



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA
Department of Education

August 21, 2015

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 students, parents and schools don't realize how quickly absences, excused or unexcused, can add up to academic trouble. Chronic absence, missing just 18 days per school year, can lead to third graders unable to master reading, sixth graders failing courses and ninth graders dropping out of high school. The impact is the greatest on economically disadvantaged students who lack the resources to make up for the lost time in the classroom.

This September will mark the third 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. Additional partners include America's Promise Alliance, Campaign for Grade-Level Reading, Points of Light and United Way Worldwide.

As a part of the "Call to Action," 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.

Additional information and resources, including a [Tool Kit](#), are available at the [Attendance Works Website](#). 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.

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