

ED 632 Research Informs Teaching: Attendance

Initial Research question: *Does adding attendance-related incentives (bell ringers, discussion questions, daily participation points, etc) to classroom instruction improve student attendance?*

I found three very strong references to help me better frame my research question and inform my future practice. I say future practice and not teaching because I am wrapping up my principal licensure and will be working as a 7-12 principal in the fall. What I really wanted to do with my research question above was to build list of references from which I could cite evidence-based programs that have positively impacted student attendance.

I have found that working with teachers is not unlike working with students. As an education leader you must have clear expectations, obtainable objectives that can be tied to standards, and data to support/inform your decision making process. For the past few years, teachers in our building have been conducting “mandatory bell ringers” at the beginning of class as a way to combat tardiness. I was asked during my job interview for the principal position if I would continue to support that practice. I said I would look into what the data suggests and adjust as needed with input from the teaching staff.

I don’t want teachers to be doing “bell ringers” or random “thought of the day” activities, taking up precious instructional time, if evidence does not, as I suspect, support arbitrarily assigned “first ten minutes of the period” activities. From what I have read thus far, any evidence is anecdotal at best.

So what from my research will I use to inform my practice as a principal next fall? I have culled the following concepts from my three initial sources and will continue to seek out other data as the summer progresses:

From my first article, titled “Establishing School-wide Attendance Incentives”, I will take the overall framework for school-wide attendance initiatives and the emphasis put on ALL stakeholders (teachers, administrators, school board members) focusing on their piece of the attendance puzzle.

I will build upon that “it takes a village” approach to attendance with notes from my second resource, a white paper published by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NREL) in 2004 titled, “Increasing Student Attendance: Strategies from Research and Practice. I will focus on the research based strategies presented in the chapter titled, “What Can Individual Staff Members Do?”. It is clear that the author, Jennifer Railsbach, places a stronger emphasis on relationship building versus specific activities to curb attendance issues.

Finally, I will take the strategies presented in my third article, “Fifteen Effective Strategies for Improving Student Attendance and Truancy Prevention” (Smink & Reimer, 2005), and work them into small, manageable action plans for the various stakeholders mentioned above.

This is not the end of the process by any means. I realize I cannot come in next fall with an armload of reforms and initiatives and changes. But I have worked with this core group of secondary teachers for almost five years now and I feel I have built up enough equity that I can present them with two or three main goals (one of them being improving attendance) and get enough “buy in” to make an impact.

References

Attendance Works. (2014). *Establishing School-wide Attendance Initiatives*. Pamphlet

Railsbach, Jennifer. (2004). *Increasing Student Attendance: Strategies from Research and Practice*. Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory

Smink, Jay & Reimer, Mary S. (2005). *Fifteen Effective Strategies for Improving Attendance and Truancy Prevention*. National Dropout Prevention Center/Network.