



ABSENCE INTERVENTION TOOLKIT

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ABSENCE INTERVENTION TOOLKIT

PURPOSE

This Toolkit provides information about student absences – causes, as well as possible interventions or solutions GEAR UP staff can use to better serve our students. Sample procedures and forms are also included in this Toolkit.

“Chronic absence – missing 10 percent or more of school days due to absence for any reason – excused, unexcused absences and suspensions, can translate into third-graders unable to master reading, sixth-graders failing subjects, and ninth-graders dropping out of high school. Children living in poverty are two to three times more likely to be chronically absent – and face the most harm because their community lacks the resources to make up for the lost learning in school. Students from communities of color as well as those with disabilities are disproportionately affected.”

AttendanceWorks.org

OBJECTIVES

- Encourage consistent attendance for all students by providing needed student supports and interventions.
- Reduce the number of absences for all students.

STUDENT GRADE LEVEL

This Toolkit is more relevant to schools/programs serving 7th graders, but all middle and high school students can benefit from this Toolkit.

TARGET AUDIENCE FOR TOOLKIT

This Toolkit is written for GEAR UP Specialists, to be used in conjunction with Nevada GEAR UP Minimum Standards for Absence Intervention. However, school counselors, school administrators, parent liaisons and student resource officers could potentially benefit from this information.

TOOLKIT CONTENTS

This Toolkit contains information on the common causes of student absences and ways to effectively address attendance problems. It also includes a variety of sample forms and letters, listed below, as well as a list of additional resources available from attendanceworks.org:

- Sample Referral Procedure
- Sample Referral Forms
- Sample Letters to Parents
- Sample Student Forms for Tracking Missing Work
- Policies and Procedures



Absence Intervention Toolkit

The GEAR UP community across the nation is dedicated to student success, and generously shares information and resources among programs. This toolkit was created from wisdom and experience shared by many GEAR UP projects, but we'd particularly like to thank Washington State GEAR UP and Arizona GEAR UP whose Family Engagement Toolkit inspired us.



Absence Causes & Solutions

There are many reasons that students miss class time. Some of the possible reasons are listed below:

1. Illness
2. School Issues – Not being prepared for a test or not having their homework done, bullying, etc.)
3. Care-Giving – Student misses to take care of younger siblings, sick, or elderly family
4. Family-related – Financial problems, parent is incarcerated or hospitalized, family/cultural events, trips, funerals, no one at home in the A.M. to ensure student gets up and to school, etc.
5. Lack of Transportation
6. School-Related – Activities and events
7. Suspensions

Tips for effective absence intervention:

1. Remember, the GEAR UP specialist is not the school truancy officer. The Specialist approaches the intervention as the student's ally and advocate, with the goal of preventing future absences, whereas the truancy officer may come from a position of punishment.
2. Oftentimes, it is difficult for students to disclose the reasons they are missing school until they feel comfortable with you. If they are not open with you during an initial intervention conversation, don't give up.
3. Once you identify the reason(s) for the absences, work with the student to figure out the best plan moving forward. Don't dictate a solution or plan. Be creative with ideas and solutions.
4. For many students, this might mean connecting the student and/or student's family to other school or community resources. You might need to work with your team of counselors and administrators to best support the student. Social services, counseling resources, mentoring programs, or support groups might be needed. It's important that GEAR UP Specialists are aware of community and school resources.
5. Sometimes the solution is providing the student or parents with simple, practical information such as a bus schedule, or helping with forms and paperwork.
6. Provide the GEAR UP students and families with school resources and information to help them make up for the time missed to reduce the negative consequences for any future absences, such as GER UP room open hours for homework help, computer resources, online information and resources (i.e. missing work listed online, make-up work guidelines, parent-school link), and tutoring resources. (See **Missed Assignment Policy Form** in Section 4).
7. Give students ideas for ways to get involved at school and connected to clubs and organizations that they are interested in.
8. Provide families ways to get involved in the school.
9. Consider providing incentives for improved attendance for those students most at risk (i.e. name in a drawing for a prize; donated gift certificates; etc.). See **Section 5, Attachment 4**.
10. If your school serves breakfast to students, consider creating a before-school support or mentoring program for students who have had attendance issues ("Breakfast Club").
11. Establish a process and timeline "trigger" for absence intervention that meet or exceed GEAR UP minimum standards for absence intervention. For example, a school may establish the following process/procedure:



Trigger	Intervention
4 absences in one semester (excused or unexcused; nonconsecutive)	Student will be called into the GEAR UP Office; the GEAR UP Specialist will talk with the student about the importance of regular attendance in light of the student’s own goals, and will follow Nevada GEAR UP minimum standards for absence intervention in addressing the student’s attendance
3 consecutive unexcused absences	The GEAR UP Specialist and appropriate school staff will together visit the student’s home; discussion with the parent and student at these home visits will follow the Nevada GEAR UP minimum standards for absence intervention
6 consecutive unexcused absences	The school Registrar, or appropriate school staff will mail a letter to the parent explaining the school’s drop policy, cc’ing the GEAR UP Specialist, who will then call the parent/student, following Nevada GEAR UP minimum standards for absence intervention during the phone conversation

12. Think (and act) systemically:

- a. Through interactions with students and families to determine the reasons for absenteeism (per Nevada GEAR UP minimum standards for absence intervention), evaluate if any school/district policies are inadvertently affecting student’s ability to attend school, and/or succeed in school after being absent. Advocate for changing such policies.
- b. Consider evaluating the district’s suspension policy and suspension data and collaborate with administrators to implement preventative interventions for GEAR UP students most at risk of being suspended.
- c. Establish a plan and process for monitoring absence data not only to learn which students to target for absence intervention (per Nevada GEAR UP minimum standards for absence intervention), but also to observe patterns and determine if a systemic issue may be contributing to absenteeism within your cohort or school.

13. Be aware that absence intervention takes time. You’ll need to set aside time on a regular basis, perhaps daily, to complete this work.



SECTION 1:

SAMPLE STAFF MEMORANDUM



Staff Memorandum

The following page contains a sample letter from a GEAR UP Specialist to school staff that can be modified to meet the needs of your school. The purpose of this letter is to reiterate information that was shared with staff at the staff orientation to GEAR UP. School staff members are encouraged to refer students to the GEAR UP Specialist(s) to address the following concerns:

- ✓ Excessive Absences
- ✓ Poor Academic Performance
- ✓ Behavior Issues in Class
- ✓ Not Turning in Homework Assignments
- ✓ Other...

This letter also outlines the GEAR UP Specialist's policies and procedures for submitting the student referral form and addresses follow-up. Please feel free to edit or change the letter to best serve your students.



SAMPLE REFERRAL PROCEDURE

Insert School Logo Here

MEMORANDUM

To: All Teachers, Administrators, Counselors and Staff at <Name> School

From: <Name>, GEAR UP Specialist

Date: <MM/DD/YYYY>

Re: Referring GEAR UP Students for Intervention

As discussed at the Teacher & Staff Orientation to GEAR UP in <Month>, you are invited to refer GEAR UP students you have concerns about because of excessive absences, poor academic performance, behavior issues in class, not turning in homework assignments, etc., to me for intervention.

Simply complete a GEAR UP Referral Form – available in the <Location>, and place it in my mailbox, or deliver it to me personally in room <Number>.

A copy of the Referral Form is also attached for your convenience - you may make copies, as needed.

My role as the GEAR UP Specialist, in intervening with students who struggle in any way, is to help identify the reasons for their struggles, and work with the student and his/her family to find solutions. I will provide resources and referrals to the student and his/her family as needed, and will also commit to following up with students based on the improvement plan we create, to help ensure follow-through and success.

I also commit to reporting back to you the outcome of the intervention with your student.

Thank you. Together we make a mighty team, providing support to every student when and how they need it.



SECTION 2:

SAMPLE TEACHER REFERRAL

FORM



Teacher Referral Form

The following page displays a sample Teacher Referral Form for GEAR UP support and absence intervention. The highlighted text should be modified to fit your needs.



SAMPLE REFERRAL FORM

Insert School Logo Here

Teacher Referral For GEAR UP Support / Absence Intervention

Instructions: Please complete the form below and return to: <Name>, GEAR UP Coordinator - <Phone; Email Address> Please return the completed form to my mailbox <Location>, by email, or in person.

Upon receipt of this Referral Form, I, <GEAR UP Specialist Name> will talk with the student named below, one-on-one in an attempt to learn the reason(s) for the absences or other academic problems listed and will take actions aimed at remedying the problem(s). This may include contacting the student's parent(s) and/or providing referrals and resources, as well as developing an attendance improvement plan with the student (and parent if applicable). I will also follow-up to keep you informed of my intervention efforts and any attendance plan that was developed.

Date: _____

Student: _____

Class: _____

Period: _____

Teacher: _____

Please check as applicable:

- The above-named GEAR UP student has been having problems in my class as follows: Excessive Absences or Tardies, Missing Assignments, Poor Academic Performance, Other: _____

Please see or call me to discuss the above-named GEAR UP student. I can be reached at (indicate best days, times, places, etc. for GEAR UP Specialist to meet with you):

Comments: _____



SECTION 3:

SAMPLE PARENT LETTER ADDRESSING ABSENCES



Sample Parent Letter – Addressing GEAR UP Student Absences

The following page displays a sample letter that can be mailed/emailed to GEAR UP parents when they have not been available by phone/text. The highlighted text needs to be modified for your use. Some Specialists have found that adding a personal note or message increases the likelihood of a parent responding.



SAMPLE LETTER TO PARENTS

<School Letterhead>

Date: <Date>

Dear Parent,

I have been trying to reach you by phone and/or text message without success. I would like to talk with you about your child's attendance at school. I want you to know that your child's success at <School Name> is important to us and we are here to support you and your child.

I would like to discuss with you the reasons for your child's absences and how we can improve his/her attendance. I also want to discuss any concerns that you might have at this time so we can work together toward the best outcome.

Please contact me at your earliest convenience at: <Work Phone>, <Email Address>, or by text at <Cell Phone Number>.

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

<Name>

<School Name> GEAR UP Specialist



SECTION 4:

SAMPLE MISSING ASSIGNMENT & POLICIES PAGE



Students Missing Assignments & Class Policies Sheet

The following page displays a form that can be customized and used by GEAR UP Specialists to teach GEAR UP students to navigate the different class policies that are part of being successful in middle and high school. When students miss school, it is imperative that they know how to be proactive and responsible for obtaining and completing any material missed. Learning how to self-advocate and communicate effectively and appropriately with teachers is a critical skill for all students to learn. Instructions are included on the form.



SAMPLE STUDENT FORM FOR TRACKING MISSING WORK POLICIES & PROCEDURES

Missing Assignment Policies for My Classes

School attendance is very important. If you aren't in class, you can't learn! Sometimes though, absences are unavoidable. For example, if you're sick, you shouldn't come to school and get your classmates sick as well. To prepare in case you have to miss school, find out what you need to do to make up your work in each class. Not all teachers have the same policies and procedures for making up missed work. Some classes post the assignment(s) online, while others might have an in-class folder that has the next day's assigned work. Ask each of your teachers what their policies and procedures are for making up work if you are absent. Communicating with your teacher can really help you to achieve your goals. List what you learn here:

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1st Hour – Class: _____ Teacher: _____
What are the policies for getting your missed work in this class?

Name and phone number of a helpful classmate in this class: _____

.....

2nd Hour – Class: _____ Teacher: _____
What are the policies for getting your missed work in this class?

Name and phone number of a helpful classmate in this class: _____

.....

3rd Hour – Class: _____ Teacher: _____
What are the policies for getting your missed work in this class?

Name and phone number of a helpful classmate in this class: _____

.....

4th Hour – Class: _____ Teacher: _____
What are the policies for getting your missed work in this class?

Name and phone number of a helpful classmate in this class: _____

.....

Continued on Reverse
→



5th Hour – Class: _____ Teacher: _____

What are the policies for getting your missed work in this class?

Name and phone number of a helpful classmate in this class: _____

6th Hour – Class: _____ Teacher: _____

What are the policies for getting your missed work in this class?

Name and phone number of a helpful classmate in this class: _____

7th Hour – Class: _____ Teacher: _____

What are the policies for getting your missed work in this class?

Name and phone number of a helpful classmate in this class: _____



SECTION 5:

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



Additional Resources from AttendanceWorks.org

AttendanceWorks is a non-profit organization dedicated to advancing student success and reducing equity gaps by reducing chronic absence. Their three objectives entail 1) building public awareness and political will; 2) fostering state campaigns and partnerships; and 3) encouraging local practices – all aimed at addressing and reducing chronic absence. They provide a variety of excellent and free tools and resources on their website, attendanceworks.org. A few resources are listed here, but Specialists and others responsible for absence intervention are encouraged to browse their site for additional information and resources.

Handouts for Families:

[Attendance Works handouts for families](#)

See Attachment 1

Resources for Engaging Parents in Absence Intervention:

[Attendance Works resources for engaging parents in absence intervention](#)

See Attachment 2 for an exercise you can do with families. This is just one exercise from the AttendanceWorks toolkit accessed via the link above.

Attendance Success Planning:

[Attendance Works attendance success planning](#)

See Attachment 3 for [Student Attendance Success Plan](#) in English and Spanish.

Attendance Incentives:

[Attendance Works attendance incentives](#)

See Attachment 4

Attendance Videos:

[Attendance Works attendance videos](#)



ATTACHMENT 1:

HANDOUTS FOR FAMILIES



ATTACHMENT 2:

FAMILY PLAN FOR STUDENT SUCCESS – EXERCISE



ATTACHMENT 3:

ATTENDANCE SUCCESS PLAN (ENGLISH & SPANISH)



ATTACHMENT 4:

ATTENDANCE INCENTIVES