

Parents do want their children to do well in school. However most don't know how many days their student is absent each year, and few understand the connection between strong attendance and achievement. One strategy for improving attendance is talking with families, guardians and other adults about absences.

Do

- **Make sure to approach the conversation with concern and optimism** rather than telling families what they're doing wrong. Almost all families want their child to be in school, but many don't understand the connection between too many absences and poor achievement. Assume that once they know better, they will do better.
- **Build upon the hopes and dreams of families for their children.** Families want the best for their children, including success in school and, for many, a college education. Let them know that strong attendance will enable their child to do well in school, graduate ready for the work force or college. Consider sharing your hopes and dreams for their children so families see that you care about their child's success.
- **Ensure families and students are aware of what they miss when students are absent, even in the early grades.** Help families understand that lessons build on one another—an absent student misses the chance to learn something that he will need in order to understand more difficult material later in the school year. The exercise [Washing the Elephant](#) helps parents understand how some things taught in the classroom can't be learned at home.
- **Families can be your best allies when it comes to getting their child to school every day.** Help them to identify the barriers that might keep their child from getting to school. What approaches can help them address these challenges? Consider how you can provide families access to or information about resources that address challenges such as recurring illness, mental health and transportation challenges. Families can also fill out [My Family's Help Bank](#) to identify family members, neighbors or others who could help get their child to school.
- **Help families recognize the importance of monitoring and tracking absences.** Research shows that parents with children missing more than two days a week often didn't know the number of absent days. Yet the same parents are often willing to track absences and take steps to improve attendance. You can offer parents the [Student Attendance Success Plan](#) to track their children's attendance and work with teachers to set goals. A [facilitator's guide](#) is available to show you how to explain the plan to parents.
- **Leverage trusted messengers with strong relationships to families.** Parents and students say they most trust teachers to talk with them about attendance. If you need support, consider reaching out to other members of the school staff who have developed a friendly relationship with the family who can talk with them about absences. If the family comes from a different cultural or language background, the school can contact a community partner for assistance.
- **Draw on the knowledge of social workers, probation officers, court-appointed special advocates and community services providers.** They can help you understand a student's past attendance patterns if she has transferred from another school. You'll also find out if the student is missing school because of court dates or other required appointments. These individuals can advocate that such appointments take place during non-school hours.

Don't

- **Don't assume families know what good attendance is.** By and large, families and students don't know that missing two days a month over the course of a school year puts a student off-track for graduation.
- **Don't just rely on robocalls** to let families know that their children have missed school. Studies show that parents often don't listen to recorded phone calls from school.
- **Don't send impersonal, threatening letters** home which could add to the impression that no one at school cares about their children. Parents can be turned off by notices that use jargon or cite legal codes.
- **Don't jump to the conclusion that students miss school because their families don't care.** Most families believe their student is on track for graduation, even for students who are chronically absent.
- **Don't assume families are aware of the number of days their child has been absent.** Surveys show that almost all families underestimate their children's absences by half.



Attendance Works is a national and state initiative working to improve the policy and practice around attendance. For more information go to www.attendancework.org