



Case Study

Meriden Public Schools

How one Meriden school leveraged KiNVO to decrease chronic absenteeism by over 10 percent



—Mark Benigni, Ed.D.
Superintendent
Meriden Public Schools

Introduction

Connecticut’s Meriden Public Schools serves 8,600 students. The district comprises eight neighborhood elementary schools, two middle schools, two high schools, the Venture Academy alternative education program, The Success Academy, and a College and Career Readiness Center.

10% ▼

Decrease in chronic absenteeism rates between the 2016–2017 and 2017–2018 school years, arising as a district leader in student and family reengagement.

When it came to attendance, Roger Sherman Elementary was among the lowest performing schools in the district. Free and reduced lunch rates hover at 90 percent, and the school has a higher-than-average special education population. However, despite these factors, along with severe weather conditions and a changing student demographic, between the 2016–2017 and 2017–2018 school years the school decreased chronic absenteeism rates by over 10 percent, arising as a district leader in student and family reengagement.

How did they do it?

“Family engagement remains our top priority. Even though we had a huge jump in attendance, we still need to focus on engaging and supporting our families. We improved a school that has many challenges, and to keep building on that momentum we need to continue focusing on strong teacher parent engagement and a climate and culture that puts students and parents first.”

—Dave Cardona
Family-School Liaison
Meriden Public Schools

Leveraging software to support change management and treat parents as partners

In Spring 2017, Kinolved launched a partnership with Meriden Public Schools. Kinolved is a social enterprise on a mission to boost student attendance and tackle chronic absenteeism by engaging educators, families, and communities through a combination of technology tools—notably the KiNVO attendance and communications app—and in-person interventions.

Kinolved’s professional services team worked hand in hand with district leadership and the school’s principal to strategically implement KiNVO and create feedback loops to be sure the app best served the school’s needs.

Working with school leaders, Kinolved supported Roger Sherman’s efforts to focus on at-risk youth—specifically those whose attendance levels put them at risk of chronic absenteeism—by helping the school set and achieve positive family engagement goals.

David Cardona, Meriden’s family-school liaison, explained that Roger Sherman made KiNVO the cornerstone of their multifaceted approach to curbing chronic absenteeism, using the app to foster two-way, positive engagement with families in the following ways.

Emphasizing day-to-day, positive engagement with families of at-risk students

KiNVO enabled school staff to send updates about attendance improvement, incentives, and school programs and activities via text, a universally accepted and approachable form of communication. As a result, parents who had previously never engaged with the school wrote back to KiNVO-powered messages.

Using attendance data to uncover and engage at-risk students

Throughout the year, educators worked with assigned groups of at-risk students to discuss their engagement in and perspectives on school. Giving students the agency to share their voices helped develop relationships between, and among, students and staff; it also allowed educators to determine the best incentives to reward improved attendance.

Incentivizing great attendance in absolute and relative terms

Staff members offered students weekly and monthly incentives for improving and maintaining high attendance, and it paid off. Two school buses’ worth of students earned tickets to a local minor league baseball game, and at the end of the year, students earned access to a YMCA outdoor camp.

¹ Extended school days are particularly beneficial for low-income students—according to ExpandED, by sixth grade, economically advantaged children have spent six thousand more hours learning than have their counterparts born into poverty.

Engaging all families, regardless of attendance metrics

Using KiNVO, school faculty provided families with regular text reminders of incentives, attendance improvement data, and schedule-friendly family events. These positive messages stood in direct contrast to pre-KiNVO attendance phone calls and letters, which focused on absence rates, leading to deeper engagement and strengthened school-home connections.

Extending the school day to guarantee more learning time

With support from the American Federation of Teachers, Meriden participated in the TIME Collaborative, a five-state initiative launched in 2012 by the National Center on Time and Learning and the Ford Foundation. Roger Sherman became an expanded learning time school, offering children one hundred minutes more instructional time per day over traditional schools. As a result, student achievement has improved, teachers' ratings have risen, and attendance rates are up.¹

When speaking with parents, Mr. Cardona consistently hears gratitude for KiNVO's text messages and emails. He's learned that KiNVO messages help not only at-risk youth but also students who are generally on track. In addition, parents of on-track children noted that they enjoy positive updates and invitations to school events.

Teachers can also reach out to parents in real time and in multiple languages. Mr. Cardona noted that teachers have communicated about attendance, positive behavior, and general information, and have engaged families with specific offers to provide assistance where helpful.

With proven results, Meriden expands KiNVO to more schools in the district

Meriden has expanded KiNVO to one of its high schools, Orville H. Platt High School, and will soon implement the app in another elementary school. While Platt is still in its initial year of implementation, chronic absenteeism is already trending 21 percent better than the previous year. Mr. Cardona shared that the high school's principal has reportedly connected with previously hard-to-reach parents, and that KiNVO's daily digest ensures parents are aware of their child's daily attendance.

Frontline workers, including teachers, now have access to more critical attendance information than ever before. Teachers use KiNVO to view and act on daily student attendance data, chronic absenteeism tiers, and updated parent contact information.

Roger Sherman remains focused on what moves the needle to prevent student disengagement

Last year the Roger Sherman community exchanged 24,050 messages among families, educators, and administrators, and while they have made significant gains compared to years past, school leaders know that family engagement is never "done" and that there is always room for improvement.

With chronic absenteeism declining by over 10 percent, the school topped the district ranks for highest year-over-year attendance improvement. They are committed to deepening their relationships and partnerships with families.



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