



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

Showing up for school has a huge impact on a student's academic success starting in kindergarten and continuing through high school. Even as children grow older and more independent, families play a key role in making sure students get to school safely 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.
- 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 potentially serious difficulty.
- By 6th grade, absenteeism is one of three signs that a student may drop out of high school.
- By 9th grade, regular and high attendance is a better predictor of graduation rates than 8th grade test scores.
- Missing 10 percent, or about 18 days, of the school year can drastically affect a student's academic success.
- Students can be chronically absent even if they only miss a day or two every few weeks.
- Attendance is an important life skill that will help your child graduate from college and keep a job.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Make school attendance a priority

- Talk about the importance of showing up to school everyday, make that the expectation.
- Help your child maintain daily routines, such as finishing homework and getting a good night's sleep.
- Try not to schedule dental and medical appointments during the school day.
- Don't let your child stay home unless truly sick. Complaints of headaches or stomach aches may be signs of anxiety.

Help your teen stay engaged

- Find out if your child feels engaged by his classes and feels safe from bullies and other threats. Make sure he/she is not missing class because of behavioral issues and school discipline policies. If any of these are problems, work with your school.
- Stay on top of academic progress and seek help from teachers or tutors if 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 meaningful afterschool activities, including sports and clubs.

Communicate with the school

- Know the school's attendance policy – incentives and penalties
- Talk to teachers if you notice sudden changes in behavior. These could be tied to something going on at school.
- Check on your child's attendance to be sure absences are not piling up.
- Ask for help from school officials, afterschool programs, other parents or community agencies if you're having trouble getting your child to school.



Help Your School and Community Improve School Attendance:

PUSH FOR BETTER TRACKING OF CHRONIC ABSENCE DATA

Every report card includes a box showing parents just how many absences their children have. But does your school look at absenteeism numbers for the whole student body? And can the principal tell you how many students are missing so much school that it interferes with their academic performance? Keep in mind, too much absenteeism isn't just a problem for the students missing school but can disrupt learning for the whole classroom.

All parents should know this sort of information about their children's school. But many schools and districts don't track or release what's known as chronic absence data – the percent of students missing 10% or 18 days over an entire school year. They look at the average number of students who show up for school, rather than at the number who are missing too much school due to any kind of absence, excused or unexcused. Average figures can mask large numbers of chronically absent, at-risk students.

Parents can make a difference!

WHAT YOU CAN DO

In Your Community

- **Get the data:** Ask your school and district to calculate chronic absence rates and share them with parents, teachers and principals.
- **Identify barriers to attendance:** Work with your school to find out from parents and students what prevents them from getting to school.
- **Make a plan:** Encourage your school to make a plan and partner with community agencies to address identified attendance barriers.
- **Create incentives:** Help your school recognize students and families for good and improved attendance. Assist with award ceremonies and certificates or even reach out to local businesses to contribute incentives like gift cards or food items.
- **Educate parents:** Help all parents in your school understand the importance of attendance and who to call for the health, transportation or social services resources they need.

In Your State

- **Encourage tracking:** State regulations or laws should ensure that more school districts track chronic absence data and report it to the state.
- **Urge better reporting:** Your state education department should release chronic absence data statewide, just like they release test scores for districts and schools.
- **Advocate for accountability:** Your state department of education and districts should hold schools accountable for addressing chronic absence in their school improvement plans.



For more about school attendance, visit
www.missingschoolmatters.org