



Chapter 6:

Student Attendance is Rooted in Personal Relationships; Safe, Clean Schools; and Meaningful Learning

As wildfires overwhelmed southern California, L.A. Unified closed over 250 schools this week. When the fires erupted, I went to nearby schools and experienced the smoke. As both a mother and colleague, I was consumed with concern for the safety of our students and staff. We worked around-the-clock to gather intel, assess, coordinate, make hard choices, and communicate—tasks of great magnitude and difficulty in any situation involving school closures, but made even more challenging by a threat that shifted with the unpredictable, powerful winds. We relocated a handful of schools the first morning, closed over 50 the next, and shut down the entire Valley and schools in the west the day after. We also established three sites where we offered meals to students of closed schools, and partnered with the City of L.A. to expand access to recreation centers in the Valley. With conditions now significantly improved, all schools will be open on Monday. My heartfelt gratitude goes to all who assisted!

We are taking steps to ensure that our safety-driven closures do not result in a loss of attendance-related resources. The revenue we receive from the state is determined by how many students attend school each day. When there is a natural disaster, the state has an established waiver process to excuse drops in attendance. To ensure that this waiver process will be applied to *all* schools impacted by the fires, the District and our labor partners sent a [letter](#) to State Superintendent Tom Torlakson and reached out to him personally to reiterate this request. He was very understanding and expressed his full support, for which we are grateful. We are also pursuing financial relief from the federal government.

Attendance drives revenue, but more importantly, it drives *learning*, which is why we are doubling down on our attendance efforts this year. From an early age, attendance is one of the greatest predictors of long-term success. We are accelerating attendance efforts by empowering schools with real-time attendance data and resources for individualized intervention; launching a community-wide

[campaign](#) around the importance of coming to school; mailing personalized alerts to students with low attendance; and expanding partnerships with community organizations. These efforts are great, but they alone are not enough.

Student attendance is rooted in personal relationships; safe, clean campuses; and meaningful learning. *You* have the power to cultivate these conditions and increase student attendance—one act at a time. When you warmly greet a student by name in the morning, pick up a piece of trash on campus, comfort a hurting child, mentor a struggling youth, build a connection with a caregiver, impart wisdom through classroom lessons or hallway pep talks, or fuel these efforts through your work in a central office, you are making schools safer, more welcoming, and happier places for our youth, thereby inspiring their daily attendance. These simple acts can transform a student's life trajectory and open up new worlds of opportunity. This is the tremendous power of public education, realized. As a bonus, if our collective efforts are able to get every student to miss just *one day* less of school, it will result in approximately \$30 million of additional revenue. That is a lot of money—and a lot of learning—for your small daily investments.

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