



Louisiana's

Solutions Summit

PARENT TOOLKIT

Truancy and Families in Need of Services (FINS)

What does the law say about going to school?

In Louisiana, kids who are **between 5 and 18 years old** must go to school, unless they finish high school before turning 18. This can be a public school or a private school. Parents or guardians are responsible for making sure their kids go to school. You can reference the law here: [RS 17:221 – School Attendance](#).

What happens if a student keeps missing school?

If a student misses school too many times without a good reason, parents or guardians can get in trouble. They might:

- Have to pay up to **\$250**
- Go to **jail for up to 30 days**
- Be asked to do **community service** or attend **parenting classes**

Can families get help before it gets that serious?

Yes! There is a legal process called **FINS (Families in Need of Services)**.

If a student has **5 unexcused absences** and the school has already tried everything they can to help, the school will ask FINS to step in. You can reference the law here: [Louisiana Children's Code Article 731](#).

Does every student with absences get reported to FINS?

No. Schools only report to FINS **after** they have:

- Met with the student
- Talked with the parents or guardians
- Tried help from the school's support staff

Only **after all of that** and 5 unexcused absences can the school make a FINS report.

What is the purpose of FINS?

FINS **helps families keep kids in school**—not punish them. It focuses on solving problems early and giving support to families so things don't get worse.

How does FINS help?

FINS Officers look at what might be causing the student to miss school. They check things like:

- Does the family have enough food, clothes, or a place to live?
- Are there any mental or emotional health issues?
- Are there learning problems or special education needs?
- Are there any dangers like drugs or human trafficking?

The goal is to find out **why** the student isn't going to school—not just punish them.

What happens after that?

There will be a **meeting** with:

- The student
- The parents or guardians
- The school and other people who can help

At the meeting, everyone works together to make a **family plan** called an **IFSPA** (Informal Family Service Plan Agreement).

What happens next?

The FINS Officer checks in to make sure everyone is following the plan. If the student starts going to school regularly and the problems are being fixed, the case can be **closed without going to court**.

Five Steps to Address Chronic Absence at the Start of School

Student chronic absence has become a national crisis we can and must address. Messaging and positive engagement strategies raise awareness about why showing up to school matters and also help build the universal positive conditions for that motivate all students to attend school. Below are five key steps with linked resources communicators can use with their school communities:*

- 1. Welcome and connect.** Attendance and participation improve when a school community offers a warm and welcoming environment that engages students and families.
 - a. Teachers can send a welcome call using the [Flamboyant Welcome Call Strategy](#)
 - b. Principals can send families a [welcome letter](#)
- 2. Convey the value of showing up to school.** Families and students often aren't aware of the benefits of being in school and how chronic absenteeism can present challenges to realizing their hopes and dreams.
 - a. [Posters and social media resources](#)
 - b. Use [talking points](#) from the Attendance Works Showing Up Matters for R.E.A.L. toolkit
 - c. [Share videos](#) from Children's Aid, or create your own video that helps people understand the value of being in school
- 3. Encourage preparation for school.** Developing routines or making back up plans for getting to school make daily attendance easier especially when challenges come up.
 - a. [My Family's Help Bank](#)
 - b. [Ready Set Go for Prek or Kindergarten](#)
 - c. [Family handouts for Prek-12](#)
- 4. Offer clear health guidance.** Reducing unnecessary health-related absences is critical to improving attendance.
 - a. [Health handouts for families](#)
- 5. Host special events.** Back-to-school nights, assemblies, teacher conferences and special exhibits all provide opportunities to educate families about the value of regular attendance. Use these opportunities to orient parents/caregivers to school policies and connect them to helpful resources. If you have data for your school or community, share the information with parents.
 - a. [Talking points for school leaders and educators](#)
 - b. [Interactive parent/caregiver exercises](#)
 - c. [Bringing Attendance Home video](#)
 - d. [Parent Teacher conference handout](#)

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Help Your Child Succeed in Preschool and Kindergarten

Build the Habit of Good Attendance

DID YOU KNOW...

Showing up on time every day is important to your child's success and learning from preschool forward.

Missing 10% of school (1 or 2 days every few weeks) can make it harder to:

- Gain early reading and math skills.
- Build relationships.
- Develop good attendance habits.

High quality preschool and kindergarten has many benefits!

- The routines your child develops will continue throughout school.
- Make the most of early grades by encouraging your child to attend every day.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Work with your child and his/her teacher to develop your child's strong attendance.

Talk about it – sing about it – make it an adventure!

- Set a regular bedtime and morning routine.
- Lay out clothes and pack backpacks the night before.
- Share ideas with other parents for getting to school on time.

Before the school year starts

- Find out what day school starts and begin a countdown!
- Make sure your child has the required shots.
- Attend orientation with your child to meet teachers and classmates and find out about health and safety procedures.

Ready, Set, GO!

- If you are concerned your child may have a contagious illness, call your school or health care provider for advice. Ask for resources to continue learning at home if needed.
- Ask family members or neighbors for assistance if you need help.
- Try to schedule non-urgent medical appointments and extended trips when school is not in session.
- If your child seems anxious about going to preschool, talk to the program director, teacher, your doctor or other parents for advice. Make sure the program is a good fit for your child.





Get ready for one of the biggest adventures of your child's life!

School will be starting soon. These tips can help your children look forward to attending school every day.

Did you know that missing just one or two days of preschool or kindergarten every few weeks can make it harder for children to develop reading skills, and to be prepared for first grade?

Adventure Time!

Take your child to visit the school to see the building

- If possible, meet their teacher and visit their classroom!
- Visit with neighbors to see who is going to the same school. It's always fun to have a buddy.
- Explore a pick-up and drop off sharing plan with neighbors, or a "Walking School Bus."
- Respond right away to outreach from your child's teacher. Ask any questions you have!



Story Time!

Tell your child positive stories from when you were a young student

- Make up silly songs about everyday routines: getting up, eating breakfast and going to school.
- Read to your child each night in your home language.
- Books can address children's concerns in playful ways and support conversations.





Get ready for one of the biggest adventures of your child's life!

Habit Time!

Set a standard bed and wake up time a few weeks in advance

- Let children choose what clothes they'd like to wear the next day.
- Routines make everyone feel in control, and that's a good feeling.



Good Health Time!

Make sure your child has the right shots to attend school

- If you are concerned your child may have a contagious illness, call your child's health care provider or school for advice.
- If your child is at high risk for complications from common illnesses, talk to your school about developing a health plan.
- Schedule non-urgent medical appointments and extended trips when preschool is not in session.



Preschool through first grade establishes the foundation for relationship building and life-long learning. Help your child gain comfort, self-confidence and delight in these milestone events.



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

DID YOU KNOW?

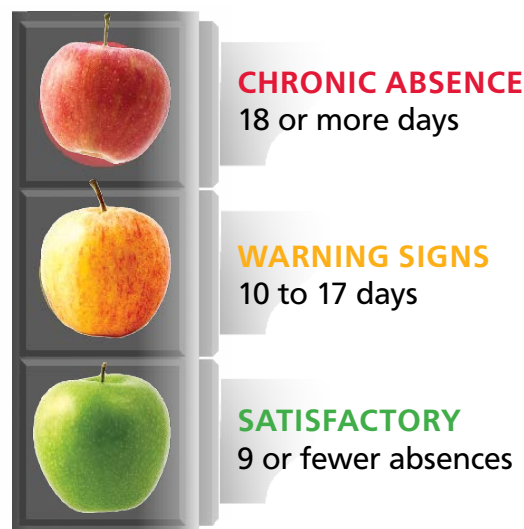
- Starting in preschool and kindergarten, too many absences can cause children to fall behind in school.
- Missing 10%, or about 2 days each month over the course of a school year, can make it harder to learn to read.
- Students can still fall behind if they miss just one or two days every few weeks.
- 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-urgent 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 a contagious illness, call your school or health care provider for advice.
- If your child must stay home due to illness, ask the teacher for resources and ideas to continue learning at home.

When Do Absences Become a Problem?



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



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

Showing up for school has a huge impact on a student's academic success. Even as children grow older and more independent, families play a key role in making sure students get to school every day and understand why attendance is so important for success in school and on the job.

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-urgent related medical appointments during the school day.
- Keep your student healthy. If you are concerned about a contagious illness, call your school or health care provider.
- If your children must stay home because they are sick, 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 teens 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 teen'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.
- Support your students if you notice signs of anxiety, and if needed, seek advice from your school or health provider.

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.



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Visit Attendance Works at www.attendanceworks.org for free downloadable resources and tools!

ATTENDANCE

in the early grades

Many of our youngest students miss 10 percent of the school year—about 18 days a year or just two days every month. Chronic absenteeism in kindergarten, and even preK, can predict lower test scores, poor attendance and retention in later grades, especially if the problem persists for more than a year. Do you know how many young children are chronically absent in your school or community?

Who Is Affected

Kindergarten and 1st grade classes often have absenteeism rates as high as those in high school. Many of these absences are excused, but they still add up to lost time in the classroom.

1 in 10 kids

in kindergarten and 1st grade are chronically absent. In some schools, it's as high as 1 in 4.¹



2 in 10
low-income kids

miss too much
school. They're also
more likely to suffer
academically.¹



2.5 in 10
homeless kids

are chronically
absent.²



4 in 10
transient kids

miss too much
school when
families move.²



Why It Matters

If children don't show up for school regularly, they miss out on fundamental reading and math skills and the chance to build a habit of good attendance that will carry them into college and careers.

Preliminary data from a California study found that children who were chronically absent in kindergarten and 1st grade were far less likely to read proficiently at the end of 3rd grade.

Who Can Read on Grade Level After 3rd Grade?³



64%

of kids with good attendance in K and 1st
(missed 9 or fewer days both years)



43%

of kids with at-risk attendance
(missed more than 9 days both years)



41%

of kids chronically absent in K or 1st
(missed 18 or more days one year)



17%

of kids chronically absent in K and 1st
(missed 18 or more days both years)

What We Can Do

Engage Families



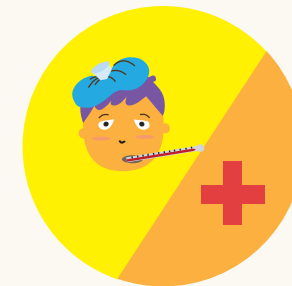
Many parents and students don't realize how quickly early absences can add up to academic trouble. Community members and teachers can educate families and build a culture of attendance through early outreach, incentives and attention to data.

Fix Transportation



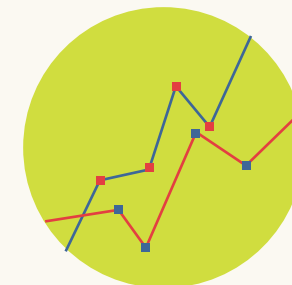
The lack of a reliable car, or simply missing the school bus, can mean some students don't make it to class. Schools, transit agencies and community partners can organize car pools, supply bus passes or find other ways to get kids to school.

Address Health Needs



Health concerns, particularly asthma and dental problems, are among the leading reasons students miss school in the early grades. Schools and medical professionals can work together to give children and families health care and advice.

Track the Right Data



Schools too often overlook chronic absence because they track average attendance or unexcused absences, not how many kids miss too many days for any reason. Attendance Works has free data-tracking tools.

These are a few steps that communities and schools can take. How do you think you can help?

¹ Chang, Hedy; Romero, Mariajose, *Present, Engaged and Accounted For: The Critical Importance of Addressing Chronic Absence in the Early Grades*, National Center for Children in Poverty: NY: NY, September 2008.

² *Chronic Absence in Utah*, Utah Education Policy Center at the University of Utah, 2012.

³ *Attendance in Early Elementary Grades: Association with Student Characteristics, School Readiness and Third Grade Outcomes*, Applied Survey Research. May 2011.