



Every day counts when kids are learning to count



SCOTT RYAN

@SenatorRyan

If a parent was told their child has a 90 per cent school attendance rate, they probably wouldn't be too worried.

A few days off school with a tummy ache, a few days off school to catch up on sleep, a few days off school to visit relatives — what's the big deal?

But what if they were told that if their child stays home one in every 10 school days?

By the start of Year 10 that means they will have missed a full year of school.

Most parents would react with horror at the idea of missing a whole year of school.

And rightly so.

While school attendance is

primarily the responsibility of state governments and our schools, as students head back to the classroom, the Australian Government is keen to impress on parents the importance of sending their children to school each and every day.

In Victoria, 178 schools had average school attendance rates

below 90 per cent in 2013.

Around Australia, almost one in five Australian schools has an average attendance rate of 90 per cent or less.

Too many students are missing too many classes.

This creates problems for teachers, who are forced to spend time playing "catch up" to bring

absent students up-to-date.

It creates issues for other students who sit down to finish a group project only to find one or two members of their group are constantly missing.

But most of all, it creates serious difficulties for the student who is missing.

A student's level of school

attendance has a major influence on their academic achievement. Studies have shown the more a student misses school, the lower a student's NAPLAN test score. NAPLAN is not an end in itself, it is the way we measure whether students are learning how to read, write and do maths.

These are essential skills necessary for further learning and the basic skills needed in a workplace.

The implications of missing school are grave and long-term: fewer employment opportunities and lower wages throughout life.

Unfortunately, research has also shown that students who miss lots

of school tend to have things in common.

They are more likely to come from disadvantaged backgrounds, they are more likely to have parents with a low level of education and they are more likely to be indigenous.

While government and school principals have a role to play in promoting school attendance, the prime responsibility is for parents to ensure their child attends every day they can, to ensure they are not left behind.

Parents need to impress on their child the importance of attending school every single day.

Parents should also talk to their child's teacher if there are barriers

in getting their child to school or if there are other factors that make school attendance a problem.

A day off here and there might not seem important, but the effect of absence accumulates over time. Whether on the couch at home or hanging around at a shopping centre, the more school students miss, the more their academic achievement decreases.

In 2015, the number one lesson for all parents needs to be: children who attend school every day will be more successful adults.

Every day matters.

**SENATOR SCOTT RYAN IS
PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY TO THE
MINISTER FOR EDUCATION AND
TRAINING**