Does Our District Have a Systemic Approach to Reducing Chronic Absence?

A Tool for Self-Assessment

(Revised March 27, 2014)

Actionable data, positive messaging, capacity building, and shared accountability all play an integral role in reducing chronic absence in your district. While conducting the assessment across all four ingredients, think about the actions your district takes on its own, as well as whether you are making strategic use of community partnerships to advance your strategies.

ACTIONABLE DATA	Strength	OK for Now	Could Be Better	Urgent Gap	Don't Know	How Do You Know?
1. Attendance data is entered accurately on a daily basis for each student into an electronic database.						
2. Data on levels of chronic absence are calculated (ideally at least quarterly) for our district as a whole as well as by grade, school, student sub-population and, if possible, by zip code.						
3. At least once a month, school site teams and a district team receive data on the current level of chronic absence overall, by school, and by grade. School teams also receive a list of the students by grade who have missed 10% or more of school.						
4. Students and parents can access their own attendance data in a format that is easy to understand and shows them if the student is at risk due to chronic absence (ideally they can also track problematic academic performance or behavior that may be related to absences)						
5. Data on chronic absence (and ideally other attendance measures) are publicly reported annually (if not more often) and available to families and community partners.						

POSITIVE MESSAGING	Strength	OK for Now	Could Be Better	Urgent Gap	Don't Know	How Do You Know?
1. The superintendent consistently and clearly stresses the importance of daily attendance in communications with parents and the general public, as well as other key stakeholders.						
2. Written materials from the district (parent handbook, flyers, back to school letters, etc. for all the major languages spoken in the district) explain how regular attendance and avoiding chronic absence is critical to success in school.						
3. As soon as signs of chronic absence are detected, someone (from the school, district, community partner, volunteer, etc.) reaches out to the student and family in a positive way to let them know they were missed and this is a potential problem, to encourage improved attendance, and to identify needed supports. Follow-up is pursued until contact is made.						
4. Schools and **community partners** (city government, businesses, parent organizations, social workers, healthcare providers, local service providers, clergy, etc.) build a positive culture of attendance through communications with families and attendance incentives.						
5. We recognize positive examples of students, families, teachers, schools, and **community partners** improving attendance and use these examples to inspire action.						

CAPACITY BUILDING	Strength	OK for Now	Could Be Better	Urgent Gap	Don't Know	How Do You Know?
1. We have a widely disseminated, comprehensive attendance policy and practice manual that clearly lays out why attendance matters, describes what schools and the district will do to build a positive culture of attendance, and outlines what the response should be when student attendance is poor.						
2. Principals understand what chronic absence is, as well as how to address it; they are prepared to lead and coach their school staff and **community partners** in working together to improve attendance.						
3. Schools have teams in place that regularly review attendance data and practice, seek input from youth and families on attendance barriers, and use the insights gained to inform programmatic action and intervention.						
4. Professional development and materials are available to help **community partners** understand our attendance practice and how they can help build a culture of attendance and engage in positive messaging to students and families.						
5. High quality trainings and workshops are available throughout the year and in the home languages of families to help parents understand how to help their children succeed in school, why attendance matters, how to access data on their children's attendance and performance, and what they can do to ensure daily attendance.						

SHARED ACCOUNTABILITY	Strength	OK for Now	Could Be Better	Urgent Gap	Don't Know	How Do You Know?
1. The Superintendent and School Board have established and announced annual district-wide goals and provided guidance for setting school-wide goals for improved attendance and lower chronic absence.						
2. Each school site has a school improvement plan that includes data on chronic absence and attendance, targets for improvement, and the steps it will take with **community partners** to maintain or improve attendance.						
3. Contracts or MOUs with **community organizations** outline how they will support the school and district in improving school attendance and how they will assess if their contributions are having an impact.						
4. Every student with a prior history of chronic absence has an attendance improvement plan that sets attendance goals and identifies how they will be attained with support from families, school staff and community providers, as needed.						
5. The district and key **community stakeholders** meet regularly to review chronic absence data in the context of other student, school, and community data, to identify causes of absence and opportunities for action, to discuss implications for targeting available resources, and to set community-wide goals for improved attendance.						

Overall Reflections & Next Steps

1. What are your district's greatest strengths across the four ingredients?

2. What are the biggest challenges your district faces across the four ingredients?

3. What are the three or four most important steps that could be taken over the course of the next year to lay the foundation for reducing chronic absence?

4. What is already going on in your community and school district that could be leveraged to help take these steps?

5. If you are conducting this assessment with others, share all of your ideas for the three or four most important steps. Identify if any of the steps are more important to achieve first to lay the foundation for others. Agree upon the top three to five shared priorities for action.

6. For each priority, identify the following: What are the resources that could be leveraged; who are the key groups that should be involved; who could take the lead in moving it forward; and what is your timeline for action.