ACCOUNTAX SCHOOL OF BUSINESS, INCORPORATED

Continuing Education for IRS Enrolled Agents, Certified Public Accountants, and Practicing Attorneys

Marlene Parham Murphy, Bachelor of Science in Education; Master of Science in Accounting
President, Accountax School of Business, Inc

How to Improve Student Attendance

▶ Excused absences, unexcused absences, suspensions—all contribute to chronic absenteeism, which is defined as missing 10 percent or more school days per year. While the causes vary, chronic absenteeism is now viewed as a warning sign that something within a school or student's life needs to be addressed to keep learning on track.

1. Form an attendance review team to catch problems early

An attendance review team is a school-based task force that monitors student attendance, researches students' needs to identify why they're chronically absent, and provides strategic intervention to address those needs and improve attendance. To catch problems early, it's helpful to establish intervention warning flags for specific numbers of tardies, absences, and class removals and outline action steps for the team to take after each flag. For example, a warning flag of three absences would trigger a parent phone call, and five absences would result in a face-to-face meeting with the parent and child.

► **2. Provide individualized support**

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If absences continue, the attendance review team will need to provide more individualized support. In this case, the team should create an attendance action plan that outlines interventions and consequences if attendance fails to improve. The team can then monitor the student's progress to see if attendance goals are being met or if further action is required.

▶ **3. Build a positive school culture**
When schools have a positive culture, students become more invested in their learning and excited about attending school. When schools don't, students disengage and are less likely to have healthy attendance. In 2016-17, 1,037 students were suspended from LCS, which meant that more than 15 percent of students missed at least one day of school. We want our scholars to be in school every day, learning from their choices rather than receiving punishment that keeps them out of the classroom. So, we're revisiting district-wide discipline policies. We're rolling out training for staff on strategies to improve their school culture. We're also shifting our focus to interventions that rely on proactive approaches to resolving issues before they result in a suspension, such as Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports and Social and Emotional Learning.

- **4. Focus on the most essential behaviors**
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  Indeed, to help students feel safe, welcomed, and supported, it's critical to teach and nurture the behaviors that create a positive school culture. A new compendium called the [Positive School Culture Inventory™](#) (PSCI) has identified the 19 behaviors that are most essential to creating a positive culture. The PSCI is based on an analysis of more than 152 million student behavior instances collected over seven years by educators in 645 schools. We're exploring this resource to determine which behaviors we want to emphasize in our schools

5. Collect and act on real-time data

While behavior challenges are common reasons why students miss school, few districts actually have systems to regularly check in on a student's behavior and daily interactions. Using a behavior management system or school culture system such as Kickboard, we can intentionally set behavior goals and monitor culture data in real time, as well as celebrate progress or provide support when students need it. Further, this type of data system can help clarify which interventions are effective, when to intensify supports, and when schoolwide systems may need to be revised to improve student attendance

- **6. Develop positive relationships**

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A student's emotional attachment to school can also be increased by developing positive student-to-teacher relationships. When students feel safe and seen by their educators, school begins to feel more like a home away from home. Having positive peer relationships can promote healthy attendance as well. Using structures like student government and morning meetings, we're empowering students to have an active presence and helping them develop a collective identity. We're also working toward implementing restorative justice practices to create a bigger impact next school year.

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- **8. Involve families**

- Students are more likely to have a positive experience at school if their parents or guardians are actively involved. Last year, many families told us that they didn't feel welcome and they weren't given enough opportunity to interact with their child's school. To change that, every school is designating a family liaison. We're creating a calendar of events to help students and parents develop positive connections to the school and district. We're also conducting ongoing family surveys to determine what we can do to provide more opportunities for parents to contribute to their child's learning.

> ## 9. Develop community partnerships

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Schools may not have all of the resources required to support chronic absenteeism improvement. In LCS, we have established a Community/Business/School Partnership team to identify and collaborate with community resources, such as social services and housing agencies, to ensure that no student need goes unmet.

> Students need to be at school to learn. The more absences each student has, the more likely they are to not meet learning goals. There are a number of ways that schools and districts can address scholars' needs to improve attendance, using in-school supports and community resources. The key is to intervene before it's too late.