Facilitator Guide

The Power of Invisibility: Factors that Influence Attendance

Although irregular attendance is often treated as a matter of compliance, complex factors impact whether or not a student chooses to come to school. These factors can range from sensing a lack of belonging at school, believing that classes have no value or purpose, or feeling compelled to address issues outside school. However, when teachers and counselors use practices that help students feel visible in their school communities, attendance and engagement improve. This session provides an overview of factors that influence student attendance and research-based practices that motivate students to improve attendance.

Session Overview

TIME: 60 MIN

Reflection and Connection: 10 MIN
Discuss the relationship between feelings of invisibility and student attendance

Research and Inspiration: 25 MIN
Develop an understanding of what helps students feel visible at school

Application: 20 MIN
Explore ways to implement practices to improve attendance

Next Steps: 5 MIN
Decide on path forward

Learning Objectives:

> Understand how students' relationships, beliefs about themselves as learners, and recognition of future prospects contribute to their attendance

> Explore practices that help students feel connected, engaged, and optimistic in order to improve attendance

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		Steps	Materials
Prep		› Review the **What Makes Students Feel Visible** handout in preparation for the discussion and planning activities in Steps 3–6. Anticipate participant responses about which factors are already in place at their school and which might be opportunities for growth.	⤓ What Makes Students Feel Visible
		› Review the three **Research Briefs** and the **4A's Questions** on the **Participant Note Catcher** for the activity in Step 4. Decide how you will form three groups that will each look at one brief (by grade-level teams, department teams, or self-selection by topic).	⤓ What Motivates Students to Turn around Attendance ⤓ NQCHS - What Makes a Difference in Attendance ⤓ WBCHS Attendance Outreach Excerpt
Full Session 60 MIN			⤓ Slides ⤓ Participant Note Catcher
10 MIN	1	Reflect on how irregular student attendance might signal a sense of invisibility	⤓ Profiles in Invisibility
	2	Discuss the feelings, experiences, and beliefs that might be true for students who feel visible and invisible	
25 MIN	3	Learn about the factors that help students feel visible at school	⤓ What Helps Students Feel Visible ⤓ Facilitator Cheat Sheet: Attendance Practices
	4	Explore research behind strategies that help students improve attendance	Research Briefs: ⤓ What Motivates Students to Turn around Attendance ⤓ NQCHS - What Makes a Difference in Attendance ⤓ WBCHS Attendance Outreach Excerpt
20 MIN	5	Identify small and large steps to take to begin implementing attendance strategies	
	6	Find areas to focus attendance efforts as a school	
5 MIN	7	Complete exit ticket	⤓ Exit Ticket
	8	Decide on a path forward	
Follow-Up		› Review participants' exit tickets › Provide additional resources and support as needed › Determine next steps for professional learning	↖ If appropriate: Attendance Session 2: Data-Driven Practices to Build Positive Attendance

⤓ Download materials for this session at https://eskolta.org/learningcenter/sessions/the-power-of-invisibility/
↖ For **general facilitation preparation and tips**, review School Improvement Methods modules at https://eskolta.org/learningcenter/

Reflection and Connection | 10 MIN

The opening activity invites participants to consider why students might feel visible or invisible at school and how those feelings might influence their actions. Participants draw on previous experiences to establish a foundation for new learning about student attendance.

1. Review Absenteeism Scenarios | 3 MIN

MATERIALS:
Distribute *Participant Note Catcher*

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Review: What makes a student feel invisible?

I'm behind in work and I'm not sure if I can catch up.

I have a late-night job and sometimes oversleep.

It seems like teachers only notice me when I'm doing something wrong.

Even though I don't cause trouble, I get all of the blame when things go wrong.

Turn invisible and no one will care

People seem to think my issues are invisible

Why would I show up just to be reprimanded?

No one—not even the teachers—seems to really see me

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FACILITATOR MATERIALS
Review *the Profiles in Invisibility* handout

Presenting scenarios on the reasons why a student may not come to school allows participants to develop empathy and understanding of the complex reasons behind chronic absenteeism.

FACILITATOR: Use the *Profiles in Invisibility* handout to describe the three examples of students who become "invisible." Then ask participants to share any initial reactions upon seeing these profiles.

PARTICIPANTS: Do any of these profiles look familiar to you?

When discussing student behavior, encourage participants to share their own observations of their students. Encourage them to focus on what they have seen and heard in their classes to explain assumptions about reasons for their students' behavior, which may be affected by a variety of factors related to poverty, racism, social oppression, and other issues.

2. Reflect on Experiences | 7 min

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Reflect on Experiences:

Think of a student who appears to have the *power of invisibility*.

▪ What does that look and feel like?

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Providing an opportunity for discussion allows participants to process their reflections, unearth connections to their own learning experiences, and engage in collaborative inquiry with colleagues.

FACILITATOR: Ask participants to briefly reflect in writing about a student in their class who has been more absent than present. Then facilitate a discussion to share reflections.

PARTICIPANTS: Think of a student in your class who appears to have the power of invisibility. What does that look and feel like?

These discussions may touch on delicate issues. If you haven't already, establish community agreements around confidentiality to help ensure that student privacy is honored throughout the session.

Research and Inspiration | 25 MIN

This activity allows participants to consider student attendance at their school through the lens of research-based practices that increase a sense of belonging and visibility among students.

3. Explore Attendance Practices | 7 min

MATERIALS:
Distribute *What Helps Students Feel Visible* handout

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Nine Practices that Help Students Feel Visible

Greeting at the door every day	Morning check-in call or conversation	Daily personal connection
Home outreach (with positive parent-student relationship)	Conversation about effects on graduation	Meaningful feedback
Future-oriented discussions	Peer or extracurricular connections outside of class	Noticing patterns together

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FACILITATOR MATERIALS:
Keep *Facilitator Cheat Sheet: Attendance Practices* on hand

Participants will explore research on practices that connect to student attendance.

FACILITATOR: Direct participants to look at the nine practices listed on the *What Helps Students Feel Visible* handout. Use the *Facilitator Cheat Sheet: Attendance Practices* and corresponding slides to introduce these practices. Explain that these were identified through research with transfer school students and have been shown to improve attendance.

PARTICIPANTS: While you look these over, make note of any elements that connect to what students at your school might experience.

Anticipate the practices that teachers and counselors at your school already use and which ones may not be present or widespread.

4. Connect to Your School | 18 min

MATERIALS:
Distribute copies of the 3 research briefs

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Deepen Understanding:

Select one piece of research to explore further in a small group.

Use the 4A's Questions on your Note Catcher to reflect and discuss:

- What is one takeaway you **agree** with?
- What is one **assumption** the author makes?
- What is one strategy you would **argue** with?
- What is one thing from the research you **aspire** to do?

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Self-reflection empowers learners to derive their own meaning from research.

FACILITATOR: Invite participants to form three groups based on what you decided before the session and prompt each group to use the 4A's Questions in the *Participant Note Catcher* to explore one research brief on motivating interventions and student experiences

PARTICIPANTS: Select one piece of research to explore further in a small group. Use the 4A's Questions in the *Participant Note Catcher* to reflect and then discuss within groups: What is one takeaway you agree with? What is one assumption the author makes? What is one strategy you would argue with? What is one thing from the research you aspire to do?

Encourage participants to take visible notes as they share their insights and questions from exploring the research briefs.

Extension | 15 MIN

After the small-group discussion, invite all participants to return to the larger group and share one insight from each category. List these on chart paper or a whiteboard. Ask the group to share any patterns they notice. Then ask, "What are the implications for our work with students?"
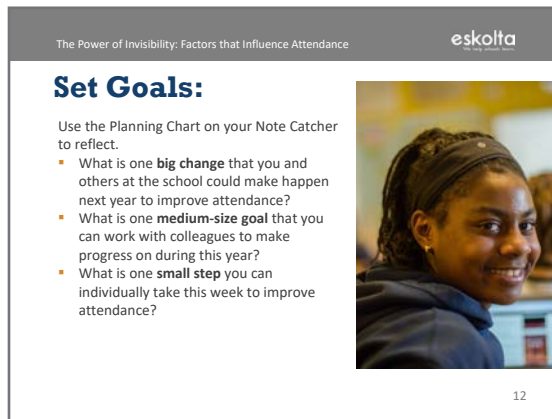
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Interactive Application | 15 MIN

Participants apply their research-based understanding of factors that build student visibility by analyzing practices to boost attendance and identifying action steps they can take.

MATERIALS:
Distribute
*Participant
Note Catcher*

5. Set Goals | 8 min

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Set Goals:

Use the Planning Chart on your Note Catcher to reflect.
- What is one **big change** that you and others at the school could make happen next year to improve attendance?
- What is one **medium-size goal** that you can work with colleagues to make progress on during this year?
- What is one **small step** you can individually take this week to improve attendance?
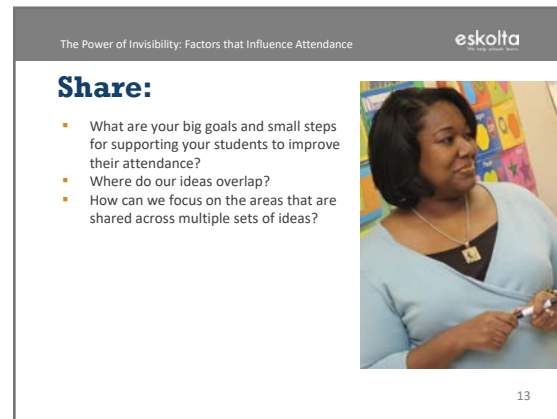
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This activity allows participants to consider practices that could be implemented with different levels of difficulty and ambition.

FACILITATOR: Direct participants to the planning section of their *Participant Note Catcher*.

PARTICIPANTS: What is one big change that you and others at the school could make happen next year to improve attendance? What is one medium-size goal that you can work with colleagues to make progress on during this year? What is one small step you can individually take this week to improve attendance?

Invite participants to think about the particular locations and structures within their school—as well as the roles that they play—when considering which strategies are feasible and meaningful to implement.

6.   Share and Identify Overlaps | 7 min

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Share:

- What are your big goals and small steps for supporting your students to improve their attendance?
- Where do our ideas overlap?
- How can we focus on the areas that are shared across multiple sets of ideas?

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This activity provides participants with an opportunity to hear from colleagues and use this to find shared thinking and shared priorities.

FACILITATOR: Facilitate a brief discussion to allow participants to share their ideas and get feedback from colleagues. Emphasize that focus helps: if there are areas of overlap within the same school, it may be worth picking these more popular areas to start rather than committing to every idea.

PARTICIPANTS: Where do our ideas overlap? How can we focus on the areas that are shared across multiple sets of ideas?

You might consider having participants document their plans in a shared file to facilitate tracking and follow-up, especially if they intend to use the same strategies and/or focus on the same students.

Next Steps | 5 MIN

Based on where the group lands, invite participants to commit to completing follow-up steps before the next meeting.

MATERIALS:
Distribute
Exit Ticket

7. Wrap-Up | 3 min

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Learning Wrap-Up

- Reflect on what you learned today.
- How do your takeaways compare to the session's Learning Objectives? How were these objectives addressed today?

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

- Understand how students' **relationships, beliefs about themselves as learners, and recognition of future prospects** contribute to their attendance.
- Explore **practices** that help students feel connected, engaged, and optimistic in order to improve attendance.

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Reflecting on learning promotes closure and consolidation of new knowledge and skills.

FACILITATOR: Distribute the *Exit Ticket*. Invite participants to share how their thinking has shifted.

PARTICIPANTS: How do your takeaways compare to the session's Learning Objectives? How were these objectives addressed?

Consider highlighting specific insights or questions that emerged during the session and how they connect to the Learning Objectives.

8. Next Steps | 2 min

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What's next?

- Learn more about the factors that contribute to irregular student attendance
- Use current attendance data to identify students with irregular attendance and explore the root causes of their disengagement
- Plan individual contributions to a school-wide system for promoting student attendance
- Develop a resource to support attendance outreach to individual students as a counselor or teacher

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Establishing next steps ensures that today's work is carried forward.

FACILITATOR: Offer next steps or follow up with participants based on their *Exit Ticket* responses.

PARTICIPANTS: What's next for your professional growth? What will you take back to your classroom? What resources will you need? How will you impact student learning? What evidence would determine that impact?

Participants may be at different places at this point. Provide specific recommendations based on readiness, such as in the chart on the following page.

Next Steps | *CONTINUED*

Based on where the group lands, invite participants to commit to completing follow-up steps before the next meeting.

If participants need to…	Support them in…
Learn more about the factors that contribute to irregular student attendance	‣ Exploring Strength-Based Culture Foundational Sessions ‣ Exploring Learning Mindsets Foundational Sessions
Use current attendance data to identify students with irregular attendance and explore the root causes of their disengagement	‣ Explore Attendance Support Session 2: Data-Driven Practices that Improve Attendance
Plan individual contributions to a school-wide system for promoting student attendance	‣ Exploring Attendance Support Session 3: Developing School-wide Systems that Boost Attendance
Develop a resource to support attendance outreach to individual students as a counselor or teache	‣ Exploring Attendance Support Session 4: Designing Practices that Strengthen Attendance