

THE GIFT OF ATTENDANCE: MESSAGING ATTENDANCE IN THE HOLIDAY SEASON



All families want what is best for their children, but they don't always realize how absences can add up to academic problems. Sometimes they allow children to miss school when it's not absolutely necessary. This often happens before and after the winter holidays, as families try to squeeze a few more days out of the vacation season. At the same time, results of a parent survey suggest that families would be willing to shorten vacations if they believe the absences are affecting academic success. Principals and teachers have an opportunity to reduce holiday absences by making sure parents and students understand the toll that absenteeism takes on achievement.



Attendance Works has developed some tools and messages for school leaders hoping to encourage good attendance around the winter holidays. We recommend:

- Send a letter out before Thanksgiving and again in the weeks before the longer winter break urging students and families to avoid absences.
- Stress that teachers will be teaching every day and that children will miss out on instruction if they do not show up. Remind them that a homework packet does not take the place of classroom learning and interaction.
- Encourage teachers to talk to students about the importance of showing up in the days before and after the holiday break.
- Plan a special event for the first day after the holiday break. If possible, create a contest or find ways to recognize good attendance. If the school or teachers are equipped to text parents, send a text right before school starts again to remind them of special plans.

TALKING POINTS:

Consider using these talking points in your interactions and communications with students and families.

- This holiday season, the best gift you can give your child is a good education. And the best place to get that education is in school. Every day. On time.
- Every year, absences spike in the weeks before and after winter break. It's time to break that cycle.
- We know it's tempting to extend your vacation by a few days on either side of the holiday.
- We recognize that holidays are an important time for reconnecting with families far away and exposing your children to your home and language, whether you grew up in another part of the United States or a different country. The costs of plane tickets often influence when you want to travel. But keep in mind the costs to your children's education if they miss too much school.
- Just a few missed days here and there, even if they're excused absences, can add up to too much lost learning time and put your child behind in school. This is as true in kindergarten as it is in high school.
- So make sure your child is in school every day, right up until vacation starts. Our teachers will be teaching, and our students will be learning. But it's harder to teach and it's harder to learn when too many students are absent.
- If missing school is unavoidable, talk to your children's teachers in advance to create a plan for making up missed work. But remember, a homework packet cannot make up for the interaction and learning that goes on in the classroom.
- So give your child the gift of attendance and help build a habit of attendance.

PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENTS OR ROBO CALLS:

You can use local radio stations or the robo-call system in district schools to broadcast your message. Feel free to use these template scripts or tailor them to your community. Read our [tips for creating PSAs](#).

PSA 30 seconds

This holiday season, the best gift you can give your child is a good education. And the best place to get an education is in school. It's tempting to extend your vacation by a few days, but remember, those days count as absences. Just a few missed days here and there, even if they're excused absences, can add up to too much lost learning time. So make sure your child is in school every day, right up until vacation starts. Our teachers will be teaching, and our students will be learning.

PSA 15 seconds

Every year, school absences spike in the weeks before and after winter break, as families squeeze a few more days of vacation out of the holiday season. Let's break that cycle. Make sure your child is in school every day. Because the best gift you can give your child is a good education.

RECOGNIZING GOOD AND IMPROVED ATTENDANCE:

Make sure students have a reason to come to school until winter break starts and come back for the first day after the break. Special events, class competitions, raffles and other recognition efforts can be effective in improving student attendance. It's important to let students and families know about these special plans before they make holiday arrangements – and, if possible, remind them before school starts up again.

The Los Angeles Unified School District has developed a number of suggestions in its attendance toolkit for competitions and activities designed to bring students to school in the days before and after winter break. Ideas include:

- Plan an activity that will bring students and parents to your school on the last day before winter break. This can be an awards assembly, holiday program or a service opportunity.
- Schedule a food bank distribution, toy give-away or winter coat closet for the last day before vacation starts or the first day after the holiday. Engage students in collecting goods and giving them away.
- Offer incentive “door busters” to the first 10 students from each grade to arrive at school/class during the last week before break and the first week afterward.
- Create a class competition with recognition for the classroom with the best attendance in the weeks before and after the holiday break.
- Provide a lesson plan for teachers in early December emphasizing the importance of good attendance.
- Plan, promote and implement “A Day Without an Absence” campaign for the first week of school after winter break.
- Develop a seasonal theme such as:
 - » Celebrating A Season of Good Attendance
 - » Giving the Gift of Attendance
 - » On the 1st Day of Attendance my teacher gave to me
 - » Stuffing Our Stockings With Good Attendance
 - » Good Attendance is Coming to Town

SAMPLE LETTERS TO PARENTS

Sample Letter or Email:

Are you planning a family trip for the holidays? As you think about your arrangements, we want to stress the importance of sending your child to school every day possible. Every year, absences spike in the weeks before and after the winter holiday as families squeeze in a few more vacation days. It's time to break that cycle. We know that just a few missed days here and there, even if they're excused absences, can add up to too much lost learning time and put your child behind in school. This is as true in kindergarten as it is in high school. Put simply, too many absences at any age can affect a student's chances for academic success and eventually for graduation.

We recognize that holidays are an important time for reconnecting with families far away. The costs of plane tickets often influence when you want to travel. But keep in mind the costs to your children's education if they miss too much school—and the message you will be sending about the importance of attendance. Even if you've got a homework packet from the teacher, it doesn't make up for the interaction and learning that happens in the classroom. Our teachers will be teaching, and our students will be learning, right up until vacation starts and the first day back. [Our schools will be hosting a special event on WHAT DAY/offering incentives and contests to encourage students to come to school every day.] You can help us convey that message. This holiday season, give your children the gift of an education and the habit of attendance.

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Thanksgiving Letter:

We are thankful!

As we prepare to take a short break from school for Thanksgiving, we want to express our gratitude for everyone who makes it possible for as many students as possible to come to school every day, on time, ready to learn. We thank:

- Our students and families for making daily attendance a priority since they know the habit of attendance will help them do well in the classroom and eventually in a job.
- Our wonderful teachers who pour their energy into making each classroom an exciting place for exploration and knowledge so children do not want to miss out on learning
- Our support staff and community volunteers who provide the extra hands and attention our children need

We appreciate each one of you so much. We look forward to seeing you after the Thanksgiving holiday. We also hope you will keep in mind that school is closed on (fill in day of week, date, time) and reopens (fill in week, date, time).

We especially appreciate everyone's efforts to avoid taking extra days off during the Thanksgiving holiday. Just a few missed days here and there, even if they're excused absences, can add up to too much lost learning time and leave your child behind in school. This is as true in kindergarten as it is in high school.

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