

Improving Attendance in Your School and Classroom

Improving Attendance in Your School and Classroom

Getting Them There, Keeping Them There

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CORWIN
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INTRODUCTION

**“Attendance is not about filling seats.
It is about opening doors to learning,
belonging, opportunity, and possibility.”**

POEM: DID I MISS ANYTHING?

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* Improving Attendance in Your School and Classroom

Nothing. When we realized you weren't here
we sat with our hands folded on our desks
in silence, for the full two hours

Everything. I gave an exam worth
40 per cent of the grade for this term
and assigned some reading due today
on which I'm about to hand out a quiz
worth 50 per cent

Nothing. None of the content of this course
has value or meaning
Take as many days off as you like:
any activities we undertake as a class
I assure you will not matter either to you or me
and are without purpose

Everything. A few minutes after we began last time
a shaft of light descended and an angel
or other heavenly being appeared
and revealed to us what each woman or man must do
to attain divine wisdom in this life and
the hereafter
This is the last time the class will meet
before we disperse to bring this good news to all
people on earth

Nothing. When you are not present
how could something significant occur?

Everything. Contained in this classroom
is a microcosm of human existence
assembled for you to query and examine and ponder

This is not the only place such an opportunity has been gathered
but it was one place
And you weren't here

Source: "Did I Miss Anything?" in Did I Miss Anything?: Selected Poems, 1973–1993, Tom Wayman, 1993, Harbour Publishing. Reprinted with permission from the publisher.

THE VALUE OF BEING PRESENT

When students ask, “*Did I miss anything?*,” they are usually asking about assignments, notes, or homework. This poem reminds us that they are asking the wrong question. The better question is, “*What experiences, conversations, relationships, and opportunities can never be re-created once they are missed?*”

Attendance is not simply about being in a seat. It is about being part of something that only happens once.

- ◆ Learning is more than completing assignments.
- ◆ Some experiences cannot be re-created after the fact.
- ◆ Every class period is an opportunity for learning, connection, and growth.
- ◆ Classrooms are communities, not just places where information is delivered.
- ◆ Presence matters because participation matters.
- ◆ Relationships develop through showing up consistently.
- ◆ Students often underestimate what they miss when they are absent.
- ◆ Teachers have the power to make each day worth attending.

“Attendance is the outcome. Student experience is the cause.”

1. THINK ABOUT A STUDENT WHO WAS FREQUENTLY ABSENT.

- * What do you believe that student missed beyond assignments or instruction?

- * What experiences, relationships, or opportunities were difficult to re-create?

2. CONSIDER YOUR OWN CLASSROOM.

- * If a student asked, “Did I miss anything?” what would your honest answer be?

3. COMPLETE THESE SENTENCES.

- ★ Students attend my classroom/school because _____
_____.
- ★ If students miss a day, they miss _____
_____.
- ★ One thing I can do this year to make every day more worth attending is _____
_____.

4. DISCUSS WITH A COLLEAGUE OR TEAM.

Create two lists:

- ★ Things students can easily make up after an absence
- ★ Things students can never fully make up after an absence

Compare your lists. Which list is longer?

As you read this book, return to these reflections often. Every strategy in the chapters ahead is designed to answer one essential question: **How can we create classrooms where students believe that being present truly matters?**

“Absenteeism appeared to be the facet most strongly related to academic performance.”¹

“In Elementary Schools, school safety has the strongest correlation with chronic absenteeism.”²

“In Middle Schools, both school safety and positive feelings about the school environment show moderate correlations with chronic absenteeism.”³

“In High Schools, social awareness, self-management, and supportive relationships are the topics most strongly linked to chronic absenteeism.”⁴

“Absenteeism in kindergarten was associated with negative first grade outcomes such as greater absenteeism in subsequent years and lower achievement in reading, math, and general knowledge.”⁵

“By 6th grade, chronic absence becomes a leading indicator that a student will drop out of high school.”⁶

UNDERSTANDING THE CAUSES OF ABSENTEEISM

Not every absence is preventable.

Students become ill. Families experience emergencies. Medical appointments cannot always be scheduled outside the school day. Severe weather, transportation problems, housing instability, and other circumstances sometimes make attendance impossible. These realities are part of every school community.

Recognizing these barriers is important. Attendance improvement should never begin by assigning blame to students, families, or educators. Instead, it begins by asking a better question: Which factors are beyond our control, and which factors can we influence?

Research consistently shows that while many reasons for absenteeism originate outside of school, the school experience itself also plays a significant role in whether students attend consistently.⁷ Students are more likely to come to school when they feel physically and emotionally safe, experience meaningful relationships with adults and peers, find learning engaging, and believe that their presence matters. In fact, based on a study of 3,116 schools and 1,734,870 students, the probability that a student was chronically absent increased or decreased by as much as 20 percent based on the school attended and what the staff in the school did to ensure students felt safe and engaged.⁸

This distinction is critical.

Schools cannot eliminate illness or family crises. They cannot control the weather or every transportation challenge. However, schools can create environments that encourage students to return, reduce avoidable absences, and strengthen students' connections to learning.

CAUSES OF ABSENTEEISM

Some factors are largely outside of the school's control, while others can be influenced through thoughtful practices and intentional relationships.

Factors We Cannot Control (acknowledge these)	Factors We Can Influence (improve these)
Illness and medical conditions	Positive teacher–student relationships
Family emergencies	Students' sense of belonging
Severe weather	Engaging, relevant instruction
Housing instability	Classroom climate
Transportation disruptions	School safety and welcoming environments
Family caregiving responsibilities	Clear communication with families
Community violence	Attendance supports and interventions
Court appointments	Flexible opportunities to reconnect after absences
Mental health conditions requiring treatment	Helping students feel successful and valued

CHECK-IN

WHERE DOES IT BELONG?

Place a check (✓) in the column that best represents each factor. Some factors may fit in both columns.

Factor	Mostly Beyond Our Control	Mostly Within Our Influence
Student illness		
Teacher– student relationships		
Family transportation		
Students feeling like they belong		
Engaging instruction		
School safety		
Family communication		

(Continued)

(Continued)

Factor	Mostly Beyond Our Control	Mostly Within Our Influence
Academic anxiety		
Returning after an absence		
Classroom climate		

Reflection: Which items in the “Mostly Within Our Influence” column deserve the greatest attention in your classroom or school this year?

Remember ...

As you begin exploring the strategies in this book, keep these ideas in mind:

- ☐ I cannot remove every barrier to attendance.
- ☐ I can create a classroom where students feel known.
- ☐ I can help students feel they belong.
- ☐ I can make learning worth attending.
- ☐ I can support students when they return.
- ☐ Every positive interaction increases the likelihood that students will come back tomorrow.

THE FOUR PILLARS OF TEACHER INFLUENCE ON ATTENDANCE

Although teachers cannot eliminate every barrier that keeps students from attending school, they have tremendous influence over what students experience when they arrive. Research consistently demonstrates that students are more likely to attend when they feel connected to caring adults, experience a sense of belonging, engage in meaningful learning, and receive support when challenges arise.⁹

Pillar	Teacher Focus	Why It Matters	Examples	Question to Ask
Relationships	Every student feels known and valued.	Students are more likely to attend when they know someone notices, cares, and expects them to be there.	Greetings, check-ins, positive communication, mentoring	Does every student have an adult who knows them well?
Belonging	Students feel connected to the class and school community.	Students return to places where they feel accepted, included, and important.	Morning meetings, cooperative learning, classroom jobs, traditions, extracurricular activities	Do students believe they are an important part of this community?
Instruction	Every day offers meaningful learning.	Students are more motivated to attend when learning is engaging, relevant, and interactive.	Engaging lessons, discussion, inquiry, hands-on activities, student voice	Would students feel they missed something important if they were absent today?
Support	Barriers to attendance are reduced.	Students are more likely to return when schools help them overcome challenges rather than punish them for absences.	Welcome-back plans, flexible catch-up, early outreach, collaboration with support staff	How easy is it for students to reconnect after an absence?

ASSESSING YOUR FOUR PILLARS

Take a moment to reflect on your current classroom or school. Rate each pillar using the scale shown.

Pillar	Needs Attention	Developing	Strength
Relationships			
Belonging			
Instruction			
Support			

CHECK-IN

- ★ Which pillar is your greatest strength? How do you know?

- ★ Which pillar has the greatest potential to improve attendance in your classroom or school?

- ★ If you focused on strengthening just one pillar this semester, which would it be?

- ★ Which strategies in this book are you most eager to implement?

ATTENDANCE DATA

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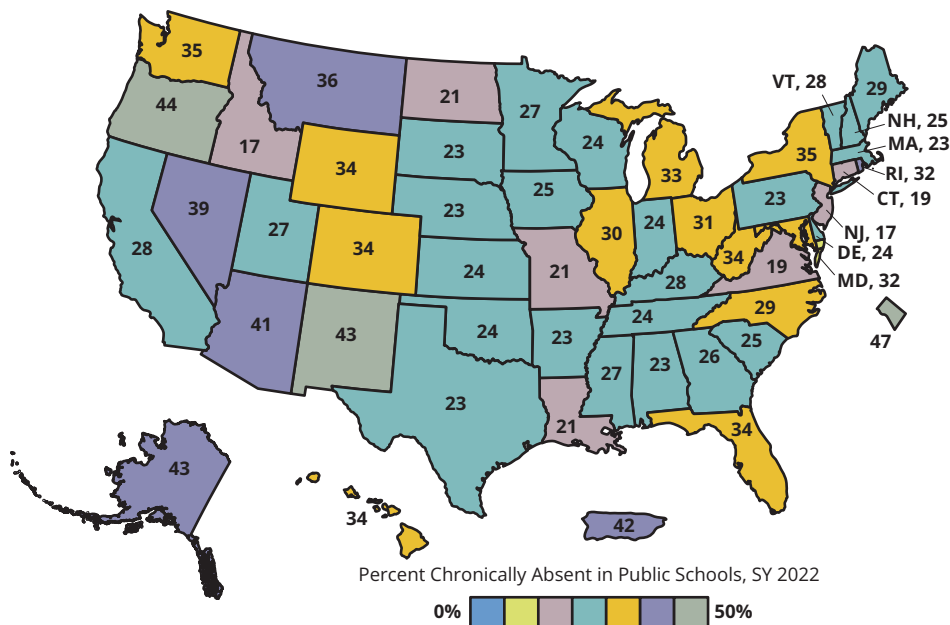
Improving Attendance in Your School and Classroom

Rates of absenteeism have remained high—higher than in 2019 (prior to the COVID-19 pandemic) and before.

Annual chronic absenteeism rates have nearly doubled since the 2018–2019 school year.¹⁰

But the good news is that the rates are slowly if steadily decreasing, in large part because of the efforts of educators.

RATES OF CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM BY STATE, SCHOOL YEAR 2022–23

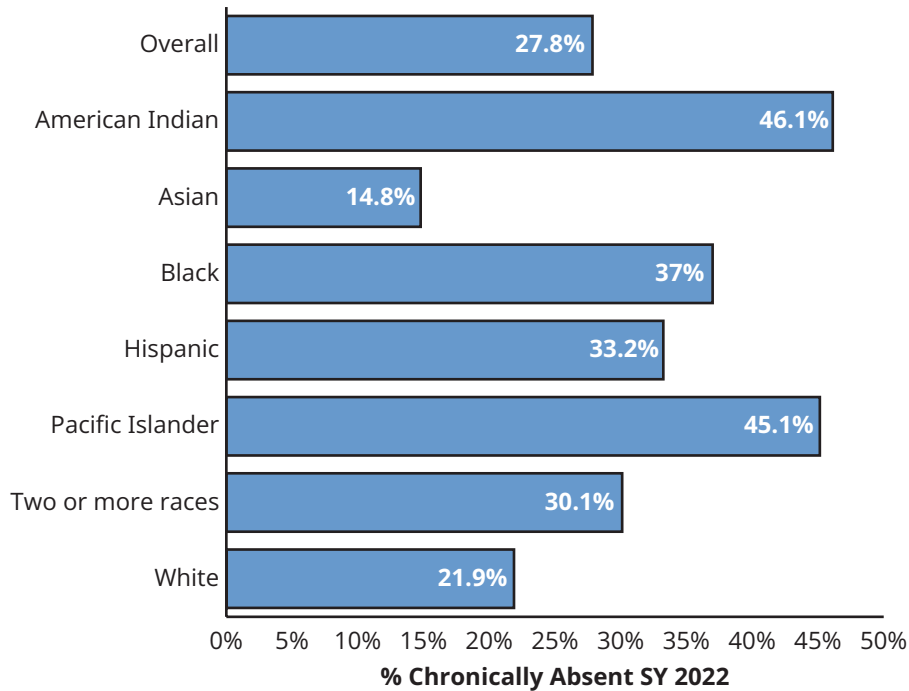


Source: U.S. Department of Education, ED Data Express, *Chronic Absenteeism Data*.

<https://www.ed.gov/teaching-and-administration/supporting-students/chronic-absenteeism>

RATES OF CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM BY CATEGORY, SCHOOL YEAR 2022-23

While prevalent across the country, students of different races and ethnicities experience chronic absenteeism at different rates.



Source: U.S. Department of Education, ED Data Express, *Chronic Absenteeism Data*.

<https://www.ed.gov/teaching-and-administration/supporting-students/chronic-absenteeism>

Students with disabilities are about 36 percent more likely to experience chronic absenteeism than students without disabilities.

Multilingual learners are 20 percent more likely to experience chronic absenteeism compared with non-English learners.

YOUR CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM DATA

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★ Improving Attendance in Your School and Classroom

Chronic absenteeism is defined as missing 10 percent or more of school, or generally eighteen days. This represents students who miss considerable amounts of schooling. Complete the following table by entering the approximate percentage of students in each cell, and identify trends and needs in your classroom or school.

	Most Recent Year	Second Most Recent Year	Third Most Recent Year
All Students			
Multilingual Learners			
Foster Youth			
Homeless			
Socioeconomically Disadvantaged			
Students With Disabilities			
American Indian			
Asian			
African American			
Filipino			
Hispanic			
Pacific Islander			
Two or More Races			
White			



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CHECK-IN

After completing the chronic absenteeism table, answer the following questions to identify patterns and determine where to focus your efforts:

LOOKING FOR PATTERNS

- ★ What trends do you notice across the past three years?

- ★ Which student groups have the highest rates of chronic absenteeism?

- ★ Which student groups have shown improvement? Which have remained relatively unchanged?

- ★ Are there groups whose attendance rates surprise you? Why?

LOOKING BENEATH THE NUMBERS

- ★ Which attendance gaps are the largest?

- ★ What factors might be contributing to these patterns?

- * Which groups may require additional supports beyond schoolwide attendance initiatives?

- * Are there times of the year when absenteeism increases? What might explain these trends?

SHOW UP AND THINK

- * Which strategies are currently in place to improve attendance?

- * Which student groups appear to be benefiting from these efforts?

- * Where might current strategies be falling short?

- * How well do your attendance practices address students' sense of belonging, engagement, and connection?

YOUR AVERAGE DAILY ATTENDANCE DATA

Average Daily Attendance (ADA) measures the percentage of students who attend school on an average day. It is different from chronic absenteeism, which measures the percentage of students who miss 10 percent or more of the school year. Complete the following table by entering the approximate ADA percentage in each cell, and identify trends and needs in your classroom or school.

$$ADA = \left(\frac{\text{Total Days of Student Attendance}}{\text{Total Days of Student Enrollment}} \right) \times 100$$

	Most Recent Year	Second Most Recent Year	Third Most Recent Year
All Students			
Multilingual Learners			
Foster Youth			
Homeless			
Socioeconomically Disadvantaged			
Students With Disabilities			
American Indian			
Asian			
African American			
Filipino			
Hispanic			
Pacific Islander			
Two or More Races			
White			

INTERPRETING ADA

ADA	Interpretation
99%	Excellent attendance
97%–98%	Strong attendance
95%–96%	Good, but room for improvement
Below 95%	Indicates a significant number of absences
Below 90%	Serious attendance concern



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CHECK-IN

After completing the ADA table, answer the following questions to identify patterns, celebrate successes, and determine where attendance can improve:

LOOKING FOR PATTERNS

- ★ What trends do you notice across the past three years?

- ★ Has your overall ADA improved, declined, or remained stable?

- ★ Which student groups have the highest and lowest ADA?

- ★ Which groups have demonstrated the greatest improvement over time?

LOOKING BENEATH THE NUMBERS

- ★ Which student groups consistently have lower ADA than the school average?

- * Are there gaps between student groups that warrant further investigation?

- * What school or community factors might be influencing these attendance patterns?

- * How might attendance differ during certain months or seasons?

SHOW UP AND THINK

- * Which attendance practices appear to be contributing to strong ADA?

- * Which student groups may need additional supports or interventions?

- * How effectively do your current practices promote student engagement, belonging, and consistent attendance?

- * Are there classrooms, grade levels, or programs that outperform others? What can be learned from their practices?

ADA vs. CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM

These two metrics tell different stories:

Average Daily Attendance	Chronic Absenteeism
Measures attendance across all students on an average day	Measures the percentage of individual students missing 10% or more of school
Can appear high even when many students are chronically absent	Identifies students who are missing significant instructional time
Often used for school funding and operational reporting	Used to identify equity gaps and target interventions

For example, a school may have an ADA of 95 percent, which appears healthy. However, if many different students each miss around eighteen or more days over the course of the year, the school could still have a chronic absenteeism rate of 20 percent or higher. This is why many educators consider chronic absenteeism a more useful measure for understanding student engagement and identifying students who need support.



ROOT CAUSE ANALYSIS

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Attendance data tells us what is happening. Root cause analysis helps us understand why it is happening.¹¹

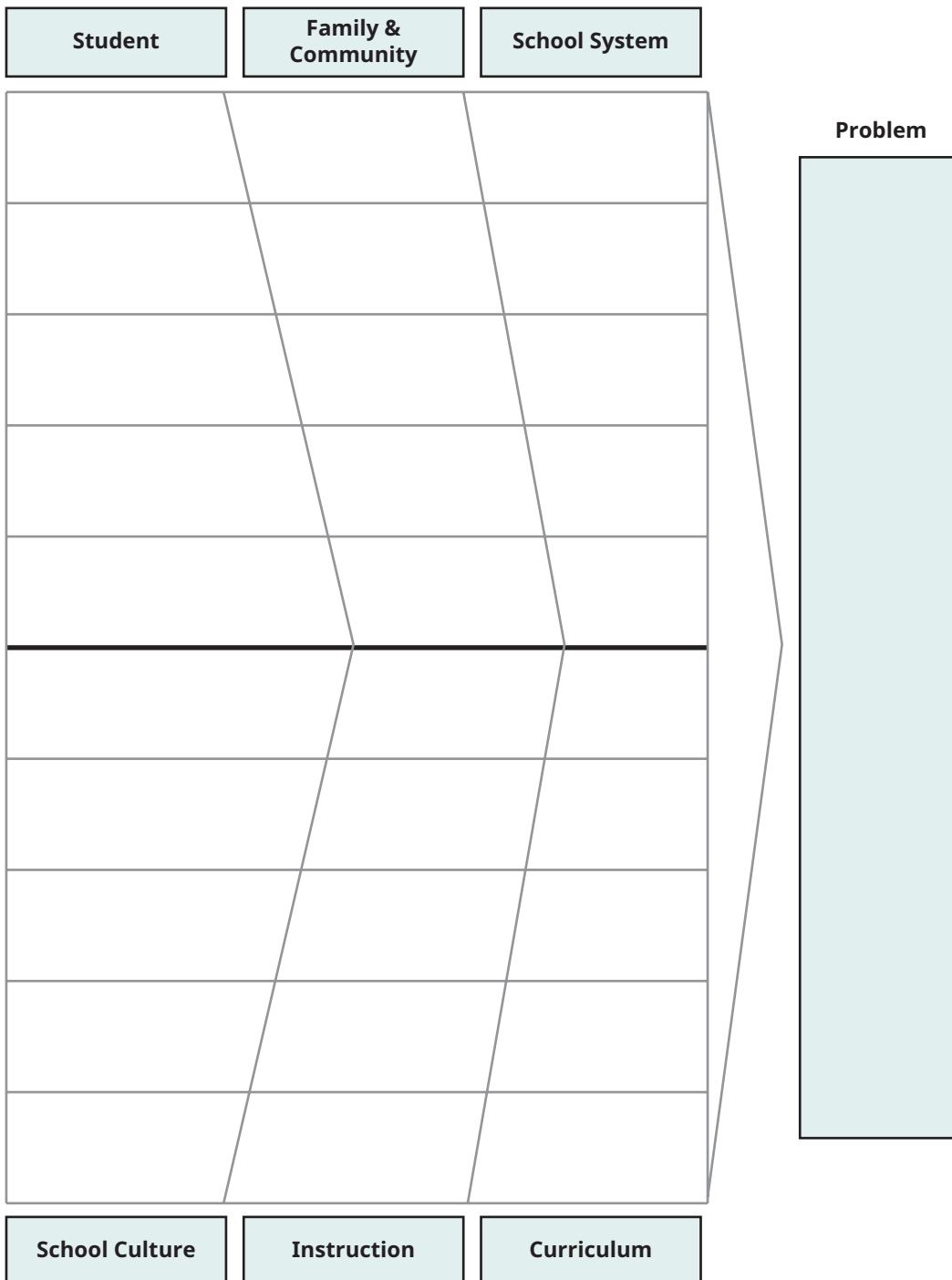
When attendance declines, it is tempting to jump immediately to solutions. We may assume students are unmotivated, families don't value education, or transportation is the primary issue. While these factors may play a role, lasting improvement begins by identifying the true causes of absenteeism rather than treating the symptoms.

As you analyze your attendance data, think broadly. Some causes may be outside of your school's control. Others are well within your sphere of influence. Focus your energy on where you can make the greatest difference.

ROOT CAUSE BRAINSTORM

For each category listed, identify possible factors contributing to absenteeism in your school. Then, complete the form that follows.

Category	Possible Root Causes
Student	Motivation, health, anxiety, peer relationships, academic confidence, sense of belonging
Family & Community	Transportation, housing instability, family responsibilities, communication, community resources
School System	Attendance procedures, scheduling, arrival routines, intervention systems
School Culture	Student belonging, adult relationships, safety, expectations, school climate
Instruction	Student engagement, relevance, classroom participation, meaningful learning experiences
Curriculum	Rigorous and relevant learning, student choice, cultural responsiveness, real-world connections



CHECK-IN

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* Improving Attendance in Your School and Classroom

1. Which category appears to have the greatest influence on attendance in your school?

2. Which factors are within your school's sphere of influence?

3. Which factors are outside of your school's control but should still be acknowledged?

4. Are your current attendance initiatives focused on symptoms or root causes?

5. If you addressed just one root cause this year, which would have the greatest impact on student attendance?

SPHERE OF CONCERN VERSUS SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

When analyzing attendance challenges, it is easy to become overwhelmed by all the factors that affect whether students come to school. Some of these factors are outside of our control. Others are well within our influence.

The Sphere of Concern includes everything that may affect attendance, whether we can change it or not. The Sphere of Influence includes the people, practices, and conditions we can improve through our daily actions and decisions.

Rather than spending our energy on factors we cannot change, effective educators focus on those they *can* influence. Small changes, consistently applied, often produce significant improvements in student attendance.

PART 1: IDENTIFY THE FACTORS

Enter the attendance factors that you’ve identified so far in the following form, within the category that best fits each (Sphere of Concern or Sphere of Influence).

Sphere of Concern	Sphere of Influence
<i>Factors outside of our direct control</i>	<i>Factors we can improve</i>

PART 2: PRIORITIZE YOUR INFLUENCE

Which three factors in your Sphere of Influence would have the greatest impact on attendance if improved?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

PART 3: TAKE ACTION

Identify three priority actions you will take to address the factors that are within your Sphere of Influence, including who will lead each action and when it will start.

	Priority	Specific Action	Who Will Lead?	When Will It Begin?
1				
2				
3				

CHECK-IN

- ★ What attendance barriers receive the most attention in your school?

- ★ Are you spending more time discussing problems or implementing solutions?

- ★ What is one action your team can begin this week that is entirely within your Sphere of Influence?

“You may not be able to change every circumstance affecting attendance, but you can create a classroom and school where students feel welcomed, connected, engaged, and eager to return.”



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SECTION 1

CREATING THE CONDITIONS FOR SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

Improving attendance begins before the first absence occurs. The most effective schools focus on creating conditions that encourage students to come to school every day not because they have to, but because they want to. When students feel connected, safe, and valued, attendance becomes much less of a challenge.

Creating these conditions requires intentional effort from every adult in the school. Small, consistent actions often have the greatest impact.

Schools that foster strong attendance typically emphasize four key areas:

1. **Relationships:** Every student has at least one trusted adult who knows, supports, and encourages them.
2. **Belonging:** Students feel accepted, included, and like an important part of the school community.
3. **School Climate:** The school is physically, emotionally, and psychologically safe, with positive interactions and respectful expectations.
4. **Expectations:** Students and families understand that attendance matters because learning, relationships, and participation matter.

These foundational conditions create a school culture where students are more likely to

- ◆ Look forward to coming to school
- ◆ Feel connected to their teachers and peers
- ◆ Engage actively in learning
- ◆ Seek help when challenges arise
- ◆ Develop positive attendance habits

The strategies in this section focus on strengthening these preventive factors. Rather than waiting for attendance problems to develop, educators can create environments where regular attendance becomes the natural result of students feeling welcomed, supported, and inspired to learn.

Attendance improves when schools stop asking, “*How do we get students to come to school?*” and begin asking, “*What can we change that will cause students to want (and enable them) to come to school?*”

RELATIONSHIPS: EVERY STUDENT NEEDS SOMEONE WHO NOTICES

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KEY IDEA

Strong relationships are the foundation of strong attendance. Students are far more likely to come to school consistently when they know that someone will notice if they are absent, care that they are there, and value their presence.

Creating the Conditions for School Attendance



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Students do not attend school simply because policies require it. They also attend because they feel connected to the people inside the building. A caring relationship with a teacher, counselor, administrator, coach, clerical staff, food service worker, bus driver, or other trusted adult can become one of the strongest protective factors against chronic absenteeism.¹ These relationships create a sense of accountability rooted in care rather than compliance. When students know someone is genuinely interested in their success, they are more likely to overcome obstacles and show up each day.

Building relationships does not require elaborate programs. Instead, it grows from small, intentional actions repeated consistently over time. Greeting students by name, asking about their interests, checking in after an absence, celebrating successes, and listening with empathy all communicate an important message: *You matter here*. For students who have experienced trauma, isolation, or repeated school failure, these everyday interactions can reshape how they view school and their place within it.

Schools that prioritize relationships create systems that ensure no student falls through the cracks. They intentionally identify students who may lack strong adult connections and provide mentoring, advisory periods, restorative conversations, or structured check-ins. When every student has at least one trusted adult in the building, attendance shifts from being a compliance issue to a relationship issue. Students are much less likely to stay away from places where they know they will be missed.

PRESENT EVERY DAY

You know relationships are a priority when ...

- ◆ Every student can identify at least one trusted adult at school.
- ◆ Staff greet students by name throughout the day.
- ◆ Teachers notice and follow up on student absences.
- ◆ Positive contacts with families outnumber contacts about problems.
- ◆ Adults know students' interests, strengths, and goals.
- ◆ Students regularly check in with an adult mentor or adviser.
- ◆ New students are intentionally welcomed and onboarded into the school community.
- ◆ Staff collaborate to ensure isolated students receive additional support.

WHO KNOWS THEM BEST?

Think about the students in your classroom or school. Complete the table below.

Student who . . .	Name	Adult Connection
Lights up when greeted		
Seems disconnected		
Has missed several days		
Rarely speaks in class		
Could benefit from a daily check-in		

CHECK-IN

What is one action you can take this week to strengthen a relationship with one of these students?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

“Students are more likely to attend school when they believe someone would notice and care if they were missing.”

BELONGING: HELPING EVERY STUDENT FEEL VALUED AND NEEDED

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✧ Improving Attendance in Your School and Classroom

KEY IDEA

Students are more likely to attend school consistently when they feel accepted, included, and valued as members of the school community. A strong sense of belonging transforms school from a place students must attend into a place where they want to be.



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Belonging is more than simply being present or fitting in a classroom. It is the feeling that “I matter here.” Students who experience a stronger sense of belonging are more likely to engage in learning, build positive relationships with peers, and persevere through challenges.² Conversely, students who feel isolated, invisible, or disconnected are at greater risk of disengagement and absenteeism. Importantly, belongingness is not static. It is dynamic. Every interaction, routine, and classroom practice either strengthens or weakens a student’s sense of belonging.

Belongingness requires intentional effort. Teachers foster belonging when they learn about students’ interests and cultures, encourage every voice to be heard, celebrate individual strengths, and create opportunities for meaningful collaboration. Schoolwide traditions, extracurricular activities, student leadership opportunities, and welcoming classroom environments all reinforce the message that every student is an important part of the community. When students experience respect for who they are, they are more likely to feel connected to school.

Belonging is everyone’s responsibility. From the front office to the cafeteria, every adult contributes to the climate students experience each day. Schools that prioritize belonging intentionally welcome new students, reduce social isolation, address bullying quickly, and create opportunities for students to build friendships. When students believe they are valued members of the school community, attending school becomes less about obligation and more about connection.

PRESENT EVERY DAY

You know students experience a sense of belonging when . . .

- ◆ Students feel welcomed when they arrive each day.
- ◆ Students have responsibilities in the classroom.
- ◆ Every student participates in classroom discussions and activities.
- ◆ New students are intentionally introduced and included.
- ◆ Students are expected to, and supported to, respond in class.
- ◆ Students work collaboratively with a variety of classmates.
- ◆ Differences are respected and celebrated throughout the school.
- ◆ Students see themselves reflected in classroom materials and displays.
- ◆ Bullying and exclusion are addressed promptly.
- ◆ Students participate in clubs, activities, or leadership opportunities.
- ◆ Adults regularly recognize students' strengths and contributions.

ONE MORE STUDENT

Think of one student who may not yet feel like they fully belong.

Student _____

What signs suggest this student may feel disconnected?

What is one intentional action you will take this week to help this student feel included?

How will you know your efforts are making a difference?

“Students return to places where they feel they belong. Every interaction is an opportunity to remind a student, *‘There is a place for you here.’*”

SCHOOL CLIMATE: CREATING A PLACE STUDENTS WANT TO BE

42

★ Improving Attendance in Your School and Classroom

KEY IDEA

A positive school climate encourages students to attend because they feel safe, respected, supported, and inspired to learn. When students experience a welcoming environment, attendance becomes a natural outcome rather than a constant challenge.



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School climate reflects the everyday experiences students have from the moment they arrive until they leave. It includes how adults interact with students, how students treat one another, the physical environment, and the overall emotional tone of the school. Students are far more likely to attend regularly when they know they will be greeted warmly, treated fairly, and learn in an environment where they feel physically and emotionally safe.³

A positive school climate is built through thousands of daily interactions. Respectful conversations, predictable routines, restorative responses to conflict, and high expectations communicated with care all contribute to an environment where students feel comfortable taking risks and engaging in learning. Conversely, schools characterized by frequent conflict, inconsistent expectations, or negative interactions can unintentionally discourage attendance, particularly for students who already feel vulnerable or disconnected. Keep in mind when a student has a negative interaction with one staff member, it can undermine schoolwide efforts. Therefore, it is crucial to monitor and respond to difficult interactions at the adult level as well as the student level.

Creating a positive climate is a shared responsibility. Every adult, from classroom teachers and office staff to bus drivers, cafeteria workers, custodians, and administrators, shapes students' daily experiences. Schools that intentionally invest in kindness, inclusion, student voice, and positive relationships create environments where students feel welcomed and valued. When students enjoy being at school, improving attendance becomes significantly easier.

PRESENT EVERY DAY

You know your school has a positive climate when ...

- ◆ Students report feeling physically and emotionally safe.
- ◆ School expectations are clear, consistent, and fair.
- ◆ Conflicts are resolved respectfully and restoratively.
- ◆ Bullying and harassment are addressed promptly.
- ◆ Students have opportunities to share their ideas and opinions.
- ◆ Classrooms are welcoming, organized, and inviting.
- ◆ Adults model kindness, empathy, and professionalism.
- ◆ Positive interactions outnumber negative ones throughout the school day.

“Students are more likely to show up when school feels like a place of safety, respect, and possibility, not just a place where learning is supposed to happen.”

CLIMATE TOUR

Imagine you are a student walking into your school for the first time. As you tour the campus, what messages does the environment communicate?

Students are welcomed by ...

Students may feel uncomfortable because ...

One area that could become more welcoming is ...

One action I will take this week to improve our school climate is ...

EXPECTATIONS: COMMUNICATING THAT EVERY DAY MATTERS

46

✦ Improving Attendance in Your School and Classroom

KEY IDEA

Clear, consistent expectations help students and families understand that attendance is an essential part of learning. When schools communicate high expectations with encouragement and support, students are more likely to develop positive attendance habits.



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Students thrive when expectations are clear and consistently reinforced. Attendance is no exception. While policies establish attendance requirements, expectations shape the culture around them. Schools that communicate the importance of showing up every day help students understand that attendance is about more than avoiding consequences. It's about participating in learning, building relationships, and contributing to the classroom community. Every day offers experiences that cannot be fully re-created after an absence.

High expectations are most effective when they are paired with care and understanding. Educators recognize that students may face barriers such as illness, transportation challenges, or family responsibilities. Rather than lowering expectations, effective schools work alongside students and families to overcome these obstacles. They communicate a simple but powerful message: *We believe you can be here, and we will help you get here whenever possible.*

Consistency is equally important. Students receive mixed messages when attendance expectations vary from one classroom or adult to another. Schools with strong attendance cultures establish common routines, reinforce positive habits, and celebrate improvement rather than perfection. By focusing on growth, encouragement, and shared responsibility, educators help students build lifelong habits of reliability, responsibility, and engagement.

PRESENT EVERY DAY

You know attendance expectations are clear when ...

- ◆ Students understand why daily attendance supports learning.
- ◆ Families receive consistent messages about the importance of attendance.
- ◆ Staff communicate the same attendance expectations across the school.
- ◆ Attendance is discussed positively rather than only when problems arise.
- ◆ Students are recognized for improved attendance and persistence.
- ◆ Teachers begin learning promptly, reinforcing that every minute counts.
- ◆ Students know what to do if they miss school.
- ◆ Adults balance high expectations with empathy and support.

EXPECTATION CHECK

Reflect on the messages students receive about attendance in your classroom or school.

What message do students hear most often about attendance?

- ☐ “Don’t miss school or you’ll get in trouble.”
- ☐ “Your learning matters every day.”
- ☐ “We notice when you’re here and when you’re not.”
- ☐ “We’ll help you overcome barriers to being here.”
- ☐ Other _____

One message I want students and families to hear more consistently is

One way I will reinforce that message this week is

“The goal isn’t perfect attendance. The goal is creating a culture where every student understands that their presence is valued and every day of learning counts.”