Leading Attendance in California:

How Elementary Principals Can Close the Achievement Gap by Reducing Chronic Absence
I. Welcome and Why Chronic Absence Matters ~ Gordon Jackson

II. What Is Chronic Absence and How Can You Address It ~ Hedy Chang

III. California Principal’s Toolkit ~ Hedy Chang

IV. Principal Panel ~ Cecelia Leong
   • Steve Trotter, Rodeo Hills Elementary School, John Swett Unified School District
   • Ed Clement, Parkridge Elementary School, Corona-Norco Unified School District

IV. Announcements
Welcome

Gordon Jackson
Assistant Superintendent

Coordinated Student Support Division,
California Department of Education
California (CDE/COE) Attendance Peer Learning Network

Student Programs and Services Steering Committee

REGION IX EQUITY ASSISTANCE CENTER

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Tom Torlakson, State Superintendent of Public Instruction
It’s not that I’m so smart, it’s just that I stay with problems longer.  
-Albert Einstein

- It is safe to say that we have an attendance problem in too many California schools.

- We know that students are more likely to succeed in life when they start out attending school regularly.

- When students are not in school they are more likely to get “schooled” about life in not the best of ways.

- Dropout patterns are linked with poor attendance beginning in kindergarten.

- School budgets are linked to attendance and schools with high absences have less money to address essential classroom needs.
California Context
Chronic Absence in the Elementary Grades is a Major Barrier to Achievement

An estimated 250,000 students (K–5) were Chronically Absent in 2013–14.

Source: Office of California Attorney General Kamala Harris. In School + On Track 2014
Benefits of Reducing Chronic Absence Starting with the Elementary Grades

- Increase funding for districts (More Average Daily Attendance)

- Chronic absence (missing 10 percent of school for any reason including excused and unexcused absence) in elementary school has often been overlooked.

- Reduce negative student outcomes linked with absenteeism such as lack of proficiency in reading by third grade and eventual course failure and dropout.
Poll Question

What is your role?

• Principal/School Administrator
• District Office Administrator/County Office of Ed Administrator
• Practitioner (working in a community)
• Funder/Researcher/Evaluator
• TA Provider/GLR Network Member
Attendance Works

Hedy Chang
Director
What is Chronic Absence and How Can You Address It?
Unpacking Attendance Terms

**Average Daily Attendance**
- Nationally, ADA is generally understood as the % of enrolled students who attend school each day. In California, for funding purposes, it is also defined as total days of student attendance divided by total days of student instruction.

**Truancy**
- Typically refers only to unexcused absences and is defined by each state under No Child Left Behind. It signals the potential need for legal intervention under state compulsory education laws. In CA, it refers to a child absent 3 days without a valid excuse or late 3 times to class by at last 30 minutes without a valid excuse.

**Chronic Absence**
- Missing 10% or more of school for any reason – excused, unexcused, etc. It is an indication that a student is academically at risk due to missing too much school.
High Levels of Average Daily Attendance (ADA) Can Mask Chronic Absence

90% and even 95% ≠ A

Chronic Absence For 6 Elementary Schools in Oakland, CA with 95% ADA in 2012

Chronic Absence for 6 Schools in New York City with 90% ADA in 2011-12

98% ADA = little chronic absence
95% ADA = don’t know
93% ADA = significant chronic absence
Chronic Absence Versus Truancy

Number of students missing 10% versus 10 unexcused absences (San Francisco Unified School District)

- # chronic absentees - 2010-2011
- # of students with 10 unexcused absences (as of May 16th 2011)
Find Out Why Students Are Chronically Absent

**Myths**
- Absences are only a problem if they are unexcused
- Sporadic versus consecutive absences aren’t a problem
- Attendance only matters in the older grades

**Barriers**
- Chronic disease
- Mental Health & Social-Emotional Wellness Challenges
- Lack of access to health or dental care
- Poor transportation
- No safe path to school

**Aversion**
- Child struggling academically
- Lack of engaging instruction
- Poor school climate and ineffective school discipline
- Parents had negative school experience
- Mental Health & Social-Emotional Wellness Challenges

**Chronic disease**

**Mental Health & Social-Emotional Wellness Challenges**

**Lack of access to health or dental care**

**Poor transportation**

**No safe path to school**
AW Recommended Site-Level Strategies

A. Recognize Good and Improved Attendance

B. Engage Students and Parents

C. Monitor Attendance Data and Practice

D. Provide Personalized Early Outreach

E. Develop Programmatic Response to Barriers (as needed)
Ingredients for System-wide Success & Sustainability

- **Positive Messaging**: Conveys why building a habit of attendance is important and what chronic absence is.
- **Actionable Data**: Is accurate, accessible, and regularly reported.
- **Shared Accountability**: Ensures monitoring & incentives to address chronic absence.
- **Capacity Building**: Expands ability to interpret data and work together to adopt best practices.
- **Strategic partnerships between district and community partners address specific attendance barriers and mobilize support for all ingredients.
Investing in Principals to Lead Attendance!

Leading Attendance in California: A Principal’s toolkit

http://www.attendanceworks.org/policy-advocacy/state-reports/california/california-principals-toolkit/
Principals are positioned to:

1. ** Cultivate ** a school-wide culture of attendance

2. ** Use Data ** to determine need for additional supports

3. ** Take a Team Approach ** and develop staff capacity

4. ** Advocate ** for additional resources and improved policy
Principals are uniquely positioned to adopt a tiered approach to improve attendance

TIER 3  Students who are chronically truant or missed 20% or more of the prior school year (severe chronic absence)

- Intensive case management with coordination of public agency and legal response as needed

TIER 2  Students exhibiting chronic absence (missing 10%)

- Provide personalized early outreach
- Meet with student/family to develop plan
  - Offer attendance Mentor/Buddy

TIER 1  All students

- Recognize good and improved attendance
- Educate & engage students and families
  - Monitor attendance data
- Clarify attendance expectations and goals
- Establish positive and engaging school climate
1) Tier 1: Cultivate a School-wide Culture of Attendance

- **Start outreach** to families before the school year begins
- **Leverage existing activities** to communicate the importance of good attendance and offer support
- **Nurture** a school-wide system of attendance incentives
- **Message** about the importance of attendance all year long, beginning with Attendance Awareness Month
Attendance Messaging to Parents
Vast majority of parents, even those of students with excessive absences, believe their child’s attendance is same as classmates, better than classmates, or just don’t know.
Harvard research study found comparison reduced absence by 5-10% for all students, regardless of severity of absenteeism
Ad Council
California School Attendance Research Project

For the CA Office of the Attorney General: Contact Ben Chida (Ben.Chida@doj.ca.gov)

June, 2015
C&C Multicultural, LLC
Strategic Research
Dissonance

“My child is doing well in school”

“My child can make up for the absence with homework provided by teacher”

“Missing one day here and there is less harmful than consecutive absences”

“He can catch up within the year”

“She is not doing well because she just doesn’t like or is not good in school.”

25
Schools Reinforce Negative Behaviors

Interviewed Parents:
- Disregarded or felt frustrated by impersonal letters
- Thought that homework packets made up for the absence
- Never had a teacher raise concerns about excessive absences
- Were worried about school safety
- Felt like their kids were absent about as often as the norm

School activities that:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reinforce Attendance</th>
<th>Reinforce Absenteeism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Rewards to classrooms with the best attendance, generally consisting of ice cream or DJ parties. | • Impersonal letters  
• Teachers send work home in response to absences  
• Teachers do not address absenteeism issue with the parent  
• Parents do not feel their child is safe in school  
• Allowing perception that chronic absence is normal |

Big motivators for kids, but not the parents

Reinforces parents’ existing attitudes and behaviors toward absences

For more details, please refer to pages 13–14 of the report
Messaging: Absences v. Attendance

Absences
- Associate with what child is missing
- This behavior is planned so makes parents think about impact of planned absences
- Change in behavior

Attendance
- Associate with what child is already gaining
- This behavior considered automatic, makes parents feel like they are already doing
- Reinforces current behavior

For more details, please refer to page 16 of the report
## Recommendations

### Insights

- **Parents** do not connect early absences with long-term negative consequences.
- **Teachers** communicate with parents, but not about absences.
- **Absence letters** alone are ineffective, generating fear, denial, or misunderstanding—especially for Hispanic parents.
- Parents often rely on **communities** and social networks to care for their children.

### Recommendations

- **Educate** parents about the impact of early absences.
- Encourage **teachers** to speak to parents about absences; explore easy ways (e.g. text messaging programs) to help them regularly do so.
- Help parents **keep track** of the # of absences.
- Take stock of **community members** who play critical roles in kids’ lives, and enlist their help.

For more details, please refer to page 20–22 of the report
Tools for Communication, Education, and Engagement

Teaching Attendance:
Everyday Strategies to Help Teachers Improve Attendance and Raise Achievement

BRINGING ATTENDANCE HOME
Engaging Parents in Preventing Chronic Absence

www.attendanceworks.org

August 6, 2014
version 2.0
2) Tier 2: Use Data to Identify Priority Students for Early Interventions

- Chronic absence (missed 10% or more of school) in the prior year, assuming data is available.
- And/or starting in the beginning of the school year, student has:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Period</th>
<th>Absence Criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In first 2 weeks</td>
<td>2 absences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In first month (4 weeks)</td>
<td>2-3 absences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In first 2 months (8 weeks)</td>
<td>4 absences</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Possible Tier 2 Interventions

- Assign Attendance Buddies
- Partner with families/students to develop Student Attendance Success Plan
- Recruit for engaging Before- or After-School Activities
- Connect to Walk- to-School Companion
- Offer plan or contacts for Health Support
Look for Your School’s Chronic Absence Lists

• District Offices are preparing the list of students who were chronically absent in 2014-15

• Your district offices are also offering Guidance and Supports for early intervention
3) Take a Team Approach to Address Attendance

Attendance teams could be drawn from an existing structure or established for this purpose. They should include a Principal (or vice principal) and, ideally, the following:

- social worker, nurse, or counselor
- attendance clerk
- parent liaison
- teacher lead
- community based organization/partner(s) offering support that engage students or parents or address an attendance barrier

(Tip: Consider designating a staff person to facilitate the meetings as well as a note taker)
Attendance Teams...

- Should be **action-oriented**
- **Use data** to understand which sub-populations of students are most affected and what are trends over time
- **Identify and mobilize** school and community resources to address identified needs
- **Ensure needs of individual students** with poor attendance are being addressed

Attendance Teams best practices sources: Attendance Works, Children’s Aid Society, the Children’s Initiative, the Baltimore Education Research Consortium, and the Baltimore Student Attendance Campaign
Fill Out Your Pyramid

For each tier, fill in the activities/supports currently in place.

School District/ School Name: ________________________________

TIER 3
Students at risk of missing 20% or more of school (severe chronic absence)

How many students are in each tier?

Tier 3
Tier 2
Tier 1

TIER 2
Students at risk of missing 10-19% (moderate chronic absence)

High Cost

TIER 1
All students

Low Cost

http://www.attendanceworks.org/tools/schools/3-tiers-of-intervention/
4) Advocate for Additional Resources and Improved Policy

• **Call for your district** to provide real-time chronic absence data to all schools

• **Advocate coordination** and sharing of best practices across schools

• **Encourage district leadership** to act on this issue

• **Support improved city, county and state policy** for monitoring chronic absence and allocating resources

• **Join with other administrators** and professional associations to advocate for better policy
Attendance Works

Cecelia Leong
Associate Director
Panel Discussion

• **Steve Trotter, Principal**
  Rodeo Hills Elementary School
  John Swett Unified School District

• **Ed Clement, Principal**
  Parkridge Elementary School
  Corona-Norco Unified School District
Questions

1. How did you create a positive culture of attendance in your school?

2. How do you use data to determine which students need additional supports?

3. Share ways in which you increased staff capacity to address issues of attendance.

4. Where have you found additional resources in your district or the wider community?

5. How can partners help principals?
Our Special Guests

Steve Trotter

Ed Clement
Questions?
Announcements & Resources
Leading Attendance in California

A TOOLKIT FOR PRINCIPALS TO ADDRESS CHRONIC ABSENCE

Principals and teachers can use this toolkit to address chronic absence in their schools. The toolkit includes tips and strategies for identifying and addressing chronic absence, as well as resources for implementing school-wide attendance policies. The toolkit is available online at http://www.attendanceworks.org/policy-advocacy/state-reports/california/california-principals-toolkit.
• SETTING THE STAGE
• VIDEO (6 minutes)
• FACILITATED CONVERSATION
  – THE CONSEQUENCES OF CHRONIC ABSENCE
  – HOW TO IMPROVE ABSENTEEISM
    • FAMILY PRACTICE
    • INCREASE SOCIAL CAPITAL
    • IDENTIFY HOW SCHOOL CAN HELP
    • COMMUNITY SERVICES

New in 2015: Available in English and Spanish!
Student Attendance Success Plans

MY CHILD’S ATTENDANCE SUCCESS PLAN

POSSIBLE STRATEGIES TO REACH MY CHILD’S ATTENDANCE GOALS:

- I will talk to my child about how going to school every day will help them do well in school and achieve their hopes and dreams.
- I will keep an attendance chart at home. At the end of the week, I will recognize my child for attending school every day.
- I will make sure my child is in bed by ____ p.m. and the alarm clock is set for ____ a.m.
- If my child complains of a stomachache or headache, and medical exam has been ruled out, I will send him/her to school anyway and call _______ so that he/she can check in with my child during the day.
- If my child has a cold but no fever (less than 100 degrees), I will send him/her to school anyway. If I don’t have a thermometer, I will purchase one soon.
- I will find a relative, friend, or neighbor who can take my child to school if I can’t make it.
- If my child is absent, I will contact his/her teacher to find out what he/she missed.
- I will set up medical and dental appointments for weekdays after school.

To improve my child’s attendance, I commit to the following:

1. 
2. 
3. 

We will review progress to meet this goal in two months.

Family Signature: __________________________ Date: __________

Teacher Signature: __________________________ Date: __________

To learn more, please visit www.attendanceworks.org

Adapted with permission from the DVaM Parent Brochure, and from a worksheet created by Audi Works + East Beaver Elementary School in Portland, Oregon.

MY FAMILY’S HELP BANK

MY FAMILY

EVERYDAY HELPERS

2. Everyday Helpers: Identify who you can call on to help drop your child off or who can pick him/her up when you can’t.
These are people like friends, neighbors and relatives who can help regularly.
3. Occasional Helpers: Identify people who probably can’t help everyday, but can help as a push. Maybe it’s a grandparent, a relative or a friend who lives outside your neighborhood but can be there for short stays.
4. Potential Helpers: Identify people who are part of your school community, church or neighborhood who are able to help— if you ask.

OCCASIONAL HELPERS

POTENTIAL HELPERS

1. My Family: ________
2. Everyday Helpers: ________
3. Occasional Helpers: ________
4. Potential Helpers: ________

If I need help getting my child to and from school, I will ask the following people to be our back-up:

Name: __________________________ Best Contact Number: __________________________

Name: __________________________ Best Contact Number: __________________________

Superintendent Torlakson’s Letter encourages all schools and districts to:

1. Issue a local proclamation for attendance awareness month – sample template:
   http://awareness.attendanceworks.org/resources/proclamations/

2. Share their concerns based on local chronic absence data

3. Highlight local efforts to raise awareness about the importance of attendance for student academic success
Attendance Awareness Month and Nationwide Campaign 2015
Share What You Are Planning

Post your community’s plans for Attendance Awareness Month 2015 on our map

http://awareness.attendanceworks.org/map/
The Superintendents Call to Action

Prioritize Attendance

Mobilize the Community

Drive With Data

To sign-up for the Call to Action, or to learn more, please visit: www.attendanceworks.org/superintendents-call-to-action
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Visit the website to find:

• Updated Call to Action
• A list of Superintendents who have joined the call
• Tips for getting started
• Tips for developing a community action plan
• Toolkits and resources
• Media tools
Look for the EdWeek Ad in September

SUPERINTENDENTS CALL TO ACTION
MISSING SCHOOL MATTERS!

As many as 7.5 million students nationwide miss nearly a month of school every year, excused and unexcused absences that erode student achievement. As superintendents, we are launching this new school year with a commitment to:

1. **Prioritizing Attendance**: We are making reducing chronic absence a top priority in our district from the superintendent to the teachers, from the school staff to the families.

2. **Mobilizing the Community**: We are making student attendance a broadly owned and widely shared civic priority. That includes engaging families and tapping civic and elected leaders, local businesses, health providers, housing authorities, clergy members and more.

3. **Driving with Data**: We are using data to determine how many and which students are chronically absent in each grade, school and population. And we are intervening to ensure absences don’t add up.

Note: Superintendents will be featured in an Ed Week Ad!
When it comes to attendance, the principal deserves a PAL!

The inaugural PAL (Principal Attendance Leader) award:

• Recognizes school leaders who have effectively lead their school teams to reduce chronic absence

• Highlights best practices in leading attendance with stories and a webinar at the conclusion of Attendance Awareness Month

Nominate a principal today!

http://www.attendanceworks.org/tools/for-school-districts/nominate-a-principal/
2015 Webinar Series

All webinars will be held from 2-3:30 Eastern Time

- April 15, 2015, Ready, Set, Go! Launching Attendance Awareness Month 2015
- May 13, 2015, Start Strong: Address the Attendance Gap in the Early Grades
- August 12, 2015, Finish Strong: Close the Attendance Gap in High School
- September 9, 2015, Mapping the Early Attendance Gap: Insights from State and National Chronic Absence Analyses

http://www.attendanceworks.org/peer-learning-resources/
Spread the Word!

- Host a webinar party to watch the webinars and use the Discussion Guides to digest how you can apply what you learned for your community.

- Write, talk, blog, tweet about Attendance Awareness Month 2015

#schooleveryday
To our partners in the California Attendance Peer Learning Network and to our funders:

- Californians Dedicated to Education Foundation
- The California Endowment
- Campaign for Grade-Level Reading
- The Re(a)d Zone, a Bay Area early literacy initiative of the 50 Fund, the legacy fund of the Super Bowl 50 Host Committee
Please Give Us Your Feedback


Thank you for participating!