



**State of New Jersey**  
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October 27, 2015

**TO:** Chief School Administrators  
Charter School and Renaissance School Project Lead Persons  
School Counselors

**FROM:** Bari Anhalt Erlichson, Ph.D.  
Assistant Commissioner  
Division of Data, Research, Evaluation and Reporting

**SUBJECT:** Chronic Absenteeism

Earlier this month, the leaders of the United States Department of Education (ED), Health and Human Services (HHS), Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and Justice (DOJ) announced a joint commitment to building capacity across the federal government to support states and local communities in work to address and eliminate chronic absenteeism. Their announcement can be found here:  
<http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/guid/secletter/151007.html>

The first action step articulated in their announcement is to ‘generate and act on absenteeism data.’ In New Jersey, we can be proud that we’ve worked hard on collecting high quality data on chronic absenteeism. For the past several years, such data has been submitted by districts thru NJSMART and published on the New Jersey School Performance Reports. In addition, NJSMART has incorporated chronic absenteeism into its ‘at-risk’ district report allowing districts to capture in near real time information about student’s whose attendance trend suggest that he/she is chronically absent. For more assistance on how to utilize this report, please contact the NJSMART HelpDesk at [NJSMART@pcgus.com](mailto:NJSMART@pcgus.com) or (800) 254-0295.

A year ago at the October meeting of the New Jersey State Board of Education, I presented data to illustrate the ways that chronic absenteeism impacts student outcomes, drawing from data from New Jersey’s participation in NAEP assessments as well as our own statewide assessment programs. Mrs. Diodonet, then principal of School 5 in Paterson, joined me to present the outcomes of her efforts – a resounding 76% decline in chronic absenteeism! Our presentations can be found here: <http://www.state.nj.us/cgi-bin/education/sboe/sboe.pl?y=2014&m=October&t=public> And coverage of her efforts can be found here: <http://www.state.nj.us/cgi-bin/education/sboe/sboe.pl?y=2014&m=October&t=public>

We were also pleased that the Advocates for Children of New Jersey has also taken a particular interest in chronic absenteeism, publishing their own report – which can be found here: <http://acnj.org/125000-nj-children-are-chronically-absent-from-school/>

As the federal announcement makes clear, awareness of the impact of chronic absenteeism is an important first step. There are resources that schools can use to raise awareness at the Attendance Works website, located here: <http://www.attendanceworks.org/>

I urge you to review your attendance data, identify students who are on track to being chronically absent (i.e., missing two or more days a month on average), and devise supports for those students. From both national research and the research that we've conducted using our own data, it is plain that students who miss school frequently achieve at lower levels than those that are in school regularly.

I thank you for your efforts on this important front!

BAE/st

c: Members, State Board of Education  
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