Chronic Absence

## Introduction

In Connecticut, nearly 60,000 students were chronically absent from school during the 2013-14 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 school days of school for any reason, including excused and unexcused absences.  Being chronically absent has a significant impact on a student's ability to read at grade level, perform well on standardized tests, and graduate on-time.

National research shows that good attendance is essential to student achievement and graduation. Truancy and chronic absenteeism can be precursors to school drop-out, academic failure and juvenile delinquency.  These absences can occur due to many factors, e.g., health problems, poor nutrition, lack of consistent and stable housing, transportation, school avoidance and students feeling unsafe or unwelcomed at school.

## Best Practices for Addressing Chronic Absence

The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) is collecting best practices from districts and schools across the state that are showing success in reducing their rates of chronic absence, including:

- review of individual student attendance data by student attendance teams to identify specific issues or student populations disproportionately impacted;
- 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;
- communicate and promote the expectation of attendance across the entire community through branding, signage and messaging at shopping centers, businesses, parks, housing and health centers; and
- implement policies and programs that improve parenting skills.

    Additional strategies can be found in the CSDE Guidelines for Implementation of the Definitions of Excused and Unexcused Absences and Best Practices for Absence Prevention and Intervention.

**Key Steps for Reducing Chronic Absence**

1. Attendance Tracking – Track and ensure accurate and consistent data entry of individual attendance and absences with longitudinal student databases.
2. Chronic Absence Data – Ensure that reports providing chronic absence data and analysis are available and reviewed by attendance teams that convene on a regular basis.
3. Family Engagement – Provide parents with actionable, real-time data on their children's attendance, as well as alerts if their children are accruing so many absences, excused or unexcused, that they are academically at risk.
4. Public Awareness – Convey why attendance matters for success in school, graduating from high school and eventually succeeding in the workplace.
5. Strategies for Intervening – Encourage schools and community partners to intervene with chronically absent students and their families through communitywide approaches to solve health and transportation challenges as well as personalized outreach.

**Looking Forward**

During the 2015-16 school year, the CSDE will be providing guidance and assistance to districts and schools in order to develop and implement strategies to address this important issue as per new legislation defined in Public Act 15-225. Additional information and guidance on this new law will be forthcoming.

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 at www.attendanceworks.com.