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# LAUSD Tackles Chronic Absenteeism with InClassToday

## Leveraging Behavioral Science to Drive Results

*by Kathleen Choi*

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*Cost-effective, scalable, and easy to implement, InClassToday is a proven method to reduce absenteeism.*

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### The Challenge

Improving attendance is a top priority for Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). In SY2016-17, more than 80,000 students—14% of the district’s student population—were chronically absent, missing 15 school days or more; another 96,400 students missed between 8 and 14 days per year. High rates of chronic absenteeism jeopardize educational outcomes for these students. For the district, absenteeism creates a challenge to serving all students due to the significant financial cost of absenteeism, which last year amounted to over \$600 million in lost revenue.

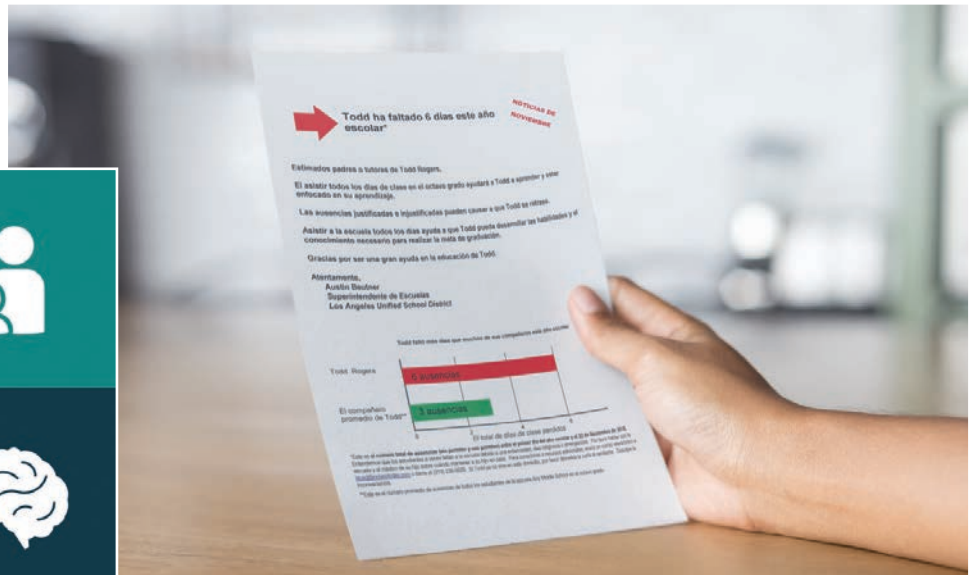
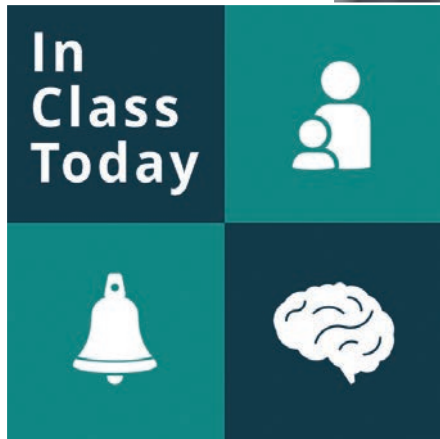
**Cost-effective, scalable, and easy to implement, InClassToday is a proven method to reduce absenteeism.**

### Piloting a Simple Solution

In SY2017-18, LAUSD engaged InClassToday to launch a pilot program to raise attendance among 24,000 students in grades K-12. Leveraging behavioral science research by the Student Social Support Research and Development Lab at Harvard University, InClassToday implements targeted programs that motivate families to reduce school absences.

LAUSD provided InClassToday with student attendance data and address information. InClassToday used this data to identify students at risk of becoming chronically absent and then created and mailed a series of individualized “Absence Reports” to these students’ households. These Absence Reports reinforced the importance of attendance, informed families how many days their children had been absent, and put the information into context by comparing the students’ absences to those of their classmates. Families received up to five rounds of Absence Reports, which were delivered in English or Spanish, as appropriate.

InClassToday’s approach is based on research by the Student Social Support R&D Lab, which shows that parents frequently have misconceptions about their child’s school attendance. For example, parents routinely underestimate how many days their children have missed and tend to believe that



An example of an individualized Absence Report delivered in Spanish

their children miss about as many days as other students, or even fewer days. Some parents also believe that missing a few days of school is not that important. InClassToday’s Absence Reports directly address these misconceptions in simple language and with frequency, keeping parents’ attention focused on attendance throughout the year.

**24,000** days of instruction recaptured, generating **\$1.5m** in ADA revenue.

## Getting Results

As a result of the pilot program, LAUSD successfully reduced chronic absenteeism in SY2017-18:

- For students who received a full course of five Absence Reports, chronic absenteeism went down from 29.5% to 26.2%, an 11% reduction.
- LAUSD recaptured 24,000 days of instruction the students otherwise were likely to have missed, generating an additional \$1.5 million in average daily attendance (ADA) revenue—more than nine times the cost of the program.

Given the success of the pilot program, LAUSD expanded the InClassToday program across the district in SY2018-19.

InClassToday is a strategic partner of the District Management Group.