



Viewpoints

Creative Solutions to Address Chronic Absenteeism in School

Chronic absenteeism in schools is a multifaceted issue that requires innovative and comprehensive solutions. Traditional approaches, such as punitive measures and superficial engagement tactics, have proven insufficient in addressing the root causes of absenteeism. Thought leaders in education advocate for a holistic approach that considers the diverse factors influencing student attendance, including socio-economic challenges, mental health issues, and family dynamics. By fostering a supportive school environment that prioritizes student well-being, educators can create conditions that encourage regular attendance. This involves integrating mental health services, providing access to basic needs like food and clothing, and implementing flexible learning schedules that accommodate students' individual circumstances.

Moreover, leveraging technology and community partnerships can significantly enhance efforts to combat chronic absenteeism. Schools can utilize data analytics to identify patterns and predict at-risk students, allowing for timely and targeted interventions. Partnering with local organizations and businesses can provide additional resources and support systems for students and their families. For instance, community mentorship programs can offer guidance and motivation, while local businesses might contribute to initiatives aimed at reducing barriers to attendance, such as transportation and after-school care. By embracing creative, data-driven, and community-centered strategies, educators and thought leaders can work towards sustainable solutions that not only improve attendance rates but also foster a culture of inclusivity and support within the school system.

When students didn't come back to Maple Elementary after COVID-19 restrictions were lifted, Niki Espinoza, the school's community school coordinator, noticed right away. "I live in the Shafter community... I see these children out with their parents in the market, at recreational sports, games, at high school sports games and out at restaurants," she said, emphasizing that the school community is small and close-knit. Situated in a rural district in California with nearly 300 students, Maple Elementary faced the concerning reality that nearly a third of their students were becoming chronically absent.



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Chronic absenteeism, defined as students missing 10% or more of the school year, has long been a concern for educators, but the challenges worsened during the pandemic. Stanford economist Tom Dee's research revealed that chronic absenteeism rates across the country nearly doubled on average.

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