



COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS PACESETTER

CHULA VISTA

Category: Attendance

Well before the rest of the nation had even heard the term chronic absence, Chula Vista, California, was measuring and addressing it. As a result, this mid-sized city just seven miles north of the Mexican border has seen more than a decade of sustained attention and efforts to reduce chronic absence in its schools.

The results have been encouraging: only 4 percent of students in grades K-3 in the 2010-11 school year were chronically absent. The community has interventions in place so that when students miss too much school, principals work with those students, their teachers and parents to resolve the problem. Strategies include meeting with parents, conducting School Attendance Review Team meetings, counseling students, referring to community resources and recognizing improved attendance.

Names of students who exceed the district threshold for excused or unexcused absences are provided in a quarterly report to principals. This report ranks every school in the district in terms of attendance, using data from the previous three years. Recognizing that they cannot do their jobs if the students are not in school, administrators use this information to communicate with parents and to monitor the effectiveness of their truancy intervention programs.

Families who need help can turn to any of the five Family Resource Centers in the district, which offer a range of services to any family needing additional support. Once a school has exhausted its resources, the principal refers the student to the district's School Attendance Review Board (SARB). Initially developed to deal with truancy, SARB includes representatives from community agencies that offer family and student support. Each case is dealt with individually based on student data and family circumstances. Often the family is given a contract outlining expectations. The family is then invited to talk about progress.

If attendance does not improve, SARB can move forward with legal actions such as a referral to juvenile court. Judges provide recommendations and expectations for parents to elicit positive changes in attendance patterns. Because of the many interventions in place, the school district has a low percentage of students who are chronically absent.

Still, several schools have chronic absence rates above 10 percent. Future plans include:

- Providing schools with daily attendance reports through a new data dashboard application
- Creating an iPad application for students to track their own attendance
- Emphasizing the importance of good attendance as part of preschool and kindergarten orientations

STRATEGIES

- Tracked chronically absent students and regularly shared that information with principals
- Adapted a state process developed for truancy to deal with chronic absence and tardiness
- Tapped community resources to help families overcome barriers to good attendance