

For

Housing Authorities

Why Attendance Matters



The Attendance Imperative:

Attending school regularly is essential to students gaining the academic and social skills they need to succeed. Reducing absenteeism is a simple, cost-effective, but often overlooked strategy for improving academic performance. Starting as early as preschool and kindergarten, chronic absence—missing 10 percent of the academic year—can leave third graders unable to read proficiently, sixth graders struggling with coursework and high school students off track for graduation.

Chronic absence is especially problematic among students living in poverty who are most likely to have poor attendance over multiple years and least likely to have the resources to make up for the lost time in the classroom. In some communities, chronic absence affects more than one out of four children.

Unfortunately, many schools and communities don't realize the extent of the problem because districts don't look at all the right data. They're paying attention to how many students show up every day and how many skip school, but not how many miss so much school in excused and unexcused absences that they're at risk academically.

The good news is chronic absence can be significantly reduced when schools, families and community partners work together to monitor data, nurture a habit of regular attendance and address hurdles that keep children from getting to school every day such as lack of access to health care, unhealthy environmental conditions, unreliable transportation, housing instability or the lack of safe paths to school.

Why should we (housing authorities) care?

- **It is an anti-poverty strategy:** Housing authorities nationwide provide homes for more than 1 million children younger than 9 from low-income families. Education is the best chance for these children to break the cycle of poverty. But they can't learn if they're not in school regularly.
- **It improves safety:** When students aren't in school, it increases the likelihood that they will be involved in crime—either as a victim or a perpetrator. Keeping students in school every day makes for safer communities.
- **It leverages your connection to families:** Housing authorities are uniquely positioned to address chronic absence, both as landlords to many low-income families and managers of housing vouchers for others.



How can we (housing authorities) can make a difference:

1. Convey the importance of going to school every day.

- Put up posters in your offices or hand out fliers to tenants and clients encouraging good attendance.
- Host a back to school picnic or put door hangers on every apartment reminding parents when school starts and what they need to do to make sure their children are ready.

2. Help parents get kids to school.

- In housing projects, ask your managers and staff to keep an eye out for children who aren't in school. Talk to families about why students are missing class.
- If traffic or community violence makes the walk to school dangerous, organize parents and other volunteers to walk with children.
- Recruit parents to become "attendance ambassadors," role models and liaisons between schools and other parents.
- Eliminate mold and other asthma triggers that contribute to absenteeism.

3. Leverage afterschool and summer programming to improve school attendance.

- Make sure afterschool and summer programming staff are equipped to engage in messaging about the importance of attendance including helping families know when school starts.
- Use summer and afterschool programming to reach out to chronically absent students and connect them to health and social supports that will improve attendance during the school year.

4. Maintain housing stability throughout the school year.

- When possible, schedule changes in housing vouchers or public housing for summer, so that children don't have to move mid year.
- Provide support for families who have to move during the school year so that children don't miss too much school.
- Help homeless families find a stable housing situation.

5. Partner with schools.

- Create data-sharing agreements with local school districts that allow for tracking grades, test scores and attendance for students in your projects or housing vouchers.
- Join a coalition taking a community-wide approach to reducing chronic absence.
- Target schools in your community with high rates of chronic absence and provide support to students and families there.

6. Engage community based service providers.

- Share resources with the community-based organizations that provide services to the families living in housing.
- Provide them with strategies for communicating with families about the importance of good attendance.

For more information, go to Attendance Works at <http://www.attendanceworks.org>. Please email phyllis@attendanceworks.org if you have promising examples to share about how housing authorities can improve student attendance.

