

Counselor's Corner



October 2018

The opening days of school conjure up images of backpacks stuffed with notebooks and unsharpened pencils, bulletin boards freshly decorated by teachers, and students showing off new clothes to old friends.

But even in these early days of the new school year, some students already are heading toward academic trouble: They're missing too many days of school. Across the country, as many as 7.5 million students miss nearly a month of school every year—absences that can correlate with poor performance at every grade level.

This trend starts as early as kindergarten and continues through high school, contributing to achievement gaps and ultimately to dropout rates. We can't afford to think of absenteeism as simply an administrative matter. Good attendance is central to student achievement and our broader efforts to improve schools. All of our investments in curriculum and instruction won't amount to much if students aren't showing up to benefit from them.

Problems with absenteeism start surprisingly early: National research shows that one in 10 kindergarten and first-grade students are chronically absent, meaning that they miss 10 percent of the school year, or about 18 days of instruction, because of excused and unexcused absences.

Chronic absence can have consequences throughout a child's academic career. Children who are chronically absent in kindergarten and first grade are less likely to read proficiently by third grade, and students who don't read well by that critical juncture are more likely to struggle in school. They are also more likely to be chronically absent in later years, since they never developed good attendance habits.

By middle school, chronic absence becomes one of the leading indicators that a child will drop out of high school. By ninth grade, it's a better indicator than how well a student did on eighth grade tests.

Chronic absence isn't just about truancy or willfully skipping school. Instead, children stay home because of chronic illness, unreliable transportation, housing issues, bullying or simply because their parents don't understand how quickly absences add up—and affect school performance.

After all, 18 days is only two days a month in a typical school year. This is true whether absences are excused or unexcused, whether they come consecutively or sporadically throughout the school year.

So how do we turn this around?

A key step is understanding the critical role you as parents/caregivers play in getting children to school on time every day. It's up to parents/caregivers to build a habit of good attendance, enforce bedtimes and other routines and avoid vacations while school is in session. Teachers will reinforce these messages and provide positive messages of encouragement for students who attend school daily and on time.

We are also going to continue to take a close look at our attendance numbers to see how many students are missing 10 percent or more of school days and who they are. We'll set attendance goals and send reminders home when a student's absences begin to add up. Just as we use test scores to measure the progress that students and schools are making, we will look at chronic absence rates.

But school district can't do this alone, we need the continued support from parents, caregivers, and the community to join us in our effort to make every day count. If you are experiencing difficulty in getting your child to school on time and on a daily basis, please reach out to your child's guidance counselor. The guidance counselors or the Student Assistance Counselor will work with you on developing a plan to ensure that your child attends school on a consistent basis.

Information from www.attendanceworks.com.

For further details or information, please contact your child's guidance counselor:

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