



## Toowoomba SHS Attendance spotlight

### **Increasing attendance targets**

In 2015, Toowoomba State High School set an individual minimum attendance target of 95%. The school had noticed that attendance rates had flattened out over the last 12 months, so used an increased target as a way of motivating further improvement.

As school records indicated that Year 8 and Year 12 students had been achieving a 93% attendance rate, the minimum expectation for attendance was set at 95% even though Years 9 and 10 data was lagging behind. The target is an individual minimum expectation of all students.

Having set their attendance target, Toowoomba SHS is **using a whole of school approach to attendance improvement with students, teachers and parents working together to achieve this goal.**

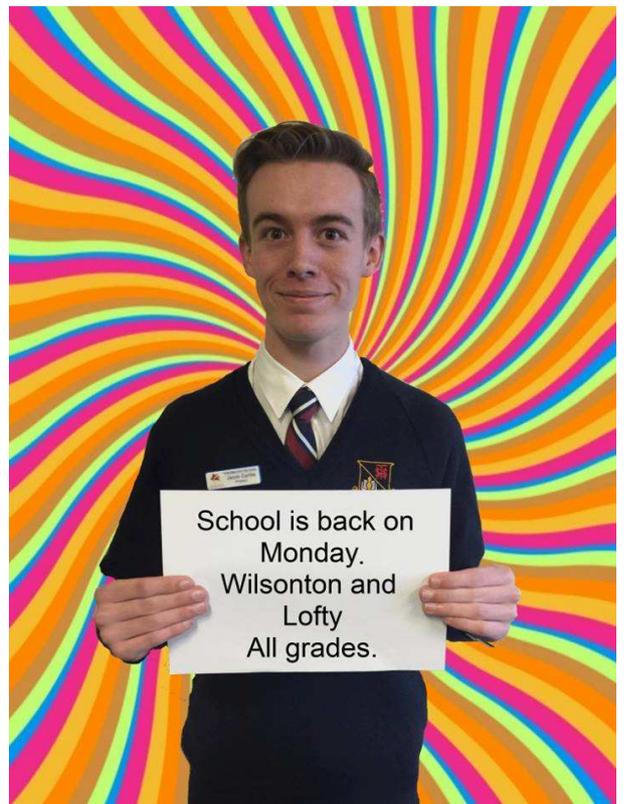
### **Communicating attendance expectations**

Integral to success, is the clear communication of the attendance goal to all students and parents. This is being done in a variety of ways. Attendance levels and expectations are discussed at each Year level assembly and prior to specific events such as sports carnivals, last days of term and the day after the show holiday. As a result, attendance has increased from around 50-65% on these days to over 85%.

**WELCOME**  
*Term Three at Toowoomba SHS*  
**BACK!!**

Students and parents/carers are informed of the attendance rates by letter. Students absent for three consecutive days or five over two weeks receive a letter. At the end of Semester, those below 85% are reminded of the expectation as well as the support available.

The school is harnessing the power of social media, particularly Facebook, to post about attendance expectations including using posts featuring students to promote return to school dates prior to the start of each term.





### **Using rewards and incentives**

Students in Year 12 need to achieve the attendance target (or have negotiated individual rates due to special circumstances such as illness) to attend the Year 12 formal and to wear their sport jersey on a day other than *Sport Wednesdays*. These expectations are clearly outlined to students at assembly and every other opportunity. Only Year 11 students who achieve the attendance target will be entitled to receive a Year 12 jersey.

All students achieving 95% or above attendance receive an attendance certificate each term which is presented at assembly. From Semester 2, 2015, they will also be presented with a star to wear. (A range of reward stars of different colours signify achievement in specific target areas of performance.)

Students achieving target attendance levels are awarded VIVOS - an electronic system where students collect points and 'spend' them in the online store.



Deputy Principals also use positive postcards at the end of term. Target groups of students also have negotiated targets and goals which are rewarded in a variety of ways like a BBQ.

### **Tracking using attendance data walls**

The Deputy Principals track attendance using OneSchool cohort data as well as monitoring individual student attendance fortnightly. They display individual student names, their previous year's attendance rate and their current year-to-date attendance rate.

Each fortnight, the deputies discuss students whose attendance is declining and make referrals to support staff as necessary. Students in the 95-86% range work with Year Coordinators, below 85% attenders are referred to support services and below 50% are managed by the Deputy Principal using case management and possibly enforcement processes.

Years 7 and 8 classes have trialled in-class attendance charts in Term 1, 2015 to increase student ownership of personal performance. Daily stickers, trophies and other visuals are used to mark various attendance thresholds such as 50%, 85% and over 90%. The charts are 2m long and produced in-house.



The trial was successful in Term 1 and students in other year levels are requesting to participate in home group now.

### **Celebrating milestones**

Toowoomba SHS also celebrates significant student milestones such as the first 100 days of Year 7 with certificates!



*'When we talked about school improvement we recognised the elephant in the room was our approach to managing poor attendance. We were, in fact, skilfully avoiding the whole conversation. Then we confronted it and our own attitudes.*

*We invented a set of complicated rules and processes and launched ourselves into enforcement. Then we started to find more creative and effective ways of encouraging good levels of performance. Like any process, we are constantly refreshing the approach, adding new strategies and resting others.*

*The main thing is that students commit to the school expectation, know their level and look forward to the rewards we have put in place.*

*Social media plays a big part in communicating to everyone that school is a welcoming, busy, fun place where a huge range of achievements are celebrated – big and small every day.'*

*Christopher Zilm, Principal*

