

Kelly Bacot Highlights Student Engagement and Student Well-being as Essential to Reversing Learning Loss

Experienced educator Kelly Bacot explains how strong relationships, high expectations, and student well-being can improve attendance and accelerate academic achievement.



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Bacot

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma Jul 20, 2026 ([Issuewire.com](https://www.issuewire.com)) - Chronic absenteeism has become one of the biggest threats to student achievement. It contributes to lower performance in reading and mathematics while reflecting broader challenges tied to poverty and mental health. [Kelly Bacot](#), an experienced educator and instructional leader, believes schools can reverse these trends by strengthening student engagement, building supportive classroom environments, and maintaining high

academic expectations.

According to Bacot, improving academic outcomes begins with recognizing that attendance is more than a statistic. Every missed school day means lost instructional time. Students also lose opportunities to participate in classroom discussions and strengthen relationships with their teachers. When absenteeism becomes chronic, the effects quickly multiply. Students often struggle to keep pace with grade-level expectations. "Students cannot benefit from excellent instruction if they are not consistently present," Bacot says. "Attendance reflects much more than compliance. It often tells us whether students feel connected, supported, and confident in their ability to succeed."

Recent education data shows that chronic absenteeism remains significantly higher than pre-pandemic levels in many districts. National assessments also continue to report declines in reading and mathematics proficiency, particularly among younger learners. Academic interventions remain important. However, Bacot believes schools must also understand the barriers preventing students from fully engaging with their education.

Teachers across the country increasingly identify poverty, food insecurity, unstable housing, transportation challenges, and [mental health concerns](#) as major obstacles to learning. Students who arrive at school carrying emotional stress often struggle to concentrate. They may participate less in class, fall behind on assignments, or have difficulty building positive relationships with their peers.

Bacot believes these challenges should never lower academic expectations. Instead, they should encourage educators to provide additional support while maintaining rigorous standards. "High expectations and compassion are not opposing ideas," Bacot explains. "Students deserve classrooms where they are challenged academically while also knowing their teachers understand the realities they may be facing outside of school."

She believes engagement is one of the strongest predictors of academic growth. Students who actively participate in lessons, collaborate with classmates, ask questions, and understand the purpose behind their learning are more likely to attend school consistently. They are also more likely to perform well academically. Creating this level of engagement requires planning. It cannot depend on a single instructional strategy for every learner.

Bacot advocates for differentiated instruction that recognizes students' individual strengths and learning needs. Teachers can use formative assessments to identify learning gaps early. They can then adjust instruction before students fall further behind. Ongoing progress monitoring also helps ensure that interventions remain effective throughout the school year.

Relationship building is equally important. Bacot believes strong relationships provide [the foundation for lasting academic success](#). Students who feel respected, valued, and emotionally safe are more willing to take academic risks. They are also more likely to ask for help and stay engaged during challenging lessons. "Mental well-being influences learning every single day," Bacot says. "Students who feel secure and supported are better able to focus, solve problems, and develop confidence in their abilities."

Growing awareness of student mental health has encouraged many schools to expand counseling services and social-emotional learning initiatives. Bacot welcomes these efforts. At the same time, she believes they should complement strong classroom instruction rather than replace it.

Academic confidence can also strengthen emotional well-being. Students who experience steady progress begin to believe in their own abilities. Achievable goals, constructive feedback, and consistent

encouragement help build resilience. Small successes often create momentum that motivates students to remain engaged even when coursework becomes more demanding.

Bacot also emphasizes the importance of strong partnerships between schools and families. Parents and caregivers reinforce attendance, encourage reading habits, support homework routines, and communicate with teachers when challenges arise. Schools that maintain consistent communication with families are often better equipped to identify problems before they become long-term barriers to success.

Educators, she adds, cannot solve every challenge alone. Poverty, food insecurity, and mental health concerns require collaboration among schools, families, community organizations, healthcare providers, and policymakers. Long-term progress depends on coordinated support that places students at the center of every decision.

Technology can also strengthen engagement when used thoughtfully. Digital learning tools provide personalized instruction, immediate feedback, and additional practice for students who need reinforcement. Even so, Bacot cautions that technology should enhance teaching rather than replace meaningful interactions between teachers and students. "The teacher remains the most important resource in any classroom," Bacot notes. "Technology should strengthen relationships and instruction, not substitute for them."

As schools continue to search for ways to improve attendance and accelerate learning, Bacot believes that lasting progress begins with balance. Strong instruction, supportive relationships, high expectations, and timely interventions all play essential roles. Together, they create classrooms where students can thrive academically and personally.

For Bacot, success extends beyond higher assessment scores. It means preparing students with the knowledge, confidence, resilience, and engagement they need for lifelong success. "Every student deserves the opportunity to learn in a classroom where they feel challenged, supported, and inspired," Bacot says. "When schools invest in both academic achievement and student well-being, they create the conditions where every child has the opportunity to succeed."

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