

*Every Day Counts*  
*Jean Skorapa, RSU5 Superintendent*

*“One day Alice came to a fork in the road and saw a Cheshire cat in a tree. ‘Which road do I take?’ she asked. ‘Where do you want to go?’ was his response. ‘I don’t know,’ Alice answered. ‘Then,’ said the cat, ‘it doesn’t matter.’ — Lewis Carroll, Alice in Wonderland*

Over two decades ago my youngest child stood at the end of our street, waiting to board the big yellow bus which would take him to Morse Street School in Freeport for his first day of Kindergarten. I remember the striped shirt tucked in beneath his Oshkosh overalls and the blue and white railroad cap he wore on his head. I remember the new backpack he carried with a pencil box filled with crayons and a special snack packed inside. I remember taking pictures of him standing on the first step of the bus and then waving to him as he smiled from the window as the bus drove away.

Although he is now grown and has a career of his own, I remember the sense of pride I felt as he reached that milestone, but I also remember the feelings of sadness at the realization of how quickly he was growing up. I will always cherish this memory and so many, many more from his school experience.

In a student’s K-12 career, there are 2275 school days in which to receive the instruction and support required to prepare them to pursue their passion after high school graduation. In just 2275 school days, children progress from learning to identify letters and shapes to analyzing complex texts and testing hypotheses. There is so much to learn and so little time.

The importance of regular school attendance cannot be overstated. Research from the U.S. Department of Education demonstrates that regular school attendance is a critical factor in academic achievement at all grade levels. Chronic absenteeism is defined as missing 10% or more of the school year or 18 days, regardless if the absence is excused or unexcused. Chronic absenteeism, even as early as Kindergarten, correlates with reduced achievement in literacy and math that lasts for multiple years. In addition, there is a demonstrated negative impact on the social/emotional development of children who are regularly absent from school as they do not have an opportunity to learn how to play with peers. Sadly, at the middle and high school levels, chronic absenteeism is one of the strongest predictors that a student will fail to graduate on time or will drop out of school.

Last year, over 14.5% of students in RSU 5 were chronically absent from school. The cumulative impact on a chronically absent student’s learning and social/emotional development is significant. For example, a student who misses 12.5 days a year each year, although not considered chronic absenteeism, has missed nearly a full year of schooling in their educational career.

Unlike Alice from Alice in Wonderland we know where we are going and we know the path to success. The staff of RSU 5 is committed to partnering with parents and caregivers to significantly decrease absenteeism in the 2024-2025 school year. We are confident that if we work together, we can significantly increase student attendance, achievement, and cumulative positive outcomes. We know the path...let’s take it together.