

MUST BE PRESENT TO WIN!!

Help Send the Message that Going to School Every Day Matters for Success in School and Life



Key Concepts & Messages

Improving student attendance is an essential, cost-effective but often overlooked strategy for ensuring our students are on-track to learn and succeed. Nationwide, at many as one out of 10 students is chronically absent, meaning they miss 10 percent or more of school days, or nearly a month. Chronic absence is a leading, early warning indicator of academic trouble and later dropout.

The good news is that chronic absence is a problem we can solve. While addressing some attendance barriers—such as health, poor transportation, and unstable housing—can often require longer-term strategies, everyone can make a difference by helping students and families understand that going to school every day and avoiding absences whenever possible is critical to realizing their hopes and dreams. Too often, we don't realize how quickly absences add up: Missing just two days every month can cause a child to fall behind.

Below are key messages that everyone – schools, preschools, public agencies, community organizations, faith based institutions, elected officials, and parents themselves—can use to help spread the word about this important issue. What can you do to help get these messages out in your agency, community or school?



1. Good attendance helps children do well in school and eventually in the workplace.

Good attendance matters for school success, starting as early as prekindergarten and throughout elementary school. By middle and high school, poor attendance is a leading indicator of dropout. Developing the habit of attendance prepares students for success on the job and in life.



2. Excused and unexcused absences easily add up to too much time lost in the classroom.

- » Students are at risk academically if they miss 10 percent of the school year, or about 18 days. Once too many absences have occurred, they can affect learning, regardless of whether absences are excused or unexcused.
- » Sporadic, not just consecutive, absences matter. Before you know it – just one or two days a month can add up to nearly 10 percent of the school year.
- » Avoid unnecessary absences. Some absences are unavoidable. Occasionally, children get sick and need to stay home. What is important is getting children to school as often as possible.



- 3. Chronic absence, missing 10 percent of the school year or more, does not just affect the students who miss school.** If too many students are chronically absent, it slows down instruction for other students, who must wait while the teacher repeats material for absentee students. This makes it harder for students to learn and teachers to teach.



- 4. We need to monitor how many days each student misses school for any reason— excused, unexcused or suspensions— so we can intervene early.** Districts and schools should use data to identify how many and which students are chronically absent so they can target extra supports that can improve attendance and interrupt a pattern of chronic absence. Families should track how many days their children have missed so they are aware of when they should be concerned and take action. We can't afford to think of absenteeism as merely a lack of compliance with school rules or a loss of funding. Absences represent lost opportunities to learn in the classroom.



- 5. Chronic absence is a problem we can solve when the whole community, along with to parents and schools, get involved in improving attendance.** All of us can make a difference by helping students and families feel engaged in learning and their schools, setting the expectation that school attendance matters and working together to identify and help families overcome barriers to getting to school. Community partners are especially important for helping schools and families address and overcome tough barriers, such as limited access to health care, unstable housing, poor transportation or neighborhood violence.



- 6. Relationship building is fundamental to any strategy for improving student attendance.** Students are more likely to go to school if they know someone cares whether they show up. Trusting relationships – whether with teachers, mentors, coaches or other caring adults – are critical to encouraging families and students to seek out help to overcome barriers to attendance.



- 7. Reducing chronic absence can help close achievement gaps.** Chronic absence especially affects achievement for low-income students who depend more on school for opportunities to learn. Because they are more likely to face systemic barriers to getting to school, low-income children, many of whom are children of color, have higher levels of chronic absence starting as early as prekindergarten. Chronic absence data can be used to trigger interventions so high-risk student populations receive the supports they need, ideally before they fall behind academically. Especially among older students of color, chronic absence could signal the need to reform inappropriate and biased student discipline policies and practices that are pushing students out of class.

Tips for Talking to Parents

Stress that good attendance will help your children do well in high school, in college and at work.

1. Your children can suffer academically if they miss 10 percent of the school year or about 18 days. That can be just one day every two weeks, and that can happen before you know it.
2. Some absences are unavoidable. We understand that children will get sick and need to stay home occasionally. The important thing is to get your children to school as often as possible.
3. Sporadic absences, not just those on consecutive days of school, matter. Before you know it – just one or two days a month can add up to nearly 10 percent of the school year.
4. If too many absences occur, it is still a problem whether they are excused or unexcused because they represent too much lost learning time in the classroom.
5. Attendance matters as early as kindergarten. Studies show many children who miss too many days in kindergarten and first grade can struggle academically in later years. They often have trouble mastering reading by the end of third grade.
6. Preschool is a great time to start building a habit of good attendance. Young children with poor attendance in preschool also lose out on valuable learning time and if chronic absence continues into kindergarten, it can pull down academic achievement.
7. By middle and high school, chronic absence is a leading warning sign that a student will drop out.
8. Too many absent students can affect the whole classroom, creating churn and slowing down instruction.
9. Families should avoid extended vacations that require your children to miss school. Try to line up vacations with the school's schedule. The same goes for doctor's appointments.
10. For younger children, you can set a regular bedtime and morning routine. Make sure they get 9 to 11 hours of sleep. You can lay out clothes and pack backpacks the night before.
11. For older children, you can help them develop homework and bedtime routines that allow for 8 ½ to 9 ½ hours of sleep. Make sure that when the lights go out, so do the cell phones, video games and computers.
12. Get to know the teachers and administrators. With younger children, make sure you introduce your child to teachers before school starts and keep in touch with the teachers. For older students, school officials can help you stay on top of academic progress and social contacts to make sure your child is staying on track.
13. Above all, set an example for your child. Show him or her that attendance matters to you and that you won't allow an absence unless someone is truly sick. Avoid asking older students to help with daycare and household errands.

14. You can turn to the school for help. Many schools offer services for the whole family.
15. You can ask your principal to calculate chronic absence rates for the whole school. Even if your child attends regularly, it's important to know how many students in your child's school are missing 10 percent or more of the school year.
16. Seek help from the school or community if you are facing tough challenges related to access to health care, unstable housing, poor transportation or lack of food. More schools and community agencies are working together to offer help for the whole family.

What to Say to Students

Beyond the talking points for parents, you should target some messages to students of all ages. As they grow older, they need to hear this message from peers, as well as teachers and parents.

1. School is your first and most important job. You're learning about more than math and reading. You're learning how to show up for school on time every day, so that when you graduate and get a job, you'll know how to show up for work on time every day.
2. Students who attend school regularly are more likely to graduate and find good jobs. In fact, a high school graduate makes, on average, a million dollars more than a dropout over a lifetime.
3. School only gets harder when you stay home too much. Sometimes it's tempting to stay home because you've got too much work or you don't understand what's going on in class. But missing a day only makes that worse.