A surreal landscape featuring a red schoolhouse with a clock tower on the left and a blue house on the right, both situated on a floating island. The island is surrounded by a deep chasm filled with clouds and a bright sun in the distance. Several small figures of people are walking across the island. The scene is bathed in a warm, golden light.

**Turning research into action  
for stronger school-home  
partnerships to support  
attendance**

**Dr David Heyne  
Excellence in Attendance Support  
[info@davidheyne.org](mailto:info@davidheyne.org)  
December 1, 2025**



**The mind  
creates the  
abyss**







**The heart  
crosses the  
abyss**



**1**

**The Space  
Between School  
& Home Matters**





## 2

**What the  
Research  
Tells Us**



**3**

**What  
Gets in the Way**

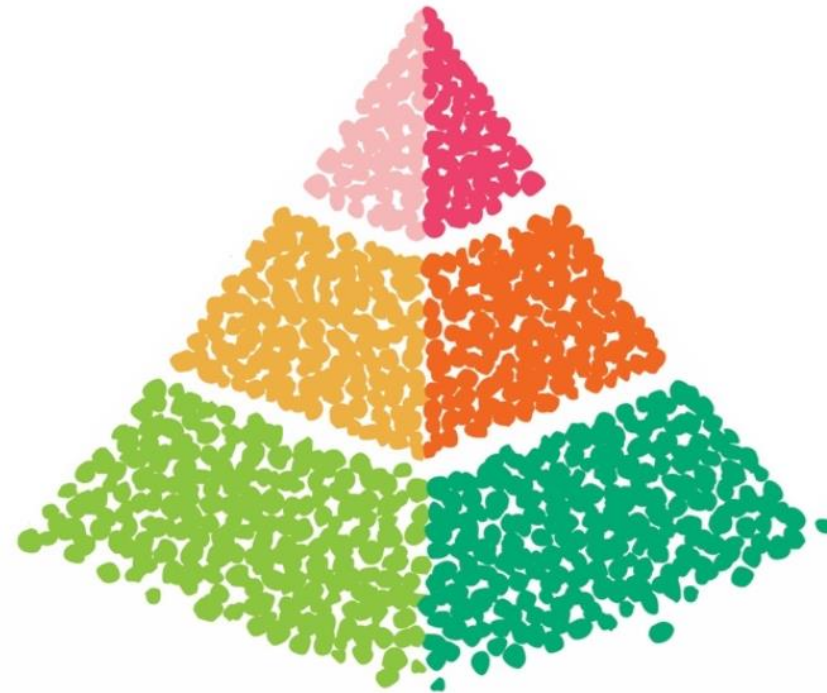
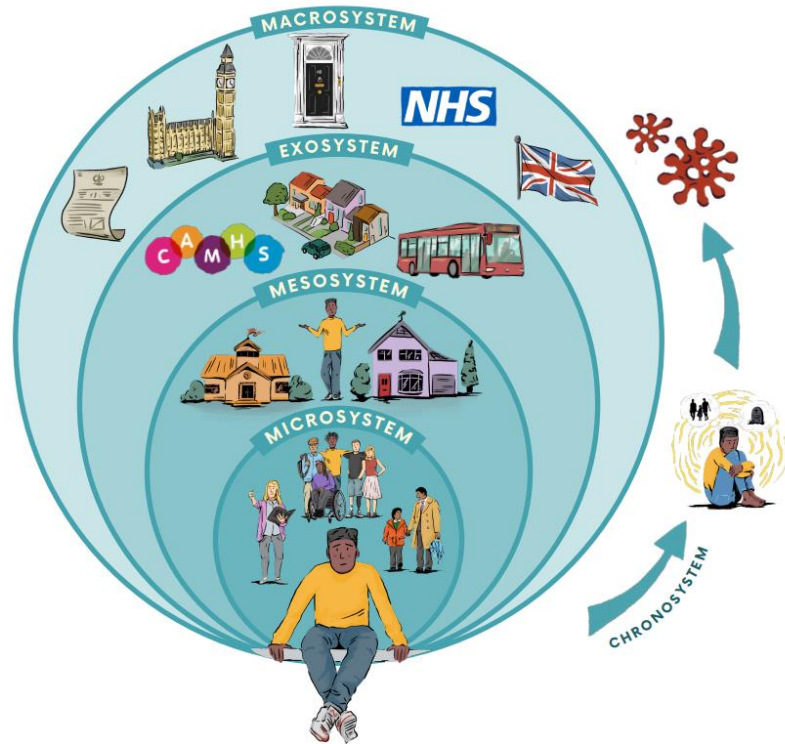




**4**

**Steps Toward  
Stronger  
Partnership**

# Where I'm coming from today (my perspective) ...





## Where I came from, literally ...





**1**

**The Space  
Between School  
& Home Matters**

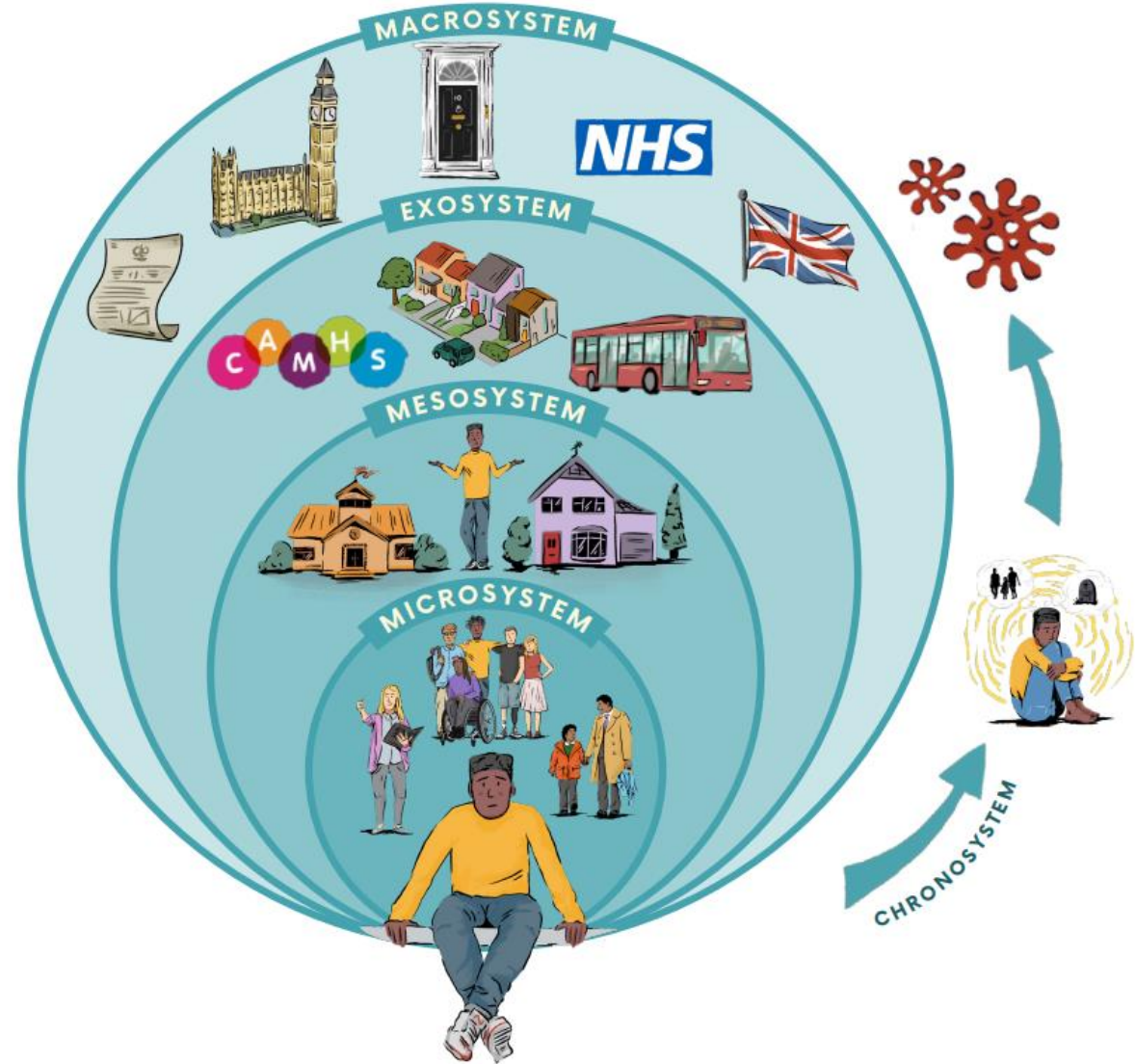




# Absence, it's complicated

**“A wicked problem”**

(Childs & Lofton, 2021,  
Masking attendance: How  
education policy distracts  
from the wicked problem(s)  
of chronic absenteeism)



(Jerricah Holder, EBSA Horizons, 2023)



# Absence is Complex The Outer Circles

Persistent absence three times higher  
for the most economically deprived students

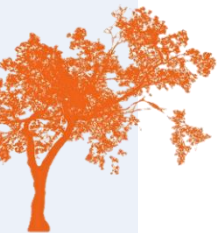
Youths with intellectual and developmental disabilities  
have higher rates of absenteeism

Youths from non-White ethnic backgrounds  
are more likely to be chronically absent

Black students are more likely to be permanently excluded  
from school compared to those from other ethnic groups

Absence disproportionately affects vulnerable groups  
(Kearney et al., Frontiers in Education, 2022)





# Absence is Complex

## The Inner Crickles

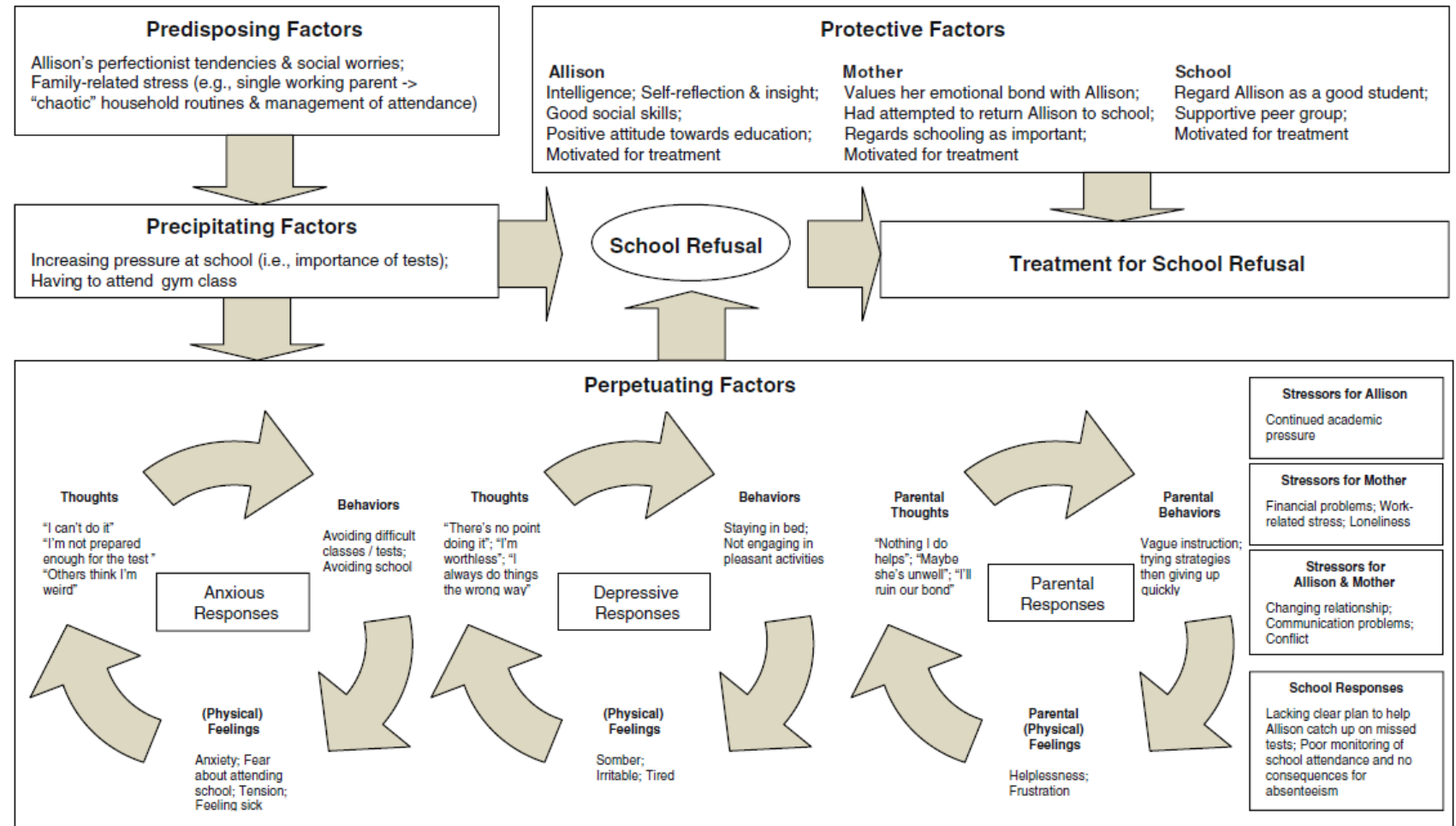


Fig. 1 Diagrammatic case formulation of predisposing, precipitating, perpetuating, and protective factors

(Heyne et al., Clinical Child & Family Psychology Review, 2014)

# Yes, the family system matters

**“There are times I get sick, and it is hard for my child to get to school. I have a hard time asking for help.”**

(Conway, 2024, Factors contributing to chronic student absenteeism)



(Jerricah Holder, EBSA Horizons, 2023)





# Yes, the family system matters

**“Some single parents have several children and many jobs. If they work at night, they can oversleep; the kids have no way to get to school.”**

(Conway, 2024, Factors contributing to chronic student absenteeism)



(Jerricah Holder, EBSA Horizons, 2023)



# Yes, the school system matters

**School staff beliefs about the causes of absence influence how schools engage with families**

(Alaimo & Kelly, 2025, School staffs' views on student non-attendance: A systematic literature review)



(Jerricah Holder, EBSA Horizons, 2023)





# And yes, the meso-system matters

The link between home  
and school is more than  
a backdrop

It's a driver of  
attendance



(Jerricah Holder, EBSA Horizons, 2023)



# And yes, the meso-system matters

**For example, strong  
relationships help when  
family priorities around  
attendance change**

(Heyne & Gentle-Genitty, 2024,  
Beyond solo acts)



(Jerricah Holder, EBSA Horizons, 2023)







## 2

What the  
Research  
Tells Us

# 1. Schools with strong family engagement saw much smaller rises in chronic absence

## The study

**Quantitative**

**Longitudinal**

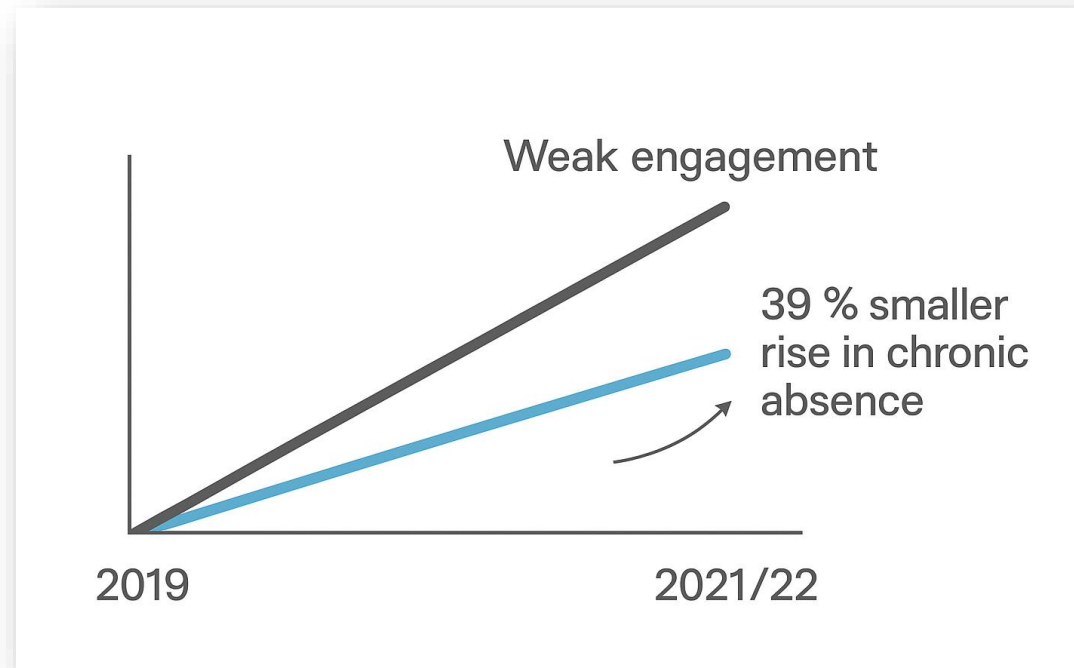
**> 3000 schools**

**Teacher report**

**Validated measure**

**Strong statistical controls**

**USA**



(Learning Heroes & TNTP, 2023, Investigating the relationship between pre-pandemic family engagement and student and school outcomes)





## 2. School staff see attendance and absence linked to school-home relationships

### The study

**Qualitative review**

**11 studies (2013-2024)**

**7 of the 11 focus on ER-SAC**

**All studies: young people 4-18 years**

**England, Sweden, USA, France,  
Ireland**

(Alaimo & Kelly, 2025, School staffs' views on student non-attendance: A systematic literature review)



## 2. School staff see attendance and absence linked to school-home relationships

### **Linked to increased absence**

**Poor communication  
between home and school**

**No shared understanding of  
the difficulties**

**No shared approach**

### **The study**

**Qualitative review**

**11 studies (2013-2024)**

**7 of the 11 focus on ER-SAC**

**All studies: young people 4-18 years**

**England, Sweden, USA, France,  
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(Alaimo & Kelly, 2025, School staffs' views on student non-attendance: A systematic literature review)





## 2. School staff see attendance and absence linked to school-home relationships

### Crucial for improved attendance

**Warm, trusting relationships**

**Regular contact**

**Really trying to understand how the student and family feel**

**Joint planning**

**Coordinated action**

The study

Qualitative review

11 studies (2013-2024)

7 of the 11 focus on ER-SAC

All studies: young people 4-18 years

England, Sweden, USA, France, Ireland

(Alaimo & Kelly, 2025, School staffs' views on student non-attendance: A systematic literature review)



### **3. Nordic youth, parents and professionals report ineffective school-home cooperation for SAPs**

#### **The study**

**Qualitative review**

**Voices of young people,  
parents, professionals**

**17 studies (2013-2022)**

**4 of the 17 focus on ER-SAC**

**Sweden, Denmark,  
Norway, & Finland**

(Hejl et al., 2025, A review and qualitative synthesis of the voices of children, parents, and school staff with regards to school attendance problems in the Nordic countries)





### 3. Nordic youth, parents and professionals report ineffective school-home cooperation for SAPs

#### The study

Qualitative review

Voices of young people,  
parents, professionals

17 studies (2013-2022)

4 of the 17 focus on ER-SAC

Sweden, Denmark,  
Norway, & Finland

#### Findings

**All want a return to school, but feel emotional strain and poor collaboration**

**Unclear responsibility: parents unsure who is in charge; staff feel left alone with SAPs**

**Lack of time, resources, and skills for joint work and for handling high-conflict meetings with parents**

(Hejl et al., 2025, A review and qualitative synthesis of the voices of children, parents, and school staff with regards to school attendance problems in the Nordic countries)



### 3. Nordic youth, parents and professionals report ineffective school-home cooperation for SAPs

#### The study

Qualitative review

Voices of young people,  
parents, professionals

17 studies (2013-2022)

4 of the 17 focus on ER-SAC

Sweden, Denmark,  
Norway, & Finland

#### Findings

**School staff asked for a “middle person” (e.g., nurse, psychologist, teacher) to share responsibility for SAPs, support them, and lead the most difficult school-home conversations.**

(Hejl et al., 2025, A review and qualitative synthesis of the voices of children, parents, and school staff with regards to school attendance problems in the Nordic countries)





## 4. When school–home partnership fails, families leave school

### **The study**

**Qualitative**

**Survey and interviews**

**99 families, 149 youth**

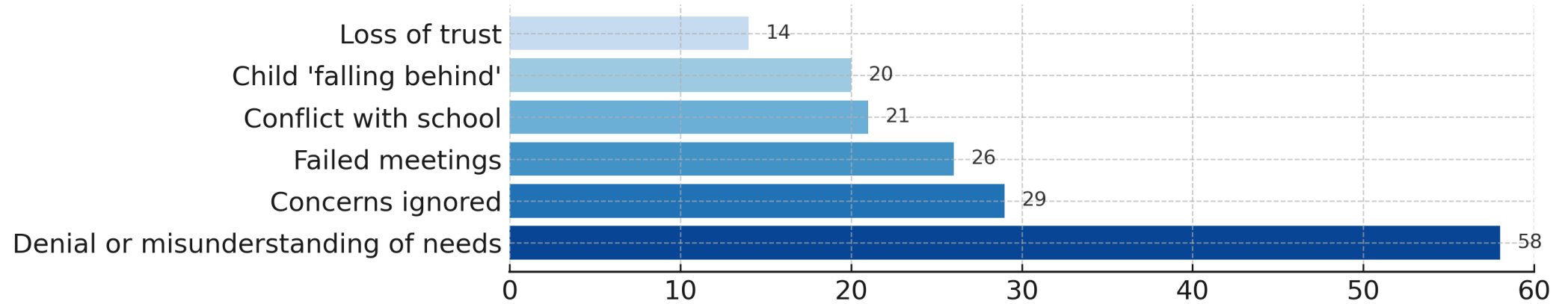
**Mostly neurodivergent**

**UK**

(Gillie, 2025, 'It feels like we're out of the rat race': Family reflections on traumatic school experiences leading to home education)



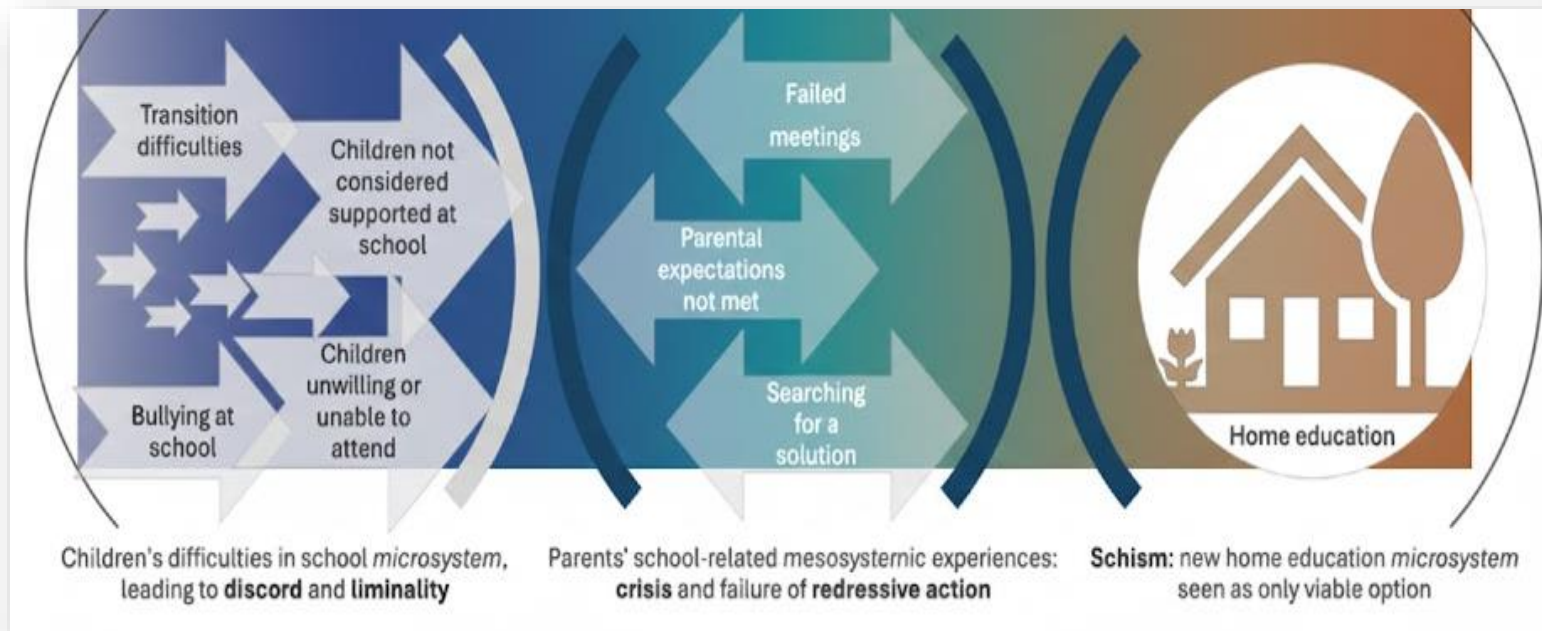
## 4. When school-home partnership fails, families leave school



(Gillie, 2025, 'It feels like we're out of the rat race': Family reflections on traumatic school experiences leading to home education)



## 4. When school-home partnership fails, families leave school

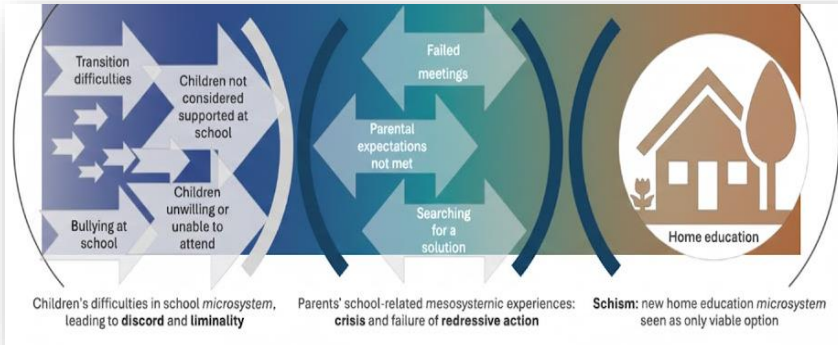


(Gillie, 2025, 'It feels like we're out of the rat race': Family reflections on traumatic school experiences leading to home education)





## 4. When school-home partnership fails, families leave school



**Repair** requires real collaboration between parents and school, not punishment or pressure

**Recommendations:** training in inclusive, collaborative practice; and flexi-schooling

(Gillie, 2025, 'It feels like we're out of the rat race': Family reflections on traumatic school experiences leading to home education)



# What does this research tell us?

- 1. Schools with strong family engagement saw much smaller rises in chronic absence**
- 2. School staff see attendance and absence linked to school–home relationships**
- 3. Nordic youth, parents and professionals report ineffective school–home cooperation for SAPs**
- 4. When school–home partnership fails, families leave school**



# What does this research tell us?

- **Strong school–home engagement protects attendance, even in difficult times.**
- **Students, parents and staff all link attendance to the quality of the school-home relationship**
- **When families feel listened to, respected & involved, it's easier to prevent and solve attendance problems.**
- **When trust breaks down, students and families start to turn away from school.**





# What does this research tell us?

**Across countries, the message is the same:  
School-home partnership is not a luxury,  
it's essential to attendance work**





**3**

**What  
Gets in the Way**

# What gets in the way SILO-ISATION



One of the most unhelpful influences on attendance?  
Lack of connection between perspectives, disciplines, services, stakeholders





# What gets in the way SILO-ISATION



**Services ...**

**Mental Health**

**Education**

**Community  
Agencies**



# What gets in the way SILO-ISATION



**Stakeholders ...**

**Families**

**Professionals**

**Ministries**



# What gets in the way SILO-ISATION



**Solutions to complex problems** become possible when we step across the boundaries of our disciplines and services and stakeholder groups

(Choi & Pak, Clinical & Investigative Medicine, 2006)







**We need cultures of collective responsibility for attendance**





# What helps **SILO-FREE SYNERGY**

to increase understanding, coordinate efforts, share resources & expertise  
**and thus achieve more with less**

(Heyne et al., Frontiers in Education, 2024)





# What gets in the way **FINGER-POINTING**



# What gets in the way **FINGER-POINTING**

they gave up

it's unsafe there

no-one cares

they push too hard

they are not doing  
their part







# What gets in the way **FINGER-POINTING**

some parents keep children  
at home too easily

parents don't value  
education

some parents accept  
non-attendance

parents are not  
doing their part



# What gets in the way **LABELING**

family issues

truancy

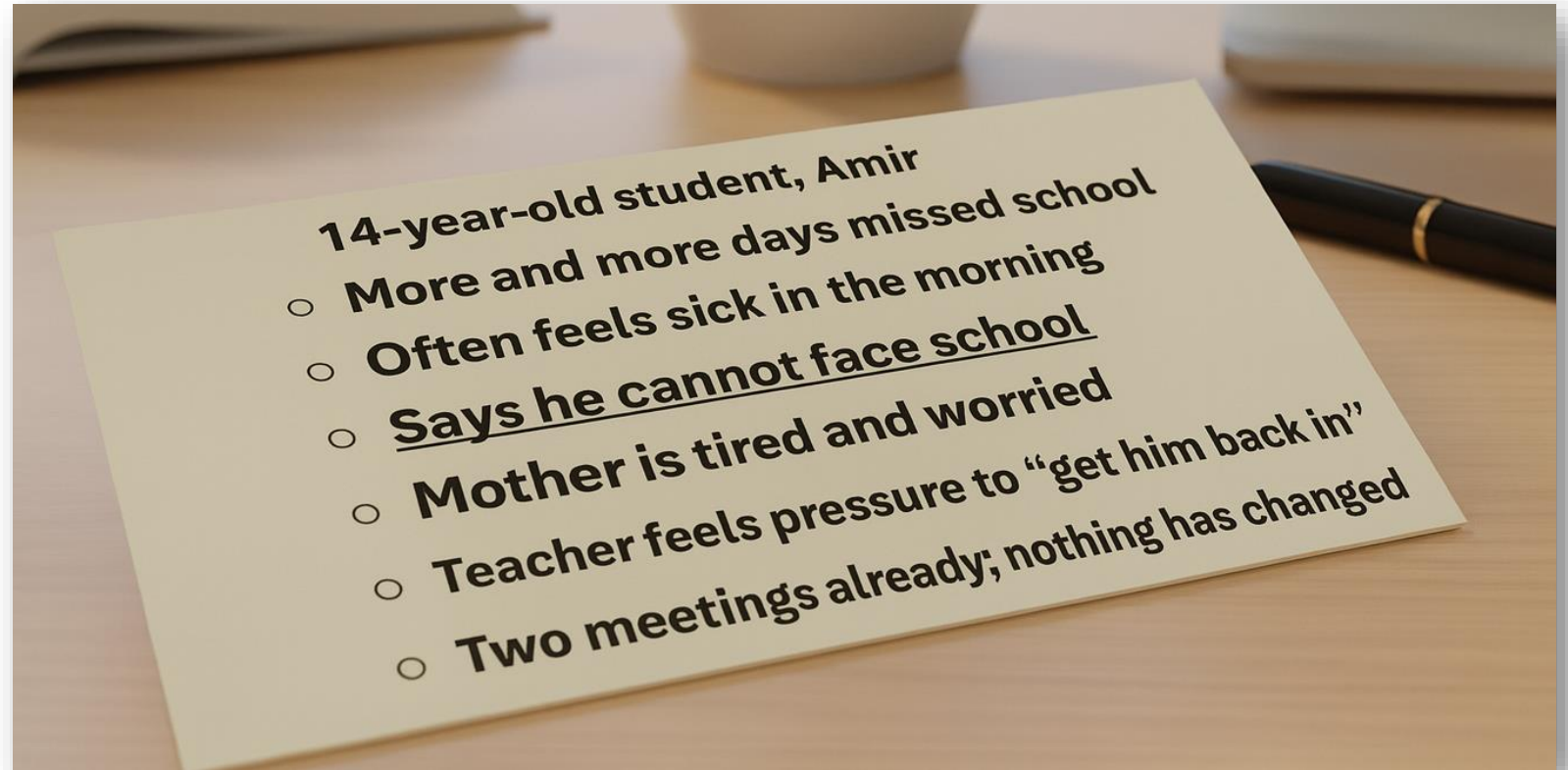
school refusal

unmotivated





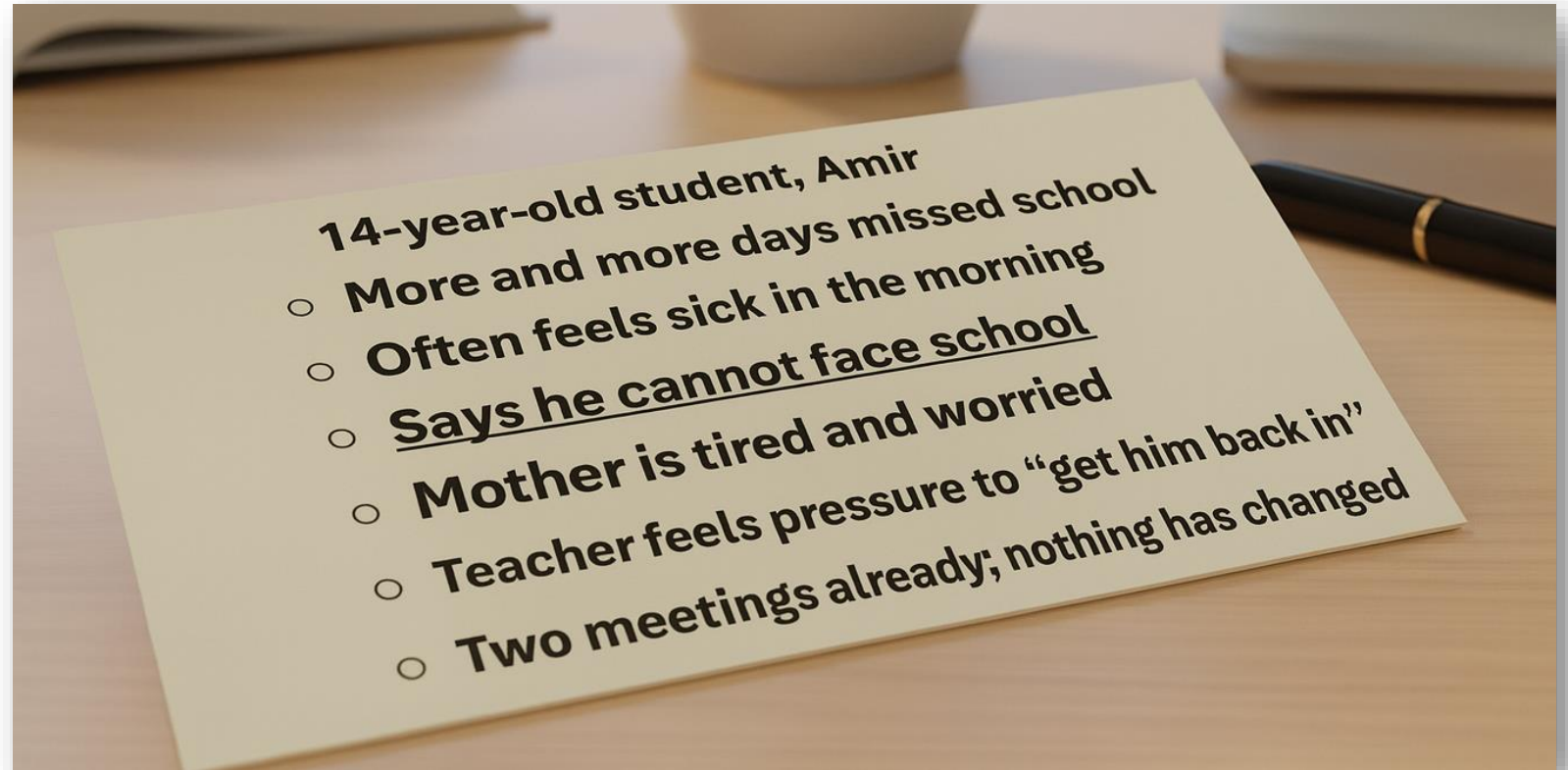
## Amir's story – what gets in the way?



**Think of a real student like Amir, from your own work.  
What might people in the system think or say that does *not*  
help – that widens the gap between school and home?**



## Amir's story – what would help?



**What are some things that people in your role could do or say to build a stronger bridge between school and home?**









**4**

**Steps Toward  
Stronger  
Partnership**



# A strengths-based model of family engagement

## Foundational actions



(Lindstrom Johnson et al., 2024, School-family partnerships to support attendance:  
Advancing an equity-centered theoretical framework)



# Advocacy and Outreach

Take the first step in contacting families

Build routines for regular positive messages home

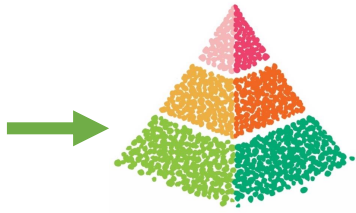
Provide ongoing tailored training on working with families



(Lindstrom Johnson et al., 2024, School-family partnerships to support attendance: Advancing an equity-centered theoretical framework)







Parent awareness due to  
school communication  
improves attendance

Ages 3-7 years  
Pyramid Level 1

(Himmelsbach et al., 2022,  
Your child missed learning the  
alphabet today: A randomized trial of  
sending teacher-written postcards  
home to reduce absences)

1<sup>st</sup> Quarter

Days missed  
so far  
this year

4+ Days  
Urgent— Call us!

3 Days  
3 Months of lost learning

2 Days  
2 Months of lost learning

1 Day  
Try to keep it here

0 Days  
Keep it up

District  
logo  
here

Every Student.  
Every Day.

missed lessons about \_\_\_\_\_

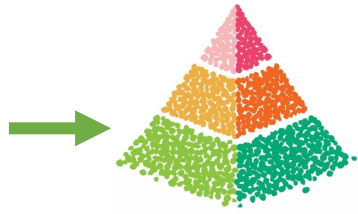
in class on \_\_\_\_\_

The classroom is the best place to learn  
these lessons. I look forward to seeing  
him/her in school.

Main Phone

We are counting on you to get your child to school on  
time every day. Let us know how we can help!

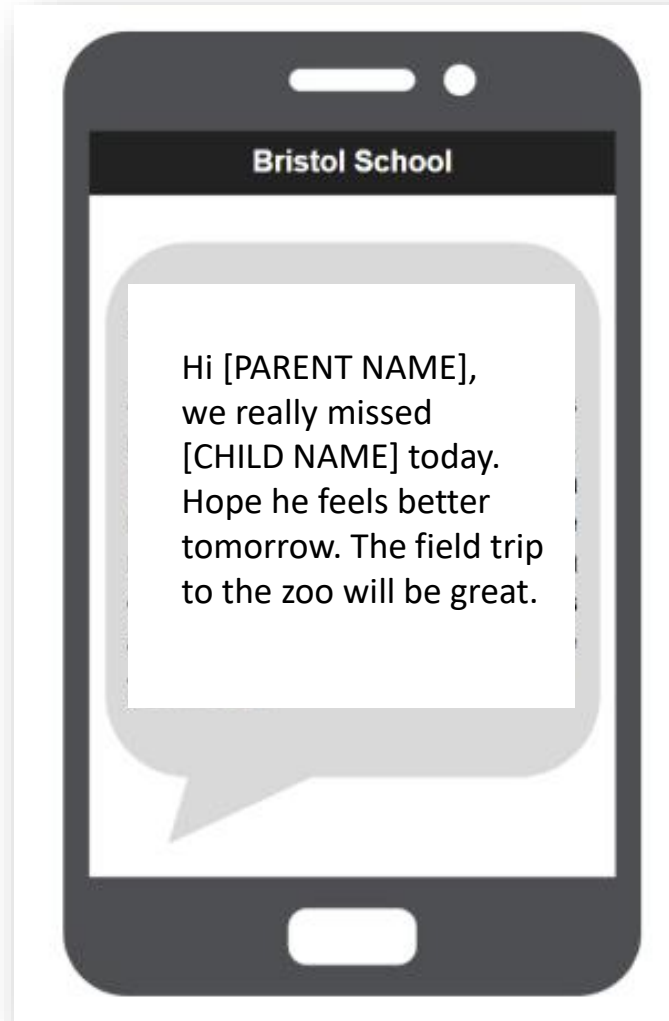
Learning partners from  
'intervention' schools  
were present at school  
8% more than those  
from 'control' schools



Parent awareness due to  
school communication  
improves attendance

## Kindergarten Pyramid Level 1

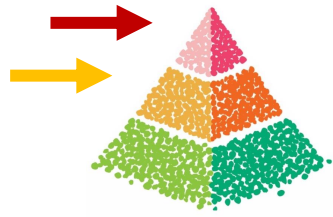
(Smythe-Leistico & Page,, 2018,  
Connect-text: Leveraging text-  
message communication to mitigate  
chronic absenteeism and improve  
parental engagement in the earliest  
years of schooling)



Two-way communication  
helps uncover reasons  
and offer support

75% of families engaged

Chronic absence halved



## Simple parent messages: a start, but not the whole solution

### The study

Meta-analysis of 7 parent-communication trials

Often > 5,000 students

Mostly students with emerging or chronic absence

Mostly USA, 1 UK study

### What schools did

**Short texts, letters, or automated calls to parents**

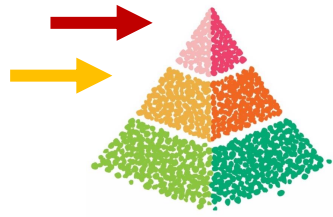
**Explained why attendance matters**

**Gave simple data on their child's absences**

**Sometimes added a gentle “nudge” (e.g., compared attendance with average level)**

(Education Endowment Foundation, 2022, Attendance interventions: Rapid evidence assessment.)





## Simple parent messages: a start, but not the whole solution

### The study

Meta-analysis of 7 parent-communication trials

Often > 5,000 students

Mostly students with emerging or chronic absence

Mostly USA, 1 UK study

### What the research found

**Simple messages had a very small positive impact on attendance (ES = 0.07)**

**A tiny shift – on their own, messages unlikely to change patterns of chronic absence**

**More intensive parental-engagement approaches exist and show larger effects**

**So, messages are best used as a low-cost nudge, alongside deeper work with families**

(Education Endowment Foundation, 2022, Attendance interventions: Rapid evidence assessment.)





# Opportunities for Involvement

Move from 'informing parents' to sharing power and decisions

Create clear ways for parents to give input

Check whose voices are missing; adjust meeting times and format



(Lindstrom Johnson et al., 2024, School-family partnerships to support attendance: Advancing an equity-centered theoretical framework)

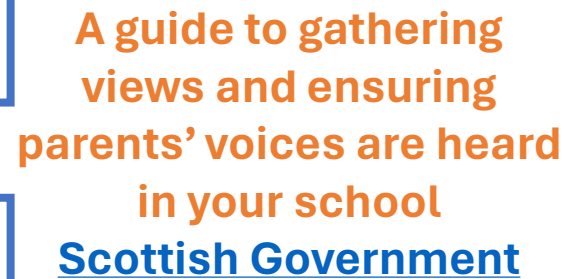


# Opportunities for Involvement

Move from 'informing  
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Create clear ways for  
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Check whose voices are  
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times and format



**A guide to gathering  
views and ensuring  
parents' voices are heard  
in your school**  
**Scottish Government**

(Lindstrom Johnson et al., 2024, School-family partnerships to support attendance:  
Advancing an equity-centered theoretical framework)



# Opportunities for Involvement

**For example,  
Transform your  
back-to-school meeting**

**Not just attendance policies**

**Parent-led conversations  
about hopes and experiences**

**Speaking to the head  
*and to the heart***

(Heyne & Gentle-Genitty,  
Beyond solo acts, 2024)



# School as a Resource

Map common needs (e.g., transport, health); link families to support

Keep a welcoming family space in school that feels like “our place”

Strengthen systems for more intensive help (e.g., referrals, home visits)



(Lindstrom Johnson et al., 2024, School-family partnerships to support attendance: Advancing an equity-centered theoretical framework)



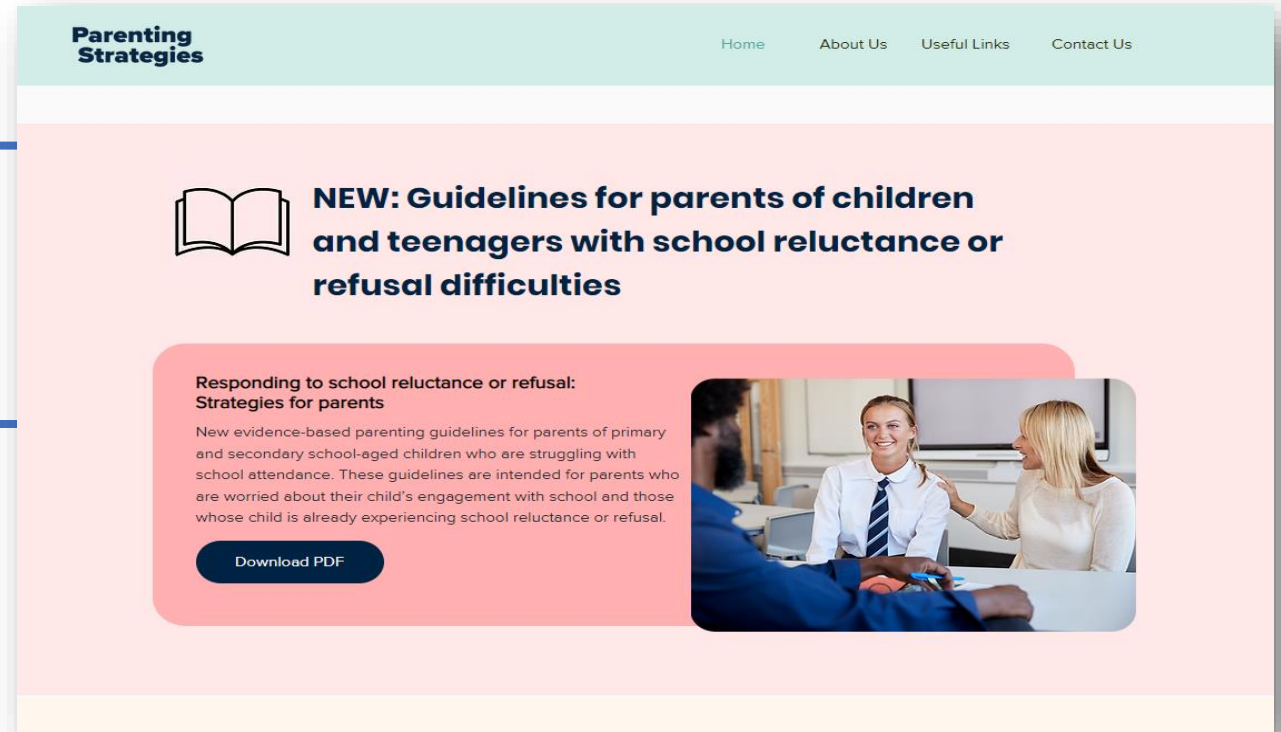
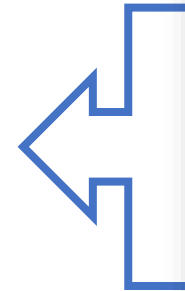


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[www.parentingstrategies.net](http://www.parentingstrategies.net)

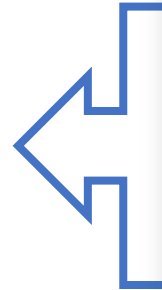




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## ¡Prepárese para una de las aventuras más grandes de la vida de su niño!



La escuela va a empezar pronto. Estos consejos pueden ayudar a que su niño tenga ganas de ir a la escuela todos los días.

¿Usted sabía que faltar uno o dos días un par de veces por mes en la preescola o en kindergarten puede hacer que sea más difícil para que los niños desarrollen las habilidades de lectura y estén preparados para el kindergarten o el primer grado?

### ¡Hora de la aventura!

Lleve a su niño para que visite la escuela para que vea el edificio

- Si es posible, conozca a sus maestros y visite su salón de clases.
- Visite a sus vecinos para ver quién va a ir a la misma escuela. Es siempre divertido tener un compañerito.
- Explore un plan para compartir con los vecinos la tarea de llevar y buscar a los niños, o un grupo para caminar hasta la escuela.
- Responda inmediatamente a cualquier contacto de los maestros de su niño. ¡Haga todas las preguntas que tenga!



### ¡Hora de la historia!

Cuente a su niño historias positivas de cuando usted estaba en la escuela

- Invente canciones tontas sobre las rutinas diarias: despertarse, desayunar e ir a la escuela.
- Lea para su niño todas las noches en el idioma de su hogar.
- Los libros pueden lidiar con las preocupaciones de los niños de maneras divertidas y ayudar en las conversaciones.

1

[‘Attendance Works’ Resources](#)

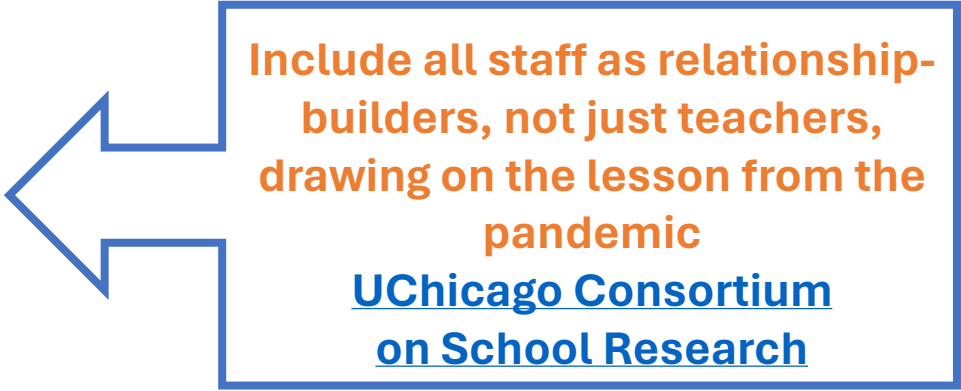


# School as a Resource

Map common needs (e.g., transport, health); link families to support

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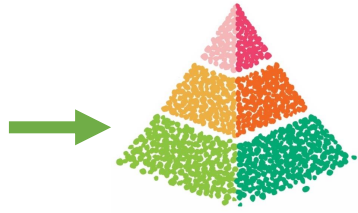
Strengthen systems for more intensive help (e.g., referrals, home visits)



**Include all staff as relationship-builders, not just teachers, drawing on the lesson from the pandemic**

**UChicago Consortium on School Research**





# Universal ‘start-of-the-year’ home visits: what teachers reported

## The study

29 teachers (K-12)

Home visits to every family  
before start of school year

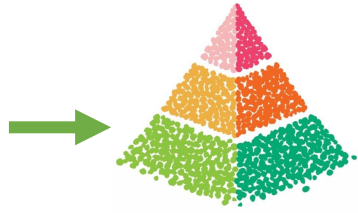
Teacher perceptions after  
several years of home visits

USA

(Meyer, 2011, A five-year follow-up: Teachers’ perceptions of the benefits  
of home visits for early elementary children)







# Universal ‘start-of-the-year’ home visits: what teachers reported

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29 teachers (K-12)

Home visits to every family  
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Teacher perceptions after  
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USA

## What teachers said home visits did

### Attendance

- **Positive impact (61%)**
- **Neutral impact (21%)**

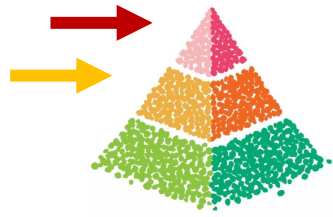
### Attitudes to school

- **Positive impact, student attitudes (89%)**
- **Positive impact, parent attitudes (100%)**

### Better insight, easier communication

(Meyer, 2011, A five-year follow-up: Teachers’ perceptions of the benefits  
of home visits for early elementary children)





# Home visits in more intensive support

## The studies

7 studies at Level 2 or 3

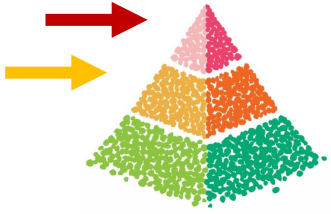
Home visits a part of wider programs for students with emerging or chronic absence

Often with counselling, family meetings, social work support, or court/health responses

USA

(Meyer, 2011, A five-year follow-up: Teachers' perceptions of the benefits of home visits for early elementary children)





# Home visits in more intensive support

## The studies

7 studies at Level 2 or 3

Home visits a part of wider programs for students with emerging or chronic absence

Often with counselling, family meetings, social work support, or court/health responses

USA

## What the studies found

**Social work and teacher home visits sometimes reduced absences; one study showed no clear change**

**Home visits plus counselling/casework linked to > attendance, especially for serious truancy**

**Nurse, social worker or court-linked home visits for very high absence followed by clear attendance gains**

(Meyer, 2011, A five-year follow-up: Teachers' perceptions of the benefits of home visits for early elementary children)



# Parenting Support

Ask families what kind of parenting support they want, and tailor help

Use family nights to share tools for learning and homework at home

Connect parents with parenting or community programs



(Lindstrom Johnson et al., 2024, School-family partnerships to support attendance: Advancing an equity-centered theoretical framework)







# Parenting Support

**For example,  
Mentoring and coaching  
programs**

**Connect experienced parents  
with new parents to provide  
valuable support and  
guidance**

(Heyne & White, 2025,  
The follow-through factor:  
Navigating sustainable  
attendance programs)



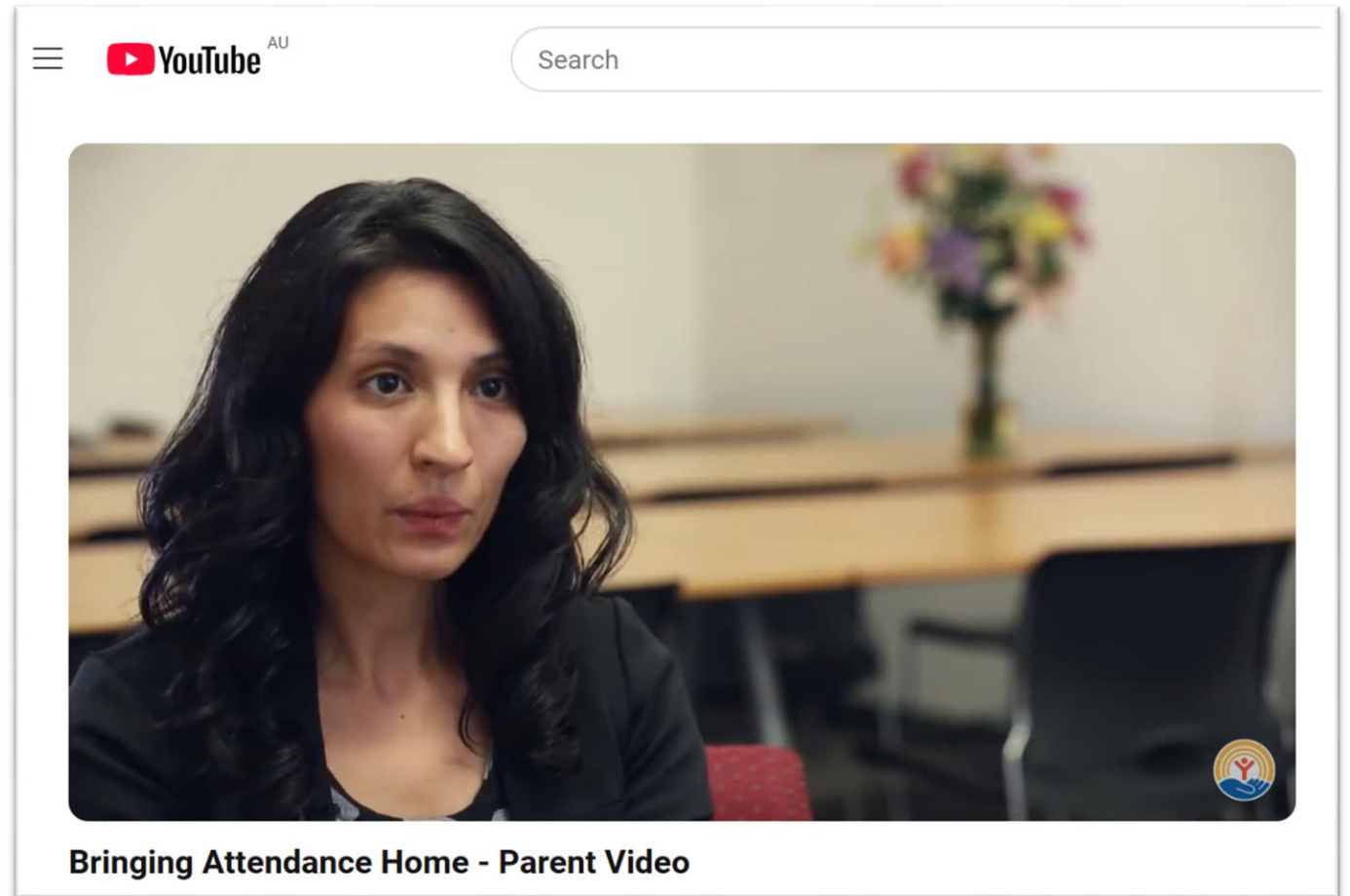


# Parenting Support

**For example,  
Mentoring and coaching  
programs**

**Peer-to-peer videos  
strengthen parent support**

**When schools co-create with  
parents, they also strengthen  
parent involvement**



[‘Attendance Works’ Resources](#)

# Which of these three categories best matches how we work with families?



(UChicago Consortium on School Research, 2022, New research: Seven lessons from school-family communication during the pandemic that are still helpful today)

# Which of these three categories best matches how we work with families?



## Traditional Parent Involvement

### School and Family View

School and family are separate; school is in charge at school, parents in charge at home.

### Decisions & Communication

School makes most decisions alone.  
Communication is one-way, mainly about grades and events.

(UChicago Consortium on School Research, 2022, New research: Seven lessons from school-family communication during the pandemic that are still helpful today)





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### School and Family View

School and family are separate; school is in charge at school, parents in charge at home.

### Decisions & Communication

School makes most decisions alone.  
Communication is one-way, mainly about grades and events.



## School-Parent Partnership

### School and Family View

School asks for parent feedback and listens to parent views.

### Decisions & Communication

School consults parents on some decisions.  
Communication is two-way, but mostly started by the school and focused on school topics.

(UChicago Consortium on School Research, 2022, New research: Seven lessons from school-family communication during the pandemic that are still helpful today)



# Which of these three categories best matches how we work with families?



## Traditional Parent Involvement

### School and Family View

School and family are separate; school is in charge at school, parents in charge at home.

### Decisions & Communication

School makes most decisions alone. Communication is one-way, mainly about grades and events.



## School-Parent Partnership

### School and Family View

School asks for parent feedback and listens to parent views.

### Decisions & Communication

School consults parents on some decisions. Communication is two-way, but mostly started by the school and focused on school topics.



## Family and Community-Centred

### School and Family View

Families are seen as co-leaders; school and community work together for students' and families' well-being.

### Decisions & Communication

School and parents share decisions. Communication is two-way, started by both sides, and covers school and out-of-school needs.

(UChicago Consortium on School Research, 2022, New research: Seven lessons from school-family communication during the pandemic that are still helpful today)



# What do we need to do better – or stop doing – to reach our preferred partnership style?



## Traditional Parent Involvement

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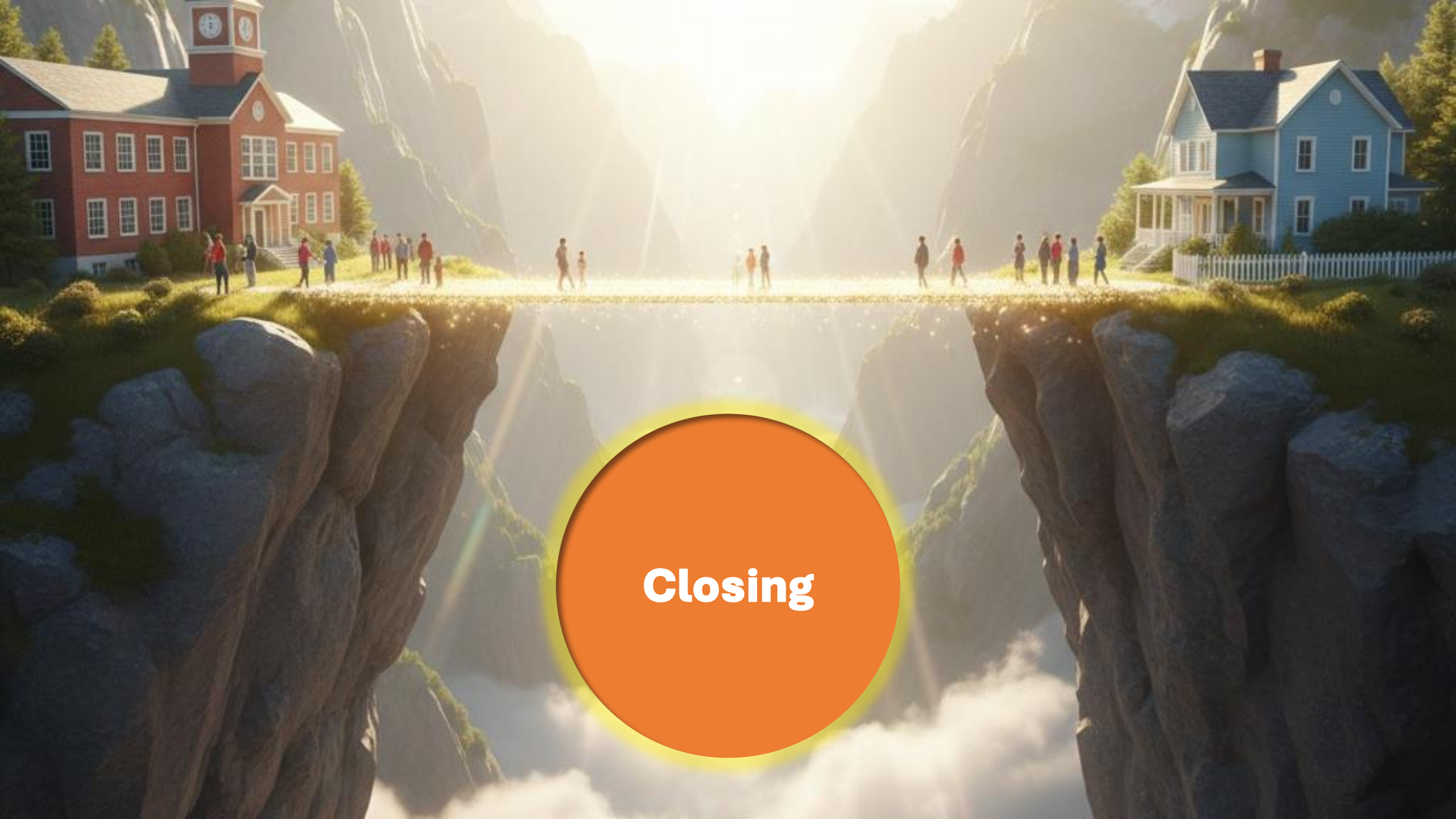
### Decisions & Communication

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**Closing**





**What are we  
proud of?**



**What makes  
our bridge  
stronger?**

# What can I do, to strengthen the bridge?

a) Before a meeting, ask:

*“What is my mind story about this family?”*

*“What is my heart hope for this young person?”*

b) When absence starts to grow, use an early, curious phone call instead of waiting

c) In family meetings, ask at least once:

*“What matters most to you for your child right now?”*





## What can my team do?

- a) Agree on shared, respectful language about attendance (not “difficult family”, etc.)
- b) Decide who will be the link person for each family in high need, so families know who to contact
- c) Build in short debriefs after hard meetings:  
*“What helped the bridge here? What hurt it?”*





## What can our school do?

- a) Review emails, texts, and newsletters to families so they are clear, warm, and in language they understand
- b) Provide time or create a dedicated school-family role, to lead the most complex conversations
- c) Create welcoming spaces and routines – for example, regular open mornings or coffee corners





To promote attendance and engagement,  
and address attendance challenges



**INSA**   
International Network  
for School Attendance









## On Course for Attendance! 2026 INSA Conference



**Samo Varsik**  
OECD  
France



**Tamsin Ford**  
University of Cambridge  
UK



**Aaron Lyon**  
University of Washington  
USA


### KEYNOTE SPEAKERS



**September 30 - October 1 & 2, 2026**  
**Hotel Alicante Golf - San Juan (Alicante, Spain)**





A surreal landscape featuring a red schoolhouse with a clock tower on the left and a blue house on the right, both situated on a floating island. The island is surrounded by a deep chasm filled with clouds and a bright sun in the distance. Several small figures of people are walking across the island. The scene is bathed in a warm, golden light.

**Turning research into action  
for stronger school-home  
partnerships to support  
attendance**

**Dr David Heyne  
Excellence in Attendance Support  
[info@davidheyne.org](mailto:info@davidheyne.org)  
December 1, 2025**