# Superintendent’s Memo #205-19


**COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA
Department of Education**

DATE: August 30, 2019

TO: Division Superintendents

FROM: James F. Lane, Ed.D., Superintendent of Public Instruction

## SUBJECT: September is Attendance Awareness Month

School attendance is essential to academic success. Research shows that missing as little as two days every month, or ten percent of the school year can have a significant impact on students. Missing school can translate into third-graders unable to master reading, sixth-graders failing courses and ultimately, teens dropping out of high school. In Virginia, missing ten percent of the school year is considered chronic absenteeism.  Chronic absenteeism includes excused and unexcused absences.

This September will mark the seventh annual [Attendance Awareness Month](http://awareness.attendanceworks.org/) campaign, an opportunity to rally your community, advocates, policymakers, volunteers, funders, and supporters around the importance of attendance and its role in academic achievement.  The campaign is spearheaded by [*Attendance Works*](http://www.attendanceworks.org/), a national initiative that promotes better policy and practice around school attendance.

As a part of the "Call to Action" from the United States Department of Education (USDOE), and the [Every Student, Every Day](https://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/chronicabsenteeism/toolkit.pdf) Initiative, superintendents are encouraged to:

* **Prioritize Attendance**: Make clear that improved student attendance is one of the top priorities for your teachers and principal;
* **Mobilize the Community**: Reach out to make improved student attendance a broadly owned and widely shared civic priority; and
* **Drive with Data**: Use data to map the attendance gap, showing how many students are chronically absent and if they are concentrated in particular grades, schools, and student populations.

The Virginia Department of Education (VDOE), in collaboration with *Attendance Works*, has created a 12 module series entitled [Attendance and Truancy Among Virginia Students](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/support/prevention/attendance-truancy/attendance-truancy-va-students/index.shtml). The modules include a Participant/Facilitator Guide, which can be viewed individually or in a group, and will assist schools and divisions in looking at current practice and at ways to improve future practice with the goal of addressing and eliminating chronic absenteeism, and ultimately boost student outcomes and success. Also, a Chronic Absenteeism webinar will be hosted by the Virginia Department of Education on Friday, September 27, 2019, from 9:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. Information on accessing the webinar will be sent to Superintendents in early September.

Additional information and resources, including an [Attendance Awareness Month Tool Kit](https://awareness.attendanceworks.org/resources/toolkit/), are available on the [*Attendance Works*](http://www.attendanceworks.org/) website.  Questions regarding resources to promote attendance may be directed to Michael Gregory, School Social Work Specialist, by telephone at (804) 225-4543, or by email, at Michael.Gregory@doe.virginia.gov.

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