



Does Regular School Attendance Matter?

By Beula Postlewait, Communications Representative

I was reading an article in the local newspaper which talked about the effect of attendance on students. A school district in an eastern state had a strict code of attendance. A kindergartener had fourteen absences in five months, half of them without explanation. The school district contacted the prosecutor's office, and the mother was convicted for violating the state's compulsory school attendance law. This led me to do some research on how important daily attendance is for learning and achievement. I went to the U.S. Department of Education's website to gain some information.

The article, "Attendance in the Early Grades: Why It Matters for Reading," * revealed that in 2014 fourth graders were not reading proficiently, according to national assessments. Eighty per cent of them had not reached proficiency. According to the article, attendance had a significant impact on those reading deficiencies.

The article emphasized that good attendance habits begin at home. Parents must understand the importance of regular attendance and help the children get to school every day if possible. There are many reasons why younger students may miss school. There seems to be a higher degree of poor attendance among low-income families where the families have fewer academic resources available to them. "Low-income children are four times more likely to be chronically absent...

These children are less likely to have resources outside of school to help them catch up.” The good news is that when the absences decrease, the literacy levels go up.

Family Attitudes Affect Attendance

Parents who believe attendance is important have children with higher attendance scores. Those parents who do not believe attendance is important had children with double the absenteeism rates. Some parents may think they earn their child’s love by allowing the child to miss a day of school!

How can school personnel help families improve their attitude about attendance?

1. Communicate with the parents the value of good attendance. Let the parents know how much difference it makes when students attend daily. Give them examples of the increase in learning levels when attendance is consistent and the decrease in levels when the child misses too much instruction time. Point out that the parents, administrators, and teaching staff have shared responsibility in helping a child to learn and succeed. Teachers lose valuable instruction time for the whole class when they must take time to help one or two students catch up to the level of the other students.
2. Offer incentives to recognize and build a culture of attendance. This should be a school-wide effort that allows all parents to be involved. The incentives do not need to be expensive. It could include extra recess time, special certificates, a class party, permission to wear a particular type of clothing for a day, recognition during daily announcements, hallway bulletin boards highlighting classrooms with best attendance. Let the students suggest some type of reward that is within the limits you set.
3. What will make the attendance incentives work?

Teachers should let the students know they miss the students when they are absent, and every student in the class is important to the class.

Creating interclass competition can make this emphasis more fun for the students.

Encourage the students to be in class each day, but do not pressure students to come to school when they are sick. Perfect attendance is rarely possible, and you do not want students to feel they must come to school when they are ill. Recognize improved attendance. Keep the increments small—weekly and then perhaps monthly recognition.

My daughter’s school has a section of the wall near the office where attendance is recognized. The principal posts a large picture of the class with the highest percentage of attendance for the month on the wall for all the students to see. During the morning announcements, the principal tells the attendance percentage for the previous day and encourages the students to come every day.

Do not forget to emphasize timeliness as well. Some families always send the children to school late. Encourage these families to be on time so the students can benefit from the complete school day. Every classroom must participate in this endeavor to create a climate of timeliness and good attendance throughout the school.

4. Identify the barriers to attendance and work with parents to eradicate those barriers.

Some of the common barriers to attendance are transportation problems, parents' job issues, a student developing anxiety issues about other students or the subject matter, and lack of schedule and organization in the home. Some parents may need help to arrange for carpools or transportation to and from school. Encourage parents to schedule medical appointments after school hours or during school breaks. Talk with parents about arranging alternate plans for getting kids to school before a time of crisis arises. Alert parents that school counselors are available for students who develop fear or anxiety about going to school. Encourage parents to train their children before they go to bed to have a designated place to lay out their clothes for the next day and any homework or materials needed, including the lunch bag.

The habits required for good attendance in school begin a model of attendance that will help the students as they transition to higher learning and/or job opportunities. People who are continually late for work or frequently absent find it difficult to keep a job.

Help students and parents understand the importance of attending consistently and being on time. Everyone benefits when that happens.

Resource:

“Attendance in the Early Grades: Why It Matters for Reading”—

<https://www.attendanceworks.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Attendance-in-the-Early-Grades.pdf>

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