

ON TIME, EVERY DAY, EVERY SCHOLAR MATTERS.

# Attendance HANDBOOK

**Attendance  
Awareness  
Tool Kit** for  
School Leaders  
and Support Staff



*Adapted with permission from materials provided  
by Attendance Works ([www.attendanceworks.org](http://www.attendanceworks.org))  
and Puget Sound Educational Service District  
([www.psesd.org/programs-services/learning-teaching-and-family-support-ltfs/enhancing-equitable-systems/early-warning-systems/attendance-awareness-toolkit](http://www.psesd.org/programs-services/learning-teaching-and-family-support-ltfs/enhancing-equitable-systems/early-warning-systems/attendance-awareness-toolkit))*

EACH SCHOLAR: A VOICE. A DREAM. A **BRIGHT** FUTURE.



**FEDERAL WAY  
PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

# Attendance **HANDBOOK**

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An **Attendance Awareness**

**Tool Kit** for School Leaders and Support Staff

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# Attendance Action Items

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The purpose of this guide is to provide school leadership teams across the district with aligned attendance awareness communications and activities. We'll start strong district-wide with our attendance awareness campaign during the month of September. Then, throughout each month, we ask that your school team continues with intentional awareness to bring information to scholars and provide ongoing communication to families.

- ☐ Communicate about the importance of attendance with scholars, families, and staff.
- ☐ Complete Attendance Awareness Planner (pages 8-11), to pre-plan Attendance Awareness activities throughout the year.
- ☐ Meet with at least one community partner to share information about attendance.
- ☐ Meet with your school support staff to communicate information (counselors/social workers, family liaisons, office team, and site coordinators).
- ☐ Monthly Newsletter: Create an Attendance Awareness section. Content available at [Attendanceworks.com](http://Attendanceworks.com) and on the FWPS J drive at J:\Attendance\Attendance Awareness TOOLKIT
- ☐ Staff Meeting: Consider using 3-5 minutes per staff meeting to go over one statistic or handout that covers attendance. Share attendance information at minimum one staff meeting prior to November and another staff meeting prior to May.
- ☐ Distribute district provided hard copy flyers at open house and/or Scholar-Led Conference.
- ☐ Administrators: Place yard signs in your yard throughout the school year. Ask families to place yard signs at their home in the neighborhood. Ask area housing communities (apartments, HOA or mobile homes) to display yard signs on their property. Contact the FWPS Communications Department to get yard signs at 253-945-2264.
- ☐ Assembly: Show attendance video and/or have some form of scholar-friendly information presented at an assembly.
- ☐ Work with your school team to create a system for ongoing communication about the importance of attendance. Identify the what, how, when, and who for ensuring this site-based system is established. Content available at [Attendanceworks.com](http://Attendanceworks.com) and on the FWPS J drive at J:\Attendance\Attendance Awareness TOOLKIT
- ☐ Send successes your school has had with attendance to the Communications Department at [comments@fwps.org](mailto:comments@fwps.org), so they may be considered for recognition at an upcoming educational board meeting during the Good News Announcements.
- ☐ Be intentional, inspirational, and individualized. Make attendance real for every scholar.
- ☐ For questions or feedback contact the Office of Equity for Scholar & Family Success, 253-945-4692, [Becca@fwps.org](mailto:Becca@fwps.org)

# District

Federal Way Public Schools is committed to ongoing attendance awareness.

We want our scholars to wake up each morning knowing they have at least one caring adult who expects to see them at school and will miss them if they are not attending. Attendance Awareness is a Tier I social, emotional support for scholars. Please continue to promote the **importance of attendance throughout the school year.**

In addition, over this year, our district and school efforts will strengthen as we move into Tier II and Tier III supports that specifically address barriers that keep our scholars from attending classes.

Our goal is to provide district-wide common messaging. Here is a list of resources the district provides.

- ✓ Facebook and Twitter posts that can be reposted found at Facebook: [www.facebook.com/fwps210](https://www.facebook.com/fwps210) X, formerly known as Twitter: @fwps210
- ✓ Attendance Welcome Back postcard from Dr. Dani Pfeiffer sent to each scholar in September
- ✓ Attendance flyers uploaded to PeachJar
- ✓ Attendance handbook (this document)
- ✓ Yard signs will be provided for display on school property
- ✓ Local media: Submit articles to the Federal Way Mirror and regional media
- ✓ Promotional items targeted at elementary and secondary level scholars and families to use at home to support attendance every day
- ✓ Article in FWPS Scholar Chronicle
- ✓ Highlight attendance successes at the educational board meetings during the Good News Announcements



## STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL

**two** WHOLE CHILD:

**Thriving, confident, responsible individuals**

Every scholar will be empowered and prepared to develop personal responsibility in order to be positive, productive members of society.

This is measured by the percent of scholars participating in at least 90 percent of classroom instructional time.



# School

## *Build excitement!*

Our goal is to build attendance awareness and excitement and dedication throughout the year. Attendance awareness activities are required district-wide and should be made a priority.





## ANNOUNCEMENTS TO SCHOLARS

*Use these scripts as a starting place to announce attendance related information. Please share announcements with scholars once a week at minimum, starting the beginning of September and continuing the following three weeks.*

## September is Attendance Awareness Month

### WEEK 1

#### Elementary

"September is Attendance Awareness month and did you know that..."

Scholars who attend school regularly are more likely to graduate and find good jobs? We want you to have the job of your dreams and it begins with being at school every day, on time for every class.

*On time, every day, every scholar matters."*

#### Secondary

"September is Attendance Awareness month and did you know that..."

Scholars who attend school regularly are more likely to graduate and find good jobs. In fact, a high school graduate makes, on average, one million dollars more than a dropout over a lifetime. We want you to have the job of your dreams and it begins with being at school every day, on time for every class.

*On time, every day, every scholar matters."*

### WEEK 2

#### Elementary

"Last week we learned about the importance of finishing high school. This week let's think about today. The importance of being at school today, right now. Some of you are reading, writing, singing, solving math problems, and learning about science. Even just five minutes in class makes a difference. Today, I want you to share with each other and your teacher at least one reason why being in class every day is important.

*On time, every day, every scholar matters."*

#### Secondary

"We continue this week to focus on the importance of you being in class.

The myth is that missing a day here or there doesn't matter. But absences add up quickly, and just 2 days a month adds up to ten percent of classroom time. You matter and so does your participation in class.

*On time, every day, every scholar matters."*



## ANNOUNCEMENTS TO SCHOLARS

*Please continue to share with scholars once a week at minimum, through Week 4.*

## September is Attendance Awareness Month

### WEEK 3

#### Elementary

"This is our third week of focusing on the importance of attendance. Did you know that you are missed when you're not at school? We understand that sometimes you have to stay home because you don't feel good. Maybe you have a fever or the flu. We understand that there are times when it's best to stay home and rest. However, please remember if you're tired, or feel like missing a day of school does not matter, well, you matter and we all miss you when you are not at school. Always do your best to come to school.

*On time, every day, every scholar matters."*

#### Secondary

"This is our third week of focusing on the importance of attendance. School only gets harder when you stay home too much. Sometimes it's tempting to stay home because you've got too much work or you don't understand what's going on in class. Maybe you worked late or stayed up too late.

But missing a day only makes that worse. You are missed when you are not at school. Remember, high school is just part of your life journey. Your goals and future aspirations require you to complete this part of your journey in order to prepare you for going onto college and attaining an excellent career.

*On time, every day, every scholar matters."*

### WEEK 4

#### Elementary & Secondary

"This is our final week of attendance awareness month but not our final commitment to making sure you are at school and in class. If you're having trouble getting to school or have other reasons that keep you from coming to school, choose one of the adults you trust here at our school to talk with. Remember, we miss you when you're not here. School only gets harder when you stay home too much. Sometimes it's tempting to stay home because you've got too much work or you don't understand what's going on in class.

*On time, every day, every scholar matters."*



## ATTENDANCE AWARENESS PLANNER

### SEPTEMBER MONTHLY FOCUS: *Attendance Awareness Month*

*A variety of tools are available on the shared J drive at J:\Attendance\Attendance Awareness TOOLKIT*

- ☐ Announcements from Attendance Handbook/Toolkit

Dates: \_\_\_\_\_

- ☐ Yard signs distributed to Families/Neighborhoods/Housing communities

Locations: \_\_\_\_\_

Staff responsible: \_\_\_\_\_

- ☐ Newsletter content from AttendanceWorks.org or FWPS Attendance Toolkit

This month's fact: \_\_\_\_\_

- ☐ School assembly/mini lesson

☐ PowerPoint

☐ Skit

☐ Video

☐ Activity/Game

- ☐ Family event/activity: Resources available in All Admin folder

☐ PowerPoint

☐ Skit

☐ Video

☐ Activity/Game

### OCTOBER MONTHLY FOCUS: *Tardies—On time, every day, every scholar matters*

- ☐ Attendance announcement

Dates: \_\_\_\_\_

- ☐ PBIS Attendance Announcements/Celebrations

Dates: \_\_\_\_\_

- ☐ Newsletter content from AttendanceWorks.org or FWPS Attendance Toolkit

This month's fact: \_\_\_\_\_

- ☐ School assembly/mini lesson

☐ PowerPoint

☐ Skit

☐ Video

☐ Activity/Game

- ☐ Family event/activity: Resources available in All Admin folder

☐ PowerPoint

☐ Skit

☐ Video

☐ Activity/Game



## NOVEMBER MONTHLY FOCUS: *Prearranged absences/Family trips*

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- ☐ Attendance announcement

Dates: \_\_\_\_\_

- ☐ PBIS Attendance Announcements/Celebrations

Dates: \_\_\_\_\_

- ☐ Newsletter content from AttendanceWorks.org or FWPS Attendance Toolkit

This month's fact: \_\_\_\_\_

- ☐ School assembly/mini lesson

☐ PowerPoint

☐ Skit

☐ Video

☐ Activity/Game

- ☐ Family event/activity: Resources available in All Admin folder

☐ PowerPoint

☐ Skit

☐ Video

☐ Activity/Game

- ☐ Scholar-Led Conferences

Highlight absences to parents, share significance of chronic absences and provide awareness of local community resources/organizations (ex. libraries, Communities in Schools, etc.)

## DECEMBER MONTHLY FOCUS: *Tardies—On time, every day, every scholar matters*

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- ☐ Attendance announcement

Dates: \_\_\_\_\_

- ☐ PBIS Attendance Announcements/Celebrations

Dates: \_\_\_\_\_

- ☐ Newsletter content from AttendanceWorks.org or FWPS Attendance Toolkit

This month's fact: \_\_\_\_\_

- ☐ School assembly/mini lesson

☐ PowerPoint

☐ Skit

☐ Video

☐ Activity/Game

- ☐ Family event/activity: Resources available in All Admin folder

☐ PowerPoint

☐ Skit

☐ Video

☐ Activity/Game

## JANUARY MONTHLY FOCUS: *How sick is too sick?*

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- ☐ Attendance announcement

Dates: \_\_\_\_\_

- ☐ PBIS Attendance Announcements/Celebrations

Dates: \_\_\_\_\_

- ☐ Newsletter content from AttendanceWorks.org or FWPS Attendance Toolkit

This month's fact: \_\_\_\_\_

- ☐ School assembly/mini lesson

☐ PowerPoint

☐ Skit

☐ Video

☐ Activity/Game

- ☐ Family event/activity: Resources available in All Admin folder

☐ PowerPoint

☐ Skit

☐ Video

☐ Activity/Game

## FEBRUARY MONTHLY FOCUS: *Tardies—On time, every day, every scholar matters*

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- ☐ Attendance announcement

Dates: \_\_\_\_\_

- ☐ PBIS Attendance Announcements/Celebrations

Dates: \_\_\_\_\_

- ☐ Newsletter content from AttendanceWorks.org or FWPS Attendance Toolkit

This month's fact: \_\_\_\_\_

- ☐ School assembly/mini lesson

☐ PowerPoint

☐ Skit

☐ Video

☐ Activity/Game

- ☐ Family event/activity: Resources available in All Admin folder

☐ PowerPoint

☐ Skit

☐ Video

☐ Activity/Game

## MARCH MONTHLY FOCUS: *Prearranged absences/Family trips*

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- ☐ Attendance announcement

Dates: \_\_\_\_\_

- ☐ PBIS Attendance Announcements/Celebrations

Dates: \_\_\_\_\_

- ☐ Newsletter content from AttendanceWorks.org or FWPS Attendance Toolkit

This month's fact: \_\_\_\_\_

- ☐ School assembly/mini lesson

☐ PowerPoint

☐ Skit

☐ Video

☐ Activity/Game

- ☐ Family event/activity: Resources available in All Admin folder

☐ PowerPoint

☐ Skit

☐ Video

☐ Activity/Game

## APRIL MONTHLY FOCUS: *Accumulated absences—How many do you have?*

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- ☐ Attendance announcement

Dates: \_\_\_\_\_

- ☐ PBIS Attendance Announcements/Celebrations

Dates: \_\_\_\_\_

- ☐ Newsletter content from AttendanceWorks.org or FWPS Attendance Toolkit

This month's fact: \_\_\_\_\_

- ☐ School assembly/mini lesson

☐ PowerPoint

☐ Skit

☐ Video

☐ Activity/Game

- ☐ Family event/activity: Resources available in All Admin folder

☐ PowerPoint

☐ Skit

☐ Video

☐ Activity/Game

## MAY MONTHLY FOCUS: *Tardies—On time, every day, every scholar matters*

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- ☐ Attendance announcement

Dates: \_\_\_\_\_

- ☐ PBIS Attendance Announcements/Celebrations

Dates: \_\_\_\_\_

- ☐ Newsletter content from AttendanceWorks.org or FWPS Attendance Toolkit

This month's fact: \_\_\_\_\_

- ☐ School assembly/mini lesson

☐ PowerPoint

☐ Skit

☐ Video

☐ Activity/Game

- ☐ Family event/activity: Resources available in All Admin folder

☐ PowerPoint

☐ Skit

☐ Video

☐ Activity/Game

## JUNE MONTHLY FOCUS: *It's not summer yet!*

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- ☐ Attendance announcement

Dates: \_\_\_\_\_

- ☐ PBIS Attendance Announcements/Celebrations

Dates: \_\_\_\_\_

- ☐ Newsletter content from AttendanceWorks.org or FWPS Attendance Toolkit

This month's fact: \_\_\_\_\_

- ☐ School assembly/mini lesson

☐ PowerPoint

☐ Skit

☐ Video

☐ Activity/Game

- ☐ Family event/activity: Resources available in All Admin folder

☐ PowerPoint

☐ Skit

☐ Video

☐ Activity/Game

## COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

Our goal is to increase access for all scholars to critical attendance information, resources for supports to mitigate the barriers that keep scholars from school. To accomplish our goals we must first:

- Acknowledge the barriers that people of color and immigrant and refugee communities experience in accessing or participating in outreach campaigns like this attendance awareness campaign;
- Recognize diversity as both a strength and an opportunity; and
- Affirm that a healthy community requires outreach and public engagement that takes into account our communities' racial, cultural, and socio-economic complexity. (Puget Sound Educational Service District, 2016)

### EXAMPLES

The resources in this toolkit provide various types of literature that can be used to promote attendance. The following are examples of ideas and information that have been extracted from the provided resources. In addition, each newsletter, assembly and contact time with our community of parents/guardians needs to be another touch point for sharing and encouraging others to share the information.

Intentionally use all forms of communication to promote awareness: **social media, newsletters, PTA/PTO meetings, reader boards, and community use areas (foyers, gyms)**, sharing information with all families in multiple different modalities.

#### Newsletter

"Attendance has been proven to be one of the most powerful predictors of academic achievement and can have a dramatic impact on key milestones, including third grade reading, 9th grade achievement, high school graduation, and postsecondary persistence. Chronic absenteeism is missing ten percent of school, regardless of the reason. A focus on chronic absenteeism examines the link between loss of class time and academic achievement. An awareness of chronic absenteeism and its potential impact will empower scholars, families, and communities to make informed decisions regarding missing school."

*(Puget Sound Educational Service District, 2016)*

#### Assembly

Have the attendance song/video playing at the beginning of an assembly. [www.youtube.com/watch?v=k4UI7XgYOZY&index=2&list=RDk4UI7XgYOZY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k4UI7XgYOZY&index=2&list=RDk4UI7XgYOZY)

#### Parent/Guardian/Community

Video can be used to communicate critical information. For example, at a PTA meeting you could show the video and have a discussion on ideas the group may have for communicating the information out to more families.

<https://vimeo.com/63614396>

## RESOURCES

*All resources are  
hyperlinked*

### FOR SCHOLARS

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=KizKpIIC9RU&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KizKpIIC9RU&feature=youtu.be)

### FOR TEACHERS/FAMILIES

<https://vimeo.com/63614396>

<https://www.attendanceworks.org/resources/handouts-for-families/>

### FOR TEACHERS

*Provides various ideas and information to promote attendance*

[www.attendanceworks.org/](http://www.attendanceworks.org/)

*Provides additional communications tools for school and district leaders*

<https://www.attendanceworks.org/resources/toolkits/>





# MY CHILD'S ATTENDANCE SUCCESS PLAN



## POSSIBLE STRATEGIES TO REACH MY CHILD'S ATTENDANCE GOALS

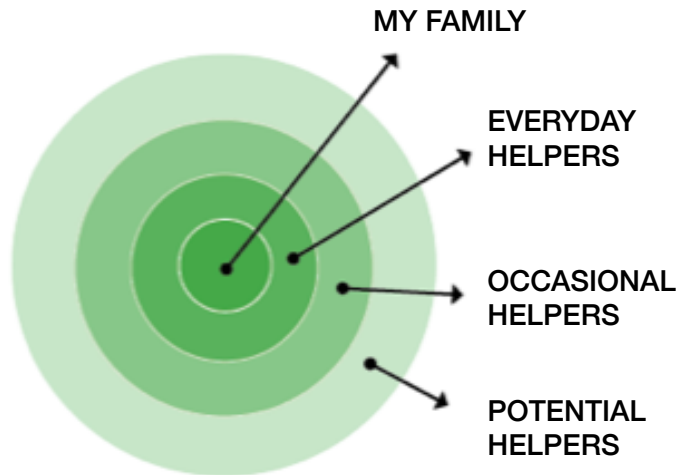


### FEDERAL WAY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

- I will keep an attendance chart at home. At the end of the week, I will recognize my child for attending preschool every day with \_\_\_\_\_. (i.e. a visit to the park, a new book, a break from doing chores, a special treat)
- I will make sure my child is in bed by \_\_\_\_\_ p.m. and the alarm clock is set for \_\_\_\_\_ a.m.
- If my child complains of a stomachache or headache, and medical concerns have been ruled out, I will send him/her to preschool anyway and call \_\_\_\_\_ so that he/she can check in with my child during the day.
- If my child has a cold but no fever (less than 100 degrees), I will send him/her to preschool anyway. If I don't have a thermometer, I will purchase or borrow one.
- I will find a relative, friend or neighbor who can take my child to preschool if I can't make it.
- If my child is absent, I will contact his/her teacher to find out what he/she missed.
- I will set up medical and dental appointments for weekdays after 3:30 p.m.

## MY FAMILY'S HELP BANK

- 1. My Family:** List who lives in your house.
- 2. Everyday Helpers:** Identify who you can call on to help drop your child off or who can pick him or her up when you cannot. These are people like friends, neighbors and relatives who can help regularly.
- 3. Occasional Helpers:** Identify people who probably cannot help everyday, but can help in a pinch. Maybe it's a godparent, a relative or a friend who lives outside your neighborhood but can be there for short stints.
- 4. Potential Helpers:** Identify people who are part of your school community, church or neighborhood who are able to help—if you ask.



Adapted with permission from materials provided by  
Attendance Works ([www.attendanceworks.org](http://www.attendanceworks.org))



### *Every Night...*

- ☐ Ask your child about his or her day at school
- ☐ Check your child's backpack for important information from the school
- ☐ Check the weather for the next day
- ☐ Lay out clothing and supplies for the next day
- ☐ Arrange a transportation back-up plan
- ☐ Set your alarm, leaving extra time for unexpected delays

### *Other Tips...*

- ☐ Schedule appointments for after school
- ☐ Tell your school if your phone number or address changes
- ☐ Send a note or call your school if your child needs to miss school

Use this checklist to help you prepare your young child for school ... every day.

# Key Attendance Awareness Messages



**Key messages that everyone —schools, preschools, public agencies, community organizations, faith based institutions, elected officials, and parents themselves—can use to help spread the word about this important issue.**

1. Good attendance helps children do well in school and eventually in the workplace. Good attendance matters for school success, starting as early as prekindergarten and throughout elementary school. By middle and high school, poor attendance is a leading indicator of dropout. Developing the habit of attendance prepares students for success on the job and in life.
2. Excused and unexcused absences easily add up to too much time lost in the classroom.
  - Students are at risk academically if they miss 10 percent of the school year, or about 18 days. Once too many absences have occurred, they can affect learning, regardless of whether absences are excused or unexcused.
  - Sporadic, not just consecutive, absences matter. Before you know it – just one or two days a month can add up to nearly 10 percent of the school year.
  - Avoid unnecessary absences. Some absences are unavoidable. Occasionally, children get sick and need to stay home. What is important is getting children to school as often as possible.
3. Chronic absence, missing 10 percent of the school year or more, does not just affect the students who miss school. If too many students are chronically absent, it slows down instruction for other students, who must wait while the teacher repeats material for absentee students. This makes it harder for students to learn and teachers to teach.
4. We need to monitor how many days each student misses school for any reason— excused, unexcused or suspensions— so we can intervene early. Districts and schools use data to identify how many and which students are chronically absent so they can target extra supports that can improve attendance and interrupt a pattern of chronic absence. Absences represent lost opportunities to learn in the classroom.
5. Chronic absence is a problem we can solve when the whole community, along with to parents and schools, get involved in improving attendance. All of us can make a difference by helping students and families feel engaged in learning and their schools, setting the



Adapted with permission from materials provided by Attendance Works ([www.attendanceworks.org](http://www.attendanceworks.org))

expectation that school attendance matters and working together to identify and help families overcome barriers to getting to school.

Community partners are especially important for helping schools and families address and overcome tough barriers, such as limited access to health care, unstable housing, poor transportation or neighborhood violence.

6. Relationship building is fundamental to any strategy for improving student attendance. Students are more likely to go to school if they know someone cares whether they show up. Trusting relationships – whether with teachers, mentors, coaches or other caring adults – are critical to encouraging families and students to seek out help to overcome barriers to attendance.

7. Reducing chronic absence can help close achievement gaps. Chronic absence especially affects achievement for low-income students who depend more on school for opportunities to learn. Because they are more likely to face systemic barriers to getting to school, low-income children, many of whom are children of color, have higher levels of chronic absence starting as early as prekindergarten. Especially among older students of color, chronic absence could signal the need to reform inappropriate and biased student discipline policies and practices that are pushing students out of class.



Adapted with permission from materials provided by Attendance Works ([www.attendanceworks.org](http://www.attendanceworks.org))

# Key Parent Attendance Messages



***Stress that good attendance will help your children do well in high school, in college and at work.***

1. Your children can suffer academically if they miss 10 percent of the school year or about 18 days. That can be just one day every two weeks, and that can happen before you know it.
2. Some absences are unavoidable. We understand that children will get sick and need to stay home occasionally. The important thing is to get your children to school as often as possible, on time and to communicate with the school when your child will be absent.
3. Sporadic absences, not just those on consecutive days of school, matter. Before you know it – just one or two days a month can add up to nearly 10 percent of the school year.
4. If too many absences occur, it is still a problem whether they are excused or unexcused because they represent too much lost learning time in the classroom.
5. Attendance matters as early as kindergarten. Studies show many children who miss too many days in kindergarten and first grade can struggle academically in later years. They often have trouble mastering reading by the end of third grade.
6. Preschool is a great time to start building a habit of good attendance. Young children with poor attendance in preschool also lose out on valuable learning time and if chronic absence continues into kindergarten, it can pull down academic achievement.
7. By middle and high school, chronic absence is a leading warning sign that a student will drop out.
8. Too many absent students can affect the whole classroom, creating disruptions and slowing down instruction.
9. Families should avoid extended vacations that require your children to miss school. Try to line up vacations with the school's schedule. The same goes for doctor's appointments.



Adapted with permission from materials provided by Attendance Works ([www.attendanceworks.org](http://www.attendanceworks.org))



10. For younger children, you can set a regular bedtime and morning routine. Make sure they get 9 to 11 hours of sleep. You can layout clothes and pack backpacks the night before to make your morning routines run more smoothly.

11. For older children, you can help them develop homework and bedtime routines that allow for 8 to 10 hours of sleep. Make sure that when the lights go out, so do the cell phones, video games and computers.

12. Get to know the teachers and administrators. With younger children, make sure you introduce your child to teachers before school starts and keep in touch with the teachers. For older students, school officials can help you stay on top of academic progress and social contacts to make sure your child is staying on track.

13. You can set an example for your child. Show him or her that attendance matters to you and that you won't allow an absence unless someone is truly sick. Avoid asking older students to help with daycare and household errands. For more information go to:  
<http://awareness.attendanceworks.org/>

14. You can turn to the school for help. Many schools offer services for the whole family.

15. You can ask your principal to calculate chronic absence rates for the whole school. Even if your child attends regularly, it's important to know how many students in your child's school are missing 10 percent or more of the school year.

16. Seek help from the school or community if you are facing tough challenges related to access to health care, unstable housing, poor transportation or lack of food. More schools and community agencies are working together to offer help for the whole family.



Adapted with permission from materials provided by Attendance Works ([www.attendanceworks.org](http://www.attendanceworks.org))



## Keep Your Child On Track in Middle and High School: Pay Attention to Attendance

*Even as children grow older and more independent, families play a key role in making sure students access learning opportunities and understand why attendance is so important for success in school and on the job. Families can also advocate for resources to help students learn if they cannot attend in-person.*

### DID YOU KNOW?

- Students should miss no more than 9 days of school each year to stay engaged, successful and on track to graduation.
- Frequent absences can be a sign that a student is losing interest in school, struggling with school work, dealing with a bully or facing some other difficulty.
- By 6th grade, absenteeism is one of three signs that a student may drop out of high school.
- By 9th grade, attendance is a better predictor of graduation rates than 8th grade test scores.
- Missing 10%, or 2 days a month, over the course of the school year, can affect a student's academic success.

### WHAT YOU CAN DO

#### Make school attendance a priority

- Talk about the importance of showing up to school every day.
- Help your children maintain daily routines, such as finishing homework and getting a good night's sleep.
- Try not to schedule dental and non-Covid-19 related medical appointments during the school day.
- Keep your child healthy, and if you are concerned about Covid-19, call your school for advice.
- If your children must stay home because they are sick or in quarantine, make sure they have asked teachers for resources and materials to make up for the missed learning time in the classroom.

#### Help your teen stay engaged

- Find out if your children feel engaged by their classes, and feel safe from bullies and other threats.
- Make sure your children are not missing class because of challenges with behavioral issues or school discipline policies. If any of these are problems, contact the school and work with them to find a solution.
- Monitor your child's academic progress and seek help from teachers or tutors when necessary. Make sure teachers know how to contact you.
- Stay on top of your child's social contacts. Peer pressure can lead to skipping school, while students without many friends can feel isolated.
- Encourage your child to join meaningful after-school activities, including sports and clubs.
- Notice and support your children if they are showing signs of anxiety.

#### Communicate with the school

- Know the school's attendance policy – incentives and penalties.
- Check on your child's attendance to be sure absences are not adding up.
- Seek help from school staff, other parents or community agencies if you need support.

Revised October 2021



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## Mantenga a su hijo o hija en camino en la escuela intermedia y secundaria: Preste atención a la asistencia escolar

Llegar a la escuela tiene un gran impacto en el éxito académico de un estudiante. Al mismo tiempo que los niños crecen y se vuelven más independientes, las familias juegan un papel clave para asegurar que los estudiantes vayan a la escuela todos los días y comprendan por qué la asistencia escolar es importante para el éxito escolar y profesional.

### ¿SABÍAS?

- Los estudiantes no deben perder más de 9 días de clases cada año para mantenerse involucrados, exitosos y encaminados hacia la graduación.
- Las ausencias frecuentes pueden ser una señal de que un estudiante está perdiendo interés en la escuela, luchando con el trabajo escolar, lidiando con un acosador o enfrentando alguna otra dificultad.
- Para el sexto grado, el ausentismo es una de las tres señales de que un estudiante puede abandonar la escuela secundaria.
- Para el noveno grado, la asistencia escolar es un mejor indicador de las tasas de graduación que los puntajes de las pruebas de octavo grado.
- Faltar un 10%, o 2 días de clases al mes, durante el transcurso del año escolar, puede afectar drásticamente el éxito académico de un estudiante.

### Lo Que Usted Puede Hacer

#### Haga de la asistencia escolar una prioridad

- Hable sobre la importancia de presentarse a la escuela todos los días.
- Ayude a su hijo o hija a mantener las rutinas diarias, como terminar la tarea y dormir bien por la noche.
- Trate de no programar citas médicas y dentales durante el día escolar.
- Si su hijo o hija debe quedarse en casa porque está enfermo/a, asegúrese de que hayan pedido a los docentes recursos didácticos y materiales para compensar el tiempo perdido en el aula.

#### Ayude a su adolescente a mantenerse involucrado

- Averigüe si su hijo o hija se siente involucrado/a con sus clases y si se siente protegido/a de acosadores y otras amenazas.
- Asegúrese de que su hijo o hija no falte a clases debido a desafíos con problemas de conducta o políticas de disciplina escolar. Si hay algún problema, comuníquese con la escuela y trabaje con ellos para encontrar una solución.
- Supervise el progreso académico de su hijo o hija y busque ayuda de docentes o tutores cuando sea necesario. Asegúrese de que los docentes sepan cómo comunicarse con usted.
- Manténgase al tanto de los contactos sociales de su hijo o hija. La presión de los compañeros puede llevar a faltar a la escuela, mientras que los estudiantes sin muchos amigos pueden sentirse aislados.
- Anime a su hijo o hija a participar en actividades significativas después de la escuela, incluidos deportes y clubes.
- Observe y apoye a su hijo o hija si muestra signos de ansiedad, como dolores de cabeza o de estómago. Escuche sus inquietudes y, si es necesario, pida ayuda al personal de la escuela.

#### Comuníquese con la escuela

- Conozca la política de asistencia escolar de la escuela: incentivos y sanciones.
- Verifique la asistencia escolar de su hijo o hija para que las ausencias no se sumen.
- Si necesita apoyo, busque ayuda del personal escolar, otros padres o agencias comunitarias.



Visite el sitio web Attendance Works en [www.attendanceworks.org](http://www.attendanceworks.org) para obtener recursos didácticos y herramientas descargables sin costo.



## Help Your Child Succeed in School: Build the Habit of Good Attendance Early

### DID YOU KNOW?

- Starting in preschool and kindergarten, too many absences can cause children to fall behind in school.
- Missing 10%, or about 2 days each month over the course of a school year, can make it harder to learn to read.
- Students can still fall behind if they miss just 1 or 2 days every few weeks.
- Being late to school may lead to poor attendance.
- Absences and tardiness can affect the whole classroom if the teacher has to slow down learning to help children catch up.

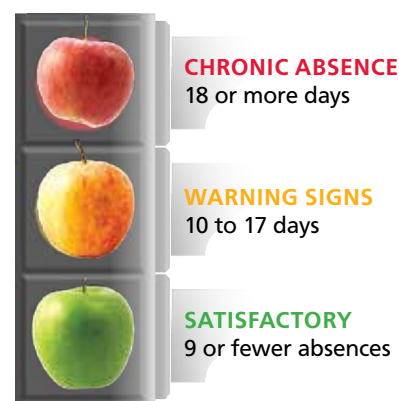
Attending school regularly helps children feel better about school—and themselves. Start building this habit in preschool so they learn right away that going to school on time, every day is important. Eventually good attendance will be a skill that will help them succeed in high school and college.

### WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Set a regular bedtime and morning routine.
- Lay out clothes and pack backpacks the night before.
- Keep your child healthy and make sure your child has the required shots.
- Introduce your children to their teachers and classmates before school starts.
- Develop backup plans for getting to school if something comes up. Call on a family member, a neighbor or another parent.
- Try to schedule non-Covid-19 related medical appointments and extended trips when school isn't in session.
- If your child seems anxious about going to school, talk to teachers, school counselors and other parents for advice on how to make your child feel comfortable and excited about learning.
- If you are concerned that your child may have Covid-19, call your school for advice.
- If your child must stay home due to illness or quarantine, ask the teacher for resources and ideas to continue learning at home.

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### When Do Absences Become a Problem?



Note: These numbers assume a 180-day school year.

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## Ayude a su niño a tener éxito en la escuela: desarrolle el hábito de la buena asistencia escolar desde los primeros años

### ¿SABÍA USTED?

- A partir de preescolar y kínder, demasiadas ausencias pueden hacer que los niños se retrasen en la escuela.
- Faltar un 10%, o aproximadamente 2 días al mes durante el transcurso de un año escolar, puede dificultar el aprendizaje de la lectura.
- Los estudiantes aún pueden quedarse atrás si faltan solo uno o dos días cada pocas semanas.
- Llegar tarde a la escuela puede provocar una baja asistencia escolar.
- Las ausencias y tardanzas pueden afectar a toda el aula si el docente tiene que retrasar el aprendizaje para ayudar a los niños a ponerse al día.

**Asistir a la escuela con regularidad ayuda a los niños a sentirse mejor con la escuela y con ellos mismos. Comience a desarrollar este hábito en el preescolar para que aprendan de inmediato que es importante ir a la escuela a tiempo, todos los días. Con el tiempo, la buena asistencia escolar será una habilidad que les ayudará a tener éxito en la escuela secundaria y la universidad.**

### LO QUE PUEDE HACER

- Establezca una rutina regular para la hora de dormir y una rutina matutina.
- Elija y disponga la ropa y empaque las mochilas la noche anterior.
- Mantenga a su niño saludable y asegúrese de que haya recibido las vacunas necesarias.
- Presente a su niño a sus docentes y compañeros de clase antes de que comience la escuela.
- Desarrolle planes de contingencia para llegar a la escuela si surge algo. Llame a un familiar, vecino u otro padre.
- Trate de programar las citas médicas no relacionadas con el Covid-19 y los viajes largos para cuando no haya clases en la escuela.
- Si su niño parece tener ansiedad por ir a la escuela, hable con los docentes, los consejeros escolares y otros padres para que le aconsejen cómo hacer que su niño se sienta cómodo y emocionado por el aprendizaje.
- Si le preocupa que su niño pueda tener Covid-19, llame a su escuela para que le aconsejen.
- Si su niño debe quedarse en casa debido a una enfermedad, pídale a los docentes recursos didácticos e ideas para seguir aprendiendo en casa.

### ¿Cuándo se convierten las ausencias en un problema?



Nota: Estos números se basan en un año escolar de 180 días.

Revisado en octubre de 2021

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# Chronic Elementary Absenteeism: A Problem Hidden in Plain Sight

*A Research Brief from Attendance Works and Child & Family Policy Center*



Charles Bruner, Anne Discher and Hedy Chang | November 2011

## Summary

Chronic absenteeism—or missing 10 percent or more of school days for any reason—is a proven early warning sign of academic risk and school dropout. Too often, though, this problem is overlooked, especially among elementary students, because of the way attendance data are tracked. This study confirms the premise that districts and schools may fail to detect high levels of chronic absence because the problem is easily masked by average daily attendance, one of the most commonly calculated attendance measures. While many educators assume a 95 percent ADA rate is an indicator of good attendance, our research found that is often not the case. We found that schools with average daily attendance rates higher than 97 percent rarely have a problem with chronic absence, but that schools with ADA rates between 93 and 97 percent need to analyze their data to determine whether chronic absence is a significant problem. Moreover, schools with ADA rates of 93 percent or below are almost certainly dealing with high concentrations of absenteeism. Local, state and federal governments can take steps to ensure districts and schools use existing data to monitor and identify chronic absence starting in kindergarten.

“If children aren’t in school, they don’t learn. Improving school attendance improves success in school.”

## The Critical Importance of Attendance In the Early Grades

A key ingredient for ensuring success in school is helping children — at the beginning of their academic careers — get into the habit of attending school every day. While going to school regularly will not by itself ensure that children learn, missing extended periods of school, especially when children are acquiring the basic academic skills that lead to becoming proficient readers, certainly puts a child at risk. The research shows:

- All children, regardless of socio-economic background, do worse academically in 1st grade if they are chronically absent (missing 10 percent or more of school including excused and unexcused absences) in kindergarten. A recent study in California found that only 17 percent of children chronically absent in both kindergarten and 1st grade were proficient readers by the end of 3rd grade as compared to 64 percent of their peers who attended regularly (missing less than 5 percent of school.)<sup>i</sup>
- Going to school regularly in the early years is especially critical for children living in poverty, who are less likely to have the resources to make up for lost time in the classroom. Among poor children, chronic absence in kindergarten predicts the lowest levels of educational achievement at the end of 5th grade.<sup>ii</sup>
- Available well before the results of standardized tests — typically in 3rd grade — chronic absence can be an important early warning sign that intervention may be needed to ensure a child is on the path to success.

While chronic absence is not a problem everywhere, it can reach surprisingly high levels even in the early grades. Nationwide, nearly 10 percent of kindergartners and 1st graders are chronically absent. In some communities, chronic early absence can affect a quarter of all students in kindergarten through 3rd grade. Within particular schools in the same district, chronic early absence can range from less than 1 percent to more than 50 percent!<sup>iii</sup>

### Why is chronic early absence overlooked?

Unfortunately, although teachers take roll every day, most schools currently do not use their data to monitor if they have a problem with chronic absence. Schools generally focus on average daily attendance (ADA) figures and mistakenly assume that 95 percent ADA is an indicator of good attendance. This is not necessarily the case. For example, even in a school of 200 students with 95 percent average daily attendance, 30 percent (or 60) of the students could be missing nearly a month of school (i.e. chronically absent) over the course of the school year. It all depends whether absences are due to most students missing a few days or excessive absences among a small but still significant minority of students.

In keeping with No Child Left Behind, states, school districts and schools also typically track and monitor truancy. While the definition of truancy is left to states to determine, in most places it only refers to unexcused absences and is associated with students willfully missing school without the permission of an adult. Most importantly, truancy figures miss chronic absence especially among young children, who typically do not stay home without the knowledge of an adult who can call in an excuse.



Nationwide, nearly 10 percent of kindergartners and 1st graders are chronically absent.

- i Attendance in Early Elementary Grades: Association with Student Characteristics, School Readiness and Third Grade Outcomes, *Applied Survey Research*. May 2011
- ii Chang and Romero, Present, *Engaged & Accounted For: The Critical Importance of Addressing Chronic Absence in the Early Grades*, National Center for Children in Poverty: September 2008, [http://www.nccp.org/publications/pub\\_837.html](http://www.nccp.org/publications/pub_837.html) (accessed July, 2009).
- iii Chang & Romero. 2008.

### What is the connection between Average Daily Attendance and Chronic Absence?

To better understand the relationship between ADA and chronic absence, Attendance Works and the Child and Family Policy Center obtained school-by-school attendance information for elementary schools in three urban districts. The data include both the average daily attendance rate and the percentage of students who met the definition of chronic absenteeism. We then plotted this information and calculated the degree to which the ADA rate could “explain” or “predict” the level of chronic elementary absenteeism.

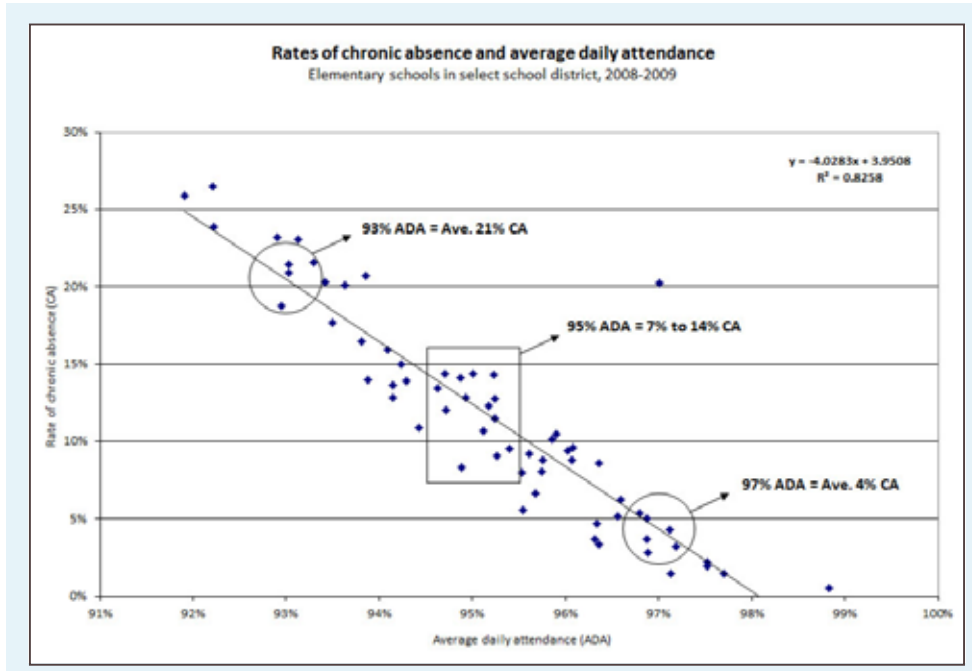
The analysis found:

- Schools with average daily attendance rates higher than 97 percent rarely have a problem with chronic absence.
- Schools between 93 and 97 percent need to analyze their data further to determine the extent of the problem.
- Schools with ADA rates below 93 percent are almost certainly dealing with high concentrations of absenteeism.

In fact, all schools would benefit from an analysis of chronic absence to determine patterns of absenteeism and possible interventions. All schools enroll some students who have injuries or illnesses leading to frequent absences, and schools should know who these students are and design individual strategies to support them. But buildings where 4 percent of students are chronically absent do not have systemic attendance failures. Buildings where 20 percent are chronically absent, on the other hand, clearly face individual as well as school- and community-wide challenges. There may be systemic problems in the building, such as a negative school climate, ineffective discipline practices or chaotic classrooms. Or there may be community and family challenges, such as a lack of access to health care, unreliable transportation, high levels of violence or unaffordable housing. Strategies to reduce chronic absenteeism require public recognition and community support, as well as school-wide policy changes and strategies targeted toward with specific children and their families.



“ Even in a school of 200 students with 95 percent average daily attendance, **30 percent (or 60)** of the students could be missing nearly a month of school over the course of the school year. ”



### The Results

Figure 1 shows the results of the analysis in one of the three urban districts studied, with similar patterns discerned in the other districts, as well. (see the appendix for information on all districts).<sup>1</sup> The data show that schools around the 95 percent ADA mark (between 94.5 percent and 95.5 percent) have rates of chronic absenteeism ranging from a little more than 7 percent to as high as 14 percent.<sup>2</sup> Analysis from other cities included in the [appendix](#) show rates higher than 20 percent. That range implies at least some concern with chronic absenteeism at many of the schools in this group; understanding the nature of that concern—whether individual, school or community issues—students requires further study.

Figure 1

At the higher or lower levels of average daily attendance, the relationship to chronic absenteeism is more straightforward. In the district depicted in Figure 1, average daily attendance rates in most buildings range from 93 percent to 97 percent. In the schools with 97 percent ADA, only 4 percent of the children are, on average, chronically absent. In comparison, in the schools with 93 percent ADA, 21 percent of children are, on average, chronically absent. This 4 percentage point difference in average daily attendance translates to a 17 percentage point difference in chronic absenteeism!

- 1 Although the slopes of the lines and the range of attendance and chronic absenteeism patterns are slightly different, the data from all three districts are very consistent with Figure 1.
- 2 The  $r^2$  value shows the percentage of the variation in chronic absenteeism across schools that can be predicted simply from knowing the average daily attendance. For the data in the Figure, the  $r^2$  value is .8258. Statistically, values that exceed .8 (80 percent) in the social science world are uncommonly high and suggest that there is a nearly complete match in what underlies their measurement.

## Implications

If schools, school districts and states are to improve educational achievement and, in particular, the sentinel measure of 3rd grade reading proficiency, they will need to address chronic elementary absenteeism.

To do so effectively, they will need more and better data. They will need to know how many, and which, students are chronically absent. This requires comparing the number of days each student attends school with the number of days the student is enrolled. At a minimum, such measures should be incorporated into school data systems at the district and state levels. Additional information – on tardiness, the reasons for absences and the enrollment history of students who change schools within a school year – would be helpful to fully understand and respond to chronic absenteeism, starting in elementary school.

Such data collection will not happen overnight. Examination of average daily attendance information offers a valuable way to begin assessing the degree of concern around chronic absenteeism while laying the groundwork for collecting more complete data:

- At the district level, officials can start by identifying elementary schools with average daily attendance rates at or below 95 percent to collect information about chronic absenteeism and act upon it.
- At the state level, education departments can report more fully on ADA and its implications and provide technical assistance to districts in addressing low rates of attendance, while at the same time requiring or pressing for collection of chronic absence data.
- At the federal level, the reauthorization of ESEA can require or provide incentives for states to collect information on chronic absenteeism for all schools and districts and provide incentives (through demonstration grants, use of ESEA funds and technical assistance and support) to report and act upon chronic absenteeism.

One of the great values of focusing upon chronic absenteeism in elementary school is that it represents an



early warning sign for subsequent school problems. In a presentation to the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading in March 2011, U.S. Secretary of Education Arnie Duncan noted as much. “We know in pre-K and K who our students most at risk are, those students who are missing, 15, 20, 25 days a year,” he said. “We know right there if we don’t intervene, these are our future dropouts.”<sup>iv</sup> Beyond that, it’s a problem that can be fixed with the right response from school and community leaders. Nationally, there is increasing attention to this issue, particularly as it relates to early literacy. The Campaign for Grade-Level Reading—a collaborative effort by dozens of funders to ensure more children master reading by the end of third grade—recognizes chronic elementary absenteeism as a significant problem that must be addressed

Further, many of the solutions represent low-cost or no-cost activities that make education simpler, rather than more complicated, for all involved. Finally, successful efforts to address chronic absence generally involve schools, families and communities working together, an approach that also supports educational success generally.

iv “Duncan Vows Support for Early Learning in ESEA, Grant Programs,” at: <http://www.gradelevelreading.net/2011/03/duncan-vows-support-for-early-learning-in-esea-grant-programs/>.





