

for
**Parent
Leaders**

*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.

As a parent leader, you are especially well-positioned to help schools recognize when learning is affected by poor attendance and draw upon other parents to determine why chronic absence is a problem. You are critical to ensuring that families are not blamed for chronic absence, but rather that schools and community agencies work with families to make sure students are in class every day.

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 should also pay particular attention to chronic absence levels among English learners, foster youth, and low-income students.

What can parent leaders do to ensure districts address chronic absence?

- 1. Building awareness among families.** Make sure families in your district understand why going to school every day is important for their own children and for the overall success of schools in your district. Help families realize that missing too much school for any reason, not just unexcused absences, can prevent their children from being successful in school. Let parents know they play an important role in ensuring students attend class every day. Attendance Works [offers handouts and other resources](#) in multiple languages for sharing information with parents.
- 2. Request chronic absence data.** Find out if your school and district knows the extent to which chronic absence is a problem for your school and district as well as for particular grades and student populations. Call for an analysis if this data isn't yet available. Make sure your district is calculating chronic absence (missing 10% of the school year for any reason) versus just truancy or average daily attendance. Make sure this information is being shared with parent organizations and is ideally available online for all families to review.
- 3. Help your districts determine why students are missing school.** Identify parents and others who could help the school staff use qualitative and quantitative data to identify and address common barriers to attendance for schools or student populations with high levels of chronic absence. Consider brokering partnerships with local community agencies known for their capacity to connect to the most affected populations or schools. Keep in mind the importance of identifying school-specific as well as district-wide challenges.
- 4. Call for capacity building.** Ask your district to ensure administrators, teachers, community partners and families have opportunities to learn about effective tools and practices for reducing chronic absence and improving attendance. This includes starting with prevention and early intervention at school sites, connecting children and families to necessary services, and only using legal intervention as a last resort. Attendance Works has free tools available online for schools and districts, ranging from [data tools](#) to resources for developing awareness campaigns and integrating attendance into classroom activities.
- 5. Participate as an experienced stakeholder.** Find out when LCAP planning meetings are scheduled and actively participate. Attend the meetings and encourage other parents to participate as well. Make sure that the meetings include organizations or people from the school or the community who have experience encouraging students to attend regularly and helping families address barriers to getting to school. Together, you can help your district and schools develop meaningful solutions that leverage local practices, resources and knowledge. Ensure that information is available to help families know when such meetings are occurring at their children's schools.
- 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 your school's single-site plan for improvement and ensure families have easy access to this information for their children's schools.

