

CONNECTICUT STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION
Hartford

TO: State Board of Education

FROM: Dr. Dianna R. Wentzell, Commissioner of Education

DATE: November 2, 2016

SUBJECT: Update on Chronic Absenteeism

Executive Summary

Purpose

This presentation provides an update to the State Board of Education (SBE) on the efforts and progress being made on reducing chronic absenteeism across the state. This effort is aligned with the Connecticut State Board of Education Five-Year Comprehensive Plan, 2016-21 – *Ensuring Equity and Excellence for All Connecticut Students*. One of the four promises made to our students in the Plan is: *Ensuring their non-academic needs are met so they are healthy, happy, and ready to learn*. The presentation will address the current data, strategic efforts and outcomes on chronic absenteeism in Connecticut. Additionally, September was nationally recognized as Attendance Awareness Month, a national awareness campaign celebrated by states and school districts across the nation. The month was used to promote and inform various stakeholders of the importance of our students being in school and engaged every day.

Background Information

National research as presented by Attendance Works (Chang, 2015), shows that good attendance is essential to student achievement and graduation and that truancy and chronic absenteeism can be precursors to school drop-out, academic failure and juvenile delinquency. Chronic absenteeism (also referenced as chronic absence), defined as missing 10 percent or more of school for any reason including excused and unexcused absences, is a proven predictor of academic failure and dropout rates. These absences can occur due to many factors, e.g., health, unstable housing, lack of transportation, and safety concerns/school climate. An assessment of barriers uncovers information on which to build school or districtwide plans and individualized interventions based on needs. Additionally, research has shown that:

- Improving attendance and reducing chronic absence takes commitment, collaboration and tailored approaches to particular challenges and strengths in each community.
- The impact of chronic absence hits low-income students and children of color particularly hard if they do not have the resources to make up for lost time in the classroom and are more likely to face systemic barriers to getting to school, such as, unreliable transportation, lack of access to health care, and unstable or unaffordable housing.
- Chronic absence exacerbates the achievement gap that separates low-income students from their peers, since students from low-income families are both more likely to be chronically absent and are likely to be affected academically by missing school.

Absenteeism also undermines efforts to improve struggling schools, since it is hard to measure improvement in classroom instruction if students are not in class to benefit from instruction.

Given the research, Connecticut's chronic absenteeism efforts are built on a cross-sector approach that includes the Connecticut General Assembly's Committee on Children, the SBE and the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) as well as multiple state and local stakeholders. Further, our efforts are supported by national leaders such as Attendance Works and the Campaign for Grade Level Reading.

Connecticut is recognized as a national leader in this work and has presented at the first national conference that was convened in June 2016 in Washington, DC - *Every Student, Every Day National Conference: Eliminating Chronic Absenteeism by Implementing and Strengthening Cross-Sector Systems of Support for All Students*, hosted by the U.S. Department of Education, in collaboration with the U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, and Justice. A team from Connecticut, including CSDE, facilitated a workshop presentation that focused on key elements for building a state-level infrastructure to reduce chronic absenteeism. Additionally, the opening conference panel, *Leadership Matters: The Importance of State and Local Leadership in Eliminating Chronic Absenteeism*, featured Connecticut's work as represented by Charlene Russell-Tucker, CSDE's Chief Operating Officer. Finally, an October 2016 article in Kappan Magazine, *Chronic early absence: What states can do*, also features Connecticut's efforts in assisting districts and building a state infrastructure to address chronic absenteeism.

Follow-up Activities

The SBE's continued engagement is important as we remain focused on addressing the issue of attendance. The research supports the concept that being present and engaged in learning is foundational to ensuring equity and excellence for all children. The CSDE will continue to update and inform the SBE on progress and outcomes made in reducing chronic absence in all of Connecticut's schools and districts.

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Chang, H. (2015, September). *Mapping the Early Attendance Gap, Charting a Course for School Success*. Retrieved from Attendance Works: <http://www.attendanceworks.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Mapping-the-Early-Attendance-Gap-Final-4.pdf>