

LETTERS

# How one Mass. school bucked the rise in absenteeism

Updated November 22, 2023, 2:20 a.m.



A first-grade class at Pyne Arts Magnet School in Lowell in September 2021. JESSICA RINALDI/GLOBE STAFF

The Nov. 15 editorial, [“How to get absent students back in the classroom,”](#) rightly points out that “more fresh thinking” is needed to address chronic absenteeism. Beyond students’ losing the opportunity to learn, absenteeism decreases their confidence and

self-esteem and erodes the culture of learning. There are strategies schools can put in place to make students happier and more engaged in their learning.

At Pyne Arts Magnet School in the Lowell Public Schools system, we have decreased chronic absenteeism by 15 percent at a time when peer schools have seen absences increase by more than 20 percent. We did it by adopting strategies that increased student engagement, made students less anxious about being back in school, and brought more joy and creativity to the learning day. They include:

- Starting and ending every school day with electives that students choose.
- Redesigning early release days to focus on projects that kids do not want to miss.
- Initiating student-led parent-teacher conferences, which engage families more deeply in their children's learning.
- Designing high-quality cross-curricular learning experiences that incorporate the arts throughout the school day.

These results — replicable in all schools — were achieved by aligning around a vision for making school a place where kids feel curious about what they are learning, and where hands-on STEAM learning (science, technology, engineering, the arts, and math) is the norm.

ADVERTISING



Solutions for chronic absenteeism are within reach. We can make school a joyful and interesting place while supporting academic growth and students' sense of belonging.

Wendy Crocker-Roberge

Interim chief schools officer

Lowell Public Schools

Courtney Dickinson

Founder and head of school

Acera: The Massachusetts School of Science, Creativity, and Leadership

Winchester

*AceraEI, of which Dickinson is also a founder, is a nonprofit education organization collaborating with the Lowell Public Schools on curriculum development and teacher training.*

[Show comments](#)