



CALIFORNIA
DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION

TOM TORLAKSON

STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

August 31, 2017

Dear County and District Superintendents and Charter School Administrators:

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

As we begin the new school year, I invite you to join me in reminding families and community partners of the importance of developing good attendance habits and helping families overcome any challenges associated with poor attendance.

September is recognized as National School Attendance Awareness Month. This initiative encourages all members of the education community—including parents, guardians, and caregivers—to increase effective practices around school attendance.

Starting now, we can help our students by building awareness about the connection between attendance and school success and engaging students' families more effectively.

We can communicate with parents, guardians, and caregivers before there is a serious attendance problem—not just when their children are identified as truants or when their children miss 10 percent or more of the days enrolled. The communication should include information to support families in understanding how missing just two days a month over the course of the school year can negatively affect their children's academic progress and ultimately their ability to graduate.

In amending California *Education Code (EC)* Section 48240, the Legislature expanded the duty of attendance supervisor to “raise the awareness of school personnel, parents, guardians, caregivers, community partners, and local businesses of the effects of chronic absenteeism and truancy and other challenges associated with poor attendance.”

In thinking about how you or your attendance supervisor can deliver the message about improving school attendance this year, consider the “Count Us In! 2017 Toolkit” developed by Attendance Works for strategies in effectively communicating with families about attendance on the Attendance Awareness Month Web page at <http://awareness.attendanceworks.org/resources/count-us-toolkit-2017/can-deliver-message/>.

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Attendance improves when districts adopt school board policies to identify and respond to grade level or pupil subgroup patterns of chronic absenteeism or truancy. A sample board policy consistent with the amendments to *EC* Section 48240 is available on the California Department of Education (CDE) Sample Policy and Administrative Regulation Web page at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/ai/sb/samplepolicy.asp>.

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 as well as intensive interventions. In 2017, the CDE recognized three times the number of Model SARBs than were awarded in 2016, and I encourage even more exemplary attendance programs to consider applying for Model SARB recognition this year. Information about the Model SARB Recognition Program and the application process is on the CDE Model SARB Recognition Program Web page at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/ai/sb/modelrecognition.asp>.

Using baseline chronic absence data enables SARBs and schools to closely monitor progress and meet goals aligned with Local Control and Accountability Plans (LCAP). Together with families and community partners, we must promote attendance and reduce barriers to attendance.

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 will 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. *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.
2. You may also have your attendance supervisor share disaggregated chronic absence rates with your SARB to help identify and address common barriers to attendance for different groups of students, including transportation issues, lack of access to health care, or excessive school suspensions. SARB members may then engage community partners—especially volunteers and businesses—in providing attendance incentives that reward students for good and improved attendance. SARB representatives may also enlist partners from public health, behavioral health, law enforcement, and social 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. Have schools or SARBs link families with attendance problems to positive, prevention-oriented supports for medical, vision, dental, and mental health support.

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Chronic absenteeism data for California will be available for the first time this year through our California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System, providing a new opportunity to understand how chronic absenteeism is concentrated at certain grade levels and in pupil subgroups throughout the state.

I encourage you to use this data and move forward this year with a winning, collaborative strategy to address chronic absenteeism and celebrate successful, comprehensive school attendance programs.

If you have any questions, please contact Education Programs Consultant David Kopperud 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.

Sincerely,



Tom Torlakson

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