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To: BOCES District Superintendents
Superintendents of Public School Districts
Principals of Public Schools
Charter School Leaders

From: Kathleen R. DeCataldo 

Subject: Accurately Reporting Attendance and Chronic Absenteeism Data

In a recent audit conducted by the Office of the State Comptroller on the Department's [Oversight of Chronic Absenteeism](#), auditors noted significant concerns about the accuracy of data submitted to the Student Information Repository System (SIRS) by districts. In particular, the auditors identified instances of improperly coded absences that resulted in inaccurate identification of students as chronically absent. The auditors noted this issue appears to be attributable to "mapping" of local attendance codes to the State Attendance Codes collected in SIRS at the local level.

This memo is intended to provide guidance to help districts and schools accurately report attendance data in the SIRS and to use the data to recognize and address chronic absenteeism at the student and school level.

The New York State Education Department's (the Department) approved [Every Student Succeeds Act \(ESSA\) Plan](#) includes Chronic Absenteeism as a measure of School Quality and Student Success for school and district accountability, beginning with the 2017-18 school year results.

[Commissioner's Regulation §104.1](#) regarding pupil attendance recordkeeping indicates that the purpose of the regulation is to accomplish the following:

1. ensure the maintenance of an adequate record verifying the attendance of all children at instruction in accordance with Education Law section 3205;
2. establish a practical mechanism for every public and nonpublic elementary, middle and secondary school in the State of New York to account to the parents of all children enrolled in such schools for the whereabouts of such children throughout each school day; and
3. ensure sufficient pupil attendance at all scheduled periods of actual instruction or supervised study activities to permit such pupils to succeed at meeting the State learning standards.

It is understood that to comply with these requirements, district and school attendance systems contain detailed records that allow school officials to *“account to the parents of all children enrolled in such schools for the whereabouts of such children throughout each school day.”*

Although the detail of the records collected by district and school attendance systems throughout the state may vary, it is necessary for these local attendance codes to be “mapped” to the State Attendance codes collected in SIRS. The State Attendance codes are “E” for an excused absence, and “U” for an unexcused absence. For example, a school local attendance system may include codes that track why a student was not present in class(es) for events such as field trips, school nurse office visits, or an off-campus school event. Such information is necessary to account for a student’s whereabouts during the school day. However, for the purpose of reporting data regarding chronic absenteeism, school activities should not be reported in SIRS as excused (“E”) or unexcused (“U”) absences.

Chronic absenteeism or absence differs from traditional attendance collection systems because the emphasis is on ***missed instructional time*** without a focus on the reason(s) that instructional time is missed. This distinguishes it from truancy, which focuses exclusively on unexcused absences.

Chronic absence data gives schools and districts the ability to identify students within their schools who repeatedly miss instruction. To address the auditors’ identified instances of improperly coded absences that resulted in inaccurately identifying students as chronically absent, districts **must** take steps to ensure the following:

- Accurate “mapping” of State Attendance codes collected in SIRS to local attendance codes in district (or school) student management systems used to maintain student attendance records;
- School-affiliated absences from instruction, such as field trips, assemblies, college fairs, etc. as defined in local attendance policy, **are not reported as absences** from school in SIRS;
- Other than school-affiliated activities (mentioned above) that are not reported as absences from instruction, all other missed instructional time should be reported as an absence;
- **Complete and accurate** daily student attendance, enrollment, and school calendar data are submitted to SIRS, and that data submitted to SIRS are reviewed, verified, and re-submitted to SIRS as necessary, prior to the reporting deadline (for more information see the SIRS reporting timeline: <http://p12.nysed.gov/irs/>);
- An internal process for verification and communication between the data coordinator and the attendance official that meets the individual needs of the district or school is established to ensure accurate data are reported to SIRS; and
- The superintendent reviews and certifies the accuracy of the data that have

been submitted in SIRS in accordance with the SIRS reporting timeline (<http://p12.nysed.gov/irs/>). In the coming months, the Department will be contacting selected schools and districts to schedule on-site monitoring visits to review current attendance practices and data accuracy.

Verifying Accuracy of Data Reported to the Department

Attendance and chronic absenteeism verification reports are available in the Department’s Level 2 Verification Reporting System (L2RPT) to assist schools in verifying the accuracy of data submitted in SIRS and used in accountability determinations. A brief description of the reports is provided below. More specific information is available in the report guides posted at <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/irs/level2reports/SIRS-360--361-combinedReportGuide.pdf> and <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/irs/level2reports/documents/sirs-107-chronic-absenteeism-accountability-report-guide.pdf>.

SIRS-351 Student Attendance Summary Report: This report provides a year-to-date summary count of students absent (excused, unexcused), tardy, in-school and out-of-school suspensions. This report is intended to provide a brief summary of the daily student attendance records being reported in SIRS to simplify the task of verification. As with other summary reports in L2RPT, designated staff can “drill through” from the summary report to a student detail report that shows for each day, the students who are included in the summary count.

SIRS-360 Student Attendance Daily Summary Report: This report provides a daily summary count of students enrolled, absent and tardy. This report is intended to provide a simplified summary of the daily student attendance records being reported in SIRS to assist in the task of verification. As with other summary reports in L2RPT, designated staff can “drill through” from the summary report to a student detail report that shows for each day, the students who are included in the summary count.

SIRS-361 Year-to-Date Student Attendance/Absenteeism Summary Report: This report provides, by grade or by student subgroup, a year-to-date summary of attendance days, the number of students enrolled during the school year, the number and percentage of students absent between 0-4% of enrolled school days, 5-9% of enrolled school days (at-risk of becoming chronically absent), and 10% or more of enrolled school days (chronically absent). Designated staff can “drill through” from the summary report to a student detail report that shows the following for each student:

- the number of days enrolled, present, and absent; and
- the start and end enrollment dates.

SIRS-370 Day Calendar Summary Report - This report provides a summary of the data reported for each calendar day types by grade for instructional and non-instructional days. The drill through provides a day type for each calendar day by month. The count of

instructional days is used in the calculation of student chronic absenteeism.

SIRS-107 Chronic Absenteeism Accountability Report - This report allows districts and schools to view data they reported in SIRS that will be used to determine Chronic Absenteeism at the elementary/middle level (grades 1-8 and ungraded age equivalent) and the secondary level (grades 9-12 and ungraded age equivalent) for accountability purposes. For these purposes, students are considered chronically absent if they were enrolled for 10 or more instructional days, in attendance for at least one of those days, and absent (excused or unexcused) for 10% or more of their enrolled instructional days. Additional information about the data contained in the report is available in the [Chronic Absenteeism Accountability Report Guide](#). For more information about the State Plan, the New York State accountability system, and how each of the accountability measures is used to determine school and district accountability statuses, please visit: [Office of Accountability – Every Student Succeeds Act \(ESSA\)](#).

We look forward to continuing to work with you on this important initiative. If you have questions or concerns, please contact Student Support Services at (518) 486-6090 or StudentSupportServices@nysed.gov. If you have questions or concerns about the data in the reports or in SIRS, please contact your Regional Information Center or Big 5 Data Coordinator, or you may contact the Office of Information and Reporting Services at datasupport@nysed.gov. If you have questions about the use of the chronic absenteeism data for accountability purposes, please contact accountinfo@nysed.gov.