Attendance

By Assistant Director of Student Support Services Dr. Jen Sahr

Start the Year Strong: Why Every Day of School Matters

As a new school year begins, it's natural to focus on setting up students for a strong start — new supplies, early bedtimes, and reconnecting with school communities. But there's one often-overlooked piece that plays a powerful role in your child's academic success: showing up.

Even just a couple of absences early in the year can set a pattern. In fact, research shows that students who miss just two days in the first month of school are more likely to be chronically absent, missing 10% or 18 days of school or more. That's why we're encouraging families: Don't let two missed days define your year. If your child is healthy, send them to school. Each day counts.

Why Attendance Matters from Day One
Children can't benefit from school if they're not there. Every absence — whether it's excused or unexcused —means lost learning time. Nationwide, students who miss three or more days in a month have lower test scores and are less likely to read proficiently by the end of third grade or pass key math benchmarks in middle school. By fourth grade, students with poor attendance may be more than a full year behind their peers in reading.

Attendance matters just as much for younger children. Missing too many days in kindergarten — even in preschool — has been linked to difficulties with learning to read, paying attention, and adapting socially. These challenges often persist into later grades, especially for students already at risk due to poverty or other barriers.

Patterns That Can Be Prevented
One of the most surprising findings from the research is how quickly poor attendance patterns develop. A study from Baltimore found that half of the students who missed just two to four days in September went on to become chronically absent for the year. Nearly 90% of those who missed five days or more in the first month ended the year missing more than a month of school.

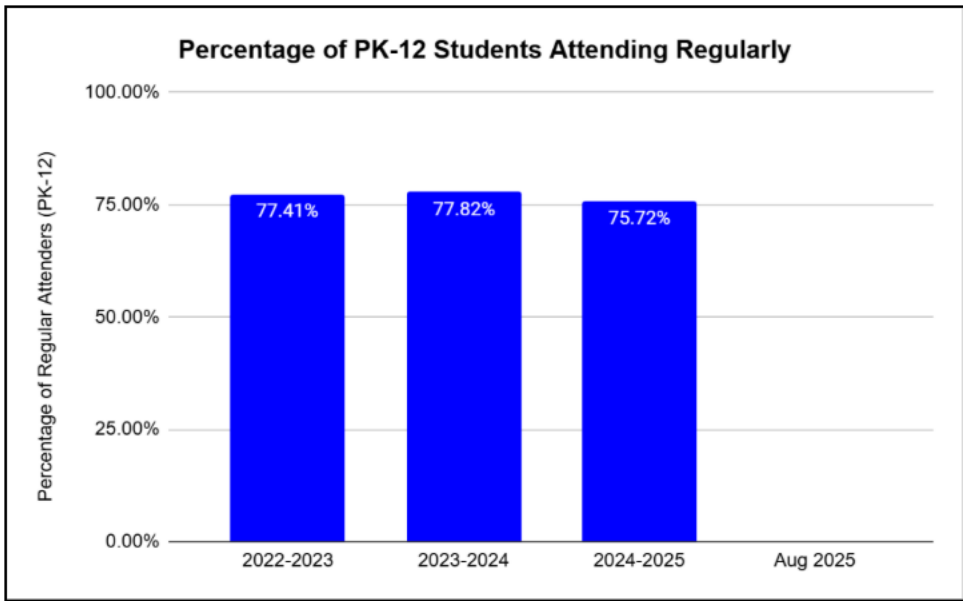
These aren't just numbers; they represent missed opportunities to build relationships with teachers and other school adults, develop study habits, and master foundational skills.

What Families and Communities Can Do

- **Set a routine early**: Children and youth thrive on structure. Help them establish good sleep and morning routines in August and keep them consistent.
- **Keep kids home only when truly sick**: Fever, vomiting, or contagious illness are reasons to stay hom, but colds, sniffles, and "I'm tired" often aren't.

Attendance, continued

- **Schedule wisely**: Try to plan vacations and appointments outside of school hours whenever possible.
- **Partner with your school**: If your child is struggling to get to school, let us know. Schools can often help problem-solve barriers like transportation, mental health needs, or chronic health concerns.

Every Day Counts
Together, we can make a difference. Communities, schools, and families working together can prevent chronic absence — and support each child's right to learn, grow, and succeed. Let's start the year strong — **Attend Today, Achieve Tomorrow.**

Fargo Public Schools is committed to improving student attendance. As part of our district's Strategic Plan, we are working toward a goal to annually increase the percentage of PK–12 students who regularly attend school (90.1% or more of the time) by an average of 3% each year, with 90% of students regularly attending by the end of the 2029–30 school year. The chart below shows our year-end data for the past three school years and monthly progress throughout the 2025–2026 school year.