



April 7, 2014

Dear County and District Superintendents:

With the implementation of the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), and the issuance of regulations relating to the State Board of Education's template for the Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP), our state is embarking on an unprecedented opportunity to improve educational outcomes for all of our students. As Attorney General Harris made clear in her 2013 report on California's elementary school truancy and absenteeism epidemic, [*In School + On Track*](#), one of the most important factors in improving educational outcomes is increasing student attendance.

In light of these findings, the Attorney General's Office encourages you to consider the important link between attendance and future success as you engage your local communities in crafting your LCAPs. Specifically, we strongly encourage you to address both truancy and chronic absence in your LCAPs. School attendance improvement is one of the core aspects of the LCFF, and your LCAP provides your district with an opportunity to develop new programs or fully invest in existing successful programs to improve school attendance. We have developed the enclosed sample LCAP to help you take advantage of this unique opportunity to address critical issues in our education system such as truancy, chronic absenteeism, and the success of low-income students, English learners, and foster youth.

Improving attendance provides substantial benefits for at-risk children, such as low-income students, English learners and foster youth. Reducing truancy and chronic absence will not only increase your districts' funding, but it will provide numerous other benefits for California's economic health and public safety. For example, elementary school students who are truant or chronically absent are much more likely to fall behind and eventually drop out of school, increasing their risk of becoming either a victim or perpetrator of crime. The cost to California taxpayers resulting from this pattern is over \$46 billion each year. In addition, school districts lose \$1.4 billion per year in funding due to absences.

As you know, Education Code section 52060, subdivision (d)(5), includes "school attendance" and "chronic absenteeism" rates as measures of "pupil engagement," which is one of the eight state priorities under the LCFF. As part of addressing those priorities, your district should set goals for increasing attendance rates and reducing chronic absenteeism in your schools, track progress towards these goals, and use LCFF funds, including basic, supplemental and concentration grants, to reach these goals. We offer several suggested guidelines as you begin this process.

First, we encourage you to use multiple measures of "school attendance," including, but not limited to, truancy, habitual truancy, and chronic truancy, as defined respectively in Education

Code sections 60901, subdivision (c)(1), 48260, 48262, and 48263.6, in order to determine your “pupil engagement” goals.¹

Second, in preparing your LCAP, we encourage you to use the definition of “chronic absence” widely cited by advocates and researchers in the field² and, in fact, by the California Legislature itself, which classifies a student as chronically absent when the student is absent for 10% or more of the school days in the school year.³ Extensive research shows that students who miss 10% or more of schooldays suffer academically and are at risk of dropping out. Therefore, 10% is an important benchmark for identifying at-risk students who need additional attention from schools. Using this consistent definition for “chronic absence” in your LCAP will also allow schools to benefit from best practices developed in other parts of the state and country to improve attendance.

Taken together, these measures of attendance act as useful benchmarks for school and district intervention as a child’s absences accumulate. They can also allow districts to leverage their current obligations under California law – for example, the duty to engage with parents through notifications of truancy – to probe deeper into the reasons why a child is absent and ways in which the family may need help to improve the child’s attendance. Thus, rather than using average daily attendance as the only measure of school attendance in your district, using truancy, habitual truancy, chronic truancy, and chronic absence provides a more accurate picture of “pupil engagement.”

Third, we encourage you to establish attendance policies that focus on consistent, real-time attendance data collection, review, and application. These updates to your attendance policy will provide a better understanding of attendance in your county or district. Having accurate, real-time records that are consistent across a number of years is essential to develop good practices for identifying and reducing truancy and chronic absenteeism. Comprehensive attendance

¹ California classifies a student as truant when the student misses more than 30 minutes of instruction without an excuse three times during the school year. A student is habitually truant if he/she is absent without a valid excuse for five days during a school year and the district has made a conscientious effort to meet with the family. A student is classified as a chronic truant when the student misses 10% or more of the school year without a valid excuse. The only excused absences are absences in which a student has a valid excuse for missing school, such as a doctor’s appointment.

² See, for example, Attendance Works, *Reducing Chronic Absence: Why it Matters for Student Success and Implementation of LCFF* (Dec. 5, 2013), available at <http://www.attendanceworks.org/tools/presentations-2/>.

³ A “chronic absentee” has been defined in Education Code section 60901, subdivision (c)(1), as “a pupil who is absent on 10 percent or more of the school days in the school year when the total number of days a pupil is absent is divided by the total number of days the pupil is enrolled and school was actually taught in the regular day schools of the district, exclusive of Saturdays and Sundays.”

April 7, 2014

Page 3

records will also help districts and counties learn from each other about what programs are working across the state.

Finally, as you will see from our enclosed sample LCAP, your LCAP should provide specific information on how your district intends to use its supplemental and concentration grants for attendance-related efforts, especially as related to the LCFF subgroups of pupils eligible for free and reduced-price meals, English learner, and foster students.

However, this sample LCAP addresses only a small subset of the many important components of a complete LCAP. The Attorney General's Office does not suggest that other components of the LCAP are unimportant; quite the contrary. Rather, we focus on tips related to attendance in order to share the information we have gleaned over the past year of research for the Attorney General's report, [*In School + On Track*](#), and as part of Attorney General Harris' longstanding commitment to reducing elementary school truancy and chronic absenteeism.

We look forward to reviewing your LCAPs to see the bounty of ideas and plans that our state's school districts develop. Attorney General Harris will dedicate a portion of her 2014 Truancy and Chronic Absenteeism report to analyzing LCAPs and their goals to improve attendance. Creating an LCAP for your district can be an intricate process, but it is not one that you have to undertake on your own. Numerous advocacy groups have published sample LCAPs that include innovative ideas intended to address the needs of the general population as well as specific student groups such as foster youth, pupils eligible for free and reduced-price meals, and English learners. With our sample LCAP, we hope to contribute to your efforts. This is an exciting opportunity for each district to lay the foundation for the future success of its students, and we encourage you to be creative and innovative with your LCAPs, as LCFF intended.

If you have any questions or concerns about these materials, please contact Deputy Attorney General Michael Newman at 213-897-2642.

Thank you for the work you do every day on behalf of California's children. Attorney General Harris applauds your efforts, and we look forward to continuing to work with you.

Sincerely,



ANGELA SIERRA
Senior Assistant Attorney General
Civil Rights Enforcement Section

For KAMALA D. HARRIS
Attorney General

Encl.: California Attorney General's Sample LCAP