

## **Components of a Comprehensive School-Based Approach to Increase Attendance**

Establish a sensible and sustainable district-wide model for ensuring students regularly attend and stay in school by incorporating the critical elements of recognized, proven approaches developed by Baltimore, Alhambra, Los Angeles and other school districts, as highlighted below.

### **1. Create a strong attendance data collection and dissemination system that helps target interventions early and often**

- Collect and regularly publish school district attendance data that includes a strong focus on chronic absences and severe chronic absences and that highlights suspensions and other out-of-school exclusions
- Make accurate, real-time attendance data available to individual schools and their community partners to drive agency decision-making
- Disaggregate attendance data by key demographic and educational categories
- Measure, publicize, and address all absences, including those excused and unexcused
- Set yearly concrete, measurable and well-publicized attendance goals by school and by district
- Record the reason(s) for student absences, so that appropriate school and support staff can address them
- Build an early warning system that uses multiple measures of attendance and suspensions
- Require school-sites to review data daily and weekly to identify students with needs and provide them with appropriate interventions
- Set student attendance levels that, if not met, will trigger an immediate response from school attendance office staff, such as convening a Student Study Team meeting or a meeting with the student and parent at which the importance of attendance is shared and strategies and services are offered

### **2. Reduce school-initiated exclusions**

- Ensure that the school's discipline code requires that initial interventions be made prior to suspensions for minor offenses, that it restricts the use of suspensions for "defiance," and that it promotes affirmatively teaching positive behavior and providing pro-social behavior lessons to students who violate school rules
- Set clear and ambitious goals by school and by district for reducing suspensions and expulsions across the board and for particular subgroups, such as African-Americans, who are disproportionately suspended and expelled

### **3. Partner with families early on and often**

- Invite family participation early on by making person-to-person contact on the same day of an absence or tardy
- Adopt problem-solving strategies for students who are chronically absent, and work closely with parents to alleviate the reasons behind their child's poor attendance

- Find ways to honor and reward parents for their child’s good attendance in pre-school through the 8<sup>th</sup> grade
  - Offer parents specific suggestions that will help them understand how to support their children in school and get involved in their education. Ensure that these suggestions are “do-able” for all parents, especially for those who may have struggled in school themselves
  - Educate parents about the basic things they can do to establish a school-going culture in their home, such as annual health and dental check-ups, providing for an adequate night’s sleep, ensuring there are morning routines that allow enough time for travel and breakfast, etc.
  - Include questions on parent surveys about attendance, such as when and why it is difficult to get their children to school and how the schools can help
4. **Create a communication/media campaign regarding the importance of attendance**
- Establish a school-going culture, recognizing that the basis of good attendance is having a good school to attend
  - Make first-day-of-school enrollment and regular attendance during the first two weeks of school a top priority for schools, the mayor’s office, county and city agencies, and community organizations and partners. Identify corporate, media, cultural and elected supporters to help carry this message
  - Communicate frequently with parents and families about the importance of regular and on-time attendance and use a variety of messengers, languages and formats to ensure that these messages are heard and reinforced
5. **Create a uniform system at each school site for prevention and intervention**
- Focus on prevention, intervention, and recovery rather than on punishment and legal intervention
  - Develop a system that immediately identifies at-risk and truant youth and provide a continuum of services for assisting them
  - Ensure school counselors and staff are trained to provide daily supports and interventions to students with attendance concerns
  - Develop an individualized, comprehensive plan for students with the most intense (“Tier 3”) needs that includes incentives, prevention, intervention, and recovery strategies and services, relationship building, case management, and other tools that address the root causes of truancy
  - Partner with the Department of Public Health, community and faith-based organizations to publicize available services, stress their importance, and address parental concerns
  - Maximize health partnerships that will ensure students receive annual health, dental and vision examinations
  - Ensure that school-based health staff use attendance and chronic absence data to target their outreach and prioritize services and follow-up for dental, nutrition, asthma, mental health or other health needs
  - Require a comprehensive assessment to be conducted by school sites for low-attending students
6. **Focus on high-need populations, schools, grades, and times of year**
- Develop an indicator for use in schools and their attendance offices that shows the number of school years in which a student has been chronically absent. Include this

indicator on key school reports and focus attendance efforts on children with multiple periods of chronic absence

- Require schools with poor attendance to budget for a full-time, dedicated attendance monitor and make attendance the first priority of their school improvement plan
- Focus on attendance in key transition grades—Kindergarten, 1<sup>st</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup>—and provide additional attention and interventions in these grades. Partner with and help train early childhood organizations such as Head Start, Zero to Three, LAUP and others, to emphasize the importance of pre-K and Kindergarten attendance
- Encourage schools to use mobility as a trigger for additional academic and support services and pay special attention to the attendance of highly mobile students, such as homeless youth and youth in foster care

**7. Utilize rewards and attendance incentives**

- Adopt a ratio of 4 incentives to each consequence to align with research on effective attendance and student engagement initiatives
- Require every school to have monthly attendance incentives and publicize positive attendance
- Provide “high-value” incentives for the highest attending students and schools

**8. Provide training to all school staff**

- Ensure that attendance office and other key school staff are trained to recognize and help highly mobile, homeless, or foster care students stay enrolled in their current schools, to expedite enrollment changes when necessary, and to provide material supports and encouragement to enable regular attendance
- Provide professional development for principals and teachers to help them improve attendance

**9. Focus on proven universal strategies such as:**

- Effective and engaging instruction (like Big Picture Learning’s one-student-at-a-time, advisor-led, project-based approach), and alternative school models for students with challenging or special needs
- Transforming schools to create a positive culture with high expectations, excellent management, good teachers, a solid curriculum, strong parent involvement and engagement, and learning environments that are culturally relevant and respectful of the skills and knowledge students bring to school
- Welcoming schools where students want to be and feel they belong and where students feel that schools care about them. In these schools, for example, if a student is missing from school, staff members may go to their homes and knock on the door to find out what’s wrong

**10. Address transportation and safety barriers: make it easier, safer, and quicker to get to school**

- Provide easier and more frequent opportunities for parents and students to give feedback about transportation (e.g., MTA and Yellow Bus) service and needs

(especially for 6<sup>th</sup> grade riders), such as adding a texting or on-line complaint hotline or some questions to an annual school survey (e.g., Alhambra's Climate Survey)

- Develop more Walking to School Bus, Community Watch, Safe Passage and other programs that involve teachers, school staff, the Mayor's Office, community organizations, parents and family members in efforts to protect children and youth on their way to and from school
- Consider awarding different types of MTA passes to students, varying the time, allowable routes, and number of rides depending upon the student's age (maturity), prior attendance, and school performance. This could include awarding unrestricted daily bus passes to very high attending and performing high school students
- Solicit funding for a transportation system review that would investigate alternative bussing systems, such as the one developed in Denver, CO which uses a system of mini-buses and a hub-and-spoke system
- Implement a transportation texting campaign to gather more current information regarding MTA service. Investigate the demand for and the cost of providing yellow bus service for the (few) 6<sup>th</sup> grade students who currently use MTA and have to transfer

**11. Increase the role of the youth voice in schools and learn from youth about how to improve attendance**

- Establish forums, suggestion boxes, and listening tours to hear from students about what would help them get to school regularly and on time
- Involve students in the planning of transition plans, IEP's, school course selections, middle and high school choices, etc.
- Ensure there is an established student governance structure at secondary schools
- Expand student school climate surveys to allow suggestions about desired services, classes and activities and add a "what would make it more likely that you would come to school regularly?" question

**12. Utilize the SARB process only after documented interventions have been provided and failed and only in connection with mental health and other resources and strategies**

**13. Referrals to law enforcement or the City or District Attorney should be made only as a last resort and after proof of multiple failed interventions**

- Significantly limit truancy filings against parents and other punitive initiatives (such as citations) which have, in most cases, not been shown to be effective, and require more missed school time for cases where schools have documented extensive interventions and where children have been truant for extended periods of time