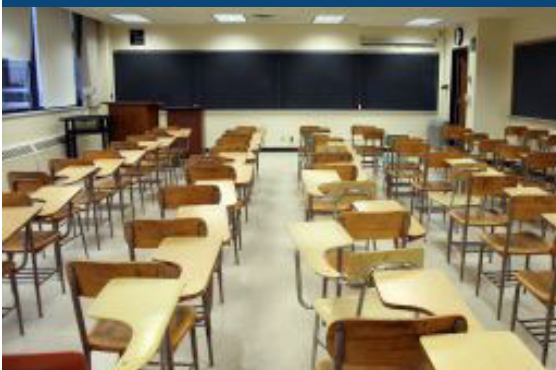


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**Chronic Absenteeism in  
Sacramento City Unified School District (SCUSD)  
2015-2016:  
Attendance Monitoring and Promotion  
Across Five School Sites**

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# Chronic Absenteeism in Sacramento City Unified School District

## Executive Summary

Sacramento City Unified School District (SCUSD) schools, students, and the community as a whole are paying a high price for chronic absence. District-wide, chronic absence is a substantial challenge, as more than 1 in 10 students are chronically absent; more specifically, a study of 191 chronically absent SCUSD students found that children and families experienced on average 10 different barriers to regular school attendance.<sup>i</sup> In 2010-11, SCUSD lost over 4 million dollars due to absenteeism beyond what was regularly expected, and 73% of the cost was associated with approximately 10% of students.<sup>ii</sup> In sum, district trends from 2010-2014 revealed that chronic absence is associated with millions of dollars of lost funding each year, compromised student learning, and broader social costs.

In response, SCUSD staff and UC Davis researchers partnered with 4 schools in 2014-15 to explore and address chronic absenteeism at the school site level across grades K-8 as a Chronic Absence Learning Collaborative (CALC), with support from The California Endowment's South Sacramento Building Healthy Communities collaborative. In 2015-16, the CALC added a high school, and all schools generously allowed in depth observation of their chronic absence intervention and monitoring systems to enable their own and others' learning; this observation focused on an anonymous student cohort that reflected 10% of each school's chronically absent student population.

Analyses of school-wide chronic absence interventions, monitoring practices, and student cohort data revealed that while there were key similarities across school sites and grade levels, patterns were not exactly the same, highlighting the importance of assessing and building upon school, neighborhood, and community level patterns, needs, and resources (reported in Sections 2.0 thru 4.0). These data, along with school site interviews and observations, provide emerging lessons about promising practices to address chronic absenteeism (reported in Section 5.0).

## Recommendations

Overall 2015-2016 findings suggest multiple recommendations for the SCUSD board and district office, as well as for school sites and community partners. Abbreviated recommendations are as follows (see Section 6.0 for full recommendations).

### SCUSD Board and District

#### I. Lead on Attendance

- A. Communicate regularly with schools, students, caretakers, and the community in compelling, culturally responsive ways about attendance, and the resources available to support it.
- B. Engage cabinet-level leadership to build on district efforts to coordinate attendance support activity across relevant departments and initiatives.
- C. Build interagency, community, and business partnerships to promote awareness that every day counts, align systems, recruit mentors, and ensure student safety.

# Chronic Absenteeism in Sacramento City Unified School District

D. Pursue policy/practice changes to:

- Clarify guidelines for ensuring the safety of missing students,
- Monitor/intervene in kindergarten chronic absence regardless of age,
- Ensure adequate staffing to flag and address inter- and intra-district transferee attendance problems during (re)enrollment,
- Ensure adequate staffing to monitor attendance and build school awareness of district attendance promotion expectations and resources,
- Enable community partnerships that help children and families feel connected to their schools and access attendance resources,
- Require all schools to create and assess a Multi-tiered Attendance Support System strategy (MASS) as part of their annual site improvement plans, and
- Return to schools a percentage of ADA funds generated via improved attendance.

## II. Support Data Use

- A. Resolve Student Information System (SIS) challenges regarding tracking and reporting on attendance and intervention data.
- B. Integrate an algorithm to flag student attendance patterns that raise safety concerns.
- C. Provide adequate and multiple training and refresher opportunities on using the SIS to monitor and report attendance-relevant data.
- D. Ensure data/analyses are available with appropriate confidentiality to multiple constituencies.
- E. Ensure disaggregated district and school level chronic absence and intervention data are available to inform LCAP development and school planning.

## Schools

### I. Implement key “nuts and bolts” strategies to address chronic absenteeism

- A. Use data to develop, implement, and assess attendance plans.
- B. Build a committed attendance leadership system that consistently works on attendance promotion strategies, and can weather staff turnover, staff leave, etc.
- C. Include parent/community liaisons on the attendance leadership team who are knowledgeable about the local community and culture(s).
- D. Ensure attendance leadership team and all school stakeholders have appropriate training on attendance systems, resources, and why attendance matters.

### II. Pursue approaches that reflect these guiding principles:

- A. Monitor the impact of attendance promotion strategies and creatively adjust practices.
- B. Work with communities to identify and address systemic attendance barriers.

# Chronic Absenteeism in Sacramento City Unified School District

C. Build a school-wide understanding of attendance as everyone's responsibility.

D. Make sure every child matters, and knows that they matter.

## Community

**I. Community and regional stakeholders should partner with young people, families, and schools to support school attendance.**

A. Encourage, inform, and enable district, school, city, and county investment in attendance promotion.

B. Help schools and the district implement culturally responsive approaches to attendance promotion and support.

C. Spread the word that every day counts.

D. Align agency activities to ensure the safety of students who are chronically absent.

E. Implement policies and practices that help students (and help parents/caretakers help students) get to/from school and stay there throughout the school day.

School systems themselves are absolutely critical to improving attendance, but alone, they are inadequate. All of us with a stake in young people's well-being need to step up to ensure that SCUSD students reap the full benefits of public education, which starts with them being at school.