

# STAY THE COURSE: SUPPORT ATTENDANCE, ENGAGEMENT AND LEARNING IN THE WINTER MONTHS



## WHAT CAN SCHOOLS AND DISTRICTS DO:

### 1. Brainstorm alternative ways to get students to school

Some ideas include:

- a) Use a phone tree to connect parents to neighbors who can drive to school.
- b) Start a “walking school bus” that picks up children around the neighborhood and walks with them to school.
- c) Connect with city agencies to make sure sidewalks are cleared quickly and snow doesn’t pile up at corners.
- d) Organize a group of volunteers to ensure that sidewalks closest to your school are safe for walking.
- e) Recognize the extra effort students, families and staff make to come to school on bad weather days by offering a warm welcome and, if possible, a warm beverage.
- f) Prepare a letter and/or robocall offering families help in getting their children to school.
- g) Make sure that families have up to date information on Covid-19, know where to seek help and get questions answered.
- h) Make sure families know how to obtain resources to keep students learning and connected to school if they must stay home.
- i) Share this handout for families.

### 2. Emphasize good health habits

- a) Make sure that families complete annual health forms. Schools should be aware of all students with chronic health issues, and have permission to keep and use necessary medications at school. Offer families access to appropriate resources.
- b) Ensure that students have access to mental and physical health services (including vaccines, Covid testing and masks) on your campus or make it easy for families to connect with nearby clinics.
- c) Work with local partners to provide specific health screenings (vision, hearing, dental, etc.)
- d) Screen for food and housing insecurity.
- e) Promote hand washing before and after eating and after using the bathroom. If soap and water are not readily available, provide access to hand sanitizer.
- f) Offer breakfast in the classroom or grab-and-go items to ensure every child has a good meal.
- g) Keep a closet full of donated coats, hats and mittens for students who show up at school without cold weather clothing. Ask parent organizations, community partners and businesses to stock the closet.
- h) Aim for students to be physically active (recess, gym, after school activities, etc.) for 60 minutes a day.
- i) Ensure buildings are clean, properly ventilated and free of mold. Poor air quality and dust can contribute to respiratory illnesses, not just Covid-19. Consider bus idle reduction policies and monitoring of outdoor air to determine if outdoor play should be limited.

## WHAT COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS AND LOCAL LEADERS CAN DO:

1. **Volunteer** to walk children to school on bad weather days or shovel snow near the school.
2. **Donate** winter coats and hats, snacks or bottles of hand sanitizer.
3. **Offer** your expertise, whether in health care, transportation or another area.
4. **Advocate** for a nurse in every school and support other district or school programs that address mental or physical health barriers to attendance.
5. **Connect** with city agencies to make sure sidewalks are cleared quickly and snow doesn't pile up at corners, or organize a group of parents and volunteers to ensure that sidewalks closest to your school are safe for walking.
6. **Advocate** at the local and state level to put in place adequate and accessible transportation services for students.
7. **Provide** access to tutoring, mentoring or afterschool programs especially for students who have missed significant amounts of school.

## WHAT TO SAY TO FAMILIES:

Your partnership with families is crucial to ensuring students get to school every day possible. As a member of the school community, you can communicate with parents and caregivers to let them know you care and you want to partner with them. Share some or all of these talking points with parents during conversations, community events or even in school newspapers or blogs.

- a) If you're having trouble getting to school, we want to help! Please call the school office.
- b) This is the time of year when winter weather and children's illnesses can take a toll on school attendance. But it's important to get your children to school every day possible.
- c) Too many absences can make it hard for students to stay engaged, connected and learning. This is as true in kindergarten and elementary grades as it is in high school.
- d) Children who miss too much school in kindergarten are less likely to read well by third grade. By middle school, absenteeism can predict who will graduate from high school.
- e) There's not much we can do about the weather, but there are steps parents can take to help avoid absences.
- f) Do what you can to keep your children healthy. Dress them warmly for the cold weather. Encourage students to eat a healthy diet, be physically active, get enough sleep and wash their hands regularly.
- g) Schedule a yearly physical for each child and make sure students are up to date on vaccines, including flu and Covid.
- h) If you are concerned your child may have Covid, or if your child seems anxious about going to school, call the child's medical practitioner and/or the school nurse for advice.
- i) If your child is unable to get to school due to Covid or other significant challenges, ask the school for materials to keep learning at home. Help your child stay connected to classmates and teachers.
- j) Help your children learn to persevere. Today, they learn to overcome wintry weather. In the future, they will have the confidence to triumph over other obstacles to reach their dreams.

To view the full toolkit, go to <https://www.attendanceworks.org/resources/messaging/stay-the-course-a-winter-messaging-toolkit/>

To learn more about attendance and strategies that make a difference visit [www.attendanceworks.org](http://www.attendanceworks.org)

Updated December 2022