Section C: Attendance

Section Contents

Introduction to Attendance
page 61

Tools

Introduction: Attendance

"There are a number of students who don't come to school and who come to school after class has started."

Attendance is a vital component in student achievement. Data indicate a clear link between attendance and academic outcomes. When students and families feel welcomed and valued, students are more likely to make a positive connection with school, attend regularly, and succeed academically. Building connectedness between students, families and school is vital.

In addition, a highly engaging and meaningful curriculum is critical to improved student attendance. Students who are engaged and challenged look forward to coming to school.

Additional information is available through the MPS Department of Student Support Services, Office of Attendance, at 612-668-5470 or http://sss.mpls.k12.mn.us/.

The table below offers some practical tips for building leaders to implement in their schools.

Focus Areas	Role of Building Leader(s)
School Connectedness	• **Maintain a focus on building positive relationships in the building—model, support, and encourage them.** • Become familiar with the cultural expectations and traditions that students bring with them and find ways to acknowledge and celebrate them at school. • Reach out to families and communities where students live; invite volunteers in and welcome parents when they come into the building.
Attendance	• **Use data to identify the patterns of attendance among students.** • Establish the expectation that students are to be in school and in class on time. Find ways to recognize students who do that. • Use consistent messages and reinforcement to support student attendance.

Tool Guide: Attendance

Tool: Assessing Attendance Functions

A tool to assess which key attendance functions are in place and where there are gaps

School Name _____ Date _____

Planning Group _____

_____

	Not discussed	Discussed but no action	In development	Implementation in process	Established practice
Our school has a climate that promotes attendance.					
Our school has an accurate and timely attendance tracking system.					
We communicate our attendance expectations and policies to parents.					
A specific person has responsibility for each of the following roles: • Collecting and monitoring attendance data • Analyzing data and problem solving • Contacting students and families • Designing, implementing and evaluating interventions					

	Not discussed	Discussed but no action	In development	Implementation in process	Established practice
Our school has identified barriers to attendance. The 3 most significant barriers are: • • •					
Our school has specific plans in place to address identified barriers to attendance.					
We monitor the implementation and effectiveness of our attendance practices.					
We use community agencies to help address attendance concerns.					
We have strategies across the full continuum: • Staff development • Climate • Promotion • Prevention • Early identification and intervention • Intensive intervention					

Tool: Creating an Effective Attendance System

Guidelines and strategies to help shape the attendance system in your school

Attendance Policy Purpose: improved attendance and connectedness, not punishment.

Early Intervention Makes a Difference
- Attendance patterns begin as early as kindergarten and first grade.
- Attendance is most likely to improve when identified and addressed early in each school year (e.g. within first few weeks).
- Be aware of students who may be losing interest and/or experiencing school problems. Plan interventions that address individual student needs (e.g., one-to-one meetings, mentors, student focus groups, recognition for slight improvements).

Family/Parent Communication and Involvement is Key
- Establish partnerships with families to promote good attendance.
- Seek multiple opportunities to ensure that attendance procedures are understood by all staff, students and families (e.g., what is an "excused" vs. an "unexcused" absence).
- Prioritize family involvement, parent notification, and frequent home-school contacts.
- Take opportunities to understand families' ethnic, cultural, linguistic and/or religious backgrounds and how this may influence their students' attendance.

Target Interventions for Students with Established Patterns of Poor Attendance
- Identify specific reasons for poor attendance (e.g., an alarm clock may not be helpful if the student is staying home to baby-sit younger siblings).
- Seek family involvement and support; make home visits when necessary.
- Identify barriers for families; engage community partners to assist.
- Institute school based interventions that are meaningful to the student.

School-Wide Planning is Important
- Communicate to all building staff that attendance is everyone's responsibility.
- Develop goals for the school year, based on previous attendance data patterns.
- Seek input from student focus groups.
- Identify strategies to meet goals based on best practices and assessment of previous efforts. Don't assume incentives have made a difference without looking at the data.

The Attendance Team
- Identify an attendance team with the understanding that it is a school-wide responsibility.
- Develop team protocols for doing the work, including:

—How and when to look at data; identify others who should receive data (e.g., OCR attendance data, students on "C" and "D" lists, letters sent, teacher tracking).
—Roles and responsibilities of team members (as well as others in the school).
—Plan for a continuum of interventions from prevention to intensive intervention.
—Analyze and report data to leadership and grade level teams monthly.

- Establish procedures to sustain the work:
  —Create a written plan with clear roles and responsibilities to ensure system continues in event of staff changes.
  —Cross train staff.

- Keep attendance in the forefront through student celebrations; plan for public recognition of students with good and/or improving attendance, and involve parents.

Tool: Sample Attendance Goal Work Plan

A planning tool to help focus attendance goals and strategies, and identify roles and responsibilities

Goals	Strategy	Required Actions	Lead Person(s)	Time Frame	Evaluation
Example: *Increase attendance group A from baseline of 58% to 61%*	Meet biweekly to plan for celebrations, and measure improvement team- and school-wide.	Develop student celebration committee: hold three celebrations a year for improved attendance. Measure and monitor improved attendance on teams.	Social worker, truancy worker	Next meeting in 3 weeks	Review school-wide data and for specific teams by A–D attendance; review monthly (same date each month). Have first celebration planned.

Tool: Sample Attendance Intervention Monitoring Sheet

A tool to track interventions for individual students

Student Name: Parent/Guardian Name:
Date: Person Responsible:
Family contact: Relationship:
Address:
Phone:

Reason for referral (check all that apply):
- Frequent tardiness (>5/month)
- Frequent absences (>3/month)
- Frequent behavior referrals/suspensions (>4/month)
- Failing classes (on "Academic Intervention" AI)

Actions taken (check all that apply):
Please include dates, relevant information and outcomes.

- Discussion/meeting with student:

- Discussion/meeting with family member (please identify and indicate phone or home visit):

- Discussion with teachers/school staff (please identify):

- Started attendance monitoring/reinforcement plan with student (please describe/attach relevant information):

- Regularly scheduled meeting/check/connect time with student:

- Other (please describe):

- Shared information with team at attendance meeting (date) _____

Return sheet to Attendance Team

Tool: Strategies for Students with Chronic Attendance Problems

- Identify strategies that focus specifically on students in "C" and "D" attendance categories.

- Communicate regularly with families.

- Maintain frequent contact with students and provide positives for small gains.

- Create ongoing supportive check-ins with a specific group of students (e.g., a "prompt and present" club for students moving from "C" to "B" attendance group).

- Involve parents in celebrations/recognitions.

- Hold student focus groups to gather information on barriers and to help develop supportive strategies.

- Set individual attendance/educational goals.

- Review/discuss truancy video with students as an incentive to be in school more regularly.

- Develop contracts/action plans with students, sharing with parents.

- Discuss plans with students and staff regarding barriers that contribute to poor attendance.

- Give out alarm clocks for those in need while developing attendance goal/sheet/contact for individual students.

Tool: Sample Tardy Rules and Procedures

Expectations
- Tardy policy is established and clear.
- All building staff knows and understands the tardy policy and procedures.
- All teachers/staff positively reinforce students being on time.
- Expectations reinforced every day in class.

Rules
- Work is ready for students who arrive early or on time.
- Teachers close classroom doors when bell rings. Students outside of classroom are tardy but are expected to enter class.
- Do not argue with students who arrive late.
- Do not send tardy students back out into halls for a pass.
- Student is assigned detention every time s/he is tardy, including first time.
- Parents are notified of detention.
- If students fail to appear for detention, in-school suspension will be used.
- No passes given for first 10 minutes of day/period or last ten minutes.

Procedures
- Principal frequently reminds students of importance of arriving on time.
- Staff positively reinforces students who come to school on time.
- Data are collected to determine effectiveness of tardy policy and procedures.
- School consistently reminds parents and students of policy through newsletter, announcements, at meetings, etc.