Attributes of a strong campaign

- Clear & Single-minded
- Tangible
- Relevant
- Emotional
Great communication strategies lead to social change
Scope of the Issue

Chronic Absenteeism

even in elementary school, is the strongest predictor of falling behind and dropping out of school

1 in 5
of CA’s K-6 students were truant (2012-2013 school year)

90%
of elementary students with the most severe attendance problems are estimated to be low-income

$46B
is what dropouts cost the state of California each year (including $1B in juvenile crime costs)
California parents of children in elementary school (grades K-5) with an emphasis on lower income and minority parents
Develop a communication strategy that educates parents about the importance of attendance and motivates them to act.
Formative Research Objective

**Understand** absenteeism in California

**Understand** parents’ perceptions, attitudes & behaviors surrounding attendance

**Identify** key attitudes & behaviors that need to change

**Identify** communication areas that would move parents to act

**Determine** the best communication channels to reach parents with an attendance message.
Research Approach

**Phase 1: Exploratory**
- Expert Interviews (7)
- Parent In-home ethnographies in English and Spanish (24)

**Phase 2: Parent Survey**
- Online survey of English-speaking parents (n = 573)
- Phone survey of Spanish-speaking parents (n = 250)
All parents want what’s best for their child.

They understand that education is the key to their success.
But different challenges interfere with parents’ level of school involvement

Poverty
Crime
Trauma
Disability
Unemployment
Non-English speaking

Resources
Support
Education
Positive examples
Experience
Higher expectations

Low Involvement

High Involvement
Parents think about attendance and absences very differently

Attendance is the norm so the daily impact is not considered
Parents think about attendance and absences very differently

Absences are abnormal so the impact of missing is considered
Parents keep their children home for a number of reasons.

For which of the following reasons did your child miss school?

- Skips school
- Moved/transferred schools
- Doesn’t like going (e.g. bullying)
- Vacation
- Chronic illness (e.g. Asthma)
- Illness (cold, flu, stomachache)

For English-speaking parents (n = 573):
- Skips school: 89%
- Moved/transferred schools: 12%
- Doesn’t like going: 8%
- Vacation: 3%
- Chronic illness: 9%
- Illness: 3%

For Spanish-speaking parents (n = 250):
- Skips school: 88%
- Moved/transferred schools: 13%
- Doesn’t like going: 8%
- Vacation: 3%
- Chronic illness: 9%
- Illness: 3%
Most absences are excusable

Very excusable
- Illness
- Doctor/Dentist Appointment
- Moving/Transferring schools

Somewhat excusable
- Parent has childcare conflict
- Doesn’t like going (bullying)
- Helping care for family member
- Family vacation

Not at all excusable
- Parent is ill or tired
- Reward for good behavior
- Helping around the house
- Skipping/ditching

All are rationalized

“My child is doing well in school”

“Absences do not matter as much in early years”

“My child can make up for the absence with homework provided by teacher”

“Missing one day here and there is less harmful than consecutive absences”

“He can catch up within the year”

“She is not doing well because she just doesn’t like or is not good in school.”

“Others in my child’s class miss as much school as my child”
Parents do not keep track of absences and under estimate the instances

They are far more likely to say their child missed about 2 days a month than they are to say they miss 20 days of school

Missed an average of 2+ days per month

- English-speaking parents (n = 573): 90%
- Spanish-speaking parents (n = 250): 82%

Missed 10+ days annually

- English-speaking parents (n = 573): 30%
- Spanish-speaking parents (n = 250): 66%

Both

- English-speaking parents (n = 573): 21%
- Spanish-speaking parents (n = 250): 50%
They do not think it’s a big deal if their child misses (particularly in K-5)

Q: On a scale of 1-5, how big of a deal is it if your child misses school in the following grade levels

% who say “it’s a big deal to miss at this grade level”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Pre-K</th>
<th>Kindergarten</th>
<th>Grades 1-3</th>
<th>Grades 4-5</th>
<th>Middle School</th>
<th>High School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English-speaking parents</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish-speaking parents</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base = all respondents
Ultimately, parents associate absences with the immediate benefit of staying home (now)

Rather than the long term consequences of missing school (later)
Attendance Matters
School, even in the early years, is critical to building a strong foundation for learning that will help your child succeed in middle school, high school and beyond. You cannot make up for too many absences with homework or take-home assignments. Each day your child is not in school is a missed opportunity to learn something they will need in order to understand more difficult material later. Help your child succeed in their future. Make sure they are in school every day.

Absences Add Up
Even in elementary school, missing 18 or more days per year (or just 2 days per month) is too many. Students who miss too many days in elementary school are more likely to fall behind in reading, writing and math. This makes them less likely to graduate high school. Keep track of and limit your child’s absences in order to keep them on course to succeed in their future.
Establishing Poor Attendance Now
Can you imagine your child ditching school all the time? It may be difficult to picture now, but kids who miss too many days in elementary school are more likely to miss in middle and high school. This puts them at greater risk of dropping out. If you allow them to be absent too many times now they can form poor habits which could be harmful to their future success. Help your child build good attendance habits by making sure they are at school every day.

All Absences are Equal
Chances are your child will need to miss a few days of school this year. While some absences might seem more excusable, the impact is actually the same whether your child is sick, ditching or taking a family trip. Any absence makes it harder for your child to keep up with the everyday classroom learning that is needed to grow and succeed. Some absences are unavoidable; but too many will make your child fall behind and they might not be able to catch up. Save absences for when it is absolutely necessary and make sure they are in school every day.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attendance Matters</td>
<td>Make-up work can't replace child's learning. Describes how to build a foundation for the child's future/success.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absences Add Up</td>
<td>Absences adds up/2 days a month is a lot. More likely to fall behind / not graduate high school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishing Poor Attendance Now</td>
<td>Describes how absences have an affect on children &amp; can create bad habits.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Absences are Equal</td>
<td>All absences are considered the same.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## What made each statement most convincing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attendance Matters</th>
<th>Absences Add Up</th>
<th>Establishing Poor Attendance Now</th>
<th>All Absences are Equal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Children may be left behind/missing opportunities</strong></td>
<td><strong>Children may be left behind/missing opportunities</strong></td>
<td><strong>Help child develop good habits for future</strong></td>
<td><strong>Children may be left behind/missing opportunities</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Absences can lead to dropping out</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Base: Respondents who said the concept was the most convincing.*
## What didn’t work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Attendance Matters</strong></th>
<th><strong>It is common sense</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Help your child succeed in their future. Make sure they are in school every day.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Absences Add Up</strong></th>
<th><strong>It’s a negative message</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Keep track of and limit your child’s absences in order to keep them on course to succeed in their future.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Establishing Poor Attendance Now</strong></th>
<th><strong>Not all absences are considered the same</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Can you imagine your child ditching school all the time? If you allow them to be absent too many times now they can form poor habits which could be harmful to their future success.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>All Absences are Equal</strong></th>
<th><strong>Sending sick children to school is not ok</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The impact is actually the same whether your child is sick, ditching or taking a family trip. Save absences for when it is absolutely necessary and make sure they are in school every day.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Parents need specific examples and tangible tips

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>This (specific)</th>
<th>Vs.</th>
<th>That (vague)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Too many absences threaten your child’s foundation for learning</td>
<td>Vs.</td>
<td>Attendance is important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing just 2 days per month can make them fall behind</td>
<td>Vs.</td>
<td>Don’t let them miss too many days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You cannot make up for too many absences with homework or take-home assignments</td>
<td></td>
<td>Absences have consequences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too many absences makes them fall behind in reading, writing and math</td>
<td>Vs.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too many absences makes them less likely to graduate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do everything you can to ensure they do not miss</td>
<td>Vs.</td>
<td>Make sure they attend every day</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Communications Strategy
When parents understand the consequences of just 2 absences a month, they are less likely to allow their child to miss
Key Insight

- Wants child to be successful
- Knows that education is the key
- Knows they shouldn’t miss too much school
- Doesn’t think it’s a big deal if they miss (right now)
- Is not keeping track of absences
- Doesn’t think child is in danger of falling behind
- Believes child is smart & can make up missed work
Challenge

From:

“I’m not aware of the impact that absences have”

“It’s no big deal if my child misses school”

“I don’t think about or track my child’s attendance”

To:

“Just 2 days missed per month will cause them to fall behind”

“I don’t want my child to miss an opportunity to learn something they will need later”

“I am going to track their absences and do everything I can to ensure they do not miss”
Every Absence Matters:
Even in elementary school, just 2 days missed per month adds up and threatens the educational foundation that is critical to their academic success.
Reasons to believe

- Learning in elementary school is sequential - each day builds on earlier learning. So, each day absent is a missed opportunity for your child to learn something they will need in order to understand more difficult material later.

- Students who miss more than 18 days of school are less proficient in reading, writing and math compared to their peers with good attendance.

- Students who do not learn the fundamentals of reading, writing and math by third grade are more likely to fall behind and are less likely to graduate high school.

- Absences make it very difficult for your child to keep up academically because make up work and take home assignments cannot replace the everyday learning your child loses by being absent from school.
Call-to-Action

Keep track of and limit your child’s absences
Tone

**Be:** concerned, empathetic, and respectful, but also urgent

**Avoid:** accusatory, condescending, finger wagging
Success Metrics

- Increase awareness “Just 2 days missed per month can allow them fall behind”
- More parents understand the importance limiting absences
- More parents are tracking their child’s absences
Other Considerations

- Highlight absences rather than attendance
- Use tactical advice and solutions (vs.) vague statements
- Highlight “just 2 days a month (even in elementary school)” vs. 18 days total in the school year
- Avoid inferring that missing “fewer than 18 total” is okay
- Avoid implying that it’s ok to send kids to school when sick
- Avoid complicated statistics, hyperboles and metaphors
- Consider lower literacy levels & avoid policy/academic-sounding jargon
Communications Approach
Approach

Strategic Idea

Every Absence Matters

Communications Goals

Raise awareness:
Just 2 days per month (even in elementary school) can allow your child to fall behind

Inspire action:
Track absences and make sure they do not miss too many days of school
## Approach

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategic Idea</th>
<th>Communications Goals</th>
<th>Level of Focus</th>
<th>Communications Focus</th>
<th>Recommended Channels</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Every Absence Matters</strong></td>
<td><strong>Raise awareness:</strong> Too many absences (even in grades K-5) can allow them to fall behind</td>
<td><strong>Broad:</strong> National State District</td>
<td><strong>Just 2 days missed per month can threaten their educational foundation which is critical to their success</strong></td>
<td><strong>TV, OOH, Print, Brochures, Website, Social Media, Direct mail, Events, Newsletters, Mobile/text, Teachers’ class communications</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Inspire action:</strong> Track absences and make sure they do not miss too many days of school</td>
<td><strong>Targeted:</strong> Individual School</td>
<td><strong>Keep track of your child’s attendance and Seek resources to help avoid absences</strong></td>
<td><strong>Influencers: Teachers, school admin/guidance counselors, parent conferences, individualized letters, text messages</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Leveraging All Media Channels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mobile</th>
<th>Direct</th>
<th>Out of Home</th>
<th>Digital</th>
<th>TV</th>
<th>Radio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Text-based messages</td>
<td>E-mail</td>
<td>Bus Kiosks</td>
<td>Social Media</td>
<td>Family programming</td>
<td>Spanish/Hispanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opt-in mobile program</td>
<td>District newsletter</td>
<td>Public Transportation</td>
<td>Internet: Online video, gaming, news, entertainment, parenting</td>
<td>Multi-cultural</td>
<td>Religious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Billboards</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Urban</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Individualized**
- **Reliable**
- **Flexible**
- **Drives engagement**
- **Opt in/opt out**

- **Localized**
- **Drives awareness & education**

- **Sharable**
- **Individualized**
- **Drives awareness**
- **Drives engagement**
- **Drives to website**
- **Searchable**

- **Drives awareness & education**

- **Drives awareness & education**

- **Localized**
A Role for All Media Channels in Changing Behavior

Build Awareness

Shift Attitudes

Shift Behaviors

PR
Radio
TV
Online Display
Print
Outdoor
Word of mouth

Direct Mail
Email
Events
Website info
Social Media

PR
Radio
TV
Online Display
Print
Outdoor
Word of mouth

Online Search

Direct Mail

Email
Events
Website info
Social Media

PR
Radio
TV
Online Display
Print
Outdoor
Word of mouth

Bloggers / Content sharers
Word of mouth

Blogging / Content sharers

Blogging / Content sharers

Teachers
Texting / SMS
School Admin
Mobile App / Site
Website resources

Blogging / Content sharers

Blogging / Content sharers

Word of mouth

Word of mouth

Website resources

Website resources

Word of mouth

Word of mouth

Website resources

Website resources

Website resources

Website resources
Leveraging Key Influencers for Parents

Who:
- Child’s Teacher
- School Principal/Vice Principal
- Peers/Other parents
- Guidance Counselor
- Family
- District Admin
- Courts/Legal

Why: Reliable, Believable, Individualized, Drives awareness & education

Source: Ad Council qualitative research project on CA Attendance (May 2015) and the follow-up quantitative validation survey and concept test (August 2015)
How to leverage key influencers: Teachers

Channel:
- School Communications, District Communications, Teacher Blogs, Curriculum Websites, Professional, Development Events, Flyers/Brochures

Ask to:
- Remind parents that even in elementary school, missing just 2 days per month can cause your child to fall behind.
- When possible, connect missed opportunity to learn with specific class curriculum/content.
- Point parents into the direction of resources which can help them keep track of and limit absences

Tone:
- Be: Supportive, helpful, empathetic
- Avoid: Compliance and fear based tactics/messages
Thank you