



When it comes to summer programs, every day that you can keep a child attending and engaged increases the likelihood that they'll do better in the following school year. It's a daunting task, you're up against national marketing campaigns spending millions of dollars, encouraging kids to stay inside, watch TV, eat sugar right out of the bag. We're here to support you with best practices from local and national providers.

Promoting daily attendance among students begins in spring with recruitment and retention, and continues from Day 1 of your program. We encourage you to check out the related sections of Recruitment and Engagement to learn about best practices ranging from signing up students to keeping them committed to their program of choice.

The Boston Nature Center and New Sector Alliance developed a [field guide](#) to engage families and promote student daily attendance. Lessons learned from this field guide were also featured in a [journal article](#) about family engagement, student attendance, and positive student outcomes. Generally, there are three reasons why students don't attend a summer program:

- They choose not to attend (they don't see the value in attending)
- They can't get to the program (family illness, transportation issues)
- They won't attend the program (concerns about safety)

Any of these reasons can waylay even the most dedicated student, but it can be devastating for a child who is struggling. Here are some strategies for keeping things on an even keel.

A. Encourage & Support

One element of ensuring attendance is to provide encouragement and support for students and families who may have difficulty making a summer program a priority.

The best practices below have emerged from local and national summer programming researchers, including NIOST, RAND Corporation, and Crosby Marketing.

Keeping communication around summer learning focused on fun AND learning can emphasize the value of participating for students and families: *The Summer Learning Program only lasts a bit more than a month, so every day counts. It's fun, and can help your child get ready to succeed next year – but only if your son or daughter attends regularly.*

BEFORE PROGRAM

- **Reminder phone calls**
 - Complete calls in the weeks leading up to the program to answer questions and communicate important program dates.

BEST PRACTICES: ATTENDANCE

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- **Identify students at high-risk for poor attendance**
 - Using school-year attendance data, identify children at high-risk for poor attendance. Reach out to these parents using unique messaging about the importance of program attendance and the supports available (example: transportation).
 - Have a summer staff member make a personal connection to both the parent and child.
- **Registration confirmation**
 - A confirmation packet should be sent to each student that successfully registers for the summer program. The packet should contain a program calendar, student behavior expectations, transportation options, and an incentive.
 - A registration confirmation incentive can include a water bottle, t-shirt or program magnet. Check out this [unique magnet](#) that the YMCA of Greater Boston sent to students who signed up for their summer program.
- **Attendance contract**
 - Develop an attendance contract for parents/guardians to review with their child to reinforce the importance and value of attending daily. Have parents/guardians and students sign the contract as part of the registration process.
 - Check out an [example attendance contract](#) from MathPOWER, based at Northeastern University, which runs a 5-week summer learning program on campus.

DURING PROGRAM

- **“Welcome” phone call during Week 1 to parents/guardians highlighting summer ahead**
- **Communications folder**
 - This folder is sent home every night to distribute general information to families (progress reports, field trip information, flyers, newsletter).
 - Each folder is labeled with child’s name.
 - Stress importance of the folder early in the program to encourage the habit of checking the folder each night, and bringing it back to the program each morning.
- **“Phone call availability” form**
 - This form allows families to note a time that is convenient for them to receive a phone call from the program. This form should be sent home during the first program week. Check out a [sample here](#).
 - This strategy is best coupled with “Good News Phone Calls” – in which programs intentionally make phone calls home to relay positive updates to parents and guardians.
- **Weekly newsletters**
 - Recap of what children did that week, emphasizing both skill gains and fun.

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- Include photographs of students at program and tips for parents on how to make the morning routine easier.
 - Check out a weekly [newsletter template here](#) or see YMCA of Greater Boston's [example here](#).
 - **Attendance “hotline”**
 - Offer an attendance “hotline” to provide advice and guidance to parents struggling to enforce attendance.
 - Informal check-ins with parents during drop-off or pick-up time to address concerns, reinforce daily attendance expectation.
 - **Parent events - Engage parents with your program site by offering weekly, or end of the program events. Potential events include:**
 - Breakfast event with speaker
 - Enrichment afternoon where parents participate in activities with their children
 - “Walking Museums” Snapshot from the Field (best practice from a Boston-area provider): *“During the summer, we had opportunities for parents, siblings, and friends of the students to enjoy displays of summer students’ work. We created a “Walking Museum” which changed bi-weekly, which displayed work from all of the students’ classes.”*
 - **Incentives for parents**
 - Provide incentives for parents whose children attend regularly.
 - Snapshot from the Field: *“At the end of the program, we provided parents the opportunity to participate in a raffle for three Stop & Shop gift certificates if their child had consistently great attendance.”*
 - **Congratulatory attendance calls**
 - At the end of each week, call the parents of children who had perfect weekly attendance.
 - If available, an automated calling system – such as One Call or ConnectEd – is useful in implementing this strategy.
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B. Promote Safety & Inclusiveness

A safe place to learn and play can make the difference between a good day at your summer site and a difficult one.

BEFORE PROGRAM

- **Include student behavior expectations in orientation materials.**
 - Check out how MathPOWER at Northeastern University develops [contracts](#) with families and students to promote a safe and orderly environment, which can help boost daily attendance.

DURING PROGRAM

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- **Contact information**
 - Provide contact information to parents for a staff member available for questions, concerns about attendance, behavior, bullying, etc.
 - **Expectations chart**
 - Create an expectations chart, based on the student behavior expectations created before the program.
 - Post the chart in a prominent place at the site and reference it when communicating with students.
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C. Provide Value

Greeting your students each morning, congratulating a child for good attendance, and creating a welcoming experience for your site can make a child feel valued, engaged, and committed to participating every day.

BEFORE PROGRAM

- **Engage with students (during school year)**
 - Engagement can occur through site field trips, orientations, or informally at student's school.
- **Family friendly signs & décor on site**
 - Welcome Poster – including names of all summer participants.
 - Update photo wall weekly, chronicling the summer experience for students.
- **Assign a staff buddy**
 - Each student should be assigned to a staff member, who will then be responsible for personally greeting the student each morning and congratulating him or her each week for good attendance.

DURING PROGRAM

- **Absent phone calls**
 - A staff member should call families of absent students who have registered for the program. Phone calls should be placed each day a student is absent, to enforce that the student is valued in the program and that attendance is important.
- **Acknowledge importance of attendance**
 - During morning circle, or the first morning activity, staff should acknowledge the students' attendance and its importance.
- **Good news phone call**
 - Program staff members periodically call parents to highlight behavioral and academic strengths and accomplishments of students.
- **Progress reports**

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- To be sent home every Friday, individualized for each student. Designed to be short, simple and concise. Teachers need to be able to complete reports quickly and parents need to easily understand them. Check out a [template here.](#))
- **Culminating event**
 - Create an end of program event for students to anticipate, such as a barbeque, book publishing party, or performance.
 - Highlight the last day event from first day forward to build anticipation, and inspire daily attendance.
- **Incentivize perfect attendance**
 - Weekly raffles for perfect weekly attendance, or a big field trip at the end of the summer for students with perfect attendance.
 - Wall of Attendance Fame where top attenders' photographs are posted.
- **Take-home conversation starter**
 - A half-sheet piece of paper that describes a highlight of the day and a question for a parent to ask their child.