

## **Why Attendance Matters**

**The Attendance Imperative:** Attending school regularly is essential to students gaining the academic, social and emotional skills they need to thrive. Chronic absence, no matter its cause, has real life consequences for students, families and society as a whole. Research shows starting as early as preschool and kindergarten, chronic absence—missing 10% of the academic year—can leave third graders unable to read proficiently, sixth graders struggling with coursework and high school students off track for graduation\*.

Prior to the pandemic, 8 million students were affected by chronic absence. Today chronic absence has nearly tripled. Students of color, those living in poverty, those with disabilities and English language learners have tended to be especially affected. Chronic absence, which involves monitoring when and which students miss too much school for any reason, is different from truancy (unexcused absences) or average daily attendance (how many students typically show up each day to school.)

Reducing absenteeism is an essential, but often overlooked, strategy for responding strategically to the academic and social-emotional loss experienced by millions of students. School and district attendance data can be used to identify which student groups have lost out most on opportunities to learn during the pandemic and ensure they are prioritized in recovery planning. Effective strategies to improve attendance can benefit the entire community.

The good news is that chronic absence can be significantly reduced when schools, families and community partners work together to monitor data, nurture a culture of engagement, promote regular attendance and routines, and address hurdles that keep children and youth from getting to school every day – such as lack of access to food, clothing and health care; unhealthy environmental conditions, unreliable transportation, housing instability or the lack of safe paths to school.

**Why attendance matters to expanded learning providers:** A focus on attendance has a double bottom-line. First, regular attendance and participation in a quality program increases its impact on social and academic outcomes. Second, research shows that quality programs can improve school-day attendance. The sense of belonging, the connection to caring adults and the academic enrichment they provide outside of school can make children more likely to go to school.



## How expanded learning providers can make a difference:

### Give children and youth a reason to come to school:

- **Engage students in enriching activities:** Innovative, stimulating activities keep students coming to your program and to school. Some children and youth say they come to school just so they can attend after school enrichment programs.
- **Establish a welcoming environment that promotes a sense of safety and belonging.** Prioritizing respect and creating a space where students feel connected to adults in the program can help build trusting relationships that motivate them to show up and participate.
- **Promote a routine of regular attendance:** Take the time to acknowledge and notice each child every day they attend the program, and express concern if they are absent. Don't forget to celebrate improvements.
- **Share the importance of regular attendance with students and parents.** Use your interactions with students and parents to share why attendance matters and to explore and problem-solve with families when students are absent.
- **Provide access to resources.** Expanded learning programs can offer health and mental health services, tutoring, mentoring, technology, and extra-curriculars like sports, music and other clubs.

### Track data and share with schools and districts

- **Record program attendance accurately:** Make sure that you emphasize good attendance in the expanded learning program. Keep regular records and examine the data for patterns.
- **Share data with feeder schools or the school district:** Let the school(s) know about student attendance in expanded learning programs. And arrange to see their data on chronically absent students who participate in your programs.

### Support chronically absent students and families

- **Use chronic absence data when deploying resources.** Consider locating new programs in communities with high chronic absence rates, where additional engagement and support for students and families is needed.
- **Offer supports to improve attendance.** Serve as a bridge to the school and community resources for parents and other caregivers who may have had negative school experiences themselves. Programs can be especially helpful when staff reflect the communities served.

\*A growing body of research has shown the prevalence of chronic absence, its critical role in student achievement, and how it can be addressed. Access a research summary: <https://awareness.attendanceworks.org/wp-content/uploads/Research2016.pdf>

Click here to find a full list of research: <https://www.attendanceworks.org/research/>

For more information, go to Attendance Works at [www.attendanceworks.org](http://www.attendanceworks.org).

