



California Attendance

Communications Strategy
September 2015

Attributes of a strong campaign



**Clear &
Single-minded**

Tangible

Relevant

Emotional

Great communication strategies lead to social change



**INVEST IN BETTER FUTURES.SM
HELP KIDS GO TO COLLEGE.**

LEARN MORE



**30% OF HIGH SCHOOL
STUDENTS DROP OUT.
100% NEED A BOOST.**

boostup.org



**2MIN
2X DAY**

2min2x.org

2MIN 2X DAY
2min2x.org

Ad Council



love
has
no
labels

Before anything else, we are all human.
It's time to embrace diversity.
Let's put aside labels in the name of love.

Scope of the Issue



Chronic Absenteeism

even in elementary school, is the strongest predictor of falling behind and dropping out of school

1 in 5

of CA's K-6 students were truant (2012-2013 school year)

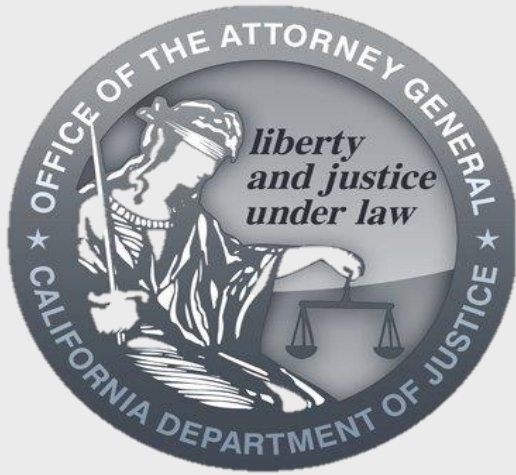
90%

of elementary students with the most severe attendance problems are estimated to be low-income

\$46B

is what dropouts cost the state of California each year (including \$1B in juvenile crime costs)

Project Partners



Target Audience



California parents of children in elementary school (grades K-5)
with an emphasis on lower income and minority parents

Project Goal



Develop a communication strategy that educates parents about the importance of attendance and motivates them to act

Formative Research Objective

Understand absenteeism in California

Understand parents' perceptions, attitudes & behaviors surrounding attendance

Identify key attitudes & behaviors that need to change

Identify communication areas that would move parents to act

Determine the best communication channels to reach parents with an attendance message.



Research Approach

Phase 1: Exploratory

- Expert Interviews (7)
- Parent In-home ethnographies in English and Spanish (24)

Phase 2: Parent Survey

- Online survey of English-speaking parents (n = 573)
- Phone survey of Spanish-speaking parents (n = 250)



Research Findings

All parents want what's best for their child.

They understand that education is the key to their success.



But different challenges interfere with parents' level of school involvement



Parents think about attendance and absences very differently



Attendance is the norm so the daily impact is not considered

Parents think about attendance and absences very differently

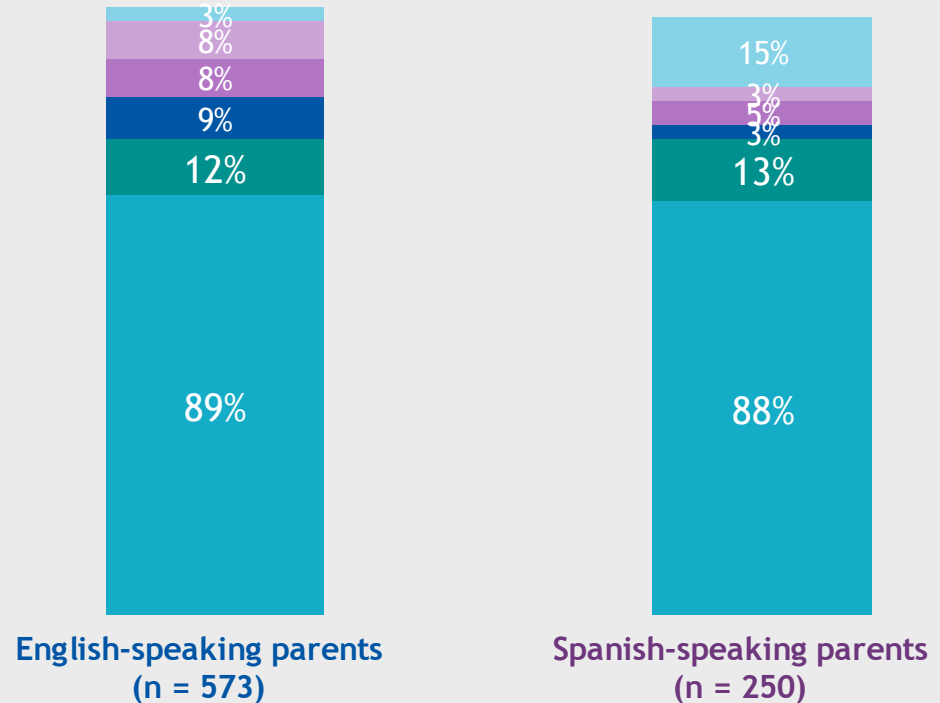
Absences are abnormal so the impact of missing is considered



Parents keep their children home for a number of reasons

For which of the following reasons did your child miss school?

- Skips school
- Moved/transferred schools
- Doesn't like going (e.g. bullying)
- Vacation
- Chronic illness (e.g. Asthma)
- Illness (cold, flu, stomachache)



Most absences are excusable

Very excusable

Illness

Doctor/Dentist Appointment
Moving/Transferring schools

Somewhat excusable

Parent has childcare conflict
Doesn't like going (bullying)
Helping care for family member
Family vacation

Not at all excusable

Parent is ill or tired
Reward for good behavior
Helping around the house
Skipping/ditching

All are rationalized

"My child is doing well in school"

"Absences do not matter as much in early years"

"My child can make up for the absence with homework provided by teacher"

"Missing one day here and there is less harmful than consecutive absences"

"He can catch up within the year"

"She is not doing well because she just doesn't like or is not good in school."

"Others in my child's class miss as much school as my child"

Parents do not keep track of absences and under estimate the instances

They are far more likely to say their child missed about 2 days a month than they are to say they miss 20 days of school

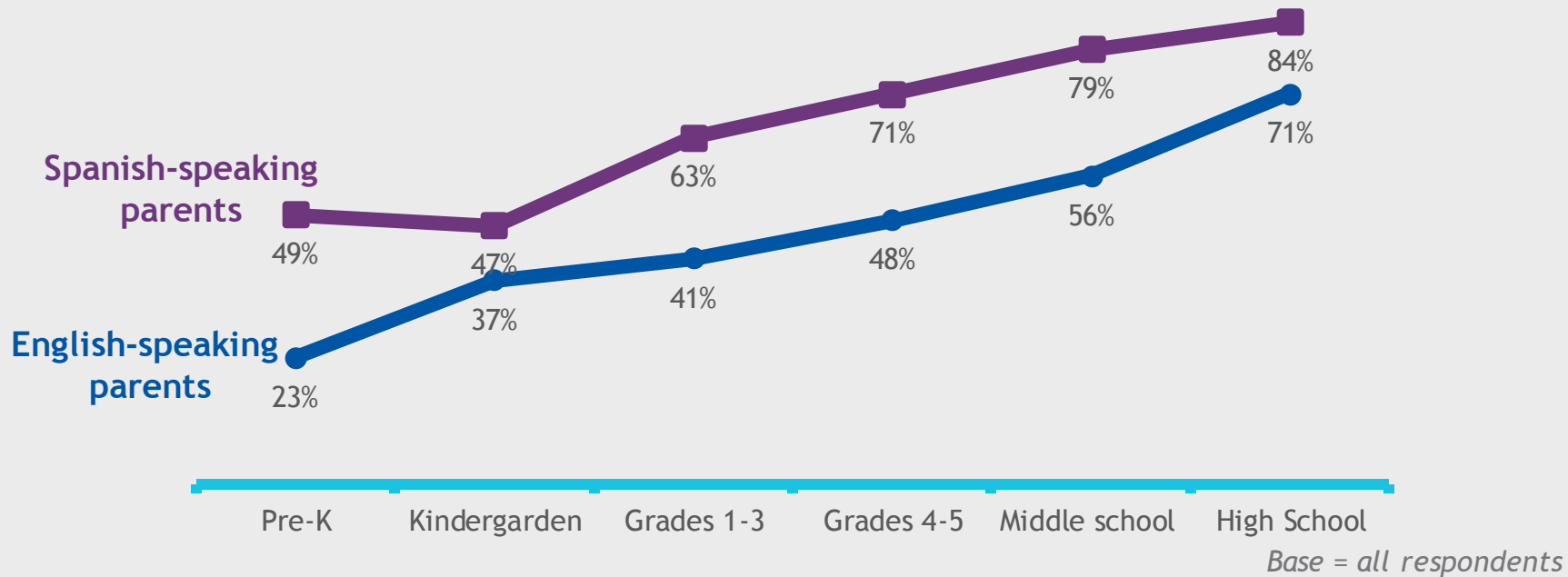


English-speaking parents
(n = 573)

Spanish-speaking parents
(n = 250)

They do not think it's a big deal if their child misses (particularly in K-5)

% who say "it's a big deal to miss at this grade level"





Ultimately, parents associate absences with the immediate benefit of staying home (now)

Rather than the long term consequences of missing school (later)

Concepts tested

Attendance Matters

School, even in the early years, is critical to building a strong foundation for learning that will help your child succeed in middle school, high school and beyond. You cannot make up for too many absences with homework or take-home assignments. Each day your child is not in school is a missed opportunity to learn something they will need in order to understand more difficult material later. Help your child succeed in their future. Make sure they are in school every day.

Absences Add Up

Even in elementary school, missing 18 or more days per year (or just 2 days per month) is too many. Students who miss too many days in elementary school are more likely to fall behind in reading, writing and math. This makes them less likely to graduate high school. Keep track of and limit your child's absences in order to keep them on course to succeed in their future.

Concepts tested

Establishing Poor Attendance Now

Can you imagine your child ditching school all the time? It may be difficult to picture now, but kids who miss too many days in elementary school are more likely to miss in middle and high school. This puts them at greater risk of dropping out. If you allow them to be absent too many times now they can form poor habits which could be harmful to their future success. Help your child build good attendance habits by making sure they are at school every day.

All Absences are Equal

Chances are your child will need to miss a few days of school this year. While some absences might seem more excusable, the impact is actually the same whether your child is sick, ditching or taking a family trip. Any absence makes it harder for your child to keep up with the everyday classroom learning that is needed to grow and succeed. Some absences are unavoidable; but too many will make your child fall behind and they might not be able to catch up. Save absences for when it is absolutely necessary and make sure they are in school every day.

What made each statement new or different

Attendance Matters

Make-up work can't replace child's learning

Describes how to build a foundation for the your child's future/success

Absences Add Up

Absences adds up/2 days a month is a lot

More likely to fall behind /not graduate high school

Establishing Poor Attendance Now

Describes how absences have an affect on children & can create bad habits

All Absences are Equal

All absences are considered the same

What made each statement most convincing

Attendance Matters

Children may be left behind/ missing opportunities

Absences can lead to dropping out

Absences Add Up

Children may be left behind/ missing opportunities

Establishing Poor Attendance Now

Help child develop good habits for future

All Absences are Equal

Children may be left behind/ missing opportunities

What didn't work

Attendance Matters

Help your child succeed in their future. Make sure they are in school every day.

"It is common sense"

Absences Add Up

Keep track of and limit your child's absences in order to keep them on course to succeed in their future.

"It's a negative message"

Establishing Poor Attendance Now

Can you imagine your child ditching school all the time? If you allow them to be absent too many times now they can form poor habits which could be harmful to their future success.

"Not all absences are considered the same"

All Absences are Equal

The impact is actually the same whether your child is sick, ditching or taking a family trip.

Save absences for when it is absolutely necessary and make sure they are in school every day.

"Sending sick children to school is not ok"

Parents need specific examples and tangible tips

This (specific)	Vs.	That (vague)
Too many absences threaten your child's foundation for learning	Vs.	Attendance is important
Missing just 2 days per month can make them fall behind	Vs.	Don't let them miss too many days
You cannot make up for too many absences with homework or take-home assignments		
Too many absences makes them fall behind in reading, writing and math	Vs.	Absences have consequences
Too many absences makes them less likely to graduate		
Do everything you can to ensure they do not miss	Vs.	Make sure they attend every day

Communications Strategy

Opportunity



When parents understand the consequences of just 2 absences a month, they are less likely to allow their child to miss



Key Insight



Wants child to be successful

Knows that education is the key

Knows they shouldn't miss too much school

Doesn't think it's a big deal if they miss (right now)

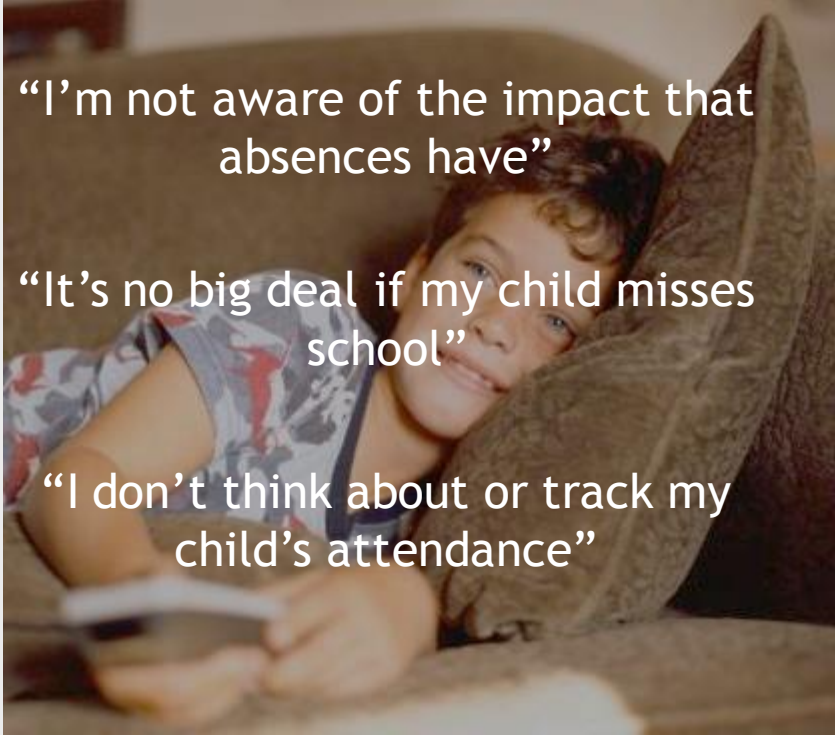
Is not keeping track of absences

Doesn't think child is in danger of falling behind

Believes child is smart & can make up missed work

Challenge

From:

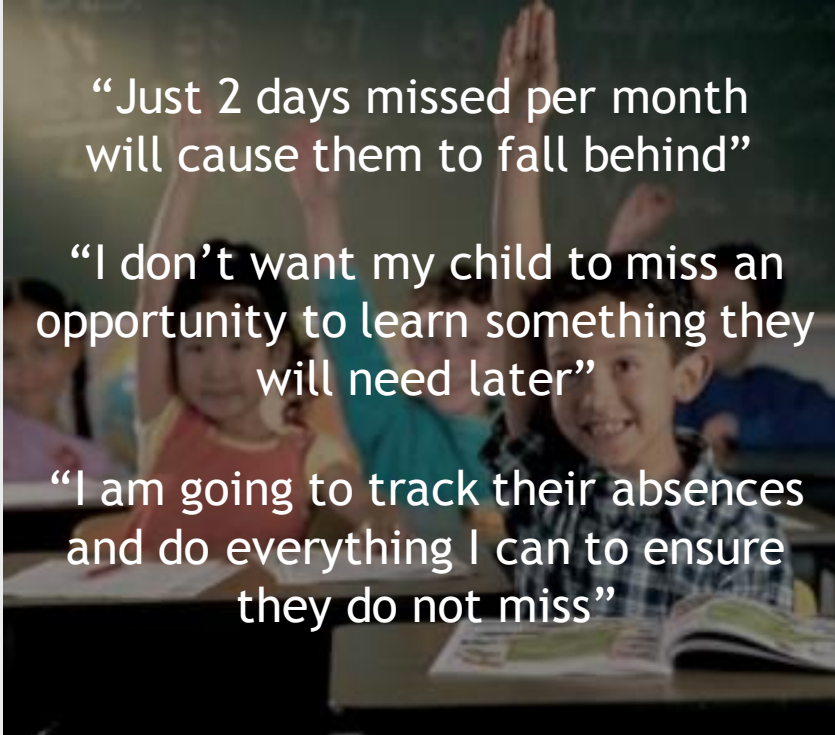


“I’m not aware of the impact that absences have”

“It’s no big deal if my child misses school”

“I don’t think about or track my child’s attendance”

To:



“Just 2 days missed per month will cause them to fall behind”

“I don’t want my child to miss an opportunity to learn something they will need later”

“I am going to track their absences and do everything I can to ensure they do not miss”

The Main Message

Every Absence Matters:

Even in elementary school, just 2 days missed per month adds up and threatens the educational foundation that is critical to their academic success.



Reasons to believe

- **Learning in elementary school is sequential** - each day builds on earlier learning. So, each day absent is a missed opportunity for your child to learn something they will need in order to understand more difficult material later.
- **Students who miss more than 18 days of school are less proficient** in reading, writing and math compared to their peers with good attendance.
- Students who do not learn the fundamentals of reading, writing and math by third grade are **more likely to fall behind and are less likely to graduate high school**.
- Absences make it very difficult for your child to keep up academically because **make up work and take home assignments cannot replace the everyday learning** your child loses by being absent from school.

Call-to-Action

Keep track of and limit your child's absences



Tone

Be: concerned, empathetic, and respectful, but also urgent

Avoid: accusatory, condescending, finger wagging

Success Metrics



Increase awareness “Just 2 days missed per month can allow them fall behind”



More parents understand the importance limiting absences



More parents are tracking their child’s absences

Other Considerations

- Highlight absences rather than attendance
- Use tactical advice and solutions (vs.) vague statements
- Highlight “just 2 days a month (even in elementary school)” vs. 18 days total in the school year
- Avoid inferring that missing “fewer than 18 total” is okay
- Avoid implying that it’s ok to send kids to school when sick
- Avoid complicated statistics, hyperboles and metaphors
- Consider lower literacy levels & avoid policy/academic-sounding jargon

Communications Approach

Strategic Idea

Every Absence Matters

Communications Goals

Raise awareness:

Just 2 days per month (even in elementary school) can allow your child to fall behind

Inspire action:

Track absences and make sure they do not miss too many days of school

Approach



Leveraging All Media Channels



Mobile

Text-based messages

Opt-in mobile program

Individualized
Reliable
Flexible
Drives engagement
Opt in/opt out

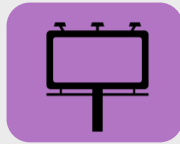


Direct

E-mail

District newsletter

Individualized
Reliable
Drives awareness & education



Out of Home

Bus Kiosks

Public Transportation

Billboards

Localized
Drives awareness & education



Digital

Social Media

Internet:
Online video, gaming, news, entertainment, parenting

Sharable
Individualized
Drives awareness
Drives engagement
Drives to website
Searchable



TV

Family programming

Multi-cultural

Spanish-language

Drives awareness & education
Drives to website



Radio

Spanish/Hispanic

Religious

Urban

Contemporary

Drives awareness & education
Localized

A Role for All Media Channels in Changing Behavior



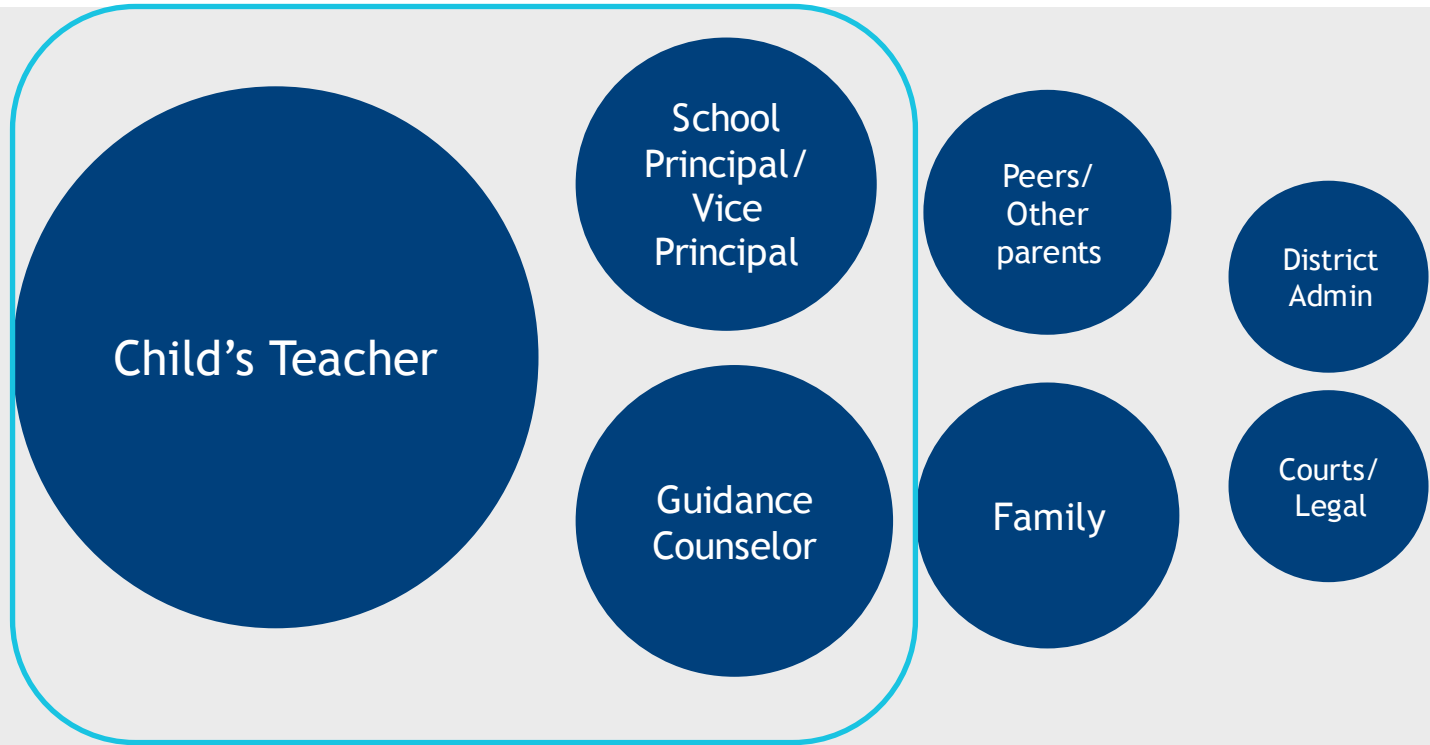
Build Awareness

Shift Attitudes

Shift Behaviors

Leveraging Key Influencers for Parents

Who:



Why:

Reliable, Believable, Individualized, Drives awareness & education

How to leverage key influencers: Teachers

Channel:

School Communications, District Communications, Teacher Blogs, Curriculum Websites, Professional, Development Events, Flyers/Brochures

Ask to:

- Remind parents that even in elementary school, missing just 2 days per month can cause your child to fall behind.
- When possible, connect missed opportunity to learn with specific class curriculum/content.
- Point parents into the direction of resources which can help them keep track of and limit absences

Tone:

Be: Supportive, helpful, empathetic
Avoid: Compliance and fear based tactics/messages



Thank you