Making every day count

Case study one
Far North Queensland secondary state school

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- 1,700 students
- 30% indigenous students
- 45% English as an additional language or dialect
- Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) value — just over 900 with 75% of students in bottom and bottom middle quartiles

1. Develop a positive school culture

Create a safe, supportive and inclusive environment

Establish an inclusive and culturally safe environment where all cultural groups can be celebrated.

Parent and community engagement

Make positive phone calls to parents when their child had worked hard.

'Some parents…get a call. "Oh, what's he done now?" 'Actually, I am here to say what a good job he's done this week.'… And then they come back and go, "Wow, someone said something nice about my kid." And then it makes a difference for the kid.' (Teacher)

Seek expert advice

"We are working with Dr George Otero … a leader in 'Relational Learning' … we talk to him about building our partnerships with community and how we can engage community." (Deputy Principal)

"A lot of our staff… are working towards Harmony Day…having different cultural groups represented." (Deputy Principal)

2. Communicate high expectations of attendance

Explicit focus on expectations

The school has a 'clearance process', i.e. attendance at events or access to a school-based apprenticeship requires at least 85% attendance, school fees paid or on a payment plan, assessment complete, good behaviour, or no overdue library books. Students who won't be 'cleared' are given opportunities to address the issues to meet the expectations.

"If students can't get clearance, we will have a talk about how they can get clearance… we give them a chance to improve…we make some allowances." (HOD Senior Pathways)

"We don't have school rules; we have expectations because rules are made to be broken; expectations are made to be met." (Principal)

3. Record and follow-up student absences

Consistent responses

Address overt truancy with a three strikes approach.

Involve parents in the conversation about the school's detention policy and the consequences for truancy.

"First time truanting is a warning and a call home … second time, a lunch time detention of 20 minutes. Third time … with permission from the parents; a 3 p.m. after-school detention with me" (Attendance Officer)

4. Monitor student non-attendance

Attendance data is monitored to keep track of students

"I monitor attendance every day, five days a week. I keep a spreadsheet of the students that I am watching." (Attendance Officer)

"In 2013 we targeted students who had attendance between 65 and 85% to look at the reasons, the barriers, and to move that attendance up" (Principal)

5. Provide intervention and support

Collaborative team approach

Have a large Student Wellbeing and Attendance Team (SWAT) - this includes an attendance officer, school-based police officer, guidance officers, youth support workers, chaplain, psychologist, HOD (Behaviour), HOD (Student Engagement).

Address barriers to learning and wellbeing

Support students to access work experience and school-based apprenticeships by having a loan scheme for protective equipment (e.g. clothing, boots, equipment) that has been donated by local businesses.

The school has an Open Learning Centre – for short term, one-on-one support; and a specialised English as an additional language/dialect program.

"Everyone needs to be part of the team, otherwise it all falls apart." (HOD)

Queensland Government