

From Attendance Signal to Student Support

A practical guide to uncovering root cause through stronger family partnerships.

**Attendance data tells us
WHAT.**

**Understanding tells us
WHY.**

Different WHYs require different responses.

The work is not simply to count absences. It is to understand what is underneath them early enough to help in the right way.

THE CORE IDEA

Better attendance starts with better understanding.

Use this guide with attendance teams, school leaders, counselors, family engagement staff, and teachers to move from an attendance signal to the right conversation and the right support.



Built from the September 17, 2026 District Administration TalkingPoints presentation's ("The Missing Piece In Attendance Improvement") central progression: effort, understanding, relationships, scale, take action

What's Underneath the Absence?

An absence is a signal. The same attendance pattern can reflect very different barriers, and therefore require very different responses.

Transportation

Transportation plan / route / logistics

Academic Struggle

Academic intervention or support

Health

Health plan / flexibility / coordinated support

Housing / Family Circumstances

Resource connection and individualized support

Anxiety or Well-Being

Mental health or student support response

Belonging

Trusted adult / peer connection / school climate

Bullying / Safety

Safety response and follow through

School Climate

Relationships, belonging, and climate PD

You can't identify the right support until you understand the root cause.

Five Moves School Can Make Tomorrow

1

Lower the listening threshold

Don't wait for chronic absence. When a pattern begins to change, create an opening for a conversation.

2

Ask before you assume

Turn an attendance notice into an invitation to share what may be making school hard right now.

3

Build relationships before intervention

Positive, proactive contact creates trust before more difficult conversation is needed.

4

Go where families already are

Use accessible channels and existing touchpoints instead of requiring families to come to you.

5

Match the response to the reason

Transportation, anxiety, academic struggle, belonging, health, and family circumstances need different supports.

Five Questions That Can Uncover the WHY

The goal is not to diagnose the problem from one response. It is to open a two-way conversation that makes it easier to understand barriers, strengths, and possible solutions.

- 1 We've noticed a change. How are things going?
- 2 Is anything making it harder to get to school right now?
- 3 How is your child feeling about school?
- 4 What would make attendance easier?
- 5 What's one thing we could do that would help?

Try this shift

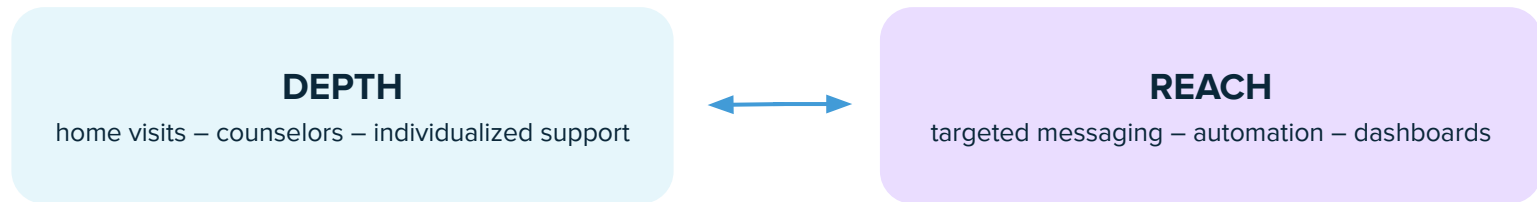
Instead of: "Your child has missed 8 days."

Try: "We've noticed Jordan has missed several days recently, and we wanted to check in. Is there anything making it harder for Jordan to get to school right now?"

Listen for: barriers, strengths, changes in circumstances, the student's experience, what the family thinks would help.

Depth and Reach Should Not Be a Tradeoff

High-touch supports create deep understanding. Scalable systems create broad reach. The goal is to use technology to reduce friction and focus human time where it matters most; not to automate the relationship.



Use this 6-question team check

1. Are we noticing emerging attendance changes early enough to act?
2. Can every family receive and respond to outreach in a language and channel that works for them?
3. Are our messages mostly notices, or do they create genuine two-way conversations?
4. Can staff distinguish a risk signal from a known root cause?
5. Can we match students to supports without creating a new workflow for every case?
6. Do we follow up and learn whether the support changed the underlying conditions?

A useful design principal

Technology handles friction. People build relationships.

Use systems to reach, translate, surface patterns, and prioritize. Preserve human judgement and connection for understanding and support.

Turn Attendance Data Into Meaningful Action

TalkingPoints is designed to help districts combine scalable reach with two-way family partnership. Attendance Improvement Plus connects attendance insights with targeted, barrier-free trusted engagement so teams can act earlier and learn more about what is driving absences.

REACH

Text-first communication and translation into 150+ languages help school connect with each family.

UNDERSTAND

Two-way messaging and absence-reason workflows help schools learn more about what is happening behind the attendance patterns.

PRIORITIZE

Attendance dashboards and targeted views help staff identify students and groups that may need attention.

ACT

Targeted and automated attendance messaging supports timely and effective outreach while preserving staff capacity for higher-touch support.

Evidence worth exploring

TalkingPoints' externally-validated, causal research included a Tulsa Schools study reporting a 24% decrease in absenteeism and a separate two-year large urban district study reporting statistically significant attendance gains.



Want to see it in action?

Book a demo by September 30 and ask about the District Administration webinar special pricing pilot offer.

talkingPoints.org

Sources & further reading: TalkingPoints Attendance Improvement Plus overview (Apr. 2026); TalkingPoints attendance and behavior research; Tulsa Public Schools attendance study; TalkingPoints attendance and demo resources. Webinar content is adapted from the September 17, 2026 District Administration presentation.