Send the Message that Showing Up Matters!

PRESENT, ENGAGED AND SUPPORTED!

ATTENDANCE AWARENESS CAMPAIGN 2020

What are the Key Messages 2020?

This year more than ever before, there is a great need to invest in the transition back to school for both students and families. Every student and family experienced some level of stress, while others have experienced deep trauma from family illness, death and loss of income.

During the 2020-2021 school year, education may occur in classrooms, virtually or as a combination. School transitions in and out of classrooms may occur more than once. New research shows that many students could begin the new school year significantly behind in their academic learning. As protests over racism demonstrate, our public institutions, including schools have not adequately addressed the systemic barriers that limit access and equitable opportunities.

Poor attendance is an alert that students and families may face barriers to accessing rich and supportive learning opportunities, whether in or out of school, especially if they live in poverty, experience racial discrimination or have disabilities. Monitoring attendance and active student engagement will need to take multiple forms and reflect the mode of instruction. Find our new framework for monitoring attendance during the pandemic.

Below are key messages that everyone can use this year to encourage their school communities to engage and support students in order to improve attendance, nurture development and promote learning. We use "participation" to describe "taking part in distance learning activities."

1. **Supporting regular attendance and monitoring absenteeism reduces educational inequities.**
   a. A consistent and predictable routine for learning every day gives children a reassuring sense of stability which many lost when school buildings closed.
   b. Chronic absence (missing 10% or more of school) leads to students not reading proficiently by third grade, course failure in middle school and dropout in high school.
   c. Absenteeism is a lost opportunity to learn. We can't afford to think of absenteeism as merely a lack of compliance with school rules.

2. **Building strong, trusting relationships that promote belonging is fundamental to improving student attendance and participation.**
   a. Parents and caregivers are one of the most underutilized resources in education. Establishing ongoing communication with families/caregivers and welcoming them as partners helps ensure that students are supported at home and in school.
   b. Strong, trusting relationships motivate students to attend school even when it isn't easy to get to class or participate in distance learning.
   c. Caring adults, such as teachers, mentors and afterschool providers are critical to encouraging families and students to pay attention to absences adding up and to seek out help to overcome barriers.
   d. Responding to the social-emotional learning goals and needs of students, families and staff is essential, especially during the transition into this new school year, if we want children and youth to benefit fully from education.

3. **Students are more likely to attend school if they feel safe (emotionally + physically), connected, supported, and are encouraged to believe they can learn and achieve.**
   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. Educators and community partners can ensure that all students are welcome and feel they belong in school. Given positive, supportive conditions, students will become engaged in learning.

4. **Reducing health related absences is key because illness is the top reason students and families give for missing school.**
   a. Addressing fears about Covid-19 among students and families as they return to school for the start of the school year, and through any subsequent school closures, will help students focus and learn.
   b. Follow the advice of local health agencies and districts regarding clean environments and how to handle students who become ill if your building is open.
   c. Health professionals, particularly pediatricians and nurses, are allies for communicating with caregivers and schools about when students should stay home and when to return to school after being sick.

5. **The key to success is a proactive, positive, data driven, problem-solving approach.**
   a. Although chronic absence has been waived as a reportable accountability measure during this crisis, existing chronic absence data, collected before schools closed, and other metrics of involvement in remote learning, can be important assets in assessing where help may be needed.
   b. During remote learning, employ multiple measures (e.g. prior chronic absence, contact, connectivity, relationships and participation) to monitor whether extra support and enrichment is needed to ensure academic success. Read the definition of these measures and learn more about Monitoring Attendance in Distance Learning on our website.
   c. Families, educators and community partners need to monitor which and how many students are missing too much school and which populations of students and families are most affected.

6. **Poor participation is a problem we can solve when the whole community collaborates with families and schools to support the transitions into school, whether it be in person, virtual or a blend.**
   a. Governments, public agencies and community partners can address barriers to being in school by providing food, access to physical and mental health care, financial assistance and other supports for students and families.
   b. Districts can share data on which schools and populations of students are struggling with absenteeism to guide investments from public agencies and community partners.
   c. State leaders can encourage the availability of timely data, support professional development, offer trauma resources, 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.