



# COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS PACESETTER

## BALTIMORE

### Category: Attendance

Baltimore became one of the first cities to start using chronic absence data to drive policy and practice, and it has demonstrated several innovative approaches to improving attendance.

A mid-Atlantic city with high poverty rates in much of its urban core, Baltimore has a wealth of chronic absence data. Maryland is one of the few states that require schools to report how many students are chronically absent, which the state defines as missing 20 or more days a year. Baltimore is home to Johns Hopkins University, where researchers have linked chronic absence in middle school to dropout rates and, more recently, have shown the detrimental effects of absenteeism as early as prekindergarten.

Driven by data showing that 34 percent of middle school students and 44 percent of high school students were chronically absent, the mayor's office collaborated with Open Society Institute–Baltimore and Baltimore City Public Schools to launch a citywide attendance work group that brought together city, school and community stakeholders.

After-school programs that receive money from the city must spell out how they are responding to chronic absence. City child welfare workers review attendance data for children in foster care to identify families that may need support since chronic absenteeism, especially in the early grades, can signal that a family is struggling. This project is helping to identify more than 700 children and families each month that are in need of assistance.

The school district has launched a public education campaign, Every Day Counts, which encourages students, parents and community members to focus on good attendance. Posters and videos allow students to explain why they go to school and how they make every day count. "Every day, I like learning big new words in school," says Aiyanna, an elementary school student. "I go to school every day to see my teacher," says Liam, a kindergartner. The initiative also posts attendance messages on the district website, texts parents about attendance incentive programs and creates an "every day" culture of attendance in Baltimore City.

Baltimore City Schools are tapping into the range of partnerships it has established across the city to support attendance improvement. School Every Day!, a City Schools initiative, works with volunteers from local faith-based organizations to connect families with the resources and support they need to overcome barriers to attendance.

#### STRATEGIES

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- Created a work group pulling together city, school and nonprofit partners
- Required after-school programs receiving city funding to respond to chronic absence among students
- Shared school data with city agencies that can help improve attendance
- Launched a public messaging campaign aimed at engaging the whole community