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Do You Know....

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Fact Sheet for Virginia's Parents
The Importance of School Attendance

Why is Attendance Important?

Students who are chronically absent may have more difficulty mastering reading concepts by third grade, a higher chance of failing subjects in middle school, and if absences continue, an increased probability of dropping out of high school.

What is Chronic Absenteeism?

Chronic absenteeism is defined as missing 10 percent or more of the school year regardless of the reason. It includes both excused (e.g., illness, among others) and unexcused absences (e.g. truancy, among others). The Virginia Board of Education's *Regulations Establishing Standards for Accrediting Public Schools in Virginia* are designed to ensure that an effective educational program is established and maintained in Virginia's public schools. Virginia is one of 35 states that uses chronic absenteeism as a school quality indicator to measure student engagement.

Attendance and Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities are more likely to be absent from school than their peers without disabilities. There are many reasons for these absences, including health, disability, and other challenges. There may be barriers to transportation, housing, medical/mental health treatment, justice system involvement, etc. Often schools can work with families to try to identify community resources that can be of assistance to them in reducing barriers.

For students with disabilities receiving services under an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or a 504 Plan, attendance should be a regular part of team discussions. If determined appropriate, the IEP or 504 Plan can include goals, objectives, and strategies to improve attendance. It is important that the IEP/504 plan not just set attendance benchmarks but identify and address the root cause(s) of the absences and include specific interventions designed to remedy the root cause (s).

Why Students Skip School

Beyond the barriers listed above that may result in poor attendance, students may be chronically absent for the following reasons:

Resources on Attendance

Virginia Department of Education
Attendance and School Management

Attendance Works
ESSA Implementation: Keeping Students with Disabilities in School

The Advocate
9 Ways to Improve Your Child's School Attendance

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- They don't like school because they don't feel supported or engaged.

- They don't feel that the instruction is relevant to them.

- The school climate is not positive.

- They are bowing to peer pressure of others skipping school.

- They may be experiencing bullying and are afraid to go to school.

- They may not recognize how missing even a little school can affect their future, or they may think that attendance only matters during high school.

Steps that Parents Can Take to Improve Attendance

If your child is skipping school or asking to be absent, it is important that you try to figure out what is wrong and talk to your child and his school team to determine what needs to change at school (or at home) in order for your child to want to attend school. Here are some additional steps that parents can take:

- Know the school attendance policy and make school attendance a priority. Ask for help if you are having problems getting your child to school.

- Talk about the importance of going to school. Create attendance goals and track progress. For younger children, consider small rewards for attendance.

- Help your child maintain daily routines, such as finishing homework and getting a good night's sleep.

- Don't let your child stay home unless really sick. Headaches, stomachaches, and behavior changes can be signs of anxiety.

- Make sure you talk with your child about how school absences can affect their success in school. Make the conversation relevant to their future hopes and dreams, like going to college or getting the job they want.

- Stay on top of your child's academic progress and seek help if her performance is declining.

- Know who your child is friends with, and they influence they may have.

- Work with your child's teachers and counselor. They may have important insight and information to share with you.

What can Schools Do?

- Communicate the **importance of attending school** to parents and students.

- **Recognize and celebrate** good student attendance for individual students and school wide.

- Examine the school climate including **disciplinary policies** that can lead to school absences (like suspension and expulsion) and ensure that **positive behavioral strategies** are in place and teachers are trained in their use.

- **Review efforts to address student absenteeism** for individual students and school-wide and refine if progress is not made.

- Work to **increase overall school engagement** by students with disabilities (such as extra-curricular activities). This can improve student attendance

- Provide **extra support** to students with disabilities and **identify students who are at risk** before their academic performance declines.

- Work with families to **proactively develop and implement strategies** so that their children attend school regularly.

PEATC's mission focuses on building positive futures for Virginia's children by working collaboratively with families, schools and communities to improve opportunities for excellence in education and success in school and community life.
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U.S. Office of Special Education Programs