

BE COOL, PACK THE SCHOOL ATTENDANCE CAMPAIGN

South St. Paul High School
South St. Paul, Minnesota

The purpose of our Attendance Campaign was to increase student attendance by educating students, parents, staff, and the community about attendance issues. Achieving a “higher rate of attendance” was a school improvement goal for the 1998-99 school year. The Attendance Campaign was sponsored by the Partnership Action Team. We met over the summer of 1998 to begin our efforts in August, 1998.

A previous task force on Attendance Concerns indicated that parents do not understand attendance procedures, i.e., forget to send notes when students are absent; misunderstand about legal issues; are uninformed about guidelines to help determine if the student should (should not) go to school.

Incorporated into the campaign were communication pieces to educate and inform parents, students, teachers, and the community.

Parents: A mailing to parents included a flyer explaining the importance of students attending school, and giving simple attendance process instructions; an attendance magnet with a 24-hour call-in number; and business cards with attendance numbers for wallets or work Rolodexes. The principal’s monthly newsletter contained an attendance fact. The attendance page in the student/parent handbook was revised with “simple” attendance steps. Twelve on Thursday parent meeting agendas included attendance as a discussion item.

Students: The desktop publishing class came up with the campaign slogan, “BE COOL... PACK THE SCHOOL.” (Note: We are the South St. Paul Packers!) They also designed posters which were posted throughout the school and in every classroom. Morning announcements included an attendance fact or “motivational” quote. Students received awards for perfect attendance. The student newspaper, *Packer Pipeline*, included an article about attendance.

Teachers: Two forms were created for teachers to help them keep better attendance. Reminders about attendance were written in the weekly in-house staff memo, *In the Loop*. The high school held an instructional focus day on attendance. All teachers attended a half-hour presentation which included comments from teachers who have worked in the attendance office. Administrators were present to clarify teachers’ comments and to answer questions. “Good News Notes” were used by teachers to send notes to parents when students had perfect or improved attendance.

Community Members: The principal wrote an article about the importance of school attendance that was published in the local newspaper. School attendance reminders and results were published on the high school web site. Signs were given to local businesses which said, "If you're skipping school, skip this place."

Our district graphics department designed the parent flyer, magnet, and business card. The building budget paid for the off-set printing of these pieces in our district duplicating department. Student rewards for perfect attendance were donated by local businesses.

Student attendance for September and November 1999 was 92.5%, as compared with 90% for these months in 1998. This translates into 42 more students in school every day. We gave awards to 485 students for perfect attendance in Term I. The instructional focus day on attendance received high ratings from teachers and positive comments on their evaluation forms. When we met with parents during the year and asked about the attendance mailing, use of magnets, etc., informal feedback was positive. We believe our attendance campaign has been most successful.

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