The Power of Monitoring & Addressing Chronic Absence

December 17, 2019
Beyond the Bench Conference, San Diego CA
www.attendanceworks.org

About Us

Attendance Works advances student success and closes equity gaps by reducing chronic absence. Operating at the local, state, and national level, Attendance Works:

✓ Advances better policy
✓ Nurtures proven and promising practice
✓ Promotes meaningful and effective communication
✓ Catalyzes needed research

Since our launch in 2010, we have become the nation’s “go-to” resource for improving student attendance. To learn more, visit our website: www.attendanceworks.org

For consultation and t.a. inquiries: consulting@attendanceworks.org
Session Objectives

Participants will:
1. Understand why chronic absence matters for academic success
2. Discover what works to reduce chronic absence and create supportive schools
3. Engage with data tools that allow stakeholders to identify schools with chronic absence challenges
4. Learn about free-on-line resources to help address chronic absence in your own community

Introductions

Who do you work for?

• A school, district or county office of education?
• The court system?
• Social services?
• A health provider?
• A nonprofit?
• Research organization?
• Other?

At what level? School, district, county, state?
Reflect Back

Think about your experiences as a student.

- What motivated you to go to school and to learn?
- What made it hard for you to get to school?

Defining Chronic Absence to Support Prevention and Early Intervention

Chronic absence is missing so much school for any reason that a student is academically at risk. To ensure it acts as an early warning sign, Attendance Works recommends defining it as **missing 10% or more of school for any reason**.

Chronic absence is different from **truancy** (unexcused absences only) or **average daily attendance** (how many students show up to school each day).
Absences Due to Suspensions

11 MILLION DAYS LOST
RACE, DISCIPLINE, AND SAFETY
AT U.S. PUBLIC SCHOOLS
PART 1
A REPORT BY THE CENTER FOR CIVIL RIGHTS AND EQUITY OF UCLAS CIVIL RIGHTS PROJECT
AND THE AMERICAN CIVIL LIBERTIES UNION OF THE BAY AREA


Average Daily Attendance (ADA) Can Mask Chronic Absence

90% and even 95% ≠ A

98% ADA = little chronic absence
95% ADA = don’t know
93% ADA = significant chronic absence
Chronic Absence vs. Truancy

Number of students missing 10% versus 10 unexcused absences
(San Francisco Unified School District)

Chronic Absence = 18+ days of absence = As few as 2 days a month

Chronic absence is easily masked if we only monitor missing consecutive days

Chronic Absence Works ©

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Chronic Absence A Significant Issue in California

702,531 students chronically absent in 2017-18
Source: California Department of Education

Why Does Attendance Matter for Achievement?

What we know from research around the country
Illustrating the Gap
(interactive exercise for educators and families)

Instructions found in Bringing Attendance Home Toolkit
http://www.attendanceworks.org/resources/toolkits/bringing-attendance-home/

Multiple Years of Chronic Absenteeism = High Risk for low 3rd Grade Reading Skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Average Second Grade DIBELS</th>
<th>Risk for Interventions+</th>
<th>Risk for Substantial Intervention++</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not Chronically Absent (n=4,073)</td>
<td>98.8±</td>
<td>72.9****</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chronically Absent in Pre-K (n=1,289)</td>
<td>94.6***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chronically Absent in Pre-K and K (n=423)</td>
<td>88.9**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chronically Absent in Pre-K, K, and 1st Grade (n=253)</td>
<td>81.8***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: ***Indicates that scores are significantly different from scores of students who are never chronically absent, p<.001 level; + in the DIBELS 6th Edition Assessment and Scoring Guide (Good & Kaminski, 2002), these are labeled as "Some Risk," indicating the need for additional intervention and "At Risk," indicating the need for substantial interventions.
Chronic Early Absence Connected to Poor Long-Term Academic Outcomes

A Rhode Island Data Hub analysis found that compared to kindergartners who attend regularly, those chronically absent:

- Scored 20% lower in reading and math in later grades and gap grows.
- 2X as likely to be retained in grade.
- 2X likely to be suspended by the end of 7th grade.
- Likely to continue being chronically absent.

The Effects of Chronic Absence on Dropout Rates are Cumulative

Proportion of Students Dropping Out by Number of Years the Student was Chronically Absent from 8th-12th Grades
Reducing Chronic Absence Can Help Close Equity Gaps

- Vulnerable children, especially those living in poverty, are 2-3 times more likely to experience chronic absence at earlier ages.
- Vulnerable children are much less likely to have the resources to make up for lost learning time in the classroom.
- Vulnerable children are more likely to experience multiple years of chronic absence.

When a Student Misses School the Impact Ripples
How Can We Address Chronic Absence?

Changing outcomes requires adopting a NEW attendance paradigm

From: Truancy
- Counts unexcused absences
- Emphasizes individual compliance with school rules
- Uses legal, typically more blaming and punitive, solutions

To: Chronic Absence
- Counts all absences
- Emphasizes academic impact of missed days
- Uses preventive problem-solving, trauma-sensitive strategies
- Cultivates family & student engagement
Requires a Mindset Shift

*Shifts focus from...*

**Attendance = Compliance**

_to_

**Attendance = Opportunity to Learn**

**Attendance Data = Action Alert**

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**Take a Data Driven Systemic Approach**

*Positive Engagement:* Uses caring relationships, effective messaging and a positive school climate to motivate daily attendance.

*Actionable Data:* Is accurate, accessible, and regularly reported in an understandable format.

*Capacity Building:* Expands ability to work together to interpret data, engage in problem solving, and adopt best practices to improve attendance.

*Shared Accountability:* Ensures chronic absence is monitored & reinforced by policy.

*Strategic partnerships:* Between district and community partners address specific attendance barriers and mobilize support for all ingredients.

*Students & Families:* Actionable Data:

  - Is accurate, accessible, and regularly reported in an understandable format.

  - Uses caring relationships, effective messaging and a positive school climate to motivate daily attendance.

  - Ensures chronic absence is monitored & reinforced by policy.

  - Expands ability to work together to interpret data, engage in problem solving, and adopt best practices to improve attendance.

  - Between district and community partners address specific attendance barriers and mobilize support for all ingredients.

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*www.attendanceworks.org*
### The advantages of Chronic Absence Data

- Annual data available on-line
- Increasingly produced in real-time by school districts
- More frequently available than measures of emotional health or academic performance

### Solutions Require Understanding What Factors Contribute to Chronic Absence

#### Barriers
- Illness, both chronic and acute
- Lack of health, mental health, vision, or dental care
- Family responsibilities
- Trauma
- Unsafe path to/from school
- Lack of health care
- Involvement with child welfare or juvenile justice systems
- Inequitable access to resources due to bias & discrimination

#### Negative School Experiences
- Struggling academically and behaviorally
- Ineffective or harmful interventions
- Bored
- Social challenges
- Bullying
- Suspensions and expulsions
- Harsh, biased disciplinary practices especially for students of color
- Negative attitudes of parents due to their own school experience
- Undiagnosed disability
- Lack of appropriate accommodations for disability

#### Misconceptions
- Absences are only a problem if they are unexcused
- Missing 2 days per month doesn’t affect learning
- Sporadic absences aren’t a problem
- Attendance only matters in the older grades
- Suspensions are not relevant

#### Lack of Engagement
- Lack of or inequitable access to challenging, culturally responsive, engaging instruction & enrichment
- Lack of academic, emotional and behavioral support
- No meaningful or negative relationships to adults in the school
- Students at risk with peers out of school than in school
- Unwelcoming school climate
- Failure to earn credits/no future plans
- Many teacher absences or long-term substitutes

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**High and extreme levels of chronic absence are an alert that additional investment is needed to unpack and address common causes of missing school.**
Invest in Prevention and Early Intervention

High and extreme levels of chronic absence are an alert that additional support is needed to address chronic absence.

What are Conditions for Learning?

Physical and Emotional Health and Safety

Adult and Student Emotional Competence

Belonging, Connection, and Support

Academic Challenge and Engagement

Relationships are Essential to Positive Conditions for Learning
The Push and Pull of Conditions for Learning

Examples of Push-Out Factors

**Feeling:**
- Ignored
- Unsafe
- That you do not belong

**Experiencing:**
- Bullying
- Boredom
- Harsh and Exclusionary Discipline

Examples of Pull Factors

**Feeling:**
- Cared for
- Safe
- That you belong

**Experiencing:**
- Engagement
- Support for students and their families

Partners for Change

The greater the size of the challenge, the more partners are needed. Many different types of partners can be enlisted but local government and public agencies are especially important.

- Businesses
- Community Schools Initiatives
- Family Support Organizations
- Early Childhood Providers
- Faith Based Organizations
- Health Providers
- Housing Agencies
- Hunger Relief Organizations
- Institutes of Higher Education
- Local Government

- National Service/Volunteers/Mentors
- Out of School Time providers
- Social Emotional Learning Providers
- Social Services
- Population-Specific Service or Civic Organizations
- Philanthropy (including foundations and United Ways)
The Link Between Good Attendance and Health
http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/early/2019/01/24/peds.2018-3648

The statement includes:
- Summary of studies on health-related causes of absences
- Summary of evidence for physical and mental health interventions
- Recommendations to pediatricians on addressing school attendance

Discussion

Turn to a partner:

Does this resonate?

What are potential implications for partnerships with schools in your area?
Tier 1: Engagement and Prevention

Attendance is higher when schools:

- **Promote a sense of belonging** and connection including noticing when students show up
- **Make learning engaging** so students don’t want to miss class
- **Engage in restorative practice** not punishment
- **Meet the basic needs** of our most economically challenged families so all have the opportunity to get to school
- **Build awareness** about how absences can easily add up to too much time lost in the classroom
- **Identify and Remove Barriers** faced by students with disabilities
Parents Underestimate the Number of Year-End Absences

Ad Council research commissioned by the CA Attorney General asked parents with students with a history of absence about their children’s absences in two ways:

1. Was your child absent an average of 2 or more days a month?
2. Was your child absent more than 10 days over the year?

60% of parents said their child was absent an average of 2+ days a month, but not 10+ days a year.

The math: If a child is absent an average of 2+ days a month, then he or she is absent far more than 10+ days a year.

Parent Video & Discussion Guide

Bringing Attendance Home Video (6 minutes)

- Facilitated conversation
- The consequences of chronic absence
- How to improve absenteeism
- Family practice
- Increase social capital
- Identify how school can help
- Community services

Help Students and Families Create a Success Plan

- Set attendance goals
- Make backup plans
- Track absences
- Recognize success!

http://www.attendanceworks.org/resources/student-attendance-success-plans/

Take A Health Oriented Perspective for Addressing Absences

I. Help families understand that even when absences are excused, they can add up to a critical loss in learning time.

II. Encourage students and families to take steps to stay healthy and prevent health related (physical, dental, behavioral) absences.

III. Build awareness about knowing when to keep students home or send them to school when they complain of illness.
Combating Attendance Dips (From Module II)

Use Incentives Strategically to Motivate Improved Attendance

Employ behavioral insights to identify myths, barriers and aversion:
- Questions: In which grades, schools, families do we see high rates of absences? When are students absent? Why?
- Potential Behavioral Reasons:
  - Incorrect/belief understanding
  - Overload/Planning challenges related to logistics
  - Low motivation or trust

Develop a theory of action for which incentive mechanisms can reduce absences:
- Define problem behavior
- Hypothesize mechanisms for behavior change:
  - Encouragement
  - Recognition
  - Reward

Use evidence on incentives’ effectiveness to refine implementation and further explore the root causes of student absence:
- How did the use of this incentive work? Did it reduce absences? By how much, and compared to whom?
- Why did it work or not? What other mechanisms might be at play?
- What designs and tests could better match other types of incentives with those other mechanisms?

Implement incentives to increase salience and decrease trade-offs:
- Identify incentive recipient and level (individual, group or family)
- Select frequency and intensity
- Scope and amount
- Who delivers the incentive?
- What is the attendance behavior (reaching a target, any improvement)
- Time lag from behavior to receiving incentive
- Amount

http://www.attendanceworks.org/resources/teaching-attendance-curriculum/

Improving Truancy Notifications

Todd Rogers, Harvard Kennedy School


Note: This info is now on the CDE web-site in Child Welfare and Attendance School Attendance Improvement Strategies

- Our goal is to partner with families to ensure that students are attending school every day. Although the following consequences may appear harsh we are mandated by Education Code Article 48260.5 to inform you of the following:
  - That the parent or guardian is obligated to compel the attendance of the pupil at school.
  - That parents or guardians who fail to meet these obligation may be guilty of an infraction and subject to prosecution pursuant to Article 6 (commencing with Section 48290) of Chapter 2 or Part 27.
  - That alternative education programs are available in the district.
  - That the parent or guardian has the right to meet with appropriate school personnel to discuss solutions to the pupil’s truancy.
  - That the pupil may be subject to prosecution under Education Code Section 48264.
  - That the pupil may be subject to suspension, restriction, or delay of the pupil’s driving privilege pursuant to Section 13202.7 of the Vehicle Code.
  - That it is recommended that the parent or guardian accompany the pupil to school and attend classes with the pupil for one day.
  - Please recognize that we are required to monitor attendance and notify parents of potential problems with student attendance. If you have concerns about your child’s attendance, or if you believe there is an error in this notice, contact the school at «SCHOOL_PHONE_NUMBER». The designated attendance personnel will work with you to resolve this issue. We look forward to assisting you.
Randomized field experiment

• Large urban public-school district
• Experimental universe
  - Grades K-12
  - All truant students between Nov. 2015 & Jan. 2016
• Three waves of randomization; $N = 131,312$
• Outcome: total absences in post-mailing period (~1 month)

Highlighting parental efficacy

Emphasizing cumulative effect of absences

Simplified language: 4th grade reading level; <150 words

Mandated language in fine print
Results

If standard truancy notice is as effective as other mail-based absence interventions...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letter</th>
<th># absences in 1 month post mailing</th>
<th>Effect relative to no letter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No letter</td>
<td>3.71 days*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard letter</td>
<td>3.51 days</td>
<td>-0.2 days*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved letter</td>
<td>3.44 days</td>
<td>-0.27 days</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

→ ~40% improvement over standard

*Estimated effect of standard letter based on other mail-based absence interventions (see, e.g., Rogers & Feller, 2018; Robinson, Lee, Dearing, & Rogers, 2018)
Discussion

• **Turn to a partner:**
  
  • Does this resonate?
  
  • What are potential implications for partnerships with schools in your area?

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Tier 2 Interventions

**Tier 2**

• Targeted interventions that remove identified barriers and increase positive connections that motivate improved attendance

**Who are the families in Tier 2?**

• Missing 10-20% of the prior or current school year for any reason
• Families experiencing some challenge e.g. chronic disease, job loss, divorce, etc.
• Families whose child has a disability that is impacting attendance

**For which families is Tier 2 sufficient?**

• Families with barriers to school attendance who may not understand how to access support
• Families who see school as “the deliverer of bad news”
• Families who are more successful when there is a positive relationship with someone at the school
Criteria for Identifying Priority Students for Tier 2 Supports

- Chronic absence (missed 10-19.9% of school) in the prior year.
- And/or starting in the beginning of the school year, student has:

  - In first 2 weeks: 2 absences
  - In first month (4 weeks): 2-3 absences
  - In first 2 months (8 weeks): 4-7 absences
  - Missing 10% any time after

Tier 2 Interventions are Especially Critical

- Priority Early Outreach for Positive Linkages and Engagement
  - Assign caring mentors
  - Recruit for engaging before- or after-school activities
  - Connect to Walk-to-School Companion
  - Partner with families/students to develop Student Attendance Success Plan
  - Add attendance goals and supports to IEP
  - Offer plan or contacts for health support
  - Priority Early Outreach for Positive Linkages and Engagement
My Family Help Bank: Part of Success Plan

We all need the help of others some time!

Help parents and caregivers anticipate likely needs and network with one another in advance of predictable difficulties.

Use the Help Bank as a problem-solving device in a one-on-one setting with families whose children are having attendance challenges due to transportation or scheduling.

The help bank can be especially helpful if parents or caregivers are struggling with physical or mental health or transportation issues.

CONNECT WITH MENTOR

CHRONICALLY ABSENT STUDENT

01 Meet and greet each morning.
02 Reach out and engage mentee’s family
03 Call home if mentee misses school
04 Meet with mentees 1-on-1 or in small groups
05 Track mentees’ attendance and improvements
06 Recognize & celebrate successes
07 Work with school staff for support & intervention

### Tier 3 Interventions

**Tier 3**
- Tier 3 provides intensive interventions, often from multiple agencies or specialists within a school district or community

**Who are the families in Tier 3?**
- Missing 20% or more of the prior or current school year for any reason
- Already involved in the system (child welfare, juvenile or criminal justice)
- Families needing additional school and community based supports for a child with a disability

**For which families is Tier 3 sufficient?**
- Families who feel hopeless because of the barriers they face
- Families who are unable to experience success without intervention
- Families who have a negative relationship with school
- Families who require ongoing support for sustained success

### Who Can Help Families in Tier 3?

- Community schools
- Family liaisons
- School integrated service teams
- IEP/504 teams
- Community mental health services
- Family resource centers
- School-based health centers
- McKinney Vento representatives
- Public agencies

**Who would you add to this list?**
What Might Educators and Community Partners Say to Families?

1. **Learn**
   - Learn about the student’s family. Ask what their vision is for their child’s future. What are their hopes and dreams for them?

2. **Share**
   - Share positive things you’ve observed about the student. Share your own vision for student learning & development, including helping put students on a pathway to success by encouraging a habit of good attendance.

3. **Inform**
   - Review attendance report with parents. Tailor conversation to student’s level of absenteeism & inform parents of possible impacts of missing school. Connect attendance to parents’ hopes and dreams for their child.

4. **Discuss**
   - Discuss the challenges parents face in getting their children to school, as well as strengths they can build upon. For chronically absent students, try to understand the barriers that are keeping their children from school.

5. **Arrive at a Plan**
   - Think through strategies with parents for addressing absences and help them develop an attendance improvement plan. Offer referrals to services as needed and ask if there are other ways you can help.

Adapted with permission from materials created by © High Expectations Parental Service, 2011.
What are the tiers where you or your agencies can make a difference?

Fill Out Your Pyramid

For each tier, fill in the activities and supports currently in place.

https://www.attendanceworks.org/chronic-absence/addressing-chronic-absence/3-tiers-of-intervention/

Reducing Chronic Absence Requires a Team
Need Data Driven District and School Teams

**District Team**
- Ensure the availability of actionable data and routinely analyze districtwide attendance patterns and trends
- Build school-level capacity to implement best practices to improve attendance
- Implement and monitor systemic policy and practice responses
- Secure community partnership agreements
- Provide schools with effective communication strategies and resources

**School Team**
- Monitor and act upon attendance data
- Coordinate a year-round multi-tiered attendance strategy that begins with prevention and early intervention
- Engage the whole school community in the effort
- Use qualitative and quantitative data to understand and remove common attendance barriers
- Ensure students receive needed supports

Attendance Responsibilities of a School Leadership Team

1. **Monitor attendance data** to assess which groups of students are most affected and what works to reduce chronic absence.

2. **Develop and organize a year-round multi-tiered attendance strategy** that begins with prevention and early intervention and determine which teams and/or staff are responsible for implementation.

3. **Use data to understand and remove common attendance barriers for students.**

4. **Ensure chronically absent students receive services** from a student support team.
Implementing a Multi-tiered Attendance Strategy

**Key Considerations:**

- Can a school climate or PBIS team be responsible for Tier 1 activities and incorporate promoting good and improved attendance into their activities?
- Can an existing team assume early intervention responsibility for moderately chronically absent students or is a new team needed?
- Can an existing student support team with related functions provide triage and case management for chronically absent students (e.g., RTI, SRBI, etc.)?

Avoid Common Pitfalls

- Establish an attendance team that operates in isolation
- Fail to rally whole school in prevention
- Focus only on students with most absences
- Jump to solutions without sufficient understanding of factors behind absences
- Fail to leverage community partners
- Only promote attendance in the Fall vs all year long
Create A Yearly Plan to Operationalize the Multi-tiered Strategy

- Summer: Taking Stock & Assessing Needs
- Welcome Back: Establishing a Culture of Attendance & Engagement
- Fall: Supporting Early Intervention
- Winter: Sustaining the Momentum
- Spring: Ending the Year Strong

Yearly Planning Calendars

- District and School team versions available
- Blank versions available so you can customize your plan!

https://www.attendanceworks.org/resources/year-long-planning/
What is Teaching Attendance?

Three Online Learning Modules:

1. Why We Teach Attendance

2. Creating a Culture of Attendance
   (Primary and Secondary versions available)

3. Using Data for Intervention and Support
   (Primary and Secondary versions available)
Identify Schools and Districts In Need Of Support

Background

• In 2013-14, California’s Local Control Funding Formula recognized the importance of chronic absence as a key measure of student engagement and required districts to address it in their Local Control Accountability Plans (LCAPs).

• Beginning in 2016-17, CDE began reporting chronic absence rates for grades K-12 on Dataquest.

• In 2018, state policy makers chose chronic absence as an academic accountability measure for grades K-8 and suspensions, which are a component of chronic absence, as a school quality or student success measure for K-12.

• Chronic absence is now an active status and growth indicator on the California Dashboard.
Accountability Measure for K-8 Schools

California School Dashboard

https://www.caschooldashboard.org/

State of California
Explore the performance of the State of California under California's Accountability System.

- Chronic Absenteeism: Yellow
- Suspension Rate: Yellow
- English Learner Progress: No Performance Color
- Graduation Rate: Yellow
- College/Career: Yellow
- English Language Arts: Orange
- Mathematics: Orange
Chronic Absenteeism

9% chronically absent
Maintained 0.3%

Equity Report
Number of Student Groups in Each Color

American Indian
Orange
17.8% chronically absent
Maintained -0.3%
Number of Students: 21,667

African American
Orange
17.9% chronically absent
Increased 1%
Number of Students: 234,481

Students with Disabilities
Orange
15.1% chronically absent
Maintained 0.4%
Number of Students: 544,974

English Learners
Orange
8.6% chronically absent
Increased 0.6%
Number of Students: 1,088,575

Foster Youth
Orange
18.5% chronically absent
Maintained No Data
Number of Students: 32,569

Homeless
Orange
19.4% chronically absent
Increased 1.2%
Number of Students: 183,400
DataQuest – includes high school data

- Dataquest, https://data1.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/
- Use the Absenteeism Report to search by District, School, Grade Span or Sub-groups
- Use the Discipline report to see the impact of Suspensions by District, School and Sub-groups
Homework: Identify a School of Interest Using Most Current Data

Figure out what is the level of chronic absence using one of these sources:

a) Dataquest: [https://data1.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/](https://data1.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/)

b) The California dashboard [https://www.caschooldashboard.org/](https://www.caschooldashboard.org/)
