Working Together To Support Student Success

Freeport, Maine
October 29, 2015
Attendance Works is a national and state initiative that promotes awareness of the important role that reducing chronic absence plays in achieving academic success starting with school entry. We are an implementation partner for attendance with the Campaign for Grade Level Reading.

Our three focus areas to improve student attendance are:

• Build public awareness and political will to address chronic absence
• Foster state campaigns
• Nurture local practice

www.attendanceworks.org
• One story about how you tried to help a student or a school improve attendance?
• What did you learn from that experience about what works?
• What was hard? What barriers did you face?
What Is Chronic Absence?

**Average Daily Attendance**

• ADA = How many students typically show up to school each day? Typically calculated by dividing the total number of students present each day by total number of students enrolled.

**Truancy**

• Truancy = Who is missing school without permission? It is a trigger for possible legal action. Under NCLB, define by each state. Truancy in Maine: Before 6th grade = missing 7 days unexcused or 5 consecutive days unexcused. After 6 grade = missing 10 days unexcused or 7 consecutive days unexcused in a school year.

**Chronic Absence**

• CA = Who is academically at risk because they missed too much school any reason – excused, unexcused, suspensions. Frequently defined by researchers as missing 10% or more of school for any reason.
Why Define as Missing 10% of School for ANY reason (excused, unexcused, suspension etc.)?

- Any absence = a day of missed instruction
- Based upon research
- Promotes early detection and intervention
- Allows for comparison across districts and states with different academic calendars
- Increases efficiency of data collection when required by all agencies
High Levels of Average Daily Attendance (ADA) Can Mask Chronic Absence

Even 95% ADA may not = A

98% ADA = little chronic absence
95% ADA = don’t know
93% ADA = significant chronic absence
Chronic Absence Versus 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)
Why We May Not Notice Chronic Absence

Absences Add Up

Chronic Absence = 18 days of absence = 2 days a month
Why Does Attendance Matter for Achievement?

What we know from research around the country
Attendance is An Essential Ingredient of Academic Success

Attainment
Over Time

Achievement
Every Year

Attendance
Every Day

Advocacy
For All

4 A School Success Framework

Developed by Annie E. Casey Foundation & America’s Promise Alliance
For more info go to http://www.americaspromise.org/parent-engagement-toolkit
Improving Attendance Matters Because It Reflects:

**Exposure to language:** Starting in Pre-K, attendance equals exposure to language-rich environments especially for low-income children.

**Time on Task in Class:** Students only benefit from classroom instruction if they are in class.

**On Track for Success:** Chronic absence is a proven early warning sign that a student is behind in reading by 3rd grade, failing courses middle and high school, and likely to drop-out.

**College Readiness:** Attendance patterns predicts college enrollment and persistence.

**Engagement:** Attendance reflects engagement in learning.

**Effective Practice:** Schools, communities and families can improve attendance when they work together.

(For research, see: [http://www.attendanceworks.org/research/](http://www.attendanceworks.org/research/))
Starting in PreK, More Years of Chronic Absence = Need for Intensive Reading Support By 2nd Grade

Some risk

At risk

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>DIBELS Oral Reading Fluency Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not chronically absent</td>
<td>98.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chr in PreK (n=1,381)</td>
<td>94.6***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chr in PreK + K (n=423)</td>
<td>88.9***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chr in PreK, K, and 1st grade</td>
<td>81.3***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chr in PreK, K, 1st, and 2nd</td>
<td>72.9***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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* Indicates that scores are significantly different from scores of students who are never chronically absent, at p<.05 level; **p<.01; ***p<.001
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

With every year of chronic absenteeism, a higher percentage of students dropped out of school.

Attendance Is Even More Important for Graduation for Students In Poverty

Attendance in 9th Grade and Graduation in 4 Years by Lunch Eligibility

Presentation to: The Interagency Council for Ending the Achievement Gap
November 7, 2013, CT State Dept of Education.
Chronic Absence in High School Predicts Lower College Participation

In Rhode Island, only 11% of chronically absent high school students persisted into a 2nd year of college vs. 51% of those with low absences.
How Can We Address Chronic Absence?
Myths
- Absences are only a problem if they are unexcused
- Sporadic versus consecutive absences aren’t a problem
- Attendance only matters in the older grades

Barriers
- Chronic disease
- Lack of access to health or dental care
- Poor Transportation
- Trauma
- No safe path to school

Aversion
- Child struggling academically
- Lack of engaging instruction
- Poor school climate and ineffective school discipline
- Parents had negative school experience
Going to School Every Day Reflects When Families Have ...

Hope
for a better future
+

Faith
that school will help you or your child succeed
+

Capacity
Resources, skills, knowledge needed to get to school
AW Recommended Site Level Strategies

A. Recognize Good and Improved Attendance
B. Engage Students and Parents
C. Monitor Attendance Data and Practice
D. Provide Personalized Early Outreach
E. Develop Programmatic Response to Barriers (as needed)
Tier 1: Creating a positive, engaging school climate that explicitly supports attendance

Attendance is higher when schools:

- promote a sense of belonging and connection including noticing when students show up
- make learning so engaging students don’t want to miss class while creating understanding of how easily absences can add up
- engage in restorative practice not punishment
- help our most economically challenged families and students meet their basic needs so all have the opportunity to get to school.
- Build awareness about how absences can easily add up to too much time lost in the classroom.
Vast majority of parents, even those of students with excessive absences, believe their child’s attendance is same as classmates, better than classmates, or just don’t know.
Messaging: Absences v. Attendance

Absences
- Associate with what child is missing
- This behavior is planned so makes parents think about impact of planned absences
- Change in behavior

Attendance
- Associate with what child is already gaining
- This behavior considered automatic, makes parents feel like they are already doing
- Reinforces current behavior

Associations
- Perceptions
- Potential Impact
Parents Underestimate the Number of Year-End Absences

We asked each parent about his or her child’s absences in two ways:

1. Was your child absent an average of 2 or more days a month?
2. Was your child absent more than 10 days over the year?

60% of parents said their child was absent an average of 2+ days a month, but not 10+ days a year.

The math: If a child is absent an average of 2+ days a month, then she is absent far more than 10+ days a year.
Most High-Absence Parents Reported that Their Schools Had Not Contacted Them

72% of parents reported that they most trust teachers to talk to them about absences.

BUT

Only 42% reported that a school official, including a teacher, contacted them about attendance in the last 6 months.

We need to make it easier for teachers and school leaders to talk to parents about absences.
Schools Inadvertently Reinforce Some Absence-Causing Beliefs

School Behaviors that…

Reinforce Attendance
Class rewards for good attendance (e.g. popcorn or ice cream parties)
Individual recognition for students with good attendance

Reinforce Absenteeism
- Impersonal letters
- Teachers send work home in response to absences
- Teachers do not address absenteeism issue with the parent
- Parents do not feel their child is safe in school
- High levels of absenteeism in the class

Reinforces parents’ existing attitudes and behaviors toward absences

Big motivators for kids, but not parents

Impersonal Letters:
- Easy to disregard
- Many parents felt the school miscounted—but parents couldn’t verify because they weren’t tracking absences
- Many parents felt that the school didn’t understand them

Sending Work Home:
- Parents thought that completing a makeup packet caught their child up for the missed day’s work

Teachers Not Addressing Absenteeism:
- Most parents reported that they regularly communicate with their children’s teacher, but never about absences
Reflections

• What do you think about these findings about parents’ attitudes about attendance and absence?
• What are potential implications for your own work?
• Questions?
Tier 1: Communication, Education, and Engagement

Teaching Attendance:
Everyday Strategies to Help Teachers Improve Attendance and Raise Achievement

BRINGING ATTENDANCE HOME
Engaging Parents in Preventing Chronic Absence
Build Awareness of How Absences Add Up


b. **Talk with parents early and often** to share the value of good attendance and let them know that you are there to help.

c. **Consider using an activity at a parent event** to demonstrate the importance of avoiding absences. (e.g. Illustrating the Gap or BAH Video)

d. **Utilize written commitments** to encourage good attendance such as a pledge or the attendance goal work sheet.
Discussion: When and where might you use these materials with a family or a group?
Make Creating Back Up Plans a Norm:
Student Attendance Success Plan

MY CHILD'S ATTENDANCE GOALS

To improve my child's attendance, I can commit to the following:

1. 
2. 
3. 

We will review progress to meet this goal at the next Parent Teacher Conference.

POSSIBLE STRATEGIES TO REACH YOUR CHILD'S ATTENDANCE GOALS

• My child was present _____ days.
• My child was absent _____ days.
• My child's current attendance rate is _____%.
• My goal for next year is to improve my child's attendance to _____%.

To learn more, please visit www.attendanceworks.org or www.att-glc.net

YOUR FAMILY'S HELP BANK

YOUR FAMILY

1. Your Family: 
2. Everyday Helpers: 
3. Occasional Helpers: 
4. Potential Helpers:

If I need help getting my child to and from school, I will ask the following people to be my back-up:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Best Contact Number</th>
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EVEN MORE HELPERS

1. Everyday Helpers: Identify someone who can help your child attend school who can pick him her up when you can't.
2. Occasional Helpers: Identify people who can help your child attend school who can help regularly.
3. Potential Helpers: Identify people who can help your child attend school who can help on occasion.

YOUR FAMILY

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2. Everyday Helpers: 
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Tip: Start with the Help Bank and the Calendar on the 3rd page. Offer up first page as homework to take home.
Leveraging Parent Teacher Conferences

• How many of your work in a district or a school where parent teacher conferences are still held?
• Do teacher’s discuss attendance during those conferences?
• Are school social workers involved in helping teacher’s prepare for parent teacher conferences?
What might educators and community partners say to families?

**Satisfactory Attendance**
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**
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.
Framing the Conversation to Build a Relationship of Trust

1. Learn
   - Learn about the student’s family. Ask what their vision is for their child’s future. What are their hopes and dreams for them?

2. Share
   - Share positive things you’ve observed about the student. Share your own vision for student learning & development, including helping put students on a pathway to success by encouraging a habit of good attendance.

3. Inform
   - Review attendance report with parents. Tailor your conversation to student’s level of absenteeism and inform parents of possible impacts of missing school. Connect attendance back to parents’ hopes and dreams for their child.

4. Discuss
   - Discuss the challenges parents face in getting their children to school, as well as strengths they can build upon. For chronically absent students, try to understand the barriers that are keeping their children from school.

5. Arrive at a Plan
   - Think through strategies with parents for addressing absences and help them develop an attendance improvement plan. Offer referrals to services as needed and ask if there are other ways you can help.
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% -20% of the prior or current school year for any reason.
• Families experiencing some challenge e.g. chronic disease, job loss, divorce, etc.

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% or more of school) in the prior year, assuming data is available.

And/or starting in the beginning of the school year, student has:

- **Tier 2:** Criteria for Identifying Which Students Need It

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

Missing 10% any time after
Possible Tier 2 Interventions

(See Power of Positive Connections Toolkit)

- Assign Attendance Buddies
- Partner with families/students to develop Student Attendance Success Plan
- Recruit for engaging Before- or After-School Activities
- Connect to Walk-to-School Companion
- Offer plan or contacts for Health Support

Priority Early Outreach for Positive Linkages and Engagement
Key Finding: Success Mentors & Supporting Infrastructure Substantially Improved Student Attendance

• Students with prior histories of chronic absenteeism with a Success Mentor gained nearly two additional weeks of school (9 days), which is educationally significant.

• In the top 25% of schools, students with Success Mentors gained one additional month of school.

• High School students with Success Mentors (including those overage for their grade) were 52% more likely to remain in school the following year.

• Mentees reported they liked having a mentor and the mentor helped improve their attendance, schoolwork, motivation, and confidence.
Tier 3 provides intensive interventions, often from multiple agencies or specialists within a school district or community.

Who are families in Tier 3?
- Missing 20% or more of the prior or current school year for any reason.
- Already involved in the system (child welfare, juvenile or criminal justices)

For which families is Tier 3 necessary?
- Families who feel hopeless because of the barriers they face.
- Families who are unable to experience success without intervention.
- Families who have a negative relationship with school.
- Families who require on-going support for sustained success.
Who Can Help Families at Tier 3?

- Community schools
- Head Start family liaisons
- School integrated service teams
- Family resource centers
- County Social Services
- McKinney Vento representatives

Who would you add to this list?
Ingredients for System-wide Success & Sustainability

Community
- Use positive relationships to engage parents and understanding about why monitoring absence is essential to a better future.

District
- Is accurate, accessible, and regularly reported

Positive Engagement
- Expands ability to interpret data and work together to adopt best practices

Actionable Data
- Ensures monitoring & incentives to address chronic absence

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

Capacity Building
- Expands ability to interpret data and work together to adopt best practices
Professional development: trained site administrators and teams to interpret attendance data, adopt best practices and engage in peer learning.

Actionable data: sent report every 10 days with information on how many and which students are chronically absent.

School attendance teams: monitored the data and ensured appropriate supports are in place.

Home visits: hired two outreach workers to conduct home visits to chronically absent kindergartners.

Parent engagement and communications: Messaged thru newsletters, daily interactions with parents & attendance incentives.

Community partnerships: used community agencies to offer supports at school sites and thru a district Attendance Review Committee formed to avoid referrals to juvenile court.
In New Britain, chronic absence dropped from 20-13% for K-8 in ‘11/12; progress sustained in year ‘12/13 & ‘13/14.
Local to State Change Pathway

Advance local practice through peer learning

Inform actions and advocacy of state organizations with insights from local practice

Spread work state-wide through TA and policy

Locality A
Locality B
Locality C: Early Innovator

Peer opportunities to:
• compare data
• Share, demonstrate & learn about best practices
• Identify & problem-solve common challenges

Communities/Districts Across State Join In

State Dept of Education
State Supt Assoc.
School Board Assoc.
Unions
Parent Organizations
Advocacy Organizations
ECE/HS Association
Others

Ongoing peer learning, technical assistance, administrative guidance, regulations, legislation, etc. promote best practices & systemic change
Superintendents Call to Action

• 222 superintendents have signed onto the Call to Action, committing to 1) prioritizing attendance, 2) mobilizing the community and 3) driving with data.

• Appears in Sept. 30 Education Week Ad, the list included:
  ➢ Sanford Prince, Windham-Raymond Schools
  ➢ Bill Webster, Lewiston Public Schools
  ➢ Ken Kunin, South Portland SD
Every Student, Every Day
A National, Cross-Sector Initiative to Address and Eliminate Chronic Absenteeism in Our Nation’s Schools

Launched by the U.S. Department of Education in partnership with the U.S. Departments of Justice, Health & Human Services, and Housing & Urban Development in support of President Obama’s My Brother’s Keeper Initiative
Every Student, Every Day
Resource Package

The federal resource package for *Every Student, Every Day* includes:

- “Dear Colleague” letter with guidance for states, schools, and local communities
- *Every Student, Every Day* community toolkit
- National awareness campaign sponsored by ED, the Ad Council, and the Mott Foundation, beginning in January 2016
- Technical assistance for states and school districts beginning in January 2016
- National chronic absenteeism summit in Spring 2016
- Civil Rights Data Collection release of first-ever national chronic absenteeism data in Spring 2016 *(Reporting # of students missing 15 or more days of school)*
Chronic Absence =
The Warning Light On A Car Dashboard

The Parallels

• Ignore it at your personal peril!
• Address early or potentially pay more (lots more) later.
• The key is to ask why is this blinking? What could this mean?
• The first step is making sure the check-engine light works.