OSPI ESSER Attendance & Reengagement Project: Successes & Outcomes

Overview

Over the 2022-23 and 2023-24 school years, OSPI invested $19.4 million in COVID Relief ESSER funding to address attendance, engagement and reengagement. The project included support for and collaboration with eighty (80) school districts, six (6) State-Tribal Education Compact schools and the nine (9) Educational Service Districts, and over 80,000 students. The [ESSER Attendance & Reengagement Project](#) had two areas of focus:

1. **Re-engage youth who were disconnected from school or not attending.**
   OSPI funded districts and ESDs to hire re-engagement staff to provide one-on-one family support and connection to services.
2. **Build system-wide practices that improve school attendance.**
   MTSS structures and teaming were utilized and staff accessed and analyzed attendance data, developed tiered attendance interventions, community partnerships, and listened to students and families about school engagement.

Impact Summary

- Of the students served individually, the chronic absence rate dropped from 71 percent to 56 percent in one year; 12.5 percentage points more than the state average over the same time
- Schools participating in the project saw a reduction in chronic absence rates of 9.8 percentage points, 2.8 percentage points higher than schools not in the project.
- Served over 12,270 students via individualized supports
- Served students furthest from educational justice, with the proportion of students served by student group being either **equal to or higher than** the group's proportion of the overall population
- 58% of unenrolled students in 2022-23 and 41% of unenrolled students in 2023-24 re-enrolled in an educational pathway through the OSPI project.

Chronic absenteeism rates decreased markedly

School Attendance Outcomes

Schools participating in OSPI's project over both years experienced a decrease in average chronic absenteeism rate of **9.8 percentage points**, compared to schools that did not participate in the project that saw an average decrease of 7 percentage points, a 2.8 percentage point difference. In these schools, over 80,000 students were served.

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Student Attendance Outcomes

OSPI's project accomplished the goal of decreasing student absences. The project resulted in significant reductions in chronic absenteeism rates[1]. Among students who were supported directly by reengagement specialists (one-on-one or in group supports), the percentage of students that were chronically absent dropped from 71% in school year 2022–23 to 56% in school year 2023–24. The notable reduction of **15 percentage points** is even more meaningful when compared to the state-wide reduction of 2.5 percentage points.

Students were Successfully Re-enrolled

- **Reconnection**: 58% of unenrolled students in 2022-23 and 41% of unenrolled students in 2023-24 re-enrolled in an educational pathway through the OSPI project. Without the resources, it is unlikely these students would have reenrolled at all[2].
- **Persistence**: 94% of students that were enrolled at the beginning of the project maintained enrollment throughout the school year– meaning they were still enrolled at the end of the school year.

Students furthest from Educational Justice were Prioritized

The project successfully achieved its goal of serving students furthest from educational justice. The proportion of students served by student group in this program were either **equal to or higher than** that group's proportion of the population.

What We Learned from Students

Student voice was collected through project evaluation. Here's what we learned:

Reasons Students Disengaged

- Physical health or mental health issue
- Didn't feel comfortable or welcome at school
- Home situation made it difficult to attend
- Did not have support they needed with schoolwork
- Had other responsibilities

Barriers to Reengagement

- School doesn't feel relevant or helpful
- Do not have access to services or support for physical or mental health
- Do not feel anyone at school cares for them or their success
- Do not have what they need to get caught up in academics

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[1] Chronic absenteeism is when a student misses 10% or more of their school days for any reason.

[2] ~40% of all students served were not enrolled at the time service began. The students that were served in this project were selected because had the highest rates of absences or were completely disconnected from school. Reengagement is a long complex process, and this compared to other reengagement work is a successful outcome.

- Don't have services/support for basic needs (enough food, stable housing, managing family emergencies)

Positive Experiences in School
- Being with friends
- My classes
- Participating in sports or other after school activities

Testimonials from students

Reengagement Specialists in the project engaged one on one with students, building trust and providing support. Students had the following to say about their interaction with re-engagement specialists:

- they felt supported
- that someone cared about them
- they were motivated by their reengagement specialist
- their specialist helped them get caught up in their classes
- their specialist helped them with mental health barriers
- helped them with setting and meeting goals
- helped them to think about life after graduation

State-wide leadership with regional supports

Through this project effort, a significant success was OSPI's development of robust regional supports for attendance and reengagement through launching ESD Attendance & Reengagement Coordinators. The coordinators provided coaching, training, support and resources for schools and districts on improving attendance and engagement, as well as to improve truancy processes. OSPI & ESDs collaborated weekly to ensure alignment across the state. This coordinated system and capacity did not exist state-wide prior to the OSPI project, and included state-wide offerings such as the Attendance Community of Practice and the Reengagement Specialist Peer Learning Network, led by OSPI and supported by the ESD Coordinators. Addressing the attendance challenge we face in Washington has been demonstrated as possible when these regional resources are allocated.

System Implementation Progress in Schools and Districts

Participating schools and districts identified their progress in key attendance systems and practices. Their progress on a subset of the indicators is identified in the table below.

Attendance System or Practice	Significant/Some Progress
Taking and recording attendance	93%
Using attendance data to inform our work	86%
Accessing chronic absence and truancy data	84%

Teams that pay attention to attendance data	80%
Updated attendance & truancy policies, procedures and communication	80%
Tier 1 Attendance Supports	80%
Tier 3 Attendance Interventions	80%
Reinstated or improved Community Engagement Board (CEB)	70%
Tier 2 Attendance Interventions	70%
Gathered feedback from students and families	64%
Used student and family feedback to inform changes	64%
Partnering with community organizations	59%

Source: ESSER District Survey (2022-23)

More Information

For more information on this program, see the following resources.

Videos

- ESSER Attendance & Reengagement Overview
- Safe, Fun, and Active School Commute | Tacoma Walking School Bus | OSPI
- Lessons Learned Practitioner Panel Discussions
    - Reengagement Specialists
    - Attendance Systems

Evaluation Reports

- See OSPI ESSER Attendance & Reengagement Lessons Learned for the following results:
    - Executive Summary of Final Results
    - Final Evaluation Results Full Report
    - Participant Case Studies
- OSPI's Attendance Resource Library and Webpage

Contact

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