

## **Every Student, Every Day:**

*A National Initiative to Address and Eliminate Chronic Absenteeism*

*Community Action Guide to Eliminate Chronic Absenteeism for*

### **SCHOOL DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENTS AND STAFF, AND SCHOOL PERSONNEL**

#### **Why Chronic Absenteeism Matters for School District Superintendents and School Personnel**

The research on chronic absenteeism is clear: Chronic absenteeism is a primary cause of low academic achievement and a powerful predictor of those students who may eventually drop out of school. An estimated five to seven and a half million students are chronically absent each year. But too often, sole reliance on average daily attendance figures masks the high numbers of students who may be chronically absent and in danger of falling behind. Much of the work you do to improve public education and student outcomes each year can be seriously undermined by chronic absenteeism among your students, which makes it imperative that we work urgently to ensure that every student is supported so that they can be in school every day.

#### **Did You Know?**

- Chronic absenteeism means missing 10% or more of school days in a year.
- 5 to 7.5 million students are chronically absent each year.
- Students who are chronically absent are less likely to succeed academically and more likely to drop out of school.
- Chronic absenteeism affects students who benefit from school the most, especially students who are low-income, students of color, homeless children, students with disabilities, students who are highly mobile, and/or juvenile justice-involved youth.

As superintendents, administrators, classroom educators, and school-based personnel, you are in a unique position to identify struggling students and then mobilize systems of support for students who are, or are at risk of becoming, chronically absent from school. In addition, you can review and revise discipline policies to ensure that chronically absent students are supported and reengaged in school, rather than further excluded from class through punitive disciplinary policies. By providing engaging and relevant instruction, opportunities for enrichment and extra support, and safe, supportive learning

environments, you can help ensure not only all students' daily attendance, but also regular engagement and communication with families that can build trusting relationships that can help ensure students are in school every day.

To eliminate chronic absenteeism, schools must first track daily attendance figures for students, and then enable district staff, classroom educators, school administrators, and other school-based staff to work in a coordinated and collaborative fashion to support students who are missing too many days of school. Every member of a school's staff should be encouraged to play an active role in engaging students and ensuring that they are supported to attend and succeed in school every day. The action steps below are crafted for different groups of professionals in schools—who will play different roles in this work, but who also should work collaboratively to achieve maximum impact

### ***Take Action to Help Eliminate Chronic Absenteeism***

School District Superintendents and District Staff Should:

1. Understand the research about chronic absenteeism, which students are most often affected and how it affects them. Ensure awareness of these facts among district personnel.
2. Invest in sustainable early warning prevention and intervention systems and procedures that support schools in tracking daily attendance and identifying students who are, or are at-risk of becoming, chronically absent, and intervene *before* they miss too much school.
3. Direct your student support team to work with schools to provide necessary services that address the underlying causes of chronic absenteeism to ensure students' daily attendance in school.
4. Mobilize efforts at the district and school levels to partner with third-party providers and agencies—in a manner consistent with applicable State law and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)—that can provide additional support services to students who are chronically absent and to their families (for more information, please see <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpco/doc/ferpa-and-community-based-orgs.pdf>).
5. Engage in and lead community-wide, cross-sector efforts to eliminate chronic absenteeism among students within the community by addressing its underlying causes.
6. Regularly communicate with your staff, students, and their families about the importance of daily attendance and the availability of any support services that can help keep students in school and on track to success.

## Did You Know?

A student is chronically absent if he or she misses as few as two days of school a month.

**2 DAYS A MONTH x 9 MONTHS = CHRONIC ABSENCE**

### *Take Action to Help Eliminate Chronic Absenteeism*

Preschool-12<sup>th</sup> Grade Educators and School Staff Should:

1. Understand the research about chronic absenteeism, which students are most often affected and how it affects them. Ensure awareness among school personnel.
2. Use data from early warning prevention and intervention systems to track daily attendance and identify students who are, or are at-risk of becoming, chronically absent and intervene *before* they miss too much school.
3. Revise discipline policies to remove punitive consequences such as suspension and expulsion for chronically absent students, and implement supports for such students.
4. Engage third-party providers and agencies—in a manner consistent with applicable State law and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)—that can provide additional support services to students who are chronically absent and to their families (for more information, please see <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpco/doc/ferpa-and-community-based-orgs.pdf>).
5. Support and engage in community-wide, cross-sector efforts to eliminate chronic absenteeism among students within the community by addressing its underlying causes.
6. Regularly communicate to all staff, students, and their families about the importance of daily attendance and the availability of any support services that can help keep students in school and on track to success.
7. Acknowledge students and families that demonstrate improved attendance, and use that occasion as an opportunity to reinforce the importance of daily school attendance.