



Attendance

INSA
International Network
for School Attendance

BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

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On Course for Attendance!**

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WELCOME MESSAGE

Welcome to the 2026 **5th INSA Conference, “On Course for Attendance!”**

We are delighted to welcome you to the 2026 INSA Conference in the beautiful Spanish coastal city of Alicante.

Our Conferences are our premier activity towards achieving our mission of sharing and disseminating information about the latest practice, research and thinking about school attendance and engagement to our global community. We are particularly pleased to bring together colleagues from across countries and professional contexts, reflecting the truly international nature of the INSA community.

This year’s theme, **“On Course for Attendance!”**, reflects our shared ambition to move from understanding school attendance problems to taking meaningful action to prevent absences and promote attendance and engagement. As much as the conference is an opportunity to learn from distinguished researchers, practitioners, and educators from around the world, we also hope that you will take the opportunity to connect with fellow delegates who share your commitment to improving school attendance and engagement. We encourage you to exchange ideas and experiences, continue conversations over lunch and between sessions, and build connections that extend beyond the conference itself. We hope you will connect with colleagues from different countries and professional backgrounds, exchange ideas and experiences, and build relationships that continue well beyond the conference.

We would also like to thank all our contributors, presenters, and delegates for bringing their knowledge, experience, and commitment to this shared space. We are grateful to our sponsors and partners, whose support has helped make this conference possible.

Conferences like ours don’t just happen. They are a result of years of countless hours of planning and action by our volunteer workforce. We would like to take this opportunity to thank all of those who have worked hard, usually in their own time, for bringing this conference to you, in particular the outstanding 2026 INSA Conference Committee which has been supported by the INSA Executive Committee.

We look forward to seeing you in Alicante and to sharing three days of learning, discussion and connection.

Prof. Carolina González
Chair, 2026 INSA Conference Committee

Prof. Glenn Melvin
President, and on behalf of the INSA Executive Committee

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AARON R. LYON

Every day counts: understanding, preventing and responding to school attendance problems

Samo Varsik

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, France)

Every morning, millions of children are expected to attend school. Yet there are many face barriers that prevent regular attendance. School attendance problems are no longer a marginal issue; they have become a challenge affecting classrooms in nearly every country. Drawing on the OECD report [Every Day Counts: Understanding, Preventing and Responding to School Attendance Problems](#), this presentation examines why school attendance problems have become a pressing concern across education systems, and what can be done before absence becomes entrenched. The presentation will move beyond narrow debates about truancy or compliance to consider attendance as a complex, multi-level challenge. It will highlight how absences often start early and can intensify during key educational transitions. The discussion will also explore the consequences of absences: reduced learning time, weaker academic and social-emotional outcomes, higher risks of early leaving from education and training, and others. At the same time, the presentation will focus on policy pointers. It will argue that improving attendance is not about choosing between accountability and care, but about building coherent systems that identify problems early, work with students and families, strengthen relationships in schools, and connect education with health, social and community services. Ultimately, the presentation frames attendance as a signal: not only of whether students are present, but of whether education systems are responsive, inclusive and trusted. If every day counts, then every absence deserves understanding – and every response should help bring students back into learning.

Keywords: attendance; trends; consequences; policies; recommendations.

Mental health and attendance at school

Tamsin Ford

University of Cambridge (United Kingdom)

The mental health of children and young people has deteriorated, with a greater number who experience impairing difficulties. Furthermore, evidence is accruing that the impact and longer-term outcomes of mental health conditions in childhood and adolescence are worse among recent cohorts. The resulting pressure on agencies working to support children in health, education and the third sector is huge. Potential explanations include academic pressure at school, as well as the impact of job insecurity and challenging economic conditions on families, and social media. Studies in the UK consistently show that parents and children seek support for mental health from school staff, who are mostly not trained or supported to manage these problems. Many mental health conditions impair a child's ability to cope with school, adversely affecting attainment, peer relationships, and behaviour as well as attendance. Indeed, poor school attendance or a sudden deterioration in attendance might be the first indicator of emerging difficulties. There is a complex relationships between special educational needs and mental health conditions. For some children, such as those with ADHD or autism, their mental health condition will be the primary reason behind their special educational needs. For others, global or learning difficulties, themselves a special educational need, may precipitate mental health conditions, as may bullying experienced at school. Long term physical health conditions may impair a child's ability to access the curriculum, and also increase a child's risk of poor mental health. This talk will explore the complex relationship between mental health conditions and school through interventional and epidemiological data. It will also consider factors that might influence attendance but also the options for effective response across agencies working with children.

Keywords: mental health; public health; intervention; policy.

Implementation of science and human-centered design: Methods to improve intervention uptake in schools

Aaron R. Lyon

University of Washington (United States of America)

Schools are the most common setting for the delivery of supports to address issues such as mental health concerns or school attendance problems (SAP). However, like most other service contexts, there is a substantial gap in the extent to which the prevention and intervention programs delivered to students reflect high-quality evidence-based practices (EBP). Although an array EBP for SAP exist (Pérez-Marco et al., 2025), their implementation is variable and critical factors – such as intervention fidelity – are rarely assessed (Eklund et al, 2020). Implementation science – the study of methods to facilitate the uptake of research and EBP into routine practice – identifies multilevel barriers (e.g., practitioner self-efficacy, organizational leadership) and associated implementation strategies (e.g., training, coaching, leadership supports) to improve use. Implementation science has a high degree of relevance to the implementation of SAP EBPs, but guidance for applying its methods and strategies in this domain has only recently emerged (Graczyk & Kearney, 2024). Further, many interventions and implementation strategies suffer from design problems that can decrease their fit with new contexts and inhibit their application at scale. Human-centered design (HCD) is an approach that grounds innovation development in information collected about the people and settings that will ultimately use those products. HCD has increasingly been applied within the field of implementation science to improve the usability and scale of both EBPs and implementation strategies but has not yet been explicitly applied to the implementation of SAP interventions. This presentation will build on emerging guidance for implementing SAP EBPs and explore recent ways in which the complementary fields of implementation science and HCD can be integrated to improve the reach of complex psychosocial interventions (e.g., student-facing interventions for SAP, multilevel implementation strategies) in schools.

Keywords: implementation science; human-centered design; intervention; mental health; evidence-based practice.

2. SYMPOSIUMS

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It takes a school culture to raise attendance

Coordinators: David Heyne¹ & Chaja Deen²

¹*Excellence in Attendance Support (International Consultancy)*; ²*Netherlands Youth Institute (The Netherlands)*

The 2026 INSA Conference – On Course for Attendance – is a call to move from collective concern to shared practice that is disseminated, implemented, and sustained. This symposium brings together school-related approaches that keep young people connected with learning, strengthen partnership with families, and support staff to address attendance with confidence. Grounded in the expertise of those who design and deliver these interventions, the symposium unites four approaches from Norway, the Netherlands, the UK, and the USA. The interventions span a multi-tiered continuum, ranging from Tier 1 prevention to Tier 3 re-engagement for students facing severe and persistent attendance challenges. The central inquiry of this symposium is practical: How can interventions at different tiers help shift school culture in ways that support wellbeing and attendance? School culture is defined here as the shared norms, values, and collective assumptions that shape ‘how things are done’ in the school community over time. In practical terms, it includes shared responsibility for attendance among staff, families, and partners, and routines that enable early response and relational belonging. This enduring cultural foundation is distinct from school climate, which captures members’ day-to-day perceptions of school life. If school culture is the long-term ‘personality’ of the institution, school climate is its prevailing ‘mood’ (Obed-Chukwuka et al., 2025). The symposium covers the foundations of intervention and the pathways of change in school culture. Each presentation details its target demographic, delivery model, theoretical basis, and current evidence, while identifying pathways that shape school culture. Featured models include Mini-RISK (Norway), a teacher- and nurse-led prevention program; the @School Intervention (Netherlands), a modular intervention for chronic difficulties; Attend Well (United Kingdom), an inclusive school-centred approach; and Positive Family Supports Care (United States of America), a trauma-informed model for under-resourced communities. A related workshop will translate these insights into feasible implementation steps, emphasising immediate actions that foster culture change.

Keywords: school culture; school attendance; school-related interventions; multi-tiered system of supports; implementation.

Attend Well - From Avoiding to Belonging

Joanna Anderson

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The ongoing UK Attend Well project is co-producing an evidence-based, web-based whole-school programme to prevent Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance (EBSNA)

and support reintegration. It is designed to promote inclusive culture, strengthen student–teacher relationships and foster belonging. Drawing on findings from systematic reviews, a longitudinal survey, interviews with young people experiencing EBSA, parents and staff, and linked healthcare–education data analysis we develop a mechanistic model of EBSNA. Intervention components are selected through youth-led behaviour and context mapping, guided by Intervention Mapping and MRC frameworks, with final content agreed through Delphi consensus. The Attend Well programme promotes attendance by strengthening inclusive school culture, so all students feel welcome and supported. Schools begin with a 360° review of their inclusion practices and culture, completed by students, parents and staff, to identify areas for improvement. All schools then implement a core programme focused on everyday practices such as communication about attendance and mental health, behaviour management, celebrating progress and addressing beliefs about reasons and responsibility for non-attendance. Schools can also access additional modules, including guidance on neuroinclusive design, restorative approaches and positive behaviour management strategies.

Changing school culture around family inclusion in attendance interventions

Sarah Lindstrom Johnson

Arizona State University (United States of America)

Positive Family Supports: Communities and Resilience in Education (PFS CARE) is a multi-tiered approach to family engagement focused on changing the beliefs and behaviours of school staff as well as institutionalising school-practices that support trauma-informed, culturally-responsive interactions with families. The intervention is delivered by trained mental health providers and includes schoolwide trainings contextualising the schools' attendance challenges, supports for classroom teachers in engaging with families, and assessment and data-based decision making around school-based family engagement practices. Results from a preliminary randomised controlled trial in the Southwest United States demonstrated improvements in child behaviours and parenting behaviours, specifically those related to internalising behaviours that continued 18 months post-intervention. PFS CARE centres on the foundational shift in school culture needed to engage families as meaningful partners in problem-solving related to attendance. This entails a shift from placing blame on families for situations often beyond their control to the critical need for the school to provide parenting support, resources for behavioral concerns, and connections with broader social services (i.e., clothes, food). In addition to changing school staff beliefs, the intervention aims to shift staff behaviour in how they intentionally engage with families, including who sets the agenda for meetings and how interactions take place. This is supported through data collection on how family engagement is carried out in practice, together with communication strategies such as motivational interviewing.

Shared language, shared routines, shared responsibility: School culture at Tier 3 through @School

Evelyn Karel¹, David Heyne² & Cynthia Defourny¹

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@School is a modular intervention for emotion-related school attendance challenges (ER-SAC). Guided by collaborative case formulation, it aligns educational and therapeutic goals via CBT-informed modules for youth, parallel parent support, and structured collaboration with school staff. In an effectiveness study, it was delivered in a school setting with youth aged 10–17 whose ER-SAC sat at the top of Tier 3, including neurodivergent youth and/or those with chronic health conditions. The study showed substantial increases in attendance (17% to 80% at 5-month follow-up) and reductions in anxiety symptoms, school-related fear, and parent-reported depressive symptoms. We propose that @School shapes school culture through two pathways. Directly, collaborative case formulation fosters shared meaning-making among school professionals, youth, and parents, shifting explanations of severe absence from “individual non-compliance” to shared responsibility, and influencing how professionals approach attendance challenges and engage youth and families in decisions about reintegration and support. Indirectly, @School embeds school-based routines (e.g., regular multidisciplinary meetings, individualised reintegration pacing, coordinated planning between educators and psychologists), reduces fragmentation between education and mental health systems, and strengthens school–family partnership. @School highlights the importance of shared language, shared routines, and shared responsibility for supporting attendance and wellbeing at Tier 3.

Building anxiety competence in schools: Mini-RISK as a pathway to preventing school absence

Åshild Tellefsen Håland & Thomas Bertelsen

Sørlandet Hospital (Norway)

Mini-RISK is a school-based, indicated (Tier 2) group intervention for youth (aged 12–17) with anxiety, delivered in primary and secondary schools across the Agder region of Norway. Groups of 4–6 youth attend 8 sessions (~15 hours), led by a public health nurse and a school social worker, with active parent and teacher involvement. Core components include psychoeducation, extensive in-session exposure practice, and reduction of maladaptive accommodation. The intervention is CBT-informed, with exposure as the primary change mechanism, and employs a public-health logic to build lasting competence within school structures. Mini-RISK is currently being evaluated in a cluster-RCT across 70 schools, tracking implementation sustainability, accommodation practices, and school absence. Mini-RISK directly shifts school culture by replacing common accommodation practices such as exemptions, separate rooms, unrestricted exits, with an expectation that anxious youth can face feared situations with support. As public health nurses and teachers

co-deliver the intervention, CBT principles transfer into everyday practice: staff learn to recognise avoidance and encourage gradual exposure rather than withdrawal. Indirectly, structured collaboration between school staff, health services, and families builds a shared language around anxiety, moving schools from reactive crisis management toward proactive absence prevention. Our experience suggests that embedding mental health competence within existing school roles is a scalable route to culture change.

Understanding the relationships between attendance and mental health - International perspectives utilising mixed method approaches

Coordinator: Tamsin J. Ford

University of Cambridge (United Kingdom)

Mental health and school attendance have a bidirectional relationship. Children and young people experiencing mental health difficulties, particularly anxiety and depression, are at increased risk of school absenteeism. Conversely, persistent absence can negatively impact mental health through increased social isolation, academic pressure, and reduced access to support, creating a reinforcing cycle. This symposium presents three complementary studies examining these relationships across international contexts. A quantitative study from Scotland investigates mechanisms linking socioeconomic disadvantage to absenteeism. Using linked data from the Millennium Cohort Study and Department for Education National Pupil Database (n=7,330), mediation analyses across key educational stages show that parental income is significantly associated with school absences. Internalising behaviours account for a modest but consistent proportion of this association, suggesting a stable mediating role. While most effects are direct, findings indicate that addressing internalising difficulties may help reduce inequalities in attendance. A second quantitative study from Spain applies a Self-Determination Theory to examine motivational risk profiles. Latent Profile Analysis of adolescents (n=1,049) identified three absenteeism groups (low, moderate, high). Students in the high absenteeism group reported consistently lower autonomy and competence, particularly in academic and leisure domains, highlighting increased vulnerability to poorer mental health and broader developmental impacts. These findings support the value of early identification and targeted, motivation-focused interventions. Complementing these findings, a UK qualitative study explores perspectives of young people, parents, and school staff on attendance difficulties resulting from emotional distress associated with being at school. Semi-structured interviews highlight the role of mental health needs, neurodivergence, school environment, and access to support in shaping attendance, as well as key barriers and facilitators to reintegration. Together, these studies emphasise the importance of integrated, mental health-informed approaches to addressing school absenteeism across policy and practice.

Keywords: attendance; self-determination theory; internalising problems; socioeconomic status; mental health.

Is school absenteeism a warning sign of poor mental health? Insights from motivational profiles across adolescents

María Pérez-Marco & Andrea Fuster-Rico

University of Alicante (Spain)

School absenteeism is increasingly recognised not only as an educational challenge but also as an early warning sign of adolescent mental health difficulties. Across international contexts, patterns of non-attendance are linked to emotional distress, disengagement, and long-term risks for social and academic adjustment. Grounded in Self-Determination Theory, this study examines how students' basic psychological needs relate to distinct absenteeism profiles and their implications for mental health. This study had two primary aims: (1) to identify distinct profiles of school absenteeism based on ARSNA reasons; and (2) to analyse differences between these profiles in perceived autonomy and competence. Participants were 1049 Spanish adolescents ($M_{age} = 14.85$, $SD = 1.83$) who completed the Assessing Reasons for School Non-Attendance (ARSNA; Havik et al., 2015), the Perceived Autonomy in Life Domains Scale (PALDS-16; Blais et al., 1990), and the Perception of Competence in Life Domains Scale (PCLDS; Losier et al., 1993). Latent Profile Analysis revealed three groups characterised by low, moderate, and high absenteeism. Students in the High Absenteeism profile consistently reported lower levels of autonomy and competence, suggesting heightened vulnerability to poorer mental health outcomes. These disparities were particularly pronounced in academic and leisure domains, pointing to the broader developmental impact of disengagement. These findings highlight the need for mental health-informed attendance policies. Identifying motivational risk profiles can guide early detection and targeted interventions, with implications for international educational practice.

How internalising behaviour mediates the impact of parental income on school absences

Samara Marta

University of Strathclyde (United Kingdom)

Socioeconomic disadvantage is a well-established risk factor of school absenteeism, yet the mechanisms underlying this relationship remain unclear. Children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to experience internalising difficulties, such as anxiety and social withdrawal, which may hinder school engagement and attendance. This study examines whether children's internalising behaviour mediates the association between parental income and school absences. Using linked data from the Millennium Cohort Study and the National Pupil Database ($n = 7,330$), mediation path analysis was conducted across three key educational stages: the first year of primary school, the first year of secondary school, and the final year of secondary school. Models were progressively adjusted for baseline and residual confounding. Parental income showed a significant total effect on school absences, with internalising behaviour accounting for approximately 6.4-10.0% of this association across key educational stages. The indirect effect was modest but statistically significant and remained consistent across school stages and model specifications. These findings suggest that internalising behaviour plays a small but stable mediating role in the relationship between socioeconomic disadvantage and absenteeism. While most of the association operates through direct pathways, interventions targeting internalising difficulties may help reduce socioeconomic inequalities in absenteeism.

A qualitative study to explore EBSA and mental health and school-level factors influencing it

Joanna K. Anderson, Jennifer Saxton, Hayley Gains, Helen Casey, Tamsin J. Ford & Anne-Marie Burn

University of Cambridge (United Kingdom)

Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) is an increasing concern, reflecting complex interactions between mental health needs and school environments. This qualitative study explores students', parents', and school staff's perspectives on the drivers of EBSA and identifies strategies to support re-engagement with education and reintegration into mainstream school. We conducted semi-structured interviews with young people aged 13–18 years experiencing persistent absence (n=19), their parents (n=20), and school staff (n=14). Interviews explored factors contributing to attendance difficulties, including mental health and neurodivergence, the impact on young people and families, access to support and pathways to reintegration. Data are being analysed using the Framework Method. Findings will enhance understanding of EBSA by highlighting the role of mental health needs, access to and perceived effectiveness of support, and key barriers and facilitators to reintegration. These insights will inform more responsive, coordinated, and inclusive approaches to addressing EBSA.

The role of schools and parents in understanding and intervening for students with school attendance problems. Presentation from Finland and Norway

Coordinator: Trude Havik

University of Stavanger (Norway)

Schools have a unique and critical position in the lives of all children and adolescents, acting as the primary arena for both prevention and early identification of school attendance problems (SAPs). Because absence often develops gradually, the school is the most essential setting for avoiding a "wait to fail" approach. By utilizing early warning signs and implementing timely interventions, schools can effectively mitigate the severe long-term negative consequences associated with SAPs, such as social marginalization, mental health challenges, and future school dropout. This symposium explores the complexity of SAPs through four distinct themes that bridge research and practice across the Nordic countries. Drawing on recent findings from Finland and Norway, the presentations highlight that addressing absenteeism requires a systemic approach rather than focusing solely on the individual student. The first half of the symposium focuses on the Finnish context, beginning with a vital exploration of the parental perspective. Long-term school refusal prompts profound emotional and relational shifts for parents. To ensure these parents are not left alone in their struggle, it is essential that schools actively seek to understand and support them from their perspective. By fostering non-judgmental collaboration, schools can recognize parents as active agents navigating complex challenges rather than placing blame. This section also explores the deep connection between school engagement and various types of absenteeism among lower secondary students. The second half shifts to Norway, focusing on schools' pedagogical and structural capacities. This includes an investigation into the significance of teacher-student interactions as a protective buffer in upper secondary education, as well as insights from a large-scale Municipal Development Project aimed at building coordinated, cross-sectoral preventive structures. By integrating qualitative narratives, large-scale longitudinal data, and intervention studies, the symposium provides a comprehensive overview of how Nordic schools can move from fragmented responses to cohesive, evidence-based practices. The findings underscore that fostering a sense of belonging and maintaining clear, supportive communication pathway, especially with parent, are the most enduring strategies for promoting consistent attendance

Keywords: school attendance problems; parental perspective; school engagement; teacher-student interactions; cross-sector collaboration.

Parenting in the shadow of school refusal

Petra Vesuri

University of Jyväskylä (Finland)

This presentation draws on a narrative study of 13 Finnish parents whose children had refused school or struggled with regular attendance for more than two years. Using narrative interviews and narrative analysis, the study explores how parents make sense of their everyday lives and construct meaning around their parenting across different stages of their child's school refusal. The analysis identified three distinctive story types that illustrate parents' changing self-positioning: Adaptation (moving from emotional overwhelm and self-blame toward greater tolerance and self-compassion), Searching for solutions (shifting from helplessness to more flexible and responsive parenting as understanding deepened), and Questioning (moving from internalised blame toward critically examining societal and school related expectations surrounding "good parenting" and the "ideal pupil"). Across all narratives, parents described long term school refusal as a process that profoundly challenged and reshaped their sense of themselves as parents. Their accounts reveal how easily families may be left navigating the situation with limited guidance, significant emotional strain, and strong cultural expectations. These findings underscore the importance of professionals—including schools—seeking to understand parents' perspectives and ensuring that families are not left to manage these challenges alone.

School engagement and absenteeism among lower secondary students

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This study explores how school engagement, encompassing students' feelings, thoughts, and relationships, relates to both sickness-related and unexcused absences. Grounded in ecological systems theory, the research analyzes data from the Finnish School Health Promotion Study (2010–2023), involving over 1.1 million 8th- and 9th-grade students. Findings reveal that while absence patterns fluctuate (with sickness absences rising to 38% monthly in 2023), the link between low engagement and absenteeism remains constant. Positive teacher-student relationships and "liking school" serve as critical protective factors, whereas bullying significantly increases the risk for all types of absence. The results underscore that absenteeism is not merely an individual issue but is deeply embedded in the school community's social climate. Furthermore, the 2023 data suggest that the traditional distinction between "sickness" and "truancy" is increasingly blurred, highlighting the need to move beyond rigid administrative categories to consider students' broader life contexts and subjective perspectives.

The significance of the teacher-student relationship in school absenteeism

Trude Havik

University of Stavanger (Norway)

Previous research increasingly indicates that the quality of the teacher-student relationship is a fundamental structural determinant for school attendance. This relationship can serve as a critical protective buffer, keeping students connected to the school environment, or conversely, as a significant risk factor for school absence when the relationship is poor or conflictual. In this study, the teacher-student interactions were measured using the Teaching Through Interaction (TTI) framework in upper secondary schools. In a cluster randomized control trial containing 98 teachers and 1341 students, we investigated the effect of a video-based teacher coaching intervention on students SAPs, defined as 10% or more absence. The study investigates the effect of a teacher-coaching intervention on teacher-student interaction on students' SAPs. Preliminary results of multilevel complier average causal effect (CACE) estimation using a combined dosage and fidelity compliance marker indicate a small effect size for SAPs according to Cohen's standards. For this type of intervention, the effect is considered large considering that SAPs are a secondary outcome. By focusing on the interactional level, the study provides evidence of how specific pedagogical shifts in the classroom can directly influence student attendance patterns in a high school setting.

Building system-level capacity for preventing severe school absenteeism: A municipal development project in Norway

Cecilie Eikefjord Udberg-Helle

USN/Sunnfjord Municipality (Norway)

Severe and persistent absenteeism places a substantial strain on students, families, and municipal services, highlighting the urgent need for coordinated preventive structures. This four-year systems-level project in Sunnfjord Municipality aims to strengthen early identification, improve cross-sector collaboration, and ensure coherent support. Preliminary findings from the integrated PhD project indicate that children who develop severe absenteeism often experience early deficits in autonomy, competence, and belonging in the classroom. These challenges frequently manifest as internalizing or externalizing behaviors and somatic symptoms. Furthermore, both children and caregivers report feeling dismissed or overridden by schools and support services, leading to a breakdown in communication and repeated breaches of trust. To address these systemic gaps, the project maps absenteeism patterns and develops shared routines and clear pathways between education, health, and social services. By formalizing responsibilities and enhancing communication, the project delivers a municipal absenteeism guideline designed to improve the collective preventive capacity of schools and support services.

No one left outside: Reaching young people and families the system struggles to hold

Coordinator: Thompson Hokianga
Haukūnui Solutions Ltd (New Zealand)

Across education, social services and community systems, there are young people and families who sit on the edges not because they do not care, but because traditional systems have struggled to engage them in ways that feel relevant, safe and respectful. This symposium brings together three connected strands of work focused on ensuring no one is left outside. The first strand explores capturing the minds and hearts of gang leaders, kids and families. Rather than approaching gangs through deficit or enforcement lenses alone, this session examines how identity, belonging, loyalty and survival shape engagement choices. It highlights approaches that meet gangs where they are, recognise their strengths, and open pathways toward education, purpose and hope through trust based relationships. The second strand focuses on shifting the dial for our most at risk children and young people experiencing complex layers of trauma, disengagement and exclusion. This session challenges traditional attendance, behaviour and compliance models, showing how culturally responsive practice, consistent relational adults, and wrap around support can change trajectories when systems move from reacting to genuinely caring. The third strand centres on innovative engagement with families the system finds hardest to reach. It explores how fear, mistrust, past harm and practical barriers can disconnect families from services, and how new ways of working grounded in humility, flexibility and partnership can rebuild connection and shared responsibility for children's wellbeing. Together, this symposium invites participants to rethink who systems are designed for, whose voices are heard, and what it truly takes to hold people in. It is a call to move beyond programmes and policies, and towards courage, connection and collective responsibility because when we hold the margins, everyone benefits.

Keywords: gangs; at risk; marginalised; solutions; innovation.

Capturing the hearts and minds of our gangs

Thompson Hokianga
Haukūnui Solutions Ltd (New Zealand)

This session explores what it truly takes to engage gang leaders, young people and families in ways that foster connection, trust and positive change. Moving beyond deficit based or enforcement led approaches, it examines how identity, belonging, loyalty and survival influence how gangs interact with education and community systems. These factors are often misunderstood, yet they are critical to understanding engagement choices. Drawing on practice-based experience, the session highlights approaches that meet gangs where they are acknowledging their strengths, leadership structures and protective functions

within whānau and communities. It demonstrates how trust-based relationships, cultural responsiveness and consistent presence can open pathways toward education, purpose and hope. Participants will be invited to rethink common assumptions and consider how courage, respect and partnership can shift engagement outcomes for some of the most marginalised young people. This strand challenges systems to move from control to connection, and from exclusion to opportunity, while keeping the wellbeing of children and families at the centre.

Shifting the ‘attendance’ dial for our most at risk children

Melanie Taite

Tuahiwi Education Ltd (New Zealand)

This session focuses on what it takes to meaningfully shift the attendance outcomes for children and young people most at risk of persistent disengagement from learning. Rather than treating attendance as a compliance issue, this strand reframes it as a reflection of wellbeing, belonging, and trust in the education system. Drawing on real world practice, the session examines how factors such as trauma, poverty, disrupted relationships, cultural disconnection, and system complexity contribute to poor attendance. It highlights approaches that move beyond surface level interventions toward relational, culturally responsive, and wrap-around supports that hold children consistently over time. The speaker will discuss shared accountability, stable adult relationships, and how collaboration across schools, families and agencies can change trajectories for learners who are often pushed to the margins. This strand challenges delegates to consider how shifting mindsets, structures and supports can reset the attendance dial and keep our most vulnerable children connected, supported and on course.

Innovation Engagement of our hard-to-reach families

Nicole Manawatu-Brennan

Tuahiwi Education Ltd (New Zealand)

This session focuses on the positive impact achieved when families are actively recognised as partners in their children’s learning and wellbeing. It explores innovative approaches that strengthen connection with families whose voices and strengths are not always reflected in traditional engagement models. Rather than framing families as “hard to reach,” this strand highlights how systems can adapt to better recognise cultural knowledge, lived experience, and the deep commitment families have to their children. Drawing on practice-based examples, the session showcases flexible, respectful, and relationship centred ways of working that open genuine pathway for collaboration. Participants will explore how shared problem solving, trust building, and meeting families in ways that work for them can lead to stronger engagement, improved attendance, and better outcomes for children. This session invites delegates to rethink engagement as a

two-way process and to design approaches that honour dignity, strengths, and partnership because when families are connected and valued, children flourish.

Navigating the shift to attendance: Comparative lessons from new legislation in England, Finland, and the Netherlands

Coordinators: Irma de Wit¹, Victoria Franklin² & Johanna Sergejeff³

¹*National Support Centre for Inclusive Education (The Netherlands);* ²*Independent /freelance Consultant working across many organisations including the Dept for Education at national level (United Kingdom);* ³*University of Jyväskylä (Finland)*

Across Europe, governments are intensifying their efforts to address persistent and rising school non-attendance. As countries introduce or revise attendance legislation, there is a growing need to understand how legal reforms translate into meaningful changes in practice. This symposium brings together perspectives from England, Finland, and the Netherlands, three national contexts that are each navigating different stages of introducing or implementing new attendance and absence legislation. The symposium explores how each country experienced its legislative shift, the change processes before and after implementation, and the contextual factors that shaped these developments. Each presentation examines three core dimensions: (1) the specific attendance/absence legislation introduced and its policy goals; (2) the structure and characteristics of the national educational landscape; and (3) the journey from policy to practice, including barriers, enablers, and concrete implementation strategies. Presenters will reflect on behaviour change approaches, cross agency collaboration, and efforts to move from punitive responses to supportive attendance cultures. Through a comparative lens, the symposium provides valuable insights into what works, what can be improved, and how countries can learn from each other when setting a new course for attendance. To deepen the comparative learning, there is time for questions and discussion, enabling participants to explore implications for their own contexts and share perspectives across countries.

Keywords: school attendance; educational policy; implementation strategies; cross country comparison; behaviour change.

Bridging policy and practice: The Dutch approach to reducing school-absenteeism

Irma de Wit

National Support Centre for Inclusive Education (The Netherlands)

In April 2026, the Netherlands adopted the Law to Reduce School Absenteeism, marking a significant shift in national educational policy aimed at strengthening early intervention, cross sector collaboration, and consistent accountability. This symposium offers an insider's perspective on the Dutch "polder model," a consensus driven approach that shaped the development and implementation of the new legislation. Participants will gain insight into how stakeholders across all levels of education (teachers, school leaders, local authorities, and care and youth partners) collectively negotiated the goals, responsibilities,

and practical implications of the law. A central focus of the session is the translation of formal legal provisions into practical, accessible tools for educators and partners in the field. The National Support Centre for Inclusive Education has developed a comprehensive implementation toolkit to support schools in navigating the new requirements, standardizing practices, and strengthening collaborative problem solving. Recently launched, this toolkit provides concrete guidance, templates, and step by step processes that make the legislation operational in daily practice. By exploring both the legislative journey and its practical outcomes, this symposium offers valuable lessons for policymakers and professionals seeking to bridge the gap between statutory intent and effective real-world applications.

Working together to improve school attendance - changes in policy and legislation in England (Aug 2024) to ensure a consistent approach to attendance and absence management

Victoria Franklin

Independent /freelance Consultant working across many organisations including the Dept for Education at national level (United Kingdom)

This session will examine how legislation and policy change in England has been instrumental in driving a culture shift to the management of attendance and absence across the country. Local Authorities /Schools and Communities are embedding a 'support first approach' and an ethos that 'Attendance is Everyone's responsibility'. This shift coupled with the mandatory daily collection of attendance and absence data and a uniform set of attendance and absence codes for ALL students regardless of whether they are compulsory school age, has provided clearer insights and enabled deeper analysis of the bigger picture. This has led to the development of data reporting tools that together with AI enhance knowledge of absenteeism and support best practice. Implementation of the legislation and policy will be examined, looking at the challenges together with what worked well. During this session references to research linked to this work will also be shared. There will be time for questions and discussion as part of the symposium.

Shaping attendance laws and policies in Finland

Johanna Sergejeff

University of Jyväskylä (Finland)

In 2023, Finland implemented significant updates to its Basic Education Act and the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education, demonstrating a strengthened commitment to addressing absence and promoting school engagement. This part of the symposium outlines how the Ministry of Education and Culture launched a project to develop a national Engaging School Community Work model (Operation SKY). The aim of the project was to support students' engagement and attendance in school and to reduce the number of absences. Another aim was to develop practices that would harmonize the

monitoring of absences and the compilation of statistics on them. The development work, coordinated by the Ministry of Education and Culture, was carried out in close cooperation with the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre, the Finnish National Agency for Education and certain pilot projects that had received special grants. The updates and the steps taken to implement and disseminate these reforms are also discussed, along with the successes achieved and the challenges encountered.

Embedding youth voice in school attendance policy: A European perspective

Coordinators: Melchior Wammes & Mathias Vinsten Munk

Adviesraad EigenWijsheid (The Netherlands)

Across Europe, policies on school attendance are often developed about young people, rather than with them. This top down approach frequently misses the nuanced realities of students facing attendance barriers. This session brings together multiple European youth-led and youth partnered organisations to explore how meaningful youth participation can be structurally embedded in attendance policy and practice, moving beyond mere box ticking exercises. Drawing on diverse experiences from various national contexts, we will reflect on what it truly means to genuinely listen to young people, especially those with lived experiences of school attendance challenges, school absenteeism, and neurodivergence. We will discuss how their unique insights can shape more effective, humane, and sustainable educational policies. The session will combine brief, impactful contributions from participating organisations with an interactive, facilitated dialogue with the audience. Together, we will critically examine the systemic barriers to youth participation, such as tokenism, adultism, accessibility issues, and inherent power imbalances within educational governance. More importantly, we will share practical, field tested strategies to overcome these hurdles. Participants will leave this session with concrete ideas, actionable frameworks, and creative methodologies on how to transition from incidental consultation to the structural, long term inclusion of youth voices. This shift is essential for co-creating inclusive school environments where every young person feels seen, heard, and supported in their educational journey.

Keywords: youth participation; national attendance policy; communication with students and parents; documentary.

Youth-led influence on school attendance policy in the Netherlands

Melchior Wammes

Adviesraad EigenWijsheid (The Netherlands)

In the Netherlands, a diverse landscape of youth-led and youth-partnered organisations is actively engaged in shaping policies around school attendance and chronic absenteeism. In this presentation, Melchior Wammes, board member of Adviesraad EigenWijsheid, explores how these organisations contribute to national discussions and decision-making processes. Drawing on collaboration with networks such as NJR, LAKS, LBVSO, Stem van de VSO-leerling, JongPIT, and ExpEx, this session highlights concrete examples of how young people have influenced policy, raised awareness, and brought lived experience into institutional spaces. These examples illustrate both the potential and the growing recognition of youth voice in addressing school attendance challenges. At the same time, the presentation critically reflects on persistent barriers, including issues of accessibility, continuity, and the risk of

tokenistic involvement. By sharing both successes and ongoing challenges, this session provides an honest and practice-based perspective on what it takes to structurally embed youth participation in school attendance policy in the Dutch context.

Fragmentation and pitfalls: Youth participation and school attendance in Denmark

Mathias Vinsten Munk

Adviesraad EigenWijsheid (The Netherlands)

In Denmark, youth participation in school attendance policy faces a fundamentally different landscape. This session, led by Mathias Vinsten Munk, explores the challenges of engaging young people in a context where national, cross-cutting youth organisations on school attendance are largely absent. Instead, youth representation is often organised around specific subgroups, such as young people with autism, giftedness, or physical disabilities. While these groups play an important role in advocating for their own communities, their efforts remain fragmented and are rarely connected to broader school attendance issues or systemic policy development. This presentation examines the implications of this fragmentation for policy-making and inclusion. It highlights how the lack of overarching structures limits the ability to address complex, overlapping causes of school absenteeism and makes it harder to build a unified youth voice. At the same time, Mathias is working on an innovative initiative to establish a national youth organisation in Denmark, like Adviesraad EigenWijsheid. He will not only share early insights, but also actively invite participants to provide advice and ideas to help make this initiative impactful in the Danish context.

From “no chance” to opportunity: Andries’ journey in Norway

Andries Mackay

Adviesraad EigenWijsheid (the Netherlands)

In this session, Andries shares his personal journey of feeling “hopeless” within the education system and how this evolved into a path toward opportunity through a global search for learning environments that truly fit him. He reflects on his experiences of exclusion, resilience, and rediscovering what meaningful education can look like. The presentation includes a fragment from the documentary “Wen er maar aan”, which illustrates key moments from his story and highlights the broader realities of young people who struggle to find their place in traditional schooling. A central part of the session focuses on Norway’s Change Factory, an organisation that has significantly influenced how youth voice is integrated into education and youth policy. Andries discusses both the impact and strengths of this approach, as well as the gaps and shortcomings that still exist within the model. Finally, he explores how these lessons might inform future improvements and reflects on what could be strengthened to ensure more consistent and meaningful youth involvement in shaping education systems.

What can we learn from parents? - Narrative approaches to support school attendance

Coordinator: Petra Vesuri

University of Jyväskylä (Finland)

A child's absence from school places considerable strain on the entire family, increasing parental stress, uncertainty, and feelings of powerlessness, and often affecting family dynamics. At the same time, parental support is crucial in promoting school attendance. Despite this, parents' perspectives remain underrepresented in research on school attendance problems (SAPs). Differences in how students, parents, and professionals understand the causes and consequences of absence highlight the need for inclusive, relational, and systemic approaches. This symposium foregrounds parents' lived experiences to deepen understanding and inform more effective responses to attendance challenges. The symposium brings together three studies conducted at universities in Finland. The first study uses narrative approaches to examine how parents navigate school mornings when their child experiences emotionally based attendance difficulties, illustrating how parental agency is shaped in situations marked by urgency, uncertainty, and moral tension. The second study, based on an online survey, employs a mixed-methods design to explore support for students with neurodevelopmental conditions, home-school collaboration, and relationships with teachers and peers, highlighting the importance of relational trust, inclusive practices, and coordinated support. The third study, based on interviews with guardians, investigates risk and protective factors related to prolonged absence, emphasizing the role of trusting relationships, flexible educational arrangements, and interprofessional collaboration in supporting school re-engagement. Together, these studies provide multidisciplinary insights and underscore the importance of strength-based, family-informed, and coordinated practices. The symposium contributes to a more nuanced understanding of SAPs and supports the development of inclusive approaches that promote sustainable school attendance.

Keywords: school attendance problems (SAPs); parents' experiences; multidisciplinary insights; neurodevelopmental challenges; parental agency; school re-engagement.

“Those mornings” – Constructing parental agency when children face school attendance challenges

Petra Vesuri, Tanja Vehkakoski, Anna Rönkä & Tuomo Virtanen

University of Jyväskylä (Finland)

This presentation brings life parenting on school mornings with children experiencing emotion related school attendance challenges (ER-SAC). Drawing on in depth interviews with 17 Finnish parents, the study foregrounds parents' own voices and experiences, focusing on how they describe and negotiate demanding school day transitions at home.

Using a narrative approach, including small stories and word images, the study explores and presents how parental agency is constructed in accounts of these mornings—moments often marked by uncertainty, urgency, and moral tension. From parents' narratives we composed word images (research poems), which reveal complex reflections on responsibility, effort, limits, and hope, highlighting how everyday interactions at home shape possibilities for school participation. By attending parents' lived experiences, this presentation contributes to a more relational and humane understanding of school attendance challenges. It underscores the importance of listening to parents as knowledgeable partners whose insights are critical for developing supportive practices and pathways back to school. The findings invite educators, practitioners, and researchers to reconsider how parental agency is recognised, supported, and engaged in efforts to promote school re-engagement.

Supporting school attendance among neurodivergent students: Parents' perspectives on school relationships and support

Annika Borgström¹, Raisa Carpelan¹, Katarina Alanko^{2,3} & Monica Londen¹

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Early research often understood school attendance problems (SAPs) among students with neurodevelopmental diagnoses (NDs) as resulting from individual or family deficits. More recent work emphasizes the complex interactions between student characteristics and school environments. Guided by Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model, this study examined parents' perspectives on school-based support, home-school cooperation, and school relationships among students with NDs experiencing SAPs. Parents (N = 789) completed an online survey addressing school circumstances and school attendance. A mixed-methods design, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative approaches, was applied. Nearly half of the students (49%) had multiple NDs, while ADHD was the most common single diagnosis (32%), followed by ASD (12%), sensory hypersensitivity (3%), and Tourette syndrome (0.7%). Preliminary thematic analyses of the open-ended responses indicated that commonly reported support included small-group instruction, part-time special education, shortened school days, adapted homework, and modified exam-situations. Parents underscored staff knowledge of NDs, effective anti-bullying measures, opportunities for emotional regulation during the school day, and regular, trusting communication between home and school as critical for sustained school attendance. The findings highlight the importance of inclusive school practices and policy initiatives supporting students with NDs.

Understanding school attendance problems through guardians' perspectives: Risk factors, support, and re-engagement

Tiina Laurén-Knuutila¹, Jaanet Salminen², Niina Junttila² & Katarina Alanko^{1,2}

¹*Åbo Akademi University (Finland);* ²*University of Turku (Finland)*

This study examines risk and supportive factors related to school attendance problems (SAPs), focusing on the experiences of parents and legal guardians. The data consist of semi-structured interviews with 16 guardians describing 19 adolescents (13–18 years). Using thematic analysis and Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological model, the study examines interactions between individual, relational, institutional, and societal processes. Guardians associated SAPs with psychological and social challenges, bullying, loneliness, and feelings of not belonging, alongside schools’ limited capacity for early, flexible responses. Support was often delayed and fragmented, leaving families feeling unheard. Return was supported by strengthened individual resources, trusting adult relationships, flexible educational arrangements, and interprofessional collaboration. The findings challenge deficit-based individual explanations of SAPs and highlight the importance of relational and systemic perspectives. A strength-based and inclusive approach is needed to better recognise family resources and to promote coordinated practices that support sustainable school attendance.

When the pursuit of perfection leads to school refusal: Exploring the relationship between perfectionism and school attendance problems

Coordinator: María Vicent
University of Alicante (Spain)

Perfectionism has taken on a central role in recent decades in understanding individuals' psychological well-being across different stages of development. Far from being a unidimensional trait, current evidence describes it as a complex system of beliefs and behavioral patterns that may predispose individuals to various forms of psychopathology. This symposium aims to present recent advances by the PREBI research group in the study of perfectionism and school attendance problems, within the framework of the project "Assessment and analysis of academic perfectionism and its impact on the educational, psychological, and social development of Primary and Secondary Education students (PID2023 152358NA I00)", funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities. First, recent data will be presented on the prevalence of different perfectionism profiles among Spanish Secondary Education students and their relationship with school refusal. Subsequently, adopting a variable centered perspective, we will examine differential patterns among perfectionism, excellencism and students' perceived teacher support, a variable related to academic achievement and self-efficacy. Third, returning to a person centered approach, we will present the identified profiles of school refusal in Spanish adolescents and their association with other oriented perfectionism. Finally, also from a school refusal profile perspective, we will examine differences between these profiles and the perfectionist facets of socially prescribed perfectionism, self-critical perfectionism, and perfectionist strivings. Taken together, these contributions offer an updated view of the relationship between multidimensional perfectionism and school attendance problems among adolescents.

Keywords: school attendance problems; perfectionism; Spanish students; profiles.

Mapping perfectionism profiles in relation to school refusal

María Vicent, Carolina González, Andrea Fuster & Ángel Amat
University of Alicante (Spain)

Both perfectionism and school attendance problems have been consistently associated with poorer emotional well-being in children and adolescents. Despite growing interest in perfectionism, relatively little research has examined its relationship with key educational variables, including the broad spectrum of School Attendance Problems. Nevertheless, prior studies indicate that perfectionism is linked to somatic complaints, school burnout, and heightened negative emotionality. In this context, the present study investigates the association between perfectionism and school refusal, conceptualized as a functional explanation for school non-attendance, using a person-centered approach. The sample

comprised 681 Spanish students aged 12 to 18 years. Participants completed the Child and Adolescent Perfectionism Scale and the School Refusal subscale of the Assessing Reasons for School Non-attendance questionnaire. The Latent Profile Analysis was conducted to identify perfectionism profiles based on combinations of Socially Prescribed Perfectionism and Self-Oriented Perfectionism. Three profiles emerged: non-perfectionism, moderate perfectionism, and high perfectionism. Adolescents in the high perfectionism profile reported higher levels of school refusal than their peers with moderate and low perfectionism. These findings suggest that students with elevated perfectionism may avoid school to cope with perceived failure and reduce negative emotional experiences. Consequently, teachers should be trained to identify students with high levels of perfectionism and provide appropriate support to help reduce self-critical thinking and alleviate social pressure. In doing so, students may come to perceive school as a context for developing their abilities without adopting extreme perfectionistic tendencies that could contribute to school attendance problems.

Differential associations of excellencism and perfectionism with perceived teacher support in adolescents

Alba Lorenzo-Rumbo, Ángel Amat, María Pérez-Marco & María Vicent
University of Alicante (Spain)

Decades of research on perfectionism have yielded inconsistent findings regarding the Perfectionistic Strivings (PS) factor and its associations with psychological variables. The Model of Perfectionism and Excellencism distinguishes PS from a more flexible orientation toward excellence, aiming to clarify their relationships with adjustment and maladjustment outcomes. A central debate in this field concerns performance and the psychological costs associated with the way goals are pursued. This study examined differences between Excellencism and Perfectionism in relation to students' perceived teacher support, a variable related to academic achievement and self-efficacy. The sample comprised 497 adolescents aged 12 to 16 ($M = 14.03$; $SD = 1.35$; 50.7% boys). Participants completed the Scale of Perfectionism and Excellencism (SCOPE) and the first factor of the Teacher and Classmate Support Scale (TCSS), assessing perceived teacher support. Results showed that perceived teacher support was significantly correlated only with Excellencism ($r = .220$; $p < .001$). Significant differences were found between students with high ($M = 48.48$; $SD = 6.75$) versus low ($M = 42.57$; $SD = 9.29$) perceived support, with a moderate effect size ($d = .65$). Logistic regression indicated that Excellencism was associated with a 9% increase in the odds of perceiving high teacher support ($OR = 1.09$; $p < .001$). These findings suggest that Excellencism reflects a flexible achievement orientation facilitated by teacher support, whereas Perfectionism appears unrelated to perceived support, indicating its rigid component is less sensitive to contextual influences. Promoting adaptive high-achievement orientations may foster positive academic experiences.

Demanding perfection from others: A key to understanding school refusal?

Andrea Fuster, María Pérez-Marco, Alba Lorenzo-Rumbo & Ángel Amat-Seller

University of Alicante (Spain)

Understanding school attendance from a well-being perspective requires greater attention to the psychological mechanisms underlying students' engagement with school due to regular school attendance is widely recognised as a fundamental condition for students' academic development, social integration, and psychological well-being. The present study conceptualizes school refusal as a multidimensional attendance-related difficulty and examines the role of other-oriented perfectionism in adolescent adjustment. A sample of 620 Spanish adolescents aged between 13 and 16 years completed the School Refusal Evaluation Scale and the Other-Oriented Perfectionism Subscale-Junior Form. Using the Latent Profile Analysis, which identified three distinct profiles of school refusal based on emotional and behavioral indicators: High School Refusal, Moderate School Refusal and Low School Refusal. Significant differences in other-oriented perfectionism were observed across the identified profiles. The High School Refusal reported the highest levels on other-oriented perfectionism. Furthermore, logistic regression analyses demonstrated that other-oriented perfectionism significantly predicted profile membership. These findings indicate that interpersonal perfectionistic tendencies may play a relevant role in shaping adolescents' school attendance behaviors. Overall, the results emphasize the importance of considering relational and contextual factors when addressing school refusal and highlight the potential of strengths-based, context-sensitive interventions to enhance student engagement and support psychological well-being in educational settings.

When expectations overwhelm: Uncovering school refusal profiles through perfectionism

María Pérez-Marco, Carolina González, Alba Lorenzo-Rumbo & Andrea Fuster

University of Alicante (Spain)

School refusal is a complex and heterogeneous phenomenon increasingly linked to emotional maladjustment in children and adolescents. At the same time, perfectionism, particularly its maladaptive dimensions, has been identified as a key vulnerability factor for psychological distress. However, little is known about how different school refusal profiles relate to distinct perfectionism patterns. This study aimed to identify latent profiles of school refusal based on functional conditions and to examine differences in multidimensional perfectionism across these profiles. Participants were 1,276 Spanish adolescents aged 13–16 years who completed the School Refusal Assessment Scale-Revised (SRAS-R) and the Child and Adolescent Perfectionism Scale (CAPS). Latent Profile Analysis identified four groups: Non School Refusal, School Refusal by Negative Reinforcement, Mixed School Refusal, and High Mixed School Refusal. Results showed that students in the Mixed and High Mixed School Refusal profiles reported the highest levels of socially prescribed perfectionism and self-critical perfectionism, both strongly associated with psychological vulnerability. These findings highlight maladaptive perfectionism as a key factor underlying more severe school refusal patterns. From an

applied perspective, they underscore the importance of integrating perfectionism-focused strategies into early identification and intervention efforts aimed at preventing school attendance problems and promoting adolescent mental health.

Leveraging large datasets and applying a bioecological framework to further understanding of school non-attendance and contributing factors in Australia and the UK

Coordinators: Amy Meade¹, Lauren Cameron^{1,2} & Chloe Eddy³

¹*Deakin University (Australia);* ²*Monash University (Australia);*

³*University of Southampton (United Kingdom)*

Improving school attendance remains a persistent international challenge and educational priority, particularly for students at elevated risk of non-attendance. In this symposium, we present findings from studies utilising large-scale national longitudinal datasets to explore trajectories of school non-attendance in Australia and the UK. We apply the Kids and Teens at School (KiTeS) framework to examine modifiable predictors and correlates of school attendance challenges at the individual, family, school, and system level. First, Meade uses the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (n = 10,090) to explore prevalence, correlates, and predictors of school refusal. Her findings suggest that neurodivergence, school belonging, and peer relationships are amongst the strongest correlates of school refusal. Second, Cameron investigates how school-level (i.e., mainstream vs. special schools) and system level (i.e., COVID-19 pandemic) factors interactively impact attendance trajectories in a large-scale data set (n = 2433) of schools from Victoria, Australia. Her findings suggest that special schools (i.e. schools that exclusively enrol students with intellectual disabilities) had higher rates of non-attendance pre-pandemic than mainstream schools and have had a slower rate of recovery in the post-pandemic period. Third, Eddy examines sex differences in non-attendance trajectories amongst autistic students across individual, family, school-levels of analysis using a combination of the United Kingdom's National Pupil Database and the Millennium Cohort Study (n = 11,872). Her findings suggest that autistic girls and boys follow distinct trajectories of school non-attendance and exhibit different predictors of school non-attendance by age 14. The symposium will conclude with a discussion of the opportunities and challenges presented by large-scale datasets, cross-national insights, and the value of a bioecological perspective in supporting students to remain on course for attendance.

Keywords: school non-attendance; bioecological approach; large datasets; correlates; risk factors; longitudinal.

Insights into school refusal from the longitudinal study of Australian children

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Background. Systemic efforts to keep students on course for attendance and reduce school refusal (SR) have been constrained by limited longitudinal evidence on SR aetiology. **Objective.** This research examines the prevalence, correlates, and predictors of SR in Australia, and identifies characteristics disproportionately represented amongst students who experience SR. **Method.** Growing Up in Australia: The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children follows two nationally representative cohorts (N = 10090) of Australian children aged 4 – 15 years and their families across their compulsory schooling years. A bioecological lens is applied to analyse factors associated with SR using descriptive analyses, logistic regressions, and machine learning algorithms. **Results.** Preliminary findings reflect higher lifetime prevalence of SR than previously indicated. They highlight the value of a bioecological perspective and underscore the importance of relationships and belonging at school. **Discussion.** These early findings contribute new insights into the prevalence and aetiology of SR in Australian students and may inform universal measures to support attendance. They also provide foundational evidence for developing screening tools to identify SR risk prior to onset which may enable implementation of targeted preventative interventions.

School attendance in Victorian mainstream and special schools and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

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Background. School attendance rates have been decreasing over the past decade, further exacerbated by the COVID pandemic. In Australia, the declining trends in attendance and chronic absenteeism have been reported, however, attendance rates for special schools enrolling students with intellectual disabilities has not been established. **Method.** The current study undertook secondary data analysis of school attendance data from 2014 to 2024, obtained from the Australian Curriculum, Assessment, and Reporting Authority, exploring attendance rates and chronic absenteeism for students attending Victorian mainstream schools (n=2433) and special schools (n=81) and their trajectories pre- and post-pandemic. The school-level factors impacting rates and trajectories were also investigated using Latent Growth Modelling. **Results.** Special schools saw a greater decline in attendance pre-pandemic and have had a slower rate of recovery post-pandemic compared to mainstream schools. School sector, socioeducational advantage, school size, and cultural diversity have all had significant impacts on school attendance, particularly in the post-pandemic period. **Discussion.** The current study confirmed that special schools for students with intellectual disabilities have lower attendance than mainstream schools. Identifying the reasons why special schools have lower attendance is essential and overdue to ensure appropriate supports and interventions can be implemented.

Sex differences in school non-attendance trajectories amongst autistic students in England and Wales: Evidence from the Millennium Cohort Study and National Pupil Database

Chloe Eddy, Sarah Parsons, Hanna Kovshoff & Valerie Brandt

University of Southampton (United Kingdom)

Cross-sectional studies suggest that autistic students are at elevated risk of school non-attendance compared to non-autistic peers, yet longitudinal evidence for this pattern is limited. Moreover, little is known about whether this elevated risk differs between autistic boys and girls, despite growing recognition of sex differences in their school experiences. We examined sex differences in school non-attendance trajectories amongst autistic students in England and Wales and sought to identify predictors of non-attendance. We linked data from the National Pupil Database and the Millennium Cohort Study, a nationally representative longitudinal cohort study ($n = 11,872$). We applied the Kids and Teens at School bioecological systems framework to examine modifiable individual, family, and school-level predictors of school attendance trajectories using structural equation modelling. Preliminary findings indicate that autistic girls and boys follow distinct trajectories of school non-attendance and exhibit different predictors of school non-attendance by age 14. Applying a bioecological perspective to longitudinal population data underscores the influence of individual, family, and school-level processes to understanding school attendance. Our findings suggest that approaches to intervention should be sex-sensitive and target systemic factors that facilitate sustained engagement with school.

Nordic pathways back to school: A systematic review of interventions for school attendance problems

Coordinator: Katarina Alanko

University of Turku (Finland) and Åbo Akademi University (Finland)

School attendance problems (SAP) require coordinated, multi-level responses that extend beyond individual-level treatment. While the Nordic countries are often recognised for strong welfare and educational systems, prolonged school absence remains an increasing concern across the region. This symposium presents findings from an ongoing Nordic systematic review mapping interventions and support systems designed to facilitate students' return to school. The review systematically identifies interventions across Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, and Iceland, examining their theoretical foundations, target groups, implementation contexts, interprofessional collaboration, and level of empirical support. Searches were conducted using both English and Nordic-language terms related to school absence and intervention approaches, enabling the inclusion of both peer-reviewed and grey literature. The symposium begins with a methodological and conceptual overview, including the general English-language search strategy and emerging cross-national patterns. This is followed by country-specific presentations from Finland, Denmark, and Iceland, that function as case examples of national searches, highlighting grey literature findings within Nordic welfare systems. Together, the presentations provide a rare comparative perspective on structured approaches to school reintegration. By identifying shared principles and context-sensitive differences, the symposium contributes to international discussions on sustainable and collaborative responses to SAP, aligning with the conference theme "On Course for Attendance!".

Keywords: school attendance problems; school reintegration; Nordic countries; interventions; scoping review; comparative research.

Interventions for school attendance problems: A Nordic systematic review

Katarina Alanko

University of Turku (Finland) and Åbo Akademi University (Finland)

This presentation provides an overview of a Nordic scoping review examining interventions addressing school attendance problems (SAP). The review aims to map the range, characteristics, and evidence base of interventions across five Nordic countries. A systematic search strategy was developed using English-language databases and search terms combining concepts of school absence (e.g., absenteeism, truancy, school refusal) with intervention-related terminology. The presentation focuses on the general search strategy, inclusion criteria, and analytical framework guiding the review. Interventions are analysed in terms of theoretical orientation, level of intervention (individual, school, or

system), and degree of empirical support. Preliminary findings indicate substantial variation in how SAP is conceptualised and addressed, with differences in emphasis on mental health, family engagement, and school-based practices. This overview establishes the foundation for the subsequent country-specific presentations by identifying cross-national patterns and gaps in the literature. It also highlights the importance of integrating grey literature to capture practice-based interventions not represented in academic research.

Finland as a case example

Martina Mölsä¹ and Eeva-Liisa Markkanen²

¹*Åbo Akademi University (Finland);* ²*University of Turku (Finland)*

This presentation examines Finland as a case example within a Nordic scoping review of interventions targeting school attendance problems (SAP). Building on a shared review framework, the Finnish search strategy integrates both academic and grey literature to capture policy, research, and practice-based knowledge. Searches were conducted using Finnish- and English-language terms combining concepts of school absence (e.g., non-attendance), student, and intervention-related terminology. Data sources included national databases and repositories such as Finna (409 records), Valto (451 records), and other grey literature sources (e.g., FinGreyLit and structured Google searches). Screening and selection procedures follow established scoping review guidelines. The presentation provides an overview of the types of interventions identified in Finland, their target groups, and their organisational contexts. It also highlights challenges related to documentation, evaluation, and variability across national agents, municipalities, and organisations, which influence both the visibility and comparability of interventions. The Finnish case demonstrates how grey literature expands understanding of real-world practices and complements international research, contributing to a broader comparative analysis of Nordic pathways back to school.

Denmark as a case example

Mikael Thastum

Århus University (Denmark)

This presentation explores Denmark as a case example within the Nordic systematic review of interventions addressing school attendance problems (SAP). The Danish search strategy is aligned with the shared Nordic framework and mirrors the logic of the English-language search by combining terms related to school attendance problems (e.g., school absence, school refusal, problematic or involuntary school absence) with intervention-related terminology (e.g., intervention, support, treatment, programme, or structured course). Both peer-reviewed literature and grey literature are included. Searches are conducted in national research databases and library resources and supplemented by systematic and targeted Google searches to capture reports, evaluations, and practice-

based descriptions of interventions implemented in municipal and school contexts. This approach is necessary, as many Danish interventions are documented outside academic journals and are therefore not indexed in international databases. The presentation provides an overview of the types of interventions identified in Denmark, their target groups, and their organisational contexts. In addition, examples of Danish interventions will be presented to illustrate how school attendance problems are addressed in practice and to highlight challenges related to documentation, evaluation, and evidence generation within the Danish context.

Iceland as a case example

Friðþjófur Helgi Karlsson, Eyrun Runarsdóttir & Ragný Þóra Guðjohnsen
Haskóli Íslands (University of Iceland)

This presentation focuses on Iceland as a case example within the Nordic scoping review, highlighting how school attendance interventions are developed and implemented in a smaller national context. The search includes both academic and grey literature, with particular emphasis on locally developed practices. Searches were conducted using Icelandic translations of concepts in English, with combinations on three levels; schools and student level, avoidance and absence level, and interventions and support level. The national database leitar.is gave three hits when all three levels of search were conducted and 40 hits with the two first levels of search. In addition, a search was conducted on Google Scholar with all three levels of concepts (394 hits). Screening and selection procedures follow established scoping review guidelines. Preliminary findings suggest that Icelandic approaches are characterised by close collaboration between schools, families, and specialised services, supported by relatively integrated systems. However, limited formal evaluation and documentation pose challenges for assessing effectiveness. As a case example, Iceland provides insight into how smaller systems can offer flexible and collaborative responses while facing challenges related to evidence generation. These findings enrich the overall comparative analysis of Nordic approaches.

Designing for impact: Building a national implementation network for an MTSS framework for school attendance through dissemination science

Coordinators: Patricia Graczyk¹, Rene Halberstadt² & Marije Brouwer-Borghuis³

¹*University of Illinois Chicago (United States);* ²*Ingrado (The Netherlands);* ³*Ingrado and Radboud Universiteit (The Netherlands).*

In the Netherlands, the implementation of the Multi-Dimensional Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MD-MTSS) framework (or Pyramid) for school attendance has gained significant traction across educational sectors. To effectively guide this large-scale transformation, principles from dissemination science have been systematically applied. Central to this approach is the structured training and ongoing support of key stakeholders involved in implementation processes at the school and municipal levels. A core component of the program is the development of a cascading (train the trainer) training model. Trainers are trained to support schools and local governments, while they themselves receive continuous coaching and supervision from more experienced experts. This layered support system fosters both fidelity of implementation and adaptability to local contexts. As a result, a dynamic, nationwide network of professionals has emerged, organized into communities of practice that promote collaboration, peer learning, and shared ownership. Within these communities, participants actively exchange experiences, reflect on challenges, and co-develop new insights and practical tools, while still maintaining fidelity to the essential components of the framework. This iterative process not only strengthens implementation quality but also contributes to the ongoing refinement of the MD-MTSS framework in practice. This one-hour symposium presents an evaluation of this national approach. It will begin with an introduction to dissemination science and its relevance for scaling educational innovations. Subsequently, we will share key findings from the Dutch implementation, focusing on outcomes related to trainers' evaluations, capacity building, network development, and sustainability. Finally, trainers from primary education, secondary education, and vocational education will offer firsthand accounts of their experiences, highlighting both successes and lessons learned.

Keywords: MD-MTSS framework for attendance; dissemination science; implementation; train the trainer; community building.

Staying on course: Dissemination science for attendance

Patricia Graczyk

University of Illinois Chicago (United States)

Across educational systems, new approaches frequently struggle to achieve sustained, large-scale impact when implementation is not deliberately planned and supported. In the Netherlands, the uptake of the Multi-Dimensional Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MD-

MTSS; “Pyramid”) for school attendance has therefore been explicitly guided by principles from dissemination science. Rather than treating scale up as a linear transfer of knowledge, the Dutch approach conceptualizes dissemination as a dynamic, system level process that requires attention to fidelity, adaptation, capacity, and context. This presentation opens with an introduction to dissemination science, focusing on its relevance for scaling complex educational innovations across diverse settings. Key concepts such as planned dissemination, implementation fidelity, leadership support, data informed decision making, and sustainability are discussed. By situating MD-MTSS within a dissemination science perspective, this presentation highlights how intentional design choices can keep large scale attendance initiatives “on course”: aligned with their theoretical foundations while remaining responsive to local educational, municipal, and policy contexts.

What we learned: Insights from the Dutch implementation

Rene Halberstad

Ingrado (The Netherlands)

Building on this theoretical foundation, the second part of the symposium presents insights from the Dutch dissemination of the MD-MTSS framework for school attendance. This section focuses on program evaluation, trainer development, capacity building, network formation, and sustainability. Quantitative and qualitative findings from the Train the Trainer program evaluation illustrate how participation influenced knowledge, skills, confidence, and perceived role clarity in supporting schools and municipalities. In addition, we examine how capacity was built not only at the individual level, but also across organizations and regions. Attention is given to the emergence of a nationwide professional network structured around communities of practice, in which trainers actively exchange experiences, discuss challenges, and collaboratively refine strategies. These networks appear to function as important mechanisms for sustaining engagement, shared ownership, and collective problem solving over time. The findings also shed light on sustainability conditions, including the role of ongoing coaching, peer support, and alignment with existing educational and municipal structures. By reflecting on both successes and constraints, this section provides practical insights for scaling attendance initiatives, while maintaining implementation quality and long-term impact.

Cascade to capacity: Meet our trainers!

Marije Brouwer-Borghuis

Ingrado and Radboud Universiteit (The Netherlands)

A cornerstone of the Dutch dissemination is its cascading train-the-trainer model, designed to support large-scale implementation without over-centralizing expertise. In this model, trainers are prepared to guide schools and local governments in applying the attendance framework, while also receiving ongoing coaching and supervision from more experienced experts. This layered structure ensures that support remains close to practice

yet anchored in a shared theoretical and methodological foundation. This section of the symposium focuses on how trainers roll out the MD-MTSS framework for school attendance within their own regions. It highlights how the train-the-trainer model supports them in this process, through ongoing coaching, reflection, and peer learning. Trainers are not positioned as passive knowledge transmitters, but as reflective practitioners embedded in communities of practice. Firsthand accounts from trainers working in primary, secondary, and vocational education illustrate how this plays out in daily practice, including how they engage schools and local partners, what works well, and where challenges arise.

Supporting parents of children with school attendance problems: From intervention models to clinical tools and supports

Coordinator: Marie Gallé-Tessonneau

Dr. Psychology, psychotherapist, trainer and lecturer (France)

This symposium presents different approaches to understanding and supporting school attendance problems, with a focus on adolescents and families. It brings together work from research, intervention, and clinical practice. The aim is to better support parents across diverse care and school contexts. The first presentation provides an overview of Swedish practices in supporting parents facing school attendance difficulties. It describes three complementary interventions: a group program for parents, an intensive home-based intervention grounded in CBT principles, and a digital program under development aimed at improving access to care. The second presentation focuses on the adaptation of an online parenting guidance program (PiP-Ed+) to better meet the needs of neurodivergent adolescents. Using a co-design approach and the Double Diamond framework, it identifies adaptations designed to enhance the neuro-inclusivity of content and delivery. The third presentation examines the impact of SAPs on family environment, parenting practices, and parent distress in a comparison of non-clinical and clinical (anxious/depressed) youth. Results show how SAPs increase parent use of accommodation and may contribute to parent depressed mood. Recommendations highlight how to address accommodation and parent distress management in principles-based CBT. Finally, the fourth presentation offers a highly clinical and operational perspective. It presents five tools that can be used directly in clinical practice to support parents in managing school refusal: assessment, psychoeducation, home-based anxiety management, and collaboration with schools. Overall, the symposium follows a progression from service delivery models to structured interventions, to clinical mechanisms, and finally to their translation into practical tools for everyday clinical work.

Keywords: school attendance problems; emotionally based school avoidance (EBSA); parenting interventions; adolescents mental health; cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT); neurodiversity.

Supporting parents of children with school attendance problems: Insights from Swedish practice

Sebastian Röhlcke & Ia Sunberg Lax

Akademi Magelungen (Sweden)

School attendance problems places substantial strain on families and is associated with long-term risks of social withdrawal, mental health problems, and educational underachievement. In this symposium, we offer brief insight into how parent-focused interventions are currently implemented within the Swedish context to support school

attendance. The presentation provides an overview of three examples representing different types of support available to families. First, we introduce a structured, group-based parent program aimed at increasing understanding of maintaining factors and strengthening supportive parental responses to school attendance problems. Second, we outline key features of an intensive, individualized home-based intervention (the “Hemmasittarprogrammet”), where multidisciplinary teams work collaboratively with families and schools using cognitive-behavioral principles. Third, we present an ongoing initiative to develop a digital parent support program designed to improve accessibility to early, evidence-informed interventions. Together, these examples provide a snapshot of current Swedish practices and illustrate how different forms of parent support are being used to address school attendance problems across varying contexts and levels of need.

Adapting a coach assisted online parenting program for emotionally-based school avoidance to better support parents of neurodivergent adolescents

Brydie Garner¹, Anna Smout¹, Mairead Cardamone-Breen¹, Glenn Melvin² & Marie Yap¹

¹*Monash University (Australia);* ²*Deakin University (Australia)*

Emotionally based school avoidance (EBSA) appears to be more prevalent among autistic students and those with ADHD, compared to neurotypical students. Therefore, it is important that interventions addressing EBSA are neuro-inclusive. The Partners in Parenting - Education Plus (PiP-Ed+) program is a coach-assisted, web-based intervention that empowers parents to respond to adolescent EBSA. This study aimed to identify and develop program adaptations to make PiP-Ed+ neuro-inclusive. Co-design workshops were completed with eight parents, four young people, three education-sector experts and three health professionals, all with lived or professional experience of EBSA in neurodivergent adolescents. Workshops explored the unique school attendance challenges faced by neurodivergent students and strategies to overcome them. Participants reviewed PiP-Ed+ content to assess acceptability and propose adaptations. Three overarching themes were identified: (a) Emotional, Cognitive and Sensory Experiences of Neurodivergent Adolescents; (b) School Fit, Stress and Neurodivergent Burnout; (c) Unique Complexities of Parenting a Neurodivergent Child. These themes informed module adaptations such as incorporating neuro-inclusive language, tailored examples of neurodivergent attendance challenges, and guidance on distinguishing parental accommodation of anxiety from reasonable adjustments. Our approach enabled a systematic, targeted adaptation process, identifying key considerations for embedding neuro-inclusive intervention content.

The impact of school avoidance on family environment, parent practices, and parent stress amongst clinical and non-clinical youth: Directions for family interventions

Brian C. Chu

Rutgers University (United States of America)

Family environment and parenting practices are critical in understanding youth anxiety/mood problems. Less is known about how school avoidance (SA) impacts family functioning. This study examined the impact of SA on family cohesion/conflict, parent accommodation, and parent distress in clinical and non-clinical samples. 264 youth (ages 9-18; 55% female) and their caregivers, that included 143 (54%) with a DSM-5 anxiety disorder, 63 (24%) with depression, and 58 (22%) with no disorder, completed a diagnostic interview, the Family Environment Scale (FES; Moos, 1974), Family Accommodation Scale (FASA; Lebowitz et al., 2013), adult Depression Anxiety and Stress Scale (DASS; Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995). A third (n=93) had SA. Results from 3 (diagnosis) x 2 (SA) ANOVAs, controlling for age and sex revealed no differences in family cohesion or conflict. Combined with SA, anxious youth and caregivers reported greater FASA, even compared to depressed youth. Parents reported greater depressed mood when anxious youth had SA, but no differences in parent anxiety or stress. Accommodation is a critical parent practice to address when managing youth SA. Parents may also experience elevated distress. Recommendations for principles-based CBT focusing on accommodation and parent stress management will be discussed.

Working with parents in emotionally based school avoidance: 5 practical tools for clinical practice

Marie Gallé-Tessonneau

Dr. Psychology, psychotherapist, trainer and lecturer (France)

This presentation focuses on clinical work with parents of children experiencing school refusal. It is based on 15 years of private practice and knowledge of the international scientific literature. The aim is to provide tools that can be used immediately in clinical settings. Five tools, methods, or practical tips will be presented. They are simple, concrete, and easy to implement. They are grounded in current cognitive behavioral models of school refusal. They target key aspects: the assessment phase, parent psychoeducation, anxiety management, and communication between parents, school staff, and clinicians. For example, we will present school attendance monitoring, a “resource basket,” and home-based anxiety management sheets. These tools aim to strengthen parents’ sense of competence. They also help professionals structure their interventions. They are consistent with a CBT framework by considering parents as potential factors in the maintenance, improvement, or worsening of the disorder. This proposal complements the more academic contributions of the symposium. It is rooted in clinical practice. It offers directly applicable strategies for clinicians, researchers, and school professionals.

Optimization of the Back 2 School intervention and establishing a RCT in Norway

Coordinator: Jo Magne Ingul

Regional center for Mental health and child welfare (RKBU Midt-Norge); NTNU (Norway)

This symposium outlines the optimization of the Back to School (B2S) manual in Norway following a feasibility study. School attendance problems (SAPs) have increased in Norway after the pandemic. Helping youth as early as possible, with effective interventions are therefore more important than ever. The B2S program was systematically refined to improve attendance among youths with school attendance problems (SAPs). Core enhancements include a strengthened functional assessment protocol, enriched family school interviews, and new coping and problem-solving materials for youths and parents. Fidelity checklists, monitoring tools, and a teacher focused resource guide have been introduced to support consistent implementation and to empower school personnel. Formal written agreements with school leaders clarify responsibilities and establish regular coordination meetings, positioning teachers as equal partners in a collaborative ecological approach. To evaluate the impact of these refinements, a Norwegian randomized controlled trial will enroll 240 participants (ages 9–15) exhibiting $\geq 20\%$ absenteeism over the preceding 12 weeks. After consent, screening and randomization, participants are allocated to an immediate intervention arm or a delayed intervention arm (13 weeks). Each child receives an individually tailored intervention plan derived from comprehensive assessments, encompassing direct work with the youth, parental counselling, and school-based adaptations. The coordinated, simultaneous delivery of these components is guided by a shared case formulation. Data are captured electronically via the GDPR compliant FORSTA platform, which stores teacher, B2S team, youth, and caregiver questionnaires, as well as “black data” on attendance. A newly developed teacher app supplies real time attendance monitoring and will serve as the primary outcome measure. Outcomes are assessed post intervention and at six month follow up. At the symposium we will present and discuss the process of optimizing and adapting the intervention to Norwegian culture and conditions.

Keywords: Back2School, RCT, optimization, role of school, data collection, delivery.

Optimization of the Back 2 School manual

Kristin Gärtner Askeland & Marit Hjelset Larsen

RKBU Vest, NORCE (Norway)

Following a pilot study of the B2S intervention in Norway, the intervention was optimized based on 1) insights from qualitative interviews with parents, teachers and the municipal team members conducting the intervention, 2) experiences from the project group, and 3) a two day

workshop with parents, team members, teachers, user representatives and the project group to discuss necessary changes. The main changes included revisions of the presentation of the meetings in the manual, changes in layout and inclusion of new background material, development of separate workbooks for parents and children and a Teacher Resource Guide and increasing school involvement through additional meetings with the school. Moreover, an electronic data collection system both for questionnaires and school attendance data was developed. The electronic system also allows the municipal teams and the project group to monitor the progress of participants through the intervention. The assessment interviews with the families and school at the beginning of the intervention were revised.

The teacher as the first responder: Empowering schools in the Back2School intervention

Trude Havik¹, Elisabeth Valmyr Bania² & Solveig Holen³

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To ensure sustainable support for students with School Attendance Problems (SAPs), the BACK study has adopted an integrated approach. Recent research highlights the critical role of the teacher in fostering a protective school climate and emphasizes that true collaboration across the student's ecological system is essential for successful interventions. Recognizing that the school personnel are "first responders" in students' daily life, we have significantly strengthened their role within the Back2School intervention. To move toward a structured partnership, we have introduced formalized written agreements with the school leaders to clarify responsibilities between the school and the municipal Back2School team, and more frequent coordination meetings with the teachers. We have also developed a Teacher Resource Guide offering practical tools for managing complex school-return transitions. By repositioning school staff as equal partners, we ensure that municipal support becomes a tangible resource in the classroom. This approach equips educators to confidently navigate their vital role in helping students to attend school more successfully.

Understanding SAPs through guardians' perspectives: Risk factors, support, and re-engagement

Kristin Ytreland¹, Carina Lisøy² & Ole Martin Vangen²

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In the feasibility study of Back2School in Norway, we encountered several problems with data collection, especially with respect to collecting reliable attendance data. This was identified as a key improvement point during the optimization phase following the feasibility study. In the Back-study we will collect and store electronic consent forms and survey data using the FORSTA system. Teachers, B2S-teams, youth, and caregiver will access surveys via unique links to answer questionnaires at different time-points. The

system also features a new application for teachers to report school attendance, which is the primary outcome of the study. The system provides feedback to the B2S-team, with information from surveys and student attendance. This system complies with the GDPR and is approved for storing highly sensitive information (black data). During the presentation different aspects of the system will be demonstrated and discussed with respect to data security and data quality.

The Norwegian RCT study

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This study will test the Norwegian-adapted Back2School intervention for increasing school attendance. In the study we will recruit 240 participants, aged 9-15 with more than 20% absence in the last 12 weeks; half receive the intervention immediately, and half will receive the intervention after 15 weeks. After consent, screening, and randomization, an individual intervention plan is formed based on the results of assessments. Youth, families, and schools collaborate with the municipal team for 13 weeks to increase attendance. The intervention includes individual work with the child, counselling with parents, and helping schools to adapt and support the child where necessary. These different interventions are offered simultaneously, in a coordinated fashion based on a shared understanding/ case formulation. Outcomes are assessed after the intervention and at 6-month follow-up. In the symposium we will present plans for the study and discuss different aspects of the study design, assessment procedures, interventions, and outcomes.

SOS-Attendance Observatory: A European initiative to understand and address school attendance problems

Coordinator: Carolina González

University of Alicante (Spain)

The SOS-Attendance Scientific Observatory is a European initiative funded by the Erasmus+ Programme (2022-1-ES01-KA220-SCH-000088733) and coordinated by the University of Alicante, in collaboration with an international consortium of educational and research institutions. Its main objective is to establish a European reference center focused on the study, prevention, and intervention of school attendance problems and early school leaving. This symposium aims to present the design, development, and main outcomes of the SOS-Attendance Observatory, as well as to foster knowledge exchange on the factors influencing school attendance from a multidimensional and inclusive perspective. The Observatory integrates data collection, reporting systems, research activities, professional training, and dissemination of best practices, with the goal of improving evidence-based decision-making in educational policy and school contexts across Europe. The project is grounded in an international and comparative approach, involving collaboration among partners from Spain, Italy, Portugal, and Turkey. In this symposium, speakers from these four countries will present the main findings from their national contexts, highlighting similarities and differences in school attendance challenges and responses. They will also share key resources developed within the Observatory, including training courses, professional development materials, and practical tools for educators and practitioners. The main findings underline the multifactorial nature of school attendance problems, emphasizing the interaction between individual factors (such as emotional difficulties), family dynamics, school climate, and socio-cultural influences. The results also highlight the importance of early identification and coordinated responses across educational, psychological, and social services. Additionally, differences have been identified among national intervention protocols, particularly in thresholds for action, levels of support, and inter-agency coordination. Overall, this symposium contributes to raising awareness of international research on school attendance and supports evidence-based strategies to ensure the right to education, while promoting student engagement, school retention, and long-term academic and social success.

Keywords: school attendance; school absenteeism; international collaboration; Erasmus+ project; Observatory; SOS-Attendance.

Presenting the SOS-Attendance Observatory: From its origins to its role in improving school attendance

Carolina González, María Pérez-Marco, Ángel Amat, Andrea Fuster, Alba Lorenzo-Rumbo & Aitana Fernández Sogorb

University of Alicante (Spain)

The SOS-Attendance Scientific Observatory is a European initiative funded by the Erasmus+ Programme aimed at addressing school attendance problems and early school leaving through a collaborative and evidence-based approach. This communication presents the rationale behind its creation, based on the need to better understand the increasing complexity and multidimensional nature of absenteeism across educational systems. The Observatory was designed to establish a European framework for data collection, research, and intervention, promoting knowledge exchange among partner countries. Its main objectives include identifying key risk factors, developing common protocols, and supporting schools and policymakers with evidence-based resources. Key results highlight the multifactorial nature of school attendance problems and reveal both shared challenges and country-specific differences among Spain, Italy, Portugal, and Turkey. The project has also led to the development of joint tools and guidelines to improve prevention and early intervention strategies. Finally, this communication reflects on the strengths and limitations of international collaborative work, emphasizing the value of diverse perspectives while acknowledging challenges related to coordination, contextual differences, and implementation variability, and outlining future lines of collaboration aimed at strengthening sustainable networks and expanding the Observatory's impact across educational contexts.

Addressing school refusal: Intervention proposals for students, parents and educators

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Promoting well-being in schools is essential for addressing students' emotional, social, and academic needs and preventing school refusal (SR), defined as difficulty or active refusal to attend classes. From an ecological perspective, SR develops from the interaction between individual factors, such as emotional regulation, and contextual factors, including family dynamics and the school climate. Therefore, effective interventions must address both individual and contextual factors. The e-learning training "Help Your Student/Child Succeed at School" is a program designed to raise awareness among educators and parents about SR and provide practical tools to practice emotional and communication skills. In line with this program, the training "The Courage to Be There: Strategies for When School Feels Too Much" is a psychoeducational intervention for students focused on strengthening the individual skills that influence school attendance, such as emotional awareness and self-efficacy, and on developing functional communication skills. Through

interactive activities and self-reflection exercises, students are guided to develop effective strategies for coping with school situations perceived as stressful. In addition to the training for educators and parents, the program for students would foster a more supportive and aware school environment capable of reducing the risk factors associated with SR and promoting students' overall well-being.

Understanding and addressing school attendance problems: Integrated evidence from the Türkiye implementation of the SOS-Attendance project

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Ataturk University (Türkiye)

School attendance problems (SAP) represent a major challenge for educational systems, affecting academic achievement, well-being, and future opportunities, and requiring comprehensive, evidence-based, and culturally responsive approaches. This study presents a synthesis of the Türkiye implementation within the Erasmus+ SOS-Attendance Project, integrating findings from stakeholder workshops, focus groups with teachers, parents, and administrators, and a cross-cultural doctoral research program conducted in Türkiye, Italy, and Spain. Using a mixed-methods design, the doctoral component included literature reviews, latent profile and network analyses, structural equation modeling, and qualitative data from multiple perspectives. Across countries, four school refusal profiles were identified, with key psychological factors such as emotional dysregulation, experiential avoidance, and intolerance of uncertainty playing central roles. In Türkiye, results show that SAP are shaped by interconnected individual, family, and school factors, including academic pressure, family expectations, peer relationships, and institutional variables, while recent policy initiatives have contributed to improvements in attendance rates, highlighting the importance of preventive and systemic approaches. Overall, the study offers a comprehensive and culturally grounded framework, providing evidence-based implications for intervention, policy development, and international collaboration to enhance student engagement and retention.

School absenteeism: Findings from research conducted in Portugal

Maria Assunção Flores, Diana Pereira & Eva Fernandes

University of Minho (Portugal)

This paper draws on data from a larger project aimed at understanding school attendance problems. A mixed-methods approach was selected a student survey and focus groups. In total 1,831 students from two public school clusters located in Northern Portugal participated in the study. The qualitative component involved 18 focus groups (n = 138) conducted with teachers (8 FG; n = 82) and parents/guardians (10 FG; n = 56). Findings suggest that school absenteeism was generally limited, with most students reporting either no absences or short periods of absenteeism of 1–4 days. However, a non-negligible minority of students experienced more extended absenteeism, which represents a group of

students potentially at higher risk for developing chronic absenteeism. Absenteeism was predominantly explained by health-related complaints, reported far more frequently than other reasons. Non-health-related reasons were reported by a much smaller proportion of students, such as tiredness, participation in more attractive activities outside school, fear related to school, and avoidance of unpleasant situations. These findings highlight that while school absenteeism is mostly occasional and health-related, the presence of students with prolonged absences and non-health-related difficulties should not be underestimated, particularly in the case of vulnerable students.

Understanding school non-attendance among students with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND): The scale of the problem, mechanisms, and evidence for intervention

Coordinators: Vanessa Cieplinska¹, Olivia Smith² & Lauren Cameron²

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Students with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) are at an increased risk of school attendance problems. In this symposium, we draw on data from UK and Australia to describe the prevalence of persistent absence amongst autistic students and those with intellectual disability (ID) and discuss the mechanisms underlying emotionally based school avoidance in autism. We will also describe the scale of severe school absence among students with SEND, as well as discuss interventions aimed to address school absence amongst students with SEND. The first presentation draws on a repeated cross-sectional study (2005/06 to 2014/15) describing the prevalence of persistent school absence. Autistic students, students with ID, and autistic students with ID displayed higher prevalence of persistent absence compared to typically developing peers. Persistent absence was highest among students with ID and more common among female, White, older, and more socioeconomically deprived students, as well as those attending mainstream rather than special schools. The second presentation reports on the emerging findings of qualitative research exploring the experiences of Emotionally Related School Attendance Challenges (ERSAC) for autistic students with ID. Semi-structured interviews with parents/carers, school staff, health professionals and young people explore perceived contributors to ERSAC and facilitators for re-engagement in education for this sub-population. The third presentation examines changes in persistent and severe absence following the COVID-19 pandemic using total population data from England. Persistent and severe absenteeism increased for all students after the pandemic, but increases were not significantly greater for students with SEND compared to their non-SEND peers. The final presentation synthesizes evidence from studies of interventions aimed at reducing school non-attendance among students with SEND. Of the 15 studies identified, participants were primarily autistic students, with few studies including students with ID. Limited data were available on effective interventions for students with SEND.

Keywords: special educational needs and disabilities (SEND); autism; intellectual disabilities; persistent absenteeism.

The prevalence of persistent absenteeism among autistic students and students with intellectual disabilities in England, 2005/06–2014/15

Vanessa Cieplinska

University College London (United Kingdom)

Evidence suggests that school persistent absence is a significant issue among autistic students and students with intellectual disabilities (ID). However, the current evidence is limited by restricted time frames and convenience sampling. Determining the prevalence of persistent absence requires total population administrative data. Through a repeated cross-sectional design, this PhD study examined the prevalence of persistent absence among secondary school-aged autistic students, students with ID, autistic students with ID and typically developing students (approx. three million) from 2005/06 to 2014/15 school years using the Growing Up in England (GUiE) dataset. Students with ID consistently displayed the highest prevalence of persistent absence. Autistic students with ID displayed lower prevalence of persistent absence compared to autistic only and ID only student groups. Persistent absence was stratified by demographic and educational variables and was most prevalent among female, White, older, and more socioeconomically deprived students, as well as those attending mainstream rather than special schools among students with the three neurodevelopmental conditions of interest. The consistently higher prevalence of persistent absence among students with ID highlights this group as disproportionately affected and therefore a priority population for targeted interventions for improving school attendance.

Better understanding emotionally related school attendance challenges (ERSAC) in autistic students with intellectual disability

Olivia Smith

Deakin University (Australia)

Autistic students with intellectual disability (ID) are vulnerable to experiencing emotionally related school attendance challenges (ERSAC), however are often excluded from research. This results in a limited understanding of the phenomenon in this population and hence how they are best supported. This study aims to explore perceptions of contributors to ERSAC among this student cohort, as well as perceived facilitators for re-engagement in education. Participants will include autistic students with an ID and their parents, and school staff and health professionals who work with this population. Adults will participate in virtual interviews and interviews with young people will be enhanced through the use of Talking Mats (a form of augmentative and alternative communication designed to support individuals with complex communication needs to express their opinions). Interviews will be analysed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis to develop a cohesive 'story' of the dataset. It is anticipated that identified contributors to ERSAC and facilitators for re-engagement in education will likely include child, family, school and community factors consistent with Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems framework. The findings will increase understanding of ERSAC in this population and can be applied to developing supports for autistic students with ID experiencing ERSAC.

Post-COVID-19 increases in persistent and severe school absence were not more pronounced among students with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND): A repeated cross-sectional study in England

Vanessa Cieplinska

University College London (United Kingdom)

Students with SEND are more likely to experience difficulties with school attendance. This study examined whether post-pandemic increases in school non-attendance were greater among students with SEND than their non-SEND peers. Using total population data, persistent and severe ($\geq 50\%$ of sessions missed) absenteeism were analysed in $< 7,000,000$ English students (2017/18–2022/23). Multilevel Poisson and negative binomial regression models compared Incidence Rate Ratios (IRRs) across five years for eight SEND subgroups and one non-SEND comparison group. Levels of persistent and severe absence were significantly higher among students with SEND (persistent: 13.3%–41.8%; severe 0.6%–8.9%) compared to non-SEND students (persistent: 9%–20%; severe 0.4%–1.2%). There was no evidence that post-pandemic increases in absence were larger in students with SEND. Persistent absence increased across all SEND subgroups in 2020/21 (IRR=1.06–1.63), but in 2021/22, the non-SEND group surpassed the subgroups, showing the highest rate (IRR=2.11 compared with 2017/18). Severe absence IRRs increased over time for all students, but the difference between some SEND subgroups and the non-SEND group decreased after the pandemic. Persistent and severe absence increased for all students after COVID-19, but increases were not significantly greater for students with SEND compared to those without.

Interventions to improve school attendance for students with special education needs and disabilities (SEND): A systematic review

Lauren Cameron

Deakin University (Australia)

Few interventions are available to support students with SEND to attend school. The current systematic review aimed to review the evidence for interventions for improving school attendance for students with SEND and explore views and experiences of students, families, teachers, and practitioners who received and delivered these interventions. The systematic review protocol was pre-registered, and databases were searched to 30 November 2025. Articles were independently screened for inclusion and assessed for risk of bias. A total of 15 studies met the inclusion criteria. Three identified studies were randomized controlled trials, one a non-randomized controlled trial, seven were uncontrolled trials, and four were single case studies. Participants were mostly autistic students, with few studies including students with intellectual disability. Most studies reported on interventions targeting behaviours associated with school non-attendance. There was limited data in the included studies reporting on the views and experiences of those involved with the intervention. Well-designed randomized controlled trials of interventions that encompass the broad range of factors influencing school attendance for

young people with SEND are urgently needed. Research must also ensure that views of young people, families, and schools are embedded within the intervention design and evaluation.

The Back 2 School intervention and results from the Norwegian pilot study

Coordinator: Frode Adolfsen

UiT The Arctic University of Norway (Norway)

School attendance problems (SAP) necessitate integrated interventions that address their multifaceted nature, including individual, family, and school-related influences on youths' functioning. The following symposium will be focused on an intervention for School Attendance Problems (SAP). The first presenter is the founder of the intervention and presents the development of the Back2School intervention and its core principles. The theoretical approach of the B2S intervention is transdiagnostic and based on a modular cognitive behavioural manual. Furthermore, experiences and feasibility from a Norwegian national pilot study using the Back2School (B2S) intervention will be presented. The B2S intervention has its origin in Denmark, and in collaboration with Professor Mikael Thastum, we were allowed to translate the manual and test the intervention in a Norwegian context. Based on experience from Denmark, we decided to establish interprofessional teams in the municipalities to run the intervention. Seven teams in Norwegian municipalities were established and ran the intervention for a period of two years, helping youth, families and schools to cope with school attendance problems. Thastum and colleagues trained the professionals to implement the intervention. All teams carried out 3 cases and received supervision during the project period. Data was collected at the beginning of each case, after the intervention, and at 3-month follow-up. Experiences from the intervention will be presented in the following symposium, focused on the feasibility aspects of the study, parents' experiences, how the teachers describe working with school attendance problems, and at least how the teams experience working together with complex school attendance problems. Based on this feasibility study, we optimized the intervention and established implementation strategies for Norwegian municipalities.

Keywords: school attendance; back2school intervention; parents; youth; school; team collaboration.

Back2School: Development, core principles, and dissemination

Mikael Thastum

University of Aarhus (Denmark)

This presentation introduces the Back2School (B2S) intervention and outlines its development in Denmark as a structured and manualized approach for children and adolescents with School Attendance Problems (SAP). Central to B2S is the development of an individualized, shared case formulation integrating perspectives from the young person, parents, and school. SAP are conceptualized within a systemic

framework, where emotional, behavioural, family related, and school-based factors interact to maintain school absence. Establishing shared understanding and common goals across stakeholders is fundamental and guides coordinated intervention planning and school-based support. The intervention integrates cognitive behavioural strategies with collaboration across systems. Findings from a Danish randomized controlled trial demonstrated improvements in school attendance, psychological functioning, reduced impact of difficulties, and high satisfaction among participating families. Implementation experiences from Danish municipalities, particularly Aarhus Municipality, is outlined.

The Norwegian feasibility study

Toril Sørheim Nilsen

UiT The Arctic University of Norway

This feasibility study examined a Norwegian adaptation of the Back2School intervention for youth with school absence problems. Fourteen families participated with high completion and satisfaction. Recruitment of municipalities and youth with SAP was efficient, emphasizing the need for systematic intervention. Challenges in obtaining valid school attendance data highlighted the need to refine data collection methods. The youth ($n = 14$) showed high school absence and symptoms of anxiety and depression, confirming alignment with the target population. Approximately 55% ($n = 6$) improved attendance, though three experienced relapse at 3-month follow-up. These findings align with other CBT-based interventions, which report moderate attendance improvements. Findings informed manual revisions and underscored the need for better SAP assessment before a RCT.

Parents' experiences from the Back2School intervention

Bente Storm Haugland

University of Bergen (Norway)

This is a presentation of a qualitative study examining parents' experiences from participation in the Norwegian feasibility study on the Back2School (B2S) intervention for youth with School Attendance Problems (SAP). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with parents from nine families ($n = 13$ parents). The children included five girls and four boys, with a mean age of 13.33 years ($SD = 1.5$), ranging from 11 to 15 years. The duration of the SAP varied from one to six years. An inductive, reflexive thematic analysis approach was applied, with the following three themes being developed: 1. being understood and acknowledged, 2. collaboration and commitment, and 3. structured plans and concrete actions. According to the parents, the B2S intervention contributed to all parties gaining an understanding of the complexity of the child's SAP, increasing the school personnel's commitment and responsibility for solving the SAP, and helping parents and school staff to develop concrete, detailed plans and a step-by-step approach

for the child to return to school. Most parents experienced meaningful changes during the B2S intervention, facilitated by collaboration with the B2S team and the school personnel.

Teachers and teams' experiences of working with the Back2School intervention

Elisabeth Bania¹ & Frode Adolfsen²

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These qualitative studies examined the implementation of the Back2School (B2S) intervention for school attendance problems (SAP) in Norway, with a focus on teacher involvement and interdisciplinary collaboration. Interviews were conducted with seven teachers from primary and secondary schools and with seven interdisciplinary municipal teams implementing the intervention. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Teachers highlighted the need for clearer structures and more extensive involvement, identifying time and resource constraints as key challenges. Interdisciplinary teams emphasized the complexity of school attendance problems and the importance of shared responsibility, interdisciplinary collaboration, and alignment of professional perspectives. Despite the time-consuming nature of collaboration, participants across teams valued interdisciplinary, team-based approaches and emphasized the central role of youth, parents, and schools in successful intervention outcomes.

3. ROUND TABLE DISCUSSIONS

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Ongoing impacts of colonisation on student attendance - How we are staying on track!

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In Aotearoa New Zealand, patterns of irregular and chronic attendance for Māori (indigenous) learners cannot be understood without recognising the ongoing impacts of colonisation, including disruption to language, identity, relationships, and trust in education systems. These legacies continue to shape how children and family experience schooling today. This roundtable explores how historic disadvantage, intergenerational trauma, and system design contribute to attendance challenges, particularly for Indigenous and other marginalised learners. Moving beyond deficit explanations of non-attendance, the session reframes attendance as a measure of belonging, cultural safety, and relational trust. When learners feel unseen or disconnected from their identity, culture, and communities, non-attendance becomes a symptom rather than the core issue. Drawing on lived experience, the session provides opportunities to share practical approaches being used to “stay on track” despite persistent structural challenges. These include strengthening partnerships with iwi (tribe) and communities, prioritising culturally responsive practice, and embedding attendance responses within wider wellbeing and learning support frameworks. The discussion also examines how school leaders and systems can focus on cultural connection, consistent relationships, and local knowledge as protective factors that support re-engagement. Central to this work is recognition of students and family as experts in their own lives. Strategies grounded in connections, working together, and shared accountability demonstrate that attendance improves when learners feel valued, culturally affirmed, and holistically supported. While grounded in the Aotearoa, New Zealand context, the insights shared are relevant for international audiences addressing the long-term effects of colonisation on student engagement and educational outcomes.

Keywords: indigenous; culture; chronic; colonization; identity.

Measuring school attendance problems: Where are we now—and where are we going?

Johan Strömbeck

Åbo Akademi University (Finland) and Magelungen Utveckling AB (Sweden)

School attendance problems (SAPs) remain a widespread and complex challenge with significant consequences for students, schools, and society. Staying on course for attendance requires not only effective interventions, but also sustainable, system-level approaches to how attendance and absenteeism are measured, understood, and continuously monitored. This round table discussion invites participants to reflect on current and future approaches to measuring SAPs, using the INSA Questionnaire Database as a starting point for dialogue. The discussion will draw on the questionnaires currently available through the INSA Network, while also opening up broader questions about measurement: What do we need to measure to truly understand attendance problems? How can assessment support implementation, collaboration, and long-term sustainability across systems? And how can shared measurement tools contribute to a societal-level view of SAPs? Looking ahead, the session will explore visions for future measurement of school attendance, including evolution of existing tools, identification of gaps, and possibilities for greater alignment across research, practice, and policy. Particular attention will be given to the potential role of the INSA Questionnaire Database as a living, collaborative resource that supports continued attention to attendance. By connecting past progress, present tools, and future needs, this round table aims to stimulate shared reflection, learning, and innovation—helping the field collectively remain on course for attendance.

Keywords: school attendance problems; measurement; INSA Questionnaire database; next-generation assessment; instrument development.

Take a look through my eyes

Nils Aukema & Pien De Jonge

Adviesraad EigenWijsheid (The Netherlands)

Multidisciplinary meetings (MDOs) play a crucial role in addressing complex school attendance challenges. However, the dynamics within these meetings, including differing perspectives, power relationships, communication styles, and competing priorities, are often difficult to fully understand without experiencing them firsthand. For students and families, MDOs can be particularly intense and overwhelming. It's not uncommon for 10 to 12 professionals to be present, many of whom can be unfamiliar to the student. Large amounts of information are shared in a short period of time. Discussions can sometimes feel fragmented, with the professionals not always working together but against one another. In this highly interactive session, participants will partake in a simulated MDO. Each participant will be assigned a role, such as a student, parent, care coordinator, teacher, or another professional involved with the student. The participants will navigate a realistic case involving a student facing persistent attendance challenges. The case is based on real experiences and stories shared by students. Because of this, the session reflects encounters that professionals encounter every day. The role-play is designed to surface tensions, misunderstandings, and opportunities for collaboration and create a realistic learning environment. After the simulation, participants will engage in a structured reflection to analyze what happened, explore different perspectives, and discuss areas for improvement. This session will give the participants a unique opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of different aspects of an MDO. It will make sure the participants leave with practical insights and a renewed perspective on how to approach future MDOs.

Keywords: conversation techniques; multidisciplinary collaboration; trauma-sensitive approach; student participation; juvenile involvement.

Emerging Scholars Committee: Moving the field of school attendance forward

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This roundtable, organized by the Emerging Scholars Committee, builds on discussions initiated at previous conferences as well as recent Social Cafés and community events. It invites participants to collaboratively explore how the Emerging Scholars community can actively contribute to staying on course to advance the field of school attendance. The session engages with INSA's aim to examine ongoing developments in the field, expand perspectives through international collaboration, and consider the socio-political contexts shaping school attendance challenges. Within this framework, the roundtable offers a space to reflect on the unique roles and contributions of Emerging Scholars in driving these developments forward. At the same time, the discussion will address key challenges faced by early-career researchers in this area and critically explore how INSA can better support Emerging Scholars in navigating these challenges and strengthening their impact. To ensure that the session reflects the priorities of the community, Emerging Scholars will be invited prior to the conference to vote on specific topics for discussion. Potential themes may include opportunities for international collaboration and network-building, challenges and barriers faced by Emerging Scholars and establishing a vision for the future activities and direction of the Emerging Scholars Committee. Overall, the roundtable seeks to create an interactive and participatory forum that strengthens the Emerging Scholars network while contributing to the future direction of school attendance research and practices.

Keywords: emerging scholars; school attendance; international collaboration; community building.

Bridging the gap: Elevating Tier 2 in multi-tiered attendance frameworks

Lisa McKay-Brown & Johanna Taylor

University of Melbourne (Australia)

Despite widespread adoption of multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) in schools, Tier 2 interventions for attendance often remain underdeveloped or inconsistently implemented. This roundtable will explore the pivotal role Tier 2 plays in preventing chronic absenteeism by delivering targeted, timely supports for students who do not respond to universal strategies. A brief overview of MTSS for school attendance will be shared before the group discusses identifying evidence-based Tier 2 supports. Participants will engage in a collaborative discussion to identify common barriers, including limited staffing, unclear protocols, inaccurate data systems, competing priorities and variability in intervention fidelity, and will examine practical, equity-centred solutions that strengthen family engagement and remove systemic obstacles. The discussion will highlight how screening and data-driven decision-making, early warning indicators and frequent progress monitoring can inform selection, intensity and duration of interventions. The session will foreground real-world examples from schools currently implementing MTSS frameworks for attendance, share user-friendly tools for tracking patterns, and consider strategies for partnering with community agencies and other providers. Attendees will co-construct an actionable, evidence-informed toolkit based on their experience working with schools. This interactive exchange aims to build capacity to close attendance gaps, promote consistent school engagement for all students and sustain improved outcomes.

Keywords: MTSS; Tier 2; attendance; collaboration; fidelity.

From global perspectives of student voice to local action in attendance

Johanna Taylor

University of Melbourne (Australia)

The importance of student voice in attendance work has been recognised in literature and has been a focal point of many discussions at INSA conferences over the years. To keep us on course, it is essential that proactive and practical approaches to incorporating student perspectives are included as ongoing discussions. This round table will investigate what it means to move from the idea of student voice to action informed by the perspectives of the young people at the centre of our work. To begin, delegates will be invited to share how student voice is embedded in or used to inform attendance practices at system, whole school, classroom and individual levels. By sharing from their own settings and allowing others to do the same, participants will build knowledge from across diverse international contexts. Additionally, delegates will be encouraged to reflect on a range of questions such as: How are barriers to capturing student voice addressed? What tensions may arise for schools when incorporating student voice? How are insights from students translated into proactive attendance supports? Whose voices are being heard? By the end of the session, delegates can expect to come away with a deeper understanding of how student voice can be used to provide more responsive and contextually relevant approaches to keep students on course with attendance.

Keywords: student voice; attendance; inclusion; school practices; proactive supports.

International comparative studies on school attendance – How useful are they?

Susanne Kreitz-Sandberg
Stockholm University (Sweden)

In this round table, we'll explore the possibilities and challenges surrounding international comparative studies on school attendance. How can these studies support efforts to improve student attendance and engagement in education? Let's discuss and set course for attendance! Research shows that countries define school absence differently—some register only unauthorized absence, while others include all types of absence. Additionally, some focus on long-term absence, whereas others emphasize persistent absence (Heyne et al., 2022; Kreitz-Sandberg et al., 2023; Sandhaug et al., 2022). Such variations complicate meaningful comparisons across education systems and frame possibilities for effective monitoring. Large-scale studies like PISA offer valuable insights by incorporating questions about skipping school (Keppens, 2023; Fredriksson, 2024). Furthermore, policy comparisons among Nordic countries have been highlighted in Erasmus+ reports (2020, 2021). Qualitative case studies have also explored perspectives from educators and students in Germany and Sweden regarding prevention and support (Enderle et al., 2025; Kreitz-Sandberg et al., 2025). There is a growing variety of comparative studies that apply different methods to meet their goals. Recent systematic literature reviews are beginning to address the importance of contextual nuances (Hejl et al., 2024; Alanko et al., 2024). In international and comparative education, we understand that context plays a crucial role in how education is designed. Therefore, it's important to place greater emphasis on the context in which school attendance studies are conducted. Can we learn from each other's approaches? Should we compare vastly different systems or focus on more similar ones? We invite researchers and practitioners, regardless of their comparative experience, to discuss such questions, share insights and spark curiosity.

Keywords: school attendance problems (SAPs); international comparison; prevention; persistent absence; monitoring; International and Comparative Education (ICE).

The INSA Chile Network: Where is school attendance in Chile heading?

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In this round table discussion, the case of the INSA Chile Network will be presented in a context where school absenteeism has become a critical challenge for educational trajectories, especially in post-pandemic scenarios. In response, the coordination of efforts through collaborative networks has emerged as a key strategy to accelerate the improvement of school attendance. The INSA Chile Network will be presented as an example of intersectoral coordination that integrates civil society, academia, and the public sector, connecting international evidence with local implementation. After a brief contextualization of its origin and development, participants will be invited to reflect on their own experiences in collaborative networks, addressing purposes, scope, governance, challenges, working methodologies, products, and achievements. In a second phase, the main current challenges of school attendance in Chile and the lines of work that the network has prioritized to address them will be addressed in depth. From this, international exchange among participants will be promoted through questions aimed at identifying similarities and differences between contexts, the most affected educational levels, and the strategies that have proven effective in different countries. Likewise, concrete lessons learned from the network's experience will be shared, including elements of governance, intersectoral coordination strategies, and mechanisms for influencing public policies, providing practical references for the design or strengthening of networks in other contexts.

Keywords: intersectoral collaboration; cross-national collaboration; educational trajectories; school attendance network.

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Workshop team: Carolina Soto-Uribe; Marije Brouwer; Janeth Kigobe; Maria Pérez-Marco; Johan Sundqvist & Åsa Karström

From intervention to integration: Embedding attendance practices in school culture

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This workshop builds on the insights provided in the symposium ‘It Takes a School Culture to Raise Attendance’. The central inquiry of the symposium was practical: *How can interventions at different tiers help shift school culture in ways that support wellbeing and attendance?* School culture was defined as the shared norms, values, and collective assumptions that shape ‘how things are done’ in the school community over time. In practical terms, it includes shared responsibility for attendance among staff, families, and partners, and routines that enable early response and relational belonging. This enduring cultural foundation is distinct from school climate, which captures members’ day-to-day perceptions of school life. If school culture is the long-term ‘personality’ of the institution, school climate is its prevailing ‘mood’ (Obed-Chukwuka et al., 2025). Each of the four presentations in the symposium detailed the target group for a specific intervention, delivery model, theoretical basis, and evidence base, tracing pathways through which interventions shape school culture. In preparation for the symposium, the team of presenters discussed their common underlying belief that, to achieve long-term results, interventions need to become an integral part of school culture. That is often easier said than done. *Therefore, the workshop goes deeper into what helps or hinders cultural change around attendance.* The workshop commences with a short panel discussion where our main question is: What key lessons have been learned about school culture through the development and implementation of the interventions presented in the symposium, namely Mini-RISK (Norway), the @School Intervention (Netherlands), Attend Well (UK), and Positive Family Supports Care (USA). The panel discussion has two advantages: (1) it bridges the information gap for those delegates who were unable to attend the symposium; and (2) it allows workshop participants to start considering the relevance and impact of Tier 1, 2, and 3 interventions on school culture. Then, in small groups, workshop participants dive deeper into the pathways that influence an ‘attendance mindset’ as a part of school culture. These deep dives are supported by facilitators (i.e., the eight members of the symposium and workshop team, together with other

international professionals working on this topic), and by tools that stimulate thinking and planning around positive school culture. The workshop concludes with a larger group discussion to translate small group insights into feasible, collaborative implementation steps, emphasising immediate actions that foster culture change.

Keywords: school culture; attendance promotion; implementation and change; barriers and facilitators; multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS); relational belonging.

Shifting from stress to empowerment: Providing space for student voices in shaping the course for attendance

Coordinator: Chiara Enderle

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Article 12 of the UNCRC mandates that every child has the right to express their views in all matters affecting them. This is acutely relevant to school attendance, yet student perspectives remain frequently underrepresented in both research and intervention design. To truly be "On Course for Attendance," we must ensure the journey is co-designed with the students themselves. Creating meaningful spaces for student voice can contribute to more inclusive, responsive, and effective approaches to supporting attendance. This workshop brings together an international group of contributors from seven countries (Netherlands, Chile, Germany, Australia, Norway, USA, and Tanzania) to explore how student perspectives can move the periphery to the center of research, policy, and practice. Rooted in the guiding question "How can student voice inform response, prevention, research, and policy?" This workshop aims to stimulate thinking, conversations, and pathways ahead. We move away from deficit-oriented, one-sided views of school absence toward empowering, participatory approaches that actively incorporate student voices. The workshop is built on the philosophy that while every student's situation is unique - much like a "snowflake"- practitioners and researchers require a "menu of options" to effectively facilitate engagement across different ages, cultures, tiers, and stages of the attendance continuum. The workshop is divided into two parts. The first half features a series of short presentations from different regions and contexts that highlight student voices. These contributions showcase diverse "puzzle pieces" of student-centered work, including: research designs or concepts, findings from studies focusing on students' experiences of attendance and absence, and good-practice examples of how student voices have been integrated into research, school practice, or intervention development. The second part of the workshop is organised as an interactive session in which participants dive deeper into good-practice examples and tools of how student voices can be integrated into research, school practice, interventions and policy. Participants will circulate through a "carousel of materials" - a marketplace of five stations hosted by the

Workshop members and supported by their colleagues from the same national or institutional contexts. These co-facilitated stations allow for a rich exchange where participants engage directly with practical tools and cases, such as visual mapping resources, participation forms and tools designed to identify school-based stressors. The workshop concludes with a collective innovation session. By sharing these cross-national "puzzle pieces," we aim to provide participants with a toolbox of adaptable strategies. We will reflect on how to bridge the gap between hearing a student's voice and implementing actionable change in school environments. Ultimately, this workshop aims to demonstrate that listening to students is not just a secondary support measure, but the primary mechanism for reducing barriers to education and fostering inclusive school climates worldwide.

Keywords: student voice; school attendance support; absence; participatory approaches; cross-national collaboration.

From enforcement to encounter: A systemic perspective on school attendance. Exploring real attendance dilemmas through practice-based learning

Coordinator: Ramona Meza

Praktijk interactie (The Netherlands)

Across many international contexts, responses to school absenteeism are shaped by expectations of compliance, procedural frameworks, and legal responsibility. While these approaches are intended to restore attendance, practitioners frequently encounter situations where increased pressure leads to further withdrawal, escalating tensions, and fragmentation between students, families, schools, and services. This interactive workshop creates a structured space to explore such challenges through a systemic and relational perspective. Rather than introducing a specific programme or intervention model, the session is grounded in participants' own attendance dilemmas, allowing for a practice-based examination of how absence emerges and is sustained within interconnected relational and institutional contexts. Participants will work in small interdisciplinary groups with real or recognisable cases. Through guided reflection, they will explore how responses from different actors (such as schools, families, care providers, and policy frameworks) interact and sometimes unintentionally reinforce disengagement. Absenteeism is approached not only as behaviour to be corrected, but as meaningful communication that may reflect accumulated stress, misattunement, role tensions, or a lack of relational safety. The workshop is organised around four interconnected movements: understanding the situation within its broader context, noticing how professional positioning and responses shape the dynamics, re-examining the interpretations and meanings attributed to absence, and identifying opportunities to support renewed engagement among those involved. By focusing on these movements, participants are invited to consider how small shifts in professional stance and interaction can open space for dialogue, restore shared responsibility, and support sustainable re-engagement. Attention is given to how attendance measures and procedures can be used differently when informed by a systemic perspective. This session is relevant for educators, practitioners, researchers, and policy professionals working across attendance systems. It aligns with international calls to approach school attendance through ecological, trauma-informed, and relational lenses, and offers an applied opportunity for interdisciplinary reflection on what it means to be "on course for attendance" in complex, real-world contexts.

Keywords: school attendance; systemic intervention; relational patterns; reframing; co-constructed meaning; relational repair.

The glue people: Who are they and what's their role in fostering school attendance?

Coordinator: Yali Horta Hurtado

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School attendance problems (SAPs) are widely recognized as a complex and multifactorial phenomenon shaped by the interplay of individual, familial, school-related, and societal factors. Reducing its causes to a single domain not only fails to capture this complexity but also risks reinforcing stigmatization and mutual blame among stakeholders, particularly affecting students and their families. Empirical research further highlights divergent perspectives on the causes of school attendance problems. While students and parents tend to attribute SAPs to school-related factors, professionals more often locate their origins in individual or family contexts. These differing interpretations can hinder effective collaboration and the development of sustainable and holistic solutions. Against this background, increasing attention has been paid to intersectoral collaboration (IC) approaches that aim to bridge institutional gaps. To explore these challenges and the differing perceptions regarding the causes of SAPs and suitable interventions, we introduce the metaphor of so-called “glue people” (GPs). This metaphor is used to describe actors who connect people and settings across systems and take on boundary-spanning roles. These actors not only mediate between different perspectives, but also connect stakeholders, facilitate communication, and coordinate support across systems. Their roles vary across national contexts and may include school attendance teams, social workers, psychologists, health professionals, policymakers, and school attendance officers. Rather than describing a clearly defined role, the concept of “glue people” highlights the often implicit work of connecting systems and perspectives. This metaphor helps participants recognize and articulate such roles in their own contexts. However, the opportunities and challenges of these boundary-spanning roles remain underexplored. This interactive workshop brings together researchers and practitioners from Germany, Sweden, the Netherlands, and Chile. In the first part, they will share insights into the roles and contexts of “glue people” within their educational systems. In the second part, participants will engage in a collaborative visual mapping session to identify “glue people” in their own contexts. These mappings will then be compared across countries to explore similarities, differences, successes, and challenges in addressing SAPs. The workshop will conclude with joint reflections. The workshop aims to foster critical reflection on intersectoral collaboration, identify glue people as well as key success factors and barriers, and support participants in translating these insights into their own professional contexts.

Keywords: educational trajectories; school attendance support; intersector collaboration; cross-national collaboration; network analysis; mapping networks.

NONNA: From international experiences to local action

How can the NONNA framework support the development of national school attendance networks?

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Workshop team: Carolina Soto-Uribe¹; Marije Brouwer²; Janeth Kigobe³; Maria Pérez-Marco⁴; Johan Sundqvist⁵ & Åsa Karström⁶

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Chronic school absenteeism is a complex and multifactorial challenge with consequences for students' learning, wellbeing, and long-term educational trajectories. Because attendance problems are shaped by individual, family, school, community, and policy-level factors, effective responses require more than isolated school-based interventions. International evidence increasingly supports coordinated, multi-tiered, and cross-sector approaches that bring together schools, families, policymakers, practitioners, researchers, and community organisations to identify needs early, share responsibility, and sustain action over time (Kearney & Graczyk, 2020; Kearney, 2022). This highlights the need for sustainable national and international networks that can connect stakeholders, promote shared learning, and support coordinated action on school attendance. The Network of National Networks for Attendance (NONNA) is an international collaborative initiative established within the INSA framework to support the development, consolidation, and sustainability of national school attendance networks worldwide. The workshop will introduce the emerging NONNA framework for building national school attendance networks, developed from shared learning across countries that have already created, or are currently developing, collaborative attendance networks. Rather than presenting a single model, the framework identifies common building blocks that can be adapted to different national, regional, and local contexts. The session will provide a practical and interactive space for participants interested in creating a new attendance network or strengthening an existing one. Through guided discussion and collaborative activities, participants will explore key stages of network development, including identifying relevant stakeholders, defining a shared purpose, establishing governance and leadership structures, promoting cross-sector participation, developing communication mechanisms, and using data and evidence to guide collective action. The workshop will also address common challenges such as sustaining engagement, coordinating diverse actors, aligning with policy priorities, and maintaining momentum beyond initial implementation. Participants will be invited to reflect on the current state of attendance-related collaboration in their own country or context and to identify concrete opportunities for strengthening connections among relevant actors. Working individually and in small

groups, they will consider the conditions, partnerships, and structures needed to move from interest to coordinated action. By the end of the workshop, participants will have engaged with practical tools, international experiences, and peer discussion to support the development of national school attendance networks in their own contexts. The session will also help strengthen NONNA as a global platform for peer learning, mutual support, and strategic collaboration within INSA.

Keywords: school attendance; chronic absenteeism; national networks; cross-sector collaboration; network governance.

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From dropout to attendance: Using dropout typologies to inform targeted attendance interventions

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School attendance problems in Vocational Education and early school leaving (dropout) are often approached as separate phenomena, despite strong conceptual and empirical overlap. This presentation builds on a previously published study that identifies distinct dropout typologies, focusing on underlying mechanisms rather than surface-level indicators. The typologies describe why (vocational) students disengage from education, differentiating between motivational, relational, psychological, and structural pathways into dropout. Currently, these dropout typologies are being further validated in ongoing research. Preliminary insights suggest that the same underlying mechanisms that contribute to dropout may also help explain persistent school absenteeism and non-attendance. If we understand why students drop out, we may also better understand why students stop attending and, crucially, how this can be prevented. The presentation combines theoretical insights with practical experience and uses this integrated perspective to explore implications for policy, school practice, and interdisciplinary collaboration. It argues that aligning dropout research with attendance frameworks can strengthen early identification, improve intervention fit, and support sustainable school attendance.

Keywords: vocational Education; school attendance; student dropout; dropout typologies; attendance interventions.

Development of a national evidence-based guideline for school attendance problems in Norway

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The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, the Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs, the Norwegian Directorate of Health, Statped (an agency under the Ministry of Education and Research, supports the municipalities' work with children and pupils with permanent and extensive needs for specially adapted), and the Norwegian Institute of Public Health have jointly developed a national evidence based guideline for school attendance problems. This cross-sectoral collaboration reflects a growing recognition that school absenteeism is a complex and multifaceted challenge that requires coordinated efforts across education, psychosocial support services, and public health systems. The guideline synthesises the best available evidence from research, policy, and practice, ensuring that its recommendations are grounded in internationally recognised knowledge while being carefully adapted to the Norwegian context and legislative framework. We have used an internationally recognized, evidence-based method to develop the guideline. The process relies on quality assessed systematic reviews as the knowledge base. A guideline panel helps identify key challenges and interpret the evidence. To move from evidence to recommendations in a structured way, we mainly use the Evidence to Decision framework. The guideline provides clear, action-oriented guidance for schools, school owners, and the Educational and Psychological Counselling Service on how to prevent the development of attendance problems and how to follow up students who already show concerning patterns of absence. By integrating both preventive and responsive approaches, the guideline aims to promote equitable, high-quality services nationwide and ensure that children and young people receive timely, appropriate, and coordinated support.

Keywords: evidence-based guideline, prevention, follow-up, school attendance problems, cross-sectoral collaboration.

From enforcement to encounter: A systemic reframing of school attendance

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Across many countries, responses to school absenteeism are shaped by expectations of compliance, procedural frameworks, and legal responsibility. Although these approaches are intended to restore attendance, practitioners often see the opposite effect: increasing pressure can lead to withdrawal, disengagement, and strained relationships between students, families, schools, and professionals. This presentation offers a systemic perspective on these dynamics, explored through a shift from enforcement (“must”) to encounter (“meeting”). Drawing on practice-based experience in multidisciplinary attendance work, it examines how absenteeism can be understood not simply as problematic behaviour, but as meaningful communication within a wider relational and institutional context. From this viewpoint, absence can function as a way of responding to accumulated stress, misattunement, role tensions, or a lack of relational safety. Rather than adding new interventions, this approach asks how professionals position themselves within these dynamics. By slowing down responses, creating space for dialogue, and restoring shared understanding among those involved, attendance can re-emerge as a relational outcome instead of a target to be enforced. Examples from practice will illustrate how this shift influences everyday decision-making, collaboration between education and care, and the use of existing attendance measures. In this sense, being “on course for attendance” is not only about what we do, but about how we understand and engage with absence in the first place.

Keywords: school attendance; systemic practice; relational approach; school absenteeism; professional positioning.

Universal Tier 1 student support: Using the Youth Wellness Action Plan and online training course to strengthen student well-being and reduce school risk factors for school attendance challenges

Sheryl Boswell

Youth Mental Health Canada (Canada)

Student well-being is foundational to engagement, attendance, and readiness to learn. Schools increasingly recognize the need for proactive, universal approaches that support all students before challenges escalate. This presentation introduces a Tier 1 universal student support framework centered on the Youth Wellness Action Plan (YWAP) and a companion online learning course designed for educators and school communities. The Youth Wellness Action Plan is a practical, student-friendly resource that helps young people build self-awareness, identify strengths, understand stressors, and develop personalized strategies for maintaining mental health and wellness. When implemented school-wide, the YWAP promotes emotional literacy, resilience, and help-seeking while normalizing conversations about mental health in everyday learning environments. The accompanying online course equips educators with the knowledge and tools to integrate universal mental health promotion into classrooms and school culture. Participants learn how Tier 1 strategies can strengthen protective factors, support student engagement, and create psychologically safer learning spaces. Together, these resources support a preventive, whole-school approach aligned with multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS). By embedding universal wellness strategies into regular classroom practice, schools can enhance students' capacity to regulate emotions, build coping skills, and stay connected to learning. Strengthening well-being at the Tier 1 level not only benefits individual students but also improves overall school climate and readiness to learn.

Keywords: Tier 1 universal student support; student well-being; school attendance and engagement; youth wellness action plan; mental health promotion in schools; readiness to learn.

Tiered, school-wide strategies to support students with school attendance challenges

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Youth Mental Health Canada (Canada)

School attendance challenges are increasingly recognized as complex issues influenced by student well-being, school climate, family context, and systemic barriers. Addressing these challenges requires coordinated, proactive approaches that move beyond individual interventions toward tiered, school-wide strategies that promote engagement and remove barriers to learning. This presentation explores a comprehensive framework for supporting students with school attendance challenges through Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS). The approach emphasizes universal (Tier 1) strategies that foster positive school climate, strengthen relationships, and promote student well-being, alongside targeted (Tier 2) and individualized (Tier 3) supports for students experiencing persistent attendance difficulties. Participants will learn how schools can implement practical strategies that build protective factors and create environments where students feel safe, connected, and motivated to attend. The presentation will highlight tools and resources designed to help educators identify early warning signs, address underlying barriers such as anxiety, disengagement, or unmet learning needs, and collaborate effectively with families and community partners. By integrating mental health promotion, early intervention, and coordinated school-wide practices, educators and support staff can improve attendance outcomes while also strengthening overall student engagement and readiness to learn. The session will share practical insights and examples to help schools implement sustainable, inclusive approaches that support all students, particularly those experiencing barriers to education and learning.

Keywords: school attendance challenges; tiered school-wide strategies; multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS); student engagement and well-being; early identification and intervention; barriers to education and learning.

Implementing a strength-based approach to school attendance: Practitioner perspectives from Belgium

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Across many jurisdictions, there is a growing shift away from deficit-oriented, sanctions-based responses to school absence toward more strength-based approaches. This shift reflects a growing recognition that punitive frameworks are insufficient to address the complex and structural drivers of non-attendance. Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) have become particularly influential in this regard, given their emphasis on prevention and early intervention. A central feature of these frameworks is the use of data, both to identify individual students at risk of school attendance problems and to support schools in evaluating and improving their attendance policies. Yet the conditions under which such approaches can be meaningfully implemented remain poorly understood, particularly in schools serving students whose life chances are already constrained. This paper draws on interviews with 41 practitioners responsible for attendance policy in Flemish schools (=Dutch-speaking part of Belgium), examining how they experience and navigate the shift toward a more strength-based institutional orientation. The study pays particular attention to the bottlenecks and tensions that emerge in practice. Findings reveal two recurring and intersecting fault lines. First, practitioners report significant challenges in the use of attendance data. Rather than serving as a tool for early, supportive intervention, data is often experienced as administrative burdens or instruments of surveillance, undermining the relational foundations of a strength-based approach. Second, implementation proves especially fraught in schools with high proportions of students from diverse backgrounds and socioeconomically vulnerable families. In these contexts, practitioners describe heightened tensions between institutional expectations, family circumstances, and cultural understandings of schooling, dynamics that existing frameworks insufficiently address.

Keywords: school attendance; strength-based approach; school policy; MTSS; school staff voices.

Coping@School: A preventive, school-based CBT group approach for early school attendance problems for children with elevated anxiety/depression-preliminary findings

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School attendance problems often develop gradually and are frequently associated with internalizing difficulties such as anxiety and low mood. Early, feasible interventions in school settings are therefore needed to prevent escalation and support sustained attendance. Coping@School (2025–2027) evaluates a preventive approach in elementary schools combining (a) an interdisciplinary school attendance (“presence”) team model and (b) the EMOTION intervention (Mestrende barn), a transdiagnostic CBT-based group program previously shown to reduce anxiety and depressive symptoms but not yet tested for attendance outcomes in larger studies. Our aim is to examine feasibility, acceptability, and preliminary indications of change in attendance and mental health. Children aged 9–13 years (grades 4–7; planned $N \geq 112$) with emerging attendance difficulties and elevated levels of anxiety and depression are offered participation in eight-week coping groups delivered in a hybrid format (school sessions plus brief digital sessions). The study uses a single-arm pre–post design with a 6-month follow-up. Outcomes include school attendance (school records), early indicators of attendance problems (SCREEN), anxiety/depression symptoms (RCADS), and school functioning (multi-informant). Parents complete a functional assessment of school refusal behavior (SRAS-P), and a subsample participate in qualitative interviews regarding perceived causes and support needs. User satisfaction and perceived stigma/acceptability are assessed for children and parents, and staff satisfaction is collected for presence teams. We will present preliminary data from the first cohorts, including recruitment/retention, highlighting feasibility, acceptability and patterns of attendance and symptom outcomes.

Keywords: school attendance; school refusal; early intervention; cognitive behavioral therapy; anxiety and depression; implementation/user satisfaction.

Neurodivergent pupils' experiences of school distress and attendance difficulties: A mixed-methods study

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Increasing numbers of children and young people (CYP) globally are experiencing attendance difficulties. A crucial underpinning reason for attendance difficulties is school distress, where pupils experience such high levels of emotional distress and anxiety that they cannot attend school. While evidence suggests that neurodivergent CYP are disproportionately impacted by school distress and attendance difficulties, research seldom centralises their lived experiences. One-hundred-and-thirty-nine CYP (aged 11-17) and 212 parents completed an online, mixed-methods survey. Parents provided information about demographics and attendance. CYP completed a bespoke School Experiences Survey, which involved rating 44 statements about school on a 5-point Likert scale and answering six qualitative questions about their attendance difficulties, such as how they felt when they do not attend and what might help them. Their qualitative answers were analysed using content analysis. Statement ratings suggested that CYP experienced anxiety (M=4.75/5) and emotional distress (M=4.66/5) when attending school, and that attending school harmed their mental health (M=4.51/5). They also reported sensory challenges, such as high volumes of noise and wearing uniforms. In their qualitative answers, the complex mixture of emotions about their school distress and attendance difficulties clearly highlighted the multifaceted nature of these issues for CYP. Aligned with conference theme 'On Course for Attendance', CYP suggested how to improve their school experiences, such as by having smaller classes and better staff understanding. Overall, our findings highlight the need to consider how the mainstream school environment does not meet the needs of many neurodivergent CYP.

Keywords: school distress; attendance; neurodivergent; autism; education; inclusion.

The unseen journey: Mothers navigating school refusal for mixed-roots children in Japan

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This presentation is based on a qualitative doctoral study that examines mothers' experiences supporting mixed-roots children engaged in futōkō (school refusal) in Japan. Drawing from 10 semi-structured interviews with non-Japanese mothers, the research maps a multi-stage journey: initial confusion and self-blame; intense information-seeking and engagement with culturally specific supports; and the creation of individualized educational pathways. The narratives reveal a spectrum of withdrawal, with some children's futōkō behaviors veering towards hikikomori (severe social withdrawal). Silence was also employed as a form of self-preservation, a statement of refusal, or even as a form of surrender. Mothers frequently described an initial phase of being systemically and interpersonally silenced when their concerns were dismissed by school staff or family members. In turn, they sometimes inadvertently silenced their children out of fear or embarrassment, compounding the child's isolation. A pivotal turning point for many mothers involved a conscious act of silencing the external noise of societal expectations and judgment and often marked a definitive turning away from societal norms and a profound turning toward the child. Finally, a consistent thread in successful transitions was the influence of a single, key individual: a parent, a supportive teacher or coach, or a trusted friend, whose validation and understanding were sufficient to catalyze the child's willingness to re-engage with an educational setting.

Keywords: school refusal (futōkō); mixed-roots/biethnic; Japan; othering; maternal experience.

Findings on school attendance in the context of vocational schools

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School absenteeism in vocational education and training (VET) has gained increasing attention, yet reliable and systematically collected attendance data remain scarce in many contexts, including Germany. This lack of data limits both research and the development of evidence-informed interventions. The FAIR project addresses this gap by establishing a systematic approach to monitoring school attendance in vocational schools in one urban area in Southern Germany. Building on the framework of “Recording, Reporting, and Using” (Heyne, 2022), the project implements standardized procedures for collecting and utilizing attendance data across participating schools. Methodologically, the project combines quantitative attendance data with survey-based and qualitative insights in a collaborative and iterative design. Close cooperation with schools allows for a practice-informed analysis of contextual factors associated with absenteeism. The formative evaluation facilitates an ongoing exchange between school practice and research. We present recent findings on attendance patterns and related conditions in VET and derive evidence-informed strategies to support regular participation. The contribution situates these findings in an international perspective and invites discussion on monitoring practices and intervention approaches in vocational education.

Keywords: vocational schools; attendance data; appropriate measures; practice to theory.

Addressing school absenteeism through resource schools: Organization, practices, and goals

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Since 2022, the possibility of placement in a resource school has been included in the Swedish Education Act. This option was introduced as part of the efforts to address increasing school absenteeism. A resource school is an educational setting for students who need special support for reasons other than those for which special schools are intended. Resource schools are not a separate type of school; they follow the same curriculum as mainstream schools. Instead, it is a way of organizing support. Resource schools are often smaller units characterized by adapted learning environments, small student groups, and a high staff to student ratio. The purpose of this study is to identify, describe, and discuss how activities in resource schools can be organized, why they are organized in certain ways, and what goals the operations pursue. Staff at three resource schools in three different municipalities, each with partly different conditions, have been interviewed. The interview responses have been thematically analyzed, and the results present and discuss the different themes, focusing on both similarities and distinguishing features. The study is still ongoing, but some tentative findings indicate that the conditions for the various resource schools differ depending on the size and geographical location of the municipality; that the schools target partly different student groups; and that they work toward partly different goals. However, the overarching aims are that students in resource schools should return to regular schooling after long-term absenteeism, achieve the learning objectives in their subjects, and develop both socially and individually.

Keywords: resource schools; special educational support; school absenteeism; educational organization; thematic analysis; student reintegration.

Parent support center – Parents of children and young people experiencing school absenteeism

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In Sweden, parents are responsible for ensuring that their children attend school. When a child begins to refuse to attend school, a significant responsibility falls on parents to maintain contact with the school, healthcare services, and social services, while also managing their own worry and shame about their child's absence. In addition, parents must also take care of their child who is not feeling well. This study, conducted at a Parent Support Center, focuses on parents of children and young people experiencing school absenteeism. Staff at the Parent Support Center invited parents of students with school absenteeism to participate in three group sessions together with other parents in similar situations. During the sessions, factual material was presented, group discussions were held, and parents' own experiences were shared. Some seventy parents have taken part in these group sessions over the past three years. All of them were asked to complete a questionnaire in the spring of 2026. The survey results show, among other things, that the parents felt strengthened, less lonely, and less burdened by guilt after having the opportunity to exchange views and share their different challenges with other group participants. The project's results have contributed valuable insights into improving support for parents of children with school absenteeism, thereby helping parents and providing them with the tools to support each other and their children. More research on effective interventions, including parents, is needed.

Keywords: emotional burden; group intervention; parental support; parent perspective; school absenteeism.

Child participation as a key to reintegrating isolated children into school

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On January 1, 2024, the Barnets Lov (The Child's Act) came into force in Denmark with the aim of strengthening children's rights, participation, and well-being. A particularly vulnerable group in this context consists of children and young people who have been isolated at home for an extended period and disconnected from the school community. Experience shows that a lack of dialogue with these children reduces the likelihood of re-establishing well-being and school participation. A step toward breaking isolation can be conversations with a professional. For the children to be able and willing to take part in these conversations, it is important that both the parents and the children feel safe and experience a high degree of control over the conversations and within the conversations. In practical work with this target group, it has been proven effective to follow a structured approach consisting of three phases: Thorough preparation to establish a baseline for well-being and functioning; A consistent and predictable conversation structure focusing on the child's strengths and including the parents as key partners; Follow-up, in which the child's participation and influence are central to achieving positive outcomes. The experiences indicate that supporting this group requires holistic and professional effort from all professionals surrounding the child to build trust, ensure well-being, and promote lasting engagement in the school environment.

Keywords: children's rights; participation; well-being; isolation.

Beyond absence: Disability and school attendance problems in a system-level analysis of school referrals

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School Attendance Problems (SAPs) are increasingly recognised as complex, multifaceted phenomena shaped by interacting bioecological factors. In Australia, the post-COVID decline in attendance rates prompted a Senate Inquiry into school refusal, with a key finding being the significant intersection between SAPs and disability. Despite this, mainstream schools have received little practical guidance on how to respond through an inclusive education framework. This study draws on secondary administrative referral data from primary and secondary Catholic schools within the Catholic Schools Parramatta Diocese (CSPD), Western Sydney. The dataset comprises students referred to a Tier 3 intensive attendance support service, for whom all school-based strategies had been exhausted. Mixed-methods analysis examined student characteristics, how schools conceptualise SAPs, and patterns in referral practice. Findings reveal that students referred for attendance concerns are disproportionately those with disability, learning difficulties, and social-emotional needs. A considerable percentage of students did not have a Personalised Plan at the point of referral, with Autism, ADHD, and anxiety among the most commonly identified disabilities. Qualitative analysis found that school teams most frequently attributed SAPs to parental and family factors, with disability ranking second — both substantially outweighing school-based explanations. These findings challenge practitioners and policymakers to move beyond reactive absence management toward proactive, strengths-based responses embedded within existing inclusive education frameworks. When schools reframe SAPs through a lens of belonging and adjustment, they are better positioned to intervene early, reduce marginalisation, and foster genuine participation for all learners.

Keywords: inclusive education; disability; attendance intervention; intersection.

Understanding and co-creating safe spaces in schools: A participatory study with autistic students

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School environments often pose significant challenges for autistic students, including sensory overload, social uncertainty, and high demands. These challenges create overwhelming learning environments ultimately leading to exclusionary practices or increasing patterns of school avoidance. Despite growing attention to the concept of safe spaces in education, the term is often reduced to the provision of designated physical rooms and overlooks that safety is primarily a situated and subjective experience, shaped by the interaction of various conditions. The present study therefore conceptualizes safe spaces not merely as physical locations but as conditions that foster well-being within everyday school practices. Aim: The study aims to (1) examine how autistic students experience safety and exclusion within school environments, (2) identify and systematically prioritize the conditions they consider necessary for participation and well-being, and (3) translate these insights into a co-produced safe-space framework that can inform inclusive school development. Methods: The project employed a participatory mixed-method design combining Photovoice to explore students' lived experiences of safety and exclusion, and Q-sort methodology to identify and prioritize students' needs regarding inclusive learning environments. Findings from both strands were integrated through participatory co-production workshops involving students and school staff. Results: Findings indicate that safe spaces are not primarily defined by designated physical areas but by predictable structures, opportunities for sensory regulation, transparent communication, and flexible participation formats embedded within everyday school practices. Implications: The study demonstrates the potential of participatory and co-productive approaches to inform school development and provides a transferable model for safe-space development in mainstream schools.

Keywords: autism; inclusive education; safe spaces in schools; participatory research; photovoice; Q-methodology; co-production.

When school participation becomes fragile: Understanding autistic students' educational pathways across perspectives

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International research indicates that educational pathways of autistic students are often characterised by instability, including school changes, non-attendance, and exclusion. Rather than isolated events, these processes reflect cumulative mismatches between students' needs and school environments. Existing research, however, remains fragmented and rarely integrates multiple stakeholder perspectives within a coherent framework. Aim: This contribution aims to integrate three empirical studies to examine (1) patterns of educational pathways and participation instability, (2) school- and system-level conditions associated with these trajectories, and (3) how different stakeholders (teachers, parents, and autistic students) interpret and respond to these processes. Methods: The study adopts a multi-method, multi-informant design. First, a large-scale teacher survey (N = 392) maps educational pathways and institutional conditions across school types. Second, a quantitative parent survey (N = 533) investigates participation instability, school environment factors, and support structures. Third, a Q-sort study with autistic students (N = 32) captures subjective interpretations of school experiences and educational pathways. Findings are integrated through a comparative, cross-perspective analysis. Results: Across perspectives, educational pathways emerge as non-linear and marked by recurring phases of strain rather than isolated events. Instability is not primarily described through formal exclusion, but through ongoing difficulties in sustaining everyday participation. While teachers emphasise institutional constraints and limited resources, and parents highlight patterns of participation instability and the burden of navigating support systems, autistic students articulate school experiences in terms of overwhelm, loss of control, and the need for predictability. Notably, they do not frame school non-attendance primarily as failure, but often as a necessary response to environments that exceed their coping capacities. Implications: The findings underline the need to conceptualise attendance and participation as relational outcomes. Integrating multiple perspectives provides a more comprehensive understanding of how educational pathways become stabilised or disrupted and offers a foundation for developing responsive, inclusive school environments.

Keywords: autism; educational pathways; school attendance; participation instability; inclusive education; relational perspective; multi-informant research; Q-methodology.

The silent strain: A case study examining the disrupted maternal attachment in school avoidance

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School avoidance can destabilize the family system, particularly the maternal–child dyad. When this relationship is placed under chronic stress, mothers may experience heightened emotional distress, diminished parental efficacy, and relational strain with their child. Despite extensive research on anxiety, depression, neurodevelopmental profiles, and sensory processing in school-avoidant students, comparatively little attention has been given to the experiences of mothers and the relational impact within the maternal–child dyad. This qualitative case study explored the experiences of five mothers whose sons exhibited school avoidance. The mothers described profound feelings of helplessness, frustration, isolation, and uncertainty as they attempted to respond to their child’s escalating emotional needs. Many reported feeling invalidated by family members, peers, and school systems, contributing to emotional dysregulation and disruptions within the attachment relationship. Grounded in attachment theory and centered on maternal perception, this study examined how disorganized attachment patterns may develop or intensify under conditions of prolonged school avoidance. Using pattern matching and explanation building, findings revealed that the mothers experienced a significant loss of parental confidence and emotional connection within the mother–child relationship. At the same time, the findings highlighted the mother’s critical role as a potential bridge in supporting school re-engagement. By centering maternal experiences, this study underscores the importance of validating and supporting mothers as essential partners in collaborative interventions designed to foster relational stability and improve student re-engagement with the school community.

Keywords: Attachment Theory; School Avoidance; Maternal Influence; Mother/Child Dyad.

Beyond compliance: Reframing school attendance through co-produced, systems-level action in SEND

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School attendance problems in Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) are not compliance failures - they are failures of systems, relationships, and shared responsibility. Yet dominant responses continue to individualise the problem, relying on punitive and compliance-driven approaches that marginalise families and undermine the partnerships required for sustained engagement. This paper advances a conceptual shift: from attendance as behavioural compliance to attendance as a systems-level participation challenge, rooted in relational dynamics and cross-system coordination, particularly during key educational transitions and periods of increased vulnerability for pupils. We introduce a co-produced, theoretically integrated framework that brings together Empowerment, Participation, and Multisystem Resilience. Developed through an international Delphi study, the framework specifies key psychosocial processes and distinguishes between those that enable meaningful participation within partnerships and those that align coordinated action across systems. In doing so, it provides a coherent architecture that links theory, intervention, and implementation, while clarifying the mechanisms through which engagement can be restored and sustained. The framework is operationalised through participatory co-design to develop a strengths-based psychosocial intervention that brings students, caregivers, and school staff into shared processes of learning, problem-solving, and action. Early application within multi-stakeholder workshops demonstrates how iterative co-production embeds stakeholder voice, strengthens relational trust, and shapes feasible, contextually responsive programme design. This work reframes SAPs as relational and systemic phenomena, offering a transferable model for co-produced intervention design in complex educational contexts. It contributes a novel conceptual and practical foundation for inclusive, stakeholder-driven reform, directly responding to global calls to move beyond compliance-based approaches and toward sustainable system-level change.

Keywords: school attendance; home-school partnership; multi-stakeholder; participation; empowerment; intervention co-production.

Beyond compliance: Supporting autonomy and participation in school engagement for young people in residential care

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Children in Care experience disproportionately high levels of school attendance problems (SAPs). In Ireland, children and young people in residential care, a group placement setting with 24-hour staff, also experience SAPs at a higher rate than their peers in foster care (CSO, 2025). International literature suggests this is in part due to complexities of the residential care placement, its relationship to the school and the potential additional complexity of support need for some young people within this setting (Garcia-Molsosa et al., 2021). Despite this, little research has explored their lived experiences of schooling. This study used rights-based and participatory methods to explore SAPs from the perspectives of young people and professionals. Data was collected in Ireland through one-on-one participatory sessions with young people in residential care (n=8) interviews with education and social-care professionals (n=23). In contrast to research focusing solely on professional stakeholders, young people in this research focused on the care home setting, rather than the school, as the place of greatest potential influence. Findings show that placement instability and a breakdown in trust in the care system undermines school attendance and engagement for young people in residential care. Crucially, everyday opportunities for participation within residential settings shape how young people experience and navigate school. Viewed through an epistemic-injustice lens, young people's agency is frequently constrained, and their knowledge is often discounted within professional narratives. This study suggests that school non-attendance may represent adaptive attempts to restore autonomy within restrictive environments, highlighting the need for more relational, empowering practice.

Keywords: young people; residential care; school attendance; participation; autonomy.

Navigating the challenges, the rising tide of school avoidance: Educator perspectives

Martha Brady

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The COVID-19 pandemic caused unprecedented disruption to education systems worldwide, including in Ireland, where schools closed in March 2020 and rapidly transitioned to remote learning without prior preparation or guidance. These disruptions had significant consequences for adolescents, affecting not only academic progress but also social development, well-being, and engagement with school. In the years since, concerns about school attendance have intensified, with increasing levels of absenteeism and school avoidance among post-primary students. School avoidance is a complex and multifaceted issue shaped by emotional, relational, institutional, and systemic factors. This study explores how Irish post-primary educators interpret and respond to student school avoidance within their professional contexts. It is informed by a critical realist framework, supported by Ecological Systems Theory, enabling an examination of educators' perspectives as situated within broader educational and social systems. A sequential mixed-methods design was employed. An initial survey gathered a broad range of educators' perspectives across Ireland, followed by semi-structured interviews to explore in greater depth how professionals understand and respond to school avoidance. This approach provides both breadth and depth of insight into the challenges educators face. Findings highlight the emotional and psychological dimensions of school avoidance, including anxiety, distress, and disengagement, as well as the pressures experienced by educators in addressing these issues. The study contributes to a deeper understanding of professional experiences and identifies the need for improved training, support structures, and collaborative approaches to better support students experiencing school avoidance.

Keywords: attendance; school avoidance; educators; post-primary school; perspectives; understanding.

STAY: A new stepped care intervention to increase attendance of students with emotionally based school avoidance

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Chronic absenteeism has risen since the pandemic, with emotionally based school avoidance (EBSA; Heyne et al., 2019) becoming an important and often overlooked factor, especially for neurodiverse students, who are reported to experience EBSA more often (Adams et al., 2025). Although cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) is an evidence-based method for EBSA, most interventions are clinic-based and have limited support when used by school-based staff or for neurodiverse learners. The Stepped Care Approach for Addressing Youth-Motivated School Refusal Behaviors (STAY) was created to fill this gap. STAY is a school-based, function-informed intervention that combines functional behavior assessment (FBA) with CBT techniques. It is designed for students in grades 3–8 who have disabilities or are at risk of developing disabilities. To improve feasibility and scalability, STAY uses a stepped care model and is meant to be implemented by school staff. Step 1 includes brief, time-limited CBT strategies targeted at the function of school avoidance. Step 2 offers a more intensive, individualized intervention for students who do not respond to Step 1. This presentation will share insights from focus groups with educators and stakeholders that guided the design and refinement of STAY, highlighting strengths, perceived challenges, and how well it fits within school environments in the United States. Preliminary results from an ongoing feasibility study launched in Spring 2026 will be shared, including the practicality of implementation, training and resource requirements, fidelity, and changes in student attendance. Attendees will also see sample STAY materials and discuss the next steps toward a two-year pilot study.

Keywords: school attendance; emotionally based school avoidance; stepped care; disabilities; school-based intervention; CBT.

Beyond individual misconduct: A multilevel analysis of school attendance problems and the central role of school experiences

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School attendance problems are often framed as individual issues yet increasingly viewed as shaped by dynamic interactions between students' personal school experiences and institutional contexts. Building on this perspective, the present study examines two patterns of attendance challenges: truancy-related reasons (e.g., boredom, attractive alternatives outside school) and emotion-related reasons for absence (e.g., anxiety, depressive mood related to attendance). Conceptually, both dimensions reflect underlying processes shaping students' school attendance. Using data from the SANSCHO study (analytic sample $N = 5,100$) in Schleswig-Holstein, we estimated multilevel linear models with students nested in schools. Random intercept models were built stepwise, including (1) student background characteristics, (2) individual school experiences, and (3) structural school characteristics. Missing data were handled by multiple imputation ($m = 20$). Findings show that between-school differences were modest and decreased markedly once students' experiences were considered. For truancy-related reasons, the intraclass correlation dropped from 12.9% in the null model to 1.5% in the full model; for emotional reasons, it declined from 4.1% to nearly zero. Across both outcomes, school belonging emerged as the most consistent and strongest negative predictor, alongside perceived safety, while social integration was particularly relevant for emotion-related reasons. Overall, the results suggest that school attendance problems are closely tied to students' experiences of belonging, safety, and integration in school, rather than reflecting individual misconduct. Collectively, the findings point to the relevance of school-based strategies that consider micro-level determinants alongside structural conditions to support students in staying on course for attendance.

Keywords: school attendance difficulties; school belonging; perceived safety; multilevel linear model; reasons for absenteeism.

Reading for enjoyment: A literacy promotion workshop to foster school attendance

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"Reading for Enjoyment" is a literacy promotion workshop implemented in schools across the city of Alicante as a universal prevention strategy to foster school attendance. The intervention is based on the premise that the acquisition of reading and writing skills forms the foundation of academic learning and is a key factor in enhancing students' motivation, school engagement, and effective access to the right to education. The overall aim of the programme is to help children of compulsory school age fully exercise their right to education while supporting their academic, personal, and social development. More specifically, the workshop seeks to increase students' motivation towards literacy as a preventive strategy against school absenteeism. The intervention targets first-grade primary school students and is delivered during regular school hours. Each session includes storytelling, followed by reading comprehension, writing activities, and reflection on the values conveyed through the story. The programme is offered to schools across the municipality of Alicante, with priority given to those located in socially vulnerable areas. It was established through a collaboration agreement between the University of Alicante, via the Permanent University (UPUA), and Alicante City Council through its Technical Department for School Absenteeism Prevention, highlighting the value of institutional collaboration in promoting school attendance through a preventive and community-based approach.

Keywords: prevention; right to education; literacy; school attendance.

Beyond the 10% threshold: A latent profile analysis of attendance heterogeneity and behavioral mechanisms

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To stay “On Course for Attendance!” schools require diagnostic insights that transcend simple cumulative metrics. While international research and administrative frameworks often utilize a 10% absence threshold as a primary indicator of risk, this study demonstrates how such a “one-size-fits-all” approach oversimplifies a deeply heterogeneous phenomenon. Utilizing a robust administrative dataset, we employ Latent Profile Analysis (LPA) to identify five distinct attendance typologies. Our model incorporates a multidimensional set of behavioral facets—including intensity, fragmentation, absence velocity, type and persistence—to define these latent clusters. To interpret the nature of these profiles, we utilize the COM-B framework (Capability, Opportunity, Motivation) as an analytical lens. We demonstrate how administrative data provide “behavioral fingerprints” where specific patterns of detachment correspond to varying configurations of student barriers. The utility of this approach is validated by observing academic outcomes in a targeted cohort of Grades 7 and 8. Our results reveal a complex relationship between attendance and achievement, characterized by evidence of academic resilience in certain high-absence groups contrasted with persistent academic vulnerability in others, regardless of their level of physical presence in the classroom. We conclude that these latent profiles could inform the development of more precise, data-informed identification strategies that better align interventions with specific behavioral patterns and academic needs.

Keywords: heterogeneity; absenteeism; latent profile analysis (LPA); attendance trajectories.

Enhancing teacher-student relationships to support school attendance? The potential of banking time intervention

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Relationships with teachers are central in shaping students' school experience and school attendance. Research shows that conflictual teacher-student relationships (TSRs) can undermine students' sense of belonging, well-being, and engagement, which in turn increases the risk of school absence and dropout. In contrast, a positive TSR functions as protective factor that promotes students' school attendance and engagement. These relational dynamics may be of particular relevance for students with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD), who frequently experience conflict in TSRs and who are at heightened risk of truancy. Yet, the value of enhancing the quality of TSRs as a proximal process in promoting school attendance and preventing attendance challenges is poorly understood. Therefore, this research analyzes the effect of an eight-week Banking Time intervention to enhance TSR quality and to reduce emotional and behavioral problems. Banking Time is a relationship-based intervention in which teachers engage in brief (10-15 minutes), structured one-on-one sessions with a student two to three times per week. During these sessions, the teacher follows the student's lead in a positive interaction context aimed at building trust, connection, and emotional security. Results of a current intervention study (ABE-plan) with 11 teacher-student-dyads using Banking Time to enhance the quality of dyadic TSRs will be presented. The discussion will explore the theoretical underpinnings of Banking Time and its potential to enhance (or restore) students' school engagement. Banking Time may represent a promising approach on the course for attendance, particularly for students with EBD and previous negative interaction experiences.

Keywords: banking time; teacher-student relationships; school engagement; emotional and behavioral disorders.

Do affective latent profiles differ in school refusal behaviour scores in the Spanish youth population?

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Due to the lack of studies analysing the connection between affect and school refusal behaviour, the current communication pretends to detect affective latent profiles and to study the differences in school refusal behaviour scores among the identified profiles. The sample was formed by 1816 Spanish students from 15 to 18 years old ($M = 16.39$; $SD = 1.05$). The two subscales of the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule for Children-Short Form were used to identify the affective latent profiles, and the four subscales of the School Refusal Assessment Scale-Revised for Children were administered to study the differences of school refusal behaviour scores. After analysing the affective latent profiles, five groups were identified combining the scores of positive and negative affect: self-fulfilling profile (high positive affect and relatively low negative affect), self-destructive profile (low positive affect and high negative affect), low affective profile (low scores in positive and negative affect), low positive affect profile (low positive affect) and high affective profile (high positive and negative affect). The two affective profiles that obtained the highest scores of school refusal behaviour were: self-destructive (three first factors) and high affective profile (fourth factor). On the other hand, the self-fulfilling (first two factors) and the low affective profile (last two factors) obtained the lowest scores in school refusal behaviour. The results of this communication provide useful information regarding the possibility of enhancing adaptive affective profiles, such the case of self-fulfilling profile, in detection and intervention programs for reducing school refusal behaviour.

Keywords: affective latent profiles; school refusal behaviour; PANAS-C-SF; SRAS-R-C; adolescents.

The effects of basic education students' absences and the support provided for them on schooling

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This paper presents the key findings of a research project examining school absenteeism in Finnish basic education. Absenteeism was analysed using multiple data sources, including longitudinal quantitative data, qualitative data, and register data. The aim was to examine the associations between students' school absences and their learning, mental health, and educational outcomes. Across data sources, the results showed that even modest increases in school absences predicted persistent attendance problems later on. In particular, absences exceeding 20% of school time in primary school strongly predicted similarly high levels of absenteeism throughout lower secondary school. School absences were also associated with lower academic achievement, weaker school engagement, and increased risks of mental health problems and educational discontinuity in early adulthood. Absence trajectories often emerged already in primary school and intensified during the transition to lower secondary education. Support activities in schools were focused on students with high levels of absenteeism, indicating that support was often provided reactively rather than preventively. The most commonly used support measures included small group instruction, school changes, non-graded instruction, shortened or modified school days, placement in special support, and multi professional collaboration within the student welfare system. In addition, predominantly negative monitoring practices were associated with increased absenteeism, whereas supportive and relational approaches were linked to better attendance outcomes. The findings provide clear implications for research, policy, and practice: early identification of emerging attendance problems, proactive support for schooling, and relationally sensitive school practices are central to preventing cumulative absenteeism and strengthening long term school engagement.

Keywords: school absences; primary school; lower secondary school; early identification and support.

Get a grip on attendance

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In this oral presentation, we share insights from our regional study Grip op Geoorloofd Verzuim (Kohnstamm, 2023) and the key drivers for improving school attendance. The GRIP study aimed to support a Dutch school district in gaining better insight into attendance by raising awareness of authorized absences and strengthening attendance practices. Using an action research approach we, as two district-level consultants, focused on building trust with school staff, administrators, and district personnel to foster strong collaboration. A total of 31 out of 33 secondary schools participated in the study, providing and analysing absence data from the 2018–2019 academic year. In a follow-up article, Addressing Authorized Absences: A School District's Initiative to Examine Prevalence and Promote Proactive Attendance Practices (Heyne, Verstraete, & De Wit, 2025), we reflected on the findings and identified six key drivers for improving school attendance: district-wide collaboration, trust-building through non-judgmental engagement, using data to create urgency, empowering schools with data-driven insights, applying a tiered approach to attendance, and adopting an adaptive approach for continuous improvement. This presentation does not aim to offer a single solution or a fixed method. Instead, it introduces a different perspective: systematically and collaboratively asking questions across all levels of the organization, guided by these six key drivers. Rather than providing a blueprint for action, this approach invites dialogue and supports stakeholders, from classroom to board level, in asking meaningful questions to better understand attendance. By exploring these questions in a coherent and connected way, the focus shifts from solving problems to fostering understanding and connection. School attendance is approached not as a problem to fix, but as a relational issue that requires shared reflection, dialogue, and continuous learning.

Keywords: grip on attendance; school system; school attendance; action-oriented and investigative approach; joint research and dialogue.

One size doesn't fit all: Contextualising multi-tiered systems of support for real world attendance gains

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Ensuring school attendance is integral to child and youth development. In Australia attendance has not recovered from COVID-19 with a Senate Inquiry recommending a system-wide response. Drawing on Kearney and Graczyk's Multi-tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) for school attendance, Pathways2Participation (P2P) was developed as an MTSS framework emphasising prevention, early intervention and evidence-based supports across three tiers. To ensure fit before implementation, P2P requires contextualisation to local cultural values, language, pedagogical practices and socioeconomic realities. This paper synthesises survey and interview data collected to inform contextualisation for an Australian Catholic school system. One hundred and sixty-five Catholic school staff completed a survey on attendance practices and improvement areas. Sixteen school and system staff participated in semi-structured interviews on attendance policies and strategies. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics; qualitative data used inductive coding. Findings indicated variability in attendance data systems, inaccurate recording of attendance data and inconsistent chronic absenteeism thresholds, undermining data driven decision-making. Attendance responsibilities were often dispersed without dedicated teams, prompting reactive responses. Universal supports consistent with MTSS including welcoming environments, quality teaching, routines, family partnerships and recognition were present but rarely used with attendance as an explicit target. Priorities identified included strengthening relationships, enhancing data systems and early absence detection. Implementation implications include targeted training in data use and tiering, formation of multidisciplinary attendance teams, centrally accessible early warning dashboards and critical appraisal of incentives. They also offer lessons for other school systems seeking to reduce absenteeism through contextualised MTSS implementation effectively.

Keywords: education; MTSS; schools; research; attendance improvement.

Thresholds where school absences harm learning

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School absences are widely recognized as being associated with poorer learning outcomes. A recent study by Sergejeff et al. (2026) demonstrated that grades in mother tongue and literature are particularly negatively associated with students' school absences. Building on this work, the present study draws on data from more than 12,000 lower secondary school students in 2023 (Grades 7–9; $M_{\text{age}} = 13.65$ years, $SD_{\text{age}} = 0.10$) enrolled in a Finnish wellbeing services county. Absences were expressed as a proportion of the minimum annual number of lessons. To examine whether the association between absences and achievement in mother tongue and literature changed across thresholds, we fitted a piecewise linear regression model with knots at 5%, 10%, 15%, and 20% absences. The results revealed a progressively strengthening negative association between absences and grades. In the 0–5% range, the association was statistically non-significant. Between 5–10% and 10–15% absences, the negative relationship became stronger. In the 15–20% range, the slope became markedly steeper, indicating a sharp decline in grades at higher absence levels. These patterns were consistent across genders and did not differ between students receiving and not receiving special education support. Overall, the findings suggest that while low levels of absenteeism may not substantially harm academic performance, higher levels—particularly those exceeding 15% of annual lessons—are associated with a pronounced deterioration in learning outcomes. The results provide empirical evidence to delineate absence thresholds that clearly lower students' academic performance.

Keywords: school absence thresholds; piecewise regression; academic achievement; lower secondary school.

The empty desk in the classroom - consequences of absenteeism, a qualitative study highlighting youths' lived experiences

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A substantial portion of young people's waking hours is governed by institutions in today's society, starting with school in the morning, often followed by after-school programs and leisure activities. Despite this, there is a growing trend where students don't attend school, further resulting in missed lectures and an increasing distance from their peers. Some adolescents have a strong desire to stay present, but attending school becomes increasingly difficult due to underlying psychological, emotional, or contextual factors. This presentation explores the consequences of prolonged school absence among youth, and it draws on 27 qualitative, in-depth interviews with adolescents who experienced absenteeism during their lower secondary school. Using a retrospective approach, the participants described the extended periods away from school and reflected on how their absence shaped their overall well-being and school engagement. The findings illuminate how these young people spent their time at home during their absence, as well as how the resulting isolation impacted their wellbeing, peer relations, and academic development. Taken together, the presentation provides insight into the lived experiences of youth facing prolonged school absence with particular attention to their perceptions of being positioned outside the school community. It further examines how extended periods of school absence affected their daily lives, sense of belonging, school engagement, and overall well-being.

Keywords: prolonged school absence; absenteeism; youth perspectives; school nonattendance; coping strategies; escapism; wellbeing.

Variation across system levels: School absence through a bioecological lens

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Although it is well established that individual risk factors influencing school attendance and absence rarely occur in isolation, studies that examine multiple factors simultaneously with contextual and interactional variables remain scarce. This study offers a system-wide picture of students' school absences in Finnish comprehensive education, mapping patterns of absence and examining which student and school characteristics are or are not associated with school absence. The study was guided by Bronfenbrenner's and Morris' (2006) bioecological systems theory, specifically the person-process-context-time model. An extensive register-based dataset with more than 188,000 students from eight wellbeing service counties (WSC) enabled a hierarchical analysis using linear mixed effects modelling. The results showed that class and school level variables accounted for 8–18% of the variance in absence across the WSC's, with most variation at the student level. None of the variables at the school level showed significant effects but attendance decreased across all class levels. Mother tongue subject grade was the strongest student level predictor, with higher achievement associated with lower absence. The protective effect of special educational need status (SEN) was strongest in the early class levels but diminished as students progressed and lead in higher absence among SEN students in lower secondary school. The results indicate that variation between schools in Finland has been successfully maintained at a relatively low level. Attention should be directed to supporting students' attendance during the transition from primary to lower secondary school and in the final years of comprehensive schooling, especially among students with low academic achievement and students with SEN.

Keywords: school absence/attendance; compulsory education; bioecological systems theory; linear mixed-effects modelling.

Building bridges: A salutogenic approach to enhancing school connectedness for absent students

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Ängelholms kommun (Sweden)

beyond traditional classroom adjustments. This presentation details an ongoing three-year European social fund project, investigating specific components that facilitate the return to school for students facing long-term absence. At the core of this initiative are two "bridge builder" roles established at middle schools, designed to implement and test interventions tailored to the specific needs and interests described by the students themselves. Departing from conventional educational structures, these interventions take place in collaboration with civil society and the natural environment. Examples include physical training with personal trainers, academic peer-mentoring, and mindfulness activities in the nature. Our preliminary results show improvement in student well-being and an increase in students' school attendance in more than half of the participants. Through qualitative analysis, we have identified four decisive factors for success: activation, trusting relationships, increased school connectedness, and the provision of low-demand environments. However, the project also highlights a "friction point" concerning the school's mandate. While such interventions are sometimes viewed as healthcare rather than education, our findings suggest that a salutogenic, health-promoting approach is essential for rebuilding the student-school bond. We wish to discuss the implications of schools stepping outside their traditional boundaries: What are the long-term benefits for attendance, and what risks are involved? This session offers insights into how innovative bridge-building roles can help students get back "on course" for attendance.

Keywords: school attendance; school connectedness; salutogenic approach; bridge builders; educational interventions.

School attendance as a public health challenge: Primary prevention

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School absenteeism is increasingly recognized as a significant public health issue, influencing young people's wellbeing, educational achievement, long term development, and future health. School attendance is shaped not only by individual factors but also by broader determinants such as mental health, family stress, and socioeconomic conditions. Rather than focusing on individual cases, the presentation centers on population level health promotion. How can schools, communities and health services work together to prevent attendance problems at a collective level? What can improve students' health? Which public health interventions might improve attendance? We explore ideas to create a healthy environment in which students can thrive, thus reducing the need for school absenteeism. This includes prevention focused health strategies, addressing underlying problems such as mental wellbeing and family stress, and embedding attendance supportive actions into everyday routines, such as hygiene practices. This contribution demonstrates how a public health perspective can contribute to school attendance. The authors will share practical advice for schools and communities. Finally, participants are invited to reflect on how public health services in their own countries can be more closely involved in preventing absenteeism. A stronger partnership between education and public health can create healthier school environments and improve attendance for all young people.

Keywords: school attendance; absenteeism prevention; public health; primary prevention; population level health promotion.

The caring conversation: Early interprofessional collaboration to promote school attendance

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Ängelholms kommun (Sweden)

Problematic school absenteeism requires early, coordinated interventions across multiple systems to support the student (Kearney & Graczyk, 2020). To address this, a Swedish municipality implemented "Omtankesamtalet" (The Caring Conversation), a novel early intervention collaborative model. This model brings together school staff, student health professionals, and social services to work with students and parents before absenteeism becomes entrenched (Green Landell, 2023). This study aimed to identify success factors and obstacles in these early collaborative meetings. Utilizing a value-creating scientific method, Designed Action Sampling (Lackéus & Sävjetun, 2023), we collected data from 24 professionals. Participants provided immediate written reflections, tags, and emotional responses following their participation in a Caring Conversation. Content analysis revealed three main themes: effective meeting design, participatory communication, and process development. Key success factors included thorough preparation, a clear shared purpose, and the use of a structured visual tool (a "Needs Compass") to holistically focus on the child's needs. Conversely, significant obstacles involved initiating the process too late, holding overly long meetings, and overwhelming families by including too many professionals, which hindered the child's participation. The findings highlight that while early cross-boundary collaboration is vital for keeping students "on course for attendance," the structural design of these meetings is critical. To build trust and effectively address unmet needs, interventions must be carefully calibrated to avoid intimidating families, ensuring the student's voice remains central.

Keywords: school absenteeism; interprofessional collaboration, early intervention; student health; social services.

Presentation of the thesis: Measuring school attendance problems – validation of the School Refusal Assessment Scale and the Inventory of School Attendance Problems

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School attendance problems (SAPs) are a widespread and complex challenge with serious consequences for students' learning and wellbeing. Staying on course for attendance requires sustainable, system-level approaches where assessment plays a central role in implementation and long-term solutions. This oral presentation presents findings from a doctoral thesis aimed at strengthening the measurement foundation of SAPs in a Nordic context. Because attendance problems are heterogeneous and influenced by factors at multiple system levels, reliable and valid assessment tools are essential for understanding students' needs and supporting appropriate intervention. The thesis evaluates the psychometric properties of two widely used questionnaires—the School Refusal Assessment Scale (SRAS) and the Inventory of School Attendance Problems (ISAP)—both translated and validated for use in Sweden for the first time. Using student and parent samples from Sweden and Finland, the thesis examined aspects of reliability and validity. Overall, results showed generally acceptable psychometric properties, with the adapted SRAS-R performing better than the original version and the ISAP demonstrating strong measurement invariance across key subgroups. By providing validated instruments and highlighting areas for further refinement, this work supports more consistent, informed, and sustainable assessment of SAPs—contributing to continued, system-level attention and helping the field remain on course for attendance.

Keywords: assessment instruments; measurement; ISAP; SRAS; reliability; validity.

A systemic perspective on preventing absence in school communities – students' experienced social participation as part of comprehensive student welfare

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To prevent school absences, students' subjective experiences of school culture, especially social participation, are important when designing and implementing efforts to strengthen a schoolwide, community-oriented culture. This study examined school culture experiences, especially social participation of eight- and ninth-graders student in basic education and their background factors in relation to absences and use of student welfare services, using the national dataset the 2023 School Health Survey. Theoretical framework of study was formed by Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) ecological systems theory, which conceptualizes the individual-community interaction as processes embedded in school structures and schoolwide, community-focused practices. The data were analyzed using SPSS and Mplus software. Findings indicated that students' sense of belonging and challenges in social relationships were statistically significantly associated with both absences and use of student welfare services. According to the results, if a student felt they belonged to the community and teachers were interested in them, they had fewer school absences. Problems in social relationships, as assessed by students, were more strongly associated with use of individual students' welfare services. The result reinforces the significance of school culture that strengthens participation and community-oriented student welfare in efforts to prevent school absences. High-quality interaction competence among school staff and the strengthening of community-oriented students' welfare are investments of perspectives from both student participation and resourcing of student welfare.

Keywords: school absences; belonging and participation; challenges in social relationships; ecological systems theory; student welfare system as whole.

Developing our understanding of EBSA in autistic students: A multi-stakeholder study

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Emotionally based school avoidance (EBSA) is a pervasive school attendance problem that has been linked with a variety of negative outcomes for the children who experience it. While autistic students are estimated to make up approximately 40% of the children who experience EBSA, there are presently few supportive resources that are available to, and tailored for, neurodiverse families. Within the research literature, there is also little in-depth exploration of the nuances of autistic children's experiences of EBSA, and how support is experienced by families. This study seeks to address this gap by examining the perspectives of three stakeholder groups, and in doing so support the development of more effective interventions that better meet the needs of autistic students struggling with EBSA, and their parents. 17 semi-structured interviews were conducted with clinicians and educators with experience supporting autistic children with EBSA, and parents with lived experience of EBSA. Reflexive Thematic analysis was used to construct themes that first explore the experiences of neurodiverse families as told by parents with lived experience, before addressing the complexities of neurodivergent experiences of EBSA as it is understood by all three stakeholder groups. The findings examine (1) how EBSA is a unique experience for autistic students compared to non-autistic students, (2) the systems that are contributing to the problems autistic students experience and how they impact the support families receive, and (3) stakeholders' visions for the future and how current problems might be addressed.

Keywords: school attendance; autism; multi-perspective study; school distress; interventions.

Bridging the gap: Online learning as a re-engagement pathway for chronically absent youth

Trista Hill

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This presentation introduces a phenomenological study currently underway in Canada, a national context where absenteeism research lags considerably behind international peers. The central research question asks: What is the lived experience of learning online for youth who cannot or will not attend brick-and-mortar school? The study seeks to contribute to a cross-cultural conversation about how education systems can respond to chronic disengagement in new and generative ways. Online learning, ubiquitous during the COVID-19 pandemic, has persisted post-pandemic as a connective bridge between absent students and their schooling. Despite its growing use as a re-engagement strategy, little research, Canadian or international, has specifically examined this phenomenon. This study represents an early and necessary step toward filling that gap. The research draws on a novel theoretical synthesis. The ecological agency model illuminates the interplay of personal history, aspiration, and environmental conditions that enable or constrain a student's decision to disengage. While the Academic Community of Engagement framework models how engagement is sustained during online learning through course structure and personal community. Together, these frameworks trace the trajectory from absenteeism through re-engagement via online modalities. The design applies interpretive phenomenology, centering the voices of youth and supportive adults; perspectives critically underrepresented in absenteeism literature globally. As this study is actively in progress, this presentation is offered in a spirit of collaboration and inquiry. The goal is to stress-test the framework, surface international insights, and collectively reimagine online learning as a meaningful pathway to belonging, agency, and reconnection.

Keywords: Canada; online learning; phenomenology; re-engagement; agency; engagement.

Did anyone ask me? – Student perspectives on school attendance problems and a Tier 3 therapeutic case management intervention

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School attendance rates across Australia had been declining prior to COVID-19, and the pandemic has since accelerated this trend, with levels yet to return to pre-pandemic baselines — placing growing pressure on students, families, schools, and systems. The Australian Government's Senate Inquiry report, *The National Trend of School Refusal and Related Matters* (Australian Government, 2023), calls for a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) to guide interventions and emphasises the meaningful inclusion of all stakeholders, particularly those with lived experience. Despite this, student voice remains a striking gap in the literature, with research predominantly reflecting adult perspectives. This paper presents a pilot mixed-methods project designed to elicit student voice within the evaluation framework of the Attendance Team at Catholic Schools Parramatta Diocese (CSPD), which employs a Tier 3 Therapeutic Case Management (TCM) model for students whose attendance has not improved following Tier 1 and Tier 2 supports within mainstream school settings. Eliciting student perspectives has proven methodologically complex; a previous attempt was unsuccessful, underscoring both the challenge of meaningfully engaging this cohort and the urgency of doing so. The pilot pursues two aims: to deepen understanding of how students experience and make sense of their own attendance difficulties, and to illuminate how students have experienced the TCM intervention itself — without adults speaking on their behalf. Findings will inform the ongoing refinement of the TCM model, contribute to the broader evidence base on school attendance, and ensure that student perspectives are honoured and embedded in future intervention design. It is hoped this pilot will lay the groundwork for a larger evaluative framework eliciting the voices of students, families, and school staff to further strengthen practice and deepen stakeholders' understanding around the complexity and nuanced nature of School Attendance Difficulties.

Keywords: student voice; MTSS; lived experience; evaluation; therapeutic case management.

They should've listened to me – Autistic flourishing as prerequisite for school attendance

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Research examining the experiences of autistic students in mainstream schools underscores that these settings frequently fail to provide the support necessary for students to thrive. Consequently, many autistic learners navigate their education characterized by fear, anxiety, and frustration. While there is an imperative to understand how environments can enable flourishing from the perspective of autistic individuals themselves, research focusing on learners' own views remains scarce. This study adopts a framework proposed by Pellicano (2025), which conceptualizes a flourishing autistic life through four dimensions: People, Place, Purpose, and Power. The research draws on 20 semi-structured interviews with autistic learners in Germany who faced school attendance problems in mainstream settings. The analysis focuses on their articulated needs and visions for systemic change. Utilizing reflexive thematic analysis, the study addresses two central questions: 1. What constitutes a flourishing school life across the four dimensions? 2. Which specific actions can be implemented to foster flourishing within the school environment? Findings reveal that People, Place, Purpose, and Power are not discrete categories but deeply interconnected conditions. Participants' accounts demonstrate that acceptance by People establishes the safety of a Place, while the organization of the place determines whether learning is perceived as meaningful. Crucially, Purpose is only accessible where Power is shared. The results suggest that prioritizing flourishing is a prevention of school absenteeism and therefore a prerequisite for attendance.

Keywords: autism; neurodiversity; inclusive education; student's perspectives; quality of life.

Using novel linkages between health and education data to understand the longitudinal association between school absence and mental health outcomes

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School absence is known to be associated with adolescent mental health problems, however most existing studies are cross-sectional. An understanding of the longitudinal association between school absence and later mental health problems is essential for informing school attendance interventions and mental health prevention and early identification strategies. Two novel data linkages in England have enabled exploration of this association using routinely collected absence data from the Department for Education's National Pupil Database. These data have been linked to de-identified child and adolescent mental health services data from South London, as well as to the Millenium Cohort Study, a nationally representative cohort study. Using these data, we have been able to identify longitudinal associations between persistent school absence (missing >10% of school sessions) and several mental health outcomes: self-reported mental health problems, accepted referrals to mental health services, self-reported self-harm, and self-harm presentations to hospital emergency departments (adjusting for sociodemographic and educational covariates). We also compared the sensitivity and positive predictive value of different absence thresholds for predicting adverse mental health outcomes. Findings from these studies suggest that persistent school absence could be used as an early marker of increased risk for mental health problems, and/or contribute to the development of mental health problems. Future research using these rich data assets could further advance our understanding of the relationship between different patterns/types/trajectories of school absence and various mental health and neurodevelopmental conditions. This could help to inform and evaluate policies and interventions aimed at improving both school attendance and mental health.

Keywords: mental health; school absence; routinely collected data; data linkage; longitudinal studies; early intervention.

Escape room as a tool to promote interest and enthusiasm for attending class

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The activity is offered in primary schools (ages 11 to 12), in the 6th grade of that level. It is an escape-room type experience that consists of various activities involving solving puzzles and clues (like detectives) to unravel a mystery. Participants work in small teams within the classroom. Teams earn points in different ways and in collaborative team activities, but attendance is the main metric. Additionally, they can play with teams from other educational centres that are carrying out the same project. The game includes videos in which an 11-year-old child (AI) asks for help due to a cyberattack, and they must assist. The program lasts three months and consists of seven sessions (five led by a technical team and two by teachers). And coordination meetings between the project leaders and the educational centre. To date, the project has been implemented in 7 schools in the municipality of Elche that experience absenteeism. The evaluation carried out by the management teams shows greater group cohesion and a positive attitude towards school attendance. The activities carried out may vary in form and content, adapting them to the reality of each school, neighbourhood, or population. It is a simple, fun way to motivate attendance in class and a sense of belonging to the group.

Keywords: motivation; absenteeism prevention; play; escape room.

Exploring effective school-based approaches to support young people experiencing emotionally-based school non-attendance

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School absences are a growing international concern. Low school attendance is associated with poorer health and educational outcomes, which contribute to widening inequalities. Absence caused primarily by underlying emotional or psychosocial factors such as anxiety is known as emotionally-based school non-attendance (EBSNA). Limited evidence exists on what school-based supports are available to young people experiencing EBSNA and how effectively these meet their needs. The Addressing Barriers to School Attendance to Improve Long-term outcomes (ABSAIL) project aims to provide practice-driven insights into effective school-based support for EBSNA. Using a case-study methodology with 12 schools, interviews were conducted with young people (n=18), parents/carers (n=21), school staff (n=24) and local authority staff (n=12). Data were analysed using thematic analysis, drawing on systems thinking and critical realist approaches. Participants across groups described numerous, intersecting supports they found effective, including in-school hubs, flexible timetables, and involvement of home school link workers. Participants described key barriers to addressing EBSNA at school level as limited training, inconsistent approaches, communication issues and resourcing.

Supportive relationships and open communication between young people, families and the school were essential to effective management and support. Young people also emphasised the importance of having safe spaces at school and flexible arrangements to accommodate their needs. There is an urgent need to identify broader, systemic, school-based factors which may contribute to school attendance difficulties. These findings highlight innovative approaches to addressing EBSNA, including the development of flexible and supportive environments to enable young people to fulfil their educational potential.

Keywords: emotionally-based school non-attendance (EBSNA); school attendance; school-based support; education; adolescent mental health.

On course for attendance: How schools and school organizers steer their work

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This oral presentation will explore how schools and school organizers can steer attendance work by coordinating policy and practice at an organizational level. The session is grounded in the PRINS model (PReSent IN School), a research-based framework. The model is developed by Aggie Öhman in a Swedish context, but applicable in other contexts as well. The model shows how a structured, data-driven approach can create unified attendance policies, a shared professional language, and systematic interventions across municipalities, private school organizers, and from local to national policy levels. While briefly relating to the model's support and structure for individual cases, the main focus will be on group and organizational levels. The session will lift how leadership, routines, data, analysis, clear responsibilities, decision-making authority, and collaborative structures enable consistent attendance work over time. The PRINS model draws on Multi-Dimensional Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MD-MTSS) and Response to Intervention (RtI). It offers a five-step iterative process: identification, analysis, intervention selection, implementation, and evaluation. The model includes clear roles, forums, and administrative structures. The session connects directly to the conference theme “On Course for Attendance” by demonstrating how schools and organizers can navigate the complex interaction between policy expectations and practical implementation. And how steering the work together can lead towards less absence and more proactive, data-driven attendance cultures.

Keywords: school attendance; organizational development; policy–practice interaction; PRINS model; systematic attendance work; school organizers.

Associations between students' learning experiences and different types of school absence – a structural equation modeling study using national survey data

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School non-attendance is linked to both learning and well-being, yet these dimensions are often studied separately. Less is known about the joint role of learning experiences and school-related well-being in different types of school absence and whether these associations vary across student groups. This study (article in preparation) examines associations between teacher support, classroom climate, school burnout, schoolwork engagement, self-reported learning difficulties, and different types of school absence, as well as variation by gender, immigrant background, and socioeconomic status. The data consist of Finnish 8th and 9th grade students ($N = 83,586$) from a nationwide survey. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to analyze relationships between five latent constructs and five self-reported absence types: tardiness, unexcused, sickness-related, pre-planned, and other absences. Model fit was good and multigroup analyses were conducted across key subgroups. Preliminary results show differentiated associations with school absence. Self-reported learning difficulties emerge as the strongest predictor of school non-attendance. School burnout is positively associated with most absences, whereas schoolwork engagement shows a protective role. Teacher support shows small but consistent negative associations with absences, while classroom climate shows weak direct effects. Explained variance ranges from low to moderate ($R^2 = 0.02\text{--}0.15$), indicating partly distinct processes across absence types. Overall, findings highlight that learning experiences are closely linked to school attendance. Addressing learning-related challenges alongside psychosocial factors and ensuring high-quality pedagogy and adequate learning support may be central to preventing and reducing school non-attendance.

Keywords: school non-attendance; learning experiences; learning difficulties; school well-being; absence types; structural equation modeling.

Cooperation between different welfare services for children and youth in cases of long-term school absence: The role of institutional logics

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Extensive school absenteeism in primary schools is an increasing phenomenon, both in Norway and internationally. In recent years, the trend has been that extensive absenteeism increasingly involves younger students, often from the age of 8–9 years. Such absenteeism is often “wicked problems” for schools, problems that neither have a simple cause nor an obvious solution. They are often composed of various causes and triggering mechanisms that have developed over time, and in many cases, several welfare services for children and young people are involved in these cases. In this paper, I will analyze how two welfare services for children and young people, the school health service and the Educational-Psychological service, collaborate with the school on cases concerning long-term school absenteeism. The data basis for the analyses is in-depth interviews and group interviews with school leaders, teachers, employees in the school health service, and the Educational-Psychological service in 6 schools in Mid-Norway. The concept of institutional logics from institutional sociology provides tools to understand how collective identities are formed, institutionalized, and develop their own distinct institutional logic. Such logics can be related to organizational forms, professional perspectives, or institutional logics related to solving specific societal tasks (Thornton & Ocasio 2016). Through the analyses, I will show that one characteristic of such collaborative relationships is that the different services largely understand each other's professional perspectives. However, what is seen as adequate solutions of measures seems to be formed by different institutional logics, which means that the solutions proposed do not necessarily resonate between the school and the other institutions.

Keywords: school psychology service; school health service; primary school; measures for school non-attendance.

From fragmentation to framework: Co-developing a quality standard for school attendance services

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School absenteeism has emerged as one of the most pressing challenges facing education systems globally. As a critical social determinant, it is associated with significant negative educational, economic, and health outcomes across the lifespan. Increasingly conceptualized as complex and multifaceted, absenteeism reflects the interplay of individual, relational, and contextual factors, as well as diverse patterns of disengagement. In response, school-based approaches have shifted from compliance-oriented models toward a continuum of supports, spanning universal prevention to intensive, wraparound interventions, and emphasizing connections to mental health, well-being, and inclusion. In Canada, limited research, inconsistent data collection, and variability in practice continue to constrain coordinated responses. In the province of Ontario, Attendance Counsellors are provincially funded to support students experiencing school attendance problems, yet the role remains heterogeneous and lacks standardized, evidence-informed guidance. In 2025, the Ontario Association for Counselling and Attendance Services (OACAS) partnered with the Canadian School Attendance Partnership (CSAP) to co-develop a provincial Quality Standard for Attendance Services. This paper presents findings from a participatory mixed-methods study, including two scoping reviews and province-wide practitioner engagement through surveys and a World Café consultation. The resulting framework articulates foundational values, key elements of equity-responsive and relationship-centred practice, system-level enablers, and multidimensional outcomes emphasizing student well-being, engagement, and equity. Implications for research, policy, and cross-sector collaboration will be discussed.

Keywords: school attendance; quality standard; school-based services; attendance counselling.

Reasons for school dropout among students in Turkey: A systematic review

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The Turkish education system is a macro-system comprising nearly 18 million students and over one million teachers in primary and secondary education (Ministry of National Education [MoNE], 2025). This large system suffers from significant issues such as its overly centralized and hierarchical structure (Duyar et al., 2013), as well as deficiencies in physical, academic, and technological capacity, and problems related to teacher qualifications (Aslan, 2021). Another major issue the Turkish education system is facing is the high rate of early school dropout (Bayrakçeken et al., 2025). Although some significant policies aimed at preventing early school leaving have been implemented in recent years, the rate remains well above the European Union average (Eurostat, 2021). It is well known that school dropout has significant consequences for individuals, societies, and the economy (Gubbels et al., 2019; Kearney et al., 2019; Psyridou et al., 2024). For this reason, like many other countries, Turkey has placed the prevention of early school dropout at the center of its education policies. In this context, a series of reform-oriented initiatives and projects have been implemented in Turkey. For example, the mandatory education period was extended from 8 to 12 years; vocational education reforms were introduced; financial aid programs and mentoring initiatives were launched; and large-scale projects such as the “1,000 Schools Project in Vocational Education,” the “Education Participation and Absenteeism Monitoring Project,” and the “Project to Increase Attendance and Enrollment Rates in Secondary Education” were implemented. Additionally, Erasmus+ and eTwinning projects and second-chance programs such as open education schools have been expanded. However, despite all these efforts, early school dropout remains one of the most significant problems facing the Turkish education system.

Keywords: early school leaving; policies to prevent early school leaving; systematic review; Türkiye.

Chronic absenteeism in Chilean primary education: Territorial patterning and associations with academic achievement and school context

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In Chile, chronic absenteeism (CA) may depend on both persistence and the school context (1, 2). Although studies have reported associations between school attendance, National Student Achievement Testing System (SIMCE) performance, and Personal and Social Development Indicators (IDPS) (3), less is known about their territorial patterning and persistence in the post-pandemic period. This study examined the territorial distribution of absenteeism in primary education and its association with school-level academic achievement and contextual indicators. We constructed a longitudinal student-year panel of primary education students using national attendance records from 2022 to 2025. Moderate and severe absenteeism rates were estimated by grade and region to identify territories with contrasting exposure. School-level multivariable linear regression models were fitted separately for Grade 4 (2023, 2024) and Grade 6 (2024), with mean SIMCE reading or mathematics scores as outcomes and the proportion of students with attendance below 89.9% as the main predictor, first adjusting for region and then for IDPS indicators. While Region 3 displayed the highest rate, Region 7 presented the lowest level of CA; hence, both were selected for comparative analysis. Higher school-level CA was associated with lower SIMCE scores, with the strongest associations observed in Grade 6 in 2024 for reading ($\beta = -0.222$, $p < 0.001$) and mathematics ($\beta = -0.266$, $p < 0.001$). Model fit improved after adjustment for IDPS ($R^2 = 0.330$ and 0.307 , respectively; Fig. 1), although the negative association remained significant, suggesting that CA is linked to academic achievement beyond broader school-context factors.

Keywords: chronic absenteeism; primary education; academic achievement; school attendance; territorial inequalities.

Supporting autistic students with early signs of EBSA: Investigating the feasibility of a teacher implemented intervention

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Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) in autistic students is an increasing concern. Early, targeted steps to support ongoing attendance are recommended within a Multidimensional Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MD-MTSS) however there is limited guidance on interventions that are theoretically grounded, informed by lived experience and feasible for teachers to implement within everyday classroom practice. To address this gap in the literature, this project is guided by a systematic intervention development process and draws on contemporary behavioural approaches. This includes exploration of how teacher practices in response to early signs of EBSA can shape student engagement. An exploratory sequential mixed methods design was used. In the first strand, qualitative interviews with parents and school learning-diversity leaders informed the design of the intervention, ensuring it reflected lived experience and the practical realities of school-based support. The intervention was designed as an enhanced Tier 1 approach, positioned between Tier 1 and Tier 2, and aligned with existing approaches used in schools within Victoria, Australia. In the second strand, teachers participated in a workshop introducing the intervention before an implementation pilot was commenced. Within this strand, feasibility was examined using a quantitative approach. Findings from both strands will be presented, alongside implications for teacher-implemented approaches to supporting autistic students experiencing early signs of EBSA.

Keywords: EBSA; autism; early intervention; teacher practices; MD-MTSS.

When is school no longer the best place for a child? A qualitative study on how professionals in the Netherlands decide on medical exemptions from school attendance

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In the Netherlands, children may be exempted from school attendance on physical or psychological grounds, but in the absence of standardized criteria, socio medical assessments rely on professional judgment, which may result in variation and inequality. International and national legislation obliges schools to provide support for students with special needs, raising the question of when a child is considered too ill to attend school despite these measures. This study aims to explore the determinants and criteria applied by professionals in socio medical assessments for exemptions. This qualitative study included eleven physicians and one educational psychologist. Participants were interviewed using a semi structured topic guide addressing their approach to assessing exemptions from school attendance. All interviews were audio recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed thematically through an iterative coding process until data saturation was achieved. Analysis revealed four interrelated themes: best interest of the child, navigating legal frameworks, constructing a holistic child profile, and sensing, taking and sharing responsibility. This study contributes to a better understanding of the complexity of socio medical assessments for exemptions. They require a holistic, collaborative approach rather than a fixed checklist. The study highlights the need for clear guidelines, shared interpretation of legislation, and further research into the target group and long-term outcomes. These insights provide a foundation for developing evidence informed guidelines to promote consistency and equity in socio medical assessments, which may help reduce variability and support more equal educational opportunities.

Keywords: socio-medical assessment; exemption; compulsory education; youth health physician; medical advisory physician; school absenteeism.

From public awareness to national action: Establishing a knowledge centre on school attendance in Denmark

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National Knowledge Center on School Attendance (Denmark)

School absence has been a growing concern in Denmark for years, widely experienced by practitioners, families, and children. However, in autumn 2025, a national TV documentary series brought the issue into the homes of the general public, creating widespread awareness and sparking significant political attention. Within two months of the broadcast, 130 million DKK was allocated to address school absence over a four-year period. As part of this initiative, a National Knowledge Centre on School Attendance was established in March 2026. This presentation invites participants into the thinking behind the centre: its purpose, core focus areas, and the strategic direction for the coming four years. The session will explore how the centre aims to strengthen knowledge, support practice, and contribute to more coherent, cross-sector approaches to school attendance. Drawing on early developments, the presentation highlights how national momentum can be translated into meaningful change for children, families, and professionals. It will also address key questions: What kind of knowledge is needed? How can it be mobilised effectively? And how can we create new pathways for participation? The session is both an inspirational and forward-looking contribution, offering hope and concrete perspectives for developing more inclusive and sustainable responses to school absence.

Keywords: school attendance; national policy; knowledge centre; public awareness; cross-sector collaboration; systemic change.

Being heard or being blamed? Marginalized perspectives of young people and families facing school attendance problems

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School attendance problems (SAPs) are understood as a complex and multifactorial phenomenon shaped by the interplay of individual, family, school, and societal factors. One-sided perspectives on these factors, as well as a narrow focus on specific actors, fail to capture this complexity and may lead to unidirectional attributions of blame. Previous research has primarily relied on the perspectives of professionals, while the voices of young people and their families have rarely served as the starting point for academic discussion, despite growing attention in recent studies. Moreover, studies show that parents often feel held responsible for their children's absences and experience mistrust and criticism from school staff (Hansen et al., 2025; Lissack & Boyle, 2022). However, research centering the experiences and perceptions of adolescents and their families remains limited. This presentation draws on a qualitative, multiperspective study based on the Grounded Theory Methodology. Data were collected through problem-centred interviews with five school-absent adolescents with special educational needs, their mothers, class teachers, school social workers, and other professionals. This contribution focuses on the perspectives of adolescents and their families. The findings show that these perspectives are often not sufficiently considered or are even dismissed, leading to their marginalization. Key categories include experiences of injustice, struggles to be heard, stress and discomfort at school, and perceived devaluation of parental competencies. The results highlight the need to critically reflect on professional practices and power dynamics. Strengthening participatory approaches that actively incorporate these perspectives is essential for more equitable responses to SAPs.

Keywords: school attendance problems (SAPs); students' voices; family perspectives; marginalized perspectives; experiences of injustice; qualitative research.

The struggle for belonging: Everyday life experiences of “absent” children

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Prolonged school absenteeism has increasingly been framed as an individual problem related to motivation, anxiety, or academic failure. This paper challenges such understandings by foregrounding children’s everyday experiences of being absent. Drawing on institutional ethnography as theory and method, the study explores how prolonged absenteeism shapes children’s daily lives and how school practices organize their experiences. The empirical material consists of interviews, observations, and institutional documents involving nine children with prolonged absenteeism in primary school. Starting from the children’s standpoint, the analysis examines the work children carry out to remain connected to school, including efforts to sustain social belonging, explain their absence, and navigate institutional expectations of attendance. The findings show that prolonged absenteeism is experienced primarily as a disruption of social belonging rather than academic loss. Regardless of why they are absent, children describe social exclusion and the loss of friendships as the hardest consequences, making it difficult to feel like a legitimate part of school life. The analysis demonstrates how institutional practices and ruling relations – such as attendance expectations, documentation, diagnoses, and dominant discourses of normality – coordinate children’s everyday work and self-understandings. Children invest substantial effort in appearing present, explaining their absence, and maintaining social ties despite exclusion from classroom participation. The paper argues that prolonged absenteeism cannot be understood as individual deviation or lack of motivation but emerges through institutional arrangements that privilege measurable attendance and academic progress over relational conditions for participation. It highlights social belonging as a central condition for meaningful participation in school.

Keywords: prolonged school absence; social belonging; children’s perspectives; institutional ethnography.

An approach to improve school attendance in Amsterdam - The Netherlands

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Sustainable improvement in school attendance requires more than knowledge of the MD-MTSS framework alone. In our work as educational process facilitators, we focus on supporting schools in translating the framework into daily practice through long-term, system-oriented guidance. In this session, we will share how we guide School Attendance Teams (SATs) in secondary schools through a two-year programme combining workshops with ongoing coaching and process facilitation. Within the workshops, teams strengthen their understanding of the MD-MTSS framework while simultaneously applying it within their own school context. What makes this approach effective is the integration of principles from change management, data-informed practice, and solution-focused and needs-based working. Rather than introducing isolated interventions, we support teams in embedding new ways of thinking and acting into their daily routines and structures. Alongside the workshops, coaching plays a crucial role. By working closely with schools, we tailor the process to their specific culture, structure, and starting point. This allows us to move with the school's pace, strengthen ownership within teams, and support sustainable implementation over time. This approach helps schools move beyond reactive responses to absenteeism and towards a shared, preventive, and system-oriented way of working. By strengthening collaboration, clarity of roles, and collective responsibility, schools become better equipped to recognise attendance patterns early and respond in a more consistent and supportive way.

Keywords: ownership; coaching on process; solution-focused thinking; needs-based approach; change management.

Implementing Back2School in Aarhus municipality: Results from a municipal implementation of an evidence based school attendance intervention

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Problematic school absence poses a major challenge for children, families, and public services. Back2School (B2S) is a systemic structured cognitive behavioral intervention that has previously demonstrated effectiveness in a randomized controlled trial. Building on this evidence, B2S has been implemented within municipal services in Aarhus Municipality, Denmark. This oral presentation focuses on results from the municipal implementation of B2S. Data have been collected as part of routine practice from approximately 280 children referred to the intervention, with outcome analyses based on participants with complete pre and post intervention data. Outcomes include school attendance, parent and teacher reported emotional and behavioral difficulties, functional impact, and satisfaction with the intervention. At the INSA conference, I will present quantitative results showing significant improvements in school attendance and reductions in emotional difficulties and functional impact, with small to moderate effect sizes. In addition, high levels of parent and teacher satisfaction will be presented, particularly regarding trust in practitioners, quality of information, and collaboration between families and schools. The presentation will also highlight variability in outcomes and discuss how results from this real-world municipal implementation compare with findings from the original RCT. The findings provide practice relevant evidence on the effectiveness, acceptability, and implementation of Back2School in a public service context.

Keywords: school attendance; back2school; municipal implementation; evidence-based intervention; parent and teacher satisfaction.

Beyond anxiety: Understanding school avoidance through shame and pathways to re-engagement

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Knowledge Centre on School Attendance (Denmark)

Increasing numbers of children and young people are withdrawing from school. While school absence is often understood through the lens of anxiety, this presentation argues that shame is a critical – and frequently overlooked – core mechanism in many cases of school avoidance. Drawing on practice-based knowledge and emerging insights, the session explores the distinction between anxiety driven and shame driven absence, and why this distinction matters for how professionals respond. For many students, experiences of not belonging, constant comparison, and eventual resignation contribute to a deep sense of shame that leads to withdrawal and disconnection. The presentation addresses a key challenge: how to engage with children and young people who have effectively “shut down.” It explores how shame operates not only in students, but also in parents and professionals, often shaping interactions in ways that unintentionally reinforce avoidance. A central argument is that meaningful intervention can only begin once shame is recognised and regulated. The session introduces practical, relational approaches to working with shame, rebuilding trust, and creating conditions for re engagement. Participants will gain a new conceptual lens for understanding school absence, along with concrete strategies for responding in ways that reduce shame and support renewed participation.

Keywords: school avoidance; shame; school absence; student withdrawal; belonging; relational practice.

Factors that promote sustainability in school attendance programs

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Fundación Educacional Oportunidad (Chile)

Getting an educational intervention to have a lasting impact requires more than a good idea: it demands a rigorous, sustained, and coordinated process that takes into account the institutional context and the dynamics of the educational community. Numerous studies agree that the sustainability of a program depends on multiple factors, among them, technical support, adaptation to the context, team commitment, distribution of leadership, and integration into organizational structures. In Chile, the experience of Fundación Oportunidad's School Attendance Program shows that, when these factors come together, it is possible to build a solid foundation for lasting change. Designed to address chronic absenteeism in pre-K and K, this program has succeeded in establishing itself as a practice that goes beyond the external support period of two years, becoming embedded in the institutional culture of the participating early childhood education settings. The program's strategies include the creation of attendance committees, the implementation of the "Attendance Panel" to encourage family participation, and the use of the educational character "Super Attendance," which playfully reinforces the value of attendance. These actions have been adapted according to the context of each preschool, allowing for both universal and targeted interventions. Its success lies in a collaborative, adaptable, and forward-looking approach. Continuous support has been crucial for effectively transferring practices, while the program's flexibility has enabled its contextual integration within diverse communities. This is further reinforced by distributed leadership that fosters shared responsibility among educational stakeholders, and coordination with families that strengthens the collective understanding of the importance of attendance.

Keywords: educational trajectories; school attendance leadership; attendance culture; professional development; sustainable programs.

A change in posture from the New Zealand Ministry of Education – attendance interventions

Melanie Taite

The Ministry of Education (New Zealand)

Across many education systems, declining student attendance has prompted governments to reassess how responsibility, accountability, and intervention are applied. In Aotearoa New Zealand, this has resulted in a notable change in posture by the Ministry of Education, with increased emphasis on formal intervention, escalation, and prosecution as levers to address persistent non attendance. This presentation examines that shift and explores what it means for learners, families, schools, and communities. Attendance challenges in New Zealand are shaped by a complex mix of social, cultural, historical and economic factors. For many learners, particularly those experiencing poverty, trauma, marginalisation, or intergenerational disengagement from schooling, non attendance is not a simple matter of choice. However, recent system responses have placed greater focus on compliance based mechanisms, clearer thresholds for intervention, and strengthened legal responses to non attendance. This session explores how and why this shift has occurred, and what it reveals about system pressure, public expectations, and political accountability. The presentation provides insight into how this posture is being experienced at the front line. It examines the impacts of intensified intervention on schools, attendance services, whānau, and particularly on children already identified as most at risk. The session highlights tensions that arise when enforcement tools are applied in contexts where trust in institutions is fragile, and where underlying barriers to attendance remain unresolved. It asks whether stronger enforcement alone can sustain attendance, or whether balanced approaches that prioritise trust, support, and relationships are required to keep vulnerable learners connected and systems genuinely on course.

Keywords: intervention; compliance; change; government; policy.

From individual cases to systemic patterns: A tiered, data-driven approach to reducing chronic absenteeism in Chilean schools

Rebeca Molina, Oriana Pizarro & Andrés Contreras

Fundación Presente (Chile)

Interventions targeting chronic absenteeism commonly focus on intensive, individualised support for the highest-risk students. While valuable, this approach can obscure systemic patterns, exhaust school teams, and lead to inefficient resource allocation — addressing symptoms rather than causes. This presentation reports on Fundación Presente's experience implementing a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) for attendance across 24 schools in 2024 and 16 schools in 2025 in Chile, a context where chronic absenteeism affects 44.5% of the national student population. Rather than prioritising individual case management, the programme applied a stepped-care logic that shifts the analytical focus from individual students to school- and classroom-level patterns. Using a purpose-built data visualisation platform, school teams were supported to identify previously invisible trends: peak absenteeism on Fridays and days surrounding long weekends; sharp declines in attendance during December rather than mid-year; absenteeism driven primarily by low valuation of schooling rather than logistical barriers; and attendance gaps linked to specific teacher absences and shortened school days. These systemic insights enabled the design of universal strategies under the I.D.A.R. framework (Identify, Challenge, Ensure Meaningful Classes, Remind), targeted pedagogical adjustments, and focused awareness campaigns — all at whole-school level. Across both cohorts, schools showed mean increases in cumulative attendance of +3.7 percentage points (2024 cohort, n=24 schools) and +1.97 percentage points (2025 cohort, n=16 schools), alongside a 14.9% reduction in chronic absenteeism rates in 2025. In the most improved schools, the distribution of students across attendance tiers shifted dramatically — reversing the inverted pyramid that characterises most educational systems. These findings suggest that a systemic, universal approach is both more sustainable and more cost-effective than case-by-case intervention for addressing chronic absenteeism at scale.

Keywords: chronic absenteeism; multi-tiered system of supports; data-driven practice; universal strategies; school attendance; Chile.

Words matter!
**Words and definitions in Dutch education policy and education
legislation in relation to the MDMTSS model**

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Ingrado (Nederland)

A literal translation of the Dutch term for children who have been absent from school for more than a month is “sitters at home” (“thuiszitters”). This term carries various implications. Most importantly, it seems to assume a characteristic of the child. In Dutch education policy, the term “thuiszitters” is limited to unauthorized absence. However, the term “thuiszitters” and the government policy around it are increasingly being questioned by various organizations that refer to the right to education as enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights. The growing familiarity with the multidimensional, multi-tiered support model (MDMTSS) has also played a role in this. The beginning of a transition is becoming visible, for example in the recently adopted bill “Reducing school absenteeism”. We will show what the criticism and the transition look like—also in terms of the words being used—and how these relate to the MDMTSS model. In addition, we explain what Ingrado (the Dutch association of compulsory education officers) is doing to take the implementation of this model a step further and, in this context, is looking for better words. Because words matter.

Keywords: longterm absenteeism; MDMTSS model; transition; The Netherlands.

Mapping the psychological pathways among school experiences, perfectionism, anxiety, and self-regulation in students: A meta-analytic structural equation modeling

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School experiences—which encompass indicators such as school engagement, school adjustment, and school belonging—are considered key determinants of students’ developmental processes, academic achievement, and school attendance. However, students’ school experiences can also be shaped by individual psychological characteristics, including perfectionism tendencies, anxiety levels, and self-regulation skills. The literature indicates limited research examining the relationships between these psychological constructs and school experiences within a comprehensive model. Further evidence is needed regarding how interactions among perfectionism, anxiety, and self-regulation shape students’ school experiences. Accordingly, this study aims to examine the relationships among students’ school experiences, perfectionism tendencies, anxiety levels, and self-regulation skills using the meta-analytic structural equation modeling (MASEM) approach. By integrating primary data from various studies, the study aims to identify direct and indirect relationships among these variables. A comprehensive literature search was conducted in the Web of Science and Scopus databases to identify relevant studies. No year restrictions were applied; the document type was limited to “article” and the publication language to “English.” The initial search identified 4,535 studies, which will be screened through title, abstract, and full-text evaluations based on inclusion criteria. A meta-analytic correlation matrix will be constructed using correlation matrices and sample sizes from eligible studies, and the proposed structural model will be tested using MASEM. Model fit will be evaluated through goodness-of-fit indices. The expected findings are anticipated to contribute to understanding the relationships between students’ school experiences and perfectionism, anxiety, and self-regulation processes based on a broader sample. Furthermore, the results are expected to provide a theoretical foundation for interventions aimed at strengthening self-regulation skills and reducing the potential negative effects of perfectionism and anxiety on school experiences.

Keywords: school experiences; perfectionism; anxiety; self-regulation.

The winning trio around child suffering school refusal (SR): The experience seen by the parents

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We are a French association representing 15,500 families, established in 2008. As parent volunteers and, in a sense, expert patients, our primary mission is to provide peer support to families. Based on our experience, we believe that supporting parents and helping them navigate the challenges of school refusal (SR) is a crucial step in helping children and young people improve their mental health and find their way back to learning and school attendance. The focus of our latest conference and roundtable was “The Winning Trio ‘School–Family–Care’ Against School Refusal: Reality or Utopia?” Drawing on the experiential knowledge gained from supporting thousands of families, we have found that this winning trio is essential, yet in practice it is far from guaranteed over the long term. Numerous obstacles can hinder effective collaboration, including difficulties in understanding the perspectives of other stakeholders, differing timelines and priorities, the constraints faced by each party, and the challenge of recognising that parents can also be experts on their own child alongside healthcare and education professionals. In our view, maintaining trust among all stakeholders, building genuine partnerships, and adopting pragmatic and creative approaches tailored to each child’s unique situation are, above all, matters of mindset. This presentation will explore the factors that, based on our experience, can either facilitate or hinder the development of this winning trio, examining each side of the triangle (family, healthcare, and school) from the perspective of families.

Keywords: school refusal; parents’ expertise; stakeholders alliance; winning trio.

Academic-emotional predictors of school attendance in adolescence: The role of emotional intelligence, school anxiety, and school refusal

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Adolescence is a critical developmental period in which emotional and academic processes interact and may influence students' adjustment and school attendance. Difficulties in emotional regulation, school anxiety, and school refusal may increase vulnerability to school avoidance and absenteeism, yet these factors are often examined separately. This presentation introduces a recently funded research project that aims to develop and test an integrated model of academic-emotional vulnerability in adolescents, with a particular focus on factors associated with school attendance and the prevention of school refusal and absenteeism (PII2027_23). The project will examine the relationships between emotional intelligence, school anxiety, school refusal, learning strategies, and causal attributions, while exploring the mediating role of self-concept. A cross-sectional, multivariate study will be conducted with approximately 700 students aged 12–18 years enrolled in compulsory secondary and upper secondary education in public and publicly funded schools in Alicante, Spain. Validated instruments will be used to assess emotional intelligence, school anxiety, school refusal, learning strategies, causal attributions, and multidimensional self-concept. Hypothesized relationships will be examined using Structural Equation Modeling, including mediation analyses with bootstrapping procedures. The project is expected to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of emotional and academic vulnerability associated with school attendance difficulties and to support the identification of risk profiles. Ultimately, its findings aim to inform preventive interventions targeting emotional regulation, self-concept, and academic self-regulation to promote regular school attendance and prevent school refusal and absenteeism.

Keywords: emotional intelligence; school anxiety; school refusal; school attendance; absenteeism; self-concept; adolescents; academic-emotional vulnerability.

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SARA LINDERDAHL

School attendance problems and intellectual disabilities: A systematic review

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School attendance problems are associated with negative academic, social, and mental health outcomes (Kearney, 2016). Students with intellectual disabilities (ID) may be particularly at risk due to health-related challenges, limited accessibility, and insufficient educational support (Melvin et al., 2023). However, evidence on school attendance problems in this population has not yet been systematically synthesized. This systematic review aims to synthesize empirical studies on school absenteeism among students with ID, focusing on the scope of available studies, reported prevalence and forms of absenteeism, and associated individual, familial, and school-related factors. The ongoing review follows PRISMA guidelines and is conducted using Covidence systematic review management software. A comprehensive search is being conducted in PsycINFO, Scopus, PubMed, Psyn dex, Education Source, ProQuest, and Web of Science. Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods studies in compulsory education are eligible. Out of 876 identified records, 40 eligible studies were included for data extraction and quality assessment. Study selection, data extraction, and quality appraisal are performed independently by two reviewers. Research highlights school attendance problems among students with ID as a critical issue, driven by a complex interplay of health-related, familial, and school-based factors. The final systematic synthesis will map key themes, report prevalences, and associated factors. This review will provide a comprehensive overview of evidence on school absenteeism among students with ID, highlight knowledge gaps, and inform future research, educational practice, and policy. A successful school attendance and specific support for children and adolescents with ID are essential to ensuring that their right to education is realized.

Keywords: school attendance problems; students with intellectual disabilities; special education; systematic review.

Early signs, early support: Evaluating the EAGLE model for emerging school absenteeism

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EAGLE (Early Absenteeism Guide for Lifelong Education) is an early intervention model designed to address emerging school absenteeism in the early elementary years by targeting both children and their parents. In educational context where timely and accessible responses are critical, EAGLE provides a structured and readily implementable framework for school staff, delivered over a ten-week period. Developed by school psychologists, the model places particular emphasis on strengthening home-school collaboration. The intervention includes three structured meetings involving school staff and parents, as well as two sessions led by a school psychologist for parents, focusing on anxiety, avoidance, and early indicators of attendance difficulties. A pilot study has been conducted, indicating promising results in terms of both feasibility and potential effectiveness. Building on these findings, a larger controlled study is planned for spring 2027. This study will examine the extent to which EAGLE can prevent the escalation of absenteeism, as well as how parents and school personnel perceive its impact on communication, shared problem solving, and collaboration surrounding the child. Qualitative interviews from the pilot study further suggest that many parents of children with attendance difficulties report having experienced similar challenges during their own schooling. The forthcoming study will explore whether and how such experiences should be addressed in efforts to support families and prevent absenteeism.

Keywords: school attendance problems; early interventions; school psychology; parent-school collaboration; preventive intervention.

Collaboration between care and education: Insights from consultations in complex situations in the Netherlands

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In complex cases where care has reached an impasse, effective collaboration between care and education is crucial, yet it does not occur automatically. Professionals operate from separate frames, systems and responsibilities, while families need an integrated approach that connects with the child's everyday environment. This poster presents success factors and barriers in the collaboration between care and schools to support school attendance among children, based on insights from consultations conducted by the Centre for Consultation and Expertise (CCE) in the Netherlands. CCE provides an external, fresh perspective in situations where children, parents and professionals struggle to move forward. Our earlier studies show that integrated coordination, shared decision-making with parents, and tailored educational and care trajectories help prevent school exclusion and drop-out and strengthen developmental opportunities. Successful trajectories are characterized by unconditional commitment, flexibility, connecting different life domains, and creating one shared plan around the child. This poster presents focus group results based on consultation experiences illustrating the conditions that facilitate collaboration, the structural bottlenecks that are repeatedly observed, and how partners can organize shared responsibility and coordination in complex situations related to school attendance. The aim of this poster is to share practice-based insights and stimulate dialogue about sustainable forms of collaboration between care and education in situations that have reached an impasse, ultimately contributing to school attendance and supporting children's development within a supportive context.

Keywords: school attendance, care–education collaboration, integrated support, complex situations.

Toolkit - 'From law to mindset redraw'

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On April 7, 2026, the School Absenteeism Reduction Act was approved in the Netherlands. The legislation, expected to enter into force on September 1, 2027, aims to prevent and reduce long-term school absenteeism and unjustified school exemptions. Effective implementation requires not only legal compliance but also professional engagement across multiple levels of the education system. Steunpunt Passend Onderwijs developed a practice-oriented implementation toolkit translating statutory requirements into actionable guidance for educational professionals. The development process combined empirical field research, international comparative insights, and stakeholder participation. Data has been collected during the KNSA Congress 2025 through written feedback, short interviews, and a structured small-group session involving 30 participants. In addition, a multidisciplinary think tank contributed expertise from policy, practice, and behavioral science. The toolkit was structured using the COM-B behavior change model, addressing capability, opportunity, and motivation. The resulting toolkit consists of downloadable, role-specific resources tailored to classroom teachers, internal support professionals, school-based ambassadors, school leaders, policy advisors, school administrators, supra-school strategic policymakers, and regional cooperation bodies in primary and secondary education. The tools address both operational and strategic implementation challenges and emphasize coherence across organizational levels. By integrating legal, behavioral, and practical perspectives, the toolkit supports a shift from compliance-driven implementation toward a shared professional mindset. The COM-B-based structure promotes implementation and behavioral change towards a more effective and coherent approach to reducing school absenteeism.

Keywords: implementation of education policy; tools for school absenteeism; mindset; inclusive education.

Patterns of school attendance problems related to gender: A cluster analysis examining German secondary school students

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While girls and boys are comparable in school absenteeism prevalences, research indicates that there might be a difference in patterns of school attendance problems (Havik et al., 2015). Concerning non-binary students, the few studies including this group point to a higher risk for disintegration, internalizing problems and absenteeism (Day et al., 2022; Chaphekar et al., 2024). Using data from the SANSCHO study (analytic sample $N = 3686$), we conducted a cluster analysis to identify patterns of school attendance problems and examine their relationship to gender. The data yield a cluster ($n = 2110$) of well-integrated students that don't manifest emotional nor conduct difficulties and have little challenges related to school attendance, a cluster of emotionally distressed but behaviorally inconspicuous students ($n = 1007$) with high levels of emotional problems and above average emotionally-based school attendance problems, and a high-risk cluster ($n = 569$) of poorly integrated students manifesting conduct problems, and disengagement as well as emotionally-based absences. Examining the distribution of girls, boys and students who stated to be undecided in terms of gender ($n = 46$) within these clusters, there is overrepresentation of girls in the emotionally distressed cluster, an overrepresentation of boys both in the high-risk cluster and the well-integrated cluster, and an overrepresentation of the undecided group in both risk clusters respectively. Though not deterministic, these results point to a tendency in patterns of school attendance problems related to gender and imply that differentiated measures for prevention and intervention should also consider gender as a relevant dimension.

Keywords: school attendance problems; gender; cluster analysis; sexual minorities; school-belonging; emotional and conduct problems.

Introducing the INSA questionnaire database: Tools for understanding and addressing school attendance problems

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School attendance problems (SAPs) are a widespread and persistent challenge in education systems and call for clear, structured ways of identifying, understanding, and addressing attendance difficulties. As the INSA community stays on course for attendance, shared tools and sustainable resources are needed to support implementation and long-term system-level work. This poster introduces the INSA Questionnaire Database, a concrete resource developed to support continued attention to school attendance. The database brings together questionnaires related to school attendance and absenteeism that are available through the INSA Network website. It includes instruments targeting different age groups and informants and covering a range of attendance-related domains. The poster provides an overview of all questionnaires currently included in the database, describing what they measure, intended use, target groups, available languages, and evaluation status. By making these tools visible and easily accessible in one place, the database supports practitioners, researchers, and policymakers in selecting appropriate measures and promoting consistency across contexts. The INSA Questionnaire Database reflects an evolving, societal-level approach to SAPs and contributes to sustainable implementation by supporting shared understanding, informed practice, and continued focus on attendance—helping the field remain firmly on course for attendance.

Keywords: INSA questionnaire database; assessment; identification; standardized instruments; available resources.

From experience to action: English resources on school attendance and youth participation

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Over the past years, our organisation has co-developed a wide range of English-language materials focused on school attendance, inclusion, and youth participation. These resources are grounded in lived experience and co-created with young people who have faced significant barriers to education, including chronic absenteeism, school refusal, and exclusion from decision-making processes. This poster presentation showcases key outputs such as the 11-Point Plan on School Attendance, The Classroom Anchor, The Collaboration Game, the book *How Are You Doing?*, the webpages of the Netherlands Youth Institute (Nederlands Jeugdinstituut) on the right to be heard (hoorrecht), and the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (OCW) youth vision document on inclusive education. Together, these tools translate complex experiences into accessible insights and practical guidance for professionals, policymakers, and youth workers. We will highlight how these resources can be used in practice to improve understanding, strengthen dialogue between young people and professionals, and support more inclusive and preventive approaches to attendance challenges. Participants are invited to explore, discuss, and adapt these materials within their own national and professional contexts, with a strong emphasis on ensuring that youth perspectives are not only included, but structurally embedded in policy and practice.

Keywords: youth participation; inclusion; transportation issues; school safety; pedagogical environment; inclusive language.

A retrospective analysis of parent-reported school attendance problems: Unspecified reasons and the dominance of school refusal

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The present study analysed demographic and assessment data on Japanese students with school attendance problems (SAPs), collected through school-based parent consultations conducted by school counsellors. Participants were 62 parents (one parent per student) of elementary and secondary school students with SAPs who sought support between 2020 and 2024. During the initial consultation, all participants completed the Parent Intake Questionnaire for School Attendance Problems (PIQ-SAP), which was developed by the authors for clinical use in parent consultations based on the School Non-Attendance Checklist (SNACK). The mean age of the students was 12.3 years (SD = 2.13), with no significant sex differences. A substantial proportion of parents reported unspecified reasons for SAPs (33.9%), making this one of the most frequently endorsed categories alongside friendship-related issues. SAPs were predominantly classified as school refusal (77.4%), with relatively few cases of truancy or school withdrawal. No significant associations were found between SAP types and demographic or contextual variables. At-home activities during school absence were characterised by high engagement in screen-based activities, particularly smartphone or tablet use (79.0%), followed by sleeping and gaming. A significant association was found between school grade and SAP type, indicating developmental differences in the presentation of SAPs. These findings suggest that parent-reported data represent an essential source of information when direct assessment of children with SAPs is not feasible, while also highlighting potential biases and the need for cautious interpretation.

Keywords: school attendance problems; school-based parent consultation; parent intake questionnaire for school attendance problems; retrospective study.

Grade-independent studies to support school engagement

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School dropout is a major societal concern due to its long-term consequences for young people's employment, well-being, and social inclusion. In Finland, the school dropout rate in 2023 was close to the EU average (9,6%) but rose by 1,2% on the previous year. To address this challenge, Finland has implemented a support model, grade-independent studying, that allows students to complete basic education flexibly and enrol in upper secondary education. In this model, incomplete studies do not require repeating the entire grade. Instead, students continue where they left off the following academic year, and completed credits remain valid. In this context, the aim of this study is to examine school engagement of young people at risk of dropping out during the final years of basic education. The theoretical basis of this study is grounded in three dimensions of school engagement: affective, behavioural, and cognitive (e.g., Fredricks et al., 2004). In this study, 21 young people studying grade-independently in lower secondary school were interviewed using a thematic approach to analyse the manifestation and development of their school engagement. School engagement varied, particularly before the transition to grade-independent studies. Despite weakened behavioural engagement, emotional and cognitive engagement remained evident in these young people's thoughts and actions. Social relationships were experienced as factors that strengthened or weakened school engagement among these young people. According to the results, school pedagogical practices during grade-independent studies reduced student absenteeism, promoted school engagement, and supported attendance and completion of studies.

Keywords: school drop-out; engagement; support; grade-independent studies; attendance.

What does PISA really measure? Evidence on school absenteeism from socio-emotional competencies

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Truancy refers to unexcused school absenteeism traditionally linked to active processes of school disengagement, low academic involvement, and weaker associations with school-related anxiety, constituting an indicator of educational disconnection included in international assessments such as PISA. From this perspective, socio-emotional competencies such as perseverance and stress resistance may play a relevant role in understanding truancy. While perseverance is related to educational continuity and academic self-regulation, stress resistance may show differential associations depending on the underlying motivations for absenteeism, particularly when absences are linked to the avoidance of stressful school situations as opposed to the search for external rewards outside the educational setting. The aim of this study was to analyse the relationship between perseverance, stress resistance, and school absenteeism across European Union countries. Using a quantitative *ex post facto* design, data from PISA 2022 corresponding to 183,894 students from 24 European countries were analysed. Multiple imputation procedures with Blimp and binary logistic regression models were conducted using IDB Analyzer. The results show that perseverance acts as a protective factor against truancy, particularly in Belgium, Estonia, and Portugal. Conversely, stress resistance significantly increases the odds of truancy in most analysed countries, except Finland. These findings suggest that the absenteeism measure used in PISA may be capturing profiles more closely related to external positive reinforcement than to avoidance-based forms of school refusal, highlighting the importance of integrating emotional well-being and anxiety indicators into absenteeism assessments and fostering perseverance among students involved in truancy.

Keywords: absenteeism; PISA; socio-emotional competencies; perseverance; stress.

Absence and help-seeking: Are persistently absent students less likely to receive or ask for support with their mental health?

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In the United Kingdom, rates of mental health difficulties experienced by children and young people (CYP) are rising alongside persistent absence (PA; attendance <90%). The relationship is likely bidirectional as mental health difficulties may drive school absence, which may in turn worsen mental health through social isolation and reduced contact with trusted adults. Schools are increasingly the de facto gateway for CYP to access support, yet this model assumes the student is physically present in school, meaning those with the greatest need may be least able to access help. This cross-sectional study examines whether attendance and PA are associated with previous receipt of help (secondary students) and current help-seeking (primary and secondary students) for problems with mood, worries, concentration, or behaviour. Data were drawn from the School Resilience Project, a co-produced survey programme across South London schools delivered via the digital platform, myJournE (N=1,192; aged 9–17; 56.3% male; 43.7% female; 10.2% PA). Covariates included symptoms of depression (SMFQ), social and generalised anxiety (RCADS), gender, Special Education Need status, and indicators of deprivation. Descriptively, 34.1% of students requested help through the survey. Among secondary students, 50.2% reported previously experiencing problems, of whom 39.3% had received help. Logistic regression analyses, unadjusted and adjusted for covariates, are underway. Full results and descriptive reporting of help-seeking barriers will be presented at the conference. These findings could have direct implications for how help-seeking pathways are better designed to reach vulnerable students.

Keywords: attendance; persistent absence; help-seeking; children and young people; mental health.

Mental health and persistent absence at primary-to-secondary school transition: A cross-sectional survey of students in four South London academies

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Since the Covid-19 pandemic, persistent absence (PA; <90% school attendance) rates in England have nearly doubled, affecting 18% of students in 2024/25. PA can be associated with mental health difficulties, and the primary-to-secondary school transition can be a risk period for increasing school absence. Schools however have limited information on the associations between mental ill-health and school absence for their incoming students. This study aims to help schools better understand these associations, whilst considering other important contextual factors, to inform their approach to supporting PA students. A cross-sectional survey will be administered to students (aged 10-11) in the summer before secondary school transition, measuring symptoms of anxiety and depression, as well as wellbeing, school life, self-esteem and neurodevelopment. Survey data will be pseudonymously linked to student socio-demographic and attendance data, including documented reasons for and patterns of absence, and will be collated in a comprehensive report for schools. Regression analyses will examine associations between PA and mental health and wellbeing in the year preceding school transition. Data collection is planned for July 2026, and results will be presented at the conference. We anticipate recruiting approximately 500 students, with an estimated 20% meeting the threshold for PA. Findings from this multi-site study will offer insights into the mental health of PA students, informing the most appropriate approaches to supporting students with attending school, beyond what school records alone can identify. This work forms part of a longitudinal project tracking mental health and attendance patterns across the primary to secondary school transition

Keywords: persistent absence; school attendance; secondary school transition; mental health.

What are the main factors associated with SAPs? A mixed-methods analysis in the Italian context

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School Attendance Problems (SAPs) represent a global challenge that impacts adolescent developmental trajectories and long-term psychosocial well-being. To study this phenomenon, it is necessary to adopt a comprehensive ecological perspective, because attendance issues arise from a dynamic misalignment between the student's internal psychological state and their surrounding systems, including family dynamics and the school environment. This study employs a mixed methods design to capture this complexity. The qualitative phase, involving 124 parents and 120 teachers, identifies a core "Emotional-Relational Disconnection". While parents often attribute disengagement to psycho-physical exhaustion and perceived lack of empathy from educators, teachers point toward external factors such as fragile family structures and misguided school choices. Moreover, a significant perceptual gap is observed, as 91.6% of teachers recognize the problem compared to only 25.8% of parents. Quantitatively, a correlational and regression analysis on 539 high school students reveals that learned helplessness and procrastination are positively associated with subjective health complaints and school refusal. Conversely, a mastery orientation and a positive school climate serve as protective factors. These findings suggest that attendance is fundamentally rooted in the relation between educator, student, and parent, requiring interventions that prioritize emotional connection and psychological resilience over purely didactic or performance-driven solutions.

Keywords: school attendance problems; school refusal; mixed-methods; ecological perspective.

Seeing beyond resignation: Student wellbeing archetypes and the prevention of school absence

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Problematic school absence is often understood through the lens of risk factors, mental health difficulties, or individual deficits. In this study, we explore how a resource-oriented understanding of school wellbeing may contribute to the prevention of school absence. Drawing on qualitative interviews with twelve eighth-grade students attending a lower secondary school in a socioeconomically disadvantaged area, we examine how students understand themselves, their relationships, and their opportunities for participation in school. Using a dramaturgical framework, we analyse how students present themselves and navigate the social and academic demands of school life. The analysis identifies three archetypal student positions: the Easy-going, the Rebel, and the Resigned. Particular attention is given to the Resigned Student, characterised by low expectations, limited belief in personal capabilities, social and academic marginalisation, and a pessimistic view of the future. From a school absence perspective, this position is of particular concern, as the student increasingly withdraws from both academic and social participation. However, we argue that the Resigned should not be understood simply as lacking resources. Rather, it reflects a way of understanding oneself and one's possibilities, shaped through ongoing interactions with peers, teachers, and the broader school environment. We argue that preventing school absence requires more than reducing risk factors. From a strength-based and socially relational perspective, teachers can play a crucial role in recognising students' existing strengths, supporting reflection on personal possibilities, and creating experiences of competence, belonging, and agency. Such processes may be central in promoting wellbeing and preventing the development of school absence.

Keywords: problematic school absence; school wellbeing; strengths-based perspective; belonging.

Stop Talking About Attendance!

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One of the overarching findings from our interview study is a clear message from young people who have experienced problematic school absenteeism: Stop talking about attendance! This poster draws on 23 in-depth interviews with young people from different parts of Sweden who experienced problematic school absenteeism during their first ten years of school. The interviews explore how different aspects of their lives developed over time, and how school, family, friends, social services, and other significant actors collectively shaped their journeys through school. A newly developed visual interview tool complemented the interviews, allowing participants to map and reflect on their experiences and the roles different actors played. The poster visually illustrates the young people's struggles and the mismatch that can occur when the problem schools are trying to solve is not the problem the child is experiencing. For many, by the time their school absence became alarming, they had already been struggling, often in silence, for years. Over time, they had gradually become more disconnected from school and other parts of their lives, and less trusting of those around them. When attendance became the focus, the difficulties underlying their absence often remained unseen, reinforcing their sense that nobody was actually interested in understanding what was going on for them. Several described disengaging from meetings and other support efforts as a way of coping, as these added to their burden without addressing what they were actually struggling with. The poster also presents suggestions from the young people themselves for more meaningful support.

Keywords: children's voices; school trajectories; school connection; visual methods; participatory methods; interview study.

BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

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