allhere

Every student, every day, on track for success.

Equity as an Essential Component to Attendance and Enrollment Recovery Programs

Ensuring Your Initiatives Meet the Needs of Students With Unique Challenges

A Sobering Picture from Our Classrooms

Because rates of chronic absenteeism correlate to school dropout rates, educators are very uneasy about the most recent attendance reports. The number of families who said their child was on track to be chronically absent from middle or high school in late 2021 were nearly three times higher than before the pandemic, at 22%, compared to 8% in the spring of 2020.

Despite schools' ongoing efforts to get everyone back in the classroom, attendance rates for students from low-income families have continued to worsen. In addition to the impact on learning, they're also missing out on access to meals, supplemental services, and physical activity. Moreover, their parents are less likely to report that they've received support around academic and mental health recovery than parents in more affluent households.

Attendance is just one example of the pandemic's inequitable impacts on learning. There are also gaps in reading and math achievement for students in majority-Black schools compared to their peers in majority-white schools. And a collaborative report by 12 national organizations found that students whose education has been the most disrupted include those whose families are experiencing homelessness or students who have disabilities, are learning English, are in the foster care system, are incarcerated, are undocumented, and identify as LGBTQ.

Looking at the data from a classroom perspective, a typical group of 30 fourth-grade students would usually have eight students who are two or more grade levels behind in math or reading. Since the pandemic, there are three more—equating to a third of the class. This makes an already tough job even tougher for teachers.

More than $200 billion in federal aid is reaching schools over the course of the 2021-22 school year. Much of this ESSER funding is being funneled through programs that use traditional approaches to attendance and enrollment recovery. However, even before the pandemic, students in majority-Black schools were behind those in majority-white schools—a clear indication that the "old normal" hasn't worked for all students.

Importantly, many attendance and enrollment initiatives rely on students' having a home address. With the rise in housing insecurity fueled first by the pandemic and now by sharply rising rental rates, many families lack a permanent address—making them more difficult to reach through postal mail or personal visits.

Who Is Most Impacted by Gaps?

Many schools and districts are unaware that their current initiatives to help drive attendance and enrollment are not meeting the needs of all students and families, especially those who:

- Do not have a permanent home address due to housing insecurities. Recovery initiatives often include outreach via postal mail.

- Are not able to reach out to the school proactively due to time, health, or schedule constraints.

- Do not speak English. Language barriers may impede communication between parents or learning guardians and schools or districts.

- Are experiencing other types of hardships, ranging from health concerns to disabilities.

Outreach too often takes a hardline tone (such as court summons or harsh letters) that lacks encouraging empathy. These families deserve support and guidance toward positive actions such as resuming daily attendance or taking steps for re-enrollment.

Strategies for Reaching Students Experiencing Challenges

The reasons for chronic absence or unenrollment are often complex and interrelated. Therefore, a one-size-fits-all approach is unlikely to succeed. Consider three of the most common scenarios that continue to impact students' attendance.

✅ Economic Uncertainty

A substantial population of students unenrolled to help provide support for their families by getting a job and contributing their income, looking after younger children at home, or caring for sick family members. A big portion of this population is at risk of deciding not to re-enroll because of outreach tactics that lack empathy and encouragement or because they feel overwhelmed by the process and requirements for catching up. Engaging with them requires providing connections to the necessary supports and offering encouraging outreach to get them back on track.

✅ Housing Insecurity

Efforts to keep students enrolled and attending school even if they do not have a permanent home address are not new—the McKinney-Vento Act ensuring children's immediate school enrollment dates back to 1987. In 2021, the federal McKinney-Vento program allocated $106.5 million to states and local districts, and the American Rescue Plan included an additional $800 million specifically dedicated to support the identification, enrollment, and school participation of an estimated 1.3 million children experiencing homelessness.

✅ Family Stressors

Some parents and learning guardians have jobs with little flexibility or work multiple jobs, and their ability to come to school in person or call is limited during the tight window of business hours when staff are available. In addition, the long-term tension over everything from masks to racial equity has created a mistrust within school communities. Some parents who were concerned about their children's emotional, social, or physical health chose to keep them home from school for well-intentioned reasons, but they were not always met with understanding by school staff and administrators.

Recommendations for supporting re-enrollment that can be implemented at state and community levels include:

• Coordinating campaigns to help identify students who may have moved to another district.

• Establishing regional hotlines parents can contact about their child's enrollment status.

• Coordinating among state-level agencies and local programs such as early childhood, higher education, housing authorities, and healthcare centers to identify students who are no longer attending school.

• Publicizing children's educational rights, regardless of their housing situation or other challenges.

Narrowing in to the district or school level, successful strategies include:

• Partnering with a high-tech, low-lift solution to handle positive communications and outreach at scale, lessening the burden on staff.

• Adopting positive school discipline practices, including around chronic absence.

• Replacing harsh messages—which are less likely to change behaviors—with compassionate invitations about re-enrollment that offer specific and straightforward next steps.

• Upgrading online enrollment systems to make them simpler and easier to complete.

• Emphasizing the benefits of academic recovery so families understand the long-term ramifications of their child's absence from school.

• Asking families what works for them. For instance, common academic recovery strategies such as summer school and after-school programs are not optimal for families who face economic or housing uncertainty because their transportation options are often limited and it's challenging for them to make long-term plans.

• Screening for homelessness and other risk factors in all school and district outreach efforts.

• Ensuring access to mental health services for students who may have experienced trauma or have social-emotional needs.

• Addressing barriers to transportation through partnerships with public transit agencies, rideshare services, and district bus services.

• Purchasing prepaid phones to keep in touch with families who have been hard to reach in the past.

• Evaluating capacity to find and re-engage students and, if needed, hiring additional staff or adding hours to staff assignments.

• Increasing the number of counselors and social workers.

A Checklist to Ensure Equity

An equitable attendance and enrollment recovery program offers:

• Options to communicate in multiple languages.

• A way to reach families and students outside of a postal mailing address.

• A way to reach families and students in their preferred channel (such as SMS/text messages).

• Encouraging, empathetic outreach that help nudge positive action.

• Easily accessible information.

• 24/7 communications availability—with an immediate response.

Support from Chatbots and Artificial Intelligence

Administrative staff and teachers are already overwhelmed with day-to-day demands, making it difficult to take on additional tasks like attendance and enrollment outreach. Technology tools can assume some of the responsibility for providing information to families and supporting their incoming requests, freeing up school employees for the most impactful work, such as following up on urgent individual needs.

Artificial Intelligence

The term "artificial intelligence" is applied when a machine mimics cognitive functions that humans associate with other human minds, such as learning and problem solving. AI describes a flexible rational agent that can perceive its environment and take actions that maximize its chance of success at some goal.

Chatbots

A chatbot is a service, powered by rules and sometimes artificial intelligence, that people interact with via a chat interface. The service could be any number of things, ranging from functional to fun, and it's available 24/7 to push out information and answer questions.

A chatbot armed with knowledge-based software built for real student and family conversations can dramatically boost a school team's ability to handle the large volume of communications that takes place each day. Best of all, the more families engage, the greater the knowledge base grows, and the "smarter" the AI that powers the chatbot becomes.

Integrating AllHere into Your Solution

Innovative solutions such as AllHere can aid districts in creating more equitable attendance and enrollment recovery through reaching all students.

AllHere has helped many schools achieve their goals through:

1 **Our secure, AI-powered chatbot** that automates two-way messaging through preferred channels for 24/7 support, allowing open dialogue between schools and families.

2 **Timed text messages and reminders** to families and/ or students that are proven to help them attend and engage in school, regardless of the barriers they face, by nudging them to action.

3 **Custom data** that visualizes how families and students are engaging with the chatbot and incorporates their sentiments, questions, and concerns.

4 **Impact reporting** that shows outcomes aligned to your state and district goals.

Based on the results of last spring's AllHere pilot program, schools who added a chatbot saw a 17% increase in class attendance and a 38% reduction in course failures. Fewer than 10% of families opted out of the messages—an indication that they appreciated the actionable information sent at regular intervals.

AllHere's platform builds on key insights and evidence-based strategies about how best to partner with families so they feel looked after, informed, and able to more effectively support attendance and learning. And unlike some tech solutions, it doesn't require additional apps or training for teachers, families, or students.

Schools typically designate a small number of staff members to reply to any communications the chatbot is not able to answer—but in districts of all sizes and demographics, it consistently responds to 94-96% of questions in a fraction of the time a person would need, at any hour of the day or night.
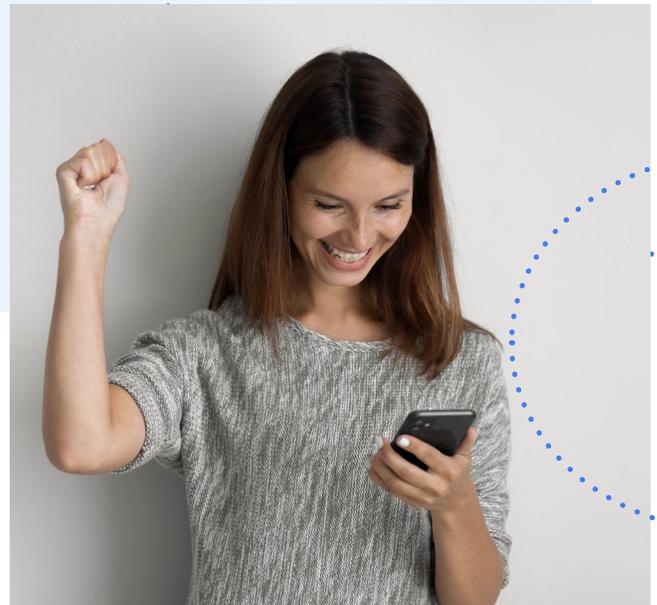
Workflow Options

Because addressing attendance and enrollment recovery is complex, AllHere offers separate workflows to support the identification, enrollment, participation, and success of children and youth experiencing homelessness.

- Form submission (including intent to enroll)
- Easy enrollment without documents
- Orientation, registration, and attendance
- Unlimited personalized learning help 24/7 from expert tutors
- Assistance with food, technology, connectivity, healthcare, hygiene items, housing assistance, and other immediate needs
- Transportation planning
- Social-emotional development
- Video services and support 24/7 for mental and physical healthcare
- Connections with McKinney-Vento liaisons

About AllHere

AllHere combines conversational AI, behavioral science, research-backed empathetic messaging, and interactive nudges to support students and their families as they navigate K–12 education. We automate personalized, two-way text messaging with chatbots to improve attendance rates, community engagement, and academic outcomes while guiding students and families through school. Our adaptive, evidence-based system provides 24/7 support, giving parents and students the help they need, when they need it most, enabling teachers and staff to focus their precious time on the most meaningful interactions.

For more information, details, or to set-up your own equitable attendance and enrollment recovery program, visit www.AllHere.com.

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