

Shifting Mindsets on Chronic Absenteeism Series - Session 3

Supporting Better Attendance Practices: The Evolving Role of COEs

Below are the responses to questions submitted to the presenters during the third Open Door session of the Shifting Mindsets on Chronic Absenteeism Series, Supporting Better Attendance Practices: The Evolving Role of COEs, held on May 31, 2023. Questions that were submitted are not necessarily provided verbatim, and may have been edited for clarity, but have not been altered in substance. Questions that are similar or on the same topic have been grouped together for ease of navigation and response.

Presenters:



Rachel Perry
Executive Director,
Center for Student Assessment &
Program Accountability, Sacramento
County Office of Education



Caryn Lewis
Assistant Superintendent,
Educational Services, Monterey
County Office of Education



Cecelia Leong
Vice President of Programs,
Attendance Works

QUESTIONS

- How often did SCOE hold workshops on improving attendance (slide 15)?

***Rachel Perry:** Workshops were scheduled six times a year: two in the Fall and four in the Spring, with a lot of thought as to the timing (e.g., 3-4:30) to best fit in with school site staff schedules.*

- Are LEAs required to send out Truancy notification letters or is this something that LEAs can stop doing?

***Cecelia Leong:** California Ed Code specifies when LEAs should notify families about unexcused absences. However, LEAs have leeway to modify the tone and content of the NOT (notification of truancy) letters to express concern and offer support rather than threatening legal consequences. See these examples from the [State Attendance Review Board](#). [Research](#) shows that better truancy notifications—ones that start with positive language, make the connection between attendance and achievement, use fewer words, that are written at the 5th grade reading level and formatted to help readers skim quickly—resulted in better attendance.*

Also note that NOTs are just one step in a comprehensive tiered attendance intervention system. In the vast majority of cases, you need to understand what is leading to absences and either remove a barrier or change a behavior in order to improve attendance and reduce chronic absence.

- Is Differentiated Assistance from MCOE for LEAs solely around chronic absenteeism or is it one of several areas of focus the COE provides?

***Caryn Lewis:** County Offices of Education (COEs) provide differentiated assistance in a wide variety of focus areas determined by state and local data included in the California School Dashboard. These data help inform local decisions regarding continuous improvement efforts along with internal district data and system-level analysis. Throughout the self-assessment process, LEAs identify an area of focus to improve student outcomes. In Monterey County, four LEAs selected to focus on chronic absenteeism and engage in this process through a community of practice model. The COE provides differentiated assistance for many additional focus areas, depending on the identified need.*

- How much do we know about why students are not coming to school? What are we learning from the students who are not attending?

***Caryn:** Students in Monterey County are sharing a variety of reasons for missing school - such as changing family circumstances, the need to support the family by holding a job, anxiety related to many challenges, and a need for new learning experiences within the environment.*

- Have any leaders in the state suggested that we use this opportunity to join the majority of states across the country and explore/pursue a competency-based approach to education, where we worry less about seat time and more about whether students can demonstrate a level of mastery/competency in both core academic areas as well as success skills (i.e., 6Cs)?

***Rachel:** That is an interesting perspective on addressing attendance and chronic absenteeism. Individuals interested in pursuing further conversations about this idea should explore reaching out to their local elected officials, Superintendent Thurmond's office at the California Department of Education, or the members of the State Board of Education.*