



Go-Learn-Grow

Improving the school attendance of New Jersey's youngest learners



# Strategies for Improving Attendance in Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten: Toolkit for Districts, Schools, and Early Childhood Providers



Fall 2019

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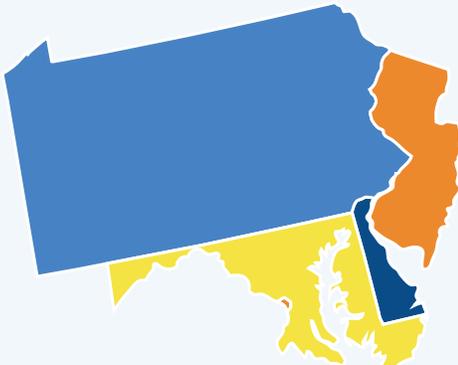
## Introduction

**Chronic absenteeism—defined as missing 10 percent or more of school days—is a problem across the nation. In New Jersey, students are defined as ‘chronically absent’ when they miss 18 days or more each school year, or about 2 days per month.** Chronic absenteeism is particularly high for pre-kindergarten and kindergarten children compared with students in other elementary and middle school grades. Missing a substantial amount of school in pre-kindergarten and kindergarten sets students up for a number of challenges. Students who are chronically absent in the early years often lack critical school readiness skills, are more likely to miss important academic milestones, and their social-emotional development may lag behind their peers.

The New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) released [guidance for district and school leaders](#) that defines chronic absenteeism and suggests strategies to reduce K-12 absenteeism. However, the issues leading to absenteeism and strategies to reduce it may be different for children in pre-kindergarten and kindergarten than for older students.

This toolkit is a companion resource to the state’s existing K-12 guidance. NJDOE and the U.S. Department of Education’s Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Mid-Atlantic have partnered to create this toolkit with specific resources and handouts to support districts, schools, and early childhood providers in improving school attendance in pre-kindergarten and kindergarten. The goals of these materials are to:

- Help educators and families understand the importance of attendance in the early grades
- Encourage schools to gather and include data on preschool students when reporting chronic absenteeism rates on school report cards
- Help schools collect information from families to help identify reasons for absenteeism in the early grades
- Provide guidance on selecting and implementing research-based strategies to improve attendance in pre-kindergarten and kindergarten, based on the identified challenges



REL Mid-Atlantic is one of 10 regional educational laboratories across the U.S. funded by the Institute of Education Sciences, which is an independent, non-partisan entity within the U.S. Department of Education. The purpose of REL Mid-Atlantic is to work directly with the states and districts in New Jersey, Delaware, the District of Columbia, Maryland, and Pennsylvania to help build capacity to access, conduct, interpret and apply research.

# Contents

► **Fact sheet series: Chronic Absenteeism in the Early Grades**, aimed at **district and school leaders and other early childhood providers**. We encourage staff to review and disseminate this fact sheet series to help educators and other school staff learn more about the issue of chronic absenteeism in the early grades and plan and implement effective ways to address absenteeism. Specifically:



► **Fact Sheet 1: Chronic Absenteeism in the Early Grades: A Snapshot of New Jersey** highlights the problem of chronic absenteeism in the early grades in New Jersey and across the nation.

► **Fact Sheet 2: Chronic Absenteeism in the Early Grades: Risk Factors and What Schools Can Do** discusses reasons for chronic absenteeism, including strategies educators can use to assess patterns in their schools and districts.

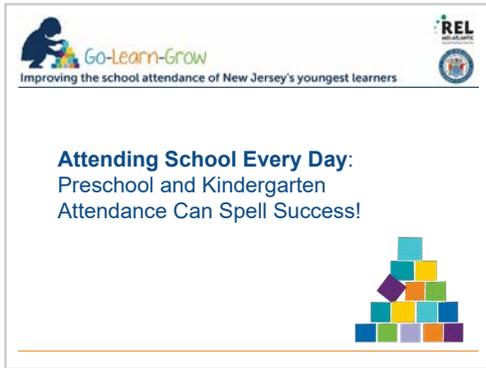
► **Fact Sheet 3: Chronic Absenteeism in the Early Grades: How to Choose and Implement Proven Strategies to Improve Attendance** highlights research-based strategies to reduce chronic absenteeism in the early grades.

► **Infographic (flyer): Attendance in Preschool and Kindergarten Spells Future Success** is aimed at **parents and families**.



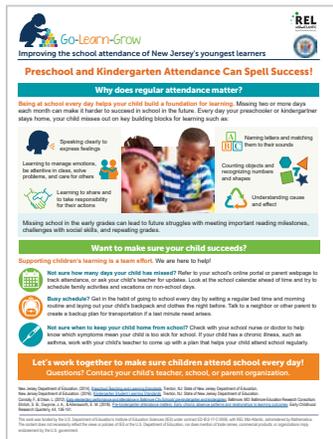
► This user-friendly flyer shows why attendance during the early years is important and how families can work with schools to reduce chronic absenteeism. It provides schools and early childhood providers with a stand-alone resource that can be easily disseminated by posting it on bulletin boards or walls of schools, sending home with children, or by sharing with community agencies. This flyer is also available in Spanish.

► **Slide deck: *Attending School Every Day: Preschool and Kindergarten Attendance Can Spell Success!***



► This prepared slide deck with talking points and a corresponding handout is designed for **school leaders and staff to use in talking directly with parents and families**. We encourage school staff to use this slide deck and its talking points during parent meetings and other events, personalizing it based on the school's policies and procedures. This toolkit contains a PDF of the presentation slides for reference, and the full slides with talking points can be found [here](#).

► **The corresponding handout: *Preschool and Kindergarten Attendance Can Spell Success!*** is aimed at **parents and families**.



► This one-page handout can be shared with parents and families when delivering the accompanying presentation or during other types of parent and family school meetings, such as parent-teacher conferences. This flyer is also available in Spanish.

► **References and additional resources:** The references used to develop materials in this toolkit, as well as other initiatives that provide resources related to decreasing chronic absenteeism in the early grades, are included in the final section of this toolkit.

**Let's work together to ensure New Jersey's young children attend school every day!**

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## Fact Sheet Series:

For leaders in districts, schools, and  
other early childhood providers





# Chronic Absenteeism in the Early Grades: A Snapshot of New Jersey

**Chronic absenteeism**—defined as missing 10 percent or more of school days in most states—is a problem across the nation. In New Jersey, this means missing 18 days or more each school year, or about 2 days per month. Chronic absenteeism is particularly high for pre-kindergarten and kindergarten children compared with students in other elementary and middle school grades. A recent [report](#) revealed that 11.4 percent of kindergarten students in New Jersey were chronically absent in the 2015–2016 school year.<sup>1</sup> Missing a substantial amount of school in pre-kindergarten and kindergarten sets students up for a number of challenges. Students who are chronically absent in the early years often lack critical school readiness skills, are more likely to miss important academic milestones, and may lag behind their peers with social-emotional development.

## New Jersey is tackling the problem

The New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) developed [guidance for district and school leaders](#) that defines chronic absenteeism. It suggests strategies to reduce K-12 absenteeism, and identifies information schools can use to support student attendance initiatives.<sup>2</sup> However, the issues leading to absenteeism and strategies to reduce it may be different for children in pre-kindergarten and kindergarten than for older students. And the need for support from NJDOE to address the issue of chronic absenteeism in these early years has grown, as more districts in New Jersey now offer pre-kindergarten programs.

Like many other states, New Jersey chose to include chronic absenteeism as a measure of school accountability in the [state's Every Student Succeeds Act \(ESSA\) plan](#). Public schools in New Jersey with high chronic absenteeism rates are required to develop a corrective action plan of strategies specific to their student population and community to decrease chronic absenteeism rates. Although New Jersey's ESSA plan does not include pre-kindergarten in the calculation of chronic absenteeism rates for the purposes of school accountability, the state's plan recognizes that monitoring and improving attendance is critical to ensuring that children receive the benefits of quality preschool education. As a result, New Jersey schools are required to include data on pre-kindergarten students when reporting chronic absenteeism rates on school report cards.

### New Jersey's vision to reduce chronic absenteeism in the early grades

- **Expand preschool** to provide all children with the opportunity to regularly attend programs close to home.
- **Focus state and local attention on the value of school attendance** at the critical developmental stage when young students build cognitive, social, emotional, and language skills needed for school readiness.
- **Improve students' chances of school readiness** by enhancing family engagement in learning and development.
- **Provide tools and resources** that assist schools' and districts' efforts to help young children in their communities come to school ready to learn.

## Research shows that missing school in the early years matters

Routines start early for students and their families.

**Getting in the habit of regularly going to school in preschool and kindergarten can help with later attendance.**<sup>3</sup> A 2018 study found that students who were chronically absent in pre-kindergarten were five to six times more likely to be chronically absent at age 7, when they were typically in 2nd grade.<sup>4</sup>

Research also suggests that chronic absenteeism in pre-kindergarten and kindergarten is associated with poorer school outcomes as children transition through school, including:

- **Lack of kindergarten readiness skills.** Research shows that students who were chronically absent in pre-kindergarten had **lower kindergarten readiness scores in math, letter recognition, and social emotional skills** such as engaging with others, cooperation, following instructions, and self-regulation.<sup>4</sup>

- **Missing critical academic milestones.** Attendance in pre-kindergarten and kindergarten influences academic achievement as students progress through school. **Research shows that students who were chronically absent in pre-kindergarten scored lower on reading fluency in 2nd grade.**<sup>4</sup> Early reading performance, in turn, is highly predictive of future school success. When students are behind in reading performance early on, they are four times more likely to drop out of high school.<sup>5</sup>
- **Future social emotional and behavior problems.** Missing school in pre-kindergarten and kindergarten has been linked to poor social emotional development in the early grades, including **reduced social engagement with peers.**<sup>6</sup> Students may also be more likely to experience behavior problems later on. For example, one study found that **students who were chronically absent in kindergarten were twice as likely as high-attending peers to be suspended from school by 7th grade.**<sup>7</sup>
- **Grade repetition.** Chronic absenteeism in the early grades decreases students' likeliness to move on to the next grade. A 2012 study found that **one-quarter of the students who were chronically absent in pre-kindergarten and kindergarten were held back in later grades.**<sup>8</sup>

## Next steps

Using data to identify the extent of the problem and who is most likely to be chronically absent is the first step in reducing chronic absenteeism in pre-kindergarten and kindergarten:

- School districts can work closely with pre-kindergarten providers (both state-funded and private) to systematically collect attendance data.
- Education leaders can examine attendance records to assess the level of chronic absenteeism in pre-kindergarten and kindergarten.

Next, stakeholders can work together to increase attendance among the youngest learners:

- Researchers, policymakers, and school leaders can work together during collaborative meetings to identify and promote evidence-based practices that schools and teachers can implement to combat chronic absenteeism.



This fact sheet is part of a three-part series that highlights the problem of chronic absenteeism in the early grades in New Jersey and across the nation. An additional fact sheet looks at reasons for and patterns of chronic absenteeism, including strategies educators can use to assess patterns in their schools and districts. Another fact sheet highlights research-based strategies to reduce chronic absenteeism in the early grades.

## References

- <sup>1</sup> Chen, P., & Rice, C. (2017). *Showing up matters: The state of chronic absenteeism in New Jersey. 3rd annual report*. Newark, NJ: Advocates for Children of New Jersey.
- <sup>2</sup> New Jersey Department of Education. (2018). *Getting students to school: Strategies for improving attendance and reducing chronic absenteeism*. Trenton, NJ: State of New Jersey Department of Education.
- <sup>3</sup> Gottfried, M. A. (2015). *Can center-based childcare reduce the odds of early chronic absenteeism?* *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 4(2), 1–15.
- <sup>4</sup> Ehrlich, S. B., Gwynne, J. A., & Allensworth, E. M. (2018). *Pre-kindergarten attendance matters: Early chronic absence patterns and relationships to learning outcomes*. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 44, 136-151.
- <sup>5</sup> Hernandez, D. J. (2011). *Double jeopardy: How third-grade reading skills and poverty influence high school graduation*. Baltimore, MD: Annie E. Casey Foundation.
- <sup>6</sup> Gottfried, M. A. (2014). *Chronic absenteeism and its effects on students' academic and socioemotional outcomes*. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk*, 19(2), 53–75.
- <sup>7</sup> RI DataHUB. (2015). *Chronic absenteeism among kindergarten students [Presentation]*. Kingston, RI: RI DataHUB.
- <sup>8</sup> Connolly, F., & Olson, L. (2012). *Early elementary performance and attendance in Baltimore City Schools' pre-kindergarten and kindergarten*. Baltimore, MD: Baltimore Education Research Consortium.

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## Chronic Absenteeism in the Early Grades: Risk Factors and What Schools Can Do

Chronic absenteeism—defined as **missing 10 percent or more of school days** in most states—is a problem across the nation. **In New Jersey, this means missing 18 days or more each school year, or about 2 days per month.** Students who are chronically absent in the early years often lack critical school readiness skills, are more likely to miss important academic milestones, and may lag behind their peers with social-emotional development. Recognizing the challenges and common risk factors is the first step. Next, school leaders must identify chronically absent students and examine the underlying risk factors and causes of chronic absenteeism in their schools.

### What school leaders can do

Regularly reviewing attendance data can help identify patterns of students who are chronically absent, which can inform steps to improve attendance. New Jersey provides [explicit guidance](#) to schools on how to report student absences and calculate chronic absenteeism in grades K-12. This guidance includes determining acceptable reasons to excuse absences and making sure reporting systems meet a rigorous standard. The next step is to explore the root causes of why pre-kindergarten and kindergarten students are not coming to school.

**Turn the page for ideas on connecting with families and assessing reasons for absenteeism.**

### Factors that lead to absenteeism

In the earliest grades, educators can help families recognize the importance of school attendance. Sometimes early learning is not valued as much as it is in the upper grades, so educators should take steps to ensure that families see the benefits of these earliest learning experiences.<sup>1,2</sup> Educators should also recognize that many factors lead to absenteeism at any age including student, family, school, and community specific issues:

- **Student-specific factors** can include anxiety or fear associated with going to school, childhood trauma, illness, or chronic health problems, such as asthma.<sup>3</sup>
- **Family-specific factors** can include inconsistent or nonstandard work schedules, unstable housing, extended trips, stressful family events, and lack of social or economic resources. A family may not have access to reliable transportation, food, clothes, and health care. When children and families lack these resources, it may be more challenging to attend school.<sup>4</sup>



- **School-specific factors can include infrequent family–teacher interactions, difficulty with other children in class, and poor school climate.** For example, a 2016 study found associations between negative school climate and chronic absence in urban school settings, suggesting that factors such as connectedness with school, school safety, and absences may be linked.<sup>5</sup>
- **Community-specific factors** can include unsafe neighborhoods and lack of social and educational supports. For example, a 2017 study found that exposure to neighborhood violence is associated with chronic absence.<sup>6</sup>

### Students most at risk

School leaders must pay special attention to students most at risk for being chronically absent from school.<sup>7</sup> In New Jersey, students who are more often chronically absent tend to come from disadvantaged groups, including:

- Children of color
- Students living in poverty
- Students with disabilities
- English language learners<sup>8</sup>

## Connecting with families is critical

When schools partner with families, they can help parents and other family members become advocates for ensuring children come to school every day, ready to learn. Educators should engage regularly with families about the importance of coming to school.<sup>9</sup> They should begin these conversations early, during pre-kindergarten and kindergarten registration, open houses, back-to-school nights, and individual conversations designed to get to know the children and families.

Districts should also encourage schools to gather information from families and teachers to understand attendance patterns and challenges. This information can help inform schools' corrective action plans, and link families with community resources when appropriate.<sup>10</sup>

## Next steps

Once schools identify students who need support and gather information about root causes, the next steps are to identify, implement, and evaluate interventions to reduce rates of chronic absenteeism.



This fact sheet is part of a three-part series aimed at understanding and combating chronic absenteeism among New Jersey's youngest students. An additional fact sheet addresses the association between chronic absenteeism and critical school readiness skills and academic milestones. Another fact sheet provides evidence-based examples of what schools can do to monitor and improve levels of chronic absenteeism, and how to assess whether attendance improves.

## References

- <sup>1</sup> Ehrlich, S. B., Gwynne, J. A., Stitzel Pareja, A., Allensworth, E. M., Moore, P., Jagesic, S., & Sorice, E. (2014). *Preschool attendance in Chicago public schools: Relationships with learning outcomes and reasons for absences*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research.
- <sup>2</sup> Robinson, C. D., Lee, M. G., Dearing, E., & Rogers, T. (2018). *Reducing student absenteeism in the early grades by targeting parental beliefs*. *American Educational Research Journal*, 20, 1–30.

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- <sup>8</sup> Chen, P., & Rice, C. (2017). *Showing up matters: The state of chronic absenteeism in New Jersey, 3rd annual report*. Newark, NJ: Advocates for Children of New Jersey.
- <sup>9</sup> Chang, H., & Romero, M. (2008). *Present, engaged, and accounted for: The critical importance of addressing chronic absence in the early grades*. New York: National Center for Children in Poverty.
- <sup>10</sup> Pyne, J., Grodsky, E., Vaade, E., Camburn, E., & Bradley, D. (2018). *What happens when children miss school? Unpacking elementary school absences in MMSD*. Madison, WI: Madison Education Partnership.

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## Chronic Absenteeism in the Early Grades: How to Choose and Implement Proven Strategies to Improve Attendance

Chronic absenteeism—defined as **missing 10 percent or more of school days in most states**—is a problem across the nation. Students who are chronically absent in the early years may lack critical school readiness skills, miss important academic milestones, and lag behind their peers in social-emotional development. Once school leaders identify chronically absent students and the risk factors in their schools, it is time to select and test strategies to improve attendance among the earliest learners.

### Selecting the right strategy

School leaders, teachers, and support staff can work together to identify and implement strategies to decrease chronic absenteeism. Helpful approaches include working with families to understand challenges that impact many chronically absent students, selecting strategies based on these challenges, and providing personalized supports to families who are struggling the most. Use proven strategies when possible. However, given that most of the scarce evidence on reducing chronic absenteeism is based on studies of older children, consider implementing and testing new or less proven strategies based on the specific needs of your students.

### Research shows that:

#### Informing families about the importance of attendance in the early grades can help improve attendance rates.

- Families may not understand why regular attendance during the early years is so critical. A recent report revealed that informing families about the importance of attendance through **messages on public buses and recorded wake-up calls** improved attendance for New York City public school students.<sup>1</sup>

#### Families may not know that their child is chronically absent.

- Parents tend to underestimate their children's absences and think they have missed the same or fewer days than classmates.
- A recent study showed that **sending a postcard to families** improved attendance rates.<sup>2</sup> Both a postcard with a general message about the importance of school attendance and a specific one about the number of days that student missed were effective.
- Another study showed the effectiveness of **sending text messages to parents**.<sup>3</sup> Teachers sent targeted messages to parents of kindergarten students on the day they missed school, expressing concern and offering assistance. Based on parents' responses, teachers linked families to resources, such as transportation, temporary housing, or clean clothes. These messages reduced chronic absenteeism rates by 11 percentage points.

#### Offering transportation alternatives can help get children to school.

- Schools or neighborhoods can organize [walking school buses](#), where students walk to school in a group with at least one adult.

### Tips for communicating with families

- **Habits start early!** Help families understand how to get into the routine of going to school every day during pre-kindergarten and kindergarten.
  - **Remind families** why pre-kindergarten and kindergarten are so critical to their child's success. Share information about critical skills students learn in the early grades or about what they missed on a specific day.
  - **Share ideas and resources** with parents to help them become part of the team, rather than placing blame on them. Mutual trust helps families and schools work together to solve problems.
  - **Teachers can provide families with tools** such as [attendance trackers](#) to help monitor days missed and stay on target for attendance goals.
- Schools can help arrange regular transportation to help families without reliable access.<sup>4</sup> For example, schools can provide buses themselves or partner with community organizations such as local churches that have vans or buses.

#### Coordination between families and school staff can help decrease illness-based absences.

- Coordinate with a school nurse or a child's doctor to help determine whether a student is too sick for school. Most illnesses do not require children to stay home, unless the illness prevents the child from participating in activities, requires more attention than staff can provide, or poses a risk of spreading germs to others.<sup>5</sup>

- Use preventative measures such as helping children wash their hands and cover their mouths when coughing or sneezing, discouraging them from sharing food and drinks with others, and arranging wellness visits with school nurses to reduce absences due to illness.<sup>6,7</sup>
- Home visits by school staff for families who are struggling can improve attendance for students who have a chronic illness, such as asthma, because school staff can learn what supports children might need at school.<sup>6</sup>

### Help build community partnerships through resources

- Linking families that are stressed by household instability, food insecurity, or financial challenges to housing agencies and other community supports can help them obtain the resources they need to get students to school.
- Resources provided to families should be culturally and linguistically responsive and build on existing relationships that may already exist in the community.
- Translate materials into additional languages, as necessary, or find a trusted person who lives in the community who can help schools share important information with families.

## Implementing and testing your strategies

The work is not over after the strategy is selected! It is important to test whether strategies are being implemented as expected by tracking all the steps in the process, and to collect data to determine how well the strategies are working to improve attendance. This way, if the strategy is not being adopted consistently in your school, or if attendance is not substantially improved, you will know about it and have valuable data to help inform changes to your strategy.

This fact sheet is part of a three-part series aimed at understanding and combating chronic absenteeism among New Jersey's youngest students. Another fact sheet addresses the association between chronic absenteeism, school readiness skills, and academic milestones. An additional fact sheet shares information on how school leaders and teachers can identify chronically absent students.

## References

<sup>1</sup> Balfanz, R., & Byrnes, V. (2013). *Meeting the challenge of combating chronic absenteeism*. Baltimore, MD: Everyone Graduates Center, Johns Hopkins University School of Education.

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<sup>4</sup> Gottfried, M. (2017). *Linking getting to school with going to school*. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 39(4), 571–592.

### Step-by-step guide for tracking progress:

- ✓ **Record attendance rates** prior to implementing any change
- ✓ **Create standard procedures** for implementing the strategy
- ✓ **Check throughout the intervention period to make sure the strategy is implemented as expected**
- ✓ **Obtain feedback** from those implementing the strategy about challenges
- ✓ **Provide feedback** to educators/schools if there are issues with implementation
- ✓ **Record follow-up attendance data** to compare pre- and post- attendance rates

## School leaders can help expand the range of proven strategies

We are still learning about ways to combat chronic absenteeism for New Jersey's youngest learners. School leaders and educators can help by trying and testing strategies. For example, although attendance awards were once believed to encourage attendance, research now shows they have a negative impact in the early grades.<sup>8</sup> Testing new strategies can provide important information about what works for improving attendance for young learners.

<sup>5</sup> American Academy of Pediatrics (2011). *Caring for our children: National health and safety performance standards: Guidelines for early care and education programs (3rd ed.)*. Elk Grove Village, IL: American Academy of Pediatrics; Washington, DC: American Public Health Association.

<sup>6</sup> Kerr, J., Price, M., Kotch, J., Willis, S., Fisher, M., & Silva, S. (2012). *Does contact by a family nurse practitioner decrease early school absence?* *The Journal of School Nursing*, 28(1), 38–46.

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# Infographic (flyer):

For parents and families







## Improving the school attendance of New Jersey's youngest learners

### Attendance in Preschool and Kindergarten Spells Future Success!

Every day that your preschooler or kindergartner is in school builds their foundation for learning. Missing two or more days each month can make it harder for them to succeed. Navigating the path to your child's learning is a team effort.



**Busy schedule?** Set up a morning routine. Prepare your child's backpack the night before.



**Transportation issues?** Talk to a neighbor or other parent to create a backup plan for transportation.



**Not sure how many days your child has missed?** Ask your child's teacher for updates or start to track days on your own.



**Not sure when to keep your child home from school?** Check with your school nurse or doctor.



#### Regular attendance helps your child:



Learn numbers, letters, and shapes



Learn to manage emotions and behaviors



Learn early reading and writing skills



Achieve future academic milestones



**Let's work together to make sure children attend school every day!**  
Questions? Contact your child's teacher, school, or parent organization.

New Jersey Department of Education. (2014). [Preschool Teaching and Learning Standards](#). Trenton, NJ: State of New Jersey Department of Education.  
New Jersey Department of Education. (2016). [Kindergarten Student Learning Standards](#). Trenton, NJ: State of New Jersey Department of Education.  
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### ¡Asistencia a preescolar y kindergarten significa futuro éxito!

Cada día que su estudiante de preescolar o kindergarten está en la escuela construye su base de aprendizaje. Faltar dos días o más por mes puede hacer que sea más difícil tener éxito. Navegar el camino al aprendizaje de su hijo(a) es un esfuerzo en equipo.



**¿Calendario ocupado?** Establezca una rutina matutina. Prepare la mochila de su hijo(a) la noche anterior.



**¿Problemas con el transporte?** Hable con un vecino u otro padre para crear un plan alternativo de transporte.



**¿No sabe cuántos días ha faltado su hijo(a)?** Pida actualizaciones al maestro de su hijo(a) o empiece a contar los días usted mismo(a).



**¿No sabe cuándo mantener su hijo(a) en casa?** Pregunte a la enfermera de su escuela o a su doctor.



**Asistencia regular ayuda a su hijo(a) a:**



Aprender números, letras y formas



Aprender a manejar emociones y comportamientos



Aprender capacidades de lectura y escritura temprana



Lograr futuros éxitos académicos



**¡Trabajemos juntos para asegurar que los niños asisten a la escuela todos los días!**  
**¿Preguntas? Contacte al maestro de su hijo(a), escuela u organización de padres.**

New Jersey Department of Education. (2014). [Preschool Teaching and Learning Standards](#). Trenton, NJ: State of New Jersey Department of Education.

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# Slide Deck and Handout:

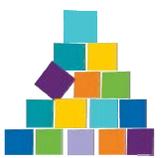
For school leaders and staff to use  
with parents and families



Improving the school attendance of New Jersey's youngest learners



## Attending School Every Day: Preschool and Kindergarten Attendance Can Spell Success!



Improving the school attendance of New Jersey's youngest learners



### Preschool and Kindergarten Attendance Can Spell Success!

#### Why does regular attendance matter?

Being at school every day helps your child build a foundation for learning. Missing two or more days each month can make it harder to succeed in school in the future. Every day your preschooler or kindergarten stays home, your child misses out on key building blocks for learning such as:

- Speaking clearly to express feelings
- Learning to manage emotions, be attentive in class, solve problems, and care for others
- Learning to share and take responsibility for their actions
- Naming letters and matching them to their sounds
- Counting objects and recognizing numbers and shapes
- Understanding cause and effect

Missing school in the early grades can lead to future struggles with meeting important reading milestones, challenges with social skills, and repeating grades.

#### Want to make sure your child succeeds?

Supporting children's learning is a team effort. We are here to help!

- Not sure how many days your child has missed?** Refer to your school's online portal or parent webpage to track attendance, or ask your child's teacher for updates. Look at the school calendar ahead of time and try to schedule family activities and vacations on non-school days.
- Busy schedule?** Get in the habit of going to school every day by setting a regular bed time and morning routine and laying out your child's backpack and clothes the night before. Talk to a neighbor or other parent to create a backup plan for transportation if a last minute need arises.
- Not sure when to keep your child home from school?** Check with your school nurse or doctor to help know which symptoms mean your child is too sick for school. If your child has a chronic illness, such as asthma, work with your child's teacher to come up with a plan that helps your child attend school regularly.

#### Let's work together to make sure children attend school every day!

Questions? Contact your child's teacher, school, or parent organization.

New Jersey Department of Education, (2014). *Education, Training and Learning Standards*. Trenton, NJ: State of New Jersey Department of Education.  
New Jersey Department of Education, (2016). *Guidelines for Learning Standards*. Trenton, NJ: State of New Jersey Department of Education.  
Candy, E. & Chen, C. (2012). *Early Childhood Learning Standards and Guidelines in Baltimore City Schools and Washington and Montgomery Counties, MD*. Baltimore Education Research Consortium. Research Quarterly, 41, 136-151.  
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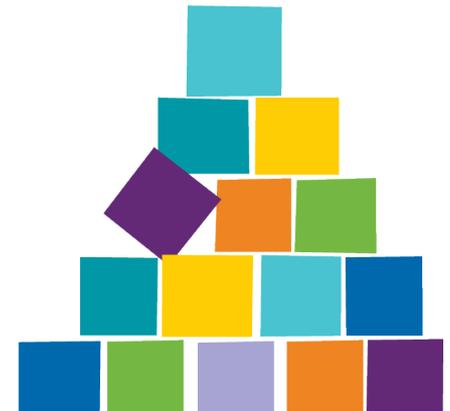
Go-Learn-Grow

Improving the school attendance of New Jersey's youngest learners

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# Attending School Every Day: Preschool and Kindergarten Attendance Can Spell Success!



# How much is too much school to miss?

- When children miss **10%** or more of the school year, research suggests it is harder for them to develop a strong base for learning.
- Being absent **2 or more days a month** can add up to missing 10 percent of the school year.

# Important learning happens in the early years

- Learning experiences in preschool and kindergarten can help your child **explore, examine, and learn about the world around them.**
  - When your child misses school they could be missing out on:
    - Naming letters and matching them to their sounds
    - Early reading and writing skills
    - Counting objects and recognizing shapes
    - Critical thinking skills, such as planning and carrying out experiments and learning cause and effect
    - Learning to manage their emotions, be attentive in class, solve problems, and care for others
    - Speaking clearly to express their feelings and ideas
-

# Missing school puts children at risk of falling behind

- Missing school in the early years can lead to **future struggles with school readiness, school suspensions, and being held back** in later grades.
  - Students who are chronically absent early on are more likely to experience the following in later grades:
    - Lower school readiness scores in math, letter recognition, and social emotional skills
    - Challenges meeting reaching key reading milestones
    - Continued attendance issues
    - Poor social-emotional development and behavior problems
    - Suspensions and being held back in later grades
-

# We want to help you get your child to school

**Many challenges may make it difficult for your child to attend school every day, such as:**

- Health conditions
- Other family obligations or schedules to work around
- Transportation challenges
- Unstable housing
- Stressful life events

**Let's work together to support our children's learning!**

---

# When is a child too sick to come to school?

- **Having a sore throat, cough, or mild congestion doesn't always mean a child can't handle going to school**
  - Check with the school nurse (**XXX-XXX-XXXX**) or your doctor to help know when your child has symptoms that mean they are too sick for school.
- **We can help you navigate your child's chronic illness**
  - If your child has a chronic illness, such as asthma, let's work together on a plan that helps your child attend school regularly.



# Do other obligations make it hard to prepare for school every day?

## Habits start early!

**Help your child get into the habit of getting to school every day, on time by:**

- Setting a regular bed time and morning routine
- Laying out clothes and backpack the night before



# Need help with transportation to school?

## Have a back-up plan!

- Check with us if you need help finding transportation.
- Talk to a friend, neighbor, or parent from your child's class that you trust to provide support.
- Consider talking with a fellow parent here before you leave!



# Experiencing unstable housing or other challenges?

**There are resources in our state that can help!**

Dial 2-1-1 or go to [NJ211.org](https://www.nj211.org) for assistance, or contact a [local homeless prevention hotline](#).



# Having a hard time keeping track of missed school days for your young child?

**Knowledge is power!**

**Let's work together to track our children's attendance to avoid missing too much school:**

- Ask your child's teacher for regular updates.
- Refer to your school's online portal or parent webpage to help track attendance.
- Look at the school calendar ahead of time and try to schedule family activities and vacations on non-school days.



# Getting our children to school, every day!

**We've talked about the importance of school for your young learners and ways we can reduce the challenges to attending school every day.**

Please don't hesitate to reach out to us about ways we can support you to ensure your child gets to school every day!



# Questions and Answers



# Disclaimer

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<https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/midatlantic/>





## Preschool and Kindergarten Attendance Can Spell Success!

### Why does regular attendance matter?

**Being at school every day helps your child build a foundation for learning.** Missing two or more days each month can make it harder to succeed in school in the future. Every day your preschooler or kindergartner stays home, your child misses out on key building blocks for learning such as:



Speaking clearly to express feelings

Learning to manage emotions, be attentive in class, solve problems, and care for others



Learning to share and to take responsibility for their actions



Naming letters and matching them to their sounds

Counting objects and recognizing numbers and shapes



Understanding cause and effect

Missing school in the early grades can lead to future struggles with meeting important reading milestones, challenges with social skills, and repeating grades.

### Want to make sure your child succeeds?

**Supporting children's learning is a team effort.** We are here to help!



**Not sure how many days your child has missed?** Refer to your school's online portal or parent webpage to track attendance, or ask your child's teacher for updates. Look at the school calendar ahead of time and try to schedule family activities and vacations on non-school days.



**Busy schedule?** Get in the habit of going to school every day by setting a regular bed time and morning routine and laying out your child's backpack and clothes the night before. Talk to a neighbor or other parent to create a backup plan for transportation if a last minute need arises.



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## ¡Asistencia a preescolar y kindergarten puede significar éxito!

### ¿Por qué es importante la asistencia regular?

Asistir a la escuela todos los días ayuda a su hijo(a) a construir una base de aprendizaje. Faltar dos días o más por mes puede hacer que sea más difícil tener éxito en la escuela en el futuro. Cada día que su estudiante de preescolar o kindergarten se queda en casa, su hijo(a) se pierde piezas fundamentales de aprendizaje como:



Hablar con claridad para expresar sentimientos

Aprender a manejar emociones, prestar atención en clase, resolver problemas y cuidar a los demás



Aprender a compartir y a asumir responsabilidad por sus acciones



Nombrar letras y relacionarlas con sus sonidos

Contar objetos y reconocer números y formas



Entender causa y efecto

Faltar a la escuela en los primeros grados puede llevar a problemas futuros para cumplir con hitos de lectura importantes, a desafíos con habilidades sociales y a repetir grados.

### ¿Quiere asegurarse de que su hijo(a) tiene éxito?

Apoyar el aprendizaje de nuestros niños es un esfuerzo en equipo. ¡Estamos aquí para ayudar!



¿No sabe cuántos días ha faltado su hijo(a)? Refiérase al portal en línea de su escuela o al sitio web que controla la asistencia, o pida actualizaciones al maestro de su hijo(a). Vea el calendario escolar con anticipación e intente programar actividades familiares y vacaciones en días no escolares.



¿Calendario ocupado? Acostúmbrese a ir a la escuela todos los días estableciendo una hora regular de dormir y rutina matutina y preparando la mochila y ropa de su hijo(a) la noche anterior. Hable con un vecino u otro padre para crear un plan alternativo para el transporte si surge una necesidad de último momento.



¿No sabe cuándo mantener a su hijo(a) en casa? Pregunte a la enfermera de su escuela o a su doctor para que le ayude a saber qué síntomas significan que su hijo(a) está demasiado enfermo(a) para ir a la escuela. Si su hijo(a) tiene una enfermedad crónica, como asma, trabaje con el maestro de su hijo(a) para tener un plan que ayude a su hijo(a) a asistir a la escuela regularmente.

¡Trabajemos juntos para asegurar que los niños asisten a la escuela todos los días!

¿Preguntas? Contacte al maestro de su hijo(a), escuela, u organización de padres.

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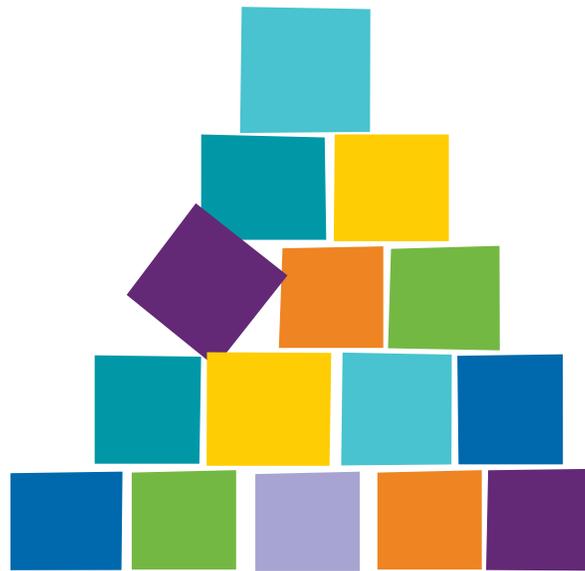
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# References and Additional Resources





## Improving the school attendance of New Jersey's youngest learners



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## Additional Resources

The initiatives that follow provide additional resources related to decreasing chronic absenteeism in the early grades.

**AttendanceWorks** seeks to advance students' success and help close equity gaps through close partnership with states and local agencies to combat chronic absenteeism. The organization works to build public awareness about the need to address chronic absenteeism and encourages local practice by providing technical assistance, including resources that focus on attendance during the transition to kindergarten. To learn more about the work being done at AttendanceWorks, go to <https://www.attendanceworks.org/>.

**Every Day Matters** is a campaign launched by the Oregon Department of Education to reduce chronic absenteeism. The website provides toolkits and resources for families, schools, and communities to address chronic absenteeism in the state of Oregon. For more information, see <https://www.every-day-matters.org/>.

**The Hamilton Project**, developed by the Brookings Institution, includes an interactive map of national data reported by school districts to the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights from the 2015–2016 school year. This map enables users to explore rates of chronic absenteeism at the school, district, state, and national levels by student and school characteristics. Access this map at [http://www.hamiltonproject.org/charts/chronic\\_absence\\_across\\_the\\_united\\_states](http://www.hamiltonproject.org/charts/chronic_absence_across_the_united_states).

**Read by 4th** is a Philadelphia-wide campaign managed by the Free Library of Philadelphia, bringing together a coalition of partners working toward a shared vision that all children will be able to read on grade level by the time they enter 4th grade. Through a comprehensive research review, Read by 4th believes the key levers to achieving grade level reading are school readiness, daily attendance, quality classroom instruction, and out-of-school learning experiences. Read by 4th's Attendance Matters campaign includes a toolkit for school leaders and teachers with handouts and specific advice on ways to make school more welcoming to children and families, strategies to encourage more regular attendance, and ways to address income-related challenges to getting to school. There is also information directed at families. To learn more about the work being done in Philadelphia, go to <http://readby4th.org/>. To review resources aimed at parents, go to <http://readby4th.org/families/attendance/>.

**Success Mentors** is a program used by New York City community schools with chronically absent youth to address the barriers that keep them from attending school every day. Success Mentors are students or caring adults, such as teachers, social workers, school counselors, administrative staff, tutors, or youth advocates that support students and help them reach their potential educational outcomes. For more information, go to <http://www.communityschools.nyc/resources/attendance-resources/success-mentors>.

Let's work together to ensure New Jersey's young children attend school every day!

**For more information, contact us:**

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