

New Orleans public schools roll out program to cut student absences

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Nearly a quarter of Orleans Parish's 48,000 public schoolers in the 2017-2018 school year missed 15 to 18 days of class, which is more than 10 percent of the school year. (Shutterstock)

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By [Wilborn P. Nobles III, NOLA.com | The Times-Picayune](#)

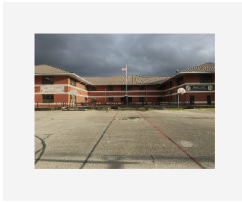
Research shows students who chronically miss school are **less likely** to succeed academically and more likely to drop out of high school. Starting this year, New Orleans public schools are partnering with community leaders to address the city's own high rate of absenteeism through an initiative called "Keeping Kids in School."

Nearly a quarter of the 48,000 students in Orleans Parish public school missed 15 to 18 days of class during the 2017-2018 school year, according to the [Orleans Parish School Board](#), which is helping the initiative. That adds up to more than 10 percent of the school year. Additionally, the latest data shows chronic absenteeism is on the rise in New Orleans in recent years.

Angela Wiggins, executive director of the OPSB's Office of Child Welfare and Attendance, said the new initiative aims to address all the causes of absences, from truancy, or cases where students are intentionally skipping school, to absences caused by medical problems. The school board noted a wide range of issues affect school attendance, including poverty, juvenile arrests, lack of access to social services, and weak, uncoordinated support systems for students and their families.

"What we know is that many kids are enrolled and registered for school but they're not always attending school on a regular basis," Wiggins said.

School board needs money to run Harney, but can't access federal funds: report



The OPSB launched the “Keeping Kids in School” initiative last Monday (Jan. 28) at a breakfast with representatives from [Mayor LaToya Cantrell's](#) office as well as more than 30 community members and representatives from local businesses and non-profits. Attendees [signed letters of commitment](#) agreeing to help do their part to curb absenteeism in their community. Among other ideas, the school district is encouraging community members to mentor chronically absent students.

The OPSB is also asking businesses for help rewarding students who are attending school on a regular basis. Tony Duhon, founder and owner of Premier Automotive, donates a new car to one Orleans Parish public schooler with perfect attendance each year.

Wiggins also called on businesses to look for signs that children are skipping school.

“If you are a business, we’re asking that businesses do not serve kids during school hours,” Wiggins said.

Research from the [U.S. Department of Education](#) shows chronically absent students in preschool, kindergarten and 1st grade are much less likely to read at grade level by the 3rd grade. Students with frequent absences are also more at risk of dropping out of school, the department stated.

Wiggins added community members can do their part as well. She asked residents who see students outside of school between the hours of 9 a.m. and 2 p.m. to report their location to the OPSB Truancy Center by calling 504-218-5386. The center does not punish students, Wiggins said. Rather, it connects students with a team of social workers who work on understanding the reasons why they’re missing school, she said.

“In order for kids to achieve academically, they need to be present in school,” Wiggins said.