



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA
Department of Education

DATE: September 7, 2018
TO: Division Superintendents
FROM: James F. Lane, Superintendent of Public Instruction
SUBJECT: September is Attendance Awareness Month

School attendance is essential to academic success, but too often parents, students, and sometimes teachers do not realize how quickly absences, excused as well as unexcused, can add up to academic trouble. At the same time principals, division leaders, and community members often do not know if chronic absence is a significant problem in local schools.

Research shows that missing as little as two days every month, or ten percent of the school year is considered chronic absenteeism. Missing school can translate into third-graders unable to master reading, sixth-graders failing courses and ultimately, teens dropping out of high school.

This September will mark the sixth annual [Attendance Awareness Month](#) campaign, an opportunity to rally your community, advocates, policymakers, volunteers, funders, and supporters around the importance of attendance and its role in academic achievement. The campaign is spearheaded by [Attendance Works](#), a national and state initiative that promotes better policy and practice around school attendance.

As a part of the "Call to Action," from the United States Department of Education (USDOE) and the [Every Student, Every Day](#) Initiative, superintendents are encouraged to:

- **Prioritize Attendance:** Make clear that improved student attendance is one of the top priorities for your teachers and principal;
- **Mobilize the Community:** Reach out to make improved student attendance a broadly owned and widely shared civic priority; and
- **Drive with Data:** Use data to map the attendance gap, showing how many students are chronically absent and if they are concentrated in particular grades, schools, and student populations.

The Virginia Department of Education, in collaboration with Attendance Works, has also created a 13 module series entitled [Attendance and Truancy Among Virginia Students](#). The modules include a Participant/Facilitator Guide, can be viewed individually or in a group, and will assist schools and divisions in looking at current practice and at ways to improve future practice with the goal of addressing and eliminating chronic absenteeism, and ultimately boost student outcomes and success.

Additional information and resources, including a [Tool Kit](#), are available at [Attendance Works](#). If you have questions contact Joseph Wharff, School Counseling Specialist, by telephone at (804) 225-3370, or by email at Joseph.Wharff@doe.virginia.gov.

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