



# Attendance & Truancy Among Virginia Students

## Session Five

### *Messaging Attendance*

#### **Presentation Description**

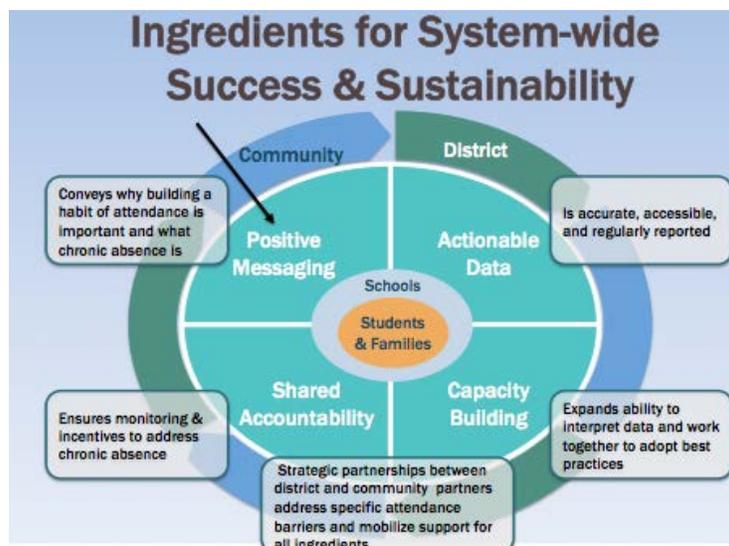
Module five provides schools and school divisions an overview of key findings about parent and care giver perceptions about student attendance and key strategies for effective messaging to reduce absenteeism.

#### **Participant Goals**

- Educators, particularly teachers, can identify effective messages about attendance and can incorporate them into their interactions with families.
- Educators will learn why it is important to help parents and students understand what constitutes good attendance.
- Educators will learn why it is important to help parents and students understand that absences add up and impact academic achievement from Pre-k – 12th grade.

#### **Facilitation**

Have the participants review the module and reflections. Each reflection is designed to help participants further their understanding and learning of key concepts, frameworks, and strategies for reducing chronic absence.





## Attendance & Truancy Among Virginia Students

### Module 5: Messaging Attendance

#### The Purpose

- This PowerPoint and Webinar serves as No. 5 in a series of modules designed to equip Virginia school divisions to reduce truancy and absenteeism.
- This module is focused on positive and effective messaging for families and students.

#### Virginia Absenteeism & Truancy Professional Development Series

1. Understanding Chronic Absenteeism
2. Learning What Works to Reduce Chronic Absence
3. Establishing School Attendance Teams
4. Using Data to Drive Action
5. Messaging Attendance
6. Integrating Attendance In Parent Engagement
7. Utilizing Parent-Teacher Conferences to Talk with Families about Attendance
8. Recognizing Good and Improved Attendance
9. Providing Personalized Early Outreach
10. Identifying barriers
11. Creating opportunities for peer learning
12. Engaging Community Partners
13. State Attendance Laws and Regulations

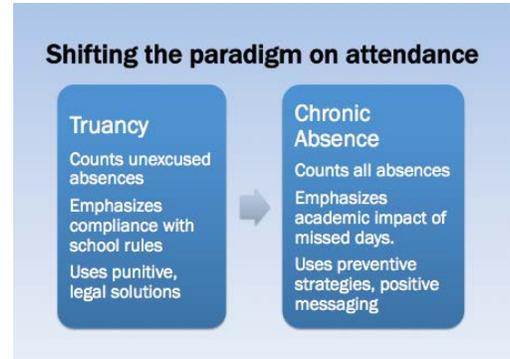
### Warm Up - Reflection One

How does your school or school division convey the connection between school attendance and academic achievement to families and students? How does your school or division encourage parents to track their child's attendance and absences as part of helping them succeed in school?

#### Warm Up Notes

## Reflection Two

Does your school or division focus chiefly on truancy (unexcused absences) or does it emphasize how absences of all types can add up to too much time missed in the classroom?



### Reflection Notes

## Reflection Three

How can we leverage the fact that all parents want their children to have a better future?

### What We Know About Parental Attitudes

Ad Council conducted a survey:

- To understand mindset & behaviors among parents whose children miss 10+ days of school
- Identify how to reach & communicate to this audience

Phase 1:

- Consultation with experts
- 24 in-home interviews in English & Spanish with parents of California students (grades 4 - 9) who missed 10+ days of school

Phase 2:

- 823 telephone and online surveys in English & Spanish with Calif parents whose children missed 10 + days

### Parents Understand the Importance of Education

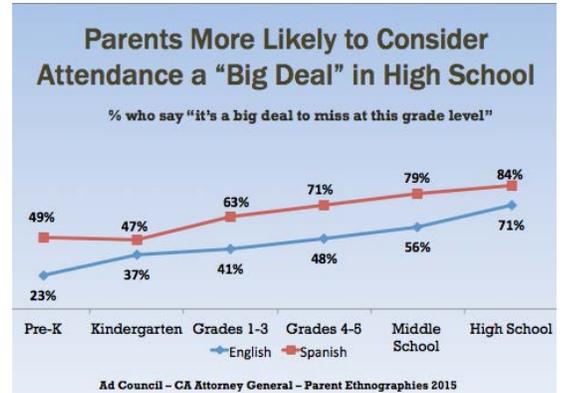
- All parents – even those whose children miss too much school – want what’s best for their kids
- Parents understand that education is key to that success.



### Reflection Notes

## Reflection Four

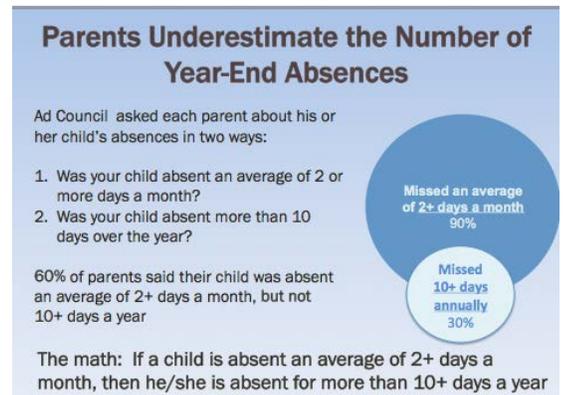
Why do you think that a commonly held misunderstanding about the importance of attendance in elementary school for student's academic success exists? What can elementary school administrators and teachers do to educate families about the importance of attendance in elementary and middle school?



### Reflection Notes

## Reflection Five

Another common misunderstanding is the impact of sporadic absences. Does your school tell parents that sporadic absences add up to significant lost instructional time? Describe your efforts to encourage parents to track absences.



### Reflection Notes

## Reflection Six

Why do you think families might think absences are OK as long as they've given permission? What might help parents understand why absences, even when they occur with parent permission, can still have an impact on learning?

### Parents Believe Absences are Okay if They Have Given Permission

- An absence is not okay if a child ditches
- If the parent gives permission it's okay
- Reasons reported for permissive absence include:
  - Protecting their child from bullying
  - Their child needed the rest
  - Family vacation
  - As a reward for good grades
  - Doctor appointments for the child or siblings
  - Help around the house

### Reflection Notes

## Reflection Seven

List ways that your school or division can reinforce good attendance.

### Schools Can Unwittingly Reinforce Poor Attendance

Parents interviewed said they:

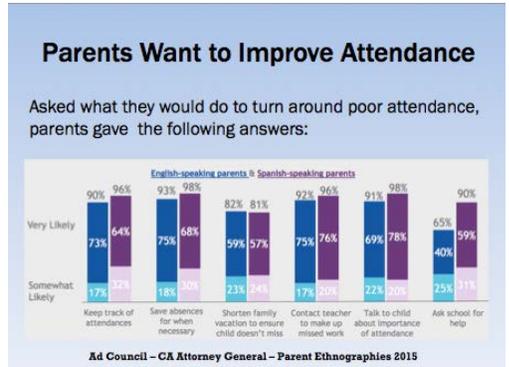
- Disregarded or felt frustrated by impersonal letters
- Felt like their kids were absent about as often as the norm
- Thought that homework packets made up for the absence
- Never had a teacher raise concerns about excessive absences
- Were worried about school safety

System and school practices reinforce parents' existing attitudes and behaviors toward absences

### Reflection Notes

## Reflection Eight

How can you take advantage of the willingness of parents to take steps to improve attendance?



### Reflection Notes

## Reflection Nine

Given these insights and recommendations, what could you do to help your school or division change existing messaging?

### Insights

- **Parents** do not connect early absences with long-term negative consequences.
- **Teachers** communicate with parents, but not about absences.
- **Absence letters** alone are ineffective, generating fear, denial, or misunderstanding, especially for Hispanic parents.
- Parents often rely on **communities** and social networks to care for their children.

### Recommendations

- **Educate** parents about how absences as early as prek can impact reading and math skills and how middle/high school absences are linked to dropout.
- Encourage **teachers** to speak to parents about absences. Specific information about the lessons students are missing can be helpful.
- Help parents **keep track** of the # of absences. Let them know how their children compare to others in the class.
- Take stock of **community members** who play critical roles in kids' lives, and enlist their help.

### What Not to Say to Parents

- Don't focus solely on compliance with school rules; make the case that students miss valuable instructional time and could fall behind whatever the reason for the absence.
- Don't lay blame or suggest parents and students don't care; instead find out what challenges they face.
- Don't talk generally about attendance. Be specific about absences and how children compare to others in the class.

### Reflection Notes

## Reflection Ten

Please reflect on a situation where there was a family cultural barrier that contributed to a student's absenteeism. What was the barrier? How did you or your school work to connect with the family and resolve the barrier? What worked?

### Cultural Considerations

Take into account the different life experiences and different cultural values that parents may prioritize. Here are some examples:

- **Education as a Pathway to Success:** For some parents, education was not the pathway to success in adult life. They may have succeeded as entrepreneurs, farmers, craftsmen or factory workers.
- **Different values take priority:** It isn't that school is unimportant but many families prioritize connection to extended family and preservation of culture over missing school.
- **Negative experience with public schools:** Public schools have been a negative force for certain groups such as Native Americans or African Americans.

### Unpacking Cultural Considerations

1. **Learn: Don't assume you understand a family's history or priorities.**
  - Ask parents about how they see education as a path to success in life.
  - Ask how it fits with other family priorities.
  - Check with others such as a respected leader from the same cultural group. What would they say about attendance?

### Unpacking Cultural Considerations

2. **Validate the family's priorities and experiences.**
  - Reflect back what you heard
  - Empathize (if you have had a similar struggle)
  - Name the group's experience and history

### Addressing Cultural Considerations

3. **Seek solutions that acknowledge the family's priorities and reality**
  - Look for win-win solutions
  - Explore the consequences
  - Negotiate

### Reflection Notes

## Reflection Eleven

Is your entire school community engaged in positive messaging? Who is not yet on board with this idea? How might they be engaged?

### The Value of Positive Messaging

All students and families can benefit from positive messaging: a low-cost approach to helping students avoid unnecessary absences



Reflection Notes

\*Additional information can be found on the last page of this guide

# Learn More

Before moving on with the additional modules, we would like to encourage you to learn more about this issue. Specifically, please consider reading/viewing:

- Ad Council toolkit (when ready)
- Make Every Day Count messaging toolkit:  
<http://www.attendanceworks.org/tools/for-public-messaging/>
- Promotional materials:  
<http://www.attendanceworks.org/tools/schools/promotional-materials/>
- Attendance: A Community Imperative video:  
<http://www.attendanceworks.org/tools/for-public-messaging/attendance-community-imperative-video/>