

School Innovations & Achievement We Were Disruptive Before Disruptive Was Cool



From the beginning, our entire approach to education software has been guided by the philosophy: If you want dramatic improvement, do something dramatic.

Early on, we suspected there was a connection between the achievement gap and attendance problems in our nation's schools. So we did our homework—and discovered that as early as kindergarten, a student's pattern for success or failure in school and in life is established.

It's no surprise that our research verified that if students didn't show up, learning couldn't take place. We also learned that the achievement gap had less to do with race, gender, economics or geography, and more to do with being present and accounted for.

In looking at innovations that redefined their industry—Uber, Fitbit, debit cards—all of these ideas were game changers. We applied this same disruptive thinking to education. Since we believe that attendance is inextricably linked to achievement, what if we simply focused on attendance? What if we could take the studies around attendance and turn them into action? What would happen to the achievement gap? At School Innovations & Achievement (SI&A), we shifted our focus away from student achievement and took a different approach: Attendance.

Under our company's achievement initiative we created Attention2Attendance (A2A), the multiple-award-winning software-and-services solution that happens to work 100 percent of the time.

Through A2A, we've reached more than 2 million students in school districts as varied and diverse as California, Illinois, New Mexico, Oregon and Texas.

Three years later, we actively tracked 170,000 of those students and were delighted (but not surprised) to discover

that their high school graduation rates profoundly exceeded national averages. Our core belief was realized, achievement is an outcome, not a plan. Increasing learning time was and is our strategy.

In so doing, A2A—and engaged parents, teachers and administrators—have significantly bridged the achievement gap.

How A2A Works

We challenge districts' thinking on a subject they know all too well: Attendance. A2A disrupts the normal approach and goes at what districts are doing in a completely different way.

By systematically notifying parents when their child misses school, A2A creates a bridge between parents and principals, getting absent students, from very early in their school careers, back into the classroom and into the mindset of wanting to achieve.

We are creating a culture of achievement starting with creating a culture of "showing up." School administrators marvel, "With A2A, we talk to families we've never been able to talk to before." On average, over a three year period, A2A reduces truancy by 27 percent, excused absences by 30 percent and chronic absenteeism by 50 percent.

The program is deceptively simple. It's practically a turn-key package designed to increase learning time, improve school and parent relationships and increase parental engagement and communication.

Throughout an entire district, A2A disrupts the status quo, and brings every school together in a consistent process, all while enhancing school culture and increasing learning time.

A Personal Mission

A2A has become not only a leader in our company's suite of products, but also a personal mission for many of our employees, who have young children. Chronic absenteeism in the early years of learning is associated with lower academic performance, especially in reading and math.

Across the country, one in every 10 kindergartners and 1st graders is chronically absent, which means they miss more than 10 percent of the school year. That's 18 days—but because that may comprise only a couple of days a month, it can go unnoticed.

At SI&A, we're proud of being on the frontlines of the battle to bridge the Achievement Gap.

We're believers of disruptive thinking, we'll admit. And we pledge to keep doing it. 