



CALIFORNIA  
DEPARTMENT OF  
EDUCATION

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STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

September 22, 2016

Dear County and District Superintendents and Charter School Administrators:

**ATTENDANCE AWARENESS: ENGAGING COMMUNITIES  
TO REDUCE CHRONIC ABSENCE**

As the beginning of the school year continues, our halls and classrooms are filled once again with children. It is the perfect time to remind schools, families, and community partners about the annual September Attendance Awareness campaign of the importance of developing good attendance habits and reducing the number of chronically absent students.

This school year will be the first time that attendance data will be collected in the California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System.

A brief by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights found that 6.5 million students (13 percent) were chronically absent in the nation's schools during the 2013–14 school year. California did only slightly better than the national average, with 12 percent of our students chronically absent. This means that 719,747 children are at risk of falling behind and possibly dropping out before high school graduation—a staggering number that calls for our most diligent efforts to address this crisis for California children.

Starting now, we can help our students by building awareness about the connection between attendance and school success and engaging parents more effectively. We can communicate with parents and guardians, not only when their children are considered truant, but when their children miss 10 percent or more of the days enrolled for **any** reason. The communication can include information to support parents and guardians in understanding how too many absences negatively impact their child's chance of success.

Here are some resources for you to consider for a parent summit or as a guide for principals:

- Bringing Attendance Home Toolkit: Engaging Parents in Preventing Chronic Absence on the Attendance Works Web page at <http://www.attendanceworks.org/tools/for-parents/bringing-attendance-home-toolkit/>

- Principal's Toolkit on the Attendance Works Web page at <http://www.attendanceworks.org/?p=11321>

Attendance improves when schools closely monitor chronic absences and engage in personalized early outreach to support families. Many of our School Attendance Review Board (SARB) programs have reduced chronic absenteeism rates by monitoring attendance by grade level, ethnicity, and special programs and by providing targeted early interventions. Using baseline chronic absence data enables you to closely monitor progress and set goals aligned with your Local Control and Accountability Plans (LCAP).

Recent studies have found areas of the state with significant concentrations of chronic absence, even among schools facing similar levels of poverty and serving similar ethnic populations.<sup>1</sup> Typically, low chronic absenteeism does not occur by chance. Together with families and community partners, we must promote attendance and reduce barriers to attendance.

Together we can give all children an equal opportunity to learn by using chronic absence data to ensure that our students are in the classroom. These three steps can help you improve your system of attendance supervision:

1. If you have not already done so in your LCAP, use your chronic absence data to identify which schools and student populations have the highest chronic absence rates. California *Education Code (EC)* Section 60901 defines a chronic absentee as a student who has missed 10 percent or more of school days for any reason, including unexcused or excused absences and suspensions, during the days enrolled. Remember that chronic absence is different from truancy. In California, truancy is defined in *EC* Section 48260 as missing three days of school or being more than 30 minutes late to class without a valid excuse three times in one school year.
2. You also may share the aggregate data on chronic absence rates with your SARB so that SARB members can help identify and address common causes for high chronic absenteeism rates, including transportation issues or lack of access to health care. Encourage SARB members to engage community partners, especially volunteers and businesses, in providing attendance incentives that reward students for good and improved attendance. The SARBs also can enlist partners from public health, behavioral health, law enforcement, and social

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<sup>1</sup> Hough, Heather. Using Chronic Absence In A Multi-tiered Accountability System, PACE April 2016. <http://www.edpolicyinca.org/publications/using-chronic-absence-multi-metric-accountability-system>. Buehler, Melanie Hart; Tapogna, John; and Chang, Hedy. [Why Being in School Matters: Chronic Absenteeism in Oregon Public Schools](#), Attendance Works, June 2012.

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services to assist your schools when families need to be linked to community services.

3. Use your data to identify students with a past history of poor attendance who could benefit from positive personal engagement and extra support at the start of the school year. Link them to prevention-oriented supports (for example, an authorized enrollment center for Covered California that includes medical, vision, dental, and mental health support or a nonprofit outreach organization that provides after school activities and family support).

If you would like more resources from the Attendance Works research organization about communication strategies, visit the Messaging Web page at <http://www.attendanceworks.org/tools/for-public-messaging/>.

I encourage you to move forward this school year with a winning, collaborative, data-driven strategy to address chronic absenteeism and celebrate the positive results.

If you have any questions regarding this subject, please contact David Kopperud, Education Programs Consultant in the Educational Options, Student Support, and American Indian Education Office, by phone at 916-323-1028 or by e-mail at [dkopperud@cde.ca.gov](mailto:dkopperud@cde.ca.gov).

Sincerely,



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