



SUPPORTING ATTENDANCE THROUGH AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAMMING MINI-GUIDE

OSTPD

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Supporting Attendance through After School Programming

CONNECTION BETWEEN AFTER SCHOOL AND ATTENDANCE

There is a great deal of research that demonstrates the incredibly positive impact that participation in after school programs has on improving school attendance. This is dramatically increased when programs and schools work together collaboratively. Using the references provided at the end of this mini-guide, you will be able to access much of this data and research.

COLORADO DROPOUT PREVENTION FRAMEWORK

The Colorado Department of Education provides the following framework regarding alternative pathways and dropout prevention. This resource provides a wealth of information including tips on identification of issues, implementing institutional change, and interventions and supports, ideas and resources. The information provided is structured in the following sections:

Identification

- Data Analysis
- Early Warning Systems
- Tracking of Out-of-School Youth

Institutional Change

- Assess and Enhance the School Climate
- Policy and Practice Review
- Community Engagement

Intervention and Support

- Family Involvement
- Transition Programs
- Multiple Pathways to Graduation
- Reengagement of Out-of-School Youth

- Enhanced Counseling and Mentoring
- Credit Recovery Options

The full framework can be located online at:

http://www.cde.state.co.us/dropoutprevention/cgp_framework

ATTENDANCE MATTERS

Why does attendance at school matter? Academic success is surely the first thing most people think of. In order to pass classes, you need to be present in order to learn the information, but in order to do that, students need to be able to engage in the learning that is occurring. The ultimate success of grade school, of course, culminates in high school graduation.

The ability to develop and grow social and emotional connections with both peers and adults is an integral part of successfully navigating these school years. These experiences assist in forming the foundation for future relationships and interactions with others in every aspect of a person's life.

CREATING CONNECTIONS

Some of the ways that after school programs impact attendance include tutoring and homework assistance – forms of academic support. This is further increased through the hands-on, creative learning approaches that tend to be more prevalent in after school programs than in more traditional classroom settings.

The relationships between youth in afterschool programs with the staff tend to be far different than those with their teachers. This often times lends itself to developing positive and supportive relationships with both staff, as well as with peers, even peer tutors. When teachers do come into the after school environment to work with youth they also tend to feel they can interact differently and on a different level than the typical formality of a classroom, when all of their students are present.

This support network both assists the youth with the content area, but also increases their self confidence in the work they are completing.

Partnerships with parents and schools can have an incredibly positive impact on the youth, and demonstrates to them that there is a network of caring, supportive people who are willing and interested in helping them succeed.

Lastly, after school programs, often times, in and of themselves, are a reward to youth who participate – something they look forward to at the end of their school day.

DEFINE THE SCOPE

Knowing the scope and extent of attendance issues is an important starting point. This will help drive and shape what efforts and the amount and type of resources will be necessary.

It is also important to know what youth are impacted so efforts can be properly directed.

SELF-ASSESSMENT

Here is a self-assessment tool from Attendance Works^[1] that can help what areas you can improve in, and then lead to creating action plans in the program to develop and implement change. In the next section, we will look deeper at steps in how after school supports attendance.



Does Attendance Really Count in Our AfterSchool Program?

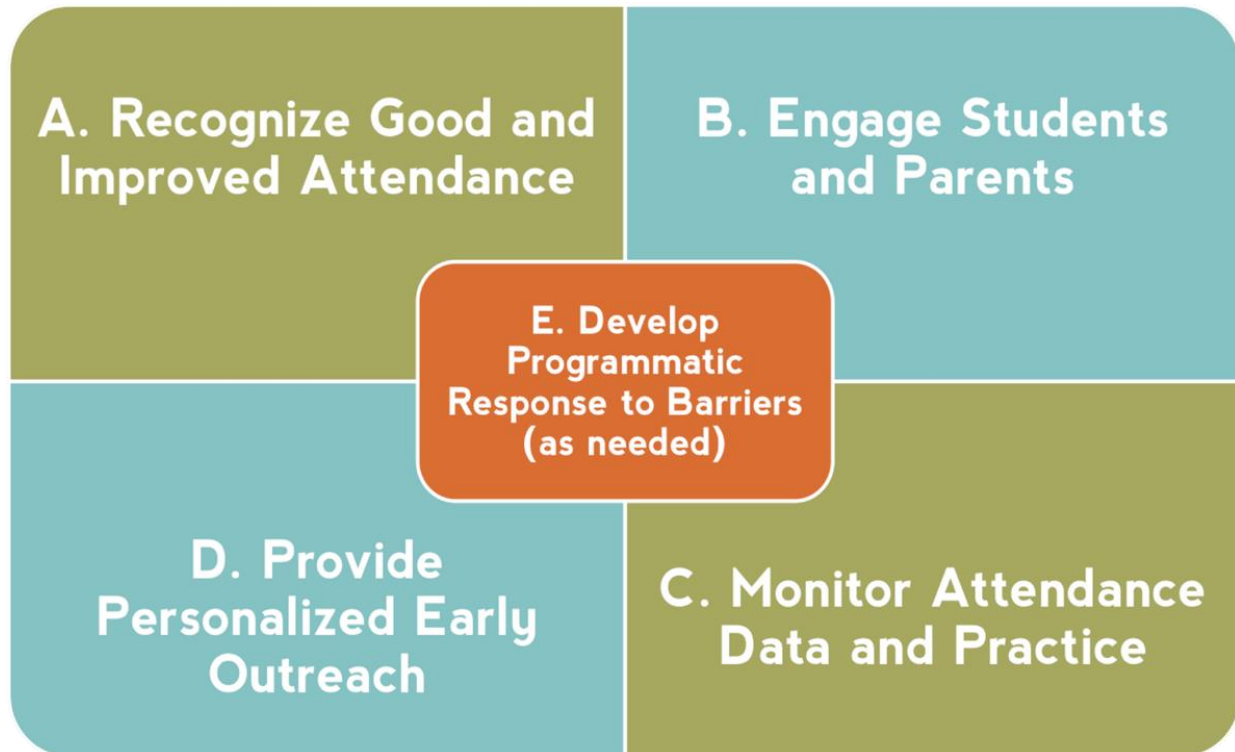
A Tool for Self Assessment - (Version October 2012)

Key Element	Strength	OK for Now	Could be Better	Urgent Gap	Don't Know	Implication(s) for Action
1. Every day, in every afterschool class, staff take roll accurately and in a caring manner.						
2. We enter our attendance data into an electronic data base that can generate regular reports on satisfactory attendance, chronic absence and average daily attendance.						
3. We have a clear policy expressing the value placed on regular attendance and clearly communicate this policy to students and families.						
4. We track which students have poor attendance in our afterschool program and reach out to find out why and how attendance could be improved.						
5. We review and use afterschool attendance data to identify problematic situations or promising approaches for improving attendance in afterschool classrooms or program sites.						
6. We offer meaningful incentives to attract and reward students for attending our program.						
7. We have access to the school day attendance records of the students we serve.						
8. The schools where we work share information about which students have poor attendance so our program can help to address their needs.						
9. Afterschool staff and school day staff work together to inform parents about the importance of attendance in both programs and encourage parents to help each other get their children to class.						
10. We evaluate the impact of our work on improving school day attendance.						
TOTAL						

(Note: Chronic Absence is missing=> 10% of the possible days of attendance over a year; Satisfactory Attendance is missing=< 5% of the possible days of attendance over a year)

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HOW AFTER SCHOOL SUPPORTS ATTENDANCE [III]



This chart is taken from Attendance Works [III]

Recognize Good and Improved Attendance

Recognition is an important motivator, especially for youth. But they need to begin with a strong and clear message that attendance is important and why. This message needs to be consistent with messages from the school, and also communicated to both youth and parents. Likewise, in order to get staff buy-in, they need to understand the importance as well.

Recognition and reward systems often times go hand in hand, however, recognition can also bridge the interim steps in progress between levels of rewards. It's important to recognize attempts and even small improvements, especially at first. Rewards need to be appropriate and be something that will motivate the youth. Be sure to set up steps where the youth are able to earn rewards and receive encouragement at intervals while also balancing their need to show improvement.

It's important to remember that these systems shouldn't make perfect attendance the only goal or many struggling students will see the goal as insurmountable and unachievable. You will lose them rather than motivate them.

Engage Students and Parents

Sometimes programs don't spend enough time, or the right effort in engaging parents and youth in the program. To begin, consider first impressions. Are your entrances warm and welcoming? What do your brochures, websites and literature look like? Is it a place you would want to go? How can you improve that initial impression someone interested in, or coming into your program? How do staff greet them at the door?

Some programs, when they stop and consider it, haven't really invited parents to the program. They assume parents know, or have read that particular section of the 35 page parent handbook, that they are welcome. Reach out and invite them to the program. Hold a parent meeting, host a dinner or reception where they meet staff and youth show off their work or an activity. Consider the time of an event and how you can support the parents, especially those with other young children, to maximize attendance. Some programs offer day care for younger siblings, or offer dinner during the event so they don't have to rush out and worry about that afterwards.

Parents will tend to be more invested when they know and better understand the positive impacts and negative consequences of attendance at school. This includes both excused and unexcused absences, which collectively, when they increase, have an impact on the youth. A positive program culture that is inclusive of youth involvement, increases youth commitment and ownership in the program, and enables youth to feel like partners with the staff and adults.

Monitor Attendance Data and Practice

In order to know the extent of the issue and where to focus your efforts, it's important to track attendance and progress. Be sure that staff take and maintain records on attendance daily. This should also be coordinated by talking with the school attendance office regularly. There are a number of tools and resources available from Attendance Works using their website and the link provided. These will help you in monitoring attendance and identifying problem areas. A typical threshold would be for youth who miss 10% or more of school – this falls into the chronic absence area.

Provide Personalized Early Outreach

By providing a personalized and early outreach approach you can increase your chances of success. Someone reaching out to a family regarding attendance issues should already have a relationship with them. There needs to be some rapport that enables open conversation and trust.

Knowing the issues that are impacting attendance is important to begin to consider ways to help. Are there health issues, transportation issues, shelter issues? Once you better understand the "why" then you can consider community resources and other supports that can assist the family and begin to improve school attendance.

Developing a supportive relationship, and maintaining regular contact will show the family this is about long term change and that they could rely on you as a support system. They need to see you working with them as a positive partnership. Your relationship and work with them needs to be seen as an ally.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCE FROM COLORADO DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Using this link, you can access additional information provided by the Colorado Department of Education regarding alternative pathways and dropout prevention.

http://www.cde.state.co.us/dropoutprevention/cgp_framework

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REFERENCES AND ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- I. The Expanded Learning and Afterschool Project - <http://www.expandinglearning.org/expandingminds/article/building-culture-attendance-schools-and-afterschool-programs-together-can-and>
- II. Afterschool Alliance http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/issue_47_quality.cfm
- III. Attendance Works - <http://www.attendanceworks.org/tools/tools-for-afterschool-providers/>
- IV. California After School Resource Center - <http://www.californiaafterschool.org/attendancesupport>
- V. After School Programs in the 21st Century: Their Potential and What It Takes to Achieve It – Harvard Family Research Project - <file:///C:/Users/jmurphy/Downloads/OSTissuebrief10.pdf>
- VI. Making Afterschool Programs Better, Denise Huang & Ronald Dietel, National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards & Student Testing, UCLA - http://www.cse.ucla.edu/products/policy/huang_MAPB_v5.pdf
- VII. MOST Network - http://mdoutofschooltime.org/resources_links/school_day_attendance
- VIII. Attendance Works – What Works - <http://www.attendanceworks.org/what-works/>
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