



ATTENDANCE TOOLKIT

RESOURCES FOR SCHOOLS TO
INCREASE STUDENT ATTENDANCE



In collaboration with [Count ME In](#)



THE IMPORTANCE OF STUDENT ATTENDANCE

THE BASICS

This information is designed to help school staff understand how attendance can impact a variety of health factors for students as it relates to health services, school climate, family engagement, and community involvement.

WHY DOES ATTENDANCE MATTER?

Students who miss more than 10% of their school days (whether they are excused, unexcused, or disciplinary), are experiencing chronic absenteeism. These students are at a higher risk of reduced academic achievement, increased risk of dropping out, and delayed graduation. Improving attendance requires a comprehensive approach that considers various factors such as physical health, mental well-being, school climate, and family circumstances. The integration of support services and collaboration among educational organizations and programs are essential components of efforts to improve student attendance and, consequently, their overall educational outcomes.



RESOURCES

Maine DOE Attendance & Dropout Prevention - Resources and guidance to help schools monitor and reduce chronic absenteeism.

Attendance & Truancy Tracker - Data & information for Maine students.

School Team Self-Assessment - Resource to help school leaders and their teams identify strengths and opportunities to implement a schoolwide attendance strategy.

STRATEGIES

COLLECT DATA

Review historic attendance data and implement real-time attendance monitoring systems. Student-level data should be reviewed at least monthly. Analyzing disaggregated attendance data can help identify groups with attendance challenges.

DEVELOP A TEAM

Build a team consisting of admin, student support staff, school nurse, attendance coordinator, and other relevant stakeholders. All schools with chronic absenteeism rates above 10% should have a team that meets monthly.

MAKE A PLAN

Utilizing data, teams should develop a tiered attendance improvement plan that includes targeted interventions and strategies to address absenteeism based on the specific needs of their local community.





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HEALTH SERVICES

This information is designed to help school staff understand how attendance can impact a variety of health factors for students as it relates to health services, school climate, family engagement, and community involvement.

WHY DO HEALTH SERVICES MATTER?

Since health is such a critical factor in student attendance, school-based health services and programs have the potential to significantly reduce absenteeism, especially in communities with limited access to health resources. Review student health records, implement individualized health plans, and develop education campaigns to address misconceptions in your school community.



RESOURCES

Maine DOE School Health Services - Staff to help students with preventive care such as flu shots, vision and hearing screening, and acute and emergency care.

Asthma-Friendly Schools Toolkit - a comprehensive approach to asthma management in schools that aligns with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Managing Chronic Conditions in Schools - Model school wellness policy supplement from the National Association of School Nurses.

STRATEGIES

AUDIT RECORDS

Student health records can provide important clues about the reasons for absences. When school nurses are aware that specific students are frequently absent, consider health information that could be relevant.

REVIEW HEALTH PLANS

Having current individualized health plans in place for students with chronic conditions can reduce absences related to those conditions. Noting increases in physical complaints may be a clue to emergent health issues.

EDUCATE

Misconceptions about the risk of communicable diseases may lead to unnecessary absences. School policies and education should reflect accurate information. For example, the low likelihood of students transmitting lice at school so that students are not absent for that reason.





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SCHOOL CLIMATE

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WHY DOES SCHOOL CLIMATE MATTER?

Students are likelier to stay home from school if they do not feel physically and emotionally safe. Use your school's Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey (MIYHS), school climate, and local behavioral data to understand the impact of bullying, bias, fear of physical violence, and lack of acceptance on your school community. Greet students warmly, address bullying and bias, and explicitly teach behavior just like you teach academic skills.

RESOURCES

Maine DOE Bullying Prevention - State resources to understand laws and data surrounding bullying with resources for schools.

Maine DOE Restorative Practices - Statewide training in implementing restorative practices in schools.

Maine School-wide Positive Behavior Interventions & Supports - Training, conferences, policy & guidance, and additional resources from Maine DOE & The University of Maine.

National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments - Provides training and support to state and local administrators to improve school climate and conditions

STRATEGIES

GREET STUDENTS

Create a welcoming school environment that expects and celebrates good attendance. Greet students with positive, welcoming messages even when late or missed several days.

ADDRESS BULLYING & BIAS

Bias and bullying perpetuate an unsafe school climate. Address bias through inclusive curriculum, training, and diverse hiring. Address bullying with policies, education, consequences, support, and community involvement. Use reported data to determine if your actions are effective.

TEACH & REINFORCE SKILLS

Implement a multitiered program to teach and reinforce positive social and behavioral skills. Explicitly teach the social and behavioral skills that are needed in school to ensure that all students understand school expectations.





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FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

This information is designed to help school staff understand how attendance can impact a variety of health factors for students as it relates to health services, school climate, family engagement, and community involvement.

WHY DOES FAMILY ENGAGEMENT MATTER?

Caregivers play a crucial role in determining whether students attend school regularly; however, they may need to understand the importance of regular attendance for their children in pre-K, kindergarten, and 1st grade. Children who are chronically absent in their earliest school years are less likely to be reading at grade level by third grade and, in turn, are much more likely to drop out before graduating from high school.

RESOURCES

Maine DOE Family Engagement & Cultural Responsiveness - Department resources to assist the education system in family engagement

Attendance Nudge Template - Example of an attendance nudge that can be sent to families.

Attendance Works Family Engagement Toolkit - Created with the help of practitioners who have worked successfully with families to improve attendance

STRATEGIES

INCENTIVIZE

Consider using incentives to build regular attendance habits. The Perfectly Punctual Campaign engages children in monitoring their own daily attendance and honors parents monthly for getting their children to school on time.

NUDGE

Attendance nudges are interventions designed to encourage and remind families. Review attendance data regularly and communicate total absences to families to promote awareness. Tangible communications are better than digital.

PARTNER

Effective family engagement programs develop staff cultural competency, identify effective communication strategies, and build parenting skills. Partner with families to understand barriers and address challenges collaboratively.





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COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

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WHY DOES COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT MATTER?

Schools can only meet the physical health, mental health, and family stability needs that affect attendance if they partner with related providers and agencies that focus on those respective areas. Additionally, providers in places other than education are unlikely to consider school attendance as an outcome of their services. Build relationships with organizations in the local community to help provide wrap-around supports for students and families.



RESOURCES

Attendance Works Awareness Campaign - Webinars, toolkits, templates, blogs, and other resources to promote attendance for students.

National Drop Out Prevention Center Mentoring - Overview of the importance of mentoring in relation to dropout prevention

Collective Impact Toolkit - Community tool box of resources to support the implementation a collective impact approach

STRATEGIES

PROMOTE MEDIA CAMPAIGN

Educate the broader community about the importance of school attendance and opportunities to support your work.

CONDUCT INTERVIEWS

Attendance Works has resources that can be used to educate the community about chronic absenteeism. Each district should have an attendance coordinator that monitors student attendance regularly. When a student is at risk for chronic absenteeism and/or truancy, coordinators should interview students and parents to understand the challenges and help develop a plan.

UNIVERSALLY SUPPORT

Take a universal approach to identifying highly mobile families. All families should receive accessible, easy-to-understand notifications about supports for highly mobile students during enrollment and several times a year.





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MENTAL HEALTH

This information is designed to help school staff understand how attendance can impact a variety of health factors for students as it relates to health services, school climate, family engagement, and community involvement.

WHY DOES MENTAL HEALTH MATTER?

Student support personnel are trained to recognize, respond to, and access resources for children who are missing school due to family instability, mental health issues, and social/emotional concerns. They play key roles in determining which students require intensive interventions and are critical to maintaining effective communication with outside providers. Utilize their expertise as part of your attendance team and to build staff capacity.



RESOURCES

Maine DOE McKinney-Vento Education - Information, opportunities, and other resources from the Maine DOE to support highly mobile students.

Attendance Support Plan - Template for educators and administrators to use with students and families to support increasing attendance.

NAMI Maine Mental Health First Aid - Skills-based training that teaches participants who are 18+ how to identify, understand, and respond to someone who is experiencing a mental health or substance use problem.

Access Maine - Online resource guide with information to connect people living in Maine to public programs, services, and other resources.

STRATEGIES

SCREEN

Universal screening can extend the reach of support staff, connect students with resources before absences pile up, and enlist the broader school community. Build staff capacity by providing Mental Health First Aid training. Screen for McKinney Vento eligibility and be proactive in supporting students who move frequently.

MENTOR

Implement an evidence-based mentoring program to mobilize community members. Check and Connect, and The Success Mentor both leverage relationships with students to improve attendance.

COLLECTIVELY IMPACT

Adopt a collective impact approach to addressing health, substance use, socioeconomic, and other mental health issues that impact attendance.





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PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

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WHY DOES PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT MATTER?

Creating a safe, comfortable, and easily accessible school environment is crucial for ensuring regular student attendance. When students feel secure and protected from bullying and violence, they are more inclined to attend school consistently. Additionally, a comfortable and well-maintained physical environment and convenient transportation options further encourage students to attend regularly, fostering their educational success.



RESOURCES

Maine DOE School Safety Center - Statewide training & resources ranging from emergency management and behavior threat management to transportation safety.

Air Quality & School Attendance - Research from the EPA regarding the impact of air quality on student performance.

Attendance Works - Research regarding student impact of accessible transportation.

STRATEGIES

TRANSPORT

Schools well-connected to efficient school bus services generally experience better attendance, because transportation challenges can limit access. Create alternative plans for canceled routes and help to coordinate carpool plans. Walking School Bus programs also support getting to school safely everyday.

MONITOR AIR QUALITY

Air quality can impact attendance by affecting the health and comfort of students and staff, their ability to concentrate and learn, and even parental decisions about sending children to school. Schools with good air quality are more likely to have higher attendance rates.

REVIEW SAFETY PLANS

It's important for schools to be safe and for students to feel protected. When schools have good safety measures and address bullying, more kids come to school regularly.





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COMPREHENSIVE HEALTH EDUCATION

This information is designed to help school staff understand how attendance can impact a variety of health factors for students as it relates to health services, school climate, family engagement, and community involvement.

WHY DOES COMPREHENSIVE HEALTH EDUCATION MATTER?

Comprehensive health education can improve school attendance by developing healthy behaviors, addressing mental health concerns, preventing substance use, fostering a positive school climate, teaching disease prevention, and encouraging parental engagement. By equipping students with the knowledge and skills to maintain their health and well-being, schools can reduce absenteeism and create a more conducive learning environment.



RESOURCES

Maine DOE Health Education - Provides teachers, administrators, nonprofits, higher education faculty, parents, and community members with access to a broad range of resources and tools reflective of Maine’s learning standards.

Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey - Biennial survey of Maine students in grades 5 through 12 that monitors health behaviors and attitudes regarding tobacco, alcohol, substance use, mental health, nutrition, physical activity, and protective factors.

STRATEGIES

REVIEW DATA

Make comprehensive health education a core element of the curriculum. Best practices for developing a skills-based curriculum that addresses student needs include reviewing the school’s [MIYHS data](#) and other local health-related data sources.

PREVENT ILLNESS

Health education provides students with knowledge and develops skills to practice hygiene and prevent diseases. When students understand how to prevent the spread of illnesses like colds and flu, they are more likely to take precautions and reduce illness-related absences.

PROMOTE PREVENTION

When students are educated about the risks and consequences of drug and alcohol use and develop skills to avoid use, they are less likely to engage in these behaviors. This can lead to improved attendance because substance misuse issues often result in absenteeism.





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SCHOOL NUTRITION

This information is designed to help school staff understand how attendance can impact a variety of health factors for students as it relates to health services, school climate, family engagement, and community involvement.

WHY DOES SCHOOL NUTRITION MATTER?

Implementing universal meals in schools boosts student attendance. It improves overall health and well-being, including lower risk of obesity, better nutrition, and reduced levels of anxiety, depression, and behavioral incidents. Improving student access to nutritious food at school and in the community can help address health issues related to poverty and reduce chronic absenteeism.



RESOURCES

Maine DOE Child Nutrition - Provides a variety of programs and resources for school nutrition programs and staff.

Full Plates, Full Potential - Working to end childhood food insecurity and create access to nutritious meals.

Good Shepard Food Bank - Sources, prepares, and distributes commodity foods to partner agencies across the state.

STRATEGIES

SERVE BREAKFAST

When students have access to a nutritious breakfast at school, they are more likely to arrive on time and be ready to learn. Serving breakfast in school eliminates barriers related to transportation or stigma.

PROMOTE NUTRITION

Teach students about the importance of making healthy food choices, reading food labels, and preparing balanced meals. Nutrition education can help students and their families make informed decisions about their diets, leading to better health and, potentially, better attendance.

PARTNER WITH COMMUNITY

Initiatives like food pantries, after-school meal programs, and weekend food backpack programs can help ensure students have access to adequate nutrition outside of school hours, reducing absenteeism due to hunger or malnutrition.





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PHYSICAL EDUCATION

This information is designed to help school staff understand how attendance can impact a variety of health factors for students as it relates to health services, school climate, family engagement, and community involvement.

WHY DOES PHYSICAL EDUCATION MATTER?

Physical education (PE) and activity through classes, recess, experiential learning, and diverse extracurricular programs can create a supportive atmosphere that fosters healthier, more engaged students. By providing them an opportunity to learn motor skills, concepts, fitness knowledge, and safety factors, students can become successful in a variety of physical activities.



RESOURCES

Maine DOE Physical Education - Information and resources including standards for instruction, assessment, and professional learning opportunities.

Maine Health Let's Go - Community engagement initiative working with communities to create environments that support healthy choices.

Playworks - Playworks helps schools and districts make the most of recess through on-site staffing, consultative support, professional development, free resources, and more.

CDC Health Schools - Resources for creating frameworks for physical education and activity in schools.

STRATEGIES

MOVE YOUR BODY

Daily PE and physical activity provides students with consistent opportunities to be active during the school day. Research indicates that schools with PE/physical activity each day have better attendance. These opportunities can improve a students' overall fitness, positively impacting their health and attendance.

OFFER EXTRACURRICULARS

Offer a diverse range of sports teams and clubs that cater to different interests and skill levels. Participation in these activities can motivate students to attend school regularly, as they may not want to miss activities, practices, or games.

PROMOTE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Initiate campaigns to promote the benefits of physical activity and healthy lifestyles. Campaigns might include informational posters, community newsletters, and educational programs to raise awareness.





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EMPLOYEE WELLNESS

This information is designed to help school staff understand how attendance can impact a variety of health factors for students as it relates to health services, school climate, family engagement, and community involvement.

WHY DOES EMPLOYEE WELLNESS MATTER?

School employees who embrace healthy practices and model positive behaviors and attitudes for students will create a more inviting atmosphere for student attendance. Promoting the overall health of school employees also helps to support students' health and academic success. Individual schools or districts may wish to review their local attendance data to determine whether staff well-being may be influencing student attendance.



RESOURCES

Maine DOE Employee Health Promotion & Wellness

- Professional learning opportunities & resources for school employee wellness promotion.

CDC Employee Wellness

- Information about the importance of employee wellness and health, including tools for creating a culture of wellness.

STRATEGIES

SUPPORT WELLNESS

Fostering adult well-being encourages a positive learning environment and ensures that staff are emotionally and mentally healthy. This creates an engaging school atmosphere and positive classroom environments support student attendance.

PROVIDE TRAINING

Providing all school employees with professional development that focuses on building their own social-emotional skills will have a positive effect on the wellness culture and climate of the school. These effects will support regular attendance for everyone.

HONOR TEACHER ATTENDANCE

High rates of teacher absenteeism, whether due to illness or burnout, can negatively impact student attendance. Frequent teacher absences can lead to disruptions in the learning process, substitute teachers who may not be as familiar with the curriculum, and a less stable classroom environment.





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EARLY LEARNING

This information is designed to help school staff understand how attendance can impact a variety of health factors for students as it relates to health services, school climate, family engagement, and community involvement.

WHY DOES EARLY LEARNING MATTER?

Early learning programs play a crucial role in laying the foundation for future academic success and regular attendance is critical to reaping these benefits. Offering mixed delivery systems, building strong family partnerships, and facilitating smooth transitions are interconnected approaches that create a supportive and engaging learning environment for the youngest of learners.



RESOURCES

Maine DOE Public Pre-K Self-Assessment - Self-assessment and CQI tool for school administrative units.

Maine DOE Transitioning to Kindergarten - Resources for parents, caregivers, educators, and providers, including professional opportunities and learning modules.

Head Start Knowledge Center - Information to help promote regular attendance, including strategies for schools.

STRATEGIES

ENGAGE FAMILIES

Families that feel engaged are more invested in the child's education. This can be achieved through regular communication, celebrations, and collaboration. To bolster partnerships, consider a two-generation approach or planned home visits.

PLAN TRANSITIONS

In childcare settings, there is a need for regular communication with the caregiver and a focus on the child's socio-emotional development. School settings add a layer of academic instruction and begin to focus more on the child than the whole family.

CONSIDER ALTERNATIVES

School hours rarely completely overlap with working hours. To acknowledge the continued childcare needs of families, provide mixed-delivery early learning opportunities. Consider full-day programming. Develop community partnerships to support before- and after-school care.

