



SEIZE THE DATA OPPORTUNITY IN CALIFORNIA: Using Chronic Absence to Improve Educational Outcomes

I. Overview:

This report – a collaborative effort of Attendance Works, Children Now and the University of California, Davis Center for Regional Change – is a call to action. It urges everyone interested in improving our students' educational outcomes to use chronic absence data recently released by the California Department of Education (CDE) to identify the schools and groups of students that most need support, so all students have an equal opportunity to learn.

Chronic absence, defined in California as missing 10 percent or more of school days for any reason¹, is a proven early warning sign of academic risk for students from preschool through high school. Chronic absence is different from truancy (unexcused absences)² and average daily attendance (how many students show up to school, on average, every day). Chronic absence has an especially adverse impact on students living in poverty. They are more likely to face attendance barriers at an earlier age and lack resources to make up for lost instructional time.

High levels of chronic absence in a school is a red alert that systemic barriers to daily attendance may exist at home, in the community, within the school or a combination of all. It is a sign that additional support from the district, other public agencies and non-profits is needed to address these barriers. Even moderate levels of chronic absence can signal that schools are having difficulties providing universal supports that can prevent students from becoming chronically absent and needing more intensive interventions. Poor attendance also can serve as an early warning sign that a school improvement effort is not effectively engaging and meeting the needs of students and families.

The good news is that chronic absence can be turned around, especially when schools, students, families, caregivers, public agencies and partners take a data-driven approach to putting in place comprehensive supports, starting with prevention and early intervention. In California, which serves one of six public school children in the country, the data that is needed to understand how many and which students are chronically absent was not previously available. This changed in December 2017 when CDE released chronic absence data in its interactive data portal, DataQuest (see box).

Examine Your School or District's Chronic Absence Data Now!

DataQuest makes educational data publicly available. Use this interactive data portal to find the chronic absence rates for schools, districts and student populations in your community. Attendance Works has created guidance on accessing and analyzing chronic absence data from DataQuest. Find the guidance.

Use this UC Davis-created Data Story Map to see maps showing chronic absence rates in California schools, and the prevalence of schools with high levels of chronic absence by county and region.

¹ SB 1357 (Steinberg) 2010 http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=200920100SB1357&search_keywords=absenteeism.

² See <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/ai/tr/> on the California Department of Education website.

Having available chronic absence data is new for California even though the state has long collected data on truancy (unexcused absences). Relying on truancy data, however, only offers a partial picture and can hide from public view a large number of students, especially in the early grades, who are academically at-risk because they have missed instruction due to excused, unexcused absences and suspensions.

Chronic absence data are an essential tool for ensuring and intensifying the impact of efforts to boost student success – whether these efforts focus on instruction, curriculum, school climate or social emotional learning. If students are not in school, they cannot benefit from reform efforts. The goal of focusing on chronic absence does not require a new independent effort. Instead it bolsters existing work by providing critical information and another lens for understanding what is needed to achieve more equitable student outcomes, especially for our most vulnerable students.

The new availability of chronic absence data offers an invaluable opportunity to improve educational outcomes. To shed light on how the data can be used, this report shares findings from our analysis on levels of chronic absence in California schools. Findings include:

1. *In nearly one in 10 traditional³ public schools, nearly 20 percent or more of students are chronically absent.*
2. *Approximately half (330,986) of the state’s chronically absent students attend schools where chronic absence affects 10 to 19.9 percent of students.*
3. *Nearly one in five traditional high schools experience chronic absence rates of greater than 20 percent.*
4. *The largest number of traditional schools with chronic absence rates of 20 percent or more are elementary schools.*
5. *Chronic absence is especially high in alternative education settings, which also have a more stringent approach to collecting attendance data.*
6. *Rural counties in northern California experience a higher percentage of schools with chronic absence rates of 20 percent or higher .*
7. *Southern California and the Central Valley counties, which have the largest student populations, are home to the largest numbers of schools with chronic absence rates of 20 percent or higher .*
8. *School-level chronic absence is correlated to higher suspension rates, higher dropout rates, lower graduation rates and fewer graduates completing students taking college-track courses.*

The report closes with action recommendations for key stakeholders.

While this report is focused on California, it is relevant for other states because it demonstrates how publicly-available chronic absence data can be used to inform the allocation of resources and to alert key stakeholders when collective action is needed to address barriers to attendance.

³ For the purposes of this publication, “traditional” schools are all publicly-funded schools, including charters, that were not designated with [Dashboard Alternative School Status \(DASS\)](#). See footnote 4 for definition of DASS.

II. Seizing the DataQuest Opportunity

In California, the public release of chronic absence data in December 2017 by the CDE offers an invaluable opportunity to take data-driven action. Because of the easy accessibility of chronic absence data via DataQuest, any interested person can quickly find out the extent to which chronic absence is a problem for their school, district, county or student population.

Chronic absence data can inform a school district's decisions about goals to set in its Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) and how to allocate resources to meet those goals. It can shed light on which schools need support from community partners. Districts and schools have a vested interest in addressing chronic absence because they are now held accountable for chronic absence data through the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and California's Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF).

Although California was the first state to define the term "chronic absence" when it passed Senate Bill 1357 in 2010, it is among the last states to add attendance data to its longitudinal data system. Because California did not include attendance in its Adequate Yearly Progress metrics, adopted under the federal No Child Left Behind Act, the addition of attendance to CALPADS (California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System) was initially considered a state mandate that would have required additional state funding at a time when the state was in an economic recession. Things changed with the passage of ESSA in 2015, which requires that every state report on chronic absence data. CDE began collecting attendance data in June 2017, which then made possible the public release of reports through DataQuest in early December 2017.

Since this was a first-time data collection, concerns initially existed about the data's accuracy and consistency. CDE determined, however, that the data was of relatively high quality, despite a data glitch with one district's submission. CDE believes the data is of high quality because California has collected and audited aggregate attendance data for many years, for the purpose of allocating state funding based on average daily attendance.

Starting in fall 2018, when CDE has access to two years of chronic absence data, the department will use this information to set benchmarks for improvement in the California School Dashboard. The dashboard contains reports on the performance of local educational agencies (LEAs), schools and student groups, displayed via state and local measures. The dashboard helps identify strengths, challenges and areas in need of improvement.

Quick Facts on Chronic Absence in California

Drawn from DataQuest, these facts paint a picture of the scale of chronic absence and the student populations most affected. In terms of percentages and overall numbers.

- One in 10 California students (an unduplicated count of 694,030) is chronically absent.
- The highest levels of chronic absence are found in kindergarten (14%) and high school (15.4%).
- Our most vulnerable students – foster youth and homeless youth – are more than twice as likely as the statewide average to be chronically absent. One in four foster youth – 25.1% or 13,879 – is chronically absent. One in five homeless youth – 21.2% or 53,630 – is chronically absent.
- Other student populations of concern include socioeconomically disadvantaged youth (13.5% or 529,250) and students with disabilities (17.7% or 136,566).
- Also disproportionately affected are American Indian/Alaska Native (20.9% or 7,124), African American (18.8% or 69,566) and Pacific Islander (15.5% or 4,724).
- The largest numbers of chronically absent students are Latino (407,181), White (145,981) and African American (69,556).

Examining levels of chronic absence is essential because this offers invaluable insights into what is needed to turn around poor attendance and improve educational outcomes. Attendance Works has found it helpful to classify the causes of chronic absence into four major categories: barriers, negative school experiences, lack of engagement and faulty beliefs. See the chart below.

Barriers	Negative School Experiences	Lack of Engagement	Misconceptions
<p>Illness, both chronic and acute.</p> <p>Lack of health, mental health, vision or dental care.</p> <p>Trauma.</p> <p>Unsafe path to/from school.</p> <p>Poor Transportation.</p> <p>Frequent moves or school changes.</p> <p>Involvement with child welfare or juvenile justice systems.</p>	<p>Struggling academically or socially.</p> <p>Bullying.</p> <p>Suspensions and expulsions.</p> <p>Negative attitudes of parents due to their own school experience.</p> <p>Undiagnosed disability.</p> <p>Lack of appropriate accommodations for disability.</p>	<p>Lack of culturally relevant, engaging instruction.</p> <p>No meaningful relationships with adults in school.</p> <p>Stronger ties with peers out of school than in school.</p> <p>Unwelcoming school climate.</p> <p>Failure to earn credits/ no future plans.</p> <p>Many teacher absences or long-term substitutes.</p> <p>justice systems.</p>	<p>Absences are only a problem if they are unexcused.</p> <p>Missing two days per month doesn't affect learning.</p> <p>Sporadic absences are not a problem.</p> <p>Attendance only matters in the older grades.</p> <p>justice systems.</p>

When a school or student population experiences a high level of chronic absence, this suggests that the school and district should invest resources in analyzing the factors at play and enlist the expertise and help of public agencies and other community partners to identify and address barriers, as needed. Typically, a comprehensive assessment involves collecting both qualitative and quantitative data. It also benefits from drawing upon multi-disciplinary perspectives. When chronic absence affects a large number of students, this is a sign that systemic challenges may need to be addressed, using programmatic solutions.

III. Analyzing School Levels of Chronic Absence in California:

To better understand chronic absence at the school level, the Center for Regional Change at UC Davis collaborated with Attendance Works and Children Now to analyze the data available from DataQuest and other CDE datasets to explore four key questions. (See Appendix A for more information about our methodology.)

- 1. What are the chronic absence levels in schools across California? To what degree are schools experiencing the following levels?** Using chronic absence *rates* (the percentage of students enrolled at the school over the course of the school year who missed 10 percent or more of school days), we categorized schools in terms of chronic absence *level*. (Find the same levels used in the publication, Portraits of change.)

 - extreme chronic absence (30 percent or more of students chronically absent)
 - high chronic absence (20 to 29 percent of students chronically absent)
 - significant chronic absence (10 to 19 percent of students chronically absent)
 - modest chronic absence (5 to 9 percent of students chronically absent)
 - low chronic absence (less than 5 percent of students chronically absent)

2. **Do chronic absence levels vary across different types of schools?** We compared rates for traditional elementary, middle school, high school and K-12 public schools. We analyzed alternative schools separately because significant differences in attendance data collection procedures and student populations make comparison of the rates across the two types of schools problematic. For the purposes of this publication, “traditional” schools are all publicly-funded schools, including charters, that were not designated with [Dashboard Alternative School Status \(DASS\)](#).⁴ Traditional schools serve most students in California, using mainstream educational approaches. Alternative schools focus on high-risk populations and are characterized by small unit size and responsiveness to learning and instructional style differences among students.
3. **How is chronic absence distributed geographically?** We used California’s 58 counties as the primary unit of analysis. A county-level analysis made sense given the critical role that county offices of education play in implementing California’s LCFF and the fact that county governments have major responsibility for the delivery of health and human services to children, youth and families.
4. **What is the connection between school-level chronic absence and educational outcomes for schools?** While a wealth of research shows that chronic absence is associated with poor educational outcomes for individual students, it is also important to explore the impact on schools’ outcomes. We examined whether higher levels of chronic absence for schools were associated with lower graduation rates, higher dropout rates, lower rates of participation in college-track classes and higher suspension rates.

It is important to keep in mind that for calculating state funding, California state law allows most schools to count a student “present” as long as the student was marked present for a single period. As a result, California’s chronic absence levels for secondary schools are likely to appear lower when compared with states that only count a student “present” if the student was present for a longer portion of the school day (typically at least half the day) or when compared with California alternative schools (<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/ac/eligibilitycriteria.asp>)⁴, which generally collect attendance by period.

Key Findings for California:

1. ***In nearly one in 10 traditional public schools, nearly 20 percent or more of students are chronically absent.***
As shown in Table 1, in almost one in 10 traditional schools (822 schools), 20 percent or more of students are chronically absent. By contrast, in more than one out of two schools (56 percent or 4,980 schools), 10 percent or less of students are chronically absent. Such high levels of chronic absence could be used to help identify schools that particularly need extra assistance from public agencies and community partners to support a comprehensive, prevention-oriented approach to improving attendance.
2. ***Approximately half (330,986) of all chronically absent students are found in 3,099 schools with chronic absence affecting 10 to 19.9 percent of students.*** This finding suggests that it will be important to also build the capacity to address chronic absence among schools facing significant (although not high or extreme) levels of chronic absence. For these schools, integrating attention to chronic absence into existing reforms may be especially important.

⁴ Certain types of schools, including continuation, opportunity and community day schools automatically qualify for DASS. Others may apply for DASS status if they meet specified criteria including having at least 70 percent of the school’s total enrollment (upon first entry to the school) comprised of high-risk students.

TABLE 1. Chronic Absence Levels in Traditional California Schools

Traditional Schools	Low Chronic Absence (CA) (0-4.9%)	Modest CA (5-9.9%)	Significant CA (10-19.9%)	High CA (20-29.9%)	Extreme CA (30%+)	Total (n)
Number of schools	1,713	3,261	3,099	563	259	8,895
Percentage of schools	19	37	35	6	3	100
Cumulative enrollment	1,132,876	2,497,033	2,423,415	362,691	88,000	6,504,015
Number of chronically absent students	36,321	186,673	330,986	85,122	37,929	677,031 ⁵

3. **Nearly one in five (474) traditional high schools have chronic absence rates of greater than 20 percent.** It is important to keep in mind that relative to other states, this calculation may be an undercount, given that traditional high schools count a student as attending for the day as long as the student is marked present for a single period in the day. K-12 schools, which represent a much smaller number of schools, are also heavily affected by chronic absence. K-12 schools have a broader grade span than elementary, middle or high schools. Many serve all grades K-12, but some serve 6-12.

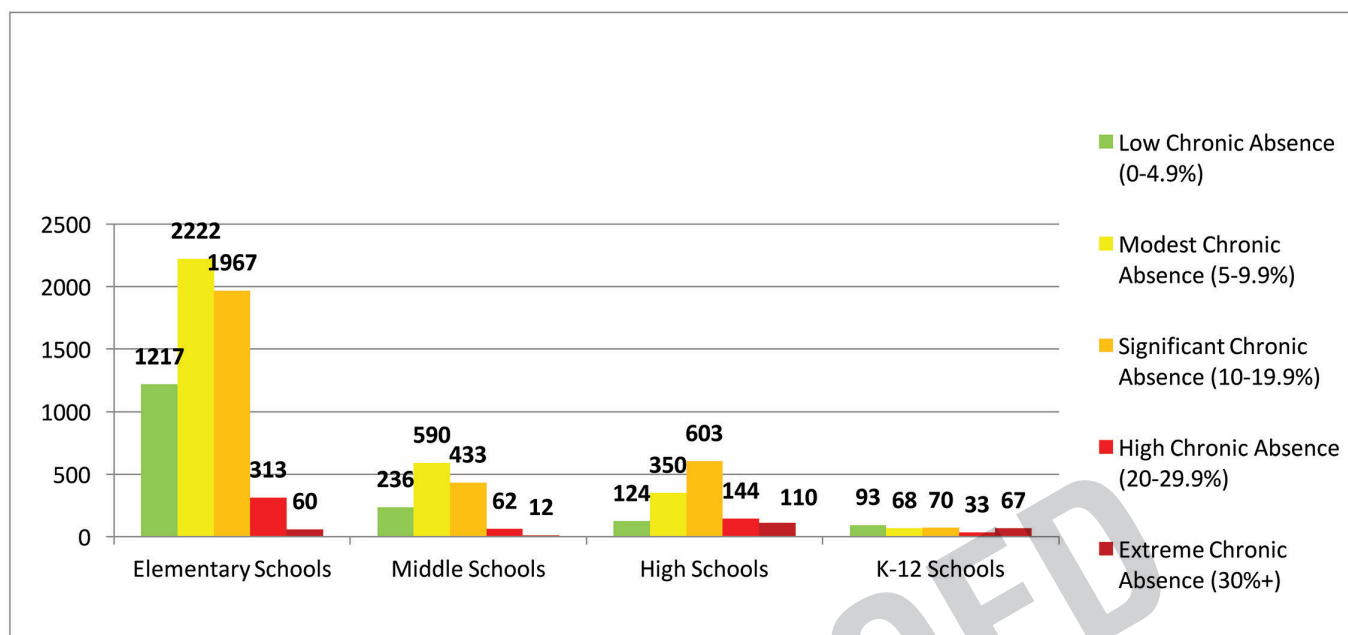
TABLE 2. Traditional Schools at Each Chronic Absence Level by Grade Level

Chronic Absence Level	Elementary Schools		Middle Schools		High Schools		K-12 Schools	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Low (0-4.9%)	1,217	21	236	18	124	9	93	28
Modest (5-9.9%)	2,222	38	590	44	350	26	68	21
Significant (10-19.9%)	1,967	34	433	32	603	45	70	21
High (20-29.9%)	313	5	62	5	144	11	33	10
Extreme (30%+)	60	1	12	1	110	8	67	20
Total	5,779		1,333		1,331		331	

4. **The largest number of traditional schools with chronic absence rates of 20 percent or more are elementary schools.**

While the percentage of elementary schools with high and extreme levels of chronic absence is lower (6 percent) than other grade spans, elementary schools make up the largest number of schools (373 schools) with high and extreme levels of chronic absence. This situation reflects the reality that California has many more elementary schools, and the elementary schools tend to be smaller in size.

⁵ Note, this count of 677,031 is lower than the 694,030 cited earlier because it represents an unduplicated count of students. The chronically absent students listed in Tables 1 (traditional schools) and Table 3 (alternative School however include some duplication since chronically students enrolled in multiple schools are included in the count for each of the school each time they missed more than 10% of possible days enrolled while attending that school.

FIGURE 1. Number of traditional schools by chronic absence and grade level

5. Chronic absence is especially high in alternative education settings, which also have a more stringent approach to monitoring poor attendance

High numbers of alternative schools (continuation schools, opportunity schools, county and district community day schools, juvenile court schools) experience high or extreme levels of chronic absence. Such prevalence is not surprising given that they serve students who have experienced many social and educational challenges that traditional school settings often do not have the capacity to meet. In addition, continuation schools, (with an alternative high school diploma program) are specifically required by statute to collect “hourly attendance” – a more stringent method for collecting attendance that may result in higher chronic absence rates. Other alternative schools may, but are not required, to collect hourly attendance. Traditional schools count students as present as long as they are marked present for at least one period. Students whose attendance is collected on an hourly basis are considered chronically absent if they miss 10 percent of the total number of hours they are scheduled to attend, instead of if they miss 10 percent of the total number of days they are expected to attend.

TABLE 3. Most Alternative Schools have high or extreme levels of chronic absence

Alternative Schools	Low Chronic Absence (CA) (0-4.9%)	Modest CA (5-9.9%)	Significant CA (10-19.9%)	High CA (20-29.9%)	Extreme CA (30%+)	Total (n)
Number of schools	74	20	31	41	377	543
Percentage of schools	14	4	6	8	69	1
Cumulative enrollment	39,745	19,266	29,450	21,993	109,824	220,278
No. chronically absent students	651	1,341	4,670	5,733	55,364	67,759

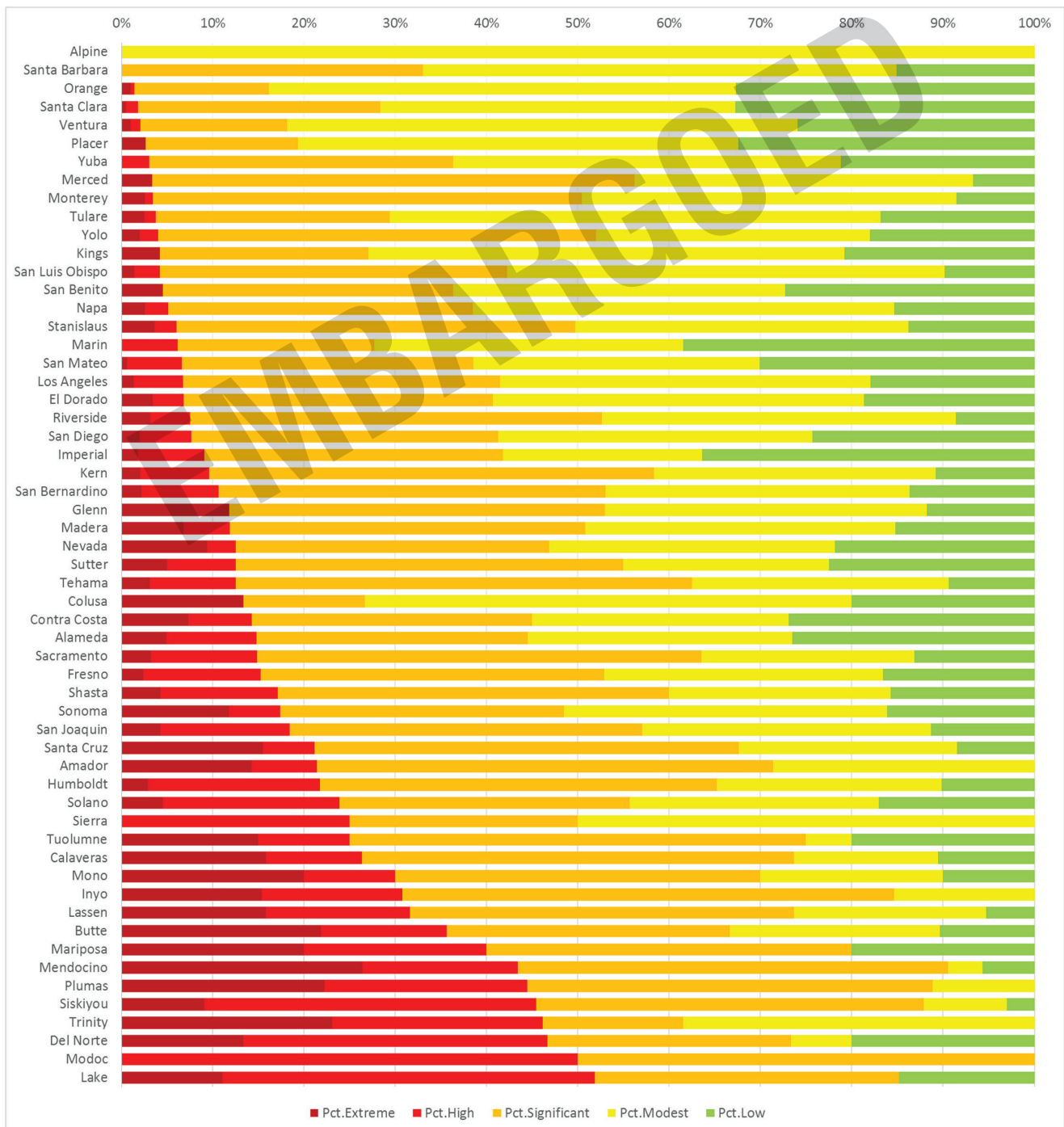
For the purposes of this analysis, a school was considered to be alternative if it automatically qualified for or applied for and received Dashboard Alternative School Status (DASS).³

6. Rural northern California counties experience a higher percentage of schools with 20 percent or higher rates of chronic absence.

We examined the geographic distribution of chronic absence by calculating the percentage of all the schools in a county that have high or extreme levels of chronic absence. Below is a chart showing the percentage of schools with high or extreme chronic absence, from lowest to highest. All counties were included except San Francisco, for which data were initially submitted incorrectly.

The presence of high levels of chronic absence in a sparsely populated county with few schools could suggest the need for counties to work together to adopt a regional approach that leverages resources, so they can be pooled across a larger geographic area.

FIGURE 2. Counties Ranked by Percent of Traditional Schools with High and Extreme Chronic Absence



7. Southern California and the Central Valley counties, which have the largest student populations, are home to the largest numbers of schools with 20 percent or higher levels of chronic absence.

An analysis of the number of schools with high or extreme levels of chronic absence yields a different picture. In general, counties with the largest populations, and therefore more schools, which are found in Southern California and parts of the Central Valley, are home to the greatest number of schools struggling with the highest numbers of students with chronic absence. Knowing which counties have the largest number of schools struggling with high levels of chronic absence helps inform discussion about where and how to allocate available resources, especially from potential public or community partners. Table 4 below is also available in alphabetical order in the Appendix.

TABLE 4. Number of Traditional Schools with High or Extreme Chronic Absence by County

County	Total Number	High Chronic Absence (CA)	Extreme CA	High or Extreme CA	Percentage of Schools with High or Extreme CA
Alpine	1	0	0	0	0
Santa Barbara	106	0	0	0	0
Amador	12	0	1	1	8
Colusa	14	0	1	1	7
San Benito	22	0	1	1	5
Sierra	4	1	0	1	25
Yuba	33	1	0	1	3
El Dorado	53	2	0	2	4
Glenn	17	0	2	2	12
Kings	48	0	2	2	4
Napa	39	1	1	2	5
Yolo	50	1	1	2	4
Merced	89	0	3	3	3
Mono	10	1	2	3	30
Placer	114	0	3	3	3
San Luis Obispo	71	2	1	3	4
Calaveras	17	2	2	4	24
Inyo	13	2	2	4	31
Marin	65	4	0	4	6
Mariposa	10	2	2	4	40
Modoc	8	4	0	4	50
Monterey	117	1	3	4	3
Nevada	32	1	3	4	13
Plumas	9	2	2	4	44
Tehama	32	3	1	4	13
Ventura	193	2	2	4	2
Imperial	55	4	1	5	9
Sutter	40	3	2	5	13
Tuolumne	20	2	3	5	25
Del Norte	12	5	1	6	50
Lassen	19	3	3	6	32
Trinity	13	3	3	6	46
Tulare	160	2	4	6	4
Madera	59	3	4	7	12

TABLE 4. Number of Traditional Schools with High or Extreme Chronic Absence by County *(continued)*

County	Total Number	High Chronic Absence (CA)	Extreme CA	High or Extreme CA	Percentage of Schools with High or Extreme CA
Santa Clara	388	5	2	7	2
Orange	575	2	6	8	1
Stanislaus	167	4	6	10	6
San Mateo	166	10	1	11	7
Shasta	70	9	3	12	17
Lake	27	11	3	14	52
Humboldt	69	13	2	15	22
Santa Cruz	71	4	11	15	21
Siskiyou	33	12	3	15	45
Butte	73	11	7	18	25
Solano	88	17	4	21	24
Kern	240	18	5	23	10
Mendocino	53	9	14	23	43
Contra Costa	249	18	9	27	11
Sonoma	161	9	19	28	17
Riverside	441	19	14	33	7
San Joaquin	212	30	9	39	18
Fresno	295	38	7	45	15
Alameda	358	35	13	48	13
Sacramento	343	40	11	51	15
San Bernardino	498	42	11	53	11
San Diego	708	40	14	54	8
Los Angeles	2,051	110	28	138	7

To make it easier to see how each county and region is affected by chronic absence, UC Davis developed data maps showing how many schools in a given area are affected by different levels of absenteeism. To see how your county or region is affected, go here https://caes-crcgis-dev.ou.ad3.ucdavis.edu/youth_dev/webmap/webmap.html.

8. School-level chronic absence is correlated with higher suspension rates, greater dropout rates, lower graduation rates and fewer students taking college-track courses.

Although previous research has found that chronic absence is a strong predictor of poor academic outcomes among individual students, minimal research has focused on how school-level chronic absence impacts school-level outcomes. As a result, we used the data from DataQuest to examine whether higher levels of chronic absence were associated with lower rates of graduation, higher dropout rates, lower rates of participation in college-track (A-G) classes (i.e., A-G course requirements for eligibility to enter a four-year public college in California) and increased rates of suspensions. We also used partial regression analysis to take into account the impact of the variables on each other.

School-level chronic absence increases with poverty, as measured by the percentage of students eligible for free and reduced-price meals and suspension rates. These correlations are not surprising. Students living in communities facing higher levels of poverty are likely to face greater barriers (limited access to health care, unstable housing, unreliable transportation, community violence, environmental hazards, etc.) to getting to school. Higher rates of suspension contribute to absenteeism and can indicate that a school is struggling to put in place a welcoming and engaging school climate as well as appropriate school discipline practices. We also found that after adjusting the analysis to account for school-level poverty rates, and enrollment and suspension rates, the percentage of students who are African American or Hispanic or who are English Learners is *not* substantially correlated with school chronic absence rates.

School-level chronic absence is associated with higher high school dropout rates and with lower high school graduation rates even after accounting for poverty and suspensions. These associations are expected because many of the students whose attendance is reflected in a school's chronic absence rate are also among those who dropout or fail to graduate from high school. However, there is also evidence that high levels of chronic absence in high schools are negatively associated with the performance of students who do go on to graduate. After accounting for high school graduation rates, schools with higher chronic absence have lower A-G completion rates. In other words, the higher the level of chronic absence at a high school, the lower the percentage of graduates ready to attend a four-year college.

IV. Recommendations for Action

These findings have implications for action by key stakeholders at multiple levels including:

- Students and families
- School leaders
- Community agencies and partners
- District leaders and administrators
- County offices of education
- School board members
- California Department of Education
- Research institutions and schools of education

Data can help stakeholders ask hard questions about what is in place to improve attendance and advocate for additional supports. Data can help activate local engagement and deeper analyses of the root causes of chronic absence. Chronic absence is an accountability metric included in California's Local Control Funding Formula and the federal Every Student Succeeds Act.

Stakeholders at multiple levels play critical roles in reviewing data for accuracy, helping to understand the scale and size of the challenge, developing solutions based on a clear understanding of attendance barriers, engaging stakeholders in supporting the work, and nurturing shared accountability to reduce chronic absence. These important functions shape the recommendations below.

Students and Families

- 1) **Review your own absences.** How many total days did you miss last year? If it is more than 18 days, you were chronically absent. If it is between nine and 17 days, this still could affect your academic achievement. If you have too many absences, consider filling out a student attendance success plan

- 2) **Find out if chronic absence is a big challenge for your school.** Ask your school for this information or look on DataQuest to find out if chronic absence is a challenge for many students and families in your school and if it is affecting overall school academic achievement.
- 3) **Help engage other students and families.** Work with your school to ensure that students and families are identifying and analyzing common attendance barriers as well as developing solutions.
- 4) **Ask your principal about your school's attendance plan.** Find out how your school is working to address attendance and who is responsible. Use a comprehensive approach that begins with prevention and early intervention. Explore how students and families can strengthen the work.
- 5) **Monitor and advocate for support from the district and community.** Ask your principal and district officials about available attendance supports and how they make sure students and families get them, as needed. Check if plans to address chronic absence are in your district's LCAP. Advocate for different and/or more supports, if needed.

School Leaders

- 1) **Use DataQuest and data from your district to examine how your school is affected by chronic absence.** Review the percentage and number of students who are chronically absent. Review for accuracy and identify which students are most affected, by grade and subgroup.
- 2) **Ensure that your school has a team responsible for attendance.** The team should routinely monitor attendance data, develop an effective school-wide strategy¹ and ensure that students are connected to available supports.
- 3) **Engage students, families, school staff and community partners.** Work together to identify and analyze attendance barriers as well as to develop solutions. Integrate this work into existing family engagement efforts.
- 4) **Use data to identify "bright spots" where attendance is better than average.** See whether this offers insights into what works in your school.
- 5) **Use your chronic absence data to assess the need for additional supports and community-based partners.** Use the Attendance Works pyramid to map resources and gaps for putting in place a comprehensive, multi-tiered attendance approach that begins with prevention and early intervention.
- 6) **Incorporate your plans to improve attendance into your school's annual needs assessment, LCAP and site improvement plan.**

Community Agencies and Partners

1. **Find out which and how many schools are heavily affected by chronic absence,** using DataQuest or reports made available by the district.
2. **Engage in positive messaging** about the importance of regular school attendance with the children and families you serve.
3. **Contact schools and districts to find out their plans for improving attendance,** especially those with high levels of chronic absence.
4. **Help schools and districts unpack attendance barriers and solutions.** Engage students and families to offer insights through surveys or focus groups. Offer insights from relevant data maintained by your agency on health, transportation, and/or inventories of community supports.
5. **Use high levels of chronic absence to target allocation of resources,** related to health, afterschool programs, transportation, early childhood, family support, youth development, mentoring, private donations, etc.
6. **Participate in the LCFF's stakeholder engagement process** to ensure that relevant strategies for addressing high levels of chronic absence are included.

District Leaders and Administrators

1. **Ensure that promoting regular attendance is a top priority.**
2. **Examine chronic absence data** for schools, student populations and grade levels to determine how much chronic absence is a problem and for whom.
3. **Review district attendance policies and procedures to ensure that:**
 - a) Attendance and truancy issues are identified at the earliest time possible, by quickly trying to connect with students who do not appear, as expected, at the beginning of the year, as well as with students who miss school during the year.
 - b) Principals and school site staff are well-versed on district attendance policies and procedures; and that attendance personnel are trained to enter attendance data consistently and accurately into your student information system.
 - c) The district supervisor of attendance is empowered with the training to perform duties as required and specified in AB 2815 and found in California Education Code Section 48240⁶.
4. **Promote effective use of data by:**
 - a) **Leveraging student information system** functionality or using available tools to implement and utilize an early warning system for attendance, at the district and/or school site level.
 - b) **Routinely monitoring attendance data throughout the year**, and annually reviewing data from CALPADS to see how your district and schools are doing and comparing your data with county and state data.
 - c) **Building principals' capacity** to monitor and use data from your early warning system to develop strategies to address identified problem areas; develop attendance teams; learn from each other; and put in place a multi-tiered attendance intervention. Principals' can also engage the entire staff, including teachers, in supporting attendance as an integral part of an overall approach to addressing social emotional learning and academic success.
 - d) **Offering guidance on setting meaningful attendance goals.** Help schools set ambitious but achievable goals. Encourage them to set goals for improvement, using baseline data from the prior school year as well as the anticipated level of support to be put in place.
5. **Celebrate and share strategies illustrated in "bright spots"** about schools, principals and school staff who have improved or supported attendance, especially among vulnerable populations.
6. **Provide materials and supports for positive engagement** and attendance messaging across schools.
7. **Convene key agencies and community partners** to work with the most affected schools to unpack and address barriers.
8. **Collaborate with community partners to examine geographic concentrations of chronically absent students and relevant community factors** (poverty, subsidized housing, health conditions and resources, early childhood programming, youth/family support gaps, transit, etc.). Use secondary and locally-collected data to target resources. Enlist help from government and research institutions with mapping capacity.
9. **Publicize goals and strategies for reducing chronic absence in LCAPs.**

⁶ California Education Code Section 48240(b)(2) states that district supervisors of attendance must identify and respond to grade-level and pupil subgroup patterns of chronic absenteeism or truancy, and that this requires training.

County Offices of Education

1. **Review school-level chronic absence across your county and region**, looking for patterns that require interagency collaboration across jurisdictional lines to address them.
2. **Review attendance policies and procedures for county-operated schools** to ensure that they promote identifying students' attendance and truancy issues at the earliest time possible and to ensure that students exiting county-operated schools enroll in district schools.
3. **Ensure that the county has an effective network of School Attendance Review Boards (SARBs)** by compiling a list of SARBs operating in the county and ensuring that all county school districts have access to a SARB.
4. **Strengthen school districts' capacity to address chronic absence in their LCAPs.** Offer guidance about how to set meaningful goals, review and analyze data, and adopt effective strategies for reducing chronic absence. Encourage sharing of effective LCAPs across districts.
5. **Celebrate and share practices and strategies of "bright spot" school districts.**
6. **Bring together key county agencies and community partners to review chronic absence data with school districts** and to determine how everyone can work together to unpack and address attendance barriers.
7. **Develop Professional Learning Networks** to help school districts and their partners put in place a multi-tiered attendance intervention, learn from one another, and identify promising practices within and across districts. As part of this, encourage meetings between county and district supervisors of attendance, within or across counties, for professional development, sharing effective strategies and identifying shared concerns.
8. **Create county-wide attendance messaging campaign materials and resources** that can be tailored locally.
9. **Support districts' efforts to examine data maps, exploring the relationship between chronic absence and relevant community factors** (e.g. poverty, subsidized housing, health conditions and resources, early childhood programming, youth/family supports, transit access, etc.). For example, see the UC Davis, Regional Opportunity Index.
10. **Create a task force to unpack barriers to attendance and address chronic absence in alternative schools.**

School Board Members

1. **Examine chronic absence data** for schools, student populations and grade levels in your district or county to determine how much chronic absence is a problem and for whom.
2. **Build awareness of chronic absence and how it can be addressed among leaders in your school district or county office of education.** Encourage implementation of this report's recommendations.
3. **Promote training for district supervisors** that ensures that they understand what chronic absence is and how they can promote data-driven strategies. County board members, in particular, are responsible for certification and training of these positions (ED Code 48240).^{6,7}
4. **Bring together your district or county office of education with other public agencies or community partners** to review data on chronic absence and develop plans for improving attendance, especially in schools with high and extreme levels of chronic absence.
5. **Ensure chronic absence is addressed in the LCAP** for your district and/or districts in your county.

⁷ California Education Code 48245 states that in any district or districts with an average daily attendance of 1,000 or more school children, according to the annual school report of the last preceding school year, no district supervisor of attendance shall be appointed, unless he has been lawfully certificated for the work by the county board of education. (Enacted by Stats. 1976, Ch. 1010.)

California Department of Education

1. **Ensure high quality and consistent data.** Offer training and guidance to LEAs on how student absence data are submitted to CALPADS as well as how to review aggregate data to identify potential data quality issues, investigating and addressing issues as necessary.
2. **Use chronic absence data as a factor** in determining the allocation of related grant funding and technical assistance, and in conjunction with other performance indicators to identify broader issues.
3. **Expand available guidance and professional development to help school districts and county superintendents to advance a multi-tiered approach to improving attendance that begins with prevention.** Draw upon the best practices of model SARBs to demonstrate what is possible.⁸ (This work aligns with California Education Code Section 48341.)
4. **Fully Incorporate Chronic Absence in the School Dashboard** as a state level indicator by establishing standardized cut points that reflect the cut points and five levels of performance.
5. **Explore the need for establishing different performance standards for different types of schools** and districts (e.g. elementary versus K-12 versus high school).
6. **Create DataQuest reports that enable users to cross-tabulate data** on chronic absence with other key metrics related to suspensions and academics.
7. **Convene state agencies to review chronic absence data and develop interagency strategies** for addressing schools, counties and populations with high levels of chronic absence.
8. **Use DataQuest data to examine the need for regional solutions** and when there is a need, bring together key local and state stakeholders to develop actions.
9. **Expand guidance and materials on effective strategies** for reducing chronic absence, including information on how to set realistic goals for improvement. Ensure that this guidance is integrated into efforts related to school climate, education equity and academic achievement.
10. **Establish a professional learning network focused on alternative education settings.**
11. **Conduct further analyses on attendance data submitted for alternative schools,** including looking for differences based on attendance collection type (daily attendance, hourly attendance and coursework completion).

Research Institutions and Schools of Education

1. **Partner with the California Department of Education** to conduct further in-depth analyses of chronic absence data in conjunction with data for other performance indicators.
2. **Partner with school districts on data analysis** to assess chronic absence and its causal factors.
3. **Help school districts evaluate the impact of interventions** and share the results broadly.
4. **Examine the interactions between performance indicators** (e.g. How does chronic absence interact with suspensions and achievement and vice versa?) and help identify effective integrated approaches to improving student achievement.
5. **Conduct additional research** to determine when and how high levels of absenteeism impact school learning environments for all students, including those who maintain good attendance.

⁸ Model School Attendance Review Boards are “bright spots” recognized annually by the California Department of Education (<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/ai/sb/modelrecognition.asp>). County offices and school districts are invited to apply annually by the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, and Model SARBs have pledged to help other county and district SARBs become models. Model SARBs are announced annually by the State Superintendent: <https://www.cde.ca.gov/nr/ne/yr18/yr18rel33.asp>

Appendix A. Methodology

Data on chronic absence for 2016-17, containing records for 10,559 schools, were merged with other CDE datasets that contain information about student enrollment and outcomes. High school data for 2016-17 had not been released at the time this analysis was conducted, so we use high school outcomes data from SY 2015-16. All other datasets are from SY 2016-17.

All schools in San Francisco Unified School District were dropped from the analysis because the district acknowledged errors in their chronic absence data. Nonpublic nonsectarian schools (NPS) (specialized private schools that provide services to public school students with disabilities), and schools missing data on chronic absence rate were similarly omitted from the analysis. In addition, six schools with an Education Institution Level (EIL) code of 'A' (Adult) or 'UG' (Ungraded) were dropped, leaving 9,862 schools. (EIL code is used by the CDE to classify schools by grade level). Schools missing an EIL Code (n=132) were omitted from the analysis of chronic absence by school grade level. All other data were used as provided by CDE without independent verification.

We analyzed traditional and alternative schools separately. Dashboard Alternative School Status (DASS) is used to classify schools as traditional (non-DASS) or alternative (DASS). Certain types of schools, including continuation, opportunity and community day schools automatically receive DASS. Other alternative schools may be eligible and apply for DASS if they have an unduplicated count of at least 70 percent of the school's total enrollment (upon first entry to the school) comprised of high-risk students. While continuation schools automatically qualify for DASS, they were categorized separately for the purpose of this analysis.

Appendix B. Correlations

In order to investigate how chronic absence is related to school composition and other school characteristics, we calculated partial correlations between school chronic absence and each of the following variables, while controlling for the other variables. This method is used to partial out the effect of one variable from that of other variables with which it is related with.

Among all traditional schools (n=8,895) the correlation coefficient for Poverty Rate ($r = 0.33$), for example, indicates that there is a moderate positive association between poverty rate and chronic absence when controlling for % English Learners, % Hispanic, % Black, cumulative enrollment, and Suspension Rate. In other words, as the poverty rate increases, so does the chronic absence rate. Note that correlations that have an absolute value of less than 0.20 are considered very weak, while those between 0.20 and 0.39 are considered weak, and correlations that are over 0.39 are considered moderate. Thus, the partial correlations for % English Learners, % Hispanic, % Black and Enrollment indicate very little association between those variables and chronic absence rate. There is a weak association between suspension rate and chronic absence ($r = 0.24$).

Poverty Rate	% English Learners	% Hispanic	% Black	Enrollment	Suspension Rate
0.33	-0.07	-0.08	0.17	-0.15	0.24

Among traditional high schools that reported a graduation rate (n = 1,289), we also looked at partial correlations between chronic absence and dropout rate, graduation rate, and A-G completion rate, controlling for the other school characteristics listed in the table above.

Dropout Rate	Graduation Rate	A-G Completion Rate
0.35	-0.39	-0.25

We found that there is a weak correlation between chronic absence and dropout ($r = 0.35$) and graduation ($r = -0.39$). As chronic absence rate at a high school increases, its dropout rate also increases and its graduation rate declines. While also controlling for graduate rate, we further found a weak correlation between chronic absence and A-G course completion ($r = -0.25$). Controlling for school poverty, % Black and % Hispanic, suspension rate and graduation rate, A-G course completion among graduates declines as the chronic absence rate increases.

Appendix C

TABLE 4. Number of Traditional Schools with High or Extreme Chronic Absence by County in Alphabetical Order

County	Total Number	High Chronic Absence (CA)	Extreme CA	High or Extreme CA	Percentage of Schools with High or Extreme CA
Alameda	358	35	13	48	13
Alpine	1	0	0	0	0
Amador	12	0	1	1	8
Butte	73	11	7	18	25
Calaveras	17	2	2	4	24
Colusa	14	0	1	1	7
Contra Costa	249	18	9	27	11
Del Norte	12	5	1	6	50
El Dorado	53	2	0	2	4
Fresno	295	38	7	45	15
Glenn	17	0	2	2	12
Humboldt	69	13	2	15	22
Imperial	55	4	1	5	9
Inyo	13	2	2	4	31
Kern	240	18	5	23	10
Kings	48	0	2	2	4
Lake	27	11	3	14	52
Lassen	19	3	3	6	32
Los Angeles	2,051	110	28	138	7
Madera	59	3	4	7	12
Marin	65	4	0	4	6
Mariposa	10	2	2	4	40
Mendocino	53	9	14	23	43
Merced	89	0	3	3	3
Modoc	8	4	0	4	50
Mono	10	1	2	3	30
Monterey	117	1	3	4	3
Napa	39	1	1	2	5
Nevada	32	1	3	4	13
Orange	575	2	6	8	1
Placer	114	0	3	3	3
Plumas	9	2	2	4	44
Riverside	441	19	14	33	7
Sacramento	343	40	11	51	15
San Benito	22	0	1	1	5
San Bernardino	498	42	11	53	11
San Diego	708	40	14	54	8
San Joaquin	212	30	9	39	18
San Luis Obispo	71	2	1	3	4
San Mateo	166	10	1	11	7

TABLE 4. Number of Traditional Schools with High or Extreme Chronic Absence by County in Alphabetical Order *(continued)*

County	Total Number	High Chronic Absence (CA)	Extreme CA	High or Extreme CA	Percentage of Schools with High or Extreme CA
Santa Barbara	106	0	0	0	0
Santa Clara	388	5	2	7	2
Santa Cruz	71	4	11	15	21
Shasta	70	9	3	12	17
Sierra	4	1	0	1	25
Siskiyou	33	12	3	15	45
Solano	88	17	4	21	24
Sonoma	161	9	19	28	17
Stanislaus	167	4	6	10	6
Sutter	40	3	2	5	13
Tehama	32	3	1	4	13
Trinity	13	3	3	6	46
Tulare	160	2	4	6	4
Tuolumne	20	2	3	5	25
Ventura	193	2	2	4	2
Yolo	50	1	1	2	4
Yuba	33	1	0	1	3

Acknowledgements

Seize the Data Opportunity in California is a collaborative effort of Attendance Works, the Center for Regional Change at the University of California, Davis and Children Now.

Attendance Works played the lead role in conceptualizing, writing and producing the brief, which is modeled after the national report, Portraits of Change, produced in September 2017. Executive Director, Hedy Chang is the lead author while Special Projects Manager Annie (Lionberger) Reed played a critical role in coordinating the project, particularly the process for seeking feedback from partners. Communications Manager Catherine Cooney led the editing, production and release of the brief, while Associate Director for Programs, Cecelia Leong offered invaluable conceptual input throughout.

The Center for Regional Change at UC Davis conducted the analysis of chronic absence rates by school using the data available from the California Department of Education on DataQuest and produced the maps portraying levels of chronic absence for schools and counties throughout California. We are especially indebted to Cassie Hartzog, Postdoctoral Scholar at the Center for Regional Change, UC Davis, for her excellent research and analytical skills and willingness to quickly crunch the numbers as new research questions emerged. This brief would not have been possible without her dedication and commitment. This effort also benefited significantly from the wisdom and knowledge of Nancy Erbstein, Department of Human Ecology and Faculty Affiliate, Center for Regional Change, UC Davis, whose academic vision combined with practical experience working directly with schools guided the research project from start to finish.

Children Now played an especially critical role in ensuring the effort was grounded in a deep understanding of the current opportunities and challenges facing K-12 education in California. Brad Strong, Senior Director for Education for Children Now, was a key partner in shaping the overall direction of the brief as well as the policy recommendations.

This brief would not have been possible without the insights of a number of key advisors. First and foremost, we would like to express appreciation to our colleagues at the California Department of Education, particularly Gordon Jackson, David Kopperud and Paula Mishima, for their willingness to review the initial data analysis, discuss proposed recommendations and offer critical feedback on multiple drafts. They also helped to ensure key pieces of the drafts were reviewed by other colleagues at the California Department of Education when their expertise was needed.

Second, we thank several researchers (Michael Gottfried, Heather Hough, and Steven Gervais) for offering invaluable feedback on our research methodology.

Third, we deeply appreciate our colleagues who reviewed an early draft. These include members of the Chronic Absence and Attendance Partnership (CAAP)— a coalition of groups working together to improve attendance policy and practice in California. We especially appreciated the input received from Brian Bonner, with California's Ninth District PTA; Mary Briggs, with the California School Board Association; Lisa Eisenberg, with the California School Based Health Alliance; and Brian Lee, with Fight Crime Invest in Kids. We also benefited from the comments of Michelle Castelo of Los Angeles Unified School District and Deborah Duardo, Los Angeles County Superintendent.

This brief was made possible by the generous support of the California Endowment. While their support is deeply appreciated, the conclusions are those of the authors alone.