

Idaho Prevention Conference Summary – April 16–18, 2025

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Pre-Conference Focus: Chronic Absenteeism (April 16)

This full-day session was one of the most valuable professional development opportunities I've experienced. It challenged our current thinking and highlighted the need for a more compassionate and proactive approach to attendance.

Key Shifts in Thinking:

- **Definition Matters:** Chronic absenteeism is defined as missing 10% or more of the school year for *any* reason.
- **Awareness is Critical:** We must know who is missing and why. Early identification is essential.
- **Punishment Doesn't Work:** Traditional reactionary or punitive responses don't address root causes. We cannot punish students or families into compliance.
- **Create a Culture of Attendance:** Shift the focus away from perfect attendance to consistent, supported effort.
- **Celebrate Progress:** Recognize and encourage attendance improvement with students and families.
- **Messaging Must Be Clear and Positive:** What we focus on grows. Attendance must be framed as a community value, not just a requirement.

Implementation at West Minico – 2025–2026:

1. **Early Identification:** In the first 20 days of school, we will flag students who miss 2 or more days and begin consistent check-ins and supports.
2. **Revise Communication:** Attendance letters will be rewritten to be less punitive and more supportive in tone and content.
3. **Build a Culture of Attendance:** Schoolwide messaging, celebrations, and student recognition will focus on growth and effort—not perfection.
4. **Be Curious, Not Critical:** Staff will be encouraged to ask *why* students are missing rather than assume disengagement. We will seek to understand and support, not judge. Show kids that we care – move away from “why are you late?” “Where have you been” “You need to be here” to “I am so happy to see you today, I noticed you were gone yesterday.”
5. **Magnets for each parent that has school calendar and messaging for**

This learning will directly inform our school and district attendance strategies moving forward. A positive, unified approach is essential to creating meaningful change.

Vaping & Alternatives to Suspension

Presented by Pocatello School District

This session focused on how the Pocatello School District is addressing vaping through a prevention and intervention lens rather than relying on exclusionary discipline. Their approach stood out for its clarity and focus on student well-being:

- **Safe Bathrooms Initiative:** The district intentionally worked to make school bathrooms feel safe and welcoming for *all* students—not just those engaging in risky behavior.
- **Clear Intervention Protocol:** Pocatello has established a well-defined response when a student is caught vaping on campus. The goal is *intervention*, not punishment.
- **Health Partnership:** In collaboration with their public health district, they provide students with access to vaping education and cessation classes as part of the intervention process.
- **Support Over Suspension:** Rather than suspend students, the emphasis is on helping them understand the risks of vaping and supporting behavior change before s

Phone-Free Learning Policies

This session explored how several districts across Idaho are implementing phone-free learning environments, each with their own unique approach. While the specific policies varied, a few common themes stood out:

- **Shared Influence – *The Anxious Generation*:** Many districts credited the book *The Anxious Generation* by Jonathan Haidt as a key influence in shifting mindsets among both staff and parents. It helped frame phone-free policies as a way to support student mental health and reduce distractions in the classroom.
- **Different Models, Same Goal:** Some schools collect phones at the start of the day, others use pouches, and some restrict use during instructional time only. While the methods differed, all emphasized the importance of reducing digital distractions to improve student focus and engagement.
- **Parent Communication is Key:** Presenters shared strategies for introducing families to phone-free expectations, including:
 - Framing it around student well-being and academic focus.
 - Sharing research and data (including takeaways from *The Anxious Generation*).
 - Setting clear, consistent expectations at the beginning of the school year.
 - Clear, simple consequences

This session affirmed that while implementation may look different from school to school, the priority is the same: creating distraction-free learning environments that support student success.