

# ATTENDANCE WORKS

## Advancing Student Success by Reducing Chronic Absence

### ABOUT ATTENDANCE WORKS



Attendance Works is a national and state initiative that promotes better policy, practice and research around school attendance. Our goal is to ensure that more districts track chronic absence, an often overlooked metric, and partner with communities to improve attendance.

Executive Director Hedy Chang is a national expert on chronic absence and co-author of the seminal research on early chronic absence, *Present, Engaged and Accounted For*. The Attendance Works team has extensive expertise in attendance policy, technical assistance and communications.

### THE CHRONIC ABSENCE PROBLEM

Today, in a country where more than one in 10 students miss nearly a month of school every year, improving student attendance is an essential, cost-effective but often overlooked strategy for ensuring our students are on track to learn and succeed.

Put simply, if students don't go to school they can't benefit from what is taught in the classroom. This is as true for kindergartners as it is for high school students.

#### What is chronic absence?

Chronic absence is missing too much school for any reason, excused or unexcused, including suspensions. Attendance Works recommends defining it as missing 10% or more of school or about 18 days a year, or two days a month.

#### How big a problem is it?

- As many as 7.5 million students are chronically absent nationwide. That includes one in 10 kindergartners.
- As early as preK, chronic absence predicts poor attendance and academic performance in later grades.
- Poor children are more likely to be chronically absent and more likely to lose ground academically.
- By 6th grade, chronic absence is a leading indicator that a student will drop out of high school.
- By 9th grade it becomes a better predictor of dropout rates than 8th grade test scores.
- Classroom churn from too many absences affects all students, even those who attend regularly.

#### Why is the problem overlooked?

Schools and districts often don't look at all the right data. They track how many students show up every day and how many are skipping school, but not how many students are chronically absent. Parents and teachers don't realize how quickly absences can add up to academic trouble.

*“Students, especially those at risk, will not be at school and engaged unless we work together to uncover and remove the barriers to good attendance. In Connecticut, we see this work as the responsibility of multiple community partners. By sharing their knowledge, research and ready-to-use resources, Attendance Works is helping us use chronic absence data as an early warning indicator that triggers supports and actions to prevent students from missing school and falling behind academically.”*

- **Charlene Russell-Tucker**

Chief Operating Officer, Connecticut State Department of Ed.  
Co-Chair, Chronic Absence Strategic Action Group, Committee on Children: RBA Children's Report Card

## OUR RESPONSE

The good news is chronic absence can be significantly reduced when schools, families and community partners work together to monitor data, promote good attendance and address hurdles that keep children from getting to school every day. Attendance Works embraces a range of strategies:

**Promoting effective policy:** We are forging a national consensus about the need to track, report and address how many students are chronically absent.

- Catalyze national and state attention to chronic absence, prompting legislative and regulatory change
- Align with influential national organizations to launch Attendance Awareness Month
- Sponsor a Call to Action asking school superintendents to make attendance a priority starting in the early grades
- Muster unanimous support for a U.S. Conference of Mayors resolution on reducing chronic absenteeism

**Sharing tools and best practices:** Our website offers easy online access for teachers, school districts and communities.

- Free tools for crunching chronic absence data
- Inspiring examples of schools and communities that are improving attendance
- Handouts for working with parents
- The latest research on chronic absence

**Providing effective technical assistance:**

- Peer learning webinars reaching nearly 2,000 practitioners and policymakers in the past year
- Ongoing support for the more than 230 communities working with the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading
- Targeted assistance on a fee-for-service basis working with districts and peer networks to build capacity

## WHY ATTENDANCE WORKS

- **It matters for student success:** Students need to attend school to achieve academically and to build the good habits they need to graduate, attend college and succeed in a job. Study after study shows that students who don't show up regularly don't succeed.
- **It's a smart use of resources:** The best investments in instruction and curriculum won't matter much if students aren't showing up to benefit from them. Focusing on attendance allows schools and funders to make the most of their resources and leverage community support.
- **It's data driven and it's simple:** Data-driven approaches to education often meet resistance because of their complexity. By contrast, attendance is a simple, common-sense measure already recorded by teachers and understood by parents.
- **It's a winnable strategy:** Schools, districts and communities that work together to track chronic absence and improve attendance often see the numbers move quickly. This can not only improve academic performance but can boost morale for teachers and administrators as they see measurable progress.



## ATTENDANCE WORKS

**Hedy Chang**, Executive Director  
hedy@attendanceworks.org

**Cecelia Leong**, Associate Director of Programs  
cecilia@attendanceworks.org

**Sue Fothergill**, Associate Director of Policy  
sue@attendanceworks.org

[www.attendanceworks.org](http://www.attendanceworks.org)



## How Can Attendance Works Help Us?

Attendance Works is a national and state level initiative promoting better policy, practice and research on chronic absence. The goal of our technical assistance is to help build capacity to monitor and address chronic absence. Many of our services are available for free on our website where you can, for example, download our tools or sign up to participate in our webinars that emphasize peer learning. If additional support is needed to advance the work, we offer a range of support on a fee-for-service basis. We charge \$1,600 per day plus expenses.

	<b>Free Tools on our website</b>	<b>Fee for Service</b>
<b>Data Analysis</b>	School districts can use our tools or their own data systems to conduct a chronic absence analysis for all grade levels.	Attendance Works can help conduct the analysis, interpret the results, craft a presentation based upon the findings and develop an appropriate plan for action.
<b>Professional Development</b>	PowerPoints and other materials to help communities develop their own training sessions are available on our website.	Attendance Works can provide keynote presentations, training sessions and materials to help partners understand why it's crucial to address and monitor chronic absence.
<b>Public Messaging</b>	Our Count Us In! toolkit and other publications offer ideas for customizing flyers, PSAs, bumper stickers, billboards and talking points to launch an attendance campaign in your community.	Attendance Works can offer more tailored support with communications materials or strategies. Assistance in branding our free materials is available for a small fee -- simple changes begin at \$100.
<b>Peer Learning</b>	Archived webinars, PowerPoints, and other materials are available for Peer Learning support on local and state levels. Sign up for free webinars at <a href="http://www.attendanceworks.org/tools/technical-assistance-resources/peer-learning-network/">http://www.attendanceworks.org/tools/technical-assistance-resources/peer-learning-network/</a>	Attendance Works can help local, regional or state networks of communities and school districts work together to develop strategies to reduce chronic absence. This approach, which emphasizes peer learning and collective policy actions, can be funded by a local foundation or contributions from various partners. Ideally, Attendance Works would partner with a local entity that can serve as the ongoing local source of coordination and technical assistance.
<b>Case Studies</b>	Most communities have at least one school that is beating the odds and maintaining high levels of attendance despite challenging circumstances. We offer tips for conducting site visits to build local capacity to document what works.	Attendance Works can help a local team interview staff and parents to determine what the school is doing right and how its efforts can be replicated, as well as document and share insights gained.
<b>Surveys and Focus Groups</b>	Attendance Works has developed surveys of older students, parents and principals to assess attitudes about absenteeism and strategies for getting students and schools back on track.	Attendance Works can administer, tailor, analyze or present the results for additional costs.

For more information on fee for service consulting services, contact :  
 Associate Director of Programs, Cecelia Leong: [Cecelia@attendanceworks.org](mailto:Cecelia@attendanceworks.org)  
 Visit [www.attendanceworks.org](http://www.attendanceworks.org) for available tools and written materials.