It Takes a Village
ADDRESSING CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM WITHIN THE DUBUQUE MARSHALLESE COMMUNITY
1. Background

2. The Causes of Absenteeism

3. The Path to Improving Attendance

4. Q&A
The Project Team

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Community Empowerment Law Project

- Part of the law school’s clinical programs
- “Works to strengthen communities, create economic opportunity, and advance social justice in the State of Iowa”
- Led by Daria Fisher Page
The Community Foundation

- Founded in 2003
- Completed Immigration Community Assessment in 2023
- Wanted to explore chronic absenteeism among Marshallese students more thoroughly
Chronic absenteeism in U.S. classrooms is presenting unique challenges to teachers

MARCH 10, 2024 - 8:42 AM ET
By Emily Files

About one of every four students are working in empty classrooms. The crisis is impeding attempts to reverse the learning loss students experienced after pandemic absenteeism.

Two-thirds of schools struggle with high absenteeism after pandemic

Why School Absences Have ‘Exploded’ Almost Everywhere
The pandemic changed families’ lives and the culture of education. “Our relationship with school became optional.”

Rates of skipping class alarmingly high in schools, with students missing 10 percent of the school year: study

A chronically absent student is out of school for at least 18 days, or 10% of the school year.

National issue

Chronic absenteeism among Marshallese students

Absenteeism is predictor of academic, career, and health

Post-covid spike

Why so many kids are still missing school

What it means to be “chronically absent” — and why it matters.

The Latest

The academic achievement of millions of American students faltered during the pandemic — and in many cases, has not recovered three years later. The latest data on student attendance offers one explanation: Far more students are missing many days of school compared with before the pandemic.

'Tangle of challenges': Dubuque district officials focus on chronic absenteeism

BY ELIZABETH KELSEY elizabeth.kelsey@thmedia.com  Aug 11, 2023 Updated Aug 11, 2023
The Marshall Islands

- Chain of 29 atolls and 5 islands in the Northwest Pacific Ocean
- Colonized by Spain, Germany, Japan, and the US
- Used for nuclear testing in the 1950s
- Climate change has increased flooding and severe weather
The Marshallese

Dubuque has one of the largest Marshallese populations in the midwest.

[Map showing the distribution of Marshallese populations across the United States, with Dubuque highlighted.]
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Defining the Problem

Intersectional  Holistic  Chronological
COVID-19’s Impact on Absenteeism

Absenteeism in Dubuque Public Schools

- 2018:
  - All Students: 10
  - Pacific Islanders: 30

- 2023:
  - All Students: 70
  - Pacific Islanders: 80

Legend:
- Blue: All Students
- Orange: Pacific Islanders
Lack of Belonging

- Aspirations and post-secondary plans
- Bullying
- Large class sizes
- Lack of role models
- Generation gap between youth and parents
Understanding of Norms

• Differences from Marshallese school system

• Public health messaging during pandemic
Communication

- School materials aren’t translated
- Shared phone
- Familiarity with Facebook and Facebook Messenger
- Home visits effective, but resource intensive
Systemic Barriers

Transportation

Sleep

Nutrition
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Guiding Principles

- Primary objective: increase attendance
- Feasible, sustainable, and holistic approach
- Center and empower the affected group
- Use strengths and positioning
Five Pillars

- Student Engagement
- Programming for Pacific Islander Clubs
- Parental Engagement
- Improved Communication Channels
- Addressing Systemic Barriers to Education
Implementation

• Key actions include
  • Developing professional development for cultural competency in teachers
  • Leadership training for Pacific Islander Club students
  • Hosting parent support groups
  • Utilizing social media to communicate with parents
  • Improve access to information on public transportation
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Thank You!
Community Empowerment
Law Project