<Insert Date>

Dear teachers,

You know first-hand that student attendance is essential to academic success, but families and students sometimes do not realize how quickly absences can add up. Missing 10% or more of instructional time—for any reason—means that a student is “chronically absent,” and chronic absenteeism is directly linked to reduced academic and social outcomes.

Tennessee students who are chronically absent in kindergarten are 15 percentage points less likely to reach proficiency in either 3rd grade math or ELA. Nationally, four out of five students who miss more than 10% of both kindergarten and first grade are unable to read on grade-level by third grade. The problem continues as students get older. Tennessee students who are chronically absent in 9th grade are 30 percentage points less likely to earn an on-time diploma (62% vs. 92%).

**The good news is that research tells us that parents trust teachers more than anybody else when it comes to hearing about their child’s absences and are most open to receiving attendance information directly from teachers.**

That is why I am asking for your help in making attendance a priority for our students. As we start a new school year I will be communicating directly with parents and caregivers about the importance of good attendance, but you are uniquely positioned to continuously share and reinforce positive messages about attendance.

As part of your initial communication with parents, please remind them of the importance of good attendance and encourage them to reach out to you if they have any concerns or are in need of assistance. Additionally, please consider using the attached talking points for conversations with parents when a student’s absences exceed 10% of instructional days; that is, two or more days missed per month.

By working together, I am confident we can ensure that our students take advantage of the opportunity to learn in our classrooms every day.

Thank you for your partnership,

**Tips for talking with parents about absences**

1. Approach the issue of out of concern, rather than compliance. *Make parents feel supported, rather than guilty and in trouble. Remind them that attending school is an opportunity for their child to learn.*
2. Share the student’s number of absences with the parent. *Mention that most students in Tennessee miss six or less school days each year.*
3. Refer to absences by month, rather than by year. *Point out that just “2 days missed per month” or “one day every two weeks” has consequences.*
4. Use simple, easy-to-understand language. *Avoid complicated statistics, hyperboles, or metaphors.*
5. Be realistic about what you are asking parents to do. *Avoid implying that parents should send children to school when they’re sick.*
6. Frame the discussion around “absences” rather than “attendance.” *Talking about “attendance” validates what parents already believe they do; talking about “absence” focuses their attention on what they’re missing.*
7. Describe the compounding impact of absences. *Help parents understand that learning is sequential—an absence is a missed opportunity to learn something their child will need in order to understand more difficult material later. For older students, good attendance transfers to success in college and/or the workplace.*
8. Give parents specific reasons why absences matter, rather than making vague statements. *Say things like…“You cannot make up for too many absences with homework or take-home assignments” or “Too many absences will allow them to fall behind in reading, writing, and math”.*
9. Connect parents to the class curriculum to help them understand what their child may be missing. *Say things like…“We are learning to identify numerators and denominators this week. Please make sure your child does not miss school because his/her understanding of this lesson will make him better prepared for next week’s lesson on adding fractions with common denominators”.*
10. Encourage parents to do everything they can to ensure their child does not miss school. *Ask for reasons why the child was out and connect them to appropriate resources (e.g., transportation issues, child care, clothing, etc.)*
11. If policy allows, consider using text messages to communicate with parents about absences as one component of ongoing and regular school-to-parent communications. *Many parents rely on text messages more than any other form of communication (including phone calls and emails). It can be used to help build trust and regular communication between parents and the teacher.*