

Every Day Counts: Reducing Chronic Absenteeism

Grant Type: **Dollar and nondollar support**

Dollar Amount: **\$50,000**

Foundation Name: **The Patterson Foundation**

What was your objective with the grant or initiative?

When a student misses 10% of the school year (i.e., 2 days per month), he or she is chronically absent and in danger of falling behind—and likely will not catch up later with his or her peers. The objective of this initiative was to engage students in the “why, what, when” of being in school every day so they would understand the importance of regular attendance. By creating a poster—either as homework or a class activity—the students became the teachers of “Every Day Counts.”

What were the results of this grant or initiative?

This initiative, offered to Sarasota and Manatee countywide school districts in Florida, resulted in more than 38,000 posters created by students in Pre-K through 12th grade. Attendance in each district improved quarter to quarter and over the previous year. Each grade in each district received a prize: A total of 387 students and their families were invited to a Circus Sarasota performance. In addition, a prize was awarded to one student per grade in each district; the 27 winners received iPads.

Why would you say this grant or initiative had outsized impact?

Many poster contests are held; however, Every Day Counts took teacher and student engagement to a deeper level. Participation was voluntary, and 40% of students participated. Reducing chronic absenteeism now is on the radar screen of both school districts. Each district has staff and teams that are delving deeper into why individual students are chronically absent.

Thanks to the support of local media, this issue has been given visibility. Images of posters hung in community venues, such as county fair and hallways of municipalities and schools, continue to be shared via social media. Popular demand has called for repeating this initiative. Across the country, other communities engaged in the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading are now replicating this model.

The Patterson Foundation learned that there is true value in thinking boldly, paying attention to who needs to know what, and being responsive when glitches occur. Communicate, communicate, communicate. Have fun while doing important work



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