

The Pandemic's Threat to Attendance

Understanding and Reducing Absenteeism

Problem

In 2017 the U.S. Department of Education declared “chronic absenteeism” as a hidden educational crisis.¹ The problem has always existed, but is intensifying. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, approximately one in six students were chronically absent. Now, it is closer to one in three.²

Illness is a key contributing factor to not attending class regularly.³ One NIH study found 47% of school days missed were due to yearly influenza (the flu).⁴ Absenteeism isn't a new concern, yet it still has not been resolved. Schools need to focus on student health and take notice of warning signs of truancy.

Challenges

Students need to be in class to learn, yet there remain barriers to achieve this simple feat.

First, absenteeism has a compounding effect wherein the more frequent students are absent, the more likely they are to miss again.² Thus, attendance is likely to decline further through a student's educational career if left unabated.

Second, grades, test scores, and likelihood of graduation are all impacted by attendance. Absenteeism in elementary and middle school can be a predictor of dropping out of high school, especially if it worsens over time.¹

Third, schools have been known to use nightly disinfection as a measure to combat the spread of disease, but routine disinfection can be expensive and laborious.



Solution

While some nightly disinfection methods can be costly and strenuous, it has been shown to decrease absenteeism by 46%.⁵ Therefore, the question for schools is *how to find a cost-effective disinfection solution*. Solutions like the Breezy One autonomous robot can disinfect classrooms in 30 seconds and have 99.9999% efficacy. Adding a disinfecting robot into a school eases the minds of parents and staff while also piquing the interest of students, especially those intrigued by STEM concepts.

Conclusion

Understanding the reasons for absenteeism and tools available to combat it will help improve attendance. Disinfecting a school should be a regular procedure, and it can be cost-effective and optimized without losing efficacy. Schools that choose to invest in disinfection will generate higher attendance rates which leads to better test scores, increased academic performance, and improved graduation rates.

A focus on attendance means prioritizing learning and student success.

¹ US Dept. of Education. (2016, June 7). “Chronic Absenteeism in the Nation’s Schools.”

² Everyday Labs. (2021, September). “The Power of a Student Being Present.”

³ Attendance Works. (2015, June). “Why are So Many Students Missing So Much School?”

⁴ Influenza and other respiratory viruses (2017, February). “School absenteeism among school-aged children with medically attended acute viral respiratory illness during three influenza seasons, 2012-2013 through 2014-2015.”

⁵ Journal of School Nursing. (2009, November 10). “Occurrence of Bacteria and Viruses on Elementary Classroom Surfaces and the Potential Role of Classroom Hygiene in the Spread of Infectious Diseases.”