

Send the Message that Showing Up Matters!



What are the Key Messages 2021?

This school year, the number of students who have been absent and missed out on significant amounts of learning is alarming and unprecedented. Making sure students don't fall further behind this year requires ensuring they can access instruction even if they must stay home due to illness, quarantine or even a natural disaster.

Regular attendance and participation, at any grade level, provides students an opportunity to learn and to reach for their dreams. When students are chronically absent, (missing 10% or more of the school year), starting as early as preschool and kindergarten, they are at risk of not reading proficiently by third grade, poor achievement in middle school and dropping out of high school.

Monitoring when students miss opportunities to learn is an invaluable tool for strengthening the efforts of educators, community partners and families to reduce the adverse impacts of the pandemic. We recommend that leaders expand the collection of student metrics to paint a picture of whether children are benefitting from learning opportunities and allow daily attendance taking for in-person and distance learning. Learn more about the [five key metrics here](#).

Chronic absence is a call to action that we can and must address if we want all children and youth to benefit fully from an education that prepares them for success in school, work and life. Everyone can notice when absences start adding up and ensure steps are taken to address attendance barriers.

To reflect the key role attendance plays in recovery, the 2021 Attendance Awareness Campaign theme is Rebound with Attendance! Below are key messages that everyone – districts, schools, preschools, health providers, public agencies and advocates, afterschool programs, community and service organizations, faith-based institutions, elected officials, businesses and families – can use this year to rally their school communities to engage and support students and families in order to improve attendance and achievement.

- 1. Chronic absence reflects and contributes to educational inequity.**
 - a. Absenteeism is a lost opportunity to learn. We can't afford to think of absenteeism as merely a lack of compliance with school rules.
 - b. We must ensure students can continue learning while they are at home due to quarantine, illness or a natural disaster.
 - c. Reestablishing consistent, predictable routines for learning every day is essential to attendance and participation in all modes of learning.
 - d. All of us should examine and address current or historical patterns of racism, bias and discrimination that create barriers and contribute to poor attendance.

- 2. Building strong, trusting relationships that promote a feeling of belonging is fundamental to improving student attendance and engagement.**
 - a. Recognize families as essential partners. Establish reciprocal relationships to support student learning at home and in school.
 - b. Responding to the social-emotional learning needs of students, families and staff is essential if we want children and youth to benefit fully from education. This need has only intensified since the pandemic.
 - c. Building relationships that nurture a sense of belonging takes time. Start in the spring and continue throughout the school year.

3. **Students are more likely to attend school if they feel safe, connected and supported.**
 - a. School staff, especially teachers, play a primary role in creating an engaging, supportive school climate that motivates students to attend, fosters a belief that students can achieve, and encourages families to become and stay involved.
 - b. Community and local government partners can help to ensure that all students are welcomed, affirmed and feel they belong in school.
 - c. Students will become engaged in learning when given positive, supportive conditions, with access to individualized learning and behavioral supports.

4. **A positive, problem-solving approach driven by data will improve attendance.**
 - a. Chronic absence, (missing just 2 days per month or 18 days over the school year), is easily masked by average attendance rates and truancy.
 - b. Monitoring chronic absence data for in-person and remote learning helps identify barriers to learning. The data also informs decisions about Covid-19 recovery resources and continuous improvement.
 - c. Use multiple measures, (chronic absence, home contact information, technical connectivity, relationships to school staff and participation in distance learning), to monitor whether outreach, extra support and enrichment is needed to ensure academic success. Learn more about [Monitoring Attendance in Distance Learning](#) on our website.
 - d. When families, caregivers, educators and community partners monitor which and how many students are missing too much school, they become more successful at developing strategies to reduce chronic absence.

5. **Keeping students, families and school staff physically and emotionally healthy supports attendance.**
 - a. Follow the advice of local health agencies and districts regarding clean environments and how to care for students who become ill when school is in person.
 - b. Addressing fears about Covid-19 among students and families will increase the likelihood that families will enroll and that they will support in-person attendance at the start of the school year.
 - c. A proactive approach to mental health will help students focus and learn.
 - d. Health professionals can be allies for communicating with parents, caregivers and educators about when students should stay home and when to return to school after being sick.

6. **When the whole community collaborates with families and schools, we can overcome barriers to attendance and engagement.**
 - a. Governments, public agencies and community partners can address barriers to being in school by providing food, access to physical and mental health care, disability-specific services, support for foster and unstably-housed youth, financial assistance, access to online learning and other supports for students and families.
 - b. Districts can share chronic absence data to guide investments from public agencies and community partners.
 - c. State leaders can encourage the availability of timely data, support professional development, and allocate funds and programs to address the school or community conditions that contribute to chronic absence.
 - d. Leaders at all levels and from every sector can call for a positive, prevention-oriented approach including participating in the national Attendance Awareness Campaign.

