



Central Oregonian Column by Holly Scholz: Dec. 3, 2019

Media contact: Holly Scholz, Crook County School District Communication and Event Specialist
Direct line: 541-416-4209 Cell: 541-903-2059 Email: Holly.Scholz@CrookCounty.k12.or.us

Regular school attendance produces student success

Students are considered chronically absent if they miss 14 or more days of school in one school year

Some community members believe that student attendance affects school district funding.

That is not true.

Funding is not impacted by student attendance. Funding is impacted by student enrollment – the more students the Crook County School District has enrolled, the more funding the district receives.

Student attendance is important to us because it has a direct impact on student achievement and growth.

“The research around the connection between regular attendance and school success is rock-solid,” says CCSD Curriculum Director Stacy Smith. “It doesn’t matter how strong the instruction or how effective the curriculum is if students aren’t at school to receive them.”

If students miss 10% of the scheduled school days, they are considered chronically absent and are much less likely to graduate on time.

In our district, students are chronically absent if they miss 14 or more days of school in one nine-month school year. Think about that – students are chronically absent even if they only miss a day or two every few weeks.

What’s the difference between an excused absence and a non-excused absence?

Smith points out that it gets a little tricky because of the difference between compulsory education law and a statewide initiative to reduce chronic absenteeism.

According to law, a principal or teacher may excuse a student’s absence for an illness, including mental health; if there is an illness in the student’s family; some kind of emergency; or prior arrangements are made (within certain limits).

Oregon did recently acknowledge that mental health issues are a growing concern and allows that up to five days of illness may be excused as “mental health” days.

Students who must miss school because of school-sponsored events, such as traveling to sports contests or going on field trips, are not considered absent, which is a new law.

According to compulsory attendance laws, all other absences are considered unexcused.

However, in an effort to curb chronic absenteeism, all absences, both excused and unexcused, are used to calculate a student’s regular attendance.

So how does the district notify families whose children are on the path to chronic absenteeism?

Hopefully, the first contact is coming from the student's classroom teacher at the elementary level, their Focus teacher at middle school level, or their Connections teacher in high school. Each building also sends letters to the parents of students who have become at risk for chronic absenteeism.

"Our hope is that we can come alongside parents, inform them of how important it is that their student attend regularly, share the research with them and get their help in making sure their student attends regularly," Smith said.

In order to increase student attendance, the district is using research and data to arm parents and students with facts about the relationship between regular attendance and success in school.

We are also trying to incentivize regular attendance with individual prizes, classroom or grade-level prizes, and school-wide prizes.

Smith believes two areas may be extremely helpful for parents. The first is some guidance around "how sick is too sick to go to school?"

"Our elementary folks are doing a good job of getting this information out to parents," he said. "Second, I would encourage parents have an honest conversation with their child about the root cause of excessive absences. If it is because of issues around bullying or lack of engagement, your schools and administrative teams stand ready to help in these areas."

Regular school attendance has a profound influence on students' academic success – from kindergarten all the way to their senior year. Even as kids mature and become more independent, their families play a big role in helping them get to school safely every day and knowing that attendance is key to success in school and in their future careers.

###