



September 2017

From: The Fall River Community Task Force on Attendance
Re: September is National Attendance Awareness Month -
Update on Attendance Task Force Strategies
Written by: Marcia Picard, Co-chair

September is National Attendance Awareness month. Although conceived nationally to coincide with the start of the school year, it is essential for everyone, especially family adults, to understand attention to good attendance is crucial every day of every school year, not just in September when the school year begins. Members of the Fall River Community Task Force on Attendance understand this and have unveiled three major strategies aimed at improving Fall River's attendance rates district-wide for the coming school year.

First, the Attendance Task Force called upon community members from all walks of life to help launch the upcoming school year, demonstrating to students and their families that good attendance matters to us all. For the second year in a row, the Task Force invited people from around the City to join them on the first day of school, outside of each Fall River elementary and community school, to High-Five students as they begin their first day of the new school year. As they did last year, community members included firefighters, police officers, nurses, doctors, lawyers, bankers, business owners and employees, elected officials, neighborhood residents and more. All welcomed students back to school with an emphasis on good attendance. Approximately 300 community members participated in Fall River's High-Five event with expectations next year running even higher.

Secondly, on August 14th, the Fall River School Committee unanimously approved a newly-revised Attendance Policy, the result of work that began within the Attendance Task Force. This new policy sets clear expectations for student attendance at every grade level. This renewed emphasis on attendance speaks to the importance of students being in school every day, on time. Missing even 1-2 days of school a month translates to 10% of a school year missed with students falling further and further behind in their studies. Lost time on learning not only adversely affects the future for individual students, it can also have a negative effect on the economic future of Fall River as ill-prepared students may reach workforce age without the benefit of a high school diploma, never mind a higher education. Good attendance is key to student achievement and broader efforts to improve our City schools. District investments in curriculum and instruction won't amount to much if students aren't showing up to benefit from them. After all, teachers cannot teach empty chair

And lastly, in a move to maintain consistency in the way chronic absenteeism is addressed and to continue city-wide collaboration, a comprehensive and multi-step Attendance Proclamation was created and signed by both the Superintendent and the Mayor of our city.

Fall River cannot afford to think of absenteeism as simply a school administration concern. Support for academic success is up to everyone – parents, grandparents, extended family adults, neighbors, service providers, health care professionals, business and faith-based citizens - to everyone! For the future of our children, for the future of Fall River, everyone must do their part to help fill every empty chair – every child, every day.