Have you heard the quote by Malala Yousafzai? "Let us remember: One book, one pen, one child, and one teacher can change the world." That concept is powerful. Last year, more than 38,000 students in Sarasota and Manatee counties participated in the 3rd Annual Attendance Awareness Poster Contest. Imagine the possibilities this year when we engage students and their families across our four-county region -- Sarasota, Manatee, Charlotte, and DeSoto. Picture how many more lives will be touched.

As students engage in the poster contest, there are a number of ways schools can support them:
Schools are encouraged to include positive messaging about the importance of outstanding attendance on their marquees, in communications to parents/caregivers, and in their daily messaging to students.

Schools are encouraged to display posters throughout the remainder of the year.

Schools are encouraged to share the winning images on their individual webpages, in electronic newsletters, in cards, calendars, and in correspondence.

Schools, educators, staff, parents, etc., are encouraged to use #EveryDayCounts, #SchoolEveryDay or #GLReading when sharing on social media platforms to promote the contest, e.g. the creative process, the winning posters, special moments, other attendance related activities.

Posters will be judged according to the following criteria:

- Use of Every Day Counts template - the Every Day Counts icon must be visible.
- Relevance to the theme - Attendance Awareness.
- Creativity and originality.
- Visual clarity and appeal.

We know that there’s no such thing as perfect, especially when it comes to attendance. After all, children do get sick or may need to miss school for a number of reasons. We don’t want our children missing 20 days, so what’s a realistic number? Consider striving for less than five absences per year as hitting the mark of excellence!

Creating a Culture of Attendance:
Attendance Works New Teaching Attendance Curriculum

Strong communities thrive in the face of adversity and work together to achieve shared aspirations. Our region is strong, and we are not alone. We are one of 390 Grade-Level Reading (GLR) communities that are embracing the journey to address common obstacles impacting a child’s ability to read. Attendance Works, an ally helping the GLR Network jump the hurdle of chronic absenteeism, is
helping to LIFT, LEARN and LEAD communities like ours through their new attendance curriculum, created to equip school leaders, teachers, and school support staff with an understanding of the issue, guidance, and resources to reduce chronic absences.

They have created three modules to support teachers and school administrators as each integrates attention to attendance into existing practices. Each 40-minute course contains videos, reflections, and opportunities to apply new concepts.

- Module 1: Why We Teach Attendance
- Module 2: Creating a Culture of Attendance - Primary Grades Version
- Module 2: Creating a Culture of Attendance - Secondary Grades Version
- Module 3: Using Data for Intervention and Support (Primary Grades Version) Look for Module 3 later in 2018!
- Module 3: Using Data for Intervention and Support (Secondary Version) Look for Module 3 later in 2018!

In our four-county region, nearly 12,500 students are chronically absent. When we work together to monitor data, encourage a habit of regular attendance, and reduce hurdles that keep children from getting to school, chronic absenteeism will eventually wither away. Together, let's explore how this new tool can assist our work in closing the gap.

On the Horizon

By

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Community Foundation of Sarasota County

"Given the chance to learn, even children living in poverty can transform their lives." - Linda Ferdinand, Director of Horizons Unlimited Christian Academy

Much like the name implies, Horizons Unlimited Christian Academy has shown that when children, parents, community members, and education professionals come together to create a greater impact, the possibilities can be endless. Founded by Bethlehem Bible Church, Horizons has been serving families in
Sarasota’s Newtown Community since 2003. After recognizing that about 90% of their families were on subsidized tuition support, Horizons decided to expand their services to include a supportive environment that would put families on a path to educational success and economic security.

Horizons partnered with the Community Foundation of Sarasota County to establish a pilot program called O3: “Our School, Our Families, Our Community” that would be focused around the Community Foundation’s two-gen approach, working with both children and their parents simultaneously to increase the overall quality of the early learning experience for students and create new pathways and economic supports for parents. Through this partnership, the program made a number of implementations to ensure that the school provided a more strategic approach to addressing the needs of their families, such as:

- Designing a computer center with a dedicated instructor to teach basic functions and familiarize students with its uses in state testing that is required in preschool and beyond.
- Working with elementary professionals to select computer programs designed to increase kindergarten readiness skills and reduce summer slide.
- Providing economic support, Adult Learner scholarships, workforce development opportunities and tuition scholarships (including cost-free, 2-gen enriched summer programming) so parents could pursue their dreams of higher education and career advancement.
- Increasing opportunities for professional development by various state training organizations in which Horizons staff obtained more than 40 new certifications.

Now in its second year, the pilot has demonstrated that family engagement, community support, and the two-gen approach play a vital role in increasing the success of any program. We’re proud to report parents of O3 have already gone on to obtain degrees in nursing, become first-time homebuyers, and small business owners. Even more exciting is that because of the commitment to academic excellence, their students were more prepared for Kindergarten than non-Horizons students. In fact, Horizons was only one of two VPK programs in Sarasota County to be assigned a VPK readiness score of 100 by the Florida Department of Education for their 2016-2017 graduating class. The program is growing, and we can only look to greater things on the horizon!

We welcome your thoughts. Contact us at info@GradeLevelReadingSuncoast.net.