



Update from the Superintendent

To: All BDS Employees
From: Bill Husfelt, Superintendent
Date: October 21, 2022

This is a copy of the Superintendent's weekly message that is sent to parents/guardians. We want to make sure you have the same information as well so you're in the loop :)

Attendance matters.

While school is based on a foundation of academics, none of our fantastic lessons and research-based practices have any impact if students are not in attendance.

And we need to talk about attendance in Bay County schools because we're seeing some alarming trends.

By the time you read this, we will have had approximately 45 days of school. And already, we have students who have missed one-fourth (or more) of those days. In fact, we currently have attendance concerns about 30 percent of our elementary school students who have missed more than ten percent thus far. About 21 percent of our middle school students have already missed ten percent or more of this school year and about one-fourth of our high school students are in the same category.

Attendance matters. It's worth saying again.

You might think that 90 percent attendance is a great statistic but stop and think about how we really live our lives. What happens if your car only starts 90 percent of the time? Or how about if the store you need is only open 90 percent of the time or if your mail only comes 90 percent of the time or, worse, if your internet only connects 90 percent of the time?

What if your doctor only attended class 90 percent of the time?

My point is, 90 percent is a good grade on an assignment but it's a terrible benchmark for attendance, work ethic and achievement overall. Missing ten percent of our school year is already truly impacting our children, our classrooms and our entire educational system in a very negative way.

Our educators do their very best to work with students who miss class due to illness BUT make-up work is not the same as in-person learning opportunities where students can ask questions, and get help, in "real-time." Teachers spend hours designing engaging lessons with small group activities, manipulatives, student-directed exploration and discussion and ALL of that is missed when students are absent.

It's heart-breaking and, quite candidly, very concerning.

I think we can all agree that the days of schools giving out perfect attendance awards and putting that pressure on students are long gone. No one, and I mean no one, wants a child to come to school when he or she is sick. So we get it; there will be days that must be missed due to illness or appointments that can't be made after school.

But we're seeing MUCH more than that. We're seeing disturbing patterns of students missing Mondays and Fridays or coming to school late every day. Did you realize that a student who is 15 minutes late to school every day has missed A WHOLE DAY of instruction by the end of the month?

Nine thousand BDS students met the state's definition of truancy last year. That's 9,000 students who had 15 or more unexcused absences within a 90-day window.

Parents/guardians, we need your help and we need it quickly.

I do recognize that most of the people reading this are doing their very best to get their students to school on time every single day. And to all of you, I say a very grateful "thank you."

For those struggling to get students to school on time and five days a week, please contact your child's school to see how they can help you overcome whatever barriers are standing in your way. I think all parents, universally, want their children to do better than they did in school and to achieve all of their dreams and goals. That all begins with the habit of regular school attendance and diligence with classwork. We want to help support the families in our community who are struggling NOW before it becomes too late.

Attendance matters in every single grade, whether it's pre-kindergarten or 12th grade. Important things happen at school that can't just be made up three days later, and missed learning opportunities are just tragic for all of us.

Please, please talk with your friends and family members about school attendance. See if you can help a family that's struggling or a family that doesn't see the importance of regular attendance. While we're SO VERY concerned about the alarming attendance trends we see in elementary school, we know those students are relying on parents/guardians to get them up for school, and so we've got to figure out how to help the parents and guardians so they can help their students.

Again, we all know there's that one day, usually a Monday LOL, when it's hard to get out the door on time and I completely understand that. We all have "those" days and I'm not talking about the one day missed for illness or the one day traffic was terrible and your student got a late start. I'm talking about those students who are chronically late or habitually absent ... the students who are missing out on foundational skills that will set them up for lifelong success.

Help us this week, and going forward, to stress the importance of attendance for our students and our families. We want to fill those empty seats with the smiling faces of the students who should be there so we have a chance to work educational magic in all of our classrooms every single day. We want to make sure our students are learning the academic skills and the "soft skills" (like work ethic) that begin in the early grades and set them up for lifelong success.

Stay safe and God Bless!