

Press Release

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New report shows that two-thirds of states have reinstated daily attendance taking

Daily attendance can be used to reconnect and reengage millions of students missing significant amounts of school during the pandemic

SAN FRANCISCO, December 17, 2020 – A scan of 50 state policies that track whether students are missing school during the coronavirus pandemic shows that the majority have reinstated daily attendance taking, according to a new report from Attendance Works.

Early data suggests that millions of students have missed a significant amount of school during the pandemic. When attendance is taken daily, absenteeism can serve as an early warning signal to help states, districts and community partners know when action, additional outreach and resources are needed to help schools support students and their families.

Are Students Present and Accounted For? An Examination of State Attendance Policies During the Covid-19 Pandemic, released by Attendance Works, discusses how the coronavirus pandemic impacted attendance data. It presents a summary of state attendance guidance developed since spring 2020, and examines the extent to which recent state guidance guarantees the availability of consistent, reliable data taken on a daily basis.

“Covid-19 has worsened existing inequities and increased barriers to learning and development. The potential long-term impact of these worrisome trends, particularly for Black, Native American, Pacific Islander and Hispanic/Latinx, and children from low-income communities, is likely to be devastating without timely intervention by the government at every level. Monitoring absenteeism helps inform strategic action,” said Hedy Chang, executive director of Attendance Works.

The publicly available online scan shows that 32 states plus the District of Columbia have requirements that attendance be taken daily. Another five states require attendance be taken, but not daily, while eleven states leave the decision about how and when to track attendance to local discretion. In two states, attendance expectations were not explicitly addressed in available guidance.

Attendance Works gathered and analyzed state department of education reopening and restart plans and memos as well as copies of relevant legislation available online. Based upon this information, states are placed into one of four categories: daily attendance taking required; attendance taking required but not daily; attendance taking decisions, including how and when, is left to local districts; and, attendance is unaddressed by state guidance. The information was reviewed by state level educators through the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), the Attendance Works Network to Advance State Attendance Policy and Practice and with educators at the state and local level. Find the online scan here.

“This report is a call to action for states to take immediate steps to ensure that districts and schools can use attendance data to monitor attendance, track participation and partner with families to engage and reconnect students who have missed a significant amount of school during the pandemic,” Chang said.

When too many students are missing 10% or more of instruction it is clear that systemic changes should be developed to address barriers and promote engagement and attendance.

Are Students Present and Accounted For? offers seven recommendations for states outlining effective state-wide attendance procedures and policies for districts and schools. These recommendations are:

- 1. Promote tracking daily attendance for all students**
- 2. Leverage currently available data to inform action and resource allocation**
- 3. Promote interagency collaboration and review of data**
- 4. Invest in research and data systems**
- 5. Build capacity among districts to collect, analyze and use data on attendance and absenteeism**
- 6. Refrain from using chronic absence as an accountability measure until more research evidence is developed on attendance and absenteeism**
- 7. Ensure adequate funding for districts, especially those serving vulnerable populations**

Attendance Works is a national and state initiative that works to advance student success and help close equity gaps by reducing chronic absence. Learn more at www.attendanceworks.org.