Counselortalk ideas-Jan, 2017

* Present a lesson at the beginning of the year on attendance.  This lesson would include modeling how to get prepared for school each day.  It would also include creating a chart or offering scenarios that would cause you to miss school (fever, vomiting, etc.) versus issues that would not (stayed up too late, have a cold, miss your mom, etc.).  This would allow us to frontload attendance expectations to students at the beginning of the year.
* Reinforce attendance in each classroom throughout the year by rewarding a class each time they have a certain number of days of perfect attendance.  For example, each class could have a visual outside their door that reads “PERFECT ATTENDANCE” in bubble letters.  For each day that all students are present **on time**, a student gets to color in a letter on the class visual.  When all letters are colored, the class receives a small reward like a five minutes of extra recess, popcorn, or whatever the teacher decides.  This allows for frequent reinforcement and give all classes the opportunity to earn something. Finally, it might help students put some peer pressure on one another.
* Target students who are consistently late or absent with small group support.  The counselor would lead a group focusing on the importance of coming to school each day and teaching students how to get themselves prepared the night before and set an alarm clock.  Each child would receive a social story about getting prepared for school and an alarm clock donated by Wal-Mart.
* At our high school and middle school we take attendance by the period and no longer do "half" days, etc.  There are also no "excused" absences.  Students get 9 absences in a class.  On the 10th they are removed from the course with an "F" and put into a study hall.  If they are removed from 3 classes in a semester they are expelled for the remainder of the semester.  They found that students with insurance were able to get an "Excuse" note anytime but those who didn't have it could not get the note for seeing a dr.  This has improved our overall attendance rate.  The actual policy is on our website.
* I run groups that meet during breakfast for these kiddos.  They start by tracking last year's attend/tardiness on a calendar so they have a visual of past performance.  They then begin tracking this year.  We work on attendance vocabulary (e.g., tardy) and understanding of laws/rules. I use the School Attendance Matters: A six session small group unit by the Savvy School Counselor also.
* The school I'm currently at saw a gradual 5 percent increase in attendance when they adopted a finals exemption policy (you are exempt from the final if you meet grade and attendance expectations). Attendance is around 96-97 percent. I really have seen it work; especially between freshman and sophomore year when they catch on.