Improving Student Attendance and Engagement

PACE Annual Conference
January 25, 2024
Session objectives

- Explore the underlying reasons for high rates of absenteeism
- Learn about the current status of absenteeism in California and its differential impact on student groups and schools
- Gain insight into how community schools strategies and expanded learning opportunities can bolster attendance and engagement.
How is chronic absenteeism defined in CA?

A student is considered “chronically absent” if they miss 10 percent or more of their expected attendance days.

The Chronic Absenteeism Rate Indicator is one of several state indicators reported on the Dashboard. It represents the percentage of K-8 students who were chronically absent.
Chronic absence has more than doubled. It has increased from 12.1% in 2018-19 to a high of 30% in 2021-22 with a 5.1% decrease to 24.9% in 2022-23.

Source: CA Department of Education
Chronic absenteeism is highest in kindergarten

Absenteeism is now most prominent among kindergarteners.

Source: CA Department of Education
Chronic absenteeism varies by subgroup

- African American: 36.6%
- Am. Indian/Alaskan: 36.3%
- Asian: 10.2%
- Filipino: 13.4%
- Hispanic/Latino: 28.9%
- Pacific Islander: 36.6%
- White: 19.7%
- Two or More Races: 21.4%
- English Learners: 28.1%
- Foster Youth: 39.2%
- Homeless Youth: 40.6%
- Migrant Education: 22.5%
- IDEA: 34.6%
- SED: 30.5%
- Total Statewide: 24.9%

Source: CA Department of Education
“Why Aren’t Students Showing Up for School? Understanding the Complexity Behind Rising Rates of Chronic Absenteeism”

November 17, 2023
https://edpolicyinca.org/newsroom/why-arent-students-showing-school
Panelists:

- Hedy Chang, Executive Director, Attendance Works
- James Bridgeforth, Postdoctoral Research Fellow, Community Schools Learning Exchange (CSLX)
- Jessica Gunderson, Co-CEO, Partnership for Children and Youth (PCY)
Table Introductions

- Name
- Organization
- Why you chose to come to this breakout session
Showing Up Matters for R.E.A.L.

It is an opportunity to:

✔ **Build Routines**

Daily attendance routines can reduce stress and create a sense of safety and security especially after chaotic transitions.

✔ **Increase Engagement**

Being in school helps build relationships with peers and school staff that nurture engagement.

✔ **Provide Access to resources**

Schools provide access to meals, health and mental health services, tutoring, mentoring, technology, extra-curriculars (sports, clubs, music etc), afterschool and summer programs.

✔ **Support Learning**

Showing up to school regularly helps students become proficient in reading and math and graduate from high school.

Find toolkit: https://www.attendanceworks.org/resources/toolkits/showing-up-matters-for-real/
When a Student Misses School the Impact Ripples

2 out of 3 students attend a school with 20% or more absenteeism nationwide (SY 2021-22)
In California, the percent of schools with high and extreme chronic absenteeism levels more than tripled since the pandemic.
In California, Schools With Greater Percentages of Socio-economically Disadvantaged Students Had Much Higher Levels of Chronic Absenteeism in SY 2022-23
The number of elementary schools with high and extreme absence levels increased exponentially.
Every type of locality has a majority of schools with high and extreme levels of chronic absence; as well as a small percent of schools with much better attendance (potential bright spots)
High levels of chronic absence reflect an erosion in positive conditions for learning.
Adopt A Multi-tiered Response

Tier 3
Intensive Intervention

Tier 2
Early Intervention

Tier 1
Universal Prevention

Foundational Supports
Which Promote Positive Conditions for Learning

https://www.attendanceworks.org/chronic-absence/addressing-chronic-absence/3-tiers-of-intervention/
## Tiered Solutions Must Address the Reasons Students Are Missing Too Much School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barriers</th>
<th>Aversion</th>
<th>Disengagement</th>
<th>Misconceptions</th>
</tr>
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</table>
| • Chronic and acute illness  
• Family responsibilities or home situation  
• Trauma  
• Poor transportation  
• Housing and food insecurity  
• Lack of access to needed services (including health)  
• System involvement  
• Lack of access to technology  
• Community violence | • Struggling academically and/or behaviorally  
• Unwelcoming school climate  
• Social and peer challenges  
• Anxiety  
• Biased disciplinary and suspension practices  
• Undiagnosed disability and/or lack of disability accommodations  
• Caregivers had negative educational experiences | • Lack of challenging, culturally responsive instruction  
• Bored  
• No meaningful relationships to adults in the school (especially given staff shortages)  
• Lack of enrichment opportunities  
• Lack of academic and behavioral support  
• Failure to earn credits  
• Need to work conflicts with being in high school | • Absences are only a problem if they are unexcused  
• Missing 2 days per month doesn’t affect learning  
• Lose track and underestimate TOTAL absences  
• Assume students must stay home for any symptom of illness  
• Attendance only matters in the older grades  
• Suspensions don’t count as absence |

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**Portraits of Change: Aligning School and Community Resources to Reduce Chronic Absence**  
**Addressing the Health-Related Causes of Chronic Absenteeism: A Toolkit for Action**

www.attendanceworks.org
Especially critical strategies

Woven together into a systemic, tiered approach informed by data / student success systems.

- Family Engagement
- Student Connectedness
- Health & Safety
- Community Partnerships
Key Ingredients of Systemic Change to Reducing Absenteeism
James Bridgeforth

Postdoctoral Research Fellow, Community Schools Learning Exchange (CSLX)
Pillars, Standards & Frameworks – Oh My!

Connecting the CS Dots: Pillars

What Are Community Schools?
All kids deserve schools with expanded curriculum, wrap-around supports, and community involvement

Key Strategies
- Well-prepared and effective teachers
- Wrapsaround Academic, Social/Emotional & Health Supports
- Positive Discipline Policies
- Engaged Parents & Communities

Universal Access
- Every child is ready to learn when they enter school and none are left behind.
- Equitable School Funding

Expand Learning Time

- Expanded Learning Time and Support Programs
- International School Programs

Engaged Parents & Communities
- Local businesses and non-profits

Community School Overview
- Families, School Staff, and Community members share needs
- Community Schools use feedback to plan programming meeting needs of students and families

NEA Community Schools Model
- Strong Core Curriculum
- High Quality Teaching
- Positive Behavior Practices
- Family Community Partnerships
- Community Support Services

Community Schools
- Whole Child
- Parent and Family Engagement
- Health and Wellness Supports
- Community Members

Support Services
- Early Childhood Development
- Expanded Learning Opportunities

Academic Support

Engaged Learning Opportunities
A community school strategy transforms a school into a place where educators, local community members, families, and students work together to strengthen conditions for student learning and healthy development.

As partners, they organize in-and-out of school resources, supports, and opportunities so that young people thrive.

Community Schools Forward, 2023
A Shared Framework

All students flourish in thriving school communities

Legend:
- Yellow: Why we do this work
- Orange: Who drives this work
- Teal: Enabling conditions
- Light blue: Key practices
- Dark blue: Supportive infrastructure
“What would happen if we treated the student as someone whose opinion mattered in how learning occurred and for what purpose?”

-Fullan, 2015, p. 174
Typical Approaches to Student Voice in Schools

• Students are seen as passive actors, not active collaborators.
• Student involvement is limited to event planning and fundraising (e.g., proms, bake sales) instead of curriculum, school climate, policymaking, or funding decisions.

Perceived Barriers to Student Voice in Schools

• “There’s just not enough time in the day.”
• “We have to focus on academics, not extra things like student voice.”
• “Our students are too young and immature to be involved in those decisions.”
• “We already have a spot for students on our school site council. Isn’t that enough?”

(Bertrand et al., 2020; Biddle & Hufnagel, 2019; Conner et al., 2023; Leher-Small, 2019; Lyons & Brasof, 2020; Mitra, 2018; Pierrottet, 2022)
Why Student Voice in Policy and Decision-Making?

• Ground decision-making practices in the experiences of those most directly impacted by our decisions – students!
• Students are able to solve real-world educational problems through shared decision-making that helps them develop and apply critical thinking skills.
• Student voice practices can positively impact school climate and culture through strengthened relationships amongst students and between students and the adults in the building as a result of shared experiences.

(Bron & Veugelers, 2014; Kennedy & Datnow, 2011; Levin, 2011; Voight, 2014)
<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Impact</td>
<td>Reproduce inequities</td>
<td>Tokenization</td>
<td>Voice</td>
<td>Delegated Power</td>
<td>(Shared) Ownership</td>
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<tr>
<td>Goal</td>
<td>Provide youth with relevant information.</td>
<td>Gather input from youth.</td>
<td>Ensure youth needs and priorities are part of the process &amp; solution.</td>
<td>Ensure youth capacity to play a leadership role in design and implementation of decisions.</td>
<td>Democratic participation and equity through shared leadership, &amp; decision-making.</td>
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<td>Message</td>
<td>“We will keep you informed.”</td>
<td>“We care what you think.”</td>
<td>“You are making us think (and therefore act) differently about the issue.”</td>
<td>“Youth leadership and expertise are critical to how we address the issue.”</td>
<td>“We cannot unlock transformative solutions without you.”</td>
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<th>Racial Equity</th>
<th>BIYOC + Black, indigenous, youth of color</th>
<th>BIYOC and underrepresented, intersectional youth have significant or full leadership and decision-making power. They collaborate with adults as equals.</th>
<th>BIYOC and underrepresented, intersectional youth engage in events to share their unique needs and priorities.</th>
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<td>Communication materials are distributed widespread without targeted outreach to BIYOC.</td>
<td>Multiple rounds of widespread BIYOC engagement events and activities are conducted through a variety of methods (such as surveys, focus groups, and town halls).</td>
<td>Targeted engagement of BIYOC and underrepresented, intersectional youth engage in events to share their unique needs and priorities.</td>
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| Activities | Online information postings, fact sheets, presentations, open houses | Focus Groups/Surveys, Community Forums, Public Comment | Youth Advisory Committees, Students on Hiring Committees | Youth on school wide decision making committees or as members on boards or school site councils, youth task force, partnering with a community organization to engage and support youth | Participatory Budgeting, youth-led initiatives or campaigns, partnering with a community organization to have youth lead |

Adapted from: Youth Voice adoption of “Spectrum of Community Engagement” by Rosa Gonzalez of Facilitating Power, in collaboration with Movement Strategy Center and the Building Healthy Communities Initiative.
### Moving from *Typical* to *Transformational*

#### Student Voice Continuum

**STUDENT POWER**

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[Image of the Student Voice Continuum diagram]
What Does Student Voice Have to do with Chronic Absence?

In a study including 86 schools in a large and diverse district, Kahne et al. (2022) observed:

• “a consistent, positive relationship between a school’s responsiveness to student voice and students’ grades and attendance.”

• “Responsiveness to student voice, whether measured at the student level or school level, was related to higher GPAs, fewer absences, and less chronic absenteeism.”

Is Responsiveness to Student Voice Related to Academic Outcomes?
Strengthening the Rationale for Student Voice in School Reform

JOSEPH KAHNE and BENJAMIN BOWYER
University of California, Riverside

JESSICA MARSHALL
Northwestern University

ERICA HODGIN
University of California, Riverside
A Shared Framework

All students flourish in thriving school communities

LEGEND

- Why we do this work
- Who drives this work
- Enabling conditions
- Key practices
- Supportive infrastructure
By strategically linking practice and policy, we make sure that children and youth in the most under-resourced communities receive quality expanded learning opportunities and that all their learning environments—school, afterschool, and summer—support their academic, social, emotional, and physical well-being.
Stronger partnerships between schools and expanded learning improves student connectedness and engagement

“You almost can’t see the line between the school district and afterschool because one can’t succeed without the other.”

—Ernesto Villanueva
Principal, Rice Elementary School

“The benefits of community-based and school-based partnerships are endless. We get to do what we do best, which is invest in young people, build caring relationships, and give them opportunities to learn and play and grow. It gives our kids the sense that there are more people rooting for them.”

—Michelle Edwards Heery
Executive Vice President, Boys & Girls Clubs of Sonoma-Marin
Expanded learning is uniquely positioned to increase student connectedness and engagement.

Research shows that participation in afterschool and summer programs improves:

- School-day attendance
- Sense of belonging + school connectedness
- Meaningful + participatory learning

Alignment between research-based quality standards and school engagement:

- Safe + supportive environment
- Active + engaged learning
- Skill building
- Youth voice + leadership
- Diversity, access, + equity
- Healthy choices + behaviors

Coherence matters to student success: authentic collaboration is necessary to maximize the value of additional learning time.
ELO-P funding is flexible and ongoing

1. Very flexible and ongoing - supports local needs and creative solutions
2. Allocated at district level and meant to be a universal program: can implement system-level strategies
3. Built on existing infrastructure, partnerships, and staff relationships
4. Prioritizes students & schools experiencing the highest levels of chronic absence

(Students and families served by publicly funded expanded learning prior to ELO-P)
What expanded learning offers

A diverse workforce rooted in their communities

- 70% are people of color
- 90% are bilingual in English and Spanish
- 78% live in the community they serve

Positive staff-child relationships are the foundation of expanded learning programs and improve student learning and social development

Staff work in partnership with families, teachers, and administrators

Publicly funded expanded learning programs employ 30,000+ professionals statewide

Majority are pursuing careers in teaching, afterschool leadership, education administration or school counseling

Community partners

Community resources + Longstanding relationships → Larger table
Strategies that increased student engagement during/after pandemic:

- **More flexible roles and schedule:** afterschool workers could deliver meals, provide tech support to families

- **Targeted recruitment and outreach:** schools and CBOs recruited students as a team using attendance as a key factor *(phone calls, home visits from bilingual staff)*

- **Small group tutoring/learning groups:** smaller ratios supported more planning time for teachers or extra attention for targeted groups

- **Fun in learning and student choice:** provided relevant and interesting enrichment based on surveys of kids and families; field trips

- **Wellness (for students & staff) during afterschool hours,** including therapy, mindfulness, social workers

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“Coming from the pandemic and quarantine, I was really looking for a sense of community. And I found that in the afterschool program.”

—Ailyn, age 17
Alliance Collins Family College Ready High School, Los Angeles

“Our priorities and program objectives were focused on getting the students to regain confidence and skills that maybe they missed as a result of COVID...We targeted our most vulnerable students first, by asking ‘What are your interests? What are your skills? And let’s build from that.’”

—Kathy Serrano
Santa Barbara Unified School District
Actions for districts/schools & students/families

- **Build awareness and engagement with families:** schools are now open in some cases 7am-6pm and offer 3 meals/day

- **Conduct targeted outreach to families:** work with expanded learning to use data to target disengaged students and families via phone calls and home visits with multilingual staff

- **Integrate teams:** Site coordinators should be an integral part of CARE and attendance teams

- **Increase awareness building and training** for expanded learning staff on the importance and impact of chronic absence, especially when they are interacting with families regularly

- **Offer summer bridge programs for transitions:** TK to Kindergarten and into middle or high schools

- **Motivate participation:** implement responsive and fun programing

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**Expanded learning is part of the multi-tiered approach to address barriers**

- Tier 3: Intensive Intervention
- Tier 2: Early Intervention
- Tier 1: Universal Prevention
- Foundational Supports Which Promote Positive Conditions for Learning

Actions for state leaders

- **Data collection and data sharing:**
  - State-level data on ELO-P needs to be collected
  - Expanded learning needs to be integrated into student information systems
- State could **prioritize slots** for chronically absent students
- Increase state **technical assistance** for both school day and expanded learning to better develop a coordinated response
Table talk prompts

- What questions or observations came up for you?
- What are ideas or action items you can take back to your organization?
- What statewide policies, structures, or supports are needed at this time?
Panelist Q&A