



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.

What to Say to Parents

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

- **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.
- **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.
- **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.
- **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.
- **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.
- **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.
- **By middle and high school, chronic absence is a leading warning sign** that a student will drop out.
- **Too many absent students can affect the whole classroom**, creating churn and slowing down instruction.
- **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.
- **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.

- **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.
- **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.
- **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.
- **You can turn to the school for help.** Many schools offer services for the whole family.
- **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.
- **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 add in some messages targeted to students of all ages. As they grow older, they need to hear this message from peers, as well as teachers and parents.

- **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.
- **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.
- **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.