

California School Absences Project Fact Sheet

BACKGROUND:

California is facing an elementary school truancy and absence crisis, with dire consequences for the well-being of its children and its economy. In elementary schools across the state, truancy and chronic absence occur at rates that are deeply troubling and have long-term negative effects:

- **In the 2012–2013 school year, 1 out of every 5 elementary school students were truant, and 1 out of every 10 kindergartners and first graders missed more than 10% of the school year.**
- **4 out of 5 students who missed more than 10% of both kindergarten and first grade were unable to read on-level by third grade.**
- **Students who cannot read on-level in third grade are 4 times more likely to drop out of school before they graduate.**
- **Low income and minority students disproportionately represent those students with the most severe attendance problems. For instance, 1 out of every 4 African American kindergartners missed more than 10% of the school year, and 4 out of 5 elementary school students who missed more than 20% of the school year were low-income. These attendance disparities help widen the achievement gap.**

ABOUT THE PROJECT:

The messaging recommendations were developed based on extensive research conducted to:

- **Understand the issues of truancy and chronic absenteeism in California, and what is currently being done to combat them.**
- **Gain a deeper understanding of parents' attitudes and behaviors surrounding school attendance and truancy.**
- **Observe parent and student behaviors to identify key attitudes and behaviors that need to change.**
- **Gain a better understanding of what would move parents to act (i.e. ensure their child regularly attends school).**
- **Determine how best to frame a message about attendance that is clear, relevant and motivating to parents of elementary school-aged children.**
- **Identify the best communication channels to reach parents with an attendance message.**

KEY OBJECTIVE:

To communicate to California parents of elementary school students the importance of consistent school attendance and the impact absences can have on academic outcomes.

MAIN MESSAGE:

Every Absence Matters: Just 2 days missed per month adds up and can threaten the educational foundation that is critical to their academic success.

TARGET AUDIENCE:

Parents of children in elementary school (K-5), with an emphasis on lower-income parents of color.

Detailed research findings, communication recommendations, and resources on chronic absenteeism in California are provided in an online toolkit (www.oag.ca.gov/truancy/toolkit).



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ABOUT THE PARTNERS:

Office of the Attorney General, State of California

The Attorney General represents the People of California in civil and criminal matters before both state and federal courts. She also assists state officers, agencies, and law enforcement in the administration of justice. Attorney General Kamala D. Harris has been committed to being “smart on crime,” addressing root causes of crime and focusing on prevention. Because of its relationship to later crime and other negative outcomes, reducing chronic absenteeism and truancy is an important part of that approach.

The Ad Council

The Ad Council is a private, non-profit organization with a rich history of marshaling volunteer talent from the advertising and media industries to deliver critical messages to the American public. Having produced literally thousands of PSA campaigns addressing the most pressing social issues of the day, the Ad Council has affected, and continues to affect, tremendous positive change by raising awareness, inspiring action and saving lives. To learn more about the Ad Council and its campaigns, visit www.adcouncil.org, like us on **Facebook**, follow us on **Twitter** or view our **PSAs on YouTube**.

The California Endowment

The California Endowment is a foundation that focuses on health and health equity. The California Endowment’s mission is to expand access to affordable, quality health care for underserved individuals and communities and to promote fundamental improvements in the health status of all Californians. The California Endowment’s goal is simple: First, change the way people view health—from the notion that health happens in the doctor’s office to a belief that health happens where you live, work, learn, and play. Second, integrate smart solutions in communities across the state. To do this, California Endowment works with their partners and grantees to fundamentally change “the rules”—laws, policies, and systems—that impede health in our communities.