



# EXCUSED ABSENCES FOR MENTAL HEALTH

A PROJECT OF COMMUNITY EQUITY COLLABORATIVE

## How to Advocate at your School Board Meeting

### HOW TO MAKE A “PUBLIC COMMENT”

By right, members of the public can speak at the meetings of elected and appointed government bodies, within certain guidelines. These inputs are called “public comments.”

- To find out how to make a comment at your school board meeting, **visit your district’s website**, find the page for the “School Board” or “Board of Education” and click through to the meeting agendas page, where you can find the time of the meeting and how to participate, virtually or in person.
- Find the meeting agenda for the date you wish to comment. Look for the start of the Open/Public Session and then for the **“Public Comment”** agenda item. This is the time when anyone from the public can make a general comment related to items not on the agenda for that evening.
- **If you are making your comment in person**, you can pick up and submit a “comment (or speaker) card” from the board clerk at any time. Indicate on the card that you would like to speak during general public comment.
- **If you are making your comment via Zoom**, raise your virtual hand when the board president or clerk reaches that agenda item and asks whether any members of the public would like to make a comment.
- You will have an **allotted amount of time** (usually 2 or 3 minutes) to make your comment. Practice to be sure you can finish in time!

### TALKING POINTS

Here is a draft script with talking points you can choose from to make your comment.

*Good evening. My name is [name] and I am a [student/alumnus/parent/staff member/member of the general public]. I’m commenting tonight to make sure you know about a new law that Governor Newsom signed in 2021. This law expands school attendance policies to include absences for the purpose of supporting student mental health in the list of acceptable reasons for an excused absence.*

[Choose from the talking points below, or create your own!]

- **Occasional mental health days can prevent** long-term mental health issues that can cause chronic absenteeism and stand in the way of student academic performance and wellness.

- **Mental health affects brain development**, social and emotional skills, and academic success. The occasional mental health wellness day can keep a student in a healthy frame of mind and teaches students to prioritize their mental health from an early age.
- We are experiencing a **youth mental health crisis** in California: 45% of teens report having recently struggled with their mental health; almost  $\frac{1}{3}$  have recently experienced serious psychological distress. LGBTQ+, low-income, and multi-racial youth are at even higher risk. In California, suicide is the **second-leading cause of death** for adolescents.
- Tell your own story about student mental health!

Here are a few things this school district can do now to help:

- **Update your attendance policies** to reflect this new law.
- Ensure all teachers are aware that, **by law, they must allow students to make up work** when they take an excused absence for the purpose of mental health.
- Ensure attendance policies are **easily accessible** on your district and school-site websites, in student/family handbooks, etc.
- Provide information about SB 14 as part of the **mental health component of your health curriculum**.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak.