

[Insert date here]

Dear Board Member [insert last name here],

According to an expert at the Education Commission of the States, most children who drop out of school are “on that trajectory by the time they’re 8 years old.” I am writing to raise awareness about one of the factors that can put kids on that path — poor oral health. Children cannot learn when they are in pain, sleep-deprived or distracted because of tooth decay. The [name of school district] can do more to address this issue.

Years ago, California created the Kindergarten Oral Health Assessment (KOHA) to improve school readiness and raise families’ awareness of oral health’s importance. The percentage of children in [name of school district] who get a KOHA dental check-up is higher than the statewide average. That’s good news. Will you work with us to build on this progress, ensuring that all kids arrive at school healthy and ready to learn?

Consider what is at stake for our schools. Here’s what the education and health experts tell us:

- **Poor dental health can affect both school attendance and academic performance.** Children with poor dental health are nearly 3 times more likely to miss school due to dental pain. Research has also found that California teens who recently experienced dental pain were about 4 times more likely to report lower grades.
- **Many California children are affected.** Dental problems resulted in an estimated 869,202 missed school days in one year among California children and teens ([2018 California Health Interview Survey](#), UCLA Center for Health Policy Research)
- **Poor dental health has financial consequences for schools.** The Department of Education reported that dental-related absences cost California public schools an estimated \$60 million each year in lost attendance-based funding.
- **This is about equity.** We want all children to succeed. Unfortunately, the negative impact that absences have on learning is greatest among the most vulnerable students — low-income children and English language learners.

Tooth decay can occur at very early ages, and, if untreated, it can cause toothaches. By encouraging parents to have their kids screened, KOHA helps to identify and treat cavities *before* they become a more serious infection. This law has helped many parents find a “dental home” (dentist) for their children.

To make KOHA more of a priority, we need the support of you and your fellow board members. Will you meet with us to discuss ways for the district to raise its KOHA participation rate and collect data to monitor its progress?

By working together, schools and local health advocates can promote dental health and put children on a path to better health and academic success. We know our district has a lot of priorities on its plate. Still, we hope you will agree that KOHA is an approach worthy of the district’s time and energy.

[Insert a sentence indicating your availability and/or your willingness to work around the Board member’s schedule. If you are sending this as a snail-mail letter, be sure to provide your email address.]

Sincerely,

[Name, Title]  
[Organization]