



February 11, 2015

KFCS' District Newsletter

By Paul Hillyer, KFCS' Superintendent

The Battleground: Grade Failure and Chronic Absenteeism

As we fight to improve graduation rates in the district, there are two key battles that must be won. The first is chronic absenteeism and the second is the number of students who are failing classes. Not surprisingly, these two areas are closely related as 79% of students in grades 6-12 who are chronically absent have at least one F on their report cards. This compares to 39% of students who have 90% or better attendance and at least one F. Admittedly, 39% is still far from acceptable. However, it shows that if students attend school regularly, they have a much better chance of succeeding in school.

Chronic absenteeism is defined as missing 10% or more of school in a year. Ten percent absence is about 18 days in a year. On a month-to-month basis, this does not seem like that much -- only about two days per month. However, it really adds up when one considers the average school month is only 19 days. Thus, a chronically absent student likely misses the equivalence of at least one month per year. Some students miss far more than this. If this becomes an ongoing pattern for a student, it will not be long before he or she misses the equivalence of an entire school year.

As a district, 21.74% of our students were chronically absent during first semester. These students put themselves at great risk for school failure. Once a student develops the habit of failure, failure can also become chronic. This in turn leads to dropping out of school.

What can be done to stem this challenging tide? Staff at all our schools are working very hard to improve attendance and reduce failure rates. Each school is required to have a plan for reducing chronic absenteeism and reduce class failures. As a result, attendance improved during first semester of 2014-15 compared to first semester the year before by almost 4%. This is encouraging. Likewise, the failure rate during second quarter 2014-15 improved over the first quarter. This is also positive.

However, we have a long way to go as the high percentage of students receiving one or more F's on their report cards testifies. Real success will require a strong home and school and community partnership. We must change the mindset that skipping school and failing grades is acceptable.

Schools working to improve these two areas are closely tracking each student's attendance each month. They send home letters to any families whose students were chronically absent during the prior month. If the problem does not improve the next month, the schools make a personal contact with the parents. In most cases, this is face-to-face at school or at the family's home. If the problem continues, a citation for truancy is issued. Students and their parents must then go to court. Further consequences include a possible truancy fine and jail lock up.

Our schools do more than focus on the negative, however. They also reward faithful and improved attendance with letters home, school assembly recognition, positive and encouraging personal comments to students, prize drawings, and so forth. In other words, schools are going the extra mile to encourage faithful attendance and school success.

As far as reducing failure rates goes, schools are also working very hard. They provide interventions during and after the school day for students who are struggling. Each school has an after-school program that includes tutoring and extra support. Teachers carefully monitor success and offer students additional help. Summer school is also provided. Likewise, organizations such as Citizens for Safe Schools and Friends of the Children offer mentoring support. DHS also provides support for their families and even the Probation Department encourages their clients to make sure their children are in school.

These are only some of the strategies that are being used to improve attendance and increase student success. However, chronic absenteeism and school failure are powerful enemies that have taken a strong foothold in our community. Thus, it will take a community effort to change this dismal situation. Please do anything you can to encourage the young people you know to be in school and to see school success as critical to their future happiness and success as adults.

Finally, if you have any ideas on what our schools can do to make more headway in overcoming this culture of failure, please let us know through responding to this email. Working together, we can create an expectation of success.

Other News:

1. On the good news front, our district's five-year completer rate increased from 78.63% in the 2012-13 school year to 81.26% during the 2013-14 school year. This rate includes those students who received a high school diploma or a GED. Those receiving diplomas increased from 70.48% in 2012-13 to 71.55% in 2013-14. This is an encouraging trend.
2. KU's 4-year graduation rate in 2013-14 was 79.47%. Their 4-year completer rate (includes GED's) was 82.12%. The overall district 4-year grad rate was 63.53% and the 4-year completer rate was 71.80%. Both of these district 4-year percents were up about 1% from the year before.
3. Are you interested in volunteering to tutor students at our high school or middle school? Both Pondo and KU are looking for adults that can give an hour or more of their week during the school day helping students in AVID classes with their math and English studies. Please respond to this email if you are interested.
4. Klamath Community College was named the 2014-15 KFCS' Community Partner of the year at last month's Everyday Hero ceremony. They earned this through their work with our district in creating the 5th year diploma program for our students and for all the collaboration they are providing in creating other college-credit opportunities for our KU students. We are very grateful for their hard work in offering increasing ways for students to earn college credits while in high school. They have also been very active partners in the Klamath Promise Initiative.
5. In case you missed it, here is a video that presents the KFCS' 2014-15 Everyday Heroes. Each of these recipients has worked very hard to earn this honor. <http://youtu.be/ypkkM6rvDOI>.
6. Here are some current job openings in our district:
[School Psychologist \(Open until filled\)](#)
[After School Program - Teacher/Mentor - \(Open until filled\)](#)

[Speech Language Pathologist - Early Childhood Intervention \(Open until filled\)](#)

[Assistant Principal - Klamath Union High School \(Open until filled\)](#)

[Physics Teacher \(Open until filled\)](#)

[Assistant Track - Ponderosa Middle School \(Open until filled\)](#)

[Advanced Math - TWO POSITIONS \(Open until filled\)](#)

7. Enjoy a SHORT STACK for a TALL CAUSE. The After-School Program invites you to an Applebee's Pancake Breakfast Fundraiser to support 21st CCLC. It will be held **Saturday, March 14, 2015**, from 8:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. Tickets are \$7.00.

Please forward this newsletter to anyone you think might be interested in KFCS news. If you are not a regular recipient of this free newsletter and would like to be, please respond to this email and let us know.