MAKING DATA WORK IN CALIFORNIA:
Leveraging Your District's Data and Student Information System (SIS) to Monitor and Address Chronic Absence

OCTOBER 2016

Until recently, chronic absence–defined in California state law as missing 10 percent or more of the school year due to excused, unexcused absences and suspensions–has been an overlooked issue. Based upon data recently released by the U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, Attendance Works estimates that chronic absence affects 12 percent of students (or approximately 740,000) in California.[1] In her report In School + On Track 2015, State Attorney General Kamala Harris estimates that 8 percent of California's elementary school students are chronically absent and that starting in the early grades, rates of chronic absence are even higher for our most vulnerable students. Because chronic absenteeism disproportionately affects low-income students, African American, Native American, and Latino students,[2] it is not just an education issue but also a matter of equity and civil rights.

As the evidence showing the link between absences and negative student outcomes mounts, federal and state education leaders are responding with policy changes that promote monitoring and greater accountability for addressing chronic absence. The boxes below summarize key developments in California and at the federal level.

Fortunately, chronic absence is a solvable problem, as illustrated by a growing number of California success stories. And we know that the districts that have succeeded in making chronic absence reductions did so by starting with a hard look at their chronic absence data before adjusting district and school policy and practice. By reducing chronic absence, districts can improve academic achievement, narrow the achievement gap, demonstrate progress on Local Control and Accountability Plans (LCAP) goals, and boost funding by increasing Average Daily Attendance.

California State Reporting & Accountability

- CALPADS will begin collecting attendance data for SY2016-17 to calculate chronic absence

- Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) are required to establish goals for reducing chronic absence and improving overall student attendance

- The State Board of Education has committed to adopt chronic absence as an LCFF evaluation metric

- The School Quality Improvement Index for CORE waiver districts includes chronic absence in their accountability index

Federal Reporting & Accountability

- Federal education legislation, the Every Student Succeeds Act, includes chronic absence reporting requirements under Title I, allows Title II funds to be used for professional development on chronic absence and allows states to use chronic absence as an additional measure of school quality and student engagement.

- The biennial Civil Rights Data Collection by the U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights now includes chronic absence data (defined as missing 15 days) for every district in the nation; the first national dataset for SY2013-14 data was released in June 2016

The purpose of this document is to help district decision-makers in California think about how they might collect and use chronic absence data, with an emphasis on leveraging their Student Information Systems (SIS) to support this work. It includes recommendations for maximizing the opportunities presented by recent state and federal changes and leveraging SIS providers for tracking, calculating, analyzing, disseminating, and acting on chronic absence data. These recommendations are structured within to reflect the key questions outlined in the checklist below.

Checklist: Is Your District Equipped to Produce and Utilize Chronic Absence Data?

1 | Does My District Have the Right Data to Calculate Chronic Absence?

Based on the California Department of Education's (CDE) announcement, all districts will be required to submit student-level attendance data annually to CALPADS. The new data will provide an overall, high-level picture of chronic absenteeism across California and will help identify bright spots where policies and practices can be replicated as well as regions or LEAs that may need targeted technical assistance. While this is an important step for statewide monitoring of chronic absence data, it does not replace the need for LEAs to monitor their own attendance data to track district-wide patterns and to identify and address individual student attendance problems before they escalate.

The good news is that districts generally already have most of the information necessary to calculate chronic absence and disaggregate levels by subgroup. Data elements such as Total Days Present, Total Days of Excused Absence, Total Days of Unexcused Absence and Suspensions are likely to be part of the CALPADS collection. These data elements, when disaggregated by elements already routinely collected for CALPADS (school and student characteristics), are the essential variables for your own district analysis.

Defining Common Terms

- **Chronic absence:**
  Missing 10 percent of the school year for any reason (excused, unexcused, out-of-school suspensions).

- **Truancy:**
  Under state law, a student is considered a truant and receives a notice of truancy if the student has three unexcused absences or tardies of 30 minutes or more. A student is deemed a habitual truant and may be referred to a School Attendance Review Board if a student has been reported as a truant three or more times in one school year and not responded to a conscientious effort by school staff to hold at least one meeting with the parent and the student. Truancy has a long history in California but only focuses on unexcused absences, which can mask chronic absence issues, particularly in the early grades.

- **Average Daily Attendance (ADA):**
  The percent of enrolled students who attend school each day. For ADA purposes, a day present occurs when the student is marked present for any period of the day (but not necessarily all periods). In California, ADA is submitted as an aggregate number to CDE and used to determine state education funding.

Attendance Bands:

In addition to defining chronic absence, Attendance Works recommends analyzing data in terms of varying levels of absenteeism since it helps schools and community partners anticipate the intensity of the interventions to meet student needs. We suggest using the following bands of attendance:

- **Severe Chronic Absence:**
  Missing over 20 percent of school days enrolled

- **Moderate Chronic Absence:**
  Missing 10-20 percent of school days enrolled

- **At-Risk Attendance:**
  Missing 5-9.99 percent of school days enrolled

- **Satisfactory Attendance:**
  Missing less than 5 percent of school days enrolled

2 | Does My District Have a Standard Protocol for Collecting and Responding to Attendance Data?

A. *Has My District Clarified Roles and Expectations for District and School Site Staff Regarding Attendance Data Collection And Action?*

Good attendance data starts at the school site. Strong district practice ensures that there is clear attendance protocol communicated to and implemented with fidelity by staff at the district and school sites, including:

Collecting Data:

- Who is responsible for recording student attendance and putting it into the district's data system?

- Is there an attendance manual that school site staff can refer to?

- Is there a deadline for attendance reporting each day/week?

- Is there a common district definition for a day of absence?

- Is there a common understanding of how your district records and responds to tardies and suspensions?

Responding to Data:

- Who does a school call at the district level for support with attendance?

- What happens when a student is late?

- What happens when a student is absent once (e.g., calls home)?

- What happens when a student is absent for more than one day?

- What happens when a student is missing school, but not consecutively?

- Is there a school site structure to address students with attendance issues?

- Is it the responsibility of a single staff person or an attendance team?

B. *Has My District Created Systems to Assess Chronic Absence Data Accuracy?*

An SIS provider can complement district efforts by generating reports to track completion of attendance records (attendance data input by teachers and schools) and flag any data anomalies that indicate data entry errors. Chronic absence reports will not be reliable if there are long lags in attendance reporting at the school site, particularly if a student is marked "Present" by default. Districts can institute auditing procedures to check for data accuracy as well. This can be automated or can be conducted periodically by district staff to spot check for any obvious discrepancies.

3 | Does My District Generate Timely and Useful Chronic Absence Reports?

A. *Has My District Determined How To Calculate Chronic Absence?*

The first step in generating a chronic absence report is ensuring your district is prepared to calculate chronic absence correctly. In California, state education code 60901 defines a chronic absentee as a student who has missed 10 percent or more of school days for any reason, including unexcused or excused absences and out-of school suspensions. In this case, the numerator is total days missed of school while the denominator is total possible days of attendance. The denominator should be adjusted if a child enrolls late or withdraws early during the school year.

However, districts should keep in mind that for the purposes of reporting to CALPADS, they can consider middle and high school students present for the day as long as they are marked present for at least one period within that day. This practice is consistent with how attendance is taken for the purposes of calculating Average Daily Attendance, which is tied to school funding. Unfortunately, it also easily overlooks students who are academically at risk because they frequently miss particular class periods but not entire school days. To identify these students, Attendance Works recommends that districts explore the feasibility of establishing an early warning system that flags when students miss 10 percent of total possible periods in order to trigger early outreach and intervention.

Another common challenge is determining how to handle highly mobile students when calculating chronic absence. If students transfer to one or more schools during the course of a single academic year, a key concern is how to calculate and assign their absence rates. This is especially important given the high mobility rates among groups specifically named in the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), particularly low-income students and students living in foster care. For mobile students, Attendance Works recommends calculating their absence rate based on the number of days absent and enrolled in the district that year-to-date, regardless of how many schools the student has attended, and then include their data in either a) the student's most recently attended school, or b) the school where they were enrolled for the longest time. Find a way to document your methodology. If possible, include school-level student transfer rates with chronic absence rates to ensure the data picture captures the high mobility of the student population. The strong relationship between school transfer and chronic absenteeism should not suggest reduced school responsibility for addressing attendance barriers, but rather indicates that additional support and investment is needed.

B. *Does My District Generate Timely Chronic Absence Reports?*

To be useful, chronic absence data needs to be available in a timely way to school staff so they can review reports for accuracy, flag students in need of immediate and individual attention, as well as plan and assess school-wide interventions. The nature and frequency of the report depends upon how it is being used.

I. Reports to Support Interventions with Individual Students

For purposes of intervening with students and verifying the accuracy of attendance data, ideally districts can work with their SIS providers to make real-time data available through an online dashboard and/or weekly or biweekly reports. Regardless of the format, such a report should quickly offer a quick overview of the total number and percent of students who are chronically absent along with a list of chronically absent students with relevant information such as name, grade, ethnicity, home language, number of total days, number of absences by type (excused, unexcused, suspensions). Having such information available on a regular basis is important for correcting data entry mistakes and ensuring staff reaches out to students and their families as soon as possible to help identify and address barriers to attendance.

Most importantly, these reports should leverage real-time data to identify the students who have missed 10 percent of the school year so far–a strong predictor of chronic absence for the school year without further intervention. (For example, a student who has already missed six days of school in the first two months of the year should receive immediate intervention.) Instituting early warning systems in the beginning of the school year will have the most impact for "catching" the students in need of intervention. Such an approach can be integrated with a broader strategy for early warning that also incorporates a focus on other indicators such as those referenced in Robert Balfanz's Attendance, Behavior and Course Failure method. Open a dialogue with your district's data staff and, if necessary, your SIS provider to discuss how they can generate and report real-time data and/or predictive analytics.

II. Reports to Assess Practice and Inform Planning

A more robust set of data reports that help generate information about patterns of chronic absence are critical for assessing whether current practice is making a difference for students and planning what interventions are needed. Such reports are not needed as frequently but should be available at critical points during the school year when district and school teams develop their school and district plans for improving student outcomes or assess whether mid-course corrections are needed. These reports should be available least at the end of the school year and again in January or February.

Reports to identify patterns should generate data for the district overall and by school by grade, student subgroups, and other relevant categories such as feeder patterns or geographic area. Disaggregated chronic absence data helps districts identify who is most affected by chronic absence and likely to require additional supports to improve attendance. Identifying disproportionalities across student subgroups can reveal equity issues and support LCAP goals for reducing chronic absence among the priority student groups (low-income, foster children, English Learners). Some districts have also found it useful to examine trends across multiple years of data or attendance rates over the course of a school year (which can identify times of the year when absences are common).

When analyzing data, Attendance Works has found that it is critical to look at both the number of chronically absent students in a category as well as the percentage. Examining both ways can expose different patterns or disproportionalities.

Suggested Chronic Absence Analyses

- **Chronic absence and ADA by school -** What are the attendance patterns of each school in the district? How does each school's average daily attendance compare to its rates of chronic absence?

- **Chronic absence by grade –** How many students are at- risk based on their attendance? How does this break down by grade level?

- **Chronic absence by race/ethnicity –** How many students in different racial/ethnic groups are at- risk based on their attendance?

- **Chronic absence by race/ethnicity and grade –** How many students are at- risk based on their attendance, by race and grade?

- **Chronic absence by Special Needs status –** To what extent are students with and without special needs at- risk based on attendance?

- **Chronic absence by English Learner status –** To what extent are English Learner and non-English Learner students at- risk based on attendance?

- **Chronic absence by free-and reduced-price meal status –** To what extent are students with and without free- and reduced-price lunch meal enrollment at-risk based on attendance?

- **Chronic absence by foster care and homeless status –** To what extent are students in foster care or who are homeless at-risk based on attendance?

- **Chronic absence by zip code –** How many students in each zip code are at risk based on their attendance?

- **Chronic absence by suspension incidents –** What are the suspension patterns of each school in the district? How does each school's suspension rate compare to its rates of chronic absence?

- **List of students with moderate or severe chronic absence –** Which students and families require immediate intervention?
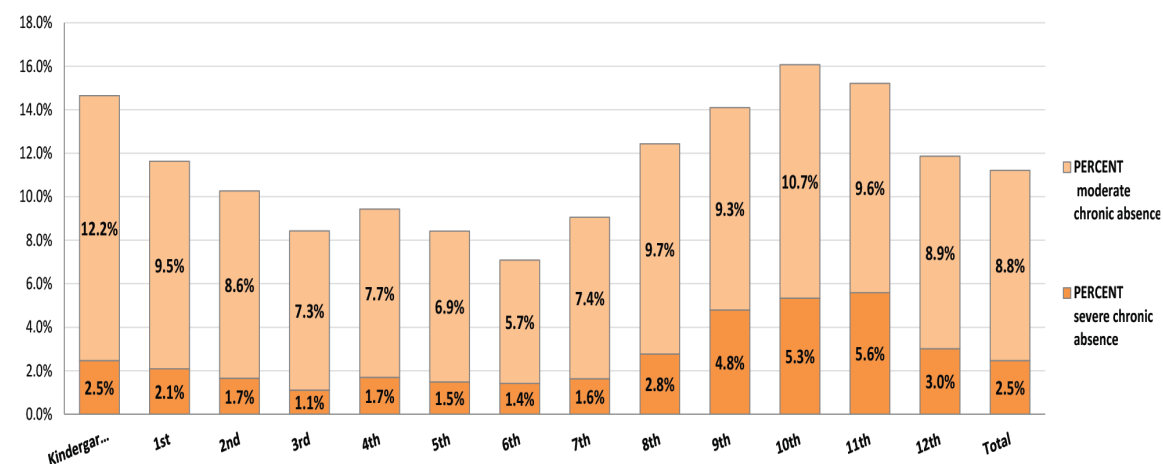
C. *Does My District Generate Visual Chronic Absence Reports that are Easy to Interpret?*

Generating chronic absence reports, whether the output is displayed in data tables, visualized in graphs or listed by individual student and school (or all of the above), is one of the most critical ways an SIS provider can partner with your district to support the reduction of chronic absence. Visual representations are particularly useful in identifying patterns of attendance that may not be as obvious when analyzing raw data. Some SIS providers have built-in data modules with dynamic, real-time reports and graphs that allow users to disaggregate by various student subgroups. Start a conversation with your SIS provider about how they can produce something similar. (Read about Eagle Software Aeries Analytics example at the end of this document.)

Attendance Works offers a free, Excel-based tool called the District Attendance Tracking Tool (DATT) that has examples of various analyses that can be helpful when examining chronic absence data. The DATT template includes a series of analyses to unpack your chronic absence data and displays these analyses in both data tables and bar graphs. Each data analysis in the DATT is also broken out into separate tiers of attendance bands (severe chronic absence, moderate chronic absence, at-risk and satisfactory attendance) that translate easily when planning multi-tiered interventions (see page 10).

Example of a Graph Generated By the DATT

What percentage of students in each grade level were MODERATELY or SEVERELY chronically absent?

PERCENT moderate chronic absence

PERCENT severe chronic absence

Districts can also consider developing visual tools that help them gain insights from reviewing data on average daily attendance (the percent of students who show up each day). Consider the example below from New York City, which offers a look at patterns when average daily attendance is graphed for every day of the school year. It shows, for example, decreases in attendance during parent-teacher conferences before and after holidays. This attendance "heartbeat" can help districts and schools identify when they might develop solutions that help with the attendance of all students for example, offering special attendance incentives the day after a holiday or re-thinking their approach to parent-teacher conferences.

Example of a Graph Using Average Daily Attendance

SOURCE: New York City Department of Education: Daily attendance data, 2013-14. Center for New York City Affairs data visualization.

4 | Does My District Have the Capacity to Review and Use Our Data to Take Strategic Action?

Data only adds value if it is reviewed and used strategically to take action. Districts face several key decision points regarding data dissemination, including:
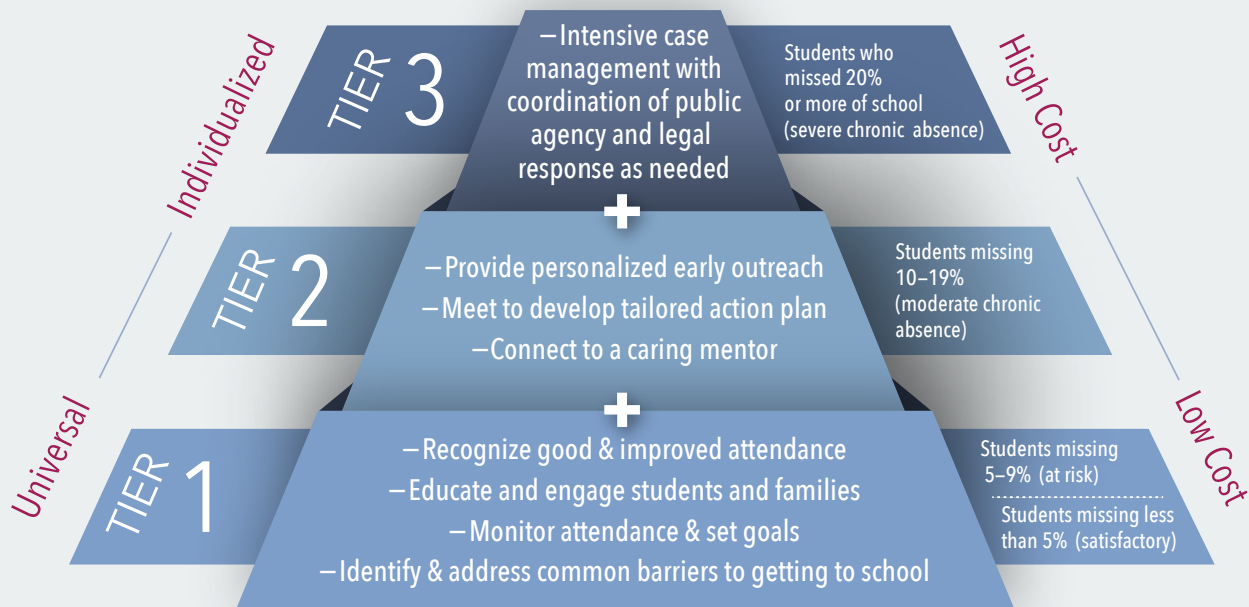
- Who should determine who receives reports (board members, administrators, social workers, counselors, teachers, etc.)

- How often to disseminate the reports – districts might consider distributing biweekly reports to principals and teachers and monthly reports to the Superintendent, Board of Education, and other district leaders.

- How to equip stakeholders to understand how to interpret data and what action steps to take based on what the data reveal

- How often are staff are expected to review the data – in some districts, principals reserve time at the monthly staff meeting to review attendance data with teachers. Similarly, principal supervisors can include chronic absence data as a routine part of meetings with principals or send out regular reports by school.

- What information to include in chronic absence reports – not surprisingly, the answer to this question depends on the audience and the purpose of review. See below for more information about what information is most useful for different roles.

- An SIS should be able to help districts implement these decisions by providing different levels of access and reporting within the data system (e.g., grouping schools for a network superintendent) as well as a method for pushing out reports to specific audiences (e.g., a monthly cabinet-level report that is automatically generated and emailed).

A. Has My District Built Staff Capacity for Accessing, Interpreting and Acting on Chronic Absence Data?

The regular practice of reviewing chronic absence data and interpreting patterns using data and charts might be unfamiliar for some school site staff, and districts should be prepared to provide basic training on how to access reports (i.e., using the SIS or other data platform) as well as how to understand the reports. Even more important is the ability for staff to understand how chronic absence data can be meaningful for taking action.

Attendance Works' primary recommendation for taking a data-informed approach is using multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS). This three-tiered system for identifying levels of student need and developing strategies to address them include: Tier I Strategies, which are universal strategies that should be available to every student in a school building. Tier II Strategies are aimed at early intervention and designed to help students who need slightly more support to avoid chronic absence. Tier III Strategies are intensive supports offered to the students facing the greatest challenges to getting to school.

Multi-Tiered System of Supports to Address Chronic Absence

Individualized

TIER 3 — Intensive case management with coordination of public agency and legal response as needed

Students who missed 20% or more of school (severe chronic absence)

High Cost

TIER 2 — Provide personalized early outreach — Meet to develop tailored action plan — Connect to a caring mentor

Students missing 10–19% (moderate chronic absence)

Universal

TIER 1 — Recognize good & improved attendance — Educate and engage students and families — Monitor attendance & set goals — Identify & address common barriers to getting to school

Students missing 5–9% (at risk)

Students missing less than 5% (satisfactory)

Low Cost

B. *Does My District Review School-Level Chronic Absence Data?*

School-level data are important for sites to identify students who are at risk of becoming or who are already chronically absent. Teachers should know who in their classroom is struggling with attendance and what resources are available to support them. Real-time information should be available to teachers so they can double-check data for accuracy, check-in with the student if they are starting to see a spike in absences and, if needed, call for support from the administration (ideally, a school attendance team) if the situation is beyond what they can address.

A school team that meets regularly to review attendance data and use it to develop the school's approach to reducing chronic absence is critical. A school attendance team can exist as part of an existing school committee or as a separate entity. Strong school teams can work together to organize existing resources to ensure strategies are in place for each tier of a comprehensive system as well as advocate for additional supports from the district if what they have in place is not sufficient given the needs of their student population. Teams ideally include the principal or assistant principal, social worker or counselor, school nurse, attendance clerk or school secretary, and can also include community partners or on-site programs. (More resources are available in Attendance Works' California Principal's Toolkit and school attendance teams.)

The school team should meet regularly to review chronic absence attendance data to:

- Coordinate the school's multi-tiered strategy to reduce chronic absence
- Use qualitative and quantitative data to understand the attendance challenges at their school
- Use trend data to identify which subgroups of students are most vulnerable to absenteeism
- Connect families and students to need-based resources
- Monitor progress

Key Questions Chronic Absence Data Can Answer:

- Do the data look accurate to you? If not, what might be causing problems with attendance data entry? What improvements might be needed to increase data accuracy?
- Is chronic absence a problem? Is it getting worse or better?
- Is chronic absence concentrated among particular students?
- Is chronic absence higher or lower among particular grades?
- Do some student populations have higher or lower levels of chronic absence?
- What might explain some of these differences? What additional information do you need to identify barriers or effective strategies in place?
- Does the level of need (reflected in the severity of absences) compare to availability of supports to improve attendance in your school and district?

From the Leading Attendance in CA: Principal's Toolkit

C. *Does My District Examine District-Level Chronic Absence Data?*

Aggregate district-level data are critical to understanding best practices, major challenges and possible points of intervention for chronic absence. Comparing data across schools, particularly those in the same community where students might face similar opportunities and challenges, can point to which schools are struggling most with attendance so district staff can support those schools in uncovering and addressing what school or community factors are preventing students from attending school. District-level analysis can also lead to identifying "bright spots," where school policy or practice is considered a best practice that could be replicated by other schools. See Attendance Works' Positive Outlier Toolkit for more information about how to identify inspiring cases. Looking at data across schools can also point to challenges that might be affecting attendance among students across multiple schools (e.g., high levels of kindergarten absence across schools, neighborhood challenges like community violence or health issues) so that the district can enlist the support of community partners to address barrier to attendance.

Centralized district infrastructure is important for supporting the work of school sites to improve attendance. District leaders should ensure that an appropriate level of staffing at the district level is assigned and equipped to support school sites around accessing, interpreting, and acting on chronic absence data. Ideally, district staff from a cross-section of departments (i.e., academic instruction, student support services, family and community engagement and health services) who often work in silos but whose collaboration is essential to improving attendance should work together to review chronic absence data and develop interventions accordingly.

D. *Does My District Use Qualitative Data to Unpack Barriers to Attendance?*

Even after quantitative data have been disaggregated, a deeper qualitative look is helpful for understanding barriers to attendance impacting specific schools, geographic regions, or student subgroups. Unpacking the reasons why students and families have a difficult time coming to school every day–without jumping to blame–is a critical step to knowing what programmatic interventions are needed. Examining multiple sources of data can illuminate why students are missing school, whether families lack awareness of how absences add up, if there are environmental or structural barriers such as a safe path to school or poor housing conditions that lead to asthma and other chronic health conditions, or whether school climate and disciplinary approaches are contributing to aversion and disengagement. This deeper understanding of what drives absences ensures that schools take a supportive, caring approach to addressing student needs rather than blaming students or their families for missing school, which often backfires. Attendance Works provides some guidance on understanding contributing factors to chronic absence.

How a California District is using Chronic Absence Data to Change District Attendance Practice: A Conversation with Dr. Felicia Cruz Delgado in Corona-Norco Unified School District

Felicia Cruz Delgado is Coordinator of Student Services for Corona-Norco Unified School District, a mid-size district of approximately 54,000 students in southern California's Riverside County. After deciding to focus on chronic absence, the district's overall chronic absence rate dropped from 10.4 percent in the 2012-2013 school year to 9.7 percent in the 2014-2015 school year, with particularly significant drops in Transitional Kindergarten and Kindergarten. (See box below). Here are insights from Felicia's experience.

Why did you take on chronic absence?
I started looking into this because of the LCAP nearly four years ago; before that, we had only focused on average daily attendance. This led me to wonder, "When a student is chronically absent, what are the ramifications?" A lack of student engagement, which is directly tied to Goal 5 of the LCAP, academic performance, warning signs such as poor behavior, suspensions, and a whole menu of other ramifications. We believe that, "Today's Attendance Gap becomes tomorrow's Achievement Gap."

How have you created buy-in around the issue?
When I talk about attendance, I package it with academic impact–what that looks like from a site leader perspective and what it does to school climate and culture. What was most helpful was: 1. Time to speak directly with principals; 2. My credibility as former principal; and 3. Making the connection between attendance and other issues principals care about, such as school climate and achievement. Connecting the dots is huge for site leaders.

What steps did you take to address chronic absence?
Step one was the data; collecting the right data and data awareness. Step two is the, "Now what?" question. For our principals, the concept was a paradigm shift in how to look at attendance. Before, if they had 96 percent ADA, they felt good about that. With the DATT report and seeing how many students were on the chronic absence list, they began to get alarmed.

How did your district create chronic absence data reports?
We took Attendance Works' DATT and worked with the IT Department to embed it into our own internal data system. It was easy to transition the data profiles but then the training piece was more time consuming.

What data reports have been most helpful?
Attendance by grade and year is the analysis that schools like the most. We also give the three-year historic span in that report. The next best report is the list of individual students who are chronically absent.
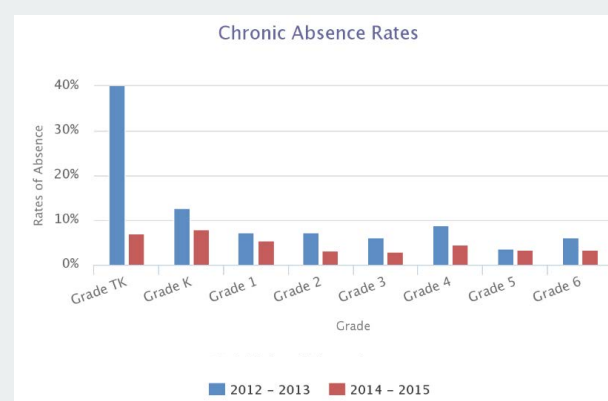
How do you build staff capacity?
We train classified employees (e.g., attendance clerks) every August. I address attendance at least quarterly during a monthly Assistant Principal academy. For principals, I conduct a brief training at the beginning of the year and go to on-site consultations. I also place school chronic absence reports in each principal's folder in beginning of year (October) and mid-year.

How does your district address chronic absence?
We emphasize site-level strategies based on the data. Our district's social-emotional approach is to get to know the kid's story–then we can begin applying interventions. However, chronic absence is also embedded into our core district-wide initiatives, "Excellence through Equity" by bridging our "Social Emotional Learning" and "Academic Rigor and Relevance" pillars.

September is Attendance Awareness Month, so I try to build excitement around that throughout the district. We are introducing school incentives that provide a small budget for positive recognition (assemblies, certificates, backpack giveaways).

Districtwide reductions in chronic absence in Corona-Norco

Read more about Corona-Norco Unified School District's efforts to address chronic absence in the Office of the Attorney General's *In School + On Track 2015 Report*.

5 | Does My District Share Chronic Absence Data with Key Stakeholders?

A. Does My District Engage Families in Their Child's Chronic Absence Data?

Strong family engagement will give families the information and tools they need to be partners in their child's education—and that includes up-to-date information about their child's school attendance. Parents and guardians not only need to know whether their child's absences are adding up, they should also be equipped to understand what that number means and why showing up matters. Sharing chronic absence data with families can engage them in a productive conversation about how schools can support positive habits of attendance and how families can reinforce them at home. The Office of the Attorney General recently collaborated with the Ad Council to develop a toolkit that identifies strategies for communicating with California parents about attendance.

Possible options for providing families with access to data on their own children, along with information to help them interpret the data include:

- Providing families with an online portal that includes information about how their child is doing in school. For example, Los Angeles Unified School District's Parent Passport provides real-time information for parents to check their child's performance, including attendance.

- Sending out notices ensuring families are aware of how many absences their student is accumulating over the course of the school year. Researchers Todd Rogers of Harvard and Avi Feller of the University of California find that personalized messages mailed to parents of at-risk students reduced chronic absenteeism by 10 percent, partly by correcting parents' misbeliefs about their students' total absences. Learn more about their research here.

- Including information on their student report card. In this case, it is important to not only share data about the total days missed but to help educate families what level of absences are problematic. See these examples.

- Including an explicit discussion of chronic absence as part of their parent-teacher conference. Districts can encourage teachers to use parent-teacher conference meetings to help establish and maintain ongoing dialogue with parents to recognize good and improved attendance as well as identify barriers – such as transportation issues, job loss, unstable housing arrangements or health concerns. See Attendance Works' Teaching Attendance Toolkit for tips and step-by-step guidance about how to leverage parent-teacher conferences to discuss attendance.

Keep in mind the importance of training staff so they can help parents to understand the data and why it matters.

B. Does My District Share Annual Chronic Absence Reports Publicly?

Addressing chronic absence requires an acknowledgment that schools can't do it alone. The barriers that impact regular school attendance often require a deep and holistic approach to supporting a student's needs that go beyond school walls. School districts can better leverage community organizations and other local agencies by equipping these partners with the necessary information to unpack barriers and target resources. Publicly available district dashboards that include chronic absence rates and numbers disaggregated by student subgroup and school can be powerful tools for partnering with community members around solutions to improve attendance without requiring special permissions or confidentiality waivers. Los Angeles Unified School District, Oakland Unified School District, and the CORE SQII reports all have strong examples.

Publishing aggregate chronic absence reports also signals a strong commitment to transparency and accountability that invites prospective parents and community members to have conversations about the connection between school attendance and academic performance. Sometimes an SIS provider can create a dashboard appropriate for public consumption or, alternatively, the district can utilize another graphic design service.

C. Has My District Developed Structures for Sharing Actionable Chronic Absence Data with Community Partners?

Community partners can serve as key collaborators in addressing barriers to attendance. As such, districts are encouraged to develop structures for sharing aggregate and individual-level data with partners to help shape and target their efforts. Districts should consider how to establish a forum to share and discuss the public data with community partners so they understand trends and specific schools, subgroups, or grades that might need additional support.

Sharing individual-level data with external partners can be logistically complicated but can result in valuable support from community organizations that can add services such as mentoring or case management. Establishing data-sharing Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) with partners and informing outside groups as well as district staff about what types of data sharing are permissible will facilitate improved collaboration. Some programs or districts will also require parental permission for data-sharing (explore whether this needs to be an opt-in consent form or can be an opt-out notice). Training for district staff, school site staff and community partners is important to ensure that student confidentiality is protected at all stages. Work with your SIS provider to create a process for extracting ad-hoc reports or including data fields that identify students in specific programs to more easily generate reports in order to further productive partnerships (e.g., chronic absence levels for students in after-school programs or living in public housing).

6 | Is My District Leveraging Our Student Information System to Produce and Utilize Chronic Absence Data?

A. Has My District Educated Our SIS Provider about Our Chronic Absence Data Reporting Needs?

Examine how you can make the most of your relationship with your SIS provider as systems are adapted to comply with new state and federal reporting requirements. Hearing from current and prospective clients will increase an SIS provider's awareness of the demand for responsive vendors that can develop chronic absence data analytics. As stated in earlier sections, some of the changes you might want to request include:

- Collecting other data variables beyond those that will be required in CALPADS that can provide a fuller picture of attendance issues

- Running checks to flag any potential data entry errors

- Providing different levels of access and reporting within the SIS as well as a method for pushing out reports to specific district audiences

- Generating lists for individual student intervention, with an overview of the total number and percent of students who are chronically absent along with a list of chronically absent students with relevant information such as name, grade, ethnicity, home language, number of total days, number of absences by type (excused, unexcused, suspensions)

- Running pattern analysis to monitor trends of student subgroups for the district overall and by school by grade, student subgroups, and other relevant categories such as feeder patterns or geographic area

- Generating attendance and chronic absence data for 1-3 years prior to understand change over time

- Building visual reports (graphs, dashboards) that are easy to interpret, ideally as dynamic, real-time reports and graphs that allow users to disaggregate by various student subgroups

- Developing an early warning system using real-time data and/or predictive analytics

- Developing attendance rates by class period for secondary students to better understand lost instructional time (total periods present out of periods enrolled, by student)

- Creating a dashboard appropriate for public consumption

- Extracting ad-hoc reports or including data fields that identify students in specific programs to more easily generate reports for external community and agency partners

B. *Has My District Explored Downloading from Our SIS into the Attendance Works Free California District Attendance Tracking Tool (CalDATT?)*

Attendance Works offers a free, Excel-based tool for districts and schools in California that reveal data patterns, called the California District Attendance Tracking Tool (CalDATT) and a school version, called the School Attendance Tracking Tool (CalSATT). If your district does not have the capacity to produce chronic absence results already, consider using it to create an initial snapshot or download data on a more regular basis (i.e., quarterly). Downloading into the CalDATT is not expensive and can allow a district to determine what types of visual reports would be most helpful without or before taking the more involved and costly step of changing district dashboards.

Districts can sign up to gain access to the CalDATT here. Typically, a skilled data analyst can download the necessary data into the DATT, with the help of an accompanying manual, over the course of a few hours.

District should also consider asking their SIS provider if an automated query download can be created that will export data directly into the DATT template from your SIS system, similar to the example discussed in the Aeries profile below. Attendance Works has also created a similar query for PowerSchool Users. If your district uses a different SIS provider, they may be able to create something similar at a modest cost, particularly if it is shared across multiple districts, or you might check to see whether another district client of your SIS provider has already developed a query and is willing to share it.

C. *Has My District Advocated for Enhanced Functionality within Our Existing SIS?*

Explore whether your SIS provider will build custom chronic absence data reporting functions under your current contract or collaborate with other districts that use the same SIS provider to share best practices and jointly advocate for changes to the SIS platform. While an individual district's resources may not constitute a sufficient business argument for a large SIS provider to make modifications to its product, it is still helpful to open the conversation and educate your vendor about your district's chronic absence data reporting needs. Particularly at this time when SIS providers must adapt to the new CALPADS attendance reporting requirements, a group of districts with the same SIS provider or the collective voice of district leaders through professional

associations can make a convincing argument that the consumer market has high demand for making changes that will facilitate improved chronic absence data reporting.

Should your district be in the position to issue an RFP or negotiate a contract with a new or existing SIS provider, you could include these recommendations in the scope of work or request a demonstration of chronic absence reporting (and other data analytics) during the interview stage.

In addition, some districts elect to use a third party vendor for specific purposes (such as monitoring and creating early warning systems for attendance) or internally developing tools and processes for reporting and sharing data. Hopefully, the recommendations in this document are applicable for these scenarios as well.
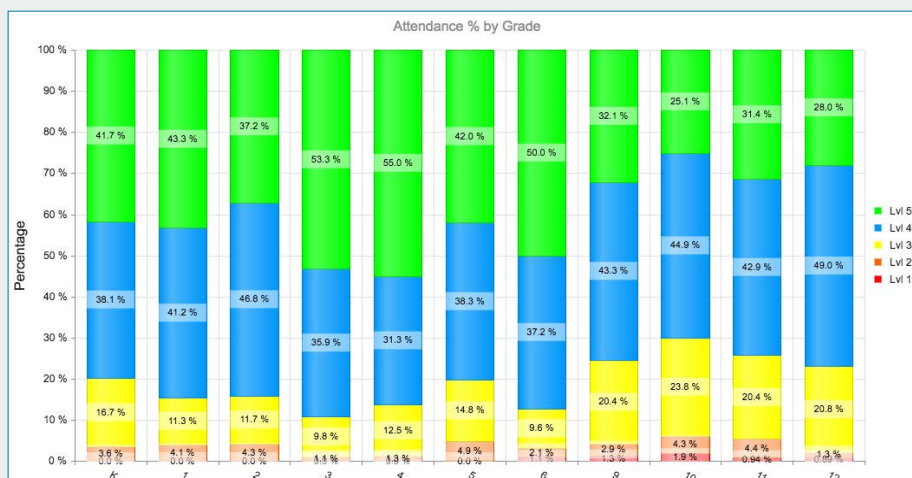
Aeries Jumps Ahead of the Curve: Why One Student Information System Provider Took the Initiative to Build Chronic Absence Reporting into its System

Aeries is a Student Information System that currently serves 46 percent of the market share in California, or 2.7 million students. Three years ago, the Office of the Attorney General in California and Attendance Works began a discussion with Camden Iliff, Aeries' Director of Product Development, to explore Aries interest in developing a chronic absence report based upon the Attendance Works Excel-based District Attendance Tracking Tool (DATT). Because chronic absence had already become a required reporting metric in the LCFF, Iliff quickly recognized that adjusting their software to support easier to produce chronic absence reports would make their product even more attractive to current and potentially new customers.

Iliff began with the inexpensive approach of asking his team to write a macro so that Aeries users could "push a button" and the correct data fields and format would automatically download into the DATT template. This macro now allows any district using their latest software to download and produce chronic absence reports, for free, as needed, throughout the school year.

Informed by the positive reception to the free download, Aeries has now made the much more expensive and time consuming investment needed to build out dynamic LCAP data dashboards (including chronic absence) for all of its district clients as part of an add-on software package. This new product, called Aeries Analytics, draws directly from data stored within Aeries without an export to a third party. Aeries believes upgrading its software tools and training so districts can better use data to promote student achievement is both good for students and for their future as a business.

Example of LCAP Data Dashboard Included with Aeries Software

References

1. The U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 2013-14 Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) data release is the first time the CRDC obtained data on missing 15 days for any reason including excused and unexcused reasons. This definition of chronic absence is similar to the metric recommended by Attendance Works, missing 10 percent of the school year (typically 18 days). CRDC data are self-reported from school districts and may include data reporting errors; based on data in the file, several California schools would have negative chronic absence rates or rates over 100 percent. However, OCR data and the data sample reported to the Office of the Attorney General are our best estimates of statewide chronic absence levels in California until CalPads has collected and released its own data for SY2016-17.

2. Office of the Attorney General. In School + On Track 2015.

Attendance Works is a national initiative dedicated to improving the policy, practice and research around attendance. Its website offers materials, studies and success stories about reducing chronic absence.

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