



October 16, 2013

KFCS' District Newsletter

By Paul Hillyer, KFCS' Superintendent

Attendance: Why be Concerned?

KFCS invests a great deal of time and energy to improve student attendance. Principals call families, send out attendance letters, meet with parents and students, cite students with attendance violations and, when all else fails, contacts an attendance officer. This officer, called the Youth Attendance Officer, will visit homes to bring students to school. When this is not enough, parents and students are summoned to court. Judge Osborne, the youth attendance judge, requires the students to improve attendance or face the likelihood of lockup in our county jail. Why all the bother?

The reasons KFCS takes attendance issues so seriously are two: Safety and educational achievement. Students who are not showing up for school could be doing something unhealthy or even dangerous. For example, students who are not in school could be involved in vandalism, shoplifting, drug use, or premarital sex. It is safe to say our community is worse off with young people wandering the streets or hiding in their homes when they should be in school.

Student achievement problems with truants is another important motivator for improving attendance. Common sense tells us that students who are not in school likely will not learn the material taught that day. The data supports this logic: Of students who attend at least 92% of the time, 60% reach the academic-growth targets set by the state. This compares with only 39% of students who do not attend at least 92% of the time.

The Oregon Department of Education labels students who attend less than 92% of the time "chronic truants." Think about this for a minute: A student who is absent 10% of the time is missing about 18 school days per year. That is equivalent to almost one month of school. By ninth grade, such students could miss about one year of school! What is the likelihood that they will be on track for graduation going into high school?

The answer to this question is obvious and is one key explanation for the poor graduation rate in our district. Twenty-eight percent of KFCS' students are chronically truant. Thus, as a starting point, only 72% of KFCS' students are setting themselves up for graduation success by their school attendance. The number at the high school level is considerably worse where 38% of students are chronically truant. This is a tremendous anchor on student achievement and graduation.

What can be done to solve this significant problem? This article has already documented the many ways schools respond to improve attendance. What can parents do? First, they need to

make sure their students are in school unless they have a fever or are vomiting. With very few exceptions, if students do not display these symptoms, they are healthy enough to learn. Secondly, parents need to be sure their students make it to school. All schools call home when a student is not in attendance. Monitoring these calls and providing swift consequences to students who are reported missing is critical. As a last resort, if parents feel they have no control in getting their students to school, they should call the school office for help and support in dealing with this issue. Sometimes a joint effort between the home and the school is necessary to overcome the attendance problem.

In conclusion, faithful attendance is a key to student success. Those with good attendance have a much better chance of succeeding in school and moving on to graduation than those students who do not. With a united effort between the home and the school, this community can dramatically reduce the number of chronic truants. This will lead to great benefits for students, schools, and the community as a whole.

Other News:

1. Another key to student academic success is staying in a district for more than one year at a time. In KFCS, of the students who are in the district less than a year, only 31% reach their academic growth scores set by the state. This compares to 56% who reach their growth scores when they are in our district two or more years. Attendance and mobility are key factors in student achievement.
2. Patience is requested: All Oregon schools were told last spring they had to change their reporting systems from letter grades to numeric scores based on proficiency in subject area learning concepts. This change may seem small, but it is actually very consequential as the letter grading system has been used for perhaps a century or more and schools are now required to change this in the course of a few months with little state help, direction, or models. KFCS does not yet have a perfect system in place; however, principals and teachers are in the process of putting together an effective system for the first quarter report cards. Once the first report comes out using the new approach, please let us know any ideas you might have to improve them.
3. Another big change this year is the move to teach the new national standards in all our grade levels and schools. The new standards, called the Common Core State Standards, are significantly more rigorous than the Oregon standards that preceded them. These new learning outcomes will be tested starting in the Spring of 2015 with the new national assessment system called, the Smarter Balance Assessment. This testing tool will include both multiple-choice items and open-ended response items. It will also take a great deal more student time than the prior Oregon test called, OAKS. This is a very big change that will have lasting consequences to teaching and learning across the nation. It is hoped this will be a positive change.
4. 21st Century Grant after-school programs will begin on Tuesday, November 12th. Applications and more information will be out the week of October 28th. About 180 students will be served in the three elementary schools, Pelican, Mills, and Conger, about 200 will be served at Pondo, and about 150 will be served at KU. KFCS is in the process of hiring for this program. If you or

someone you know is interested in a three-hour per day after-school position, please call our personnel office at [541-883-4702](tel:541-883-4702).

5. **Wanted: Volunteer Mentors!** Citizens for Safe Schools works to support schools that are both physically and psychologically safe for all students. Their goals are to promote academic success, help students feel more connected to their community and reduce delinquent behavior (substance abuse, violence, bullying, etc.). You can help Citizens for Safe Schools achieve those goals by becoming a volunteer mentor. Volunteer mentors need not be perfect, just willing to spend an hour a week sharing what they know with a young person, exposing them to opportunities they might not otherwise have and offering positive encouragement and support to do well in school and in life. As part of the Kids in the Middle Mentoring Program, mentors agree to spend one hour weekly for one year with a 4th-8th grader. Students are referred to the program by school counselors and are young people who show a gap between their performance and their potential. These students need additional adult support in their lives to stay on track. Over the years, studies have shown impressive results from Citizens for Safe Schools' Kids in the Middle Program: Students were two times more likely than non-mentored youth to be planning for their future, three times less likely to commit an act of delinquency, and six times less likely to re-offend had they come to the program having already committed an act of delinquency. Student attendance and grades also show significant improvement. Volunteers report great personal satisfaction in helping these young students succeed. Interested in learning more about Kids in the Middle or other mentoring programs with Citizens for Safe Schools? If so, please contact them at [541-882-3198](tel:541-882-3198), email kmorris@citizensforsafeschools.org and/or visit them online at www.citizensforsafeschools.org.
6. **CORRECTION:** The kickoff for the Klamath Promise Initiative has been re-scheduled for **Tuesday, November 19, 2013**, and will be held at the Ross Ragland Theater. Registration will begin at 6:30 p.m. with the program commencing at 7:00 p.m. A dessert will directly follow the program in the Ross Ragland annex. RSVP's for the event are requested. If you would like to RSVP through this email, please respond with your name and number attending.

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