



# **Teacher Guide** **for Communicating with** **Parents and Guardians About** **Student Absences**

Improve Student Attendance by Helping Teachers  
Become Experts on Discussing Absenteeism

# Administrator Instructions: How to Use This Guide

## First Thing's First...Why Should Teachers Contact the Parents of Absent Students?

- ▶ **Parents<sup>1</sup> trust teachers more than administrators** when communicating about student absences.<sup>2</sup>
- ▶ Teachers invested in improving attendance are **twice as likely** to see their students graduate.<sup>3</sup>
- ▶ Communication between teachers and families **immediately increases student engagement.**<sup>4</sup>



### District Leaders:

- 1 Distribute this resource directly to building principals or administrators who supervise teachers and staff expected to contact parents and guardians of absent students.



### School Principals or Administrators:

Follow the steps below to help teachers and staff use this guide successfully:

- 1 Clearly communicate teacher and staff expectations for contacting parents and guardians of absent students. Make sure all teachers and staff know and record the following three pieces of information:
  1. Which teachers and staff are expected to contact parents and guardians of absent students?
  2. When should they make contact? (e.g., after how many consecutive absences?)
  3. How should they make contact? (e.g., via phone, email, text message, etc. Method of communication should take into consider teacher capacity and any parent preferences.)

▶ Encourage phone calls whenever possible. Early [research](#) shows phone communication leads to quicker action and stronger parent-teacher relationships than email and text.

- 2 During an existing faculty meeting or professional development session, disseminate pages 3-5 of this resource to teachers and staff who are expected to communicate with parents and guardians of absent students.
- 3 Inform teachers and staff of your preferred method for sharing their follow-up notes from parent and guardian communications. **Have teachers record this information in the bottom section of page 3.**

1) "Parents" is used interchangeably with "Guardians" or "Caretakers" throughout this document to be inclusive of all students' homes.  
2) State of California Department of Justice, [Top 10 Things to Consider When Talking to Parents About Attendance](#)  
3) Liu and Loeb, [Engaging Teachers: Measuring the Impact of Teachers on Student Attendance in Secondary School](#)  
4) Kraft & Dougherty, [The Effect of Teacher-Family Communication on Student Engagement](#)

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### 1 Review the six-point communication outline on page 4.

These are the six points you should include in your message based on parent and guardian communication research.

### 2 Prepare your message based on your mode of communication (phone, email, or text).

Refer to the suggested language examples for each communication method (phone, email, text).



*If you're reaching out via email or text message, you're ready to start writing. Ensure your email or text includes all six points in the outline.*



*If you're reaching out via phone, use the **Preparing for Phone Calls Template** on page 5 to prepare your talking points in advance and record notes during the call.*

### 3 Pass along follow-up notes to an administrator via their preferred method.

If a parent or guardian shares a concern that needs to be elevated to a principal or administrator, forward any email or text messages with viable concerns to a principal or administrator. If taking notes during a phone call, share your **Preparing for Phone Calls Template** with specific notes marked for follow-up.

## Important Information to Gather from Your Administrator Before You Begin:

▶ When should I contact parents and guardians of absent students? (e.g., *After 2 consecutive unexcused absences; When I receive the notification email from our Student Information System*)

▶ What method of communication should I use? (e.g., *Phone calls whenever possible; First by email, then follow up by phone*)

▶ How should I share follow-up notes with my administrator? (e.g., *Share the Call Prep Template via email; Forward concerning parent emails to my principal*)

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# Communication Outline for Phone, Email, and Text

After a student exceeds the number of absences set by your district, contact the parent or guardian via phone, email, or text message. Structure your communication using the 6-point outline below. Reference the icons to the left of each language example to choose phrasing appropriate for each type of communication.

## 1 Start with a friendly introduction

Greet the parent or guardian by name (double-check pronunciation, if necessary), and always reintroduce yourself. Whether your first or fourth communication, a parent or guardian might need to be reminded of your relationship to the student.

 "Hi Ms. Ellis, this is Mr. Wells, John's biology teacher. Is this a good time for a quick conversation?"


 "Dear Mrs. Lenz, My name is Ms. Park, and I am the guidance counselor at Piedmont High School."

 "Hi Mr. Yang – This is Mrs. Harmon, John's homeroom teacher."

## 2 Share a positive note


Establish a positive tone by complimenting the student's social skills (*good friend to others, sense of humor*), academic progress (*growth as a reader, eagerness to learn*), or another anecdote (*funny story from class*).

  "First off, I'm really impressed with John's progress in math this quarter."

 "I really enjoy seeing John in class."

## 3 Inquire about student wellbeing



Emphasize care for the student. Avoid implying that parents or guardians should send their child to school if the student is ill.

  "I wanted to check-in and see how John is doing. [Is he feeling better?]"

 "How is John [doing/feeling]?"

## 4 Reference the absence and what the student missed


State the cost of absence – don't just reiterate the importance of attendance. Most parents and guardians already agree that attendance is important, and it's less impactful to validate something they already believe.


  "We missed John last week when he was absent. We finished presenting book reports, which would have been a great opportunity to practice John's public speaking skills. "

 "We missed him last week when the class shared science fair projects."

## 5 Pinpoint barriers to attendance

Ask if the parent or guardian has concerns about common barriers to attendance (e.g., transportation, work conflicts, etc.)

 "I wanted to ask - is there anything I can do to make it easier for John to be in school every day? Did he mention anything about our classroom that is keeping him from school?"

  "Is there anything John needs in order to return to school?"

► Record responses using the template on **page 5** and elevate concerns requiring follow-up to an administrator.

## 6 Keep communication lines open

Give the parent or guardian clear next steps at the end of your communication.

 "Thank you for taking the time to speak today. What is the best way for us to keep in touch?"

  "I'm available via phone or email between 8am and 5pm. Please feel free to reach out."

## Preparing for Phone Calls: Template & Follow-Up

Use this template to prepare key talking points, take notes, and capture any barriers to attendance the parent or guardian mentions. If the parent or guardian mentions something you feel requires follow-up, check the box in the Notes column and share this template with the appropriate administrator.

6-Point Outline	<b>Call Prep</b> <i>Write down key points or examples you plan to raise in your phone call.</i>	Notes & Next Steps
1. Start with a friendly introduction		
2. Share a positive note		
3. Inquire about student wellbeing		<input type="checkbox"/> Follow-up required
4. Reference the absence and what the student missed		<input type="checkbox"/> Follow-up required
5. Pinpoint barriers to attendance		<input type="checkbox"/> Follow-up required
6. Keep communication lines open		Best contact method <input type="checkbox"/> Phone: _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Text: _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Email: _____

### Troubleshooting a Conversation Gone Wrong:



If a parent or guardian doesn't answer the phone, **leave a message** using the same 6-point outline.



If a parent or guardian asks a question you can't answer, **refer them to a principal administrator** by saying:

- "That is a great question. I don't know the answer, but I will raise that concern to Mr. Thiemann, our Vice Principal."



If a parent or guardian becomes **argumentative**, double-down on empathy. Use phrases like:

- "I care about John and his future, and I know you do too."
- "I want to stay focused on what John needs. Let's think of solutions together."