

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 that 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 more than doubled. 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, including housing agencies, 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 student attendance matters to housing organizations:

It is an asset management investment: Children who are in school and busy with activities and homework have far more supervised time than children who are chronically absent, and have far less time to be tempted by adolescent mischief. Keeping students in school every day makes for safer communities.

It is an anti-poverty strategy: The mission of public and affordable housing organizations is to support families living in poverty. Education is one of the biggest contributors to breaking the cycle of poverty for children who live in subsidized housing. Being in school regularly is essential to graduating from high school.

It employs your assets in unique ways: Housing organizations are uniquely positioned to be education partners. Your property managers and resident services staff tend to know more about where families are and what they're doing than any other community partner. That proximity and trust can be leveraged for social good.



How housing organizations can make a difference:

1. Convey the importance of a daily attendance routine for social and emotional well-being and learning.
 - Put up posters in your offices or hand out flyers to tenants and clients encouraging good attendance.
 - Host a back to school picnic or put door hangers on every apartment or front door reminding parents/caregivers when school starts and what they need to do to make sure their children are ready.
2. Help parents/caregivers get kids to school.
 - Ask your managers and staff in housing developments to keep an eye out for children who aren't in school. Talk to families about why students are missing class.
 - If traffic or community violence makes the walk to school dangerous, organize parents/caregivers and other volunteers to walk with children.
 - Recruit adults to become "attendance ambassadors," that act as role models and liaisons between schools and other parents/caregivers.
 - Eliminate mold and other asthma triggers in housing that contribute to absenteeism.
3. Leverage afterschool and summer programming to improve school attendance.
 - Make sure afterschool and summer programming staff are equipped to help support a routine of regular attendance, get students excited about learning, and message about the importance of attendance, including helping families to know when school starts.
 - Use summer and afterschool programming to reach out to chronically absent students and connect them to health and social supports that will improve attendance during the school year.
4. Maintain housing stability throughout the school year.
 - When possible, schedule changes in housing vouchers or public housing for summer, so that children don't have to move mid-year.
 - Provide support for families who must move during the school year so children don't miss too much school.
 - Help homeless families find a stable housing situation.
5. Partner with schools.
 - Create data-sharing agreements with local school districts that allow for tracking grades, test scores and attendance for students in your housing development, or for families using housing vouchers.
 - Join a coalition taking a community-wide approach to reducing chronic absence.
 - Target schools in your community with high rates of chronic absence and provide support to students and families there.
6. Engage community-based service providers.
 - Share resources with the community-based organizations that provide services to families living in public housing.
 - Provide these partners with strategies for communicating with families about the importance of regular attendance routines. Consider resources in our Showing Up Matters for R.E.A.L. toolkit.

*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.

