

## **The Continuing Battle with Attendance**

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**Project Funding Sources:**

This project did not require any additional funding. During some months, we used general funds for classroom recognitions for highest overall attendance percentage. This was limited to \$30.00 per class per month with one class being recognized monthly.

**Project Cost and Brief Budget Narrative:**

During the months of September through March, we provided monthly recognitions for the classroom with the highest attendance percentage. The “winning” teacher was given a menu of options each month for the students to vote on for the recognition. The awards ranged from Dunkin Donuts and coffee to movie and popcorn. Every recognition was under \$30.00. Total costs for year was under \$300.00.

**Project Description:**

This was a school-wide plan that we implemented this year using the vehicle of Child Study Team meetings to discuss, tweak and support the teachers and students with attendance difficulties. Our school is a dropout prevention high school serving 400 students, ages 16 through 21 (or 22 if they have an IEP). Our average daily attendance seems to be a major hurdle that impacts student achievement. Our average attendance hovers around 50% each and every day. We analyzed our processes with Child Study Team last summer and put into place new support processes from our Leadership Team to our Teaching Team. We also revised monthly reporting on attendance for every student at the school so we know a student’s overall attendance percentage starting on the first day of enrollment at our school. We designed a color-coded system to indicate attendance patterns based on overall attendance percentage. We assigned a member of the Leadership Team to support a subgroup of classroom teachers. The Leadership Team member then set up meetings with each teacher to review the data provided. The teacher was to take a lead on supporting the students falling in the green, yellow and orange categories while the Leadership Team member took a lead on anyone falling into the red category. This plan allows the teacher to work with students on the verge of poor attendance while the Leadership Team member works with the most chronic absentee students. Child Study Team meetings occurred twice per month and recommendations for final withdrawal are made at that meeting after all interventions have been exhausted.

**Staffing Pattern:**

We currently have 9 classroom teachers with 2 homerooms each (am and pm). We have two administrators and a graduation coach (Counselor) as part of the Leadership Team.

**Population Served:**

All 400 students were monitored through this project. There is some level of transiency at our school but we try to maintain enrollment close to 400 throughout the year. The chart below represents the breakdown of student population at this time. All students fall between grades 9 through 12. There were no participation criteria since all students’ attendance was being monitored through this system but later I will share what group of students required our laser focus. Our school is comprised of 25% of our students having IEP’s and 18% of our students speak English as a second language (ELL). 13% of our students also have 504 Accommodation Plans. As a school, we now recognize the fact that a majority of our students suffer from anxiety, PTSD, panic attacks, depression, and suicidal tendencies. We have worked very hard on the climate of our school to ensure it is warm, accepting and inviting.

We give the students the expectation of adult-like behavior and then we troubleshoot with kids when that expectation is momentarily forgotten. Suspensions have minimized tremendously as we work with families and students.

Enrollment Data	Number	Percentage
Black	81	20.70%
Hispanic	91	23.30%
Male	232	59.30%
Female	159	40%

### **Project Origination:**

I am the facilitator of the Child Study Team that meets once every two weeks. The goal of this team is to monitor attendance of all students and identify students with chronic absentee problems. Our process clearly stated that we could withdraw students after being absent for 11 consecutive days. We analyzed data for two-week periods and made decisions on enrollment or withdrawal status based on our knowledge of student. The problem with this method is the fact we were not seeing the entire absentee pattern of the student from the beginning of the year and there was not a point person to follow up with the student and family on a continuing and consistent basis. During the summer of 2018, we met with this team and decided to make some major changes that included assigning a Leadership Team member to a teacher for the entire year. Each Leadership Team member has three teachers to follow up with on a monthly or more frequent basis. We used some ideas from the website, Attendance Works, <https://www.attendanceworks.org/> to generate a monthly reporting that we could filter and set parameters for various reporting categories. We also knew that our goal for the 2018-19 school year was for students to be in school an average of 55%. When we analyze data from our school and from other comparable schools in our district, we know this is the biggest problem to overcome with our young adults. In 2017-18 school year, the average attendance rate for our school was 49%. Setting our goal at 55% sets a high parameter for improvement in less than one year. The monthly reports generated by the Child Study Team list out all the students in the classroom. Based on their attendance percentage for the entire year, the student would fall into one of four color-coded categories for monitoring.

Green = 60% or higher

Yellow = 50-59%

Orange = 31-49%

Red = 0-30%

We also indicated how many credits have been accomplished in a year with this report to help us motivate students whose attendance is acceptable but he or she is not completing timely coursework. The Leadership Team member would generate the filtered report and meet with the teacher to discuss students. The teacher was responsible for all students falling into green,

yellow and orange while the Leadership Team member would take a lead on the most challenging students falling into red. The next page is a sample for one teacher for one month. This color-coded system led to easy discussions that focused on the students who were struggling. We shared any information known to us and then the administrator would make the students in the “red” category his or her top priority in identifying the obstacles for the student to attend school. This chart was conducive to these types of conversations. I would also keep a percentage of each color category each month for each teacher so we can discuss any improvements or declines in percentages. We can compare charts between months to see if students are making incremental progress or declining.

Color-coded Classroom Chart generated monthly for meetings with teacher.

Student	Attendance %	Home Room	Credits This Year	High Attend./ < 2 Credits
Student 1	97.06%	JARQUIN	5.5	
Student 2	68.75%	JARQUIN	5.5	
Student 3	98.75%	JARQUIN	0.5	YES
Student 4	23.44%	JARQUIN	3.5	
Student 5	9.63%	JARQUIN	0	
Student 6	60.98%	JARQUIN	1.5	YES
Student 7	58%	JARQUIN	1.5	
Student 8	23.08%	JARQUIN	0	
Student 9	60.38%	JARQUIN	1.5	YES
Student 10	88.89%	JARQUIN	0	YES
Student 11	63.70%	JARQUIN	2.5	
Student 12	93.55%	JARQUIN	1.5	YES
Student 13	81.40%	JARQUIN	0	YES
Student 14	16.67%	JARQUIN	1	
Student 15	15.44%	JARQUIN	0	
Student 16	54.41%	JARQUIN	1.5	
Student 17	45.59%	JARQUIN	1.5	
Student 18	96.32%	JARQUIN	5.5	
Student 19	20.83%	JARQUIN	0	
Student 20	49.22%	JARQUIN	6	
Student 21	93.98%	JARQUIN	3.5	
Student 22	67.57%	JARQUIN	2	
Student 23	87.76%	JARQUIN	0.5	YES
Student 24	57.14%	JARQUIN	1.5	
Student 25	63.97%	JARQUIN	4	
PM CLASS				

Student 26	37.50%	JARQUIN	1	
Student 27	72.50%	JARQUIN	2	
Student 28	95.12%	JARQUIN	4	
Student 29	68.29%	JARQUIN	4	
Student 30	64.71%	JARQUIN	0.5	YES
Student 31	75%	JARQUIN	5	
Student 32	19.08%	JARQUIN	3	
Student 33	36.67%	JARQUIN	1	
Student 34	14.71%	JARQUIN	0	
Student 35	89.71%	JARQUIN	5	
Student 36	17.05%	JARQUIN	0	
Student 37	65.75%	JARQUIN	4.5	
Student 38	81.91%	JARQUIN	0	YES
Student 39	50.74%	JARQUIN	3	
Student 40	89.66%	JARQUIN	2.5	
Student 41	84.56%	JARQUIN	1.5	YES
Student 42	89.58%	JARQUIN	3.5	
Student 43	68.18%	JARQUIN	0	YES
Student 44	63.24%	JARQUIN	0.5	YES
Student 45	45.24%	JARQUIN	0	
Student 46	87.04%	JARQUIN	5.5	
Student 47	76.56%	JARQUIN	0.5	YES
Student 48	50.74%	JARQUIN	1	
Student 49	88.97%	JARQUIN	1	YES

**Issues Addressed:**

Child Study Team was making decisions on enrollment and withdrawal status based on two weeks of data. This was not enough information to make a decision that had such a potentially negative impact on the student. If a student had chronic attendance problems and was not withdrawn, that had a negative impact on the school and our overall achievement data. Another issue that became a concern was the communication with students and families fell primarily on the teacher. Sometimes teachers didn't know how to get to the actual obstacles through their conversation so there was no opportunity to truly improve attendance for the student. The Leadership Team had more time to talk through and troubleshoot through any problems presented and knew the resources that were available.

**Desired Outcomes and Measurable Objectives:**

Overall Attendance goal of 55% which is a marked improvement over the 2017-18 average daily attendance of 49%. We also wanted to create a system of tracking data for all students and a more defined system of helping the students who were falling in the "red" category for severe, chronic absence. To provide data for the Child Study Team to make informed decisions about keeping students enrolled or to withdraw them due to the chronic status. We also wanted to provide consistent support to the teachers who were previously troubleshooting all of the

attendance issues for all students. The teachers now had a partner in a Leadership Team member that will take a lead troubleshooting with the most chronic cases (red category).

**Strategies and/or Interventions of the Project:**

Once a student fell into the “red” category an effort was made by the Leadership Team to figure out the obstacles for that particular student. Some examples are below:

***Problem***

Student could not get a ride to school  
Student’s job conflicted with school  
Student had serious family problems  
Student needs a job

No clean clothes/food  
Bedrest ordered due to pregnancy

Childcare problems

***Intervention***

Mail them a bus pass  
Create school schedule around work hours  
Talk with student – share 211 resources  
Come in and meet with our vocational specialist  
Troubleshoot with community resources  
Work with student on getting classwork done at home. Teacher can assist via phone or email. Can arrange home visit if needed.  
Allow student to bring baby on Mondays and Fridays.

The key is to remove as many obstacles as possible from the student’s shoulders. The Leadership Team member always shares their cell phone number with the student and we enter their phone number in our phones as well. Our goal is to develop a relationship with student so they feel comfortable sharing their problems with us.

The other aspect to this is for the teachers to feel supported with their most challenging students. It takes some time to track down some of these students. It is not as simple as a text. It might be using social media, contacting their friends, family members, home visit, mailing a letter, etc. In other words, we have to be creative with the resources to track down the students. Sometimes if teachers don’t have the convincing language to persuade a student to come back and talk through the obstacles, the administration team is skilled in its approach and listens carefully for anything they can troubleshoot through with the student.



Bayside	57%	68%	73%	77%	80%	82%	82%	84%	86%	
Gulfcoast	74%	78%	86%	88%	90%	89%	90%	90%	91%	
<b>Enterprise HS</b>	Absent rate	48.15%	48.40%	48.72%	50.03%	44.68%	47.94%	46.97%	47%	
	In Attendance	51.85	51.6	51.28	49.97	( 55.32%) in att.	52.06%	53.03%	53%	

Our goal was to reach average attendance rate of 55% which would be a significant increase over the 2017-18 average daily attendance of 49%. As of the end of April, our estimated average attendance is 52.26%. Our data tracking did not begin until August 27<sup>th</sup> and the first day of school was August 13<sup>th</sup> so two weeks of data is missing from our spreadsheet. The county does calculate out the daily average attendance rate in our end of the year reporting so it is hopeful that our data is conservative and a small increase over our calculation will be expected. This data is available to us by the end of August for previous year. One data point that is very important to point out is the charting of our average attendance as well as data from district on the other two dropout prevention schools with the public school system. This chart is counting the absentee rate at each school and as you can see our school outperforms the other two schools by significant margins.

Our observations as of now as far as impact on data is as follows:

- We have had more students be successful in earning credits this year than any previous year. Our goal states 45% of our students in attendance for both FTE date certain ( October and February) will earn a minimum of 4 credits. At this time, 49% of those students have earned 4 credits and we still have 3 more months of school to add to this percentage. I am confident we will be close to 60% for this particular goal.
- We are also on track to have the most graduates in one year from our school. We hold two graduation ceremonies a year but there are three times a year in which one can graduate; December, May and the end of July. We typically graduate close to 100 students in a year and in December 2018, we graduated 55 students and it looks like we are on track to graduate 100 students in May. This does not include our summer graduates so we may easily hit a target of 175 graduates for the 2018-19 school year.

I cannot contribute all of our goal success solely on improved attendance because it is improved attendance plus all of our processes in place to help students achieve and regain self-confidence. We do know if a student is here in school, we can ensure a diploma and I believe this data supports that connection.

**Project Timeline:**

August 2018- May 2019. During the summer of 2019, we will analyze the process for improvement to roll out for the 2019-20 school year.

**Outcomes Related to School Completion, Dropout Prevention, and/or Graduation Rates:**

Our cohort graduate goal is 39%. It does look like we should hit this target goal as well and will have that final data in September or October for the 18-19 school year. At this time we have a denominator of 176 students in cohort, which means we need 69 students to graduate to achieve 39%. We currently have 29 cohort students graduated and need 40 more. We have identified a total of 42 potential graduates for May and another 12 cohort students for July graduation. We feel confident on achieving this goal. We are on track to graduate the most students in a year since our opening day 11 years ago. This is a significant data point because it motivates staff to identify what process is working and where we can improve. We have the potential to graduate 175 students in the 2018-19 school year. We were at capacity for most of second semester and currently have a wait list of over 123 students to start with us this summer. Giving students the entire year to access curriculum and earn credits helps them to catch up and recover failed courses. If a student does withdraw from our school it is not due to wanting to go to a different school, it is due to life circumstances. The student is always told to come back as soon as possible so we can help him or her to finish. Often times, they return to us within six months.

**Special Conditions, Expertise, and/or Skills Required to Carry Out Project:**

All of our trainings have a focus on reaching the challenging student. We now recognize all the factors that go into bad behavior or checked-out behavior. We focus in on anxiety, PTSD, trauma, abuse, and other mental health factors that impact a student's ability to be successful in the classroom or school setting. Our school has sent 6 team members to the Reaching the Wounded Student Conference and we are sending 6 more to the Orlando Conference in June 2019; National Trauma-Skilled Schools Conference. I think having an experienced team of colleagues who are extremely knowledgeable in how to work with challenging teens is a major key to our success. We have a philosophy of hiring experienced teachers and maybe having one to two new teachers on our team at all times. It does not work to have a team that is learning how to do their job and learning how to deal with our teenagers at the same time.

**Current Status of Project:**

We are in the final month of first year implementation. This summer we will analyze our data and processes for improvement.

**Role in Project as a NDPS Certification Program Participant:**

I was the lead facilitator in this project. I was in charge of the Child Study Team meetings and assisted with generating the reports.

**Lessons Learned:**

The lessons learned were many. We always knew attendance was a major factor in a student working towards their high school diploma. We also know that our students have a lot of baggage that they carry with them when they come to school each and every day. We tell the kids to treat us like a job and to stay in touch with us if they are absent for a period of time. This way we can document the extenuating circumstances and continue to reach out to the student. It is important to set realistic goals for your school and for your students. If our attendance percentage was 49% for the 2017-18 school year then it is reasonable

to try to attain 55% in the 18-19 school year. In the same light, if a student is attending zero days a week; it is reasonable to set mini-goals and try to get them into school two to three days per week instead of going for five days. We always compared our monthly attendance averages with our other dropout prevention schools in the district. We always strived to do better than these other schools and that is a fair comparison. It wouldn't be fair to compare our attendance averages against a school that has a bell curve of a population rather than a school like ours that is 100% dropout prevention. The number one thing that makes a difference with our students is listening and having a relationship with the students. This is what keeps them coming back to school.

**Advice for Dropout Prevention Practitioners about the Project:**

Design the system that you want to follow for the year. It is important to set up these processes based on what worked and didn't work the previous year. We did not get to the system in place today overnight. This is a compilation of many years of a trial and error approach to making an improvement with attendance percentages. At the end of each year, have your team identify what went well and what didn't go well to make continuous improvements on the system designed. Understand that small incremental improvements at the school level and the student level need to be celebrated. I find at the high school level, it is no longer about tangible reinforcers. It is the pat on the back and the "I am proud of you" statement that makes all the difference in the world. Instead of hearing, "Where have you been?" we try to say, "It is nice to see you, I have missed you".