



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

United Way of Benton & Franklin Counties Welcomes New Mentors for 2026–27 Attendance Matters® Mentoring Program

KENNEWICK, WA — United Way of Benton & Franklin Counties is proud to welcome a new group of dedicated mentors who will serve local students through the Attendance Matters® Mentoring Program during the 2026–27 school year. The Attendance Matters® Mentoring Program connects our mentors with students who may be experiencing challenges that impact their ability to attend school consistently. Through regular mentoring relationships, mentors provide encouragement, support, accountability and a positive connection to help students recognize the importance of being present and engaged in school.

“Every day in the classroom matters and sometimes having one caring adult in a student’s corner can make all the difference,” said Asta Bonheyo, Community Impact Director at United Way of Benton & Franklin Counties. “Our mentors are investing their time and energy in helping students overcome barriers, build confidence and understand that their attendance and education can have a lasting impact on their future.”

Attendance Matters® mentors work alongside school staff to encourage students to show up and to celebrate progress. The goal is not simply to improve attendance, but to build meaningful relationships that help students feel supported, connected and motivated to succeed.

Research consistently shows that regular school attendance is closely connected to academic achievement, graduation and long-term success. By addressing attendance challenges early and providing students with positive support systems, the Attendance Matters® Mentoring Program seeks to help students stay on track and reach their full potential.

2026–27 Attendance Matters® Mentors

- ☐ Lillian McMillan - Jefferson Elementary School: A recent graduate of Hanford High School, Lillian is now attending CBC studying Early Elementary Education. She looks forward to being a positive impact in the community.
- ☐ Isaac Cervantes - Virgie Robinson Elementary: Isaac grew up in the Tri-Cities and will be serving in the Pasco School District, the same district he grew up in. Isaac also serves as an Infantryman in the Washington Army National Guard since. He is proud to serve the community and committed to help local students succeed in their own goals as he also works towards his long-term goal of being a music teacher.
- ☐ Jasmin Ortega-Gallegos - Park Middle School: With a HCA counselor's license and a background in early childcare, adult and adolescent MAT care, Jasmin joined with United Way in 2025 and will be in her second year as serving as a mentor at Park Middle School. Starting at the Juvenile Justice Center in 2022 sparked her interest in working with kids in community in order to give them a voice in what they need for support.
- ☐ Jeidi Leyva - Amistad Elementary School: Jeidi is excited to step into her first year as an attendance matters mentor. She looks forward to connecting with students and helping transform school into an inviting, supportive space where kids want to be every day.
- ☐ Cynthia Escalera - Ochoa Middle School: Cynthia is a Certified Peer Specialist and helped families as a Family Peer Support Specialist at 3 Rivers Therapy. She previously worked as an AmeriCorps Mentor at Park Middle School and is excited to be back as a mentor.

“Mentoring is about showing up, not only for students, but with students,” said Bonheyo “We are grateful for the individuals who have committed to being a consistent, caring presence in a young person’s life this school year.”

United Way of Benton and Franklin Counties believes that when schools, families, businesses and community members work together, students have a stronger foundation for success. The Attendance Matters® Mentoring Program is one way our community can come together to make sure local students know they are supported and that their future matters. For more information about the Attendance Matters® Mentoring Program or how to become involved, contact United Way of Benton and Franklin Counties.

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