

for
**Early Childhood
Educators**

Why Attendance Matters

The Attendance Imperative: Attending school regularly is essential to students gaining the academic and social skills they need to thrive. Chronic absence, no matter its cause, has real life consequences for students, families and society as a whole. [Research shows](#)* that starting as early as preschool and kindergarten, chronic absence—missing 10% of the academic year—can leave third graders unable to read proficiently, sixth graders struggling with coursework and high school students off track for graduation. Equally important, it affects personal and emotional development and makes it hard to gain the habit of showing up, which is crucial to success in the workplace.

In 2018, 8 million students (one out of 6 students) were affected by chronic absence. During the pandemic chronic absence nearly doubled. While it has started to decrease, it remains elevated. Although chronic absence rose for students of all backgrounds and in all regions, students of color, those living in poverty, those with disabilities and English language learners experienced the highest levels. When schools experience high levels of chronic absence, it affects everyone—making it harder for teachers to teach and set classroom norms as well as for students to learn. Chronic absence, which involves monitoring when and which students miss too much school, is different from truancy (unexcused absences) or average daily attendance (how many students typically show up each day to school).

Reducing absenteeism is an essential, but often overlooked, strategy for responding strategically to the academic, social and emotional loss experienced by millions of students. School and district attendance data can be used to identify which student groups have lost out the most on opportunities to learn and ensure they are prioritized in planning. At the same time, effective strategies to improve engagement and attendance can benefit the entire community.

The good news is that chronic absence can be significantly reduced when schools, families and community partners work together to monitor data, nurture engagement, promote regular attendance and routines, and address hurdles that keep children and youth from getting to school regularly. Partners can help to remove these barriers, such as a lack of food, clothing and access to physical and mental health care; unhealthy environmental conditions, unreliable transportation, housing instability or the lack of safe paths to school.

Why attendance matters to early childhood educators:

Promoting attendance is an effective way of partnering with families to prepare children for success in kindergarten and beyond.

Consider the following:

- **Regular attendance allows children to benefit from participating in quality early education.** Research shows that students who miss too many days of preschool have weaker literacy and numeracy skills entering kindergarten. This is especially true for children from families living in poverty, who gain the most when they attend but lose out more when they are absent.
- **A habit of attendance IS a school readiness skill.** Along with social-emotional and readiness skills, consistent on-time attendance is a habit that lasts. Children who are chronically absent in preschool are far more likely to be chronically absent in later grades.



- **Good attendance reflects strong parent engagement.** Attendance improves when families feel welcome and supported and when they understand what their children are learning in a program. Attendance often improves when parents are encouraged to problem-solve with staff members when their child is missing too much school.

How early education providers can make a difference: Early childhood educators can play an important role in reducing chronic absence by addressing positive attendance strategies from the outset of schooling.

Motivate regular attendance

- **Engage parents:** Use parent orientation materials, meetings and daily interactions with parents/caregivers to make sure they understand what children are learning and convey what they miss if they are absent. Encourage families to share and exchange effective strategies with each other for getting children out of bed, ready and out the door on time every day.
- **Engage children in enriching activities:** Make sure your program offers the kind of fun learning activities and environments that make young children want to come every day.
- **Use age appropriate strategies to convey attendance matters:** Let the children track their own attendance by marking off if they show up on time every day on simple, fun, worksheets as they enter the classroom. Recognize children with praise and stickers when they show up daily on time or their attendance improves.

Offer extra support to families with chronically absent children

- **Reach out to families facing attendance challenges:** Rather than remove children who don't attend regularly, reach out to families to find out why and problem solve with them. Connect parents/caregivers to available community resources and collaboratively develop action plans outlining steps that everyone will take to support better attendance.
- **Partner with community partners and resources to address common attendance challenges:** If multiple families face the same challenge, for example, the lack of a safe path to school, asthma or a lack of access to health or dental care, identify a community partner who can help organize a programmatic response.

Develop systems for supporting improved attendance

- **Improve the accuracy of attendance records:** Ensure staff record attendance every day and take the time to periodically review data to monitor for accuracy.
- **Produce reports on chronic absence:** Use the data you collect to inform attendance strategies and outreach. Begin by creating reports to detect which and how many children are missing 10% or more of preschool to identify families in need of extra assistance.
- **Engage program managers in developing site-based strategies for improving attendance:** Encourage them to review data on chronic absence and work with staff to develop attendance strategies that reflect their own program strengths and realities.
- **Partner with schools and districts:** Develop partnerships to address common barriers to attendance and jointly convey the importance of regular attendance to families.
- **Partner with local schools:** Support a successful transition into kindergarten by providing families with registration information or conducting a site visit. Work with districts to create school readiness summer programs for entering kindergartners.

*A growing body of research has shown the prevalence of chronic absence, its critical role in student achievement, and how it can be addressed. Access a research summary: <https://awareness.attendanceworks.org/wp-content/uploads/Research2016.pdf>

Click here to find a full list of research: <https://www.attendanceworks.org/research/>

For more information, go to Attendance Works at www.attendanceworks.org.

