



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 student attendance matters to faith leaders: Faith communities and schools, despite different missions, share a common goal: whether it's Friday night, Sunday morning or a regular school day, they all care about preparing children for the future. Local congregations are well positioned to help because you are often the first place families turn to for guidance or parenting

Chronic absence represents both a symptom and a cause of many problems that faith leaders are already working to solve. High rates of absenteeism can:

- Signal a community in distress, whether because of unstable housing, violence or little access to healthcare
- Reflect a breakdown in family functioning
- Erode initiatives to improve schools and improve graduation rates
- Stall efforts to break the cycle of intergenerational poverty or to boost the local economy

This is a problem we can solve. We can build a strong culture of attendance in every community. We can ensure that school districts are tracking the right data to identify the students and schools headed off track. And we can marshal resources that many churches, synagogues and mosques already offer to address the challenges that may be keeping many students from getting to school: food, clothing, illness, transportation problems, housing instability and concerns for community safety.



How you can make a difference:

Build public awareness

- **Support a public messaging campaign** to convey that every school day counts. Faith leaders can share the pulpit and invite school leaders to speak about the local attendance campaign. Congregations can distribute [posters, handouts and stickers](#) to promote attendance and share the adverse impact of missing too much school.
- **Join with your superintendent, mayor** and others in a community-wide coalition to reduce chronic absence. See if your community is connected to the [Campaign for Grade-Level Reading](#).
- **Recognize and appreciate good and improved attendance.** Support school efforts to recognize students and families who are turning the corner on attendance.

Help students and families in your congregation make attendance a priority

- **Encourage students to attend school regularly:** If you work directly with children, youth and families, you have opportunities every week to ask how school is going, share the connection between regular attendance and academic achievement and help families overcome barriers to good attendance.
- **Talk with parents about absenteeism:** Use your regular interactions with parents to talk about any problems with attendance and to share why it matters. This is a natural extension of caring for the student's well-being.

Provide an extra shift of adults

- **Volunteer in schools:** Encourage your congregation members to serve as attendance buddies or mentors for chronically absent students. Use your own experience, skills and connections to work with young people and parents. Help organize events to recognize good and improved attendance and encourage local businesses to donate prizes as attendance incentives.
- **Work with school districts:** At the planning table, bring your knowledge about the needs and the resources available to help students and families struggling with health, housing or other issues.

Tackling chronic absence is a winnable strategy that can engage the entire community. Attendance is a simple, common sense metric already recorded by teachers and understood by parents. Schools, districts and communities that work together to reduce chronic absence often see attendance increase quickly.

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

