



How Attendance Data Can Help Identify At-Risk Students

Absenteeism can be a red flag for a number of conditions that put students at risk. More and more studies are exposing links between absenteeism and other severe challenges a student may be facing.

Keep reading to learn more.

An Overview of Absenteeism



Chronic absenteeism is defined as missing more than 15 days in the school year (about 3 days a month, or 10% of total days). During the 2015-2016 school year, **more than 7 million** students in the U.S. (about 1 in six) were chronically absent, according to a report by InformED and the 2015-16 Civil Rights Data Collection.

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While it's present across grades, chronic absenteeism is most prevalent among high school students. Beyond the obvious academic consequences, a 2019 meta-analysis published in the journal *European Child & Adolescent Psychiatry* found a correlation between absenteeism and both suicidal ideation and self-harm in young people.



So, even though it's impossible to compare the two eventualities, slipping below grade level and slipping into suicidal ideation could be seen as two ends of the chronic absenteeism spectrum. To prevent both outcomes, attendance levels should be monitored on a student-by-student basis. When administrators, faculty, and (in many cases) parents understand the causes behind chronic absenteeism, and have the attendance data to monitor it, they'll be better prepared to intervene.

Common Causes of Absenteeism



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As for the link between self-harm and absenteeism, the European Child study notes a number of factors:

- **The presence of mental disorder** is one factor which could certainly play a role in this association, with depression, anxiety and externalising disorders known to be associated with both poor school attendance and self-harm.
- **The presence of depression or anxiety** could result in school absenteeism and self-harm could form part of the presentation of these disorders.
- **Bullying** is another important potential explanatory factor, with existing evidence that bullying is an established cause of school absenteeism and also an important risk factor for self-harm.

A study in the Journal of Youth and Adolescence and findings from Robert Wood Johnson Foundation noted additional factors that could cause absenteeism:

Physical health challenges

Substance abuse and other anti-social or risky behavior

Negative attitudes toward school in general or the quality of the students' particular school

Socio-economic challenges like food insecurity, lack of transportation, parental job loss, and a lack of health insurance

Difficulties at home, like dealing with trauma and/or violence, low parental involvement in school activities, ineffective family systems, and ailing family members

Data and Awareness Can Drive Prevention



Many of the studies we refer to here say that actively tracking and monitoring attendance data, student-by-student, is an important first step toward addressing the correlations between chronic absenteeism and poor academic and health outcomes in students.



If issues can be identified at school, particularly using data which is routinely collected, this could help to inform strategies to intervene through addressing modifiable risks

the European Child study reads.

Schools can use data-driven attendance tracking tools to gain greater insights on students' attendance patterns and to identify students who may be at risk. If the data shows chronic absenteeism, administrators can work with parents and teachers to identify potential risk factors and begin positive interventions.

There are readily available platforms, like, TrueCare's Attendance & At-Risk Program, that tracks attendance data and offers administrators a direct line of communication to parents to discuss why a student is absent, whether intervention may be necessary, and next steps in scheduling care (which may include speaking with a counselor or similar professional).

Attendance metrics are important at the district level as well, according to a report from The University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research (UChicago CCSR). By tracking chronic absence rates at schools, districts can determine the degree to which schools may need support, and suggest strategies for getting more students to come to school regularly. Monthly or biweekly watch lists that highlight those students who miss more than a particular number of days may prove useful, so that teachers can reach out to parents to help develop strategies for attending more regularly.

The UChicago CCSR report focuses primarily on preschool attendance, but many of its solutions for curbing chronic absenteeism can apply to any school and any age group.

The report also notes that:

There is evidence suggesting schools can contribute to setting a culture that supports better attendance. School organization may play a role in fostering good attendance, and school leaders can create structures that support family efforts to get their students to school every day.



Districts and the schools within them can build programs across their network of faculty, parents and community partners to implement solutions like carpooling, information resources, discounted lunch programs, mental health counseling, and more.



Some neighborhood organizations utilize parents to reach out to other parents, helping to create social networks for families

the UChicago CCSR report reads.

Schools that partner with community-based organizations may jointly be able to figure out additional strategies to address the schools', families', and students' particular challenges, while engaging families in the process, thus building trust.

Districts and schools that document absenteeism and look for signs of risk create opportunities for intervention. However, administrators and faculty can get proactive about fighting absenteeism by working together with parents and the community to build a network of support that encourages students to not only come to school, but thrive there.

Truancy Analysis to Dramatically Reduce Absenteeism

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