

On January 27, summer program leaders met to explore best practices to increase student attendance.

Three programs with historically high attendance rates, Achieve, Camp Harborview, and Inquilinos Boricuas en Acción, shared their proven strategies and facilitated break-out groups for attendees to discuss methods for improving attendance at different grade levels.

The workshop focused on three themes:

- **Setting clear goals around consistent attendance - with students, families, and staff**
- **Developing a warm, caring program climate that intertwines fun, learning, and positive relationships**
- **Implementing a culture of high expectations among staff, students, and families**

Below you will find a compilation of best practices discussed during the convening:

Setting Clear Attendance Goals

Explicitly naming and communicating program attendance expectations to students, families, and staff members is an important first step towards bolstering attendance.

- Establish your program’s attendance policy with students and families at the point of recruitment and consistently reiterate it through the program’s first day
 - Be transparent about the reasons that attendance is important - cite research into academic achievement as well as program culture
 - Have students and families sign attendance contract at orientation [[View Achieve’s Attendance Contract](#)]
 - Have students resign the same contract on day one – stress *why* attendance is important and connect it to the program’s core values
 - Offer attendance contracts in multiple languages
- Maintain contact with students and families between recruitment and orientation, and orientation and the program’s start date
 - Make an effort to build relationships with students and families before day one
 - Consider a longer recruitment period and designate staff to call or communicate with families
 - Hire staff fluent in the languages spoken by your students and their families to help communicate attendance expectations
 - Stay in contact with families on your waitlist in case they end up in your program
 - Connect parents with parents of past students
- Ensure attendance policy is both firm and responsive to individual students’ circumstances
 - Create definitions for “excused” and “unexcused” absences

- Find out *why* students miss programming from families and students themselves
 - Form strong relationships with parents and students to understand individual barriers to attendance
 - Balance adherence to policy with inclusivity
- Work with parents to address barriers to attendance
 - Help families form a network of support – facilitate connections between parents for carpooling, pair students to travel together, etc.
 - Offer drop-off and pick-up windows rather than times. For example, allow students to be dropped-off between 8:15 and 9:00 and picked up between 4:15 and 5:00.
 - Communicate with parents about drop-off and pick-up windows. Do these times accommodate work schedules, child care for siblings, etc.?
- Be aware of summer school requirements
 - Some students may find they have to go to summer school after they have started your program
 - For BPS students in grades K-8, summer school is not mandatory. The decision to send a student to summer school is made jointly by teachers, principals, and families. It may be possible for your program to count as summer school
 - For BPS students in high school, summer school can be mandatory and a program must be approved by the student's high school
- Ensure staff actively support student attendance
 - Assign staff members to check in with specific students and families
 - Ensure staff set attendance expectations on day one by calling home early in the day if a student is late or absent
 - When calling home, have staff ask, “what time is [student] coming in today?” as opposed to “will [student] be coming in today?” to stress the importance of attendance
 - Encourage staff to model good attendance by offering staff incentives for perfect attendance
- Incentivize student attendance
 - Highlight students with perfect weekly attendance and offer prizes/recognition in front of peers

Developing a Positive Program Climate

Students, especially teens, will be more inclined to attend your program if it offers a positive, caring environment that supports learning, community, and fun.

- Use routines and rituals to help build community

- Consider greetings and goodbyes, opening and closing circles
- Teach students to lead rituals
- Remove hierarchy
 - Allow students to call staff members by their first names
 - Provide students with avenues to ask for change and shape program culture
- Practice restorative justice
 - Value students' voices and agency when confronting misbehavior
 - Seek out mediation instead of punishment
- Offer learning experiences that develop community
 - Allow students to work together on self-directed projects
 - Provide opportunities for students to showcase their work
- Recognize when students are absent and reinforce students' value to the community
 - When a student returns after an absence, let the student know that their absence didn't go unnoticed: "We really missed you here yesterday...."

Develop a Culture of High Expectations

Students will consistently attend your program if they are provided with opportunities to take on leadership and feel that others are depending on them to attend and contribute.

- Explicitly name your program's core values and be intentional about how they are implemented
 - Spend time identifying the values your program communicates implicitly
 - Communicate values to students verbally and visually
 - Ensure staff and leadership consistently model core values – if teamwork is a core value, students should see staff and leadership working in teams effectively
 - "Operationalize" core values – design rotating student roles that embody core values
- Allow students to play a role in defining expectations
 - Foster accountability and student ownership of expectations by allowing students to create "community agreements"
- Offer experiences that foster student interdependence
 - Group projects and opportunities for older students to mentor younger students strengthen relationships and make students feel responsible to one another and their communities within the program
- Offer opportunities for students to take on leadership and make choices

- Provide students with opportunities to direct activities to deepen investment in the program
 - Call on older students and returning students to model core values and lead others by example
-
- Highlight students that demonstrate your program's core values
 - Take advantage of opportunities to discuss core values in positive settings
 - Make sure values are not only discussed when they are violated