

# ATTENDANCE STRATEGIES

A UTAH LEADING THROUGH EFFECTIVE, ACTIONABLE, AND DYNAMIC EDUCATION

## INNOVATIVE PRACTICE REPORT



**ULEAD**  
EDUCATION



**TEACHER**  
FELLOWS NETWORK

# ABOUT THIS REPORT

Utah Leading through Effective, Actionable, and Dynamic (ULEAD) Education was created to find, research, and highlight proven practices in Utah schools for replication statewide. ULEAD partners with practitioners, researchers, and education organizations to develop and curate resources, foster collaboration, and drive systemic change for improved student outcomes. The ULEAD Clearinghouse is a growing repository of innovative, effective, and efficient practice resources and tools to support educators.

The ULEAD Steering Committee, composed of current Utah educators and stakeholders, meets quarterly to inform the focus priorities that ULEAD will research. ULEAD uses data to find positive outliers in each focus area and create reports, such as this one, illuminating the practices and policies that resulted in positive data. At the time of this report, these priorities include: Student

Attendance, Educator Retention and Job Satisfaction, Academic Achievement through Strategic Engagement through Technology, and Academic Success through Social Emotional Supports Grounded in Academic Classroom Practice. This report addresses strategies for increasing student attendance.

ULEAD collaborates with Institutes of Higher Education

and education practitioners to develop Innovative Practice Reports. This report was developed in partnership with the Utah Teacher Fellows as a culminating activity. Fellows worked to identify outliers and complete field research resulting in thematic evidence of influential practices in Utah public education settings.

## UTAH TEACHER FELLOWS

The Utah Teacher Fellowship Program aims to improve the teaching and learning conditions in Utah's public schools and provide educators in the program with a chance to refine their teacher leadership skills.

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**"Research on truancy and absenteeism suggests that students with better attendance score higher on achievement tests than their more frequently absent peers."**

(Epstein & Sheldon, 2002, p. 308)



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Educators from seven Utah schools across four districts and one charter school detailed their efforts to increase and maintain high levels of student attendance through semi-structured interviews.

Albert R. Lyman Middle School  
San Juan School District  
Gennera Blake, Student Advocate

Dual Immersion Academy  
Public Charter School  
Shannon Sanchez, Social Worker

Glendale Middle School  
Salt Lake City School District  
Keslie Green, Assistant Principal

Hawthorne Elementary  
Salt Lake City School District  
Cody Colvin, Principal

Monument Valley High School  
San Juan School District  
Coerina Fife, Principal  
Ryan Carlson, Vice Principal

South Jordan Middle School  
Jordan School District  
Spencer Young, Counselor  
Kami Taylor, Assistant Principal

Water Canyon High School  
Washington County School District  
Steve Showalter, Principal  
Brad Garrett, Learning Coach

## THEMES

Qualitative interview analysis illuminated four critical components of an effective attendance plan including:

### 1. relationship building with students and families

### 2. accurate attendance tracking

### 3. timely communication, and

### 4. parent education

There is no one practice that comprehensively accounts for each of these four components. Instead, participants discussed various strategies for bolstering

these attendance system needs and practices work in concert to produce results. Included in this report are examples of strategies from each practice site.

All sites use multiple instances of relationship building outside of the attendance system in addition to focused efforts.

Each of the **school leaders stressed the importance of building consensus with parents on why school attendance is important** for

their students and provided frequent, personal, and timely opportunities and incentives leading to a positive culture around attendance.

The **main limitation of cited practices is time** for dedicated attention to attendance concerns, tracking, training, and personal connections, however; schools that have prioritized the time needed have seen positive outcomes in student attendance.

# PARTICIPANT IDENTIFICATION

Participants were selected from attendance rates by school, grade level, and demographic descriptors paired with contextual data such as the type of school, Title I status, LEA type, and enrollment. These schools were filtered to include only brick-and-mortar schools serving regular education students where the n-size was above 30.

Within each overall school attendance and grade level group, the interquartile range, and upper and lower fences were identified. Records outside these fences were removed. Remaining schools were divided

into elementary (schools with a grade 1), middle (schools with a grade 7), and high (schools with a grade 12). Within each group (elementary, middle, and high schools), Gower’s distance was used to calculate similarity using the fields of Local Education Agency (LEA) Type, Title I status, federal locale code, percent minority, percent economically disadvantaged, total K12 students, percent language learner, percent special education enrollment, and percent female. These distances were separated into a matrix and calculation of the clusters of similar schools was

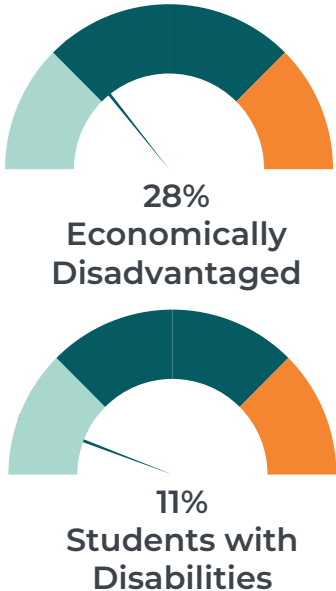
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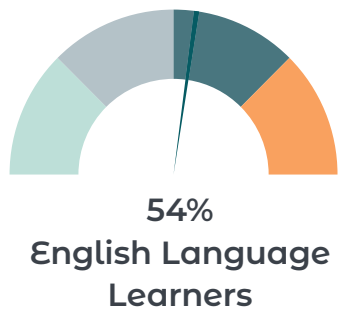
Each school was assigned to, and labeled with, a cluster. The clustered presented three key descriptors including traditional or charter school, poverty level, and locale. Within each cluster, the schools with the highest values for percent difference between the 2021 and 2022 attendance rates were identified. This list of top performers in each cluster was used to identify schools of interest as participants using demographic characteristics, location, and higher percent difference. These schools were asked to participate in the study.

# DISTRICT & SCHOOL DEMOGRAPHICS

## Dual Immersion Academy

The Dual Immersion Academy (DIA) is a Public Charter School located in the Glendale neighborhood of Salt Lake City, Utah. Serving nearly 500 students in grades K-8, DIA’s mission is “providing an academically rigorous curriculum in a supportive, nurturing environment; to preparing students to become Spanish-English bilingual, biliterate, and bicultural while developing the tools to be successful in higher education, the workforce and in life” (Dual Immersion Academy, 2023). The school follows a 90:10 model with 90% of instruction occurring in Spanish, though this decreases over each grade until a 50:50 balance of English and Spanish instruction is achieved. Students enrolled in DIA are from both native English and native Spanish speaking households and are taught following Utah Core Standards.





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- Black or African American
- Hispanic or Latino
- Native American
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- Two or more races
- White

## Jordan School District

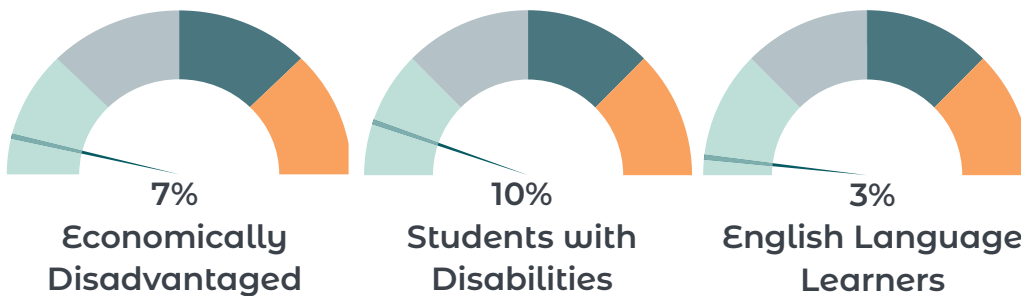
The Jordan School District serves more than 57,000 students including the Bluffdale, Copperton, Herriman, Riverton, South Jordan, and West Jordan communities. Portions of the Jordan School District are included in the Salt Lake City metropolitan area. The Jordan School District includes 42 elementary schools, 13 middle schools, 10 high schools that include an adult high school and career and technical school, 3 schools dedicated to serving students with unique needs, and virtual learning options (Jordan School District, 2023). Students in the district are 73% Caucasian, 18% Hispanic, 17% economically disadvantaged, and 14% are students with a disability (Utah State Board of Education, 2022a). One Jordan School District middle school was included in this study.



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## South Jordan Middle School

South Jordan Middle School is located in the city of South Jordan in Salt Lake County. The school serves 1,250 students in grades 7-9. For the 2020-2021 school year, the school was rated an A with Exemplary English Learner Progress and achievement above both district and state averages in English, Mathematics, and Science (Utah State Board of Education, 2022a).

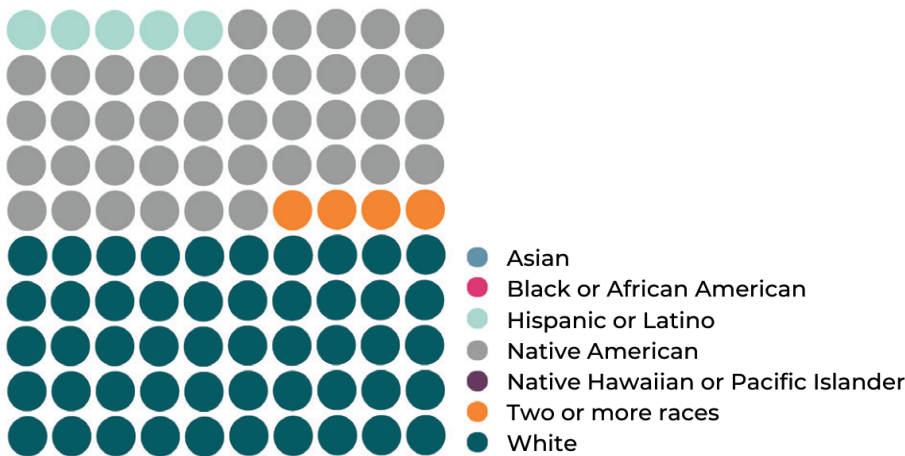
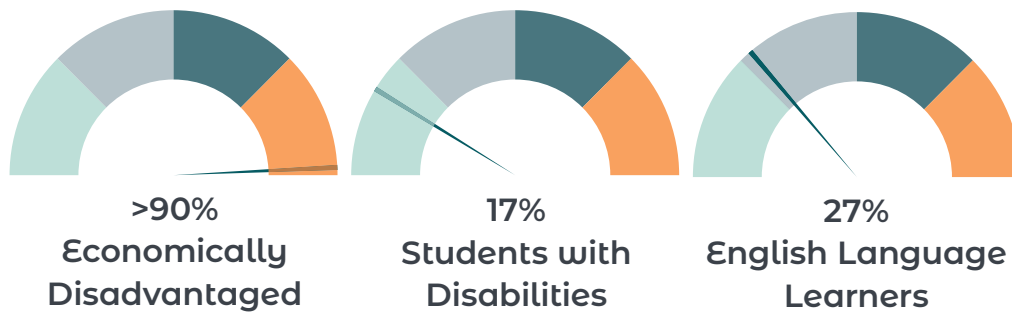


## San Juan School District

The San Juan School District office is located in Blanding, Utah in the southeast corner of the state. The district's nearly 8,000 square mile land area encompasses portions of Canyonlands National Park, Bears Ears National Monument, and Lake Powell while bordering Arizona, New Mexico, and Colorado at Four Corners. A rural area, the district employs 77 buses which run 43 routes for nearly 5,000 miles each day (San Juan School District, 2023b). Of the 3,140 total students, approximately 57% are Native American, and 27% are English Language Learners. All of the Utah portion of the Navajo Nation and a part of the Ute tribal lands are included in the San Juan District. The 12 district schools have Title I designations and there are a total of 177 teachers. The smallest school, La Sal Elementary, has just 11 students while the largest school, Blanding Elementary, has 579 students. Two San Juan School District schools were included in this study.

### Albert R. Lyman Middle School

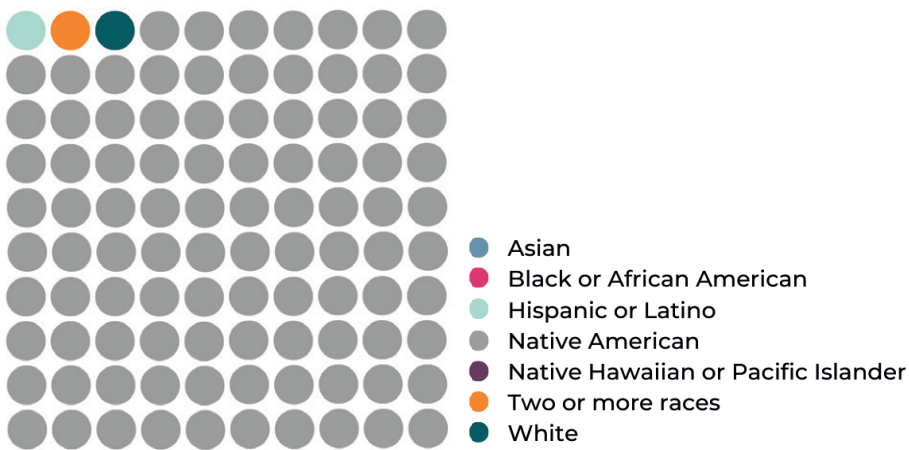
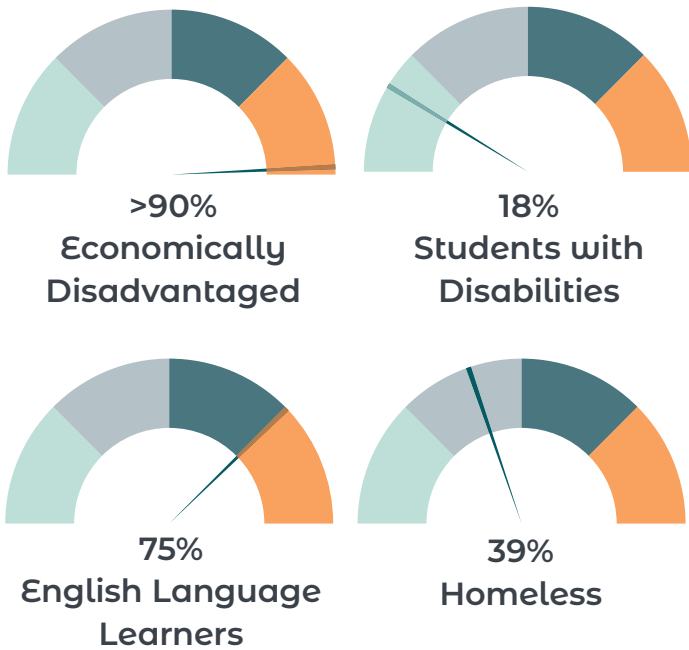
Albert R. Lyman Middle School is located in Blanding, Utah in San Juan County and is one of the largest schools with 331 students throughout grades 6-8. In the 2021-2022 school year, the school earned a Commendable performance rating in Growth and English Learner Progress (Utah State Board of Education, 2022a).





## Monument Valley High School

Monument Valley High School is located in Monument Valley, Utah in San Juan County. The school serves grades 7-12 and enrolled 230 students in 2023 (San Juan School District, 2023b). Students may enroll in concurrent courses for free through Utah State University Eastern and additional support services for Native American students are available at no cost through the district Accessing Choice in Education (ACE) program funded by a federal grant (Monument Valley High School, 2022; San Juan School District, 2023a).

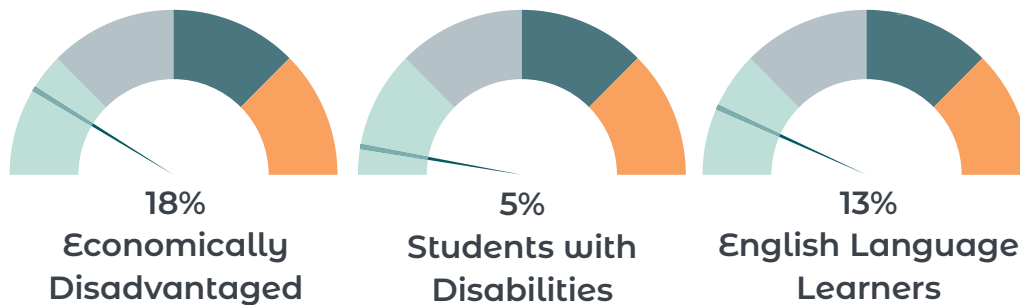
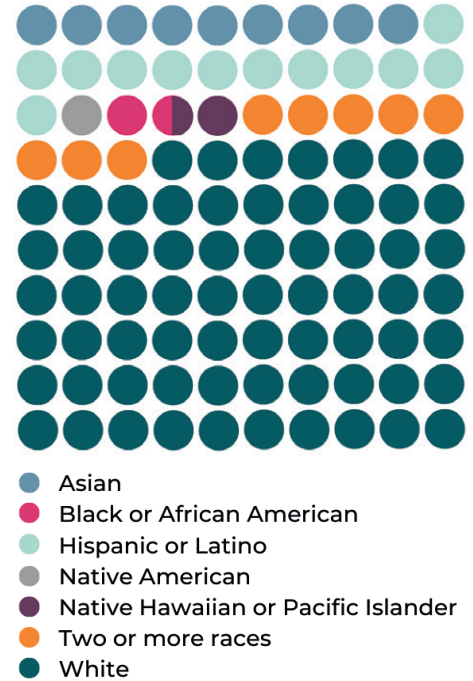


## Salt Lake City School District

The Salt Lake City School District is an urban minority-majority district within the largest metropolitan center of Utah. It enrolls close to 20,000 students and had 42 schools in the 2022-2023 schools year including K-8, online, and charter schools. There are 80 home languages spoken by students and 27% of students are multilingual learners. Fifty-three percent of all students come from low-income households (Salt Lake City School District, 2023). Two schools in Salt Lake City participated in this study.

### Hawthorne Elementary School

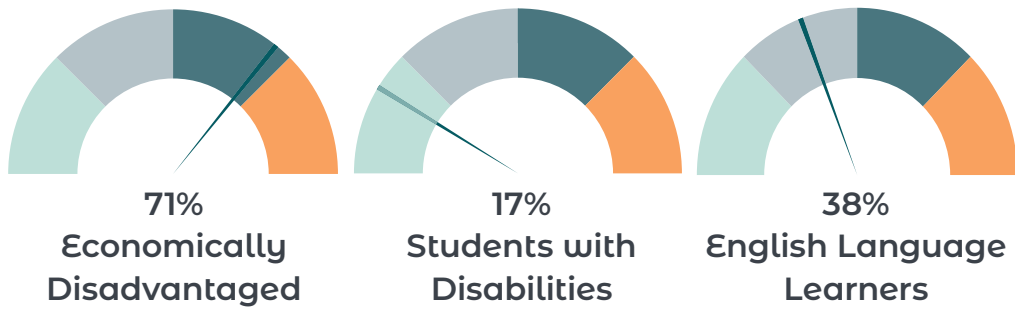
Hawthorne Elementary School is located in Salt Lake City, Utah. It serves approximately 360 students in grades K-6. Hawthorne houses one of the magnet Extended Learning Programs, a Curriculum and Assessment Lab program, and participates in the Beverley Taylor Sorenson arts program (Hawthorne Elementary, 2023). In addition, students may participate in band, orchestra, choir, and dance and have access to after school programs, full-day kindergarten, and a neighborhood extended learning program. For the 2021-2022 school year Hawthorne had an A on the Utah School Report Card (Utah State Board of Education, 2022a).



### Glendale Middle School

Glendale Middle School is also located in Salt Lake City, Utah. There are nearly 750 students enrolled in grades 6-8. In the 2021-2022 school year, Glendale had Exemplary growth with English, Mathematics, and Science scores on par or slightly better than state and district averages (Utah State Board of Education, 2022a). Students can participate in AVID, dual immersion, intramural sports, chess, and a variety of music programs.





## Washington County School District

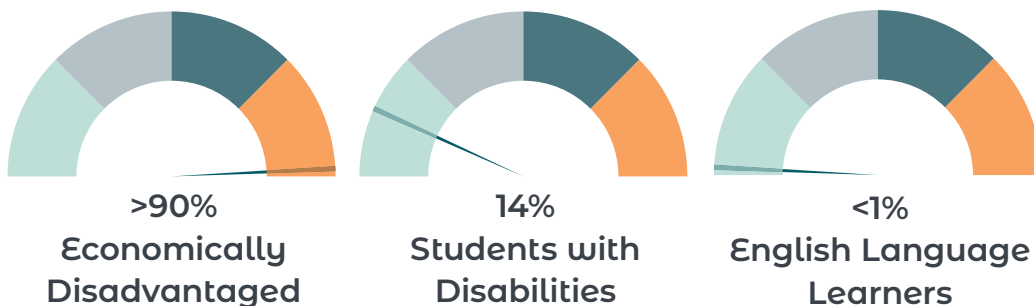
The Washington County School District encompasses over 2,400 square miles in southern Utah. In 2022-2023, the fall district enrollment had over 36,000 students (Utah State Board of Education, 2022d). The district office is located in St. George, Utah, but the district area encompasses other cities such as Bloomington, Winchester Hills, Washington, Santa Clara, Hurricane, La Verkin, Leeds, and Springdale. There are 28 elementary, 6 intermediate, 6 middle, and 9 high schools with a tenth high school slated to open in 2023, access to K-12 Utah Virtual School, and a community-based transition program high school. One Washington County high school participated in this study.

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### Water Canyon High School

Water Canyon High School is located in Hildale, Utah in Washington County close to the Arizona border. The school was established in 2016 and serves grades 7-12 with a student enrollment of 201 (Utah State Board of Education, 2022d). Students at Water Canyon have an option to take concurrent enrollment courses through Utah State (Goold, 2018). In 2021-2022 the school earned a B on the Utah School Report Card with an Exemplary rating for Growth (Utah State Board of Education, 2022a).



# UNDERSTANDING ATTENDANCE

School attendance is not only a daily wellness checkpoint, it is also a significant predictor of student success (Chambers et al., 2020). Nationally, attendance rates have dropped significantly and show little recovery after the COVID-19 pandemic coinciding with a national decline in National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) achievement (Attendance Works, 2022). There are critical disparities in attendance data according to race or ethnicity, poverty, and disability status (Gee, 2018). While disparities are evident, factors contributing to absenteeism are often complex and interlinked.

The impact of school attendance and absenteeism remains a topic of consistent study across all school systems, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic. The state of Connecticut tested a home visits intervention and according to a Center for Connecticut Education Research Collaboration report, “The results of the evaluation showed a significant increase in attendance rates” (Stemler et al., 2022, p. 9). More than improved attendance, the home visitors and families noted the following benefits:

## 1. Improved Family-School Relationships

## 2. Increased Student Attendance

## 3. Increased Student Engagement

## 4. Increased Student Achievement

## 5. Increased Feelings of Belonging

## 6. Increased Access to Resources for Families

## 7. Increased Expectations of Accountability

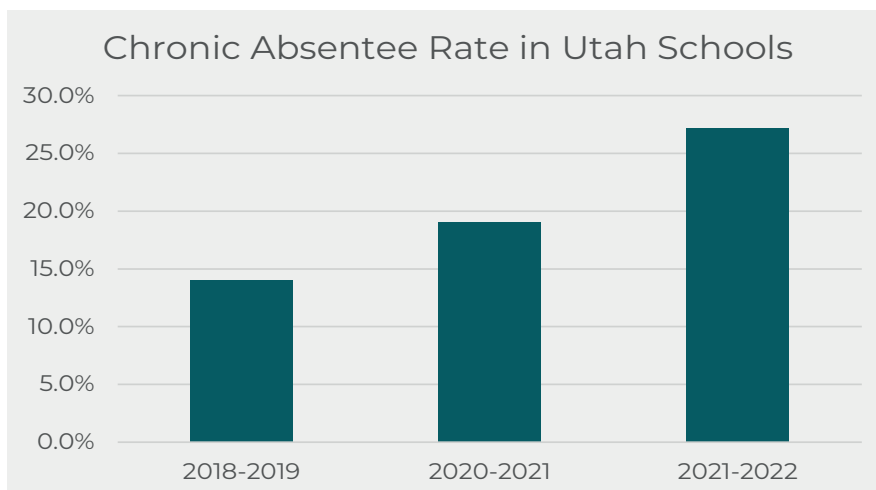
## 8. Greater Gratitude and Appreciation

(Stemler et al., 2022, p. 8)

This study indicates the power of building positive connections with students' families, rather than seeking harsher penalties for lack of attendance.

Even small moves to communicate with families about the importance of attendance can pay off. In a randomized study conducted in a Philadelphia school district, “a single postcard that encouraged guardians to improve their student’s attendance reduced absences by roughly 2.4 percent” (Rogers et al., 2017, p. i). The effect was similar across grade levels, and the message didn’t need to be specific to their child. This is a promising reminder that schools can start with simple acts of communication when seeking to improve attendance outcomes.

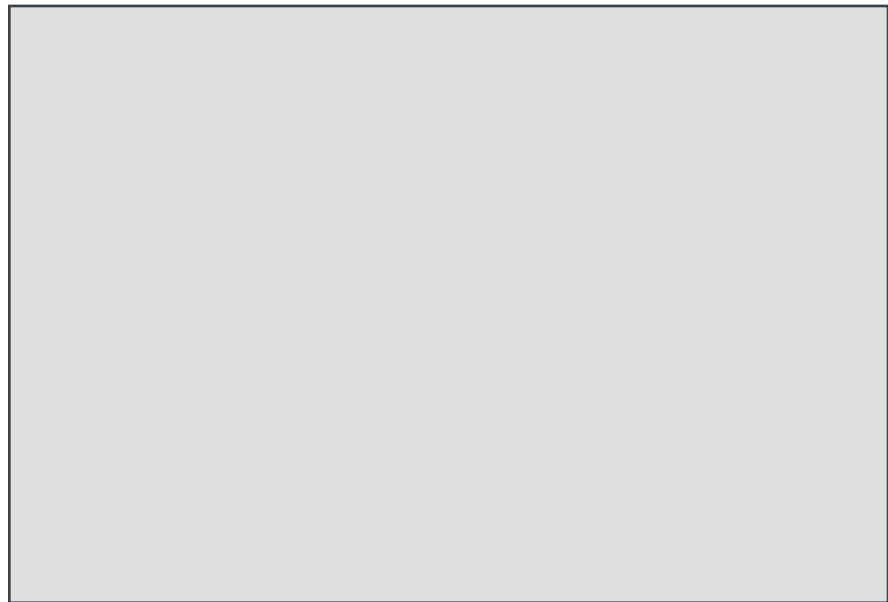
More targeted and long-term



(Utah State Board of Education, 2022c)

messaging can have an even greater impact. Rogers and Feller (2018) conducted a study of sharing personalized information with parents of high-risk, K-12 students, also in Philadelphia, for a full year. As they report, “The most effective versions reduced chronic absenteeism by 10% across all grade-levels, partly by correcting parents’ biased beliefs about their students’ total absences” (Rogers & Feller, 2018, p. 235). One key aspect of this study was that it was focused on “an ‘asset’ view of parents... that empower[s] parents as partners in improving student outcomes” (p. 342).

Reducing absenteeism in Utah is a critical issue. State attendance rates in 2021-2022 were down for all grade levels. The overall chronic absentee rate increased 43% between 2020-2021 and 2021-2022. The pre-pandemic chronic absentee rate in 2018-2019 was 14.3% meaning that chronic absenteeism has almost doubled to 27.2% just a few years (Utah State Board of Education, 2022c).



A recent report from the Utah Data Research Center found that areas of poor social and economic health lead to higher instances of chronic absenteeism and chronically absent 11th graders are more likely to not graduate (Fenn, 2021). While this issue is not new it continues to impact teaching and learning and there are different barriers and solutions in the post-pandemic era.

An additional complexity is Utah's consistent attendance data collection. Local education agencies prior to 2020 were allowed to develop their own definitions for several

attendance categories, such as what constitutes truancy. This made statewide comparison of attendance data difficult, therefore monitoring the effectiveness of interventions was also more difficult. To provide a more consistent basis for attendance reporting, the state legislature passed H.B.14 School Absenteeism and Truancy Amendments in 2020 which defined the terms “truant,” “valid excuse,” “absence,” and “school day,” as well as providing rules for local reporting.

Even with more consistent definitions, attendance reporting is subject to unreliable data

**Days Attended:**

**(Required)** This represents the sum of days attended by the student in both regular settings (SI) and self-contained settings. A student should be counted as in attendance on a school day if the student was counted on the roll by a teacher as being “present”:

Grades 1 - 6: at any time during the day

Grades 7 - 12: in at least one period of the day

(Utah eTranscript and Record Exchange, 2023, p. 41)

entry, particularly at the secondary level where students rotate throughout the day. Currently, state-level attendance data is based on a single field reported from local student information systems: days attended.

To remedy the reliability issues recording days attended and to provide more specific reporting, three new fields have been added to the data exchange between local student information systems and the Utah State Board of Education (USBE): Excused Absences, Unexcused Absences, and Absences Due to Suspension (see appendix A for

definitions). These fields will provide better information about statewide attendance in the future. For current inquiries into school attendance, all reporting must rely on the Days Attended field. The main attendance metrics calculated from Days Attended are:

- Attendance Rate: Average Days of Attendance divided by Average Days of Membership
- Chronic Absentee Rate: The percentage of students who were chronically absent
- Chronically Absent: A student is considered chronically absent if they were absent for more than 10% of days

enrolled (the student had to be enrolled in the LEA 60 calendar days or more to be included in the calculation)

- Consistent Attendance Rate: the percentage of students who miss fewer than ten school days during the school year

The statewide K-12 school attendance rate has significantly decreased since the school year 2017-2018. The school year 2019-2020 may show as an anomaly with increased attendance, but that is due to the relaxation of attendance & membership requirements during the pandemic. In reality, school

## Utah Attendance Rate by Demographic

	SCHOOL YEAR					DIFFERENCE
	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2018-2022
African American or Black	94.5	94.0	95.5	93.6	91.7	-2.8
American Indian	92.0	92.1	93.7	91.5	88.0	-4.0
Asian	96.4	96.1	96.5	95.9	93.8	-2.6
Hispanic or Latino	94.0	93.5	94.9	92.2	90.3	-3.7
Multiple Races	94.7	94.2	95.6	93.2	91.1	-3.6
Pacific Islander	92.8	92.5	94.3	91.5	87.9	-4.9
White	95.1	94.5	95.7	94.2	92.1	-3.0
Female	95.0	94.5	95.5	93.4	91.6	-3.4
Male	95.1	94.5	95.6	93.5	91.6	-3.5
Student with a Disability	93.5	92.9	94.9	92.7	90.7	-2.8
Economically Disadvantaged	93.7	93.2	94.4	92.3	90.1	-3.6
Not Economically Disadvantaged	95.6	95.1	95.8	94.3	92.4	-3.2
English Learner	94.0	93.4	94.9	92.7	90.3	-3.7
Not English Learner	94.9	94.3	95.4	93.9	92.9	-3.0
Homeless	91.4	90.7	92.7	89.5	86.7	-4.7
Not Homeless	94.8	94.3	95.4	93.9	92.0	-2.8

Note: Numbers shown represent a percent of 100. The difference is the change in attendance rate from 2018 to 2022.

attendance has not recovered since the pandemic and schools have felt the impact of student absenteeism.

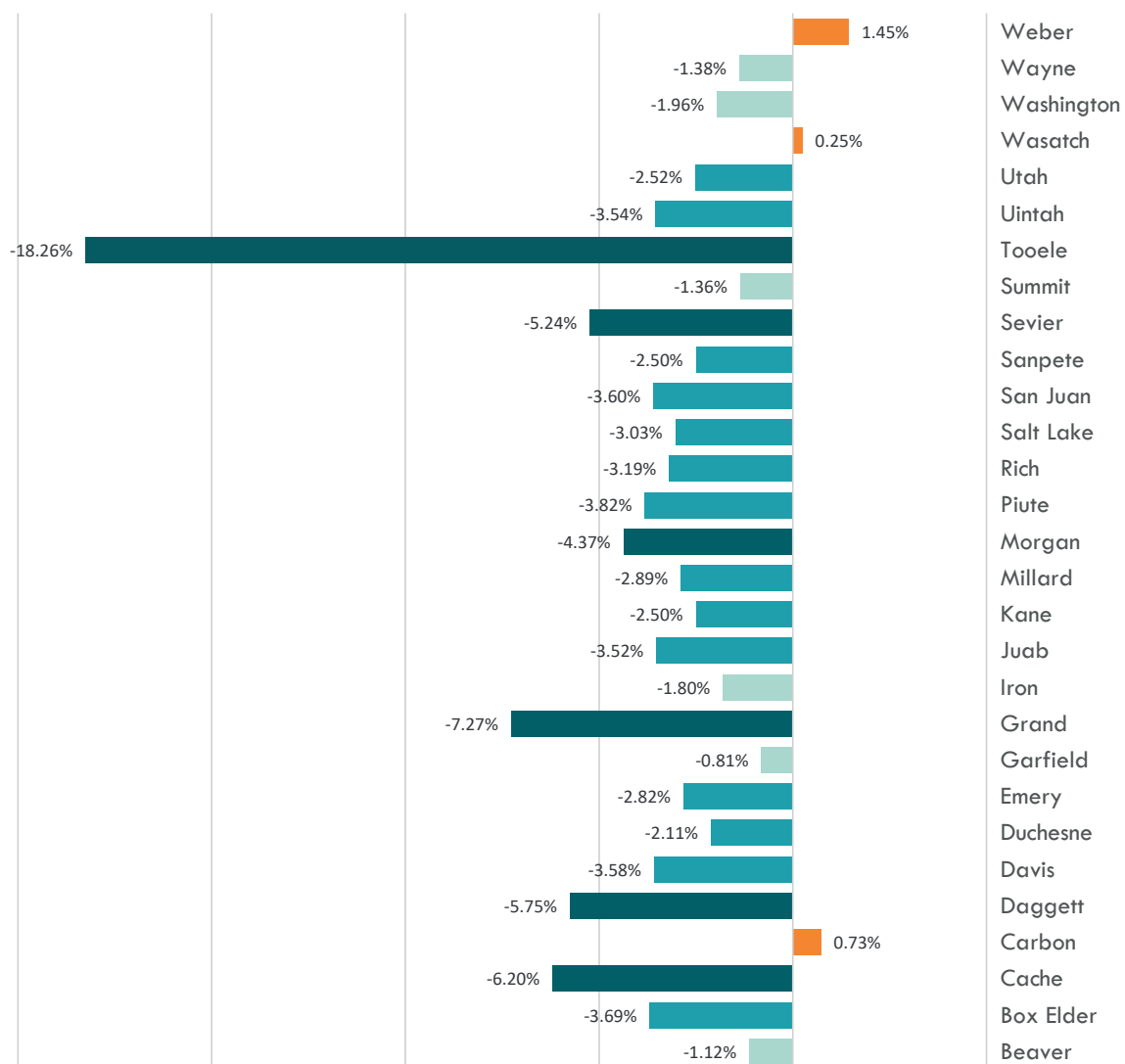
The decrease in school attendance was not equal among all student groups. Native American, Hispanic/Latino, Pacific Islander, and homeless students experienced the largest declines. Changes in school attendance between

2018 and 2022 have also varied significantly by location.

While the general trend is towards greater absenteeism, there were schools improving attendance outcomes or bucking the trend. The research team reached out to a variety of schools across the state to see how they were successfully addressing student attendance: Albert R Lyman Middle School,

Dual Immersion Academy, Glendale Middle School, Hawthorne School, Monument Valley High, South Jordan Middle, and Water Canyon High. In each school, researchers found school leaders focused on 1) relationship building with students and families, 2) accurate attendance tracking, 3) timely communication, and 4) parent education.

Difference in Utah Attendance Rates between 2018 and 2022 by County



(Utah State Board of Education, 2018, 2022b)

# PRACTICE OBJECTIVES

Gennifer Blake, Albert R. Lyman Middle School's student advocate, said they have experienced attendance issues due to the fact that students have to travel over two hours to school and some of these students are lacking the basic necessities like power and water. Their overarching goal was to **make relationships with kids**, to let parents and students know that the school faculty cares that the students are in attendance and miss them when they are not there.

Shannon Sanchez, Dual Immersion Academy's social worker, said the K-8 school was experiencing a high number of unexcused absences and absences related to illness. Their strategy was to **focus on the importance of attendance**. The goal is for the school to reach a 95% attendance rate.

Kesslie Green, Glendale Middle School's assistant principal, saw mounting challenges of students not attending school regularly so together with an outreach team, they formed a plan to **incentivize students to engage** in school.

Hawthorne Elementary's Principal, Cody Colvin, said he was concerned about rising tardiness and made plans to **incentivize punctual attendance**.

Monument Valley High School prides itself on being a center for resources and student socialization in the Navajo Nation, but faces serious attendance issues. Staff said a significant roadblock is many parents and caregivers do not prioritize attendance. The administration is trying to achieve better attendance with **access to resources** as the incentive.

At South Jordan Middle School, counselors

were concerned to see an increase in chronic absenteeism over the last few years. In particular, they were concerned that Pacific Islander students made up just 2.1% of the school population, but 13.3% of chronically absent students. Their goal was to **reduce the percentage of Pacific Islander students who were chronically absent** from 13.3% to 7% by the end of third term.

At Water Canyon High School, Principal Steve Showalter and Learning Coach Brad Garrett are attempting to overcome a long history of distrust toward public institutions in the community. Hildale residents are predominantly members of the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints which advised against sending students to public school in 2000, creating a significant decrease in enrollment. When the high school opened in 2016, administrators, teachers, students, parents, and other stakeholders sought to **reestablish the norms and procedures of public schools, including school attendance and parent communication**.

Each of the schools featured in this report vary in location and demographics, but their approach to improving attendance was consistent: improve communication and relationships with affected families, and offer positive incentives for school attendance.





# PRACTICE IN ACTION

Several schools that improved attendance rates between school years 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 have focused on building better connection and communication with families in order to increase the value parents and students place on school attendance.

Albert R. Lyman Middle School relies on building relationships with students and their parents to encourage and increase attendance rates. Faculty meet students at the front doors as they enter and express gratitude for their being at school that day. They also make home visits to address the attendance of chronically absent students and help to solve issues that might be keeping students from attending. The vice principal sends out attendance letters and tracks student attendance. The letters get progressively sterner as absences accrue. Overall, administrators say the best incentives to attend have been relationships the faculty have created with the students and school-provided basic amenities that some of the students do not have at home. The school offers meals, Internet access, and social interactions that are valued by students and families.

Dual Immersion Academy primarily uses parent contact to increase student attendance. Attendance reports are pulled daily for the current and

previous day. Parents are called for any student that has two consecutive unexcused absences. The purpose of these phone calls is to find out the reason for the student's absence. School personnel express concern for the absences and stress the importance of letting the school know why the student is absent. They take this opportunity to inform the parents as to the importance of calling and informing the school. Teachers have also been instructed not to take notes from the parents to excuse their students' absence, instead relying on the personal interaction of a phone call. These practices have helped attendance because parents do not want phone calls from the school.

The school social worker and teachers also meet with parents to discuss what is causing absences and what can be done to help improve attendance. Parents are given a worksheet to help with transportation information and ideas to help them be on time, prepare a backpack, go to bed earlier, identify three solutions to work

on. Additionally, parents are counseled as to what symptoms qualify as "sick". They have found that post-COVID, parents keep kids home for minor and mild symptoms. Faculty stress the fact that a student should only be kept home if they are exhibiting symptoms of a fever, diarrhea, or vomiting.

A second area of focus to improve student attendance at Dual Immersion Academy takes place during the Kindergarten orientation. Parents are given a handout with graphics and tips to educate them on what 95% attendance looks like (only 9 absences). The school posts monthly attendance percentages and uses the Class Dojo attendance stoplight to inform parents and students about monthly attendance. In addition, the school and counselors created student and school wide incentives for students to improve their overall attendance.

Glendale Middle School adopted the use of Class Dojo as a communication platform connecting home and school,

as well as using it as a reward system during the extended period of online learning implemented by the Salt Lake City School District amidst the pandemic. During at-home learning, students were awarded points for attending virtual classes and at the end of each week names of students that attended school were drawn for a prize. The counseling team personally delivered the prizes to the winners and pictures of the recipients were shared on the Canvas platform. To address attendance challenges, Glendale Middle School established an outreach team comprising administrators, counselors, and selected teachers. This team took the initiative to visit the homes of students who were not attending school regularly, aiming to establish meaningful connections with both the students and their families. The outreach team

visited families' homes every day. The teachers at Glendale Middle School worked to craft engaging lessons on the Canvas platform to ensure students remained actively involved in their learning.

Hawthorne Elementary's overarching strategy revolves around cultivating an environment that fosters a deep sense of enjoyment and engagement among students. Their primary intervention plan involves conducting collaborative meetings with families when students have been absent for multiple days. By forging robust partnerships with families, they aim to bolster student attendance and overall participation. When meeting with families, staff create contracts that specifically target attendance, allowing students to earn incentives when they successfully achieve their attendance goals.

In their efforts to address tardiness, which may potentially progress to absenteeism, they have introduced a creative approach called the random attendance raffle, where students have a chance to enjoy donuts with the principals. These measures are part of their comprehensive strategy to foster a culture of punctuality and active participation among the students. Administrators point out the emphasis is not on penalizing students, but rather on finding effective strategies to inspire

their desire to be present and engaged in school.

Monument Valley High School primarily uses an incentive program for students to increase their attendance. Education is optional on the Navajo Nation, but resources are not. The school promises to provide students with free meals for breakfast and lunch, after school tutoring, an accessible food bank, meals for the weekends, warmth (many student homes run on a coal furnace and families are not always able to afford enough coal to keep the furnace warm), electricity, and drinkable water. If a student attends, they have access to these resources. The school has increased its resource bank to provide resources to students they might not be able to otherwise have in their familial settings.

At South Jordan Middle School, counselors have taken a multi-faceted approach to improving attendance for Pacific Islander students specifically, and the student body generally. They enlist 17-hour aides to complete attendance tracking for individual students, while counselors meet with identified students to help students see the value of education. The students and counselors identify barriers and develop plans to remove them, plus they create incentives to work towards. A "Connection Group" brings students together to help them feel more connected to home and school.



By forging robust partnerships with families, they aim to bolster student attendance and overall participation.

In addition to the Connection Group, the counselors also sponsor a Connection Week for the whole school.

Counselors also reach out to parents to improve attendance. They target parents of students with continual absences and collaborate on removing barriers to attendance. To improve community engagement and awareness, they held a community evening event with Bob Kittell, an acclaimed speaker and author, to train parents on connecting with their students. Jordan Family Education classes are also offered on a continuing basis for parents.

Water Canyon High School has implemented a variety of policies and procedures that collectively created a positive impact on student attendance. However, before implementing any solutions, Principal Showalter emphasized the importance of implementation fidelity to existing attendance procedures. The accuracy of current attendance data is crucial to understanding the current reality, which leads to the creation of solutions for existing problems. The Water Canyon administration states the ultimate goal is to prevent an attendance problem from occurring in the first place. By using accurate and timely attendance records staff can communicate with students and parents the moment an issue arises instead of waiting

"Educational interventions that inform and empower parents... can complement more intensive student-focused absenteeism interventions."

(Rogers & Feller, 2018, p. 335)

for attendance problems to escalate.

In order to increase fidelity with existing attendance, administration and faculty created a Collective Commitment to take and record attendance accurately. If attendance is not recorded in a specific class, teachers receive a gentle reminder during class from a secretary or administrator. If attendance is still not recorded during the class period, a secretary or administrator asks in person that attendance be recorded right away.

Because teachers had a hand in creating the Collective Commitment centered around attendance records, emails and visits do not feel punitive.

Administrators believe the emphasis on accurate attendance records has created a latent consequence of all stakeholders (admin, teachers, students, support staff, parents, etc.) viewing attendance as a priority.

Upon increasing the fidelity of existing attendance procedures, the school's leadership team determined some next steps to improve attendance:

1. Contact parents regarding student absences during the school day instead of relying on the automated phone calls from the Student Information System (SIS) at the end of the day.
2. Teachers will make all class

time valuable, especially the early minutes of each class. All teachers at Water Canyon High School begin class with some sort of starter activity. The teachers have the autonomy to select the starter but all teachers are expected to have something.

3. A schoolwide focus on highly engaging instructional practices in order to make all class time both valuable and fun, therefore making school a desirable place to be for students.
4. Water Canyon High School seeks to shift the priority for teachers away from power and control over students and to providing value and joy.

Water Canyon High School, like all high schools, has its own contextual factors which lead to complex issues that require complex solutions. However, school attendance is a common problem which permeates all types of contexts. Creating a faculty-wide collective commitment to collect and report accurate attendance, contacting parents/guardians as soon as possible, implementing school wide procedures for class structures, and continually learning and applying highly effective instructional strategies are all ingredients in a recipe that lead to improved attendance.

# PRACTICE OUTCOMES

Attendance Rate from USBE Data Sets is calculated as the average number of days that the students attended divided by the average number of days that the students were enrolled (most schools have a 180 day school year). The Consistent Attendance Rate is provided in the Utah School Report Card for the 2021-2022 school year and is the percentage of students who miss fewer than ten school days during the school year. Comparisons to the district and state and performance over time are also from the Utah School Report Card.

**Albert R. Lyman's** attendance increased as a result of some of these practices for the 2021-2022 school year.

## Attendance Rate for All Students

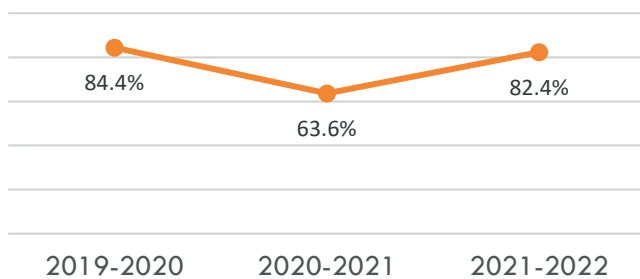
2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
94.33%	93.11%	93.88%	91.14%	93.98%

**82.4%** Consistent Attendance  
*Percent of students that missed fewer than 10 days of school*

### Consistent Attendance: How did this school compare to the district and state?



### Consistent Attendance: How did this school perform over time?

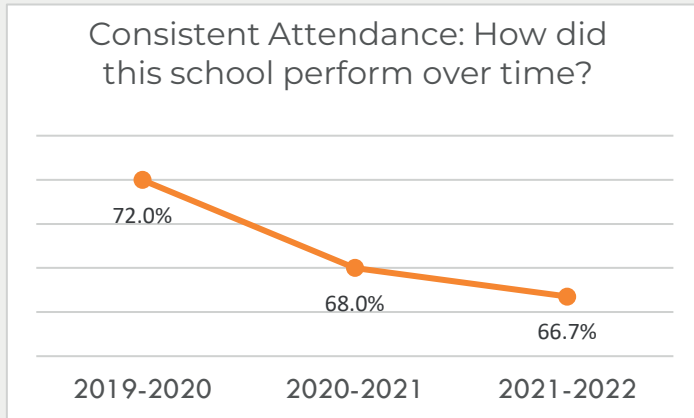


The practices described in the report for **Dual Immersion Academy** have taken place during the 2022-2023 school year to address the decrease in attendance from the prior year.

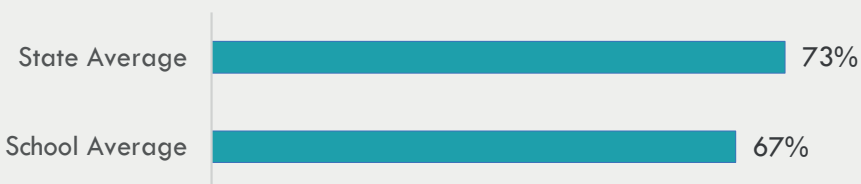
### Attendance Rate for All Students

2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
94.19%	95.05%	92.49%	90.33%	92.11%

**66.7%** Consistent Attendance  
*Percent of students that missed fewer than 10 days of school*



Consistent Attendance: How did this school compare to the district and state?



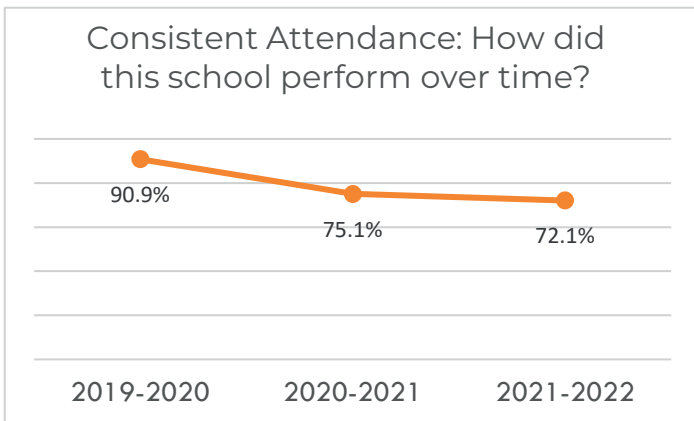


Glendale Middle School observed a 2.3% decrease in attendance in 2021 and a 1.3% decrease in 2022. It is worth noting that challenges such as technological issues and limited access to internet connectivity were encountered by families and students during online learning, which significantly contributed to the decline in attendance rates.

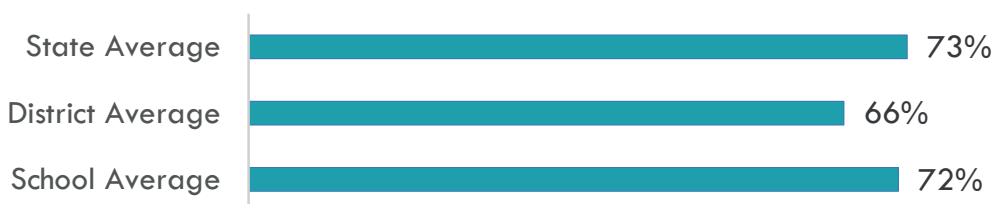
### Attendance Rate for All Students

2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
94.31%	94.24%	96.13%	93.75%	92.52%

**72.1%** Consistent Attendance  
*Percent of students that missed fewer than 10 days of school*



### Consistent Attendance: How did this school compare to the district and state?



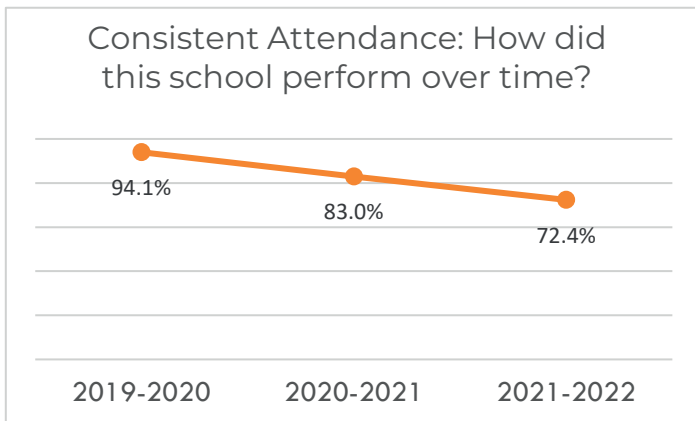


**Hawthorne Elementary School** experienced a decrease of 2.4% in attendance from 2020 to 2021, but notably, the decrease was only 0.6% from 2021 to 2022. Challenges such as technological issues and limited access to internet connectivity were encountered by families and students during online learning, which significantly contributed to the decline in attendance rates.

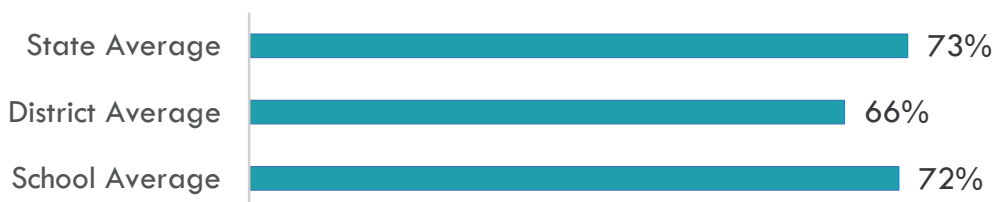
### Attendance Rate for All Students

2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
95.46%	95.19%	95.99%	93.58%	91.83%

**72.4%** Consistent Attendance  
*Percent of students that missed fewer than 10 days of school*



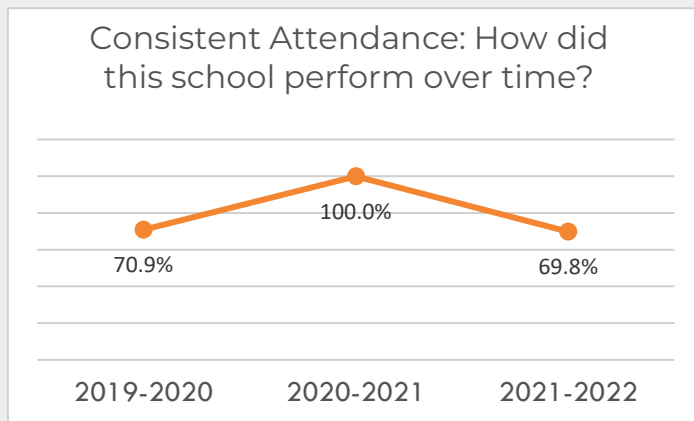
### Consistent Attendance: How did this school compare to the district and state?



**Monument Valley High School** saw an attendance increase at the height of the COVID pandemic as more students were in greater need of resources. Since incentives to attend included access to resources, more students attended in-person or virtually to access the resources for themselves and their families. There was a 2.3% decrease in attendance in 2021 and a 1.3% decrease in 2022. It is worth noting that challenges such as technological issues and limited access to internet connectivity were encountered by families and students during online learning, which staff indicate significantly contributed to the decline in attendance rates.

**69.8%** **Consistent Attendance**  
*Percent of students that missed fewer than 10 days of school*

Attendance Rate for All Students				
2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
94.2%	92.0%	91.4%	98.2%	92.4%



Consistent Attendance: How did this school compare to the district and state?

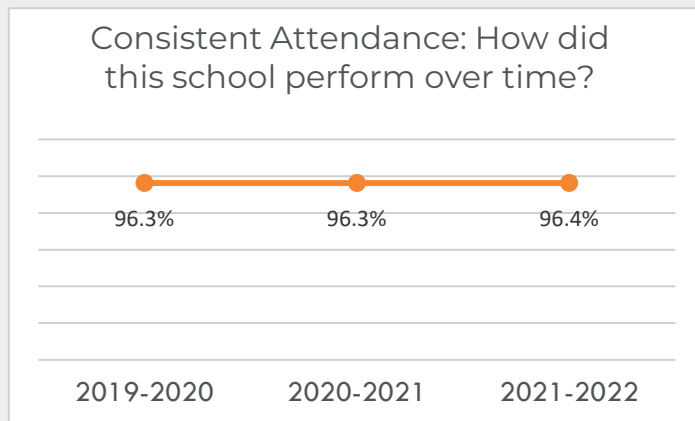




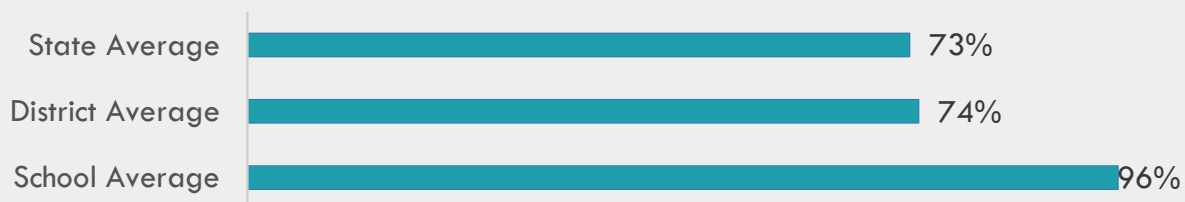
At **South Jordan Middle School** counselors were able to see results for their Pacific Islander students by third term. The percentage of chronically absent students who are Pacific Islander dropped from 13.3 % to 4.2%. Over time, attendance rates for Pacific Islander students have improved significantly.

**96.4%** **Consistent Attendance**  
*Percent of students that missed fewer than 10 days of school*

Attendance Rate for All Students				
2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
92.62%	92.06%	96.04%	96.615	97.21%



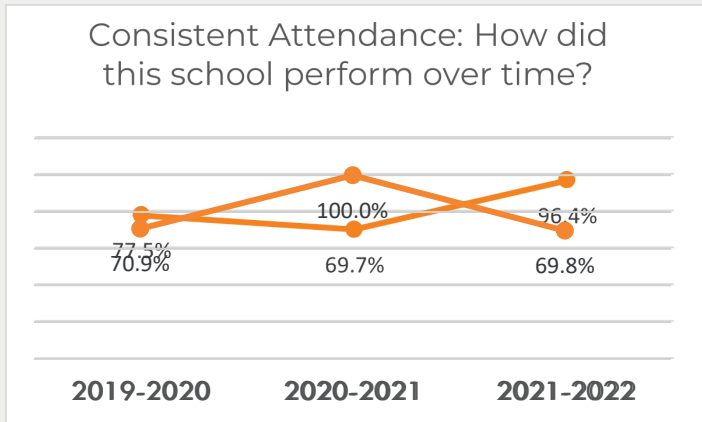
Consistent Attendance: How did this school compare to the district and state?



**Water Canyon High School** is showing a promising trend with longitudinal attendance data. While attendance peaked in the 2019-2020, the recovery has been swift and more students are attending school now than prior to the COVID-19 Pandemic.

**76.1%** **Consistent Attendance**  
*Percent of students that missed fewer than 10 days of school*

Attendance Rate for All Students				
2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
89.1%	89.8%	93.7%	91.0%	92.6%



Consistent Attendance: How did this school compare to the district and state?



# PRACTICE REPLICATION

## Considerations

To replicate the parent conferences central to Dual Immersion Academy, Hawthorne School, and South Jordan Middle’s approach, counselors or administrators would need to prioritize time spent on calling families until a meeting could be arranged. Water Canyon High School, like the other schools mentioned, made timely phone calls to parents as needed. Both Water Canyon High and Dual Immersion Academy mentioned a staff member calling home until a parent or guardian was reached. This represents an investment in staff time.

Being able to meet with parents about immediate concerns necessitates accurate attendance tracking. At South Jordan Middle School, a larger middle school, 17-hour aides were tasked with tracking attendance for certain students. At Albert R. Lyman Middle, a small rural school, a school administrator performed this task. At Water Canyon High School, another small rural school, the secretary or administrator monitored attendance-taking by teachers. At any school, the accurate tracking of attendance must be a clear responsibility for some or all staff members. Training in attendance codes and policy would also be a consideration.

At Albert R. Lyman Middle and Glendale Middle, administrators and counselors also performed home visits. The logistics of home visits require an investment in time, training, and transportation.

Dual Immersion Academy and South Jordan Middle School both offered parents formal training opportunities and materials in addition to informal meetings and phone calls. Access to these formal training opportunities, like community nights with guest speakers, may be only available at a cost.

Several schools, like Dual Immersion Academy and Glendale Middle, also made special use of Class Dojo. Subscription software services like Class Dojo would also require budgeting and training.

## Scale

It is possible to quickly scale access to software services, like Class Dojo, with district-level or state-level purchasing. Scaling use, though, will require consistent and ongoing training opportunities. Accurate attendance tracking may also be eased by widespread and consistent training in using the LEA student information system.

The work of meeting with parents and students, home visits, and building connections

must necessarily remain local to the school. However, structural changes to school schedules and job responsibilities can prioritize using time to connect with families.

Districts can scale attendance interventions as well by offering formal parent education opportunities and community nights at the district level, or funding them at the district level.

## Limitations

The biggest limitation in replicating attendance interventions across other schools is time. Each school that significantly improved attendance devoted a significant portion of staff time to do so. At Water Canyon High School in particular, this was a main focus of the staff’s time and attention. Making room for attendance tracking and follow-up may require setting other priorities aside. However, the success of the efforts documented by these schools, as well as available research, suggest that the investment in time will yield positive results in student attendance rates.

Low enrollment rates in formal training opportunities and low engagement from parents could also be a limiting factor in successfully replicating these attendance practices.



# RECOMMENDATIONS & CONCLUSION

## Recommendations

It is possible to emphasize family-school connections building, district, or state-wide, although the time and effort to build those relationships remains a the responsibility of the local school. LEAs or the state office could support these efforts by providing protocols and training for both school staff and parents. Creating parent education materials and initiatives at the LEA or state level would also save local school leaders the time of creating them themselves.

Perhaps more importantly, LEA or state leadership could help make time for such efforts by allowing flexibility with

mandated processes. Making room for more staff time for phone calls, conferences, and visits home is the biggest barrier to wider implementation.

Accurate attendance tracking is already aided by the efforts of the Utah Legislature and USBE with recent laws mandating common attendance definitions and reporting. This emphasis on consistent recording and reporting statewide must continue in order to see the impact of policy.

## Conclusion

Attendance rates have fallen and chronic absenteeism has risen in schools across the

country in the last three years. Utah has been no exception, seeing significant declines in consistent school attendance. Some schools, however, have bucked the trend by prioritizing attendance tracking and proactive interventions such as parent conferences. Each of the school leaders interviewed stressed the importance of building consensus with parents on why school attendance is important for their students. They have achieved this through more frequent, personal and timely communication with families.

In addition, parent education opportunities and incentives for students build a positive culture around attendance.



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# APPENDIX A

## UTREX FILE SPECIFICATIONS FOR ATTENDANCE FIELDS

From UTREx Data Clearinghouse File Specification 2022-23 pages 41-43  
<https://schools.utah.gov/File/094ffb64-e238-4086-af78-90465d445df3>

**Days Attended:** (Required) This represents the sum of days attended by the student in both regular settings (S1) and self-contained settings. A student should be counted as in attendance on a school day if the student was counted on the roll by a teacher as being “present”:

Grades 1 - 6: at any time during the day

Grades 7 - 12: in at least one period of the day

BLANK is an error at year-end. If present, must be complete (right justify, zero fill); ‘000’ is ok; can’t be greater than the sum of school membership and self-contained SCRAM and YIC membership; BLANK is ok for October 1 and December 1, but if present, all above constraints apply. **Days Attended should be reported in [180-day equivalent days](#).**

**Note 1:** If the sum of Days Attended for all students associated with a school is less than 50% of total membership (the sum of regular and self-contained special education and self-contained YIC membership for all students) a warning will be generated.

**Note 2:** If the sum of Days Attended for all students associated with a school is 0, an error will be generated.

**Note 3:** If the student has the Early Graduate flag and is earning > 180 days of membership, days attended should be based on the same proration calculation. For example, if the student is taking one additional class and will earn 200 days of membership their days attended could equal 200 if the student has 100% attendance.

**Excused Absences:** (Required for K-12) This represents the sum of days absent with a valid excuse that meet the threshold for truancy. **This sum should not include days absent due to suspensions.** Absences included in this sum must meet definitions in Utah Code [53G-6-201](#) for absence, valid excuse, and truancy, including one of the following truancy absence thresholds:

For a student primarily enrolled in a face-to-face, **or attendance validated**, learning program: half, or more than half, of the school day.

For a student primarily enrolled in a learner verified, **or learner validated**, program: above the threshold of “the relevant amount of time under the LEA’s policy regarding the LEA’s continuing enrollment measure as it relates to truancy.”

**Excused Absences should be reported in [180-day equivalent days](#).**

**Note 1:** BLANK is an error at year-end. If present, must be complete (right justify, zero fill); ‘000’ is ok; can’t be greater than the sum of school membership and self-contained SCRAM and YIC membership; BLANK is ok for October 1 and December 1, but if present, all above constraints apply.



**Note 2:** If the sum of excused absences, unexcused absences, and absences due to suspension is greater than the sum of school membership, self-contained SCRAM, and self-contained YIC membership for the student, an error will be generated.

**Note 3:** If the sum of excused absences for all students associated with a school is 0, a validation warning will be generated.

**Unexcused Absences:** (Required for K-12) This represents the sum of days absent without a valid excuse that meet the threshold for truancy. **This sum should not include days absent due to suspensions.** Absences included in this sum do not meet the definition of valid excuse, but do meet definitions in Utah Code [53G-6-201](#) for absence and truancy, including one of the following truancy absence thresholds:

For a student primarily enrolled in a face-to-face, **or attendance validated**, learning program: half, or more than half, of the school day.

For a student primarily enrolled in a learner verified, **or learner validated**, program: above the threshold of “the relevant amount of time under the LEA’s policy regarding the LEA’s continuing enrollment measure as it relates to truancy.”

**Unexcused Absences should be reported in [180-day equivalent days](#).**

**Note 1:** BLANK is an error at year-end. If present, must be complete (right justify, zero fill); ‘000’ is ok; can’t be greater than the sum of school membership and self-contained SCRAM and YIC membership; BLANK is ok for October 1 and December 1, but if present, all above constraints apply.

**Note 2:** If the sum of excused absences, unexcused absences, and absences due to suspension is greater than the sum of school membership, self-contained SCRAM, and self-contained YIC membership for the student, an error will be generated.

**Note 3:** If the sum of unexcused absences for all students associated with a school is 0, a validation warning will be generated.

**Absences Due to Suspension:** (Required for K-12) This represents the sum of days absent due to in or out of school suspension that meet the threshold for truancy. Absences included in this sum are due to in or out of school suspensions, and meet definitions in Utah Code [53G-6-201](#) for absence and truancy, including one of the following truancy absence thresholds:

For a student primarily enrolled in a face-to-face, **or attendance validated**, learning program: half, or more than half, of the school day.

For a student primarily enrolled in a learner verified, **or learner validated**, program: above the threshold of “the relevant amount of time under the LEA’s policy regarding the LEA’s continuing enrollment measure as it relates to truancy.”

**Absences Due to Suspension should be reported in [180-day equivalent days](#).**

**Note 1:** BLANK is an error at year-end. If present, must be complete (right justify, zero fill); ‘000’ is ok; can’t be greater than the sum of school membership and self-contained SCRAM and YIC membership; BLANK is ok for October 1 and December 1, but if present, all above constraints apply.

**Note 2:** If the sum of excused absences, unexcused absences, and absences due to suspension is greater than the sum of school membership, self-contained SCRAM, and self-contained YIC membership for the student, an error will be generated.

**Note 3:** If the sum of absences due to suspension for all students associated with a school is 0, a validation warning will be generated.

# APPENDIX B

## ATTENDANCE AND MEMBERSHIP

### DATA NOTES

From Attendance: School Year 2022 report:  
<https://schools.utah.gov/data/reports>

1. Which students' attendance is included in the average daily attendance dataset?
  - a. Students who had enrollment in kindergarten through twelfth grade (K-12) who meet the following rules for inclusion:
    - i. Grade K-12
    - ii. Sum of attendance is greater than 0
    - iii. Sum of regular membership and Self-Contained SCRAM membership is greater than 100
    - iv. School of Record not reported as no
    - v. Attending school in Utah (resident status 'A', 'B', 'F', 'J', or 'U')
2. Timing for this dataset:
  - a. The dataset for Attendance aggregates herein uses reported attendance and membership information from the Year End data submission, thus dataset will be updated each year after the Year End data has been finalized (approximately sometime in late July)
3. How enrollment records are handled when a student has more than one K-12 enrollment record (for example, a student was enrolled part-time in two schools):
  - a. A student is included once in each "unit level" in which they meet the rules for inclusion. For example, in the aggregates by School, if a student is enrolled in two schools they will be included in the counts of both of those two schools. In the aggregates by LEA, if those two schools are in two different LEAs the student will also be included in the counts of two different LEAs. If, however, the schools are in one LEA, In the aggregates by LEA the student will be included in only one LEA. Each student will only be included once in the overall state counts. Totals summed up across schools, LEAs, Counties, and LEA types will not sum to the same number as the state counts. The State aggregates by Charter and by District are both lower than the aggregate state totals due to students for whom some of their attendance and membership was in a Charter and some of their attendance and membership was in a district, thus the student's aggregates at each 'LEA Type' unit level was lower than their aggregates at the state totals unit level.
4. Blank cells: Aggregates are not shown if there are fewer than 10 students in the group.
5. Missing Schools: Schools are not shown on the school tab if there are fewer than 10 students with attendance in the school.

#### Definitions

School Year: The ending year that the school year spans. The school year from July 1, 2021 to

June 30, 2022, is referred to as school year (SY) 2022

Average Days of Attendance: The average number of days that the students attended (most schools have a 180 day school year)

Average Days of Membership: The average number of days that the students were enrolled (most schools have a 180 day school year)

Attendance Rate: Average Days of Attendance divided by Average Days of Membership

LEA: Local Education Agency, comprised of one or more school. LEAs in Utah are Districts, Charters, or Other Agencies (Utah Schools for the Deaf and Blind)

Note on SY2020 data

Summary: For the 2020 school year the USBE approved the following change to Board Rule R277-419 to modify the calculation of membership (see ):

Link to Board Docs: <https://usbe.civicclerk.com/Web/GenFile.aspx?ad=3356>

Selected text from Board Rule R277-419-8. Student Membership Calculation During the 2020 Covid-19 Pandemic.

Notwithstanding the requirements of Sections R277-419-6 and R277-419-7, the Superintendent shall calculate an LEA's membership for days of instruction from March 16, 2020 to June 30, 2020, based on the LEA's average rate of membership between July 1, 2019 and March 13, 2020 if:

- (1) the LEA has submitted a continuity of education plan; and
- (2) the LEA provides educational services through the end of the LEA's regular school year calendar.

Actions: "In practice, since membership is reported to USBE in aggregate for the school year, USBE could not differentiate between membership before and after March 16. As such, USBE made a decision to prorate reported membership based on an estimate that, on average, most LEAs will have been at about their 145th day of membership as of the last day of school prior to Covid closure (March 13, 2020). LEAs were essentially "held harmless" for membership days over 145, which may have been difficult for them to manage due to Covid school closures during the last 35 days of membership (on average). In addition, LEAs were advised to extend the "hold harmless" concept in taking attendance for students who were having a difficult time staying engaged in school after March 16 due to technological and other limitations. In the Agreed Upon Procedures (AUP) reports on the Year-End Student Membership data, auditor's reports have used the following footnote when testing compliance with the 10-Day Rule:

\* Beginning March 16, 2020, the School implemented the state mandated soft closure of schools in response to COVID-19; therefore, no procedures on continuing enrollment measurement have been performed after this date."

Impact on Data: One of the outcomes of this "hold harmless" provision and the differences in attendance and membership reporting requirements during the Covid school closures is that the mobility and chronic absence rates are lower than expected (based on trend data), and attendance and average daily membership rates are higher than expected (based on trend data). It may be advisable to exclude the SY2020 data from attendance trend analyses.



**Utah Leading through Effective, Actionable, and Dynamic Education**

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