

Adjusting attendance

New process promotes team approach to improve attendance rates

Sophia Vamvakias

Get to class! That is what most high school students have been told some time in their schooling career, but are students actually listening? Data collected from powerschool say no, students are not getting to class, at least not enough to reach Englewood High School's goal of a 91 percent attendance rate.

Last school year, EHS's attendance rate, according to the Colorado Department of Education, was 83.19 percent. Compared to other schools attendance rates like Littleton High School (93.26 percent), Arapahoe High School (94.15 percent), and Heritage High School (94.75 percent), EHS's rate does not stack up.

In order to bring the attendance rate up and reach Englewood's goal of 91 percent, administration has changed the way absences are handled. A new attendance process is starting to be implemented in the high school, allowing much more communication between students, parents, and teachers by having personal meetings with students who are absent a lot.

"What we've been doing lately is putting together these Student Intervention Team meetings, and we've been having a really good turn out with a lot of teachers present, the student, and their mom or dad," Principal Jon Fore said. "Then we walk through what's going on and let the student tell us from their perspective why they're missing class. We hear from the parents on what their ideas are, or their goals maybe for their kids, which generally comes down to graduation. It's really more of a problem solving meeting where there's plans made say if there is low grades or their skipping in math. We talk about that."

Having strong communication pathways with students who are truant, letting them know there are adults willing to help them, and also holding them accountable are the important focuses of this new process, according to Fore.

"We also enter into it an attendance contract, with the student, the school and the family. So there are student responsibilities, parent responsibilities, and school responsibilities, and the contract spells all that out. The goal is to keep student and their families out of truancy court. Generally what we've been finding is if we get kids on attendance contracts and bring in their teachers and parents, and make a big deal out of it, that the attendance will improve," Fore said.

The new process is highly supported by the staff that work mostly with truant students.

"I think it's [the new process] a great idea and the reason why is because I think like people can get behind and skipping class is like habit, and so the only way to break a habit is through intervention. So you stop it, and open up new doors for people to enter through and new options for people. I think people need to feel like there is a reason to come to school. So sometimes, when you're a freshman, or a sophomore people don't really go, but when you talk with kids and work through it, it helps a lot," Truant Officer Keelyn Lewis said

However, with this new process, the focus is not only on students who are chronically absent, but a focus is also put on rewarding students who have good attendance in ways that matter to them.

"New incentives are being put in place to reward good attendance. Students with perfect attendance each week will have their names entered for a drawing of weekly prizes and will have a chance to earn monthly prizes. I know there are movie tickets [for one of the prizes]," Dean of Students Justin Johnson said.

So far, this new method seems to be working.

"Attendance rates are rising. We haven't reached our goal yet, but we are making strides. In fact, we received an award from the district for February with the highest rate of improvement for any school in the district. The two snowy days didn't help, as our attendance rates dropped for those two days. The biggest gain has been for seniors. While they still trail the other grade levels in overall attendance rates, their attendance rates are trending up," Johnson said. "Since there is a direct correlation between attendance and grades, we are seeing student's grades increase as we address their attendance. This has a positive emotional impact on the student because they begin to feel less stress daily and receive more positive feedback."

For students who have good attendance, this is a welcome change.

"I think it's a great idea because I barely miss any school, and I don't get a whole lot of recognition, so I think it's a great idea," Josie Phillips (12) said.

However, not all students agree with the new process.

"What I think about the new policy is it will bring a lot of trouble upon the adults, and it can cause problems at home that weren't there before because you either couldn't get to class or missed class repeatedly. If things don't change I think they take it a few step too far beyond the point of just calling home," Jeremiah Trailer (11) said.

This new process is going to take effort on not only student's part, but also the teachers part as well.

"Our job is to check the progress monitoring sheet that has a space for absences. Those absences are for every two week. If there are 10 absences in any combination of classes or five absences in the same class over a two week period, we have to call home, and maybe set up a meeting with the dean," English teacher Sarah Fuller said.

Levels of attendance process

