

Problem-Solving Blueprint for Chronic Absenteeism

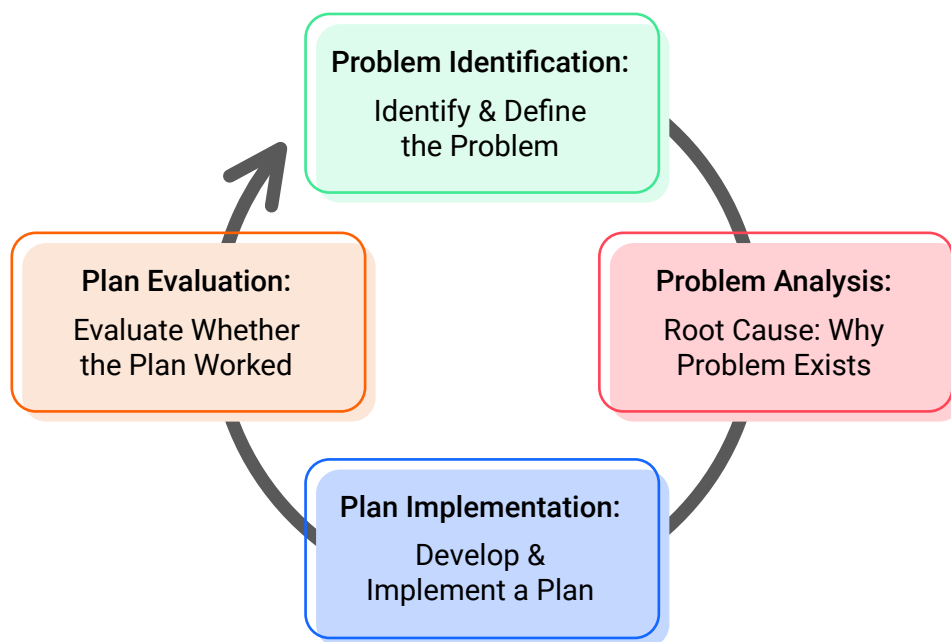
Chronic absenteeism is a problem that warrants intentional problem-solving. Problem-solving is an evidence-based process that facilitates a solution-oriented approach rather than getting stuck admiring the problem by focusing on factors that go beyond educators' control. When done right, problem-solving focuses on getting at the root cause that explains why the problem exists, which leads to more precise and likely effective solutions. Problem-solving typically has 4-steps that guide educators through a coordinated, cycle process to address an identified problem like chronic absenteeism.

Problem Identification: Problem identification to identify and clearly define the problem. A problem is the discrepancy between what we expect and what is actually happening. The larger the discrepancy, the larger the problem. Solutions aim to reduce the discrepancy that exists.

Problem Analysis: This is where educators seek to identify the root causes that explain why the problem exists. This is important to identify precise supports and interventions that target the root cause instead of the symptoms. Chronic absenteeism, in this case, is the observable symptom, while the root causes are what explains why we are observing chronic absenteeism for some students.

Plan Development: This is the step where educators generate solutions to address the hypothesized root cause that explain why the problem exists. The plan outlines who will be involved, when the solutions will be implemented, and how the solutions will be implemented.

Plan Evaluation: The last step involves gathering data to determine whether the plan was implemented as intended and whether improvement in the outcome of interest occurred as a result of the plan. For example, did the number of students with chronic absenteeism decrease over time or were improvements in weekly student attendance at school observed?



Problem-Solving Blueprint

Below is a blueprint that outlines each step of the problem-solving process to demonstrate how a school can systematically work through each of the steps to develop and evaluate a plan that aims to address chronic absenteeism and promote greater school attendance.

Problem Identification:

Chronic Absenteeism and Lack of Access to Educational Experiences

School-Wide Baseline Data (local data specific to your school system):

- Number/percentage of chronically absent students (chronic absenteeism = missing 15+ days a year): _____
- Average Weekly Student Attendance: _____

Magnitude of the Problem (i.e., discrepancy between what is expected and what is happening)?

- What we expect is (e.g., fewer than 5 students who are chronically absent or average weekly student attendance is 95%+ student attend school each day of the week)? _____
- What is happening is: _____

Problem Analysis:

Root Causes that Explain Why Chronic Absenteeism is Happening

Sense of Safety

School is a place where some students do not feel emotionally and physically safe.

Belonging

School is a place where some students do not feel a sense of belonging as a valued, respected, and wanted member.

Purpose / Motivation

Students who do not see the value and relevance of school to their lives now and in the future.

Mental Health

Students who struggle with mental health difficulties such as anxiety and depression that lead to avoidance of school.

Peer Influence

Students who affiliate with and experience pressure from peers to skip school.

Family

Family dynamics that prevent getting the student to school on certain days (transportation difficulties, family does not feel welcomed and included as a member of the school, low parental monitoring of student)

Health/Medical

Students who have health and medical conditions that interfere with regular school attendance.

Plan Development:

Generate Solutions that Target Root Causes and Develop a Plan for Implementation

Sense of Safety

Solution:

- ☐ Establish, teach, model, and reinforce behavioral expectations and routines that focus on promoting safe, respectful, and inclusive behaviors (Tier 1 PBIS practices).
- ☐ Respond with high support and high accountability to instances of behaviors that are unsafe and harm relationships (restorative practices)

Plan (who, when, how):

Belonging / Connection

Solution:

- ☐ Promote positive educator-student relationships through intentional practices to establish (e.g., banking time, positive greetings), maintain (e.g., 5 to 1 ratio of positive to negative interactions), and restore (e.g., connect with the student to repair relationship through skilful communication) relationships with students.
- ☐ Community-building relational activities to promote positive peer relationships that cultivate a sense of belonging and classrooms where students feel valued, respected, and accepted.
- ☐ School-wide opportunities to feel connected to school through school events, groups, and extracurricular activities.

Plan (who, when, how):

Purpose / Motivation

Solution:

- ☐ Motivational practices that support students to develop a sense of purpose for their future, including exploring desired future identity/self about who the student wants to become in the future and how school supports them being on a pathway to get there.
- ☐ Ensure learning content and activities in class are relevant to students' lived experiences and connected to students' interest to increase the value in learning.
- ☐ Reinforce and recognize students for school attendance in ways that enable students to access preferred experiences, social experiences, and privileges that

Plan (who, when, how):

Mental Health

Solution:

- ☐ Increase student access to school-based mental health services to address underlying struggles (anxiety, depression) that lead to school avoidance.
- ☐ Connect families to needed mental health services to promote caregiver mental health and wellbeing.

Plan (who, when, how):

Peer Influence

Solution:

- ☐ Connect the student with a mentor who makes positive connections and creates opportunities for the student to connect with prosocial peers in school.
- ☐ Connect the student with extracurricular activities that promote participation in school and prosocial connections with others.

Plan (who, when, how):

Family

Solution:

- ☐ Transportation difficulties - connect family to transportation supports, such as public transportation vouchers, private cars, ride shares or consistent bus routes.
- ☐ Lack of engagement & connection to school - Family liaison who connects with families to establish a trusting relationship. School culture and climate where families can see their cultural backgrounds represented and included, and a place where families feel welcome and accepted.
- ☐ Low parental monitoring - two-way communication with families to ensure they are aware of their student's absences and how best to monitor and support school attendance.
- ☐ Family knowledge - Family education initiatives that help families understand the negative impacts of chronic absenteeism and positive impacts of school attendance.

Plan (who, when, how):

Medical / Health

Solution:

- ☐ Identify hybrid learning opportunities that enable students with medical / health conditions to attend school virtually and in-person.
- ☐ Connect family to needed health services in the community to ensure caregivers and the student have access to needed medical services.

Plan (who, when, how):

Plan Evaluation:

Gather Data to Determine Whether the Plan Worked

Did we implement the plan with fidelity (i.e., as intended)?

- Data Tool/Method:
- Summary of Data:
- Data-Based Decision:

Did the plan result in desired *improvements in the outcomes* of interest?

- Increase in average weekly student attendance
 - Data Tool/Method:
 - Summary of Data:
 - Data-Based Decision:
- Decrease in the number and percentage of students with chronic absenteeism
 - Data Tool:
 - Summary of Data:
 - Data-Based Decision: