

# **Chronic Absenteeism Literature Review**

*Evidence to Inform Attendance Improvement in North Carolina*

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## **Abstract**

Chronic absenteeism has intensified in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and remains well above pre-pandemic levels, with disproportionate impacts for students from low-income households, students of color, English learners, and students with disabilities. This literature review synthesizes recent peer-reviewed research (2020–2025) on chronic absenteeism in K–12 general education settings, with a deliberate focus on behaviorally driven, unexcused patterns of nonattendance (including school refusal and truancy) rather than health-related excused absence. Using a PRISMA-aligned systematic review process, studies were identified across multiple databases, screened using explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria, and narrowed to a final corpus for analysis. Findings indicate that chronic absenteeism is associated with substantial academic consequences (lower achievement, course failure, grade retention, and dropout risk) and meaningful non-academic harms (reduced engagement, weaker school connectedness, and heightened family stress). The reviewed evidence underscores that absenteeism is multicausal, shaped by interacting student-level, school-level, family, and structural factors, and that effective responses typically combine relational strategies with concrete barrier reduction. Promising micro-level approaches include early warning and attendance teams, adaptive caregiver messaging, home visits, and strengthening peer and adult connections, while macro-level levers include transportation access, community school models, and economic supports. Across interventions, implementation quality and contextual fit are decisive: low-lift messaging can yield modest gains, but sustained improvement generally requires integrated, data-enabled multi-tiered systems of support and coordinated cross-agency efforts that address root causes.

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# Chronic Absenteeism Literature Review

## Method of Study

This methods section outlines a systematic review designed to surface educator-actionable evidence on chronic absenteeism in K–12 settings. To avoid conflating conceptually distinct phenomena, we focus on behaviorally driven, unexcused absenteeism rather than health-related, excused absences. Following PRISMA standards, we searched academic databases using iteratively refined Boolean terms; limited results to peer-reviewed studies published 2020–2025 in general-education K–12 contexts; and used Covidence for de-duplication, eligibility screening, and reliability-oriented coding. The sections below document the search strategy, inclusion/exclusion criteria, and screening flow that produced the final corpus for analysis.

## Definition of Terms

It is important to note that chronic absenteeism has multiple definitions and oftentimes conflates concepts such as school refusal and truancy with absenteeism that has less to do with student behaviors than with health and wellness concerns. We provide the following operationalization of terms in order to make transparent our approach to this topic and to underscore our use of inclusion and exclusion criteria in screening literature. For the purposes of this review, we focus primarily on two types of chronic absenteeism: school refusal and truancy.

**School refusal** is defined as child-motivated refusal to attend school and/or problems remaining in classes for an entire day (Kearney, 2008) resulting in *inexcusable absences*. We will not be exploring to the same extent that which are considered *excusable absences* as they refer to student absences related to medical illness or injury, as our purpose is to identify district, school, and educator behaviors that break down the barriers for student attendance insofar as those students and families can *choose* to engage in their K-12 buildings. This criterion is echoed below in the PRISMA chart (Figure 1.1).

**Truancy** is a term that is used in multiple contexts throughout education research and policy, and generally refers to unexcused, illegal, or surreptitious absences; non-anxiety-based absenteeism; absenteeism linked to lack of parental knowledge about the behavior; absenteeism linked to delinquency or academic problems; or absenteeism linked to social conditions such as homelessness or poverty (Fremont, 2003).

## Identification of Studies

To begin the study identification process, we sought to create inclusion and exclusion criteria to guide our systematic review. Given our emphasis on understanding the persistence of chronic absenteeism in K-12 schools following the pandemic, we focused on more recent literature and *included* studies in this analysis only if they met the following criteria:

- published between the years of 2020-2025;
- published in English;
- focused on chronic absenteeism;

- took place in a K-12 general educational setting.
- published in a peer-reviewed journal.

Based on this inclusion criteria, we thus *excluded* studies from this analysis if they met the following criteria:

- research took place in a higher education institution, or early childhood (Pre-K) general educational setting.
- used the topic of chronic absenteeism as a comparator for another variable where absenteeism is not the primary focus.
- did not offer a full text article from a peer reviewed journal.
- was not published between the years of 2020 and 2025.

To identify a comprehensive set of articles for this systematic review, the search included all databases within the providers of ProQuest Central, EBSCO (ERIC), Web of Science, PsychInfo, and Academic Search Complete. We made continuous modifications to the search terms adjusting for how they were cited in the article abstract and/or title. By addressing these search limitations, we refined and finalized a total of 10 key words and phrases to conduct our literature review as shown in Figure 1.1 below.

**Figure 1.1.** Boolean Search Term

*[chronic absenteeism” OR “chronic absence” or “problematic school absence” or “truancy” or “school refusal”) AND (“K-12” or “public school” or “elementary school” or “middle school” or “high school”]*

After conducting these searches, we uploaded final results into Covidence so that further screening processes based on the above inclusion and exclusion criteria could occur. A total of 221 articles were uploaded into Covidence. While uploading the saved search files into Covidence, the system detected 47 duplicate articles automatically removed them. During manual screening, an additional four articles were found to be duplicates and were removed. A total of 170 articles were left to review using the aforementioned inclusion and exclusion criteria. After these two processes were completed, 63 articles were considered irrelevant to our study based on their title and the presented abstract. This left a remaining 106 articles to enter the full-text review stage of the data extraction process.

**Screening Process**

To begin, we conducted an initial title and abstract screening of the 170 sources to decide if the article addressed the targeted research topic of chronic absenteeism, interventions, its impact on students, or other seemingly relevant research inquiries in K-12 school environments. During this first screening, we eliminated 63 irrelevant sources, leading to 106 references entering a full-text review stage. During the full-text review process, we conducted a close read of each article to further determine if it should be included or eliminated from review.

A total of 58 studies were *excluded* for a variety of reasons including the following:

- a focus on health-related school absence ( $n=16$ ).
- study was completed in a non-U.S. context ( $n=13$ ).
- chronic absenteeism was not the primary topic of investigation and was instead used as one variable unrelated to school attendance ( $n=9$ ).
- study design includes school absences that would be considered *excusable* or related to Other Health Impairments ( $n=5$ ).
- the study was comparing students' absences to other factors such as gender ( $n=5$ ).
- the study was looking at outcomes for students after they have left the K-12 educational space ( $n=3$ ).
- the study was looking at outcomes unrelated to student engagement in school ( $n=3$ ).
- the study was using an intervention that is not unrelated to educators, such as providing local health centers to families in rural areas ( $n=2$ ) the study was using *student school phobia* as their way of conceptualizing chronic absence, which is no longer considered to be relevant in the literature ( $n=1$ ).

The completed full-text review process allowed us to systematically and accurately gather 48 peer-reviewed research articles or reports that followed our intended research topic by adhering to the inclusion and exclusion criteria. The PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses) (Moher et al., 2009) flow chart provided by the Covidence system documents all parts of the systematic review process, beginning with the article identification process and ending with the final articles to be included for analysis (see Figure 1.2). By using these reporting guidelines, the suggested findings from this systematic review are methodologically transparent and well-defined.

### **Understanding the Current Crisis of Chronic Absenteeism**

Chronic absenteeism has emerged as a national educational crisis, with rates surging in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Swiderski et al. (2024), chronic absenteeism rose nationally from 15% in 2018–19 to 28% in 2021–22, affecting an estimated 14.7 million students across the country. The impact has been especially severe in high-poverty, rural, and urban districts, where nearly 1 in 3 students were chronically absent during the 2021–22 school year. Moreover, data from Germain et al. (2024) reinforce this national picture and highlight disproportionate effects on students of color, English learners, students with disabilities, and those from low-income households. While chronic absenteeism rates have declined since their pandemic peak, absenteeism levels in general remain well above pre-pandemic norms. In North Carolina, for example, roughly 25% of students were chronically absent during the 2024–25 school year. This pattern signals that ***chronic absenteeism is not a temporary disruption but a sustained problem that demands a systemic response***, particularly for students most at risk of lost learning, disengagement, and long-term harm without targeted supports.

**Figure 1.2. PRISMA Diagram**



## What are the Impacts?

### *Academic Outcomes*

Chronic absenteeism exerts wide-ranging effects on academic achievement and long-term educational outcomes. Students who miss more school consistently demonstrate **lower test scores, grades, and proficiency in core subjects** such as reading and math, with cumulative effects that extend to higher risks of **grade retention and dropout** (González et al., 2019; Kirksey, 2019). In the short term, missed instructional time disrupts learning continuity, increases the likelihood of course failure, and undermines the development of strong academic routines (Mac Iver et al., 2022). Analyses of school refusal and absenteeism profiles similarly find poorer academic performance across verbal, math, and general school outcomes, further underscoring the tight link between attendance and achievement (Giménez-Miralles et al., 2021).

At the school level, elevated chronic absence is associated with **lower accountability ratings and proficiency outcomes** (LeBoeuf et al., 2023; Mac Iver et al., 2022), while meta-analytic and intervention studies confirm that efforts to improve attendance frequently yield parallel gains in academic performance (Eklund et al., 2022). Moreover, chronic absenteeism can also influence the behavior of peers: Gottfried et al. (2020) demonstrate that **absenteeism among individual students can spread within peer groups**, making it not only an individual issue but a collective one. In the long term, evidence suggests that these academic harms extend into adulthood, constraining **postsecondary enrollment, career readiness, and long-term economic mobility** (Dee, 2024; Covelli et al., 2025).

### *Non-Academic Impacts*

Beyond academics, absenteeism generates substantial non-academic consequences for students, families, schools, and communities. For students, chronic absenteeism is linked with **lower engagement, increased school refusal behaviors, and unmet social-emotional and health needs** (Kearney & Graczyk, 2020). These impacts vary depending on the function of absenteeism, with students facing both internal (e.g., anxiety, stress) and external (e.g., disengagement, peer influence) drivers experiencing the steepest declines in academic and socio-emotional outcomes (González et al., 2019; Giménez-Miralles et al., 2021). Families face heightened stress and barriers to participation, as chronic absence often reflects systemic issues such as transportation challenges, limited health care access, or unstable housing (Chang, 2023).

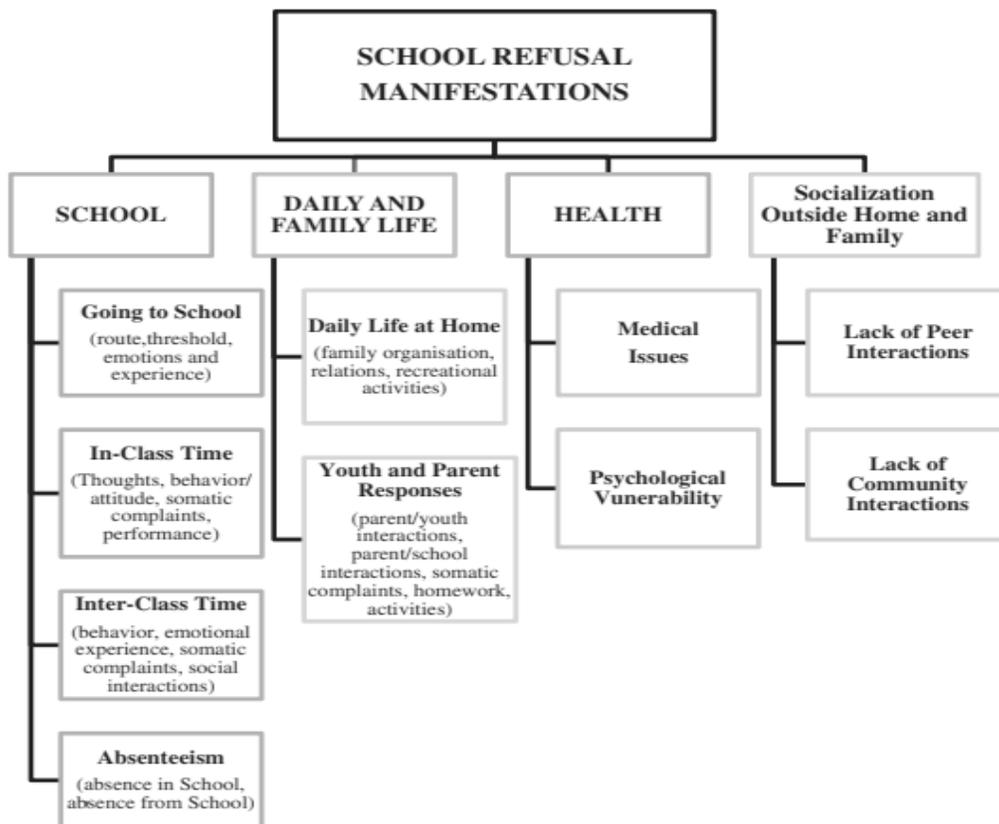
For schools, absenteeism disrupts instructional planning, **burdens staff with additional intervention needs, and erodes school climate**, yet improvements in safety and connectedness have been shown to reduce absence (Hamlin, 2021). At the community level, widespread absenteeism weakens long-term educational attainment and workforce readiness, posing risks to local economic vitality and social cohesion (Dee, 2024; Covelli et al., 2025). Chronic absence also reduces access to school-based health and nutrition services in the short term and is associated with lower rates of civic participation, such as voting and community

engagement, in the long run (Ilakkuvan & Price, 2021; Chang, 2023). Community school approaches demonstrate that integrating academic, health, and family supports not only improves attendance but also strengthens student engagement, family-school partnerships, and access to critical services (Germain et al., 2024; Covelli et al., 2025).

### What Contributes to Chronic Absenteeism?

Chronic absenteeism emerges from a web of interrelated student, family, school, and community factors rather than a single cause. Gallé-Tessonneau and Heyne (2020) developed SChool REfusal EvaluatioN (SCREEN) model shown in Figure 1 that illustrates the diverse ways that school refusal manifests for students.

**Figure 1.** Inventory and organization of school refusal manifestations.



**Note.** Prepared by Gallé-Tessonneau and Heyne (2020)

### Student-Level Factors

Research that subtypes school refusal behavior (SRB) finds heterogeneous profiles in which **anxiety, low self-concept, and avoidance** processes jointly elevate risk of chronic absenteeism (González et al., 2019; Gallé-Tessonneau & Heyne, 2020). Student health, including anxiety and related mental-health symptoms associated with school refusal, are also a

consistent driver of absenteeism, pointing to the importance of multi-tiered, school-connected supports (Kearney & Graczyk, 2020; Giménez-Miralles et al., 2021; González et al., 2019; Gallé-Tessoneau & Heyne, 2020). Community-school profiles underscore how integrated student supports (**on-site health and social services, family engagement**) are mobilized to address these barriers and improve attendance (Germain, Maier, & Espinoza, 2024; Maier, 2024).

Giménez-Miralles et al. (2021) argue that schools must acknowledge the heterogeneity of absentee students in order to respond meaningfully and effectively. Their work suggests that students may avoid school for both internal and external reasons, including students with anxiety, **academic stress or social difficulties**, and that those reasons can intersect in complex ways. Research by González et al. (2019) demonstrates this complexity, highlighting that students with SRB driven by both positive and negative reinforcement tend to have the lowest self-concept and are at the greatest risk of academic and emotional disengagement. These findings suggest the need for differentiated responses based on psychological factors such as **low self-esteem and interpersonal skill deficits**, which were echoed in interviews of elementary teachers conducted by Inoue (2022).

Finally, it is essential to understand that chronic absenteeism and its impacts are not evenly distributed: students of color, **English learners, students with disabilities, and those from low-income households** experience disproportionately higher rates of chronic absenteeism and steeper academic consequences (Chang, 2023; Germain et al., 2024). Unfortunately, disciplinary systems can also reinforce these inequities. For example, **racially minoritized students** are more likely to be labeled truant or suspended for similar behaviors, which can exacerbate absenteeism and disengagement (Weathers et al., 2023; Gregory et al., 2010).

### ***School-Level Factors***

Identifying students at risk also requires attention to school-level and systemic factors. School climate plays a role, though its effects are modest. Students' **perceptions of safety and engagement** are associated with slightly lower absence and chronic absence and declines in perceived safety or **connectedness between eighth and ninth grade** correspond to small increases in absence (Hamlin, 2021). Perceptions of a **controlling or unsupportive classroom climate** can exacerbate anxious anticipation and interpersonal discomfort, increasing avoidance and refusal, whereas strong **teacher–student relationships** help students manage difficult transitions from home to school (Sorrenti et al., 2025). More broadly, **school-based health supports** (e.g., managing chronic conditions such as asthma) are frequently cited as part of effective attendance strategies, underscoring the role of physical and mental health in absenteeism risk (Dee, 2024).

Discipline environments appear salient as well: schools with higher **rates of suspensions and expulsions** tend to have higher rates of habitual truancy, and greater **school police presence** predicts higher habitual truancy, raising concerns about differential processing and the indirect contribution of exclusionary discipline to missed school (Weathers, Muñoz, & Loeb, 2023). Their findings raise concerns about differential enforcement, wherein racially minoritized students may

be disproportionately labeled as truant due to biases in school discipline systems, even when behavioral patterns are similar to those of their peers (Gregory et al., 2010).

Classroom “**peer contagion**” effects also appear in the literature: a student’s likelihood of later chronic absence rises when more classmates were chronically absent earlier in the year, suggesting that absence behavior diffuses through classroom networks (Gottfried, Kirksey, & Ozuna, 2020). Structural continuity also matters: having more “familiar faces” (the **same teachers and peers across courses**) is associated with fewer overall absences and particularly fewer unexcused absences and truancy, implying that stability, consistency, and belonging can reduce discretionary nonattendance (Kirksey & Elefante, 2024).

### ***Family and Logistical Barriers***

Studies and fieldwork with caregivers repeatedly identify transportation, health, and neighborhood safety as primary obstacles; families describe relationship-building outreach as helpful only when it connects them to concrete resources that remove these barriers (Stokes, Lenhoff, & Singer, 2024).

Causal and quasi-experimental evidence highlights transportation specifically: **being eligible for school transportation** reduces absenteeism, particularly chronic absenteeism, for economically disadvantaged students by as much as four percentage points, suggesting transportation mitigates the negative effects of distance to school (Edwards, 2023). At the same time, policy design matters; a fare-free public bus program was associated with declines in attendance and higher chronic absenteeism, with the largest effects in high schools and in schools serving more students qualifying for free/reduced-price lunch and students of color, an illustration that well-intentioned transportation policies can have unintended consequences if not tailored to school-day needs (Garcia Munoz & Sandoval, 2022).

### ***Immigration Enforcement***

Bellows (2021) provides compelling evidence that **immigration enforcement policies can directly contribute to chronic absenteeism**, particularly for Hispanic students. In a study analyzing the effects of 287(g) partnerships-agreements that allow local law enforcement to collaborate with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), Bellows found that the activation of such programs is **associated with a statistically significant increase in student absences**. Hispanic students, both those ever classified and never classified as English Learners, miss approximately one additional day of school per year when these programs are in place. For Hispanic students ever classified as English Learners, the consequences are more severe: there are marked increases in chronic absenteeism, with **more students missing 15, 20, and even 50 or more days annually**. This research underscores that punitive immigration policies not only create a climate of fear among immigrant families but also tangibly disrupt students’ educational engagement. Bellows’s findings reinforce the broader argument made by Cook et al. (2017) that out-of-school policies can be powerful drivers of absenteeism, suggesting that reversing or resisting such enforcement mechanisms may itself be an impactful intervention.

Collectively, these findings suggest that **efforts to reduce chronic absenteeism must begin with a nuanced understanding of who is absent and why**. Predictive screening tools, psychological insights, and systemic analyses all point to the potential of identifying at-risk students early, while cautioning against universal, one-size-fits-all interventions. In the sections that follow, we examine the frameworks and supports currently in use to intervene in cases of chronic absenteeism, particularly through systemic supports, mentoring, and family engagement strategies.

## **Approaches to Addressing Chronic Absenteeism**

In this section we trace how the field's thinking on attendance has evolved from punitive, high-intensity fixes that sought quick wins to a broader, student-centered agenda that treats absenteeism as a multi-system problem. We first review the limits of exclusionary discipline, justice-based truancy responses, and short-term "turnaround" models. We then examine micro-level strategies such as home visits, caregiver messaging, and school climate efforts alongside the implementation realities that determine whether promising ideas take root. We then highlight macro-level levers (transportation, health and family supports, community schools, school stability, economic policy, and flexible learning) that reshape school conditions. Finally, we address the limitations of these approaches and suggest that **research points toward a data-enabled, multi-tiered system of services that integrate academic, behavioral, and social supports** and are built for sustainability and their local context and implemented with fidelity.

### **A Historical Perspective**

Historically, many efforts to address chronic absenteeism have relied on punitive approaches and large-scale, whole-school turnaround reforms. However, mounting evidence suggests that these strategies often fall short, both in addressing the root causes of absenteeism and in sustaining long-term improvements in student outcomes.

#### ***Exclusionary Discipline Approaches***

One dominant approach has been the use of **exclusionary discipline**, such as suspensions and expulsions, in response to perceived attendance or behavior issues. Mahowald et al. (2024) argue that this practice **contributes to the broader "school-prison nexus,"** a system in which students, disproportionately students of color, are monitored and punished in ways that mirror the criminal justice system. Rather than addressing the underlying social, emotional, or economic drivers of absenteeism, these punitive measures **tend to reinforce marginalization and disengagement**.

**Court diversion and justice-based programs** emerged as alternatives to formal juvenile justice proceedings in response to truancy laws. Yet, evaluations of these programs suggest they may not be particularly effective either. McNely et al. (2019) found no significant improvement in attendance among students enrolled in a juvenile justice-based truancy intervention program compared to students in a neighboring district with no such program. These programs, while theoretically less punitive, still operate under a legal framework that

**criminalizes non-attendance, often without addressing systemic or individual barriers to attendance.**

### ***Turnaround Reform Models***

Another popular strategy has been the creation of “turnaround schools” that implement sweeping, intensive reforms in a short period of time. While these schools aim to flood students with resources and interventions, the results have not lived up to their promise. Pham et al. (2025) found that the **effects of these schools are often negligible and do not persist once students leave** the school environment. Their findings suggest that one-off, high-intensity interventions may not be as impactful as smaller-scale, sustainable reforms embedded within broader systems of support.

Attempts to improve attendance have also included a range of behavioral, academic, family-school partnership, and policy-oriented interventions. A systematic review by Eklund et al. (2022) found that while some interventions showed small, positive effects, there was a lack of consistency in outcomes. **Behavioral approaches** such as mentoring, token systems, and social-emotional learning showed the most promise, but even these interventions **were limited by small sample sizes, lack of replication, and weak study designs**. Family engagement strategies, such as mandated truancy court appearances or communication efforts like letters and phone calls, were often included, but few were rigorously evaluated.

Together, these findings suggest that past approaches, whether they be punitive, reactive, or overly ambitious, have often missed the mark. What’s needed instead is a move toward systemic, targeted, and sustainable attendance interventions that consider the complexity of students’ lives and the school ecosystems in which they exist.

### **Micro-Level Interventions to Address Chronic Absenteeism**

Efforts to reduce chronic absenteeism operate across two broad levels: micro-level interventions and macro-level interventions. **Micro-level interventions focus on the school and classroom context, targeting individual students and families through relational, behavioral, and logistical supports**. These strategies include early identification systems, mentoring, home visits, adaptive caregiver messaging, and school climate initiatives. In contrast, macro-level strategies address systemic and structural conditions such as transportation policy, economic supports, and community school models that shape attendance patterns across districts and states. While macro-level reforms set the stage for systemic change, micro-level interventions provide the day-to-day tools educators need to respond to attendance challenges within their sphere of influence. Together, these levels form a complementary framework for addressing the complex drivers of chronic absenteeism

### ***Early Identification and School-Based Attendance Teams***

A consistent theme across the literature is the importance of early identification and prevention. Early identification benefits from **using student characteristics and attendance trajectories to identify students at-risk of being chronically absent**. Using school-wide indicators,

Wroblewski et al. (2019) offer compelling evidence that school-wide social-emotional screening can help proactively identify students likely to become moderately to chronically truant. Their study demonstrated that belief-in-self and belief-in-others, as measured by the SEHS-S, were significant predictors of later attendance patterns, enabling schools to accurately classify students' future truancy risk with over 60% accuracy at the start of the school year. This predictive potential, however, relies heavily on data systems that are usable, timely, and sustainable.

Chu et al. (2019) note that while school counselors often monitor attendance trends, doing so manually can be burdensome. They advocate for **automated systems that offer real-time attendance tracking and feedback** to educators and families, as **even minimal attendance monitoring has been shown to reduce absenteeism** when implemented consistently (Nadeem et al., 2016). Such tools could form the backbone of a sustainable early detection system embedded in school infrastructure.

Attendance teams are a common schoolwide strategy for addressing chronic absenteeism, typically composed of administrators, support staff, and teachers who meet regularly to review attendance data, identify students at risk, and coordinate targeted interventions such as personalized outreach, family engagement, and referrals to community resources (Lavigne, Caven, Bock, Zhang, & Braham, 2021). Evidence from Providence Public Schools suggests that when implemented with moderate to high fidelity, **attendance teams can serve as the organizing hub that links universal attendance messaging with more intensive, individualized supports** (Lavigne et al., 2021).

Related work underscores that attendance-focused teams are most effective when they (1) intentionally leverage strong school–family relationships, (2) have staff who interact frequently with parents and caregivers (Stokes, Lenhoff, & Singer, 2024), (3) are embedded within broader efforts to strengthen students' sense of school connectedness, and (4) use early warning data systems to flag emerging attendance problems for intervention (Balfanz, 2023).

### ***Parent and Caregiver Communication***

A growing body of literature identifies school-initiated communication with parents, particularly through low-cost, scalable messaging strategies, as a promising avenue for reducing chronic absenteeism. These interventions, while modest in scope and cost, have demonstrated outsized impacts on attendance when designed with behavioral insights and implemented consistently.

Kurki et al. (2022) provide compelling evidence for the effectiveness of adaptive attendance text messaging. In this large-scale randomized controlled trial, parents received **messages tailored to their child's attendance patterns, which led to reductions in chronic absence rates**. The intervention demonstrated remarkable feasibility and efficiency: over 95% of messages were successfully delivered, and implementation costs ranged from just \$7 to \$8.50 per student. These findings affirm that personalized, frequent, and data-driven messaging can improve student attendance at scale without requiring significant investments in personnel or infrastructure.

Similar results were found in Musaddiq et al. (2024), which evaluated a multi-district messaging intervention that informed parents about their child’s attendance and their standing relative to peers. Messages **reduced both excused and unexcused absences by about 0.2 days across all districts, and by over 0.33 days in districts with high-fidelity implementation.** Importantly, the intervention had its strongest effects on students who were already at risk of being chronically absent, reducing chronic absenteeism among this group by 2% to 7%. Moreover, the study found that the intervention had durable effects, with attendance improvements persisting into the following school year. These findings suggest that strategic parent messaging not only disrupts absenteeism in the short term but may also help reshape long-term attendance habits.

Mac Iver et al. (2022) extend this line of research by emphasizing the potential of “nudge” letters defined as brief, low-cost communications that highlight the importance of attendance and prompt action. Their study found short-term gains in middle school attendance but noted limited effects across all grade levels. Still, they underscore that **the cost per additional day of attendance is far lower for nudges than for intensive interventions** requiring individualized student support. At the implementation level, Lavigne et al. (2021) investigated how fidelity of attendance-related supports varies across districts. Their findings suggest that simple parent outreach tools like phone calls and nudge letters were **adopted with high fidelity due to their relatively low lift.** At the same time, more complex supports such as school-based attendance teams, while requiring more staffing and coordination, were implemented with moderate to high fidelity in many elementary schools. These teams play a critical role in coordinating supports for chronically absent students and are a logical next step for schools seeking to address more entrenched attendance issues. Lavigne and colleagues advise school leaders to weigh the strategic value of these higher-lift supports against local resource constraints and the severity of absenteeism challenges.

### ***Home Visits***

One promising and natural extension of family communications for improving attendance and engagement is the use of teacher-led home visits. Soule and Curtis (2021) found that **high school students who received home visits had lower rates of chronic absenteeism and higher graduation rates** than their peers for four out of five years of data analyzed. Beyond outcomes, the practice supports the development of strong, trust-based relationships among the student–parent–teacher triad, a concept rooted in Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory.

This relational approach is **bolstered by intentional teacher preparation.** Teachers in the study site received ongoing professional development, including annual refresher trainings focused on the purpose of home visits, communication strategies, and structured debriefing practices. These trainings increased teachers’ confidence and ability to carry out positive, productive visits. The study underscores that when implemented with care, home visits can serve as a powerful, relationship-centered strategy to strengthen school–family partnerships and support student success.

### ***Fostering Peer Connectedness***

Multiple studies emphasize the central role of social relationships, especially peer connections, in shaping students' sense of belonging and their motivation to attend school. Ahmad Swartz and Benz (2021) argue that peer interaction is essential to students' experience of school connectedness and overall success. They find that the loss of peer interaction, particularly during periods of remote learning, reduced student engagement and may have contributed to increased absenteeism. Their findings align with a broader body of research (Adams et al., 2016; Kidger et al., 2012) that identifies peer community as a primary motivator for school attendance, especially in K–12 settings. These insights suggest that school leaders may improve attendance by creating intentional opportunities for socialization, both in and beyond the classroom, through clubs, team-based learning, and structured community-building events.

### ***School Climate***

Sorrenti et al. (2025) found that students who perceive their educational climate as unsupportive, as characterized by overly strict or competitive teachers, experience increased school anxiety, interpersonal discomfort, and emotional distress that often manifests in absenteeism. In contrast, **students who feel connected to their teachers and peers, and who perceive school as responsive to their developmental needs, are less likely to engage in school-avoidant behaviors.** These findings suggest that teacher–student relationships and classroom climate can either buffer against or exacerbate school avoidance, depending on how well students' needs for belonging and emotional safety are met.

In a large-scale analysis of student responses to the nation's largest school climate survey, Hamlin (2021) finds that associations between perceived school climate and attendance are statistically significant but small. At the individual level, student **perceptions of safety and academic engagement were correlated with slightly fewer total and chronic absences.** At the school level, increased perceptions of school safety from eighth to ninth grade were linked with marginal reductions in absenteeism, while decreases in perceived safety, connectedness, and academic engagement were associated with minor increases in absences. While these effects are directionally aligned with other research, Hamlin's findings suggest that improvements to school climate alone are unlikely to drive substantial changes in chronic absenteeism without complementary supports and interventions.

### ***Holistic Models for Cultivating School Connectedness***

Balfanz (2023) proposes a systemic approach to fostering school connectedness, calling for integrated student support systems that go beyond isolated strategies. In a case study of effective schools, Balfanz documents efforts to consolidate traditionally separate initiatives, such as Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS), and attendance or dropout prevention teams, into a single, holistic model. These integrated systems center on building relationships, promoting extracurricular participation, and addressing students' multifaceted needs in a streamlined way. Notably, Balfanz emphasizes that such systems do not require extensive funding, making them accessible to both large and small schools. The success of these models lies not in the individual programs themselves, but in how effectively they are integrated to provide a cohesive climate of support.

### ***Alternative Models and Real-World Learning***

The importance of student engagement with meaningful, real-world learning is further highlighted in Vail's (2024) study of the Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center (the Met) in Rhode Island. Schools in the Big Picture Learning network, like the Met, operate on a model that deeply integrates interest-based learning and internships. Students spend two days per week exploring their personal passions in professional contexts. This model reframes school as a welcoming, purposeful space for adolescent identity formation and goal-setting. Vail argues that chronic absenteeism often signals a lack of engagement and perceived relevance in traditional schooling. In response, schools that offer personalized learning experiences grounded in students' interests may foster deeper connections and, by extension, improved attendance.

### ***Expanding MTSS to Address Chronic Absenteeism***

One of the most consistently supported recommendations in the literature is the expansion of existing multitiered systems of support (MTSS) to directly target chronic absenteeism. MTSS offers a flexible and scalable framework that many schools already use to address academic and behavioral needs, making it a **natural structure within which attendance concerns can also be embedded** (Nairn, 2022; Kearney & Graczyk, 2020). As Fernandes et al. (2024) note, MTSS strategies can be tailored by intensity and aligned with student need, making the framework particularly useful for addressing the multifaceted causes of school refusal and absenteeism.

At Tier 1, school-wide strategies can promote a culture of attendance through universal supports such as school climate initiatives (Cemalcilar, 2010), implementation of social-emotional learning programs (Durlak et al., 2011), and staff training in trauma-informed practices and mental health literacy (Conroy et al., 2022; Devenney & O'Toole, 2021). Tier 2 interventions involve **early, targeted supports for students beginning to exhibit attendance concerns** and often include the student and family (Nairn, 2022). Tier 3 offers intensive, individualized interventions that require collaboration among school personnel, families, and outside agencies (Kearney & Graczyk, 2020).

Bundshuh et al. (2021) examined the implementation of a school-based attendance initiative within an MTSS-aligned framework. Their study highlighted multiple strategies that align with Tier 1 and Tier 2 interventions, including regular monitoring of absences, building positive relationships with students and families, clearly communicating attendance policies, offering mentorship, and providing family supports. One of the outlier supports that the high school of investigation used was the implementation of an Attendance Dean to oversee the program. The program emphasized both supportive and accountability-driven components: schools were required to contact homes for each unexcused or unexplained absence, track attendance patterns for students with 5–10 unexcused absences in a month, and intervene early using a mix of mentoring, resource referral, and, when necessary, disciplinary consequences.

Similarly, Lavigne et al. (2021) explored how the Providence Public School District operationalized attendance supports within an MTSS framework through the creation of attendance teams: groups comprising school staff and administrators who analyze attendance data, identify chronically absent students, and coordinate tailored interventions. Their approach leveraged partnerships with community organizations (e.g., City Year, Inspiring Minds) to bolster student supports. Components of this system included mentorship programs, nudge letters sent to families after five unexcused absences as mandated by district policy, and multilingual parent engagement specialists dedicated to building relationships between families and schools. Schools also utilized both automated robo-calls and personalized outreach to maintain consistent communication with caregivers. The results of this study emphasized the **importance of identifying barriers to high fidelity implementation and providing clear guidance** to increase their effectiveness.

Evidence suggests that past **practices focused only on individual students or isolated risk factors have limited effectiveness** (Eklund et al., 2020; Kiani et al., 2018). Instead, MTSS allows for a more holistic and blended approach that integrates academic, social, behavioral, and attendance-related supports. This might involve expanding the roles of mentors to include attendance discussions, embedding attendance into school communication systems and behavioral assessments, or including attendance tracking in broader school mental health efforts (Kearney & Graczyk, 2020).

Crucially, successful implementation of an MTSS approach to absenteeism **depends on consistent data use, incremental rollout, and a shared commitment across schools and districts**. As Kearney and colleagues (2020) suggest, school teams might begin by reviewing early indicators such as tardiness or declining grades to proactively address attendance concerns. Broad buy-in and inter-agency collaboration are essential to ensure that schools can sustainably extend MTSS to meet this growing challenge.

### **Macro-Level Interventions to Address Chronic Absenteeism**

Research on chronic absenteeism increasingly emphasizes the importance of addressing not just in-school factors but also broader conditions that affect student attendance. These macro-level strategies address systemic and structural conditions that shape attendance patterns across districts and states by removing large-scale barriers and creating equitable conditions for engagement. Policy and practice innovations illustrate important distinctions: **structural and systemic changes** such as expanding transportation access (Edwards, 2023) and embedding health and family supports (Covelli et al., 2025) **tend to show the strongest and most sustained effects on both attendance and achievement**. In contrast, lighter-touch strategies like adaptive text messaging to parents often increase attendance modestly but generate small or null effects on test scores (Heppen et al., 2020). Several of these “macro” or district- and state-level interventions have shown promise in reducing chronic absenteeism by altering structural, policy, and economic conditions that impact student engagement. These interventions highlight the importance of coordinated policy decisions that can either exacerbate or alleviate barriers to consistent school attendance.

### ***Addressing Transportation Barriers***

One of the most consistent structural barriers to student attendance, particularly for low-income families, is access to reliable transportation. School districts that take intentional steps to mitigate transportation challenges may see measurable improvements in attendance, especially among economically vulnerable populations. Recent research has examined both the positive effects of school-provided transportation and the unintended consequences of restrictive or underfunded transportation policies.

In a large-scale quantitative analysis, Edwards (2023) finds that **eligibility for school bus transportation significantly reduces the likelihood of chronic absenteeism, particularly for students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds**. The study uses an intent-to-treat (ITT) approach, measuring the effect of being eligible for bus transportation regardless of whether the student actually used the service. The findings show that simply being eligible for school-provided busing decreases the probability of chronic absenteeism by up to four percentage points for low-income students. This suggests that school buses act as a crucial equalizer, especially for students whose families might lack flexible work schedules, reliable vehicles, or alternative means of transport. Edwards concludes that transportation supports can counteract the challenges posed by distance to school, ultimately improving educational access for the most vulnerable student populations.

In contrast, Garcia Munoz and Sandoval (2022) investigate how transportation policy shifts can inadvertently harm school attendance. Their analysis focuses on changes in public school transportation services and policies in Leon County, Florida, and finds that high schools and schools with higher percentages of students of color and those eligible for free and reduced-price lunch experienced more pronounced declines in attendance following transportation modifications. Interestingly, the authors clarify that these attendance declines were not directly caused by reductions in the number of yellow school buses or overall transportation expenditures. Instead, the **negative effects appear to stem from logistical complexities, policy enforcement issues, and inequities in access created by subtle but impactful changes, such as limited bus route availability or unclear restrictions on fare-free student transportation** during school hours. For example, enforcing restrictions on which routes students may use, or attempting to coordinate bus access across varying school start and end times, proved both impractical and potentially harmful to students who faced long or complicated commutes.

### ***District and Statewide Messaging Campaigns***

Several studies have explored the role of family engagement and direct communication with parents or caregivers as an intervention strategy to reduce chronic absenteeism. At a macro level, this often involves school districts adopting **systematized messaging campaigns that aim to raise awareness among parents** about the extent and impact of their child's absences.

Robinson et al. (2018), for example, examined a large-scale randomized controlled trial across multiple districts in which parents received mailed messages informing them of how many days

their child had missed relative to their peers. **This "social norm" messaging approach led to modest but statistically significant reductions in absenteeism**, particularly among students with previously high rates of absenteeism. The intervention was low-cost and scalable, which makes it an appealing option for districts seeking interventions that do not require major financial investments or staffing changes.

In a similar vein, Heppen et al. (2020) evaluated a district-level intervention designed to influence what the researchers termed "malleable behaviors" among families, namely those daily routines and choices that might impact whether a student gets to school on time or at all. Their study examined the framing of messages sent to caregivers and found that districts could use either positive or negative rhetoric to encourage behavior change. Some messages emphasized the benefits of improved attendance ("Your child will have better academic outcomes with regular attendance"), while others warned about the consequences of continued absenteeism ("Missing school now puts your child at risk of falling behind"). Additionally, the intervention offered "helpful tips" for parents, such as strategies to get their child up and out the door in the morning.

While the intention was to be supportive and motivational, the tone of many of these messages has raised questions among educators and researchers about the potential for condescension or blame. Although such interventions may demonstrate marginal gains, they also risk alienating families if the messaging does not account for the structural barriers many face, including housing instability, transportation challenges, or caretaking responsibilities. **As with other interventions aimed at caregiver behavior, cultural responsiveness and sensitivity to context remain critical.**

The research on caregiver messaging suggests that while this is a relatively low-cost, scalable strategy with some positive outcomes, its effectiveness may depend heavily on how messages are framed, delivered, and interpreted by families, especially those already under considerable stress.

### ***School Stability and the Power of Familiar Faces***

Recent research also suggests that maintaining school stability and resisting unnecessary student redistributions can positively impact attendance. Kirksey and Elefante (2024) identify the presence of "familiar faces" (i.e., students and teachers who persist over time within the same educational environment) as a strong predictor of reduced absenteeism. Their study finds **a stronger correlation between familiar faces and reduced unexcused absences** compared to excused absences, suggesting that social cohesion and connectedness may be key factors in whether students choose to attend school. These findings emphasize the value of continuity in school staffing and student placement and caution against disruptive practices like redistricting or frequent reassignment, which can erode relational trust and school connectedness.

### ***Flexible and Resilient Learning Environments***

Sullivan and Morris (2024) explore how the COVID-19 pandemic's forced shift to remote learning revealed the potential of flexible learning models to accommodate students with irregular attendance patterns. Their research argues for the institutionalization of hybrid and virtual learning environments that are not merely reactive but are strategically designed for flexibility and resilience. They suggest that districts should develop clear guidelines for virtual instruction, provide professional development for teachers, and implement structured systems of support for students learning in these environments. Crucially, they recommend that districts communicate clear expectations and accountability measures to families, which can enhance student participation. These flexible options may not only serve students during public health emergencies but could also offer a longer-term solution for students who struggle with traditional in-person attendance.

### ***Community Schools as a Macro-Level Strategy***

An increasingly prominent macro-level intervention to combat chronic absenteeism is the implementation of community schools, especially in regions facing persistent structural disadvantage. Community schools are public schools that partner with local organizations to provide integrated student supports such as health services, expanded learning opportunities, family engagement, and social services that are tailored to the needs of the surrounding community. By design, they **aim to mitigate the external factors that often prevent regular attendance, including poverty, housing instability, health disparities, and intergenerational trauma**. As the following studies illustrate, however, the success of community schools hinges on sustained investment, strategic partnership-building, and careful consideration of local context.

In a robust longitudinal study, Covelli et al. (2025) evaluated the New York City Community Schools Renewal Strategy (NYC-CS/RS) and found compelling evidence of the model's effectiveness in reducing chronic absenteeism. Their analysis revealed an immediate reduction in chronic absenteeism among elementary and middle school students by 5.6 percentage points in the first year of implementation (2015–2016). These **reductions in chronic academic were not only statistically significant but also sustained over time**, with a decrease of 11.4 percentage points by the third year before leveling off at 8.0 percentage points in the fourth year. These gains in attendance were accompanied by improvements in overall attendance rates (1–2 percentage points each year), indicating that community schools may contribute to a long-term cultural shift around attendance. However, Covelli et al. caution that realizing the academic benefits of full-service community schools **takes time and demands sustained commitment, resources, and evaluation**.

Germain et al. (2024) further illuminate how community schools act as connective tissue between students' in-school and out-of-school lives. In a cross-site qualitative study of community schools in New Mexico, Germain and colleagues observed that school leaders and coordinators intentionally strengthened the local social safety net to address non-academic barriers to attendance through on-site food distributions, clothing and supply supports, and legal aid. At Los Padillas Elementary, where many students are being raised by grandparents, the school partnered with the University of New Mexico to provide legal services for grandparent

caregivers who lacked formal guardianship, helping families understand their rights and access benefits and school resources. Importantly, these **whole-child supports and relationship-building strategies coincided with a substantial reduction in chronic absenteeism at Los Padillas elementary, which fell from a peak of 65.5% (2021–22) to 31.3% (2023–24).**

In addition to wraparound supports, Germain (2024) documents how community schools often reframe curriculum and culture to foster deeper engagement and belonging through culturally relevant instruction, enrichment, and community-connected learning. These shifts appear to matter for attendance because they rebuild trust with families and strengthen school climate, which the attendance literature consistently links to improved student participation in school. At the same time, Germain and colleagues underscore sustainability constraints: community school implementation depends on stable funding for coordination and integrated supports, and state-level funding variability can destabilize implementation if districts cannot reliably backfill reductions.

Maier (2024) also highlights evidence of district wide impacts in Peñasco Independent School District, where community school implementation is associated with measurable improvement in chronic absenteeism and school climate. **District chronic absenteeism decreased from 45% (2021–22) to 31.6% (2022–23), a 13.6 percentage point drop, outpacing the statewide reduction over the same period (about 1.5 percentage points).** Peñasco High School also moved away from exclusionary disciplinary practices, resulting in fewer than five out-of-school suspensions in the 2023–24 school year. Meanwhile, Peñasco Elementary reported marked gains in student-reported school climate, with more students saying they liked school and had strong peer relationships, two critical indicators linked to regular attendance in the broader absenteeism literature.

### ***Economic Interventions and Family Financial Stability***

Addressing the root causes of absenteeism also requires attention to family financial stability. McDaniel et al. (2020) point to the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) as an example of an economic policy that, while not education-specific, has demonstrated indirect educational benefits. Their work highlights that financial hardship can diminish parents' capacity to engage with their children's education, including monitoring school attendance. The EITC, currently the largest anti-poverty program in the United States, has been linked to reductions in childhood poverty and improvements in student achievement. States that offer higher EITC matches see even greater benefits. McDaniel et al. advocate for increasing state-level EITC percentages, noting that in Illinois, for example, the state match lags significantly behind that of states like California. By reducing economic stress, such measures could also improve school attendance, particularly in communities where poverty is a major barrier to consistent engagement.

### **Practices That Undermine Attendance Efforts**

The research also highlights the limits and pitfalls of these micro- and macro-level attendance interventions, namely an over-reliance on climate and relationships as a singular lever, implementation that is shallow or fragmented, and structural reforms that are disconnected from

local context. Addressing chronic absenteeism effectively requires aligning relational work with material supports, investing in the capacity to implement multi-component strategies well, and designing policy changes with careful attention to potential unintended consequences.

### ***When Relationship-Building Backfires***

While many studies affirm the significance of school connectedness, relationship-building, and caregiver communications, Stokes et al. (2024) found that families of chronically absent students often view these efforts with skepticism or even resentment. Many **caregivers viewed repeated phone calls and home visits as forms of harassment rather than meaningful engagement**. Moreover, families overwhelmingly identified systemic issue such as transportation, health barriers, neighborhood safety, as the primary obstacles to regular attendance. Stokes et al. warn that when schools interpret absenteeism primarily as a matter of caregiver motivation or weak relational ties, they **risk overlooking structural conditions that cannot be addressed through connection alone**. This study also exposes contradictions in how school staff perceive relationship-building: while some staff embraced the language of care and connection, they simultaneously attributed absenteeism to caregiver apathy, reflecting a lack of authentic trust. The authors suggest reframing relationship-building not as a standalone intervention, but as a means of uncovering and responding to broader barriers to attendance, whether economic, social, or logistical.

### ***The Problem of Shallow Implementation***

Several studies in this review highlight that relatively low-cost “light-touch” interventions, such as generic nudge letters, automated calls, and mass text blasts, are often implemented with higher fidelity than more intensive supports, yet these **low-lift communications and messaging campaigns have limited impact when used in isolation**. In a multi-school study of attendance supports in Providence, Lavigne et al. (2021) find that reminder letters, phone calls, and basic texting platforms are widely adopted, but higher-lift strategies like multi-stakeholder attendance teams, data-driven problem solving, and coordinated case management are unevenly implemented and more likely to falter in secondary schools. The **lack of staffing, time, and clear role definitions needed to sustain more intensive practices blunts the potential of otherwise promising approaches**. Related work on student success systems also cautions that fragmented initiatives organized around narrow issues (for example, separate meetings for behavior, academics, attendance, and dropout) can dilute impact, whereas integrated systems that look holistically at students’ needs are more likely to produce meaningful improvements (Balfanz, 2023). Collectively, these findings suggest that without adequate human and financial resources, clear structures, and integrated planning, schools may default to lower-touch communications that **raise awareness but do little to change underlying conditions** driving chronic absence.

### ***Unintended Consequences of Structural Reforms***

The literature also provides evidence that well-intentioned structural or policy changes can inadvertently worsen attendance or fail to improve it. The study by Garcia Munoz and Sandoval

(2022) highlights transportation's importance but also the unintended consequences of **policies without complementary safeguards or coordination** with school schedules. Similarly, a quasi-experimental study of truancy diversion programs finds no long-term improvements in attendance relative to students in a neighboring county, despite these programs being framed as less punitive alternatives to juvenile court (McNeely et al., 2019), suggesting that as long as truancy is defined as a status offense, justice-based responses may be constrained in their ability to address non-legal drivers of absenteeism. Research on turnaround school reform echoes these concerns, with Pham et al. (2025) finding that sweeping, high-intensity turnaround models yield at best modest, nonpersisting gains in attendance once students leave the targeted schools, indicating that **structural overhauls can redirect effort and resources without addressing underlying drivers of disengagement**. Together, these studies underscore that even non-punitive or structurally oriented reforms can thwart progress when they are not theory-driven, contextually tailored, or coupled with attention to students' and families' day-to-day realities.

### Implications & Takeaways

One effect that this literature review may have on district and school policies going forward is the depiction of the ineffectiveness of certain "common sense" interventions. Through the investigation of differing empirical studies of similar interventions, we have been able to understand in a more comprehensive way strategies that seem, at first glance, to be straightforward. For example, the idea of fare-free bussing was found to have a negative impact in the study done by Garcia Munoz and Sandoval (2022) and begs the question of implementation specifics.

Through the systematic review presented here, we are able to infer three possible problems with absenteeism intervention implementation:

- 1) when programs are implemented without having consulted empirically studied protocols, they may have less efficacy regardless of a school's good intentions
- 2) when programs are implemented and there is no system in place to track the efficacy of interventions, non-effective programs may continue over a number of years and this can lead to a misunderstanding of root causes; and,
- 3) interventions ought to be implemented based on data-driven decision-making in order for the allocation of public funds to be considered ethical. Without the review of empirical evidence to this effect, even the most well-intentioned interventions could be considered in violation of public trust.

Furthermore, this literature review contributes to the ongoing conversation around interventions to mitigate chronic absenteeism in an important way: by investigating the causes and interventions and presenting them in accordance with their status as either "macro" or "micro," this review dispels the notion that individual solutions can fix systemic issues. Indeed, one educator, one school, one district can implement interventions and strategies in order to affect that which is within their sphere of influence, but to place the burden of alleviating that which is outside said sphere of influence on the individual is to gravely misplace responsibility. This

misplacement can actually lead to higher levels of helplessness and hopelessness in the face of “macro” concerns. The Bellows (2021) study on the effort of 287(g) partnerships on the absenteeism rates for latinx students provides a clear and useful example of a macro level decisions wherein the institution (in this case, the state government agency) does not have a shared vision with the individual LEAs for supporting students, and therefore the LEAs have a cause for absenteeism that is outside their sphere of influence to solve. As Lavigne et al. (2021) point out aptly, there needs to be a certain level of buy-in and fidelity to any program or intervention strategy in order to see positive returns, and there needs to be a level of institutional and systemic support in the form of resources such as capital, time, personnel, and a shared vision.

Thus, the recommendations here are twofold. First, in the “macro” sense, **state policymakers should consider moving beyond punitive truancy frameworks and instead investing in empirically valid whole-child supports**, including attendance-focused staff like social workers and success coaches, the strategic use of attendance data as a support tool, and the integration of chronic absenteeism metrics into ESSA school improvement plans and funding decisions. A logical next step and recommendation of this literature review the support of schools through additional funding for attendance related personnel or resources (Bundshuh et al., 2021) with the goal of expanding school MTSS team capacity to address chronic absenteeism (Kearney et al., 2020).

Second, the “micro” level recommendations of this review are less straightforward; that is, **individual schools and districts should undergo the process of self-study to identify and select among empirically investigated interventions that can be feasibly implemented through the (re)allocation of resources and efforts by educators**. The development of a deep understanding behind student chronic absenteeism that utilizes both qualitative and quantitative data points to isolate why school absenteeism is manifesting (i.e. Gallé-Tessonneau and Heyne’s (2020) inventory) is a necessary first step, to be followed by collaborative engagement toward solutions only for those causes within the individual entity’s control.

To that end, researchers from this team intend to craft a mixed methods study that leverages the Positive Deviance (+Dev) framework (March et al., 2004) in order to capitalize on the uncommon, effective, and replicable interventions being implemented in “bright spot” schools across NC. By creating like-school cohorts and identifying strategies being used to reduce chronic absenteeism, we will develop professional development that considers contextual and mediating factors and makes appropriate recommendations. Through a collaboration that capitalizes on a researcher-practitioner partnership, this study will serve to extend NCDPI’s shared vision into the individual schools and classrooms that need these unique practices and support structures the very most. Because +Dev empowers those closest to the problem, it simultaneously builds local capacity, shifts narratives from deficits to assets, and transforms seemingly intractable problems into opportunities for improvement.

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