

Poor Student Attendance Hurts Us All

"It's all fun and games until somebody gets hurt." We've all heard it before, or something very similar, "No running in the house!" A warning coming from our mother, a coach, our 4th grade teacher, someone we care about and someone who we know cares about us. The message, simply, "Knock it off!" Case in point, "Senior Ditch Day," which is not, by the way, a school sanctioned activity. "Senior Ditch Day" - "It's all fun and games until somebody gets hurt." Well not only has "somebody" been hurt, we all have, all of us in the La Costa Canyon High School Community.

Every time a student is absent from school, whether this absence is "excused" or "unexcused" we all get hurt. Our school, and it is our school, all of ours, a "public" school, our school, La Costa Canyon High School, loses \$52.26 per student per day every time a student is absent, whether "excused" or "unexcused."

On November 1, 2007, "Senior Ditch Day" we had 115 seniors absent from school. At \$52.26 each, those absences cost us, all of us, remember, "public" school \$6009.90. By comparison, during the two previous days, October 30 and 31, 2007 we had, respectively, 10 and 12 seniors absent. Those cost us too, \$522.60 and \$627.12. Day by day, it adds up. Imagine what we could buy. Our La Costa Canyon Foundation is dedicated to fundraising for all the extras, and even the essentials that we just can't afford. And all along, the best fund raising we could do would be something as simple as just showing up.

Now, of course there are occasions where we all have to be absent, or are anyway - all of us, students, parents, teachers, even principals. And for all of us, whether those absences are "excused" or "unexcused" there are costs involved. Economic costs, productivity costs, educational costs - a loss of learning,

and for the "unexcused" variety especially, intrinsic costs - what do those absences say about our character?

Character is a quality that we want to develop in our students, in our children. Here at La Costa Canyon High School we emphasize Four Pillars of Character - Respect, Responsibility, Trustworthiness, and Kindness. Good attendance is part of this. Good attendance is reflective of our character, our perseverance, our ability, as Jackson Browne put it, "...to get up and do it again - Amen!"

Now you can argue with my philosophizing all you want. The fact remains, we lose \$52.26 per student per day every time a student is absent, whether "excused" or "unexcused." "Senior Ditch Day" happened. We will hope it never happens again, but November 1, 2007 is past - that bull is out of the barn - \$6009.90 lost.

There is something we can do. There are answers. We can support our students, our children, toward good attendance, and not make excuses for them, especially when there really is no good excuse. And, we are developing an Academic Support Saturday School to augment and compliment our more usual Discipline and Attendance Saturday School. Students will not have to be assigned to the Academic Support Saturday School. Instead, they can actually choose to attend, and we will have teachers, our teachers, their teachers, there to support them in Math, Science, English, Social Science, and Physical Education. Our students benefit, and for each student who had an absence, "excused" or "unexcused" during the previous week we recover, at least a significant part of, that lost \$52.26.

"It's all fun and games until somebody gets hurt." Poor student attendance hurts us all. "Knock it off!"

Craig Lewis

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