

Schools seek to tackle chronic absenteeism

By **ALEX PARKER-MAGYAR**
EDITOR

WATCHUNG - Nearly one in three Bayberry School students were absent on more than 10 percent of school days last year.

Those 31 percent of Bayberry students, along with 17 percent of Valley View Middle School students, qualify as "chronically absent," Interim Superin-

tendent Stephanie Bilenker said at a Tuesday, Oct. 9, Board of Education meeting.

The grades K-8 school district is looking to reduce the "pretty significant" figure, she said, starting with a letter already sent to parents containing a copy of the district's attendance policy.

"We have to do something in speaking with our principals, in connecting with

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parents and encouraging them to send their children to school when they're not

ill, and to maybe cut down on some vacation time," she said.

The issue of chronic absenteeism was briefly discussed at a board meeting in July, when it was noted the figures factor into Watchung's ratings in the School Performance Report conducted by the state Department of Education (DOE) every year.

Bilenker said she hopes

parents read the district's letter carefully and heed its message.

She noted after the meeting how easy it is for a student to fall behind his or her classmates after missing a day of lessons.

"We're going to enforce the attendance policy very carefully," she said, "and it's very important for children to come to school and learn so that we improve."