



Strategies to Support a Positive School Climate

Truancy

School attendance refers to “regular attendance at any regular accredited educational institution or program, public or private, for organized learning at any level of education” (United Nations, 2017, p. 218). In contrast, school nonattendance includes both authorized absences, as is the case when students are ill, and unauthorized absence, or truancy, when students miss school without permission, including being late, skipping class or not attending school at all (Willms, 2014).



Why is it important?

- Regular student attendance is associated with better academic performance (Willms, 2003).
- Students that have a pattern of nonattendance or truancy early in their school career are more likely to be truant during the secondary school years (Rumberger, 1995).
- Poor attendance rates are linked to disruptive and risky behaviours, negative dispositions towards school, increased risk of dropout, and poor outcomes later in life (Baker et al., 2001).

In Practice

The research is clear, attendance matters and there are both short- and long-term consequences of student truancy. When addressing attendance-related issues, early intervention works best.



What can schools do?

Schools can counter student truancy by adopting the following proactive practices:

- Set the tone and expectations for attendance for all students. This could involve a whole school assembly or discussion with individual classes (Cohen et al., 2009).
- Develop a culture that celebrates regular attendance and discourages absenteeism. Celebrations can include ceremonies with rewards for good attendance (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002).
- Use extracurricular activities to entice chronically absent or frequently truant students to attend school more regularly (Lehr et al., 2003).
- Create a peer mentor program that involves students contacting peers who are absent to encourage them to come to school (Kearney & Graczyk, 2014).



In the Classroom

Educators can provide extra support for students who struggle with school nonattendance or truancy by:

- Tracking and monitoring attendance by regularly reviewing data on absences, tardiness, and skipped classes.
- Determining the reasons students are missing school and helping them overcome these barriers by co-developing strategies for improved attendance.
- Engaging the families of regularly truant students with strategies, progress updates and attendance milestones.
- Being persistent and continuing to check-in with students, even after their attendance improves (Reid, 2002).

References

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