

INDEPENDENT

EDUCATION

Deer Valley Unified attendance rates up early in new school year

While district bucks the trend of statewide chronic absenteeism, one elementary school in particular went back to the basics to keep kids in school



(Independent Newsmedia/Steve Stockmar)

“It’s a known practice for Tier 1 behavior intervention that establishing that connection with kids first thing in the morning is so important,” said Copper Creek Elementary Principal Christina Myers, who welcomed students to school, as she and the faculty staff do every morning, on Sept. 8 on the Glendale campus.

The new school year is young but attendance is on the rise throughout Deer Valley Unified School District.

That’s key, considering that the Arizona Department of Education [earlier this year reported](#) significant spikes in chronic absenteeism statewide, with some districts reporting more than 30% of students missing at least 10% of the school year.

An early look at the new school year shows a 95% attendance rate at all Deer Valley Unified schools since school opened July 31, which is up a couple ticks from last year’s 93% rate, according to district data.

“Across the nation, rates of chronic absence have nearly doubled from pre-pandemic levels, and Arizona is facing its own urgent challenge, with one of the highest chronic absence rates in the country,” the [Arizona Chronic Absence Resource Guide](#), published by the Read On Arizona task force in September 2024, wrote in its findings. “Nearly one in three of our students are missing this significant amount of instructional learning time, with certain negative impact on their success in school.”

Chronic absenteeism is defined as missing 10% of the school days. In a typical school year of 180 days that meets five days per week, this means missing at least 18 days.

Over the course of a full school year, missing two days of school per month equates to being chronically absent.

The reasons for chronic absenteeism can vary widely among students and their unique circumstances. As a result, ways to reverse the trend can be just as varied but one Deer Valley Unified elementary campus is in its third year with a program that is helping the effort.

As part of the district's "Everyday Counts" initiative that encourages each campus to focus on attendance, Copper Creek Elementary, at 7071 W. Hillcrest Blvd., in north Glendale, has all teachers stand everywhere from the curb where students are dropped off to their classroom doors in a coordinated – and clearly fun – effort to welcome each student as soon as they arrive for the morning.

When teachers might otherwise have been making final preparations for the day as students file in, instead every teacher stands at the door for a high-five, a fist bump, or hugs.

Simple, yes. But for a kid – particularly those who may be anxious about arriving for school – it's a big thing. And it encourages students to embrace the idea of arriving at school on a positive note with a broader aim at maintaining attendance.

While students across Arizona experience a 30% chronic absenteeism rate, Copper Creek, with an enrollment of almost 700 students, has a chronic absenteeism rate of 15%.

"If that child wasn't seen or heard in the morning or had a rough start or maybe was on the fence about coming to school or didn't feel good, when they get here and their teacher says, 'good morning, happy to see you, how are you, how was your game,' they instantly have a connection," Copper Creek Principal Christina Myers, who has more than 30 years of experience in education, said Monday morning as she, naturally, greeted students for the morning. "I think it just starts their day out a positive connection."

Unlike truancy, chronic absence focuses on students who miss school regularly whether the absences are excused or unexcused, the Arizona Chronic Absence Resource Guide notes. Chronic absence is an indicator that shows the level at which students are missing instructional time.

In 2021 in the midst of COVID, chronic absenteeism more than doubled, according to the study. One in five enrolled students in grades 1-8 missed more than 10% of the school year, and one in four of all Arizona public schools had 30% or more of their students chronically absent.

Chronic absenteeism continued to rise in 2022, the report found, with one in three students chronically absent in grades 1-8, and 59% of schools throughout Arizona showing 30% or more of their students chronically absent.



First-grade teacher Michelle Abraham welcomes each student as they arrive at their classroom on Sept. 8 on the Glendale campus.