Attendance Works
Advancing Student Success By Reducing Chronic Absence

Strategies for Connecting with Students and Families

The ideas below provide options to help you locate students and families who have not been in touch with your school or district during the coronavirus pandemic. When reaching out keep in mind that the reason for making contact is to express your concern for the safety and wellbeing of each student and family. Ask families and students what they need, and don't talk about missed virtual attendance or school work at this time. If possible translate messages into languages spoken in your community.

Idea One: Multiple Modes of Outreach

- Divide the list of students who have not been contacted among school staff and assign student names to each staff person.
- Each staff person can reach out to students and families using all available modes of communication, such as email, phone, text message and social media. Try using these methods at different times of the day and on different days of the week.
- Consider sending a letter expressing concern for the student and family by registered mail with delivery confirmation. This will let you know that someone at the home has received the correspondence.
- Keep written communications short and use simple language so they can be understood by readers with a low literacy level. Consider using bullets next to the most important messages so readers can skim the text. If possible translate messages into languages spoken in your community.
- Offer to hold virtual meetings with family members through Zoom or other online services.

Idea Two: Media

- Prepare and distribute a public service announcement (PSA) asking families and students to get in touch with their school. Place the PSA with popular radio shows and talk shows that reach the community you serve.
- For families that speak a language other than English, work with radio stations to translate PSAs into home languages.
- Leverage social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and others. Search by first name or any nickname of the student that you may know. Logging onto the Facebook page of one student and observing their friend list may give you access to other students and their family members who are on Facebook.
- Create a school social media page on Instagram and other platforms that are popular in the community, or consider asking your after-school provider or other trusted partner to create a page for you. Post messages asking students and families to get in touch with the school. Offer resources, such as access to food or health services, as incentives for engagement.
- Ask a local celebrity or trusted community leader to reach out via social media to ask students and families who have not been in touch with their school to call.

Idea Three: Leverage Personal and Social Networks

- Identify school staff members who have a relationship with the "missing" students, or who might know other people who might be in touch with them. Staff members with this relationship could be teachers, coaches, non-profit partners or other school staff in the building.
- "Each one, reach one" Identify the friends and classmates of the students you want to contact and ask them to reach out to the students you are not in touch with using the phone, social media or online games such as XBox. This can be particularly helpful for secondary students.
- If possible, use the emergency contact listed on the student's "emergency card." Contact information should be documented and updated in a school database throughout the year.
- Have all staff (including social workers, secretaries, counselors, school liaison officers, etc.) maintain one-on-one contact with assigned students. Ask each staff person to contact their "mentees" weekly to see how they're doing. These relationships can help to identify students who suddenly lose contact. These relationships might also help to ensure other students are less likely to go missing without someone at the school knowing.
- Engage established school partners, such as community organizations/agencies or after-school providers, to obtain student/family contact information.
- Tap into the expertise of school staff and community partners to communicate in families' home languages.
- Host virtual group lunch meetings for students with an adult that has close relationships with these students. This can be especially important for students who are at home alone.

Idea Four: School Marquees and Sign Boards

- Use school marquees and sign boards to post messages. Messages can offer information about where to find meals, pick up lesson packets, access resources, etc.
- If districts can coordinate phone calls, the schools can encourage families to call and leave a message on a district phone number. On this message ask families if they are safe, have moved and/or have new contact information.

Idea Five: Home Visits (Please follow the guidance of local health officials and local school district. Also, see the safe home visiting protocols at the end of this document)

- Require all school personnel to follow the local safety protocol. **If allowable at the local level, consider** these home visiting strategies gathered from practitioners across the country:
- Consider leaving a letter and information about how to obtain a resource (e.g. food, internet access, other supports) and your request for the family to get in touch. Offer multiple response options including phone, text, and email.
- While in the neighborhood, first take all recommended safety precautions. If allowable, ask neighbors if they know where the student or family may be located. Leave messages with neighbors letting them know that educators at the school are concerned about the student and family and would like them to contact the school. Remember to leave your contact information behind.

Idea Five: Engage Public and Private Partners

- Consider creating a flyer asking students and families who have not been in touch to contact the school. Be sure to include the school's contact information.
- Contact local apartment and public housing complexes, churches and community agencies, open businesses such as corner stores and pharmacies, and the local urgent care or other public and private health care providers, to ask if they will post your flyer in high traffic areas.

Strategies were taken from Attendance Works experience working with multiple schools and districts as well as through the UCLA Center for Mental Health in Schools and Student Learning Supports' School Practitioner Community of Practice (a national network)

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Home Visits Safety Protocols

Home visits can be done while practicing social distancing and personal safety measures, such as gloves and masks, sending people in a team of two, etc. Be sure to follow recommendations from your school district or local health agency. If contact is made at the home, bring along a paper copy of resources in the community and in the district that families and caretakers can reach out to directly. The graphic below has been adapted from Parent Teacher Home Visits: http://www.pthvp.org/

A Guide to Home Visits

Home visits are a proactive approach to student & family engagement, and a Tier 1 approach to support student attendance.

Conducting the Home Visit

Arrival:

- ✓ Suggest an environment conducive to meeting. Visits can occur in the community if that will make the family feel more comfortable (café, library, community center, local agency)
- ✓ Set the tone (warm introduction, thank family for time and participation)
- ✓ Include all family members in the home who would like to participate

During the visit:

- ✓ Review purpose of visit: allow family to speak
- ✓ Listen with intent
- ✓ Share student information related to visit
- ✓ Identify student/family strengths
- ✓ Elicit feedback from family
- ✓ Answer questions/give information & resources
- ✓ Establish goals, make a plan

Concluding the Visit:

- ✓ Summarize visit
- ✓ Discuss next steps
- ✓ Provide business card, contact info.
- ✓ Thank them for their time

After the Visit:

- ✓ Document visit
- ✓ Evaluate visit
- ✓ Follow-through on action steps identified in plan

Tips to Enhance Effectiveness:

Have specific goals for each visit
Be pleasant and flexible
Be prompt for your home visit
Remember that small improvements lead to big one
Respect cultural and ethnic values
Monitor and manage your own behavior

Safety Tips:

Dress appropriately
Leave jewelry at home
Leave purse at office or in trunk
Survey neighbor in advance
Trust your instincts
Travel in pairs when possible

Adopted from Parent Teacher Home Visits