

BACK-TO-SCHOOL SUCCESS

A Guide for Principals Working to Reduce Chronic Absence



Daily attendance is critical to success in school. When children miss class, they miss out on learning opportunities that can't be replaced by homework or make-up assignments. In Iowa, too many elementary school students are chronically absent. The rates are highest in kindergarten and preschool. Chronic absence—missing 18 days over the school year or just two days a month—is a proven predictor of academic trouble, starting as early as preschool and kindergarten. Kindergartners who miss that much school, especially if it persists into 1st grade, are less likely to read by the end of third grade and risk falling behind in all of their classes. It doesn't matter if absences are excused or unexcused; they can still add up to too much time lost in the classroom. Chronic absence at a young age can also lead to skipping school in middle and high school.

While everyone can help students show up to class every day, principals are uniquely positioned to ensure their schools adopt a comprehensive, tiered approach to improving attendance and, with it, academic achievement. The work starts even before students return to school and continues all year long .

This guide offers four initial steps to ensure that families get their students to class. They are:

- 1. Emphasize Why Daily Attendance Matters in Your Back-to-School Activities**
- 2. Recognize Good and Improved Attendance**
- 3. Encourage Parents and Teachers to Discuss Absences and Review During Parent-Teacher Conferences**
- 4. Engage Student and Family with Personalized Outreach**

These steps emphasize action early in the school year and early in a child's academic career to imprint the importance of showing up every day. It's important to launch this work in the first month of school, since absences in the first month of school can predict a pattern of poor attendance throughout the year.

>> ABOUT THIS TOOLKIT

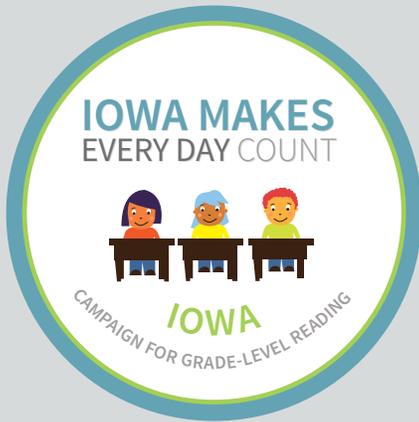
Back-to-School Success is the first phase of a toolkit to help Iowa's principals reduce chronic absence in the early grades. This guide includes templates, tools and messaging needed to get students off to a strong start in the new school year. See the full guide at:

<http://www.attendanceworks.org/iowa-principals-toolkit/>

>> VOICES

“ We believe attendance counts and we work together to support students in being in school and on time every day. To show our commitment to attendance, we post monthly attendance percentages on our school marquee.

**Principal Trudy Evans,
Rue Elementary School,
Council Bluffs**



IOWA MAKES EVERY DAY COUNT!

GOOD SCHOOL ATTENDANCE MEANS...

PRE-SCHOOLERS Build habits and develop good habits for showing up on time.	ELEMENTARY STUDENTS Read well by the end of third grade.	HIGH SCHOOLERS Stay on track for graduation.	COLLEGE STUDENTS Earn their degrees.	WORKERS Succeed in their jobs.
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Did you know missing just two school days a month—in excused or unexcused absences—can prevent our students from succeeding in school, college, and their careers? Go to www.gradelevelreading.net to learn what you can do to make every day count in our community!

Help Your Child Succeed in School: Build the Habit of Good Attendance Early
School success goes hand in hand with good attendance!

DID YOU KNOW?

- Starting in kindergarten, too many absences can cause children to fall behind in school.
- Missing 10 percent (or about 18 days) can make it harder to learn to read.
- Students can still fall behind if they miss just a day or two every few weeks.
- Being late to school may lead to poor attendance.
- Absences can affect the whole classroom if the teacher has to slow down learning to help children catch up.

Attending school regularly helps children feel better about school—and themselves. Start building the habit in preschool so they learn right away that going to school on time, every day is important. Good attendance will help children do well in high school, college, and at work.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Set a regular bed time and morning routine.
- Lay out clothes and pack backpacks the night before.
- Find out what day school starts and make sure your child has the required items.
- Introduce your child to her teachers and classmates before school starts to help her transition.
- Don't let your child stay home unless she is truly sick. Keep in mind complaints of a stomach ache or headache can be a sign of anxiety and not a reason to stay home.
- If your child seems anxious about going to school, talk to teachers, school counselors, or other parents for advice on how to make her feel comfortable and excited about learning.
- Oversee back-up plans for getting to school if something comes up. Call on a family member, a neighbor, or another parent.
- Avoid medical appointments and extended trips when school is in session.

When Do Absences Become a Problem?

CHRONIC ABSENCE
10 or more days

WARNING SIGNS
Up to 17 days

SATISFACTORY
8 or fewer absences

Note: These numbers assume a 180-day school year.

For more on school readiness, visit attendanceworks.org & gradelevelreading.net

1. Emphasize Why Daily Attendance Matters in Back-to-School Activities

The flurry of communication and events at the start of school, or even before the year begins, provide a terrific opportunity to talk about attendance. It's important to keep messages positive while mentioning that families will be contacted if absences start adding up. Use these Iowa materials in newsletters, letters, kindergarten orientation sessions and back-to-school nights.

2. Recognize Good and Improved Attendance

Principals can send a clear message that going to school every day is a priority by providing regular recognition to students and families with good and improved attendance. Keep in mind, the goal is not to just award perfect attendance for a semester or the school year, since the children who struggle the most will soon be left out. Rather, consider awards for shorter periods of time so that children and families can feel successful. The guide include tips for developing a school-wide approach that can engage the entire community

3. Lay the Groundwork for Reviewing Absences During Parent-Teacher Conferences

The connection between teacher and family is crucial to building good attendance habits and turning around absenteeism. Parent-teacher conferences are a natural opportunity to make talking about student attendance and its implications for academic performance a norm for all families. The guide includes a Student Attendance Success Plan for tracking attendance and coming up with strategies for reducing absences.

4. Engage Student and Family with Personalized Outreach

One of the easiest ways to recognize attendance is greeting students and families when they arrive every morning. Teachers can make a point of welcoming back a student who was absent the day before and ask the class to join in the welcome. Parents and other community partners can also serve as greeters helping to create a warm, friendly and caring atmosphere to start the day. The guide includes strategies particularly for paying attention to any student with a history of chronic absence or who is missing a lot of school in the first few weeks of school.

>> CALL TO ACTION

Encourage your superintendent to join the Call to Action sponsored by Attendance Works and the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading. Signing on helps demonstrate that chronic absence is a priority and ensures your district has timely access to the latest on-line resources.

Go to: <http://www.attendanceworks.org/join-our-call-to-action/> to sign up.