

for

Early Childhood Educators

Why Attendance Matters



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 should early childhood educators care? Promoting attendance is in keeping with the goal of partnering with families to prepare children for success in kindergarten and beyond. Consider the following:

- **Regular attendance ensures children benefit from participating in quality early education:** Research shows that students who miss too many days of preschool have weaker literacy and numeracy skills entering kindergarten. This is especially true for children from low-income families, who gain the most when they attend but lose out more when they are absent.
- **A habit of attendance is a school readiness skill:** An important role of early education programs is helping children to develop important social-emotional skills, including forming a habit of attendance. Children who are chronically absent in preschool are far more likely to be chronically absent in later grades.
- **Good attendance is a measure of parent engagement:** Attendance improves when families understand what their children are learning while they are in a program as well as feel welcome and supported. Early childhood educators can use attendance to assess how well they are doing with engaging and supporting families and their children.

How early education providers can make a difference:

Motivate regular attendance

- **Engage parents:** Use parent orientation materials, meetings and daily interactions with parents to make sure parents understand what children are learning in your program and convey what they miss if they are



absent. Encourage families to share and exchange effective strategies for getting children up, ready, and out the door in a timely manner every day.

- **Engage children in enriching activities:** Make sure your program offers the kind of fun learning environments that make young children want to come every day.
- **Use age appropriate strategies to convey attendance matters:** Stress attendance by, for example, rewarding young children with stickers and praise when they show up on time. Let the children track their own attendance by marking off if they show up on time every day on simple, fun, worksheets as they enter the classroom.

Offer extra support to families with chronically absent children

- **Reach out to families facing attendance challenges:** Rather than remove children who don't attend regularly, reach out to families to find out why and offer as much support as possible. Connect them to available community resources and develop [action plans](#) outlining steps that everyone will take to support better attendance.
- **Partner with community resources to address common attendance challenges:** If multiple families face the same challenge, for example, the lack of a safe path to school, asthma or lack of access to health or dental care, identify a community partner who can help organize a programmatic response.

Develop systems for supporting improved attendance

- **Improve the accuracy of attendance records:** Ensure staff record attendance every day and take the time to periodically review data to monitor for accuracy.
- **Produce reports on chronic absence:** If possible, begin creating reports that detect which and how many children are missing 10% or more of preschool in order to identify how much poor attendance is a challenge and identify families in need of extra assistance.
- **Engage program managers in developing site based strategies for improving attendance:** Ensure program managers have an opportunity to review data on chronic absence and are encouraged to work with their staff to develop strategies for improving attendance that reflect their own program strengths and realities.
- **Partner with schools and districts:** Develop partnerships with nearby schools to address common barriers to attendance and jointly convey the importance of regular attendance to families. As appropriate, work together to improve attendance for families facing especially challenging barriers to getting to school and preschool.
- **Partner with local schools:** Support a successful transition into kindergarten by providing families with registration information, conducting a site visit to the local schools, or by hosting a kindergarten evening with to talk about what happens in kindergarten, what children will be learning and why coming to school every day is paramount to their success.

Tackling chronic absence is a smart strategy for early education providers working to build good habits and skills among our youngest students. Attendance is a simple, common sense metric easily understood by parents. And it's a winnable strategy.

