The Geographic Distribution of Chronic Absenteeism in the Sacramento City Unified School District (SCUSD), 2010-2013

Poor school attendance has high costs in terms of young people's academic learning, connection to peers, teachers and schools, health, high school graduation, and future employment.[1] Chronic absence—missing at least 10% of school—is an important benchmark of poor attendance. From 2010 through 2013, over 1 in 10 SCUSD students were chronically absent each academic year: 5020 student in 2010-2011, 6223 students in 2011-2012 and 5205 students in 2012-2013.[2] Chronic absence rates varied substantially across grade-levels and student subgroups.[3] To direct resources toward reducing chronic absenteeism where they are most needed, it is important to understand the geographic distribution of chronic absenteeism across the school district. This brief describes chronic absence rates across SCUSD neighborhoods and schools, revealing that chronic absenteeism is unevenly distributed.

Chronic Absence Across the Community

Using data from 2012-13, the following maps help pinpoint areas where large numbers of chronically absent students live, and where there are high proportions of chronically absent students. Figure 1 shows the number of chronically absent students who lived in each census block group in which at least 25 young people were enrolled in the SCUSD. [4]

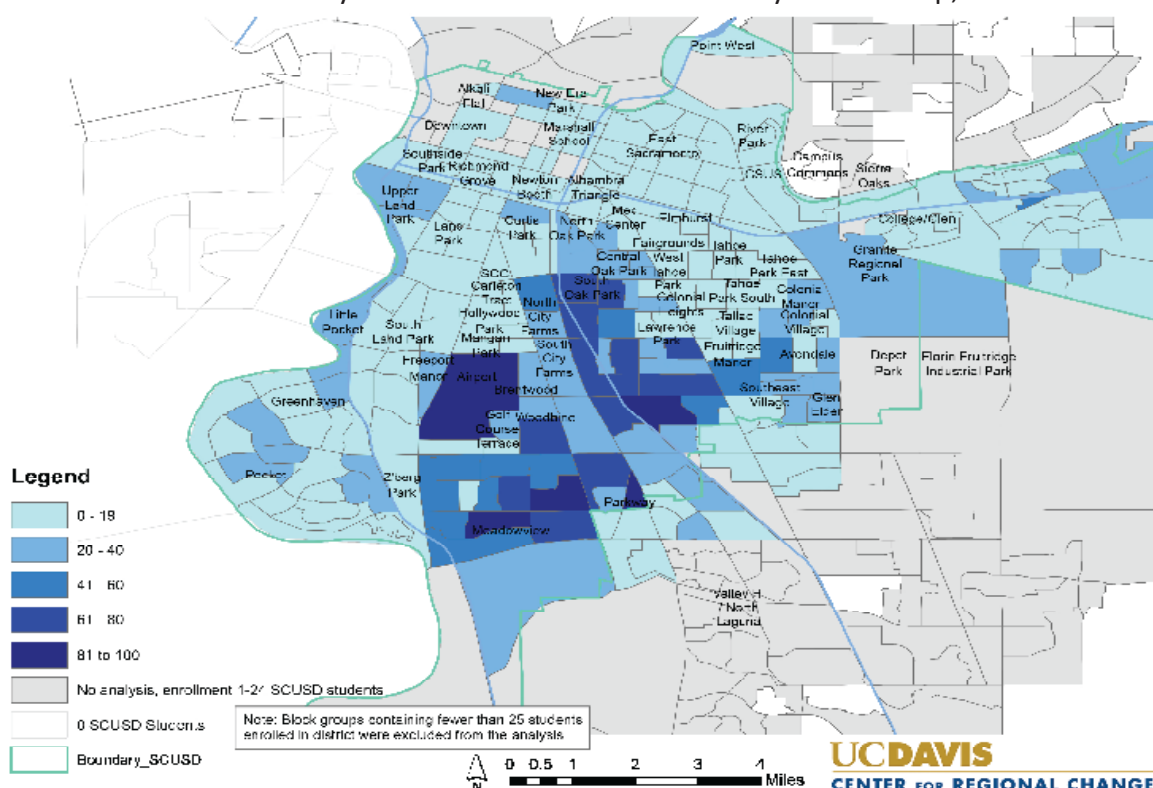### Number of Chronically Absent Students in the SCUSD by Block Group, 2012-2013

Figure 1. Number of Chronically Absent Students in the SCUSD by Block Group, 2012-2013

This figure can help answer the question: where did the greatest numbers of chronically absent students live in 2012-2013? Locations that are marked with darker blue were home to the largest numbers of chronically absent students, while locations in lighter blue were home to fewer chronically absent students. Figure 1 shows that while chronically absent students were living throughout Sacramento, chronically absent students were not evenly distributed across neighborhoods.

Figure 1 provides important information about where chronically absent students are concentrated. However, it does not provide information about whether an especially high or low proportion of enrolled students in a neighborhood are chronically absent, which can help focus attention on possible neighborhood attendance barriers.   Figure 2, below, describes how the chronic absence rate of each census block group compares with the overall district average chronic absence rate. This analysis includes each census block group in which at least 25 students are enrolled in the SCUSD.

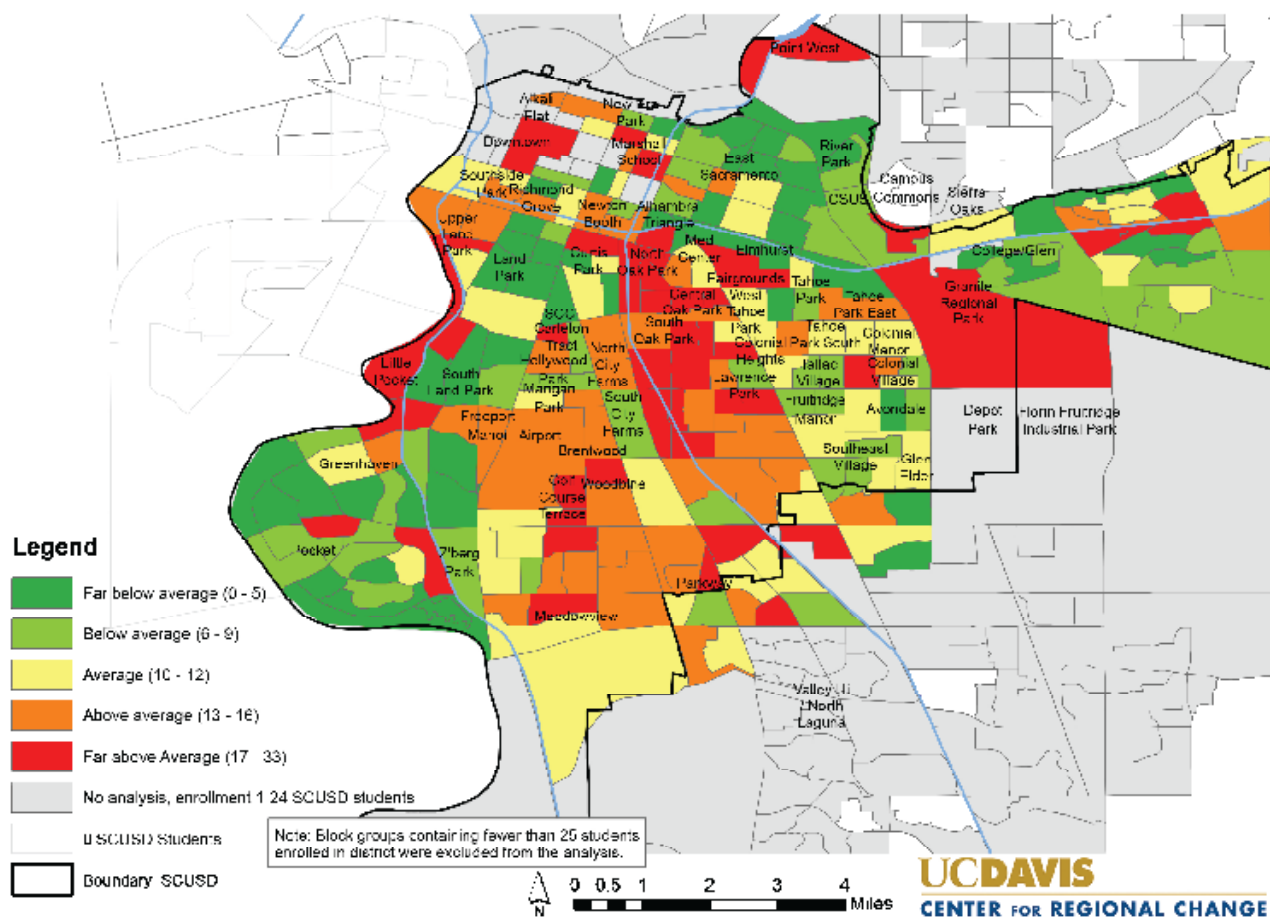### Chronic Absence Rates by Block Group Relative to the District Average, 2012-2013

Figure 2. Chronic Absence Rates by Block Group Relative to the District Average, 2012-2013

Figure 2 shows that chronic absence rates vary across SCUSD. [5] Block groups in yellow have chronic absence rates that approximate the district average. Green block groups have chronic absence rates that are significantly lower than the district average. Orange and red block groups have significantly higher rates of chronic absence compared with the district average. In red block groups, from 17 to 33 of every 100 SCUSD students were chronically absent.

Figure 3 shows whether chronic absence rates in each block group increased, decreased or remained approximately the same from 2010-2011 to 2012-2013. On this map places where rates remained similar over time are yellow. Places where chronic absence rates increased are orange and red, and decreases are indicated in green. Please note this analysis does not describe whether block group chronic absence rates are relatively high or low, but rather whether they changed and, if so, whether they increased or decreased. "Increases" were changes in chronic absence rates that shifted a block group's 2012-2013 rank on the Figure 2 legend towards Above Average by either one or two categories ("increased" and "substantially increased" respectively). "Decreases" were changes in chronic absence rates that shifted a block group's 2012-2013 rank on the Figure 2 legend towards Far Below Average by either one or two categories ("Decreased" and "substantially decreased" respectively).

Change in Rates of Student Chronic Absenteeism by Block Group, 2010-2011 to 2012-2013
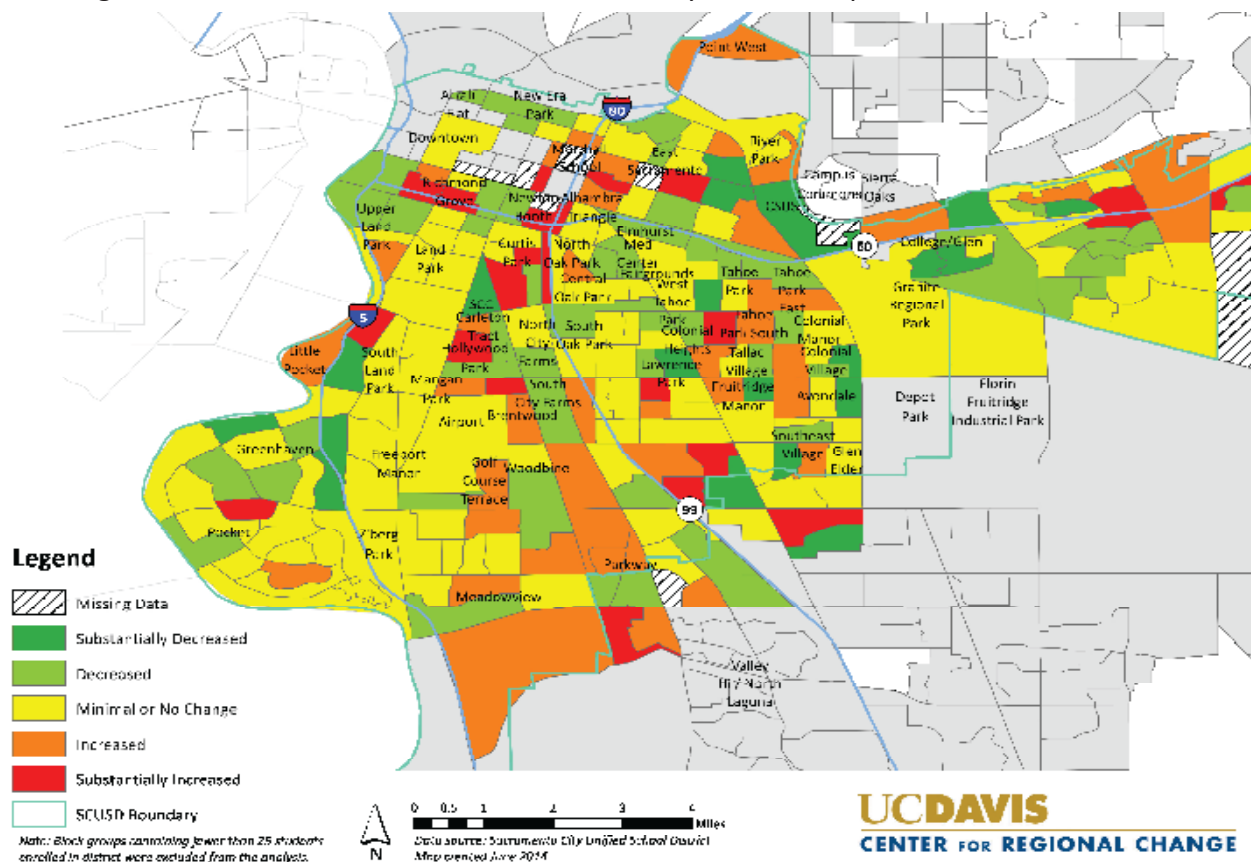

Figure 3. Change in Rates of Student Chronic Absenteeism by Block Group, 2010-2011 to 2012- 2013

While chronic absence rates decreased in some locations, they increased in others. Together these maps reveal that students living in several neighborhoods are chronically absent at especially high rates, raising questions about neighborhood factors that might compromise student attendance. These are important places for further investigation, collaboration and intervention focused on reducing chronic absence.

School Chronic Absence Rates

Identifying schools that serve high concentrations of chronically absent students can help prioritize investment addressing attendance barriers. Locating schools with relatively low or decreasing rates of chronic absence that serve similar student populations to those with schools with high or increasing chronic absence rates may help identify strategies that effectively support attendance.

Most SCUSD school-level chronic absence rates from 2010-2011 through 2012-2013 reflected a district-wide 2011-12 increase in chronic absenteeism. [6]   However, at some schools chronic absence rates *decreased* each subsequent year. These include: Earl Warren Elementary, Hollywood Park Elementary, Hubert H. Bancroft Elementary, Isador Cohen Elementary, Leatata Floyd Elementary, Matsuyama Elementary, Oak Ridge Elementary, Peter Burnett Elementary, Sutterville Elementary, Theodore Judah Elementary, William Land Elementary, Alice Birney and The Met High School. The following maps show 2012-2013 chronic absence rates across the district for elementary, middle and high schools. [7]   In each map, schools are depicted with color-coded dots that indicate the school's chronic absence rate. The background shading reflects the percentage of children under 18 living in households with incomes below the federal poverty line.

SCUSD Elementary School* Chronic Absence Rates and Percentage of Children in Households
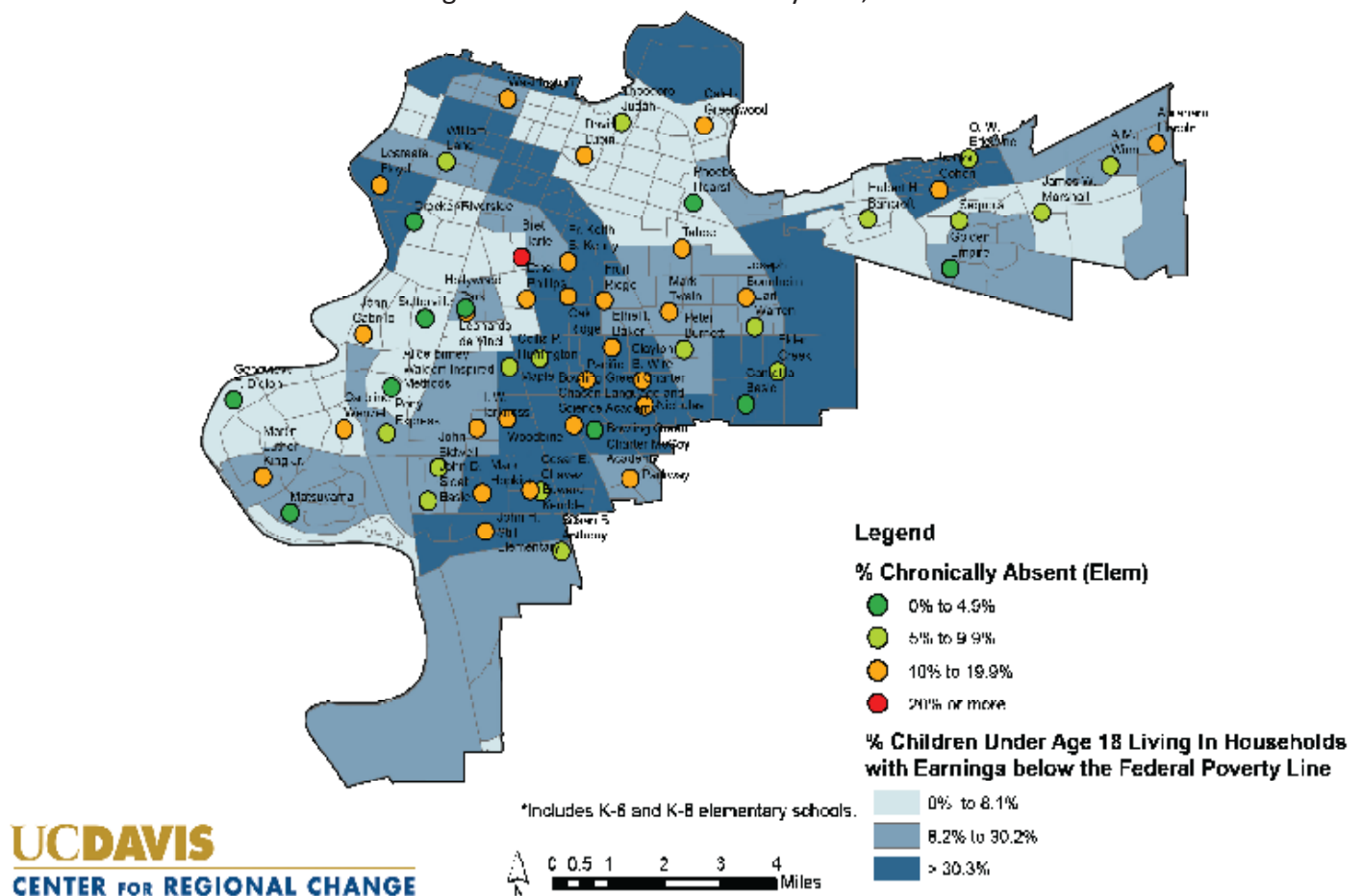With Earnings Below the Federal Poverty Line, 2012-2013

Figure 4. SCUSD Elementary School Chronic Absence Rates and Percentage of Children in Households with Earnings
below the Federal Poverty Line, 2012-2013

SCUSD Middle School* Chronic Absence Rates and Percentage of Children in Households
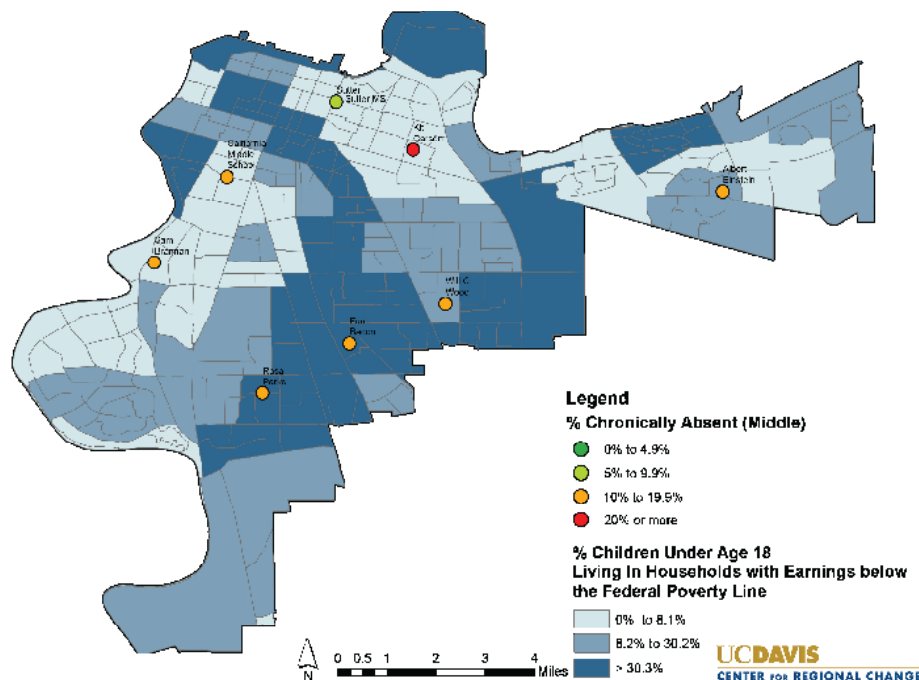With Earnings Below the Federal Poverty Line, 2012-2013

Figure 5. SCUSD Middle School Chronic Absence Rates and Percentage of Children in Households with Earnings below the Federal Poverty Line, 2012-2013

SCUSD High School* Chronic Absence Rates and Percentage of Children in Households
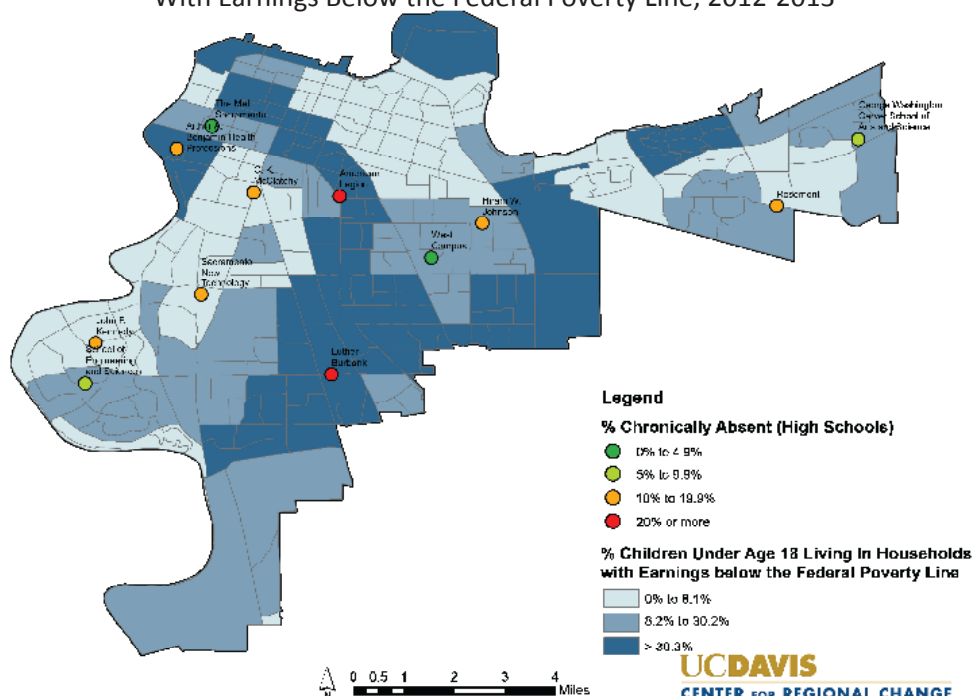With Earnings Below the Federal Poverty Line, 2012-2013

Figure 6. SCUSD High School Chronic Absence Rates and Percentage of Children in Households with Earnings below the Federal Poverty Line, 2012-2013

Rates depicted here might differ from current school chronic absence rates. For updated information on chronic absence at specific school sites, please see the SCUSD Data Dashboard at http://www.scusd.edu/attendanceabsence-tables-0

Conclusion

This brief has described the geographic distribution of chronic absenteeism in SCUSD. Districtwide more than 1 in 10 students missed at least 10% of school during the 2010-2011, 2011-2012 and 2012-2013 academic years. However, chronic absenteeism was uneven across places. In some neighborhoods and schools, more than 1 in 5 young people were chronically absent.

Chronic absenteeism is a chronic problem in SCUSD. Neighborhoods and schools where chronic absenteeism decreased over three years might offer insight into its causes and solutions. Places with especially high levels of chronic absenteeism are important sites of investment in forging school-community partnerships to identify and address attendance barriers.

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Endnotes:

[1] See Brief #2: The Cost of Chronic Absence in the Sacramento City Unified School District Chronic Absence Issue Brief Series at regionalchange.ucdavis.edu/ourwork/projects/chronic-absence-in-the-sacramento-unified-school-district

[2] Chronic absence rates reflect the percentage of students who were enrolled in the district for at least one month, and who missed at least 10% of the days they were enrolled in school. To assess chronic absence, we consider student absence rates, which are generated as follows: absence rate=(#days absent/#days enrolled) x 100%. These calculations rely upon district-generated data on "# days absent" and "# days enrolled." According to district staff, in secondary schools where attendance is marked for each class period, "# days absent" is generated by counting every day's worth of periods a student is marked absent as the equivalent of one day absent. Primary school "tardies" are not counted as absences. We are unable to independently verify district-generated figures.

 Students enrolled in SCUSD for at least one month were included in this analysis. However, for the purpose of this calculation, we excluded attendance data for students in Grade 13 and with School code = "Home/Hospital." We were unable to include data for students attending John Morse Therapeutic Center, Yav Pem Suab Academy, Success Academy, Language Academy, The Academy, Sacramento Accelerated, Capital City, and sites coded "Non-public school," and "Special Education Independent."

[3] See grade level and sub-group analyses at regionalchange.ucdavis.edu/ourwork/projects/chronic-absence-in-the-sacramento-unified-school-district

[4] A census block group is a statistical division of a U.S. Census tract that is generally defined to contain from 6oo to 3000 people (http://www.census.gov/geo/reference/gtc/gtc_bg.html).

[5] A standard score called a z-score is used to compare each block group's chronic absence rate to that of the entire district. It is derived by subtracting the district's mean chronic absence rate from an individual block group's raw chronic absence rate (calculated as numbers of chronic absentees per 100 students enrolled) and dividing the difference by the population standard deviation. The categories include below -1.5 standard deviations, between -1.5 and -0.5, -0.5 to 0.5, 0.5 to 1.5 and above 1.5.

[6] School-level chronic absence rates were calculated by dividing the total number of chronically absent students by the total number of students enrolled in the school, and multiplying by 100%. Students enrolled in SCUSD for less than one month were excluded from the analyses. Students who attended multiple SCUSD schools during the academic year were assigned to the school they attended longest during that year.

[7] Maps for 2010-2011 chronic absence numbers and rates can be found at http://regionalchange.ucdavis.edu/ourwork/publications/chronic-absence-scusd/Brief3_ChronicAbsencePopulation