



STUDENT SOCIAL R&D SUPPORT LAB

Student Social Support R&D Lab

[The Student Social Support R&D Lab](#) (S3 Lab) uses randomized controlled experiments and behavioral science to develop and prove scalable, high ROI interventions that mobilize and empower students' social support systems to improve achievement. The research focuses on three areas:

- Connecting parents to what's happening in class
- Connecting other adults who care about the student with the student's education
- Correcting parents' miscalibrated beliefs

This work is conducted in more than 1,400 educational settings including K-12 schools, online universities, state and community colleges, and MOOCs.

Professor Todd Rogers

[Todd Rogers](#) is an Associate Professor of Public Policy at the Harvard Kennedy School. He is a behavioral scientist who runs the [Student Social Support R&D Lab at Harvard](#) and is Senior Researcher at the think tank ideas42. His [research](#) sits at the intersection of education, psychology, judgment and decision-making, and behavioral economics.

Prior to joining the faculty at HKS, Todd Rogers was founding Executive Director of the Analyst Institute, LLC, which uses randomized field experiments and behavioral science insights to understand and improve voter communications. He received his Ph.D. jointly from Harvard's department of Psychology and Harvard Business School and received his B.A. from Williams College, majoring in Religion and also Psychology.

Interested in partnering with us?

Contact Kim Bohling at kim_bohling@hks.harvard.edu

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I. Engaging and Empowering Families with Timely, Actionable Information

Public school parents receive personalized communications from their children's schools (beyond report cards) less than twice per year, on average. New school-to-parents communication technologies can increase the frequency of contact at little cost. This suite of projects involves sharing student-specific information with parents, primarily via text message. The communications are easy to implement as they solely utilize administrative data already collected by the school and/or district in their learning management system, student information system, or personalized learning system. The data is incorporated into psychologically-informed messaging that provides actionable updates about students, such as attendance, grades, missing homework, and course content.

These projects may also explore topics such as what influences parent demand for actionable information, the impact of information overload on parent engagement, and intra-household communication flows between parents and students.

Ideal partners: High schools and middle schools

Launch date: Fall 2016

Sample size: 4,000+ students across several schools

Implementation details: Ideal to implement at district-level and requires coordination with district data team

2. My Student's Team

Many students have relationships with supportive adults who care about whether the students succeed. These include grandparents, coaches, mentors, and family friends. However, schools are prohibited from communicating with these supporters for several reasons, not the least of which is FERPA. This project involves guardians identifying supporters within their students' pre-existing support "team" to receive frequent, actionable, and personalized communications about the students' educational activities. These communications duplicate what the parents receive (e.g., report cards) and also include additional messages that invite and empower the supporters to be more involved in the students' academic lives. The goal is to increase student success by turning students' social networks into a social support system.

Supporters receive mail, email, and/or text messages that include personalized information on topics such as:

- Progress reports and report cards
- Class schedules
- Attendance
- Prompts for discussing what is happening in school with the student

Ideal partners: High schools and middle schools

Launch date: Fall 2016

Sample size: 3,000+ students across several schools

Implementation details: Requires recruiting parents to participate in the project and coordination with the district data team

3. Reducing Absenteeism at Scale

The S3 R&D Lab is developing and testing low-cost automated strategies to reduce student absenteeism. These projects extend our recently developed interventions that were found to reduce chronic absenteeism by 10%+ in a large urban district at a small fraction of the cost of the next best research-proven approaches. Parents of high absence students tend to underestimate their child's absences by almost 50%. In an experiment involving more than 28,000 at-risk K-12 students, we sent parents a series of mail-based communications that utilized behavioral-science tailored messaging to target that misbelief and provide timely and regular recalibrations about the students' total absences. We are now developing strategies to amplify this intervention, including layering in text messages and using predictive analytics to identify the precise moments when the most at-risk students are in danger of missing school and would most benefit from some form of outreach.

We are also exploring other promising low-cost absence-reducing interventions. These include household-level interventions that reduce absenteeism among all students within a household, sibling influences on absenteeism, peer influences on absenteeism, and parent false beliefs about absenteeism (e.g., the relationship between absenteeism and graduation, how students' absenteeism affects "on track" status, whether excused and unexcused absences differ in terms of their impact on learning, etc.).

Ideal partners: K-12 districts with 20,000+ students

Launch date: Fall 2016

Implementation details: Particularly easy to implement at the district-level; requires coordination with the district data team

4. Engaging Study Supporters

Many students have non-residential college experiences that are separate from their friends, families, and jobs. This intervention aims to turn those outside-of-school social networks into social supports. Students in online and community colleges are asked to identify friends/ family with whom they communicate regularly to serve as "Study Supporters." These Study Supporters then receive regular text and email messages that serve two purposes. First, the messages actively invite Supporters to play a more active role in the students' educational efforts. Second, the messages inform Supporters of ways that they can support the students' educational efforts (e.g., the messages provide information about specific course content, upcoming deadlines, and academic resources available). The S3 Lab has conducted several pilot studies examining the impact of this intervention on the persistence and performance of online college and MOOC students. In one pilot with an accredited online university, sending text messages to students and their Study Supporters throughout the semester significantly increased course passing and semester-over-semester re-enrollment by 4 to 5 percentage points – which would make it one of the most effective college persistence interventions yet developed. We would like to extend this work in community colleges in the coming years and explore what kinds of messages and which Study Supporters are most effective.

Ideal partners: Community colleges with 8,000+ students

Launch date: Ongoing study

Implementation details: Requires recruiting students to participate, ideally by including recruitment in student registration processes; requires coordination with college staff to craft messaging and access data