

## Professional Development: A Deeper Dive—Leveraging Firm and Fair Discipline

**Instructions:** In this professional development activity, you'll develop a strategy to address students who struggle with attendance. These students may be elementary students who have truancy, or they could be middle school or high school students who are either truant or skipping school. The activity provides three options as prompts and then a short story in order to get you thinking. After this, you are encouraged to design a plan for your particular school context, and know that you only need to select one context of the three if that is all that applies.

### ELEMENTARY SCENARIO

You have five families with high rates of truancy. Each family has between two and four children, and when one is absent, the siblings typically are as well. Even on days when they are in school, they arrive late and are often ill kempt and unfed. The parents have a history of moving from school to school once the local family courts become involved.

### MIDDLE SCHOOL SCENARIO

Your school typically has around 85 to 90 percent attendance of the student body on any given day. A number of your students come from migrant families, and during certain times of the year, you find that these students are helping with family work and have attendance patterns that interfere with passing grades. Local courts have taken notice yet are not proactive in taking action, unless the students are causing mischief. You have about twenty students who skip school often and are seen around town. Some are involved with the law, but not all.

### HIGH SCHOOL SCENARIO

Your school has 95 to 98 percent attendance rates, and a small number of students who skip frequently. They profess that they do not care about their grades. The model in place has been a choice–consequence model with progressive consequences for each subsequent offense: from after-school detention to Saturday school, moving to one-day, three-day, five-day, and ten-day suspensions thereafter. Often, students are being suspended for skipping, a system you inherited and one that finds favor with staff. They say with *those students* not around, they can concentrate on those who wish to learn.

### STORY ACTIVITY

Now please read the following story to see if you can find any parallels between the potential lesson embedded in the story and how you might approach your selected scenario when addressing your issue of school attendance.

Three friends were walking along a river one day when they spotted some turbulence in the water. Two people waded in and, alarmed, discovered a drowning child. They pulled the little boy up on the bank but then saw more turbulence. This time it was a little girl flailing and fighting for her life. They pulled her out too—then realized their buddy was missing. They called out and eventually he walked back.

"Where were you?" one man said, exasperated. "We needed your help and you wandered away!"

"I know," the friend responded, "but somebody needed to find out who was throwing the children in the river to start with." (Books, 2011, p. 47)

## Design a Plan

Again, using the information from one or more of the scenarios—elementary, middle school, and high school—as well as the story’s theme to guide your thinking, use the following template to design a plan of action for how you will address the attendance challenges thrust on your desk as an assistant principal. Be sure to detail what you will do, whom you will involve, what resources you will apply, over what time you expect results, and why you believe it will work. Be sure to incorporate a way to assess how your plan is working.

Scenario (elementary, middle school, or high school)	What will you do?	Whom will you involve?	What resources will you apply?	Over what time do you expect results?	Why will your approach work?	How will you assess your plan?

REPRODUCIBLE

## Reference

Books, S. (2011). *What we don't talk about when we talk about "the achievement gap."* In R. Ahlquist, P. Gorski, & T. Montano (Eds.), *Assault on kids: How hyper-accountability, corporatization, deficit ideologies, and Ruby Payne are destroying our schools* (pp. 35–50). New York: Peter Lang.