



School Attendance Team Overview

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School leaders and educators know from experience and common sense what research confirms: showing up for class matters. Students can't benefit from investments in high quality instruction and engaging curriculum unless they are in their classrooms. While everyone can help ensure students show up to class every day, the leadership role of a principal is irreplaceable. Principals are uniquely positioned to ensure their school community adopts a comprehensive, tiered approach to improving attendance that fits with their overall goal of promoting academic achievement.

This document has been developed as a training guide for principals interested in establishing a school-based student attendance team as a vehicle to improve attendance and reduce chronic absence for all students.

What is the purpose of an attendance team? The primary purpose of an attendance team is to organize the school's strategy to foster improved attendance for all students. Essentially the attendance team coordinates, assesses, and prioritizes. The specific functions include:

1. **Monitor data trends.** See who is most affected and whether the data is getting better or worse.
2. **Examine causes of chronic absenteeism** using both qualitative and quantitative data.
3. **Coordinate implementation of the school's multi-tiered strategy** by engaging the entire school community in developing and supporting a comprehensive strategy that begins with prevention and early intervention. Reducing chronic absence begins with evidence-based prevention and early intervention strategies that involve the whole school community.
4. **Ensure chronically absent students receive needed supports** from both the school and the community.

What makes an effective attendance team? Attendance teams are successful when they involve the right people and have established group norms, defined roles/responsibilities, and regularly scheduled meetings with a standard meeting agenda. As the team leader, the principal should set the parameters for the attendance team and either serve as the team facilitator or identify another skilled facilitator who will serve as the attendance team leader.

Team composition: The most effective attendance teams are cross-functional and leverage the knowledge of key stakeholders including students, families, school staff (including teachers) and community partners. Teams should have three or more people in membership.

- Depending on the school's resources, the team might include: the school nurse, social worker, guidance counselor, attendance clerk/secretary, school climate coordinator, attendance or truancy officer, parent/family liaison, IEP coordinator, family resource staff and district staff as appropriate. Teams may also include teachers or lead teachers for grade cohorts. Minimally, there should

be a process for teachers to provide their perspective on reasons why students are absent.

- Ideally, when discussing community strategies to prevent absenteeism and address common barriers to attendance, teams should include representatives from the community such as local businesses, religious institutions, community organizations, legislators, and public agencies.
- Certain community agencies are in the position to help reach out to students and their parents, as well as offer resources for overcoming barriers to attendance. When including community agencies, confidentiality protocols for sharing student data need to be followed.
- **Group norms:** Effective teams have established group norms which are negotiated and established as the first step in the team process. Norms define the habits and expectations for how the team will function, including how to share resources, processes for communication, and accountability for follow through on action items. For more information on how to establish group norms, use this resource [here](#).
- **Roles and responsibilities:** Effective teams ensure that each team member has a clearly defined role as well as the capacity to perform their role. Core roles include: team leader, meeting facilitator, data coordinator, and note taker. All team members should have access to a common system that monitors student outcomes, records interactions and interventions, and tracks progress on agreed upon tasks. This can be an existing districtwide database (e.g., PowerSchool) or a simple Google document that all team members can access during the meeting.

Can an existing team serve as the attendance team? Principals and school staff should determine, based upon local conditions, if a new group needs to be established to monitor attendance data and practice, or if the work can be successfully incorporated into the responsibilities of an existing team. The principal should assess what teams already exist in their school (e.g., PBIS, school climate, RTI, Instructional Leadership Team, etc.), including their purpose, meeting frequency, and participants. Based on this assessment, the principal will need to decide how the attendance team functions will be implemented in their school.

Principals can consider dividing up the functions across multiple teams, adding all of the functions to an existing team, or establishing a new team. For example, a school climate team can be responsible for Tier 1 strategies which focus on whole school strategies such as establishing a positive and engaging school climate and promoting good and improved attendance. An existing team that looks at academic data and/or behavioral or health issues can be responsible for Tier 2 and Tier 3 [strategies](#) which focus on the needs of students, since poor attendance may be a factor for low academic achievement and behavioral health issues. If the attendance strategy is implemented across different teams, it is important to have a system for communication between the teams.

How to establish a school attendance team? Once the principal has determined the group organization, composition, and roles of the team members, they are ready to convene the attendance team. The principal should take these steps to ensure team success.

Steps to organizing the school attendance team:

1. Determine whether an existing team will take on the work of attendance improvement or if a new team will be established.
2. Hold the first meeting and ensure team members understand chronic absence, how it contributes to students falling behind academically, and the distinction between chronic absence and truancy.
3. Review and agree on the group norms and roles/responsibilities.
4. Review the standard meeting agenda and set a regular meeting schedule for the year, ideally weekly.
5. Review Attendance Works' [Teaching Attendance E-Learning Modules](#).
6. Review the school's chronic absence data, including year-to-date, year-over-year, and subgroup rates.
7. Review and understand the district's regulations, guidance, protocols and practices around attendance.
8. Map the school's tiered intervention strategy for preventing and reducing chronic absence.
9. Assess the school's [attendance practice](#), [existing tiered strategies](#), and develop an attendance improvement plan.
10. Use school data to set schoolwide and student sub-group goals for attendance improvement.

Attendance Works has developed an attendance team rubric and practice self-assessment. This tool can help principals assess the level of proficiency of the attendance team in key strategic areas of the structure and process. Find the [Attendance Team Self-Assessment Tool](#).

School Attendance Team Meeting – Sample Agenda

The attendance team should meet regularly (ideally weekly when chronic absence rates exceed 5 percent) to review the school’s attendance data and coordinate schoolwide efforts to reduce chronic absence. The agenda should ensure that there is sufficient time to review and monitor the team’s attendance strategy so that the team does not become overly focused on individual students with the highest levels of absence.

Often attendance teams spend most of their time discussing individual students with the highest level of absences (Tier 3) and/or students who are truant. This does not allow enough time for the team to discuss prevention or early intervention strategies for students who are at risk of becoming chronically absent. These early prevention strategies could reduce the number of students who become seriously chronically absent. Exclusively focusing on individual students also takes away from the team’s time to examine trends and common attendance barriers for groups of students. Consider reserving Tier 3 students for a sub-committee of members who are directly responsible for their intervention plans if the team does not have longer than 60 minutes to meet.

5 min	Aggregate data presentation
	High-level picture of all students by tier and by attendance categories (satisfactory, at-risk, chronic absence, severe chronic absence) and changes since last meeting.
10 min	Early warning students
	Review list of students who are on the “cusp” of moving from one tier to another; discuss the reasons for the absence, identify interventions and assign a person to implement the intervention.
25 min	Tier 2 Intervention Strategy
	Review common causes of chronic absence; discuss possible solutions to the barriers students are experiencing, analyze the patterns across groups of students and identify systemic interventions (e.g., walking school bus), assign responsibility and/or discuss progress of interventions strategies and attendance improvement outcomes.
15 min	Tier 1 Prevention Strategy
	Tier 1 interventions: Discuss status and impact of Tier 1 interventions, including successes, challenges, and new strategies using the year-long calendar of activities.
5 min	Team assignments review and next steps agreement.
Tier 2 and 3 – Case Management	
30 min	Tier 2 and 3 students: Review individual Tier 2 and 3 students; discuss the causes of the absence, assign interventions and/or discuss progress of interventions, attendance improvement outcomes, and community and agency support.