emphasis on maintaining habits from middle school and building better attendance skills should be a priority for freshmen.

The University of Chicago, which has conducted a lot of research on student achievement, specifically around 9th Grade On-Track Rates, reports that one of the most critical components of student success is attendance (Allensworth et al., 2014). Students who attend school regularly are far more likely to graduate from high school (Allensworth et al., 2014). Likewise, Balfanz and Byrnes analyzed data from the ELS2002 survey and reported that “only six of every 10 students with 10 or more absences in the tenth grade ended up successfully completing high school [and they]... were three times more likely to drop out of high school, with one in four doing so, even after having made it successfully to the 10th grade” (p. 27). Two years prior, Byrnes and Reyna (2012) found that chronic absenteeism was the strongest predictor of high school dropouts, stronger than suspension, age, and test scores. When students miss massive amounts of school, their likelihood of academic success falters. Ginsburg et al. (2014) explain that absenteeism connects to high school dropout and college completion, demonstrating the expansive impacts regular attendance has on students and their future.

Some might argue that attendance might not matter as much for highly skilled students. However, students with high test scores but frequent absences are more likely to fail courses than students with low test scores who attend school more frequently (Allensworth & Easton, 2007). The impact of absenteeism on high school students is staggering. Research discussed in Balfanz and Byrnes (2012) unpacks the implication of chronic absenteeism, showing that each day a student misses school is associated with a decline in test scores. They state that there is “an

essentially linear relationship where each missed day is associated with a further decline in test scores, at least through the first 20 days missed,” with math and reading the most negatively impacted (p. 26). Absenteeism even impacts students after high school; Balfanz and Byrnes (2012) found that chronically absent students are far less likely to attend college.

Balfanz and Byrnes (2012) examined absenteeism data in three ways: chronic absenteeism over a year, chronic absenteeism over multiple years, and a cumulation of the trends. Their meta-analysis found “over the elementary and middle grades, and middle grade and high school years, it is possible for nearly half of all students to experience at least one year of chronic absenteeism, and for close to a fifth of students, at least at one point, to miss two or more months of school” (p. 13). This finding suggests that most students will have an event occur during the school years that keeps them from regular attendance. Balfanz and Byrnes (2012) found that for a 6th grade cohort in Florida, nearly one-third of students were chronically absent for at least three years, indicating that for some students, chronic absenteeism is episodic, while for some it is persistent.

Balfanz and Byrnes (2012) also examined the pattern of absenteeism. They share that for many students, absenteeism begins as early as kindergarten. They may improve over the course of elementary school, but once students hit middle and high school, trends of absenteeism spike, with some of the highest absenteeism rates in 12th graders. Teasley (2004) argues that truancy often involves avoiding academic support and explains that this pattern begins in middle school and increases through high school. However, the fact that absenteeism reduces across elementary grades offers promise for the possibility that schools might be able to impact the behaviors of families.

Balfanz and Byrnes (2012) also looked at who is missing school and found, “consistently higher [rates of absenteeism] among economically disadvantaged students and those in special education classes, across all states for which data were available” (p. 19). One study from Maryland found that students who are economically disadvantaged are three times more likely to be chronically absent at the secondary level (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). In other words, the students who miss school the most are those who live in poverty. These are also the students who might benefit most from being in class to reach grade level on learning targets.

An Oregon study in which researchers interviewed high school students found that “students emphasized the need to be respected by adults, to have teachers who hold high expectations for them, and to provide them with the tools they need to achieve success” (Hanover Research, 2016, p. 7). Further analysis of research by Hanover (2016) found that statistically significant predictors of chronic absenteeism included: students with less favorable perceptions of school, lax or inconsistent parental discipline, student feelings of academic performance inferiority, family conflict, and lack of social competence. Connection and belonging in schools are critical for students to be motivated to attend regularly.

Research by Kearney (2008) links chronic absenteeism to both present issues and life-lasting impacts, stating: “youths with chronic school absenteeism and school refusal behavior are at risk for delinquency and school dropout in adolescence and various economic, psychiatric, social, and marital problems in adulthood” (p. 464). The lasting impacts of missing school are detrimental to many of our students, and solving this problem is of critical importance.

Barriers to Attending

When students miss school, they miss out on valuable learning experiences. Understanding the root cause of absenteeism can potentially help school administrators

determine how to better support their students. Students experience a variety of barriers to attending school regularly. Balfanz and Byrnes (2012) classify motivating factors attributed to poor attendance into three categories: *cannot attend*, *will not attend*, and *do not attend*. Similarly, Hanover Research (2016) lists the causes of truancy to be: “family factors, school factors, economic factors, or student factors” (p. 6). These factors were further unpacked as being multifaceted and often intertwined (Hanover, 2016). In their meta-analysis, Gubbels et al. (2019) analyzed risk factors for chronic absenteeism, looking at 44 different risks sorted by child, family, school, and peer related. Of those studied, 28 were found to be statistically significant risk factors, implying that these are true risks that might lead to chronic absenteeism. Gubbels et al. (2019) reported the following characteristics as having the largest effect size ($r \geq 0.252$): “the *child related* risk domains ‘having a negative school attitude’, ‘anti-social behavior/cognitions’, ‘smoking’, ‘drug abuse’, ‘alcohol abuse’, ‘other internalizing problems’, ‘psychiatric symptoms or disorders’, and ‘being a sexual minority’”; the *family related* risk domains ‘low parental school involvement’ and ‘history of child abuse victimization’; and the *school related* risk domain ‘poor pupil-teacher relationship’ (p. 1646). These characteristics and scenarios are often major problems for children that could impact their entire lives.

Balfanz and Byrnes (2012) share that “students who cannot attend school due to illness, family responsibilities, housing instability, the need to work or involvement in the juvenile system” highlight the fundamental barriers many students face (p. 4). These are unfortunate situations in the lives of many students, and schools must be aware of this root-cause of poor attendance then intervene appropriately, connecting students to valuable resources. “National data show that more than half of students experiencing homelessness in the 2021-2022 school year were chronically absent, a rate that jumped 20% following the pandemic” (Attendance

Works, 2024; National Center for Homeless Education, 2023). Additionally, an increasing number of students are experiencing homelessness (Attendance Works, 2024; National Center for Homeless Education, 2023). Hanover indicates broader implications of families facing difficult life circumstances involve “lack of supervision, poverty, alcohol or drug abuse, lack of awareness of attendance laws, and attitude toward education” (p. 6). For these families, the barriers to get to school are severe, as they often face traumatic events as well as lack of transportation, food, clothing, hygiene products, and more. Alongside family factors, Hanover points out economic factors that particularly influence secondary students including “employed students, single parent homes, high mobility, parents with multiple jobs, and lack of transportation” (p. 6). Hanover (2016) notes that traditionally underserved populations are more susceptible to these factors influencing attendance, having a cascading effect on other areas of the student’s academic achievement and well-being.

One reason for chronic absenteeism that bears further exploration is students missing school to avoid pre-existing conflicts and situations, Balfanz and Byrnes (2012) define these to be “bullying, unsafe conditions, harassment, and embarrassment” (p. 4). Fears of attending school can range from not wanting to be called on in class to fear of harassment from other students. Balfanz and Byrnes (2012) point out spikes in chronic absenteeism in kindergarten, sixth, and ninth grades are likely to be connected to this cause for absenteeism. When students go through major changes in their school experience, such as when they transition from one school building or structure to another, it sparks new fears, anxieties, adjustments to routines, and potential conflicts. Hanover (2016) describes the school factors more broadly as “school size, attitudes of students, staff, and teachers, inflexibility towards meeting different learning styles, and inconsistent procedures for dealing with chronic truancy” (p. 6). Absenteeism is a public

health issue. Kearney (2008), states that it is “a key risk factor for violence, injury, substance abuse, psychiatric disorders, and economic deprivation” (p. 451).

Kearney (2008) analyzed the differences between students who had anxiety-based school refusal compared to those who were chronically truant. Some of the dynamics Kearney (2008) discovered included that youth with truant behaviors had parents who were more lax in their supervision, and those with anxiety-based refusal had more issues with peers and significant problems with fear, worries, sleep, and somatic complaints. Yet students from both groups showed no significant difference in demographics “with respect to poverty, family size, living with a stepparent, parents without a high school diploma or unemployment, living in a dangerous neighborhood, parenting style or conflict, maternal depression, or parents with history of criminal convictions” (Kearney, 2008, p. 456). The factors discussed by Hanover (2016) point towards these situations as not being single barriers, but complex.

The last category of absenteeism explained by Balfanz and Byrnes (2012) points not to a specific cause but rather to students who simply do not go to school. The authors discuss situations at early grades where families do not feel kindergarten is important, do not value education, and cannot seem to get their students on a schedule that supports regular attendance. In the secondary grades, this category encompasses students skipping class and parents not requiring their students to attend again, with the authors again suggesting that this is associated with parents who do not see value in the education system. This level of absenteeism can be connected to family perceptions and values in education. Teasley (2004) states, “weak parent-child relationships and inadequate parental involvement regarding education are associated with truancy” (p. 120). Family structure (single parent homes vs two-parent households) and socio-

economic status impact this correlation (Teasley, 2004). Teasley (2004) argues that in affluent communities' access to support is more prevalent and can more easily reduce truancy.

Effectiveness of Interventions and Incentives

Over two decades ago, Epstein and Sheldon (2002) asserted that “Attendance improves when schools take comprehensive approaches to family and community involvement” (p. 317). There is not a one-size fits-all approach to solving absenteeism, but rather a combination of involvement between students, families, and the community. School districts that have a plan for addressing absenteeism are more effective at reducing truancy (Teasley, 2004). Ginsburg et al. (2014) discuss the importance of thoroughly tracking student attendance in databases that are comprehensive and regularly engaged with. Solving attendance issues requires a balance of prevention and intervention that is flexible and responsive to student and family needs (Hanover, 2016). Hanover Research (2016) reports six critical components for truancy reduction programs. These include “collaboration among professionals to implement effective programs; family involvement in the system; comprehensive approach that is both flexible and broad; incentives and sanctions; supportive culture and resources; and rigorous evaluation and assessment using data to inform decision making and track progress” (p. 10). Similarly, Smink and Reiner (2005) identified fifteen effective strategies for improving student attendance and truancy prevention that can be categorized into four core strategies including: school and community perspective, early intervention, basic interventions, and making the most of instruction.

Kearney and Graczyk (2013) advocated for improving attendance through a tiered response to intervention (RTI) model. This framework encompasses a foundational tier, a layer of support relevant to all students; followed by a more targeted and structured approach at tier two; and finally, the most severe and extensive interventions at tier three (Kearney & Graczyk,

2013). Regular school attendance is critical for students to be successful academically, socially, and in accomplishing their college and career goals. The RTI model attempts to intervene on all levels to ensure that each individual student has solutions to their barriers to attending school, and it uses the approach of intervening early and often.

Tracking and assessing all student attendance is critical to assigning the interventions that will improve individual attendance. Hanover (2016) explains that schools must have a comprehensive tracking system to evaluate outcomes and review potential concerns for achievement. Often, dropping out of high school and poor attendance go together. Reviewing data and identifying early warning signs can help get in front of the problem to best serve students (Hanover, 2016). Assessment of attendance is what allows effective interventions to take place. In this approach, level one foundational strategies meet the needs of students missing less than 5-9% of the school year, whereas level two targeted interventions seek to reduce absenteeism and treat chronic absenteeism for students missing 10-19% of the school year, and level three severe interventions are for those missing more than 20% of the school year, labeled as severely chronically absent (Hanover, 2016).

Foundational Strategies to Improve Attendance for All

The foundational strategies include reinforcement of a positive school climate, safety and response to bullying, school-based health programs, mental health and social emotional learning, and parental involvement (Kearney & Graczyk, 2013). These tier one strategies are critical for creating a school that is welcoming, supportive, and fosters positive relationships with students and families. Kearney (2008) emphasizes the importance of school climate in addressing absenteeism, stating that “school climate is moderately but significantly correlated with school

attendance (.40)” (p. 459). Creating schools that embrace safety, connection, acceptance, value, and the overall essence that students are seen and heard is critical for improving attendance.

Positive reinforcement and engagement paired with connections in school is an effective method for improving attendance (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). Incentivizing students with positive rewards for improved daily attender rates and reduced chronic absenteeism has been shown to be an effective method of improving attendance (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). Singer shares that these incentive programs are used less frequently but are still effective methods of encouraging students to attend school. This is a tier one intervention that provides all students with motivation and encouragement for attending school regularly. Hanover (2016) explains that when incentives for positive and improved attendance are recognized school-wide, attendance culture can shift, creating a powerful motivator for behavior change.

Additionally, communication is a critical component of tier one interventions for all students. Singer (2024) reports that communication is the most frequently used strategy in addressing absenteeism. This includes phone calls and letters home about the number of absences and the importance of attending school. Clear communication is a fundamental component of positively impacting regular attender rates. Research by Rogers, et al. et al. (2017) found that a single postcard encouraging regular attendance reduces absences by 2.4%, and that this impact was found in both primary and secondary education. Rogers, et al. (2017) tested two different messaging strategies—the first was an encouragement to improve attendance and the other provided a record of the student’s attendance history—and found no statistically significant difference between the two messages. Additionally, Lasky-Fink et al., (2021) found that when truancy notifications simplify language, emphasize parental efficacy, and highlight the negative effects of missing school, they are more likely to be effective in changing attendance behaviors.

In other words, it appears that the existence of communication has a positive impact, irrespective of the messaging strategy used.

Targeted Interventions to Reduce and Prevent Chronic Absenteeism

The second tier of intervention often covers the most wide-ranging strategies and reaches the most students. These strategies, which focus on targeting the issues and solving them, are most relevant for students who “don’t go to school” (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012) either due to a lack of connection and purpose, lack of motivation, or a conflict with peers or school. Kearney and Graczyk (2013) describe these types of intervention as: *psychological interventions* focused on reducing anxiety and stress around school; *student engagement* such as finding classes and clubs of interest; peers and mentoring to address *connection*; and *assessment* of attendance. Both tier two and three interventions are often comprehensive and multifaceted to address each student’s unique needs.

Chang and Romero (2008) support a comprehensive research-driven approach to addressing absenteeism, with family engagement at the center. A cornerstone to comprehensive attendance programs is communication. It is critical to engage with families and educate them about the importance of attending school (Chang & Romero, 2008). Additionally, notifying them of their student’s attendance and offering support can positively impact outcomes (Chang & Romero, 2008). An exploratory study by Epstein and Sheldon (2002) reviewed various interventions and determined which were statistically significant in improving attendance outcomes. The study’s findings suggest that at the elementary level the following approaches positively impact student attendance and reduce chronic absenteeism: awards to students, communication with families, school contact person, workshops for parents, and after school programs.

Providing connections to resources and support in the community is an important tool for helping students overcome the difficulties keeping them from regular attendance. However, Singer (2024) reports that this approach is ranked the least frequently used strategy by principals. Hanover (2016) explains the power of mentoring programs as a successful method of improved attendance and attitude toward school. These mentors may be partnered with community organizations or developed with the check-in/check-out method present in schools with attendance staff; either way, Hanover (2016) suggests they are positively impactful. Teasley (2004) reports that peer tutoring and mentoring strategies show promise for reversing truancy.

A meta-analysis conducted by Eklund et al. (2020) reviewed various strategies to determine effects on reducing chronic absenteeism. Behavioral interventions that include student attendance contracts, counseling, and parental involvement and academic interventions were determined to have a low effect size. Interventions that yielded a higher effect size included social emotional learning and teacher mentoring (Eklund et al., 2020). Eklund et al. (2020) concluded that more research is needed on intervention effectiveness, as the sample size for each intervention in their study was small. Overall, the take-away from their study was “targeting student academic and behavioral outcomes and family-school partnership had a small to moderate effect on student attendance” (p. 13). Although targeting strategies and partnership with families showed only a small effect size in the Eklund et al. (2020) study, such strategies may still be worth implementing to improve attendance.

Hanover (2016) also suggests that engagement in an enriching learning environment is an effective tool for improving students’ attendance. When students become highly disengaged in content and lack enjoyment in school, they are much more at risk for truancy (Hanover, 2016). A variety of effective strategies can be used to create an enriching learning environment, and it is

essential teachers understand the impact they have in their students' attendance. Gershenson (2016) found that teachers have a statistically significant effect on absences, not only the year a student is in their class, but also in following years. This study also found that more experienced teachers had greater impact. Learning experiences have the power to impact student behavior, motivating them to attend or disengage from school.

Rigorous classrooms that are inclusive, welcoming, rich learning environments involve some specific components and teach actions. Learning environments must foster the growth of diverse student populations, ensuring that all students feel welcomed, supported, and safe to take academic risks (Araujo Dawson et al., 2022). Beamon (n.d.) shared, "for me, inclusivity starts with making the classroom a comfortable, supportive space for students to be themselves." Araujo Dawson (2022) advocated for considering student cultural identity, learning needs, and motivation when developing culturally responsive instruction. These approaches highlight comprehensive learning needs and help students to see themselves as part of the educational system—rather than focusing negatively on a pre-designed system into which they do not fit. Inclusive strategies in classrooms to build positive culture and community help students feel connected to their learning community. Activities like creating a class social contract can help build trust and relational capacity and require teachers to hold students accountable to shared learning agreements (Araujo Dawson et al., 2022).

Effective teaching practices and student engagement are linked to increased academic achievement (Tomaszewski et al., 2022). "Drawing on a system of structural equations, we demonstrate that effective learning time has a direct effect on students' performance and an indirect effect via improved positive behavior, attendance and homework behavior" (p. 1). Effective classrooms involve high levels of student discourse, problem-solving, rigorous reading

and writing, and more. Tomaszewski et al. (2022), emphasize the importance of setting clear expectations and following through on them, asserting that teachers can have a great influence over student goal setting and attainment. Additionally, this study highlights the importance of structured lessons that plan meaningful engagement. A vast array of strategies can accomplish these learning environments, what is important is that they are present and that students feel supported, to drive positive attendance trends and create schools where students are highly engaged with a desire to learn and find meaning in their education.

Severe Interventions for Chronically Absent Students

The most intensive interventions fall under the tier three RTI supports. Kearney and Graczyk (2013) explain that many of these tier three interventions expand upon tier two approaches, while adding additional layers of structure and accountability. These additional layers of structure and accountability address the child's academic and behavioral situation to significantly alter their education to improve attendance. Hanover (2016) lists these interventions as including home visits, frequent check-ins with a school contact person, workshops for families, truancy court referral, and truancy officer partnerships. Teasley (2004) advocates for interventions with families, as students missing more than 20% of the school year are facing much more severe issues. Home visits conducted by educators hold a lot of power to influence both student-family and teacher behavior (McKnight et al., 2022). McKnight et al. (2022) found that home visits conducted by staff foster educator empathy, equitable punitive practices, and increase trust and relational capacity with the school. Although only a small effect size was found, the importance of collaboration between school and family is modeled through effective truancy meetings that develop an action plan to address attendance issues, as discussed by Eklund et al. (2020).

Family therapy has demonstrated some success in reversing truancy and should be included as an intervention that leverages community resources. Teasley (2004) points out that in low-income neighborhoods with higher prevalence of single parent households, truancy is not likely to be solved with parent-student intervention alone, and incorporating community networks is often necessary. Youth programs can have a positive impact on truancy when partnerships are effectively in place (Teasley, 2004).

Kearney and Graczyk (2013) also include truancy court in their list of tier three interventions and list alternative educational placements as a possibility. Alternative education placements are effective in reducing absenteeism and preventing high school dropout (Kearney & Graczyk, 2013). Truancy court is used for the most severe cases of chronic absenteeism and is intended to be a program that supports family growth and accountability for regular attendance. Truancy court can be a meaningful tool to partner students and families with community connections that will encourage improved behavior. It was also listed among the most infrequently used strategies by Singer (2024), although Eklund et al. (2020) found that police involvement in school attendance yielded one of the highest effect sizes in their study. The consistency of truancy practices is a critical component of its success (Teasley, 2004).

Lasky-Fink et al.'s 2021 report on truancy notification systems found that communication that targets behavior is more effective than truancy notifications, which often hinder effective parental engagement. Their study shares evidence that supports the importance of school-family partnerships to improve student outcomes, connects low adult literacy skills to difficulty in understanding complex language often cited in truancy letters, stresses that families understand how critical their role in their child's education is to their success, and shares that there is a general sense of overconfidence in student achievement neglecting the need for parent

engagement. Lasky-Fink et al. (2021), state, “parents consistently underestimate the number of absences their child has accrued and fail to appreciate that even a few absences add up to have real educational consequences” (p. 3). Combining these impacts over years, we can better understand how the culture of not valuing education and showing up to school can occur. This research points to the importance of communication around truancy being short and to the point, as well as welcoming engagement rather than threatening consequences.

Oregon District Initiatives

While I was conducting my dissertation study a meaningful report on addressing chronic absenteeism in Oregon was released by Dr. Berman. The report highlights the work of eleven districts across the state from varying sizes, all achieving meaningful attendance improvements ranging from 4.2% to 10.6% growth through commonly applied principles and innovative adaptations relevant to their local contexts. Berman (2025) uncovered four primary root causes to chronic absenteeism: family health and economic circumstances; lack of belonging and safety in school; feeling of academic failure; insufficient academic engagement and challenge leading to disengagement with instruction.

Berman (2025) states, “the most impactful strategies—relationship building, communication transformation, and collective efficacy—required commitment and culture change rather than additional funding” (p. 3). The importance of relational capacity echoed throughout this 2025 study. Berman states, “relationship between attendance and belonging emerged as reciprocal and mutually reinforcing” (p. 4). Additionally, Berman emphasized that district leadership is critical in improving attendance outcomes, sharing, “successful districts positioned attendance as central to their educational mission rather than treating it as a compliance issue handled by specialists” (p. 4). Leadership at all levels establishes the

importance of attending school regularly and can impact growth in attendance outcomes.

Another key theme of Berman's (2025) research is the impact of transforming the culture of attendance from compliance towards authentic connections to schools, coining this concept "compliance to invitation" (p. 7).

Berman (2025) discusses the importance of creating communications that improve sense of belonging and connection. The "power of positive communication extends beyond attendance improvements to encompass broader goals of family engagement and community building" (p. 9). Berman points to shifting attendance notification letters from threatening truancy to "nudge" letters that have a more supportive tone. Additionally, positive communication should be present in phone calls, meetings, and any interactions with families and students to encourage relational building.

Breaking down barriers was critical to the success of these Oregon districts. Berman says, "rather than blaming students or their families for truancy and absenteeism and using threats and consequences to force compliance, effective interventions focus on understanding the circumstances and needs of students and the family and finding solutions that address those needs" (2025, p. 7). A supportive system for this is the liaisons and family advocates that serve as a conduit between school and home. Connecting students to the resources they need to overcome the barriers they face is central to the district attendance work and systems.

The lack of belonging and safety is further addressed by Berman (2025) and the connection between mental health difficulties and students feeling a sense of safety at school. Berman clearly states, "when students feel like they belong, they show up" (p. 10). Berman pairs strategies to address these significant issues faced by students, sharing the importance of "check and connect, social emotional learning, and home visits" (p. 10) as effective ways to address

absenteeism through systematic interventions that lead to students feeling more welcomed in schools. Furthermore, Berman (2025) shares that the barrier of feelings of academic failure has similar interventions that lead to success including universal design for learning, mentoring programs, and targeted academic interventions. And finally, the researcher states that the barrier of engagement can be addressed through authentic and personalized instruction, learning engagement strategies, and extracurricular activities.

Central to Berman's (2025) research was the creation of attendance teams at each school district site. Berman says, "strategic use of attendance data and school-based and district attendance teams has proven effective for improving attendance" (p. 14). Utilizing the data, attendance teams implement interventions that match the data trends and can share meaningful discussions about absentee patterns in their district. The attendance team serves as a system that enhances culture around the importance of attendance. The role of improving attendance cannot lie solely on one person; rather, it requires collaboration from multiple departments and comprehensive partnerships.

Berman's (2025) conclusion emphasizes the importance of shifting from compliance to invitation, alongside sustained commitment and collaboration between students, families, schools, and the community. Highlighting the importance of systems, Berman (2025) says, "findings reveal that attendance problems are rarely isolated issues but rather symptoms of broader systemic challenges that require coordinated responses across multiple domains" (p. 63). The localization, barriers, interventions, and overall goals of Berman's research connect deeply to this dissertation study, and influenced the questions asked, particularly in the qualitative interviews conducted as part of this work.

The Current Study

Despite the existing research base on the importance of student attendance and the different interventions to increase attendance that have been studied, there is still a need for additional research, particularly research set in the Pacific Northwest, which might increase its relevance for educators in this part of the country. To that end, I conducted a study to explore the impacts and causes of chronic absenteeism in an Oregon school district with an eye toward identifying interventions that might increase regular attender rates. Specifically, I hoped to gather data to answer the following research questions:

1. What are current trends in regular attender rates across Oregon school districts?
2. What are the common barriers to regular attendance faced by students and families in Oregon school districts?
3. What attendance interventions and system components are currently being utilized to effectively improve regular attender rates?
4. What do educational leaders want from absenteeism policy?

CHAPTER III

METHODS

In my dissertation, I analyzed attendance systems used by school districts in Oregon separated out by districts by their designated size *small* (0-1650 students), *medium* (1,651-9,999 students), or *large* (10,000 or more students) and then comprehensively reviewed their regular attender rates and their ability to improve regular attender rates among special populations, with the hope of identifying effective interventions and system components to support student attendance. District-wide attendance data were disaggregated over five years (2023-2024; 2022-2023; 2021-2022; 2020-2021; 2018-2019; no data were available for 2019-2020). Districts that experienced substantial growth in regular attender rates were identified and further investigated to determine what might lie behind the quantitative improvement. The next phase of the study involved collection of survey data and interviews, based on findings in the quantitative analysis.

As I discussed earlier, chronic absenteeism is significantly impacting student learning across the state, and evaluating what districts are doing while determining what is working may result in insights into system-level supports that could be applied by districts seeking to improve their outcomes. I was hopeful that my use of localized data would yield unique perspectives to Oregon attendance systems with targeted solutions that Oregon school leaders could use to improve regular attender rates at their schools.

Mixed Methods Design Overview

This explanatory mixed methods study involved reviewing extant data on absenteeism across school districts in the state for the past five years and then surveying school district leaders on their attendance systems. Next, I interviewed leaders from districts with demonstrated

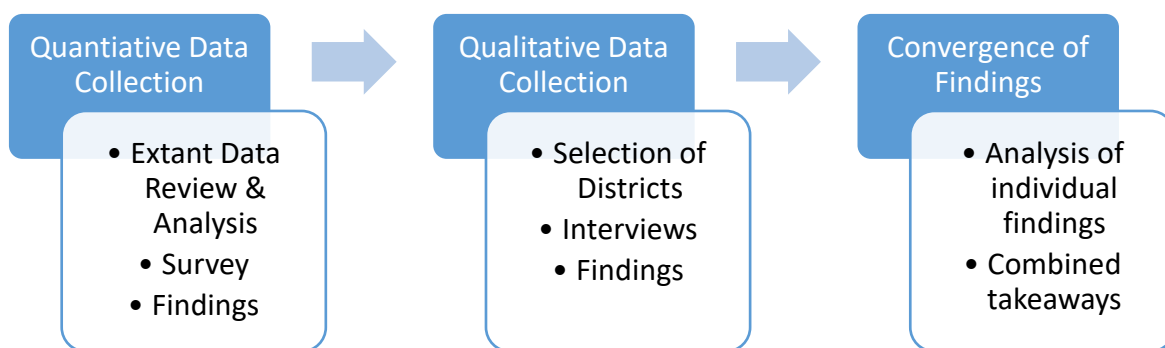
strong regular attender rates within the past five years to dig deeper into the components of their attendance systems that might have contributed to the growth, and to find out whether they are implementing a truancy-like ordinance and the reasons behind that decision. I hoped that these interviews would provide a better understanding of ways to improve attendance systems and inform policy makers on the relevance and perceptions of mandating truancy programs.

Research Design

This mixed methods study provided a variety of data to enable me to thoroughly evaluate this topic and identify systems-level supports that rural and town schools and districts could use to improve student attendance. For this study, I analyzed my data quantitatively first and then qualitatively and then brought those takeaways together to converge the findings (Creswell, 2023). This method allowed findings to be confirmed by comparison of both data types to establish a well-substantiated conclusion (Creswell, 2023). Converging the findings of both data collections allowed for robust explorations of impactful practices and discussion about effective attendance systems in this population of Oregon schools (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Flowchart of Data Collection and Analysis



Note: Flowchart of mixed methods data collection and analysis procedures.

Quantitative data consisted of extant data collected from the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) and disaggregated to identify who was being disproportionately impacted by chronic absenteeism. All school districts within this data set were given the label of *small* (0-1650 students), *medium* (1,651-9,999 students), or *large* (10,000 or more students). With these district size designations, I sorted the all-student regular attender rate from best to worst and then did the same for each special population. Once these were sorted, I pulled the top 10 from the small and medium districts, and top 5 from the large districts, using the top 10-10-5's data I analyzed the data to pinpoint outliers and effective school districts. Next, I collected survey data from schools that stood out as leaders in overall attendance and/or serving special populations, with a mix of selected response and constructed-response questions centered around components of district attendance systems and applied interventions. This quantitative data allowed me to pinpoint schools that are performing well, populations that are underserved, and common components of district attendance systems.

I used the analyses of both survey and attendance data to identify outlier school districts with the most growth and then conducted interviews with a sample five district leaders. These leaders were identified in the initial survey as showing interest in participating in the interview portion of the research. The mixed methods approach provided initial understanding of the effectiveness of different attendance strategies and greater understanding of factors influencing attendance systems.

Setting & Participants

Oregon schools serve a diverse range of students and population sizes. ODE (2023-24) reports that Oregon school districts serve 547,424 students, with enrollment steadily declining over the past five years. Over 50% of Oregon students are enrolled in large school districts,

around 40% in medium size, and less than 10% in small districts (ODE, 2023-24). The proportion of students in Oregon experiencing housing insecurities has risen in the past five years (ODE, 2023-24). Oregon’s average regular attender rate was 65.7% in 2023-24, up slightly from the prior two years. Oregon’s regular attender rates for special populations (Students Experiencing Poverty, English Learners, Ever English Learners, Students with Disabilities, Migrant, Students Experiencing Houselessness, and Students in Foster Care) are lower than the state average (ODE, 2023-24).

Regular attendance in Oregon peaks between grade two and six (ODE, 2023-24). Nationally, regular attender rates are around 74%, demonstrating that Oregon lags in this area and has significant room for growth (U.S. Department of Education, 2023). Figure 2 highlights just how significant the problem is in Oregon, with some of the very worst rates of chronic absenteeism in the entire nation. Oregon is dedicated to improving attendance with targeted approaches to addressing root causes of absenteeism improving student belonging and engagement as a tool for increased student attendance (ODE, 2023-24).

Figure 2

Rates of Chronic Absenteeism by State, 2022-23 from US Department of Education).

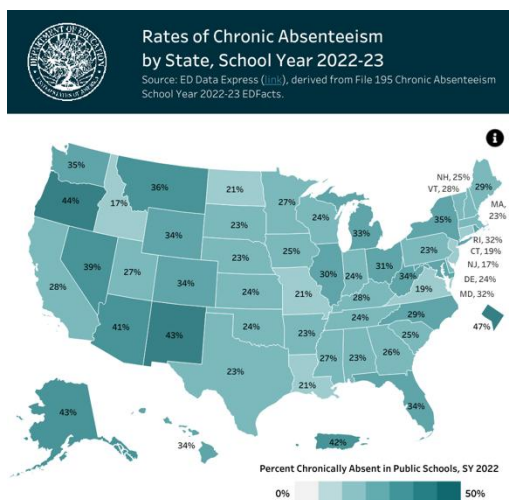


Table 1 lists which districts in Oregon fall into the specific school size category of *small* (0-1650 students, $n=130$), *medium* (1,651-9,999 students, $n=57$), or *large* (10,000 or more students, $n=10$).

Table 1
Distribution of School District Sizes in Oregon

Size	School Districts		
Small	Adel SD 21	Gervais SD 1	Paisley SD 11
	Adrian SD 61	Gladstone SD 116	Perrydale SD 21
	Alsea SD 7J	Glendale SD 77	Philomath SD 17J
	Amity SD 4J	Glide SD 12	Pilot Rock SD 2
	Annex SD 29	Harney County SD 3	Pine Creek SD 5
	Arlington SD 3	Harney County SD 4	Pine Eagle SD 61
	Arock SD 81	Harney County Union High SD 1J	Pinehurst SD 94
	Ashwood SD 8	Harper SD 66	Pleasant Hill SD 1
	Athena-Weston SD 29RJ	Harrisburg SD 7J	Plush SD 18
	Bandon SD 54	Helix SD 1	Port Orford-Langlois SD 2CJ
	Banks SD 13	Huntington SD 16J	Powers SD 31
	Blachly SD 90	Imbler SD 11	Prairie City SD 4
	Black Butte SD 41	Ione SD R2	Prospect SD 59
	Brookings-Harbor SD 17C	Jefferson SD 14J	Rainier SD 13
	Burnt River SD 30J	Jewell SD 8	Reedsport SD 105
	Butte Falls SD 91	John Day SD 3	Riddle SD 70
	Camas Valley SD 21J	Jordan Valley SD 3	Riverdale SD 51J
	Central Curry SD 1	Joseph SD 6	Rogue River SD 35
	Central Linn SD 552	Junction City SD 69	Seaside SD 10
	Clatskanie SD 6J	Juntura SD 12	Sheridan SD 48J
	Colton SD 53	Knappa SD 4	Sherman County SD
	Condon SD 25J	Lake County SD 7	Sisters SD 6
	Coquille SD 8	Long Creek SD 17	Siuslaw SD 97J
	Corbett SD 39	Lowell SD 71	South Harney SD 33
	Cove SD 15	Mapleton SD 32	South Umpqua SD 19
	Creswell SD 40	Marcola SD 79J	South Wasco County SD 1
	Crow-Applegate-Lorane SD 66	McKenzie SD 68	Spray SD 1
	Culver SD 4	Milton-Freewater Unified SD 8	St Paul SD 45
	Dayton SD 8	Mitchell SD 55	Stanfield SD 61
	Dayville SD 16J	Monroe SD 1J	Suntex SD 10
	Diamond SD 7	Monument SD 8	Sutherlin SD 130
	Double O SD 28	Mt Angel SD 91	Troy SD 54
	Douglas County SD 15	Myrtle Point SD 41	Ukiah SD 80R
	Drewsey SD 13	Neah-Kah-Nie SD 56	Umatilla SD 6R
	Dufur SD 29	Nestucca Valley SD 101J	Union SD 5
	Echo SD 5	North Douglas SD 22	Vale SD 84
	Elgin SD 23	North Lake SD 14	Vernonia SD 47J
	Elkton SD 34	North Marion SD 16	Wallowa SD 12
	Enterprise SD 21	North Powder SD 8J	Warrenton-Hammond SD 30
	Falls City SD 57	Nyssa SD 26	Willamina SD 30J
	Fern Ridge SD 28J	Oakland SD 1	Winston-Dillard SD 116
	Fossil SD 21J	Oakridge SD 76	Yamhill Carlton SD 1

	Frenchglen SD 16 Gaston SD 511J	ODE YCEP District	Yoncalla SD 32
Medium	Ashland SD 5 Astoria SD 1 Baker SD 5J Bethel SD 52 Canby SD 86 Cascade SD 5 Centennial SD 28J Central Point SD 6 Central SD 13J Coos Bay SD 9 Corvallis SD 509J Crook County SD Dallas SD 2 David Douglas SD 40 Douglas County SD 4 Eagle Point SD 9 Estacada SD 108 Forest Grove SD 15 Grants Pass SD 7 Greater Albany Public SD 8J	Hermiston SD 8Hood River County SD Jefferson County SD 509J Klamath County SD Klamath Falls City Schools La Grande SD 1 Lake Oswego SD 7J Lebanon Community SD 9 Lincoln County SD McMinnville SD 40 Molalla River SD 35 Morrow SD 1 Newberg SD 29J North Bend SD 13 North Santiam SD 29J North Wasco County SD 21 Ontario SD 8C Oregon City SD 62 Oregon Trail SD 46 Parkrose SD 3	Pendleton SD 16 Phoenix-Talent SD 4 Redmond SD 2J Reynolds SD 8 Santiam Canyon SD 129J Scappoose SD 1J Scio SD 96 Sherwood SD 88J Silver Falls SD 4J South Lane SD 45J3 Springfield SD 20 St Helens SD 502 Sweet Home SD 55 Three Rivers/Josephine County SD Tillamook SD 9 West Linn-Wilsonville SD 3J Woodburn SD 103
Large	Beaverton SD 48J Bend-LaPine SD 1 Eugene SD 4J Gresham-Barlow SD 10J	Hillsboro SD 1J Medford SD 549C North Clackamas SD 12	Portland SD 1J Salem-Keizer SD 24J Tigard-Tualatin SD 23J

Study participants included district attendance leaders who manage their district's attendance systems. An invitation to participate in the survey was sent to all schools that over the course of five years ranked in the top 10-10-5. This sample size was chosen because it would allow me to draw conclusions about the structure of attendance systems in the state's varying sizes of public-school districts. District office officials have detailed knowledge of their district's attendance systems, and I thought they would be valuable in providing insightful information on perceptions of truancy-like programs as well as attendance interventions and incentives. In cases where a district representative was not the best fit, they were asked to point me in the direction of school-based experts such as building principals or assistant principals who would be best suited to answer the survey adequately.

To gain a deeper understanding of attendance interventions and incentives in Oregon schools, I also conducted interviews with superintendents of districts that have significantly improved attendance outcomes post COVID-19 pandemic and who indicated that they would be willing to be interviewed when they filled out the survey. Five participants indicated willingness to be interviewed. The criteria for selecting these districts included overall regular attender rates improving, special populations disproportionately impacted demonstrating improvement, and/or unique survey findings. Once potential interviewees were identified, I scheduled a 30-minute semi-structured interview over Zoom, an online videoconferencing software platform.

Quantitative Study Components

Data Collection Procedures & Sources of Data

A variety of size schools across the state of Oregon were selected. During the first phase of the study, I analyzed data on regular attender rates for each Oregon school district designated as *small, medium, or large*. The ODE releases regular attender rate reports in November of each year for the prior year's data. This allowed for analysis from 2018-19 to 2023-24 with the exclusion of the 2019-20 data due to the Covid-19 pandemic which restricted schools from reporting that year. The ODE data includes special population attendance percentages for regular attenders and chronically absent students. The special populations reported include gender, grade level, ethnicity, students with disabilities, English learners, ever English learners, talented and gifted, military connected, homeless, migrant, foster care, students experiencing poverty, currently or formerly incarcerated students, and recent arrivers (ODE, 2023). Using this information, I calculated average regular attender rate for each school district over five years, prevalence of occurrence on the 10-10-5 list, and separated the data by regular attenders and special population counts.

I used these calculations to identify districts with greater-than-state-average attendance / less-than-state-average chronic absenteeism, with a particular focus on students from the special populations groups. I then used the results of this analysis to classify districts into one of the following categories: (a) *more effective than average at improving attendance for students, including those from the special populations groups*; (b) *more effective than average at improving attendance for students, but not necessarily for students from the special populations groups*. This analysis enabled me to cluster the different school districts by their attendance/chronic absenteeism patterns, in comparison to state averages, for the next part of my study.

Following analysis of district attendance data, I called each school district on the list and requested the best email to use to contact someone who could provide information about attendance systems in the corresponding district. Using this information, I then sent an email invitation to complete a brief online survey, asking for details about district attendance initiatives and specifically if they are utilizing a county ordinance regarding *failure to supervise* to take students through the truancy process. This survey required no more than 10 minutes to complete and included selected response questions (i.e., yes or no, scaled, or categorical) with just one open-ended question to gather baseline understanding of attendance practices. The survey was the same for all potential district participants, but I used a different invitation link to enable me to identify whether a respondent fit into the best at improving overall attendance, and/or special populations sub-groups. The respondents were given the opportunity to share what district they were representing or to remain anonymous. Once surveys were completed, I added a new column to the dataset to code *category type* before combining the responses from all participants into the same data set for continued analyses.

Components of the survey included questions targeted at better understanding the existing attendance intervention models within the districts. These questions focus on what attendance systems are in place in each district, what leaders perceive to be most important, and perceptions around truancy-like systems. All but one of the questions offers collection of categorical data. The survey was as follows:

1. School District Name *optional
2. What is the size of your district?
 - a. Small (0-1,650 students)
 - b. Medium (1,651-9,999 students)
 - c. Large (10,000+ students)
3. How would you currently rate attendance in your district? (five stars being the very best)
4. Which of the following attendance interventions does your district use? Select all that apply.
 - a. Attendance letters
 - b. Home visits
 - c. Incentives
 - d. Parent meetings
 - e. Personal phone calls
 - f. Phone calls via auto-dialer
 - g. Positive outreach
 - h. Truancy-like programs
 - i. Other:

5. Which three interventions are most frequently utilized in your school district? Select only three.

- a. Attendance letters
- b. Home visits
- c. Incentives
- d. Parent meetings
- e. Personal phone calls
- f. Phone calls via auto-dialer
- g. Positive outreach
- h. Truancy-like programs
- i. Other:

6. Which three interventions do you feel are the most effective in improving attendance outcomes? (Select only three)

- a. Attendance letters
- b. Home visits
- c. Incentives
- d. Parent meetings
- e. Personal phone calls
- f. Phone calls via auto-dialer
- g. Positive outreach
- h. Truancy-like programs
- i. Other:

7. What do you believe are the primary barriers to regular attendance faced by students in your community? (Select up to five)
- a. Transportation
 - b. Homelessness or housing instability
 - c. Mental health
 - d. Economic hardship
 - e. Lack of parental engagement
 - f. Motivation
 - g. Behavioral (suspensions, juvenile involvement, etc.)
 - h. Academic preparedness
 - i. Other:
8. Does your district use a county-level truancy ordinance with legal consequences for chronic absenteeism?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
9. If you answered yes to question 8, how effective does this system seem?
- a. Very effective
 - b. Somewhat effective
 - c. Neither effective nor ineffective
 - d. Somewhat ineffective
 - e. Very ineffective
 - f. NA

10. If you answered no to question 8, on a scale of 1-5 how likely would your district be to support truancy-programs in the future if they were available to your school district?

- a. Very likely
- b. Somewhat likely
- c. Neither likely nor unlikely
- d. Somewhat unlikely
- e. Very unlikely
- f. NA

11. What do you believe is the single most needed resources or support to help improve attendance in your school district?

- a. Incentives or reward programs for students
- b. Mental health support and counseling
- c. Enhanced transportation services
- d. School-based health clinics or healthcare access
- e. After-school programs and enrichment activities
- f. Parental engagement and education resources
- g. Monitoring and support for absenteeism
- h. Expanded educational opportunities for leaders
- i. Truancy-like program
- j. Other

12. Which of these resources or supports to help improve attendance in your school district would you like to improve or add/expand upon (select as many as you would like)?

- a. Incentives or reward programs for students
- b. Mental health support and counseling
- c. Enhanced transportation services
- d. School-based health clinics or healthcare access
- e. After-school programs and enrichment activities
- f. Parental engagement and education resources
- g. Monitoring and support for absenteeism
- h. Expanded educational opportunities for leaders
- i. Truancy-like program
- j. Other

13. Please feel free to share any additional thoughts you might have about attendance challenges and/or ways schools might improve student attendance.

14. Would you be interested in participating in an interview to further discuss your district's attendance systems?

- a. Yes
- b. No

15. Name and position *optional

16. Email address *optional

17. Phone number *optional

Using these data, I created simple charts to display common trends visually. Survey findings led to a basic understanding of what many districts are doing and what they value, as well as gathering perceptions around attendance progress and resources needed. Additionally, the survey led to a list of individuals willing to participate in a more in-depth interview discussion. The survey questions were able to guide the interviews, informing me of what areas to dig deeper into and what attendance leaders valued in attendance systems.

Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis

Data Collection Procedures & Sources of Data

Following analysis of district data and intervention structures, I identified and interviewed leaders willing to participate. I managed to interview personnel from five districts with improved attendance, with representation from districts with and without a county ordinance allowing for legal ramifications for not sending students to school. The intent of these interviews was to better understand effective components of attendance intervention systems and perceptions around the truancy process, effectiveness of interventions, and to solicit advice for districts working on improving attendance. Interviews were conducted over Zoom, an internet-based video conferencing platform and recorded through OtterAI to generate a transcript.

These interviews were semi-structured and conversational, offering the opportunity for rich conversations around attendance systems, aimed at not glorifying the problem but discussing how to solve a major issue. The questions were as follows.

1. Your school district has been identified for this research because of its strengths in improved attendance outcomes. Tell me more about what is going well for your school district when it comes to attendance.

2. Now let's unpack your attendance systems. Districts often use tiered intervention systems to address absenteeism. If your district uses a tiered intervention system, what do your tiers look like? If it doesn't, describe how your school or district addresses absenteeism. [Engage in follow-up questions about unique components and systems.]
3. Which interventions do you perceive have the greatest impact on improving attendance outcomes? And why?
4. Please describe any specific actions targeted at addressing traditionally underserved and/or special populations.
5. What would you tell a district that is struggling with attendance? Where do you start when striving to impact change around attendance?
6. What resources have been most helpful to your district when it comes to improving attendance outcomes?
7. Does your county have an ordinance that implements a truancy-like system for severely chronically absent students? If so, tell me more about how it works.
8. Talk to me about your perceptions of truancy court. Do you see a need for it to return to policy in Oregon or are you satisfied with the current model? Why?
9. What resources do you think districts need the most to improve attendance? What policy or school system changes do you think are necessary to significantly improve attendance across the state?
10. What work do you feel still needs to be done within your district to continue to improve attendance outcomes and serve students and families?
11. Is there anything else attendance related you'd like to share or discuss?

To analyze the qualitative data, I first used descriptive coding to simplify language across the interviews (Saldaña, 2021). This coding method allowed for narrowing down the focus of what was discussed during the interview and served as an effective first cycle of coding (Saldaña, 2021). Next, I coded the transcripts to highlight the phrasing of the participants, pinpointing key phrases that were repeated throughout interviews. For the final coding cycle, I utilized thematic and pattern coding to determine key themes and reoccurring patterns (Saldaña, 2021). This coding method was especially important for understanding the big picture the data was painting. Saldaña (2021) explains that all coding should be reflective of themes in the study, and that is just what this process helped to uncover about attendance systems.

Improving Research Integrity

I used triangulation of data sources and member checking to increase the trustworthiness of my study and credibility of my findings by comparing the interview responses with attendance data. Using OtterAI for the recorded transcript allowed for a quick member check of key takeaways at the end of the interview to ensure that the interviewee's perspectives were appropriately captured.

CHAPTER IV

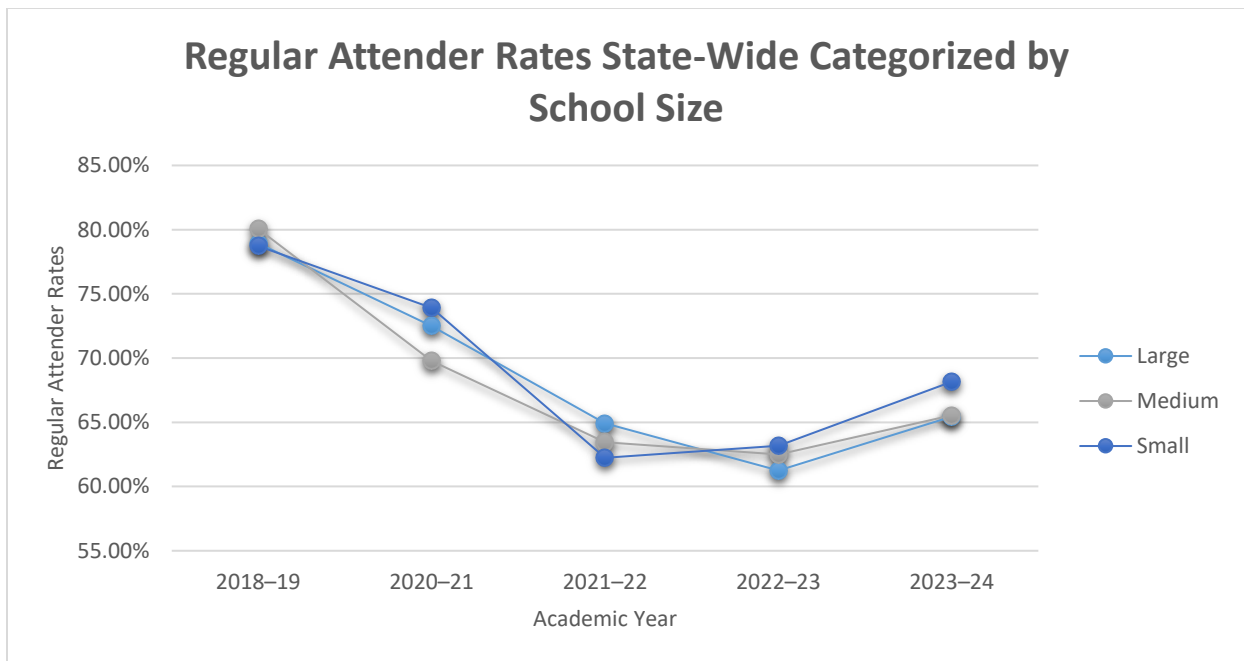
RESULTS

Over the course of July 2025, I analyzed school district data for regular attender rates.

Figure 3 presents a graph plotting the regular attender rates by school district size, demonstrating that they all follow a similar trend line. Figure 3 depicts the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on attendance rates as they continuously dropped following 2018-19, data were omitted for 2019-2020, as there was no state attendance reporting requirement during the pandemic, and then begin to rebound with recent years.

Figure 3

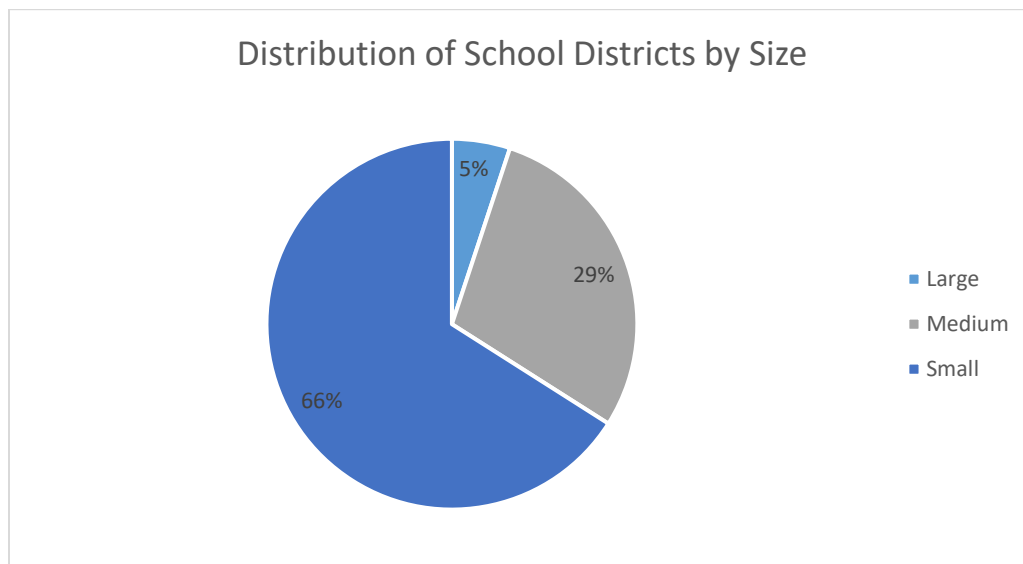
Regular Attender Rates State-Wide by School Size



Across the state, there is a wide distribution of school districts sizes, with 10 classified as large, 57 medium, and 130 small. Figure 4 depicts the percentage of school districts in each of these three sizes across the state of Oregon.

Figure 4

Distribution of School Districts by Size in Oregon

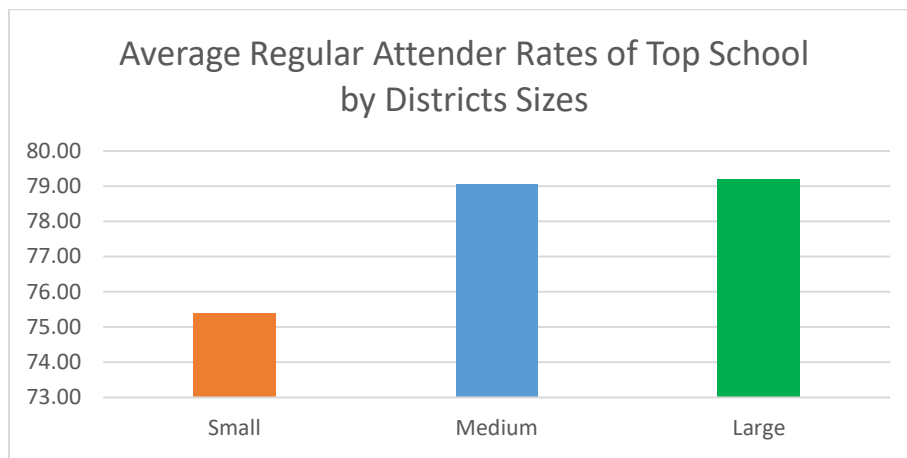


Note: The distribution of districts by size highlights the range of district sizes across the state

I sorted each year's ODE regular attender rate report by *large*, *medium*, and *small* school districts, and compiled the districts with the top regular attender numbers. Those appearing on the list the most times were labeled as leaders in attendance overtime, using the top 5-10-10 rule described in the methods chapter. The findings first indicated that large and medium-sized school districts shared similarities in their average regular attender rate over the past 5-year period (excluding 2019-20). For small school districts the average attender rate was lower than the average attender rate of large and medium sized school districts. Figure 5 groups the average regular attender rate of the top performers by district size. This graph demonstrates that smaller districts have lower average attender rates and the large and medium top performers have very similar average regular attender rates.

Figure 5

Average Regular Attender Rates of Identified School Districts by Size



Note: Medium and large sized districts show similar averages of regular attender rates, while smaller school districts' average attender rate is much lower.

Table 2 shows the districts identified as top performers with their average regular attender rate appearing on the top 5-10-10 list numerous times, pinpointing the overall top five large school districts, ten medium school districts, and 10 small school districts rank as it relates to this research study.

Table 2

Top 5-10-10 for Overall Regular Attender Rates

Size of District and District Names	Count of how many years (out of five) the district appeared on top 5-10-10 list for overall regular attender rates.
Large	
Beaverton SD 48J	5
North Clackamas SD 12	5
Hillsboro SD 1J	4
Portland SD 1J	4
Bend-LaPine Administrative SD 1	2
Medium	
Lake Oswego SD 7J	5
Sherwood SD 88J	5
Ashland SD 5	4
Estacada SD 108	4

Ontario SD 8C	4
Baker SD 5J	3
Bethel SD 52	3
Eagle Point SD 9	3
Scappoose SD 1J	3
Astoria SD 1	2
Small	
Paisley SD 11	4
Echo SD 5	3
Blachly SD 90	2
Fossil SD 21J	2
Harney County SD 4	2
Harney County Union High SD 1J	2
Harper SD 66	2
Imbler SD 11	2
Jewell SD 8	2
Joseph SD 6	2

Table 3 depicts the prevalence of special populations on the top 5-10-10 lists organized by district size. I used this process to identify districts that are especially good at supporting the attendance of special populations.

Table 3

5-10-10 for Prevalence of Special Populations

Size of District and District Names	Count of how many years (out of five) the district appeared on top 5-10-10 list for special population regular attender rates.
Large	
North Clackamas SD 12	36
Hillsboro SD 1J	34
Beaverton SD 48J	32
Eugene SD 4J	25
Medford SD 549C	25
Medium	
Lake Oswego SD 7J	27
Ontario SD 8C	27
Eagle Point SD 9	23
Hood River County SD	22
Klamath County SD	20
Sherwood SD 88J	19
Bethel SD 52	18

Ashland SD 5	17
Grants Pass SD 7	13
Newberg SD 29J	13
Small	
Adrian SD 61	13
St Paul SD 45	13
Creswell SD 40	12
Nyssa SD 26	10
Amity SD 4J	8
Sisters SD 6	7
Fossil SD 21J	6
Gervais SD 1	6
Marcola SD 79J	6
Athena-Weston SD 29RJ	4

Some districts appeared on both lists. That overlap in classification is listed in Table 4.

Table 4

Top 10-10-5's Overlap in Regular Attenders Overall and Special Populations

Large	
Beaverton SD 48J	
North Clackamas SD 12	
Hillsboro SD 1J	
Medium	
Lake Oswego SD 7J	
Sherwood SD 88J	
Ashland SD 5	
Ontario SD 8C	
Bethel SD 52	
Eagle Point SD 9	
Small	
Fossil SD 21J	

Quantitative Survey Findings

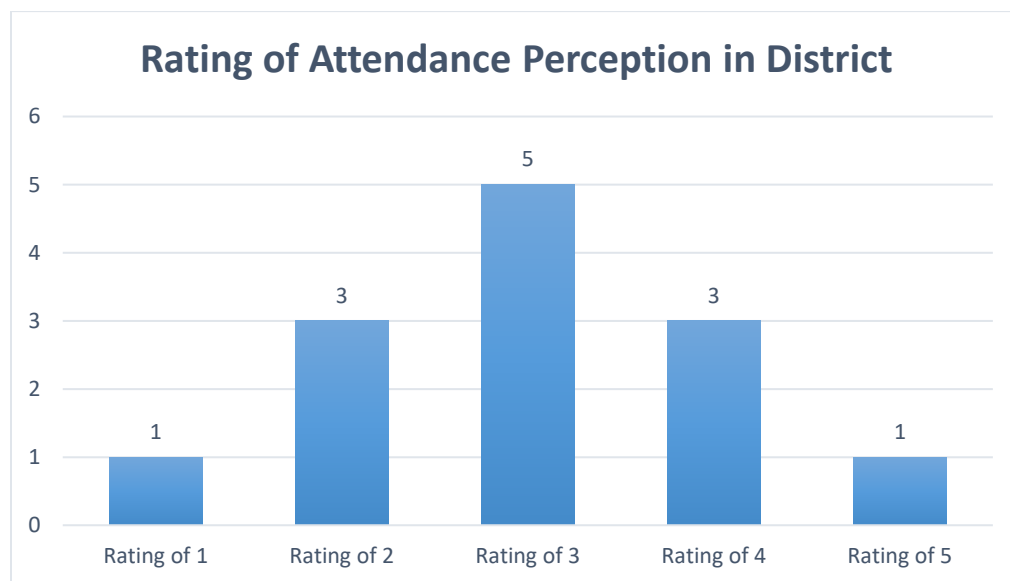
In early August, I made phone calls to each district listed in Tables 3 and 4 to ensure that the survey was sent to the correct person and provide preparatory communication regarding the purpose of the survey. In September, I emailed all school districts listed in Table 3 and 4 an

invitation to participate and a link to the survey created in Microsoft Office Forms. All districts identified as leaders in attendance excellence in overall and special populations were emailed the same survey. Survey participants were sent a total of two emails requesting their participation in the study: the first sent on August 28th, the second on October 17. The survey remained open for responses until October 21. When I closed the survey, I had received a total of 13 responses from school districts of varying sizes. Two of the respondents requested to remain anonymous while all others identified which school district they represented. The survey had responses from three large school districts, seven medium school districts, and three small school districts.

When asked “How would you rate attendance in your district? (five being the very best), responses ranged from 1 to 5, with the average rating being three out of five (see Figure 6).

Figure 6

Rating of Attendance Perceptions in District

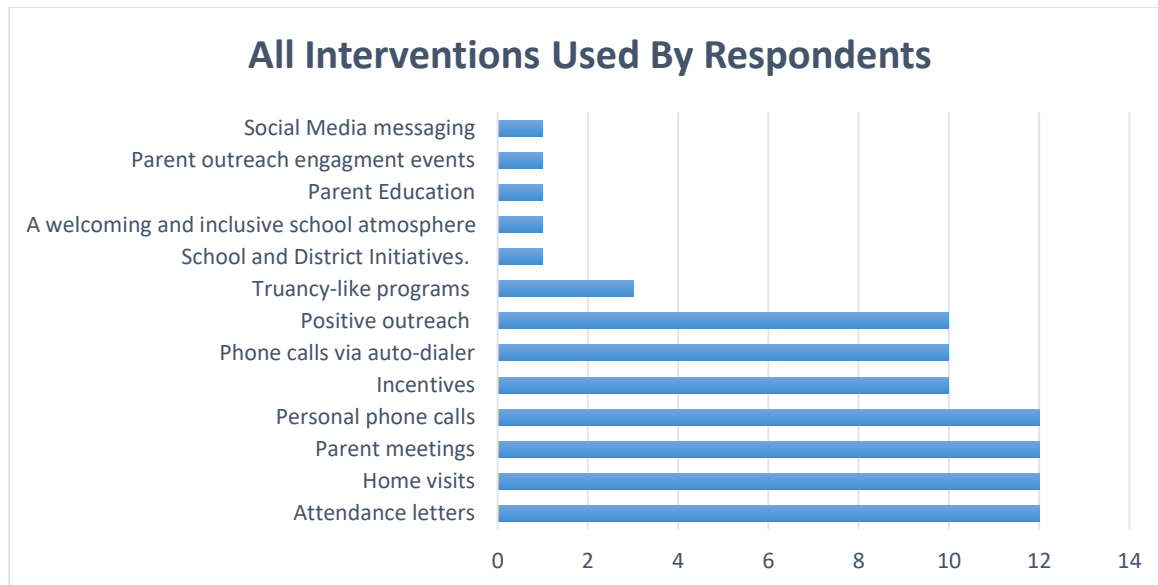


When asked, “Which interventions are being used in your district?” respondents indicated personal phone calls, parent meetings, home visits and attendance letters were most frequently

used, with social media messaging, parent engagement events, parent education, a welcoming and inclusive school atmosphere, and School and District initiatives mentioned by only one respondent (see Figure 7).

Figure 7

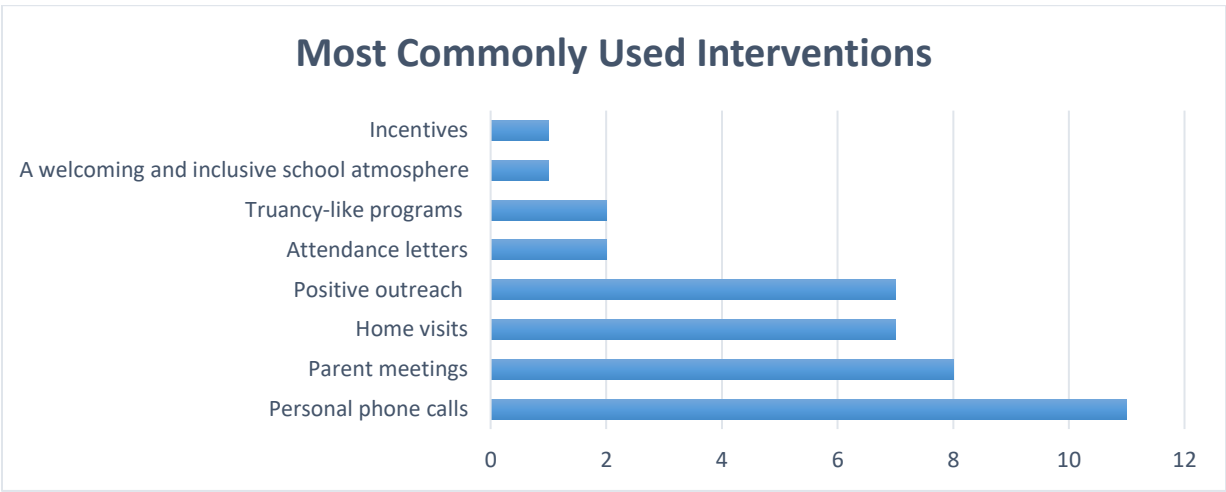
All Interventions Applied



When asked, “Which three interventions are most frequently utilized in your school district? (Select only three)” the most frequently used intervention was personalized phone calls, with parent meetings being second. Other popular interventions included home visits and positive outreach (see Figure 8).

Figure 8

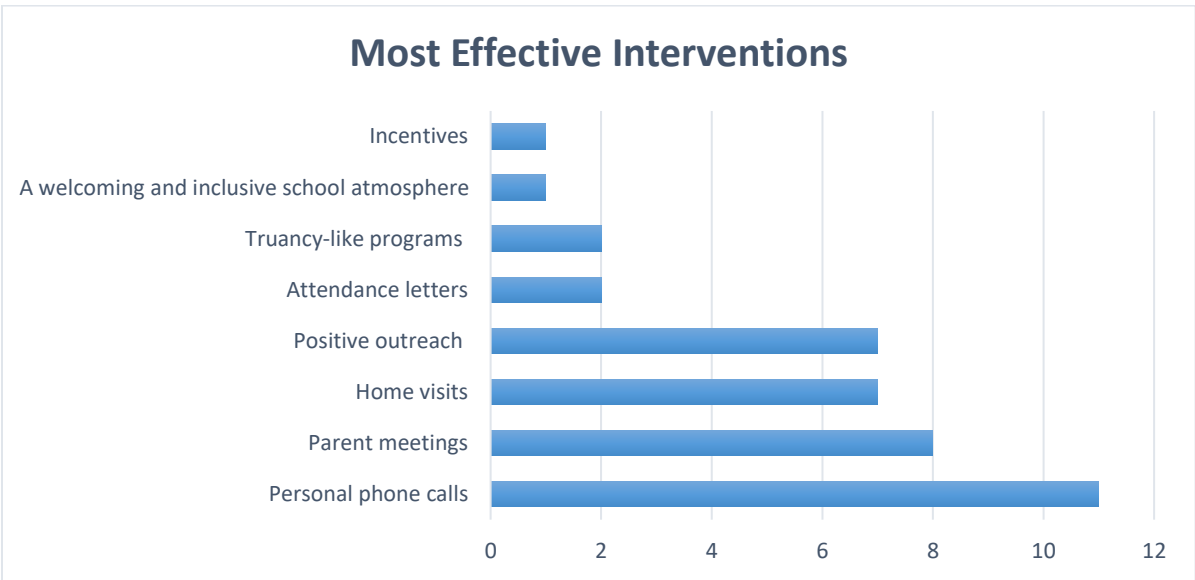
Commonly Used Interventions



Respondents were then asked to identify which three interventions are the most effective at improving attendance outcomes in their district. The results mirrored the commonly used interventions, with personalized phone calls the most frequently cited, followed by parent meetings, and then home visits and positive outreach (see Figure 9).

Figure 9

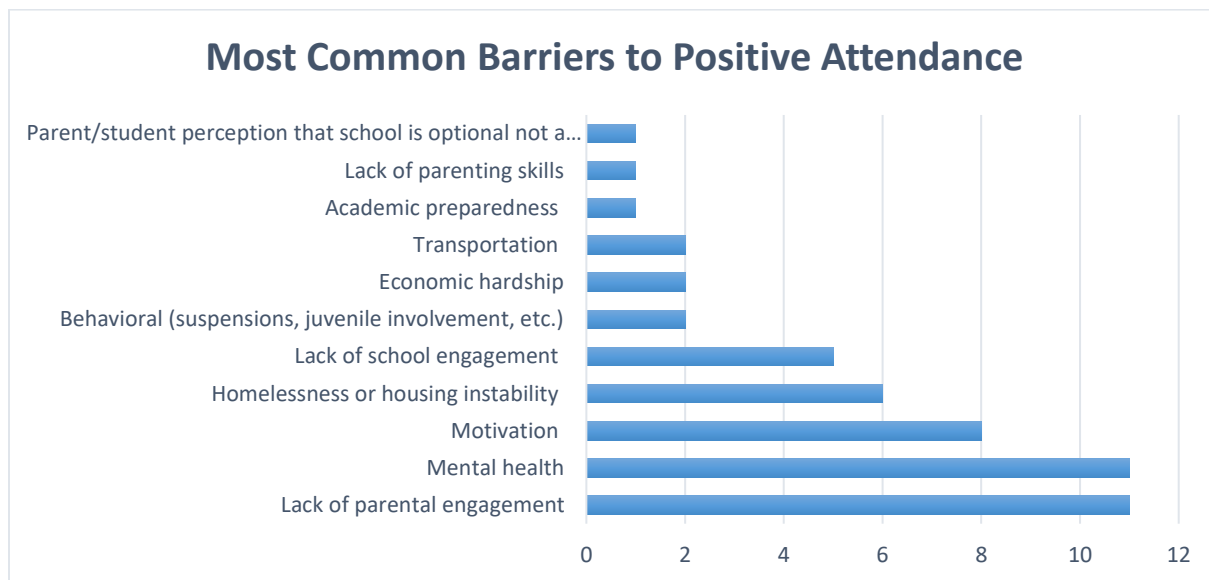
Most Effective Interventions



When asked to reflect on what the most common barriers to regular attendance are in their district, respondents most frequently reported barriers included lack of parental engagement, mental health, and motivation (see Figure 10).

Figure 10

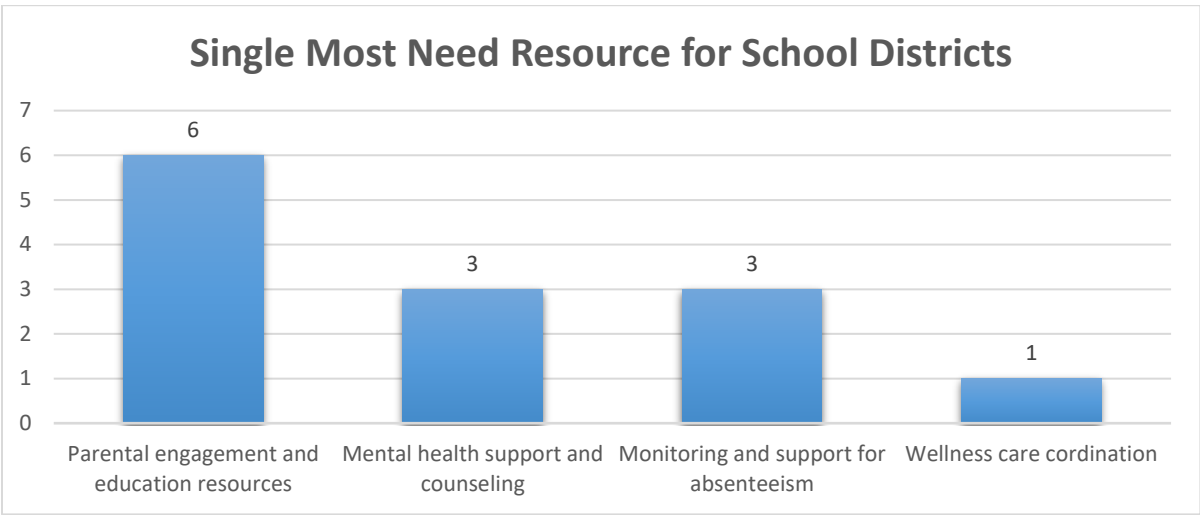
Most Common Barriers to Attendance



When asked about the need for resources to reduce barriers, respondents most commonly cited parental engagement and education resources, followed by mental health support and counseling, and monitoring and support for absenteeism (see Figure 11).

Figure 11

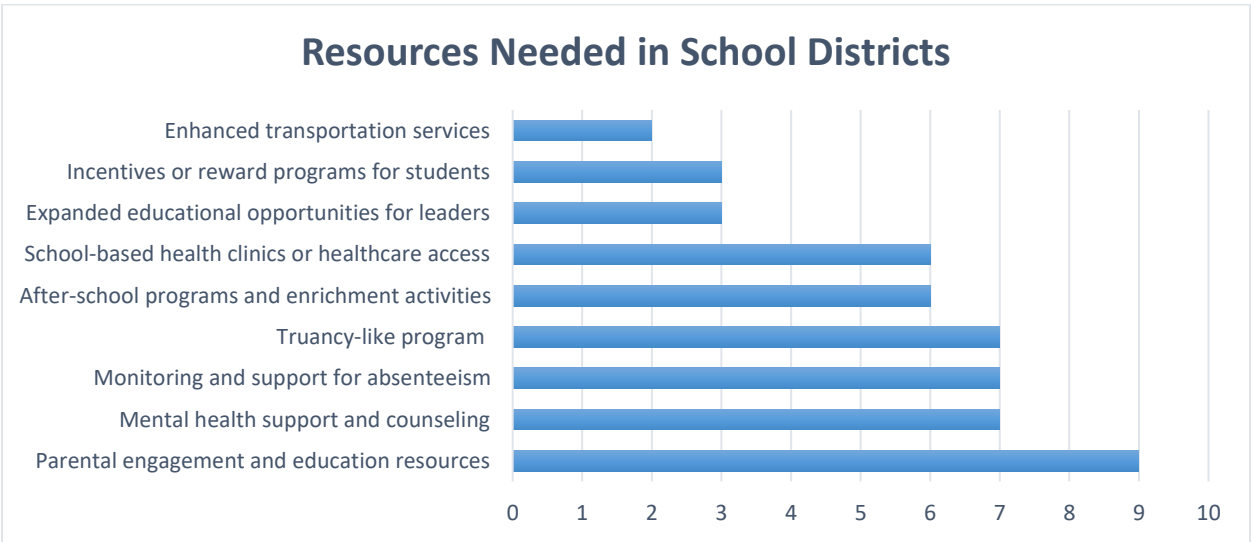
Most Needed Resources for Attendance Improvements



The next question asked about resources or supports to help improve attendance. Respondents could select as many options as they wanted. The resources respondents most frequently indicated they needed to positively impact attendance were parental engagement and education resources (see Figure 12).

Figure 12

Overall Resources Needed in School Districts to Address Attendance



The last set of questions reflected whether the district offered a truancy-like system, and if their response was no, how likely they would be to support one. These data are organized by school district size. Districts reported that those with truancy systems were most often effective, but sometimes neither effective nor ineffective. Additionally, half of responding districts ($n = 5$) indicated they would be *very likely* to support the return of truancy court, while one district was *likely* to support, and three reported *neither likely nor unlikely* to support (see Table 5).

Finally, a portion of the survey was left open for additional comments. These ranged widely, but each representative who chose to answer this question shared inciteful information into their district's attendance system and what works. In the additional comments section districts highlighted the inconsistent implementation of truancy-like programs. These comments emphasized the importance of effective systems that support relationship building with students and families. Respondents noted that families often underestimate how quickly absences add up and their real impact on academics. Participants highlighted the importance of positive, clear communication and interactive opportunities for family engagement. Attendance leaders also stated the importance of the growing role of mental health and social-emotional needs in addressing attendance issues. Districts attributed success to creating welcoming environments, providing resources, and offering engaging opportunities.

Table 5*Perceptions of Truancy Programs*

School District Name	District Size	Does your district use a county-level truancy ordinance with legal consequences for chronic absenteeism?	If you answered yes to question 8, how effective does this system seem?	If you answered no to question 8, on a scale of 1-5 how likely would your district be to support truancy-programs in the future if they were available to your school district?
Gervais School District	Small	Yes	Somewhat effective	Very likely
Klamath County School District	Medium	Yes	Somewhat effective	Very likely
Medford School District 549C	Large	No	NA	Very likely
Eugene School District 4J	Large	No	NA	Very likely
Eagle Point School District 9	Medium	No	NA	Very likely
Ashland School District	Medium	No	NA	Somewhat likely
Anonymous	Medium	No	NA	Neither likely nor unlikely
Beaverton School District	Large	No	NA	Neither likely nor unlikely
Fossil School District 21J	Small	No	NA	Neither likely nor unlikely
Anonymous	Medium	No	NA	Neither likely nor unlikely
Grants Pass School District	Medium	Yes	Neither effective nor ineffective	NA
Baker School District 5J	Small	Yes	NA	NA
Sherwood School District	Medium	No	NA	NA

Qualitative Interview Findings

Throughout the month of November, I conducted six interviews with attendance leaders across the state in varying school district sizes. One interview was with a large school district, three were conducted with medium sized school district, and two represented the small size school districts. Each interview was conducted over Zoom and ranged from 30-45 minutes. The interviews were recorded with OtterAI, allowing the transcript to be analyzed following the interview. As noted in the methods section, the transcripts were first coded using descriptive and then phrasing coding. Next, I applied pattern and finally thematic coding cycles. The results shared in this section emphasize the patterns and themes that emerged from the qualitative data sets overall and then sectioned out by district sizes. For confidentiality purposes, districts will be referred to as District A, District B, District C, District D, District E, and District F. The role of the representative interviewed from each district varied, so to protect individual privacy, all interview participants will be referred to as District Attendance Leaders throughout this paper.

Theme One: Relationships and Connection Embedded into Culture

The overwhelming theme that emerged across interviews and questions was *the importance of authentic relationships and connections with students and families*. This concept was discussed in every single interview and was a key theme across multiple questions asked. These connections and relationships were described by District Attendance Leaders as developing through home visits, family engagement opportunities, student empathy interviews, and meaningful personalized phone calls. In nearly all districts, knowing the community and responding to individual needs of students and families was shared as critical to fostering authentic and meaningful relationships. District A's Attendance Leader shared, "Every kid needs to be seen. Every kid needs to be heard. That's what makes them feel connected."

The concept of *shifting communication from compliance to care* was echoed across a variety of districts within an effort to create more welcoming environments and build positive relationships with students and families. Two districts specifically stated, “an absence is an absence, excused or unexcused it’s still an absence” and many spoke about the need to communicate the importance of learning gaps tied to missed school. *Clearly communicating the implications of missing school* not to intimidate families, but *to increase transparency of the impact*, was shared across districts. District F’s Attendance Leader shared, “relationship is huge. And I think teaching parents the importance of attendance, most parents, 99% of my parents, do not know that attendance is one of the leading factors that a student will drop out. And parents don’t want to hear that. That’s scary to them. Yeah, so a lot of that is just informing them and meeting them where they’re at.” Leveling with families and having hard conversations was discussed across districts.

Districts stressed the importance of a *school culture that welcomes families* as a cornerstone to building trust and relationships. District B’s Attendance Leader stated, “you have to create a culture that the kids feel welcomed.” How this is accomplished is discussed as being different in each district. In smaller districts, leaders shared things like, “you see people in the grocery store, and you have a conversation, and you know, a lot of times it’s, oh, I didn’t realize that that was happening. So, we just try to make sure we connect with parents as consistently as we can, especially when we know that there are kids that are struggling with getting to school.” Other districts cited the importance of engaging events reaching families, stating “we’ll have evenings where we call it like the ABCs of attendance. Get to know the myths, and so those are really fun, and we make it more like trivia, where families and it’s all inclusive, where families can win prizes. So really just teaching families, I think about attendance, because I think Covid

set the platform for a lot of that, a lot of those views of where school is optional.” *Family engagement* was discussed across districts as being critical to improving outcomes.

Theme Two: Removing Barriers

Building off the concept that connections and relationships are critical to successful attendance interventions is the need for districts to provide *authentic removal of barriers*.

Districts cited the importance of breaking down barriers as significant to improving attendance; however, it was very clear that these had to be unique to the student and family—there is no one barrier that had to be removed. Often the barriers included aiding families and students in resources like rent, a bed, meals, and more. District C’s Attendance Leader emphasized that the removal of barriers is at the very core of all interventions, stating that “to provide an intervention is to remove a barrier.” Many districts shared heart-warming stories of their actions to remove barriers that made a significant impact on students and families.

District A’s Attendance Leader discussed the importance of *home visits* in understanding and seeing the needs of students and families. They stated, “we were able to observe like, oh, did you see what this kid’s got their living conditions, or the fact that dad couldn’t go to work, either because the car is broken down, or it’s just dad and the kid and you know, dad is struggling, so how do we get him some support?” In a rural community, District B, the school district transports students’ hours away for vision screenings, and transports students home from practices to ensure they can be connected to sports and after-school activities—in this rural community these drives often are not short. “We not only take kids to school and take them from school, but we also actually take kids home after they have even a junior high practice. We’ll make sure that the parents aren’t required to come and pick them up and that, I think when you

look at that it, it allows parents to allow their kids to do things that they really enjoy, and a lot of those extracurricular activities are what keeps kids coming to school.”

District C shared that families are fearful of coming into the school, so they regularly go to homes and never show up empty handed, consistently bringing food. District C also goes out of their way to provide basic needs to students, things like cleaning laundry and providing food. Their Attendance Leader shared, “a lot of them are on their own, and so they have backpacks that they bring in, and I have specific backpacks, and they'll bring them in, and they leave them in my office, and I fill it with various food or whatever items that I can and then they come back later and just take a backpack home.” Additionally, District C’s Attendance Leader shared engagements and incentives as pivotal to shifting the culture around attending school. District D’s Attendance Leader did not specifically mention a barrier, but three different times throughout the interview they shared the importance of addressing barriers. District E’s Attendance Leader explained that asking families about barriers is central to their attendance systems. In discussing barrier removal with District F, the Attendance Leader clearly stated, “if we don’t provide those essential needs, if those aren’t being met, then we can’t expect a student or a family to be successful, because those essential needs have to be met.” Each district accomplishes the barrier removal differently, but all stressed the importance of this role in attendance systems.

Theme Three: Attendance Systems & Data

A key theme that emerged across districts was the importance of *systems and data in coordinating attendance efforts*. Most districts shared that they have attendance teams that analyze data, coordinate interventions, and drive the direction of the district’s attendance goals. Systems were comprehensively unpacked as part of the interviews. All but one district shared a

tiered system of intervention. The common interventions were progressive letters, personalized phone calls, student-admin conferences, home visits, and positive outreach like incentives and family engagement opportunities. Nearly all districts emphasized the importance of data in their interventions, some with comprehensive systems for analyzing and tracking, and others that were more simplified. District C's Attendance Leader reinforced the importance of consistency within the systems and implementation of interventions, stating "don't give up after a couple of months. Don't give up after a year. You got to keep going, because it was two years before I saw the jump [in data]."

Many districts emphasized the importance of analyzing data and utilizing student data in interventions. The Attendance Leaders in larger District E and medium District A utilize a data management tool that analyzes student data and track interventions through their student management system. Much smaller districts rely on secretary staff to monitor student progress. Regardless of how they do it, all these high-performing districts utilized monitoring student progress as central to their attendance intervention systems.

When discussing most effective interventions, districts varied in their responses, but the central focus was how to make the most meaningful connections with students and families as a means of the intervention. District A's Attendance Leader cited home visits as their most effective intervention and celebrating positive attendance with incentive programs. District B's Attendance Leader didn't share a specific intervention but rather emphasized the importance of creating relationships and a culture where students feel welcomed. District C's Attendance Leader shared that utilizing empathy interviews has been pivotal to their intervention system. These empathy interviews have a carefully designed list of questions to ask students that lead to understanding and removing barriers. Additionally, District C's Attendance Leader highlighted

incentive systems as critical to celebrating progress. District D's Attendance Leader shared that their most effective intervention also centers around relationship building through personalized phone calls, positive postcards, and overall clear and supportive communication. District E's Attendance Leader suggested that rather than emphasizing one intervention, it is critical to analyze data by student, because what works for one student might not work for another, so rather it is essential to have a close connection to the student data. District F's Attendance Leader again emphasized the importance of removing barriers and providing resources to families, alongside teaching families the importance of attendance. Additionally, District F has a comprehensive call system, in addition to robo-calls if a student is absent either unexcused or unverified, the secretary makes a care call every day the student is gone. This personalized connection was credited to much of the connections built into the district's attendance system.

Across conversations, the strategies district Attendance Leaders shared were less about what and how the district was implementing attendance interventions, and more about the end goal of creating authentic relationships and building connection with families. In discussion with numerous districts, the emerging theme of interventions was more about pick something and really own it to make an impact. Numerous districts cited the work of Dr. Berman and the COSA Oregon Attendance cohort as being influential to their attendance teams, data analysis, and systems.

Theme Four: Addressing Special Populations

Districts that were identified for improving attendance for both special populations and the overall population were simply combined as the sample size was smaller than anticipated. This led to all districts being asked about how they address special populations more specifically. Many districts shared that they wished they could improve their data in these areas especially for

students experiencing homelessness, SPED populations, and traditionally underserved ethnicities.

Common components of the attendance system included the inclusion of liaison roles. This includes McKinney-Vento liaisons, multi-lingual coordinators, and SPED staff. Generally speaking, districts shared the importance of relationships and welcoming environments for all students and families. District E's Attendance Leader shared that schools are required to set specific goals for special populations annually in their improvement plans. District D's Attendance Leader highlighted the importance of providing wrap-around services and removing barriers for these students. District F's Attendance Leader took this a step further with specifying culturally responsive family engagement, providing multicultural baskets to families, and honing in on meeting essential needs. District C's Attendance Leader also spoke to the authenticity of serving many of our families, addressing that some populations are currently fearful of coming into school buildings, so they are going to homes with resources for families. The commonalities present were the focus on connection and relationships and specific roles tied to achievement for special populations.

Theme Five: Mixed Perceptions of Truancy

The results in this subcategory do not clearly support a fixed common perception on truancy-like programs. The consensus leans towards not in support of truancy-like programs, but for varying reasons. Three districts gave a clear *not in favor* of truancy programs.

Of those three districts, District E's Attendance Leader reflected on the district's history of truancy court and shared that it was time consuming and only made things worse for the relationships with families. They stated, "every time they took a family to court, it was basically for him [attendance supervisor] a whole day, because, understandably, attendance in court is at

the end of the agenda, because it is not the main priority. So, they had to stay there the whole day, and at the end the result, what they saw, is that it didn't make a difference and maybe even made things worse." District B's Attendance Leader shared that they are also not in support of truancy-like programs, sharing that they don't have a need for them and when they were in place they put a disproportionate impact on families that were in need. They instead suggested that districts focus their attention on creating inclusive environments. District D's Attendance Leader discussed that they currently have a truancy ordinance available to use but none of the district attendance leaders desire to use it. These attendance leaders have shared that they would prefer to "shift focus on inviting families instead of demanding compliance."

The two districts that stated they were in favor of truancy-programs discussed that it is critical that the program is localized. These districts shared that truancy-programs can be very collaborative, especially in smaller communities where the court might be seeing the importance of supporting students as a method of preventing later behaviors tied to the court system. District A's Attendance Leader emphasized how critical it is to have a county judge who aligns with the district and works in collaboration with the school system. District C's Attendance Leader spoke about the importance of accountability stating, "people aren't going to pay attention to the speed limit unless they know that [it will be enforced], you know people are still going to speed, but it's greatly reduced by not being sure if you're going to get a speeding ticket or not." Additionally, this attendance leader shared a story of a recent graduate who was difficult while in school but has now come back to her and thanked her for her dedication to getting this student to school even through the court system.

Theme Six: Common Trends Among Like-Sized Districts

Small districts emphasized the critical importance of deep relationships with students and families in the community. Examples of seeing families at the grocery store and long-time retention of employees were mentioned as components of those relationships. These District Attendance Leaders tended to rely most on phone calls, home visits, and simply being present within the community to address struggles with attendance. District B's Attendance Leader described leadership as central to this mission, being present in the hallways, and promoting an open-door policy for families and students to address issues. Addressing barriers was a theme throughout all districts, regardless of size, but was especially highlighted among these two districts as being unique to their populations. The resource needed from small districts was pinpointed to being personnel who can specifically focus on attendance and leaders who take ownership over the importance of positive attendance.

Medium sized districts also highlighted the importance of relationships and connections, but did so from a much more systematized process. These districts clearly relied on the importance of teamwork and utilizing data in decision making around interventions. The medium sized districts had a significant focus on the importance of communication, particularly positive messaging that focuses on inviting families into schools, and proactive early interventions as a core component of their communication. Opportunities for personalized communication were highlighted among this group. These were most commonly suggested in personalized phone calls and home visits. These districts more comprehensively addressed barriers with things that were still unique to the student but had a system wrapped around finding the barrier and, in some cases, more common barriers (such as laundry, providing food, etc.) were addressed. Common

resources requested by medium sized districts included the widest range of all categories with personnel standing out but also requests for social-emotional learning and mental health.

Only one large district participated in the interviews; however, the tone of this interview emphasized more systemized approaches than any other district size group. This district focused on attendance data with a more comprehensive system than any other district in this study. They seemed to rely more on progressive intervention systems than the smaller districts and highlighted their attendance teams. Resources requested were similar to those of medium sized districts and included personnel time, but more emphasis was placed on the need for social-emotional learning and mental health support.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

In this mixed methods study, I sought to uncover effective system-wide approaches to improving attendance in Oregon School Districts. I began by identifying top attendance performers across the state in the past five years and then surveyed and interviewed these key attendance leaders. This process yielded a wealth of both qualitative and quantitative data on attendance systems impacting outcomes in Oregon school districts. In this chapter, I first address the limitations of my study, then discuss findings related to each of my four research questions, linking my findings to prior research, and then discuss implications for practice and future research.

Limitations

All studies include limitations, and this one is no different. Minimizing threats to validity is highly important to the effectiveness of this study. Several factors may have influenced the outcomes of this study that are not directly related to attendance systems. Plans were put into place to mitigate such risks. The main threats to validity involve history, timing of the study, selection bias, sample size, and maturation.

In 2020 the global COVID-19 pandemic closed schools pushing learning to online and hybrid models. Following these academic years, regular attendance dropped (Pate, 2024). It is important to note that years including 2020, 2021, and perhaps some schools in 2022 operated on learning models determined by their district in collaboration with county and state health authorities. Additionally, the five years of comparison data involves one-year pre-pandemic and four years post, which may skew the analysis. As a result of the pandemic the state suspended the use of truancy programs, which altered the traditional intervention systems for many districts.

This historical component undoubtedly played a major role in both what attendance interventions were implemented and the trends. Rather than trying to mitigate this challenge, I am acknowledging it and incorporating it as part of the research.

Another threat to validity is the potential for selection bias because those who participated in the survey self-selected to engage in the discussion. Those who responded to the study likely have higher stakes in improving attendance or a heightened interest, as indicated by the fact that they volunteered to participate. Also, district leaders may have overstated the effectiveness of their interventions or could have skewed perception of success based on their ideas. To mitigate this risk, I reviewed the growth trends of each district that participated. This study sought to capture the whole story of attendance systems in school districts located throughout the state of Oregon. I paid special attention to where in the state responses came from, to insure the inclusion of diverse voices from across the state and school district sizes.

To enhance student achievement across the state, districts have comprehensive improvement plans in place. It is reasonable to believe that improvements in attendance could be a result of other factors, some of which districts may have largely had an influence in and others that could contribute to further outside sources. Additionally, over the five years from which they were drawn, districts have undertaken lots of changes adapting into and out of learning modalities to accommodate community health considerations during the pandemic. Funding streams have also varied significantly throughout this time. To compensate for this, the survey and interview included the opportunity for more open-ended responses, allowing respondents to identify these factors if they believed them to be important in their district.

Another key limitation was the timing of the study, both in terms of when data collection took place related to educators' other responsibilities and in relation to the publication of a large

study with a similar focus. The survey was administered in the fall of 2025, when schools were just returning from summer break, and the interviews were conducted in November, which typically is a busy time for professional responsibilities as the year really begins to ramp up. When considering the timing of the study, it often feels as if there is no “good” time for educators, given the demands of the field and whether leaders are working in the summer months. However, an October survey and November interview, or February and March, or even July and August may have yielded more participants. Additionally, shortening the data collection window might have been beneficial because

Dr. Berman’s 2025 report *From Compliance to Invitation: Lessons in Improving Attendance in Eleven Oregon School Districts* was both a limitation and a deep connection to this study. I conducted my interviews within weeks of the release of Berman’s report to the Coalition for Oregon School Administrators (COSA) attendance cohort. Three of the interview participants mentioned the Berman study in their interview and referenced the key concepts included in that report as part of their attendance intervention philosophy and practice. Although I am thrilled that my study aligns closely with the work of Dr. Berman, the recent review of this study by interview participants could have impacted my findings and unnaturally aided in that alignment.

The final limitation is the lack of separation in surveys and interviews addressing special populations. To balance my sample size, which was small, I combined the two groups, leaders in *overall regular attenders* and *special populations*, into one group and then asked all participants about how they address special populations. This limits my ability to answer the specific research question related to improving attendance for special populations, as the data collected during interviews were not particularly unique to growth in this category.

Despite these limitations, this study adds important information to our knowledge of school attendance in Oregon. Many of these limitations offer valuable insights that will better prepare me for future research.

Research Question One: Regular Attender Rate Trends

I first used statewide data collected by the Oregon Department of Education to analyze current trends in regular attender rates across Oregon school districts. The data suggest a dramatic impact on regular attender rates associated with the Covid-19 pandemic (Chun & Grosso, 2024). For all sizes of districts, regular attender rates were high in the year 2018-19, prior to the pandemic, with averages around 80% regular attenders (ODE). As previously explained, the state did not report regular attender data during the pandemic (ODE). However, after the pandemic, there were steep declines, which did not begin to reverse until School Year 2022-23, when small sized districts' regular attender rates began to show an incline, followed by a similar pattern for medium and large size school districts in School Year 2023-24 (ODE). At the lowest point, the Oregon school district regular attender rates averaged around 60%, but post-pandemic, the rates have risen by about 10% (ODE). District five-year averages for medium and large size districts are very similar, but small sized district rates are lower (ODE). However, the smaller districts are rebounding post-Covid quicker than medium and large districts (ODE). These trends lag national averages, with Oregon reporting some of lowest attendance rates in the nation (US Department of Education, 2022-23).

These low regular attender rates were reflected in the surveys I collected as part of this dissertation study. When asked about how attendance is perceived by education leaders within their district, survey respondents had mixed results, with an average rating of three out of five. These results point to a neutral perception of attendance, which is less than ideal for motivating

positive change. The interviews gave further context to this perception poll, with the majority of district Attendance Leaders interviewed expressing the dire need for improvement, while some were proud of recent accomplishments and felt more confident in their current data.

Leaders from every district interviewed discussed the importance of analyzing data to inform decision making around attendance interventions and systems. Furthermore, they noted that tracking trends alongside interventions helps districts and schools effectively intervene. Both awareness of state and national trends, alongside trends within individual districts can help districts align their work. Attendance Works (2023) emphasizes the importance of analyzing data by “grade, student population, school, district, and geography” (p. 2). A statement made repetitively by districts and echoed by Attendance Works (2023) was the concept of excused and unexcused absences; mitigating both was shared as an important next step as, although the trends have not changed, the volume of absenteeism certainly has (Hollon et al., 2025). Although the data trends analyzed in this study show promising improvements in attendance outcomes, there is much to be done within the district systems and across the state to bring attendance levels up.

Research Question Two: Barriers to Regular Attendance

My second research question focused on the common barriers to regular attendance faced by students and families in Oregon school districts. When surveyed, attendance leaders shared that top barriers faced by students included lack of parental engagement and mental health, followed by motivation, then homelessness or housing stability, and finally lack of school engagement. These barriers are consistent with research findings among experts in the field, as identifying and addressing root causes of poor attendance is shared as critical to improving outcomes (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Berman, 2025; Gubbels et al., 2019; Hanover Research, 2016). The categories of barriers to attendance I found most closely align with Hanover (2016)

which lists factors such as family, school, student, and economics as leading reasons why students miss school and points out that often these factors are interwoven and have a disproportionate impact on traditionally underserved populations. The most frequently listed barriers to attending school found in my study are all significant life situations that have big impact on students. These barriers connect to the concept that poor attendance is a symptom of other issues that need to be addressed (Berman, 2025; Hanover Research, 2016).

Throughout the qualitative data collection process, every single school district Attendance Leader brought up the need to address barriers. Berman (2025) emphasizes the importance of supporting attendance intervention models, either that address individual circumstances or shift their program to address the needs of many students. The stories District Attendance Leaders shared with me often emphasized the need for essential support that would more specifically fall under housing instability or homelessness, as previously shared by Berman (2025) and Balfanz and Byrnes (2012), yet this concern ranked lower than other categories in the survey I conducted. Lack of parental engagement was frequently mentioned both in the sense of lack of knowledge around the importance of attendance and connection to lacking critical resources persistent in the family such as food, laundry, and other basic needs of students (Berman, 2025; Lasky-Fink et al., 2021). These discussions supported the nuance that students facing the most barriers to attending often have multifaceted needs that appear within family dynamics, including economic hardship, health, and more (Garcia & Weiss, 2018).

District Attendance Leaders made it abundantly clear that improving attendance outcomes hinges on creating relationships with families. This finding is similar to the finding published by Berman (2025), that stresses the importance of coming alongside families in partnership and invitation to bring to the forefront the importance of attending school regularly

and shift behaviors. My study suggests the act of providing resources to families is foundational to relationship building, which many studies point to. Berman (2025) and Singer (2024), for instance, find that addressing unique barriers is essential to building foundations that support positive attendance. For example, one district Attendance Leader in this study shared that they make care calls to ensure safety, offering an opportunity to express a need to the district any time a student is absent. That same district does not show up to home visits empty-handed; they deliver food or whatever resource the family needs when visiting a home to have a difficult conversation around attending school. A similar but much larger scale and more comprehensive study conducted by Singer (2024) shares that the work districts are conducting around attendance is often far too surface level, stating districts ought to begin “acknowledging the complex and interconnected causes of absenteeism, prioritizing intensive efforts to identify and alleviate barriers to attendance, and forging external partnerships and cross-sector collaborations to ensure there are resources and services available for students” (p. 25). The district whose Attendance Leader shared how their home visits include provision of needed resources, appears to have found a way to apply Singer’s suggestion. The fact that they were one of the top attendance improving districts in the state provides evidence of the merit of such a practice.

The discussions on barriers were often unique to the student level. One district’s Attendance Leader highlighted the process of structured empathy interviews that is embedded into their tiered attendance intervention procedure to ideally address the needs of students early on. Another barrier heavily discussed in the interviews was the misconceptions parents have about the importance of attending school and how it impacts their student’s learning, a barrier also discussed by Lasky-Fink et al. (2021). Many district Attendance Leaders emphasized the importance of sharing the impact of learning gaps from poor attendance with families, pointing

out how learning gaps influence reading and might also lessen chances of on-time graduation for students (Allensworth et al., 2014; Balfanz et al., 2007; Chang and Romero, 2008). This finding underscores previous studies' similar findings that chronic absenteeism has a negative impact on students across grade-level, including reading and math gaps at early grade levels; declines in standardized test scores; issues with belonging, particularly in the middle and high school grades; and absenteeism as a strong predictor of becoming a high school dropout (Allensworth et al., 2014; Balfanz et al., 2007; Chang & Romero, 2008). These scary statistics must be reported to families effectively and out of authentic care and connection (Lasky-Fink et al., 2021).

Proper teaming between the school district and parents is commonly addressed through positively framed communication, family engagement nights, and individual conversations (Berman, 2025; Lasky-Fink et al., 2021). Districts shared that incentive systems are also a beneficial practice for shifting the culture of attendance (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Singer, 2024). In Berman's (2025) study multiple districts sought out engagement opportunities with families as a vehicle for improving attendance. Participants in my study likewise emphasized that establishing a welcoming environment is critical to maintaining buildings where students want to attend school and feel a sense of value and belonging (Berman, 2025). Berman (2025) suggests that implementing social-emotional learning is an important factor in improving school belonging and attendance outcomes.

Although my survey respondents reported believing that mental health was very important to address, a finding echoed by prior research (Falconer, 2025; Gubbels et al., 2019; Kearney & Graczyk, 2014), mental health did not rise to the surface as frequently in my interviews. When asked about resources needed to improve attendance, however, medium and large district Attendance Leaders requested social-emotional learning and mental health support,

a finding similar to what was suggested by Berman (2025). Additionally, numerous districts in my study mentioned wrap-around health services and community-based as key to addressing student needs tied to mental health, a finding reminiscent of Berman (2025) and Falconer (2025). Attendance models that emphasized wellness support were highlighted in Berman's study; student health and feeling of inclusion are critical to attendance success (Berman, 2025). My research found that removing barriers of all kinds was a key theme to successful attendance interventions.

Research Question Three: Interventions & Systems

In response to my third research question, which asked which attendance interventions and system components are currently being utilized to effectively improve regular attender rates, I had mixed results. On the survey, personalized phone calls (Berman, 2025; Eklund et al., 2020; Epstein & Sheldon, 2002) was highlighted as ranking first, followed by parent meetings (Berman, 2025; Eklund et al., 2020; Smink & Reiner, 2005), and then positive outreach and home visits (Berman, 2025; Chang & Romero, 2008; McKnight, 2022; Rogers et al., 2017; Singer, 2024). This finding was supported through the qualitative interview process, where participants emphasized again the importance of creating relationships and connecting with students and families. During interviews, the impact of home visits (Berman, 2025; Kearney and Graczyk, 2013; McKnight, 2022) was frequently emphasized along with engagement (Berman, 2025; Chang & Romero, 2008; Epstein & Sheldon, 2002) and incentives (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002).

The interventions implemented by a school are highly important, but what the interviews uncovered is that it is less about *what* you do and more about *how* you do it when it comes to seeing improvements in regular attender rates. When a district decides on a system and stands

behind it consistently over time, they see results improve. All systems involved analyzing data and effectively responding to it (Attendance Works, 2023; Berman, 2025; Hanover, 2016); whether it was formal or informal, utilizing comprehensive data tracking systems or simple monitoring, the concept of frequently analyzing who is absent and how frequently, was present. Many districts discussed the importance of both district and site level attendance teams, as well as being part of bigger state-wide attendance initiatives described by Berman (2025).

In small school districts the interventions and systems capitalize on the importance of relationships (Berman, 2025; Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Kearney, 2008), being present within the community and school. These districts fostered a culture of knowing their students and families and meeting their unique needs. Additionally, their staff was highly invested in providing care for their students and families through addressing common needs or needs more specific to the family (Berman, 2025; Singer, 2024). Actions like personalized calls when students are absent or seeing a parent at the store and facilitating a short conversation about their student were baked into the welcoming culture these districts emphasized (Berman, 2025; Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Kearney, 2008).

Medium sized school districts highlighted systems more thoroughly. They indicated a need for attendance teams (Berman, 2025; Sprick & Sprick, 2019), comprehensive data analysis and intervention tracking (Attendance Works, 2023; Berman, 2025; Hanover, 2016), and clear pro-active communication that emphasized the importance of being present and offered support (Berman, 2025; Change & Romero, 2008; Lasky-Fink, et al., 2021; Rogers, et al., 2017; Singer, 2024). At the core of their interventions remained the common theme of relational capacity and connections with students and families (Berman, 2025; Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Kearney, 2008). Effective systems, respondents indicated, built procedures around care calls, home visits,

and early interventions to meet the needs of students and families and thus help them stay connected to school. Personalized phone calls, followed by home visits, were the most mentioned among this group during interviews (Berman, 2025; Kearney & Graczyk, 2013; McKnight, 2022). Interventions that capitalize on inviting families into the school rather than forcing compliance were repetitively mentioned (Berman, 2025). Localized interventions were important. Among this group there were more resources tied specifically to attendance improvements, sometimes with an individual whose role is based around attendance improvements (Berman, 2025; Singer, 2024)—in these districts the attendance interventions are more systematized with more control over them.

Large districts, on the other hand, relied more heavily than other districts on progressive communication and more comprehensive data analysis and tracking tools, alongside RTI models (Berman, 2025; Hanover, 2016; Kearney & Graczyk, 2013). Such districts had structures built in that were more comprehensive than smaller districts in the sample. For example, special populations were required to be addressed by the school's annual improvement plan. Despite the size of the district, the Attendance Leader highlighted the importance of connection and relationships. Relationships may have been fostered differently than in the small district, but the goal of finding ways to help families feel connected to school remains the same.

Interventions specific to special populations were tied closely to culturally responsive strategies (Berman, 2025; Chang & Romero, 2008; Hanover, 2016) and provided resources unique to these students and families. Echoing the theme of the previous research question in this category was the importance of removing barriers to attendance, however unique and severe they might be. Further emphasized with this question was the importance of removing these barriers in a culturally responsive manner (Hanover, 2016). District Attendance Leaders mentioned

delivering multi-cultural baskets on home visits, ensuring students in homeless situations have an actual bed to sleep in, and never requiring families to come into schools for meetings. The application of interventions for students from special populations was often credited to liaison roles tied directly to that specific population, but Attendance Leaders noted the need for continued growth in this area.

The cohesion across districts of the goal to bring the family alongside the efforts of the school and create meaningful relationships around attendance interventions was loud and clear. Each district indicated that they go about accomplishing this goal differently, but all said that remaining consistent is how attendance outcomes over time will see growth and students can gain connections to school. The concept of welcoming, inclusive school environments clearly outweighed attendance messaging emphasizing compliance. This philosophy was heavily supported and in Oregon led by the work of Dr. Berman (2025) through the attendance cohort model that models the shift in attendance compliance and threatening tone that attendance leaders have previously taken to a welcoming, inclusive approach with an emphasis on relationships. Although many studies point to the importance of school to home relationships and school culture (Chang & Romero, 2008; Singer, 2024; Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Lasky-Fink et al., 2021), much of the structural components have been built around the tiered intervention model (Hanover, 2016; Kearney & Graczyk, 2013; Teasley, 2004) that may end in truancy court and often involves communication that has a tone of compliance that is becoming less common in my participating districts, selected for their high performance in increasing regular attender rates. In particular, it is worth pointing out the potential for unintended negative consequences of the truancy court system (Singer, 2024) and how this compliance-based approach goes against the philosophy of work by Berman (2025).

Research Question Four: District Needs

The final question focused on what educational leaders want from absenteeism policy. Interestingly, in my study, it was clear that participating districts desire more resources rather than a focus on policy. The main resource requested during the interviews was personnel dedicated to improving attendance outcomes, echoing what Singer (2024) and Balfanz and Byrnes (2012) reported. Districts shared their need for staffing to tie directly to their most significant student needs, whether it be a family advocate (Berman, 2025; Falconer, 2025) or more comprehensive health and social support such as nurses and social workers (Falconer, 2025; Kearney & Graczyk, 2014). My survey results clearly pointed to a need for parental engagement and educational resources, both of which were also identified by Berman (2025) and Eklund et al., (2020) as important.

The next most requested resource both in survey and interview responses was mental health support (Attendance Works, 2023; Grosso & Chun, 2024). This finding is similar to what Berman (2025), Grosso and Chun (2024) and Eklund et al., (2020) reported, while differing from research that suggests that policy changes in requirements for data tracking and reporting (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012) and shifts to positive over punitive measures are the answer (Falconer, 2025). Overall, districts noted the desire to tackle their own unique and complex challenges leading to absenteeism within their district, rather than state or school board mandated narrow interventions or specific approaches. Additionally, the interview data yielded a need for social-emotional learning, while survey results suggested the need for a way to monitor students and support for providing attendance interventions to students and families (Berman, 2025; Eklund et al., 2020). These resources took priority for districts over any policy or system change.

I also directly explored district Attendance Leaders' thoughts about the need for truancy-like programs. Findings support elevating connection and inviting students and families into the school over utilizing truancy programs. Opponents of truancy programs shared that they were highly time consuming, can have a disproportionately negative impact on those most in need, and often made relationships with the school worse. Of the districts that supported truancy programs, Attendance Leaders indicated that they prefer for these systems to be highly localized and collaborative within the community to lead to the most positive impact. They emphasized the importance of accountability and support throughout these programs. These findings are similar to those of Falconer (2025), who notes that punitive measures often disproportionately impact families that are already struggling. Smink and Reimer (2005) found truancy court to be the least effective method of encouraging a child to attend school, suggesting that it should only be used as a last resort. These findings point towards the argument made by Berman (2025) that attendance interventions ought to shift from forcing compliance to encouraging participation and partnership with students and families.

Implications for Policy & Practice

Taken as a whole, my findings suggest that creating relationships and connecting with students and families is the foundation of all positive attendance work. Additionally, the need to address barriers to attending school was emphasized throughout both quantitative and qualitative data in my study. Utilizing systems and data also emerged as a common trend but was specific to the individual district and size of district and always tied to the goal of improving outcomes by fostering healthy, supportive relationships with students and families. This research clearly points to the association between attendance outcomes and relationships with students and families, suggesting that the more positive relationships that can be fostered among students and

families, the more likely they are to feel welcomed by the school and attend more frequently. As leaders across the state analyze improvements for their districts, the importance of attendance cannot be understated: Research clearly shows the benefits of regular attendance on achievement.

Two themes emerged from the research with implications for allocation of resources. The first potential implication relates to the creation and support of funding streams for designated attendance type roles within districts. Additionally, my study suggests that the state should continue their pattern of excluding truancy programs and allow localized efforts, such as county-wide ordinances, to be established when it makes sense to the community and where the goal remains to connect support. Currently, the Oregon legislature is considering funding free school lunches for all students, connecting the need for food-stability to school attendance. Ideally the state will continue to expand services that support student needs comprehensively.

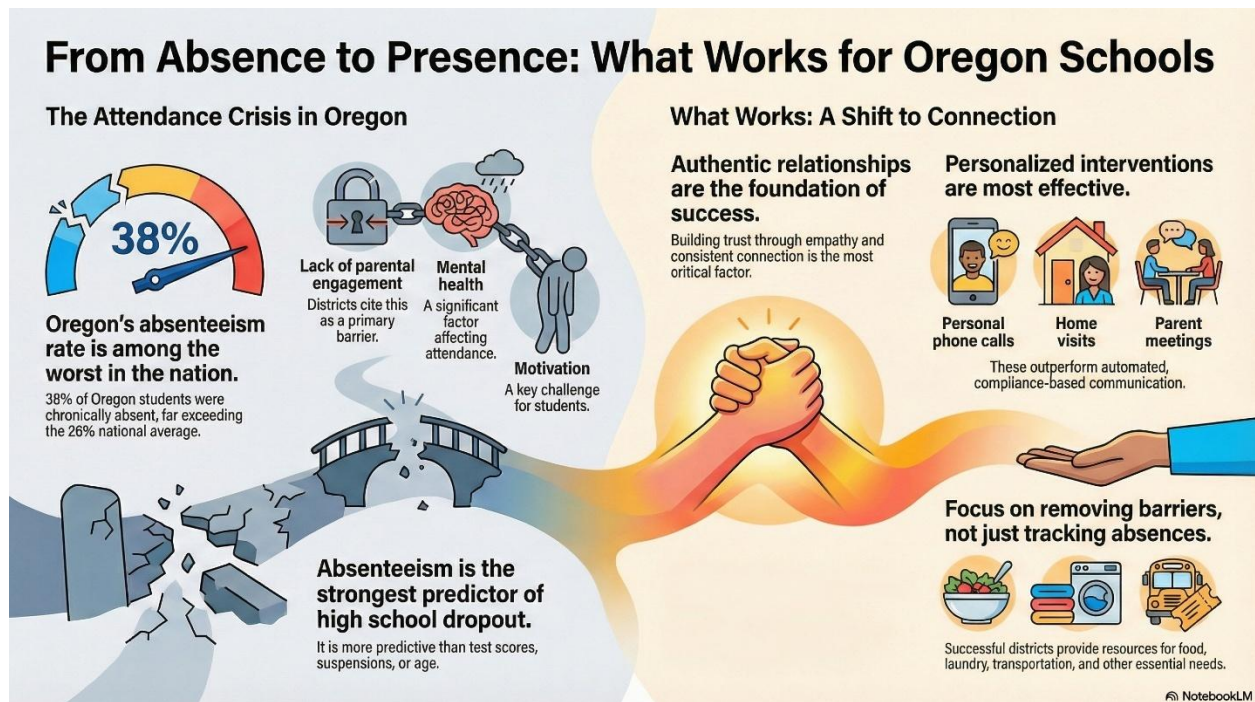
Implications for District and School-Based Programs

As mentioned in my introductory chapter, I was led to this topic because of the persistent and significant issues the district I work in has faced with attendance, alongside the state and even nation. As Director of Student Improvement, these findings can help guide my work as I seek to improve attendance for the students in the district I serve. Based on this study, I developed an attendance playbook (see Appendix A) that building principals and teachers can use to enhance communication, better respond to absences, and put into place systems for early intervention. This playbook highlights the importance of removing barriers. Most importantly, it guides leaders to understand the importance of addressing attendance and using it as a critical point to make lasting relationships with families. The interventions most important to emphasize

include personalized phone calls, home visits, and parent meetings. As part of this attendance playbook, I created an infographic to guide district attendance work (see Figure 13).

Figure 13

Improving Attendance Infographic



One of the biggest areas for improvement this study uncovered for me as a leader is the importance of training building leaders on how to impact change through relationships. Specifically, focusing attention away from letters and truancy court to adopting the interventions that make the most headway in creating lasting and meaningful relationships with families. First, we must have well established systems to know who is missing and track what we are doing about it. One of the things I recommend is that building leaders implement weekly attendance data review among their leadership teams and/or attendance teams. At the elementary grade levels, I will begin working with teams to implement early intervention phone calls and then build to middle school grades and beyond from there. Adopting this approach means we will be

making phone calls every day for any student who is absent, unexcused, to check in and ensure they are safe. Additionally, I suggest that we shift the roles of attendance teams to allow for principals and assistant principals to spend more time making home visits and conducting meetings. Finally, I plan to work with our school board to set goals for attendance improvements. Doing this would be a beneficial way to keep improving student attendance as the focus of our district leadership and help with collaboration around an attendance campaign.

Future Research

Based on the findings of this study, I believe there is a need to further research the impact of relational capacity on attendance and improve our understanding of how to build meaningful relationships within school communities. Addressing these research topics from the perspectives of different size districts helps to provide meaningful insights into all sizes of districts.

Additionally, the current study only focused on the voice of administrators. To better understand the experience of students and families, it would be meaningful to talk to a wider range of stakeholders. Perhaps a similar study could involve carefully selecting top performers among categories and making comparisons between findings from different stakeholder groups, including staff, students, and families.

The current study looked at absenteeism in general. An interesting focus for future research could be studying purely *severely chronic* absenteeism vs those *in tier two just meeting the threshold of being chronically absent*. When discussing chronic absenteeism, districts often jump to severe scenarios so with this group it would be important to look further into removal of barriers, as this suggestion emerged as a priority for the participants in my study. Rather than understanding barriers in terms of large categories, it would be informative to know if there are trends regarding exactly what students and families are lacking that keep them from attending

school. A future study could examine individual students who have been identified as severely chronically absent, conduct empathy interviews asking about their needs, and then corresponding barrier removal with attendance trends for individual students. Additionally, a study that focuses on the chronically absent bubble could be very interesting, emphasizing implementation of nudge letters and personal phone calls.

Widening the lens of attendance, another future study could compare Oregon attendance protocols and systems with those of other states that are better performing in regular attender rates. Perhaps analyzing attendance in comparison to school year lengths across the nation could yield informative findings. Included in this approach could be a policy analysis that compares the fundamental components of addressing attendance issues state to state. Furthermore, looking into how other states prioritize connection with families could lead to important findings around improving attendance outcomes. Building off of this study is the potential for analyzing the difference between district-based and school-based strategies for improving attendance, and how that varies with districts of differing sizes.

This current study particularly lacked in sample size and ability to address special populations. Future studies should increase participation, allowing for disaggregating special populations, independently addressing what strategies work best among which subsets of each special population and how they vary to provide targeted support to our most traditionally underserved populations. My current study had, by design, quite a broad scope. However, digging deeper into a specific strategy such as communication, personalized phone calls, home visits, truancy court, or school culture might allow for more meaningful connections. An in-depth qualitative study might provide useful insights into how such approaches can be made most impactful.

Tracking what works in the post-pandemic attendance systems will be vital to tracking long-term success. Much of the discussion was tied to the current work of Dr. Berman (2025). A study comparing the districts that participated in COSA's Attendance Cohort and those that did not, could help to validate or uncover missing components of this study. Districts participating in the Berman's COSA Attendance Cohort range significantly in size and geographic location, making them ideal candidates to get a full and generalized picture of attendance in Oregon. Additionally, it would be meaningful to study whether the impact of changes proposed in these districts stands the test of time or is limited to temporary growth.

Over the course of the next five years, it will be important to closely watch attendance trends. As we move further from the Covid-19 pandemic that upset attendance outcomes so dramatically, districts will stabilize growth rates. Districts that surpass stabilizing rates and move well beyond state averages should be given special attention. Studying those high performing districts can lead to important conclusions for student success. More specifically, comparing these districts' models of intervention or attendance playbooks could be highly meaningful to inspiring struggling districts. Again, focusing on like-sized districts allows for inclusive findings that districts of all sizes walk away from reading feeling as if they, too, could implement something from the study.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study examines attendance systems in Oregon and pinpoints the critical importance of building connections with families as a key component of improving attendance outcomes. Building positive relationships may be credited to personalized interventions that demonstrate care and concern, including personalized phone calls, family school meetings, and home visits. Additionally, removing barriers proved to be instrumental to

creating connections, fostering positive relationships, and providing authentic interventions. Together, these actions help families and students to strengthen their trust in schools and offer individualize interventions that offer authentic support.

As attendance rates climb out of pandemic rates, it will be critical that school districts continue to focus on the importance of regular attendance and that researchers continue studying all facets of attendance interventions and systems. Poor attendance is often so much more than just skipping school, breaking it down to the root causes it reflects challenges that are far broader and may include challenges related to academics, social-emotional, and economic conditions that vastly impact a student and their well-being. Addressing absenteeism requires comprehensive, coordinated approaches that support the student in their unique needs.

Attending school is vital to student success, a factor in our school systems that is far too important to overlook. Attendance has become a system wide issue for schools that reflects the challenges students face both inside and outside of our school building—it requires solutions that are comprehensive and encompassing of the whole student. Improving attendance is not just about increasing the number of days present in school, it is about ensuring every student has equitable access to learning, connecting, and meaningful opportunities.

This study demonstrates that the most notable and meaningful gains in attendance can be accomplished by teams of educational leaders and support staff through systems that put relationships and serving students at the center of their model, with authentic barrier removal and targeted personalized interventions. When districts of all sizes incorporate these components into their attendance systems, they are likely to experience sustained gains in regular attender rates. Shifting attendance systems from compliance to care may also foster school environments where

students feel supported, valued, and motivated to attend school out of value in learning and connection within the school.

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Attendance Playbook

Tracking Success: Evaluating Attendance Systems in Oregon School Districts

2025-26

Executive Summary:

Chronic absenteeism remains one of the most significant barriers to student success, particularly in the years following the COVID-19 pandemic. Attendance challenges are not evenly distributed; students experiencing poverty, disability, language barriers, housing instability, and mental health challenges are disproportionately impacted.

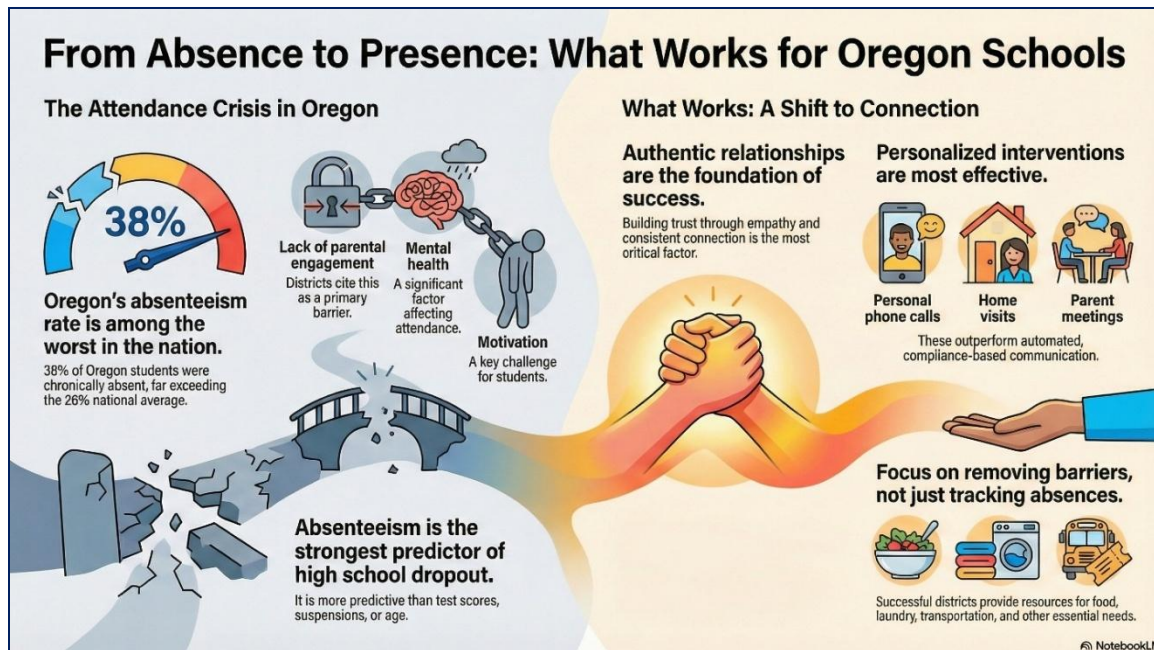
This Attendance Playbook provides a comprehensive, equity-centered framework to improve attendance outcomes through connection, data-informed decision-making, and barrier removal.

This plan is grounded in a five-year goal to improve districtwide attendance outcomes by 15%, as measured by the Regular Attender rate (ODE definition), using 2024–24=5 as the baseline year. The approach intentionally shifts attendance work from a compliance-driven model to one rooted in relationships, shared responsibility, and proactive support.

The strategy is organized around three mutually reinforcing pillars:

- **Fostering a Culture of Belonging and Engagement** – Ensuring every student feels safe, seen, and connected to school.
- **Implementing Data-Driven, Tiered Support Systems** – Using consistent attendance data and MTSS structures to intervene early and effectively.
- **Strengthening Family and Community Partnerships** – Collaborating with families and community agencies to remove barriers to attendance.

Strategic Planning



Vision: Improve attendance outcomes through authentic relationships, personalized interventions that focus on removing barriers students face.

Goal: Improve attendance outcomes by 15% over the course of 5 years, by implementing systems to track attendance data and determine interventions, removing barriers faced by students, and building relationships between school and families.

Years 1-2: Foundational Years

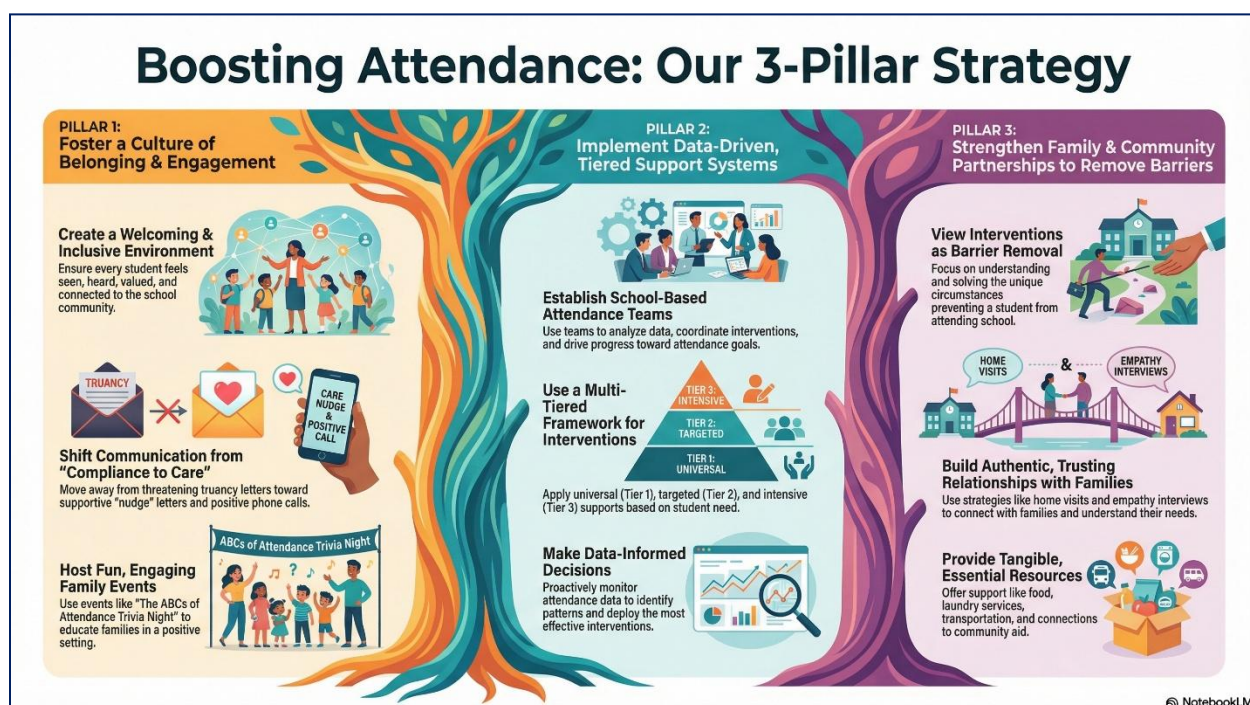
This initial phase is dedicated to building the essential infrastructure for success. The focus will be on establishing collaborative teams, revising communication protocols, implementing data systems, training all staff in universal strategies, and beginning the critical work of shifting the district's culture from compliance to connection.

Years 3-4: Expansion & Refinement

With a solid foundation in place, this phase concentrates on deepening interventions for chronically absent students, expanding community partnerships to remove complex barriers, and using disaggregated data to identify and address inequities in attendance patterns.

Year 5 & Beyond: Sustainability

In the final phase, the goal is to fully embed these new practices into the district's operations. This involves integrating attendance goals into school improvement plans, systematizing continuous improvement cycles, and ensuring the long-term viability of the new approach.



The plan is organized around three strategic pillars, each with a clear, measurable goal:

1. Fostering a Culture of Belonging and Engagement

Create a welcoming, inclusive, and engaging school environment where every student feels seen, valued, and connected, increasing their motivation to attend school regularly.

2. Implementing Data-Driven, Tiered Support Systems

Establish a consistent, district-wide system for proactively monitoring attendance data and implementing a multi-tiered framework of interventions to prevent and address absenteeism.

3. Strengthening Family & Community Partnerships to Remove Barriers

Build authentic, trusting partnerships with families and community organizations to collaboratively identify and remove the unique barriers preventing students from regularly attending school.

Pillar 1: Fostering a Culture of Belonging and Engagement

Research overwhelmingly demonstrates that students who feel safe, seen, and connected to their school community are far more likely to attend regularly.

Goal: Create a welcoming, inclusive, and engaging school environment where every student feels seen, valued, and connected, thereby increasing their motivation to attend school regularly.

Phase	Key Actions	Success Metrics
Years 1-2: Foundation	1. Establish Attendance Teams: Form school-based and district-level attendance teams to champion this work. 2. Launch Positive Communication Campaign: Shift all attendance messaging (letters, calls, website) to a supportive, "invitational" tone. 3. Administer School Climate Surveys: Gather baseline data from students and families on feelings of safety, belonging, and engagement.	• Attendance teams established in 100% of schools. • All automated and template communications are revised. • Baseline climate data collected and analyzed.
Years 3-4: Expansion	1. Implement "Check and Connect" Mentoring: Pair at-risk students with a dedicated adult mentor for regular check-ins 2. Expand Extracurricular Access: Analyze participation data and remove barriers (e.g., transportation, fees) to ensure equitable access to clubs/sports. 3. Expand Learning on Social Skills Implement curriculum to build student skills and positive peer relationships.	• 75% of identified Tier 2 students are matched with a mentor. • Participation in extracurriculars increases by 15%. • Curriculum implemented in K-8 classrooms.
Year 5: Sustainability	1. Embed into School Improvement Plans: Mandate that every school includes a specific goal related to school climate and belonging in their annual improvement plan. 2. Systematize Student Voice: Create formal opportunities (e.g., student advisory committees) for students to provide input on school culture and policies.	• 100% of school improvement plans include a belonging-focused goal. • Active student advisory committees are operational in all secondary schools.

Pillar 2: Implementing Data-Driven, Tiered Support Systems

An effective attendance strategy requires more than good intentions; it requires consistent systems and the strategic use of data.

Goal: Establish a consistent, district-wide system for proactively monitoring attendance data and implementing a multi-tiered framework of interventions to prevent and address absenteeism.

Phase	Key Actions	Success Metrics
Years 1-2: Foundation	1. Define Attendance Tiers: Formally define the thresholds for each tier (e.g., Tier 1: 0-9% missed; Tier 2: 10-19% missed; Tier 3: 20%+ missed) 2. Adopt Data Dashboard: Implement a user-friendly data system that allows school teams to easily view attendance data by student, grade, and sub-group. 3. Train Staff on Tier 1: Provide professional development on Tier 1 strategies, including positive communication / the importance of daily attendance.	• District-wide tier definitions are published and adopted. • Data dashboard accessible to all attendance teams • 90% of staff complete Tier 1 training.
Years 3-4: Expansion	1. Fully Implement Tiers 2 & 3: Systematize the use of targeted interventions (e.g., personalized calls, family meetings, home visits) based on data 2. Analyze Disaggregated Data: Use the data dashboard to identify and address disproportionate absenteeism rates among special populations (e.g., students with disabilities, English learners). 3. Develop Intervention Menu: Create a menu of evidence-based interventions for attendance teams to use.	• 100% of students in Tiers 2 and 3 receive designated interventions. • Attendance gaps for special populations decrease by 10%. • Intervention menu is published and in use.
Year 5: Sustainability	1. Conduct Annual Intervention Audits: review the effectiveness of interventions and refine the intervention menu. 2. Integrate Attendance Data: Link attendance data with academic and behavioral data to create a holistic view of student needs.	• Annual effectiveness report is presented to the school board. • Integrated student data profiles are available to school support teams.

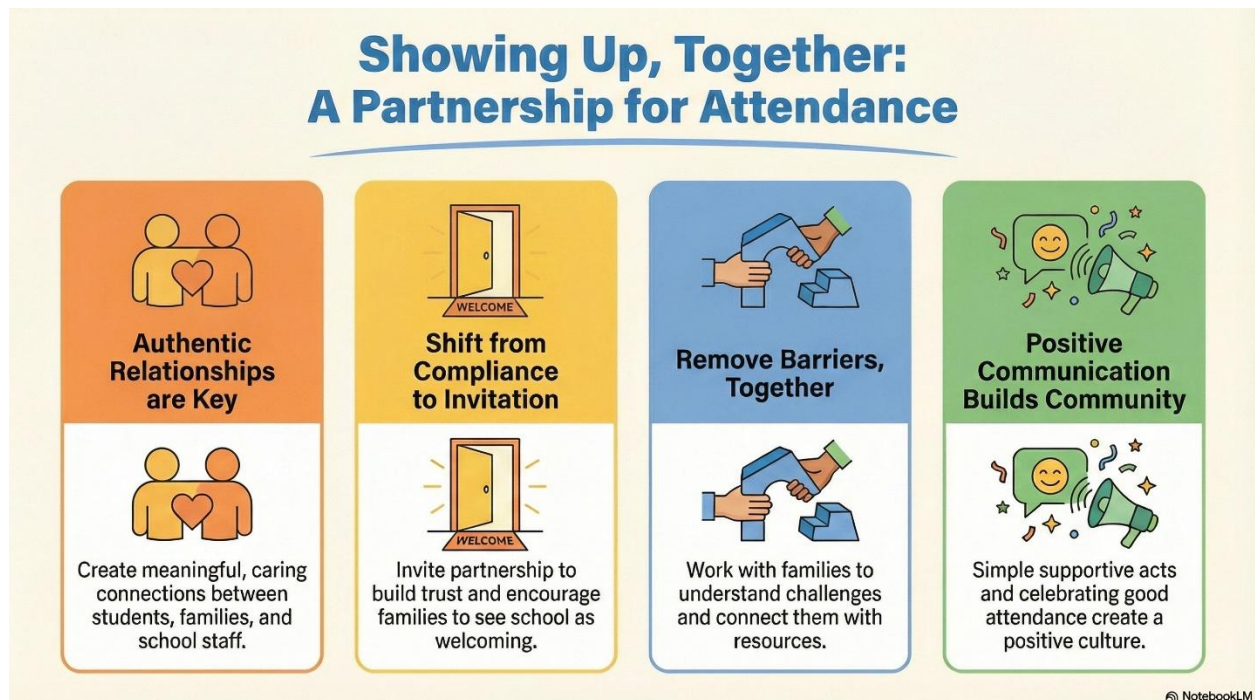
Pillar 3: Strengthening Family & Community Partnerships to Remove Barriers

Research confirms that challenges like housing instability, mental and physical health issues, lack of transportation, and economic hardship are significant drivers of chronic absence. An effective attendance strategy recognizes that the school's role is to partner with family and the broader community to collaboratively remove these barriers.

Goal: Build authentic, trusting partnerships with families and community organizations to collaboratively identify and remove the unique barriers preventing students from regularly attending school.

Phase	Key Actions	Success Metrics
Years 1-2: Foundation	1. Create Community Resource Map: Develop and maintain a comprehensive, accessible map of local support services (food, housing, mental health, etc.). 2. Train Staff on Empathetic Communication: Conduct mandatory training for key staff on conducting non-judgmental, solutions-focused "care calls" and home visits. 3. Host Parent Education Workshops: Offer workshops on topics identified as barriers, such as understanding the academic impact of absences and navigating mental health resources.	• A digital and print resource map is available to all staff and families. • Key staff complete 10+ hours of training. • At least two parent workshops are held per semester.
Years 3-4: Expansion	1. Establish Formal Community Partnerships: Streamline student referrals for services and support. 2. Hire Family Liaisons: Allocate funding for dedicated Family Liaison or Advocate roles to serve as a bridge between home and school. 3. Implement Proactive Home Visits: Shift from reactive to proactive home visits for students identified as at-risk.	• 5+ partnerships established. • At least one Family Liaison is in place for every 2-3 schools. • 80% of home visits are conducted before a student becomes chronically absent.
Year 5: Sustainability	1. Co-locate Services: Partner with a community agency 2. Form a Parent Advisory Council: Establish a parent council focused on attendance and barrier removal ensuring family voice informs policy.	• One co-located community service is operational. • A Parent Advisory Council is established and meets quarterly.

The Attendance Leader's Playbook



Vision: Improve attendance outcomes through authentic relationships, personalized interventions that focus on removing barriers students face.

Goal: Improve attendance outcomes by 15% over the course of 5 years, by implementing systems to track attendance data and determine interventions, removing barriers faced by students, and building relationships between school and families.

Accountability and Ownership Framework

To ensure fidelity and sustainability, each component of the Attendance Playbook includes clearly defined ownership:

- **District Leadership:** Vision, policy alignment, annual evaluation
- **District Attendance Team:** Systems oversight, data monitoring, intervention refinement
- **School Administrators:** Implementation, supervision, family engagement
- **Attendance Teams:** Case review, tier placement, intervention monitoring
- **Counselors / Family Liaisons:** Direct student and family support

Attendance Teams

- **Site Team:** Consists of administrators, teachers, behavioral staff members, counselors, liaison roles, and attendance secretary.
- **District Team:** Superintendent, district director tasked with improving attendance outcomes, and all site attendance leads.

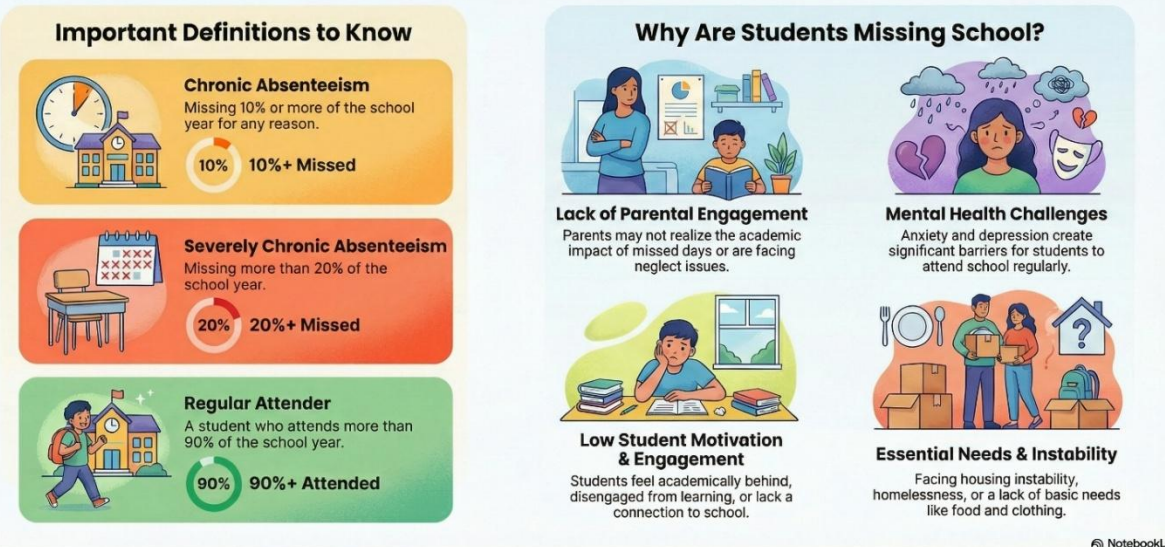
Common Agreements

- All attendance interventions will be documented in the student information system or designated intervention log.
- Attendance teams will review intervention fidelity at least monthly.
- Annual intervention audits will inform refinement of practices and resource allocation.
- Elementary calls will be made for any student missing school unexcused daily.
- Middle school personalized calls will be made for any student missing two consecutive days unexcused.
- High school personalized calls will be made for three consecutive days absent labeled as unexcused.
- Home visits conducted for any elementary student missing 3 consecutive days, MS student missing 5 consecutive days unexcused, and HS student missing 8 consecutive days unexcused.
- Never show up to home visit empty handed.
- Utilize common set of empathy interview questions and student support plan.

Root Causes & Common Definitions

Understanding Student Absenteeism: Key Terms and Root Causes

Student absenteeism, a critical issue worsened post-pandemic, stems from complex student, family, and economic factors impacting learning opportunities.



Important Definitions to Know:

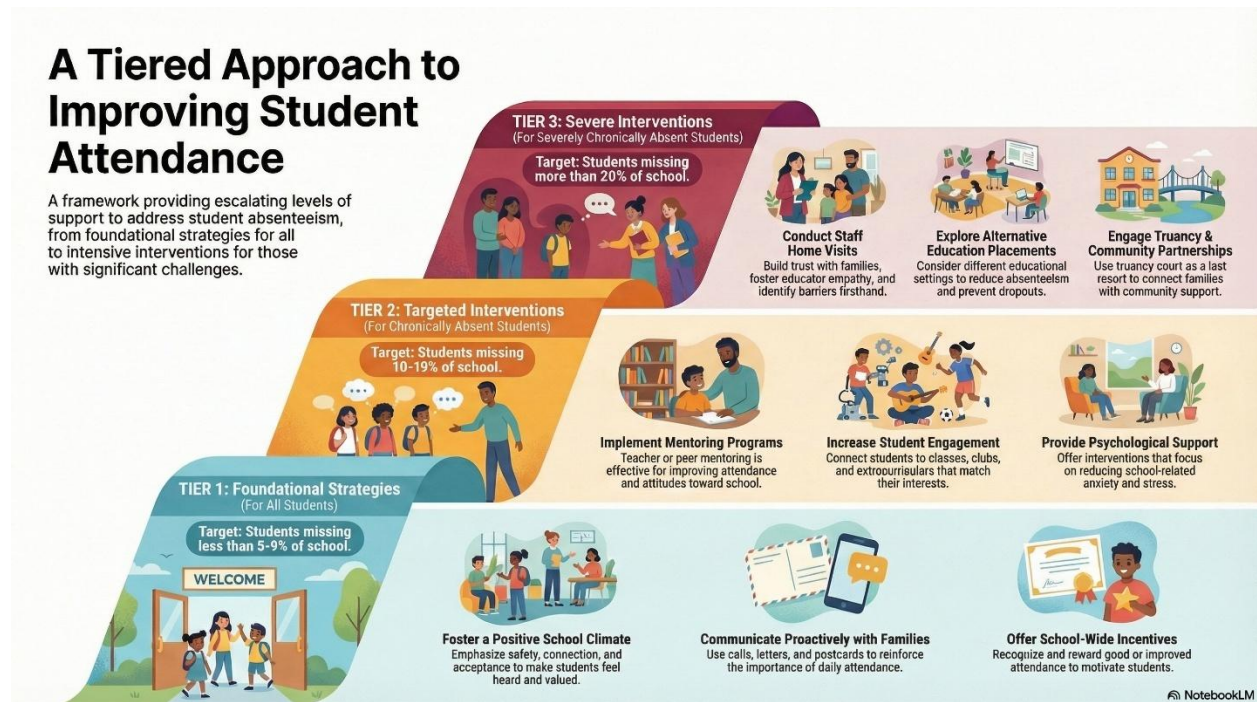
- **Chronic absenteeism:** Missing 10% or more of the school year for any reason, excused or unexcused.
- **Severely chronic absenteeism:** Missing more than 20% of the school year.
- **Regular Attender:** A student who attends more than 90% of the school year.

Why Are Students Missing School?

- **Lack of Parental Engagement:** parents not knowing the importance of being in school and the impact of learning gaps, and potential neglect of student.
- **Mental Health Challenges:** students struggling with anxiety and/or depression, experiencing at school or in student's life impacting attendance.
- **Student Motivation & Engagement:** struggling academically, disengaged in learning, feelings of failure in school, or lacking connection.
- **Essential Needs & Instability:** homelessness, housing instability, lack of essential needs including food, clean clothing, etc., and frequent instability in home and/or family environments.

The Tiered Intervention Framework at-a-Glance

The following table provides a clear, concise overview of our district's Response to Intervention (RTI) model for attendance. Each tier represents a different level of support, ensuring that all students receive what they need to succeed, based on nationally recognized definitions.



Tier	Student Indicator (% of School Year Missed)	Key Interventions	Goal
Tier 1: Universal	0-9% (Good Standing)	Positive school climate, engaging instruction, universal communication on attendance importance, school-wide incentives.	Prevention: Keep 90%+ of students in Tier 1.
Tier 2: Targeted	10-19% (Chronically Absent)	Personalized "care calls," family meetings, student success plans, mentoring, removal of specific barriers.	Intervention: Reduce absenteeism and move students back to Tier 1.
Tier 3: Intensive	20%+ (Severely Chronically Absent)	Intensive case management, frequent home visits, formal partnerships with community agencies, family therapy referrals.	Recovery: Provide comprehensive support to overcome severe barriers and re-engage the student.

Tier 1 Playbook: Proactive & Universal Strategies

Tier 1 strategies are for all students, all the time. They form the foundational layer of a positive school-wide attendance culture and are focused on prevention and proactive engagement.

Communication Template: The "Welcome & We Miss You" Postcards

Research shows that simple, positive communication can significantly reduce absences. These postcards should be sent to all families to reinforce our partnership.

- **Template 1 (Beginning of Year):** "Welcome to the new school year at [School Name]! We are so excited to partner with you and your student. Regular attendance is the first and most important step to a year of learning and growth, and we are here to support you every step of the way."
- **Template 2 (Mid-Semester):** "Here at [School Name], every student is a vital part of our community, and every day of learning counts. If your child has missed any school, let's work together to ensure they are present and ready to learn. We are here to help and support your family in any way we can."

Ideas for Positive Incentives

School-wide incentives can shift the culture by celebrating and encouraging good attendance.

- **Classroom Competitions:** Award the classroom with the best weekly or monthly attendance a small, desirable prize (e.g., extra recess, popcorn party).
- **Individual Recognition:** Acknowledge students with perfect or significantly improved attendance in school announcements, newsletters, or with a certificate.
- **"Attendance" Raffle:** Give students a raffle ticket for every week of perfect attendance or improved attendance for a chance to win a desirable prize (e.g., gift card, lunch with the principal).

Tier 2 Playbook: Targeted Interventions

Tier 2 interventions are for students who have become chronically absent, defined as missing 10-19% of school days. These strategies are personalized, proactive, and focused on early problem-solving to reverse attendance issues before they become severe.

Protocol: The Personalized "Care Call"

Personalized phone calls were identified as one of the most effective interventions. The goal is to connect and problem-solve, not to accuse.

- **Identify:** Any student absent for 2 consecutive days, or any student who hits the 5% absence threshold.
- **Discussion Prompts:**
 - "Hi, this is [Your Name] from [School]. I'm calling to check in on [Student's Name], as we've missed them. Is everything alright?"
 - "We know things can be challenging sometimes. Is there anything happening that's making it difficult to get to school, how can we help?"
 - "We really value [Student's Name] in our school community. What can we do to support you in getting them here every day?"

Root Cause of Absenteeism Questionnaire (Empathy Interview Guide)

This is not a checklist, but a guide for a caring conversation with a student or family to understand the true barriers to attendance.

This should be used over the phone or in-person meetings.

- **Opening:** "Thanks for talking with me. My only goal here is to understand how we can help you succeed. School is a better place when you are here."
- **School Experience:** "Tell me about your school day. What parts do you look forward to? What parts are challenging or stressful?" (Probes for bullying, academic failure, engagement).
- **Life Outside School:** "What is your morning routine like? Is getting to school on time easy or hard?" (Probes for transportation, family responsibilities, housing instability).
- **Well-being:** "How have you been feeling lately? Is there anything you've been worried or stressed about?" (Probes for mental and physical health).
- **Closing:** "Thank you for sharing. Based on what you've told me, it sounds like [summarize barriers] is a real challenge. Let's brainstorm some ideas together to address that."

Tier 3 Playbook: Intensive Support

Tier 3 interventions are reserved for students with severe and persistent attendance issues, defined as missing 20% or more of school. This level requires a comprehensive, wrap-around support approach involving intensive case management and strong community partnerships.

Protocol: Supportive Home Visit OR Family Meeting

A home visit can be a powerful tool for understanding a family's situation and building trust when conducted with empathy and a focus on support.

- **Identify:** Student reaches 10-15% absence rate and is unresponsive to Tier 2 interventions OR has missed 10 consecutive days with no family contact.

- **Preparation:**
 1. Always go in pairs. Inform an administrator of your destination and expected return time.
 2. Plan to have necessary support individuals at the meeting OR home visit.
 3. Call ahead to let the family know you'd like to stop by to check in, OR schedule a meeting date
 4. Prepare a "care package" with school supplies, information about school events, and community resources. Never show up empty handed.

- **During the Visit OR Meeting:**
 1. State your purpose clearly and with empathy: "We were worried about [Student] and wanted to come by to make sure you're okay and see if we can help."
 2. Focus on observing and listening to understand the family's situation and barriers.
 3. Ask the questions listed on previous page for empathy interview.
 4. Offer specific, immediate help by providing the resource map and connecting them to a specific service if possible.
 5. Collaboratively schedule a follow-up meeting at the school or another neutral location.

Tool: Student Success Plan Template

This plan should be co-created with the student and family to establish clear, shared goals and commitments.

Student Name Date	
Attendance Goal	
Identified Barriers	
Student Actions	
Family Actions	
School Actions	
Follow-Up Meeting Date	
Signatures	
Notes	

Protocol: Attendance Letter Sequencing

- **Letter #1:** *For students missing 5 days.*
Message is welcoming and explains the importance of regular school attendance. Stresses that we are not concerned, but are here to help if need.
- **Letter #2:** *For students missing 8 days.*
Message is welcoming and explains the importance of regular school attendance. Explains that illnesses and vacations happen, but if the family needs anything we are here to help.
- **Letter #3:** *For students missing 10 days, always paired with personal phone call.*
Message is welcoming and explains the importance of regular school attendance, highlighting the risks of continuing to accrue absences as it relates to learning gaps. Explains that they are approaching chronically absent thresholds and that we would love to sit down together and develop a success plan.
- **Letter #4:** *For students missing 12 days, always paired with personal phone call and meeting being scheduled OR home visit.*
Message is welcoming and explains the importance of regular school attendance, highlighting the risks of continuing to accrue absences as it relates to learning gaps. Explains that they are approaching chronically absent threshold has been reached and we are scheduling a meeting to develop a success plan.

Appendix B

Attendance Facts One-Pager

Fast Facts on School Attendance: The High Cost of Missed School Days

A. Early Grades (K-5): Foundational Gaps

In the foundational early grades, chronic absenteeism creates profound and lasting gaps in the core skills upon which all future learning is built. For young learners, consistent classroom presence is directly linked to mastering fundamental concepts in literacy and numeracy.

- Chronic absenteeism is directly linked to lower reading scores, an impact that is especially severe for students from underserved populations.
- Chronic absence in kindergarten is a strong predictor of achieving the lowest state assessment scores in 5th grade.
- In Oregon, being chronically absent in both kindergarten and first grade is linked to the lowest test scores throughout elementary school.

B. Secondary Grades (6-12): The Path to Dropping Out

By middle and high school, absenteeism becomes a primary indicator of student disengagement and a critical warning sign for dropout risk. As academic and social demands increase, regular attendance is essential for staying on track toward graduation.

- Chronic absenteeism is the strongest predictor of high school dropouts, more so than suspensions or test scores.
- Attending school less than 90% of the time in sixth grade significantly increases the chance that a student will not graduate from high school.
- Only 6 of every 10 students with 10 or more absences in the tenth grade successfully completed high school.
- Even high-achieving students with frequent absences are more likely to fail courses than their lower-scoring peers who attend regularly.

C. Classroom and Community: A Ripple Effect

The impact of one student's chronic absence extends far beyond their own desk. It creates a ripple effect that disrupts the learning environment for their peers and can be a predictor of broader community challenges.

- The need for teachers to slow down instruction to help absent students catch up has a "spillover effect," resulting in lower reading and math scores for the entire class.
- Research has shown that truancy is a predictor of future delinquent behavior patterns.