TIPS FOR INCREASING STUDENT ATTENDANCE

✔ Create a climate of change. Take the issue of attendance improvement more seriously and facilitate collaboration and new ideas from the staff and student body leaders. Create a “blueprint” for increasing student attendance, including a plan, responsibilities, timeline, and necessary resources.

✔ Make students and parents/guardians feel welcome at your school. Make it a point to say “hello” to every parent/guardian or student you see in the halls and outside--make it your business to know his or her names.

✔ When a student is absent, get as many members of the school community as possible to immediately talk to the student and the parents/guardians. Teachers, principals, counselors, other staff and students should all be involved. Let absent students know you are aware that they have been missing and that you care that they are at school. Dedicate clerical staff to make a phone call to parents/guardians at work during the day. Since most parents today carry a cell phone, obtain updated emergency information that includes their cell phone numbers.

✔ Reward and recognize individuals and classes for improved attendance, not just perfect attendance. Schools are encouraged to get creative and use their existing community partnerships to find incentives for students. Small, frequent, inexpensive prizes can be a good incentive, even for high school students. The District will be providing certificates and other prizes to give for attendance improvement. Be sure to announce prizewinners in your newsletter or on your school website.

✔ Provide Counseling Services: All secondary schools are encouraged to purchase a full-time Pupil Services and Attendance (PSA) counselor. Counselors are crucial because they identify students with problems through their attendance patterns and work with them and their families to develop support plans that will help them stay in school. PSA counselors also visit students’ homes to assess environmental factors and identify barriers that contribute to high absenteeism. These counselors help families and schools to develop strategies aimed at improving school attendance and reduce dropout.

✔ Clarify and publicize legal and school standards related to attendance for students and parents/guardians and enforce them consistently. Students between the ages of 6 and 18 must attend school daily. Parents or guardians are responsible for sending their children to school. A student who is absent three full days without a valid excuse, or is tardy or absent on three occasions without a valid excuse for more than 30 minutes, or any combination thereof, is a truant. Truancy can lead to severe consequences, including fines and criminal prosecution.

✔ With the SIS system, use last year’s attendance figures to make a target list of low-attending students who need more attention from staff. Meet with the students and their parents early in the school year to discuss the importance of improving attendance. (Secondary schools only.)
Make teachers and administrators aware of the loss of Average Daily Attendance (ADA) funds due to absences. Make them aware of the monetary benefits that will come to the schools as attendance increases.

Create an environment where students understand that bullying is not acceptable and will not be tolerated. Discuss with staff, students and parents/guardians all aspects of the anti-bullying policy and strategies to prevent bullying. Intervene immediately and take corrective action when bullying is observed. Assure the target of the bullying that steps will be taken to monitor that this behavior will not continue.

Hold assemblies for parents/guardians and the students who are chronically absent. Provide suggestions to get students back to school and describe consequences if they don’t return. Make necessary resources available at the meeting to make it effective for parents and guardians; the point of the assembly is to be educational, not punitive.

Make home visits concerning student absences if parents/guardians cannot be reached by telephone. Explore the possibility of creating flexible schedules for counselors to allow for Saturday home visits. This could include exchanging one weekday every two weeks for one Saturday.

Forge a relationship with local businesses where youth may congregate when truant—encourage them to keep students in school during school hours. Create a poster that states “We support youth in school” and provide the business with the school phone number. Window signs supporting “Count Me In” will be provided to local businesses.

Make your school a place where students feel safe and respected. Adopt a character education program that includes disciplinary procedures, involves students in the planning process and is enforced consistently.

Work with the District Attorney’s Abolish Chronic Truancy Program and the City Attorney’s Operation Bright Future Program to enforce mandatory attendance laws. Representatives from these offices can speak to parents/guardians during school parent nights and set up meetings with parents/guardians of low-attending students. The DA or CA will explain the importance of attendance and the legal consequences of truancy. Families will receive suggestions for improving attendance, referrals to agencies for counseling, as well as a reminder of their legal obligation to send their children to school.

Make the relationship between students and schools more personal. Ask office aides, clerks, and secretaries to make individual contact with "high-risk" students on a daily basis. Develop an "Adoptee Program" in which teacher or staff volunteers make weekly informal contacts with "high-risk" students. Make sure that volunteers have some training in mentoring.

Initiate mentoring programs among the students. Let older students with good attendance regularly assist younger students. Specifically, determine ways to have older students help younger students transition from elementary to middle school and also from middle school to high school.