



For Immediate Release

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USC SCHOOL OF DENTISTRY JOINS BACK TO SCHOOL EFFORT TO ADDRESS, READING, WRITING AND TOOTH DECAY DURING FAMILY DENTAL FAIR

Free Dental Exams Allow Parents to Meet Mandatory Requirement of New Legislation for Children Entering School

(Los Angeles, CA) The USC School of Dentistry joins "Back to School" effort to address, reading, writing and dental decay during its "First Annual Family Dental Fair". Hundreds of children and their families took advantage of free oral screenings that were provided by the USC School of Dentistry faculty and dental students on Saturday, July 21st. In addition, the children participated in games, received a free book and visited with the tooth fairy.

Parents preparing their children for the first day of school need to add another box to their checklist of pencils, crayons and glue. California legislators approved AB 1433 last year. The state law, which took effect in January, now makes a dental check-up part of the health requirements for children entering elementary school in kindergarten or the first grade. The Fair at the USC School of Dentistry addresses AB 1433 and helps local families establish a dental home for their children. Hal Slavkin, Dean of the USC School of Dentistry says, "The goal of the legislation and of the on-campus event is to encourage families of young children to establish a dental home and an ongoing relationship with a local dental provider hopefully leading to a foundation of lifelong good oral health." Slavkin adds, "We want our community partners to realize that we at USC are a resource for the community and can become a dental home for the community children."

National studies have also found that school age children age five to 17 miss nearly 2 million school days each year nationwide. "Dental disease, as we know, is a serious health issue in this state and there is growing awareness that it impedes a child's ability to develop and learn," says Roseann Mulligan, Associate Dean of USC's School of Dentistry Community Health Programs.

The California Dental Association sponsored the bill. Supporters contend it is an important step in targeting a major but silent epidemic plaguing California's children. A study released last year by the Dental Health Foundation found that dental disease outpaces asthma, childhood diabetes and even obesity as the state's primary health problem affecting children. Jennifer Holtzman, a USCSD faculty member and director of the school's Neighborhood Mobile Clinic, worked with other members of the CDA in creating the grassroots effort that lead to the CDA championing this effort. "The program will identify the children who need more dental treatment and will also identify barriers to receiving care." Holtzman adds, "We need to have data. You can't work to address a problem without knowing what the extent of the problem is."

The California law follows similar legislation recently passed in Illinois. States such as Pennsylvania, Rhode Island and Georgia also have similar laws in place.

