

Help Send the Message that Going to School Every Day Matters for Success in School and Life - It's Time to Team Up for Attendance!

Key Concepts & Core Messages 2018



Improving student attendance is an essential, cost-effective but too often overlooked strategy for ensuring our students are on-track to learn and succeed. Nationwide, as many as one out of seven students are chronically absent. When students are chronically absent they are missing on average two or more days a month, or 10 percent or more of school days over the academic year. Chronic absence is a leading, early warning indicator of academic trouble and later dropout.

Chronic absence is a problem we can solve. Everyone can make a difference by building awareness that going to school every day, preventing absences whenever possible, and using data to activate supports is vital for student success. Reducing chronic absence is critical to ensuring that all students and their families can realize their hopes and dreams for academic success and opportunity.

Below are key messages that everyone – districts, schools, preschools, public agencies, community organizations, faith-based institutions, elected officials, businesses and families—can use to help spread the word during the first month of school and throughout the year.



1. **Good attendance helps children do well in school and eventually in the workplace.** Good attendance matters for school success, starting as early as prekindergarten and throughout elementary school, and helps students stay on the path to academic success. By middle and high school, poor attendance is a leading indicator of dropout. Absences represent lost opportunities to learn in the classroom.



2. **Students are at academic risk if they miss 10 percent or more of the school year, or about 18 days a year.** Once too many absences occur, they can affect learning, regardless of whether absences are excused or unexcused.
 - » Sporadic, not just consecutive, absences matter. Before you know it, just missing two or more days every month can add up to missing 10 percent of the school year.
 - » Prevent absences whenever possible. Some absences are unavoidable, for example, due to serious or a contagious illness. But some absences may be preventable by, for example, helping families resolve transportation challenges.



3. **Relationship building is fundamental to any strategy for improving student attendance.** Trusting relationships – whether with teachers, mentors, coaches or other caring adults – are critical to encouraging families and students to pay attention to absences adding up and to seek out help to overcome barriers to attendance. Trusting relationships help motivate attendance even when it isn't easy to get to class.



4. **The key to success is avoiding blame and taking a proactive, positive, data driven, problem-solving approach.** Taking a positive, not punitive approach is essential to having honest conversations about what keeps students from getting to school so solutions can be put in place. Data, both quantitative and qualitative, can show us where absenteeism is most concentrated (by school, grade, ethnicity, geography, income, etc.) and help us assess and identify the causes of absenteeism.



5. Poor health and undiagnosed conditions can cause too many absences.

Even when absences are excused, missing too much school can lead children to fall behind. Challenges related to poor physical, dental and mental health are leading reasons students miss too much school. Health professionals can convey to families the importance of avoiding unnecessary absences, help families keep students healthy and secure needed services.



6. Chronic absence does not just affect the students who miss school.

If too many students are chronically absent, it slows down instruction, as teachers are likely to repeat material for students who have missed too much school. This makes it harder for students to learn and stay engaged and teachers to teach.



7. Educators and families need to monitor how many days each student misses school for any reason – excused, unexcused or suspensions – so we can intervene early.

Districts and schools should use data to identify how many and which students are chronically absent to provide extra support where it is needed. Families should track how many days their children have missed so they are aware of when they should take action. We can't afford to think of absenteeism as merely a lack of compliance with school rules or a loss of funding.



8. Reducing chronic absence is essential to ensuring more equitable outcomes.

Children from low-income communities are more likely to face systemic barriers to getting to school, and have higher levels of chronic absence starting as early as prekindergarten. Their families are less likely to have resources to help make up for time lost in the classroom. Chronic absence data can be used to trigger interventions so students receive the supports they need before they fall behind academically.



9. States can lead the way and encourage districts and schools to take action to improve student attendance.

State leaders can ensure availability of timely data, support professional development, and allocate public and community resources to address chronic absence. Chief state school officers can call for a positive, prevention-oriented approach, including participating in Attendance Awareness Month.



10. Chronic absence is a problem we can solve when the whole community works with families and schools.

All of us can make a difference by helping create a positive school climate that engages students and families in learning and sets the expectation that attendance matters. Community partners can help families overcome tough barriers, such as limited access to health care, hunger, unstable housing, poor transportation or neighborhood violence.

