

Highlighting Attendance: Tips for Taking Advantage of Parent-Teacher Conferences

Parent-Teacher Conferences offer an excellent opportunity to talk with parents about the importance of their own child's attendance. Use this time to recognize improved, good or excellent attendance as well as communicate concern about poor attendance. Many parents are unaware of the impact that chronic absence can have—particularly in the early grades. And even when parents do understand the importance of regular attendance, they can easily lose track of the number of days their child has missed. Updating parents on absences can be effective in helping them track their child's attendance and shift behavior before the absences pile up, as well as laying the foundation for working with them to develop attendance improvement plans and goals.

Beyond the attendance-specific tips below, see [Making the Most of Your Parent-Teacher Conference: A Step-By-Step Guide for Teachers](#) (also included in your toolkit) for more detailed guidance on how to build trust and use a strengths-based approach in your conference.

Consider these ideas for your conferences with parents:

- **Provide an update to parents on their child's attendance to date.** Review the absences so far, in both number and percentage terms. Discuss with them how their child's rate compares to chronic absence, or missing 10% or more of school days, and the negative impacts associated with that level of absenteeism. Or take a moment to congratulate them on good or improved attendance.
- If a child is struggling with attendance, **be ready to talk with parents about the challenges that are causing absences and find out about what makes them want to come to school.** Work with them to develop an attendance improvement plan and set personalized goals. Included in your toolkit is a sample worksheet that you can walk through with parents to define goals and lay out possible strategies.
- **Give parents tools to help them track absences at home.** Included in your toolkit is a calendar to hang on the refrigerator where parents can record each absence. This can be an effective visual reminder of the number of days missed and the fact that absences add up.
- **Remind parents about the Make Every Day Count program** and if they are not currently participating, encourage them to sign the consent form. Ask if they've received the postcards from the Kindergarten 2 College program notifying them of how much money they've earned. While there is no need to incorporate any rituals or activities specific to this program into your classroom, meeting individually with parents can be a great time to celebrate the money earned.
- **If the student participates in the after-school program, invite after-school program staff to participate in the conference** so that they can talk with parents about the additional support the child is missing when she is not able to attend the after-school program, as well as share the academic and social benefits that attending afterschool regularly can have. Find out if participating in certain fun afterschool activities might help engage their child in school.