

for

Out of School Time Providers

Why Attendance Matters

2014



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 out-of-school time providers: Improving attendance aligns directly with our central mission. Afterschool programs are designed to provide students more time to learn. This extra time we offer is particularly important for low-income children, who often have less access to books or enrichment at home. Absenteeism undercuts this effort, costing children valuable instructional time during the day, as well as time on task in afterschool programs. Unfortunately, chronic absence is more prevalent among children living in poverty, who in many cases miss school because of concerns beyond their control.

Research has long shown that good afterschool programs can improve school-day attendance. The sense of belonging, the connection to caring adults and the academic enrichment that we provide in afterschool can make children more likely to go to school. Often though, improved attendance is a by-product of our programs, rather than a stated goal. We could make even more of a difference if we make it an intentional focus of our work.

How out of school time providers can make a difference:

Give them a reason to come to school:

- **Engage students in enriching activities:** Make sure your program offers the kind of innovative activities that will keep students coming to your program and to school. Some children say they come to school just so they can attend afterschool enrichment programs.



- **Encourage students to attend school regularly:** Share the importance of regular attendance for academic achievement. Encourage staff to take the time to acknowledge and notice each child every day they attend the program and express concern if they are absent. Students are more likely to attend if they know someone cares.
- **Serve as a resource for parents to support good attendance:** Use your interactions with parents at pick-up time to share why attendance matters and, if children are absent, find out about what might be getting in the way of attending school.

Track data and share with school district

- **Record program attendance accurately:** Make sure that you emphasize good attendance in the afterschool program. Keep regular records and examine the data for patterns.
- **Work with school districts to share data:** Let the school know about student attendance in afterschool programs and arrange to see their data on chronically absent students in your programs.

Target resources to support chronically absent students

- **Use chronic absence data when deploying resources.** Consider locating new programs in communities with high chronic absence rates, where students and families need help building good attendance habits and bringing absenteeism under control.
- **Hold managers accountable for improving attendance.** Stress to program managers that part of their job is to make sure attendance rates improve both in the afterschool program and during the school day. Ask for data regularly and share strategies for reducing chronic absence.

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

