

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
September 11, 2014

PHONE: 916-655-8330
E-MAIL: Joe.Kocurek@asm.ca.gov

State Schools Chief Tom Torlakson and State Leaders Announce School Attendance Awareness Month

SACRAMENTO—State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Torlakson, Secretary of Health and Human Services Diana S. Dooley, Assemblymember Shirley Weber, Superior Court Judge Stacy Boulware Eurie and Special Assistant Attorney General Jill E. Habig came together in Sacramento to declare September as “School Attendance Awareness Month,” urging families, schools, communities to prioritize student attendance in the coming months.

Superintendent Torlakson first began his attendance initiative in 2011 with a Sacramento policy forum, “Taking Attendance Seriously: Promoting School Success by Preventing Chronic Absence,” later joining forces with Secretary of Health and Human Services Diana S. Dooley in 2013 to jointly convene, “Working Together: The Interagency Policy Forum on Chronic Absence.”

“All of us have a part in preparing California’s children for brighter futures,” Torlakson said, “Through local and state collaboration, we can improve the overall health, safety and well-being of our children by promoting public awareness and reforms that improve attendance.”

Secretary Dooley called on state and local leaders to support attendance saying, “Collaboration between all of our agencies and programs is critical, because school attendance problems come in more than one variety, and we need to develop strategies for them all. We know that one reason that a child may be truant or chronically absent may well be related to the health or mental health of the child and his or her family.” The Secretary highlighted her agency’s leadership on several initiatives including implementation of the “Affordable Care Act” and her “Let’s Get Healthy California Plan.”

Assemblymember Shirley N. Weber (D – San Diego) discussed her Assembly Concurrent Resolution (ACR) 149 which recently passed the Legislature to designate September as “School Attendance Awareness Month” in California.

Presiding Juvenile Court Judge Stacy Boulware Eurie of Sacramento and Special Assistant Attorney General Jill E. Habig highlighted attendance initiatives led by Chief Justice Tani G. Cantil-Sakauye, which includes her “Keeping Kids in School and Out of Court” initiative with its goal of reducing the out of school suspension rate in California and Habig discussed Attorney General Kamala D. Harris’ major “In School + On Track” campaign to reduce truancy and absenteeism.

“Raising awareness about absenteeism is integral in furthering our efforts to develop early identification and prevention efforts to help students who may be at risk,” said State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Torlakson in closing. “Our schools can have the very best facilities, materials, and teachers in the world – but no school can reach a child who simply isn’t there.”

School Attendance Awareness Month is a national initiative sponsored by [Attendance Works](#) to raise awareness around reducing chronic absence in schools. The campaign brings together families, schools, community and statewide leaders to underscore the direct connection between school attendance and academic achievement.

###



CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

NEWS RELEASE

TOM TORLAKSON

State Superintendent
of Public Instruction

REL#14-91
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
September 11, 2014

CONTACT: Giorgos Kazanis
PHONE: 916-319-0818
E-MAIL: communications@cde.ca.gov

State Schools Chief Tom Torlakson Marks School Attendance Awareness Month

SACRAMENTO—State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Torlakson today recognized September as “School Attendance Awareness Month,” which publicizes the importance of good attendance in schools.

“Children must attend school to learn, succeed, and prepare for a bright future,” Torlakson said. “It’s a simple concept that’s sometimes overlooked. The link between attendance and academic achievement is clear, making it critical that all of us—parents, teachers, administrators, and community members—work together to prevent chronic school absence.”

Torlakson was joined at the news conference by California Secretary of Health and Human Services Diana S. Dooley; Assemblymember Shirley Weber, (D-San Diego); Presiding Juvenile Court Judge Stacy Boulware Eurie of Sacramento; and Special Assistant Attorney General Jill E. Habig.

School Attendance Awareness Month, a national initiative sponsored by [Attendance Works](#), brings together families, schools, community, and statewide leaders to publicize the connection between school attendance and academic achievement.

Since taking office, Torlakson has made preventing chronic absence a top priority and taken the following actions:

- Worked with the judiciary and law enforcement to support legislation to reduce truancy and chronic absence.
- Promoted workshops throughout the state, together with the California Endowment, highlighting alternatives to out-of-school suspensions.
- Convened forums that brought together different agencies to focus on monitoring and preventing chronic absence.

[More...more...](#)

The California Legislature recently passed [Concurrent Resolution \(ACR\) 149](#) by Assemblymember Weber, designating September as “School Attendance Awareness Month” in California.

###

The California Department of Education is a state agency led by State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Torlakson. For more information, please visit the [California Department of Education](#) Web site or by [mobile device](#). You may also follow Superintendent Torlakson on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), and [YouTube](#).

MEDIA CONTACT INFORMATION

The Honorable Tom Torlakson
State Superintendent of Public Instruction
1430 N Street, Suite 5602
Sacramento, CA 95814
Press Contact: Giorgos Kazanis
Email: GKazanis@cde.ca.gov Tel: (916) 319-0818

The Honorable Shirley Weber
California State Assembly
State Capitol, Room 3126
Sacramento, CA 94249-0079
Press Contact: Joe Kocurek
Email: Joe.Kocurek@asm.ca.gov Tel: (916) 319-2079

The Honorable Kamala D. Harris
Attorney General's Office
California Department of Justice
P.O. Box 944255
Sacramento, CA 94244-2550
Press Contact: Nick Pacilio
Email: Nicholas.pacilio@doj.ca.gov Tel: (415) 703-5837

The Honorable Stacy Boulware Eurie
State of California Superior Court, Sacramento
Juvenile Court Presiding Judge
9605 Kiefer Boulevard
Sacramento, CA, 95827
Press Contact: Cheryl Hall
Email: hallC@saccourt.ca.gov Tel: (916) 875-5686

Secretary Diana S. Dooley
California Health and Human Services Agency
1600 Ninth Street, Room 460
Sacramento, CA 95814
Press contact: Karin Caves
Email: Karin.caves@chhs.ca.gov Tel: (916) 654-3780

Jill E. Habig
Special Assistant Attorney General
California Department of Justice
Office of Attorney General Kamala D. Harris
455 Golden Gate Ave., Ste 14500
San Francisco, CA 94102
Email: jill.habig@doj.ca.gov Tel: (415) 703-1008

Press Conference Support (Background Material Resources)

Hedy Chang, Director
Attendance Works
www.attendanceworks.org (Attendance Awareness Month Info)
Press Contact: Phyllis Jordan
Email: pjordan@thehatchergroup.com Tel: (301) 656-0348

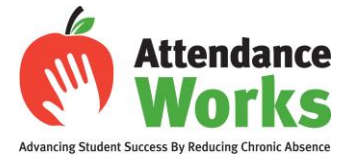
Brad Strong, Senior Director
Children Now
1510 J Street, Suite 115
Sacramento, CA 95814
Email: bstrong@childrennow.org Tel: (916) 588-7584

Related Twitter posts @attendanceworks ; #schooleveryday & #DoTheMath



Attendance Matters:

How California Can Improve Student Success by Reducing Chronic Absence



Good attendance—from preschool through high school—ensures that students achieve the grades and test scores they need to graduate from high school and succeed in college or a career. Yet as many as 7.5 million U.S. students are chronically absent each year, meaning they miss 10% of the school year or nearly a month of school. These absences—whether they are excused, unexcused or for disciplinary reasons—add up to academic trouble and reduce the likelihood that a student will graduate from high school, enroll in college or earn a degree.

Starting in elementary school, poor attendance can leave youngsters struggling to read on grade level, an essential skill for later school success. Chronic absence strikes particularly hard among students from low-income families, who are more likely to face health, transportation and housing challenges that make it hard to get to school. But few students or parents recognize the full impact of absenteeism on academics—or the positive benefits that occur when students improve their daily attendance.

The National Picture:

- **Chronic absence is one of the first warning signs that students are headed off track for graduation.**
 - ✓ As early as 6th grade, absenteeism can predict whether a student will drop out of high school, research shows. Other early indicators include poor grades and suspensions.
 - ✓ A statewide study in Utah found that a student who is chronically absent in any year between 8th and 12th grade is 7.4 times more likely to drop out.

- **Poor attendance habits are often acquired early and can leave children unable to master reading by the end of 3rd grade, setting them up for academic struggles later.**
 - ✓ One in 10 kindergarten and 1st grade students is chronically absent, national research shows.
 - ✓ As early as prekindergarten and kindergarten, chronic absence is associated with children being unable to read well by the end of 3rd grade, according to studies from Chicago and California. This is especially true if chronic absence persists for more than one year.
 - ✓ An analysis in Oakland, California, found that chronic absence in 1st grade predicted chronic absence, poor academic performance and higher suspension rates in 6th grade.

- **Students with poor attendance habits can improve their chances for graduation if they start attending school more regularly.**
 - ✓ When Chicago Public Schools began focusing on improving attendance and other risk factors among ninth grade students, graduation rates increased.
 - ✓ New York City students who emerged from chronic absence improved their grade point averages and were more likely to remain in school than peers who remained chronically absent.
 - ✓ Positive support, particularly mentoring relationships, proved most successful at reducing chronic absence, the New York study showed.

- **We can identify the students at risk of chronic absence early in the school year and begin to intervene.**
 - ✓ Poor attendance in the first month of school can predict whether a student will be chronically absent for the entire year, new research shows. Half the students who missed 2-4 days in September went on to miss more than 10 % of the school year.
 - ✓ The best predictor of who will be chronically absent in the current school year is who was chronically absent the year before, several studies show.

The California Picture:

- **Hundreds of thousands of students across California miss too much school.**
 - ✓ A 2013 report from Attorney General Kamala Harris found that 1 million elementary school students were truant, that is, absent 3 or more days without a valid excuse or tardy 30 or more minutes three times in a school year, and 250,000 missed 18 or more school days at a cost of \$1.4 billion in lost funds to California school districts.
 - ✓ An Attendance Works study found that 18% of California fourth graders and 19% of eighth graders who took the 2013 National Assessment of Educational Progress missed three days in the month prior to the test. Those figures are slightly better than the 20% average nationally, but have just as serious effects on student scores on math and reading assessments. The students who missed that much school scored between 10 to 16 points lower than peers with better attendance on average.
- **California and its school districts need to do more to track chronic absence.**
 - ✓ California is one of just a handful of states that does not include attendance information in its longitudinal data base tracking student achievement. A bill approved by the legislature would require the state to add the data to its CALPADS system, but Gov. Jerry Brown is considering a veto.
 - ✓ The state's new Local Control Funding Formula requires districts to track chronic absence as a metric for assessing school climate. But a review of a representative sample of local plans found that 82% of districts did not include baseline data on chronic absence.
 - ✓ Effective practices for reducing chronic absence have yet to be widely adopted although some California school districts have begun leading the way by putting in place effective approaches to reduce chronic absence. These include Los Angeles, Oakland, Hayward, Chula Vista and Del Norte, to name a few.

To see the research studies in detail, go to www.attendanceworks.org/research

Attendance Awareness Month:

- **Attendance Awareness Month is a nationwide event** involving 45 national organizations and more than 200 cities, states, school districts and community organizations. The leading partners are America's Promise Alliance, Attendance Works, the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading, Points of Light and United Way.
- **September's activities and materials are designed to alert students, parents and educators** to how quickly absences—excused and unexcused—can add up to academic trouble. Missing 10 % of the school year, or 18 days in many school districts, is the tipping point. That's an average of two days a month.
- **September's events encourage schools and community partners** to nip chronic absence in the bud early in the school year and early in a child's academic life.



For more information go to awareness.attendanceworks.org
Contact Phyllis Jordan at phyllis@attendanceworks.org

Assembly Concurrent Resolution No. 149

RESOLUTION CHAPTER 142

Assembly Concurrent Resolution No. 149—Relative to School Attendance Awareness Month.

[Filed with Secretary of State September 2, 2014.]

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

ACR 149, Weber. School Attendance Awareness Month.

This measure would designate the month of September 2014 as School Attendance Awareness Month, and would encourage public officials, educators, and communities in California to observe the month with appropriate activities and programs.

WHEREAS, The Legislature and the Governor enacted a local control funding formula and clearly established school attendance as a matter of great state interest by explicitly identifying pupil engagement, as measured by school attendance and chronic absenteeism rates, as a state priority; and

WHEREAS, The Legislature first enacted Senate Bill 1357 of the 2009–10 Regular Session to establish the definition of a “chronic absentee” as a pupil who misses 10 percent or more of school for any reason, making no distinction between excused and unexcused absences; and

WHEREAS, For the first time, every county office of education, school district, and charter school in California is required to calculate chronic absenteeism rates and establish specific goals and actions to improve pupil engagement; and

WHEREAS, The impact of chronic absenteeism hits low-income pupils and children of color particularly hard if they do not have the resources to make up for lost time in the classroom. Low-income pupils and children of color are more likely to face systemic barriers in getting to school, including unreliable transportation, lack of access to health care, unstable or unaffordable housing, and even unfair discipline policies; and

WHEREAS, Improving school climate, reducing instruction missed due to discipline policies and out-of-school suspensions, and implementing schoolwide positive behavior intervention and support systems and restorative justice practices can have a significant impact on improving attendance; and

WHEREAS, School attendance improves, and chronic absenteeism is significantly reduced, when schools, parents, and communities work together to monitor and promote good attendance and address hurdles that keep children from getting to school; and

WHEREAS, Schools and school districts must do more to track, calculate, and share data on how many and which pupils are chronically absent so that

schools and communities can work to deliver the right interventions for the right pupils; and

WHEREAS, Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Torlakson, Attorney General Kamala D. Harris, Secretary of California Health and Human Services Diane Dooley, Chief Justice Tani G. Cantil-Sakauye, and others have joined efforts to combat chronic absenteeism to encourage state and local action to improve the overall health, safety, and well-being of our children by promoting public awareness and reforms that improve school attendance; now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the Assembly of the State of California, the Senate thereof concurring, That the Legislature designates the month of September 2014 as School Attendance Awareness Month in the State of California, and encourages public officials, educators, and communities in California to observe the month with appropriate activities and programs; and be it further

Resolved, That the Legislature hereby joins with other communities across our nation to increase awareness of the importance of school attendance by addressing school attendance barriers and the root causes of chronic absence; and be it further

Resolved, That the Chief Clerk of the Assembly transmit copies of this resolution to the Superintendent of Public Instruction, the Attorney General, the Secretary of California Health and Human Services, the Chief Justice of California, the author, and the coauthors for appropriate distribution.



CALIFORNIA
DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION

TOM TORLAKSON

STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

August 26, 2014

Dear County and District Superintendents and Charter School Administrators:

SEPTEMBER ATTENDANCE AWARENESS MONTH: ENGAGING PARENTS TO REDUCE CHRONIC ABSENCE

On July 29, 2014, I asked you to join me in the September Awareness Month: Joining Forces to Reduce Chronic Absence campaign. Now I am asking you to enlist parents in our campaign to reduce chronic absence.

As we get closer to September, we need to use every opportunity to build parent awareness about the importance of school attendance and the connection to student success.

Many of you have already begun preparations to promote September Attendance Awareness Month, and you are building public awareness about the importance of school attendance by enlisting partners from public health, behavioral health, law enforcement, and social services to assist your schools when families need to be linked to community resources.

Below are additional resources for you to consider in your September Attendance Awareness Month campaign to engage parents. These resources may be incorporated in a back-to-school night or a parent summit:

- Bringing Attendance Home Toolkit at <http://www.attendanceworks.org/tools/for-parents/bringing-attendance-home-toolkit/>
- Bringing Attendance Home Video and Discussion Guide at <http://www.attendanceworks.org/tools/for-parents/bringing-attendance-home-video/>
- Parent Handouts at <http://www.attendanceworks.org/tools/for-parents/parent-handouts/>
- Attendance Infographic in English and Spanish at <http://awareness.attendanceworks.org/resources/promotional-materials/infographic/>

You may also want to promote September Attendance Awareness Month using banners, badges, and Facebook cover photos available at <http://awareness.attendanceworks.org/resources/promotional-materials/>.

Thank you for your efforts in making September Attendance Awareness Month a success!

If you have any questions regarding this subject, or questions about tools that can be used to engage parents to reduce chronic absence, please contact David Kopperud, Education Programs Consultant, by phone at 916-323-1028 or by e-mail at dkopperud@cde.ca.gov.

Sincerely,

Tom Torlakson

TT:dk
2014-07113

Last Reviewed: Wednesday, August 27, 2014



Keeping Kids in School and Out of Court Initiative

455 Golden Gate Avenue • San Francisco, CA 94102-3688
415-865-4200 • www.courts.ca.gov

TANI G. CANTIL-SAKAUYE
Chief Justice of California
Chair of the Judicial Council

September 4, 2014

Dear Juvenile Court Presiding Judges:

I am writing to invite you to join me in recognizing September as Attendance Awareness Month by encouraging our courts, our schools, and our communities to implement effective strategies for improving student attendance starting with the beginning of this new school year. Ensuring children are in school so they can learn and thrive is central to fulfilling our courts' most basic obligation to protect the best interests of the children we serve. We in the judicial branch have an important role to play in fostering regular school attendance and combating the problems of chronic absenteeism.

Our courts typically become involved in addressing school attendance when children are chronically truant and they or their parents are being held accountable for unexcused absences, but research clearly shows that too many absences for any reason, can adversely affect learning outcomes for our children and youth. California law now recognizes a category of attendance problem called chronic absenteeism, which is defined as missing 10 percent or more of the school year whether excused or unexcused. We know that children who are chronically absent in the early grades are less likely to be reading by third grade and ultimately less likely to graduate from high school.

While chronic absenteeism is a serious problem, particularly for our system-involved students, the good news is many steps can be taken to improve attendance for all of our youth. Here are a few suggestions:

- a) **Recommit your court to its responsibilities to track the attendance of all the children subject to juvenile court jurisdiction.** The California Rules of Court require our courts to make findings and orders at every juvenile court hearing regarding the child's educational needs, including that the child is enrolled in and attending school. Students who are chronically absent have far worse educational outcomes than their peers who regularly attend school, so it is critical that we as judges regularly track the

attendance of the children under our jurisdiction and look for solutions to improve attendance for those who are chronically absent. This is particularly critical for our foster youth in the early elementary grades, as research demonstrates that attendance problems often manifest in the earliest grades — even in preschool and kindergarten — and continue as the child continues through school. I urge you to ensure that all of your judicial officers are actively inquiring about school attendance for all juvenile court youth and working with the other system stakeholders to address problems at the earliest possible stage to ensure success for these vulnerable children and youth.

- b) **Encourage school districts to strengthen site-based prevention to improve attendance.** School districts across California are more focused than ever on attendance because they are required to address chronic absence as part of their Local Control Accountability Plans. You can reach out to your local districts to support and encourage a comprehensive system of support that starts with prevention in the classroom and at the school level. Attendance can be improved when schools and community organizations work together to engage families in nurturing a habit of attendance and reaching out to families to identify and resolve challenges to getting to school (e.g., lack of access to health care, community violence, inadequate public transportation, etc.) before children miss so much school they cannot get back on track. As a judge, your leadership role can call attention to the importance of schools engaging in early outreach and early intervention so communities can avoid the need for more costly court intervention.

- c) **Support coordination across systems for the children with the most severe attendance problems.** As a judge, you can also help convene the right set of agencies to look at available data on chronic absence. Encourage stakeholders to identify which schools, neighborhoods and students are most affected and given what you see, what are the implications for collaboration. Explore how agencies might work together to address the needs of children whose poor attendance reflects challenging family situations. In Baltimore, for example, Maryland child welfare social workers work with schools to identify chronically absent students in those areas that generate the most child welfare referrals. Social workers then visit these students' families and can provide supportive services early on that prevent the need for removal of the child. When a child misses too many days of school it is an early warning sign that the child is at risk. We in the judicial branch can work with our partners to ensure that this warning sign is not ignored.

I launched my Keeping Kids in School and Out of Court Initiative because I know that if we can support all students in California in attending safe and supportive schools, then we can improve our statewide graduation rates, and reduce the number of youth coming into our juvenile and criminal justice systems. I ask you to take this opportunity to look at the role that you and your court can play in providing leadership on this most basic requirement for educational success.

More information on the research and promising interventions to improve school attendance can be found at our Keeping Kids in School and Out of Court Web site:

<http://www.courts.ca.gov/truancy.htm>, and please feel free to contact my staff for this initiative,

September 4, 2014

Page 3

Chris Cleary Christine.cleary@jud.ca.gov and Tracy Kenny tracy.kenny@jud.ca.gov, for more information and assistance in implementing positive strategies to improve school attendance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "T. Cantil-Sakauye". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

TANI G. CANTIL-SAKAUYE
Chief Justice of California and
Chair of the Judicial Council