1. Own the issue by using the first month of school to make public that reducing chronic absence is a priority through your communications to key stakeholders, the media, students and their families.

- Sign your school district up for Attendance Awareness Month in September. Use the Count Us In! toolkit to find ideas, templates and messaging points.

- Share that you are signing on to this Call to Action with your staff, school board and key community stakeholders.

- Send out a press release and possibly hold a media event. Attendance Works has template commentaries on the Superintendents Call to Action web page to help publicize your participation.

- Designate, if you haven't already, a lead staff person to oversee the work and strengthen partnerships with key stakeholders. Let us know who the contact is so we can provide online resources.

- Build capacity to take a comprehensive, prevention-oriented approach to reducing chronic absence. Encourage principals to take a leadership role in ensuring their staff are equipped to take action. Alert them to the availability of Attendance Works interactive online Teaching Attendance modules available at no cost for anyone who registers.

- Get the word out to parents by adopting attendance messaging strategies that help build a culture of attendance. Possibilities include:

    » Sending a letter to all parents letting them know that daily attendance is important and that the entire school community is committed to preventing absences.

    » Encourage all schools to reach out to students and families to welcome them to school and convey the importance of attendance by using or adapting these parent handouts.

    » Encourage schools to show the Bringing Attendance Home video at back-to-school events or parent gatherings.

    » Encourage schools to use the Student Attendance Success plan as a tool for talking to parents about attendance.

    » Ask all schools to use all attendance incentive programs to recognize good and improved attendance and not just perfect attendance. See these guidelines.

Use your data to prioritize the populations that most need messaging and support. Typically chronic absence levels are higher in the transition grades: kindergarten and 1st as well as 6th and 9th. These grades are also a critical time to build a habit of regular attendance before students miss so many days they are off track for succeeding in school. More ideas for attendance messaging are included in this Attendance Works' Count Us In! toolkit.

2. Mobilize your community by letting key stakeholders know about the attendance initiative and that you would like to involve them in developing, strengthening and/or implementing your plan of action.

- Consider using our District and Community Self-Assessment and District and Community Planning Tool to help develop your local plan.

- If you already have a plan for addressing chronic absence, use this as an opportunity to engage community groups in strengthening it and deepening their support.

- If your community is participating in the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading, tap the coalition in place to engage the community in improving attendance.

- If you don't have a plan or a coalition in place, compile a list and convene community partners who can help you develop one. Natural partners include:

  - » Mayor or county leader
  - » Government agencies, including social services, health and transportation departments
  - » PTA or parent advocacy groups
  - » Teachers union or leadership
  - » United Way and community-based nonprofits

  - » Chamber of Commerce and business leaders
  - » Juvenile judges or prosecutors who deal with truancy cases
  - » Faith leaders
  - » Afterschool providers
  - » Local foundations

3. Drive with data by moving beyond average daily attendance and truancy to monitoring chronic absence. Consider using the District and School Attendance Tracking Tools offered for free by Attendance Works and available here.

- Calculate how many students are chronically absent, or missing 10 percent of school days. If data isn't available ask for analysis.

- Examine whether chronically absent students are concentrated in particular grades, schools, neighborhoods or student populations.

- Urge principals to develop attendance teams to track chronically absent students and develop a prevention and intervention strategy. Use these tips for attendance teams.

- Use data to identify positive outliers, schools that have high rates of attendance despite challenging circumstances. Use our Positive Outliers toolkit to determine what practices and policies are working and how they can be replicated districtwide.

- Use the data to identify where you most need support from community partners to improve attendance.

- Use the data to set goals with principals and schools and to measure progress in school improvement efforts.

For more information, visit www.attendanceworks.org or contact:

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