

# Partnering with Families to Address Truancy and Attendance

According to Ohio's zero tolerance law, local school boards must have a zero tolerance policy for violent, disruptive or inappropriate behavior including excessive truancy. Districts also are charged with establishing strategies to address such behaviors that range from prevention to intervention.

Engaging the families of all students to prevent truancy is critical. When families are engaged in their children's education, they are more likely to make sure their child attends school. This important link from parental involvement to attendance is explained in a national report by Chang, H.N. & Romero, M. (2008). When parents understand what goes on at school and the importance of attendance, they are more likely to ensure that their children attend school regularly. Working together with the families of truant students as an intervention also is important. It is particularly important to work closely with families of children with IEPs, since this student population typically has the highest incidence of school absence. When parents understand that their child's learning needs are being met at school and they have a positive connection with the school, they are more likely to ensure that their children attend school.

## Sample Action Steps

### Universal Strategies (for all students and families)

- Start young. Work with families of kindergarten students to help them understand that attendance is critical to their child's learning.
- Teachers talk with parents at the beginning of the school year about the importance of regular attendance for student achievement. In many cultures, teachers are respected and their direction is valued by families.
- A school contact person should be responsible for monitoring student absences and available to discuss attendance issues.
- Clearly communicate to non-English speaking families in their home language the importance of attendance.
- Build strong personal relationships between teachers and parents.
- Place responsibility for verification of excessive excused absences for illness on parents and students. If the reasons for the absences are not verified by a doctor or appropriate school official, count those absences as unexcused.
- Telephone parents/guardians at work or in the evening to verify absences.
- Use bilingual aides to contact parents with limited English-speaking ability and send out school attendance notification letters in the language appropriate to the family.
- Install a telephone voicemail system to record absence excuses before school opens and to reduce the workload of the office staff in the morning. Advertise the service to all parents.
- Monitor student attendance and absence through a computerized attendance record-keeping system that keeps track of any unexcused absences.
- Clarify school standards related to attendance by making sure high school students and their families understand the consequences of unexcused absences.
- Set up a telephone hotline in the school district attendance office that allows community residents to report apparent truants anonymously so that school attendance complaints can be investigated.

- Offer attendance incentives for all students.
- Choose a highly visible place to post the names of students with perfect attendance.
- Hold a drawing for special prizes donated by local businesses. Use perfect attendance as the eligibility requirement for the drawing.
- Send commendation letters to students and parents for perfect attendance and improved attendance.
- Seek small or large financial incentives from the parent association to be awarded to the classroom with the best attendance record; allow teachers to spend financial rewards for any purpose selected by the class members or the teacher.
- Initiate a "Cross-Age Helper" system in which older high school students with good attendance are permitted to assist younger students on a weekly basis.
- Personalize relationships between children and attendance office personnel; ask office aides, clerks and secretaries to make individual contact with "high-risk" students on a daily basis.
- Establish homeroom periods in secondary schools, with students remaining with the same homeroom teacher all four years; make homeroom teachers responsible for monitoring their students' attendance records and discussing truancy with parents/guardians.

### **Targeted/Intensive Strategies (For students who may need extra help with building literacy skills)**

- Develop a system that contacts parents promptly when their child is absent.
- Keep accurate attendance records that show who has been reported as truant and what efforts have been made to hold a conference with the parent or guardian and with the student. When the normal avenues of school intervention are exhausted, refer habitual truants to the proper authorities.
- Schedule home visits with families of students with irregular attendance or those who are chronically absent, especially when no phone contact could be made.
- Certain factors related to poverty contribute to absenteeism. These include lack of transportation, not having coats and boots, lack of clean clothes and the need for health care. Work with families and community agencies to help link families to services and supports they need to address these issues.
- Refer students with frequent absences to a counselor, administrator or school social worker to identify problems that contribute to truancy and recommend solutions.
- When parents work late shifts, help them establish ways to ensure their child is awake and ready for school in the morning.
- When a student is deemed truant, initiate a weekend day for make-up classes. For students who fail to attend, establish an after-school or weekend study program.
- Develop an "Adoptee Program" in which teacher volunteers make informal contacts with "high-risk" students on a weekly basis.
- Refer students and parents to outside agencies for counseling.
- Publicize the consequences of becoming classified as a truant and enforce them consistently.

## Resources

*Present, engaged, and accounted for: The critical importance of addressing chronic absence in the early grades.* Chang, H.N. & Romero, M. (2008). Columbia University, Mailman School of Public Health, National Center for Children in Poverty.

This report examines the importance of establishing good attendance patterns from the earliest years of education. It provides strategies for schools and communities to work together early on to ensure families get their children to class consistently and encourage intervention before problems are more difficult and costly to ameliorate. [http://www.nccp.org/publications/pub\\_837.html](http://www.nccp.org/publications/pub_837.html)

### ***Meeting the challenge of student attendance at the high school level***

This feature article from the Principals' Partnership discusses effective programs and policies, as well as best practices in high schools for preventing truancy and providing intervention for truant students. <http://principalspartnership.com/feature204.html>

### ***Improving school attendance: A resource guide for Virginia schools***

This document provides a comprehensive look at attendance from kindergarten to graduation and offers sound preventative strategies, as well as interventions. It was developed under the leadership of the office of student services at the Virginia Department of Education in 2005.

<http://www.doe.virginia.gov/VDOE/studentstvcs/ImprvngSchAttend.pdf>

### ***Research Brief: Partnership Activities Help Improve Student Attendance in Elementary Schools***

This brief highlights successful practices for improving attendance that were implemented at elementary schools in the National Network of Partnership Schools.

[http://www.csos.jhu.edu/P2000/Research/type2\\_research\\_briefs/ttype2i7.htm](http://www.csos.jhu.edu/P2000/Research/type2_research_briefs/ttype2i7.htm)

## Evidence-Based Programs

Click [here](#) to link to evidence-based programs that include family involvement strategies in addressing truancy.

## Sources

California Department of Education (2009) School Attendance Improvement Strategies. Retrieved March 3, 2009, from California Department of Education. Web site: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/ai/cw/attendstrategy.asp> .

Chang, H.N. & Romero, M. (2008). Present, engaged, and accounted for: *The critical importance of addressing chronic absence in the early grades*. Retrieved Jan. 30, 2009, from Columbia University, Mailman School of Public Health, National Center for Children in Poverty Web site: [http://www.nccp.org/publications/pub\\_837.html](http://www.nccp.org/publications/pub_837.html)

Sheldon, S. B. & Epstein, J. L. (2004) Getting students to school: using family and community involvement to reduce chronic absenteeism. *School Community Journal* 4(2), 39-56.

Epstein, J. L. & Sheldon, S. B. (2002). Present and accounted for: Improving student attendance through family and community involvement. *Journal of Educational Research*, 95, 308-318.