Counselortalk Wisdom August 2017

My advice is to meet with parents and try to demonstrate the effect that absences are having on grades (big picture), provide counseling resources (external referrals), and enforce school policies.  Calling DCS is a last resort, but lack of attendance is considered educational neglect.

We work with our local prosecutor’s Project Attend initiative.  A representative joins us for a meeting at the school and has the family sign a contract which stipulates that charges will be filed if x,y, an z happens.  It’s very effective.  I hope you have something similar available at your disposal.   Don’t forget about work permits.  Once students turn 18, Project Attend is no longer appropriate, so we’ve threatened to pull work permits.

To participate in prom, clubs, or dances we have a board approved rule, you may have not attend dances if your attendance is over five NON-EXCUSED days.

We also, offer three Saturday schools, where a student can buy back one full day (not by periods but any absences that falls the same day) for each buyback Saturday.

You'd be surprised how quickly kids sign up and how closely they monitor their attendance in order to attend.  Additionally, the rule is that you can not be flunking any classes the quarter before the dance, in order to attend.

I worked at the elementary level, but what worked for me was personally calling each family for each absence.  I also had teachers call when students were present and thank parents for attendance.  We did end up setting up attendance plans for some students which did come to DCS calls in a couple of cases, but overall our rates went from the low 80's to over 98% consistently.

It takes time, but targeting the individual causes is the only way to get the most chronically absent.

Have you thought about creating a Breakfast Club and eating breakfast together and monitoring attendance?  Getting them to bond and enjoy time together might encourage them to come.  If they don't show up to Breakfast Club that week, then you call them into your office.  At least if you can get them to come a little more often...