To: The Schools Division Superintendent
Through: The Chief, School Governance and Operations Division
From: The research team of [School Name], with the endorsement of the School Principal

Act on the First Absence, Not the Fifth: A Three-Step Follow-Up

Key Messages

- In one public junior high school, chronic absence fell from 14.5% to 11.7% of 640 learners after advisers began to call a parent on the day of every absence, hold a conference at the third absence in 20 class days, and visit the home at the fifth. In the same weeks of the previous school year, under the usual rule, it rose from 14.8% to 15.4%.
- The usual rule, a home visit after five consecutive absences, led to one home visit in eleven weeks. The three steps led to 95 conferences and 35 home visits in six weeks, for PhP 13,950 in prepaid load and fares.
- The evidence comes from one school, six weeks and a comparison with another school year. It is enough to test the follow-up in more schools, not yet to require it of every school.
- We recommend phasing the three steps in across the secondary schools that volunteer, half of them drawn by lot to start when School Year 2027–2028 opens, and deciding on division-wide adoption from the first year's results.

The Problem

A learner who misses 10% or more of the class days for any reason is chronically absent (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). In the first five weeks of School Year 2025–2026, 14.8% of our 628 learners had reached that line, and in the rainy weeks that followed, the school's attendance rate fell from 95.04% to 94.56%.

The rules every secondary school follows act late. School Form 2 asks the adviser to act on learners "who were absent for 5 consecutive days" (Department of Education [DepEd], 2014, School Form 2, Guidelines, item 5); the Child and Youth Welfare Code has the teacher report absences to the parents "the moment these exceed five schooldays" (Presidential Decree No. 603, 1974, Art. 59[7]); and the grading guidelines call for timely interventions "when a learner reaches approximately twelve (12) absences" (DepEd, 2026, para. 70). A learner absent every other day passes five absences in the third week, when the Code has the parents told, but never misses five days in a row, so School Form 2's home visit never comes. The grading guidelines' twelve absences arrive in under five weeks. In our school, the five-day rule led to one home visit in the first eleven weeks of School Year 2025–2026.

What Our Study Found

From July 20 to August 28, 2026, weeks 6 to 11 of Term 1, the school's 16 advisers followed up every absence in three steps: a call to a parent on the same day, a conference at the third absence within 20 class days, and a home visit at the fifth. We compared the school's attendance records with the same weeks of the previous school year, when the usual rule applied ([School Name] Research Team, 2026).

Measure	Usual rule, SY 2025–2026	Three steps, SY 2026–2027
Learners chronically absent, weeks 1 to 5	14.8%	14.5%
Learners chronically absent, weeks 7 to 11	15.4%	11.7%
Attendance rate, weeks 7 to 11	94.56%	96.20%
Home visits, weeks 6 to 11	1	35
Median change in the absence rate of the 93 learners chronically absent in weeks 1 to 5	2.6 points lower	7.7 points lower

Advisers reached a parent on the same day for 590 of the 712 absences (82.9%). The reasons parents gave most often were the learner's illness (33.6%), the weather or a flooded road (17.3%), household chores or caring for siblings (12.4%), and an illness or emergency in the family (8.3%); another 7.5% had no fare or ride.

The follow-up cost PhP 9,600 in prepaid load for 16 advisers over two months (PhP 300 an adviser a month), PhP 4,350 in fares for 35 home visits, and PhP 1,150 to copy the call logs and forms, paid from a research grant. Each adviser logged and called for about 45 absences in six weeks.

What the Evidence Cannot Show Yet

The study covered one school for six weeks and compared it with a different school year, whose rains and learners were not the same. The fall in chronic absence passed the usual test of statistical significance only

narrowly (p = .044). The advisers knew the study was running. A test in more schools, over a full school year, with schools that start later as the comparison, would answer what one school cannot.

Policy Options

We set five criteria before comparing the options: the evidence that an option reduces chronic absence, its cost to schools, the advisers' time it takes, the learners it reaches in the first year, and what the division would learn from it. We weighed the evidence and what the division would learn three times, cost and time twice, and reach once.

Option	For	Against	Score
A. Keep the present rules	No new cost or work	Acts after five consecutive absences; led to one home visit in eleven weeks	19 of 33
B. Require the three steps in every secondary school from School Year 2027–2028	Reaches every learner at once	Rests on one school's six weeks; about PhP 4,800 a month in load for a school of 16 advisers, and about PhP 124 a home visit in fares; leaves no comparison to show whether it works	16 of 33
C. Phase the three steps in by lot (recommended)	The schools that start first are compared with those that start a year later, so the division learns whether the follow-up works	Reaches fewer learners in the first year; the answer takes a school year	25 of 33
D. Same-day text messages to parents only, in every school	Reaches every learner for little cost; mailed messages to parents reduced chronic absence in a large trial in the United States (Rogers & Feller, 2018)	Drops the conferences and home visits, where the reasons for absence came out; untested in the division's schools	17 of 33

Note. Each option was scored from 1 to 3 on each criterion, and the score is the weighted sum. The scores are the research team's judgments.

Recommendations

1. **Phase the follow-up in by lot.** By March 2027, invite the division's secondary schools to volunteer. At an open meeting, draw half of the volunteers by lot to start the three steps when School Year 2027–2028 opens; the others keep their present practice for that year and start in School Year 2028–2029.
2. **Fund the calls before classes open.** Have the division's budget unit confirm, by May 2027, the fund for the advisers' prepaid load and fares: PhP 300 an adviser a month, about PhP 4,800 a month for a school of 16 advisers, and about PhP 124 a home visit. DepEd already counts prepaid load as a communication expense of research grants (DepEd, 2021).
3. **Protect the advisers' time.** In the memorandum that opens the pilot, by May 2027, authorize parent conferences and home visits held beyond regular work hours, so that they earn vacation service credits (DepEd, 2024).
4. **Measure both groups the same way, and decide from the results.** Have the SGOD's Planning and Research Section compare chronic absence in the two groups of schools at the end of each term, from School Form 2, and report to the Superintendent after Term 3. Extend the three steps to every secondary school if chronic absence falls more in the schools that started first; revise them if it does not.

Implementation and Safeguards

- **Privacy.** Advisers call or message the parent or guardian only, never a group chat: information about a learner's education is sensitive personal information (Republic Act No. 10173, 2012, Sec. 3[l][2]).
- **Child protection.** A home visit that raises a concern of abuse or neglect goes to the school's Child Protection Committee (DepEd, 2012).
- **Doing what was planned.** Each week, the guidance designate checks every adviser's call log against School Form 2. The target is same-day contact for at least 80% of absences, which our advisers reached.
- **The reasons behind absences.** Flooded roads and fares need the barangays and the local government. Pilot schools record the reasons parents give, so that the division can take them to the local school boards.

Decision Needed

A decision by March 2027 leaves time to draw the schools, confirm the fund and train the advisers before School Year 2027–2028 opens.

References

Balfanz, R., & Byrnes, V. (2012). *The importance of being in school: A report on absenteeism in the nation's public schools*. Johns Hopkins University Center for Social Organization of Schools. https://new.every1graduates.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/FINALChronicAbsenteeismReport_May16.pdf

Department of Education. (2012). *DepEd child protection policy* (DepEd Order No. 40, s. 2012). https://www.deped.gov.ph/2012/05/14/do-40-s-2012-deped-child-protection-policy/

Department of Education. (2014). *Adoption of the modified school forms (SFs) for public elementary and secondary schools effective end of school year 2013–2014* (DepEd Order No. 4, s. 2014). https://www.deped.gov.ph/2014/01/30/do-4-s-2014-adoption-of-the-modified-school-forms-sfs-for-public-elementary-and-secondary-schools-eeffective-end-of-school-year-2013-2014/

Department of Education. (2021). *Amendment to DepEd Order No. 016, s. 2017* (DepEd Order No. 026, s. 2021). https://www.deped.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/DO_s2021_026.pdf

Department of Education. (2024). *Revised guidelines on the grant of vacation service credits for teachers* (DepEd Order No. 013, s. 2024). https://www.deped.gov.ph/2024/09/18/september-18-2024-do-013-s-2024-revised-guidelines-on-the-grant-of-vacation-service-credits-for-teachers/

Department of Education. (2026). *Revised guidelines on classroom assessment, grading system, and awards and recognition for the K to 12 Basic Education Program* (DepEd Order No. 015, s. 2026). https://www.deped.gov.ph/2026/06/04/june-4-2026-do-015-s-2026-revised-guidelines-on-classroom-assessment-grading-system-and-awards-and-recognition-for-the-k-to-12-basic-education-program/

Presidential Decree No. 603. (1974). *The Child and Youth Welfare Code*. https://lawphil.net/statutes/presdecs/pd1974/pd_603_1974.html

Republic Act No. 10173. (2012). *Data Privacy Act of 2012*. https://lawphil.net/statutes/repacts/ra2012/ra_10173_2012.html

Rogers, T., & Feller, A. (2018). Reducing student absences at scale by targeting parents' misbeliefs. *Nature Human Behaviour, 2*(5), 335–342. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-018-0328-1

[School Name] Research Team. (2026). *Tiered attendance follow-up and chronic absenteeism in a junior high school* [Unpublished action research report].

A teaching sample: the study and the brief are invented. From the NASH Reviewer blog, nash.com.ph/blog/policy-brief-action-research.