

for
**Community
Agencies**

Chronic Absence and the Local Control Funding Formula

2014

Why should I care about chronic absence?

Building a habit of regular attendance is critical to students succeeding in school and eventually graduating from high school. Unless students are in school, they cannot benefit from the instruction offered in the classroom. If too many students are chronically absent, the churn can slow down learning for all students.

Studies show that that chronic absence (missing 10% of the school year) as early as pre-kindergarten and kindergarten is associated with lower third grade reading scores. By sixth grade it becomes a leading indicator that a student will drop out of high school. In ninth grade, it's a stronger indicator of dropout than eighth grade test scores. Low-income students, who don't have the resources to make up for time lost in classroom instruction, are especially hard hit.

Research also shows that chronic absence can be significantly reduced if schools partner with community agencies and families to build a local culture of attendance as well as identify and address barriers to attendance. The key is adopting a comprehensive, tiered response that begins with prevention, leverages the strength and knowledge of local stakeholders, and engages all school staff.

Community agencies working with children, youth and families are especially well-positioned to help schools understand the community conditions affecting school attendance, as well as to help them develop solutions to chronic absence that leverage available resources (including their own programs). If you do not operate district-wide, focus your efforts on the schools currently or potentially most affected by your operations.

What is the connection between chronic absence and the LCFF?

With the passage of the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) in June 2013, school districts throughout California are for the first time required to monitor and address chronic absence. Chronic absence is a key LCFF accountability measure within the pupil engagement section of the Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) required for all districts. In accordance with the legislation, districts and school sites must pay particular attention to chronic absence levels among English learners, foster youth, and low-income students.

What can community agencies do to ensure districts address chronic absence?

1. Request chronic absence data. Each district must use its attendance data to generate reports on the rates of chronic absence. Find out if your district knows the extent to which chronic absence is a problem district-wide and for particular schools, grades and student populations. Call for an analysis if this data isn't yet available.

Your districts can also go [here](#) for more information and resources ([including free data tools](#) available from Attendance Works) to help with calculating chronic absence rates consistently over time, across all types of schools and for highly mobile student populations. If needed, support the allocation of resources to ensure your district has the capacity to calculate and report chronic absence rates accurately.

2. Ask for the designated lead. Ask the superintendent which staff person or team has responsibility for ensuring that chronic absence and attendance is explicitly addressed and reflected in the development of the Local Control Accountability Plan. The lead should ensure that work on attendance is coordinated and integrated across multiple levels. Chronic absence decreases when everyone including teachers, principals, district leaders, classified staff and community partners include attendance as a priority in their ongoing work with students and families.

3. Help your districts determine why students are missing school. Help your district use qualitative and quantitative data to identify and address common barriers to attendance for schools or student populations with high levels of chronic absence. Encourage your district to review results of the [California Healthy Kids Survey](#) for insights into common causes of absence. Offer relevant data that your agency collects on child, family or community conditions (health, neighborhood safety, access to or attendance in child care or youth development programs, etc.). If possible, help your district hold focus groups or conduct surveys of students and families to learn about their perceptions of barriers to attendance and what helps motivate and enable them to get to school every day.

4. Support capacity building. Ask your district about how it is building the capacity of school and district staff to adopt effective tools and practices for partnering with students and families to reduce chronic absence, as well as develop strong partnerships between schools and community partners to improve student attendance. Ask for the inclusion of community partners in professional development opportunities available to district employees. Capacity building should support the adoption of effective approaches that involve starting with prevention and early intervention at school sites, connecting children and families to necessary services, and using legal intervention only as a last resort (as is noted in the [SARB handbook](#)).

5. Participate in planning meetings. Find out when LCAP planning meetings are scheduled and actively participate. Make sure that the meetings include organizations, staff and parent leaders from the school or the community who have experience encouraging students to attend regularly and helping families address barriers to getting to school. You can help your school and district develop meaningful solutions that leverage local practices, resources and knowledge.

6. Ask about Targets. Ask your district and school to share the annual goals, specific



actions and budgets addressing chronic absence. Find out if these targets are in the single-site plan for improvement of each school. Consider using this information to determine which schools to prioritize for your own operations if you have resources to help them improve student attendance.