

10 Things a School Can Do to Improve Attendance

1. Make students and parents or guardians feel welcome at school and school events.
2. Create an environment that enables students to succeed in academics or activities by acknowledging accomplishments, even small ones.
3. When a student is absent, immediately talk to the student's parent or guardian.
4. When students are absent, talk to them upon their return about why they were gone.
5. Forge relationships with local businesses where youths may congregate when truant so those business owners encourage students to go back to class.
6. Forge relationships with local law enforcement, juvenile courts, and faith-based or community organizations to share information and suggestions for keeping students in school.
7. Don't provide the temptation for youths to become truant by keeping campus closed during lunch and breaks.
8. Empower and expect teachers to take action when they think a student may be truant.
9. Reward and recognize good attendance.
10. Make school a place where students feel safe from harm and harassment.

This pamphlet was produced by the Attendance & Truancy Division, Lake County Center for Dropout Prevention, a program that serves Lake County, and is funded by the Illinois State Board of Education's Truant's Alternative & Optional Education Program (TAOEP). For more information about ATD, call (847) 223-3400, x223 or go to our website www.lake.k12.il.us.

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School Contact:

Educator's Guide

Improving Student Attendance



Sponsored by:

- Illinois State Board of Education
- Truant's Alternative Optional Education Program



Attendance & Truancy Division

Monika Schwander, Director

19525 W. Washington Street
Grayslake, Illinois 60030

Phone: 847.223.3400

Fax: 847.223.3415

Web site: lake.k12.il.us

Promote a Culture of Daily Attendance



Teachers, school staff and members of the community, can help build a positive culture of attendance, by communicating about it throughout the school year and showing students that they are valued members of the school.

If students continue to struggle with attendance, teachers can partner with the school's attendance team to find out what is going on and help the child improve their attendance.

Dealing with truancy involves both early and effective action to get the students back to school. It also requires taking steps to engage students at school once they return. Some strategies schools can use include:

- Establish a School Attendance Planning Team
- Encourage in-school, not out-of-school, suspensions
- Adjusting student schedules (when applicable)
- Offer alternative programs for credit recovery and supportive services
- Send opening school attendance packet expressing attendance goals and policies
- Review attendance data to look for patterns of absences—excused and unexcused
- Evaluate possible barriers to attendance beyond the classroom, such as health, transportation and housing problems

For those beginning to tackle truancy issues, ATD recommends reviewing the *Strategies and Tools for Truancy and Dropout Prevention*, available at www.lake.k12.il.us.

Truancy Predictors:

- ☆ Disengagement from school
- ☆ Lack of success in school
- ☆ Association with delinquent peers
- ☆ Personal delinquent values
- ☆ Lack of family attachment

Definition's:

Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE)

Compulsory School Age - a student between the ages of 6-17 required to attend school.

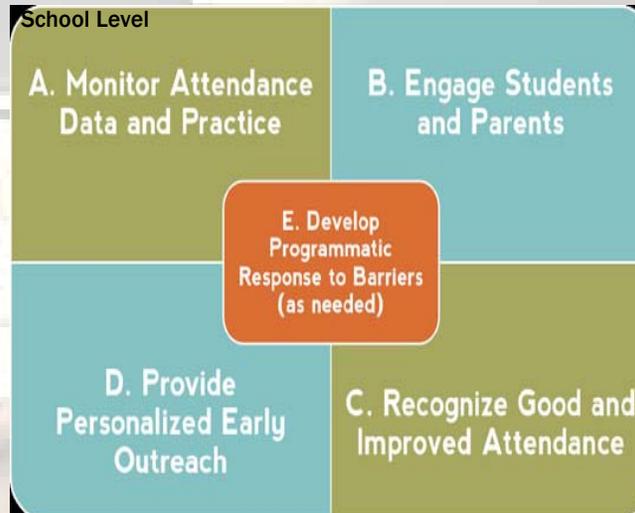
Truant - a child who is absent without valid cause from school.

Chronic Truant - a child who is absent without valid cause from school for 5% or more of the previous 180 regular attendance days (9 days).

Key Elements for Reducing Chronic Absences

Source: [Bringing Attendance Home: Engaging Parents in Preventing Chronic Absence Toolkit](#).

Based upon related research and work with schools and districts over the last several years, Attendance Works has identified the following key elements of a comprehensive approach to reducing chronic absence.



The first level (chart above) of elements exists at the school level. Schools that have these elements in place over the course of an entire academic year see measurable improvements. The second level incorporates the district and community resources (chart can be seen at Attendance Works Website).

Key Principles for Engaging Parents

Research shows parent involvement has a positive impact on school attendance. In addition, Joyce Epstein and Steven Sheldon from Johns Hopkins University found that certain parent engagement practices contribute to improving daily attendance and decreasing chronic absence. Schools have better attendance when they:

- Orient parents on school policies and expectations for student attendance and on-time arrival
- Provide parents with a school contact person
- Communicate often (as needed) to provide all families with information on attendance
- Reward students for excellent attendance. (This is not the same as perfect attendance. Attendance Works suggests rewarding students for improved attendance as well.)

Make home visits

Refer chronically absent students to a school counselor or a truant officer who intervenes in firm, but positive, ways

For a complete list of actions schools can take to involve parents visit www.attendanceworks.org. When seeking to engage parents, it's important to remember these key principles:

- Engage families early
- Establish a positive relationship
- Communicate clear expectations and support
- Use approach based on student strengths
- Ensure parent understands impact of school absences
- Attempt to communicate in the parent's primary language
- Offer support when needed
- Parent engagement is an on-going process, not a one-time event

Truancy Outcomes: Increased risk for:

- ☆ Poor academic performance
- ☆ School dropout
- ☆ Delinquency
- ☆ Teenage pregnancy
- ☆ Substance Abuse