Attendance Works

Advancing Student Success By Reducing Chronic Absence

Establishing Schoolwide Attendance Recognition

School attendance is a simple, easily understood measure of student performance and engagement. One strategy for improving attendance is engaging students, parents, educators and community members in a campaign that offers positive recognition for getting to school on time.

What to Remember:

- Avoid recognizing perfect attendance. It is not wise to encourage children to come to school when they're sick. Students should be recognized for good and improved attendance.
- Consider how the incentive or contest can be more inclusive for students with special health-care needs.
- Attendance incentives are most effective when part of a comprehensive approach that includes outreach, positive relationships and assistance to remove barriers to attendance for all students and families. Recognition of good and improved attendance should be part of creating a schoolwide culture and accompanied by a deep commitment to ensuring that students are engaged in the classroom once they show up.
- Recognition of good and improved attendance does not need to be costly. Recognition from peers and the school through certificates or assemblies, extra recess time, homework passes or even dancing in the hallways goes a long way toward motivating students and classrooms. Ask students and families what they consider a meaningful motivator.
- Keep the long-term goal in mind: Relationships, recognition and incentives are positive ways to help students internalize the value of showing up every day. Recognition is not meant to be a bribe.
- Interclass competition is a powerful motivator. The sense of competition between classes (with recognition like a party for the class with the best monthly attendance) can be a powerful motivator. Such strategies encourage students to feel accountable to one another for attending class.
- Recognize timeliness as well as daily attendance. Because tardiness also has an adverse impact on learning, many schools spotlight punctuality as well as daily attendance.
- Send home information highlighting both the value of attendance and the consequences of poor attendance. Ensure families know about the recognition program and the importance of attendance for academic success as well as school policies in which poor attendance can result in failing a course or being retained. Sanctions should never be used without incentives.
- Offer recognition for families, not just students. Often, families appreciate access to resources such as food baskets, gas cards or bus passes.
- Implement the recognition program schoolwide. To foster a culture of attendance, every classroom needs to participate!
- Make sure attendance incentives are aligned with the federal Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act requirements and your district wellness policy. Celebrations and recognition should offer healthy foods or even avoid using food as an incentive altogether. Alliance for a Healthier Generation has information and ideas for fun, healthy incentives.

Ideas for Incentives

Teachers can offer:

- Positive comments to children
- Positive notes home to parents that appreciate their efforts to get their children to school on time
- Extra time at the computer, PE or recess
- Free homework pass
- First-in-line privileges for lunch or dismissal
- Pencils, pens, stickers, posters, book covers, bookmarks etc.
- Team certificates for the best record or most improved record
- Name on the "attendance wall" in the classroom
- Chance to act as teacher's assistant

Administration, PTAs and student councils can provide:

- Recognition during morning announcements
- Certificates/awards at student assembly
- Breakfast/lunch with the principal, superintendent, school board president, mayor or local celebrity
- School supplies (pencils with logo or flash drives)
- Food coupons redeemable in school cafeteria
- Smoothie party for class with best attendance
- "School money" for the school store
- Choice of donated products (movie, tickets, gift certificates)
- Traveling trophy for grade-level homeroom with best monthly attendance
- Attendance T-shirts, hats, buttons
- Age-appropriate rewards for most improved attendance

Good attendance helps kids succeed in school and bolster their self-esteem. Improving attendance requires a comprehensive approach that goes beyond sanctions and includes recognition.

Here are some steps schools are taking:

One California elementary school awards the class with the best attendance an extra 15-minute recess on Fridays supervised by the principal. The students enjoy the attention from their principal, and the teacher gets an extra-long lunch break.

An Oklahoma elementary school issues "school dollars" to students with good and improved attendance. Students can use the dollars at the school store to buy presents for family.

At a Chicago high school, students with good and improved attendance earn special access to the school's VIP lounge.

In Massachusetts, high school students who met attendance goals received free tickets to the homecoming game, simultaneously fostering strong school spirit and a culture of attendance.

Attendance Works is a national and state initiative working to improve the policy and practice around attendance. For more information, go to www.attendanceworks.org.

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NEBRASKA EVERY DAY COUNTS!

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NEBRASKA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION