

Codes That Tell the Truth

How do we build the four reasons into our student information system?

10 slides • 2 handouts • evidence from Schools Spared, Children Punished and the Attendance Science™ research base



The registrar's summer spreadsheet

“

A registrar's system offered two non-medical codes: excused and unexcused. An eviction, a fear of a classmate and no call at all landed in one bucket. She re-coded three years by hand. Nearly 40% of what the data called truancy was withdrawal or avoidance.

Source: *Schools Spared*, Ch. 1, *Another Voice from the Field*



Every story in this series is a composite or a published case. Names are invented.



What data teams are asking

How do we build the four reasons into our student information system?

1

Software was procured
before classification existed.

2

Staff can only enter the
codes the menu offers.

3

New state laws require
category reporting.



Shared words before shared work



Attendance code

A data-entry outcome, never a diagnosis.



Category reporting

Recording absence reasons, as in Indiana's SEA 482 framework.



Re-classification

Updating a case's category as new information arrives.



The numbers behind the moment

~40%

of 'truancy' was withdrawal or avoidance after re-coding

Schools Spared, Ch. 1, Another Voice from the Field

2025

Warren Township among the first districts to apply the four classifications to its codes

Schools Spared, Children Punished, Ch. 3: MSD of Warren Township case study

SEA 482

Indiana statewide absence-category reporting, effective July 1, 2025

Attendance USA Attendance Intelligence Briefs, Aug to Oct 2026 (primary-source checked)



Classify before you consequence

Truancy

Code only after a documented conversation.

Withdrawal

Sub-codes: transport, caregiving, housing, economic.

Avoidance

Sub-codes: bullying, climate, specific class or time.

Refusal

Sub-codes: anxiety, health; protect privacy.



Three moves you can make this week

01

Cost: \$0

Audit the menu

List every code staff can choose today.

02

Low cost

Add a reason field

Add the four reasons as a required field after a conversation.

03

Cost: \$0

Train the front desk

Show staff entering data what each code means.



A PRESENCE™ prompt for your building



Problem definition



Research evidence



Environmental context



Statistical analysis



Equity assessment



Network and partnership



Compliance and legal



Evidence-based recommendations

YOUR PROMPT

Export one semester of codes. What share is 'unexcused' with no reason recorded? That is your misclassification risk.



Common missteps, and how you will know it works



Letting the default code decide the category



Adding codes without training staff



Recording sensitive health details in open fields

LEADING INDICATOR • Moves first

Absences with a recorded reason

LAGGING INDICATOR • Confirms it worked

Share coded unexcused with no reason



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