



Minnesota Association of Secondary School Principals

Star of Innovation Award Application Form

School Name Denfeld High School Grade Levels 9-12
 Name of School District Duluth Public Schools ISD 709
 Name of Principal Tom Tusken
 Application Submitted By Tom Tusken, Principal & Heather Jarvis SEBMTSS Coordinator
 School Street Address 401 N 44th Ave W
 City, Zip Duluth, MN 55807
 Telephone Number 218-336-8830
 MASSP Division _____
 Name of Program Attendance Recovery

Please answer the following questions on a separate sheet/s of paper.

- Description of the program.
- How has it impacted your school?
- What difficulties did you encounter in its implementation?
- What issue/s might another school encounter in replicating this program?
- Do you have any data to show the impact of this program? If so, please share it with us.

Applications must be submitted to MASSP offices by March 1.

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Questions? Please contact:
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School Name: Denfeld High School

Program Name: Attendance Recovery

Description of Program

Attendance has been a significant concern and we have seen the consequential impact of unexcused absences on our graduation rate as well as our overall school culture among both students and staff. During the 2022-23 school year our students accumulated a total of nearly 200,000 class periods of absence, with approximately 175,000 of those hours unexcused. Our consistent attendance rate among the entire student body was 41.75% during last school year. This is a substantial amount of learning loss.

Despite these staggering numbers, many students who accumulate a large number of unexcused class periods are still passing many of their classes. Additionally, the volume of students who do come to school every day while not attending their classes impacts feelings of safety and accessibility of basic elements of the school building, in particular the hallways and the bathrooms. Anecdotal and self-report data from both staff and students highlights a sense of defeat when students are able to progress toward graduation while not being present in our building or contributing in their classrooms.

As a result of this endemic of avoidance behavior, we have attempted to hold students accountable for their non-attendance. One of the primary strategies we use to do so is requiring a standard of attendance in order to access school-wide privileges (including dances, home games and off campus lunch) through our Hunter License program. We have also assigned Incompletes in classes where students exceed the district-set limit of unexcused absences in any one class.

Our Attendance Recovery program is the restorative tool that allows students to recover their unexcused absences in order to maintain or regain their Hunter License and/or to avoid or resolve an assigned Incomplete. The Attendance Recovery program started as our Destination Graduation program during the second half of the 2018-2019 school year. At the time, students were able to make up class hours in exchange for being able to turn in missing work for a percentage of the point value, in an effort to earn credit for the class. Although the elements of the program have evolved since its beginning, the essential concept remains the same - there are direct consequences for students who are not going to class and they have a chance to make things right to move forward.

The Attendance Recovery program offers students the opportunity to make up time before school, after school or on Saturday mornings. While at Attendance Recovery students are expected to work on their school work. During week day sessions, students are able to access tutors for additional academic support. Teachers often volunteer their time and come into Attendance Recovery in order to provide direct support to their students, creating the space for relationship building. For students who regularly

come to Attendance Recovery, staff complete progress checks with students for their attendance and grades.

Attendance Recovery is staffed by members of our Behavior Support Team. Students who struggle with attendance also often struggle with self-regulation and other behaviors throughout the school day. Through Attendance Recovery, the Behavior Support staff members are able to connect with students in a different setting, allowing for a unique relationship building opportunity that has mutual benefit for staff and students and has a positive impact on the school climate.

Attendance Recovery has an additional layer of accountability for students who receive an Incomplete due to a significant number of unexcused class periods or students who have a barrier to completing recovery in person. We have created Attendance Academies Canvas courses. Each academy has a different set of assignments for students to complete with the goal to examine and reflect on their attendance and the impact it has on themselves and those around them. The themes of the attendance academies move from providing education around attendance to building an attendance improvement goal to teaching strategies to manage emotions and common barriers that contribute to class avoidance.

How has it impacted your school?

Attendance Recovery has had a positive impact on the culture within our school building. Students are focused on recovering their unexcused class periods in order to access privileges and earn their credit back. To date in the 2023-24 school year, students have recovered nearly 8,500 hours and 20 students have restored grades and credit. Students are also focused on avoiding a similar inconvenience in the future, so many of them are making progress on goals to improve habits and self-regulate their emotions. Students are making intentional efforts to monitor their attendance and track the number of hours they have recovered.

The enhanced focus on attendance has made it far easier to have conversations with students by relevant points of buy-in. Anecdotally, the ability to bounce back and restore credit or privileges lost has increased student resiliency individually and as a collective. Students are learning they can make mistakes and have ways to make things right without completely giving up. When students feel like they have hope and something to work toward, they are more likely to continue to engage in hard conversations and make positive progress toward change.

We have seen evidence of this in our school climate survey. The percentage of students who identify feeling connected to school has increased from 79% to 85% over the past two years. While making up attendance hours can certainly not be the only factor contributing to that increase, improved confidence that comes from completing recovery and moving forward differently certainly drives that improvement.

What difficulties did you encounter in implementation?

Staff can be challenging. Some of our behavioral support team members are hourly employees, so it can be challenging to fit coverage into their schedule without going into overtime. It can also be difficult to find staff who are able to fit coverage of Attendance Recovery, particularly Saturday sessions, into their schedule. When a consistent staff member is absent, it can be difficult to find other staff who are willing to cover.

We have also had difficulty in tracking recovery hours in a way that can be easily communicated with other staff in the building as well as with students and families. Our student information system is not set up to code attendance hours as recovered. We have to track the information in a spreadsheet. It can be difficult to do so and share the data in a way that makes sense to other staff who are trying to help students track their attendance and recovery efforts.

What issues might other schools encounter when replicating this program?

In addition to staffing and tracking, schools may also encounter an issue with space. There will need to be a large area that is able to accommodate students who are doing school work, such as the Media Center or a classroom. It is surprising how difficult it is in a high school to find a space that is consistently available. If the location or days and times are not consistent, it is difficult to gain buy-in and embed recovery into the culture of the school.

An additional challenge that other schools may face is how to collaborate with other support staff and/or afterschool programming. It can be a challenge because several staff members who have relationships with students are willing to accommodate recovery sessions in their space because that creates discrepancy in tracking and monitoring student behavior. If program will collaborate, having a direct and clear conversation about the duties of each part and having a central tracking system will make a huge difference to the success of the program.

Do you have data to show the impact of the program? If so, please share with us.

We have shared different points from the current school year throughout this application, including the number of hours recovered, number of students who have restored their credit and grades, and increased climate survey numbers.

This is the third school year we have used Attendance Recovery as a restorative tool. Over that 2.5 year period, students have recovered nearly 80,000 hours of attendance. 105 students have resolved attendance incompletes. We have not tracked data around how many students regain their Hunter License by recovering attendance at this point, but that would be a great piece of data to track and report.