

# Chronic Absence Strategic Action Group

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September 2014 e-Bulletin

## Welcome

Welcome back to a new school year! Did you know that September is Attendance Awareness month? Please help to spread the word. You can learn more at [Attendance Works!](#) The facts below outline the challenges that we are working together to resolve:

- Approximately 60,000 (11.5 percent) students statewide are chronically absent (based on 2012-13 data); and
- Disparities continue to exist in chronic absenteeism rates; students from our historically underperforming subgroups (Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, students with disabilities, English language learners, and those eligible for free/reduced meals).

Over the summer, the Chronic Absence Strategic Action Group (SAG) Planning Team has been busy meeting with stakeholders and members, discussing best practices and reviewing data that are available and identifying data that are still needed. We hope that you find this update informative and that it helps you find ways that you can help us to address this challenge!

Co-Chairs, Charlene Russell-Tucker and Joe Vaverchak

## Chronic Absence – the Topic of Conversation

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Chronic absence is a topic that everyone is talking about. Presentations were made at the following events:

- September 3, 2014, State Board of Education Legislation and Policy Development Committee (Joe Vaverchak and Kelt Cooper, Superintendent of the Consolidated School District of New Britain);
- August 19, 2014, Commissioners "Back to School" meeting with Superintendents from across the state (Charlene Russell-Tucker); and
- May 1, 2014, Alliance District Convening – full day meeting with all 30 Alliance Districts.

Going forward we will be working with the Governor's Prevention Partnership, state and local United Ways and many other organizations to connect partners with school districts to provide the school-linked supports that they have identified as areas of need.

## Data Issues/Data Development Subgroup

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Erica Bromley, Lead

The Data Subgroup has been working closely with the CT State Department of Education (CSDE's) Performance Office to begin work analyzing data related to attendance, suspensions and expulsions. This work will lead to the implementation of a data development agenda. This group is also working with four pilot communities to develop GIS Mapping that will overlay demographic data, chronic absences and resources for each community. This will assist communities in strategic planning. Ultimately, this best practice will be shared with other communities to adopt.

The CSDE continues to address chronic absenteeism and improve data quality and use through training, data system enhancements, transparency and accountability. Examples:

- Offering training sessions and webinars to district data managers to help them understand the attendance reporting requirements, the data sources and the calculation methodology;
- Providing new reports that display overall and subgroup absenteeism rates at both the district and school level and identifying individual students who are chronically absent;
- Publishing chronic absenteeism rates by district and subgroup on the CSDE Web site and on the Governor's Open Data Portal;
- Identifying chronic absenteeism as a key indicator in the CSDE's district and school turnaround efforts; and
- Providing professional development and technical assistance to support districts in connecting with community partners to fill their identified gaps in services.

## Best Practices Inventory Subgroup

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Joe Vaverchak, Lead

Members of the Best Practices Inventory Subgroup have been discussing and submitting their best practices for reducing chronic absence. These practices have been collected and will continue to be updated and cataloged into a Showcase of Best Practices to be shared on-line with school districts, partners and communities. Watch for a template to be released soon for submitting your best practice strategies for reducing chronic absence.

## Spotlight on What's Happening

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Below is a sampling of efforts already underway at the state-level to reduce absenteeism:

- Court Support Services – As of July 1, all Family with Service Needs referrals (mostly truancy and school discipline issues) are served through the community-based programs, Children, Youth and Family Support Centers. These are one-stop, multi-service centers that provide or link families to services that they need;
- School based medical and mental health clinics develop ongoing relationships with students to help address their health needs; engages them in school; builds a relationship with a trusted adult and encourages a healthy lifestyle. All of which contribute to student engagement and school dropout prevention; and
- The Governor's Prevention Partnership provides school districts with technical assistance and training to increase efforts to provide mentors for students who are chronically absent. [Learn more!](#)

Below is a sampling of efforts already underway at the local level to reduce absenteeism:

- Establishing district-level departments or teams that focus on attendance, truancy, and youth development. Using aggregate data, districts identify attendance trends, e.g., excessive absences beginning in kindergarten;
- Convening school attendance teams (consisting of the school social workers, nurses, truancy officers, DCF liaisons, school counselors, and administrators) that meet monthly to discuss policy and address the causes and reasons specific students are chronically absent;
- Addressing attendance problems through a tiered intervention. Individual teachers meet with students regarding their attendance prior to any intervention. If the student's attendance does not improve, the teacher will meet with the parent. If attendance still does not improve, then a team meeting (administrator, teacher teams, student, and parents) is

held to look for attendance inhibitors, e.g., students feel disassociated with the school or students needing to be at home to care for a younger sibling; and

- Communicating early and directly with parents through e-mail and other means on the importance of "Making Every Day Count!" Setting the clear expectation that students should be in school every day.

## Moving into Action!

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To organize the work and stay on task, a Chronic Absence SAG Action Plan has been created by the Planning Team for membership review. It includes the overall purpose of the group, the goals, strategies and actions as well as who is responsible and a timeline. This is a "living" document that will grow and evolve as the work of the group continues to grow and evolve. The following is an overview of the Action Plan. Your feedback is welcome!

Overall Purpose:

To improve attendance in Connecticut schools by (1) serving as the centralizing force for existing initiatives and promising new approaches to achieve better, measurable results and (2) promoting statewide coordination and communication among critical partners.

**Goal 1:** Data Issues/Data Development – To ensure that data are available and accurately inform policy and practice.

**Goal 2:** Best Practices Inventory/What Works – To ensure that policies and practices with proven results are implemented to improve outcomes.

**Goal 3:** Strategic Action Group membership is identified and represents all strategic partners with a role to play in improving results and "turning the curve."

**Goal 4:** Report Card Development – The Report Card is revised and posted and used as a SAG communication tool.

## In the News!

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Feel free to send in articles that you would like to share!

- [Community wide efforts needed to combat chronic absenteeism in schools](#), Reminder News, September 15, 2014
- [Absences Add Up](#), Attendance Works, August 2014
- [Report: High Percent of City's Children are Obese](#), New Britain Herald, September 8, 2014

## Next Meeting

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The next meeting of the Chronic Absence Strategic Action Group will be on **Thursday, October 16, 2014, from 10 a.m. to Noon in Room 1C** at the Legislative Office Building.

## Stay in Touch!

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As always, stay in touch! Let us know what you know. If you have ideas or suggestions, please feel free to share. **We are seeking volunteers to work on our subgroups and other projects.** If there is a project that you would like to become involved with, there is always room at the table! Please join us! Contact the co-chairs, [Charlene Russell-Tucker](#) or [Joe Vaverchak](#).