



ADDRESSING CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM AT SKYLINE HIGH SCHOOL

Front Royal, Virginia
Warren County Public Schools
2024-2025



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Prepared for:

Skyline High School



FRANK BATTEN SCHOOL
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Applied Policy Project Disclaimer

The author conducted this study as part of the professional education program at the Frank Batten School of Leadership and Public Policy, University of Virginia. This paper is submitted in partial fulfillment of the course requirements for the Master of Public Policy degree. The judgments and conclusions are solely those of the author and are not necessarily endorsed by the Batten School, the University of Virginia, or by any other agency.

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University of Virginia Honor Statement

On my honor as a student, I pledge that I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid on this assignment.



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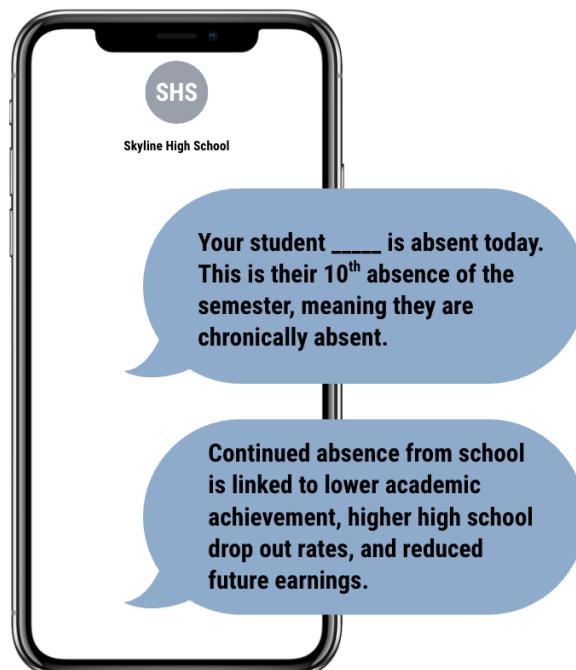
Executive Summary

Chronic absenteeism, when students miss 10 percent or more of the school year due to unexcused absences, is a pressing issue nationwide that threatens student achievement, increases the risk of high school dropout, and has long-term economic consequences for individuals and society (Virginia Department of Education, 2023-a). This document focuses on solutions for Skyline High School where over 32 percent of students (approximately 286) were chronically absent during the 2023 to 2024 academic year, a consistent trend since the COVID-19 pandemic (Virginia Department of Education, 2023-a). This is higher than the national average (28%) by approximately 14%. Taking steps to address chronic absenteeism is critical for ensuring student success, and it is within the scope of Skyline High School to take further action on the issue.

The following report analyzes three policy alternatives to respond to chronic absenteeism at Skyline High School:

1. Establishing a School-Based Peer Mentor Program
2. Creating an Automated Attendance Text Alert System for Parents
3. Implementing a Family School Attendance Calls Program

These alternatives are evaluated based on their cost-effectiveness, sustainability, immediacy, and equity. Ultimately, I recommend that Skyline High School establish and maintain an automated Attendance Text Alert System based on its high cost-effectiveness, sustainability, and immediacy. This alternative best-balanced Skyline's need to address absenteeism quickly without putting much strain on funding and staff resources.



Client Overview: Skyline High School



My client is Skyline High School which is located in Warren County, Virginia. The mission of Warren County Public Schools and Skyline High School (SHS) is to “empower everyone to achieve excellence by sparking inspiration and learning through innovation” (Warren County Public Schools, n.d.-a). To realize this mission, SHS students must regularly attend school. Chronic absence directly impacts students current and future success and the schools’ accreditation, underscoring the need for Skyline to take action on this issue (Virginia Department of Education, n.d.-b). Skyline has the ability to address the problem of absenteeism within the school by taking steps to understand why many students are chronically absent, informing students and families about the impact of absenteeism, and pursuing initiatives aimed at addressing the causes of absenteeism.



Introduction

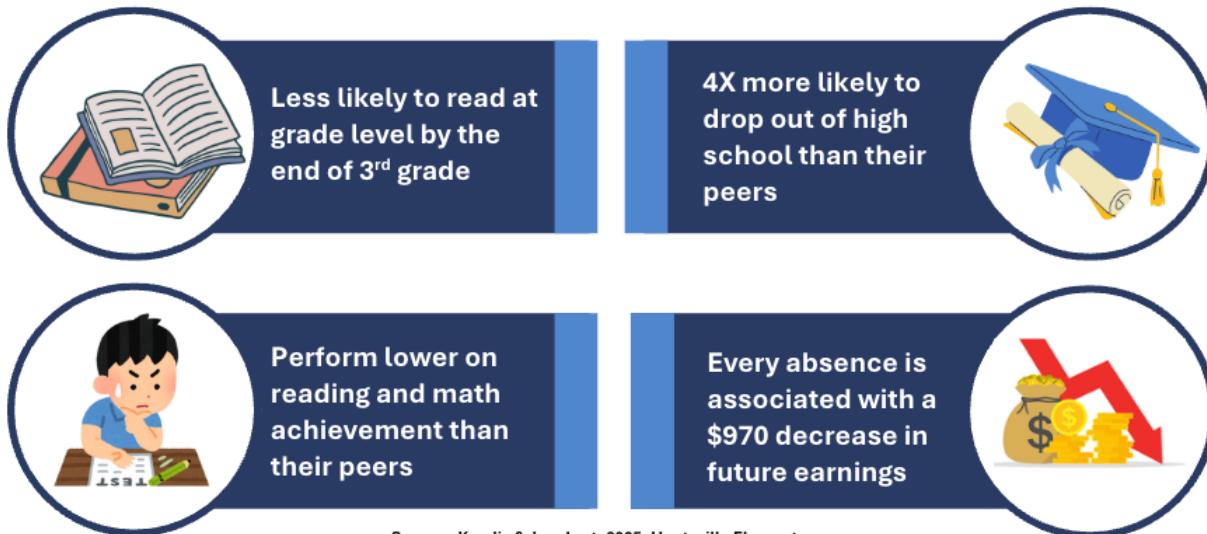
Chronic absenteeism is a nationwide crisis, disrupting student learning and threatening educational outcomes across the United States. With absenteeism rates rising – notably since the COVID-19 pandemic – millions of students are missing critical classroom instruction, leading to lower academic achievement and long-term economic consequences for individuals and society. This paper explores the state and impact of chronic absenteeism at Skyline High School in Front Royal, Virginia. It outlines why this problem matters, the root causes of the issue, and prior efforts to combat it, and proposes three potential solutions for Skyline to address chronic absenteeism. By understanding the root causes and exploring effective interventions, Skyline can take further action to ensure students remain engaged in their education and attend school and rates of chronic absenteeism fall.

Problem Statement

During the 2023 to 2024 academic year, more than 32 percent of Skyline High School students were chronically absent and this has been a consistent trend over the past four years (Virginia Department of Education, 2023-a). Chronic absenteeism, when a student is absent for 10 percent or more of the school year, is linked to reduced academic achievement, higher high school dropout rates, and reduced economic achievement later in life (Liu et al., 2021; U.S. Department of Education, n.d.; Virginia Department of Education, 2023-a).

FIGURE 1: Impact of Chronic Absenteeism on Students

The Impact of Chronically Absent Students



Consequences of Chronic Absenteeism

Chronic absenteeism has profound implications for students, schools, and society. Chronically absent students face lower academic achievement, such as reduced test scores, and are four times more likely to drop out of high school (displayed in Figure 1 above) (Attendance Works, n.d.). On average, chronically absent students are 25 percent behind in math and 18 percent behind in reading compared to their peers (Martinez, 2023). Additionally, chronically absent students are more likely to face reduced job opportunities and lower earnings in the future. A United Kingdom Department of Education study estimated that each absence for a student is associated with an approximately \$970 decrease in future earnings per absence (Kendix & Lambert, 2025). Schools also face challenges as chronic absenteeism disrupts the learning environment and lowers overall school performance, impacts school accreditation, and strains resources as they attempt to reengage absent students. On a societal level, chronic absenteeism can reduce the number of qualified individuals entering the workforce after high school and limit economic growth for society.

Background on the Problem

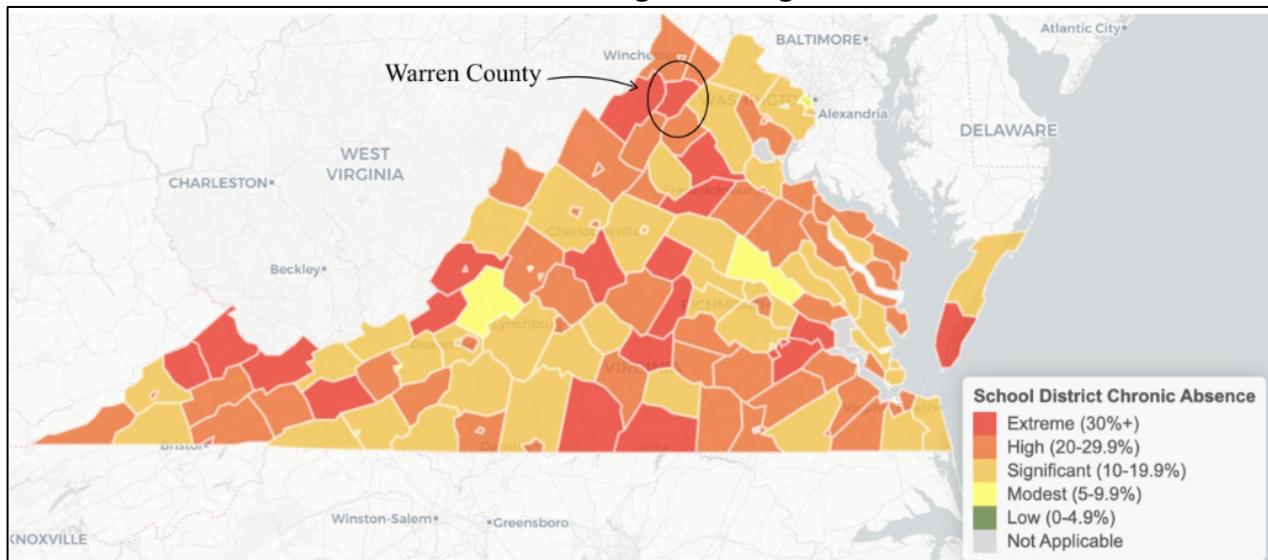
Education in America assumes that students are in class every weekday. However, we must consider how absence from school affects student performance and educational attainment and evaluate what can be done to combat the issue of chronic absenteeism. A key point to differentiate when discussing student absences is the difference between truancy and chronic absenteeism. Truancy only considers unexcused absences and depends on legal and administrative solutions to address repeated student absences from school (Attendance Works, n.d.; Virginia Department of Education, n.d.-a). Chronic absenteeism accounts for all absences (i.e., excused, unexcused, suspensions) and focuses on the academic impact that missing school has on students then employs various strategies to address the issue (Attendance Works, n.d.). Nationally, approximately 28 percent of students were chronically absent in the 2022 to 2023 school year, a trend seen throughout Virginia as well (“Chronic absenteeism,” n.d.). Figure 3 below displays the variation between rates of chronic absenteeism nationally, in Virginia, and at Skyline High School from pre-COVID in 2018 through the 2023 to 2024 school year.

Absenteeism in Virginia

The chronic absenteeism rate in the Commonwealth of Virginia doubled from 2020 to 2023. Approximately 20 percent of students missed more than 10 percent of the school year (Martinez, 2023). This problem is particularly severe in high-poverty areas and among low-income students (Naff et al., 2023). The rise of chronic absenteeism prompted the Governor of Virginia, Glenn Youngkin, to create the Virginia Chronic Absenteeism Task Force to address attendance, literacy, and learning loss issues (Martinez, 2023). Figure 2

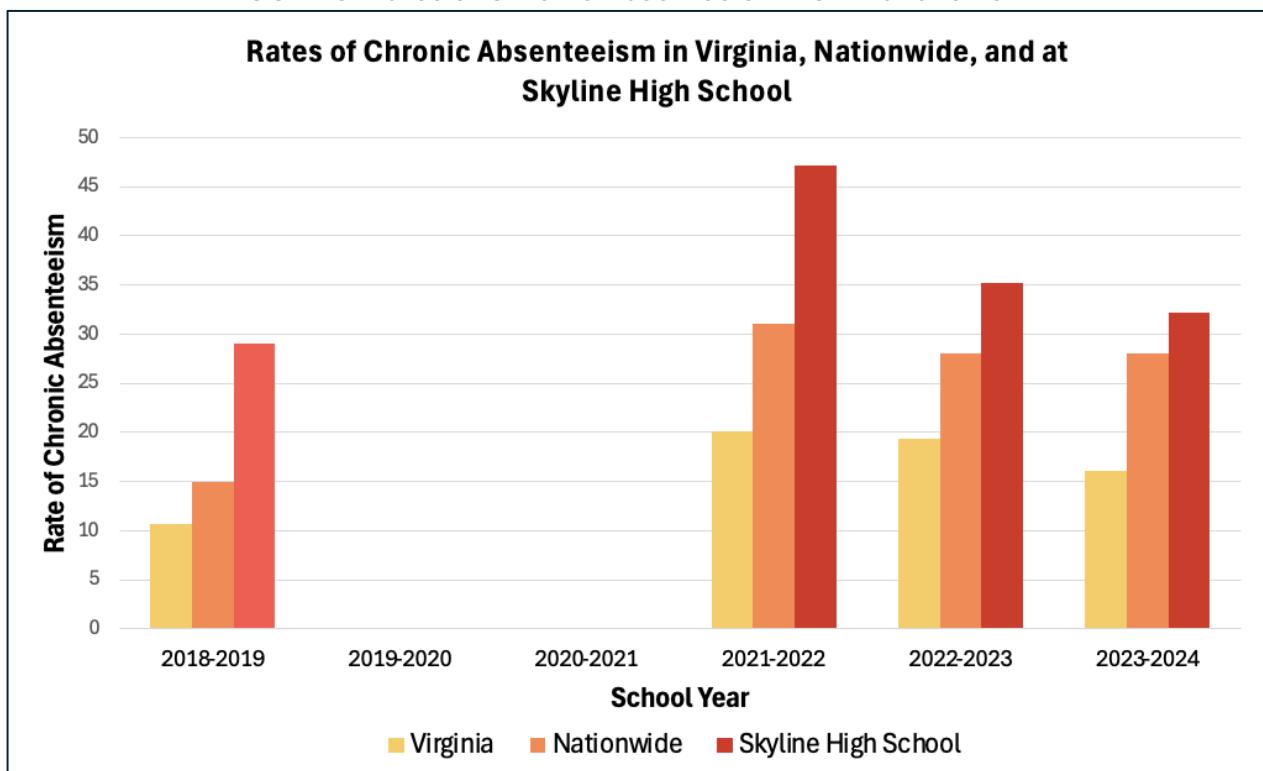
below displays chronic absenteeism rate in Virginia, with many counties having between 10 percent to 30 percent chronic absence rates. Warren County, where my client is located, is one of the counties experiencing the highest rates of chronic absenteeism in the state.

FIGURE 2: Chronic Absence Rates in Virginia during the 2021-2022 School Year



Source: Everyone Graduates Center and Attendance Works analysis of data from the U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Census Bureau

FIGURE 3: Rates of Chronic Absenteeism from 2018 to 2024



Source: Virginia Department of Education School Climate Reports (n.d.-c), FutureEd

Potential Causes of and Factors Contributing to Chronic Absenteeism

A range of factors influence a student's ability and willingness to attend school, including chronic illness, mental health challenges, the school environment, transportation issues, and socioeconomic disparities. These factors contribute to chronic absenteeism, which increases the likelihood of adverse student outcomes, such as lower test scores, higher high school dropout rates, and diminished long-term success. As I review the drivers of chronic absenteeism, I will indicate the extent to which specific concerns are relevant to Skyline High School and the depth to which I intend to focus my evaluation on these issues. The connection between the contributing factors to the problem and the potential outcomes is illustrated in Figure 4, a root cause analysis map, which can be found in Appendix E. As I progressed with my research, I focused on three identified causes: mental health issues, family factors and socioeconomic disparities, and school environment. I believe that by focusing on these root causes I will be able to generate alternatives that have the best chance of impacting Skyline High School.

Socioeconomic Disparities

Students' home environment plays a crucial role in their school attendance, which is impacted by family size, family income, and home responsibilities. There is a socioeconomic element to the issue of absenteeism. A study found that 23.2 percent of students who were eligible for free and reduced-price lunch (FRPL) were absent three or more days per month of school, compared to only 15.4 percent of students not eligible for FRPL missing three or more days (Garcia & Weiss, 2018). The students from lower-income households, eligible for FRPL, were also twice as likely to be absent 10 or more days a month compared to students without FRPL eligibility (Garcia & Weiss, 2018). Additionally, research shows that parents from lower socioeconomic backgrounds have fewer financial and educational resources to support their children if they become consistently absent, limiting parents' ability to supplement missed classroom instruction (Cooper & Stewart, 2021; Sosu, Goodfellow, & Klein, 2021; Yeung et al., 2002).

Physical & Mental Health/Wellbeing of Students

Student health is another key barrier to attendance in school and can contribute to chronic absenteeism. Chronic illnesses are a common reason students become chronically absent, and research shows that students with chronic illnesses had a 37 percent higher rate of absenteeism compared to their classmates (Emerson et al., 2016; McDougall et al., 2004; Schlecht et al., 2023). However, directing my research and policy options toward causes other than chronic illness will enhance the likelihood of effectively addressing chronic absenteeism at Skyline High School (SHS) by engaging a broader spectrum of students. Mental health is another factor in school attendance (Havik, Trude, & Ingul, 2021). Studies have found that anxiety, depression, and other mental health conditions impact a student's willingness to attend school (Kearney, 2008; Kearney & Albano, 2004; McShane et al., 2001; Sparks, 2023). As shown in Figure 4 (Appendix E), the root cause map and various secondary root causes of chronic absenteeism impact mental health. For example, a student's feeling of physical and psychological safety can impact their mental

health, which then affects school attendance. In a survey of high school students, 16 percent of students reported anxiety as the reason they were absent from school (Stanford, 2023). The ongoing youth mental health crisis in America, which was declared by the US Surgeon General in 2021, impacts student well-being, stress levels, academic performance, and attendance and is a factor to consider when analyzing methods to address chronic absenteeism (Peetz, 2023).

Transportation Issues

Another issue impacting students' attendance is their transportation to and from school. Across the United States, over half of students rely on school-provided buses to get to school (Department of Transportation, 2021; Hopson et al., 2024; NYSBCA, n.d.). Low access to or shortages in public transportation to school can be a key barrier to student attendance (Gottfried et al., 2021). Transportation challenges were previously a concern for Warren County Public Schools. Still, the district addressed this issue by consolidating bus routes and implementing staggered start times for elementary, middle, and high schools (Phipps, 2022).

Conclusion on Causes & Consideration

The ongoing prevalence of chronic absenteeism, along with its multiple contributing factors, underscores the urgent need for a deeper analysis of the issue and exploration of potential solutions (Balfanz and Byrnes, 2012; Liu et al., 2021; Virginia Department of Education, 2023-b). The following section of this paper outlines key frameworks to consider when discussing education interventions and assessing prior efforts to address the problem.

Prior Approaches to Address Chronic Absenteeism

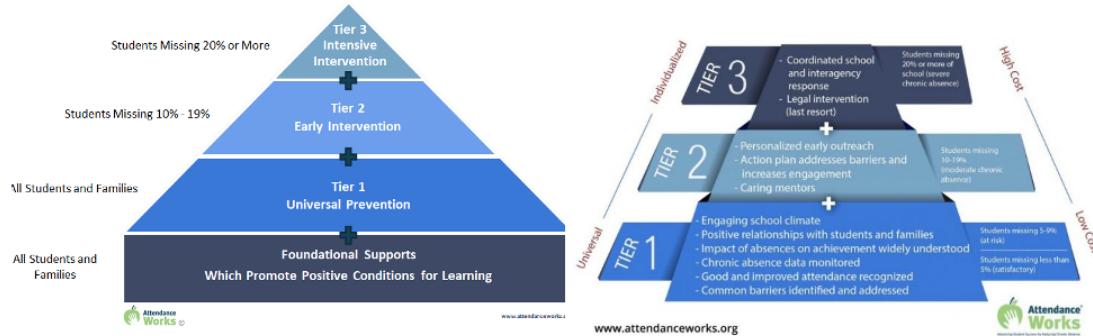
Multi-Tiered System of Supports Framework

Much of the literature on chronic absenteeism highlights how the issue is often due to an interplay of contributing factors, such as mental and physical health challenges, lack of connection to school, and family instability or responsibilities (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2013; Gottfried, 2014; Gubbels & Assink, 2019). Many educators and academics conclude that practical solutions to chronic absenteeism require targeted interventions that address various contributing factors (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2013; Gottfried & Gee, 2017; Gottfried, 2019; Learning Policy Institute, 2024). However, most studies evaluating the impact of interventions on chronic absenteeism focus on assessing programs that address a single contributing factor. More research is needed to strengthen the argument that effective solutions require a comprehensive approach that tackles the multiple factors influencing absenteeism.

The primary framework for addressing school-related challenges, including chronic absenteeism, is the Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) framework. MTSS enables

educators and administrators to consider targeted academic and behavioral interventions tailored to students' diverse needs (Epperson, 2023). This system is structured across four levels of support - foundational supports, Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3, each designed to address varying degrees of need within the student population (the tiers are represented in Figure 5 below) ("3 Tiers of Intervention," n.d.).

FIGURE 5: Multi-Tiered System of Supports Framework



The MTSS framework was developed to address growing concerns about how schools identified and addressed student needs, especially academic achievement gaps, behavioral issues, and social-emotional development. MTSS expands on two prior education frameworks: Response to Intervention (RTI) and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS). Response to Intervention (RTI) is an education framework that utilizes a tiered model to identify where students need additional academic support ("Essential components of RTI," 2010; University of Kansas, 1970). RTI focuses on early identification and intervention for students at risk of academic failure and uses progress monitoring to help decide what interventions are needed for students ("Essential components of RTI," 2010; University of Kansas, 1970).

The Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) also uses a tiered approach to address behavioral issues by fostering a supportive school climate and teaching positive behaviors (Arway, 2023; "What is PBIS, n.d."). Tier 3 of PBIS centers on school-wide behavior expectations, Tier 2 focuses on offering targeted interventions for students that need additional support, and Tier 3 interventions provide more intense, individualized support for students with the most behavior challenges (Arway, 2023; "What is PBIS, n.d."). Schools nationwide began implementing RTI (for academics) and PBIS (for behavior) in the early 2000s and the MTSS framework emerged as a unified approach to these prior frameworks that focused on addressing students' academic, behavioral, and social-emotional needs. These frameworks are used widely in education with at least 21 states in the US using MTSS or RTI to structure education interventions in 2020 (Schiller et al., 2020).

The foundational support level of the MTSS framework focuses on creating positive learning environments for all students and families (Kearney & Graczyk, 2020; Stoiber & Gettinger, 2015; “Three Tiers Framework,” 2020). By fostering these supportive conditions, schools increase the likelihood that students feel more engaged and motivated to attend school regularly (Daily et al., 2020). Tier 1 interventions focus on universal strategies that prevent chronic absenteeism for all students, such as rewarding good attendance, engaging the school climate, and monitoring absence data (“Three Tiers Framework,” 2020). Tier 2 interventions prioritize early intervention for students with moderate chronic absence and include more personalized strategies like mentoring and family outreach. Lastly, Tier 3 includes intensive interventions at the individual level that often engage support from the school district, public agencies, or the courts as a last resort (“Three Tiers Framework,” 2020). Tier 3 interventions address the most vulnerable students who miss over 20 percent of the school year.

In addition to the MTSS framework, the literature identifies three key levels of intervention to consider when addressing chronic absenteeism: school-based programs, family or guardian focused approaches, and community-centered interventions. A variety of research is available that evaluates school-based initiatives, such as mentor programs and family-centered strategies, but more limited research on the effectiveness of community-centered programs in reducing absenteeism. Consequently, this review focuses primarily on analyzing the impact of interventions at the school and family levels.

Community-Centered Programs

Community-centered programs have shown success in reducing chronic absenteeism in some interventions. One community-centered program is called community schools, where the school works with local community organizations to support students by bringing support services into school buildings (“Our Mission & History,” n.d.). These services can include social services, mental health counseling, health care, and additional tutoring outside of what is provided by the school. A 2022 study in New York City evaluated the NYC Community Schools Initiative where they brought mental health counseling, after-school programs, healthcare, and family engagement services into elementary, middle, and high schools (Johnston, et al., 2020). Researchers used a quasi-experimental method to estimate that the community schools intervention reduced the portion of chronically absent elementary and middle school students by an average of 7.3 percentage points each year for three years and high school students by 8.3 percentage points (Johnston, et al., 2020). The main limitation of this study is that it may be affected by selection bias – since the students and schools were not randomly assigned to participate in the community schools program, it is possible that other factors, like school motivation or community involvement influenced the outcome. However, they were able to compare program schools with nonprogram schools that had similar baseline characteristics and used a large sample size to best display the potential impact of community schools on chronic absenteeism. Although a community schools program has shown to lower chronic

absenteeism, it requires a lot of coordination and resources. I do not think it is a realistic option in the context of Skyline High School.

School-Based Programs

Mentor Programs

Mentor programs have demonstrated promising potential in reducing chronic Absenteeism. However, their effectiveness can vary based on program structure, unique student needs, the context of the school and community, and the level of support provided. By fostering positive relationships between students and mentors, these programs can enhance students' sense of belonging and connection to the school, which may increase attendance (Jordan, 2023; May et al., 2021). For example, the Check & Connect mentor program has been shown to reduce absences by approximately 37 percent (Social Programs that Work, 2018). A randomized control trial conducted in Chicago Public Schools (CPS) evaluated the impact of one year in the mentor program on student attendance for middle and high school students (Guryan et al., 2021). The study found that students in the program, who were assigned a mentor for regular check-ins, progress monitoring, and social support, experienced a reduction in absences by 4.2 days per year (22.9 percent) in grades 5 to 7. Still, no significant effect was observed for students in grades 1 to 4 (Guryan et al., 2021). One limitation of this study is that the sample size is only 765 students, which may limit how confidently the results can be generalized to larger or more diverse student populations. Additionally, the main concern regarding this study's applicability to my client's context is that CPS is a large, urban district and the study focused on students in elementary and middle school, so we may see different effects if this was implemented at Skyline, a rural high school.

Another study assessed the impact of the Finish Strong attendance program at Surf High School in Florida (Bundshuh et al., 2021). This program employed a multifaceted approach, which included monitoring student absences, clearly communicating attendance policies, assigning student mentors, and enforcing consequences for noncompliant students, such as detention and parent conferences. Longitudinal data was used to compare Surf High School to the six other high schools in the district (Bundshuh et al., 2021). The evaluation found that five years after its implementation, the Finish Strong attendance program led to an 8.42 percentage point reduction in the number of students with 21 or more absences, a change not observed in other high schools in the district (Bundshuh et al., 2021). A limitation of this study is that it may be affected by selection bias – since students were not randomly assigned to receive a mentor, it's possible that differences in student behavior, school leadership, or other unmeasured factors influenced the outcomes rather than the program itself. While the study's non-randomized design is a limitation, the presence of multiple comparison high schools within the same school district strengthens the validity of these findings. It supports the conclusion that the program can be an intervention to reduce chronic absenteeism.

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Programs

Social-emotional learning programs are designed to help students build essential self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy and relationship-building skills. By improving students' emotional resilience, SEL programs can reduce anxiety, stress, and negative perceptions of school, which are often linked to absenteeism (Kearney, 2008; Kearney & Albano, 2004; McShane et al., 2001; Sparks, 2023). These programs teach students coping strategies, conflict resolution techniques, and goal-setting skills, which can help students manage personal challenges that may impact school attendance. A randomized control trial in Chicago evaluated the impact of the Positive Action (PA) SEL program on the wellbeing of students in third through eighth grade (Snyder et al., 2009). The study found that PA significantly reduced levels of depression and anxiety among participating students (Snyder et al., 2009). While SEL programs have demonstrated positive effects on students' mental health and school climate, limited evidence directly links these programs to a reduction in chronic absenteeism.

Family/Guardian Focused Interventions

Attendance Letters Sent to Households

Family-centered interventions to address chronic absenteeism often focus on strengthening the relationship between home and school for students through parental outreach and engagement. Research shows that family involvement can improve student attendance, and several studies have explored the effectiveness of informational interventions, such as sending attendance data to parents, to reduce absenteeism (Mac Iver et al., 2022; Rogers et al., 2017). A randomized control trial in the School District of Philadelphia assigned households with students in grades one through twelve to either receive or not receive a “nudge” letter about their child’s absence (Rogers et al., 2017). The study found that those who received the letter saw a reduction in absences by approximately 2.4 percent (Rogers et al., 2017). The nudge intervention had differential impacts across grade levels, with middle school students seeing the largest reduction in absences and high school students having the lowest reduction. A limitation of the study is that the timeframe to evaluate the intervention’s impacts, 14 weeks, is relatively short, and a more extended evaluation period may have enhanced the validity of the results.

A similar intervention was conducted in Seattle Public Schools, modeled after the Rogers (2017) study, where the district sent “nudge letters” to the students identified as chronically absent during the 2016 to 2017 school year (Mac Iver et al., 2022). However, a key limitation of this study is the large difference in the proportion of students in the treatment and control groups, which likely affected the power of the analysis. The nudge letter included the number of days the student missed in the previous school year and provided contact information for school staff that parents could contact. To estimate the impact of the letters on attendance rates, the researchers compared outcomes of students just above and below a 10% absence rate. Students above the 10% absence rate received the nudge letters and those below the threshold did not. Still, the study found no

statistically significant improvement in attendance compared to the control group (Mac Iver et al., 2022).

Home Visits

Another family-based intervention aimed at reducing chronic absenteeism is parent teacher home visits (PTHV), which aim to address chronic absenteeism by visiting students identified as chronically absent. An observational study across four large urban districts found that three schools implementing PTHV experienced a 5 percent reduction in the average chronic absenteeism rate (Sheldon & Bee, 2018). Additionally, school students who utilized home visits were 22 percent less likely to be chronically absent than those who did not implement this intervention (Sheldon & Bee, 2018). A limitation of this study is that it may be affected by selection bias – since students were not randomly assigned to receive the intervention, it's possible that differences in student behavior, school leadership, or other unmeasured factors influenced the outcomes rather than the program itself.

A similar home visit program, the Learner Engagement and Attendance Program (LEAP), was launched in 2021 across 15 school districts in Connecticut (Stemler et al., 2022). An evaluation of LEAP revealed that students who received home visits showed an increase in attendance rates compared to their pre-intervention records, with average attendance rates rising by approximately 15 percentage points in the following school year (Stemler et al., 2022). While the results suggest that home visits could help improve attendance, the study compares students' attendance before and after they received the visits, rather than comparing them to a separate group of students who did not receive the visits. This makes it harder to tell whether the improvement was caused by the home visits or by something else that changed over time with the students. This limits its ability to establish causality due to the lack of randomization. Another limitation is the variability in how the program was implemented across different districts, which complicates efforts to replicate or standardize the intervention.

Attendance Text Alerts

A final family-focused intervention is attendance text alerts which send messages to parents and guardians about their student's attendance with the goal of increasing parental engagement in their student's education. The U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences conducted a randomized study in 2020 to assess the impact of attendance text message notifications sent to families on absenteeism rates. The researchers concluded that the text message program reduced chronic absenteeism by 2.4 to 3.6 percentage points (Kurki, Heppen, & Brown, 2020).

Conclusion on Prior Interventions

The literature highlights several promising interventions for addressing chronic absenteeism, particularly those focusing on school-based and family-centered

approaches. Among school-based programs, mentor initiatives show significant potential in improving student attendance by fostering relationships that promote engagement and a sense of belonging. Social-emotional learning (SEL) programs, while beneficial in enhancing students' emotional resilience and mental wellbeing, still show limited direct impact on absenteeism and likely need to be paired with other strategies to result in attendance improvements. At the family/guardian level, interventions such as parent teacher home visits, attendance letters, and texts have effectively addressed chronic absenteeism by strengthening school-home connection and increasing parental awareness of absenteeism. Overall, the most promising interventions appear to be Tier 1 and 2 focused initiatives focusing on direct student support (e.g., mentor programs) or family engagement (e.g., home visits and attendance notifications).

Criteria

The following criteria will be used as the evaluative measures to assess each policy option. The weight of each criterion is listed, based on its relevance to Skyline High School.

Cost-effectiveness (40%)

Cost-effectiveness measures the relationship between the total monetary costs required to implement a policy over four years. Effectiveness is measured by the percentage point reduction in chronic absenteeism that resulted from the alternative over four years. Cost-effectiveness costs are determined using a 3 percent discount rate (White House, 2017).

The cost-effectiveness ratio is calculated by dividing each alternative's net present value (NPV) total costs by the net present value estimate of its effectiveness. The outcome provides the cost per percentage point reduction in chronic absenteeism. To enable comparison across alternatives, cost-effectiveness estimates are converted to points based on a 1-5 scale, as outlined below (a lower cost-effectiveness ratio is more favorable). The most cost-effective policies will reduce chronic absenteeism with the lowest cost per percentage point reduction, specific assumptions, cost estimates, and calculations made for the cost-effectiveness analysis can be found in Appendix A.

$$\text{Cost - effectiveness ratio} = \frac{(\text{NPV Total Cost})}{(\text{Percentage Point Reduction in Absenteeism})}$$

Score out of 5	Cost per percentage point reduction in chronic absenteeism
1 (very low cost-effectiveness)	≥ \$9,500
2 (low cost-effectiveness)	\$7,500 - \$9,499
3 (moderate cost-effectiveness)	\$5,500 - \$7,499
4 (high cost-effectiveness)	\$3,500 - \$5,499
5 (very high cost-effectiveness)	\$0 - \$3,499

Sustainability (20%)

Sustainability measures the long-term viability of a policy or program, ensuring it can stay effective even if the school experiences changes, such as leadership transitions, staff turnover, or resources shifts. A sustainable policy can be maintained and expanded over time with minimal disruption. Since absenteeism is an ongoing challenge, policies must be resilient and adaptable to continue addressing the issue at Skyline if it persists or reemerges. To evaluate sustainability, I consider the number of parties involved in maintaining a policy long-term (e.g., the school, outside organizations, companies, etc.) beyond its initial implementation. Policies that rely on fewer parties and partnerships are more likely to endure and less vulnerable to changes in personnel or resources. I evaluate each alternative on a 1-5 scale based on the number of individuals/parties involved, with higher scores indicating greater sustainability due to fewer dependencies.

Score out of 5	People/parties Involved
1 (very low sustainability)	Requires engagement from more than 10 individuals/parties (e.g., parents, teachers, counselors, students)
2 (low sustainability)	Requires engagement from 6-9 people/parties
3 (moderate sustainability)	Requires engagement from 4-5 people/parties
4 (high sustainability)	Requires engagement from 2-3 people/parties
5 (very high sustainability)	Requires engagement from 1 person/party (self-sustainable)

Immediacy (30%)

The criterion of immediacy will consider the steps necessary to implement each alternative to assess how difficult and time-consuming the policies will be for Skyline to establish. Immediacy is important because the interventions should be relatively easy to implement and options that Skyline High School can achieve in a timely manner. To evaluate this criterion, I will score the alternatives based on how many steps are necessary to establish each policy. The steps required for each policy option to be implemented. Each alternative is evaluated on a 1-3 scale based on the number of steps needed to implement it, as outlined below.

Score out of 5	Number of steps required to establish alternative
1 (very low immediacy)	≥ 9 steps
2 (low immediacy)	7-8 steps
3 (moderate immediacy)	5-6 steps
4 (high immediacy)	3-4 steps
5 (very high immediacy)	1-2 steps

Equity (10%)

The equity criterion evaluates if a policy alternative will ensure that low-income students, individuals disproportionately facing chronic absenteeism, have the same access to the resources or support outlined in the alternative as other students (Learning Policy Institute, 2024). To operationalize equity, each alternative is assessed based on the statements in the rubric below which consider potential barriers to access and the impact of the alternative. Each alternative is then given a score from 1-5 points and will receive a point for each statement below that applies to it. The more points the alternative gets, the more equitable it is.

Point potential	Aspects of Equity
1	The alternative is accessible to students of all income levels with no substantial barriers to participation (e.g., does not require internet or technology, transportation, or parental availability).
1	The alternative specifically targets low-income students.
1	The alternative is available to students regardless of parent work schedules by offering flexible engagement methods (e.g., asynchronous communication, school-based participation).
1	The alternative does not require technology access (e.g., laptop, smartphone, internet) for participation.
1	The alternative provides culturally and linguistically inclusive support to ensure accessibility for students from diverse backgrounds (e.g., translated materials, multilingual staff, culturally responsive engagement strategies).

Findings

This section outlines the three alternatives being considered - Peer Mentoring, Attendance Text Alerts, and Family Attendance Calls - and evaluates them through each of the criteria.

Alternative 1: Peer Mentoring

A one-on-one peer mentoring program is a way to increase student feelings of support and engagement in school by fostering positive relationships and enhancing students' sense of belonging and connection (Jordan, 2023; May et al., 2021). Skyline counselors would pair each underclassman with an upperclassman mentor at the start of the school year. Then mentor meetings would occur every three weeks for thirty minutes at some point within the school day. The school counselors would develop questions the students could use to guide the meetings that would change based on what period students were in the school year. Below are a few questions that could be used for a mentor meeting at the beginning of the school year are below.

- What classes are you taking this year? (Discuss shared classes, study tips, etc.)
- What activities or events are you looking forward to this school year?
- Do you feel like you have the support you need from teachers, friends, and family to be successful in school?

Cost-effectiveness: 1

To estimate the cost of Alternative 1, a study from the Children and Youth Services Review was used, which conducted statistical analysis to estimate the marginal cost of a community-based volunteer mentor program in the US (Alfonso et al., 2019). The study breaks down the total expenditures for the program and concludes it costs approximately \$80 per month per mentor. Due to differences in time and resource requirements for Skyline, I reduced the cost per mentor by 25 percent to \$60 per month (see Appendix A for more details). This estimate was adjusted for inflation (34.09 percent) from 2016 to 2025 to estimate that the 2025 yearly cost of the program per mentor is \$965.42 (see Appendix A for calculation). Based on the adjusted estimate and a discount rate of 3 percent, this alternative's total net present value expected cost over four years is approximately \$1.7 million (see Appendix A for calculation and assumptions) (White House, 2017).

To estimate the effectiveness of Alternative 1, a report by the Johns Hopkins School of Education was used, which evaluated the impact of New York City's Success Mentors program on chronic absenteeism rates (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2013). The average reduction in absenteeism was 1.5 percentage points per year - this estimate was used to calculate cost-effectiveness (see Appendix A for more details on the study) (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2013).

Dividing total costs by reduction in chronic absenteeism, a mentor program is expected to cost approximately \$284,635 per percentage point reduction in chronic absenteeism, giving it a cost-effectiveness score of 1 (see Table 1 in Appendix A for results).

Sustainability: 3

Peer mentoring has moderate sustainability, as it requires ongoing involvement from multiple parties within the school. The primary stakeholders responsible for maintaining the program would be the three school counselors at Skyline, who oversee the mentor-mentee pairings, schedule the mentor meetings, and provide guiding questions throughout the year (Inclusive School Communities, n.d.). Additionally, the program relies heavily on students. The upperclassmen mentors must consistently participate and engage with their mentees. There is a significant reliance on student mentor engagement and counselor investment (Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities, 2024). A positive aspect of the program is that no external partnerships are required and once the framework is established, it can be used with minimal adjustments in the following years. Teachers will also play an indirect role in the program because their classrooms will likely need to be used for students to gather during mentor meetings. Additionally, sustaining student engagement and ensuring consistent participation may require extra oversight from school staff and administration. Given these factors, the Mentoring Program is moderately sustainable, receiving a sustainability rating of 3 as it involves various internal stakeholders within the school (i.e., students, administrators, counselors, and teachers).

Immediacy: 3

Six key steps were identified for the implementation of a mentoring program at Skyline High School. The steps are outlined in Table 16 of Appendix C. While Alternative 1 does not have excessive steps, it requires multiple administrative actions, program creation, staff training, and stakeholder input before launching (Inclusive School Communities, n.d.). The program requires multi-step coordination to establish the program between most individuals in the school, including administrators, counselors, and teachers. Additionally, time-intensive components like staff training, scheduling, and gathering feedback could delay implementation. Lastly, unlike automated systems such as Attendance Text Messages, the program is not immediately deployable, and this option requires significant pre-planning, structuring, and reallocation of resources within the school. Given these factors and at least six key steps are necessary to implement and establish a mentor program at Skyline High School, this alternative receives an immediacy score of 3 (see Table 16 in Appendix C for the steps required to implement Alternative 1).

Equity: 3

The Peer Mentoring program does not explicitly target low-income students. Still, it does not present significant barriers that would prevent low-income students from accessing the alternative compared to their peers. This school-based program means that all students, regardless of socioeconomic status, have equal access to mentoring sessions during the school day. Since meetings occur on school grounds at a designated time, participation is not dependent on technology access, transportation, or parental availability - common barriers that disproportionately affect low-income students in other interventions (Yeung et al., 2002). One potential barrier to be aware of is considering that low-income students may face different challenges than other students, such as financial

instability or lack of extra academic support or resources at home (Cooper & Stewart, 2021; Sosu, Goodfellow, & Klein, 2021). Suppose no mentor training occurs to consider mentees' different challenges during meetings. Low-income students may not receive tailored guidance and support to improve their attendance and engagement. However, since the mentoring program is more about building community and a sense of belonging for students, I will not count this barrier in my consideration for equity. This policy does not explicitly target low-income students, but it is accessible to students of all income levels, and there are no substantial barriers to participation. Therefore, it receives a 3 for equity (See Table 13 in Appendix B for equity rubric evaluation).

Alternative 2: Attendance Text Alerts

An attendance nudge text message initiative is a quick and effective way to engage parents and guardians about improving student attendance. Skyline's Dean of Students and other administrators and counselors could set up an automated system to send text messages to parents once a student reaches a certain threshold of absences. These text messages would include key information, such as the number of absences the student has accumulated, an explanation of chronic absenteeism, and the potential future consequences that could result if the student continues to miss school (e.g., higher high school dropout rates, learning loss, reduced economic earnings). The text messages would be a reminder to encourage parental involvement in addressing absenteeism and is a convenient and immediate way for families to stay informed.

Cost-effectiveness: 5

To estimate the cost of Alternative 2, a study by the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences was used. The randomized study, conducted in 2020, assessed the impact of attendance text message notifications sent to families on chronic absenteeism rates. The study concluded that a text message program that sent texts about student attendance costs \$6.90 to \$8.53 per student per year in 2020 (Kurki, Heppen, & Brown, 2020). These estimates were adjusted for inflation (23 percent) from 2020 to 2025 and the 2025 cost of the program would be between \$8.50 to \$10.50 per student (see Appendix A for calculation). The study's estimate included costs for labor, equipment, facilities for staff who implemented the program, creating message content, developing a text platform, setting up text automation, and sending messages (Kurki, Heppen, & Brown, 2020). Based on this adjusted estimate and a discount rate of 3 percent, the total net present value expected cost of this alternative over four years is between \$30,095.20 and \$37,204.64 (see Appendix A for calculation and assumptions) (White House, 2017).

The researchers in the above study found that the text message program reduced chronic absenteeism by 2.4 to 3.6 percentage points (Kurki, Heppen, & Brown, 2020). To obtain an effectiveness estimate for Alternative 2, I averaged this estimate and concluded that the text program reduces chronic absenteeism by three percentage points per year or 12 percentage points over four years.

Dividing total costs by reduction in chronic absenteeism, an Attendance Text Alerts program is expected to cost between approximately \$2,530 to \$3,127 per percentage point reduction in chronic absenteeism, giving it a cost-effectiveness score of **5** (see Table 5 in Appendix A for results).

Sustainability: 5

The Attendance Text Alerts initiative has strong long-term sustainability due to its minimal dependence on ongoing involvement from multiple parties. After the text alert automated system is established, it will primarily operate independently. The main parties required to maintain the system long-term will be an oversight individual within the school to ensure messages are being delivered and that someone reviews the program's impact later on (e.g., the Dean of Students) (Kurki, Heppen, & Brown, 2021). Additionally, the school must maintain access to the messaging platform used for sending alerts. Unlike alternatives that require continuous coordination, staff training, or high levels of human engagement, the automated nature of this system reduces the burden on school staff after its initial implementation (Kurki, Heppen, & Brown, 2021). As a result, alternative 2 is highly sustainable and requires only one oversight individual to maintain long-term operation. Given these factors, the Attendance Text Alerts alternative receives a sustainability rating of **5**.

Immediacy: 4

Four key steps were identified to implement an Attendance Text Alert program at Skyline High School (Institute of Education Services, 2024). The steps are outlined in Table 17 in Appendix C. Compared to other alternatives, this option requires fewer administrative actions and school-wide involvement to establish and can be implemented more quickly. The most time-consuming and challenging parts of the alternative are selecting a messaging platform and integrating student attendance data and contact information into the system. Selecting a messaging platform and integrating attendance data requires some initial setup, but these processes rely on existing school records and can be completed quickly. Given these factors and that only four key steps are required to implement the Attendance Text Alert program, this alternative receives an immediacy score of **4** (see Table 17 in Appendix C for specific steps needed to implement Alternative 2).

Equity: 1

The text alert program contacts all families through text messages once their student reaches a certain absence threshold. However, it does not explicitly target low-income students, disproportionately affected by chronic absenteeism. A key barrier low-income students and families may face the Attendance Text Alerts initiative, which is access to technology. Low- and higher-income households have a differential level of access to smartphones. Households with annual incomes less than \$30,000 are 21 percentage points less likely to have a smartphone than to high-income households.

(over \$100,000 per year) (Vogels, 2021). Further, about 24 percent of households who earn less than \$30,000 per year report that they do not own a smartphone (Vogels, 2021). This gap in phone access could hinder the policy from reaching low-income families, limiting an impact on low-income students' absences. Since the policy does not explicitly target low-income students and the barrier of technology access may limit low-income students' access to the alternative compared to other students, it receives a 1 for equity (See Table 14 in Appendix B for equity rubric evaluation).

Alternative 3: Family Attendance Calls

A Family Attendance Calls program is an alternative designed to strengthen communication between families and schools by addressing absenteeism in a more personalized and accessible manner. This program would involve scheduling virtual meetings between teachers and/or administrators and parents or guardians once a student reaches a certain number of absences. During the video calls, school representatives would discuss the student's attendance, explain the impact of chronic absenteeism, and offer support resources such as counseling, tutoring, or information on community programs when relevant. The video calls provide a more convenient option for families, especially those with scheduling or transportation challenges, to stay engaged in their child's education and in connection with the school.

Cost-effectiveness: 4

The key costs associated with Alternative 3 are paying school staff to establish the program, the hourly wages for staff who complete the attendance calls, and a school Zoom account to conduct the calls. I reviewed previous studies to estimate the time required to set up this alternative, assuming a staff wage of \$25 per hour and a discount rate of 3 percent (See Tables 10 & 11 in Appendix A for more information on assumptions) (White House, 2017). I concluded that this alternative's total net present value cost over four years, plus the set-up costs, is \$43,480.71 (see Appendix A for calculation).

To estimate effectiveness, an observational study by the John Hopkins School of Education assessed how parent-teacher home visits (PTHV) impact school and student outcomes (Sheldon & Bee, 2018). The pre-PTHV rate of chronic absenteeism in schools was 16.9 percent and in schools where at least 10 percent of the students participated in a home visit, it fell to 13.9 percent for the 2016-2017 school year (Sheldon & Bee, 2018). From these metrics, I concluded that the effectiveness of a Family Attendance Calls program is approximately a three-percentage point reduction in chronic absenteeism per year (See Appendix A for more details on calculations and assumptions) (Sheldon & Bee, 2018).

Dividing total costs by reduction in chronic absenteeism, a Family Attendance Calls program is expected to cost \$3,623.39 per percentage point reduction in chronic absenteeism, giving it a cost-effectiveness score of 3 (see Table 9 in Appendix A).

Sustainability: 2

Alternative 3 will require school counselors, the Dean of Students, other administrative staff, and teachers engage with the attendance calls program once established (Mac Iver et al., 2022; Rogers et al., 2017). Since video calls must be scheduled, conducted, and likely followed up on, the program is staff-dependent meaning it is more vulnerable to staff turnover, scheduling conflicts, and resource constraints. Additionally, every call requires outside engagement with parents or guardians to first schedule a call and then conduct it. Given the size of Skyline (893 students) and that the average rate of chronic absenteeism was 38.19 percent across the last four years, at least 340 calls will have to occur if trends continue. This is likely an underestimate because it is only accounting for how many families would be contacted once a child hits the chronically absent threshold, of missing 10 percent or more of the school year, and does not consider that the school may want to conduct these calls at a lower absence threshold. Overall, the program requires high engagement and time commitment from teachers, counselors, administrative staff, and families to maintain the program. Given these factors, the Attendance Calls Program has a low sustainability rating, receiving a sustainability score of **2**.

Immediacy: 3

Five key steps were identified for implementing a Family Attendance Calls program at Skyline High School. The steps are outlined in Appendix C. While this alternative does not require major structural changes in the school, it requires many administrative actions and investment, staff recruitment, and training before implementation. The program requires coordination between administrators, counselors, the Dean of Students, and teachers to recruit school representatives who will conduct the calls and establish a process for scheduling. Additionally, training staff on best practices for engagement, communication, and what content to review during the meetings will take time. The school will also have to consider creating a scheduling system that can account for the various availabilities of student parents and guardians. Given these factors and at least five key steps required to implement the Family Attendance Calls program at Skyline, this alternative receives an immediacy score of **3** (see Table 18 in Appendix C for specific steps necessary to implement Alternative 3).

Equity: 1

A Family Attendance Calls program aims to engage all families of chronically absent students by scheduling virtual meetings with parents or guardians to discuss a student's attendance, explain the impact of chronic absenteeism, and offer support resources when relevant. However, the policy does not explicitly target low-income students, disproportionately affected by chronic absenteeism. Low-income families may face in accessing this alternative is limited access to technology and internet services (Swenson & Ghertner, 2020). Low-income households are less likely to have a stable internet connection or devices supporting video calls. According to the Pew Research Center, approximately 29 percent of adults with an annual income below \$30,000 do not have

internet access at home and these lower-income households are 26 percentage points less likely to have this internet access compared to families with annual incomes between \$30,000 to \$99,999 (Vogels, 2021). Additionally, it is important to consider that low-income parents and guardians may work jobs with more rigid schedules and have less leave than higher-income families and lack the flexibility to participate in scheduled virtual meetings with school representatives. These structural barriers may prevent low-income families from fully engaging with the program compared to higher-income families, limiting its overall impact on reducing absenteeism for students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Since this policy does not explicitly target low-income students and the existing technology and scheduling barriers may disproportionately affect their access, this alternative receives a **1** for equity (See Table 15 in Appendix B for equity rubric evaluation).

Outcomes Matrix

Scale: 1 point (low) - 5 points (high/favorable)

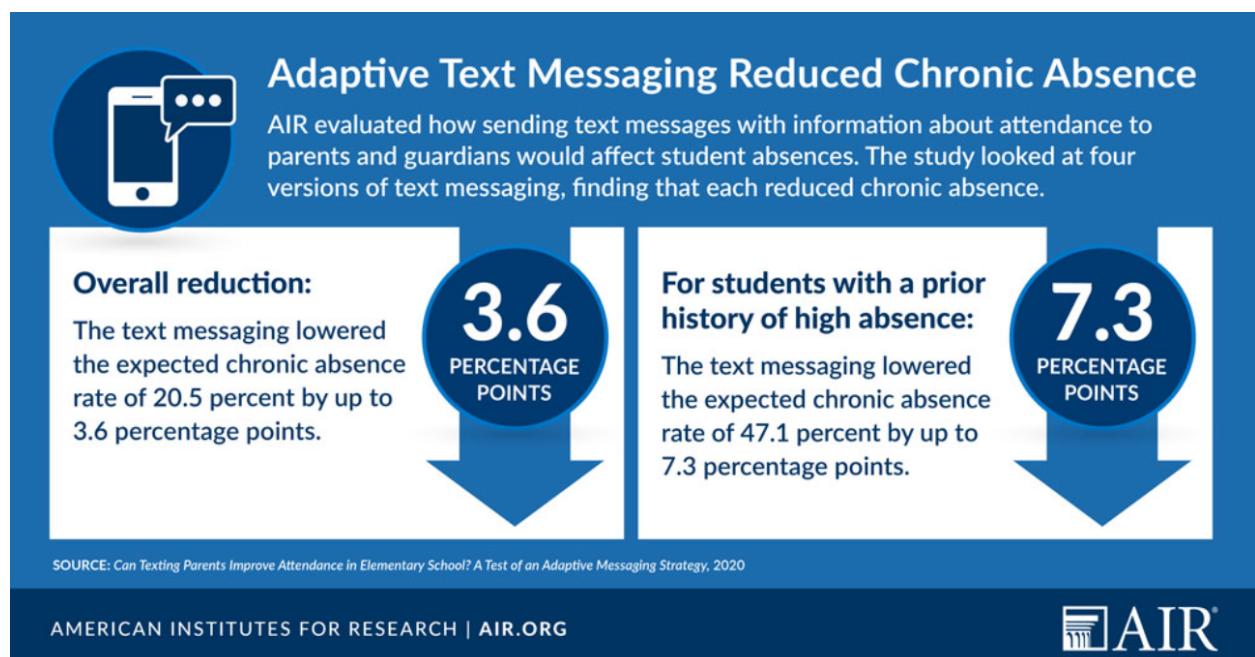
	Cost-effectiveness (40%)	Sustainability (20%)	Immediacy (30%)	Equity (10%)	Weighted Average (highest point value is most favorable)
Alternative 1: Mentor Program	1 Very low cost-effectiveness (\$284,635)	3 Moderate sustainability (4 parties)	3 Moderate immediacy (6 steps)	3	2.2 pts
Alternative 2: Attendance Text Alerts	5 Very high cost-effectiveness (\$2,530 - \$3,127)	5 Very high sustainability (1 party)	4 High immediacy (4 steps)	1	4.3 pts
Alternative 3: Family Focus Attendance Calls	4 High cost-effectiveness (\$3,623.39)	2 Low sustainability (6-9 parties)	3 Moderate immediacy (5 steps)	1	3 pts

Weighted average calculations can be found in Appendix D

- Cost-effectiveness: Cost per percentage point reduction in chronic absenteeism.
- Sustainability: Assesses the long-term viability of the policy by considering the number of parties involved in maintaining it.
- Immediacy: This measure assesses how challenging the policy will be to establish based on the number of steps required to implement it.
- Equity: Evaluates if the alternative will ensure that low-income students are supported.

Recommendation

After a comprehensive evaluation of each alternative based on the criteria of cost-effectiveness, sustainability, immediacy, and equity, I recommend Skyline High School implement Alternative 2: the Attendance Text Alerts program. This option received the highest overall score (4.3 points) according to the established criteria (see Outcomes Matrix above). The Attendance Text Alerts program offers a cost-effective and relatively easy implementation to address chronic absenteeism by sending automated text notifications to parents and guardians. Alternative 2 is the most sustainable, requires the fewest steps for implementation, and is the least resource-intensive compared to Alternatives 1 and 3. Its minimal administrative demands after program establishment and automation capabilities allow for its integration into Skyline without burdening school staff. While Alternative 2 is cost-effective and easy to implement, there is an equity trade-off due to its reliance on technology, as low-income families are less likely to own smartphones or have technology access to receive the messages. This barrier may limit the program's reach among the students most affected by chronic absenteeism, making it less equitable than school-based programs like Alternative 1. By utilizing technology to deliver timely attendance notifications, this approach ensures that families and guardians receive important attendance information, enhancing parent-school communication and engagement, while allowing school staff to remain focused on daily responsibilities – key steps towards addressing chronic absenteeism at Skyline.



Implementation

Implementation Overview

To successfully implement the text alerts recommendation, a collaborative approach between staff at Skyline High School will be necessary. School administrators should serve as implementation managers, overseeing the program's development and integration into school processes. The Institute of Education Sciences (IES) at the US Department of Education provides a toolkit outlining best practices for school districts to create a text messaging initiative to address absenteeism, which will serve as a valuable resource during implementation (Institute of Education Services, 2024). Given Skyline's current resource constraints, I recommend they begin establishing the text alert program over the summer when school is not in session.

Table 17 in Appendix C outlines four key steps to establish an Attendance Text Alert program: Set school meetings to establish program goals, develop a blueprint for the text messages, select an automated messaging platform to use, and integrate student data into the system. These steps are likely to be completed over summer break for the school, offering enough time (two to three months) to establish the text program before the 2025-2026 school year.

The first step to implementation is for administrators and the Dean of Students to meet and establish clear goals and objectives for the initiative. Next, they should define the context of attendance-related text messages (e.g., what will the messages contain, when they will be sent) and select an automated messaging platform, such as Remind and PowerSchool which are both FERPA-compliant systems commonly used in similar interventions (Joseph, n.d.; PowerSchool, 2025). Once a platform is selected, student data and family contact information must be integrated into the system. The Dean of Students, who oversees attendance data at Skyline, should collaborate with the information technology staff to ensure data integration occurs. Skyline can also work with the selected messaging platform to learn more about the system. Since the text alerts will be automated, no training is required for staff how to use them. An important legal consideration during implementation, as outlined in the IES toolkit, is compliance with the Telephone Consumer Protection Act (TCPA) of 1991 (Kurki, Heppen, & Brown, 2021). This law provides specific guidelines for schools on contacting families. To ensure compliance, Skyline High School must identify itself in the initial message to parents, not send texts between 9 p.m. and 8 a.m., and provide parents with the option to opt out of future messages (Kurki, Heppen, & Brown, 2021).

Challenges to Implementation

Funding

While attendance text alert programs have shown promise in reducing chronic

absenteeism, implementation challenges remain, with funding being the primary obstacle that may impact Skyline. Establishing an Attendance Text Alerts program at Skyline High School costs between \$30,000 to \$38,000 over four years. Schools have historically relied on federal and state grants to support similar initiatives. For example, Virginia Governor Glenn Youngkin signed HB 6001/SB6001 to address learning loss and combat chronic absenteeism which allocated \$418 million in state funds for public schools in 2024 (Virginia Department of Education, 2023-b). Additionally, School Improvement Grants under the Every Student Succeeds Act provide financial support for programs such as the Attendance Text Alerts initiative. With federal funding cuts and freezes, Skyline will likely depend on local and state resources. However, the Superintendent of Warren County Public Schools reported a 23 percent increase in state revenue for the district since 2022, while local funding has risen by only 3.5 percent, contributing to ongoing budget constraints for the school system (McCool, 2025). The superintendent requested a \$4.2 million budget increase from the county but concerns over tax increases may hinder approval, further exacerbating funding concerns (McCool, 2025).

Family Opt-Out & Technology Access Issues

A study by the Institute of Education Sciences found that while attendance text alert programs can reduce absenteeism, approximately 12 percent of parents opted out of receiving these messages, highlighting a potential challenge in the intervention reaching all families (Kurki, Heppen, & Brown, 2021; US Department of Education, 2020). Additionally, disparities in technology access can limit the program's effectiveness, as families without reliable access to mobile devices may not be able to receive the intended communications (Klein, 2022). Low-income households are less likely to have smartphone access, with those earning less than \$30,000 annually being 21 percentage points less likely to have a smartphone than high-income households (over \$100,000 per year) (Vogels, 2021). About 24 percent of low-income households also report not owning a smartphone (Vogels, 2021). These technology access gaps and the ability to opt-out could create barriers to effective implementation and limit the program's reach among students who need it most.

Program Evaluation

Skyline High School should use a combination of quantitative and qualitative measures to evaluate the effectiveness of the Attendance Text Alerts program. The school should track chronic absenteeism rates before and after implementation to measure the program's impact on attendance. Additionally, collecting feedback from parents and students will help assess its effects on communication between families and the school and family engagement. Monitoring opt-out rates will also be crucial - if a significant portion of families choose not to receive attendance text alerts, administrators or the Dean of Students should try to assess the reasons and consider alternative approaches to address the problem. A single staff member, such as the Dean of Students, can likely manage data collection for the program. By continuously monitoring these metrics and adjusting as

needed, Skyline can ensure the program is the best path to address chronic absenteeism at the school.

Conclusion

In conclusion, chronic absenteeism remains a significant challenge at Skyline High School, with over a third of students missing substantial instructional time during the 2023 to 2024 school year. Chronic absenteeism poses serious risks to student achievement, graduation rates, and long-term economic outcomes, making it imperative for the school to take further targeted action. After evaluating multiple policy alternatives, implementing an automated Attendance Text Alert program is the most practical and effective solution. This approach offers a cost-effective, sustainable, and immediate response to absenteeism that aligns with Skyline's mission to empower and support students. By initiating an Attendance Text Alert program, Skyline High School can proactively engage families, enhance communication, and support improved attendance rates in future academic years. While an automated Attendance Text Alert Program is a solid first step, closing the remaining gap in chronic absenteeism likely requires a multi-faceted approach. More investment in improving the school environment, mental health support, or enhanced hands-on learning activities will likely be necessary to fully combat the factors contributing to chronic absenteeism.



Appendix A: Costing Calculations & Assumptions

While calculating the cost-effectiveness of each alternative, I made various assumptions that are outlined in this appendix. More information on assumptions and formulas used can be found in the Excel sheet here: [Cost-effectiveness Calculations](#)

Alternative 1: Individual Mentoring

According to my analysis, funding the Family Attendance Calls program is expected to cost \$284,635 per percentage point reduction in chronic absenteeism, giving it a cost-effectiveness score of 1, as shown in Table 1 below. To get this metric the total NPV costs (\$1,707,813.73) were divided by the total annual reduction in absenteeism (6 percentage points) (shown in Table 1 below).

TABLE 1: Cost-effectiveness of Mentor Program

Results: Cost-effectiveness Estimate Alt. 1			
	Total Net Present Value Costs	Total Annual Reduction in Chronic Absenteeism	Cost Per Percentage Point Reduction in Chronic Absenteeism
	\$1,707,813.73	6.00	\$284,635.62

The assumptions used in the calculation for the cost-effectiveness of alternative 1 are shown in Table 2 below. I assume a discount rate of 3 percent and an inflation rate of 2.42% (White House, 2017). I also think that there will be approximately 446 mentees in the program at a time or about half of Skyline's student population. I use an effectiveness estimate of a 1.5 percentage point reduction in chronic absenteeism per year based on a report by the Johns Hopkins School of Education that evaluated the impact of New York City's Success Mentors program (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2013). The report explains the steps taken to implement a mentor program, which paired students with mentors who were school staff or community members, to combat chronic absenteeism in NYC between 2010 and 2013. To assess the impact of the mentor program on chronic absenteeism, the task force used school attendance data and ran regressions to draw comparisons. Twenty-five schools that participated from 2010-2013, 25 additional schools that participated from 2011-2013, and 50 more that joined from 2012-2013. The data from those schools were obtained before and during the mentor program and it was compared with data from 46 comparison schools that had similar rates of absenteeism as the targeted schools but did not receive the intervention (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2013). While the average reduction in chronic absenteeism was 1.5 percentage points, there was a range of overall effectiveness estimates across schools with the lowest being a reduction in absenteeism by 0.9 percentage points.

The cost estimate of \$60 was derived from a statistical analysis by the Children and Youth Services Review which estimated the marginal cost of a community-based volunteer

program-Big Brothers Big Sisters mentoring- in the US. The authors reviewed data regarding program costs from 2008 to 2015 and estimated that the cost per mentor was \$80 per month (Alfonso et al., 2019). Because approximately 25 percent of total expenditures for the program is attributed to rent for meeting spaces, administrative fees, and other costs that are not applicable to implementing a mentor program at Skyline, I reduced the marginal cost estimate by 25 percent (Big Brothers Big Sisters of Central Texas, 2017). Table 2 also includes Consumer Price Index (CPI) data for 2016 and 2025 that was used to adjust the marginal cost data for inflation.

TABLE 2: Assumptions for Cost-effectiveness of Mentor Program

General Assumptions		Inflation Adjustment Assumptions	
			Notes
Discount Rate	3.00%	CPI 1	CPI 1 is the January 2016 CPI (the year program developers estimated the per student cost of Check & Connect mentor program)
Average Reduction in chronic absenteeism (percentage points per year)	1.50	CPI 2	CPI 2 is the 2025 CPI for the year I'm assuming the school starts the program
Inflation	2.42%		
Program Cost Assumptions from study (per mentor per month)	\$60.00		
Number of students receiving mentoring	446		

Sensitivity analysis: Reduce per mentor program cost (Cost-effectiveness = 1)
Because the cost estimate used is from a program that does not fully represent mentor program implementation at Skyline, I conducted sensitivity analysis to consider how the cost-effectiveness will change if program cost per mentor is lower than the estimate in the study. I reduced the cost per mentor per month by 50 percent, meaning the cost estimate is now \$30 per mentor per month since the study's cost estimate likely overestimates the expenditure required if Skyline were to implement a mentor program. The main reason it overestimates cost is because the Big Brothers Big Sisters mentor program conducts interviews and background checks on all mentors, costs Skyline would not have to bear (Big Brothers Big Sisters of Central Texas, 2017). With this adjustment, funding the Mentor Program is now expected to cost approximately \$142,318 per percentage point reduction in chronic absenteeism, resulting in a cost-effectiveness score of 1 (shown in Table 3 below). To get this metric the total NPV costs (\$1853,906.87) were divided by the total annual reduction in absenteeism (6 percentage points).

TABLE 3: Cost-effectiveness of Mentor Program with Cost Reduction

Results: Cost-effectiveness Estimate Alt. 1			
	Total Net Present Value Costs	Total Annual Reduction in Chronic Absenteeism	Cost Per Percentage Point Reduction in Chronic Absenteeism
	\$853,906.87	6.00	\$142,317.81

Sensitivity analysis: Reduce mentor program effectiveness (Cost-effectiveness = 1)
The average estimate of effectiveness used was a 1.5 percentage point reduction in chronic absenteeism per year, however there was a range of overall effectiveness estimates in the study, with the lowest being a reduction in absenteeism by 0.9 percentage points (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2013). To consider how the cost-effectiveness of the alternative will change if effectiveness per year is lower than the average estimate in the report, I used the lowest effectiveness estimate - 0.9 percentage points - to estimate cost-effectiveness. This analysis is important to consider because the NYC Success Mentors program is not peer based and included weekly check-ins, as opposed to monthly meetings, so it was more involved than the program Skyline would be implementing. Because the NYC program was more intense, the effectiveness estimate of 1.5 percentage points is likely an overestimate. With this sensitivity analysis, funding the Mentor Program is expected to cost \$474,393 per percentage point reduction in chronic absenteeism, a cost-effectiveness score of 1 (shown in Table 4 below). To get this metric the total NPV costs (\$1,707,813.73) were divided by the total annual reduction in absenteeism (3.6 percentage points).

TABLE 4: Cost-effectiveness of Mentor Program with Effectiveness Reduction

Results: Cost-effectiveness Estimate Alt. 1			
	Total Net Present Value Costs	Total Annual Reduction in Chronic Absenteeism	Cost Per Percentage Point Reduction in Chronic Absenteeism
	\$1,707,813.73	3.60	\$474,392.70

Alternative 2: Attendance Text Alerts

According to my analysis, funding the Attendance Text Alerts program is expected to cost between about \$2,507.93 to \$3,100.39 per percentage point reduction in chronic absenteeism, giving it a cost-effectiveness score of 5, as shown in Table 5 below. To get this metric the total NPV costs were divided by the total annual reduction in absenteeism.

TABLE 5: Cost-effectiveness of Attendance Text Alerts

Results: Cost-effectiveness Estimate Alt. 2			
	Total Net Present Value Costs	Total Annual Reduction in Chronic Absenteeism	Cost Per Percentage Point Reduction in Chronic Absenteeism
Lower bound	\$30,095.20	12.00	\$2,507.93
Upper bound	\$37,204.64	12.00	\$3,100.39

The assumptions used in the calculation for cost-effectiveness of alternative 2 are shown in Table 6 below. I assume a discount rate of 3 percent and an inflation rate of 2.42% (White House, 2017). Additionally, the 2024 enrollment at Skyline, 893 students, was used as the estimate of the number of students who would participate in the program (US News & World Report, 2023). The effectiveness estimate of a three-percentage point reduction in chronic absenteeism per year was drawn from a randomized study by the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences in 2020 to assess the impact of attendance text message notifications sent to families on rates of chronic absenteeism. The study found that the text message program reduced chronic absenteeism by between 2.4 and 3.6 percentage points (Kurki, Heppen, & Brown, 2020). For the cost-effectiveness calculation, I averaged this estimate and conclude that the text program reduces chronic absenteeism by three percentage points per year or twelve percentage points over four years. The study concluded that the text message program would costs \$6.90 - \$8.53 per student per year in 2020 (Heppen, Kurki, & Brown, 2020). I used this as the cost estimate for Skyline's text alert program. I used CPI data to adjust this estimate for inflation to conclude that the per student cost of the text alert program in 2025 would be between \$8.50 and \$10.50 (see Table 6 for calculations).

TABLE 6: Assumptions for Cost-effectiveness of Attendance Text Alerts

General Assumptions		Inflation Adjustment Assumptions			Notes
Discount Rate	3.00%	CPI 1	257.971	2020 CPI (the year the study estimated the cost of their program per student)	
Average Reduction in chronic absenteeism (percentage points per year)	3.00	CPI 2	317.671	CPI 2 is the 2025 CPI for the year I'm assuming the school starts the program	
Inflation	2.42%				
Program Cost Assumptions from 2020 study (per student per year, lower & upper bound)	6.90 8.53				
Number of students in school receiving attendance text messages	893				
Adjusting per student cost for inflation					
	Cost per student per year in 2020	CPI 1	CPI 2	Inflation Rate from 2020-2025	Adjusted cost per student per year
Lower bound	\$6.90	257.971	317.671	0.231421361	\$8.50
Upper bound	\$8.53	257.971	317.671	0.231421361	\$10.50

Sensitivity analysis: Reduce per student program cost (Cost-effectiveness = 3)
 To consider how the cost-effectiveness of the alternative will change if program cost per student is lower than the estimate in the study, I reduced the per student cost by 50 percent. The study's estimate included costs for labor, equipment, facilities for staff who implemented the program, creating message content, developing a text platform, setting up text automation, and sending messages. This is likely an overestimate of the average cost per student because my recommendation suggests that Skyline utilize an existing messaging system to implement the alternative, so less funding is needed in that area. With this adjustment, funding the Attendance Text Alerts program is now expected to cost between about \$1,253.97 to \$1,550.9 per percentage point reduction in chronic absenteeism, giving it a cost-effectiveness score of **5** (results shown in Table 7 below). To get this metric the total NPV costs were divided by the total annual reduction in absenteeism.

TABLE 7: Cost-effectiveness of Attendance Text Alerts with Cost Reduction

Results: Cost-effectiveness Estimate Alt. 2			
	Total Net Present Value Costs	Total Annual Reduction in Chronic Absenteeism	Cost Per Percentage Point Reduction in Chronic Absenteeism
Lowerbound	\$15,047.60	12.00	\$1,253.97
Upperbound	\$18,602.32	12.00	\$1,550.19

Sensitivity analysis: Texts only sent for chronically absent students (Cost-effectiveness = 5)

I assume that all students at Skyline High School will have text message alerts sent out to notify their parents or guardians about their attendance each year. If I instead assume that messages are only sent once a student is labeled chronically absent the overall cost would fall. With a student population of 893 and an average rate of chronic absenteeism of approximately 39 percent (from 2021-2024), an estimated 341 students would receive messages through the text program if prior absenteeism trends continued (US News & World Report, 2023). With this sensitivity analysis, funding the Attendance Text Alerts program is expected to cost between about \$957.68 to \$1,183.91 per percentage point reduction in chronic absenteeism, maintaining its initial cost-effectiveness score of **5** (results shown in Table 8 below). To get this metric the total NPV costs were divided by the total annual reduction in absenteeism.

TABLE 8: Cost-effectiveness of Attendance Text Alerts with Scope Reduction

Results: Cost-effectiveness Estimate Alt. 2			
	Total Net Present Value Costs	Total Annual Reduction in Chronic Absenteeism	Cost Per Percentage Point Reduction in Chronic Absenteeism
Lower bound	\$11,492.12	12.00	\$957.68
Upper bound	\$14,206.92	12.00	\$1,183.91

Alternative 3: Family Attendance Calls

According to my analysis, funding the Family Attendance Calls program is expected to cost \$3,623.39 per percentage point reduction in chronic absenteeism, giving it a cost-effectiveness score of 4 (results shown in Table 9 below). To get this metric the total NPV costs (\$43,480.71) were divided by the total annual reduction in absenteeism (12 percentage points).

TABLE 9: Cost-effectiveness of Family Attendance Calls

Results: Cost-effectiveness Estimate Alt. 3			
	Total Net Present Value Costs + Set-up Costs	Total Annual Reduction in Chronic Absenteeism	Cost Per Percentage Point Reduction in Chronic Absenteeism
	\$43,480.71	12.00	\$3,623.39

The assumptions used in the calculation for cost-effectiveness of alternative 2 are shown in Table 10 and Table 11 below. I assume a discount rate of 3 percent and an inflation rate of 2.42% (White House, 2017). I also assume that calls are conducted only for chronically absent students. With a student population of 893 and an average rate of chronic absenteeism of approximately 39 percent (from 2021-2024), an estimated 341 calls would need to be conducted (US News & World Report, 2023). The key costs associated with this alternative are paying school staff to establish the program, the hourly wages for staff who complete the attendance calls, and a school Zoom account to conduct the calls on (Zoom, n.d.). I assume that total hours to establish an attendance calls program is 140. To estimate the hours required, I reviewed previous studies and literature that estimate time needed to recruit staff, create online training materials, and establish a call schedule system (Cloke, 2024; Mac Iver et al., 2022; Rogers et al., 2017). The breakdown of how I anticipate the 140 hours will be spent is shown in Table 11 below. I assume a staff wage of \$25 per hour based on the wage posted by Warren County Public Schools (White House, 2017). I assume all Skyline teachers (55 as of 2025) will be trained to conduct the calls and that the training will be one hour per teacher, so 55 training hours total.

I used an effectiveness estimate from an observational study conducted by Johns Hopkins School of Education in the cost-effectiveness calculation (Sheldon & Bee, 2018). The study assessed how Parent Teacher Home Visits (PTHV) impact school and student level outcomes. PTHVs have the same process and goals as a Family Attendance Calls program and the main difference is that PTHVs are in-person. The 2015 to 2016 rate of chronic absenteeism for schools about to implement the PTHV program being evaluated was 16.9 percent (Sheldon & Bee, 2018). For schools where at least 10 percent of the students participated in at least one home visit, the rate of chronic absenteeism for the 2016-2017 school year fell to 13.9 percent. I used these metrics to conclude that PTHV had an impact of a three-percentage point reduction in chronic absenteeism (Sheldon & Bee, 2018). Because this is an observational study without randomization, there will be bias in the estimate. The schools involved provided data on which families participated in home visits but did not explain how the families were selected to receive home visits so there is not a way to conclude if the impact of PTHV's effectiveness is an over or underestimate. The call system was chosen over the traditional PTHV method for this alternative to limit costs, reduce strain on Skyline High School, and potentially improve effectiveness.

TABLE 10: Assumptions for Cost-effectiveness of Family Attendance Calls

General Assumptions		Cost Assumptions	
Discount Rate	3.00%	Hourly wage	\$25
Average Reduction in chronic absenteeism (percentage points per year)	3.00	Zoom Account (per month)	\$15
Inflation	2.42%	Each call to a parent is logged as 1 hour of work	\$25.00
Hourly Wage	\$25.00		
Hours required to establish program	140		
Number of students in school receiving attendance calls (assumes call is conducted for chronically absent students)	341		
# of Teachers in School	55		
teachers to complete 1 hour online training before conducting calls (assumes all)	55		

TABLE 11: Assumptions for Establishment Time of Family Attendance Calls

Program Establishment Time		
	Notes	Total hours
Initial Meeting	Participants: 2 principals, Dean of Students, 3 school counselor 2 hours	12
Staff recruitment	55 teachers at Skyline 1 hour spent, by a counselor or the Dean of Students, per teacher on recruitment to participate in the parent school call program	55
Staff Training Material Creation	Skyline should create a virtual training module to train staff who will conduct parent school calls. Growth Engineering estimates it will take 49 hours to create basic eLearning content.	49
Meeting on how schedule the calls	Participants: 2 principals, Dean of Students, 3 school counselor 4 hours	24
Total hours to establish program		140

Sensitivity analysis: Double Program Establishment Time (Cost-effectiveness = 4)
 Because establishment times could vary, the 140 hours I calculate costs with could be an over or underestimate of the true time required. To consider how the cost-effectiveness will change if the establishment time was an underestimate, I doubled the estimate for total hours required to establish the program. With this adjustment, funding the Family Attendance Calls program is now expected to cost about \$3,915 per percentage point reduction in chronic absenteeism, maintaining its cost-effectiveness score of **4** (results shown in Table 12 below).

TABLE 12: Cost-effectiveness of Family Attendance Calls with Cost Increase

Results: Cost-effectiveness Estimate Alt. 3			
	Total Net Present Value Costs + Set-up Costs	Total Annual Reduction in Chronic Absenteeism	Cost Per Percentage Point Reduction in Chronic Absenteeism
	\$46,980.71	12.00	\$3,915.06

Appendix B: Evaluating Equity

This appendix includes an evaluation of each alternative through the equity rubric.

TABLE 13: Equity Rubric for Alternative 1 – Peer Mentoring

Points	Aspects of Equity
1/1	The alternative is accessible to students of all income levels with no substantial barriers to participation (e.g., does not require internet or technology, transportation, or parental availability).
0/1	The alternative specifically targets low-income students.
1/1	The alternative is available to students regardless of parent work schedules by offering flexible engagement methods (e.g., asynchronous communication, school-based participation).
1/1	The alternative does not require technology access (e.g., laptop, smartphone, internet) for participation.
0/1	The alternative provides culturally and linguistically inclusive support to ensure accessibility for students from diverse backgrounds (e.g., translated materials, multilingual staff, culturally responsive engagement strategies).

TABLE 14: Equity Rubric for Alternative 2 - Attendance Text Alerts

Points	Aspects of Equity
0/1	The alternative is accessible to students of all income levels with no substantial barriers to participation (e.g., does not require internet or technology, transportation, or parental availability).
0/1	The alternative specifically targets low-income students.
1/1	The alternative is available to students regardless of parent work schedules by offering flexible engagement methods (e.g., asynchronous communication, school-based participation).
0/1	The alternative does not require technology access (e.g., laptop, smartphone, internet) for participation.
0/1	The alternative provides culturally and linguistically inclusive support to ensure accessibility for students from diverse backgrounds (e.g., translated materials, multilingual staff, culturally responsive engagement strategies).

TABLE 15: Equity Rubric for Alternative 3 - Family Attendance Calls

Points	Aspects of Equity
0/1	The alternative is accessible to students of all income levels with no substantial barriers to participation (e.g., does not require internet or technology, transportation, or parental availability).
0/1	The alternative specifically targets low-income students.
1/1	The alternative is available to students regardless of parent work schedules by offering flexible engagement methods (e.g., asynchronous communication, school-based participation).
0/1	The alternative does not require technology access (e.g., laptop, smartphone, internet) for participation.
0/1	The alternative provides culturally and linguistically inclusive support to ensure accessibility for students from diverse backgrounds (e.g., translated materials, multilingual staff, culturally responsive engagement strategies).

Appendix C: Evaluating Immediacy

This appendix includes steps required to implement each alternative.

TABLE 16: Immediacy/Steps to Implement Alternative 1 - Individual Mentoring

Steps Required to Implement Mentoring
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. <u>Program Design:</u> Skyline High School administrators and counselors meet to establish a framework for who will run the mentor program. Establish objectives for the program and expectations for mentors, mentees, and how the school will support them.2. <u>Staff Training:</u> Train school counselors on how to manage the mentoring program and discuss how they will assign the mentors with mentees. Outline a plan for when the counselors will create and distribute questions to help guide the mentor meetings.3. <u>Collect Stakeholder Feedback:</u> Gather feedback from teachers and other school staff on ideas for the mentor program and what time of day they suggest the mentor meetings that occur every three weeks should take place.4. <u>Schedule Meetings:</u> School administration works with counselors to establish a schedule for mentor meetings throughout the school year.5. <u>Pair Mentors with Mentees:</u> School counselors assign each underclassman to an upperclassman mentor that they will work with throughout the school year.6. <u>Family/Student Notification:</u> Before school begins in the fall, counselors notify students of their mentor-mentee pairing and the schedule for mentoring for the coming school year.

TABLE 17: Immediacy/Steps to Implement Alternative 2 - Attendance Text Alerts

Steps Required to Implement Attendance Text Alerts Program
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. <u>Program Design:</u> Skyline High School administrators and Dean of Students meet to establish goals and objectives for the program.2. <u>Develop a Text Message Blueprint:</u> The school needs to create an outline for what information the text message regarding attendance information will include and be sent by the automated system.3. <u>Select a Messaging Platform:</u> Skyline's administration will need to select an automated text messaging system (e.g., Remind, PowerSchool) that will send the messages (Joseph, n.d.; PowerSchool, 2025).4. <u>Select Attendance Threshold & Integrate Student Data:</u> Establish an attendance threshold that triggers the text message being sent to parents/guardians. Integrate student attendance data and contact information for parents/guardians into the system.

TABLE 18: Immediacy/Steps to Implement Alternative 3 - Family Attendance Calls

Steps Required to Implement a Family Attendance Calls Program
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. <u>Program Design</u>: Skyline High School administrators, counselors, and Dean of Students meet to establish the goals, objectives, and logistics of the program.2. <u>Staff Recruitment</u>: Administrators and counselors will need to recruit teachers to participate in the call program.3. <u>Staff Training</u>: Train teachers, counselors, and administrators who will conduct calls on what content to discuss, facts about chronic absenteeism, and best practices for engagement and communication with families.4. <u>Scheduling System Setup</u>: Establish a process for assigning calls to school representatives and scheduling calls between families and the school.5. <u>Parent/Guardian Notification</u>: Inform families about the program by explaining the purpose, what the calls will entail, and how they will be contacted if their student meets the absenteeism threshold.

Appendix D: Outcomes Matrix Weighted Averages

Outcomes Matrix Averages Calculation

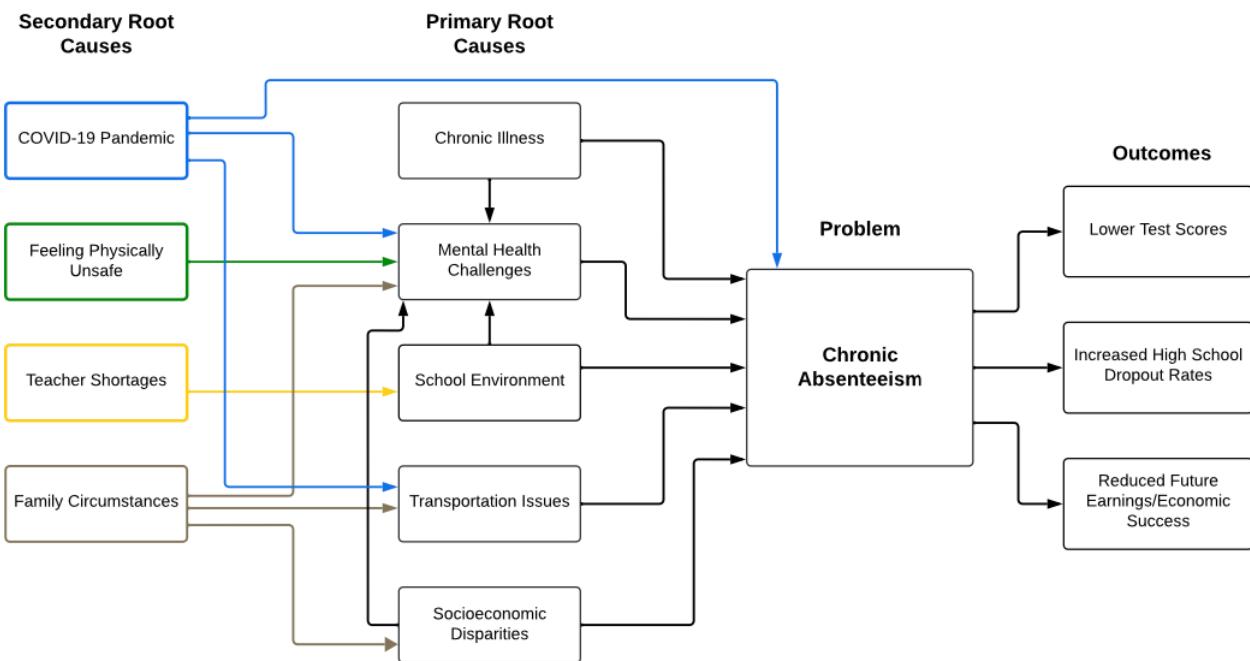
$$\text{Alternative 1: } 1(0.4) + 3(0.2) + 3(0.3) + 3(0.1) = 2.2$$

$$\text{Alternative 2: } 5(0.4) + 5(0.2) + 4(0.3) + 1(0.1) = 4.3$$

$$\text{Alternative 3: } 4(0.4) + 2(0.2) + 3(0.3) + 1(0.1) = 3$$

Appendix E: Root Cause Analysis Map

FIGURE 4: Root Cause Analysis Map - Chronic Absenteeism



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