

The Attendance Imperative: Attending school regularly is essential to students gaining the academic and social skills they need to thrive. Chronic absence, no matter its cause, has real life consequences for students, families and society as a whole. [Research shows](#)* that starting as early as preschool and kindergarten, chronic absence—missing 10% of the academic year—can leave third graders unable to read proficiently, sixth graders struggling with coursework and high school students off track for graduation. Equally important, it affects personal and emotional development and makes it hard to gain the habit of showing up, which is crucial to success in the workplace.

In 2018, 8 million students (one out of 6 students) were affected by chronic absence. During the pandemic chronic absence nearly doubled. While it has started to decrease, it remains elevated. Although chronic absence rose for students of all backgrounds and in all regions, students of color, those living in poverty, those with disabilities and English language learners experienced the highest levels. When schools experience high levels of chronic absence, it affects everyone—making it harder for teachers to teach and set classroom norms as well as for students to learn. Chronic absence, which involves monitoring when and which students miss too much school, is different from truancy (unexcused absences) or average daily attendance (how many students typically show up each day to school).

Reducing absenteeism is an essential, but often overlooked, strategy for responding strategically to the academic, social and emotional loss experienced by millions of students. School and district attendance data can be used to identify which student groups have lost out the most on opportunities to learn and ensure they are prioritized in planning. At the same time, effective strategies to improve engagement and attendance can benefit the entire community.

The good news is that chronic absence can be significantly reduced when schools, families and community partners work together to monitor data, nurture engagement, promote regular attendance and routines, and address hurdles that keep children and youth from getting to school regularly. Partners can help to remove these barriers, such as a lack of food, clothing and access to physical and mental health care; unhealthy environmental conditions, unreliable transportation, housing instability or the lack of safe paths to school.

Why attendance matters to volunteers and National Service members:

Volunteers from community-based organizations and National Service members are driven by the opportunity to make a meaningful difference in the school or community where they are working. Reducing chronic absence provides a simple, straightforward goal that can be accomplished by engaging students and families and an extra set of adults to support schools.

This is a problem we can address. We can build a strong culture of engagement and attendance in every community. We can ensure that school districts are tracking the right data to identify the students and schools that are headed off track. And we can address the challenges that may be keeping many students from getting to school: struggling with school work, lack of school-based relationships, loss of hope and concerns for community safety. Volunteers and National Service members can work with schools, parents and communities to do this.



How volunteers and National Service members can make a difference:

1. Nurture a culture of attendance and engagement

- Sponsor a door-knocking campaign before school starts to encourage student enrollment and regular attendance, and ensure children and youth have the resources they need for a successful start to the school year.
- Join a local coalition taking a community-wide approach to addressing barriers that contribute to students missing school. See if your community is involved with the [Campaign for Grade-Level Reading](#).
- Partner with local school district to sponsor a parent summit with child-serving agencies and community-based groups to connect students and families to resources and support school attendance.
- Provide incentives for good or improved attendance, such as books, healthy snacks, access to enrichment activities or backpacks.

2. Expand the number of adults available to support students

- Become a mentor or attendance buddy encouraging chronically absent students to show up for school every day. If you're a tutor, emphasize relationship building and discuss any barriers to attendance when you work with students.
- Support data analysis by helping schools to create systems for tracking all absences and to identify the barriers that keep students from coming to school.
- Reach out to parents/caregivers with calls and home visits when students are missing too many days.
- Work with families and community members to start a "Walking School Bus" or other ways to create safer routes to school.

3. Advocate for adequate and equitable resources for schools

- Survey students and families through focus groups and one-to-one meetings to learn about what makes it hard to get to and participate in school, and work with them to develop solutions.
- Create a campaign in partnership with students and families to raise awareness about the barriers to getting to and participating in school.

*A growing body of research has shown the prevalence of chronic absence, its critical role in student achievement, and how it can be addressed. Access a research summary: <https://awareness.attendanceworks.org/wp-content/uploads/Research2016.pdf>

Click here to find a full list of research: <https://www.attendanceworks.org/research/>

For more information, go to Attendance Works at www.attendanceworks.org.

