Minnesota State

Attendance Pilot

House Education Finance Committee

February 26th, 2026

Key Takeaways - Burnsville

Data-Driven Infrastructure & Standardization

- Standardized Guidance
- Data Integrity
- Strategic Oversight

Direct Intervention & School-Level Support

- School Attendance Teams
- Individualized Support

Community & Inter-Agency Partnerships

- County Collaboration
- Community Crisis Response

Key Takeaways - Chisholm

- **Absences and Truancies Have a Root Cause**
  - We need to find the root cause or function of behavior causing absenteeism and address those base needs.
  - Funding is necessary for mentorship programs that can work directly with students and families.
- **Student and Family Voice**
  - Students and families must be actively included in conversations and decision-making, which will help create a stronger understanding of attendance policy, state law, and the importance of consistent attendance.
  - Direct conversations with families were more effective than sending attendance letters alone, which is busy work that doesn't often produce results.
- **Communication Improvements**
  - Schools increased communication through phone calls, texts, email, mailed notices, and in-person meetings.
  - Mentors worked proactively with families to schedule supports and problem-solve barriers.
- **Policy and Practice Changes to Remove Barriers**
  - Policy adjustments focused on supporting students and families rather than creating additional barriers.
  - Pre-make-up slips were no longer required for absences to be excused.
  - Tardies no longer automatically resulted in unexcused absences.
- **Expanded Supports to Eliminate Barriers/Community, School, and County Collaboration:**
  - Transportation was provided through Type III drivers to support attendance needs.
  - Schools collaborated with county providers.

CHISHOLM PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Key Takeaways - Columbia Heights

The importance of a focused attendance team at each school is imperative
- Consistent communication and team meeting yield positive results
- Follow up and follow through with established operation protocols
- Humanize every situation leads to intentional support for students

Develop a strong system of support and partnerships
- County support help students to access support
- Families needs are better understood
- Community Based Organizations are key partners to support families

Internal accountability
- Consistent feedback, follow through and support for schools
- Annual training and development due to staff change
- Evaluation and review of processes is critical for success

Columbia Heights Public Schools

Key Takeaways - Cook County

- Educate families on attendance policies
  - *Exposure to handbook, accountability, revisit policies as needed.*
- Office staff must be consistent when recording and responding to families and code appropriately and fairly.
- Respond early when any student begins to show signs of concern.
- Stay efficient and persistent in communication with support services and county.
- Seek out the root causes of absenteeism and work to shift culture/routines.
- Create Attendance Team
- Follow through with families, students, support and county services.
- Stay focused for the long haul.
- Consistency is invaluable all levels.

Cook County ISD 166
Home of the Vikings

Key Takeaways - Minneapolis

Strength-Based, Prevention-Focused Attendance Framework

- Shift from a failure-first model to a proactive, problem-solving approach. Don't let students disengage before providing support.
- Foster the development of family partnerships to create ongoing collaboration addressing student attendance & engagement.
- Support schools so that they may prioritize early, positive outreach with students and families to address attendance barriers.
- Bring student voice to the forefront to identify causes and create solutions to increase attendance.
- Create a bank of evidence-based practices - universal, targeted, and intensive for schools to have preventative and reactive strategies.
- Establish a district-wide commitment recognizing that everyone— district staff, schools, families, county agencies, and community partners—plays a vital role in supporting student attendance.

MINNEAPOLIS PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Key Takeaways - Moorhead

Evidence-Based Interventions: Implementing **Check & Connect** at MHS and attendance check-in models at elementary/middle school sites to provide direct mentorship and early support.

Stakeholder Collaboration: Partnering with Clay County to streamline procedures and holding monthly cross-agency meetings to collaborate and discuss complex, family-level barriers.

Operational Consistency: Aligning internal attendance coding with to ensure clean, comparable data across all Moorhead buildings.

Building-Level Accountability: Weekly attendance meetings at all sites to review real-time data and assign interventions in a timely manner.

Community Engagement: Planning a community-wide book study on chronic absenteeism for the 2026-27 school year to foster shared understanding across community stakeholders.

MOORHEAD AREA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Key Takeaways - Northfield

➔ **Statewide definition of consistent attendance and clear messaging about expectations for attendance**.
   ◆ *Statewide consistent messaging about attendance with coherent definitions and data*
   ◆ *Necessary for clean, actionable data and funding decisions*
   ◆ *Data systems configured to reliably reflect expectations*

➔ **Dedicated attendance liaison(s) is a <u>key</u> component of a district attendance plan.**
   ◆ *Attendance affects <u>all</u> other district systems and should be supported commensurate with its impact on district learning goals.*

➔ **Strong systems have to be in place and continuously improved**
   ◆ *Planned data distribution and review via dedicated teams*
   ◆ *Efficient plan for responding to data - developing policies procedures, intervention and then communicating effectively*

➔ **Robust, non-punitive family support**
   ◆ *As we close in on our goal, family needs are more complex*
   ◆ *Schools cannot do it all (we do a LOT!) community collaboration essential*

Northfield
PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Key Takeaways - Red Lake

Attendance Improvement: Key Takeaways

- **Proactive Family Partnerships**
Engaging families early and consistently strengthens relationships and supports improved student attendance.
- **Connected School Wide Efforts**
Aligning programs and initiatives within the school creates a coordinated, more effective attendance strategy.
- **Student Voice & Peer Leadership**
Empowering students through our Peer Leaders program and 9th-grade advisory challenges increases ownership, motivation, and positive attendance behaviors.
- **Clear & Consistent Attendance Systems**
Standardized procedures for coding, taking attendance, and pulling data ensure accuracy, transparency, and better decision-making.

Red Lake Schools
Home of the Warriors

Key Takeaways - Rochester

- **Tier 1 Family Communication**: Monthly messages sharing updated student attendance rates and reinforcing expectations to promote positive norms and prevent chronic absenteeism

- **Freshman On Track**: Early identification and intervention for off-track 9th graders to improve attendance, course completion, and on-time graduation

- **Real-Time Data Systems**: Locally built dashboards enabling early identification of attendance concerns and systematic tracking of interventions

- **Restorative Truancy Intervention**: Partnership with Three Rivers Restorative Justice to address root causes of truancy and strengthen family engagement to increase consistent attendance

- **Re-Engagement Systems**: "The Reentry Project" reconnecting students after a 15-day drop to restore enrollment and remove barriers to consistent attendance

- **Transition Supports**: LINK Crew and WEB programming to increase engagement and belonging, supporting stronger attendance during school transitions

- **Responsive Attendance Strategy**: Targeted outreach and support to address attendance declines linked to ICE activity in the community (3–4% district decrease)

Rochester Public Schools

Key Takeaways - Sauk Rapids - Rice

- **Revised Attendance Codes/Reasons** across all buildings of the district to ensure accurate data tracking and to have the ability to identify barriers to consistent student attendance.

- **Improved and Increased Communication** - Being more diligent with our communication to families, students, and community about the importance of school attendance.

- **Solidified Attendance Teams** in all schools - meeting consistently to identify students who need support and create action plans.

- **Monthly Attendance Meetings** w/county to triage support for families and students.

- **Developing an Attendance Handbook** with protocols and procedures to be used as a guide for our schools/teams.

- **Challenge** - So many external factors impacting school attendance are out of schools' control. Mental health, family situations, etc.

STORM SAUK RAPIDS-RICE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Key Takeaways - Windom

Glows

- Hiring an attendance coordinator to be utilized in our district
- Relationship building to promote positive attendance - chronically absent numbers have improved and classroom tardies have decreased drastically
- Solidified coding to ensure we have a very accurate attendance report and in-time information
- Students see our attendance coordinator as a resource on the ground everyday in hallways
- Families are growing in trust and value having the support of getting rides as needed to promote positive attendance

Grows

- Long-term financing of the position beyond the scope of the PILOT
- Bridging gaps in vulnerable communities based on socioeconomic indicators or new to community families

Windom Area Schools
Learning. Leading. Excelling. Together.

Common Challenges

School Level Resource and Capacity Constraints:

- Clear systems must be established to rapidly identify chronic absenteeism and create a sustainable referral process of students for targeted support.
- While most schools have Attendance or Support Teams, staff shortages limit the ability to provide regular and intensive interventions.
- Transportation: student in walk zones, inconsistent bus routes, behavior issues, and lack of transportation outside standard busing hours.
- Family communication: Families need clarity on attendance policies, illness-related absences, and reporting procedures.
- Truancy reporting can be delayed due to the lack of staff time to file reports.
- Gaps in effective collaboration with county staff in responding to truancy reports. Many county referrals result in little or no action, or in responses that do not improve attendance or address underlying causes.

Lessons Learned to Date

- It takes time to identify evidence-based practices across all tiers, especially for students who are most chronically absent. A vetted bank of interventions by tier level would be beneficial.

- Many strategies require significant person power to organize, serve, and evaluate the work. Pilot initiatives go beyond pilot dollars.

- Communication and partnership with families is challenging, yet critical for success. We need to be persistent in our efforts.

- Acknowledging the value of student voice. Finding creative ways to engage students in shaping the climate of their school and address absenteeism.

- The majority of absences are excused absences. We need to prevent and respond to all absences - not just truancy.

- Districts lack clarity of definition of absences - what counts as a tardy, half-day and full day absence, or exempt.

Attendance Coding & Counting

A subcommittee of seven pilot districts along with MDE representation was created to review current processes and to develop recommendations. The committee meets monthly.

Purpose and scope of the subcommittee:

- Increase accuracy and reliability of attendance reporting.
- Improve data comparability across districts in the state.
- Ensure equitable treatment in coding for all students.
- Align attendance coding with state accountability systems.

A key finding indicates that districts want clearer guidance on attendance recording procedures, particularly regarding how to classify exempt absences and determine when missed instructional time constitutes a tardy versus an absence. Additionally, there is ambiguity in the current state statute defining "Exemption."

In response, a draft attendance policy is being developed to strengthen comparability of attendance outcomes across districts and to improve the reliability and equity of attendance as a statewide accountability measure.

THANK YOU

Any Questions?

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Districts not Reporting

- Mankato