

Every Day Matters CO!



Colorado Department of Education

Attendance Guidebook

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COLORADO
Department of Education

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Purpose of the Guidebook

CDE created this guidebook to support schools and districts’ implementation of attendance programs. It includes summary information about state rules for implementation of attendance processes, data collection, and information on best practices to support improved attendance.

Thank you for your work to improve student attendance, connection, and engagement at school! Please reach out to CDE’s Dropout Prevention Team with questions.

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Why Attendance Matters

Consistent attendance in school provides children and teenagers the opportunity to develop crucial skills and to thrive academically. [Extensive research](#) demonstrates how patterns of strong attendance contribute to positive outcomes later in life. In contrast, chronic absenteeism, defined as missing 10% or more of school days for any reason, is associated with a variety of negative outcomes.

Patterns for attendance start early. Absenteeism in the first month of school is associated with [absenteeism throughout the year](#) – it's important to begin the year strong!

Despite the importance of pre-k and kindergarten for academic success, [a recent study](#) found that chronic absenteeism was highest in kindergarten across the United States, setting children up for an academic career marked by absence. Often, [parents are not aware](#) that their child is at risk of becoming chronically absent. Reminding parents about the importance of attendance and keeping them aware of their own child's attendance record will help them set their children up for success.



ACADEMIC

Missing school is associated with lower academic outcomes throughout K-12. Students who miss too many days of preschool have weaker literacy and numeracy skills when they enter kindergarten. In first grade, missing school is associated with greater absenteeism in subsequent years and lower achievement in reading, math, and general knowledge. Missing school in the early years is associated with lowered reading proficiency in 3rd grade and difficulties with coursework in 6th grade. Lastly, chronic absenteeism in middle and high school is one of the main early indicators for dropping out and not graduating.



SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL SKILLS

[Children who are frequently absent often](#) have worse interpersonal skills than children who attend regularly and experience more school-related stress and lower motivation and feelings of belonging at school.

Current challenge

Since the pandemic, rates of chronic absenteeism have risen in Colorado and across the country and impacted almost every school and district. At its peak in 2021-22, more than one of every 3 Colorado students was chronically absent. At this level the impact on students is incredible and also impacts high attending students within the same schools and classrooms.

Role of Parents

Parents play an enormous role in balancing a child’s emotional, social, physical, and academic needs. Parents and families are in important part of establishing patterns of attendance and ensuring that students are connected to school and ready to learn. Attendance has an impact on a child’s education and missing even a few days a month adds up over time.

Things Every Parent Can Do:

- **Make School a Priority** – Help your student build healthy habits and routines that include attending school every day unless truly sick. This routine helps build consistency and can help to identify potential stresses or issues as they arise. When routine is disrupted, it is important to understand why a student is missing (avoiding school, sickness, etc.)
- **Communicate with the School** – Parents are a key advocate for their student. If an issue does arise or a pattern is noticed regarding attendance, contact the school. If a student is missing school for specific reasons, there might be ways to help. For example – if a student gets sick every day at lunch time, there might be something happening at lunch or in the class before lunch. The partnership between home and school will help identify any barriers and find solutions to help the student be successful.
- **Build a Community** – It is important to build relationships with other families at the school, working together to form partnerships that focus on helping each other in times of need or emergencies. Attendance can be impacted due to circumstances outside the students’ control, for example lack of transportation or emergency childcare. By having a support network, priority to attend school is maintained by utilizing others to help navigate the barriers that might be preventing the student from attending school.

How Sick Is Too Sick?

The [Colorado Department of Public Health and the Environment \(CDPHE\)](#) continues to create guidance to help school districts and families navigate sickness. Many districts share this directly or work locally to ensure there is common agreement on when sickness should lead to non-attendance.

CDPHE guidance suggests that there are four main reasons for a student to stay home:

1. The child or staff member could infect others with a contagious illness, either because of symptoms, a diagnosis, or recent exposure to a contagious illness.
2. The child or staff member does not feel well enough to take part in usual activities.
3. A child needs more care than teachers and staff can give while still caring for the other children.
4. The child or staff member has symptoms or an illness on the list below, and staying home is required.

Keep your child home or seek care if they:	Send your child to school even if they:
Have a fever of 100.4° F (38° C) or higher	Haven't had a fever overnight and they have not taken fever-reducing medicine during that time.
Have vomited two or more times in the last 24 hours	Have a mild stomachache.
Have a persistent cough, difficulty breathing or trouble catching their breath or if they develop a fever with the cough.	Have a mild cold, which may include a runny nose and/or cough
Have a rash with blisters that are draining, are painful, look like bruises and/or if a fever develops.	Have a mild rash with no other symptoms
Have eye swelling, eye pain, trouble seeing or an eye injury.	Have eye drainage without fever, eye pain or eyelid redness
Have a sore throat causing drooling, trouble swallowing, or a fever and/or rash.	Have head lice. Though they are annoying and should be treated, lice are not a reason to exclude a child from school.

Talking Points

The Importance of Going to School

Regular school attendance is fundamental for a student's academic success, social development, and future opportunities. Missing school can lead to gaps in learning, reduced academic performance, and feelings of isolation. Teachers, parents, community members, and activity sponsors play a crucial role in emphasizing the importance of going to school and supporting students in overcoming any barriers to attendance. Here are key talking points and guidance to help convey this message effectively.

One day off won't hurt – or will it?

If a student in a typical calendar misses 2 days a month, starting in kindergarten:

- They will have missed 10% of school or almost one month of school by the end of the year and;
- The equivalent of one year of school by 8th grade.

On the flip side, a student improving their attendance from 3 days per month to 1 day per month:

- Improves their average daily attendance from 85% to 95% attendance
- Increases by almost one month the number of school days attending school

Teachers to Students

Importance of Regular Attendance

Quote: "Attending school every day is essential for your learning and success. Each day you miss is a lost opportunity to engage with new material and participate in classroom activities that help you grow academically and personally."

Guidance: Emphasize the connection between attendance and success. Highlight specific examples of how missing school can impact their grades and understanding of subjects.

Quote: "If you're facing challenges that make it difficult to come to school, please talk to us. We are here to help you, whether the issues are related to school, home, or personal struggles. Together, we can find solutions to ensure you can attend regularly."

Guidance: Create an open and trusting environment where students feel safe to share their issues. Offer reassurance that seeking help is a positive step.

Open Communication

Positive School Environment

Quote: "Our school is a community where your presence matters. We strive to create a welcoming and engaging environment where you can feel valued and supported. Your contributions are important, and we miss your voice and ideas when you're not here."

Guidance: Encourage students by highlighting their importance to the school community. Share stories of how their participation has made a difference.

Parents to Students

Long-Term Impact

Quote: "Your education is a foundation for your future success. Attending school regularly helps you stay on track with your studies and develop important life skills like responsibility, time management, and perseverance."

Long-Term Impact

Guidance: Discuss future goals and how regular attendance is a steppingstone towards achieving them. Relate school attendance to real-life examples and career aspirations.

Supportive Partnership

Supportive Partnership:

Quote: "We're here to support you in your educational journey. Let's work together to overcome any obstacles that might prevent you from attending school. We believe in you and are committed to helping you succeed."

Guidance: Offer consistent support and be proactive in addressing potential barriers. Foster a team approach to problem-solving,

emphasizing that the student is not alone.

Building Habits:

Quote: "Developing the habit of going to school every day is important. It sets a foundation for good habits in adulthood, helping you become a reliable and committed individual. Starting now will benefit you in the long run."

Guidance: Reinforce the value of good habits early in life. Share examples of how consistency and reliability are valued in the adult world.

Building Habits

Community Members to Students

Community Support:

Quote: "Our community believes in you and your potential. We offer various programs and resources designed to support you and make it easier for you to attend school regularly. You are not alone, and we are here to help."



Guidance: Inform students about available community resources. Encourage participation in community programs that provide additional support and enrichment.

Role of Education in the Community:

Quote: "As members of this community, your education and well-being are important to us. When you succeed in school, it benefits not just you but also the entire community. Education is a key to building a better future for all of us."

Role of Education
in the Community

Guidance: Highlight the broader impact of their education. Explain how their success contributes to community improvement and collective well-being.

Encouragement
And
Mentorship

Encouragement and Mentorship:

Quote: "We are here to encourage you and provide mentorship. Engaging with community programs can help you find additional support and motivation to attend school regularly. We believe in your potential and are here to guide you."

Guidance: Provide examples of successful community members who benefited from regular school attendance. Offer mentorship opportunities and emphasize the availability of role models.

Community involvement programs help students be more successful and engaged in their school life, leading to higher achievement both for the student as well as the school. Connections outside of the classroom extends far beyond academic success, shaping character, and fostering personal growth, it provides a sense of belonging, overcome challenges, embrace uniqueness, and future plans.

Athletic Coaches and Activity Sponsors to Students

Commitment and Responsibility:

Quote: "Being part of a team or activity requires commitment and responsibility, just like attending school regularly. Your dedication to both your education and your activities will help you succeed in all areas of your life."

Guidance: Draw parallels between the discipline required for sports and activities and the discipline needed for consistent school attendance. Emphasize the value of being reliable and responsible.

Commitment
And
Responsibility

Team and
Group Success

Team and Group Success:

Quote: "Your presence matters not just for your personal growth but for the success of the entire team or group. When you attend school regularly, you're better prepared and contribute more effectively to our collective goals."

Guidance: Highlight the importance of each member's role in the success of the team or group. Use examples of how regular attendance leads to better performance and outcomes.

Balancing Academics and Extracurriculars:

Quote: "Balancing academics and extracurricular activities is key to your overall development. Excelling in both areas will open up more opportunities for you in the future, whether in sports, the arts, or academics."

Guidance: Encourage students to see school attendance and extracurricular participation as complementary. Provide strategies for managing time effectively to ensure success in both areas.

Balancing Academics
and
Extracurriculars

Attending school regularly is crucial for a student's overall development and future success. By working together, teachers, parents, community members, and activity sponsors can create a supportive environment that encourages consistent school attendance and addresses any barriers that may arise. Let's continue to emphasize the importance of education and provide the necessary support to help our students thrive.

State and district rules for attendance and truancy

Regular and punctual attendance is a key aspect to students’ academic success. Frequent absences may lead to poor academic work, lack of social development, and possible academic failure.

Every child, who is six years old, as of Aug 1, and under the age of 17, is required to have access to and attend school except in situations provided by law. Parent/guardians’, schools, and districts all have a responsibility to ensure consistent attendance.

Colorado Attendance Laws

Colorado law directly connected to attendance focuses on compulsory school attendance, truancy and school finance.

Truancy: Truancy is defined as an unexcused absence. The rate is calculated by dividing the reported total student days unexcused absences by the total student days possible.

Habitually Truant (Student Count): A student is counted as habitually truant if the student has four unexcused absences in one month and/or 10 absences in one school year.

Chronically Absent: A student absent 10 percent or more of the days enrolled during the school year is chronically absent. All absences are included – unexcused, excused and suspensions. The rate is the percentage of students enrolled who are chronically absent.

Colorado law requires local boards of education to adopt policies, rules and regulations in order to maintain efficient administration of the affairs of the district. [C.R.S. 22-32-109](#).

Colorado Attendance Law and Board Rule

School Attendance Act – Residence of child ([§22-1-102, C.R.S.](#))

- Every public school shall be open for the admission of all children, between the ages of five and twenty-one years, residing in that district without the payment of tuition.

School Attendance Act – Compulsory School Attendance ([§22-33-104, C.R.S.](#))

- Requires that each child between the ages of six and 17 shall attend public school unless otherwise excused.
- Encourages districts to establish attendance procedures to identify students who are chronically absent.
- States that parents and guardians are required to have their student enrolled and attending school.

Truancy enforcement ([§22-33-107, C.R.S.](#))

- Requires school district to have policy for a truancy plan with the goal of assisting the child to remain in school.

Local School Board Policies

State law (C.R.S. 22-33-104) states that the local board of education should have a written school board policy outlining attendance requirements, reasons for excused absences (that include, at a minimum, reasons in state law) and may include appropriate penalties for nonattendance due to unexcused absences. State law also encourages each district to include procedures for identifying students who are chronically absent and “to implement best practices and research-based strategies” to improve attendance.

Each district may have unique board policies, but there are common board policy coding and language utilized by many districts in the state. Some of the language within these policies is required and some may be determined by the local board.

Common board policies related to attendance include:

JEA – Compulsory Attendance Ages – This section will provide information on attendance age. Every child who has attained the age of six years on or before August 1 of each year and is under the age of 17 is required to attend public school with such exceptions as provided by law. It is the parents’ responsibility to ensure attendance. The courts may issue orders for the child to attend school.

JF – School Admissions – This section covers rules for admission. All people between the ages of six and 17 who live in the school district may attend school without paying tuition. Some districts extend these ages from age 5 to 21. This policy will also include required documentation the parent/guardian will need to provide for enrollment.

JH – School Absences and Excuses - This section will include definitions on the different types of absences. It may also include policies for what occurs for attendance tracking and what occurs if a student misses a day of school.

JHB – Truancy – This section covers truancy processes and rules. If a student is absent without an excuse signed by the parent/guardian or if the student leaves school or class without permission of the teacher or administrator in charge, the student is considered truant. A student who has ten or more unexcused absences is considered “habitually truant.” The district and/or school must monitor the student’s attendance and notify the parents if there is a concern regarding the students attendance. A plan will be developed for a student who is at risk of being declared habitually truant with the goal of assisting the child to remain in school.

JHD – Denial of Admission and Exclusion from School Attendance – This section covers rules for when denial of admission is permitted and may include information about transferring information. There are specific reasons, stated in the policy and state statute, that a student may be denied admission. If a student is denied admission, and they reside in the district, the student may be eligible to participate in the districts program for expelled students or other transitional programming programming as space is available.

JH-R – Student Absences - It is the parent/guardian’s responsibility to notify the school regarding an absence on the day of or prior to the absence. It is the school’s responsibility to communicate with the home regarding unexcused student absences or excessive excused absences.

A Comprehensive Approach to Attendance

Improving attendance requires a comprehensive approach. Key components of this approach and recommended areas for planning are included below.

School and District teams

As absences increase in a school or district, there is often a need for more individuals to address attendance concern. In addition, learning from research and practice has pointed to the importance of a comprehensive approach to improve attendance. There are two key ideas that may help schools and district in establishing and strengthening teams:

- **Attendance as a team focus:** Where possible, if attendance can be added as a focus of an already created team or an expansion of one, it can more closely align attendance support to other efforts, save time, and avoid duplication of efforts on common preventative approaches, such as family engagement.
- **Reflection on a comprehensive approach:** [Attendanceworks](#), a national nonprofit organization working to improve attendance has created a number of self-assessment tools that provide a valuable comprehensive approach to reflection and planning, and concrete areas to help frame initiatives.
 - [AttendanceWorks Self Assessments](#)

School Team Self-Assessment					
Lead A Whole School Approach to Attendance	Solidly in Place	Measurable Progress	Needs Improvement	Urgent Gap	Evidence
1. The principal makes attendance a top priority for the entire school.					
2. The group responsible for organizing the school's attendance strategy is aligned with other school teams to ensure attendance is an integral component of the school's plan to improve outcomes for all children.					
3. Our team members reflect the demographics of our school community and/or are able to bring the perspectives of the student demographics.					
4. Collectively, team members have the authority, will and skill to remove barriers and address inequities.					

Example of 1 of the 5 categories in Attendanceworks Self-Assessment

Tiered responses and foundations for learning

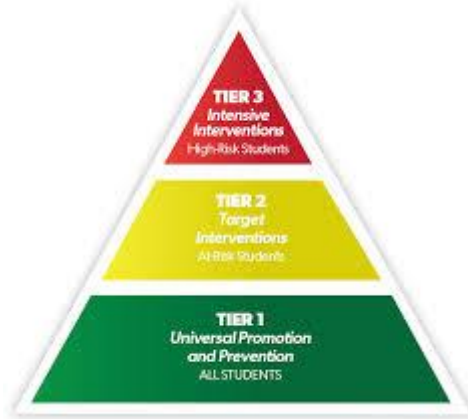
There are two main concepts that CDE recommends schools and districts examine as they organize attendance efforts. These concepts are taken from research, recommended processes in state statute, and national experts.

- **Strong Foundations for Learning:** While attendance systems are often focused on interventions and how to best respond when students are absent, a strong foundation is essential and must be a part of any improvement efforts. The strong relationships that students make with staff, the challenge, interest and engagement in learning, and their connections to school are the best preventative work that we can do to keep kids attending, connected, and engaged. More details on this approach are outlined in a [report released in 2019](#).

Rather than taking a punitive approach, we must understand that the continued high levels of chronic absence reflect that positive conditions for learning are missing for too many students.



- **Tiered Response Systems:** However, even with the best and improving prevention work, schools and districts need systems to respond and intervene when students begin to miss school. These tiered systems must mix preventative and responsive approaches to ensuring that students and families see the importance in attendance and that schools and districts can organize to intervene and support when needed.



Root causes/reasons for absence

There are a wide range of reasons why students might be absent and identification of the root causes or most common reasons is a valuable process for any school. While there are a variety of [tools to examine root causes](#), CDE staff have recently seen these two additional processes as valuable to understand from students why they are absent and how they reconnect to school after absences. Both tools were originally created for other focus areas but have distinct connections to attendance.

- **Empathy Interviews:** A process for conducting interviews of students (or others) to better understand their perspective.
- **Shadow a Student:** A process to better understand how a student interacts with the school, staff, and others throughout their day.
 - [PBS News Hour video](#) overview of a school piloting the process.
 - [Shadow a Student guidebook](#)

Role of School Nurses

School Nurses are an integral member of school and district teams, promoting regular school attendance and addressing chronic absenteeism by supporting students' physical and emotional health and well-being. In fact, many indicate that the school nursing profession was created to support improved attendance in the early 1900s when infectious diseases were keeping children from school. There are a few key areas to consider:

- **Proactive strategies to reduce sickness:** Development of initiatives that promote health and wellness, reduce the spread of illness in the community, and pro-active screening tools all help reduce student absences.
- **Support for chronic conditions:** Students with chronic conditions may need access to school health services and modifications to support attendance, including regular medications, emergency response planning, and access to resources.
- **Managing acute illness and the spread of infectious disease:** In individual or group cases, implementation of plans to address needs, reduce the spread of illness, and ensure that students and staff can safely return to learning.

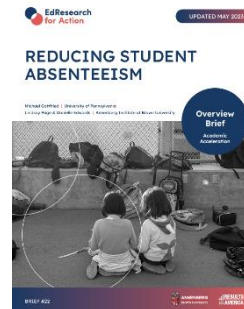
For more information on the role of school health offices and processes for school nurses, visit the [CDE school health office manual](#).

Strategies and Best Practices

Impacting attendance and engagement should include strategies from across a school and district. This section provides a brief summary of some key takeaways about attendance interventions or responses. There are a variety of research backed programs that have a strong impact on improving attendance. CDE recommends two valuable guidebooks to help inform selection and refinement of strategies.



FutureEd Attendance playbook: This playbook provides summary information about a number of tier 1, 2, and 3 strategies.



Reducing Chronic Absenteeism: This brief summarizes research on strategies to reduce chronic absenteeism and may be helpful in adjusting and targeting current attendance strategies.

In addition, while strategies will differ by location, there are a few key ideas that are commonly found in research on effective strategies and examples below each.

Relationship based strategies: Many of the effective interventions rely on effective relationships and trust. This includes more formal relationship building mentoring programs as well as programs designed to help solve challenges students or families are facing. In these strategies, student and family trust often leads to better outcomes and connections to needed services or support.

- [Check and Connect](#)
- [New York City Success Mentors](#)

Family connections: Strong relationships and communication between school and family can lead to stronger relationships, problem solving, and higher levels of engagement. This is especially true in the early grades where families have increased responsibility in supporting their children to get to school.

- [Home Visit models](#)
- [Nudge letters and awareness](#)

Communication and awareness: While there is an increasing awareness of the importance of attendance and some of the current challenge, communication is essential in a comprehensive approach. This includes larger scale awareness initiatives as well as strategies to improve ongoing two-way communication with families.

- [Two-way Text Messaging](#)