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## Monitoring Student Attendance and the SARB Process

The Attendance Clerk has a very important role in improving both attendance and student learning. Identifying and monitoring students who are developing poor attendance habits enables available resources to be employed before attendance problems escalate out of control.

A positive climate often begins with the school Attendance Clerk. His/her role is critical in identifying poor attendance as he/she begins the relationship with the family regarding attendance. The Attendance Clerk is the one who will first notice that a student has poor attendance. It is important to note that school attendance requires a strong systematic approach that includes the office staff, administrators, teachers, counselors, resource specialists, and district staff. Working as a team provides the student and family the support needed to encourage good attendance and school success.

Under California law (Education Code Section 48200) all children between the ages of six and eighteen are required to be enrolled and in regular attendance at school unless exempt by other provisions of the Education Code or unless excluded, expelled, suspended, or graduated. If a student and his/her family are going to be referred to court because of habitual truancy certain steps and procedures must have been implemented prior to the referral as governed by the State of California, the San Diego County Juvenile Court and the San Diego Unified School District.

Attendance is a priority responsibility of the district/in-school counselor and/or dean of students. Their work upholds the expectations of both the district procedures and California law that every effort be made to ensure the welfare and the education of each student. Students chronically absent, whether excused for illness or unexcused and truant, are entitled to a systematic and coordinated effort to correct the underlying problems and thus allow learning to go forward. (SDCS Administrative Procedure 6150.)

The site Attendance staff is the beginning of the systematic approach to resolving attendance problems. It is he/she who notices persistent attendance problems that need to be referred to the counselor, administrator and the nurse when relevant. He/she verifies the absences and records the reasons. This information is critical in helping a student to attend school on a regular basis.

If a student has persistent truancy problems that cannot be remedied at the school site, the School Attendance Review Board (SARB) is available to provide a coordinated community effort to improve student attendance. SARB is to divert students with school attendance problems from the Juvenile Justice System after all available resources have been exhausted. As outlined by California legislation, SARB is to be considered when all site interventions and solutions have failed.

### **Attendance Letters**

The district counselor and/or administrator must be notified when a student has a large number of tardies and/or absences. The report should include the dates absence or tardy, the absence codes and any information on the student or parent. If a student has a large number of illnesses the school nurse needs to be notified and the student should be monitored. The counselor and site staff will use the Attendance Clerk's information to begin appropriate intervention.

The Attendance Clerk keeps detailed, auditable records on each identified student in case the court or state subpoenas the attendance records. The school counselor or administrator must sign attendance letters; the nurse signs the excessive illness letters.

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## **Monitoring Student Attendance and the SARB Process (continued)**

### **Attendance Letter A**

Attendance Letter A is a broad warning to the parent/guardian that their child is missing school, is frequently tardy, or has had many illnesses. Attendance Letter A is the only letter that may be used to address tardies (T). This letter may be used throughout the year. All letters are to be signed by either a counselor, administrator or nurse. The Attendance staff should notify teachers and other support staff as appropriate when a student is having attendance problems in order to set up preventative measures. A personal note on attendance letters can be effective in reducing absences. Attendance letters are to be perceived as strong interventions to be used as needed.

### **Attendance Letter B**

State law requires schools to classified a student as a Truant if he/she is absent from school without a valid excuse (codes U or Z) or is tardy or absent for more than any 30-minute period during the school day without a valid excuse (code W) on three occasions in one school year or any combination thereof. State law also requires that the student's parent/guardian receive a written notification (Letter B) outlining the state law and the possible consequences for noncompliance with the law, thus giving the parent due process in case the court becomes involved. The Mandated Cost Unit will send Letter B to the parent or guardian of a student upon the students fourth (4th) U, Z, or W or any combination thereof, in any period. Counselors will be notified by Mandated Cost via school mail at least five (5) days before the letters are sent to allow an opportunity for the school staff to review the list of student's whose parent/guardian is about to receive a letter. Contact the Mandated Cost Unit for questions about Letter B at (619)725-7567.

### **Attendance Letter C**

Once a student is reported as truant and is again absent without a valid excuse for three more days or tardy for over 30 minutes for three more days, (a total of 6 U's, Z's, or W's) the student shall be reported as a Habitual Truant. A conscientious effort shall be made to hold at least one face to face conference with the parent/guardian and the student to review the student's status, to plan remediation of the problems affecting attendance, and to document this effort. Letter C may go out after this conference has taken place. This conference is mandated by state law. If a parent refuses to meet with school staff, conscientious efforts to reach this parent must be documented. Student Study Teams (SST's) and School Attendance Review Teams (SART's) are strongly encouraged at this point. They are often the powerful interventions that address the underlying symptoms and help to remediate the attendance problem. Letter C may be given at these meetings.

### **Nurses Letter**

If a student presents many health problems the school nurse is to be notified by the Attendance Clerk. The nurse may choose to send a Nurse Letter offering his/her assistance to the family while notifying them that their student is missing too much school. This letter encourages the parent/guardian to work closely with him/her and the student's doctor to set up accommodations at school for the student. If the parent does not respond to the first letter the nurse may send out a Second Notification Letter. This letter affords the parent/guardian due process in that the nurse may use her discretion from that day forth to classify illnesses as unexcused unless there is a medical verification by either a doctor, health clinic, or school nurse.

### **Attendance Letter D-SARB**

When all efforts have failed and the student continues to be truant as defined by California Education Code, Letter D may be sent by the counselor or administrator informing the parent that they and their child are being referred to the School Attendance Review Board (SARB). This referral will include copies of Attendance Letters A,B,C,D, the nurses letters if applicable, the dates of parent conferencing, and the attendance record. The Referral Packet documents all the attempts made by the site to address the attendance problem. The SARB Referral Packet is to be filled out by the counselor/administrator documenting that all procedures for SARB are in place. The court will not accept a case without the above documentation. A court also encourages information regarding the referred student siblings and their attendance records.

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## **Monitoring Student Attendance and the SARB Process (continued)**

### **SARB**

Once SARB receives a referral a SARB Case Manager will be assigned to the student and the family will be contacted. And a SARB Staff Manager will be assigned to the student. If after SARB has worked with the student and his/her family and the student continues to be truant the family will be required to attend a SARB hearing. These hearing panels may be comprised of representatives from the following:

- San Diego City Schools
- San Diego County Probation Department
- San Diego Police Department, Juvenile Division
- San Diego Department of Social Services
- Community-based organizations
- Children's Hospital

At the hearing, additional resources and services are offered by the SARB panel to the family. SARB requires a certificated staff member, usually a counselor, site administrator, and/or the nurse to attend these hearings to help facilitate the panel suggestions and to continue monitoring and working with the student at the school.

If, after the hearing, the student continues to be truant, the student and their parent/guardian will be referred to the San Diego City Attorney's Office or the San Diego District Attorney's Office, depending on the age of the student. Referrals are made to the City Attorney's Office when the student is under the age of 12; the parent is responsible for the student's attendance. The District Attorney receives referrals for students 12 years or older; the student is responsible. The judge will mandate further interventions that will support school attendance. At this meeting the judge will order the parent to participate in counseling, parenting classes or community service. Fines may also be imposed. In juvenile court, the student may be mandated to do community service and the parent and student may receive a fine. Another court appearance will be scheduled at this time for a follow-up. If there still is no improvement the judge may refer the student to Juvenile Hall and the parent/guardian may be further fined. Sanctions and consequences will continue to escalate until the student attends school on a regular basis. During the period that the student awaits his/her court date the Attendance Clerk continues to document attendance and the site continues to encourage school attendance.

The San Diego City Attorney's Office and the San Diego District Attorney's Office require referred cases to have all day U's and Z's, or a combination. Neither court system accepts cases of students with period absences, period trancies, or tardies, T's or W's.

State law, as well as the City Attorney's Office and the District Attorney's Office, require interventions by both schools and SARB, including a face-to-face conference. Each letter must be spaced so that interventions can be employed. Once a referral is made to the SARB office, additional interventions are required, including a home visit and conferences. If either court system determines interventions insufficient, the case will be rejected.

Special education students can be referred to SARB. The Individual Education Plan must be current. The IEP team needs to determine that poor attendance is not due to his/her disability.

For any questions regarding the SARB process call the SARB office at # 858-490-8676.