Reducing Chronic Absence

Why does it matter? What can we do?
About Us

Attendance Works advances student success and closes equity gaps by reducing chronic absence. Operating at the local, state, and national level, Attendance Works:

✓ Advances better policy
✓ Nurtures proven and promising practice
✓ Promotes meaningful and effective communication
✓ Catalyzes needed research

Since our launch in 2010, we have become the nation’s “go-to” resource for improving student attendance. To learn more, visit our website: www.attendanceworks.org

For consultation and t.a. inquiries: consulting@attendanceworks.org
What is Chronic Absence?

**Chronic absence** is missing so much school for any reason that a student is academically at risk. Attendance Works recommends defining it as **missing 10% or more of school for any reason**.

Chronic absence is different from **truancy** (unexcused absences only) or **average daily attendance** (how many students show up to school each day).
Average Daily Attendance (ADA) Can Mask Chronic Absence

90% and even 95% ≠ A

98% ADA = little chronic absence
95% ADA = don’t know
93% ADA = significant chronic absence
Chronic Absence vs. Truancy

Number of students missing 10% versus 10 unexcused absences (San Francisco Unified School District)

- # chronic absentees - 2010-2011
- # of students with 10 unexcused absences (as of May 16th 2011)
Chronic absence is easily masked if we only monitor missing consecutive days.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>September</th>
<th>October</th>
<th>November</th>
<th>December</th>
<th>January</th>
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<tbody>
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Chronic Absence = 18+ days of absence = **As few as 2 days a month**
Why Does Attendance Matter for Achievement?

What we know from research around the country
Illustrating the Gap
(interactive exercise for educators and families)

Instructions found in Bringing Attendance Home Toolkit
http://www.attendanceworks.org/resources/toolkits/bringing-attendance-home/
Multiple Years of Chronic Absenteeism = High Risk for low 3rd Grade Reading Skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Average Second Grade DIBELS Oral Reading Fluency Score</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not Chronically Absent</td>
<td>98.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=4,073)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chronically Absent in Pre-K</td>
<td>94.6***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=1,381)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chronically Absent in Pre-K and K</td>
<td>88.9***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=423)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chronically Absent in Pre-K, K, and 1st Grade</td>
<td>81.8***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=255)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chronically Absent in Pre-K, K, 1st, and 2nd Grade</td>
<td>72.9***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=306)</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: ***Indicates that scores are significantly different from scores of students who are never chronically absent, at p<.001 level. In the DIBELS 6th Edition Assessment and Scoring Guide (Good & Kaminski, 2002), these are labeled as "Some Risk," indicating the need for additional intervention and "At Risk," indicating the need for substantial interventions.
A Rhode Island Data Hub analysis found that compared to kindergartners who attend regularly, those chronically absent:

- Scored **20% lower in reading and math** in later grades and gap grows.
- **2X** as likely to be **retained** in grade.
- **2X** likely to be **suspended** by the end of 7th grade.
- Likely to continue being chronically absent.
The Effects of Chronic Absence on Dropout Rates are Cumulative

Proportion of Students Dropping Out by Number of Years the Student was Chronically Absent from 8th-12th Grades

Reducing Chronic Absence Can Help Close Equity Gaps

• Vulnerable children, especially those living in poverty, are 2-3 times more likely to experience chronic absence at earlier ages.

• Vulnerable children are much less likely to have the resources to make up for lost learning time in the classroom.

• Vulnerable children are more likely to experience multiple years of chronic absence
When a Student Misses School the Impact Ripples
What does Attendance Matter: From a business perspective

**The workforce challenge:** Absenteeism contributes to high school dropout rates, leaving students without the academic credentials and skills needed to compete in a 21st century workforce.

**The soft skills challenge:** Regular attendance is the precursor to the “soft skills” that employers will continue to expect and require. Students who don’t develop the habits associated with good attendance in the early years will find it difficult to develop them as adults.

**The productivity challenge:** Children who are sick miss school. And their parents miss work. Businesses have a real stake in reducing the numbers of days that children stay home due to preventable illnesses.
Requires A New Attendance Paradigm

**Truancy**
- Counts unexcused absences
- Emphasizes individual compliance with school rules
- Uses legal, typically more punitive, solutions

**Chronic Absence**
- Counts all absences
- Emphasizes academic impact of missed days
- Uses preventive problem-solving, trauma-informed strategies
How Can We Address Chronic Absence?
Think about a child you know who struggles to get to school every day.

- What is a key barrier he or she faces?
- What helps him/her get to school even when it is difficult?
### Factors That Contribute to Chronic Absence

#### Barriers
- Illness, both chronic and acute
- Lack of health, mental health, vision, or dental care
- Family Responsibilities
- Trauma
- Unsafe path to/from school
- Poor Transportation
- Frequent moves or school changes
- Involvement with child welfare or juvenile justice systems

#### Negative School Experiences
- Struggling academically or socially
- Bullying
- Suspensions and expulsions
- Negative attitudes of parents due to their own school experience
- Undiagnosed disability
- Lack of appropriate accommodations for disability

#### Lack of Engagement
- Lack of culturally relevant, engaging instruction
- No meaningful relationships with adults in school
- Stronger ties with peers out of school than in school
- Unwelcoming school climate
- Failure to earn credits/no future plans
- Many teacher absences or long-term substitutes

#### Misconceptions
- Absences are only a problem if they are unexcused
- Missing 2 days per month doesn’t affect learning
- Sporadic absences aren’t a problem
- Attendance only matters in the older grades
Recognize that Going to School Reflects When Families Have…

**Hope**
for a better future

**Faith**
that school will help you or your child succeed

**Capacity**
Resources, skills, and knowledge to get services in schools
Adopt a Comprehensive Approach

TIER 1
- Engaging school climate
- Positive relationships with students and families
- Impact of absences on achievement widely understood
- Chronic absence data monitored
- Good and improved attendance recognized
- Common barriers identified and addressed

TIER 2
- Personalized early outreach
- Action plan addresses barriers and increases engagement
- Caring mentors

TIER 3
- Coordinated school and interagency response
- Legal intervention (last resort)

Students missing 20% or more of school (severe chronic absence)

Students missing 10-19% (moderate chronic absence)

Students missing 5-9% (at risk)

Students missing less than 5% (satisfactory)

Low Cost

High Cost
Invest in Prevention and Early Intervention

High and extreme levels of chronic absence are an alert that additional support is needed.

TIER 1
Prevention
- Engaging school climate
- Positive relationships with students and families
- Impact of absences on achievement widely understood
- Chronic absence data monitored
- Good and improved attendance recognized
- Common barriers identified and addressed

TIER 2
Early Intervention
- Personalized early outreach
- Action plan addresses barriers and increases engagement
- Caring mentors

TIER 3
Specialized supports
- Coordinated school and interagency response
- Legal intervention (last resort)

Students missing 5–9% (at risk)
Students missing less than 5% (satisfactory)
Students missing 10–19% (moderate chronic absence)
Students missing 20% or more of school (severe chronic absence)
Tailor Response to Scale and Intensity of the Challenge

• **At the District Level**: is there a need for a community-wide response or targeted efforts in a sub-set of schools?

• **At the School Level**: how many students are chronically absent?

• If it’s 30 or less, a student support team can lead the effort.

• If it’s closer to 50 or more, teachers will need to play a critical role.

• If it’s over **100**, community partners will likely be needed to provide additional person power

*Source: Everyone Graduates Center*
Positive Engagement:
Uses caring relationships, effective messaging and a positive school climate to motivate daily attendance.

Actionable Data:
Is accurate, accessible, and regularly reported in an understandable format.

Capacity Building
Expands ability to work together to interpret data, engage in problem solving, and adopt best practices to improve attendance.

Shared Accountability:
Ensures chronic absence is monitored & reinforced by policy.

Strategic partnerships
between district and community partners address specific attendance barriers and mobilize support for all ingredients.

Positive Engagement

Actionable Data

Schools

Students & Families

Shared Accountability

Capacity Building

District

Community

Take a Data Driven Systemic Approach
Requires A New Data Mindset

Expands focus from

Attendance = Compliance

to

*Attendance = Opportunity to Learn

*Attendance Data = Action Alert
Reducing Chronic Absence Requires a Team
The primary charge of an “attendance team” is to organize the school’s attendance strategy and foster improved attendance for all students.
1. **Monitor** data to understand which groups of students are most affected

2. **Examine causes of chronic absence** using qualitative and quantitative data

3. **Develop and enlist support** for a school wide strategy that build upon existing assets and challenges

4. **Engage** in triage for tier 2 and 3 students (make sure chronically absent students are being assigned to someone who can help)
Principals and school staff should determine, based upon local conditions, if a new group needs to be established, if the work can be successfully incorporated into the responsibilities of an existing team (MTSS, PBIS, Leadership, etc.), or if functions must be divided up with strong coordination across different teams.
The Team Should Be Led by the School Principal and Have Diverse Representation

Attendance Team

- Principal
- Guidance Counselor
- Nurse
- IEP Chair
- Parents/Students
- Community Partners
- Attendance Clerk/Administrative Assistant/Secretary
- Social Worker
- Teacher(s)
What Makes an Effective Team?

- They involve the right people
- Have established group norms
- Clearly defined roles and responsibilities
- Regularly scheduled meetings
- Shared responsibility and accountability
- Utilize a standard meeting agenda
- Maintain school calendar of attendance related events or opportunities
Team Members Have Clearly Defined Roles and Responsibilities

Core Team roles include:

❖ Team facilitator/leader
❖ Data coordinator
❖ Note taker
Possible Team Agenda Items

Aggregate Data Trends
High-level picture of all students by tier and attendance categories; changes since last meeting
✓ Parents/Students/Community Partners Can be Involved

Tier 1 Strategies
Discuss strategy for school as whole. Is it working? What needs to be improved? Identify who needs to help problem solve.
✓ Parents/Students/Community Partners Can be Involved

Early Warning Systems
Review of students on the “cusp” of tiers; identify any patterns or trends across groups of students and interventions including insights about common barriers

Tier 2 and Tier 3 Students
Review individual students; causes for absence; assign interventions

Meeting Decisions and Next Steps
Work as a team to fill out your pyramid so you can identify and fill in gaps.

Fill Out Your Pyramid

For each tier, fill in the activities/supports currently in place.

School District/School Name: ____________________________

How many students are in each tier?

Tier 3

Tier 2

Tier 1

Tier 1A: missing less than 5% of school ( < 1 day per month)

Tier 1B: missing between 5% but less than 10% of school (1+ days per month)

Tier 2: missing more than 10% but less than 20% of school (2-3 days per month)

Tier 3: missing more than 20% of school (4+ days per month)

High Cost

Low Cost
Leveraging Parent/Student Teacher Conferences

### Satisfactory Attendance

**If student has missed fewer than 5%**

Congratulate parents on making attendance a priority and encourage them to keep it up. Ask them what they’re doing that’s enabling them to be so successful.

### At-Risk

**If student has missed more than 5% and is nearing 10%**

Let parents know that you are concerned about attendance because their child is beginning to head off track, and it is easy for absences to add up.

**If student is right around 10% or a little above**

Let parents know their child may be academically at risk because they have missed so much school. Discuss underlying causes and how you can help.

### Chronic Absence

**If student is severely chronically absent (e.g. >20%)**

The type of challenges these families face may differ from those with more moderate absence problems. Be prepared to touch on difficult topics, be supportive, and be ready to connect to community resources.

Consider seeking help from social worker
Making a Difference Within A School Year Requires Attention to At-Risk and Moderate Bands

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DAYS MISSED IN SCHOOL YEAR</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Satisfactory Attendance</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Missed less than 5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>(fewer than 9 days in a 180-day year)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>At-risk</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Missed 5-9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>(9-17 days in a 180-day year)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Moderate Chronic Absence</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missed 10-19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(18-35 days in a 180-day year)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Severe Chronic Absence</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missed 20% or more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(36 or more days in a 180-day year)</td>
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### Tier 2 Interventions

**Tier 2**
- Targeted interventions that remove identified barriers and increase positive connections that motivate improved attendance

**Who are the families in Tier 2?**
- Missing 10% or more of the prior or current school year for any reason
- Families experiencing some challenge e.g. chronic disease, job loss, divorce, etc.
- Families whose child has a disability that is impacting attendance

**For which families is Tier 2 sufficient?**
- Families with barriers to school attendance who may not understand how to access support
- Families who see school as “the deliverer of bad news”
- Families who are more successful when there is a positive relationship with someone at the school
✓ Chronic absence (missed 10-19.9% of school) in the prior year.
✓ And/or starting in the beginning of the school year, student has:

- In first 2 weeks: 2 absences
- In first month (4 weeks): 2-3 absences
- In first 2 months (8 weeks): 4-7 absences

Missing 10% any time after
Tier 2 Interventions Are Especially Critical

Priority Early Outreach for Positive Linkages and Engagement

- Assign caring mentors
- Recruit for engaging before- or after-school activities
- Partner with families/students to develop Student Attendance Success Plan
- Connect to Walk-to-School Companion
- Add attendance goals and supports to IEP
- Offer plan or contacts for health support

The Power of Positive Connections
Reducing Chronic Absence through PEOPLE: Priority Early Outreach for Positive Linkages and Engagement

www.attendanceworks.org
Avoid Common Pitfalls

Pitfalls to Avoid:

• Focus only on students with most absences
• Case management as the sole strategy
• Too small a team
• Fail to rally whole school to support prevention and early intervention

For additional tips, see:
What is Teaching Attendance?

Click on the course below and start learning today!

Module 1 - Why We Teach Attendance?
Module 2: Creating a Culture of Attendance (Primary and Secondary)
Module 3: Using Data for Intervention and Support (Primary and Secondary)

http://www.attendanceworks.org/resources/teaching-attendance-curriculum/
Purpose of the Teaching Attendance Curriculum

★ Give school leaders a quick way to equip teachers and school staff with evidence-based strategies to improve attendance

★ Rally school staff to act as the first line of prevention and early intervention

★ Inspire better attendance practices that are positive, proactive and problem-solving
Three Online Learning Modules:

1. Why We Teach Attendance

2. Creating a Culture of Attendance
   *(Primary and Secondary versions)*

3. Using Data for Intervention and Support
   *(Primary and Secondary versions)*
What are the key features of our E-Learning Modules?

Through a combination of videos and interactive technology, these modules:

❖ Summarize key concepts and relevant research
❖ Showcase effective practice while pointing out common pitfalls
❖ Connect concepts to personal experience
❖ Apply knowledge to their own situations
❖ Link to available resources
Uses personal experiences to remind everyone of the important influence they have on children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What were your POSITIVE experiences?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When you were in school, who motivated you to attend? <em>Select all that apply.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Academic teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Cafeteria staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Counselor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Music, drama and art teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Bus driver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Coaches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Faith-based leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Parents/Caregivers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- School nurse</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What was something they did or said?

Type your response here.
Encourage reflection about the implications of negative as well as positive experiences.
Combating Attendance Dips (From Module II)

The Attendance Heartbeat

Do you notice a pattern as to when attendance dips in this school year? Select each area to see how attendance correlates to calendar and weather events.

http://www.attendanceworks.org/resources/teaching-attendance-curriculum/
Cleveland, Ohio
Investing in Tier 1 and 2
YOU can make it!

CLEVELAND METROPOLITAN SCHOOL DISTRICT
GET TO SCHOOL → YOU CAN MAKE IT
THREE PRONGED CAMPAIGN

1) Citywide Awareness Efforts
   – Billboards
   – Radio advertising
   – Bus signs
   – Yard signs
   – Celebrity endorsements
   – Social media
   – Profiles of kids who improved attendance
GET TO SCHOOL → YOU CAN MAKE IT
THREE PRONGED CAMPAIGN

2) School-based efforts
   – IVRs
   – Attendance Robo-calls
   – Attendance Incentives
   – School attendance committees (200 minutes)
GET TO SCHOOL ➔ YOU CAN MAKE IT
THREE PRONGED CAMPAIGN

3) Targeted district-wide efforts
   – Door-knocking
   – Literature drops
   – Phone banks
   – “You Can Make It” Days
   – 12 Campaign Clusters
Impact of Strategies in Cleveland

44% → 30%

From 2015-16 to 2017-18
Reflections

• What do you see as the implications for your community?

• Share with the person next to you.
Positive Engagement: Uses caring relationships, effective messaging and a positive school climate to motivate daily attendance.

Actionable Data: Is accurate, accessible, and regularly reported in an understandable format.

Positive Engagement

Actionable Data

Capacity Building

Shared Accountability

Strategic partnerships between district and community partners address specific attendance barriers and mobilize support for all ingredients.

And, champions to put the system in place!