

## Education Innovation and Research Program (EIR) Project Abstract

**Applicant Name:** Oregon Research Institute

**Project Title:** Youth Attendance Navigators: Building Community-School Alliances for Youth Success

**Type of Grant Requested:** (select one)  Early-Phase  Mid-Phase  Expansion

**Absolute Priorities the Project Addresses:** (select all that apply)

Absolute Priority 1-- Demonstrate a Rationale (Early), Moderate (Mid), Strong (Expansion)

Absolute Priority 2-- Field-Initiated Innovations—General

Absolute Priority 3-- Promoting STEM Education

Absolute Priority 4-- Meeting Student Social, Emotional, and Academic Needs

Absolute Priority 5-- Educator Recruitment and Retention

**Competitive Preference Priorities the Project Addresses:** (select all that apply)

Competitive Preference Priority 1— Promoting Equity in Student Access to Educational Resources and Opportunities: Implementers and Partners

Competitive Preference Priority 2— Addressing the Impact of COVID-19 on Students, Educators, and Faculty

**Total number of students to be served by the project:** 682

**Grade level(s) to be served by the project:** 6-12

**Definition of high-need students:** Underrepresented, underperforming, and economically disadvantaged students enrolled in urban Title I schools.

**Brief description of project activities:** The Youth Attendance Navigators program will undergo three phases of development and testing to refine and evaluate its effectiveness for high-needs urban students. Phase A will gather stakeholder feedback ( $n = 74$ ) to identify areas for standardization and measure fidelity. Phase B will conduct a 6-month pilot study with 70 students and 2 Youth Attendance Navigators to evaluate implementation, participant buy-in, and retention, followed by surveys and interviews to finalize procedures. Phase C will conduct a randomized controlled trial with 554 students to assess the program's impact on educational outcomes, attendance, school connectedness, mentorship alliance, and social validity, collecting data at multiple intervals for short- and long-term effects.

**Summary of project objectives and expected outcomes:** The Youth Attendance Navigators program aims to identify challenges and refine protocols through focus groups and surveys (Phase A), train mentors and achieve proficiency, obtain consent from 70 students, implement with high fidelity, and finalize refinements (Phase B), then obtain consent from 554 students, collect and analyze data, finalize materials for scale-up, and engage partners for sustainability (Phase C). The project seeks to improve educational outcomes for high-needs urban students by addressing barriers, refining components, and enhancing engagement and stability for replication.

**Summary of how the project is innovative:** This project addresses the chronic absenteeism crisis intensified by COVID-19 by embedding mentors with lived experiences into high-needs urban schools. These mentors provide continuous support to at-risk students, focusing on improving attendance, academic performance, and social-emotional learning (SEL). Over the course of the project, we will standardize program components, develop fidelity measures, and create an implementation database for scale-up and national replication. Through iterative development, pilot testing, and a rigorous randomized controlled trial, the project aims to refine and evaluate the program's effectiveness, fostering environments that promote regular attendance and holistic student well-being.

**Other studies related to the proposed project:** The Youth Attendance Navigators program builds upon prior research demonstrating the effectiveness of community-embedded mentors with lived experiences in improving attendance, academic performance, and social-emotional learning (SEL) for high-needs students, addressing chronic absenteeism through evidence-based practices (mentoring through lived experience, weekly monitoring of alterable school risks, Restorative Circles, experiential learning, and individualized support) and strong school-community partnerships.

**Proposed implementation sites:** Participants will include underrepresented, underperforming, and economically disadvantaged students in 8 Title I urban middle and high schools in Omaha Nebraska. Middle schools include McMillan, Nathan Hale, King Science, and Monroe. High schools include Omaha North, Norwest, Benson, and Central.

**Organizations partnering with this project:** Oregon Research Institute; Urban League of Nebraska; Abt Global; Omaha Public Schools (Nebraska)