Count Us In!
Working Together To Show That Every School Day Matters

2014

AMERICA'S PROMISE ALLIANCE

Attendance Works
Advancing Student Success By Reducing Chronic Absence

THE CAMPAIGN FOR GRADE-LEVEL READING
3RD GRADE READING ≡ SUCCESS MATTERS

POINTS OF LIGHT

LIVE UNITED
United Way

Introduction

School attendance is essential to academic success, but too often students, parents and schools do not realize how quickly absences – excused as well as unexcused – can add up to academic trouble. Chronic absence – missing 10 percent of the school year, or just 2-3 days every month– can translate into third-graders unable to master reading, sixth-graders failing courses and ninth-graders dropping out of high school.[1] The impact hits low-income students, who most depend on school for providing opportunities to learn, particularly hard.[2]

Chronic absence is an alarming, largely overlooked problem that is preventing too many children from having a chance to learn and succeed. It currently affects 5 million to 7.5 million students — more than one in 10 — nationwide.[3] In some communities, chronic absence has reached epidemic proportions, affecting more than one in every four students. States that have analyzed their data find it is a problem in districts of every size, urban, suburban and rural.[4] Stemming this crisis is essential to our country's economic and educational future.

The good news is that we can fix this problem. Chronic absence can be reduced when schools and communities partner to build a strong culture of attendance and work with students and families to identify barriers to getting to school. This work starts by helping everyone in a community recognize that they have a stake and a role in ensuring that students are in school every day so they can learn. It then requires careful attention to data and strategic, locally tailored interventions to address the challenges keeping students from attending school regularly.

This year, we're using the second-annual Attendance Awareness Month to encourage schools and communities not only to deliver the message that attendance matters, but also to take concrete steps to turn around chronic absence. Everybody has a role to play: parents, schools, city agencies, community nonprofits, afterschool programs, healthcare providers, businesses and others. While it is important to emphasize attendance throughout the year, the start of the school year is essential. Fall is when schools and communities lay out expectations for the coming year and can develop a culture of attendance that will continue throughout the year. Our first Attendance Awareness Month in September 2013 brought in hundreds of schools and communities. To keep the momentum going, we're providing this expanded toolkit with:

- Ideas for parent summits and outreach to families
- Posters, incentives and contests to encourage students
- A template proclamation from a mayor, school board or superintendent
- Public Service Announcements on national and local media
- Tools especially for educators
- Free data tools to identify students and schools with high levels of at-risk attendance
- Strategies for mobilizing a community-wide campaign to help break down the barriers to good attendance

Over 40 national organizations are working together to ensure that everyone can participate: from a single school to a citywide coalition to a national organization. Sign up here to receive email updates on Attendance Awareness Month.

Video

Attendance Works' video spells out how chronic absence affects achievement—and how schools and communities can turn the problem around.

How to Use the Toolkit

This toolkit is designed to help you plan your involvement and enlist stakeholders who can help get the message out. You can start planning now for activities in September. We offer a variety of options for promoting good attendance. No school, community or organization should feel that they need to accomplish all of them. Instead, choose which options work best for you and build the support you need to do more in the following year.

You can:

- **Download** the entire toolkit.
- **Browse** the Table of Contents and go directly to items that interest you
- **View** our calendar of What to Do When
- **Go** to our Activities by Stakeholder:

Mayor and Elected Officials

Businesses and Chambers of Commerce

Superintendents and School Boards

Local Philanthropy

School Principals and Teachers

Community Organizations and Faith-Based Groups

Afterschool and Early Education Programs

Health Care Providers

This is a living toolkit that we anticipate will be revised and improved over time. We encourage schools, partners and communities to contribute ideas for improving attendance and to share your successes. Submit your ideas, examples or questions here.

Toolkit Contents

Click on the items below to go directly to what interests you.

Toolkit Contents (cont.)

Click on the items below to go directly to what interests you.

I. Why Attendance & Chronic Absence

It's a big problem: Nationally, an estimated 5 million to 7.5 million students are at risk academically each year because they are chronically absent. That's at least one in 10 students. In some communities, one in four students is missing that much school. Starting as early as kindergarten and prekindergarten, chronic absence can have adverse consequences for academic achievement, research shows. By third grade, chronically absent students, especially those who have experienced multiple years of poor attendance, are less likely to read on grade level. By sixth grade, chronic absence becomes an early warning sign that a student may drop out of high school. By ninth grade, it's a better indicator than eighth-grade test scores. Children with certain risk factors—including poverty, homelessness, frequent moves and disabilities—are especially hard hit since they can least afford to miss school. In school districts where state funding is determined by average daily attendance, chronic absence is costing schools millions of dollars each year.

But it's often overlooked: Too many schools and districts have no idea how big the problem is because they don't track how many students are missing so much school—for any reason, excused or unexcused. Instead they look at average daily attendance (the percentage of students who typically show up every day) or at truancy, which generally includes only unexcused absences.

We know what to do: Schools, families and communities can work together to turn around absenteeism and build a culture of attendance in every school. Research from a New York City pilot program showed that the right interventions, particularly personalized outreach and support, could result in improved attendance and higher academic performance. Successful efforts start with educating students and families that regular attendance, from a child's first day in school, is essential to long-term academic success.

Positive approaches include incentives and recognition for students and schools where attendance improves. Closer attention needs to be paid to data to identify when students are missing too much school and trigger early outreach, support and intervention for at-risk students. Data can also identify schools with an unusually large number of chronically absent students and the "bright spots," schools with good attendance despite challenging conditions. These positive outliers can help inspire and teach others effective strategies for improving attendance. A common characteristic of these schools is a comprehensive approach to turning around attendance that begins with positive supports. Starting with prevention is more effective and less costly than punitive efforts involving fines and court appearances. Legal action should always be the last resort.

1 in 10 kids in kindergarten and 1st grade are chronically absent.
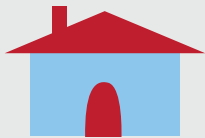
In some schools, it's as high as 1 in 4.

To view the full infographic, visit: http:\\www.attendanceworks.org/infographic\

2 in 10
low-income kids miss too much school. They're also more likely to suffer academically.

2.5 in 10
homeless kids are chronically absent.

4 in 10
transient kids miss too much school when families move.

We know what to say: Based on the Ad Council's research with parents, we know that how we talk about attendance matters. All parents care about their children's success in life. But they often do not realize how quickly absences can add up to academic trouble. For example, many parents don't see absences as a problem if they are excused or if they are not on consecutive days. Parents also don't always make the connection between attendance in elementary and middle school and eventual graduation from high school. The message we must deliver, backed up by research, is that every absence matters at every grade level. Every day missed is a day of instruction missed, a day of classroom interaction with students and teachers that can't be recovered. A critical intervention can be ensuring that parents know exactly how many days of school their child has missed and at what point too many absences become problematic.

The time is right: While it is important to send a message throughout the year that attendance matters, the start of the school year is crucial because that is when schools and communities lay out expectations for the coming year and can develop a culture of attendance that will continue throughout the year. Many principals hold rallies or assemblies, which are perfect opportunities to share this message with students, parents and staff. School officials are often interviewed by the media at this time, which is another chance to reach the entire community. September is also the right time to establish a baseline for attendance data, so that you can measure improvement in the year ahead. We recommend looking at chronic absence numbers, an easy task for districts with automated attendance systems. This allows schools to identify individual students who are struggling to get to school every day, as well as trends in absenteeism. But average daily attendance figures, which most schools already report, can also provide clues to where problems lie.

II. Who Should Use this Toolkit?

This toolkit is designed with four main audiences in mind:

1. Teachers, principals, superintendents and school boards

who see the corrosive effects of absenteeism in their schools. The toolkit provides tailored materials for dealing with attendance in back-to-school letters, meetings and at parent-teacher conferences. School superintendents can sign on to the Call to Action sponsored by Attendance Works and the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading. With support from school boards, they own the issue, drive with data and mobilize the community.

2. Any community group or agency

that works with families and can deliver positive messages about why going to school every day is so important for success in school and life. It could, for instance, be a doctor's office, a housing authority, a faith-based institution, a preschool or an after-school program. Our hope is that you will use this toolkit to determine how to build these messages into your communications and everyday interactions starting in September.

3. National organizations can build

attendance into their own communications as well as encourage their members to address this issue by increasing awareness of why chronic absence matters and promoting strategies to incorporate attendance into current activities and metrics. Groups can also sign on as coordinating partners.

School Success

In Los Angeles, the school district's strategic plan to reduce chronic absence increased the number of students attending school regularly and saved the school district more than \1 million in state funding that would have been lost to student absenteeism. It also led to partnerships with the Chamber of Commerce, city government and the broader community.

Community Success

In Lee County, Florida, a set of Head Start programs increased attendance dramatically with a focused campaign to educate parents and students about the importance of showing up every day.

National Success

Reach Out and Read, a network of pediatricians that promotes early literacy, recently has begun incorporating attendance into its handouts and discussions with parents.

4. Local leaders and organizations can convene and engage the entire community in working together to address school attendance. If the resources and conditions are ripe for a community campaign, collaboration can lead to greater impact. Among the leaders who are well positioned to spearhead a campaign are:

- **Mayors and other local elected leaders** can demonstrate their commitment to partnering with schools to improve educational outcomes, since good schools are essential to a strong local economy.
- **Chief state school officers** and other leaders can use their bully pulpit for spreading the word about the importance of going to school every day and promoting participation in Attendance Awareness Month
- **Chambers of Commerce** can demonstrate their commitment to the local community and the need to promote the development of skills that will be needed in the future workforce.
- **Local philanthropy and United Way chapters** can convene grantees and community partners around an issue that is easy to understand and monitor.

In Baltimore, local philanthropy spurred the mayor's office, school district, city agencies and volunteers to work together to reduce school absences. Initial efforts helped cut middle school absences in half. Now attention has shifted to the early grades. See their Best Practices brochure.

In New York City, then-Mayor Michael Bloomberg launched an attendance initiative in 2010 that has significantly reduced chronic absence in its pilot schools. Every Student, Every Day relies on data tracking, school attendance committees and Success Mentors who work with students at risk of dropping out.

In California, State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Torlakson convened a policy forum with Secretary of Health and Human Services Diane Dooley to discuss the need to work collaboratively to reduce chronic absence across California. The forum drew nearly 100 representatives of state and local agencies, as well as advocates.

Points of Light is expanding its Corps 18 program, an education-based program that seeks to address the issue of chronic absenteeism. Corps 18 offers VISTA Corps members to work in schools and other organizations for 12 months to assist with attendance tracking and the addressing the barriers that keep students from attending regularly.

Who Can Help?

In the schools:

- **Students and parents** can keep track of absences and look for ways to reduce excused absences.
- **Teachers** can deliver the message about good attendance in the classroom, take attendance every day in a caring manner and create incentives to encourage showing up.
- **Principals** can create an engaging school culture, offer incentives and use data to identify students or, in some cases, classrooms in need of extra support.
- **PTAs** can organize parent summits to expand awareness of how families can monitor chronic absence and help each other get their children to school.
- **Superintendents** can track chronic absence data district-wide and hold schools accountable for absenteeism.
- **School boards** can proclaim the importance of attendance and adopt policies to ensure chronic absence is monitored and addressed.
- **Chief state school officers** can advance awareness, data collection and capacity building to improve student attendance.

In local government:

- **Mayors and other elected leaders** can proclaim the importance of good attendance and convene a coalition to address absenteeism.
- **Social workers** can address family problems that are keeping students from getting to school.
- **Housing officials** can reach out to families with chronically absent students, help organize safe walks to school and publicize information (such as reminders about when school starts) that can help families avoid unnecessary absences.
- **Police officers** in dangerous neighborhoods can provide safer routes to school.
- **Transit agencies** can provide free passes to students who lack reliable transportation.

In the community:

- **Health care providers** can address chronic illness, such as asthma, and reinforce the importance of school attendance at children's annual checkups.
- **Afterschool providers** can help build a culture of attendance, reach out to chronically absent students and provide enriching activities that motivate students to show up for school.
- **Faith-based groups** can volunteer to help parents and mentor at-risk students.
- **Businesses** can donate incentives for improved attendance and share the message with their employees.
- **National service members** (e.g. AmeriCorps & VISTA) can provide an extra shift of adults to support students at risk of dropping out.
- **Local foundations** can convene community members and underwrite the costs of attendance improvement efforts.
- **Media partners** can spread the word about the importance of good attendance.

III. How Can We Deliver the Message?

1. Incorporate information about attendance into daily interactions with families

The responsibility for good attendance starts with families, and messaging efforts should start there, too. Parents want their children to succeed in school and life, but they often don't make the connection between absences and academic trouble, especially in the years before high school.

Help them make that connection through conversations in the community and by building a welcoming environment at school, in letters sent home and in parent-teacher conferences. PTAs can develop programs to educate parents and help families with barriers to attending school regularly. Business owners can talk to employees about the value of attendance. Community agencies and volunteers can help get the word out even before school starts.

Here are some tools and materials:

- Key messages for use during Attendance Awareness Month and Throughout theYear
- Talking Points for Interacting with Families
- Tips for Outreach Before the First Day of School
- Tips on One-on-One Meetings
- Sample Back-to-School Letters
- Script for Back-to-School Robocalls
- Tips for Parent-Teacher Conferences
- Tips for Contacting Hard-to-Reach Parents
- Handout for Parents of Elementary School Students
- Handout for Parents of Elementary School Students (Spanish)
- Handout for Parents of Secondary School Students
- Handout for Parents of Secondary School Students (Spanish)
- Pledge Cards for Parents
- Pledge Card for Parents (Spanish)
- Info Graphic on Attendance in the Early Grades
- Info Graphic on Attendance in the Early Grades (Spanish)
- Perfectly Punctual Workshops for Parents
- Sample Student Survey

Parent Engagement Toolkit

BRINGING ATTENDANCE HOME
Engaging Parents in Preventing Chronic Absence

May 22, 2013

Attendance Works

Created with the help of practitioners who have worked successfully with families to improve attendance, this toolkit is filled with ideas, activities and materials that you can use to spark conversations with parents.

2. Attendance Incentives and Contests

The opening of school is an excellent time to put in place a strong system of incentives to encourage better attendance among students and their families or to make sure an existing system recognizes improved attendance, not just perfect attendance. Incentives and contests take advantage of the fact that students often respond better to concrete rewards and peer pressure than they do to lectures from parents and teachers.

Incentives

- Attendance Works Tips for Incentives
- New York City Incentive Resources
- Template Attendance Certificate
- Attendance Certificate from Oakland

Contests

- Sponsor a poster contest: Let students of all ages convey the importance of attendance
  - Sample Posters from Baltimore

- Sponsor a video contest: Let your middle and high school students create PSAs that the community can use during attendance month and beyond.
  - Tips for Video Contests

- Create an attendance month competition between classes, grades or local schools to see who can best improve attendance. The rewards can be as simple as an extra recess or as fancy as a raffle ticket for a new car. Businesses can donate gift certificates or movie tickets. Local celebrities and sports stars can visit the winning schools.

- Get involved with Get Schooled, a nonprofit that uses rock stars and celebrities to help reduce dropout rates. It offers celebrity wake-up calls and twice-yearly Attendance Challenges for secondary schools. The 12-week Fall 2014 challenge starts in October, so use September to prepare students for the contest. The challenge allows students and school communities to earn a celebrity principal for the day. Students can play educational games, brag about their amazing teachers, learn about various educational resources, and earn points as they improve their attendance.
  - Get Schooled Toolkit

In Des Moines, Iowa, East High School is one of Iowa's lowest performing schools, but that didn't stop students from exceeding all expectations in a national attendance competition. With hard work and teamwork, the school improved attendance by more than 2.5 percent and won a regional title—and a visit from a celebrity—in the Get Schooled Attendance Challenge.

In Baltimore, the mayor's office sponsored a series of quarterly attendance contests among schools serving students from preK through grade 12. The winning schools receive $1,000 grants and prizes for the students—including trips to a local children's museum and visits from the Baltimore Ravens.

3. Host Special Events

The new school year means back-to-school night for parents and assemblies for students. These are ideal times to convey the link between absenteeism and student achievement and to build a culture of attendance.

- **Parent summits or back-to-school nights.** This is an opportunity to orient parents to school policies and connect them to helpful resources. Think of ways to provide incentives for parents who are trying to improve their children's attendance. If you have data for your school or community, share the information with parents. Or simply share what we know about the importance of good attendance.

  In addition to the handouts listed above, here are some tools and materials:
  - Tips for school meetings
  - Get Schooled Attendance Counts Calculator
  - Talking points for principals
  - Interactive parent exercises
  - Attendance Works video

- **Student back-to-school assemblies.** For students, use an assembly at the start of September to introduce the topic. Also use this opportunity to explain to students why attending school is so important. If possible, have some students speak about why going to school matters.
  - Talking points for principals and teachers addressing students
  - Examples of student messaging
  - Tips for Developing Incentives

- **Parent-Teacher Conference.** Parent-teacher conferences are an ideal time to talk to parents about the importance of attendance. Teachers can use these one-on-one discussions to update parents on their child's attendance. They can encourage students with good attendance to keep it up and use this as an opportunity to express concern and come up with a plan to improve attendance for chronically absent students. It is an ideal time to make sure students are aware of programs in place, or school activities that promote attendance.

4. Publicly proclaim the importance of attendance and the establishment of September as Attendance Awareness Month

Mayors and other elected leaders, school boards and superintendents can signal the importance of school attendance by declaring that September is Attendance Awareness Month. Reach out to state legislators and education leaders. National and local organizations can also use the proclamations and disseminate them through their networks.
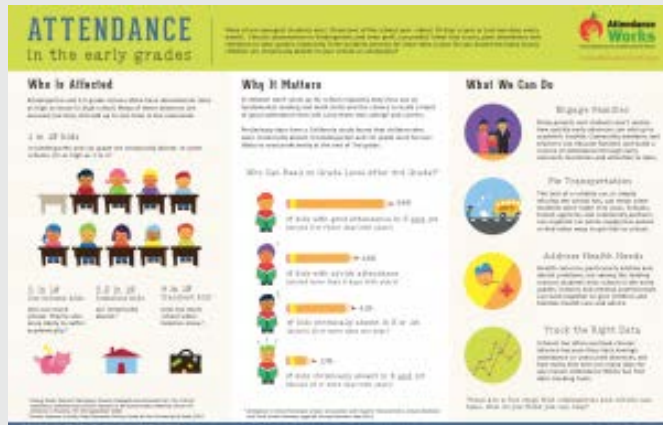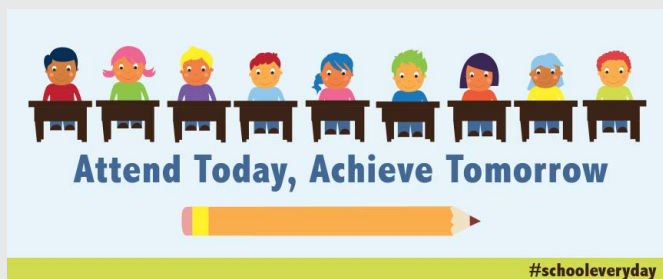
- Template proclamation for mayors and elected leaders
- Template proclamation for superintendents
- Template proclamation for community organizations
- Template proclamation for school boards

- **Attendance Exhibits.** Promote good attendance in a display in the lobby of city hall, the school district's central office, the main library or other public spaces. Retail shops and restaurants can put posters in their windows or on bulletin boards. If there is a student poster contest, decorate public spaces with the posters. Our Attendance Awareness Month Badge can be used in e-mail signatures and on websites.

  You can use:
    - Attendance Works Info Graphic
    - Attendance Awareness Month Banners & Posters
    - Attendance Awareness Month Badges
    - Campaign for Grade-Level Reading Banner
    - Get Schooled Info Graphic

Check out our banners and posters for you to download or print for free!

Attend Today, Achieve Tomorrow
#schooleveryday

Asista Hoy, Tenga Éxito Mañana
#schooleveryday

ATTEND TODAY, ACHIEVE TOMORROW
DON'T LET ABSENCES ADD UP

Asista Hoy, Tenga Éxito Mañana
#schooleveryday

Magic Johnson PSA

5. Develop media and public outreach to take place in September

Every year, print and broadcast reporters turn up looking for back-to-school stories. Suggest that this year's pieces focus on school attendance and the efforts by your organization or community to reduce absenteeism.

- **News Stories**
    - The Facts about Attendance
    - Tips for dealing with the media
    - Template news release for mayors
    - Template news release for superintendents
    - Template news release for community organizations

- **Op-eds and blogs.** Compose a commentary stressing the importance of attendance and the role a school or community is playing to reduce absenteeism. If you can't sell it as an op-ed piece, shorten it and offer it as a guest blog or a letter to the editor. Remember TV and radio stations allow on-air commentaries.
    - Template op-ed
    - Template op-ed for school boards

- **Social Media.** Post 30 tweets and Facebook entries about attendance data — one for every day in September. Use our hashtag: #schooleveryday and we'll retweet.
    - Sample Tweets and Facebook Posts
    - Attendance Awareness Month Facebook Cover Photo

- **Public Service Announcements.** We expect national partners to develop PSAs that will run on broadcast networks, but communities can develop their own announcements cheaply and easily.
    - Instruction sheet on how to do radio PSAs
    - Instruction sheet on how to do TV PSAs
    - PSA scripts

- **Public Television.** Local stations are often willing to partner with community initiatives. Contact your station and ask for support.

Sample Tweets for Attendance Month

7.5 million students miss 10% of school year nationwide. That's 135 million days total. http://bit.ly/1oqfID7 #SchoolEveryDay

For poor kids, chronic absence in kindergarten = lower academic achievement through 5th grade. http://bit.ly/1oqfID7 #SchoolEveryDay

Chronic absence affects all kids, not just the absent ones. Learn how to get kids in #SchoolEveryDay here: http://bit.ly/1oqfID7

Missing 10% of school days, just 2 days each month, can put children at risk of academic failure. http://bit.ly/1oqfID7 #SchoolEveryDay

One in 10 kindergarten & 1st grade students misses nearly a month of school each year. http://bit.ly/1oqfID7 #SchoolEveryDay

Join the Attendance Awareness Campaign today and end chronic absence in our schools: http://bit.ly/1oqfID7 #SchoolEveryDay

IV. How Can Educators Improve Attendance?

Teachers play a key role in reducing chronic absence by teaching children – and reinforcing to parents – the value of attendance. Teachers witness how absences can disrupt learning, not just for the absent student but for the entire classroom. They can emphasize attendance from Day One, use parent teacher conferences to talk about attendance and promote a culture of attendance all year long. Click here for our Teaching Attendance toolkit.

Principals set the tone for the entire school, ensuring that students, parents and teachers know that attendance matters. That message can be conveyed by greeting families every morning, sending letters homes and making robocalls. Principals can call for the district to provide the data needed to identify at-risk students in need of support. They can also help identify and address systemic barriers and provide professional development to teachers. Click here for more tools for schools.

Superintendents play a pivotal role in monitoring and improving school attendance. Local superintendents can proclaim their support and help launch their local attendance awareness efforts by signing on to the Call to Action on Attendance sponsored by the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading and Attendance Works. Participation signals a commitment to owning the issue, mobilizing the community and driving with data. Learn more and sign up here.

School Boards can make reducing chronic absence a key policy objective and hold superintendents accountable for taking action to improve attendance. They can commission chronic absence reports and use the results to determine allocation of resources to address problem areas. They can also use chronic absence as a metric for school or superintendent success. Click here to learn more.

Chief state school officers can also help advance awareness and action to improve student attendance. They can use their position to serve as a bully pulpit for spreading the word about the importance of going to school every day, promote participation in Attendance Awareness Month, produce and release statewide reports on chronic absence, and encourage local superintendents to sign on to the Call to Action.

Attendance Awareness Month Across the Country

Delray Beach, FL

In Del Ray, Mayor Cary Glickstein and the City Commission adapted the Attendance Awareness Month logo with its own slogan and created a roll of stickers to give to schools. The local Chamber of Commerce provided $500 mini-grants to schools for flyers and attendance incentives.

Buffalo, New York

Buffalo launched a "First Day, Every Day" campaign that included hundreds of lawn signs and posters, as well as an attendance competition, reinforcing a year-long push that is already reducing chronic absence.

Dubuque, Iowa

Dubuque launched an "Up, Up and Attend" campaign complete with contests, billboards and jelly bracelets. An attendance pilot funded by the Community Foundation of Greater Dubuque is expanding to all elementary schools.

Oakland, California

Oakland created a video with Seattle Seahawks running back Marshawn Lynch celebrating school attendance. The Alameda County District Attorney's Office and school district developed a toolkit to help principals and teachers reduce chronic absence.

Ogden, Utah

In Ogden, students with 100% attendance were rewarded with free admission to an Ogden Raptors baseball game and were given a fan foam finger, a pretzel and a drink to enjoy. The Ogden School District partnered with the Ogden School Foundation to arrange the baseball outing as part of their recognition of Attendance Awareness Month. Ogden Mayor Mike Caldwell presented a joint proclamation (between the city and the district) on the importance of being in school every day. As part of Attendance Awareness Month, an Ogden Raptor visited Ogden schools to encourage students to maintain regular attendance and focus on their schooling.

V. How Can We Engage the Community?

If you are in a position to engage the full community in your attendance campaign, the broader approach can amplify your efforts. If possible, work with a cross-sector coalition to advance your plans. Whether you have a coalition or not, find ways to put tools in the hands of other agencies and organizations.

1. Mobilize a Community Coalition

- Determine who can take on the issue. If your community is participating in an existing effort focused on academic achievement or dropout prevention, such as Campaign for Grade-Level Reading or Grad Nation, tap the coalition in place to engage the community in improving attendance. All the right players might already be involved, or the coalition could consider using attendance as a way to engage additional partners.

  - List of Grade-Level Reading Communities
  - List of Grad Nation Communities

- Reach out to other existing coalitions. Networks already organized to reform schools, promote literacy, reduce dropout rates, address health needs and improve communities might offer enthusiastic partnership and leadership around addressing chronic absence. If your districts or schools are tracking early warning indicators, they're already paying attention to attendance.

In Grand Rapids, Michigan, the Kent School Services Network brings together school districts; funders; the United Way; and county health, mental health and social services agencies to help track chronic absence and intervene with the students, schools and communities most affected. Schools involved have seen absenteeism drop and test scores rise.

In Omaha, an organization called The Attendance Collaborative brings together business, civic and political leaders with the University of Nebraska at Omaha to work with schools in Douglas and Sarpy Counties to improve attendance through school and community partnerships.

In Vero Beach, Florida, the Moonshot Moment literacy coalition created a Think Tank and used a combination of home-spun materials, such as student-created slogans and handouts from the Attendance Awareness Month campaign to marshal support throughout the community.

- If no coalition exists to take on this issue, then consider launching your own; convene community partners who can help schools improve attendance.
  - List of possible stakeholders
  - Sample invitation letter

- Hold a meeting to discuss ideas and solicit buy-in. Consider using the house party approach:
  - Host a House Party (Sample Agenda)
  - Key Messages
  - Attendance Works video
  - Sample PowerPoint

- Use these materials and reports:
  - The Facts about Chronic Absence
  - Research summary on chronic absence
  - Research summary on early grade attendance
  - The Importance of Being in School: A report detailing the prevalence of chronic absence
  - Present, Engaged and Accounted For: Research documenting the effects of early chronic absence

- Ideally you would provide data on the number and percent of chronically absent students in your community. If your district has not calculated this, then consider registering for these tools.
  - Tools for crunching your data

2. Create locally tailored schools and community partners toolkit

- Attendance Works has developed a template toolkit with handouts, activities and local resources that can be easily adapted to help schools and local partners reduce absenteeism. Some communities have adapted Attendance Works materials for local audiences.
  - Template toolkit that communities can tailor
  - Local toolkit from Oakland
  - Toolkit from Contra Costa County
  - Toolkit from Solano County

- Attendance Works has developed toolkits to guide principals and teachers working to improve chronic absence. Los Angeles and New York City have also created guides.
  - Teaching Attendance Toolkit
  - Los Angeles Unified School District Toolkit
  - New York City Toolkit

- New York City developed a toolkit for community and faith-based groups.
  - Toolkit for Community and Faith-Based Groups

VI. How Can We Identify & Help Students with Poor Attendance

1. Organize and train volunteers or national service members to reach out to absent students and families

Reaching out to chronically absent students and their families often takes an extra shift of adults—whether they are volunteers from faith-based groups, mentors from the business world or national service members from City Year.

General Mentoring Resources
- Attendance Action Planning Worksheet
- New York City Principals' Handbook on Success Mentors
- Strategies for leveraging volunteers and national service
- Sample confidentiality form for community-based organizations
- Sample confidentiality form for mentors
- City Year Student Engagement Toolkit
- RAMP Mentoring Sheet
- MENTOR toolkit for managers
- MENTOR tips for individuals
- Check & Connect toolkit
- Check & Connect monitoring form

Models
- **Check & Connect** assigns trained mentors to at-risk students to improve engagement with school and learning through close monitoring of their attendance, behavior, and grades.

- **City Year** uses AmeriCorps members who commit to a year of full-time service in schools, where they work as tutors, mentors and role models. Attendance is a key focus.

- **RAMP**: The Ready to Achieve Mentoring Program uses group, peer and individual mentoring to build on career-development efforts by schools and employers.

2. Schools can assemble or reconvene attendance teams and host a first meeting in September

Student attendance teams provide a vehicle to keep track of school-wide attendance trends, as well as what's going on with chronically absent students. In addition to administrators and teachers, the team can include the school counselor and representatives of community groups or volunteer organizations working with the school.

- Tips for an effective attendance team
- New York City Principal's Handbook on attendance teams
- Tips for understanding contributing factors
- Handout on breaking barriers to attendance

In New York City, schools draw on City Year, Experience Corps and groups to provide Success Mentors for chronically absent students. The program has shown extraordinary results: Students with mentors attended nearly 12,000 more days in the past school year than similar students without the extra support. For a how-to guide, click here.

3. Ensure that every school identifies students at risk of chronic absence and reaches out to parents

The best way to identify students with poor attendance is to calculate the data that schools are already collecting. In addition to looking at school-wide averages, as most schools do, shift the data to see how many students missed 10 percent of the school year in the previous year. Reach out to their parents sometime in September. At the end of the month, look at how many students have already missed 10 percent (2-3 days) and track their attendance going forward. Attendance Works has created data tools that districts can use to examine patterns and identify which students are at risk due to poor attendance.

If you can't look at chronic absence, average daily attendance (ADA) numbers can provide some direction about where to focus resources. Generally, schools with ADA rates higher than 97 percent have little trouble with chronic absence, while those with rates below 93 percent almost always have too many students missing too many days. At schools with 95 percent ADA, chronic absence rates can vary dramatically.

You can also use data to look for positive outliers, schools that have good rates of attendance despite challenging circumstances. These schools can offer strategies—and living proof—that chronic absence can be reduced.

- How to Conduct a Successful Data Analysis
- Data tools for crunching chronic absence numbers
- How to Identify Positive Outliers
- Chronic Elementary Absenteeism: A Problem Hidden in Plain Sight, a report on the link between ADA and chronic absence
- New York State Handout

4. Use data to determine where and how to target resources that can address common challenges of getting to school and build a local culture of attendance.

Consider targeting the schools with the highest levels of chronic absence and the community agencies with the strongest relationships there.

- **Transportaton Challenges:** Some students miss school because of neighborhood violence or dangerous intersections in route to the campus. Schools and communities have started creating "Walking School Buses" and other approaches to keep kids safe.
  - Safe Routes to Schools toolbox
- Some students have no school bus or reliable transportation to take them to school; transit agencies and parent carpools can help.

In Springfield, Massachusetts, dozens of elementary school students wait on street corners every morning for the\"Walking School Bus" to arrive. Led by teachers and parents, the organized walk provides a safe and healthy way for children to get to school. Average daily attendance rates are up, and tardiness is down, school officials report.

In Waco, Texas, the school district worked with the city transit agency to offer free rides for middle and high school students who don't have school bus service. More than 10,000 students have taken the free rides so far, and other communities are considering similar programs.

Health

In Long Beach, California, health workers with the Alliance for Children with Asthma assess the home environment; educate families and children about asthma's causes; establish an action plan; provide families with nontoxic cleaning products and other community resources; and monitor asthma symptoms. Nearly 74 percent of children who missed school before enrolling in the program had not missed school at the six-month follow-up assessment.

In Los Angeles, breakfast can be a powerful draw. At 52nd Street Elementary School in South L.A., 850 students joined a breakfast-in-the-classroom program in October 2012. The percentage of kids with perfect attendance shot up dramatically, and the only thing that has changed is breakfast.

Housing

In Oakland, California, the public housing authority has partnered with the schools to examine chronic absence among students living in public housing. Just before school starts, housing authority leaders and staff reach out to families with personal phone calls and back-to-school information packets emphasizing what is the first day of school and the importance of regular attendance.

In New York City, the mayor's office, the Department of Education and the Department of Homeless Services now track student attendance and absences at 15 targeted shelters, then designate individuals at each shelter to help provide students with support to stay on track. In addition, family shelters citywide have created homework centers.
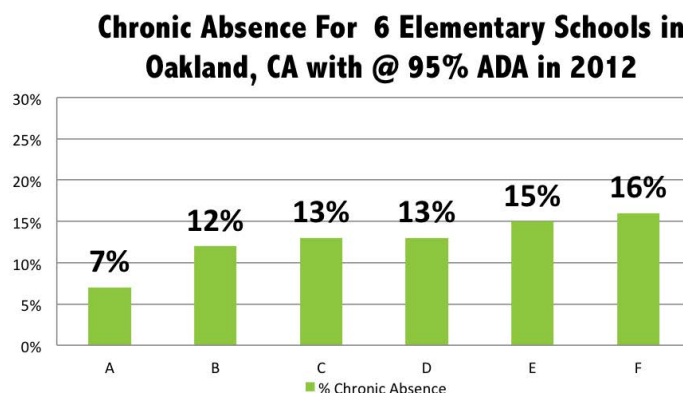
Health Challenges: Some students have chronic illnesses and mental health problems that keep them from attending school regularly. Schools and communities can provide support to ensure their health needs are met.
- Asthma Health Guide
- Oral Health Guide
- Promoting Healthy Food Choices
- How Sick is Too Sick sheet
- How Sick is Too Sick (Spanish)
- State of Chronic Absenteeism and School Health
- Families Fighting the Flu
- A Health Flyer for Parents

- **Breakfast in the Classroom:** Students who eat breakfast at school attend an average 1.5 more days of school every year. When offered in the classroom, breakfast can be an opportunity to bond with the teacher and get kids ready for class.
  - No Kid Hungry Best Practices
  - Breakfast Fact Sheet

- **Housing Challenges:** Children who live in public housing, move frequently or are homeless often miss too much school. Housing authorities and homeless shelters are taking steps to address absenteeism.

- **Afterschool Programs:** Research shows that good afterschool programs can improve school-day attendance. Ensure that schools with high chronic absence rates have access to quality programs, and work with the afterschool providers to target at-risk students.
  - Afterschool resources
  - Tools for providers

- **Recess:** Physical activity at a well-run recess can make for more engaged students—and better attendance. A school in Boston found that the average number of absences dropped 78 percent after using the Playworks program.
  - Playworks facts on recess

VII. How Can We Measure the Impact of our Attendance Awareness Month Activities?

1. Crunch The Numbers

If your district doesn't already know, determine the current baseline of chronic absence as well as average daily attendance so you can identify whether your activities have an impact on improving student attendance over the school year. If you haven't crunched your chronic absence data, you can start by looking at how much average daily attendance improves—though it is important to recognize that average daily attendance might mask high levels of chronic absence.

Chronic Absence For 6 Elementary Schools in Oakland, CA with @ 95% ADA in 2012

School	% Chronic Absence
A	7%
B	12%
C	13%
D	13%
E	15%
F	16%

2. Develop your own metrics for monitoring implementation

How many parents did you reach? How many students participated in contests? How many teachers report that students are more motivated to attend school regularly? There are many quantitative and qualitative measures to evaluate your success and get feedback on how your efforts could be improved.

3. Let us know what you're doing

We're asking all schools and districts that have calculated chronic absence to put a pin on our Community Action Map. If you're planning an event or activity, you can post that, too. The pin will show up in a different color.

VIII. What to do When

Spring

1. If you're working with a coalition, plan a meeting and agree on activities
2. Recruit partners to support the work
3. Launch a student poster contest or video contest, with winning entries to be displayed during September
4. Enlist health care providers to share information on attendance during back-to-school checkups
5. If you're planning to look at data, approach appropriate school or district officials about the availability of attendance information
6. Identify one or two local schools that are bright spots. These schools serve low-income students, but have better-than-average attendance can inspire others to act.

Early Summer

1. Enlist elected officials to sign proclamations
2. Recruit local sports stars and celebrities for school visits\and assemblies
3. Recruit local faith leaders to speak to congregations about attendance
4. Distribute talking points to key partners
5. Line up incentives from businesses and other partners for contest
6. If you're planning to look at data, crunch the numbers for chronic absence
7. If you have the data, build a data dashboard with weekly reports to principal

Late Summer

1. Tape radio or TV PSAs
2. Begin media outreach
   a. Meet with local newspaper editorial boards to encourage editorials
   b. Submit a commentary piece to local media in mid- to late August
   c. Pitch a reporter about the community's or school district's renewed emphasis on attendance
3. Print banners and posters

4. Plan an attendance display
5. Plan student assemblies and parent summits
6. Launch a door-knocking campaign to remind families when school start
7. Share the Teaching Attendance toolkit with teachers during professional development sessions before school starts
8. If schools open in August, hold first-day-of-school events stressing the importance of attendance

September

1. Release proclamations
2. If schools open in September, hold first-day-of-school events stressing the importance of attendance
3. Hold an end-of-the-month summit, rewarding students with good or improved attendance
4. Launch an attendance contest among schools and classes
5. Host a press conference talking about the community's or school district's emphasis on attendance
6. Pitch reporters to attend assemblies or report on celebrity visits
7. Unveil an attendance display
8. If you've crunched chronic absence numbers, share with the school board, city officials and, if appropriate, the public
9. Share tweets (#SchoolEveryDay) and Facebook posts about the Attendance Awareness Campaign.

IX. Additional Resources

Nonprofit Organizations

Attendance Works is a national organization dedicated to improving the policy, practice and research around attendance. Its website offers materials, research and success stories about reducing chronic absence. Attendance Works also offers technical assistance to school districts and communities.
www.attendanceworks.org

BoostUp is a partnership between the U.S. Army and the Ad Council dedicated to reducing dropout rates. It has adopted attendance as a key issue and is creating public service announcements and other materials to educate parents about the value of good attendance.
www.boostup.org

Everyone Graduates Center combines analysis of the causes, location, and consequences of the nation's dropout crisis with the development of tools and models designed to keep all students on the path to graduation. That includes tracking of early warning indicators, including chronic absence.
www.new.every1graduates.org

Get Schooled was founded on the belief that students themselves have the power to improve their future if given the right information and motivation. The organization sponsors attendance contests, wake-up calls and leverages the key influences in teens' lives to directly engage them on their path through high school and into college.
www.getschooled.com
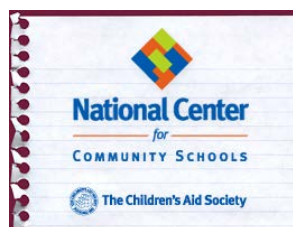
National Center for Community Schools, part of the Children's Aid Society, has facilitated the development of more than 15,000 community schools nationally and internationally. It offers consultation, advocacy and innovation, including advice on how to use chronic absence as a metric of school improvement.
www.nationalcenterforcommunityschools.childrensaidsociety.org

IX. Additional Resources (cont.)

Webinars

The Attendance Awareness Campaign is planning three webinars this year to prepare schools and communities:

- April 8 Webinar: Count Us In! Again
- May 28 Webinar: We Need You: Enlisting Allies for Attendance Awareness Month
- August 6 Webinar: Engaging Parents and Youth: new resources for messaging about attendance

In 2013, we held several webinars as well:

- August 7 Webinar: Absences Add Up! Tips for Communicating to Parents and the Media
- June 7 Webinar: Must Be Present to Win

Research Institutions:

Baltimore Education Research Consortium
www.baltimore-berc.org

University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research
www.ccsr.uchicago.edu

John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities
www.jgc.stanford.edu

X. Footnotes

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