

Best Practices Inventory for Reducing Chronic Absence

Multi-tiered Approach, Vernon Public Schools

“Everyone is on the same page. Attendance is a priority for everybody.” The community of Vernon considers attendance at school to be of the utmost importance. Beginning with the development and implementation of the *Vernon Community Plan for Children and Youth, Keeping Our Kids in Focus*, all stakeholders from: town hall; the superintendent’s office; child care providers; youth services; the regional YMCA; and many others formed a partnership and a vision for a culture and expectation of attendance for every child, every day.

The superintendent sets the stage for success with a letter to all families at the beginning of the year that outlines the importance of regular attendance at school and the responsibilities of the family. This letter, in English and Spanish, outlines the strategic steps that will take place as students accumulate absences:



- Three (3) absences (excused or unexcused) – A letter will be sent home expressing concern.
- Six (6) absences (excused or unexcused) – A letter will be sent home and a phone call placed to the family by student support personnel.
- Nine (9) absences (excused or unexcused) – A letter will be sent home and the family will be asked to meet with school personnel.

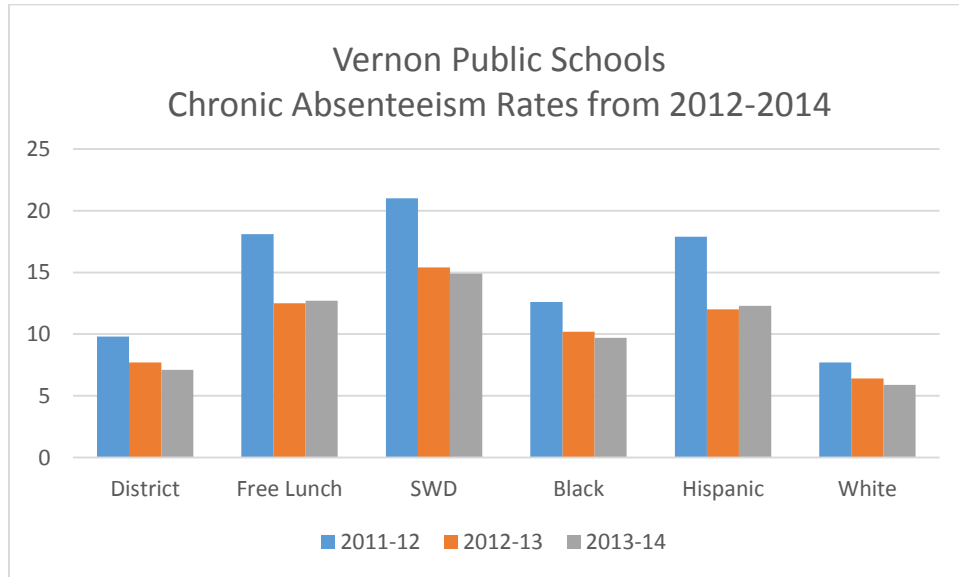
Each of Vernon’s schools has a weekly attendance team meeting that includes the principal/assistant principal, nurse, school counselor, social worker, school psychologist, and special education teacher. In addition, the High School has established a Student Attendance Review Board (SARB). The SARB works to divert students with school attendance problems from the juvenile court system by providing guidance and coordinated community services to meet their special needs. The SARB is composed of representatives from the high school administration, support staff, the Vernon Juvenile Review Board, DCF, Juvenile Probation and various community agencies in the field of mental health and substance abuse. An up-to-date data report is reviewed that identifies students that are accumulating excessive absences. Depending on the number of absences, the intervention as outlined is triggered and a follow-up is made by an attendance officer.

Shrewd data collection, analysis and use. *Vernon Public Schools looks at both average daily attendance, as well as chronic absence. Every month, the district generates an ADA report by school and breaks out the ADA by grade level. The goal is 95% ADA for every school and every grade and the superintendent celebrates when schools achieve that goal. In addition, knowing that ADA alone can paint an unwarranted rosy picture and mask individual students who repeatedly miss school, school-based teams also monitor chronic absence reports every week to identify individual students who are chronically absent and follow up with them. (Attendance Works, 2015)*

A school district truancy counselor coordinates the teams at the middle and high school level and serves as a liaison with families. At the elementary school level, an attendance youth counselor from the city

Youth Services Bureau coordinates the meetings and serves as a liaison with families, often making home visits. Both of their roles are important as they build trust and understanding with the families.

Vernon’s success is systemic and multi-tiered. It builds on an expectation of daily attendance set by the town, the superintendent and all community organizations, interventions are driven by data, and families are engaged by trusting and helpful staff that can link them to the supports that are needed in order to ensure that students are attending school every day.



References

Attendance Works. (2015, March 16). *Vernon: Data-Driven School District*. Retrieved from Attendance Works: <http://www.attendanceworks.org/what-works/vernon-conn-data-driven-school-district/>

Contact Information: