



February 3, 2016

Honorable Margaret Doherty
Chair, House Education Committee
900 Court Street NE Salem, Oregon 97301

Chair Doherty and Members of the House Education Committee,

We commend the House Education Committee for your consideration of chronic absenteeism as a key issue impacting Oregon students and communities. In Oregon, one-in-ten students routinely miss more than 10 percent of their school days. This group of students has a significantly lower chance of graduating high school. Chronic absenteeism is also more likely for students of color and students navigating poverty. Since 2012, the State has made the reduction of chronic absenteeism a key outcome, and the Chief Education Office identified improving student attendance as one of the most critical initiatives to reaching state educational goals.

As the State's P-20 coordinating agency, the Chief Education Office has worked with school districts, the Oregon Department of Education, the Early Learning Division, and the Oregon Health Authority to research causes and identify solutions. We know three patterns of chronic absenteeism exist: a large number of students start missing school in Kindergarten, sixth grade, and ninth grade. Our research identified collaborative approaches, involving multiple cross-agency partners, are especially effective in improving attendance. Many statewide Regional Achievement Collaboratives supported by the Chief Education Office, have identified improving student attendance as a goal, and have built local partnerships and programs to holistically support students and families.

We recently collaborated with Portland State University to conduct extensive focus groups with students and families across the state to better understand the factors contributing to chronic absenteeism. For example, the findings showed students and families who endured trauma inside and outside of school, was a key factor affecting chronic absenteeism. In addition, our work this fall with the Poverty Workgroup created by House Bill 2968 and the Tribal Attendance Project, a Legislative investment from the 2015 session, has further identified the historical and generational sources of traumatic stress on students.

A comprehensive, trauma-informed approach to improve the educational and health interventions in schools is one strategy showing promise in making a difference for students. It is clear that more coherent, coordinated efforts to deliver health, education, and other comprehensive supports for students and families are needed to truly address chronic absenteeism and create a bright future for all Oregon students.

Sincerely,

Lindsey Capps
Acting Chief Education Officer