CCNETWORK Regional Comprehensive Center Northwest

Improving attendance among multilingual students

Multilingual students identified as English learners bring valuable personal, linguistic, and cultural assets that can support academic success. The achievements of former English learners demonstrate these strengths.[1] However, educators may find it difficult to identify evidence-based instructional practices and programs that build on these assets. The Northwest Comprehensive Center created this resource to help Oregon district leaders and educators identify practices and programs that improve school attendance among multilingual (ML) students. This resource identifies four strategies:

1. Increase communication with families via personalized and automated messages to parents and caregivers
2. Strengthen school-family partnerships through parent-teacher home visits
3. Address students' holistic needs through caseworkers and support from counselors
4. Recruit teachers who reflect the racial, ethnic, and language diversity of students

For each strategy we address the estimated implementation time, the most appropriate settings and student populations, how to get started, and where you can learn more. Not every strategy will be practical or appropriate for every district or school.

These strategies are supported by rigorous research that is aligned with Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) tiers of evidence. We identify one strategy with **STRONG EVIDENCE,** including findings from at least one randomized controlled trial study and multiple correlational studies. We also identify strategies with **ML EVIDENCE,** showing positive effects for students classified as English learners. A database of the research is available.

These strategies are not necessarily the most effective ways to improve student outcomes overall. Student attendance is influenced by many factors. These strategies focus on what districts and schools can do to support attendance for ML students.

The Oregon Department of Education's Multilingual Learner Strategic Plan identifies four priority areas to support English learner students and families:

- **Authentic and responsive community engagement and partnerships**
- **Transformative educators and administrators**
- **Systems, instruction, and assessment improvements**
- **Pathways to multilingualism**

Throughout this brief, we use icons to identify the intersection between each strategy and the four priorities.

Family engagement strategies to improve attendance

Estimated implementation time: 1–2 years



Strategy 1. Increase communication with families via personalized and automated messages to parents and caregivers STRONG EVIDENCE | ML EVIDENCE

Strategy 2. Strengthen family engagement through parent-teacher home visits ML EVIDENCE

Most appropriate settings and student populations. Family engagement plays an important role in supporting regular school attendance.[2] Research shows that personalized mail and text messages can improve attendance, especially for elementary school students.[3] Communication should be provided in families' home language and explain why daily attendance matters. They should also include personalized information about the student's attendance, such as number of days the student has missed in this school year in a way that recognizes the student's assets and encourages regular attendance. One study found larger attendance improvements among ML students and students from low-income backgrounds.[4] Parent-teacher home visits are another strategy that can reduce chronic absenteeism.[5] Teachers receive training and visit families at home to build trust and learn about family goals.

How to get started

Establishing a communication system, either automated text messages or physical mailers, is relatively easy and cost effective for a school district to set up. For parent teacher home visits, educators benefit from professional development and ongoing support to implement this strategy. Districts can offer professional development and stipends for teachers to conduct home visits.

Learn more

Improving Attendance with Personalized Messages

Parent Teacher Home Visits

School-based supports to improve attendance

Estimated implementation time: 2–3 years



Strategy 3. Address students' holistic needs through caseworkers and support from counselors ML EVIDENCE

Most appropriate settings and student populations. Lack of access to basic needs such as transportation, housing, and food can contribute to absenteeism. School-based caseworkers[6] and counselors[7] can improve attendance by working with students and families to identify and address barriers to attendance and connect them to supports. These efforts can improve attendance for individual students and across the school.

How to get started

Districts can partner with community-based organizations to provide effective and appropriate case management for students and families. In addition, to improve student-to-counselor ratios and allow counselors to effectively support students, districts can increase the number of school counselors and prioritize funding for doing so.

Learn more

Michigan's Pathways to Potential Program

School Counselor Shortages (see mitigation strategies)

Staffing changes to improve attendance

Estimated implementation time: 3-plus years



Strategy 4. Recruit teachers who reflect the racial, ethnic, and language diversity of students

Most appropriate settings and student populations. All students benefit from a teacher workforce that reflects the racial, ethnic, and language diversity of the communities it serves.[8] Research suggests that these benefits are most pronounced for students of color.[9] When students have teachers who share their racial or ethnic background, they tend to have fewer unexcused absences. One study found the strongest effects among Latinx students[10] in grades 11 and 12. Multiple studies show the positive effect that student-teacher demographic matches have on attendance.[11]

How to get started

Districts can explore Grow Your Own, teacher residency, and other models for increasing diversity among educators. To promote retention, districts and states can provide effective and appropriate support and improve conditions for teachers of color.

Learn more

Diversifying the Teacher Workforce: Research and Strategies

Endnotes

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