

Frequently Asked Questions about Calculating and Monitoring Chronic Absence for LCFF

April 25, 2014

1. What is chronic absence?

Broadly defined, chronic absence is missing excessive amounts of school for any reason including excused and unexcused absences, as well as days missed due to suspensions.

In California, state education code 60901 defines a chronic absentee as a student who has missed 10% or more of school days for any reason, including unexcused or excused absences and suspensions, over an academic year.

This definition is based upon research which shows that chronic absence as early as prekindergarten and kindergarten is associated with lower third grade reading scores. By sixth grade it becomes a leading indicator that a student will drop out of high school. In ninth grade, it's a stronger indicator of dropout than eighth grade test scores.

This 10% definition also allows for easy comparisons across districts even if the length of the school year varies. It also promotes earlier identification of students to trigger intervention since students can be detected as off track due to chronic absence at any point during the school year even if a student only misses 2-3 days each month.

A district or school's chronic absence rate is the percentage of students who are chronically absent.

2. How can we obtain data on chronic absence?

Reports on chronic absence rates must be generated locally. Since attendance is not currently reported for individual students to the California Department of Education (CDE) for California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System (CALPADs), CDE cannot calculate and provide these statistics for districts. All school districts, however, have the data needed to produce a chronic absence analysis (and are required to do so as part of their LCAP in accordance with 52060(d)(5)(B) and 52066(d)(5)(B)) as long as they have a student information system that includes data on the total number of days enrolled and total days of absence for each student.

A few districts in California have already begun calculating chronic absence and have embedded it into their data dashboards. While some produce the information through a paid contract with an outside vendor, such as Attention 2 Attendance, that helps them generate a variety of attendance reports, a significant number have developed the internal capacity to generate chronic absence rates. A district can go [here](#) to obtain free data tools offered by Attendance Works to help with calculating chronic absence. These free tools work with any student information system and typically require a district from 4-8 hours, depending upon the skill of their data staff, to download their data into the tools.

Regardless of the approach used, districts should calculate chronic absence in accordance with EC 60901 (c)(1) which establishes a chronic absentee as a pupil absent on 10% or more of the school days in the school year, where the school days in the school year consists of the total number of days that the pupil is enrolled and that school is in session.

As part of your LCAP, it is important to document how you are tracking and calculating a day of attendance. Here are some questions to ask:

- Are you counting students as attending based upon the count taken for ADA?
- Are you translating periods into full day attendance (see Question 7 below for more information)?
- Is taking attendance an active process where teachers must affirmatively indicate that a child is in school in order for a student to be counted? Or is the data system set up to assume a child is present unless changed by the teacher or attendance clerk?
- What provisions are in place for ensuring the accuracy of data entry at school sites?

Keeping track of how attendance is collected, tracked and calculated will help you understand your baseline data so you can maintain the same methodology over time or note whether changes in rates are due to changes in your approach to measuring chronic absence.

4. How do we address concerns about data accuracy?

Data accuracy is a significant concern. Before publicly reporting on chronic absence, your district should review the data with school site administrators to ensure there are no problems with consistent data entry. If accuracy appears to be a challenge, invest time and resources in reviewing how data are collected and entered in order to clarify. You should also identify what is needed to improve data quality whether it is guidance, training, staffing or other investments.

5. Is chronic absence different from truancy?

Truancy and chronic absence are not the same. Truancy refers to unexcused absences and, under No Child Left Behind, is defined by each state. In California, truancy is defined (EC 48260.) as missing 3 days of school or being more than 30 minutes late to class without a valid excuse three times. It is a trigger for beginning legal procedures that could, if poor attendance persists, lead to legal action being taken to ensure a child and their family complies with state compulsory education laws. Once a child is detected as truant, state law (EC 48260.5.) requires a notice of truancy (NOT) to be sent to a student's family. If the NOT is issued three times, the school is required to hold a Student Attendance Review Team (SART) meeting to work with the child and family to develop an attendance plan. If poor attendance persists, the student is considered a habitual truant and can be referred to the School Attendance Review Board (SARB), probation department, or district attorney mediation program for more intensive intervention.

While these truancy provisions are extremely important, they can still overlook when children miss a lot of school but the absences are excused. Particularly when they are young, students can miss a considerable amount of school due to excused absences or the combination of excused and unexcused absence, and both result in the loss of funding through average daily attendance (ADA).



While districts are not required to provide truancy data for the LCAP, districts could include truancy rates along with chronic absence and average attendance rates to help paint a more robust attendance picture. However, districts should be careful to explain how these measures are different from each other. Annual truancy rates can be obtained from the CDE website using Dataquest.

6. Should we count suspensions as days absent?

Yes, suspensions should be included in the calculation of chronic absence because a child who misses school due to suspension is still missing out on classroom instruction. Chronic absence occurs when a child misses more than 10% of instruction for any reason, including unexcused or excused absences and suspensions.

7. How should we translate “period” attendance to full-day attendance?

If a district chooses to translate “period” to “day” attendance and then calculate chronic absence, be sure to note the methodology so that other readers of the Local Control Accountability Plan understand the data. While a “period” method of attendance accounting is beyond the requirements of LCFF, it is appropriate and provides a more accurate picture of missed instruction. That makes it even more useful for local identification and prevention efforts.

Since chronic absence is a measure of time on task, we recommend using the following method to define chronic absence: calculate the total periods missed over the total possible periods of attendance. If this exceeds 10%, the student should be considered chronically absent for purposes of the Local Control Accountability Plan State Priorities in EC 52060 and 52066. For example, if a student has 7 periods of instruction a day for five days a week – that is 35 periods a week or 350 periods every 10 weeks. If this student misses 35 periods or more in this ten-week period, he has crossed the threshold into chronic absence. The rationale is that this “period” method provides the most accurate picture of student’s time spent out of the classroom.

This methodology recognizes that just counting the days where a middle or high school student is marked absent for a full day can too easily mask absences when students are skipping class, have doctor/dental appointments, arrive late or are pulled out early. In California, where funding is based on Average Daily Attendance, districts are likely to treat a student as “Present” for a full day as long as he or she is marked present for a single period because that is the requirement for “attendance” by the state for daily ADA. It also reflects the reality that in many middle and high schools, attendance is still not being taken consistently in every class.

8. How should we handle highly mobile students in calculating chronic absence?

If students transfer to one or more schools during the course of a single academic year, a key question is how to calculate and assign their absence rates. This is especially important given the high mobility rates among groups specifically named in the LCFF, particularly low-income students and students living in foster care.



For mobile students, we recommend 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 they've 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. Again, find a way to document your methodology.

If possible, also 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 they might need additional support/investment to do so.

For a broader discussion of chronic absence and the LCFF, please read our brief, [*Accountable for Attendance*](#).



Attendance Works is a national and state initiative that promotes awareness of the important role that school attendance plays in achieving academic success. Based in San Francisco, Attendance Works is supporting several California districts as they track chronic absence data and intervene with students and schools.

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