



Oak Park Elementary School District 97

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TO: Board of Education

FROM: Dr. Carol Kelley

SUBJECT: Why Address Chronic Absenteeism?

DATE: September 4, 2018

Making the Case for School Attendance

Attending school regularly is essential to students gaining the academic and social skills they need to succeed. Reducing absenteeism is a simple, cost-effective, but often overlooked strategy for improving academic performance. Starting as early as preschool and kindergarten, chronic absence—missing more than 17 days during the academic year—can leave third graders unable to read proficiently, sixth graders struggling with coursework and high school students off track for graduation. *In District 97, chronic absence affects more than one out of 14 children.*

Unfortunately, many families may not realize the extent of the problem because we have not shared the right data. They may have paid more attention to how many students show up every day, but not how many miss so much school in *excused and unexcused* absences that they are at risk academically.

The good news is chronic absence can be significantly reduced when schools, families and community partners work together to monitor this data, nurture a habit of regular attendance and address the hurdles that keep children from getting to school every day - e.g., lack of access to health care, unhealthy environmental conditions, unreliable transportation or housing instability.

Why student attendance matters to board of education members

Board of education members are driven by the opportunity to make a meaningful difference in the community where they are serving. Reducing chronic absence provides a simple, straightforward goal they can accomplish by engaging families and community members and providing policy or funding to support schools' efforts related to student attendance. Not only is attendance a simple, common sense metric already recorded by teachers and understood by families, it is also essential to the success of our district's initiatives.

For the 2018-2019 school year, let's fight for what's right by building a strong culture of attendance in our community. When schools and communities work together to reduce chronic absence, we often see student attendance increase quickly. Thus, each month this school year, we plan to share student attendance data across the district. This will allow the community and board to discuss the challenges that may be keeping many students from getting to school: illness, transportation problems, and housing instability.

We appreciate your support of our efforts related to student attendance.