

ATTEND. ACHIEVE. SUCCEED.

Everyday Counts, Every Student Matters

Attendance Awareness Communications Toolkit
2017 - 2018





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Attendance Works

Advancing Student Success By Reducing Chronic Absence

ATTENDANCE WORKS IS A NATIONAL AND STATE INITIATIVE THAT PROMOTES BETTER POLICY AND PRACTICE AROUND SCHOOL ATTENDANCE. WE PROMOTE TRACKING CHRONIC ABSENCE DATA FOR EACH STUDENT BEGINNING IN KINDERGARTEN OR IDEALLY EARLIER, AND PARTNERING WITH FAMILIES AND COMMUNITY AGENCIES TO INTERVENE WHEN POOR ATTENDANCE IS A PROBLEM FOR STUDENTS OR SCHOOLS.

WWW.ATTENDANCEWORKS.ORG

Attendance Works has three objectives:

- **Build public awareness** and political will about the need to address chronic absence. This includes extensive media outreach as well as working with key national organizations to spread the word about why this issue matters and explore the role federal government can play. It also includes explaining the critical difference between chronic absence and truancy.
- **Foster state campaigns** by developing coalitions to advance state and local policies that promote tracking attendance for individual students and reporting on chronic absence to ensure schools, especially if they are low-performing, will intervene to improve student attendance.
- **Encourage local practice** by providing technical assistance and tools to help communities, schools and school districts monitor and work together to address chronic absence. This includes creating peer learning networks and tapping skills and assets available from state and national organizations.

This communications toolkit was inspired by the amazing work done by Attendance Works. The Puget Sound Educational Service District (PSESD) Communications and Public Relations Department and the Early Warning Systems (EWS) program partnered to develop a toolkit that was customized to

the Puget Sound region and reflective of the PSESD's commitment to lead with racial equity in support of our agency's END: Success for Each child and Eliminate the Opportunity Gap.

In this toolkit we have included original and adapted materials with permission by Attendance Works. Educators and community organizations working to reduce chronic absence can download our free materials and disseminate them without express permission from Attendance Works and Puget Sound Educational Service District. The content can be reformatted and reused without changes to the wording as it appears in this toolkit as long as credit is given to Attendance Works, and Puget Sound ESD where noted. That can include use of our logo and/or a line reading "used with permission of Attendance Works." If organizations wish to alter the wording of these materials in any way from its original form, prior authorization via email is required. Attendance Works reserves the right to review any and all alterations before granting this authorization. If we are not comfortable with your alterations, we reserve the right to deny use of our name and logo.

PSESD appreciates the leadership, dedication and collaborative approach that Attendance Works has taken in this arena. We are supportive of their work, their objectives and are excited to partner in this initiative to bring these resources to the districts and communities in the Puget Sound region in support of the students and families that we serve.

WHAT THIS TOOLKIT IS, HOW TO USE IT AND WHEN

■ WHY ATTENDANCE & CHRONIC ABSENCE

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, ninth grade achievement, high school graduation, and postsecondary persistence. Chronic absenteeism is missing 10% 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 students, families, and communities to make informed decisions regarding missing school.

According to OSPI, In 2016, WA State absentee rate was at 16.7% - 193,929 students were at risk



■ WHO SHOULD USE THIS TOOLKIT?

The purpose of this toolkit is to rally communities around the cause of improving absenteeism. With that said, we encourage all school and district staff, as well as community organizations, religious institutions, local businesses, healthcare providers, and family members to use this toolkit to improve attendance among the youth in your community.

■ CAN WE MAKE CHANGES?

In an effort to support school districts in our region, this toolkit was developed by Puget Sound Educational Service District's (PSESD) Communications and Public Relations team in partnership with the Early Warning Systems program.

The information found in this plan includes resources from Attendance Works, OSPI, and original content and images from PSESD. Use of the materials from these sources has been granted to school districts in the Puget Sound Region. Please credit Attendance Works and PSESD with our logos and/or a line reading "used with permission of Attendance Works and PSESD." as appropriate.



Districts are encouraged to customize the messaging with district specific information.

In addition to using this messaging through their own platforms, we encourage districts to share, retweet and repost information shared through the PSESD social platforms.

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/PSESD>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/PSESD>



■ HOW DO WE ACCESS IT?

In addition to this PDF, there is a web page dedicated to providing more in-depth and updated information: psesd.org/attendance toolkit

INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Any communication you have with students and families in your community should be responsive, inclusive and culturally appropriate. Attending to culturally sensitive communication supports two of the four anti-bias domains: Identity and Diversity. Culturally relevant family engagement strategies communicate to students that their family identities are understood and valued. It also demonstrates respect for families with a diverse range of backgrounds and structures.



KEY MESSAGING

CUSTOMIZING YOUR ATTENDANCE MESSAGE TO YOUR AUDIENCE

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 parents and schools, get involved in improving attendance. All of us can make a difference by helping students and families feel engaged in learning. Their schools are setting the expectation that school attendance matters and working together to identify and help families overcome barriers of getting to school. Community partners are especially important for helping schools and families address and overcome tough barriers, such as limited access to healthcare, 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.

TIPS FOR TALKING TO FAMILIES

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



1. 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, whether they are excused or unexcused, it is still a problem 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.

For student messaging, translations, flyers and more visit: psesd.org/attendance toolkit

KEY MESSAGING FOR HEALTHCARE PARTNERS

PHYSICAL, MENTAL, BEHAVIORAL, VISION, DENTAL, SOCIAL AND
EMOTIONAL HEALTH ISSUES CONTRIBUTE TO ABSENTEES.

■ WHY SHOULD HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS CARE ABOUT CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM?

1

Poor physical, dental and mental health are leading causes for poor attendance and low academic achievement.

2

Higher academic achievement is linked to lower disease incidents

3

School health services are a key strategy for ensuring students have access to the care they need to manage the health conditions that result in missed school, including asthma, diabetes, ADHD, dental and vision problems and obesity

4

Low-income students are four times more likely to be chronically absent than others often for reasons beyond their control, such as lack of access to health care.



HOW CAN HEALTHCARE PARTNERS HELP WITH ATTENDANCE?

	<p>Partner with School Districts to align messaging</p>		<p>Talk to parents and students about the value of good attendance during back-to-school check-ups</p>
	<p>Provide guidance on when a child should stay home sick and how to avoid absences due to minor illness or anxiety</p>		<p>Make available medical appointments for school aged children before or after school. If this is not possible, schedule toward the beginning or end of the day and encourage parents to send their child back to school</p>
	<p>Advocate for providing school-based and school-linked health supports to prevent children from missing too much school, especially in places with high levels of chronic absence. Help justify these investments by explaining the benefit of avoiding costly emergency room care</p>		<p>Work with community partners to ensure children have health coverage and access to a medical home, which is particularly important for asthma management and less costly sick care.</p>

KEY MESSAGING FOR EARLY LEARNING PARTNERS



■ OPPORTUNITIES FOR EARLY LEARNING PROVIDERS TO MESSAGE IMPORTANCE OF ATTENDANCE TO FAMILIES

Throughout the course of a school year, family support and teaching staff meet frequently with parents. Each meeting is an opportunity to increase awareness of the importance of promoting good school attendance for the long-term academic success of their children and the steps that they can take on their own and in partnership with others to get their students to school every day.

1		2		3	
Preschool may seem like a time just to play, but it's really about building a foundation for your child to succeed in school.	If chronic absence continues into kindergarten, it can leave a child struggling to read in later grades. These students are more likely to be held back in a later grade and more likely to miss too much school when they're older.	We understand that children get sick and need to stay home sometimes. The important thing is to get your children to preschool as often as possible. Avoid absences whenever possible.			
4		5		6	
Share and discuss daily attendance	Children who miss too many days of preschool can miss out on the important lessons learned there.	Preschoolers are learning to be students, and one of the most important lessons they can learn is showing up on time.			

WAYS FOR PARENTS TO HELP WITH ATTENDANCE

1 Set a regular bed time and morning routine	2 Lay out clothes and pack backpacks the night before
3 Find out what day school starts and make sure your child has the required shots	4 Introduce your child to her teachers and classmates before school starts to help her transition
5 Don't let your child stay home unless she is truly sick	6 Keep in mind complaints of a stomach ache or headache can be a sign of anxiety and not a reason to stay home
7 If your child seems anxious about going to school, talk to teachers, school counselors, or other parents for advice on how to make her feel comfortable and excited about learning	8 Develop back-up plans for getting to school if something comes up. Call on a family member, a neighbor, or another parent
9 Avoid medical appointments and extended trips when school is in session	10 Talk about the importance of attendance at home

SCHOOL DISTRICTS ATTENDANCE INTERVENTION

■ FIVE UNIVERSAL STRATEGIES FOR BUILDING A CULTURE OF HIGH ATTENDANCE EXPECTATIONS

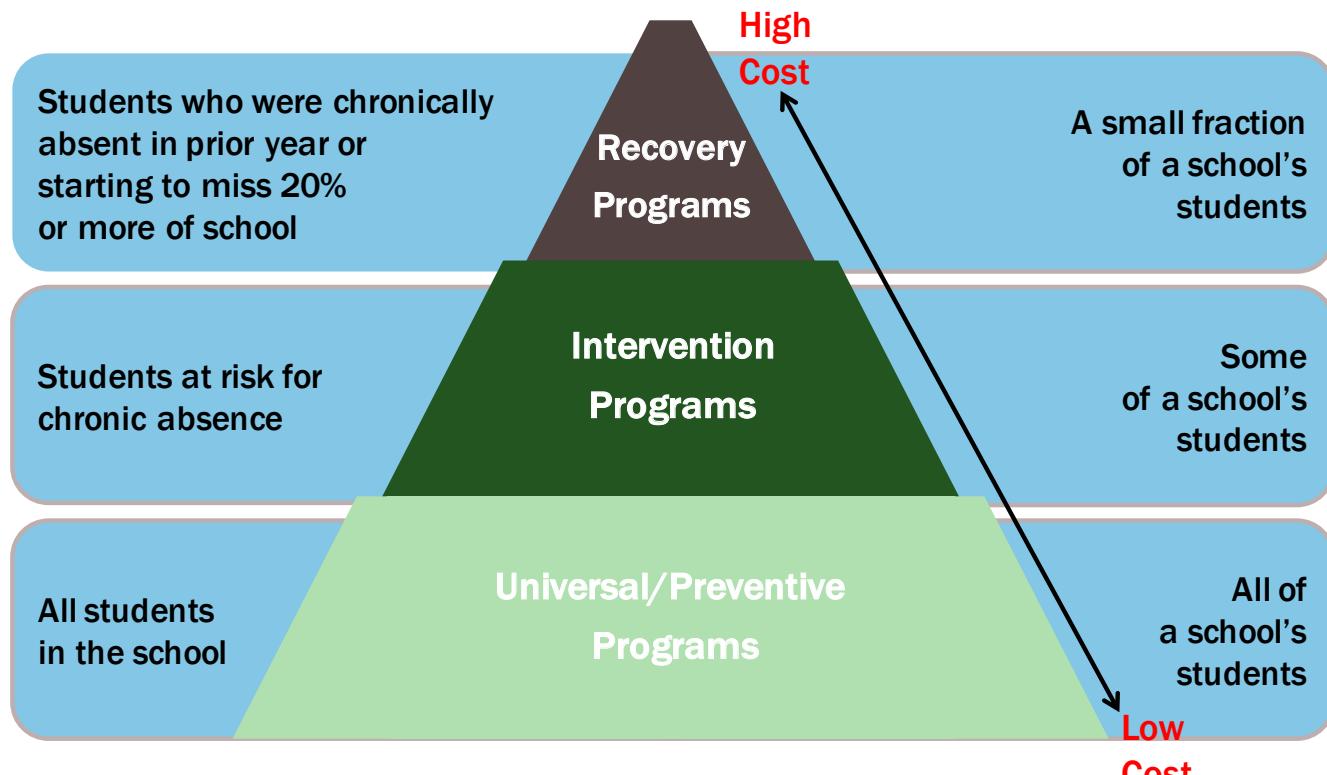
Tackling Chronic Absence: 5 Universal Strategies for Building a Culture of High Attendance Expectations
(Baltimore City Public Schools Adapted from www.attendanceworks.org)

1. Recognize good and improved attendance
2. Intentionally and proactively engage students and families
3. Monitor attendance data and daily practices
4. Facilitate personalized and early outreach to students with attendance concerns
5. Identify programmatic responses to barriers to school attendance

Increased Attendance Involves a 3-Tiered Approach that Fits with Most Reform Efforts

A 3-TIERED APPROACH

A systematic and sustainable approach to reducing chronic absence requires a combination of universal and preventative programs that build a culture of attendance throughout the school and the community, early outreach that enables school and community staff to build relationships with families and stem absenteeism early on, and intensive intervention that focuses resources on the most high need families.



Full documents, additional PowerPoint Presentations, PDFs, and Truancy information can be found at psesd.org/attendance toolkit

STRATEGIES FOR SCHOOLS TO BUILD A CULTURE OF ATTENDANCE



Emphasize attendance from day one

- Participate in attendance awareness month and use back-to-school night to communicate with parents
- Send home information and tips about attendance
- Engage parents in attendance awareness activities throughout the year

Engage Parents

- Create a welcoming environment that engages families
- Use parent-teacher conferences to talk about attendance
- Outreach to families that are not able to meet at schools

Promote a culture of attendance all year long

- Engage students in tracking their own attendance
- Greet students warmly, take attendance daily and check in with them when they come back after an absence
- Include attendance in home visits

Partner with community agencies

- Evaluate possible barriers to attendance, such as health, transportation and housing problems
- Engage community partners who can help
- Encourage your school to develop a sheet of resources for families who need support

BUSINESSES



■ WHY SHOULD BUSINESS LEADERS CARE ABOUT ABSENTEEISM?

1

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.

2

The Soft Skills Challenge

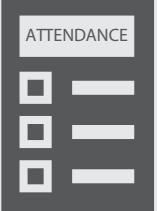
Regular attendance is the precursor to the “soft skills” that you will continue to expect and require. Students who don’t develop the habits associated with good attendance in the early years will find it difficult to develop them as adults.

3

The Productivity Challenge

Children who are sick miss school, causing their parents miss work. As employers, you have a real stake in reducing the numbers of days that children stay home due to preventable illnesses.

How can Business Leaders Make a Difference?

	<p>Work with a local school to provide incentives for good or improved attendance, such as gift certificates, books, healthy snacks or backpacks.</p>		<p>Host a community forum to discuss the need for good attendance and build support for solutions.</p>
	<p>Talk to other business leaders about the role attendance plays in improving achievement and school success.</p>		<p>Educate your own employees about the importance of good school attendance.</p>
	<p>Put up a poster promoting good attendance in your store or office window.</p>		<p>Join a local coalition taking a community-wide approach to improving attendance.</p>

GOVERNMENT



■ WHY SHOULD ELECTED OFFICIALS AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT LEADERS CARE ABOUT ATTENDANCE?

1 Stronger Economy	2 Better Education	3 Safer Communities	4 Socio-Economic Growth
Good schools are key to creating a healthy and vibrant city that attracts businesses as well as new residents. Chronic absenteeism can undermine efforts to improve school performance and can contribute to higher dropout rates.	Students who attend school more regularly have better grades and higher test scores. When too many students miss too much school, chronic absenteeism can be a drag on entire classrooms, as teachers slow down instruction to help absentee students.	Students who aren't in school are more likely to be involved in a crime, either as victims or perpetrators. Better attendance means safer streets and safer children in our cities.	Reducing chronic absence is especially important for children living in poverty, who need as much time as possible in a literacy-rich, engaging learning environment during the early years to set them on a path toward academic success and third grade reading proficiency

Adapted by PSESD, with permission, from materials provided by Attendance Works (www.attendanceworks.org)

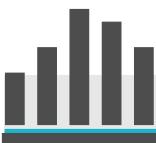
How Can Government Help with Attendance?



Recognize and appreciate good and improved attendance. Lend your voice and clout to efforts to recognize students and families who are turning the corner on attendance.



Launch a public awareness campaign to convey that every day counts. You can send a clear message about the importance of school attendance and the adverse impact of missing too much school. Your speeches, proclamations and billboards can reinforce the message to students and parents.



Use chronic absence data to shape budget priorities. Use the data when deciding where to invest in child care, early education and afterschool programs, all of which can help families build good attendance habits and bring absenteeism under control.



Promote using federal grants to form school-community partnerships to reduce high levels of chronic absenteeism.



Host a community forum to discuss the need to reduce chronic absence and build support for community solutions.

OUT OF SCHOOL TIME AND YOUTH DEVELOPMENT



■ WHY SHOULD OUT OF SCHOOL TIME PROVIDERS CARE ABOUT CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM?

1

Out of school programs can improve school-day attendance. The sense of belonging, the connection to caring adults and the academic enrichment that we provide in afterschool can make children more likely to go to school. Often though, improved attendance is a by-product of our programs, rather than a stated goal.

2

Out of school programs are designed to provide students more time to learn. This extra time is particularly important for low-income children, who often have less access to books or enrichment at home.

3

Out of school programs engage students in challenging activities which develop persistence, persistency can be applied in school and life.

5 TIPS for Out of School Providers

1



Engage students in enriching activities

Make sure your program offers the kind of innovative activities that will keep students coming to your program and to school. Some children say they attend school just so they can attend afterschool enrichment activities.

2



Serve as a resource for

parents to support good attendance

Use your interactions with parents at pick-up time to share why attendance matters and, if children are absent, find out about what might be getting in the way of attending school.

3



Use chronic absense data when developing new programs

Consider locating new programs in communities with high chronic absence rates, where students and families need help building good attendance habits and bringing absenteeism under control.

4



Encourage students to attend school regularly

Share the importance of regular attendance for academic achievement. Encourage staff to take the time to acknowledge and notice each child every day they attend the program and express concern if they are absent. Students are more likely to attend if they know someone cares.

5



Record program attendance accurately

Make sure that you emphasize good attendance in the afterschool program. Keep regular records and examine the data for patterns



SUMMER. SEPTEMBER. SUSTAINABILITY.

Improving student attendance is an essential, cost-effective but often overlooked strategy for ensuring our students are on-track to learn and succeed. Chronic absence is a leading, early warning indicator of academic trouble and later dropout. The good news is that chronic absence is a problem we can solve. Too often, we don't realize how quickly absences add up: Missing just two days every month can cause a child to fall behind. Help students stay in engage during the summer months and establish good attendance at the beginning of the year.

SUMMER

- Summer provides the opportunity to prepare for the school year and set the tone for the rest of the year.
- Use the summer to build trusting relationships with families and to equip staff with skills that will improve students' attendance.
- Build excitement and momentum with students and families by engaging them in learning so they recognize that showing up every day helps build new skills.

ATTENDANCE AWARENESS IN SEPTEMBER #SchoolEveryday

- The first month of school is the perfect time to build a sense of excitement about the school year and to introduce students and families to expectations about attendance.
- The first month can also be a gauge for the coming year and gives teachers and community partners the opportunity to step in and to stem early signs of chronic absenteeism.
- Key parent-focused events, such as Back to School Night and parent teacher conferences, can be excellent opportunities to reinforce messaging about the importance of good attendance.

BE SURE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE NATIONAL ATTENDANCE WORKS CAMPAIGN VIA SOCIAL MEDIA EVERY DAY IN SEPTEMBER USING THE #SCHOOLEVERYDAY HASHTAG.

SUSTAINABILITY

- Use positive relationships to engage students and families in attendance activities. Outreach to families who are not able to meet in a school setting.
- Celebrate good and improved attendance throughout the year.
- Develop strategic partnerships with districts and community partners to address specific attendance issues and to mobilize support

KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR EFFECTIVE OUTREACH AND INTERVENTION

- Trusting relationships with families are a critical component for making an impact, and taking the time to build these relationships is a worthwhile investment.
- Tailor intensive intervention strategies to student population and the unique barriers that families face.
- Home visits are a good way to build relationships with families, share school expectations, learn about students, and hear parents' hopes and dreams for their children.

Adapted by PSESD, with permission, from materials provided by Attendance Works (www.attendanceworks.org | [Tips-for-Outreach-1st-Day.pdf](#))

ATTENDANCE AWARENESS MONTH

Join us for the sixth annual Attendance Awareness Month! Attendance Awareness Month is a nationwide event recognizing the connection between school attendance and academic achievement.

Participate in Attendance Awareness Month this September in one or all 5 of these ways:

1. Engaging Parents and Students Right Away!

Parents and families are essential partners in promoting good attendance because they, ultimately, have the bottom-line responsibility in making sure their children get to school every day. When children are young, they are especially dependent upon adults or older siblings to help them get to school or preschool. Just as parents should focus on how their children are performing academically, they have a responsibility to set expectations for good attendance and to monitor their children's absences so that missed days don't add up to academic trouble. **Start the Conversation right away at the beginning of the year!**



2. Reach out to your local media contacts

or respond to reporters' calls and suggest articles on school attendance and what your organization or community is doing to reduce absenteeism.

3. Op-eds and Blogs

Ask your Superintendent, Principal and/or School Board member to submit an Op-ed and/or write a blog for your district website. Compose a commentary stressing the importance of attendance and the role a school or community is playing to reduce absenteeism. If you can't sell it as an op-ed piece, shorten it and offer it as a guest blog or a letter to the editor. Remember TV and radio stations allow on-air commentaries.

4. Run your own Daily Social Media Attendance Campaign.

Post 30 tweets, Facebook entries, Instagram photos about attendance data — one for every day in September.

Use the national hashtag: #schooleveryday

5. Attendance Action Map

Post your activities and events on the AttendanceWorks.org Attendance Action Map if your school or community is monitoring chronic absence. Fill out the participation form to submit your plans.

For more information, including resources, visit www.psesd.org/attendance toolkit

DELIVERING THE MESSAGE

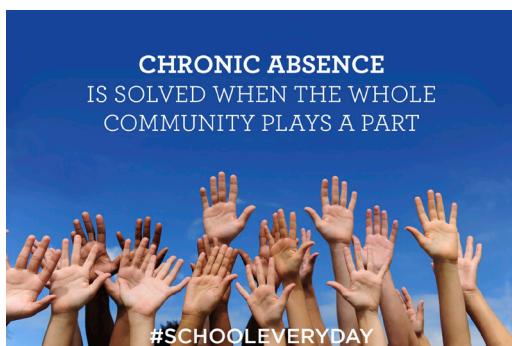
HELP FAMILIES UNDERSTAND THE IMPORTANCE OF DAILY ATTENDANCE



The message we must deliver is that every absence makes a difference at every grade level. Every day missed is a day of instruction that can't be recovered. Research shows that two to four missed days in the first month of school can predict chronic absence throughout the year. Spreading the message about good attendance at the beginning of the school year can get everyone off to a good start.

■ SOCIAL MEDIA

Sample posts and media graphics



#schooleveryday



#schooleveryday

Adapted by PSESD, with permission, from materials provided by Attendance Works (www.attendanceworks.org | [count-us-toolkit-2016/can-deliver-message](#))

■ FLYERS AND POSTERS



ARE YOU ON THE FIVE DAY PLAN?



Attending school every day improves your chances of graduation, completing college and succeeding in life.

Samples of Student Posters



As most kids have returned to the classroom by September, it seems appropriate that this month marks "Attendance Awareness Month."

The goal of the month is to raise awareness around the importance of students attending school daily and how it connects to academic achievement.

According to numerous studies, missing several days of school significantly reduces the likelihood that students will graduate from high school.

With attendance being a crucial factor in keeping kids on the right path to graduation, *Attendance Works*, which is a leader during this month, has substantial information on attendance and the impact on student achievement.

We've compiled some of the research on the next page on why attendance matters.

Find out more information about Attendance Awareness Month and *Attendance Works* on their website (www.attendanceworks.com).



Adapted with permission from materials provided by *Attendance Works* (www.attendanceworks.org | Mapping-the-Early-Attendance-Gap)

Fast Facts

■ PRESS RELEASES

[DISTRICT] Superintendent Pledges to Make School Attendance a Priority Starting in the Early Grades

[DISTRICT] Superintendent [NAME] has joined a nationwide Call to Action to make chronic absenteeism a priority in the new school year, agreeing to raise public awareness, dig deeper into attendance data and work with community partners to improve school attendance starting as soon as children enter kindergarten.

"[NAME or DISTRICT] knows that poor attendance is a surprisingly prevalent but often overlooked factor in why students and schools are struggling academically. Although attendance is a key indicator of a child's success, many students in [NAME or DISTRICT] in 1st and kindergarten and first-grade students miss nearly a month of school every year in chronic and unexcused absences."

"We know that we will never narrow the achievement gap or reduce our dropout rate unless being in school is a higher priority, and that means starting early," said **[SUPERINTENDENT]**. "All our efforts to improve curriculum and instruction won't matter much if kids aren't in school."

The Call to Action for superintendents is supported by seven national organizations that lead the *Attendance Awareness Month* campaign: Attendance Works, Attendance Works, The Campaign for High School Success, Get Schooled, High School Campaign, Points of Light United Way Worldwide, Puget Sound Educational Service District, CECER and ReadyWA.

"We know that chronic absence is a problem we can solve when schools, families and communities work together to support students. We can identify the root causes of chronic problems as early as possible and help families overcome hurdles to getting to school," said Hedy Chang, director of Attendance Works. "We've seen local efforts achieve measurable differences in chronic absence within just a single school year."

Chronic absence is described as missing 10 percent of the school year—or about 18 days—for any reason, excused or unexcused. That's the point at which absenteeism begins to affect student performance, research shows.

[DISTRICT] teachers and administrators will be sharing information, tips and tips with students and their parents, online and through social media throughout the month of September to raise awareness about the importance of getting to school on time and being in class every day.

We suggest you send this in late August or early September just before the first day of school

■ ARTICLES



Making the Case for Tracking Chronic Absence

A growing body of research is revealing the prevalence of chronic absence and its critical role in student achievement. Fortunately, research is also showing that chronic absence can be addressed when school districts, communities, and policymakers work together to monitor the problem and implement solutions that address the underlying causes.

General

• Ballou, Robert and Byrnes, Vaughan (2013). *Meeting the Challenge of Combating Chronic Absenteeism*. Everyone Graduates Center, Johns Hopkins University School of Education. This report examines the impact of New York City's chronic absence problem and proposes a strategy to combat it. The report finds that students in the poorest 20 percent in NYC and tracked more than 60,000 students in NYC public schools. The state found that students who missed at least 20 days of school per year—the definition of chronic absenteeism—had lower grades and were more likely to drop out than students with lower rates of chronic absence.

• Ballou, Robert and Byrnes, Vaughan (2012). *The Importance of Being in School: A Report on Absenteeism in the Nation's Public Schools*. Johns Hopkins University School of Education. This report analyzes data on chronic absenteeism at the state level to begin the process of mapping to exist and measure the problem. The report finds that chronic absence is a significant problem in the U.S. and that states are encouraged to estimate 10-15% of students in the U.S. are chronically absent each year. The report also highlights some promising practices among cities, school districts and nonprofits to combat chronic absenteeism. The authors offer policy recommendations on tracking and addressing chronic absence.

• Bruner, Charles, Hickey-Sant, and Chang, Hedy (2011). *Chronic Elementary Absenteeism: A Problem Hidden in Plain Sight*. Child and Family Policy Center and Attendance Works. This study confirms the premise that districts and schools may fail to detect high levels of chronic absence because the problem is only marked by average daily attendance, one of the most commonly calculated attendance measures. While many educators assume a 95% ALE rate is an indicator of good attendance, this study shows that this measure can mask a problem with a group of students missing excused days.

Early Education and Elementary

• Attendance in Early Elementary Grades: Association with Student Characteristics, School Boundaries and Third Grade Outcomes, *Applied Survey Research* (2011). This study shows that attendance in the early grades is critical to sustaining the school readiness skills that preschool or Head Start programs can help children to develop. The report finds that students with high attendance in the early grades are more likely to graduate from high school and to graduate on time and in grade year—averaging an average of 6 points below similar students with good attendance on grade ranking tests.

• Chang, Hedy and Bruner, Marjorie (2008). *Present, Engaged and Accounted For: The Critical Importance of Addressing Chronic Absence in the Early Grades*. National Center for Children in Poverty. This report documents the consequences, persistence, potential causes and possible solutions to children missing extended periods of school. The report finds that students with high rates of chronic absence are less likely to graduate from high school and are academically at-risk because of extended absences when they first embark upon their school careers. Naturally, an estimate one in 10 kindergarten and first-grade students are chronically absent. The report recommends that schools, communities and families monitor and promote attendance, as well as to identify and address barriers to good attendance.

- Research Summary on Chronic Absence
- Present, Engaged and Accounted for



September 15, 2010

Five Myths About School Attendance

By Hedy Chang

5 million children begin the new school year

millions of teachers have inevitably begun to teach the daily routine in their classrooms.

Done right, the new school year can provide a way to welcome and engage students, but also offer important clues about the challenges ahead in schools and communities. Most schools miss out on this information, though, because they don't track the right numbers and they just the following common myths:

1. STUDENTS DON'T START MISSING A LOT OF SCHOOL UNTIL MIDDLE OR HIGH SCHOOL

Actually, one in 10 kindergartens and 1st grade students misses at least a month of school every year, national research shows. In New York City, one in five elementary students fails to attend school regularly. In February, Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg to launch pilot programs addressing the problem. 25 schools will be selected to be labeled "truant" in the early grades, since most 5- and 6-year-olds don't stay home without a parent's knowledge. It's a good start, but "unexcused absence" is a bigger problem.

2. UNEXCUSED ABSENCE ISN'T A BIG PROBLEM

National research shows that chronically absent kindergartners demonstrated lower academic performance than their peers one

they got to 1st grade. For many low-income children, the poor performance persisted through 5th grade. A long-term study in Baltimore found that chronically absent 6th graders later dropped out of high school. In Chicago, poor attendance in 9th grade was a better predictor of dropping out than 8th grade.

3. TOO MANY STUDENTS MISS TOO MUCH SCHOOL, THE CLASSROOM STOPS TOFFECT THE ENTIRE CLASS, AS TEACHERS REPEAT MATERIAL TO HELP CHILDREN CATCH UP. WHEN STATE FUNDING IS LINKED TO ATTENDANCE, THESE ABSENCES MEAN SCHOOL IS LOSING MONEY.

4. MOST SCHOOLS ALREADY KNOW HOW MANY STUDENTS ARE CHRONICALLY ABSENT.

In fact, most schools don't look at chronic-absence patterns. They measure schoolwide attendance—or they track truancy (unexcused absences). Neither figure captures all that's going on. In New York City, an average school of 400 students can have 95 percent of its students showing up every day and yet still have 10 percent of its students miss 18 days—or 10 percent of the school year.

Further analysis can find that these students are concentrated in neighborhoods with no school bus service, in chaotic classrooms with an inexperienced teacher, or in communities with high rates of poverty. Chronic absence is tied to poverty—to families who have no reliable transportation, little access to health care, and unstable housing, or home or all.

Understanding these patterns can lead to solutions—if we crunch and examine the numbers.

Five Myths of School Attendance

■ LETTERS AND EMAILS

Guide to Preventing Truancy and Understanding the "Becca Bill"

Truancy

On our state, the law requires that children ages 6 to 17 who are enrolled in public schools, attend school Monday through Friday, unless there is a good reason for being absent. In this case the parent or legal guardian must excuse the absence by notifying the school.

When students miss school and their parents have not excused the absence, they can be considered truant.

Schools and districts around the state have different rules and regulations about student attendance and how parents should excuse absences. Be sure to read the attendance policies in your school district and discuss them with your student.

The Becca Bill

The "Becca Bill" (SB 439) is our state's truancy law. It is intended to stop truancy before it becomes a problem. Schools and families should work together as a team to ensure school attendance and student safety. Because the state has unexcused absences, this law requires that schools and school districts take the following actions:

1. One (1) unexcused absence. The school must inform the parent when there is one unexcused absence. This is often done by a phone call home.

2. Two (2) unexcused absences. After the second unexcused absence, the school is required to schedule a meeting with the parent, guardian and student to discuss the causes of the unexcused absences and find solutions to prevent further absences. This is a valid excuse.

3. Five (5) unexcused absences within 30 days. The school must enter into a written truancy agreement with the family, where the parent, student and school agree on the necessary steps to resolve the student's attendance problem.

4. Seven (7) unexcused absences during a month or the tenth (10th) unexcused absence within a school year. The school district will file a petition in juvenile court to order the student to attend school. The court will then determine if the student is eligible for a Contingent Hearing and the student could be ordered to do community service or spend time in juvenile detention. The parent may be fined up to \$250 for each day of unexcused absence.

The school district may also refer the family to a "Community Truancy Board" if there is one in the community. A Truancy Board is a group of citizens who help resolve truancy cases away from the court.

Schools must send the student a notice of the truancy court petition by certified mail with return receipt or in person delivery. The petition includes many important dates and deadlines that must not be missed by the student and the family. A student and/or parents can be represented by a lawyer in truancy court.

Sample letters, emails and guides.

Full documents, graphics and content for social media, flyers, posters, press releases, articles, letters, and emails can be found at p sesd.org/attendance toolkit

Adapted by PSES, with permission, from materials provided by Attendance Works (www.attendanceworks.org)

ABOUT EWS

Early Warning Systems (EWS) uses research proven thresholds of the ABC's (Attendance, Behavior and Course Performance) to identify students who are struggling early and intervene to bring students back on track for high school graduation and postsecondary success. Research proven, nationally recognized and highly predictive indicators generally include:

- A – Attendance: 90% or lower
- B – Behavior: Suspension/Expulsion
- C – Course Performance:
 - Failure of core course in middle school
 - Failure of any course in high school

It is essential that all students graduating from high school are prepared and ready for postsecondary education. Georgetown University Center on Education in the Workforce projects that 67% of Washington State jobs will require postsecondary education by 2018. Early Warning Systems allow districts, schools and community partners to proactively use data to reduce disproportionality and target interventions for those students who most need additional support to reach graduation and beyond. It is a key strategy to help eliminate the opportunity gap and ensure success for each student. (psesd.org/EWS)

■ CONTACT INFO

Questions about the Toolkit? Please Contact one of us:

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■ www.psesd.org/attendance toolkit