

TO: District leaders
FROM: Mike Herrmann, executive directors of healthy, safe, and supportive schools
DATE: July 12, 2017
SUBJECT: **Back-to-School Attendance Toolkit Overview**

In Tennessee, we believe student attendance is critical to academic success—when students attend school, they have the opportunity to learn. As a result, we have added the Chronically Out of School Indicator to our state’s accountability framework under the Every Student Succeeds Act. This measure is the percentage of students who have missed 10 percent or more of the days a student is enrolled in school for any reason, including excused absences and out-of-school suspensions. Including this measure in school and district accountability underscores our belief that student attendance is an actionable data point for school and district teams to regularly monitor and act upon throughout the year.

The back-to-school attendance toolkit provides several communication materials and planning resources to help your district start the school year strong from a student attendance perspective. Research indicates that the first month of school is a critical period both in terms of establishing a strong positive attendance norm as well as addressing absence patterns early before lost instructional time compounds the challenge of catching up.

Specific elements of this toolkit include:

- A **Chronically Out of School FAQ** that answers basic questions about the new Chronically Out of School Indicator. The FAQ is particularly appropriate for district- and school-level leaders in helping further their understanding of the indicator from both an accountability and a school improvement perspective.
- A **Chronically Out of School PowerPoint** presentation that can be used in full or adapted to better suit your needs.
- A **Letter to Parents** that explains the importance of school attendance and asks them to become part of your district’s effort to improve attendance for all students. The parent letter includes **Attendance Pointers for Parents** as well.
- A **Letter to Teachers** that asks for their assistance in conveying a strong, positive attendance messages to students and parents. The teacher letter also includes **Tips for Talking with Parents**.
- A **Guide to Using Data to Support Student Attendance**, which details out four steps for making data-based decisions, including how to pull the appropriate data that can be used to identify the schools, grade levels, subgroups, and individual students most in need of attention.
- Two worksheets with **Guiding Questions for Exploring the Data**, which include questions for district- and school-level leaders.
- A **Resources** one-pager with hyperlinks to a variety of attendance resources.

We would be remiss to not acknowledge the source of much of the information provided in this toolkit. Attendance Works is a national leader in the area of chronic absenteeism. The organization’s [website](#) includes a wealth of resources for schools, parents, and the community. We strongly encourage you to visit their website and to consider participating in Attendance Awareness Month in September.

We hope that you find the resources helpful. Questions regarding the toolkit can be directed to Mike.Herrmann@tn.gov.