

Psych Savvy

ANCHORAGE SCHOOL DISTRICT PSYCHOLOGY DEPARTMENT

*Diane Poage,
Director*

*Joan Bohmann, Ph.D. NCSP
Editor*

Improving School Attendance

By Chris Tower Zafren, NCSP, School Psychologist
November, 2004

Regular school attendance is important for so many reasons. Strong attendance is highly related to academic progress, self-esteem, graduation rates, and exposure to a variety of learning experiences and persons of diverse backgrounds. Poor attendance has a cumulative effect with students finding it harder and harder to keep up the more they are absent. Students who fall behind academically are more likely to drop out of school. High school graduates are twice as likely to be employed than someone who doesn't complete high school. College graduates earn more than twice as much as a high school graduate.

Listed below are steps that can be taken at various levels to promote school attendance and improve student connection to school. We can be proud that many of these ideas are in place in our school district.

School District Level

- Consistent rules for tracking attendance so problems can be identified easily.
- Summer school, peer tutoring or Saturday school for students exhibiting poor attendance so they don't fall further and further behind.
- Provide Homelessness support programs/Child in Transition services,
- Breakfast programs help provide important nutrition so children are able to focus on learning rather than their hunger.
- Close high-school campuses at lunchtime to reduce temptation for student truancy and promote safety during the day.
- Ask parents to avoid scheduling doctor's appointments, vacations, sports trips during school time

School Level:

- Immediate phone contacts to check on absences. Automated programs are in place in our secondary schools.
- Involve all school staff in promoting good attendance.
- Tutorial assistance for students with academic deficits.
- Report chronic truancy to the Office of Children's Services or to the Police/School partnership liaison officer.

- In-school incentive programs for regular attendance.
- Behavioral contracting to improve attendance.
- Refer parents who are struggling with attendance issues for counseling assistance.
- Home visits to establish a working relationship with parents.
- Provide school-based mentors for at risk students.
- Ensure a safe school environment.
- After school sports or other programs at the school site give students a chance to make new friends, experience a positive atmosphere, and feel a sense of accomplishment.
- Teachers should provide students with positive regard and interact with the entire class (preferably asking open-ended questions).
- Teachers should be careful to minimize verbal reprimands and other forms of punishment, and de-emphasize competition in the classroom.

Parents:

- Know your child's friends.
- Maintain contact with your child's teacher.
- Call to confirm absences
- Try to schedule vacations and appointments that match school vacation days to reduce disruptions to learning.
- Seek assistance if your student is struggling academically.
- Contact the school immediately if your student complains of being scared to go to school.
- Create schedules to ensure adequate sleep and time to get ready for school in the morning.
- Encourage good nutrition in your home to foster learning.

Community Level:

- Firm sanctions for truancy. Some states link driver's license eligibility to regular school attendance or mandate court ordered counseling for truant students.
- Fund Truancy officers. Some juvenile justice programs have grants to support school attendance and reduce delinquency.
- Create alliances with schools, social service agencies and law enforcement to address truancy problems in the community.
- Assist students and educators with career exploration and related career education before and during high school.
- Get involved with school-business partnerships.

Resources:

Baker, M., Sigmon, J., & Nugent, M. Truancy Reduction: Keeping Kids in School. Retrieved July 13, 2004 from <http://www.ncjrs.org/pdffiles1/ojjdp/188947.pdf>

Manual to Combat Truancy prepared by the U.S. Department of Education
www.ojp.wsdoj.gov/ojjdp

Student Truancy. Retrieved July 13, 2004 from
<http://www.kidsource.com/education/student.truancy.html>