



# IT'S NOT OK TO BE AWAY



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The following resources come from the *Getting Clever with Attendance* resource. The report was developed as a result of the Yarra Schools Network School Participation Project. The full report is available at <http://www.nmr.vic.edu.au/>

### How clever is your school at improving attendance?

#### An Audit Tool

Strategy	Beg	Con	Est
<b>Clearly stated expectations</b>			
Development of transparent and workable policy and procedures documents			
Consultative and collaborative approach used in policy development			
Policies and procedures reviewed regularly			
Clear verbal statements made to teachers, parents and students about school and community attendance expectations			
Regular and effective statements in school publications			
Modelling of regular attendance and punctuality by all staff			
<b>Effective use of data</b>			
Accurate and rigorous data gathering and recording procedures			
Regular analysis of attendance data			
Accurate and correct use of CASES21 codes or equivalent			
Regular 'clean ups' of data			
Effective student transfer and enrolment procedures			
Early identification of patterns of absenteeism for individual students and groups of students			
Use of accurate data to inform evaluation and planning			
Use of accurate data to regularly inform students and parents			
<b>Strategic Direction</b>			
Attendance made a key priority in strategic and annual implementation plans			
Attendance improvement directly linked to school vision and strategic direction			
Articulation of clear, achievable and measurable goals and outcomes			
Establishment of clear prioritisation and realistic timelines			
Team agreement on who is responsible for action			
Use of varied data gathering techniques			
<b>Professional Learning Opportunities</b>			
Regular discussions and facilitated sessions in staff forums on attendance and engagement issues			
Leadership mentoring and modelling with staff			

<b>Strategy</b>	<b>Beg</b>	<b>Con</b>	<b>Est</b>
Discussion of attendance improvement strategies in performance review meetings			
Sharing knowledge and understandings with network schools and community agencies			
Participation in external professional learning opportunities			
<b>Prevention</b>			
Effective monitoring of student attendance including where appropriate period and engagement issues			
Early identification of at risk students			
Implementation of transition support programs			
Well-developed student wellbeing programs and student mentoring structures			
Raising student awareness of the importance of regular attendance			
Creation of learning environments, which are supportive, purposeful and productive			
Individual student learning plans which include attendance and punctuality goals			
Creation of safe and supportive school environments			
Provision of out of school programs including breakfast, homework and walking bus clubs			
Parents actively involved in the life of the school			
Provision of parenting programs			
Modification of the timetable to enable maximize student attendance			
<b>Support for Students and Parents</b>			
Development of collaborative, cooperation and empowering relationships with individual students and their parents			
Use inclusive practices including translation of materials and the use of interpreters			
Immediate and apparent follow-up to individual student absence			
Development of a knowledge and understanding of the different types and causal factors of individual student's absence and the response and support required			
Establishment of appropriate forums for multi-disciplinary discussion and support of individual students and their families			
Adoption of appropriate protocols and procedures for inside and outside referrals for support			
Mentoring programs for identified students			
Organisation of attendance meetings with students and parents			
Flexibility with meeting venues to include home or 'off-site' meetings when necessary			
<b>Network and Community Links</b>			
Collaborative joint programs with network schools and community agencies			
Understanding of the key stakeholders in student attendance work			
Membership of school network groups			
Outside referral of students and parents for family, social or emotional support			
Joint network transition initiatives			
Membership of collaborative and consultative forums with local community agencies			
Regular communication with the DoE regional office			

## RESOURCE

### How many days has your child missed this semester?

0-6 *This is within normal range. A child with this attendance rate is able to take full advantage of the teaching and learning opportunities available to them.*

7-10 *This attendance rate is below average. A child with this attendance rate could miss over one year of schooling between prep and year 10.*

11-20 *This is a poor attendance rate. A child with this attendance rate could miss out on up to two years of schooling between prep and year 10.*

20+ *This is a very poor attendance rate. A child with this attendance rate could miss over two and one half years of schooling between prep and year 10.*

### ***Remember***

**Students need to attend school regularly to make the most of educational opportunities.**

**There is a direct link between school attendance and achievement later in life.**

**Poor patterns of attendance in the early years lead to poor patterns of attendance throughout the school years.**

**Poor attendance makes it difficult for children to form positive relationships with their peers.**

**When young people are in school every day, they are safer and less likely to be victims of crime, or become involved in crime.**

## **RESOURCE**

### **Remaining clever about attendance throughout the year**

#### **Each Week**

1. Enter data set at least once a week but preferably daily. If possible ring every parent every day. Ensure that follow-up phone calls have been made by the end of the week.
2. Check student attendance levels and give classroom teachers summary reports at least once a fortnight.
3. Use the following CASES 21 reports:

ST 21314 Absence Report Type by Whole School  
ST 21316 Student Absence Summary by Home Group

Check:

Explanation documentation and any unexplained absences.  
The number of absences for particular students especially any targeted students.  
Absence patterns for particular students.

#### **Each Month**

1. Send CASES 21 letters or similar at the end of the month.
2. Look summary attendance reports at least once a month. Use the following CASES 21 reports:

ST 21314 Absence Report Type by Whole School  
ST 21316 Student Absence Summary by Home Group  
SXAB21330 Unapproved absence Summary (for whole school)

3. Hold discussions and professional development activities about attendance at staff meetings.
4. Remain abreast with other ideas by participating in discussions with other schools and regional professional development activities. Do an internet search using key terms such as “school attendance”, “school absenteeism”, “truancy”, “school retention” etc.
5. Provide staff and parents with regular updates on data.
6. Include an item about attendance on the parent newsletter.

#### **Each Semester**

1. Complete thorough six monthly analyses of data. Use excel graphs to assist the process.
  - a. Use the following CASES 21 reports:
    - i. ST 21314 Absence Report Type by Whole School
    - ii. SXAB21330 Unapproved absence Summary (for whole school)
    - iii. ST 21316 Student Absence Summary by Home Group
    - iv. ST 21317 Student Absence Summary by Year Level

- v. ST 21318 Half Day attendance under 80 per cent
- vi. ST 21314 Absence Report Type by Whole School-Extended Family holiday.

Consider:

Average number of absences per student in each year level compared with same level and state mean of year before.

Overall average number of days per student P-6 or 7-12 compared with same level and state mean of year before.

The absence rate for girls compared with boys.

The number of day's absence per student particular reasons e.g. extended family holiday; parent choice etc.

The number of unexplained absences per student at each level and for the school as a whole

1. Ensure that absence data is on all student progress reports.
2. keep information about attendance issues and expectations on the agenda at all parent teacher conferences and parent information nights.

### **Each Year**

1. Set annual targets and include attendance as a priority on all strategic and annual implementation plans.
2. Make follow-ups of attendance the responsibility of each teacher and include as a listed responsibility for performance reviews.
3. Ensure that new and replacement staff is given details of attendance policies and procedures.
4. Set processes are in place to enable the cyclical review of all policies and procedures.
5. Circulate an information brochure to all parents and publish the attendance policy in the parent newsletter.

### **TIPS FOR WORKING WITH STUDENTS' PARENTS AND GUARDIANS**

**By Ruby K Payne Ph.D**

- Phone systems: let parents and guardians talk to a real person. Phone systems at secondary schools often make it very difficult to talk to anyone.
- Have an awards assembly for parents.
- Identify a clear mechanism for getting information. For affluent parents, a website is wonderful. For all parents, videos work. The videos need to be short and focused. For example, how to talk to your teenager, how to find out what is happening at the school, how to get your child back to school after a suspension, etc.
- Another option is a predictable newsletter. But it needs to be simple, clear and to the point – and it must include many icons or visuals so that it can be used whether you're literate or extremely busy. These newsletters can be

posted outside the building in glass cases and updated weekly. They can be posted in supermarkets, Laundromats, etc. Newsletters can be mailed home, a better option than children carrying them home.

- Pay parents to come in and call other parents. Have a list of things to say and have two rules: you may not discuss teachers and you may not discuss students other than your own children.
- Have gatherings that involve *food*. For example, anyone can come to the school for 50 cent hot dogs.
- If you do parenting classes, don't call them that. Focus on the student: "How to help your child..." Many parents of teenagers are desperate for good information about teens. Teenagers are typically tight-lipped and unless you have much opportunity to be around them, as a parent you may not even know what is 'normal'. Find ways for individuals with lots of exposure to teenagers to share that information with parents and guardians.
- Adopt a plot of land to keep landscaped and clean. One school in a very poor neighbourhood did this. Parents took pride in it. (Some even planted tomatoes!).
- Divide parents up among all the staff members (secretaries included). Each staff member contacts those parents and tells them, "If you have a question you cannot get an answer to, you can always call me".
- Create emotional safety for parents by being respectful of their concerns, openly sharing school activities, clarifying behavioural parameters. Expectations of the school and identifying available opportunities.
- For all activities, organisations, handbooks, etc, use simpler formats for giving the information. Liberally use visuals to appeal to the illiterate, the immigrant, and the busy.

Ruby K Payne PhD

### **Other resources**

The following resources were developed for use in secondary schools but I have received some very positive feedback about the usefulness of them from both primary and secondary schools - they are:

- i. School retention...What does it take?
- ii. Retention and reintegration
- iii. Preventing drug related harm

They are available for download at:

<http://www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/druged/schools/scresources.htm>