

Why Attendance Matters

The Attendance Imperative: Attending school regularly is essential to students gaining the academic and social skills they need to thrive. Chronic absence, no matter its cause, has real life consequences for students, families and society as a whole. [Research shows](#)* that starting as early as preschool and kindergarten, chronic absence—missing 10% of the academic year—can leave third graders unable to read proficiently, sixth graders struggling with coursework and high school students off track for graduation. Equally important, it affects personal and emotional development and makes it hard to gain the habit of showing up, which is crucial to success in the workplace.

In 2018, 8 million students (one out of 6 students) were affected by chronic absence. During the pandemic chronic absence nearly doubled. While it has started to decrease, it remains elevated. Although chronic absence rose for students of all backgrounds and in all regions, students of color, those living in poverty, those with disabilities and English language learners experienced the highest levels. When schools experience high levels of chronic absence, it affects everyone—making it harder for teachers to teach and set classroom norms as well as for students to learn. Chronic absence, which involves monitoring when and which students miss too much school, is different from truancy (unexcused absences) or average daily attendance (how many students typically show up each day to school).

Reducing absenteeism is an essential, but often overlooked, strategy for responding strategically to the academic, social and emotional loss experienced by millions of students. School and district attendance data can be used to identify which student groups have lost out the most on opportunities to learn and ensure they are prioritized in planning. At the same time, effective strategies to improve engagement and attendance can benefit the entire community.

The good news is that chronic absence can be significantly reduced when schools, families and community partners work together to monitor data, nurture engagement, promote regular attendance and routines, and address hurdles that keep children and youth from getting to school regularly. Partners can help to remove these barriers, such as a lack of food, clothing and access to physical and mental health care; unhealthy environmental conditions, unreliable transportation, housing instability or the lack of safe paths to school.

Why business leaders should care: Chronic absence is a problem we can solve, especially if business leaders work with schools, parents and communities to improve student attendance. Business leaders should get involved for the following reasons:

- The workforce challenge: Absenteeism contributes to high school dropout rates, leaving students without the academic credentials and skills needed to compete in a 21st century workforce.
- The soft skills challenge: Regular attendance is the precursor to the “soft skills” that you will continue to expect and require. Students who don’t develop the habits associated with good attendance in the early years will find it difficult to develop them as adults.
- The productivity challenge: Children who are sick miss school. And their parents miss work. As employers, you have a real stake in reducing the numbers of days that children stay home due to preventable illnesses.



How business leaders can make a difference:

Marshal the data:

- Work with your superintendents to ensure the district is tracking chronic absence numbers—how many total absences for each student—not just daily averages of how many students showed up.
- Encourage districts to evaluate each school, grade and neighborhood. Share these [data tools](#).

Nurture a culture of attendance

- Work with a local school to provide incentives for good or improved attendance, such as gift certificates, books, healthy snacks or backpacks.
- Host a community forum to discuss the need for good attendance and build support for solutions.
- Talk to other business leaders about the role attendance plays in improving achievement and school success.
- Educate your own employees about the importance of good school attendance. Share these [handouts](#).
- Put up a poster promoting good attendance in your store or office window. See [these examples](#).
- Join a local coalition taking a community-wide approach to improving attendance. See if your community is involved with the [Campaign for Grade-Level Reading](#).

Create New Pathways to Work and Graduation

- Provide paid internships for students to explore a career in your industry.
- Create flexible schedules for students so they can attend school as well as work part-time.
- Partner with schools and districts to offer alternative career paths that allow students to earn credit as well as gain valuable work experience.

Address barriers to good attendance

- Work with community members to start a “Walking School Bus” or other ways to create safer routes to school.
- Support programs that address the health barriers to attendance, particularly asthma, dental care or lack of access to masks or Covid-19 testing.
- Encourage employees to volunteer as attendance buddies or mentors for chronically absent students.

*A growing body of research has shown the prevalence of chronic absence, its critical role in student achievement, and how it can be addressed. Access a research summary: <https://awareness.attendanceworks.org/wp-content/uploads/Research2016.pdf>

Click here to find a full list of research: <https://www.attendanceworks.org/research/>

For more information, go to Attendance Works at www.attendanceworks.org.

