

From the desk of *Ron Saari*, District Administrator....

Make Every Day Count!

The intent of this letter is to point out the need for students to understand the importance of regular school attendance, starting in the early grades and continuing through high school.

We are now closely tracking our student attendance data – absences (excused and unexcused) – so that we know which students have a problem with absenteeism. That way, we can intervene to turn the problem around. Our goal is to build a habit and a culture of good attendance by helping everyone understand why going to school regularly matters, and what everyone can do to ensure students are in school.

Recently a group of HS students told me they had “days to burn” and thought they could miss up to 10 school days in a given year. I explained to these students that state law mandates students to be in school each day and minute school is in session. There is no such thing as “days to burn or take off.” Schools in WI typically do not begin the truancy process (where charges and fines are issued) until a student reaches 5 absences in a semester. That doesn’t mean students can miss up to 5 days in a semester. There has to be a legitimate reason for an absence, such as an illness or a doctor appointment that can’t be scheduled outside of the school day. School is our children’s first and most important job. Students obviously learn more than math and reading during their school career, they learn how to show up for school on time every day, so that when they graduate and get a job, they know how to show up for work on time every day. This may seem like common sense to the older generations; however it isn’t as common with some people of our younger generations today.

As many of us know, school attendance is essential to academic success, but too often students, some parents, and schools don’t realize how quickly absences, excused or unexcused, can add up to academic trouble. Chronic absence— missing more than 9 days of school during a year, can lead to third graders unable to master reading, sixth graders failing courses, and ninth graders dropping out of high school or “barely making it through.”

Attendance in the early grades is critical to sustaining school readiness skills. Research shows that students who miss more than 9 days of school during their kindergarten and/or first grade years—scored an average of 60 points below similar students with good attendance on third-grade reading tests!

It’s important to stress a few key messages; and we are asking for the help of all parents, guardians, grandparents, and community members to promote the following to our youth:

- 1.) Attendance matters for doing well in school and life, starting in kindergarten and even in pre-kindergarten. Children who miss too many days in kindergarten and first grade, more often than not, struggle academically in later years.
- 2.) Absences can add up before you know it.

- 3.) Poor attendance is not just about unexcused absences, or children willfully skipping school – excused absences can affect performance, too. All absences represent lost time in the classroom and a lost opportunity to learn.
- 4.) As parents, we are responsible for making sure our children develop the habit of regular attendance. This is a positive life habit that will do them well in the world of work.
- 5.) Good attendance helps your child do well in school, college, and as previously mentioned, at work.
- 6.) Too many absent students can affect the whole class, creating churn and slowing down instruction for all students.
- 7.) Our School values family time. We ask that families avoid extended vacations that require children to miss a lot of school. We also understand that sometimes special family time vacations are necessary during the school schedule.
- 8.) Students who attend school regularly are more likely to graduate and find good jobs. In fact, high school graduates make, on average, a million dollars more than a dropout over a lifetime.

So please, work to “Make Every Day Count.” The habits our children learn during their school years usually stay with them throughout their lives, and can become very difficult for them to change afterwards. These habits also help develop attitudes and outlooks that form the destiny of our children’s future. We, as you, want them to be successful; and developing good attendance habits is another practice that will give them an edge in the challenging world we live in.