

Count Us In!

Working Together To Show
That Every School Day Matters

2015



Introduction

Attendance is essential to school success, but too often students, parents and schools do not realize how quickly absences – excused and unexcused – can add up to academic trouble. Chronic absence – missing 10 percent of the school year, or just 2-3 days every month—can translate into third-graders unable to master reading, sixth-graders failing courses and ninth-graders dropping out of high school.¹ Low-income students, who most depend on school for opportunities to learn, are especially harmed when they miss too much instruction.²

Chronic absence is an alarming, largely overlooked problem that is preventing too many children from having an opportunity to learn and succeed. It affects 5 million to 7.5 million students— more than one in 10 – nationwide.³ This is not just a problem in middle and high school: It starts in kindergarten and preschool. It is a problem in districts of every size, urban, suburban and rural.⁴ In every state, missing too much school correlates with weaker standardized test scores.⁵

Stemming this crisis is essential to our country's economic and educational future. The good news is this is a problem we can fix when schools and communities work with students and families, starting in the early grades, to identify barriers to getting to school, help students overcome these barriers and cultivate a culture of attendance that encourages showing up every day even when it isn't easy. This starts by helping everyone in the community recognize they have a stake and a role. It requires careful attention to data and strategic, locally tailored interventions to address attendance challenges.

We're using the third-annual Attendance Awareness Month to encourage schools and communities to "Map the Attendance Gap," determining *who*, *when* and *where* students are most likely to miss too much school. *Why* is also important: What challenges or misconceptions are keeping students from getting to class? We also want to know *how* schools and communities are turning attendance around so that all students have an equal opportunity to learn.

Everybody has a role to play: parents, schools, healthcare providers, city agencies, nonprofits and foundations, afterschool programs, businesses, faith leaders and others. While it is important to emphasize attendance all year, the start of the school year is essential. Research shows that poor attendance in the first month can predict trends for the entire year.

For the past two years, Attendance Awareness Month has engaged hundreds of schools and communities. This year, our expanded toolkit offers:

- Ideas for summits and outreach to families
- Posters and contests to encourage students
- Template proclamations from mayors, school boards or superintendents
- Tools for principals and teachers
- New tools for preschool providers
- Free data tools for Mapping the Gap
- Strategies for bringing together community stakeholders

Nearly 50 national organizations are working together to ensure everyone can participate: from a single school to a citywide coalition to a national organization.

Video

Attendance Works video spells out how chronic absence affects achievement—and how schools and communities can turn the problem around.



How to Use the Toolkit

This toolkit is designed to help you plan your involvement and enlist stakeholders who can help get the message out. You can start planning now for activities in September. We offer a variety of options for promoting good attendance. No school, community or organization should feel that they need to accomplish all of them. Instead, choose which options work best for you and build the support you need to do more in the following year.

You can:

- **Download** the entire toolkit.
- **Browse** the Table of Contents and go directly to items that interest you
- **View** our calendar of What to Do When
- **Go** to our Activities by Stakeholder by clicking on the icons below:



Mayor and Elected Officials



Businesses and Chambers of Commerce



Superintendents and School Boards



Local Philanthropy



School Principals and Teachers



Community Organizations and Faith-Based Groups



Out-of-School Time Programs



Health Care Providers



Early Childhood Educators



Housing Authorities

This is a living toolkit that we anticipate will be revised and improved over time. We encourage schools, partners and communities to contribute ideas for improving attendance and to share your successes. Submit your ideas, examples or question [here](#).

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I. Why Attendance & Chronic Absence

It's a big problem: Nationally, an estimated 5 million to 7.5 million students are at risk academically each year because they are chronically absent—missing 10 percent or more of school days in excused and unexcused absences. Starting as early as kindergarten and prekindergarten, chronic absence can have adverse consequences for academic achievement, research shows. By third grade, chronically absent students, especially those who have experienced multiple years of poor attendance, are less likely to read on grade level. By sixth grade, chronic absence becomes a warning sign that a student will drop out of high school. By ninth grade, it's a better indicator than eighth-grade test scores. Children with certain risk factors—including poverty, chronic health conditions, homelessness, frequent moves and disabilities—are especially hard hit since they can least afford to miss school. Children of color are also disproportionately affected. In school districts where state funding is determined by average daily attendance, chronic absence costs schools millions of dollars each year.

But it's often overlooked: Too many schools and districts have no idea how big the chronic absence problem is because they don't track how many students are missing too much school—for any reason, excused or unexcused. Instead they look at average daily attendance (the percentage of students who show up every day) or at truancy (unexcused absences).

We know what to do: Schools, families and communities can work together to identify and overcome barriers to attendance while building a positive culture of attendance. In New York City, the right interventions, particularly personalized outreach and support, improved attendance and academic performance. Starting with prevention is more effective and less costly than punitive efforts involving fines and court appearances. Legal action should always be the last resort. Preventive steps include:

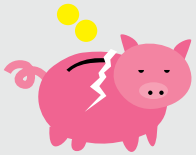
- Educating students and families that regular attendance, starting as early as preschool, is essential to long-term academic success.
- Providing incentives and recognition for students and schools when attendance improves.
- Using student data to identify when students are missing too much school and to trigger early outreach, support and intervention for at-risk students.
- Using school-level data to identify schools with an unusually large number of chronically absent students and the "bright spots" with good attendance despite challenging conditions.
- Tapping health providers, business leaders, housing authorities and other community partners to support schools and families.

1 in 10 kids in kindergarten and 1st grade are chronically absent.

In some schools, it's as high as **1 in 4**.

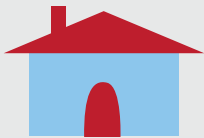


To view the full infographic, visit: <http://www.attendanceworks.org/infographic/>



2 in 10

low-income kids miss too much school. They're also more likely to suffer academically.



2.5 in 10

homeless kids are chronically absent.



4 in 10

transient kids miss too much school when families move.

We know what to say: All parents care about their children's success in life. But they often do not realize how quickly absences can add up to academic trouble. For example, many parents don't see absences as a problem if they are excused or if they are not on consecutive days, according to results from focus groups. Parents also don't always make the connection between attendance in elementary and middle school and graduation from high school. Likewise, students don't realize the cost of absenteeism. Nearly half the older students surveyed by *Get Schooled* believe they could skip a day a week and still not suffer academically. The message we must deliver is that every absence matters at every grade level. Every day missed is a day of instruction missed, a day of classroom interaction with students and teachers that can't be recovered. A critical intervention can be ensuring that parents and older students know exactly how many days of school have been missed, how that compares to other students and at what point too many absences become problematic.

The time is right: While it is important to send a message all year that attendance matters, the start of the school year is crucial because that is when schools and communities lay out expectations for the coming year and begin to develop a culture of attendance. Rallies or assemblies provide perfect opportunities to share this message with students, parents and staff. School officials are often interviewed by the media at this time, another chance to reach the entire community. September is also the right time to begin paying attention to attendance trends. Educators can predict who might struggle with attendance by looking at past year absenteeism—or absences in the first month of school. Research shows that two to four missed days in that first month can predict chronic absence throughout the year. Beyond individual students, districts should use data to identify which schools, grades and groups of students most need a more comprehensive approach that addresses barriers to going to school while encouraging daily attendance.

II. Who Should Use this Toolkit?

This toolkit is designed with four main audiences in mind:

1. Teachers, principals, superintendents and school boards

who see the corrosive effects of absenteeism in their schools. The toolkit provides tailored materials for dealing with attendance in back-to-school letters, meetings and at parent-teacher conferences. School superintendents can sign on to the Call to Action sponsored by Attendance Works and the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading. With support from school boards, they own the issue, drive with data and mobilize the community.

2. Any community group or agency

that works with families and can deliver positive messages about why going to school every day is so important for success in school and life. It could, for instance, be a doctor's office, a housing authority, a faith-based institution, a preschool or an after-school program. Our hope is that you will use this toolkit to determine how to build these messages into your communications and everyday interactions starting in September.

3. National organizations can build attendance into their own communications as well as encourage their members to address this issue by increasing awareness of why chronic absence matters and promoting strategies to incorporate attendance into current activities and metrics. Groups can also sign on as coordinating partners.

School Success

In New Britain, Connecticut, the school district's focus on attendance in elementary school reduced chronic absence rates by double digits. The biggest drop came in kindergarten, where rates fell from 30 to 13%; reading scores also improved. The district's approach informed a statewide initiative to hold struggling districts accountable for improving attendance.

Community Success

In Lee County, Florida, a set of Head Start programs increased attendance dramatically with a focused campaign to educate parents and students about the importance of showing up every day.

National Success

Reach Out and Read, a network of pediatricians that promotes early literacy, recently has begun incorporating attendance into its handouts and discussions with parents.

4. Local leaders and organizations can convene and engage the entire community in working together to address school attendance. If the resources and conditions are ripe for a community campaign, collaboration can lead to greater impact. Among the leaders who are well positioned to spearhead a campaign are:

- **Mayors and other local elected leaders** can demonstrate their commitment to partnering with schools to improve educational outcomes, since good schools are essential to a strong local economy.
- **Chief state school officers** and other leaders can use their bully pulpit for spreading the word about the importance of going to school every day and promoting Attendance Awareness Month.
- **Chambers of Commerce** can demonstrate their commitment to the local community and the need to promote the development of skills that will be needed in the future workforce.
- **Local philanthropy and United Way chapters** can convene grantees and community partners around an issue that is easy to understand and monitor.

In the Pittsburgh area, the United Way of Allegheny County launched a county-wide Be There campaign to target chronic absence, initiating supports in targeted schools, while creating events celebrating attendance throughout the year, including Attendance Awareness Month.

In New York City, the lessons from then-Mayor Michael Bloomberg's successful attendance pilot have been shared citywide, with an emphasis on data tracking, attendance committees and Success Mentors. A new community schools initiative championed by Mayor Bill de Blasio is using these strategies in 45 schools.



In California, the state Superintendent of Public Instruction, Attorney General, Health and Human Services Secretary and Chief Justice have committed to work collaborative to reduce chronic absence. Lawmakers approved a new school funding formula requiring California school districts to include chronic absence as an accountability metric.

Points of Light is expanding its Corps 18 program, which offers VISTA Corps members who mobilize and train volunteers to improve attendance and support children and communities in academic conditions that often lack quality resources and/or programs. The program equips volunteers with the right resources to support the right interventions that make a positive impact on student success.

Who Can Help?

In the schools:

- **Students and parents** can make attendance a priority and help other students.
- **Teachers** can deliver the message about good attendance in the classroom, take attendance every day in a caring manner and create incentives to encourage showing up.
- **Principals** can create an engaging school culture, offer incentives and use data to identify students or, in some cases, classrooms in need of extra support.
- **PTAs** can organize parent summits to expand awareness of how families can monitor chronic absence and help each other get their children to school.
- **Superintendents** can track chronic absence data district-wide and hold schools accountable for absenteeism.
- **School boards** can proclaim the importance of attendance and adopt policies to ensure chronic absence is monitored and addressed.
- **Chief state school officers** can advance awareness, data collection and capacity building to improve student attendance.

In local government:

- **Mayors and other elected leaders** can proclaim the importance of good attendance and convene a coalition to address absenteeism.
- **Social workers** can address family problems that are keeping students from getting to school.
- **Housing officials** can reach out to families with chronically absent students, help organize safe walks to school and publicize information (such as reminders about when school starts) that can help families avoid unnecessary absences.
- **Police officers** in dangerous neighborhoods can provide safer routes to school.
- **Transit agencies** can provide free passes to students who lack reliable transportation.

In the community:

- **Health care providers** can address chronic illness, such as asthma, and reinforce the importance of school attendance at children's annual checkups.
- **Afterschool providers** can help build a culture of attendance, reach out to chronically absent students and provide enriching activities that motivate students to show up for school.
- **Faith-based groups** can volunteer to help parents and mentor at-risk students.
- **Businesses** can donate incentives for improved attendance and share the message with their employees.
- **National service members** (e.g. AmeriCorps & VISTA) can provide an extra shift of adults to support students at risk of dropping out.
- **Local foundations** can convene community members and underwrite the costs of attendance improvement efforts.
- **Media partners** can spread the word about the importance of good attendance.

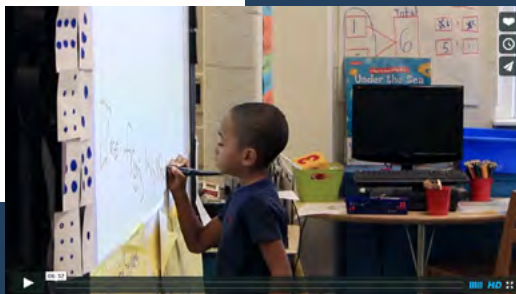
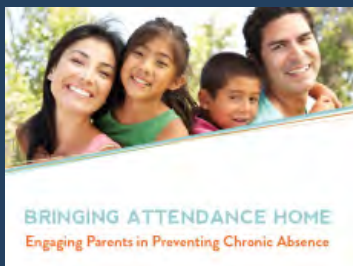
III. How Can We Deliver the Message?

1. Incorporate information about attendance into daily interactions with families

The responsibility for good attendance starts with families, and messaging efforts should start there, too. Parents want their children to succeed in school and life, but they often don't make the connection between absences and academic trouble, especially in the years before high school.

Help them make that connection through conversations in the community and by building a welcoming environment at school, in letters sent home and in parent-teacher conferences. PTAs can develop programs to educate parents and help families with barriers to attending school regularly. Business owners can talk to employees about the value of attendance. Community agencies and volunteers can help get the word out even before school starts.

Parent Engagement Toolkit and Video



Created with the help of practitioners who have worked successfully with families to improve attendance, [the toolkit](#) and [video](#) are filled with ideas, activities and materials that you can use to spark conversations with parents.

2. Attendance Incentives and Contests

The opening of school is an excellent time to put in place a strong system of incentives to encourage better attendance among students and their families or to make sure an existing system recognizes improved attendance, not just perfect attendance. Incentives and contests take advantage of the fact that students often respond better to concrete rewards and peer pressure than they do to lectures from parents and teachers.

Contests

- Sponsor a poster contest: Let students of all ages convey the importance of attendance
 - [Sample Posters from Baltimore](#)
- Sponsor a video contest: Let your middle and high school students create PSAs that the community can use during attendance month and beyond.
 - [Tips for Video Contests](#)
- Create an attendance month competition between classes, grades or local schools to see who can best improve attendance. The rewards can be as simple as an extra recess or as fancy as a raffle ticket for a new car. Businesses can donate gift certificates or movie tickets. Local celebrities and sports stars can visit the winning schools.
 - [Leveraging Sports Teams](#)
 - [Pittsburgh Attendance Challenge Toolkit](#)
- Get involved with [Get Schooled](#), a nonprofit that uses rock stars and celebrities to help reduce dropout rates. It offers celebrity wake-up calls and twice-yearly Attendance Challenges for secondary schools. The 12-week Fall 2015 challenge starts in October, so use September to prepare students for the contest. The challenge allows students and school communities to earn a celebrity principal for the day. Students can play educational games, brag about their amazing teachers, learn about various educational resources, and earn points as they improve their attendance.
 - [Get Schooled Toolkit](#)



Photo Credit: Get Schooled

In Baltimore, students at the [Maritime Industries Academy](#) increased attendance by a whopping 10 percent and won the National Attendance Challenge sponsored twice a year by Get Schooled. Their reward: a visit from rapper Sch**h**oolboy Q, who served as principal for a day. He urged the students to believe in themselves and work hard. And he shot some hoops with the basketball team.

3. Host Special Events

The new school year means back-to-school night for parents and assemblies for students. These are ideal times to convey the link between absenteeism and student achievement and to build a culture of attendance.

- **Parent summits or back-to-school nights.**

This is an opportunity to orient parents to school policies and connect them to helpful resources. Think of ways to provide incentives for parents who are trying to improve their children's attendance. If you have data for your school or community, share the information with parents. Or simply share what we know about the importance of good attendance.

In addition to the handouts listed above, here are some tools and materials:

- [Tips for school meetings](#)
- [Get Schooled Attendance Counts Calculator](#)
- [Talking points for principals](#)
- [Interactive parent exercises](#)
- [Attendance Imperative video](#)
- [Bringing Attendance Home video](#)

- **Student back-to-school assemblies.**

For students, use an assembly at the start of September to introduce the topic. Also use this opportunity to explain to students why attending school is so important. If possible, have some students speak about why going to school matters.

- [Talking points for principals and teachers addressing students](#)
- [Examples of student messaging](#)
- [Tips for developing incentives](#)
- [Attendance Rap Video](#)
- [Every Day Matters Video](#)

- **Parent-Teacher Conference.** These one-on-one conferences are an ideal time to talk to parents about the importance of attendance. Teachers can acknowledge parents whose children attend regularly or express concern and come up with a plan to improve attendance for chronically absent students. It is an ideal time to make sure parents are aware of programs in place, or school activities that promote attendance. The tips can also work for home visits or phone calls home.

- [Teaching Attendance Toolkit](#)
- [Tips for Taking Advantage of Parent-Teacher Conferences](#)
- [A Step-by-Step Guide for Teachers](#)
- [Promoting Attendance Through One-on-One Communications](#)

4. Publicly proclaim the importance of attendance and the establishment of September as Attendance Awareness Month

Mayors and other elected leaders, school boards and superintendents can signal the importance of school attendance by declaring that September is Attendance Awareness Month. Reach out to state legislators and education leaders. National and local organizations can also use the proclamations and disseminate them through their networks.

- [Template proclamations](#)

- **Attendance Exhibits.** Promote good attendance in a display in the lobby of city hall, the school district's central office, the main library or other public spaces. Retail shops and restaurants can put posters in their windows or on bulletin boards. If there is a student poster contest, decorate public spaces with the posters. Our Attendance Awareness Month Badge can be used in e-mail signatures and on websites.

You can use:

- [Attendance Works Info Graphic](#)
- [Attendance Awareness Month Banners & Posters](#)
- [Attendance Awareness Month Badges](#)
- [Campaign for Grade-Level Reading Banner](#)

Check out our banners and posters for you to download or print for free!



ATTENDANCE in the early grades

Who is Affected
Attendance is a key indicator of a child's readiness to learn. Children who miss school frequently are at a higher risk of not learning the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in school and in life.

Why It Matters
Children who miss school frequently are at a higher risk of not learning the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in school and in life. This is because missing school frequently can lead to a child falling behind in their learning. This can lead to a child not being able to read, write, and do math. This can lead to a child not being able to get a job or go to college.

What We Can Do
We can help children learn and do better in school by making sure they are in school every day. We can help them learn and do better in school by making sure they are in school every day. We can help them learn and do better in school by making sure they are in school every day.

ATTEND TODAY, ACHIEVE TOMORROW

GOOD SCHOOL ATTENDANCE MEANS...

PRESCHOOLERS
Must learn and develop good habits for elementary school.

ELEMENTARY STUDENTS
Learn and do well in school.

MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOLERS
Get ready for college and careers.

COLLEGE STUDENTS
Earn their degrees.

WORKERS
Get a good job.

Too many absences—excused or unexcused—can keep students from succeeding in school and in life. How many are too many? 10% of the school year—that's 18 missed days or 2 days a month—can knock students off track.

Attendance Works
www.attendanceworks.org



5. Develop media and public outreach to take place in September

Every year, print and broadcast reporters turn up looking for back-to-school stories. Suggest that this year's pieces focus on school attendance and the efforts by your organization or community to reduce absenteeism.

- **News Stories**
 - [The Facts about Attendance](#)
 - [Tips for dealing with the media](#)
 - [Template news releases](#)
- **Op-eds and blogs.** Compose a commentary stressing the importance of attendance and the role a school or community is playing to reduce absenteeism. If you can't sell it as an op-ed piece, shorten it and offer it as a guest blog or a letter to the editor. Remember TV and radio stations allow on-air commentaries.
 - [Template op-eds](#)
- **Social Media.** Post 30 tweets and Facebook entries about attendance data – one for every day in September. Use our hashtag: #schooleveryday and we'll retweet.
 - [Sample Tweets and Facebook Posts](#)
 - [Attendance Awareness Month Facebook Cover Photo](#)

- **Public Service Announcements.** We expect national partners to develop PSAs that will run on broadcast networks, but communities can develop their own announcements cheaply and easily.
 - [Instruction sheet on how to do radio PSAs](#)
 - [Instruction sheet on how to do TV PSAs](#)
 - [PSA scripts](#)
- **Public Television.** Local stations are often willing to partner with community initiatives. Contact your station and ask for support.

Sample Tweets for Attendance Month

7.5 million students miss 10% of school year nationwide. That's 135 million days total. <http://bit.ly/1oqfID7> #SchoolEveryDay

For poor kids, chronic absence in kindergarten = lower academic achievement through 5th grade. <http://bit.ly/1oqfID7> #SchoolEveryDay

Missing 10% of school days, just 2 days each month, can put children at risk of academic failure. <http://bit.ly/1oqfID7> #SchoolEveryDay



IV. How Can Educators Improve Attendance?



Teachers and early education providers play a key role in reducing chronic absence by teaching children – and reinforcing to parents – the value of attendance. Teachers witness how absences can disrupt learning, not just for the absent student but for the entire classroom. They can emphasize attendance from Day One, use parent teacher conferences to talk about attendance and promote a culture of attendance all year long. [Click here for our Teaching Attendance toolkit.](#)

Principals set the tone for the entire school, ensuring that students, parents and teachers know that attendance matters. That message can be conveyed by greeting families every morning, sending letters homes and making robocalls. Principals can call for the district to provide the data needed to identify at-risk students in need of support. They can also help identify and address systemic barriers and provide professional development to teachers. [Click here for our Leading Attendance toolkit.](#)

Superintendents play a pivotal role in monitoring and improving school attendance. Local superintendents can proclaim their support and help launch their local attendance awareness efforts by signing on to the Call to Action on Attendance sponsored by the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading and Attendance Works. Participation signals a commitment to owning the issue, mobilizing the community and driving with data. [Learn more and sign up here.](#)

School Boards can make reducing chronic absence a key policy objective and hold superintendents accountable for taking action to improve attendance. They can commission chronic absence reports and use the results to determine allocation of resources to address problem areas. They can also use chronic absence as a metric for school or superintendent success. [Click here to learn more.](#)

Chief state school officers can also help advance awareness and action to improve student attendance. They can use their position as a bully pulpit, promote participation in Attendance Awareness Month, produce and release statewide reports, and encourage local superintendents to sign on to the Call to Action. Several state chiefs lead the Advisory Committee on Ending Chronic Absence.

V. How Can We Engage the Community?

Walking School Bus, Springfield, Mass

If you are in a position to engage the full community in your attendance campaign, the broader approach can amplify your efforts. If possible, work with a cross-sector coalition to advance your plans. Whether you have a coalition or not, find ways to put tools in the hands of other agencies and organizations.

1. Mobilize a Community Coalition

- Determine who can take on the issue. If your community is participating in an existing effort focused on academic achievement or dropout prevention, such as Campaign for Grade-Level Reading or Grad Nation, tap the coalition in place to engage the community in improving attendance. All the right players might already be involved, or the coalition could consider using attendance as a way to engage additional partners.
 - [List of Grade-Level Reading Communities](#)
 - [List of Grad Nation Communities](#)
- Reach out to other existing coalitions. Networks already organized to reform schools, promote literacy, reduce dropout rates, address health needs and improve communities might offer enthusiastic partnership and leadership around addressing chronic absence. If your districts or schools are tracking early warning indicators, they're already paying attention to attendance.

In Grand Rapids, Michigan, the [Kent School Services Network](#) brings together school districts; funders; the United Way; and county health, mental health and social services agencies to help track chronic absence and intervene with the students, schools and communities most affected. Schools involved have seen absenteeism drop and test scores rise.

In central New Mexico, [Mission: Graduate](#) brought together more than 200 school districts, community organizations and partners for an attendance summit in January. The cradle-to-career partnership has produced videos with students urging other students that Every Day Matters.

In Vero Beach, Florida, the Moonshot Moment literacy coalition created a Think Tank and used a combination of home-spun materials, such as student-created slogans and handouts from the Attendance Awareness Month campaign to marshal support throughout the community.



- If no coalition exists to take on this issue, then consider launching your own; convene community partners who can help schools improve attendance.
 - [List of possible stakeholders](#)
 - [Sample invitation letter](#)
 - [Statements for Making the Case](#)
- Hold a meeting to discuss ideas and solicit buy-in. Consider using the house party approach:
 - [Host a House Party \(Sample Agenda\)](#)
 - [Key Messages](#)
 - [Attendance Works video](#)
 - [Sample PowerPoint](#)
- Use these materials and reports:
 - [The Facts about Chronic Absence](#)
 - [Research summary on chronic absence](#)
 - [Research summary on early grade attendance](#)
 - [The Importance of Being in School](#)
 - [Present, Engaged and Accounted For](#)
 - [Absences Add Up](#)
- Ideally you would provide data on the number and percent of chronically absent students in your community. If your district has not calculated this, then consider registering for these tools.
 - [Tools for crunching your data](#)

2. Create locally tailored schools and community partners toolkit

- Attendance Works has developed a template toolkit with handouts, activities and local resources that can be easily adapted to help schools and local partners reduce absenteeism. Some communities have adapted Attendance Works materials for local audiences.
 - [Template toolkit that communities can tailor](#)
 - [Local toolkit from Oakland](#)
 - [Toolkit from Contra Costa County](#)
 - [Toolkit from Solano County](#)
- Attendance Works has developed toolkits to guide principals and teachers working to improve chronic absence. Los Angeles and New York City have also created guides.
 - [Teaching Attendance Toolkit](#)
 - [Leading Attendance Toolkit](#)
 - [Power of Positive Connections](#)
 - [L.A. Unified School District Toolkit](#)
 - [New York City Toolkit](#)
- New York City developed a toolkit for community and faith-based groups.
 - [Toolkit for Community and Faith-Based Groups](#)

VI. How Can We Identify & Help Students with Poor Attendance

1. Organize and train volunteers or national service members to reach out to absent students and families

Reaching out to chronically absent students and their families often takes an extra shift of adults--whether they are volunteers from faith-based groups, mentors from the business world or national service members from City Year.

General Mentoring Resources

- [Attendance Action Planning Worksheet](#)
- [New York City Principals' Handbook on Success Mentors](#)
- [Strategies for leveraging volunteers and national service](#)
- [Sample confidentiality form for community-based organizations](#)
- [Sample confidentiality form for mentors](#)
- [City Year Student Engagement Toolkit](#)
- [RAMP Mentoring Sheet](#)
- [MENTOR toolkit for managers](#)
- [MENTOR tips for individuals](#)
- [Check & Connect toolkit](#)
- [Check & Connect monitoring form](#)

Models

- **Check & Connect** assigns trained mentors to at-risk students to improve engagement with school and learning through close monitoring of their attendance, behavior, and grades.
- **City Year** uses AmeriCorps members who commit to a year of full-time service in schools, where they work as tutors, mentors and role models. Attendance is a key focus.
- **RAMP**: The Ready to Achieve Mentoring Program uses group, peer and individual mentoring to build on career-development efforts by schools and employers.

2. Schools can assemble or reconvene attendance teams and host a first meeting in September

Student attendance teams provide a vehicle to keep track of school-wide attendance trends, as well as what's going on with chronically absent students. September is a great time to identify students who were chronically absent in the past year or in the first month of school.

- [Tips for an effective attendance team](#)
- [New York City Principal's Handbook on attendance teams](#)
- [Tips for understanding contributing factors](#)
- [Handout on breaking barriers to attendance](#)
- [Power of Positive Connections](#)



In New York City, schools draw on City Year, Experience Corps and groups to provide Success Mentors for chronically absent students. The program has shown extraordinary results: Students with mentors attended nearly 12,000 more days in a school year than similar students without the extra support. For a how-to guide, click [here](#).

3. Ensure that every school identifies students at risk of chronic absence and reaches out to parents

The best way to identify students with poor attendance is to calculate the data that schools are already collecting. In addition to looking at school-wide averages, as most schools do, shift the data to see how many students missed 10 percent of the school year in the previous year. Map the attendance gaps by grade, by classroom, by neighborhood, by poverty rates and by racial and ethnic groups. Reach out to their parents sometime in September. At the end of the month, look at how many students have already missed 10 percent (2-3 days) and track their attendance going forward. Attendance Works has created data tools that districts can use to examine patterns and identify which students are at risk.

If you can't look at chronic absence, average daily attendance (ADA) numbers can provide some direction about where to focus resources. Generally, schools with ADA rates higher than 97 percent have little trouble with chronic absence, while those with rates below 93 percent almost always have too many students missing too many days. At schools with 95 percent ADA, chronic absence rates can vary dramatically.

You can also use data to look for positive outliers, schools that have good rates of attendance despite challenging circumstances. These schools can offer strategies—and living proof—that chronic absence can be reduced.

- [How to Conduct a Successful Data Analysis](#)
- [Data tools for crunching chronic absence numbers](#)
- [How to Identify Positive Outliers](#)
- [Chronic Elementary Absenteeism: A Problem Hidden in Plain Sight, a report on the link between ADA and chronic absence](#)
- [New York State Handout](#)

4. Use data to determine where and how to target resources that can address common challenges of getting to school and build a local culture of attendance.

Consider targeting the schools with the highest levels of chronic absence and the community agencies with the strongest relationships there.

- **Transportation Challenges:** Some students miss school because of neighborhood violence or dangerous intersections in route to the campus. Schools and communities have started creating "Walking School Buses" and other approaches to keep kids safe.
 - [Safe Routes to Schools toolbox](#)
- Some students have no school bus or reliable transportation to take them to school; transit agencies and parent carpools can help.



In Springfield, Massachusetts, dozens of elementary school students wait on street corners every morning for the "Walking School Bus" to arrive. Led by teachers and parents, the organized walk provides a safe and healthy way for children to get to school. Average daily attendance rates are up, and tardiness is down, school officials report.

In Waco, Texas, the school district worked with the city transit agency to offer free rides for middle and high school students who don't have school bus service. More than 10,000 students have taken the free rides.

Health

In Long Beach, California, health workers with the Alliance for Children with Asthma assess the home environment; educate families and children about asthma's causes; establish an action plan; provide families with nontoxic cleaning products and other community resources; and monitor asthma symptoms. Nearly 74 percent of children who missed school before enrolling in the program had not missed school at the six-month follow-up assessment.

In Los Angeles, breakfast can be a powerful draw. At 52nd Street Elementary School in South L.A., 850 students joined a breakfast-in-the-classroom program in October 2012. The percentage of kids with perfect attendance shot up dramatically, and the only thing that has changed is breakfast.

Housing

In Oakland, California, the public housing authority has partnered with the schools to examine chronic absence among students living in public housing. Just before school starts, housing authority leaders and staff reach out to families with personal phone calls and back-to-school information packets emphasizing what is the first day of school and the importance of regular attendance.

In New York City, the mayor's office, the Department of Education and the Department of Homeless Services now track student attendance and absences at 15 targeted shelters, then designate individuals at each shelter to help provide students with support to stay on track. In addition, family shelters citywide have created homework centers.

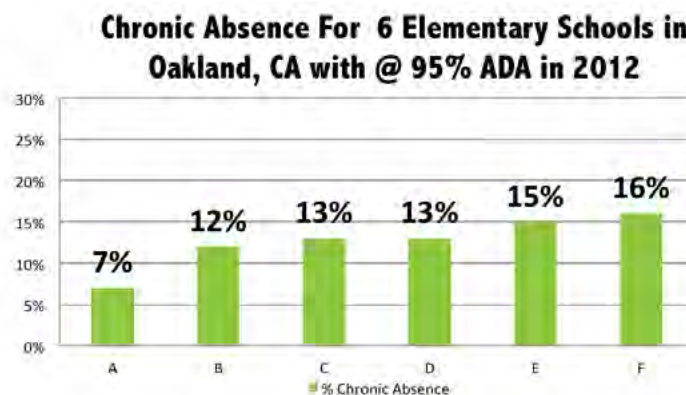
Health Challenges: Some students have chronic illnesses and mental health problems that keep them from attending school regularly. Schools and communities can provide support to meet their health needs.

- [Asthma Health Guide](#)
 - [Oral Health Guide](#)
 - [Promoting Healthy Food Choices](#)
 - [How Sick is Too Sick sheet](#)
 - [How Sick is Too Sick \(Spanish\)](#)
 - [State of Chronic Absenteeism and School Health](#)
 - [Families Fighting the Flu](#)
 - [A Health Flyer for Parents](#)
- **Breakfast in the Classroom:** Students who eat breakfast at school attend an average 1.5 more days of school every year. When offered in the classroom, breakfast can be an opportunity to bond with the teacher and get kids ready for class.
 - [No Kid Hungry Best Practices](#)
 - [Breakfast Fact Sheet](#)
 - **Housing Challenges:** Children who live in public housing, move frequently or are homeless often miss too much school. Housing authorities and homeless shelters are taking steps to address absenteeism.
 - [Making the Case to Housing Authorities](#)
 - **Afterschool Programs:** Research shows that good afterschool programs can improve school-day attendance. Ensure that schools with high chronic absence rates have access to quality programs, and work with providers to target at-risk students.
 - [Afterschool resources](#)
 - [Tools for providers](#)
 - **Recess:** Physical activity at a well-run recess can make for more engaged students—and better attendance. A school in Boston found that the average number of absences dropped 78 percent after using Playworks.
 - [Playworks facts on recess](#)

VII. How Can We Measure the Impact of our Attendance Awareness Month Activities?

1. Crunch The Numbers

If your district doesn't already know, determine the current baseline of chronic absence as well as average daily attendance so you can identify whether your activities have an impact on improving student attendance over the school year. If you haven't crunched your chronic absence data, you can start by looking at how much average daily attendance improves—though it is important to recognize that average daily attendance might mask high levels of chronic absence.



2. Develop your own metrics for monitoring implementation

How many parents did you reach? How many students participated in contests? How many teachers report that students are more motivated to attend school regularly? There are many quantitative and qualitative measures to evaluate your success and get feedback on how your efforts could be improved.

3. Let us know what you're doing

We're asking all schools and districts that have calculated chronic absence or are planning an event to pin on our maps:

- [District Action Map](#) shows who is calculating chronic absence
- [Attendance Action Map](#) shows who is participating in Attendance Awareness Month

VIII. What to do When

Spring

1. Recruit partners, work with a coalition, plan a meeting and agree on activities.
2. Launch a student poster contest or video contest, with winning entries to be displayed during September.
3. Enlist health care providers to share information on attendance during back-to-school checkups
4. Plan how you will use data to map the attendance gap. Approach appropriate school or district officials about the availability of attendance information.
5. Identify one or two local schools that are bright spots. These schools serve low-income students, but have better-than-average attendance can inspire others to act.

Early Summer

1. Enlist elected officials to sign proclamations.
2. Recruit local sports stars and celebrities for school visits and assemblies.
3. Recruit local faith leaders to speak to congregations about attendance.
4. Distribute talking points to key partners.
5. Line up incentives from businesses and other partners for contest.
6. Crunch the numbers for chronic absence and identify where and when attendance gaps occur.
7. If possible, build a data dashboard with weekly reports to principal.



Late Summer

1. Tape radio or TV PSAs.
2. Begin media outreach.
 - a. Meet with local newspaper editorial boards to encourage editorials.
 - b. Submit a commentary piece to local media in mid- to late August.
 - c. Pitch a reporter about the community's or school district's renewed emphasis on attendance.
3. Print banners and posters.
4. Plan an attendance display.
5. Plan student assemblies and parent summits.
6. Launch a door-knocking campaign to remind families when school start.
7. Share the Teaching Attendance toolkit with teachers during professional development sessions before school starts.
8. If schools open in August, hold first-day-of-school events stressing the importance of attendance.

September

1. Release proclamations.
2. If schools open in September, hold first-day-of-school events stressing the importance of attendance.
3. Hold an end-of-the-month summit, rewarding students with good or improved attendance
4. Launch an attendance contest among schools and classes.
5. Host a press conference talking about the community's or school district's emphasis on attendance.
6. Pitch reporters to attend assemblies or report on celebrity visits.
7. Unveil an attendance display.
8. Share your chronic absence analysis with the school board, city officials, and if appropriate, the public. Brainstorm about how to close attendance gaps.
9. Share tweets (#SchoolEveryDay) and Facebook posts about the Attendance Awareness Campaign.

IX. Additional Resources

Nonprofit Organizations



Attendance Works is a national organization dedicated to improving the policy, practice and research around attendance. Its website offers materials, research and success stories about reducing chronic absence. Attendance Works also offers technical assistance to school districts and communities.

www.attendanceworks.org



Everyone Graduates Center combines analysis of the causes, location, and consequences of the nation's dropout crisis with the development of tools and models designed to keep all students on the path to graduation. That includes tracking of early warning indicators, including chronic absence.

www.new.every1graduates.org



Get Schooled was founded on the belief that students themselves have the power to improve their future if given the right information and motivation. The organization sponsors attendance contests, wake-up calls and leverages the key influences in teens' lives to directly engage them on their path through high school and into college.

www.getschooled.com/dashboard



National Center for Community Schools, part of the Children's Aid Society, has facilitated the development of more than 15,000 community schools nationally and internationally. It offers consultation, advocacy and innovation, including advice on how to use chronic absence as a metric of school improvement.

IX. Additional Resources (cont.)

Webinars

The Attendance Awareness Campaign is planning four webinars this year to prepare schools and communities:

- April 15: Ready, Set, Go! Launching Attendance Awareness Month 2015
- May 13: Start Strong: Address the Attendance Gap in the Early Grades
- August 12: Finish Strong: Close the Attendance Gap in High School
- September 9: Map the Attendance Gap: Use Data to Target Action

In 2014, we held several webinars as well:

- April 8: Count Us In (Again)! Launching the 2014 Attendance Awareness Campaign
- May 28: We Need You! Enlisting Allies for Your Attendance Campaign
- August 6: Can You Hear Us Now? Amplifying Key Messages About the Importance of Attendance
- Sept. 30: The Power of Positive Connections: Reducing Chronic Absence Through PEOPLE

Research Institutions:

Baltimore Education Research Consortium

www.baltimore-berc.org

Center for New York City Affairs at The New School

www.centernyc.org

University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research

www.ccsr.uchicago.edu

ECONorthwest

www.econw.com

John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities

Utah Education Policy Center at the University of Utah

uepc.utah.edu

X. Footnotes

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² Ready, Douglas D., Socioeconomic Disadvantage, School Attendance, and Early Cognitive Development, The Differential Effects of School Exposure, Sociology of Education, October 2010.

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⁴ Hart Buehler, M., and Topanga, J., and Chang, H., Why Being in School Matters: Chronic Absenteeism in Oregon Public Schools, Attendance Works, June 2012.

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