



Attendance Challenge

Planning Guide and Toolkit

Created by the United Way of Southwestern
Pennsylvania's

Be There Attendance Campaign

www.uwswpa.org/be-there

Email: BeThere@uwac.org

Twitter: @BeTherePgh

Phone: (412) 456-6833





A How-To: Attendance Challenge

Introduction	2
What is an Attendance Challenge?	3
Chronic Absence FAQ	4
Monitoring Attendance Data	5
Attendance Challenge Timeline	6
The 5 Phases of an Attendance Challenge	7-11
Roles and Responsibilities	12
Challenge Types	13
Incentive Ideas	14
What's Next?	15
Support Material Templates	16



Join us and inspire kids to be in school.



United Way of Southwestern

Pennsylvania leads and mobilizes the caring power of individuals, the business community and organizations to help local people in need measurably improve their lives. United Way creates long-lasting change for the betterment of our community.

Through the Be There Attendance Campaign, United Way of Southwestern Pennsylvania both convenes community partners to connect key stakeholders to school attendance work and directly supports schools, programs, and communities with materials and initiatives that positively reinforce school attendance.

By hosting an attendance challenge, you are motivating students to make it to school every day, which is the first step towards building a habit of great attendance!

A student's attendance in September can be a strong indicator of his or her attendance for the rest of the school year.

In September of 2014, Pittsburgh Schiller hosted an attendance challenge in order to encourage students to start the year off right. Students were challenged to have 100% attendance for the entire month, and the students who achieved this goal would be rewarded with a field trip to Romp n' Roll roller rink.

By Pittsburgh Public Schools standards, in past years Redasha's attendance had been considered severe. But she was determined to go on the field trip with her friends.

Redasha came to school every single day in September. If she missed the bus, she called a neighbor for a ride, or she would walk to the nearest bus stop and catch a public bus, just so she could make it to school. She might have arrived late a couple times, but she made it. And coming late is much better than not coming at all.

At the end of the month, Redasha's hard work paid off. Along with 113 of her fellow students, feeling accomplished, Redasha boarded the bus to the Romp n' Roll!

By setting a habit of getting to school every single day, Redasha's attendance continued to improve.



This toolkit is a step-by-step guide to planning and executing
an attendance challenge.

An **attendance challenge** is...

an opportunity

to *challenge* students

to come to school **everyday**

for a set period of time

and **reward** them for their achievement!

Students respond well to positive recognition. Let's be proactive instead of reactive!

Be There constructed this toolkit so every school and organization in Southwestern PA can hold its very own attendance challenge. By outlining each step, providing checklists & agendas, and creating other support materials, we want you to use this toolkit as a guide to implement a successful attendance challenge to celebrate good attendance with your students!



Chronic Absence FAQ

Q: What is chronic absenteeism?

A: Chronic absence is defined as **missing 10%** or more of a school year. Think about it this way:

- ❖ There are **180** days in a school year
- ❖ Missing **18** days a year is 10%
- ❖ Missing 18 days in **9** months of schools equals...
- ❖ Missing **2** days of school each month

Missing only **two days of school a month** makes a student chronically absent. It may not seem like much, but two days each month adds up!

Q: Is chronic absence different than truancy?

A: Yes! **Truancy** indicates *intentional* or *unexcused* absence. **Chronic absence** includes unexcused, excused, and days missed from suspension. Any absence from school, regardless of reason, is counted in chronic absence.

Q: Why does chronic absence matter?

A: Nationally, up to **7.5 million** students are chronically absent. Multiple years of chronic absence at any point in a youth's school career is a forewarning of academic trouble. Research shows that chronically absent students are less likely to succeed academically, are more likely to be suspended, and are more likely to eventually dropout. In fact, **3 out of 4 6th graders who are chronically absent will never graduate high school**. By working to prevent chronic absence, we are working to give our youth a brighter future.

Q: Why don't schools typically monitor it?

A: According to the law in Pennsylvania, schools are only required to monitor

average daily attendance (ADA) and truancy. However, **both ADA and truancy can mask a bigger problem**. Schools with ADAs of 95% can still have significant chronic absence. Failing to look at chronic absence data can mean lost opportunities to intervene before students require expensive remediation or drop out. Tracking attendance prompts timely response and allows school staff to work together with families and community partners to prevent students from missing so much school that they fall behind and lose hope of ever succeeding academically.

Did you know?

- By 6th grade, chronic absence is a predictor of dropping-out. By 9th grade, missing twenty percent of the school year is a better predictor of dropping out than 8th grade test scores.
- Children living in poverty are more likely to be chronically absent at a young age because of barriers such as: a lack of access to health care, housing insecurity, and unreliable transportation. These students are more likely to suffer academically from missed days because their families often lack the resources to make up for lost time.



Monitoring Attendance Data

There are attendance monitoring systems that track chronic absence available to your school **free** of cost.

1. DHS Data Share Agreement

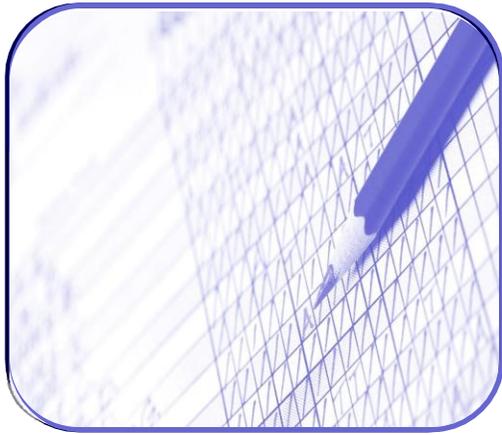
This agreement enables school districts and the Allegheny County Department of Human Services (DHS) to create and implement strategies and/or interventions to improve educational outcomes. A partnership between schools and DHS allows for improved coordination and transparency with the goal of improving the well-being of youth they serve. By combining data from schools with the human services database, DHS is able to examine issues, such as attendance, within the greater picture of what is happening in students' homes and communities.

This service is available to all school districts free of cost. Simply request an agreement for your school district with the DHS office.

Visit www.alleghenycounty.us/DHS or email the DHS Education Liaison Sam Murphy at Samantha.Murphy@AlleghenyCounty.us.

2. Attendance Works DATT/SATT

Attendance Works provides a free and easy-to-use solution for both schools and districts to track chronic absence. **District Attendance Tracking Tools (DATT)** and **School Attendance Tracking Tools**



(SATT) are self-calculating spreadsheets in Microsoft Excel. Educators need only to copy and paste student information into an excel file, and are then able discover chronic absence levels across ages, grades, and other categories. The DATTs and SATTs are designed to work with a school's student information systems and are user-friendly. They are organized into three separate modules for grades K-5 (Elementary), 6-8 (Middle) and 9-12 (High).

A free webinar on how to use the spreadsheet is also provided.

To download DATT/SATT or to learn more, go to:

www.attendanceworks.org/tools/tools-for-calculating-chronic-absence/.

3. Chronic Absence Analysis

Attendance Works also provides free worksheets for chronic absence analysis. This is a great starting place for schools without current data on chronic absence. Attendance Works provides resources for you to collect and analyze data. Choose from: school-wide, district-wide, district-wide by sub population, and school-to school comparison.



Attendance Challenge Timeline

An attendance challenge can be broken down into five stages:

1. Planning and Prep
2. Attendance Challenge Kick-off
3. Halfway Point Check-in
4. End Celebration
5. Follow-up

Below is a general timeline of an attendance challenge. It is useful to begin planning at least a month before the challenge begins. This early preparation will ensure that your challenge runs smoothly and prevent any last minute crises!

1a. One Month Before

- Schedule planning meeting
- Ask for student input
- Teacher buy-in

2. Challenge Kick-off

- Challenge commences
- Cheer on students
- Hold informal assembly

4. End Celebration

- Reward and recognize students
- Invite parents to assembly
- Hand out certificates



1b. One Week Before

- Send parent flyer
- Create school awareness
- Invite volunteers to kick-off event

3. Halfway Check-in

- Check data
- Send data to Be There contact
- Remind and encourage

5. Follow-up

- Debrief Be There
- Take evaluation survey
- Think about future challenges



Phase 1: Planning and Prep

Phase	To Do	Completed
Phase 1	Schedule planning meeting	_____
	Encourage all staff to participate	_____
	Assign roles & responsibilities	_____
	Select challenge beginning and end dates	_____
	Brainstorm incentive ideas	_____
	Talk to students about their wants	_____
	Spread awareness around school	_____

Before an attendance challenge can begin, the logistics and details need to be determined. Schedule a planning meeting and invite all interested staff, parents, and teachers. It is very helpful to get teacher input and buy-in early on in the planning process.

Tip: Ask kids what they want as a reward! This challenge is for them. The more motivated they are to win the prize, the more motivated they will be to come to school!

Then, establish the beginning and end dates and delegate roles & responsibilities. The planning meeting is also a great time to brainstorm ideas for prizes/rewards.

Ideas for spreading awareness and generating excitement for the challenge is another good topic to discuss. Everyone in the school should know about the challenge before it begins. There are many ways to get students excited about the challenge:

- Hang up flyers and posters around school.
- Make daily announcements over the P.A. system

Check Materials! Number 1 in the Support Material Templates, found at the end of this packet, is a sample agenda to print and use at your planning meeting. Material Number 2 is a sample parent letter to help you start writing yours.



Phase 2: The Challenge Kick-off

An attendance challenge kick-off is a fun and informal event to excite students for the upcoming challenge. Recruit volunteers to hold signs and cheer on kids as they enter school. Passing out pencils, stickers, or other age-appropriate items, is a great way to make a tangible association with attendance. Make posters that volunteers can hold that include a positive message about coming to school:

Welcome to school!

Thank you for being here everyday!

We are so happy to see you!

Tip: To make the kick-off event special, invite parents, families, mentors, tutors, pastors, and community providers.



Bank of America volunteers cheer on Schiller 6-8 students as they enter school in May 2014.

To generate buzz for the challenge, a kick-off takes place in the morning as students arrive at school. Welcoming students as they enter the school building signifies that today is the start of something special. This will not only be a final reminder that the attendance challenge is starting, but will also reinforce that school staff and community members are happy to see them at school.

Don't forget to make an announcement encouraging students to strive for perfect attendance. This could look like an informal assembly in the morning, at lunch, or even a P.A. announcement.

Phase	To Do	Completed
Phase 2	Send home a parent flyer week prior to kick-off	_____
	Recruit volunteers & staff for kick-off event	_____
	Cheer on students as they enter school	_____
	Announce commencement of challenge	_____
	Hold informal assembly or announcement	_____
	Encourage students to attend everyday	_____
	Begin to closely monitor attendance data	_____



Phase 3: Halfway Point

The half-way point is exactly what it sounds like — the middle of the challenge. It is important to check your attendance data now, not only to make sure it is recording accurately, but also to guide you as you plan your end celebration.

Tip: Check in with homeroom teachers to see how attendance monitoring is going. It is better to catch any data errors now than the day before the celebration!

The half-way point is a great opportunity to remind students, and staff, why attendance matters. Provide encouragement and enthusiasm in the form of small incentives. Some possible ways to do this are:

- Give away a small prize or have a raffle
- Make a special morning announcement
- A commendatory note home to parents of students with perfect attendance

By this point, you should have a concrete idea for your students’ reward. You should start planning your end celebration, if you have not already.

This may also be the time to check in students who have not had very good attendance. Although they may not be eligible for the reward, it is important to remind them that their attendance matters too!



Students at Woodland Hills Dickson Elementary enjoy an ice cream social after a end-of-the-year attendance challenge.

Phase	To Do	Completed
Phase 3	Check accuracy of attendance data	_____
	Begin to finalize incentive details	_____
	Remind and encourage students	_____
	Bonus step: Tell parents how their child is doing!	_____



Phase 4: End Celebration

This is the moment that all the students have been waiting! The end celebration does not have to take place on the same day the challenge ends. In fact, spacing it out will give you a few days to finalize your data, and to confirm student numbers. It is best to hold the celebration on a Friday or the day before a break starts. For example, if the attendance challenge officially ends on a Tuesday, we recommend postponing the celebration until Friday. Whichever day you choose, make sure you have enough time to prepare for your celebration.

Tip: Families, especially of younger students, play a big part in getting their kids to school. Congratulate and thank families

A good way to start the celebration day is to hold a school-wide assembly. If appropriate, invite parents and community members — not only will the students take pride in the public recognition, it also encourages positive family involvement. This assembly is also an opportunity to thank teachers, staff, and volunteers who helped orchestrate the challenge.

The way you distribute the prize or the timing of the event depends on what is most appropriate for your school.

Phase	To Do	Completed
Phase 4	Print and prepare certificates	_____
	Purchase prizes/incentives	_____
	Coordinate logistics with staff	_____
	Invite parents to assembly/ceremony	_____
	Celebrate good attendance!	_____

Check Materials! Number 3 in the Support Material Templates is a list of six different attendance certificates. Categories include: Perfect, Outstanding, and Most Improved. Certificates cost nothing, but give students positive recognition. Homeroom teachers can fill them out for their class and pass them out after the challenge.



Phase 5: Follow-up

After the challenge is completed, it is important to look at attendance data to see what difference, if any, the attendance challenge made. You can make several comparisons:

- ¼ Compare the data collected during the challenge to the prior months' data
- ¼ Compare the challenge month's data to the same month last year

This comparison will show if attendance challenges are an effective way to motivate your students.

We also ask that you fill-out our Be There Attendance Challenge evaluation. We want to know what worked, what didn't work, and what we can improve for next time. Let us know if you are interested in hosting another challenge or if you need any more Be There resources!



Volunteers at a kick-off in McKeesport hold signs they made to welcome students on their first day of school.

To complete the evaluation, please go to:

<http://bit.ly/1EhT1Fd>

Even if you did not see a change in your data, you did a great thing by starting the conversation and spreading awareness on the importance of attendance.

Phase	To Do	Completed
Phase 5	Thank all participants Check and compare attendance data Complete Be There evaluation Continue to promote good attendance	_____ _____ _____ _____



Roles and Responsibilities

There are 4 distinct roles that play a part in organizing and implementing an attendance challenge. Delegate these roles at the planning meeting so your team is on the same page and your challenge runs smoothly. Remember: one person can have multiple roles.

Role	Responsibility
1. The School Lead	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organize the planning meeting Update Be There contact throughout the challenge Make sure attendance challenge team knows their roles and timeline of events Build hype with students Encourage and support all challenge participants
2. Incentive Coordinator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Brainstorm rewards that fit students' wants Plan a budget for prizes or carry-out creative free incentives Contact the appropriate places to secure needed items Send Be There an estimate of students eligible for the end prize a week prior to celebration event
3. Attendance Monitor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use data resources to track every student's daily attendance—follow-up with teachers to ensure accurate data Share data with Be There before, during, and after challenge Share final number of students with incentive coordinator Differentiate between perfect, outstanding, and (if applicable) most improved
4. Community Organizer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spread awareness to parents, afterschool providers, and potential community volunteers Send parent letters home a week prior to challenge start Recruit volunteers prior to kick-off event Call families when student is absent Thank everyone for their efforts



Challenge types

The list of student incentives is virtually endless. The first step, however, is to identify what type of challenge competition you want to have. Below are the four variations you can use to determine which students will receive the end reward.

Perfect Attendance

- In this set-up, only students that did not miss a single day of school receive the end celebration reward. If you choose this method, we suggest small weekly rewards or raffles to keep students motivated. This could be as simple as a morning announcement over the intercom.

Perfect & Outstanding

- Outstanding attendance usually indicates 95% or better ADA. For a 30 day challenge, this equates to missing only one day. Students with both perfect and outstanding attendance receive recognition and a reward.

By Grade Level

- Challenging students to compete against one another can be an excellent motivator. The grade with the best overall attendance at the end of the challenge wins a party or celebration. If you decide to host a grade level competition, it is important to recognize all students with perfect attendance, regardless of grade.

By Homeroom

- A competition against homerooms stimulates comradery between classmates. Students are likely to motivate and encourage classmates to make it to school, on time, everyday. It can also get teachers more involved and instill a sense of class pride. As is the case with grade level competition, make sure to recognize all hardworking individuals.



Incentives Ideas

Prizes don't have to cost a lot, or anything at all! A good way to include a lot of students without spending a lot of money is a raffle. Consider holding several raffles for students with perfect/outstanding attendance. Below are both free and low cost ideas for raffles and fun end celebrations. Remember to *ask the students* what they would like to win.

Free	Low Cost
Coupons to Student Store	Movie and Popcorn
Free Homework Pass	Pizza Party
Name on "Attendance Star" Wall	Gift Cards
Extra Recess/Free Time	Host a School Dance
Positive Letter Home to Parents	Trophy for Winning Class or Grade
"Dress Down" Day	Rita's or Ice Cream Social
Lunch with the Principal/Teacher	Gift Basket
A Shout-Out on the P.A. system	School Clothing/Merchandise
"Fast Pass" to Skip the Lunch Line	Bagel Breakfast for Families
Pajama Party	Sports Concession Stand Coupons



Healthy Attendance Incentives

Rewarding good attendance with healthy incentives is an effective way to recognize a student's efforts to be at school while offering rewards that align with your school's wellness policy. Healthy incentives also encourage healthy habits in students. Below are some examples of healthy attendance incentives.

Special Privileges	Activity Based Incentives
Deliver something to the main office	Extra recess time or a double period of gym class
Choose when the class visits the water fountain for a water break	Dance party during last period of the day
VIP seating at a school sporting event	Pool party at the school pool
March in a school parade	Bring in own sport equipment to play with at recess
Team captain for gym class	Play beach ball volleyball in the classroom
Class or lunch outdoors	Lead classroom physical activity break
Lead the class to recess or lunch	Attend a special field day
Choose partner for class project or activity	Lead warm up or stretches in gym class

Many schools choose to plan special events or celebrations to recognize good student attendance. Here are a few ideas on how to put a healthy twist on some popular attendance celebrations:

Celebration	Healthy Alternative
Ice cream social	Frozen yogurt party with fresh fruit for toppings
Movie day	Give out plain air-popped popcorn and allow students to season with various spices and herbs rather than salt and butter
Pizza party	Salad bar or taco bar where students make their own creations with fresh ingredients

Healthy attendance prizes you can purchase: water bottles, pedometers, stop watches, jump ropes, side walk chalk, whistles, shoe laces, ear buds, [Growums](#) garden kits, recipe cards, measuring cups or spoons



What's Next?

Hosting an attendance challenge is the first step in cultivating a culture of attendance. Now it's time to keep this positive conversation about school attendance going for the rest of the year. The more you make attendance a priority, the more students will do the same.

What can you do to keep up the good work? Start by taking some of the steps below!

Keep talking about attendance!

Make **daily** morning announcements. Encourage **weekly** communication with teachers and parents. Recognize students **monthly** with incentives and positive notes/calls home. The more you talk about it, the more good attendance will become a regular part of your school's culture. If you are interested in more resources, please contact us!

Engage parents and families

Research has shown that **parent involvement** has a positive impact on attendance. Families should be an integral part of the process, and regular contact with them a norm. Connect families and communities with all attendance activities. Discuss attendance policies and trends during PSCC meetings, open houses, parent-teacher conferences, in newsletters, and on social media. Call parents when students aren't in school to say they are missed.

Create a cycle of challenges

Why stop at just **one attendance challenge**? Offering prizes and recognition may be a really effective method for your students. Think about establishing a cycle of challenges. Determine which months of the year have historically had the worst attendance. Plan challenges over the summer and promote them throughout the year.

Build caring relationships

One of the most effective ways to motivate students to go to school is to develop positive relationships with adults. Students are more likely to show up if they know a **caring adult** is waiting for them. Trusting relationships can come from teachers, coaches, secretaries, mentors, or even special attendance buddies. For more information on how to build caring relationships in a strategic way, contact us.



Free Support Material Templates

In this section, you will find easy-to-use, customizable materials to help you plan, organize, and execute an attendance challenge.

These materials are at your disposal, but we please ask that you refrain from removing the Be There and United Way logos.

To access, download, and edit materials Number 2 and Number 3, please go to our website: www.unitedwaypittsburgh.org/be-there

Number 1: Planning Meeting Agenda

-  Take this agenda to your planning and prep meeting.
-  Fill it out with your team and keep it somewhere safe.

Number 2: Sample Parent Letter

-  This is an example of a letter to send home to families announcing your upcoming attendance challenge.
-  Customize your letter by downloading the file on our website and filling in the correct information.

Number 3: Attendance Certificates

-  Categories include: Perfect, Outstanding, and Most Improved.
-  The first three are middle/high school appropriate.
-  The following three are great for elementary school students.
-  Customize your certificate by downloading the file online and adding your school name and logo.



Attendance Challenge Planning Agenda

1. **Define** what an attendance challenge means to you and establish your objective.

As a group, answer the following questions.

 *What* type of attendance challenge do we want?

 *Why* are we having one?

 *What outcomes* do we hope to achieve?

2. **Delegate** respective roles and responsibilities. (Note: 1 person may take on multiple roles)

 *Who* is responsible for the various roles?

Role	Assigned to
School Lead	
Incentive Coordinator	
Attendance Monitor	
Community Organizer	
Be There Contact	

3. **Dates** to know.

 *When* are we starting, finishing, and celebrating?

Don't forget to mark your calendars!

The attendance challenge will kick-off on: _____.

The last day of the challenge will be: _____.

Details for the celebration will be finalized by: _____.

The end celebration will be held on: _____.



Attendance Challenge Planning Agenda

4. **Decide** the style of competition. It is okay to mix and match. Choose what fits the needs and wants of your staff, students, and budget.

Do we want to reward...

 **Perfect Attendance** _____

 **Perfect & Outstanding** _____

 **By Grade Level** _____

 **By Homeroom** _____

Do we want to offer...

 **Small weekly incentives** _____

 **An awards ceremony** _____

 **Celebration party** _____

 **Raffles** _____

5. **Discuss** possible prizes and incentives. Be mindful of what your students value. Take your budget into consideration. Also keep in mind connections to resources your school might already have.

Possible incentives:

-
-
-
-
-