



TRANSCRIPT

Video: Attendance Matters – Parlier Unified School District

NARRATOR

Attending school every day really matters. When students miss school, they miss out on learning, which can have lasting effects from grade to grade and hurt their chances to graduate. With about 8 million students nationwide missing significant numbers of school days each year, absenteeism is no small problem.

Fortunately, it's a problem we can address – by joining together as families, schools, and communities to make sure that students are present and accounted for every day.

Students are considered “chronically absent” when they miss 10 percent or more of school days for any reason – whether their absence is excused by a parent or guardian or unexcused. That 10 percent is just two days a month.

There's a lot of evidence showing that when absences add up, student achievement goes down. For example, chronically absent preschool and kindergarten students are academically and developmentally behind their classmates who attend school regularly; by 3rd grade, chronically absent students have lower reading and math achievement, signaling academic problems ahead; being chronically absent in 6th grade raises the likelihood of not graduating from high school; and students are 7 times more likely to drop out if they are chronically absent even just one year between 8th and 12th grade.

It's also worrying that chronic absence is so widespread. Nationwide, about 1 in 7 students is chronically absent. In California, 1 of every 10 students is chronically absent. And in many communities, the rate is even higher. These rates also vary by grade level. Absenteeism is typically high in kindergarten, dips in the elementary grades, and then increases from the middle grades up, peaking in high school.

To better understand the causes and consequences of missing school, let's meet two students, Ricky and Crystal, who are like many students we know.

Ricky loves school. Every day he arrives on time and ready to participate. Crystal likes school too, but like her siblings, she has missed so many days this year that she's dropped behind in her learning and also feels left out socially.

Some of the common reasons students like Crystal miss school are problems with transportation, housing, or health; being bullied; or feeling discouraged about academic struggles.

In some cases, parents – or students themselves – don't realize how important daily attendance is to school success.



While Ricky is on track to move up through the grades and earn a high school diploma, Crystal's multiple absences have caused a number of setbacks. She struggles with reading and has fallen behind her classmates, which affects her attitude and behavior at school, resulting in school office visits and causing her to miss even more class time. It's also caused her to lose out on recess and some other activities she likes, further separating her from classmates.

By being chronically absent this year, Crystal is headed for more academic trouble in years to come.

Chronically absent students need help in avoiding the barriers that can limit school attendance. And schools are using a number of promising practices to boost attendance for students like Crystal.

Here in California's Central Valley, Parlier Unified School District is making a difference by using data to monitor absenteeism, raising awareness about chronic absenteeism, building a culture that promotes good attendance, taking care of students' needs, and working with partners like its school-based health center.

PRAXADES TORRES, DIRECTOR OF CHILD WELFARE AND ATTENDANCE, PARLIER UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

So a couple of years ago, Parlier's attendance wasn't doing too good. But after some hard work, some dedication from our entire staff and community, Parlier has actually reduced the chronic absenteeism to be one of the lowest in the state of California.

We've organized our district around a slogan, "Every student, every classroom, every day." And those aren't just words. Those are things that we take to heart.

NARRATOR

To reduce chronic absence, the district first turned to data to identify which students have so many absences that they need some form of support...and then it turned to superheroes for help.

PRAXADES TORRES

We use data. We do it daily, we do it weekly, and, of course, we do it monthly. We know which students are missing, we know which students need support, we know what parents need support, and we go get them.

You know it started when I happened to pick up a student and he told me, "Man, you're like a superhero, I see you everywhere," and that just popped into my head and said, "You know what? Superheroes are everywhere."

STUDENT SUPERHEROES

Attendance matters every day!



PRAXADES TORRES

The way we came up with our campaign was, we looked at superheroes as being good versus evil. And the evil, of course, being the barriers that our families and our students go through. And, of course, the superhero part would be our teachers, our district staff, everyone that dealt with these students. And, of course, we were going to build up these kids to be superheroes of their own.

NARRATOR

For some students, attending school every day is challenging. Giving consistent messages about the importance of attendance and providing supportive interventions are key to reducing chronic absence.

PRAXADES TORRES

So as you come in to our community you'll see a billboard that says, "Attendance Matters." We flood our community with the message that attendance matters, so for us, attendance is huge. We do promote it, and we love to get the word across to our community.

LYDIA MARTINEZ, POSITIVE BEHAVIOR INTERVENTIONS AND SUPPORTS COORDINATOR, PARLIER UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

Here at Parlier Unified School District we have been working really hard to improve the school culture, to create a positive school culture where students want to be in school. And by doing so we have been able to increase attendance.

ALAN MACEDO, PRINCIPAL, MATTHEW J. BRLETIC ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Every kid is important and that goes from the ABCs: academics, attendance, behavior, and character. Knowing our kids by name, greeting them every morning out on the curb, talking to parents, creates a welcoming and safe learning environment for students.

(To students) Hey, hey, good morning! How are you, sir? Good. Good morning, sunshine. How are you? Hey, Cougars. Good morning, good morning, good morning, and good morning!

Students can earn golden Cougar dollars, and if they receive 30 per class, they get a VIP table in the cafeteria where they get to choose what's on the menu, the table is dressed up, and they're recognized during the announcements. If they exceed that, they get an extended recess. It's great and Cougars absolutely love it.

(On PA system) Good morning, Cougar nation! And congratulations to Miss Van Wallace's 6th grade class on the attendance awards. You'll get the banner and then you'll also get the trophy, and the two golden Cougar dollars. And in the lower grades, congratulations to Miss Paulino's second grade class for attendance awards. We're very, very proud of you for 97 percent.



STUDENTS

Yay!

VERONICA CAUFIELD, GUIDANCE INSTRUCTIONAL SPECIALIST, JOHN C. MARTINEZ ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Why is coming to school every day so important?

STUDENT

Coming to school every day is important because you can learn stuff.

STUDENTS

(Singing) School is important for everyone, you'll learn a lot and you'll have fun. Learning to read and write every day will get you ready for your career, hooray!

YESENIA FLORES, ATTENDANCE SECRETARY, PARLIER UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

When kids don't come to school we try to figure out what's going on in their lives. We do home visits. We find out that kids sometimes they're missing school not because they want to, just because sometimes they have problems in their life. And we try to help them with transportation, clothes, food, and even haircuts.

FRANCISCO RAMOS, BARBER, PHAT BOBBY'S CUTS

Sometimes all it takes is a haircut for a kid to go back to school.

YESENIA FLORES

When we visit our families, we send this message that we care and we're there to support them in any type of way.

NARRATOR

The school-based health center is located in the district, but it serves the entire community.

ALICIA GALLEGOS, HEALTH CARE ASSOCIATE, UNITED HEALTH CENTERS

Here we work closely with the students, families, in providing clinical support. We play a very big role in helping students be healthy so that they're not missing out in school, and also increasing their attendance.

CRYSTAL SAUCEDA, MEDICAL ASSISTANT, UNITED HEALTH CENTERS

So here to the left we have our automated vitals station. And we're going to come on in to one of the rooms. You'll see our lab room where we do our own labs and we prep our own immunizations.



BLAKE CARPENTER, DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS, UNITED HEALTH CENTERS

Healthy students create healthy attendance.

LINZY URRUTIA, PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT, UNITED HEALTH CENTERS

As the medical provider, I work closely with the local educators and families to help care for the students so that they don't miss out on school time due to illness or injury or behavioral health needs. The most common health concerns we deal with is asthma, allergies, colds, sports injuries, medication management, and as well as medication for behavioral health needs.

CHRYSTAL HEDLIN, CLINICAL SOCIAL WORKER, UNITED HEALTH CENTERS

I'm proud to be a part of this Parlier School District where we're identifying kids before they fall through the cracks for behavioral, mental health, or academic concerns affecting attendance.

PRAXADES TORRES

Every student, every classroom, every day. That is our goal. The district, the schools, the school-based health centers, our police officers, our parents, the entire community works together.

DISTRICT GROUND AND MAINTENANCE STAFF

It's everybody's job to get the kids to school on time every day – yeah!

DISTRICT FOOD SERVICES STAFF

Food Service supports attendance every day!

DISTRICT TRANSPORTATION STAFF

It's my honor and privilege to make sure that the children from Parlier Unified get to school safely, on time – attendance is of the utmost importance.

PARLIER POLICE DEPARTMENT

The members of the Parlier Police Department keep our students safe every day to ensure that they get to school safe.

ELIZABETH TIENDA, SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER, PARLIER UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

Making sure that students don't miss school is very important because they miss a day of school, they miss a day of instruction, they are left behind. We don't want to leave any students behind.



ALMA BELTRAN, MAYOR, CITY OF PARLIER

As a parent, I make sure that my children attend school every day. As the mayor of Parlier, I'm committed to making sure that the students attend school for success. Attendance matters.

JAIME ROBLES, SUPERINTENDENT, PARLIER UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

Here in Parlier, be a superhero and be in school.

STUDENTS

Superheroes show up on time!

PRAXADES TORRES

We love when you're here because when you're here we know you're safe, we know that you guys are going to eat, and we know that you guys are going to learn from some great teachers. Attendance matters. This is what it's all about, guys. Be a superhero.

NARRATOR

This video is funded by the Institute of Education Sciences at the U.S. Department of Education. To learn more about REL West, please email relwest@wested.org or visit ies.ed.gov.

For more information about local efforts to reduce chronic absence, please contact your local school district office or your child's school principal.