

STAY THE COURSE: SUPPORT ATTENDANCE 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. Learn how to form a walking school bus here <http://www.walkingschoolbus.org/>.
- 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 parents and 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 cup of cocoa.
- f) Prepare a letter and/or robocall offering families help in getting their children to school or connected to learning if they must quarantine.
- g) Clearly communicate Covid-related messages to families.
- h) Make sure families know how to obtain resources to keep students learning and connected to school if they must quarantine.
- i) [Share this handout](#) for families.

2. Emphasize good health habits

- a) Keep a list of students with asthma and ensure the school nurse gives them extra attention in the winter months, when colds can exacerbate this condition.
- b) Offer mental and physical health services (including vaccinations, Covid testing and masks) on your campus or make it easy for families to connect with nearby clinics.
- c) Make sure every room has hand sanitizer and that teachers show students how to use it. Consider asking local businesses or community partners to donate small bottles of hand sanitizer. Teach children how to wash their hands properly with soap and water.
- d) Offer breakfast in the classroom or grab-and-go items to ensure every child has a good meal.
- e) 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.
- f) Ensure buildings are clean, properly ventilated and free of mold. Poor air quality and dust can contribute to respiratory illnesses, not just Covid-19.

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, bottles of hand sanitizer or snacks.
3. **Offer** your expertise, whether in health care, transportation or another area.
4. **Support** district or school programs that address mental or physical health barriers to attendance or that encourage relationship-building.
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:

Families are crucial to ensuring students attend school every day, whether their role is to transport a young child to school or monitor whether their teenager is showing up and participating in class.

As a member of the school community, you can communicate with parents and caregivers about why regular attendance is important and how quickly a child can fall behind due to too many absences. Share these talking points with parents during conversations, community events or even in school newspapers or blogs.

- a) 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.
- b) Absences can add up to lost learning time and result in student disengagement and lower grades. This is as true in kindergarten and elementary grades as it is in high school.
- c) 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) If you're having trouble getting to school, reach out to other families or call the school.
- g) Do what you can to keep your children healthy. Dress them warmly for the cold weather. Encourage them to wash their hands regularly, and give them a bottle of hand sanitizer.
- h) If you are concerned your child may have Covid-19, or if your child seems anxious about going to school, call the school for advice.
- i) If your child is unable to get to school due to quarantine 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 grit 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