

Spring 4-30-2021

## Strategies for Increasing Attendance for Identified Student Populations via Online Engagement Methods During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Catherine Douglas  
cmdouglas15@winona.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://openriver.winona.edu/counseloreducationcapstones>



Part of the [Counselor Education Commons](#), [Educational Leadership Commons](#), [Educational Methods Commons](#), and the [Online and Distance Education Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Douglas, Catherine, "Strategies for Increasing Attendance for Identified Student Populations via Online Engagement Methods During the COVID-19 Pandemic" (2021). *Counselor Education Capstones*. 146. <https://openriver.winona.edu/counseloreducationcapstones/146>

This Capstone Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the Counselor Education - Graduate Studies at OpenRiver. It has been accepted for inclusion in Counselor Education Capstones by an authorized administrator of OpenRiver. For more information, please contact [klarson@winona.edu](mailto:klarson@winona.edu).

Strategies for Increasing Attendance for Identified Student Populations via Online Engagement

Methods During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Catherine Douglas

A Capstone Project submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the Master of Science Degree in

Counselor Education at

Winona State University

Spring 2021

Winona State University

College of Education

Counselor Education Department

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

---

CAPSTONE PROJECT

---

Strategies for Increasing Attendance for Identified Student Populations via Online Engagement

Methods During the COVID-19 Pandemic

This is to certify that the Capstone Project of

Catherine Douglas

Has been approved by the faculty advisor and the CE 695 – Capstone Project

Course Instructor in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Master of Science Degree in

Counselor Education

Capstone Project Supervisor: Anquetta V. Calhoun, Ph.D.

*Anquetta V. Calhoun*

---

Signature

Approval Date: 30 April 2021

### Abstract

This Capstone literature review discusses a school counselor's role in increasing attendance in schools. The review discusses the common risk factors of absenteeism and the new risk factors that arose after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic changed the strategies that school professionals should use to increase engagement in learning, increase school attendance, and check on the well-being of identified student populations. The review brings light to several strategies that may help counselors increase school attendance with online education during the COVID-19 pandemic. Strategies include: incorporation of gameplay into lessons, keeping consistency with the lesson formats when possible, encouraging autonomy, and incorporating hands-on lessons into homework.

*Keywords:* COVID-19, Students, Attendance, Engagement

Table of Contents

Introduction .....5

Review of Literature .....7

    Research on Risk Factors of Absenteeism.....7

    Research on Strategies for Increasing Attendance.....8

    Research on Online Classroom Engagement Strategies.....10

    Application to the COVID-19 Pandemic.....11

Discussion.....12

    Limitations.....12

    Application to the Field of School Counseling .....13

    Future Research.....14

References .....15

## **Strategies for Increasing Attendance for Identified Student Populations via Online Engagement Methods During the COVID-19 Pandemic**

School absenteeism has been a chronic problem for schools, which has often required action from school policy makers at the local, federal, and state levels (Gottfried & Kirksey, 2018). There is a large array of risk factors that are associated with school absenteeism for school-age students in grades K-12. Some of the common risk factors include: risky sexual behavior, pregnancy, mental illness, physical illness, bullying, and substance abuse (Assink et al., 2019). The rise of COVID-19 in 2020 created new risk factors for school absenteeism (Besser et al., 2020). Some of these risk factors include: increased isolation of students from their classmates and teachers, increased feelings of loneliness when students are away from their schoolmates, increased anxiety related to frequent disruptions from students' routines, and increased safety concerns with the threat of contracting the virus (Besser et al., 2020).

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, many schools incorporated online education into their curriculums (Besser et al., 2020). With the development of innovative online technologies in the 2000s, schools became attracted to the numerous benefits of online education, including wide varieties of communication systems and convenient learning management systems (Dumford & Miller, 2018). After the initial spike in COVID-19 for the United States in March of 2020, many schools shut down and switched to total distance learning, with little notice (Besser et al., 2020). Due to the increase in online education after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important for teachers and school staff to be knowledgeable in effective online education methods (Besser et al., 2020). Due to the popularity of online education before the pandemic, the spike in creation of online education methods during the pandemic, and the numerous

benefits of online education to student learning, knowledge of online education methods will likely be important after the pandemic as well (Besser et al., 2020).

Students have varying levels of knowledge and adaptability for online education (Dumford & Miller, 2018). Despite its benefits, there are challenges to online education. Some of these challenges include: difficulties in incorporating traditional classroom techniques, difficulties with establishing personal connections within the classroom, and increased opportunities for students to cheat (Dumford & Miller, 2018). When teachers develop online lessons, it is important that they are user-friendly, include adequate technological support, are engaging, adapt well to the online format, and enhance learning (Dumford & Miller, 2018). An increased knowledge in online education techniques can help education professionals enhance growth-oriented learning in their students, despite its challenges (Dumford & Miller, 2018).

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, there was an array of educational strategies that professionals used to increase classroom attendance (Azad et al., 2019). Some of these strategies include: incorporating class attendance into one's final grade, using engaging in-class participation strategies, providing coping strategies for academic success, using assessments that are created by individuals other than the teacher, and incorporating hands-on lessons outside of the classroom setting (Azad et al., 2019). With the rise of online education during the COVID-19 pandemic, education professionals must find strategies for increasing attendance that work well with the virtual learning format (Besser et al., 2020). Some online strategies for keeping students engaged and more willing to attend class include: keeping consistency in the delivery of the lessons, encouraging autonomy, and combining online lessons with other forms of learning (such as at-home exercises) (Besser et al., 2020).

## **Review of Literature**

### **Research on Risk Factors of Absenteeism**

There are many risk factors for absenteeism in education, and many of them are related to physical and mental health conditions (Deighton et al., 2019). Some health conditions that have evidence of increasing absenteeism include: asthma (Dahl et al., 2018), diagnosed mental health disorders (Deighton et al., 2019), and most recently, COVID-19 (Besser et al., 2020). Dahl et al. (2018) conducted a study that measures factors of attendance for caregivers and students who have severe asthma symptoms. They found that students are more likely to be absent from school if they are experiencing severe symptoms of asthma (Dahl et al., 2018). The results of the study showed that students are even more likely to be absent from school, if their caregivers are experiencing severe asthma symptoms (Dahl et al., 2018).

Deighton et al. (2019) conducted a study that measures the correlation between mental health issues and school attendance. The study also indicated socioeconomic status and special education needs as significant risk factors for absenteeism from school (Deighton et al., 2019). They found strong, positive correlations between persistent absenteeism in schools and struggles with mental health concerns related to emotional difficulty (ex. anxiety, depression) and hyperactivity/attention (ex. ADHD, ADD) (Deighton et al., 2019). This article highlighted the importance of strong mental health support in schools, and strong mental health policy creation, in preventing student absenteeism (Deighton et al., 2019). This includes factors such as having enough school counselors, having more school-wide mental health policies, having easily accessible support resources, and having the availability of school-based mental health counselors (Deighton et al., 2019).

Due to the recent rise of COVID-19, limited research is currently available about the specific effects that COVID-19 has on one's school attendance. The most prominent study is one conducted by Besser et al. (2020) on students' adaptability to online learning during the pandemic. In this study, the researchers surveyed the reactions, opinions, and successes for students in the transition between in-person learning and online learning, during the COVID-19 pandemic (Besser et al., 2020). The researchers found that one's success, motivation, positive attitudes, and positive attendance for distance learning depend on one's adaptability skills and one's general qualities of resilience (Besser et al., 2020). Therefore, in a future experimental study on this topic, it may be helpful to use a personality assessment, to further investigate the correlation between one's educational adaptability with one's personal traits and natural abilities (Besser et al., 2020).

### **Research on Strategies for Increasing Attendance**

There is a large gap in the research about increasing attendance in K-12 schools. However, some relevant research studies on school attendance are: Gottfried and Kirksey's (2018) study about the benefits of maintaining classroom consistency, Lin's (2018) study on the effect of engagement on class lecture attendance, and Boulton et al.'s (2019) study on strategies for increasing students' wellbeing overtime. According to Gottfried and Kirksey's (2018) study, students are more likely to come to school if their classrooms are consistent. This means that a kid will feel more comfortable to come to school if they have the same classmates long-term and are comfortable with those classmates (Gottfried & Kirksey, 2018). Therefore, in times of COVID-19, the continual inconsistencies in the classes could be a contributing factor to the rise of school absenteeism (Gottfried & Kirksey, 2018).

In Lin's (2018) study, the author designed three games, in order to increase positive engagement in lectures and to increase attendance in class. The results of the study showed positive evidence that gameplay increases class attendance (Lin, 2018). The results of the study also presented evidence that gameplay increases students' comprehension of class lecture materials and boosts students' scores on exams (Lin, 2018). This study was primarily geared towards college students, in classes where lecture attendance is more optional than it is in K-12 schools. If game play increases attendance in a setting where class attendance is optional, such as in Lin's (2018) study, then game play may be an increased motivation for attendance in K-12 education.

Boulton et al.'s (2019) study showed evidence that students are happier when they are more engaged with the material in their classes. There are several engagement strategies from this study that can be easily applied to current online and hybrid educational models, including: independent studies, online systems, digital systems, and fun study activities (Boulton et al., 2019). However, contrary to other studies, such as Lin's (2018) study about increasing engagement with gameplay, this study did not show a positive correlation between student engagement and student performance in classes. It found that while strategies that are designed to increase engagement might increase student attention, it can also pull away from a student's focus (Boulton et al., 2019). Boulton et al.'s (2019) study is designed for University students, where an individual's focus in one's field of study may be a more important factor than student engagement. If the student engagement strategies from their study were applied to younger students, in a K-12 school setting, the results may be different (Boulton et al., 2019).

### **Research on Online Classroom Engagement Strategies**

There is a large array of research for engaging strategies in online learning. Online education was a hot topic before the COVID-19 pandemic, and the need for engaging online strategies skyrocketed as the schools across the globe switched to online and hybrid delivery methods (Besser et al., 2020). There are various research studies that provide strategies for student engagement in online education (Boulton et al., 2019). Some of these studies include: Lin et al.'s (2020) study on the use of engaging electronic materials, Dumford and Miller's (2018) study on the advantages and disadvantages for online student engagement, Bolliger and Martin's (2018) study on instructor and student perceptions of classroom engagement, and Bolliger and Halupa's (2018) study on students' perceptions of online engagement. There are also studies that provide strategies for increasing interest in online learning without direct engagement (Choi, 2018). The most relevant of the research to this topic includes Choi's (2018) study about entertainment techniques for lecture videos.

In Lin et al.'s (2020) study, online students were given an activity with either an interactive graphic organizer, a fill-in organizer activity, or a text only reading activity. Student participants of this study performed better and were more satisfied with the interactive graphic organizer activity than with the other two activities. Dumford and Miller's (2018) study also demonstrated that interactive activities can be very useful and beneficial for online learning. This study shows that quantitative reasoning activities work especially well for increasing engagement in online coursework (Dumford and Miller, 2018). Bolliger and Martin's (2018) study indicated that both instructors and professors find that strategies for interactive engagement are important for online courses. Therefore, instructors would likely benefit from learning about more interactive engagement strategies that are successful for online coursework (Bolliger &

Martin, 2018). Finally, Bolliger and Halupa's (2018) study presents evidence that students are likely able to engage with their professors in an online course, but the online format makes it harder for a student to engage with fellow students.

### **Application to the COVID-19 Pandemic**

Recent research studies have brought light to the following risk factors for school absenteeism: physical illnesses of caregivers, physical illnesses of students, mental health concerns of students, low socio-economic status, unfulfilled special education needs, and unpredictable changes from the COVID-19 pandemic (Deighton et al., 2019; Dahl et al., 2018; Besser et al., 2020). Other recent research studies have brought light to the following strategies that have shown success for increasing school attendance: keeping the classes as consistent as possible, introducing new interactive lessons, and incorporating gameplay into the lectures (Gottfried & Kirksey, 2018; Lin, 2018; Dumford & Miller, 2018). Finally, recent research studies have brought light to a variety of strategies for keeping students engaged in their classes when they have to switch to online or hybrid education. These strategies include: using interactive graphic organizers, using quantitative reasoning activities, creating entertaining lecture videos, initiating frequent instructor-student communication, and initiating frequent student-student communication (Bolliger & Martin, 2018; Choi, 2018). The current literature review takes strategies for increasing attendance, which takes the current state of the pandemic, risk factors for absenteeism and successful strategies for keeping kids on the right track, into account (Deighton et al., 2019). The following strategies are likely useful in future experimental research on student engagement during COVID-19: needs-assessments, personality assessments, and interactive lecture activities that are versatile for online and in-person delivery.

## **Discussion**

The purpose of this Capstone literature review was to increase one's understanding for the risk factors of absenteeism and of strategies that a school professional should use to increase school attendance. This review takes COVID-19 into account, and it discusses how the progression of the pandemic can create new risk factors for absenteeism. The review uncovered a variety of risk factors that K-12 students have for school absenteeism, including: risky sexual behavior, pregnancy, mental illness, physical illness, bullying, and substance abuse (Assink et al., 2019). New risk factors that arose during the COVID-19 pandemic were also uncovered, including: increased isolation of students from their classmates and teachers, increased feelings of loneliness when students are away from their schoolmates, increased anxiety related to frequent disruptions from students' routines, and increased safety concerns with the threat of contracting the virus (Besser et al., 2020). Strategies were discussed for increasing school attendance, including: incorporating class attendance into one's final grade, using engaging in-class participation, providing coping strategies for academic success, using assessments that are created by individuals other than the teacher, and incorporating participation outside of the classroom setting (Choi, 2018; Azad et al., 2019). New strategies were discussed for increasing online education methods during the COVID-19 pandemic, including: keeping consistency in the delivery of the lessons, encouraging autonomy, and combining online lessons with other forms of learning (such as at-home exercises) (Besser et al., 2020).

## **Limitations**

There are two main limitations to this review. The first limitation is that this research is that the delivery method for education during the COVID-19 pandemic frequently changes. The progression of the COVID-19 pandemic itself also changes frequently. Some of the research

studies from the literature review were conducted after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, and many of the research studies from the review were conducted before the pandemic.

Therefore, it is unknown if the findings from this study will apply to the progression of the COVID-19 pandemic, after the conclusion of this study, or not. It is also unknown if the findings from this study will apply to post-pandemic environments, or not.

The second limitation is that there is not a lot of research available for increasing attendance for online education in K-12 schools. Much of the research that is available was conducted with the college-aged population instead of the K-12 population. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, in-person education was the most common method for K-12 education, and online education was more common in a university setting than in a K-12 setting. Online education requires independent study skills that a college student would be more likely to have than a younger student. Therefore, the studies about online education that were conducted in a college setting may or may not apply to a K-12 setting.

### **Application to the Field of School Counseling**

A school counselor's role is to assist K-12 students with their academic, socio-emotional, and career needs. A school counselor can use the findings from this study to have a better understanding of the mental health needs of students during the pandemic. According to Besser et al. (2020), students may be suffering from an array of mental health concerns, including isolation, loneliness, and anxiety. School counselors can use this information to stay up to date with interventions that help with these particular issues. A school counselor can also use online engagement strategies from this literature review to better connect with their students. A school counselor can encourage regular online communication with their students, in order to establish

consistency during the unpredictable conditions of the pandemic. This also helps decrease a student's feelings of isolation from the school.

Finally, a school counselor can use online engagement strategies from this study to aid a student in their academics, with the new online education formats. A school counselor can use some of these strategies to help encourage a student to invest in their education and to come to school. A school counselor can use tools such as graphic organizers, online games, quantitative reasoning activities, interventions that encourage autonomy, to assist their students in academic areas that they struggle with. A school counselor can also use these tools to connect with their students and keep them engaged during sessions.

### **Future Research**

In future studies, an experimenter could develop a wide variety of online tools to enforce academic and socio-emotional success for online education. One could develop a new graphic organizer to use with students in an online classroom setting. They could use the graphic organizer for all of the class periods for the same lesson in the same class for the same school. The school counselor could follow up with the students to discuss progress with the graphic organizers and to reinforce when needed. The school counselor could also follow up with the teachers and evaluate attendance records. In addition, the school counselor could follow up with the mental health for students during the pandemic and create school-wide interventions for feelings of loneliness, isolation, and anxiety. Finally, the school counselor could conduct the online education methods from the literature review after the pandemic, to see if the results would still be applicable in that environment.

### References

- Assink, M., Gubbels, J., & Put, C. E. (2019). Risk factors for school absenteeism and dropout: A meta-analytic review. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, *48*, 1637-1667. Doi: <http://dx.doi.org.wsuproxy.mnpals.net/10.1007/s10964-019-01072-5>
- Azad, A., Kim, A. S., Park, L., Popovic, C., & Shakory, S. (2019). Understanding the impact of attendance and participation on academic achievement. *Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Psychology* *1*, 1-13. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1037/stl0000151>
- Besser, A., Flett, G. L., & Zeigler-Hill, V. (2020). Adaptability to a sudden transition to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic: Understanding the challenges for students. *Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Psychology*, *1*, 1-21. Doi: <http://dx.doi.org.wsuproxy.mnpals.net/10.1037/stl0000198>
- Bolliger, D. U., & Halupa, C. (2018). Online student perceptions of engagement, transactional distance, and outcomes. *Distance Education*, *39*(3), 299-316. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01587919.2018.1476845>
- Bolliger, D. U., & Martin, F. (2018). Instructor and student perceptions of online student engagement strategies. *Distance Education*, *39*(4), 568-583. Doi: <http://dx.doi.org.wsuproxy.mnpals.net/10.1080/01587919.2018.1520041>
- Boulton, C. A., Hughes, E., Kent, C., Smith, J. R., & Williams, H. T. (2019). Student engagement and wellbeing over time at a higher education institution. Doi: <http://dx.doi.org.wsuproxy.mnpals.net/10.1371/journal.pone.0225770>

Choi, G. Y. (2018). Learning through digital storytelling: Exploring entertainment techniques in lecture video. *Educational Media International*, 55(1), 49-63. Doi:

<https://doi.org/10.1080/09523987.2018.1439710>

Dahl, A. L., Everhart, R. S., Koinis-Mitchell, D., Leibach, G. G., & Miller, S. (2018). Caregiver asthma in urban families: Implications for school absenteeism. *The Journal of School Nursing*, 34(2), 108-113. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1059840516689326>

Deighton, J., dos Santos, J. P. G. A., Lereya, S. T., & Patel, M. (2019). Mental health difficulties, attainment and attendance: A cross-sectional study. *European Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 28(8), 1147-1152. Doi:

<http://dx.doi.org.wsuproxy.mnpals.net/10.1007/s00787-018-01273-6>

Dumford, A. D., & Miller, A. L. (2018). Online learning in higher education: Exploring advantages and disadvantages for engagement. *Journal of Computing in Higher Education*, 30(3), 452-465. Doi: <http://dx.doi.org.wsuproxy.mnpals.net/10.1007/s12528-018-9179-z>

Gottfried, M. A., & Kirksey, J. J. (2018). Can having similar classmates from last year link to better school attendance this year? *The Elementary School Journal*, 119(2), 224-243. Doi:

<http://dx.doi.org.wsuproxy.mnpals.net/10.1086/700236>

Lin, T. (2018). Using classroom game play in introductory microeconomics to enhance business student learning and lecture attendance. *Journal of Education for Business*, 93(7), 295-303. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/08832323.2018.1493423>

Lin, L., Mayer, R. E., Wang, X., & Zhou, P. (2020). Benefits of interactive graphic organizers in online learning: Evidence for generative learning theory. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 1*, 1-14. Doi: <https://doi.apa.org/doi/10.1037/edu0000606>