

# for School Board Members

## *Chronic Absence and the Local Control Funding Formula*

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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.

Research shows that chronic absence (missing 10% of the school year) as early as prekindergarten 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 to 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 school board member, you are well positioned to build awareness of chronic absence and support the adoption of policies that ensure chronic absence is monitored and addressed.

### 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 schools sites must pay particular attention to chronic absence levels among English learners, foster youth, and low-income students.

### What can school board members do to ensure districts address chronic absence?

**1. Ensure your district can produce data on chronic absence.** 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 district 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.

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. Establish a designated lead.** Ask your superintendent which staff person or team has been given responsibility for ensuring that chronic absence and attendance are 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. Encourage your district administrators to work with community partners** to find out why students are missing school. Use qualitative and quantitative data to identify and address common barriers to attendance for schools or student populations with high levels of chronic absence. 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. Consider brokering partnerships with local universities or community agencies known for their capacity to connect to the most affected populations or schools.

**4. Invest in capacity building.** Make sure administrators, teachers and community partners have opportunities to learn about effective tools and practices for partnering with students and families to reduce chronic absence and improve attendance. 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](#)).

**5. Support the engagement of internal and external stakeholders.** Make sure that your district leverages the insights of existing programs, key personnel, and student and parent leaders as it reviews data and identifies solutions that leverage local practices and resources. These stakeholders should include not only organizations 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 chronic absence rates.

**6. Set Targets.** Ensure your board is presented with annual goals, specific actions and budgets for approval and inclusion in the LCAP. Ideally, these targets should build upon goals set by each school site for reducing chronic absence as part of their single site plans for improvement.

