PHILADELPHIA
IS SHOWING UP FOR ATTENDANCE
Educator Resources to Improve School Attendance 2019-2020
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## READY-TO-USE MATERIALS (APPENDIX)

### FAMILY PACKET
- Attendance in the Early Grades Flyer
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- Weekly Attendance Tracker
- FAQs: District Attendance Policies
- Helpful Resources to Overcome Attendance Barriers
- School Health Statement
- “I Don’t Feel Good” When Sick is Too Sick for School
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### EDUCATOR PACKET
- School Self Assessment
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- Monthly Attendance Calendars
- Attendance Hero Certificates
- Project Planning Questions
- We Missed You!
The toolkit is designed for educators of elementary school students in Philadelphia. As many of us are fellow principals, teachers, support staff, and parents of young children, we know how hectic things can get. With this in mind, we designed the toolkit to be useful and easy-to-use.

• **Understand how the toolkit is organized.**
  
  • The first section, WHY ATTENDANCE MATTERS, provides tools and talking points for communicating with parents, students, and teachers about why attendance is so important.

  • The second section, BUILDING AN ATTENDANCE CULTURE includes ideas for educators from fellow educators on changes that can affect an entire school, classroom, or even just one student.

  • The third section, ADDRESSING COMMON BARRIERS, suggests strategies and resources to address some of the issues that can make good attendance a challenge for many families.

  • Finally, don’t miss the READY-TO-USE MATERIALS appendix, with lots of handouts and information to share with families.

• **Make the toolkit work for your school.** Feel free to customize materials, where possible, for your school.

• **Get and distribute copies of the toolkit.** Get and distribute copies of the toolkit. Printable and translated materials are available at [readby4th.org/attendance](http://readby4th.org/attendance) and on the Office of Attendance & Truancy page at [philasd.org](http://philasd.org).

• **Help us make the toolkit better.** Email your feedback and ideas to Abby Thaker: thakera@freelibrary.org.

• **Share what’s working on social media.** Use #ShowingUp #PHLed @Readby4th.
WHY ATTENDANCE MATTERS

As an educator, you probably already know how important it is for children to have good attendance so they are present for every moment of learning time. Here are a few talking points you can use to help convey why attendance is so important.

• **We all want our students to be successful.** Research shows that helping children get to school every day, on time is one of the most important things we can do to help set them up for success.

• **When children miss school, they miss out on valuable opportunities for learning.** When children have good attendance, they are more likely to read at or above grade level.

• **It starts early, too.** Children with good attendance in kindergarten are more likely to read on grade level by the end of the year—and are more likely to read on grade level by the end of 3rd grade, too.

• **It’s important to arrive on time.** Reading is taught first thing in the morning—we don’t want children to miss a moment.

• **We’re here to help!** Contact me, your child’s teacher, our school nurse or our guidance counselor if anything is making it difficult to get to school every day. We are all here to help.
WHY ATTENDANCE MATTERS
SLIDES FOR BACK-TO-SCHOOL PRESENTATIONS

Include these slides in your back-to-school presentations to communicate with families about why attendance is so important. Download the Powerpoint slides at readby4th.org/attendance and on the Office of Attendance & Truancy page at philasd.org; then, edit as-needed to customize for your school.

WHY ATTENDANCE MATTERS

- **Every day, on-time:** Helping children get to school every day, on-time is one of the most important things we can do to help set them up for success.
- **Take advantage of opportunities:** When children miss school, they miss out on valuable opportunities for learning. When children have good attendance, they are more likely to read at or above grade level.
- **It starts early, too:** Children with good attendance in kindergarten are more likely to read on grade level by the end of the year—and are more likely to read on grade level by the end of 3rd grade, too.
- **It’s important to arrive on time:** Reading is taught first thing in the morning—we don’t want children to miss a moment.

Why Attendance Matters

Everyone can be an attendance hero.

The goal is for students to achieve at least 95% attendance. This means missing no more than 9 days during the school year. This is based on a 180 day school year.

Kindergarten Attendance Matters

SDP study shows kindergarteners who missed fewer days of school were more likely to become stronger readers by the end of the year.

We’re Here to Help

Let us know if you are moving or have a change of address or phone number.

Our goal is for students to achieve at least 95% attendance. This means missing no more than 9 days during the school year. This is based on a 180 day school year.
WHY ATTENDANCE MATTERS
FAMILY PACKET

What's inside the Family Packet? We hope you use what's inside the Family Packet as an integral part of a comprehensive plan to help build an attendance culture at your school. We developed this packet of resources with a clear focus: to strengthen every school's most vital partnership with our families.

Feel free to distribute the entire family packet after you customize it for your school's use, or just use individual handouts if that works better. Great times for sharing information in the family packet are during registration days, back-to-school nights or parent-teacher conferences throughout the year.

They also provide great conversation starters and talking points about attendance for educators. We hope you agree.

Everything is downloadable in various formats and languages at readby4th.org/attendance and on the Office of Attendance & Truancy page at philasd.org.

SAMPLE LETTER FROM PRINCIPAL

Great to share as a part of your back-to-school program or welcome message. Update and personalize the letter, then cut and paste it onto your school's letterhead.

*An editable version is available for download at readby4th.org/attendance and on the Office of Attendance & Truancy page at philasd.org.

ATTENDANCE IN THE EARLY GRADES

Share this handout with families at orientation or back-to-school events to let them know why attendance matters.
ATTENDANCE HEROES

Encourage families to post this where everyone at home can see it: on the fridge, their child’s room, etc. Schools running an Attendance Hero program can distribute this at their launch assembly or event.

PLEDGE OF ATTENDANCE

With this pledge, parents can work together on their family efforts around striving for perfect attendance.

WEEKLY ATTENDANCE TRACKER

Young students learn by doing, and they’re motivated by actual signs of progress. This tracker gives the whole family a fun, easy way to track their weekly attendance. Encourage parents to put them in a highly visible spot. Remind them to reward the whole family when they reach their goal.

FAQS: DISTRICT ATTENDANCE POLICIES

We created one document answering the questions most frequently asked by parents about attendance. Feel free to refer to this during parent-teacher conferences and back-to-school night.
HELPFUL RESOURCES TO OVERCOME ATTENDANCE BARRIERS

All students can experience issues around attendance and tardiness. When they do, their families may need extra support. Use this starter list of key resources to help them.

SCHOOL HEALTH STATEMENT

Did you know that each school building in the district has an assigned school nurse? A school nurse is here to help you and your child stay healthy so there is a better chance for 95%+ attendance.

“I DON’T FEEL GOOD” WHEN SICK IS TOO SICK FOR SCHOOL

We all struggle with knowing when we should keep our children at home or send them to school. This handout was designed to help parents decide and is also good to post in classrooms.
SCHOOL DISTRICT OF PHILADELPHIA
IMMUNIZATION REQUIREMENTS AND CITY HEALTH CENTERS

FEDERALLY QUALIFIED HEALTH CENTERS

ABSENCE EXCUSE NOTE

Make it easier for parents with this excuse note template to get their notes in on time following every absence. Schools may want to pair this with the What You Missed flyer from the Educator Packet Appendix by printing on the other side.
BUILDING AN ATTENDANCE CULTURE

Educators districtwide are making great strides in building a school culture that promotes on time daily attendance. This attendance toolkit brings together some of the best ideas developed and implemented with positive results by fellow principals, teachers and staff.

In this section, we present resources designed for in-school use. Find downloadable versions of this toolkit at readby4th.org/attendance or on the Office of Attendance and Truancy page at philasd.org.
To start, identify one person who can assume responsibility for facilitating this assessment to improve student attendance at your school.

Bring together a team of key stakeholders in your school to complete this self-assessment. Include the principal, parents, attendance personnel, classroom teachers, and community partners—anyone who could offer valuable insights and divergent perspectives on strengthening an attendance culture at your school.

Ask everyone to complete the assessment. Let them know it takes about 10 minutes.

Add up everyone’s responses for each key element of an attendance school culture. As completed copies of the assessment are collected, quickly tabulate scores to get an aggregate score for each key element.

Share and discuss the results with the entire group. Explore differences in opinions and perspectives. Keep in mind the goal is to deepen a collective understanding of why these differences might exist rather than to get everyone to agree on any one rating.

Identify top priorities for improving student attendance. Once identified, determine:

• Immediate next steps?
• Who needs to be involved? Who can take the lead?
• What is the best way to stay apprised of each other’s progress?
• Should a follow-up meeting be set?

Adapted from materials provided by Attendance Works.

*School Self-Assessment can also be found in the Educator Packet Appendix of this toolkit.
## BUILDING AN ATTENDANCE CULTURE
### SCHOOL SELF-ASSESSMENT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Element</th>
<th>Strong Evidence</th>
<th>Requires Improvement</th>
<th>Does Not Exist</th>
<th>How Do You Know?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Attendance is accurately taken and entered daily into the District data system-SIS in all classrooms/periods.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2 Our school has a clear understanding of the District’s attendance policy.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 A multidisciplinary team including the Principal or Assistant Principal, attendance designee, guidance counselor, school nurse, or other school staff reviews attendance data on a regular basis to identify students at different attendance tiers, such as 95%+, 90-95%, 85-90%, and below. Patterns are monitored by grade levels and other factors, including identified barriers. Our school reaches out to chronically absent students and their families to identify barriers to attendance.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4 Our school has a welcoming and engaging climate that promotes safety and positive interpersonal relationships among students, staff, and families.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Our school recognizes students who attend 95%+, for example, through monthly, quarterly &amp; annual incentive programs.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Our school recognizes students who improve, moving from 85% to 90%-95%+, for example, through incentive programs.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7 Our school reaches out to parents with positive messaging to acknowledge the role they played when their children are achieving 95%+ or are moving in the right direction.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8 Our school partners with community agencies that offer resources, such as volunteer mentors and in-kind donations that can help students and their families remove barriers to getting to school.</td>
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<tr>
<td>9 Our school informs parents in non-policy language about the importance of attendance and encourages parents to help each other get their children to school.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Our school discipline policy and practice ensure students do not miss instruction due to suspensions for non-violent behavior.</td>
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<tr>
<td>11 Our strategies for supporting student attendance are reflected in our school attendance improvement plan.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from materials provided by Attendance Works.
For more, visit attendanceworks.org/resources/self-assessment
Work with your attendance team or School Advisory Council to determine what’s best for your school.

Set monthly attendance goals rather than yearly ones. This gives students (and their families) a fresh start each month to strive for perfect attendance. Younger students also find shorter-term goals more manageable.

Specify your school’s monthly attendance goal. Reviewing how your school did the same month the previous year would help determine this goal.

Create a theme around your school’s attendance goal for every month. See suggestions on the monthly attendance target flyers.

Get the word out. Promotional ideas include: attendance cheers in the morning yard or during assemblies; flyers given out during arrival/dismissal along with quick huddles with parents on how they can help and reminders through school messenger, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, and Class Dojo.

Integrate campaigns into school community life. Think through:

- How can students, families, teachers and other school community members experience this campaign?
- How can students become promoters? Brainstorm with them. Motivate them to motivate our families.
- What incentives would motivate students, whole classes, the entire school (e.g., grade-level dance party on Friday, trip at the end of the month, etc.)?
- How will you will celebrate students who are making progress (e.g., attendance heroes, dojo dollars, etc.)?
- How can we ensure all we do to promote attendance is trauma-informed?

Create an Attendance Recovery Plan for student re-engagement.

- How will students who are not in attendance the first day be contacted?
- Who will do visits to students’ homes who are not in school? Mobilize your “Boots on the Ground” team. Ask for volunteers or offer EC for teachers to go in pairs to students’ homes who have three or more unexcused absences.

Schedule weekly Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) meetings with the Attendance Team to identify at-risk students. Monitor progress to see whether interventions are working and what needs to be adjusted.

- Implement system for monitoring daily attendance.
- Ensure classroom teachers are taking daily attendance on SIS. Identify point person to pull daily reports and provide data on gaps in attendance taking.
- Support teachers who are struggling with SIS.

Debrief and plan for next month. Reconvene your attendance team to review what went well and areas for improvement, and to develop a plan for next month. Follow up with parents who have students with three or more unexcused absences.
## Building an Attendance Culture

### Attendance Timeline

**Summer**
- Review attendance data from prior school year to identify where more support is needed
- Meet with Attendance Team and complete School Self-Assessment *See page 13*
- Outline Attendance Campaign to promote year-round attendance

**Back to School**
- Celebrate the 1st day of school with welcome back activities
- Promote Attendance Awareness Month all September long
- Distribute Family Packet during Back to School Night and discuss attendance goals *See Family Packet Appendix.*

**Fall**
- Send home “We Missed You” letter when a student is absent from school *See Educator Packet Appendix.*
- Meet with parents during report card conferences to discuss student’s attendance
- Acknowledge students with excellent and good attendance with certificates *See Educator Packet Appendix.*

**Winter**
- Plan attendance incentives during winter months when attendance usually drops, like surprise hot chocolate or pretzels to be given out to students at the school entrance
- Encourage healthy habits and remind families when sick is too sick for school *See Family Packet Appendix.*
- Show appreciation for students and their families coming to school every day, on time

**Spring**
- Schedule activities and events that will build enthusiasm for daily attendance, like walking trips, field day and spirit week
- Make a shift to weekly incentive cycles so that students have more opportunities to be rewarded
- Give special recognition to students and families for meeting attendance goals, including special incentives for classes who reach 95%+ and individuals who reach 100% in May and June. *See page 22*

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### More Advice from Fellow Educators and Parents

**Kindergarten Orientation**
“Ensure leadership highlights the importance of Kindergarten attendance for school success during orientation.”
—Tamara Edwards, Principal
*Thomas K. Finletter Academics Plus School*

**Good Habits Start Early**
“We all wish we could find the magic formula that would help parents and students know that attending school is an investment towards a successful future. At our school, we begin at kindergarten, letting parents know that good habits start at an early age.”
—Rosa Lopez, School Improvement Support Liaison
*Potter Thomas*

**Back-to-School Night**
“Use Back-to-School Night as an opportunity to emphasize the data on the relationship between student attendance and student reading levels.”
—Jason Harris, Principal
*Joseph Pennell School*
Building an attendance culture in elementary school requires knowing our audience. Like their K-3 peers everywhere, our youngest students enjoy being a part of a team effort and counting their progress—over the short term. A full school year is too long of a goal for students at these ages. This is why we divide the school calendar and various attendance activities into daily, weekly and monthly chunks to promote school attendance.

The Daily Attendance Tracker is designed as a 18” x 24” poster to be hung in a school’s main hallway. The laminate covering to this tracker makes it easy to refresh numbers every day.

Download the Daily Attendance Tracker and the following Monthly Attendance Target Flyers at readby4th.org/attendance or on the Office of Attendance and Truancy page at philasd.org. *See Educator Packet Appendix of this toolkit.
The Monthly Attendance Target flyer can be placed in each classroom. Let students know exactly how many days of school there are for each month to set goals for the entire school, grade, or class. Keep it at the total number of days per month, reprint blank sheets, or laminate the countdown number to countdown each day.
Building an attendance culture starts with making students and families feel welcome. There are countless ways to be welcoming, from daily routines and regular events to something never tried.

**A familiar face who greets.** Have school community members (e.g., popular teachers, parents, faith leaders, shopkeepers, barbers, etc.) serve as greeters on different days, welcoming students with an enthusiastic hello, handshake or high-five.

**Special handshakes.** Come up with a signature school handshake to greet one another in the morning.

**Fun, front-loaded.** Play music at the school entrance to energize mornings. Have homeroom start with something the kids won’t want to miss. No better way to motivate parents than their own children wanting to get to school on time every day.

*A non-traditional take on first-day traditions. The Fellowship: Black Male Educators for Social Justice organizes African-American men to “suit up and show up” at their neighborhood school to welcome back students and wish them a great year. To learn more, contact The Fellowship at 1000x2025@gmail.com.*
When children want to go to school, it is easier to get everyone out the door and to school on time. What they think of their teachers and classmates, how much they like what they’re learning, fun after-school programs—all help children want to come to school every day so they don’t miss out.

Friendships build attendance. Students who have good school friends are more likely to come to school. Research shows positive friendships are vital to school-age children’s healthy development and academic performance, including attendance. To encourage these:

- Offer students ample unstructured, but supervised, time with one another.
- Create more team-building games and recreational sports.
- Set clear rules for expected behavior: handling different social situations, addressing negative comments, and considering things from other points-of-view.

Checkin’ in. A child’s willingness to come to and stay in school also depends on their feeling someone at school cares enough to ask them how they are. This is often difficult to do. Ask students to describe their feelings and support peer efforts to change moods into positive ones.

“I believe in you” video. As a way to promote attendance and address the trauma and traumatic stress experienced by students at his school, Principal John Piniat and his team created this video just to show how much students mean to them.

You can watch the video on the Feltonville Arts & Sciences YouTube channel: https://bit.ly/2iXnC2Q
1 Definition and Selection. Determine who the attendance heroes are. Who’s eligible to be one? What’s the attendance period (e.g., weekly, monthly, quarterly, yearly, multiple years)? We recommend shorter periods allowing students to continually strive for attendance. Shorter periods are also more manageable for younger students. Examples: Students who consecutively remains at 95% during the month. Class who maintains the longest streak of 95% present.

2 Student Awards. What’s the best way to award your attendance heroes? Feel free to use the award certificates on the following pages. Also review the list of free/low-cost incentives.

3 Family Recognition. Will attendance heroes be announced at a school event? If so, how will parents/guardians also be recognized? How can they celebrate along with their child? After the event, how will you continue highlighting their family achievement?

More Advice from Fellow Educators and Parents

Rewarding Progress, Not Just Perfection
“Students should be rewarded for improved attendance, not just perfect records. Offering weekly perfect attendance awards can allow students to still have a chance to succeed the next week if they are absent this week.”

—Shanté Leneir Quartlebaum
Education Coordinator, Families Forward

Striving for Good Attendance
“Set quarterly perfect attendance challenges and recognize parents at the attendance awards assemblies. Striving for 95% allows a student to be recognized even if he doesn’t have perfect attendance.”

—Deanna Bredell
Assistant Principal, Kenderton Elementary
1 WHAT IS AN ATTENDANCE SCOREBOARD?

Just because attendance is serious business doesn’t mean it can’t be fun.

The Attendance Scoreboard is designed to gamify attendance among students and families, using the power of competition and our innate desire to reach goals to encourage showing up on-time, everyday, ready to learn.

The Attendance Scoreboard, pioneered by John Piniat, principal at Feltonville Arts & Sciences uses Microsoft Excel and Word to generate regular attendance “scoreboards” formatted to look like a sports scoreboard. All to inform and fire up the competitive spirit of students and their families.

Individual scores are also used to create classroom scores, motivating the entire class to strive for prizes tied to set attendance goals. It all works to create positive peer pressure among students who don’t want to let down the “team.”

It also offers a great way to identify, recognize and celebrate Attendance Heroes.

2 DOES IT WORK?

It’s a simple idea, but it seems to be really effective. Seven early-adopter schools report substantial gains in attendance.

3 WHY DOES IT WORK?

It’s all about leveraging the power of competition. Attendance Scoreboard translates attendance into terms students can understand. Then this understanding is used to “gamify” attendance. As Principal Piniat says, “Students now own their attendance score and talk about it with their parents.”

4 HOW DO I USE ATTENDANCE SCOREBOARDS AT MY SCHOOL?

Contact attendanceandtruancy@philasd.org for support using the Attendance Scoreboard at your school.
INCENTIVES 101

1. **Make attendance incentives** a part of your school's comprehensive plan to build an attendance culture.

2. **Incentives work.** They encourage positive behavior, including improved attendance.

3. **There are many ways to use them.**

4. **Accurate tracking is essential.** You can't reward what you don't record.

5. **Incentives don't need to be costly to be effective.** Find out what motivates students. Ask them.

6. **Offer incentives to families, too!** They appreciate being recognized for their attendance efforts.

7. **Inter-class competition is a powerful motivator.**

**FREE/LOW-COST IDEAS**

**For individual students:**
- Award certificates
- Name on attendance or honor roll, school papers, community newspaper, etc.
- Lunch with principal, mascot, etc.
- Good calls home and thank you letters to parents
- School paraphernalia and supplies
- Prizes provided by local business or organization (e.g., store vouchers for snacks)

**For classrooms:**
- Trophy that travels between classrooms
- Class breakfast/park picnic with principal and families
- Field trip
- Disco Ball Party
- Dress-down day
- Extra recess
- Spirit week

For help sponsoring incentives, contact your local partners and businesses to see what in-kind or financial donations they can provide. You may also consider posting your project to Philly FUNDamentals: thefundsdp.org/get-involved/philly-fundamentals

*A project planner for the incentives can also be found in the Educator Packet Appendix of this toolkit.*
**WEEKLY ATTENDANCE ASSEMBLY**

**For Kindergartners**
To improve their weekly attendance, particularly on Mondays

**Program Description:**
Every Monday the names of every kindergartener who was present in school from Monday through Friday the prior week has the chance of being recognized and awarded as one of two Attendance Heroes.

**Step 1:** On the Friday prior to the Monday drawing, all teachers place tickets of those students who were present all week in the bowl.

**Step 2:** Before the drawing begins, an Attendance Mantra is said or sung.

**Step 3:** Two students’ names are selected from the bowl, and they are awarded a prize. The following week, their families are invited to come to the assembly and be recognized along with their child.

**Supplies/Materials:**
- Bowl + Raffle tickets
- Award certificates
- Two prizes each week ($0.99 each)

**Estimated Cost:**
$2.00/week

**HIGH-FIVE CLUB**

**For Kindergarteners**
To improve their daily and weekly attendance

**Program Description:**
Weekly badges are awarded every Friday for kindergarteners with perfect attendance all week.

**Step 1:** Design, create, order to use existing design to print badges.

**Step 2:** Keep track of perfect attendance for the kindergarteners.

**Step 3:** Every Friday, hand out badges to the students with perfect attendance that week.

**Step 4:** Give high fives to those students wearing the badges as a way of congratulating them on their attendance success.

**Supplies/Materials:**
- High-Five Club Badges
- Safety pin or yarn to hold badges

**Estimated Cost:**
Cost of badges and pins based on quantity.

**KING/QUEEN FRIDAYS**

**For K-5**
To improve their weekly attendance, particularly on Fridays

**Program Description:**
Students who are present each Friday get a crown in the form of a necklace. Each Friday that they are present in school, they earn a sticker to be placed on their crown.

**Step 1:** Hand out crown necklaces to all students who are present on the first and subsequent Fridays. One crown necklace per student.

**Step 2:** Reward each student with a sticker to place on their crown each Friday.

**Step 3:** Beam with joy every Friday you are named King/Queen for attending school.

**Supplies/Materials:**
- Foam Sheet Crowns
- Stickers
- Yarn

**Estimated Cost:**
- $1.00/24 Crowns
- $1.00/Book of Stickers
ATTENDANCE CULTURE
INCENTIVES: PROJECT PLANNING QUESTIONS

1 Incentive Program Name:

2 School, Grade(s), Class(es):

3 Attendance Goal:

4 Program Description: What's the incentive/reward? Who’s eligible to get it?
How do you get one? Can you get more than one in a year?

5 Program Implementation Steps: How does it work? Use clear action steps.
How will you keep track of who has earned an incentive? Do you foresee any issues?
If so, what are your plans to address it.

6 Personnel: Who do you need on the project? What would be their role/responsibilities?
Is this project manageable given school-day expectations and schedules?

7 Supplies/Materials and Other Requirements: In addition to the incentive, what else is needed? Do you need anyone’s approval? Forms? Anything else?

8 Estimated Cost: How much do you think this will cost?
Family-focused events. Hold a dad-and-daughter dance in the fall, then a mom-and-son dance in the spring. Try out “throwback” movie nights or parties themed with TV shows or music from the parents’ generation.

At each event, announce your school’s attendance heroes and distribute books to younger students.

Good calls home. Develop a schoolwide strategy for every student to receive at least one good call home, for example, congratulating them on improved attendance, jumps in reading levels, good grades, great behavior, class leadership, etc.

Don’t wait: the earlier in the year, the better. And no need to stop at just one good call.

Family breakfasts from around the world. Ask parents to organize a monthly family breakfast on a school day that showcases different cultures and foods. Be sure to get the word out about the delicious way to start the school day, on time and ready to learn.

Fridge Magnets for Weekly Home Trackers. To show your appreciation, send each family a magnet along with their attendance packet.
ADDRESSING COMMON BARRIERS

Many students face circumstances that can make coming to school every day on time a challenge—such as illness, transportation, lack of clean uniform clothes, or other barriers. This section includes strategies to help educators connect families with available resources.

Also look for the ‘Helpful Resources to Overcome Attendance Barriers’ and ‘School Health Statement’ flyers found in the Family Packet Appendix of this toolkit.
When parents are given accurate information about their children's absences, new research shows they can become valuable players in making sure their kids show up at school.

**We communicate with families all the time, but are we communicating the right things?**

Most families drastically underestimate how often their children miss school. When researchers asked parents whose children were absent nearly 18 days in one school year how many days they thought their child had missed, they thought it was more like 10.

(Source: Nature Human Behaviour)

Instead of blaming kids and their families, focus on treating them with respect in trying to support their school attendance. For starters, show them respect by giving them the information they need to make informed decisions.

- **Few simple letters sent home with the right information.** The most effective letter in the research was the one that simply reported the total absences over time against school expectations. Parents could more accurately guess their kids’ attendance at the end of the year if they had received letters with this kind of tracking information, suggesting that this information influenced their perception. With this kind of right information, chronic absenteeism decreased by 10 percent.

- **Daily personal calls home to absent students.** In addition to the robo-call from the School District, personal phone calls, let parents and students know they are missed and encourage them to come back, or even the same day if they can so they don’t miss the another whole day.

  Decide in advance each month who will make these daily calls and ensure they have adequate time allotted on their schedule. On every call, as with “good calls,” be sure to share something positive about the student. Great sample scripts can be found on readyfreddy.org.

- **We-missed-you note.** Use the we-missed-you note to make our youngest students who have missed school (for reasons generally out of their control) feel welcomed back and supported in their catching up. *See Educator Packet Appendix.*

- **Absence excuse note.** Make it easier for parents with this excuse note template to get their notes in on time for every absence. *See Family Packet Appendix.*

  Schools may want to pair these flyers together by printing double sided.
**Action plans to ease attendance barriers.** Students who face significant barriers to attendance, such as illness, transportation, and a lack of clean clothes, need a plan to help their families, many of whom are experiencing challenges tied to poverty. To help, here are some ideas and resources:

- **Clothes Swap.** Organize a clothing swap where families can bring in uniforms, coats, boots, or rain gear that their children have outgrown while picking up “new” items that they need.

- **Clean Clothes.** Purchase a washer-dryer for the school building and allow families to wash school clothing. See if community partners can help with this expense or promote the request on Philly FUNDamentals. [thefundsdp.org/get-involved/philly-fundamentals](http://thefundsdp.org/get-involved/philly-fundamentals)

- **Safe Passage.** Consider starting a walking school bus route to help children walk in groups. The Office of Transportation Services website also describes how to request transportation changes for students. [philasd.org/transportation](http://philasd.org/transportation)

- **Housing instability, doubling up, evictions, homelessness.** Students experiencing homelessness have the right to remain in their school of origin even if they are no longer in-catchment, or to immediately enroll in their new neighborhood school without proof of address documentation. Build relationships with local homeless service providers to discuss potential ways to collaborate to support families and increase attendance.

- **Translation services.** Clearly communicate with limited English proficient speaking families in their home language the importance of attendance. Schools can partner with their Bilingual Counseling Assistants (BCAs) to provide interpretation and translation services for limited English-speaking ability families, and to send out school attendance notification letters in the language appropriate to the family. Schools can use their access code to contact LanguageLine for telephonic interpretation services. [philasd.org/face/multilingual/interpretation-services/](http://philasd.org/face/multilingual/interpretation-services/)

*Helpful Resources to Overcome Attendance Barriers flyer can be found in the Family Packet Appendix of this toolkit.*

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**More Advice from Fellow Educators and Parents**

**Not a Robot, but a Person Who Cares**

“When we see a pattern of absences, we contact families to offer support. Parents respond to being able to talk with a live person who cares and shows concern, rather than a robo-call or just another letter sent home.”

—Eva Sanchez, SAC Member, Parent, Student Climate Staff, McClure Elementary School
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Read by 4th is the nation's boldest and largest citywide coalition of families and partners protecting every child's right to read. Please visit readby4th.org/about/partners.

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