Preparing Students for Success — The Importance of Daily Attendance

Based on national data, chronic absences in kindergarten were associated with lower academic performance in first grade. The impact is twice as great for students from low-income families. Other studies have found a strong relationship between sixth-grade attendance and the percentage of students graduating on time or within a year of their expected high school graduation. Chronic absenteeism increases achievement gaps at the elementary, middle, and high school levels making it more difficult to stay on track to graduate. Furthermore, students with histories of chronic absenteeism have a higher chance of becoming involved with the juvenile justice system.

Key Features
Fresno Unified is committed to:

- Working with students and their families to ensure that all students attend school regularly
- Understanding there are a variety of factors that may influence school attendance and helping families to overcome issues/barriers
- Providing strength-based and culturally appropriate interventions and services including:
  - case management
  - individual and group counseling
  - home visits
  - parent education
  - referrals to school/community based resources

What is the legal definition of a truant student?
- A student is deemed a truant when he or she has been reported as having unexcused absences three or more times per school year.
- Truancy letters are sent to parents informing them that their child has reached three or six or nine unexcused absences. This is a district-wide procedure that takes place on an ongoing basis in hopes of improving communication and decreasing overarching issues that cause absenteeism.

Helping Kids Graduate Ready for College and Career
Because students raised in poverty benefit the most from being in school, one of the most effective strategies for providing pathways out of poverty is to do what it takes to get these students in school every day. This alone will drive up achievement, high school graduation, and college attainment rates. Attendance matters.

Fresno Unified has added 30 more minutes of instructional time at 40 elementary schools, adding nearly a month of instruction by the end of the school year. This investment in time and instruction is lost if students aren’t in school. The Georgia Department of Education found that just a 3 percent improvement in attendance — five additional days -- would have led more than 55,000 students to pass end-of-year standardized tests in reading, English, or mathematics in grades 3 to 8. The biggest impact was for students who missed between five and 10 days of school, suggesting that missing even a week to two weeks can have a significant negative impact on achievement (Barge, 2011).

Chronic absenteeism poses a challenge at each of our more than 100 school sites. That is why Fresno Unified has invested in additional attendance staff to help support school sites, students and parents through our School Attendance Review Board (SARB) process. SARB was created to help truant students and their parents or guardians solve school attendance and/or behavior problems with the help of available school and community resources. The purpose of SARB is to work collaboratively on developing strategies (prevention, intervention, and enforcement) that will help students improve school attendance and behavior while diverting cases away from the juvenile justice system and ultimately help them get back on track at school.

For additional information contact:
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