

Also, appointments and vacations are listed as top reasons in the literature as well. Dougherty attests to this in saying, “It is now common practice for students to miss school for general appointments to avoid tests and assignments” (1998, p. 10). Two authors noted that homeless students or students who live in a family that move very frequently are more likely to be chronically absent from school (Epstein, Sheldon, 2002, p. 311). Some of the authors also agree that if a student is not succeeding in school then they are less likely to want to come to school. This also goes along with schools that do not give praise to students or interact with the students so that no one feels left out, and help to see that everyone succeeds (Dougherty, 1998, p. 10). In short, all of the authors agree that parental involvement and student-teacher interaction is very important in keeping absenteeism down.

Effective Policies and Parental Contact

As schools seek new programs and ideas for increasing student attendance, one of the two most frequently mentioned tactics in the literature are having an effective attendance policy and increasing communication with parents and guardians. According to Dan Vandivier (2003), a high school principal, attendance policies must be stringent and must also be persistently adhered to. He states that policies must be fair and also have “flexibility to accommodate mitigating circumstances” (Vandivier, 2003, p. 81). Vandivier’s new attendance policy no longer distinguished between excused and unexcused and allowed administration discretion in dealing with excessive absences for legitimate reasons (Vandivier, 2003, p. 81). Dougherty (1998) agrees that schools must produce a clear fair attendance policy that is up to date and standardized and communicate it.

Many studies have also shown a correlation between increased parental contact and increased attendance (Smerka, 1993; Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). Smerka (1993) noted that after mailing notices to all parents informing them of the success of the attendance program and asking for their support, the perfect attendance rate increased to 13.9 percent (p. 96.) He claimed that the key to good attendance is promoting it everywhere to everyone (Smerka, 1993, p. 96). Another study also found that “the degree to which schools overcame the challenge of communicating effectively with families was related to gains in student attendance and declines in chronic absenteeism” (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002, p.315). The study noted that providing families with someone to talk to at the school about attendance or other issues was effective in increasing attendance (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002, p.315).

In addition to simply having contact with parents, many authors agree that it is the responsibility of the parents to monitor their student’s absenteeism (Dougherty, 1998; Ford & Sutphen, 1996; Kube & Radgan, 1992). Dougherty (1998) says that parents “must be responsible for their child’s daily attendance and promptly inform the school attendance office when the student is absent” (p. 11). One study shows that increasing communication with parents and involving them in the student’s education are strategies for increasing attendance. This study also cited the use of a letter to parents informing them of the policy and encouraging them to discuss the importance of good attendance with their children (Ford & Sutphen, 1996, p. 96). Another study also said that parents “must be responsible for the student’s daily attendance” and they must “stress the importance of daily attendance to their children” (Kube & Radgan, 1992). Creating effective attendance policies that are reviewed and renewed regularly and establishing parental contact are very important stepping stones for increasing attendance in schools.

Conclusion

The survey indicates that even though most schools have an attendance policy some teachers are not necessarily aware of it. This presents a problem when enforcing the attendance policy. However, several that are aware of the attendance policy implement specific incentives in their classrooms. This practice is shown to increase attendance within the classroom. Based on survey responses, teachers feel that communication with parents and students is also a key factor in increasing attendance. Through this survey we have developed some recommendations for increasing attendance.

Recommendations

Create a clear and fair attendance policy that is up to date and communicate it.

Provide someone for families to talk to about the attendance policy.

Increase communication with parents by sending letters home and involving them in the student's education.

Discuss the importance of attendance at conferences or through written messages and encourage them to discuss it with their children.

Teachers should remind students daily how important it is to be in school every day.

Teachers should always tell a child they were missed when they return from being absent.

After more than 3 absences in a month there should be a one-on-one student teacher meeting.

Chronically absent students should be placed with a teacher-mentor and meet one-on-one at least twice a week.

Involve the community and local businesses by coordinating with them in incentive programs such as gift certificates and food coupons.

Classroom incentive programs should be implemented particularly certificates of recognition and toys, prizes, and gifts.

Closing

In closing, absenteeism is not only a problem for Beech Grove Intermediate but the problem is growing for schools all across the country. It is important to do what we can to prevent America's future from becoming a complacent element in society. Based on our research we have made these recommendations and we feel sure that they will go a long way in helping to increase attendance at Beech Grove Intermediate school or, in fact any elementary school who is willing to implement these simple procedures within their school system.