

# 10 Steps Communities Can Take to Reduce Chronic Absence

Research and common sense tell us that school attendance has a direct bearing on student achievement. But too often, we think of reducing absences as the job of parents or school clerks in the front office. Communities across the country have started to help schools address chronic absence, recognizing that they can build public awareness and leverage resources to address a problem that we can solve.

- 1. Find out how many students and schools are affected by chronic absence.** The first step to reducing absences is understanding the depth and scope of the problem in your community. Community leaders can ask school districts to conduct an analysis of chronic absence—the number of students missing 10 percent of the school year. Or, if needed, ask districts for attendance data and then city or county data offices can crunch the numbers themselves. For help, ask Attendance Works for its free data tools.
- 2. Convene a task force on student attendance** to ensure that it becomes a priority across the community. The task force should bring together senior leadership from across school and community agencies from a range of disciplines: early childhood, K-12 education, family engagement, social services, public safety, afterschool, faith-based, philanthropy, public housing and transportation.
- 3. Launch a public awareness campaign to convey that every day counts.** Community leaders can send a clear message about the importance of school attendance and the adverse impact of missing too much school. Speeches, proclamations and billboards can reinforce that message to parents and children, as can parent summits at the start of the school year and public service messages.
- 4. Recognize and appreciate good and improved attendance.** Simple rewards—recognition from peers and the school through certificates, assemblies, stickers, extra recess or ice cream parties—go a long way toward motivating students. Mayors can help link schools to businesses that can provide incentives, such as sports tickets, backpacks or movie tickets.
- 5. Use chronic absence data to shape budget priorities.** High chronic absence rates at a school can often signal a community in distress. Use the data when deciding where to invest in child care, early education and afterschool programs, all of which can help families build good habits and bring absenteeism under control.
- 6. Use chronic absence as an accountability metric.** Make sure data on chronic absence is regularly shared with you and your agency chiefs and ideally included in data dashboards. Ask programs applying for funding to explain what they will do to improve attendance. Use evidence of reduced chronic absence to identify which programs should continue to receive funding in tight budget times.
- 7. Partner with schools and public agencies to address health concerns.** Asthma and dental problems are leading causes of chronic absence in many cities, especially when students have little access to health care. Use the health department to provide preventative care in targeted communities or at school-based clinics.
- 8. Work with the transportation department** to ensure that students and parents can get to school safely. Adjust bus lines and provide passes for students who use public transit. Work with police and community groups to develop safe routes to schools or “walking school buses” in neighborhoods where street violence is a concern.
- 9. Recruit an extra shift of adults to mentor chronically absent students.** Volunteers and National Service programs such as City Year and Experience Corps can provide mentors to monitor attendance, reach out to families and make sure students are showing up.
- 10. Don't forget the parents.** Parents are on the front line of the attendance battle. Don't assume that they even know about the negative effects of too many student absences especially in the early grades. Make it easy for them to access data and find resources that will help them improve their children's attendance.

## For more information:

Attendance Works has developed a **Toolkit for City Leaders**, case studies of communities making a difference and data tools available on our website at [www.attendanceworks.org](http://www.attendanceworks.org). Contact director Hedy Chang at [hedy@attendanceworks.org](mailto:hedy@attendanceworks.org)