

# Sending the Right Message about Attendance to Parents and Students

## OVERVIEW

This September we are encouraging organizations and communities across the United States to celebrate **Attendance Awareness Month**. Our goal is to start the school year off engaging everyone in raising awareness about the importance of attending school and conveying the right message to the parents and students. Attendance messaging builds a habit and a culture of attendance by helping everyone understand why going to school regularly matters and what they can do to ensure students are in school.

No attendance initiative is complete without attention to parents, who are crucial in turning around chronic absence. In some cases, especially in the early grades, parents may not understand the importance of good school attendance or realize how quickly absences can add up. In the high school years, they may not know that their children are skipping school.

A good campaign will engage parents, not blame them.

## KEY OVERALL MESSAGES

Parents and students need to understand the importance of attendance, starting in the early grades and continuing through high school. It's important to stress a few key messages:

- **Attendance matters for doing well in school and life** – establishing a culture of attendance has to start as early as kindergarten and even in pre-kindergarten.
- **People tend to grow concerned only about students who miss consecutive days of school**, but single-day absences can be just as disruptive as they can add up before you know it – just one or two days a month can add up to nearly 10 percent of the school year.
- **Poor attendance is not just about unexcused absences or children willfully skipping school** – excused absences can affect performance, too.
- **As a parent you are responsible** for making sure your child develops the habit of regular attendance.
- **If you are facing tough challenges** related to access to health care, unstable housing, poor transportation or lack of food, you can and should seek out support from the school and community.

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- **The impact of chronic absenteeism hits low-income students particularly hard**, especially if they don't have the resources to make up for lost time in the classroom and are face barriers to getting to school – such as unreliable transportation, poor access to health care and unpredictable work schedules for parents.
- **Chronic attendance affects all students**, not just those who are absent, because teachers must take time away from the class to re-teach information.

## WHAT TO SAY TO FAMILIES/PARENTS

- Families can make a difference. From a child's first day of formal schooling, the family can set the expectation that school attendance matters and absences won't be allowed unless someone is truly sick.
- 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.
- It's important to establish a habit of good attendance in the early grades. That will help children do well in high school, college and at work.
- People tend to grow concerned only about students who miss consecutive days of school, but occasional absences can be just as disruptive as they can add up before you know it – just one or two days a month can add up to nearly 10 percent of the school year.
- Your children can suffer academically if they miss 10 percent of school days or about 18 days.
- It doesn't matter if these absences are excused or unexcused. They all represent lost time in the classroom and a lost opportunity to learn.
- Too many absent students can affect the whole classroom, creating churn and slowing down instruction as teachers must re-teach lessons.
- Families should avoid extended vacations that require children to miss school. Try to line up vacations with the school's schedule. The same goes for doctor's appointments.
- Remember you can turn to the school for help. Many schools offer services for the whole family to help, for example, with issues concerning access to health care and reliable transportation.