



# Commissioner's Back-to-School Meeting

Connecticut State Department of Education | August 22, 2016

## Chronic Absence

### Introduction

In Connecticut, nearly 55,956 students were chronically absent during the 2015-16 school year. This is over 10 percent of all students in Connecticut public schools, and the rates are significantly higher in many communities. Chronic absence is defined as missing 10 percent, or more, of days of school for any reason, including all absences, excused, unexcused, and disciplinary. Being chronically absent has a significant impact on a student's ability to read at grade level, perform academically, and graduate on time.

Chronic absence and truancy are not interchangeable terms. They describe different aspects of the absenteeism problem and require different approaches. Truancy is a term that generally refers to unexcused absences. Section 10-198a of the Connecticut General Statutes defines truancy as four unexcused absences in one month or 10 unexcused absences in a school year. Responses to truancy are usually about rule compliance and court intervention.

Chronic absence, on the other hand, incorporates all absences: excused, unexcused, and suspensions. The focus is on the academic consequences of lost instructional time, determining the root causes, and connecting to the necessary supports required for improved attendance. It also focuses on preventing absences before students fall behind in school. Chronic absence is calculated beginning in the first month of school. It is an early warning system to identify students who are missing too much school from the very beginning of the year. Just two days each month can lead to chronic absence.

### What's New?

Administrators at the state, district, and school levels are addressing reduction of chronic absence as a key component of their education reform strategies. Efforts include:

- Alliance Districts are including chronic absenteeism in the Alliance and Priority School District plans. Preliminary data from 2015-16 show districts are moving the needle and strategies put in place are having results.
- Districts and schools are establishing attendance teams, unpacking their data, and developing strategies to improve attendance.
- More districts and schools are reaching out for support from state and national resources, including the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) Office of Student Supports and Organizational Effectiveness and [Attendance Works \(http://www.attendanceworks.org/\)](http://www.attendanceworks.org/).
- [EdSight \(http://edsight.ct.gov/SASPortal/main.do\)](http://edsight.ct.gov/SASPortal/main.do), CSDE's new interactive data website, includes chronic absenteeism data at the district and school level. It includes trend data from 2011-12 to 2014-15 as well as by race, grade, gender, and other demographics.



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- Public Act 15-225, [An Act Concerning Chronic Absenteeism](https://www.cga.ct.gov/2015/act/pa/2015PA-00225-R00SB-01058-PA.htm) (<https://www.cga.ct.gov/2015/act/pa/2015PA-00225-R00SB-01058-PA.htm>), requires local and regional boards of education to monitor and address absenteeism rates in schools. Specifically, it requires boards of education to:
  1. Establish Attendance Review Teams:
    - a. District Attendance Review Teams: District has 10 percent or higher rate of chronic absence or one or more schools with a chronic absence rate of 15 percent or higher.
    - b. School Level Attendance Review Teams: Individual schools where chronic absenteeism rates have reached 15 percent or higher.
  2. Expands the definition of an absence to include an in-school suspension that is greater than or equal to one-half of a school day.

## **Best Practices for Addressing Chronic Absence**

The CSDE is collecting best practices from districts and schools across the state that are showing success in reducing their rates of chronic absence. Successes reported include the practices below:

- review of individual student attendance data by student attendance teams to identify specific issues or student populations disproportionately affected;
- communicate early with parents and guardians when students reach certain absenteeism rates;
- establish working relationships with community partners to help students and families obtain supports and services, including:
  - engaging families and developing family plans to meet the family's needs and achieve their goals; and
  - home-visiting programs for first-time parents;
- identify pockets of chronic absence to determine community needs, e.g., housing, transportation, access to child care; and
- implement policies and programs that improve parenting skills.

## **Looking Forward**

- CSDE, with statewide partners, is launching an attendance awareness campaign to celebrate September as Attendance Awareness Month, a national celebration of Attendance Works.
- A Prevention and Intervention Guide for Schools and Districts for Reducing Chronic Absence will be rolled out and presented at state and local conferences.
- Opportunities for professional development and peer-to-peer networking will be offered during the 2016-17 school year.

The CSDE looks forward to working closely with districts and schools as we work collaboratively to improve student attendance and ***keep every student in school and engaged***.

An extensive library of resources is available to assist both districts and schools with reducing chronic absences and promoting an environment where daily attendance is expected. Visit <http://www.ct.gov/sde/chronicabsence>.

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