Reducing Chronic Absence: What Will It Take?

Exploring Implications for Health Providers

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Presentation for the Bay Area Regional Health Inequities Initiative
Attendance Works

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1. Introduction and Overview
2. What is Chronic Absence and why does it matter?
3. Barriers and solutions: how health impacts attendance
4. How can public agencies and providers partner with school districts?
   ~Tools & Resources
5. Conclusion
**Unpacking Attendance Terms**

**Average Daily Attendance**
- The % of enrolled students who attend school each day. It is used in some states for allocating funding.

**Truancy**
- Typically refers only to unexcused absences and is defined by each state under No Child Left Behind. It signals the potential need for legal intervention under state compulsory education laws.

**Chronic Absence**
- Missing 10% or more of school for any reason – excused, unexcused, etc. It is an indication that a student is academically at risk due to missing too much school starting in Kindergarten.
High Levels of ADA Can Mask Chronic Absence

90% and even 95% ≠ A

Chronic Absence For 6 Elementary Schools in Oakland, CA with @ 95% ADA in 2012

Chronic Absence for 6 Schools in New York City with 90% ADA in 2011-12

98% ADA = little chronic absence
95% ADA = don’t know
93% ADA = significant chronic absence
Truancy (unexcused absences) Can Also Mask Chronic Absence

Number of Chronically Absent Versus Chronically Truant Students
San Francisco Unified School District

- # chronic absentees - 2010-2011
- # students missing 10 days unexcused (as of May 16th 2011)
A 407 alert is issued when a student misses 10 consecutive days or 20 days over a 40 day period. It misses more sporadic absence.

1 out of 5 elementary school children were chronically absent.

Nationwide, as many as 10-15% of students (7.5 million) miss nearly a month of school every year. That’s 135 million days of lost time in the classroom.

In some cities, as many as one in four students are missing that much school.

Chronic absenteeism is a red alert that students are headed for academic trouble and eventually for dropping out of high school.

Poor attendance isn’t just a problem in high school. It can start as early as kindergarten and pre-kindergarten.
The Campaign for Grade-Level Reading is focusing on three challenges to reading success that are amenable to community solutions:

- **The Readiness Gap**: Too many children from low-income families begin school already far behind.
- **The Attendance Gap (Chronic Absence)**: Too many children from low-income families miss too many days of school.
- **The Summer Slide (Summer Learning Loss)**: Too many children lose ground over the summer months.
Starting in preK, chronic absence affects learning and school readiness. Attendance matters most for the children who enter the farthest behind.

Analyses control for prior preschool experience, race, gender, neighborhood poverty and social status, special education status, ELL status, and program type. Missing data points represent values with fewer than 30 students.
Students with more years of chronic absenteeism, starting in preK have lower 2nd grade scores

* Indicates that scores are significantly different from scores of students who are never chronically absent, at p<.05 level; **p<.01; ***p<.001
Students Chronically Absent in Kindergarten and 1st Grade are Much Less Likely to Read Proficiently in 3rd Grade

Percent Students Scoring Proficient or Advanced on 3rd Grade ELA Based on Attendance in Kindergarten and in 1st Grade

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attendance Risk</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No risk</td>
<td>Missed less than 5% of school in K &amp; 1st</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small risk</td>
<td>Missed 5-9% of days in both K &amp; 1st</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate risk</td>
<td>Missed 5-9% of days in 1 year &amp; 10% in 1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High risk</td>
<td>Missed 10% or more in K &amp; 1st</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Applied Survey Research & Attendance Works (April 2011)
The Long-Term Impact of Chronic Kindergarten Absence is Most Troubling for Poor Children

5th Grade Math and Reading performance by K attendance for children living in poverty. Academic performance was lower even if attendance had improved in 3rd grade.

Source: ECLS-K data analyzed by National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP)
Note: Average academic performance reflects results of direct cognitive assessments conducted for ECLS-K.
Multiple Years of Elementary Chronic Absence = Worse Middle School Outcomes

Each year of chronic absence in elementary school is associated with a substantially higher probability of chronic absence in 6th grade.

Chronic absence in 1st grade is also associated with:
- Lower 6th grade test scores
- Higher levels of suspension

Oakland Unified School District SY 2006-2012, Analysis By Attendance Works
The Effects of Chronic Absence on Dropout Rates Are Cumulative

With every year of chronic absenteeism, a higher percentage of students dropped out of school.

Reducing Chronic Absence is Key to Reducing the Achievement Gap

% Chronically Absent Students By Ethnicity
2011-12 School Year

- African American
- Asian
- Latino
- White

Grade Level

% of Active Students
Questions?
Why Are Students Chronically Absent?

Myths
- Absences are only a problem if they are unexcused
- Sporadic versus consecutive absences aren’t a problem
- Attendance only matters in the older grades

Barriers
- Lack of access to health care
- Poor transportation
- No safe path to school

Aversion
- Child struggling academically
- Lack of engaging instruction
- Poor school climate and ineffective school discipline
- Parents had negative school experience
Health Barriers are Significant, Especially in Low-Income Communities

Nationally:

• Asthma is the leading health-related cause of school absence, leading to 14 million missed school days annually, according to the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America. It is also the third leading cause of hospitalization for children under 15.

• Children from low-income families are 12 times as likely to have missed school as a result of dental problems than their peers from higher-income families.

In California:

• Almost 18% of California adolescents have asthma, which was responsible for an estimated 1.9 million missed days of school in California in 2005.

• Almost two million children in California come from homes that experience food insecurity (lack of consistent access to adequate, nutritious food).
Asthma and Attendance in Oakland

- In 2011-12, students diagnosed with asthma are associated with higher rates of chronic absence:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>% Students Diagnosed with Asthma who were chronically absent</th>
<th>% Students not Diagnosed with Asthma who were chronically absent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific Islander</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Higher rates of asthma diagnoses tend to be found in schools and neighborhoods (such as West Oakland) located closer to freeways, the Port of Oakland, and industrial areas of Oakland.
Going to School Every Day Reflects...

Hope
for a better future
+

Faith
that school will help you or your child succeed
+

Capacity
Resources, skills, knowledge needed to get to school
Universal Strategies for Building a Culture of Attendance & Identifying Barriers

A. Recognize Good and Improved Attendance
B. Engage Students and Parents

E. Develop Programmatic Response to Barriers (as needed)

D. Provide Personalized Early Outreach
C. Monitor Attendance Data and Practice
Increased Attendance Involves a 3-Tiered Approach that Fits with Most Reform Efforts

- **Students who were chronically absent in prior year or starting to miss 20% or more of school**: Recovery Programs
- **Students at risk for chronic absence**: Intervention Programs
- **All students in the school**: Universal/Preventive Programs

- **A small fraction of a school’s students**: High Cost
- **Some of a school’s students**: Low Cost
- **All of a school’s students**: Low Cost
## Variation Across Schools Helps Identify Good Practice and Need for Intervention

Chronic Absence Levels Among Oakland Public Schools (2009-10)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># Schools with 0%-5% Chronic Absence</th>
<th>Elementary</th>
<th>Middle</th>
<th>High School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Schools with 5.1%-10% Chronic Absence</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Schools with 10.1%-20% Chronic Absence</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Schools with &gt;20.1% Chronic Absence</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total No. Schools</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Highest % of Chronic Absence</th>
<th>Elementary</th>
<th>Middle</th>
<th>High School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>31.5%</td>
<td></td>
<td>32.8%</td>
<td>42.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lowest % of Chronic Absence</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
<td>14.9%</td>
<td>21.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>11.9%</td>
<td>15.6%</td>
<td>22.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Examples of Successful Efforts

**New York City:** Citywide interagency task force led by Mayor; “NYC Success Mentor Corp.”, largest school-based mentoring effort in nation reaching about 9,000 at-risk students; interagency data sharing; community impact strategies; celebrity WakeUp! NYC calls; incentives & public-private partnerships. Pilot reduced chronic absenteeism in elementary, middle and high schools, outperforming comparison schools. Students with Success Mentors gained more than 11,800 days of school.

**Baltimore:** Fewer unnecessary suspensions, reduced middle school transitions, expanded monitoring of attendance data, and a citywide campaign have helped cut middle school chronic absence in half. Baltimore is now turning its attention to preschool and elementary school and to public messaging.
Ingredients for Success & Sustainability in a District and Community

- **Positive Messaging**
  - Conveys importance of building a habit of attendance & explains what is chronic absence

- **Capacity Building**
  - Expands ability to interpret data and adopt best practices

- **Actionable Data**
  - Is accurate, regularly reported and easily obtained

- **Shared Accountability**
  - Ensures monitoring & incentives to reduce chronic absence
The Superintendents Call to Action

Own the Issue
Mobilize the Community
Drive With Data

To sign-up for the Call to Action, or to learn more, please visit: www.attendanceworks.org/superintendents-call-to-action
Questions?
How can health providers help reduce chronic absence?

a) Address the health needs of students

b) Use chronic absence data to help target services

c) Use your position as a health provider to help educate students and families about the importance of avoiding unnecessary absences.
Health, Education, and Attendance for Life (H.E.A.L.)

- Addressing the intersection of student health and attendance in Alameda County

Tools & Resources

  http://www.attendanceworks.org/peer-learning-resources/

• Research on Health Issues & Absenteeism
  http://www.attendanceworks.org/research/health-issues-and-absenteeism/
Tools & Resources

Tools for Healthcare Providers, including:

➤ Self-assessment for School-Based Health Programs

➤ Chronic Absence Toolkit from the California School Health Centers Association

http://www.attendanceworks.org/tools/tools-for-healthcare-providers/
Questions?
Key Message #1: Good attendance helps children do well in school and eventually in the work place.
Key Message #2: Absences add up. Excused and unexcused absences result in too much time lost in the classroom.
Key Message #3: Chronic absence, missing 10 percent of the school year or more, affects the whole classroom, not just the students who miss school.
Key Messages

Key Message #4: We need to monitor how many days each student misses school for any reason — excused, unexcused or suspensions — so we can intervene early.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Name</th>
<th>Middle Name/Initial</th>
<th>Last Name</th>
<th>Absence Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>STUDENT</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>satisfactory</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STUDENT</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>satisfactory</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STUDENT</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>chronic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STUDENT</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>at risk</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STUDENT</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>satisfactory</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STUDENT</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>satisfactory</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STUDENT</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>at risk</td>
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<tr>
<td>STUDENT</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>satisfactory</td>
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<td>STUDENT</td>
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<td>satisfactory</td>
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<tr>
<td>STUDENT</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>at risk</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STUDENT</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>at risk</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Key Message #5: Chronic absence is a problem we can solve when the whole community, including parents and schools, gets involved.
Key Message #6: Relationship building is fundamental to any strategy for improving student attendance.
Key Message #7: Reducing chronic absence can help close achievement gaps.
Questions?
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