

August 30, 2016

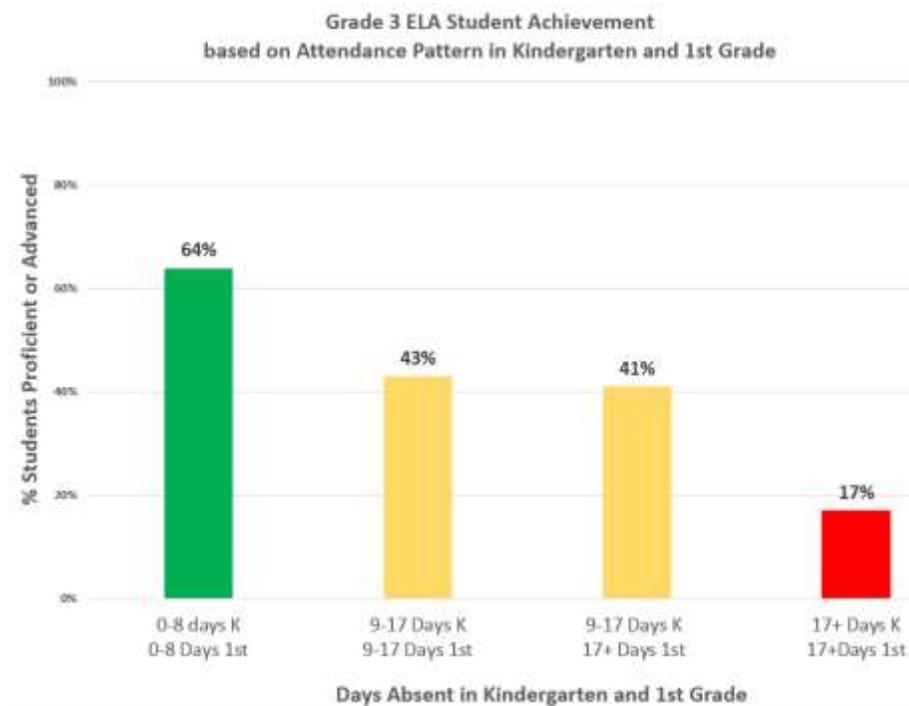
Dear Tahoma Family:

Welcome back to another great year in Tahoma schools. We are excited about the work we are doing to support high quality learning and want to reach out to our families on an important issue with which we need your help. School attendance is critically important. Simply put, if students aren't here we can't teach them.

Frequent absences are an issue at many other school districts in Washington, which has the second-highest rate of absenteeism in the nation. Unfortunately, Tahoma is experiencing a higher percentage of chronically absent students than most districts. While not all of the reasons for frequent absences are clear, it is apparent that school attendance must become a higher priority for all students so that they have the best chance to be successful.

When students are not in school, they miss important learning opportunities that can't be made up by simply trying to catch up on assignments. In a 180-day school year, a 10 percent absentee rate equals two days a month, on average, that a student is not in school. Being in school every day is especially important to younger students. For example:

- Starting in kindergarten, too many absences (excused and unexcused) can cause children to fall behind in school. As illustrated in the chart below, less than one fifth of students who are chronically absent during kindergarten and 1st grade will be achieving at grade level by grade 3 in reading and writing.
- Missing 10 percent (or about 18 days) increases the chance that your student will not read or master math at the same level as their peers.
- Students can still fall behind by missing just a day or two every few weeks.



The impact of frequent absences are not isolated to a particular grade level or group. Similar impacts are seen across all grade levels and in all core subjects. These impacts are felt by all our students. This is especially concerning because catching up is very difficult for students once they fall behind.

We know that:

- Tardies count – being chronically late to school may lead to poor attendance.
- Absences can affect the whole classroom if the teacher has to slow down learning to help children catch up.
- By 6th grade, absenteeism is one of three indicators that a student may drop out of high school.
- By being present at school, your child learns valuable social skills and has the opportunity to develop meaningful relationships with other students and school staff.
- By 9th grade, good attendance is a better predictor of graduation rates than 8th grade test scores.

This year, Tahoma School District is placing special emphasis on attendance. Parents will receive information throughout the year that promotes good attendance. Parents can also expect to be contacted if their child is frequently absent. The state is requiring we look at total student absences and take action, whether excused or unexcused. School board policy also is changing to encourage improved attendance and following state law reduces what qualifies as an excused absence. In Tahoma we see this as being an important part of our Future Ready initiative. Regular school attendance and a commitment to learning carry over into future education and career opportunities.

“We need the help of parents and students if we are going to reduce absenteeism,” Rob Morrow, superintendent, said. “We want students to be present every day. We understand that there will be times when students must miss school due to illness or other legitimate reasons. But we also believe that school must be the top priority for students so that they will have the best chance to succeed now and in their adult lives.”

We hope you will join us in working to ensure that our students understand the importance of good attendance. Together, we can help our students prepare for their future by having good school attendance.

Sincerely,

Dawn Wakeley

Executive Director of Teaching and Learning