



Every day counts

Step 2: Communicate high expectations of attendance

The information below expands on advice to improve student attendance provided in [A model for making every day count](#).

Schools that have achieved improved attendance set high expectations for attendance. They communicate and promote the importance of attending to students, parents, staff and other members of the school community when and where possible.

Explaining the correlation between attendance and achievement is particularly powerful in convincing students and parents of the importance of consistent attendance.

Discussion of attendance is important when a student first enrolls at a school. The Prep year and the move from primary to high school are crucial transitions during which attendance patterns are established for the future.

The community can play a role in helping schools to improve student attendance.

Ideas¹

- Consider the social context in which students are living, their personal circumstances and how the school is affecting student attendance, both positively and negatively.
- Include frequent and consistent messages about the importance of attendance in all communications with the school community including newsletters, assemblies, noticeboards, websites, Facebook pages, flyers, and at staff meetings. Emphasise the importance of attendance at the beginning of each year, with reminders throughout the year.
- Involve students, staff, and parents in the development of a school attendance policy. You may wish to do this through informal discussions, involvement of existing committees (e.g. P & C and Student Council), surveys, focus groups, face-to-face discussion with small groups, interactive websites and social media (online surveys, emails).
- Include information about the attendance policy in your school handbook and in information for new parents. Ensure that parents of Prep students understand the importance of attending school every day.
- Talk about absences in terms that students and parents can easily understand. For example, 'Missing one day each week means that you miss out on about 2 weeks of lessons each term.' and 'We follow up with parents if students are not at school because we care about their safety and wellbeing.'
- Promote the links between school attendance and attainment to all members of the school community.

¹ These ideas have been collected from Queensland schools, as well as other national and international schools. Schools will need to consider local circumstances, priorities, age of students etc in determining which (if any) of these ideas might be useful in the local context.

Ideas (continued)

- Encourage open dialogue with staff, students, parents, and the community to identify potential improvements and new ideas.
- Encourage staff to consistently reinforce attendance expectations to students and parents.
- Provide staff with regular reports on attendance and progress towards the school's targets. Discuss data trends and the underlying reasons for absences at your school during staff meetings.
- Talk with students about acceptable and unacceptable reasons for being absent.
- Ask students to graph their own attendance on a regular basis. Schools that have used this strategy report that students were often surprised at how quickly the 'occasional day off' adds up.
- Hold a competition to come up with a school slogan on attendance. Include attendance slogans as banners in headers or footers of school documents (such as newsletters).
- Ensure induction programs for new staff include information on attendance expectations of students.
- Establish relationships with significant people in the community and involve them as guest speakers, student mentors, or in special interest lunchtime activities (such as art, cultural activities, Indigenous art, sport, chess, craft, student leadership, drama) or as Artists in Residence or Authors in Residence.
- Carefully consider the use of awards and celebrations and be aware that they may have unintended consequences on attendance if students never receive the benefits (e.g. students affected by illness or family issues may be reluctant to attend if there is a focus on their poor attendance record). Class rewards for attendance may also create peer pressure on non-attendees.

