

Appendix: State Action and Policy

Arkansas: Embedding in Early Literacy Campaign



Partners within the Arkansas Campaign for Grade-Level Reading (AR-GLR) are bringing attention to the issue of chronic absence and its impact on student performance on state assessments. An initial analysis has found that more than 10 percent of kindergarten and first-grade students are chronically absent. Chronic absence is three times higher among first- through third-grade students scoring below basic on state assessments than it is among those who score advanced.

AR-GLR has launched Arkansas Make Every Day Count to engage schools and districts to analyze data and develop solutions for reducing the percentage of students who are chronically absent. As these schools and districts develop their plans, which will be implemented during the 2014-2015 school year, they will identify existing policy barriers that must be addressed as well as new policies that could help improve school attendance.

Arkansas partners are using Attendance Awareness Month to inform educators, policymakers and the public about chronic absence and the severity of the problem in the state and within districts that are participating in Arkansas Make Every Day Count.

In 2013, the Arkansas Legislature created an interim study on grade-level reading that will include recommendations on attendance policy. The report will be presented to the joint House and Senate Education committee in fall 2014.

California: Including in School Funding Formula



With the support of a statewide coalition of nonprofit advocacy organizations, chronic absence is emerging as a priority for several state agencies. The California Department of Education encourages districts to monitor chronic absence through its handbook on attendance policy and practice as well the awards it presents for model School Attendance Review Boards. In May 2013, State Superintendent of Instruction Tom Torlakson, along with state Secretary of Health and Human Services Diane Dooley, hosted a forum on interagency collaboration encouraging agencies to work together to reduce chronic absence, especially in low-income communities where the impact is most adverse. Torlakson called for everyone to recognize September as Attendance Awareness Month, and amplify the message that attendance matters. California State Attorney General Kamala Harris is also advancing attention to chronic absence as a strategy for truancy reduction.

The most significant development is the Local Control Funding Formula enacted in 2013 and championed by Gov. Jerry Brown as well as key advocacy organizations. It targets considerable resources to high-need students and enables far greater local discretion over the use of funds. In the absence of state-mandated programs, and to ensure that student needs are being met, districts are required to adopt Local Control Accountability Plans. Advocates secured provisions to ensure that chronic absence and suspension/expulsion rates are carefully monitored by districts as part of developing plans and reporting on student engagement and school climate – two of the eight priorities enumerated in the legislation.

Connecticut: Connecticut: Tracking and Sharing Data



The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE)— in partnership with multiple state agencies, nonprofit organizations, and other stakeholders— is working to strengthen awareness and supports to Connecticut’s schools and families about the importance of being in school every day. Activities include:

- **Statewide Chronic Absence Analysis:** In May 2013, CSDE released an analysis of chronic absenteeism at the state, district and school levels showing that the 2011-12 school year, 11 percent of all K-12 students are chronically absent. The results also confirmed significant disparities based on race, poverty, language barriers, special needs and urban settings. Additionally, the CSDE data system provides customized reports to each district that can be used in local efforts to reduce absenteeism.
- **Statewide Conference:** CSDE and the Interagency Council for Ending the Achievement Gap convened a statewide conference to focus on the latest research and strategies to remove barriers to student attendance. Using a School-Linked Services Approach to Solve Chronic Absence stressed the importance of connecting families to services through school partnerships with community organizations. Attention was given to social, emotional and physical health issues.
- **Policy on Excused and Unexcused Absences:** In May 2013, CSDE released guidance on excused and unexcused absences emphasizing the need for districts to intervene early with students and families to address attendance issues.
- **Alignment of Activities/A Call to Action:** At the start of the school year, Education Commissioner Stefan Pryor addressed the importance of reducing chronic absences at his annual back to school meeting with Connecticut superintendents. Within CSDE, the Commissioner promotes cross-division collaborations to align efforts to turn around under-performing schools and coordinate wraparound strategies. CSDE is using chronic absenteeism as an indicator of its reform efforts within the 30 lowest performing districts.
- **Local Efforts:** At the local level, 11 communities and their school districts have begun to track and monitor chronic absenteeism using the District Attendance Tracking Tool, developed by Attendance Works. The William C. Graustein Memorial Fund, in partnership with the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading, has provided support and technical assistance and is building a peer learning network.

Georgia: Addressing Through School Climate Initiatives



Georgia tracks how many students miss 15 days in a school year and analyzes the effects of these absences on high-stakes testing. In 2011, researchers concluded that increasing student attendance by 3 percent, or five days, would result in more than 10,000 additional students passing the CRCT Reading test required for graduation. In math, more than 30,000 additional students would have passed with the added attendance.

Using the 15-day definition, Georgia found that about 10 percent of the state's students were chronically absent in the past school year. The state Department of Education's researchers also tracked attendance for ninth-graders who started high school in 2007 and found that chronic absence predicted dropout rates.

In response to the growing body of research indicating that school climate significantly affects school attendance, Georgia is the first state to include school climate as an indicator in their academic accountability system known as the College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI). In August 2013, public and private agency, legislative and academic leaders drafted a state plan to promote Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) as a strategy to improve school climate throughout early childhood and K-12 education.

In March 2013, child advocates worked with state lawmakers to develop a new juvenile code, including two important provisions affecting chronically absent students. Signed into law by the governor in June, the new code: (1) quantifies of the number of days a student is absent before schools seek intervention from the courts and (2) includes a provision decriminalizing truant behavior and calls for community-based alternatives.

Hawaii: Building Into Accountability Index



Hawaii places significant emphasis on attendance, including chronic absenteeism, which it defines as missing 15 days of school (or 8.5 percent of the school year) and uses as a critical indicator for a variety of purposes including planning, monitoring, coaching and accountability.

Each school is required to set targets for reducing chronic absenteeism as part of its annual school academic plan. The state produces quarterly reports for each complex area (Hawaii's regional clusters of schools), highlighting schools with high chronic absenteeism and low average daily attendance. Chronic absenteeism is also a key element in the state's new school accountability and improvement system, known as the Strive HI Index, serving as 15 percent of an elementary school's accountability rating.

In addition to emphasizing chronic absenteeism through these state-led routines with its education leaders, Hawaii has invested in infrastructure that improves on-demand access to chronic absenteeism data at the school-level. Its data system provides designated school officials with access to a list of students who have missed more than 5 percent of the school year; this data is updated nightly. Additionally, the state data system incorporates chronic absence into the risk measures used in its early warning system.

Illinois: Forming Task Force and Changing Compulsory Education Law



Legislators established a task force in 2013 to examine “issues regarding truancy and excessive absences” and identify strategies to improve attendance. The task force is expected to articulate approaches that school leaders can use to promote ongoing professional development that will enable school-based personnel to reduce factors that contribute to truancy and chronic absenteeism, as well as engage community organizations and parents in encouraging students to attend school.

Gov. Pat Quinn recently signed a bill that requires all children to be in school at age 6, instead of 7, in an effort to curb truancy and chronic absence in the early grades.

Indiana: Clarifying Definitions and Adding Reporting Requirements



State legislators passed a bill in 2013 that distinguishes chronic absence from truancy, adds chronic absence to school data reports and requires addressing absenteeism in school improvement plans for all but the highest-performing schools.

The law changed the state’s definition of chronic absenteeism to include excused and unexcused absences and sets the mark at missing 10 percent of the school year. It requires the state Department of Education to provide schools with resources and guidance in best practices and strategy to reduce chronic absenteeism.

Schools, in turn, must develop “chronic absenteeism reduction plans” that will be incorporated into school improvement plans. Schools also must report the number of habitually truant students in their annual performance reports. Legislators also established an interim study committee to examine the definitions of excused and unexcused absences, as well as the use and effectiveness of school district-court partnerships in serving habitually truant students (along with suspended and expelled students).

Iowa: Incorporating into Third-Grade Reading Push



As part of its 2013 education reform legislation, Iowa requires schools and districts to examine chronic elementary absenteeism as a part of their school improvement plans, in an overall emphasis on achieving third-grade literacy for all students.

That legislation also established and financed a Reading Research Council to develop practical tools to assist districts in developing effective strategies to improve reading. The Council has established chronic absenteeism in elementary school as one of its areas of focus. One of the priorities is to provide comparative information on chronic absenteeism in elementary school by grade, school, and district and subgroups, through reports produced by the state’s longitudinal student database.

Maryland: Starting Early to Track and Report Data



Maryland maintains a strong commitment to data tracking and reporting. Chronic absence (defined as missing 20 or more days) along average daily attendance and good attendance (missing 5 or fewer days) are maintained on the Maryland State Dept. of Education's (MSDE) Maryland report card website.

Additionally the department is developing a Child Enrollment and Attendance Record System (EARS) which will capture continuing, real-time child enrollment and attendance data and staff-child assignment data from licensed child care programs. It will interface with MSDE's data systems to permit unique student identifiers so that children can be traced through their school careers.

The state uses average daily attendance as school performance measure in its accountability system and established a 94% average daily attendance rate as a required measurable objective. Schools that fail to meet the state standard are required to submit attendance plans as part of its school improvement plan.

The Maryland legislature passed a law during the 2013 session requiring districts intervene when a student has missed 10 percent or more of school days for unexcused reasons. Graduate Maryland, a state campaign led by Advocates for Children and Youth is working to increase use of early warning systems. There is also a statewide initiative involving school leaders and nonprofit organizations to reduce unnecessary suspensions.

Massachusetts: Embedding in Early Warning Indicator System



Massachusetts has adopted an Early Warning Indicator System (EWIS) that tracks attendance and other student indicators from first-grade through high school. The metrics are built into the state's "Edwin" system, which provides educators with student-level and aggregate data reports showing the progress that students are making toward various academic goals. Those goals include:

- Achieving proficient or advanced on third-grade English language arts (ELA) Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) (grades 1-3)
- Achieving proficient or advanced on sixth-grade ELA and math MCAS (grades 4-6)
- Passing all ninth-grade courses (grades 7-9)
- Graduating from high school (grades 10-12)

The state built on an existing previous early warning index and worked with the American Institutes for Research, which conducted an extensive literature review and then tested best practices for early warning systems. State officials then reached out to districts with webinars, tools and other resources.

New Jersey: Including in School Accountability Reports



New Jersey added chronic absence as an accountability metric for elementary and middle schools as part of its waiver from No Child Left Behind's (NCLB) strictures in 2012. School performance reports produced by the NJSMART data system now reflect how many students are missing 10 percent or more of the school year for any reason—excused or unexcused. Schools are compared on this and other measures to a cohort of peers with similar student populations.

Any school with more than 6 percent of its enrollment determined to be chronically absent are advised to begin to pay closer attention to attendance trends. Previously, New Jersey tracked only average daily attendance and truancy.

New York: Raising Public Awareness



Through a partnership of government, nonprofit and educational organizations, New York is rolling out a public awareness campaign called Every Student Present! The partnership, which is coordinated by the New York State Council on Children and Families, includes representatives from Attendance Works, Children's Aid Society, Erie I Board of Cooperative Educational Services, New York State Afterschool Network, the State Education Department, State University of New York and United Way of New York City.

- The Every Student Present! campaign is targeted toward school administrators, parents and community partners. Campaign activities include:
- Articles in statewide membership publications, including the New York State School Board Association and New York State Parent Teachers Association,
- Distribution of Every Student Present! lapel pins and informational palm cards to members of the New York State Legislature and all school superintendents across the state,
- Ongoing collaborations with various youth advocacy organizations across the state, and
- Development of an Every Student Present! website designed to help local coalitions: (1) share information and build awareness, (2) enhance school engagement and recognize good attendance, (3) use data and inform action, and (4) intervene early and provide supports.

Oregon: Advancing Through Achievement Compacts



A statewide analysis that found nearly 25 percent of Oregon students were chronically absent prompted state leaders to include the attendance measure in a high-profile accountability report. The governor's office has added chronic absence as an indicator in its achievement compacts that districts will make with the state. Specifically, districts must report the percentage of sixth-grade and ninth-grade students missing 18 days or more, or 10 percent of the school year.

The Oregon analysis, released in February 2012, not only measured chronic absence rates, but also tracked students over time, correlating absences with poor attendance and weak academic performance in later grades. The first of its kind released statewide, the analysis uses data from the Oregon Department of Education to breakdown chronic absence rates by geographic area, grade level, ethnic and racial background, and poverty levels. The analysis includes outcomes for multiple cohorts to examine the effects of absenteeism every time.

Rhode Island: Reporting in Annual Data Book



Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, a statewide children's policy organization, highlights the issue of chronic absence by regularly reporting data on Chronic Early Absence and School Attendance for the state and each school district in its annual publication, the Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Factbook. In addition, the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) includes chronic absenteeism information for the state, each district and public school in Rhode Island as part of InfoWorks, an easy-to-use data resource accessible to the public on the RIDE website.

Both Rhode Island KIDS COUNT and RIDE define chronic absence as missing 10 percent or more of the school year, which translates to missing 18 or more days. Since data on chronic absence has become more widely available, the extent of the problem and strategies to reduce chronic absence have become more widely known, discussed in the mainstream media, and addressed in policy discussions at the state and district levels. The Rhode Island DataHub features a data story connecting chronic absenteeism in high school to decreased likelihood of post-secondary persistence and success.

Utah: Expanding public awareness and data collection



Using research completed in 2012 by the University of Utah's Education Policy Center, nonprofit organizations are engaged in both a public awareness campaign and expanding data collection within Utah's public schools.

Voices for Utah Children is leading a public awareness campaign among various stakeholders, educating them about the importance of school attendance and its relationship to academic achievement. The stakeholders include the state teacher's union, PTA, cities, elected officials and community leaders. The campaign is primarily focused on Attendance Awareness Month and includes the following components:

- Public service announcements in English and Spanish with either Gov. Gary R. Herbert or Real Salt Lake soccer player, Sebastian Velasquez,
- Proclamations announced by several major cities in Utah, and
- A back-to-school event with Gov. Herbert where he issued a formal proclamation declaring September as Attendance Awareness Month.

Virginia: Including in Early Warning System



Virginia's new accountability system developed under its NCLB waiver plan creates a "Graduation and Completion Index" for tracking the progress that high school students are making toward graduation. Central to this effort is the Virginia Early Warning System (VEWS), a set of indicators that helps schools predict and monitor on-track performance. High schools involved in the school improvement process are required to use VEWS, while others are encouraged to use it. Among the warning signs tracked are: 10 percent absenteeism in the first 20 days of school, in the first grading period and over the entire school year.

VEWS was developed in collaboration with the National High School Center, Appalachia Regional Comprehensive Center, and four school districts in Virginia. The goal is to provide high school educators with information to intervene before it is too late in a student's career to overcome barriers to graduation. The VEWS Tool allows users to easily import data from existing databases and quickly provide updated school- and student-level reports.