



# Case Study Providence Public School District

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What started as a school pilot turned into a district-wide implementation with meaningful results.





## Introduction

Providence Public Schools, Rhode Island's largest school system, serves approximately twenty-four thousand students.

In Spring 2018, Providence Public Schools launched a seven-school pilot with Kinvolved, the social enterprise boosting student attendance and tackling chronic absenteeism through software and community engagement services.



*“Providence Public School District is committed to elevating family voice across our schools, because it’s important that every family feels engaged and empowered. We know that by strengthening family relationships, we can move the needle on student outcomes. KiNVO has changed the game with our family outreach efforts, and we have seen real growth in our student attendance”*

—Christopher Maher  
Former Superintendent  
Providence Public School District



## Providence teams up with Kinvoled to launch KiNVO software and professional services

### Photo top

Providence Public School District students at a Kinvoled Community Summit in Providence, RI.

Providence's pilot objectives were to train school leaders on KiNVO functionality, collaborate on the following school year's rollout plan, and measure the pilot term's impact.

KiNVO is a powerful, user-friendly attendance and communications app that gives school staff, students, and families real-time data that highlights attendance patterns, building bridges for parents who are hard to reach due to irregular schedules, work commitments, or language barriers.

External research, combined with our own work in the field, has shown that an investment in strategic family engagement yields significant attendance improvement. Through ongoing school-level coaching on KiNVO and its accompanying "Intention, Empathy, and Engagement" family partnership curriculum, the Kinvoled team ensured that the process was approachable and realistic for Providence schools.

Over the course of the semester-long pilot, Kinvoled's professional services team convened implementation and policy strategy sessions with key district and school leadership, developing critical relationships and ensuring that the partnership rollout accommodated the district's culture and community. The team also led sessions on building empathy with families, using KiNVO effectively during attendance team meetings, and initiating open-ended conversations with students to understand the "why" behind absenteeism and lateness.

KiNVO use across pilot schools was intentional, and school leaders followed tailored protocols every week. Kinvoled worked with district leadership to develop and provide school leaders with weekly messaging templates about attendance tips for parents. Further, leaders were guided through how to focus on a target group of students' families whose children were on the brink of being chronically absent.

## Impact

In May 2018, concluding a three-month, mid-year pilot:

- **School leaders and families exchanged more than fourteen thousand messages via KiNVO**
- **Four pilot schools reduced chronic absence rates**
- **All forty Providence schools opted to adopt KiNVO for the 2018–2019 school year**

Providence district leaders rightfully believe that school-level buy-in is critical to success. At the conclusion of the pilot, the district offered all forty schools the option to participate in the Kininvolved partnership and KiNVO rollout, and 100 percent opted in.

Ranging from kindergarten through twelfth grade, every school now uses KiNVO to enable real-time, two-way communication with families.

## Lessons Learned

To truly engage families, schools must meet students and parents where they are and show empathy toward their circumstances. Texting is a quick and easy way to share important information about attendance, school events, and behavior, and KiNVO is the best tool for the job.

- Parents show gratitude when they receive messages in their preferred language, so
- KiNVO enables two-way translation in more than 80 languages.
- Treating parents as partners by using KiNVO reinforces positivity and shared accountability, expressing this intention from the very first message.
- By removing barriers, KiNVO offers many families their first opportunity to be involved in their child’s education in real time.

Teachers, leaders, parents, and communities want to see their children succeed; in order for that to happen, children have to show up to school. That’s why the heart of every KiNVO interaction is a desire to get every student to every class, every day.



*“Providence is committed to an all-students agenda in which stakeholder voices matter, especially those of parents and families. We know that we must make an effort to ensure every family is engaged and empowered to act as change agents and advocates for their children and young people. By strengthening family relationships, we can move the needle on student outcomes—especially attendance and academic achievement.”*

—Nkolika Onye  
Executive Director of Student Supports  
Providence Public School District

# Spotlight: Del Sesto Middle School

Principal Arzinia Gill led Del Sesto's KiNVO pilot, and she focused on learning the mechanics of the software and integrating it with a comprehensive suite of diverse attendance interventions. She has served as Del Sesto's principal five years and has built a strong culture of positive family engagement.

4.2% ▼

Del Sesto Middle School's chronic absence rate decreased by 4.2 percent.

KiNVO enabled her team to download attendance reports and strategically build relationships with families, supporting her mission to ensure that all families are not just included but also engaged in her school community. "Parents are asking us questions now," says Gill. "They want to be more involved with our school. This is something they could not do in the past with other communication systems used."

Nicholas Bernardo, the school culture coordinator, adds that it is critical to ensure families who speak languages other than English are equally involved. "Allowing us to have conversations with every family is massive," he shares. "In the past, we have worked on getting information out, informing parents that an event would happen. We could not



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—Arzinia Gill  
Principal  
Del Sesto Middle School



***“In the past, we have worked on getting information out, informing parents that an event would happen. We could not have a two-way conversation with English learners. Now, with KiNVO we can talk about the event, answer questions, and build healthier relationships.”***

—Nicholas Bernardo  
School Culture Coordinator  
Del Sesto Middle School

have a two-way conversation with English learners. Now, with KiNVO, we can talk about the event, answer questions, and build healthier relationships.”

In particular, Del Sesto is now more thoughtful when engaging families that speak Creole and Arabic, and it has made a positive shift in how families interact with the school. “It might even be the first time these families have been able to have a conversation with their children’s school,” says Bernardo.

Principal Gill and Mr. Bernardo are actively involved with the school’s attendance team, which meets biweekly. The attendance team works together to analyze attendance records, match chronically absent students with mentors, and celebrate exemplary attendance and growth. One low-cost incentive that has proved successful is hosting get-

togethers with music and games. City Year manages this celebration, and Del Sesto students enjoy spending time together because it allows them to have fun in a stress-free way.

Del Sesto focuses on holistic support for their students, offering programs from City Year, Mentor RI, Beat the Streets, Squash Busters, the YWCA, and College Crusade. Mr. Bernardo shared that “students love meeting with their mentors. I think they come to school sometimes just for their one-on-one time with a caring adult.”

“We learned that one student always showed up to periods two and six, but not five, via their KiNVO student profile,” Mr. Bernardo continues. “I was able to proactively intervene and ask the student more open-ended questions. I learned so much that the conversation went from ‘Why weren’t you in class?’ to ‘Let me support you in making it to every class.’ It is really about detecting the root cause of absenteeism, and KiNVO helps us do that.”

In the coming years, Ms. Gill and Mr. Bernardo will support their teachers in learning these practices and asking more questions about attendance and engagement data.

# Spotlight:

## Alan Shawn Feinstein Elementary School

Alan Shawn Feinstein Elementary School is building a culture of authentic, two-way relationships between school and home.

*“The best thing about KiNVO for me as a school principal, aside from the manageability, is the commitment that both parties—school and home—can make to sustaining a productive relationship. When kids and families truly believe that we want them and that we need them as partners, that’s when we will see results.”*

—Michael Templeton  
Principal

Alan Shawn Feinstein Elementary School

School principal Michael Templeton champions the message of leveraging positive school-home relationships to drive student outcomes, and his methods are working.

Feinstein strategically implemented KiNVO during the 2017–2018 school year, and the software helped him foster an authentic, inclusive community between staff and families. Due to the overwhelmingly positive results, the school expanded its use this year to engage the community at large.

“No other technique or tool I’ve utilized has worked as well as KiNVO, especially with our families who speak and read languages other than English,” says Templeton. “Even if we have a parent who is working and cannot be reached by phone due to workplace constraints, they are still able to check text messages, allowing us to be in touch in real time. When you need to reach a parent immediately, as in the cases where a child severely misbehaves or has a health/safety issue, KiNVO is absolutely invaluable.”

Principal Templeton tested a few ways to use KiNVO.

- **“Principal Good News Message”:** Teachers email anecdotes about students who have improved in attendance, behavior, or classroom performance. Templeton sends that good news to parents via KiNVO. He says that “this simple practice builds a lot of goodwill. It has laid a foundation that ‘we’re in this together,’ and it’s especially helpful when I then have to make those calls about rough weeks. Parents understand that I’m coming from a supportive place, particularly because I’ve tried to front-load positivity.”
- **Incorporating KiNVO into weekly and monthly awards:** During Feinstein’s monthly grade-level assemblies—their “Buzz Awards”—Templeton recognizes the classrooms with the highest rates of attendance. To do this, he filters through his KiNVO app dashboard to identify top classrooms, which then receive a variety of recognition

*“The KiNVO platform connects us with parents whose jobs don’t allow them to talk on their phone but do enable them to receive and send text messages.”*

—Michael Templeton



Templeton is now focused on utilizing KiNVO with fidelity and staff buy-in. “A tool is only as powerful as the intention and strategy behind it,” he explained.

Commitment to routine is key. Templeton continues to work on integrating KiNVO into his daily communications, having his KiNVO dashboard side by side with his email. As a result, KiNVO no longer feels like another thing added on to his very full plate, but rather an integral and helpful part of his day, and he works to share that message with his staff.

In addition, because of the intentional care he takes in writing clear, concise, and thoughtful messages, parents are learning how to reply in kind.

opportunities. This practice has boosted morale among not only of students, but staff members, too.

- **Weekly shout-outs:**

It is also important to recognize student-level attendance progress, so on a weekly basis Templeton praises the students with the best improvement by hosting one-one-one conversations in the main office, cafeteria, or even in the hallway. Templeton shared that, “though initially surprised, students love feeling that they are important enough for their principal to track their individual attendance.”

# Spotlight: 360 High School

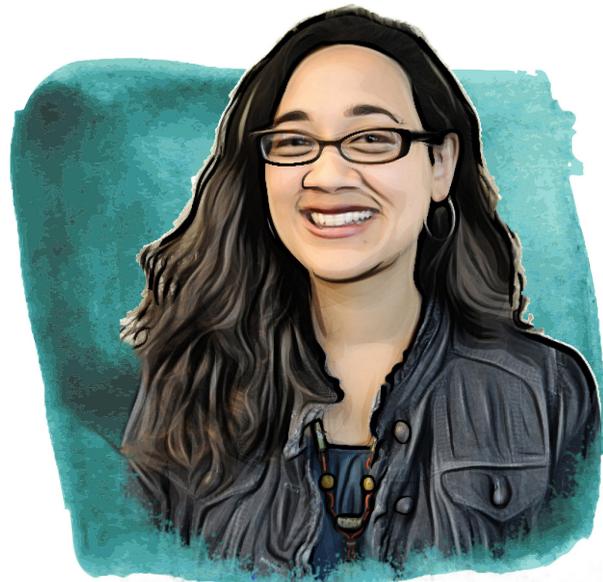
Dulari Tahbildar, 360 High School's director of student support, directed the pilot and learned the importance of accountability as she rolled out KiNVO to her staff.

8.6%  
▼

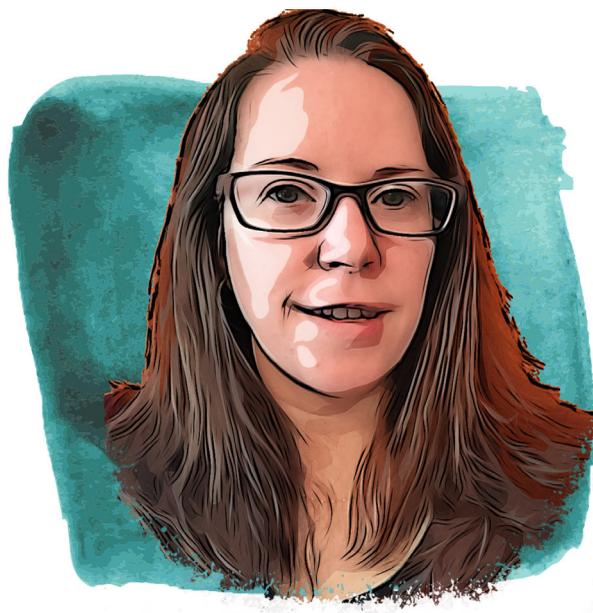
360 High School's chronic absence rate decreased by 8.6 percent.

Ms. Tahbildar established a culture of positivity, and required all staff members to follow suit. "We want our families to work alongside us as equal partners, and we need to establish a baseline of communication and trust so that parents understand they have this equal voice," says Ms. Tahbildar. "KiNVO is the tool we use to establish those baselines."

She collaborated with with Kinolved's co-founder, Alexandra Meis, to develop a texting etiquette guide—an approachable, commonsense reference document that outlines appropriate ways to effectively engage families. Kinolved incorporated the etiquette into its national solution and now offers it to all partner districts as part of its coaching service.



Dulari Tahbildar  
Director of Student Support  
360 High School



*“KiNVO is a gamechanger for our school community in many ways, especially because of the multilingual communication features and user-friendly platform. It has also increased positive interactions between school home.”*

—Kerry Tuttlebee  
Principal  
360 High School

Ms. Tahbildar also believes that students should be active users of KiNVO. “We founded our high school in Providence with a focus on student voice and empowerment—students working alongside adults as partners,” says Ms. Tahbildar.

Every month, advisors are expected to review KiNVO attendance report cards with students in order to begin dialogue about the root causes of absences and to co-generate personalized support and intervention strategies.

For the 2018–2019 school year, Ms. Tahbildar has expanded her school’s KiNVO utilization. Teachers and staff now use KiNVO for invitations to the school building, reminders about important assignments, and sending positive messages about student growth. Response rates to KiNVO-powered messages are high.



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