**Principal Interview**

**Sample Protocol**

**PART A: Background**

1. **How long have you been a principal at this school? What did you do before?**
2. **When you first became the principal here, was there a positive culture of attendance? That is, was good attendance highly valued by the staff, parents and students?**
   1. ***Probe****: What did you see or hear that led you to this conclusion?*
3. **Please share some things you have done as a leader to build a culture of attendance.** 
   1. ***Probe****: What daily, weekly or monthly routines have you introduced? What are some key messages you’ve communicated to students, families and staff about attendance?*
4. **Can you give us an overall sense for what happens at this school to engage students academically and socially?**

**PART B: Student Attendance Data**

1. **Do you use attendance data to identify students at risk due to problematic attendance?**

Yes \_\_ No \_\_

**If yes, what attendance measures do you use to identify students at risk due to problematic attendance and how do you define them?**

\_\_Chronic absence(Example definition: missing 20 days or more of school for any reason, or 5 days a quarter)

**\_\_**Truancy (Example definition: missing 20 or more days of school unexcused and on roll for at least 90 days)

\_\_Unsatisfactory attendance (Example definition: missing 10 or more days of school for any reason, or 3-4 days a quarter)

\_\_Tardiness

\_\_Other: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. **Do you review school wide attendance data? Yes \_\_ No \_ If yes, how often?**

\_\_ daily

\_\_ weekly

\_\_ monthly

\_\_ every semester

\_\_ every quarter

\_\_ at interims

\_\_ at the end of year

\_\_ never

1. **What types of school-wide attendance data do you review?**

\_\_ high attendance (Example definition: missing fewer than 5 days of school)

\_\_ unsatisfactory attendance

*\_\_* chronic absence

**\_\_** truancy

\_\_ tardiness

\_\_ other: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. **What is the source of the attendance data that you review?**

\_\_ District generated reports that are sent to me

\_\_ I generate my own reports using district data system

\_\_My staff generates attendance reports and provide them to me

\_\_Other (please explain)

**PART C: Attendance Barriers:**

1. **What do you think are the biggest barriers to regular attendance for the students who have poor attendance in your school?**

***Probes:***

* *What are parents’ attitudes about the importance of attendance? Of attendance in kindergarten? (Particularly relevant if you are visiting an elementary school)*
* *Are students avoiding school because they are struggling academically?*
* *Are there issues with bullying?*
* *Do students often miss school because of illness or doctor’s appointments?*
* *Is getting to school (lack of transportation or lack of safe paths) a problem for some?*

**PART D: Promising Practices**

1. **Who is involved in supporting the work on student attendance in your school? (i.e. which staff, organizations, etc.) What role do teachers play? Classified staff? Administrators? Staff from community agencies?**
2. **Attendance Works has identified a number of elements of practice that we think are helpful for improving attendance. See attached self-assessment tool. For each one, we’d like to understand the extent to which these are occurring in your school. For each element, please indicate whether you think it is:**

- Strength - OK For Now - Could be Better - Urgent Gap - Don’t Know

After you share your rating, we’d like to you to very briefly explain your response. For example, if it is an area of strength, please give us a short overview of what you are doing to carry out that element. If you thought it could be better or is an urgent gap, please briefly help us understand what is behind that assessment.

**Does Attendance Really Count in Our School?**

***A Tool for Self-Assessment***

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Key Element** | Strength | OK for Now | Could be Better | Urgent Gap | Don’t Know | How do you know? |
| 1. Attendance is accurately taken and entered daily into the district data system in all classrooms. |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 1. Our school has a clear and widely understood attendance policy. |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 1. A team including the site administrator reviews attendance data on a regular basis to identify chronically absent students and monitor attendance patterns by grade, student sub-groups and classroom. |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 1. Our school offers such rich and engaging learning activities that students do not want to miss school. |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 1. Our school recognizes and appreciates good and improved attendance. |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 1. Our school informs parents about the importance of attendance and encourages parents to help each other get their children to school. |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 1. Our school identifies and reaches out to chronically absent students and their families in a caring manner to see how attendance could be improved. |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 1. Our school partners with community agencies that offer resources (pre-K, afterschool, health services, volunteer mentors, transportation) that can help engage students & their families and remove barriers to getting to school. |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 1. Individual learning plans are developed for high-risk students and address poor attendance along with low academic performance. |  |  |  |  |  |  |

**(Note:** *Chronic Absence is missing 10% or more of school over a year including any type of absence; Satisfactory Attendance is missing 5% or less of school over a year)*

1. **Are there any other strategies, not captured by these elements, that you think are especially helpful to improving student attendance?**
2. **Do you have sub-populations of students that struggle with attendance or chronic absenteeism more than others (e.g. certain racial or ethnic groups, English language learners, students living in public housing)? Have you discovered any certain strategies that are especially effective for these students? If yes, please explain.**
3. **Is there anything else that you are doing at your school that may have an indirect effect on high attendance? (Popular afterschool programs, engaging classroom learning, music program, school culture changes, etc.)**

**PART E. Support**

1. **You have clearly done an exemplary job, despite challenging circumstances, of implementing good practice around attendance in your school. What type of support(s) (e.g. professional development, data, availability of classified staff to support attendance) have been most important for helping you and your school adopt effective attendance practices? What type of support would be helpful for you to improve even more?**

(Revised September 18, 2013)

**Principal Interview**

**(Prior to site visit – may be conducted by telephone)**

**Sample Protocol**

1. How long have you been a principal at this school? What did you do before?
2. Data on school attendance suggests your school does a better job than many others in ensuring students attend regularly.

We’d like to understand what you are doing to support good attendance at your school. Can you give me a quick overview of what your staff and community partners are doing that is making such a difference?

Probes (if time allows):

* 1. Close monitoring of student attendance data
  2. Attendance incentive
  3. Parent engagement & education about the importance of attendance
  4. Early identification and outreach to students with poor attendance
  5. Providing an engaging curriculum that makes students want to come to school
  6. Offering school based health services or social supports that help keep students from missing school to health or economic issues
  7. Ensuring a safe school climate
  8. Providing effective alternatives to suspension
  9. Professional development for school staff on the importance of attendance and what they can do to improve it
  10. Encouraging a team approach to supporting good attendance that includes teaching and support staff and potentially community and parent partners

Are you doing anything else that you think is making a difference but isn’t listed?

1. What do you think are the biggest barriers to students attending school? What is most important for helping overcome those barriers?

***Probes***: (if time allows)

* *What are parents’ attitudes about the importance of attendance? What about in the early grades, especially kindergarten? (Particularly relevant if site is an elementary school)*
  + *Are students avoiding school because they are struggling academically?*
  + *Are there issues with bullying?*
  + *Do students often miss school because of illness or doctor’s appointments?*
  + *Is getting to school (lack of transportation or lack of safe paths) a problem for some?*

1. What have you found to be the most helpful supports for enabling you and your staff to tackle improving attendance in your school?
2. What do you think is most helpful for ensuring that other schools in your district are also taking steps to improve student attendance and taking steps to reduce or prevent chronic absence (missing 10% or more of school)?
3. Who are the key people, besides you, we should be sure to interview when we visit?

* Assistant principal
* Members of the attendance team
* Attendance clerks
* School nurse
* Counselor
* Family outreach workers
* Staff from community-based organizations that provide services on site
* Teachers
* Parents/parent leaders
* Students
* Others who may have a role in promoting good attendance?

1. Is there a quiet place where we can talk to people and not disrupt the daily routine?

**Questions for Students and Parents or Guardians**

**Student**

1. What grade are you in?
2. Do you like coming to school? What makes you want to go to school every day?
3. What most helps you get to school? Is there anything your school or teacher does that is especially helpful?
4. What makes it hard to get to school? Is there anything that helps you overcome those challenges to getting to school?
5. Have your teachers or principal talked to you about the importance of coming to school every day? Why is it important to attend school every day?
6. What happens when you miss school? Does anyone notice?
7. Do you know who to go to at your school for help if you are struggling with a problem that keeps you from attending school? (*for older children)*
8. *Sometimes students get suspended. Can you tell me about some of the reasons why a student might get suspended? (for older children)*
   1. *Probe: Do you think the rules are fair?*
   2. *Probe: Are the rules applied to everyone equally?*
   3. *Probe: What would make the rules more fair?*

**Parents and Guardians**

1. How many children do you have in this school? In which grades?
2. Do you think attending school regularly is important for your child? Why or why not?
3. What helps you to get your child to school? Is there anything that your school, teacher, or a program at school does that is especially helpful?
4. What makes it hard to get your child to school? What helps you to overcome those challenges?
5. Have you received information from your school about the importance of your child’s attendance in school every day?
6. Do you think your school notices when children are absent? What happens?
7. Is there someone at the school you can talk to if you are experiencing a challenge that makes it difficult to get your child(ren) to school every day? Are there resources available to help support your child’s attendance?
8. Do you receive information about your child’s attendance at interim or report card time?
9. *Sometimes students get suspended. Can you tell me about some of the reasons why a student might get suspended? (for parents with older children)*
   1. *Probe: Do you think the rules are fair?*
   2. *Probe: Are the rules applied to everyone equally?*
   3. *Probe: What would make the rules more fair?*

(Revised September 18, 2013)

**CBO or School Staff Interview Protocol**

1. How long have you been working here?
2. To what extent do you think good attendance is highly valued by the staff and families at this school?
   1. What did you see or hear that leads you to this conclusion?
   2. What do you think is the main motivator for families to get their children to school every day?

*Prompt:*

* + 1. *Their children enjoy it*
    2. *They need to have their children supervised while they go to work*
    3. *They believe attending school is important for their children’s success*

1. What do you think are the biggest barriers to students attending school?
   1. What are parents’ attitudes about the importance of attendance? What have they said to you about the importance of attendance?
   2. Do students often miss school because:
      1. They are sick or have doctors’ appointments?
      2. Getting to school is difficult (lack of transportation)?
      3. They are avoiding school due to academic struggles?
      4. There is bullying?
      5. Other reasons?
2. What is most important for helping overcome those barriers?
3. What do you think is most helpful for ensuring that schools in your district pay attention to student attendance and take steps to reduce or avoid chronic absence (missing 10% or more of school)?

(Revised September 18, 2013)