

## TEACHING ATTENDANCE 2.0 SUMMARY



**Strategies to help educators  
infuse attendance into  
everyday activities**





# Introduction

Every day a student is absent is a lost opportunity for learning. Too many absences can affect achievement not just for the absent student but can also disrupt learning for the entire class. While teachers play a key role, [everyone in the school building](#)— from the principal to the front office to the cafeteria— can teach attendance.

Teaching attendance involves taking steps that build awareness about how many absences are too many, encourage students to come to school every day even when it is hard and engage them once they are in the school building.

Chronic absence is a national issue in every state and at every grade level. National data show that at least 6.8 million students missed three or more weeks of school in 2013-14. Chronic absenteeism (missing just 2 days per month or 18 days over the school year) can be an early warning sign that a student will have academic trouble starting as early as kindergarten and preschool. Missing too many days can lead to a child who struggles to read proficiently by the end of third grade, fails courses in middle school and drops out in high school. Read this [research summary](#) for more details.

The good news is that educators don't need to solve the problem of chronic absence alone. When educators review student attendance data and notice absences adding up, they can encourage families to partner with other school staff, such as social workers or nurses, as well as community agencies to get needed supports.

[Teaching Attendance 2.0](#) was developed in collaboration with our partners American Federation of Teachers (AFT), National Education Association (NEA) and Parent Teacher Home Visits (PTHV). It is filled with tips, scripts, and a variety of free tools that you can tailor to the needs of your school and community. This toolkit summary offers an overview of the four basic steps for incorporating attendance into day-to-day activities.

- 1 Create a welcoming environment that engages students and families
- 2 Engage families at parent-teacher or student-led conferences
- 3 Use data to ensure early intervention and secure needed supports
- 4 Advocate for a school-wide approach

# Step-by-Step Process

## Step 1

### Create a welcoming environment that engages students and families

Creating positive and trusting relationships with students and their families is key to promoting good attendance. Offering a warm and welcoming environment, enriching lessons and information about the impact of too many absences are essential for developing relationships. You can make a difference without adding to an already full work load by strategically infusing attention to attendance and the power of positive relationships into everyday interactions with students and families.

Here are four key steps for creating a welcoming environment at school. Click on the linked titles for details, tools and resources:

#### 1. Build positive relationships

Take roll in a positive manner and welcome families at the start of the school year to lay the foundation for a relationship that motivates students to come to school. Consider meeting with families on their home turf to open lines of communication.

#### 2. Use effective messaging

Many families and students don't understand how quickly absences can add up and how much classroom learning time is lost. Kindergarten registration, back-to-school nights or high school orientations are opportunities to raise awareness and engage families in dialogue about why attendance is important.

#### 3. Recognize good and improved attendance

Offer positive recognition and incentives to help students internalize the value of showing up every day. Simple things, such as certificates, extra recess time, or dancing in the hallways can motivate students to attend.

#### 4. Emphasize attendance strategically throughout the year

Use data to identify when absences increase, such as on Mondays or Fridays, or before or after holidays when some parents extend vacations. Plan hands-on lessons and special incentives or activities for families to strategically address dips in attendance.



This video created for the Atlanta Speech School shows how small changes in adult behavior can create a welcoming environment.

**Click here to view the video.**

## Step 2

# Engage families at parent-teacher or student-led conferences

Parent-teacher conferences—or student-led conferences facilitated by teachers—are an ideal time to talk about the importance of regular attendance, as early as kindergarten and even in prekindergarten. Talking about attendance during these meetings should be as routine as discussing academic performance and classroom behavior.



Teachers can use parent-teacher conferences to help establish and maintain ongoing two-way communication with parents. Explore the reasons behind a student's aversion to attending school and help parents to identify any barriers to being in school, such as transportation, health or bullying. Use this opportunity to inform families about resources, programs or school activities that promote attendance.

Use these materials to discuss attendance during regular parent-teacher conferences:

- » [Making the Most of Your Parent Teacher Conference – A Step by Step Guide](#)
- » [Student Attendance Success Plan](#)
- » Attendance Works' simple [Classroom Attendance Calculator](#)
- » [Get Schooled Attendance Calculator](#)

## EVERYONE CAN TEACH ATTENDANCE

*Schools that successfully reduce chronic absenteeism have created a school wide culture of attendance that involves everyone in the building. Teachers are key to this, especially certificated classroom teachers, resource specialists, and instructional aides. Other professionals who interact with students and their families daily—school secretaries, bus drivers and kitchen staff—can also make a difference in helping students get to school every day.*



# Step 3

## Use data to ensure early intervention and secure needed supports

The good news is chronic absence can be turned around when educators use attendance data to identify and connect at-risk students—as early as possible—with supports that address barriers and motivate them to attend. Once at-risk students are identified, social workers, counselors or other staff can help to find relevant resources in the school or community. Did you know that [research](#) shows that the best predictor of chronic absence is a history of poor attendance during the prior school year?

Educators can play an important role in identifying at risk students and ensuring early intervention occurs. Here are four strategies:

### 1. Monitor chronic absence data

Monitoring chronic absence data is essential to ensuring educators are equipped to support their students. Ask staff for attendance records in the electronic Student Information System, look at student report cards from prior years, or use our simple [Classroom Attendance Calculator](#) to obtain your students' attendance data.

### 2. Anticipate needed supports

Once you know which students are at risk due to poor attendance, take stock of what you know about their situations. This worksheet on [Understanding the Causes of Student Absences](#) can help organize what you have learned from regular interactions and teaching the student. Consider seeking input from members of your school community as you engage in this analysis.



