Why Attendance Matters

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Unpacking Attendance Terms

Average Daily Attendance
- The % of enrolled students who attend school each day. It is often used for allocating funding.

Truancy
- Typically refers only to unexcused absences and is defined by each state and sometimes by school district. It signals the potential need for legal intervention under state compulsory education laws.

Chronic Absence
- Missing 10% or more of school for any reason – excuse, unexcused, etc. It should be (but is often not) used to trigger early intervention.
Moving into Action Requires Knowing If Chronic Absence is a Problem

Most Schools Only Track Average Daily Attendance and Truancy. Both Can Mask Chronic Absence.

Chronic Absence For 6 Elementary Schools in Oakland, CA with @ 95% ADA in 2012

98% ADA = little chronic absence, 95%ADA = don’t know; 93% ADA = significant chronic absence
Chronic Absence Versus Truancy
(San Francisco Unified School District)

(Note: SFUSD identified chron/hab truants as = 10 unexcused absences)
Nationwide, as many as 7.5 million students miss nearly a month of school every year. That’s 135 million days of lost time in the classroom.

In some cities, as many as one in four students are missing that much school.

Chronic absenteeism is a red alert that students are headed for academic trouble and eventually for dropping out of high school.

Poor attendance isn’t just a problem in high school. It can start as early as pre-kindergarten. Improving attendance is a critical part of a comprehensive approach to ensuring students can read proficiently by the end of 3rd grade.
Students ChronicallyAbsent in Kindergarten & 1st Grade Less Likely to Read Proficiently in 3rd Grade

Percent Students Scoring Proficient or Advanced on 3rd Grade ELA Based on Attendance in Kindergarten and 1st Grade

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attendance Risk</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No risk</td>
<td>Missed less than 5% of school in K &amp; 1st</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small risk</td>
<td>Missed 5-9% of days in both K &amp; 1st</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate risk</td>
<td>5-9% of days absent in 1 year &amp; 10% in 1 year</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High risk</td>
<td>Missed 10% or more in K &amp; 1st</td>
<td>17%</td>
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Source: Applied Survey Research & Attendance Works (April 2011)
The Long-term impact of Chronic Kindergarten Absence Is Most Troubling for Poor Children

5th Grade Math and Reading Performance By K Attendance

Source: ECLS-K data analyzed by National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP)
Note: Average academic performance reflects results of direct cognitive assessments conducted for ECLS-K.
9th Grade Attendance Predicts Graduation for Students of All Economic Backgrounds

Note: This Chicago study found attendance was a stronger graduation predictor than 8th grade test scores.

Chronic absence data (as well as other attendance measures) should be examined by classroom, grade, school, neighborhood or sub-population.

If chronic absence is unusually high for a particular group of students, explore what might be common issues (unreliable transportation, community violence, asthma and other chronic diseases, poor access to health care, unnecessary suspension for non-violent offenses, lack of engaging curriculum, child care or afterschool programming, foreclosures, etc.)

If chronic absence is unusually low for a high risk population, find out what they are doing that works.
**Solutions Only Work If Grounded in Understanding Of What Leads to Chronic Absence**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discretion</th>
<th>Aversion</th>
<th>Barriers</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents don’t know attendance matters</td>
<td>Child is struggling academically</td>
<td>Lack of access to health care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School lacks a strong culture of attendance</td>
<td>Child is being bullied</td>
<td>No safe path to school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Poor transportation</td>
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Special thanks to Dr. Robert Balfanz, Everyone Graduates Center, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD for providing this framework.
Proposed Universal Strategies For Influencing Discretion and Identifying Causes of Absence

- Recognize Good & Improved Attendance
- Parent and Student Engagement
- Personalized Early Outreach
- School Team Monitoring Attendance Data & Practice
Increased Attendance Involves a 3-Tiered Approach that Fits with Most Reform Efforts

- **Universal/Preventive Programs**
  - All students in the school
  - Low Cost

- **Intervention Programs**
  - Students at risk for chronic absence
  - Some of a school’s students
  - High Cost

- **Recovery Programs**
  - Students who were chronically absent in prior year or starting to miss 20% or more of school
  - A small fraction of a school’s students
  - High Cost
Afterschool: An Untapped Opportunity

- Research and field experience show OST can help improve attendance in school.

- Focusing on attendance can improve collaboration with schools.

- By increasing school day attendance, OST can improve the academic success and reduce dropout.
1. 7th and 8th graders attending afterschool programs at a Boys & Girls Club skipped school fewer times, increased school effort and gained academic confidence. (2009)

2. Afterschool participants attending Pathways to Progress in Minneapolis and St. Paul came to school an average 18.4 more days than their peers. (2004)

3. School-day attendance improved for students in California’s Afterschool Learning and Safe Neighborhoods Partnerships Program. Students absent 10% of the year came another 11 days. (2002).
What Can Afterschool Programs Do?

Step 1: Create Culture of Attendance

a. Take roll every day in a caring manner
b. Partner with schools to educate families and students about the importance of attendance
c. Reach out to students/families with poor attendance
d. Offer incentives for attendance
e. Use engaging program activities to motivate students to come to school.
f. Analyze program attendance data to identify areas in need of improvement.

What would you add?
Step 2: Get/Share Attendance Data on Program Participants

a. Seek parent waiver allowing A/S to see attendance and grades, ideally as standard part of enrollment.

b. Regularly get data on in-school attendance for program participants.

c. Find out if you are serving any students with problematic attendance.

d. Use poor attendance in afterschool to identify students who might begin to have trouble showing up to school day program.

e. Partner with school staff to find out what are the challenges facing students with poor attendance and what would help get them to school.
Step 3: Find Out About Attendance In Schools Served

a. Find out what the school is doing to reduce chronic absence and improve attendance. Identify if there is a role for the afterschool program.

b. Learn if your school has a team that monitors attendance data; Seek membership on the team or at least access to review school day attendance.

c. Use the afterschool program as an opportunity to solicit insights from students and if possible parents about what are the barriers to attendance in the school day and what could help overcome them.