

Date of Hearing: April 3, 2024

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
Al Muratsuchi, Chair
AB 2771 (Maienschein) – As Introduced February 15, 2024

SUBJECT: Pupil attendance: schoolsite absence intervention teams

SUMMARY: Requires the California Department of Education (CDE) to post information on its website about methods of reducing chronic absenteeism by the beginning of the 2026-27 school year. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Requires the CDE to post information on its website about the methods of reducing chronic absenteeism by the beginning of the 2026-27 school year, including all of the following:
 - a) Identifying barriers to attendance for chronically absent pupils through screenings and interpersonal data collection;
 - b) Developing and implementing absence intervention plans that may include supportive services for pupils and families;
 - c) Home visits to chronically absent pupils;
 - d) Counseling and wellness check-ins;
 - e) Workshop trainings for families of chronically absent pupils;
 - f) Partnering with public and nonprofit agencies to provide assistance to families and pupils to reduce absences; and
 - g) Forming schoolsite absence intervention teams. Members of schoolsite absence intervention teams may include, but need not be limited to the following:
 - i) A school counselor;
 - ii) A representative from the school or school district;
 - iii) A representative from the school or school district who has a relationship with truant children;
 - iv) A representative of community-based youth service centers;
 - v) A representative of child welfare and attendance personnel;
 - vi) A representative of school or county health care personnel; and
 - vii) A representative of school, county, or community mental health personnel.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Requires the governing board of a school district and any county office of education (COE) to appoint a supervisor of attendance and assistant supervisors of attendance as may be necessary to supervise the attendance of pupils in the school district or county. Requires the governing board to prescribe the duties of the supervisor or assistant supervisor to include, among other duties that may be required by the governing board, those specific duties related to compulsory full-time education, truancy, work permits, compulsory continuation education, and opportunity schools, classes, and programs, now required of attendance supervisors. (Education Code (EC) Section 48240)
- 2) Expresses the intent of the Legislature that in performing their duties, the supervisor of attendance promotes a culture of attendance and establishes a system to accurately track student attendance in order to achieve all of the following:
 - a) Raise the awareness of school personnel, parents, guardians, caregivers, community partners, and local businesses of the effects of chronic absenteeism and truancy and other challenges associated with poor attendance;
 - b) Identify and respond to grade level or pupil subgroup patterns of chronic absenteeism or truancy;
 - c) Identify and address factors contributing to chronic absenteeism and habitual truancy, including suspension and expulsion;
 - d) Ensure that pupils with attendance problems are identified as early as possible to provide applicable support services and interventions; and
 - e) Evaluate the effectiveness of strategies implemented to reduce chronic absenteeism rates and truancy rates. (EC 48240)
- 3) Authorizes the supervisor of attendance to provide support services and interventions, including, but not limited to:
 - a) A conference between school personnel, the student's parent or guardian, and the student;
 - b) Promoting co-curricular and extracurricular activities that increase student connectedness to school, such as tutoring, mentoring, the arts, service learning, or athletics;
 - c) Recognizing students who achieve excellent attendance or demonstrate significant improvement in attendance;
 - d) Referral to a school nurse, school counselor, school psychologist, school social worker, and other student support personnel for case management and counseling;

- e) Collaboration with child welfare services, law enforcement, courts, public health care agencies, government agencies, or medical, mental health, and oral health care providers to receive necessary services;
 - f) Collaborating with school study teams, guidance teams, school attendance review teams, or other intervention-related teams to assess the attendance or behavior problem in partnership with the student and their parents, guardians, or caregivers;
 - g) In schools with significantly higher rates of chronic absenteeism, identify barriers to attendance that may require school-wide strategies rather than case management;
 - h) Referral for a comprehensive psychosocial or psychoeducational assessment, including for purposes of creating an individualized education program for an individual with exceptional needs;
 - i) Referral to a school attendance review board established by the county or by a school district or to the probation department pursuant to Section 48263; and
 - j) Referral to a truancy mediation program operated by the county's district attorney or probation officer. (EC 48420)
- 4) Requires that each person between the ages of 6 and 18 years, not otherwise exempted, be subject to compulsory full-time education and attend the public full-time day school or continuation school or classes in which their parent or guardian resides, and that each parent, guardian or other person having control or charge of the pupil ensure that pupil's enrollment and attendance. (EC Section 48200)
- 5) Defines a "truant" as any student subject to compulsory full-time education or to compulsory continuation education who is absent from school without a valid excuse for three full days in one school year or tardy or absent for more than any 30-minute period during the schoolday without a valid excuse on three occasions in one school year, or any combination thereof. (EC Section 48260)
- 6) Authorizes a School Attendance Review Board (SARB) to be established at the local and county level to provide intensive guidance and coordinated community services to meet the needs of students with school attendance or school behavior problems. (EC Section 48320)

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown

COMMENTS:

Need for the bill. According to the author, "The surge in chronic absences in schools highlights a need for effective and sustainable solutions. There must be a collaborative approach, where everyone- from teachers to counselors to community members plays a vital role in supporting student and families. This bill aims to make resources more accessible by mandating the CDE to provide information on its website on reducing chronic absenteeism rates. This would include information about identifying barriers, conducting home visits, creating a student absence intervention team, and organizing workshops to empower students and families. By fostering

connections and working together we can ensure students have the opportunity to succeed in school and beyond.”

Impacts of chronic absenteeism. Students are considered chronically absent when they miss 10% or more of school for any reason. Left unaddressed, chronic absence can translate into students having difficulty learning to read by Grade 3, reaching grade-level standards in middle school, and graduating from high school. Chronic absenteeism has soared in California and nationally in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, and addressing this extraordinary increase is crucial to helping students catch up academically. Although rates of chronic absence have begun to decrease, they remain alarmingly high. Ensuring equitable opportunities to learn will require ongoing attention and action. (Chang, 2024)

Chronic absenteeism remains high and varies by grade level as well as by student subgroup. Chronic absence rates in California K-12 schools increased from 12% (702,531 students) in 2018–19 to a high of 30% (1,799,734) in 2021–22. In 2022–23, there was a decrease of 5 percentage points to a chronic absenteeism rate of 25% (1,486,302 students). Although this modest decrease is a hopeful sign, rates are still much higher than they were prior to the pandemic. This indicates the need for continued and intentional investment in re-engaging students and families and helping them to overcome barriers to getting to school. (Chang, 2024)

The rates of chronic absenteeism vary by grade level. Prior to the pandemic, kindergarten chronic absence was 16%, just slightly lower than the chronic absenteeism rate for high school of 16%. Kindergarten chronic absence increased to 40% in 2021–22 and remained at 36% in 2022–23, approximately 10 percentage points higher than high school rates of 26%. (Chang, 2024)

Students who are involved in the foster care system, are experiencing homelessness, and/or have been identified as having a disability have extraordinarily high levels of chronic absenteeism. In addition, Native American, Black, and Pacific Islander students have especially high rates of chronic absence. For these populations, chronic absenteeism both reflects and exacerbates inequities. These high rates can reflect challenges facing students and families in the community (e.g., lack of access to health care, unreliable transportation, housing, and food insecurity, etc.) and within the school (e.g., bullying, unwelcoming school climate, biased disciplinary or attendance practices, or lack of a meaningful and culturally relevant curriculum). Such difficulties can affect students’ ability to learn as well as cause them to fall farther behind because they miss invaluable instruction. (Chang, 2024)

In California, students of color are disproportionately represented among chronically absent students compared to other student populations; 36.6% of African American students and 28.9% of Hispanic/Latino students were chronically absent in 2022-23, compared to 19.7% of White students. (Policy Analysis for California Education (Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE), 2024)

According to researchers, although the California numbers of chronic absenteeism are challenging, absenteeism can be addressed when districts, with state support, help schools take a comprehensive, data-informed approach to attendance that is grounded in an understanding of local assets and difficulties faced by students and families. 2022–23 school-year data offers hopeful signs that attendance levels in California are moving in the right direction, but even greater efforts are needed in the schools and communities most affected by COVID-19 and education inequities. (Chang, 2024)

Factors contributing to chronic absenteeism? As noted in the figure below, students may be absent from school for a wide range of reasons, including myths relating to the importance of school attendance, barriers relating to student and family needs, an aversion to attending school, and a sense of disengagement from school.

Myths	Barriers	Aversion	Disengagement
Absences are only a problem if they are unexcused	Lack of access to health or dental care	Struggling academically or socially	Lack of engaging and culturally relevant instruction
Missing just 2 days per month won't affect learning	Chronic illness	Bullying	No meaningful relationships with adults in school
Sporadic absences aren't a problem	Trauma	Ineffective/exclusionary school discipline	Vulnerable to being with peers out of school vs. in school
Attendance only matters in the older grades	No safe path to school	Parents had negative school experience	Poor school climate
	Poor transportation	Undiagnosed disability	Discouraged due to lack of credits
	Housing instability		
	High mobility		
	Involvement with child welfare or juvenile justice system		

Source: Portraits of Change, Attendance Works, 2017

Chronic absenteeism is tracked on the California School Dashboard. The Dashboard provides performance information on multiple indicators for K–12 schools and districts across the state. This data is used to identify strengths and areas in need of improvement for schools. LEAs serving students enrolled in kindergarten through 8th grade receive a chronic absenteeism indicator on their school dashboard representing the number of students who were absent 10% or more of the school year. The dashboard also compares data from one year to the next to determine whether the school or district made improvements by reducing the rate of chronic absenteeism, or had a higher rate. The 2023 California School Dashboard identifies that 24.3% of students in kindergarten through 8th grade were chronically absent, having declined 5.7% from the prior year. As noted above, these rates varied between students of different races/ethnicities as well as by subgroup:

Student group	2023 Rate of Chronic Absenteeism	Decline from prior year
African American	36.4%	6.5%
American Indian	36.1%	6.8%
Asian	10.1%	1.4%
Hispanic	28.4%	7.4%
Pacific Islander	37.6%	6.3%
White	18.5%	3.5%
English Learners	26.3%	7.3%
Foster Youth	33.6%	8.5%

Student group	2023 Rate of Chronic Absenteeism	Decline from prior year
Homeless	38.7%	6.4%
Socioeconomically disadvantaged	29.9%	7.5%
Students with disabilities	33.1%	6.5%

Arguments in support. The Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE) writes, “Chronic absenteeism is a significant challenge facing schools and districts across our state, stemming from various underlying causes. Despite the existing mechanisms for addressing attendance and behavioral issues, such as county and local school attendance review boards, many students continue to struggle with regular attendance, impacting their academic achievement and overall well-being. LACOE recognizes the importance of collaborative efforts in addressing chronic absenteeism and applaud the inclusion of provisions in this bill that promote coordination and partnership among stakeholders. By leveraging the expertise and resources of various community members, schoolsite absence intervention teams can develop comprehensive strategies to address the root causes of absenteeism and provide students with the necessary support to overcome barriers to attendance.”

Related legislation. AB 2815 (O’Donnell) Chapter 829, Statutes of 2016, authorizes a supervisor of attendance to provide specified support services and take specified interventions.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

Los Angeles County Office of Education

Opposition

None on file

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