

Solving absenteeism at scale

Why attendance intervention fails at scale, and what schools can do about it.

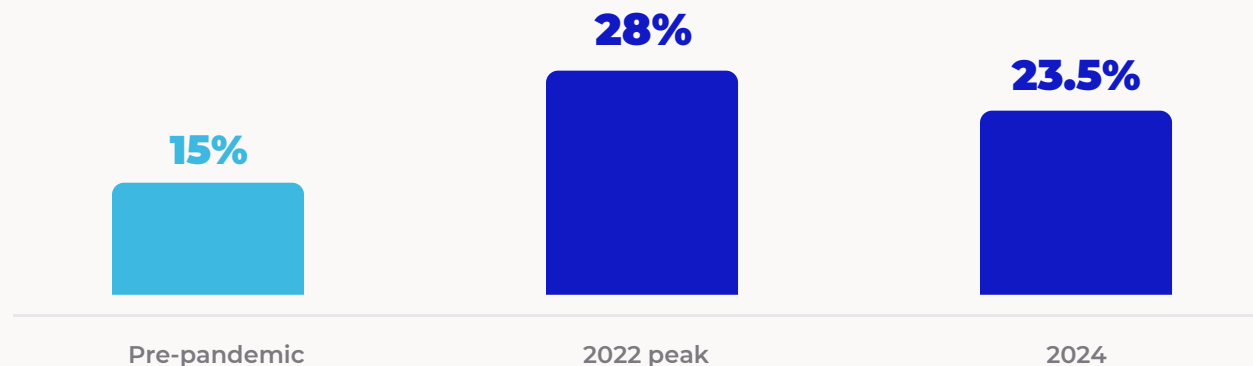
INTRODUCTION

The scale of chronic absenteeism is well understood. What is less examined is the structural reason schools struggle to respond to it effectively, even when they recognize the urgency.

Chronic absenteeism in U.S. schools surged from 15 percent of students before the pandemic to a peak of 28 percent in 2022. It has declined since then, but slowly: a 2025 AEI analysis tracking 44 states found the national rate still at 23.5 percent in 2024, representing approximately 8.6 million students and 155 million lost instructional days in a single year.¹

CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM, SHARE OF U.S. STUDENTS

A slow, incomplete recovery



RAND Corporation's 2024–25 survey of school district leaders found that 40 percent named chronic absenteeism among their top three most pressing issues, and that in roughly half of urban districts, more than 30 percent of students remained chronically absent.²

8.6M

students chronically absent
in 2024

155M

instructional days lost in
a single year

40%

of school leaders rank it a
top 3 issue

Schools have absence data in their student information systems by 8 a.m. The gap is what happens between that data point and a completed follow-up: the call to the family, the reason logged, the pattern flagged, the counselor looped in. That workflow, done manually and done well, is more labor-intensive than most schools can sustain at scale.

01

Why timing is the critical variable

Research on attendance intervention is consistent on one point: the earlier the outreach, the better the outcome. The IES evidence clearinghouse identifies early warning systems and timely family engagement as among the most effective strategies for preventing chronic absenteeism from becoming entrenched.⁴ An *Education Week* analysis published in January 2026 found that absenteeism begins to affect academic performance in math and reading before it reaches the standard threshold for "chronic absence" of 10 percent of school days missed. The window for intervention, in other words, is earlier than the moment schools typically act.³

The intervention window opens

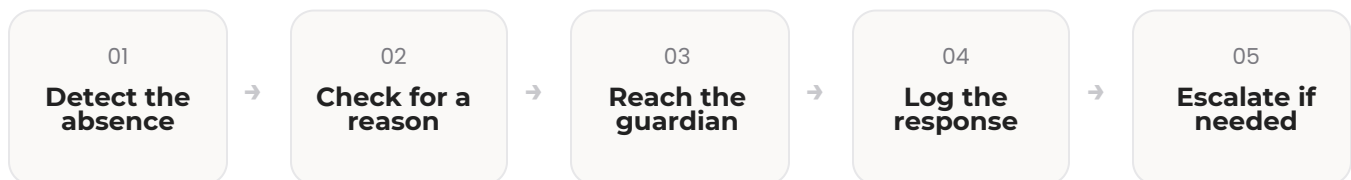
**before the pattern is
visible**

If the goal is to reach families before absence becomes a pattern, outreach needs to happen within days of the first or second absence, not after the pattern is already visible in the data.

That finding has a direct operational implication. A workflow that batches calls at the end of the week, or that depends on a staff member finding time to make individual calls each morning, is structurally misaligned with the intervention window the research identifies.

Where the workflow breaks down

The standard attendance response at most schools involves several steps. Each is straightforward in isolation. Together, repeated for every unexcused absence, every morning, across a student body of several hundred or several thousand, they represent a significant and recurring labor cost.



In practice, that labor cost produces one of two outcomes. Both fail on the same axis: consistency across a full school year.

BATCHED OUTREACH

Families are contacted later in the day or week, reasons go unlogged until someone has time, and escalation happens *after* the pattern is already visible. **Misses the intervention window.**

PERSONALIZED EARLY OUTREACH

Produces better results, but spends staff time that cannot be sustained at scale. The workflow degrades the moment the person carrying it is unavailable. **Cannot be sustained at volume.**

10-20
hours

A single staff member handling attendance follow-up in a moderately sized school may spend ten or more hours each week on outreach alone. That's time taken from other student support responsibilities.

RAND's 2024 survey found that most districts had implemented some form of attendance intervention, but many were reporting limited success in moving their chronic absenteeism numbers.⁵ The effort is there. The infrastructure to sustain it at the right moment, consistently, is what is missing.

What closing the gap requires

The research on what works points to three consistent elements. None is technically complex. The challenge is executing all three, reliably, for every student, without making it a manual process that degrades under normal staff constraints.⁴



Timely identification

Absence data must move from the SIS into a workflow immediately, not at the end of the day.



Family engagement

Two-way communication: a message goes out, a response gets logged, a reason connects to the record.



Escalation with context

Patterns surface automatically to the right person with context already attached, no manual routing.

When one independent school built a highly personalized weekly attendance outreach program, the results were significant, as was the cost.

90%
REDUCTION

A **90 percent reduction in chronic absenteeism**, at a cost of more than ten hours of staff time each week. That tradeoff made visible both the potential of early, personalized outreach and the reason it cannot be the long-term answer.

The outcome depends on the effort. What schools need is a way to sustain the outcome *without* sustaining the effort.

That tradeoff is the real constraint. Follow-up work doesn't shrink to fit the hours a staff member has in a week, and hiring more people to do it isn't how most schools solve a problem like this. Closing the gap between detection and completed follow-up, for every student, every week, without adding headcount, is what the Attendance Assistant is built to do.

• **PRODUCT SPOTLIGHT**

The August Attendance Assistant

The Attendance Assistant runs the follow-up loop automatically. When an absence is detected from the SIS, it applies configurable delay logic to distinguish a late arrival from a genuine absence, then initiates outreach to the right guardian by text or email. Handling the back-and-forth, logging the reason and expected return date, and routing repeated absences to the right staff member with full context attached.

Detect & delay

Configurable logic separates a late arrival from a genuine absence before anyone is contacted.

Two-way outreach

Text or email to the right guardian, with the reason and return date logged automatically.

Context-rich escalation

Repeated absences route to the right person with the history already attached.

Leadership visibility

Review queues and reporting surface patterns across the student body. There's no manual data review.

For deans and divisional heads, it means that by the time an absence reaches their desk, the family has already been contacted and the context is there. It connects to existing SIS infrastructure and is configured at the school level. Tone, triggers, routing logic, and escalation thresholds can all be configured. **The intervention window stays open because the workflow no longer depends on available staff capacity on any given morning.**



More information is available at augustschools.com

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See the Attendance Assistant in action.

Sustain early, personalized attendance outreach for every student, every week. Scan to schedule a walkthrough with our team.



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Student success starts in August.

