



HOW THE RUBBER MEETS THE ROAD: Funding Efforts to Reduce Chronic Absence in California School Districts March 17, 2017

Mounting evidence about the connection between school attendance and academic achievement has led to new state accountability for reducing student absences. Chronic absence, defined as missing 10 percent or more of school for any reason (including excused, unexcused absences and suspensions), puts children academically at risk. Chronic absence 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; and in ninth grade, it's a stronger indicator of dropping out than eighth grade test scores. Low-income students, who typically don't have the resources to make up for time lost in classroom instruction, are especially hard hit.

To strengthen the ability of Local Education Agencies (LEAs) to monitor chronic absence, the California Department of Education (CDE) has taken steps to support attendance data collection and reporting requirements for California school districts. Beginning with the 2016-2017 school year, all LEAs will submit data to CDE on excused and unexcused absences, as well as out-of-school suspensions as required by the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Rates of chronic absence, defined in California state law as

missing 10 percent or more of the school year due to excused, unexcused absences and suspensions, will also become part of the state's new accountability system through the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF).

The goal of these reporting requirements is, at least in part, to encourage and inform local activities to reduce chronic absence, which requires an investment of time and resources. With easier access to chronic absence data, district leaders, including school board members and superintendents, can set targets to reduce chronic absenteeism, define specific actions and corresponding funding to include in Local Control and Accountability Plans (LCAP) required by LCFF, and monitor progress towards their goals.

Many California school districts have already gotten this work underway, and provide useful examples of how other LEAs may finance their efforts to reduce chronic absence. Four major funding mechanisms have been identified to fund chronic absence initiatives: 1) leveraging Average Daily Attendance; 2) capitalizing on the LCFF; 3) applying for Proposition 47 funds, and 4) applying for the California Scale-Up MTSS State-wide (SUMS) Initiative Technical Assistance grant.

1) Leveraging Average Daily Attendance (ADA)

An estimated \$1.52 billion in ADA funds was left unclaimed by California school districts in the 2015-2016 school year as a result of student absences. Investing in efforts to reduce chronic absence can have considerable financial implications for school districts whether they are large or small, as evidenced by the following examples.

- » In 2016, Parlier Unified School District (3,381 students in 2015-16) in the Central Valley invested \$22,000 in their student attendance program and recouped \$260,000 in ADA funds - over 10 times the initial investment.

2) Capitalizing on the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF)

Under California's LCFF, chronic absence is an accountability measure for pupil engagement. Districts are required to report on this measure and describe how they will address it when submitting their LCAPs.

- » Garden Grove Unified School District (48,000 students in 2016-17) designated over \$200,000 in their 2016-17 LCAP for a comprehensive attendance strategy, including monitoring chronic absence data, providing professional development for teachers and staff, and partnering with local organizations to provide resources to students and families with attendance-related issues.

3) Applying for Prop 47 Funds

Reducing chronic absence is a key metric of a new grant program administered by CDE. Funded through [Prop 47](#), local districts are eligible to apply for funding to support evidence-based strategies to improve school climate and mitigate the school-to-prison pipeline. The legislation that approved the funds prioritizes districts with high rates of chronic absence, out-of-school suspensions and dropouts. The grants are for three years and require a 20 percent local match, which can come from districts' LCFF budgets. CDE expects to release the proposal in March 2017 on this web page (<http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/ss/se/schoolsuccess.asp>), where updates, the grant application, FAQs and other pertinent information can also be found. In the meantime, check out the [Attendance Works website](#) for the latest information on evidence-based approaches to reducing chronic absence.

4) Applying for California Scale-Up MTSS State-wide (SUMS)

Funds in the amount of \$10 million have been awarded as part of Assembly Bill 104, Chapter 13, Statutes of 2015, for scaling up of the utilization of Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS). An additional \$20 million, appropriated by Senate Bill 828, Chapter 29, Statutes 2016, augments the original grant award of \$10 million. A combined total of \$18 million from the award and its augmentation will be awarded to each LEA in sub-agreements to assist in scaling up MTSS. The grant funding will be distributed into three separate cohorts with up to \$6 million awarded in each round of applications.

Applicants may apply for one-time funding as a single LEA for up to \$25,000 or as a consortium with two or more LEAs applying jointly (one application). In the latter case one LEA must act as the lead for up to \$50,000. For a copy of the RFA, click [here](#).

Attendance Works is a national initiative dedicated to improving the policy, practice and research around attendance. Its website offers materials, studies, and success stories about reducing chronic absence.

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