



**THE INITIATIVE:** Research confirms the clear connection between health, learning, and attendance. In support of this, State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Torlakson has initiated **Team California for Healthy Kids (TCHK)** to promote healthy foods and physical activity throughout the day, every day, in schools, before and after school programs, early childhood programs, and communities. The campaign focuses on making healthy choices the easy choices.



### HEALTHY STUDENTS LEARN BETTER

- Health is critical to academic success. Active and well nourished children/youth have better attendance, stay in school, and are ready to learn.
- Research demonstrates that regular physical activity and physical fitness are associated with higher levels of academic performance. Giving students breaks for physical activity throughout the school day can significantly increase on task behavior.<sup>1</sup>

### The Costs of Poor Health to Students and Schools

- Adolescents with poorer general health are less likely to graduate from high school on time or attend college or post-secondary education.
- Chronic diseases such as asthma, diabetes, obesity, and tooth decay affect about 20 to 30% of children and adolescents in California, which leads to more absenteeism and lower school performance.
- Children with poor oral health and poor general health are more than twice as likely to report poorer school performance as those with good oral health.
- Students who experience high levels of stress or depression tend to do poorly in school.
- Health-risk behaviors such as substance use, violence, and physical inactivity are consistently linked to academic failure and often affect students' attendance, grades, test scores, and ability to pay attention.<sup>2</sup>

## Health, Academic Achievement and Attendance

<sup>1</sup> Trost, SG and van der Mars H. *Why We Should Not Cut P.E.* Educational Leadership, Health and Learning, 2009/2010:67(4):60-65. -

<sup>2</sup> Dewey JD. *Reviewing the relationship between school factors and substance use for elementary, middle, and high school students.* Journal of Primary Prevention 1999: 19(3):1777-225. Swingle CA. *The relationship between health of school-age children and learning implications for schools.* Lansing, MI; Michigan Department of School Health; 19997

# Health, Academic Achievement and Attendance

## Attendance is a Risk Factor for Other Problems

- Almost 18 percent of California adolescents have asthma, which was responsible for an estimated 1.9 million missed days of school in California in 2005. Asthma is the leading cause of absenteeism.
- Children who miss 20 or more days of school in kindergarten through grade three do poorly in school, and have future problems with truancy, delinquency, substance abuse, and drop out of school.
- For low income students in urban areas, each additional day absent from school in elementary grades is associated with a seven percent lower probability of graduating from high school.
- Truancy is a 97 percent predictor of first time drug use. The greater the number of truant days, the greater the use.<sup>1</sup>

## The Difference that Schools Can Make

Schools are crucial players in helping to ensure the health of their students. They can take steps – many of which have no or little cost – to help their students be healthy. These “education supports” are resources, services, strategies, and practices within and outside of school that ensure that all students are physically, socially, emotionally and intellectually ready to succeed in school.

## What Can School, Health and Community Leaders Do?

1. Work together as partners towards a continuum of support for students' physical, social, and emotional needs.
2. Participate in a school health advisory committee, evaluate the local school wellness plan on a regular basis; schools should designate a coordinator.
3. Work together to conduct an assessment and review data utilizing resources such as the California Healthy Kids Survey, California School Climate Survey, and local school attendance records.
4. Create and implement policies that support school health.
5. Identify sufficient resources to succeed.



### Resources

- The California Endowment, *The Critical Connection Between Health and Academic Achievement: How Schools and Policymakers Can Achieve a Positive Impact*
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Student Health and Academic Achievement*
- California Department of Education, *Team California for Healthy Kids*
- California Department of Education, *Coordinated School Health*

This document is adapted from *The Critical Connection Between Student Health and Academic Achievement: How Schools and Policymakers Can Achieve a Positive Impact*, The California Education Supports Project, 2011.

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *Youth Violence: A Report of the Surgeon General*, Rockville, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control; Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Mental Health Services; and National Institutes of Health, National Institute of Mental Health, 2001

