



The Attendance Crisis: Tackling School Avoidance, Together (w/ Dr. Carolyn Gentle-Genitty) (Transcript)

*Educator Wellness Podcast
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[PODCAST INTRO] 0:00 | Dr. Kari Vogelgesang:

Hello everyone. I'm Kari Vogelgesang, your host of the Educator Wellness Podcast. Here to share and promote my life's work and passion, all things wellness. But not just any wellness. We're here to discuss wellness specifically as it pertains to educators. I am a former elementary school teacher and I am passionate about helping educators see wellness in a very different way.

This podcast is dedicated to educators across the globe, creating a space for us to come together in an authentic and therapeutic way, sharing our stories, our hopes, our joys, our fears, our sorrows, and hopefully creating some space to share some laughter with one another as well in our journey to learn how to support one another, to prioritize wellness and enhance our overall well-being.

Please join me as we talk with nationally recognized experts to guide us on a transformative journey of self-discovery, helping us to embrace and weave all dimensions of wellness into the fabric of both our personal and professional lives.

Also, please note that the opinions and perspectives that are shared on this podcast do not necessarily represent those at the Scanlan Center for School Mental Health, or the University of Iowa.

[EPISODE INTRO] 1:12 | Kari Vogelgesang:

Welcome to the Educator Wellness Podcast. In today's episode, we tackle one of the most pressing issues in our schools and communities today, which is school attendance. And as many educators listening today already know, absenteeism rates are rising across the United

States, making school attendance an increasingly urgent issue. And despite the well-recognized importance of consistent attendance for academic success, health, and just overall well-being, many students face significant barriers that are preventing them from regularly attending school. These barriers include socioeconomic challenges, health issues sometimes, transportation difficulties, and quite frankly, just a lack of engagement with our curriculum.

Absenteeism not only affects individual students' academic achievement, but also has far-reaching implications for communities and society at large. To help us better understand and address these issues, we are joined today by Dr. Carolyn Gentle-Genitty. Dr. Carolyn holds a PhD in social work with a minor in criminal justice from Indiana University, and both of her bachelor's and master's degrees in social work from Spalding University in Louisville, Kentucky.

She's originally from Belize, and she brings extensive leadership and programmatic experience to this work. She has over 25 years of experience in higher education, including six years at Indiana University. And Dr. Carolyn also has 23 years of teaching and scholarly activities, and over 30 years in the field of youth development, both locally and internationally. Her research focuses on the school to prison pipeline, school competence, truancy, and social bonding, and I'm just very excited for all of you to listen to our conversation today. I hope it will help us better understand the root causes of school attendance issues and provide valuable suggestions for improvement. Welcome to the conversation everyone.

3:32 | Kari Vogelgesang:

I would've never imagined even 10 years ago thinking that I would be here talking with you, I'm glad I'm here talking with you today, but talking with you about how we get our kids to go to school. But here we are, and I think maybe if we could just start by just starting with you and talking. If you can just tell us a little bit about your background and how you came to researching this topic, studying this topic, and sharing your expertise with audiences like we have with the Scanlan Center for School Mental Health podcast, your expertise.

4:06 | Dr. Carolyn Gentle-Genitty:

Dr. Kari, it's such a delight to be invited to talk. And you're right, it's a challenge, it's a concern. It's one for, I think for every human is what I have experienced over the last 20 years, but particularly over the last five years, it's grown.

So I've been studying youth development at least about 30 years now, starting with gang and youth development in general to the point when I said, rather than being on the back end of the work, how do we prevent some of these? So I moved back looking at truancy and then looking at behavior. I developed an instrument about 15 years ago, a little bit over 15 years, perception of school social bonding, because we heard school climate was a concern.

And the more I began to study that area, I realized that everybody was doing their own version of the work and nobody had very clear evidence-based practices or interventions that were consistently, as you would indicate with fidelity, implemented. There was just so many silos.

And I was mentioning in 2018 or so, several colleagues of mine, one in Australia, one in Sweden, the other in the Netherlands, and myself in the US decided we need to put together an article that really just says, "Here are the different types in the categories of this challenge or problem that we're experiencing."

As we did that, we realized that it was cited by many, recognizing that there was a problem or challenge. And so we started the International Network for School Attendance, sort of finding a way to create an international feel on attendance and absenteeism.

And doing that, that's when our work just ballooned. We found ourselves with small chapters in at least 20 different countries. We began to be invited into many conversations. But at that time, and still now, I am a tenured university professor and it was trying to balance research and teaching, so we got young scholars who were also interested in the topic and junior scholars to research. I eventually then created and became the CEO of Pivot Attendance Solutions, looking at the problem locally, and moved into a vice president role for the International Network for School Attendance and Absenteeism. And that brings us to today and this work

6:46 | Kari Vogelgesang:

To today. So said something that it definitely relates to one of the questions that I wanted to unpack with you today, which is, so when did this start? When did we start to really have a school attendance issue here in the United States? I think a lot of people, as you know, I mean this area of expertise, will say, "Oh Covid," but we know that this was happening before Covid too.

7:16 | Dr. Carolyn Gentle-Genitty:

Of course.

7:19 | Kari Vogelgesang:

Yeah. So did it get worse with Covid?

7:21 | Dr. Carolyn Gentle-Genitty:

Let me unpack that question, because it has at least three layers. So the simple answer is, in the early 19th century when we began to establish schools and all these other processes, there also came with a requirement that each state would have some mandatory school attendance law. So the idea of attendance has been on the books since we had schools. How are we going to get these kids to school? How are we going to track that they come? That idea of presence and absence been there for a very long time.

But it was only until about 2006 the term itself chronic absenteeism was developed, and the first study or the first reporting of that didn't come out until 2013, 2014. So it's a newish issue. And when I say newish, it's because in the early days it was really just about tracking. Is somebody present? Is somebody absent?

When we moved into chronic absenteeism, it was all recorded absences, whether it was excused or unexcused, authorized or unauthorized, medical, a doctor's note, or serving at the school fair, or helping out with elections. All these absences are calculated, so we're looking at missed instructional time. So that's the key with chronic absenteeism.

When you talk now about the idea of the pandemic, what the pandemic did is it forced schools to look at how students were showing up, and that was different. So many of the laws talked about seat time, when students are physically present, involved in the curriculum approved by the school. But during the pandemic, students were not able to be physically present.

So when you examine some of the laws, for instance here in Indiana, our law indicated yes, physical present. But it also said, or if the student is engaged in the curriculum approved by the school at a different location. So what you saw then were schools trying to use that secondary layer of attendance or absenteeism on the books to capture remote learning.

Once parents and schools realized that remote learning was now an option, when the pandemic was over, it was hard to reel back all of those. So parents found that they have more options. Students found that they had more options, teachers had more options. And it's similar to the

workplace. Some people are now requesting that they work remotely, similar to students and parents.

So three layers. 19th century was when it first started, generally around 1918. We moved into 2006 with the chronic absenteeism term. And eventually 2013, 2014 was when we did the first study. The first study was popularized in the US and the pandemic then sort of kicked it into drive.

10:41 | Kari Vogelgesang:

Okay. So can you tell us in general, because this might change from state to state, I'm not sure, you tell us. What is the definition of chronic absenteeism? Is there a certain number of days or a percentage of the year that a student misses that would put you into that category?

11:00 | Dr. Carolyn Gentle-Genitty:

It's a very, very good question. I want to applaud you for asking it the way that you did, simply because chronic absenteeism really doesn't have anything to do with the student. It has to do with the school. The unit of analysis is the school, and it asks the schools, "How many of your students have been absent for any reason?" And that's the same across the entire US, what absences for that school.

What happens then is they calculate funeral, suspensions, 4H, doctor's note vacations, any reason a child has been absent from school, whether excused or unexcused.

So unexcused are the ones that a lot of people find themselves talking about more, and that's truancy, right? When a child misses school without the parent knowing about it, without the school knowing about why they've missed. So that's that truancy piece. What you have at chronic absenteeism is the totality of both. They look at all absences where the child was absent from instructional time.

12:14 | Kari Vogelgesang:

Do you have data that supports this narrative right now that truancy rates have increased over the past 10 years?

12:31 | Dr. Carolyn Gentle-Genitty:

There's data that's available, and it varies by schools, simply because schools are not consistent in reporting this out. And you'll find consistency wherever the federal government requires. Let me take that back. There are segments where the federal government gives funding. And wherever there is funding given to schools, you'll find some sense of consistent data that's reported.

When it comes to truancy, it's very likely you'll find those rates on all schools website or the state's website. But it's often flawed. It's not consistent. And the way schools measure it may vary.

So let's take for instance, there's regular public schools, private schools, parochial schools, charter schools. All of them will report it differently, but you'll hear them use the same around the 10. You hear people joke about, "Attendance is at 10, we dance," right?

13:35 | Kari Vogelgesang:

[inaudible 00:13:34] actually.

13:38 | Dr. Carolyn Gentle-Genitty:

So it's that we only interact or engage then with the parent, or the student, or the resources, or the law, which is that dance when we're at 10. And that's because sometime ago somebody assumed that 10% is about the minimum that a child should be absent. But that 10% is not unauthorized absence. So unauthorized absence, those unexcused absences is what makes up truancy.

So what you'll see is a child may have missed school 40-something days, but the school may not interact with that child until those 10 unexcused absences are registered. And that could be a combination of half-day absences or period absences where you see, for instance, girls have high truancy rates, but their truancy rates are not because of not wanting to be in school. It may be every month when they have their menstrual cycle around that period, they miss PE. And so you'll see them adding up these period absences or half-day absences that will lead to truancy. Which is why when you look at truancy and you're looking for accurate data, it is not accurate because schools don't track it at that level. And not all schools do full-day absences. Some do half, some do periods, some do a combination.

15:07 | Kari Vogelgesang:

Well, so a couple things about this. I mean, because I want to get into something that you just led us to, which is the different reasons for why kids miss school. I do have to put a plug in for my bonus child, Sarah Brenneman. She is 19, she's a freshman in college of. Well, she just finished her spring semester at the University of Iowa as a freshman. She wrote an article about period absences her senior year of high school. Actually, no, that was her junior year she wrote, published.

And it's a huge deal that we really just don't talk about very much. And she basically in her article was just like, "Listen, we make girls," even at least in their school, even when you supply these feminine products for free, which not all schools do, but even when you do, they're oftentimes locked up in the health office. So then you have to go into the health office with all of these people in the health office and ask for them, and then they give you one thing maybe that you... So anyway, I think this is a whole nother, this is literally a whole nother podcast for women. But it does lead us down this path of, okay, let's unpack all of the different reasons why kids don't want to go to school. Right? Do you have a list? Is there a top five, a top top 10 list of why we don't go to school?

16:43 | Dr. Carolyn Gentle-Genitty:

Well, there are many different reasons, and you're absolutely right. And the reasons are, if we had to find a way to categorize them, most of them are developmental. So think of early childhood adolescent all the way through when these transitions that we go through in life. So the number one reason has to do with developmental processes.

The second has to do with school and climate, what's actually happening in the school environment itself. And that's both physical in terms of infrastructure, all the way to emotional, and bonding, and engagement with teachers and persons within that environment. So those are the broad two. The third would be societal factors, whether that be poverty or homelessness, all these other things that surround. So those would be the top three.

I would caution though that when you look at those top three, the developmental is the one that takes up, if we had to do a pie chart, it would take up at least 70% of it.

17:48 | Kari Vogelgesang:

Whoa.

17:49 | Dr. Carolyn Gentle-Genitty:

Yes. And that's because of some of the same period stuff that you're talking about. We bring in some of Erikson's work and others, and we understand identity and identity formation in that development. You look at the idea of bonding and attachment that occurs very early with peer and peer group language and language development, understanding social cues, peer relationship, peer grouping, dependence on parents. Much of those fall within the scope of developmental and developmental theory. So that's the primer.

18:24 | Kari Vogelgesang:

That's so fascinating. So what do we do? How do we shore this up, right? So I'm an educator, experienced educator. Been doing this for over 25 years, so similar to you. And you say that to me and so I immediately, I am starting to put the pieces together, but thinking, wow, we have a lot of work to do.

18:46 | Dr. Carolyn Gentle-Genitty:

We do, we do. The challenge though is that we don't want to feel overwhelmed with it, and sometimes it can feel like that. But what we do well as educators is care. We care. And so that means we are committed to the process and we're making sure we're culturally responsible. We try to be attentive and automate where possible. We figure out who's responsible for the change, and being consistent in that responsiveness and availability. And then we educate to meet the emotional needs of the students that we're serving.

Those four components are at the heart of how we do this work. It's not about bringing in a whole bunch of stuff to overwhelm you, nor the parents, nor the students. It's to say, we care enough that we want to show up when you need us to show up. Those are the key points.

Now interrupting, and you and I are very familiar with this, it comes back to the three components of human behavior, stimuli, pattern, and behavior. We have to recognize the stimuli. And if we recognize the stimuli, we may recognize the behaviors that are offshoots of that stimuli. Thereafter, we begin to pay attention to the patterns.

If we want to change that, we have to disrupt the pattern, and we disrupt patterns by disrupting behavior. We disrupt behaviors by changing the stimuli, right? These are things that we do as educators all day, every day when we show up as teachers in the classroom. And I think that's what we need to go back to make the difference.

20:31 | Kari Vogelgesang:

There was one thing that you would suggest. So there's going to be educators listening. There's going to be lots of different types of people listening to this, parents, personnel that work for our AEAs, administrators.

If you were an educator though, and you didn't necessarily have a lot of control over sweeping district school policies, what piece of advice would you give an educator for what they do have control over, to increase the attendance, even just within their own environment, their classroom?

21:08 | Dr. Carolyn Gentle-Genitty:

I'll start off with one example or joke to speak to the context and then offer five key areas. The first as the example is I did a session maybe 17 years ago, and one teacher said, "Here's what I did. I pulled out five little," she said, "Just show these little cards," cut out a paper, and gave it to each student at the start of the semester and say, "You're responsible for your 10 absences

before I have to do something." Agency, recognizing what you have control over and letting everybody be aware of it.

I want to put that context in your head or the audience's head, because the five things that I offer are within your immediate control to do today, and the first is to take quick action. We are the ones that are, outside of the parents, we spend the eight hours of, pretty much of the waking hours or spent with teachers or within the classroom. So if something is going to be observed with behavior, pattern, or stimuli, teachers are the first to know.

So have a plan when you take action, partner with clinicians. Don't just be aware that, oh, the psychiatrist is down the way, or the nurse is down the way. Have a relationship with them that when you recognize that a student needs help, you know who can provide that help, and you have a good relationship with the parents and the students to build that trust. So take quick action.

The second is to partner with that mental health professional or trained professionals. Get them on your docket to come to the classroom to show what's important, so that when the child does need help, particularly with good avoidance, this person is not a stranger. This is a person they've bonded with. They have good trust. They know that they would respect their rights and responsibilities, not embarrass them. All those things, build good relationships. So the second is to partner with mental health partner. The third is to train staff, really in a way that you're recognizing and responding with the goal of getting the student back.

So a lot of staff want to intervene. And though that may seem like the right thing to do, especially your front desk staff, or the custodial, or the bus worker, everybody wants, that's overwhelming to the child. And it also embarrasses the child. It embarrasses the parent as well as if, "Oh, you don't know what to do to bring your own child to school or to make sure they're doing the right thing." So training staff to recognize what is possible, but also who is responsible.

So if there's a channel of information that consistently goes to that one person, or that unit, or that teacher, then there's a coordinated effort with that child. And again, saving face for that child as well within that environment.

A fourth would be get the student back to school as quick as possible. And it doesn't have to be in the school environment. It's engaged in the curriculum that the child needs for that particular time, engaged in some sort of learning. And that's going to help with gradually helping the child to confront fears. It'll help them work on their executive functioning skills, time management, organization, how to articulate for their needs, how to show up for themselves in the environment to tell the teacher when I'm overwhelmed or when change is needed. So it's important then to get the child back to school and have a plan to do that. And the last is just to offer resources in a way that they feel that they're getting the accommodations and being supportive.

And if I may, so there are many schools that are doing many aspects of these five things. So for your entire school, if you don't have anything in place, the key is early intervention. So as quick as you can, pull a team together and say, "How do we take quick action? How do we partner with our mental health people? Do we need to bring more people in? Do we have a training on the books? How can we get students back, what resources we can offer?"

But I know Westwood Regional School District in New Jersey for instance, they're partnering with clinicians, so much so that they're sending therapists to the home of students with school avoidance and working directly with the student and the parents saying, "Can we prepare a plan for you? Can we offer some options that have worked with other people?" And then using that plan to gradually bring the child back.

Kalamazoo Public School in Michigan uses the Knock and Talk session, and they visit parents, but it's not to be punitive. It's not to say, "You must come to school." It's say, "Tell us what happened. Tell us what's going on." Offer some support to parents and say, "How can we help you find some solutions?"

Alexandria City Public Schools as well in Virginia, they developed an app for parents to creatively share their information in a supportive environment, find resources, communicate with other parents that may be having some of the same challenges, and at least two more.

I remember Sankofa here in Indiana, and they use a Building Dreams platform, a really robust, I didn't even know it existed, a really robust platform that tracks the socio-emotional experiences of kids enough that you could say, "How do I show up in school today? Am I nervous? Did something happen at home? Did I not eat? What's going on?"

And throughout the day, teachers can put in information about it. The student can put in information. They get rewards for doing good things and notifications for things that they need to improve.

So there are many different options, but Warren MSD in Indiana is the one that I think has brought a lot more of these resources together, and that's where they provide 30 clinicians or partners with. Whether it's homelessness and they need to find housing, whether it's anger and anger management, or they saw bullying. They just have a wealth of resources that they provided.

And they went one step further by creating a community resource center that the parent can drop in outside of the school. In the same community, but outside of the school where generally they can go for anything from clothing, to food, to transportation passes, to meeting a counselor, to doing mental health, to tutoring, a whole bunch of resources. And they've been able to identify who needs the help by tracking all absences using RaaWee. RaaWee is technology for K-12 attendance, which tracks every single type of attendance that it can spit out a record that says, "Here's what the child has been up to."

So there are many schools that are doing many different versions, but ultimately it's the same five things. Taking quick action, partnering with community and mental health, training the staff about what's possible, with the goal of getting the student back by using resources.

28:28 | Kari Vogelgesang:

I can't tell you how thankful I am. I can't tell you enough how thankful I am that you were able to join us and share all of this information. I know that like we said at the very beginning, this is just a really important topic, and there's so many people that are really struggling with it. I think you put it best. There's lots of parents who are embarrassed about it. Even teachers and school administrators just feel embarrassed that we are having such a hard time getting students to want to come to school and to stay at school. So I really appreciate your work. Thank you for coming.

29:06 | Dr. Carolyn Gentle-Genitty:

No, thank you for having me. And I want to make sure, I would be remiss if I don't share and help schools to recognize. So this is not teachers, but school systems. If you can find a... Sorry. But for school teachers, they have what they could do. But school systems, townships, it is extremely important. If I could put a plea, it's extremely important to begin to sift through the attendance data that we collect in a way that can categorize these types of absences.

So we know that there's school withdrawal, and school withdrawal are those absences that are parentally condoned. The heater guy is coming, somebody needs to stay home. Johnny is sick,

but mommy has to work. So two of you can stay home. We know the parentally condoned absences. Those are school withdrawal.

School avoidance has a lot more to do with all these anxiety-provoking stuff, it has to do with the school environment. So that's where schools, and school leaders, and administrators can say, "What's going on in my school environment? How can I address or respond?" And that's where my Perception of School Social Bonding Instrument is often used, and it's a free instrument. So a lot of people have asked to use it just to get an early feeling about what's going on in the school environment. So that's the school avoidance. And school refusal or a lot of those psychological types of personal situations that are going on.

And those three are very different than truancy. And truancy is that last N, last 10 absences. And we need to find a way to punish students for not coming to school. And that's not what we want to continue to do because it doesn't help. It makes more of a challenge for everybody. And this is a problem that's both academic, it's social, and it's economical. When more students miss school, we step back a little.

Schools get money through their average daily attendance, right? Then the federal government recognizes this process and give them a certain amount of money. But when students are absent and consistently absent, schools get less money to do the same work. And so teachers get less resources to do what they need to do. But on the contrary, students don't get the employment skills and they continue struggling. They don't get the critical thinking skills. They don't get the problem-solving skills or the team-building skills.

So there's a lot of danger to not showing up in the school environment or not attending school in general. But it's important for schools to sift through their current data, find a way to categorize into these four areas so they're providing the right support. Pushing more resources or punishment to a child who wants to attend, but feels that there's something, whether it's bullying in the school environment that's impacting their life. It won't get them back until they know that it's a safer environment for them to be in.

So it's recognizing some of those that I think are important. Academic achievements, a lot of people have linked it to reading, and test scores, and graduation. But in reality it's about underachievement, lack of social maturation, friendship and cues that are not formed with some economic concerns. So I'm grateful for the opportunity. Thank you for the extra grace to go a little bit into those definitions, but I think it's important as schools begin to find a way to respond.

32:34 | Kari Vogelgesang:

Yeah. I am glad that you took the time to step us back a little bit and talk through that, because that's another thing that people will talk about and say, "Well, does it really matter if they don't come to school?" And so it's really good that you highlighted not only how schools need to start to sift through their data to recognize, start to recognize maybe why some students aren't coming. But also, to highlight that our students don't just come to school just to learn chemistry or just to learn algebra. We are getting lots of pushback right now from different groups of people saying, "No, I'm going to send my kid to school, and they're just going to learn how to read. They're just going to learn science."

And that is sure, one thing we do want them to do when they come to school, of course. Be experienced to lots of different content, academic content. But we also know that without school experience, many students would not learn some of the skills that you just highlighted, at least not learn them to the degree that they can learn them when they're around a diverse group of people day in and day out.

33:51 | Dr. Carolyn Gentle-Genitty:

Well said.

33:52 | Kari Vogelgesang:

And that can be so dangerous for our society. Very dangerous if we are not practicing with students how to negotiate, how to compromise, how active listening skills, how to build relationships with people where out of the gate, you don't see anything that you really have in common with them. Because it can happen. You can actually create some really dear friendships with people who you also have some pretty big disagreements with.

So I think that when people ask that question, for me, that is such a scary question, that grown-ups aren't even seeing the value of coming together and practicing the most important skills that we can possibly grow and mature as human beings.

I actually don't really care if my kid can sit down and pass a chemistry test. I mean, that's great if he can. But if he's not going to become a doctor, or a chemist, or a teacher, I mean it's great [inaudible 00:34:59] what he does learn by going, or he or she, what they do learn is they learn resiliency. Is that a content area that they really like? They learn how to work in teams. And I don't know, I'm probably going sideways.

35:14 | Dr. Carolyn Gentle-Genitty:

No, you are absolutely correct. I want to amplify that. If I could put an exclamation, bold, underline under those statements, you are absolutely right. Even from language, we learn how to speak and pick up, or choice words from interacting with friends or others. We learn whether or not we could be independent from our parents just by being with our peer group.

So there's so much that's into it that I remember a colleague even talking about just emotional regulation. "My son doesn't know how to do that well." And it's not that we want to stop anybody from doing homeschooling or all of these other options. We're just saying find an environment where the child is engaged in the learning and the curriculum, but with others, because we will forever live in a world where we must interact with other humans.

36:06 | Kari Vogelgesang:

Well, and we also know that when you don't, when you isolate yourself, then look at the Harvard study that just came out. Was it just this past fall? Loneliness is the most concerning health issue globally right now. It has both physical, social, emotional, psychological ramifications that are so damaging to our lives.

36:31 | Dr. Carolyn Gentle-Genitty:

Correct. And it goes the entire developmental cycle. So from birth, the child being very lonely without the parent there in attachment, all the way to when we get older in our lives, and we don't have the work friends, and we don't have the church friends, and we find ourselves alone. So it's consistent.

But if I may, one more plug, maybe a tangent here, is that the more we see what's missing and we see loneliness in all these other categories, we're also seeing rise in suicide. We're seeing rise in drug use. We're seeing additional rise in school shootings. And much of it comes again from not belonging, not feeling that people are doing what they should do to meet our needs, and not feeling as if we're a part of this world that we are currently in.

So there's so many ramifications to school attendance and school absenteeism that I'm glad the entire world is now paying attention to it. But I'm also disappointed that we're just now doing it after we've lost so many children or so many kids on our watch. So this is a time for bold action,

but it's action that begins with caring. It begins with us just showing up and asking, "How are you, what happened? How can I help?"

37:49 | Kari Vogelgesang:

Yeah. Thank you so much for coming today.

37:52 | Dr. Carolyn Gentle-Genitty:

Thank you for having me. This has been such a joy. I always love talking about this topic, and learning more people that are interested in it and making a difference. So thank you for the opportunity.

38:02 | Kari Vogelgesang:

Wow, that was quite the conversation. I have so much going through my mind right now, so many thoughts. But as we draw this episode to a close, one thing that sticks out to me is that the issue of school attendance extends far beyond just our Ferris Bueller's Day Off example of skipping school or skipping class. It's really about confronting the social determinants that hinder access to education, which is complex. It's reassessing the relevance of our curriculum, and fostering inclusive and welcoming environments for everyone. For everyone who engages in a school community.

And to affect real change, it's imperative that all stakeholders, so everyone connected to the school, educators, parents, leaders, policymakers, that we all come together and we solve this problem collectively, together as a team.

As always, as we've talked about before, throughout this episode, even at the introduction of this episode, this issue is extremely complex and multi-layered, requiring systemic changes that commit to collaborative action fueled by empathy and determination, to ensure every student and educator has the opportunity to thrive.

Remember, the future of our society depends on the choices we make today. And a lot of the choices that we're making right now are clearly impacting in a negative way our students' ability or desire to come to school, stay in school, and stay engaged in our school communities. I really thank you so much for joining us today, for listening. And until next time, I'm Kari Vogelgesang forever cheering you on. Take care, everyone.