

“There is no such thing as other people’s children” —Hillary Clinton

“Every kid is one caring adult away from being a success story” —Josh Shipp

MENTORING STUDENTS EXHIBITING CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM

This packet contains information about the definition and importance of good school attendance, as well as strategies for working with students on coming to school more regularly. The enclosed materials are useful for students who exhibit, or are beginning to exhibit, chronically absent behavior. Please utilize these materials as you see fit.

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WHY ATTENDANCE MATTERS

Regular school attendance is important because students cannot meet their academic potential if they do not attend school. In other words, teachers cannot teach students who are not present in the classroom. Additionally, students who miss school are most likely behind when they do return to the classroom and require additional instruction time to catch-up. School is often the safest place for students to be as it is structured and supervised. Finally, showing up regularly, and on time, is key to success in school, the workplace, and life in general. This characteristic is best instilled at a young age and continues throughout adulthood.

Chronic absenteeism is defined as missing 10% or more of school regardless of the reason. In Columbus, this means a student who misses just two days per month, or 18 days in a school year is exhibiting chronic absenteeism, and will likely have a negative impact upon student academic performance. Moreover, chronic absenteeism disproportionately affects students of color and low socio-economic backgrounds.

In the 2017-18 school year, House Bill 410 will take effect that eliminates the term “chronic truant” and defines “habitual truant,” to refer to any student who accumulates unexcused absences for:

CURRENT TRUANCY STATUTE	PREVIOUS TRUANCY STATUTE
Habitual Truant	Chronic Truant
30+ Consecutive Hours	5+ Days
42+ Hours in a School Month	7+ Days in a School Month
72+ Hours in a School Year	12+ Day in a School Year

It is important to note that per House Bill 410, absences are now tallied in minutes and hours as opposed to the number of days missed. This method of calculation means that seniors who earned passing course grades, but fail to meet the required number of hours and minutes in class time, are at risk of not meeting graduation requirements.

Ensuring that our students come to school each day, on time is the first step in providing students the greatest opportunity to be successful.

WHY MIGHT A STUDENT BE ABSENT FROM SCHOOL?

Showing up on time each and every day is the key to student success. As with all effective interventions, it is imperative to first identify the underlying causes of absenteeism so that interventions are tailored to meet the student’s needs. Put simply, we will not know what to do until we know why they are missing school.

Some common examples of why a student may be absent include, but are not limited to:

- Inadequate access to food
- In need of glasses to see what is going on in the classroom
- Lack of clothes and/or school uniforms
- Experiencing homelessness
- Lack of transportation
- Chronic illness and lack of access to medical care
- Lack of school supplies
- Need to support family financially and/or otherwise
- Feel like they don’t fit in and/or being bullied
- Need for a caring adult in their life

Communities in Schools, 2015.

As a mentor, your role is not necessarily to solve the issues that may be causing a student to be, or become, chronically absent. Instead, your role is to recognize that absenteeism is, or is becoming, an issue and leverage your relationship with the student and their family to pinpoint the concerns leading to absenteeism and connect them to resources to address these needs. Once you identify the underlying cause for absenteeism, share this information with your school point person so that a tailored plan of intervention is developed and implemented.

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SCHOOL SUCCESS MENTOR INITIATIVE: MENTOR TOP TEN TO-DOS

Success Mentors are trained to serve as advisors, motivators, connectors, confidence-builders, and early warning systems for students exhibiting chronically absent behavior and who are at risk of getting off track. **This document is an adaptation of the My Brother’s Keeper School Success Mentor Initiative Top-Ten To-Dos, 2015.*

1. Get to know your mentee and work to establish a supportive, positive relationship.
2. Find strengths to notice, build upon, and communicate to parents. Work to find a hook in school for your mentee—a club, activity, or class they might particularly enjoy.
3. Let them know you are their school success coach. You know they can succeed and want to help them. The first part of success is being in school every day. Help mentee and parents understand the short and long-term consequences for missing school.
4. When you see your mentee, greet them warmly and say you are excited to see them in school every day, expect them to be there tomorrow, and will notice if they are not.
5. When mentees are absent, reach out to them and/or their parents that day and see if you can help them come in late, and if not, ask how to get them there tomorrow.
6. Provide frequent recognition for progress, highlighting even small improvements.
7. After you have formed a positive relationship, begin to discuss in a supportive, non-judgmental way what makes it hard for them to come to school every day and what challenges they face.
8. Work with your mentees and/or their parents to problem solve or modify behaviors to remove barriers to regular attendance.
9. If a serious issue emerges, share the information with the appropriate person: counselor, social worker, the weekly data review team, etc.
10. After greeting your mentee, check in to see if he or she is ready to succeed in school that day. Is his work for class done? What classes is he excited to attend? Are there any problems with teachers or fellow students standing in way of success?

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