

School Attendance

Strategies for Schools, Families, and Youth

Introduction

A strong body of research shows that chronic absenteeism is a powerful predictor of students at risk of not completing their education. Defined as missing at least 10 percent of school days, excused or unexcused, chronic absenteeism contributes to low academic achievement and disengagement from school. It is not only missing school at the secondary level that creates problems. Chronic absenteeism at the kindergarten and first grade levels can lead to delays in reading and math skills that can impact a student for years to come. An estimated five to seven million students are chronically absent each year. Not completing their education and the lack of a high school diploma can have negative consequences for a student that last a lifetime. It is imperative that educators, families, and communities work together to eliminate chronic absenteeism and provide a path that permits students to graduate.

Myths About School Attendance

- **There is no need to be concerned with school attendance until middle school or high school**

Chronic absenteeism at the elementary level can lead to academic deficits and disengagement from learning

- **Attendance is solely the responsibility of families; there is nothing schools can do to improve attendance**

Schools can recognize the unique needs of their students and community, and work to implement interventions that will improve student attendance

- **Missing school is not an issue as long as the student makes up the work**

Chronic absenteeism makes it very difficult to complete missed assignments and can be an indication of more significant issues for the student

Attendance Strategies

- Local Education Agencies, Administration and Staff
 - ▷ Be familiar with the research on chronic absenteeism
 - ▷ Implement and monitor early-warning systems meant to track data on absenteeism and other indicators of students who are at risk of dropping out
 - ▷ Identify underlying causes of chronic absenteeism, for individual students and school wide
 - ▷ As appropriate, implement programs offering alternative ways to attend school
 - ✓ After hours school
 - ✓ Community-based, alternative sites for school



- ✓ School within a school
- ✓ Cyber classes
- ▷ Review policies related to attendance and identify areas that may be contributing to chronic absenteeism

- Families
 - ▷ Make attending school a priority for the family
 - ▷ Monitor your child's attendance at school
 - ▷ Encourage your child to share what is keeping them from attending school
 - ▷ Work with the school to identify supports and services necessary to help your child regularly attend school
- Community Leaders
 - ▷ Learn about chronic absenteeism and recognize the impact it has on your community

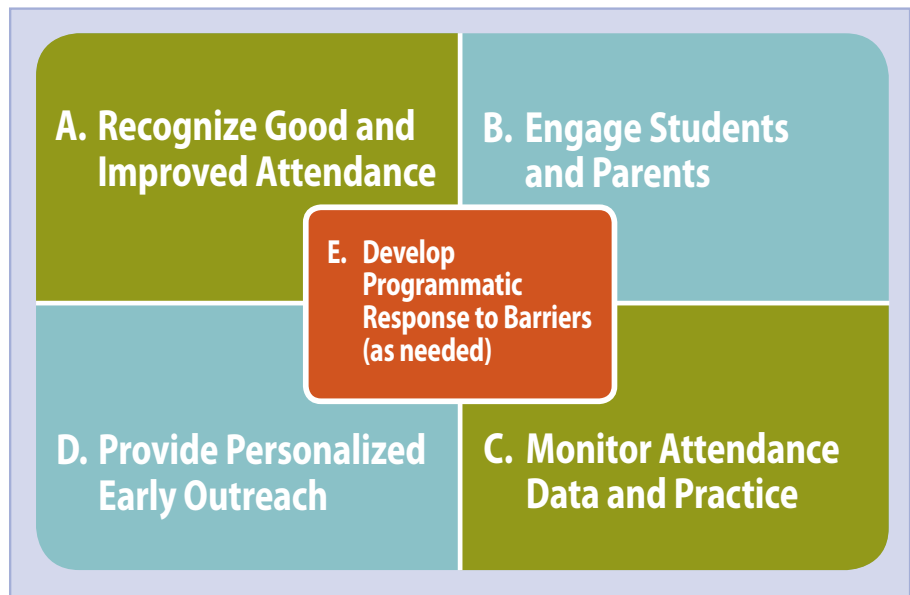
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- ▷ Make student attendance at school a priority and organize local resources to promote it
- ▷ Partner with families and school personnel to creatively work together
- Youth
 - ▷ Recognize that being absent as little as two days a month will have a negative impact on the likelihood that you will graduate
 - ▷ Understand the importance of a high school diploma
 - ▷ Be open with school personnel and your family about why you are frequently absent
 - ▷ Utilize all of the supports and services the school and community have available for you

Successfully completing high school is an important first step in creating a healthy and fulfilling adult life. Promoting regular school attendance and eliminating chronic absenteeism are critical components of school success.

The following description from *Attendance Works* highlights key strategies to reduce chronic absence:

Schools can send a clear message of the importance of attending school by providing recognition or rewards to students and families. Schools can



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engage families and students with a warm, welcoming environment and inform families of research findings about the positive impact of good attendance and the negative effects of missing too much school. Monitor attendance data and identify those students that are at-risk and match them to an appropriate intervention or support. Personalize the environment and provide the opportunity for the development of a relationship with a caring adult or mentor to help improve attendance. Identify the factors contributing to chronic absence and address the barriers and common challenges within your system.

Resources for Families

Increasing Graduation Rates and Decreasing Dropout Rates Initiative, Educational Initiatives
www.pattan.net

Attendance Works, Advancing Student Success by Reducing Chronic Absence,
www.attendanceworks.org

Check and Connect, Student Engagement Intervention Model,
www.checkandconnect.umn.edu

National Center for School Engagement,
www.schoolengagement.org

HUNE, Inc., www.huneinc.org

PEAL Center, www.pealcenter.org



Do you know a student who is considering dropping out of school?

Contact your school!

PaTTAN
 Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network