United Way Teams Up with San Diego Schools to Keep Kids in Class
"Every Student, Every Day" Attendance Initiative Reduces Absenteeism;
Increases Academic, Economic Success

SAN DIEGO (Nov. 6, 2018) – Educators have long tracked a direct link between higher rates of student absenteeism and lower test scores, graduation rates and lifetime earnings. A flurry of recent studies nationwide confirm that students can't learn if they're not in class, and too many of them are missing critical seat time, including in the San Diego County region, where one out of every 10 students missed a month or more of school last year.

Despite these sobering statistics, **United Way of San Diego County** and its school district partners are sharing and analyzing data that demonstrate that an intensive community-wide attendance intervention initiative is gaining grounds on chronic absenteeism in more than a dozen local schools.

Launched in 2015 by United Way and San Diego Unified School District, the **"Every Student, Every Day"** initiative identifies and supports families that are struggling to get their children, grades kindergarten to third grade, to school regularly.

In the 2017-18 academic year, 69 percent of the students in Every Student, Every Day who started the year chronically absent made attendance improvements in 14 elementary schools in two school districts, San Diego Unified and Lemon Grove. There were 274 students identified as top priority for intensive intervention and experienced an increase in attendance of six to seven more days of school – resulting in 670 more days in school, with an estimated $35,700 returned to districts in recouped average daily attendance dollars.

In addition, last year, more than 7,200 students and families were engaged in the initiative's attendance awareness efforts, including, school assemblies and personal communication.

"Chronic absenteeism is a serious issue with lasting and severe implications," said United Way Chief Impact Officer Ian Gordon. "It's directly tied to underemployment and lifelong poverty, and that's why United Way and our partners have taken such an interest in it. We're very encouraged that our joint efforts are starting to reverse those downward attendance trends."

Three factors have been key to the ongoing success of the "Every Student, Every Day" initiative:

- The school districts' early warning system flags students whose attendance, behavior and coursework indicate they are beginning to fail

- A cohort of clinically supervised college interns who engage with students and families to reduce absenteeism and truancy, and connect those who need further support with community-based services, ranging from psychological counseling and housing assistance to food pantries, healthcare providers and transportation services. Last year's

initiative included 18 student interns from Point Loma Nazarene University, San Diego State University, the University of Finland and University of San Diego

- United Way staff and interns working closely with school site staff to create school-wide events and competitions to engage all students in positive activities to increase their daily attendance

Increasingly, Gordon said educators, employers, policymakers, civic and business leaders are focusing on student attendance as a major factor in school improvement efforts.

"Research has found that poor attendance in early grades is a predictor of students' reading skills at the end of third grade – a prime indicator of future academic success," said San Diego Unified School District Superintendent Cindy Marten. "Our district's singular focus is on student success, and Every Student, Every Day helps achieve this vision."

"The Every Student, Every Day initiative has been beneficial for our students, families and community," said Lemon Grove School District Superintendent Kimberly Berman, Ph.D. "Long-term studies have shown that high school dropouts often have early records of absenteeism, so we're putting a halt to that early on with this initiative. We're helping our students and families find the community resources outside school so our teachers and principals can do their jobs inside school."

Going into its fifth year, "Every Student, Every Day" has grown tremendously thanks to its partnerships, and continues to innovate and pilot new strategies to refine impact. United Way and its partners' goal is to make an even bigger difference by taking these tested practices and bringing them to other communities countywide.

Added Gordon, "By building on what works, we can make a bigger impact throughout the region, and make measurable, significant changes in the success of our families and children."

About United Way of San Diego County
For 98 years, United Way of San Diego County has disrupted cycles of poverty by developing long-term solutions for children and families. United Way plays a unique role in the San Diego community, bringing people and resources together to spark breakthrough community action that elevates every child and family toward a brighter future.

Developing regional partnerships around effective practices, the organization makes measurable, significant change in the education and success of children from cradle to career and helps families have the support needed to ensure that success. United Way focuses on educational milestones, such as kindergarten readiness, third-grade literacy, high school preparation, and college and career pathways. Learn more at www.uwsd.org, the blog, Facebook and Twitter.

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