

## DOCKETED

<b>Docket Number:</b>	08-AFC-08A
<b>Project Title:</b>	Hydrogen Energy Center Application for Certification Amendment
<b>TN #:</b>	200701
<b>Document Title:</b>	Ann Gallon Comments: HECA: Kern Schools absenteeism & high incidence of asthma
<b>Description:</b>	N/A
<b>Filer:</b>	System
<b>Organization:</b>	Ann Gallon
<b>Submitter Role:</b>	Public
<b>Submission Date:</b>	10/1/2013 2:58:39 PM
<b>Docketed Date:</b>	10/1/2013

*Comment Received From: Ann Gallon*

*Submitted On: 10/1/2013*

*Docket Number: 08-AFC-08A*

## **HECA: Kern Schools absenteeism & high incidence of asthma**

TO CEC:

I wish to submit additional information supporting my opposition to the siting of HECA in Kern County. This quote is from an October 1, 2013 news article by staff writer Courtenay Edelhart and published in The Bakersfield Californian, page 2, titled "Absenteeism Crimps Kern Schools." Source article is attached. This is a pertinent excerpt:

"Another challenge for Kern schools is a high number of sick children, since the education funding formula takes into account all absences, including excused absences for illness.

That hits Central Valley schools hard because of their disproportionately high asthma rates and large numbers of children with no health insurance, according to KCSOS officials."

This is another reason that the HECA project is not appropriate for siting in Kern County.

*Additional submitted attachment is included below.*

## Absenteeism crimps Kern schools' funding

<http://www.bakersfieldcalifornian.com/local/grade/x196572302/Absenteeism-crimps-Kern-schools-funding>

BY COURTENAY EDELHART Californian staff writer [cedelhart@bakersfield.com](mailto:cedelhart@bakersfield.com) October 1, 2013

Kern County is among the most severely affected counties in the state for public funding lost by students missing school, according to a report released Monday.

That was among the findings of a new report, "In School and On Track," issued by the office of California Attorney General Kamala Harris.

Top 10 California school districts lost ADA revenue, per pupil

**Taft Union High** \$2,325

**Orick Elementary** \$1,232

**Feather Falls Union Elementary** \$1,219

**La Grange Elementary** \$1,084

**Upper Lake Union High** \$1,035

**Kashia Elementary** \$1,034

**Santa Cruz City High** \$862

**Willow Creek Elementary** \$836

**Round Valley Unified** \$793

**Upper Lake Union Elementary** \$718

*Source: "In School and On Track" report from the office of the California Attorney General*

"The California Constitution guarantees every child the right to an education, yet we are failing our youngest children, as early as kindergarten," Harris said in a statement issued along with the report. "These are children as young as 5 years old who are out of school, falling behind, and too many of them never catch up."

"This crisis is not only crippling for our economy, it is a basic threat to public safety."

It costs public schools money when students miss class because federal and state funding is based in part on average daily attendance, or ADA.

California school districts lost about \$1.4 billion in the 2010-11 school year due to student absences, according to the latest data available in the report.

Absenteeism cost Kern County public schools \$319.09 per pupil. That was the 10th highest per-pupil loss of the state's 58 counties and added up to nearly \$53.9 million.

That's not surprising given the demographics of the region, said Mary Barlow, assistant superintendent of administration, finance and accountability at the Kern County Superintendent of Schools office.

Kern County has a large number of low-income students, "and those families tend to have a harder time getting their kids to school," she said.

Another challenge for Kern schools is a high number of sick children, since the education funding formula takes into account all absences, including excused absences for illness.

That hits Central Valley schools hard because of their disproportionately high asthma rates and large numbers of children with no health insurance, according to KCSOS officials.

Taft Union High School District left the most ADA money per student on the table of any district in the state, losing \$2,325 for each student who didn't show up.

Taft Superintendent Blanca Cavazos and business manager Chuck Hagstrom were both out of the office Monday and could not be reached for comment.

School board members Kenneth Anderson, Stan Barrett and Tom White said they hadn't seen the report and declined comment.

California's public schools already are financially challenged, according to the report. The state dropped to 49th in the nation in per pupil spending in 2010, paying \$8,482 per student.

In that light, schools need to capture as much money as they can with high attendance, said Daryl Thiesen, prevention programs coordinator for KCSOS.

Local districts are attacking the problem on two fronts, Thiesen said.

There are proactive efforts, such as incentives and rewards to keep children from missing school in the first place, and there is early intervention to redirect students who are on a path to becoming habitual truants.

It doesn't help that probation officers dedicated to monitoring habitual truants were a casualty of recession-related budget cuts, Thiesen said, but schools are using their remaining resources to deal with the problem.

A coalition of education and law enforcement officials meets regularly to share ideas and information aimed at keeping students in school. Called the Truancy Reduction & Attendance Coalition of Kern, or TRACK, the group has a website with resources for educators and parents: [www.kernstayinschool.org](http://www.kernstayinschool.org).

Also, many school districts, including Kern High School District, have websites where parents can track grades and attendance online.

Parents who neglect their children's education are fined, Thiesen said, but often, parents aren't aware there's a problem, or they may know but can't control their children.

"We try to provide parenting classes and other support to parents whose children are just willfully defiant," he said.

Sometimes, it's just a matter of making parents aware of simple changes to prevent avoidable absences, said KCSOS' Barlow.

"We need to train our parents to schedule doctor appointments after school instead of mid-morning, and to stick to school breaks for family vacations," she said.

Those unnecessary absences rob schools of much needed money to serve students, Barlow said. And more importantly, regularly missing school hurts a student's odds of graduating and succeeding in life, she said.

"That's our highest priority."