

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT LEARNING SERIES

Family Engagement to Support Student Engagement and Attendance

Welcome to the Family Engagement Learning Series briefs! These briefs summarize a six-part webinar series of conversations designed to Raise the Bar for family engagement practices between school and home. The 2023 series produced by the U.S. Department of Education in partnership with Carnegie Corporation of New York and Overdeck Family Foundation, provided an overview of evidence, highlighted bright spots in the field, and shared resources and evidence-based strategies to support student success with education leaders and practitioners.

Introduction

“[Raise the Bar: Lead the World](#)” is the U.S. Department of Education’s call to action to transform public education and unite around what truly works — based on decades of experience and research — to advance education equity and excellence. Achieving academic excellence for all students by supporting the conditions to [accelerate learning](#) and offering a [comprehensive and rigorous education](#), as well as [boldly improving learning conditions](#), are key focus areas under Raise the Bar, with a focus on assisting states and districts in achieving these goals for every student.

We believe parents, families, and caregivers are essential partners in supporting student success. Research finds that strong partnerships between home and school lead to increased academic success and engagement for students. Thus, the U.S. Department of Education is committed to [Raising the Bar for Parent Partnership in Our Schools](#).

We know students who are chronically absent — meaning they miss at least 18 days of school in a year — are at serious risk of falling behind. Even before the



pandemic, 8 million students fit into this category. Now, the numbers are even worse: some estimates show that the number of students chronically absent doubled to 16 million in 2021-22, affecting one in three students nationwide. There are no easy solutions to this problem, but family engagement practices offer some promise when it comes to improving attendance and student engagement.



Evidence: Family Engagement to Support Student Engagement and Attendance

The second webinar in the series, [Family Engagement to Support Student Engagement and Attendance](#), moderated by Hedy Chang, founder and executive director of Attendance Works, builds upon [Dr. Karen Mapp's Dual Capacity-Building Framework](#).



Scan to access the webinar

Dr. Mapp's [Dual Capacity-Building Framework](#), highlights that strong family-school partnerships and engaging families helps ensure that children show up to school every day. Also highlighted was a [recent analysis](#) by the Kansas Technical Assistance System Network that explored the correlation between family engagement and chronic absenteeism, as well as between chronic absenteeism and student performance on statewide assessments. Findings revealed:

- Higher levels of family engagement are associated with better attendance.
- Schools that share power and advocacy, as well as create welcoming environments, have lower levels of chronic absenteeism.
- Student attendance impacts achievement. Lower levels of chronic absence translate to higher levels of achievement in math and language arts.

Understanding Chronic Absenteeism

- Chronic absence is characterized by missing 10% or more of school for any reason, whether it is excused, unexcused, or due to suspensions. This translates to about two days of absences per month in school. This is a helpful early warning metric that can be used throughout the year to illuminate which students, populations, and schools need more support.
- Chronic absence measures time missed from school for any reason and is not the same as truancy, unexcused absences, or average daily attendance, which is the number of students who show up to school each day.



- Chronic absence is a leading indicator and a cause of education inequity.
- The percentage of students chronically absent is estimated to have doubled nationwide since the pre-pandemic school year of 2018-2019, from 16% to nearly 30%.
- Increased disengagement of students and families escalates the level of chronic absence.
- Increases in chronic absence is correlated with significant drops in student academic achievement.
- Factors causing chronic absence:
 - Transitions: It is higher in the early grades as well as high school, particularly during the transition into 9th grade and, more recently, 12th grade, where students have experienced at least three years of disrupted learning due to the pandemic.
 - The erosion of positive conditions in schools, for example, physical and emotional health and safety, adult and student well-being and emotional competence, a sense of belonging, connection and support, and academic challenge and engagement.



When kids are missing school, it's a sign of challenges that they're facing, both in the community — lack of transportation, lack of access to healthcare — or in schools — bullying, poor school climates — cause kids not to do well in school, but also cause them to miss more school and fall farther behind.

- HEDY CHANG

- Investments in student and family engagement strategies are critical to engage in healthy and meaningful relationships between home and school and promote attendance.

Learnings from Bright Spots

This webinar highlighted [EveryDay Labs](#), [Parent Teacher Home Visits](#), and [TalkingPoints](#). Strategies implemented by these organizations have effectively decreased chronic absence through collaboration with districts, using [Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief](#) (ESSER) funds provided by the [American Rescue Plan](#) (ARP). Panelists included:

- [Gina Martinez-Keddy](#), Parent Teacher Home Visits (PTHV);
- [Kari Sullivan Custer](#), Connecticut State Department of Education;
- [Susan Fergusson](#), Torrington Public Schools (Connecticut);
- [Kate Pechacek](#), TalkingPoints;
- [Mercedes Williams](#), Pittsburgh Public Schools (Pennsylvania); and
- [Todd Rogers](#), Harvard Kennedy School of Government.



Key Takeaways and Strategies

- Utilize models that offer universal supports as well as opportunities to meet the needs of targeted populations with “boots on the ground” efforts (e.g., Connecticut’s use of home visits represents engaging families with the more universal PTHV approach and the Learner Engagement and Attendance Program that targets home visits for the chronically absent).
- Establish sustainable quantitative and qualitative data collection systems to evaluate the impact of programs, knowing that funding is often tied to



Chronic absence is typically characterized by missing 10% or more of school for any reason, (excused, unexcused, or due to suspensions), translating to about two days of absences per month.

- HEDY CHANG

measurable student outcomes.

- Compensate educators for the investment of their time in building relationships with families (i.e., parent-teacher home visits, training on family engagement best practices).
- Strive to offer relationship-building opportunities to all families. If this is not possible, select a representative sample of students (research shows these practices have a multiplier effect, i.e., parent teacher home visits with just a few students produces positive learning outcomes for all students).
- Build trust and empathy between families and educators so that students know they are loved and supported by the adults in their lives.
- Provide families with easy access to the information they need (i.e., concise messages that are more likely to be read and responded to, personalized, precise, and consistent communication with families about attendance).
- Prioritize inclusive, equitable, and culturally competent forms of communication (i.e., technology and language accessibility factors that impact the messages families receive and how they process them).
- Put everyday tools into the hands of educators, enabling them to communicate with families in authentic, accurate, and immediate ways.
- Focus on engagement. How can you promote a back-and-forth dialogue between educators and families? As an example, the U.S. Department of Education produced [Sample Questions Parents and Families Can Ask to Partner with Your Child’s Teachers and School](#).



Student attendance was very poor, especially in remote learning in our high need districts. Governor Lamont (Connecticut) and our education commissioner saw the need to engage schools and community-based organizations in a common and sustained approach to essentially put boots on the ground and meet families where they are at their home, on their front porch, a park, or local community location to reengage them with school.

- SUSAN FERGUSSON



Pittsburgh really has focused on that everyday back and forth relationship-building that allows two things to happen. Families learn more about what is happening at school. . . . [They] are now able to receive some guidance around how to support their student and how to have academic conversations with students. But teachers are learning about the families, teachers are learning about the students, and they're learning about the context and the life students are living in.

- MERCEDES WILLIAMS

RESOURCES

- Family Engagement Learning Series [summary and links to videos](#)
- U.S. Department of Education's [website](#)
 - › [Resources for parents and educators](#)
 - › [Raise the Bar priorities](#)
- [Overdeck Family Foundation](#)
 - › [2022 Grantmaking & Impact Report](#)
- [Carnegie Corporation of New York](#)
- [Improving Our Schools, One Family at a Time](#)
- [Attendance Works](#)
 - › Blog on [Kansas State Department of Education family engagement research](#)
 - › Blog on [current levels of chronic absence](#)
 - › [3 Tiers of Intervention](#)
 - › [Learner Engagement and Attendance Program \(LEAP\)](#), a home visiting program in Connecticut public schools conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, improved student attendance rates by approximately 4 percent overall in the month following the visit, compared with pre-pandemic levels
 - › [Guide to Using the Attendance Playbook: Smart Strategies for Reducing Chronic Absenteeism](#)
- Parent Teacher Home Visits (PTHV) [website](#)
 - › [Brochure](#)
 - › [Mindset Shifts and Parent Teacher Home Visits](#)
 - › [Student Outcomes and Parent Teacher Home Visits](#)
 - › [Video on Parent Teacher Home Visit project](#)
 - › [Research shows](#) that the PTHV program can improve attendance, academic performance, and teacher capacity; PTHV has adapted with a virtual option
- Connecticut LEAP [website](#)
 - › Center for Connecticut Education Research Collaboration (CERC) [evaluation of home visits re-engaging students after COVID-19](#)
 - › Connecticut State Department of Education [monthly attendance data](#)
 - › [LEAP video on assessing chronic absenteeism](#) from Collaborative for Student Success
 - › New York Times Article on Torrington, CT: "The Key to Getting Students Back in Classrooms? Establishing Connections." [New York Times Article \(pdf\)](#)
- [TalkingPoints](#)
 - › [TalkingPoints' causal research findings](#) on improved outcomes in large, diverse, urban districts, executive summary
 - › Connect with TalkingPoints
 - [TalkingPoints X \(formerly known as Twitter\)](#)
 - [TalkingPoints LinkedIn](#)
- [Dr. Todd Rogers](#)
 - › ["Writing for Busy Families"](#) checklist
- [EveryDay Labs](#)
- [U.S. Department of Education's National Student Attendance, Engagement, and Success Center \(NSAESC\)](#)
- [U.S. Department of Education's Student Engagement and Attendance Technical Assistance Center \(SEAC\)](#)



This brief is one of a six-part Family Engagement Learning Series produced by the U.S. Department of Education in partnership with Carnegie Corporation of New York and Overdeck Family Foundation. This webinar series provided an overview of evidence, highlighted bright spots in the field, and shared resources and evidence-based strategies to support student success with education leaders and practitioners. For more information, please visit <https://www.ed.gov/raisethebar/parents>.