



# Taking a Deeper Dive

## *Assessing How Your OST Program Can Reduce Chronic Absence*

Hedy Chang, Director

# Reflections

**Turn to a neighbor, share your reflections from the key note:**

- 1. Any “ahas” or surprises?**
- 2. Any questions?**



# What Can Afterschool Programs Do?

## Step 1: Create Culture of Attendance

- a. Take roll every day in a caring manner
- b. Partner with schools to educate families and students about the importance of attendance
- c. Reach out to students/families with poor attendance
- d. Offer incentives for attendance
- e. Use engaging program activities to motivate students to come to school.
- f. Analyze program attendance data to identify areas in need of improvement.
- g. Engage students in helping develop messages for other students about what is good attendance.

*What would you add?*



# What Can Afterschool Programs Do?

## Step 2: Get/Share Attendance Data on Program Participants

- a. Seek parent waiver allowing A/S to see attendance and grades, ideally as standard part of enrollment.
- b. Regularly get data on in-school attendance for program participants.
- c. Find out if you are serving any students with problematic attendance.
- d. Use poor attendance in afterschool to identify students who might begin to have trouble showing up to school day program.
- e. Partner with school staff to find out what are the challenges facing students with poor attendance and what would help get them to school.



# What Can Afterschool Programs Do?

## Step 3: Find Out About Attendance In Schools Served

- a. Find out what the school is doing to reduce chronic absence and improve attendance. Identify if there is a role for the afterschool program.
- b. Learn if your school has a team that monitors attendance data; Seek membership on the team or at least access to review school day attendance
- c. Use the afterschool program as an opportunity to solicit insights from students and if possible parents about what are the barriers to attendance in the school day and what could help overcome them.



# Mining our own best practices

**In groups of 3-4:**

- **What is a promising practice that you are currently engaged in?**

**(We will also discuss as a group)**



# Identifying challenges

**In groups of 3-4:**

- **What is 1-2 major challenges that you are facing in addressing student attendance?**
- **What would help you overcome them?**

**(We will also discuss as a whole group)**



# Levels of Absenteeism

## Good Attendance

Student has missed **fewer than 5%** of school days (generally less than 4 or 5 days in a semester)

## At-Risk

Student has missed **between 5% and 10%** of school days (generally between 5-9 days in a semester)

## Chronic Absence

Student has missed **10% or more** of school days (generally 9 days or more in a semester)

# Having 1-on-1 Conversations About Attendance

**Good Attendance**  
(missing <5%)

Congratulate parents on making attendance a priority and encourage them to keep it up. Ask them what they're doing that's enabling them to be so successful.

**At-Risk**  
(missing 5 - 9.9%)

Let parents know that you are concerned about attendance because their child is beginning to head off track, and it is easy for absences to add up.

**Chronic Absence**  
(missing  $\geq 10\%$ )

*If student is right around 10% or a little above*

Let parents know their child may be academically at risk because they have missed so much school. Discuss underlying causes and how you can help.

*If student is severely chronically absent (e.g. >20%)*

The type of challenges these families face may differ from those with more moderate absence problems. Be prepared to touch on difficult topics, be supportive, and be ready to connect to community resources.



# Framing the Conversation to Build a Relationship of Trust

1

**Learn**

Learn about the student's family. Ask what their vision is for their child's future. What are their hopes and dreams for them?

2

**Share**

Share positive things you've observed about the student. Share your own vision for student learning & development, including helping put students on a pathway to success by encouraging a habit of good attendance.

3

**Inform**

Review attendance report with parents. Tailor your conversation to student's level of absenteeism and inform parents of possible impacts of missing school. Connect attendance back to parents' hopes and dreams for their child.

4

**Discuss**

Discuss the challenges parents face in getting their children to school, as well as strengths they can build upon. For chronically absent students, try to understand the barriers that are keeping their children from school.

5

**Arrive at a Plan**

Think through strategies with parents for addressing absences and help them develop an attendance improvement plan. Offer referrals to services as needed and ask if there are other ways you can help.



# Your Turn...

Practice talking with parents and caregivers one-on-one about chronic absence

1. Split into groups of 3
2. Role-play using the Caring Conversation scenarios. Pick the scenario (elementary school, middle school, high school) that is most relevant to you
3. Debrief
4. If you have time, switch roles and try a new scenario



# Strategies for Building Positive Relationships with Parents and Students

- Communicate understanding
- Set rules, limits and consequences
- Create a safe and trusting environment
- Remain neutral
- Use nonjudgmental language
- Respond only when a response is necessary
- Encourage people to “vent” while being aware of safety
- Listen and repeat what students say (reflective listening)
- Identify and label feelings, values, and topics to be resolved (strategic listening)
- Ask open-ended questions
- Assist people in using a positive problem-solving approach

*Adapted from Baltimore City Public Schools*



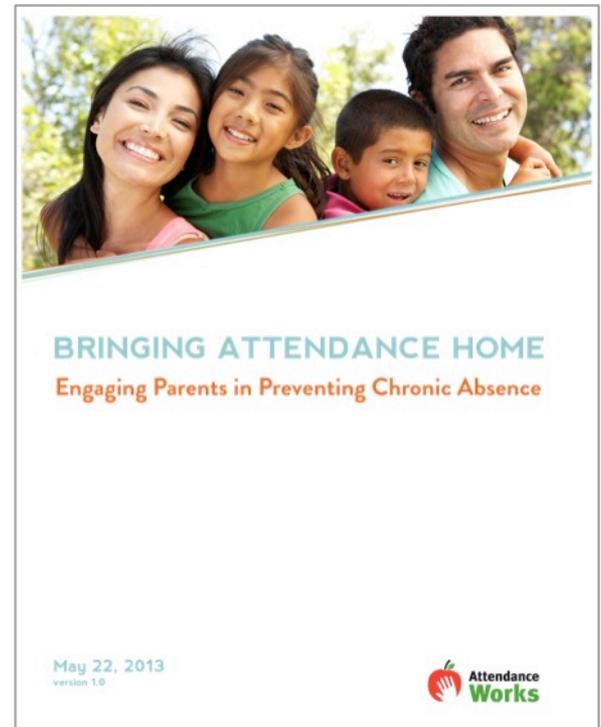
# Key Principles for Engaging Parents on Attendance

- Engage families early
- Establish a positive relationship
- Take a strengths-based approach
- Give parents a chance to talk
- Check for understanding
- Communicate in the parent's primary language
- Offer support
- Remember that parent engagement is an on-going process, not a one-time event



# Available Resources

- Parent Engagement Toolkit
- Parent Flyers
- Infographics (English and Spanish)
- Video
- Interactive exercises
  - Example: Washing the Elephant



# Summary of Key Messages

1. Good attendance helps children do well in school and eventually in the work place.
2. Absences add up. Excused and unexcused absences result in too much time lost in the classroom.
3. Chronic absence, missing 10 percent of the school year or more, affects the whole classroom, not just the students who miss school.
4. We need to monitor how many days each student misses school for *any* reason— excused, unexcused or suspensions— so we can intervene early.
5. Chronic absence is a problem we can solve when the whole community, including parents and schools, gets involved.
6. Relationship building is fundamental to any strategy for improving student attendance.
7. Reducing chronic absence can help close achievement gaps.



# What can we do next?

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- 1. Take the self assessment**
- 2. Identify one item that you would want to work on more**
- 3. Share your thoughts with a neighbor**



# Attendance Works

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