Important to Remember

- Remember that post-graduation excused absences for 8th and 12th graders count against official school EOY totals.
- Be proactive for SY17 and set a plan for students who have been chronically absent this year.
- Host spirit weeks and attendance challenges until the end of the year to maintain your ADA.
- Keep all copies of attendance documentation with the student’s file (i.e., absence notes).

Celebrating Our Wins!

- Entering into June 2016, CPS is trending above last year at this time.
- All elementary grade levels are above their YTD SY15 attendance.
- All Networks, but one, are trending at or above their ADA from last year at this time.

Best Practice Sharing from Network 9

In December, Network 9 kicked off an exciting series of attendance challenges. Kendall Straughter, Network Program Coordinator for Attendance, shared that the Network was looking for a way to create a “carrot and stick” approach to attendance, as well as create a friendly competitive edge among their schools. Based on success Mr. Straughter had in his past work as a disciplinarian, and his love for throwing parties, he proposed the idea of using fixed time period attendance challenges with a fun event at the end to reward winning schools.

The Network divided its schools into three cohorts around the recognize/push/reinforce model, based on the schools’ current attendance practices, ADA, and supports needed. This allowed schools with a greater need for intensive support to be grouped in cohorts together, allowing for a more fair competition. As a result, schools that historically struggled with attendance have been able to win some of the challenges, which has really boosted momentum and energy. Each attendance challenge lasts 14 days, and whichever school had the highest attendance in their cohort for that period receives a prize. In December, winners were invited to a concert. Another challenge in spring was organized to avoid the historic dip that is typically seen at that time. For that challenge, 30 students from each winning school were invited to 3.5 hours of unlimited play and pizza at Razzmatazz Family Fun Center. The next challenge concluded on May 25th with 30 students from each winning school attending a White Sox game, including photographs on the field, wearing White Sox gear. Which students are chosen to attend is at the discretion of the schools, but they are asked to bring a mix of students – both those with overall good attendance, and those with improved attendance. The final challenge will end in June, with winning schools earning extra tickets to the Network attendance carnival.

Thus far, the Network has focused primarily on their 22 elementary schools, and has seen a real move in attendance numbers as a result of this strategy. There is an excitement and energy around attendance and building a strong attendance culture. High schools have been more challenging, especially with the issue of suspensions. The Network plans to spend the summer doing intense planning, focused on how to bring a similar strategy and success to their high schools in the next school year. At Week 35, Network 9 had an ADA of 92.97%, which is 0.64% above this time last year!

Why does Attendance & Truancy like this strategy?

Because it gives everyone an equal chance to compete for success!

To the right: Students heading to Razzmatazz to celebrate their attendance challenge win; left, top: students celebrating with Mr. Straughter; left, bottom: challenge winners posing at U.S. Cellular Field.
RESEARCH & PRACTICE

**QUESTION 1: CAN A STRUCTURED MENTORING PROGRAM IMPROVE ATTENDANCE? YES!**

Check & Connect is an evidence-based, structured mentoring program that was implemented as part of a large study in CPS elementary schools from 2010-15. The program demonstrated significant effects on attendance, particularly for older students: 6th-8th grade students gained **two weeks of additional attendance** in the second year of receiving services. Check & Connect is a high-touch, intensive intervention with dedicated mentors. The study highlighted the value of using research-based interventions, and of providing structure, progress-monitoring, and dedicated, long-term relationships in mentoring programs, which too often can be irregular and loosely-focused. It also identified the best target population for the intervention: at-risk students before and during the transition to high school. Schools can invest in such a program, or they can take the learned components and utilize them as a strategy for their own schools.

**QUESTION 2: CAN PERSONALIZED, AUTOMATED COMMUNICATIONS IMPROVE ATTENDANCE? YES!**

The Chicago Attendance Project was a study sponsored by Harvard University. The research was investigating if light-touch personalized, automated communications (letters, phone calls, texts) to parents improved attendance. Parents already receive robocalls and school phone calls when their student is absent, but they often do not realize how those absences add up. The study proved that sending regular messages to parents about the importance of attendance and the number of cumulative absences in the year actually made students come to school more, and including information linking absences to reduced chances of graduation doubled the effect. Some possible takeaways for schools:

1. Regular communication (even automated) can make a tangible difference to attendance;
2. It is important for parents to realize the total number of days a student has missed;
3. Do not underestimate the value of letters in this electronic age—surveys indicated that while texts and phone calls can get lost after receipt, letters sometimes provided continual reminders as they ended up posted on refrigerators and countertops;
4. Explicitly linking absences with reduced chances of graduation can be a powerful message to parents.

These takeaways can be repeated by schools as a strategy to combat attendance hurdles.

On June 28, the University of Chicago’s Urban Labs will host an event to share these results, along with other studies investigating strategies that increase student attendance and engagement. District and Network leaders, Check & Connect principals, partners, and funders will be part of this important forum.

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Day of Action in Springfield: A Snapshot from Network 10

On May 26, 2016, more than 2,000 people joined together at the Illinois State Capitol in Springfield to urge politicians to fix the state’s education funding system. Participants included administrators, educators, parents, students, and other advocates from 12 school districts across Illinois. Legislation that passed the Senate and is currently pending in the House would change the way the state funds public education, shifting more money towards high-poverty districts. Research has shown that Illinois, under its current funding system, has the most inequitable school funding of all states in the nation, meaning that wealthier districts tend to spend much more money per pupil than high-need districts.

Network 10’s FACE Manager, Sonia Castro, went to Springfield with CPS families—parents as well as students—to have their voices heard. She shared, “This Springfield trip to rally for equal funding was an amazing experience for parents to impact and advocate for our children’s education.” Attendance is not simply about being present; all the efforts that go into providing services and supports to students so they can come to school and learn are all part of what is at stake.

Pictured above: Parents from Network 10’s Stevenson ES.

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Best Practice Sharing from Network 2’s Jordan ES

At Jordan, their PBIS values are Respect, Responsibility, and Showing Integrity. Students work hard all year collecting PAW Prints to spend at their Safari Store. To encourage positive behavior, which includes attendance, and to celebrate all the wonderful work the students have done, they end the year with the Jordan Carnival. Students earn special Carnival Paws to spend on carnival games, jump in the bouncy house, and dunk teachers and the principal in the dunk tank! They are so proud of the work their students do all year and are happy to reward their behavior with the Jordan Carnival. At Week 35, Jordan’s ADA is 95.74%, which is 0.34% above this time last year!
**Best Practice Sharing from Network 6’s**

**Wells High School**

Well HS has made great strides in attendance and culture-building over the past few years. Attendance & Truancy contacted Dean Sam Kyme and Social Worker Edwin Caraballo (pictured below), who shared: “As a social work team we keep an eye on three areas: behavior, attendance, and grades. Whether students are seen individually or in groups, they are encouraged to attend classes and be on time. We have seven social work interns that work with our most vulnerable students; those that have the most difficulty with behavior, attendance, and grades. The interns help create goals and use strategies to help change their academic behavior. Interns have been very effective with creating accountability with our students, which helps them meet their social and emotional needs. We have also implemented restorative, trauma, and anger management circles which has increased students’ connection to our school and given them important support systems. Students also have teacher mentors. These mentors have conversations with students who have issues in these areas, helping guide them back to success.

Tardies to school and class used to be a major problem at Wells. For the past three years we have implemented a system that requires students to serve lunch detention if they arrive to school late. If students are tardy to two or more classes in the same day, they have to serve a lunch detention the following day. Our first period failure rate has decreased drastically and we now see students running to school to be on time instead of strolling into the building when they want. Teachers mark students tardy to classes, and we can pull this report at the end of each day to see who has been late to two or more classes. Teachers and staff are in the hallways encouraging students to get to class on time, which clears hallways faster.

We believe that change must come from our students along with adults. This year we chose four senior students to help monitor the hallways and lunchroom before school. They encourage students to make the right choices and model positive behavior. We also have student leaders in our peer jury program, in which students work through discipline-related issues and create solutions that will change behavior in the future. The peer jury program has also helped to decrease our in- and out-of-school suspensions by more than 50% over the past 3 years.

A little over five years ago the attendance rate at Wells was as low as 67%. Three years ago, under a new administration, three priorities were created: Instruction, Transitions, and Climate and Culture. The two of us (Dean and Head of Social Ser-

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**Best Practice Sharing from Network 1’s**

**Portage Park ES**

Portage Park launched a new effort this year called Panther Paws. Staff and parents were notified that the school will give out Panther Paws for each day individual classrooms have perfect attendance. The days do not need to be consecutive. Individual classes can use their earned Paws to “buy” cool incentives and rewards. With support from the attendance grant, the current prize list includes:

- 5 Panther Paws=Prize from Attendance Fun Box
- 10 Panther Paws=Free Gym/Extra Recess
- 15 Panther Paws=Whole Class “Ditch the Dress Code” Pass
- 20 Panther Paws=Dance Party
- 25 Panther Paws=Homework Pass
- 75 Panther Paws=Bus for Field Trip

For teachers, Portage Park announced that any teacher with a class reaching 96% or better attendance for the month receives a jeans pass. Portage Park also started Double Paw Monday, after the school found that their Monday attendance was consistently lower than other days of the week. This sounds like a sustainable strategy—way to go Portage Park! At Week 35, Portage Park had an ADA of 91.80%, which is 2.04% above this time last year!
What’s trending on twitter? Ogden Attendance!

Congratulations to our 1st grade attendance champions for the month of April!

Best Practice Sharing from Network 11’s Randolph ES
Randolph ES hosts a monthly SOAR party for students with perfect attendance, no misconducts, and no D’s or F’s for the month. All students have the opportunity to take part in the monthly celebration since a new count on all metrics begins after the close of each month. Pictured above are a group of smiling honorees, AP Cain (left), and Principal Meyers (center).

STOP AND SHARE! How are you keeping attendance exciting?
Send your stories and/or photos to Dr. Zakieh Mohammed at ZAMohammed@cps.edu

Best Practice Sharing from Network 4’s Monroe ES: It’s Time for a Block Party!

At Monroe ES, the Operations Team came up with an attendance incentive plan that rewards students on 5 week intervals. At the end of every 5 week period, the students who had perfect attendance (no tardies and no absences) earn a reward. For example, for one of the periods, students with perfect attendance had their names entered into a raffle, and each of the 40 classrooms at Monroe drew the names of 4 students who won AMC gift cards.

For the most recent reward, Monroe threw an awesome attendance block party! It was a chance for students to come out of the school building and spend an afternoon in the sunshine. Monroe’s attendance lead, Matilde Schiffino, used her contacts to have members from the fire department and policy department attend the event and interact with students. There was also a DJ sponsor and balloon animals. The event was run on a very low budget with a lot of help from parents and the community. Ms. Schiffino noted how excited the members of the neighborhood were and described an “amazing outpouring” of support from community members and families. Of the 970 students at Monroe, over 600 earned the reward of attending the block party. This is about 100 students more than usually complete the 5 week attendance challenges!

Monroe’s final attendance challenge is designed to get students across the end-of-the-year finish line. For students who complete the final 5 week challenge, each day between June 13th and June 17th the school will raffle off a bike, a Chromebook, Beats headphones, and other prizes. However, students have to be present every day that week in order to win a prize; prizes will not be given out until the 17th. This will help students have a goal to reach, and excel in their attendance as the year draws to a close! At Week 35, Monroe ES had an ADA of 96.07%, which is 0.67% above this time last year!
Best Practice Sharing from Network 13—End of Year Celebrations

Students in Network 13 look forward all year to the big attendance celebrations they know are coming: the end of year Perfect Attendance Student Honoree Celebration, and the Engage Attendance Event. Having been held with such great success in the past, these generate an excitement and buzz throughout the Network.

Attendance and Truancy had the pleasure of attending this year’s Perfect Attendance Celebration, held on May 20th at Mount Vernon Elementary School’s campus park. In addition to the many Network 13 Principals and support staff, CPS CEO Janice Jackson, Chief Karen Saffold, Network Attendance Administrator Sarah Barber, and Sara Shaw from the Office of the Illinois Secretary of Education were in attendance. Students from Network 13’s 35 elementary and high schools were honored for their fantastic accomplishment of perfect attendance for the SY16 school year. There were approximately 2,000 student honorees this year, an increase of 700 students from last year!

The day featured carnival games, grilled hot dogs, popcorn and sno-cones, a DJ, clowns, an appearance from Chicago White Sox mascot Southpaw, balloon animals, and other fun activities that students of all ages were able to enjoy. The most exciting portion of the day was the performances and services offered by our own CPS students. Owens ES and Julian HS held a “battle of the drumlines”, complete with color guard, flag presentations, and dancers. Students from Chicago Vocational Career Academy, Dunbar Vocational Career Academy, and Simeon Career Academy offered their skills as trained barbers and cosmetologists to host haircuts and manicures for the honorees. It was a privilege to watch the students’ excitement and joy as they celebrated their accomplishment.

Network 13’s other end-of-year attendance event, the Engage Student Attendance Grant event, will be held on June 10th at Corliss HS. After-school program vendors who work in partnership with Network 13 through the Attendance Grant will showcase the work they have done with students. Network 13’s vendor partners include A Knock At Midnight, DanceArt, Dancing with Class, Global Girls, Manhood Shelter, Polished Pebbles, Reel Beauty, Pretty Brown Girl, and the YMCA. Performances will feature students who participate in the after-school programs, plus a special performance by the Bennett ES pom-pom squad. This event is always a memorable experience for parents and families, as they are treated to a morning of watching their students display their gifts. Likewise, it is always a pleasure to see the self-confidence and talent that has blossomed in the students over the course of the year.

Network 13 attributes their continued attendance growth to pairing Network-wide end-of-year attendance celebrations with smaller attendance challenges and attendance energizers throughout the school year. The importance of attendance is messaged in classrooms and schools every day, and the end-of-year events are a way for students and families to celebrate their hard-earned accomplishments. At Week 35, Network 13 had an ADA of 93.69%, which is 0.92% above this time last year!

Best Practice Sharing from Network 5’s Mason Elementary

On May 23, 2016, Mason Elementary School held its first A 10 Dance celebration to acknowledge students with great attendance and encourage students to look forward to attending school each and every day. The A 10 Dance celebration was a success thanks to parents, community, and staff who supported the celebration with donations, artistic skills, and time to show the students how important their presence is to the school.

A 10 Dance is one of the many attendance incentives held at Mason Elementary School. Students attend the celebration during lunch and recess periods. All students who have attended school for ten consecutive school days are rewarded by receiving a ticket as an invitation to attend the celebration which includes a dance floor with 10 popular songs.

The celebration kicked off at the Welcome Center, where each student who received a ticket exchanged it for a goodie bag filled with school supplies. It continued with students visiting stations for a variety of activities such as: dance floor, face painting, ring toss, balloon art, jump ropes, frisbee fun, hula hoops, bubble fun, chalk art, popcorn and more! The celebration ended on a high note with students talking excitedly about their plans to reach their goals to attend the next A 10 Dance celebration. What a stimulating way to end the year! At Week 35, Mason ES had an ADA of 95.67%, which is 2.26% above this time last year!
Best Practice Sharing from Network 12’s Dixon, Park Manor, Cole, and Mann Elementary

Network 12 has worked tirelessly to make attendance a priority at their schools. With their rock star school teams, it sounds like the effort has really turned into a successful practice.

Kindergarteners were celebrated at Dixon Elementary. Teacher Ms. Quinn, pictured, was all smiles as the students reached 96.56% for the month. The attendance coordinator, Ms. Meadards, helped coordinate the classroom celebration that included dancing! Their goal? Perfect attendance for the coming month!

Park Manor Elementary uses the attendance trophy strategy to motivate their achievers. It has been a staple of their strategy this entire school year. The winners receive an extra hour of gym or a pizza party celebration. Park Manor knows that keeping the students motivated to come is all about planning. They just completed a spirit week that included: Mix and Match Day, Twin Day, Chicago Sports Team Day, Throwback Thursday, and NWEA Spirit Day. They also have recognitions peppered throughout the month until the very last day of school, in order to keep the momentum going. Way to go Park Manor!

Not to be outdone, Cole Elementary School hosts Attendance Balls. Students achieving perfect attendance during select weeks are invited to a ball, where they dance and share in their achievement. The Cole Elementary motto is Attend Today, Achieve Tomorrow—that is sound advice.

Mann Elementary School students with the most improved attendance were taken to Simeon High School where they were treated to haircuts, styling, and manicures. What a wonderful idea! Attendance and Truancy loves the idea of recognizing students who are showing improvement! Bravo Mann Elementary!

Schmid Elementary School rewarded students with 95% or above attendance with a fun-filled time of cardio-building activities. Principal Black participated in a Relay Race, the gym teacher Ms. Monroe prepped her gym for basketball and Nerf football, and outside jumping rope was thing to do. Schmid Scholars participated in the games as they celebrated their achievement.

Network 12 schools use their creativity, their talented staff, devoted families and gifted students to make clear that coming every day and being on time is the path to success! Attendance and Truancy loves these ideas because they are low cost and utilize the talent that exists in our buildings and in our District! Most importantly, these ideas demonstrate that attendance belongs to everyone! Everyone needs to be talking about, caring about, and understanding the importance of attendance! At Week 35, Network 12 had an ADA of 93.33%, which is 0.85% above this time last year!