



Chronic Absence, Suspension Reform, and School Attendance Review Boards

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Keeping Kids In School and Out of Court

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CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Tom Torlakson, State Superintendent of Public Instruction



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Definition of “Chronic Absentee”

What is a **chronic absentee**?

EC Section 60901(c)(1):

A “**chronic absentee**” is a pupil who is absent on 10 percent or more of the school days in the school year when 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.



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Definition of “Truant”

What is a **truant**?

California *Education Code (EC)* Section 48260:

A “**truant**” is any pupil between the age of six and eighteen who is absent from school for more than any 30-minute period without a valid excuse on three days during one school year.

Parents of truants must be notified because a truant is in violation of California’s compulsory education law, and parents are legally required to compel their children’s attendance in school.



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Futures at Risk: Early Indicators

Students who are chronically absent in kindergarten and first grade:

- Are much less likely to be proficient readers. Only 12 percent of students who are chronically absent in kindergarten and first grade read proficiently in third grade.
- Have higher levels of suspension and lower academic achievement in middle school

Chronic absence in sixth grade is the most predictive indicator that a student will not graduate from high school.

(Attendance Works)



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Chronic Absenteeism and LCFF/LCAP

EC Section 52060(d)(5) lists five different rates that will be used to measure pupil engagement in a local control and accountability plan. EC Section 52060 (d)(5)(B) lists chronic absenteeism rates as one of the five different rates, but does not define "chronic absenteeism."

EC Section 60901(c)(1) defines "chronic absentee" for the purposes of CALPADS to include data on pupil attendance. EC Section 52060(d)(5)(B) could be amended to state that chronic absenteeism will defined pursuant to the definition of a "chronic absentee" used in EC Section 60901(d)(5)(B) which is currently limited in applicability to CALPADS.



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Absentee and Attendance Rates: Proposed Definitions and Accountability

Chronic absenteeism shall be applied to pupil subgroups as identified in LCFF/LCAP.

The attendance rate is calculated as follows:

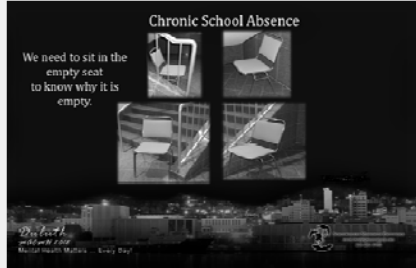
average daily attendance for a given period of school days

—————
average daily enrollment for the same given period of school days



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The big question:
Why is this student absent?





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Why isn't this student in
school today?

What is this student
absent from?

Where is this student
instead of in class?



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Barriers to Attendance

- School climate
- Bullying
- Excessive suspensions instead of restorative/rehabilitative approaches
- Chronic health conditions (such as asthma, diabetes, dental, or mental health issues)
- Homelessness
- Domestic violence
- Sexual exploitation
- Parental neglect
- Pregnant and parenting / child care (for own kids or siblings)
- Teenage rebellion or bullying
- Drug or alcohol abuse
- Transportation issues



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Setting Expectations

Schools and communities can make a difference when they develop a culture which promotes regular attendance!

- Clearly state attendance expectations for all students and address the consequences of truancy and chronic absence on the youth's future life.
- Communicate with parents/guardians and community organizations via notifications (flyers, school Web sites) and reinforce messages throughout the year. (You can help with your stakeholders!)
- Celebrate successes in school, in public, in meetings, in the courtroom.



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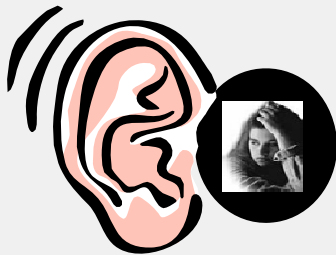
Early Identification System

- Create an early warning system to monitor student attendance closely and frequently.
- Within schools, continuously collect, monitor and analyze data about absences
- Look for patterns in the identified subgroups to determine the most effective interventions. For example, is a schoolwide intervention needed—or does your school need case management of individual chronic absentees?
- Law enforcement/courts/social services agencies should triage and collaborate with schools.



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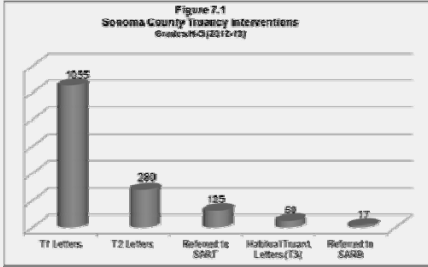
**First, ask the student what is wrong.
Then, LISTEN TO HER!**





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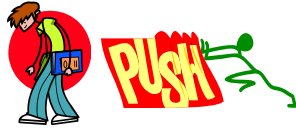
Truancy Interventions



Keep kids in?



Or push them out?





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Learning/Unlearning

by
the student(s)
and by
the educator(s)



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Zero Tolerance

Two Definitions:

- **Must punish/suspend/expel**
- **Must intervene**



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Mission Statement

blah blah blah blah blah
 blah blah blah blah blah
 blah **PUNISH** blah blah blah
 blah blah blah blah
 blah blah **CASTIGATE** blah blah
 blah **REBUKE** blah blah blah
 blah **REPRIMAND** blah
 blah blah blah blah blah
 blah **CHASTISE** blah blah blah
 blah blah blah blah blah
 blah blah blah blah
 blah blah **PENALIZE** blah blah



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Zero tolerance
 commits us
 to **intervention**
 to support
 the successful
 development
 of the student
 —**not punishment.**



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Suspension Can Be Counterproductive

- Worried about gangs? ➡ Send students out of school and into the streets.
- Concerned about quality of home life as part of the cause of the problem? ➡ Send students home to dysfunctional adults.



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What are we suspending when we tell a student that s/he is not allowed to come to school?

- Academic learning (new and reinforcement)
- Connection to school community
- Safety from outside environment
- Access to the student for us to use our professional skills to help him (un)learn behaviors, as appropriate



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Students might infer that either whatever is taught has so little value that missing lessons is not a considered a serious problem, or that their own learning is not highly valued by school

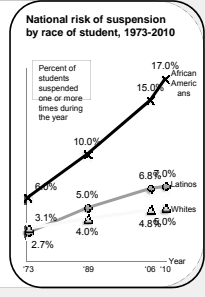
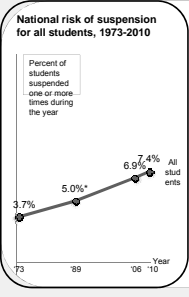
Blah blah blah
blah blah blah
blah blah





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Widespread use of suspension is a relatively recent phenomenon

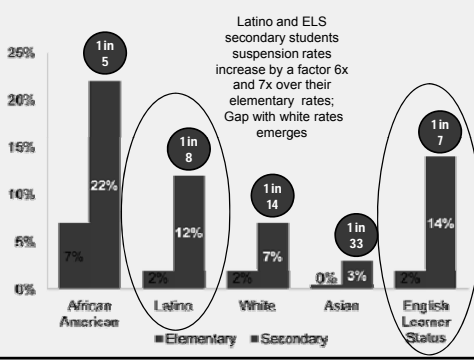


Source: All the data were reported by the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights, Losen, D. and Gillespie, J., *Opportunities Suspended: The Disparate Impact of Disciplinary Exclusion from School*, The Center for Civil Rights Remedies, Civil Right Project UCLA, August 2012. *Preliminary estimate based on disaggregated numbers.



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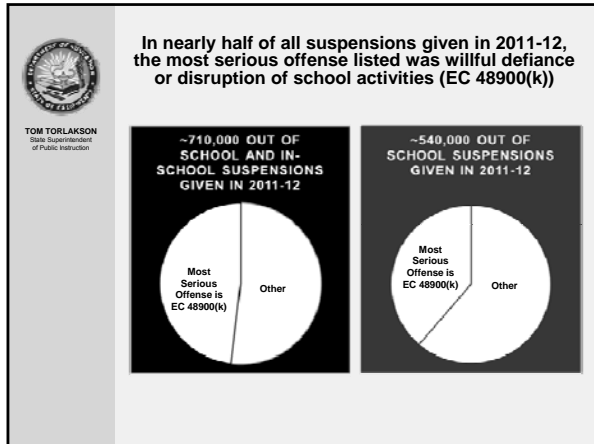
California school suspension rates by grade span, race, and English Learner Status

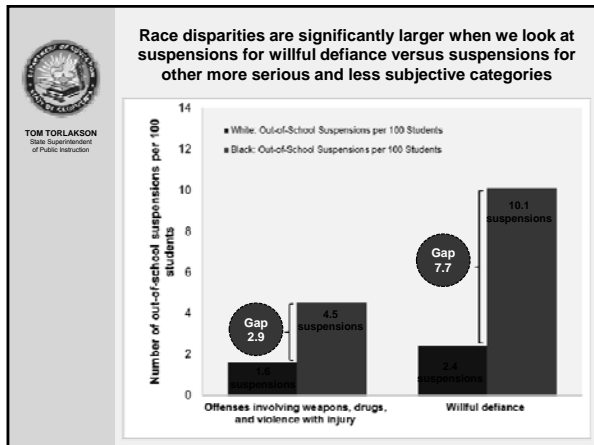




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What is this intervention responding to?

What is this intervention creating?



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Automatic Interventions

Appropriate



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CDE Regional Workshops:
**Implementing Research-
Based Alternatives to
Out-of-School Removals**

September 23, 2013 – Sacramento (North)
September 25, 2013 – Long Beach (South)



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Restorative Practices

A set of principles and practices centered on promoting respect, taking responsibility, and strengthening relationships. Restoring the community and the student's place in it.



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Schoolwide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports

The overarching and continuous goal of SWPBIS is to establish a positive school and classroom climate, in which expectations for students are predictable, directly taught, consistently acknowledged and actively monitored.



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**We have so much to do
to teach to the standards.
How do we fit this in?**





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***Positive School
Climate
=
More Teachable
Time***





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Suspension, Expulsion and LCFF/LCAP

“School climate” is one of the eight key foci of LCFF/LCAP. Pupil suspension and expulsion rates are specifically listed under this item. To clearly understand these factors, it is necessary to differentiate between in-school and out-of-of school suspensions, and to express the data in disaggregated subgroups for suspensions and expulsions.



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School Attendance Review Boards

Partnering to Reduce Chronic Absence

Chronic absence is a risk factor for lower achievement and higher suspension and expulsion rates. Research shows that students with chronic absence are more likely to be suspended or expelled than students without chronic absence.

Chronic Absence is a Risk Factor for Lower Achievement and Higher Suspension and Expulsion Rates

Research shows that students with chronic absence are more likely to be suspended or expelled than students without chronic absence.

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Why is a School Attendance Review Board Necessary?

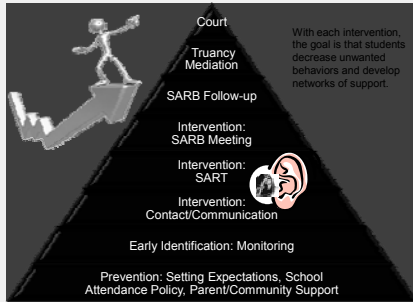
School Attendance Review Boards (SARBs) provide leadership to focus on prevention, early identification, and intervention to improve **behavior** and **attendance** by:

- Resolving school-related issues through collaboration and coordination of services
- Building capacity for home, school, and community resources
- Identifying and diverting students with school attendance and behavior problems out of the juvenile justice system – *in other words, keep in or return them to school*
- Referring cases to court in cases of parental noncompliance. Use of informal probation for students.
- Using Model SARB programs to share best practices and serve as mentors.



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Continuum of Support for All



Schoolwide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports



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School Attendance Review Board Members

Education Code Section 48321

48321 (a) (1) A county school attendance review board may be established in each county.

(2) The county school attendance review board, if established, shall include, but need not be limited to, all of the following:

- (A) A parent.
- (B) A representative of school districts.
- (C) A representative of the county probation department.
- (D) A representative of the county welfare department.
- (E) A representative of the county superintendent of schools.
- (F) A representative of law enforcement agencies.
- (G) A representative of community-based youth service centers.
- (H) A representative of school guidance personnel.
- (I) A representative of child welfare and attendance personnel.
- (J) A representative of school or county health care personnel.
- (K) A representative of school, county, or community mental health personnel.

Note: 48321(b) provides for the same membership for local SARBs, but the membership list is permissive rather than mandated.



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Mental Health Representative

A representative of school, county, or community mental health was included as a member of local and county SARBs by Assembly Bill 42 in 2011. This person plays a key role along with the school or county health care representative.



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Law Enforcement Agencies and Probation Representatives

- SARB members representing the legal system, including police and sheriffs, deputy and assistant district attorneys and probation officers are crucial in looking critically at schools as systems, as well as the individual students, so that as much as possible, we keep kids in schools and out of the courts.
- The legal process can order that students and key adults participate in specific courses of action to address mental and physical health challenges, and/or substance abuse.



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Model SARB Recognition Program

The Model SARB Recognition Program identifies outstanding results-based school attendance improvement programs and creates a resource list of quality programs for dropout reduction. These SARBS serve as mentors to others seeking to increase their own effectiveness.



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Model School Attendance Review Board Content Areas

- Population Served
- Goals and Objectives
- Evidence of SARB Collaboration
- Inventory of Community Resources
- Program Design/Organizational Structure
- Prevention, Early Identification, and Interventions
- Leadership Strategies
- Description of SARB Meeting Dynamics
- Measuring and Reporting Outcomes
- Letters of Support



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We Look at Rates by Grade Level, School, and Subgroups

Truancy, chronic absentee, and suspension rates should be analyzed for any numerically significant subgroups:

- Black or African-American
- Hispanic or Latino
- American Indian or Native Alaskan
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- Asian
- Filipino
- Two or More Races
- White
- Socioeconomically Disadvantaged
- Students with Disabilities
- English Learners
- Foster Youth



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2013 Model School Attendance Review Board Programs

- Alameda Unified School District
- Alhambra Unified School District
- Bellflower/Paramount Unified School Districts
- Chula Vista Elementary School District
- Colton Joint Unified School District
- El Segundo/Hermosa Beach/Manhattan Beach/Redondo Beach Unified School Districts (SARB 16)
- Grossmont Union High School District
- Montebello Unified School District
- San Bernardino City Unified School District
- Santa Ana Unified School District
- Santa Paula Union High School District



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Resources

- **Why We Must Reform School Discipline in California**
Instead of correcting students' behavior and making communities and schools safer, the quick removal methods, such as out-of-school suspension and expulsion, deprive students of the chance to receive the education and help that they need, making it more likely that they will drop out of school, enter the criminal justice system, and place their future options in jeopardy. There is a much better way to hold students accountable and keep schools safe.
<http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/ss/se/behavioralintervention.asp>
- **School Attendance Improvement Handbook (PDF)**
The School Attendance Improvement Handbook provides strategies to improve school attendance for teachers and school principals.
<http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/ai/cw/documents/schoolattendance.pdf>
- **Present, Engaged, and Accounted For**
This document focuses on the critical importance of addressing chronic absence in the early grades.
http://www.nccp.org/publications/pub_837.html





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- **2012 School Attendance Review Boards Handbook (PDF)**
The handbook provides information on establishing a School Attendance Review Board (SARB); identifies behavioral patterns of problem students; gives helpful hints on how to work with students and their parents or guardians; suggests by-laws and standing rules; identifies effective factors for parent and pupil conferences; lists California compulsory attendance and other related laws; and provides sample letters and forms to petition the Probation Department, Office of the District Attorney, and the courts.
<http://www.sbcss.k12.ca.us/stuServe/SARB/StateSARBHandbook.pdf>
- **In School + On Track – Attorney General's 2013 Report on California's Elementary School Truancy and Absenteeism Crisis**
This document focuses on the critical importance of addressing truancy in the elementary grades.
<https://oag.ca.gov/truancy>
- **Chronic Absence Forum**
Prepared remarks by State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Torlakson on May 19, 2011, during the Taking Attendance Seriously: Promoting School Success by Preventing Chronic Absence Forum in Sacramento.
<http://www.cde.ca.gov/nr/sp/yr11/yr11sp0519.asp>



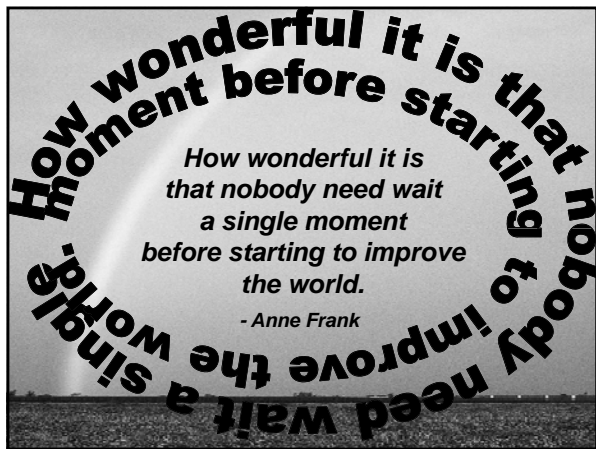


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**Improved Behavior and Attendance:
You can make it happen!**



Photo by Max Flanery
Courtesy of California Geological Survey





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