



EARLY MATTERS

Integrating Attendance Into Kindergarten Transition



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What Is the Transition to Kindergarten?

The transition into kindergarten, whether from a preschool or from home, represents an important milestone in a family's life. As children move into elementary school, there is a unique opportunity for schools to establish positive relationships with families and to encourage the development of habits that promote long-term success in school. A growing number of schools, preschools, districts, and communities now offer supports and programs to help families and children navigate this new experience.

Quality transition programming can be especially important for vulnerable populations such as families with children with special needs or those who speak a language other than English. Other vulnerable groups include families from a community with a history of negative experiences with educational institutions or those who are struggling with barriers related to poverty.

Why Address Attendance During Kindergarten Transition?

Helping families overcome challenges to getting to preschool or school and nurturing a habit of consistent on-time attendance is an often overlooked element of supporting a smooth transition to kindergarten. Research shows that students who miss 10 percent or more of the school year (just 2 days each month) in the very early years are at risk of falling behind in reading and math by third grade.

Unfortunately kindergarten is typically the grade with the highest levels of chronic absence in elementary school. Kindergarten chronic absence is a warning sign that families don't have the supports they need to overcome barriers to attendance prior to and during kindergarten. This is most often true for vulnerable populations that lack the resources to make up for lost learning time.

Public policies now require attention to reducing chronic absence, defined as missing 10 percent or more of school or preschool for any reason - including excused and unexcused absences and suspensions. The Head Start Performance standards require programs to monitor and address the needs of students who miss 10 percent or more of the program. The federal Every Student Succeeds Act requires all states to include chronic absence in publicly available school report cards. And in 36 states and the District of Columbia, chronic absence is a school accountability metric starting in kindergarten.



Who Can Make a Difference?

Principals and preschool directors are the critical leaders at the site level, creating the environment and the strategies that encourage families to make sure their children go to school every day and are on time. Site leaders are pivotal to ensuring every employee in the building – from bus drivers, office staff and cafeteria workers to teachers, social workers and health professionals – helps establish a positive, welcoming climate that motivates and supports consistent on-time attendance. The resources within this toolkit provide a “how-to” for integrating attention to attendance into key practices designed to smooth the transition to kindergarten.

District administrators, public agency and non-profit leaders, policy makers, funders and other influential stakeholders can use this toolkit to recognize how they can individually and collectively support implementation of the recommended practices. Attendance is more likely to be integrated into kindergarten transition practices when access to data, community-wide campaigns, professional development and funding are available.

What is in this Toolkit?

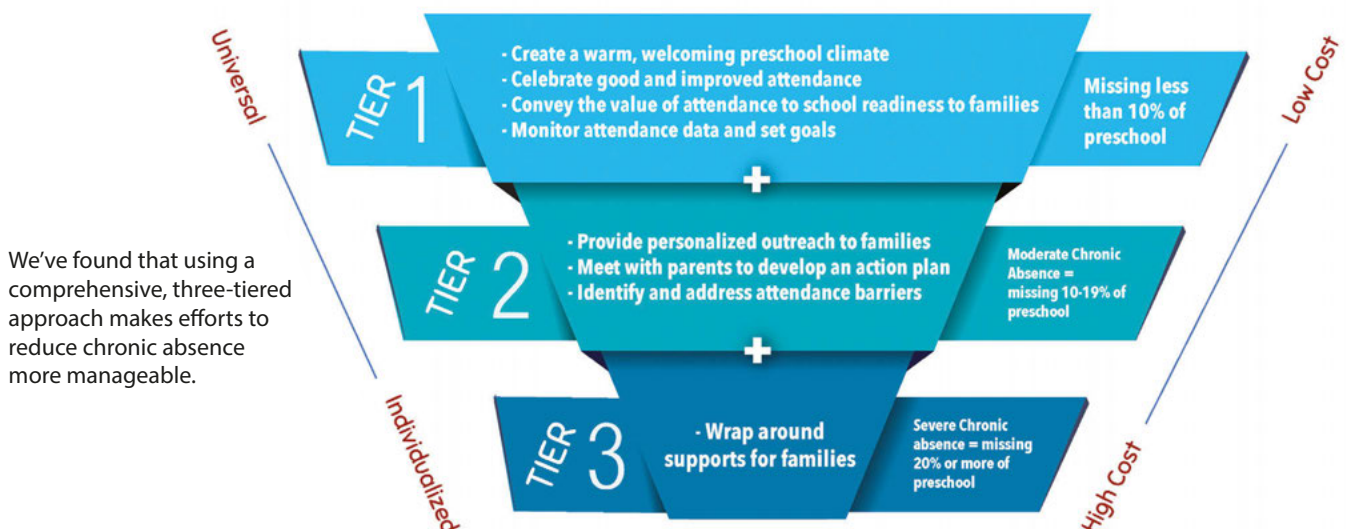


Early Matters offers ideas, resources and inspiring examples for schools, preschools and districts to help incorporate attention to attendance into practices for improving the transition to kindergarten at the site level. A separate set of practices are offered for districts and community partners to reinforce and encourage such practices through system level supports. Inspiring examples from sites and districts around the country show how integrating attendance awareness and positive attendance habits into transition practices can strengthen the impact of high quality programming and improve the likelihood that all children, including our most vulnerable students, can reach their full potential.

Site Level Practices

Schools, preschool and districts can integrate attendance into these five site level practices that support the transition to kindergarten.

- 1. Address Attendance During Transition Activities.** Research consistently shows positive results when educators address transition with intentionality. Orienting children to kindergarten should begin during the preschool year. Transition activities that include a strong emphasis on attendance help parents and children connect attendance with academic success.
- 2. Discuss Attendance When Welcoming New Families.** Family-teacher and teacher-child relationships are the bedrock of enthusiasm for attending school and learning. Relationship building is a one-on-one effort that takes patience and persistence. Outreach can range from a personal call home before school starts to a comprehensive year-long home visiting program. The more personal and warm the contact is, the more effective it is likely to be.
- 3. Equip Families to Connect Attendance and Educational Success.** Children whose families hold high expectations, set goals, monitor progress and actively assist with learning at home are most likely to do well in school. Schools, preschools and communities can provide parents with a variety of opportunities to learn about how to support their children's education. Integrating attention to attendance into these efforts is essential.
- 4. Use Attendance to Nurture a Strong School Community.** Community and family engagement is critical to establishing a warm, positive climate that motivates daily attendance for all children. The transition to kindergarten offers educators a critical opportunity for helping incoming families meet others and know that they are valued members of their new school community.
- 5. Offer Supports to Reduce Health Related Absences.** Research finds that preschool families report that over 60 percent of their children's absences are health-related. During the transition to kindergarten, preschools and schools are in a unique position to provide students and their families with information and access to services that help children stay healthy throughout the year. These efforts are even stronger when schools and early education programs partner with health providers in the community and leverage health resources already available in school or districts.



District and Community Supports

Whether or not preschools and schools integrate attendance into the site level practices is heavily influenced by whether districts and other key community partners work together to put in place systems to support adoption of good practice at scale. These supports create a foundation for infusing attendance into kindergarten transition efforts. What can districts and community partners do?



- 1. Engage Community Stakeholders in Promoting Attendance.** Districts play an essential role in setting the context for individual schools and preschools to improve their transition practice. The district, ideally in partnership with another public agency or prominent community leader, can convene stakeholders from local government, business, civic, social services and education sectors. Together they can discuss why attendance, starting in preschool and kindergarten, matters for long-term academic success and identify how they can work together to promote attendance.
- 2. Organize Attendance Campaigns that Reach Families with Young Children.** Families want their children to do well in school. But in the early school years, most families are still just learning that chronic absence, or missing just 2 days each month, starting in preschool and kindergarten, can result in young children falling behind. Community-wide messaging campaigns make it easy to share this important information with families and for families to hear reinforcing messages everywhere they go.
- 3. Monitor, Analyze and Review Chronic Absence Data.** Building capacity to monitor, analyze and review chronic absence data is essential to improving attendance. Children are at risk of chronic absence if they were chronically absent the prior year of school or preschool, or if they miss 10 percent of the school year in the first month. This toolkit provides ideas and resources to generate and share meaningful reports on chronic absence based on the attendance data they collected in schools and preschools every day.
- 4. Provide Joint Professional Development on Chronic Absence.** Too often administrators and educators are not aware that chronic absence is a challenge facing their schools or preschools, and they aren't familiar with effective strategies for improving attendance. Efforts to reduce chronic absence require schools and preschools to adopt a comprehensive, tiered approach. Key concepts, ideas and resources included in this toolkit can be integrated into existing professional development, or used to design professional development opportunities to equip educators to address chronic early absences.



Attendance Works is a national organization dedicated to advancing student success and closing equity gaps. Its website offers materials, studies, and success stories about reducing chronic absence. Sign up to receive updates at: <http://www.attendanceworks.org/>

This document is just a summary, for the full toolkit with links to many more resources, visit: <https://www.attendanceworks.org/resources/toolkits/integrating-attendance-into-kindergarten-transition/>

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