

School Spotlight: New Brighton Elementary Cuts Absenteeism with Community Engagement

An in depth look at how family-focused engagement helped New Brighton improve students' attendance and educational outcomes.

Spotlight Snapshot:

A two-part approach to student and family engagement:

1. Regular **attendance awards** and parties for students
2. A unified, schoolwide platform for **communication** and **student behavior**

approx.

40%
reduction in
chronic
absenteeism

THE CHALLENGE

Making the connection between engagement and attendance

Since the pandemic, chronic absenteeism has more than doubled in schools across the U.S¹. New Brighton Elementary School is no exception. "Attendance is the number one focus for me, you can't learn if you're not here," says Principal Jason Hall, EdD.

With over 20 students chronically absent, Dr. Hall and the school Social Worker, Mrs. Tracey Mannarino, quickly recognized that family engagement was key to driving attendance and academic success. However, Dr. Hall was skeptical that one solution could work for all of New Brighton's teachers, spanning grades K through 5.

New Brighton Elementary School



Grades K-5



600
students



New
Brighton, PA

THE CHANGE

Rewarding students for good attendance and simplifying school to family engagement

Dr. Hall had already built a strong foundation for engagement and attendance that started with the students. “I believe in connecting with the kids first at school,” he says, “by creating a relationship with them, being around in the cafeteria, and greeting them as they come in the building. Then, when you go out in the community and a child identifies you, their parents are already won over.”

Beyond that, Mrs. Mannarino came up with a plan to boost attendance and make kids feel like VIPs.

She introduced regular in-person celebrations and rewards for students with good attendance, including:

- **Monthly donuts with Dr. Hall** for one student from each grade
- **Monthly pizza delivery by Dr. Hall** to the family of one student from each building
- An **annual ice cream party** for all students with less than five absences

She also introduced classwide incentives, like extra recess for the classroom with the best overall attendance.

Next, Dr. Hall and the team knew they needed a unified way to promote these events and opportunities. During the search for that solution, Dr. Hall heard about ClassDojo from both teachers and parents.

New Brighton teachers Lisa Patterson and Holly Ziegler had both been using ClassDojo with their second grade classroom communities, and told him how it had been a gamechanger for engaging parents and reinforcing positive student behavior. So, Dr. Hall and his staff embraced [ClassDojo schoolwide](#). Today, while teachers use class Stories to engage families, Dr. Hall also uses school Stories to provide whole community updates and attendance incentives. They have also introduced Points to reinforce shared values, Signups to better manage events, and automatic reminders to keep families in the loop and engaged.



“We needed something to pull everybody together for positive behavior, attendance, and more. Dojo did that.”

– Jason Hall, EdD
Principal

THE IMPACT

Deeper connections and more time in class

Reaching 90% of families

After adopting ClassDojo as their consistent mode of communication, Dr. Hall says he can send announcements and messages out with “confidence that 90% of my families are going to see it.”

~40% drop in chronic absenteeism

Dr. Hall and his team credit the inspirational boost in attendance to the combination of in-person rewards and using ClassDojo to promote them. “We have one kid,” he says, “who would miss the bus sometimes. Today, he will call our school and ask for a ride.”

Fewer court cases

Tracey Mannarino, New Brighton’s Social Worker, has reported a significant drop in referrals of parents/guardians to the magistrate court for failure to comply with attendance laws.

ClassDojo is now for your whole school. And it’s 100% free, forever.

Schools like New Brighton use ClassDojo to:

- Better engage families with school **Stories** and **auto-translation into 130+ languages**
- Energize students and build a positive school culture and with **PBIS-aligned Schoolwide Points**
- Turn families into teammates through with **Signups** for events and automatic reminders



See what else is new at classdojo.com/sayhello

TAKEAWAY

Host Your Own Attendance Awards

Adapted from the program Ms. Mannarino developed, here's a **guide to recognizing attendance the New Brighton way.**

Once a month...

Donuts with [SCHOOL LEADER]

for one student per grade

Pizza delivered by [SCHOOL LEADER]

for one student per building

At the end of the school year...

Ice Cream Party

for all students with less than 5 absences

Attendance Incentives don't need to bust your budget! Consider swapping in extra recess or a certificate as needed.



Guidelines for Developing Incentives

Here are some further guidelines from Attendance Works, a non-profit that partners with schools, districts, and states to reduce chronic absences:

- Consider awards for shorter periods of time so that children and families can feel successful sooner
- Reward “behavior,” not people
- Include students or families when choosing possible recognition so they feel it is meaningful and positive
- Recognize families, not just students, especially in elementary school and preschool
- Offer incentives (e.g., gas cards, grocery cards, food baskets) that help to address common barriers to getting to school
- Build in recognition for teachers and staff who successfully motivate students to show up and engage families

Learn more at attendanceworks.org