

## To Reduce Chronic Absenteeism: Don't Forget Family Engagement

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*"We're consistently looking at these surveys, looking at data, and thinking about some impactful things we can do right away." A leader in Kansas commenting on the results of a school family engagement survey.*

Family engagement practices are *often* recommended as strategies that improve student engagement, attendance and achievement. Now an analysis of family engagement surveys from the Kansas State Department of Education (KSDE) shows just that: districts and schools with higher ratings on a family engagement survey had statistically lower percentages of students who were chronically absent. In addition, as chronic absenteeism in a school decreased, student academic performance increased.

The survey showed that two areas of family engagement were found to be significantly correlated to lower chronic absenteeism: welcome all Families and sharing power and advocacy.

Nationally, chronic absence [has likely doubled](#) since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. Patterns for Kansas are similar: Chronic absence was 13.93 in 2019, rose to 17.54 in 2020, and sharply increased to 24.51 in 2022. This increase is causing districts and schools in Kansas to prioritize decreasing chronic absenteeism. One approach they are implementing is to engage families in the process.

[Research shows](#) that family engagement positively impacts student attendance. To explore how family engagement impacts attendance in Kansas, the Kansas Parent Information Resource Center (KPIRC) and the KSDE Technical Assistance Systems Network (TASN) Evaluation Team developed a statewide family engagement survey.

The survey was created collaboratively with feedback gathered from a variety of stakeholders, including families, early childhood projects, the KSDE Special Education and Title Services team and the National Association for Family, School and Community Engagement. This survey asks families to provide feedback on the family engagement practices within their children's schools. Families rate items on a scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

It was categorized into five domains based on the PTA National Family School Partnership Standards: Welcome All Families; Communicate Effectively; Support Student Success; Share Power; Speak Up for Every Child; and Collaborate with Community. For this survey, Speak Up for Every Child and Share Power were combined into one domain. The five domains consist of 20 statements in which participants rank their agreement on a 1-5 point scale.

To build the capacity of local education leaders to assess the equitability of their existing family engagement practices, demographic information was collected on students who receive special

education services; race and ethnicity; free and reduced lunch rates and limited English proficiency. The survey is made available in the top eleven languages in Kansas.

Districts and schools register for the survey at [www.districttools.org](http://www.districttools.org) and receive a link to send to their families and caregivers. This platform gives districts and schools the ability to access the results in real time.

After the survey deadline has passed, the data is formulated into a report for each district or school. The report provides data by each standard, each statement, and demographic information. For example, a district or school can compare if they “Welcome All Families” by comparing the responses of families of color compared to the responses of the rest of the school or district population. These reports provide actionable data to districts or schools resulting in improved family engagement practices.

In 2022, a focus group was conducted with school leaders on their use of the survey. One principal stated that, “The subgroup data on the survey helps us make sure that ALL families feel communicated with, accepted, and loved on- that’s always the goal.” Finally, a superintendent said, “Every interaction, whether we like it or not, matters.”

Focus group participants reported that their data reflects their current realities. They are using it to guide them on what they need to focus on and create action plans that are directly impacting family engagement practices within their districts and schools.

A summary of the research and data in this blog may be found at:  
<https://www.ksdetasn.org/resources/3666>