

Proclamation of September 2022 as Attendance Awareness Month

WHEREAS the Covid-19 pandemic and other crises have eroded positive conditions for learning and created an absenteeism crisis,

WHEREAS chronic absence, missing 10% or more of school, alerts schools, community partners and families that one or more positive conditions for learning are not in place,

WHEREAS students are more likely to attend school when positive conditions for learning – physical and emotional health and safety; a sense of belonging, connection and support; academic challenge and engagement; and adults and peers with social emotional competency – are in place,

WHEREAS the impact of absenteeism and punitive approaches to school discipline contribute to the achievement gap that separates students living in low-income communities and many students of color from their peers who may have more resources to make up for lost learning time in the classroom,

WHEREAS showing up for school is an opportunity for students to build routines that can create a sense of safety and belonging, increase engagement and develop trusting relationships with peers, teachers and school staff that increase engagement and motivate them to participate in learning,

WHEREAS reducing absenteeism requires taking a comprehensive approach that begins with prevention and early intervention, and adopting trauma-informed approaches rather than responding with punitive action,

WHEREAS improving attendance and reducing absenteeism takes schools, families and community partners working together to identify and address factors contributing to students missing school, particularly a lack of digital access, mental and physical health services and access to basic economic supports including food and housing,

WHEREAS partnering with students and families to monitor attendance as well as understand and address barriers to attendance requires building and sustaining caring relationships and regular communications in the home language spoken by families,

WHEREAS research found, even before the pandemic, that families had high aspirations for their children, yet faced significant barriers in getting their children to school or lacked the knowledge that showing up nearly every day to school was crucial to academic achievement,

WHEREAS taking attendance daily in a consistent manner and for different types of learning opportunities (remote or in-person) is essential to identifying when students begin to miss too much school,

WHEREAS taking a positive problem-solving approach to reducing absenteeism requires expanding data to include reviewing chronic absence and attendance data for in-person and remote learning, availability of working contact information for families, connectivity (devices and internet) and positive relationships,

WHEREAS promoting attendance requires noticing - as soon as possible - when students are starting to miss too much school in order to engage students and families, identify and offer needed support and early intervention resources,

WHEREAS ensuring an equal opportunity to learn requires using data to detect high levels of absenteeism and missed opportunities to learn by school, grade, and student population,

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that Clay County Board of Education stands with the nation in recognizing September as "Attendance Awareness Month." We hereby commit to focusing on reducing absenteeism and addressing the factors that cause students to miss school (whether offered at a distance, in-person or a blend) in order to ensure all children an equitable opportunity to learn, grow and thrive academically, emotionally and socially. We recognize that we must work together to engage students and families and send the message that learning can and must continue, whether students participate in person, remotely or through blended approaches.

Specifically, we will:

1. Affirm the importance of showing up, and reflect with students and families on what is needed to make showing up to school worthwhile, especially given the challenges experienced during the pandemic.
2. Make clear that improving student attendance, including taking daily attendance in a consistent manner and monitoring absenteeism, continues to be a top priority.
3. Use an expanded set of data, (including analyzing attendance and participation in in-person and remote learning, digital access, availability of working contact information and relationships to school staff), to monitor outcomes for different populations of students, raise public awareness, establish goals, allocate resources, track progress and assure accountability for an equal opportunity to learn.

4. Engage in activities, like attendance buddies or transition programming for new students that help students build regular attendance routines.
5. Engage students, families, educators and the broader community – including civic and elected leaders, local businesses, clergy members and nonprofit organizations – in working together to identify and remove barriers to getting to school and develop meaningful solutions that ensure all children and youth keep learning despite the challenges of Covid-19.
6. Ensure access to learning by promoting universal access to internet and computer devices to all students and school staff.
7. Use chronic absence data, along with other indicators, to identify where the instructional losses are occurring, and invest additional resources in schools and school-related programs, including tutoring, expanded learning, community school strategies and health services.