

Families can be hard to reach for different reasons. They may be highly mobile or work during early morning or evening hours. They may not speak or read English well. Some may want to avoid contact with schools or social workers due to negative interactions in the past or fears of government agencies. Is your school having trouble getting contact information for parents or guardians of chronically absent kids? Check out these tried and true tips from teachers, advocates, and school officials from around the country.

Start with the basics:

- Ask students for their home phone number, as well as any relevant cell phone numbers.
- Talk to a chronically absent student's siblings if you can't reach the actual student.
- Look at school forms – accurate phone numbers are often on free and reduced lunch forms.

Seek out the parents:

- For younger children, approach the person who picks up the child.
- Send a letter home asking parents to provide up to date emergency numbers and contact information. Emphasize the importance of being able to reach them if their child gets sick or has an accident at school. Inform them of their legal obligation to provide up- to-date emergency numbers and contact information. Make sure the letter is in the family's home language and uses plain, easy-to-understand terms.
- If you are scheduling a home visit, be sure to verify the family's contact information and who to call in case of emergency.
- Try school based attendance outreach workers to do home visits or talk to community members to find information.
- Enlist trusted messengers to help reach out. Trusted messengers can include teachers who have built a positive relationship in previous years, family liaisons, afterschool providers, coaches, other parents, or respected elders such as grandmas, aunts, or uncles. Look for people who have credibility with families who can reassure families that your outreach efforts are intended to help their child, not punish them or harm their families. In many communities, families worry that they will be fined or taken to court or, worse yet, their children will be taken away.

Get creative:

- If an event is coming up that parents are likely to call about, such as school picture day, be sure to alert office workers to ask parents for their contact information.
- Use address information to find and get in touch with families who live near chronically absent kids whose parents you're having a hard time reaching.

Ideas and tips from Sarah Jonas, Debra Duardo, and Ken Seeley.