

New 2025 Data:

How to Engage K-12 Families to Improve Student Attendance



Timing is of the essence when it comes to student attendance. A new SchoolStatus analysis confirms it. Drawing from four years of intervention data across up to 205 districts, along with 3.3 million school-home messages sent in 116 districts, the findings show that the most effective attendance efforts happen early, often, and with intention.

The Window of Opportunity Is Smaller Than You Think

If you're reading this report, you already know chronic absenteeism isn't just a data point on a dashboard. It's the eighth grader who stopped showing up in October. It's the fourth grader whose mom thought "just a few days" wouldn't matter. It's the high schooler who slipped through the cracks one absence at a time. When students miss too much school, learning gaps widen, social connections fray, and the path forward gets harder to see.

The data shows that when you reach out makes a real difference. Early outreach helps prevent chronic absenteeism and strengthens student engagement.

About This Report

This report is based on two distinct datasets:

- **Attendance intervention data** from SchoolStatus Attend, tracking four years of behavior change across 133 to 205 districts
- **Family communication data** from SchoolStatus Classic, analyzing 3.3 million SMS messages across 116 districts in 15 states, representing 88,000 students and 22,000 educators

Together, these insights offer a clear roadmap for connecting with families and improving attendance, starting today.

3.3M texts

88k students

22k educators

15 states

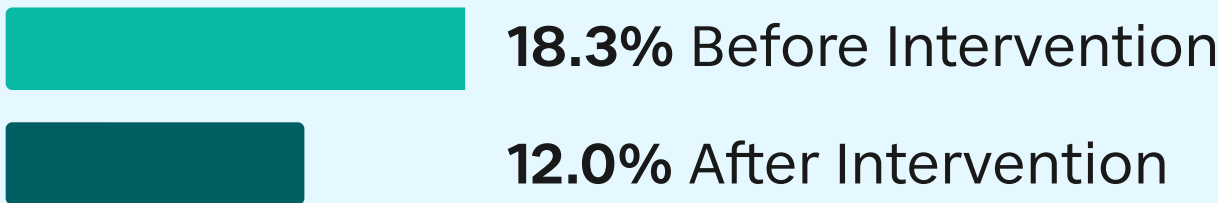
Finding 1: Early Action Makes the Biggest Difference

Here's what the data tells us: reaching out before students become chronically absent, which means missing 10% or more of school days, is crucial. In a typical 180-day school year, chronically absent students miss at least 18 days, which is a significant amount of learning time. Once a student crosses that threshold, the intervention becomes much harder.

First Contact Changes Everything

When schools reach out early, families respond. And the impact of that first touchpoint is substantial. **The average absence rate dropped by 27.4% after one intervention.**

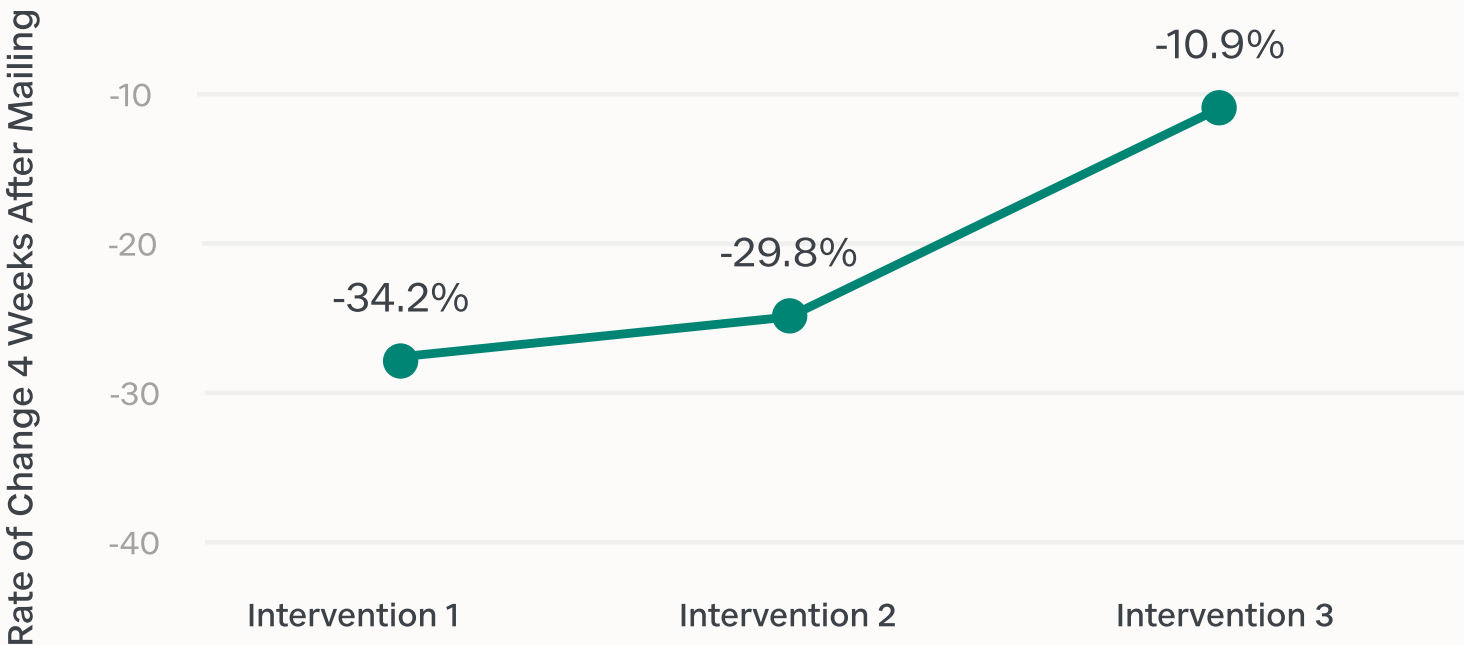
Average Absence Rate



These improvements were measured by comparing absence rates in the four weeks before interventions were sent to the four weeks after. A family that didn't realize how quickly absences add up now has a clear picture and a reason to course-correct.

By the time students reach a third intervention, the effectiveness drops to 10.9%. That's still meaningful for the individual student, but it represents a fundamentally different challenge. These are the students who need wraparound support, not just notifications.

Absence Rate Change

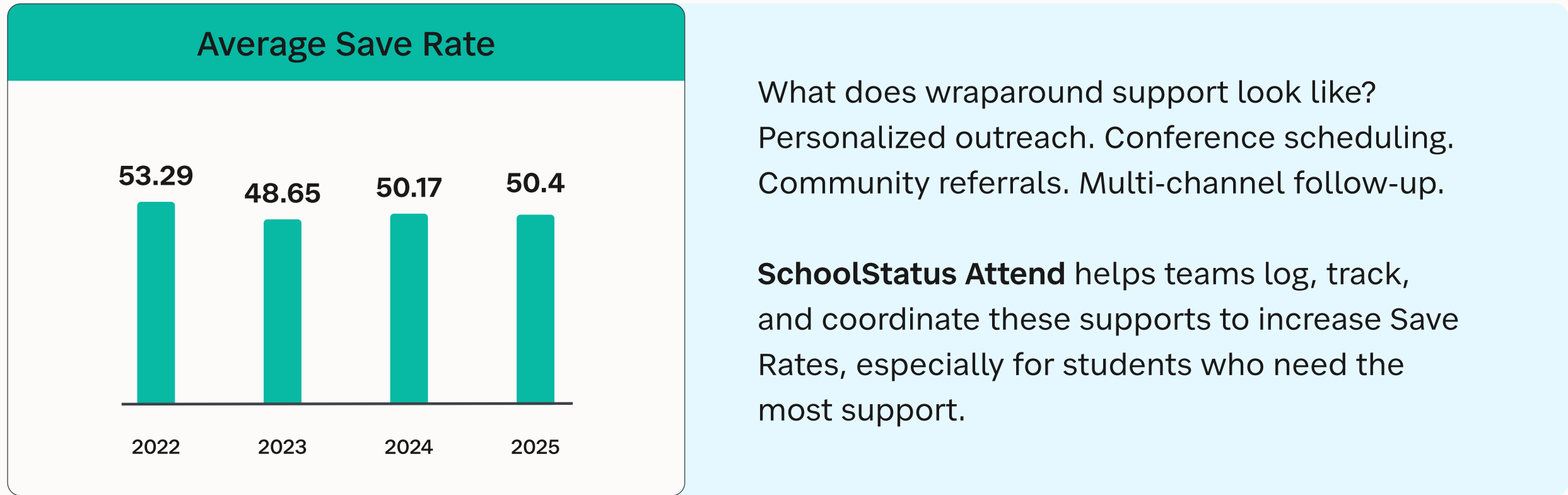


First intervention
improved attendance by **34.2%**
(absence rate dropped from 18.3% to 12.0%)

Second intervention
improved attendance by **29.8%**
(absence rate dropped from 22.0% to 15.4%)

Save Rate: Proof That Early Intervention Works

More than half of the students who receive one intervention don't need a second. We call this the "Save Rate." The consistent impact of the first intervention, across multiple states and school years, shows that there are often families who don't realize how deeply missed days, even when absences are excused, affect learning.



One clear communication changes the trajectory for more than half of students. Think about what that means in real terms. A student who's been absent nearly 17% of school days drops to 12%. That's the difference between missing roughly one day every six school days and missing one day every eight days.

KEY INSIGHT:

Delay means missed opportunity. The longer schools wait to reach out, the harder it becomes to change the trajectory. Every week matters.



Finding 2: Communication Timing Drives Engagement

Here's something that might surprise you: families and guardians are remarkably responsive when schools reach out at the right time.

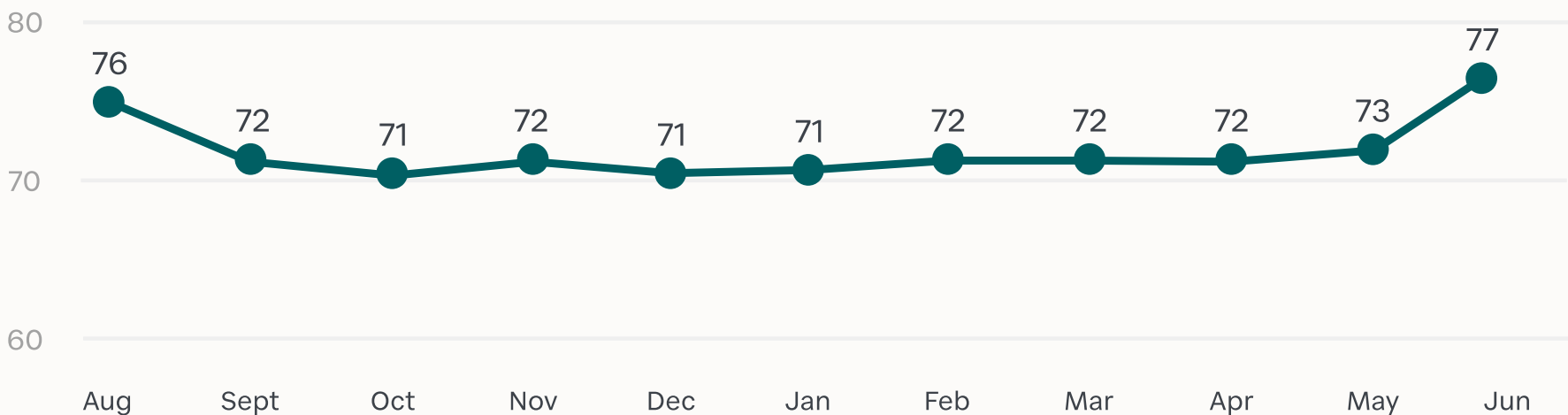
Parents Are Paying Attention

2024-25 SMS data reveals engagement levels that challenge the narrative that parents don't care or won't respond:

- **11-minute median response time:** The average time between an educator's outbound message and a parent's reply is just 11 minutes
- **73% reply rate:** For every 100 families contacted, roughly 73 reply within a week

Eleven minutes. That's faster than most of us respond to work emails. This tells us something important: families are not only willing to engage, they're ready to partner with schools when communication is accessible, timely, and specific.

Parent Reply Rate by Month



SchoolStatus Classic makes it easy to coordinate, document, and measure all of your outreach. Whether it's sending a text, logging a phone call, scheduling a conference, or mailing a letter, every action can be sequenced to match district policy and get students back in class.

For every 100 families contacted, approximately 73 reply within a week

73%

Average reply time is just 11 minutes

11 min

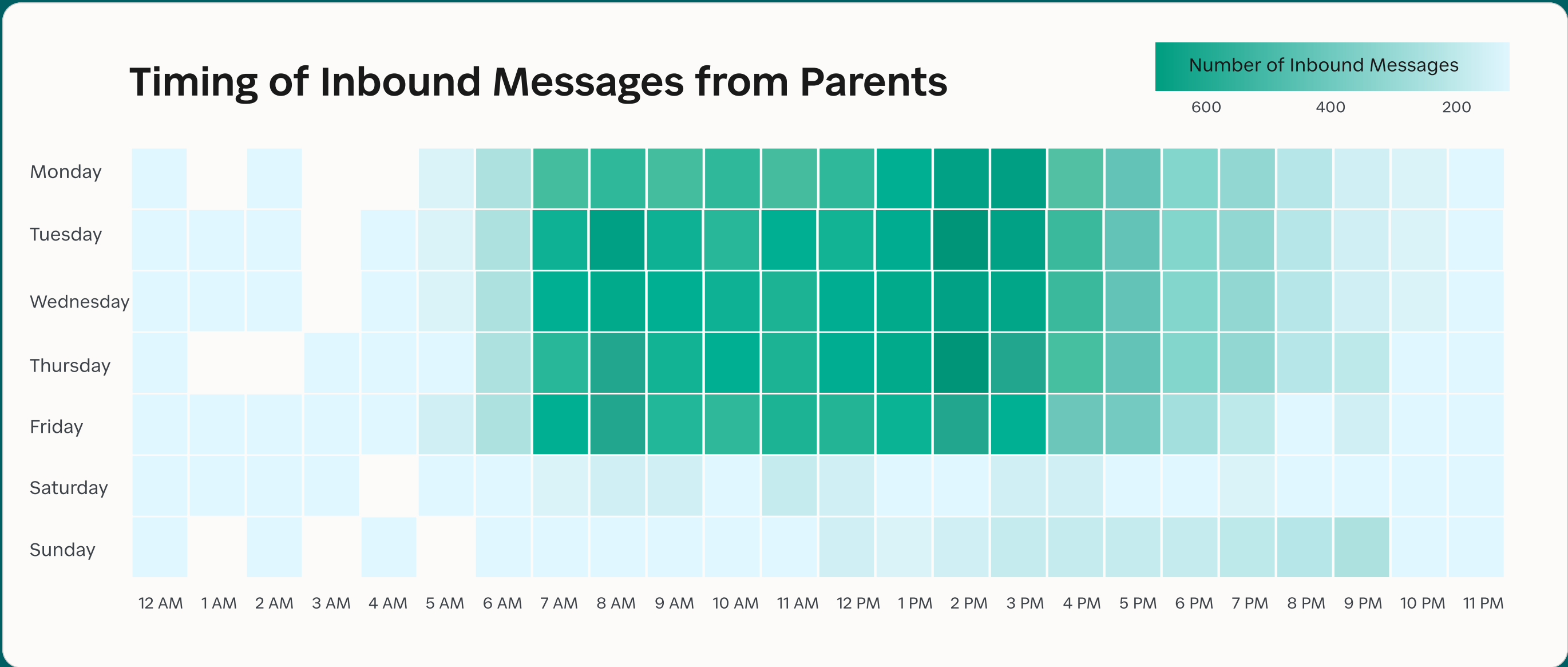
When to Reach Families

Families text back during predictable windows that align with their daily routines. Think about when parents are most likely to check their phones: right before the school day starts and during the afternoon pickup window. The data confirms this.

Active times: 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Thursday; 7 a.m. to 4 p.m. Friday
Peak engagement: 8 a.m. and 2 to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday

At 8 a.m., parents are getting kids ready for school, checking backpacks, and making sure everyone's out the door. From 2 to 4 p.m., they're thinking about pickup, planning the afternoon, and often waiting in carpool lines with phones in hand.

For families working non-traditional hours or multiple jobs, these windows may look different. Yet, the principle holds: messages that arrive during natural transition points in the day are more likely to be seen and answered. A parent checking their phone during a break at work, a caregiver scrolling while waiting for the bus, a family member glancing at texts before the evening rush begins. These are the moments when school is already top of mind or when there's a brief pause to check in.



Early Engagement Predicts Sustained Involvement

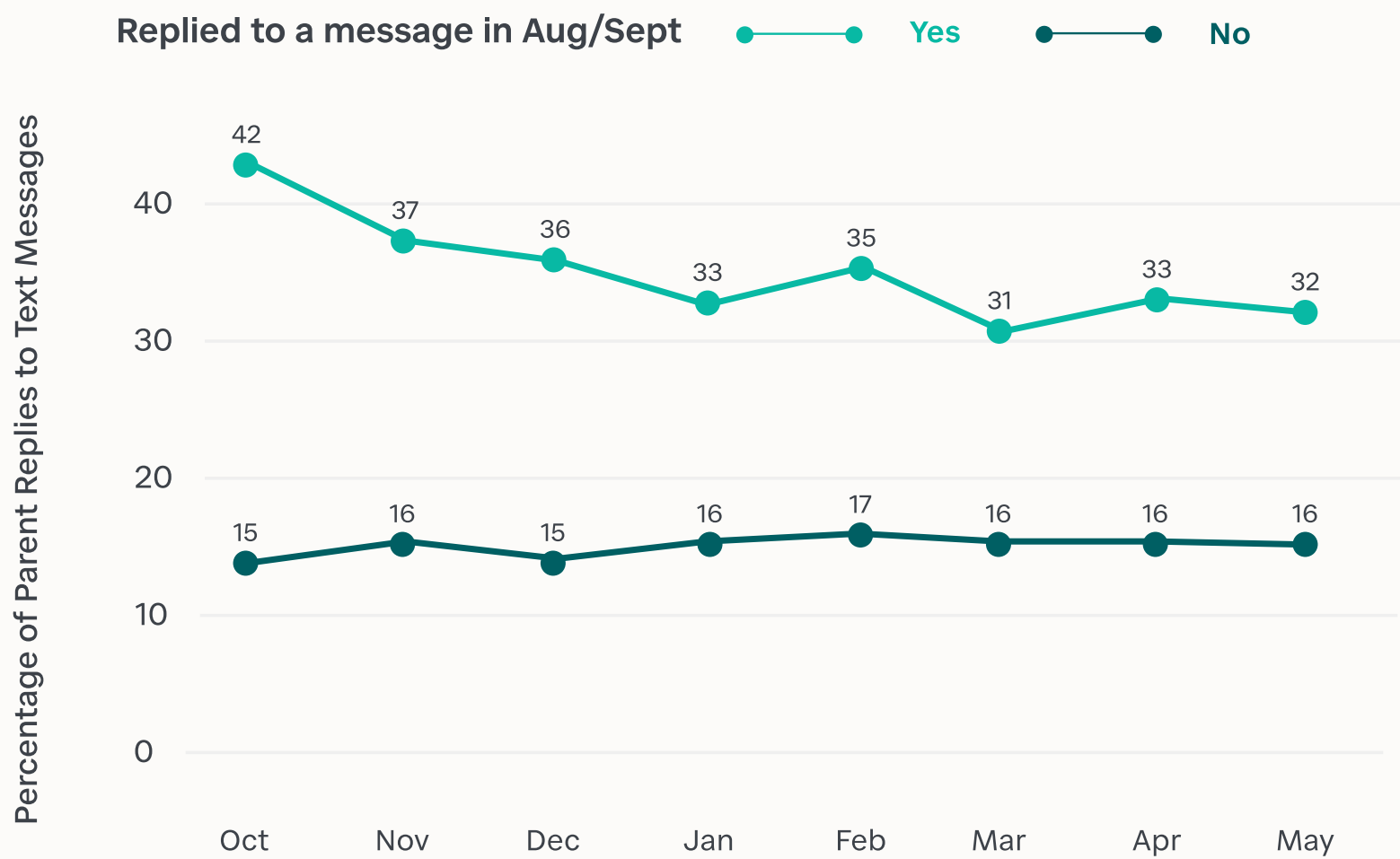
Families who reply at least once in August or September stay more engaged throughout the year. The difference is meaningful:

- Early engagers replied to **77%** of all outreach attempts
- Later engagers replied to **71%** of all outreach attempts (a 6 percentage point difference)

When we looked at January as a benchmark (the month when New Year momentum fades and winter fatigue sets in), the pattern held: 33% of early-engager exchanges had at least one parent reply, compared to just 16% of non-early exchanges.

What this suggests is that those early conversations in August and September do extra work. They establish trust, open a communication channel, and signal to families that partnership matters. When parents know a school will reach out and that their responses are valued, they stay engaged even when life gets hard.

Sustained Engagement: Early vs. Late Responders



KEY INSIGHT:

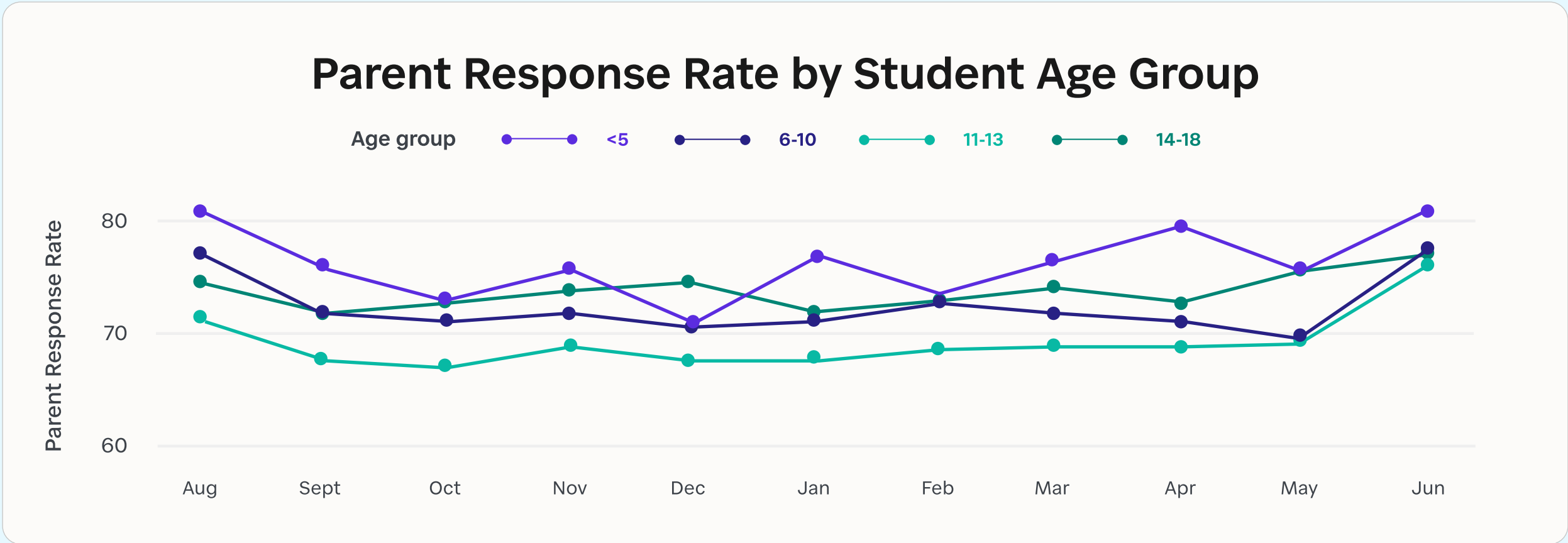
Families who replied at least one time in August or September stayed more engaged through the year.

Early engagement predicts sustained responsiveness. Those first exchanges in August and September matter far beyond the immediate conversation.



Finding 3: Specific Grade Levels Offer Key Opportunities to Address Attendance

Certain transition points in the K-12 journey represent high-need moments when students benefit most from proactive, personalized support. Attendance dips align with structural, academic, and social changes.



KEY INSIGHT:

Communication content and cadence need to be relevant to each age group. Kindergarten and PreK have the highest parental response rates while middle school has the lowest. These trends stay relatively consistent throughout the school year. Engage parents early to build sustained involvement.

Middle School: The Critical Intervention Point


Sixth grade shows the sharpest spike in chronic absenteeism: a 3.32 percentage point increase from fifth grade. If you've worked in a middle school, this won't surprise you. Sixth graders face new building layouts, rotating class schedules, increased academic demands, and complex social dynamics. They're navigating more independence at a time when adult oversight naturally decreases.

Sixth grade is still early enough to intervene and change the trajectory. These students haven't yet developed years of chronic absence patterns. Their habits aren't entrenched. The academic gaps, while growing, are still manageable. This is the moment when intensive, personalized outreach can prevent years of attendance challenges.




The data also reveals that response rates for families of middle schoolers (ages 11-13) lag behind other age groups. Traditional parent-focused outreach may need to be supplemented with direct student communication during these years. Eleven-year-olds check their phones. They're forming their own identities and making their own decisions about school. Addressing them directly, not just through their parents, may be part of the solution.

**Solution Spotlight:
SchoolStatus Connect**

Middle schoolers often need a different approach. With Connect, educators can send secure, trackable messages directly to students—no apps or personal numbers required. It's one more way to meet students where they are and keep them connected to school.




Kayla Gibson



Grade
7th grade

ELL
No

Guardians (2)
 s.gibson@sch

Create New Message

Hi Mrs. Gibson, I wanted to check in on Kayla! She's missed school 10 times this year so far.

Overview

10 ABSENCES	2 CALLS MADE	6 TEXTS SENT	4 TEXTS RECEIVED	3 EMAILS SENT
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Average Daily Attendance

77%

23%

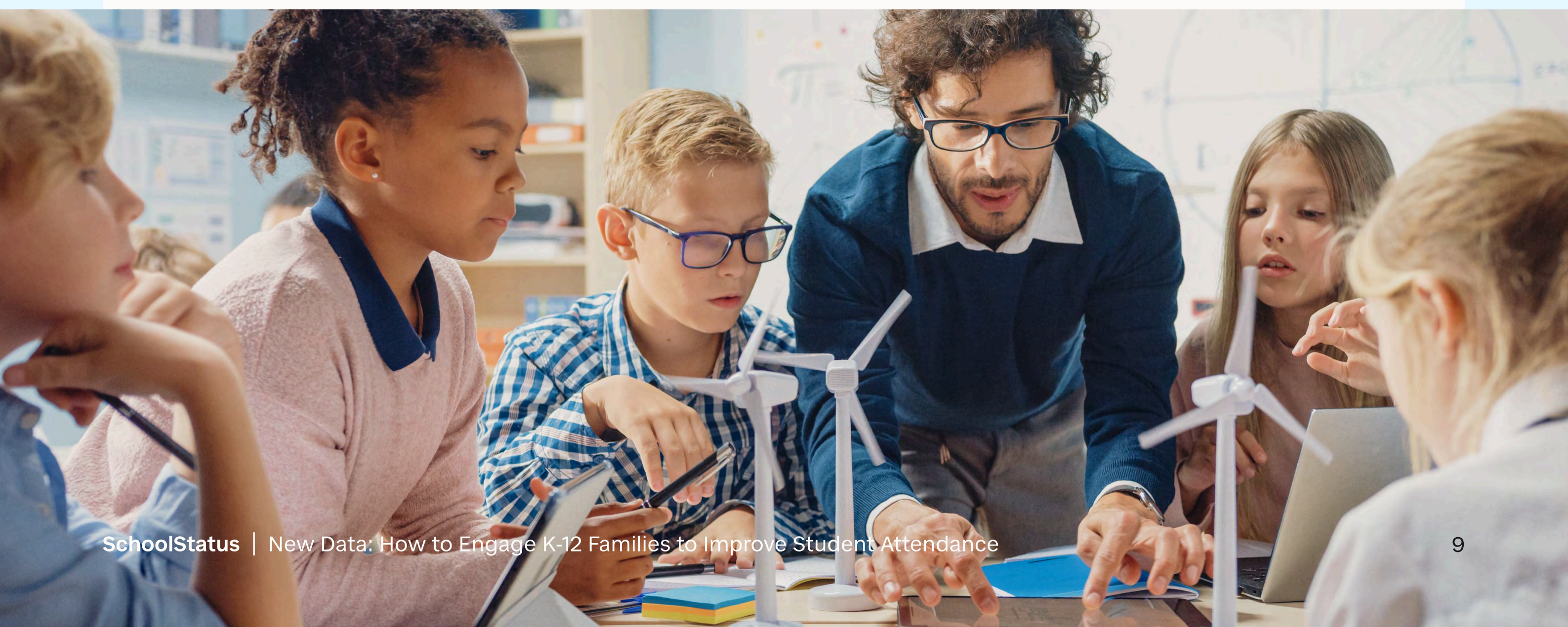
Other Grade-Level Patterns Worth Noting

PreK and Transitional Kindergarten show the highest chronic absenteeism rates. This makes sense: younger children get sick more frequently, families may not yet understand that even early childhood attendance matters, and the daily school habit is still forming. This group shows a critical opportunity. They are the families you can reach before academic stakes increase, before patterns harden, before attendance becomes "just how we are."

Fourth grade emerges as an early signal for future struggles. Students who show attendance challenges in fourth grade often continue those patterns through middle school. If you're looking for an early warning system, fourth-grade attendance data is worth monitoring closely.

Fifth grade is the high-water mark for attendance. Students are still in elementary structures with consistent adult support and haven't yet hit the transition challenges of middle school. This is your baseline, the year that shows what's possible when structures support attendance.

High school presents unique challenges in both communication and attendance. Chronic rates more than double from 5th to 12th grade, meaning districts are systematically losing students in increasingly larger numbers each year. A high school junior has agency over their choices, including schedules and transportation, in ways a second grader doesn't. High schoolers need different motivators than younger students in order to come to class. Understanding this progression can impact how districts approach attendance intervention.

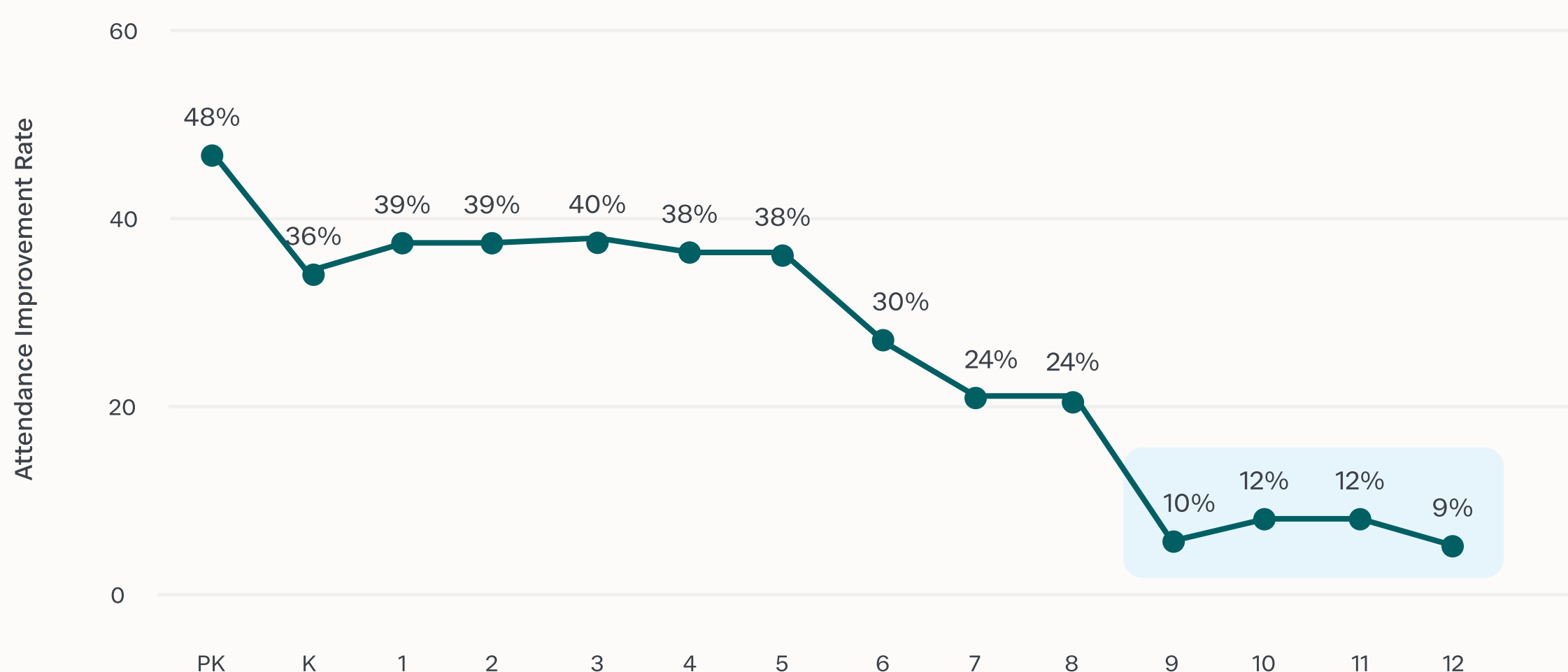


Conference Trends

If attendance doesn't improve after a second intervention is sent, conferences are scheduled. Data shows that one-on-one meetings significantly outperform group sessions for attendance improvement. Group conferences, while logistically easier for high school meetings, don't address the individual barriers keeping a specific student out of school.

The average attendance improvement rate across all grades is 23% after a conference, but effectiveness is strongest and most stable throughout elementary school. Conference effectiveness tapers off as parental control over attendance decreases which happens at the same time group conferencing increases.

Post-Conference Attendance Improvement by Grade Level



KEY INSIGHT:

Middle school represents the best opportunity to intervene. Sixth grade marks the point where prevention is still possible, where systems of support can be built, and where students haven't yet fallen into entrenched patterns of chronic absence. Schools that target sixth grade with intensive, personalized outreach can potentially prevent years of attendance challenges.

Strategies for District Leaders and Educators

You've seen the data. Early interventions work better than later ones and have a lasting impact. First letters change behavior for more than half of students. Families reply to 73% of messages, often within minutes.

Now the question becomes: what do you do with this information?

Response patterns vary by student group, which means one-size-fits-all approaches won't work. The good news is, small shifts can create meaningful change.

Different Students Need Different Approaches

The variation in Save Rates and response times across age groups tells us that different families are dealing with different challenges:

First intervention response rates reveal that families may not realize how quickly absences add up, even with legitimate reasons. One clear communication often solves the problem. Families with truancy patterns rather than excused absences may be dealing with more complex barriers that require ongoing support, so it's important to understand why absences don't immediately improve for the other 49% of students.

Age-based differences in both SMS response and conference efficacy indicate that middle and high school students may benefit from direct communication in addition to parent outreach. Response rates lag for 11 to 13-year-olds. Conference effectiveness drops for older students when delivered in group settings. These patterns suggest that adolescents need to be part of the conversation, not just its subject.

Early engagement patterns show that building relationships in August and September pays dividends all year. Families who engage early stay engaged suggesting that the first weeks of school are about more than procedures and expectations. You need to establish trust and open communication channels that will matter when challenges arise later in the year.

Practical Strategies That Work

Based on these findings, here are evidence-backed approaches you can implement now:



Review attendance early in the week.

Monday or Tuesday reviews allow time for outreach during peak engagement windows before the week ends. If you wait until Thursday to notice a pattern, you've missed the window for timely intervention.



Send messages during peak windows.

The 8 a.m. and 2 to 4 p.m. time slots aren't random. They align with when families are most responsive. Messages sent at 8 a.m. arrive when parents are getting kids ready for school. Messages sent between 2 to 4 p.m. arrive during pickup or when parents are transitioning from work to family mode. These messages fit naturally into parents' daily rhythms, which means they're more likely to be read, processed, and acted upon.



Keep communication short, timely, and specific.

The 11-minute median response time tells us parents are ready to engage when messages are clear and action-oriented. Plain language outperforms educational jargon. Specific absence counts ("Your student has missed 4 days this month") outperform vague language ("We've noticed some absences"). Direct offers of help ("Reply if you need support with transportation or health concerns") outperform lengthy explanations of attendance policy.



Consider direct student messaging for ages 11-18.

Middle and high schoolers check their phones constantly. Pairing parent outreach with age-appropriate student communication may improve response rates during these critical years. A text to a 14-year-old that says, "We missed you yesterday. Everything okay?" can open a conversation that wouldn't happen through a parent.



Track what works and iterate by student group.

The data shows that no single approach works equally well for all students. Monitor your Save Rates, response times, and behavior change metrics by grade level and intervention type. Which families respond to texts versus emails or printed letters? Which need additional support? Are there common barriers in your community? Which time windows work best for your community? Use this information to refine your approach throughout the year.

Remember, Timing Is a Force Multiplier

Students and families are responsive when schools reach out with the right message at the right time. The 73% reply rate proves this. The 28-40% improvement after the first letter confirms it.

Every missed day matters. Every day we wait to act matters just as much.

A three-absence intervention versus a 10-absence intervention is the difference between catching a family when one clear communication can change behavior and catching them when patterns have hardened.

Reaching out at 8 AM versus 6 PM is a message arriving when school is already on a parent's mind, instead of competing with a dozen other demands.

Engaging families in August versus waiting until later in the year means the difference between 77% response rates and 71% response rates, between 33% still responding in January and 16% still responding in January.

You can't control every barrier families face. You can control when you reach out, how quickly you respond to absence patterns, and whether you engage families in August or wait until crisis mode. And that timing? It changes everything.

Additional Resources

If you're looking for more ideas to proactively prevent chronic absenteeism, join ***Mission: Attendance*** to receive free monthly tools packed with tactics proven to get kids back in the classroom.

[Join ***Mission: Attendance*** today →](#)

Improve Your Attendance

Ready to see successful attendance interventions and family engagement in action? Book a meeting to learn how SchoolStatus can help you achieve the kind of results highlighted in this report.

[Book a Meeting](#)