PHILADELPHIA
IS SHOWING UP FOR ATTENDANCE

Educator Resources to Improve Preschool Attendance 2019-2020

THE SCHOOL DISTRICT OF PHILADELPHIA
Office of Early Childhood Education
August 2019

Dear School/Center Leadership,

Welcome to the new program year! We are confident that this year will be better than the last as we work day in and day out to ensure that we deliver the most engaging program to our most valuable assets—our children and their families.

In support of our work, we are pleased to present the *Prekindergarten Attendance Toolkit*. This kit and the accompanying resources will support you as you promote on time, daily attendance among your students’ families and caregivers. Please utilize the kit as you promote daily attendance.

We know that coming to preschool on time, every day provides a strong foundation for student success. Research shows that children who come to school each day outperform their peers that have sporadic attendance academically. This is especially true in regards to language and literacy. The goal is to have every child reading at a proficient level by the fourth grade. High quality, early childhood programming supports children in obtaining all of the necessary knowledge and skills to become proficient readers for life! We are confident that the *Prekindergarten Attendance Toolkit* will support your work in promoting every day attendance for the children we serve.

Thank you for your hard work and have a great year!

Sincerely,

Michele Linder-Coates  
Executive Director, Office of Early Childhood Education, School District of Philadelphia

Jenny Bogoni  
Executive Director, Read by 4th, Free Library of Philadelphia
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• School District of Philadelphia Immunization Requirements
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EDUCATOR PACKET
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• Daily Attendance Poster
• Monthly Attendance Calendars
• Attendance Hero Certificates
• Project Planning Questions
• We Missed You!
• Family Breakfast Flyer
TIPS FOR USING THIS TOOLKIT

The toolkit is designed for preschool educators 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 program, 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 program.** Feel free to customize materials, where possible, for your preschool.

• **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 Early Childhood Education page at [philasd.org](http://philasd.org).

• **Help us make the toolkit better.** Email your feedback and ideas to James Cupit: [jhcupit@philasd.org](mailto:jhcupit@philasd.org).

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

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

• **Research shows that preschoolers who miss 10 percent or more of the school year (or just 2 days per month)—in excused or unexcused absences—arrive at kindergarten with lower levels of school readiness.** *(Attendance Works)*

• **We’re here to help!** Contact your child’s teacher if anything is making it difficult to get to preschool every day. We are all here to help.
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/center. We developed this packet of resources with a clear focus: to strengthen every educator’s most vital partnership with our families.

Feel free to distribute the entire family packet after you customize it for your school's/center’s use, or just use individual handouts if that works better. Great times for sharing information in the family packet are during registration days or at 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 Early Childhood Education page at philasd.org.

SAMPLE LETTER FROM PROGRAM ADMINISTRATOR

Update and personalize the letter, then cut and paste onto your letterhead.

*Available for download at readby4th.org/attendance and on the Office of Early Childhood Education page at philasd.org.

ATTENDANCE HEROES

Encourage families to post this where everyone at home can see it: on the fridge, child's room, etc.
PLEDGE OF ATTENDANCE

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

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.

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 IMMUNIZATION REQUIREMENTS AND CITY HEALTH CENTER LOCATIONS

Read by 4th.org/attendance or on the Office of Education for Children and Youth website.
WHY ATTENDANCE MATTERS
FAMILY PACKET

FEDERALLY QUALIFIED HEALTH CENTERS

Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) are “safety net” providers such as community health centers. The main purpose of the FQHC Program is to enhance the provision of primary care services in underserved communities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facility</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Zip Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AHS Health Center #6</td>
<td>1900 N. 20th St</td>
<td>19132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DVCH Fairmount Primary Care Center</td>
<td>301 W. Girard Ave</td>
<td>19120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QCHC Meade Family Health Center</td>
<td>2840 Dauphin St</td>
<td>19141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPHA Hunting Park Health Center</td>
<td>1412 Fairmount Ave</td>
<td>19121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPHA Medical Suite At Temple</td>
<td>1300 W. Louden St</td>
<td>19121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DVCH Maria De Los Santos Health Center</td>
<td>2501 W. Lehigh Ave</td>
<td>19133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Esperanza Health Center – Kensington</td>
<td>1999 W. Hunting Park Ave</td>
<td>19124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Esperanza Health Center – N. 5th St.</td>
<td>3223 North Broad St</td>
<td>19107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Esperanza Health Center – N. 6th St.</td>
<td>4417 N. 6th St</td>
<td>19140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PHMC Health Connection</td>
<td>1900 N 9th St</td>
<td>19140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PHMC Health Center at Temple</td>
<td>3401 North Broad St</td>
<td>19133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PHMC Congreso</td>
<td>412 W. Lehigh Ave</td>
<td>19140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spectrum Broad St Health Center</td>
<td>2230 Cottman Ave</td>
<td>19130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spectrum Community Health Center</td>
<td>4510 Frankford Ave</td>
<td>19132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y-HEP Health Center</td>
<td>5675 N. Front St</td>
<td>19130</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

FAMILY ATTENDANCE CHECKLIST BOOKMARK

Providers can distribute this handy attendance checklist bookmark at registration, parent engagement events, and parent/teacher conferences.

ABSENCE EXCUSE NOTE

Make it easier for parents with this excuse note template to get their notes in on time following every absence.
BUILDING AN ATTENDANCE CULTURE

Educators citywide 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 educators, teachers and staff.

In this section, we present resources designed to foster a positive attendance culture. Find downloadable versions of this toolkit at readby4th.org/attendance or on the Office of Early Childhood Education page at philasd.org.
To start, identify one person who can assume responsibility for facilitating this assessment to improve student attendance at your school/center.

Bring together a team of key stakeholders in your school/center 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/center.

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/CENTER 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 in database daily if applicable.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Our school/center has a clear understanding of the attendance policy.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. A team reviews attendance data on a regular basis to identify students achieving 95%+ attendance and students who are making progress toward the goal.</td>
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<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Our school/center intentionally welcomes and honors all students and families in ways that are culturally sensitive.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Our school/center recognizes students who attend 95%+, for example, through monthly, quarterly and annual incentive programs.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Our school/center recognizes students who improve moving from 85% to 90%-95%+, for example through incentive programs.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Our school/center reached out to parents with positive messaging when students are achieving attendance goal 95%+ or are moving in the right direction.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Our school/center 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>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Our school/center informs parents in non-policy language about the importance of attendance and encourages parents to help each other get their children to school.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

10. Any additional feedback or suggestions you would like to provide:

Adapted from materials provided by Attendance Works.
For more, visit attendanceworks.org/resources/self-assessment

**School/Center:** ____________________________  **Date:** ____________________________
1. Work with your attendance team or School Advisory Council to determine what’s best for your school/center.

2. 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.

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

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

5. 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.

6. Integrate campaigns into preschool community life. Think through:
   - How can students, families, teachers and other preschool 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/center (e.g., pajama day, 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?

7. 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?

8. 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. Identify point person to pull daily reports and provide data on gaps in attendance taking.
   - Support teachers who are struggling with attendance entry.

9. 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 in preschool 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 preschool 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 in promoting school attendance.

The Daily Attendance Tracker is designed as a 18” x 24” poster to be hung in your school’s/center’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 Early Childhood Education page at philasd.org or see the 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. Keep it at the total number of school days per month, reprint blank sheets, or laminate the countdown number to countdown each month.
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 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 handshake to greet one another in the morning.

Fun, front-loaded. Play music at the school/center entrance to energize mornings. Have the day start with something the kids won’t want to miss. There is no better way to motivate parents than their own children wanting to get to school on time, every day.
INCENTIVES 101

1 Make attendance incentives a part of your center’s/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.

FREE/LOW-COST IDEAS

- Award certificates
- Name on attendance poster, newsletter, bulletin board, 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)
- Theme day activities (e.g., Crazy Hat Day, Pajama Party, Super Hero Day, etc.)

For help sponsoring incentives, contact your local partners and businesses to see what in-kind or financial donations they can provide.

*A project planner for the incentives can also be found in the Educator Packet Appendix of this toolkit.*
ATTENDANCE CULTURE
INCENTIVES: PROJECT PLANNING QUESTIONS

1 Incentive Program Name:

2 School/Center:

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 family breakfast or special event honoring a caregiver (e.g., Donuts for Dads or Muffins for Moms). Try out “throwback” movie nights or parties themed with TV shows or music from the parents’ generation.

At your family engagement events, announce your school’s attendance heroes and distribute books to students.

**Good calls home.** Develop a strategy for every family to receive at least one good call home, for example, congratulating them on improved attendance, 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.

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**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 for parents to bring their child to school, on time and ready to learn.
ADDRESSING COMMON BARRIERS

Many children face circumstances that can make coming to preschool 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 on time, every day. 

**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.** Let families 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 whole day.

  Focus first on students who have missed more than 10% of preschool days to date (considered chronically absent), those who have missed more than 5% of preschool days to date (the SDP 95%+ metric), or those on the cusp of the 95% threshold.

  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 preschool (for reasons out of their control) feel welcomed back and supported in their catching up.

- **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/centers 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 clothing, 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 your 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

- **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.

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

We'd like to thank past and present members of the Read by 4th Attendance Working Group whose extraordinary contribution of their time and expertise made the Attendance Toolkit possible.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

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.

READ BY 4TH

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Attendance Works

Advancing Student Success By Reducing Chronic Absence

attendanceworks.org