

for
Principals

Chronic Absence and the Local Control Funding Formula

2014

Why should I care about chronic absence?

Addressing chronic absence is key to creating equal opportunities to learn for all students in your district. 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.

Research shows 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.

The good news is 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.

As a principal, you are uniquely positioned to ensure that your school understands the extent to which chronic absence is a challenge overall and for specific student populations. You are essential to ensuring school staff are working with each other and partnering with families and community agencies to adopt effective strategies for improving student attendance.

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. The district LCAP should reflect the planning that has taken place at each school site, including your own. 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 principals do to ensure districts address chronic absence?

1. Ensure your school has access to accurate data on its rates of chronic absence. Chronic absence data for your school site should be produced and made available to you by the district. If it has not yet been provided, ask your district for data showing the extent to which chronic absence is a problem for your entire school as well as for specific grades and student populations. Make sure your district is calculating chronic absence (missing 10% of the school year for any reason) versus just truancy or average daily attendance. Once you receive your data, review it for accuracy to ensure that you do not need to take steps to improve the quality of the data being submitted by your own staff to the district.

Encourage your district to 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. Make sure school site administrators have the opportunity to review initial data reports for accuracy before they are made public. If needed, support the allocation of needed resources to ensure your district has the capacity to calculate and report chronic absence rates accurately.

Make sure your district is calculating chronic absence (missing 10% of the school year for any reason) versus just truancy or average daily attendance. Common approaches to analyzing data are essential to making comparisons across school districts.

2. Find out why students are missing school. Use qualitative and quantitative data to identify and address common barriers to attendance for your school. Use additional resources like the [California Healthy Kids Survey](#) and other available statistics on local health, economic and social conditions to gain insights into potential causes of high levels of absence. Attendance Works offers [this guidance](#) to help you analyze attendance challenges.

3. Invest in capacity building. Make sure administrators, teachers, and community partners have opportunities to learn about effective tools and practices for partnering with families to reduce chronic absence. This includes 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](#)). This [self-assessment tool](#) can help you assess strengths that you can build upon as well as areas needing improvement.

5. Engage experienced internal and external stakeholders. Engage your staff, student and parent leaders and community partners who have experience working on attendance in reviewing the data and identifying solutions. These stakeholders should include not only programs and people already working on attendance and truancy, but also those working in related areas such as school climate, parent engagement, student health, building facilities, early childhood education and afterschool programming. These programs can have a significant impact on chronic absence rates.

6. Set Targets. As part of your school's single-site plan for improvement, adopt an annual goal for reducing chronic absence and improving attendance and reflect this priority in your actions and strategies as well as budget allocations.

