

Send the Message That Showing Up Matters!



Key Concepts & Messages

Starting as early as preschool and kindergarten, regular attendance is essential for students gaining the academic and social skills they need to thrive. Research shows that when students are chronically absent (missing 10% or more of the school year or 18 days over an entire school year), they are less likely to read proficiently by third grade, achieve in middle school and graduate from high school.

In addition to the well-publicized learning losses, students also lost opportunities to develop socially and gain skills in problem-solving and self-regulation, all which are needed to grow and learn.

Since the pandemic, national data shows chronic absence almost doubled from 8 million in 2018-19 to 14.7 million students nationwide in 2021-22. That's one out of three students. Absenteeism has surged among all student groups, at every economic level. Black, Latino, and Native American students, students living in poverty, students with disabilities and English language learners have been especially affected. Available state data from 2022-23 shows only a slight decrease.

Without efforts to reduce chronic absence, education investments designed to improve students' academic and social losses will miss their mark.

We can nurture a culture of engagement and attendance at school. This starts by helping everyone in the community – families, elected officials, businesses, nonprofits, religious leaders and more – recognize they have a stake and a role, because schools certainly can't do it alone. We all prosper when children and youth, regardless of their race, ethnicity, neighborhood, family income or disability status, have the opportunity to gain skills and abilities that prepare them for success in school, work and life.

Below are key messages that everyone can use this year to raise awareness about the urgent need to partner with students and families in order to improve attendance, engagement and academic achievement.

1. Responding to absences with care and support, not blame, can motivate students and families to show up to school.



- a. Partner with students and families to understand and address the challenges they face inside or outside school that cause them to miss school and disengage.
- b. Use chronic absence data to help identify which student groups and families need extra support and engagement.

2. Ensuring children and youth get to school every day provides opportunities for students to progress academically, develop socially and reach for their dreams.



- a. Clearly communicate that attending school daily matters. Families may not understand the true impact of missing just two days a month until it's too late, or may think absences aren't a problem unless they are unexcused.
- b. Everyone in the community should be able to explain that regular school attendance offers students opportunities to learn and achieve, and create routines that can reduce anxiety and instill a lifelong habit of showing up.
- c. Schools can be hubs that offer families resources on campus and in the community to help overcome barriers to showing up to school.

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3. Building trusting relationships that promote belonging is critical for improving student attendance.



- a. Recognize families as essential partners who can support student learning at home and in school.
- b. Developing relationships takes time. Begin when you can and continue your efforts throughout the school year.
- c. Mentoring by adults and peers, especially as part of a school-wide effort, can be leveraged as an engagement and attendance strategy.

4. Supporting the health and well-being of students, families and school staff improves attendance.



- e. Help students and families take steps to stay physically and emotionally healthy and avoid illness.
- f. Expand access to school-linked and school-based health and mental health services.
- g. Work with health professionals to communicate with parents, caregivers and educators about when students should stay home and when to return to school after being sick.
- h. Invest in clean, well-ventilated school buildings.

5. Students are more likely to attend school if they feel safe, connected and engaged in learning.



- a. All school staff members, especially teachers, can foster a belief among students that they can achieve.
- b. Students engage in learning when given supportive conditions with access to individualized learning and behavioral support when needed.
- c. Consistent, predictable routines can create a sense of safety.

6. A problem-solving approach driven by data will improve attendance.



- a. Make chronic absence data public so everyone is aware of the size and scale of the attendance and engagement challenge.
- b. Regularly review data. Identify which student groups have so many absences that they require early intervention.
- c. Chronic absence is easily masked by average attendance rates and truancy (unexcused absences).
- d. Chronic absence is a complex problem. Adopt a tiered approach that starts with investing in positive conditions for learning for the whole school or district.

7. When the whole community collaborates with families and schools, we can overcome systemic barriers to attendance and engagement.



- a. Local leaders, public agencies and community organizations are essential partners for addressing attendance barriers (such as transportation, housing and food insecurity) and ensuring that positive conditions for learning are in place for all students.
- b. Districts can share chronic absence data to guide investments from public agencies and community partners.
- c. State leaders can promote the availability of timely data, support professional development, allocate funds and implement programs to ensure positive conditions for learning are in place.
- d. Leaders from every sector can call for a positive, prevention-oriented approach, including participating in the national Attendance Awareness Campaign.

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