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To: BOCES District Superintendents  
Superintendents of Public School Districts  
Principals of Public Schools  
Charter School Leaders

From: Renee L. Rider

Subject: Chronic Absenteeism Reports Now Available in SIRS

Consistent with initiatives from the U.S. Department of Education and other states, and as discussed at the December 2014 meeting of the Board of Regents (<http://www.regents.nysed.gov/common/regents/files/1214p12d3.pdf>), New York State is embarking on a new statewide initiative to promote student engagement and increase student achievement by encouraging school personnel to track student absenteeism and develop intervention strategies to reduce chronic absence from school. The department is now able to calculate chronic absenteeism using attendance data reported by districts, BOCES and charter schools in the Student Information Repository System (SIRS) and new verification reports are now available in the Level 2 Reporting system (L2RPT). This memorandum includes information about the definition of chronic absenteeism, how it is calculated, and where to find resources to help reduce it.

## Background

Chronic absence from school, which is defined as missing at least ten percent of enrolled school days, warrants our urgent attention because it diminishes successful student outcomes and undermines learning. The connection between instructional time and achievement is intuitive, and there is extensive research in the area of absenteeism that indicates missing ten percent of school days tends to be the 'tipping point' when student achievement declines.<sup>1</sup>

The issue of chronic absence is particularly relevant to our work for a number of reasons. First, it is closely associated with key academic priorities, including reading proficiency, math performance, graduation rates, and college completion. Second, the reduction of chronic absence is a means for narrowing the achievement gap as research indicates low-income students are more likely to be at risk of being chronically absent. Third, identification of chronic absence provides us

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<sup>1</sup> Balfanz, Robert and Byrnes, Vaughan, Chronic Absenteeism: Summarizing What We Know From Nationally Available Data, Johns Hopkins University Center for Social Organization of Schools, May 2012.

with our earliest and possibly most direct indication that a student is at risk of school failure.<sup>2</sup> In fact, the high prevalence of chronic absence among our youngest students is striking. Improving the ability to identify students at risk affords school staff the opportunity to engage students and their families early to ensure students are on track to learn and succeed.

Chronic absence differs from traditional attendance measures because its emphasis is on *missed instructional time*, which takes into account both unexcused and excused absences. This distinguishes it from truancy, which focuses exclusively on unexcused absences. Likewise, the calculation of an Annual Daily Attendance (ADA) rate can mask significant attendance deficiencies for certain students. Chronic absence provides a more refined view of individual students' attendance and gives the ability to identify specific students within our schools who repeatedly miss instruction.

Clearly, having students in school for instruction is a fundamental first step to helping students achieve. When students stop being chronically absent, they improve academically and are more likely to stay in school.

### **Call to Action**

Since 2014, the New York State Education Department (NYSED) has partnered with a number of New York State agencies on the “*Every Student Present*” campaign to raise awareness statewide about the impact that chronic absenteeism has on successful academic outcomes for children and adolescents, and to provide information to aid schools, families and communities to help reduce it. Resources include posters, parent fliers, and examples of successful intervention strategies and programs that are being used in school districts in New York to reduce chronic absence (<http://www.everystudentpresent.org/>).

In addition, in October 2015, The U.S. Department of Education announced a nationwide initiative to reduce chronic absenteeism, “*Every Student, Every Day*,” a partnership with the U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, and Justice, and released a joint memorandum to states, school districts, and communities. The joint memo calls on states to reduce chronic absenteeism by at least ten percent each year (<http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/guid/secletter/151007.html>) and asks state and local education, health, housing, and justice agencies to work immediately and collaboratively to take the following action steps:

- Action Step 1: Generate and act on absenteeism data;
- Action Step 2: Create and deploy positive messages and measures;
- Action Step 3: Focus communities on addressing chronic absenteeism; and
- Action Step 4: Ensure responsibility across sectors.

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<sup>2</sup> Balfanz, Robert and Byrnes, Vaughan, [\*Meeting the Challenge of Combating Chronic Absenteeism: Impact of the NYC Mayor’s Interagency Task Force on Chronic Absenteeism and School Attendance and Its Implications for Other Cities\*](#), Everyone Graduates Center, Johns Hopkins University School of Education, November 2013.

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), passed in December 2015, includes chronic absenteeism reporting by states for Title I schools. Information about specific requirements will be shared with you when they are made available by the U.S. Department of Education.

### **Calculating Chronic Absenteeism Data**

Beginning in the 2013-14 school year, student daily attendance (excused, unexcused, tardy, and suspended) was first collected in the Student Information Repository System (SIRS). Districts, BOCES and charter schools should continue reporting student attendance data in SIRS, consistent with the requirements defined by local attendance policy.

Through consultation with school and district administrators, representatives from other states, and policy experts, SED staff have drafted business rules for calculating chronic absenteeism from data in SIRS. Simply stated, the chronic absenteeism rate for a school is the number of students who have been identified as chronically absent (excused and unexcused absences numbering ten percent or more of enrolled school days) as a percentage of the total number of students enrolled during the school year (denominator). Chronically absent students will be identified as such based on *the number of days a student is enrolled*. This is significant because students may enroll in the school or district during different points in the school year. For example, a student who misses four days of school and was enrolled from September 1 through January 31 would not be considered chronically absent. However, a student who is enrolled only for the month of December yet missed four days of school may be categorized as such. This definition has the advantage of identifying chronically absent students regardless of the point in time they enter the district or school.

In the definition of chronic absenteeism adopted by NYSED, the emphasis is on missed instruction, and as such, when determining chronic absenteeism, both unexcused and excused absences will be included. Suspensions will not be considered absences because suspended students must receive alternate instruction as long as the student is of compulsory school age.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, a student who is not present in school for an extended period of time for medical reasons would receive instruction at home and would not be reported as absent.

New attendance and chronic absenteeism verification reports are now available in L2RPT. A brief description of the reports is provided below; more specific information is available in the report guide posted here: <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/irs/level2reports/SIRS-360--361-combinedReportGuide.pdf>

- **Year-to-Date Student Attendance/Absenteeism Summary Report:** this report provides, by grade or by student subgroup, a year-to-date summary of attendance days, students enrolled during the school year, the number and percentage of students absent between 0-4% of enrolled school days, 5-9% of enrolled school days (at-risk of becoming chronically absent), and 10% or more of enrolled school days (chronically absent). As with other

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<sup>3</sup> Matter of Ackert, 30 Ed. Dept. Rep 31.

summary reports in L2RPT, designated staff can “drill through” from the summary report to a student detail report that shows for each student, the number of days enrolled, present, and absent, and start and end enrollment dates.

- **Student Attendance Daily Summary Report:** this report provides a daily summary count of students enrolled, absent and tardy. This report is intended to provide a brief summary of the daily student attendance records being reported in SIRS to simplify the task of verification. As with other summary reports in L2RPT, designated staff can “drill through” from the summary report to a student detail report that shows for each day, the students who are included in the summary count.

To take advantage of the information provided in the reports, every effort should be made to submit complete and accurate attendance data to SIRS, however, there will be no certification required for the new attendance and chronic absenteeism reports for the 2015-16 school year, and the data will not be included in the 2015-16 school year Report Cards.<sup>4</sup> To ensure accuracy of the data in the repository and the reports, establishing an internal process for verification that meets the individual needs of the district or school, and communication between the data coordinator and the attendance official will be an important part of submitting and verifying attendance data in SIRS.

Feedback provided from school and district administrators regarding this initiative included requests to make use of the attendance data being collected in SIRS to provide attendance details for out of district placed students to the home district. SED anticipates working with district and BOCES staff in 2016-17 to develop an additional attendance report for out of district placed students. If possible, BOCES locations should begin reporting student daily attendance data in SIRS to support this work.

Successful intervention strategies to reduce chronic absenteeism will require early identification of students who are chronically absent, or at-risk of becoming chronically absent, and it is understood that schools must establish internal processes and procedures to do so. SED is developing and distributing these year-to-date absenteeism reports so that all schools have access to a uniform method of identifying students who are academically at risk because of excessive absence from school using a standard statewide definition.

You will find additional links to some of the resources mentioned in this memo and some highlights of research in the attachment. We look forward to continuing to work with you on this important initiative. If you have questions or concerns, or have suggestions for how to improve the reports, please contact Student Support Services at (518) 486-6090 or [StudentSupportServices@nysed.gov](mailto:StudentSupportServices@nysed.gov).

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<sup>4</sup> Note that the chronic absenteeism data calculated from SIRS for the 2015-16 school year will be used as baseline data for the 2016-17 school year for Persistently Struggling and Struggling Schools in receivership that selected chronic absenteeism as one of their Demonstrable Improvement Indicators.

## Appendix

Please take a moment to visit the following websites for additional information and resources to help students and their families engage in school:

*Every Student Present* (<http://www.everystudentpresent.org/>)

*Attendance Works* (<http://www.attendanceworks.org/>)

*Every Student, Every Day/USDOE Community Toolkit to Address and Eliminate Chronic Absenteeism* (<http://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/chronicabsenteeism/index.html>)

The bullets below highlight research that underscores the link between chronic absence and school outcomes. The findings span studies from preschool through college:

- students who are chronically absent in preschool are five times more likely to be chronically absent in second grade;<sup>5</sup>
- compared to children with average attendance, chronically absent students gained 14 percent fewer literacy skills in kindergarten; in first grade they had 15 percent fewer literacy skills and 12 percent fewer math skills;<sup>6</sup>
- chronic absence in kindergarten was associated with lower academic performance in first grade, the impact is twice as great for students in low-income families;<sup>7</sup>
- students identified as academically ready at the beginning of kindergarten but who were chronically absent in kindergarten and first grade scored 60 points below students with good attendance on third grade reading tests;<sup>8</sup>
- by sixth grade, chronic absence is one of three early warning signs that a student is more likely to drop out of school, and ninth grade student attendance has been shown to be a better predictor of dropout than eighth grade scores;
- course performance in the ninth grade was the strongest predictor of student graduation and chronic absence was the strongest predictor of course performance;<sup>9</sup>
- fifty percent of students who miss two or more days of school in September miss a month or more of school for the school year;<sup>10</sup> and
- among students who graduate, those who missed ten or more school days during tenth grade had a 25 percentage point difference in their post-secondary enrollment rates.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ehrlich Stacy B. et al., [Preschool Attendance in Chicago Public Schools: Relationships with Learning Outcomes and Reasons for Absences](#), University of Chicago, Consortium on Chicago School Research, May 2014.

<sup>6</sup> Ready, Douglas D., [Socioeconomic Disadvantage, School Attendance, and Early Cognitive Development: The Differential Effects of School Exposure](#), Sociology of Education, October 2010.

<sup>7</sup> Chang, Hedy & Romero, Mariajose, [Present, Engaged & Accounted For: The Critical Importance of Addressing Chronic Absence in the Early Grades](#), National Center for Children in Poverty: NY: NY, September 2008.

<sup>8</sup> [Attendance in Early Elementary Grades: Associations with Student Characteristics, School Readiness and Third Grade Outcomes](#), Applied Survey Research, May 2011.

<sup>9</sup> Allensworth, Elaine and Easton, John, [What Matters for Staying On-track and Graduating in Chicago Public High Schools: A Close Look at Course Grades, Failures, and Attendance in the Freshman Year](#). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago, Consortium on Chicago School Research, July 2007

<sup>10</sup> Olson, Linda S., [Why September Matters: Improving Student Attendance](#), Baltimore Education Research Consortium, July 2014.

Best practices for school-level interventions to reduce chronic absenteeism include, but are not limited to:

- ✓ positive, prevention-focused attendance policies and strategies that promote a culture of good attendance;
- ✓ recognize and reward improved attendance through tiered prevention strategies;
- ✓ ongoing monitoring of attendance data by staff dedicated to this function;
- ✓ use of weekly or bi-weekly attendance teams directed to reduce absences among students who are chronically absent (miss ten percent or more of enrolled days) or at risk of becoming chronically absent (miss between five and nine percent of enrolled days);
- ✓ integration of school mentors; and
- ✓ ongoing, communitywide public awareness.

Multiple factors contribute to chronic absence that may be specific to students, their families or the community (e.g., school anxiety, academic challenges, family challenges, and transportation issues). As such, it may require resources external to districts to address chronic absence, including community outreach. Additionally, increasing parents' understanding about the detrimental impact of excessive absences may best be accomplished through messaging from a combination of credible school and community sources (e.g., churches, medical professionals). Due to the multiple dimensions necessary to reduce chronic absence, a community wide public awareness approach is helpful.

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<sup>11</sup> Balfanz, Robert and Vaughan Byrnes, [\*Meeting the Challenge of Combating Chronic Absenteeism: Impact of the NYC Mayor's Interagency Task Force on Chronic Absenteeism and School Attendance and Its Implications for Other Cities\*](#), Everyone Graduates Center, Johns Hopkins University School of Education, November 2013.