

SCHOOL-WIDE ATTENDANCE AND ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Elementary, Middle, and High School Levels

School-wide Attendance Goal Setting

Schools should set an attendance goal and calculate how many students must be in attendance each day in order to achieve their school goal. This information should be made available to the faculty and students so that everyone is aware of what needs to be done to achieve their goal. They are also able to monitor progress towards reaching the desired goal.

Parent Notification About School-Wide Attendance Efforts

Use various methods to inform parents of your intention of embarking upon a school-wide effort to improve your school's attendance rate and eliciting their support in ensuring their children's daily and on time attendance. Methods may include Meet the Teacher discussion, Open House presentation, beginning of year parent letters, attendance flyers, PTA/SAC forum, Connect Ed calls from administration, school newsletter, marquee, signs/posters in front office, and sandwich boards at parent loop.

Outside Billboard/Marquee

Schools can use their outside billboard/marquee to encourage school attendance by displaying a weekly message regarding school attendance or recognizing grade levels or classes that meet or exceed their expected attendance rates. To encourage student participation, have students write and submit a phrase/sentence encouraging classmates to attend school or stressing the importance of education, and select one of these statements weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly to be placed on the school's outside billboard/marquee or other prominent site around the school. Post the name of the student who submitted the statement.

Grade Level Attendance Monitoring

Schools can further calculate how many students from each grade level must be in attendance each day to reach their goal. This allows each grade level to monitor their progress on a daily or weekly basis and take steps to improve if they have not reached their goal. Such close monitoring allows teachers to take corrective action when their students are not in school. Schools should look for ways to recognize or reward teachers or grade levels that maintain or exceed the expected levels of attendance.

Class/Period Attendance Monitoring

Each day that all students are in attendance in class, the class earns a letter towards spelling out a slogan (such as PERFECT ATTENDANCE). Once the slogan is complete, recognize/reward the class as appropriate.

Targeted Intervention

When students have been identified as being chronically absent (via the KEEP report), utilize targeted and more intensive interventions to promote increased school attendance. (i.e. mentoring program, check and connect, turnaround award, etc.). Conference with parents regarding the missed instructional time and coordinate a plan of action to increase academic exposure.

Turnaround Award

When students that had/have been identified as being chronically absent show significant improvement in their attendance, reward them with a Turnaround Award. This may occur upon improvement or at select intervals, such as interims or end of grading period.

Perfect Attendance Recognition

Every quarter, recognize students that have had perfect attendance via various means, such as award ceremonies, certificates, awards, shout outs, PA announcements, school news, school newsletters, picture on bulletin board, picture on PowerPoint projection during lunch, etc.

School Attendance Messaging on Campus

Post attendance posters in the classrooms and around the school campus. Use your school news and PA systems to emphasize school attendance. Announce a "Thought for the Day" emphasizing attendance

each morning/day. The announcement can be made by school staff or by students. To encourage student participation, have students submit an attendance-related “Thought for the Day” quote and select one to be announced each day. Whenever a student’s quote is selected, put his/her name in a drawing for a prize on either a weekly, bi-weekly, or a monthly basis and/or award the student who had the most quotes selected during a specific time period.

Student Input

Ask students for suggestions on incentives that would motivate them to attend school and to identify barriers that prevent them from attending school. Include any suggestions that would encourage students and staff to work together to problem solve and find solutions.

Student Ownership of Attendance Messaging

To encourage students to promote good attendance, invite students to draw posters, make banners, and produce videos regarding its importance and the importance of an education. Hang the posters and banners around campus, on classroom doors, in the office, in the cafeteria, etc. Have students produce individual videos or interviews of other classmates about the importance of good attendance and an education. Show these clips on the school news, social media, and in the front office. Encourage students to promote school attendance on social media.

Training-Vital Role of Teachers

At a faculty meeting, convey to the teachers that they play a vital role in encouraging and promoting regular school attendance to maximize academic exposure in order to help students achieve educational success. Encourage teachers to initiate contact with families when students are absent. Share with them some of the barriers students/families face that prevent students from attending school, and that there is not a “one size fits all” solution. Provide teachers with strength-based practices in communicating effectively with students and parents. When truancy patterns emerge, follow the PST Attendance process in accordance with the Compulsory School Attendance Law.

Encouraging and Welcoming Words

When students return to school after an absence, welcome them back with eagerness and enthusiasm and let them know they were missed. Talk to them about their absence and ask if there is anything you can do to help. Encourage them to make up missed work (or assist them with such) and participate in classroom activities.

Parent Surveys About School Experience

Develop parent surveys soliciting their input about their own school experience. If their experience was negative, they may feel reluctant to send their child to school and may not see how non-attendance adversely affects their child’s academic achievement.

Utilize Various Communication Methods to Contact Parents

Schools should obtain parents’ cell phone numbers and use these numbers as the first line of notification when a student is absent, if possible. This will decrease the possibility of students intercepting or retrieving phone messages about their absences when parents are not available to answer calls from the school. Text messages may also be sent, although apps/programs may need to be downloaded to your computer to utilize this method of communication, such as the Remind app. You may also consider sending notification through e-mail messages, if available.

Communicating Effectively with Parents

Utilize a strengths perspective when communicating with parents about educational concerns. Begin with sharing the good news, compliment parents on their child’s positive behaviors and strengths, and project an optimistic outlook when discussing the child’s potential to improve. Emphasize that you all want the child to succeed, and you need their help in solving the problem. Give parents the opportunity to give their input and suggestions, and try to see the situation from their perspective. End the conversation by summarizing what was discussed and the delegated tasks, and thank them for taking the time to speak with you and for sharing their input.

Support from PTA/PTSA and Community Partners

Elicit donations and support from the PTA/PTSA and community partners to assist with encouraging regular school attendance and supporting attendance initiatives, activities, and incentives/rewards for students, classes, and teachers and/or school staff (such as trinkets, food items, free rewards, gift certificates, attendance-themed buttons/wristbands, etc.).

Wake-up Call Initiative

Students can submit voice recorded messages about the importance of waking up to attend school daily and on time. All appropriate entries would be featured to call identified students/families.

Targeting Transitions

Schools should consider focusing on engagement and re-engagement for students who are experiencing transition periods including entry into kindergarten; new students; new class; articulation from elementary, middle, and high school; re-entry from suspensions, expulsions, and detention; and inclusion from ESE to general education classes.

Nudge Letters

For students that are chronically absent or are at-risk of becoming chronically absent, send parents a “nudge letter” which compares their child’s attendance with the average attendance of students in his/her grade, school, and across the district. (These letters will be mass generated every 20 school days for elementary and will be available for download for secondary schools.)

Recognize Staff Role Models

Intermittently recognize and/or reward staff that have good attendance at work. Recognize and/or reward teachers, faculty, and staff members who are influential in encouraging students to attend school regularly.

School-Related Events and Extra-Curricular Activities

To engage students and parents in the school community, offer school-related events (FACT Fair, Math and Science Night, College/Career Night, Multi-cultural activities, award ceremonies, Grandparent Support Group, PTA sponsored activities) and extra-curricular activities/programs before and after school (clubs, band/chorus, sports, tutoring, mentoring, etc.). Connect families with these activities/programs and encourage their participation.

SCHOOL-WIDE ATTENDANCE AND ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Elementary School Level

Pro-active Parent Contact

At the beginning of the school year, communicate with parents of students who have had an attendance problem the previous year, encourage them to improve the attendance this year, offer to help them obtain that goal, and stress the importance of maintaining good attendance throughout the school year to achieve academic success.

Parent Loop

School staff cheers for students and families arriving on time in the mornings. Fifth graders are part of the “Hello Team” to welcome younger students to school in the mornings. Sandwich boards are displayed at parent loop with encouraging words, identifying the school’s attendance goals, or detailing the tardies/absences for the previous day or week.

Frequent Parent Communication

Contact parents daily when your student is absent from class. Utilize the student planner daily and/or weekly to communicate with parents regarding the student’s attendance. Make the most of the opportunity at parent pick up/drop off to briefly communicate with parents by highlighting the child’s progress/strengths, showing concern about the challenges that the student and/or family may be facing, inquiring about best communication methods (new phone numbers, etc.) and/or scheduling a formal parent/teacher conference.

Parent Resource Center

Provide attendance prizes at the school’s parent resource center to be utilized in rewarding children for improved attendance.

Breakfast/Lunch with Principal or Preferred School Staff for Improved Attendance

When chronically tardy or absent students improve their on-time arrival and daily attendance for a designated number of days, the principal or other preferred school staff celebrates with the student and the parent by having breakfast bars/donuts or lunch together.

Treasure Chest Prizes

Keep a “treasure chest” in the cafeteria stocked with inexpensive prizes such as cool pens/pencils, stickers, book marks, hair accessories, games, puzzles, etc. Every day during lunchtime, have the attendance clerk announce six students (one from each grade level) who attended school the previous day. The selected students pick one prize each from the treasure chest. The daily announcements should include a reminder about the importance of having EVERYBODY in school, EVERY DAY.

Non-monetary Incentives

Offer various classroom incentives to encourage a culture of attendance. Incentives may include extra time at the computer or PE/recess, free homework pass, first in line privileges for lunch or dismissal, chance to be the teacher’s assistant, name on an “Attendance Wall” in the classroom, borrow teacher’s chair for the day, choice of music for the class to listen to, and lunch with teacher or select school staff.

Brag Pass

Teachers can use a “Brag Pass” to give to students for attending school or being on time for a specific number of days. The students take the brag pass to the front office where everyone congratulates them and gives them lots of positive attention. Take the students’ pictures and display on a “Brag Board.”

Books for Being Here

On Fridays, select six students (one from each grade level) that have achieved perfect attendance for the week. Call these students to the office to reward them with a Scholastic book of their choice. Take their photographs and place on the “Books for Being Here” bulletin board for the following week. Reveal the names of the selected students during the school counselor’s announcements of “Terrific Kids.”

Check-In Program

Connect staff members with identified chronically absent students to briefly “check-in” with students daily to reinforce school attendance and promote positive relationships. For severe cases, implement a more formalized check-in program with students, which requires parent permission and cooperation. Point sheets are designed to incentivize students’ daily/on time arrival, exhibiting appropriate behavior at school, and completing school work/homework. Parents must sign point sheets every evening, which are ultimately attached to trinket prize winnings.

Classroom Recognition for Perfect Attendance

Recognize classes that attain daily perfect attendance with a ribbon/display on their doors and make a public announcement on the PA or morning news. Enter the classroom teachers’ names in a weekly or designated time frame drawing for a prize or special celebration to be awarded at designated intervals (weekly, monthly, or quarterly). Award the classes that achieved perfect attendance for an entire week.

Classroom Recognition for “Nearly Perfect Attendance”

In each grade level, recognize the class that achieved “nearly perfect attendance” for 2 weeks by displaying a traveling trophy or prized item within their classroom.

Perfect Attendance Parade

At random, a class that achieved perfect attendance for the day is recognized by parading through the front office as school staff cheers them on for their achievement. The class is rewarded with trinkets or food item, such as chocolate milk, donuts, piece of candy, etc.

Congratulation Postcards

When attendance of individual students has improved, send the family a postcard that congratulates them on their improvement, such as “Your child attended school daily for the week” or “We appreciate you ensuring your child is attending school every day.”

Recognition at School Assemblies

Award students at assemblies with pins for perfect attendance for the quarter/semester and trophies for perfect attendance for the entire school year. For students with perfect, good, or improved attendance, in addition to recognizing the students, also recognize their parents at school assemblies for supporting their children’s education.

Attendance in Pre-K and Kindergarten

Assist parents in changing their view that this is the beginning of formal education and that attendance in the early years is important to their child’s educational success. Discuss the importance of regular attendance at orientation, teacher conferences, etc. Stress to parents the requirements and standards of learning for kindergarten.

Welcoming Latecomers

When students arrive late to school, implement a school policy that requires the parents to come to the front office to sign the student into school. Upon greeting the parent and student, school staff should express “we are so glad you are here” and ask the parent and student “is there any way we can help the child be on time tomorrow...our school thrives when your child is here every day on time.”

Restorative Justice Practices

Improve approaches to student discipline other than out of school suspensions when possible, such as writing apology letters, community service hours, etc.

SCHOOL-WIDE ATTENDANCE AND ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Middle School Level

Acknowledge and Build Relationships with Students

Greet students and express that you are glad to see them each day. Verbally call out students' names when taking attendance and attempt to make eye contact with them. Have conversations with students about their participation and progress in class. When a concern arises, make mention of it to the student, offer support, and listen to their story, which may include personal and/or family challenges they may be facing.

AttenDANCE

Boost student's enthusiasm for being at school by sponsoring a dance as an incentive for attending. Only those students who achieve full-day attendance at least 95% of a nine weeks/semester should be invited to attend.

Grade Level Contests

Create attendance contests or challenges between or among 6th, 7th, and 8th grade.

Support for Incoming 6th^h Graders

Offer summer orientation for all incoming 6th graders to familiarize them to the school building, identify classes enrolled, get student ID, get locker, purchase PE uniform, buy school shirts, meet peers and school staff, and become aware of/sign up for clubs, sports, and extracurricular activities. Hold 6th grade assemblies and school-wide Back to School activities (music, cheers, band, etc.) the first week of school to promote engagement. Analyze data from the 5th grade year to plan for supports for their first year of middle school.

Utilizing Incentives

To foster a culture of attendance, utilize incentives for students with good and/or improved attendance, such as free tickets to school events (dances, sporting events/games, drama productions, etc.), on-campus privileges, and donated items/gift certificates from the community.

Breakfast or Lunch with Preferred School Staff for Improved Attendance

When chronically tardy or absent students improve their on-time arrival and daily attendance for a designated number of days, preferred school staff celebrates with the group of students by having breakfast bars/donuts or lunch together.

Mentoring Program

Implement a mentoring program, such as Check and Connect, to support students in monitoring their grades, behavior, and attendance. Mentors may be student peers, school staff, community leaders, business partners, volunteers, or college/university students.

Parent Involvement

Encourage parents to monitor their children's attendance, grades, assignments, etc. on ParentPortal. In doing so, parents can look for attendance patterns, keep the child accountable, and contact the teacher(s) and/or school counselor when concerns are noticed. Ensure parents are aware of pupil progression in middle school and earning of quality points to move on to high school.

Parent Notification When Skipping

When patterns of skipping are identified, notify the student's parents as soon as possible in the school day. Timely notification may allow parents the opportunity to contact their child or find the child if they are able to do so, and bring or return them to school.

Prevent Unauthorized Movement

Implement and enforce policies in moving about campus, such as required hall passes, tardy sweeps, and monitoring of common skipping areas (i.e. gymnasium, behind buildings, etc.). Secure campus to prevent unauthorized egress and ingress (repairing fences, escorting students to class/designated location, sign out procedures, etc.).

Contact with Students through Technology

With parent permission and/or awareness, utilize downloadable apps, such as the Remind App or Class Messenger App, to contact and encourage them to attend school daily.

Support When Students Return to School

When students return from an extended absence, school staff should welcome them back and conference with the student and their parents to gain an understanding of the absences, communicate with teachers, handle any sensitive information, and provide support in the completion of makeup work.

Attendance Committee

Create an Attendance Committee to identify and implement strategies designed to improve attendance. Invite various students to participate in order to give input as to barriers to attendance and incentives. Reduce known economic barriers to school attendance by providing Votran passes, school uniforms, hygiene products/facilities, food, etc.

Early Warning Indicators

Regularly monitor Early Warning Indicator reports and address those students who are at-risk of academic failure and potentially dropping out of school. Counselors and/or school staff should frequently convene with these students and invite their parents in for formal conferences to create and implement a plan to get the student back on track for middle school progression to high school.

Problem Solving Team Process

When truancy patterns form with students, utilize the PST process to identify barriers to attendance and provide appropriate interventions to address the problem. Provide incentives/reinforcements to re-engage students in the learning environment and coordinate with the parents to supplement these efforts at home. Assist students with a plan in completing relevant makeup work. As appropriate, consider a schedule change to address barriers to attendance and/or for credit retrieval. If available, educational options may be discussed.

SCHOOL-WIDE ATTENDANCE AND ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

High School Level

Acknowledge and Build Relationships with Students

Greet students and express that you are glad to see them each day. Verbally call out students' names when taking attendance and attempt to make eye contact with them. Have conversations with students about their participation and progress in class. When a concern arises, make mention of it to the student, offer support, and listen to their story, which may include personal and/or family challenges they may be facing.

Regular Contact with Students through Technology

Utilize downloadable apps, such as the Remind App or Class Messenger App, to contact and encourage them to attend school daily.

Mentoring Program

Implement a mentoring program, such as Check and Connect, to support students in monitoring their grades, behavior, and attendance. Mentors may be student peers, school staff, community leaders, business partners, volunteers, or college/university students.

Support for Incoming 9th Graders

Offer summer orientation for all incoming freshman to familiarize them to the school building, identify classes enrolled, get student ID, get locker, purchase PE uniform, buy school shirts, meet peers and school staff, and become aware of/sign up for clubs, sports, and extracurricular activities. Hold freshman assemblies and school-wide Back to School activities (music, cheers, band, etc.) the first week of school to promote engagement. Analyze data from these students 8th grade year to plan for supports for their first year of high school.

Messaging Workforce Success

To promote relevancy to their lives, promote daily attendance as an essential requirement for workforce success—an employee will have difficulty maintaining a job if he/she only shows up 90 percent of the time.

Leveraging Privileges

Implement and enforce policies in moving about and on/off campus, such as required hall passes, tardy sweeps, take attendance at assemblies, one point of entry/exit, front gate monitor, or permission slip to leave campus. Secure campus to prevent unauthorized egress and ingress (repairing fences, escorting students to class/designated location). Utilize on campus privileges as leverage for class attendance, such as parking pass privileges and open campus lunch.

Utilizing Incentives

To foster a culture of attendance, utilize incentives for students with good and/or improved attendance, such as free tickets to school events (homecoming, prom, sports games, drama productions, etc.), on-campus privileges, parking space near building, and donated items/gift certificates from the community.

Parent Notification When Skipping

When patterns of skipping are identified, notify the student's parents as soon as possible in the school day. Timely notification may allow parents the opportunity to contact their child or find the child if they are able to do so, and bring or return them to school.

Content Area Attendance Contests

In efforts to improve student attendance in core courses, create attendance contests or challenges among subject area courses. Elicit support from content area chairpersons.

Support When Students Return to School

When students return from an extended absence, school staff should welcome them back and conference with the students and/or their parents to gain an understanding of the absences, communicate with teachers, handle any sensitive information, and provide support in the completion of makeup work.

Student Attendance Committee

Establish a Student Attendance Committee. This committee should consist of students with perfect attendance as well as students with chronic absences. All students should be encouraged to give input in terms of what will encourage students to attend school more regularly.

Attendance Committee Team

Establish an Attendance Committee Team. The team should consist of, but need not be limited to, an assistant principal, chair and co-chair, attendance office specialist, representative from each grade level, school counselor and the school social worker. The team should meet regularly and work as a cohesive unit to share ideas and implement attendance improvement strategies, in addition to reducing identified barriers to school attendance (such as by providing Votran passes, school uniforms, hygiene products/facilities, food, etc.)

Early Warning Indicators

Regularly monitor Early Warning Indicator reports and address those students who are at-risk of becoming high school dropouts. Counselors and/or school staff should convene with these students and invite their parents in for formal conferences to create and implement a plan to get the students back on track for graduation.

Problem Solving Team Process

When truancy patterns form with students, utilize the PST process to identify barriers to attendance and provide appropriate interventions to address the problem. Provide incentives/reinforcements to re-engage students in the learning environment. Assist student with a plan in completing relevant makeup work. Explore educational options/schedule change to address barriers to attendance and for opportunity for credit retrieval.