

HOST AN ATTENDANCE AWARENESS HOUSE PARTY



The key to building public awareness about the need to improve student attendance is finding partners and colleagues who can help get the word out! To be successful, we need the main messages about attendance and chronic absence repeated over and over by as many trusted sources of information as possible. Our goal is to saturate communities with these messages during the month of September so we can begin the school year with a strong culture of going to school every day. We will need the help of as many groups as possible to reach students and families in every school and neighborhood using as many different forms of communication as possible.

In order to engage more stakeholders in sending the message of attendance in September, we are encouraging partner organizations and participants to host attendance awareness “house parties.” In common parlance, a “house party” is an event that gathers potential supporters for a campaign or cause. We are calling these activities “house parties” to reflect their role as tools for mobilizing participants and generating interest in our attendance campaign. Unlike a political campaign though, our primary ask is about participation in the work, not fundraising. The main goal of these parties is to identify the local champions who will donate their time and talents to making Attendance Awareness Month a success in your community. If the term “house party” doesn’t work, feel free to call your event something different that will be more appealing to the stakeholders you seek to engage.

Here are some suggested steps for hosting an Attendance Awareness House Party to generate partnership and interest in using September to send key messages about attendance. To mobilize by September, we recommend holding these events during the months of June and July so you and your allies have time to put your plans into action.



Step 1: Identify who you want to engage as participants.

Use these criteria to help identify who to target as messengers. These are people who:

- a) Are trusted by students and families; what they say is credible. You may want to identify several different types of ambassadors (e.g. the head of the Boys and Girls Club or a sports coach) who carry weight with particular groups of students or families.
- b) Would easily see why supporting this effort would make sense because of the nature of their work or their connection to particular schools, communities or local initiatives.
- c) Are connected to you or your organization and would likely respond to an invitation.

Create a list of the names of key contacts, phone numbers and e-mails. Consider cultivating a few key allies from among this group who can help you with outreach, perhaps even acting as an organizing committee.



Step 2: Develop an agenda for your house party.

Develop a house party agenda that will ensure everyone is on the same page in terms of understanding chronic absence, why it matters, and how everyone can play a role conveying key messages in September. Click here for a [sample meeting agenda](#) and resource materials that can be tailored to your own community or agency.

We suggest that you begin the meeting by making opening comments, or asking a respected local leader to explain why this issue is important. Consider using the newly released [video](#) from Attendance Works to lay a foundation. Ideally, the agenda includes an opportunity for one or more people in your community to share what they have already done to help improve attendance. It's very powerful for a group to see that chronic absence is not an abstract problem but one that affects the local school down the street and their own children. And it shows that a local leader can make a difference for kids in their community. Contact such individuals early on to get their support for the meeting and help with outreach.

Remember to plan in advance how your house party will be staffed. Designate a facilitator to keep the meeting moving and ensure that everyone has a chance to speak. If your group is very big, you may want to break into smaller groups and then report back to the entire group with the ideas that are generated. Consider assigning a scribe to take notes on a flip chart so everyone can see who has committed to do what and by when. Or you can use the table in the sample agenda as a worksheet. Either way, be sure that you end with a plan that is realistic, the work is shared by all participants, and everyone is clear about what will happen next.



Step 3: Develop and send out your invitation.

Come up with a date and location and send out an invitation that briefly explains the idea of launching attendance awareness month in your community or agency.

Here's an example:

“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.”

Consider tailoring your message to the particular interests of your guests. For example, if potential participants are concerned with reading at grade-level by the end of third grade, talk about how good attendance contributes to reading proficiency by giving students more time to master reading skills. If you are speaking to local business owners, talk about how fostering the habit of attendance translates into showing up on time for work. Emphasize that you need their help to get the word out.



Step 4: Hold your House Party!

Enjoy the opportunity to catalyze action in your own community.



Step 5: Thank your participants.

Send out a thank you note and summary of next steps.



Step 6: Let us know you've made a difference!

Log on to awareness.attendanceworks.org to share that you held or are planning to host a house party on our [map](#) of the United States. This way your house party can help inspire action well beyond the borders of your own community or organization.

House Party Checklist

- A. Identify speakers:
 - » Someone who can talk about why your community needs to make September Attendance Awareness Month, perhaps sharing local chronic absence data
 - » 1-2 people/organizations who can give local examples of what they are doing to improve attendance
- B. Set date and location
- C. Write and send invitations
- D. Plan the meeting
 1. Develop the agenda
 2. Assign roles: room set-up, host/greeter, facilitator, note taker
 3. Assemble resources:
 - Our [video](#)
 - Informational [flyers](#) for parents (in English, Spanish, Russian, Vietnamese, and Chinese!)
 - Our [key messages handout](#)
 - The [Count Us In! Toolkit](#)
 - Examples of local proclamations (see page 15 of the Count Us In! toolkit)
 4. [Commitment Cards](#) for participants to note what they plan to do for Attendance Awareness Month (make sure there are enough copies for all participants)
 5. Sign-in sheet
- E. Hold the House Party!
- F. Follow up: thank speakers, summarize commitments

The Webinar Option

If your group includes an organization that has access to a webinar system, you might also consider hosting your Attendance Awareness House Party as a webinar to expand the reach of your coalition, especially if participants are geographically spread out and hard to gather in one place.

Use the following materials to ensure that the webinar is well-attended and garners support from participants:

- Checklist for planning a successful webinar (see below)
- [Sample PowerPoints that can be tailored to include local information](#)
- [Attendance Works video](#)

Checklist for Planning a Successful Webinar

1. Determine the audience you are trying to reach. Is a webinar the best way to reach this group or would a face-to-face meeting be better?
2. Decide who will host the webinar. Consider asking a group with an extensive community network such as the local United Way to cosponsor the webinar.
3. Recruit 1-2 local speakers who can provide vivid examples of how community members working together can improve attendance. Speakers may be mayors, superintendents, school board members, principals, local business leaders, pediatricians or after-school providers. What's important is finding someone who can talk with conviction about why attendance is an important issue for your community or group to rally around.
4. Publicize the webinar widely at least 2-3 weeks in advance. Be sure to collect contact information for participants at registration so you can follow up afterwards.
5. Create a simple agenda and make sure the speakers are familiar with the webinar technology. A short practice session is always a good idea.
6. Be sure to include "Action Steps" that you want webinar participants to take as a result of the presentation.
7. Share the recording of the webinar so that people who could not attend can view it. Be sure to include your contact information.