

# for Superintendents

## *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. If too many students are chronically absent, the churn can slow down learning for all students.

Research shows that chronic absence (when children are academically at risk due to missing too much school for any reason, including excused, unexcused absences as well as suspensions) 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 superintendent, you are essential to ensuring your district tracks, monitors and reports data on chronic absence; enlisting the support of families and community partners to improve student attendance; and holding schools accountable for adopting best practices for reducing chronic absence.

### 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 superintendents 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. If your district has not yet produced such reports, direct your data staff to analyze the extent to which chronic absence is a problem district-wide and for particular schools, grades and student populations.

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. 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. Designate responsibility for leading this work.** Announce 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. 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. Engage experienced internal and external stakeholders.** Engage district and school staff and parent leaders, as well as community partners who have experience working on attendance or addressing common barriers to getting to school, in reviewing data and identifying solutions that leverage local practices and resources. 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 which can have a significant impact on chronic absence rates.

**6. Set Targets.** Work with the school board to adopt 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.