



The Attendance Imperative: Attending school regularly is essential to students gaining the academic and social skills they need to succeed. Reducing absenteeism is a simple, cost-effective, but often overlooked strategy for improving academic performance. Starting as early as preschool and kindergarten, chronic absence—missing 10 percent 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. Chronic absence is especially problematic among students living in poverty who are most likely to have poor attendance over multiple years and least likely to have the resources to make up for the lost time in the classroom. In some communities, chronic absence affects more than one out of four children.

Unfortunately, many schools and communities don't realize the extent of the problem because districts don't look at all the right data. They're paying attention to how many students show up every day and how many skip school, but not how many miss so much school in excused and unexcused absences that they're at risk academically.

The good news is chronic absence can be significantly reduced when schools, families and community partners work together to monitor data, nurture a habit of regular attendance and address hurdles that keep children from getting to school every day such as lack of access to health care, unhealthy environmental conditions, unreliable transportation, housing instability or the lack of safe paths to school.

Why student attendance matters to volunteers and National Service members:

Volunteers from community-based organizations and National Service members are driven by the opportunity to make a meaningful difference in the school or community where they are working. Reducing chronic absence provides a simple, straightforward goal they can accomplish by engaging students and families and providing an extra shift of adults to support schools.

This is a problem we can solve. We can build a strong culture of attendance in every community. We can ensure that school districts are tracking the right data to identify the students and schools that are headed off track. And we can address the challenges that may be keeping many students from getting to school: illness, transportation problems, housing instability and concerns for community safety. Volunteers and National Service members can work with schools, parents and communities to do this.

How volunteers and National Service members can make a difference:

Nurture a culture of attendance

- **Sponsor a back-to-school, door-knocking campaign** before school starts to encourage good attendance.



- **Provide incentives for good or improved attendance**, such as books, healthy snacks or backpacks.
- **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](#).
- **Sponsor a parent summit** with child-serving agencies and community-based groups who can help overcome barriers to school attendance

Provide that extra shift of adults

- **Become a mentor or attendance buddy** encouraging chronically absent students to show up for school every day. If you're a tutor, emphasize good attendance when you work with students.
- **Support data crunching** by helping schools to create systems for tracking all absences and to analyze the findings and identify the barriers that keep kids from coming to school.
- **Reach out to parents** with calls and home visits when students are missing too much school.
- **Work with community members to start a "Walking School Bus"** or other ways to create safer routes to school.

Tackling chronic absence is a smart strategy for improving a city and its schools. Attendance is a simple, common sense metric already recorded by teachers and understood by parents. It's essential to other education reforms: The best investments in instruction and curriculum won't matter much if students aren't showing up to benefit from them. And it's a winnable strategy. Schools, districts and communities that work together to reduce chronic absence often see attendance increase quickly.

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

