California School Health + Chronic Absence Diagnostic Tool

March 2019

Attendance Works
Advancing Student Success By Reducing Chronic Absence

CA Local School Wellness Policy Collaborative

HEALTHY SCHOOLS CAMPAIGN

Introduction

Chronic absence, defined most commonly as missing 10 percent or more of school for any reason (including excused and unexcused absences and suspensions), is a cross-cutting metric that is both a warning sign and predictor of education and health outcomes. California has recognized the power of chronic absence as a tool for better understanding poor academic performance by integrating it into the state's Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) and including it as a school quality measure in the state plan for the nation's new education law, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

As a result, chronic absence is included as a measure in the [California School Dashboard](). Additionally, other federal and state policy requirements, such as the local school wellness policy, create new opportunities to set goals, plan actions and leverage new resources to address chronic absence.

While the root causes of chronic absence are multifold, student health issues, including physical and mental health issues, are a major factor. For example, asthma is a leading cause of absence, accounting for one-third of all days missed instruction. Children with persistent asthma are more than three times as likely to be chronically absent than their peers. The critical connection between health and chronic absence and the importance of addressing this issue was most recently recognized by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) in a [new policy statement]().

Fortunately, there are numerous, evidence-based school health interventions to address the health-related causes of chronic absence. These include employing school health providers, such as school nurses and counselors, implementing universal, in-classroom breakfast programs, adopting positive school discipline policies, providing high quality physical education programming, comprehensive health education and many more.

This document will help you:

· determine the health-related root causes of chronic absence in your school or district,

· identify what interventions are already underway or should be implemented,

· consider what funding sources are available to support those interventions,

· link efforts to address health-related causes of chronic absence with the policy priorities of your state education agency (SEA) or local education agency (LEA).

We have outlined six steps that will help you identify and address the health-related causes of chronic absence. We have included a Background Information Chart (page 6) with key reference information, as well as a Root Cause Analysis Chart (page 10) that your team can fill out.

Examine data and identify leading health conditions

[DataQuest](#) and data from your district can help you examine your chronic absence rates and differences in rates by subgroups. It is also critical to look at additional data to better understand the health conditions impacting student in your school or district. This can be accomplished by examining student level data collected through student health information cards, student Individualized Education Programs (IEP) and 504 plans, and school health provider records.

In addition, aggregate level data available at the school and community level can be helpful in better understanding the health issues impacting students in your school or district. For example, all non-profit hospitals are required to complete community health needs assessments and make this information publicly available. These assessments usually draw on public health data and present a snapshot of the leading health issues impacting all populations in the community, including children. Community health data can also be accessed by contacting your local public health agency.

Note: In addition to collecting this type of data for this diagnostic tool, it is important to think about how to integrate it into existing assessments and systems of support utilized by your school or district. For example, consider whether questions related to leading student health issues can be integrated into district needs assessments or a health and wellness goal can be added to the district school improvement plan template.

Once the leading student health conditions are identified, prioritize those which you want to focus on addressing through school health interventions.

Key questions you can ask to inform this decision, include:

1. What health issues have the greatest prevalence among our students?
2. Which of those health issues are we best able to address?
3. How can we leverage existing interventions, policies, or funding opportunities?
4. Which of these issues can be addressed through community partnerships?

Identify appropriate interventions

Once you have identified and prioritized the health issues you intend to focus on, the next step is to identify school interventions that can be implemented to address these issues.

The Background Information Chart on page 6 provides examples of school health programs that can be implemented to address the leading health-related causes of chronic absence.

Identify potential funding streams

There multiple funding opportunities available to support the implementation of school health programs to address the root causes of chronic absence. Many of these funding streams can be braided and blended to ensure enough resources are in place to support the effective implementation of the appropriate interventions.

Potential funding streams include:

Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF)
California enacted a historic Local Control Funding Formula in 2013, which requires school districts to track chronic absence as a metric of pupil engagement. School districts across California are now required to monitor and address chronic absence as part of the Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) prescribed under the LCFF.

ESSA Title I funding
ESSA allows Title I funding to be used to implement school health programs including hiring school health providers, including school nurses and mental health providers, implementing curricula to support social and emotional learning and physical education and implementing positive school climate programs.

ESSA Title II funding
ESSA allows Title II funding to be used to provide professional development to school staff, including teachers, principals, school health providers and others, on addressing chronic absence and specifically calls out the need to train school staff on supporting students' social and emotional well-being.

Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants (SSAEG)
SSAEG is a new flexible grant program under ESSA that offers funding to school districts to support programming that addresses well-rounded education, supporting safe and healthy students and effective use of technology. Determine how much funding your district will receive under this program on shapeamerica.org.

Medi-Cal
California is in the process of expanding the types of health services for which school districts can bill Medi-Cal. Previously, Medi-Cal could only be billed for school health services included in a student's IEP. As a result of this change, Medi-Cal can be billed for any Medi-Cal eligible service delivered to a Medi-Cal enrolled student. More information is available on dhcs.ca.gov.

Check out this brief written by Attendance Works on opportunities to fund efforts to reduce chronic absence in California school districts.

Determine which policy requirements you are supporting

Chronic absence can be used as an organizing principle to help schools prioritize and align their responses to different policy requirements, including the following:

Local Control Funding Formula

California's LCFF requires school districts focus on eight key areas that can help all students succeed. Pupil engagement is one of these eight focus areas and chronic absence is used as a measure of pupil engagement. In addition to directly impacting pupil engagement, implementing programs to address the health related causes of chronic absence can support additional LCFF focus areas, particularly school climate, pupil achievement and basic services, which includes providing all students with safe, properly maintained school facilities.

Local school wellness policy

All school districts participating in federal school meal programs are required to develop a local school wellness policy that promotes the health of students. Required components of the wellness policy include goals for nutrition promotion and education, physical activity, and other school-based activities that promote student wellness; and nutrition guidelines and policies for all foods and beverages available or for sale on the school campus during the school day. Therefore, implementing programs, such as universal in-classroom breakfast and high quality physical education programs, to address the health related causes of chronic absence can also help school districts meet the local school wellness policy requirements.

ESSA

Under ESSA, all states are required to create state accountability systems that are then used to identify underperforming schools in need of comprehensive or targeted support and improvement. California's ESSA state accountability system includes a number of measures that can directly be positively impacted by efforts to address the health-related causes of chronic absence. These include chronic absence, high school graduation rate, academic performance and connectedness to school.

Engage the community

Schools cannot and should not be solely responsible for addressing the health related causes of chronic absence. Community partners, including health providers, community based organizations, local businesses and others, can play a key role in providing support to schools. Once you have the data and have identified the programs you would like to see implemented in your school or district to address the health-related causes of chronic absence, consider who in your community can help you accomplish this.

Whether it is a local hospital providing flu immunizations through a mobile clinic or a community based organization implementing after school programming to support physical activity, it is important to engage the surrounding community in this work and leverage their assets and resources.

Evaluate the impact

It is critical to collect pre and post data to document the impact your school or district's programs have on student health and attendance. This diagnostic tool can provide an important way of documenting the baseline data for your school or district's chronic absence rates and leading health issues. This tool should be completed at least annually to document any changes in key metrics and to make the case for continued investment in school health programs.

This diagnostic tool should be adapted to best meet your needs and completed with a group of individuals from your school or district committed to addressing chronic absence. This might be members of a school's attendance or wellness committee, a school nurse or the district's school health services and/or programs coordinator.

Background Information

Identifying and Addressing the Health-Related Causes of Chronic Absenteeism

This chart outlines several of the most common health-related causes of chronic absence, and gives examples of data sources, evidence-based interventions, possible funding sources and accountability levers that can be used to spur action on these issues. This chart can be used as a reference when filling out a chart for your district's or school's data (see page 10).

What are the health-related causes of student absences?	What data can be used to explore this root cause?	What interventions can help address this root cause?	How can we pay for these interventions?	What are the policy/ accountability metrics that justify efforts to address this issue?
Acute Illness Acute illness, such as flu, is a leading cause of absenteeism.	· Reasons for absences · School nurse ratios · Public health department records · Qualitative data · Return to classroom rates	· School based health services · Partnerships with local health providers · Coordination with local health departments · Hand washing · Immunization campaigns · Green cleaning · Parent/family education · School meals/healthy eating	· LCFF/LCAP · ESSA Title I · ESSA Safe, Supportive and Academic Enrichment Grants program · USDA meal reimbursement	Local School Wellness Policy: · Student wellness LCFF: · Pupil achievement · Pupil engagement · School climate ESSA: · Chronic absenteeism · Academic performance
Chronic illness (asthma, diabetes, oral health, etc.) Asthma is one of the leading causes of school absenteeism, accounting for 1/3 of all days of missed instruction. Children with poor oral health status are nearly 3 times more likely than their counterparts to miss school as a result of dental pain.	· Reasons for absences · Student health records (district SIS) · IEPs/504s · School nurse ratios · Public health department records · Air quality indices · Return to office rates · Hospital Community Needs Assessment · Emergency room visits for children 5-17	· School based health services · Partnerships with local health providers · Coordination with Local Health Depts · Green cleaning · Add to Local School Wellness Policy · IEPs/504s address attendance · School meals/healthy eating · Health Education	· LCFF/LCAP · ESSA Title I · ESSA Safe, Supportive and Academic Enrichment Grants program · Medicaid · USDA meal reimbursement	Local School Wellness Policy: · Student wellness LCFF: · Basic services · Pupil achievement · Pupil engagement ESSA: · Chronic absenteeism · Academic performance · HS graduation rate · Connection to school

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Mental/ Behavioral Health Issues When students' mental health needs are met, they are less likely to be absent and more likely to be engaged in and have a sense of connectedness to school.	· Reasons for absences · CA Healthy Kids Survey · Guidance counselor staffing ratios · IEPs/504s · Behavioral referrals · Suspension data · Student health records (district SIS) · Public health department records · Hospital Community Needs Assessment	· School based mental health services/programs · Partnerships with local health providers · Coordination with Local Health Depts · Add to LSWP · Professional development for school staff (i.e., trauma-informed care, social emotional learning) · Student education · Parent education · Peer to peer programs · IEPs/504s address attendance	· LCFF/LCAP · ESSA Title I · ESSA Safe, Supportive and Academic Enrichment Grants program · Medicaid	Local School Wellness Policy: · Student wellness LCFF: · Pupil achievement · Pupil engagement · School climate ESSA: · Chronic absenteeism · Academic performance · HS graduation rate · Suspension rate · Connection to school
Food insecurity and poor nutrition Children who come from food-insecure families are more likely to be suspended from school and have higher absenteeism rates compared to children who come from foodsecure homes. Increasingly, evidence indicates a positive association between school breakfast programs and student attendance rates.	· % students enrolled Free and Reduced Meals · % eligible students participating in breakfast · % eligible students participating in lunch · % students overweight/ obese · Student feedback (including Student Advisory Council) · <u>Smarter Lunchrooms Movement</u> (SLM) scorecard · <u>CA Dashboard</u> - nutrition education standards · % students experiencing food insecurity (local food bank or public health department)	· <u>Nutrition Education</u> · Integrate nutrition education into Common Core Standards · Breakfast in the Classroom · Backpack program · <u>Smarter Lunchroom Movement</u> · Before/after school programs offer snacks/meals · School Food Pantry · Farm to School/School gardens · Adequate time to each · Recess before lunch	· USDA reimbursement · LCFF/LCAP · ESSA Safe, Supportive and Academic Enrichment Grants program · Grants · Bonds	Local School Wellness Policy: · Nutrition Standards · Nutrition Education and Promotion · Public notification LCFF: · Basic services · Pupil achievement · Pupil engagement · School Climate ESSA: · Chronic absenteeism · HS graduation rate · Academic performance · Connection to school

What are the health-related causes of student absences?	What data can be used to explore this root cause?	What interventions can help address this root cause?	How can we pay for these interventions?	What are the policy/accountability metrics that justify efforts to address this issue?
Physical Inactivity Children who are obese are 1.7 times more likely to have 10 or more absences in a given year than their non-obese peers.	· % of students in Healthy Fitness Zone for Physical Fitness Test · % students overweight/obese · Certified PE specialist/student ratio · Compliance with CA PE minutes (ES requirements, MS/HS requirements) · CA Dashboard - PE and PA standards	· PA classroom breaks · Professional development for teachers · Daily structured recess · Recess before lunch · Active transportation to and from school (including walking school bus)	· USDA meal reimbursement · LCFF/LCAP · ESSA Safe, Supportive and Academic Enrichment Grants program · Grants · Bonds	Local School Wellness Policy: · PA/PE · Public notification LCFF: · Basic services · Pupil achievement · Pupil engagement ESSA: · Chronic absenteeism · HS graduation rate · Academic performance · Connection to school
Negative School Climate 7.1% of students report not going to school at least 1 day during the past 30 days because they felt unsafe at school.	· Dashboard-CA Healthy Kids Survey · CA School Climate Survey · Counseling staff · DataQuest Dashboard-Suspensions · Facility status (SARC) · Scan of Environment and Attendance Tool	· Social and emotional learning professional development and curricula · Anti-bullying policies and programs · Mental Health services · Staff wellness · Parental engagement · After school programs · Experiential health education	· LCFF/LCAP · ESSA Safe, Supportive and Academic Enrichment Grants program · Grants · Bonds	Local School Wellness Policy: · Nutrition Standards · Nutrition Education and Promotion · PA/PE LCFF: · Basic services · Pupil achievement · Pupil engagement · School climate ESSA: · Chronic absenteeism · Academic performance · HS graduation rate · Suspension rate · Connection to school

What are the health-related causes of student absences?	What data can be used to explore this root cause?	What interventions can help address this root cause?	How can we pay for these interventions?	What are the policy/ accountability metrics that justify efforts to address this issue?
Unsafe routes to school A lack of reliable transportation is a primary factor in chronic absenteeism for students. This is particularly true for low income students.	· DataQuest Dashboard-Tardiness · Walking assessment · Number of walk to school events and participation · Qualitative data (i.e., conversations with students and parents)	· Safe Routes to School · Parent education · Second school bus · Walking school bus	· LCFF/LCAP · ESSA Safe, Supportive and Academic Enrichment Grants program · Grants · Bonds	Local School Wellness Policy: · Physical Activity LCFF: · Basic services · Pupil achievement · Pupil engagement · School climate ESSA: · Chronic absenteeism · Academic performance · HS graduation rate · Connection to school

Root Cause Analysis

Identifying and Addressing Health-Related Causes of Chronic Absence

Using health and attendance data, complete this worksheet to determine how to address the health-related causes of absence that are most prevalent in your school, district or state. Identify what interventions are already underway or should be implemented, what funding sources are available to support those interventions, and how efforts to address health-related causes of chronic absence support your LEA's policy priorities. View and edit this chart online.

Chronic Absence Rate

School: _____ District: _____ County: _____ State: 10.8% (Source: dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest)

Student group(s) at risk: _____

Potential Health-Related Causes of Chronic Absence	What evidence shows this is a problem for our students (e.g. what is the prevalence of each issue in our school)?	What existing assets and interventions can address this root cause?	What interventions will we prioritize? What funding sources are available to support these interventions?	Who are partners we can work with to help us implement these interventions?	What unanswered questions do we have?
Acute Illness (flu, cold, etc.)					
Asthma					
Oral health issues					

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Mental/Behavioral health issues (e.g. ADHD, depression/anxiety, substance misuse)					
Other chronic illness (e.g. diabetes)					
Food insecurity and poor nutrition					

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Physical Inactivity					
Negative school climate					
Unsafe routes to schools					

Stay connected!

Healthy Schools Campaign

Healthy Schools Campaign (HSC) engages stakeholders and advocates for policy changes at the local, state and national level to ensure that all students have access to healthy school environments, including nutritious food, physical activity and essential health services, so they can learn and thrive.

To get involved go to healthyschoolscampaign.org.

For more information contact:
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California Local School Wellness Policy Collaborative

The California Local School Wellness Policy Collaborative brings together state leaders committed to improving student wellness and academic success. By leveraging collective resources, the collaborative members are building a statewide infrastructure that supports schools in updating and implementing their wellness policies.

To learn more about the collaborative and access resources visit healthyeating.org/CASchoolWellness.

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Attendance Works

Attendance Works is a national organization dedicated to advancing student success and closing equity gaps by improving the policy, practice and research around attendance.

Its website offers materials, studies, and success stories about reducing chronic absence. Sign up to receive updates at attendanceworks.org.

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