



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

United Way of Benton & Franklin Counties Expands Focus of Attendance Matters® Program to Elementary and Middle Schools

KENNEWICK, WA — United Way of Benton & Franklin Counties is deepening its commitment to student success by focusing its Attendance Matters® program on elementary and middle school students, recognizing the critical role early attendance habits play in long-term academic achievement.

For the 2025/26 school year United Way of Benton & Franklin Counties has hired 6 mentors to work with Students at 6 local schools, pairing two mentors per school district. Our Attendance Matters® Mentoring Program is paving the way to helping kids show up to school every day and staying on track to graduate. Having reliable mentors at school, every day, looking out for these kids, has drastically improved students becoming chronically absent, and the kids want to go to school because of our amazing mentors.

"After funding was cut in April of 2025 for the AmeriCorps program and our former members who served as mentors, we knew we needed to pivot our Attendance Matters® program so that we could continue to maintain consistency and support to the students we serve," said Asta Bonheyo, Community Impact Director. "Although the program has had some changes based on the current climate of funding, the goal remains the same - to promote student connection, consistency in relationships, and continued reduction in chronic absenteeism," Bonheyo said.

During this upcoming school year you will find our mentors at Amistad ES and Park MS in the Kennewick School District, at Robinson ES and Ochoa MS in the Pasco School District and at Jefferson ES and Chief Jo MS in the Richland School District. We can't wait to share success stories with you from our mentors and the students they connect with.

By also having our Attendance Matters® mentors in elementary schools we can target the foundational years of a child's education, where attendance patterns are formed and early learning gaps can have lasting effects.

"Research shows that students who are chronically absent in the early grades are far less likely to read proficiently by third grade or successfully transition into middle and high school," said Bonheyo "By focusing on elementary and middle schools, we're aiming to intervene earlier—before attendance issues become deeply rooted."

We are also offering an Attendance Matters® Toolkit for parents and school staff in all the districts we serve to have access to. The toolkit plays a big role in our program to educate the community about regular school attendance and address absenteeism, it's also help schools promote attendance. While we are not able to have mentors in every school in our area, yet, we are able to offer our toolkit to every school in our area.

"We're not just counting absences; we're working to understand why students aren't in school and how we, as a community, can help," said Bonheyo. "Whether it's transportation, health issues, or family challenges, we're here to connect families to resources and schools to solutions."

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