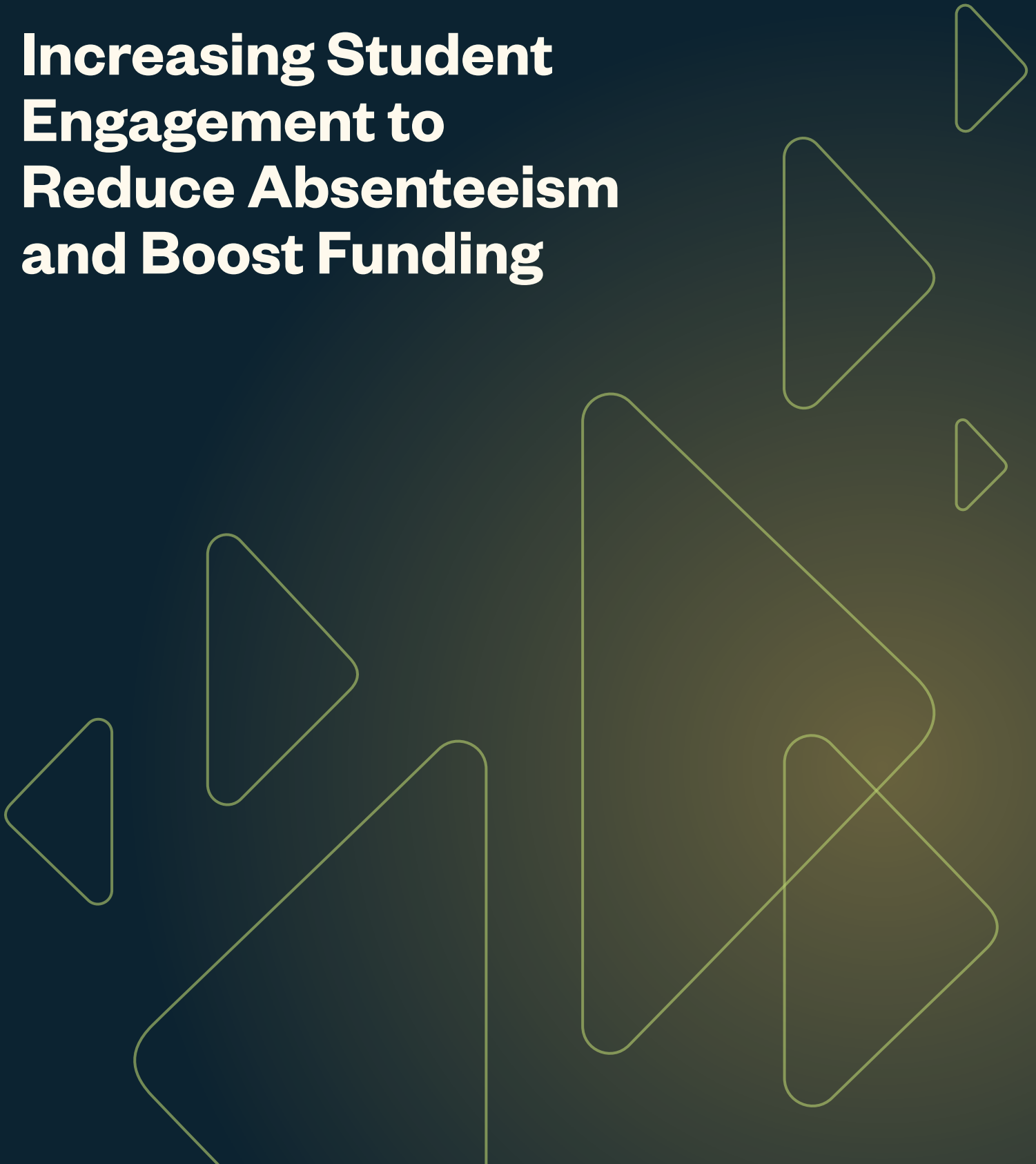


WHITEPAPER

# Increasing Student Engagement to Reduce Absenteeism and Boost Funding





In the United States, many K-12 schools rely on Average Daily Attendance (ADA) as a key metric for funding. ADA measures the total number of days attended by students divided by the total days of instruction. When students miss school for any reason the district's ADA is lowered, making it a less favorable reflection of enrollment. In many states, ADA is used to determine school funding levels, creating a direct link between attendance and a school's financial health.

## The financial cost of student attendance

**“The District loses \$50 per day when a student is not in school.”**

Gary W. Woods, Superintendent

**“This 2024 school year, student attendance has not improved. Not many kids come to school regularly. Every day a student is absent means that we lose money.”**

Audrey Greene, Targeted Special Populations coordinator

### Chronic absenteeism as a national concern

Post-pandemic, chronic absenteeism — defined as when a student misses 10% or more of school days in a year — has surged nationwide. The percentage of students categorized as chronically absent increased from 15% pre-pandemic to 26% in the most recent year. This alarming trend cuts across socioeconomic and geographic lines, highlighting a pervasive issue in public education.

### District-level financial losses

For many districts, funding is only received for days when students are physically present. Absenteeism — whether due to illness, family vacation, or student disengagement — incurs substantial costs. For example, the San Marcos Unified School District in California loses \$50 per day for each absent student.

### Consider the following example:

During the 2007–08 flu season, the San Marcos Unified School District lost \$105,000 in funding due to absenteeism, equivalent to the absence of 17 full-time students for the entire school year.



For larger districts, the financial losses can escalate even further. The Diego Rivera Learning Complex, part of the Los Angeles School District in California, loses \$90 per day per absent student, which adds up to tens of thousands of dollars daily when absenteeism rates spike.

# Increase funding through improved attendance

Boosting attendance rates can have a major financial impact on schools, as even small improvements help reduce funding losses. Below are examples showing potential savings for a school with 1,000 students and a \$50-90 per day funding loss per absent student.

## EXAMPLE 1 2% increase in attendance

**Scenario:** A school of 1,000 students, with 180 school days, and \$50 funding loss per missed day.

**Total possible attendance days:**  
1,000 students × 180 days = 180,000 total student days per year

**2% increase in attendance:**  
 $0.02 \times 180,000 = 3,600$  additional attendance days

**Savings:** 3,600 days × \$50/day = **\$180,000 per year**

An increase of 3,600 attendance days is equivalent to the attendance of **20 full-time students** for an entire school year.

## EXAMPLE 2 5% increase in attendance

**Scenario:** A school of 1,000 students, with 180 school days, and \$50 funding loss per missed day.

**Total possible attendance days:**  
1,000 students × 180 days = 180,000 total student days per year

**5% increase in attendance:**  
 $0.05 \times 180,000 = 9,000$  additional attendance days

**Savings:** 9,000 days × \$50/day = **\$450,000 per year**

An increase of 9,000 attendance days is equivalent to the attendance of **50 full-time students** for an entire school year.

## EXAMPLE 3 10% increase in attendance

**Scenario:** A school of 1,000 students, with 180 school days, and \$50 funding loss per missed day.

**Total possible attendance days:**  
1,000 students × 180 days = 180,000 total student days per year

**10% increase in attendance:**  $0.10 \times 180,000 = 18,000$  additional attendance days

**Savings:** 18,000 days × \$50/day = **\$900,000 per year**

An increase of 18,000 attendance days is equivalent to the attendance of **100 full-time students** for an entire school year.

### Additional Funding Per Year

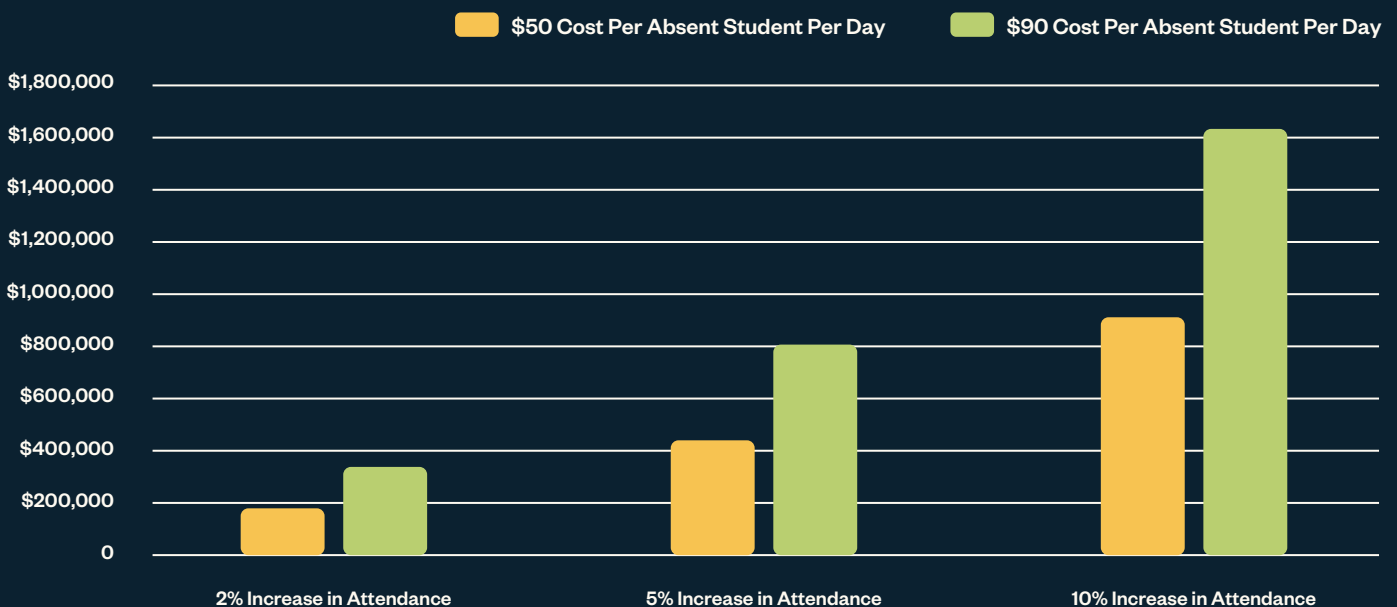


Figure 1: Yearly funding increases per 1,000 students for schools with a \$50-90/day funding loss per absent student

## Additional Attendance Days Per Year

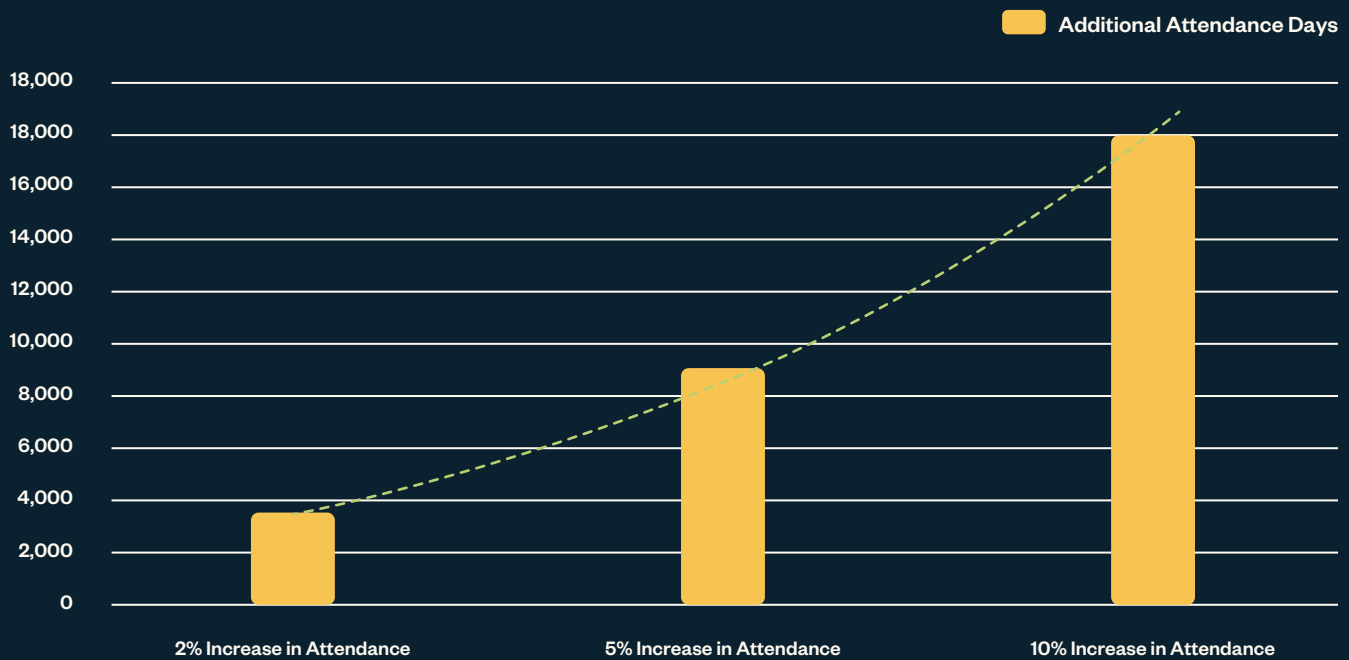


Figure 2: Days of attendance saved per 1,000 students for schools per year.

## The Power of Student Attendance Gains

This visual highlights the impact of improving attendance rates by illustrating them in terms of full-time students (per 1000 students, attending 180 school days).

- A 2% attendance increase is equivalent to 20 additional full-time students attending every school day for the entire year.
- A 5% attendance increase is equivalent to 50 additional full-time students.
- A 10% attendance increase is equivalent to 100 full-time students.

These figures demonstrate how even small attendance improvements can bring significant increases to a school's funding.

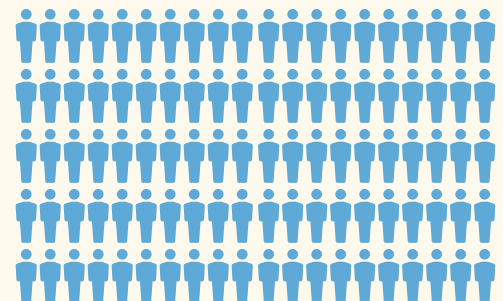
**2% = 20**



**5% = 50**



**10% = 100**



# Student engagement as a solution to absenteeism

## EXAMPLE

**Scenario:** A school of 1,000 students, with 180 school days, chronic absenteeism reduced from 28% to 12%, and \$50/day funding loss.

**Total possible attendance days:**  
1,000 students × 180 days = 180,000 total student days per year

**Missed attendance days:**

- Before intervention: 28% of 180,000 = 50,400 missed days
- After intervention: 12% of 180,000 = 21,600 missed days

**Attendance days recovered:**  
50,400 – 21,600 = 28,800 additional attendance days

**Funding from recovered attendance days:** 28,800 days × \$50/day = \$1,440,000 per year

The reduction in absenteeism (28,800 days) is equivalent to the attendance of approximately **160 full-time students** for an entire school year.

## The link between engagement and attendance

Student engagement is a well-researched predictor of attendance. When students feel connected, supported, and engaged in their learning environments, they are more likely to attend school regularly. Research consistently shows that engaged students:

- Are 2.5 times more likely to report excellent grades
- Are 4.5 times more likely to feel hopeful about their future

Engagement supports stronger interpersonal relationships and academic success, creating a feedback loop that helps both attendance and learning outcomes. Conversely, disengagement can lead to absenteeism, academic struggles, and other related issues.

Data from the Leaps Student Voice Survey reveals that **students reporting positive, engaging school experiences are 25% less likely to be chronically absent** than those with negative experiences. This demonstrates the importance of building learning environments that prioritize active engagement and connection.

## Real world cost savings

A compelling example comes from a middle school in Salem Public Schools, which piloted a program to improve attendance through engaging, positive student experiences. Chronic absenteeism dropped from 28% to 12% in its first year and continued to decline below 10% the following year. The financial implications were equally significant, using our same model of 1,000 students.

## Real Life Example

A school of 1,000 students in Salem, with 180 school days, 26% chronic absenteeism rate before intervention, and \$50/day funding loss.

	Before Student Engagement Intervention	After Student Engagement Intervention	Yearly Savings Per School
Missed Attendance Days	50,400 days	21,600 days	28,800 days
Chronic Absenteeism Rate	26%	12%	50% reduction
Attendance Funding	\$6,480,000	\$7,920,000	\$1,440,000 per year

Figure 4: The reduction in chronic absenteeism (28,800 days) is equivalent to the attendance of 160 full-time students for an entire year.

# Active learning increases engagement

Students reporting positive, engaging school experiences are **25% less likely to be chronically absent.**

Active learning is a proven method to increase engagement and attendance, especially in online settings. Platforms like Engageli empower educators to create dynamic, interactive learning environments that encourage participation and connection. By incorporating elements such as small-group collaborative exercises, real-time data and feedback, and AI-powered moments of engagement, active learning platforms can transform disengaged students into active participants.

For online learning, which often struggles with engagement, active methodologies have a particularly significant impact. Students who feel involved in their learning process and connected to their peers and instructors are more likely to attend classes and stay committed.

## Increase student attendance through engaged, active learning

Improving student engagement is a proven strategy to reduce absenteeism, enhance academic outcomes, and preserve critical funding for schools. When schools implement active instructional methods, the results are clear: better engagement leads to better attendance, which in turn drives financial stability for schools.

Tools like those offered by Engageli empower educators to create engaging learning environments that address absenteeism head-on, yielding measurable academic and financial benefits. Schools that prioritize engagement can achieve sustainable improvements, ensuring both students and districts thrive.



For more information, download the full **Active Learning Impact Study**.



## Schedule a demo today to experience Engageli firsthand.

Book a demo ▶

