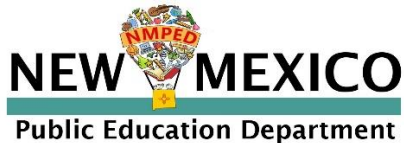


ATTENDANCE IMPROVEMENT MODEL



Attendance Matters
BeHereNM.org



INTRODUCTION

Chronic absenteeism has become a significant problem for schools and districts in every state. The economic and social factors that affect New Mexico amplify the root causes of absenteeism, leading us to have some of the highest rates of chronic absenteeism in the nation. The impacts of this problem are severe and persistent. According to a [report by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation](#):

- Students chronically absent in preschool, kindergarten, and first grade are much less likely to read at grade level by the third grade.
- A student who is chronically absent any year between grades eight and twelve is seven times more likely to drop out. When you examine data showing that better-educated people are more likely to live longer, healthier lives, it becomes clear that the impact of chronic absenteeism lasts a lifetime.
- Chronic absenteeism is disproportionately high among children from low-income families, children of color, and vulnerable populations. Children who have been exposed to traumatic events in their homes or communities are also more likely to be chronically absent.

The root causes of absenteeism vary by individual community, school, and student. The complexity of the problem calls for a solution based on the unique needs of the community and the impacted students.

BASIS FOR THIS MODEL

This framework is based on three premises: a theory of action that addresses students' social-emotional, academic, and support needs; a tiered approach to intervention; and varied resources to meet the unique needs of schools and districts.

To combat chronic absenteeism, we must examine what motivates students to come to school and what prevents them. Research conducted by Robert Balfanz from the Everyone Graduates Center at Johns Hopkins School of Education and Hedy Chang from Attendance Works identified [four reasons that students don't come to school](#):

1. They have an aversion to going to school due to things like social anxiety, a feeling of being unwelcome, or peer challenges.
2. They are disengaged due to a lack of challenging and relevant instructional opportunities or support to bridge academic gaps. They don't see the connection between attending school and positive future outcomes.
3. They face barriers to attendance, such as transportation, housing instability, or lack of medical care.
4. Their family has misconceptions such as that only unexcused absences matter or that attendance is only essential in the upper grades.

THE THEORY OF ACTION

A theory of action was developed to address the root causes of student absenteeism and support a culture of attendance in every school. The theory involves three critical components:

1. **A school culture where students have a strong sense of belonging and connectedness to the school:** They can identify at least one adult who knows and cares about them. They have respectful and supportive relationships with their peers. They have opportunities at their school that reflect their interests.
2. **Classrooms that support high levels of student engagement and agency:** Strong, culturally and linguistically responsive core instruction challenges students and provides scaffolding for them to meet high expectations for learning. Frequent opportunities for enrichment and applied learning are available. Students take ownership of their learning and can evaluate their progress.
3. **Systems are in place at the school and district levels to collect and analyze attendance data, identify root causes, and implement strategies and supports to reduce barriers:** All school community members work together to support a culture of attendance.

The theory of action is that students will attend school regularly if they feel connected to their school, have a sense of belonging, are engaged in their learning, possess personal agency, and if there are systems of support in place to meet their needs and reduce barriers.

HOW TO USE THIS MODEL

The interventions and strategies in this document are organized by tiers aligned to the annual attendance improvement plans. Each tier has several suggested strategies vetted through current research to have a positive impact. Research or explanatory documents are linked where available.

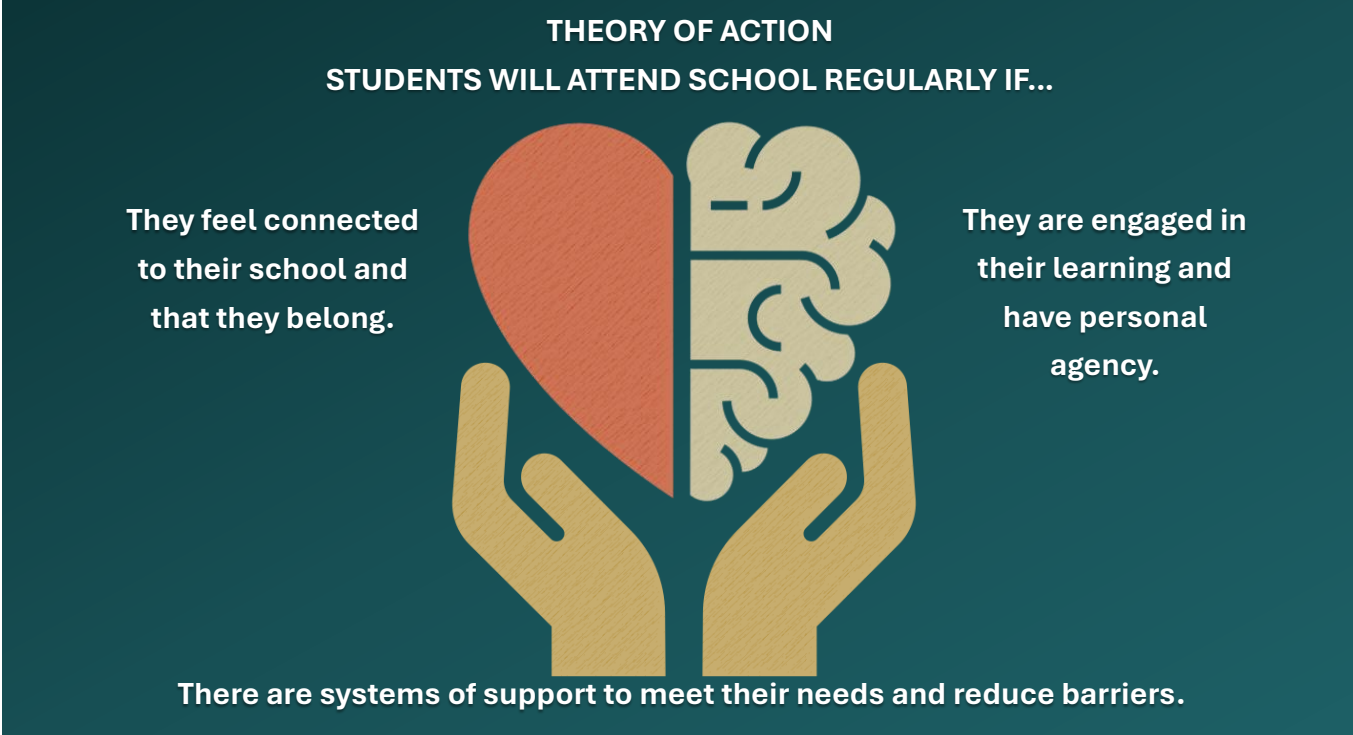
Tier 1: Whole school prevention that promotes favorable conditions where students can learn and thrive. These conditions support multiple positive outcomes for students beyond attendance.

Tier 2: Individualized prevention for students whose absences are less than 10% of enrolled days. These strategies aim to prevent a student from becoming a chronic absentee. Research shows that intervention at this stage is more effective.

Tier 3: Early intervention for students who have been absent at least 10%, but less than 20% of enrolled days. Strategies should be selected to address the root causes for the individual student.

Tier 4: Intensive intervention for students who have been absent 20% or more of enrolled days and are therefore considered excessively absent. Attendance data for these students should be monitored frequently, and interventions should be adjusted based on their effectiveness.

While a comprehensive list of strategies is available for each tier, attendance teams should identify a small number that they feel would be most effective based on a deep understanding of students' and families' needs. The New Mexico Public Education Department is always available to support your efforts to reduce chronic absenteeism and improve outcomes for children.



AN OUNCE OF PREVENTION...

Like other bad habits, absenteeism is more straightforward to address before it starts. The root causes of chronic absenteeism are complex and can range from lack of reliable transportation to bullying. The easiest way to combat absenteeism is to build a foundation and culture of support. If absenteeism is about why students don't come to school, attendance is about the things that make coming to school a positive part of a student's daily routine.

School closures and infection mitigation policies implemented during the COVID 19 pandemic have had lingering effects on students' and parents' views about school attendance. Relaxed expectations for school attendance, keeping students at home at the first signs of an illness, and options for learning from home changed students' and families' perceptions about the importance of regular school attendance. This attitudinal shift continued long after the health crisis had passed.

According to a study published by the Rand Organization in spring 2024, district leaders reported that the most effective approaches to mitigating absenteeism involved leveraging existing school relationships and making schools more engaging and welcoming. Leaders also indicated that efforts to increase a student's social connectedness paired with efforts to improve relationships with adults at the school showed positive results.

A foundational approach to fostering the conditions that support school attendance also creates conditions that allow students to thrive academically, socially, and emotionally. A healthy school climate that welcomes and engages students and supports the needs of families offers the best prospect for reestablishing regular attendance habits.

THREE CRITICAL COMPONENTS FOR ADDRESSING ABSENTEEISM

Three major components of this approach to addressing absenteeism include school climate, engaging instruction, and systems to identify and remove barriers for students and families. These components are present in the tiered strategies forming an attendance improvement plan. Individual students may have a greater need in one area than the others, and personalization may need to be increased based on the level of chronic absenteeism. These same components apply to the needs of families as well.

CRITICAL COMPONENT 1:
A strong school climate that fosters feelings of belonging and connectedness for students and families

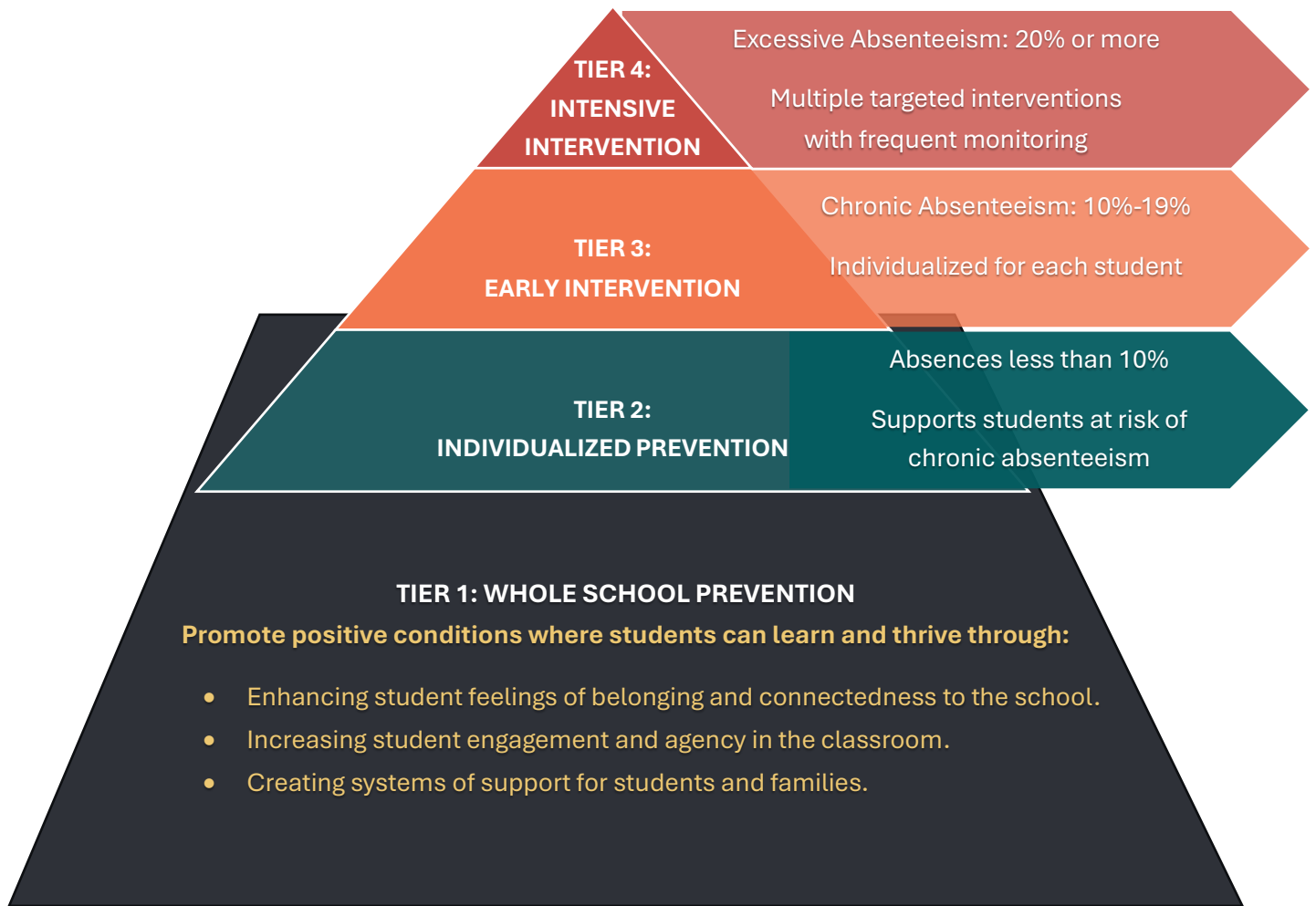
- Every student can identify an adult at school who knows and cares about them.
- Social emotional learning practices are embedded throughout the school day in a variety of settings.
- Schools and families engage in frequent, two-way communication.
- All students have access to extra-curricular, sports, and after-school activities.

CRITICAL COMPONENT 2:
Highly engaging classrooms that allow students to take ownership of their learning

- Instruction is culturally and linguistically responsive.
- Experiential learning opportunities are available through fine arts, CTE, PBL, and STEAM.
- Core instruction holds all students to high expectations and fosters a growth mindset.
- Restorative practices encourage students to take responsibility for their actions.

CRITICAL COMPONENT 3:
Attendance teams looking at data and identifying systems of support to address absenteeism

- Attendance data is publicly available and evaluated regularly by school and district teams.
- Barriers to attendance are understood for both the community and the individual student.
- Information about school, district, and community resources is easily accessible by families.
- Educators, students, and families understand the negative impacts associated with absenteeism and make attendance a priority.



A TIERED MODEL FOR ADDRESSING ABSENTEEISM

Like most other intervention systems, attendance uses a tiered model to address the intensity of the intervention needed. Tier 1 strategies are designed to apply to every school and every student and establish a school environment that allows students to thrive socially and academically while also putting systems in place to address the needs of families. Tiers 2 through 4 provide progressively more targeted interventions that intensify as the student’s level of chronic absenteeism increases. The tiers layer on top of each other so that students at Tiers 3 or 4 are supported by multiple strategies.

Strategies selected at each tier are closely tied to the root causes for the student’s absenteeism, addressing attendance and any academic gaps caused by missed instruction. A thoughtful root cause analysis using a technique like [“The 5 Whys”](#) is an important starting point. As previously stated, the strategy’s effectiveness is directly related to how well it reflects an understanding of the student’s challenges and needs. Social-emotional needs, as well as the needs of the family, must be taken into consideration. It is crucial to consider the whole child when identifying the cause of the problem as well as the potential solutions.

TIER 1: WHOLE SCHOOL PREVENTION — Research-Based Strategies & Activities

Build Positive Relationships

- **Teacher to Student:**
 - [Incorporate humor into lessons.](#)
 - [Incorporate storytelling into lessons.](#)
 - [Ask students about their interests and hobbies.](#)
 - [Greet students at the door.](#)
 - [Tell students who return after absence that they were missed.](#)

- **Student to Student:**
 - [Walk and talk.](#)
 - [Memorize first and last names.](#)
 - [Peer to peer mentorships .](#)

- **Staff to Staff:**
 - [Observe one another for advice and reflections.](#)
 - [Talk about practice to build knowledge through a community of practice.](#)
 - [Root for one another and support each other's daily work.](#)
 - [Cultivate agency for specific teacher groups.](#)

Create a Culture of Belonging and Connectedness

- [Publish family communications in multiple languages.](#)
- [Engage families in supporting attendance.](#)
- [Create opportunities for families to participate in school events.](#)
- [Recognize the importance of listening.](#)
- [Bring elements from the community into the classroom.](#)
- [Connect social and emotional learning to daily instruction.](#)
- [Reinforce responsibility to others through restorative practices.](#)

Prioritize Attendance as a School

- [Take and collect attendance data with fidelity.](#)
- [Ensure that teachers are aware that teacher absenteeism correlates with student absenteeism.](#)
- [Analyze and discuss attendance data frequently as a school staff.](#)
- [Look at what other districts are doing.](#)
- [Post attendance data in areas where students and families can see it.](#)

TIER 1: WHOLE SCHOOL PREVENTION — Research-Based Strategies & Activities

Support Engaging Instruction and Student Agency

- [Incorporate project-based learning.](#)
- [Provide opportunities for student voice and choice.](#)
- [Use movement to get students focused.](#)
- [Set high expectations and scaffold instruction appropriately.](#)
- [Allow time for questions and discussion.](#)
- [Create opportunities to work in teams.](#)
- [Incorporate gamification.](#)
- [Ensure that instructional materials provide “windows and mirrors.”](#)
- [Address solving authentic problems.](#)
- [Create work-based or community-based learning opportunities.](#)
- [Support career-connected learning and CTE.](#)

Put Systems in Place to Address Student and Family Barriers

- Make sure that all students are up to date on required vaccines.
- [Talk to students and families to identify root causes.](#)
- [Make sure that families understand the importance of attendance.](#)
- [Self-assess your school or district to identify areas for improvement.](#)
- [Look at a community school model.](#)
- [Leverage federal funds for students experiencing homelessness.](#)
- [Ensure families have guidance about when to keep students home due to illness.](#)
- [Provide absence notification to families in multiple channels, including phone and texts.](#)

TIPS FOR ATTENDANCE IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Tier 1 strategies include engaging school climate, developing positive relationships with students and families, sharing the impact of absences so it is widely understood, recognizing good or improved attendance, and identifying and addressing common barriers to attendance.

- Monitor classroom attendance taking and send reminders to teachers who forget to take attendance. The plan is only as good as the quality of the data you collect.
- Share your attendance plan with the whole staff and review attendance data regularly.
- Publish facts about the importance of regular attendance in family newsletters.
- Notify families about student absence totals as well as notification about a daily absence.
- Monitor school and district chronic absenteeism rates during the year.

TIER 2: INDIVIDUALIZED PREVENTION — Research-Based Strategies & Activities

Individualized prevention includes targeted intervention strategies for individual students who are missing five percent or more but less than ten percent of classes or school days for any reason. Remember that absences earlier in the year are a good predictor of a student who will develop a pattern of absences. It is important to identify these students early and get them back on track.

- [Utilize a relationship mapping strategy to ensure that every student is connected to an adult in the school.](#)
- [Track and recognize improved attendance through competitions, celebrations, certificates, and verbal and written acknowledgment. Make sure to share this with both students and families.](#)
- [Place calls home each day that the student is absent. Personal calls from someone who knows the student are more effective than automated communications.](#)
- Include attendance on progress reports reviewed at parent conferences.
- Make sure that clear expectations about attendance are communicated, particularly at the primary grades.
- [Talk to student to determine what motivates them to come to school and identify any factors such as bullying or anxiety that may be triggering avoidance.](#)
- Welcome students back and identify any academic support they need to catch up.
- Keep school clear of health hazards that might contribute to asthma.
- [Host immunization clinics.](#)
- Offer enrichment programs or clubs before and after school to engage students.
- Offer resources at the school like a clothing bank or make information about community resources easily available for families.
- [Implement check-in/ check-out systems](#)
- [Put transportation support systems in place, like walking school buses, bike programs, or ride sharing.](#)
- Connect students with the school counselor.

TIPS FOR ATTENDANCE IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Tier 2 strategies include personalized outreach, assessing student and family needs, service coordination with health and social service providers to meet needs, and individualized action plans that address chronic absences and barriers to attendance and increase school engagement.

- Ensure that teachers can identify their students by attendance tier based on simple calculations.
- Consider local cultural holidays in the creation of school calendars.
- Add attendance strategies to student MLSS, SAT, 504, and IEP plans.
- Consider implementing early intervention and monitoring systems.
- Implement a school or districtwide attendance awareness campaign.

TIER 3: EARLY INTERVENTION — Research-Based Strategies & Activities

Early intervention includes interventions for students who are considered chronically absent and missing ten percent or more but less than twenty percent of classes or school days for any reason. This is an additional layer of support that will be added on top of the Tier 1 and Tier 2 supports that are already in place.

- [Monitor attendance to identify patterns.](#)
- Develop alternatives to exclusionary discipline that incorporate restorative practices.
- [Review data on a weekly basis for students who are chronically absent.](#)
- Provide opportunities for students to catch up when they return from an absence.
- [Focus on empathy rather than punitive messaging to families.](#)
- [Send precise and personalized information to families rather than generic messages.](#)
- [Provide opportunities for high-dosage tutoring.](#)
- [Engage community school resources.](#)
- Identify if student is displaying academic or social avoidance behaviors that might indicate an underlying issue.
- [Partner with community pediatricians to reinforce messaging about the importance of school attendance.](#)
- Have the school nurse closely monitor students with asthma or other chronic health conditions
- Incorporate attendance into MLSS plans.
- [Create a student success system.](#)
- [Identify specific supports for students in foster care and those experiencing homelessness.](#)

TIPS FOR ATTENDANCE IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Tier 3 strategies include developing individualized student intervention plans that focus on keeping the student in an educational setting with weekly progress monitoring and contract for attendance.

- Meet with families to develop a student success plan that addresses barriers.
- Consider afterschool or weekend options for students to make up missed instruction.
- Make community resources easily available to families, particularly those with transportation challenges.
- Provide tutoring and success mentoring services from adults or peers.
- Consider home visits.
- Evaluate the need for a referral to the Health and Wellness Team

TIER 4: INTENSIVE INTERVENTION — Research-Based Strategies & Activities

Excessive absenteeism is missing twenty percent or more of classes or school days for any reason. Tier 4 focuses on students who have not responded to previous interventions provided by the school.

- Provide accelerated credit recovery for high school students.
- [Perform a root cause analysis to identify all reasons behind poor attendance and identify supports or interventions for each](#)
- Meet with the family regularly to discuss a plan for addressing attendance and monitor the effectiveness of interventions and strategies that have been put in place.
- Partner with public agencies and community-based organizations that provide mentoring for students who lack a strong connection to their family.
- Offer community service as an alternative to exclusionary discipline.

TIPS FOR ATTENDANCE IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Tier 4 strategies include giving written notice to the student’s family with a scheduled time to meet with the school principal and the attendance team, establishing non-punitive consequences at the school level, identifying appropriate specialized supports that may be needed to help the student address the underlying causes of excessive absenteeism, and notifying the student and their family about the consequences for further absences.

- Provide targeted case management.
- Create a student success plan and monitor progress weekly.
- Implement restorative practices specific to attendance to reduce exclusionary discipline.
- Provide referrals to families for community resources.

A LAST WORD FROM MIGUEL A. CARDONA

United States Secretary of Education

March 22, 2024

Every goal we hold for our students—increasing academic achievement, delivering a well-rounded education, and creating pathways to college and a career—requires that they be regularly in school and are engaged in their learning and connecting with others.

Evidence-Based Strategies & Resources

Tools for School and District Teams

[How to Improve Your School's Response to Chronic Absenteeism](#) – from GradPartnership.org

[Team Reflection and Action Planning Tools](#) – from GradPartnership.org

[Attendance Playbook](#) – from Future-Ed.org

[Planning Tool for Family Engagement](#) – from USDOE Student Engagement and Attendance Center

Summer and Out-of-School-Time Learning

[A Summer for Learning & Recovery](#) – from AfterschoolAlliance.org

[High-Impact Tutoring: Out-of-School-Time Playbook](#) – from StudentSupportAccelerator.org

Incentives and Recognition

[Establishing Schoolwide Attendance Recognition](#) – Guidance from AttendanceWorks.org

[Social Recognition Ideas](#) – from GradPartnership.org

School Climate and Student Belonging

[Recess Lab](#) – Recesslab.org

[Building Community with Attendance Questions](#) – from Edutopia

[Making Sure Every Child is Known \(video\)](#) – from Edutopia

[Relationship Audit Activity](#) – from GradPartnership.org

Student Agency

[Now is the Moment to Lean into Student Agency](#) – from Christensen Institute

[Core Practice Continuums Rubric](#) – from Turnaround for Children

Guidance and Support for Families

[Interactive Exercises](#) – from AttendanceWorks.org

[Handouts for Families](#) (multiple languages) – from AttendanceWorks.org

[My Child's Attendance Success Plan](#) (multiple languages) – from AttendanceWorks.org

Appendix A: Taking Attendance — Tools and Best Practices Guide

It is critical that complete and correct attendance data goes into the school data information system each school day. Efficient attendance-taking routines will provide high quality data that will provide the school with critical information about students and the learning environment.

This guide should be used by attendance teams or student success teams to be shared with the whole school community so that processes and procedures can be implemented uniformly and consistently.

Best Practices for Schools

Review attendance policies and procedures.

- What time are teachers expected to take attendance each day (this will vary for elementary and secondary levels)?
- Have we clearly communicated that staff are expected to input attendance in the student information system at a specific time each day?
- Are procedures in place for substitute teachers?
- It is important to allow for questions and possibilities for adjustments to the procedures as school staff have a clear understanding of what works best in the classroom.

Define specific attendance taking procedures.

- Do we have a report to view which teachers have NOT taken attendance or is it something we need to create?
- Is there someone who is designated to check this report each day or do we need to assign this task to a staff member (this may be the attendance clerk, secretary, dean of students, etc.)?
- Does the school have a procedure for monitoring teachers taking attendance and send a reminder within the first half of the school day?
- Do we have a system for taking attendance during crisis situations (fire drill, lockdowns, evacuations, etc.)? *There can be serious implications if a school does not know if a student is supposed to be at a relocation site. This can cause major safety risks.*
- Once you have established the process and procedures the school will implement for the school year, follow up with an email to staff outlining the process.
- Remind teachers during morning announcements.

Monitor and measure progress throughout the school year.

- Review the number of classrooms taking attendance on a weekly or bi-weekly basis to ensure all teachers are following the process.
- Collect data on accurate attendance-taking and report it to the staff regularly.
- Review attendance taking procedures quarterly to ensure compliance and offer support and make changes where necessary.

Best Practices for Teachers

Each teacher plays a vital role in supporting student success and safety by making sure that attendance data is accurate and entered daily. Attendance-taking procedures may vary depending on the district attendance policies and procedures.

Create a time in the morning routine to take attendance.

- Bell-work to activate prior learning
- SEL activities such as having students indicate what they are looking forward to during the day
- Set a timer on the board for a timed task.
- During morning announcements
- Have students mark their names off on a whiteboard as they enter the room.
- Ask students a “Would you rather?” question and mark them present as they answer.

Create systems for taking attendance.

- Have a buddy teacher who can take attendance when you are absent.
- Keep a copy of attendance-taking procedures with your sub-plans.
- Keep a printed roster or an app for your SIS on your phone to use in the case of an evacuation.
- Set a notification reminder on your computer to prompt you to take attendance.

Best Practices for Attendance Clerks

- Check that all teachers have taken attendance **one-half hour after the tardy bell to ensure that all teachers have taken attendance.**
- Send a reminder email or chat to teachers who have not taken attendance. Your SIS may have a process for automating this notification.
- Keep a log of daily communications with teachers regarding attendance taking and give a copy to the principal (hard copy or email) at the end of the week so they can monitor teacher compliance. Save a copy of the report at the end of the day for future reference.
- Communicate and train all staff, especially substitute teachers, to take attendance and input it into the system within one-half hour after the tardy bell.
- Communicate to staff and students that ALL tardy students must check in at the front office to be coded in the SIS as tardy instead of absent.
- Input communications from families (phone messages, letters, and doctor’s notes) and tardy students from sign-in log into the SIS as soon as possible so that all students are accounted for and families will not receive an attendance call unnecessarily.

Appendix B: Self-Assessment from AttendanceWorks.org

Name: _____ SCHOOL PRACTICE SELF-ASSESSMENT: rev. 5/25/2022

Instructions for Conducting a School Practice Self-Assessment

The goal of this self-assessment is to help school leaders identify strengths and opportunities to develop a systemic approach to reducing chronic absence. Ideally, this assessment is completed in partnership with a team. Below is a suggested process.

1. Bring together a team of key stakeholders in your school to complete this self-assessment. Participants should include the principal, attendance personnel, classroom teachers, staff from partnering community agencies, and if possible, active parents. Feel free to expand this list to include others who might have valuable insights to offer about student attendance in your school.
2. Identify one person who will assume responsibility for facilitating the process and dialogue.
3. Ask each participant to spend 10 minutes completing the tool.
4. [Hand out an extra copy of the tool](#) and ask all participants to add in their responses on a single copy with a hatch mark. Make copies of the version with everyone's responses. An alternative option is to put up an enlarged copy of the tool on the wall and ask participants to add their responses using a marker. This approach allows everyone to see the collective responses without the need for additional copies.

[See "Instructions for Using the Self-Assessment Tool."](#)

5. As a group, review the collective results. Encourage participants to identify and explore where there appear to be differences in how stakeholders have ranked a particular element. Use this as an opportunity to find out why stakeholders might have different perspectives. Keep in mind that the goal is to deepen understanding of why the differences of opinion might exist; agreeing upon a rating is not essential.
6. Develop a plan: Participants should discuss what they see as the biggest gaps or priorities to address in the near future. If needed, use dots or take a hand vote to agree upon the top three next steps. For each one, discuss:
 - Who needs to be involved in advancing this priority?
 - What are the immediate next steps?
 - Who can take responsibility for ensuring follow-up occurs?

Determine how to stay in communication with each other about progress on the next steps and decide whether a follow-up meeting is needed.

7. Communicate the results: The team should communicate the results of the assessment with school (and potentially district) staff and community partners and engage them in executing the plan.