

State School Attendance Review Board Recommendations to the State Superintendent of Public Instruction

Background:

Each year, the State School Attendance Review Board (SARB) is required to make annual recommendations to the State Superintendent of Public Instruction (SSPI) on uniform guidelines or other means to reduce the number of dropouts in California's public education system.

This year, the primary focus of the State SARB's recommendations will be on how the SSPI can:

- Ensure California maintains a strong system of addressing habitual truancy
- Reinvigorate California's approach to prevention and early intervention through monitoring and reducing chronic absence
- Develop Model SARB programs under challenging financial constraints

California has a long, rich, and valuable history of paying attention to truancy. Our current systems of truancy notifications, student attendance review teams, and SARBs were established to ensure a comprehensive approach to dealing with truancy. The SARB process starts with notifying parents that their students are missing school and follows up with increasingly intensive interventions. Recently, state legislation has strengthened the process with additional legal consequences for parents of young chronic truants (students of age six through eighth grade).

However, as attendance supervision has evolved, we have become aware of the importance of prevention, early identification, and intervention of attendance problems before students become habitual truants. Local SARBs can and should play a role in creating policies supporting strong prevention and early intervention programs to decrease the number of cases eventually referred to the SARB. Since many children miss too much school due to excused absences, more schools need to identify chronic absentees—in addition to habitual truants—and implement site-level action where it is needed. Monitoring chronic absence allows districts to create more effective early warning systems and interventions that recoup badly needed average daily attendance funding and help save students' futures.

Paying greater attention to chronic absence is more important than ever, given a growing body of research demonstrating that increased attendance in the early grades is critical to reducing the number of dropouts. Chronic absence—missing 10 percent or more of school for any reason—is a proven predictor of academic struggles leading to higher dropout rates. Few students who are chronically absent in both kindergarten and

first grade are reading at grade level by the end of third grade. By the sixth grade, chronic absenteeism is highly predictive of which students will drop out of high school. By the ninth grade, attendance is a better predictor of graduation than eighth grade test scores.

Chronic absentee rates are highest in low-income communities, where education offers students an essential opportunity for brighter futures. Chronic absenteeism undermines efforts to narrow the achievement gap, since improvements in classroom instruction have little impact if students are not in class. And all students are affected—even those who show up regularly—when teachers must spend time repeating instruction for the benefit of those who missed class. Chronic absenteeism is a red flag that something is wrong in a child's life—alerting schools, public agencies, and community partners to investigate and intervene before it is too late.

The SSPI's Chronic Absence Forum in May 2011 was an excellent first step in encouraging schools and districts to strengthen early identification and prevention of school attendance problems. The California Department of Education (CDE) has begun recognizing districts with early warning systems to identify and intervene when students become chronic absentees. The CDE also has used its Model SARB Program and updated 2012 *SARB Handbook* to promote sharing of other best practices for reducing chronic absenteeism and habitual truancy.

Now, the CDE needs to continue its leadership by supporting efforts that help schools and districts focus on the critical need to aggressively monitor attendance and use positive interventions, despite dwindling resources. To improve school attendance and reduce the number of dropouts, the SSPI can take the following steps to assist schools, districts, and county offices:

Recommendations:

1. Continue to Propose Guidelines and Other Means to Reduce Chronic Absence and Habitual Truancy:

- A. Join with the Attorney General to make a statement supporting, promoting, and protecting best practices to enforce compulsory education laws:
 - Mandates that fund parental notification and habitual truant conferences should be maintained at an adequate level.
 - Local districts should implement effective practices and state laws as seen in Model SARBs.
- B. Support technical amendments to *Welfare and Institutions Code* Section 256, *California Education Code (EC)* Section 48264.5 and *Vehicle Code* Section 13202.7 to make these compulsory education enforcement laws easier to

implement without establishing new state mandates. (See attached legislative proposal.)

- C. Continue to lead an awareness campaign, using public speaking and communications with the media to call attention to:
- The vital connection between attendance, early achievement, and high school graduation
 - The critical importance of every school district identifying chronically absent and truant students to intervene before poor attendance has an adverse impact on school success and graduation
 - The value of calculating and monitoring commonly defined attendance measures (particularly chronic absence and truancy) in all districts to decrease confusion and create uniform guidelines
 - The solvable nature of chronic absence and truancy, especially if communities take the comprehensive approach exemplified by model SARBs that build positive school climate and support early identification of school attendance problems
- D. Recommend that the State Board of Education add an optional model of the School Accountability Report Card (SARC) in 2014–15 or 2015–16. This optional model would include chronic absence rates by grade level and subgroups. Although chronic absentee rates are not currently mandated for the SARC, the collection of chronic absentee rates is so critical to the early identification and early intervention of at-risk students that they should be included in this public accountability document. Districts could use this model SARC to identify disproportionate absentee rates occurring among the 10 listed subgroups. This optional model would allow volunteer schools to show their progress in addressing this critical risk indicator for subgroups.
- E. Include reduction of chronic absenteeism as one of the criteria for California Distinguished School awards and School Improvement Plans. Reduction of chronic absenteeism should be a common goal for schools which are distinguished, as well as for schools involved in major reform to improve chronic absenteeism. The CDE could phase in chronic absentee criteria over time as a strategy for reducing the number of students at risk of dropping out.
- F. Provide additional staff resources within CDE over time (as funding allows) to offer technical assistance to schools which are developing early warning intervention systems. Consultants could advise schools on how to use systems that track chronic absence and evaluate the effectiveness of the schools' attendance interventions. Because CDE resources are limited, the CDE may need to seek funding from foundations and other agencies.

- G. Join with the Attorney General, the Director of Health and Human Services, Attendance Works, and Children Now to convene a forum that: (a) raises awareness of the critical importance of improving attendance; and (b) calls for collaboration within communities to build a culture of attendance and overcome barriers that prevent students from coming to school.

The forum should especially highlight chronic absence due to:

- Chronic health conditions facing families (such as asthma, diabetes, dental, or mental health problems) that keep children from getting to school
- Excessive suspensions or expulsions
- Disproportionately applied disciplinary interventions
- Challenging family circumstances such as homelessness, involvement in the child welfare system, domestic violence, and human trafficking or commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC)
- Parent neglect of young children that requires legal interventions
- Teenager habitual truancy that requires legal interventions

The forum would especially encourage local SARBs to address chronic health issues and CSEC, by partnering with local coordinated school health practitioners, community-based organizations, and law enforcement. The forum also would encourage the use of positive interventions that focus primarily on behavioral rehabilitation and development, rather than exclusion from school.

- H. Challenge key parent and community organizations to develop a shared strategy for building awareness among parents about the critical importance of regular attendance, starting in the early grades. Encouraging all districts to include a parent representative on their SARB (pursuant to *EC* Section 48321) could create greater awareness of what parents can do individually and collectively to ensure their children and their children's peers get to school. This strategy can build upon an emerging national consensus that every day counts for every child.

2. Recognize Exemplary School Attendance Review Board Programs:

- A. Participate with the California Association of Supervisors of Child Welfare and Attendance (CASCWA) in presenting the annual awards for model SARB recognition. The presentation could be made at CDE Headquarters during the

annual CASCWA conference this year, since the conference is being held in Sacramento in April 2013.

- B. Award Senate or Assembly resolutions to SARBs that have been recognized for more than one year as Model SARBs.
- C. Encourage previously recognized Model SARBs to share their comprehensive and cost-effective approaches for improving school attendance, by creating a new award for model SARBs that disseminate model practices to other school districts or county offices.
- D. Commit CDE resources to fund travel to evaluate Model SARB programs, similar to visits for the California Distinguished School Program.
- E. Collaborate with the State Attorney General in the recognition of Model SARBs.

3. Approve the Following List of Nominees to the State SARB:

(See pages 6, 7, and 8.)

2012 Nominees for State SARB

Name	Occupation	Representing
Lois Baer	Deputy District Attorney, Santa Clara County	California District Attorneys Association
Christine Beltran	Upward Bound, California State University at San Bernardino	Higher Education
Jennifer Bunshoft	Deputy Attorney General, California Department of Justice	Department of Justice
Linda Calvin	Consultant, Child Welfare and Attendance	Suburban School Districts
Ann Maura Cervantes	Assistant Director, Student Services and School Attendance Department, Clovis Unified School District	Member-at-Large
Hedy Chang	Researcher	Chronic Absence and Attendance Partnership
Tony Chillemi	Probation Officer/Youth Supervisor, Sutter County	Sutter County Probation
Jane Claar	Coordinator, Child Welfare and Attendance, Twin Rivers Unified School District	CASCWA, Delta-Sierra Section
Ray Culberson	Director, Youth Services, San Bernardino Unified School District	Large Unified School Districts
Grace Espindola	Coordinator, Intervention and Prevention Programs	Sutter County Office of Education
Stephen P. Fraire	Child Welfare and Attendance Coordinator, San Diego County Office of Education (retired)	CASCWA, Southern Section
Dr. Angel Gallardo	Chairperson, Montebello Unified School District SARB	Urban SARBs
Jennifer Gomeztrejo	Consultant II, Child Welfare and Attendance	Los Angeles County Office of Education
Sherman Garnett	Coordinator, Child Welfare and Attendance, San Bernardino County Superintendent's Office	Statewide CASCWA
Sheri Hanni	SARB Coordinator, Butte County Office of Education	Small County Offices of Education

Name	Occupation	Representing
Lindy Khan	Academic Administrator, Contra Costa County Office of Education	County Office Administrators
David Kopperud	State School Attendance Review Board Chairperson, CDE	Attendance Improvement Programs
Mike Lombardo	Director of Prevention Services	Placer County Office of Education
Jane Marie Loomis	Principal, Sierra High School, Tahoe-Truckee Unified School District	Rural SARBs
Jeni Mendel	SARB Chairperson, Grossmont Union High School District	Union High School Districts
Jane E. Mills	Director, Child Welfare and Attendance, Palm Springs Unified School District	Association of California School Administrators
Hector Molina	Child Welfare and Attendance, Woodland Joint Unified School District	CASCWA, Delta-Sierra Section
Jill Montbriand	High School Counselor, Rio Americano High School	California Association of School Counselors
Monica Nepomuceno	Education Programs Consultant, CDE	School Mental Health Service Programs
Maria Osborne	School Social Worker, Escondido Elementary School District	California Association of School Social Workers
Barbara Owens	Teacher, Tamalpais Union High School District (retired)	California Federation of Teachers
Jan Passama	Community and Legal Liaison, Alameda County Office of Education	County Offices of Education/Child Welfare and Attendance
Ruth Person	School Nurse, San Juan Unified School District	California School Nurses Organization
Barbara Pomerantz	Education Administrator I, Educational Options, Student Support, and American Indian Education Office, California Department of Education	CDE
Kathy Rabun	Vice President, Community Concerns, State Parent Teacher	State Parent Teacher Association

Name	Occupation	Representing
	Association	
Michael Richards	Teacher, San Bernardino City Unified School District	California Teachers Association
Agnes Ruszkowski-Murray	Deputy District Attorney	San Bernardino County District Attorney's Office
Dan Sackheim	Education Programs Consultant, CDE	Community Day Schools; Countywide Expulsion Plans; Opportunity Education; Diploma Plus High Schools
Jim Schiffman	Chairman, County SARB for Modoc County	Rural County SARBs
Brad Strong	Advocate	Chronic Absence and Attendance Partnership
Nancy Sullivan	Deputy Operations Officer	California School Information Services
James Tate	Consultant, Student Services and School Attendance Department, Clovis Unified High School	High School Attendance Supervisors
Joe Taylor	Administrator, Child Welfare and Attendance, Sacramento County Office of Education (retired)	County Child Welfare and Attendance
Joe Trautwein	Pajaro Valley Unified School District	Coastal Districts
Frank Valadez	Alliance Collaborative for Educational Success	Member-at-Large
William Whitton	Coordinator, Pupil Services, Newark Unified School District	CASCWA, Bay Section
Jane Williams	California Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs	California Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs
Browder A. Willis	Superior Court Judge, San Diego County	Member-at-Large
Jackie Wong	School Health Education Consultant, CDE	Foster Youth Services