

Conversation Guide for Schools: Talking with Families about Attendance for Students in Grades 6-8

Using this Guide

Attendance conversations provide a supportive space to explore the family's perspectives, identify barriers, and collaboratively develop practical solutions. Schools and districts can use the questions below to guide meetings with families about student attendance. The facilitator should use open-ended questions, allow time for reflection, and keep the conversation strengths-based and focused on actionable strategies.

- **Example:** *What are your thoughts about how important school is?*
- **Non-example:** *Did you know that your child is required to attend school?*

STUDENT/FAMILY BACKGROUND

- What are your child's strengths, skills, or interests?
- How does your child spend their time outside of school?
- How does your child handle stress or challenges?
- What motivates your child?

STUDENT/FAMILY SCHOOL EXPERIENCE

- What school subjects or activities does your child enjoy most, and why?
- How does your child feel about attending school?
- How do you view school and attendance for your child?
- What has your child's experience at school been like so far?
- Who at school does your child feel comfortable talking to if they're having a hard day?
- What situations, times, or classes are most difficult for your child?
- What goals do you and your child have for learning this year?

ATTENDANCE CHALLENGES

- What makes it difficult for your child to attend school regularly? (e.g., transportation, health, family responsibilities, school environment, etc.)
- Describe your child's daily routines at home (morning, bedtime, etc.). What about these routines support or make it challenging for your child to attend school regularly?
- Have there been any changes at home that affect your child's attendance?

- What strategies have you tried in the past to support attendance, and how have they worked?
- Are there school policies or practices that make attendance easier or harder for your child?

SCHOOL-BASED SUPPORTS FOR STUDENTS

- What can the school do to better support your child’s learning and attendance?
- How does your child learn best (i.e. hands-on, reading, listening, etc.)?
- What supports or resources have helped your child succeed academically?

FAMILY SUPPORT

- What would help you feel more confident in supporting your child’s attendance?
- Are there resources, communication tools, or guidance from the school that would make it easier to support your child?
- How can school staff partner with you to address barriers to attendance?
- Have there been any shifts in family or home dynamics over the past few months/years?
- How could the school make it easier for you to connect with teachers, counselors, or other staff?

Building a Collaborative Attendance Plan

Close the conversation by working with families to turn their insights into a practical plan for improving attendance. Keep the approach positive and solution-focused, highlighting the family’s strengths and ideas while ensuring the dialogue remains constructive and supportive.

SUGGESTED REFLECTION PROMPTS

- Based on our conversation, what are some steps we can take together to support your child’s attendance?
- What goals or actions feel realistic for your child and family right now?
- How will the school follow up with you to ensure supports are working?

NOTES: