

TRANSCRIPT

Utah State Superintendent Remarks

SPEAKER Joel Coleman
Superintendent
State of Utah

EVENT TITLE *Every Day Counts Policy Forum: Developing Utah Solutions to Increase Attendance and Improve Student Outcomes*

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SYDNEE DICKSON

Without further ado, I'd like to turn the time over to my friend and mentor and current boss, Joel Coleman.

JOEL COLEMAN

Thank you, Ann, and Dr. Dickson, especially, for your kind comments. So it's actually an honor for me to be here and support this today. I think it's fantastic, and it's nice to just pick up the ball for a short amount of time to carry it on from where Dr. Menlove started, and all the rest of you who have done so much on this. When we ... the first thing that came to my mind when I realized I'd be making some brief comments at a forum on chronic absenteeism was just the word *absenteeism*, and I started thinking of my time in high school as a junior at Olympus High, and I don't think I would qualify under the definition of chronic absenteeism. But there were a few courses and a few opportunities that my friends and I took to educate ... to self-educate at a little coffee shop called Bagel Nosh up the street, and ... until our mothers found out about it, and that's what ended our chronic absenteeism.

But honestly, you know, we're not here to talk about that. We're here to talk about a real issue today, and it's exciting to me that we have the kind of data, the kind of team work, that goes together to look at something like this and hopefully find some solutions. As I read through some of the research surrounding this, I realize what we're talking about today, we'll have to deal with co-variants—things like homelessness and mobility; we'll have to look at other demographic factors. But what's most impressive to me is, it's not always what people assume it is when you talk about students with chronic absenteeism. There are those students who are most at risk, and they are addressed under many different initiatives and ways to emphasize their needs, and they are certainly a significant part of this.

I'm most interested in what we do to shake up the thinking a little bit—about the status quo kind of thinking—where people just make certain assumptions about the other students who don't fit the demographics necessarily, with the key indicators you would assume would be suffering from chronic absenteeism. And so, for reasons like that, I'm very excited it's just

going to be an open, honest dialogue, and that you will be learning from each other as well as from the experts who have sacrificed so much of their time and their professional talents to put this together today.

It's always a challenge, when you talk about implementing new policies, to find that balance. I firmly believe that whatever we—"we," whatever "we" is—come up with at the state level here, I know that it's going to have to be vetted, and there's going to have to be a meaningful dialogue with people at the local level. And what I mean by that is not just the LEAs, the local school districts and charters. But what I also mean by that is the populations that they serve, including parents who are such, of course, key players and the fundamental educators of their children.

I know with something like chronic absenteeism, we want to target the issue without necessarily criminalizing other students who perform well, but emphasizing the things that really need to happen. And so it's my hope that today will be a tremendous success, and I have every reason to expect that because of the caliber of you and of those who have put this together. And so it's probably important to understand that we're having this forum right now because it's the beginning of the school year. We need to ... there's not a lag time where we kind of work on the problem and work through it. It's got to start now where we address this. But also, September is Attendance Awareness Month, and across the country it's supported by organizations like Attendance Works and the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading, whom we have here today with us. And schools, cities, and states, and others can also sign on to this campaign to show support for that. And I know you probably would love to hear from me for a lot longer time, but what I think I should probably do right now is introduce our lieutenant governor.