



PHILADELPHIA IS SHOWING UP FOR ATTENDANCE

Educator Resources to Improve School Attendance 2019-2020



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READY-TO-USE MATERIALS (APPENDIX)

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TIPS FOR USING THIS TOOLKIT

The toolkit is designed for educators of elementary school students in Philadelphia. As many of us are fellow principals, teachers, support staff, and parents of young children, we know how hectic things can get. With this in mind, we designed the toolkit to be useful and easy-to-use.

- **Understand how the toolkit is organized.**
 - The first section, WHY ATTENDANCE MATTERS, provides tools and talking points for communicating with parents, students, and teachers about why attendance is so important.
 - The second section, BUILDING AN ATTENDANCE CULTURE includes ideas for educators from fellow educators on changes that can affect an entire school, classroom, or even just one student.
 - The third section, ADDRESSING COMMON BARRIERS, suggests strategies and resources to address some of the issues that can make good attendance a challenge for many families.
 - Finally, don't miss the READY-TO-USE MATERIALS appendix, with lots of handouts and information to share with families.
- **Make the toolkit work for your school.** Feel free to customize materials, where possible, for your school.
- **Get and distribute copies of the toolkit.** Get and distribute copies of the toolkit. Printable and translated materials are available at ready4th.org/attendance and on the Office of Attendance & Truancy page at philasd.org.
- **Help us make the toolkit better.** Email your feedback and ideas to Abby Thaker: thakera@freelibrary.org.
- **Share what's working on social media.** Use #ShowingUp #PHLed @Ready4th.



WHY ATTENDANCE MATTERS

As an educator, you probably already know how important it is for children to have good attendance so they are present for every moment of learning time. Here are a few talking points you can use to help convey why attendance is so important.

- **We all want our students to be successful.** Research shows that helping children get to school every day, on time is one of the most important things we can do to help set them up for success.
- **When children miss school, they miss out on valuable opportunities for learning.** When children have good attendance, they are more likely to read at or above grade level.
- **It starts early, too.** Children with good attendance in kindergarten are more likely to read on grade level by the end of the year—and are more likely to read on grade level by the end of 3rd grade, too.
- **It's important to arrive on time.** Reading is taught first thing in the morning—we don't want children to miss a moment.
- **We're here to help!** Contact me, your child's teacher, our school nurse or our guidance counselor if anything is making it difficult to get to school every day. We are all here to help.



WHY ATTENDANCE MATTERS

SLIDES FOR BACK-TO-SCHOOL PRESENTATIONS

Include these slides in your back-to-school presentations to communicate with families about why attendance is so important. Download the Powerpoint slides at readby4th.org/attendance and on the Office of Attendance & Truancy page at philasd.org; then, edit as-needed to customize for your school.



Why Attendance Matters

Everyone can be an attendance hero.

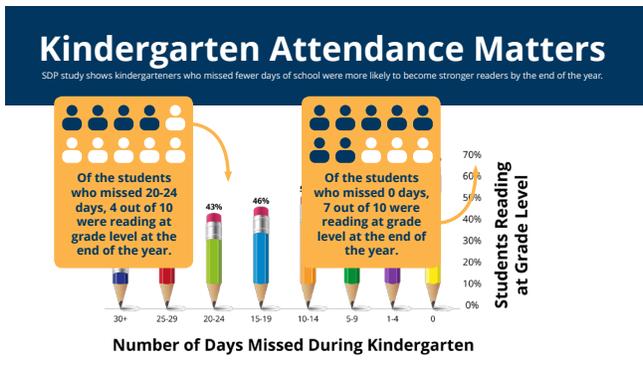
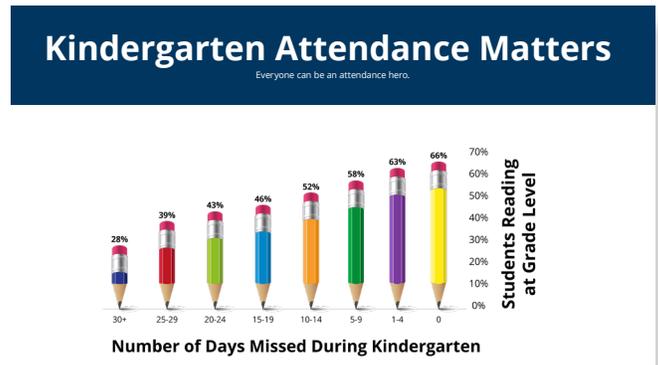
- **Every day, on-time.** Helping children get to school every day, on-time is one of the most important things we can do to help set them up for success.
- **Take advantage of opportunities.** When children miss school, they miss out on valuable opportunities for learning. When children have good attendance, they are more likely to read at or above grade level.
- **It starts early, too.** Children with good attendance in kindergarten are more likely to read on grade level by the end of the year—and are more likely to read on grade level by the end of 3rd grade, too.
- **It's important to arrive on time.** Reading is taught first thing in the morning—we don't want children to miss a moment.

GOAL: 95% Attendance

Everyone can be an attendance hero.

Our goal is for students to achieve at least 95% attendance. **This means missing no more than 9 days during the school year.**

This is based on a 180 day school year.



We're Here to Help

Let us know if you are moving or have a change of address or phone number.

[Insert School Name here]

[NAME], Principal	[NAME], Guidance Counselor	[NAME], Climate Manager
PHONE	PHONE	PHONE
[NAME], School Nurse	[NAME], Attendance Designee	[NAME], Secretary
PHONE	PHONE	PHONE

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WHY ATTENDANCE MATTERS

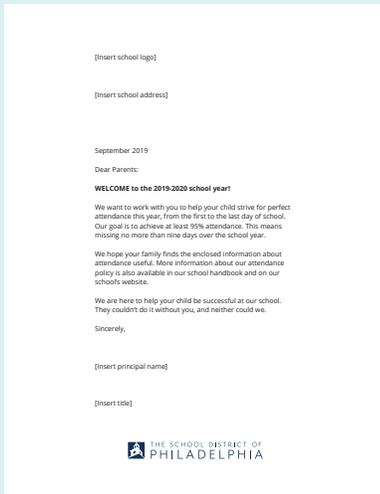
FAMILY PACKET

What's inside the Family Packet? We hope you use what's inside the Family Packet as an integral part of a comprehensive plan to help build an attendance culture at your school. We developed this packet of resources with a clear focus: to strengthen every school's most vital partnership with our families.

Feel free to distribute the entire family packet after you customize it for your school's use, or just use individual handouts if that works better. Great times for sharing information in the family packet are during registration days, back-to-school nights or parent-teacher conferences throughout the year.

They also provide great conversation starters and talking points about attendance for educators. We hope you agree.

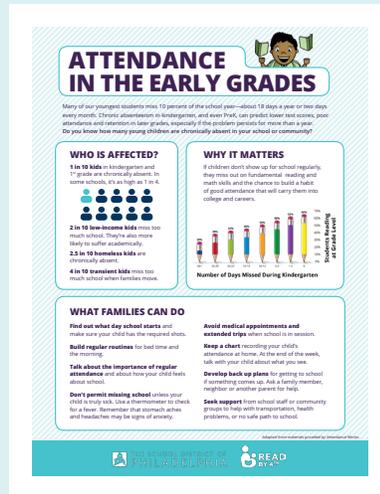
Everything is downloadable in various formats and languages at readby4th.org/attendance and on the Office of Attendance & Truancy page at philasd.org.



SAMPLE LETTER FROM PRINCIPAL

Great to share as a part of your back-to-school program or welcome message. Update and personalize the letter, then cut and paste it onto your school's letterhead.

**An editable version is available for download at readby4th.org/attendance and on the Office of Attendance & Truancy page at philasd.org.*



ATTENDANCE IN THE EARLY GRADES

Share this handout with families at orientation or back-to-school events to let them know why attendance matters.

WHY ATTENDANCE MATTERS

FAMILY PACKET

Attendance Heroes

Everyone can be an attendance hero. Strive for perfect attendance.

Good attendance helps you become a strong reader and do well in school.

How do I get good attendance?

Don't miss more than nine days during the school year, or no more than two days every report card period.

Do I have to be on time, too?

Yes, every day counts. Start to finish, especially because reading is taught best done in the morning.

Family Checklist

Good habits build confidence that lasts a lifetime.

- ☐ Make the bed every night.
- ☐ Get clothes and backpack ready the night before.
- ☐ Get a regular wake-up time.
- ☐ Have a backup plan to the backup plan.
- ☐ Get there on time because reading is taught first.

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ATTENDANCE HEROES

Encourage families to post this where everyone at home can see it: on the fridge, their child's room, etc. Schools running an Attendance Hero program can distribute this at their launch assembly or event.

Pledge of Attendance

STUDENT PLEDGE:

I, _____, pledge to attend school and class, every day, on time. If I am absent from school, I will turn in an excuse note as soon as I return and will complete all of my assignments that I missed.

I will respect myself, my education, and my community by having good school attendance and by being involved in my education. I will come to school prepared to learn and with a positive attitude.

By signing this pledge, I agree to do my best, each and every day!

PARENT PLEDGE:

I, _____, pledge to help my child to attend school and class, every day, on time. If my child is absent from school, I will turn in an excuse note as soon as I receive it and will make sure that he/she completes all of the assignments that he/she missed.

I understand that regular attendance and punctuality are vital parts of my child's success. I agree to help monitor my child's daily attendance and to partner with the school if my child has any issues.

By signing this pledge, I agree to support and encourage my child to do his/her best, each and every day!

Student Signature: _____
 Parent/Guardian Signature: _____
 School Name: _____

EVERY DAY COUNTS. START TO FINISH!

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PLEDGE OF ATTENDANCE

With this pledge, parents can work together on their family efforts around good attendance.

EVERY DAY COUNTS START TO FINISH

MAKE PERFECT ATTENDANCE A WEEKLY FAMILY GOAL

Coming to school every day helps young students become strong readers.

FAMILY CHECKLIST

Good habits build confidence that lasts a lifetime.

- ☐ MAKE THE BEST WAY TO SCHOOL.
- ☐ GET CLOTHES AND BACKPACKS READY THE NIGHT BEFORE.
- ☐ GET A REGULAR WAKE-UP TIME.
- ☐ HAVE A BACKUP PLAN TO THE BACKUP PLAN.
- ☐ GET THERE ON TIME BECAUSE READING IS TAUGHT FIRST.
- ☐ SHARE HEALTH UPDATES WITH YOUR SCHOOL NURSE.

WEEKLY TRACKER 2019-2020

Make it to school on time every day for the whole week!
 Fill in a star and treat the whole family!

FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL: MAKE IT A STAR

EVERY DAY COUNTS: MAKE IT A STAR

LAST DAY OF SCHOOL: MAKE IT A STAR

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WEEKLY ATTENDANCE TRACKER

Young students learn by doing, and they're motivated by actual signs of progress. This tracker gives the whole family a fun, easy way to track their weekly attendance. Encourage parents to put them in a highly visible spot. Remind them to reward the whole family when they reach their goal.

EVERY DAY COUNTS START TO FINISH

FAQs DISTRICT ATTENDANCE POLICIES

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT THAT MY CHILD ATTENDS SCHOOL?

When children miss a day of school (or arrive late or leave early) they are missing out on opportunities to strengthen their reading, learn new behaviors, or build friendships. Research shows that children who attend every day, or have an excuse note, do better and excel academically.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF MY CHILD IS ABSENT FROM SCHOOL?

For all absences, parents are required to write an excuse note giving the child's name, absence(s), date(s) absent and reasons for absence. Schools must receive the excuse note within three days following your child's absence.

All absences of three or more days in a row also require a doctor's note. When a student has been absent, excused with a parent note, pending eight (8) days (cumulative), all subsequent absences require a doctor's note.

DOES BEING LATE OR LEAVING EARLY IMPACT STUDENT ATTENDANCE AND TEST SCHOOL PERFORMANCE?

Yes, when your child is tardy or leaves early, they are missing out on instructional time and classroom activities. Any K-6 student coming to school five hours after the start or leaving two hours before the end of the school day will be marked as absent one half-day.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN AN EXCUSED ABSENCE AND AN UNEXCUSED ABSENCE?

Excused: The following conditions are considered excused: authorized school activities, illness, quarantine, recovery from accident, required court appearance, and a death in the family. Full or partial credit will be given.

Five (5) days, including day of funeral: parent/step-parent, child, grandparent, grandchild, or death of immediate family.

Three (3) days, including day of funeral: sibling, grandparent, grandchild, or death of immediate family.

Day of funeral: aunt, uncle, first cousin, niece, nephew.

Unexcused: Absences are unexcused if (1) they do not meet any of the above conditions and (2) if the school does not receive a signed excuse note from a parent.

Family absences on school days are considered unexcused absences. Please see our District Calendar to plan family activities as well as doctor visits around school days.

WHAT HAPPENS IF MY CHILD IS TRUANT?

Students are considered truant when they have three (3) unexcused absences. If your child is truant, the school will generate a Third Day Legal notice to send home. Your child continues to be truant you will be required to attend a truant hearing where you will be required to sign a Parent Plan (APP) will be created in order to support you and your child in identifying and removing attendance barriers. If the plan is not met and your child continues to be truant, we may be required to remove your child from school. A truant hearing may be made to the Office of Attendance and Truancy.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF MY CHILD'S ATTENDANCE RECORDS ARE INCORRECT?

If you feel there is an error/discrepancy on your child's attendance record, you have the right to address it with the school. Be ready to present proper documentation about the absence (e.g. doctor's note, court appearance, funeral, etc.) to the principal or principal's designee for change for the current school year.

Any changes to a prior year's records must be completed by the Office of Attendance and Truancy. All such requests can be forwarded to: attendanceandtruancy@philsd.net or mailed to:

The Office of Attendance and Truancy
 School District of Philadelphia
 4th Floor, 3700 Chestnut
 Philadelphia, PA 19107
 215-680-8300, Extension 1

We're here to help. Let your school know if you are moving or have a change of address or phone number.

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FAQs: DISTRICT ATTENDANCE POLICIES

We created one document answering the questions most frequently asked by parents about attendance. Feel free to refer to this during parent-teacher conferences and back-to-school night.

WHY ATTENDANCE MATTERS FAMILY PACKET

EVERY DAY COUNTS START TO FINISH **HELPFUL RESOURCES TO OVERCOME ATTENDANCE BARRIERS**

PARENTS, WE'RE HERE TO HELP.

We know it takes a lot to get children to school every day, on time. Thank you for doing what you do to make sure your child gets to school every day. We want to help keep your child from falling behind, so please call us as soon as possible if your family is facing challenges related to transportation, health issues, housing instability, tough work schedules, or anything else we can help you with. We'll get you set up with a school nurse. We hope these resources help. Ask your school for copies of handouts or download them at read.org/attendance or on the Office of Attendance and Truancy page at attendance.org.

STUDENT HEALTH

When Sick is Too Sick for School. Not sure about sending your child to school or keeping them at home when they're feeling sick? Keep this handout handy. Talk with your child's school nurse and check the District's use for updated policy information, including about asthma: read.org/attendance.

Mental Wellness (Drug and Alcohol Support). Resources for children and families seeking or in need of mental health, behavioral counseling, and/or supports: read.org/attendance.

Community Behavioral Health. CBH is the city-operated health maintenance organization for persons needing mental health care. Substance abuse treatment through the Coordinating Office for Drug and Alcohol Abuse Programs (CODAAP) can also be accessed through CBH. Medical Assistance patients should call this number first for information and referrals: 215-473-3700 or 1-800-545-2000. The crisis hotline number is 215-688-4000. read.org/attendance behavioralhealth.org.

Call the number on the back of your insurance card if you need help getting connected to a medical provider. For those who don't have insurance, the website lists free health clinics in Philadelphia: read.org/attendance.

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EVERY DAY COUNTS START TO FINISH **HELPFUL RESOURCES TO OVERCOME ATTENDANCE BARRIERS**

FAMILY SUPPORT

Income case management services and support. Families can often overcome for in-home case management services and support with health, financial, housing, electrical, and transportation issues through the Family Employment Services Program. Call the DHS hotline 215-683-4000, then select menu option #9 and ask to be referred to the Family Employment Services Program.

NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program). SNAP benefits are available through an Access card, which works like a debit card. Use it to buy food at supermarkets, corner and convenience stores, and most farmers' markets. Find out if you qualify today. Call the SNAP hotline at 215-402-0206.

WIC (Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children). Low-income pregnant and breastfeeding women, new moms, and children under age 5 can receive food, health screenings, and nutrition counseling under the WIC program. Call 1-800-743-8300 to find out if you are eligible or visit read.org/attendance wicphiladelphia.org.

Food Pantries. The Coalition Against Hunger connects families and individuals with food pantries across the city: read.org/attendance.

LEGAL ASSISTANCE

Philadelphia Legal Assistance. The General Inquirer Line provides legal advice and referrals to clients with a wide variety of legal problems. Applicants must meet financial eligibility guidelines. To see if you are eligible, visit read.org/attendance or call 215-981-3800.

EMERGENCY HOUSING

The City of Philadelphia provides emergency and temporary housing to parents experiencing homelessness, as well as case management assistance to assist households with obtaining appropriate long-term housing: read.org/attendance www.phila.gov/department/housing.

If your family is experiencing housing instability, contact the Office of Education for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness to learn what resources they can offer to support your family during this period. Email ECYH@phila.gov or call 215-784-9205.

CHILD CARE ASSISTANCE

The Early Learning Resource Center helps families seeking assistance paying for children and other early childhood supports previously provided by CCES and the Region Keys: read.org/attendance elrcphila.org.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

The Philadelphia Domestic Violence Helpline is free and open 24/7. Call 800-723-3014 or 215-456-1539.

These organizations provide support (such as counseling or shelter) for individuals who have experienced or are experiencing sexual or physical abuse:

- Women Against Abuse: read.org/attendance www.womenagainstabuse.org
- NCAAP (National Organization Against Rape): read.org/attendance www.ncaap.org

REFUGEE + IMMIGRANT PARENTS

Nationalities Services Center. This nonprofit also offers free and/or low-cost translation and interpretation services for non-English speaking and English language learners, as well as other social and educational services: read.org/attendance www.nscphila.org.

The School District of Philadelphia's Office of Multilingual Family Support includes Bilingual Counseling Assistants who speak more than 30 languages. Call 215-400-4300.

HELPFUL RESOURCES TO OVERCOME ATTENDANCE BARRIERS

All students can experience issues around attendance and tardiness. When they do, their families may need extra support. Use this starter list of key resources to help them.

EVERY DAY COUNTS START TO FINISH **SCHOOL HEALTH STATEMENT SCHOOL NURSES ARE HERE FOR YOU**

Did you know that each school building in the district has an assigned school nurse? A school nurse is here to help you and your children in many ways. Not only do we assess and treat your child's physical health needs during the school day, we also help to organize health and wellness opportunities to benefit you and your family.

Responsibilities of the school nurse include but not limited to:

- Vision, hearing and dental screenings
- Medication administration and first aid
- Coordination of care with your primary care provider

School nurses can answer any health questions you or your child may have and discuss your child's medical needs. Please call or stop by to see your school nurse with questions or to talk about any concerns you may have.

The following checklist includes important things to remember to discuss with your school nurse:

1. **Tell your school nurse about your child's recent or long-term health problems.** The school nurse can work with you to develop a plan to lessen the chance that health problems will get in the way of your child's attendance and learning in school.
2. **Make sure to share any updates about your child's health condition with the school nurse as soon as they occur.** There are forms that the school nurse will provide to you so that you can tell the school about your child's health history. These forms should be given to the nurse at the beginning of the year. You can also update the forms at any time of the year with new health information.
3. **Your school nurse will let you know if we do not have up-to-date records of your child's shots.** The nurse will send a letter home to you with that list of shots for your child's needs. Please take the letter to your child's health care provider. Your provider will update the shot record if your child always has the vaccine and provide proof that your child is no longer at risk for the infection. If your child needs to receive the shot, your provider will give the vaccine. It is important that you follow up with your school's nurse after your visit with the health care provider so we can update your child's school health record.
4. **The school nurse can provide you with a list of resources if you need any help accessing health care or other essential needs.**
5. **If your child has a chronic health condition like asthma or diabetes the school nurse can help you keep your child healthy in school and able to learn.** Chronic health conditions do not have to stop your child from coming to school. Remember to share information about your child's health condition with the school nurse, including any medication needed.
6. **If any of your contact information changes during the school year, please notify the school's main office and the school nurse.** This will help us to contact you and follow up with any important information you need to know regarding your child.

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SCHOOL HEALTH STATEMENT

Did you know that each school building in the district has an assigned school nurse? A school nurse is here to help you and your child stay healthy so there is a better chance for 95%+ attendance.

EVERY DAY COUNTS START TO FINISH **"I DON'T FEEL GOOD" WHEN SICK IS TOO SICK FOR SCHOOL**

SEND TO SCHOOL

- ❑ No other symptoms but a runny nose or just a little cough.
- ❑ No fever in the past 24 hours without fever-reducing medicine.
- ❑ No vomiting or diarrhea for 24 hours.

KEEP AT HOME

- ❑ Fever higher than 100.5 degrees even after taking medicine.
- ❑ Vomiting or diarrhea for more than two days.
- ❑ Stiffles for more than a week, and not getting better.
- ❑ Asthma symptoms after using asthma medicine.
- ❑ When child is complaining of any ear or throat pain.

CALL THE DOCTOR

- ❑ Fever higher than 100 degrees for more than two days.
- ❑ Vomiting or diarrhea for more than two days.
- ❑ Stiffles for more than a week, and not getting better.
- ❑ Asthma symptoms after using asthma medicine.
- ❑ Call 911 if your child is having trouble breathing after using an inhaler.

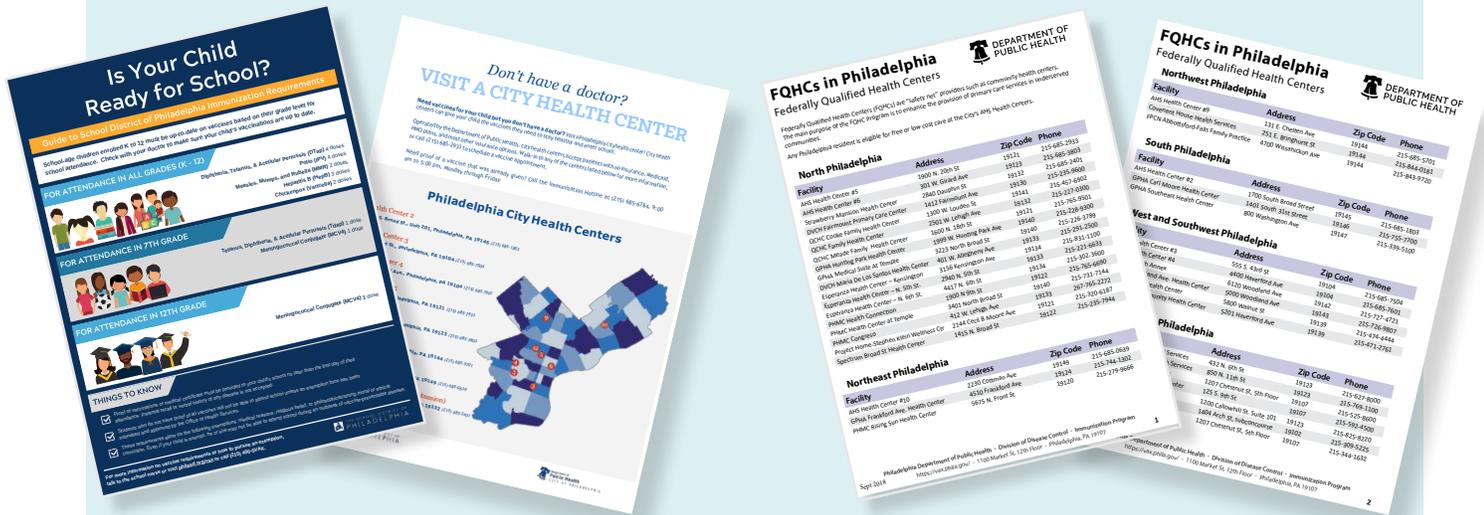
Approved form materials provided by Allegheny Health.

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"I DON'T FEEL GOOD" WHEN SICK IS TOO SICK FOR SCHOOL

We all struggle with knowing when we should keep our children at home or send them to school. This handout was designed to help parents decide and is also good to post in classrooms.

WHY ATTENDANCE MATTERS FAMILY PACKET



**SCHOOL DISTRICT OF PHILADELPHIA
IMMUNIZATION REQUIREMENTS AND
CITY HEALTH CENTERS**

FEDERALLY QUALIFIED HEALTH CENTERS



ABSENCE EXCUSE NOTE

Make it easier for parents with this excuse note template to get their notes in on time following every absence. Schools may want to pair this with the What You Missed flyer from the Educator Packet Appendix by printing on the other side.

BUILDING AN ATTENDANCE CULTURE

Educators districtwide are making great strides in building a school culture that promotes on time daily attendance. This attendance toolkit brings together some of the best ideas developed and implemented with positive results by fellow principals, teachers and staff.

In this section, we present resources designed for in-school use. Find downloadable versions of this toolkit at readby4th.org/attendance or on the Office of Attendance and Truancy page at philasd.org.



BUILDING AN ATTENDANCE CULTURE

SCHOOL SELF-ASSESSMENT

This self-assessment is designed to help school attendance teams, SACs, or other stakeholder groups discuss what initiatives are already going well to support attendance at your school and to identify potential opportunities for improvement.

1

To start, identify one person who can assume responsibility for facilitating this assessment to improve student attendance at your school.

2

Bring together a team of key stakeholders in your school to complete this self-assessment. Include the principal, parents, attendance personnel, classroom teachers, and community partners—anyone who could offer valuable insights and divergent perspectives on strengthening an attendance culture at your school.

3

Ask everyone to complete the assessment. Let them know it takes about 10 minutes.

4

Add up everyone's responses for each key element of an attendance school culture. As completed copies of the assessment are collected, quickly tabulate scores to get an aggregate score for each key element.

5

Share and discuss the results with the entire group. Explore differences in opinions and perspectives. Keep in mind the goal is to deepen a collective understanding of why these differences might exist rather than to get everyone to agree on any one rating.

6

Identify top priorities for improving student attendance.

Once identified, determine:

- Immediate next steps?
- Who needs to be involved? Who can take the lead?
- What is the best way to stay apprised of each other's progress?
- Should a follow-up meeting be set?

Adapted from materials provided by Attendance Works.

**School Self-Assessment can also be found in the Educator Packet Appendix of this toolkit.*

BUILDING AN ATTENDANCE CULTURE

SCHOOL SELF-ASSESSMENT

Key Element	Strong Evidence	Requires Improvement	Does Not Exist	How Do You Know?
1 Attendance is accurately taken and entered daily into the District data system-SIS in all classrooms/periods.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
2 Our school has a clear understanding of the District's attendance policy.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
3 A multidisciplinary team including the Principal or Assistant Principal, attendance designee, guidance counselor, school nurse, or other school staff reviews attendance data on a regular basis to identify students at different attendance tiers, such as 95%+, 90-95%, 85-90%, and below. Patterns are monitored by grade levels and other factors, including identified barriers.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
4 Our school reaches out to chronically absent students and their families to identify barriers to attendance.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
5 Our school has a welcoming and engaging climate that promotes safety and positive interpersonal relationships among students, staff, and families.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
6 Our school recognizes students who attend 95% +, for example, through monthly, quarterly & annual incentive programs.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
7 Our school recognizes students who improve, moving from 85% to 90%-95%+, for example, through incentive programs.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
8 Our school reaches out to parents with positive messaging to acknowledge the role they played when their children are achieving 95%+ or are moving in the right direction.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
9 Our school partners with community agencies that offer resources, such as volunteer mentors and in-kind donations that can help students and their families remove barriers to getting to school.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
10 Our school informs parents in non-policy language about the importance of attendance and encourages parents to help each other get their children to school.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
11 Our school discipline policy and practice ensure students do not miss instruction due to suspensions for non-violent behavior.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
12 Our strategies for supporting student attendance are reflected in our school attendance improvement plan.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

*Adapted from materials provided by Attendance Works.
For more, visit attendanceworks.org/resources/self-assessment*

School: _____

Date: _____

BUILDING AN ATTENDANCE CULTURE

PLANNING FOR ATTENDANCE YEAR-ROUND

From Debora Borges-Carrera, Assistant Superintendent, Neighborhood Network 1

- 1 Work with your attendance team or School Advisory Council to determine what's best for your school.**
- 2 Set monthly attendance goals rather than yearly ones.** This gives students (and their families) a fresh start each month to strive for perfect attendance. Younger students also find shorter-term goals more manageable.
- 3 Specify your school's monthly attendance goal.** Reviewing how your school did the same month the previous year would help determine this goal.
- 4 Create a theme around your school's attendance goal for every month.** See suggestions on the monthly attendance target flyers.
- 5 Get the word out.** Promotional ideas include: attendance cheers in the morning yard or during assemblies; flyers given out during arrival/dismissal along with quick huddles with parents on how they can help and reminders through school messenger, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, and Class Dojo.
- 6 Integrate campaigns into school community life.** Think through:
 - How can students, families, teachers and other school community members experience this campaign?
 - How can students become promoters? Brainstorm with them. Motivate them to motivate our families.
 - What incentives would motivate students, whole classes, the entire school (e.g., grade-level dance party on Friday, trip at the end of the month, etc.)?
 - How will you will celebrate students who are making progress (e.g., attendance heroes, dojo dollars, etc.)?
 - How can we ensure all we do to promote attendance is trauma-informed?
- 7 Create an Attendance Recovery Plan for student re-engagement.**
 - How will students who are not in attendance the first day be contacted?
 - Who will do visits to students' homes who are not in school? Mobilize your "Boots on the Ground" team. Ask for volunteers or offer EC for teachers to go in pairs to students' homes who have three or more unexcused absences.
- 8 Schedule weekly Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) meetings with the Attendance Team to identify at-risk students.** Monitor progress to see whether interventions are working and what needs to be adjusted.
 - Implement system for monitoring daily attendance.
 - Ensure classroom teachers are taking daily attendance on SIS. Identify point person to pull daily reports and provide data on gaps in attendance taking.
 - Support teachers who are struggling with SIS.
- 9 Debrief and plan for next month.** Reconvene your attendance team to review what went well and areas for improvement, and to develop a plan for next month. Follow up with parents who have students with three or more unexcused absences.

BUILDING AN ATTENDANCE CULTURE

ATTENDANCE TIMELINE

Summer

- ❑ Review attendance data from prior school year to identify where more support is needed
- ❑ Meet with Attendance Team and complete School Self-Assessment **See page 13*
- ❑ Outline Attendance Campaign to promote year-round attendance



Back to School

- ❑ Celebrate the 1st day of school with welcome back activities
- ❑ Promote Attendance Awareness Month all September long
- ❑ Distribute Family Packet during Back to School Night and discuss attendance goals
**See Family Packet Appendix.*



Fall

- ❑ Send home “We Missed You” letter when a student is absent from school
**See Educator Packet Appendix.*
- ❑ Meet with parents during report card conferences to discuss student’s attendance
- ❑ Acknowledge students with excellent and good attendance with certificates
**See Educator Packet Appendix.*



Winter

- ❑ Plan attendance incentives during winter months when attendance usually drops, like surprise hot chocolate or pretzels to be given out to students at the school entrance
- ❑ Encourage healthy habits and remind families when sick is too sick for school
** See Family Packet Appendix.*
- ❑ Show appreciation for students and their families coming to school every day, on time



Spring

- ❑ Schedule activities and events that will build enthusiasm for daily attendance, like walking trips, field day and spirit week
- ❑ Make a shift to weekly incentive cycles so that students have more opportunities to be rewarded
- ❑ Give special recognition to students and families for meeting attendance goals, including special incentives for classes who reach 95%+ and individuals who reach 100% in May and June. ** See page 22*



More Advice from Fellow Educators and Parents

Kindergarten Orientation

“Ensure leadership highlights the importance of Kindergarten attendance for school success during orientation.”

—Tamara Edwards, Principal
Thomas K. Finletter Academics Plus School

Good Habits Start Early

“We all wish we could find the magic formula that would help parents and students know that attending school is an investment towards a successful future. At our school, we begin at kindergarten, letting parents know that good habits start at an early age.”

—Rosa Lopez, School Improvement
Support Liaison *Potter Thomas*

Back-to-School Night

“Use Back-to-School Night as an opportunity to emphasize the data on the relationship between student attendance and student reading levels.”

—Jason Harris, Principal
Joseph Pennell School

BUILDING AN ATTENDANCE CULTURE

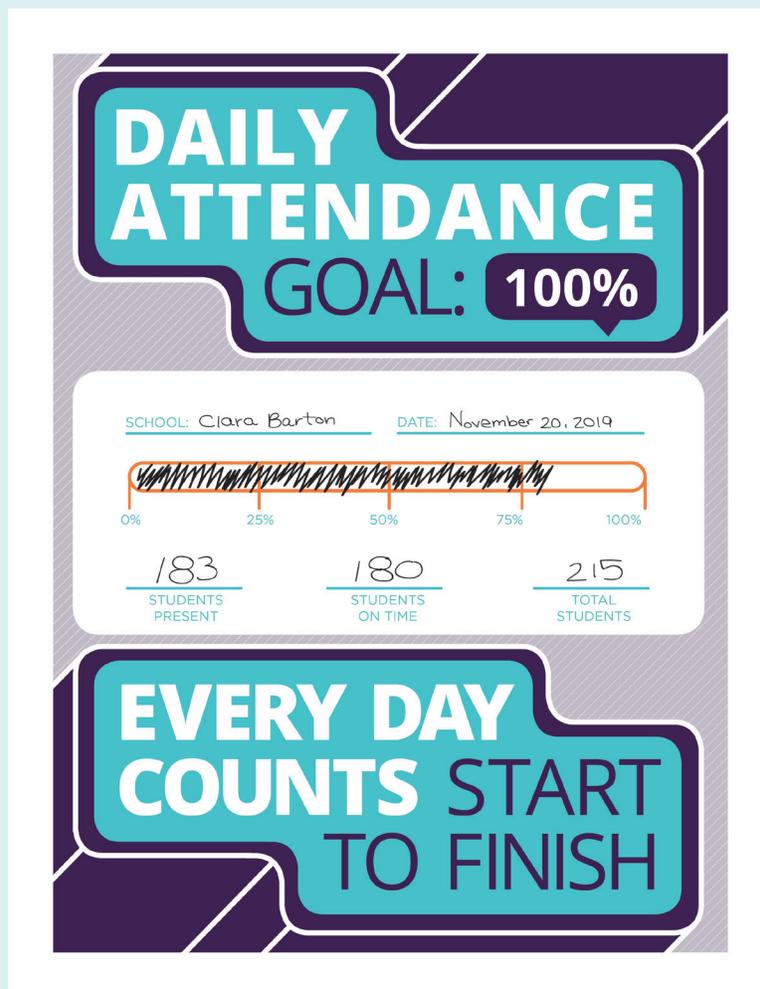
DAILY ATTENDANCE TRACKER

Building an attendance culture in elementary school requires knowing our audience. Like their K-3 peers everywhere, our youngest students enjoy being a part of a team effort and counting their progress—over the short term.

A full school year is too long of a goal for students at these ages. This is why we divide the school calendar and various attendance activities into daily, weekly and monthly chunks to promote school attendance.

The **Daily Attendance Tracker** is designed as a 18" x 24" poster to be hung in a school's main hallway. The laminate covering to this tracker makes it easy to refresh numbers every day.

Download the Daily Attendance Tracker and the following Monthly Attendance Target Flyers at readby4th.org/attendance or on the Office of Attendance and Truancy page at philasd.org. *See Educator Packet Appendix of this toolkit.



BUILDING AN ATTENDANCE CULTURE

MONTHLY ATTENDANCE TARGET FLYERS

The **Monthly Attendance Target flyer** can be placed in each classroom. Let students know exactly how many days of school there are for each month to set goals for the entire school, grade, or class. Keep it at the total number of days per month, reprint blank sheets, or laminate the countdown number to countdown each day.



BUILDING AN ATTENDANCE CULTURE

CREATING A WELCOMING ENVIRONMENT

Building an attendance culture starts with making students and families feel welcome. There are countless ways to be welcoming, from daily routines and regular events to something never tried.

A familiar face who greets. Have school community members (e.g., popular teachers, parents, faith leaders, shopkeepers, barbers, etc.) serve as greeters on different days, welcoming students with an enthusiastic hello, handshake or high-five.

Special handshakes. Come up with a signature school handshake to greet one another in the morning.

Fun, front-loaded. Play music at the school entrance to energize mornings. Have homeroom start with something the kids won't want to miss. No better way to motivate parents than their own children wanting to get to school on time every day.



A non-traditional take on first-day traditions. The Fellowship: Black Male Educators for Social Justice organizes African-American men to “suit up and show up” at their neighborhood school to welcome back students and wish them a great year. To learn more, contact The Fellowship at 1000x2025@gmail.com.

BUILDING AN ATTENDANCE CULTURE

CREATING A WELCOMING ENVIRONMENT

When children *want* to go to school, it is easier to get everyone out the door and to school on time. What they think of their teachers and classmates, how much they like what they're learning, fun after-school programs—all help children want to come to school every day so they don't miss out.

Friendships build attendance. Students who have good school friends are more likely to come to school. Research shows positive friendships are vital to school-age children's healthy development and academic performance, including attendance. To encourage these:

- Offer students ample unstructured, but supervised, time with one another.
- Create more team-building games and recreational sports.
- Set clear rules for expected behavior: handling different social situations, addressing negative comments, and considering things from other points-of-view.

Checkin' in. A child's willingness to come to and stay in school also depends on their feeling someone at school cares enough to ask them how they are. This is often difficult to do. Ask students to describe their feelings and support peer efforts to change moods into positive ones.



"I believe in you" video. As a way to promote attendance and address the trauma and traumatic stress experienced by students at his school, Principal John Piniat and his team created this video just to show how much students mean to them.

You can watch the video on the Feltonville Arts & Sciences YouTube channel: <https://bit.ly/2IXnC2Q>

BUILDING AN ATTENDANCE CULTURE

HOW TO START A “HEROES” PROGRAM

- 1 Definition and Selection.** Determine who the attendance heroes are. Who’s eligible to be one? What’s the attendance period (e.g., weekly, monthly, quarterly, yearly, multiple years)? We recommend shorter periods allowing students to continually strive for attendance. Shorter periods are also more manageable for younger students. Examples: Students who consecutively remains at 95% during the month. Class who maintains the longest streak of 95% present.
- 2 Student Awards.** What’s the best way to award your attendance heroes? Feel free to use the award certificates on the following pages. Also review the list of free/low-cost incentives.
- 3 Family Recognition.** Will attendance heroes be announced at a school event? If so, how will parents/guardians also be recognized? How can they celebrate along with their child? After the event, how will you continue highlighting their family achievement?



(ABOVE) Student certificates for good attendance and attendance heroes.
*See Educator Packet Appendix.

(LEFT) Superintendent Hite congratulates the entire family for being attendance heroes.

More Advice from Fellow Educators and Parents

Rewarding Progress, Not Just Perfection

“Students should be rewarded for improved attendance, not just perfect records. Offering weekly perfect attendance awards can allow students to still have a chance to succeed the next week if they are absent this week.”

—Shanté Leneir Quartlebaum
Education Coordinator, *Families Forward*

Striving for Good Attendance

“Set quarterly perfect attendance challenges and recognize parents at the attendance awards assemblies. Striving for 95% allows a student to be recognized even if he doesn’t have perfect attendance.”

—Deanna Bredell
Assistant Principal, *Kenderton Elementary*

BUILDING AN ATTENDANCE CULTURE

THE ATTENDANCE SCOREBOARD

From John Piniat, Principal, Feltonville Arts & Sciences School

1 WHAT IS AN ATTENDANCE SCOREBOARD?

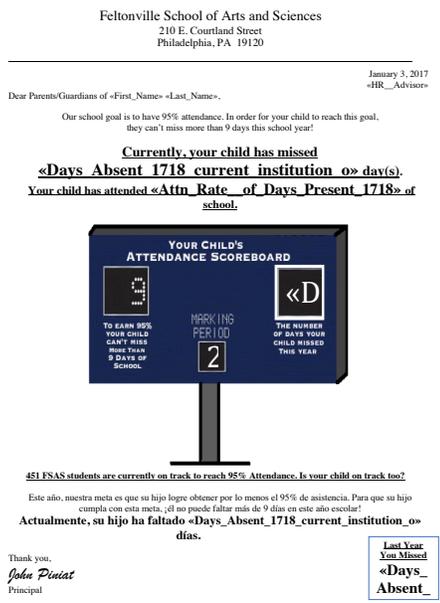
Just because attendance is serious business doesn't mean it can't be fun.

The Attendance Scoreboard is designed to gamify attendance among students and families, using the power of competition and our innate desire to reach goals to encourage showing up on-time, everyday, ready to learn.

The Attendance Scoreboard, pioneered by John Piniat, principal at Feltonville Arts & Sciences uses Microsoft Excel and Word to generate regular attendance "scoreboards" formatted to look like a sports scoreboard. All to inform and fire up the competitive spirit of students and their families.

Individual scores are also used to create classroom scores, motivating the entire class to strive for prizes tied to set attendance goals. It all works to create positive peer pressure among students who don't want to let down the "team."

It also offers a great way to identify, recognize and celebrate Attendance Heroes.



2 DOES IT WORK?

It's a simple idea, but it seems to be really effective. Seven early-adopter schools report substantial gains in attendance.

3 WHY DOES IT WORK?

It's all about leveraging the power of competition. Attendance Scoreboard translates attendance into terms students can understand. Then this understanding is used to "gamify" attendance. As Principal Piniat says, "Students now own their attendance score and talk about it with their parents."

4 HOW DO I USE ATTENDANCE SCOREBOARDS AT MY SCHOOL?

Contact attendanceandtruancy@philasd.org for support using the Attendance Scoreboard at your school.

BUILDING AN ATTENDANCE CULTURE

INCENTIVES: INTRODUCTORY OVERVIEW

INCENTIVES 101

- 1** **Make attendance incentives** a part of your school's comprehensive plan to build an attendance culture.
- 2** **Incentives work.** They encourage positive behavior, including improved attendance.
- 3** **There are many ways to use them.**
- 4** Accurate tracking is essential. **You can't reward what you don't record.**
- 5** **Incentives don't need to be costly to be effective.** Find out what motivates students. Ask them.
- 6** **Offer incentives to families, too!** They appreciate being recognized for their attendance efforts.
- 7** **Inter-class competition is a powerful motivator.**

For help sponsoring incentives, contact your local partners and businesses to see what in-kind or financial donations they can provide. You may also consider posting your project to Philly FUNDamentals: thefundsdp.org/get-involved/philly-fundamentals

FREE/LOW-COST IDEAS

For individual students:

- Award certificates
- Name on attendance or honor roll, school papers, community newspaper, etc.
- Lunch with principal, mascot, etc.
- Good calls home and thank you letters to parents
- School paraphernalia and supplies
- Prizes provided by local business or organization (e.g., store vouchers for snacks)

For classrooms:

- Trophy that travels between classrooms
- Class breakfast/park picnic with principal and families
- Field trip
- Disco Ball Party
- Dress-down day
- Extra recess
- Spirit week

PHILLY
fundamentals
Find a School. Fund a Future.

**A project planner for the incentives can also be found in the Educator Packet Appendix of this toolkit.*

BUILDING AN ATTENDANCE CULTURE

INCENTIVES: SAMPLE PROGRAMS

WEEKLY ATTENDANCE ASSEMBLY

For Kindergartners

To improve their weekly attendance, particularly on Mondays

Program Description:

Every Monday the names of every kindergartner who was present in school from Monday through Friday the prior week has the chance of being recognized and awarded as one of two Attendance Heroes.

Step 1: On the Friday prior to the Monday drawing, all teachers place tickets of those students who were present all week in the bowl.

Step 2: Before the drawing begins, an Attendance Mantra is said or sung.

Step 3: Two students' names are selected from the bowl, and they are awarded a prize. The following week, their families are invited to come to the assembly and be recognized along with their child.

Supplies/Materials:

Bowl + Raffle tickets
Award certificates
Two prizes each week (\$0.99 each)

Estimated Cost:

\$2.00/week

HIGH-FIVE CLUB

For Kindergartners

To improve their daily and weekly attendance

Program Description:

Weekly badges are awarded every Friday for kindergartners with perfect attendance all week.

Step 1: Design, create, order to use existing design to print badges.

Step 2: Keep track of perfect attendance for the kindergartners.

Step 3: Every Friday, hand out badges to the students with perfect attendance that week.

Step 4: Give high fives to those students wearing the badges as a way of congratulating them on their attendance success.

Supplies/Materials:

High-Five Club Badges
Safety pin or yarn to hold badges

Estimated Cost:

Cost of badges and pins based on quantity.

KING/QUEEN FRIDAYS

For K-5

To improve their weekly attendance, particularly on Fridays

Program Description:

Students who are present each Friday get a crown in the form of a necklace. Each Friday that they are present in school, they earn a sticker to be placed on their crown.

Step 1: Hand out crown necklaces to all students who are present on the first and subsequent Fridays. One crown necklace per student.

Step 2: Reward each student with a sticker to place on their crown each Friday.

Step 3: Beam with joy every Friday you are named King/Queen for attending school.

Supplies/Materials:

Foam Sheet Crowns
Stickers
Yarn

Estimated Cost:

\$1.00/24 Crowns
\$1.00/Book of Stickers

ATTENDANCE CULTURE

INCENTIVES: PROJECT PLANNING QUESTIONS

1 Incentive Program Name:

2 School, Grade(s), Class(es):

3 Attendance Goal:

4 **Program Description:** What's the incentive/reward? Who's eligible to get it? How do you get one? Can you get more than one in a year?

5 **Program Implementation Steps:** How does it work? Use clear action steps. How will you keep track of who has earned an incentive? Do you foresee any issues? If so, what are your plans to address it.

6 **Personnel: Who do you need on the project?** What would be their role/responsibilities? Is this project manageable given school-day expectations and schedules?

7 **Supplies/Materials and Other Requirements:** In addition to the incentive, what else is needed? Do you need anyone's approval? Forms? Anything else?

8 **Estimated Cost:** How much do you think this will cost?

BUILDING AN ATTENDANCE CULTURE

CREATIVE WAYS TO STAY CONNECTED

Family-focused events. Hold a dad-and-daughter dance in the fall, then a mom-and-son dance in the spring. Try out “throwback” movie nights or parties themed with TV shows or music from the parents’ generation.

At each event, announce your school’s attendance heroes and distribute books to younger students.

Good calls home. Develop a schoolwide strategy for every student to receive at least one good call home, for example, congratulating them on improved attendance, jumps in reading levels, good grades, great behavior, class leadership, etc.

Don’t wait: the earlier in the year, the better. And no need to stop at just one good call.



Family breakfasts from around the world.

Ask parents to organize a monthly family breakfast on a school day that showcases different cultures and foods. Be sure to get the word out about the delicious way to start the school day, on time and ready to learn.



Fridge Magnets for Weekly Home Trackers.

To show your appreciation, send each family a magnet along with their attendance packet.

ADDRESSING COMMON BARRIERS

Many students face circumstances that can make coming to school every day on time a challenge—such as illness, transportation, lack of clean uniform clothes, or other barriers. This section includes strategies to help educators connect families with available resources.

Also look for the ‘Helpful Resources to Overcome Attendance Barriers’ and ‘School Health Statement’ flyers found in the Family Packet Appendix of this toolkit.



ADDRESSING COMMON BARRIERS

RE-ENGAGEMENT: WHAT TO TELL PARENTS

When parents are given accurate information about their children's absences, new research shows they can become valuable players in making sure their kids show up at school.

We communicate with families all the time, but are we communicating the right things?

Most families drastically underestimate how often their children miss school. When researchers asked parents whose children were absent nearly 18 days in one school year how many days they thought their child had missed, they thought it was more like 10.

(Source: *Nature Human Behaviour*)

Instead of blaming kids and their families, focus on treating them with respect in trying to support their school attendance. For starters, show them respect by giving them the information they need to make informed decisions.

- **Few simple letters sent home with the right information.** The most effective letter in the research was the one that simply reported the total absences over time against school expectations. Parents could more accurately guess their kids' attendance at the end of the year if they had received letters with this kind of tracking information, suggesting that this information influenced their perception. With this kind of right information, chronic absenteeism decreased by 10 percent.
- **Daily personal calls home to absent students.** In addition to the robo-call from the School District, personal phone calls, let parents and students know they are missed and encourage them to come back, or even the same day if they, can so they don't miss the another whole day.

Decide in advance each month who will make these daily calls and ensure they have adequate time allotted on their schedule. On every call, as with "good calls," be sure to share something positive about the student. Great sample scripts can be found on readyfreddy.org.



- **We-missed-you note.** Use the we-missed-you note to make our youngest students who have missed school (for reasons generally out of their control) feel welcomed back and supported in their catching up. *See *Educator Packet Appendix*.
- **Absence excuse note.** Make it easier for parents with this excuse note template to get their notes in on time for every absence.

*See *Family Packet Appendix*.

Schools may want to pair these flyers together by printing double sided.

ADDRESSING COMMON BARRIERS

RE-ENGAGEMENT: IDEAS TO OVERCOME

Action plans to ease attendance barriers. Students who face significant barriers to attendance, such as illness, transportation, and a lack of clean clothes, need a plan to help their families, many of whom are experiencing challenges tied to poverty. To help, here are some ideas and resources:

- **Clothes Swap.** Organize a clothing swap where families can bring in uniforms, coats, boots, or rain gear that their children have outgrown while picking up “new” items that they need.
- **Clean Clothes.** Purchase a washer-dryer for the school building and allow families to wash school clothing. See if community partners can help with this expense or promote the request on Philly FUNDamentals. thefundsdp.org/get-involved/philly-fundamentals
- **Safe Passage.** Consider starting a walking school bus route to help children walk in groups. The Office of Transportation Services website also describes how to request transportation changes for students. philasd.org/transportation.
- **Housing instability, doubling up, evictions, homelessness.** Students experiencing homelessness have the right to remain in their school of origin even if they are no longer in-catchment, or to immediately enroll in their new neighborhood school without proof of address documentation. Build relationships with local homeless service providers to discuss potential ways to collaborate to support families and increase attendance.
- **Translation services.** Clearly communicate with limited English proficient speaking families in their home language the importance of attendance. Schools can partner with their Bilingual Counseling Assistants (BCAs) to provide interpretation and translation services for limited English-speaking ability families, and to send out school attendance notification letters in the language appropriate to the family. Schools can use their access code to contact LanguageLine for telephonic interpretation services. philasd.org/face/multilingual/interpretation-services/

**Helpful Resources to Overcome Attendance Barriers flyer can be found in the Family Packet Appendix of this toolkit.*

More Advice from Fellow Educators and Parents

Not a Robot, but a Person Who Cares

“When we see a pattern of absences, we contact families to offer support. Parents respond to being able to talk with a live person who cares and shows concern, rather than a robocoll or just another letter sent home.”

—Eva Sanchez, SAC Member, Parent, Student Climate Staff, McClure Elementary School

CONTRIBUTORS

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City of Philadelphia

Department of Human Services

- Katie Brooks, Truancy Prevention and Intervention Fellow
- Dionne Freeman, Truancy Intervention and Prevention Program Administrator
- Barbara Newton, Social Worker Supervisor
- Luciana Terrell, Director of Education Support Center

Mayor's Office of Education

- Andrea DiMola, Community Schools Coordinator Supervisor
- Sarah Peterson, Communications Director

Bethanna CUA 8

- Carolotta Q. Stafford, Strengthening Families Coordinator

Catapult Learning, LLC

- Carrie Slater, Counseling/Family Connections Area Manager
- Kate Weyer, Counseling/Family Connections Supervisor

Children's Hospital of Philadelphia

- Sarah Dzedzic, Social Worker

Drexel University

- Rachel Viddy, Project Director, West Philadelphia Promise Neighborhood

Families Forward Philadelphia

- Laura Brown, Case Manager
- Shanté Quartlebaum, Education Coordinator

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- Deborah Smith, Reading Captain
- Terah Stivers, Special Projects Coordinator, Read by 4th
- Abby Thaker, Director of Strategic Partnerships, Read by 4th

Independence Mission Schools

- Benny Morten, Director of School Support

School District of Philadelphia

Office of Attendance & Truancy

- Molly Ashburn, Attendance Coach
- Shirley Carroll, Attendance Coach
- Kesha Hines, Attendance Coach
- Maurice West, Director

Office of Family and Community Engagement

- Jenna Monley, Executive Director
- Shannon O'Brien, Program Coordinator
- Lauren Rowland, Program Specialist
- Irene Kim, Family Engagement Project Assistant

Office of Research and Evaluation

- Adrienne Reitano, Senior Research Associate
- Kristyn Stewart, Senior Research Associate
- Giselle Saleet, Research Assistant
- Katherine Mosher, Research Specialist

Office of Student Health Services

- Irene Kratz, RN, Director of Nursing
- Natalie Mathurin, MD, Medical Director, Deputy Chief Health Service

Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities

- Rachel Holzman, Esq., Deputy Chief

Allen M. Stearne Elementary School

- Mecca Jackson, Principal
- Tiffany Clark, STEP Coordinator

United Communities Southeast Philadelphia

- Lauren Fein, Director of Case Management

William Penn Foundation

- Kellie Brown, Program Officer

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Read by 4th is the nation's boldest and largest citywide coalition of families and partners protecting every child's right to read. Please visit readby4th.org/about/partners.



2000 Hamilton Street, Suite 201
Philadelphia, PA 19130
215-814-4111
readby4th.org



440 N. Broad Street
Philadelphia, PA 19130
215-400-4000
philasd.org



Advancing Student Success By Reducing Chronic Absence

attendanceworks.org