

NEWS

Whirlpool Put Laundry Machines In Some Schools And Increased Attendance By 90%

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MEREDITH BLAND Aug 10, 2016

The Whirlpool Care Counts program put laundry machines in schools and made a huge difference in attendance

When you think about kids in middle school who have attendance problems, it can be easy to blame the parents (or the kids themselves), shake your head, and throw up your hands at a problem that is too big to be fixable. But what if all some of these kids need are clean clothes to wear to school? Whirlpool has taken on what could be dismissed as a minor issue and seen tremendous results.

Last year the good people at Whirlpool created the [Whirlpool Care Counts Program](#) and donated seventeen pairs of washers and dryers to school districts in St. Louis and in Fairfield, California. The schools then invited kids with attendance problems to bring in their laundry to be cleaned while they were in class.

The results were astounding: over 90% of participating students increased their attendance that year, at-risk students attended almost two more weeks of school, and each student got approximately 50 loads of laundry done at school. This year, Whirlpool will expand the program

to twenty more schools in five more districts.

When compared to factors like economic opportunity, unemployment, and institutional racism, laundry seems pretty inconsequential in the fight to keep kids in school. But while that might be the case for their parents, for a ten-year-old who already has the odds stacked against them, having nothing clean to wear to school could be the deciding factor in whether or not they want to face their classmates that day.

Enter Dr. Melody Gunn, the former principal of Gibson Elementary School in St. Louis. While talking with the parents of some of her students, she learned that they had significant trouble being able to afford to do laundry or scheduling a time to go to laundromats from week to week. She approached Whirlpool and asked if they would donate a washer and dryer to her school. Whirlpool got interested, did

its own research, and found that one in five students in the United States have trouble finding clean clothes to wear to school.

One. In. Five. Y'all.

In an interview with Today Parents, seventh-grade teacher Alison Guernsey from Fairfield said, "One of my students had just sort of withdrawn from school completely...After we started the program, he was more excited about coming, and he started to be actively engaged in class. He didn't feel like an outsider anymore."

Too often, kids with attendance issues are branded as "troubled" or "lazy." More fortunate adults either can't imagine not being able to do something that seems as simple to them as laundry, or they don't take the time to put themselves in these kids' shoes long enough to consider that it might be those kinds of issues that are playing a part in their struggles. Parents who are working to keep their kids fed and alive sometimes need to let other, less essential things (like a two-hour trip to the laundromat), go.

Bravo to Dr. Gunn and Whirlpool for taking the time to ask why and offering a solution that gives these kids some of the extra confidence they need to go to school.