

# How to Text Message Parents to Reduce Chronic Absence Using an Evidence-Based Approach

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# How to Text Message Parents to Reduce Chronic Absence Using an Evidence-Based Approach

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## Introduction

This toolkit is for school districts that are considering using text messaging to improve attendance. Text messaging can reach large numbers of parents<sup>1</sup> with minimal cost. A recent study sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education’s Institute of Education Sciences (IES) demonstrated that a carefully designed texting strategy can reduce chronic absence rates in elementary schools. This attendance text messaging is likely within reach for most school districts in the United States. However, to get there, districts must consider their needs and resources and have basic knowledge of the system and technology requirements to carry it out.

The guidance provided in this toolkit is based on findings and lessons learned from IES’s recent successful study, “[Can Texting Parents Improve Attendance in Elementary School? A Test of an Adaptive Messaging Strategy.](#)”



### OBJECTIVES

**This toolkit is intended to enable district leaders and staff to:**

1. Consider goals and priorities for using text messaging to communicate with parents about student absences.
2. Understand the attendance data collection procedures and information technology (IT) infrastructure needed to implement a texting strategy.
3. Consider whether the text messaging strategies used in the Parent Messaging Study are feasible to adopt and implement.
4. Set up a text messaging system using the district’s student information system and (if appropriate) a short messaging service (SMS) vendor.

## Sections of the Toolkit

The **Background** section provides an overview of chronic absence in elementary schools and describes the texting strategy that was found in the Parent Messaging Study to reduce chronic absence rates.

**Part I** is for *district leadership and the team in charge of planning for student attendance text messaging*. This section will help district staff assess their needs, examine capabilities, and plan to implement the messaging strategy.

**Part II** is geared specifically to *district staff working with the student information system and district IT*. It describes key actions to set up and monitor a text messaging system and provides information about security and privacy considerations.

**Part III** is a set of tools and resources to support the district’s work on both Parts I and II. The Example Attendance Text Messaging Blueprint is the same blueprint that was used in the Parent Messaging Study. The other tools were developed specifically for this guide.

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<sup>1</sup> The term parent is used throughout the guide, but the recipient of the messages could be any primary caretaker.

## Background

Chronic absence is a nationwide problem, even among young students. Several studies now show that messaging parents about attendance can reduce chronic absence.<sup>2</sup> While messaging strategies using mailings (i.e., periodic postcards and letters) have been shown to reduce student absences, there are advantages to using text messaging.

### ADVANTAGES TO USING TEXT MESSAGING

- **Good reach:** Cell phone ownership is high.<sup>3</sup> Texts can reach parents quickly, and most received texts are read within minutes.<sup>4</sup>
- **Real-time information:** Texts can be automated to provide “just in time” information on the day a student is absent.
- **Flexible:** Messaging via text can easily adapt in response to changing trends, such as increased absence rates for individual children.
- **Inexpensive:** Text messaging is low cost.
- **Works with other strategies:** Texting can complement other attendance improvement strategies, including strategies that are more targeted and costly.

The Parent Messaging Study developed and tested an adaptive text messaging strategy over the course of a school year (2017-18) in four urban school districts. The messaging was *adaptive* in the sense that it became more intensive in the spring for families whose children had a greater number of absences in the fall. Using a rigorous research design, the study found that the messaging substantially reduced chronic absence among elementary school students, particularly those with a prior history of high absences.

### Attendance Texts Found to Be Effective in the Parent Messaging Study

The texting strategy was based on prior research that suggested a low-cost approach—providing parents with basic information about attendance—could work.<sup>5</sup> The specific messages used in the study drew on communication strategies shown to motivate and elicit behavior change. The study built on this prior research by newly testing the idea that messaging about attendance may be more effective if adapted over time to add more information and motivation for those who need it. Specifically, the adaptive text messaging strategy had two phases: **basic** and **intensified**.

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<sup>2</sup> In addition to the Parent Messaging Study, studies that have demonstrated reductions in absence with informational messaging include Rogers and Feller (2018) and Rogers et al. (2017).

<sup>3</sup> In 2018, more than 95 percent of the U.S. adult population owned cell phones, and more than 77 percent owned smart phones (Pew Research Center, 2021). In 2017, one in five adults whose annual household income was below \$30,000 were smartphone-only Internet users (Perrin, 2017). In the Parent Messaging Study, 85 percent of the families had a functioning cell phone number. This rate may vary by district.

<sup>4</sup> Ninety-five percent of business text messages are read within 5 minutes of being sent (Burke, 2016).

<sup>5</sup> Rogers & Feller, 2018; Rogers et al., 2017.

**Basic messaging** was sent to all parents in the study’s messaging groups. These messages were automated, prescheduled texts that were sent out weekly. The weekly texts emphasized the importance of attendance in terms of possible consequences of frequent absences, or the benefits of good attendance. (See consequences example at right.)

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#### AUTOMATED PRESCHEDULED

Children who miss 2 or more days a month starting in elementary school are less likely to graduate from high school. (*consequences framing*)

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#### SAME-DAY NOTIFICATIONS

We missed Ann in school today. Ann has missed a total of 5 days of school this year. Going to school every day will help Ann learn important reading and math skills. (*benefits framing*)

**Basic messaging** also included **same-day notifications** sent to parents on days their children were absent. These texts were triggered by daily data in the district Student Information System (SIS). When a student was recorded as absent that day, their parent was sent a same-day notification, which was personalized with the child’s name. These texts included the total number of absences to date that year, by combining SIS data over time.

**Intensified messaging** used two different types of **interactive, two-way texting**, with the goal of providing parents additional motivation and more tailored information about their child’s absences than basic messaging alone.

One type of intensified messaging—School Staff Outreach—involved school staff directly texting parents to increase engagement and provide opportunities for individualized support. This interactive, **two-way, person-to-person messaging** was supported by the texting platform set up for the study.

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#### PERSON-TO-PERSON TEXTING

Dear Caregiver/Caregiver/Guardian,  
This is Ms. Wilson, a school counselor. Brian has missed 14 days of school so far this year.  
Please text me back or call me at 202-999-5000 so we can set up a time to talk. I am here to help. Thank you.  
(*school staff outreach*)

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#### GOAL COMMITMENT MESSAGING

Children lose opportunities to learn when they miss school. Will you make it a goal that Ann attends school every day this week? Reply YES to join other parents in setting this goal. (*goal commitment*)

The other type of intensified messaging was **Goal Commitment Messaging**, in which weekly automated texts asked parents to set goals for perfect attendance for the upcoming week. Parents were invited by an initial text to respond. If they responded “yes,” they were sent a feedback message reporting back on the goal at the end of the week.

The study took place in 108 elementary schools. More than 20,000 students in grades K-5 and their families participated. Students and their families were randomly assigned to basic messaging (either the benefits or consequences version) or to a “no messaging” control group in fall 2017. In December, the study team identified children who were frequently absent in the fall, defined as missed 8 percent or more of school days.

Families whose children met this threshold were then randomly assigned in January 2018 to additionally receive one of the two intensified messaging strategies, School Staff Outreach or Goal Commitment Messaging, through the end of the school year.

The study found **that the adaptive attendance text messaging reduced chronic absence rates.**

**THE IES STUDY FOUND:**

1. All the combinations of basic and intensified messaging tested in the study reduced chronic absence, both for students overall and for students who had a prior history of high absence (that is, were chronically absent the prior school year).
  - The messaging lowered the expected chronic absence rate of 20.5 percent for students overall by 2.4 to 3.6 percentage points.
  - For students with a prior history of high absence, the messaging lowered the expected chronic absence rate of 47.1 percent by 3.5 to 7.3 percentage points.
2. Basic messaging alone reduced chronic absence in the fall, whether the message was benefits- or consequences-framed.
3. School Staff Outreach reduced chronic absence rates in the spring more than Goal Commitment Messaging for students with a prior history of high absences.

The study also demonstrated that text messaging can inform parents about absence on a large scale at relatively low cost. Over 95 percent of the messages were sent out as intended, and the per-student cost for the four versions of adaptive messaging strategies ranged from about \$7 to \$8.50.

Although the texting substantially reduced chronic absence,<sup>6</sup> the study did not detect a measurable difference in student achievement within the same school year. See the [full report](#) for more detail on all of the findings.

Given the study findings, this guide is intended to help districts adopt either basic messaging only or basic messaging intensified with School Staff Outreach, with the following considerations in mind.

- a. The benefit of basic messaging alone in the fall was substantial enough that this guide recommends districts adopt basic messaging only if the costs and complexity of intensified messaging exceed available resources.
- b. Although both types of intensified messaging tested in the study added value beyond basic messaging, this guide recommends districts that wish to intensify messaging use the School Staff Outreach approach. First, School Staff Outreach was a more effective strategy than Goal Commitment messaging for students with a prior history of high absences. Second, parents who were sent Goal Commitment messages were more likely to request messaging stop than did parents

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<sup>6</sup> In addition to the reductions in chronic absence rates observed, the attendance text messaging reduced the average number of days absent. The magnitude of effects on both absence measures (chronic absence and days absent) was similar. See the study report for more information.

who received School Staff Outreach (20 percent vs. 14 percent). This finding suggested that the School Staff Outreach messages may have been more welcome and better received by parents than the Goal Commitment messages.

The information provided in this guide is meant to be used by districts to consider adopting the Parent Messaging Study's text messaging approaches with parents of students in elementary school. Other types of messages may be more appropriate for parents of middle and high school students. It is not known whether the specific messaging strategies used in the Parent Messaging Study would affect attendance rates for older students.

## Part I: Information for District Staff

This guide is intended to provide step-by-step information about how to implement the attendance texting strategies and specific text messages used in the Parent Messaging Study. The messaging strategies are meant to be used with parents of elementary grades students, and include **basic messaging only** or an **adaptive approach that starts with basic messaging and intensifies with School Staff Outreach**.

### Steps for Carrying Out Text Messaging Strategy

Successful setup of an attendance texting strategy requires careful planning. This section describes eight key steps:



***Step 1: Form a team and gather background information.***

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***Step 2: Assess district data quality and system capabilities.***

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***Step 3: Determine needs and set priorities.***

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***Step 4: Consider resources required for basic versus adaptive messaging.***

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***Step 5: Develop district-specific text messaging blueprint.***

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***Step 6: Select an SMS vendor.***

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***Step 7: Communicate with parents and staff.***

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***Step 8: Pilot and scale up, with ongoing monitoring.***

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The timeline for putting attendance texting messaging in place depends on many factors, including the complexity of the planned texting strategy, availability of district staff's time for planning, and district staff's prior experience with text messaging and text messaging vendors. Districts may want to preserve up to 9 months to proceed through the eight steps described in this section. Some districts may move through the steps more quickly.<sup>7</sup>

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## EXAMPLE TIMELINE



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<sup>7</sup> The Parent Messaging Study began communications with parents via text in September and commenced attendance texting in October. Following this schedule allows districts to begin attendance texting about 1 month into a new school year, after official enrollment records are stabilized.



## ***Step 1: Form a team and gather background information***

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This guide includes a set of tools for use in each step. The Parent Messaging Study team used the Example Attendance Text Messaging Blueprint to carry out the study. The other tools developed specifically for this guide, after the study findings suggested other districts may want to adopt the messaging approaches the study tested.

The team charged with planning the district's attendance texting strategy may include district leaders, attendance and community outreach experts, research director, district IT and SIS staff, and school staff and representatives of community as applicable (e.g., parents, relevant community organizations). Ideally, a representative from each of these groups will be included to ensure that the texting strategy addresses district priorities and goals, is feasible to implement from a technology perspective, and is sensitive to the needs of parents and community.

To begin planning, all team members should have access to common key information required for assessing district readiness and guiding the planning process. This key information includes current district attendance policies and SIS capabilities. The [Readiness Assessment Checklist](#) can be used to gather this necessary information. The team can reference the key information as it moves through the subsequent steps.



## ***Step 2: Assess district data quality and system capabilities***

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**Assessing readiness includes (a) assessing attendance data quality and (b) assessing SIS capabilities.**

**2.A. Assess attendance data collection and quality.** Accurate and timely student-level attendance data is needed to carry out any of the attendance texting strategies found to be effective in the Parent Messaging Study, because they all include notifications when students are absent and some personalization of messages (e.g., child's name, number of days absent). To do this kind of personalization or notification prompted by attendance data, districts ultimately must have the following:

- **A systematic process for collecting accurate daily attendance.** Ideally, attendance data are recorded for each student in every school in a similar way, either directly into the district SIS or transferred to the district SIS around the same time each day.
  - If any schools do not enter attendance data into the district SIS as intended, it is important for the district to understand why, address barriers, and create a standard procedure for attendance collection and reporting.
- **Clearly defined daily attendance measures to use.** A daily indicator of whether each student is absent or present is typically the most useful for attendance texting. Distinguishing between excused or unexcused absences may not matter because the overall goal is to reduce missed instruction.

- **A clearly defined threshold for when students are considered chronically absent.** This threshold is needed if the district’s messaging strategy includes specific messages for parents with children who are chronically absent or at risk of becoming chronically absent. Many districts use 10 percent or more school days missed during a given period as the definition of chronic absence. This threshold is supported by research.<sup>8</sup> Some districts use more than one threshold to identify students as at risk for becoming chronically absent before they are officially considered chronically absent.

The [Implementation Planning Guide](#) provides a set of questions about attendance data collection and quality for districts to consider when getting started. Completing the [Readiness Assessment Checklist](#) will help to gather the key information needed to answer these questions.

**2.B. Assess student information system (SIS) capabilities.** The district’s SIS will be needed to facilitate attendance texting.

- **The existing SIS may be able to send texts, and if not, external providers can help.** Many districts use a commercial SIS (e.g., PowerSchool, Skyward®, Gradelink®, Infinite Campus, Synergy®, QuickSchools, Alma™, Focus, FACTS, Salesforce Digital Engagement®). Some SISs include text messaging as an optional service module.
  - District staff can discuss with their SIS vendor representative whether and what type of text messaging their SIS can support.
  - If the district’s SIS does not support text messaging, districts will need to identify a short messaging service (SMS) or parent communication system vendor (we refer to both as external SMS vendors).<sup>9</sup>
- The selection of whether to use an add-on SIS texting module/service or a separate vendor for texting will be informed by the type of text messaging the district wishes to do, as well as other considerations including existing vendor relationships and cost. Step 6 ([Select an SMS vendor](#)) gives more information.<sup>10</sup>

### **Attendance variables must be programmed into the district’s SIS**

- The attendance variables to be used (e.g., total days absent to date) need to be programmed into the district SIS, whether texts are sent by the SIS directly or by an external SMS vendor.
  - Most commercial SISs allow districts to program both simple and more complex attendance measures in the SIS database.
  - It is important to know whether the SIS defaults to absent or present if a teacher does not report attendance on a given day to correctly program attendance measures.

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<sup>8</sup> Allensworth & Easton, 2005, 2007; Heppen & Therriault, 2008; Ready, 2010.

<sup>9</sup> SMS vendors typically have a limited focus on messaging (e.g., emails, texting), while parent communication system vendors often offer wider range of services under one platform, including school notifications (e.g., emergency, weather, meeting, and attendance), mobile apps, web content management, and user management (including parent opt in for texting).

<sup>10</sup> Discussion in this guide about how to select a vendor is based on lessons learned from the Parent Messaging Study. The discussion merely provides suggestions based on what worked well for the study team. IES does not intend this to be considered advice on contracting.

- If an external SMS is used, the district SIS needs to be able to generate automated attendance data downloads.
  - The external SMS vendor may have a ready-to-use application programming interface (API) to connect with SIS attendance data and to send texts. This may speed up the process of setting up attendance text messaging.



### ***Step 3: Determine needs and set priorities***

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This step is about clarifying the problem you hope texting will solve. Doing so involves using data to better understand district attendance patterns and establish priorities.

**3.A. Use data to understand attendance patterns.** To assess attendance problems, districts can look at attendance data already in hand. See Step 3A in the [Implementation Planning Guide](#) for important questions for districts to work through. Some example questions include:

- What percentage of students was chronically absent (e.g., missed 10 percent or more of school days) in the most recent school year across schools and grade levels?
  - This is the district’s chronic absence rate.
- How much do the chronic absence rates vary across elementary schools? Do some elementary schools have a high percentage of students who are chronically absent (e.g., in which schools do 15 percent or more of students meet the definition for chronic absence, and in which schools not)?<sup>11</sup>

**3.B. Set priorities.** After these and the other questions about district attendance patterns in the Implementation Planning Guide are answered, the district can identify priority schools. The Parent Messaging Study took place in elementary schools in which 15 percent or more of students were chronically absent the prior year. Districts can make different choices; however, it is unknown whether sending attendance texts in schools with lower chronic absence rates would yield similar results.

**3.C. Set Goals.** It is critical to define specific, measurable goals for reducing chronic absence with attendance text messaging. The goals can be ambitious but should be realistic and tied to the current chronic absence rate. Please see the [Implementation Planning Guide](#) for questions to guide goal-setting.

- A district goal could be, for example, to reduce chronic absence by 10 percent for students in grades K-2 if attendance in early grades has been identified as a problem.
- In the Parent Messaging Study, text messaging reduced chronic absence by 19 percent for students in grades K-5 overall and by 15 percent for students who had a prior history of high absences.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> The Parent Messaging Study took place in four large urban school districts. The schools that participated were elementary schools in which 15 percent or more of the students were chronically absent the prior year.

<sup>12</sup> The chronic absence rate for students overall who were in a “no messaging” study group was 20.5 percent. The messaging lowered the chronic absence rate by 2.4 to 3.6 percentage points. For students with a prior history of high absence, the messaging lowered the chronic absence rate of 47.1 percent by 3.5 to 7.3 percentage points.

The other key decision in terms of setting priorities is whether to plan for **basic messaging only** or **basic plus intensified (adaptive) messaging**. The options are described as follows:

- **Basic messaging only:** Text parents of all children in the identified elementary schools in the district. Basic messages include weekly preventative, informational messages with tips and same-day notifications that are personalized with the child’s name and number of days absent to date.
- **Adaptive strategy–basic plus intensified messaging:** After 3 months of basic messaging, intensify the messaging for parents of children who were frequently absent during that period. **Frequently absent in the Parent Messaging Study was defined as missing 8 percent or more of school days between October and December.** In districts that opt to use an adaptive messaging strategy, families with one or more children who meet this threshold would get School Staff Outreach on top of basic messaging for the remainder of the school year.



**WHEN CONSIDERING WHETHER ATTENDANCE TEXTING IS RIGHT  
FOR YOUR DISTRICT, KEEP IN MIND THE FOLLOWING:**

- Existing attendance policies and strategies. Consider:
  - Would attendance text messaging be redundant with other district approaches to communicating with parents about attendance?
  - Could texting complement or replace those other approaches?
- A feasible role for attendance text messaging.
  - Texting can affect parent knowledge about the importance of attendance, attitudes toward student absences, and everyday organizational skills.
  - Texting cannot on its own address underlying problems such as chronic illness, mental health and substance abuse, homelessness, lack of transportation, and other significant challenges facing many families with school-aged children.



## Step 4: Consider resources required for basic versus adaptive messaging

The different types of messaging found to be effective in the study vary in complexity and differ in the level of resources required. Basic messaging included preset automated messages that are the least complex and resource intensive (all parents get the same message on a given day). More complex messages are triggered by daily attendance data and are tailored with personalized information. Adding School Staff Outreach required additional texting platform capability, and training and participation of school-based staff to send messages and follow up with parents.

When planning for attendance text messaging, it is important to consider costs for the following:

- District, school, and IT staff time to:
  - Set up the text messaging system (e.g., connecting the district’s SIS and the SMS vendor; programming messages using SMS vendor platform, monitoring text messaging).
  - Communicate with parents that text messaging will occur and address requirements for parent consent.
  - Create and deliver training to district and school level staff if the strategy involves direct outreach from staff to parents (i.e., School Staff Outreach).
  - Carry out direct messaging by school staff
- SMS vendor cost, if applicable, including the cost of setting up the automated messaging system, providing ongoing reports about message delivery, and sending out text messages

Table 1 describes the texting platform and SIS capabilities required for each messaging type.

**TABLE 1. SYSTEM CAPABILITIES REQUIRED FOR EACH MESSAGING TYPE**

Messaging type	Needed for Basic	Needed for Intensified
<p><b>1. Automated prescheduled messages that do not depend on SIS data</b></p> <p>The most straightforward texting sends the same messages to all parents in a particular school, grade level, or district.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Basic messaging</b> includes a weekly informational message about the importance of attendance, and a tip, such as how to help children with homework. These messages are intended to be motivational and informational, conveying the district’s commitment to student attendance and emphasizing the importance of not missing school. The tips include short links to more resources or information.</li> <li>• Most SMS vendors can send automated prescheduled messages via bulk messaging and include active web links.</li> </ul>	✓	

Messaging type	Needed for Basic	Needed for Intensified
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## 2. Messages that depend on SIS data



Linking SIS data to the texting system allows for more tailored messages to be sent to parents when their child is absent.

- **Basic messaging** includes same-day text messages sent to parents when triggered by an indicator that a child was absent that day. This is known as “conditional messaging.” The messages are populated with the child’s name and the number of total absences to date that year.
- Same-day notifications require accurate, updated daily attendance data from the SIS, as well as combined SIS data over time to generate an accurate cumulative absence total across the year.
- The **School Staff Outreach intensified messaging** uses SIS data to populate the messages with the child’s name and the number of absences to date.
- The text messaging features necessary for the study’s messages that require SIS data may not be offered by all SMS vendors. These include conditional messaging (i.e., if child absent, then send ...) and personalization of texts through embedded data fields based on daily SIS data and SIS data combined over time.

## 3. Person-to-person texting



One type of interactive texting is person-to-person, where a text is sent by a specific person from a specific number.<sup>a</sup> If the recipient responds, back and forth can ensue.

- The **School Staff Outreach intensified messaging** uses person-to-person two-way texting. School staff used the texting platform to establish contact, assess the root causes of absences, and refer parents to additional services.
- It is important to verify whether SMS vendors can provide a platform allowing person-to-person two-way texting between district or school staff and parents that does not rely on staff’s personal mobile devices. If external SMS vendors can establish user accounts with different user levels (e.g., district level account for informational and same-day notifications vs. building-level accounts for person-to-person two-way texting) that are linked to the SIS, the school staff will have access to updated phone number information in the SIS on a daily basis.

<sup>a</sup> Another type of interactive texting is keyword-prompted interactive texting, in which an initial text is sent that prompts a response. When the recipient sends a response, a follow-up text is sent. This type of interactive messaging was used in the Goal Commitment intensified messaging strategy tested in the Parent Messaging Study. As mentioned earlier, this guide does not recommend districts use the Goal Commitment strategy given School Staff Outreach was more effective and the messaging for Goal Commitment more burdensome and complex to implement.

The Parent Messaging Study demonstrated that basic messaging—which combined automated, prescheduled messages with same-day notifications that relied on SIS data—reduced chronic absence. The impact of the basic messaging over a full school year was strengthened with the intensified messaging strategies that used the more complex interactive texting, particularly the person-to-person texting of School Staff Outreach.

Districts should consider whether basic messaging alone or basic messaging plus intensified messaging is most appropriate for their context based on the district’s priorities, goals, and available resources. See the [Text Messaging Features List](#) in this guide for more information about the technical features required for different types of messaging and for a list of SMS system features.



## ***Step 5: Develop the district’s text messaging blueprint***

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It is important to have a district-specific, detailed blueprint that lists plain-text versions of each message, the dates and times of day for the messages to be sent, and to whom each message is to be sent (e.g., all parents, parents of students who were absent that day, parents of students who missed more than 8 percent of school days during a prior period). The district team should review the absence codes in SIS to ensure that a same-day absence notification is not sent when a family is experiencing adverse circumstances such as a death in the family. A detailed blueprint fosters accurate and fast programming of the text messages to the text messaging platform.

The [Attendance Messaging Blueprint](#) included in this guide was used in the Parent Messaging Study. The specific dates were adapted for each participating district.

The district team should review the messages to ensure that they are relevant and appropriate in their context. In particular, locally specific information in the study’s text messages will need to be tailored, such as reference to the academic calendar or locally available services or programs.

The text messages were created with the goals of being:

- Relevant, relatable, and actionable;
- Short and easy to understand; and
- Culturally and linguistically sensitive, respectful to parents, and accessible to parents with different educational backgrounds and levels of resources.
  - The messages used in the study were reviewed by focus groups of parents to ensure they were relevant, responsive to cultural and linguistic needs, and not off-putting.
  - Text were sent out in different languages, based on parent preferences documented in the SIS. (We recommend getting messages professionally translated to all languages your district typically uses in parent outreach. Some messaging systems can automatically translate messages, but automatically translated messages can contain grammatical errors.)
  - Texts were never sent late in the evening, early in the morning, or at times when families are most likely to be engaged in cultural or religious activities.
  - Messages did not use language above the sixth- to eighth-grade reading level.

The [Considerations When Drafting Text Messages](#) tool provides more information about how to effectively present information in text messages. The district team may choose to revise the messages for the district's own blueprint, but it is important to note that the evidence generated by the Parent Messaging Study is for the set of messages provided in the [Blueprint](#) in this guide.



## ***Step 6: Select an SMS vendor***

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District leadership, attendance counselors, and IT department staff should work together to decide if a separate SMS or parent communication platform is needed to deliver attendance text messages, and if so, which one. These decisions will be driven by the type(s) of text messaging the district wants to use (basic messaging only, or basic plus intensified messaging), the available resources, and whether district already has an SMS vendor or parent communication system for other purposes.

We recommend that district staff consider the features they think their intended text messaging would require (using the [Text Messaging Features List](#)) and write a brief description that can be shared with external SMS vendors when contacting them or putting out requests for proposals. The district's text messaging blueprint, created in [Step 5](#), should be shared with the potential vendors. As noted in [Step 2](#), many external SMS vendors can deliver attendance texting. Therefore, we recommend districts contact multiple vendors before making a final decision. The box that follows lists questions to ask vendors during the selection process. Note that this list of questions is based on lessons learned from carrying out the Parent Messaging Study. IES does not intend for this information to be considered advice on contracting with vendors.



## SUGGESTED QUESTIONS FOR TEXTING VENDORS

- What is the interfacing compatibility of the platform with other data systems, such as [name of the district’s SIS system]? Can you describe how the data from the district’s SIS would be transferred to the text messaging platform?
- What levels of customization and other functions are available?
  - Is prescheduled and reoccurring bulk messaging available?
  - Is conditional messaging available, that is, can messages be sent based on daily attendance data (present/absent)?
  - Is personalization (with student first names) through data fields available?
  - Is two-way texting available? Can you describe how it works?
- Can the system accommodate multiple users (e.g., “super-users” at the district level, subaccounts at the school level)?
- Do you have a web-based platform for district staff to input information about the schedule for messages to be sent out?
- Do you provide training in the use of the platform?
- What message tracking ability and audit recording is available? Can we download daily records of the number and percentage of messages successfully sent and delivered to local carriers?
- How is the system backed up?
- What are the set-up and service costs?
- What is the availability and cost of technical support services?
- What is the cost per message sent?
  - Are there any other costs?
  - What are the payment options?
  - Is there a monthly minimum credit purchase requirement?
  - Is there an expiration period for credits purchased?
  - Can you test the system at no charge?
  - How are the accounts and availability of remaining credits managed?
- What is the quality of the network coverage? Can you share your privacy and security policies? Is your text messaging system compliant with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act?

*Note.* Information about selecting a vendor reflects suggestions based on lessons learned from carrying out the study. IES does not intend this to be considered advice on contracting.



## ***Step 7: Communicate with staff and families***

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Communicating with parents about the attendance text messaging before it starts is critical. Parents must be informed if they are going to be sent attendance texts, how to unsubscribe at any time, and the potential cost related to receiving text messages. Whether districts and schools need to collect parent consent depends on the type of messages sent and is regulated by the Telephone Consumer Protection Act (TCPA) of 1991. Many districts manage their parent permissions and communication preferences through the SIS or parent communication platforms (e.g., SchoolMessenger®, Blackboard®) that allow parents to change their communication preferences or to update their contact information at any time.

This toolkit provides a sample form requesting parent consent for different types of messages [here](#).<sup>13</sup>



## ***Step 8: Pilot and scale up, with ongoing monitoring***

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We strongly recommend pilot testing the attendance messaging before scaling it up and monitoring the attendance texting on an ongoing basis.

***8.A. Pilot before scaling up.*** After first completing system testing to the district's satisfaction (described in [Part II, Action 4](#)), consider **trying out the text messaging in a few schools before scaling up** to more schools. To confirm that the messages are being sent out to parents according to the blueprint, the district should ask the SMS provider for timestamped data on the number and percentage of messages successfully sent to local phone carriers for delivery. For example:

- If prescheduled messages are to be sent out on Sunday afternoons, confirm that the messages were sent on that specific date within the timeframe defined in the messaging blueprint.
- For same-day absence notifications, check that the texts are correctly sent only to those parents whose child was marked as absent in the SIS on that specific day.

After the district determines that the attendance texting is operating as intended in a small number of schools, it can be scaled up to more schools.

***8.B. Continue to monitor.*** After the texting is scaled up, it is important to **continue to monitor the send and delivery rates and to conduct ongoing accuracy checks**. Sometimes due to unpredictable reasons, such as power outages or district IT system updates, data files are not transferred on time and the texting may unexpectedly break down.

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<sup>13</sup> See also [Privacy and Security Considerations in Part II](#) and the [Privacy and Security Considerations Checklist](#) for more detail.

In addition, districts can **monitor student attendance data** to assess whether the messaging appears to be working to reduce absences. For example:

- Look at the number of days absent or chronic absence rates over time for different subgroups of students (e.g., groups of students who were chronically absent the previous year, demographic groups, English learners, students with disabilities)
- Compare these trends for a current school year (with attendance texting) with those in previous years (without attendance messaging).<sup>14</sup>

To understand whether parents find the text messaging off-putting or too burdensome, districts can **track the rates at which parents unsubscribe**.

- If a large percentage of parents unsubscribe, it is possible that the messaging is too frequent or does not have an appropriate tone.

In addition to understanding the patterns and rates of unsubscribing, districts may want to track any replies parents send. Some parents may try to contact the district or their child's school through replying to a text to share their concerns or to ask for help.

Finally, it is important to note that the Parent Messaging Study examined the impact of the attendance texts described and provided in this guide over one school year. In districts that choose to send attendance texts for more than 1 year, or in districts that use texting to communicate about other matters than attendance, parents may unsubscribe at higher rates or ignore attendance messages as time goes on.

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<sup>14</sup> Districts may consider conducting an internal evaluation or hiring an evaluator to determine the effectiveness of the text messaging strategy.

## Part II: Information for District IT Staff

Successful attendance messaging depends on accurate attendance data and a well-functioning SIS. The sections that follow describe the recommended key actions for district IT and attendance staff to set up automated text messaging.

### Key Actions for IT Staff to Set Up the System

This section describes four key actions for setting up text messaging.

- **Action 1:** Determine which platform to use to send out texts
- **Action 2:** Set up the SIS to provide attendance data for texting
- **Action 3:** Program SMS platform to send messages
- **Action 4:** Conduct quality assurance and monitor attendance messaging on an ongoing basis

### *Action 1: Determine which platform to use to send out texts*

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As is discussed in Step 2B, Assess student information system (SIS) capabilities, some SISs can send text messages without requiring the use of an external SMS vendor. To determine whether it is feasible to use your SIS to send attendance texts, consult your SIS provider about additional modules or services you may need to purchase and how the attendance texting can be set up. If you have decided to use an external SMS vendor<sup>15</sup> to send texts, it is important that the SIS can do the following:

1. Be programmed to create attendance-related variables based on daily absent/present data through database queries.
2. Either push out an automated daily attendance dataset in a common file format such as CSV that can be uploaded by the external SMS vendor platform, or communicate with the SMS vendor through application programming interface (API) to use attendance data to prompt messaging.

If your district uses a statewide SIS, you may need to coordinate with the state education agency regarding the programming of the attendance variables and downloading and transferring of data.

- In the Parent Messaging Study, district SISs exported CSV files into the SchoolMessenger® platform. The data in the CSV files were then used by the SchoolMessenger® platform to prompt and personalize messages.

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<sup>15</sup> That is, a parent communication system such as SchoolMessenger®, Blackboard®, Kinvoled™, or SMS vendor such as DialMyCalls, SchoolStatus, Zendesk Support Suite®, Salesforce Digital Engagement®, and Text-Em-All, among others.

## Action 2: Set up SIS to provide daily attendance data

The SIS holds key information needed for carrying out the attendance texting used in the study. For example, the SIS likely holds parent contact information needed to send any texts. It will also hold the daily attendance data needed to send same-day notifications to parents when their child is absent. To create the data that the messaging platform can use, district staff will need to program data queries in the SIS.

- A same-day absence notification requires an indicator variable that a student was absent that day. When creating this indicator, it is key to understand what the default value for attendance is (absent vs. present) if a teacher does not report attendance. If the default value is “absent” and attendance reporting does not take place, then the system would send absence notifications to all parents.
- For the same-day notification message to include information about the total number of absences that student has had so far that year, a daily variable that sums the number of days the student has been absent is also needed.



### TIP FOR PROGRAMMING

While many SMS platforms allow programming of data fields, it is best to create the needed attendance indicators within the SIS. Doing so will minimize the processing time and the risk of sending messages incorrectly.

Many districts have staff, such as SIS analysts, who can program the needed attendance data fields. If additional help is needed, many SIS providers offer technical assistance at no or little cost. Districts can otherwise hire consultants to create these queries.

While the attendance data variables you will need will depend on the messaging approach you choose, a short list of variables should suffice even for complex text messaging approaches. Table 2 describes each of the variables used for texting in the Parent Messaging Study.

**TABLE 2. LIST OF VARIABLES USED IN TEXT MESSAGING THAT EXIST IN SIS**

Variable	Use in the Parent Messaging Study
<b>District name</b>	This variable was used for the “district name” predetermined data field in the message to increase message personalization.
<b>Student ID</b>	The unique ID was helpful in searching for students in attendance datasets from previous dates. It allows you to link datasets across days for data checks as needed.
<b>Name of school student is enrolled in</b>	This variable was used for the “school name” predetermined data field in the message to increase message personalization. It can be used in conditional logic to limit messages to parents of students in specific schools.

Variable	Use in the Parent Messaging Study
<b>Student first name</b>	This variable was used for the “student first name” predetermined data field in the message to increase message personalization.
<b>Student last name</b>	This variable was used for the “student last name” predetermined data field in the message to increase message personalization. It also was used in searching for a student without looking up the student’s unique ID.
<b>Student grade level</b>	This variable was used for the “grade level” predetermined data field in the message to increase message personalization. It also was used in conditional logic to limit messages to parents of students in specific grades.
<b>Home language code of student</b>	These codes were used to identify language used in messaging. These codes may be the language spoken (e.g., “English,” “Spanish,” “Mandarin”) or character (e.g., “Eng,” “Sp”) or numeric values (e.g., “1,” “2”) that are associated with a home language. Some SMS platforms will automatically translate messages to other languages. However, automatically translated messages can contain errors in meaning and grammar. We recommend getting messages professionally translated to all languages your district typically uses in parent outreach.
<b>Parent name</b>	This variable was used for the “parent name” predetermined data fields in the message to increase message personalization. Depending how your data are set up, you may just have one primary name linked to one or more phone numbers associated with the student, multiple names linked to all phone numbers associated with the student, or multiple names each linked with one or more phone numbers.
<b>Phone numbers</b>	Many systems will contain multiple contact numbers, for example, work phone number(s), a cell phone number for each guardian, and a home phone number. Many SMS vendors can detect which numbers are cell numbers or landlines and can limit texts to known cell phone numbers. However, many districts will not know which numbers are currently valid (e.g., up-to-date, functional). In those cases, we recommend sending texts to all cell numbers linked to a student. Parents can reply “STOP” to block future messages if they do not want messages sent to a given number.

In addition to these fields, the attendance dataset will need to include a set of attendance variables that are based on the daily absence data (a student marked present or absent), depending on the type of messages the district wants to send out, and the conditional logic behind those messages (see sample on the right for an example of message using name and date data fields). The data fields that were used for the texts in the Parent Messaging Study are shown in Table 3.

**TABLE 3. DATA FIELDS CREATED IN SIS THROUGH QUERIES FOR BASIC AND INTENSIFIED MESSAGING**

Data field	Type of messaging used for	How used in the texting strategies tested in the Parent Messaging Study
<b>Absent today</b>	<b>Basic</b>	<p>This variable indicates that the student was absent.</p> <p>In the Parent Messaging Study, this variable (coded as today’s date if the student was absent, missing if the student was present) was used to prompt same-day absence notifications for parents whose child was marked as absent. To create this indicator correctly, it is important to know whether the SIS defaults to absent or present if a teacher does not report attendance on a given day. If the default is “absent” and a teacher does not report attendance, then absence notifications will be sent to all parents.</p>
<b>Absent reason code</b>	<b>Basic</b>	<p>This variable shows the reason why the student was absent, if known. This variable can be used to limit the messages triggered by the “absent today” field so that messages go out only if the student is absent for specific reasons.</p> <p>In the Parent Messaging Study, most districts prevented absent notifications going to families when a student was absent due to being hospitalized, attending a funeral, a suspension, or a religious holiday.</p>
<b>Number of consecutive absences</b>	<b>Basic</b>	<p>This variable counts the number of consecutive days a student was absent, excluding weekends or vacation days. This variable, coded numerically, can be used to prevent messages from going out to parents after a specific number of consecutive absences, since longer absences tend to reflect serious illnesses, family emergencies, or in some cases, a student moving to another district without informing the school. While creating this variable it is important to limit the consecutive absences for days schools are open (not to count weekend days or holidays as being absent or present).</p> <p>In the Parent Messaging Study, same-day absence notifications were sent only to students who were absent between 1 and 4 consecutive days. (On the fourth consecutive absence, parents were sent a message asking them to contact the school about their child’s absence if they hadn’t already, and the daily notifications ceased thereafter.)</p>

Data field	Type of messaging used for	How used in the texting strategies tested in the Parent Messaging Study
<b>Cumulative number of absences</b>	<b>Basic and Intensified (School Staff Outreach)</b>	<p>This variable counts the number of days the student was absent during the school year, regardless of reason. This variable, coded numerically, is used for the predetermined data fields in the same-day absence notifications to inform parents about their child’s total number of absences to date.</p> <p>In the Parent Messaging study this information was used in the same-day absence notifications included in basic messaging and was also included in the School Staff Outreach messages.</p>
<b>Absent yesterday</b>	<b>Basic</b>	<p>This variable indicates that the student was absent the prior school day. In the Parent Messaging Study, when this “absent yesterday” variable was coded “Yes” (or 1) and the “absent today” variable was coded “No” (or 0), the system sent a “welcome back” text messages to parents acknowledging their child was back in school after an absence.</p>

After the needed data fields are created through queries and have been checked for accuracy, the SIS analyst can automate the creation of datasets and automate exporting of the attendance data to the external SMS vendor.

The timing of attendance dataset creation and export depends on when the attendance data are updated. This in turn depends on when schools are required to provide updated attendance data in the district SIS. Same-day notifications should only go out after attendance is updated. Otherwise, the messaging will be inaccurate and could confuse or frustrate parents.

Generally, the later in the day the texts are sent, the more accurate the messages will be; however, messages should go out at a reasonable hour. We recommend ensuring texts do not go to parents past 8 p.m. local time.

Another consideration for the timing of attendance data exports is the processing time it takes for the district IT systems to create the daily attendance dataset. If the processing time is very long, it is plausible that the SIS’s data architecture was not set up correctly, the data queries were not optimized, or the district is executing multiple daily large-scale data runs at the same time. Based on our experience in the Parent Messaging Study, district SIS and IT personnel typically can solve long run-time issues. Other tips for district IT staff based on lessons learned from set-up in the Parent Messaging Study include the following:

We missed [name data field] in school today. [Name data field] has missed a total of [number of days data field] days of school this year. Going to school every day will help [name data field] learn important reading and math skills.



## TIPS FOR DISTRICT IT STAFF BASED ON LESSONS LEARNED FROM SET-UP IN THE PARENT MESSAGING STUDY

**Order variables in the output consistently.** That is, if the “absent today” variable is the 4th column in the daily attendance dataset, changing this to be the 5th column without updating SMS platform logic will result in incorrect messaging, as the SMS platform will reference the 4th column variable (i.e., the platform will not search for the variable name).

**Format variables in the output consistently.** The log used in the SMS platforms will reference exact values in the uploaded attendance datasets. As a result, changing data values from, for example, date format to numeric format, will result in incorrect messaging.

**When automatically exporting daily attendance files, archive a copy of that file for later reference.** When exporting data to an SMS platform, the prior day’s data file is often automatically replaced. While replacing the previous day’s file within the SMS platform is often the simplest solution, erasing the previous day’s file can make it difficult to troubleshoot problems with messages from prior days. Consider saving copies of the daily attendance file (e.g., all files, or just the past week), which will allow SIS analysts to troubleshoot problems that may have occurred (e.g., if messages did not go out, or if messages did go out, but with error).

If your district is using an API developed by an external SMS vendor to pull attendance data instead of using queries to create a daily dataset for export, we recommend that district SIS and IT personnel work with the SMS vendor to explore the simplest, most secure way to make the attendance data required for the texting messaging blueprint available for the SMS vendor.

### ***Action 3: Program SMS platform to send messages***

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Most SMS vendors offer web-based platforms that allow district staff to program automated prescheduled informational messaging, automated conditional messaging needed for same-day absence notifications, and engage in person-to-person two-way messaging. As described in Part I, we recommend district staff create a full blueprint that lists each message, the dates for each automated message to be sent, time of day, to whom, and description of conditional logic. The blueprint should clearly document the conditional logic; that is, “If a child in grades K-5 is absent, then send message to all parent contacts for that child.”

Most SMS platforms are web-based and allow programming conditional messages by providing dropdown menus where the programmer can choose data fields and Boolean-type operators to program under which circumstances a specific type of a text messages will be sent.

Exhibit 3 describes the logic behind some of the messages used in the Parent Messaging Study (the different types of messages were described in [Step 4 in Part I](#)). Table 3 provides the messaging logic that can be programmed using different SIS programming languages.

**TABLE 4. LOGIC FOR PARENT MESSAGING STUDY MESSAGES**

Data field	Logic	Notes
<b>Prescheduled messages</b>	Unconditional, sent to all parents in schools participating in attendance texting	Can be made conditional on schools, grades, or any other fields if needed. The messages can be scheduled out go out at a specific day and time. If two messages are going back to back (e.g., if one message is broken into two because the original message had too many characters to be contained in one text), then we recommend spacing the message timing by a few minutes so that the first message arrives first, and second arrives second.
<b>Same-day absence notification (days 1-3)</b>	If absent today==today's date AND consecutive days absent==3 AND absent reason code does not contain exclusion reasons	Exclusion reasons are up to the district but could contain codes that refer to hospitalization, family emergencies, funerals, and so on.
<b>Same-day absent notification (day 4)</b>	If absent today==today's date AND consecutive days absent==4 AND absent reason code does not contain exclusion reasons	Exclusion reasons are up to the district but could contain codes that refer to hospitalization, family emergencies, funerals, and so on.
<b>Return notification</b>	If absent today==blank AND absent yesterday==1	
<b>School Staff Outreach (two-way messaging)</b>	Conditional based on number of student absences in fall, sent purposefully by a school or district staff person to parents of students selected	These messages were only sent to families in the spring (January-end of year) who had at least one child who was absent 8 percent or more of school days between October and December.

## OTHER CONSIDERATIONS FOR TEXT MESSAGE PROGRAMMING

**Use short messaging service (SMS) versus multimedia messaging services (MMS).** SMS is older and still the most commonly used texting technology. SMS messages are cheaper to send and have a wider reach than MMS messages. SMS messages are also cheaper to receive, as most call plans in the United States offer unlimited text packages for SMS. The messages used in the Parent Messaging Study do not require MMS.

**Use an attendance-specific short code number for all attendance messaging.** Districts that plan to use texting for multiple purposes (e.g., weather-related closures, sports events, reminders about back-to-school and parent evenings) may consider using a separate short code for attendance texting. This allows parents to unsubscribe from receiving attendance-related messages while continuing to receive other informational texts.

**Automated stop function.** Parents must be able to unsubscribe from receiving texts. An automated stop function in which parents can send back a key word such as STOP will save staff time and avoid delays.

**Use of non-Latin alphabet in texting.** Most SMS vendors support Unicode text, allowing your district to text families whose home language does not use the Latin alphabet (e.g., such as Arabic, Amharic, Chinese, Korean).

### ***Action 4: Conduct quality assurance checks and monitor on an ongoing basis***

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Setting up text messaging requires multiple steps (e.g., programming attendance datasets, programming automated daily exports of attendance datasets to the external SMS vendor or making data available for SIS for text messaging, and programming and scheduling text messages). An error in any of the set-up can cause the system to fail to send messages or to send the wrong messages to parents. Systematic quality assurance processes ensure the correct messages go to the intended parents. After initial quality assurance checks, we recommend that district staff (whether attendance analyst or counselors, or SIS or IT staff) conduct a brief pre-pilot and conduct ongoing monitoring of the text messaging accuracy.

**Initial quality assurance checks.** We recommend taking the following steps to ensure that the messages are populated with accurate content and are sent out as intended.

**Crosscheck programmed messages against the district's messaging blueprint.** Review the programmed messages (in the SIS or SMS platform) against the messaging blueprint. The crosswalk should be conducted to make sure of the following:

- All messages from the blueprint were programmed.
- The prescheduled messages are scheduled for the correct date(s) and time(s).

- The messages were programmed to reach the intended group of parents (e.g., prescheduled messages go to all parents while same-day notifications only go to parents whose child was marked absent).
  - Attendance variables used in the same-day absence notifications are programmed correctly.
  - The conditional logic for the same-day notifications is programmed correctly.
- Messages do not contain typos or other errors. For example, make sure that web links to external resources are typed in correctly and are functional; web links may not work if you add a period to the end of the link.
- Data fields in the messages read in correct data (e.g., a data field for “student first name” reads in student names, not school phone numbers).
- Non-English language versions of the messages that are professionally translated (if this is something your district has done) are correctly entered. For example, Arabic messages read from left to right. It may take some trial and error to enter the messages correctly.

***Pre-pilot test with simulated data.*** It is critical to pre-pilot test the text messaging before sending any messages to parents.

To pre-pilot the messages, first identify volunteer district staff willing to help with the testing. Then, create a simulated dataset that mimics the format of the daily attendance datasets that will be used to prompt your real messaging. The simulated attendance dataset should include contact information only for the volunteers helping with the testing, and made-up student names with made-up attendance information. Over the course of a week or two, test whether prescheduled messages work as intended (i.e., are sent out on planned days at the correct times, with the correct information).

The volunteer staff should document which messages they received and when, along with any errors or problems they see with the text or information in the messages. When errors or problems occur, the district staff programming the messages should review the data that were used, the logic of the messages, and any errors in how the messages were programmed into the messaging platform to troubleshoot what caused the problems.

- Errors in the logic or how the messages were programmed in the platform could result in no messages going out, or in messages going out to every phone number linked to students in your SIS.

It is vital to do this pre-piloting work to prevent issues from occurring with parent recipients.

***Pilot test with parents and real data.*** After you have confirmed the messages are correctly programmed into the SMS platform, the next step is to pilot the messaging in a small number of schools. This is when ongoing monitoring begins.

## SMS REPORTING FEATURES FOR ONGOING MONITORING

*Send statistics.* Many text messaging systems provide data such as logs of messages sent and whether messages were undeliverable (bounced), which numbers were unsubscribed (through “stop” requests). This type of information can be important to track the results of text messaging interventions.

*Data exports.* Most SMS vendors can export data to outside applications such as Microsoft Excel®. More complex systems may have advanced software and security measures of data capture, storage, and interface with databases or analysis software.

*Ongoing monitoring.* After the messaging starts, it is important to analyze the message statistics daily to see whether the messages are being sent as intended. Most platforms will produce a dataset or a report that shows, for each student and each phone number, whether the message was sent and the message’s delivery status (remember to work with your SIS or SMS platform vendor to understand the codes or descriptions that show these data).

Monitor the messaging by doing the following:

1. Examining the number of messages sent by message type each day. This simple check allows you to see if there were messages that should have gone out but did not (i.e., 0 prescheduled informational messages were sent on a day when all parents in the district should have been sent a message) or if the number of messages that went out is implausible (e.g., parents of all students received a same-day absence notification).
2. Examining the proportion of messages that were *sent* as intended. That is, the message was sent from the SMS platform to guardians who should have been sent the messages, based on the text messaging blueprint.
3. Examining the proportion of messages that were *delivered* as intended. That is, the SMS platform’s statistics show evidence that the messages were delivered to at least one cell phone of guardians who were correctly sent messages.



### TIPS FOR MONITORING MESSAGES

When monitoring messaging, it is important to reformat and clean the vendor data because (a) messages may be sent to more than one contact number per student and (b) students in the same household will have the same contact information. Many SMS platforms will only record message delivery to a phone number once. Without reformatting and cleaning, the delivery rate may appear lower than it truly is. These issues need to be addressed in the analysis to provide meaningful and accurate information.

In the Parent Messaging Study, we considered messaging successfully delivered if the text was delivered to at least one number related to the student. This approach gave us a general sense of messaging uptake.

The results of this monitoring could point to flaws in the programming of the messages. The results can indicate which students do not have guardians with working cell phones in the SIS (by looking at the delivery success) and allow those monitoring the data to observe trends in the accuracy of cell phone contact information in the

SIS over time. For example, as the year progresses, parents may change cell phone numbers and not update their information in the SIS; monitoring allows you to observe these rates and identify the students whose contact information may need updating.

In the Parent Messaging Study, a team of three people worked together to check the messages for typos and errors, program and schedule the messages into the vendor platform, conduct quality assurance of the programmed messages, and monitor the accuracy of message delivery. Based on our experience, it would take approximately 170 hours during one school year, shared among three district staff, to program, check, and monitor attendance text messaging.<sup>16</sup> To implement basic messaging over one school year, the per-district cost was about \$50,000, approximately \$1,500 per school or \$5.88 per student. This cost includes text messaging vendor costs and the staff time to enter the messages into the platform and monitor the accuracy of the messaging. To implement School Staff Outreach, the per-district cost was about \$36,000, approximately \$337 per school or \$15 per student. These costs include district staff time for monitoring the accuracy of messaging.<sup>17</sup>

## Privacy and Security Considerations

District IT staff are well positioned to help the district understand the privacy and security considerations that must be kept in mind when planning and then carrying out an attendance text messaging strategy. This section discusses important information about regulations related to parent consent, data security, and privacy. Also see the [Privacy and Security Considerations checklist](#) for further assistance in addressing privacy and security in attendance messaging.

*Need for parent consent.* There are multiple relevant laws and regulations related to text messaging, as well as recommendations from [the Cellular Telecommunications Industry Association \(CTIA\)](#) and the [Mobile Marketing Association \(MMA\)](#).

The Telephone Consumer Protection Act of 1991 (TCPA) is a federal law that limits how and when telemarketers can contact consumers via phone, text, and fax. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) is the government agency that enforces the TCPA. It has developed a set of rules for implementing messaging services. Per the 2016 Blackboard/Edison declaratory ruling, school districts and schools are not required to comply with some of the TCPA rules, but it is best practice to follow them. Districts and schools may send text to parents without prior expressed consent in the following cases:

1. Emergencies, including student medical emergencies, school lockdowns, or student unexcused absences
2. School closings and dismissal announcements, and information related other key functions of schools such as reminders of parent-teacher conferences

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<sup>16</sup> This total includes approximately 130 hours entering and scheduling basic messages to the texting platform and approximately 40 hours monitoring the accuracy of messaging over one school year.

<sup>17</sup> The cost analysis conducted in the Parent Messaging Study collected and included multiple types of personnel and nonpersonnel costs to estimate the overall and average per-student cost of carrying out attendance text messaging over one school year. However, not all costs were accounted for; some costs may have been hidden, such as staff time spent answering parent questions about information provided in the texts (e.g., the number of cumulative absences). The cost estimates from the Parent Messaging Study are provided to give districts a sense of the ballpark costs; the actual cost of carrying out attendance texting will vary by district.

Districts and schools cannot, however, send general informational messages without prior expressed consent. As it is still unclear whether more general information about attendance and information about excused absences are considered to be related to school's key functions or as general information, some school districts prefer parents to opt-in to text messaging.<sup>18,19</sup>

TCPA also requires that:

1. Your district is identified as the sender of the messaging in the first text message sent to parents.
2. Texts are not sent to parents between 9 p.m. and 8 a.m. local time.
3. Parents must have the opportunity to opt out from future messaging.

In addition to TCPA, CTIA has made somewhat stricter industry recommendations, including informing parents that the same short code is used to send recurring messages, that receiving messages may result in local mobile carrier costs (e.g., message and data rates may apply), and how to unsubscribe through texting (e.g., text STOP to opt out). In addition, MMA discourages one-way texting and recommends that when customers reply asking for help, they should be sent a response. In addition, if parents sign on for text messaging through a web portal, the system should send a text to parents to reconfirm the accuracy of phone number and phone ownership. Finally, any kind of contest or sweepstakes or other promotional programs that include an element of chance should not be conducted via SMS without legal guidance.

Finally, [the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act \(FERPA\)](#) is relevant as well. FERPA is particularly focused on restricting the sharing of personally identifiable information. Any student educational records must be sent via a secure, FERPA-compliant system, and not all text messaging systems are FERPA compliant. We align with industry recommendations that parents give their permission for attendance texting and that text messages are generic enough so that individual students cannot be identified easily. For example, even when including information about student attendance such as number of absences, messages should only mention the student's first name, not their first and last name.

We recommend the district's goal be to reach as many parents as possible, while not violating laws and policies. The stricter the interpretation of the requirement for active parent consent for attendance-specific text messaging, particularly if separate in timing or process from other media and communications/notification releases, the harder it will likely be to obtain the consent from the hardest-to-reach families. These families are the most important to try to reach with a text messaging campaign intended to reduce chronic absence. Ideally, the parental consent process does not unintentionally exclude them from potentially benefiting from the attendance texting strategy.

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<sup>18</sup> If you engage with a third-party organization to make calls or send texts on your behalf, parental consent that you have collected extends to that third party.

<sup>19</sup> The FCC recommends that schools disclose the types of calls and messages parents/guardians can expect to receive when they provide the school with their cell phone number to assure necessary and informed consent (that is, parents can refuse to be sent certain types of messages). As the interpretation of the TCPA is not straightforward, many school districts ask for parent expressed consent prior to sending attendance-related text messages. If your district does not have a process in place for collecting parent communication preferences and expressed consent, we recommend that you obtain legal guidance about the type of parent consent needed for attendance text messaging. Bear in mind that assuming a true opt-in approach will likely mean that many of the hardest-to-reach families will not then be involved.

*Vendor privacy and security policies.* If the district decides to use an external SMS or parent communication vendor, it is important to review the vendor’s privacy and security policies. These policies often cover how personal information is defined, what personal information is collected, how it will be protected, and what will be do done with it (e.g., when will it be destroyed and how).

If your district is partnering with an external SMS vendor, you should discuss the topics of parent consent, privacy, and data security. SMS vendors working with school districts and schools should be up to date on the regulations and requirements. It is in their best interest to aid the districts and school to comply due to the heavy penalties that are allowed through TCPA for noncompliance.



**TIP FOR REVIEWING PRIVACY AND SECURITY POLICIES**

Review the vendor’s privacy and security policies. These policies often cover how personal information is defined, what personal information is collected, and how it will be protected.

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## Part III: Tools to Support Planning and Creating an Attendance Texting Strategy

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## Attendance Texting Readiness Checklist

The Attendance Texting Readiness Checklist is meant to be completed at the start of the planning process, by administrators, SIS, and IT staff. It will provide the team an overall idea of district readiness, resources, and initial information to assess needs and goals for attendance text messaging. The team can refer to or update the information in the checklist as they proceed with the subsequent steps. Answers to some checklist items may not be fully clear until subsequent steps are completed, which is completely fine. The process of gathering information and planning for attendance texting is iterative.

Readiness questions	Yes	No
<b>Collection, documentation, and entering of daily attendance data</b>		
<p>What student information system (SIS) does the district use?</p> <p>_____</p>		
<p>Are key attendance data indicators and reasons for absence available in the district data system?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Excused absences</li> <li>• Unexcused absences</li> <li>• Reasons for absences</li> <li>• If reasons for absences are a dropdown or “check one,” list reasons provided:</li> </ul> <p>_____</p>		
<p>Are attendance data collected from each classroom in a consistent way, every school day?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If No—what are the reasons for inconsistencies and what could be done to improve the process?</li> </ul> <p>_____</p>		
<p>Are attendance data entered to the SIS every day?</p>		
<p>By what time of day are attendance data entered to the SIS? _____</p>		

Readiness questions	Yes	No
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Present?      Absent?

What is the default setting for attendance in SIS if teachers do not document attendance? Present or absent?

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Are some schools consistently late reporting attendance into the district system?

- If *Yes*, some schools are consistently late—what are the reasons for late reporting and what could be done to improve the process? (e.g., IT issues, staffing issue, prioritization issue)
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Does the SIS hold families’ contact information, including cell phone numbers?

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How is the contact information updated, and how often?

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Does the SIS have the capacity to send any text messages to parents?

If the SIS cannot send the text messages:

- Does the district use a parent communication system that allows text messaging? (e.g., SchoolMessenger®, Blackboard®, Kinolved™, etc.)
- Does the district have an existing relationship with a text messaging vendor, for example sending out weather or school closing notifications?
- Does the district need to identify a text messaging vendor for attendance messaging?

**Programming Text Messaging**

Does the district have the IT capacity to run attendance queries in the SIS to send same-day absence attendance notifications by 8 p.m. or earlier?

## Readiness questions

Yes

No

Does the district have personnel who can write attendance queries for the SIS in order to automate data transfers or to work with application programming interface (API)?

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Does the district have IT personnel who can monitor and troubleshoot problems?

## Consent and Privacy

Does the district have a consent process in place for district/school-parent communications?

- If Yes—is the consent specific about the kind of text messaging parents can or will be sent?
  - If Yes—Is attendance texting covered?
- If No—Can the district create a form to distribute to parents in the fall or use a web-based tool to collect parent communication preferences and consent?

## Current District Communication Strategy and Resources

According to current district attendance policy, how are parents informed about attendance?

- Letters or postcards?
  - Emails?
  - Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- 

Are there district- or community-level resources that caregivers can be informed about/referred to in the texts?

Readiness questions	Yes	No
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Does the district have attendance counselors at the district level who can coordinate or work on attendance text messaging?

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Do the schools have attendance counselors or other staff who could be designated to do more personalized texting?

- If Yes—do they have time and can the district provide resources for personalized texting?
  - If No—can other responsibilities be shifted to allow school attendance counselors to engage in personalized texting, or can other district or school staff take on this task (e.g., staff in charge of community outreach or student services)?
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What are district policies regarding parent communication in languages other than English? Which languages would the text messages need to be translated to?

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## Implementation Planning Guide for Steps 1-8

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The Implementation Planning Guide includes questions to help the planning team think through district readiness for attendance texting, set priorities and goals, develop the district’s text messaging blueprint, and plan out how the blueprint will be executed. This Implementation Planning Guide is meant to be used after the completion of the [Readiness Checklist](#) and in tandem with the description of Steps 1 through 8 in [Part I](#) and the [Attendance Text Messaging Blueprint](#).



### ***Step 1: Form a team and gather background information***

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Steps	Questions to Ask	Guidance	District Notes
<b>Step 1: Form a team and gather background information</b>	<b>Questions to ask about forming a team and gathering information:</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Who will be on the team to address attendance, parent outreach, data, IT, and SMS vendor selection issues?</li><li>2. What is the relevant information with which all team members need to be familiar to be able to effectively plan for attendance text messaging?</li></ol>	<p>The team will ideally include district leadership, attendance and community outreach experts, SIS and IT staff, school staff, and parent and community representatives. A team is needed to ensure that the texting strategy addresses district and community priorities and goals. The team will ensure the strategy is successfully executed by district staff, either on their own or in a partnership with the student information system (SIS) provider and/or an external text messaging vendor.</p> <p>The <a href="#">Readiness Checklist</a> provides a starting point for collecting key information for team members to consider together as they work through the steps in this Implementation Planning Guide.</p>	

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## Step 2: Assess district data quality and system capabilities

Steps	Questions to Ask	Guidance	District Notes
<b>Step 2A:</b> <b>Assess attendance data collection and quality</b>	<p><b>Questions to ask about attendance data collection:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What types of student attendance data are collected at the school level?</li> </ol> <p>For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Present/absent each day, or by class period?</li> <li>• If once per day, is this information recorded at the same time at all schools or at different times?</li> <li>• Excused vs. unexcused absences?</li> <li>• Reasons for absences?</li> <li>• Other?</li> </ul>	<p>Many state departments of education provide detailed guidelines about the definition of daily absence. As a result, many districts have clear guidance for defining absence for different grade levels (e.g., how much of a day a child must miss school to be documented as absent).</p> <p>A daily indicator of present versus absent is not necessary for automated prescheduled attendance texting. However, it is necessary for same-day notifications informing parents daily about absences.</p> <p>Distinguishing between excused versus unexcused absences does not matter for attendance texting if the goal is to reduce missed instruction. If this is how they are marked in the SIS, they can be added to yield “total absences.” If the district’s attendance texting strategy includes same-day notifications, these could be triggered by either/or programming.</p> <p>Capturing reasons for absences is not necessary for doing attendance texting. However, if reasons are noted in the SIS, this information could be used to increase sensitivity of the messaging. For example, parents could be excluded from notifications when their children are absent for legitimate and sensitive reasons, such as a death in the family. Reasons for absences may also be useful to school staff using texting for more individualized outreach to parents.</p>	

Steps	Questions to Ask	Guidance	District Notes
	<p><b>Questions to ask about attendance data entry:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How do the attendance data get into the district student information system (SIS)?</li> <li>2. Does this happen once per day for all schools around the same time, or does each school upload their data into the district SIS at different times or on different days?</li> <li>3. What is the default value in the SIS if attendance is not reported (absent vs. present)?</li> </ol>	<p>For reliable attendance texting, districts should have a systematic approach for collecting and entering absence information into SIS. When the same data are available every school day for all schools, parents will receive consistent and accurate information about attendance, even if they have children in different schools.</p> <p>As part of assessing readiness, districts may need to pinpoint and address problems schools may have in collecting and recording attendance using the district’s preferred systematic approach. (Some example problems may be that substitute teachers do not know how to keep attendance, or schools have not identified a back-up person to enter attendance data.)</p> <p>The timing of when attendance information is recorded or uploaded to the district SIS matters. Same-day absence notifications are only possible if all schools enter absence information early enough in the day for the attendance data to be processed by the SIS to create indicators used in the attendance text messages (e.g., total cumulative absences to date).</p> <p>It is important to know the default setting when a teacher or a school does not take attendance on a given day. In some cases, the SIS default assumes all students were present if attendance information is not reported for a given day. In other cases, all students are marked absent unless attendance information indicating which students were present that day is reported. Either way, it is very important to avoid sending same-day absence notifications to parents when their children were, in fact, present.</p>	

Steps	Questions to Ask	Guidance	District Notes
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Such notifications will frustrate parents. Even if the SIS defaults to absent, it would be preferable for the attendance texting system to avoid sending notifications on days when attendance is not reported by a given teacher or school.

Questions to ask about how chronic absence is measured:

1. How do you define chronic absence?
2. Do the data in the district SIS allow chronic absence to be calculated on a periodic basis (e.g., on a quarterly basis, days absent/total days in the quarter)?
3. Do the data in the district SIS allow chronic absence to be calculated daily (i.e., days absent/total school days to date)?

Chronic absence is typically defined as 10 percent or more school days missed during a given period, regardless of whether the missed days were excused or unexcused absences. School districts often create other attendance indicators as well, for example to identify students who are at risk of becoming chronically absent. The team should be aware of the existing attendance thresholds that prompt district activities (e.g., letters to parents).

It is important to understand which attendance indicators the district SIS captures or can be programmed to create. If attendance data are recorded daily in the SIS, most SIS can be programmed to create attendance indicators such as chronic absence (e.g., 10 percent missed school days for a specified time period). It is helpful early during the planning process to include a district SIS analyst in the conversation about attendance indicators and how to create them.

Steps	Questions to Ask	Guidance	District Notes
<b>Step 2B: Assess SIS capabilities</b>	<p>Questions to ask to understand what SIS can and cannot do:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What SIS does the district currently use? Are any changes planned or expected in the next 2 years?</li> <li>2. Does the SIS support text messaging?</li> <li>3. Does the SIS hold contact information for student guardians, including cell phone numbers?</li> </ol>	<p>Most SISs have the functionality to create, store, and download attendance indicators for attendance text messaging. Some SISs support text messaging or have add-on modules available for this purpose. If the district SIS supports text messaging, it is important to ask the SIS provider about the types of text messaging the system can and cannot support. The district’s SIS or data analyst most familiar with the SIS should be included in these conversations.</p> <p>If the district is considering changing their SIS system and is planning to conduct systematic attendance text messaging, it will be important to confirm that the new SIS can provide the required attendance information to support the texting.</p> <p>If the SIS does not support sending texts, the district should look at other software applications they have for conducting parent communications and explore their use for attendance text messaging. If the district’s existing applications do not support attendance text messaging, the district will need to identify an external SMS provider. The district may, depending on their needs, choose a more general parent communication and learning management system (e.g., SchoolMessenger®, Blackboard®, or Kininvolved™) or an SMS vendor that specializes in text messaging (e.g., DialMyCalls, SchoolStatus, Zendesk Support Suite®, Salesforce Digital Engagement®, and Text-Em-All). See <a href="#">Step 6, Select an SMS vendor</a> and the <a href="#">Text Messaging Features List</a> for information to guide the selection of a text messaging vendor.</p>	

Steps	Questions to Ask	Guidance	District Notes
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Parent cell phone numbers are necessary for attendance texting. It is important that contact information is as up to date as possible to maximize the chance that attendance texts will reach at least one guardian per student.

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### Step 3: Determine needs and set priorities

Steps	Questions to Ask	Guidance	District Notes
<b>Step 3A.</b> <b>Use data to understand attendance patterns</b>	<p><b>Questions to ask to understand attendance patterns:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What percentage of students across the district was chronically absent (e.g., missed 10 percent or more of school days) in the most recent school year, across schools and grade levels?</li> <li>2. How much do the chronic absence rates vary by elementary school?</li> <li>3. Do higher chronic absence rates seem concentrated in particular schools? Particular grade levels?</li> <li>4. What are the attendance trends for different groups of students (e.g., English learners, students with disabilities, students in different ethnicity/race groups, or certain grade levels)?</li> <li>5. What is known about families whose children have higher rates of absences? For example, are they experiencing housing insecurity, language barriers, or transportation problems? What resources are currently available for them (e.g., tutoring, parent workshops, social services, counselors)?</li> </ol>	<p>Districts can determine the degree and type of attendance issues they are facing. By using attendance and student demographic data readily available in district's SIS, a data analyst can conduct descriptive analyses to identify patterns. For example, attendance data could be analyzed by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• district geographic area,</li> <li>• grade level (elementary vs. middle vs. high or specific grade bands)</li> <li>• school</li> <li>• student demographics</li> <li>• day of a week, and</li> <li>• spikes in absences around holidays.</li> </ul> <p>These analyses will help districts to understand (a) what kind of an attendance issues they face, (b) which students and families are affected most, and (c) what the priorities for attendance text messaging should be.</p>	

Steps	Questions to Ask	Guidance	District Notes
<p><b>Step 3B: Set priorities</b></p>	<p><b>Questions to ask when establishing priorities:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Based on the district’s assessment of attendance data and needs, will the texting strategy be focused on particular schools?</li> <li>2. Based on the district’s assessment of the attendance data and needs, should the district adopt basic messaging only? Or should the district adopt an adaptive strategy that starts with basic messaging and then adds intensified messaging for parents of children with higher absence rates over an initial period of basic messaging?</li> </ol>	<p>If clear differences in chronic absence rates exist between schools, the district may want to focus on those schools with greater attendance problems. (The Parent Messaging Study focused on schools where 15 percent or more of the students in grades K-5 were chronically absent the year before.)</p> <p>Most districts could carry out basic messaging, including prescheduled automated messages and same-day notification when children are absent. Many districts could also carry out adaptive messaging, where School Staff Outreach is added to basic messaging for parents of students who are chronically absent over an initial period of basic messaging alone.</p> <p>The decision about whether to use basic messaging only or basic plus intensified messaging depends on the district’s sense of the severity of the attendance problems, existing capacity to implement the more complex interactive messaging needed for the intensified strategies, and available resources (see Step 4).</p>	

## Step 4: Consider resources required for basic versus adaptive messaging

Steps	Questions to Ask	Guidance	District Notes
<p><b>Step 4:</b> <b>Consider resources required for basic versus adaptive messaging</b></p>	<p><b>Questions to ask about resources:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Does the district have qualified staff with time available to plan for and carry out basic messaging, including:               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. developing the district’s attendance text messaging blueprint,</li> <li>b. determining if the district SIS can be used for texting and explore options for an additional vendor if not,</li> <li>c. selecting an SMS vendor (if necessary),</li> <li>d. programming attendance variables in the SIS to support conditional texting required for the same-day notifications and enter messages to the vendor’s SMS platform according to the district’s blueprint,</li> <li>e. monitoring delivery of texts, and</li> <li>f. creating a communications strategy to inform parents about the texting and to collect parent consent as needed?</li> </ol> </li> <li>2. Does the district have adequate resources to cover the relevant staff time costs in the list above?</li> </ol>	<p>As the team considers whether to use basic messaging only or basic plus intensified messaging, it is important to take an honest assessment of the staff time needed for setting up, delivering, and monitoring the attendance texting strategy.</p> <p>The district has to also assess their current resources for texting and to estimate the costs for (a) securing a vendor, (b) system set-up and programming messages in the platform, (c) monitoring the reach and accuracy of attendance texting (e.g., text are sent as intended and reach the expected proportion of parents), and (d) troubleshooting problems.</p> <p>Costs incurred by the Parent Messaging Study are outlined below to help districts estimate resource requirements.</p> <p><b>Development Costs—</b></p> <p>The Parent Messaging Study spent \$92,000 for developing the message content, which would not be incurred by districts using the text message bank provided in this guide.</p>	

Steps	Questions to Ask	Guidance	District Notes
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. Does the district have adequate resources for securing a text messaging provider that can carry out basic messaging?</li> <li>4. Does the district have qualified staff with time available to plan for and carry out basic plus intensified messaging, including:               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. All items 1a through 1f, plus</li> <li>b. creating and delivering staff trainings to carry out School Staff Outreach, and</li> <li>c. carrying out more personalized, school-level outreach?</li> </ol> </li> <li>5. Does the district have adequate resources to cover the relevant staff time costs in the list above?</li> <li>6. Does the district have adequate resources for securing a text messaging provider that can carry out basic plus intensified messaging?</li> </ol>	<p>However, districts should plan to cover costs for reviewing the messages, revising messages to match the district calendar, and inserting locally relevant links to resources (see Step 5).</p> <p><b>Costs for System Set-Up, Programming, Monitoring, and Troubleshooting–</b></p> <p>The texting provider in the study, SchoolMessenger®, refined their main platform to support basic messaging at a total cost of about \$59,000. Further refinements to the platform for intensified messaging cost \$44,000.</p> <p>To implement basic messaging over one school year, the per-district cost was about \$50,000, approximately \$1,500 per school or \$5.88 per student. This cost estimate includes staff time to enter messages into the SMS platform and monitoring the accuracy of the messaging.</p> <p>To implement School Staff Outreach, the per-district cost was about \$36,000, approximately \$337 per school or \$15 per student. These costs include staff time for monitoring of accuracy of messaging.</p>	

Steps	Questions to Ask	Guidance	District Notes
		<p>The actual costs for implementing the Basic or School Staff Outreach strategies depend on the selection of the SMS vendor (e.g., whether any platform development is required), and district staff availability to enter messages to the vendor platform and to perform quality assurance. Some districts may prefer to select a vendor that can support entering messages, provide quality assurance, and monitor accuracy of messaging. We estimate that district staff would spend approximately 130 hours entering and scheduling basic messages to the vendor platform and approximately 40 hours monitoring the accuracy of messaging during one school year.</p>	

## Step 5: Develop the district's text messaging blueprint

Steps	Questions to Ask	Guidance	District Notes
<p><b>Step 5: Develop the district's text messaging blueprint</b></p>	<p><b>Questions to ask when developing the blueprint:</b></p> <p><b>Message Bank</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Do the messages provided in the Attendance Messaging Blueprint seem appropriate and relevant for your district?</li> <li>2. To refine the messages to local context, what are the available local resources to which the messages can refer parents (e.g., food banks, clothing drives)?</li> <li>3. Knowing the parent population in the district, into which languages should the text be translated?</li> <li>4. Will the district be able to seek parent feedback to ensure the messages will be well-received, and if so, how?</li> </ol> <p><b>Schedule</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. Do the prescheduled messages need to be sent in a specific order or at a specific time of the school year?</li> <li>6. Weekly schedule: Are certain types of messages to be sent on specific weekdays at specific times?</li> </ol>	<p>The messages in the <a href="#">Attendance Messaging Blueprint</a> were tested in the Parent Messaging Study and found to reduce chronic absence.</p> <p>The blueprint provides the full set of texts used for basic messaging, including the weekly prescheduled informational messages and same-day absence notifications. In the study, some parents were sent “benefits-framed” basic messages and other parents were sent “consequences-framed” basic messages. The study did not find a difference between the two types of framing. Therefore, districts should choose framing that matches their preferred tone and existing practice of providing attendance information.</p> <p>The blueprint also provides the full set of texts used for School Staff Outreach, sent in the study to parents of children who missed more than 8 percent of school days in the fall.</p> <p>Depending on the parent population and district policies, districts have to determine whether the automated text messages will be sent out in multiple languages depending on “home language” information in district SIS.</p>	

Steps	Questions to Ask	Guidance	District Notes
	<p><b>Audience</b></p> <p>7. Which parents should receive which type of messages?</p>	<p>If the district decides to match the language of the attendance text messages to the home language in the SIS, we recommend professionally translating the messages to various languages instead of using automated language translators offered by SMS vendors. The auto-translation can have grammatical errors and may not retain the intended spirit or content of a given message. It is also important to monitor parent feedback because the home language field in the SIS may contain inaccurate information.</p> <p>Incorporating parent feedback before finalizing the attendance texts may be useful as part of the planning process. This can be done, for example, through small focus groups or by piloting the attendance texts with a set of parents and surveying them for feedback. Parents should be asked to provide feedback about the clarity, tone, and usefulness of the messages and the links to locally relevant resources included in them.</p> <p>The district-specific text messaging blueprint is a concrete plan for programming attendance texts into the SMS platform.</p>	

Steps	Questions to Ask	Guidance	District Notes
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The blueprint should at least include (a) the attendance text message, (b) type of attendance message, (c) date the message will be sent out, and (d) audience for the message. (See the [example blueprint](#).)

The blueprint also sets the schedule for each message. For basic messaging, all prescheduled informational messages are intended to be sent on Sundays around 2 p.m. All same-day absence notifications were sent before 8 p.m. local time.

It is important for the blueprint to note whether messaging is conditional. That is, it will note whether all parents or only a subset of parents, for example those parents whose children have more absences, should receive the messages.

## Step 6: Select an SMS vendor

Steps	Questions to Ask	Guidance	District Notes
<p><b>Step 6: Select an SMS vendor</b></p>	<p><b>Questions to ask when selecting a text messaging vendor:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What is the district’s budget for attendance texting?</li> <li>2. What type of provider would best match district’s longer-term needs? Is attendance text messaging the only type of messaging district plans to implement?</li> <li>3. Can the provider deliver the attendance text messaging strategy as the district intended?</li> <li>4. Can the provider support district staff in implementing the attendance text messaging strategy? For example, can they provide training in the use of their platform? Can they provide ongoing technical assistance?</li> </ol> <p>See Part I, Step 6 for additional questions to ask potential providers.</p>	<p>Districts have to assess what is likely to be the most cost-effective way to implement the attendance text messaging strategy they want to adopt. As noted in Step 1B in Part I, the district SIS or parent communication system may already have the ability send out texts. If that is not the case or if the SIS can only send some messaging types but not others of interest to the district, the district may want to purchase services from an external SMS vendor. The decision of whether to use existing infrastructure or whether to invest into new tools should be based on district’s priorities and goals for attendance texting and future plans for using texting for to communicate with parents for other purposes. For example, if the district is planning to deliver report cards, parent meeting notices, reminders, parent surveys, or other information via texts, it is important to invest into a system that can handle different types of messaging and protect student privacy.</p> <p>To support attendance texting well, the district should select a vendor that has the technical capabilities to implement the intended attendance texting strategy and can provide initial training and ongoing support to the district staff to program and carry out the attendance texting.</p>	

Steps	Questions to Ask	Guidance	District Notes
		<p>We recommend that the district staff create a request for proposals with a description of the intended attendance text messaging strategy to vendors and ask detailed questions while competing multiple vendors. <a href="#">Step 6</a> in the toolkit provides a list of example questions. We also recommend that districts start the process of securing a vendor as early as possible in devising their attendance texting strategy, as the vendors may be able to help districts to think through some of the technical issues and suggest cost-effective alternatives.</p>	

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## Step 7: Communicate with staff and families

Steps	Questions to Ask	Guidance	District Notes
<b>Step 7:</b> <b>Communicate with staff and families</b>	<p><b>Questions to ask when planning for staff and parent outreach:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What is the best way to introduce attendance text messaging to staff and parents?</li> <li>2. Beyond information about it happening, are there any needs for training any school staff?</li> <li>3. Have you already collected parent expressed consent for school and district communications, including text messaging?</li> <li>4. What would be the most efficient way to collect parent expressed consent?</li> </ol>	<p>It is important that district and school staff as well as parents who will be receiving attendance text messages are informed in advance. School staff should be informed so that they are not caught off guard by parents asking questions about the texts. In addition, if the district plans to have attendance counselors or other district or school staff members conduct two-way personalized messaging, it is important that the staff is trained in the use of the SMS platform as well as trained to implement the text messaging as intended.</p> <p>Many districts collect annual parent media preferences through their SIS or parent communication system. Parents can notify the district if they wish not to receive texts, including attendance texts. See <a href="#">Part II, Privacy and Security Considerations</a>, for more information.</p>	

## Step 8: Pilot and scale up, with ongoing monitoring

Steps	Questions to Ask	Guidance	District Notes
<b>Step 8A. Pilot before scaling up</b>	<p><b>Questions to ask when piloting:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Are the attendance texts correctly programed in the vendor platform? For example, are prescheduled messages sent on correct days at correct times; are conditional messages, such as same-day absence notifications sent to the intended parents whose child was absent that day?</li> <li>2. Are attendance texts delivered at expected rate?</li> </ol>	<p>Prior to piloting attendance texting with parents, it is important to ensure that messages are correctly programmed into the SMS platform by using simulated data with district staff (see <a href="#">Part II, Action 4</a>). Once correctly programmed, attendance text messaging should be piloted in a small number of schools before scaling up to all relevant (e.g., elementary) schools or to district-wide implementation. Piloting in a small number of schools allows district staff to identify problems with calculating daily or over-time absence indicators, transferring attendance data to the SMS platform, or content of the messages. Parents will find the information useful only if it is accurate and clear.</p> <p>During piloting, you can also check the reach of attendance texting and flag any potential issues with message delivery. For example, if 80 percent of parents have a valid cell number stored in the SIS, you would expect that unconditional prescheduled texts would be delivered to approximately this percentage of parents.</p>	

Steps	Questions to Ask	Guidance	District Notes
<b>Step 8B. Continue to monitor</b>	<p><b>Questions to ask when scaling up:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Are attendance text messages delivered as planned and with expected rate?</li> <li>2. Is there a need to revise the attendance text messaging strategy based on attendance data or parent feedback?</li> </ol>	<p>Ongoing monitoring of the accuracy and text messaging delivery rates is important to ensure successful implementation and parent satisfaction. The delivery rates could change over time for the following reasons:</p> <p>Attendance data may not be processed on time, and as a result, same-day absence notifications are not sent out.</p> <p>The text messaging may become out of sync after holidays or vacations.</p> <p>Parent contact information is not being kept up to date.</p> <p>It is important to fix any problems in a timely manner because after the attendance texting starts, parents learn to expect it. Some parents may become upset if a text indicates their child was absent when they were present.</p> <p>We also recommend districts track the rates at which parents unsubscribe from the texts. If a large percentage of parents unsubscribe (e.g., more than 10-15 percent), it is possible that there are issues either with the frequency or the tone of the messaging.</p>	

## Considerations When Drafting Text Messages

The Parent Messaging Study staff wrote the text messages used in the study. These messages are made available in the [Example Attendance Text Messaging Blueprint](#). The draft text messages were created according to the guidelines listed in the table below and revised based on parent focus group and participating districts’ staff feedback. The table provides a list of practices related to appearance, content, and functionality of text messages for district staff to consider if they revise any of the study’s text messages.<sup>20</sup>

Message Characteristic	Guideline
<b>Length</b>	Text messages should be fewer than 160 characters, including spaces and punctuation. However, most modern phones and networks support concatenation and segment and rebuild messages up to 1,600 characters. Some recipients of the text messages may, however, receive the rebuilt messages in the wrong order. Therefore, if possible, keep the messages to 160 characters. Instead of letting the system concatenate the messages, plan to send two separate shorter text messages in a rapid sequence.
<b>Abbreviations</b>	Because text messages are meant to be brief, abbreviations are often used. However, use abbreviations only if they are easily understood and do not change the meaning of the message.
<b>Emojis</b>	Avoid using emojis because parents may not find them professional.
<b>Cultural and linguistic sensitivity</b>	Messages should be respectful of and responsive to the cultural and linguistic needs of all parents. For example, The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services created the <a href="#">National Standards for Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services in Health and Health Care</a> that emphasize the importance of providing services that are responsive to diverse cultural health beliefs and practices, preferred languages, health literacy, and other communication needs.
<b>Tone</b>	Aim for a professional tone; parents want factual information.

<sup>20</sup> This list is based on the [Text Messaging in Healthcare Research Toolkit](#) developed by the Center of Research in Implementation Science and Prevention (CRISP) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [Guide to Writing for Social Media](#).

Message Characteristic	Guideline
<b>Translation to district supported languages</b>	Text messages should be sent in parents' native language if plausible. Many student information systems (SIS) store information about home language that can be used to identify in which language messages should be sent. The messages should be professionally translated into all languages a district typically supports in parent communications. Some SMS providers or parent communication systems offer automated translation. The automated translation, however, may not be accurate, and an inaccurate message may cause parents to unsubscribe.
<b>Non-Latin characters</b>	Work with the SMS vendor to ensure that languages that use non-Latin alphabet (e.g., Arabic, Amharic, Chinese, Korean) will be sent correctly.
<b>Readability</b>	Aim for a sixth- to eighth-grade reading level to ensure that the texts can be comprehended by all parents.
<b>Content</b>	<p><i>Actionable:</i> The messages should include information about what parents can do to learn more about the importance of attendance or to help their child with attendance (such as links to additional information or tips).</p> <p><i>Tailored:</i> The messages should be tailored to provide information that is clearly relevant for attendance. It may make sense to tailor some messaging to be used only when reaching out to parents whose children struggle with attendance.</p> <p><i>Personalized:</i> Some messages, such as daily absence notifications or individualized outreach, should be personalized and include the student's name and student-specific information about attendance, such as the number of days a student has missed school so far this school year.</p> <p><i>Branded:</i> If the district has an ongoing attendance initiative, it is a good idea to use the same branding. For example, if district uses an attendance slogan, it could be included in some of the texts.</p> <p><i>Tested:</i> If possible, request feedback from the school staff and parent community regarding the content, tone, and clarity of the messages.</p>

Message Characteristic	Guideline
<b>Use short code if possible</b>	Using a short code (a short digit sequence) instead of a long phone number for attendance text messaging has multiple advantages. First, using a specific short code allows the district to separate text messaging from other types of messaging the district does (e.g., weather notifications, emergency notifications, sports events etc.). Second, a short code allows efficient sending of a large number of messages at the same time. Third, because short codes are approved by local carriers, the text messages do not get blocked. Finally, it is easier for parents to recognize the sender when the same short code is consistently used.
<b>Inclusion of hyperlinks</b>	Text messages can include hyperlinks to connect parents to additional resources such as websites. SMS vendors typically use URL shorteners to create shorter URL addresses. Work with your SMS vendor to make sure that they shorten the URL addresses and consequently leave more characters open for texting.
<b>Unsubscribe instructions</b>	Text messages must inform parents how they can unsubscribe from receiving messages. Typically, SMS vendors use a keyword that receivers of the messages can text back to unsubscribe. For example, the message could include a phrase “To stop attendance messaging, reply STOP.”

## Text Messaging Features List

The Text Messaging Features List describes text messaging features required or recommended for the three types of messaging described in the guide: basic information messaging, same-day absence notifications, and School Staff Outreach.

Feature	Required or recommended	Description	Basic messaging—weekly prescheduled	Basic messaging—same-day notifications	Intensified messaging—School Staff Outreach
<b>Bulk messaging</b>	<b>Required</b>	One-way text messages sent to a large list of recipients.	✓	✓	
<b>Prescheduling one-time or recurring texts</b>	<b>Required</b>	Messages that have been set to go out at certain date or time. Prescheduled messages can also be reoccurring, the same text is sent out at a preset frequency (e.g., once a week on Mondays at 5 p.m.). The prescheduling would be used for a general informational text about attendance.	✓		
<b>Two-way messaging</b>	<b>Required</b>	The capacity of the system to send and receive text messages. Most SMS providers can do two-way messaging. However, it is important to understand whether the SMS provider can create multiple user accounts, for example one for each school, to allow schools to do two-way messaging with caregivers (see below system features).			✓

Feature	Required or recommended	Description	Basic messaging– weekly prescheduled	Basic messaging– same-day notifications	Intensified messaging– School Staff Outreach
<b>Personalization through data fields</b>	<b>Required</b>	<p>Most SMS providers can read values from datasets to predetermined data fields in the texts to customize the content. For example, student name and number of days the student has been absent during the school year can be data fields in the texts that are populated by using data from the student information system. This feature could be used in same data attendance notifications.</p>		✓	✓
<b>Short codes</b>	<b>Recommended for high-volume outbound messaging</b>	<p>Short codes are numbers used for sending and receiving texts. These codes are normally five or six digits, so they are easy to read and remember, allowing the receivers of a text to identify the sender more easily. It is not necessary to have a short code, but they are recommended for high-volume outbound messaging. Short codes are available for lease from the Common Short Code Administration or they may be obtained through a text messaging vendor for an additional cost (approximately \$6,000). If districts want the attendance text messaging to be separated from other messaging districts may do (e.g., weather, sport events etc.), then acquiring a short code is an easy way to do it.</p>	✓	✓	

Feature	Required or recommended	Description	Basic messaging– weekly prescheduled	Basic messaging– same-day notifications	Intensified messaging– School Staff Outreach
<b>Long codes</b>	<b>Recommended for low-volume two-way messaging</b>	A long code is a 10-digit local number from which SMS messages are sent. They can be obtained from an SMS service provider. Long codes are less efficient than short codes but do not include any additional cost. Long codes were used for the two-way text messaging conducted by a school staff member because it was not cost-effective to pay for a short code for each school staff member/school conducting personalized outreach.			✓
<b>Conditional messaging</b>	<b>Required</b>	Most SMS providers allow use of indicators to identify a subset of text messaging recipients for texting. For example, a district may identify certain types of messages to only go to caregivers who have children with high level of absences or parents whose child was absent today.		✓	✓
<b>Active links</b>	<b>Required</b>	URL links that direct recipients to a website may be included in the text. This can be used to direct people to a survey or provide access to information in addition to what can be sent in a text message. Use of shortened links is recommended to save more space for the content of the message.	✓		

Feature	Required or recommended	Description	Basic messaging– weekly prescheduled	Basic messaging– same-day notifications	Intensified messaging– School Staff Outreach
<b>Unicode support</b>	<b>Required</b>	This feature accommodates messages in any language using proper characters and formatting, such as Arabic, Amharic, Chinese, Japanese, and Korean. Using Unicode support is important especially for districts that plan to translate messages to multiple languages, including those not using a Latin alphabet.	✓	✓	✓
<b>Automated stop function</b>	<b>Required</b>	This feature allows users to unsubscribe by sending the keyword “STOP” if they wish to stop receiving text messages from the sender. The “STOP” message can be used to automatically update the recipients list.	✓	✓	✓

## Example Attendance Text Messaging Blueprint

The Example Attendance Text Messaging Blueprint displays how a district’s text messaging strategy can be concretely laid out and documented. The blueprint will help programming of messaging to the SMS platform. This example blueprint is intended to serve as a resource. Districts should decide whether to use benefits- or consequences-framed basic messaging. The example blueprint first lists benefits- and consequences-framed prescheduled, weekly messages and tips, and then benefits- and consequences-framed same-day notifications. Each prescheduled, weekly message is a combination of two separate text messages. The first text includes an informational statement. The second text includes more information about a specific topic with a web link or a behavioral tip with a web link. The topics and tips were not expected to be relevant to all parents on any given day. Following the basic messages, the example blueprint lists the School Staff Outreach messages. All these messages were used in the Parent Messaging Study.

### *Benefits-framed weekly prescheduled messages (basic messaging)*

Message	Message type	To whom	Date	Programming logic
[Attendance Slogan]. Regular school attendance is one of the biggest factors that can help your child succeed in life.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	1-Oct	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
For more information about the importance of attendance and district attendance policies, go to [LINK].	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	1-Oct	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Children who attend school every day or miss at most 1 day a month, are more likely to read on or above grade level.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	8-Oct	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Some kids want to skip school because of unfinished homework. For homework help ideas, go to [LINK].	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	8-Oct	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.

Message	Message type	To whom	Date	Programming logic
Going to school regularly helps students get good grades.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	15-Oct	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Some children stay home because of minor illness when they should be in school. For more information about when to keep your child home, go to [LINK].* <sup>21</sup>	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	15-Oct	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Children who attend school every day or miss at most 1 day a month, are more likely to graduate from high school.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	22-Oct	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
It's important to know the school calendar. Visit [LINK] before planning family events or travel.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	22-Oct	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Regular attendance helps your child feel like an important part of their class.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	29-Oct	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Asking children about their school day helps them succeed. Visit [LINK] for tips on how to get started.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	29-Oct	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.

<sup>21</sup> Messages in this Blueprint that are marked with an asterisk (\*) are related to attendance when children have minor illnesses. These messages were used in the Parent Messaging Study in 2017-18 so they are included here. However, districts should exercise caution about using them in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and current public health guidelines, and may wish to delete them altogether.

Message	Message type	To whom	Date	Programming logic
[Attendance Slogan]. Children who regularly attend school learn important lifelong study skills.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	5-Nov	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
For more information about the importance of attendance and district attendance policies, go to [LINK].	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	5-Nov	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
When children go to school, they learn more.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	12-Nov	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Sometimes children miss the bus. Have a back-up plan to get your child to school. For ideas go to [LINK].	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	12-Nov	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Sometimes Metro is delayed. Have a back-up plan to get your child to school. For back-up plan ideas go to [LINK1]; for Metro schedules go to [LINK2]	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	12-Nov	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Children who attend school every day or miss at most 1 day a month, have an easier time learning the reading and math skills they need.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	19-Nov	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
We are thankful for our students and our school community. Remember that the Thanksgiving holiday starts on [DATE]. For a list of other school holidays, go to [LINK].	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	19-Nov	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.

Message	Message type	To whom	Date	Programming logic
Children who attend school regularly learn to work with peers.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	26-Nov	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Allergies can trigger asthma in some children. For more information about asthma, go to [LINK].	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	26-Nov	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
[Attendance Slogan]. Going to school regularly helps children learn how to finish the tasks they start.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	3-Dec	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
For more information about the importance of attendance and district attendance policies, go to [LINK].	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	3-Dec	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Children who attend school every day or miss at most 1 day a month score higher on reading and math tests.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	10-Dec	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Some children are nervous about school and do not want to go. For info about school anxiety, go to [LINK].	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	10-Dec	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Children who go to school regularly are better at working through difficult tasks.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	17-Dec	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Homework doesn't have to be a chore. Get free homework help by visiting [LINK].	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	17-Dec	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.

Message	Message type	To whom	Date	Programming logic
[Attendance Slogan]. Children who regularly attend school benefit from activities done in class.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	7-Jan	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
For more information about the importance of attendance and district attendance policies, go to [LINK].	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	7-Jan	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Going to school regularly helps children learn how to finish the tasks they start.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	14-Jan	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Some children are hard to get out of bed in the morning. For more information, click [LINK].	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	14-Jan	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Children who attend school every day or miss at most 1 day a month, are more likely to be ready for the next grade.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	21-Jan	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Your child can still go to school even if they have a simple cold. Go to [LINK] to learn how to spot the difference between a cold and the flu.*	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	21-Jan	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Regular attendance at school helps children learn good study habits.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	28-Jan	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Some kids want to skip school because of unfinished homework. For homework help ideas, go to [LINK].	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	28-Jan	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.

Message	Message type	To whom	Date	Programming logic
[Attendance Slogan]. Regular school attendance is one of the biggest factors that can help a child’s academic success.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	4-Feb	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
For more information about the importance of attendance and district attendance policies, go to [LINK].	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	4-Feb	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Children who attend school every day or miss at most 1 day a month are more likely to graduate from high school.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	11-Feb	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Some children have a hard time transitioning from home to school. For more information, go to [LINK].	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	11-Feb	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Children who regularly attend school learn important lifelong study skills.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	18-Feb	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Some children do not want to go to school because of bullying. For more information about bullying, go to [LINK]. For ways to help your child, contact [PERSON AT SCHOOL].	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	18-Feb	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Children who attend school regularly learn to work with peers.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	25-Feb	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.

Message	Message type	To whom	Date	Programming logic
Some children struggle with getting ready on time in the morning. For tips on how to help your child get ready, go to [LINK].	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	25-Feb	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
[Attendance Slogan]. Children who attend school every day or miss at most 1 day a month score higher on reading and math tests.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	4-Mar	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
For more information about the importance of attendance and district attendance policies, go to [LINK].	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	4-Mar	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Children who go to school regularly are better at working through difficult tasks.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	11-Mar	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Spring allergies can trigger asthma in some children. For more information about asthma, go to [LINK].	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	11-Mar	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Regular attendance helps your child feel like an important part of their class.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	18-Mar	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Education is one of the best gifts a parent can give. Click on [LINK] for tips on how to talk to your child about what they did in school.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	18-Mar	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
When children go to school, they learn more.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	25-Mar	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.

Message	Message type	To whom	Date	Programming logic
Some kids have trouble with homework. To learn more about sites offering free homework help, go to [LINK].	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	25-Mar	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
[Attendance Slogan]. Regular school attendance is one of the biggest factors that can help your child succeed in life.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	1-Apr	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
For more information about the importance of attendance and district attendance policies, go to [LINK].	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	1-Apr	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Children who attend school every day or miss at most 1 day a month have an easier time learning the reading and math skills they need.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	8-Apr	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Does your child have a toothache? For ways to take care of your child's teeth, go to [LINK].	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	8-Apr	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Going to school regularly helps students get good grades.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	15-Apr	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Your child can still go to school even if they have a cold or allergies. Visit [LINK] for more info.*	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	15-Apr	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Children who attend school every day or miss at most 1 day a month, are more likely to graduate from high school.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	22-Apr	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.

Message	Message type	To whom	Date	Programming logic
It's important to know the school calendar. Visit [LINK] before planning family events or travel.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	22-Apr	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Regular attendance at school helps children learn good study habits.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	29-Apr	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Some students may get stomachaches because they are worried or nervous about school. For more information, go to [LINK].	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	29-Apr	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
[Attendance Slogan]. Children who attend school every day or miss at most 1 day a month are more likely to read on or above grade level.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	6-May	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
For more information about the importance of attendance and district attendance policies, go to [LINK].	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	6-May	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Going to school regularly helps children learn how to finish the tasks they start.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	13-May	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Some children stay home because of minor illness when they should be in school. For more information about when to keep your child home, go to [LINK].*	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	13-May	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.

Message	Message type	To whom	Date	Programming logic
Children who regularly attend school benefit from activities done in class.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	13-May	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Summer is almost here! Go to [LINK] for ways to help your child succeed at the end of the school year.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	13-May	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Regular school attendance is one of the biggest factors that can help your child's academic success.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	20-May	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Some children struggle with getting ready on time in the morning. For tips on how to help your child get ready, go to [LINK].	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	20-May	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Regular school attendance is one of the biggest factors that can help your child succeed in life.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	20-May	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Many local libraries have fun summer reading programs for kids. Visit [LINK] for information about local libraries.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	20-May	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Children who regularly attend school benefit from activities done in class.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	27-May	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Summer is almost here! Go to [LINK] for ways to help your child succeed at the end of the school year.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	27-May	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.

Message	Message type	To whom	Date	Programming logic
Going to school regularly helps students get good grades.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	27-May	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Your child can still go to school even if they have a cold or allergies. Visit [LINK] for more info.*	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	27-May	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
[Attendance Slogan]. Children who attend school every day or miss at most 1 day a month are more likely to be ready for the next grade.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	3-Jun	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Summer is almost here! Visit [LINK] for information about fun summer activities.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	3-Jun	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Children who regularly attend school benefit from activities done in class.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	3-Jun	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Summer is almost here! Go to [LINK] for ways to help your child succeed at the end of the school year.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	3-Jun	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Regular school attendance is one of the biggest factors that can help your child succeed in life.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	10-Jun	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Many local libraries have fun summer reading programs for kids. Visit [LINK] for information about local libraries.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	10-Jun	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.

Message	Message type	To whom	Date	Programming logic
Children who regularly attend school learn important lifelong study skills.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	10-Jun	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Some children do not want to go to school because of bullying. For more information about bullying, go to [LINK]. For ways to help your child, contact [PERSON AT SCHOOL].	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	10-Jun	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Regular school attendance is one of the biggest factors that can help your child succeed in life.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	17-Jun	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Many local libraries have fun summer reading programs for kids. Visit [LINK] for information about local libraries.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	17-Jun	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.

## Consequences-framed weekly prescheduled messages (basic messaging)

Message	Message type	To whom	Date	Programming logic
[Attendance Slogan]. Missed school days are one of the biggest factors that can harm your child's success in life.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	1-Oct	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
For more information about the importance of attendance and district attendance policies, go to [LINK].	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	1-Oct	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Students who miss 2 or more school days a month are less likely to read on or above grade level.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	8-Oct	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Some kids want to skip school because of unfinished homework. For homework help ideas, go to [LINK].	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	8-Oct	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Missing school makes it harder for students to get good grades.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	15-Oct	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Some children stay home because of minor illness when they should be in school. For more information about when to keep your child home, go to [LINK].*	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	15-Oct	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Children who miss 2 or more days a month, starting in elementary school, are less likely to graduate from high school.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	22-Oct	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.

Message	Message type	To whom	Date	Programming logic
It's important to know the school calendar. Visit [LINK] before planning family events or travel.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	22-Oct	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Missing school makes it harder for your child feel like an important part of their class.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	29-Oct	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Asking children about their school day helps them succeed. Visit [LINK] for tips on how to get started.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	29-Oct	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
[Attendance Slogan]. Children who miss school have a harder time learning important lifelong study skills.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	5-Nov	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
For more information about the importance of attendance and district attendance policies, go to [LINK].	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	5-Nov	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
When children miss school, they learn less.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	12-Nov	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Sometimes children miss the bus. Have a back-up plan to get your child to school. For ideas go to [LINK].	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	12-Nov	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Sometimes Metro is delayed. Have a back-up plan to get your child to school. For back-up plan ideas go to [LINK1]; for Metro schedules go to [LINK2]	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	12-Nov	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.

Message	Message type	To whom	Date	Programming logic
Children who miss 2 or more days of school a month have a harder time learning the reading and math skills they need.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	19-Nov	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
We are thankful for our students and our school community. Remember that the Thanksgiving holiday starts on [DATE]. For a list of other school holidays, go to [LINK].	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	19-Nov	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Children who miss school also miss out on learning to work with their peers.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	26-Nov	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Allergies can trigger asthma in some children. For more information about asthma, go to [LINK].	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	26-Nov	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
[Attendance Slogan]. Missing school makes it hard for children to learn how to finish the tasks they start.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	3-Dec	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
For more information about the importance of attendance and district attendance policies, go to [LINK].	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	3-Dec	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Students who miss 2 or more school days a month score lower on reading and math tests.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	10-Dec	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.

Message	Message type	To whom	Date	Programming logic
Some children are nervous about school and do not want to go. For info about school anxiety, go to [LINK].	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	10-Dec	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Children who do not go to school regularly have a harder time working through difficult tasks.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	17-Dec	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Homework doesn't have to be a chore. Get free homework help by visiting [LINK].	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	17-Dec	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
[Attendance Slogan]. Children who miss school can't benefit from activities done in class.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	7-Jan	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
For more information about the importance of attendance and district attendance policies, go to [LINK].	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	7-Jan	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Missing school makes it hard for children to learn how to finish the tasks they start.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	14-Jan	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Some children are hard to get out of bed in the morning. For more information, click [LINK].	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	14-Jan	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Children who miss 2 or more school days a month are less likely to be ready for the next grade.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	21-Jan	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.

Message	Message type	To whom	Date	Programming logic
Your child can still go to school even if they have a simple cold. Go to [LINK] to learn how to spot the difference between a cold and the flu.*	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	21-Jan	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Missing school makes it hard for children to learn good study habits.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	28-Jan	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Some kids want to skip school because of unfinished homework. For homework help ideas, go to [LINK].	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	28-Jan	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
[Attendance Slogan]. Missing school is one of the biggest factors that can harm a child's academic success.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	4-Feb	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
For more information about the importance of attendance and district attendance policies, go to [LINK].	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	4-Feb	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Children who miss 2 or more days a month, starting in elementary school, are less likely to graduate from high school.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	11-Feb	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Some children have a hard time transitioning from home to school. For more information, go to [LINK].	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	11-Feb	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Children who miss school have a harder time learning important lifelong study skills.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	18-Feb	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.

Message	Message type	To whom	Date	Programming logic
Some children do not want to go to school because of bullying. For more information about bullying, go to [LINK]. For ways to help your child, contact [PERSON AT SCHOOL].	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	18-Feb	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Children who miss school also miss out on learning to work with their peers.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	25-Feb	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Some children struggle with getting ready on time in the morning. For tips on how to help your child get ready, go to [LINK].	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	25-Feb	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
[Attendance Slogan]. Students who miss 2 or more school days a month score lower on reading and math tests.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	4-Mar	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
For more information about the importance of attendance and district attendance policies, go to [LINK].	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	4-Mar	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Children who do not go to school regularly have a harder time working through difficult tasks.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	11-Mar	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Spring allergies can trigger asthma in some children. For more information about asthma, go to [LINK].	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	11-Mar	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.

Message	Message type	To whom	Date	Programming logic
Children who do not go to school regularly have a harder time working through difficult tasks.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	18-Mar	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Education is one of the best gifts a parent can give. Click on [LINK] for tips on how to talk to your child about what they did in school.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	18-Mar	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
When children miss school, they learn less.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	25-Mar	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Some kids have trouble with homework. To learn more about sites offering free homework help, go to [LINK].	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	25-Mar	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
[Attendance Slogan]. Missed school days are one of the biggest factors that can harm your child's success in life.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	1-Apr	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
For more information about the importance of attendance and district attendance policies, go to [LINK].	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	1-Apr	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Children who miss 2 or more days of school a month have a harder time learning the reading and math skills they need.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	8-Apr	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Does your child have a toothache? For ways to take care of your child's teeth, go to [LINK].	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	8-Apr	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.

Message	Message type	To whom	Date	Programming logic
Missing school makes it harder for students to get good grades.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	15-Apr	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Your child can still go to school even if they have a cold or allergies. Visit [LINK] for more info.*	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	15-Apr	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Children who miss 2 or more days a month, starting in elementary school, are less likely to graduate from high school.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	22-Apr	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
It's important to know the school calendar. Visit [LINK] before planning family events or travel.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	22-Apr	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Missing school makes it hard for children to learn good study habits.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	29-Apr	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Some students may get stomachaches because they are worried or nervous about school. For more information, go to [LINK].	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	29-Apr	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
[Attendance Slogan]. Students who miss 2 or more school days a month are less likely to read on or above grade level.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	6-May	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
For more information about the importance of attendance and district attendance policies, go to [LINK].	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	6-May	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.

Message	Message type	To whom	Date	Programming logic
Missing school makes it hard for children to learn how to finish the tasks they start.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	13-May	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Some children stay home because of minor illness when they should be in school. For more information about when to keep your child home, go to [LINK].*	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	13-May	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Children who miss school can't benefit from activities done in class.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	13-May	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Summer is almost here! Go to [LINK] for ways to help your child succeed at the end of the school year.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	13-May	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Missing school is one of the biggest factors that can harm your child's academic success.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	20-May	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Some children struggle with getting ready on time in the morning. For tips on how to help your child get ready, go to [LINK].	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	20-May	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Missed school days are one of the biggest factors that can harm your child's success in life.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	20-May	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.

Message	Message type	To whom	Date	Programming logic
Many local libraries have fun summer reading programs for kids. Visit [LINK] for information about local libraries.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	20-May	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Children who miss school can't benefit from activities done in class.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	27-May	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Summer is almost here! Go to [LINK] for ways to help your child succeed at the end of the school year.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	27-May	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Missing school makes it harder for students to get good grades.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	27-May	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Your child can still go to school even if they have a cold or allergies. Visit [LINK] for more info.*	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	27-May	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
[Attendance Slogan]. Children who miss 2 or more school days a month are less likely to be ready for the next grade.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	3-Jun	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Summer is almost here! Visit [LINK] for information about fun summer activities.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	3-Jun	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Children who miss school can't benefit from activities done in class.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	3-Jun	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.

Message	Message type	To whom	Date	Programming logic
Summer is almost here! Go to [LINK] for ways to help your child succeed at the end of the school year.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	3-Jun	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Missed school days are one of the biggest factors that can harm your child's success in life.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	10-Jun	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Many local libraries have fun summer reading programs for kids. Visit [LINK] for information about local libraries.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	10-Jun	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Children who miss school have a harder time learning important lifelong study skills.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	10-Jun	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Some children do not want to go to school because of bullying. For more information about bullying, go to [LINK]. For ways to help your child, contact [PERSON AT SCHOOL].	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	10-Jun	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Missed school days are one of the biggest factors that can harm your child's success in life.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	17-Jun	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.
Many local libraries have fun summer reading programs for kids. Visit [LINK] for information about local libraries.	Weekly prescheduled message	Parents of all elementary school students	17-Jun	On Sundays, to all parents, prescheduled to be sent out at 2 p.m.

## Benefits-framed same-day absence notifications (basic messaging)

Message	Message type	To whom	Date	Programming logic
We missed [CHILD] in school today. [CHILD] has missed a total of [X] days of school this year. Going to school every day will help [CHILD] learn important reading and math skills.	Same day absence notification	Parents whose child was marked absent	The day child is marked absent	Child was marked absent, embedded data fields for child's name and number of days absent, same-day notifications were sent as soon as attendance data were received by the text messaging platform but no later than 8 p.m.
We missed [CHILD] in school today. [CHILD] has missed a total of [X] days of school this year. Going to school every day will help [CHILD] feel like an important part of the school.	Same day absence notification	Parents whose child was marked absent	The day child is marked absent	Child was marked absent, embedded data fields for child's name and number of days absent, same-day notifications were sent as soon as attendance data were received by the text messaging platform but no later than 8 p.m.
We missed [CHILD] in school today. [CHILD] has missed a total of [X] days of school this year. Going to school every day will help [CHILD] learn and succeed.	Same day absence notification	Parents whose child was marked absent	The day child is marked absent	Child was marked absent, embedded data fields for child's name and number of days absent, same-day notifications were sent as soon as attendance data were received by the text messaging platform but no later than 8 p.m.

Message	Message type	To whom	Date	Programming logic
We missed [CHILD] in school today. [CHILD] has missed a total of [X] days of school this year. Going to school every day will help [CHILD] get good grades	Same day absence notification	Parents whose child was marked absent	The day child is marked absent	Child was marked absent, embedded data fields for child's name and number of days absent, same-day notifications were sent as soon as attendance data were received by the text messaging platform but no later than 8 p.m.
We missed [CHILD] in school today. [CHILD] has missed a total of [X] days of school this year. Going to school every day will help [CHILD] learn how to work well with peers.	Same day absence notification	Parents whose child was marked absent	The day child is marked absent	Child was marked absent, embedded data fields for child's name and number of days absent, same-day notifications were sent as soon as attendance data were received by the text messaging platform but no later than 8 p.m.
Some children stay home because of minor illness when they should be in school. For more information about when to keep your child home, go to [LINK].*	Same day absence notification	Parents whose child was marked absent	The day child is marked absent	Child was marked absent, embedded data fields for child's name and number of days absent, same-day notifications were sent as soon as attendance data were received by the text messaging platform but no later than 8 p.m.

Message	Message type	To whom	Date	Programming logic
We missed [CHILD] in school today. [CHILD] has missed a total of [X] days of school this year. Going to school every day will help [CHILD] participate in class activities.	Same day absence notification	Parents whose child was marked absent	The day child is marked absent	Child was marked absent, embedded data fields for child's name and number of days absent, same-day notifications were sent as soon as attendance data were received by the text messaging platform but no later than 8 p.m.
We missed [CHILD] in school today. [CHILD] has missed a total of [X] days of school this year. Going to school every day will help [CHILD] learn the skills needed to move to the next grade level.	Same day absence notification	Parents whose child was marked absent	The day child is marked absent	Child was marked absent, embedded data fields for child's name and number of days absent, same-day notifications were sent as soon as attendance data were received by the text messaging platform but no later than 8 p.m.
We missed [CHILD] in school today. [CHILD] has missed a total of [X] days of school this year. Going to school every day will help [CHILD] learn important study skills.	Same day absence notification	Parents whose child was marked absent	The day child is marked absent	Child was marked absent, embedded data fields for child's name and number of days absent, same-day notifications were sent as soon as attendance data were received by the text messaging platform but no later than 8 p.m.

Message	Message type	To whom	Date	Programming logic
[CHILD] has missed 4 days of school in a row. If you have not contacted the school about the absences, please call [NAME] at [NUMBER].	Same day absence notification, 4 <sup>th</sup> consecutive days absent message.	Parents whose child has been absent prior three school days	The day child is marked absent the 4 <sup>th</sup> time in row	Child was marked absent 4t time in row, embedded data fields for child's name and number of days absent, same-day notifications were sent as soon as attendance data were received by the text messaging platform but no later than 8 p.m.

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## Consequences-framed same day absence notifications (basic messaging)

Message	Message type	To whom	Date	Programming logic
We missed [CHILD] in school today. [CHILD] has missed a total of [X] days of school this year. Missing school makes it harder for [CHILD] to learn important reading and math skills.	Same day absence notification	Parents whose child was marked absent	The day child is marked absent	Child was marked absent, embedded data fields for child's name and number of days absent, same-day notifications were sent as soon as attendance data were received by the text messaging platform but no later than 8 p.m.
We missed [CHILD] in school today. [CHILD] has missed a total of [X] days of school this year. Missing school makes it harder for [CHILD] to feel like an important part of the school.	Same day absence notification	Parents whose child was marked absent	The day child is marked absent	Child was marked absent, embedded data fields for child's name and number of days absent, same-day notifications were sent as soon as attendance data were received by the text messaging platform but no later than 8 p.m.
We missed [CHILD] in school today. [CHILD] has missed a total of [X] days of school this year. Missing school makes it harder for [CHILD] to learn and succeed.	Same day absence notification	Parents whose child was marked absent	The day child is marked absent	Child was marked absent, embedded data fields for child's name and number of days absent, same-day notifications were sent as soon as attendance data were received by the text messaging platform but no later than 8 p.m.

Message	Message type	To whom	Date	Programming logic
We missed [CHILD] in school today. [CHILD] has missed a total of [X] days of school this year. Missing school makes it harder for [CHILD] to get good grades.	Same day absence notification	Parents whose child was marked absent	The day child is marked absent	Child was marked absent, embedded data fields for child's name and number of days absent, same-day notifications were sent as soon as attendance data were received by the text messaging platform but no later than 8 p.m.
We missed [CHILD] in school today. [CHILD] has missed a total of [X] days of school this year. Missing school makes it harder for [CHILD] to learn how to work well with peers.	Same day absence notification	Parents whose child was marked absent	The day child is marked absent	Child was marked absent, embedded data fields for child's name and number of days absent, same-day notifications were sent as soon as attendance data were received by the text messaging platform but no later than 8 p.m.
Some children stay home because of minor illness when they should be in school. For more information about when to keep your child home, go to [LINK].*	Same day absence notification	Parents whose child was marked absent	The day child is marked absent	Child was marked absent, embedded data fields for child's name and number of days absent, same-day notifications were sent as soon as attendance data were received by the text messaging platform but no later than 8 p.m.

Message	Message type	To whom	Date	Programming logic
We missed [CHILD] in school today. [CHILD] has missed a total of [X] days of school this year. Missing school means [CHILD] cannot participate in class activities.	Same day absence notification	Parents whose child was marked absent	The day child is marked absent	Child was marked absent, embedded data fields for child's name and number of days absent, same-day notifications were sent as soon as attendance data were received by the text messaging platform but no later than 8 p.m.
We missed [CHILD] in school today. [CHILD] has missed a total of [X] days of school this year. Missing school makes it harder for [CHILD] to learn the skills needed to move on to the next grade.	Same day absence notification	Parents whose child was marked absent	The day child is marked absent	Child was marked absent, embedded data fields for child's name and number of days absent, same-day notifications were sent as soon as attendance data were received by the text messaging platform but no later than 8 p.m.
We missed [CHILD] in school today. [CHILD] has missed a total of [X] days of school this year. Missing school makes it harder for [CHILD] to learn important study skills.	Same day absence notification	Parents whose child was marked absent	The day child is marked absent	Child was marked absent, embedded data fields for child's name and number of days absent, same-day notifications were sent as soon as attendance data were received by the text messaging platform but no later than 8 p.m.

Message	Message type	To whom	Date	Programming logic
[CHILD] has missed 4 days of school in a row. If you have not contacted the school about the absences, please call [NAME] at [NUMBER].	Same day absence notification, 4th consecutive days absent message.	Parents whose child has been absent prior three school days	The day child is marked absent the 4th time in row	Child was marked absent 4th time in row, embedded data fields for child's name and number of days absent, same-day notifications were sent as soon as attendance data were received by the text messaging platform but no later than 8 p.m.

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## School staff outreach messages (intensified messaging)

Message	Message type	To whom	Date	Programming logic
Dear [PARENT NAME], This is [name and position]. [CHILD] has missed [X] days of school so far this year.	School Staff Outreach	Parents whose child missed more than 8 percent of school days in fall	8-Jan	Messages are sent by school-based attendance staff to parents whose child missed more than 8 percent of school days during fall.
Please text me at [NUMBER] or call me at [NUMBER] so we can set up a time to talk. I am here to help. Thank you.	School Staff Outreach	Parents whose child missed more than 8 percent of school days in fall	8-Jan	Messages are sent by school-based attendance staff to parents whose child missed more than 8 percent of school days during fall.
Dear [PARENT NAME], This is [name and position], trying again to reach you. [CHILD] has missed [X] days of school so far this year.	School Staff Outreach	Parents whose child missed more than 8 percent of school days in fall	15-Jan	Messages are sent by school-based attendance staff to parents whose child missed more than 8 percent of school days during fall.
Please text me at [NUMBER] or call me at [NUMBER] so we can set up a time to talk. I am here to help!	School Staff Outreach	Parents whose child missed more than 8 percent of school days in fall	15-Jan	Messages are sent by school-based attendance staff to parents whose child missed more than 8 percent of school days during fall.
Dear [PARENT NAME], This is [name and position], trying again to reach you. [CHILD] has now missed [X] days of school so far this year.	School Staff Outreach	Parents whose child missed more than 8 percent of school days in fall	22-Jan	Messages are sent by school-based attendance staff to parents whose child missed more than 8 percent of school days during fall.

Message	Message type	To whom	Date	Programming logic
Please text me at [NUMBER] or call me at [NUMBER] so we can set up a time to talk - I would really like to help.	School Staff Outreach	Parents whose child missed more than 8 percent of school days in fall	22-Jan	Messages are sent by school-based attendance staff to parents whose child missed more than 8 percent of school days during fall.
Dear [PARENT NAME], This is [name and position], trying again to reach you. [CHILD] has now missed [X] days of school so far this year.	School Staff Outreach	Parents whose child missed more than 8 percent of school days in fall	29-Jan	Messages are sent by school-based attendance staff to parents whose child missed more than 8 percent of school days during fall.
Please text me at [NUMBER] or call me at [NUMBER] so we can set up a time to talk.	School Staff Outreach	Parents whose child missed more than 8 percent of school days in fall	29-Jan	Messages are sent by school-based attendance staff to parents whose child missed more than 8 percent of school days during fall.



## Sample Letter to Parents

Dear Parent/Guardian:

Your school district and school wishes to send you information regarding attendance, school or district events, updates, or initiatives. We will utilize a bulk text messaging system to inform you about your child’s attendance, send reminders, and notify you about emergencies. All district and school messaging communications are subject to district’s policy of [add relevant policy].

By signing this form, you are authorizing [district name] to deliver automated text messages to the phone numbers provided below. By signing below, you agree that this consent will remain valid and you will continue to receive text messages for the remainder of the school year, unless or until you revoke your consent. Please return this completed form to your school no later than [add date]. *Standard messaging rates and data charges may apply.*

Instructions:

- Check Box for Consent or Do Not Consent for each type of text messaging.
- Please note that the district and school can send emergency notifications without consent.

Type of Messages	Consent	Do Not Consent
Attendance notifications (e.g., general information related to attendance, information related to excused and unexcused absences)		
Reminders (e.g., parent-teacher conferences, back to school nights)		
Emergency notifications (e.g., weather, threats, etc.)	NA	NA

If you wish to receive any type of text messages, please provide us your phone number:

Parent/Guardian Cell phone number 1 for messages: (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_

Parent/Guardian Cell phone number 2 for messages: (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_

Parent/Guardian Cell phone number 3 for messages: (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of the Parent/Guardian

Print Name of Parent/Guardian

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Student Name

Student ID #

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## Privacy and Security Considerations Checklist

It is important that the attendance texting follows applicable regulations and confirms to industry standards.

Steps	Activities	Notes
Determine need for parent permission	Review current parent permission policies.  If current policies do not cover text messaging, discuss with district attorney.  Create system for gathering expressed parent consent as needed.	
Work with vendor to ensure all relevant regulations are followed	Discuss with vendor the Telephone Consumer Protection Act of 1991 (TCPA) and industry recommendations for texting. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Request parent consent as needed.</li> <li>• Identify district as the sender.</li> <li>• Do not send text to parents between 9 p.m. and 8 a.m.</li> <li>• Provide parents opportunity to unsubscribe from future messaging.</li> <li>• Inform about potential costs related to texts and data.</li> <li>• Provide automated unsubscribe through key word.</li> </ul>	
Request vendors privacy and security policies	Work with the vendor to receive and review their privacy and security policies and whether they are adequate for your district needs.	