

ATTENDANCE WORKS

Advancing Student Success by Reducing Chronic Absence

ABOUT ATTENDANCE WORKS



Attendance Works is a national and state initiative that promotes better policy, practice and research around school attendance. Our goal is to ensure that more districts track this often overlooked metric and that schools and communities take the right steps to improve attendance.

Director Hedy Chang is a national expert on chronic absence and co-author of the seminal research on early chronic absence, *Present, Engaged and Accounted For*. The Attendance Works team has expertise in technical assistance, communications, development and volunteer mobilization.

THE CHRONIC ABSENCE PROBLEM

Today, in a country where more than one in 10 students miss nearly a month of school every year, improving student attendance is an essential, cost-effective but often overlooked strategy for ensuring our students are on-track to learn and succeed.

Put simply, if students don't go to school they can't benefit from what is taught in the classroom. This is as true for kindergarteners as it is for high school students.

What is chronic absence?

Chronic absence is defined as missing 10% or more of school for any reason, excused or unexcused. That's about 18 days a year, or two days a month.

How big a problem is it?

- As many as 7.5 million students are chronically absent nationwide. That includes one in 10 kindergartners.
- As early as preK, chronic absence predicts poor attendance and academic performance in later grades.
- Poor children are more likely to be chronically absent and more likely to lose ground academically.
- By 6th grade, chronic absence is a leading indicator that a student will drop out of high school.
- By 9th grade it becomes a better predictor of dropout rates than eighth grade test scores.
- Classroom churn from too many absences affects all students, even those who attend regularly.

Why is the problem overlooked?

Schools and districts often don't look at all the right data. They track how many students show up every day and how many are skipping school, but not how many student are missing 10% of the school year. Parents and teachers don't realize how quickly absences can add up to academic trouble.



Reducing chronic absence is now a key part of raising student achievement for our entire school district. Attendance Works helped us take a deep dive into our data so we could really see how big a problem chronic absence was in our district. They helped us develop the capacity to identify which kids and schools need extra support, put strategies in place to help them, and find out about what works from peers across the country.

- **Tony Smith**
Superintendent
Oakland Unified School District

OUR RESPONSE

The good news is chronic absence can be significantly reduced when schools, families and community partners work together to monitor data, promote good attendance and address hurdles that keep children from getting to school every day. Attendance Works embraces a range of strategies:

Promoting effective policy: We are forging a national consensus about the need to track, report and address how many students are missing 10% or more of the school year as early as preK.

- Catalyzed national and state analyses of chronic absence, prompting legislative and regulatory change
- Aligned our work with an array of influential national organizations that help spread our message
- Issued a Call to Action asking school superintendents to make attendance a priority starting in the early grades
- Mustered unanimous support for a U.S. Conference of Mayors resolution calling on mayors to support reducing chronic absenteeism

Sharing tools and best practices: Our website offers easy online access for teachers, school districts and communities.

- Free tools for crunching chronic absence data
- Inspiring examples of schools and communities that are improving attendance
- Handouts for working with parents
- The latest research on chronic absence

Providing effective technical assistance:

- Peer learning webinars that have drawn more than 1,200 practitioners and policymakers in the past year.
- Ongoing support for the 124 communities working with the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading
- Targeted assistance on a fee-for-service basis working with districts and peer networks to build capacity in communities.

WHY ATTENDANCE WORKS

- **It matters for student success:** Students need to attend school to achieve academically and to build the good habits they need to graduate, attend college and succeed in a job. Study after study shows that students who don't show up regularly don't succeed.
- **It's a smart use of resources:** The best investments in instruction and curriculum won't matter much if students aren't showing up to benefit from them. Focusing on attendance allows schools and funders to make the most of their resources and leverage community support.
- **It's data driven and it's simple:** Data-driven approaches to education often meet resistance because of their complexity. By contrast, attendance is a simple, common-sense measure already recorded by teachers and understood by parents.
- **It's a winnable strategy:** Schools, districts and communities that work together to track chronic absence and improve attendance often see the numbers move quickly. This can not only improve academic performance but can boost morale for teachers and administrators as they see measurable progress.



HOW CAN ATTENDANCE WORKS HELP?

Attendance Works is a national and state level initiative promoting better policy, practice and research on chronic absence. The goal of our technical assistance is to help build capacity to monitor and address chronic absence. Many of our service are available for free on our web-site where you can, for example, download our tools or sign up to participate in our webinars that emphasize peer learning. If additional support is needed to advance the work, we offer a range of support on a fee-for-service basis. We charge \$1,400 per day plus expenses.

	Free Tools on our website	Fee for Service
Data Analysis	School districts can use our tools or their own data systems to conduct a chronic absence analysis.	Attendance Works can help conduct the analysis, interpret the results, craft a presentation based upon the findings and develop an appropriate plan for action.
Professional Development	Powerpoints and other materials to help communities develop their own training sessions are available on our web-site.	Attendance Works can provide keynote presentations, training sessions and materials to help partners understand why it's crucial to address and monitor chronic absence.
Public Messaging	Our attendance messaging toolkit offers ideas for PSAs, bumper stickers, billboards and talking points to launch an attendance campaign in your community.	Attendance Works can offer more tailored support with communications materials or strategy.
Peer Learning	Archived webinars, PowerPoints, and other materials are available for Peer Learning support.	Attendance Works can help local, regional or state networks of communities and school districts work together to develop strategies to reduce chronic absence. This approach, which emphasizes peer learning and collective policy actions, can be funded by a local foundation or contributions from various partners. Ideally, Attendance Works would partner with a local entity that can serve as the ongoing local source of coordination and technical assistance.
Case Studies	Most communities have at least one school that is beating the odds and maintaining high levels of attendance despite challenging circumstances. We offer tips for conducting site visits to build local capacity to document what works.	Attendance Works can help a local team interview staff and parents to determine what the school is doing right and how its efforts can be replicated as well as document and share insights gained.
Surveys and Focus Groups	Attendance Works has developed surveys of older students, parents and principals to assess attitudes about absenteeism and strategies for getting students and schools back on track.	Attendance Works can administer, tailor, analyze or present the results for additional costs.

ATTENDANCE WORKS

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Visit www.attendanceworks.org for available tools and written materials.