

# STAY THE COURSE: SUPPORT ATTENDANCE IN THE WINTER MONTHS



## WHAT CAN SCHOOLS AND DISTRICTS DO:

### 1. Brainstorm alternative ways to get students to school

- a) Organize a four-wheel drive brigade of parents or staff members to pick up students stranded at home.
- b) Use a phone tree to connect parents to neighbors who can drive to school.
- c) Start a “[walking school bus](#)” that picks up children around the neighborhood and walks with them to school.
- d) Connect with city agencies to make sure sidewalks are cleared quickly and snow doesn’t pile up at corners.
- e) Organize a snow shovel brigade of parents and volunteers to ensure that sidewalks close to your school are clear and safe for walking.
- f) Motivate students to come to school on bad weather days by offering incentives—snacks, pencils or other small rewards.
- g) Prepare a [letter](#) and/or [robocall](#) for bad weather days offering parents help in getting their children to school. [Share this handout.](#)

### 2. Emphasize good health habits

- a) Keep a list of students with asthma and ensure the school nurse gives them extra attention in the winter months, when colds can exacerbate the chronic condition.
- b) Offer health services on your campus. If you don’t have a clinic, arrange for doctors and nurses to visit occasionally to check on children.
- c) Make sure every room has hand sanitizer and that teachers show students how and when to use it. Consider asking local businesses or community partners to donate small hand sanitizer bottles for students. Teach children how to wash their hands properly with soap and water.
- d) Offer breakfast in the classroom to ensure every child has a good meal.
- e) Keep a closet full of donated coats, hats and mittens for students who show up at school without warm weather clothing. Ask parent organizations, community partners and businesses to stock the closet.
- f) Ensure your building is clean, properly ventilated and free of mold. Poor air quality and dust can contribute to respiratory illnesses.
- g) Send a winter letter to parents, sharing health tips so that they know when their children are too sick for school. [Share this handout.](#)

## WHAT COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS AND LOCAL LEADERS CAN DO:

1. **Volunteer** to walk children to school on bad weather days or shovel snow near the school.
2. **Donate** winter coats and hats, bottles of hand sanitizers or snacks and small prizes that schools can use as incentives.
3. **Offer** your expertise, whether in health care, transportation or other area.

## WHAT TO SAY TO FAMILIES:

Families are crucial to ensuring students attend school every day whether their role is to transport a young child to school or monitor whether their teenager is showing up to class. What families say and do has a big influence on their child's attendance.

As a member of the school community, you can engage and inform parents and guardians about why regular attendance is so important and how quickly a child can fall behind due to too many absences. Share these [talking points](#) with parents during one-on-one conversations, community events or even school newspapers or blogs.

- a) This is the time of year when winter weather and children's illnesses can take a toll on school attendance. But it's important to get your children to school every day possible.
- b) Absences, even if they are excused, can add up to academic trouble. This is as true in kindergarten as it is in high school.
- c) Children who miss too much school in kindergarten are less likely to read well by third grade. By middle school, absenteeism can predict who will graduate from high school.
- d) A study of weather-related absences in Massachusetts found that each missed day affected a student's test scores and grades. This was especially true on snowy days when school stayed open but some students missed class.
- e) There's not much we can do about the weather, but there are two key steps every parent can take to help avoid absences this year: Make back-up plans for bad weather and keep your children healthy.
- f) It's important to find a way to get your child to school even when the weather is bad. If you're having trouble getting to school, reach out to other families, or call the school. We can connect you with families or staff members who can help.
- g) If your children are sick, talk to your doctor or the school nurse to see whether they are too sick for school. [This handout](#) offers some tips about when children are too sick for school.
- h) Do what you can to keep your children healthy. Dress them warmly for the cold weather and make sure they've got hats and gloves. Encourage them to wash their hands regularly, and send them to school with a bottle of hand sanitizer. Help your child learn to persevere.
- i) Today, he learns to overcome a snowdrift. In the future, he will have the grit to triumph over even greater obstacles to reach his dreams.

To view the full toolkit, go to <http://www.attendanceworks.org/tools/for-public-messaging/winter-messaging/>