



TRANSCRIPT

Video: Attendance Matters – Tulare City 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 rural Central Valley, Tulare City School District is making a difference by using data to identify attendance problems and doing whatever it takes to remove barriers, focusing on healthy handwashing and partnering with the school-based health clinic.

CLARE GIST, SUPERINTENDENT, TULARE CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

Our common expectation is to raise up caring, creative, and confident children. We do that by providing a safe and secure learning environment for all. And that can only happen if all of our students are in their seats learning every day.

DEBORAH TERRY, CHILD WELFARE AND ATTENDANCE SUPERVISOR, TULARE CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

One of the most important tools we have is data. And we run that data on daily, weekly, monthly basis. We share that data with the people that need to know it that can help students. Our principals know who their students are who are chronically absent from school or beginning to have a problem with attendance. Our clerical staff knows, our teachers know, and our attendance liaisons know. And those people can actually make a change in those students' lives.

PATRICIA MADRIGAL, SCHOOL SECRETARY, ROOSEVELT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

One hundred percent attendance is our number one goal every day. As you can see, today we only had 15 students absent and 7 tardy. Out of those 15, we know who they are, where they are, and why they were absent. Our goal is to make sure that they get better, and they come back to school tomorrow.

DEBORAH TERRY

We know there are real reasons why students are unable to get to school or don't want to come to school. We don't judge families or blame students for those reasons. We try to find out what they are, we try to tear down those barriers and help them.



MARISOL ADAME, CHILD WELFARE AND ATTENDANCE LIAISON, TULARE CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

One of the things we do is conduct home visits. Our job is to make sure that none of those barriers get in the way of students attending school. So we will provide food, transportation, clothing, whatever it takes.

I do remember having a kindergarten student who we needed to do several home calls for. And when we did go to the home, we tried to speak with the mom. She did slam the door in our faces a few times. We were able to get mom to let us take the student to school. Mom did call us the next day and thanked us for caring about her child's education.

TRICIA LESLIE, DIRECTOR OF HEALTH SERVICES, TULARE CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

So, Operation Healthy Hands is what we have done here with Tulare City Schools this year with our TK and K students, teaching them healthy handwashing habits that they can teach to their buddies, to their parents, to their grandparents, and to the whole community in general of how important it is to wash your hands to be safe, secure, and healthy and at school every day, because attendance matters.

The reason we chose healthy handwashing is, research shows that proper handwashing reduces germs, which helps keep our kids healthy and at school.

Why did we pick TK and K to focus on? They're our early learners, and when looking at data it jumped out at us – they're the ones that are missing the most school. We need them there every day so they continue to learn and grow and graduate from our high school district.

STUDENT

If you want to graduate from high school like us, you need to come to school every day ready to learn, starting in TK and K.

STUDENTS

Attendance really matters!

TEACHER

(Discussing germs) Well, why are they yucky, what can they do?

STUDENTS

Make you sick!

TEACHER

They can make you sick.



LEANN WILLIAMSON, SCHOOL NURSE, TULARE CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

It's never too early to teach kids how to properly wash their hands.

TEACHER

What do we use to wash our hands?

STUDENTS

Soap.

STUDENT 1

Soap and water!

STUDENT 2

And we sing our ABCs.

TEACHER

You are right, good job!

STUDENT 1

Soap and water and napkins.

STUDENT 2

Sing our ABCs.

TAHNEE MANESS, TK AND K TEACHER ON SPECIAL ASSIGNMENT, TULARE CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

We developed our TK and K handwashing curriculum to promote health, boost attendance, and align with the California developmental milestones. We developed three sort of anchor lessons that we wanted to highlight throughout the year. The first lesson was based around the book *Germs are Not for Sharing*. Helping students to see the text-to-self connections, sequencing the handwashing steps, and being able to retell what happened in the story really helped teachers to see that they're able to cover more than just the importance of washing hands but other reading and literacy standards as well.

TEACHER

What are too small to see but can have the power to make you sick?

STUDENTS

Germs!



TEACHER

Can you guys show me how you scrub your hands? Scrub, scrub, scrub. Oh, how I like how you're doing top and bottom...get between your fingers.

TAHNEE MANESS

One of the most popular lessons that I saw was the lesson about washing your hands using the glitterbug. Students loved that one. They were able to kind of predict what they might see happen when they put their hands under the light and share that. And they got to try it out and experiment and then when they saw the results, they were able to talk about why they saw what they saw. And understand the cause and effect behind using proper handwashing technique.

LEANN WILLIAMSON

We had the school nurses go back in and we used a machine called a glitterbug. The students put on a special lotion that has a fluorescent powder and then they would go wash that lotion off, and then they would put their hands under the special fluorescent light and anything left glowing would represent that germs are still there and that they're not washing their hands properly.

STUDENTS

(Singing) ...C, D, E, F, G...

TAHNEE MANESS

The last lesson that we did, we developed because we felt like in order to really understand something thoroughly you needed to be able to teach it to somebody else...

TEACHER

Okay, watch and see how he's doing it. Show your buddy how to do it.

TAHNEE MANESS

...so we had our kindergarten and TK students partner with older students 4th through 6th grade and go through the steps of how they wash their hands and teach their older students how to do that.

In addition to the three anchor lessons, teachers were also provided with additional lessons they could use for global handwashing day. Teachers were given pictures of how different people around the world wash their hands, and it helped students connect to their history-social science standards of understanding different places around the world and what that looks like.



STUDENTS

(Singing) To wash, wash, wash our hands, this is what we do. Add the soap, scrub, scrub, scrub, rinse and dry them, too.

TAHNEE MANESS

I think that the reason why students were successful was because nurses and teachers were able to come together and teach it alongside each other.

STEFANIE ALLDREDGE, KINDERGARTEN TEACHER, TULARE CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

We've been emphasizing the importance of washing our hands this year and I've noticed as a teacher, this is my 23rd year, that attendance has really been positively affected by this.

STUDENTS AND TEACHER

Bye, bye, germs!

LEANN WILLIAMSON

We partner with our local school-based health clinic, Altura, and they were able to provide a goodie bag to each and every student with watermelon hand soap, and a coloring book, and a poster with the steps of how to wash your hands. So not only were they practicing at school but then they can go home and practice.

MARTHA HERNANDEZ, MEDICAL ASSISTANT, ALTURA CENTERS FOR HEALTH

One of the cool things that we offer here at our mobile van is, we bring services to the people. So, like the people that can't really travel to go see us, we're making it easier for them. This van, we see patients as we would at the normal clinic. We see the whole family.

So, for the kids, they can come in and get seen for coughs, colds, earaches, fever, most of the time; we get a lot of sore throats, and we also get physicals, like school physicals, for whatever the school may ask them, like immunizations, if they need like a vision test, or a hearing screening. And we provide all of these services so our students are healthy and in school every day and ready to learn.

NARRATOR

Everyone in Tulare can help boost attendance and make a difference in the lives of students, starting with washing hands the right way.

STUDENT

I love coming to school every day!



SUPERVISOR, CUSTODIAL STAFF

I'm a parent, a grandparent, and head of custodians here at Tulare City Schools. My job is to keep every classroom safe and healthy and have kids arrive to school every day.

FOOD SERVICES STAFF

We prepare approximately 10 thousand meals a day. Because students need a full belly. Because attendance matters! Yay!

TRANSPORTATION STAFF

I'm a bus driver for Tulare City Schools. I just wanted to let you know that our most important job is getting your kids to and from school safely. We do it every day and we do it on time.

MAINTENANCE STAFF

Everyone around here supports kids coming to school every single day. Yes.

STUDENTS

I love school! We love school!

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.