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Student absenteeism is a growing problem in schools around the country. An estimated 16 percent of public school students in all grades missed more than 10 percent of the school year in 2015-16. Read about the high cost of chronic absenteeism and find resources for effective intervention strategies.

### **Eight steps to plot your style guide**

How does your staff represent your brand? If you have a style guide, they can follow your brand guidelines and help you maintain a consistent identity for your district or school. Here are eight steps that will help you understand and implement this important branding process for a cohesive team and more effective marketing.

### **Make them green with envy: Be the best with color!**

Color is an essential design element. It can impact brand perceptions or help your audience, but how much do you know about color theory in design? This quick overview will help you find colors to communicate better and serve as a reminder for defining your specific colors in your style guide.

### **Resource round-up: References for text and image content**

Communicators must be masters of wide range of skills and tools — writing, editing, content strategy, social media, photography, videography, web content, public speaking, etc. Turn to the internet to streamline your processes to be more efficient. This list has editing and image resources to support your projects. .

### **Succession planning for a smooth transition**

Can someone else do your job if you can't? You may not have plans to leave, but it is considerate and a helpful reflective practice to think about the work you do and how you could explain it to someone who is filling in for you. Even if you hold the position for years to come, this process can help you document and streamline your routines.

### **INSIGHTS FOR PARENTS: Reducing chronic absenteeism**

Students can improve their success in school by showing up more. Research shows that communicating with parents about the importance of regular attendance can reduce absences. Parents may need reminders about the importance of attending school every day. Here are tips to help parents help their kids show up every day.

For subscription information, contact WSSDA at (800) 562-8927 or (360) 493-9231.

For content questions, contact: Marcia Latta Communications Consultant (503) 580-2612.

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## Communicating about chronic absenteeism

Student absenteeism is a problem in schools around the country. Attendance plays a large role in student success — many say the biggest role. This is true for students in all grades. Students can't learn if they don't show up.

An estimated eight million students — about 16 percent of public school students — were chronically absent in the 2015-16 school year. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requires states to report chronic absenteeism rates. States, districts and nonprofits have started initiative campaigns and public information programs to combat this growing problem.

### What is chronic absenteeism?

Chronic absenteeism is a measure of how many students miss a defined number of school days (usually between eight to 15 or more days) for any reason. Research shows that chronic absenteeism is associated with many negative consequences for students, including lower achievement, disengagement from school, course failure, and increased risk of dropping out.

Chronically absent students miss many days of school during the school year for both excused and unexcused absences. States define the measure they use for school absentee rates. Generally, it is defined as more than 10 percent of the school year, or a specific number of days, such as 15 or 18 days in a school year.

### The cost of absenteeism

High absentee rates affect the performance of your schools. Students who miss school usually struggle academically. California State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Torlakson stated that “students who miss just two or three days each month in kindergarten and first grade may never catch up.” (<http://bit.ly/2QG0LyA>). Those students start their early school years already behind — about 83 percent of them are not reading at grade level at the end of third grade, making them four times more likely to drop out of school before graduation.

Chronic absenteeism also has a financial impact on schools. School funding is generally distributed based on a per-student formula for average daily attendance. In some states, funding is reduced for each day a student misses during the school year. These budget formulas are complicated and include funding sources from the federal, state and local levels. For more information about the impact of attendance on school funding, read “The High Costs of Chronic Absenteeism.” <http://bit.ly/2QG0LyA>

### Intervention strategies

FutureEd, an education think tank at Georgetown University and Attendance Works, a national attendance awareness campaign, released its Attendance Playbook in 2019 to share in-

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intervention strategies to combat chronic absenteeism, which they say dramatically undermines student success and school performance.

*“School absenteeism represents an enormous threat to many students, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds. By 9th grade, students’ chances of graduating from high school drop by 20 percentage points for every week of school they miss.*

*Such findings have led the federal government to require all states to report chronic absenteeism rates, and they have led 36 states and the District of Columbia to hold schools accountable for chronic absenteeism rates under the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Nearly 8 million students—16 percent of the nation’s public-school population—are chronically absent.*

*But there are proven strategies that states and school districts can use to address the problem, strategies that policymakers and educators can implement quickly and cost-effectively. These are interventions that move beyond the traditional focus on punishing students for missing school, an approach that studies show has failed to reduce absenteeism.”*

*[www.future-ed.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Attendance-Playbook.pdf](http://www.future-ed.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Attendance-Playbook.pdf)*

### **Proven strategies**

This topic is getting a lot of research, and several strategies are showing promise for reversing the trend. Most tactics include sharing information about the value of attendance and the impact multiple absences can have, connecting with students, parents and community partners, removing barriers to attendance and improving the school climate.

The Attendance Playbook’s three tiers of interventions are research-based. Tier I offers cost-effective and relatively easy-to-implement tactics. They shift from a discipline-based strategy to stress the importance of positive messaging. Recommendations in Tiers II and III are more intensive and more expensive. Social supports are recommended as part of the efforts to remove barriers to attendance and improve school climate.

#### **Tier I Interventions:**

**Effective Messaging and Engagement:** nudging parents and students, home visits, positive messaging, incentives

**Removing barriers to attendance:** school-based health services, school buses and public transit, safe walks to school, breakfast for all, laundry at school.

#### **Tier II Interventions:**

**Effective Messaging and Engagement:** Early warning, mentoring, youth engagement

**Removing barriers to attendance:** Addressing asthma, targeted transportation

**Tier III Interventions:** Truancy courts, interagency case management, housing.

For more information about these interventions, read recommendations, considerations and research for each tier. [www.future-ed.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Attendance-Playbook.pdf](http://www.future-ed.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Attendance-Playbook.pdf)

### **Resources**

#### **For parents:**

##### **Chronic absenteeism: What you need to know**

Tips for parents with information about what chronic absenteeism is, why kids miss school

and what the impact is and how parents can track and reduce their child's absences.  
<https://u.org/2MU0dEb>

### **Parent Handouts: Attendance Works**

Free flyers are available for download for different grades and in different languages. These informational materials are a good starting point for families who want their children to succeed in school but don't fully understand how absences can affect academic achievement. The focus is on how to build good habits for attendance and specific tips for parents.

Topics include:

- Preschool handout
- Elementary handout
- Middle and high school handout
- Infographic fact sheet
- How sick is too sick?

[www.attendanceworks.org/resources/handouts-for-families/](http://www.attendanceworks.org/resources/handouts-for-families/)

### **For schools:**

#### **Attendance Awareness Campaign: Attendance Works**

Everybody plays a role in ensuring children attend school regularly. In the section, "What you Can Do," find tips for afterschool and early education providers, businesses, families and parents, healthcare providers, local philanthropy groups, elected leaders, principals, school board members, superintendents and teachers.

#### **Sample "nudge" letter: Oregon Department of Education Every Day Matters Campaign**

Research has found that low-key reminders to parents and caregivers about absences can improve attendance. Letters are simple reminders; they do not blame or shame. They are effective because many parents are not aware of the total number of days their child has missed. Many districts use them. Find Nudge Letter Guidance from the Oregon Department of Education, <http://bit.ly/2SUtcLZ>

#### **Student absenteeism: Three studies to know: Education Week**

Research for schools on tactics that may help them combat high absenteeism:

- Students who follow a routine that includes being ready to catch a bus for school are less likely to be absent.
- High school students who regularly skip class can contribute to high absenteeism, which may be mitigated through scheduling adjustments.
- Early warning systems can catch and predict some absences, allowing schools to connect with the students who are at risk of high absenteeism.

<https://awareness.attendanceworks.org/>

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*Contributed by Marcia Latta, communications consultant*

## Eight steps to plot your style guide

A style guide is a reference for public relations practitioners on how to create, share and use a pre-existing brand guide. A well-designed style guide will inherently support staff when they are presenting on behalf of an agency: in writing, presentations or on digital platforms. And it will ensure continuity of the brand identity by defining graphic elements, colors and fonts.

These quick tips will help you plan, design and organize a style guide for your brand. If your district or school does not have a brand identity, this overview also offers an outline of the branding process to your leadership teams.

### 1. Plan your style, engage your people

Building a school brand creates an opportunity for staff and student engagement. A style guide is an outcome of a branding process. Consider creating an advisory committee to guide the creation of the style guide.

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Meeting 1	Meeting 2	Meeting 3	Comment Period	Meeting 4
Introductions	Introductions	Introductions		Introductions
<p><b>Values Brainstorm.</b> When you think of (school, department, initiative) what words come to mind? E.g., special, active, brave, winners, professional.</p> <p><b>Group Share Out</b> Discuss the words.</p> <p><b>Consensus Activity:</b> If you like a word, put a dot next to it.</p>	<p><b>Review Meeting 1.</b> Show words that had dots (narrow to 3-5 ahead of time).</p> <p><b>Mascot Brainstorm:</b> What sorts of animals, plants, or people come to mind when you think of those words?</p> <p><b>Group Share Out:</b> Share the images.</p> <p><b>Consensus Activity:</b> If you like the animal, put a dot next to it.</p>	<p><b>Review meeting 2.</b> Show words and mascot groupings.</p> <p>Prepare color and font research options (2) and present to group.</p> <p>Q &amp; A: color and font.</p> <p><b>Decision:</b> values, mascot, colors, font.</p>	<p><b>Publish draft values, mascot, colors and font to staff and students.</b> Using surveys, suggestion boxes, comment capture sheets and focus groups.</p> <p>Include mock-ups of swag (water bottles, lanyards, t-shirts) and PowerPoint, memo, report, letterhead, Facebook and webpages</p>	<p><b>Share feedback.</b> Share options developed in response to feedback.</p> <p>If no feedback, consider bringing swag for all committee members.</p> <p>Show style guide.</p> <p>Celebrate launch of brand!</p>

<b>Materials:</b> name tags, capture sheets, dot stickers, water, fidgets, snacks.	<b>Materials:</b> name tags, capture sheets, dot stickers, water, fidgets, snacks.	<b>Materials:</b> name tags, capture sheets, dot stickers, water, fidgets, snacks.	N/A	<b>Materials:</b> celebration materials, e.g., clappers, confetti, balloons, streamers.
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## 2. Know your audience

Know your audience and craft your communications toward specific groups, (e.g., staff, stakeholders, families, legislators, etc.). Consider cultural elements relevant to your audience and reflect them in messaging. Thoughtfully use different platforms for different audiences. Be sure your style guide includes materials to cover all platforms.

## 3. Embed equity

Develop a set of reflective questions to follow when creating communications materials, especially when telling someone else’s story: Does your work capture and elevate diverse voices with authenticity? Do you have assumptions that come through in the storytelling? Who benefits from the story? What are the power dynamics? Is there any possibility of harm or risk to communities?

Language matters. Adopt a person-first approach. Avoid labeling and careless pop-culture terms. Ensure content (photos, videos, narrative) is representative of student and staff demographics, views and perspectives. Ensure materials are compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

## 4. Gather your elements

Style guides consist of various elements: colors, fonts, logos, mascots, spirit lines, symbols of action/movement. All elements should ultimately reflect established agency values.

## 5. Pick your palette

Research shows that colors have an emotional and psychological impact. Fast food chains typically use yellow and red because research shows those colors spur people to action and are more likely to invoke a sense of hunger; certain shades of blue are calming, according to Wendy L. Patrick’s article “Dieting? How Colors Impact Food Appeal and Appetite” in Psychology Today (<http://bit.ly/2MPpyz6>).

Consider the research when suggesting color combinations. Your palette should always reflect your values and/or goals. As an aside, also consider what a logo will look like in a single color, which is frequently requested for items like t-shirts and water bottles.

## 6. Choose your font family

Fonts speak volumes. Think of the times a swirly, curly doodle caught your eye, but it wasn’t for a children’s story time and instead promoted a \$250 one-off keynote imparting the latest greatest InstaWisdom trend. Did you look up the event immediately, or forget the whole thing in a flash except for the poster’s swirly, curly doodle font? What was memorable? The content or the font?

Your font personifies your values, like it or not. Do you have a serif and san serif font?

Learn the difference and choose the one that matches your agency's style. Also, make sure the font family is accessible in a platform that most staff use - not just the design team.

#### **7. Decide on a writer's guide**

Associated Press is the most commonly used style guide for copywriters. However, some educational staff may prefer using Modern Language Association or American Psychological Association formats, which are typically reserved for academic writing and not public relations or news. Additionally, some staff may prefer to modify A.P. standards, such as the way grade levels or titles are written. Agreeing on a house style to accommodate relevant modifications is essential for communications continuity.

#### **8. Give broad access to the guide**

Placing your style guides and templates on a website enhances the likelihood that the brand will be used correctly. Placing restrictions on access to a brand mostly causes people to generate their own version of the brand which most of the time results in a poor visual outcome. There is always the concern that a brand will be used for an unauthorized purpose or a purpose that does not align with the agency. On balance, most uses are in line with the agency and providing ready and easy access gives staff and the community a tool to create great-looking messages and materials.

For examples of style guides and branding guides created by the Multnomah Education Service District's communications team, see sidebar content at [www.multnomahesd.org/staff.html](http://www.multnomahesd.org/staff.html).

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*Contributed by Laura Conroy and Jaime Dunkle, communications staff at Multnomah Education Service District, Portland, Ore.*

*Laura has over 20 years of professional experience in public relations, data analysis and strategic communications leadership. She has successfully developed, coordinated and implemented a variety of community outreach and engagement strategies for MESD, school districts and nonprofits in Oregon. Laura serves as a member of MESD's Cabinet, as the Vice President of the Oregon School Public Relations Association. She is a member of the Oregon Bar.*

*Jaime Dunkle has produced multimedia content for MESD for two years. She has nearly 20 years' experience writing content for print and online publications and eight years producing videos, soundslides, infographics and photo galleries for news outlets, businesses and schools. Jaime also serves as the co-chair of the Communication and Data Action Team at East Metro STEAM Partnership. She specializes in copywriting, copyediting, videography (including editing) and photography.*

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## Make them green with envy: Be the best with color!

*Using color theory for communicating online and in social media*

Make them green with envy: Be the best with color!

Using color theory for communicating online and in social media

Okay, back to basics. With messages bombarding us from every direction 24 hours a day and countless sources, have you thought about the importance of color lately?

Color theory evolved from years of scientific study on how we receive information — and how it affects our thoughts and emotions. Understanding color is an essential design skill. Communication professionals should have a basic knowledge of color theory. To begin, here's "Color 101":

**Primary colors:** red, blue and yellow. All other colors are made from these three.

**Secondary colors:** green, orange and purple, all made from primary colors (i.e., red and yellow make orange).

**Tertiary colors:** made by mixing a primary and secondary colors. "Peach" is a good example.

**Complementary colors:** Colors and shades directly across from each other on the color wheel provide a pleasing contrast. For example, yellow is opposite blue; they look good together. Colors too close together will "clash" — Like various shades of blue or red. You wouldn't wear clashing shades of red together, would you? (um, maybe don't answer that question).

### What color is your social media?

Images and color are the foundation of capturing attention. Sixty-five percent of people retain information when it's paired with an image, compared to 10 percent who just heard or read a bit of information. Facebook posts with images get 2.3 times more engagement than posts without images.

Even with that advantage, we still need to create truly memorable images — an easy task if you have a graphic designer. If you don't, rely on the fact that COLOR is the secret weapon.

### Have a color brand? Use it!

When setting up a photo or designing an image, first consider your district or school's color scheme. If you have a well-designed logo/branding guide, it's likely the colors are already complementary. These colors are a good choice for your base social media palette. Try to plan images that include these in some way.

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Complementary colors create contrast, a technique you can use to bring the eye to a focal point. Contrast in images increases conversion rates (readers “converting” to some type of action, like taking your surveys).

Colors also invoke emotion. If you’re going for feelings of warmth, compassion or love, choose colors in the warm color range: reds, pinks, oranges and yellows, although be sensitive to the varying meanings of color in various cultures.

In general, if you’re aiming for soothing and calming, choose a blue or a green. Again, carefully consider the target audience’s culture. Blue is one of the most popular colors used online — for good reason. It’s the color of trust and inspires security and a feeling of safety.

Hues appear differently on computer screens than on paper. A color you choose from printed brand material may look slightly different on a computer screen, as will colors in the photos you take. You may need to edit and adjust images to get your desired effect.

This article from the Huffington Post has great insight on how color has shaped emotions and beliefs in different cultures around the world: [www.huffpost.com/entry/what-colors-mean-in-other\\_b\\_9078674](http://www.huffpost.com/entry/what-colors-mean-in-other_b_9078674). In general, however, you can rely on the following tips for how color affects an audience that is raised in the U.S.

### What popular colors mean

**Red:** Passionate, aggressive, important. Use it cautiously.

**Orange:** Playful, energetic, vibrant. It’s like red’s safe little sister, a good way to add excitement without severity.

**Yellow:** A strange one; often linked to happiness, but it also activates the anxiety center of the brain (“caution”). It’s the color of warning signs. Lighter shades are less stressful.

**Green:** Natural, stable, prosperous, organic, the environment. It’s a popular choice for “call to action” elements. It’s also the color of money, so be careful when talking about finance issues or readers may think you’re tricking them.

**Blue:** Serene, trustworthy, inviting. The most popular online color — for good reason. It inspires security and safety. It’s also very versatile. Light blue is the color of water and sky, so it’s refreshing. Dark blue makes you feel secure and professional. Interestingly, blue can also be an appetite suppressant, so be careful when promoting fundraisers involving food.

**Purple:** luxurious, mysterious, romantic. Careful here! You’re a school — unless this is your brand color. It conveys royalty if used elegantly, and lighter shades convey springtime.

**Pink:** Feminine, young, innocent: This works with the right audience; use sparingly, and with other colors to balance it. Also be careful with gender stereotyping!

**Brown:** Earthy, sturdy, rustic. Brown adds an authentic outdoorsy feel. It works best if paired with green — for example, a tree conveys growth and stability.

**Black:** Powerful, sophisticated, edgy, the strongest of colors. Use sparingly and mainly for text, backgrounds and key design elements that don’t overwhelm other colors.

**White:** Clean, virtuous, healthy. It’s an ideal secondary color since it pairs with everything. White can guide readers’ attention by giving the eyes a place to rest. Try using ivory or cream instead for a more comforting “white space” and to avoid a cold or sterile reaction.

**Gray:** Neutral, formal, gloomy. It’s the color of formality. It is not the best choice for engaging with students and learning. Gray can also give a depressing vibe. We suggest avoiding it unless you get professional help.

**Beige:** Accentuates other colors. It's worth mentioning because it takes on the character of colors around it. It can enhance as a background color.

Find more insights about specific colors here: [www.empower-yourself-with-color-psychology.com/meaning-of-colors.html](http://www.empower-yourself-with-color-psychology.com/meaning-of-colors.html)

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*Contributed by Shannon Priem, APR, former public information director for the Oregon School Boards Association*

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## Resource round-up: References for text and image content

Effective communication requires so many skills — writing, editing, editorial content planning, social media, photography, videography, web content expertise, public speaking, media relations. It's a big list, especially if you are a sole practitioner or part of a very small staff. You need to know what to share, when to share it and how to maximize the impact through the various communication channels that you manage.

Information moves fast and demand is high for good content. It isn't always what you say but how well you say it. Ensure that you are building your skills and your toolbox to ensure that your content is high quality, engaging and error-free.

Here is a round-up of tools to help you produce great images and high-quality error-free copy.

### Writing and editing

There are many helpful free online tools to help you write faster, better and more relevant content. The first priority is to ensure that it is clean. Your readers may not notice that your writing is error-free, but they will likely notice and criticize spelling and grammar errors.

### Word processing tools

Microsoft Office, Google Docs, Apple Pages all have built-in spell checkers, grammar review tools, word counters and reading level tools. These features may provide all the help you need to review your text.

### Grammarly.com

Add a web browser extension and sign up for a free account to check spelling, grammar, punctuation. For a monthly fee, you can check ineffective vocabulary, overused words, passive voice issues, formality levels, plagiarism and more.

### Hemingwayapp.com

Copy and paste your text to check for readability, simpler word choices and passive voice. The color-coded suggestions are easy to read and come with clear recommendations.

### SmartEdit.com

This tool has similar features as other writing and editing tools (misspellings, repeated phrases, misused words, clichés, etc.). Its difference is that it is downloadable for use in MS Word or as a standalone version. It does 20 different content checks and does not automatically change your text. It highlights problem areas for your review and better self-editing.

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## Social platforms

There are so many tools for social media content and online marketing. While some of them are platform-specific to help you reach your followers or expand your reach, others are general platform tools for security, analytics, content creation or monitoring.

A good list of current recommendations is published by OptinMonster.com, <http://bit.ly/2rRGfCK>.

### **Social media management: Hootsuite.com**

Schedule your posts, ensure message consistency among your team, curate content through tags, measure your engagement.

### **BuzzSumo.com**

This online tool will tell you about trending topics to help you shape your content. Enter a word or phrase to check total engagement or platform-specific engagement for Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest and Reddit.

### **Visage.com**

An image tool for social platforms. This tool is for creating graphics and optimizing images for different platforms. The fee-based product allows adding your style guide as a reference, resizing images, easy reordering and adding live links to graphics.

## Images

When it comes to getting attention, images are everything, and it isn't that hard to find resources to make your content more noticeable. There are free image sites with copyright-free photos and graphics that you can use as is or customize to make them original. There are also many sites that include tutorials to help you improve your design skills.

A word of caution: be sure to check copyright restrictions. The owner can do a simple image search to see if their content is being used without prior permission, which could result in legal action or a fine.

### **Adobe Creative Suite**

This is the gold standard for graphic design tools, and most districts have licenses to use it. The key apps are Photoshop, Illustrator, InDesign, Spark and Premiere, but there are many others in the suite. There is a learning curve, so take some time to learn the basics. Tutorials are included on the Adobe site, [www.helpx.adobe.com](http://www.helpx.adobe.com). There are also dozens of free videos and tutorials for specific tasks and many low-cost online courses that help you build your skills.

### **Canva.com**

Canva is a free online design tool to help you design content from scratch or templates. It's easy to use and can be built to size for print or social platforms. It also hosts design tips and tutorials. The pro fee-based membership allows you to build a brand kit or guide.

### **Pixlr.com**

"Pixlr is a cloud-based photo editing app that allows quick image adjustments, resizing, filters, drawing and more. It's a simpler interface than Photoshop and includes access to free resources like backgrounds, images and vector graphics. The app allows beginners to make simple edits or advanced users to create complex layered artwork.

Be sure to learn the basics of photo editing on your favorite image app. Photo edits are commonplace and can result in attention-getting images with better audience engagement. For a good overview of common photo edits, including cropping, resizing, contrast, brightness, temperature or white balance, and saturation, read a tip sheet published by the Multnomah Education Service District for its staff: [How to fix your photos using free websites or just your phone!](http://www.multnomahesd.org/photos.html) ([www.multnomahesd.org/photos.html](http://www.multnomahesd.org/photos.html))

### **Stock images**

Free image sites make it easy to follow copyright rules. Stock image sites provide images to support your messages on your website or social channels. Try to use your own authentic images, or your own students and staff, but the stock photos can fill in or expand your image library. A few good sites include:

**www.pexels.com** (photos)

**www.pixabay.com** (photos, vector graphics, illustrations and video)

**www.vecteezy.com** (vector graphics, including backgrounds, icons, elements, patterns, shapes and illustrations)

**www.videezy.com** (like Vecteezy but for video. Also includes After Effects templates for title and credit frames)

MESD has compiled a list of public domain photo sites for staff use: [www.multnomahesd.org/stock-images.html](http://www.multnomahesd.org/stock-images.html). The resource list includes a helpful overview of allowable uses of images and attribution requirements.

For a bigger list of tools, see **23 Tools and Resources to Create Images for Social Media:** <https://buffer.com/library/tools-create-images-for-social-media>

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## Succession planning for a smooth transition

What if you were gone tomorrow? Could someone step into your shoes to do your job?

Planning for someone else to take over when you're sick or leave the company may not be a high priority when your "to do" list is already so long, but it's critically important. It is especially so in one-person departments that have no support staff.

For example, who else besides your communication specialist knows the checklist to follow if there's a crisis in the district and the media are on your doorstep? Who else knows how to post information to your website and send out emergency alerts to parents? Who else even knows the daily tasks that your communication specialist does?

The same questions should be asked of all positions in your district. While it might feel like job security to be the only one who knows how to do particular tasks, it can be a disaster if you become ill for an extended time or decide to take a job elsewhere.

Your district shouldn't be dependent on any one person for its critical functions. Well-functioning districts work as a team, and that requires team members to be able to help each other when needed and to appreciate the value of the work each one contributes. That can't happen if team members don't even fully know what their colleagues do.

### Write down what you do

It sounds basic, but every employee should make a spreadsheet listing their day-to-day responsibilities. Organize it by month, so someone can see at a glance what your workload is throughout the year. Be detailed. If your project is to produce a parent handbook, outline what that involves, and show your deadlines for starting work, editing, proofreading, translating and getting it to the printer.

Create checklists for any special projects. For example, if emergency communications are your responsibility, list all of the steps that need to be taken if there's a lockdown or other emergency in the district. These might include:

- Notify all schools and the district office of the emergency.
- Notify the transportation department if bus routes need to be delayed or changed.
- Notify food service if lunch times will be disrupted.
- Prepare a script for your receptionist to read to callers.
- Notify the School Board.
- Notify the media.

Next, list who will own each of those tasks if you are gone. That doesn't mean the designated person is necessarily your job successor if you should leave. It just means that the important

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tasks that you do will not be overlooked in the meantime. It will also serve as a transition planning tool if it's ever necessary to replace you.

This type of planning is helpful not only for any successor but also for you in staying on track in your day-to-day assignments. A list that you review frequently helps assure that important tasks don't slip through the cracks.

Finally, write down the passwords you use to access the tools of your trade, including work email, web pages, social media pages you use for work, etc. Write them on one page and keep it in a "succession" file along with other important materials that your successor can easily access.

### **Archive your work**

Keep copies of important work that you do — flyers, letters, handbooks, posters, press releases, etc. Create an online folder (such as a Google folder) where you can store materials and easily share them with your supervisor or other key people. It can be helpful to also keep a folder with printed copies of important materials.

### **Train others in what you do**

Make sure that at least one or two others know how to do the critical tasks of your job. If your company is small, cross-train employees from other departments to ensure there is someone else who knows the ins and outs of what you do. It's a smart idea to have those colleagues perform those tasks occasionally, even if you're not gone. That allows them to become familiar with what's required while you are available to answer questions or provide additional training. It's also a way for you and your supervisor to spot who might have the potential for replacing you someday if you ever decide to leave.

### **Keep everyone in the loop**

It's easy for individuals and departments to operate in silos, but companies are much more effective when departments work cohesively. It's good practice for departments to regularly share information about the key tasks they are working on and any challenges they are facing. Some companies have monthly lunches or staff meetings where each department gives a quick update on what they are working on and how they are working with other units. These meetings give insight into what different departments are doing and help build an appreciation for the work happening throughout the office or department.

### **Be prepared**

The Boy Scouts' motto is "Be Prepared," and that's what you should be too. You never know when illness might sideline you, or when a tempting job offer will come your way. Even if you never intend to leave your job, it's smart to plan ahead so that your work can continue seamlessly if you do for some reason. That not only benefits the company but also reflects well on you and the legacy you leave.



**Reducing  
Chronic  
Absenteeism**



**February  
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INSIGHTS FOR FAMILIES is provided by your child’s school in recognition of your role as a partner in education. Insights is produced by Marcia Latta, communications consultant.

*“Eighty percent of success is showing up.”*

— Woody Allen

Chronic absenteeism — students who miss 15 or more days for any reason during the school year — is preventing students from being as successful as they could be. According to The Education Trust, “Research shows that chronic absenteeism is associated with a number of negative consequences for students, including lower achievement, disengagement from school, course failure, and increased risk of dropping out.” <https://edtrust.org/students-cant-wait/chronic-absenteeism/>

When students don’t show up, the coursework becomes harder. Challenging lessons become overwhelming when students miss too much of class and fall behind. This can lead to a cycle of further absences caused by a sense of failure.

**What is absenteeism?**

Absenteeism includes both excused and unexcused rates of absence from school. Truancy, on the other hand, is only unexcused absences. While some students must miss school due to illness or family obligation, the overall rate of absenteeism is climbing:

- Based on the most recent national data, about 13 percent of students miss 15 or more school days.
- Schools demonstrate higher chronic absenteeism rates for some groups of students — especially low-income students, Native students, and students with disabilities.
- On average, schools with higher chronic absenteeism rates have lower proficiency rates, and vice versa, regardless of how chronic absenteeism is defined. This holds for students overall and for each group of students.
- On average, schools with higher chronic absenteeism rates also have higher discipline rates for students overall.
- Research is clear that schools and districts can impact students’ absentee rates. ([www.edtrust.org](http://www.edtrust.org))

**Must be present to win**

Success at school starts with the simplest requirement: showing up. But schools around the country are battling falling attendance rates. Attendance has been found to be the number one indicator for student success, and students need an estimated three days to catch up after missing only a single day. The problem is a serious academic threat with some studies predicting future failure, starting with the youngest

grades: “Students who miss just two or three days each month in kindergarten and first grade may never catch up. <http://bit.ly/2QG0LyA>

Parents have the biggest influence on their children and can help ensure that students are at school every day. It may not seem harmful for kids to skip a day or two a month, but those absences add up to a record of chronic absenteeism. Understanding the big-picture impact may help.

Absences in early grades can have a snowball effect. Chronically absent kids in kindergarten and first grade were significantly behind in reading skills by third grade.

High absenteeism can become a long-term habit. Students who miss school at young ages are more likely to skip school when they are older. They also may be more likely to miss work after they graduate.

Chronic absences can reduce graduation rates and success in college. “In a Rhode Island study, only 11 percent of high school students with chronic absences made it to their second year of college. That’s compared to 51 percent of students who didn’t miss that much school.” <http://bit.ly/2QJxNhh>

Students with special needs or learning differences struggle more when they miss school. Each lesson builds on future lessons, so missing one makes it hard to keep up with the instruction. Also, absent kids miss opportunities to be identified for intervention and extra support. <https://u.org/2MU0dEb>

### **What can parents do?**

Students at every grade miss too much school, but kindergartners and high school students tie for the most absences. Some states, such as California, do not require kindergarten. However, if your child is enrolled in kindergarten, help them develop a habit of attendance by going every day. This long-term habit will reduce the chance that they will skip school in high school.

### **Other tips for parents include:**

- Track your child’s absences. A record of missed days will help you identify possible problems.
- Talk with your child. Try to understand why they do not want to go to school and discuss solutions together.
- Talk to your child’s school. Get advice from a teacher, counselor or principal. School professionals are there to help your child succeed. Be sure to communicate with them when you have concerns.
- Consider a learning evaluation if your child is struggling. He or she may need extra support to be successful.
- Have responses ready when your child says they do not want to go to school. Reluctance to attend may be caused by social anxiety, bullying, learning challenges or health issue. Read a list of recommended parent responses in What to Say When Your Child Doesn’t Want to Go to School: <https://u.org/2tpAug0>.