



Health Professionals • Pre-K to 12

Attendance Is a Health Indicator

Why should health professionals treat school attendance as a vital sign?

10 slides • 2 handouts • evidence from Schools Spared, Children Punished and the Attendance Science™ research base



Health and attendance travel together

“

The American Academy of Pediatrics describes school attendance and child health as closely linked and calls on pediatricians and schools to work together on both. In August 2026, health systems and school partners launched Attendance as a Vital Sign across 30 districts.

Source: Allison, Attisha & AAP Council on School Health (2019), Pediatrics 143(2); Attendance as a Vital Sign: Kaiser Permanente, Johns Hopkins Center for School Health, Attendance Works (Aug 2026)



Every story in this series is a composite or a published case. Names are invented.



What health professionals are asking

Why should health professionals treat school attendance as a vital sign?

1

Clinicians rarely ask about school days missed.

2

Schools rarely hear from clinicians.

3

Illness is the most reported reason for long absences.



Shared words before shared work



Vital sign

A routine measure that signals when something needs attention.



Health-related chronic absence

Missing 15+ days in a year for health reasons (CDC measure).



Health Stability

GG-FSI Domain 3: access to care, managed conditions, caregiver health.



The numbers behind the moment

70.5%

of long-term absences attributed to illness

OECD report on long-term student absence (causes reported)

5.8%

of U.S. children chronically absent for health reasons in 2022

CDC NCHS Data Brief No. 498 (2024): health-related chronic absence, 2022

28.7%

health-related chronic absence for children in fair or poor health

CDC NCHS Data Brief No. 498 (2024): health-related chronic absence, 2022



Classify before you consequence

Refusal

Somatic complaints on school mornings may signal anxiety.

Withdrawal

Caregiver illness keeps children home to help.

Avoidance

Untreated conditions make school feel unsafe.

Chronic medical

Documented conditions need a plan, not a letter.



Three moves you can make this week

01

Cost: \$0

Ask at every visit

How many school days has your child missed this month?

02

Cost: \$0

Write return notes well

Give clear return-to-school guidance, not open-ended rest.

03

Cost: \$0

Connect to the nurse

With consent, coordinate with the school nurse.



A PRESENCE™ prompt for your building



Problem definition



Research evidence



Environmental context



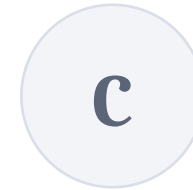
Statistical analysis



Equity assessment



Network and partnership



Compliance and legal



Evidence-based recommendations

YOUR PROMPT

Add a days-missed question to well-child and sick visits. Compare reported days with diagnoses to find where care plans could reduce absence.



Common missteps, and how you will know it works



Long open-ended excuse notes without a return plan



Assuming all illness absence is unavoidable



Sharing information without consent

LEADING INDICATOR • Moves first

Visits that ask about school days missed

LAGGING INDICATOR • Confirms it worked

Health-related chronic absence



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Seat 39: Anxiety, Refusal and Mental Health Pathways

Seat 40: Hidden Health Barriers



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