

NEWS BREAK

Sunday's News Break selects an article from Sunday, March 5, 2017 of The Seattle Times print replica for an in-depth reading of the news. Read the selected article and answer the attached study questions.

***Please remember to always preview the content of the article before sharing with your students.**

Article: Parents get 'nudge' to make sure their kids attend school (NW SUNDAY, B1)

Vocabulary: Match the words to the numbered definitions in the chart below.

A. absent	1. the act or an instance of keeping from change, loss, injury, etc...
B. chronically	2. to give (someone) a gentle reminder or encouragement
C. conservation	3. <i>Statistics.</i> of or relating to observations that are unlikely to occur by chance and that therefore indicate a systematic cause.
D. decade	4. not in a certain place at a given time; away, missing
E. nudge	5. continuing a long time or recurring frequently:
F. significant	6. to make an estimate lower than that which would be correct.
G. underestimate	7. a period of ten years

Comprehension

1. For the past two decades, scientists have found a number of easy ways to make significant changes in people's behavior. To get voters to the polls, for example, what did researchers find increased turnout by 10 times?
2. Energy companies have increased conservation by sending out what?
3. In Tacoma and 16 other cities across the nation, school districts are boosting student attendance by sending home what?
4. What do these nudge letters include?
5. Who dreamed up this idea?

6. Studies done in Chicago, San Mateo, California, and Philadelphia have shown the letters can reduce chronic absenteeism rates by what percentages?
7. Across Washington, about _____ percent of public-school students were chronically absent during the 2014-15 school year, the latest data available.
8. Chronic Absenteeism equals how many missed schools days a year?
9. The state also has made attendance a priority. Why?
10. It's no surprise that missing a lot of school hurts achievement. But new research shows even just one or two absences a month make a big difference. What do studies show?

Discussion Questions or Extension Essay Questions

In Tacoma, the first district to use nudge letters in this state, Lister Elementary last year got similar results in a pilot program.

After just one round of letters at Lister, attendance improved for 62 percent of the students who received them. And the gains persisted after a second round, persuading district leaders to expand the effort to every campus this school year. A number of other area districts are considering using nudge letters, too, including Seattle Public Schools.

- Why are they seeing such great improvements when the letters are sent?

It's no surprise that missing a lot of school hurts achievement. But new research shows even just one or two absences a month make a big difference.

- Why is attendance at school so important to a student's success?
- Have you ever missed a few days of school? Do you feel that you're behind? Is it hard to catch up? Think about missing 18+ days.

Rogers, the pollster turned-education-researcher, emphasizes that nudge letters alone won't make absences disappear, but his research suggests they're a strong starting point.

"The idea is it's insanely cost-effective and easy to implement," he said. "It doesn't require any teachers or schools to change what they're doing, and that's the sweet spot."

In behavioral science, nudge theory describes the idea that indirect suggestions can influence individuals' decisions.

- What do you think about nudge letters?

Rogers left politics years ago but brought his enthusiasm for nudge theory into education.

“How do we mobilize and empower families to support student achievement ... with scalable interventions?” Rogers said. “That’s the big picture for us.”

In one experiment, Rogers worked with 203 schools in Philadelphia. After those schools sent nudge letters home, total absences declined by 6 percent, and chronic absenteeism went down, too.

The study randomly assigned students into four groups, two of which received one of two versions of the nudge letter, a third that got a general attendance reminder, and a fourth that didn’t receive anything. That kind of experimental design is considered the gold standard because it gives researchers confidence that the effects they are seeing stem from the change and not some other factor.

In the families in the experiment’s control group (who received no letter), 36 percent of the students were chronically absent at the end of the experiments. In the families that received nudge letters, only 32 percent were.

Rogers also found a spillover effect, with attendance improving for siblings of students targeted by the mailing.

The effort took more than one letter — the families received up to five throughout the experiment. And even with the multiple reminders, attendance dropped off again two to six weeks after each mailing. But then the next letter, Rogers said, would create a new “attendance shock.”

- Why is it considered the gold standard in research studies?
- Does *nudge theory* work? Why or why not?
- Why do you think there’s a spillover effect with families that receive a letter?
- Would it make a difference if you received a letter like this regarding your school attendance? Why or why not?

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