Date: May 10, 2019  
To: Chief School Administrators, Charter School and Renaissance School Project Leads  
Route To: District Data Coordinators, School Nurses, School Counselors, Attendance Officers  
From: Carolyn J. Marano, Assistant Commissioner  
Division of Student Services  
Deadline: June 30, 2019

Updated Guidance: Reporting Student Absences and Calculating Chronic Absenteeism

Chronic absenteeism has been shown to negatively impact learning across grade levels. In recognition of the importance of attendance, chronic absenteeism was identified as New Jersey’s indicator of school quality or student success in New Jersey’s Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) State Plan for accountability. In an effort to assist schools in their efforts to address chronic absenteeism, the New Jersey Department of Education’s (NJDOE) guidance has been updated.

Schools and districts must submit attendance data according to the NJDOE’s guidelines for all students and subgroups through the online NJ SMART Student ID Management system by June 30, 2019. Schools completing an Annual School Plan may use the guidance documents to analyze attendance data and identify a SMART goal with targeted strategies to improve attendance.

The NJDOE’s Guidance for Reporting Student Absences and Calculating Chronic Absenteeism was first released in May 2017. Annually, the NJDOE reviews questions it has received from the field and revises the guidance for better clarification. Additionally, districts are reminded to review any attendance data nonfictions provided by the NJDOE’s NJ SMART contractor in preparation for submitting data for the 2018-19 school year to better capture accurate data.

The revised Guidance for Reporting Student Absences and Calculating Chronic Absenteeism responds to new questions from the field and provides information on changes since the last release. It also includes new information to further support accurate reporting and analysis of data by school and district leadership teams and other stakeholders. It is important to note the following:

- Schools can still determine how “excused” and “unexcused” absences are defined for the purposes of expectations and consequences regarding truancy, student conduct, promotion, retention, and the award of course credit, pursuant to N.J.A.C. 6A:16-7.6, as this remains unchanged. However, a school must report student attendance to the NJDOE in accordance with the guidance document.
- Attendance data should be reported for all students accountable to a district during any point during the 2018-19 school year – from July 1 to June 30 – even if that student transferred, dropped out or was otherwise not a member of the district at the end of the school year.
- Before a district makes its final submission to NJ SMART SID Management, the district should ensure that attendance has been recorded for a student through the last day of the school year.

Accurate data enables schools and districts to identify students who may be at risk of chronic absenteeism and allows them to intervene early.
Chronic absenteeism can be turned around by engaging families, leveraging staff mentors for student support, utilizing data early and often, and providing a school culture and climate that encourages students to come to school every day. When a concern is identified, there are many actions schools can take to reverse the trend.

To assist districts in improving student attendance, a companion document, *Strategies for Addressing Chronic Absenteeism*, is available on the NJDOE’s Attendance, Truancy, and Chronic Absenteeism webpage.

Questions may be directed to Attendance@doe.nj.gov.

c: Members, State Board of Education
   Lamont O. Repollet, Ed.D., Commissioner of Education
   NJDOE Staff
   Statewide Parent Advocacy Network
   Garden State Coalition of Schools
   NJ LEE Group