



The Problem

When Appleton Area School District Superintendent Greg Harjes asked district staff what their challenges to student success were, the common answer was attendance. Data showed that kids were missing school at twice the rate prior to the pandemic.

The Solution

Understanding how crucial attendance is to student success, the District established a committee representative of teachers, staff, parents, and the community to focus on improving attendance. One of the committee's recommendations was to hire a second attendance coordinator, which the District did. Responsibilities were divided into one coordinator focusing on 4K through 5th grade and one for middle through high school.

The District's commitment to improving attendance is at every level, from the School Board to individual schools. Each school has an attendance team. The teams meet regularly, review data, develop interventions for students struggling with attendance, and monitor progress.

The Results

The District isn't doing the work alone. With a grant to deter truancy before kids enter the system, the Outagamie County Youth and Family Services Department worked with the District to provide attendance incentives to students, ages



Appleton School District Attendance Coordinators Stephanie Marta (left) and Stacey Nitka (right) promote their walking school bus which supports attendance for younger students.

10-17, with truancy problems. The school attendance teams identified the students, and the attendance coordinators then worked with the students to establish attendance goals. When the students achieved their goals, they received a gift card. The program has been widely successful – approximately 80 percent of the students involved had increased attendance.

The grant also trained staff in Check and Connect, an evidenced-based program that trains mentors to connect with families. 60 school staff

were trained, and of the families participating, there was a 65 percent increase in attendance.

The District is committed to working with families to address barriers to student's attendance, and, again, relies on community partnerships. The local Boys and Girls Club provides transportation to students where parents are challenged to get their kids to school. Through a grant, the Boys and Girls Club works with a cab company for the transport. The grant requires a Club staffer to ride with the kids, and the kids need to be enrolled in the Club.

Understanding the effects of attendance on academics is now ingrained in the School District. Part of the County grant launched an attendance campaign that provided themed posters and yard signs sharing facts on the importance of attendance at school facilities.

"We don't give up on kids. We do what it takes to make our students successful, and improving attendance will help that."

GREG HARJES
APPLETON AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT
SUPERINTENDENT

"Success comes incrementally. The second day of this school year I saw one student who didn't attend school the last semester attend both days. What a great way to start a new semester!"

STEPHANIE MARTA
ATTENDANCE COORDINATOR
FOR MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL

"The conversation around attendance has shifted in our District. Many used to think there wasn't anything we could do about it, but we don't hear that anymore. We know we can do something."

STACEY NITKA
ATTENDANCE COORDINATOR
FOR 4K-5TH GRADE

The [Appleton Area School District](#) serves 15,000 students.
It has 15 elementary schools, 3 middle schools, 3 high schools, and 14 charter schools.