



**Testimony of Rashida Young  
Equity and Fidelity Senior Manager  
DC Public Charter School Board**

**Improving School Attendance: Truancy, Chronic Absenteeism, and  
the Implementation of Reform Initiative  
Committee of the Whole  
May 10, 2018**

Chairman Mendelson, Chairman Grosso and Councilmembers, my name is Rashida Young and I am Senior Manager of the Equity and Fidelity Team at the DC Public Charter School Board. In my role, I oversee several indicators of public charter school quality, including attendance and truancy.

As you may know, DC PCSB is an active member of the Every Day Counts! Task Force as well as numerous other initiatives around the city such as the Juveniles in the Care of the District of Columbia working group. We facilitate best practice sharing events, so our schools have an avenue to discuss what is and isn't working to improve student attendance and partner with groups such as Show Up Stand Out. We, like you, are concerned that despite the efforts schools, partner agencies, and we are doing to reduce truancy in the city, we have been unsuccessful in reducing the number of students missing school without an excuse. In fact, as you know, truancy rates are on the rise.

As we shared in October, one tool we use in helping schools address truancy is providing schools with up-to-date comparable attendance data and supporting them in their efforts to monitor their own rates. Additionally, we enforce our Truancy Policy, where we bring schools before our board for a notice of concern when their truancy rate exceeds 30% for elementary and middle schools, 35% for high schools, and 45% for DC PCSB designated "alternative" schools. These notices of concern can affect schools' growth plans, ability to borrow money, and is factored into their charter reviews and renewals. This school year, three school's rates exceeded the threshold and have received a Notice of Concern.

Regarding best practice sharing, we held two school climate brunches where schools shared strategies on improving school culture. And at our most recent charter leaders meeting, we invited staff of two schools that provide buses for their students to share the benefits, challenges, and lessons learned of providing transportation, as it relates to attendance.

Our staff reviews charter sector and school level attendance data monthly. Last month, after seeing that in-seat attendance numbers were dropping, we decided to survey schools to ask about their root causes of chronic absenteeism, strategies they use to improve student attendance, and what supports they'd like DC agencies to provide. The results of the survey, in short, indicate that schools need much more help from all agencies than is currently offered.

DC PCSB received 42 survey responses, 14 of which were anonymous and could not be tied to a specific charter LEA. Those survey responses indicated that 64% of the schools cited transportation as their number one barrier for students coming to school. Anecdotally, we've heard a few reasons for this. Busses are often full when they reach and travel through the city, passing by students at their stops. Both Metrobus and Metrorail can run on unpredictable and unreliable schedules. Bus routes are not necessarily optimized to get students close to where they need to be. Some students in foster care must travel from far away housing in Maryland or Virginia. And in other cases, mom, dad, or a guardian may not own a car or be able to drop them off on a given day.

One school said, "Transportation is an ongoing issue that continues to impact student attendance negatively...Many students have to wake up at 5 a.m. for their commute to school because of the transfers to several buses or the long route by car. Public transportation is not always reliable. Therefore, I would like DC agencies to consider offering students eligibility for city-provided transportation services if they live outside the quadrant where the school is located, are homeless, in Pre-K, and have a 504 Plan."

Another top reason cited by schools was the student being responsible for the care of a sibling or another family member. Many older students have to get their younger siblings to school while the parent is at work. This can also be coupled with the transportation issue if a student's sibling is late in getting ready or happens to be in an inconvenient place relative to the student's own school.

Among the suggestions for supports the schools requested were:

- Improved transportation
- More coordination between CFSA/CSS/DCYRS. They have jurisdictional issues and siloed work.
- Partnerships between schools in the same geographical area
- Assistance with conducting home visits
- Greater access to health services, including asthma education and immunization assistance

- Paid after-school internships for high school and adult students

Before I conclude, there is one issue that I just cited that I would like to expound upon. We have noticed through our conversations with schools that there is room for improvement to ensure city agencies are working cohesively as possible and following up with schools about students on their caseload or in their care. In our survey, some schools noted that they were unaware what occurred with their truancy referrals after they were submitted, particularly students age 14 to 17. Additionally, we recently became aware of an incident where there was confusion over which agency had jurisdiction over a student's whereabouts. One of our schools was trying to locate a child in the custody of CFSA or DYRS. For weeks the school did not know where the student was and was not sure which agency to work with. The school learned weeks later that the student was being detained until a space became available at a group home. We realize there are sometimes barriers to sharing information due to student privacy, but in general we believe increased communication among all DC agencies will only help schools better serve their students.

With the recent passage of the Fair Access to Schools Act, schools are now being asked effectively to address the root cause of a student's issues. Many of these are rooted outside of the school and are difficult for schools to address without more help. We ask that you take a comprehensive look at the issue and realize that the issues are not separate, cannot be addressed by schools alone, and work with us on a comprehensive strategy to assist the students most in need.

We have attached the full results of the survey of my testimony to give you more in-depth information. Thank you for allowing me to testify today. I would be happy to answer any questions.

# DC PCSB ABSENTEEISM SURVEY RESULTS



April 2018

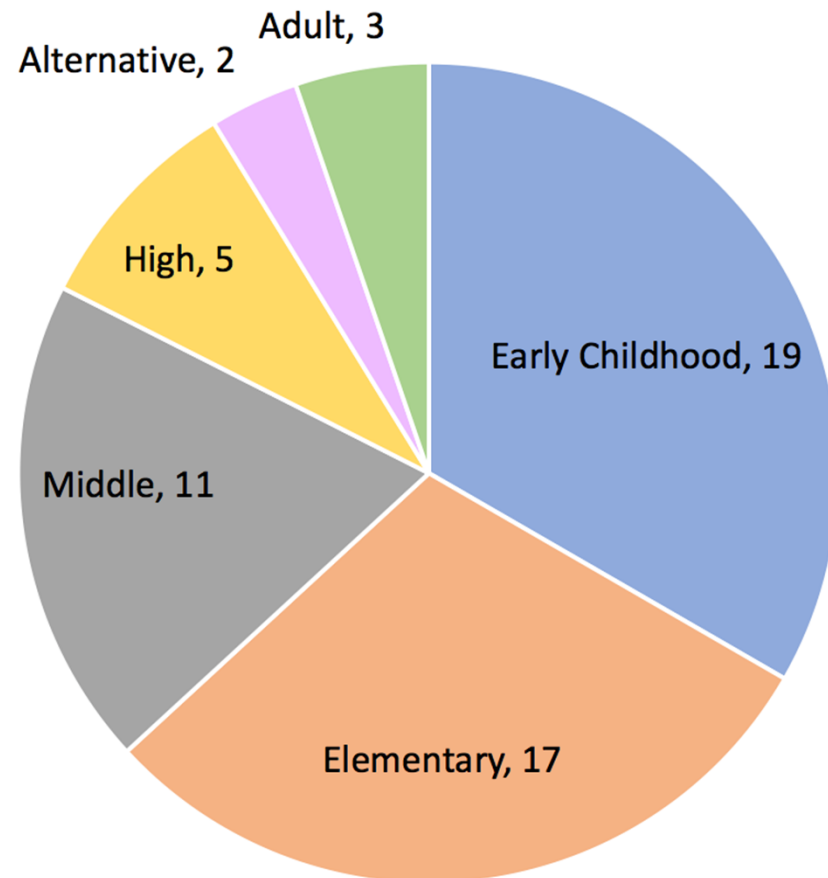
# Absenteeism Survey

- In March 2018, DC PCSB solicited feedback from public charter school leaders and staff regarding:
  1. The drivers of absenteeism/truancy
  2. The strategies they currently use
  3. The resources they believe would effectively combat truancy
- DC PCSB received **42** survey responses (22 LEAs), 14 of which were anonymous (could not be tied to a specific charter LEA)



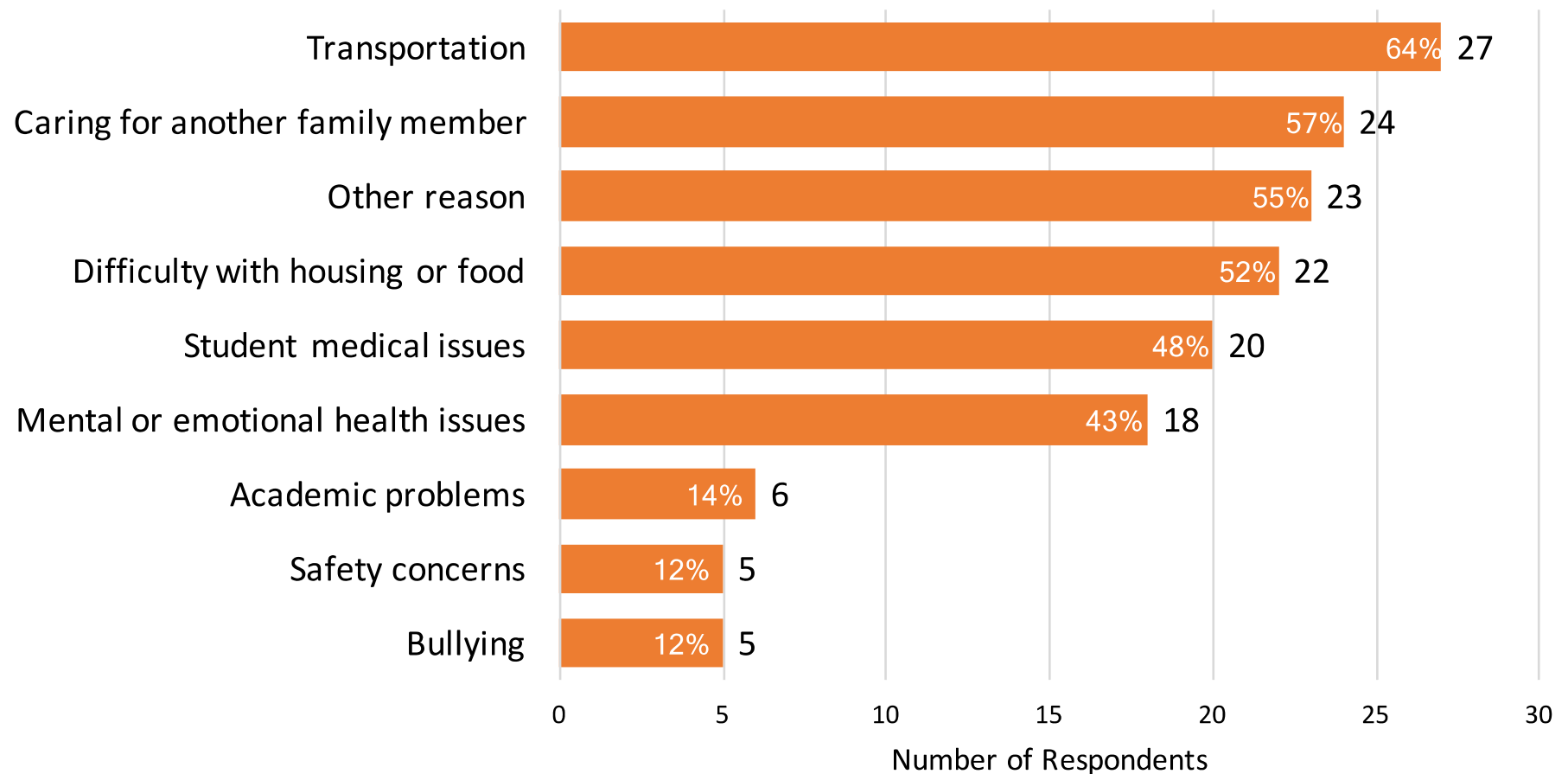
# Student Age Ranges Served by Non-Anonymous Respondents

- The respondents span every student age range and serve multiple age ranges, so the numbers to the right exceed 28



# 1. What are the root causes of chronic absenteeism at your school?

42 Respondents; Respondents could select multiple reasons



## Other root causes provided:

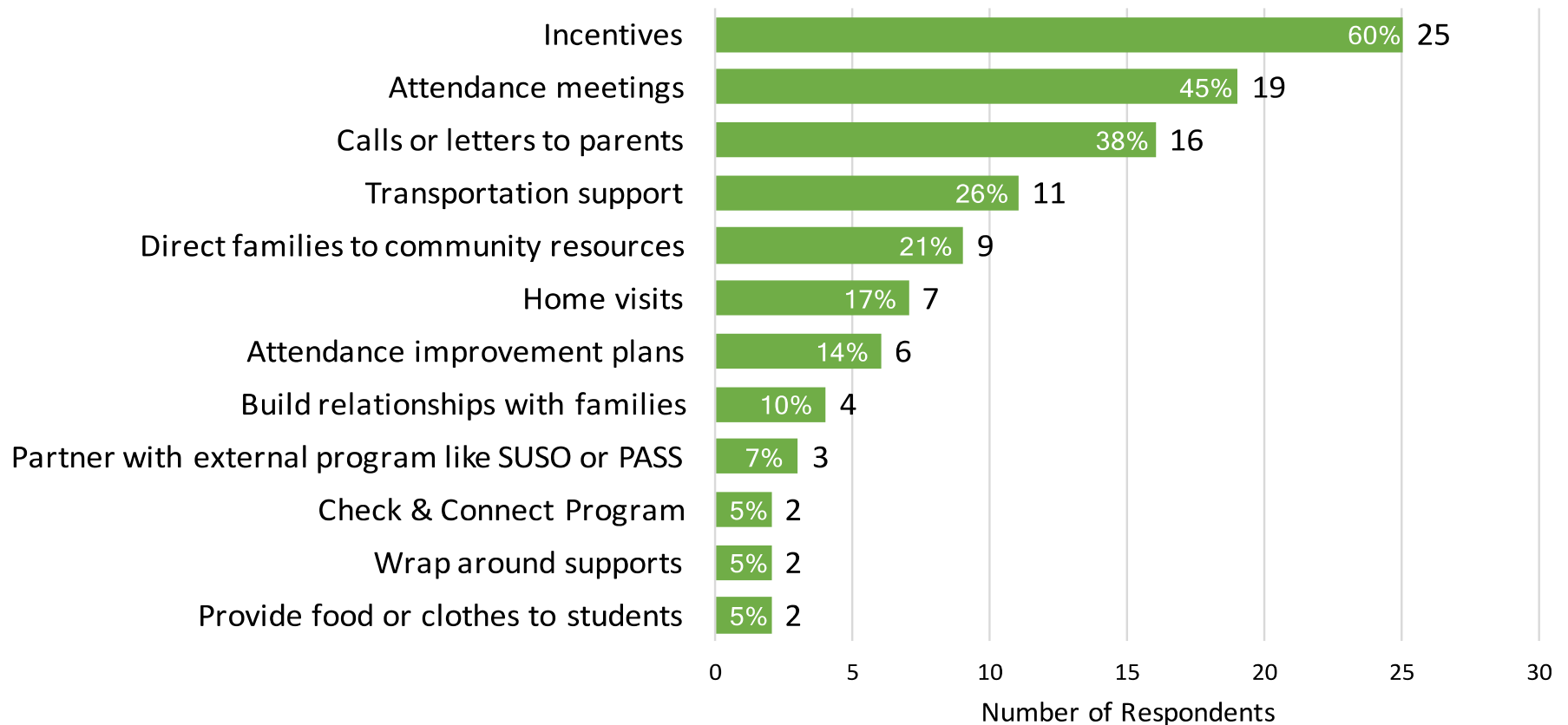
- **Challenges facing families (work schedules; mental/physical health; custody)**
- **Perception of “optional” attendance in Early Childhood Programs**
- Political climate for immigrants
- Homelessness
- Extended family vacations
- Asthma (triggered by weather conditions)
- Poverty





## 2. What strategies/interventions does your school use to improve attendance?

42 Respondents; Respondents could provide multiple strategies



Note: Question 2 was open-ended; responses were simplified into categories for visualization purposes. Strategies used by 2+ respondents are included above.

## Other strategies/interventions provided:

- One-on-one intervention support for highly truant students
- Encouraging carpooling
- Hosting parent breakfasts
- Assistance with before and aftercare programs
- On-staff attendance counselor or family liaison
- Providing work to students while at home

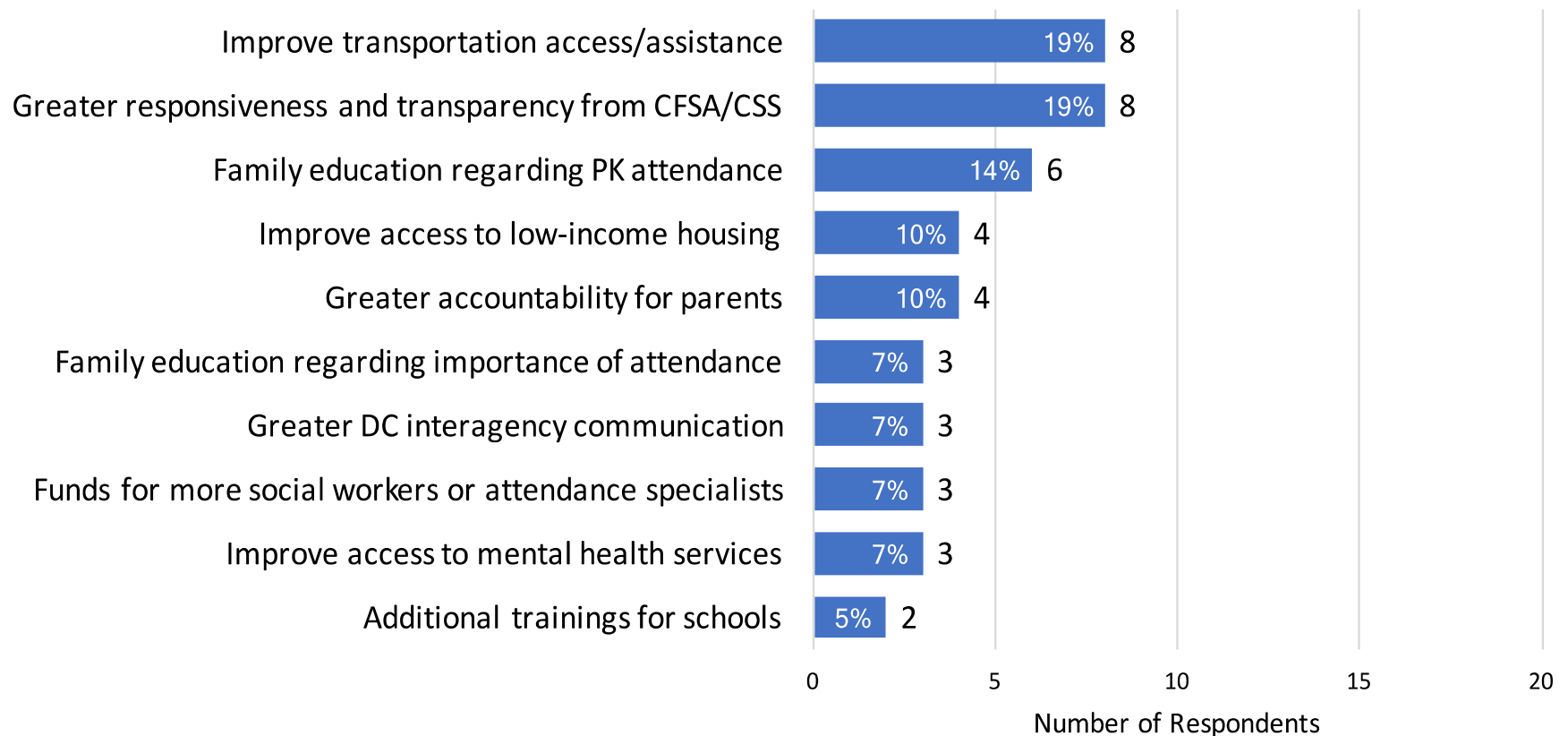


## Selected Quotes from Question 2 Responses

- “On one level, we utilize **home visits**, the **development of relationships with parents**, and the creation of **positive reasons** for the child to desire to attend school on time. On another level, we attempt to instill **hope**, which often times has been lost, and teach the young people about the **greater systems at play** around them that adversely affect their life.”
- “We have our own **food and clothes closet**. We also have **metro cards** to help with transportation.”
- “Daily **email messages, calls and text** to parents/guardians when a day is missed. Truancy follow up calls, letters to the family stating how truant child is, **meetings with family members** and staff to coordinate how to improve truancy issue (and discuss days already missed).”
- “If there is an issue where a family is having difficulties with attending school because of **housing/food** our school counselor has given family resources on **housing assistance** and or **social services contacts**. If it is an instance where the parent is unable to afford transportation to get students to/from school we have found ways to either **provide money for WMATA transportation** for parent and/or **secure a ride** the student to get to school if possible.”
- “**Monthly Perfect Attendance Club** with a small **activity** and **public recognition** of students with 100% ISA for the prior month.”

### 3. What supports would you like DC agencies to provide to help improve student attendance?

42 Respondents; Respondents could provide multiple suggestions



Note: Question 3 was open-ended; responses were simplified into categories for visualization purposes. Strategies used by 2+ respondents are included above.

## Other suggested supports

- Partnerships between schools in the same geographical area
- Assistance with conducting home visits
- Greater access to health services, including asthma education and immunization assistance
- Additional funds for classes serving ages 0-2
- Increased visibility of available community services
- Paid after-school internships



## Selected Quotes from Question 3 Responses

- “**Transportation** is an ongoing issue that continues to impact student attendance negatively...Many students have to wake up at 5 a.m. for their commute to school because of the **transfers to several buses** or the long route by car. Public transportation is **not always reliable**. Therefore, I would like DC agencies to consider **offering students eligibility for transportation services** if they live outside the quadrant where the school is located, are homeless, in Pre-K, and have a 504 Plan.”
- “I feel like the **Court systems** should move **faster** when truancy paperwork is put in so that the families know that this is a serious situation. Most of the time I don't get any **feedback** from the Truancy packets until May and by that time no one cares because school is getting out.”
- “More **public awareness at early grades**...we need more than “every day counts”, we need to distribute **facts** about why they count. Present **data about attendance impacts** on passage/graduation. Agency assistance should also include some sort of **dedicated assistance** for **families with multiple years** of attendance issues- if your student missed more than 10% of the school year last year, **summer interventions and connections** should occur to ensure other wrap-around (non-school based) services are offered.”

## Selected Quotes from Question 3 Responses (cont'd)

- “I would love to see DC agencies such as CFSA and Truancy Court **hold parents more accountable** for improving attendance by attending several mandatory workshops / parenting classes when referrals are made for Educational Neglect / Truancy. I would like to see programs such as the **PASS Program** be made **mandatory** when schools submit a referral for Truancy or other support that may be needed. Currently, parents have the option of declining services.”
- “Because school is not mandatory at **ages 3 and 4**, many parents dismiss the idea of mandatory attendance. Any support that DC agencies could provide in **messaging** the importance of **daily preschool education** would be appreciated.”
- “**Follow through with schools' reportings of chronic attendance.** Find a way to **hold parents accountable** the way in which you hold schools accountable. **Communicate** with schools **what steps have been taken with families** who have been reported, especially those reported on multiple occasions for chronic attendance issues.”

# Contact Us

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