

INTRODUCTION

In this brief, we describe attendance promotion practices within three Sacramento City Unified School District (SCUSD) departments: Student Support and Health Services (SSHS); Youth Development and Support Services (YDSS); and Attendance and Enrollment (A&E). These three departments used a three-tiered planning template—the Multi-tiered Attendance Support System (MASS) protocol—in order to: a) document existing efforts explicitly focused on attendance monitoring and promotion, b) identify existing resources that could be marshaled to support attendance, c) identify gaps to inform internal planning and budgeting, and district coordination, and d) to support external communication and partnership development. We review how these three departments are coming together to support attendance.

Service Provision Activities and Potential Growth Areas

Over the 2016-17 school year, the three district departments pursued a variety of intervention and professional development strategies. The MASS planning template reflects seven categories of research-based chronic absence intervention efforts (Student and Family Engagement, Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)/Relationships, Mental/Physical Health, Attendance/Intervention Monitoring, Positive Behavioral Supports/Restorative Justice, Academic Support, and Basic Needs) across three levels of support (Tier 1 universal, Tier 2 strategic support for students becoming chronically absent, and Tier 3 intensive support for students who are missing a great deal of school and/or are persistently chronically absent.) Departmental interviews and MASS plans revealed potential areas for growth among the three district departments' areas of activity.

Student Support and Health Services (SSHS)

SSHS provides social, emotional, and health services

to support student success. Their service areas promote attendance and positive school climate, and include supporting the Student Support Centers, Connect Center, School Climate and Bullying Prevention, Homeless Services, and Health Services. SSHS described their elevated focus on chronic absence efforts and how chronic absenteeism affects student education through building collaboration among district departments, and among community partners, while addressing student health-related barriers by identifying health resources. Their MASS plan heavily emphasized Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)/Relationships through linking students to community-based organizations for intensive support, providing staffing at all twenty-four Student Support Centers and referrals to the Connect Center, and providing key SEL infrastructure such as facilitation of SEL Program Coordination, SEL Staff Development, and SEL Classroom Instruction. SSHS also provided family engagement efforts by supporting family nights, parent meetings, and support groups, as well as supporting positive student behavior by providing conflict resolution and peer mediation services, at all twenty-four of their Student Support Center sites.

SSHS's MASS plan also focused on supporting Mental/Physical Health, Positive Behavioral Supports/Restorative Justice, and Basic Needs through coordinating staff who provide school-based counseling or mentoring, coordinating services to fulfill vaccination requirements, and providing essential supplies for students. SSHS also strongly emphasized Attendance/Intervention Monitoring efforts through planning, training, and staffing measures as the lead district entity spearheading efforts to address chronic absence.

Youth Development Support Services (YDSS)

YDSS provides support to teachers and school site administrators to address the academic and social-emotional needs of students. Their service

areas include Expanded Learning, Youth Voice and Leadership, and Foster Youth/Targeted Prevention and Intervention Services. YDSS described their focus on chronic absence in terms of promoting attendance through the My Brother's Keeper Success Mentor's Initiative, Men's and Women's Leadership Academies, Foster Youth Services, After School Programs (ASP), and partnering with Attendance and Enrollment to nominate foster youth for the "You Got Caught at School" district attendance competition. Their MASS protocol emphasized Family and Student Engagement interventions, such as holding attendance policy conversations with families at the start of the ASP year, and coordinating an attendance training for families within the American Indian Education program. YDSS's MASS plan, and area specialists who meet with thirteen designated sites regarding attendance, also emphasized Attendance/Intervention Monitoring efforts through the Success Mentor's Initiative, Positive Behavioral Supports/Restorative Justice through the coordination of restorative practices via staff trainings, and the Men's and Women's Leadership Academies. YDSS also provided (through the district's SEL Department) monthly professional development to site program managers on Social and Emotional Learning.

Attendance and Enrollment (A&E)

A&E operates through the Enrollment Center, which provides open enrollment options for district students and coordinates admissions and attendance, with service areas that include Early Childhood & Preschool Enrollment, Enrollment Center (K-12), Open Enrollment, High School Specialty Program Application, and Matriculation and Orientation Center. A&E described their focus on chronic absence efforts as coordinating several attendance initiatives, including the district-wide "You Got Caught Attending School" contest and Incentive Days, as well as year three of a four-year Coca Cola grant to promote attendance through mentorships at John Still K-8 School. A&E also participated in Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) leadership trainings and provided referrals to mental health community agencies. While A&E's MASS plan included services provided across several intervention categories, their emphasis

was Attendance/Intervention Monitoring, including coordinating with school sites, community partners, and students and families to hold Student Success Team meetings (SSTs), Student Attendance Review Team (SART) meetings and home visits; conducting truancy sweeps; and participating in Student Attendance Review Board (SARB) meetings and Sacramento County Truancy Court sessions.

While each of the three district departments have somewhat different emphases, they aim to work in ways that are complementary. All three district departments provided supports across three out of the seven MASS intervention categories (Family and Student Engagement, Social-Emotional Learning/Relationships, Attendance/Intervention Monitoring). Out of the remaining four MASS intervention categories (Mental/Physical Health, Positive Behavioral Supports/Restorative Justice, Academic Support, and Basic Needs), two of the three district departments provided supports. Overall, across the three departments, they are collectively trying to pursue interventions that address all seven categories.

“
While each of the three district departments have somewhat different emphases, they aim to work in ways that are complementary.
”

Potential Growth Areas

While departmental interviews and MASS plans revealed areas of focused activity, they also revealed some gaps that suggest potential growth areas.

- **Engaging Families and Students:** There is opportunity for SCUSD to scale up their support for Engaging Families and Students among students who are chronically, severely, or persistently chronically absent, especially since this is where most of engagement efforts are needed.

- **Mental/Physical Health:** SSSH, A&E, and YDSS have opportunities to increase collaboration in this area. A&E has opportunities to further support efforts across all intervention areas (aside from their primary emphasis on Attendance and Intervention Monitoring) and coordinate services, especially with respect to utilizing existing internal resources to refer Tier 2 and 3 students and families to resources and services. YDSS and SSSH also have opportunities to increase coordination in Mental/Physical Health.
- **Intra-district Coordination:** This year the three departments pursued increased coordination in several ways, such as inviting all to send representatives to Chronic Absence Learning Collaborative (CALC) meetings and onboarding by SSSH of YDSS to participate in the My

Brother’s Keeper initiative, which supports student mentoring as an attendance promotion strategy. Additionally, SSSH intentionally brought the chronic absence agenda to the SCUSD Board to begin updating attendance policies. However, district departments have not intentionally assessed their service gaps to improve district attendance promotion support to date, considering this being the first cycle of MASS plan development intended to facilitate further coordination.

While there has been increased effort across all departments to engage external partners for resource development, there is also an opportunity to pursue a coordinated, intentional approach to building community partnerships on behalf of school sites and the district as a whole.

Table 2.2: Attendance Promotion Resources and Reported Challenges Among Three SCUSD Departments

District Department	Resources	Reported Challenges
Student Support & Health Services	Enhanced attendance promotion messaging, chronic absence now established as an indicator on the state dashboard, supportive staff to coordinate efforts, CALC group, growing inter-departmental connections, some historical district data accountability improvements, clinicians (e.g., who can give required immunizations)	Messaging to school staff to utilize health services resources, scarcity of school nurses, accessible and accurate attendance data, only 1/3 of district school sites have Student Support Centers and 2/3 of school sites need to be served by the understaffed Connect Center, 504 Tier 3 intensive cases take Director's time to visit and assess appropriate resources, messaging to community partners about attendance promotion (e.g., medical professionals schedule appointments during school hours)
Youth Development Support Services	My Brother’s Keeper incentives, Attendance Works professional development, very strategic educational parent engagement, radio station contest for Foster Youth, monitoring/support for students in foster care	Managers need training, getting people to accept that they are part of a community with shared responsibility, state donation bags not culturally responsive or appropriate, no dedicated staff as they are juggling multiple high-profile priorities, school culture does not embrace attendance
Attendance & Enrollment	Secured gift certificates from McDonald's and Round Table, support staff to work with parents, SARB Board volunteers	Manpower: just two people working entire department, needs district fundraising website to utilize funds without legal constraints, SARB Board members unsustainable (comprised of volunteers)

Departmental Challenges

Each department also reported challenges to implementing chronic absence interventions and attendance promotion strategies, almost all of which were associated with funding and the lack of adequate staffing (see Table 2.2). In addition, SSHS identified the need to ensure school staff awareness that health services, such as school nurses, can case manage prevalent student health-related barriers, such as asthma (although an additional challenge stated was not having a school nurse who can work five days out of the week). SSHS further identified the need for greater messaging to community partners about attendance promotion.

CONCLUSION

Sustaining collaboration and coordination at the district level will help ensure that schools experience a clear continuum of support for promoting attendance and disrupting chronic absence. Initial experimentation with developing MASS plans in each department offers a foundation for expanding that district level internal collaboration and coordination. At the same time, these efforts will jointly build external community partnerships to foster a wide-ranging culture of school attendance, and enhance resources and supports for chronically absent students and their families.

UC DAVIS

CENTER FOR REGIONAL CHANGE

Nancy Erbstein, Ph.D.
nerbstein@ucdavis.edu



Jacqueline Rodriguez, LCSW
jacqueline-rodriquez@scusd.edu

