



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA  
Department of Education

August 12, 2016

TO: Division Superintendents

FROM: Steven R. Staples, Superintendent of Public Instruction

**SUBJECT: September is Attendance Awareness Month**

School attendance is essential to academic success, but too often parents, students and sometimes teachers do not realize how quickly absences, excused as well as unexcused, can add up to academic trouble. At the same time principals, district leaders and community members often do not know if chronic absence is a significant problem in local schools.

Research shows that missing as little as two-three days every month is considered chronic absence, and can translate into third-graders unable to master reading, sixth-graders failing courses and ultimately, teens dropping out of high school.

This September will mark the fourth annual [Attendance Awareness Month](#) 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](#), a national and state 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](#) 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, in collaboration with Attendance Works, has also created a 12 module series entitled [Attendance and Truancy Among Virginia Students](#). This training, which also includes a Participant/Facilitator Guide, can be viewed individually or in a group and will assist schools and divisions in looking at current practice and in looking at ways to improve future practice with the goal of addressing and eliminating chronic absenteeism, and ultimately boost student outcomes and success.

Additional information and resources, including a [Tool Kit](#), are available at the Attendance [Works Web site](#). If you have questions contact Joseph Wharff, school counseling specialist, by telephone at (804) 225-3370, or by e-mail at [Joseph.Wharff@doe.virginia.gov](mailto:Joseph.Wharff@doe.virginia.gov).

SRS/JAW/rt

