

Op-Ed...Winter 2012

Attendance---Every Day Counts

One of the most important aspects of providing a successful educational program for students is to do all that we can to make sure all students are in class as much as possible. Schools in Calaveras Unified have an annual average attendance rate anywhere from 93%-96%, and we are very active and pro-active in working to increase the percentages on an annual basis. The benefits of positive student attendance are numerous and it takes a team effort (involving students, staff and parents) to maximize our capacity in this area.

Academic Impact

Data shows that students with poor attendance generally perform at lower levels academically. The connection is simplistic in that if students miss school---are unable to access direct instruction from the teacher and support/direction on assignments---they most likely will not be as successful as they could be had they been in class. We tend to view attendance rates of 90% to 95% as positive and acceptable. However, even in this range, the amount of instructional time that is lost is significant. A student who falls in the range of a 90% to 95% attendance rate for a year has missed anywhere from 54 to 108 hours (elementary school) and/or 63 to 126 hours (middle/high school) of classroom time. These lost educational opportunities accumulate and have a negative impact on a student's academic growth.

Fiscal Impact

Calaveras Unified receives approximately \$30 per day per student. We only receive this funding (referred to as ADA....average daily attendance) if the student attends school. It does not matter if the absence is "excused" based upon California Education Code (for reasons such as illness, medical, bereavement, etc.), if the student is not in attendance, we do not receive the funding. Maximizing our funding level is especially critical given the consistent onslaught of budget cuts we must contend with thanks to the continual legislatively-lobbed fiscal firebombs we endure. The financial impact of improved student attendance is dramatic for any school district. For CUSD, if we were able to increase our overall annual attendance rate by just 1%, we would generate an additional \$172,095. For perspective, this would almost enough money to help fund three teachers (on average). To do this, it would require every student to attend school just two more days in a given year. Just two days of making a different choice in dealing with a cold, with fatigue, with motivation, with scheduling of appointments/family outings, etc.

Ideas

Parents are a significant partner in our attempts to improve student attendance. On a day to day basis, it can be easy to lose sight of the cumulative impact of missing school. Unless the student is running a fever, vomiting or displaying other significant symptoms of illness or injury they should be in class and parents need to be strong in encouraging/motivating their children in this area. Parents can also help by scheduling appointments for after school. If, however, this is not possible, it is extremely helpful if they can at least get the student to initially check in to school to get assignments for the day (to minimize the academic impact) and to be registered as attending (to minimize the fiscal impact). Also, working to schedule family vacation/trips when CUSD is on a break is important to our cause, both academically as well as financially.

Again, this is a team effort with tangible consequences on either end. Positive attendance equals greater academic success, increased funding and growth of school programs as a result. Negative attendance contributes to lower levels of academic achievement, decreased funding and further reductions to programs. Collectively, we must all take on this challenge so that we maximize our opportunities to help prepare our children for the future...for life.