



TOM TORLAKSON

STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

CALIFORNIA
DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION

December 18, 2015

Dear County and District Superintendents and Charter School Administrators:

**MESSAGING FOR THE NEW YEAR: ENGAGING PARENTS
TO REDUCE CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM**

I encourage you to join me in continuing to inform parents about the importance of avoiding school absences unless they are absolutely necessary. Every school day counts! As we prepare to welcome a new year, we can take this opportunity to focus on student attendance during the winter months.

We can share the message that children will learn and succeed in the classroom when we remove barriers to attendance, establish good attendance patterns, and overcome transportation or health problems that often arise during bad weather.

A great resource for positive messages is the Attendance Works “Stay the Course” Web page at <http://www.attendanceworks.org/tools/for-public-messaging/winter-messaging/>. The Web page includes these resources in English and Spanish that promote regular attendance during the new year and winter months:

- Informational flyers to parents stressing the importance of good attendance during the winter months
- Sample letters to send families
- Written scripts for phone calls that can be delivered through “robocall” systems

To measure the success of your efforts to engage families at different schools, you may identify which schools and student populations have the highest chronic absenteeism rates at this point in the school year.

You also may share the aggregate data on chronic absenteeism rates with your school attendance review board (SARB) so that SARB members can help identify and address the common causes of high chronic absenteeism rates, including transportation issues or lack of access to health care.

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The SARB also can 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. For example, the SARB can link children with chronic health conditions to positive prevention-oriented supports (such as 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).

Together we can engage families to reduce chronic absence and give all children an equal opportunity to learn. I encourage you to address winter challenges to school attendance by engaging families with a positive communications strategy and using your chronic absenteeism rates to measure the impact of your messaging on specific groups of students at different schools.

If you have any questions regarding this subject, please contact David Kopperud, Education Programs Consultant, 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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2015-09203