

Improving Attendance in a Remote Learning Environment

The purpose of this brief is to adapt the suggestions and strategies provided in [Improving Attendance and Reducing Chronic Absenteeism](#) to guide practice during remote instruction. Strategies from both briefs will be helpful during hybrid instructional models.

Attendance Policy

In the current context barriers to student attendance and engagement have only increased. Schools and districts are encouraged to emphasize a supportive multi-tiered model for supporting student and staff engagement and attendance rather than punitive attendance or truancy policies. Leadership teams will need to be aware of and adjust policy and practice in response to local trends related to infection rates, food insecurity, and homelessness.

Measuring Attendance and Engagement

Attendance can be difficult to monitor during remote instruction, but understanding the level of student engagement is just as important. Rather than just counting students who are physically in class, consider monitoring engagement with both synchronous and asynchronous instructional opportunities. For both synchronous and asynchronous learning consider monitoring multiple dimensions of engagement including overall time engaged, % of contact opportunities, product completion, progress toward learning outcomes, and person or role engaged with (e.g., teacher, paraprofessional, social worker, etc.)

| Synchronous Learning | Asynchronous Learning |
|--|---|
| Take attendance during each online activity or class throughout the day | Use software tracking tools to record the number and percent of students logging in to each instructional opportunity |
| Record the number and percent of synchronous assignments or activities completed | Record the number and percent of asynchronous assignments completed and turned in |

Then just as with in person instruction, monitor the number and percent of students in each of the following categories:

- **Regular attendees** (miss less than 5% of instructional opportunities),
- **At risk** (miss 5%-9% of instructional opportunities),
- **Chronically absent** (miss 10% or more of instructional opportunities), and
- **Severely chronically absent** (miss 20% or more of instructional opportunities)

When reviewing attendance data consider examining the following attendance trends across:

- Days or weeks
- Class periods or times during the day
- Subject area
- Types of activities (e.g., synchronous whole class meetings, asynchronous activities)

Reasons for Low Engagement in Remote Learning Opportunities

Understanding the reasons students may not be engaging in instructional opportunities can help leadership teams problem solve and address issues more efficiently. In general, students who do not attend school fall into three categories (Balfanz &Byrnew, 2012). These categories can be helpful to consider when reviewing remote attendance as well.

- Students who **cannot** engage in instructional opportunities due to a lack of an available device, no or limited internet access, illness or family member illness, or other family obligations.
- Students who **will not** engage in instructional opportunities to avoid aversive situations, for example, online bullying, discomfort in online platform, or instruction or activities that are too difficult in the absence of in-person support.
- Students who **do not** engage in instructional opportunities because remote learning activities are not sufficiently engaging or reinforcing or competing activities are more reinforcing. For example, online instruction may provide fewer opportunities for students to respond, involve less peer or teacher interaction, be ungraded or not required, and/or other activities (access to video games etc.) may be more reinforcing.

Each type of problem requires a different type of intervention and involves different influencing contexts. Just as with addressing in person attendance issues, supporting student engagement in remote learning will require collaboration and cooperation across schools, families, and community organizations.

| Unique factors contributing to engagement in remote learning | Possible Influencing Contexts | | |
|---|-------------------------------|--------|-----------|
| | School | Family | Community |
| Remote learning platforms that are accessible across a variety of devices | * | | |
| Parent and student training and support to access remote learning platform | * | | |
| Engaging remote instruction (e.g., fast-paced delivery, visuals) | * | | |
| Variety of activities and ways to participate in remote instruction | * | | |
| Routines to support remote attendance (e.g., regular class times, quiet work space) | * | * | |
| Reliable internet access | * | * | * |
| Access to computer or other learning device | * | * | |
| Warm welcoming interactions between instructors and students | * | | |

Addressing the Problem Remotely

In collaboration with members of the MTSS leadership team, consider the following modifications to practices that support in person attendance:

- Focus on building and re-establishing teacher-student and peer relationships especially for at risk students and freshmen.
 - [Cultivating Positive Student-Teacher Relationships](#)
 - [Academic Seminar and Freshman Success](#)
- Modify formal and informal mentoring programs to function in a remote environment
 - [Strategies for Connecting with Students and Families](#)
 - [Adapting Check in Check Out for Distance Learning](#)
- Provide direct instruction on skills related to engagement in the online environment with students and families. For example, directly teach and practice accessing and navigating online learning platforms, accessing support, strategies for scheduling and managing multiple responsibilities.
 - [Creating a PBIS Behavior Teaching Matrix for Remote Instruction](#)
- Provide acknowledgement for engagement in remote learning opportunities. Let students know being there matters and follow up with students who do not engage or miss assignments.
 - [NTACT WEBINAR](#)
 - [Postcard example](#)
- Provide frequent opportunities for student engagement including opportunities for them to provide feedback and make choices.
 - [Engaging Instruction to Increase Equity in Education](#)
 - [High School PBIS Implementation: Student Voice](#)
- Provide relevant academic remediation supports using individualized learning platforms and small groups.
 - [Features of Explicit Instruction](#)
- Provide support for families including specific training for families related to expectations and routines for online learning and, collaborate to provide school/home behavior support
 - [Supporting Families with PBIS at Home Practice Brief](#)
 - [IRIS MODULE](#)
- Provide and promote access to mental health supports including substance abuse supports. Acknowledge the increased stress and impacts on both student and teacher wellness. Proactively teach self-awareness and self-management skills and regularly screen for student or staff concerns
 - [Opioid Crisis and Substance Misuse](#)
 - [Mental Health/ Social-Emotional well-being](#)
- Provide consistent school, home, and community messaging and effective supports for physical health.
 - [Returning to School During and After Crisis](#)

After selecting practices that (a) maximize your ability to set students, families, and educators up for success in remote learning and (b) match the challenges you have identified with attendance, leverage your MTSS framework to more fully develop or adapt your continuum of practices to pro-actively support active student engagement during remote learning. As the problem intensifies, the alignment between the reason for low engagement and the specific features of the selected intervention or practice must become more precise and specific. Also, once key practices are identified, consider systems needed to support successful implementation over time (e.g., training and coaching for staff, stakeholder engagement, fidelity monitoring), and examine the impact of these strategies on the rates of attendance and engagement in remote learning.

Adapting Supports

Just as with in person attendance supports, strategies to support engagement for younger students should focus on family supports and communication, while those supporting older students can focus on direct student engagement strategies, skill building, and peer leadership opportunities. Additionally, supports will need to be adjusted based on the unique features of the remote learning environment such as number of teachers each student engages with, number of days per week students are expected to engage.

Case Example

Southbridge High School improved average daily attendance across both in person and remote learning modes by implementing universal, targeted, and individualized attendance strategies as a part of their overall PBIS framework. Specifically, remote daily attendance for hybrid students increased from 74.3% to 78.2%, and the total average daily attendance increased from 81.4% to 82.4% between November 2, 2020 and December 7, 2020. This increase in attendance at the high school occurred despite a slight decline in district wide attendance during the same time period. Southbridge High School has implemented Tier 1 PBIS with fidelity (TFI 77%) and is in the process of planning and implementing advanced tiers. They are currently offering both hybrid and fully remote learning modes due to the pandemic. In response to low attendance rates this fall they implemented the following practices in addition to their universal PBIS practices.

Universal:

Daily attendance reports are texted (via google) to families and students. Beginning in November, the climate and culture team started calling students who were not logging into their remote classrooms. Team members pulled attendance reports 15 mins after the start of each class and made phone calls to students who were not in attendance. To ensure adequate support for this practice, administrators reassigned some teacher duties to support this task. As of Dec 22, 2020, team members had made 1433 student calls and reached 614 students or family members, and 512 students responded to the call by logging in to class. The family liaison supported this effort by creating a student phone number data base to facilitate easy teacher access to this information.

Targeted:

Administrators gave teachers dedicated time during staff meetings to contact students who had (a) not engaged in school activities since the start of the school year or (b) started the year, but had since become truant. During the first one-hour staff meeting, teachers made calls to students who had not engaged in school at all this year. During the second one-hour staff meeting, teachers called students who had discontinued attending school. These calls provided an opportunity for the teachers to connect with each student, problem solve challenges with logging in to school, and encourage engagement. The vast majority (90%) of teachers reported that new students logged in following these calls. Additionally, staff made 154 home visits to drop off technology or curriculum supplies and encourage attendance.

Individual:

For students needing additional support, the family liaison conducted individualized virtual student attendance meetings. Team members crafted individual plans to meet the needs of each student. For most students, this included a shift from full remote to hybrid attendance. Through this process, team members also identified three students who were homeless and provided additional supports (e.g., housing assistance, district supplied hot spots for wifi access, and connections with mental health staff). These three students are now attending regularly.

Thus, by organizing supports within the MTSS framework, Southbridge was able to (a) increase engagement for all students with simple strategies (Tier 1), (b) connect with a targeted group of students who had not engaged (Tier 2), (c) identify students who needed further support, and (d) develop individualized plans to increase engagement for students with more intensive needs (Tier 3). Their data demonstrate that these strategies are necessary, feasible, and potentially effective ways to support students in a high-needs district during remote, hybrid, and in-person learning contexts.

This document was supported from funds provided by the Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports cooperative grant supported by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) and Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE) of the U.S. Department of Education (H326S180001). Dr. Renee Bradley serves as the project officer. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the positions or policies of the U.S. Department of Education. No official endorsement by the U.S. Department of Education of any product, commodity, or enterprise mentioned in this document is intended or should be inferred.

Suggested Citation for this Publication

Freeman, J., Flannery, B., Sugai, G., Goodman, S., Simonsen, B., & Barrett, S. (Aug, 2020; Revised, Jan 2021). Improving Attendance in a Remote Learning Environment. Eugene, OR: Center on PBIS, University of Oregon. www.pbis.org.