

August 2014

Dear Principal:

The evidence from Wisconsin data is irrefutable: students with good attendance in Kindergarten through Grade 2 have higher rates of reading and math proficiency in later grades. Good attendance in the early years also predicts good attendance rates throughout a student's K-12 education. Data reveal that repeated early absence has negative educational implications for children.

As I have [communicated to you in prior years](#), getting all students to create good attendance habits from the start is key to increasing the number of students who graduate from school ready for college and careers. Attendance habits that are established by the second grade can have lifelong effects on our children and their chance for success, but improving attendance rates at any point – in any grade has positive outcomes for students and schools.

This is why the **Department of Public Instruction (DPI) is urging schools to participate in [Attendance Awareness Month](#)**, an initiative of Attendance Works. Attendance Works is a national and state nonprofit organization that works to reduce chronic absenteeism. They have a plethora of excellent resources available on their [website](#), including research briefs, webinars, and press releases that schools and districts may freely use.

For Attendance Awareness Month, they have provided an engaging [toolkit](#) and high-quality, high-resolution [promotional materials](#) ready for schools to download and begin using. The promotional materials include ready-to-print banners, posters and decals, as well as ready-to-post badges for social media, and an infographic spelling out the facts about chronic absence in the early grades. The English and Spanish versions are embedded below for your convenience. It is vital that we build public awareness about the importance of school attendance. Please share on your website and social media. You can also print the infographic and use it as a poster, or as an enclosure/attachment in a letter to parents.

It's critical that, as education leaders, we get the message out to families, school staff, and community members that **regular school attendance from Kindergarten on is essential to successful learning** and to helping each child reach his or her full potential. Children must be present and engaged in

#### *Attendance is Predictive*

Lower attendance in the early grades is highly correlated with lower attendance, and lower reading and math proficiency all the way to Grade 8.



#### *September Matters*

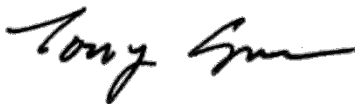
September is a busy month for schools, but it was chosen because [September matters](#). A new [study](#) has shown that absences in the first month of school predicts poor attendance patterns throughout the school year, providing an early warning to parents and educators. We also know from our own data on Wisconsin schools that poor attendance also predicts poor achievement.

order to learn. Please also refer to DPI's [Compulsory School Attendance](#) page for truancy and attendance resources that you can use in your building, many that can be shared with parents and educators alike.

I encourage you to closely examine your district's attendance data – and to explore with families and community organizations how to overcome obstacles to good attendance. Chronic absenteeism may be related to family challenges such as transportation, health care, child care, and housing, as well as school schedules, and limited busing. Addressing these challenges in the early grades can prevent later academic and social problems that are much tougher and more costly to overcome.

There's no better time than the start of the school year to promote the need for student attendance, but I encourage you to include ongoing, frequent reminders of this message throughout the school year in your communications to families and the community. Below you will find resources and strategies to aid in these efforts.

Sincerely,



Tony Evers, PhD  
State Superintendent

TE/mrf

Attachment

*Achievement Connection*

Students who miss even 10% of school learn less than their peers. Chronic absenteeism predicts significantly lower test scores in Grades 3-8.

By Grade 8, chronically absent students were half as likely to be proficient in math as their higher-attending peers.



## Attendance Infographics

[English version](#)

[Spanish version](#)



## Attendance Strategies

### **Universal strategies to improve attendance in grades K–3 include:**

- Engage families of all backgrounds in their children’s education, beginning early as they transition into the school system.
- Educate parents about the importance of attendance.
- Encourage families to help each other with school attendance.
- Frequently monitor attendance and disaggregate data by grade, race, disability, and other variables that may demonstrate patterns or disproportionality.
- Identify structural barriers to attendance within the school that may be related to attendance areas, schedules, transportation, and/or curriculum.
- Work with child care, Head Start, and other community early education programs to stress the importance of regular attendance in children’s early learning experiences. Enlist their support in sharing this information with parents.
- Work with public and private health care providers to ensure access to preventive health care, especially as children enter school.
- Offer a high quality educational curriculum that is responsive to diverse learning needs.
- Offer incentives for attendance to all children.
- Communicate individually to students that their attendance is important and they were missed when they return from absences.

### **Targeted strategies include:**

- Conduct early, personalized outreach to families with poor attendance, to assess, determine causes promptly, and develop a plan of assistance immediately.
- Provide case management to help families address social, medical, economic, transportation, and housing needs.
- For families with highest needs, coordinate public agency connections and, if needed, legal assistance for families in crisis.

(Adapted from *Present, Engaged and Accounted For: The Critical Importance of Addressing Chronic Absence in the Early Grades*, National Center for Children in Poverty)