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Strategies for improving school attendance

As part of California's new accountability system (the California School Dashboard), districts and county offices of education (COEs) will be required to monitor the extent to which they have met their goals and strategies for chronic absence as specified in their Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP). Chronic absence is defined as missing, for any reason, 10 percent or more of the school days in the school year. Information on chronic absence will be collected statewide and reflected in the Dashboard for each district/COE, each school and each numerically significant student subgroup (ethnic subgroups, socio-economically disadvantaged students, English learners, students with disabilities, foster youth and homeless students).

Although the Dashboard's chronic absence indicator is not expected to be available until fall 2018, districts/COEs must address school attendance now for purposes of the LCAP and because school attendance is a critical factor in student engagement and achievement. Districts/COEs need to have accurate information about attendance, which requires processes for tracking overall and numerically significant subgroup attendance, in order to identify individual students with attendance problems as well as patterns of chronic absence and truancy throughout the district/COE.

Strategies to promote regular school attendance for all students should include efforts to provide a positive school climate, meaningful curriculum, and activities and relationships that encourage students' feelings of connectedness to school. When students show signs of poor attendance, schools must be prepared to investigate and intervene as quickly as possible and in accordance with the student's particular circumstances. For example, a student may miss school because of health reasons, unreliable transportation, the student's or parent/guardian's employment, concerns regarding school or community safety, the student's or parent/guardian's attitude about schooling or some other reason. Determining the contributing factors can assist the school in working with the student and parent/guardian to identify solutions, including, when appropriate, referral to a student success team or school attendance review board (SARB) and the provision of district or community services.

A SARB consists of representatives from multiple agencies that serve youth and families and serves as a hearing panel for students with attendance or behavior problems. It plays an important role in the prevention of, identification of and intervention for chronic absence and truancy, and has the authority, when necessary, to refer students and their parents/guardians to court. SARBs may be established by the County Superintendent of Schools and/or by a district governing board with permission from the county superintendent. A state-level SARB provides statewide policy coordination and training.

CSBA has issued a new sample board policy and administrative regulation, BP/AR 5113.12 - District School Attendance Review Board, which outlines the basic responsibilities and operations of local SARBs. CSBA has also updated BP/AR 5113.1 - Chronic Absence and Truancy to delete duplicative material regarding SARBs and has issued a new administrative regulation, AR 5113.11 - Attendance Supervision, to describe the duties



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of attendance supervisors in accordance with the Legislature's intent as expressed in AB 2815 (2016).

When adopting policy and regulations related to school attendance and chronic absence, districts/COEs are encouraged to review the following resources:

- » The State SARB's handbook *School Attendance Review Board: A Road Map for Improved School Attendance and Behavior* (www.cde.ca.gov/ls/ai/sb/sarbandbook.asp)
- » The State SARB's model policy and administrative regulation on attendance supervision (www.cde.ca.gov/ls/ai/sb/samplepolicy.asp)
- » The California Department of Education's (CDE) *School Attendance Improvement Handbook* (www.cde.ca.gov/ls/ai/cw/documents/schoolattendance.pdf)
- » Tools available on the website of Attendance Works (www.attendanceworks.org), including the organization's March 2017 brief *How the Rubber Meets the Road: Funding Efforts to Reduce Chronic Absence in California School Districts*
- » A fact sheet on chronic absence and truancy ("Attendance Awareness Month," September 2014), jointly issued by CSBA and Attendance Works

Addressing the needs of military-connected students

California is home to the largest number of active duty military personnel in the country, with more than 60,000 students whose parent/guardian serves in the military.¹ The majority of these students attend one of 100 school districts within the state.² The average child of a military family moves six to nine times during grades K-12,³ which presents challenges related to educational transitions as well as the student's feelings of connectedness to the school. The parent/guardian's absence on deployment also produces social and emotional stresses for the child. Although schools have an obligation to meet the unique needs of these students, sometimes they are not even aware there are military-connected students in their classrooms.

Recognizing military-connected students as a vulnerable subgroup, the Every Student Succeeds Act (Public Law 114-95) requires the establishment of a military student identifier to track such students and to provide consistent data on their academic performance. Districts/COEs and states are required to collect and report disaggregated achievement test scores, school attendance and graduation rates for military-connected students in the same manner as required for economically disadvantaged students, students from major racial and ethnic groups, students with disabilities, English learners, foster youth and homeless students. Educators and policymakers can then use the data to evaluate the effectiveness of programs serving military-connected students and adjust programs and resources as needed.

Since 2009, California has been a member of the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children, as codified in Education Code 49700-49703. The purpose of the Compact is to remove barriers to educational success for military-connected students. All 50 states and the District of Columbia participate in the Compact in order to coordinate policies related to enrollment, transfer of records, course placement, graduation requirements and other administrative matters.

The CDE's 2014 report to the Legislature on the implementation of the Compact in California⁴ found that, in districts that are aware of the Compact, it "substantially aided both school districts and military families by alleviating many of the educational difficulties military children encounter in their frequent moves from a school in one state to a school in another state." However, the report also found that some districts are not knowledgeable about the Compact or are reluctant to comply with some provisions, and that many military families are unaware that the Compact exists. The report recommended that California undertake a



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more comprehensive effort to ensure that district staff and military families are familiar with the Compact so that the law will be consistently applied.

Exceeding the requirements of the Compact, legislation signed by Governor Brown this year (Assembly Bill 365) provides additional rights to military-connected students with regard to exemption from local graduation requirements and acceptance of partial credit. These mirror the rights afforded under current state law to other groups of highly mobile students, including foster youth, homeless students and former students of juvenile court schools. Any complaint alleging noncompliance with these requirements may be filed in accordance with the uniform complaint procedures specified in 5 CCR 4600-4670.

Enrollment of military-connected students was addressed by the enactment of Senate Bill 1455 last year, which provided that a student will be deemed to meet district residency requirements if his or her parent/guardian is transferred or is pending transfer to a military installation within district boundaries. This law was amended in 2017 by SB 455 to allow military-connected students to remotely enroll in any district where they will reside, regardless of whether the school is zoned to a military installation. Parents/guardians must provide proof of residence in the district within 10 days after the arrival date specified on official documentation. Under other state law, as amended by AB 2659 in 2016, neither a “school district of choice” nor a district with interdistrict attendance agreements with one or more other districts can prohibit a military-connected student from transferring out of the district as long as the receiving district approves the application.

To comply with the Compact and other state and federal laws and provide adequate supports to this student subgroup, it is recommended that districts/COEs:

- » Develop processes for accurately identifying students with a parent/guardian who is a member of the Armed Forces on active duty or full-time National Guard duty. Such processes may include collecting the information on school registration forms.
- » Adopt policies and regulations to clarify legal requirements and establish strategies for serving military-connected students. See CSBA sample BP/AR 6173.2 - Education of Children of Military Families and BP/AR 5117 - Interdistrict Attendance, both updated in October 2017, as well as AR 5111.1 - District Residency.
- » Notify and/or provide professional development to district/COE and school administrators and all staff involved in school registration regarding the rights of military-connected students.
- » Align resources with district/COE priorities for programs and services to support military-connected students.
- » Regularly report to the board and the community on the academic achievement and other outcomes of military-connected students. If this student subgroup does not demonstrate achievement comparable to other students, identify and address barriers to student success.


Resources regarding military-connected students are available from the CDE (www.cde.ca.gov/ls/pf/mc), Military Interstate Children’s Compact Commission (www.mic3.net) and Military Child Education Coalition (www.militarychild.org).

Drug and alcohol free schools

Although Proposition 64 (2016) authorizes individuals aged 21 years and older to possess and use specified amounts of cannabis for recreational purposes, it specifically prohibits all persons from possessing, smoking or ingesting cannabis or cannabis products on the grounds of a school, day care center or youth center while children are present. The law also prohibits smoking or ingestion of cannabis in a public place, smoking cannabis in any location where smoking tobacco is prohibited and smoking cannabis within 1,000 feet of a school, day care center or youth center while children are present, with limited exceptions.



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Note that proposed legislation (AB 1090) which would have amended this law to prohibit possession, smoking or ingestion of cannabis or cannabis products on school grounds regardless of whether children are present, failed to make it to the Governor's desk this year but could be considered again next year.

Previous law, added by Proposition 215 in 1996, legalized the use of cannabis for medical purposes but also limited the locations for such use, including prohibitions against smoking cannabis in a place where smoking is prohibited by law, on a school bus, or in or within 1,000 feet of a school, recreation center or youth center. Although this law only addresses smoking of medical cannabis and not ingestion, the provisions added by Proposition 64 appear to prohibit any possession or use of cannabis on school grounds for any purpose, including medical use. Furthermore, federal law (21 USC 812 and 844) prohibits all use of cannabis, although the U.S. Supreme Court declined to review a 2007 California Fourth Appellate Court decision (*Garden Grove v. Kha*), which upheld Proposition 215. Districts/COEs should consult legal counsel if questions arise about a qualified patient's prescription for cannabis.

To help communicate these prohibitions to students, staff and the community, CSBA has issued a new sample policy, BP 3513.4 - Drug and Alcohol Free Schools, which also includes the prohibition against alcohol and unlawful drugs on district/COE property. Districts/COEs have the authority to impose discipline for students or staff who violate the policy.

District policy regarding drug and alcohol free schools is also reflected in BP 5131.6 - Alcohol and Other Drugs, as updated in October. This policy primarily addresses prevention and intervention of drug and alcohol use among students. Information regarding the federal Safe and Drug-Free Schools Act, no longer in operation, has been replaced with policy language reflecting the new Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants program established by the Every Student Succeeds Act.

CSBA Annual Education Conference

CSBA's Annual Education Conference and Trade Show, to be held Nov. 30 through Dec. 2 in San Diego, offers a wide variety of general sessions, workshops, critical issue sessions, table talks, a trade show and networking events.

There will be several opportunities during the conference for attendees to learn more about current issues that may impact district/COE policies as well as services provided by CSBA to assist boards in their governance role. Board members, superintendents and district staff are invited to attend the CSBA Policy Updates workshop on Friday, Dec. 1, 10:00–11:15 a.m. CSBA policy consultants will cover important policy updates from the past year, discuss emerging policy issues and future updates, and invite conversation about policy issues facing districts/COEs. From 8:30–9:45 a.m. that morning, a policy consultant will be available at a table talk to explain policy services options and facilitate conversations around best practices for keeping policies up to date. Throughout the conference, CSBA staff will also be available in the CSBA Pavilion on the Trade Show floor to demonstrate and answer questions about policy services, Gamut Online and other CSBA services, including the updated Agenda Online service.

To register or obtain further information about the conference, go to <http://aec.csba.org>.


New resources from CSBA

Survey on board's role in LCAP

The LCAP is the cornerstone of district/COE planning efforts and accountability. State law specifies state priorities that must be addressed in the LCAP, establishes a process for consulting with stakeholders on plan development, and requires board adoption and annual



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update of the plan. To determine the extent to which board members are involved in the LCAP and the assistance they might need to fulfill their role, CSBA conducted a survey of nearly 200 board members serving in the association's Delegate Assembly.

The survey found that almost all of the board members (91 percent) were involved in aligning and approving resources to support the goals in the LCAP. Furthermore, board members were actively involved in establishing the LCAP vision and goals (78 percent), recommending revisions to the draft LCAP (68 percent) and engaging the community around the LCAP (63 percent). Nevertheless, about three-quarters of the board members reported they could be more effective and involved in the LCAP if they had a clear definition of the board's role in the process and best practices from districts similar to their own.

The results are reported in a September 2017 fact sheet, "Local Control and Accountability Plans: A Survey of School Board Member Involvement," available at www.csba.org/GovernanceAndPolicyResources.

Education funding and opportunity gaps

Two recent publications from CSBA examine the inadequacy of education funding in California, existing opportunity gaps based primarily on family income level, and strategies for making investments that are equity-focused and research-supported.

"California Education Funding: Students Deserve Better" (August 2017) cites research showing that California ranks 45th among all states in spending per student, when adjusted for regional cost differences. California's expenditure per student — \$10,236 in the 2013–14 school year — is well below the national average of \$11,998 per student. As result, California has among the highest student–teacher ratios, student–counselor ratios and ratios of students to total staff in the nation.

The governance brief "Meeting California's Challenge: Access, Opportunity, and Achievement: Key Ingredients for Student Success" (September 2017) summarizes an earlier report by CSBA that describes a vision for an adequately funded education system. It discusses eight key ingredients necessary to ensure that all students graduate from high school prepared for college and career success, including:

1. A rigorous, well-rounded and relevant curriculum
2. Academic support to improve achievement
3. Staff with the skills, competencies and knowledge to support student success
4. Early support and services
5. Education and assistance for families to support and guide learning
6. Physical, mental and environmental health supports
7. 21st-century infrastructure and technology
8. Services for students with specific needs

CSBA is committed to advocating for adequate funding that supports these opportunities and encourages districts/COEs to make the best use of available resources by considering these as areas of potential investment.

To read these resources, go to www.csba.org/GovernanceAndPolicyResources.



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Endnotes

- 1 Adams, J.M. (2016, June 1). Schools will begin to track students from military families. *EdSource*. <https://edsources.org/2016/are-students-from-military-families-succeeding-schools-will-begin-to-track/565042>
- 2 Senate Committee on Education, SB 455 bill analysis, February 16, 2017.
- 3 Kitmitto, S., et al. (2011). Educational Options and Performance of Military-Connected School Districts Research Study - Final Report. American Institutes for Research. www.dodea.edu/partnership/upload/air-research-study-2011.pdf
- 4 California Department of Education. (2014, April). Final Report to the Legislature on the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children. www.cde.ca.gov/ls/pf/mc/lriceomc2014.asp



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