



The Attendance Imperative: Attending school regularly is essential to students gaining the academic and social skills they need to succeed. Reducing absenteeism is a simple, cost-effective, but often overlooked strategy for improving academic performance. Starting as early as preschool and kindergarten, chronic absence—missing 10 percent of the academic year—can leave third graders unable to read proficiently, sixth graders struggling with coursework and high school students off track for graduation. Chronic absence is especially problematic among students living in poverty who are most likely to have poor attendance over multiple years and least likely to have the resources to make up for the lost time in the classroom. In some communities, chronic absence affects more than one out of four children.

Unfortunately, many schools and communities don't realize the extent of the problem because districts don't look at all the right data. They're paying attention to how many students show up every day and how many skip school, but not how many miss so much school in excused and unexcused absences that they're at risk academically.

The good news is chronic absence can be significantly reduced when schools, families and community partners work together to monitor data, nurture a habit of regular attendance and address hurdles that keep children from getting to school every day such as lack of access to health care, unhealthy environmental conditions, unreliable transportation, housing instability or the lack of safe paths to school.

Why we should we care: Chronic absence is a problem we can solve, especially if business leaders work with schools, parents and communities to improve student attendance. Business leaders should get involved for the following reasons:

- **The workforce challenge:** Absenteeism contributes to high school dropout rates, leaving students without the academic credentials and skills needed to compete in a 21st century workforce.
- **The soft skills challenge:** Regular attendance is the precursor to the “soft skills” that you will continue to expect and require. Students who don't develop the habits associated with good attendance in the early years will find it difficult to develop them as adults.
- **The productivity challenge:** Children who are sick miss school. And their parents miss work. As employers, you have a real stake in reducing the numbers of days that children stay home due to preventable illnesses.

How we can make a difference:

Marshal the data

- Work with your superintendents to ensure the district is tracking chronic absence numbers—how many total absences for each student—not just daily averages of how many students showed up.
- Encourage districts to evaluate each school, grade and neighborhood. Share these [data tools](#).



Nurture a culture of attendance

- Work with a local school to provide incentives for good or improved attendance, such as gift certificates, books, healthy snacks or backpacks.
- Host a community forum to discuss the need for good attendance and build support for solutions.
- Talk to other business leaders about the role attendance plays in improving achievement and school success.
- Educate your own employees about the importance of good school attendance. Share these [handouts](#).
- Put up a poster promoting good attendance in your store or office window. See [these examples](#).
- Join a local coalition taking a community-wide approach to improving attendance. See if your community is involved with the [Campaign for Grade-Level Reading](#).

Address barriers to good attendance

- Work with community members to start a “Walking School Bus” or other ways to create safer routes to school.
- Support programs that address the health barriers to attendance, particularly asthma and dental care.
- Encourage employees to volunteer as attendance buddies or mentors for chronically absent students.

For more information, go to Attendance Works at www.attendanceworks.org.

