

# CLEARINGHOUSE FOR MILITARY FAMILY READINESS

## Chronic Absenteeism: Strategies and Resources to Improve Attendance: Rapid Literature Review

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Clearinghouse Technical Assistance Team

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## Chronic Absenteeism

The U.S. Department of Education is calling chronic absenteeism a “hidden education crisis” (2016). In 2013-14, roughly 1 in 7 students missed at least 15 or more days of school. Chronic absenteeism impacts students no matter the age.

- Children who are chronically absent in preschool, kindergarten, and first grade are much less likely to read at grade level by the third grade (Ehrlich et al., 2013).
- Students that read below grade level by the end of third grade are four times more likely to drop out of high school (Hernandez, 2013).
- Research suggests that students who are chronically absent for just one year in grades 8-12 are seven times more likely to drop out of school (University of Utah, 2012).
- Individuals who drop out are more likely to live in poverty, have diminished health, and enter the criminal justice system (U.S. Department of Justice et al., n.d.).

## Addressing Chronic Absenteeism

There has been extensive research on strategies, resources, and programs that can improve student attendance and reduce truancy.

### Strategies to Reduce Absenteeism

Below we have listed recommendations and/or findings pulled from articles related to research around programs designed to decrease truancy.

- Establishing truancy prevention programs for all students (Gandy & Schultz, 2007).
- Engaging in frequent, positive, multi-modal communication with parents about attendance (Sheldon & Epstein, 2004).
- Enacting policies that promote attendance rather than punitively punish absences, especially via out-of-school suspension (Safe Schools Healthy Students, 2012).
- Rewarding students for improved attendance by providing special recognition, certificates, letters to parents, and special events (Sheldon & Epstein, 2004).
- Improving the school environment by offering personalized learning, learning communities, peer mentoring, student advisory programs, and interventions targeted at improving educational effectiveness in the classroom (Safe Schools Healthy Students, 2012).
- Promoting a pro-attendance culture by rewarding students for consistent or improving attendance, holding events that reinforce the importance of attendance, and reaching out to parents and the community via public education campaigns to create a pro-attendance culture (Safe Schools Healthy Students, 2012).

- Conducting family workshops focused on improving school attendance, including training on the difference between unexcused and excused absences, contingency management, establishing routines, and how to create incentive structures to reward positive behaviors (Gandy & Schultz, 2007; Sheldon & Epstein, 2004).
- Providing free breakfast and lunch to all students (Leos-Urbel, Schwartz, Weinstein, & Corcoran, 2013).
- Reserving use of “zero-tolerance” attendance policies solely for the most serious offenses (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008).
- Training students, parents, and teachers to cope with anxiety-based school refusal behavior via relaxation techniques or other strategies (Gandy & Schultz, 2007; Sheldon & Epstein, 2004).
- Identifying students who display predictors for high absenteeism, such as students who:
  - Display poor school perceptions;
  - Perceive their parental discipline as lax or inconsistent;
  - Perceive their parents as controlling;
  - Feel academically inferior;
  - Experience family conflict; and
  - Feel less socially competent (Railsback, 2004).
- Utilizing whole-school reforms that include attendance policies and behavioral interventions may assist schools with increasing graduation rates (Balfanz, Herzog, & Mac Iver, 2007).
- Integrating school and community resources to improve student attendance rates (Gandy & Schultz, 2007).
- Calling families after an unexplained absence, discussing the importance of consistent attendance at school, and helping solve problems that might affect attendance (Safe Schools Healthy Students, 2012).
- Considering alternative education programs for students that struggle with attendance in traditional settings, even with extensive interventions in place (Safe Schools Healthy Students, 2012).
- Delivering wake-up calls to students enrolled in a truancy prevention program (Safe Schools Healthy Students, 2012).
- Gradually reintroduce students to school settings after extended absences (Gandy & Schultz, 2007).
- Incorporating attendance into a Response to Instruction and Intervention (RTII) or Multi-Tier System of Supports (MTSS) framework in which intensity of interventions gradually increases, with court intervention being the final resort (Gandy & Schultz, 2007).
- Utilizing mediation between school representatives and families of students who are frequently absent to identify causes of attendance problems and reaching mutually agreeable solutions (Gandy & Schultz, 2007).
- Conducting home visits with students that are frequently absent (Sheldon &

Epstein, 2004).

- Utilizing a community-based courts approach to help eliminate the social and economic barriers related to court attendance (Gandy & Schultz, 2007).
- Referring students that are frequently absent to a counselor and/or truancy officer (Sheldon & Epstein, 2004).
- Refusing to provide driving eligibility certificate, on the grounds that the student is not making progress towards graduation (Education Commission of the States, 2007).

## Toolkits

There are toolkits available that assist stakeholders in setting up programming to address attendance issues. We have provided a brief description and link to each toolkit below.

### *Every Student, Every Day Toolkit*

In 2015, the U.S. Department of Education launched Every Student Every Day: A National Initiative to Address and Eliminate Chronic Absenteeism. In this initiative, schools partner with communities to provide resources that help students attend school every day by collecting and acting on data, utilizing positive messaging, building capacity in the community and in community-based organizations, and increasing accountability. As part of the initiative, the Every Student, Every Day toolkit was developed to help stakeholders take action and address truancy problems in schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

The Every Student, Every Day Toolkit can be found here: <https://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/chronicabsenteeism/toolkit.pdf>

### *National Center for School Engagement (NCSE) Toolkit*

A toolkit was created by NCSE to help parents, teachers, and school administrators support students who are chronically absent. The toolkit contains many resources, including a truancy fact sheet, an overview of truancy, literature review, discussion of legal and economic ramifications of truancy, discussion of truancy programs, program evaluation tools, and list of best practices.

The NCSE toolkit can be found here: <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/pr/217271.pdf>

### *Teaching Attendance 2.0 Toolkit*

The Teaching Attendance 2.0 toolkit contains practical tools and resources that schools can use to help students attend school consistently, thus enhancing the ability of teachers to teach more effectively.

The Teaching Attendance 2.0 toolkit can be found here: <http://www.attendanceworks.org/resources/toolkits/teaching-attendance-2-0/>

## Suggested Citation

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